

RACE, UNTIMELY FREEDOM AND THE QUESTION OF  
LEADERSHIP  
IN  
AIMÉ CÉSAIRE'S THEATRE

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Richard Ndayizigamiye  
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Richard Ndayizigamiye, Ph. D

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This dissertation investigates the interrelation between Césaire's literary and political practice. I focus on his dramatic production ranging from 1946 to 1968, the year marking the first publication of his last play, *Une Tempête*; I also consider works for which the dramatist engaged important structural revisions, particularly *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*. My work puts Césaire's Negritudinal literary politics in dialogue with the critique of his political and literary legacy by the writers of the Créolité movement; so doing, I suggest we use the critical lenses of a more encompassing historical approach akin to the recent work on Césaire by literary and cultural critics such as John Walsh (*Free and French in the Caribbean*) and Gary Wilder (*Freedom Time*). By investigating the political history of both the anticolonial resistance to French imperialism and post-World War II decolonization movements, I argue that although Césaire's political leadership may appear at odds with the militancy expressed in his literature (his dramatic work in particular), this seemingly paradoxical or ambivalent predilection translates a more pragmatic approach to politics. I thereby maintain that literature (drama to be precise) becomes a mode of cognition for models of political leadership Césaire may choose to affiliate

with, or avoid completely for that matter.

In this regard, Césaire's writing doubles as a scribal space from which he can negotiate a novel conception of freedom inscribed within the historical legacy of "race" as the sum total of the lived experience of forcible economic exploitation of the labor of slaves brought from the coasts of West and Central Africa. Beyond the reality of their brutal political oppression in the Americas, Césaire attempts to redefine postcolonial emancipation into a political ideal that transcends sheer geographical boundaries, from the French Caribbean (the Martinican "nation," Haïti) to Africa (the Congo). In this perspective, Césaire's paradigm of time acquires elastic properties through its rejection of the western European notion of *linear temporality* to embrace, instead, what Gary Wilder has termed "untimeliness," as far as the deployment of liberty is concerned in Césaire – I will expand on this notion in the introduction.

*Chapter One* reviews the unfolding of the project of freedom as conceived by Toussaint L'Ouverture for Haïti by engaging the manner in which the Haitian Revolution is narrated in *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*. Given the existence of two versions of the latter text, this analysis traces the staging of the narrative of freedom in the French Caribbean as well as its articulation within the politico-historical context of Césaire's writing. The subsequent unfolding of Césaire's voice as a dramatist consequently challenges critical methodologies attempting to label the text one way or another ("play" versus

“poetic drama,” for instance). In this consideration, this chapter also directs its gaze at the tension infused in the production and publication of the San Die Typescript (the original version), which are themselves informed by the political pressures of the World War II Vichy-leaning political regime in Martinique – with important (positive and adverse) consequences on both the content and form of Césaire’s first dramatic venture.

*Chapter Two* examines the post-heroic narrative of the struggle for Haitian independence in *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, so as to interrogate the implementation of Toussaint’s Freedom project by the unfortunate succession of Henry Christophe at the helms of the country. The argument in this section of the thesis postulates that the burden of freedom generated by Toussaint’s death in *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* finds its tragic expression in Christophe’s negation to his people of the basic fundamental rights of liberty and freedom of expression, which were the foundation of the struggle of Haitian Revolution in the first place. *Chapter Three* goes on to delineate the trajectory of a similar narrative of the tragedy of post-independence liberation as it is deployed, this time, in a non-Caribbean geographical milieu – on the African continent, the Congo – hence the title of Césaire’s third play, *Une Saison au Congo*. Through an examination of the leadership of Patrice Lumumba, Césaire’s geographical choice is to be comprehended in the context of his ongoing Third Worldist solidarity with a worldwide anti-colonial struggle in

the pursuit of political and economic freedom, for what Fanon has termed “The Wretched of the Earth,” i.e., colonized subjects.

In my *Fourth and last chapter*, I present Césaire’s last play, *Une Tempête*, as a case-studies (of sorts) of tensions within Césaire the poet-politician to decide the best medium of achieving political freedom and economic emancipation for Martinicans without repeating the errors of post-liberation leadership and governance in Haïti. His decision to implement the 1946 Departmentalization Law will have a considerable impact on Césaire’s leadership of Martinique for decades both in Martinique and at the French National Assembly.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Richard Ndayizigamiye received a B.A. in English Language and Literatures from the English Department at the University of Burundi. He received his M.A. in Comparative Literature from Cornell University in May 1994.

Dedicated to my Family and Children.



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## INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I argue that there is a convergence between Aimé Césaire's literary oeuvre and his political practice. I contend that in both his drama and poetry, his insistence on the trope of "race" is part of an attempt to establish a black literary aesthetic to counter the mental and cultural alienation experienced by people of African descent in the French-speaking Caribbean. This alienation, I suggest, is a byproduct of their experience as (post)colonial subjects still engaged in the process of recovery from the scars (mental, psychological, cultural and socio-political) of slavery. I also make the argument that Césaire's dramatic oeuvre is a metaphor for his own political practice, that is, that Césaire uses theatre as mode of understanding archetypes of leadership that could inspire him, or which he may want to evade. At the same time, I maintain, this quest for a leadership model translates into the forging of a Black New World aesthetic that finds its way in both his poetry and his theatre.

This dissertation brings together four of the plays written by Aimé Césaire (*Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, *Une Saison au Congo*, and *Une Tempête*) – three of which are at times referred to as the "trypic plays."<sup>1</sup> These works share in common: 1) a consideration of

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<sup>1</sup> Césaire, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, *Une Saison au Congo*, and *Une Tempête*.

leadership in the context of the ideology of negritude in various forms (culturalist, nationalist, pan Africanist, etc.); 2) the political conditions of post-slavery Haïti – as well as that of “decolonized” nations during the period of Césaire’s writing up each play – and the political philosophies (of revolution, nationalism, leadership) most relevant to them; and 3) their pertinence to the particular circumstances (biographical, political) and ramifications (political and cultural) of Césaire’s own leadership position in Martinique.

The plays, among other foci, address the ideology of Negritude by arranging the practice of Negritudinist politics into the pragmatics of leadership practice, in a dramatic form, in service to the betterment of the plight of peoples of African descent – at least in their intent. I argue that the material potency of the Negritude trope, for Césaire, lies in its capacity to organize simultaneously both a political discourse and an ideology, and venture to translate them into a reflection on political exercise. In this regard, I will be questioning Césaire’s own positions on crucial issues he had to deal with as a politician, and for which he had to make a number of choices, some more controversial than others. Chief among these: the dilemmatic alternatives between assimilation, departmentalization, autonomy, or a complete sovereignist territorial separation from France.

I discuss Césaire’s theatre (*Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, *Une Saison au Congo* and *Une Tempête*) in the context of Black Power

Negritudinist leadership in general – and of Martinican politics in particular. Given that the question of leadership is a longer narrative for him – and a major point of reflection in his drama – I look at how Césaire mediates the notion of Négritude as an ideology (a programme) and political leadership, as well as how these issues get worked out in the plays. What is more, I situate Césaire’s dramatic production within the historical, cultural and political context of its own time.

In my thesis, I attempt to trace not only the conceptual and rhetorical ground upon which the representational norms of leadership are built, but also their translation into Césaire’s Negritudinist ideology. I bring into account the critical work of a number of scholars on the French Caribbean: Maryse Condé, Lilyan Kesteloot, Gregson Davis, Natalie Melas, Françoise Vergès, Kora Véron, Thomas Hale, James Arnold, Clayton Eshleman, Paulin Hountondji, Richard Burton, Ngal, Femi-Ojo Ade, Alex Gil and others who discuss the cultural theories of Negritude of the twentieth century, in as much as their scholarship offers a critical assessment of Césaire’s theatrical oeuvre. I focus on the researchers and others who, through a study of Negritude, Antillanité and Créolité, fashion a critique of the mediated order of leadership in which both political theory and political practice are experienced as arranged representations drawn from the storehouse of historical leadership

in the French Caribbean (Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe), as well as Césaire's own experience of leadership in Martinique.

I locate the problematic of leadership within the context of Caribbean (Haitian), African (Congolese) and Martinican politics. The semantic extension of the word "leadership" itself, tying the political sense of the word specifically to Black Diaspora politics, betokens a tropology pairing of concepts that define a leader according to her (or his) charisma and personality, her/his message, the politicohistorical context in which s(h)e is operating, as well as the society that produces the leader. Given these figurations which assume the force of a symbiosis between the inner qualities of the leader and the external factors that help or hinder the actions of the leader, leadership then becomes a site of struggle between competing ideologies and practices which both produce tensions between the political idealism of the leaders under discussion (Toussaint L'Ouverture, Henri Christophe, Patrice Lumumba) and their political praxis. In Césaire's case, these same tensions in turn create paradoxes that are woven in his own leadership praxis, as we will discover in the course of our discussion.

In addition to arguing that Césaire's drama and his political praxis mirror each other, the second founding tenet of my argument embraces Gary Wilder's concept of "untimeliness," theorized in his 2015 *Freedom Time*: it is a useful framework for analyzing *temporality* in relation to Césaire's own

conception of time, but mostly for contextualizing the interdependence between *historical events* and their *timing*. Whereas Césaire's rejection of the western European notion of sequential time arrangements has been addressed in previous studies,<sup>2</sup> "untimeliness" rather hinges upon the postulate that the categorization of time into a logical progression – from past, to present, and to the future – has little relevance or significance to historical occurrences themselves. Even if the past certainly informs the present, it is the interplay between these intertwined elements (past and present) that underlies what Gary Wilder has termed "untimely ness," in reference to historical events that took place at a particular point in time (and could have impacted *that* historical era), but which, in their own circumstances, were out of synch with the context of their deployment (historical, political, socio-economic, etc.). Hence, their *untimeliness*. Therefore, in Césaire's drama, the playwright praises the Haitian Revolution as the harbinger of political emancipation throughout the Caribbean colonies (French especially), while bemoaning the aftermath of post-emancipation freedom in iconic Haïti, as well as the sabotaged decolonization process in the Congo. In Césaire's judgment, this type of

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<sup>2</sup> Owusu-Sarpong, *Le Temps Historique dans l'Œuvre d'Aimé Césaire*. The author analyses how Césaire constructs his own paradigm of time by approaching historical events not necessarily in a linear continuum. The study is more concerned about pointing out instances of "anachronism" in Césaire's theatre.

liberty (political emancipation) is “untimely” for Martinique (as dramatized in *A Tempest*).

I use the critical lens of the Créolité movement to develop my argument about Césaire’s dramatic work. I engage the struggle between Créolité and Negritude as it is undertaken on a literary, ideological, political and cultural plane. I juxtapose readings of Césaire’s plays and essays with Raphael Confiand’s work (*Aimé Césaire: Une Traversée Paradoxale du Siècle*), in addition to anti-Negritude essays by the Créolité Troika (Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiand himself) and Daniel Maximin. Further, I engage new research and scholarship (biographies included) that were produced in the aftermath of Césaire’s passing in 2008. The more recent work of Gary Wilder and John Patrick Walsh<sup>3</sup> provide further methodological grounding for engaging the context (global and local) of the production of Césaire’s plays, and the impact of world politics – from the Haitian Revolution (Toussaint’s political writings) to the decolonization era of the 1950s and 1960s) – on Césaire’s political philosophy.

My project extends and expands on recent critical studies of Césaire’s politics as they intertwine with his literary oeuvre – beginning with Raphaël

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<sup>3</sup> Walsh, *Free and French in the Caribbean: Toussaint L’Ouverture, Aimé Césaire, and Narratives of Loyal Opposition*; Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World*.



Confiant's *Aimé Césaire: Une Traversée Paradoxale du Siècle* (1992) and others<sup>4</sup> – by investigating the question of the relationship between Césaire's politics and his literary work via a discussion of his plays. I focus on Césaire's conception of leadership, and its underlying intersection with the aesthetic and the political. This issue, so to speak, does arise within the critical studies on Césaire in the past two decades or so.<sup>5</sup> It is, in actuality, a problem that Césaire battled with both in his literary and political career as a playwright-politician.

As a matter of fact, it is interesting to note the kinds of resonances that arise from the Créolité critique of Césaire's leadership in relation to his theater – the chief concern of my study. On one hand, the Créolité critique is a testimony (too vitriolic and acrimonious at times) on Césaire's literary, political, social and economic legacy on Martinique and its people: after all, he has left an indelible mark on the island both as the Mayor of Fort-de-France and as Deputy representing Martinique at the French Assemblée Nationale for almost five decades. On the other hand, the Créolité scholarship (mostly Confiant) purports itself primarily with a denunciation of Césaire's insistence on Blackness and African roots, as well as his refusal to use Creole as both a

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<sup>4</sup> Ngal, *Aimé Césaire: Un Homme à la Recherche d'une Patrie*. In 1975, Ngal was the first critic to argue the direct link between Césaire's literature (drama) and his politics. However, his study of Césaire's drama is very limited in scope. Confiant's focus (1992) lays more on the poetry.

<sup>5</sup> Confiant, *Aimé Césaire: Une Traversée Paradoxale du Siècle*; Ade, *Aimé Césaire's African Theater: Of Poets, Prophets, and Politicians*; Walsh, *Free and French in the Caribbean*; Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

cultural and political tool of resistance against French political and cultural domination. In the process, I find, the original critique ends up focusing too narrowly on a questioning of some of Césaire's most personal life choices, at the expense of a closer and more comprehensive examination of its intended target; that is, assessing Césaire's literary works as a whole, especially his drama: *Confiant* rather picks and chooses elements that fit his purpose. In point of fact, except for a number of references he makes about Césaire's *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* (*And the Dogs Went Silent*), *Confiant* does not go far enough in his critique to prove his claim that Césaire is a political sell out who traded Martinique to the French for a seat at the French National Assembly.

In as much as the examination of leadership is concerned, this study contributes to the major debates and positions drawn over the study of these plays in that I am taking the argument of the interrelation between Césaire's literary oeuvre and his political life a bit farther. The claim that I am making – which I have expressed since I started this study<sup>6</sup> – is that beyond the fact that Césaire's fictional writings and his exercise of power mirror each other, the dramatic oeuvre is in actuality a laboratory of ideas of sorts, that space within which the writer explores the convergence between artistic creation and political exercise.

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<sup>6</sup> Gary Wilder makes a similar argument in *Freedom Time*. Mine dates back to 1998.

Pursuant to this logic, this investigation also examines the coherence and potential dissonances in the political philosophy and vision of leadership across the plays. I explore the extent to which they function together as an exploratory dialectic (one that may be articulated in response to events in the post-colonial world as these unfold in their epoch). I discuss how the plays interrelate, respond to, or perhaps conflict with each other on the question of leadership, as I account for any conflict that may exist with the plays in that regard. I show how ideals of rulership are projected, in Césaire's work, through representations that help to define the leadership paradigm within the realm of the French Caribbean (Haïti), Africa (the Congo), as well as that of his own political practice in Martinique.

This dissertation is organized in four chapters, in alignment with the temporal linearity of their publication. This approach and methodology is based on the premise that the writings are a reflection of Césaire's political evolution and aesthetic growth as a dramatist whose writing debut – as I show in the first chapter – coincides with an era when he is preoccupied with the censorship imposed by the Vichy-leaning regime in Fort-de-France.

Thus, *Chapter One* of this study (on *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*) thereby establishes a provocative dialogue between two versions of the same work which are contemporaneous with each other, but which end up as separate texts bearing the same title. However, they couldn't be farther from each

other: the formalistic and revolutionary attributes of the original do not bridge the evacuated militancy and Greco-inspired oratorio of the sanitized San Die Text. In the printed version (1946), Haitian history becomes Negritudist myth-making for the purposes of building a transcendent truth of postcolonial-postindependence triumph against European-sponsored slavery and bondage of transplanted Africans in the New World.

The articulation of the narrative of freedom consequently unfolds as a twin<sup>7</sup> epic tale of the struggle for Haitian independence. Leadership in times of war is magnified and reified into heroism not only from the point of view of the Haitian peasants, but mostly through the glorification of Toussaint L'Ouverture's feats, and those of Jacques Dessalines when the hero is arrested by Napoleon Bonaparte's troops. True leadership, in this regard, demands self-sacrifice, as Toussaint offers his body for capture as collateral so the Haitian Revolution can come to fruition. But we soon realize, as I show in the following chapter, that the heroism on the battlefield, and the triumph of national independence, are both tempered by the hardships of post-emancipation self-governance.

*La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, as I establish in *Chapter Two*, demonstrates an increasing engagement with the key trope of leadership in general, and

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<sup>7</sup> I am referring here to the two versions of the text of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*: the original typewritten *San Die Typescript (SDT)*, as well as the first 1946 printed version.

with the management of power in particular. I single out the play for its pointed and caricatured critique of Henri Christophe's leadership. My contention is that the play is, in fact, a reflection and projection of Césaire's own political travails through the lenses of Haitian history, contrary to the numerous assertions he has made in various interviews: that he parallels Haïti's independence with the decolonization of Africa in the late 50s and early 60s.<sup>8</sup> Césaire's formatted explanation is that freedom fighters, from their guerilla bases in the battlefields, were propelled to the realms of their respective countries, and were thus faced with the responsibilities of political governance. Liberation, he reasons, is an epic endeavor, while the aftermath of liberation is always tragic.<sup>9</sup> This paradox – engendered by the tension within the management of power in the aftermath of independence – is the issue he wanted to address in the play; hence, the idea of contextualizing in Haïti the problem of the Black leader confronted with the challenge of assuming good leadership.

I beg to differ. On Easter Day 2003, when I had the opportunity to interview Césaire at his office in Fort-de-France, I mentioned Confiant's critique of him. I then asked him if he could acknowledge any link between

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<sup>8</sup> The challenges confronted by the country, the projects intended to implement his socio-economic agenda, as well as the problems encountered in the realization of the programs, etc.

<sup>9</sup> Chraïbi, "Entretien avec Aimé Césaire."

himself as a politician (at least in part) and his portrayal of Christophe facing Haïti's birthing pains. Rather grudgingly, he replied: "Oh, vous savez, certains ont voulu en faire une lecture pareille, ... possible." Hence, in light of this statement, as well as others he has made when caught off guard, we can surmise, as I argue, that the example of the tragic downfall of Haïti is a scenario he wanted to avoid for Martinique and its citizens. In fact, I contend that there is a direct connection between the thematization on Haïti and Martinican politics, in the sense that Césaire seeks to find answers to the immediate political concerns of his island through the history of the Caribbean. As Haïti is an example very close to home, the Haitian reference offers to the playwright the raw material he needs to make his own exploration of the political variables in Martinique.

What is more, in this chapter, the issue of leadership is broadened (especially Christophe's Negritudist politics) in order to investigate what happens to ideology when it is confronted to actual day-to-day politics. On the one hand, there is what political idealism requires – integrity – and what real politics actually demands on the other: compromise, forging alliances or making unpopular decisions, etc. Reviewing Henri Christophe's politicosocial programs enables a discursive space within which to discuss the concept of the "uplifting of the black race." This trope, almost a century later, will have resonances in the United States, especially the 19<sup>th</sup> century debate between

Frederick Douglass and W.E.B DuBois, relative to the best approaches of “uplifting the black race” in the U.S.<sup>10</sup>

To *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, I compare *Toussaint L'Ouverture: La Révolution Française et le Problème Colonial*, in which Césaire hones a language of political discussion founded in terms of the leadership of the architects of the Haitian Revolution. Likewise, while examining the leadership methods of politicians such as Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jacques Dessalines, and Henri Christophe, I argue that Césaire is looking at common traits in their leadership styles that may have contributed to the success or failure of their policies before, during and after the Haitian independence. In this line of thought, Césaire wants to apply those lessons to the political entity he is to govern, i.e., Martinique.

*Chapter Three* – titled “Leadership and the aborted post-colony in Césaire’s *Une Saison au Congo* – deals with Césaire’s dramatization of the troubled history of the Congo, especially the period following its independence. Though the play may be read as a “documentary” at first – given its striking stylistic distinction from *The Tragedy of King Christophe* and *A Tempest* – its chief function is simply not limited to disseminating an account of these particular events in the Congo. In fact, we can account for Césaire’s

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<sup>10</sup> Du Bois’ focus on advanced education (the “Talented Tenth” doctrine) versus Douglass’ emphasis on economic self-sufficiency for African-Americans, via vocational and trade-oriented hands-on training at the Tuskegee Institute.

departure from the geographical locus of the Americas from two perspectives: first, that of a Third Worldist politically engaged writer concerned with the process of decolonization of Africa; second, as a cultural theorist reaching out to the Motherland, aesthetically speaking. Writing about Africa becomes an intrinsic extension of the poet-politician's endeavor at marrying the political and the aesthetic in his articulation of a Negritude ethos merging all these concerns in this drama. Writing about Africa, hence, is not fortuitous; it is not only "natural," but it is also necessity, in as much as it is a way of grounding his literary imprint from the Negritude imaginary into the concretization of his concern for the land of his ancestors.

Therefore, concurrent with the Pan Africanist bent of his Negritudist ideology, Césaire directs his trilogy toward Africa (at a critical time in the history of the continent), where he seeks to explore the snares of the post-colonial era in the Congo. His dramatical outreach also opens the door for the exploration of the dynamics undergirding the European and US sabotage of nascent African nation-states. But what occupies the center platform at first is the staging of the struggle between the most important heavyweight actors on the Congolese political scene on the eve of independence: Patrice Lumumba, Joseph Kasa Vubu, Mobutu Sese Seko. Césaire tailors his dramatization specifically to the conditions under which leadership in the Congo was deployed at that time, amidst the imperialist appetites of former colonial



powers and the failure, under the direction of the then-Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, of the UN intervention policies and practices in the country.

In this chapter, also, I take as my central argument the process by which a leader becomes “ideal.” In this regard, the political importance and philosophy of Lumumba are examined. I discuss how Césaire sees this phenomenon of *idealization* to be working in “actuality” – that is, what forces made Lumumba “ideal.” As well, in analyzing how this dynamic works in the play, this chapter addresses the rhetorical and representational devices that present or comment on the quintessence of Lumumba, as well as the extent to which the play contributes to (or attempts to resist) that very process in the creation of the “character” Lumumba.

In my *fourth and last chapter* – “Caliban in Fort-de-France: Freedom Time in Aimé Césaire’s *Une Tempête*” – I discuss how the play contrasts with the others in the way that it raises crucial questions about racial and cultural hybridity, language politics, liberation methods, the vying for control over the island’s resources, etc. Furthermore, based on both Caliban’s claim for freedom and the localized debates contemporary to the historical period of the production of the play, these issues in many ways bear direct relevance to

Martinique's tense, paradoxical and problematic association with France.<sup>11</sup> I'm arguing that *Une Tempête* is a direct reflection of these concerns, and also that through the literary imaginary of the drama, Césaire is in actuality playing out alternative outcomes for the political predicament of Martinique.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, this chapter investigates the Césaire's play through the prism of his political, cultural and artistic leadership. I read the play as a dramatization of positions that Césaire took, should or would have taken on the questions of the status of the status of the Creole language and culture, Martinican statehood, as they pertain to Césaire's "decolonial project" for the island.

So doing, I counter Césaire's claim that the play is about the United States, an official position he has maintained up until 2005.<sup>13</sup> I contend that the play applies to the context of Martinique, in light of the fact that the debate on autonomy and independence is a hot topic that is still prevalent within the current Créolité debate.

In this context, I look at the assemblage and genealogy of French Caribbean and Martinican figures of political leadership, while at the same time accounting for the legacy that Césaire has left to his island (political, literary, cultural, and economic). I discuss how this legacy is assessed and

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<sup>11</sup> That is to say, the century and a half old debate about the best form of association the island should have with France: assimilation, autonomy or independence, etc.

<sup>12</sup> In the interview, he states that Blacks and Whites in the US are like Siamese twins; they are chained to each other as if in handcuffs; they therefore have to learn how to live together.

<sup>13</sup> Vergès, *Aimé Césaire : Nègre Je Suis, Nègre Je Resterai*.

evaluated by the younger generation of writers and cultural critics, (Patrick Chamoiseau, Rafael Confiant, and Jean Bernabé). In this context, then, the movement of the chapter is bi-directional, consisting mainly of a double-gaze: on the one hand, Césaire looking at his own place in Martinican politics and, on the other hand, the Créolité ideologues looking at Césaire's political legacy.

Finally, in this chapter, I consider the cultural emanations of the figure of Caliban through the critical lenses of the Caribbean postcolonial discourse that reclaims the trope of Caliban; I review Ariel's political leanings in the context of Fanon's study of the *conceptualizing* of the alienation and neurosis of the colonized, and question whether Césaire's political moves may (or not) fit into an Arielian or Calibanesque category; or both, perhaps, as we will attempt to respond to these inquiries throughout my dissertation, beginning with the first one which explores Césaire's understanding of Toussaint L'Ouverture's project not only for the liberation of the French Caribbean, but most importantly, for Haïti.

## CHAPTER I:

### *Et les Chiens se Taisaient - "Haïty On My Mind: "*

#### **Césaire, Toussaint and the Project of Freedom.**

The Haitian Revolution has had a resounding impact on the lives of millions of people not only in the Western Hemisphere (North America, the Caribbean, and Latin America), but on the world stage as well (Europe notwithstanding). Indeed, the unfolding of the San Domingo Revolution has created a worldwide fascination, captivating the minds of scholars, writers, students and commentators of the country's remarkable history. The almost mythical stature of Toussaint L'Ouverture crosses literary, cultural, and geographical boundaries. In this regard, the enormous corpus of literature relating to the revolutionary events in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Haïti is a testament to their significant importance.

More recently, the proliferation of new scholarship on the Haitian Revolution – produced in great part by the effervescence of the celebrations of the bi-centenary of Haïti's independence – has brought to the forefront additional information, as well as previously unpublished works, which all have enriched contemporary debates on Haïti's history. They testify to the import and impact of the historical events taking place in Saint Domingue during the country's anti-colonial struggle: I am thinking of the work by Susan Buck-Morris, Robin Blackburn, Gary Wilder, Patrick Walsh, David

Scott, Michel-Rolph Trouillot and Ann Julia Cooper's long-ignored *Slavery and the French Revolutionists* (1788-1805) and others.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the new (post-2004) research echoes Césaire's exaltation of the sheer fact that the revolution in Haïti succeeded against all odds: it is the only slave rebellion in human history to ever achieve successful transition into independent nationhood. Additional recent research has uncovered historical documents shedding more light on the parameters of Toussaint's agency; by the same token, they offer new accounts of the historical circumstances that contributed to the shaping of Haïti's political destiny since its independence.<sup>15</sup> What is more, lately published literary and historical scholarship further highlights the historical and geo-political forces that have influenced Césaire's political decision-making processes,<sup>16</sup> and which have impacted his literary oeuvre. It is the confluence of these streams – chiefly the political and the aesthetic – which I propose to discuss in this chapter, paying particular attention to Césaire's imaginings of the Haitian Revolution. In the chapter following this one, I will investigate his portrayal of the exercise of leadership

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<sup>14</sup> Buck-Morris, *Hegel, Haïti, and Universal History*. A critique of her thesis by Anders Stephanson can be found in *The New Left Review* (Jan-Feb 2010). See also Wilder, "Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia;" Walsh, *Free and French*; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*; Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848*; Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*.

<sup>15</sup> In 2010, Julia Gaffield, then a Canadian Graduate Student at Duke University, unearthed the only known handwritten copy of Haïti's 1804 Declaration of Independence while conducting her doctoral research at the British National Archives in London. The manuscripted document bearing Toussaint L'Ouverture's signature has been digitalized. A copy is housed at the Duke University Library.

<sup>16</sup> Gary Wilder, John Walsh, Kora Véron, Françoise Vergès, James Arnold and others.

by King Henri Christophe, the first (self-appointed) Monarch of newly independent Haïti.

In order to contextualize the significance of Haïti for our discussion, I want to review the space occupied by the Haitian Revolution within the critical discourse of Caribbean postcoloniality and the Caribbean literary imaginary pertaining to Césaire's politics and poetics. In essence, Césaire joins an outstanding club of Anglophone and Francophone writers on the Haitian Revolution – from Africa, the Caribbean to Europe – who have narrated its story in different forms (poetry, drama, the novel, the essay): William Wordsworth's poem "To Toussaint L'Ouverture" (1902), CLR James's *Toussaint L'Ouverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History* (1934) and *The Black Jacobins* (1938); Bernard Dadié's *Iles de Tempête* (1974), David Blake and Anthony Ward's *Toussaint: Opera in Three Acts* (1977), Edouard Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint* (1981), Richard Gillespie's *Papa Toussaint* (1998), Madison Smart Bell's *All Souls Rising* (2004), *Master of the Crossroads* (2004), *The Stone that the Builder Refused* (2008), to name a few.<sup>17</sup> In the Hispanic Caribbean world, Alejo Carpentier uses Haitian history and the Haitian ecological landscape as a signifier for a privileged revelation of

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<sup>17</sup> In his *Betrothal in St Domingo* (1811) written in the context of the anticolonial rebellion in Haïti, the German novella writer Heinrich van Kleist has a less sympathetic take toward the African-descended revolutionaries in St Domingue, in spite of his support for other progressive causes.

Central and Latin American reality; this conceptualization is best captured in the prologue to his well-acclaimed novel *El Reino de este Mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*), which retraces the chronological sequence of the San Domingo revolution from the early poisoning schemes of Mackandal to the seizing of power by the Mulattoes. The “privileged revelation of reality,” as it is known, inspired Carpentier to theorize “*lo real maravilloso*” (“the marvelous real”), a concept that later took the shape of the *magical realism* movement in Latin America.

Thus, discussing the slave uprising in St-Domingue raises the obvious question as to how Césaire reads the Haitian Revolution, discursively and literarily. An advised reader of Césaire’s poetry will notice that the latter is filled with numerous references to the Caribbean landscape, his Haitian-inspired imagery in particular. As well, Césaire’s interest in the Haitian Revolution can be traced back to the period of the writing of his well-acclaimed *Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal*, where the larger than life figure of Toussaint L’Ouverture functions as a signifier for Negritude. In the *Cahier*, Césaire associates the coinage of the term “Négritude” to the ultimate moment of heroic liberation of the Black Haitian masses from the grip of French colonizers. Haïti, thus, becomes the space where “La négritude se mit debout

pour la première fois et dit qu'elle croyait en son humanité."<sup>18</sup> In this verse, Césaire likens the successful uprisings of Africans on colonial plantations in Haïti to an epic moment of victory against the French planters and colonists, as if it were an epiphanic instant of self-revelation meant to eclipse the entire historical trajectory of the Trans-Atlantic slavery. Later at the end of World War II in 1944, Césaire was to travel to Haïti with his wife Suzanne Césaire on a cultural mission in Port-au-Prince, where he was charged to deliver a series of courses and lectures on modern poetry at the university in Port-au-Prince. Current documentation corroborates the Césaire couple as having sojourned in the Haitian capital between May 17 and December 15, 1944.<sup>19</sup>

This cathartic stay deepened Césaire's already-growing interest in Haïti – its history, politics, culture and society; this scholarly trip is also notable for giving Césaire the opportunity to establish important connections, particularly the friendship he developed with Henri Seyrig, who was then the Cultural Attaché at the Free French Consulate in New York.<sup>20</sup> Césaire's correspondence with Henri Seyrig, as is with Césaire's letter writing with André Breton, prove to have been pivotal in facilitating the poet's emergence on the world literary scene. Césaire's Haitian stay is further credited for stimulating his literary

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<sup>18</sup> "Negritude stood up on its feet for the first time in history and proclaimed the belief in its humanity." Unless I indicated otherwise, the translations made in this thesis are mine.

<sup>19</sup> Véron, <http://koraveron.wordpress.com/2013/11/26/haïti-à-la-croisée-des-chemins-une-correspondance-entre-aimé-césaire-et-henri-seyrig-2> (Project Muse, 431)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 431.



production as a result of his growing interest in the history of Haïti. In the section that follows, I will examine how Césaire reads the Haitian Revolution (its dynamics, its climax, as well as its post-revolutionary aftermath), paying particular attention to the works he produced (both fictional and non-fictional) and which take direct inspiration from Toussaint's homeland.

Césaire's fixation on Haïti draws its stimulus from the fact that the country is a symbol of Caribbean heroism and Afro-Caribbean nationalism, as many politicians, leaders and artists use Haïti as a reference for having created the conditions of possibility of post-colonial liberation for the Caribbean. My contention is that Césaire explores a leadership model that is closer to home than other Western-based modes of governance. Thus, in the same way that Alejo Carpentier uses Haïti as a stepping stone for the creation of a New World cultural and literary aesthetics, Césaire celebrates Haïti as the first New World Black Republic: it is the first post-colony in the entire Caribbean and Latin America to grapple with the question of modern statehood, nation-building and the management of freedom in a post-slavery era. As such, Haïti serves as a political template for the creation of other post-colonies in the Caribbean. Derek Walcott has argued along the same line, stipulating that he had to write about Haïti because the history of the revolution has been an

inspirational moment for the Caribbean as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

This phenomenon of retrieving the past to explain the present and project the future is not new: the famous Senegalese historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo explains this romanticizing of the past in the following terms:

Chaque fois qu'un peuple traverse une crise collective grave, il se tourne instinctivement vers les heures les plus marquantes de son histoire comme pour trouver à travers les brouillards du présent, les certitudes du passé qui répondent, pour ainsi dire, de la permanence de son destin futur. C'est sans doute là une des raisons profondes du désarroi si grand des peuples africains d'aujourd'hui, car vers quel passé peuvent-ils se tourner puisque l'expérience coloniale a tiré un rideau sur ce passé, et en a systématiquement oblitéré le souvenir.<sup>22</sup>

Although it is making direct reference to former African colonies, this phenomenon of the return to one's cultural roots applies to the French Caribbean context as well, in as much as Africans from both geographical areas share the common experience of trans-oceanic slavery and cultural erasure through the practices of cultural assimilation.<sup>23</sup>

Césaire, in point of fact, views Haïti as “un site de mémoire” (a “site of memory”), a site of *mémoire-race* (my coining of the term), i.e., the site of a collective Black racial memory aimed at “un-forgetting” a history that was willfully silenced off by the institutional apparatus of calculated colonial

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<sup>21</sup> Walcott, *The Haitian Trilogy: Henri Christophe, Drums and Colours, and The Haytian Earth*.

<sup>22</sup> Ki-Zerbo, “Histoire : Levier fondamental.” In *Présence Africaine*, no 37, 1961. Also quoted in Ngal, *Aimé Césaire: Un homme à la recherche d'une patrie*, 202.

<sup>23</sup> The situation was a little different in Africa, where colonialist cultural assimilationist policies were not as ruthlessly enforced.

aphasia engraved in flesh and blood through French colonial subjugation and its dismissal of the history of People of African Descent in Africa, the Caribbean, and other French overseas colonies. Not surprisingly, in an effort to reverse the *silencing of the past* (as described by Michel-Rolph Trouillot in his book by the same title), Césaire cannot help but retrieve the glorious era of the Haitian struggle for freedom, through the hero who led the country to independence from the French colonists: Toussaint L'Ouverture.

It is logical, therefore, that Césaire's reflective journey on the political philosophy of the Haitian Revolution culminated in the publication of *Toussaint L'Ouverture: La Révolution Française et le Problème Colonial* (1962), which provides an assessment of Toussaint's fight against and victory over French imperialism, as well as its impact not only in the French Caribbean (Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guyana), but also in the Anglophone Caribbean, with reverberations in Latin America: for instance, Toussaint L'Ouverture's assistance to Simon Bolivar's emancipation struggle in Venezuela.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the hero of Haitian independence holds paramount importance in Césaire's consciousness, and there is no better person than the writer himself to describe Toussaint's imposing influence both in his literary oeuvre and in his political thought. In *Toussaint*, Césaire writes :

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<sup>24</sup> Simon Bolivar requested assistance from Haïti in his fight for the independence of Venezuela. In return, he was asked by Toussaint and Jacques Dessalines to end slavery in his country.

Sa situation historique est grande, irremplaçable: cet homme comme nul autre constitue une articulation historique. En tout cas, il y a un moyen d'apprécier son rôle et sa valeur. C'est de lui appliquer le critère cher à Péguy: de mesurer de quel étiage il a fait monter le niveau de son pays, le niveau de conscience de son peuple. On lui avait laissé des bandes. Il en avait fait une armée. On lui avait laissé une jacquerie, il en avait fait une Révolution; une population, il en a fait un peuple. Une colonie, il en avait fait un État; mieux, une nation. Qu'on le veuille ou non: tout dans ce pays, converge vers Toussaint, et de nouveau irradie de lui.

C'est bien un centre que Toussaint-L'Ouverture. Le centre de l'histoire haïtienne, le centre de l'histoire antillaise.

Quand pour la première fois, il fit irruption sur la scène historique, bien des mouvements étaient en train; commencés par d'autres, mais arrêtés à mi-course, languides, impuissants à s'achever: le mouvement blanc vers l'autonomie et la liberté commerciale; le mouvement mulâtre vers l'égalité sociale; le mouvement nègre vers la liberté.

Tous ces mouvements, Toussaint les unit, les continue, les approfondit.

Quand il s'en alla, le triple mouvement était achevé ou en passe de l'être.

À vrai dire avec lui s'en allait Saint-Domingue. Mais c'est que Haïti était née. La première de toutes les Nations noires.<sup>25</sup>

Césaire's statement above raises an immediate question: how does Toussaint's political legacy thereby play out in Césaire's political thought generally (his vision of freedom and leadership), and in his literary creation (in *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* specifically)? In the upcoming sections, I want to focus on the latter (the literary production of the text *Chiens*), and return to the former (his political philosophy articulated in *Toussaint L'Ouverture*) in my next chapter, where I discuss *The Tragedy of King Christophe*.

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<sup>25</sup> Césaire, *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, 299-300.

Before we begin our discussion, I find it important to put into context the production of and publication of the text within the historical framework surrounding the year *Chiens* came out of the printing press: 1946. For Aimé, Césaire the year stands out as a very pivotal time for both his literary oeuvre and his political career. As well, 1946 saw the publication of *Les Armes Miraculeuses* (with *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* as an appendix), concurrently with Césaire's official entrance into politics (in Martinique and France). What is more, 1946 coincides with the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery in the French Caribbean, as well as with the ultimate passing of the Law of Departmentalization.<sup>26</sup> The latter event bears greater significance for Césaire the aspiring politician as it inks *the* major mark of his numerous imprints in public affairs – among many that have punctuated his long career in public service – and which has remained (for better or for worse) the hallmark signature move of his entire political legacy.

As with his ambivalence in articulating a clear and definite position vis-à-vis some key political issues affecting the status and fate of Martinique – such as Departmentalization, autonomy, administrative union and association with France – Césaire struggled through many hesitations, deliberating about the *form and content* to attribute to *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*. After many years of

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<sup>26</sup> Wilder, "Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia," 107.

painstaking crafting of the text, *Et les Chiens* was published originally as a poetic drama – almost as a footnote to his celebrated collection of poetry entitled *Les Armes*.

*Les Armes Miraculeuses*, as such, heralds a new era in Césaire's aesthetic militancy. The new poetry claims to be more engaged, acting as a weapon intent on achieving "miraculous outcomes." It articulates Césaire's vision of his role as an engaged poet – using verse as the bard's "miraculous weapons" – while at the same time serving as a forewarning of his burst onto the Martinican and French political scene. Therefore, taking into account the timing of the publication of the above-mentioned poetry collection, we can infer with reason that Césaire's transition from poetry to his timid entrance into the world of theater is a solemn declaration that the new frontline of his struggle will mostly be drama, and that the new "marvelous arsenal" is going to be theater,<sup>27</sup> so as to take his political message to the masses. In an interview with journalist François Beloux, Césaire explains this transition – as well as the importance of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* in his literary oeuvre:

On peut aussi se demander pourquoi j'ai choisi l'expression dramatique. Parce que, après tout, je suis poète, fondamentalement. En fait, j'avais déjà écrit "Et les chiens se taisaient;" il faut croire que j'étais assez hanté par le théâtre. (...) Ce texte présente pour moi une profonde importance : parce que c'est une pièce très libre et située dans son milieu - le milieu

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<sup>27</sup> See his justification for using drama as opposed to (or in addition to poetry). See also the second chapter of this dissertation on *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*.

antillais. *C'est un peu comme la nébuleuse d'où sont sortis tous ces mondes successifs que constituent mes autres pièces.* "Le roi Christophe, "Une saison au Congo", (...) et ... une adaptation d'après Shakespeare, ..."UNE Tempête."<sup>28</sup>

Once we consider the text in these terms, *Et les Chiens* – using a Caribbean flora metaphor – is the root (“nébuleuse”) of the *mangrove* from which emanates the rest of this dramatic oeuvre, the trinity of *Tragédie, Congo*, and *Tempête*, as illustrated by the numerous intertextualities that tie the plays with each other as a chain link.

Within the midst of the transition from one literary genre to another, the shift from poetry to theater in *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* rather yields a blended form translating into a mix of poetry and drama in the text; a number of critics have suggested to label the work, instead, as “poetic drama,” as opposed to a play fit for theatrical staging. Therefore, when *Et les Chiens* was entrusted to Jean-Marie Serreau for adaptation onto the stage for European audiences, the endeavor was referred to as “un arrangement théâtral,” given the preponderance of lyrical recitations in the work.

In addition, the fact that Césaire published three versions of the text (1946, 1956 and 1970) brings to light a tendency often observed in Césaire’s approach to writing: a propensity for revising his literary works after their

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<sup>28</sup> Beloux, “Aimé Césaire: un poète politique,” 29.

original publication, as if the process of rethinking and rewriting were a genre in itself. In truth, Césaire often views his writings as a work in progress: we observe this tendency via the revisions he brought to some of the writings he considered to have greater importance (or “urgency”), depending on the particularity of their message at a certain period. At times, this meant a more or less complete overhaul of the original text, infusing new content in order to reflect the historical temporality of the moment, or as a result of his reassessment of the original message of the work.

*Et les Chiens se Taisaient* is no stranger to this process. In fact, the revelation of the existence of an *Ure-text* <sup>29</sup> predating both the 1946 and 1956 editions – found by Alexander Gil Fuentes during his PhD dissertation research – brings more complexity to this discussion. The importance of this discovery lays mostly in the very significant insights the text provides into the different stages of Césaire’s thinking and (re)writing of the drama (the additions and retractions made to the text), as well as in the decision to include (or leave out) important references to the history of the Haitian Revolution – a central component of Césaire’s creative and prosaic discourse.

In point of fact, out of all of Césaire’s writings, *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* displays in many ways the most unstable textual field and shifting terrain,

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<sup>29</sup> It is the draft manuscript of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, which we shall call the *Saint-Dié typescript* (or *SDT* in short).



given its constant flux both in form and content, from its first inception in 1941 to the last revision print of 1970. In this context, it is useful to engage the literary archeology of the text in order to comprehend its *complex genealogy*. As a literary detective, Alex Gil is able to pinpoint with credible accuracy the period when Césaire undertakes to write the typescript version (unpublished draft) of *Chiens*. His investigation narrows the time by almost two years (1941) earlier than previously attributed to the early writing of the text: 1943-1944, a period linked to Césaire's sojourn in Haïti. The typescript was completed a bit before September 22, 1943 (but no later than November 16 1943),<sup>30</sup> with the first (altered) printing accomplished in 1946. The typescript would remain undiscovered for sixty-four years, until Gil travelled to St-Dié (France) to locate the original text based on a hint from reading a footnote hidden in the correspondence between André Breton and Goll indicating the existence of a draft version of the 1946 publication.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Gil, *Migrant Textualities : On the Fields of Aimé Césaire's Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, (Doctoral dissertation), 14-15. In his dissertation, Gil retraces the genealogy of the Breton-Césaire correspondence leading up to the evacuation of the manuscript of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* (i.e., the San-Die Typescript) out of Martinique, so as to remain in the trusted hands of Breton. In his letter, Césaire informs his friend that "I have just finished 'un drame Nègre'," (understand *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*). He tells him to expect, along with it, a package containing "un recueil possible de poèmes." Later, another letter dated 17 Jan 1944 forecasts the arrival of an additional set of writings, "Intermèdes," to be added to *Les Chiens*. See also Kora Véron's: <http://koraveron.wordpress.com/2013/11/26/haïti-a-la-croisee-des-chemins-une-correspondance-entre-aime-cesaire-et-henri-seyrig-2> (Project Muse, 431)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 14.

*Birth Pains.*

In light of all these genealogical elements involved in the long gestation and late delivery of the text, Césaire would complain of his frustration at laboring on the writing, unsure of the historical and political direction he wanted to assign to the text. In a letter to his literary connections in New York, Césaire his progress (or lack thereof) on his drama:

J'avoue que je le considère d'un œil très ennemi. 1<sup>e</sup> Il s'est beaucoup modifié depuis que vous en avez vu une version. 2<sup>e</sup> Il me gêne encore pas mal. Beaucoup. Je crois qu'il ne verra pas le jour. J'ai fait fausse route. Malgré les nombreuses modifications, ma tentative reste encore trop d'ordre historique. Et c'est stupide. Dans mon esprit, elle ne peut être valable que si je la situe hardiment sur le plan du mythe.<sup>32</sup> [Le texte doit donc être complété et modifié. Corrigé dans le sens d'une plus grande liberté. En particulier, la part de l'histoire, ou de l'historicité déjà passablement réduite, doit être éliminée à peu près complètement.<sup>33</sup>

In light of these tergiversations, Césaire would confide in a letter to Breton about the tensions in the text: "Né sous Vichy, écrit contre Vichy, au plus fort du racisme blanc et du cléricalisme, au plus fort de la démission nègre, cette œuvre n'est pas sans porter assez désagréablement la marque des circonstances."<sup>34</sup> *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* finally sees the light of day (in draft and in print) as a fractured drama that carries with it textual injuries inflicted by history, colonialism, slavery, censorship, etc. – wounds that emanate from the tension between history and contemporary relevance, historico-

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<sup>32</sup> Letter to Seyrig in New York, 16 July 1944. Cited in Véron, 437.

<sup>33</sup> Letter to Breton, Breton Collection, BRT, C449. Cited in Véron, 438.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 437.

geographical situatedness and dislocated abstraction, the particular and the universal, the public stage (print, publication) and the private (secretive writing), the directly explicit and the obliquely implied.<sup>35</sup> In fact, *Chiens* proves to be a text that is more interested in the process of “becoming,” rather than “being,” resisting any static state in the process. Hence, it inhabits many locales of meaning, whereby its identity oscillates as it is being “reproduced, rearranged and transposed.”<sup>36</sup>

In its draft form, *Et les Chiens* starts out as a celebration of the Haitian Revolution through the invocation of the important moments of the insurrection (before, during), highlighting Toussaint’s implication and personal investment in the revolutionary struggle, up until his capture, his forced exile and death in the Jura Mountains in France.<sup>37</sup> In the book’s 1946 print (the 1956 solo print as well), the reader-spectator is plunged headfirst into the foggy world of a nameless revolutionary (the Rebel), operating in an unspecified and rootless terrain, within a drama infused by an Oratorio-oriented worldview where he, nameless Recitors and a Chorus engage in deaf-like exchanges (“dialogues de sourds”) suited for existential monologues. Thus, we are in the presence of at least two different texts, both modified at

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<sup>35</sup> Gil, “The Césaire Gambit: Marking and Remaking the Present.” @electroalex, August 11, 2013. <http://electroalex.webfactional.com>. Accessed Jan 8, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Gil, *Migrant Textualities*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 2.

one point or another, with the 1956 version being published after an additional ten years of literary incubation and gestation from the time of its 1946 initial publication. Therefore, given the different modifications that Césaire brought to bear on the original St-Dié typescript, and their resounding differences in theme and tone, it is imperative to discuss the influences of these resonances on the receivers of the message: readership and audience(s). In the section to follow, I intend to address the political context (Martinique and France) within which Césaire was operating and its impact on the “textual migrations” of the drama from draft to printing press during World War II and beyond.

*Of censorship and self-censorship: a text longing for audience(s)*

We begin with the installation of Maréchal Pétain’s administration in Martinique, under the direct command of L’Amiral Robert after April 1941 – date of the publication of the first issue of *Tropiques* by Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, René Ménil, and Aristide Maugée. This political change of guards augured the implementation of laws (by the ultraconservative policies of the Vichy regime) limiting severely the freedom of expression on the island, in an effort to “contain the black population.”<sup>38</sup> The racism embedded in this militarist dominion over Martinique fuelled resentment among the locals,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

especially among the black intelligentsia in the colonies under French domination, hence crystallizing anti-colonialist and Black Nationalist sentiments.<sup>39</sup> On the one hand, these events help explain Césaire's turn toward Haïti in response to this curtailing of individual freedoms, as a way of seeking validation for his ideological struggle of anti-colonialist resistance, which finds its embodiment in the feats of Toussaint L'Ouverture (hence, the fact that the first version of the typescript showcases Toussaint). On another level, the absence of any evidence hinting at the possibility that Césaire had any genuine fear for his life (i.e., potential physical elimination) leads us to interrogate why he then felt the need to write in secrecy. A logical interpretation lays with the abridgement of human rights and liberties, which by mid-1943 attained a higher oppressive plane; the very severe nature of the repression of intellectual and literary expression gave rise to a growing concern within Césaire, to such an extent that a few years later (circa the end of 1943), he felt the need to engage in self-censorship and alter the text. Let us take, for instance the passage in the typescript where he casts Toussaint saying "Mort aux Blancs."<sup>40</sup> With such a statement referencing directly Toussaint's resistance against French enslavement and colonization of the black population, under no circumstances would L'Amiral Robert (and his

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

<sup>40</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 21.

administration) have allowed the publication of such a text: undoubtedly, it would have been labeled as “incendiary” (“rebellious” at best), a pointed challenge to the Vichy administration in Martinique (save an armed struggle). In this consideration, Gil answers my question regarding Césaire’s self-imposed censorship – the change from a historicized locale (1943) to the 1946 spatial abstraction – when he suggests that “... the play attacks head-on the propaganda machine of colonialism and imperialism, providing a great counterpoint to the subterfuges and misdirections of the published material of the time.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, taking into account the impact of the state censorship on literary freedom in Martinique during WW II,<sup>42</sup> the challenge that Césaire faces relates to what Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’O and Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka have termed as writing under the “barrel of a pen.”<sup>43</sup>

As a result, the cumbersome necessity on the part of the writer (Césaire) to negotiate between the absolute necessity of “liberté d’expression” (freedom of speech) and the frustrating limitations of “censure” (censorship) breeds a literary tension (“tiraillement”) that weaves its way into the two versions of the text. As well, the strain hovers between the desire to express oneself in

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<sup>41</sup> Gil, 12.

<sup>42</sup> This helps explain why Césaire then chose to get the text out of Martinique and expedite it to André Breton, who had relocated to New York after his Martinican sojourn.

<sup>43</sup> The two critics and theorists of African literature refer to writing as *resistance* in protest against the political repression and financial mismanagement that characterized many African neo-colonial regimes after the 1960s independence movements, through the 1980s as well.

private (the solitary act writing) and the restriction of the private sphere once the literary work is brought out in the public domain (print, publication, theatrical representation, etc.), depending on the targeted audience.

And as far as audiences are concerned, Gil argues – based on the format of the typescript (less the poetic recitations by Toussaint) – that the text gives the appearance that it was oriented toward a plot action attributable to popular theater – meant to elicit responses from a wider audience.<sup>44</sup> The equivalent rendition of similar events in the published mythified version, he continues, do not lend themselves as easily to stage representation.<sup>45</sup> Gil further maintains that the change (1946 edition) in the situatedness of the text (from historical rootedness to ahistorical delocalized abstraction) *should be viewed* as the author's intent to change audiences, thereby shifting from the particularity of Haitian Revolution to the singularity of an unspecified locale (both in time and space).

Through a series of date reconstructions – for instance, a passage from the original text (“le crachât de 306 ans”)<sup>46</sup> and the fact that it is the year when Martinique and Guadeloupe came under French dominion in 1635 by Pierre Belain d’Esnambouc<sup>47</sup> – Gil hence infers that the typescript points to an

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<sup>44</sup> Gil, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 10. See also Césaire's reference to the same character in *SDT*, 76.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid 10.

original Martinican audience, whereas the history enacted on Haitian soil (in the typescript) is later taken to the abstraction of a universal stage.<sup>48</sup> If we take into account this suggestion to the letter, the shift of particularity from the 1943/1944 version (the singularity of Haitian history) to the oratorio published format could be interpreted as a desire to posit (ion) the play as having more of a “universal” message, in search of a new, broader readership.<sup>49</sup> And while it is common knowledge that the meeting between Aimé Césaire and André Breton served as the catalyst of a close collaboration between the two writers – would enable Césaire to transcend the editorial limitations imposed by the Vichy regime’s WW II occupation of Martinique – Gil credits this encounter for introducing Césaire to a wider audience (mostly European).

Besides, new research surfacing post-Césaire’s death (2008) indicates that Césaire was, at the time, beginning to enjoy an even larger reception of his oeuvre in Latin America.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, Kora Véron has uncovered subsequent evidence indicating that Breton’s influence was not as decisive as it is thought to be, that in fact Césaire’s international visibility was buttressed by two other factors: his network of Alumni from the École Normale

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 9. That this would enable Césaire to transcend the editorial limitations imposed by the Vichy regime’s WW II occupation of Martinique.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 198-200.



Supérieure, and his growing friendship with Henri Seyrig, the Cultural Attaché at the Free French Consulate in New York.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, while all the above factors are relevant in explaining the influence that the play's audience(s) may have brought to bear on the transformation of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, I defer my judgement for the end of this chapter as to which ones are more relevant to the mutations in the text.

Therefore, when we engage the reading of *Chiens*, we have to take into account "text and context," i.e., the contents of the two versions of the "same" text, the context of its genesis and production, as well as the circumstances (historical, political) that generate its adaptation to its environment (literary, cultural, or otherwise).<sup>52</sup> This relates to the "generic and mediatic crossovers" of *Chiens* and its different appellations: poetic drama, dramatic poem, oratorio, theatrical arrangement.<sup>53</sup>

From this vantage point, then, a number of questions (which I venture to address in the sections to follow) beg to be heard: why did Césaire eliminate important references to the Haitian Revolution, a most paradoxical issue given that Haïti is so very close to his heart and mind? Consequently, what does the "mutating role of History" mean in the context of Césaire's engagement with

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<sup>51</sup> Véron, "Césaire at the Crossroads: Correspondence with Henri Seyrig," 430-431.

<sup>52</sup> Gil, 57.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 56-58. Gil offers here a more concise discussion on the theory of the process of textual adaptation.

the problem of freedom during the Haitian Revolution and the post-1804 epoch? Why did Césaire then, in the solo published version, decide to present the play in a rather abstract and oniric environment – or surrealist as some have suggested? Does this choice align more with the suggestion by some critics that we read the text as on “oratorio,” a style more related to the Greco-Roman dramatic tradition? Could this choice perhaps have been triggered by his new literary friendship with André Breton (who instantly hailed him as one of the greatest Surrealist poets he had ever encountered)? Or else, should we rather be looking for resonances in Césaire’s work of other poets like Guillaume Apollinaire, and existentialist writers like Jean-Paul Sartre, with whom he had personal and literary affinities? And how do we account for the change in meaning when the original content has been evacuated? What does this deletion (erasure) produce in terms of our reception or the message, i.e., what changes in our reception of the play? Or how do the avatar-copycat versions (1946/1956/1970) relate to their ancestor (circa 1943/44)? How does the text mediate the writer’s changing agenda regarding what should be included (what should be stated loud and clear) and what should be silenced? And more to the point of my argument in this dissertation, what factors in Césaire’s political and literary circumstances may have triggered the textual migration of meaning from its original conception (typescript) to its final print format (from draft to publication)? And last, from a logistical perspective, do

we need to choose, between the Saint-Dié typescript and the print version(s), which rendition should be considered as *the most “authentic”* reflection of Césaire’s political thinking in the drama?

In my view, the last officially published version of the play (1956) should not limit the scope of our discussion of the drama. Between the supposedly “real” text (1956 print) and the implied “not-real” (the St-Dié typescript original version), I will be working with the two, putting more emphasis on the unpublished draft. Given the importance of the authorial original intentionality, it is, in my view, uncensored – therefore more “authentic.” Most importantly, the SDT version stands more in alignment with Césaire’s thinking on Haïti; it reflects, as well, the trajectory of Césaire’s study of leadership in times both heroic (Toussaint L’Ouverture’s liberation struggle) and tragic (during the post-1804 reign of Christophe). In this line of argument, I propose to consider the process of the writing and rewriting of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* as a gateway, a mirror through which we can attempt to understand the creative phases delineating the production of the “poetic drama,” the literary forms it embraces, as well as the relation of the latter to Césaire’s own political consciousness, fears, ambivalences and historical concerns as they are played out at the end of the World War II era.

As workers of textual analysis and interpretation, we bear the knowledge that there exists no absolute or final reading of a text that overrides

all others; but that, as D.F. McKenzie puts it, we encounter, more often than not, a set of parallel “historical meanings”<sup>54</sup> that accompany (support, validate or deny) narratives that are presented to us. Therefore, where textual criticism and analysis interlace with literary history, what I endeavour to achieve in this chapter is to offer a rendition of other meanings imbedded in the textual field that is *Et les Chiens*, in relation to Césaire’s political thought, his reading of Toussaint L’Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution, all in connection with his own political career and practice.

From a *methodological perspective*, given the very limited (if not quasi non-existent) critical studies conducted comprehensively about the play and the subject at hand, I will rely mostly on the work of Alex Gil, whose doctoral thesis engages the issue of “... [the text’s] transition from typescript to print by reconstructing the stages of composition using codicological and historical evidence.”<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, in as much as it is paramount for us to engage Toussaint’s leadership role in his continuous pursuit of the freedom project for the Haitian slaves as a whole, it is equally important, for the sake of my discussion, to organize my analysis – when needed – in “*blocs of meanings*” (i.e. subsections) in an effort to harmonize the discussion on Toussaint’s difficult position as a leader, with the deployment of the historical sequences of the

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<sup>54</sup> McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 46. In his dissertation, Gil gives an interesting reading, more akin to a topological reading of “migrant textuality,” 55–56.

<sup>55</sup> Gil, 81.

Haitian Revolution as they occur chronologically in time, as well as their ramifications on Césaire's staging of the phases of the liberation struggle.

Far from pursuing solely a study of the history of the drama, my quest is meant to offer an alternative reading of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* focusing on the original intent of Césaire's St-Dié typescript (the original unpublished version engaging the Haitian Revolution), as well as what its transformation into the published version(s) entail(s), and the writer's re-contextualization of the primordial gist of the play. Through its metamorphosis, the meaning of the text oscillates between *old* and *new*, like Césaire's political positions, as reflected in the home front factors that impacted his decision to change *Chiens* from a local Haitian situatedness to a delocalized spatial abstraction.

Consequently, I seek to explore the variants and inconsistencies within the text, via what I will call the *mutation of meaning* through a new textual formation; I highlight the discursive correlations and differences between the two versions, the ramifications that these dissonances imply, as well as their denotations towards their targeted audiences. Furthermore, while comparing the two versions of the drama, I investigate the pertinence of both renditions to Césaire's discernment of the interaction of the questions of leadership and freedom as these apply to his vision of the issues and how they are reflected in his political practice. I also seek to identify its relation to – and its reflection into – Césaire's circumstances (political, aesthetic and literary).

I anchor my discussion of the play in the current debates on freedom in the French Caribbean (Gary Wilder, John Walsh, Carrie Noland, etc.). In doing so, I also want to bring into the discussion Gary Wilder's view that Césaire used his dramatic literature as "training" for politics by creating scenarios where heroes were faced with extremely difficult and complex choices.<sup>56</sup> His perspective is in agreement with my original argument, that is, that Césaire uses theatre as a mode of cognition for models of leadership that he would like to emulate or avoid – a position I have been expressing since the early stages of my project back in 2001.

Hereto, the investigation in this chapter will be directed toward the following key issues that the drama raises: the role of history, the quest for freedom, the temptation/seduction as well as the solitude of the hero. To begin with, history is deployed in terms local (Césaire's take on Haïti during the revolution) and universal: Césaire's preoccupation encompasses the historical oppression of People of African descent, but he also approaches the Haitian Revolution through the lenses of the French Revolution, as he does in his book *Toussaint L'Ouverture*. As well, I will be addressing the role of history as the cornerstone of SDT, as well as what evading history leads to in the print versions of 1946 and 1956 (their change in both form and content).

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<sup>56</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*. 199-200.

The second theme I want to explore is the question of and quest for freedom on both a local level (Haïti, the role of heroism, Negritude) and universal plane, that is, the linkages that Césaire makes in the context of the worldwide pursuit of freedom. Indeed, amidst the different topological spaces occupied by *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, there is one stubborn invariant, unyielding theme: *the struggle for freedom*. It is the driving force throughout all the different versions of the text: in one instance, freedom is localized (Haïti), whereas it is universalized in the second case (the printed avatars). In light of the fact that the search for freedom underscores the internal struggle of the hero, I will be comparing Toussaint's vision of freedom to that envisaged by the Chorus/Récitant/Récitante trio. In fact, this pursuit of freedom produces tensions amongst the characters and protagonists in all versions of the text (*SDT* and the 1946/1956 versions). In *SDT*, Toussaint and the rebelling slaves are pitted against the White Planters and the representatives of the Members of Parliament,<sup>57</sup> whereas in the 1946/1956 publications, the Rebel's pursuit of freedom antagonizes his Mother and the "Architecte" (who in this case represents the interests of the white planters and other French colonial administrators). In this context, the trope of the tension between the Rebel and

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<sup>57</sup> Gil, 248. Translation: "In the chasm of fright, a vast collective prison peopled with nègres, all contenders for madness and death; thirtieth day of the famine, the torture and the delirium."

his Mother has resonances with another play of Césaire: *A Tempest*, between Caliban and Prospero on one hand, as well as between Caliban and Ariel.

Considering that conflict (political, military, etc.) is unavoidable in the pursuit of freedom, I undertake to compare and contrast the deployment of the third theme in this chapter, i.e., *temptation* (and seduction in a way) in the *SDT*<sup>58</sup> and the printed versions. In reality, temptation is stratagem used by Napoleon and his envoys to trick Toussaint into accepting a deal with the French: continued French sovereignty over Haïti as a tradeoff for obtaining a privileged status for himself. When the French fail in this mission, they send Toussaint's own son Isaac to tempt him into consenting to the deal offered by Bonaparte's envoys.

As for the trope of the solitude of the hero, isolation in *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* arises not from an inability on Toussaint's part to form alliances (political, military, or otherwise), but from a temporary disconnect from the masses on one hand, and his forced seclusion by Napoleon as revenge – the price Toussaint has to pay for pursuing freedom on behalf of the Haitian people. The solitude of Toussaint the hero,<sup>59</sup> in this case, stands opposite to the solitude of power experienced by Henri Christophe and Patrice Lumumba: while the latter (Christophe and Lumumba) will have the opportunity to

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<sup>58</sup> Gil, *Migrant Textuality*, 44; Césaire, *SDT*, 48.

<sup>59</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 42-44.



exercise power over a long reign (Christophe), or short tenure (Lumumba), Toussaint's authority is only extended during the war of independence before he gets a chance to see it to fruition.

Before engaging in the discussion of the text per se, it is important for the reader-spectator of the drama to get a sense of the *plot arrangement* as (s)he moves through the different episodes of the play chronicling the Haitian Revolution, its actors, its ins and outs. Despite its mutations, the text of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* brings the different episodes together into a coherent story, as Gil indicates: "... we have the general structure of the final version of the typescript, [except for] ... the order of the segments in Acte I. ... Césaire will reframe Acte II several times (...), but the overall edifice of remains the same."<sup>60</sup> Any later additions or subtractions are confined to local, individual passages in the *St-Dié typescript*: additions are done in pencil next to words or passages in need of editing for clarification purposes; erasures are done with the use of ink.

When considered in chronological order, a linear timeline of the action in the drama unfolds, beginning with the initial stages of the Haitian Revolution, following on to Toussaint's military victory over the French occupation, and concluding with the ultimate death of Toussaint in the Jura Mountains in

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<sup>60</sup> Gil, 45. He notes that the general tenor of the drama changes as the CRR plays an increasingly central role next to Toussaint.

France at the hands of Napoleon's jailors. Hence, the plot arrangement of the drama in Acte I, *Acte II* and *III* follows the subsequent occurrences below. First, Toussaint's conquest of Saint Domingue in Acte I, and the negotiations with white representatives. The landing of Napoleon's troops in Acte II, which thereby intensifies the fight over the control of Haïti and its sovereignty; the temporary setback of Toussaint and his armies who retreat to prepare for guerilla warfare; the prophecy of Toussaint's capture by Napoleon's agents. Third, Toussaint's imprisonment in the Jura Mountains in France in Acte III; the temptation of bribery toward Toussaint from Bonaparte's emissaries and his own son Isaac; Toussaint's torture and death from his torturers.

At this stage, I want to begin my detailed discussion of the drama by giving the reader a foretaste of the opening episodes of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* (in both versions), so as to get a feel of the "same" text which inhabits at least two different environments in time and space. For instance, the beginning of the drama in the San Die typescript (Act 1, Scene 1) is filled with *great pathos* that underscores the extreme seriousness of the country's predicament. When the curtains open, the eyes of the spectator-reader are directed to a view of a plantation in St Domingue (Haïti's capital), the sight of which is far from any romantic description of a bucolic landscape. The historical setting is that of the Haitian Revolution, most probably its early stages: the Chorus/Reciter/Recitress ("Choeur/Récitant/Récitante," which

we shall refer to as CRR for convenience) delivers to a group of girls playing outside a cautionary intimation to stay clear of upcoming perils: “Rentrez ... orbites de la mort ... le mica blame.”<sup>61</sup> While the girls respond with expected childlike naivety and mockery of the CRR outsiders and asking them if it is a “devinette,”<sup>62</sup> the girls’ mother, through intuitive discernment of the menace, immediately tells the girls to enter the house. In the scene that follows (Scene 2), we are thrust into observing the announcing strangers (the CRR) conducting a fake burial of a fictive corpse, punctuating the ceremony with the statement: “Adieu, St Domingue.”<sup>63</sup> This mock burial is both symbolic and a premonition of an approaching event: it indicates that St Domingue as it *was* (the town and its population) is about to disappear, thus giving rise to a new sociopolitical order. The scene I just described, as well as the above utterance, all point to the massacres that will follow.

In the 1956 print version, on the other hand, the play opens up with a scene presaging the death of the hero (the Rebel) as opposed to that of Toussaint in the *SDT*. As the curtains elevate, the reader-spectator is welcomed by a voice via its personification through an echo, “L’Echo,” whose first declamation indicates: “Bien sûr qu’il va mourir le Rebelle, la meilleure raison étant qu’il n’y a plus rien à faire dans ce monde, confiné et prisonnier

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<sup>61</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 23.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

de lui-même ... ." <sup>64</sup> Having thus announced the imminent death of the Rebel, "L'Écho" then intercedes on the Rebel's behalf by delivering an injunction against a character named "L'Architecte aux yeux bleus" ("the blue-eyed Architect") by challenging the latter (understood as the metaphor for the French settlers and colonizers). It is worth comparing this passage with the corresponding statement found at the beginning of the *SDT*:

je te défie  
prends garde à toi architecte, car si meurt le Rebelle ce ne sera pas sans  
avoir fait clair pour tous que tu es le bâtisseur d'un monde de pestilence  
[...] En quelle nuit as-tu troqué le  
compas contre le poignard ?  
architecte [...] chacun de tes pas est une conquête et une spoliation et  
un contresens et un attentat  
Bien sûr qu'il va quitter le monde le Rebelle ton monde de viol (...). <sup>65</sup>

This indictment of the corrupt world of the colonizer (its violence via military conquest and rape) paves the way for a scene we encountered in *SDT*, that of the Récitante warning a group of young girls playing, of an impending danger. However, whereas in the *SDT* the girls ask if it is a "devinette" (a riddle), here we have the intervention of a different character, the First woman of a group of "Folles" ("crazy ladies") who, in a very "serious" tone, asks the same question to the Récitante (*not* to the girls). As in the *SDT*, the Récitante is the one who tells the girls to go home to safety.

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<sup>64</sup> Césaire, *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

The *timing* of the episode characterizes the second notable difference between the texts. In the 1956 print, “the Warning” to the girls occurs immediately after the curtain is lifted, with these stage directions: (*Dans le barathre des épouvantements, vaste prison collective, peuplée de nègres candidats à la folie et à la mort ; jour trentième de la famine, de la torture et du délire.*) (*Un silence*). The existentialist setting which is presented to the reader-spectator is that of a chaotic commotion of panicked and neurotic slaves who are gathered (or confined) in a gulag-style collective prison, facing imminent death. The silence that ensues creates the venue for the Récitante to dismiss the girls we have already encountered, in anticipation for the entrance of another character, the Administrateur. In the *SDT*, however, the scene takes place way after the beginning of the first Act (precisely in the middle part), after Toussaint – who in a captivating tour de force – manages to turn the tide in his favor by convincing the gathered slaves who were demanding his exit, to rise up against the French colonial masters. One of the Récitantes then closes this episode by indicating that “La grande révolution de St Domingue vient de commencer.”<sup>66</sup> The stage directions that follow point out that the action is now taking place in St Domingue, “... devant une riche maison coloniale style

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<sup>66</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 22. It needs to be noted that Césaire, with the stroke of a pencil, originally used the present tense (“commence”), then changed it to the future tense (“commencera”), only to revert to the use of the recent past (“vient de commencer”) at the end. For a more exhaustive discussion of the ramifications of this change in temporality in the text, see Gil, 45.

18ème siècle de jeunes filles blanches en train de jouer.”<sup>67</sup> Note that in the print version, the race of the girls is not specified; they are only told to step aside out of respect for the foreigners who are passing “... sur les riches ornières du crépuscule.”<sup>68</sup> The imagery and metaphor used in this episode of the 1956 print version are rife with irony, especially in light of the events that follow the announcement by the Récitante in the *SDT* manuscript.

The staging of the character (L'Administrateur) I just mentioned in the previous paragraph allows for the critique (albeit veiled) of the French Governor of the imagery colony (not Haïti, while this is the case in *SDT*), who immediately responds to the Rebel's criticism of the latter's colonial conquest through spoliation, land confiscation, and genocidal attacks. Says he:

Et nous leur aurions volé cette terre ? Ah ! non ! et ce n'est pas la même chose  
Nous l'avons prise ! À qui ? À personne ! Dieu nous l'a donnée...  
Et de fait, est-ce que Dieu pouvait tolérer qu'au milieu du remous de l'énergie universelle, se prostate cet énorme repos, ce tassement prodigieux, si j'ose dire ce provoquant avachissement.  
Oui nous l'avons prise  
Oh ! pas pour nous ! *Pour tous !*  
Pour la restituer, inopportune stagnation, à l'universel mouvement !  
Et pour que tous en profitent,  
Comme un scrupuleux fermier  
comme un mandataire fidèle, nous la garderons.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>68</sup> “... on the rich ruts and passage way of twilight.” Césaire, *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 10.

In this intervention, a trained Cesairean critical eye will notice the intertextuality between the Administrator's pronouncement and another episode we find in *A Tempest*, when Prospero is explaining to Caliban – as per the prevalent canonical discourse of empire during the Renaissance – that Caliban's native land was a *tabula rasa* until Prospero's benevolent intervention on the scene to carry out his civilizing mission. Furthermore, pursuing our examination of differences between the two texts I am comparing (the first scenes and episodes in each), the change of focus can be noticeable: when we compare the *SDT* to the beginning of the published version, Scene 1 and 2 of Act 1 of the typescript clearly indicate a specific time and place (in St Domingue, during the early stages of the Haitian Revolution), since the drama's original intent concentrates on the historical episode,<sup>70</sup> i.e., the historicity of Toussaint L'Ouverture, his revolutionary leadership leading up to his death. Contrary to this, the beginning of 1956 version emphasizes the upcoming death of Toussaint (which hangs over his head like a sword of Damocles) amidst an ambiance of an upcoming cataclysm – until his demise actually takes place.

Thus, unlike its printed avatar, Acte I of the *St-Dié typescript* opens from the get-go with a clearly outlined time and space, as I just indicated above.

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<sup>70</sup> Gil, 29.

The scene is taking place in Saint-Domingue, with a specific temporal mention: Césaire signals (in pencil marks) that it is the epoch of the French Revolution. Three characters occupy the stage: la Récitante, le Récitant, and Toussaint. The imagery of the recitations immediately draws the reader-spectator into a world rife with representations of illness ("ulcère"), physical disaster ("terre brûlée" - "bouche ouverte d'une gorge de feu"), curse ("pays maudit"), cannibalistic annihilation ("un pays ... dévore monstrueusement" - "pays qui mord") and Armageddon ("convergence de crocs de feu sur la croupe de l'Amérique mauvaise").<sup>71</sup> The Récitant then introduces the messianic coming of Toussaint, within a context of a civil disobedience ("comme une désobéissance"). And Toussaint doesn't chew his words :

Je salue ma fraternité totale. Saint-Domingue, tes fleuves enfoncent dans ma chair leur museau de sagouin, (...) les vagues de mon sang chantent aux cayes, Je ferme les yeux, toutes mes richesses sous ma main, (...) tous mes volcans.<sup>72</sup>

A number of terms need to be explained: first, "sagouin" - a direct reference for the local fauna, carries the zoological allusion to a macaque ("petit singe d'Amérique"); in its familiar usage, it indicates a rogue individual ("voyou"), as well as a person who undermines the work of others.<sup>73</sup> In brief, Césaire's staging of a hostile world ruled by thugs (white colonist planters and the

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<sup>71</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> <http://dictionary.reverso.net/french-definition/sagouin/forced>. Accessed July 14, 2015.



French colonial administration) showcases the forces that are antagonistic toward the freedom liberation project Toussaint and his troops are engaged in. The choice of a volcano (“volcan”), on the other hand, sends a clear message of violence: it presages an imminent eruption about to implode on the island. Figuratively, it functions as the biblical annunciation of the “Coming of the Messiah” (Toussaint himself), giving the reader-spectator notice of his arrival (like the biblical Moses) to save his people from subjugation and slavery, and lead them toward freedom. The presentation of Toussaint continues, this time with more of an epic touch:

Toussaint est debout dans le grondement du fleuve de la rive d’or cent guerriers lui lancent un cent sagaies. La poitrine de Toussaint est lunée de cicatrices Toussaint, Toussaint c’est le jour de l’épreuve. Il vient ...le messenger du roi ... il glisse ... sa bouche pleine de promesses ... le serpent siffle ... siffle ... il tient Toussaint du bout de sa langue.<sup>74</sup>

The chorus then takes over the recitation, with a clear indication that an all out war has been declared:

Toussaint a pris tout seul le sentier de la guerre. Tout s’est tu. Fusils et canons se sont tus. Toussaint est nu ... Le bouclier de paille tressée est à sa main gauche ... Il s’arrête ... Il rampe ... Il s’immobilise un genou en terre ... Le torse est renversé comme une muraille ... La sagaie est levée  
(À ce moment un cortège magnifique envahit la scène : pèlerins, chevaux, chiens. Senteurs de muse et bonjoin).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

From this point on, the introduction of a trinity of temptress voices (“Voix Tentatrices” which in actuality function as one) at the beginning of the drama operates as a preamble to the problem of *temptation*, which will carry significant relevance later in the drama (Acte III), where the stakes will be much higher for Toussaint during his imprisonment in the Jura Mountains. Toussaint will be “courted” by an envoy of the Consul (Napoleon); when that fails, his son Isaac will be sent to try changing his mind and enter into a concession with his French captors (i.e., betray the cause of Haitian independence). For their part, the “Temptress Voices” will flash in his eyes the lure of riches (minerals, gold and land titles), army titles and a higher military rank, and even the enticement of becoming a King: “Ô mon ami ... veux-tu de l’argent? des titres? de la terre? Veux-tu être Maréchal de camp? Grand Roi d’Espagne ? Roi, c’est ça, tu seras Roi. Je jure que tu seras Roi.”<sup>76</sup>

Toussaint’s invocation of the necessity to preserve the memory of slavery and slave labor exploitation – as an integral part of the long-term liberation project – suggests as well his vision (and Césaire’s perhaps) that the fight for the liberation of Haïti is a global, Pan-Caribbean movement: “Martinique, Jamaïque, tous les mirages et tous les lampornis ne peuvent faire sonner

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 4. This passage is further discussed in Gil, *Migrant Textuality*, 44-48.

d'oubli dormant le coup de feu, le sang gâché, le chant d'acier [...]."<sup>77</sup> I want to note, in passing, the intertextuality of these remarks with another passage from *Tragedy*, where Christophe exhorts his fellow citizens to never forget the history of their subjugation ("ceux qui ont connu le crachât, le rabaissement de la bête"), as this ought to motivate them to endure hard labor for their own benefit.

Therefore, the "duty of memory" ("le devoir de mémoire") paves the way for The Chorus to remind Toussaint that the onus of the struggle for freedom cannot be evaded ("Tu n'échapperas pas à ta loi").<sup>78</sup> Toussaint's response requires that we study in detail the citation as it introduces us to his vision of the Haitian freedom project, as well as his understanding of the role he has to play: "Ma loi est que je cours d'une chaîne sans cassure, jusqu'au confluent de feu qui me volatise, qui m'épure et m'incendie de mon propre don amalgamé."<sup>79</sup> The use of the subjunctive mode, in this citation, is quite topical; it indicates two prerequisites: first, the necessity and requirement to break away from both the coercive labour and the shackles of slavery that are otherwise unbreakable; second, a steady iron will to carry the revolution to its fruition, even if this means that he (Toussaint), as the leader-hero of the movement, must perish in the line of fire ("au confluent de feu") or in flames

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 7.

("m'incendie"). Armed with this resolve, Toussaint is able to embrace his fate with open eyes:

Hé bien, je périrai. Mais nu. Intact. (...)  
nu comme l'eau, nu comme le regard unicorne de midi,  
comme le cri et la morsure, j'éclaircis de basses buées  
le monde sans reconnaissance et sans ingratitude,  
où la pensée est sans équivoque, (...)  
Je veux un monde nu d'univers timbré. (...)  
Je suis nu.  
Je suis nu dans les pierres.  
Je veux mourir. (...)  
Approchez donc, flammes effilées, .... Que la senteur  
des feux jette son javelos autour de ma tête.<sup>80</sup>

Nudity, as presented in the above passage, works as the symbol of an unaltered and unblemished state ("intact"); its association with water is suggestive of crystal clear purity (perhaps that of the noble ideal of freedom) which is as perceptible and conspicuous as the memorably painful and agonizing cries of the tortured slaves. It is evident that our hero, Toussaint, is intent on clearing away ("j'éclaircis") the vestiges of the slave plantation economy, so that he can reinvent the world in his own volition – a universe devoid of folly ("monde nu d'univers timbré") – where his humanity, and that of his peers, can be validated and affirmed.<sup>81</sup> To the Récitante who challenges

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 7-8.

<sup>81</sup> This idea of total destruction as the only solution for remaking the world is a concept we already encountered in the *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*. The Speaker vows to destroy the universe of slavery with the aim of recreating a new world order where universal freedom is achieved for all, especially Africans in the Americas who have endured capture, torture, Trans-Atlantic deportation, and slavery on New World plantations.

Toussaint as a lost man facing a tragic fate while ruminating a prayer (understand “promise”) he will not honor - for whatever the Récitante’s pseudo-religious insinuations - Toussaint’s self-referencing as a Cobra (one of the most venomous snakes) can be construed as a forewarning of a fatal, deadly attack on his part (and that of the revolting slaves).

The dialogue that Toussaint imagines having with two different interlocutors opens to us the possibility of envisioning him interacting with the French colonialists. Starting with the more familiar “Tu,” he questions the first addressee: “Et tu ne vois rien parmi l’herbe nouvelle? Rien parmi le barrattement de la terre et le convulsif chahut végétal?” In the same declamation, he then switches to the more formal (or plural) “Vous:” “Ligotez-moi. Piétinez-moi. Assassinez-moi. Trop tard.”<sup>82</sup> In the first instance the invocation of the Caribbean flora - and the latter’s supposed participation in the independence struggle - all sanction the unfolding of the Haitian revolution. As is customary in Césaire’s literary world, natural elements (earth, plants and trees) generate a life force (a concept borrowed from Leo Frobenius’ concept of the “Païdema”) which, in this case, enunciates a cataclysm to come. In the second occurrence, Toussaint seems to address his future captors, a warning perhaps to Bonaparte (indirectly, via the Governor

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<sup>82</sup> Op Cit, 10.

of Haïti at the time), that the Revolution of San Domingo under way is larger than life, and that it transcends the limitations of one single individual: it is unstoppable!

The succeeding scene which stages the Chorus projecting a vision of independence (“visions souveraines”) clears the path for Toussaint to make his solemn entrance into San Domingo, whereby the “Cabido” surrenders to him the keys to the town.<sup>83</sup> However, in a forecasting of things to come, the warning of the Récitante represents a reminder for Toussaint that the winners should not rest on their laurels; moreover, it is a caution that sovereignty will be challenged by the defeated European colonial power, France in this case: “Hélas. Hélas. L’Europe arachnéenne bouge ses doigts et ses phalanges de navires.” The direct reference to the European naval blockade of Haïti after its declaration of independence speaks for itself. To this declamation, the reply of the Chorus in the same citation is very informative in its invocation of a future memory deployed under the guise of the past referencing Africa: “Mes souvenirs délirent d’*encens* et de *cloches* ... le Niger bleu ... le Congo d’or ... le Lagone sablonneux ... un gallop de bubales ... et les pileuses de millet dans le soir de cobalt.” I have highlighted the words “encens” and “cloches” as these references intriguingly play on a “double entendre”: on the surface, they may

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 11.

appear as a banal allusion to the religious ceremonies of Catholic mass rituals. But the physical materiality of the words, in the context of the current freedom struggle in the drama, also suggests the scents of war, especially of the burning of the French plantations that is to come. The sound of the galloping of the hartebeest (“bubales”)<sup>84</sup> can be equated with the sound of leaps by the cavaliers riding the horses during the revolution. On a different sonic allusion, the noise of the crashing of the millet is linked to the vibration of drums that were used by the revolting slaves to call for their insurrection and assault on white-owned colonial plantations.

At this crossroads in the narrative, the infusion of the theme of solitude is informed by the distancing (albeit temporary) between the hero and his people. As the slaves enter the stage, Toussaint feels the heat of the black populace when the sanctimonious elites (French planters, parliamentary deputies and emissaries of the French Governor of Haïti) try to persuade the Black slaves to rise up against Toussaint: they blame Toussaint<sup>85</sup> for the pushback they experience from the white planters. Toussaint’s isolation thereby feeds into a sense of alienation from the people he is leading. It is, I would argue, the kind of solitude of the hero who is misunderstood by those whose freedom he is fighting for, because the leader’s vision and socio-

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<sup>84</sup> Large African antelopes with ringed horns that curve backwards.

<sup>85</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 17-19.

political programme is either misunderstood, or has not been explained in details. However, in a rather astute “coup de théâtre,”<sup>86</sup> Toussaint turns the tide in his favor by haranguing the crowds (with Lumumba-like verbal prowess), hence recovering the trust of his slave comrades, and who thereby start chanting “Mort aux Blancs. Vive Toussaint!”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, as the dramatic plot indicates: “La révolution de St Domingue vient de commencer.”<sup>88</sup> Toussaint will encounter yet another episode of solitude while being held captive in the Jura Mountains in France, but this is more of a solitary confinement serving as punishment for defying the colonial plantation order.

Césaire’s casting of slave leaders foretells the commencement of the “dénouement” of the drama of revolution. The representatives are conferencing with white deputies in the middle of a forest, where the latter, representing the interests of the white planters (as well as their own), want the black slaves to return to the plantations, in exchange for a more “benevolent” treatment. To the group of slaves who have stormed the stage armed with knives and daggers, Toussaint astutely asks if they want to hear the wishes of the white messengers who are gambling the lives of the enslaved. In another dramatic stroke of genius, Toussaint’s harangues of the slaves turn the latter against their white oppressors, while they chant “Mort aux Blancs!” From a

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 22.



theatrical point of view, the closing of ranks by the slaves does not augur any good news for the whites as the former gather in a military-like attack formation.<sup>89</sup> We as reader-spectators are drawn to observe the warriors marching on the stage amongst cadavers and dead bodies (presumably those of the white delegates), while brandishing their knives. The scene ends with Toussaint asking his audience who is going to deliver to the rest of the white representatives their message of refusal to submit, since their envoys have been decimated. The crowd replies that they are going to do it themselves: the muted sarcastic tone hints at a negative outcome. Toussaint therefore wraps up this encounter by giving the order for the final, general assault on white St Domingue, as the slave bands disperse.<sup>90</sup>

The onslaught of the White planters heralds a critical phase of the revolution, with black slaves using daggers and knives against their masters: “les coutelas s’abattent et se relèvent et s’abattent dans le moulinet de l’exaspération.”<sup>91</sup> The imagery speaks for itself: while the Récitant does not specify to whom these light arms are used against, it is reasonable to infer that the unfortunate recipients are the French planters and their families. Furthermore, the entrance of the Récitante in the narration imbues a derision

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>91</sup> The “moulinet” is a pivoting device used to only let in pedestrians, or one person at a time, on a particular street. In our context, it is symbolic of a roadblock.

taking sarcasm to a higher level: appropriating the metaphor of the season of the gathering of crops ("la moisson"), she indicates that the harvesting is not of sugar canes or banana trees: it is, rather, the reaping of beheaded skulls smashed as farmers do to extract juice from coconuts, the hills strident with their screams, cadavers rolling into the ravine, sliding in a pool of blood, only to stop at the bottom of the pine trees.

When the Chorus joins in the narration, their intervention aims to provide a historical contextualization of the slave revolt, as well as a rationale for the slave resistance through violence and the killing of the white planters: these are showcased as the result of the ill treatment received by African slaves and the gruesome slave brutality forced onto them. Conjunctly, the retrieval of the memory of brutalization serves to validate the subsequent use of violence against their previous owners' humiliation of the African slaves via the latter's treatment as chattel cattle:

Ils nous coupaient les jarrets. / Ils nous marquaient au fer rouge/ Et l'on nous vendait comme des bêtes et l'on nous comptait les dents ... et l'on nous bâtait les bourses et l'on nous examinait le cati ou le décati de notre peau et l'on nous palpait et pesait et soupesait et l'on passait à notre cou de bête domptée, le collar de la servitude et du sobriquet.<sup>92</sup>

This exchange presented to us by the Récitant and the Chorus brings to light a split perspective as regards the plight of the former slave owners; says the

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<sup>92</sup> Op Cit, 29.

Récitant: "... les savanes se fendent dans une gloire de panaches folles ... J'entends des cris d'enfants ... dans la maison du maître;"<sup>93</sup> this is an indication of the slaughter of white families in their households."

Let us contrast that statement with the response by the Chorus: "J'entends des cris d'enfants dans la case noire ... et les petits ventres pierreux pommés en leur mitan du nombril énorme se gonflent de famine et du noir migan de la terre et des larmes et de la morve et de l'urine."<sup>94</sup> We notice in this instance that the perception of temporality by the Récitant and the Chorus is at opposite ends: whereas the former describes the developing of the revolution and its direct impact on the lives of the former slaves masters, the Chorus's reply serves to counter the Récitant's previous statement; it invalidates the suffering of the whites, with the implication that the torment endured by the slaves was far greater in comparison: slave children with empty bellies inflated by starvation, drowning in tears, glanders of their own urine, etc. At the end of this episode, the statements by the Récitant and the Récitante punctuate what amounts to a sanctioning of the undergoing carnage as they address the dying. Says the Récitante: "Au nom de tous les rêves paresseux en vos coeurs, je chante le geste d'acier du matador." While the "matador" in this bull-fighting allusion refers either to Toussaint and/or his

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 29.

troops who pierce into the neck of the animal with a sword to impact its decisive death, the recipient could be the local French planters, or symbolically the French establishment in Paris. Pushing this comparison further, the Récitant, on his part, builds on the musical celebration metaphor, this time with a marine reference: “Je chante le geste sale du harponneur et la baleine a soufflé pour la dernière fois.”<sup>95</sup> The bullfight metamorphoses into a fishing expedition, by which the harpoon swallowed by whale delivers the final blow to the mammal. The pictorial allusions used in this instance carry great symbolic significance as they announce the end of slavery on one hand, and that of French colonialism on the isle of Haïti on the other.

The staging of a group of white deputies and colonists gathered in a town hall in Le Cap displays their backlash against the slave revolt. This meeting is short-lived as a group of slaves irrupts in the room, with the flight bearer carrying the head of the Governor of the island hanging on the flag post.<sup>96</sup>

In historical terms, the apex of the revolution forced Léger-Félicité Sonthonax – the Civil Commissioner and de facto Governor of Haïti between September 1792 and December 1795 – to liberate the captive slaves from prison in Le Cap. Back into the play, the latter, then storm through the town,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 34.

hereto creating a wave of white refugees running helter skelter for dear life, jumping in departing boats and ships.<sup>97</sup> From a distance, the roaring of the drums acts becomes the rallying cry for the final phase of the insurrection, with the Récitant depicting a town that is torched in flames, as the Tam-Tam spits the «grasshoppers» of fire and blood. Le Cap flounders and collapses while the Chorus reiterates the chant “Mort aux Blancs. Mort aux Blancs.”

The ending of Act I wraps the glorious phase of the revolution in apotheosis and in great suspense. The stage instructions impose a sudden heavy silence. As the wind of the revolution descends in the skies on the entire Caribbean, a ship cuts through the mist. The symbolic burial of Old St Domingue, followed by the bloodbath of the white planters, all fade away for the advent of a new era. The field of vision above the phosphorescent sea opens up to a flag ship corralling at sea, as the nymphs make the following announcement: “... une inscription explose, sanglante, reflétée par les écueils: ... République d’Haïti.”<sup>98</sup> As the enthusiastic Chorus thereby chants “Haïti. Haïti,” the newly independent Republic is born!

Up to this point in my chapter, my analysis and commentary have concerned themselves with the staging of the Haitian Revolution through its multiple challenges and sudden changes in the circumstances and dramatic

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 40. Translation: “A set of engraved characters explodes, written in blood, and reflected by the coral reefs. ... Republic of Haïti.”

actions of our hero, Toussaint L'Ouverture. We now turn to an examination of the status of leadership as displayed after the proclamation of independence by L'Ouverture and his followers, focusing on Toussaint's management of the political and military challenge to his power launched by Napoleon Bonaparte and his troops – and Toussaint's response to France's attempt at recolonizing Haïti (Acte II). In addition, I will be discussing Toussaint's imprisonment and death in the Jura Mountains in France, examining the theme of Temptation (a major snare that befalls most leaders), as well as his strategy for maneuvering around this treacherous political terrain (Acte III).

While Toussaint's leadership is not inscribed in hands-on rulership, it is certainly limited in time and space: as the drama of Acte II becomes apparent, Toussaint's "exercise of power" is confined to crisis management in a time of war. Having declared independence from the French, Toussaint's responsibility requires him to manage a country of newly freed slaves in the midst of great political and military uncertainty given the French's attempt to reassert their dominion of the island through a new conquest. The beginning of Acte II reveals a leader who is still conscious of the vulture-like peril that hangs over the fate of Haïti, despite the fake accolades expressed by the

French representative “confirming” General Toussaint in his titles as Governor and Captain-General of the French Colony of Saint-Domingue.<sup>99</sup>

Toussaint’s dismissal of the hypocritical delegation of courtesans congratulating him reveals his distrust of human treachery. At the same time, the incident thereby facilitates the entrance on the scene of a character who claims to be related to Toussaint in a distant past. Through the declamation of the Chorus, the latter impersonates Toussaint’s imagined “Nourrice” (Nanny), whose role would have been to breastfeed, feed and raise her assigned “child” (or children) as prescribed by social practices under the slave plantation labour codes. But as Toussaint really had no “caretaker,” the real «Nanny» personifies the earth, which intercedes to the delegations on Toussaint’s behalf, as if to explain and justify our hero’s misgivings, and forgive them:

Il est bizarre, mon enfant, il est violent mon enfant ; il réclame mon enfant; des droits. Toutes sortes de droits. Des droits qui ne sont pas faits pour nous. Mais je dis que c’est pas de sa faute. Hon ! je dis que c’est son sang qui est plus fort que lui ; et qui le bat, et qui lui joue de mauvais tours. Hon. Et je vois qui l’a passé sa maladie à une foule de jeunes gens. Et c’est très malheureux. Une foule de jeunes réclameurs. Des nègres : ils ont tort de tout réclamer. Et forcément ça attire le malheur. De mon temps on était plus doux, plus acceptant, plus consentant. Hon.<sup>100</sup>

The casting by the Chorus of the imaginary Nanny of Toussaint highlights a theme that will have prescience in Césaire’s poetic and dramatic oeuvre, i.e.,

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 44.

the tension between the pursuit of freedom (*Chiens, Christophe, Congo, Tempest*) and passive acceptance of colonial oppression and enslavement.<sup>101</sup> By the same token, the presence of the Nanny forecasts the question of filiation which will be staged at the end of the play at the time of Toussaint's death and Jacques Dessalines assuming the leadership of the liberation movement. The symbolic mother, the "Nanny," implies ungratefulness on the son's part (Toussaint) for toiling away from her view of submissiveness and accommodation of the colonial order by claiming independence. The feeling of betrayal will be projected in the 1956 version of *Chiens*, whereby the Rebel is entangled in a web of battles with this Mother over his choice of pursuing the path of freedom rather than acceptance of the status-quo. Taken symbolically, we can infer that the tension that pits the two positions is viewed by the Mother as a betrayal of loyalty and filiation. On a local Martinican level, I am also suggesting that it can be read as Césaire (the son) pursuing freedom in all its possible formats (autonomy, free association with the French metropolis, independence) within the complex relationship that the island has with France as a Department d'Outre-Mer.

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<sup>101</sup> There is an intertextuality with *Une Tempête*, especially the reference to the Caliban-Prospero and Caliban-Ariel paradigm, as regards the nature of violence in opposition to the passive acceptance of a subaltern colonial status within the plantation economy of the New World. In the case of the USA, an inference can be made about Malcom X and MLK's differing approaches to solving the "Black Problem" in America.



Returning to the text, the quest of freedom for Toussaint is continually challenged by France's schemes to return the island under its control. As in Baudelaire's poetic world (whom Césaire had read extensively), nature, instead, provides clues or omens of the foreign presence on the Haitian coast: "Ô vent (...) as-tu entendu quelque chose? Toulon, Brest, Lorient, Cadix /une flotte! des flottes! L'armada du destin."<sup>102</sup> In this citation, the mere mention of the imagery of «flotte» (fleet of vessels) conjures Toussaint's apprehension (as with Henri Christophe in *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*) of the attempt by the French to reconquer the island; the mention of the armada forecasts the French naval blockade of Haïti by Napoleon's naval army after the independence proclamation. In addition to the trepidation about a fierce military confrontation with Napoleon's army,<sup>103</sup> the apprehension of the return of the French is later reiterated, but this time, it is the worst of Toussaint's nightmares: the reinstatement of slavery.<sup>104</sup>

Even if Toussaint's fears were to be dismissed as banal anxiety operating on a subconscious level, his misgivings are confirmed by the landing of whites on Haitian soil amidst the screams of the panicked black population who run

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<sup>102</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 44-45.

<sup>103</sup> In the same scene, Toussaint expresses the following intuitive "revelation:" "J'ai capté dans l'espace d'extraordinaires messages ... pleins de poignards,... de gémissements; j'entends ... une vaste improvisation de tornades, ... de maléfices, de pierres qui cuisent ... l'engourdissement ... dévorateur...une immense injustice." The wording captures an imagery of hand-to-hand combat, suffering, launching of mortars and canons, of total devastation.

<sup>104</sup> *Op Cit*, 47.

to his palace to advise him of their arrival ("les blancs arrivent"). Even if the appearance of a white flag on the scene suggests, in principle, a message of "peace" brought by French parliamentarians (ironically flanked by armed battalions) on behalf of Napoleon Bonaparte, their apparition nevertheless reinforces the suspicion that Toussaint has had about the so-called «bonnes intentions» of the 1er Consul. As we soon see, this episode will trigger for a more tumultuous phase of the revolution. In fact, the proceeding face-off between Toussaint and the French Parliamentary Envoy of Napoleon is only an "avant-goût" (foretaste) of things to come: it is reflective of the rising tension in the drama, straining already uneasy relations – or whatever is left of them – between the ruler of the new Republic (Toussaint), and the former French colonizer:

*Parlementaire*

Général, il est encore temps : la République vous donne à choisir entre la paix et la guerre.

*Toussaint*

Est-ce à moi de choisir? Attaqué, je me défends.

*Parlementaire*

La République espérait trouver en vous un fils soumis et dévoué.

*Toussaint*

Alors, pourquoi cette flotte? ces troupes? ces canons?

*Parlementaire*

Je serai franc, la République entend faire rentrer, sous sa domination, la plus belle des ses colonies : Saint Domingue.

*Toussaint*

J'ignorais que Saint Domingue eut proclamé son indépendance (...)

*Parlementaire*

Abrégeons, le temps presse : quelles sont vos intentions, général ?

*Toussaint*

Je vous l'ai déjà dit ; résister à toute agression.

*Parlementaire*

C'est votre dernier mot ...

*Toussaint*

Mon dernier mot ...

*Parlementaire*

Eh bien nous débarquerons. Tirez sur nous si vous osez.

*Toussaint*

Nous oserons. Nous avons pour nous le droit, l'honneur la liberté.

*Parlementaire*

C'est la guerre. C'est bien. Adieu général.

*Toussaint*

C'est la guerre, adieu. (...).<sup>105</sup>

Before we continue discussing this long exchange, let us pause to look at two interventions, the one where the Parliamentarian expresses his intention to bring Haïti to order as the "most beautiful of its colonies." His lapsus linguae translates the subconscious belief on the part of Bonaparte's regime that Haïti must remain under its dominion, despite having full knowledge that Toussaint and his army staff have declared emancipation. What is more interesting, however, is the way in which Toussaint, as an astute leader, masters the French language to his advantage through sarcasm by the use of both the conditional and the past subjunctive modes: "j'ignorais" – as if he didn't have knowledge of his own act – "que Saint Domingue eut proclamé,"<sup>106</sup> that is, a wish (versus a fact) that would have occurred in the past, whereas the accomplishment of Haitian sovereignty is already a done

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<sup>105</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 57.

<sup>106</sup> Translation: "... that Saint-Domingue 'would have proclaimed' [its independence] ..."

deal at the time of his declaration, at least from Toussaint's perspective, and that of his people.

Pursuant to the argument discussed above, the stage directions in this section amplify the sound of the African drums ("tams-tams") which, by their frenzied and delirious rhythm, mute the voices around them ("... des tams-tams éclatent frénétiques, couvrant les voix"):<sup>107</sup>

*Parlementaire*

Qu'est-ce que c'est ?

*Toussaint* (extatique)

(...) Aboyez tams-tams / Aboyez chiens gardiens du haut portail/  
... aboyez scandale d'étuve et de gris-gris / aboyez furie des lymphes /  
concile des peurs vieilles / aboyez / épaves démâtées / jusqu'à la  
démission des siècles et des étoiles

*Parlementaire*

Général, le 1<sup>er</sup> Consul a à se plaindre de votre administration.

*Toussaint*

Et moi, j'ai à me plaindre de l'ingratitude de la République.

L'industrie renaît, l'ordre règne, le pays prospère.

*Le Chœur*

Dites au Voudou d'éteindre le jaune solaire de ses minuits  
dites aux bothrops que les jeux sont faits / nous sommes la race tombée/  
nous sommes la race sans jour et sans lendemain

*Récitante*

(...) il se lève sous mes paupières / une aube saignée à blanc / ... ô les  
chemins fragiles têtus et certains / de mon royaume qui est et qui n'est  
pas encore.<sup>108</sup>

This episode as it unfolds between the two men embodies fully the disparate expectations that Haïti (the newly independent nation) and France (the former metropolis) have of each other as they enter into uncharted territory

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<sup>107</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 56.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 56-59.

(historically speaking), seeking to negotiate a new kind of relationship (post-colonial), a historical first at the end of the 18th century. While the drumming of the mandoucouman (as in *Tragedy*) signals the intent on the part of Toussaint and his comrades to intensify the battle for the preservation of their independence, it is not clear whether Toussaint may have been considering (as far as the drama is concerned) the same type of relationship with France that he envisaged in reality: an autonomous entity within a French Commonwealth, a sovereign state forming special close bonds with the “motherland,” or a completely independent nation free to choose its partners in matters of foreign policy, economic and trade partnership with other nations (Great Britain, for instance).<sup>109</sup> But we as reader-spectators are uncertain what Césaire intended the Parliamentarian to declare as a reply to Toussaint’s statement, as Césaire erased his repartee with a pencil in the St Dié transcript; they were originally intended to stand as: “Ce que vous reproche le consul ...”<sup>110</sup> Following the Chorus, the words of the Récitante punctuate Toussaint’s feigned uncertainty as she announces the dawn of an era of bloodshed (“... il se lève ... une aube saignée à blanc”).<sup>111</sup> What is certain,

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<sup>109</sup> John Walsh and Gary Wilder read this position as the ancestor of the Departmentalization Law that was initiated in 1846. By the same token, in the play, Toussaint is quick to point out that Haïti’s economy is prosperous once again, and that French predictions of doomsday anarchy were unproven.

<sup>110</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 58. Translation: “What the Consul reproves you...”

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

regardless, is that the Chorus' introduction of "Voudou" in the narrative of freedom augurs a different chapter in the revolutionary struggle. The referent of "voudou" is also a culturally-coded reference for a strategic military retreat that will pave the way for the *Declaration of the Bois-Caïman*, which will later bring the resistance to Napoleon's army to its final victory, for nature is on their side<sup>112</sup> and the desire for revenge, a great motivator ("aloès aveugle vengeance tonnante armée pour un siècle").<sup>113</sup>

The arrival of Napoleon's army signals Toussaint's reckoning with the reality of the French military re-entrance arriving on Haitian soil. His speech to the St Domingue population merits quoting in full:

Toussaint

Ils débarquent ... les blancs débarquent ... Ils viennent nous remettre au joug ... Ils viennent rétablir l'esclavage, ici, dans notre libre HAÏTI.

La foule

Vive la liberté. Vive la liberté.

Toussaint

S'il est encore parmi vous quelques naïfs gonflés d'illusion, je leur dis que les blancs ne font plus mystère de leur dessein. Mes amis, écoutez bien. Les blancs ont rétabli l'esclavage à la Martinique, à la Guadeloupe. Martinique esclavage, Guadeloupe esclavage : entendez-vous ? Alors je dis qu'il n'y a plus de doute : ce qu'ils nous apportent, c'est la déchéance, c'est la servitude sans espoir, pour nous et nos enfants.

La foule

Aux armes. Aux armes. Mort aux Blancs.

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<sup>112</sup> As in Alejo Carpentier's *Kingdom of this Earth*, the invocation of the Haitian flora and fauna is an imploration for their blessing and guidance; it sanctions their participation in the fight to reconquer their freedom.

<sup>113</sup> Op Cit, 63.

Toussaint  
 Aux armes. » Ça a été le cri de vos frères guadeloupéens quand ils ont  
 appris le sort que leur réservaient les tyrans.  
 “Aux armes.” Et le mulâtre Delgrès s’est fait sauter plutôt que de se  
 rendre ...  
 La foule  
 Vive la liberté. Vive Toussaint.  
 Toussaint  
 L’Europe elle-même nous a appris qu’un peuple qui se bat pour sa  
 liberté est invincible ...  
 La foule  
 Mort aux blancs.  
 Toussaint  
 Mes ordres, je vous les communiquerai plus tard. Mais sachez dès  
 maintenant que les blancs ne doivent avancer ici que parmi des ruines et  
 des décombres : trois coups de canon vous donneront le signal d’une  
 démolition systématique et implacable. Feu et cendre. Périssent Saint  
 Domingue plutôt que notre liberté : la liberté ou la mort.  
 La foule  
 Vive Haïti. Vive Toussaint.  
 La liberté ou la mort. Vive Toussaint. Vive Toussaint.  
 Toussaint  
 Aux armes. Aux armes  
 La foule  
 Aux armes. (La foule se disperse en courant).<sup>114</sup>

Apart from Toussaint’s plain call to arms in the event of a French assault,  
 Césaire, through Toussaint’s voice, seems to be suggesting the concept of a  
 movement of Pan-Caribbean solidarity of sorts between the enslaved  
 populations under French dominion, a solidarity that is inscribed in a  
 common history – and for future economic cooperation possibly. But the  
 military superiority of Napoleon’s troops necessitates a tactical retreat on the

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 61.

part of Toussaint and his army, pushing him to doubt himself, especially his allegiance to the antislavery discourse of the Abbé Grégoire (“... mes pensées transformées ... en feu *gregois*”).<sup>115</sup>

At this stage in the drama – at the closing of Acte II and immediately before Acte III – the scenic inclusion of the world of the underground serves a multi-faced purpose: first, to ensure Toussaint’s transition from free man to captive and second, from life to death, from reality to mythic (reified) heroic status. As the Récitant and the Récitante describe to Toussaint the devastation caused by the war between his troops and the French, he comes upon a group of voices, first underground, then celestial. In this eerie atmosphere, an interaction ensues, whereby the subterranean utterances insist on gaining his attention, as if advising him of his last moments as a free man on Haitian soil. Toussaint’s response to these earth-bound interlocutors is muted, as he only wants to talk about his upcoming revolution, which he views as a cleansing mechanism for all things evil in Saint Domingue and the Haitian colonial slave society (“je tiens la clé des perturbations et tout à détruire”).<sup>116</sup> While the celestial voices project a vision of destruction, the underground voices who take over the story chronicle then anticipate Toussaint’s physical voyage into exile, a recognition that Toussaint embraces – as if he can envisage his

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 67.



immediate future – by letting the celestial voices impersonate his speech: “Que l’on me bâtisse sur les montagnes des charniers durcis, une prison: je vois battre les narines des ombres glissantes et du mauvais temps,” says the first one, while the other visualizes physical punishment: “Que l’on m’invente des tortures ....”<sup>117</sup> Communication with the underground reaches its peak when the Chorus, speaking from the world of the dead, stretch their hand within Toussaint’s reach to offer their help. With the earth courting Toussaint to join its realm, his invocation of the gods of the underground assists in the contemplation of his own doom by physical torture: “Dieux d’en bas, dieux bons, j’emporte dans ma gueule délabrée le burdonnement d’une chair vivante, me voici ... ”.<sup>118</sup>

But even if Toussaint has vanished physically, he must first get the blessing of Mother-Haïti so his liberation mission can be carried on in his absence. His illusory reincarnation therefore allows him to re-enter the stage in an oniric space where he meets strangers unearthing stones (“déterreurs de pierre”) who neither recognize him, nor remember his name from recent history. The last stage direction we witness (at the end of Acte II) is that of Toussaint asking the strangers to baptize him; they immediately oblige: Toussaint, with his face inclined against the soil and his arms wide open,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 68.

receives the sanctification of Mother-Earth on his head and his neck, becoming one with Haïti, as well as with his people whom he led to freedom.

With the opening of Acte III, the loneliness and the temptation of the hero demand a sense of urgency. Toussaint's physical and mental isolation in a cold prison cell in the Jura Mountains in France open this third and final act of the play. They structure the end of the plot of the drama, while a set of characters who visit Toussaint in his cell: the Messenger, le-nègre-à-lunettes, clerics, Toussaint's son Isaac, le Grand Prohibiteur (héraut), the Virgin Mary, the Négrophobe and the Négrophile; they all play a role of varying degree, either as full-flesh bodies or ghost-like characters. In the opening episode, Toussaint's solitude offers the perfect opportunity for the entrance of the Messenger – presumably sent by Napoleon – who, as Toussaint rightly guesses, is tasked with negotiating with the latter on the Emperor Bonaparte's behalf. I want to quote an excerpt of their exchange as this highlights two key arguments I want to discuss in the last part of this chapter, i.e., the themes of *temptation* and *filiation*:

Le Messenger

Je suis ravi de vous voir revenu à de meilleures dispositions. Le 1er Consul m'envoie vous en féliciter et vous assurer que votre *complète soumission* ne le laissera pas insensible.

En tout cas, permettez-moi de remarquer que vous ne vous sous-estimez pas : vous vous rachetez au prix d'un trésor.

Toussaint

(...) ce trésor, vous ne l'aurez pas (...)

Messenger

Nous l'aurons, car de lui dépend votre vie.

Toussaint

Vous ne l'aurez pas. C'est l'or de la vengeance et de la liberté. (...)

Messenger

Voyons Toussaint, vous avez perdu la bataille. Vous êtes vaincu : il n'y a pas de déshonneur à l'admettre.

Toussaint

Toussaint est vaincu; l'esprit de Toussaint n'est pas vaincu. Il anime encore des milliers de volontés. Voyez-vous les mornes gonflés d'une menace

d'hommes à la peau rude? La révolte ... mes fils ... ce sont mes fils.

Messenger

(...) Tes fils, vieillard naïf / et ton fils pense comme nous que tu serais impardonnable / d'ajouter le vol au crime.<sup>119</sup>

Bearing in mind the solitude of the hero (in the previous episode) whereby he is misunderstood by his people, Toussaint's solitary confinement is marshalled by Bonaparte's regime as a ruse to coopt him into accepting a "trésor" (treasure, riches)<sup>120</sup> – in exchange for complete submission to the 1er Consul – and renounce his Haitian freedom project. But that pales in comparison to the announcement that Toussaint's son, Isaac L'Ouverture (Breda), is in cahoots with the French in their mission to obtain his father's complete capitulation, by all means necessary. In this context, the intervention

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 79-80.

<sup>120</sup> The *double entendre* on "trésor" illustrates the Messenger's and Toussaint's different views on what "treasure" represents: corruption in Toussaint's eyes, while the "treasure" expected by the Messenger in return is that of the restitution of Haïti under French dominion, as well as Toussaint's silence and submission.

of “le-nègre-à-lunettes” advances the Messenger’s cause,<sup>121</sup> as does that of the clerics who come to argue to Toussaint that the colonial status-quo should not be disturbed.

The role of the Récitant, the Récitante and the Chorus – which had focused on ensuring a smooth transition between different scenes and episodes (recapping what just happened and anticipating upcoming events and actions)<sup>122</sup> – bestows greater dramatic significance as they announce the arrival of Toussaint’s son. The air is filled with tension and great anticipation, and the plot thickens as father and son prepare for a meeting that is anything but pleasant:

Toussaint  
Eh bien ! libéral trop longtemps, je dénonce le pacte absurdement  
respecté de père en fils. / mon fils, / je serai celui-là qui aura commencé  
Le fils  
Mon père, aidez-moi à vous aider.  
Toussaint  
Je ne veux pas être aidé, je veux mourir ici  
Le fils  
Un mot, une seule note de vous, mon père et votre sort en est changé.  
Toussaint  
Ce mot, je ne le prononcerai pas

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<sup>121</sup> He pretty much reiterates the Messenger’s view that Toussaint is on the wrong side of history for refusing to let go of the past of slavery and exploitation, and that he has no right to impose on the new generation (that of his son Isaac) the price of deprivation that might ensue from a complete severance of ties with the French.

<sup>122</sup> Gil, 36-38. Their main intervention lies in the narrative domain (or stage commentary), using “highly elliptical idiom, clearly describing and referring to events which are either being already depicted on stage or are related to it. In this sense, the role of the chorus does not depart substantially from the chorus in Classical Greek theatre.”

Le fils

Je veux te rendre à la gloire, à la liberté, à ton île (...)

Toussaint

Ah! Le scélérat n'avait pas menti ... Et ils lancent le fils suborné aux  
trousses du père moribond. / Mon fils, à toi mes trésors, à toi mes  
bandes/ Haïti t'attend, Venge-moi.

Fils

Saint Domingue attend la paix, / l'oubli / les convalescences / Saint  
Domingue attend de dormir.

Tous

Hélas (...)

Fils

Je ne suis pas un lâche. Je ne suis pas un traître. / Ce que je suis, je ne l'ai  
point choisi : fixé équitablement entre deux continents, je suis un être de  
médiation (...)

Toussaint

Ingrat

Fils

Ingrat, non : libre, / libre de toute haine, libre de tout remords.

Toussaint

Non pas libre. Vide. La liberté est une plénitude. (...) Va-t'en, fils, je suis  
seul et la mer est une manille à mon pied de forçat.

Fils

Grâce, je demande grâce.

Toussaint

Qui a dit pitié? / qui essaie par ce mot incongru d'effacer le tableau noir  
et feu? Qui demande grâce? (...) Pas de pardon. Isaac, Isaac (...) Liberté,  
liberté/j'oserai soutenir seul la lumière de ta tête blessée.<sup>123</sup>

We are able to deduce, from this citation, the agony and disillusionment of a  
father who had higher ambitions for his son, and whom he had hoped to  
protect against the corruption of colonial politics: "... J'avais un fils ... J'avais  
réussi à le préserver des morsures de cette race de scorpions."<sup>124</sup> For

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<sup>123</sup> Césaire, *SDT*, 86-88.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

Toussaint, Isaac's betrayal doubles as disloyalty of the L'Ouverture blood line, as well as a political sell out: first, he had envisioned Isaac pursuing a military career that would have seen him succeed his father; but by aligning himself with the French, Isaac delivers his father the worst blow our leader can receive: political treachery. In this regard, temptation and deception get the upper hand in the relationship between father and son: Toussaint is unable to forgive Isaac for the latter's violation of the sacred bond between parent and child. Ergo, the abuse experienced by Toussaint expand from the mental and emotional realm to a physical plane.

As we have just seen, the tension and conflict between father and son doesn't subside; rather, it is heightened in the interaction between Toussaint's and his captors. The mental and physical torture exacerbates the solitude of the secluded hero, to the point that Toussaint asks his jail tormentors to inflict upon him the ultimate pain, so as to sanctify his martyrdom: "serrez-moi le front avec une corde ... pendez-moi par les aisselles ... chauffez-moi les pieds avec une pelle rougie."<sup>125</sup> Save for modern-day water-boarding, Toussaint seems to have borrowed these techniques from European torture manuals.

The apparition of the vision of the Virgin Mary after the torture scene is not that of a Messiah coming to rescue the distressed and the downtrodden as

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 94-97.

her son was; rather, it serves to amplify Toussaint's anguish and torment, and validate the juxtaposition of the sacred and the biblical (Christ's crucifixion) with the mundane (Toussaint's earthly pain). In point of fact, as Mary claims Toussaint as her son – a symbolic reincarnation of Christ – whose suffering is indispensable to the mother,<sup>126</sup> Toussaint is quick to reject any affiliation with her given his consideration that he was abandoned to experience all alone his agony; he sees himself first and foremost as the son of the earth. Regardless, Toussaint's initial rejection of Mary is countered (paradoxically) by conflating of his own personae with that of Christ, so implying that she chose him as her son just to see him and the Haitian people suffer. As the vision of the Virgin Mary disappears in the fog, the drumming of the tam-tam announces Toussaint's imminent demise, as he collapses and dies. The Récitant, the Récitante and the Chorus all lament his death, as they redirect the narrative to Saint Domingue.

The entrance of Jacques Dessalines and his troops on the scene (at the moment when he gives the order for the final assault) consecrates Haïti's ultimate liberation from Bonaparte's claws. As the curtains bid farewell to the spectators, Dessalines's participation in the narrative brings to light a very important question, that of filiation. Filiation in the context of this episode has

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 98.

to be understood on two levels: that acquired through genetic blood-line – represented by Toussaint’s son Isaac – and in the historical context of the play, that of political affiliation (descent) and allegiance.

On the one hand, while Isaac acknowledges his familial kinship to his father, he nonetheless resents the fact that Toussaint sent him to Europe for his studies; in fact, he deeply mourns his father’s perceived abandonment of him. But the split goes deeper beyond the emotional rift between the two, on a more political plane. Toussaint feels betrayed by his son’s political alignment and engagement with the French, who send him as their envoy to persuade his father to renounce the fight for independence and “forgo of the past,” in exchange for his freedom and the granting of political and military titles (as well as land rights). On the other hand, filiation, when considered beyond purely genetic terms in this instance, allows us to envisage a different kind of rapport, that of political descent. Hence, Dessalines’s succession to Toussaint allows him to take over the leadership of the Haitian freedom liberation project to a new level, and carry it to its completion. Therefore, Dessalines plays a double role here: firstly, he becomes the symbolic son of Toussaint since the real one failed to fulfill his father’s expectations of and ambitions for him (military career, take-over of his leadership, etc.). Dessalines is fated as the son that Toussaint could not have in real life. Secondly, Dessalines further becomes the political successor of Toussaint who inherits the latter’s political



and historic legacy. Through Dessalines, therefore, Toussaint reinvents himself in his after-life, giving himself new breath, as if to retrieve the life he lost at the hands of Napoleon's wrath and vengeance.

As a conclusion to this chapter, I need to revisit a number of topics I engaged in the process. At the root of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* – as is pretty much the case in all of Césaire's drama – is the exploration and investigation of the problem of freedom. This subject is imbedded in the backdrop of its deployment along specific points on the arc of the history of People of African descent, starting with the Haitian Revolution. For Césaire, I have indicated, this exploration is originally manifested in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* where he first articulates his vision of Negritude as reclamation of the dark history of the "black experience." The underlying project is to rehumanize black subjects within a politico-social arrangement that negated their existence and evacuated their basic humanity and the subsequent enjoyment of their freedoms. Therefore, *Chiens* obeys Césaire's logic of historical racialized Negritude through the lived experiences of African-descended Peoples worldwide.

I started this chapter by situating Haïti and the Haitian Revolution in Césaire's literary oeuvre and as a "memory site," in an effort to highlight the intersection between his aesthetic production and his political practice as both Mayor of Fort-de-France and as Martinique's Député at the French Assembly.

I also emphasized the significance of Haïti in terms of the place this country holds in the Caribbean political imaginary as the first post-colony in the Caribbean world. So doing, my intention was to decode the textual messages imbedded in the historical situatedness of the *St Dié typescript* in dialogue with the Haitian Revolution – what Césaire was trying to accomplish by showcasing Toussaint L'Ouverture as the ultimate freedom fighter in the earlier version of the text.

In the very limited amount of time that Toussaint is allowed to exert any power, he demonstrates astuteness and boldness as a military strategist who knows when to attack enemy targets, or resort to a tactical retreat in order to prepare a come-back. Patient with himself and confident in his plans and decision-making, Toussaint is a skilled diplomatic negotiator via his interactions with white parliamentarians and his own people; he knows how to tune in the cultural psyche of his fellow Haitians, and when to turn them against the white deputies and the white planters in order to regain the trust of the Haitian slaves under his leadership. Furthermore, Toussaint's resolve allows him to stand true to his principles, refuse the temptation of personal gain, the seduction of power and riches and compromise for compromise's sake, especially when *that* is not in the best interest of Haitians or the Haitian nation as a whole. To wit, Toussaint has remarkable foresight, a sound political and socio-economic vision for post-independent Haïti.

In this consideration, I retraced how the staging of the narrative of freedom and the Haitian Revolution are expressed in the drama, putting emphasis on the articulation of the questions of the place of history, the issues that the drama engages in relation to temptation (seduction, corruption), Toussaint's leadership, the role of solitude (due to external and internal influences), and filiation (both familial and political). I further explained the politico-historical context of the production of the text of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* in relation to the Vichy regime's occupation of Martinique, and the consequences of such occupation on the local literary and cultural life of Martinique during World War II: state censorship and self-censorship, and the search for an international audience (Latin-American and worldwide); I indicated how these political currents impact Césaire's writing of *Les Chiens* under the Vichy regime, especially the textual migration of the text from locality to universality (abstraction). I carried on my analysis, placing *Les Chiens* in terms of its importance (which Césaire readily acknowledges) in capturing the "essence" of the racial experience of People of African descent in the Caribbean (Haïti), the Americas and Africa.

I hereto evaluated the rewriting process of *Les Chiens* tracing its literary genealogy from the *SDT typescript* to its printing versions (1946/1956). What is more, I engaged and addressed the similarities and/or dissonances that are produced as a result of the thematic shift in relation to the Haitian Revolution

and Toussaint's leadership (its centrality in the *SDT* version, and its absence in the other). To this end, I provided examples of this discordance through a comparison of relevant episodes in each version. Where appropriate, I demonstrated intertextualities and cross-references between the original and the avatar, thus offering a reading of the text in terms of the variants and mutations of meaning, referencing at the same time questions and issues pertaining to authorial authenticity and intentionality, all the context of the pursuit of freedom in the drama.

I accounted for the tension between literary freedom and political freedom, pointing out that Césaire was compelled to engage in an uneasy negotiation between freedom of expression and censorship, which altered the original message. Consequently, the message of the original 1943 typescript version relocates – “migrates” so to speak, albeit expunged and cleansed of its militancy – into a different textual locale. The tension within freedom itself is also manifested in the play through a constant search for a balance between locality (Haïti) and universality onto a stage transcending the locus of the Caribbean, seeking in the temporality of the future to claim an international space. This strain is displayed in Césaire's progressive rewriting of the work in progress that was *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*. On one hand, the original typescript started in 1941/42 is dedicated to an investigation of Toussaint L'Ouverture's Haitian liberation project. On the other hand, by the time we

arrive at the published versions of 1946/1956, the fight for freedom is not localized in Haïti any longer. The kinship between the original and the avatar have become blurred, foggy at best. The time and space of the play are vague: the liberation struggle could be located anywhere, and the freedom fighter metamorphoses from a blood and flesh human (Toussaint) to a more generic decoy named “The Rebel,” who can be located anywhere an anticolonial/anti-slavery struggle are taking place. Hence, we are in the presence of what Gil, in his study of the transmission history of *Et les Chiens*, calls “... overlapping fields of repetition-with-a-difference, each linked to a particular set of material circumstances.”<sup>127</sup>

Far from being resolved, the tension of freedom finds temporary solace in the evacuation of the historical referent that was the catalyst for generating the text in the beginning. The end result of this “editorial vagabondage”<sup>128</sup> as per Césaire is not a syncretic summary of the contents of both the original and the revised, but rather an abstract “monster” (thematically and dramatically) with a mind of its own, extending all the way to its theatrical adaptation for a stage that was lost in its transformative journey. Furthermore, the erosion of history becomes the catalyst for a change that engenders a direct effect on Toussaint’s position in the narrative from his centrality as the major figure of

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<sup>127</sup> Gil, *Migrant Textuality*, 7.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 63.

the drama in the *typescript*, to an anonymous Rebel in the print form. Césaire's original goal of staging the heroism of Toussaint L'Ouverture will have a considerable impact on his choice of casting another figure of the Haitian Revolution, Henri Christophe, but in a rather different light.<sup>129</sup>

In consideration of the fact that Césaire was consistently engaged in the rewriting and redesign of some of his key works, it becomes easier to understand how his *textual restlessness* reflects a conscious search for new meanings in relation to his constant literary adaptation to the given politico-historical situation of the textual transformation and the writer's circumstances of the time. It becomes even more possible to entertain the idea that Césaire may have been writing for two different audiences. What is in need of clarification are the motives for engaging in such pursuit.

In my earlier discussion of the readership of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, I reviewed the variety of audiences that can claim validation to the play (local, regional and global) in regards to its different productions (typescript and print). And while it is certainly true that the print version would benefit from a wider public consumption given that the generic hero (the Rebel) could enjoy greater reception by a larger international audience in Third World countries and others that were under colonial dominion, I maintain that it is

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<sup>129</sup> Hence, by the time he gets to narrate the question of leadership post-1804, Césaire is more interested in investigating and exploring the tragic nature of power through Christophe's rulership, since he has already extolled the virtue of heroism in *Et les Chiens*.

*not* the only major deciding factor contributing to the purge of the explicit historical reference to Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution from the typescript.<sup>130</sup> This is my point of departure from Gil's position. I give not more credence than is needed to the notion that the change of the focus of the text is motivated *solely* by the necessity on Césaire's part to bow to the "pressure" to adapt to a new editorial environment, i.e., a world-wide literary congregation. Even though I do not disregard the importance of the complex tripartite relationship between writer, editor and audience, it remains that Gil's view of the hierarchical symbiosis of the above elements does not supersede any other approach or position.

I claim, instead, that it is also very (perhaps most) plausible that Césaire, in placing an abstract hero at the center of the print version, was responding to three factors, both external and internal, some of which I alluded to in the earlier part of this chapter. The first consideration relates simply to Césaire's concern for the banning of the book by l'Amiral Robert's regime, and the obvious consequence of the Vichy regime's gagging on the publication of further editions of *Tropiques*, which was the only outlet for literary and cultural expression for Aimé and Suzanne Césaire and their collaborators. The

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<sup>130</sup> Gil, 58-60. As I have explained earlier, Gil puts greater emphasis on a metropolitan (and somewhat limited Caribbean) francophone editorial environments and on Césaire's desire for a larger international audience as the *key* factors in the change of focus in the trajectory of the text *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* from its 1943 status to its 1946/56 format.

second determinant responds to another, more personal imperative in relation to politics in Martinique. Césaire decides to enter into public life in 1945, a few months before (or more or less around the same time) that he is putting the finishing touches to the version of *Chiens* to be published. Therefore, in addition to the fear of literary censorship evidenced in *Tropiques*'s evasion of Martinican politics via elusive and oblique references to culture and local flora and fauna, it stands to reason that Césaire is possibly responding to (1) an angst about the potential repercussions that may arise from publishing the 1943/1944 version (public exposition of his political views via his literature), which (2) would make him vulnerable to attacks, thus jeopardizing his ambitions for a political career. (3) In the same line of thought, Césaire is aware of the backlash he may incur from the political autocracy in France, which is still recovering from WW II and the tight control of public life by the Vichy regime of Maréchal Pétain.<sup>131</sup> We ought to remember that Césaire has just been elected as Mayor of Fort-de-France and, more importantly, as Martinique's representative at the National French Assembly in Paris. This factor is not to be taken lightly, particularly because he was working, with three other colleagues at the time (Léopold Bissol from Guadeloupe, Gaston Monnerville from French Guyana, and Raymond Vergès from Île de la

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 13.



Réunion),<sup>132</sup> on reactivating the Departmentalization Law of 1846 to be presented, a few months later at the French National Assembly.

From a political perspective, then, it makes more sense to evacuate the more combative and confrontational tone of the original *SDT* version with its outright rejection of French colonial rule and the glorification of the more radicalized version of Toussaint L'Ouverture's fight – a move that consequently flushes out the historical references to Haïti as a by-product of the revision process. In this sense, therefore, what is left out of the 1946 “final” version of the “play” included in *Les Armes Miraculeuses* publication reveals more about the echoes of Aimé Césaire's political circumstances and positions (at the end of World War II) than meets the eye. My argument is also supported by the fact that the militant cry of “Mort aux Blancs!” that was previously evacuated from the typescript in the first print (1946) reappears in the 1956 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the text (the first solo print). The question we then ask is: why reactivate a history you erased in the first place? Césaire recovers this segment because he feels that it is politically safer *then*: he has been “in power” for ten years, and he is unconcerned about any political backlash at this point in time. What adds to this matter is the fact that the cover page of the 1956 edition features the image of the Nègre Marron that adorns the Place

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<sup>132</sup> Wilder, “Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia”, 107.

de l'Indépendance in Port-au-Prince in Haïti; this is a clear homage to the heroes of the Haitian independence. Additionally, Césaire, in 1956, is working on his book *Toussaint L'Ouverture: la Révolution Française et Problème Colonial* (published a year later). Therefore, a literary retrieval of the theme he first addressed in the typescript (but timidly evaded in the 1946 print) allows him to revisit the Haitian Revolution – and Toussaint's pivotal role in it – re-using the more militant/revolutionary aspects of Toussaint's leadership that echo the apex of the revolution.

As for the third factor mitigating Césaire's transposition of Toussaint's character from folk hero to an anonymous Rebel, it has to do with his quasi-permanent fixation on Haïti. Having quenched his thirst for investigating the HR and extolling the virtues of heroic leadership through Toussaint in the 1943 *typescript*, Césaire reserves the prerogative to revisit the study of Toussaint the hero in a different literary format, i.e., that of the essay (*Toussaint L'Ouverture*). In it, he studies Toussaint's leadership through the lenses of the French Revolution, as well as through the optics of the global/worldwide historical and political circumstances prevailing at that time, in relation to the European and American colonialist/imperialist agendas of the countries that were involved in undermining the new emerging nation-state born out of the Haitian Revolution.

As we will see in the next chapter, since the first publication of *Chiens*, Césaire's intellectual curiosity would grow to encompass a related but somewhat different interest in his investigation of the question of freedom and leadership vis-à-vis Haïti: post-1956 (the first publication of *Et les Chiens* as an independent text) and post-1957 (the year of the publication of *Toussaint L'Ouverture*), Césaire is more drawn into the problematic of the management of freedom and the question of power past 1804/after independence.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### **“The Emperor Without Clothes:” Christophe, Leadership, and the Poetics of Nation-Building.**

In Chapter 1, I considered the historical significance of Haïti both in Caribbean postcolonial thought, as well as in the formation of Aimé Césaire’s political philosophy and literary creation. I want to begin this chapter by reviewing the standing of the Haitian Revolution within the Francophone Caribbean world, as well as the importance of Haïti for Césaire’s political thought and his drama.<sup>133</sup> On this subject, doing so implies asking a number of important questions: for instance, why did Césaire opt to write a play about Christophe rather than Toussaint – the most obvious hero, and the one most written about? And, to a larger extent, how does this choice subsequently impact or explain the prominence of failure in leadership across most of his plays? Or, for that matter, why didn’t Césaire simply write a series of plays extolling heroism (or at least success in leadership) as other African and Caribbean writers have done?

Taking these matters for investigation, therefore, entails an examination of how Césaire attempts to frame the problematic of leadership within the French Caribbean context through various forms, especially the essay and the

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<sup>133</sup> Specifically in *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, *Toussaint L’Ouverture: la Révolution Française et le Problème Colonial*, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* (not to mention in other numerous references to Haïti in his poetry).

drama. And speaking of form, I intend to review the rationale behind his choice of the essay form (for writing *Toussaint*) and drama (for *La Tragédie*), the genre of drama specifically. These formalistic concerns then lead me to examine the stakes at hand in relation to Césaire's own choices of political and literary filiations.<sup>134</sup>

In my current chapter, I continue my analysis by drawing attention to Césaire's *Toussaint L'Ouverture* as the "aboutissement" ("outcome") of a long-lasting project of study of the Haitian Revolution and its impact not only on French Caribbean political thought, but also on Césaire himself (his political philosophy, his political practice, as well as his literary creation). I single out Toussaint L'Ouverture and Henri Christophe as the two pivotal revolutionary figures who had a lasting resonance on Césaire's own vision of leadership.

To *Toussaint L'Ouverture* I compare *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, in which Césaire whets a dramatic register exploring the pitfalls of post-revolutionary nation-building, a language founded in terms of an assessment of the leadership of two major architects of the Haitian Revolution. I then engage in study of *La Tragédie* for its pointed and caricatured critique of Henri Christophe's rulership. I argue that while Césaire draws a parallel between, on the one hand, the birth pains experienced by Haïti toward national statehood

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<sup>134</sup> I am partly indebted here to Walsh's discussion of this issue in his book *Free and French in the Caribbean: Toussaint, Césaire and Narratives of Loyal Opposition*.

and, on the other, the challenges faced by newly independent Third World countries in the late 50s and early 60s, there is more than meets the eye: the external references to African history have closer resonances for the French Caribbean in general, and Césaire's Martinican context in particular.<sup>135</sup> I continue my examination of the play by reviewing the kind of leadership styles that contributed to the success or demise of Christophe's policies.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I deepen my probe of post-revolutionary leadership in Haïti with a close reading of Christophe's Negritudist politics, in order to interrogate the ways in which ideology is impacted by the shrew and cunning universe of politics. There is, on the one hand, what the pursuit of noble ideas demands – moral integrity of ethical principles – and, on the other hand, what hands-on politics actually requires: compromise, making alliances, shaking hands with the devil, or even sleeping with the enemy, etc. I analyze further the kinds of programs that Henri Christophe undertakes for the “uplifting” of his people, some of which have more to do with form than with substance. And, in discussing if Négritude succeeds or fails in the context of Christophe's political programme, I pose the question of whether Négritude can be considered a form of Marxism in the play, or if it is rather fascism of some sort. I also investigate the kinds of political legacies and leadership

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<sup>135</sup> In the Op Cited book, John Walsh makes the same argument (7).

models Césaire wants to align and affiliate with (Toussaint L'Ouverture), or distance himself from (Henri Christophe).

In the previous chapter, I began my discussion of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* by posing the question as to how Toussaint's political legacy plays out in Césaire's political life and praxis; in my current chapter, I inquire as well how revisiting Haitian history factors into Césaire's analysis of issues that call in question his own leadership. For one thing, within the given of the "colonial" situation of Martinique, Césaire – as a leader in search of political filiation – is seeking inspiration via the rulership tradition of previous Caribbean leaders as regards revolutionary and post-revolutionary leadership in Haïti up to the 1960s era – which witnessed the brutal rulership of François Duvalier ("Papa Doc") from 1957 to 1971. The latter's insistence on Black Pride (a recuperation of Césaire's Negritude), as well as the sheer cold-blooded nature of his regime, suggest that we read Papa Doc as a direct descendant of Christophe: by the time he was writing *Tragédie*, Césaire was well acquainted with the beginning stages of the despotic and repressive nature of the Duvalier regime. In this regard, Césaire's embrace of Toussaint's political heritage is a snub directed at Papa Doc (and Henry Christophe implicitly). Césaire directs his political gaze toward Toussaint for guidance as to how to overcome the many challenges that Martinique would face as a new "nation" – as was the case with Toussaint's Haïti at the time of its independence – should Césaire and

Martinicans decide to go it alone and declare full-fledged national sovereignty the same way that Haïti did in 1804.

Césaire's kinship with Toussaint is first of all based on the positions that they both occupied within their respective national political space. In addition, beyond that situational relation, consideration must be given to the fact that Césaire himself is a kind of political hero in Martinique. A considerable percentage of households in Martinique, it seems, has a portrait of Césaire hanging on the wall, not unlike a practice prevalent in socialist states before the collapse of the Iron Curtain republics. During his political tenure, some Martinicans even took to calling him *Papa Césaire*, as if he were the *founding father* of the Martinican nation.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, the scope of the festivities surrounding the state funeral of Césaire after his passing in 2008, are a testimony to the esteem and love a lot of Martinicans (except his critics from the Créolité movement and their followers) feel toward their "Supreme Leader," Papa Césaire. To boot, further regard of the relationship between Toussaint and Césaire has to do with the "solitude of power" experienced by both political figures, a subject I will address in the pages to follow, before extending the discussion, later on, to the ways in which the same loneliness of power applies to Christophe's *Tragédie* as well.

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<sup>136</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau makes a veiled critique of this cult of personality in *Le Nègre et l'Amiral*, referring indirectly to Césaire.



The trope of the solitude of power is first addressed by Césaire in his examination of Toussaint's leadership in *Toussaint L'Ouverture: la Révolution Française et le Problème Colonial*, where he explains how the weight of historical circumstances compelled the Haitian leader, at times, to rely solely on his own judgement, especially at crucial stages toward the end of the revolutionary struggle before his capture by Napoleon's army led by General Leclerc, Bonaparte's brother-in-law. However, in trying to explain Toussaint's at times "despotic" use of power – peasants forced labor for instance – Césaire reads this (he excuses and rationalizes this issue) as "un mal nécessaire" (a necessary evil).<sup>137</sup>

In a certain manner, then, studying Toussaint is, for Césaire, a way (an unconscious one perhaps) of engaging his own solitude as a leader and political scribe writing (or re-writing) the history of his own "country" (his imaginary Martinican nation-state) and its citizenry. I make my hypothesis based on the fact that – in addition to his concomitant occupation as Mayor of Fort-de-France – Césaire spent the majority of his political tenure spanning decades as the sole representative of Martinique at the French Assembly in Paris, a very isolating position that provided him very limited direct contact

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<sup>137</sup> Walsh, 131.

with the Martinican people during the year.<sup>138</sup> And while the loneliness of power is apparent in Césaire's portrayal of L'Ouverture in *Toussaint*, it applies to Césaire's own political circumstances as well; likewise, the leitmotiv of the solitude of power can be witnessed in the plight of the main protagonists in his plays: King Henry Christophe, and Patrice Lumumba (whom I will discuss in the next chapter of my dissertation).<sup>139</sup> In the upcoming section, I would like to analyze Césaire's choice of the literary strategies he uses to portray Christophe's solitude of power and its connection to the practice of his own leadership mode.

The elaborate choices of literary media Césaire uses to engage Haïti's history and its early leadership standards highlight the fact that chronicling the complexities of such important a historical movement (in the manner Césaire wants to do it) cannot be undertaken by simply using a fictional paradigm. In fact, in writing *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, Césaire's aim was to historicize the Haitian Revolution through a fine comb analysis of the different stages of the struggle for freedom, "les tenants et les aboutissants" ("the ins and outs") of the revolution, its actors, internal and external dynamics, etc. Therefore, a rigorous study of the minutia of historical facts and political

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<sup>138</sup> Césaire resided in Paris many months per year while the French Assembly was in session.

<sup>139</sup> Although it cannot be characterized directly as loneliness of power – the Rebel does not have any country to rein over per say – the latter nonetheless experiences deep loneliness in his quest of freedom for his people.

ideologies is more suited for the use of the essay form. Thus, in addition to Césaire's choice of what literary form to use, a related legitimate question needs to be asked: why choose to write a play on Christophe, rather than Toussaint who, I have mentioned, is the most famous hero and the major revolutionary architect of the revolts in St Domingue?

Part of the answer to the question lies in the fact that other writers, in Césaire's view, have produced works celebrating the virtues of Toussaint's revolutionary leadership.<sup>140</sup> Césaire was therefore *not* interested in writing a play extolling the heroism of the leaders of the revolution; rather, he was drawn to fictionalizing the outcome of the revolutionary struggle, via an examination of the encounter between political dogma and the management of power.

In this line of argument, I would like to turn my attention, for now, to a couple of interviews – those of Khalid Chraïbi (1965) and Françoise Vergès (2005). Although separated in time by four decades, these interviews provide direct responses, in Césaire's own words, to questions related to (1) the importance of the San Domingo Revolution to Césaire as a poet-scribe and as a politician; (2) the choice of theater (and tragedy) to dramatize Christophe; (3) the influences behind these choices, and (4) their implications for his valuation

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<sup>140</sup> These works are detailed in Gil's dissertation (*Migrant Textuality*, 22).

of Black leadership in Africa and the French Caribbean. What is more, Césaire discusses at length, in these conversations, his views on the challenges facing oppressed people in their transition from slavery and colonization to the exercise of freedom. Also, he addresses the pitfalls of power management and nation-building faced by the new country leaders, as well as the challenge of ensuring that they themselves stay connected to the reality of the people they are supposed to work.

In both interviews, Césaire acknowledges that there is an implicit correlation between the historical events in Haïti and his literary works. To Chraïbi's question: "*La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* tient sans doute une place particulière dans votre œuvre, est-ce un aboutissement, une suite logique?", Césaire responded in these terms:

Une suite logique! Le Roi Christophe incarne la négritude affrontée à trois problèmes: problème métaphysique de la race elle-même; problème politique qui est celui de la charge d'avoir un état à construire; problème humain qui est celui de l'adaptation d'un peuple à un nouvel état, passage de la dépendance à l'indépendance et à la responsabilité ... Car je considère que la phase de la décolonisation est terminée et que se pose le problème positif de former des nations qui à la fois gardent certaines traditions, maintiennent leur autonomie et s'adaptent aux exigences du monde moderne.<sup>141</sup>

From this citation there transpires, then, evidence of a literary stratagem, not uncommon with Césaire, that of the deployment of a *double entendre* (double

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<sup>141</sup> <https://www.scribd.com/doc/118314873/Khalid-Chraïbi-Best-of-Articles-choisis-a-jour-au-31-decembre-2012>. Accessed April 2, 2016.

meaning). We are, in fact, in the presence of two audiences: first, the internal audience – the Haitian and Antillean public, as Césaire adamantly insists that *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* is first and foremost a Caribbean play.<sup>142</sup> By extension, the second (larger) external audience comprises the newly independent African nations that burst onto the international political scene,<sup>143</sup> together with other newly independent Third World countries. Based on these two readings of the play, I will start by discussing the external audience of the *Tragédie* and reserve for the last part of this section a closer examination of the more localized Caribbean setting as it relates to Haïti and Martinique.

By opening up the critical space for a reading of *Tragédie* as a post-colonial play with a worldwide appeal addressing the African diaspora and the African motherland, Césaire presents the 1960s as a time when the Black World (“le monde noir”) was going through a tremendous amount of turmoil (African and Caribbean independences, the Civil Rights movement in the United States). He reexamines the responsibility that the leaders in the world of Peoples of African Descent (save the pre-Obama USA) were faced with in relation to self-governance and the running of the affairs of the state. Accordingly, it transpires, in Césaire’s view, that in order to exert some control over their destiny, these political guides need take a look back in time

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>143</sup> In the same interview, Césaire states: “*Tragédie* s’adresse aussi à l’Afrique” (“*Tragédie* makes reference to Africa as well”).

so as to interrogate their past in an effort to understand the present, before managing the future of their respective countries. Furthermore, the parallelism Césaire makes between the problems confronted by Haïti after 1804 and those faced by the African states in the early 1960s<sup>144</sup> proposes as well a reading of the play as a mirror of the African independence movement viewed through the telescope of Haitian history. In this context, Césaire avows using *Tragédie* as a reinterpretation of the Haitian independence to examine the aftermath of Third World independence movements during the decolonization era, in search of lessons to be learned.

As a prelude to discussing the challenges inherent in the exercise of leadership (the management of power and the practice of freedom within a democratic political framework) in post-revolutionary nation-building in Haïti, I posit that Césaire's construction of Henri Christophe as a despot is, in Césaire's own words, also motivated by the timing of the advent of African countries to independence. The African continent, he says, was assailed by new problems. Concurrently, the militants and leaders who were involved in protesting the colonial power (via political party formations and guerrilla warfare rebellions) were suddenly propelled to important political positions, heads of states included. The new leaders were thus confronted with the issue

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<sup>144</sup> The implementation of socio-economic development programs, materializing the aspirations of the masses, as well as the difficulties encountered in the realization of the projects, etc.

of power management in a post-independence era. In this regard, Césaire maintains, it is easier to struggle for one's freedom than it is to engage the responsibilities required by good governance once liberty has been achieved.

In *Tragédie*, Césaire wants to address this paradox, and he finds it naturally fitting to contextualize in Haïti the problem of the Black leader faced with the challenge of assuming good leadership: Haïti is, after all, the first Black State to have been confronted with these problems.<sup>145</sup> Ergo, seen through these lenses, the examination of the history of Haïti concords with the aesthetic project of the writer;<sup>146</sup> the play, in Gregson Davis's terms, becomes "... an eloquent meditation on the dynamics and pathos of leadership in the aftermath of colonialist domination."<sup>147</sup>

In the two previous paragraphs, I examined the historical references connecting the play to an external African and Third World audience. I also addressed the drama's direct allusion to Haitian history and politics through time, both past (the post-revolution 1804 era) and contemporary (the 1960s). I am arguing that what is at stake in *Tragédie* has echoes in Césaire's immediate environment of Martinique, both politically and culturally. On a cultural level,

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<sup>145</sup> Beloux, "Un poète politique : Aimé Césaire," 29.

<sup>146</sup> Salien, "Négritude et lutte des classes dans *La tragédie du roi Christophe* d'Aimé Césaire: essai de sociocritique," 147-56.

<sup>147</sup> Davis, *Non-Vicious Cycle: Twenty Poems by Aimé Césaire*, 8.

Césaire parallels certain cultural practices at the King's Court with the blind aping of European customs by a large public in Martinique.<sup>148</sup> In the interview I mentioned earlier with Ms. Vergès, in a description of *Christophe*, Césaire starts reciting a scene where the king's wife is making a rather blunt critique of the practice (at his Court) of imitating European cultural practices. Césaire then looks at Ms Vergès and exclaims: "C'est pas très Martiniquais, ça ? Je vois presque la personne que je viens de décrire."<sup>149</sup> Césaire, in this lively episode, seems to suggest that there still is a prevalent degree of cultural assimilation within a part of the Martinican population. This kind of criticism initiated by the pioneers of Negritude is, in present times, levelled equally toward Antillean citizens by the cultural critics of the Créolité movement.

From a political standpoint, the more localized space of the Caribbean bears direct relevance not only to Haïti, but also to Martinique. On one hand, the external inference of the play's link to African independence movements reminds us of Césaire's own political struggle for freedom for Martinicans at home. On the other hand, the Haitian spatial locus of the play is reminiscent of Césaire's political agenda as he was trying to come to terms with his own dilemma: whether or not Martinique should assume the status of an independent nation-state, and the repercussions that may derive from a

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<sup>148</sup> Vergès, *Aimé Césaire : Nègre je suis, Nègre je resterai*, 59.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 60.



unilateral declaration of independence from France.<sup>150</sup> The blockade of Haïti by the tripartite coalition of the US-British and French navy after the 1804 independence declaration is a grim reminder of that eventuality. It is possible as well that Césaire might have been thinking of Cuba (also a close neighbor) against whom the US enforced a total embargo after the victory of Castro's Russian-supported regime over the US-backed Batista government.

Césaire has a direct personal investment in the exploration of different modes of leadership in his literary practice: through his engagement of the leadership styles of the architects of the Haitian Revolution, Césaire is projecting onto his characters what he is or is not able to do himself as *the* leader in Martinique, in attempt to sort out the most practical political affiliations he can make, between Toussaint L'Ouverture (the political hero), or Christophe (the tragic anti-hero). In the end, it is the demise of King Christophe (assailed by serious political repudiation of his power) that triggers the tragic collapse of his reign, as I will debate in the rest of this chapter.

I need, at this stage, to elaborate on the rationale behind Césaire's choice of drama, on the one hand, as the best medium of literary expression for

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<sup>150</sup> I am referring here to the blockade embargo that befell on Haïti, orchestrated by the British, the US, and French marine and armadas to asphyxiate the island economically. Likewise, its purpose was to prevent the spread of the revolutionary movements in the rest of the European colonies in the Caribbean, given the great stake the European powers had in maintaining the Transatlantic Slave Trade for individual and national pecuniary profit.

engaging the examination of leadership in Haïti, and his choice of tragedy over other genres of dramatic representation on the other. The explanation oft given by Césaire regarding his choice of drama can be located in interviews that he has given over the decades. Two of them stand out in this regard, i.e., those of Khalid Chraïbi and François Beloux. The decision is motivated by two factors; the first one is akin to the democratization of political ideology, as a response to criticism directed at the playwright by his intellectual reading public who find the language of his poetry to be very esoteric, marred in surrealist convolutions, and somehow elitist.<sup>151</sup> In response to a related question posed by Chraïbi regarding this point, Césaire explains:

[...] c'est pour cela que, depuis quelque temps, je me suis dirigé vers l'art théâtral. Pour moi, le théâtre est le moyen de sortir de la contradiction que vous signalez, et de mettre la poésie à la portée des masses, de "donner à voir" comme dit Éluard. Le théâtre, c'est la mise à la portée du peuple de la poésie.

Le théâtre est très important dans nos pays sous-développés, il y a dans ces pays une faim de théâtre. Car ce sont des pays qui s'interrogent. Autrefois, ils étaient soumis à une domination étrangère, ils subissaient leur sort. Maintenant, ce sont eux qui forgeront leur destinée, et mettent en question, et le théâtre est la mise en question de la vie par elle-même. Avec l'indépendance, le Tiers-Monde est arrivé à l'âge où l'on s'interroge sur soi-même, et c'est là l'âge du théâtre.<sup>152</sup>

The last part of the above-cited quote highlights the second factor mitigating Césaire's choice of theater as a vehicle for watering down the cryptic register

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<sup>151</sup> Ironically, Césaire credits the African and Caribbean "common people" for having an intuitive understanding of the *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*: he cites examples of people who would stop him in Dakar and recite to him *verbatim* long passages from the cited poem.

<sup>152</sup> Chraïbi, 8.

of his writings (mostly his poetry) for reaching out to the masses: he's suggesting to envisage a theater that is accessible to people from developing countries, so the latter can attain sociopolitical self-awareness as a means of recovery from colonialism. In short, theater is to be conceived as tool for understanding one's present plight so as to forge one's future. Since theatre's aim, in this context, is to encourage reflection by the masses, what about *tragedy*, its subgenre? I will turn my attention, in the section to follow, to an examination of the reasoning behind Césaire's choice of tragedy in general, and the distinction he makes between the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian* strands of tragedy. So doing, I hope to elucidate the manner in which this approach helps the writer better frame the problematic of leadership.

Aimé Césaire, in fact, borrows from a literary genre with its own cultural history. Through numerous interviews, he has readily acknowledged the influence of the Greeks, Shakespeare, Nietzsche and Brecht in his work. Césaire has read many dramatists from Greek Antiquity. Not surprisingly, then, the use of tragedy is deliberate in the drama. In fact, it is motivated by a desire to demonstrate the tragic mismanagement of power by post-colonial leaders in the aftermath of French colonial rule in Haïti. Most pointedly, Césaire puts particular emphasis on the concept of the fallen hero in his plays (*Tragédie* included), as I will discuss later in the course of this chapter.

How then does Césaire use the genre of tragedy? I propose to look at the classical definition of the word, and then discuss if Césaire maintains continuity vis-à-vis the genre, or whether (and how) he departs from it. The New World Dictionary of American English defines tragedy as “[...] a serious play or drama typically dealing with the problems of a central character leading to an unhappy or disastrous ending brought on, as in ancient drama, by fate and a tragic flaw in his character, or, in modern drama, usually by moral weakness, psychological maladjustment, or social pressures.”<sup>153</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary, in turn, characterizes *tragedy* in the following terms: “A dramatic or literary work depicting a protagonist engaged in a morally significant struggle ending in ruin or profound disappointment, specifically: a classical verse drama in which a noble protagonist is brought to ruin essentially as a consequence of an extreme quality that is both his greatness and his downfall.”<sup>154</sup> From these definitions, I gather two ideas that are important for understanding *tragedy* while examining Christophe’s downfall. On one hand, we find in tragedy the elements of a struggle that engages the hero through trials and tribulations; on the other hand, we note the idea of a tragic ending due to the combination of both innate character flaws and unfortunate circumstances (fate).

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<sup>153</sup> *The New World Dictionary of American English*, 1418.

<sup>154</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 1284-85.

Within the Western classical tradition, tragedy as a dramatic form takes on new significance in Césaire's play (*Tragédie*) owing to his declared influence from Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. He has often acknowledged the influence of Greek tragedy on his oeuvre. In an interview cited by Gérard de Préville, Césaire states the following: "Il est vrai que les auteurs grecs de l'antiquité, que j'admire, ont eu sur moi une influence considérable. J'ai été aussi vivement impressionné par le livre de Nietzsche sur la tragédie grecque."<sup>155</sup> In *Birth of Tragedy*, one of Nietzsche's central arguments is that justice cannot be done to the achievements of the Greeks and the triumph of the Apollonian powers of restraint unless one first beholds the unrestrained Dionysian energies that the Greeks managed to harness.<sup>156</sup> In point of fact, Walter Kaufmann (the translator) writes that

Nietzsche used Apollo as a symbol for this aspect of Greek culture which found superb expression in classical Greek temples and sculptures: the genius of restraint, measure, and harmony. Far from depreciating what he called "the Apollonian," he argued that one could not appreciate it sufficiently until one became aware of another side of Greek culture that was barbarous by comparison and found expression in the Dionysian festivals. Surely *The Bacchae* of Euripides shows us passions that are worlds removed from the Greece of Winckelmann, Goethe, and Arnold; and Nietzsche claimed that the same boundless and cruel longing to exceed all norms is also occasionally encountered in the *Iliad* and in subsequent Greek poetry – and "the birth of tragedy" cannot be understood apart from it.

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<sup>155</sup> Préville, "Entretien entre Aimé Césaire et Ghislaine," 205.

<sup>156</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (Translator's Introduction), 4.

A careful reading of *The Birth* shows that Nietzsche, far from glorifying “the Dionysian,” argues that the achievements of the Greeks generally, and their tragedies in particular, cannot be understood adequately so long as we do not realize what potentially destructive forces had to be harnessed to make them possible.<sup>157</sup>

Viewed from this standpoint, Henry Christophe’s project seeks to imitate the Apollonian ideal (unconsciously perhaps), as far as the emphasis on creating harmonious forms is concerned – for instance, the building of the fortress *Citadelle la Ferrière*, the *Palais de Sans-Souci*, as well as his establishment of a new court system. At the same time, through the enslavement of the Haitian masses who built the Citadelle, it is Christophe’s unleashing of the ruinous Dionysian forces that Césaire attacks. Therefore, by portraying Christophe as a destructive and despotic ruler, Césaire validates the Nietzschean approach to tragedy, that is, the dichotomy that exists between these two polarities: the noble ideal of nation-building on the one hand, and the tremendous suffering that it unleashes on the other. Is there a tension between these two tendencies as far as Césaire’s play is concerned? And if so, which approach does Césaire favor, if any? I am suggesting that Césaire favors the latter (aesthetically speaking), that is, the Dionysian emphasis to tragedy.

Indeed, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* is, in Nietzschean terms, Dionysian in character: overall, the play shies away from the Apollonian ideal (order,

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

measure, harmony, restraint and temperance) to embrace the Dionysian model, as demonstrated by the excesses and extravagant behavior of King Christophe. In addition, the play positions itself against any kind of Apollonian individuation given its complete disregard for just boundaries, reasonableness, harmony, etc. What is more, I am arguing that the same Greek influence that permeates *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* – especially its Dionysian approach to the Rebel's suffering, martyrdom and pathos, as well as the excessiveness that contrasts with the apollonian standard <sup>158</sup> – can be found in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*. J.C. Kamerbeek maintains that all Greek tragedies, in fact, present themselves as dramatic interpretations of an epic legend or a myth.<sup>159</sup> In *The Tragedy*, Césaire does not rework a legend or a myth. Rather, he creates a new (defective) legend by drawing on an epic event (the Haitian Revolution) whose hero's deeds (Toussaint L'Ouverture's) have attained mythic proportions, with the purpose of analyzing the pathos and tragic downfall of Toussaint's successor (Henri Christophe) in the aftermath of the revolution.

I would like to preface my ensuing discussion of leadership in *Tragédie* with an analysis of Césaire's usage of dramatic norms in his arrangement of the play. Actually, he departs from the traditional rules of classical theater by

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<sup>158</sup> Cited in Ngal, *Aimé Césaire: Un homme à la recherche d'une patrie*, 206.

<sup>159</sup> Jacquot (Ed.), *Le Théâtre tragique*, 31.

adopting a three acts format, rather than five, as is usually the norm in classical theater. In addition, Césaire infuses a degree of innovation relative to the rules of unity of time and space by using the concepts of “open space” (“espace ouvert”) and “open time” (“temps libre”), rather than constrict the action of the play to one singular place in a single day. The plot itself thus becomes open-ended, spreading across space in multiple locales: the royal palace, the market, the church, around the Citadelle, in the countryside, on the river bank, etc.<sup>160</sup> As far as unity of time is concerned, Césaire modifies at will the temporal unity by infusing numerous distortions of time, switching from linear and historically accurate time to intemporal (mythical) time interchangeably.<sup>161</sup> He employs additional anachronisms by attributing to Christophe laws that were promulgated by Toussaint L’Ouverture;<sup>162</sup> or, for example, when Christophe discusses TESCO – also a word play on UNESCO that is in fact a mockery of the post-colonial European development assistance system for the Third World. Nevertheless, Césaire respects the chronological sequence of Christophe’s tenure in power by narrating his early days as Head of State up until his political demise, a practice similar to Shakespeare’s constructions while writing about historical drama.<sup>163</sup> As for the presentation

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<sup>160</sup> Syllah, “Césaire dramaturge de la décolonisation dans *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*,” 1.

<sup>161</sup> Deberre, “*La Tragédie du Roi Christophe d’Aimé Césaire : Étude Critique*,” 18.

<sup>162</sup> I am referring to other scenes in the 1972 edition of *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* (22, 76).

<sup>163</sup> Ngal, 260.



method in *Tragédie*, the spectator is introduced to the action through a number of voices and a Commentator. But unlike *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* – where the spectator is drawn from the start into a sibyllic atmosphere – in *Tragédie* s/he is led to believe from the outset that the events that will unfold throughout the play are of a tragic nature.<sup>164</sup> This stratagem, however, is not original to Césaire: it can be found in Shakespearean drama as well, whose work Césaire has read extensively.

The opening of *Tragedy* invites the spectator-reader to get involved in the atmosphere of the play via the scene of a cockfight which, according the Présentateur-Commentateur (Presenter-Commentator), is one of the (if not *the*) most preferred past time of the Haitian masses. The Presenter-Commentator then follows up by explaining to the public-reader the essence of the dramatic action, as if it were a complex web of mythical entanglements: “L’essentiel est de comprendre la situation et de connaître les personnages dont les coqs portent les noms. Qui c’est Christophe? Qui c’est Pétion? Tout mon rôle consiste à vous le dire.”<sup>165</sup> The rest of the play then unfolds as a revelation (or explanation, as it were) of that mythical representation.<sup>166</sup> The Presenter-Commentator will make two additional appearances, first during the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>165</sup> Césaire, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, 14. Translation: “The most important thing is to understand the situation and to know the characters bearing the names of the chicken. Who is Christophe? Who is Pétion? It is my duty to tell you who they are”.

<sup>166</sup> Op Cit, 261.

interlude between Act I and Act II to intercede on behalf of the raftsmen (who are critical of Christophe's regime), and then again at the end of Scene 1 (Act II), to remind the peasants of their responsibility (as liberated ex-slaves) toward the nation-building of post-independence Haïti. Further on, the Presenter-Commentator will resurface a third time at the beginning of Scene 8 (Act II) to deliver to the spectator-reader a state of union-like address assessing the status of Christophe's crumbling regime. This technique inherited from Shakespeare – and rather obsolete in modern drama – is meant to help the spectator understand what the play is really about.<sup>167</sup>

Césaire's appropriation of the cockfight and its cultural significance is not a trivial act of his creative imagining – nor is the naming of the coqs as "Henry" and "Pétion" fortuitous; these dramatic occurrences are in fact a deliberate choice that responds to two imperatives. On one hand, the cockfight, from a cultural standpoint, as well as the showcasing of Haitian popular wisdom throughout the play (in the form of "seasoned proverbs expressed by cockfighters, raftsmen, farmers and laborers")<sup>168</sup> illustrate Césaire's own preoccupation with Negritude as a formal representation of cultural specificity. The medium of these cultural deployments validate, in the Césairean Negritudinist sense of the term, the cultural essence of a people, the

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>168</sup> Walsh, 144.

Haitians in this case. On the other hand, at a deeper level, the casting of the historical post-revolutionary leaders Henri Christophe and Alexandre Pétion from the get go as “ruffled combatants” brings to life the disconcerting memory of the division of Haïti between two dysfunctional political ensembles, that is, the North and the South. The allegory of the cockfight then functions as a metaphor for the rivalry and conflict between Christophe and Pétion; this symbolism in turn highlights the already divided nature of Haïti’s leadership, hence dishonoring the memory of the thousands of lives lost during the decade old struggle for emancipation and independence.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, Haïti is, at that time, partitioned into the Northern Province (where Christophe has established his monarchic rule), and the Southern part (where Pétion – a mulatto – has succeeded in establishing a republican “state”). The North and the South are governed by leaders with two divergent agendas: these twin-states fail to cohabitate as they are inspired by clashing political dogmas: monarchism and republicanism.

The competing nature of the above-mentioned ideologies – which in turn expose the profound cracks in the fragile foundation of the nascent dysfunctional political couple (republic-monarchy) – become a major source of political discord. The failure by the two leaders to mediate power

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<sup>169</sup> Bongie, *Friends and Enemies*, 25.

consequently translates into “[...] the fractured leadership of postcolonial Haïti [thereby] cast[ing] doubt on the legitimacy of the revolution, especially since those at the helm of the republic-kingdom were also leaders of the revolution.”<sup>170</sup> Haïti thence doubles into “nations *fausses jumelles*” (“false twin nations,” my coining of the term), vying to write two different narratives of history; in their attempt to do so, both fail to scribe any meaningful political project worthy of honoring the memory of the precursors of revolutionary Haïti. To a great extent, these deep-seated divisions ultimately impact the leadership abilities of both Henri Christophe and his rival Pétion; while they account partly for the failure of the revolution, they mostly underscore the immediate threat to the stability of Christophe’s regime – and to his leadership in particular.

I would like to return to the play’s prelude for a brief examination of the symbolically loaded metaphors of *race* and *colorism* as they are reflective of the divisions (along with class) that plague post-revolutionary Haitian society in *Tragedy*, thereby auguring the tragedy of a divided country. In fact, the deep rift between Black Haitians and Mulattoes becomes a relevantly significant subtext to Césaire’s entire play as a manifestation of the simmering tensions between the northern monarchy and the southern republic; in reality, they

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<sup>170</sup> Walsh, 129.

present all the ingredients of a powder keg that can burst at any moment. Oddly for the reader-spectator, this part of the narrative is evacuated from the text until it reappears toward the end of the play (Act III), when Black peasants rebel, partly upon hearing news that Pétion has agreed to sell the land to the Haitian farmers in the southern part of the country. This move, I'd like to note, is a direct challenge to the edicts of Toussaint L'Ouverture's refusal for agrarian reform, a status-quo which Christophe maintains in his northern kingdom.

Therefore, seen in the optic of local contemporary racial politics, the scene of the cockfight magnifies the centuries-old (and ongoing) rivalry between two ethno-classes (Blacks and Mulattoes) in the Caribbean (in both the Anglophone and the Francophone contexts); its bearing to Martinique is of particular relevance to my discussion. Even though Césaire situates this struggle in Haïti for its post-1804 historical relevance, this conflict is at the same time a projection of a struggle he faces at home. As a matter of fact, one of the attacks leveled at Césaire's political legacy in Martinique is that he allowed the Mulattoes in Fort-de-France to recuperate the ideology of Négritude for the advancement of their own political careers.<sup>171</sup> Let us note, in passing, that this political jab from Rafaël Confiant is partly a veiled criticism

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<sup>171</sup> Confiant, *Aimé Césaire*, 229-241.

of Césaire's lifelong association with his close friend Dr. Pierre Alier, who co-founded Césaire's Parti Progressiste Martiniquais-PPM (the Martinican Progressive Party-MPP) in March 1958. In this line of reasoning, the historical struggle between Christophe and Pétion provides Césaire with a fertile literary ground for exploring the dynamics of the political and socio-economic power struggle between these two groups in his own backyard. Creatively, this trope will later offer Césaire creative footing to explore the tenseness of the relations between Blacks and Mulattoes in the last play of his trilogy, *A Tempest*, through the examination of the complex relationship between Caliban and Ariel.

While the division of Haïti into two parallel (and rival) political polities is not entirely of Christophe's doing, the latter considers himself to be nation-builder ("*un bâtisseur de nation*"). At the end of Scene 1, Act 1, Christophe is engaged in a conversation with Pétion, who has come to offer him the presidency of a "united" Haïti (albeit with significantly reduced executive powers) subject to considerable oversight by the Senate from Pétion's Southern Parliament. In an adroit move that rather demonstrates a degree of political savvy, Christophe refuses the offer. What is interesting here is not so much his rejection of a kind of power devoid of any real political agency, or his refusal to become a token politician serving the interests of the Mulattoes. Rather, it is the explanation he gives to Pétion for such refusal:

CHRISTOPHE

[...] le plus grand besoin de ce pays, de ce peuple qu'il faut protéger, qu'il faut corriger, qu'il faut éduquer, c'est la liberté, [...], mais non la liberté facile ! Et c'est donc d'avoir un État. Oui, [...] quelque chose grâce à quoi ce peuple de transplantés s'enracine, boutonne, s'épanouisse, lançant à la face du monde les parfums, les fruits de la floraison ; pourquoi ne pas le dire, quelque chose qui, au besoin par la force, l'oblige à naître à lui-même et à se dépasser lui-même. [...]<sup>172</sup>

The above-quoted passage bears interest not only because of Christophe's message intended for Pétion's parliament, but also for the scenic arrangement that immediately follows Christophe's declaration. The calm and collected tone of the preceding pronouncement bears sharp contrast with his exclamation that punctuates the end of the episode quoted above: "Pour le reste (*il tire son épée et la brandit*), mon épée et mon droit!" Dramatically speaking, the mere act of brandishing his sword translates Christophe's intention to sideline and eliminate any obstacle (human and natural) that stands in the way of his political project and his trajectory. What is more, it transpires that Christophe is intent on realizing his "God-given" mission of building a nation, using brute force if necessary, so that Haitians regenerate as a born-again people, and achieve self-transcendence in a bright post-independence era. What is as troubling as the presaging of despotism, regardless, is the manner in which Christophe aims to achieve this goal: linguistically, the use of the first person possessive adjective "mon" - as well

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<sup>172</sup> Césaire, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, 22-23.

its implied reference to the first person subject pronoun “je” - indicates unequivocally that he is determined to undertake the fight *his way*. Therein lies one of Christophe’s major character defects (if not *the* chief character flaw), which will be a significant contributor to his downfall.

From the aforementioned quote, we can foresee Christophe’s approach to the management of power (as a solo player) that foreshadows his *modus operandi*. Notwithstanding his privileging of the preservation of Haitian national unity, his refusal to fight Pétion and his proposal to work together with him instead, my main concern remains chiefly with Christophe’s mediation and exercise of political power. What is in question is not so much what propells Henri Christophe to power, but rather what he does with the power he has conquered. In this context, an examination of Christophe’s management of power is in order so as to evaluate his performance as a leader, with a focus on both his social vision for Haïti and the execution of his programme. The rest of the chapter proposes to do just that. Thence, in the next pages of this section, I want to first analyze Christophe’s cultural and political project. Following that inquiry, I propose to examine the contributing factors undermining Henri Christophe’s failed project; so doing, I will attempt to suggest some explanations as to the pitfalls of Christophe’s political practice.



As a prelude to my discussion of the ins and outs of Christophe's vision and the workings of his political practice, I want to look at Césaire's intended message in the play: as a background introduction to his theater, Césaire in 1967 describes his dramatic project in the following terms: « mon théâtre est le drame des Nègres dans le monde moderne. »<sup>173</sup> Hence, according to Aimé Césaire,

La *Tragédie du Roi Christophe* pose trois problèmes:

- le problème métaphysique de la race elle-même;
- le problème humain : l'adaptation d'un peuple à un nouvel état social, passage de la dépendance à l'indépendance et à la responsabilité;
- le problème politique : la charge d'avoir un État à construire comme le connaissent actuellement bien des chefs de gouvernement (...), car je considère que la phase de la décolonisation est terminée et que se pose le problème positif de former des nations qui, à la fois, gardent certaines traditions, maintiennent leur autonomie et s'adaptent aux exigences du monde moderne.<sup>174</sup>

The last part of Césaire's pronouncement needs to be nuanced as somewhat *ahistorical*, in that by the time he makes this declaration in the context of the 1960s world politics, not all former colonized countries had achieved national independence from European colonial powers.<sup>175</sup> By the same token, the assertion is in line with Césaire's notion of using the past to revisit the present so as to explain it, as a means to make sense out of it. Hence, Césaire's conflation of Haitian history with the wave of independence movements by

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<sup>173</sup> Beloux, "Aimé Césaire: un poète politique," 30.

<sup>174</sup> Sylla, 5.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 5.

formerly colonized African countries. Nevertheless, beyond this semantic flop, Césaire's declaration is consistent with both his continuous denunciation of colonialism and his warnings against the dangers of neocolonialism and alienation, its subtler form);<sup>176</sup> it is also aligned with the Fanonian-like project of reprogramming of the mindset of colonized subjects, as a remedy for the psychological ailments of cultural alienation.

Seen through the lenses of Césaire's explanation above, King Henri Christophe's vision subscribes to this tenet in terms of his own cultural and socio-political project: first, the implementation of his Negritude-inspired culturalist project of rehabilitating the black race; second, the liberation of the Haitian black racial subjects (in the name of all black African-descended people) – from the humiliation of enslavement – through the forging of a new cultural subjectivity based on black pride. Thirdly, Christophe's vision emphasizes constructing a nation-state (a New Haïti) as well as the invention of new political traditions that rival only European nations.

It is at this point that I must take a closer examination of Christophe's political programme to account for his actions as a Black post-colonial leader. In order to do so, it is necessary to revisit Christophe's original agenda, as articulated during his crowning ceremony. In Act I (Scene 4), while

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 5.

Christophe is taking the sacred political oath as the new Monarch of Haïti, under the direction of the President of the State Council, he swears with his hand on the bible:

*CHRISTOPHE, debout, bras tendu devant l'Évangile.*

Je jure de maintenir l'intégrité du territoire et l'indépendance du royaume : de ne jamais souffrir sous aucun prétexte le retour de l'esclavage ni d'aucune mesure contraire à la liberté et à l'exercice des droits civils et politiques du peuple d'Haïti, de gouverner dans la seule vue de l'intérêt, du bonheur et de la gloire de la grande famille haïtienne dont je suis le chef.<sup>177</sup>

What is striking in Christophe's solemn proclamation is its evasion of reality. It is hypocritical and highly deceptive at best; Christophe's promise to safeguard the territorial integrity of the nation is not only a fallacy but also a farce. The entire sermon is a false start and stands in direct contrast with the reality on the ground: in fact, at the time of the pronouncement of the sermon, the country, as we have seen earlier, is already divided in two fiefdoms, one republic is run by Mulattoes in the south, while the other half the North is reified into a Black monarchy. As for Christophe's intent to safeguard his people's freedom as well as respect the exercise of their political rights, the oath is rather ironical given the fact that he ends up doing just the opposite, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

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<sup>177</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 39.

In my analysis of the paradoxes and contradictions located between Christophe's vision and the implementation of his policies, let us start with a discussion of his *culturalist project*, and then debate the *praxis of his socio-political project* in the later part of this section. At first glance, King Henri's project has the trappings of a noble ideal, and Césaire has expressed warmth and empathy toward his character.<sup>178</sup> Christophe's culturalist agenda is centered on "decolonizing the minds" of the Haitian people; it is intent on implementing a politics of cultural authenticity: Christophe urges his people to undergo a radical cultural rebirth by embracing fully their African roots. This plan in turn translates into the creation of a kingdom, the changing of the names of members of his royal court (based on the French court protocol), as well as the building of an imposing physical symbol sealing the affirmation of the greatness and accomplishments of Haitians in the aftermath of French colonialism: the Citadelle La Ferrière.

The motivation behind kingdom creation finds its roots primarily in a desire to ape the former French colonial masters via an attempt to equal, if not surpass, the achievements of the French monarchy and its symbolic representations (physical and otherwise). As ill-guided as it is, this desire to seek the approval of the former colonial power finds its counterpart in

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<sup>178</sup> See the interview with Vergès, 57.

Vastey's position that Haitians should imitate the French and create in the New World an empire deserving of respect of the colonizer. As the closest advisor to Christophe, there is perhaps no better person than Vastey himself to explain the impetus behind the creation of the Kingdom of Haïti. In Act 1 (Scene 2), he addresses a gathering of citizens in a rather complacent tone:

VASTEY, complaisant

[...] Vous en conviendrez... Les Français, et cela ne laisse pas de créer une situation dangereuse, nous tiennent en mince estime.

PREMIER CITOYEN :

Évidemment, puisque nous sommes noirs !

VASTEY

Oui et non. [...] Les Français, vous savez, n'ont pas de respect pour les républiques. Napoléon l'a bien montré ! Et qu'est-ce Haïti ! Même pas une, mais eux. Deux républiques, Monsieur.

PREMIER CITOYEN

C'est vrai... Mais que faire ! Mon Dieu, que faire ?

VASTEY

*Haussant le ton et comme haranguant la foule.*

Le monde entier nous regarde, citoyens, et les peuples pensent que les hommes noirs manquent de dignité ! Un roi, une cour, un royaume, voilà, si nous voulons être respectés, ce que nous devrions leur montrer. Un chef à la tête de notre nation. Une couronne sur la tête de notre chef ! Cela, croyez-m'en, calmerait bien des têtes dont les venteuses idées peuvent à n'importe quel moment sur nos têtes, déchaîner la tempête !<sup>179</sup>

The quest for Haitian national dignity and the desire to be respected by the world (i.e., by Europeans, the French in particular) necessitate the invention of a royal institution: a kingdom with all the appendages of a European royal court. Christophe in this fashion creates hereditary nobility comprising four

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<sup>179</sup> Césaire, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, 27-28.

princes, eight dukes, twenty-two counts, thirty-seven barons, and fourteen knights, and he thusly establishes an elaborate dress code and court ceremonial procedures; to crown it all, he builds himself eight palaces and six chateaus.<sup>180</sup> These monarchic appointments notwithstanding, there is one ultimate and unavoidable passageway: his own enthronisation as King Henri Christophe Ier.

I need to come back to the scene of Vastey's previous speech where he is haranguing the crowd, as the fanfare occurs during a rather ironical moment. Vastey's pronouncement suggests to the reader-spectator a double meaning: on one hand, Vastey is alluding to the ever-present dangerous possibility of a French (or British-US led) reoccupation of Haïti; on the other hand, he could be making reference to the threat of political uprisings created by the growing unrest within a Haitian populace resentful of Christophe's political oppression. Be it as it may, the Belgian critic Lilyan Kesteloot offers a pertinent explanation as regards Christophe's motives for justifying the creation of the kingdom of Haïti; she supports Fanon's theorization about the inferiority complex of the colonized, which he discusses at great length in *Black Skin. White Mask*. Kesteloot maintains that "[...] the first intention of the colonized and the slave is to affirm himself [or herself] as the equal of his [or her]

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<sup>180</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/115781/Henry-Christophe>. Accessed Dec 30, 2014.

master.”<sup>181</sup> The fact that Christophe wants to create a form (kingdom) deserving of the respect of the outside world (Europe) and which the French can relate to, thence betrays the anxiety of the former colonial subject as (s)he wants to replace the colonial master’s vacant space by imitating him.<sup>182</sup> In this context, the aping of the old master is not a mere act of mimicry: rather, it is the result of a complete internal appropriation of the image of a model that Christophe and his fellow Haitians rejected to begin with by revolting against the French. In the end, as George Ngal argues, the tension inherent in this double movement of negation and affirmation produces the ultimate alienation within Christophe,<sup>183</sup> the kind of which King Henri himself is desperately trying to avoid, but which in the last instance deepens his tragic predicament. Through the aforementioned scene, then, Césaire seeks to criticize this blind replication of European political and cultural practices, which he views as one of the many problems that plague Christophe’s policies and thereby tarnishes the King’s effectiveness as a leader.

As important as the creation of the Haitian kingdom stands, in Christophe’s mind, a cultural project aiming to restore the lost dignity of the Haitian people, mostly by engaging a policy of cultural authenticity through the reclamation of their African heritage. In the realm of cultural politics,

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<sup>181</sup> Kesteloot & Kotchy. *Aimé Césaire: l’homme et l’œuvre*, 160.

<sup>182</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

<sup>183</sup> Ngal, 265.

Christophe thus advocates the kind Negritudist idea of “authenticité culturelle” (cultural authenticity), the Senghorean brand of Negritude that was instituted in the 1960s and 1970s as official state ideology in countries such as Sénégal and the Democratic Republic of Congo (under the fallacious ideology of “Zairinisation”). While it is supposedly a rejection of the imitation of Euro-centered cultural values, Christophe’s policy of cultural authenticity turns into a farcical enterprise: instead of drinking champagne from Europe, Christophe urges his people to drink “rhum Barbancourt,” the local brew. Christophe’s entourage carries out a similar anamorphosis of Negritude through its imitation of the pompous language used at the French court. Indeed, Christophe’s subjects are urged to use certain words more than others. Therefore, expressions like “à la franquette,” “dans la salle du tau,” and “champagne” are respectively replaced by “à la haïtienne,” “sous la véranda de case tropicale,” and “barbancourt trois étoiles.”<sup>184</sup>

By finger pointing the futility of Christophe’s so-called “cultural revolution,” *Tragedy* thereby mocks the kind of distortion of Negritude that seeks to privilege a formalistic approach to identity, at the expense of a more substantive policy of cultural reform. It is also possible to envisage this scene in Césaire’s play as a critique of Papa Doc Jacques Duvalier, given the latter’s

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<sup>184</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 153.



insistence on instilling Black pride among the Haitian citizenry during the 60s (as part of his politicocultural platform), during the early years of his reign. On a similar plane, Césaire has directed harsh criticism in his writings<sup>185</sup> toward fellow citizens in the French Caribbean for their blind unquestioning parody of French customs. In any instance, Césaire attempts to distance his position on Negritude from that of his colleague and friend Leopold Sédar Senghor. Césaire's critique is directed against the kind of Negritudinist positioning that was espoused by Black elites – in Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere – who were seeking to create new cultural and aesthetic forms that are nativist in character (understand nativist in the most pejorative sense of the term). These are deformations of Negritude given that cultural reform is not undertaken in a radical sense, but is carried out on a superficial level. It is of a folkloric nature, as further evidenced by Christophe's suggestion to Chanlatte (one of his courtesans) to create, as a national cultural project, a poetry that celebrates the virtues of local brewery, or by the choice of rum as a symbol of national unity – not unlike the role that is assigned to alcohol in dividing the people in *A Season in Congo*.

The *politics of naming*, as it were, then becomes an important subtext to Christophe's entire Negritudinist project: it is designed to recapture an

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<sup>185</sup> Césaire, *Cahier*, as well as other essays.

African essence that was erased by the experience of both slavery and colonization. In this regard, the nativist revisiting of the past which guides Christophe's politics of authenticity finds its ultimate expression in the decision to rename his people, as well as in the capturing of nobility titles (as I indicated four pages earlier). During the crowning ceremony (Act I, Scene 3), Christophe carries his imitation of the pompous and ritualistic jargon of the French court system a step farther by choosing for his followers, new names which, ironically French in substance, are motivated by a rejection of the old names of slavery, of infamy, and of orphanery, as Christophe would have it. He explains :

Jadis on nous vola  
Nos noms !  
Notre fierté !  
Notre noblesse, on, je dis *On* nous les vola !  
Pierre, Paul, Jacques, Toussaint ! Voilà les estampilles humiliantes dont  
*on* oblitéra  
nos noms de vérité.  
Moi-même votre Roi  
sentez-vous la douleur d'un homme de ne savoir pas de quel nom il  
s'appelle? À quoi son nom l'appelle? Hélas seule le sait notre mère  
l'Afrique!  
Eh bien, griffes ou non griffes, tout est là !  
... Nous devons être les «griffes». Non seulement les déchirés, mais aussi  
les *déchireurs*. Nous, nos noms,  
puisque nous ne pouvons les arracher au passé,  
que ce soit à l'avenir  
(*Tendre*).  
Allons de noms de gloire je veux couvrir vos noms  
d'esclaves, de noms d'orgueil nos noms d'infamie,

de noms de rachat nos noms d'orphelins !  
C'est d'une nouvelle naissance, Messieurs, qu'il s'agit! [ ... ]<sup>186</sup>

Rhetorically speaking, Césaire's choice of nouns, adjectives and verbs is purposeful. The verbs "voler" (steal), "oblitérer" (obliterate), "humilier" (humiliate) all bear the stamp ("estampiller") of the negative inference of the experience of slavery and cultural alienation experienced by African-descended colonial subjects. Moreover, Césaire uses contrasts as he plays on binary oppositions: the original names of Africans before their trans-oceanic deportation ("noms de gloire") are opposed to their slave names ("noms d'esclaves") assigned to them once they arrived in the Americas; the African names ("noms d'orgueil") signifying pride are pitted against the Christian names of infamy ("noms d'infamie"); the names of redemption ("noms de rachat") that Christophe intends to give his people are destined to ground them in a renaissance designed to erase the Christian names synonymous with cultural uprooting. Furthermore, in his use of nouns, Césaire opposes *fierté* ("pride") to humiliation and pain ("douleur"). I would like to note the term "griffe" (claw), which is used in association with the epithet "les déchirés" (i.e. "the dismembered people"); the latter noun is then given agency by transforming it into a more active attribute, "les déchireurs" ("the rippers") who must "rip the future" (or erase the past by inventing a *future present*) in

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<sup>186</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 37.

order to bestow upon Haitians a glory they could never enjoy in the past as slaves. All in all, Césaire resorts to a similar literary design which he uses in the *Cahier* to describe Negritude more as an ongoing action than a fixed state, and therefore pertains to Césaire's own conception of Negritude as a project rather than an essence.

In the passage of the play under discussion, the “new birth” is partly baptism (at least symbolically), but mostly a crowning ceremony that is imbued with strong religious undertones.<sup>187</sup> However, in Christophe's psyche, this ritual produces the effects of a catholic baptism: the new names of the court dignitaries, as well as the crowning itself, must all negate (albeit retroactively) the previous identity assigned onto Africans by the imposition of common Christian names like Pierre, Paul, Jacques, and Toussaint – the latter two names being an indirect reference to the two greatest heroes of Haitian independence. In this regard, Christophe's compulsion to invent a new identity for Haitians by cancelling out their previous selfhood becomes almost akin to a kind of neurotic obsession.<sup>188</sup>

While Christophe considers his project to instill in his people a new postcolonial subjectivity (its 19<sup>th</sup> century version “avant la lettre”) through the erasure of the Christian identity – equated with slavery in this case – as part

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<sup>187</sup> Ngal, 249.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 250.

and parcel of his larger Negritudinist cultural undertaking, I suggest that this buffoon-like and burlesque naming venture is backward in character, and only formal in nature. A formal name change produces neither a new identity nor a new subjectivity. Rather, Christophe's futile endeavor is a parody of the same since the "new" names remain profoundly European. The playwright will make a similar critique of the politics of authenticity in *A Season in Congo*, as we will see in the next chapter of this work.

I have argued that pride and vanity are at the root of the politics of identity in the play under discussion; Christophe's proclamation of this cultural policy encompasses its full-fledged meaning: this "re-naissance" must be expressed through concrete deeds (both metaphorically and materially) so that, in the king's perspective, they can be validated by the outside world. Indeed, parallel to Christophe's politics of naming is a project that is close to his heart: the building of a monument (the Citadelle La Ferrière) as a symbolic testimony of the survival of the Haitian people in the aftermath of French colonization. In the context of his critique of leadership, it is crucial for Césaire – who visited the Citadelle fortress during his 1944 stay in Haïti – to elaborate on the monument, as its construction is considerably responsible for the

extreme suffering for the Haitians who erected it with their sweat and blood, and perished in the process.<sup>189</sup>

The Citadelle, for Christophe, functions both as a firewall and as a project. From the start, its edification is designed as a defensive fortress for the protection of the Haitian people against any foreign military attack, Napoleon Bonaparte's army especially. Says Christophe, in Act II (Scene 8) "[...] J'ai décidé de donner à mon peuple cette bonne parade de pierre contre les buffles, ce bon chien de pierre dont la seule gueule découragera la meute de loups."<sup>190</sup> Christophe finds substantiation for his strategic vision in Hugonin words, his "fou du roi" (jester) companion: "Et s'ils viennent quand même les Français, qu'est-ce qu'ils recevront sur le paletot! Des tomates? Des mangues? Des cirouelles? Non et non ! De bons boulets de fer dans le ventre, de la bonne mitraille de papa Christophe et de bons feux de billebaude dans leur maudit cul blanc".<sup>191</sup>

Nevertheless, more than a defensive wall against any assault by armed foes, the Citadelle la Ferrière is mostly a testimonial monument and political project. In this rationale, it is worth examining how Christophe justifies the construction of the Citadelle:

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<sup>189</sup> *EB Oline*. The Encyclopedia Britannica estimates that up to 20,000 Haitians perished during the construction of the Citadelle La Ferrière.

<sup>190</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 105.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

[...] ce peuple doit se procurer, vouloir, réussir quelque chose d'impossible ! Contre le Sort, contre l'Histoire, contre la Nature, ah! ah! l'insolite attentat de nos mains nues! Porté par nos mains blessées, le défi insensé! Sur cette montagne, la rare pierre d'angle, le fondement ferme, le bloc éprouvé! Assaut du ciel ou reposoir du soleil, je ne sais, la première charge au matin de la relève! Regardez, Besse. Imaginez, sur cette peu commune plate-forme, tournée vers le nord magnétique, cent trente pieds de haut, vingt d'épaisseur les murs, chaux et cendre de bagasse, chaux et sang de taureau, une citadelle! Pas un palais. Pas un château fort pour protéger mon bien-tenant. Je dis la Citadelle, la liberté de tout un peuple. Bâtie par le peuple tout entier, hommes et femmes, enfants et vieillards, bâtie pour le peuple tout entier! Voyez, sa tête est dans les nuages, ses pieds creusent l'âbime, ses bouches crachent la mitraille jusqu'au large des mers, jusqu'au fond des vallées, c'est une ville, une forteresse, un lourd cuirassé de pierre ... Inexpugnable, Besse, inexpugnable ! Mais oui, ingénieur, à chaque peuple ses monuments ! À ce peuple qu'on voulut à genoux, il fallait un monument qui le mit debout. Le voici ! Surgie ! Vigie !

*(Halluciné.)*

Regardez ... Mais regardez donc ! Il vit. Il corne dans le brouillard. Il s'allume dans la nuit. Annulation du négrier ! La formidable chevauchée ! Mes amis, l'âcre sel bu et le vin noir du sable, moi, nous, les culbutés de la grosse houle, j'ai vu l'énigmatique étrave, écume et sang aux naseaux, défoncer la vague de la honte !

Que mon peuple, mon peuple noir,  
salue l'odeur de marée de l'avenir.<sup>192</sup>

The building of the Citadelle, thus, becomes a life or death mission motivated by a desire to achieve and, better yet, transcend the impossible against history, against fate and against nature itself. It is an act of defiance seeking vengeance against the humiliating history of the enslavement of Africans; as well, the Citadelle ought to exorcise in the minds of Haitians the traumatic experience and the memory of their Trans-Atlantic deportation from Africa.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 62-63.

Of particular interest is the poetic language that Christophe uses to describe this project as a *labor of love*; it invites for an in-depth examination of the above-quoted citation. The fact that *the Citadelle* is imagined as a *quilombo*-like city<sup>193</sup> where Haitians nationwide would retreat in the event of a military attack can be construed as a manifestation of the paranoiac fear Christophe feels of an imaginary attack by foreign powers which have attempted to (re)occupy Haiti.<sup>194</sup> Christophe qualifies the garrison by adjectives and physical characteristics commensurate with an insurmountable fort (“inexpugnable”), the equivalent of an armored battleship made out of concrete (“cuirassé de pierre”), and which Haitians must arise (“surgie”) to defend, and remain vigilant (“vigie”) to safeguard their liberty against any new European enslavement of the surviving Africans in the New World.

I want to focus on the last part of the passage under review, mainly for the irony it presents to the reader-spectator in the circumstance of its utterance: what Christophe sees during his hallucination is a recollection of the journey of the fight for independence (“formidable chevauchée”) which he parallels with a subsequent cancellation of the traumatic memory of the trans-oceanic slave ships (“annulation du négrier”) as well as with the torture of

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<sup>193</sup> I am referring here to the communes established by Free Black slaves in Brazil who fled their original plantations to form new communities modeled on their original African villages.

<sup>194</sup> We are reminded of the Spanish, British, US and French armadas whose country leaders vied for the occupation of the Haiti seeking to benefit from its lucrative sugar cane plantation economy.



Africans by slave-drivers on slave plantations in the Americas. And even if he includes himself as part and parcel of his Haitian people – “nous les culbutés de la grosse houle” (those who were made to tumble when they were thrown on the shores of the Americas by the swelling waves of the Atlantic Ocean) – Christophe is at the same time removed from his community as their oppressor. The incongruity, thus, resides in the fact that while the Citadelle is meant to represent the Haitians’ achievement of liberation against French tyrannical rule, its construction (“for his people, by his people”) is convolutedly surmised to absolve him from his own autocratic rule.

In the end, the Citadelle la Ferrière stands as Christophe’s only long-lasting “legacy,” a magnificent work of art in lieu of any other palpable, meaningful political and socio-economic achievements. Ironically, Christophe the poet seeks to concretize his grandiose and grandiloquent ambitions through the construction of a symbol fatuously representing the erasure of the shame imposed on Haitians by cultural assimilation, as well as the “grandeur” of their achievement. As an exercise in communal work, the Citadelle embodies the tension within the dual incarnation between the pursuit of liberty and the exercise of power: the project that was meant to do away with the marks of subjugation ends up reproducing the experience of what it was meant to erase in the first place: the experience of slavery itself. When there aren’t enough men to haul very heavy stones from the valley to

the top site of the mountain for the edification of the Citadelle, women and even children are forcibly constricted into mandatory labor, as directed by Christophe himself at the beginning of Scene 3 (Act II): “Pour la Citadelle, il faut faire plus et plus vite. On devrait pouvoir tirer meilleur parti de toutes les forces du pays, [...] des femmes comme des enfants. [...] Alors tout le monde au travail, au service, à transporter des pierres. Dix pierres par jour la femme, ça ne les tuera pas ! De deux à cinq l’enfant, selon l’âge.”<sup>195</sup>

At this stage in my analysis, I want (for the rest of the chapter) to direct my attention to the pitfalls of his governance, and engage the root causes of the failure of his rulership. In my exploration of what happens to ideology once confronted to real politics, I mean to highlight the gap between the idealism of Christophe’s intended goals on the one hand, and the deficient outcome of his policies once they are put into execution, on the other. In this account, I posit that Christophe’s failed projects (“projets inaboutis”) are seeded in the solitude of power, the excessive scope (“démessure”) of his socio-political enterprise, his extreme intransigence, as well as the pathological impatience he displays in the implementation of his “accelerated project.”<sup>196</sup>

I start with a discussion of the *trope of the solitude* of the hero because it is a leitmotif that occupies a central position not only in the play under analysis,

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<sup>195</sup> Césaire, *La Tragédie*, 3.

<sup>196</sup> I am borrowing the term from John Patrick Walsh’s book *Free and French in the Caribbean*.

but also throughout Césaire's literary oeuvre (poetry, essays, and drama): I am referring to the Speaker of the *Cahier*, Toussaint Bréda in *Toussaint-L'Ouverture*, the Rebel in *Et les Chiens*, King Henri Christophe in *La Tragédie*, and Patrice Lumumba in *Une Saison*. George Ngal, whom I have quoted earlier in the chapter, likens the solitude that power bestows to those who are at the helms of rulership to Césaire's own historical position and his work:

Césaire n'est pas Toussaint-Louverture, n'est pas le Rebelle, n'est pas Christophe, n'est pas Lumumba. Il en est l'auteur. Mais il est aussi tous ces personnages; ceux-ci sont au cœur du drame de Césaire lui-même. S'il est dangereux de chercher des confessions dans l'œuvre d'art, il est néanmoins improbable que dans le cas de Césaire il s'agisse de purs rêves projetés dans des personnages historiques qui, par ailleurs, présentent des traits communs et ressemblants. Parmi ceux-ci, c'est la solitude peut-être qui trouve l'écho le plus immédiat dans la sensibilité de l'auteur. La solitude du héros est celle de cet adolescent que fut Césaire au milieu des siens, de Césaire à Paris, de Césaire politicien luttant tout seul, peu suivi dans sa voie.<sup>197</sup>

As I have mentioned earlier in the chapter, Césaire – as the only representative of Martinique at the French assembly – has been quite lonesome as a politician while fighting against French colonialism on behalf of his homestead, and spearheading very important decisions impacting the fate of his country mates. His solitude as a lawmaker-legislator mirrors that of the Rebel in *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Patrice Lumumba, as well as that of Henri Christophe. By staging the solitude of his characters, Césaire makes the

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<sup>197</sup> Ngal, 207.

underlying claim that a Dionysian-type leadership entails a degree of tragedy, in much the same manner as the lonely journey of the hero in classical mythology often leads to very adverse mishaps.

Besides, beyond the assessment of Césaire's loneliness of power, my contention is that the intersection between Césaire's political life and his oeuvre goes beyond Ngal's position in this particular instance. In fact, Césaire incarnates himself through his characters; they speak and act for him,<sup>198</sup> and each of them gives Césaire the opportunity to narrate his own anxieties as a leader into the imaginings of the world of drama. Consequently, through Christophe, Césaire examines an aspect of leadership that touches him personally, that is, the possibility of psychological neurosis produced by the isolation of power.

In the case that concerns my study, Christophe is a loner, and as such, his political trajectory follows the journey of the hero in the classic sense of the term. Here, I am talking about the loneliness of the journey that the hero must undertake in order to accomplish her (his) life mission. In the play, loneliness becomes both internal and external to Christophe. And much like the solitude of Césaire's main protagonists in his plays, the King's lonesomeness is a

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 259.

Prometheus-like solitariness.<sup>199</sup> And it is the solitude of power that leads to the hero's tragic downfall, as he functions in isolation in an imperious and high-handed system within which he has cancelled any system of checks and balances. Indeed, while it is true that Haïti is endowed (at least on paper) with democratic institutions in the western sense (a government, a parliament, a Head of State, etc.), the country is politically fractured. We have already seen that the Haitian Parliament is monopolized by the mulattoes in the South, and also that Christophe has no real power over the entire country, except in the North where he has established his fiefdom.

As Christophe soon discovers, scribing a narrative of the management of power in post-revolutionary Haïti is far different from choreographing the heroic struggle for freedom as he did with his comrades-in-arms Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jacques Dessalines. The blueprint of Christophe's project – like that of Toussaint, The Rebel, Lumumba or Caliban – is gigantic. King Henri seeks to achieve an almost impossible mission that is only commensurate with the absolute. And it is precisely because he undertakes such actions with intransigence that he finds himself isolated.<sup>200</sup> In fact, the demands of the hero are so radical that he scares away his most immediate entourage; these high expectations turn off the common people, as the king's

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 252.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 252-53.

actions give rise to internal enemies of the state in the process. As a result, Christophe ends up creating around himself a political vacuum, a type of physical distancing that Ngal calls a “tragic external space” (“espace extérieur tragique”).<sup>201</sup> The more Christophe loses himself in his Prometheus-like isolation, the more tragic the distancing becomes. In reality, the dramatic progression in *The Tragedy* deepens with the increasing loneliness of the hero; it is in line with the widening gap between Christophe and his citizenry, emboldening his foes for that matter.<sup>202</sup> On another level, the distancing between the hero and the people is enacted on a spiritual plane. In point of fact, Christophe the hero fails to rally his supporters around his “revolutionary” ideals, or generate the slightest enthusiasm for his policies. Here rests the internally generated solitude of the Cesairean hero. For the more he fails to communicate with his immediate entourage, the more he locks himself up in his mythical world.<sup>203</sup> It is exactly this kind of self-made loneliness that will lead to Christophe’s own demise.

I want to extend my above-mentioned remarks on the loneliness of power to a debate of the politics of representation of the leader and the people as pertains to Henri Christophe’s relationship with his kinfolks. What kind of leader is Christophe? Or more precisely, does Christophe as a leader represent

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 253.

his people? To what extent (if any) is he the embodiment of the ideals of the Haitian people? If we abide by the notion that a leader incarnates the aspirations of the people, then Christophe falls short of the criteria, since the people he rules over do not recognize themselves in him. Rather, as an “architect-builder,”<sup>204</sup> Christophe goes against the current in his attempts to fashion the people in his own image by mobilizing them in the pursuit of his own agenda. Instilling in his people a sense of collective discipline is a central tenet of his project, that is, “mettre à la raison ces nègres qui croient que la Révolution ça consiste à prendre la place des Blancs et continuer, en lieu et place, [...] sur le dos des nègres, à faire le Blanc”<sup>205</sup> (“impart reason to those Niggers who believe that Revolution consists in replacing Whites and continue, in venue and place, to mimic white people on the back of Blacks”). In passing, it is ironic that Christophe accuses his people of engaging in aping European customs, a cultural crime of which he himself is greatly culpable.

Christophe’s nation-building thereby commands the enforcement of a rigorous way of life so as to mold his people into a hardworking nation, as one breeds domestic pets. This pedagogical relationship between the master (Christophe) and his pupils (Haitians) replicates that of the correlational links

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<sup>204</sup> Walsh, 135.

<sup>205</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 84.

between the former French colonizers and the newly freed colonized subject.<sup>206</sup>

To illustrate my point, let's fast-forward to Scene 3 (Act 2), where Christophe reflects on his duties as the supreme Master-Teacher of his students:

Ah! Quel métier! Dresser ce peuple! Et me voici comme un maître d'école brandissant la ferule à la face d'une nation de cancre! Messieurs, [...] Ou bien on brise tout, ou bien on met tout debout. On brise, [...] Tout par terre, la nudité nue. [...] Restent la terre, le ciel; les étoiles, la nuit, nous les Nègres avec la liberté, les racines les bananiers sauvages. [...] Ou bien on met debout! Et vous savez la suite. Alors il faut soutenir. Il faut soutenir. Il faut porter: de plus en plus haut. De plus en plus loin. J'ai choisi, moi. Il faut porter. Il faut marcher [...]<sup>207</sup>

Note the condescending tone of his declamation, and the unflattering reference to Haitians as "cancres" (dunces, imbeciles). As well, it is worth mentioning the striking likeness between the ideology behind Christophe's approach as expressed in the passage, and the nihilistic attitude of the Rebel as we encountered in *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*. The idea that total destruction is the only precursor to rebuilding a new order is, to say the least, a recurrent theme in Césaire's oeuvre (his poetry and drama): this observation applies as well to Lumumba's radical uncompromising stance vis-à-vis the need to destroy the Belgian colonial order with the aim of establishing a new independent Congo.

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<sup>206</sup> Walsh, 134.

<sup>207</sup> Op Cit, 86-87.



In as much as Christophe attempts to fashion the Haitian masses in his own image, it is as well necessary for him to instill in the minds of Haitians from all social formations an awareness that the reconstruction of the country demands that the Black peasant masses become conscious of the great tasks that await them.<sup>208</sup> Nowhere is this idea better demonstrated as in Scene 2 (Act 2): the spectator-reader is invited to witness a scene taking place in Le Cap, amidst the commotion of civilians on market square, most of whom are concerned with the presence of a vessel patrolling the waters of the port – a grim reminder of the French blockade of Haïti after its declaration of independence. While a group of citizens is engaged in a critique of the decision by President Boyer (Pétion's successor) to pay indemnities to France in compensation for the loss of property (human and chattels real) in exchange for France's recognition of Haïti as an independent state, Christophe appears on horseback in dramatic bang, flanked with his military staff, cutting short the discussion:

Assez! [...] Peuple haïtien, Haïti a moins à craindre des Français que d'elle-même! L'ennemi de ce peuple, c'est son indolence, son effronterie, sa haine de la discipline, l'esprit de jouissance et de torpeur. Messieurs, pour l'honneur et la survie de ce pays, je ne veux pas qu'il puisse jamais être dit, jamais être soupçonné dans le monde que dix ans de liberté nègre, dix ans de laisser-aller et de démission nègre suffiront pour que soit dilapidé le trésor que le martyr de notre peuple a amassé

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<sup>208</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 29.

en cent ans de labeur et de coups de fouet. Aussi bien, qu'on se le dise dès à présent, avec moi vous n'aurez pas le droit d'être fatigués. [...]<sup>209</sup>

Far from reassuring the masses, Christophe's pronouncement illustrates the disdain and dejection he feels toward them. His reference to the decade-long struggle for independence serves both as homage to Toussaint L'Ouverture and the heroes of independence, but mostly as a warning that there is no room for misstep: the task of building the Haitian nation is too great to allow any error.

In addition to his pertinacity, Christophe's obsessive urge to move forward – at a very fast-paced rhythm, in fact – operates detrimentally as a blinder to the necessity for political tolerance expected from leaders. Far from representing the ideals of his people, Christophe fails to cultivate a very important skill: the patience required of a leader to carry through her or his political programme. The king's intolerance is only rivaled by a similar impatience that we find in Lumumba in *A Season in Congo*. We witness yet another instance of the shortcomings in Christophe's leadership in the climactic scene of Act I (scene 7) – set in a dramatic ambience – which the playwright describes as filled with buffoonery, “in a parodic and jester style,”<sup>210</sup> and where the serious and the tragic see the light of day through

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>210</sup> Walsh, 134.

gashes of lightning. The scene centers on Christophe's celebration of the first anniversary of his reign in his regal villa, where he is surrounded by his familiar entourage and other invitees: the Master of Ceremonies sent by France, Hugonin (the court jester), Chanlatte the official poet, the officiating bishop, Martial Besse (the national Engineer), Madame Christophe, and Prézeau (Christophe's confidant and factotum). The latter delivers in Christophe's hands a letter from William Wilberforce<sup>211</sup> brought by Sir Alexis Popham from London. The letter is remitted to the king as a sign of his friend's goodwill advice, and "deploys a key metaphor to teach the new monarch about nation-building."<sup>212</sup> Says Christophe in response to Wilberforce's invite for political moderation:

Mon noble ami Wilberforce ! Des vœux pour l'anniversaire de mon couronnement! [...] « On n'invente pas un arbre, on le plante! On ne lui extrait pas les fruits, on le laisse porter. Une nation n'est pas une création, mais un mûrissement, une lenteur, année par année, anneau par anneau. » Il en a de bonnes! Être prudent! *Semer [...] les graines de la civilisation.* Malheureusement, ça pousse lentement, tonnerre! *Laisser du temps au temps...* Mais nous n'avons pas le temps d'attendre quand c'est précisément le temps qui nous prend à la gorge! Sur le sort d'un peuple, s'en remettre au soleil, à la pluie, aux saisons, drôle d'idée!<sup>213</sup>

In fact, much like Lumumba in *Saison*, Christophe's lack of patience is fueled by a desire to speed up the course of history, to catch up with time («rattraper

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<sup>211</sup> The famed British MP who advocated for the abolition of slavery. However, he is not without controversy himself.

<sup>212</sup> Op Cit, 135.

<sup>213</sup> Césaire, 7.

le temps») in view of achieving the goals of his accelerated project as fast as possible. In this context, the idea of nation-building as a process of maturation is unfathomable for Christophe. What is more, the latter's dismissal of Wilberforce's advice indicates a radicalization in his position, as much as it reflects his growing impatience toward the Haitian people. Not only does he disregard advice from his closest political advisors, but he also gives a deaf ear to his wife who counsels him to use political realism, as he has become the "big fig tree that smothers the surrounding vegetation and chokes it."<sup>214</sup>

Says Madame Christophe :

[...] Christophe, à vouloir poser la toiture d'une case sur une autre case  
sur une autre case  
elle tombe dedans ou se trouve grande!  
Christophe, ne demande pas trop aux hommes  
et à toi-même, pas trop! [ ... ]<sup>215</sup>

Christophe's scolding and corrective rebuke dismissing his wife's counsel and re-directing the debate toward his grander agenda offers further insight into the bullheadedness of his persona, which is quite the antinomy of consultative governance. In his characteristic explosive temperament, the king makes it clear that freedom entails responsibility (understand hard labor), even if nation-building must come at the price of subjugation:

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 60.

Une chose qui, autant que les propos des esclavagistes, m'irrite, c'est d'entendre nos philanthropes clamer, dans le meilleur esprit sans doute, que tous les hommes sont des hommes et qu'il n'y a ni Blancs ni Noirs. [...] Tous les hommes ont mêmes droits. J'y souscris. Mais du commun lot, il en est qui ont plus de devoirs que d'autres. Là est l'inégalité. Une inégalité de sommations [...] A qui fera-t-on croire que tous les hommes, [...] sans particulière exonération, ont connu la déportation, la traite, l'esclavage, le collectif ravalement de la bête, le total outrage, la vaste insulte, que tous, ils ont reçu, plaqué sur le corps, au visage, l'omnicrachat ! Nous seuls, Madame, [...] nous seuls, les nègres ! Alors au fond de la fosse. C'est là que nous crions ; de là que nous aspirons à l'air, à la lumière, au soleil. Et si nous voulons remonter, voyez comme s'imposent à nous, le pied qui s'arc-boute [...], les dents qui se serrent, la tête, [...] large et froide. Et voilà pourquoi il faut en demander aux nègres plus qu'aux autres : plus de travail, plus de foi, plus d'enthousiasme, un pas, un autre pas, encore un autre pas et tenir gagné chaque pas ! C'est d'une remontée jamais vue que je parle, Messieurs, et malheur à celui dont le pied flanche !<sup>216</sup>

I would like to underline the pertinence of this passage to my argument as Christophe's declamation contains all the elements of the historical position of African-descended Haitians in the context of the trans-oceanic slave trade, their "duty" (in the king's perspective) toward their race, as well as Christophe's vision of his own leadership role in the context of redressing the wrongs of history via his people's perceived responsibility of sustained labor. The relevance of this quotation is so far-reaching that Césaire found it necessary to re-enact it during the interview he gave to Françoise Vergès in the course of a series of meetings she held with the writer-politician in Fort-de-

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 59.

France<sup>217</sup> – I will return to this point in the latter part of this section. Within Christophe’s rebuke of the humanistic ideology of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> European abolitionist discourse, Césaire critiques the wishy-washy positions of the likes of William Wilberforce, the English MP who was mildly involved in the slave abolitionist efforts with a small group of MPs within the British Parliament.<sup>218</sup> Beyond that, Césaire the playwright highlights Christophe’s historically “impossible position,”<sup>219</sup> that of leading a nation struggling “to give meaning to its newfound freedom” – a citizenry whose only political legacy is enslavement and warfare – as well as engaging “... the questions and responsibilities that come with it.”<sup>220</sup>

Christophe’s narrative strategy for addressing these important questions is to use history as a pedagogical tool, reminding his entourage (as well as the Haitian spectator-readers) of their enslavement, deportation, cultural alienation, and insults, all at the hands of the French colonizers. In the king’s worldview, Haïti still is, metaphorically, «le fond de la calle» (understand “calle négrière” - the “bottom pit of the slave ships”), a reminder of the underground holding cells setup as the last stop in the slave holding pits in Gorée (Sénégal) before embarking on the voyage to the Americas. For

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<sup>217</sup> Vergès, *Nègre je suis, Nègre je Resterai*, 56-59.

<sup>218</sup> BBC Online. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/wilberforce\\_william.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/wilberforce_william.shtml). Accessed Dec. 29, 2014.

<sup>219</sup> Walsh, 130.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 132.

Christophe the history teacher, it is from that space of dehumanization that Haitians must arise to build their future: the inequality of historical positions between white Europeans as agents of oppression and black Haitians as its unfortunate recipients must summon the latter's obligation to redress historical wrongs, as the subjugation of Blacks begets a "historical burden" on their part above and beyond any other people on earth. This notion of the responsibility of the Black masses to reclaim their lost dignity through hard labor permeates Christophe's political vision in an obsessive way. To such an extent that his policies reproduce a socio-political order that is reminiscent of a not too distant experience of enslavement, and which the Haitian Revolutionaries fought so hard to destroy.

Before undertaking a discussion of the climatic crisis of Christophe's leadership, I want to return to the part of Césaire's interview where he quotes the passage of Christophe's declamation I have been discussing in this section, mostly for its relevance to Césaire's own leadership in Martinique. The writer, recounting his voyage to Port-au-Prince, recalls the political atmosphere prevailing in Haïti at the time, especially his encounter with "... a man who looked timid person, very reserved: it was Dr. Duvalier, Papadoc. [...] He had the appearance of a rather very calm intellectual, but in reality a terrible

ambition was boiling inside this man.”<sup>221</sup> Césaire goes on to state: “In Haïti I witnessed all that should not be done! A country that had supposedly conquered its freedom, which had conquered its independence and which I realized was more miserable than Martinique, a French colony! [...] It was tragic, and that could very well happen to us, to us Martinicans. It is following these experiences that I wrote *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*.”<sup>222</sup> While it is unlikely that Césaire is referring to the possibility of his own descent into despotism as regards his leadership in Martinique – he was anything but a tyrant – he is very likely thinking about the consequence for his people of a potential unilateral declaration of independence should the Martinicans opt to cut all ties with France. What is clear as well is the fact that Césaire’s concern in this interview prefigures the depiction – at the time of the writing of the play – of Papadoc’s regime whose ruthless oppression was only equaled by the dictator’s intransigent intolerance for political dissent, a trait he obviously shared with his historical precursor, Henri Christophe.

So far I have debated the appendages and trappings of power that Christophe revels in as the self-proclaimed and uncontested King of Haïti (the Northern part at least). But he fails to grasp the extent to which his autocratic rule has curtailed any support from his political base, the peasantry: his

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<sup>221</sup> Vergès, 56.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 56-57.



despotic governance style is the same agent that plants the seeds of his own downfall, as we'll in this part of my discussion. With the opening of the first scene of Act II, we are onlookers to the genesis of a collective disaffection with Christophe's policies, a discontent that is articulated first through the voice of the peasants. While the character of the First Peasant introduces the debate with a timid critique of Christophe's concept of time in relation to his *accelerated project*, the Second Peasant's comments do little to mask the latter's blatant condemnation of Christophe's agrarian policies: "Mais je me dis comme ça que si nous avons rejeté les Blancs à la mer, c'était pour la voir à nous, cette terre, pas pour peiner sur la terre des autres, même noirs, [...]"<sup>223</sup> A statement to which the First Peasant retorts that "...Christophe aime trop le cocomacaque" ("Christophe loves the use of the baton and cudgel a bit too much"), an anticipatory remark to the King's proclamation of martial law at the end of the scene.

In hindsight, Christophe's continued obduracy becomes the catalyst for the action captured in Scene 6 (Act II), after we have been exposed to a series of scenes staging the growing discontent of the general population toward the king's dictatorship – starting with the repression of a popular uprising already captured in Scene 6 (Act I): the peasants, the raftsmen, Christophe's entourage,

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<sup>223</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 74.

members of the State Council, all become involved. The part of the scene I am discussing stages an episode during which the king lectures a delegation of peasants who have come to express to him the fatigue they feel as a result of their taxing labor. Christophe's first gesture is dismissive, as expected, as he responds to their concerns:

Messieurs, la vraie question est que nous sommes pauvres, et qu'il dépend de nous d'être riches; que nous avons faim et que des terres sont là, qui n'attendent que des bras et notre volonté. [ ... ]

Vous entendez! À refaire! Remonter. Tout. Terre et eau. Percer la route. Refaire la terre. Gouvener l'eau. [...]

Une *raque*. Vous savez ce que l'on appelle une *raque*: l'énorme fondrière, l'interminable passage de boue. [...] Oui, dans la *raque*, nous sommes dans la *raque* de l'histoire.

En sortir, pour les nègres, c'est cela la liberté. Et bougre! Malheur à vous si vous croyez que l'on vous tendra la main! Alors, vous m'entendez: on n'a pas le droit d'être las. Allez, Messieurs!<sup>224</sup>

I want to comment on a few words that reflect Christophe's discernment of black history, as well as his vision for the future of Haïti and his people. Césaire invents the noun «*raque*», a derivative of the French verb «*raquer*» denoting «*cracher*» (“to spit”) in its old 1893 form, or its most contemporary casual meaning of «*payer*» (“to pay”). I retain the former meaning to imply a similar metaphor King Henry uses earlier in the play (at the end of Act I, Scene 7) referring to Haitians as the forgotten people spewed from the bottom pit of the slave ships. The pairing of the noun “*raque*” with another one,

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 97-98.

“fondrière,” gives greater depth to the trope of “bottom-of-the-barrel” entrapment as “fondrière” refers to “a deep hole filled with water and thick mud located in a quagmired-road leading nowhere.”<sup>225</sup> In this context, Césaire’s current use of the metaphor aims to redirect the symbolism to the “duty of the Black race,” and the labor needed for Haitians to dig themselves out of their historical position of enslavement, toward assuming liberty and its ensuing responsibilities.

What is more, the intertextuality between the above-quoted passage and *Les Gouverneurs de la Rosée* – the famed novel by Jacques Roumain, a Haitian himself – cannot go unnoticed. In fact, far and above Christophe’s oneiric contemplation of turning *The Artibonite* (the largest river in Haïti) into a localized version of the Nile river, it is the first time we hear in Christophe’s own words a political programme that delineates any promotion of his economic policy, that of self-sufficiency through the development of the agricultural sector. Like Roumain’s hero in *Les Gouverneurs de la Rosée*, Christophe’s imaginary plan («gouverner l’eau», that is, “to govern water”) seeks to take control of the country’s economic resources out of the hands of the French colonial planters by maximizing the opportunities offered by the use of natural resources for the improvement of the countryside, supposedly

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<sup>225</sup> *Dictionnaire Petit Robert*, 1071.

for the benefit of the local population. Therefore, notwithstanding Christophe's project of remaking the world ("refaire la terre"), this incursion into the realization of socioeconomic policies is tempered by his legendary refusal – as we have witnessed in the earlier two paragraphs – to rescind Toussaint L'Ouverture's edicts of the peasants' mandatory requirement to work the plantations formerly belonging to the colonizers; Toussaint had nationalized these agricultural farms, claiming them as the exclusive property of the new Republic of Haïti.

In closing this section, it is worth emphasizing the conclusion to this scene in its display of buffoonery and satire of the ruling class. Césaire takes his critique to the extreme as we see the members of the State Council exit the stage carrying hoes and billhooks on their way to cultivate the king's fields under the latter's orders. On a more contemporary level, this scene presages the radicalism of Thomas Sankara, who was President of Burkina Faso until the mid-1980s.<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, beyond the grotesque nature of this scene, Christophe's sermon serves to reiterate the historical entrapment of the Haitian people, and his insistence that they extricate themselves from it through hard labor.

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<sup>226</sup> Sankara (inspired by Christophe's character, as a very well-read intellectual) is known to have distributed hoes and machetes to his Ministers (after weekly meetings of the Council of Ministers) to cultivate crops, so that they could fully appreciate the harsh life of the peasantry.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that Henri Christophe's political practice subverts his consideration as incarnating the ideals of the Haitian people. In *Tragedy*, Christophe's leadership methods receive a backlash owing to his failure to represent the interests of the citizenry. Due to his refusal to listen to the concerns of the masses whose revolts against French planters created the conditions of possibility for the revolution to begin with, the ultimate dissatisfaction with his policies culminates in popular uprisings. In the first part of Act III, Césaire stages a poignant punishment for the King. We are introduced to Scene II, which takes place at the Église de la Limonade in Christophe's fiefdom; Juan de Dios Gonzales – the newly appointed Bishop of *Le Cap* following Corneille Brelle's assassination under Christophe's orders – is officiating the mass in celebration of the Feast of the Assumption. The singularity of this event lies in its doubling of celebrations: while Gonzales is reciting Latin psalms from the bible, Christophe, in a language that forebodes his ill health, starts engaging African spirituality (amidst painful groans) while invoking Vodun deities and the memory of Toussaint and Dessalines, as if paying homage to the leaders of the revolution. The symbolism of his physical decadence gains greater significance as he collapses as a result of a stroke. Even as the court physician declares him paralyzed for the rest of his life (Scene 3), Christophe's obstinacy renders him oblivious to the manifest reality of the downfall of his regime: resting in his palace (Scene 4), the "visibly aged

and impotent” king remains in denial of the wave of seditions sweeping across the country. Nor does he (in Scene 5) give any credence to the reports of his visibly agitated and panicked military officers announcing to him the arrival of General Boyer in *Le Cap* and the defection of heavy-weight generals Romain and Guerrier now aligned politically and militarily with the insurgents. To crown it all, the mulatto government in Port-au-Prince manages to sway Magny (one of his close generals) to desert to their camp by offering him governorship of that province, whilst the soldiers engage in countrywide mutinies by joining the local populace and militias. The admonishment of Christophe’s leadership could not be made much clearer and more personal, as his plantations are sacked and burned during the peasant rebellions.

Scene 6 of Act III, which immediately follows the events I described above, foretells the “dénouement” of the drama’s plot. The action is staged at the Royal Palace, under the veranda, with Christophe “[perceptibly] sick and seated in an armchair [with] bifocals by his side with which he scrutinizes the horizon from time to time”<sup>227</sup> as if assessing the mood of the country. The exchange between Hugonin and Christophe brings to light the last thoughts of the king, both in terms of a reflection on his vision and of his personal

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<sup>227</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 136.

assessment of his own leadership. Hugonin begins singing a song whose lyrics may be interpreted as a detoured critique of Christophe's reign. Their conversation then ensues as follows :

CHRISTOPHE

Semences ambitieuses, ai-je dit, pour vos terres fastidieuses [...] Sueurs et récoltes à l'avenant! Ce fut un temps sévère. Je ne regrette rien. J'ai tâché de mettre quelque chose dans une terre ingrate.

HUGONIN

De la terre montent, voyez, ... des colonnes de fumée... Du vent, des hennissements de chevaux. Ce qui brûle, ce sont les champs du roi.

CHRISTOPHE

J'ai voulu leur donner la faim de faire et le besoin d'une perfection.

HUGONIN

La faim oh la la! Qu'est-ce qu'ils s'envoient et je te bouffe les jambons du roi et je te lape le vin du roi ; [...].

CHRISTOPHE

Brisez, brisez, ruinez. J'ai engrangé pour eux; engrangé pour le vent et l'envie. Pour la ruine et la poussière !

HUGONIN

Les peuples vivent au jour le jour Majesté.

CHRISTOPHE

J'ai voulu forcer l'énigme de ce peuple à la traine.

HUGONIN

Les peuples vont de leur pas, Majesté ; leur pas secret.

CHRISTOPHE

Bougre! Les autres ont fait à petits coups de siècles. Où est pour nous le salut, si ce n'est que nous ferons nous – à grands coups d'années, grands ahans d'années ?

HUGONIN Ecoutez, Majesté; sentez, humez! Au Haut du Cap c'est la fête [...]

CHRISTOPHE

Ta voix est étrange, Hugonin; chacune de tes paroles s'encombre d'un débris de mes rêves. Parce qu'ils ont connu rapt et crachat, le crachat, le crachat à la face, j'ai voulu leur donner figure dans le monde, leur apprendre à bâtir leur demeure, leur enseigner à faire face.

HUGONIN

Et voici un battement, un battement de tambour ... Vos soldats ne font pas face, Majesté. Les soldats du roi battent le mandoucouman.

CHRISTOPHE, *tendant l'oreille*  
 Ma foi, c'est vrai. Les salauds! Les salauds! Ils battent le mandoucouman.  
 PAGE AFRICAÏN  
 Qu'est-ce que cela signifie, Majesté ?  
 CHRISTOPHE  
 Cela signifie qu'il est temps pour le vieux roi d'aller dormir. [...] <sup>228</sup>

The binary oppositions present in this dialogue underline the dichotomic views of reality as lived and seen in the eyes of Christophe and his court jester, Hugonin. Where Christophe advocates, rather with resignation, that he wanted to give Haitians "the hunger to accomplish and the quest for perfection" ("j'ai voulu leur donner la faim de faire et le besoin d'une perfection"), Hugonin's replies tread on a thin line in his use of a double-edged sword language operating on the double movement of, on one hand, seemingly acquiescing to and agreeing with everything that his king says, while criticizing him at the same time. Hugonin's oral interventions act in opposition to the view of the king by turning the latter's words upside down: "hunger" is interpreted by Hugonin as the "famine" experienced by the Haitian people who have no other alternative but "eat the legs of the king" ("*bouffe les jambons du roi*"): on a symbolic level, they devour the king's body, but the metaphor serves more to indicate that the Haitian masses are removing Christophe from power, physically. And when Christophe asserts that he *intended* to "forcibly decipher the *enigma* of this people lagging" behind

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 138-140.



History (“ce peuple à la traîne”), “give them a visible face in the world, teach them to face the world” (“forcer l’énigme de ce peuple, leur donner figure dans le monde, [...] leur enseigner à faire face”) , Hugonin wisely reminds the king that “people walk at their pace, their [non-enigmatic] *secret* pace” (“les peuples vont de leur pas, [...] leur pas *secret*.”<sup>229</sup> The incompatibility between the timeliness of Christophe’s accelerated project and the “peasant time” is hereby emphasized. In fact, the gulf between these two conceptions of time make Christophe’s “running out of time” a serious political liability. And it is Christophe’s refusal to read the mood as well as comprehend the pace of the countryside peasants that “magnifies his distance from them.”<sup>230</sup>

The drumming of the *mandoucouman* by soldiers from Christophe’s army at the end of Scene 6 functions as a transitional episode toward the finale of the play. Keith Walker refers to the *mandoucouman* as the “sacred and military drum of retreat.”<sup>231</sup> The drumming is symbolically loaded: it signifies the soldiers’ abandonment of their duty as guarantors of national peace; in effect, they become part and parcel of an army-led general uprising, hence sabotaging the pillar of Christophe’s power, they who are supposed to protect the king. At the same time, the *mandoucouman* anticipates the end of

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 138-139.

<sup>230</sup> Walsh, 148.

<sup>231</sup> Walker, “Prolégomènes à une étude de la rhétoricalité césairienne.” *Esprit créateur*, 69-86

Christophe's reign as the entire country rebels against the tyranny of the king. Christophe understands this, albeit reluctantly, as he explains to his naïve African page that "it is time [for him] to retire" from the exercise of power – and from life itself (metaphorically) for that matter.

From a thespian perspective, Scene 6 (Act III) is also very significant: it exhibits a kind of doubling of characters within Christophe, a split of personality of sorts. As Gregson Davis suggests,

The complex figure of Christophe receives a very subtle form of articulation by the use of a technique that Césaire borrowed from Shakespeare, whereby a presumed psychic whole is split between two or more characters in a drama. Such is the case, for instance, with King Lear and the enigmatic Fool, who, though given to expressing himself in a riddling manner that conflates the serious and the comic, is nevertheless a kind of alter ego of the aged monarch, and eventually his sole companion in his abject, reduced condition on the bleak health. This shared identity, as transposed to the configuration of Christophe and the buffoon Hugonin, Césaire has astutely described as "binomial." Hugonin, then, is the "fool," who paradoxically turns out to be wise, but, at a deeper level, speaks for the king's repressed self; as such, he utters the unspeakable and transgresses taboos in a form that Christophe is able to tolerate, even cherish.<sup>232</sup>

I suggest that Christophe and Hugonin are one character speaking in two voices. Right in the middle of their conversation, Christophe even tells Hugonin: "Ta voix est étrange, Hugonin; chacune de tes paroles s'encombre d'un débris de mes rêves."<sup>233</sup> ("Your voice is strange, Hugonin; every word

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<sup>232</sup> Davis, 147.

<sup>233</sup> Césaire, *La Tragédie*, 139.

that you say carries with it a piece of my dreams"). In keeping up with binarisms, the character split between Hugonin and Christophe serves as a binomial relationship reflecting two positions that operate in opposition to, but at the same time, in complementarity with each other. From one standpoint, Hugonin is the Fool who, throughout the play, gives himself the license to speak as the "official opposition" against the king's policies, thus transgressing the norms of political protocol by expressing criticism that others within his familiars and his close political entourage are afraid to voice. Hugonin always manages to get himself out of trouble with each of his statements critical toward the king. Hence, Hugonin acts as Christophe's repressed self, the twin whom the king attempts to silence – as self-imposed censorship – every time the jester becomes too vocal about the derailment of the king's policies. As another point of view, I am invoking that there is a conflation of characters between Hugonin and Christophe toward the end of the Scene under discussion. In effect, they become one person who sees himself as double while, at the same time, engaging his alter ego in an internal dialogue.

It is appropriate at this stage in my analysis of the play to discuss Christophe's changing worldview at the dawn of his life – from a European-obsessed cultural mimicry to a return toward a celebration of African-centered spirituality – so as to assess the relevance of his approach in the context of his

culturalist Negritudist positions. For instance, Negritude is used by Christophe as a panacea for the execution of his cultural policies, as well intended as they may be. The invocation of Congolese proverbs, and Christophe's final words in this scene, can be read as a first step toward a true cultural re-sourcing with Africa, as he readies himself for any fate that may befall him, including the possibility of death by a bullet at the hands of his army, in the same way as Jacques Dessalines was assassinated. Through his African-inspired incantations and his appeals toward the cosmogony of Vodun deities, Christophe resorts to Negritude as both a celebration of personal survival and a search for spiritual salvation from the near-fatal consequences of his stroke. What is peculiar, however, is the change in his discursive practice: for the first time, we hear Christophe speaking Creole. The sudden appearance of Creole in the play is rather odd given that Césaire – in his literary practice – has given little regard to the use of the language as a valid means of national literary expression. It may perhaps be, on Césaire's part, an unconscious recognition of the reality of the presence of *Créolité* locally before it was even formulated by the triumvirate of Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphael Confiant, and Jean Bernabé.

Christophe's reclamation of Negritude in the ensuing scene (Scene 7) takes place "amidst the disquieting atmosphere of a Vodun ceremony," as the playwright indicates. A peculiar linguistic dynamic takes place in so far as

French and Creole are juxtaposed, as if one were echoing the other. The scene opens with Madame Christophe singing a Creole song that augurs, in fact, the death of the king: "Moin malad m-couche m-pa sa levé" ("I am sick, I lay down and I cannot get up any longer"). Thereafter, Christophe implores Africa to come to his rescue:

Dieux d'Afrique  
Loas ! [...]  
Père attacheur du sang [...]  
Afrique mon lieu de forces [...]  
(*au page africain.*)  
Congo, l'impétueux colibri dans la tubulure du datura, je me suis  
toujours émerveillé qu'un corps si frêle puisse sans éclater supporter le  
pas de charge de ce cœur qui bat. Afrique de ta grande corne sonne  
Mon sang! Et qu'il se déploie de toute l'envergure d'un vaste oiseau!  
N'éclate pas cage de ma poitrine!  
Tambours mon poulx, battez,  
Le toucan de son bec brise le fruit du palmier-raphia  
Salut toucan grand tambourinaire!  
Coq, la nuit saigne au tranchant de la hache de ton Cri  
Salut, coq, aban tranchant!<sup>234</sup>

Two important symbolisms should be noted here, mainly the function of drumming and the role of the cock in Haitian culture. I have already discussed the purpose of the drumming of the *mandoucouman* during the rebellion against Christophe. I have also elaborated on the cockfight as an important metaphor in relation to the power struggle that takes place between Christophe and Pétion at the beginning of the play. The cock enjoys greater

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 143.

importance in that it is used in Vodun ceremonies as a sacrificial animal offered to the Gods. Drumming, on the other hand, functions as a musical accompaniment enabling the devotees to enter into trances; it is a precursor to the final stage of the Vodun ceremony during which practitioners become fully possessed by the spirits, thus achieving the ultimate communion with the venerated deities.

In addition to the cultural symbols of *drumming* and the *cock*, Christophe's invocation of the river *Congo* holds a special place in this discourse. In traditional New World African religions, there is a prevalent belief that when a person dies, (s)he will ultimately return to the Congo (that is, Africa) once (s)he has been cleansed of her (his) sins and received final clearance from the gods to fly back to their original African homestead. For that reason, by invoking Africa, Christophe hopes to recapture the spiritual strength of his continent of origin, and conjure death by fighting his political enemies to his last breath. The water of the imposing river Congo (flowing from its source in Central Africa through the forests of the equator to the Atlantic Ocean) is regarded as a source of rejuvenation. From a different standpoint, however, Christophe's reclamation of his African roots through a blood line ("père attacheur du sang") can be read as a forward escape: the stepping into the world of the spirits is, in more ways than one, an evasion of the reality of the failure of his leadership. At this juncture, a paradoxical

reversal occurs: what Christophe embraces in life, he rejects in death; the Africa that Christophe negated earlier through his blind embrace of European customs now becomes his “position of strength” and rootedness (“Afrique mon lieu de force”). Negritude becomes Christophe’s salvation.

Christophe’s fantasy, however, is short-lived as his body continues to fail him. The stage directions at this point are attention-grabbing. Through Christophe’s hallucination, the spectator is invited to witness the appearance of President Boyer (who replaced Pétion) – now Christophe’s most reviled foe – flanked by his own military staff. Through Boyer’s words, the spectator gets insight into the guilt Christophe really feels as regards the repressive policies he carried out even against his own lieutenants and generals. From this standpoint, then, Christophe’s hallucination is in actual fact a moment of epiphany that brings him to realize that his immediate political entourage has been, in reality, his “first circle of slaves.” In a magical realism type moment of revelation, Christophe makes the following declamation, which serves as both confession and plea – perhaps the most honest statement he has made throughout the entire play:

Afrique ! Aide-moi à rentrer, porte-moi comme un vieil enfant dans tes bras et puis tu me dévêtiras, me laveras. Défais-moi de tous ces vêtements, défais-m’en comme, l’aube venue, on se défait des rêves de la nuit ... De mes nobles, de ma noblesse, de mon sceptre, de ma couronne.

Et lave-moi ! Oh, lave-moi de leur fard, de leurs baisers, de mon royaume ! Le reste, j'y pourvoirai seul.<sup>235</sup>

This pre-suicide monologue stands in sharp contrast with the baptismal overtone of the crowning ceremony – during which Christophe wears the mask of the colonizer, as Fanon would have it. Christophe's heartfelt desire for a spiritual return to Africa appears as a genuine moment of emotional authenticity. Reconnecting with Africa denotes, indeed, a necessary cleansing process intended to rid the king of all the trappings of power – including his once-cherished court circus, his power, his crown and his most-priced possession: his kingdom. Negritude, thence, offers Christophe a way out, a ticket to redemption. Naked, reborn (morally and spiritually) and devoid of any fake vestmental covering, the king readies himself to meet his death upfront, on his own terms, however. As spectators, the last image we have of the king is that of a man putting his short handgun onto his temple; the narrative gets suspended at this stage. The deity that is expected to meet Christophe at the end of his journey is no other than *Legba Atibon*, the *loa* (god) of the crossroads, the intermediary who stands at the juncture between the world of humans and that of deities,<sup>236</sup> to ensure a smooth transition to Heaven for the deserving ones.

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>236</sup> Walsh, 148.



In terms of theatrical casting, we must take notice of Hugonin's absence from the scene (Scene 7) during which his king prepares to commit suicide. It is only on his way to Christophe's room that he reappears in Scene 8, losing himself in a convoluted and incomprehensible justification of his tardiness. It is almost as if the court jester had been anticipating Christophe's death all along, waiting for the inevitable to happen before he can resurface on the stage. At the sound of the detonation of a gun in the adjacent room, Hugonin then exclaims: "Merci, le roi est mort. Bernard Juste Hugonin. *Baron Samedi* pour vous servir."<sup>237</sup> What is most intriguing than Hugonin's absence from the previous suicide scene is the manner in which he does not appear to be surprised by the event, nor does he seem to be particularly affected emotionally at all. In effect, Hugonin has undergone a transfiguration by assuming the role of *Baron-Samedi*, the god of death in Vodun cosmogony. Hugonin's later invocation of *Ogun Badagry*, the god of war and iron in Yoruba and Vodun mythology, signals defiance that verbalizes the proclamation of a change of guards of sorts. His supervening declamations in Creole imply that the God of war has come back to punish the wrong-doer and sinner via a military defeat of the *Neg politique* (understand Christophe) who went wrong in his political ways and turned out to be a *disastrous*

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<sup>237</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 148-149.

politician (“mait tourné”). In many respects, Hugonin is the mouthpiece that offers Césaire a platform from which to criticize Christophe’s policies.

Following my discussion of the interrelatedness of Vodun-Yoruba cosmogony and Negritude in the play, the entrance onto the scene by *Shango*, the god of thunder, is of significant import. Originally the king of Oyo – the original capital of the Yoruba people,<sup>238</sup> Shango, like Christophe, committed suicide, and he was later enshrined by worshipers as the god of thunder. Thus, the pairing of both divinities in this instance – *Ogun*, god of iron (of creation through blacksmithry) and war (a destructive force) and *Shango* (representing the thunderous reign of Henri Christophe) – is significant as these deities (*loas*) “incarnate the dual power of natural forces;”<sup>239</sup> “they are essential to Césaire’s effort to give a fair “balance [to the] historical and mythical structures that [he] cultivates throughout the play.”<sup>240</sup> Therefore, in the context of the play, Scene 8 (Act III), which enacts Christophe’s death, bears considerable cultural significance in its conflation of syncretic elements of Haitian culture (Vodun divination practices) with traditional West-African religions. On Christophe’s part, this unconscious return to the source of his cultural roots might be interpreted as an embracing of the Césairean

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<sup>238</sup> Walsh, 148.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 149.

Négritude.<sup>241</sup> It equally signals what in Freudian psychoanalytical theory is referred to as “the return of the repressed.”<sup>242</sup> In this instance, what has been repressed is the authenticity of Haitian culture during Christophe’s reign, as well as the people’s expectations about the rewards of the Haitian Revolution.

In fact, my argument is that through the interposition of Vodun rituals in the Christian ceremony in Scene 2 (Act 3), the syncretism of European and Afro-Caribbean religious orders in the play denotes the defeat of Christophe’s foregoing policy of suppressing African cultural expressions. In reality, during his hallucination, Christophe’s sanctification of the heroes of the Haitian Revolution (Toussaint L’Ouverture and Jacques Dessalines), as well as his summons of the Vodun divinities of fire and thunder, is tantamount to a revival of the repressed self (both cultural and religious). Gregson Davis suggests that at the intra-psychic level, we may want to read the transfiguration of Hugonin into *Ogun Badagri* as the Vodun god having impersonated the Fool.<sup>243</sup> To carry the argument a step further, I submit that the visitation of the god *Bakulu Baka* acts as a metaphor for what is termed in Vodun mythology as the “*mounting by the gods*.” The appearance of the god on the scene is quite overwhelming since the mounting by the god – who takes over Christophe’s character physically and spiritually – leaves him paralyzed,

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<sup>241</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 148.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

thus triggering his death. In more ways than one, the god's visit functions additionally as a cursing of Christophe's policies and as a sanction of his failure. But the ultimate curse and irony is that Christophe, even in his death, is denied a funeral deserving of other monarchs; he is buried, instead, in his palace, facing southward toward Ifé, the land of the Yoruba.

The embalming of Christophe's corpse in the mortar of the Citadelle invites for an analysis of the *politics of representation of the body* in the play. In comparison to other political figures, Christophe's death does not call for the same kind of mythification of the death of a leader as we have seen, say in the cases of Abraham Lincoln, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Abdul Nasser or Indira Ghandi. In the case of Kennedy, his assassination produced a fantasy of a leader, someone who could rally the entire country around him, as unfortunate as the circumstances of the national celebration may be. In fact, J. F. Kennedy's death produced such powerful mythification of his leadership that the family, through the last decades, has become a kind of dynasty, an unofficial American royal family. Indira Gandhi's death produced similar results, enabling her legacy to be reincarnated through the political tenure (though short-lived) of her son Rajiv Gandhi. As for Nasser, rumors had it that after his death a sewer back up submerged all the households in the entire city of Cairo, thereby suggesting that the body of Nasser had the power to spread wings in the entire capital. In these instances,

the body of the leader is even more powerful in death than when he or she is alive. Henri Christophe, it turns out, is denied such a preeminent status. There is no national monument built in his honor; there is no national mourning to remember him by, just a crippled cadaver buried under the mortar in the coldness of the walls of the Citadelle. His death is mirrored by the same loneliness that marked his leadership.

As I am concluding this chapter, I want to re-emphasize the connection between Césaire's appraisal of Christophe's power in the early 1800s to his own political practice in the context of post-WWII French imperial projects in the French Caribbean. I have begun this chapter by outlining the importance of the Haitian Revolution in the Caribbean literary imaginary, tracing the genealogy of creative and critical discourses that take inspiration from the San Domingo insurrection leading up to the proclamation of Haitian independence in 1804. I singled out the significance of Haïti in Césaire's political thinking, linking his political praxis to his aesthetic enterprise, with the subsequent publication of two major, namely *Toussaint L'Ouverture: La Révolution Française et le Problème Colonial* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe*. In this regard, I have explained the rationale behind Césaire's different choices of writing media in his engagement of the study of two important figures of the Haitian Revolution (the essay for Toussaint L'Ouverture and theater for Henri Christophe), along with the implications that these choices have on the two

target audiences of the play: the internal audience of the French Caribbean (Haïti, Martinique) as well as the larger African/Third World public of decolonizing countries.

Pursuant to my examination of how Césaire reads the Haitian Revolution, I have argued that Césaire's retrieval of Haitian history is closely linked to his larger aesthetic and political project. It becomes therefore important to acknowledge his choice as a direct declaration of his political filiation with Toussaint on the one hand, and on the other, his "ambivalent" position toward Christophe: Césaire's criticism of the faults of the King's rulership still leaves him space to express some degree of fascination for the enigma of Christophe's politico-cultural project, which he wants to "pierce through" via the writing of the play.<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, while tracing the progression of Césaire's reflection on the major actors of the Haitian Revolution and their leadership, I provided an explanation on how, in this case, Césaire's exploration of Haitian history and his representation of Christophe's rulership mirrors his preoccupation with his own practice of leadership in his native Martinique. Thus, my analysis led me to infer that Haïti's past (1800s) and its contemporary (1960s) political turmoils had a direct

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<sup>244</sup> Vergès, 57.

echo on Césaire's consideration for possible nationalism and statehood for Martinique.

Continuing my discussion, I underscored Césaire's choice of "tragedy" out of other media of dramatic representation of theater, underlining the fact that he takes liberties vis-à-vis the norms of classical theater, while remaining faithful to the norms of tragedy; I pointed out his indebtedness to Nietzsche's definition of tragedy. I acknowledged the tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian strands of Nietzschean tragedy as they are played out in Césaire's drama, especially to explore the moral weakness that permeates Christophe's leadership in the execution of his projects, and conjointly, to highlight the latter's mismanagement of power. This context, in effect, offers Césaire the literary space needed to probe and dramatize the issues of early postcolony, nation-building, and post revolutionary management of freedom in the perspective of the Haitian Revolution, within the historical context of post-1804 French Caribbean.

As well, in my analysis of Christophe's leadership, I examined how he mediates and exercises political power, placing a particular emphasis on the manner in which he relates to the Haitian people he governs. So doing, my goal was to analyze the contradictions and paradoxes in Christophe's vision and rulership, as well as to point out the inconsistencies in the implementation of his policies. While discerning the deep-seated sources of the failure of

Christophe's endeavors is of paramount importance for this chapter – I will review its root causes farther in the sections to follow – it is all the more necessary to re-situate the play against the backdrop of Césaire's political situation and historical circumstances.

Therefore, taken in the context of both the post-WWII and the pre-independence years of French colonialism in the late 1950s and early 1960s, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* – including its conception of tragedy – can be read as one long, delicate, and frustrating (not necessarily in a bad sense) balancing act that Césaire sought to achieve, both as a politician and as a playwright who was deeply disappointed by the slow enforcement of the Law of Departmentalization sixteen years after its passing in 1946.<sup>245</sup> At this moment in history, Césaire the politician is at a crossroads, politically and literarily. After his sojourn in Port-au-Prince in 1944, Césaire has firsthand knowledge of what is to befall the political scene in Haïti; we know that he has met Jacques Duvalier (albeit briefly), of whom he got a rather negative impression as a potential despot; news of Duvalier autocratic rule had been circulating in political circles within the French Caribbean (and English-speaking countries later on) in the end during that period (late 50s and early 60s). These two confluences (the political and the aesthetic) intersect with Césaire's own

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<sup>245</sup> The enactment of the law did not begin until 1948. See Wilder, "Untimely Vision," 107.



intellectual trajectory as he finds himself disenchanted by the betrayed promises of socio-economic parity of France's Overseas Departments and Territories (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane and Île de la Réunion) with the other Départements on the French mainland. As evidenced by Césaire's many interventions and pronouncements on behalf of the Martinican citizens he represented,<sup>246</sup> France, according to him, had failed to deliver the goods at this particular historical juncture. Thus, caught between a *future past* of failed promises and a *present utopia* of the socio-economic equality that is yet to arrive,<sup>247</sup> Césaire finds himself in an "impossible position,"<sup>248</sup> that of negotiating national political sovereignty for Martinique while demanding from France a better standard of living for the island's citizens at the same time.

In this environment, Césaire's retrieval of Haitian history is relevant not only for his own political reflective journey, but also for the political decisions that he must make. To wit, the memory of Christophe's "impossible position" in 1804 becomes Césaire's new dilemma: how to manage and balance his people's political expectations and freedoms (in a post-independent era) coupled with the duty of nation-building within a web of international threats

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<sup>246</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 179-80.

<sup>247</sup> Wilder, "Untimely Vision," 103.

<sup>248</sup> Walsh, 141.

(France's possible retaliation via the economic suffocation of Martinique, as it did when it blockaded Haïti after its independence declaration in 1804). All these considerations become a complicated stand-in for Césaire between 1946 and 1963, with of course, the caveat that Césaire was not a tyrant, and Martinicans had been affranchised (at least on paper) since 1846. Through *Tragédie*, therefore, Césaire revisits the same issues of post-independence political self-management that Christophe faced 150 years before. However, through his shifting positions concerning Martinique's relationship with France, we ought to see Césaire more as an *administrative reformer* rather than a staunch *independentist*. In fact, a very a hesitant independentist at this point in time, who chooses the medium of literature as a way of figuring out and clarifying his own position on the matter, trying to carve out a comfortable public sphere for Martinique within the French empire, without falling into the trap of the kind of legacy Christophe created: in this regard, Césaire claims his political filiation more with Toussaint L'Ouverture than with Christophe.

Nevertheless, trying to move away from France's imperial yoke proves to be a not so easy endeavor; hence, his experimentation with different modes of Martinique's affiliation with France that blur the line between colonial liberation and national independence: 1) a relationship of transnational

partnership with French Republicanism within a “loyal opposition;”<sup>249</sup> 2) self-determination without state sovereignty – a notion that challenges the traditionalist view associating political independence with assumptions of territorialist integrity);<sup>250</sup> 3) the transformation of post-WWII imperial France into a global democratic federation (the Hexagone and the DOM-TOMs), thus creating a new political entity inclusive of former colonies as autonomous equals in a transcontinental polity “within the utopia of post national politics.”<sup>251</sup> These are options which Toussaint L’Ouverture explored a century and a half earlier, before Jacques Dessalines completed the Revolution and Christophe became the first Leader-King of the New Haïti.

On the continuum of post-1804 Haitian history, and beginning with Toussaint L’Ouverture as the quintessential hero of Césaire’s essay by the same name, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* marks a significant rupture with the narrative of revolution. In the evolution of Césaire’s political thinking, while Toussaint the historical figure mediates the transition between the struggle for liberty and the attainment of freedom (after which he becomes a myth in himself), Christophe, on the other hand, is cast by Césaire to dramatize the double incarnation of freedom (its management) and power (leadership).

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<sup>249</sup> I am indebted this term from Walsh’s *French and Free in the Caribbean*.

<sup>250</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 1-2.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid*, 2-16.

However, from the moment that he proclaims himself as Emperor, King Christophe ceases to be the revolutionary *liberator*<sup>252</sup> and hero that he once was in the company of Toussaint, Dessalines, and others. This observation, at this point in my discussion, therefore calls for an evaluative consideration of Christopher's representation as a leader (and of his leadership by extension), as well as an assessment of the success, or lack thereof, of his policies.

In retrospect, Christophe is a Negritudinist leader. He holds a firm belief that he is acting on behalf of Negritude globally – in accordance with Césaire's universalist ideal of the necessity for worldwide Black solidarity – in order to achieve a common goal: creating within Haïti a public space embracing of black universalism; he aims to improve, as well, the socio-economic and cultural predicament of his people. Such as it is, in this framework, this kind of racialized Negritude in *Tragédie* is not a bourgeois ideology, but a concept which encompasses the “sum total experiences of People of African Descent” (according to the Senghorean and Cesairean universalist definition).

This double role of Christophe as both *educator* and *nation-builder* becomes therefore very significant from the point of view of our discussion here. In fact, whether he is thinking of the individual or society as a whole, Christophe constantly has on his mind, in principle, the mental disalienation

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<sup>252</sup> Walsh, 132.

of his people. It is worth noting, at this point, that although Césaire would have vehemently denied it, we may envisage our playwright as a cultural descendent of Christophe (even if partly) in their common projects: the rehabilitation of the black race by instilling racial pride in the minds of People of African descent; the pursuit of cultural liberation by breaking free of the shackles of European-imposed cultural alienation, as well as the restauration of their cultural self-esteem and their human dignity.

Be it as it may, Negritude, that of “decolonizing the minds,” is an off-the road undertaking for Christophe, as manifested in his refusal to Africanize the power he holds as Head of State. His reluctance to give the Haitian masses positions of responsibility within the state political apparatus can be explained, in Christophe’s perspective, by his view that he does not want them to replace the white colonizers as exploitators of the people<sup>253</sup> - but what a contradiction in practice! This approach becomes more ironic by the fact that the salvation chosen by Christophe and his inner political inner circle still adopts France as *the* point of reference, whereas the cultural liberation project was originally intended as a distancing from and a rejection of the cultural assimilationist policies of the former colonizing metropolis.

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<sup>253</sup> This attitude contrasts sharply with Lumumba’s approach in *A Season in Congo*, where he carries out what Fanon has referred to as the “negrification of power.”

Notwithstanding, if we compare Henri Christophe with Toussaint L'Ouverture, the latter veers off track from his program *not* in principle, but in the praxis of his socio-economic and political scheme: maintaining the colonial agrarian status-quo through the refusal to extend land ownership to individual peasants after the Revolution, as well as by limiting the individual freedoms of Haitians.<sup>254</sup> On the other hand, in his effort to engage the country onto an accelerated pace of "development," Christophe fails *both* in the *principle* and in the *modus operandi* of his projects. In this perspective, what Césaire excuses away vis-à-vis Toussaint – the "necessity" of despotism in the aftermath of slavery and revolution – he paradoxically holds Christophe more accountable as a "liberator-cum-tyrant."<sup>255</sup>

Therein is located Christophe's challenge to exercising sound political leadership, because once it is confronted to political reality, the original idealism claimed by ideology vanishes in the face of the reality of political rulership. For one thing, Christophe's leadership is undermined his lack of a concrete political vision, a deficiency which thereby results in the pursuit of artificial "development projects" such as the establishment of an empire "for the affirmation of Haitian statehood," the building of the Citadelle and other

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<sup>254</sup> Toussaint justified his military micro-management style as a necessary evil in order to instill discipline into a populace that was just emerging from the chaotic disorder of slavery and war.

<sup>255</sup> Walsh, 132.

palaces, etc. Furthermore, Negritude as ruling ideology is deformed into a bizarre arrangement of folkloric protocol. In more ways than one, Christophe's approach to politics is characterized by an overwhelming obsession with form rather than with substance.

Not only does Christophe fail in his political and cultural projects, but his *work ethic* further proves to have totally devastating consequences for the country. As a matter of fact, the war he wages against the alleged inertia of the people<sup>256</sup> produces results that are completely opposite to his original intentions. Indeed, Negritude turns into *fascism*: the work undertaken by the Haitian masses becomes an alienating labor. Under the threat of violent reprisals, the peasants build the Citadelle La Ferrière as well as Congress halls that are only used once a year, instead of having their energy channeled toward the development of agriculture and other economic sectors. The plight of the peasants who fought for the revolution is worsened by the fact that Christophe is opposed to any redistribution of wealth, more so to agrarian reform which he considers as conducive to anarchy. Thus, communal labor fails mainly because it is not entuned with the needs of the people. It is, in fact,

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<sup>256</sup> Césaire, *Tragédie*, 8.

inspired by vanity, to prove to the world the value of the Black race.<sup>257</sup> The Citadel, in the end, is transformed into yet another “slaveship on land.”<sup>258</sup>

Maryse Condé has argued that a number of critics reading *Tragédie* through the lenses of the 1960s African independence movements have sought to portray Henri Christophe as a Third World leader, an African leader to be more precise, who is compelled to have recourse to dictatorial methods in order to achieve the development of their country.<sup>259</sup> Lilyan Kesteloot, on another plane, posits that Césaire might be suggesting that we read Christophe’s problem as totalitarian power that is at the same time “progressive” and “populist.” Says Kesteloot: “One can easily forgive a leader who has devoted all his energies to the betterment of his people. That, in fact, is the clue to the mystery: Christophe loves his people, lives only for the people, *and has no other interest but the people.*”<sup>260</sup> However, I am suggesting that the crucial question raised by the play is not so much that of *methods* but the *goal* that is pursued, as well as the *social vision* that fuels it. What I am questioning is the kind of society Christophe imagines and then constructs for his people (who were not consulted). Christophe wants to measure Haïti on France’s standards; he wishes to catch up with Europe, blatantly ignoring the

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>258</sup> Walsh, 136.

<sup>259</sup> Maryse Condé, cited in Mireille Rosello, *Littérature et Identité Créole aux Antilles*, 10.

<sup>260</sup> Kesteloot, 11.



fact that for Europe, development took centuries. And in so doing, Christophe ends up trampling on traditional customs, crushing popular democratic aspirations (partly inspired by Metellus, his former comrade-in-arms turned Rebel Leader), and grooming an artificial and useless court “elite” through the imposition of cultural standards that are foreign to Haïti. In return, the latter in turn into an “alienating force” in the Fanonian sense of the term, because they are less than an authentic expression of Haïti’s cultural specificity. In the end, it is precisely within these off-track efforts that the answers to Christophe’s failure are to be found.

In *Tragedy*, Césaire dramatizes the pathos of Christophe’s political life and work. I have previously argued that through Christophe, it is Césaire the political figure who feels lonely, isolated and alienated by both the power he yields and his disconnection from the Martinican people. Accordingly, his casting of King Henri articulates what Georges Balandier, in *Anthropologie Politique*, calls the *ambiguity of power* (“l’ambiguïté du pouvoir”).<sup>261</sup> In Balandier’s view, political power follows, in general, a dialectical principle. It functions according to the dictate of a double movement that is both internal and external. The first principle concerns the *need to establish institutions* governing the functioning of the state, as well as to create the conditions of

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<sup>261</sup> Balandier, *Anthropologie Politique*, 47.

possibility for a harmonious relationship between different members of a plural society. The internal principle is also guided by the importance of consolidating national unity from within. The second principle of *external necessity*, on the other hand, has to do with foreign affairs, in so far as the existence of the state can only be guaranteed by its ability to control the outcome of its external relations.<sup>262</sup>

These two postulates are interdependent, and they operate according to a movement that is both centripetal and centrifugal. On one hand, the centripetal movement of national unity is reinforced when a country faces external aggression that threatens its national sovereignty. These external pressures tend to rally most if not all the citizens around the regime in power. King Henri Christophe understands this principle all too well, as he tries to rally the Haitian masses around his regime through political manipulation by waving the threat of external aggression from France as a cover-up for the construction of the Citadelle. On the other hand, according to the centrifugal element, the exercise of power is subjected to a number of limitations, regardless of the regime in place: it requires in fact consent as well as a degree

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<sup>262</sup> Toward the end of his tenure, General Jean-Pierre Boyer, a Southerner officer who had invaded the Northern part of Haïti after Christophe's death, negotiated a payment to France of 150 million francs (later reduced to 60 million francs) as indemnity for the loss of the colony. In exchange, France recognized the Republic of Haiti and restored trade. <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/History/Haiti-history.htm>. Accessed Feb.4, 2016.

<sup>262</sup> Balandier, 47.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 49.

of reciprocity.<sup>263</sup> While power has a tendency to operate in a rather hierarchical manner, the consent needed from the citizenry to legitimize its existence tends, instead, to limit its dominating grasp. Given these two antagonistic movements, Balandier maintains, no political system should claim that it is balanced.<sup>264</sup> Herein lays the *ambiguity* of power.

In *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, it is rather the centrifugal principle that dominates the play. The total absence of consent from the Haitian masses will in the final analysis limit Christophe's power, as the lack of reciprocity on the part of his regime brings about the loss of its legitimacy through his abuse of authority. The contestation of Christophe's rulership, therefore, translates the failure of his leadership. It is a direct consequence of his inability to negotiate the consent of the people, as well as their support for his political programme. In the Nietzschean concept of tragedy, Christophe's trajectory in Césaire's play typifies the internal antagonisms inherent in "the dual powers of creation and destruction"<sup>265</sup> which, on the one hand, fuel his ascent toward a "noble ideal" (nation-building, national rebirth and social harmony) but which, by the same token, trigger the ensuing spectacular downfall of his political, social and cultural enterprise as a result of their wreckful undertaking. It is this fatality,

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 49.

this pathos of leadership that brings about King Henri Christophe's undoing, and therefore his wretched quietus, in accordance with the tragic fate of the fallen hero, a theme that permeates Césaire's drama, as we will see in the next chapter of my dissertation, which discusses *Une Saison au Congo*.

**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**Patrice Lumumba, Leadership and the Aborted Post-Colony in**  
**Aimé Césaire's *Une Saison au Congo*.**

Historically, the Congo has played an important role during the post-1492 European age of exploration: it was one of the major (if not “the” major) entry point(s) for the European colonization of Africa, as recorded about the early encounters between the Portuguese explorers and the King of the Bakongo Empire at the time. From a literary standpoint, the Congo is closely linked to a western imaginary that has deployed an “Orientalizing” discourse of otherness<sup>266</sup> traceable to works of literature such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, among others. As a cultural metaphor, the imaginings of the Congo have been recuperated in popular culture discourses. The trope has a lengthy track record of serving as inspiration material for movies such as *Outbreak* (which dramatizes the averted outbreak of the Ebola virus in the heart of the equatorial forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1995), *Congo* (1995), etc. Another movie, *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988), chronicles the life and death of Diane Fossey, the famed American anthropologist who died (December 26, 1985) in the volcanic mountains of the Virunga Park trying to save the gorillas

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<sup>266</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 7-8.

of the Kivu region from extinction. What is more, within the Caribbean and Latin America, the influence of the Congo can be recognized through the cultural and religious practices of the descendants of African slaves. Words deriving from the Kikongo language are commonly used; they form the basis, at least in part, for Gabriel Garcia Marquez' elaborations on magical realism: take, for instance, the mythical place of "Macondo," a derivative of a Kikongo word.

For all intents and purposes, Césaire's musings about the Congo borrow from the above-mentioned discursive and artistic traditions, but for a different purpose. In this sense, given that *A Season in Congo* departs from the Caribbean context, and based on the fact that the play under study does not mesh with the geographical locus of the rest of Césaire's plays, the reader may ask: what is Césaire trying to achieve in this play? What is it that's changing from his exploration of leadership within the realm of the Americas (the Caribbean and the US)? Part of my argument in this chapter will be articulated around these questions.

I would like to preface the paragraphs that follow by suggesting that even if Césaire's immediate political concerns lay with Martinique and the neighboring Caribbean countries, he is also a Third Worldist figure who, before embarking on writing his trilogy (*Tragedy of King Christophe*, *A Season in Congo*, *A Tempest*), was already interested in and concerned about the whole

project of decolonization, along the lines of the anti-colonialist argument that he outlines in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955). As a matter of fact, Césaire's entire political thought as well as its philosophical underpinnings are not just limited to the nuts and bolts of leading Martinique. Césaire starts out his writing as a Third Worldist thinker and he remains one throughout his life and career, not so much in local politics – Martinique is not a “nation” as such, and there are limits imposed to his political agency as a leader – but more in terms of his solidarity with the cause(s) of the politically oppressed throughout the world. As a writer and theorist on Negritude, it is therefore not a coincidence if Césaire chose to write a play about Africa. But what it is about Africa that specifically calls for Césaire's interest? And further, why write about the Congo, rather than any other African country?

I am proposing that two factors are at play; they are linked to both cultural ideology, and Third World postcolonial emancipation. On the one hand, the fact that Césaire chose a theme that relates to Africa is reflective of his desire to establish the grounds for an aesthetic of Black theatre through a close connection with the motherland. It is the articulation of a negritude ethos that acts as an extension of the dramatic project he initiated with his first play, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*: the elaboration of a dramaturgy of decolonization via a tryptic theatrical examination of the historical, political and cultural lived “black experience” in the Americas, the Caribbean, and

Africa.<sup>267</sup> Furthermore, if Congo is the subject of an entire play in the context of his trilogy, it is because the country, for Césaire, represents an amplified version of the problems that newly independent African countries were facing during the post-independence era in the early 1960s.<sup>268</sup> The Congo, for Césaire, is thereby the symbolic representation of all the nascent nation-states in Africa in the late 50s and early 60s, the epitome par excellence of not only a failing state, but mostly of a *sabotaged* state (my term), in pretty much the same way that Haïti was at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>269</sup>

In this consideration, in as much as Haïti is, for Césaire, a political and cultural referent as the first nation in the world to achieve a successful anti-slavery decolonial liberation, the Congo, within Césaire's literary and aesthetic

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<sup>267</sup> Césaire, "Culture et colonisation," 2<sup>ème</sup> Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs, 1959.

<sup>268</sup> Indeed, it is a fact that most of the continent has been a prey of the interests of the West through the military interventions of the superpowers during the Cold War. At the same time, most African countries have suffered from ill-preparedness for self-governance according to the western democratic model, thus creating the potential for internal ethnic strife and divisions, etc. We should also add to the list the issue of the failure of the nation-state, in the sense that most of the African countries were created as a result of a colonial policy that divided borders at random, thereby constructing arbitrary political and socio-cultural formations.

<sup>269</sup> I am reminiscent of the naval blockade that was imposed on the island jointly by the United States, France and Great Britain after the country sealed its independence in 1804. Let us remember as well the hefty financial price tag that was imposed on Haïti by France as reparations payments for the "economic loss" of the French colonial planters in St Domingue, and the "loss of revenues" in the French state coffers due to the end of the considerably lucrative slave trade and sugar plantations. As I indicated in my previous chapter, these measures were imposed in order to cripple the economy of Haiti to ensure it serves as a reminder to all the African slaves in European colonies of the fate they would incur should they attempt to make any claims to freedom and statehood should they rebel against slavery. The US, which participated in the blockade as well, was concerned that Haiti's successful independence movement would spread across the States benefiting from the slave economy and thus threatens their financial viability via the loss of revenues from the slave trade and the slave plantation economy.



logic, becomes a metaphor for the whole of Africa. In similar ways to Haïti, then, the narrative of the “independence” of the Congo is constructed as the emblematic story of a decolonization that was never meant to take place.<sup>270</sup>

Before embarking on a detailed discussion of the play, I want to return to Césaire’s use of symbolisms, in connection with the title of the play under study. The appellation points directly to the literature of 19<sup>th</sup> century France produced by one the three musqueteers of “Les Poètes Maudits.”<sup>271</sup> Borrowing from Arthur Rimbaud’s collection of poems *Une Saison en Enfer* (“A Season in Hell”), the title of Césaire’s play suggests a chaotic predicament. As Gregson Davis writes,

On the whole Césaire’s version of the inferno precipitated by the disintegration of the Belgian colony (if the subliminal equation of “hell” and “Congo” is to be read into the Rimbaldian allusion) succeeds in creating yet another vivid portrait of a black anti-colonial leader whose dreams and grandiose visions of an African resurgence are framed by violence and ultimate self-sacrifice.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> In an incident that almost presages ex-French President Sarkozy’s controversial Dakar speech in 2007 – in which he extolled the virtues of the France’s “civilizing” mission in its African colonies), King Beaudouin – on the occasion of the “Birth of Congo” on June 30, 1960 – imposed a view celebrating the enlightenment of Belgian colonialism and its good deeds in the Congo (disregarding the 1,5 million Congolese people who perished in the course of slavery and hard labor for the sake of king Leopold II personal financial benefit). A speech to which Lumumba retorted with a declaration of total political self-determination. Raging with ire, the Belgian monarch is reported to have turned to President Joseph Kasa Vubu, admonishing the latter that Lumumba’s speech was “not what [they] had agreed upon”).

<sup>271</sup> I am referring to the trio composed by Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine who, in a way, could be considered as the immediate ancestors to the 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialist movement.

<sup>272</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 151.

Indeed, while Rimbaud's original book title reflects a "descent to hell" inspired by the poet's own existentialist life journey of deceptions, betrayals, as well as self-indulgence into the orgy of hedonist pleasures (alcohol, drugs, sex) and debauchery,<sup>273</sup> Césaire's choice of appropriating this symbolism is quite telling. In fact, he reads the history of the Congo as a curse, a malediction, a nightmarish unfolding of events that begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Belgian King Leopold II's brutal genocidal exploitation of Congolese citizens and their economic resources: warfare, ethnic strife, neo-colonial economic exploitation, western imperialist interventionism, the tyranny of international capitalism, the failure of local leadership, only to name a few.<sup>274</sup> Other issues, such as armed violence, anti-colonialist struggle, political backstabbing (as well treachery and treason) among the major local political players of the time, the failure of the United Nations mediation in times of crisis, the influence of multinational corporations, etc. are woven into the fabric of the play. Given the time-specific historical reference to the late 50s anti-colonial struggle and the early 60s post-independence era, I want to open the critical space for a brief discussion of the issue of topicality, whose relevance I will later reassess at the conclusion of this chapter.

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<sup>273</sup> Reference is made here of Rimbaud's tempestuous and tumultuous relationship with Paul Verlaine, who attempted to assassinate him after Rimbaud decided to end their relationship.

<sup>274</sup> Houyoux, *Quand Césaire Écrit, Lumumba Parle*, 11-12.

*Une Saison au Congo*, indeed, is a play that uses “l’histoire immédiate” (immediate history) in its depiction of the events taking place in the Congo right before and immediately after its independence from Belgium in 1960. In that sense, Davis addresses the topicality of the play in the following terms:

The vicissitudes of the text, no less than its mixed reception, illustrate the well-known hazards, artistic and political, of addressing contemporary issues in the theater. Topicality is, by its very nature, not only hazardous but ephemeral. Césaire’s play has survived, despite its topicality, by reason of its encapsulation of enduring insights concerning the centrifugal forces at work in the forging of a national identity in the wake of colonial exploitation.<sup>275</sup>

Davis makes an important point, in the sense that a number of concerns are raised by plays that are at once topical and strive for a dramaturgy of political engagement. A preliminary step involves the necessity to investigate of how Césaire’s play incorporates the current events of the time (the independence of the Congo) into the aesthetic form of the drama (that is to say, how this transposition interprets the events). Secondly, in relation to the issue of dramaticity, it may be useful to analyze the kind of effect(s) – if any – the play does work towards in its audience (a performance-based approach to drama), and how one might read such considerations back into the text ( how they are dramatized). I will address some of these dramatic concerns in the pages to follow – and later as they are displayed in the unfolding of the drama

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<sup>275</sup> Op. Cit., 151.

- before undertaking a thematic study of the play as regards its approach toward leadership and other germane issues.

The “ephemeral” nature of literary works which often characterizes writings that address the historical events of their era does not apply much to the way in which Césaire renders the historical occurrences of the epoch. What Davis calls “enduring insights” I call “intuitive political foresight” in the sense that Césaire perceived with acute discernment that the forces impeding Congo’s post-colonial growth as an independent and sovereign nation-state would last far beyond the “temporality” of the 60s – I will return to this topic in my conclusion. In fact, our playwright uses historical accuracy through a reprise of events, speeches and dialogues as close to their original occurrence as possible. In order to do so, Césaire carried out extensive research on the history and politics of the Congo while undertaking the writing of the play, immersing himself in the study of the life and political thought of not only Patrice Lumumba, but also that of other key players (Doug Hammaraskjold for one). It is not surprising, then, that Césaire incorporated Lumumba’s political ideas and speeches in the play. His recreation of the historical events is as realistic as can be (less minute differences that appear in the depiction of the character of “Le Grand Occidental”). For the most part, Césaire refers to specific events and places that were part and parcel of the political and historical landscape of the time. Through the numerous parallelisms that he

establishes between *A Season in Congo* and the events which have shaped the decolonization of the country, and also given the numerous word for word renditions of speeches and declarations made by the most influential politicians of the time, we can say that Césaire, through this drama, has played the role of historiographer of the Congolese independence movement;<sup>276</sup> this is as well illustrated through the rewritings of the play over the decade that follows the initial publication of the play.

Césaire's subsequent revisions of the play originally published in 1966 (Editions du Seuil) were motivated by a desire to highlight the changing course of events in the Congo (or in Africa for that matter) as they developed in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. As is with other works of Césaire (*Cahier, Et les Chiens se Taisaient, Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, etc.), the revisions made to *Une Saison au Congo* are to be read as Césaire's own rethinking of the Congo situation. Hence, the 1966 version was revised in 1969 to suit the demands of the play's theatrical productions in Paris and Brussels; the play was also revised in 1974 (published by Editions du Seuil), and again in 1976 (published, this time, by the Editions Désormeaux in Paris and in Fort-de-France). That is the last record we have of any substantial modification he made to the drama. However, *Une Saison* did not lose its relevance as exemplified by the

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<sup>276</sup> Houyoux, 14-15.

resurgence of public interest in the play via, for instance, a filmic production of Lumumba's life and work by the Haitian film-maker Raoul Peck (2000). More recently, as indicated in James Arnold's *Aimé Césaire: Édition Génétique*,<sup>277</sup> a theatrical production of *Une Saison* was staged in France (between November 17 and December 1<sup>st</sup> 2013) by Christian Schiaretti, Director of the Théâtre National Populaire de Villeurbanne,<sup>278</sup> who directed the play in celebration of the year of what would have been Césaire's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. At this point, I would like to address Césaire's transposition of history into drama as relates specifically to his interpretation of the decolonization process into African theater.

Beyond purely historiographic concerns, Césaire's dramatic production is inscribed in the context of a theater whose role was, at the time, to engage the political context of the decolonization of the African continent. In fact, in light of the rate of illiteracy<sup>279</sup> of most African countries at the critical juncture of the transition from colonies to independent "nations," popular theater was perceived by African writers and intellectuals to be a practical "short cut" to conveying political messages to the masses. Césaire seems to have been sensitive to this issue: it is an integral part of what motivated him to turn to

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<sup>277</sup> Arnold, *Poésie, théâtre, essais et discours*.

<sup>278</sup> <http://www.tnp-villeurbanne.com/manifestation/une-saison-au-congo>. Accessed July 4, 2015.

<sup>279</sup> In this case, the inability to read or write in the languages of the European colonizers.

drama, as I have indicated in my previous chapter on *Christophe*. In fact, as of 1954, African theater had taken up the political emancipation struggle via a questioning of the colonial order, by engaging the themes of anticolonial resistance and the struggle for freedom. Since then, African theater from the 60s to the 80s/90s evolved in two major directions, chiefly: a denunciation of colonialism and its legacy, coupled at the same time with a critique of the political practice of the new African rulers in the post-colonial age. *A Season in Congo*, therefore, is to be understood in these circumstances, as the playwright himself explains:

Depuis l'indépendance, l'Afrique a eu à résoudre bien des problèmes et elle s'interroge. Elle a besoin de se comprendre elle-même. Dans l'état actuel des choses, le théâtre est un des genres littéraires qui répond le mieux à ses besoins. Or, nous avons des acteurs mais pas de répertoire, le théâtre en Afrique n'étant fait que de manifestations folkloriques. Ce que je voudrais, c'est créer un théâtre noir. Sous quelle forme ? Celle du théâtre local. Pour moi, théâtre, poésie et chant sont liés. J'ai été très influencé par les Grecs, Shakespeare et Brecht. Mais mon théâtre est surtout un théâtre politique parce que les problèmes majeurs en Afrique sont les problèmes politiques. J'aimerais réactualiser la culture noire pour en assurer la permanence, pour qu'elle devienne une culture qui contribuerait à l'édification d'un ordre nouveau, d'un ordre révolutionnaire ou la personnalité africaine pourrait s'épanouir.<sup>280</sup>

We should note the connection (a very interesting one) that Césaire makes between theatre, poetry, and music (songs); these intertwined elements point back to his advocacy for a theater that incorporates local cultural practices by

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<sup>280</sup> Romi, Yvette. "Une Passion Noire," Interview with Césaire. In *Le Nouvel Observateur* 16 March, 1966, 39.

responding to the needs of local populations. What is more, drama, in addition to poetry, becomes another “miraculous weapon” at the service of a literature of political engagement: political theatre as an avenue for exploring solutions to Africa’s political problems through art. At the end of the day, Aimé Césaire’s desire to ascribe a “permanent” status to “black culture” through the edification of a revolutionary new world order based on African value systems is also reflective of his Negritudinist approach essentializing the diversity of African cultures by collapsing the latter into a single category with its associated archetypes and stereotypes, as he does with his approach to the depiction of Patrice Lumumba.

On the basis of an interview that critic Nicole Zand conducted with Césaire, she suggests that the latter creates a mythic drama by changing the main protagonists, as well as the time and place into archetypes – a liberty that Césaire sometimes takes, as I have explained at the beginning of my chapter on *Tragedy of King Christophe*. And last, that by transforming human beings and events into symbols, Césaire gives to the Revolution and the new order to be achieved the metaphysical dimension of a myth. Says Césaire about the major character of the play: “À travers cet homme – Lumumba – que sa stature même semble désigner pour le mythe, toute l’histoire d’un continent et



d'une humanité se joue d'une manière exemplaire et symbolique."<sup>281</sup> Suggestion is made that Césaire takes us back to his original aesthetic project, whose aim was the creation of universal Black icons that would survive the topical nature of some of his plays: so doing, they endure the test of time. Hence, the major characters in Césaire's plays – the Rebel in the sanitized version of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, King Henry Christophe in *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, Patrice Lumumba in *Une Saison au Congo*, as well as Caliban and Ariel in *Une Tempête* – could be read as archetypal symbols. As for Lumumba the character, out of Aime Césaire's construction arises a mythical stature from the historical personae of Patrice Lumumba who, in the process, becomes the personification of the Pan-African struggle for independence in the stigmatization of the omnipresent subjugating power of neocolonialism.<sup>282</sup>

Before delving into a presentation of the salient themes of the play and details related to its theatricality, I want to contextualize the major historical periods that make up the framework of the play. Suzanne Houyoux, in her incisively detailed analysis of the play,<sup>283</sup> suggests that we consider Césaire's transcription of the Congolese independence period as one that respects the unfolding of events within their historical predicament, mainly from three

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<sup>281</sup> Houyoux, 13-14.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>283</sup> Houyoux, *Quand Césaire Écrit, Lumumba Parle*.

perspectives: (1) the period before independence having to do with the imprisonment of Patrice Lumumba after the Stanleyville riots in October and November 1959; (2) the period during the negotiation for independence and the six months following independence: this time frame lasted about 12 months, and it is the one that forms the basis for the play; and (3) the post-independence period: the confiscation of independence by a regime that quickly transforms itself into a dictatorship, and tries to recuperate the “Lumumba myth” to establish its credibility.

Thematically, Césaire provides a satirical analysis of what was commonly referred to as “Congolese problem” by UN bureaucrats and the major international political power brokers of the time. I want to suggest the coexistence of three major competing narratives in the play; they are all intertwined with and driven by a critique of leadership models: (1) *Nation-building* (its difficulties and pitfalls), as well as the “human” challenge of a people who have to adapt to new political forms, the passage from dependence to independence and responsibility.<sup>284</sup> The traps inherent in the creation of a post-colony are illustrated by the competition for power between the Congolese leaders, which ultimately results in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, as well as the subsequent rise of Mobutu to power; Césaire also

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<sup>284</sup> Ngal, 322.

discusses the role of the army as a regressive institution in the African postcolonial context. (2) *The chronicle of international imperialist interventionism*: this casting illustrates how independence is marred by the imperialistic interventions of NATO's superpowers, as well as by the economic appetites of American and European conglomerates. At a more concrete level, their covert maneuvers coalesce to encourage the secession of the province of Katanga (therefore threatening the successful political and economic nation-building of the Congo). Interventionism is also conspicuous in the role played by the United Nations in the Congo, as well as that of the former colonizing power, Belgium (exemplified by what Lumumba calls "Le Complot Belge"). This is the section where I plan on discussing my concept of a "*sabotaged state*"<sup>285</sup> due to forces that impede Lumumba's leadership and curtail the promise of the Congo as an emerging nation-state. (3) The narrative of the *confiscation of power* by both the new "comprador" bourgeoisie and the new military junta (incarnated by the character of Mokutu), whose role in the new postcolony is put under the microscope. In this context, the play stigmatizes corruption, the lack of a civic ethos among political leaders, the appetite for power demonstrated by the political class in general, and the increasing hiatus

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<sup>285</sup> Chomsky, *Failed States*, Foreword. While Chomsky describes failed states as "those that are unable or unwilling to protect their citizens from violence and perhaps even destruction, ..." I am referring to the subversion of Third World nation-states by ex-colonial and neo-colonial powers (Europe and the USA) through military interventions and economic sabotage.

between the rural masses and the urban elite.<sup>286</sup> Césaire's vitriolic critique of the postcolonial order further attacks the practices of the neocolonial system – the abusive cult of the leaders, or the institutionalization of the one party system (Act I-Scene 2, Act III - Scenes 2/7/8),<sup>287</sup> etc.

Césaire's examination of postcolonial Congolese leadership (African as well by extension) is reflected in the casting of characters. There are seven consequential actors, four of whom<sup>288</sup> inform the dramatic movement in *A Season in the Congo*. These personages bear important historical relevance as they were active participants in the events shaping the post-independent Congo circa 1960.<sup>289</sup> The major protagonist is obviously Patrice Lumumba, the hero of Congolese independence, who was entrusted with the leadership of the Congolese government as Prime Minister during the country's transition from a Belgian colony to an independent state – on paper at least. Lumumba is cast as the “true” representative of the Congolese people, a symbol of the progressive forces that want to implement meaningful sociopolitical changes and undertake a significant economic development of the country. On the

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p. 11

<sup>288</sup> Césaire changes a few names here and there, but not enough to disguise the real historical figures. He focuses on the power struggle between Kala Lubu (President Kasa Vubu), Patrice Lumumba (Prime Minister), Moïse Tzumbi (Moïse Tschombe, Governor of the Province of Katanga), and Mobutu (Army Chief-of-Staff Mobutu).

<sup>289</sup> While we may be tempted to say “after the independence period,” it is debatable whether or not that is the proper term to use, as Césaire's point is to demonstrate that a true decolonization process failed to take place in the Congo. In the play, the Congo is seen as a symbol of the Third World in general, and of the whole of Africa in particular.

other hand, Lumumba's anticolonial and post-independence project is undermined by his opponents, namely Kala Lumbu (in real life Kasa Vubu, the President of the Congo who demotes Patrice from his position as Prime Minister). Mokutu (a less veiled pseudonym for Mobutu Seseke), who overthrows the government of Patrice Lumumba, has him killed in cahoots with the CIA and the covert operations services of Belgium, Great Britain, and South Africa. A no less important opponent is Tzumbi (standing for Moïse Tshombe, the leader of the secessionist Gendarmes Katangais): he wants to sever the mineral-rich province of the Katanga from the rest of the country, with the complicity of the Belgian colonists and their financial allies (Europe, the US, and South Africa).

Bearing the supposed veil of neutrality (in theory) in the middle of all this political imbroglio is the United Nations, represented by its Secretary General the Swedish Dag Hammarskjöld. As for the Congolese people, their role is relegated to distant observers; their voice is solely mediated through the character of the Sanza Player, "... whose cryptic ditties and pointed remarks enliven and punctuate the drama."<sup>290</sup> Pauline Lumumba, on the other hand, plays the role of a reality check for her famed husband. "Mama Makosi," the owner of a bar frequented by Patrice Lumumba himself – where

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<sup>290</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 152.

he at times holds political meetings – is a figure that cannot be ignored; her presence mediates Lumumba’s image as a populist leader. In the pages that follow, I intend to discuss the concept of leadership as Césaire examines its enactment chiefly through the actions of Patrice Lumumba – within the context of national and international politics. As well, I want to place my discussion inside the realm of Césaire’s own exploration of rulership in his drama, accounting for the forces (both local and foreign) that undermine Lumumba’s leadership and sabotage his nation-building enterprise.<sup>291</sup>

Addressing the question of leadership in *A season in Congo* necessitates a close examination of Patrice Lumumba’s political vision and programme, in much the same way I engaged my discussion of Christophe’s rulership in the previous chapter. At the outset, Lumumba’s political foresight and platform – at the national level – are aimed at achieving social change through the enactment of egalitarian reforms that are conducted via self-less governance guided by clarity and transparency on the part of leaders, and consensus among the political players. In his mind, the only avenue (nonnegotiable) to reach this goal, is the unification of the Congo: Lumumba’s insistence is unwavering, that national unity and territorial integrity are the sole principles that can enable the containment of the constant threat of colonialist

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<sup>291</sup> For instance, the failure of the “africanization of power” and the confiscation of power by the Mokuu’s military junta, the interference by foreign transnational power brokers (Belgium, the US, international conglomerates and financiers, the UN, etc.).

interventions (as the secession of the Katanga province is an unceasing endangerment to national unity in the play). On an international standing, Lumumba is a staunch anti-colonialist (both in real life and in the play); this hard-line political stance finds its reflection in his intransigent rejection of Belgian colonial policies, chiefly the economic pillaging of Congo's mineral resources. And further, Lumumba professes a firm advocacy for Pan-African solidarity as a way of countering the dominion of European colonial powers on the African continent. It is this quality in Lumumba that is very appealing to Césaire, pursuant to his own leanings toward and engagement with the political causes of the Third World.

Thus, what is revealing out Césaire's characterization of Lumumba's political personae in the play is the fact that the latter typifies the kind of leader that Césaire praises in *Une Saison au Congo*. While conforming to as realistic a historical representation of Lumumba as can be, Césaire is chiefly attracted to Lumumba's idealism; he thereby constructs an image of him as a politician who puts the interests of his people at heart above his own. Lumumba is depicted as a charismatic leader who is true to his ideals, and who is committed to implementing institutional changes, even at the expense of his own political career. Therefore, Césaire, in this instance, aims to transcend the immediacy of topicality in order to present a mythical figure that would symbolize Lumumba as an iconic hero for the whole African

independence movement. So doing, Césaire further extends his tripartite examination of black leadership across the Atlantic as it plays itself out within the historical and political dynamics of the African diasporic experience.

Having described Lumumba's vision and political platform, it is necessary to pose the question as to whether or not our hero's programme is realistic, based on the goals he seeks to achieve against the backdrop of national politics in the Congo and at the international level, around the time of its independence. Or rather, is it not too idealistic a position, given the context in which Lumumba was operating between 1959 and 1961? And what about his sense of urgency – reminiscent of the one Christophe displayed in *Tragédie* – which collides with the dictates of real politics at the dawn of the country's independence? I want, in particular, to examine a statement by Lumumba, which bears a parallelism between his vision of history and that expressed by Henri Christophe in *Tragédie* (and thus reflects, to a certain extent, on his personality). This similitude is nowhere more exemplified as in Scene 8 of Act I; the setting is the office of the Prime Minister in Kalina (in the capital Kinshasa),<sup>292</sup> as he addresses his Ministerial cabinet:<sup>293</sup>

LUMUMBA

(...) Messieurs, Qui sommes-nous ? Je m'en vais vous le dire. Des forçats.

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<sup>292</sup> It is the name of a neighborhood of the capital Kinshasa (then Léopoldville). The quarter bears the current name of Gombe (now Kinshasa).

<sup>293</sup> Houyoux, 97. During the colonial period, Kalina was the residential and administrative headquarters.



Moi je suis un forçat ; un forçat volontaire. Vous êtes, vous devez être des forçats, c'est-à-dire des hommes condamnés à un travail sans fin, vous n'avez droit à aucun repos.

Vous êtes à la disposition du Congo, vingt-quatre heures sur vingt-quatre! vie privée, zéro! pas de vie privée. En échange, vous n'aurez aucun souci matériel!...

Car vous n'aurez pas le temps d'en avoir.

Je sais, je sais. Il paraît que je suis exigeant, et puis aventureux, casse-cou que sais-je ? Oui, c'est ça, il paraît que je veux aller trop vite. Eh bien! Bande de limaçons, oui, il faut aller trop vite. Savez-vous combien j'ai de temps pour remonter cinquante ans d'histoire? Trois mois, messieurs! Et vous croyez que j'ai le temps de ne pas aller trop vite!<sup>294</sup>

This quotation reads like a scene taken straight out *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, almost word for word. The term “forçat” that Lumumba uses conjures strong imagery of forced labour, either from the slave trade, or the indentured servitude commonly handed down to European criminal convicts in North America in colonial times. Césaire privileges the former interpretation as it is more in line with his account of black history throughout his literary oeuvre. Lumumba is quick to make a distinction between himself as a “forçat volontaire” – as if there is anything voluntary about forced labour – and the gallery slave forced labor he assigns to the rest of his ministers: theirs will be financially compensated, while his own toil disregards any monetary gratification. Notwithstanding, the intertextuality with Christophe’s statement I discussed in my previous chapter (*Tragédie*, 87), the wrath of time

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<sup>294</sup> Césaire, *Une Saison au Congo*, 34.

is inescapable: like the Haïtian people whom Christophe admonishes of punishment for anyone who flounders in the execution of the King's project, Lumumba's cabinet members have no right to a single iota of a mistake, as they will have no time to make any! But then why does Césaire choose to cast Lumumba as an impatient leader almost following in the footsteps of Henri Christophe?

As we have seen with Christophe in *Tragédie*, Lumumba's impatient undertaking of his "accelerated project" (which appears to require the need for servitude) urges him to want to *catch up with time*. I mention in passing his condescending characterization of his ministers as "limaçons" (slow crawly snails) and focus more on the timeline Lumumba is referring to. While Christophe in *Tragédie* makes reference to 200 years of slave and economic exploitation of Haïti, Lumumba alludes to 50 years. If we rewind the course of the history of the Congo, we find that 1908 is exactly the year when the Belgian government forced King Leopold II to relinquish to the Belgian civil administration the control of the colony he was running privately;<sup>295</sup> coincidentally, the play opens up its first act in late 1958. As for the three-month period that is mentioned, Césaire takes

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<sup>295</sup> King Leopold II was forced to do so due to international pressure that was brought to bear after numerous accounts surfaced of extreme human rights abuses (cutting the hands of African slaves who refused to work due to exhaustion).

liberty with the notion of linear time – which is not uncommon in his body of work – and rewrites Lumumba’s time in political office retroactively as if Patrice “the visionary” already knew how long he would last in power.

This matter notwithstanding, what Lumumba the character-leader refers to is *the burden of history* that has characterized, in Césaire’s view, the plight of the African diaspora (as we’ve seen in *Tragédie*). By using Lumumba as his mouthpiece, Césaire recycles his concept of historical Negritude as a “common lived black experience” shared by peoples of African descent across the east and west coasts of the Atlantic: slavery, exploitation, colonial rule, transplantation into the New World territories, economic deprivation, etc. These issues play out in *A Season in the Congo*, and they also form a subtext to the *Cahier*, given that the poem is considered to be – by Césaire himself and his literary critics – the matrix of a lot of his literary oeuvre (poetic, and dramatic to a certain extent). In the case pertaining to the current play specifically, Lumumba’s oratory advocates for a marathon progress that must be achieved quickly, at all costs. In Lumumba’s eyes, the sense of urgency of this accelerated project translates the magnitude of the work necessary to undo more than a century of Belgian colonialism (if we include Leopold’s tyrannical reign) in order to speed up the reconstruction of the Congo, and catch up with the progress that other democratized and developed nations have already accomplished. This approach is reminiscent of Henri Christophe’s nation-

building agenda for Haitian society after the war of independence. Both men (Lumumba and Christophe) are motivated by a desire to achieve quick results, using uncompromising means.

Within the realm of the two above-mentioned plays – *Une Saison au Congo* and *Tragédie du Roi Christophe* – Césaire's reference to the "burden of history" creates room for two kinds of symbolic interpretations. For one, if we accept a historical argument, Césaire is emphasizing yet again his Negritudist ideal of the Black race which needs to rise from the ashes of colonialism, stressing as well the ensuing imperative necessity of "*uplifting the black race*" (this theme resurfaces in *A Tempest*, which I discuss later in the last chapter of my dissertation). On the other hand, Césaire may be engaging a critique of the leadership of both Christophe and Lumumba by implying that in order to be a good leader, (s)he must first plant the seeds of good governance through patience and realism. I want to argue that the text allows for a reading accommodating these two renditions.

Of equal importance in the scene I discussed earlier (Act I, Scene 8) is the underlying narrative of the pitfalls of navigating and negotiating the treacherous political terrain of building from scratch the democratic institutions of a new postcolonial state. Césaire, in this instance, attacks head-on the challenges to successful nation-building (in the aftermath of colonialism) I mentioned a few paragraphs earlier: the competition for power

by the political leaders, the failure of a true africanization of power, the confiscation of power by the military, the imperialist interventionism of European and American countries vying for the control of Congo's mineral resources, etc. For the sake of this discussion, the conversation I want to engage below is a continuation of the gathering already unfolding in the play, within the setting of a meeting room where Lumumba and his ministers are holding a cabinet conference. The interaction between the leader (Lumumba) and his audience (the Ministers and the soldiers) offers an eye-opening revelation about his leadership style, but mostly about his personality as a political leader. In addition to the Ministers of Lumumba's cabinet, the casting, this time, involves soldiers who are attempting to force their way into the meeting chamber in order to convey their demands for changes within the military. Upon hearing their voices and the commotion outside, one Minister expresses his irritation toward to the demonstrations being held outside the convention room, thus provoking Lumumba's harsh response:

LUMUMBA

Les soldats ? Qu'est-ce qu'ils foutent ? [...] Qu'est-ce qu'ils crient?

M'POLO

Ils s'en prennent à vous personnellement, [...] ! Ils crient: «À mort Lumumba! Lumumba Pamba!» [...]

UN MINISTRE

C'est gai! elle commence bien, l'indépendance!

LUMUMBA

Imbécile! Et comment croyais-tu qu'elle commencerait? Et comment crois-tu qu'elle continuera? Comment croyez-vous que cela allait se passer? Quand je vous ai nommés ministres, est-ce que vous avez eu

l'impression que je vous invitais à une partie de plaisir ? [...] Tout. Nous aurons tout, et en même temps? Et tout de suite: la révolte, le sabotage, la menace, la calomnie, le chantage, la trahison. Vous avez l'air étonnés! C'est ça le pouvoir: la trahison, la mort peut-être. La mort sans doute. Et c'est ça le Congo! Comprenez: le Congo est un pays où tout va vite. Une graine en terre aujourd'hui, et demain un buisson, que dis-je, une forêt! en tout cas, les choses qui vont vite iront leur train. Ne comptez pas sur moi pour les ralentir!<sup>296</sup>

While it echoes the same hastiness expressed in the passage I previously analyzed, the above quotation provides further insight into Lumumba's "impatience with time." Aware of the snaky nature of power, Lumumba nonetheless fears death less than the possibility of treason. Even when armed with this awareness of political treachery (which could culminate in his death), Lumumba shrugs off this potential danger despite the fact that he has full knowledge that two of his rivals can potentially sideline him (and/or have him killed). I suggest we consider the following exchange between him and the soldiers. At first, Lumumba summons one of his Ministers, M'Polo, to allow entrance to the soldiers: "M'Polo, laisse entrer ces *brailards* (emphasis mine), je leur parlerai ... et ferai se retourner leur coeur au fond de leur poitrine." Césaire then stages the forcible entrance of the soldiers, and the following conversation ensues:

Entrez, messieurs. (...) je n'irai pas par quatre chemins. Vos revendications sont légitimes. Je les comprends, et je veux y faire droit! Force Publique vous étiez commandés par des Belges: Armée nationale

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<sup>296</sup> Op Cit, 34-35.

vous exigez d'être commandés par des nationaux. Quoi de plus naturel? Et nous n'avons pu hésiter un instant devant cette mesure d'africanisation radicale que parce que notre bonne volonté était mise en échec par le mauvais vouloir et les préjugés du général Massens. Prenez-en de la graine, messieurs ; voyez comme le colonialisme est perfide, têtue, funeste. (...) Massens est écarté, et le gouvernement fait droit à vos réclamations. A chacun de vous donc, le gouvernement accorde la promotion au grade supérieur : le soldat de première classe devient sergent, le sergent, adjudant...

SOLDATS

Non! Non! Des colonels, des généraux !

MOKUTU

Monsieur le Premier Ministre, ce que la troupe réclame, c'est une africanisation totale, et immédiate, des cadres. Au point où en sont les choses, il n'y a pas une minute à perdre!

LUMUMBA

Le problème n'a pas échappé au gouvernement. Aussi bien suis-je en mesure, d'ores et déjà, de vous annoncer que le gouvernement envisage, non, décide ... non, a décidé, de nommer, dès aujourd'hui, un général congolais et un colonel, congolais. Le général est Lundula, et le colonel notre secrétaire d'État à la Jeunesse, M'Pollo, ici présent.

SOLDATS

Non ! Non, pas M'Pollo, ce n'est pas un soldat, c'est un politicien.

SOLDATS

C'est Mokutu que nous voulons. A bas M'Pollo! Vive Mokutu! Mokutu a sept ans de Force Publique! C'est un soldat celui-là!

LUMUMBA

Vous choisissez Mokutu. Soit ! Je ratifie votre choix. C'est vrai, Mokutu est un soldat, et Mokutu est mon ami, Mokutu est mon frère. Je sais que Mokutu ne me trahira jamais. M'Pollo a été nommé par le gouvernement! Eh bien, moi! Je nomme Mokutu. Mais n'en parlons plus. La question est réglée!<sup>297</sup>

The term “braillard” used condescendingly by Lumumba portrays the soldiers as “bawlers” who act like loudmouthed and raucous individuals toward his government – which, in his view, is deserving of more respect from civil

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 35-37.

servants who do nothing else but squall. In the same statement, Césaire – unlike his representation of Henri Christophe – characterizes Patrice Lumumba as a charismatic leader who is aware of the power of his verbal prowess, i.e. swaying the soldiers’ opinion to his own perception of their circumstances. Hence, poetry, in Lumumba’s perspective, becomes a weapon of political persuasion (as in the scene we just considered), as if a verbal revolution is somehow capable of achieving political outcomes by waving the magic wand of his discourse.

What transpires from this exchange is the recognition on the part of both the Congolese government and the soldiers of the necessity to implement a policy of “africanization” (“nativization,” or “negrification,” to use Fanon’s term) of national institutions, the military included. However, we as spectators bear to witness how the military’s view of its role stands in sharp contrast with Lumumba’s perspective of their mandate in public life. As a result, contrary to his original expectation of persuading his audience (the army), Lumumba the political “*player*” is rather *played* at his own game. To his offer of “une *africanisation* radicale” (“radical *africanization*”) of the army, Mokutu counters by forcing Lumumba into taking a further step, that of “une *africanisation totale, et immédiate, des cadres*,” i.e., concerning the military. In this instance, Césaire’s depiction of the armed force is that of an *apparatchik* which is preoccupied more with form rather than substance: getting promoted



to higher military ranking in order to take over the positions vacated by the former colonial masters. By giving in to the soldiers' demands of appointing a member of the military (Mokutu as Colonel), instead of his initial designation of a civilian (M'Pollo) to ensure the oversight of the military, Lumumba is making a calculated risk, an impromptu decision that will prove very costly for the country, and deadly for himself. In what I consider to be Césaire's intuitive presage of the rise of neocolonial kleptocratic regimes in newly independent African states, Lumumba, while granting their wishes – with strings attached nonetheless – addresses the soldiers in these words:

LUMUMBA

Le problème n'est plus de savoir si vous serez officiers ou pas, puisque désormais, vous l'êtes. Le problème est de savoir quelle sorte d'officiers vous choisissez d'être : des officiers de parade? des officiers du profit? des officiers de la nouvelle caste? Ce que veut le gouvernement, c'est que vous soyez les officiers du peuple congolais, animés de l'esprit du peuple congolais et résolus à vous battre farouchement pour la préservation de l'indépendance congolaise. Le voulez-vous?

SOLDATS

Oui! Oui! Vive Lumumba!<sup>298</sup>

Pursuant to Lumumba's reminder to the officers of the true mission of the army, I draw our attention to his use of three qualifiers: officiers de *parade*, de *profit*, de la *nouvelle caste* ("show off, upstart and profiteering officers"). It is as if Lumumba is anticipating what will become of the government led by Mokutu, the real-life military man turned despot-ruler of the Congo for almost

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 37.

four decades. Césaire describes the Congolese army's approach in ways similar to Christophe's policy of "africanization of the royal court" in *Tragédie*,<sup>299</sup> where the aristocratic entourage of Christophe institutes a national agenda of aping the former French colonial masters by appropriating titles from the French court for their own ceremonial routines. Mokutu's demands and that of his military cohort are rather symptomatic of a danger Frantz Fanon had already warned against in *The Wretched of the Earth* when he wrote:

(...) The native bourgeoisie which comes to power uses its class aggressiveness to corner the positions formerly kept for foreigners. On the morrow of independence, in fact, it violently attacks colonial personalities: banisters, traders, landed proprietors, doctors, and higher civil servants. It will fight to the bitter end against these people "who insult our dignity as a nation." It waves aloft the notion of the nationalization and Africanization of the ruling classes. (...) Until the bourgeoisie bluntly puts the problem to the government by saying "We must have these posts." They will not stop their snarling until they have taken over everyone. (...) When the bourgeoisie's demands for a ruling class made up exclusively of Negroes (...) do not spring from an authentic movement of nationalization but merely correspond to an anxiety to place in the bourgeoisie's hands the power held hitherto by the foreigner, the masses on their level present the same demands.<sup>300</sup>

In Fanon's world, while the total and radical "africanization" of Congolese national institutions is intended as a way of ridding the country of its colonial legacy, Césaire criticizes the method advocated by the proponents of this so-called Africanization process as rather superficial, and self-centered. Within

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<sup>299</sup> Christophe only made cosmetic changes: replacing the French court's titles to Haitian referents while maintaining the core structure of the French norms at his royal court.

<sup>300</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 155- 57.

the dynamic of the play, this part of the narrative addresses the negative role of the military in the political and social life of African countries in the aftermath of colonization. In this context, what we should bear in mind is the fact that Césaire is writing at a time when many of the newly independent countries on the African continent have undergone successive “coup d’états.” And by the time he undertakes to write *Une Saison au Congo*, circa 1965-1967, he has already witnessed the early stages of Mobutu’s autocratic regime<sup>301</sup> born out of the assassination of the hero, Patrice Lumumba, and in which Mobutu bears great responsibility. Césaire, thus, emphasizes the negative role that military despots have played through their usurpation of power (in Congo and Africa), while failing, at the same time, to demonstrate effective political leadership. And when all is said and done, for the sake of our discussion on nation-building strategies, Lumumba needs to acknowledge, both himself and within his political inner circle, the failure of any substantive and practical africanization of power, whose responsibility lie within the realm of both military and civilian leadership.

Hence, Césaire’s chastisement of the army’s failure to demonstrate exemplary leadership in the formation of the postcolony (Congo) is associated with a similar critique directed toward civilian leaders (apart from Lumumba)

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<sup>301</sup> An implied likening with the despotic rule of Papa Doc Jacques Duvalier in Haïti begs for comparison. The two regimes, though separated by the Atlantic, parallel each other both in time (the late sixties throughout the seventies), and autocratic repressive methods.

who run the affairs of the state. In these circumstances, the power struggle between Kala Lubu (Kasa Vubu the President) and Patrice Lumumba (his Prime Minister) staged in Scene 7 of Act II is very illustrative of the schism prevailing in the sociopolitical visions of the two protagonists, as well as in their political platforms. From the vantage of his apartment (located in the President's palace), we hear Kala Lubu's voice as he delivers a tirade as an attempt to sort out his feelings for Lumumba in light of his strained complex relationship with his Prime Minister. It is worth quoting this diatribe at length as it collapses together a number of important historical events, thereby offering the reader-spectator Kala Lubu's perspective on the matters at hand:

KALA

Que de sang! Que d'horreurs! Les Luluas tuent les Balubas! Les Balubas exterminent les Luluas! Et notre armée, l'armée nationale congolaise, massacre tout le monde! Oh! la guerre! la guerre!

Bien sûr, j'ai donné mon consentement. [...]

A dire vrai, [Lumumba ...] me surprendra toujours. Souvent plein de délicatesse, d'ailleurs. [...]

Ce que je lui reprocherai le plus, ce serait peut-être ça, cette mobilité! Agité! excité! Une flamme qui court, qui court! [...] Nos ancêtres avaient raison, le vrai chef ne s'agite pas. Il est. Il demeure. Il se concentre. C'est un concentré d'être. Le concentré du pays. Et se concentrant, doucement, il rayonne... Celui-ci est un emporté. Il ne rayonne pas. Il allume, il met le feu! Kintu-Kintu!

Ah! c'est qu'il [Lumumba] me mettrait tout ici sens dessus dessous si je le laissais faire! Et le feu au Congo, le feu au monde! Mais je suis là et je ne le laisserai pas faire. Je suis là pour sauver le Congo et lui-même de lui-même!

Doucement, M. Patrice! Doucement! Le vieux Kala est là! [...], et pour longtemps! Ils m'appellent le vieux! Je ne suis pas vieux! Je suis lent! On dit la tortue pleine de malice! On devrait plutôt dire pleine de bon sens! Je vais lentement, lentement. [...] Lui c'est un impétueux, un emporté!

Je n'aime pas les impétueux, même quand ils ont raison! Ils vous donnent le vertige! Et puis, tôt ou tard, ils s'essoufflent. (...) En vérité, je ne vois pas pourquoi ils [les Occidentaux] s'acharnent tous sur lui! [...] Ne font-ils pas courir le bruit que Patrice me mène par le bout du nez! Que j'ai trahi les Bakongo en acceptant la présidence. Ils osent écrire «Kala est une femme devant Lumumba!» [...]...

C'est stupide! Un président est le chef! C'est le roi! D'ailleurs je peux le révoquer quand je veux, comme je veux! La loi fondamentale m'en donne le pouvoir! C'est le président qui décide, et les ministres qui exécutent. Bien entendu, je n'entends pas user de ce pouvoir. Patrice est intelligent, actif, populaire. [...] On a beau le calomnier, il est populaire! Et c'est une force ça la popularité! Et il faut que j'en tienne compte...

Mais pourquoi diable s'acharnent-ils contre lui! Tenez, leur dernière trouvaille: Patrice est communiste, et moi en le protégeant, je fais le jeu du communisme international!

Moi ça me fait rire! Patrice communiste! Je me souviens de sa tête, quand au plus fort de nos ennuis avec les Belges et dans un moment d'affolement, je lui ai proposé d'envoyer un télégramme à Khrouchtchev! Savez-vous ce qu'il m'a répondu? «Ce n'est pas possible, Monsieur le Président. On me dit déjà vendu aux communistes. Si je fais cela, on y verra une preuve de plus que je suis à la solde du Kremlin. Vous qui êtes chrétien, faites-le si vous voulez. Et encore on dira que je vous ai manœuvré!» Hein! Vous croyez qu'il m'a manœuvré? Il serait rudement fort! rudement fort! Il est vrai qu'il est fort. [...]

Mais croient-ils qu'il est si facile que ça de rouler le vieux Kala! (...)

*Il se remet au travail. Ici, le joueur de sanza chante –*

LE JOUEUR DE SANZA

Des pensées, des éclairs

Je vois le crapaud qui coasse

Caméléon sur sa branche

Il attend et tend la langue.<sup>302</sup>

The dramatic value of this monologue, more so as vocalized speech, lies in its exposition of the mental state of Kala Lubu (Kasa Vubu) as one of the key political players historically. The internal divisions among the Congolese

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<sup>302</sup> Césaire, *Une Saison au Congo*, 69-71.

political leaders – especially the political rivalry between Joseph Kasa Vubu and Patrice Lumumba – are at the root of the failure of the top Congolese leaders to foster unity among the major ethnic groups competing for power (the Bakongo, the Balubas, the Lulus, etc.). Kala Luba's conflicted sentiments between his desire to achieve his personal ambitions and his appreciation for the Prime Minister (Patrice Lumumba) stand in the way of constructive political concord with his supposed partner.

To say that Kala Luba is envious of the popularity of his Prime Minister is an understatement. Indeed, while Césaire casts Lumumba as a victim of political circumstances, Kala Luba (Kasa Vubu) is at odds with deciding what to do with the fellow: the popularity enjoyed by his political rival and subordinate, Lumumba, is a thorn in his shoes. As well, Kala Luba's approach to leadership is subject to the considerations of public opinion in the sense that he gives too much credence to the rumors that Lumumba may be manipulating him. His response to the political innuendos of the street undermines any serious consideration on his part of constructive governance through cooperation with Lumumba. This paradox is puzzling, given that he recognizes genuineness in Lumumba (as well as the latter's friendship and honesty toward him), but yet chooses, instead, to reproach the hero for his work ethic (wanting to change the status quo too quickly, for instance); nonetheless, he chooses to change allegiances (through a rapprochement with

Mokutu) to suit his personal political aims.

Before closing my reading of the scene under discussion and concluding it with an examination of the intervention of the Sanza Player, I'd like to offer a relevant historical reference to Kala Lumbu's mention of his suggestion to Lumumba to send a telegram to Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet President occupying the Kremlin at the time. This moment provides a foretaste to my discussion of the tragedy of the decolonization of the country in the section to follow, as emblematic of the limits of leadership and the restriction of the agency of the political leaders in the Congo (and that of many others worldwide), within the context of the Cold War before the era of Perestroika ("Glasnost"). In an interview with the BBC, Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja<sup>303</sup> explains in great detail that when the crisis of the secession of the Katanga erupted (and the ensuing civil war), Lumumba first turned to the United States for help to contain the rebellion and maintain the territorial integrity of the country. However, he was told by the State Department top officials that the US cannot act against Belgium interventionism as it was a fellow member of NATO. It was suggested that he seek the assistance of the United Nations instead, but the latter was severely limited by its policy of "non-intervention in the internal affairs of its members." Realizing that he was played by the

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<sup>303</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, Georges. "Patrice Lumumba: the most important assassination of the 20th century." | Global development | theguardian.com. | *The Guardian*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Sept. 2013

Americans, Lumumba, reluctantly, had no other choice but seek the help of the USSR as a last resort.<sup>304</sup> This maneuver by the US then provided a pretext for the Belgian-US led military intervention in order to stop the “communist invasion” in the whole of Central Africa.<sup>305</sup> Historical records have later shown that even Moscow was not convinced that Lumumba had any communist leanings – neither was Peking. Lumumba was in fact more of Third Worldist adherent to the Non-Aligned movement, a firm believer in Pan-Africanist liberation ideology.

I will conclude the reference to Kala Luba’s monologue with a review of the refrain by the Sanza Player about him. In the words of Janis L. Pallister, “It is not at all by accident that the Sanza player at the end of this scene sings of the chameleon and his darting tongue.”<sup>306</sup> In the context of this analysis, the image of the chameleon evokes animalistic and predator-like traits within the President’s character, who is waiting to swallow his prey (Patrice Lumumba), setting a trap in order to better devour him, politically speaking. As we will see later in the play, the poetic recitations of the Sanza Player such as the one mentioned above blend elements of speech with musical performance, and they are reminiscent of the role of the Bard in Medieval Europe. Within the realm of Césaire’s drama, the Sanza Player’s musical interventions are in line

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<sup>304</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, Georges. *Patrice Lumumba*, 111.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>306</sup> Pallister, Aimé Césaire, 76.



with his consideration that poetry and songs are part of (or ought to be integrated into) theatre and its performance. In short, that poetry forms an integral part of a “popular theatre” that must be accessible to the masses.

It is worth discussing in greater detail, at this point, Kala Lumbu’s and Lumumba’s notions of leadership, which are intertwined with their differing personalities. On the one hand, Césaire portrays Lumumba as a popular and populist leader who is close to his populace, unlike Christophe in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*. Moreover, Patrice’s leadership style is characterized by a quest to govern by consensus, clarity and transparency. Kasa Vubu’s approach, on the contrary, is dictated by his hunger for power and his refusal to engage in meaningful and honest cooperation, as well as by a fancy to eclipse anybody who takes the center stage from him, in this case, Lumumba.

The dissimilar approaches to rulership between the two politicians are quite obvious; they are congruently linked to their individual character. First, Lumumba has an idealist, somewhat quixotic notion of leadership in that he is motivated by a genuine desire to change the world; he is quite impatient, and often makes the assumption that people should and would follow his lead. He exhibits an enthusiasm similar to that of Toussaint L’Ouverture: he has a vision for his country that he wants his citizenry to embrace. However, much like Toussaint, he fails to explain his programme to the masses and, despite his popularity he becomes the victim of internal as well as external political

circumstances. What is more, he underestimates the strength of his enemies and chooses, rather, to value the power of the masses and their belief in his ability to carry out his policies (as he states in Scene 8 of Act II when talking to his wife Pauline). Lumumba is also stubbornly attached to his principles; unfortunately, a single-minded approach does not align with the necessity of negotiation and making concessions, which political practice entails.

Kala Luba, however, is a cunning and seasoned politician who has learned the rules of the trade, i.e., cutting deals, outmaneuvering his opponents, etc. Kala's main objective as President of the Congo is to save face by keeping of firm grip on power, through "pragmatic" Machiavellian politics. His leadership style leads him to negotiate deals with European politicians and businessmen seeking to preserve their economic interests in the Congo. On a local level, he is very keen at fostering divisions among the key political players of the country, along ethnic lines.

These contrasting styles in leadership can only perpetuate the political rivalry between Kasa Vubu and Patrice Lumumba. This time, we hear it from Lumumba's viewpoint in Act II, Scene 9, when he sets to fight against Kala Luba's decision to dissolve his government and appoint a new Cabinet:

*un instant prostré, se ressaisissant*

Le salaud [Kala Luba] ! Mais il n'a pas fini d'entendre parler de Lumumba Patrice! Fait! C'est moi qui l'ai fait!

(...) ce qui arrive est peut-être, est sans doute, une bonne chose. Le Congo de la loi fondamentale, le bicéphale Congo, l'albinos monstrueux

né des fornications métisses de la Table Ronde, je ne l'ai accepté que le temps d'un compromis. Or voici que, de lui-même, le roi Kala nous indique que le temps des compromis est passé.

Fort bien! Voici donc le temps de défaire le roi Kala. D'ailleurs j'ai averti la radio : je parlerai à la nation.<sup>307</sup>

Let us note that Lumumba's reference to the "bicephalous" and "monstrous albino" nature of the Congo references the national unity government and the accommodation of all the different ethnic and regional claims to inclusiveness – more so as an "*imagined community*" – born out of the Table Round of Negotiations in Brussels in early 1960.<sup>308</sup> Nevertheless, in as much as it is true that Kala Luba's decision to dismiss Lumumba's Cabinet is more of a constitutional "coup d'état" than anything else, the President's decision to form alliances with the then Chief-of-Staff of the Congolese Army, Mokutu – whom Lumumba trusts, ironically – translates into the betrayal of national unity. In fact, the demise of Patrice Lumumba, resulting from the rivalry among the political leaders, is carefully orchestrated with the complicity of Kala Luba (the President Kasa Vubu) and Mokutu (Mobutu promoted to Army Chief-of-Staff). In this regard, Scene 2 of Act III takes place at a moment

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<sup>307</sup> Césaire, *Une Saison au Congo*, 75-76.

<sup>308</sup> *The Congolese Round Table Conference*, also known as the *Round Table Conference of Brussels*, was a meeting organized in two parts in 1960 in Brussels (January 20 - February 20 and April 26 May 16) between on the one side representatives of the Congolese political class and community chiefs ("*chefs coutumiers*") and, on the other side, Belgian political and business leaders. [https://archive.org/stream/TheBelgo-congoleseRoundTable/BelconRT\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/TheBelgo-congoleseRoundTable/BelconRT_djvu.txt)

when Lumumba is arrested by Mokutu, who is flanked by no other person than Kasa Vubu.

National unity is permanently menaced due to these conflicts in the leadership conduct of politicians, as evidenced by the constant threat of secession undertaken by the province of Katanga which, though it is still attached physically to the rest of the Congo, enjoys a “de facto” independent economic and political status.<sup>309</sup> At the same time, these diverging leadership styles impact negatively national welfare in their fostering of ethnic divisions.

As Franz Fanon submits in *The Wretched of the Earth*,

Immediately after independence, the nationals who live in the more prosperous regions realize their good luck, and show a primary and profound reaction in refusing to feed the other nationals. The districts which are rich in groundnuts, in cocoa, and in diamonds come to the forefront, and dominate the empty panorama which the rest of the nation presents. The nationals of these rich regions look upon the others with hatred, and find in them envy and covetousness, and homicidal impulses. Old rivalries which were there before colonialism, old interracial hatreds come to the surface. The Balubas refuse to feed the Lulus; Katanga forms itself into a state, and Albert Kalondji gets himself crowned king of South Kasai. (...) African unity, that vague formula, yet one to which the men and women of Africa were passionately attached, and whose operative value served to bring immense pressure to bear on colonialism, African unity takes off the mask, and crumbles into regionalism inside the hollow shell of nationality itself. The national

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<sup>309</sup> I am referring to the ties that exist between the province of Katanga and most Southern African countries. Indeed, by virtue of its mineral riches and its geographical positioning, Katanga does more trade with Zambia, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia. With the recent emergence of South Africa at the forefront of the African economic scene, the latter has become a major economic partner of the province of Katanga (also known as “Shaba”) given their mutual mineral wealth; the political authority of Kinshasa has been rendered more obsolete and irrelevant.

bourgeoisie, since it is strung up to defend its immediate interests, and sees no further than the end of its nose, reveals itself incapable of simply bringing national unity into being, or of building up the nation on a stable and productive basis. The national front which has forced colonialism to withdraw cracks up, and wastes the victory it has gained.<sup>310</sup>

Fanon thus takes direct aim at the Congolese politicians immediately after independence as the epitome of a failed decolonization proceeding, deploring the self-centeredness manifested by some nationals and political leaders following Congolese independence. By chronicling this early postcolonial epoch, Fanon chastises regionalism, as well as ethnocentrism through his recounting of the rivalry between the Balubas and the Lulus with much the same historical accuracy as Césaire does within the dynamics of the play. In this case, the political leaders – as the educated elite – take on the role assigned to the bourgeoisie as the new ruling class. Fanon is right when he affirms their unwillingness to foster national unity. In fact, this failure in nation-building is brought about by the inability of the ruling elite to “think the nation as a whole,”<sup>311</sup> so to speak. At the same time, this refusal to think the nation in global terms becomes, in the play, one of the key contributing factors to the collapse of the fragile nation-state as it is constructed or imagined as a national community. In the midst of all this ethnic turmoil, the

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<sup>310</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 159-160.

<sup>311</sup> Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation. In *Nation and Narration*.

Sanza Player is the only protagonist acting as the symbolic glue for national unity: he reminds the people of the necessity to build a national conscience that is accepting of ethnic and regional diversity, as does Patrice Lumumba. I now must turn, for the last half of this chapter, to Césaire's expression of international solidarity with the Third World in general, in pairing with his reading of the decolonization project as it plays itself out in the Congo in particular.

As I mentioned in my introduction, *Discours sur le Colonialisme*, in the international politics of the time, offered Césaire the platform he needed to express not only his disillusionment with the French communist-socialist alliance (as evidenced in his *Lettre à Maurice Thorez*), but also to convey his indictment of the Western colonial project, and its disguised neocolonialist wrapping. Hence, true to the Third Worldist intellectual and writer that he is, Césaire's engagement of the imperialist interventionism in *Une Saison au Congo* becomes an extension of the critique initiated in *Discours*. In this context, his interest lays in demonstrating the restrictions of effective and autonomous leadership at the local national level in light of the supremacy of transnational forces that overpower and overshadow the claims of autonomy by leaders such as Lumumba. These transcend a single country (the Congo), and they are even more powerful than other world institutions such as the UN. In this relation, then, effective leadership in *A Season in Congo* is

constrained by an international interventionist agenda which curtails what Frederick Jameson calls “the political agency of local concerns.”<sup>312</sup> As a matter of fact, the play exposes an array of external factors that further complicate the intricacies of an already complex web of local political entanglements. For the benefit of the discussion under way, I want to focus my analysis on the implications of *five* major protagonists (individuals, ideologies and institutions) that represent the players involved in the deployment of the interventionist practices which Césaire so vehemently decries: l’Ambassadeur du Grand Occidental (The Ambassador of the Great Western World) , le Complot Belge (The Belgian Conspiracy), the Banker(s), international institutions (the United Nations represented by Dag Hammarskjöld), as well as the United States (cast by its Representative to the UN, Matthew Cordelier).

The limitations to the agency of political leaders in the Congo need to be considered within the realm of Cold War politics of the era aimed at the “fight against the dangers of Communism” in Congo; as well, we need to contextualize these politics in the context of decolonization in the 1960s. To this effect, Césaire casts a protagonist, *L’Ambassadeur du Grand Occidental*, who functions as a spokesperson for the interests of Western countries. Act I, Scene 13, captures his stream of consciousness at a moment when the Congolese

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<sup>312</sup> Jameson & Miyoshi, *The Cultures of Globalization*, xvi.

masses, who have congregated to partake in the independence ceremonies, dance to the tune celebrating the new freedom that was duly achieved. As the *Ambassador* gets closer to the front of the stage, he addresses the audience in the following terms:

Je sais bien qu'en tant que Nation, nous avons mauvaise réputation. On nous accuse d'avoir le colt facile, mais peut-on faire la politique du rocking-chair quand le monde, pour un rien, s'agite, et que les peuples entrent en ébullition!

Quand les peuples ne se conduisent pas en peuple décent, il faut que quelqu'un les ramène à la décence. C'est à nous que la Providence a confié cette tâche. Seigneur, merci!... Et puis, vous avez entendu, comme dans l'avion, il a crié: "À Moscou! À Moscou!" Eh bien, qu'on le sache, on n'est pas seulement les gendarmes, on est aussi les pompiers du monde! Les pompiers préposés à circonscrire partout le feu allumé par la pyromanie communiste! Je dis partout! Au Congo, comme ailleurs! À bon entendeur, salut!<sup>313</sup>

From a staging point of view, it is important to note the physical positioning of the *Ambassador* on the stage. His physical proximity to the front of the acting platform is meant to elicit the attention of the audience, as well as solicit their support, even more so because he feels the need to justify the policies of the West vis-à-vis the Congo in the context of the Cold War. On a textual level, however, the message is mixed in the sense that Césaire creates the character of the *Ambassadeur du Grand Occidental* (understand the *Commonwealth* of Western Nations), but at the same time has the Ambassador speak in the name of a *single nation*, the United States. On one hand, Césaire wants to underline

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<sup>313</sup> Césaire, *Une Saison au Congo*, 47.



the congruence of the economic interests of the European countries, as well as those of other developed nations of the western hemisphere, which all converge to curtail any Congolese nationalist agency, thus limiting the margin of maneuver of their leaders. We ought to take note of the kind of rationalization that underlie the *Ambassadeur du Grand Occidental's* thinking, on the other. In reality, the guilt trip he feels for the actions of the West, or of his country for that matter, is alleviated by his conscious projection of his responsibility for these covert military interventions on the instability of the developing countries (the Congo). The argument that he cannot engage in the "rocking-chair politics" – that is, pretend that he is not concerned by what is going on in the Congo – is only a pathway to his conclusion that the irresponsible behavior of the people in turmoil must be kept in check. And also that the rebelling people must be brought back to a state of "civilized" rationality. Not unlike the conquistadors' explaining away the atrocities they committed against the indigenous people of the Americas, the actions of the *Great West* countries are hereby sanctioned by divine will since the politicians of the civilized world must contain the spread of communist hegemony in the Congo and elsewhere.

In as much as Césaire critiques the imperialist policies of the Great West, his indictment is as well directed toward Belgium, Congo's former colonial administrator, which has played a very detrimental role in the country during

the time the latter was a Belgian colony. Patrice Lumumba seeks to question its role in the internal politics of the Congo in what he terms *Le Complot Belge* (the Belgian Conspiracy). In point of fact, Act I, Scene 11 sets the stage for a meeting of the Congolese Parliament in Léopoldville (the former name for the capital Kinshasa), which offers Lumumba a forum to charge the Belgian government with undermining Congo's independence:

[...] le complot belge, je le vois ourdi dès le premier jour de notre indépendance, ourdi par des hommes travaillés de dépit et épointonnés de haine. Je le vois, sous les traits du général Massens soulevant contre le gouvernement la Force Publique, à qui nous étions désignés, nous tous, comme un ramassis de politiciens et de profiteurs sans scrupules !

Le complot belge? Je le vois en la personne de l'ambassadeur de Belgique à Léo, le sieur Van den Putt, sabotant, détraquant, et pour mieux désorganiser notre République, organisant massivement l'exode de ses fonctionnaires.

Le complot belge? Je le vois en tenue de général, préparant méthodiquement, et ce, dès le premier jour, son lâcher de parachutes et ses raids de soudards. Le complot belge? C'est le traité d'amitié que les Belges avaient signé avec nous, déchiré comme un chiffon de papier; ce sont les bases de stationnement que nous leur avons concédées, transformées en bases d'agression contre nous. Le complot belge? C'est Kabylo, Boma, Matadi! Matadi et ses monceaux de cadavres!

Mais le plus grave vient de se produire: Aujourd'hui, 11 juillet 1960, Tzumbi, notre frère Abraham Tzumbi, aidé de M'Siri, Tzumbi, conseiller, poussé, patronné, financé et armé par les Belges, vient, sans consultation préalable des populations, de proclamer l'indépendance de notre plus riche province, le Katanga! Et le premier acte de ce Katanga indépendant est, comme par hasard, de passer avec la Belgique un traité d'assistance militaire et de coopération économique.

Est-il suffisamment clair, le complot belge?

Congolais, c'est ce complot qu'il faut briser, comme on brise dans l'eau, les pattes de la grenouille. Congolais, allez-vous laisser assassiner notre indépendance si chèrement conquise?

Et vous, Africains, mes frères, Mali, Guinée, Ghana, vers vous aussi, par-delà les frontières du Congo, nous crions. Afrique! je te hurle!

Croient-ils donc à l'Afrique une lourdeur à l'oreille? Ou croient-ils la main de l'Afrique trop courte pour délivrer? Je sais bien que le colonialisme est puissant. Mais je le jure par l'Afrique : Tous unis, tous ensemble, nous percerons le monstre par les narines ! [...]

Alors je vous regarde, et à travers vous, je regarde chaque Congolais, les yeux dans les yeux, et lui répète les paroles de notre chant Kikongo: Mon frère, chose qui t'appartient en main tu la tiens qu'un autre veuille te l'arracher Accepteras-tu? Vous savez la réponse? Kizola ko! Je n'accepte pas!

*Les députés se lèvent et crient.*

LES DEPUTES

Kizola ko! Je n'accepte pas! Nous n'acceptons pas!<sup>314</sup>

The above passage is based entirely on speeches and parliamentary declarations that Lumumba made as Prime Minister – Césaire combined them into the tirade above. Lumumba's condemnation of the Belgian Conspiracy underscores the external forces at work in the Congo; he is, on the other hand, represented as the incarnation of the aspirations of the Congolese people. The charge of Belgium's sabotage of the independence of the Congo through the enactment of the "divide et impera" (divide and rule) policy is evidenced by the actions of its officials, such as General Massens (the army General in charge of the colonial army) and Van den Putt (the Flemish-Belgian Ambassador in Kinshasa). What is more, Césaire emphasis on the Belgium's undermining of the nascent Congolese civil administration is evidenced

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 43-44.

through the repatriation of the stationed colonial administration – who could have trained more native managerial staff – as well as through their encouragement for the brain drain of trained the few Congolese technocrats and other members of the local elite.<sup>315</sup> Other culprits include the continuation of the Belgian interventionist policies, its failure to honor economic treaties that were signed with the Congolese government under economic cooperation agreements. Belgium's undisguised incitement for the secession of the rich province of Katanga is most appalling to Lumumba, as they prop up Abraham Tzumbi (Moïse Tchombe in real life), the Governor of the province, by hiring mercenaries for and providing financial support to his secessionist army (1960, 1965), and also by forging diplomatic ties with his self-proclaimed government, offering him military assistance and economic cooperation.

As in the paragraph above, the *Belgian Conspiracy* is further manifested in its dealings with the secessionist claims of the province of Katanga. Historically speaking – as well as in Césaire's play – Belgium deployed its diplomatic power and military might to undermine the emancipation and the national unity of the newly formed nation of the Congo, for the simple reason that granting national sovereignty to its most prized colony (like Haïti for France in 1801) was a direct threat to its own economic livelihood. Even before

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<sup>315</sup> There were only 17 Congolese graduates at independence, for a population of more than 10 millions inhabitants at the time.

independence, the financial world both in Belgium and in other western countries was wary of what would be the fate of their financial capital and investments, as denoted in the conversation that takes place in Scene 4 of Act I between the European bankers at the Round Table Conference for the independence of the Congo.<sup>316</sup> Consequently, in order to maintain their dominance and thus guarantee the safety of their holdings, the owners of capital use the “divide and rule” strategies (Act II, Scenes 2/5); they help, even encourage the secession of Katanga (also known as Shaba).<sup>317</sup> To illustrate this point, Jean Van Lierde, in his book *La Pensée Politique de Lumumba*, attests that large sums of money were transferred to Katanga in an effort to fund the secession of that very strategic province, and thus bring about the implosion of the country.<sup>318</sup>

In order to understand these fears, it is important to remember that the province of Katanga is of an extremely strategic value for the West; what is at stake, in truth, lays in the province’s underground mineral riches: Katanga, the new Eldorado, was earmarked *solely* for the development of an extraction industry aimed at supplying minerals that were, and are still needed and coveted, for the economies of western countries. As I write these lines, China, the “new kid on the block” of neocolonialism in Africa, has become, for more

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 21-23.

<sup>317</sup> Houyoux, 14.

<sup>318</sup> Van Lierde, *La Pensée Politique de Lumumba*, 302.

than a decade now, a major contender and competitor for the access to these ores desperately needed to boost and maintain a sustained growth of its developing economy.<sup>319</sup> Fanon could not have said it more eloquently when he addressed Europe's and American colonial economic exploitation of Third World countries or territories under their dominion:

We know that colonial domination has marked certain regions out for privilege. The colony's economy is not integrated into that of the nation as a whole. It is still organized in order to complete the economy of the different mother countries. Colonialism hardly ever exploits the whole of a country. It contents itself with bringing to light the natural resources, which it extracts, and exports to meet the needs of the mother country's industries, thereby allowing certain sectors of the colony to become relatively rich. But the rest of the colony follows its path of underdevelopment and poverty, or at all events sinks into it more deeply.<sup>320</sup>

Césaire makes a similar point in *Discourse on Colonialism* as regards the economic relations between so-called Third World nations and industrialized countries. What Fanon highlights, in fact, is the relation between the financial gains of the West and the self-interested nature of their participation in the "development" of the economies of the former colonized nations. As I stated earlier, at the root of this convergence of interests on the part of Western

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<sup>319</sup> In reality, for the last three years, the Chinese government has secured exclusive rights for the exploitation of the mines of Kolwezi, in exchange for building real estate and transportation infrastructure (the quality of the work leaves a lot to be desired, critics have argued). See Isobel Yeung, *Vice* on HBO, April 22, 2016.

<sup>320</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 158-59.

powers lays an appetite for Congo's minerals.<sup>321</sup> One can therefore understand Césaire's interest in dramatizing the reasons for which these riches have attracted the pecuniary ambitions of many an adventurer (colonial powers, as well as Western bankers and financiers) for personal (King Leopold II), foreign-national or corporate gain.<sup>322</sup> What is more, the minerals held by the Congo above all of paramount strategic importance for their military industries up to this date. For instance, during the course of the Manhattan Project, fifty per cent of the plutonium that was used to manufacture the first atomic bombs was taken from the uranium mines in Congo – to be more precise, from the province of Katanga, renamed Shaba (meaning “copper”) following Mobutu's cultural policy of “authenticity.” The same plutonium was then shipped to the US via Belgian conglomerates.<sup>323</sup> In addition, up until the mid-1990s, the US was still importing the tantalum and the niobium minerals necessary for the fabrication of the heads of spatial rockets.<sup>324</sup> It is also a fact that western mining companies enjoy a strong and faithful financial alliance, as well as an unshakable military and economic

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<sup>321</sup> Zaïre, as it was recently called, has been described as a “geological scandal,” in the sense that its soil harbors numerous minerals and precious stones that are rich in tenor and, at the same time, are in great demand on the international market. It is no secret that these riches have been subjected to a pattern of looting dating back to the time when King Leopold II of Belgium claimed Congo as his personal property after the Berlin Conference.

<sup>322</sup> Césaire has already made a similar point in his *Discourse on Colonialism*.

<sup>323</sup> Eynikel, *Onze Kongo-Portret van een koloniale samenleving*, 136. Read in translation.

<sup>324</sup> Houyoux, 86.

solidarity between Brussels, Paris, London, Washington, New York, Ottawa, Johannesburg, etc.<sup>325</sup> That they would coalesce to safeguard, at all costs, their economic interests is an obvious deduction.

Herein lays the importance of the character *The Banker*, whom Césaire creates to highlight the negative consequences of neocolonial capitalist exploitation. This ideology is blatantly stated in Scene 6 of Act I, when a group of financiers (“banquiers”) ridicule the post-independence speeches of politicians, Belgian and Congolese alike. They discuss their concerns in the following terms :

CINQUIEME BANQUIER

Vous avouerez, messieurs, que c’est de bonne logique  
Si Léo obtient qu’on s’autodétermine  
Soit! Nous ne pouvons l’empêcher, mais alors  
Que ce soit pour tous et d’abord pour nos mines!

PREMIER BANQUIER

Chut ! Chut ! Laissez-moi écouter! ce que dit le collègue est souvent fort sensé.

QUATRIEME BANQUIER

Collègues, quand je considère l’océan d’anarchie où le pays s’abîme  
Je m’avise qu’il nous reste la solution ultime;  
Oui, devant ce Congo mal venu, immense, embarrassant,  
La pensée s’impose qu’il serait malséant  
Que de cet énorme et informe agrégat  
Ne put à son gré, sortir notre Katanga!

PREMIER BANQUIER

Ah! Je vous ai compris! Alors je vous embrasse.  
Vive l’uranium libre! C’est bien cela n’est-ce pas?

CINQUIEME BANQUIER

Pas seulement l’uranium! Le diamant! Le cuivre! Le cobalt!

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<sup>325</sup> Kanza, *Congo 196? – “Tôt ou Tard”-“Ata N’dele*, 36.



Le Katanga enfin! Le Katanga sonore et trébuchant!  
CHOEUR DES BANQUIERS  
Hourrah! Hourrah! Vive le Katanga!<sup>326</sup>

By emphasizing that the wealth of the Congo is the object of the appetites of international conglomerates,<sup>327</sup> Césaire, through the role of *The Banker*, points to the influence of global capital that transcends national boundaries, and its negative impact on local interests. In fact, one of the claims that the play makes, is that the problem of Congo is larger than its gigantic size. It needs, therefore, to be understood not only at a local level, but also – and more importantly – on an international scale.

However, even if western powers have not spared any effort to ensure that the richest province separates from the rest of the Congo, Césaire, in the play, blames more Congo's political leaders for failing to use their power to preserve the national integrity of the country. By vilifying protagonists like Abraham Tzumbi (Moïse Tchombe), Kala Lubu (Kasa Vubu) and Mokutu (Mobutu), Césaire accordingly elevates Patrice Lumumba to the status of the *ideal leader*. The latter is shown to be more of a unifying figure, as opposed to

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<sup>326</sup> Césaire, *Une saison au Congo*, 32.

<sup>327</sup> Interestingly, these financial concerns were once again at play during the recent war that started in the fall of 1996 and resulted in the ousting of President Mobutu in the spring of 1997. Suffice it to say that representatives from Anglo-Saxon companies from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia were rushing to sign contracts with Kabila's government in exile even before the rebels were able to take over power. They currently hold – as they have since the 1950s – a great stake in the mineral extraction industries of gold, diamonds, cobalt, zinc, copper, uranium, etc.

the rest of the political cabal whose only motivation is guided by selfish ambitious based on ethnic or regional affiliation. I will return to an evaluation of what makes Lumumba an ideal leader later in my conclusion to the chapter.

In as much as Césaire vilifies the questionable leadership practices of the most influential Congolese politicians in the play, he similarly questions the integrity and effectiveness of the leaders of *international institutions*. He disputes the pertinence of their abilities in international conflict resolution as he stages, for instance, the role of the United Nations in Act I, Scene 12; Act II, Scene 3 & 9, and Act III, Scene 4. Césaire makes an assessment of the impact of leadership (or lack thereof) at the international level, and how this vacuum undermines the efficiency of leadership at the local national level (as exemplified by the UN and NATO, for instance). The spotlight now focuses on the failure of the United Nations as an impartial mediator in the resolution of international conflicts. For Césaire, then, the UN bears great responsibility for its dereliction to deploy its might and resources in order to implement efficient solutions to the “Congo problem.” For this purpose, Césaire casts two characters: the *General Secretary of the United Nations* (the Swedish Dag Hammarskjöld), and the *United States Ambassador to the UN*, Matthew Cordelier. From Césaire’s vantage point, these protagonists are symbolic of two colliding forces in their differing approaches to international political crisis management: Hammarskjöld’s idealism is pitted against the American

“pragmatic” imperialist interventionism of the Cold War, incarnated in its representative Matthew Cordelier.

In order to understand Hammarskjöld’s perspective, let us consider the justification of his “strategy” to avoid the implosion of the Congo. In Scene 12 of Act I, Hammarskjöld addresses the European experts of the United Nations before they set on a peace-making mission to the Congo:

(...) Le Congo n'est pas seulement un pays, un État, un malheureux État, qui sollicite notre aide et a besoin de notre protection. C'est aussi pour le service public international que veut être notre organisation, un banc d'essai ; le banc d'essai par excellence! (...) Nous travaillons ici à l'avenir du monde. Agissons donc au mieux de notre intelligence pour l'évolution créatrice à laquelle nous avons le privilège de collaborer.

Messieurs, si en ce moment solennel je voulais essayer non pas de résumer mes instructions, mais de synthétiser l'esprit dans lequel je souhaite que vous entrepreniez votre tâche ici, au Congo, c'est aux vers du poète que je croirais devoir avoir recours :

«Je t'ignore litige, et mon avis est que l'on vive!

Avec la torche dans le vent, avec la flamme dans le vent,

Et que tous hommes, en nous, si bien s'y mêlent et s'y consomment

qu'à telle torche grandissante s'allume en nous plus de clarté... Irritable la chair où le prurit de l'âme nous tient encore rebelles

Et c'est un temps de haute fortune, lorsque les grands aventuriers de l'âme sollicitent le pas sur la chaussée des hommes, interrogeant la terre entière sur son aire, pour connaître le sens de ce très grand désordre, interrogeant le lit, les eaux du ciel et les relais du fleuve d'ombre sur la terre peut-être même s'irritant de n'avoir pas réponse... »

Mais voici nos hôtes. Méditez ces paroles, messieurs, méditez-les un instant et fortifiez-vous-en, au moment où telle une nouvelle chevalerie, je vous lance sur la brûlante chaussée des hommes.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Op Cit, 45-46.

I want to compare the above quotation with the idealism that Hammarskjöld tries to communicate to the members of the Congolese government as he attempts to explain to them, in Scene 12 of Act I, what *his* mediation role is, and what the process entails:

Messieurs les membres du gouvernement congolais, je suis heureux de venir au Congo au moment où les Nations-Unies, à la requête du gouvernement congolais, mettent leurs ressources à sa disposition, pour aider ses dirigeants à établir les bases d'un avenir prospère et heureux. [...] On s'est parfois demandé si cela peut exister, un homme neutre. Eh bien, j'existe! Dieu merci! J'existe! et je suis un homme neutre.

Les problèmes qui se posent au Congo doivent être résolus par une procédure politique et diplomatique normale. [...] non par la force et l'intimidation, mais dans un esprit de justice et de paix. C'est pourquoi des hommes neutres peuvent œuvrer ici et aider efficacement le Congo à trouver une solution satisfaisante pour ses problèmes. Car enfin qu'est-ce qu'être des hommes neutres sinon être des hommes justes ? Encore faut-il préciser que j'entends ce mot dans son sens le plus exigeant et si j'ose dire, le plus prégnant: "Ceux, dit Maître Eckart, qui sont complètement sortis d'eux-mêmes; qui ne cherchent rien au-dessus ni au-dessous, ni à côté d'eux-mêmes; ceux qui ne poursuivent ni bien ni gloire, ni agrément ni plaisir, ni intérêt, ni sainteté, ni récompense, mais se sont dégagés de tout cela".

Bref, ceux qui donnent à Dieu son dû, et de qui Dieu reçoit son honneur. Voilà, messieurs, dans quel esprit nous venons parmi vous. Pour vous aider à calmer les passions, à apaiser les esprits! À pacifier les cœurs! Donc Justice et Paix! C'est par ces mots que je salue le Congo! Vive le Congo, pacifique et heureux!<sup>329</sup>

Before going any further, I want to pause and reflect on Dag Hammarskjöld's declarations. Even if they are directed toward two different audiences, a number of common traits emerge, which highlight his personality, his vision

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<sup>329</sup> Césaire, *Une Saison au Congo*, 46-47.

of the role of the UN at the international policy level, and in the Congo in particular.

In the first citation wherein he addresses UN personnel to be deployed in the Congo, Dag Hammarskjöld's *modus operandi* is akin to that of Patrice Lumumba in that they are both idealists who believe in the power of foresight as well as in the power of words. However, while having a clearly outlined vision is certainly a noble leadership trait, having recourse to poetry as the foundation for a basically "dirty" assignment, is quixotic at best. As a matter of fact, a hazy notion such as the ideal of a common international public good is, in my view, an empty category, especially if we take into consideration the intricacies of the political and economic interests of the political superpowers during 1960s. In this case, the poet that Hammarskjöld mentions is no other than Saint John Perse, whose poetry is cited from the latter's collection of poems entitled *Vents*.<sup>330</sup> What is more, the fact that the highest ranking officer of the United Nations regards the UN mission to the Congo as a testing ground for future UN-mediated conflict resolution policies and peace keeping operations is, to say the least, very concerning. As an example, there is no mention, in his statement, about the possible political consequences of a failed mission, nor do we feel any concern for any casualties (local or foreign) that

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<sup>330</sup> Houyoux, 120.

might occur as a result of this intervention. The major purpose of the above-mentioned mission, it seems, is action for action's sake, in the face of an international crisis that the UN is supposed to resolve, but is unable to.

In the second tirade, Hammarskjöld's insistence on UN *neutrality* (and his own) as the only way of achieving justice and fairness in resolving the Congolese conflict, is noteworthy for its naivety. In addition to poetry, philosophy is hereby effected as both a remedy for the world's conflicts, and a concoction for mediating complex international political problems. Further, the idea of non-partisan implication is supposedly emptied of any attachment to earthly personal ambitions! The religious and the spiritual are poised to supersede the quest for settling political conflicts; hence, mysticism and politics could not be mixed in any better way. But the problem remains that this blend, in the case of the Congo, only produces disaster in its failure to take into account the political realities on the ground. And to crown it all, Hammarskjöld insists that the resolution of the Congolese conflict can only be achieved through "due" political process and official diplomatic decorum – quite an unpractical avenue to navigate, a treacherous territory for a volatile situation such as the one prevailing in the Congo at the time.

In this regard, I want to revisit one of Césaire's interviews in which he discusses his characterization of the Swedish UN Secretary General. Césaire explains how he decided to cast him as an honest, but naïve person at the

same time:

Hammar skjöld, je le montre comme un parfait honnête homme. Mais il était malheureusement naïf, de cette naïveté suédoise qui tient au fait que la petite Suède vit en paix depuis cent cinquante ans et n'a jamais été mêlée aux grands événements mondiaux. Hammar skjöld croyait à la neutralité dont il parlait si souvent. Au Congo, pays tropical où tout le monde intrigue, il était égaré. La mort de Lumumba a produit en lui un revirement total. Il a pris les plus grands risques, à croire qu'il voulait se punir lui-même. En fait, Hammar skjöld était un mystique. J'ai lu ses Cahiers [le journal intime d'Hammar skjöld a été publié en français sous le titre de *Jalons* : on dirait, en moins bien, les Pensées de Pascal ; à chaque ligne on trouve les mots "Dieu", "péché" et "mort."<sup>331</sup>

Césaire's statement underscores Hammar skjöld's honesty, as well as his political idealism and naivety; pairing these with mysticism in a world ruled by dishonesty, manipulation and self-interest on the part of the international power-brokers of the day (especially the US) is a prescription for fiasco, especially his blind belief in political neutrality as a central tenet of international conflict management.

How do we then account for the role of the United Nations in the Congo conflict, or Dag Hammar skjöld's role for that matter? I am inferring in this instance, that Césaire makes more an indictment of the role of the UN than a pointed criticism of its top official charged with the duty of running the international organization. That being said, in no way do I minimize the disastrous political outcome caused by the idealistic naïveté exhibited by Dag

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<sup>331</sup> Romi, "Une Passion Noire," 39-40.

Hammar skjöld, nor do I absolve him from his share of responsibility in the ensuing political instability in the Congo in 1961.

I would like to end my discussion of the role of the UN in the Congo conflict by evaluating the matter from Patrice Lumumba's perspective. We have seen that Dag Hammar skjöld's involvement privileges diplomatic mediation in his attempt to bring an end to the civil war in the Congo. Lumumba, by contrast, is of the opinion that the prevailing chaos in the Congo warrants the use of military force, either by local authorities or under the banner of a UN peace keeping force, to quash the rebellion in Katanga that is threatening its territorial integrity. The confrontation that ensues from these differing approaches is captured in Act II, Scene 3, a scene too long to quote in its entirety; but excerpts of its most salient arguments can help highlight their differences:

LUMUMBA

Monsieur le secrétaire Général, qui m'eut dit que moi qui ai appelé ici l'organisation des Nations Unies, moi qui, de tous les chefs d'État, ai le premier, fait toute confiance à cette organisation, qui m'eut dit que les premières paroles que j'aurais à vous adresser seraient non de remerciement, mais de reproche et d'incrimination ! Croyez que j'en suis désolé. Mais il n'est que trop vrai que vous avez donné aux résolutions votées par le Conseil de Sécurité une interprétation toute personnelle : les Belges sont encore au Congo ! Et l'O.N.U. entre en conversation diplomatique avec le traître Tzumbi ! [...]

Vous avez décommandé les opérations militaires qui nous eussent permis d'entrer à Elisabethville sans coup férir. [...]

HAMMARSKJÖLD

Monsieur le Premier Ministre, j'ai fait ce que me dictait ma conscience. C'est un point de doctrine, un point de ma doctrine que l'O.N.U. ne doit



pas prendre parti dans un conflit intérieur, constitutionnel ou autre, et que ses forces militaires ne peuvent être utilisées pour en influencer l'issue ! [...]

LUMUMBA

Je vous saurais gré de votre sollicitude! Mais dites? pour ce pays, quel malheur plus grand que de se résigner à la sécession de la plus riche partie de lui-même? [...]

Votre Bunche s'est laissé abuser comme un enfant. Bunche s'est trompé! A moins que... Après tout, Bunche est américain... [...]

Les armes belges et les mercenaires affluent au Congo! Il en débarque tous les jours, et vous laissez faire! [...]

En attendant la sécession se fortifie chaque jour, au vu et au su de tout le monde, et vous, non seulement vous n'agissez pas, mais vous ne nous laissez pas agir! [...]

le Congo est un État indépendant, et (...) nous n'avons pas secoué la tutelle des Belges pour tomber, incontinent, sous la tutelle des Nations-Unies! [...]

Quoi qu'il en soit, et puisque l'O.N.U. manque à ses obligations, à son devoir, à sa mission, le gouvernement de la République du Congo assumera les responsabilités qui sont les siennes. [...]

Nous réduirons par la force la sécession katangaise. Nos troupes sont prêtes à entrer en campagne.

[...] le Congo se passera de votre aide: nous avons malgré tout quelques amis dans le monde! Nous nous passerons des hommes neutres! [...]

Adieu, Monsieur le Secrétaire général. Les Russes me prêteront les avions que vous me refusez! Dans quelques jours nous serons à Elisabethville.<sup>332</sup>

Through this exchange, Lumumba's questioning of the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo serves to emphasize his and Hammarskjöld's opposite conceptions as to what should be done to solve the thorny question of the secession of the Katanga province. As well, it underlines the UN dilemma of the 1960s between the need to respect the national sovereignty of UN member

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<sup>332</sup> Césaire, *Une Saison au Congo*, 54-55.

states on one hand, and the responsibility of the UN to intervene in the disastrous internal conflicts of its members on the other.<sup>333</sup> Thus, while taking Hammarskjöld to task for failing to implement the UN Security Council resolutions on the withdrawal of all foreign troops (the Belgian paratroopers are still in Congo, and the UN itself has engaged in peace talks directly with Tzumbi), Lumumba vehemently challenges this policy as an act of betrayal of the national sovereignty of Congo. And by refusing to allow the Congolese troops to intervene in Katanga (under the guise of neutrality), Lumumba observes, the UN is therefore sanctioning the partition of the country, while it was supposed to work toward maintaining its unity.

Enter the protagonist Bunche *on* the scene: he is one of Dag Hammarskjöld's assistants. The introduction of this character helps the reader-spectator interrogate the neutrality of the UN; Césaire uses Bunche to demonstrate that the latter acts more as an agent serving the interests of the U.S. State Department than as a simple representative of the United Nations. In this respect, Césaire joins the ranks of many critics of the international organization who have argued that the United Nations is an apathetic institution with no political clout, which is often used as an instrument of the foreign policy interests of its most powerful members, especially those

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<sup>333</sup> This approach changed slightly in the aftermath of the 1990s Bosnian War and the 1964 Rwandan Genocide.

holding a permanent seat at the UN Security Council (the USA, the USSR at the time, Great Britain, France, and China). Gregson supports Césaire's position as follows:

Depicted as a pious man with a naïve faith in the ideal of "neutrality," the earnest bureaucrat adopts a position that is ultimately revealed to be untenable in the context of a convulsive internecine conflict. High-minded neutrality becomes, in this account, tantamount to acquiescence in the status quo, and Césaire's Hammarskjöld himself comes to a belated awareness of this predicament.<sup>334</sup>

Indeed, it is the realization, which occurs too late in the interest of the Congo, that he should have taken a different political route and not trust the implicated most powerful members of the UN, that he comes to realize he has been duped into the games of the neo-colonialist powers. In fact, Hammarskjöld's naivety is to believe that Bunche is neutral in the Congolese conflict. Later, Hammarskjöld will confess to Cordelier, another American citizen working at the UN, that he always suspected the United States were up to sabotaging the UN-sponsored peace process in the Congo. The following dialogue between Dag Hammarskjöld and Mathew Cordelier, which is staged in Scene 4 of Act III at the UN headquarters in New York, is indicative of this admission:

HAMMARSKJÖLD

Vous savez la nouvelle? Je viens d'en recevoir le télégramme. Ils ont transféré Lumumba au Katanga et nous avons tout lieu de craindre pour

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<sup>334</sup> Davis, 152.

sa vie... c'est épouvantable!

MATTHEW CORDELIER

Effectivement... Étant donné les mœurs de ce charmant pays, la question Lumumba me paraît réglée à tout jamais.

HAMMARSKJÖLD

Ça n'a pas l'air de vous émouvoir plus que ça !

CORDELIER

Monsieur Lumumba n'étant pas spécialement de mes amis, je ne puis apprécier l'événement que professionnellement ; je veux dire en fonction de la simplification décisive qu'il apporte à la situation politique du Congo.

HAMMARSKJÖLD

Cordelier, soyez franc : vous le haïssez ! [...] Vous, des hommes neutres ? J'aurais dû m'en apercevoir! Vous n'avez cessé de comploter contre lui! [...] Les faits sont là et ils vous accablent: c'est vous qui lui avez interdit l'accès à la radio, l'empêchant de se défendre, quand ses adversaires avaient toute licence de répandre sur les ondes leur propagande haineuse. C'est vous qui, sous couleur de réserver l'aérodrome de Léopoldville aux seuls avions de l'O.N.U. l'avez coupé du monde extérieur pendant que toutes les heures un avion belge atterrissait au Katanga...

En somme nous lui tenions les bras, quand les autres le frappaient! Du beau travail! [...]

Dites-moi, Cordelier, que pensez-vous de Jésus-Christ?

CORDELIER

Vous me surprenez! Je suis chrétien... Méthodiste... et vous le savez!

HAMMARSKJÖLD

Et qu'est-ce que ça me fait que vous soyez méthodiste et chrétien? Il est loisible à n'importe qui, je dis bien à n'importe qui, de se frapper la poitrine et de s'écrier : «Je suis chrétien» ...

Ce que je vous demande, ce n'est pas ce que pense du Christ le Matthew Cordelier que j'ai là devant moi, la belle affaire!) mais de quel côté vous auriez été, vous Cordelier Matthew, il y a mille neuf cent soixante et une années, lorsqu'on arrêta et mit à mort, en Judée, sous l'occupation romaine, un de vos contemporains, un certain Jésus?

Allons! Retirez-vous! Assassin du Christ !<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>335</sup>Césaire, *Une Saison au Congo*, 105-107.

Césaire's indictment of the role of the United Nations in the conflict of the Congo is stated in clear terms. The biblical reference to the treason of Jesus Christ emphasizes the gravity of the event: in Césaire's view, Matthew Cordelier – who, ironically, bears the same name as St. Matthew the Evangelist – and the Americans have betrayed Lumumba as Judas betrayed Jesus. Furthermore, even more blatantly stated is the direct implication of the United States in sabotaging Lumumba and his policies by using the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council to their advantage. By the same token, it is evident from the exchange between Hammarskjöld and Matthew Cordelier, that while seemingly distancing him from the events taking place in the Congo, the latter definitely knows more than he wants to admit. Lumumba's death is too easily convenient for him and the government he works for, as Hammarskjöld painfully discovers in a sad moment of epiphany. He comes to the understanding of what he had refused to accept all along: that the U.S. and Belgium, among others, are all implicated in a conspiracy to undermine the independence of the Congo, that they used both him and the UN to their own advantage. Thus, his wrath! All along, the UN Secretary General has had, before his eyes, knowledge of the involvement of certain western countries in the internal affairs of the Congo, but chose instead to turn a blind eye to the unfolding reality. In the end, Hammarskjöld has to accept responsibility for the situation because *he* failed, through his numerous

hesitations, to take appropriate decisions, while on the contrary his opponents knew all along what they wanted: Lumumba's death and a strong grasp on the riches of the Katanga.

If there is any good to come out of this painful page of Congolese history, Hammarskjöld's late recognition that the US has had a direct involvement in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba helps strengthen his resolve to become independent as the leader of the most prestigious international organization. In reality, he will pay with his life for daring to challenge the monopoly of the US on the decisions of the UN regarding the future of the Congo.<sup>336</sup> In a similar way – as I will discuss later in my upcoming conclusion – Lumumba's death (like that of Hammarskjöld), is only the tip of the iceberg that hides a more sinister invisible hand, i.e., the international interventionism alliance of Belgium, the US, Great Britain, and South Africa.

Western interventionism, as I am arguing, participates hands-on in the shift of the balance of power between Lumumba and one major political foe,

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<sup>336</sup> Lately, with the recent revelations that surfaced with the confessions of members of the South African Intelligence Agency testifying at the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, some of these agents testified that the airplane in which Hammarskjöld was travelling was actually sabotaged by the South African Intelligence Agency with the technical assistance of the Central Intelligence Agency. Given Hammarskjöld change of heart and his decision to not support the secessionist claims of Moïse Tshombe in the province of Katanga, it is alleged that the two security agencies conspired to eliminate him in order to speed up the secession of the province, and thus enable western companies to keep a tight control on the access to its rich mineral resources.

Mokutu. As such, the power imbalance produces a rather tense relationship that is manifest in their interaction. My argument in this part is equally tied to what Fanon refers to as the *confiscation of power by the comprador bourgeoisie*; it is notably embodied in the personae of Mokutu (the legendary dictator of Zaïre, Mobutu Sésé Seko), especially his confiscation of power from Lumumba's hands. I am alluding to Césaire's indictment of the Mokutu regime as a rogue state whose overthrow of Lumumba's government foreshadows the upcoming repression of both basic civil liberties and the fundamental principles governing a state of law. In Scene 11 of Act 2, for instance, the reader-spectator is solicited to witness Mokutu's paramilitary soldiers as they assign Lumumba under house arrest. The following exchange between Lumumba and Mokutu sheds light on the divergent leadership philosophies and sociopolitical vision espoused by the two men, as Mokutu explains to Lumumba the reasons for his arrest:

LUMUMBA

Merci d'être venu, merci d'avoir pensé comme moi que j'avais droit à une explication.

MOKUTU

Je m'étonne d'avoir à expliquer l'évidence! Guerre civile, guerre étrangère, anarchie, j'estimais que tu coûtait trop cher au Congo, Patrice !

LUMUMBA

Es-tu sincère? Crois-tu vraiment qu'en sapant ses institutions, en ruinant sa légalité, au moment même où le pays se constitue en État, tu lui fais courir le plus mortel danger!

MOKUTU

Il est certain que tu aurais pu, en t'en allant de toi-même, nous faciliter la tâche. Mais il y a des choses que l'on ne peut attendre d'un politicien. Alors je t'écarte! J'ai décidé de neutraliser le pouvoir!

LUMUMBA

(...) Concrètement, où veux-tu en venir ?

MOKUTU

Rien de plus simple. Le président de la République démet le Premier Ministre. Le Premier Ministre riposte en démettant le président de la République. Moi, je les démet tous les deux! J'écarte les politiciens!

LUMUMBA

En bref, tu prends le pouvoir! Après tout tu n'auras pas été le premier colonel à faire un coup d'État. Mais attention, Mokutu! (...) Cette responsabilité, es-tu prêt à l'assumer? (...)

Mokutu, sais-tu ce que tu t'apprêtes à faire? Le petit carré de lumière au haut de la cellule du prisonnier, tu tires là-dessus le rideau d'ombre! Le grand oiseau arc-en-ciel, qui visite le plafond de cent cinquante millions d'hommes, le double serpent, qui de part et d'autre de l'horizon se dresse et s'obstine pour conjoindre une promesse de vie, une attestation de vie et de ciel, tu l'abats d'un seul coup de bâton et vois, sur le continent tout entier, tomber les lourds plis écailleux des maléfiques ténèbres!

MOKUTU

Je ne te suivrai pas dans ton apocalypse!

Je n'ai pas à répondre de l'Afrique, mais du Congo!

Et j'entends y faire régner l'ordre, comprends-tu? l'ordre !<sup>337</sup>

One of the most striking aspects of this exchange is "(...) the radical divergence between two types of leader, one visionary and idealistic (and ineffectual), the other pragmatic and narrow (and ascendant), etc."<sup>338</sup> The thematic prominence of this rift pinpoints the salient differences between the two men, as far as their political agendas are concerned. While Lumumba

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<sup>337</sup> Césaire, *Une Saison au Congo*, 79-82.

<sup>338</sup> Davis, 155.



insists on the respect of the rule of law, Mokutu, by contrast, suspends all civilian institutions *manu militari*, under the pretense of restoring order in a chaotic nation “paralyzed” by the constitutional vacuum created by the political quarrels between President Kala Lubu and his prime minister, Patrice Lumumba. As such, Mokutu engages in a *de facto* confiscation of power from the hands of the legitimately elected officials. In the following episode, the stage directions that mark the ending of the above-mentioned exchange between Mokutu and Lumumba are as follows: “*Les soldats sont entrés silencieusement et occupent toute la scène.*” (“The soldiers have entered in silence and occupy the entire stage”).<sup>339</sup> The optics of the last scene of Act II are very telling: by having soldiers besiege the stage, Césaire emphasizes, symbolically, the advent of a strong military regime in the Congo; this augurs, as well, a rather somber episode of African history: “The preponderance of the military presence – here the soldiers of Mobutu, the future leader of Zaïre – ominously foreshadows the coups that have bedeviled Africa in the postcolonial period.”<sup>340</sup>

I want to debate, in the next pages, what really enables the success of Mokutu’s usurpation of power, in conjunction with supranational agents, as well as the kind of politico-military alliances he’s able to form so as to

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<sup>339</sup> Op Cit, 156.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, 156.

establish his autocracy and keep himself in power. From the outset, it should be noted that his coup d'état would not have been possible were it not for the help of foreign intervention, specifically with the assistance of Belgian security forces and high ranking officers of the Central Intelligence Agency. These forces, we should remember, coalesced to safeguard the economic interests of the western capitalist elite. In this consideration, Fanon makes a compelling case when he writes, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, that there exists an unstated complicity between the national bourgeoisie of the former colonies and the bourgeoisie of the ex-colonizing country.<sup>341</sup> One hand, Fanon's argument aims to posit that the national bourgeoisie within the former colonies has little or no nationalist conscience; more importantly, this argument helps highlight the intricate web of political and economic ties which at the time were binding the new autocratic rulers and former colonial masters alike – a situation that has contemporary resonances in some post-colonies as I write.

If we fast-forward Congolese history beyond the date of publication of this play under study, it is common place knowledge that Mobutu managed to stay in power for almost four decades with the help of the CIA, positioning himself as *the* essential strategic asset and ally in the US fight against the

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<sup>341</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 164.

spread of Communism in Central Africa from the 1960s through the 1980s.<sup>342</sup> Mobutu had put in place a local Congolese bourgeoisie to act as both a support class of cronies serving the regime to protect him against the masses he had cut himself from, as well as middlemen between the Mobutu regime and the powerful western economic mining conglomerates. Constitutional anarchy was not only rampant, but the use of naked force was also exerted. Césaire's forecast is substantiated in the last scene of Act III (the last act of the play), when soldiers open fire on a crowd of demonstrators who are chanting the name of Lumumba. The power arrangement, as it were, is a rather brutal one. In the context of real politics, Césaire's fictional premonition would prove to have significant grounding as the Mobutu regime grew more and more repressive, quashing all political opposition, real or imagined, by using the same Tonton-Macoute tactics reminiscent of the Duvalier regime, almost as if Césaire was making a parallelism between (in fact, a double critique of) two autocracies mirroring each other in their repression of any popular demands for freedom, concomitantly, on two different sides of the Atlantic.

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<sup>342</sup> On the foreign policy front, he was able to buy the silence of key European and American lawmakers by financing their political campaigns with money either stolen from state coffers, or taken out of the sale revenues from national mining operations in the Congo (then Zaire). The Congo was and still is, for other purposes, of great strategic importance as the larger country sharing its borders with eight other countries in Africa: Central Africa, Eastern Africa, and Southern Africa.

As I conclude this chapter, an evaluation of Lumumba's work as a leader is in order. As a good leader should, Lumumba has a clearly articulated plan of action for his political programme, as well as an outlined vision of what he wants to accomplish for the welfare of the state. Lumumba's socio-political and economic platform, as we have seen, centers around anticolonialist emancipation and the immediate abolition of the colonial system, an uncompromising defense of Congolese national interests against the pressure from international mining companies and Western governments, patriotic nationalism (anti-tribalism and anti-regionalism), African nationalism, a foreign policy of political non-alignment, economic infrastructure development. I would like to add that Lumumba's political ideology was achieved with great personal integrity and an unyielding dedication to the ideals of self-determination, economic self-reliance, and Pan-African solidarity.<sup>343</sup> But how does this vision mirror his character (or vice-versa) and impact his social and political agenda? For the purpose of our debate, I want to argue as C.L.R. James does, that the success (or lack thereof) of the leader's political vision is intimately tied to his/her own personality.<sup>344</sup> In the case of

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<sup>343</sup> Nzongola, *Patrice Lumumba*, 158.

<sup>344</sup> James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York: Random House, 1963. C.L.R. James discusses the factors that contributed to the failure of Toussaint L'Ouverture's revolutionary agenda during the Haitian Revolution. He argues mainly that Toussaint was unable to carry out the revolution to a successful outcome because of his taciturn nature. It was Jacques Dessalines who brought the revolution

Patrice Lumumba, Césaire portrays him as a leader who is self-absorbed, almost barricaded behind the closeted doors of his own thoughts. Like Toussaint L'Ouverture and the character Christophe depicted in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, Patrice Lumumba is a loner: there are very few people in his entourage who vocalize their embrace of his vision, except for M'Polo, who, along with Pauline (Lumumba's wife) acts as a reality check for Patrice.

Self-absorption and loneliness notwithstanding, Lumumba is the prototype of the charismatic leader who is beloved: he is close to the masses through his interaction with them, and he makes no qualms about mingling with the common citizenry in popular gatherings (pubs and nightclubs), where he is venerated as a political folk hero. At the most critical moment in his political trajectory, he will be liberated (even if briefly) from prison (Act 3, Scene 1) by the populace that hold him in high esteem. His popularity is further captured in the scene where he is carried by his supporters who ask him to adopt the leopard skin and the stole as the ultimate traditional emblems of his power (Act 3, Scene 2). At this juncture, though, we as reader-spectators observe a split between the hero and the audience: Lumumba refuses to follow suit,<sup>345</sup> as the cosmetic trappings of power do not mean as much to him as they do for the mob who back him up. In a sense, his refusal of

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to a successful conclusion, mostly because he took the time to explain what he wanted to accomplish to the masses fighting against the white planters in San Domingo.

<sup>345</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 154.

the monarchic symbols of power buttresses his rejection of the kind of cultural Negritude espoused by Senghor, mainly through his refusal to return to archaic cultural representations that do not meet the demands of modern political mythology. Mokutu (Mobutu Sese Seko) will, on the contrary, use the same emblems – the leopard skin and the stole – to justify his seizure of power from Lumumba by claiming his legitimacy to power through the use of the same attributes of imperial (chieftan) rule.

But the most critical factor that alienates Lumumba from his supporters is the fact that he loses touch with reality. Even if a dose of idealism is appropriate for a leader to have, one of the faults that undermine Lumumba personally is his chimerical conviction that he can outmaneuver the powerful forces which subvert his limited authority. Lumumba's platonic view of the world of politics leads him to believe in the power of the word as the ultimate weapon that can bring about politico-social change. More than anything else, Lumumba's claim, "Je parle et je rend l'Afrique à elle-même" ("I speak and I restore Africa to itself"), demonstrates a preposterousness that is not in synchronicity (or said otherwise, *untimely*) with the reality of politics. The statement is rather a reflection of his naïve faith in the magical powers of verbal prowess.<sup>346</sup> Speech as theatrical performance takes on a new meaning

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid, 155.

in his world, as aesthetics and politics become intertwined to produce sterile speech acts:

Ironically, however, the poet-leader does not, empirically any more than in the play's action, succeed in changing the world through incantation, but is defeated by the inertia of neo-colonialism with its crushing combination of internecine strife and cynical capitalism. Lumumba's powerful opponents, both internal and external, eventually puncture the illusion of verbal puissance by the exercise of naked force.<sup>347</sup>

That being said, are we to conclude that Lumumba's leadership is a complete failure?

Taking into account how overly ambitious sociopolitical agendas often miss the bar when translating into concrete action, Lumumba does not fail in his programme per se; his actions are rather very limited in *time* and *place*: the *untimeliness* of his power is such that he is given *only three months* to overhaul a rigid colonial system that resists change ferociously, and whose actors, local – Congolese politicians – and foreign – Belgium, the USA, international capital(ism) etc. – will stop at nothing to crush anyone (including Lumumba) standing in the way of their interest and profit. By refusing to abandon his vision and give in to the corrupt practices and interests of his collaborators, Lumumba chooses a path *other* than admitting that political idealism has to compromise with the demands of political realism. Because of the nobility of his principles, he fails to make political alliances with “the devil,” because for

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid, 155.

him, keeping power for power's sake is contrary to his nature and leadership vision. In so doing, Lumumba becomes a victim of both internal and external factors: the struggle for power among the Congolese political leaders, as well as western capitalistic imperialism, culminates into the climax of the drama of *Une Saison au Congo*.

This tension is resolved, unfortunately, in favor of the stronger protagonists, at the expense of Lumumba's life. Lumumba's death, like that of Henri Christophe and Toussaint L'Ouverture, is a lonely death. If we compare these three historical players, Lumumba's demise shares more similarities with that of Toussaint than it does with that of Christophe. Christophe's doom is tragic more on a spiritual plane, as he dies completely alienated from the Haitian people. By contrast, Lumumba, by giving up his life, achieves the same heroic stature as Toussaint who enabled his own capture by Napoleon's troops so the momentum of the Haitian Revolution could be brought to fruition. Lumumba's hence ensures his spiritual survival in the national psyche of the Congolese people by becoming mythified as a symbol of the ultimate sacrifice; he consequently achieves an immortality that has been bestowed to a very limited number of African leaders – in fact only those who were staunch Pan-Africanists like Lumumba (Kwame Nkrumah, Albedl Nasser, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, etc.). Lumumba's death mediates his canonization, and for Césaire he becomes the ideal leader, exactly because of



his unwavering intransigence as regards his vision and political principles, the fight for which he was ready to lose his life, rather than give in to the dictates of a corrupted idea of democracy and an aborted decolonization of Congo.

Beyond the death of Lumumba – and the ensuing glorification of his political personae – I would like to revisit the discourse on nationalist decolonization and postcolonial nation-formation displayed in *A Season in Congo*; they act as an important subtext in the play, and they are tied to the issue of *topicality* which I want to address in the paragraphs to follow. In a way, Césaire’s dramatic message relates to Fanon’s advocacy for a social consciousness that goes beyond the original stage of a true national conscience sketched out in *The Wretched of the Earth*. And as Suzanne Houyoux posits, Césaire’s lucid analysis of the fragility of a young African state could also be applied, in time and place, to other countries which were under the stronghold of foreign industrial powers<sup>348</sup> during the Cold War era. Thus, by dramatizing the pitfalls of building a nation-state out of an amalgamation of more than one hundred and fifty ethnic groups into a vast space forming a patchwork called Congo, Césaire may be pointing to the futility and irrelevance of imported European notions of “nation” or “nation-state” as they were transplanted and imposed in the African context. What is more, Césaire

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<sup>348</sup> Houyoux, 14.

may be advocating the creation of (or a return to) different models of statehood – “a confederation of local republics,” to use Ernest Renan’s terms.<sup>349</sup> It may very well be an unconscious interjection, on Césaire’s part, of a concern closer to his own home turf: the kind of political autonomous agency within a larger African polity akin to the 1946 Departmentalization law he helped introduce at the French Assembly.<sup>350</sup>

When all is said and done, I am arguing that *Une Saison au Congo* is as relevant and topical today as when it was published in 1966, in relation to the events taking place in that country at the present moment, since the 1997 new “liberation war.” Beyond the mere assessment of the Congo conflict in the 1960s, Césaire can be said to be a “voyant” (seer-visionary) in the Rimbaldian sense of the term, given the fact that the predictions in the play he wrote in 1966 have, tragically enough, perdured. In fact, the unfolding of Congolese historical events in the post-Lumumba era corroborates Césaire’s depiction of the nature of the Mobutu regime (and sadly so, the present corrupt and despotic regime of Joseph Kabila, Jr.).

To say the least, these events bear a striking similarity to the issues Césaire addresses in the play. Some scholars of Césaire’s oeuvre have

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<sup>349</sup> Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* 1.

<sup>350</sup> See Gary Wilder’s work: *Freedom Time, The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*, “Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia.”

criticized him for taking liberty with the accuracy of the historical representation of certain facts in the play - shifting the timeline (*untimeliness*) of Patrice Lumumba's incarceration, for instance. Nevertheless, *A Season in Congo* is historically accurate in its thematization of the complex political problems that have plagued the country. For instance, the prediction of the brutality of the autocratic rule of Mobutu not only materialized, but it was also taken to extremes. Furthermore, the same factors that currently threaten the fabric of the Congo have been haunting the country for more than five decades: repetitive attempts at secession, rebellion, repression, and military interventions by foreign troops or mercenaries, rampant corruption, etc. Thus, if we accept the principle by which history may repeat itself, I want to argue that the forces that coalesced to overthrow Patrice Lumumba in 1961 were also at work in 1997 during the war that was intended to liberate the Congo from the dictatorship of the person who supervised the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in the first place. As a matter of fact, foreign interventionist ventures, international capitalistic conglomerates, as well as military agendas all conspired to overthrow the Mobutu regime, because he was "convenient" no longer.

In the context of this discussion, therefore, Césaire's play allows us to pose certain questions and raise some concerns. In this age of globalization, is there any place left for the locus that was ideologically occupied by liberation

struggles in the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s? In the context of the re-branding of international capitalism, what are we to make of claims for nationalism at the local level?<sup>351</sup> Moreover, is there any agency left for local claims to political autonomy without the interference of neo-colonialist interventions, whether direct or by proxy? How are we then to define, or even articulate the new “postcolonial/neocolonial order?” Do narratives of freedom, such as the one articulated in Césaire’s *Une Saison au Congo*, have any currency today?

As it stands, the power of transnational domination in *A Season in Congo* is such that it does not allow, as it were, any political freedom to the various local agents in the Congo “... to negotiate their own political contract,” to borrow Frederick Jameson’s words.<sup>352</sup> In the context of the play, Césaire wants to underscore the challenges that accompany the creation of a national project in a post-independence context that is subject to the dictates of neocolonialism. Along with the failure of political leadership on a local level, Césaire makes the suggestion that this transnational system poses a serious threat to national autonomy, as far as the Congo is concerned. We may therefore wonder whether or not capitalist exploitation in *A Season in the Congo* does take over

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<sup>351</sup> Here, I am referring to the current situation whereby Europeans have been flooding to the Caribbean – take Guadeloupe, for instance – to buy land and property, thus diluting local claims to the land. So doing, they are therefore reinvigorating a colonial “order” that is more challenging to fight, since the enemy is less visible. Under the Maastricht Treaty, the new landlords do not have to be French, since any the French speaking Caribbean islands are part of the French territory, and therefore part of the European Economic Union.

<sup>352</sup> Jameson & Miyoshi (Eds.). *The Cultures of Globalization*, xiii.

the discourse of nationalist liberation. I suggest that it doesn't! In fact, capitalist exploitation is an additional determining factor in undermining the potential for achieving true national liberation, in the Fanonian sense of the term.

Then, how does the nationalist decolonization discourse in the play balance out with issues of globalist neocolonialism? Or else, do these issues carry any pertinence, especially the kind of imperialistic tendency of the multinational corporations to exploit Congo's raw materials? Within the periodization of the play, "globalization" as it stands today is rather inscribed in a historical context that wants to situate the genesis of the current issue in the late 1980s with the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin wall, the fact that capital is able to move from one country to another without any restrictions of boundaries. Part of the argument is that there are whole chunks of the world that are left out in the globalization process, especially Africa.

However, while it is a fact that "globalization" is quite distinguishable from "neo-colonialism," globalist interests are at the service of neocolonialist agendas in the Congo, in much the same way as Christianity and colonialism formed an alliance to carry out the imperialist conquest of the New World during the Age of Discovery. It is a reality that Africa had been left out the picture in the consolidation of global markets, albeit the fact that it served as a proxy battleground for the war between Western capitalism on one hand, and

Eastern-European communism on the other. But there is ground to believe that the concept of globalization may be applicable to the continent in some form: the discourse on the “African renaissance” that followed Clinton’s trip to Africa in 1998 points to a re-nascent interest in the continent. For a long time neglected because of the political instability that was prevailing since the end of the colonial era, Africa has lately been depicted as the next “Asia” where markets would flourish. The language of this discourse itself is characteristic of a capitalist perspective. No longer useful as a buffer zone or proxy battleground for the ideological struggles of the Cold War, the continent is now being viewed as a potential New World of export markets, a playground for international capitalistic ventures. Globalization as a concept, in this context, is very relevant in the sense that it describes a setting that is pertinent to the current situation in the Congo. Except for the booming economies of Nigeria and South Africa, nowhere else on the continent is international capital more active than in the Congo. The fact that representatives of Anglo-Saxon companies were rushing to sign contracts and economic deals with the self-proclaimed government-in-exile of Joseph Désiré Kabila Sr in 1997, even while the sitting President (Mobutu) was still in office, testifies to that. What is more, the province of Katanga itself has more economic ties with South Africa than it does with the rest of the country it is supposed to be a part of.

Furthermore, let alone the fact that international capitalism is, in Jameson's argument, mostly western European, I want to propose that capital has changed hands. In fact, the main reason why Zimbabwe decided to intervene in the Congo in the "liberation wars" of 1996 and 1998 was not to restore "democracy" and the rule of law, since there was none to begin with. Rather, by recycling an argument that has been used by the US to justify (c)overt military operations worldwide, President Robert Mugabe had banked on Kabila by sending Zimbabwean troops to keep him in power so as to ensure an economic return on the investments made by Zimbabwe in the Congolese mining industry.<sup>353</sup>

Fanon's critique, in this instance, is still a valid one: he argues that the power structure takes over true nationalist struggle, which is itself recuperated by the "comprador bourgeoisie." The critique of leadership then is not a far-fetched one, as we witness a class of leaders who, rather than focus mostly on the advancement of the citizenry they are supposed to work for, demonstrate a primary interest in filling their own pockets first. Fanon's

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<sup>353</sup> Furthermore, Mugabe had to make sure that Kabila pays the bill for orders for weapons that were ordered from arms manufacturing firms from Zimbabwe. And if one looks at the alliances in the current conflict in the Congo, international capital is still present: South Africa has sided with Rwanda, even if it has an economic stake in the Congo, as South Africa is a great supplier of arms to the Rwandese army. Namibia has sided with Zimbabwe in its support of the Kabila regime, since its President, Sam Nujoma, has shares in the South African companies wanting to extract and commercialize the diamonds found in the Kasai province in the Congo.

words, in this case, are still topical when he states: "When this caste [bourgeoisie] has vanished, devoured by its own contradictions, it will be seen that nothing new has happened since independence was proclaimed, and that everything must be started again from scratch."<sup>354</sup> Given the current state of affairs in the Congo, a country with so much potential, but yet with neither sound economic infrastructure (worse than it was at the time of independence), nor effective political leadership yet, the road to recovery will certainly be a long and painstaking one.

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<sup>354</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 176.



## CHAPTER 4:

### **Caliban in Fort-de-France: Freedom Time in Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête*.**

Among the major canonical texts of the European Renaissance, few have left as indelible a mark on the literature about the Caribbean as *The Tempest* has. The critical and literary production it has spurred among Caribbean writers (George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*, Enrique José Rodó's *Ariel*, Ernesto Retamar's *Caliban*, Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*, etc.) affirms its importance within post-colonial discourses (on race, culture, nationhood, identity) in the region. To begin with, *The Tempest* relays in part the history of the Caribbean in its fictionalization of the master-slave relationship – addressed by critical theorists such as Hegel, Sartre, Fanon, etc. On another plane, the play offers a useful paradigm to discuss questions associated with the colonization of not only the New World, but also of the French Caribbean. Through its synthesis of numerous important issues – the master-slave relationship, the Prospero-Caliban Complex, the construction of the Savage Other, etc. – Shakespeare's *The Tempest* reflects the European colonial enterprise, borrowing from a variety of discourses (both literary and non-literary) from the Renaissance.

On the other hand, *Une Tempête*, Aimé Césaire's avatar of Shakespeare's original, is the third (and final) play of a trilogy preceded by *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* (1963), and *Une Saison au Congo* (1966), all of which involve

Césaire's aesthetic exploration of the black experience from Africa to North America and the Caribbean. In this dissertation, I began my study of Césaire's theater with a discussion of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* – as Césaire was transitioning from poetry to drama – whose original version (the *SDT typescript*) engages the history of the Haitian Revolution and Toussaint's leadership during the revolutionary war up to his capture and exile in France. I then followed up with *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, which sequences Césaire's investigation of leadership, but more within a post-independence context as King Christophe's exercise of power and his rulership competencies are confronted to the realities of running a country of ex-slaves, mediating the tension between the requirements of political and socioeconomic advancement on the one hand, and the respect of newly achieved individual freedom on the other. With *Une Saison au Congo*, Césaire's engagement of Africa takes on a didactic role, in as much as he uses history to analyze the forces at play in the political defeat and the death of the Congolese nationalist Patrice Lumumba, and the subsequent rise to power of one of the most notorious African dictators Jean-Désiré Mobutu.<sup>355</sup> Césaire closes off his examination of what he calls the “condition nègre dans le monde” (“the status of the black race in the world”) with *Une Tempête*.

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<sup>355</sup> Nisbet and Ormerod, “Négritude et Antillanité: Étude d'Une Tempête d'Aimé Césaire”. In *Francophone Studies*, 18.

Although it is part and parcel of this Pan-Africanist trilogy that explores issues of liberation, decolonization, and the management of power following anticolonial emancipation in the Black world (in the Caribbean and in Africa), the play parts company with historical situatedness and the critique of paradigms of black leadership (Haïti and the Congo). So doing, it seeks to engage primarily the nature of the psychosocial bond between colonizer and colonized,<sup>356</sup> as well as the problem of freedom, emancipation and self-determination within the milieu of the Americas. Originally envisioned as an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* for Jean-Marie Serreau's theatrical production at the Hammamet Festival in Tunis – and then in Avignon and Paris in 1969 – *Une Tempête* was published in 1968 as an adaptation for a Black Theatre, during peculiarly troubled times for the Third World during the 1960s: the decolonization process, the achievement of independence by African and Third World nation-states, the Civil Rights struggle movement in the United States, as well as the recurrence of armed struggle movements in Martinique and Guadeloupe.<sup>357</sup> All these factors speak to the warm reception the drama received within anticolonial circles, especially from a Third World readership.

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>357</sup> Césaire has often ignored (or failed to acknowledge) the magnitude of these local insurrections and their claims for independence.

From the standpoint of authorial intentionality, Césaire has elaborated on the messages he aimed to convey to his audience. I want to discuss four interviews that are of particular interest as they illuminate, at different periods in time, what the author had in mind while engaged in the writing of “a play on African-Americans” (*Une Tempête*). Césaire, in an interview with Nicole Zand (journalist for the French magazine *Le Monde*), reflects on the status of his dramatic journey at that epoch:

Maintenant ma raison me commanderait d’écrire quelque chose sur les nègres américains ... Je conçois cette œuvre que je fais actuellement comme un triptyque. C’est un peu le drame des nègres dans le monde moderne. Il y a déjà deux volets du triptyque: le Roi Christophe [c’est] le volet antillais, *Une saison au Congo* le volet africain, et le troisième devrait être, normalement celui des nègres américains, dont l’éveil est l’événement de ce demi-siècle.<sup>358</sup>

Pursuant to this line of reasoning, Césaire asserts in another interview that the original title of *Une Tempête* was supposed to be *Un Été Chaud*. Henceforth, in addition to an examination of the coming to political consciousness of the U.S. Black Power movement in the 1960s, Césaire – when asked by journalist François Beloux about the genesis of his theatrical enterprise – responds in these words:

[...] je voulais écrire une pièce dont l'action aurait été située aux USA ; il s'est trouvé que Jean-Marie Serreau voulait monter *La Tempête* de Shakespeare. Il m'a demandé si je voulais faire l'adaptation. J'ai dit d'accord", mais je veux la faire à ma manière, Le travail terminé, je me

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<sup>358</sup> Zand, “Entretien avec Aimé Césaire”, In *Le Monde*, 7-14.

suis rendu compte qu'il ne restait plus grand-chose de Shakespeare. C'est pourquoi, pudiquement, j'ai donné comme titre : UNE tempête.

*Le roi Christophe, Une saison au Congo*, [...] et maintenant, une adaptation d'après Shakespeare, qui s'appelle non pas «LA Tempête», mais "UNE Tempête". [...] Parce qu'il y a beaucoup de tempêtes, n'est-ce pas - et la mienne n'est qu'une parmi d'autres ... [...]

Mon texte, et c'est normal, est devenu gros de toutes les préoccupations que j'avais à ce moment-là. Comme je pensais beaucoup à une pièce de théâtre sur les États-Unis, inévitablement, les points de référence sont devenus américains ; mais enfin, ça a été une affaire de circonstance.<sup>359</sup>

Therefore, the fact that Césaire's play is entitled "*A*" *Tempest*, as opposed to "*The*" *Tempest*, may suggest that it has less to do with a particularly referential geographical location than an exploration, through fiction, of the dynamics of decolonization, the methods of liberation from colonial political domination, etc. For that matter, in Césaire's view, the play could be situated in *one* or *many* contexts corresponding to the geographical topology of an island. So doing, he infers that *his* is one of many possible interpretations of Shakespeare's play as the text moves from one vision to another.

Interestingly, however, in a later interview - this time for the drama magazine *Théâtre* - Césaire will elaborate on a lot of issues: his views on theater, his definition of Negritude versus Senghor's essentialization of the concept, the link between his political and literary careers, culture and politics, etc. In this particular occurrence, he expands on the vision he has of his

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<sup>359</sup> Beloux, *Propos Recueillis in Le Magazine Littéraire*. <http://www.magazine-litteraire.com/actualite/hommage/aime-cesaire-poete-politique-17-04-2008-31380>

dramatic oeuvre, placing a particular emphasis on *Une Tempête*. After discussing the role of the Yoruba god Eshu, and the intertwined relationship between Prospero and Caliban, Césaire goes on to say that “*Une Tempête a bien été écrite en pensant tout à la fois à l'Amérique du Nord et aux Antilles.*”<sup>360</sup> There could not be greater validation for my long held view that the play refers to the French Caribbean, and Martinique in particular, even though Césaire had never admitted the latter point publicly. I will return to this part of my argument later in the chapter. I want, for now, to discuss briefly what in Césaire’s copycat version is retained, and what is left out of Shakespeare’s original.

In terms of textual migration, some essential elements of Shakespeare’s play have been preserved in Césaire’s adaptation. However, in addition to an analysis of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, Césaire at the same time infuses into the play a new perspective for the investigation of a complex issue he is preoccupied with: the exploration of the Civil Rights struggles in the United States in the 1960s (at least that is what he has claimed in earlier statements to various media). Thomas Hale maintains that circumscribing this play to the archetypes presented in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* would be to underestimate the importance that the figures of Caliban

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<sup>360</sup> Attoun, “Aimé Césaire et le Théâtre Nègre”, In *Le théâtre*, 96-116.

and Prospero play in modern mythology.<sup>361</sup> At the same time, one would be overlooking the tremendous amount of efforts that Césaire has put into his literary works, as in his political career, to precisely attack the binary opposition found in the myth of the benevolent master and the humble slave. The dispelling of this myth, Hale continues, can be traced back to an earlier formulation found in *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*, where Césaire makes a critique of the "bon nègre" and exalts the virtue of the "mauvais nègre" (understood in a colonial perspective). In doing so, Césaire privileges the idea of maroon rebellion<sup>362</sup> against an oppressive order by having the speaker of the *Cahier* revolt against colonialism, especially its derivatives: psycho-cultural alienation, assimilation, the depersonalization of the Colonized – issues that Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi,<sup>363</sup> Césaire himself and others have written about at great length. Thence, "Césaire's powerful transformative project is underpinned by radical historical revisionism."<sup>364</sup> When Césaire was asked to compare his adaptation to its original Shakespearian rendition, the poet himself replied:

Demystified, the play [is] essentially about the master-slave relation, a relation that is still alive and which, in my opinion, explains a good deal of contemporary history: in particular, colonial history, the history of the

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<sup>361</sup> Hale, "Sur *Une Tempête* d'Aimé Césaire," 23.

<sup>362</sup> The trope of Maroon rebellion takes on a more vivid traction in the character of The Rebel in the print versions of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* (1946, 1956, and 1970).

<sup>363</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 1974.

<sup>364</sup> Krispin, Joseph. "Impetuous temptations: Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête*," 135.

United States. Wherever there are multiracial societies, the same drama can be found, I think.<sup>365</sup>

On a different plane, even if *Une Tempête* bears a close kinship with *The Tempest* in Césaire's retention of the characters forming the cast of Shakespeare's original play, the adaptation that produced the avatar contains important modifications to its Renaissance predecessor, as the author admits in the paragraphs above. As well, critics such as Lilian Almeida, Frederick Case, J. Corzani, G. Durozoi, Richard Burton, etc. have explained the circumstances in which *Une Tempête* was written, as well as the context of its adaptation (interpretation) of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.<sup>366</sup> I am much more concerned for the moment with the thematic differences exhibited by the two works. As a matter of fact, in addition to the locale of the United States, we find other important differences: the *racialization* of Caliban and Ariel as respectively a Black and a Mulatto slave; the induction of *Eshu* (a Black devil-god drawn from the Yoruba religious pantheon), one of the most ubiquitous survivors of African spirituality within the Black Diaspora of the Americas. Césaire therefore singles out three important elements: in Shakespeare's original, Ariel is an airy spirit; he is a Mulatto and a slave in Césaire's rendition. Caliban is, according to the Shakespearian version, a savage and

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>366</sup> Nisbet & Ormerod, 33.



deformed slave; even though he is a slave in Césaire's, he is neither deformed nor savage. Thus, ethnicity, social class, and religion become, for Césaire, the major differential elements that distinguish his play from the Shakespearian version.<sup>367</sup>

Granted that *Une Tempête* concerns itself with the plight of African-Americans, and also that Caliban and Ariel can be paralleled with Malcom X and Martin Luther King, Jr. respectively, there are, however, very few markers in the text that may lead us to such a definitive conclusion as Césaire would have us believe, except for the nameless marker "X" and Caliban's utterance "Freedom Now."<sup>368</sup> Regardless of the geographical location of the drama, we encounter a stratified colonial arrangement showcasing the social casting and positioning of Blacks, Mulattoes, Whites and the goals pursued by either group (domination and oppression, mediation and passing, freedom and emancipation), in conjunction with the harsh reality of political intrigues, etc.

While Césaire's version of *The Tempest* remains as complex and captivating as Shakespeare's play, *Une Tempête* is equally open to diverse insights. Indeed, a different reading of the play may bring about a divergent interpretation from the existing ones in the critical evaluation of this play. In point of fact, my reading departs from the commonly accepted view that the

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid, 28-29.

<sup>368</sup> Césaire, *Une Tempête*, 36.

play is just about the process of decolonization. I posit that by way of a “détour à la Glissant,” *Une Tempête* challenges the Departmentalization policies implemented by France in its Caribbean DOM-TOMs in general, and in Martinique in particular. In *Le Discours Antillais (Caribbean Discourse)*, Edouard Glissant, a Martinican intellectual himself and a former student of Césaire, argues that “Détour” (“*Diversion*”) “[...] is the ultimate resort of a population whose domination by an *Other* is concealed: it then must search *elsewhere* for the principle of domination, which is not evident in the country itself: because the system of domination [...] is not directly tangible.”<sup>369</sup> In its most simplistic form, *diversion* is characterized by an evasion of and a failure to solve the problems of one’s country by undertaking a return (real or imaginary) to one’s roots (as in Negritude). On the other hand, the extreme form of the process of *diversion* (that is, *to act on one’s ideas*) means not only “[...] to fight, to make demands, to give free rein to the language of defiance, but [also] to take full responsibility for *a complete break*.”<sup>370</sup> Even if it can be said that the poetic Word of Aimé Césaire invigorated and resonated with his cultural liberation project within Third World intellectuals circles (and therefore fits in the more radical understanding of Glissant’s concept of *diversion*), Césaire’s play is more directed toward the “*elsewhere*” (“*l’ailleurs*”):

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<sup>369</sup> Glissant. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, 20. A more extensive discussion of this argument is provided (19-26).

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

*Une Tempête* in fact discusses pressing issues relevant to Martinique via its purported reference to the United States.

In its apparent evasion of the compelling nature and the urgency of the problems of Martinique and the seeming negation of the poignant reality of the island (through its focus on the plight of the North American Black Diaspora), the drama similarly speaks to very important and crucial issues: race, language politics, cultural hybridity, anticolonial liberation strategies, the alternative between pacifist non-violent reform (post-national emancipation and self-determination) and violent armed resistance against an oppressive status-quo. As well, the play questions who (between the colonizer and the colonized) should have control over the island and territorial sovereignty, etc., issues which all have a direct relevance to the relationship between France and its Overseas Departments (D.O.M.s). Furthermore, based on both Caliban's search for freedom and the debates contemporary to the play in the D.O.M.s – specifically the problematic of assimilation by, association with, autonomy or independence from France – I am making the argument that *Une Tempête* is a direct reflection of these concerns; it is the fate of Martinique that is being played out in this drama as well.

Therefore, in light of the considerations mentioned above, I will be investigating Césaire's approach to examining the question of race in relation to bondage within the realm of the slave plantation economy; the dynamics of

the tripartite relationship between Prospero and his subalterns (Ariel and Caliban) on one hand, as well as that between Caliban and Ariel on the other. Arising from this vertical power arrangement are Caliban's (and Ariel's somehow) legitimate and central claims to emancipation, self-determination (cultural, political, linguistic). I plan to study these preoccupations against the backdrop of Césaire's own contestation of France's colonial dominion in the French Antilles (Martinique), concurring with his negotiation (through the various forms listed above) for the political and socio-economic autonomy of his "country" Martinique (including independence and territorial sovereignty).

Further, by discussing the above-mentioned issues in the context of the play, this chapter intends to examine *A Tempest* through the prism of Césaire's political and cultural leadership. I take inspiration from contemporary scholarship on Césaire, Negritude and Toussaint's political heritage in the French Caribbean – drawing stimulus from the recent work of Gary Wilder on *temporality* (and the concepts of "timeliness," "untimeliness," "futures past", "past presents", etc.); John Walsh, Natalie Melas, Carrie Noland, and others. These tools provide the critical lenses needed to rethink Césaire's post-2008 literary and political legacy. Moreover, I will be commenting on the play as a dramatization of different positions that Césaire took, or should (could or ought to) have taken on the status of the Creole language and culture, cultural

hybridity, race, Martinican nationhood, the troubled and paradoxical relationship between France and its Overseas Departments and Territories (DOM-TOMs) – the debate (begun prior to 1846) about the best form of political association the island should have with mainland France (assimilation, independence, etc.) pertaining to the postcolonial situation in Martinique.

An analysis of the hegemonic relationship between the protagonists of the play opens the door for investigating the cultural and political ideologies that feed into the colonial structure of the play. In Césaire's avatar, Prospero is constructed as an embodiment of all that France represents to the island. The drama centers on Césaire's denunciation of the French colonial project of "civilizing"<sup>371</sup> the invaded Caribbean territories "pushing back the frontiers of ignorance, disease and tyranny;"<sup>372</sup> it is also a rejection of Prospero's agenda through a debunking of its ideological construct. From Caliban's perspective, Prospero's colonialism is a morbid ("blanche toxine," 87), white poison" (57) and cancerous condition ("maintenant, je te connais, vieux cancer" (88) His imperial conquest is at the same time a brutish enterprise that regards nature

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<sup>371</sup> What has been dubbed as "The Sarkozy 2007 Dakar Declaration," in which he extolls the virtues and the "positive" aspects of French colonization and its "dissemination" of French cultural enlightenment. Sarkozy's speech recuperates the discourse of the European Enlightenment in its attempt at inscribing the positives values of French Colonialism in the curriculum in elementary and secondary French schools.

<sup>372</sup> Krispin, Joseph, 136.

and the people who inhabit it as either objects or commodities. Therefore, it ought to be retched out,<sup>373</sup> considering the colonialist ideology of representatives of a civilization intended on making a tabula rasa of the rest of the world, as Gonzalo's statement clarifies in Act II Scène 2:

Si l'île est habitée, comme je le pense, et que nous la colonisons, comme je le souhaite, il faudra se garder comme de la peste d'y apporter nos défauts, oui, ce que nous appelons la civilisation. Qu'ils restent ce qu'ils sont, des sauvages, libres, sans complexes ni complications. Quelque chose comme un réservoir d'éternelle jouvence où nous viendrions périodiquement rafraîchir nos âmes vieilles et citadines.<sup>374</sup>

Gonzalo shares Prospero's predatory view of their feeling of entitlement to carry out a brute conquest of the Caribbean islands under the guise of a missionary-like propagation of scientific knowledge, for the sake of Prosperity - thus, his name Prospero. While relating to his daughter Miranda the political intrigues in Naples and his brother Alonso's conspiracy to overthrow him, Prospero states:

[...] when they learned that through my studies and experiments I had managed to discover the exact location of these lands many had sought for centuries, and that I was making preparations to set forth to take possession of them, they hatched a scheme to steal my as-yet-unborn empire from me. They suborned my people, they stole my charts and

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>374</sup> Césaire, *Une Tempête*, 40-41. The following translation is mine: "If the island is inhabited, as I believe it is, and if we colonise it, as is my wish, then we must shy away, as if from the plague, from importing here our defaults, yes, what we call civilisation. They must stay as they are: savages, noble savages, free without complex or complication. Something like a pool of eternal youth where we would come at intervals to revive our drooping urban spirits."

documents and, to get rid of me, they denounced me to the Inquisition as a magician and sorcerer.<sup>375</sup>

Thus, having posited himself as the one and only scholar to accomplish what no other human being had managed to do in the course of history, Prospero further confides in Miranda about his celestial “illuminations” (that is, predictions):

My prophetic science had of course already informed me that they would not be content with seizing my lands in Europe and that their greed would win out over their cowardice, that they would confront the sea and set out for those lands my genius had discovered.<sup>376</sup>

By painting himself as the victim of the Inquisition aiming to sabotage his “revolutionary scientific discoveries,” Prospero self-presents not as the political refugee that he is (supposedly “religious” as well), but as the prototype of the “enlightened” Renaissance intellectual colonizer deeply involved in the discovery of the New World. The temporal authority that he is denied in Europe (since his pseudo-science is perceived as a menace to church doctrine), he projects onto Caliban to rationalize the seizure of the latter’s lands. In fact, Prospero considers himself as the “Founding Father” of the island that he has usurped from Sycorax, its Founding Mother. It is exactly Prospero’s purported intellectual superiority and his claims to mastery of knowledge – or at least the representation he makes of it – that enable him to

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<sup>375</sup> Césaire, *A Tempest* (Trans. Richard Miller), 9.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

impose dominion over the novel colonial order, and dominate the Other (Caliban and Ariel).

Indeed, *Une Tempête* introduces a mystique of knowledge by which the mirage of knowledge itself is presented as “Magic” through the mystification of the “Book” (and book knowledge); it is both mystified and mythicized in Caliban’s eyes, the Colonized. Similarly, knowledge – or the acquisition of it – functions as self-delusion for the Colonizer (Prospero), as part of the colonial project of cultural domination. The portrait of Prospero as the prototype of the intellectual Colonizer is meant here to point to France’s role in the colonial enterprise: after all, it was a colonization through knowledge that was carried out, in part, under the banner of science. In addition, France’s force of assimilation of its colonial subjects through its intellectual power, as well as its brute colonizing methods, have often materialized, even to this date, into an insatiable appetite for a demonstration of naked power in its D.O.M.-TOMs and other former colonies.<sup>377</sup> Césaire’s emphasis on this issue is also meant to stress the extreme nature of French cultural and intellectual domination in the Antilles, which he has many times deplored by referring to Martinicans as

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<sup>377</sup> This is illustrated in France’s military interventions in the Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Togo. Its military training of Hutu militias during the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, etc. -- as opposed to the British principle of the indirect rule of its colonies.



“culturally brainwashed” through the domination and assimilation of the metropole.<sup>378</sup>

In discussing Césaire's problematizing of France's relationship with Martinique in *Une Tempête*, an examination of the asymmetrical relations of power<sup>379</sup> is required. As the self-proclaimed undisputed ruler of the island he forcibly took from Caliban's mother, Prospero has jurisdiction over two subjects: Ariel (the Mulatto slave) and Caliban (the Black slave). Caliban (Prospero's main antagonist) is verbally subjected to constant sub-speciation from Prospero's mouth. Prospero renders Caliban as half-beast by placing him outside of the space of humanity in order to legitimize his colonial enterprise, before Caliban is allowed to embody the principle of a nationalist anti-colonial struggle. Ariel, like Caliban, is at the service of Prospero; he is the middleman between Prospero and Caliban, in fact the executioner of the former's orders. He is the instrument through which Prospero's orders are carried out: sink Alonso and Trinculo's ship, capture Caliban after his failed rebellion, etc. Ariel, however, enjoys a privileged position compared Caliban in that he is mostly assigned to perform intellectual tasks. By contrast, Caliban (who is

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<sup>378</sup> To this point, the policy was carried through the policies of cultural assimilation and the erasure of local cultures in the French colonies via “direct rule.” The policy of cultural assimilation was less pervasive in British colonies where “indirect rule” was implemented, thus leaving a certain (but limited) level of political (and cultural autonomy).

<sup>379</sup> Almquist, “Not Quite the Gabbling of ‘A Thing Most Brutish’: Caliban's Kiswahili in Aimé Césaire's *A tempest*,” 593.

positioned at the bottom of this slave hierarchy) is made to execute rather manual duties (chop the wood, light the fire, etc.), while enduring at the same time very harsh treatment at the hands of his master. In fact, in their frequent exchange of derogatory insults and resentful nicknames, Prospero rejoices in inflicting him psychological torment; disparaging Caliban's character and worthiness, he accosts him: "[...] you ugly ape. [...] you savage ... a dumb animal, a beast I educated, trained, dragged up from the bestiality that still sticks out all over you."<sup>380</sup> Such statements borrowing heavily from the discourse on primatology paired with the notion of the Noble Savage enable Prospero to lay the claim that his "duty" as the enlightened European empowers him to educate the uncouth natives and instruct Caliban how to speak properly. The silencing of Caliban's voice and language, as well as the erasure of his cultural memory, are thereby reinforced through Prospero's prohibition of Caliban's ethno-social practices (religion, customs) identified as "evil ways."

Thus, in the following sections, I want to direct my attention to 1) Césaire's criticism of Prospero's manipulation of language; 2) Césaire's denunciation of the cultural assimilation of Martinicans and African-descended Francophone Caribbeans; 3) the ways in which Césaire, along with

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<sup>380</sup> Césaire, *A Tempest*, 14.

other writers from the French Antilles, have appropriated language as a tool of counter-hegemonic cultural resistance: Negritude for Césaire, and Créolité for the younger generations of writers and cultural theorists.

To wit, the proscription of Caliban's language follows and responds to a double movement: it is oppressive and liberatory at the same time. From a colonial standpoint, Prospero's manipulation of language serves to extract Caliban's participation and compliance in dismantling his own linguistic and cultural order, and force his submission into the European conqueror's cultural mold. Precisely, in *A Tempest*, Prospero uses French (the dominant language) as a means of coercion and oppression to maintain the Black slave in physical and mental bondage. It is the tool that Prospero uses to carefully demean Caliban and destroy his self-image and self-esteem by imposing upon him an identity that he seeks to resist: the name "Caliban" itself (an anagram for "cannibal") with its heavily loaded signifiers of lack of civilization, savagery, barbarism, uncouthness, mental retardation, etc. As Caliban retorts to Prospero: "It's the name given me by hatred, and every time it's spoken it's an insult."<sup>381</sup>

Rather than share with Caliban his so-called knowledge, magic and science, Prospero's instruction is limited to imparting Caliban with just

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid, 18.

enough French so that he can understand the commands to carry out the tasks needed to satisfy the livelihood of the master. Says Caliban :

[...] Tu ne m'as rien appris du tout. Sauf, bien sûr à *baragouiner* (emphasis mine) ton langage pour comprendre tes ordres : couper du bois, laver la vaisselle, pêcher le poisson, planter les légumes, parce que tu es bien trop fainéant pour le faire. Quand à ta science, est-ce que tu me l'as jamais apprise, toi ? Tu t'en es bien gardé! Ta science, tu la gardes égoïstement pour toi tout seul, enfermée dans les gros livres que voilà.<sup>382</sup>

The above quote is a reminder of the policy of *selective education* instituted by the colonial powers with the objective of preparing a small local elite to serve as middlemen between the European colonial administration and the rest of the masses, teaching them rudimentary knowledge necessary for them to hold the natives in check. So doing, the colonial status-quo could be sustained by keeping the majority of the population in total ignorance. Moreover, Caliban's reference to Prospero's concealment of "his" science and know-how points to the creation of a European mystique of book knowledge, in as much as it precludes the full participation of colonized subjects in the French empire from reaping the benefits of intellectual scholarship. And when learning is permitted, it is to hail the merits of French civilization, and reinforce the perceived "backwardness" of the natives. In this sense, Prospero's *modus operandi* are reflective of the French policy of *cultural assimilation* practiced

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<sup>382</sup> Césaire, *Une Tempête*, 25. The English equivalent can be found in Césaire, *A Tempest* (Trans. Richard Miller), 14.

throughout all their colonies, with the aim to transform colonial subjects into “civilized” subjects of the French empire.

In the portrayal of Prospero I described above, Césaire’s sagacity is informed by a criticism of the blind embrace of all things French by his fellow citizens within the French speaking Caribbean, whom he refers to as assimilated individuals (“assimilés”) who (consciously or not) do operate outside of African-based cultural norms. To the corruption of said French assimilationist discourse, Césaire proposes a counter-narrative strategy that rejects the hegemony of French culture through the use of the same medium originally deployed to question the value of local native cultural norms: language. Within the realm of postcolonial studies, this current has been referred to through appellations such as “learning to curse back,” Spivak’s concept of “the subaltern speaks,”<sup>383</sup> which all construe the appropriation of the voice of the oppressed as discursive opposition and resistance to the European master narrative of colonial encounters. In this context, language, a seemingly neutral linguistic phenomenon, emerges as an area of contention for numerous cultural claims and positions reflecting the political leanings of writers and critics, old and young. This is especially important within French Caribbean literary history, where we notice a discursive gap akin to

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<sup>383</sup> Spivak, “*Can The Subaltern Speaks*,” 24-28

generational affiliations, from Césaire's Negritude to the theorists and writers of the Créolité movement, via Glissant's cultural theorizing of Antillanité.

Within the historical context of the French Antilles (French Guyana, Guadeloupe, Martinique), French as Prospero's language has been utilized as *the* tool par excellence of linguistic and cultural assimilation. Molière's language is Caliban's as well (though acquired through force), but that is where the similarity ends: in Caliban's case, the same medium of communication serves different aims taking into account the goals pursued and the symbolic messages deployed by interlocutors as they speak to one another. Indeed, a change ensues in the Prospero-Caliban linguistic order whereby, through Césaire's plume, Caliban is allowed to come out of his subalterneity from the moment he becomes aware of the potential of a *poetic revolution* by "learning to curse back" the master. The tone and inflection of the "parole" ("speech") change while the permutation in the semantic field operates as a transfer of the discursive power back to the oppressed. Linguistic discourse is thereby transformed into a battle ground from which Caliban can talk back; *poetic knowledge* empowers him to reclaim his voice and cultural space, as well as impose his yearning for freedom and dignity.

In addition to the reclamation of the power to speak, Césaire's mustering of the trope of language in *A Tempest* serves to dramatize the encounter between two orders with radically distinct linguistic registers and cultural

agendas: French and Creole. At this stage, I want to stir my discussion in two directions: first, address the status and deployment of *French* as the dominant lingua franca; second, examine how *Créole* (or Caliban's language, symbolically) articulates (or not) a counterhegemonic position, in relation to the anti-Césairean critique expressed by the theorists of the Créolité movement. As a start, Césaire in the drama "detours" the possible utilization of Creole toward what he has termed a *negrification*<sup>384</sup> of French through Prospero's use of derisive terms to refer to Caliban's language. The French word "baragouiner" itself ("to gibber, to jabber") referred to in the previous quote carries a heavy load of derogatory signifiers that were common currency within both the French békés and the Martinican Mulatto upper class communities in reference to Creole. As such, Prospero's and Caliban's exchanges highlight the obvious tension between the dominant French language and culture on the one hand, and the subjugated vernacular of the island (Creole) on the other. I am arguing that this is demonstrative of Césaire's own ambivalence toward the use of Creole as an agent with the potential of bringing about substantive cultural change within Martinican society.

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<sup>384</sup> At least that's what Césaire claims as his objective, to infuse into French the linguistic and semantic nuances of the French Caribbean: «colorier le Français de la culture des Antilles». See "Entretien avec Aimé Césaire" by Jacqueline Leiner, *Tropiques* 1, 13 (1978): 4.

In *Aimé Césaire: une Traversée Paradoxale du Siècle*, Rafaël Confiand outlines this ambivalence, as well as the “limitations” of Césaire’s linguistic project, i.e., the *negrification* of French meant to mold this language, its rhetorical elements and its imaginary in the Black or Negro-African spirit.<sup>385</sup> While this *negrification* endeavor fails to find an adequate illustration in *Une Tempête*, this move, according to Confiand, is already problematic in the sense that Césaire locates his project within the parameters of a Black essence that is *not real* (nor grounded in factuality), but a theoretical construction “devoid of any cultural specificity.”<sup>386</sup> Therefore, Confiand’s critique carries a certain degree of legitimacy if we question: what elements of Blackness did Césaire really use in order to “negrify” the French language?<sup>387</sup>

The case can be made that Césaire's poetic project of using writing as a process of self-discovery and recreating oneself (the self) was a valuable cultural undertaking in its own right – from a historical perspective – given the detrimental effects of the psychological wounds inflicted by France’s assimilationist policies toward its D.O.M. (overseas) subjects, as well as within its other colonies. In addition, through his poetry, Césaire was striving to create a new language capable of communicating (at least in theory) the African heritage; he was also seeking to develop a novel medium of

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<sup>385</sup> Confiand, *Aimé Césaire: Une Traversée Paradoxale du Siècle*, 103.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.



expression by "bending" the French language, so he says, in order to create an Antillean, Black French language with a Black character.<sup>388</sup> Nevertheless, however ambitious this aesthetic project was at the outset, it only resulted, as James Clifford argues, in the creation of a few neologisms.<sup>389</sup> To this end, regardless of how well intended it was, the *negrification* of French did not carry as much weight as it wanted to. And while we cannot infer that Césaire was making a prediction of the "coming" of Créolité "avant la lettre" (beforehand) in some untimely way, it may be that the interjection of these neologisms ("baragouiner" etc.) are more a by-product of form rather than a clearly articulated revolutionary poetic pursuit.

In retrospect, then, looking at the power dynamics manifested in the ways in which Caliban and Prospero make use of language, Césaire, by privileging Prospero's linguistic order over that of Caliban, is only preaching what he has practiced. As a matter of fact, Prospero's suppression of Caliban's native language can be regarded as a signifier for the suppression of Creole over decades in Martinique, with the participation of Aimé Césaire himself. Indeed, the position of the "Chantre de la Négritude" on this matter is quite puzzling: Césaire has mastered "the master's language" with an unmatched sophistication (at least with the French Caribbean) – the literary refinement of

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<sup>388</sup> Leiner, "Entretien avec Aimé Césaire," *Tropiques* 1, (1978): 14.

<sup>389</sup> Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, 177.

his fictional and non-fictional writings speaks for itself – to the point that André Breton heralded him as "one of the best lyric poets of the 20th century."<sup>390</sup> However, unlike Caliban (who “promotes” Creole in the play by insisting that he speak his native language), Césaire has done very little to promote and support the Creole language.

Indeed, Césaire has constantly refused to recognize that Creole can be a valuable tool of expressing complex concepts. In an interview with Jacqueline Leiner, Césaire makes the statement that Creole is a language of "immédiateté," a language that cannot convey abstract ideas in the same way that French does.<sup>391</sup> In a different interview with Françoise Vergès, when the latter asks his opinion on colonial violence, reparations for slavery and the risk of turning its discussion into a morality debate, Césaire concludes his convoluted response with an explanation on learning to take responsibility, as well as the need to get out of a mentality of victimization through education. Césaire does what he does best whenever he feels that he has been misunderstood; explain some more and clarify:

L'éducation que nous avons reçue et la conception du monde qui en découle sont responsables de notre irresponsabilité. Avons-nous jamais été responsables de nous-mêmes ? Nous avons toujours été sujets, colonisés. Il en reste des traces. Vous avez été à l'école, vous avez appris le français, vous avez oublié votre langue natale, etc. *Lorsqu'on a*

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<sup>390</sup> Breton, “Aimé Césaire: un poète noir.” Introduction to *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Césaire). New York: Brentano's (Bilingual Edition), 1947.

<sup>391</sup> Leiner, “Entretien avec Aimé Césaire,” *Tropiques* 1, 14.

*commencé à écrire le créole, lorsqu'on a décidé de l'enseigner, le peuple n'a pas été transporté de joie. Je visite souvent des écoles [...]. Récemment, j'ai rencontré une femme à qui j'ai demandé : « Madame vous avez déposé vos enfants à l'école. Vous savez qu'une mesure extrêmement intéressante vient d'être prise : on va enseigner le créole à l'école. Êtes-vous contente ? » Elle m'a répondu : « Moi contente ? Non, parce que si mwen ka vouyé ick mwen lékol («si j'envoie mon enfant à l'école»), c'est pas pour lui apprendre le créole, mais le français. Le créole, c'est moi qui le lui enseigne, chez moi ». Son bon sens m'a frappé. Il y a une part de vérité. Nous sommes des gens complexes, à la fois ceci et cela. Il ne s'agit pas de nous couper d'une part de nous-mêmes.<sup>392</sup>*

Césaire's concluding remarks are unflattering toward Creole, as he warns against the danger of uprooting the part of the Martinican essence ("that part of ourselves") that is French (sic). The above statement is also emblematic of the status of Creole as a sub-language (before the popularization of the Créolité movement in the late 1980s), as it is also a clear testimony of the success of the French assimilation policies within a large portion of the Martinican population. In this context, I am agreeing with Rafaël Confiant's complaint that Césaire has showed disdain toward the Martinican lingua franca, in much the same way that Prospero participates in the devaluation of Caliban's language by referring to it as "mumbling." Through Prospero, then, Césaire is thereby projecting his own suppression of the Creole language and culture.

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<sup>392</sup> Vergès, Aimé Césaire: *Nègre Je suis, Nègre Je resterai*, 41-42.

I want to conclude this section with a brief commentary on hybridity as it plays out in relation to the fear of mixing. In Rafael Confiant's book I quoted earlier, the author contends that the "créolophobie" (phobia of Creole) exhibited by Césaire and (his followers) toward anything Creole is demonstrative of his rejection of the "impure" and the "mixed,"<sup>393</sup> due to his singular emphasis on Africa while ignoring the contributions of other cultures to Créolité. In this play, the fear of cultural hybridity is transferred onto a fear of racial mixing operating within the psyche of the colonizer, Prospero, as regards his daughter Miranda. The rape motif functions abstractly in the drama: Caliban is attributed the intent of engaging in a sexual assault of Miranda, but the reader never witnesses its enactment. The alleged attempts at raping his daughter are always raised by Prospero either to silence the Black slave or deprive him of his humanity. In fact, from Prospero's paternalistic verbiage, Caliban's chase of Miranda is continually pursued, but this "undesirable" union is never consummated. This fictional gesture, I suggest, may be a translation on the part of Césaire of a fear of mixing (cultural and perhaps racial) that denies the play any possibility of looking at hybridity as a positive principle. It could be interpreted also as a betrayal of Créolité, and may as well be indicative of Césaire's desire to set himself fixed boundaries

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<sup>393</sup> Confiant, *Aimé Césaire : Une Traversée Paradoxale du Siècle*, 114.

within which he can continue to operate without further questioning of his race-based Negritudinist ideology.

At this juncture in my discussion, I want to orient my focus on the racialization of characters – in relation to the power dynamic within the local ethno classes in Martinique - as well as how this informs the political positions within these socio-racial groups in the play, in terms of their allegiance with (or rejection of) the concepts of political independence, territorial sovereignty, autonomy from, assimilation with France, etc. As well, I will be investigating how these concerns are incorporated in the drama, in concert with Caliban's battle for cultural self-determination and political freedom, and the "necessity" of anti-colonial violence in the search for emancipation.

The transition from a negrification of French (albeit failed) to the casting of race in *A Tempest* is a logical one for Césaire, in the sense that it informs most of his Negritudinist aesthetic: the racialization of the characters Ariel and Caliban as respectively a Mulatto slave and a Black slave enables Césaire to engage a number of issues he has at heart: pursue the exploration of race as a Diaspora concept from both a global perspective and at a local level, but also analyze Martinican society through the prism of race relations and the interaction of racialized subjects with each other. Within the socio-racial classes that interact in the universe of the slave economy in the play, the racialization of Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban as respectively a white master, a

mulatto slave and a black slave places us in the field of a plantation society. But beyond that, Césaire may be guiding us to reflect on a more contemporary Martinican social construction. In modern times, we have moved from a society structured around the plantations to one which is divided, up to this day, mostly along racial lines. Prospero, the white ruler of the island (or France, for that matter), holds absolute power over the subjects of his empire; next in line is Ariel, who holds a key standing in the social hierarchy of the drama: as a mulatto slave, he is the middleman between his master and his “compagnon de misère, Caliban. This arrangement has real historical significance given that mulattos have occupied an economically privileged position comparatively to the majority population of black slaves, such as in Haïti where the mulatto ethno-class was able to carve its position as an economic powerhouse in its own right, and later on, conquer political power traditionally held by black leaders, while the rest of the liberated slaves (except from the “esclaves affranchis,” or “freed slaves”) remained practically a disenfranchised class.<sup>394</sup> Alexandre Pétion, Henri Christophe’s archrival and nemesis portrayed in *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, is a perfect example.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> C.L.R. James makes quite a compelling argument about this topic in his *The Black Jacobins*.

<sup>395</sup> A more contemporary exemple is the advent to power by General Raoul Cédras and his cohort (General Philippe Biamby and Major Michel François, chief of the militarized police of Port-au-Prince). After ousting democratically elected President Bertrand Aristide, they installed Supreme Court justice Joseph Nerette as figurehead president.

In the realm of real contemporary Martinican politics, the racial hierarchy in the play is destabilized: from the standpoint of the theorists of Créolité (especially Confiant), Césaire became Prospero, an “honorary white,” an Uncle Tom of sorts – a charge I disagree with – in his passive acquiescence of French hegemony through the anti-colonialist activities of his Parti Progressiste Martiniquais; his refusal to recognize Creole as a linguistic and cultural force for Martinique;<sup>396</sup> his lack of a clear economic program for the development of the island, etc. On the other hand, the Ariels (the Mulattos) gained power within his administration (who according to Confiant have recuperated the ideology of Negritude in order to perpetuate their hegemony on the Martinican political scene),<sup>397</sup> while the mass of Black Calibans is still at the bottom of the social structure inherited from colonization.

Pursuant to my debate on Césaire’s engagement with racialization in the drama under examination, talking about race allows us to investigate how these above-mentioned socio-racial tensions impact the renegotiation of power mainly between Caliban and Prospero, how their positioning with one another (Ariel and Prospero) – or against one another (Caliban and Prospero) is informed by their views on self-determination and separation from one

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<sup>396</sup> Confiant, Chamoiseau, and Bernabé. *Éloge de la Créolité*, 17-18.

<sup>397</sup> Confiant, *Aimé Césaire*, 82. This may be a below the belt attack against Pierre Alier, a mulatto and lifelong friend of Césaire, who served for many years as deputy mayor under him. Ironically, Confiant himself is a mulatto, although he prefers to refer to himself as “racially mixed.”

another. This debate is ultimately reflective of Césaire's own decision-making process on these key issues. In his book titled *Assimilation or Independence? Prospects for Martinique*, Richard D.E. Burton writes:

It is a fundamental error to suppose that the white creole elite supports in principle and at all times the closest possible links between Martinique and France. On the contrary, it can be argued that, of all the island's inhabitants, the *békés* are in a sense the most thoroughly Martinican in that their essential frame of reference and source of identity has always been Martinique where their economic interests lie whereas the colored (and, to some extent, the black) population has traditionally looked to France both for cultural norms and for amelioration of its social and political position.<sup>398</sup>

The above quotation sheds light on the fact that the citizens of Martinique hold different views on the issue of assimilation with France, versus independence from it. The debate in fact dates back to the first stages of the progressive incorporation of Martinique into the French Metropolis, the *Mère-Patrie*, beginning with the abolition of slavery on the island in 1848 and, most importantly, with the declaration by the French Constitution of Year III that "French colonies are an integral part of the territory [of France] and are subject to the same constitutional law."<sup>399</sup>

If we consider the discourse of *assimilation to/association with/independence from* France in *A Tempest*, Prospero conforms to the prototype of the French white settler (the *béké*) who desires to remain on soil, claim the island for

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<sup>398</sup> Burton, *Assimilation or Independence? Prospects for Martinique*, 5.

<sup>399</sup> Quoted by Raymond Renard, in *La Martinique de 1848 à 1870*, 19.



himself and assert his power, pursuant to the historical establishment of the European plantocracy by the French colonists in the Caribbean. At the same time, Prospero's decision is illustrative of the dynamics of rapport, as well as the psychological interdependency, between the Colonizer and the Colonized, as Albert Memmi's argument has it.<sup>400</sup>

On the other hand, however, Caliban's stance on emancipation runs against Burton's claim of a desire by the black population to associate with France in hopes of obtaining social, economic and political advancement. While it can be argued that this position indicates a colonial paradigm different from Prospero's worldview – or simply that it highlights the uncompromising nature of the most extremist fringe of the independentist movement in Martinique – Caliban nonetheless desires to sever all ties with Prospero and reclaim the island from the one who has forfeited his entitlement rightfully inherited from his mother, Sycorax. On the other hand, Ariel's strategy for the pursuit of freedom is to work through patient collaboration with Prospero and leave Caliban alone to engage the oppressor with force. In this way, Caliban's liberation struggle is conducted on two

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<sup>400</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. In previous decades, this book was considered to be a "classic" on the interplay of power between colonizer and colonized. Contemporary critics have questioned Memmi's privileging of a Hegelian leaning. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* reads the colonizer-colonized dichotomy more through a psychoanalytic discussion.

levels: first, on a linguistic level, and second, by revolting against Prospero via an armed national liberation struggle.

Caliban's reclamation of his identity must first of all be accomplished through language. Actually, Caliban's Negritudist revolt through language is made possible through the recovery of his self-awareness. His rebellion is indeed an affirmation of the self, similar to that expressed by the speaker of Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*. It is a rejection of an imposed identity, and the construction of a new one, the kind of decolonization of the mind<sup>401</sup> professed by the liberating project of the *Cahier*. In a way, Caliban's "coming to consciousness" runs against Césaire's own contention that a true cultural liberation must be preceded by political independence.<sup>402</sup> In this case, the coming to consciousness leads to a reclamation of freedom. Furthermore, Caliban's awareness of his social, class, cultural and political condition permits him to come to terms with his oppressor Prospero; his struggle for liberation, as well as his rebuttal of Prospero's claim that Caliban needs him, are exemplary of the Black slave's attempt to do away with the so-called "dependency complex" of the colonized " [...]" that leads him neurotically to require, even anticipate, and naturally to accept the presence of Prospero the

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<sup>401</sup> That Césaire discusses this project in an interview with Lilyan Kesteloot in Kesteloot & Kotchy, *Aimé Césaire, l'Homme et l'œuvre*, 239-40.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid, 241-42.

colonizer [...]."<sup>403</sup> Both Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire vehemently reject this complex in their works, in chapter four of *Black Skin, White Masks*, and in *Discourse on Colonialism*, respectively.

In the process of reaffirming his cultural identity, Caliban must repudiate colonial assimilation and the subsequent depersonalization of the colonized subject that ensues from it, with its dreadful lot of self-denial, self-hatred inflicted upon the psyche of the native subject. This is the necessary stage encouraged by Negritude: that African-descended French Caribbeans renounce their “assimilated” subjectivity and embrace their African roots – the parallel of the “New Negro” movement popularized by the writers and theorists of the Harlem Renaissance of 1930s Black America. Furthermore, this phase is recognized by the Créolité triumvirate (Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant) as enabling the French Caribbean subject to negotiate her/his ultimate transition toward global Créolité, as defined in their famous book, *Éloge de la Créolité*.<sup>404</sup>

For Caliban, taking charge of his identity implies first of all rejecting the name given him by Prospero, in the same way that African-Americans exalted “black pride” at the peak of the Afrocentricity movement in the 1960s. This rejection is, as a matter of fact, the second stage of the liberation announced by

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<sup>403</sup> Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, 12.

<sup>404</sup> Confiant, Chamoiseau, and Bernabé. *Éloge de la Créolité*, 31.

Negritude, in which the Black person, after becoming aware of his/her condition as an assimilated subject, renegotiates his/her own cultural subjectivity. Rejecting an imposed name becomes a very important step, in view of the fact that names are heavily charged with political and cultural meanings. As the Shakespearian Caliban tells Prospero: "You taught me language, and my profit on't/Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/For learning me your language!"<sup>405</sup>

In Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête*, Caliban's ability to command Prospero's medium of expression and use it to demand respect and freedom is manifest right from the beginning. The following scene takes place when Caliban makes his first appearance on the stage, upon being summoned by Prospero to fetch for wood and water in preparation for supper to welcome his guests. After grumbling against his orders, Caliban makes his opinion heard in no uncertain terms:

CALIBAN. — *Uhuru!*

PROSPERO. — Qu'est-ce que tu dis?

CALIBAN. — Je dis *Uhuru!*

PROSPERO. — Encore une remontée de ton langage barbare. Je t'ai déjà dit que je n'aime pas ça. D'ailleurs, tu pourrais être poli, un bonjour ne te tuerait pas!

CALIBAN. — Bonjour. [...] Puisse le jour d'aujourd'hui hâter de dix ans le jour où les oiseaux du ciel et les bêtes de la terre se rassasieront de ta charogne !

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<sup>405</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 121.

PROSPERO. — Toujours gracieux je vois, vilain singe ! Comment peut-on être si laid! [...] <sup>406</sup>

Upon receiving Prospero's order to fetch for wood and water in preparation for a dinner with his guests, Caliban leaves grumbling, but he makes it clear to his master that he is rebelling against the sobriquet Prospero gave him:

Caliban. — [...] J'ai décidé que je ne serai plus Caliban.

Prospero. — Qu'est-ce que cette foutaise? Je ne comprends pas !

Caliban. — [...] je te dis que désormais je ne répondrai plus au nom de Caliban. [...] Caliban n'est pas mon nom. C'est simple ! [...] C'est le sobriquet dont ta haine m'a affublé et dont chaque rappel m'insulte.

Prospero. — Diable ! On devient susceptible ! Alors propose... Il faut bien que je t'appelle ! Ce sera comment? *Cannibale* t'irait bien, mais je suis sûr que tu n'en voudras pas! Voyons, Hannibal! Ça te va! Pourquoi pas! Ils aiment tous les noms historiques !

Caliban. — Appelle-moi X. Ça vaudra mieux. Comme qui dirait l'homme sans nom. Plus exactement, l'homme dont on a *volé* le nom. Tu parles d'histoire. Eh bien ça, c'est de l'histoire, et fameuse ! Chaque fois que tu m'appelleras, ça me rappellera le fait fondamental, que tu m'as tout volé et jusqu'à mon identité ! Uhuru! *Il se retire.* <sup>407</sup>

Krispin has commented on the fact that Caliban “crucially uses a foreign language - from the perspective of the colonizer - in order to assert his own identity and autonomy. He refuses [...] to be broken and conditioned, to be interpellated as the linguistic subject of the colonial master narrative; [...]” <sup>408</sup> Consequently, through the mastery of the European language, Caliban is able to make a claim to his universal right to express the cultural specificity of his

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<sup>406</sup> Césaire, *Une Tempête*, 24. For the English equivalent, see Césaire, *A Tempest* (Trans Miller), 18-19.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid, 27-28. For the English equivalent, see Césaire, *A Tempest* (Trans Miller), 21-22.

<sup>408</sup> Krispin, “Impetuous Temptation: Aime Césaire’s *A Tempest*, 22.

own “difference.”<sup>409</sup> Because it offers Caliban an opening to redefine the relationship between master and slave, the power of language flies in the face of Prospero’s linguistic supremacy.<sup>410</sup> The latter recognizes this new power in Caliban – but refuses to acknowledge it. Corned as he is, Prospero’s programmed reaction is a resort to derision, mockery, verbal repression and censorship by dismissing Caliban’s “parole” as a bastardized version of the island’s vernacular: “Puisque tu manies si bien l’invective, tu pourrais au moins me bénir de t’avoir appris à parler. [...] Une bête brute que j’ai éduquée, formée, que j’ai tirée de l’animalité qui l’engangue encore de toute part !”<sup>411</sup> In the upcoming sections, I want to analyze the rationale behind Caliban’s advocacy of namelessness as well as its implications with identity politics and geographical location (the USA and the Caribbean). Likewise, I will strive to investigate the choice and deployment of the concept borrowed from the Kiswahili word “Uhuru”, its target audience(s), and its repercussions on our understanding of Césaire’s positions on the problem of freedom from both a localized and a globalized perspective.

As such, Caliban’s declaration to Prospero (“Call me X”) presents the possibility of more than one contextual interpretations of the play that goes

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<sup>409</sup> Alan Lawson and Chris Tiffin, "Conclusion: reading différence," in C. Tiffin and A. Lawson (eds.), *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*. 230-235.

<sup>410</sup> *Op Cit*, 22.

<sup>411</sup> Césaire, *Tempête*, 25. English equivalent, see Césaire, *A Tempest* (Trans Miller), English, 19.

beyond the textual reference to the context of the United States. In the first instance, the word "X" makes a direct localized linkage to a "controverted" black leader of the Civil Rights movements, Malcom X.<sup>412</sup> Within the context of the United States, it follows from the passage I referenced earlier that Caliban's refusal to answer by a name fraught with connotations of barbarity, savagery, cultural and mental retardation is triggered by the fact that the term "Caliban" is an insult assigned to him out of hatred. Caliban, therefore, is the Malcom X who rids himself of his Anglo-Saxon name and embraces the "X Factor," as the marker of the namelessness and invisibility of his African-American personae. This gesture is, on Caliban's part, a rejection of the European cultural order imposed by Prospero the enlightened colonizer. At the same time, it is suggestive of a rebirth to new possibilities, new identities made possible through the coming to consciousness of one's historical legacy of colonization and dehumanization. Similarly, Caliban's struggle to regain his island and his freedom is in sync with the project of the speaker of the *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*: reclaim the identity usurped from him by the slave merchants and colonizers, and work for the betterment of the socio-economic improvement of his people.

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<sup>412</sup> On the other hand, the term "Uhuru," a Swahili word that signifies "freedom," confers a more international flair; it has been used in certain Afrocentric circles (in Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean) as a symbol of Pan-African liberation. As paradoxical as the juxtaposition of the two semantic referents may seem to be (meanings?) in their application to a French Caribbean setting.

If we direct our critical lenses to a more global plane, it is my view that the play's references to the United States can be read back into the Caribbean and Martinican contexts, on the basis of the geographical grounding of the drama: an island, as opposed to the North American subcontinent. For a start, Prospero's erasure of Caliban's culture<sup>413</sup> echoes the practice prevalent in the French Caribbean, whereby assimilation policies undertaken by France in its colonies were very effective in transforming the subjects of the French empire into "civilized" French men and women through absolute conformity into French culture. Furthermore, even though the trend of ridding oneself of a name imposed by the (former) slave masters is less common in the French Caribbean than it is in the United States, it is equally an expression of a desire to forge new identities through a cultural rebirth of sorts.<sup>414</sup>

The cultural freedom imagined by Caliban through the recuperation of the power to name himself allows him to envisage his political freedom as well: I am talking particularly of the concept of "Uhuru," a word (as we have seen before) which he flaunts in Prospero's face as soon as he arrives onto the stage. Almquist invites us to consider that "Caliban's primal cry of *Uhuru*, [...] should not be construed as the petulant and isolated mouthing of some token

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<sup>413</sup> I mean the imposition of a European-inspired name, for instance.

<sup>414</sup> As advocated by the New Negro (during the Harlem Renaissance) and the Afrocentric movements in the United States, as well as by the Negritude and Créolité movements in the French Caribbean.



exoticism. It is nothing other than a call to militant solidarity among the dispossessed, and specifically the dispossessed among the African diaspora."<sup>415</sup> Almquist also insists that "*Uhuru* is essential to Césaire's revisionary project because it gives Caliban a voice, specifically an African voice" and that «it contributes to Césaire's overall project in creating a diasporic textual counter to Shakespeare."<sup>416</sup> Let us then consider the meanings that underlay the term, and the nuances of its application to the reading of Césaire's play. In Kiswahili, "Uhuru" refers first and foremost to "freedom" in a general sense. During the struggle for independence in Africa at the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, the term was used as an anthem by guerilla fighters engaged in national liberation movements – starting with the Kenyan Mau-Mau Liberation Front – as a leitmotiv for claiming political emancipation from the yoke of European colonialism. "Uhuru" was popularized by the support of then-Tanzanian President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who hosted numerous armed guerilla movements involved in the wars to liberate Southern African countries (Namibia, Angola, Rhodesia, Mozambique, South Africa, etc.). As African colonies were demanding political self-determination based on the European nation-state model, "Uhuru" was then conflated with "independence" of the kind accompanied

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<sup>415</sup> Almquist, 587-88.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, 591.

by the recovery of territorial sovereignty. “Uhuru” later acquired international currency within the diasporic black world, especially in the USA during the Civil Rights struggle where it became a patriotic hymn for the Black Panther Movement, as well as for the Afrocentricity cultural current promulgated by Maulana Karenga.<sup>417</sup>

Therefore, by borrowing a loaded concept (“Uhuru”) from an African language (Kiswahili) with a wide audience<sup>418</sup> – but whose origin is far removed from the setting of the Caribbean and North-American locus – Césaire is engaging in a very clever linguistic play that responds to three imperatives. First, on the surface, the use of an African language can be read as a nativist recuperation of African culture that is both demonstrative of Césaire’s commitment to and in alignment with his conception of cultural Negritude – the yearning for an African cultural essence attained through linguistic authenticity. Secondly, the presence of Kiswahili accommodates the globalizing value of the term “Uhuru” in response to a Pan-African

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<sup>417</sup> The Afrocentricity Movement spearheaded by Karenga and others is a Negritudinist moment in itself, through the recuperation of African cultural forms of identity, as well as the invention of cultural traditions that respond more to the needs of African-Americans in the US: Rituals such as “Kwanzaa” were invented to counter the perceived hegemony of the Christian celebration of Christmas.

<sup>418</sup> Kiswahili is perhaps the most spoken local African language on the continent, spanning from the Northern part of East-Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Eastern Congo, Mozambique, the northeastern part of South Africa). In the early years of the African Union (during the era of its ancestor, the OAU – Organization of African States), Kiswahili was almost adopted as *the* unifying and working language for the entire continent to counter the divisions posed by the “corrupting” and divisive usage of European languages). The motion was sabotaged by ex-colonial powers of Europe and the United States.

transcontinental reclamation of freedom in Africa during the independence movements in the 1960s, as well as the Civil Rights struggle in the USA. Thirdly, on a deeper level, I am arguing that Césaire chooses to *not* set a clear demarcation within the nuances (and their rather huge implications) of the word “Uhuru” in terms of whether he implies universal freedom or localized political independence. This ambivalence, in turn, blurs the boundaries between the North American location – which Césaire claims to be assigning to the drama – and its unstated allusion to the Caribbean. Therefore, the conflation of these two possibilities is a safe position that allows him to *not* expose his true political leanings as regards the independence and self-determination debate. Césaire thus disavows opting for one paradigm or the other; so doing, he resists being pigeon-holed into any particular position on the spectrum of political emancipation and sovereign territorial nation-state formations pertaining to Martinique.

This hesitancy between emancipation on one hand, and independence associated with territorial sovereignty on the other, is maintained throughout the play. Even at the end of the drama, Césaire doesn’t present the reader-spectator with a preference for either of these alternatives. I shall revisit this debate toward the conclusion of this chapter. For now, our discussion calls for an examination of Caliban’s and Ariel’s stance on the complex political stakes that challenge their individual understanding of and quest for freedom, in

addition to their standing on the best avenues for pursuing freedom from Prospero's bondage.

Even though Caliban and Ariel both share the ambition of reclaiming their freedom from their master, it is mostly their differing liberation strategies that Césaire aspires to engage. Caliban's and Ariel's advocacy of sociopolitical change reveals two completely different positions, starting with Caliban. In the last scene of Act I (Scene 2), we have seen the germination of Caliban's fight against Prospero's domination and his efforts at reclaiming his identity. At the opening of Act II (Scene I), from the moment the curtains rise, we are introduced to Caliban working the fields (as per Prospero's orders), and singing what can be construed as African labor songs. It is the kind of chants that are vocalized as a choir by farmers in Africa working together in agricultural fields, so as to keep themselves motivated and make faster progress as a group organized in a cooperative ("Ujamaa").<sup>419</sup> What makes this episode interesting is Césaire's introduction of Shango, the god of thunder and lightning, and of war. The name "Shango" is stated to derive from "*shan*" ("to strike violently") and "*go*" (to bewilder, confuse, perplex, daze, confound). The thunderbolt that is associated with this sky-god presages something very

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<sup>419</sup> The practice of these commune-typed based group labour was a common practice all over Africa. In Tanzania, where Julius Nyerere decided to officialise this means of agricultural production (almost as cultural Negritude in action), these were referred to as "Ujamaa", i.e. African Socialism.

destructive, terrible, severe, and sudden.<sup>420</sup> Caliban presents Shango the god as a person who can act with fury or with sudden irresistible force. In addition, Shango is also a Rebel, and his significance has been appropriated in Latin America and the Caribbean as symbol of resistance against the cultural domination and enslavement of People of African descent by Europeans. In this context, Caliban's chants take on a more preeminent significance when he declares:

Ne lui offrez pas de siège, à votre guise! C'est sur votre nez qu'il prendra son assise ! Pas une place sous votre toit ! C'est votre affaire! Le toit, il le prend de force et s'en couvre la tête! Qui veut en conter à Shango fait mal son compte! Shango, Shango ho!<sup>421</sup>

In this passage, there is a phonetic interplay between the words "conter" and "compte." While the first one refers to the recitation of stories or narrating tales, the second word ("compte") refers more to fate, reaping what one has sown. All in all, Shango doesn't play games; the refusal to accommodate his presence or the needs of his people (i.e. refuse him shelter) may result in him forcing his entry into a home or space which he feels is his (or which he feels he deserves). Therefore, since wielding the thunderbolt is definitely one of the many prerogatives of the sky-god, Shango is the one deity to be feared the most as he is fearless himself: he is capable of striking the disobedient very

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<sup>420</sup> <http://cubanyoruba.blogspot.ca/2007/05/shango.html>. Accessed Dec. 13, 2015.

<sup>421</sup> Césaire, *Une Tempête*, 35. The English version can be found in Césaire, *A Tempest* (Trans. Richard Miller), 23.

hard, when one least expects it. Hence, the above quote acts as a clear warning to both Prospero and Ariel that Caliban's journey toward freedom may involve violence if he is forced into that position. This stance bears direct relevance to the debate over what means are more practical and tactical in pursuing freedom per se, from the perspective of two subaltern slaves whose treatment is racialized by their master, Prospero.

As I mentioned before, the addition of racial categories in the dramatic plot allows us to contextualize, in general terms, the problem of the Civil Rights struggle within the context of the USA – and that of Martinique (which I will discuss in the following section). We can do so by analyzing the emancipatory methods espoused by the most prominent Black leadership of the 1960s in the United States, namely Malcom X, the Black Panther Movement, and Martin Luther King, Jr: violent rebellion as opposed to non-violent, pacific “collaboration” with the oppressor. Black leadership is therefore associated with the methods used to pursue freedom. In this discursive realm, it is worth quoting in full the conversation that Ariel initiates following Caliban's labor chants, as it is quite illuminating:

ARIEL - Salut, Caliban! Je sais que tu ne m'estimes guère mais après tout nous sommes frères, frères dans l'esclavage, frères aussi dans l'espérance. Tous deux nous voulons la liberté, seules nos méthodes diffèrent.

CALIBAN - Salut à toi. Ce n'est quand même par pour me faire profession de foi que tu es venu me voir ! Allons, Alastor ! C'est le vieux

qui t'envoie, pas vrai? Beau métier : exécuteurs des hautes pensées du Maître!

ARIEL - Non, je viens de moi-même. Je suis venu t'avertir. Prospero médite sur toi d'épouvantables vengeances. J'ai cru devoir de te mettre en garde.

CALIBAN - Je l'attends de pied ferme.

ARIEL - Pauvre Caliban, tu vas à ta perte. Tu sais bien que tu n'es pas le plus fort, que tu ne seras jamais le plus fort. A quoi te sert de lutter?

CALIBAN - Et toi? A quoi t'ont servi ton obéissance, ta patience d'oncle Tom, et toute cette lèche ? Tu le vois bien, l'homme devient chaque jour plus exigeant et plus despotique.

ARIEL - N'empêche que j'ai obtenu un premier résultat, il m'a promis ma liberté. A terme, sans doute, mais c'est la première fois qu'il me l'a promise.

CALIBAN - Du flan! Il te promettra mille fois et te trahira mille fois. D'ailleurs, demain ne m'intéresse pas. Ce que je veux, c'est, *il crie*

«Freedom now!»

ARIEL - Soit. Mais tu sais bien que tu ne peux l'arracher maintenant et qu'il est le plus fort. Je suis bien placé pour savoir ce qu'il a dans son arsenal.

CALIBAN - Qu'en sais-tu? La faiblesse a toujours mille moyens que seule la couardise nous empêche d'inventorier.

ARIEL - Je ne crois pas à la violence.

CALIBAN - À quoi crois-tu donc ? À la lâcheté? À la démission? À la génuflexion? C'est ça! On te frappe sur la joue droite, tu tends la joue gauche. On te botte la fesse gauche, tu tends la fesse droite; comme ça, pas de jaloux. Eh bien, très peu pour Caliban!

ARIEL - Tu sais bien que ce n'est pas ce que je pense. Ni violence, ni soumission. Comprends-moi bien. C'est Prospero qu'il faut changer. Troubler sa sérénité jusqu'à ce qu'il reconnaisse enfin l'existence de sa propre injustice et qu'il y mette un terme.

CALIBAN - Oh là là! Laisse-moi rigoler! La conscience de Prospero! Prospero est un vieux ruffian qui n'a pas de conscience.

ARIEL - Justement, il faut travailler à lui en donner une. Je ne me bats pas seulement pour ma liberté, pour notre liberté, mais aussi pour Prospero, pour qu'une conscience naisse à Prospero. Aide-moi, Caliban.

CALIBAN - Dis donc, mon petit Ariel, des fois, je me demande si tu n'es pas cinglé! Que la conscience naisse à Prospero? Autant se mettre devant une pierre et attendre qu'il lui pousse des fleurs !

ARIEL - Tu me désespères. J'ai souvent fait le rêve exaltant qu'un jour, Prospero, toi et moi, nous entreprendrions, frères associés, de bâtir un monde merveilleux, chacun apportant en contribution ses qualités propres : patience, vitalité, amour, volonté aussi, et rigueur, sans compter les quelques bouffées de rêve sans quoi l'humanité périrait d'asphyxie.

CALIBAN - Tu n'as rien compris à Prospero. C'est pas un type à collaborer. C'est un mec qui ne se sent que s'il écrase quelqu'un. Un écraseur, un broyeur, voilà le genre! Et tu parles de fraternité!

ARIEL - Alors, que reste-t-il? La guerre? Et tu sais qu'à ce jeu-là Prospero est imbattable.

CALIBAN - Mieux vaut la mort que l'humiliation et l'injustice... D'ailleurs, de toute manière, le dernier mot m'appartiendra... À moins qu'il n'appartienne au néant. Le jour où j'aurai le sentiment que tout est perdu, laisse-moi voler quelques barils de ta poudre infernale, et cette île, mon bien, mon œuvre, du haut de l'empyrée où tu aimes planer, tu la verras sauter dans les airs, avec, je l'espère, Prospero et moi dans les débris. J'espère que tu goûteras le feu d'artifice : ce sera signé Caliban.

ARIEL - Chacun de nous entend son tambour. Tu marches au son du tien. Je marche au son du mien. Je te souhaite du courage, mon frère

CALIBAN - Adieu, Ariel, je te souhaite bonne chance, mon frère.<sup>422</sup>

In Ariel's eyes, his privileged position as an insider in the master's house (a "house nigger" for some) produces a feeling of entitlement to claim superiority over Caliban because *he only* "knows" what Prospero has got in store for Caliban. Ariel's suggestion to change Prospero's propensity for violent repression through patience by working on his conscience parallels Martin Luther King, Jr's proposed response - Gandhi-like non-violent resistance - in the face of White oppression in the 1960s: a Christian

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid, 23-26.



brotherhood and sisterhood urging its devotees to resist their oppressors through civil disobedience until the latter realize that their violence has no place in American society. As Césaire himself puts it, if Ariel is in favor of non-violence and collaboration within Prospero's colonial apparatus, it is because he has been favored by his master: he is an "Uncle Tom" who has experienced the least suffering at the hands of Prospero. The liberation that he proposes, then, cannot be but non-violence and cooperation with the despot in order to act on his conscience so he will realize the inhumanity of his acts.<sup>423</sup> Hence, Ariel's self-imposed mission focuses on liberating his oppressor, Prospero, from the mental slavery of his ignorance about the "Other", as well as from his addiction to power and "Othering."

In this context, therefore, the advocacy for the use of force calls for a discussion of the moral justification and epistemological legitimacy of political violence. In the paragraphs below, I want to examine Caliban's response through the lenses of Frantz Fanon's conception of the issue "Concerning Violence," which is also the title of the second chapter of his ground-breaking book *The Wretched of the Earth* – his study of the decolonization process in Algeria, Africa and the Third World. In this work, Fanon engages an examination of various (five) notions of violence: brute force, infliction of

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid, 25.

physical and/or psychological injuries, physical aggression, coercion, as well as militancy (radicalism in its extreme form). While the first four are a reflection of the violence inflicted by the colonizer, militancy is the violence of the oppressed, which is itself triggered by and is a response to the violence of the oppressor. The radicalization of violence is born because the oppressed is denied any opening allowing him/her the enjoyment of freedom, as minimal as it may be. Fanon then goes on to analyze the decolonization process, which he discerns in two categories: first, the physical recovery of native territorial sovereignty from the imposed dominion of the colonizing country; second, the decolonization of the mind and consciousness of the colonized subject from the psychological alienation inflicted by colonization. In Fanon's view, violence is required to do both because "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon."<sup>424</sup> Since colonization uses violence as its *raison d'être* both in the conquest of new territories and in the maintenance of the colonial apparatus through subjugation, violence becomes a "necessary evil" and an unavoidable route used by the oppressed in the pursuit of freedom. The initial force can only be met with force to counterbalance and negate the detrimental effect of the former; in fact, violent struggle is an essential agent for colonized peoples to achieve independence. It becomes an intrinsic part of the decolonization

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<sup>424</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 99.

process because the oppressor does not give away his power voluntarily. And for decolonization to be considered as successful, destruction of the old colonial order must be total.<sup>425</sup>

Pursuant to this line of reasoning, Césaire - by emphasizing Caliban's rebellion (symbolized by Malcom X) - rejects the Christian doctrine of passivity, defeatism, silent resignation and acceptance of one's fate. In point of fact, Caliban's position is a direct reflection of Malcom X's earlier philosophy of resistance against US organized state repression through the exercise of violence as a means of self-defense<sup>426</sup> "by any means necessary": an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Therefore, if we accommodate a reading that locates the play in the North American context ("étatsunien"),<sup>427</sup> the infusion of the historical Malcom X, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black Panther Movement becomes a logical explanation. Prospero's repressive methods can then be viewed as a metaphoric representation of J. Edgar Hoover's policy of fierce repression of the Black Panther Movement (BPM) in the 1960s, as well as the

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>426</sup> In real life, Malcom X will later seek collaboration with Martin Luther King Jr. due to his disillusionment toward Elijah Mohammed, and his ensuing realization of the similarity of goals pursued.

<sup>427</sup> Rafael Confiant prefers the use of this term as resistance to the totalizing and reductionist term "American" because it appropriates an entire continent to refer to a single dominant part of the larger ensemble of the Americas (Canada, Mexico, Central and Latin America).

targeted assassinations of Malcom X,<sup>428</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Eldridge Cleaver and prominent members of the BPM. In Caliban's mind, it is better to die with dignity and pride than live in constant humiliation. Thus, Césaire's view of Caliban's role is Fanonian in many ways: given that Caliban's options are limited, the only solution he eyes for seizing his opening to freedom and political agency, is violence. In the end, Césaire's consideration is that the tension between the two differing emancipatory routes discussed above – violence versus non-violence – is mostly a struggle between two orders (forcible colonial oppression and emancipatory armed resistance), one seeking to destroy the other through the same means, violent rebellion as the only response to violent oppression.

In this regard, when we broaden the scope of our discussion of space from the intended literal North American context of the play to the Caribbean, situating the drama within a Martinican environment – in terms of both local politics and Césaire's own circumstances – deserves serious consideration owing to two factors: the racialization of the cast in the drama, but also the socio-political climate in Martinique in the 1960s. The introduction of racial categories to the already charged social positioning of the two slaves enables us, therefore, to discuss the socio-cultural legacy of French colonialism in the

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<sup>428</sup> Although the finger that pulled the trigger points to Nation of Islam (Elijah Mohamed and Louis Farakkan), there have been allegations that the FBI might have offered tacit (but mum) acquiescence for the operation.

Caribbean (as I have argued earlier in this chapter), especially the privileged position of the Békés and the Mulattos in Martinique (and Guadeloupe for that matter), who mediate the politico-economic links between the French metropolis and the rest of the Black population in Martinique.

Pursuant to my argument above, the strain between violence and non-violence as a means of achieving self-determination is also one issue that has affected politics in Martinique for at least a century. As a matter of fact, parallels can be found between Caliban's violent revolt in the play with the wave of radical independentist movements that made sporadic appearances since the mid-nineteenth century, each being a radicalized version of the previous ones. Citizen revolts have an ancestry dating back to 1846, the year of the introduction of the Departmentalization Law: riots shook up the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, inspired by the ideals of Haitian Revolution led by Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jacques Dessalines. Two years later (1848), Martinicans took to the streets of Fort-de-France making the following demands: the expulsion of the békés (French Creoles born in the French Caribbean islands) and the French themselves; they were calling for the instauration of a Martinican Republic, as well as the redistribution of land. In 1959, the OJAM (Organisation Anti-Colonialiste de la Jeunesse Martiniquaise) organized revolts which were crushed by France's anti-riot police in Fort-de-

France before the Christmas of 1962.<sup>429</sup> Therefore, while these popular uprisings claiming social and political changes re-ignite the debate about redefining the political rapport between Martinique and France,<sup>430</sup> Césaire finds it *timely* to re-engage the problem of Martinique's political emancipation by *detouring* (as he often does) his investigation through the United States. Since he had already announced that the last play of his tryptic drama would concern itself with an exploration of "la condition des Nègres en Amérique." Once again, his response to the popular pushback against the introduction of "his" Departmentalization Law is mediated through literature.

I want to close this section with a discussion of power (visible and invisible) in the play (the balance power or lack thereof), examining how the asymmetrical relations of power<sup>431</sup> are distributed among the three main protagonists (Caliban, Ariel, and Prospero), as well as how power operates within the dynamic of their relationship within each other. In *Power: A Radical View*, Steven Lukes discusses power structures displayed in social arrangements in terms of authority that is visible and invisible. He argues that

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<sup>429</sup> The most radical of these movements was perhaps the *Alliance Révolutionnaire Caraïbe*, which exploded bombs more or less at the same time in Paris, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyana during the nights of May 28 and 29, 1983.

<sup>430</sup> In my interview with Rafael Confiant, the latter informed me that the pro-independentist movement was more alive than is usually given credit, citing certain municipalities, such as St-Anne, which displayed the Martinican Independence flag and refused to display the French flag!

<sup>431</sup> Almquist, 593.

visible power is more recognizable since it is, more often than not, hierarchical. Invisible power, on the other hand, involves a power disposition of deference, a herd mentality-like acquiescence, complying – without questioning – with other people’s interests even when they run against our own. This kind of power inclination is very advantageous in a context of oppressive servitude, because the oppressor doesn’t have to do anything to ensure compliance from his subjects.<sup>432</sup>

In Ariel’s case, his quest of freedom seems rather rhetorical as we don’t see him laying any postulate from Prospero, or engaging in concrete acts to fight for his emancipation – at least in comparison to Caliban. Ariel is content acquiescing to his slave status due to his fear of Prospero’s power. He fails to see *any* beacon of change beyond the apparent limitations to his personal agency, and embrace the spark of freedom. Ariel’s choice to live in a mental prison amplifies his conformity to his master’s slave society. The weight of Prospero’s invisible power interpellates his obedience to the master, while we expect him to claim his freedom - as Caliban does – and make alliances with the latter so as to overthrow Prospero’s regime.

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<sup>432</sup> Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 25-29.

On the contrary, Caliban consciously makes the decision that his enslavement by Prospero is not working out for him. Hence, he manages to conceptualize freedom via an epistemological understanding of Prospero's supposed power (and breaching it). For Caliban, this epistemic breach opens the door to claiming his freedom, drawing inspiration from the African conception of freedom – that it is a right we are all born with – as exemplified by the slaves who were born free on the motherland, and who resisted slavery fearlessly through marooning – even if that meant losing their life to assert their right to emancipation. Therefore, because he has abolished fear in his heart and mind, Caliban feels empowered to defy obedience to Prospero's orders in an instance of revolutionary fortitude comparable to the mass uprisings conducted by the African slave population in Haïti. Through resistance, Caliban is able to imagine and act upon his dream of freedom because he is mentally free of Prospero's shackles. It is precisely because mental freedom (decolonization of the mind) bears great potential for emancipation that Caliban is emboldened to take on Prospero and his military arsenal (ships, armada, firearms, etc.) In this sense, then, Caliban's revolt is not a "usurpation of power."<sup>433</sup> Rather, it is a recuperation and recovery of the power subdued from him by Prospero. Caliban's legitimate struggle for the

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<sup>433</sup> There has been a tendency to read the play as such by a euro-centered critique when discussing the power struggle between the two protagonists



recognition of his humanity, therefore, must pave the way for a reclamation of his ensuing right to universal freedom.

Despite the fact that Caliban's pursuit of liberty is morally unquestionable, it is nevertheless challenged by a reconciliation deficit between himself and Prospero, as well as by the absence of a concrete victory arising from his battle for freedom. For instance, if we compare Shakespeare's play to Césaire's adaptation, we observe that in the original, Prospero's willingness to forgive Ferdinand allows the former to consolidate his power through Ferdinand's marriage with his daughter, Miranda.<sup>434</sup> Once he is reassured of the success of his political ploy, he departs back to Europe. In Césaire's avatar, the narrative of reconciliation is emptied out by Prospero's refusal to return to homeland, and also due to Prospero's and Caliban's mutual resistance and refusal to yield any authority to one another, or share power with each other.

The ensuing unresolved tension forces us, then, to ask: how do we read the standoff that concludes Césaire's drama? What does it tell us about Césaire's consideration of the political relationship between Martinique and France? Shouldn't we perhaps read Prospero's decision to stay as demonstrative of the French settlers' fear and anxiety of losing grasp of their

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<sup>434</sup> Almquist, 593.

power over Caliban's territorial land (Martinique and the other DOM-TOMs)?

In *A Tempest*, the demise of Caliban's pursued goal (political emancipation) does not take away from the legitimacy of his demands: au contraire! At the same time, however, his inability to conduct a successful uprising questions the liberation narrative in the play. In purely tactical terms, this setback can be explained as a direct result of Prospero's military superiority,<sup>435</sup> as well as by the latter's ability to divide his subjects: the class-based alliance between Caliban on one hand, with Trinculo and Stephano on the other, fails mostly because of profound differences in their motivations for struggling for emancipation. In matter of fact, the European characters are more preoccupied with looting and enjoying the material rewards of their fight against Prospero, while Caliban is more concerned with reclaiming his dignity. As he tells Trinculo : "Laisse donc cela, imbécile, je te parle de dignité à conquérir et non de défroques à emporter!"<sup>436</sup> Not surprisingly, Ariel is the one who takes them as prisoners.

Prospero's decision to remain on the island further destabilizes our reading of the play; it invites us to think beyond the Shakespearean realm of reference of *The Tempest* to focus on an interpretation that transcends localized

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<sup>435</sup> The impressive anti-riot arsenal, tear gas machinery, etc. used by both the US government and France to quash civil unrest within their respective countries (in the 60s) and overseas department/territories.

<sup>436</sup> Césaire, *Une Tempête*, 79.

geographical considerations. Therefore, on a more profound level, the failure of Caliban's insurrection – at least in the eyes of the writer – reveals a more complex problematic: the dynamics of rapport between the colonizer and the colonized – and most importantly, the *psychological interdependency* between the two.<sup>437</sup> Indeed, at the end of the play, Césaire constructs an ending in which both Prospero and Caliban are fighting each other endlessly: Prospero's violent repression of Caliban is conversely matched by the latter's resistance and determination to struggle for his freedom until victory is achieved. In this regard, Césaire offers the following reading of the play's ending:

[...] the real drama in the United States is that Blacks and Whites cannot live separate from each other. They are stuck together like two prisoners tied to the same chain post. Like brothers – in some kind of sibling enmity. [In my play], for the two individuals who are forced to live together, there establishes between themselves a love-hate relationship: they cannot break the links that unite them.<sup>438</sup>

Hence, Césaire's insinuation that Prospero is unable to sever ties with Caliban implies that, in some convoluted way, the two foes need each other.

In this consideration, Césaire's argument reflects a belief that he holds in view of the "special relationship" (if not kinship) he feels, "paradoxically," toward France, French people and culture. In the previously mentioned

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<sup>437</sup> Césaire's reading appears to be a recuperation of these concepts from the works of Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, as well as Octave Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*.

<sup>438</sup> Beloux, "Aimé Césaire: Un Poète politique," 30. However, if we are to accept Césaire's explanation, Ariel leadership role is questionable in this political configuration and power arrangement.

interview by Françoise Vergès with Césaire, the latter, while answering a question on his position on Martinican independence (and the role of France in the affairs of Martinique), punctuates his reply in the following terms:

Nous avons une spécificité, ce qui ne nous empêche pas d'être amis. Il existe une vieille solidarité entre la France et nous. Pourquoi la rompre? Je suis martiniquais, j'aime beaucoup la France, qui est ce qu'elle est ; nous sommes solidaires, mais je suis un Martiniquais. Voilà le reproche que je fais au civilisationisme. Je ne suis pas devenu autre. Tu es toi et je suis moi.<sup>439</sup>

Stated with such candor, or perhaps in an unguarded moment of honesty at the end of his political career, Césaire's personal views seem to suggest that he doesn't envision Martinique as an entity existing apart from France politically – or that Martinicans are separable from France culturally. Hence, we can deduce that Césaire regards Martinique as a politico-social entity that appears to be stuck in a love-hate relationship with France for a myriad of complex reasons (cultural identity politics, economics, chief among others). The position expressed by Césaire in 2007 – that is, the a-posteriori bracketing of the independence scenario – reflects full circle his previous rejection and condemnation of territorial separatism: "I condemn any idea of Antillean independence ... But ... Martinican independence, desired, calculated, as reasoned and sentimental, will neither be de-graded nor under-graded."<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Vergès, *Nègre je suis, Nègre je resterai*, 33-34.

<sup>440</sup> Wilder, 106

After the Liberation of France in 1946, Césaire was dreaming of a France that would “... create a new state including overseas territories [whereby] the Antilles must enter on terms of unconditional equality.”<sup>441</sup> This «égalité dans la diversité» motto reminds us of Toussaint L’Ouverture’s musings of France imagined as a pluralistic society accommodating cultural particularity and political universality<sup>442</sup> in a worldwide Francophone embrace of the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity or, as I would like to call it, «soeurité». It is useful to reminisce that Toussaint had made a similar suggestion to Bonaparte and the Directorate of the New Republic after the 1789 French Revolution: maintain linkages between Haïti and France within an autonomous association in a preferential political and economic relationship. Therefore, thinking about Caliban’s and Prospero’s relationship as a pair of characters with an intertwined destiny in real present circumstances beyond the play’s metaphorical references, is not such a far-fetched idea.

Césaire’s explanation, as expressed in Vergès’ interview a few paragraphs earlier, serves to justify some of his equivocal positions on the political emancipation of Martinique, which he states were based on the citizens’ “readiness” (or lack thereof) for independence. I will be revisiting this issue in the concluding part of this chapter. But in the current state of affairs, if

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<sup>441</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>442</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 22.

a majority of Martinicans would not favor breaking off all ties with France at this particular historical juncture, it is mostly because they enjoy one of the best social benefits programs in the Caribbean, and not due to their unconditional love for France. What is more, if a complete break-up with France is unlikely in the foreseeable future (that is, independence through territorial sovereignty), it may be because of Martinique's peculiar neo-colonial condition (of being inside and outside of France at the same time). What is more, it may be so based on its different historical trajectory, which does not align with the circumstances necessary for "national" liberation in the "classical" post-colonial understanding of the concept. In fact, as I just alluded, what complicates the independence scenario is Martinique's peculiar status of being included in large ensembles (France to begin with, but also as a *de facto* member of the European Union) while, at the same time, it is kept at the periphery of French politics through its treatment of the island as an Overseas territory – even though it is considered as a full Department on paper.

Such a predicament has reopened the debate about the status of Martinique vis-à-vis France, one that has been sustained since the first introduction of the Departmentalization Law in 1846. I have pointed out, at the beginning of this chapter, Césaire's wavering positions on the issue of the "decolonization" of Martinique, ranging from incorporation within France as

a Department *à part entière* (assimilation), to autonomy, sovereignty, and independence. These shifting stances taken over the decades since the 1950s, came to closer scrutiny in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when theorists of the Créolité movement began labelling them as inconsistent with Césaire's Third Worldist hardline militancy as expressed in his literary production. Hence, most of this opprobrium directed at Césaire's political praxis - which castigates his positions as "selling out" (due to his political compromises) - recuperates, without much thorough questioning, Rafaël Confiant's binary view of and rigid judgment about Césaire's political decisions as if this is a black and white issue. So doing, this critique ignores the shades of gray that permeate the treacherous milieu of politics, which often provokes an important shift away from the idealism of emancipation from oppressive regimes of political, socioeconomic, and cultural domination deployed during centuries of European colonial empires.

Furthermore, painting Césaire with a black and white stroke is as much an unfair judgment of his political work as it is equally a wilful ignorance of his numerous interventions at the French National Assembly and in other public fora criticizing France for digging its heels in the implementation of the

Departmentalization Law,<sup>443</sup> among other perceived political breaches. In this regard, Caliban's refusal of Prospero's patronizing attitude toward him mirrors Césaire's rebellion against French paternalism toward its "native" citizens in the Overseas Departments. Congruently, Césaire has extensively denounced France's treatment of Martinique administratively "as a colony"<sup>444</sup> even after the official "enactment" of the Law of Departmentalization granting the island full and equal standing as with other metropolitan Departments.

Therefore, a fairer assessment requires we take a fresh look at both Césaire's body of political work and the evolution of his stances on assimilation and separatism – especially now that records are available to Césaire's scholars and the general public since his death in 2008. As well, any such examination must take into consideration the global historical and geopolitical context within which he was operating, most specifically discussions on the so-called "controversy" related to his views on independence, autonomy and assimilation, but mostly his decision to spearhead Martinique's full administrative integration into Metropolitan France. In so doing, we can then begin to understand - without necessarily approving them - Césaire's tergiversations, hesitations and dilemmas. Any

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<sup>443</sup> Wilder, "Césaire, decolonization, Utopia," 104. Although the law was pronounced an edict in 1846, it was reintroduced by Césaire and three other DOM-TOM legislators in 1946. However, it was not fully enacted until 1948.

<sup>444</sup> Césaire, *Speeches at the National French Assembly*. In Hale & Véron, *Les Écrits d'Aimé Césaire*.



such approach equally entails that we revisit his appropriation of Toussaint's political legacy as the first "French" emancipated Caribbean political theorist to venture working through the problem of political emancipation from servitude and the management of freedom for African slaves in the face of an imposing adversary, France's Napoleon Bonaparte.

Hence, having drank at the same well as Toussaint his political ancestor, Césaire's thinking on the political status of Martinique has evolved since his original push for enshrining the Departmentalization Law on the French political landscape in 1946. His political ideology gained better clarity through the writing of *Toussaint L'Ouverture: la Révolution Française et le Problème Colonial*; the latter helped him come to grips with the ambiguities of the different forms of freedom he was trying to negotiate for Martinique, via an understanding of Toussaint's political philosophy.

Indeed, Césaire has long struggled to decide whether full-fledged political emancipation accompanied by territorial secession from France was the right path for Martinique's future as a "nation," as he liked to call his native land. Thus, in our attempt to comprehend the rationale behind Césaire's seemingly eternal dilemma, an examination of Gary Wilder's conception on *temporality* helps resituate Césaire's political reasoning through the lenses of his theory on the timeliness and untimeliness of historical events. Developed in his essay titled "Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization,

Utopia,” – and with greater depth in his most recent book *Freedom Time* (2015) – Gary Wilder recontextualizes accepted notions of freedom by challenging how narratives of anti-colonial struggle posit territorial sovereignty as a prerequisite for (or as a necessary and logical consequence of) political independence and emancipation. As John Walsh does in *Free and French in the Caribbean*,<sup>445</sup> Wilder retraces the history of anti-colonial discourses within the French Caribbean in an effort to explain that post-emancipation political self-determination doesn’t necessarily entail territorial sovereignty – a viewpoint retrieved from Toussaint. He emphasizes Césaire’s refusal to be trapped in seemingly contradictory binarisms,<sup>446</sup> embracing, instead, the view that “concepts, ideals, realisms” – which at first might seem to be working in opposition with each other (integration versus separatism for instance), can be contemporaneous with one another and coexist side by side.<sup>447</sup> This tension informs Césaire’s struggle to reconcile the ends (i.e., socio-economic self-sufficiency for Martinicans to avoid a repetition of the failed promises of the Haitian Revolution), with the means (i.e., integration *with* versus independence *from* France). And for Césaire, the ends supersede the means in the attainment of the pursued goal, in as much as independentist separatism

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<sup>445</sup> In a telephone conversation I had with him on January 6, 2015, John Walsh acknowledges his intellectual indebtedness toward Gary Wilder’s conception of “temporality” in relation to anti-colonial emancipation discourses in the French Caribbean.

<sup>446</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 22.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

becomes a secondary formalistic pursuit, depending on the moment that is (or feels) right at a particular point in history.

Césaire's position, in the instance described above, conveniently fits into the "timeliness" of political events within given historical circumstances, in which the former are opportune and well-timed, occurring at a suitable time. Gary Wilder's formulation of "untimeliness" disrupts the notion of *temporality* pertaining to the post-war era of the decolonization of the Third World – specifically "as a time for freedom" – as well as "to the peculiar temporal dynamics that were set into motion"<sup>448</sup> as through the same post-colonial emancipation process. In this context, Wilder discusses "how 'untimely' practices, processes, and objects" challenge (positively so) our appreciation of history and of the politics surrounding our interpretation of it. Looking at the post-WW II era as a "moment [...] marked by untimely repetitions and re-enactments," he asserts that "untimeliness," in this case, is to be understood as a process whereby the commonly accepted view of history as a linear continuum of time "[is] interrupted, tenses blurred, and periods (seem to) interpenetrate, when figures like [...] Césaire wrote and acted *as if* they belonged to different epochs, whether past or future."<sup>449</sup> Wilder goes on to state that Césaire (and Senghor for that matter) "engaged [their] predecessors

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<sup>448</sup> *Jadaliyya Online*. [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/22483/new-texts-out-now\\_gary-wilder-freedom-time\\_negritude](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/22483/new-texts-out-now_gary-wilder-freedom-time_negritude). Web. Accessed January 25, 2016

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*

as contemporaries<sup>450</sup> and addressed future generations proleptically.”<sup>451</sup> Within such perspective, these forward thinkers “identified vital possibilities that were crystallized within seemingly outmoded projects or dwelling within present arrangements even as they anticipated worlds that had not yet arrived through acts of political imagination and utopian conjuring of seemingly impossible alternatives.”<sup>452</sup> I want to argue that Césaire’s political imagining of Martinique as a political utopia was at play here. While mulling on possible scenarios for Martinique’s political emancipation from France (or a self-governing administrative entity *within* the French empire as I have stated earlier), Césaire was trying to anticipate potential objections – from both the French colonial empire and from the people that he was charged to represent – in order to answer them in advance, in an effort to conciliate all positions.

Pursuant to the line of reasoning above, Wilder advises that “[Césaire] emphasized that the revolutionary awakening must be initiated by the people of Martinique themselves, through direct action. *Change* would have to be *seized not requested, invented not inherited*.”<sup>453</sup> He then goes on to quote Césaire

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<sup>450</sup> This is certainly the case of Césaire’s retrieval of Toussaint L’Ouverture’s political legacy and the latter’s investigation of various engagements with France as equal partners within a political and economic union.

<sup>451</sup> Op Cit. This term is to be understood as the assigning of a person or event to a period earlier than the actual one; the representation of something in the future as if it already existed or had occurred. It is prochronism, as opposed to anachronism.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 32.

as saying: “We want to live passionately. And it is the blood of this country that will decide [“statuer”] in the last instance.”<sup>454</sup> I want to emphasize the significance of the blood metaphor, in the sense that the theme reappears at a moment in Martinican history when the independentist movement was picking up steam more prevalently than in previous years. The emphasis on “seizing the right moment” becomes critical in understanding the operating framework of Césaire’s political tactics. For on the question of national independence, Césaire’s approach – so he says – is to be predicated on the position of Martinican citizens as regards the project of claiming full territorial sovereignty, as if his own volition – at least in theory – must respond to “the will of the people:” a safe stance, I submit, from which he can shield himself from any blame or criticism for his decision to reintroduce the 1846 bill in 1946 and have it enacted into legislation.<sup>455</sup>

In this context, I would like to revisit three stages in Césaire’s doctrine on the issue, which are illustrative of his ambivalence on the question of assimilation, integration, autonomy, independence, territorial sovereignty, etc. Let us imagine, for a moment, the evolution of Césaire’s positions on this question as a political symphony in three movements. In the first movement, Césaire starts by asserting that *Martinicans have the right to independence, when*

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>455</sup> Wilder points out that the 1946 Departmentalization Law was not implemented until 1948.

*they see the time and circumstances fit the occasion* (my emphasis). On this particular point, Césaire has often argued that he was waiting for the right historical opening (“the” best moment within “timeliness”) that would allow him to accord and harmonize the claims and wishes of Martinicans for political emancipation with the prevalent historical and political mood both in Martinique and within the French Overseas bureaucracy (the “political climate” in France). The second stage has to do with outright radical separatism. When frustrated with France’s patronizing and paternalistic attitude toward Martinique during his tenure as its elected Deputy at the French National Assembly (which he held concurrently as Mayor of Fort-de-France), Césaire – in a *Calibanesque* approach toward the search of freedom – would make statements such as “the time for independence has come, and we’re going to demand it.”<sup>456</sup> The third movement, however, would negate the independentist proclamations of the second stance, standing in sharp contrast with his other public declarations in the mid-to-late 1990s on this issue. Hence, at the conclusion of the latest public debates on separatism and independence in that decade, the Martinican citizenry was dumbfounded when Césaire suddenly announced that he was imposing a moratorium on the question of independence in May 1981, creating much more rumpus than

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<sup>456</sup> In an interview I had with the author himself on Easter Monday in April 2003 at the Mairie of Fort-de-France.

before. Was this, on Césaire's part, a manifestation of his mistrust in the Martinicans' ability to decide what is best for them? The jury is still open on this issue. But perhaps a clue can be found in an episode showcasing Césaire in a meeting in Fort-de-France at the height of public debates on independence. In the documentary movie *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire* by Euzhan Palcy, Césaire is shown (with rather unusual passion) addressing a crowd of Martinicans during a political rally, when he asks the question: "Est-ce que les Martiniquais sont prêts à payer le prix et à verser leur sang"?<sup>457</sup>

The above statement making reference to the "blood that must be shed" is quite important, in that Césaire knows that France would not acquiesce that a Département d'Outre-Mer (DOM), even though physically remote administratively from Metropolitan France, be "permitted" to secede and acquire an independent status: letting go of a DOM would have a domino effect on the rest of the three remaining Overseas Departments (Guyana, Guadeloupe, Île de la Réunion) – that the latter may then want to become independent, secede, or request autonomous status. Such a predicament, it is feared, would not only diminish the strategic presence of France in the Americas, but would also threaten its economic, military and strategic

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<sup>457</sup> He is implying that Martinicans are used to a certain comfort of social benefits (bénéfices sociaux, la sécurité sociale) coming from France that they may not be ready to relinquish if they become independent, and sever all ties with France. He is possibly pointing to the idea that some Martinicans may want to have it both ways (keep the benefits and become independent). See Euzhan Palcy's movie, *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire*.

interests in the region: take, for instance, the Ariane Spatial Program (the French equivalent of NASA) based in French Guyana.<sup>458</sup> Furthermore, what explains away Césaire's reluctance *for* and ambivalence *toward* the territorial secession of Martinique, is the predicament of next door neighbor Haïti: the latter's independence was sabotaged by the major European nations controlling the slave trade in the Caribbean at the time (Britain, France, the United States), especially after L'Ouverture and Dessalines led the country to the successful liberation from France.<sup>459</sup> The above superpowers undermined and crippled any possibility of Haïti's autonomous development, thus creating a political vacuum that would pave the way for the advent of the rulership of tyrants, under the sanctioning eye, approval and supervision of the United States.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> La Guyane Française also exports of tropical agricultural produce to metropolitan France.

<sup>459</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/aug/16/haiti-france>. As a precondition for diplomatic recognition by France, Haiti extorted into paying ransom (referred to as "Haiti's debt of dishonor to France") as compensation for the "manqué à gagner" for money France and its colonists would have gained from the export of Haiti's economy (sugar cane, cotton, etc.). As well, it served as "reparations" and compensation for the assets of the French government and the loss of revenue by the French colonists. Haiti finished paying its debt to France in a decade ago. Originally set at 150 Million gold francs, it was reduced to 90 million gold francs. Considering inflation over 200 years, the total sum is valued at \$40 billion US dollars.

<sup>460</sup> The US interventionist policies in Haiti started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with greater involvement through the imposition of and support for the Duvalier regime, up to the overthrow and forced exile of freely elected President Bertrand Aristide by Bill Clinton in the mid-1990s. Some Haitian political circles currently allege the invisible hand of the US in the election of outgoing President Joseph Martelly, a former cabaret, night club and strip tease dancer.



In this context, we should recall the “wisdom from history,” a lesson that sobered Césaire during his stay in Port-au-Prince in 1944, where he witnessed first-hand the beginning of the radicalization of the François Duvalier regime: its brutal abuse of human rights, the political assassination of opponents, as well as the civil unrest that ensued up until the death of the dictator on April 21, 1971. As Césaire recounts to Françoise Vergès in *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai*, he laments the fate of Haïti, which he characterizes as “un pays supposément indépendant, mais où sévit la misère et la dictature.”<sup>461</sup> As for Haitian emancipation, he refers to it rather as a failed independence (“une indépendance râtée”). Césaire then goes on to challenge the necessity of fighting for political emancipation just for independence’s sake: “On est indépendant, et maintenant, quoi?”<sup>462</sup> he questions, in reference to Haïti’s 1804 independence proclamation. This stance pairs in with a rather satirical evaluation of the failed socio-economic outcomes of African independences, when in the 1980s-1990s an adage was commonly used: “L’Indépendance, est-ce que ça se bouffe?”

In this line of reasoning, we can hear in Césaire’s words resonances of the Québec independentist-separatist liberation discourse of the 1960s, which echo similar concerns expressed at the height of the debates on Québec’s

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<sup>461</sup> Vergès, 33-45.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid, 56-57.

independence, when the hardline separatist politicians (René Levesque, Bourassa, etc.) were advocating leaving the Canadian Union altogether. The more “reasonable” voices were cautioning the negative economic repercussions that could befall Québec should secession be implemented. The same anxieties played out during the last public referendum on the Question of separation in 1995, with threats of economic boycott of Québec and removal of the Province from NAFTA (businesses moving out, economic asphyxiation of the Province by the US and the rest of Canada). In this relation, we know that Césaire was following the debates on Québec separatism.<sup>463</sup> There is reason to suggest that by the time he published *A Tempest*, Césaire could have been thinking about the Québec-inspired scenario,<sup>464</sup> whereby the proposition of complete political and economic independence (followed by territorial sovereignty from the rest of Canada) was overshadowed by the maintenance of the “status-quo” with modifications: Québec staying in the Union, but with substantial powers given to the local provincial government – except in matters of Canadian national security – therefore allowing for an autonomous Québec “nation” within the Canadian federation.

Whatever the winning scenario, Césaire resisted the temptation of espousing abstract forms of liberty that were not accompanied by substantive

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<sup>463</sup> As Césaire indicated to me in my interview with him April 2003.

<sup>464</sup> As far as the 1995 Referendum on Quebec’s independence is concerned.

financial self-sufficiency and socio-economic security for Martinicans. Instead of giving in to the claims of independence “for independence’s sake,” he opted for what he calls a “calculated strategy” of negotiating with France, which can be summed up as follows: first of all, ensure the application of the shelved 1846 Law of Departmentalization so that Martinicans can enjoy economic benefits as well as social security (what Raphaël Confiant dismissively criticizes as France’s policy of “assistanat”).<sup>465</sup> Secondly, having ensured that Martinicans would have food on the table and a roof over their heads, *then* negotiate with France political freedom *from* the empire (or *within*, granted the island is given a great degree of political autonomy). But this move, in Césaire’s view, would have to be contingent upon two set of variables: the will of the Martinican people, and the political climate in France. In light of all these historical, political and economic considerations pertaining to Martinique, one is little surprised – in Césaire’s world – that those issues would be reflected in this aesthetics, namely the play under discussion.

As such, when I embarked on my study of *A Tempest*, I began by focusing on Césaire’s approach to examining the question of race in relation to bondage within the realm of the slave plantation economy, a system that

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<sup>465</sup> Confiant, *Aimé Césaire : une traverse paradoxale du siècle*.

pointedly reflects the dynamics of the tripartite relationship between Prospero and his subalterns on one hand (Ariel and Caliban), as well as between Caliban and Ariel on the other. I then continued on to investigate these key concerns against the backdrop of Césaire's own contestation of France's colonial yoke in Martinique, as much as his negotiation of various forms of political freedom for his "country" (including independence and territorial sovereignty).<sup>466</sup>

Arising from the power arrangement between the above characters are Caliban's and Ariel's legitimate claims to emancipation and self-determination (cultural, linguistic, political, etc.). I have indicated earlier that Ariel's reluctance to engage in muscled and assertive (violent) demands for emancipation from Prospero's domination is due in large part to his failure to project an image of himself as a "free" agent. But then, what about Caliban? What kind of freedom is he seeking? The *universal freedom* proclaimed by the French Jacobins in 1789 under the French national motto of "liberté, égalité, fraternité?" Is it related (closely or remotely) to the type of emancipation envisaged by Toussaint at the time of the first proclamation of Haitian independence? Or could it be fathomed to be – as the end of the play seems to suggest – a strategic approach on the writer's part desirous of having the best

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<sup>466</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 192.

of both worlds, i.e., maintaining loose linkages with the so-called “Mère-Patrie” while enjoying full autonomy – along with economic and social benefits – in matters of self-governance? All in all, Caliban’s struggle for freedom is articulated along two arcs – claims that are made concomitantly: political liberation, as well as cultural emancipation, with a strong emphasis on linguistic freedom enunciated along the lines of the Créolité’s politico-cultural philosophy and its reclamation for expressing the authenticity of Créole linguistic and cultural expressions. By the same token, Prospero’s suppression of Caliban’s language as “barbaric” is reflective of Césaire’s refusal to give Creole any special standing as a worthy tool of intellectual communication, as has been claimed by the tenors of the Créolité movement – rightly so, in this case.<sup>467</sup>

When considered within the setting of Gary Wilder’s concept of *temporality*, Caliban does not seek to negotiate any *future* emancipation, but demands an opening in the *here and now*. And unlike the acquiescent Ariel, Caliban is in a constant struggle to claim a “future present:” a freedom that is possible in the future but still remains elusive in the present due to Prospero’s continual foreclosure of any opening of liberty for Caliban. In the end, Caliban’s failed insurrection signifies, in Césaire’s perspective, the unrealistic

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<sup>467</sup> I am referring here to Césaire’s admission that he considers Creole to be a language of “immediacy.”

nature of the radical armed liberation movements in Martinique.

But why would he want to construct such an ending for this play? As a more plausible response to this question, I want to reiterate Césaire's skepticism regarding the benefits of achieving political emancipation unsubstantiated by economic independence. This is a problem that the leaders of the Haitian Revolution were confronted with from the moment of their final military victory over the French, and *the debate for Martinique is not to be closed as yet*. Hence, we can appreciate clearer how the ending of the play responds to this given, in as much as Caliban and Prospero are still entangled in a rhetorical struggle about freedom.

In fact, the suspension of the narrative of freedom at the end of the play is deliberate on Césaire's part, given that the tensions within the liberation discourse remain unresolved. What are, therefore, the implications for our reading of the play's finale? Césaire seems to suggest that nationalist political emancipation in Martinique must be, for better or worse, a constant negotiation that is *past* – historically resisted by France through its forcible ventures to reinstate slavery in the French Caribbean colonies (Guadeloupe and Martinique in the 1850s, and Napoleon's attempts at recolonizing Haïti in 1801). At the same time, the process of negotiating Martinique's status is *present* in the sense that it is contemporaneous to the period during which Césaire was writing the play – twenty years after the official adoption of the

1946 Departmentalization Law – overlapping, equally, into the three decades following the original publication of *A Tempest*. And as I have stated in the sections before, the future of the islanders’ claims (or whatever vestiges that are left of it) for political liberation via territorial sovereignty face serious hurdles in the face of the current status of Martinique as a full fledged member of the European Union. In these circumstances, the *present future* of Martinique as a sovereign nation-state is all the more uncertain, and the debate on its status, even more *untimely*, for present and future generations of Martinicans to attempt to resolve. Césaire leaves the issue open to negotiate a political arrangement that favors the imagined “ideal post-colony” of Martinique,<sup>468</sup> in which Caliban, Prospero (and Ariel the Mulatto in the background) are engaged in a relationship of cohabitation. In this regard, Prospero’s monologue at the end of the play sounds more like confession, begrudgingly, of a certain form of “kinship” he feels toward Caliban, than a summons. The staging directions in the closing episode of the play are quite revealing of the mood of the scene, after Alphonso and Gonzalo have exited the stage, and the curtain is lowered halfway and then re-raised. The semi-darkness projects a Prospero who is elderly and wearied, acting with spasmodic gesticulation while making pitchless and slurred utterances: “C’est

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<sup>468</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 2.

drôle, le climat a changé ... Fait froid, dans cette île .... Faudrait penser à faire du feu ... Eh bien, mon vieux Caliban, nous ne sommes plus que deux sur cette île, plus que toi et moi. Toi et moi! Toi-Moi! Moi-Toi! [...]."<sup>469</sup>

Caliban and Prospero's verbal exchange above, and the last in the play, opens the door for possible readings: starting with the epiphanic realization that they are the only two actors left on the socio-political stage on the island, Prospero's word interplay between the "self" (the "Moi") and the "other" (le "toi"), puts forward consideration for the occurrence of a symbiosis of personae into a new stage character named "Toi-Moi," then inverted into a "Moi-Toi," at the same time that two units of the new entity are assumed to have equal role and power in the forging of a new partnership. The "Oneness" of the "Toi-Moi" also suggests a merging of personalities into a common psyche, a communion of soul, consciousness and intellect. The stage characters become a unitary duo, and the fate of either of the two suddenly grows intertwined with that of the other. It is as though Prospero and Caliban metamorphose into evil twins, inseparable as it would be if conjoined at the heap, and who are forced to live in a perpetually conflictual and dysfunctional relationship. But the play's last line, when Prospero yells at Caliban wanting

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<sup>469</sup> Césaire, *Une Tempête*, 92.



to know where he is ("Mais qu'est-ce qu'il fout celui-là?")<sup>470</sup> is a stark reminder of who has the upper-hand in the new union. As far as Caliban is concerned, he can only achieve freedom through words while he punctuates the dénouement of the play with chants of freedom shouting: "Freedom Hi Day!" In the end, Caliban's emancipation is only verbal, never achieved, a dream constantly deferred, a goal to be pursued perpetually. As for their relationship, it is to be continuously renegotiated.

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<sup>470</sup> Ibid, 92.

## CONCLUSION

The end of the 18th century era of European Enlightenment saw the emergence of political emancipatory ideals enshrined in the proclamation of freedom universally. The popular opposition to the autocracy of monarchies championed democratic values based on the direct participation of the citizenry in the management of their individual rights vis-à-vis the supremacy of the European nation-state. This movement had important repercussions on the European colonial regimes engaged in slave labor exploitation in the New World. For hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans, the motto of the French Revolution (liberté, égalité, fraternité) that reached the shores of Haïti became the beacon of hope that would embolden the leaders of the San Domingo Revolution<sup>471</sup> (Toussaint L'Ouverture together with his politico-military entourage) to undertake a decade-long insurgency struggle against the yoke of French colonialism and the enslavement of transplanted Africans.

However, inherent in this ideal of liberty lay a fundamental contradiction, a tension between slavery and freedom, a paradox between the economic practice of forced labor exploitation of Africans in the Americas on one hand, and the politico-philosophical project of liberty<sup>472</sup> on the other, as Napoleon Bonaparte would prove through his forcible attempts at the

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<sup>471</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 98. He refers to the Haitian Revolution as "the most radical political revolution of that age."

<sup>472</sup> Buck-Morris, *Hegel, Haïti, and Universal Freedom*, 21-22.

foreclosure of freedom for the emancipated Haitians, by attempting to reinstall slavery in Haïti. By the same token, while the enforcement of slavery negated the tenets of the Age of Enlightenment, the discrepancy between this doctrine and slave labor<sup>473</sup> created a moral and ethical impasse, a space that would offer Toussaint and his comrades an opening within which to claim their inalienable right (as oppressed slaves) to freedom as a counter to the negation of their humanity. In his push to demand the application of these emancipatory ideals, Toussaint's strategy, therefore, was to negotiate a way out of this dead-end by proposing to Bonaparte different forms of association with France via mutually agreeable political arrangements that could serve their corresponding interests: freely associated but independent national entities, Haïti as a partner in a larger Francophone political community, etc.<sup>474</sup>

This opening of freedom is what interests me, first in the way it is interpreted by Toussaint L'Ouverture, as well as how he consequently capitalizes on this historic moment to engage the French colonial empire so as to ensure the success of the Haitian Revolution. The second aspect - the

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<sup>473</sup> In the minds of some of the European thinkers as regards the tolerance and acceptability of slavery and global capitalist exploitation of slave labor, this ambivalence rested on the fact that their notion of freedom applied *only* to people of their own kind, i.e. Europeans. Africans in the New World, despite the efforts of a few abolitionists advocating on their behalf, had only themselves to rely on, since the freedom they were entitled to would not be offered to them on a silver platter. See also Buck-Morris, *Hegel, Haïti, and Universal Freedom* (339) and Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 260.

<sup>474</sup> John Walsh, *Free and French in the Caribbean*. See also Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

manner in which Aimé Césaire reads and incorporates the Toussaint's political philosophy in his literary oeuvre (the essay and dramatic forms) – becomes all the more significant in light of two key factors: 1) Césaire's direct experience of the foreclosure of political freedom by the Vichy regime in Martinique during WWII – an event that triggers the writing of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* in 1943; 2) the impact of this oppression on Césaire's engagement with Martinican politics as he takes office in 1946, so he could effect the destiny of Martinique by pursuing the best route for its emancipation (possible national self-determination, the reinstatement of the freedom of expression – political, cultural, literary, etc.).

The two above-mentioned issues – Césaire's experience of political oppression under the autocratic rule of l'Amiral Robert's administration (1941-1945) and the suppression of cultural freedom via the censorship of the magazine *Tropiques* – became, for Césaire, the catharsis for a journey of reflection on freedom within the French Caribbean context. This intellectual quest led him to draw inspiration from neighboring Haïti as a point of reference in three ways: *historically* – as a means of understanding Haïti's political trajectory from an independent nation in 1804 to a collapsed state in the twentieth century; *culturally* as a source of inspiration for his literary career; *politically* as a means of reflecting on what he should (not) do as an elected official representing Martinicans locally (as Mayor of Fort-de-France)

and nationally (as a MP representing Martinique at the French National Assembly).

Furthermore, Césaire – historically speaking – is cognisant of the adverse legacy of French and American imperialist interference in the French Caribbean. As a case in point, we are reminded of the imposition – by European nations (France and Great Britain) and the US – of the embargo against Haïti after its independence proclamation in 1804, with its consequent negation of the country’s nationhood as part of overt sabotage its economy. In addition, Césaire is aware of the successive military occupations of Haïti by the USA throughout the twentieth century, which accelerated the collapse of the Haitian state. Closer to home, as if ghosts of the past resurface to haunt national memory, Césaire has witnessed the blockade of Martinique – during the Vichy control of the island – by the US, apparently out of concern that Nazi Germany does not access a colossal cache of gold hidden by the French and the Allies in Martinique.<sup>475</sup> All in all, these reasons brought Césaire to hypothesize an eventual external interference with his project of freedom for Martinique, in the event emancipation may involve national independence. Thus, in rethinking the concept of freedom, Césaire walked the political line as if he were playing a chess match: his stratagem was to seek “une

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<sup>475</sup> See Gil, *Migrant Textualities*.

indépendance calculée" ("a calculated independence"), he would tell Ms. Vergès.<sup>476</sup>

A question, therefore, warrants to be asked: in what ways do Césaire's literary work and political practice mirror these challenges of freedom, as well as his personal understanding of the ideal of liberty? As I hope to have shown, Césaire's body of literary work is deeply informed by his ongoing reflection on what it means to be free in the French Caribbean within the context of the post-slavery era, first for Haïti in 1804, and for Césaire's own homeland from 1848<sup>477</sup> to 1946, as he was facing a political impasse as a leader: either formalize the Departmentalization Law promulgated one hundred years earlier – by engaging the French colonial empire to respect the terms of its enactment – or alternatively, break free from the French state via a unilateral proclamation of Martinique's national territorial sovereignty.<sup>478</sup>

In this context, we ought to look at Césaire's dramatic oeuvre as an allegory of the collusion of aesthetic and political discourses, within which history and politics mediate the artistic project of the writer through the prism of the postcolonial globe. A driving force behind Césaire's aesthetic scheme was to re-awaken the political consciousness of African-descended people

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<sup>476</sup> Vergès, *Nègre je suis, Nègre je resterai*, 33.

<sup>477</sup> The year of the Declaration of the Abolition of Slavery in Martinique.

<sup>478</sup> Césaire's prevarication and evasiveness on this dilemma would last almost six decades, up until his retirement from politics.

through an awareness of how their subaltern status worldwide was effected by a colonialist exploitative impact. Thus, the deployment of Césaire's project of freedom lays in the connection between the aesthetic with the political, in its condemnation of colonialist practices that limited the terms of the application of freedom for black subjects in Africa and the Americas<sup>479</sup> by separating its political abstraction from its socio-economic relevance to these populations. In its attempt to integrate politics and the past, Césaire's theatre, then, is one which is historically informed, and which urges us, at the same time, to engage the relationship between artistic endeavor and political reality within the socio-political-historical context of racial and colonial subjugation. Therefore, in as much as Césaire's drama harnessed the black historical material to incorporate the sum total of the lived experiences of colonized African peoples worldwide, the articulation of his theatre can be considered along a historical arc. First, the epic<sup>480</sup> anticolonial struggle of African-descended people in the French Caribbean for their emancipation from the constricts of colonialism and slavery, as reflected in *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* – through the characters of “Toussaint” in the *San Die Typescript* and “The

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<sup>479</sup> I mean during the colonization of the African continent by European powers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For the Americas, I am referring to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

<sup>480</sup> Césaire considers the anticolonial struggle for political emancipation as “epic,” whereas the ensuing post-national stage is “tragic,” as he thematizes in *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* and *Une Saison au Congo*.

Rebel” in its 1946 published rendition. Second, the post-independence mediation and exercise of political power (in Haïti and Africa) that is dramatized in *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* and *Une Saison au Congo*. And third – on a more personal note for Césaire – the politico-legal dead-end stemming from the pursuit of freedom for the “nation” of Martinique, especially the challenges of defining the parameters of political emancipation, we see in *Une Tempête*.<sup>481</sup>

The argument I am making in these lines is that thematic elements articulated on the temporal arc I addressed above, are imbedded in the four plays that concern my analysis. At the same time, they both relate to Césaire’s rewriting of his literary oeuvre (poetry and drama) and reflect his constant rethinking of his ideological philosophy and political practice. I intend to address the theatre, as it is the object of our study here. As well, I want to include in the following analysis the interplay between historicity, Césaire’s evolving conception of leadership, and his sustained reflection on the concept of freedom – as a mirror into how he viewed the process of decolonization in the world, both locally (within the French Caribbean) and internationally (in relation to the African motherland – the Congo in particular).

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<sup>481</sup> That is, self-determination through assimilation, autonomy, association with or separation from France; nationalist independence liberation from the metropolis



In this regard, the “*édition génétique*” of Césaire’s work undertaken by James Arnold and his research team takes on significant importance: it attempts to showcase the genealogy of Césaire’s oeuvre, i.e., the literary lineage of and modifications (rewriting) to both his poetry (*Cahier* and other poems) and his drama. Therefore, the “*édition génétique*” becomes the touchstone for re-examining Césaire’s previous political and ideological stances.

Henceforth, there is a lot to be uncovered about Césaire’s political positions,<sup>482</sup> in relation to his writings. In fact, while his dramatic oeuvre mirrors his political leanings at the time of the writing of each play, Césaire’s rewriting projects were motivated by a desire to remain contemporary with the historical currents of the time – within their timeliness. This was an effort, on his part, to recast the historical occurrences that made his ongoing work representative of an aesthetic seeking to incorporate the constantly changing movement of history. Thus, contemporaneity and historicity allowed him to re-examine his own previous positions so as to engage a new understanding of his dramatic and poetic work. Therefore, this process created a revisionist aesthetics capturing his new positions, as well as his understanding of contemporary history in light of their relevance to his work. Therefore, far

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<sup>482</sup> As it has been brought to light in the last six years following his passing in 2008.

from being an aesthetic haze, the different versions of Césaire's oeuvre allow us an entry into the poet-playwright's state of mind and thought; they titillate our yearn for intellectual and critical voyeurism so we can comprehend the inner workings of our subject of inquiry: the evolution of Césaire's aesthetic vision, as well as the maturation process of his political tenets.

In consideration of Césaire's plays, *Et les Chiens se Taisaient*, as I have tried to argue in the first chapter of this work, showcases in part the burgeoning of the poet-politician's vision for the destiny of Martinique by using Haïti's history as a projection screen for Césaire's staging of freedom for Martinicans. Based on the literary genealogy of his account of the Haitian Revolution, I have explained how two political environments in Martinique – under l'Amiral Robert's Vichy government (1941-1945) and during post-WWII Martinique (in 1946 precisely) – inform the production of two different versions of the same narrative of freedom, one more militant (the San-Die Typescript begun in 1943) than its avatar (the printed 1946 version). Fast-forwarding to ten years later, I have indicated how the publication of *Toussaint L'Ouverture: la Révolution Française et le Problème Colonial* in 1956 raised Césaire's reflection on freedom a notch higher in his endeavour to apprehend the genesis of the Haitian Revolution in connection with the French Revolution – and, by extension, with his own political environment in Martinique. Hence, his retrieval of Toussaint's investigation of a political

theory of emancipation without territorial sovereignty.

Pursuant with Césaire's exploration of various approaches to freedom, this reflection necessarily led to a deliberation on what are the most "concrete" approaches to the staging and management of political emancipation. On this issue – my second chapter demonstrates – Césaire's pessimistic view of political independence as *tragic* finds its match in *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*. After the death of Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jacques Dessalines, King Christophe is the one who embodies the hopes of his people. Unfortunately, as we have seen, Christophe is not a "meneur d'hommes" ("a leader of men") in the same manner as Toussaint or Dessalines were. As a leader, Christophe fails to connect with his people, nor does he tune into their moods, their desires and real aspirations. Suffering from a Napoleonic complex of obsession with "grandeur" and the grandiose, he is prisoner of his own ego, lost in the trappings of power and the displays of magnificence. He ends up replicating the very thing that he was fighting against – political oppression and a new kind of slavery – a perfect example, perhaps, of the neurosis of the colonized Fanon describes in *Peaux Noires, Masques Blancs*. Christophe's greatest failure, as Césaire has indicated, lies in his inability to mediate the demands of freedom and democracy in relation to his autocracy.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> Interview with Khalid Chraïbi (1965). Reprinted online (ouma.com) in 2010; no pagination.

As I discussed in my third chapter, the meditation on the tragedy of post-national political freedom is pursued in *Une Saison au Congo*, in terms of a political downfall that is exacerbated by a double tension: first, because of external neocolonial forces that sabotage post-national emancipation through the interferences of foreign international power brokers; second, due to an internal implosion brought to bear in part by the poly-ethnic realm of Congolese society. The menace to national unity is captured within the possibility of the carving (and secession) of the territorial stretch of the filthy rich Katanga Province, therefore challenging the nationalist imaginings of Patrice Lumumba. The “cou de grâce” is delivered by the ethnicization of Congolese politics as a product of the erosion of a strong nationalist vision and sentiment of the part of Lumumba’s foes (President Kasa Vubu, Katanga Governor Moïse Tchombé, Colonel Mobutu, etc.), as well as by the political near-sightedness of these statesmen.

By the time we get to *Une Tempête*, the project of freedom is questioned and challenged through the deadlock resulting from the unyielding power struggle between Caliban and Prospero. As I have shown in the last chapter of my analysis, *Une Tempête* displays a dual movement that is concurrently a progression toward and a regression from full-fledged national

independence.<sup>484</sup> In this consideration, the equivocation internal to these two political possibilities exemplifies Césaire's yearning for new forms of freedom unrestrained by constricts of the conventional limitations of postcolonial national territorial demands.<sup>485</sup> But above all other considerations, *Une Tempête* interrogates the *nature of freedom*, or more precisely, the distinction that Césaire makes between *freedom* and what he has termed "*substantive freedom*" in relation to Martinique. What is, therefore, "substantive freedom"?

Beyond the speculation regarding the best means of achieving political emancipation,<sup>486</sup> for Césaire the ends justify the means. Therefore, *substantive freedom* implied privileging *economic security* over postcolonial independence for emancipation's sake. This signified demanding from France the implementation of social and economic reforms through the improvement of the living conditions of Martinicans: paying Martinican workers the same salaries as in metropolitan France, investing in social housing projects to end the squatting on the hills of Fort-de-France by displaced and impoverished peasants moving from the countryside,<sup>487</sup> etc. Thus, re-reading Césaire's

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<sup>484</sup> As Gary Wilder indicates in his detailed account, the independentist movement in Martinique gained a lot of traction in the 1970s and 1980s, mostly as a reaction against the restriction of the political space on the island by right parties in metropolitan France. See Wilder, "Untimely Vision."

<sup>485</sup> Wilder, "Untimely Vision" and *Freedom Time*.

<sup>486</sup> Caliban's armed struggle as opposed to Ariel's non-violent endeavor to achieve the moral redemption of his oppressor Prospero,

<sup>487</sup> Wilder, "Untimely Vision." Césaire explains this socio-economic imbalance between rural and urban areas in Martinique in *Vergès, Nègre Je suis, Nègre je resterai*, 34.

position in 2005 makes it clear that he never envisioned a complete sovereigntist breakup with France.<sup>488</sup> Although preaching independence (perhaps as lip service directed at the independentist leaning political clientele, or using the independence card as a negotiating tool with imperial France), Césaire was more of an autonomist-departmentalist in as much as his political demands were concretized via administrative reforms giving greater autonomy to the DOM-TOMs, particularly Martinique. In this regard, Césaire is more of a Toussaint ideologue than anything else.

When we look at Césaire's work through the lenses of the critical theory of scholars like Gary Wilder or John Patrick Walsh,<sup>489</sup> we are better able to assess the *legacy* of his literary and political enterprise. In this instance, an important facet of the shift to current interpretations is a move away from the dominance of the "romantic"<sup>490</sup> decolonization sensibility of the previous Césaire critique, to embrace a more holistic approach taking into account the entirety of Césaire's political activity within the historical context of French imperialism (and to some extent the post-WWII global international climate) that limited his political agency.

In as much as he advocated against western colonial and neocolonial

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<sup>488</sup> Vergès, 34-64.

<sup>489</sup> To some extent, that of David Scott, whose work I would have liked to engage more than I can in these pages.

<sup>490</sup> I borrow this term from David Scott, *Constricts of Modernity*.

geopolitical arrangements excluding the participation of colonized subjects in determining their own political future, Césaire was also opposing France's hegemonic assertion of politico-economic power in its colonies and DOM-TOMs. In this regard, therefore, the "paradoxical" relationship between Césaire's literary militancy and the perceived inertia of his political positions<sup>491</sup> can be revisited in light of the new spaces of reading his work that have been offered to us thanks to new scholarship such as that of James Arnold's "édition génétique." For instance, a sole appreciation of *The Rebel* (the major protagonist) in the 1946 edition of *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* could only puzzle, in today's readership environment, an audience used to Césaire's catering to a dramatic public accustomed to his strong anti-colonial positions. However, the revelation of the existence of a previous draft of the drama – as a by-product of the "édition génétique" project – helps us realize that Césaire, for instance, was not opposed to violence against colonialist and racial oppression (as we witness with the character "Toussaint").<sup>492</sup> My argument is also supported by the fact that the cover page for its 1956 edition features the image of the iron-made statue of the Nèg-Marron that adorns the

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<sup>491</sup> As Fred Reno seems to suggest in "Aimé Césaire ou l'Ambivalence Féconde," in *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Special Issue: *Aimé Césaire: Man of the World, Master of the Word* (Winter 2009): 19-23. Reno refers to Césaire as "le Nègre départementalisé," which is a reprise of sorts of Confiant's nickname of Césaire as "le Nègre Fondamental."

<sup>492</sup> Even if he was very apprehensive about the exercise of violence to achieve political emancipation in Martinique.

“Place de l’Indépendance” in Port-au-Prince, Haïti. This is a clear indication of Césaire’s re-appropriation of the open militancy of the heroes of Haitian independence movement. Coincidentally, in an interview with Lucien Attoun (in 1970) in which he discusses his assessment of race relations in the US in relation with his portrayal of Caliban and Ariel, Césaire states the following: “Je vois mal la place d’Ariel aux Etats-Unis à l’heure actuelle, il me semble que l’histoire a simplifié le problème: la balle qui a tué Martin Luther King donne raison à Caliban.”<sup>493</sup> As well, let it be noted in passing, that the play was originally intended to be titled “*Un été chaud*” (“a hot summer”) as a way of showcasing the civil unrest that ensued from the assassination of Martin Luther King and Malcom X.

In hindsight, one can make the argument that Césaire’s drama ought to be seen as emancipatory, not merely by creating a dramatic aesthetic imbued with anticolonial reclamations of agency on behalf of racialized black subjects (enslaved and/or colonized), but rather by shattering conventional notions of political emancipation, thereby opening up contingencies for new understandings of freedom<sup>494</sup> (historically and contemporaneously) within the French Caribbean. In the case of Haïti, it goes without saying that for Césaire regarded the struggle for freedom as absolutely necessary, historically

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<sup>493</sup> “Aimé Césaire et le théâtre nègre.” Entretien avec Lucien Attoun. In *Le Théâtre* (1970): 96-116.

<sup>494</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*.



speaking. However, the post-liberation management of political emancipation is what leaves an embittered taste in his mouth; this stern assessment then brought him to question the worthiness of freedom (its nationalist and sovereigntist version) if it is not accompanied with *economic security* – which, as we have seen, he equated with *substantive (true) freedom*. As far as Martinique is concerned, up until the last years of his life,<sup>495</sup> Césaire was bemoaning the fact that the political status of Martinique was constantly hijacked by France’s paternalistic treatment of the island as a colony. In many ways, the terms of discussion remain more or less the same now as they were seventy years ago.

When I started this project, it was (and still is) my intention that this study enhance our understanding of the interplay between the aesthetic project of the writer (Aimé Césaire) and the practice of his critical and political philosophy, thus revealing the interconnectedness of these two elements with the concerns of race and post-coloniality. I centered my argument on Césaire’s leadership, particularly as it is articulated around the question of and the quest for freedom in the French Caribbean context – in Haïti during the San

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<sup>495</sup> At least up until 2005, with the publication of Vergès’ *Nègre je suis, Nègre je resterai*, which summarizes numerous interviews Césaire granted her. Based on Hale and Véron in *Les Écrits d’Aimé Césaire: Bio-Bibliographie Commentée* (783-801), Césaire granted very few interviews between 2006 and 2008, and whenever he did, none had anything to do with his involvement with politics.

Domingo Revolution (from 1781-1804), Martinique (1946 onwards), as well as the post-liberation tragedy of the Congo in the early 1960s.

Within this dynamic, the trope of *race* serves as a chain-link across his plays (as leadership does); at the same time, it interpellates us to interrogate its relevance in contemporary discursive practices, in an era of academic ideological tenets fraught with a proliferation of “posts.” In the context of our discussion, does the “post-racial” exist - as some have suggested in the aftermath of Obama’s US election in 2008 (and his subsequent re-election in 2012)? If we were to grant validity to this hypothesis, would we then ignore the historical underpinnings of *race*, and just consider it as a ghost of history, a category existing within an imaginary place of being? In the same line of reasoning, given the multiple interpellations of the concept of freedom Césaire had to negotiate, could we then consider his understanding of freedom for Martinique as *utopia*? Or, in the eventuality of political independence from France (albeit unlikely in the time to come), “a future [past] that may never come into being?”<sup>496</sup>

Whatever the case may be, race, for Césaire, was an un-negotiable historical reality that formed the cornerstone of his socio-political critique of French colonialism and slave labor exploitation. As far as the principle of

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<sup>496</sup> Frederick Jameson, “The Politics of Utopia,” *New Left Review* 25 (Jan.-Feb. 2004): 54.

liberty is concerned, as the foregoing analysis has shown, a new understanding of Césaire's writings seems to suggest that the concept, at least in the historical context of the French Caribbean, necessitated a re-imagining of the discourse of liberty. In that regard, Césaire's theatre opened up possibilities for the field of inquiry into what it means to be free. It remains to be seen, however, how the interlinked legacies of the historical memory of racialized exploitation and the challenge to political oppression will continue to engage and summon our modern understanding of race, freedom, and what the "postcolonial" category entails in the French Caribbean at this time.

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