

Critical Perspectives
on Conflict in
Caribbean Societies
of the Late 20th and
Early 21st Centuries

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Edited by

Patricia Donatien and Rodolphe Solbiac

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INTRODUCTION

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What is the relevance of studying conflict in the contemporary Caribbean? Starting this reflection from an immediate contemporary perspective we realize that, far from the touristic image of paradise, the present-day Caribbean region appears to be “the site of ongoing contests and conflicts by rival claimants which seek an autonomous space of their own” (Premdas 831). In addition, globalization appears as a source of conflict that takes the form of touristic cultural pollution and “loss of the homeland” as “the tourist industry re-casts the social and economic landscape as did the plantation” (Premdas 823). This vision invites us to further explore the role and impact of conflict in the construction and development of the Caribbean as well as to reflect on the way it can shape the future of this region.

From a very general point of view, “conflict” can be defined as an antagonistic relation between two or several units of action, one of which at least tends to dominate the social field in which they interact. However, the concept of “conflict” can be viewed and understood in different ways. Conflict has several conceptual meanings according to the way it has been interpreted and applied within the fields of various disciplines, including philosophy, ethics, sociology, psychology, political science, geography and anthropology. Moreover, conflict is a natural dimension of human relationships: it is the condition of progress and represents societies moving forward from one generation to the next. Within families, groups, communities and societies, conflict throws individuals against one another, but also creates opportunities to reaffirm convictions, develop character, reinvent the world, define and edify approaches and visions of the future.

An analysis of the construction of colonial Caribbean societies shows that it constitutes a process which encompasses different dimensions of conflict. Throughout the insular and continental Caribbean, whether English-, Spanish- or French-speaking, societies have been created on the basis of confrontation whether between civilizations, masters and slaves, or the dominant and the dominated. There has been competition between

European colonisers, but also between black and Indian groups who have struggled for survival and the conservation of their beliefs and respective systems of representation. Seeking a higher social and symbolic status within these contentious societies, both individuals and groups have repeatedly experienced conflict.

From a political perspective, the colonization of the Caribbean set up relationships of social conflict characterised by the refusal of Amerindian and African groups to submit to the control of Europeans who persistently sought to subjugate them. From a psychological perspective, cultural conflict, i. e. diverging codes, beliefs and values, is a constituent fact of Caribbean societies whose development has been the logical result of pressure, assimilation, and strategies of confrontation, but also of avoidance and negotiation by dominated groups. As a result, subcultures and complex cultural identities have emerged, characterised by double consciousness and diasporic consciousness (constituting a dimension of mental conflict for the people of the Caribbean, at both collective and individual levels).

Whether it originated from antagonism, rivalry or opposition, all Caribbean countries experienced conflict in the most violent ways—combat, revolt, struggle and guerrilla warfare, ending in violent clashes or even massacres. However, rivalry between dissenting groups, communities or races does not always manifest itself exclusively through fruitless hostility and disorder. This type of conflict can also become a phenomenon of resistance resulting in the creation of defence mechanisms, which, through clashes and friction, led to what Edouard Glissant called “rhizome-identities.” Whereas conformity places cultural, scientific and spiritual output on the same level, conflict can be seen as a competition of creativity, capable of generating commitment and reconciliation.

With the advent of Caribbean literature, authors, whatever their language, have always treated the question of conflict as central, their novels being shaped, to a large extent, by a complex sociological background. Here, conflict has been interpreted as separation, family division, social conflagration and moral objection, but also as resistance to conformity.

Though it does not seek to provide an exhaustive examination of the question, this book consists of essays about conflict in the contemporary Caribbean. The studies proposed in these pages are framed by explorations of this issue in the Caribbean region, in transnational relationships with North America as well as in transcolonial relationships between Martinique, Guadeloupe and France. In fact, the Haitian society and its North American diaspora, the transcolonial French Caribbean islands, the

Anglophone Caribbean society of Trinidad as well as the Caribbean establishments in Canada constitute the societal components of the contributors' analyses of conflict.

The resulting diversity of viewpoints is also apparent in the fact that discussions of conflict include various ethnic and gender perspectives. Such studies, in being concerned with the Caribbean subject—whether Afro-Caribbean or Indo-Caribbean, male or female, diasporic or living in the region—provide varied entries to an understanding of contemporary conflict dynamics in the Caribbean.

This book presents diverse approaches to conflict that inspire innovative conceptualizations. In addition to classical literary readings of works, contributors use interdisciplinary, cultural studies and Caribbean cultural studies to explore this question. Focusing on such forms as conflict with colonial history, the internal conflict of the artist, cultural conflict, ethnic conflict, and conflict in the representation of Caribbean identities, the essays included in this publication analyse the processes through which conflict shapes artistic, literary, intellectual and societal cultural production in the Caribbean.

The studies in this book reflect the contention between official euro-oriented history and, as Anny Dominique Curtius puts it, “the tormented chronology of non-history” that characterizes the Caribbean region. This contention with European colonial history constitutes an important dimension of conflict in the region that is reflected in the Caribbean cultural and scholarly productions, giving them a counter-cultural stance. The commitment of artists of the 1960s and 1970s to write or create against the imprint of colonial history consisted in confronting the literal violence of European colonization as well as the “epistemic violence and loss” resulting from “the prohibitions on African cultural expressions. [They also fought...] imposed languages, a school education in which the disciplines of History and Literature endorsed the superiority of the colonizers and normalized their perspective” (Donnell 80). However, the resulting cultural revolution of the 1970s produced an impressively influential “new ethics of relevance and belonging” that permeated “and cross-articulated political, critical, and creative agendas,” but did not “overwrite the persuasions of colonialism’s embedded narratives or guarantee a future free from its historical legacies” (Donnell 77).

In this respect, the 1970’s “Great Tradition-Little Tradition” debate between artists and intellectuals appears as a significant manifestation of the societal conflict between cultural forms and values inherited from colonial institutions and folk traditions, vernacular languages and social concern with the grassroots (Donnell 76). Indeed, a feature that permeates

several of the studies included in this book is that Caribbean societies were subject to struggles over meaning that were never purely academic.

Anny Dominique Curtius' article examines how the 1991 symbolic decapitation of the statue of Empress Josephine, and the subsequent cyclic and temporary acts of defacement, allow Martinicans to rewrite an official colonial history in transcolonial Martinique and reconfigure the traumas of slavery. Her Caribbean cultural studies approach uses everyday socio-cultural practices as a matrix for a critical examination of relational dynamics between transcolonial Martinique and France in a globalized world. Curtius proposes to consider how agency, creativity and a duty of memory within these socio-cultural practices interrogate and disrupt the global perspective.

This original approach notably discusses the re-appropriations of the beheaded statue by performance artist Sarah Trouche on November 16, 2012 as a broadening of the political subtext that sustains the statue and relocates Empress Joséphine within a quarrel between official History and the tormented chronology of non-history.

Bruce Jno-Baptiste's examination of conflict in the Caribbean region focuses on cultural production as a response to colonisation's epistemic violence. Rooted in a cultural studies perspective, Jno-Baptiste's essay introduces identity conflicts in the Caribbean as an expression of an historical desire to remodel Western civilization imposed by violence. It examines cultural, linguistic and intercultural conflicts as phenomena in which the harmful effects of colonial ideologies are confronted with the rectifications brought about by access to independence. Like Ralph Premdas, whose recent study of the Caribbean considers the impact of globalization, Jno-Baptiste "looks at identity as an area of change and contestation" (Premdas 811).

Discursive production challenging Western representations is also central to Gladys Francis' study, which examines original employments of rhythm and bodily movements in Gerty Dambury's and Gisèle Pineau's novels in order to disclose the way in which the theme of conflict inhabits the texts' diegeses. Through an analysis of the placements, dis/placements and re/placement of bodies in movement, this article seeks to discern the roles of rhythm, dance and music in the explorations of bodily pain carried out in these texts. It also aims at disclosing the context that generates a counter discourse to Western representations of the island as exotic and ecstatic. Providing a contrastive analysis of the two Guadeloupeans' representations of bodily conflicts, this study argues that these writings foster a space of transgression but also restore a zone of encounter, a

collective space of testimonials and female agency that engage in dialogue here and there.

This book also contains discussions of poetic creativity resulting from literary expressions of conflict. They deal with conflict as a literary device on which the action of a work of literature depends, and examine the classic form of conflict between the protagonist and himself, and between the protagonist and other characters and forces. These literary articles also explore the Caribbean writers' strategies for dealing with internal conflict resulting from postcolonial displacement and the redefinitions it entails.

These studies also testify to the fact that academic works as well as creations by writers and artists of the first decade of the twenty-first century still address and are influenced by the conditions of colonial and neocolonial life that "confiscated the Caribbean subject's history" by denying him "a relationship to the past based on established genealogy, succession, and a secure sense of place (Donnell 80)." Actually, Caribbean literary and artistic production at the beginning of this century is still significantly determined by this conflict with history, as works deal with or denounce the imprint of colonial history revealing a persistent commitment to the "rehumanization and indigenization" of those subjects whose humanity, ethnicity and history have been systematically confiscated by the conditions of colonial and neocolonial life (Donnell 80).

In addition, these studies examine how the sociological background of relationships between ethno-cultural groups bearing the imprint of ethnic conflict informs the writers' works. They refer to the heterogeneity of a Caribbean population shaped by colonization through migratory processes including deportation, displacement, deception and competition. They invite us to consider the impact of twentieth-century decolonization, which tended to accentuate processes of "othering" (Mohammed) leading to the emergence of inter-ethnic struggles as "a source of immense conflict especially in contexts of rivalry over power and pre-eminence by the 'ethno-cultural communities'" (Premdas 820).

Post-independence conflict is culturized around language and customs. Consequently, claims to membership rights, access to resources and political control are made in relation to the history of residence and levels of acculturation to European norms and language (Premdas 822). This culturization is patent in the Surinamese post-independence struggle about access to the country's resources, based mainly on a conflict of representation of what it means to be black (Scott 4).¹ In this case, the

¹ "Africa" and "slavery" are not only ethnographic or historical realities, but also semiotically inexhaustible figures that help organize and authorize a social

Afro-descendent government fights the Boni and Saramaka black people's traditional African culture because they consider it "backward."

Post-Independence Trinbagonian society is one of those Caribbean plural societies in which, according to Premdas, the failure of assimilation to create a single integrated society and the corresponding persistence of cultural pluralism, the problem of inheritance and the corresponding right to rule have become intensely contested issues (Premdas 820).²

Grounding her research on Glissantian theory, Deleuze's concept of deterritorialization and Homi Bhabha's third space, Dominique Aurelia studies the migrant Haitian-American writer's internal creative conflict resulting from his wandering between his native country and the USA of his "territorialisation." Aurelia proposes to theorize Danticat's literary articulation of this permanent quest for belonging and search for a third place of re-creation and reinvention of the self as "the poetics of staggering."

Also using the Glissantian theory of the rhizome, Rita Keresztesi examines the nature of conflict, either in the form of rebellion or revolution, through Earl Lovelace's representation of the aftermath of the 1970 Black Power Revolution in Trinidad in his latest novel, *Is Just a Movie* (2011). Her study reveals the Trinidadian writer's vision of rebellion as the constitutive element to self-hood and national formation, from which derives a perception of conflict as expressions of homegrown social movements that may be considered rebellions on their way to a full-grown revolution. Earl Lovelace's exploration as such is concerned with the crisis of representation of the Caribbean identity for people of African descent. As David Scott puts it in a recent study titled "On the Very Idea of a Black Radical Tradition," the representation of what it means to be Black in the Caribbean and Atlantic contexts is an area of conflict, as the imaginary of afro-descendants is peopled with different and competing interpretations (Scott 4).

imaginary of historical identity and community. They do not constitute a unified social imaginary, of course—a social imaginary over which there is—or can be,—complete agreement; but they shape a pervasive social imaginary, nevertheless, in which the conflicts of interpretation within and across the temporality of generations only serve to underline the common possession of a distinctive past in the present (Scott 4).

² In these states where African-Indian ratios are close, the competition for power by the main ethnic communities is not simply a matter to be decided by the electoral marketplace but by a moral claim based on historical precedence and, ironically, by the degree of assimilation of the cultural values of the departed and depreciated colonial power (Premdas 820).

Complementing Keresztesi's reflection, Rodolphe Solbiac examines Espinet's exploration of the conflicts in/of representation that the diasporic Indo-Trinidadian subject confronts and that disrupt belonging to Trinidad or Canada. Using an interdisciplinary approach that combines Renato Rosado's definition of cultural citizenship with recent conceptualizations of citizenship and the nation, Solbiac reveals how Espinet's novel articulates a poetics of the refoundation of belonging to the Trinidadian nation that emancipates its citizens from the colonial legacy of cultural and gender conflicts.

Solbiac's treatment of Espinet's deconstruction of a male-centred nation-building imagination in the former British colony of Trinidad is complemented by Jacqueline Couti's exploration of representations of femininity in francophone Caribbean literature. Making use of postcolonial, gender and sexuality theory in an interdisciplinary approach rooted in discourse analysis, Jacqueline Couti studies the impact of the ambivalent characterization of femininity in the works of Raphael Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau. Her examination of the use of metaphor and the relationship between power and the body in a French Caribbean setting introduces us to the problematic and conflictive deconstruction of a gendered colonial imaginary. It discloses the way in which "créoliste" discourse creates a two-faced construction of femininity, resulting in the transformation of the Martinican woman into a symbol of abjection and conflict. For many, imagination (e. g. Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris) and the work of art grant the Caribbean subject the tools to refashion his future. Imagination does not always contribute to emancipation, and can also create ambivalent figures that hinder progress. Couti's study of transcolonial French Caribbean literature demonstrates the significant cultural transformation brought about by imagination and activism.

This volume also addresses the question of conflict in contemporary art. Grounded in a background of transnational relationships between the Caribbean region and North America, Patricia Donatien's essay explores the role played by art in the treatment and de-escalation of ontological and social conflicts between intercommunal groups. She proposes to analyse art as a space of negotiation and mediation of cultural conflicts. Her essay provides a study of the artistic expression of three artists of the American and Canadian Caribbean diaspora backed up by critical analysis grounded in the work of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Edouard Glissant and Wilson Harris. Donatien examines how these artists redefine space using their canvases, installations and supports as surfaces of deterritorialization

of conflictive representations to conceive imaginary spaces for the resolution of historical and cultural conflicts.

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OF NAKED BODY AND BEHEADED STATUE:
PERFORMING CONFLICTING HISTORY
IN FORT-DE-FRANCE

ANNY DOMINIQUE CURTIUS
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

It is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out. It is there that, in our time, the perplexity of the living is most accurately experienced. (Bhabha, 1994, 170)

In September 1991, the statue of Empress Joséphine de Beauharnais Tascher de la Pagerie was beheaded in La Savane, a city park in Fort-de-France, Martinique. Twenty-two years later, no one has claimed responsibility for the beheading, the head has never been replaced, and the event continuously generates passionate and compelling debates among intellectuals, contemporary artists, politicians and the general population of Martinique. This article is part of an ongoing reflection I started in 2008¹ about the symbolic meaning of the beheading of the statue. More importantly, this study is also an attempt to craft a field of inquiry in Caribbean cultural studies where everyday socio-cultural practices constitute the matrix for a critical examination of relational dynamics between transcolonial Martinique and France in a globalized world. In other words, drawing on the beheading of the statue of Joséphine and its ramifications, I propose to study everyday local practices not as static phenomena that are doomed to be swallowed by the global, but as local

¹ This present study contains some excerpts from an earlier article (“À Fort-de-France les statues ne meurent pas”) where I analyzed the dynamic of installation of several statues in Fort-de-France, and the tactic of defacement they were subjected to, including Empress Joséphine’s. Here, I move away from several arguments articulated in this earlier article by making the theoretical analysis of the beheading more sophisticated.

socio-cultural practices where agency, creativity and a duty of memory interrogate and disrupt the global.

Thus, I want to explore how the recurrent cyclic defacement of the statue, the practices around its restoration, recent government decisions regarding the celebrity of Joséphine, and the latest symbolic re-appropriation of the beheaded statue by performance artist Sarah Trouche in 2012 broaden the socio-cultural and political subtexts that sustain the beheading of the statue, and relocate Empress Joséphine within a quarrel between official History and what Edouard Glissant called the “tormented chronology of non-history” (Glissant, 1989, 65). I propose to read the mutilations and subsequent transformations of the statue as a local news item that has gradually redeployed itself into a counter discourse, profoundly embedded in the dynamics of rewriting official History in transcolonial Martinique and remodelling the cultural heritage of a people.

The numerous speculations that constantly feed the quintessential question “Who cut off Joséphine’s head?” ultimately reveal that a specific silence needs to redeploy its meaning. After twenty years, what really seems to matter is how the beheaded statue enters into a dialogue with Martinicans, the French government, the City of Fort-de-France, scholars, tourists and artists who now consider the beheaded statue as contemporary art, leaving behind the identity of the offenders. Therefore, I tend to consider the desire to know the identity of the perpetrators as being part of a larger narrative that calls for an incisive interrogation about the redeployments and ramifications of an act that can no longer be approached through the lens of a local news item, as it is regularly regarded. I propose to read the beheaded statue as located in multiple contact zones² that could justify a set of ambivalent practices for negotiating the tension of postcoloniality and sovereignty between France and Martinique. Ultimately, this dialectic of entanglement reaches out to some of the concerns of the globalized world.

According to official records, Joséphine de Beauharnais Tascher de la Pagerie was born in the town of Trois-Îlets in the south of Martinique on June 23, 1763, and died in Rueil Malmaison near Paris on May 29, 1814. She married Alexandre de Beauharnais with whom she had two children,

² My use of Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of “contact zone” enters into dialogue with several paradigms including trauma, power, dispossession, entanglements, transmutations and contemporary globalization that help to redefine the postcontact relation of Martinique with France. Stuart Hall’s conceptualization of the three Caribbean presences (*Présence africaine*, *Présence européenne* and *Présence américaine*) also constitutes a significant element in rethinking the contested genealogy that is central in my study.

Hortense and Eugène. During the French Revolution, both Alexandre and Joséphine were arrested and imprisoned. While Joséphine was eventually released from prison thanks to her friendship with Barras, one of the major leaders of the French *Directoire*, her husband Alexandre de Beauharnais was beheaded. In 1796 she became the first wife of Napoleon Bonaparte and the First Empress of the French, but in 1809 Napoleon repudiated Joséphine because she could not give birth to the sons he eagerly wanted in order to form a dynasty.

In Martinique Joséphine is a controversial figure, and her status of Empress of the French does not spark pride and enthusiasm but ambivalence, confusion and rejection because her parents and her family at large owned plantations and were slave owners. Therefore, she is not spontaneously recognized as a Martinican heroine, and in this regard Édouard Glissant's discussion in *Caribbean Discourse* of the absence of great popular figures and the adoption of victorious heroes in the Caribbean is significant:

Because the collective memory was too often wiped out, the Caribbean writer must "dig deep" into this memory, following the latent signs that he has picked up in the everyday world. [...] Because the Caribbean notion of time was fixed in the void of an imposed nonhistory, the writer must contribute to reconstituting its tormented chronology. [...] History as a consciousness at work, and history as lived experience are therefore not the business of historians exclusively. [...] Would it be ridiculous to consider our lived history as a steadily advancing neurosis? [...] Other people's heroes are not ours; our heroes, of necessity, are primarily those of other people. (Glissant, 1989, 65, 69)

"Parce que la mémoire historique fut trop souvent raturée, l'écrivain antillais doit « fouiller » cette mémoire, à partir de traces parfois latentes qu'il a repérées dans le réel. [...] Parce que le temps antillais fut stabilisé dans le néant d'une non-histoire imposée, l'écrivain doit contribuer à rétablir sa chronologie tourmentée. [...] L'histoire en tant que conscience à l'œuvre et l'histoire en tant que vécu ne sont donc pas l'affaire des seuls historiens. [...] Serait-il dérisoire ou odieux de considérer notre histoire subie comme cheminement d'une névrose ? [...] Les héros d'autrui ne sont pas les nôtres, nos héros par force sont d'abord ceux d'autrui." (Glissant, 1981, 133, 136)

Reconsidering Glissant's invitation to have literature decenter official historical records, and participate in the writing of local history, what kind of new perspectives do Martinicans cast upon the painful events of the past? How do they elaborate a constructive dialogue between the silence

imposed by the repressed memory of slavery, and an agency that originates in a duty of memory performed in a healing and productive manner?

Among several concrete initiatives that were taken for the 1998 commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery, one should consider the draping of the beheaded statue of Joséphine in black³ as a socio-political act intended to unearth traumatic memories. This additional symbolic performance around the statue also echoes Christiane Taubira's December 22, 1998 sponsorship of a bill⁴ that recognizes slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity, and leads to former President Jacques Chirac's January 31, 2006 decree stipulating that May 10 is the official day of the annual commemoration of the abolition of slavery in metropolitan France.⁵ If Chirac and Taubira stand as institutional transmitters of memory, and if these French Metropolitan initiatives resonate with global human rights norms and discourses, from which perspective can we approach the beheading of the statue, its draping in black, and most recently its symbolic flogging by French performance artist Sarah Trouche? The dichotomy between the rhetorically charged debates at The French National Assembly and the Senate where these laws were discussed and voted on, and the spontaneous, anonymous and recurrent mutilations of the statue, obviously orient our investigation toward what belongs to History and what does not.

Charged with emotion and combativeness, the mutilations bear witness to the complex undertaking of healing the painful traces of slavery and colonization. They also constitute fertile ground for rethinking how the anonymous perpetrators of these acts invite everyone to participate in a cycle of performances I call "acts of memory," since they are linked to History and are no longer mere acts of vandalism, usually committed with no intended reference to institutional history. The notion of vandalism that may have been appropriate in September 1991, when the beheaded statue was first discovered, is no longer suitable, since from now on it is doomed to be symbolically re-appropriated by the conflicted memory of slavery, and each new re-appropriation offers a significant matter for reflection.

³ This event was initiated by the Comité Devoir de mémoire in Martinique.

⁴ The Taubira Law was passed on May 21, 2001, and is named after Christiane Taubira, currently France's Minister of Justice since 2012.

⁵ Articles 1 and 2 of Decree 2006-388 of March 31, 2006 stipulate that the ceremonies will be organized, "in Paris and in each metropolitan department at the initiative of the prefect as well as in the *lieux de mémoire* of slavery and the slave trade."

Joséphine's statue is the first to have been installed in August 1859 in the middle of La Savane, the public park that faces the bay of Fort-de-France, where, in 1790, Joséphine and her daughter Hortense are believed to have narrowly escaped death during the storming of the city. Moreover, great festivities that took place over several days accompanied the inauguration, and noteworthy political figures from France and the Caribbean were present (*Sur la Savane*, 18). Renovations of La Savane have been undertaken since then, and in 1974 the statue was relocated from the centre of the park to a corner near Rue de la liberté, across from the Schœlcher Library and one block from the Préfecture. This relocation was a source of polemic⁶ between those who praised Aimé Césaire's initiative and those who deplored the debasement of a prestigious historical figure. One needs to remember that Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, [Notebook of a Return to My Native Land] and André Breton's "Le Brise-lames" ["The Breakwater"] in "Des épingles tremblantes" ["Some Trembling Pins"] (*Martinique Charmeuse de serpents*) [*Martinique Snake Charmer*] are critical preludes to the contemporary creative acts of memory that reconfigure the statue in its historical context:

In this inert town, this sorry crowd under the sun, taking part in nothing which expresses, asserts, frees itself in the broad daylight of its own land. Nor in Empress Joséphine of the French dreaming high, high above negridom. (Césaire, 1995, 75)⁷

Hazy light bathes the savannah where lost amidst tall trunks of coconut palms, the blue-stained statue of Joséphine de Beauharnais casts a feminine and tender spell over the city. Her breasts gush from a high-waisted *Empire* dress; speech of the Directorate lingers on, rolling some African stones to mix the voluptuous *nolo contendere* potion of Creole talk. A Royal Palace lies buried in the ruins of old Fort Royal (pronounce it Fô-yal), the roar of great world battles—Marengo, Austerlitz, here retold heroically in three lines—don't bore the ladies—yielding to charming,

⁶ The popular satirical song by Martinican artist Guy Méthalie, "Yo déplacé Joséphine" ["They moved Joséphine"], chronicles this polemic.

⁷"Dans cette ville inerte, cette foule désolée sous le soleil, ne participant à rien de ce qui s'exprime, s'affirme, se libère au grand jour de cette terre sienne. Ni à l'impératrice Joséphine des Français rêvant très haut au-dessus de la négraille" (Césaire 1956, 28).

spread knees under the tittering roof tiles of La Pagerie plantation. (Breton, 2008, 54)⁸

While Aimé Césaire envisions the creation of a Martinican people ready to redefine an identity politics, Breton's surrealist, gendered and sexual gaze at Joséphine redeploys Césaire's call for a postcolonial reterritorialization of the cityscape of Fort-de-France with an astute connection between the Napoleonic imperialist wars and Joséphine's inherited colonialist and assimilationist mentality.

It is worth evaluating the different historical elements that adorn the statue. For example, Joséphine holds a medallion upon which is etched a profile of Napoleon, and on the front side of the pedestal a carved section represents Joséphine's coronation at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris in 1804. On the backside of the pedestal, an inscription states that in "the year MDCCCLVIII (1858) of Napoléon III's reign, the Martinican people raised this monument to honor the Empress Joséphine, born in this colony."

Complementing the beheading of the statue, inscriptions in Martinican Creole and in red paint advocating "respect for May 22"⁹ and identifying slavery as a crime against humanity covered both the pedestal and a notice about Joséphine posted next to the statue. This red paint evidently represents the blood flowing from the decapitated head, and recalls that of the victims of slavery, also symbolizing Joséphine's imprisonment in 1794 and her condemnation to decapitation by the French revolutionaries, a predicament which she eventually escaped. More importantly, it redefines the urban space of Fort-de-France, all the while taking the form of a return on memory. Even if the statue has often been the target of various forms of temporary defacement, the decapitated head and the blood-red paint permanently actualize the ideological and political message sent by this symbolic gesture. It is significant that even though a new head was commissioned by the City Hall, the statue has never been fully restored

⁸"Dans la lumière noyée qui baigne la savane, la statue bleutée de Joséphine de Beauharnais, perdue entre les hauts fûts de cocotiers, place la ville sous un signe féminin et tendre. Les seins jaillissent de la robe de *merveilleuse* à très haute taille et c'est parler du Directoire qui s'attarde à rouler quelques pierres africaines pour composer le philtre de non-défense voluptueuse du balbutiement créole. C'est le Palais-Royal enseveli sous les ruines du vieux Fort-Royal (prononcez Fô-yal), le bruit des grandes batailles du monde—Marengo, Austerlitz contées galamment en trois lignes—ne pas ennuyer les dames—expire à ces genoux charmants entr'ouverts sous les riantes tuiles de la Pagerie" (Breton, 1948, 37).

⁹ May 22 refers to the date of the abolition of slavery in Martinique, and its commemoration in Martinique on that date.



Fig. 1. 1. The beheaded statue of Empress Joséphine before the 2010 renovation

with it, and nor have the Creole inscriptions and red paint covering the statue been cleaned, as if the full restoration had become an impossible gesture. Thus, when Françoise Vergès wrongly declares in her interview with Aimé Césaire, in *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai* [*Negro I am, Negro*

I remain] that, “nobody even tries anymore to replace Joséphine's head because it is always removed the following evening” (Césaire, 2005, 10), one realizes how the beheading has generated a cycle of unfounded rhetorical interpretations.

It is important to consider that, in 1992, one year after the act of mutilation, the French Government officially acknowledged the statue as a National Heritage site. This event is all the more significant because as part of a site protected by a state procedure on account of its importance to France's historical and cultural heritage, the head should have been replaced, and the restoration shielded from future acts of defacement.

As I mentioned in my introduction, Joséphine generates passionate debate among Martinicans. While some see her as the pride of the island as the Empress of the French, or praise her passion for botany, others remain vehemently critical, and associate her solely with her role in the reinstatement of slavery in 1802. However, no historical text proves that Napoleon re-established slavery in the colonies under pressure from Joséphine, who would have wished to maintain the slave system and thus preserve the economic power of generations of slave-owners to which she herself belonged. Nevertheless, Joséphine is caught in the quarrel between official History and the “tormented chronology of non-history,” and has therefore been beheaded both by History and local history.

Joséphine's statue is tied to a historical period of conquest, slavery, colonization, liberation and assimilation. If one imagines the tactics of those who intentionally perform their acts of memory, one can see how these periods that shape the politics of memory in Martinique have guided the offenders in their choices of specific symbolic mutilations. In fact, in Martinique, because there is a need for more significant symbolic sites of memory that would allow for a serene dialogue on the history of the slave trade, on slavery and colonization, “the need for memory is also an excessive need for history” (Nora 1984). Therefore, it becomes necessary to reconfigure the statue as a political site of memory.

As a controversial symbol for Martinican society but a glorifying sign of the French republic that has gained the prestigious status of National Heritage Site, the beheaded statue has, since September 1991, become a “non-place.” By using Marc Augé's concept of *non-lieux*, I situate my argument within a gap that is present in Augé's articulation of his concept. While he considers that social structures strongly relate to places, he underscores that other places of the globalized world (transit spaces such as airports for example) that do not allow for an intense relation with social dynamics need to be conceptualized as non-places. However, the border between non-places and places cannot be hermetically sealed

insofar as the symbolic sociality that initially separates the two opposite terms of the paradigm can become the matrix that blurs the separation and initiates a new relational dimension. This interstitial zone that grounds my reflection has been subsequently identified by Augé, since he believes that the notion of place cannot be approached from an empirical perspective, and that “either place or non-place [do not] really exist [. . .] in the absolute sense of the term. The place/non-place pairing is an instrument for measuring the degree of sociality and symbolization of a given space” (Augé, 2008, viii). This interstitial zone between place and non-place, along with Appadurai’s concept of “ideoscape”, are appropriate theoretical venues to rethink how the beheaded statue occupies a symbolic space in the city of Fort-de-France. It is a non-place insofar as it is located within the logic of the symbolic preservation of an official cultural and historical French heritage that needs to be interrogated because it has not established coherent and lucid connections with the Martinican people as regards the traumas of slavery. Nevertheless, the beheaded statue can be considered as a place because in the politics of memory in Martinique, while these defacements satisfy the anonymous offenders and their ideological followers, they disturb those who believe that the acts of mutilation send the wrong message. In relation to Augé and Appadurai’s conceptualization of the ideoscape, I see the beheaded statue as a place that calls for a duty of memory by legitimizing, in an open space, public debates and counter-ideologies that destabilize dominant French discourses, and try out different patterns of temporary and utopian local sovereignty.

In other words, the statue of Joséphine before 1991 is a non-place which, once mutilated, becomes a place, that is to say a social and political symbol that serves as proof of the need for a dialogue between official historical records and non-history. The beheaded statue is located one block from the Préfecture, a “high place” of power, which symbolically represents the French Republic in the cityscape of Fort-de-France. Thus, decapitated and stained with red paint, the French Republic is wounded not only because it is disrespected, but also because the Empress of the French is insulted. One needs to bear in mind that the primary function of the statue is written on the pedestal: “to honor the Empress Joséphine.” Nevertheless, this function is disrupted since in 1991 it entered into a floating zone of ambivalence where the official message it is supposed to convey is assaulted, erased, threatened or forced to compete with a specific oppositional narrative that appropriates colonial history with the intention to deploy a different meaning.

In 1992, only one year after it was beheaded, the statue was declared a protected historical monument, raising the question of the kind of history

that is celebrated in 1992. Is it the history of “the people of Martinique who raised this monument to the Empress born in this colony,” as it is *officially* inscribed on the pedestal? Or is it the non-history of a group of Martinicans who desecrated the statue by demanding in Martinican Creole “*respé ba Matinik, respé ba 22 mé*” [respect for Martinique, respect for May 22], and asking for slavery to be acknowledged as a crime against humanity? The two historical dynamics do not coalesce and the official classification of the statue clearly falls into a hazy and conflicted zone.

According to strict regulations from the Ministry of Culture, a classified National Heritage Site cannot be destroyed, displaced, modified or restored without permission from the Ministry of Culture. Since 1991, by reconfiguring the cityscape of transcolonial Fort-de-France, the imposed model of the perfection and neatness of historical monuments has been disrupted, and the decision forces everyone to acknowledge the evidence of an ambivalence, and of a contradiction—that of a community complacent with the process of departmentalization,¹⁰ yet renegotiating the traumas brought about by assimilation, and refusing to obliterate the complexities of Martinique’s H/history. Thus, the perpetrators act on behalf of those who assert that the acts of memory constitute the community’s way of refusing to be passive spectators of an official historical narrative.

Twenty-two years after the statue was beheaded, what should have been done with the statue, and whether the city of Fort-de-France should have replaced the missing head, are still passionately debated. The question still remains: has Fort-de-France succeeded in its attempt to articulate a subtext that confirms the disfigured statue as the locus of a crisis with History? Does the beheaded statue give new meaning to missed opportunities for a true liberation from colonial ties?

La Savane, home of the statue of Joséphine, has been recently renovated. Within this dynamic of renovation, the statue was removed in 2010 to be “restored,” and a “new” Joséphine now stands in the park. However a new premeditated act of memory gives an additional meaning to the cycle of reappropriations, and to the beheaded statue, since the name of Joséphine is now erased from the inscription. The text that now reads:

¹⁰ In March 1946 Aimé Césaire was the sponsor of a law that transformed French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Reunion into French Overseas Departments. The French Government called the project Law of assimilation. For Césaire, since the word “assimilation” had humiliating cultural connotations and serious consequences for the human being, he chose to rename the Law and proposed the neologism “departmentalization,” based on the term “department” as it is used for the administrative division of Metropolitan France.



Fig. 1. 2. Pedestal of the renovated statue with the name Joséphine erased

“To the empress born in this colony” originally said: “To the empress Joséphine born in this colony.” With the name of Joséphine erased from History, and with red paint still covering the chest and the robe of the

statue, it becomes essential to question the new status of the allegedly freshly restored statue that still does not have a head.

The beheaded statue is about a conflict between official History and local history, as well as between local and national institutions. On the one hand, despite its “restoration,” the decapitation is officialized by the City of Fort-de-France since the head has not been restored; on the other hand, however, the French Government has recently proposed another twist to the story. In September 2011, on the initiative of former French Minister of Culture Frédéric Mitterrand, the Ministry of Culture and Communication created a new label for historical sites, called *Maison des illustres* [House of Notorious People]. It “promotes dwelling places that are of special interest either in terms of their history or of the famous people that lived in them.” The official website of the Ministry specifies that this architectural heritage combines a diverse range of museum structures (house-museums, house-archives, houses created by artists), and estates that hold unsuspected treasures, and which remain unjustly ignored.¹¹ Taking into consideration the involvement of notorious people in French political, social and cultural history, the new label is meant to keep their memory alive. Thus, the birthplace of Joséphine, La Pagerie, a plantation house located in the town of Trois-Islets, on the south western coast of Martinique, received the label of *Maison des illustres* in 2011. Two other plantation houses¹² in Martinique, now transformed into museums, were also designated as *Maison des illustres*.

¹¹ <http://www.france.fr/en/arts/article-old/%E2%80%9Cmaisons-des-illustres-%E2%80%9D-label>

¹² At present, 111 houses in France and the Overseas French Departments have received this recognition. Several Martinican intellectuals, including writer Patrick Chamoiseau, criticized the French Ministry for its unilateral choice. Chamoiseau notes that all the places identified are former plantations. He specifies: “If historians, politicians and men with a conscience in Martinique had simply been consulted, one might have suggested Alikier’s home, still abandoned on Deprogés street, or the house of Césaire in Redoute, of Gilbert Gratiant, or René Mesnil and Edouard Glissant in Diamant, maybe the headquarters of the Communist Party of Martinique in Terres Sainville, the house of Lagrosillière in Sainte-Marie..., one would have identified places where the admirable Victor Schoelcher, or Louis Telga, Rosannie Soleil, Frantz Fanon have stayed, or even the many anonymous shacks that constitute as many traces of heroism and courage without writing, without fuss and without words” [“Si les historiens, responsables politiques et hommes de conscience martiniquais avaient été simplement consultés, on aurait sans doute vu surgir la maison Alikier encore abandonnée rue Ernest Deprogés, celle de Césaire à Redoute, celle de Gilbert Gratiant, celle de René Ménil, ou celle d’Edouard Glissant au Diamant, peut-être le siège du Parti communiste

Keeping in mind the fact that this new initiative by the Ministry of Culture emphasizes that the label is meant to develop tourism, it is obvious that since the French Government has been unable to “reappropriate” the statue of Joséphine in Fort-de-France as an official National Heritage Site, particular attention is now given to Joséphine’s birthplace. Thus it becomes a distinguished and official location that honours Joséphine according to the new standard, since the beheaded statue in Fort-de-France, even if it is “restored,” cannot appropriately fulfill this mission.

Widening the scope of my analysis to La Pagerie, in order to insert Joséphine in a larger Black Atlantic dynamic, it is relevant to underscore that Joséphine’s birthplace is also a matter of controversy. On the nearby island of St. Lucia, a national narrative rooted in History suggests that Joséphine was not born in Martinique. Under the 1763 Treaty of Paris, St. Lucia was ceded to France and became a dependency of Martinique. Consequently, land in St. Lucia was granted to white Martinican plantation owners. Joséphine’s father was among those planters who acquired land in St. Lucia, and actually settled on the island with their families for a very short period. Historians have debated popular beliefs and imagined appropriations of a historical figure like Joséphine, and Michael Louis gathered some evidence of her alleged birth in St. Lucia in *Was Empress Joséphine Born at Paix Bouche? Exploring a Community’s Tradition* (2003). Furthermore, Lyne-Rose Beuze reports that a St. Lucian historian, commenting on the admiration of St. Lucians for Joséphine, is believed to have declared: “si zot pa lé-y ba nou-y” [“if you do not want her, giver her to us”] (2010, 23). Caught up in the dialectic of imagined origins and national pride, St. Lucians request that Martinicans return what is supposedly theirs. Thus, they articulate a disjunctive national narrative where Joséphine is once again “disseminated.” Following Homi Bhabha’s paradigm of “dissemination,” I see how the imagined and concrete appropriation of Joséphine by St. Lucians enters into a dialogue with Martinique’s ambivalent praise and symbolic beheading of the Empress.

It is revealing to note that the marketing strategies of some Caribbean Cruise companies clearly appropriate the alleged birthplace of Joséphine at Paix Bouche near Gros-Ilet as the perfect way to promote St. Lucia as a

martiniquais aux Terres Sainville, la maison Lagrosillière à Sainte-Marie..., on aurait cherché quelque lieu de séjour de l’admirable Victor Schœlcher, de Louis Telga, de Rosannie Soleil, de Frantz Fanon, ou encore ces innombrables cases anonymes qui sont autant de traces d’héroïsmes et de courage sans écriture, sans cirque et sans parole” /<http://www.christophe-girard.fr/2011/09/18/maisons-d’illustres-ou-lieux-terribles/>.

key destination for tourists in the Caribbean. Information on the web sites of Caribbean Cruises and Princess Cruises notes:

The estate of Paix Bouche, open to visitors, is where it is believed Empress Joséphine was born. (CruiseLines. us)

Established in 1746, Soufriere is the island's oldest town, and the reputed birthplace of Napoleon's Empress Joséphine. (Princess Cruises)

While Caribbean Cruises leaves some doubt on the birthplace by using “it is believed,” with the term “reputed,” Princess Cruises clearly presents its statement as being closer to a historical piece of information.

The parallel between St. Lucia’s postcolonial and global imaginary and Martinique’s postcontact presence in the world is a significant case study. While Joséphine’s appropriation by St. Lucia is linked to practices of ephemeral consumption in the local, neoliberal and globalized industry of tourism on the one hand, Martinique’s historical claim is embedded in an entangled poetics of memory. Bhabha’s notion of dissemination offers an appropriate conceptual angle to observe the beheading of the statue as Martinique disengages itself from a French national discourse about Joséphine’s celebrity, and St. Lucia shifts toward an opportunistic national discourse. However, the Martinican and St. Lucian fractures¹³ are redeployed beyond these homogeneous boundaries and temporalities of the nation space targeted by Bhabha, and lie within a more complex entity of a post-Black Atlantic imaginary where obvious and utopian modes of fractures still generate contacts. While an entangled poetics of memory in Martinique disrupts official historical records about slavery, St. Lucia’s national imaginary translates and dislocates the routes of slavery into the global and neoliberal routes of the cruise ships in a logic of economic survival.

Happening

On November 15, 2012, I gave a lecture at Colgate University about the beheading of the statue of Joséphine, and during the Q&A one aspect

¹³ In the case of Martinique, my use of “fracture” is related to several conceptual dimensions such as *fracture coloniale*, postcontact and transcolonial that all participate in a fertile debate about post-departmentalization imaginaries in the French Republic. My use of “fracture” in the case of St. Lucia is obviously rooted in the logic of its independence in 1979, but also in the nation’s tactic to bolster its economy by reconfiguring its status in the globalized tourist industry.