The Caribbean Oral Tradition

Literature, Performance, and Practice

Edited by
Hanétha Vété-Congolo

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Foreword

In his landmark film, *Sankofa*, acclaimed Ethiopian-American filmmaker, Haile Gerima provides a vivid visual representation of the power of storytelling and memory in the traumatic experience of millions of African-descended people who suffered Atlantic slavery. Gerima's jarring film opens with a declaration: "spirit of the dead, rise up and claim your story." Beyond the graphic depiction of enslavement, Gerima skillfully deployed various storytelling sessions by the matriarch, Nunu, to illustrate the essence of African oral tradition by traveling back in time to recover the moral authority of the enslaved, despite dehumanization and brutality. Evoking the spirits of the ancestors, Nunu claims in one of her stories that "we could fly anywhere and this flesh is only what is stopping us." Similarly, in many West African communities, storytelling has remained a daily routine of relating the past to the present, encoding universal moral truths for specific local contexts. In my own childhood experience in the great Yoruba city of Ibadan in the 1960s and 1970s, the moment of *itan* (story-telling session) was a time when children are acculturated in the deep values of their communities through the medium of tales. *Itan* encompasses dynamic narratives, oral histories, and mythologies on the notion of good and evil, sacred and profane, local and global, gender and generation. As a well-established tradition in many African descended communities across the Atlantic world, Nunu's vivid stories in *Sankofa*, as in the Yoruba's age-old cultural practice of *itan*, are instructive reminders of the power of an oral tradition that continues to defy conventional methods of writing and literacy in recording their history.

In keeping with Nunu's layered storytelling and the Yoruba tradition of *itan*, I see in Hanétha Vété-Congolo's erudite volume, *The Caribbean Oral Tradition*, a complicated journey of African diasporic encounters that encompasses intersections of slavery, colonialism and postcolonialism and illuminates the creative agency of Caribbean and African diaspora history and culture. In her call for papers that ultimately led to the publication of this volume, Vété-Congolo concludes: "Interorality is the systematic transposition of storytales composed in specific cultural and geographic zones into new and distinct tales [in] which intrinsic specificity is to be found. Essentially dialogical and dialectical, interorality is the first distinctive marker of the Caribbean epistemological foundation."

Drawing from broad disciplinary perspectives in the humanities and the social sciences, the impressive chapters contained in this volume dialogues with a rich tradition in Africana literary thought that have imaginatively transcribed African oral tradition into written form. Indeed, in Africana thought, the commonality in Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone diasporic worlds lies in the interfacial-intertextual-interoral relationships between the spoken and the written word. Like the proverbial broken egg, in the ritual enactment of the spoken word, the word, once spoken—because of its intricate complexity—cannot be retrieved in its original form. Furthermore, the volume extends the dialogue on how enduring Africana orality engages other dynamic cultural experiences—Western, Asian, indigenous—as well as multiple social relations that shape local political and economic conditions.

Acknowledging complicated Caribbean and African diaspora identities, the volume shares varied perspectives on the significance of interorality to the hitherto fixating discourse on Caribbeanness. From aesthetics to ethics, speech to morality, theatricality to communality, dislocated binaries to Afro-Caribbean philosophy, gender and sexual discourse to the slave sublime, ethnomusicology to local "episteme," the diversity of the chapters in their thematic concerns and spatial geographies—Brazil, Colombia, Caribbean—remind us that, although slavery and colonialism were dehumanizing, a crucial legacy of African descended peoples in the Americas is vividly expressed in the re-telling of their stories. Their history is not only told in the way it is remembered by the lettered, but also from the mouths of everyday folk such as Gerima's matriarch, Nunu, and millions of Yoruba mothers who are masters of the *itan* tradition. Through the chapters in this book, Vété-Congolo and her colleagues have effectively responded to

important theoretical, cultural, epistemological, and artistic questions that are at the core of "interorality." These scholars are worthy conduits for the transmission of the intersecting, layered, transnational, and migrating words and world that center the Caribbean and African diaspora in the globe, despite their political and economic marginalization.

In addition to their deep intellectual perspectives, Professor Hanétha Vété-Congolo and her colleagues ask their readers to contemplate the complex tapestries of Caribbean and African diaspora orality in national, transnational, and global contexts. Because of its wide range of disciplinary fields, spanning literary, sociological, artistic, cultural, and epistemological themes, this volume will certainly enrich a distinctive interdisciplinary pedagogy in Africana humanities. The volume is impressive in scope and depth—a must-read for all those interested African diaspora orality.

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Preface

Connected by Narratives: Thinking as Creation and Resistance

The new millennium began with a racket: exhausted by wars, threats, and the proliferation of images distorted by mirrors, people were still weakened by job shortages, nuclear and food risks, anguishes about unknown plagues, the growing misery in some parts of the world, the upheaval of insurrections which threatened the grand-scale sharing of powers, and the money speculation which went along with the pressing need of military-industrial complexes. Within this racket, geopolitical frontiers were redefined, memories were reconstituted, imaginary worlds were revitalized, and philosophies were commited to *speaking* and asking, with more or less honesty, questions related to the *formation of subjectivity* (individuals' and communities' identities), the *encounter with otherness*, and the shaping and display of institutions. As for philosophies, not only do they address epistemological problems concerning the conditions of possibility of notions and institutions, but in addition, they redefine the contours of blurred memories, reconstituted fantasies and all sorts of lies that the violence of war supports: deportations, mass crimes, forgetfulness, and contempt. First, to speak is to focus on this *hold* (in terms of conquest) in the question of historicity. By "hold", we mean the ways in which subjects and communities position themselves in relation to crises. That is to say, how to *measure the gap* between reality and representation, the *distance* between symbolic creation and economic-politico-scientific creation, and above all, the *relation between reality and possibility*? Second, to speak is to rethink the places

of diction in policies and philosophies; from where do we speak? Third, to speak is to refer to experience, it is to have the experience of foundations, establishments, and actions. This book, *The Caribbean Oral tradition* is a speech that actuates the concept of *interorality*, which is, in fact, a practice of foundation. By retaking Emmanuel Kant's distinction and opposition between what is *constitutive* and what is simply *regulatory*, we would say, according to Hanétha Vété-Congolo, that interorality is not only a concept, *regulating* social relations and the history of the Caribbean, but also a *constitutive matrix* of Caribbean societies and the ways in which they present themselves and represent others. This concept, which is, in fact, also a regulatory and constitutive practice, enables an *archeological* reading of the history of the Caribbean, a diacritical usage of the type of narrations, rationalities, and epistemologies that regulated and deregulated the history and humanity of the Caribbean. Last but not least, it enables a *proleptic* examination which anticipates the possible, suggesting that *interorality* is what opens up to the *Not-yet (Nondum)* in Ernst Bloch's terms.

Archeology: At the Crossroad Stands *Pawòl* which has Transformed into Experience

German philosopher Walter Benjamin deplored what he termed "deficiency in experience." In Germany, after World War I, when the attempts to restore democracy in the short-lived Weimar Republic failed, Benjamin diagnosed, among other problems, the fact that people could not narrate. There was a shortage of speech. "Can we still find people capable of telling history? Where do dying people still utter lifelong speeches that are transmitted from generation to generation…? Who can find, today, the proverb that will help you out of trouble? … [N]o, one thing is clear: the course of experience has decreased …. What is widespread in the flood of books … had nothing to do with any experience, for experience is transmitted from mouth to ear…."[1] A deficit of orality is a "lack of experience" made up, according to Benjamin, by the overflow of writings. As a compass, orality finds its expression through speech. Among the components of orality, speech provides direction, but is not the direction, for the real concern of orality is to answer to the question of how we live experience. The experience that will concern *interorality* is that of separation and reification. The interorality that emerges from Caribbean societies was constituted by multiple separations: separation

of people from Africa, separation of the subjects from their own selves, separation of families within the plantation system, separation of the subjects from their primordial languages, and finally, separation between writing and orality. Reification, here, is not only the transformation of free subjects into purely working instruments in a slavery system and a post-slavery globalized Empire, but also the transmutation of the vivid speech into imperatives and the execution of orders. Lastly, reification will be maintained by symbolism that disqualifies. Interorality also has a remote source. African orality which, with its codes and sub-codes, nourishes the preeminence of speech that at once invents, blesses, kills, breaks up, paints, and fabricates day dreams. Interorality is a reinvention of codes and new places of diction and new expressions. As a practical concept, interorality stands at the crossing of perspectives in order to put transactions together: transactions between Africa and the Caribbean, transactions between the components of the European tales' imaginary arsenal, transactions between writing and oral tradition, transactions between concept and practices, and transactions between the "I" and the "We." Interorality makes of Caribbean speech a place of production of and participation in history. In unusually strong terms, Vété-Congolo expresses the gist of this archeological and non-autarkical vision of the interorality concept:

> It also brings critical attention to the way in which, in a particularly anti-human context of death, of very hermetically tight absolutism, and almost inextricable very long systemic and systematic physical and psychic pressure undeniably likely to transform them into the image of this death-bearing system, through their conceptual response, Africans deployed an ethics and aesthetic of work that displayed a trust in humanity, in their humanity. In its aesthetic and ethic anchorage, this African conceptual and effective response can be said to have saved humanity in this part of the world.[2] (p. 44)

As philosopher and historian Michel de Certeau puts it, the issue of speech and its symbolic productions remains a "task" (*devoir*) for everyone: "the speech now a 'symbolic space' designates a site created by the distance which separates the representatives from their representations, the members of a society and their modes of association. It is both the essential and the nothing since it announces a dislocation in the opacity of exchanges and an emptiness, a discord where the units should articulate

around what they pretend to express. It comes outside of the structures, but in order to indicate what they are lacking, that is to say the adhesion and participation of the subject … it is … a task that is an interest to the totality of our system."[3] The archeological dimension is completed by a *diacritic component* which first of all insists on the role played by Africa: "This said, in the Caribbean, transposition remains the foremost means of interoral text production and systematism its paradigm. At its root, interorality presents multiple sources because the canon embodies tales from Africa mostly, but also from Europe. Although the new whole—the interoral tale—shares some of the same features as its sources, it is distinguished by its semantic autonomy."[4] (p. 4)

The Diacritic: Speech, a Primary Philosophy and "Mockery"

The dualistic approach places speech and writing in opposition. Hierarchies, and precedence were historically constructed through dualisms. Among some, writing predominates because it has a certain synthetic and historical function, and among others, speech is foundational and writing is its derivative. This is where the nub of the problem lies. *Deconstruction*, with its criticism of logocentrism, only opened the door to aporias without revealing how speech institutes and invents a new epistemology. *Structuralism*, with its basis in structures of speech, only fixed speech in codes and suppressed the flow of its energy. *Ethnophilosophical* criticism—which integrates orality into philosophy—by African philosophers (Hountondji for instance) only reduces the philosophical activity to written texts, forgetting that a text is firstly a "weaving" of something. Édouard Glissant's attempt to develop an epistemology of the rhizomatic relation not only remains confined in the Deleuzian model (*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) but also does not focus on speech as the center of "Creolizations." The criticism of the "Creolists" (Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau) with the inclusion of the "diverse" in the social creation of the Caribbean in which orality is only a regulatory component, does not perceive interorality as a philosophy. Vété-Congolo draws the contours of this philosophy: "Interorality translates the complex phenomenological and epistemological process by which pre-existing oral texts are transmuted into new ones whose symbolic meaning and significance are intrinsically independent. It is a literary process whose mode is transposition, and at the same time, a philosophical approach

to meaning, aesthetic, ethics and speech production in the Caribbean. Interorality critically distinguishes and specifies Caribbean orality. As a concept, it is a revealing indicator of Caribbean axiology and ontology. It encapsulates critical factors for examining, comprehending and establishing what can be termed, the metaphysics of Caribbean Pawòl."[5] (p. 2) The speech (*Pawòl*) that is based on this philosophy is a criticism of the established order by the regime of domination. It is also a speech that co-produces meaning and dialogue. Dialogue is, here, at the center of cultural production, and is not a confrontation in determinist relations but a *critical occurrence* and dictatorship of newness in these exchanges—complicated, difficult, full of violence, innuendoes, and false pretenses—between enslavers and enslaved. "More than a dialogue therefore, interorality connotes a Bakhtinian dialogism because, in the domain of speech and cultural production, it indicates one of the uncontrolled results of the interactions between enslaveds and enslavers. This leads to one of the properties of interorality—its avoidance of predetermined norms and qualities of pied de nez (defiance) and insolence."[6] (p. 6) *Interorality* critiques epistemological, symbolic, and economic domination, and if the Caribbean countries are primarily involved, Africa and its own procrastination and exclusions is not forgotten. Interorality aims to supersede lazy dualisms, as Henry Paget expresses in his contribution: *Interorality and Caribbean philosophy*. This philosophy rejects Hegelian exclusions of Africa in order to substitute them with an inclusive point of view which conceives proverbs, tales, fantasy—in short, folklore—as a fundamental substrate in the elaboration of categories. This philosophy is like an opera composed of concepts, percepts, and affects in the sense in which Deleuze—who did not focus on orality—defines philosophy: "philosophy needs non-philosophical understanding as well as philosophical understanding, that is why philosophy holds an essential relationship with non-philosophers … They can even have a straight understanding of philosophy without taking recourse to philosophical understanding. The style in philosophy strives towards these three poles: the concept or new ways of thinking, percepts or new ways of seeing and hearing, the affect or new ways of feeling. That is philosophy as an opera: these three ways are necessary to establish a movement."[7] Ideological separation in philosophy divided this movement into concepts, percepts, and affects. *Interorality* therefore aims to reintegrate into the general opera the concept of movement (the role of speech in the construction of identity, intersubjectivity, and the public sphere), percepts (the question of beauty, proportion, disproportion, space for

living together in harmony, the sublime, and the marvelous), and affects (the fear, the audacity to live and reprove, the courage to make mockeries, the enthusiasm and sympathy in social creation). Pertaining to the percepts of this philosophy are Solimar Otero's contribution, *Crossing Spirits, Negotiating Cultures: Transmigration, Transculturation, and Interorality in Cuban Espiritismo*—which examines the complex transcultural relations and multi-layered cultural processes that exist in the *misa espirituales* of Cuba and which she links with the Yoruba and Congo worlds in Africa—and that of John Drabinski's *Orality and the Slave Sublime*—which analyzes the situation of the "sublime slave" in postcolonial metanarratives—.

The Proleptic: A Philosophy that Involves Caribbean Humanity and Humanity in Short

Speech ties and unties, takes into account what comes before and what comes after, blesses and curses, gives and holds back. Speech is memory (it looks back to the past) and promise (it anticipates the future). For each culture, interorality represents an *ethos* which inaugurates *refoundation*; that is to say, the movement of conservation and progress through intermediary stages that are mutations and transformations. That is the meaning of the contributions by Paul Miller, *Books and Boukman: Tracing a Legendary Genealogy*—which traces the extraordinary history of Boukman in Saint Domingue—and Michael Birenbaum Quintero, *Utterance, Against Orality, Beyond Textuality*—which puts the deconstruction of hierarchies at the center of orality. Interorality is a speech of resistance. Resistance against the imperial impositions of unquestioned epistemological categories, resistance against schizophrenia which meant that Africa should be the congruous portion in the construction of Caribbean history, resistance against the closures in the little ghettoed "*quant-à-soi*," resistance against easy allocations and etiquettes, and finally, resistance against the condition of the "tamed beast, with the necklace of servitude and sobriquet (around the neck)"[8]—that is the rhythm of this philosophy. Interorality is creation, which is a risk. Interorality would thus be, as de Certeau describes orality, the association of "the art to struggle for life, which is even the definition of practice."[9]

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Notes

1. Walter Benjamin. Œ*uvres, II*. (Paris: Gallimard, 2000) 365 (Personal translation).
2. Hanétha Vété-Congolo, *Caribbean interorality*, 44.
3. Michel de Certeau, *La prise de parole et autres écrits politiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994) 38 (personal translation).
4. Hanétha Vété-Congolo, op. cit., 4.
5. Ibid., 1–2.
6. Ibid., 6.
7. Gilles Deleuze; *Pourparlers* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1990) 223–224 (Personal translation).
8. Aimé Césaire, *Les armes miraculeuses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) 131 (Personal translation).
9. Michel de Certeau, op.cit., 262 (Personal translation).

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Contents

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John Drabinski is Professor of Black Studies in the Department of Black Studies at Amherst College. He is the author of *Sensibility and Singularity* (SUNY, 2001), *Godard Between Identity and Difference* (Continuum 2008), and *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh, 2011), as well as of numerous articles on contemporary European philosophy and Africana theory. His current research is focused on Afro-Caribbean critical theory, postcolonialism, and the intersection of Europe and the Americas in theorizing memory, history, and subjectivity.

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Paget Henry (Ph.D. in Sociology, Cornell University, 1976) is Professor of Sociology and Africana Studies and Director of Graduate Studies at Brown University. His specializations are dependency theory, Caribbean political economy, sociology of religion, sociology of art and literature, Africana philosophy and religion, race and ethnic relations, poststructuralism, and critical theory. He is the author of *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (Routledge, 2000), *Peripheral Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Antigua* (Transaction Books, 1985), and co-editor of *C.L.R. James's Caribbean* (Duke UP, 1992) and *New Caribbean: Decolonization, Democracy, and Development* (Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1983). His more than fifty articles, essays, and reviews have appeared in such journals, newspapers, and magazines as *Caribbean Quarterly*, *Social and Economic Studies*, *The Cornell Journal of Social Relations*, *The Encyclopedia of the Left*, *Sociological Forum*, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *The American Journal of Sociology*, *Antigua and Barbuda Forum*, *Third World Affairs*, *The Bulletin of Eastern Caribbean Affairs*, and *Blackworld*. The editor of *The C.L.R. James Journal*, Professor Henry is also an external examiner for the University of the West Indies and the University of Guyana. He has presented papers in North America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa, and he has organized several major conferences on, for example, *C.L.R. James's Years in the U.S.* and on *Democracy and Development in the Caribbean*.

Paul B. Miller is an Assistant Professor of French, Caribbean and Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt University. He published *Elusive Origins: The Enlightenment in the Modern Caribbean Historical Imagination* (UVA Press, 2010) in which he discusses the legacy and reevaluation of the impact of the Enlightenment in the Caribbean as reflected in six modern Caribbean authors from across linguistic and

national boundaries. He has published numerous articles on Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean literature and culture in journals such as *MLN*, *Latin American Literary Review*, *Afro-Hispanic Review*, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* and *Presence Africaine*. Dr. Miller is currently working on a book project that constellates two centuries of Cuban-Haitian cultural dialogue.

Solimar Otero is Associate Professor of English and a Folklorist at Louisiana State University. Her research centers on gender, sexuality, Afro-Caribbean spirituality, and Yoruba traditional religion in folklore, literature, and ethnography. She is the author of *Afro-Cuban Diasporas in the Atlantic World* (University of Rochester Press, 2013, 2010). She is also the co-editor of *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (SUNY Press, 2013), which was selected as a finalist for the 2014 Albert J. Raboteau book prize. Dr. Otero is the recipient of a Ruth Landes Memorial Research Fund grant (2013); a fellowship at the Harvard Divinity School's Women's Studies in Religion Program, (2009–2010); and a Fulbright award (2001). She is currently working on a book, *Afrolatino Religious Performance: Affect and Ritual in Cuba*.

Olufemi Vaughan is Geoffrey Canada Professor of Africana Studies & History at Bowdoin College where he teaches courses in African studies and African diaspora studies. He is the author and editor of ten books and many articles, including the award-winning book, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s–1990s* (University of Rochester Press) and *Religion and the Making of Nigeria* (Duke University Press). He is a senior editor of the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia in African History,* and was a fellow and public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for scholars.

Hanétha Vété-Congolo is Associate Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures at Bowdoin College. She teaches French, Caribbean and African literatures, ideas and culture. Dr. Vété-Congolo's scholarship falls within the field of Africana critical theory and focuses principally on Caribbean and African ideas, literatures and orality. A special emphasis is placed on gender and women studies from the Caribbean and West and Central Africa. Her articles are published in refereed journals and anthologies such as *Ma Comère*, *Wadabagei*, *Anthurium*, *Présence francophone*, *Negritude: Legacy and Present Relevance*, *The Caribbean Woman Writer as Scholar*, *Postcolonial Text, Images de soi dans les sociétés postcoloniales*, *The Caribbean Woman as Scholar: Creating, Imagining, Theorizing*, *Marronnages et métissages dans l'œuvre de Suzanne Dracius*, *Les cahiers du GRELCEF, Ethiopiques* and *Erotique Caribbean: An Anthology of Caribbean Erotica*. She published *L'interoralité caribéenne: le mot conté de l'identité* in 2011, *Le conte d'hier, aujourd'hui: Oralité et modernité* in 2014, and edited *Léon-Gontran Damas: Une Négritude entière* in 2015. Her poetry collections, *Avoir et Être: Ce que j'Ai, ce que je Suis* and *Mon parler de Guinée* were published in 2009 and 2015, respectively.

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Introduction

In the fall of 2012, a generous grant through the Bowdoin College Faculty Symposia Program, from the Bowdoin College Dean for Academic Affairs together with sponsorship from the department of Romance Languages and Literatures, the Africana Studies Program, the Latin American Studies Program and the Mellon Mays Fellowship Program, allowed me to host at Bowdoin College an international symposium dedicated to Caribbean interorality, *Caribbean Interorality in the New Millennium*.

Gathering Caribbean and Black studies scholars from various academic systems and disciplines, the aim of *Caribbean Interorality in the New Millennium* was to reflect upon the question of Caribbean orality—one of the most fundamental cultural and philosophical referents that typifies the region—in order to "contribute to update and revive the discussion on Caribbean oral tradition in the North American academic world [and to] complement [and enlarge], with an innovative perspective, the important field work and scholarship that have been conducted on the topic up to the eighties."[1]

The lens chosen to carry out this task was that of an innovative approach and idea that I called "interorality" to characterize the intrinsic nature of the Caribbean system of oral speech. A neologism, "interorality" describes a complex literary process and is a philosophical proposition concerned with the ideas of aesthetics and ethics.

The word "Caribbean" encapsulates the region comprising a range of lands entirely or partly[2] in the Caribbean Sea whose populations, for an extended period of time, have experienced the traumatic history of enslavement and/or colonization. But in a more general way, the work

articulated in this book also applies to what is called the Black Atlantic or to South America, and therefore is also concentrated on the experience of Africans and Afro-descents in this part of the world, and to the Pacific shores of South America. It is implied that, despite their respective specificities, these African diaspora populations across the American region testify to shared and distinctive epistemological traits.

As the symposium and its appended rich reflection proved fruitful, it is with great collegial interest and pleasure that I restitute here to the academic community and general public, through this anthology, its successful production and results. *The Caribbean Oral Tradition: Literature, Performance, and Practice* explores and proposes new leads and perspectives onto the Caribbean as an object of study and as an epistemological subject. It is hoped that students, scholars and anyone interested in questions related to the Caribbean find intellectual substance to satisfy their critical inquiries and/or to further the discussion.

Very much anchored in Africana critical theory, the Cultural and Black studies areas, this anthology that contains a selected set of fine essays best embodying the level of discussion and core subject of the symposium, heavily draws on history, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, the sciences of language, literary criticism and Caribbean philosophy. It shows the operative and applicability of interorality as much as it puts the latter in perspective and engages it with previously proposed concepts in literature, cultural studies, philosophy or musicology.

Let it be emphasized that the content of this collection of essays is intended to each and everyone interested in matters pertaining to the Caribbean. The general public as much as students and scholars in the humanities would particularly find in this anthology substantial food for thought. Lastly, this introduction would not be complete if I ended it without addressing my sincere gratitude to the colleagues and friends who, aside from the Palgrave MacMillan reviewers, accepted to devote their time, energy and expertise in evaluating each one of the essays therefore helping their writers to amplify their content, form, scope and strength. It is therefore only natural that I pay my most heartedly felt respects to Dr. Carole Edwards and Dr. Jay Ketner. Finally, it is overall hoped that, for a better understanding of the Caribbean system of speech, cultures and modes of thoughts, discussions, innovative and amplifying, will thrive and enlighten even more on some of the region's most distinctive properties. May this volume serve this very purpose all the while strengthening relevant established facts and pointing critically to new and unexplored directions.

Notes

1. http://www.bowdoin.edu/romance-languages/symposia/caribbean-interorality-in-the-new-millennium-2012/
2. But sometimes not at all in the Caribbean Sea, such as the Bahamas or Turks and Caicos Islands.

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CHAPTER 1

Caribbean Interorality: A Brief Introduction

Hanétha Vété-Congolo

"Interorality" is a terminological neologism I have created following Julia Kristeva's "intertextuality".[1] It emphasizes a new and overlooked approach concerning the Caribbean culture of "the spoken word" inasmuch as it provides a critical spotlight on Caribbean epistemology and philosophy. It offers fundamental insights as to the seminal and philosophical importance of language and of "the word" or *pawòl* in the formation and articulation of what can be called Caribbean psychology and Caribbean philosophy, hence my attempt to pinpoint its hermeneutics. Interorality translates the complex phenomenological and epistemological process by which pre-existing oral texts are transmuted into new ones whose symbolic meaning and significance are intrinsically independent. It is a literary process whose mode is transposition, and at the same time, a philosophical approach to meaning, aesthetic, ethics and speech production in the Caribbean. Interorality critically distinguishes and specifies Caribbean orality. As a concept, it is a revealing indicator of Caribbean axiology and

This chapter is part of a much larger work that I described in my book, *L'Interoralité caribéenne*: *Le mot conté de l'identité* (*Vers un traité d'esthétique caribéenne*), (Saarbrücken: Éditions Universitaires Européennes, 2011). I am here offering a synthesis of some of the main points of interorality.

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ontology. It encapsulates critical factors for examining, comprehending and establishing what can be termed, the metaphysics of Caribbean *Pawòl*. I define the Creole term *Pawòl*, which means "uttered word," "speech" or "statement", as the product of the long and constant epistemological and ethical struggle of the African enslaved in the Caribbean to proffer speech whose meaning, significance and purpose are outside of the unethical and a-human terms of the enslaver's paradigm of thought and speech. It is an intelligible discourse characterized by historical, cultural, psychological, and philosophical factors, and brought about by ethical values.

The formation and occurrence of interorality, that carries the Caribbean ethics and signals *Pawòl*, are respectively a founding moment and phenomenon for the Caribbean. Phenomenologically speaking, interorality could be seen as the first carrier of Caribbean aesthetics, that is, the first manifestation of works of art bespeaking that particular critical disposition on the universe, the human person, and beauty. Indeed, such a disposition is highly determining in the conception and expression of cultural, moral, ethical, political, and intellectual values.

Given the unspeakably violent mode of formation as well as the specific nature of interorality, I am most interested in the overlooked philosophical value and scope of the Caribbean tradition of speech, speech production, utterance and meaning.

Caribbean scholars and philosophers such as Édouard Glissant, among others, have intensely reflected and proffered invaluable and powerful epistemological propositions. However, it remains that the predominating approach to Caribbean phenomena and history, especially with regard to the deported Africans, is often disturbingly mechanical and technical, almost mathematical and descriptively numerical. It is quite detached from their core value as an unprecedented statement about humankind and their capacity to raise poignantly critical issues related to philosophical considerations. Through the deportation and enslavement of Africans, Europeans directly brought to the forefront notions of philosophy and humankind related to consciousness, the fight for social justice and equality, and the reaction of the oppressed concerning both their existence and their awareness of it. One tends to neglect the fact that, in the so-called encounter of the Africans' and Europeans' worlds, there was also and, in a paramount way, an encounter between two philosophies. Even though the Europeans' outlook discarded Africans as human, the fact remains that they were indeed encountering members of humankind, and in this light, the issue of philosophy simply cannot be bypassed. This issue needs to be

placed at the center of reflections on this period and its historical events because it is intrinsically concerned with the question of humankind on the one hand, and on the other, because colonization and slavery as experienced in America[2] created a severe and lasting crisis for the human species.

The importance of interorality as bearer of *pawòl* would not have been paramount had this history not been founded on the painful predominance of anti-aesthetic and unethical ideologies, at the core of which were fierce violence, intentional separatism, exclusion, deprivation, total lack of communication, and an ongoing, persistent attempt by one group to efface the other by reducing them to silence. This attempt has proven to be critical to the ensuing and enduring general relegation of the African groups to the lowest considerations of humankind.

Therefore, through interorality, I also wish to stress a largely ignored phenomenon—the role assumed by Africans in forming, through the critical emblem of speech and discourse, a Caribbean philosophy which concerns itself with humankind. Too often, the deported Africans are portrayed as passive bearers of their fate, intellectually, ideologically, and also politically, although sometimes reacting physically and instinctively through visible revolts. My purpose is to underline one of the numerous metaphysical reactions of these Africans and their offspring who resisted in the very place—the mind (and its productions)—where they were disqualified and attacked.

Among other people's works, Lafcadio Hearn, Elsie Clews Parsons, Walter Jekyll and Harold Courlander have published volumes on the French-, English- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean, gathering tales passed down from generation to generation over centuries and collected in the region from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. These tales attest to a critical vibrancy of oral communication in this period. It is a truism that speech and the tradition of the spoken word are meaningful in the Caribbean, as proposed by, among others, Edward Kamau Brathwaite in *History of the Voice*. However, it is also my aim to revive and further discussions on Caribbean orality, on which much has already been said, but taking a new approach. My intention is not to specify a concept that captures the metaphysical situation in the Caribbean as it relates to crucial existential questions, but to apply a methodical reflection with the aim of establishing a base of pertinent, extensive and reliable knowledge about the region. It is all the more important to revisit Caribbean orality in the heavily globalized and "technologized" millennium because, by exacerbating the value of material tools, the digital revolution provokes

questions concerning immaterial and metaphysical issues. Furthermore, it brings many hyper-ephemeral communicative principles and paradigms, as well as new visions and meanings of language and oral practices that put pressure on the practice and perspective of orality.

It has been proposed that the interoral phenomenon observed in the Caribbean is also present in the geo-cultural space that Rex Nettleford names "Neo-America," comprising some continental American countries as well as some southern states of the United States. However, my discussion will be restricted to the Caribbean,[3] otherwise called insular America. These territories, which extend from the Bahamas to Aruba, experienced both enslavement and colonization for an extended period. The autochthonous people were very rapidly eradicated in most territories and the first Indians and Asians did not arrive until much later, so it was the two civilizations embodied by two sets of people—Africans and Europeans—who shaped what has come to be known as Caribbean history and culture today.[4]

Interorality: Some Characteristics

Since Propp indicated that the content of tales is permutable and transformable,[5] it has become accepted that, in any oral system, borrowing is possible. As a matter of fact, the European and African traditions comprise mutual borrowing and borrowing from other oral canons. It also goes without saying that many folktales were born in the Caribbean and not derived from transposition. This said, in the Caribbean, transposition remains the foremost means of interoral text production and systematism its paradigm. At its root, interorality presents multiple sources because the canon embodies tales from Africa mostly, but also from Europe. Although the new whole—the interoral tale—shares some of the same features as its sources, it is distinguished by its semantic autonomy.

The indicators of an epistemological transformation may be shared with Glissant's theory of *créolisation*,[6] but this approach to interorality does not aim to propose any *métissage*, *créole*, *créolisation*, *créolité* or unspecified *mélange* discourse. These discourses, which are prevalent in the French Caribbean, are based in essentialism and idealized transcendence as promoted by Lafcadio Hearn in *Two Years in the French West Indie*s and some of his followers, including the *Créolité* movement pundits.[7] Given Glissant's method of emphasizing the result rather than analyzing in depth the ethics of the mechanisms leading to it, he appears to regard all of the

elements at play in the transformational process of "creolization" as constituting in the same way and at the same level, through a very complex relation, a *totalité*, a *Tout-Monde* or a *totalité monde* resultant—a sort of aesthetics favoring a "renewed energy of the matter of the world".[8] He also proposes that, sometimes, meaning manifests "*not-one* transparence nor any kind of clarity,"[9] and that the resulting *créolisation* and aesthetic exudes a legitimate and fertile opacity, whose source cannot or should not be deciphered.[10] Glissant claims an egalitarian and cleansing objective designed to combat and counteract the very unsound concepts developed and actions perpetrated during enslavement and colonization.[11] However, despite his moral stance, he chose not to identify and to consider critically the level, symbolism and nature of the constituents' role and meaning, and thus, to leave the result epistemologically unspecified. Ideal and transcendental, motivated by a will to suggest an all-inclusive and "reparative" solution to one of the major human problems created by the colonial wrongdoings, Glissant's proposition reveals itself to contain a serious methodological and axiological pitfall. It is presented in the general context of crude, operating, *en l'état* and without questioning the symbolic and political inequalities and hierarchies existing between the constituents, which maintains, even exacerbates, the position of the African constituent in its marginalized rank. This ironically but logically allows for the fundamental metaphysical contribution of the Africans to continue to be overshadowed. Glissant's proposition is offered to a world in which the symbolic *status quo*, and admitted perceptions born during colonization about the nature, place and worth of Africa and Europe, are still intact. The ontological transformation process undergone by the parties involved in Caribbean history is undeniable. However, it is precisely the unspeakable confusion, alienation, mythologization, mystification, and unquestioned symbolism applied to the participants during colonization and enslavement (and their consequences) that beg for an epistemological clarification of that transformation and its specificities. It is the same context that demands a complete examination of the question of ethics and reparative justice.

Thus, the first inhabitants' myths, Indian tales and myths, non-transposed African tales or myths are all undeniably present in the Caribbean canon,[12] as are transpositions of some European tales.[13] However, the multiplicity of the sources notwithstanding, the vast majority of the tales come from African sources and almost every tale corresponds to an African counterpart. Most of all, the process of transformation, includ-

ing that of the European tales, was carried out by the African intrinsic mode of thought. It is true that the process implies potential exchange, communication and dialogue. However, in its unethical and anti-aesthetic nature, Caribbean history reveals the issue of dialogue as central, and therefore, magnifies the principle of a-dialogism. A-dialogism reflects the fact that, given the domineering enslaving and racist precepts, there was, of course, a total absence of dialogue. Consequently, another factor distinguishing Caribbean interorality is the unquestionably "creativicidal", "a-dialogic" and anti-aesthetic setting in which it occurred. Therefore, the principle and occurrence of interorality are achievements that were unanticipated and, in fact, logically unwanted by the oppressive party. It follows that the achievement of the African through this process is authoritative, and does not benefit from any active or conscious contribution on the part of the European.

More than a *dialogue* therefore, interorality connotes a Bakhtinian dialogism because, in the domain of speech and cultural production, it indicates one of the uncontrolled results of the interactions between enslaveds and enslavers. This leads to one of the properties of interorality—its avoidance of predetermined norms and qualities of *pied de nez* (defiance) and insolence. The insolent nature of interorality displays a spiritual trait that Edward Long, and so many other witnesses of the late eighteenth century, found when he considered the nature of the Africans' speech and its content. A racist, he was, of course, unable to capture the critical dimension of this property: "Instead of choosing panegyric for their subject-matter, they generally prefer one of derision, and not unfrequently at the expense of the overseer, if he happens to be near, and listening: this only serves to add a poignancy to their satire, and heightens the fun."[14] One cannot help but underlining the fact that here transpires the conscious nature of these Africans' posture. What Long identified as simple derision meant exclusively for "fun" appears to carry a level of complexity that is expressed through the very consciousness that guided the act. As sustained and manifested through the interoral corpus and its epistemological meaning, interorality exemplifies the philosophical particularity of the Caribbean, which is a decisively individualizing factor at the basis of which is the African's noetic work. Thus, my approach differs from Glissant's because it belies the severe and problematic marginalization of the African input to the complex process of (trans)formation characterizing the Caribbean. It is the epistemologically defining contribution of the African which provides its fundamental property and identity to the transformation.

Born amidst unspeakable tension within a "humanicide" context, interorality is indeed in the domain of aesthetics and beauty; that is, the tales are a sensorial and material artistic rendition of the elaborated and complex disposition of the mind of the African. Interorality uses systemic transposition, it highlights the systemic questions raised about mankind and its experience, it combines African and European cultural signs, and it allows for the material and immaterial endurance of Africa in America. It is the exact antithesis of the ontological determinism foreseen for the Caribbean, as well as the redressing objector to the hermetic notions of language, speech, power and freedom articulated by the slave system.

Relying on the numeric predominance of Afro-descents and African tales in the Caribbean system of speech, most of the studies into this epistemological foundation from the late nineteenth century up to the 1980s have presented the Caribbean as having an essentially oral tradition. For a region where the notion of speech, language, and the word have always been critical, it is important to try and understand the nature of the Caribbean *pawòl*. It is also important to analyze the context within which interorality emerged, examining not only its symbolic meaning, its semiotics, but some of its most distinctive characteristics as well. Through relevant historical reminders, I will explain that the Caribbean civilization is not inscribed in and coordinated by orality *per se* but by interorality, that interorality is one of the best examples of the specific ontological transformation that occurred, that this transformation was substantially sustained by the epistemological work of the African, that it is the means and the method for the safeguarding of both Africa and humanity, and finally, that it is anchored in philosophy.

Methodological Perspectives

In trying to capture the meaning of this important Caribbean product of the spirit and mode of representation, it is, first, essential to examine some of the general African approaches to art, and language in tales and proverbs. Of course, this implies that a focus on the meaning of the human person is equally important and considered. One appreciates how important it is to consider the idea of the human person because it has been under tremendous pressure in the New World and that it is Africans' reliance on their conception of personhood that supports their philosophical work. It is unnecessary to underline that the African communities are diverse, multiple and can each claim intrinsic individual properties. However, one should not neglect, for this is critical, the binding

epistemological substratum that allows for a global vision and understanding.[15] In West and Central Africa, from which the vast majority of the deported Africans were taken, the word is so important that there are "*arbres à palabres*" ("trees of words") or "houses of words." These are special places where speech can be offered, dialogues had, and communication circulated according to notions of respect, order and equity. The importance granted to the fact, ability and act of speaking of the human person is expressed through various ways, all concretely enhanced in both the spiritual and material life.

For the Dogon, for instance, the "bogolan" (or "bogolanfini," the cloth individuals wrap their body with) is a material piece of art and carries a word, inscribed through symbols that are dyed into the fabric, to reflect intimate traits of the wearer's identity. The making of this fabric follows organized codes and carries significant symbolism, each piece translating a "parole" (a word of significance) on the individual's characteristics. The process underlines a complex sense of beauty and art. It is the oral canon that reports the origin and function of the bogolan. Nommo, the divine, has invested this piece of cloth for wrapping up the body with the word, hence the fact, that: "To be naked is to be without speech."[16] The symbolic and physical functions, and also the beauty, of the bogolan are intimately intertwined because it *is the word* that articulates the wearer's immaterial life and identity. For as much as the bogolan is a gift from the divine, the word it carries has a concrete and direct material role in one's life. The bogolan, at once a material and immaterial symbol, combines aesthetics and ethics at the same time. Physically enveloping the body to beautify it, it also figuratively renders the latter's inner metaphysics, their ethics and aesthetics, as expressed onto the woven fabric itself through relevant symbolic and artistic patterns. It is the material, metaphorically the wrapping and protecting of skin, that communicates—speaks of—the inalienable spiritual properties of the individual person for whom it was made. In "Bogolanfini in Bamako: The Biography of a Malian Textile," Victoria Rovine's explanations about the traditional bogolanfini of the Bambara helps one to understand the crucial importance of the fabric in a person's life, especially women who have procreated. Indeed, the bogolanfini, whose distinctive particularity is written by women exclusively as bearers of the word, also accompanies them to their death. It is understood that the bogolanfini, through the language of the person it contains, will help them to settle in the Other World and allow the corporeal envelope it protects to maintain some dignity. It is not surprising that women, as bearers of life, organically and spiritually, are the community members who possess the gift and secret of the word, and,

therefore, of language—one of the most significant properties of humankind—that enlivens the word. However, it is also essential to bear in mind that in the process of creating the bogolan, partnership is necessary because men produce the material on which women apply the word. This reflects in a highly symbolic and meaningful way the partnership, irreducibly tied to mind and body. Body and spirit are so intimately associated in the African world vision that, in Caribbean French-African Creole, a language carrying strong markers of African epistemological influence, "my self" is actually said as "kò-mwen", "kò" meaning "body," and "mwen" meaning "me or I", but placed after the noun, signifies possession—"my". In other words, "my own self" is synonymous with "my body," thus translating the intimate and inescapable relationship existing between the corporal and the psychic to form an individual and complete identity. The very presence of the material—the fabric, the bogolan as an object—signifies that the immaterial—the psyche of the subject—needs proof of existence through credible visibility and coherent rendition. This view gives critical value to both the tangible and the abstract, to the intimate and epistemological association of beauty, aesthetics and language, and not simply to the immaterial, as many confine the African way of sensing, feeling and living the human condition. This is not the only fundamental influence of the African mode of thought in the Caribbean, as reflected by the French-African Creole language. Indeed, the epistemological disposition on personhood is explicitly derived of an African vision, as expressed in "tout moun sé moun" ("each person is a person"). The Creole "moun" means "person," "human being" or "people." It explicitly refers to the equality and justice parameter that should constitute the perspective bringing individuals to relate to and understand one another. It means that each person was formed or created from an intrinsic principle of equality in relation to another regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socio-economic group. "Tout moun sé moun" points to a specific ethic, one that is humanistic because it insists on the intrinsic properties carried by each person belonging to the basic category of human. Such a phrase, in Martinique for instance, is said routinely when the speaker faces injustice whereby he or she is deemed inferior to another and when he or she feels that their humanity is at stake. Through this spoken statement they also articulate their desire for a different ethic and aesthetics. Godfrey B. Tangwa highlights a similar approach among the Nso communities of Cameroun:

> In Lamnso', my natal language, there is the saying, wan dze wan a dze lim Nyuy: a baby/child is a baby/child, a handiwork of God. The saying signifies the unconditional acceptance of a neonate, … no matter what its

> particularizing and individuating physical and mental attributes [are]. Wan dzë wan leads directly to wir dze wir at the level of the adult human being as "a human being is a human being is a human being, purely and simply by being a human being" [which] connotes the reverential respect with which anything human is approached.[17]

Most of all, this view of the human person, stressing justice, equality, and humanity, appears in Mali's *Manden Kalikan* or Manden Charter of 1222 that stipulates in its first article that "each human life is a human life" and that no life shall be superior to any other.[18] The European world vision asserting that racial inequality was the sole relation paradigm, that they attempted to ingrain through physical and psychological violence, could have been irretrievably adopted by the Africans. However, the Creole language that was largely shaped linguistically and philosophically by Africans, as partly shown by "tout moun sé moun," testifies to their epistemological choice and ethics concerning human relations and definitions. This African perspective on aesthetics, ethics and the human person is key to comprehending what lies at the core of the epistemological choices bringing about interorality.

The second methodological perspective relates to Hegel's view on Africa and the African. This is the subject of a contentious debate, especially in Africa where the notion of a "Hegelian question" or a "Hegel and Africa" issue dominates attempts to clarify his ideological stance on Africa. In 2006, African philosopher, Amady Aly Dieng even offered a negative answer to the question framed in the title of his book, *Hegel et l'Afrique noire*: *Hegel était-il raciste*? (*Hegel and Black Africa*: *Was Hegel a Racist*?). Hegel's outlook on aesthetics was anchored in thought process, freedom, and the consciousness of self, three critical human factors that Europeans denied Africans in the anti-human parameters of the colonial and enslavement era. However, Africans have expressed their philosophical response to this treatment, and it is critically relevant to consider this reaction within Hegel's own framework. It is true that interorality exists within the realm of aesthetics and ethics, and articulates itself as a sort of Hegelian dialectic. Here, I borrow Hegel's notion of aesthetics as "the spacious *realm of the beautiful*" that deals with "the beauty of art."[19] In considering interorality, I want to emphasize a complex mode of thought process, of conceptualization and representation, such as for the bogolan, that comes from the "*profondeur*," or depth. This is a science

which individuates and informs us on the human group which formulates it, and expresses their "philosophy of fine art".[20] Aesthetics concerns itself not with what is simply beautiful but with the complex beauty of art as a science sprung from the mind. It thus testifies to freedom because "it is precisely the freedom of production and configurations [that is appreciated] in the beauty of art."[21] Besides, "the source of works of art is the free activity of fancy which in its imaginations is itself more free than nature is.… [T]he creative imagination has power to launch out beyond [natural formations] *inexhaustibly* in productions of its own."[22] It also comes from "the heart and from the unregulated imagination"[23] which does not prevent it from being a spiritual product "springing from and being created by the spirit [which in the] products of art … has to do solely with its own"[24] and which "is capable of considering itself, and of possessing a consciousness, a thinking consciousness, of itself and of everything originating in itself."[25] Most critically, Hegelasserts that: "In works of art the nations have deposited their richest inner intuitions and ideas, and art is often the key, and in many nations the sole key, to understanding their philosophy and religion."[26]

An Interoral Civilization and the Epistemological Work of the African

There is no shortage of descriptions of Africans telling folktales during the crop seasons throughout different colonies, or simply by night after working in the sugar cane fields, nor is there any shortage of references illustrating their propensity to tell proverbs, riddles or "*jeux d'esprit*." The tales bore very material meanings and, by continuous performance, they helped to conjure up the unjustness of the Africans' plight. However, historically, Africans were disparagingly viewed as belonging to a civilization of *natural* orality, and syllogistically, one that was unworthy, primitive and a-philosophical. Importantly, Kwame Gyekye aims in *African Philosophical Thought* to demonstrate the incongruity of these "false impressions of African traditional philosophy."[27] By definition, the European approach to philosophy is immutably anchored to Ancient Greece, and therefore limited to writing, and systematic questioning. Even the most fervent European abolitionists, such as Victor Schœlcher, would argue that the applied terror of slavery has suppressed Africans' capacity for intellectual and moral development.[28] This does nothing to erase the fact that the spiritual work—the

complex mode of thought process involved in conceptualization and representation that comes from the depth, including the notions of consciousness of self, of freedom, of language, of the arts, of aesthetics as springing from the mind, and of the loathsome that interorality raises—carries the critical aspects of philosophy. As the metaphysical result of Africans' spiritual and rational activity, interorality expands the notion of philosophy and above all, contributes to resituating it plainly in the domain of humanity by embracing orality as a credible and pertinent tool for considering philosophical activities. It is through orality, or a multifaceted oral and speech system, that the racist system attempted to prove that the enslaved Africans are infrahuman. Also, it is through complexified and amplified orality, one that considers mankind in its originality, diversity, and totality, that the same enslaved Africans could give their philosophical response to the anti-human discourse and practices. Here one understands that speech has been the very first *enjeu* (stake) to all things colonial.

The erroneous view holding the African as a-philosophical originates in the fixed separation, motivated by social classification, that Europeans imposed between orality and literacy, folklore and literature. However, while the African (henceforth the Caribbean) tradition is generally considered to be of orality, and therefore considered primitive, less attention has been paid to the fact that the Europeans who settled in the Caribbean were mostly from the lowest social classes of their countries, and also sprang from an established oral tradition. Europe also critically attested to a civilization of orality. The importance of social hierarchy brought Europeans to "disown themselves" by denying their own ties to rich oral and folkloric traditions, replacing them with an over-valuation of the written word, namely of a literary nature. Vladimir Propp has long pointed out the erroneous nature of this position by reminding us that: "Folklore [a historical phenomenon] had existed before the emergence of the peasantry."[29]

At this point, it should be recalled that the Christian faith, an important ontological constituent of the Western world, embodies the rupture between the oral and the written because God's word became even more regarded as essentially true when it passed from oral rendition to written transcription in the Bible. At the same time as the written word belittles the oral, this observation nevertheless highlights the incontestable place that orality used to hold in the Western experience. Besides, the writings of Plato are mostly based on the ideas bequeathed orally by Socrates, his intellectual guide, who is a central figure in the foundation of European

epistemology and philosophy, and is also one of the most significant examples of European orality. By the fifth century for instance, Nordic, Central and Southern European myths intermingled heavily and helped to form the European psyche. Michael T. Clanchy analyzes the transition from orality to writing in England from 1066 to 1307, stressing that during the reign of "Alfred the Great (871–99) the use of the written word for utilitarian or practical purposes was widespread".[30] However, he reminds us that:

> Outside the king's court and great monastic houses, property rights and all other knowledge of the past had traditionally and customarily been held in the living memory. When historical information was needed, local communities resorted not to books and charters but to the oral wisdom of their elders and remembrancers. Even where books and charters existed, they were rarely consulted at first, apparently because habits of doing so took time to develop. Unwritten customary law—and lore—had been the norm in the eleventh century and earlier in England, as in all communities where literacy is restricted or unknown.[31]

When writing was later mastered, literates nonetheless resorted to orality in order to build up creative written texts. Charles Perrault's *Contes de ma mère l'Oye*, published in 1695, is well-known, but Antoine Verard had already published *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*,[32] inspired by folktales, in 1496. In the sixteenth century, there was a fashion for tales, in both rural and urban settings that intensifies in the seventeenth century. During the eighteenth century these oral folktales were transposed into writing, while the nineteenth century is notable for the revival of and interest in orality. The 2008 French Nobel prize recipient, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio remembers in *L'Africain* that, as late as the 1940s, his grandmother would regularly tell her grandchildren ancestral tales.[33] However, it seems that ambiguity will prevail, despite Arthur Ransome's claim that "[t]he history of story-telling … is that of the abasement of the grand and the uplifting of the lowly, and of the mingling of the two. The folk-tale of the swineherd who married the king's daughter is the history alike of the progress of humanity".[34] And, as articulated by Vladimir Propp, generally, the people's stories will be more and more closely associated negatively with social class:

> For peoples who have reached the stage of social class society, folklore is the output of all strata of the population except the ruling one; the latter's verbal art belongs to literature. Folklore is, first and foremost, the art of the

> oppressed classes, both peasants and workers, but also of the intermediate strata that gravitate toward the lower social classes. One can speak with some reservations of lower middle class folklore, but never of the folklore of the aristocracy.[35]

In their introduction to *Telling Tales*, Francesca Canadé, Diana Conchado and Giuseppe Carlo Di Scipio also note the general lack of cultural activity in the Middle Ages, a period that is perceived as low culture. Historical archives do not report Europeans in the Caribbean colonies practicing the folkloric aspect of their culture. Part of Europeans' willingness to distance themselves from their own oral traditions can be explained by their self-designated mission for socio-economic and symbolic success, which left little room for cultural interests in the colonies, and —certainly not of the kind that were associated with low social status. However, one should not forget that the Europeans arriving in America in the sixteenth century were still influenced by their ancestral, especially medieval, customs. Despite the context of extreme racial and socio-economic segregation, the long-lasting and unavoidable proximity between all of the parties in the plantation had to necessarily generate conscious and unconscious interactions and voluntary or involuntary borrowing. The rigid plantation system, which sought to prevent any action or undercurrent that did not cohere to its official structure, revealed the naïveté of its creators. It reflected a mode of thought that underlined the colonizers' narrow-mindedness, their inexperience of the wider world and its peoples, and a true ignorance of the complexities of humankind. The plantation Europeans' very complexities, their own alienation and evident aporia and ambiguities should not be forgotten. Indeed, while openly denigrating Africans and displaying an organized and conscious resistance to African cultural and oral expressions, Europeans are depicted in historical archives appreciating these cultural practices,[36] thus implicitly recognizing the universal orality that they were carrying within themselves, and will end up sharing, unconsciously and passively, with Africans. The long and intimate association of these two civilizations, both of which had orality at their foundation, could not have failed to produce an environment reflecting this strong and commonly held tradition.[37] Through a complex set of interactions and paradigms, the Africans took an active and leading role in this process of construction, while the Europeans —assumed a more passive one. Indeed, European tales probably became rooted upon Caribbean soil much later than African tales. Originally in written form, these European folk stories were gradually

embraced, processed and transposed by the Africans. The introduction of *written* folktales to the interoral canon, regaining their oral nature through the mechanism of the Africans' transposition, adds a critical dimension to the development of Caribbean interorality.

Through colonization, and especially since the nineteenth century, European tales have become universally known. It is however pertinent to say that in the Caribbean, through the *work* of the African intellect and sense of poetics, they have become Africanized. In other words, they will be told, and given new meaning, by the singular and intangible African way of being, system of thought and world vision. The strong influence and participation of the Africans in the formation of interorality as an epistemological identifier also goes beyond the fact that they were more numerous. Studies usually examine the extent to which Western values have transformed the Africans spiritually, without paying much attention to the influence of Africans in shaping some of the distinctive traits of White Caribbeans. However, it is in their Africanized nature that Europeans and their descendants in the Caribbean will carry these tales that constitute a part of their ontology. As a vehicle of general identification, interorality is demonstrably, and despite all, one of the most important epistemes characterizing, carried and embraced by all of today's Caribbeans. Many of the tales that Parsons collected in Saint Barthelemy or Saint Marteen in the 1920s were recounted to her by White Caribbeans. Interestingly, in *Mémoires de békées*, Henriette Levillain provides the example of Elodie Dujon-Jourdain, a Martinican béké[38] born in 1891, who in her testimony displays an open Africanization, and a strong taste for and identification with Afro-Caribbean tales and songs rather than European ones.[39] Here, interorality appears to be a pertinent paraphrase for the complex cultural and ontological transformation that occurred, and it also indicates the substantive and constitutive work performed by Africans in that transformation.

Preventing Africanness, Organizing the *Blès*: A Proposition

The history of the Caribbean is based on an unspeakable ignominy, one that de Tocqueville describes as a wound to humankind,[40] and is eloquently rendered in French-African Creole as *blès*.[41] Very complex and founded on insurmountable contradictions, this theme is a prevalent one in the interoral canon of the Caribbean. This history can be summed

up by a tale or story, Contradictions a sort of "*jeu d'esprit*," one variant of which was told to Elsie Clews Parsons by Zulma Magras from Saint Bartholomew in the 1920s: "It was a ol' young man. It was a day, but yet it was night. It was thundering but it was quiet. The lightning was shining, but didn'. He was laying down, but standing up."[42] It is the two historical experiences of enslavement and colonization, concomitantly experienced, and particularly their exclusive and privative nature that give interorality its extreme and unprecedented significance, and increase its philosophical scope. It is also the perception and treatment of the African within this historical context, as well as the relationship and fate designed for Blacks and Whites, that provide interorality with its most critical meaning. Creating an inextricable *blès* by preventing the establishment of africanness was a structured project implemented through multiple strategies to thwart any opposition to the Europeans' objectives of material and symbolic enrichment. Consequently, seeking the philosophical death of the African—the most definite death there can be—Europeans sought to dismantle Africans through a complex of concrete and symbolic actions targetting their spirituality and physicality. Of course, the Africans had no *right* to defend themselves, and any attempt to do so was deemed traitorous, illegal and punishable by death. The intention of this power dynamic was essentially teratological in nature, as the morphologically amputated body of the African would later come to represent.

The prevention of africanness was also meant to favor among the Africans a new and distorted approach to freedom and labor *for oneself*, incompatible with their africanness. This was the philosophy and proposition—actually a racial statement bearing the strong denotation of racism—formulated by the European colonial system of thoughts and practices to try and mold what was expected to be the terms of operation of the Africans' and the region's ultimate identity. The importance of interorality should be understood and measured in relation to the chaos and anti-human context in which it was produced, because this context gave rise to the concept and practice of freedom. Indeed, it was formed within, against, and despite all of the absolute measures taken, not only to prevent it but also to definitively dissolve freedom as a concept. It is this specific set of drastic and inhuman preventive measures that partly gives credence and philosophical value to interorality, and provides the nucleus of historical and cultural factors around which it is problematized. The historical and cultural context, and also the epistemological value of interorality, require us to reconsider concepts such as freedom, labor, poetics, and language.

As might be expected, this very complex history produced similarly complex phenomena that I call "*implexe-complexe*,"[43] a term whose meaning often eludes those whose paradigm of meaning production is set in a close monolithic mode. The aporia underlined by the tale, "Contradictions," denotes the multifaceted division principle sustaining this history. Although Africans and Europeans were in America for the same goal of forging rapid and long-lasting material and immaterial benefits to the Europeans, they were regarded as incompatible and unequal. In the first place, the heavily racialized notion of ethnicity that prevailed in the seventeenth century posited Africans as inherently inferior to Europeans. Racial hierarchy, therefore, strictly governed the conscious and unconscious of both groups, determining their relationship to one another and, therefore, the possibilities or limits for each. In the second place, and perhaps most importantly, these groups differed inasmuch as Europeans arrived of their own accord, while Africans were deported and denied freedom, only to become the direct implementers and symbolic of European colonial design. Apart from the Europeans' socio-economic aim, no human project of existence was imagined for the captive Africans, who became exclusively bound to the new territories. By contrast, the Europeans, who never intended to stay, continually travelled back and forth from colony to homeland, navigating and moving freely.

The fundamental premise appears to have been that africanness and *inter*-mixture would both be ill-fated. In *The Journal of a Slave Trader* (*John Newton*) *1750–1754*, John Newton, an English slave trader, offers an explanation for the brutality, which was based on a general attitude towards Africans, by stating that they were seen but as "enemies" by the Europeans.[44] Newton also emphasized that the means deployed to erase any africanness in the "enemies" were not incidental but clearly "studied."[45] French enslaver, Reverend Labat, points to the studied and applied methodology used as he himself advocates cultural permutation, and emphasizes the need for a method to disrupt the Africans' Africanness. Giving the Africans small bits of attention at times "makes them forget about their country," and teaching them "several French dances… bring[s] them to forget about their infamous dances."[46] This amounts to Bourdieu's and Passeron's definition of any system of symbolic violence as "an imposition, by an arbitrary power, of an arbitrary culture."[47] When speaking of Africans, the Minister of the French colonies at the time declared that "it is important to make them lose any hope and faith in freedom."[48] It is this intent to efface the very idea of freedom that is by

far the most important element to consider with regard to the dismantlement process and the advent of interorality. Olaudah Equiano, a prime enslaved witness to Caribbean enslavement, offers an insight on the vision of freedom which was always fragile and subject to repeal: "a free Negro … live(s) in constant alarm for their liberty; which is but nominal …. In this situation, is it surprising that slaves … should prefer even the misery of slavery to such a mockery of freedom?"[49] Physical containment also attains high symbolic value with regard to lack of freedom for the African. Gruesome incarceration, constant starvation, systematic deprivation on all levels, and corporal mutilations became agents of the system of physical violence that was designed to transform the African into a monster. The enslavers ruling "with a rod of iron," and directing that Africans should be "confined in irons"[50] are historical facts of which the Creole language still carries the memory through the expression "*pran fè*,"[51] literally meaning "taking iron" and interpretatively, "experiencing terrible difficulties." However, according to Newton, the traders and enslavers admitted that the enslaved would try every possible way to regain their freedom.[52] The question of Africans gaining freedom therefore became the primary preoccupation of the enslavers who would employ extreme force as the first deterrent.[53]

As these examples attest, virtually every act perpetrated against the enslaved Africans was intended to impose upon them a psychic imprint of extreme fear, which in turn would support the ongoing project of repudiating the idea of freedom, the human being, and the (African) self. This interpretation of freedom should be considered along with that of labor, because it is related to a corrupted vision of the notion of work. Article 28 of the *Code noir*[54] stipulated that none of what the Africans produced through their own industrious labor belonged to them. Deported for the sole purpose of labor, this work paradigm, in which Africans in the Caribbean were denied any legal framework of production *for oneself*, might have distorted their understanding of the reason, the value, the result and goal of the act of producing economic value through work. Seeing themselves work extensively, materially, and for long periods of time without benefitting from their own production, all the while observing enslavers doing no material work themselves while being the prime beneficiaries of the labor, materially and immaterially, was potentially dangerous to the process of acquiring a work ethic. This is amplified by the fact that the Africans were seen as indolent. The interoral canon has memorized this prejudice in tales which

articulate a view on work and indolence, such as "*Cordonnier Fainyant*," "*Mait'e paresseux*," "*Fainyant épi travail*." An etiological tale combining three primary conditions of the enslaved,—work, hunger, and whipping—describes how Anansi became a spider. Famished, Anansi does not work for himself, although he pretends to do so, and in reality, he makes the pot "Work-let-me-see" cook his food for him. In his desire to gain from the absolute minimum of effort, he fails to comply, even though indirectly, with the order not to wash the pot so that it does not lose its power to work. Here, Anansi is obviously emulating the enslaver's posture. However, his fate seems inescapable and his disobedience leads to a beating.[55] This tale refers to an enslaved aspiring to the condition of the enslaver, that is, of the person in the colony who does not work but enjoys privileges while reminding the enslaved of how difficult it would be for him to extract himself from his condition.

Separatism is another method of dehumanization that has an ontological discourse. It is a theoretical framework within which the relationship is inscribed to prevent any egalitarian or genuine association. Europeans made a point of proving the unalterable distinction between Africans and themselves through their very strongly self-centered sense of self-perception. For, doesn't Edward Long, in his study of the colony of Jamaica in the seventeenth century titled *History of Jamaica*, start Chapter One of the Third Book, "Negroes," by evoking what most separates Whites and Blacks? "The particulars wherein they differ most essentially from the Whites are, first, in respect to their bodies, the dark membrane which communicates that black colour to their skins."[56] He goes on to declare the specifically extraneous nature of the African, vis-a-vis "the rest of mankind," as a sort of "*moun [an] dèwò*"[57]: "When we reflect on the nature of these men, and their dissimilarity to the rest of mankind, must we not conclude, that they are a different species of the same *genus*?"[58] Victor Schœlcher, a French abolitionist, later stressed the extraordinary demarcation he observed between Whites and Blacks in the slave society.[59] The separation was so extreme that Moreau de Saint-Mery, a historian of the French colonial and slave times, stated that "in these recently formed colonial settlements one finds no trace of true common unity, … this is such a remarkable incoherence".[60] A similar pattern was found in the colony of Puerto Rico, inviting Fernando Picó to observe the following: "The essential dichotomy between the free and the enslaved produced social divisions which had the effect of preventing conscientious reflection on the political nature of the country. The civil condition of the slaves was

so radically different that they could not enjoy the basic rights due to every human being."[61]

Another rigidly held demarcation between Blacks and Whites concerned the outlook on the Africans' cognitive ability:

> I shall next consider their disparity, in regard to the faculties of the mind. Under this head we are to observe, that they remain at this time in the same rude situation in which they were found two thousand years ago. In general, they are void of genius, and seem almost incapable of making any progress in civility or science. They have no plan or system of morality among them. Their barbarity to their children debases their nature even below that of brutes.[62]

While corporeal admixture was tolerated, as the abundance of mulattoes shows, it is in the spiritual domain that the Europeans most resented the Africans. According to the European system of belief, and formalized by theology, spirituality sees the soul as the place of residence of God in man. This theology was very much active in governing the precepts of the colonial era, evinced by the fact that the devil was called "*le Grand nègre*," that is, "the foremost Negro".[63] In this view, African spirituality was simply not conceivable, and certainly could not be permitted to associate or intermingle with that of Europe. This can be seen in Edward Long's description of the Jamaican *junkunnu* celebration: "These exercises, although very delightful to themselves, are not so to the generality of the white spectators".[64] However, this account contains a dual connotation because it also highlights, although it is dismissed by Long, that the Africans possessed an explicit and conscious vision of themselves, a fact that, given the context, is not recognized. Notwithstanding this particular case, Long generally considers that the Africans have neither a sense of poetry nor of beauty. This, coupled with the notions of freedom and labor, is the third critical parameter to consider: "They have good ears for music; and their songs, as they call them, are generally *impromptus*, without the least particle of poetry, or poetic images, of which they seem to have no idea."[65]

The belief that Africans had a spiritual defect which prevented them from any valuable cultural activity was on a par with the supposed absence of cognitive ability. One of the first predicates of the slave period is a Cartesian understanding of the universe, in which reason is the sole quality that makes one human.[66] Reason is demonstrated by the mastery of

literacy, another distinguishing factor according to Long: "They supply their ignorance of letters by a kind of technical memory."[67] In European eyes, writing was the only communication mode determining worth and superiority, hence "ignorance of letters" necessarily meant an incapacity to articulate any serious, reasoned, or complex discourse.

Furthermore, the presence of Whites was viewed as spiritually beneficial to Blacks, evinced in the colonial era by the widely accepted idea that young Blacks were elevated spiritually by contact with their white counterparts, as claimed by Du Tertre[68] or M. Lavaysse.[69] No less interesting is the fact that in the 1840s, White Martinican François Marbot rewrote in Creole fifty fables from Jean de La Fontaine. He called them "*bagage faite pou béké*"[70] (things made for the White Caribbean man), which he addressed to the black population in order to try and bring them to morality through French didactic (written) tales:

> … since, thank God I know how to read/ I am coming to you to tell you/ what I found in it [in these things made for the White Caribbean man]/ what can help you to not be horrid./If this stays in your heart/you will not want to be mean anymore/drink, maroon/and practice obeah/poison your masters' cattle/[…]/all of these things negroes do to impede their masters.[71]

The process of voluntary and active transmission of tales on the part of the dominating force—taken from a book but transmitted orally—could well be confused with interorality if it were not conducted from an unethical perspective to achieve an unethical purpose. The stated goal, using means that normally cater to Whites, is to improve the defects supposedly identified in the Africans and their offspring—just as the tales in the Bible would be used to improve Africans' moral and spiritual defects via oral transmission. Seen in this light, storytelling is used as a way to control and subdue, as demonstrated in Marbot's prologue. It does not reflect the intention of showing justice, balance and ethics that sustains interorality. Marbot offered an example of the methods employed by the colonial system to shape the African's mode of and perspective on language. It goes without saying that neither the mode nor the perspective were meant to serve the interests of the Africans. But another fact, seldom highlighted, is that this same paradigm shows the influence of the Africans on the Europeans in the domain of language, which is one of the most powerful tools in identity formation. Of course, while this interaction was seen as

elevating the Black, as in Marbot's illustration, it was believed to corrupt the White child: "This sort of gibberish likewise infects many of the white Creoles, who learn it from their nurses in infancy, and meet with much difficulty, as they advance in years, to shake it entirely off, and express themselves with correctness."[72]

Such is the conceptual disposition, and the proposition for the human person (of the African essentially but also syllogistically of the European) that regulates the conduct of the plantation and the context within which interorality developed. However, even though he dismisses it as "infection" and "gibberish," in his aforementioned observation, Edward Long offers an example of how the interaction of Africans and Europeans, and the results of that interaction, operate in the critical area of language.

Constructing "Voicelessness" or the Speech Complex

The segregationist, "creativicide" and liberticide complex becomes even more significant when one considers the issue of voice and silence, that is, the issue of speech. Speech is one of the very first paradigms to suffer throughout the history of the Caribbean. As much as the Caribbean constitutes a phenomenon of inter-relations and of complex trans-mutations and trans-positions that leads to the formation of the "*implexe-complexe*," the first issue is speech and discourse. The Caribbean is the phenomenon of speech—*parole*—. Indeed, it is through language, in its capacity to allow human beings to proffer symbolized meanings—speech—that colonial Europeans attempted to dismiss the enslaved Africans' humanity. It is also via the same means that the latter Africans proposed an answer to assert their humanity. Which one of these two conflicting speech systems would subsequently come to carry a specific Caribbean discourse or embodying philosophy was certainly a crucial challenging point in this historical paradigm. The way in which oral and written language is foundational in Caribbean history leads me to believe that it should be the starting point of any study of Caribbean phenomena. As a result of the anti-aesthetical and unethical context, the Africans were destined to lose their original languages. The Europeans would maintain theirs, and even impart them to the subdued subjects. Among the totally novel creations of the French territories,[73] was French-African Creole,[74] a language which was born out of the close linguistic and spiritual interactions of Blacks and Whites. Displaying the syntax, inflection and spirit of Africa, and very much epitomizing insular America, this language deploys itself

mostly through a complexified and Africanized French lexicon.[75] Just as any language does for the culture to which it is related, Creole, although spoken in only a few Caribbean countries, is a point of reference indicating some intrinsic Caribbean properties, hence its use as such in this reflection.

The process of philosophy or intellection implies that there is a party who thinks intensely and constantly—the thinker—and a party who receives the resulting ideas of the thinker—the community. These ideas are meant to influence and shape the community's intellectual properties. Language is crucial in this process. For language to serve as a critical tool in the construction of an individual, it must be shared by those who are engaged in intense thinking and the community. In the case of the Africans in the Caribbean, no such collective linguistic language existed. Through analytical and critical observations of their experience, of their knowledge of their past conditions and present predicament, they had to *create* a language that could render more accurately their past and present and denote their common vision and critical understanding of their experience generally. Because interorality is a text[76] which provides a strong discourse outlining a specific approach to existence, to the self and to the universe, it took shape from the shared elements, substantive and intrinsic, of all of the African groups despite the linguistic and cultural differences in their past and present situations. This common element shared was their core and intrinsic spirituality and their philosophical apprehension of the world phenomena, which allowed them to create interorality. I have previously described how the bogolan carries the material and immaterial "word" or *langaj* of a person. Another illustration is the concept of the "person" that is shared by the Akan of Ghana and Yoruba of Nigeria, to which Segun Gbadegesin points in *African Philosophy*.[77] In the Caribbean too, the African perception and the local experience will also generate an apperception of the "person" that Creole translates not only as "*moun*" but also as "*nèg*," which means "Black".[78] Often referring to "man", "*nèg*" also means "people"—"*an nèg*" means "somebody" or "a person" and more specifically "a Black male"—which leads one to pinpoint the enslaveds' critical appreciation of the political significance of behaviours and ethics in the plantation. They clearly identified and understood the *meaning* of the inhuman acts perpetrated as much as the *value* of a possible human response. This is not to be overlooked because the term and its naming process offer a comprehension of the reasoning and sense of discernment used by the African to invest the space and its phenomena with a particular ethic through the new language in their new world. Indeed, in the course of its own evolution, Europe named humankind after one

of the two units of human people—women and men—that it perceived to be most important in society, and as such in the world; that is, the masculine unit. Although women are central to humankind, they did not use "womankind" but rather "*man*kind," thereby making a strong political and symbolic statement. Using the same human process of labeling the world's phenomena according to their own experience and understanding, but through a different epistemological operation and perspective, the Africans of the Creole-speaking plantations accurately interpreted the facts of their environment in which the human principles were not honored by the enslaver. They therefore named humankind after the plantation unit which, according to their paradigm of reason and perspective, best stood in solidarity with humanity, hence "a person" being in Creole "*an nèg*" and especially, "a Black man." This also shows how their naming politics and usage of words signal their philosophical and critical position, and active awareness all the more so, the term "neg" is initially racialized by the enslaver who, through it, purports to dismiss the African's humanity. All the while maintaining the gender approach, they responded to the European racial statement because, in labeling humankind "mankind," it is implicitly understood that the European perspective means "white mankind." In other words, humankind is exclusively made in the image of the white male. Here, as testified by the Creole language, the African response to the racial statement redresses the ontological and political value of the word 'nèg'. It also complicates the issue by introducing relativity, by displacing the perspective and by shifting the focus from the exclusive notion of race to the more globalizing and binding notion of humankind. Interorality therefore emerged as a coherent, shared, metaphoric language or a metalanguage that challenged the Europeans' system of speech and their view of Africans, possibly of humankind.

Europeans and Africans were in a promiscuous *tête-à-tête*, a one-on-one and direct interaction which has nothing of the Creole *ti kozé*,[79] a pleasant verbal exchange between two parties, but which has the characteristics of the *koutdjèl*[80]—literally and interestingly, "beating of language" or a virulent altercation. In one way or another, speech will carry extreme political meaning and enhance the impression that what is also at stake, at least for the downtrodden party, is a matter of life and death. On one hand, the intention of speech is to posit absolute power, and on the other, it is about empowerment. Creole-speaking Caribbeans recognize the political and symbolic significance, as well as the function, of language as expressed in sayings involving the organic *lang*, the tongue. Indeed, it is often said

that "*lang, sé kouto a dé lanm*" ("the tongue is a double edged knife"). Other proverbs focus on speech", the word or language such as "*kalé djèl*" (inconsiderately opening one's mouth too wide), "*pawòl an bouch pa chaj*" (word in mouth is not heavy), "*pawòl pa ka izé djòl*" (speaking does not damage one's mouth) and "*pawòl sé van*" (words or speaking are wind). All of these sayings indicate a critical awareness of the problematic and philosophical questions raised by *pawòl* or speech, "the word" and language.

As evidenced in the Caribbean, spoken language illustrates some of the philosophy of language theories, while at the same time providing substantial material for critical reflection. Although there are critical differences in methodologies, perspectives, nature and philosophical intent, both the enslaved and the enslavers are engaged in a highly political and polemist complex of speech and discourses. On the one hand, the issue is the symbolic meaning of a statement that posits the intrinsic nature of the mind and thought, in a word "identity" and its respective axiology; and on the other hand, it is the strategies for enunciation.

Discourse depends on the intention, the perspective and motivations of the speaker. Therefore, the two opposing systems of speech enunciate two different perspectives or philosophies. The first system expresses the exclusive power to proffer officialized speech, and the right and duty to speak. According to Benveniste, language is a socialized structure and any discourse carries a message and is an action.[81] "[Besides,]…the intention of the motivation governs the way according to which the inventor of a style molds the common material and from his or her understanding of it, delivers himself in it."[82] According to Austin, "to *say* something is to *do* something;"[83] to which Paul Ricœur adds that the framework of saying and doing requires a plan of action.[84] It goes without saying that, in intent, the enslaver's discourse is in reality highly performative. Through formal means, it first purports to bring the enslaved to legitimize and recognize the European subjectivity and to hold it as the sole norm. Second, it means to bring the enslaved to perceive and comprehend themselves as non-beings, and thus, perform in a way that obeys this dynamic.

This said, if an utterance is situated within the framework of locution (its meaning), illocution (its intention), and "perlocution" (its reception by the listener), it is important to draw attention to the critical role played by location in a speech act for, it is from a characterized locus that speech tenders and is conferred its fundamental meaning. As George Lamming reminds us: "In any consideration of the role of language in the politics

of ethnicity of Diaspora cultures, it is always prudent to bear in mind the context or location from which you speak".[85] Needless to say, the context nurtures distinct philosophical perspectives and loci from which both respectively act to produce identifying noema as groups in America.

Deprived of aesthetics and ethics, the action—the language used by the enslaving system to materialize the enslaved's conceptual disposition—is based on absolute philosophical and linguistic monologism anchored in essentialism. Indeed, to carry out their ambition of economic and racial power, the Europeans deployed a Platonic logos against the African, both in formal and declarative writing and in speaking, through statements which contain a theological and absolute essence. Forming the basis for what was seen as a positive, divine and *natural* right, a set of written and oral texts was instituted; a sort of semiotic-linguistic complex, or a political language (*parole*) that seeks a total, concrete, symbolic and irrefutable adhesion. Platonism, as founded on negativism and the 'africanness denial' allowed by God, is at the core of the ideology that lays down the type of perception, interpretation and relationship that Europeans have with Africans. As a matter of fact, Edward Long asserts that: "The planters do not want to be told, that their Negroes are human creatures."[86] Therefore, being a 'non-human-person' referred to in the third person or seen as an *instrumentum vocale*, writing and speaking about the African meant articulating an essentialist and ontological speech and discourse, which is also a Barthian mythology. In the case of the African, and in an inextricably intertwined complex of declarative written texts and declarative oral language, the system of speech targeted every single aspect of their internal and external foundation, ranging from skin color, hair texture and styles, facial traits, body forms and proportions, sexuality, family texture and structure, male and female relationships, mother–child relationships, food, recreational practices, linguistic characteristics, intellect, cognition and cultural production, and religion. This body of formal *parole* against the African contributes heavily to the formation and duration of the *pouvoir de violence symbolique* which, according to Bourdieu and Passeron, is "a power that succeeds in imposing meanings and in imposing them as legitimate by hiding the power relation at the basis of its power.[87]

It was anticipated that, through this strategic, symbolic brutality, the mechanisms of violence will silence the Africans and be internalized by them. As a witness, Long admited that the "laws enacted to affect them are therefore rigid and inclement, even to a degree of inhumanity."[88] To the *natural* rights are coupled *legal* rights. The 1685 French *Code noir*, the

Meliorating Acts or Slave Code of the English territories, and the Dutch and Spanish written texts all place the African under a *legal* paradigm that proclaims his or her legal *devoir de silence* or obligation to silence. Article 15 of the *Code noir* explicitly states that the legally muted African has no right to defend himself or herself.[89] Articles 20 and 21[90] stipulate that the enslaved can legally travel from one plantation to the next or eventually be free only if provided with written permission or a freeing paper from the enslaver. While article 26[91] claims that an enslaved can denounce ill treatments at the hands of the enslaver, article 30[92] annuls this possibility by completely discarding the enslaved's word in a court of law. All of the other slave codes emulate these French formal and institutional legal interdictions. In his plea against enslavement, French Abolitionist Victor Schœlcher indicates that no matter what is done against him, whether his wife is raped or his child beaten, the enslaved male must remain silent in accordance with both the implicit and explicit, official and unofficial, written or oral laws of the enslaving system.[93] And this is the testimony of Mary Prince, a former Caribbean enslaved, who, when she was defending herself against her enslaver's abuse by speaking up, was ordered "to hold [her] tongue".[94]

Language disseminates the moral prejudice against the African in the slave society, targeting not just the body but especially the African's spirit. Specifically, women were said to be lascivious and hypersexual, and their children carried the stain of their parents if they were not born in the colony, not racially mixed, if unbaptized or not closely consorting with the Whites. Echoed by Edward Long,[95] Moreau de Saint Méry explains that all members of the enslaved group are generally said to be liars, thieves, libidinous, dishonest, obsequious, disingenuous, lazy, hypocritical and superstitious,[96] among other shortcomings.

The enslaver's language obsessively concerns itself with the *fonds culturel*, or cultural baggage, of the African. Speaking and the ability to use speech and discourse being essential in determining and asserting power, it is therefore not surprising that the African's ability and mode of speaking were also studied:

> The Africans speak their respective dialects, with some mixture of broken English. The language of the Creoles is bad English, larded with the Guiney dialect, owing to their adopting the African words, in order to make themselves understood by the imported slaves; which they find much easier than teaching these strangers to learn English.[97]

The goal was to ensure that one knew the enslaveds' mode in order to be better able to counter or suppress it. Moreau de Saint-Méry viewed the African propensity for volubility as unnecessary and frivolous, which he interpreted as inarticulate and uncritical. Failing to recognize the determining epistemological and phenomenological work at play, essentially through the new language that had already formed ("the language of the [African] Creoles"), Edward Long offered a long description which clearly communicates a similar take on the issue: "broken English," "bad English," "unintelligible jargon" and "gibberish," all of which infect the white Creoles:

> The better-sort are very fond of improving their language, by catching at any hard word that the Whites happen to let fall in their hearing; and they alter and misapply it in a strange manner; but a tolerable collection of them gives an air of knowledge and importance in flocking themselves with this unintelligible jargon.[98]

Of course, here, the enslaver establishes their symbolic and political power by their capacity to authoritatively voice their subjective vision, perception and interpretation of the enslaved's properties. This linguistic force, supported by a structural complex which enables them to enforce and divulge it, is further strengthened by the fact that it permited the enslaver to sustainably establish the power and to actually give to the subjective perception the eloquent appearence of an unquestionable objective statement. To Long, while the Africans' and African Creoles' borrowing of the Whites' properties bore the potential power to improve their defective ways, the Africans and Creoles did not deserve it because they perverted its properties by alteration and misapplication. The result of the borrowing process exceeded the enslaver's norms and their capacity to comprehend and decrypt the new entity that was outside of the essence of their linguistic culture that they interpreted "unintelligible" and "strange" that is, monstrous and loathsome. The new linguistic entity was certainly structurally surcharged and ontologically composed of multiple factors. Long's statement about taste and beauty has been discussed earlier. The resolute determination with which the Whites desired to prevent the process of language adaptation that Long described indicates that the view on what is tasteful and beautiful relied heavily on essential purity and monolinguism. It is clear that the Whites neither assumed nor embraced any active part in the process that was outside any paradigm of exchange

because the borrowing happened despite the enslaver who, incidentally and contemptuously, may have let fall on the Africans' ears bits of their linguistic baggage. It is equally clear that Long's testimony highlights the unethical nexus within which the Africans' epistemologizing and phenomenological work took place, and that had the potential to compromise it. Africans were under tremendous multilateral pressure and tension, including symbolic pressure, that also presented to them the enslavers' properties as hierarchically desirable. The issue of ethics is critically significant here, therefore. Long implies that the process of borrowing Whites' properties allows "the better-sort" of Africans to create intra-African categories and to access superiority over their "brethren." Borrowing is depicted as a process motivated by mere "vanity," and Creole, "bad English" according to Long's terms, was the way by which the African group attempted to reach whiteness. To Long, again, this was so much so that the presence of terms from the "Guiney dialect" in this "bad English" is due to mere simplicity and a desire to resort to doing things the easy way. Long's objectifying evaluation notwithstanding, the fact remains that these Africans took the risk of pointing to other modes of thoughts and action in the midst of critical symbolic and physical adversity and interdictions. Combination is certainly a recognized method for the creation of newness: "The Africans speak their respective dialects, with some mixture of broken English," and "[t]he language of the Creoles is…larded with the Guiney dialect".[99] Here, the imagination which is able to extend to the unknown, unseen and unheard is already seen at play. But in this situation, the imagination is given authority through the terms of its own inner freedom because no preestablished framework controls it. This is certainly a questioning of normativity and a philosophical proposition and an alternative through which is made a plea to enter modernity. To the notion of multiplicity—the plantations attest to multiple differences, the Africans and the Europeans, and their common offspring the mulattoes for instance—is offered the principle of diversity that is of active, lived and self-conscious difference. In the same way, there is a critical philosophical tension between the two discourses. While the enslaver's eidetic position pierces through as one that consecrates essence, the African perspective appears to be more concerned with existence, with the concrete experience that demands action, such as the creation of a language for practical reasons. However, after borrowing has been dismissed as vain, the combinatory process that governs the borrowing paradigm is now denied. Notwithstanding the limits of Long's interpretation, and the fact that he was guided by a racist approach, the

critical analysis of his description allows to capture the complex, transverse and lateral process by which African and African-descended people formed new epistemological creations. It goes without saying that what becomes clear from Long's description, and escaped his understanding, is very apparent in Husserlian phenomenonology. The African's experience and consciousness are very much inscribed in this pattern that proposes borrowing, combination and reduplication. Indeed, reduplication was also one of the modes for creation and part of the complex by which these Africans addressed issues of existence: "The Negroes seem very fond of reduplications, [such] as walky-walky talky-talky."[100] Of course, reduplication here is not an identical reflection because the repetition is modulated, and if the aesthetic judgement of the enslaver succeeded in devaluing the Africans' creation, in no way, did it prevent this creation from occurring. The critical point is the fact that something was truly created and placed into concrete existence despite the adverse conditions, and not that it was judged irrelevant and invalid. Although they were limited, under pressure from physical and symbolic oppression, and acted according to the means left to them by their circumstances, these Africans nonetheless also acted according to their own independent system of judgement and values which perceived borrowing, combination and reduplication as a way to produce meaning and make their world intelligible. Indeed, although the domineering party considered that the Africans' creation—the language—was "strange", "unintelligible" and loathsome, the Africans nonetheless validated it by the very fact bringing it into existence freely, and situating themselves in relation to it. Through this creation, they articulated an aesthetic and a political statement, one similar to and preceding Césaire's: "it is not true that man's work is completed/that we parasite the world/… man's work has only begun"[101] to "[e]nd the [old] world and start a new one.[102] Moreover, the ethical questions raised by the conditions and symbolic pressure within which the language was formed are addressed, and to some extent, redressed through the aesthetic statement.

Nevertheless, two aspects of the system of physical violence that bear particular psychic importance and high symbolism in the domain of oral speech need to be examined because they target the African *foyer de parole*, or heart of the vocal apparatus. First, one of the punishments inflicted upon Africans included cutting out the tongue. Another was covering the mouth with an iron muzzle, preventing speech. Teeth were readily pulled as a preventative measure to keep the enslaved from consuming any of the sugar cane they were growing.[103] Not least in its symbolism, was the

punishment defiling the African body from the inside by forcing them to swallow human or animal excrements such as reported, among others, by Jamaican enslaver, Thomas Thistlewood.[104] "Yé", a tale collected by Lafcadio Hearn in Martinique in the late nineteenth century,[105] and "Mangé mon caca," or "Eating my excrement", collected by Parsons in Dominica in the early twentieth century,[106] are both echoes of this historical fact. Again, the Creole language acts as a site of the memory because "*fè an moun manjé kaka*" (literally, "to make someone eat excrements"), which in everyday usage means "to disingenuously mislead someone," is a strong reprobation often shouted out to express outrage about a reprehensible action. The symbolic importance of the mouth being the agent of defilement should not go without comment. Attacking the vocal apparatus, physically and psychically—attempting to provoke "a-phonia" or "voicelessness" on the part of people for whom speech is epistemologically critical—boils down to causing unspeakable consequences.

Interorality: Counter-Responding to the Human Problem

It should be emphasized that, through the critique of their experience and their sense of discernment, the enslaved understood what was at stake and knew that the enslaver lied. As Schœlcher put it, there were maroons as soon as there was enslavement, and the number of physical revolts led by the enslaved throughout the colonies and the centuries is incalculable and multiform. There are several examples of these, including the serious insurrection of 1522 in Santo Domingo,[107] the 1733 revolt in St. John,[108] the Jamaican insurrection in 1760,[109] and the events of 1831 in Martinique.[110]

There were many other forms of resistance through speech and the will to make one's voice heard. For instance, Schœlcher reports the case of a 66-year-old woman, mother of 11 children, who was flogged for having *insulted* and *threatened* the overseer.[111] He also mentions a young girl who was flogged for having *sung a song* against the Whites.[112] It is important to cite Du Tertre who immortalizes the very concrete and symbolic NO of *la Pucelle des Isles*, as she came to be called in the colony of Guadeloupe, a teenage enslaved whom the enslaver wanted to forcefully marry to another enslaved for reproductive reasons. She let him take her to the priest and once there, when asked for the ceremonial acquiescence, she strongly

voiced her refusal.[113] Du Tertre's testimony implies that the force of her contestation prevented this marriage because he states that she remained, "*dans son état de fille*," that is, a unmarried.[114] In each of these examples, we note the important role of voice and speech as protestation.

But, more critically, a general "conceptual response to [this] human problem"[115]—to enslavement, to the attempt on africanness, to the language suppression and the teratological project—was proposed. Through interorality, an aesthetics concretely manifested through tales at the core of which is inscribed "the word" evolved. This was a different system of values and speech, in fact a human project and a new ethic—one that promoted diversity and the extolment of human dignity through sound, working for oneself, freedom, poetics and language—that I name *Pawòl,* by which the Africans opposed a metaphysical polylogism, and which carries a Sartrian existentialism *avant la lettre* and ensures the preservation of humanity in the region.

Oswald Ducrot argues that all that is said can be contradicted, or counter-said. The circumstances that led to the formation of the cluster of distinctive Caribbean traits placed the African in the Caribbean in a paradigm of the "counter:" counter-think, counter-do, counter-act, counter-say, counter-speak. However, despite the privative connotation of the term "counter," it also conveys inclusion and the notion of "with" and "for." The Africans speak "for:" for themselves, for those of them to come, for humankind; and they also speak "with:" with what they know of themselves, of the new location in which they find themselves, with humankind and with what they know of the enslaver. In this light, Africans in the Caribbean executed a critical and complex shift from merely having the ability to speak in the circumstances to empowering themselves and assuming the power to speak and engage in political actions.

Existing within, in spite of and because of the official slave system, interorality is not dependent on any approbation or recognition of this system. Despite and against the politics of containment, throughout the colonies, interorality emerged in the space of irreducible freedom. Given the severe sequestration, interdictions and inhuman approach governing the thoughts and practices applied in the plantation, interorality appeared as a conquest on behalf of humankind. Interorality illustrates what Brathwaite asserted of the Africans: "They had to depend on immanence, the power within themselves, rather than the technology outside themselves,"[116] and confirmed Césaire's belief that "man has yet to conquer every prohibition paralysed in the corners of his fervor."[117] Calling

on the inner "creative imagination" or "free activity of fancy," it counter-proposes an epiphany to the "logophany"[118] of the slave discourse, that is, to one said to be given by and manifesting God. Through interorality and recourse to the processes of the imagination and the word that sustains it, a sort of Cesairian *naturation* of the territory took place,[119] an action to establish a landmark indicating its most intrinsic nature. Interorality can be summed up by what Césaire says of Lydia Cabrera's folktale, which he calls an "*hymne fou à la liberté*" (an unrestrained hymn to freedom).[120] It is the epitome of a free and authoritative act whose prevention had been so rigorously attempted. In this light, as much as it is a *pied de nez*, it is also a *tour de force*. The very markers of what makes us human prevailed in the Africans' capacity to generate a sound notion of work developed in works of art, in their capacity to magnify freedom, sound speech and language, and to allow, when necessary or possible, *inter*penetration and admixture. It is the system of speech embodied in this works of art that articulates the Caribbean viewpoint as closely relating ethics to the word as well as ethics and the word since the latter is plainly depicted in the tales themselves. It is in this very "ethicalization" of the word resulting in *Pawòl* that lies the Caribbean aesthetic and deep mode of thought. Indeed, a Caribbean tale type that can be named "Eating the Word" stipulates that not honestly performing one's word induces severe sanctions, such as in the variant "He Eats his Words."[121]

Of course, in his description of the Africans' use of language as irretrievably "broken," "bad," "unintelligible" and "gibberish," Long was logically unable to realize that, through this novel mode of expression, creation and creativity, a philosophy of art corresponding to the junction between African and European cultures, the properties of the Caribbean, and the "ethicalizing" work of the African were at play. Nor could Long understand that what was being performed and actually offered as a response was what Kwame Gyekye reports of the Akan's system of speech and of thought: "Speech (talk) is one thing, wisdom is another" (*asēm nko, nyansa nko*).[122] I would add that using language on behalf of humankind and philosophizing is also another thing.Creole proverbs such as "pawol an bouch pa chaj" which means, "speaking is easy but acting and being wise is different", carry the same meaning with regard to language, the tongue, the word, or speech.[123] To the notions of wisdom and philosophy, responsibility and measure, these Creole proverbs add credibility, veracity, trust and integrity that can be granted only if the word is substantiated through action. This encapsulates the

strong influence of the Caribbean historical experience in the elaboration of these proverbs that render the Caribbean mode of thoughts. It also highlights a critical activity of the mind, and denotes intellectual vigilance, discernment, consciousness, and a sense of analytical empiricism. In other words, on the plantation, the enslavers maintain that the Africans are non-human but they cannot prove it. The enslaveds respond with the creation—that is, with an action—of an agency portraying some of the most specific traits of humanity. They answer with an *œuvre*. The enslavers present themselves in Christian speech but they fail to act out its principles. As an example, it is worth underlining here that, as a result of the nascent French Revolution in 1794, the French authorities—which were hierarchically superior to the enslaver in the colony—officially abolished enslavement in the French colonies, only to reinstitute it a few years later. The axiological issues and tensions that the notion of "the word" or speech raise are, therefore, particularly acute. This is why the notion of *action* also assumes a crucial essentiality in this context. The Creole proverbs formulate what Gyekye concludes of the Akan's perception of philosophy and wisdom: "in the view of the Akan wise person, analysis of propositions or concepts cannot dispense with experience."[124] I would now add that the process of interorality sprang not just from intuition, simple spontaneity or computation. It did not spring from a so-called *natural* propensity to orality, nor was it supported by mere numeric advantage on the part of the Africans. It sprang from a reflected-upon experience of the Africans; that is, from an activity of the mind articulated in criticism and from established values that permitted them to situate themselves relative to their experience in their new place of existence. It also echoes Benveniste's viewpoint that, in itself, no language can stop the activity of the mind, and it aligns with Merleau Ponty's assertion that "the cogito teaches us that the existence of one's conscience is confounded with the conscience that one exists."[125] Interorality is not simply the testimony of what can occur naturally when human beings are put together in the same place for an extended period of time. It proceeds from the critical activity of the mind, and amounts to the Hegelian philosophy of the art as related to the deep sense of aesthetics. An "*implexe-complexe*", it responds to a complex spiritual and intellectual process relying on logic, vision, one's understanding of the universe and of humankind, and the rational comprehension of one's environment. It draws on consciousness of the self and is also an act for restoring balance or equilibrium.

A Symbolic and Political Force

Perhaps it is the anecdote reported by Lavaysse, describing a "revolted enslaved" about to be killed and who "being brought before his judges, who had condemned him previous to hearing what he had to say in his defense, [and who] requested to be heard for a minute before he was sent to execution,"[126] that best illustrates the significant tension carried by interorality. It is a heightened tension in which the system of speech of the enslaver clamoring for the death of the revolted enslaved in Lavaysse's story[127] is constantly opposed by the latter's forceful *retort*. This is an ontological discourse that implicitly highlights that the *idea* of freedom and authoritative and ethical speech—*Pawòl*—is not sacrificed: "I was born in Africa: while defending the person of my prince in battle, I was taken prisoner and sold as a slave on the coast of Guinea."[128] In addition to stating his ontological discourse himself through an assertive repetitive mode, the revolting enslaved directly dismisses the enslaver's accusation: "Master, these hands have made tigers tremble; yet you dare to threaten me with that despicable instrument! No, I despise all the torments which you can now invent, as well as the wretch who is about to inflict them."[129] Given the enslaver's peremptory fatal decision regarding the revolted enslaved's life, the latter's unexpected reclamation is an even more peremptory and critical final assertion of control of his dignity. The revolting enslaved also has a word to say about the meaning and finality of his life: "I request … to be executed on Saturday next, or as soon as it may be convenient."[130]

Consequently, in its nature, interorality brings the monologist discourse to stutter. In Creole, it is held that *bégéyé pèd*—"stammering equates to losing"; that is, a person who stammers in their discourse annihilates or dismisses themselves. Symbolically, interorality brings the enslaver to stammer and stutter because they cannot prove their assertion on the African who, in reality and factually, disproves it through action. In fact, the Creole language has a name for individuals who speak, and speak and speak most often to magnify qualities they cannot prove to own. In English, such an individual may be called a "bragger". Interestingly, the word used by Creole to convey this idea ("badjòlè) springs from one that qualifies the "mouth", that is "*djòl*". "*Djòl*," from the French "*gueule*," denotes negativity because firstly, it means "muzzle"—an animal's mouth—and secondly, it is used as a derogative in offensive phrases. The word "*badjòlè*" combines the French words "*battre*"—to beat—and "*gueule*"—animal mouth—and literally means "beating one's mouth". It therefore evokes

a comic, but also vulgar, visual of the mouth action, simulating a speech act—the mouth opens and closes incessantly—in a mechanical and fast manner without emitting any intelligible words. In this light, interorality confers the status of "*badjòlè*" on the enslaver. It achieves the *défendu*—what is proscribed by the slave discourse: the survival of Africa in America, and the irreversible non-mechanical and very complex "alliance" of Africa and Europe in America outside of the Euro-slave terms and regulations. Interorality implies generation, regeneration, creation and creativity. This is highly worthy of note because it implies a marked *état d'esprit*, a philosophical perspective on the world's phenomena and the self in which humanity must prevail. So, interorality provided intelligibility to the new world at the same time as it conveyed another sense to the inhabitants in this new place. Interestingly, the idea at its core is captured in a tale collected by Elsie Clews Parsons from a White Caribbean from St Barthelemy in the 1920s, one that has the telling title of "Who speaks first".[131] It portrays a couple who have burnt the frying pan that they borrowed from their neighbor in good condition. The husband is reluctant to take the pan back to their neighbor, and decides that whoever speaks first will have to take it back. When the husband cries out against his wife's purposeful slap, he condemns himself to being the one to return the pan. This tale is illustrative of the political *enjeux* of interorality. Given the tension between the two characters, the strategy used by one introduces the question of ethics, the use and decisiveness of language, and the ensuing speech act and the outcome. By wishing to return the pan to the neighbor, the wife aspires to justice and reparation. However, the husband is reluctant to accede to her legitimate request and, convinced of his lack of ability to control his own language and speech and also of his wife's inability to articulate controlled critical speech, he unilaterally defines the rule that will serve his power project and confound his wife. This rule severely tests the wife's endurance, so she resorts to a strategy that reveals her critical and subtle mind, and her command over her own speech process and articulation, and contributes to a redefinition of political power and ethics. But it is also through that discerning strategy that the woman casts light on the critical issue of responsibility and order as she recenters order and compels her husband to assume his duties. Needless to say, this tale echoes both the process and procedure of interorality as much as it magnifies the *pied de nez* paradigm.

At the same time, interorality makes possible ipseity— the will to not be forcibly reduced to the opposite of oneself—as well as alterity that allows

room for the expression of difference. It widens the scope, function and intention of speech in the Caribbean and highlights relativity. In other words, what is achieved by interorality here is what Glissant reformulated in the twentieth century: "Don't you believe that you are unique nor that your fable is the best or your voice the highest."[132]

Interorality as a symbolic force should also be viewed in the light of several other critical facts. Firstly, the enslaved's word was receivable and admissible only insofar as it incriminated himself or another enslaved. Secondly, many Africans swallowed their tongues in order to demonstrate their opposition to the slave system and their refusal to serve and feed it. Recall that the integrity of the internal vocal apparatus of the Africans was often under direct physical attacks as some of the punishments inflicted upon them consisted of making them swallow feces, as we have already seen. Thirdly, on the slave ships, they were reduced to inarticulate sounds, as evidenced by reports that no sensible word was heard apart from the "rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries."[133] They had undergone a language depression,[134] shifting from a human ability to articulate speech to an animalized mode of expression. All of the enslaved's narratives state that one of the first sounds emitted by them was that of weeping. Johann Peter Oettinger, a Dutch surgeon on a Dutch slave ship testifies in his journal that women, in despair on the slave boats deporting them to the unknown, "filled the air with their heartrending shrieks, that drums and other noisy instruments were scarcely able to drown out the sound."[135] Through the symbolic figure of the mother, Mary Prince describes the extent to which the enslaved group was destitute of defense, a situation that transpired through the tears that express both their misery and helplessness: "but mothers could only weep and mourn over their children, they could not save them from cruel masters—from the whip, the rope, and the cow-skin."[136] Therefore, I also understand interorality to be a transmutation of the moaning and crying into significant and intelligible language. It acts in this light as a recovery of the tongue or a resituation of the tongue to its rightful place.

Interorality Today

Aimé Césaire affirms that Caribbean societies were created out of "continuous resistance."[137] Interorality is also one of the starting points of the continuum of resistance to the politics of division and nothingness. Caribbean interorality may well be the starting point for the Caribbean's

intellectual history because the latter is anchored in "the word" or *Pawòl*. The choice of *Pawòl* as a means for revolution is an overlooked yet particularly critical tradition. In the Caribbean, speech, language, the word and discourse have been used in their most intense, human, inhuman, pragmatic and symbolic nature, to construct or disarticulate. *Kouto a dé lanm* (a double edged-knife) condemning and redeeming, it has also been a tool of predilection to *faire la révolution* or to seek transformation, which is a choice made by the dominated group. Caribbean *Pawòl* embodies the particular mode of Caribbean ethics and aesthetics. Even in the twentieth century, a point of maturation and more direct affirmation of one's intellectual, political and philosophical position, intellectuals, poets and writers such as Alejo Carpentier, Kamau Brathwaite or Aimé Césaire resorted to "the word" or *Pawòl* to speak out on behalf of their respective peoples still facing the astute ontological and axiological questions imposed by history. They thereby asserted the usage of the "ethicalized" word as a revolutionary tool and as tradition, and in so doing, inserted themselves directly into the intellectual and philosophical action and footsteps of their ancestors. As subsumed by interorality, "the word" or *Pawòl* is what Césaire understands as *une arme miraculeuse* (a miraculous weapon), one of the primary tools for the insurance of humanity in a place where it has had to overcome one of the worst attacks in human history. In the twentieth century, Césaire also echoed the thought process governing the phenomenon of interorality by reminding us that "no race holds a monopoly of beauty, of intelligence and of strength."[138]

In 1984, Edward Kamau Brathwaite replied to Long's statement by correcting his unethical perception in naming and explaining the interoral complex phenomenon as *nation language*:

> What I am going to talk about this morning is language form in the Caribbean, the process of using English in a different way from the 'norm'. English in a new sense as I prefer to call it. English in an ancient sense. English in a very traditional sense. And sometimes not English at all, but *language*. … We have also what is called nation language, which is the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in by the conquistadores.[139]

As for the view held on the system of speech, in 1940 Cuban ethnographer, Fernando Ortiz, who wrote the introduction to Lydia Cabrera's

Spanish edition of *Afro-Cuban's Tales*, also contradicted the generally admitted and erroneous perception of the Caribbean system of speech:

> All of these opinions surely come from the perspective of white men who prejudge blacks according to an ethic that white people have decided upon among themselves. In my opinion, it would be better to try to understand an ethic that is different and instinct rather than claim that morality is lacking in the stories. There are values in the tales that emerged from economic, social, and political circumstances that were surely different from white circumstances.[140]

Of course, Ortiz raises a fundamental ethical and epistemological question:

> Those circumstances developed in the blacks' traditional ancestral African culture and also in their new more artificial culture that evolved in the Americas. Perhaps it would be more productive to consider Africans, whose soul is reflected in these stories, in the same manner that we view the ancient Greek, Etruscan, or Roman civilizations.[141]

Following in Jean Price Mars' footsteps, the young French Caribbean intellectuals in search of more relevant embodiments of their culture and identity in the early 1930s such as Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, Léon Gontran Damas, Gilbert Gratiant or René Ménil granted due attention to folktales which they deemed authentically ethnographic, stressing the inherent culture of these intellectuals in as much as they were entangled in Fanonian alienation, emulating French manners. Damas infused his Négritude poetry with Creole and Gilbert Gratiant offered poetry and tales in this nation language. Even late in the century, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant encouraged their counterparts to use orality and Creole as the basis on which to found a new literature, one that might better articulate their identity.[142]

It was also Césaire who articulated his vision by which anyone's Self can be forged but thanks to the word: "[it] allows me to apprehend my self, I can seize myself but through *a word*, through *the word*. … [I]t is through the word that one gets to the bottom of one's self."[143] Césaire continued to plead for the preservation of poetry—"*Maintenir la poésie*"—because it is through poetry that the Self—"*Je*"—rears up: "To defend oneself from social construction … through the creation of an incandescent zone, underneath which, within which the amazing flower of the "I" blossoms

in a spectacular assertiveness, … to conquer by revolt the true part where to make oneself emerge, integrally, are some of the demands which since almost a century tend to impose themselves to any poet."[144] It is indeed judicious to end with Césaire's views because interorality was one of the very first Negritudes produced in the Caribbean on behalf of humankind: "To be of humankind, to believe in mankind, to promote humankind, to find oneself in all cultures taking the true departure: memory, what is hidden, buried, all of this exhumed, given back to the world through the life-saving word."[145] Again, when in the 1940s, the Nazi calamity in Europe, particularly in France, was already evident, it was to his faith in humankind that Césaire resorted. What Césaire's ancestors achieved through interorality is nothing less than what he perpetuated in the twentieth century: "There is no time to be a parasite in the world. The question is to save it. … Wherever we look, we see darkness gaining ground. … we are among those who say no to darkness. We know that the fate of humankind depends on us too. That the world needs every single one of its children. The most humble."[146]

The Interoral Tale: Generalities

Interorality is sustained by actual tales. Its meaning becomes even more significant when considering the morphology of a tale and storytelling. From the setting to the persona and the content, all of these elements convey a semiology that brings to life the underlying meaning and metaphysics of interorality.

Traditionally told at night, a Caribbean tale's narratology is fundamentally theatrical and dialogical, with one teller and his or her audience, which is also an integral part of the performance. The story is performed in the space of and according to a dialectic connoting freedom. It is generally preceded by a moment of pleasant exchange during which riddles are solved. As much as the storyteller, the audience possesses the word that is offered only consensually through a series of strict conventions known and agreed upon by both parties. In other words, a storyteller, as knowledgeable, respected and competent in his or her art as he or she may be, is unlikely to develop the tale authoritatively if the audience withholds its consent. Even though there can be a zone of unconscious or tacit approval on the part of the receiver, the consent of the audience renders successful one of the symbolic meanings of interorality, refered to as speech inasmuch as it is approved. In Martinique for instance, where the teller is

called "*kontè*" and the audience "*la cour*," the teller asks permission with the formulaic "*yé krik*," which may or may not be granted by *la cour* with "*yé krak*". The dialogic nature of this process is enhanced by the fact that, although very powerful, the *kontè* constantly seeks the attention and consent of the *cour* throughout the narration by asking, at regular intervals, "*Est-ce que la cour dort?*" ("Is the audience asleep?") to which the latter may or may not answer. The audience's silence, their word of disapproval of the storyteller's performance, silences the latter. Additionally, the *cour* can intervene at will, choosing very subjectively the time and content of their intervention, thereby also contributing to the meaning and aesthetic of the performance, as well as of the tale itself. This shared role in story production and performance introduces relativity while also signaling that the held view on language and power is democratic. The storytelling space is also, therefore, a locus for articulating a vision of politics that can only be democratic.

The tales[147] themselves are generally set in the slave and colonial period and feature characters representing members of the plantation population. There are tales that were entirely created in the Caribbean without resorting to transposition. However, among the numerous poetic forms that translate the African way of being and mode of thought, tales and proverbs were the types retained and transposed in the Caribbean to the detriment for instance of lyrical poetry, myths, chants, songs or the popular panegyric tales.

The most prominent tales are etiological and moral tales with personified animals as characters. Examples are "Tar Baby,", "Anansi Asks God for Intelligence" or "Why Crabs Do Not Have a Head.". They feature the emblematic character I call *fouben*:[148] Anansi—the Ashanti spider Ananse; Jicotea—the Yoruba tortoise; and Compère Lapin or Ti Malice—parallels of the Bantu hare. It is the emblematic character that most embodies a sharp viewpoint on language and enacts the will and methodology for freedom. Standing in awareness, the *fouben* shines through his spirit and intelligence. Apart from his actions, everything about the *fouben* concerns his tongue and his nasalized way of talking. In the creolophone Caribbean, he is said to have a cut palate (pale-i fann). His nasalization matches his constant and defiant subversion of the plantation's debasing laws, and in its difference and singularity, this particular way of speaking reminds us of Brathwaite's nation language. The *fouben* is generally accompanied by his antithetic counterpart from whom he is inseparable but dissociable: Tacoohma or Terycooma, Zamba, Bouki.

As a matter of fact, if the *fouben* is approved and his model prescribed despite the tricks he employs to reach his goal, which is *to be and to remain alive* in the context of the plantation, Tacoohma, Zamba or Bouki assumes a role that is resented and proscribed. Indeed, due to his incredible cretinism, this pathetic character never fails to be beaten, branded by the iron or condemned to death. For this reason, I call this persona, a *tèbè-ababa*. In Creole, a *tèbè* or an *ababa* is an individual who lacks vigilance, intelligence and awareness. Both terms also render the idea of mental illness. It is also through his stupidity that the *tèbè-ababa* who helps the *fouben* articulates his most compelling discourse as his actions indicate. The *fouben*'*s* discourse posits that, regardless of how things may look, including their own physical enslavement, on the plantation, one cannot be an enslaved. One must subvert. Actually, both the *fouben* and the *tèbè-ababa* are two faces of the enslaved. It is understood that one personality is prescribed—*fouben*—and the other one is proscribed—*tèbè-ababa*—and that the enslaved's survival depends on his or her ability to critically and judiciously make use of the prescription.

However, epics such as "Jack the Giant Killer" are also abundant and popular, featuring human characters such as Ti Jean, Juan Bobo, Jean Savant, John or Jack. This character appears to originate at the same time from an African and a European persona. If the *fouben* is typically his own savior, Ti Jean acts for his group, for others, and often for his family. However, most often, these characters outwit an adversary. Ti Jean is a *fouben* of his own. The most prominent themes of Caribbean tales are incontestably carried by the *fouben* and articulate the scale of the enormous adversity that he defeats. Both the animal and the human *fouben* continually overcome adversity, making them the two heroes of Caribbean interorality.

The canon also accounts for religious tales, with deities as characters in Cuba and Haiti where the African religions, Santeria and Vodou, are more practiced than elsewhere. Harold Courlander's *A Treasury of Afro-American Folk-Lore* provides the examples of "The Distribution of the Orishas' Powers,"[149] and "Nananbouclou and the Piece of Fire."[150]

European tales found in the Caribbean interoral canon are essentially those named by Propp, "fairy tales" written by Charles Perrault or collected by the Brothers Grimm, such as "Bluebeard," "Snow White," "Cinderella," "Tom Thumb," "Donkey Skin," "Beauty and the Beast." Of course, these European tales are afro-caribbeanized in that they underwent an interoralization governed by the Africans who invested them with their intrinsic imagination.

Morphologically speaking, Caribbean tales are very interesting because segments of different variants of one African tale type from different African cultural areas were used to make up one Caribbean variant, such as "Fool Planting: Tar Baby: How Tukemah Got his Pretty Clothes: The Pelicans Take Back their Feathers: She Eats her Words."[151] For instance, a Caribbean variant of a Caribbean tale type, "*I fai grand diab'e ca mangé maman i*,"[152] is composed of segments from Ewe, Yoruba and Haoussa variants of an African tale type.

Another singularity is that one tale can be composed at the same time of sequences pertaining to both African and European tales. Such is the case for "The Girl Who Marries the Devil", an African transposition that contains segments of "Bleuebeard" which is afro-caribbeanized as "*Diab'e qui marié fi'la*."[153] But tales can combine all of the above procedures; that is, they can be the transposition of an African tale type made up with motifs of different variants of the tale type, also including motifs of European tales and incorporating intrinsic Caribbean features.

Analyzing European tales, Propp states that: "Often an element which is unclear in one text is very clear in a parallel or different text."[154] Caribbean tales too can echo one another and actually complement one another, but it is to be stressed that they can do so, not simply within one "subcategory" of the whole, as in Propp's example, but beyond the waters that is, accross different Caribbean countries. This indicates morphological and ideological unity, and a level of interdependence within the canon. For instance, some tales can be very fragmented, highly elliptical, and lacking the information crucial to comprehending their ideology. However, the information lacking in one tale from any particular country can be found in a variant of the tale type in another country. This is seen in "Devil Bridegroom" in Nevis collected by Parsons[155] and Walter Jekyll's recording in Jamaica of "The Devil and the Princess."[156] It is in the Jamaican tale that one understands why it is the rooster in the tale in Nevis that will indirectly help the young boy (Jack) deliver his sister from the devil.

Conclusion

It is not uncommon for scholars and others to point to the deported Africans as culturally and linguistically fragmented and to the Caribbean as bearing the same types of fragmentations. They also highlight divisions brought about by the respective and distinctive European languages to underline this so-called fragmentation. What they do not consider is

that it is the Europeans' physical occupation of the territories that was limited and fragmented— a given territory was physically occupied by a given European country, Portugal, Spain, England, France, Holland, or Sweden. The political, cultural and philosophical influences of the respective European countries could be exerted *directly* and *strongly* only within the geographical confines of the colonies they physically occupied. Contrariwise, the underlying African political and metaphysical influence was more unified and felt across territories because, despite the cultural diversity, most of the territories nevertheless contained members of the same African communities. For instance, British authorities and enslavers refrained from having in Jamaica, say, too many Coromantees from the Akan group. They were deemed too rebellious. The scattering of members of the same African communities throughout the colonies was meant to divide them, to create incoherence in order to prevent strong and close ties, opposition, revolts and resilience in the respective territories. However, ironically, it is because of this scattering that the different colonies came to express a unified and coherent sense and practice of culture, spirituality and metaphysics that has been inherited by today's Caribbeans. The scattering, which meant that members of the same African communities were extensively present from one end to the other of the archipelago, allowed for a sort of cultural, philosophical and spiritual *unification* of the region that was strongly reliant on African terms. Therefore, the original African linguistic disparity of the Africans and the current European linguistic diversity in the Caribbean did not and does not preclude the existence of a collective metalanguage which is vitally important in its capacity to provide and articulate critical meaning. This spoken language or even *langaj* in the Caribbean needs attention.

In a complex way, interorality brings critical attention to the incredibly acute tension at the basis of the phenomena giving shape to the Caribbean. It also brings critical attention to the way in which, in a particularly anti-human context of death, of very hermetically tight absolutism, and almost inextricable very long systemic and systematic physical and psychic pressure undeniably likely to transform them into the image of this death-bearing system, through their conceptual response, Africans deployed an ethics and aesthetic of work that displayed a trust in humanity, in *their* humanity. In its aesthetic and ethic anchorage, this African conceptual and effective response can be said to have saved humanity in this part of the world.

Notes

1. Jullia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*: *A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, 1980.
2. The words "America" or "American" are used here in their objective culturo-geographic sense to encompass the entire American region and not solely the United-States.
3. The Caribbean is not solely geographical but also anthropological and cultural. Some continental territories are part of this distinctive anthropological ensemble. What I am proposing here can be applied to continental Caribbean spaces—Louisiana, Brazil, Columbia, Belize and so on. However, this work specifically studies the phenomenon as it unfolded in insular Caribbean.
4. I am referring here to the period after the eradication of the peoples Columbus found when he inadvertently arrived and before the arrival of Asians, Indians and Chinese, or Middle Easterners after emancipation.
5. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 8.
6. Glissant, *Traité*, 26.
7. This discourse of *métissage* culminates in popular discourse and manifestations in everyday life, such as in this popular beguine song, *Fanm Matinik dou*(*Martinique Women are queens*), sung by the famous Martinican traditional singer Francisco (Frantz Charles Denis). The lyrics claim that "zendjen blan ou nèg, tout moun mélanjé sé poutji sé fanm-lan bèl, sé poutji nonm byen doubout" ("Indians, Whites or Blacks, we all are mixed and this is the reason why our women are beautiful, this is the reason why our men are strong"). On June 5, 2013, during the radio show, *Services maximum*, an African-descended listener of Martinique première, the most popular radio station in Martinique, called from France to say that he believed that everyone should be *métissé* (racially mixed) since, according to him, *métissage* was the future of the world. He added that his wife was white and his children mixed, something he wished for everyone.
8. Glissant, *Une nouvelle région du monde. Esthétique I*, 21.
9. Ibid., 23 (emphasis in original).
10. Ibid., 61.
11. Glissant departs from colonization and enslavement but also grants attention to many critical attacks on humankind such as the Shoah and various genocides.

12. In his collection of Indian folktales collected in Trinidad and Guyana in the 1970s, Trinidadian Kenneth Vidia Parmasad states the importance of Indian storytelling in Trinidad and the influence of the "African-derived folk tales which are quite prevalent in the Caribbean region" (Kenneth Vidia Parmasad, *Indian Folk Tales of the Caribbean*: *Salt and Roti*, Trinidad: Sankh Productions, 1984, xv). By the 1950s, according to Parmasad, the telling of these tales was less and less practiced due to social and economic mutations experienced by the Indian community. In 2005, Trinidadian Kumar Mahabir published a collection of 25 *kheesas* (Indian folktales) recorded in Saint Lucia, Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica and Grenada from the 1980s to the 2000s, attesting to the presence of Indian orality in the Caribbean. He points to the fact that "[t]he only kind of Indian tales that are told today are those of the religious or spiritual type." (Umar Mahabir, *Caribbean Indian Folktales*, Trinidad: Chakra Publishing House, 2005, x). Elsie Clews Parsons traversed the archipelago in the early twentieth century collecting African-derived tales. Surprisingly, her impressive anthologies do not contain Indian or Indian-derived tales. This may be due to the fact that Indian storytelling is very localized and performed primarily within the Indian villages. Although truly present, they do not seem to pervade the canon since they are not found from one end of the region to the other.
13. Undeniably present in the canon and very much a part of it, First Nations and Indian tales do not necessarily attest to the general and systematic transposition existing across the region.
14. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 423.
15. It is a truism that the African ethnic groups deported to the American region were many and culturally diverse and nuanced. However, just like the European ethnicities, unifying values were undeniably shared, and expressed in common ways that one can interpret as a general African understanding of the arts.
16. Louis-Vincent Thomas, 2 (My translation).
17. Tangwa, 39.
18. Cissé, *La charte du Mandé et autres traditions du Mali* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003). Of course, the controversy concerning the collection of historical facts in Africa is age-old. Griots can always adapt their stories, but the presence of such a story reporting Soundjata Keita's epic among the Malian storytellers is undeniable.

19. Hegel, *Aesthetics*: *Lectures on Fine Art* I, 1 (Emphasis in original).
20. Ibid., 1.
21. Ibid., 5.
22. Ibid., 5.
23. Ibid., 12.
24. Ibid., 12.
25. Ibid., 12.
26. Ibid., 7.
27. Kwame, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 44.
28. Schœlcher, *Esclavage et colonisation*, 68.
29. Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 4.
30. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 23.
31. Ibid., 2–3.
32. Le Métel, i.
33. Le Clézio, 30.
34. Ransome, 10.
35. Propp, op. cit., 4–5.
36. Labat, 231.
37. Note that, from the outset and concomitantly, writing also becomes an important mode of communication and definition in the Caribbean.
38. In Martinique, "béké" is the term for the descendants of former enslavers.
39. Levillain, 24.
40. de Tocqueville, 302.
41. From the French "blessure" which means "wound", "*blès*" refers to a pain felt in the vital organs of the body (heart or stomach). It also refers to a symbolic wound.
42. Parsons II, "Contradictions", 397.
43. The French word "implexe" translates as an extremely complex whole made up of various, very diverse and sometimes contradictory elements that cannot be reduced. To underline the level of complexity, I conjoined this first term with the adjective "complexe".
44. John Newton, 103.
45. Ibid., 104.
46. Labat, 228.
47. Bourdieu and Passeron, 19. My translation.
48. Peytraud, 321.
49. Olaudah Equiano, 107.

50. Long, 460.
51. "Fè" in Creole means "iron" which is a trope for the iron chains that shackled the Africans. The literal translation of "*pran fè*" is "taking iron" which means "to be impaired".
52. Newton, 103.
53. Long, 392.
54. *Code noir*, 23. Edicted in 1685, the Code noir regulated all matters pertaining to plantation life.
55. Sherlock, 125–129.
56. Long, 351.
57. Translated from Creole, this means "people from outside," that is "foreigners," but also figuratively, "outcast people".
58. Long, 356.
59. Schœlcher, *Esclavage et colonisation*,29.
60. Moreau de Saint-Mery, 29.
61. Fernando Picó, 197.
62. Long, 353.
63. Hoffmann, 17.
64. Long, 425.
65. Ibid., 423.
66. Descartes, 28.
67. Long, 426.
68. Du Tertre, 468.
69. Lavaysse, 370.
70. Marbot, 5.
71. Ibid., 5–6. My translation.
72. Long, 425.
73. Some of the past insular ones such as Trinidad, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Dominica or Haiti and the present ones, Martinique, Guadeloupe and continental French Guyana.
74. While the form of Spanish spoken in Puerto Rico, Cuba or the Dominican Republic is also very autonomous from Spanish from Spain, while Jamaican Patwa or the singular type of English spoken in the other English countries are also very independent and languages in themselves, French-African Creole, currently spoken in Trinidad, Saint-Lucia, Dominica, Martinique, Haiti and Guadeloupe and her dependencies, is still a distinctive phenomenon in the Region because of its history but also because of its structure and very independent identity. For further discussion on Caribbean languages see

Jean Bernabé, *Fondal Natal*: *Grammaire basilecticale approchée des Créoles guadeloupéen et Martiniquais* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983) or Mervyn Alleyne, *Theoretical Issues in Caribbean Linguistics*, (Kingston: University of the West Indies, Mona, 1982).

75. The lexicon is mostly French but the syntax, inflection and meaning of the words spring from African conceptual modes.
76. Kristeva, *Le texte du roman*, 12.
77. Gbadegesin, 42–6.
78. The word "nègre" in French and "nèg" in Creole do not exactly mean "Black." For lack of a better and more precise word, I use "Black" as a rough translation.
79. Creole for "pleasant chat."
80. Creole for "violent argument".
81. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 78.
82. Ibid., 87. My translation.
83. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 12.
84. Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 58.
85. Lamming, 53.
86. Long, 270.
87. Bourdieu and Passeron, 18. My translation.
88. Long, 497.
89. *Code noir*, 18.
90. *Code noir*, 20.
91. *Code noir*, 22.
92. *Code noir*, 24–25.
93. Schœlcher, *Esclavage et colonisation*, 63.
94. Prince, 70.
95. Long, 409–433.
96. Moreau de Saint Méry, 55.
97. Ibid., 55.
98. Long, 425.
99. Ibid., 425.
100. Ibid, 425.
101. *Notebook of a Return*, 125.
102. Ibid., 99.
103. Cugoano, 16.
104. McD. Beckles, 52.
105. Lafcadio Hearn, 158–166.
106. Parsons I, 414–415.

107. Price, 35.
108. Westergaard, 163.
109. Lavaysse 374.
110. Schœlcher, *Esclavage et colonisation*, 68.
111. Ibid., 51.
112. Schœlcher, *De l'esclavage des Noirs*, 40.
113. Du Tertre, 472.
114. Ibid.
115. Gyekye, xii.
116. Brathwaite, 19.
117. Césaire, *Notebook of a Return*, 125.
118. A neologism from the French "logophanie" pointing to a God-given ability to proffer speech.
119. *Tropiques*, XVI–XVII.
120. *Tropiques*, 11.
121. Parsons II, 295.
122. Gyekye, 63.
123. "*Tout manjé bon pou manjé, tout pawòl pa bon pou di*" (All food is good to eat, all words are not good to be said), "*Lang, sé kouto a dé lanm*" (The tongue is a double edged-knife), "*Pawòl an bouch pa chaj*" (Word in mouth is not heavy), "*Pawòl pa ka izé djòl*" (Speaking does not damage one's mouth), and "*Pawòl sé van*" (Words or speaking are wind).
124. Gyekye, 65.
125. Merleau Ponty, 387.
126. Lavaysse, 378.
127. Ibid., 379.
128. Ibid., 378.
129. Ibid., 379.
130. Ibid., 379.
131. Parsons II, 397–398.
132. Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde*, 60.
133. Ottobah Ocugoana, 15.
134. To be understood in both the medical and the metaphorical sense.
135. Westergaard, 143.
136. Prince, 70.
137. Césaire, *Discours sur la négritude*, 82.
138. Césaire, *Notebook of a Return*, 127.
139. Brathwaite, 5.

140. Ortiz, xiv.
141. Ibid., xiv.
142. Bernabé et al., 95–104.
143. *Tropiques*, XII. My translation.
144. *Tropiques*, 7.
145. Georges Ngal. My translation of: "*Être homme, croire en l'homme, promouvoir l'homme, se retrouver dans toutes les cultures en prenant le vrai départ: la mémoire, l'enfoui, l'enseveli, tout cela exhumé, remis au monde par la parole salvatrice.*"
146. *Tropiques*, 5–6. My translation.
147. They are found in all of the Caribbean islands, Spanish-, English-, French-, Creole- or Dutch-speaking, and can also be found on the continent for instance, in the United States, Columbia, Venezuela, Brazil, the Guyanas and Belize.
148. In Creole, "fouben" which comes from the French "fou" that is "mad" qualifies a person who is himself or herself characterized by excessiveness—"démesure" and who acts outside of admitted and conventional parameters. Such a person exceeds defined criteria of order and is generally marginalized and feared for the *fouben*'s ability to disorder order is very extensive and one never knows what he or she may do.
149. Courlander, 10–11.
150. Ibid. 61–62.
151. Parsons II, 401.
152. Parsons I, 242–243.
153. Parsons II, 83.
154. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 100.
155. Parsons II, 347.
156. Jekyll, 150.

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CHAPTER 2

Interorality and Caribbean Philosophy

Paget Henry

Interorality is a new but certainly welcomed lens through which Caribbean philosophy can further its ongoing tasks of self-reflection and postcolonial reconstruction. This new concept was introduced to the field of Caribbean Studies by HanéthaVété-Congolo, a literary and culture scholar from Martinique. She developed it during the course of her work on Caribbean folktales and their genesis in the mixing of African and European folktales. Caribbean folktales are a part of a larger oral tradition, and so were many of the African and European folktales from which the Caribbean ones drew. Thus, Vété-Congolo's study of Caribbean folktales raises not only the question of orality but also of interorality as a part of a larger process of hybridization and creolization.

Given this concept of interorality, this chapter will explore the question of whether or not it is applicable to Caribbean philosophy. In other words, is there a corresponding phase in the history of Caribbean philosophy that is distinctly marked by exchanges between African and European systems of orally formulated and transmitted knowledge? I will argue that, although cultural mixing did occur, there was really no such period of oral

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exchange in the history of Caribbean philosophy for two basic reasons. First, most European philosophers do not include in the history of their discipline a phase of philosophical orature. Indeed, many European philosophers recognize only phases of philosophical literature, and insist on philosophy being necessarily a written discourse. Second, many further insist on the Greek origins of philosophy and recognize as philosophy only discourses that are in some way connected to those of the ancient Greeks. Given these attitudes, I will suggest that the question of African/European philosophical interorality in Caribbean must be answered in the negative.

At the same time I will argue that there is much more evidence for the relevance of the concept of interorality in the discursive spaces between Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean[1] philosophies. In Indian philosophy there is a much more explicit recognition of an oral phase in its development. This phase is clearly and systematically integrated into the self-understanding of Indian and Indo-Caribbean philosophers. The same is true of African and Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Given these positive attitudes towards their oral phases, it becomes possible to look at the extent of the mixing and the nature of the exchanges that have occurred in the Caribbean between the African and Indian traditions of philosophical orature. Thus, after examining the orature/literature issue in European philosophy, we will examine it in Indian and African philosophy, and finally return to the question of African/Indian interorality in Caribbean philosophy.

The Colonial Erasure of African and Afro-Caribbean Philosophy

With no direct connections to the philosophy of Ancient Greece, it should not be surprising that the period of European colonization was one of negation, non-recognition and eclipse for Native Caribbean, African, Indian, Afro-Caribbean, and Indo-Caribbean philosophies. Similar erasures occurred in other discourses, bur those in philosophy were particularly extreme. Thus, in its ongoing projects of postcolonial recovery, Caribbean philosophy is several decades behind disciplines such as Caribbean literature, history, music, economics or political science. It is significant that the University of the West Indies, which was created by the British, opened in 1948 without a Philosophy department. It was only in the 1980s that

Caribbean philosophy gained serious recognition within the Caribbean and Western academies.

This late postcolonial recovery can be linked to the extreme degree to which Native Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean philosophies were excluded and silenced by European philosophy during the colonial period. This marginalization was discursively legitimated by the European inscription of Caribbean philosophy in a number of binary categories that were analogically linked to the binaries that defined the unbridgeable gap between colonizer and colonized. Among the binaries to which Caribbean philosophy was analogically linked were: European/Native Caribbean, European/African, European/Indian, White/Red, White/Black, White/Brown, civilized/primitive, rational/mythic, logical/pre-logical, and literate/oral. In this web of binaries, Africans, Indians and Native Caribbeans were categorized as pre-logical, oral, mythic, and primitive, and were thus incapable of philosophic thought.

In order to re-assert its discursive identity and the value of its contributions, Caribbean philosophy would have to extricate itself from this complex web of binary oppositions and institutional exclusion. This self-recovery would mean challenging the arguments of distinguished Western philosophers such as Hume, Kant and Hegel, as well as a number of distinguished Western anthropologists such as Levi-Bruhl, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, and others on the discriminatory manner in which they deployed the civilized/primitive, logical/pre-logical, rational/mythic, modern/pre-modern and other binaries in their scholarly works. These binaries were deployed in ways that made African rationality and philosophy disappear, while at the same time over-representing the rationality of the West to the point of making its oral and mythic heritages invisible.

These distortions in the representation of African rationality and philosophy by leading philosophers and anthropologists became all the more significant when contrasted with the works of a few well-known anthropologists, who had broken with the accounts of African rationality in the dominant tradition indicated above. Among this heretical group were Paul Radin, Placide Tempels, Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen, Melville Herskovits, and Roger Bastide. In spite of widely differing motives and intentions, this small group of anthropologists paid specific attention to the philosophic and religious thought of Africans and Native Americans, and not just to their myths, rituals, and magical practices.

Not surprisingly, their work had a major impact on African and Afro-Caribbean philosophers such as Alexis Kagame, Henry Odera Oruka and myself. We found them helpful in lifting the dark cloud of colonial invisibility that Western philosophy and anthropology had cast over African and Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

In spite of the opposing views of African rationality and philosophy, it was the claims of the dominant anthropological tradition that continued to shape Western views of African rationality and orality between the 1900s and the 1970s. This continuing influence was very evident in the case of the major German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, whose images of Africans were profoundly influenced by the works of Evans-Pritchard and Robin Horton.[2] Even in the early writings of the distinguished African philosopher, Paulin Hountondji, we can see the lingering influence of this anthropological tradition on his conceptions of African orality and pre-colonial philosophy. Hountondji excluded pre-colonial African thought from the field of philosophy proper on three grounds: (1) pre-colonial African thought was not scientific; (2) it was not dialogical; and (3) it was not written.[3] Further, he was highly critical of the reliance of pre-colonial African orature on memory. Hountondji doubted very seriously the reliability of memory and saw a "fear of forgetting"[4] in the value that African oral traditions placed on it. This in brief was the unusually dark cloud of colonial invisibility, the distinctive net of colonial binary oppositions from which Caribbean philosophy has been trying to extricate itself.

Philosophical Resistance to the Colonial Cloud

The erasure of African and Afro-Caribbean philosophy on oral and non-rational grounds did not occur without critical responses and counter-arguments. Among the many that were made, I will mention four. The first is that in excluding African thought from philosophy on oral grounds, the West is negating the very foundations of its own philosophical tradition and their connections to orality. Thus the African philosopher, Kwame Gyekye has pointed out that Socrates, the greatest of the founding fathers of Western philosophy, did not write down his own thoughts.[5] Rather, he developed them in meditation and in dialogue with others.

To the figure of Socrates, the German philosopher, Karl Jaspers, has added Jesus, Confucius and Buddha. He suggested that these four have been the most influential thinkers of all time.[6] Yet they did not write very

much, but relied greatly on the powers of meditation and orality. Further, in both Gyekye and Jaspers, there are arguments for relations of thematic continuity between myth, religion and philosophy, rather than the discontinuity of binary oppositional breaks.

A second important response to the exclusion of African orature from the field of philosophy has been Samuel Imbo's strong defense of the value placed on memory in African oral traditions. In his book, *Oral Traditions as Philosophy*, Imbo replies directly to Hountondji on a number of themes, including the nature of texts, writing, and memory. He argues that memory was a powerful tool of intellectual production in pre-colonial Africa. He suggests that if there was any fear linked to memory, it was not the fear of forgetting, but a fear of memory on the part of Hountondji and others like him. For Imbo, this fear is the energy behind their insistence on writing as a necessary condition for philosophical production.[7]

A third important response to a rigid binary opposition between orality and philosophy is that of Indo-Caribbean scholar, Anastasia Ali. Using the work of Jacques Derrida, Ali critiques the restricted relationship between rational thought and phonetic writing assumed by those philosophers who have rejected the notion of an African philosophical orature. She is highly critical of scholars who "refuse to acknowledge the boundlessness of writing,"[8] and who also "fail to see that writing is more than the inscription of phonemes".[9] With this expanding of the concept of writing beyond the confines of the phonetic model, Ali proceeds to make a case for the capacity of oral traditions to sustain the production of philosophical thought that is transmitted across generations.

The fourth and final response that I will mention here is that of empirically documenting the production of philosophy in oral societies and bringing their contributions into living engagements with the philosophical literatures of the modern period. In Africa, some of the major contributions to this response include the works of Kwame Gyekye and Henry Odera Oruka. In the Caribbean, this is the context in which I place my work on the oral phases of Afro- and Indo-Caribbean philosophy. It will also be the context in which I will take up the issue of interorality in Caribbean philosophy.

The Oral Heritage of African Philosophy

Given that African societies are among the oldest on record, and recognizing the very clear role of philosophy in their cultural formation, it

seems reasonable to suggest that the urge to philosophize is a universal one that preceded by millennia the birth of Greek philosophy. This universal urge to philosophize has origins in the equally universal correlation between the formation of human self and the symbolic world of meanings that it spontaneously creates to support its existence. As Vété-Congolo has suggested, this creative production of a symbolic world of meaning can be likened to an irrepressible *tour de force* that derives its strength and spontaneity from the process of subject formation. Philosophical thinking emerges as an integral part of this existential *tour de force*, this process of world-building or nomos-creation that answers the basic existential question of the developing human self: "to be or not to be?" Philosophy is thus one discursive expression of the inherent creativity and spontaneous movements of the human self. Assuming a lived "yes" to the above question, philosophy, along with myth, religion, literature, and science, then goes on to determine, affirm and legitimate the mode of being of the self. The universality of the above existential question, and the spontaneous philosophical creativity its answer elicits, challenge the geography of reason that has supported the claim of the Greek origins of philosophy, its special connection to Europe and its absence from Africa.

Further, this existential view of the origins of philosophy is in sharp disagreement with the claim of its Greek origins as asserted by Western philosophers such as Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, and most recently Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The noted Gadamer scholar, Frederick Lawrence, wrote: "Gadamer conceives of philosophy as a peculiar sort of activity that erupted in fourth-century B.C. Athens and radiated out from the person of Socrates."[10] We reject this view and insist that there was philosophy in Africa, India, China and many other places before the birth of Socrates.

Given the above existential starting point of philosophy, it is not at all surprising that philosophy in pre-colonial Africa was rooted in an inner, reflective discourse on the conditions necessary for realizing the being of the self. The importance and necessity for this discourse derived from the fact that the ideal conditions for self-realization were not automatically given or immediately evident. Rather, these conditions had to be discovered, carefully clarified and secured from knowledge of the surrounding environments. Reflecting important environing imperatives, these philosophical discourses consisted of bodies of knowledge regarding the spiritual, social, natural, and personal conditions necessary for realizing the

self's potential for being. It is important to stress here that philosophical knowledge of these key conditioning factors was part of a larger collective effort that also produced the specific deities, myths, folktales, poetry, music, riddles, and proverbs that constituted African oral traditions.

Of these four sets of factors, the spiritual was quite consistently presented as the most important. Thus it would appear that these early African thinkers were most impressed by the spirituality that was required for the being of the self. This position on the primacy of the spirituality of being is clearly what we can call the ontology of this tradition. From it followed the metaphysical, ethical and epistemological positions.

On the basis of such spiritually inflected discourses of self, African thinkers would often proceed to interpret and explain the natural and social worlds around them. In other words, the transcendental or knowledge-constitutive categories of these discourses of self were often metaphorically extended to account for the order and events of the outer world of objects. For example, in many pre-colonial African accounts of the origins of the world, their cosmologies were framed in categories drawn from their accounts of the origins and development of the human self. As a result, many of these early African thinkers proceeded in an order that was the reverse of modern scientific discourses, which usually begin with external observations of the outer world of objects and then apply these objective categories and modes of thinking to the inner world of the human subject.

The above metaphorically inter-related discourses on the origins of the self and the creation of the world were often comprehensive visions of existence that began with God creating the world, the birth of the human self, the disruptive consequences for creation that followed that birth, the persistent tendencies of the human self to separate itself from God and the larger order of creation, the need to end this separation, and to repair these disturbed relationships. Two good examples of such cosmological visions are those of the Akan of contemporary Ghana, and the Dogon of present-day Mali. The Akan account of creation features God (Onyame) creating the first human being, the woman Abrewa, the disruptive consequences that followed and Abrewa's efforts to repair relations with Onyame.[11] The Dogon origin narrative features God (Amma) creating the world on his double placenta, the major disruptions that followed the birth of the first prototypes of the human being, and Amma's need to redeem the world from these disruptions through the sacrifice of the less rebellious of the prototypes.[12]

In support of this general view of pre-colonial African philosophy being an integral part of the world-building process necessary for the being of the self, let us look briefly at some of the empirical work that has been done on twentieth-century figures who have continued to perform these philosophical functions in still-surviving oral traditions. As noted earlier, the work of the Kenyan philosopher, Henry Odera Oruka, has been very important in addressing the issue of philosophical production in African oral traditions. At the center of Oruka's work is the figure of the African sage. In the mid-1970s, Oruka launched a project to study the "Thoughts of Traditional Kenyan Sages". His aim was to examine the figure of the Kenyan sage and the nature of sage thinking. Toward this end, Oruka interviewed several sages and also collected the results of other scholars, both African and European, who had also interviewed African sages. In Oruka's view, the sage was one whose thinking revealed such unusual insightfulness and good judgement that it was acknowledged and respected by the larger community in which he/she lived.

Many years later, Oruka summed up the results of his project in the following way:

> Findings in Kenya show that there are two main divisions of sage philosophy. One is that of the sage whose thought, though well informed and educative, fails to go beyond celebrated folk-wisdom. Such a sage may not have the ability or inclination to apply his own independent critical objection to folk beliefs. He is therefore a folk sage in contrast to the second type of sage, the philosophic sage. The former is a master of popular wisdom while the latter is an expert in didactic wisdom.[13]

In short, what distinguishes the philosophic sage is that, in addition to being knowledgeable, he or she must have a well developed capacity for critical reflection on traditions and on self.

A similar view of orality and philosophical production in Africa emerged from the work of the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Gyekye. In his classic work, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, Gyekye focused on the wise person, or the Onyansafo, a figure who is clearly the equivalent of Oruka's sage. On the basis of his work with these wise figures, Gyekye also concluded that they were engaged in the production of vital philosophical knowledge. Supporting these findings is the work of Barry Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo, who have done extensive interviews with the Yoruba sages of Nigeria, particularly with regard to their concept of the human person.[14] In short, from Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and other parts of the

continent, it is now possible to examine an extensive body of data on the philosophical thought of African sages. In my view, this body of data constitutes a crucial basis for speaking of the oral phase of African philosophy.

However, for many Western philosophers, still trapped in the logical/mythic binary, this evidence would still not be convincing. They would insist, like Deleuze and Guattari, that "other civilizations had sages"[15] and that Socrates was not a sage. They suggest, without ethnographic evidence, that "the Greeks might be seem to have confirmed the death of the sage and to have replaced him with philosophers."[16] In contrast to Oruka, Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between the sage and the philosopher by claiming that "the old oriental sage thinks, perhaps in figures, whereas the philosopher invents and thinks the Concept."[17] This is a classic instance of a West-centered inscribing of non-Western philosophy in the mythic/conceptual binary that makes the latter philosophy disappear. It is my view that a new geography of reason is visible outside of this binary, and it includes the rich philosophical fields of Africa and its diaspora.

The Proverbial Form of African Oral Philosophy

One very important feature of African oral philosophy revealed by the above body of data is that much of it is preserved in the form of proverbs and visual representations. These could be considered as the textual forms of oral philosophy as long as "texts" include scripts other than phonetic writing. As rhythm and rhyme are basic elements in the form of poetry, proverbs and visual representations are important features of the form of African oral philosophy. Among the Akan, an *ebe* or proverb is a twig that has been broken from a larger tree of wisdom. This proverbial twig briefly summarizes an important principle, a complex idea, or an elusive insight from a private meditation or a larger discourse in a sentence or two that can be easily committed to memory. Once committed to memory, such proverbs can be subsequently elaborated in greater depth and detail in dialogue with others. For example, these others could include a young and curious sage in the making or researchers such as Oruka and Gyekye.

This philosophical view of proverbs is very nicely summed up in an Igbo proverb about proverbs. It states: "proverbs are vegetables for eating speech."[18] In other words, proverbs are crucial instruments for communicating, digesting and preserving the intellectually valuable and nutritious elements of the many claims, ideas and suggestions that are exchanged

in conversation. These claims and ideas can be religious or secular. Thus the African sage philosopher is quite often a maker and a storehouse of proverbs, which, when conversationally elaborated, yield important insights, comprehensive visions of existence, hidden underlying unities, and fundamental philosophical principles. This is the oral world of the African sage philosopher. In another Akan *ebe* about proverbs we are told that "the wise man is spoken to in proverbs."[19] Other examples of Akan proverbs are: "Let go and let God;" "God created you and your personal destiny;" "I die only when God is dead."

As Kwame Gyekye has pointed out, the well-known system of Adinkra signs is an integrated attempt to visually represent some of the core religious and philosophical beliefs of the Akan people. Thus, included in the Adinkra signs is the self-reflecting bird, Sankofa, a symbol of philosophy and sagacity. There are also Adinkra signs that are visual representations of the human self in increasing degrees of sagacity and spiritual enlightenment. Thus the sign labeled "*Sunsum*" (ego) is a diagrammatic representation of our state of ego-centered everyday consciousness with its limited degree of sagacity and spiritual awareness. The sign "*Kutankantin*" portrays this state of everyday ego consciousness when it is puffed up, inflated with pride and thus even further removed from states of sagacity and spiritual enlightenment. By contrast, the sign labeled "*Ntesie*" portrays the transformations in the everyday and inflated states of our ego consciousness that are necessary for sagacity. Further, the self-reflective insights and spiritual claims made by these signs are also summarized in proverbial form. Thus the proverb, "I die only when God is dead," is the proverbial form of the Adinkra sign called "*Nyame Brewer Na Mawu*". In short, the textual world of the African sage philosopher included both proverbs and visual representations that were used to preserve and communicate complex ideas regarding the spirituality and sociality required for the being of the self.

The African Oral Heritage and Afro-Caribbean Philosophy

During the colonial period, a distinct but invisible tradition of Caribbean philosophy emerged, and it is still growing out of the strategic points of contact and exchange between Native Caribbean, African, Indian, and European philosophies. Its character continues to be shaped by the relations of negation and affirmation that have marked these points of

intersection. Because of the long history of negation by European and Euro-Caribbean philosophers, the tradition is marked by splits and fissures. These splits and fissures have blocked the emergence of deep Creole syntheses between these four traditions that could be compared to the calypso, zouk, or reggae in music. Thus, in spite of definite exchanges, it is still necessary and appropriate to speak of Native Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean and Euro-Caribbean traditions of philosophy. Hopefully the reggae, zouk or merengue versions of Caribbean philosophy will emerge in the not too distant future.

In *Caliban's Reason*, I reconstructed the history of Afro-Caribbean philosophy by dividing it into four phases: (1) the African heritage (1500–1750); (2) the Afro-Christian phase (1750–1890); (3) the historicist/poeticist phase (1890–1980); and (4) the contemporary period (1980 to the present), which has seen the rise of schools of Afro-Caribbean phenomenology, political logicism, Afro-Caribbean feminism, and Afro-Caribbean poststructuralism. Given the concern of this chapter with orality and interorality, our focus must be on the first phase of this tradition and its versions of the African oral heritage discussed in the previous two sections.

The sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century versions of the African philosophical tradition were the bodies of ideas that Africans from the western and central regions of the continent brought with them as they arrived in chains on the shores of the Caribbean. The orderly reproduction of the philosophy of the spirituality of being would clearly be a lot more difficult under conditions of plantation slavery in the Caribbean. Those conditions indiscriminately mixed Africans from different ethnic groups and from different regions of the continent. In spite of these adverse conditions, it is possible to identify the coherent operation of world-constituting practices that have strong Yoruba, Akan and Ba Kongo roots.

However, these and other surviving traditions of African oral thought were significantly hybridized as they were forced to incorporate European languages and later European religions and primary schooling. As a result of these contacts in the areas of language, religion and schooling, African oral traditions were also exposed to European practices of phonetic writing. Hence we see a wide variety of hybrid formations between African orature and European literature emerging from these contacts. However, it is important to note that, despite these exposures to European writing practices, Afro-Caribbean thought remained for a long time primarily an oral tradition.

In spite of these definite Yoruba, Akan and Ba Kongo inheritances from Africa, life in the Caribbean produced new and distinct existential challenges that had to be answered in new discourses of the self that took account of the new social environment. Thus, even more immediate and disruptive than the above processes of hybridization, was the racializing of African identities as "Blacks," "negroes," and "niggers." This process of negrifying African identities displaced long-inherited Yoruba, Akan and Ba Kongo identities. Further, this process of negrification established Africans as the binary opposites of Whites, and thus made the Afro-Caribbean self a site of intense contestation and hybridization. This European discourse of "the negro" not only challenged African discourses of the self, but also the thesis of the spirituality of the being of the self that supported these long-inherited identities.

The roots of a distinct Afro-Caribbean tradition of philosophical thought are to be found in the active and discursive resistance of Afro-Caribbeans to these processes of enslavement, racialization, and forced hybridization. Out of this resistance came significant changes in the Afro-Caribbean discourse of self that would be the basis for differences with pre-colonial African philosophical thought. These changes were primarily responses to the more hostile social environment of plantation slavery. Existing in this environment required new learning and new ideas regarding the social conditions and environments that can deform and block the growth of the self. In other words, Afro-Caribbeans had to come to a fuller and clearer understanding of the sociality that determines the being of the self—or more specifically the colonial sociality that was now aggressively standing between them and the selfhood they were striving for.

Thus, when we compare the new ontologies that ground the oral phase of Afro-Caribbean social and philosophical thought we can see immediately the differences with those of pre-colonial Africa. The big shift in the composition of Afro-Caribbean ontologies is the place of the coloniality of being in the overall economy of these discourses of the self. The colonial sociality of the self does not replace the spirituality of the self, but takes its place beside it. For the most part, the mythic/religious framework and the proverbial form of the pre-colonial African discourses of spirituality remain very much in place. It is only much later that they will yield significant ground to Euro-Christian theological frameworks and practices of phonetic writing. In short, whether the overarching conceptual frameworks in the Caribbean were African or European, oral or written, they all

had new spaces for discursively articulating and resisting the coloniality of being that came with the negrification of African identities.

The philosophical departures from classical Africa introduced by this resistance to the new coloniality of being can be clearly seen in the anti-colonial and anti-racist discourses that emerged from the Caribbean region. First, were the political discourses of *marronage* that accompanied and legitimated the formation of Caribbean maroon communities. Second, were the neo-African and Caribbean nationalist political philosophies that motivated and legitimated major slave uprisings such as the King Court conspiracy of 1736 in Antigua, and the Haitian Revolution of 1792.[20] Both of these uprisings were anti-colonial responses to the colonization and negrification of the self that were indicative of the wider responses of Afro-Caribbeans to their new lot in life.

The written evidence that we have of this broader anti-colonial response to coloniality and negrification comes from the texts of our first political theorists. The earliest of these was Ottobah Cugoano, author of *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evils of Slavery* (1787). Born in Ghana in 1757, Cugoano was kidnapped, sold into slavery, and shipped to the Caribbean island of Grenada. For just nine months he lived the horrors of Caribbean plantation slavery. In 1772, Cugoano was taken to England by his owner where he was able to escape, gain his freedom and teach himself to read and write. In his book, Cugoano does not write out of a pre-colonial African voice. Rather he writes out of an anti-colonial Africana voice that takes account of his Caribbean experiences, his knowledge of the Africa from which he was separated, and what he knew of African slavery in the American colonies. It was a Pan African voice in writing that echoed the oral discourses of the maroons and King Court, and anticipated the texts of Toussaint Louverture and many others. This in brief was the Caribbean transformation of its oral philosophical heritage from Africa.

The Absence of African/European Philosophical Interorality

Given the oral phase in the history of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, and its many areas of European contact, it would be quite natural to expect significant instances of inter-oral philosophical exchange as in the cases of folktales, religion and music. However, it is very difficult to identify the specific institutional or dialogic sites that would have been the basis

for such exchanges. This is so for four basic reasons. The first is the general and intense denial of an oral phase in the development of European philosophy. The oft-repeated insistence that European philosophy began with the writings of the pre-Socratics and Plato's account of the thought of Socrates is clearly a major stumbling block in the way of any such inter-oral exchange.

The exclusion of the philosophical significance of the mythic past of all of Europe, with again the exception of ancient Greece, further indicates the magnitude of this obstacle. The British anthropologists who so eagerly explored the mythic and magical past of Africa showed no corresponding interest in the British past, and thus made no systematic comparisons between their African findings and the ancestral rituals of ancient Britain, such as those of Stonehenge. In short, European philosophers would have to acknowledge such a mythic/oral phase in the formation of their discipline for there to have been a real basis for distinctly inter-oral exchanges with African philosophy.

Second, a real dialogical basis for inter-oral exchanges with African sage philosophers would have required Europeans to see Africans as philosophical interlocutors from whom they could learn significant arguments regarding the being of the self, its ethics, politics, epistemology and metaphysics. But this view of Africans as genuine philosophical interlocutors was precisely what was blocked by the process of negrification. Inscribed by the discourse of "the Negro" as the polar opposite of the white rational European, the African had to be the opposite of the European not only in color, but also in reason. By the oppositional logic of the discourse of "the negro" the African had to be both black and non-rational. With this discursively imposed absence of rationality the African or Afro-Caribbean could not be a legitimate philosophical interlocutor for an inter-oral exchange.

The third reason, which is closely related to the erasure of the rationality of Africans and Afro-Caribbeans, was the inability of European philosophers and anthropologists to see African oral traditions as living discourses that could speak to them. The discourses on the spirituality and the coloniality of being that I outlined earlier disappeared under the cloud of colonial invisibility that came with the negrification of African identities. At best, they were antiquated curiosities. The long and thick presence of this cloud engulfing African and Afro-Caribbean philosophical oratures was clearly another major obstacle in the way of inter-oral exchange. One cannot and should not dialogue with a non-existent philosophical tradition.

Fourth and finally, unlike the cases of religion or music, there were no institutional settings in which European philosophers were made to meet and engage with African and Afro-Caribbean sage philosophers. There were no philosophical equivalents of the churches and musical balls where European ministers and musicians had to meet with their African and Afro-Caribbean counterparts. In both of these contexts, dialogical and instructional exchanges were highly unequal. For example, Western Christians engaged in dialogue to convert. Thus the fact that Africans incorporated some of the Christian saints into their pantheon of deities—equating, for example, Osain and St Francis—never became a serious topic of philosophical or theological exchange from which both could learn. In the case of philosophy as a distinct discourse, there were no institutional settings, no philosophical societies for even these kinds of one-way, European-dominated modes of exchange with Afro-Caribbeans. There is no reason for creating institutional spaces for systematically Europeanizing a non-existent philosophical tradition.

In short, these are, in my view, the major conditions and obstacles that account for the absence of significant findings regarding inter-oral practices between European and African philosophy in the Caribbean. However, before leaving these inhibiting factors, it is important to clarify the precise way in which they blocked inter-oral philosophical exchange. As noted earlier, philosophical discourse has been one of the ways in which the inherent creativity of the human self organizes and externalizes its intentions, meanings and experiences. Thus a specific move of philosophical interorality can take place spontaneously as part of a process of subject formation, and thus come into being as part of that larger *tour de force* that gives birth to the self. What the above acts of refusal by the imperial other have been able, and still continue, to do is to de-legitimate the epistemic and aesthetic claims produced by this spontaneous movement within the self of the colonized. This refusal of recognition makes it more difficult for the inter-oral act to gain wider recognition and normative acceptance. Under extreme circumstances, it can lead to this spontaneous creative act being rejected by the colonized individual or group. The containing of spontaneous creativity is one of the things that often happens when one existential *tour de force* clashes with another that is in possession of greater military force and institutional power. In short, the latter cannot stop the spontaneous acts of philosophical interorality of the former, but it can de-legitimate, contain and deny institutional recognition to these creative acts.

African/Indian Interorality and Caribbean Philosophy

The striking absence of African/European inter-oral exchange in Caribbean philosophy emerges in even sharper relief when compared with patterns of interorality between Indian and African philosophy in the region. This difference is significant for four basic reasons. First, in contrast to European philosophy, Indian philosophy has incorporated its oral phase into its literate understanding of itself. Second, in spite of internalizing European racial stereotypes of each other—"the negro" and "the coolie"—Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans have found it significantly easier to see each other as legitimate philosophical interlocutors. Third, they have been able to recognize each other's oral traditions and the philosophical core that they contain. Fourth and finally, as subjects of European colonization and racialization, Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans have shared many institutional settings where they were able to exchange ideas about resisting the coloniality by which their very identities were frontally challenged. To see the results of these differences for Indian/African interorality, we must take a quick look at the oral phase of Indian philosophy and its transformation in the Caribbean.

The Oral Heritage of Indo-Caribbean Philosophy

In my essay, "Ethnicity and Independent Thought: Lloyd Best and Indo-Caribbean Thought,"[21] I divided Indo-Caribbean philosophy into four crucial phases that would make it comparable with Afro-Caribbean philosophy: (1) the Indian heritage (1842–1868); (2) the Indo-Christian phase (1868–1890); (3) the historicist/poeticist phase (1890–1980); and (4) the contemporary phase (1980 to the present) which has seen the rise of Indo-Caribbean feminism and Indo-Caribbean poststructuralism. As in the case of Africa, we will focus here on the first phase—the Indian heritage. In particular, we will outline the Brahmanic spiritualism of this heritage because most of the Indians who were brought to the Caribbean as indentured servants were Hindus, with only a small percentage being Muslims.

In pre-colonial India, philosophy was also inseparable from the discourses of myth, religion, folktales, poetry, riddles and proverbs—in short, an oral tradition. All were involved in the project of fashioning visions of existence that provided answers to specific challenges confronting the very

being of self, mind and body. Even more than was the case with Africans, the search for these answers led to a profound meditative awareness of the spirituality of being. As in the case of Africa, this spirituality was evident in the Indian pantheon of deities (Brahman, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra, Kali and so on), stories of their role in creation and of their role in the personal lives of great Indian sages. Brahman was the god above the gods, the highest reality. Enshrined in doctrines of spiritual enlightenment and how to achieve it through meditation, yoga and other spiritual disciplines, this Brahmanic spirituality of being became the signature achievement of the sages of ancient India.

Another important feature of the Indian philosophical heritage is that it is older than classical Greek philosophy. During the early Vedic period of Indian philosophy (2000–900 BCE) the basic form in which it existed was that of the *sutra*. A *sutra* is a short summary statement of a complex and valuable idea that was very much like a proverb. Like the *ebe* in Africa, *sutras* in India were committed to memory and more fully developed in dialogue with others. Some of the well-known *sutras* of Indian philosophy that were subsequently written down include the *Brahma Sutra*, the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, and probably the best known in the West, the *Kama Sutra*.

Among Patanjali's yoga *sutras* were the following: (1) "yoga is the control of thought waves in the mind"; (2) "at other times when he is not in the state of yoga, man remains identified with the thought waves in his mind"; (3) "[w]hen through knowledge of the Atman one ceases to desire any manifestation of nature, that is the highest kind of non-attachment"; and (4) "non-attachment is self-mastery, it is freedom from the desire for what is seen and heard."[22]

Although more ascetic in feel and content than their African counterparts, the aphoristic form of these statements and their spiritual orientation make them comparable to the African proverbs listed earlier. Given the foundational importance of the *sutra* to the development and current self-understanding of Indian philosophy, and of the *ebe* to African philosophy, we have here a clear basis for African/Indian interorality in the context of Caribbean philosophy. Here we experience no attempts to deny this *sutra* phase of Indian philosophy or the *ebe* phase of African philosophy that correspond to the denials of orality in the case of European philosophy. On the contrary, Indian philosophers see the development of the written or *sastra* phase of their discipline as growing directly out of the *sutra* phase.[23] *Sastras* were extended written commentaries on the

sutras. In many cases they were written versions of extended dialogues on a *sutra*, much like Plato's works were written accounts of Socratic dialogues. It was out of the groups around these *sastras* that the major post-Vedic schools or *dsarnas* of Indian philosophy developed. The emergence of these powerful schools such as the *Vedanta dsarna*, did not lead to a denial of the foundational importance of the oral *sutras*.

India and the Oral Heritage of Indo-Caribbean Philosophy

As noted earlier, a distinct, but invisible and fragmented, Caribbean philosophy emerged in the early decades of the colonial period. In addition to its initial Native-, Afro-, and Euro-Caribbean dimensions, after 1842 this philosophy took on yet another aspect with the start of Indian indenture that followed the end of African slavery. By 1917, this search for a new labor force for Caribbean plantations had brought about half a million Indians to the region. Most of these new laborers were illiterate although they were coming from a literate society. Arriving from India, these indentured laborers went primarily to Trinidad, Guyana, and Surinam, with smaller numbers going to Jamaica, Guadeloupe and Martinique. Once in the region, these Indians would, like Cugoano and other Africans, be subjected to the horrors of Caribbean plantation life.

As the most recent group to arrive, these poor Indians were forced to occupy the bottom layers of the already established colonial and white supremacist social orders of these different Caribbean societies. To be integrated into these socio-racial orders, Indians were racialized as "Browns," redefined and stereotyped as "coolies." This coolietizing of Indian identities was the equivalent of the negrifying of African identities. Thus it was through this racial process of coolietization and the economic process of colonial exploitation that Indians in the Caribbean had their specific encounter with the dehumanizing consequences of the coloniality of being.

To cope with these new Caribbean realities, Indians in the region would have to make significant changes in their social lives—changes that would result in a distinct Caribbean reworking of the Indian heritage. Most of the arriving Indians were Hindus, and were thus confronted with the task of reconstructing the Brahmanic pillars of that social order, while making creative adaptations to the imperatives of living as laborers on

Caribbean plantations. Among the first areas of the Hindu order to be impacted by the white colonial sociality of Caribbean plantations were those of language, religion and family. The new arrivals were forced to speak English, French, or Dutch and to abandon their native tongues. Family life was difficult to organize because immigrants were predominantly male, with ratios of about two men to one woman in the the 1880s. In 1868, much of the Indian population of the region became the objects of intense efforts by Presbyterian missionaries to Christianize them. These efforts did yield significant results, as sizable numbers, 28% in Trinidad and Tobago, became Christians.

This imposing of European languages, religion and white supremacist ideologies shattered prior patterns of unity and wholeness within the Indian heritage, and forced it to incorporate significant elements of the European heritage. As the case of religion suggests, "coolies" were not perceived as equal interlocutors by Europeans. As Christians, Europeans had everything to say to Hindus and Muslims, while the latter had nothing to say to the Christians. This attitude of interlocutor inequality rested on the European claim that Indians too were deficient in reason, as we saw in the case of Deleuze and Guattari's "old oriental sage". In short, the transformations that the Indian heritage experienced in the Caribbean followed quite directly from the form that the coloniality of being took during the period of their indenture. Further, because this population was largely illiterate and for a long time resisted colonial schooling, Indo-Caribbean thought emerged very much as an oral tradition in spite of religious leaders who were literate.

Indo-/Afro-Caribbean Philosophical Interorality

Also profoundly affecting the transformation of the Indian heritage in the Caribbean were its points of contact and exchange with Afro-Caribbean cultures. The shared experiences of having to throw off the oppressive and dehumanizing weight of colonization, racialization and economic exploitation certainly resulted in vital exchanges, bonds of solidarity, and experiences of sameness between Indo-Caribbeans and Afro-Caribbeans. However, although extremely important, these bonds and exchanges were not powerful enough to eliminate deep feelings of difference that have persisted into the present.

The discursive articulation and organized expression of these feelings of difference varied significantly between the territories of the region.

In countries such as Guyana, Trinidad, and Surinam, where there were large numbers of Indo-Caribbeans relative to Afro-Caribbeans, these feelings of difference were clearly articulated and led to the formation of a variety of race/ethnic interest groups including major political parties. In territories such as Jamaica, Martinique and Guadeloupe, where the numbers of Indo-Caribbeans were significantly less, there were no corresponding political organizations around a specific Indo-Caribbean identity. The organizations that did spring up were often more of a cultural nature. In short, during the colonial period shared experiences of colonial oppression produced strong bonds of solidarity and identification between Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans. However, as the white-dominated colonial era receded, movements in the direction of strong race/ethnic identities emerged among both Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans. The manner of expressing these feelings of race/ethnic difference described below will refer primarily to relations between Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans in Trinidad and Guyana.

First, in these territories, there have been long-standing factors of cultural difference and strangeness that were experienced on both sides. Differences in language, religious outlook, music, dietary and other practices produced strong feelings of strangeness and mutual misunderstanding. Second, superimposed on these feelings of cultural strangeness were the additional negatives that followed from both group's internalization of white stereotypes of each other. Thus Afro-Caribbeans perceived Indians as "coolies", and Indo-Carribbeans perceived Afro-Caribbeans as "negroes". These two sets of negatives have been further intensified in the post-independence period by the racialized nature of party politics in countries such as Trinidad and Guyana. In short, these were and still are the major ethno-racial forces that have been pushing Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans apart in opposition to the forces of solidarity that emerged out of their resistance to colonialism, white racism and exploitation. Consequently, this has been the ambivalent context in which inter-oral exchanges have been taking place between these two groups.

To grasp the nature of these exchanges, it is important to understand that in the Caribbean transformations of both the Indian and African oral heritages, cultural life came to be dominated by some key practices that were performative, visual and ludic in nature. In the performative category, we find cultural practices such as calypso and chutney singing, popular theater, and classic dance performances. In the visual category, we have practices such as painting, drawing, and photography. Finally, the

ludic category is dominated by sports—cricket, soccer, athletics, netball and so on—and by the playing of "*mas*" and other dramas at festivals such as carnivals, Christmas celebrations, Phagwa, Hosay, and Diwali.

A *mas* is a collective dramatization in the streets of a real or imagined event that may involve anywhere from ten to hundreds of performers. Carnival and Christmas celebrations were primarily Afro-Caribbean events, although partly of Euro-Caribbean origin. Phagwa, Hosay, and Diwali are Indo-Caribbean celebrations. Diwali is the well-known Hindu festival of lights. Phagwa is a festival of colors with songs and dances. Hosay is a Muslim ceremony in which Hossein, the grandson of the prophet Mohammed, is celebrated as a healing saint. These festive occasions have been the ritual contexts for great outpourings of popular creativity in a wide variety of the arts. These outpourings often include portrayals of religious and philosophical beliefs from which we get glimpses of the larger vision of existence that unifies all of these performances and creations.

From the perspective of Afro-/Indo-Caribbean interorality, these public festivals are very important since they have been the key institutional contexts for exchanges between Indo- and Afro-Caribbean oral traditions. They emerged as these institutional sites of exchange because, although initially the festival of one group, both groups now participate in them. Thus carnival and calypso singing in Trinidad and Tobago were initially Afro-Caribbean but are now inconceivable without their many Indo-Caribbean participants and singers. Further, these Indo-Caribbean calypso singers have transformed the art, producing what has come to be known as chutney *soca* to which Afro-Caribbeans dance and sing. Similarly, although Diwali in Guyana, Surinam, and Trinidad and Tobago was initially Indo-Caribbean, it now has many Afro-Caribbean participants. In short, within the framework of these festivals significant exchanges have been taking place between the oral traditions of Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans.

In addition to exchanges in these performative, visual and ludic areas, exchanges have also been taking place at the religious and philosophical levels. Good examples of religious exchanges have been the incorporating of Hindu and Muslim deities into the pantheons of Shangoists and Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad and Tobago. Shango is a Yoruba tradition of worship that has survived and continues to thrive in this twin-island Caribbean state. Shango is the god of thunder in the Yoruba pantheon into which Indian deities have been incorporated. From the ethnographic work of Mahabir and Maharaj, we learn that one of the most striking

features of Shango ceremonies is their inclusion of a number of Indo-Caribbean deities and spirits, as well as the recognition of a number of others who are not formally incorporated into their pantheon.[24] Thus in addition to many of the Orishas or classic Yoruba deities such as Elegba (god of crossroads), Obatala (god of forms), Ogun (god of iron and war), Osain (god of healing) and Oya (goddess of rivers), we find the Hindu deity, Hanuman (ally of Rama in his fight with Ravana) and the Muslim figure, Hossein.[25] Also included are a number of lesser Hindu figures such as Ganga Mai, Sadhu, and Baba.[26] Recognized but not incorporated into the Shango pantheon are the well-known Indian deities Lakshmi, Durga, Ganesh and Kali.

In the Shango order of things Ogun is associated with Hanuman, both being perceived as good and strong. At the same time Osain is associated with the Muslim figure Hossein, as both are seen as healing figures. These two parallels call to mind those with the Christian saints, but particularly the association of Ogun with St. Michael, and Osain with St. Francis. However, as we will see shortly, the consequences of these Christian associations for philosophical interorality have been quite different from the Hindu and Muslim ones.

Other significant areas of religious inter-oral exchange can be found in "practices like cooking ritual food, the feeding of devotees, drumming, singing, and chanting."[27] Drumming is particularly important as it is by distinct rhythms that the deities of both Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans are called to possess or manifest on devotees. Afro-Caribbean practitioners who wish to summon Indian deities must eat an Indian diet of rice and dahl. Further, the attaching of flags to bamboo poles in honor of deities is a practice shared by both Hindus and Shangoists. In some cases such as Ogun and Hanuman the flags are the same color, red. Among the Christian majority of Afro-Caribbeans these flags are associated with Indo-Caribbeans and are known by the Indian term, *jhandi* flags.

Interorality and the Spiritual Baptists

Although we cannot go into great detail here, significant inter-oral exchanges have also taken place between Indo-Caribbean religious and philosophical thought and the Spiritual Baptists—another Afro-Caribbean religious group. Although different, the nature of the hybrid and inter-oral aspects of their religious and philosophical outlook places them on a

continuum with the Shangoists. From the ethnographic work of Maarit Laitinen Forde, we learn that a "central metaphor in their belief system is the journey."[28] The important ritual of "mourning" is the avenue, the existential path of this spiritual journey. The journeys of these "pilgrims" take "place in a distinctive environment, a Spiritual world with various nations" that includes Africa, India, Syria, China, Egypt, and specific sites such as Jerusalem, Zion, Canaan, and regional beaches and rivers. This spiritual landscape is "inhabited by various personifications of the Holy Spirit, that have been identified as 'an Indian man', Catholic saints, angels, prophets, *orishas*, and beings such as the spirit of the air and the earth.[29] This is the nationally inclusive pantheon of the Spiritual Baptists. An important difference with the Shangoists is that only the Holy Spirit may possess an individual, even though one should expect and welcome encounters on one's journey with spirits and deities from all of these nations that have come together to constitute the cultural life of Trinidad and Tobago. As Forde points out, Spiritual Baptists "emphasize the importance of always inviting all the saints representing all of the various nations simultaneously in their rituals."[30]

These cases of the Shangoists and the Spiritual Baptists illustrate very clearly the kind of inter-oral religious and philosophical exchanges that have been taking place at the sites of a variety of rituals and have over time became ethno-racially mixed. From the philosophical perspective, the significant factor in all of these exchanges has been the discussions between Shangoists, Hindus, Muslims, and Spiritual Baptists regarding the meaning and significance of these exchanges. What was the basis or principle upon which associations or parallels were established between Hindu and Yoruba deities? What did this principle say about these different yet similar processes of cosmogonic world-building? How did these similarities affect perceptions of each other as equal religious and philosophical interlocutors? Indeed, it is precisely around these questions that we can see significant differences with the exchanges at points of contact with Western Christianity.

In general, the discussions between Shangoists, Spiritual Baptists, Hindus and Muslims regarding the significance of these cultural exchanges have generated philosophical visions of, and arguments for, human unity and sameness that challenged practices of ethno-racial difference, feelings of strangeness, and the racializing of political competition. Thus Mohabir and Maharaj report that "some Shango leaders maintain that Africans and Indians are of one family, as could be seen in their similarities of belief,

and that Africans are really dark-skinned Hindus."[31] These philosophical conceptions of a deep underlying unity between Africans and Indians are not the conceptions of human unity that exist within majority communities of "pure" Hindus, Christians, and Muslims, and also not the conceptions that emerged from exchanges with Europeans. In the writerly context of this chapter, the most effective way of making clear these philosophical implications is to examine some writing that has come out of these communities. The Afro-Trinidadian painter and poet, LeRoy Clarke, and the very mixed, Trinidadian philosopher, Burton Sankeralli, are two individuals whose writings very clearly reflect the processes of inter-oral exchange described above. For reasons of space we will look only at the philosophical work of Sankeralli.

Burton Sankeralli and Afro-Indian Philosophical Interorality

Philosophical exchanges between Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans extend over the course of the four phases into which we earlier divided the histories of their philosophies. Indeed, it is quite likely that the most extensive set of exchanges occurred during their overlapping historicist/poeticist periods. However, some of the clearest philosophical expressions of the implications of inter-oral exchanges between these two ethno-racial groups can be found in the works of the contemporary philosopher Burton Sankeralli. He is currently (2016) the president of the Trinidad and Tobago Philosophical Society, which has brought together Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans from a variety of backgrounds to talk and exchange philosophical ideas.

The chapters of Sankeralli's book, *Of Obeah and Modernity*, are constructed around cosmogonic exchanges between Hindu and Yoruba deities or systematic examinations of differences between these two as oral traditions on the one hand, and literate Western philosophers such as Descartes, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida on the other. Sankeralli's focus on the differences with literate Western philosophy is motivated by his interest in describing and making conscious the unique and distinctive ground from which Caribbean philosophy arises as part of a larger cosmogonic process of world-construction. In other words, as pre-colonial Africans and Indians had to find answers to the fundamental questions of being, so too must we, but under conditions that are specific to our region.

Because of what we have called the coloniality of being, the founding cosmogonic binaries of chaos/cosmos and wilderness/nomos take on very specific meanings in the Caribbean context. Cosmogonic activities of world-construction always arise out of a fertile chaos and thus remain subject to the possibilities of collapse and a return to that chaos. It is in this sense that Sankeralli speaks of "the play of chaos and cosmos which is history."[32] The establishing of a polis or a nomos within this larger cosmos is what "discloses the possibility of history."[33] Within "the abyss" or "swirling vortex" of chaos are possibilities of relations that are both cosmos- and nomos-constituting. For Sankeralli chaos is the "**chthonic** realm" of primary forms and relations with which we begin the fashioning our worlds, whether Hindu or Yoruba. Thus for him "primal being is pure relation."[34] This "**chthonic** realm is the substance of Caribbean existentiality"[35] because our pre-colonial heritages have been imploded by our internalizing of the coloniality of being.

As among other people, we also know this realm as a field of primal struggle between competing possibilities of being—conflicts that are intensified by the shared threat of dissolution into chaos. Thus violence is an integral part of life in the swirling vortex of chaos. To grasp fully the distinct challenges to cosmogonic creativity in our region, we must add to these conflicts inherent in the fertility of chaos what Sankeralli calls "the war against the colonizer."[36] It is the imperial penetration of this chthonic level of self-formation that gives the coloniality of being its ontological status. This external intrusion is a violent, racialized one that imploded the earlier cosmogonic constructions of Africans and Indians, and thus returned us very close to the borders of chaos. On these chthonic borders we work creatively with fragments—putting some things back together again, making inter-oral exchanges, and sometimes establishing new relations of being. Hence Sankeralli writes: "the Caribbean itself represents this chaotic confluence."[37] It is out of this chaotic confluence that philosophic and other forms of creativity have arisen. Our creative constructions during the colonial and postcolonial periods have been attempts at building new cosmic and social orders out of the distinct confluence of chaotic forces that has become the existential ground of the region. This is what Sankeralli sees in the cosmogonies of the Shangoists and the Spiritual Baptists, while his own philosophy builds on the foundations that they have established.

In his articulation of the distinct processes of cosmogonic creativity that the confluence of chaotic forces has called forth in the Caribbean,

Sankeralli begins with the Yoruba figure of Ogun, the chthonic warrior who carries the blade of iron "that shapes possibilities" including that of challenging the colonizer. Ogun personifies the type of violent creativity that both Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans have found it necessary to mobilize. Sankeralli associates and compares Ogun with the "dreadful warrior god, Yahweh" of the Hebrews.[38] He also associates and compares Ogun with the Hindu deity Krishna in his role as advisor to Arjuna, who is reluctant to fight his war against a colonizer. In these themes and associations that fill Sankeralli's account of the ground of contemporary Caribbean cosmogonic creativity we can see the continuities between his philosophy and the creative strategies of the Shangoists and Spiritual Baptists. As themes of human unity emerged from the philosophies of these two religious groups, the corresponding theme that emerges from Sankeralli's philosophy is that our Caribbean project, as disclosed by our oral traditions, remains "the struggle for cosmological relation"[39] even in this modern era of metaphysical individualism.

Conclusion

The threads between the arguments of this paper are complex, moving as they do between Europe, Africa, India and the Caribbean over many centuries. Integrated and concentrated, my hope is that they have produced four significant results. First, that they have helped to make more visible Indo- and Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Second, that the exchanges between Afro- and Indo-Caribbean philosophy have been fruitful sites for applying Vété-Congolo's concept of interorality. Third, that the interface between Euro- and Afro-Caribbean philosophy has been a significantly less fruitful location to apply Prof. Vété-Congolo's concept of interorality. Finally, that for Caribbean philosophy to extricate itself from webs of old colonial binaries and reassert the value of its contributions, it must write a new history and geography of both reason and philosophy.

Notes

1. In this essay, "Indo-Caribbean" and "Indian" refer respectively to East-Indian descents in the Caribbean and to East Indians from East India.
2. Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press), 43–48.

3. Paulin Hountondji, *African Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 66–70.
4. Ibid., 103.
5. Kwame Gyekeye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) 95.
6. Karl Jaspers, *Socrates*, *Buddha*, *Confucius*, *Jesus*: *The Paradigmatic Individuals* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1962).
7. Samuel Imbo, *Oral Traditions as Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 51.
8. Anastasia Ali, "The Myth Deconstructed: Legitimating African Thought as Philosophical Discourse", *C.L.R. James Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (Providence: Brown University, Dept. of Africana Studies, 2006), 9.
9. Ibid., 9.
10. Frederick Lawrence, "Translator's Introduction" in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), xi.
11. Anthony Ephirim-Donker, *African Spirituality* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998), 31–33.
12. M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen, *The Pale Fox* (Chino Valley, Arizona: Continuum Foundation, 1986), 165–207.
13. Henry Oruka, *Sage Philosophy* (Nairobi: ACTS Press, 1991 ed.), 34.
14. B. Hallen and J.O. Sodipo, *Knowledge*, *Belief and Witchcraft* (London: Ethnographica, 1986).
15. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 3.
16. Ibid., 3.
17. Ibid., 3.
18. Emefie Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes* (Ibadan: Pastoral Institute, 1985), 43.
19. Gyekye, op. cit., *An Essay*, 43.
20. Paget Henry, "Gordon Lewis and the Writing of Afro-Caribbean Philosophy", forthcoming.
21. Paget Henry, "Ethnicity and Independent Thought: Lloyd Best and Indo-Caribbean Thought" in Selwyn Ryan (ed.), *Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom* (St. Augustine, ISER, Trinidad, 2003)115–144.
22. Patanjali, *How to Know God* (New York: Signet Books, 1969), 11–19.

23. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Kavyalava Publishers, 2005), 87–100.
24. N. Mohabir and A. Maharaj, "Hindu Elements in the Shango/Orisha Cult of Trinidad" in F. Birbalsingh (ed,), *Indenture and Exile* (Toronto: TSAR, 1989) 194.
25. Ibid., 194.
26. Ibid., 194.
27. Ibid., 195.
28. Maarit Laitinen-Forde, "The Global Cosmology of a Local Religion", *C.L.R. James Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Providence: Brown University, Dept. of Africana Studies, 2002/03), 149.
29. Ibid., 149.
30. Ibid., 150.
31. Mohabir and Maharaj, op. cit., *Indenture and Exile*, 199.
32. Burton Sankeralli, *Of Obeah and Modernity* (Port of Spain: The Philosophical Society of Trinidad and Tobago, 2008), 44.
33. Ibid., 42.
34. Ibid., 44.
35. Ibid., 42.
36. Ibid., 42.
37. Ibid., 41.
38. Ibid., 42.
39. Ibid., 73.

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CHAPTER 3

Crossing Spirits, Negotiating Cultures: Transmigration, Transculturation, and Interorality in Cuban Espiritismo

Solimar Otero

"Yo no soy Espiritista." This is how Fernando Ortiz opens his study, *La Filosofía Penal de los Espiritistas*.[1] His disavowal and fascination with *Espiritismo* in this text is a fruitful place to start considering the depth of the influence of cultural theory on enacted religious practice and vice versa. Espiritismo is a vernacular religion found within Latina/o and African diaspora spiritual networks whose practices have operated in global circuits mediated through a range of genres of expression, reception, and consumption for over a century.[2] This chapter on contemporary Cuban séances—*misas espirituales*—links affect theory to interoral performative[3] moments in Espiritismo by revisiting and revising Ortiz's idea of transculturation in light of his own attention to nineteenth-century Spiritist doctrine. I use the term "interorality" to describe how in *misas* participants interact, collaborate, and quote each other in constructing narratives of inter-connectivity with the spirit plane. In this regard, Édouard Glissant's

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idea of Caribbean cross-cultural poetics can help us to think about the non-universalist aesthetic of the oral performances expressed at the *misa*.[4] The cultural work of contemporary *espiritistas* (spirit mediums) also retools positivist notions found in writings on Espiritismo by circumventing linear ideas of spirit progression through the affective linking of ethnic and racial difference. Ironically, it is the *practice* of transculturation at a *misa* that disrupts some of the modernist tendencies that have gone into the theorization and characterization of Espiritismo by Kardec and Ortiz.[5]

Transculturation is Ortiz's view of cultural admixture that allows for the flow of influences moving back and forth between groups that create openings for new creolized cultures to emerge. As he puts it, transculturation expresses:

> los variadísimos fenómenos que se originan en Cuba por las complejísimas transmutaciones de culturas que aquí verifican, sin conocer las cuales es imposible entender la evolución del pueblo cubano … La verdadera historia de Cuba es la historia de sus intrincadísimas transculturaciones.
>
> the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here, and without a knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the evolution of the Cuban folk …The real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transculturations.[6]

Ortiz clearly sees cultural borrowing as a complex and relational process, one that has deep and varied effects on multiple facets of Cuban culture and quotidian life. Further, he articulates that transculturation affects: "en lo económico, como en lo institucional, jurídico, ético, religioso, artístico, lingüístico, psicológico, sexual, y en los demás aspectos de su vida" (in the economic, as in the institutional, legal, ethical, religious, artistic, linguistic, psychological, sexual, or other aspects of its life).[7] That is, both micro and macro performances of culture, the intimate and the institutional are embedded in an intense intra-cultural negotiation. In this manner, transculturation moves away from the idea of cultural synthesis that terms like acculturation and assimilation suggest. Instead, transculturation maintains the detailed intersectional aspects of cultural difference and conflict in order to reveal Cuba's colonial historicity.[8] This articulation of transculturation is influenced in part by Ortiz's earlier consideration of Spiritist doctrine.[9]

The nineteenth-century Spiritist Allan Kardec[10] writes of the idea of spiritual transmigration in his influential *Le Livre des Esprits* (*The Spirits' Book*) (1857). Here, spirits move from both metaphysical and cultural

locations in their search for building a new world. Ortiz comments on the nature of these worlds and the movement of the spirit:

> La vida del espíritu presupone, pues, una serie de *avatares* en uno o en varios mundos, según el estado de progreso de estos mismos, a cuyas transmigraciones el espíritu aporta su personalidad eterna vaciándola en una forma tangible y material …
>
> The life of a spirit presupposes, then, a series of *avatars* in one or several worlds, depending on the status of the progress of these [very spirits], to whose transmigrations the spirit transports their eternal personality [,] depositing it in a tangible and material manner…[11]

Ortiz sees a multiplicity of spiritual forms, *avatares*, and locations, *varios mundos*, implicated in the transmigration of spirits from one plane to another in the philosophy of Espiritismo. In Ortiz's formulation of transculturation, we see how encountering Kardec's idea of multiple worlds and spiritual forms, and their potential for mobility through transmigration, helped to shape his later emphasis on the variety of ways that cultural admixing can be communicated and encountered. In particular, the ways that transculturation can occur simultaneously in different registers of Cuban culture resonates with how spirits can simultaneously move through different planes (worlds). This emphasis on cultural and spiritual multiplicity and movement illustrates an attention to processes rather than artifacts or form. In this regard, where Ortiz and Kardec see Espiritismo's theoretical movement in a linear evolutionary light, practitioners "transculturate" spirits in performances where interorality creates a tapestry for rethinking the routes of the spirit "worlds" in more of a rhizomatic flow.[12]

In their writings, Kardec and Ortiz conceive notions of spiritual, racial, and cultural movement and confluence in religious practice.[13] Their work expresses an evolutionary thrust in thinking about spiritually and racially ascribed cultural movement. For example, consider the following statement from Ortiz regarding the logic of Espiritismo:

> Pero el espiritismo se distingue de otros credos religiosos porque viene a ser una *teoría evolucionista del alma* …
>
> But Espiritismo distinguishes itself from other religions because it becomes an *evolutionist theory of the soul*…[14]

In Ortiz's estimation, the evolutionary movement that Espiritismo ascribes to the soul also becomes progressive in its nature, developing on earlier forms towards specific ends of enlightenment.

As Reinaldo Román has noted, Ortiz's admiration for Kardec's progressive, evolutionary ideas about the development of the spirits is rooted in a modernist interpretation of the religious doctrine.[15] Indeed, Ortiz's view that Espiritismo is able to theorize movement on "dos escalas paralelas evolucionistas, la material y la espiritual"(two parallel evolutionary scales, the material and the spiritual), illustrates a concern for understanding spiritual order in relation to the material world, reinforcing yet also stretching the limits of Cartesian thinking on materiality.[16] The evolutionary parallelism that so excites Ortiz also creates a space where multiple movements are mirroring, perhaps even engaging each other. The layering of registers that Ortiz articulates for Kardec's spiritual transmigration reflects the range of cultural registers that inform the idea of transculturation in Ortiz's original definition provided above. In both cases, transmigration and transculturation are articulated as processes where mobility creates new localities.[17] Further below, I will demonstrate how these localities in the performance of *misa espirituales* are actually created through a transcultural process that is relational and based on the spiritual community's structures of feeling or affect.[18]

In *Queering Mestizaje*, Alicia Arrizón re-contextualizes Ortiz's concept of transculturation within colonial discourses of race, sexuality, and gender.[19]She goes on to challenge the polarities of race created by the colonial project in her chapter on the *mulata* figure in Cuba. She sees Ortiz's formulation as a vexed but useful starting point for performing a range of in-between identities that come out of colonial encounters. I find Arrizón's *mestiza* approach to transculturation useful because *espiritistas*, like Arrizón, revise and recycle the idea of transculturation to confuse and re-order linear, binary colonial models of race, time, and cultural "progress." In comparing and contrasting how related strands of cultural thinking on race and movement happen in different enacted contexts, we see a re-articulation of both Ortiz and Kardec by practitioners of Espiritismo that also challenges the modernist and positivist strands found in writings on the doctrine. In this regard, Cuban *espiritistas* do important work that relocates race and ethnicity in an ethno-historical theater of possession at *misas espirituales.* These performances re-purpose the ideas of transmigration and transculturation by configuring especially Afrolatina/o ethnicity as portable and relational.

In a related fashion, Todd Ramón Ochoa has commented on the significant role that *espiritistas* play in Afro-Cuban religious culture in general in terms of "re-remembering" colonial experience as performances that are temporally heightened and politicized.[20] The expression of gender,

race, religion, and sexuality in *misa espirituales* reveal a co-exploration of embodiment by spirits and their mediums that profoundly marks the construction of the self. This co-production happens as *espiritistas* perform and play with oral tradition. In *misas* practitioners reinvent and quote in an intertextual fashion several genres of oral traditions, including: proverbs, personal experience narratives, legends, jokes, storytelling, divination, prayers, ceremonial opening/closing formulas, and song.[21] The interoral poetics that also comment upon a colonial historical imagination at the *misas* reveal a vernacular Caribbean Creole aesthetic that mystifies official, written universalist renderings of history in favor of the diversity of perspectives that grow out of the fluidity of oral discourses and vernacular beliefs.[22]

In May 2013 and December 2014, I visited Havana to work with spirit mediums Tomasa Spengler, Mercedes Zamora Albuquerque, José Días Casada, Soñia Bustamonte, and Maximina Bustamonte for an ethnographic project on interorality and ritual (see Figure 3.1). We performed *misas* at the Spengler residence in the neighborhood of Mantilla.[23] After sets of prayers and songs were performed, spirit guides began arriving. We were visited by a range of spirits: a departed grandmother, Afro-Cuban *palera/os*, a Spanish *gitana* (gypsy), a *monja* (nun), a Native American, a spirit guide associated with the *oricha Elegua*, and a spirit guide associated with both the Catholic saint *San Lazaro* and the *Lucumí oricha Babalu Aiye*. The mediums engaged in code-switching and cross-referencing between different religious traditions, nationalities, and ethnicities in co-constructing the life histories of the spirit guides they saw, felt, heard, and embodied at the *misa*.[24] Some of the spirits themselves were described as having multiple valences in terms of sources of spiritual power, as in having both Yoruba and Congo ritual implements in the spirit world to work with, primarily to help the living.[25] The divergent, conflated, and conflicted discourses of the many voices expressed at the *misa* illustrate how the performative expression of the idea of transculturation creates an opportunity for the study of the performance of spiritual creolization—in its most "messy," conflicted, and emotive sense.[26]

In this regard, Afro-Cuban religions are intersectional as multilayered beings are produced in rituals that also are embedded in varying social registers and hierarchies of power. Looking at how micro-performances of race and ethnicity emerge in the *misa* also offers us a way of disturbing linear temporalities, and what "histories" are implied by such disturbances, as a form of ritual transculturation. Ortiz is also deeply interested in how Espiritismo reveals "las discontinuidades de espacio y tiempo en

la sociedad cubana" (the discontinuities of space and time in Cuban society).[27] Such temporal and spatial ruptures exist in the *misa* as ontological moments whereby spirits co-become with a community from alternative sites in terms of time and place. The "worlds" that Ortiz remarks upon for Kardec's spiritual journeys are then re-routed onto the *misa*. Performances here then layer representations of memory and history onto each other not unlike other Cuban cultural palimpsests.[28]

As an example of a kind of spiritual Cuban palimpsests, I would like to highlight a moment of performative becoming for a *gitana* spirit that visited one of the *misas* I participated in. Soñia Bustamonte and José Días Casada co-created the following representation of a spirit whose amalgamation of Afrolatina/o characteristics spanned races, continents, religions, and ethnicities:

> **Soñia Bustamonte:** Ahorra yo veo, desde el momento que cantamos "Los Clavelitos" una tendencia de gitana. Gitana, con una saya rosada llena de óvalos. De muchos colores. Con unas argollas grandes. Ella no toca castañuelas, ella no tiene castañuelas. Pero la veo rodando te. Con esa saya de dos vuelos y óvalos. … Esa gitana tiene tendencia de Oya, de Centella.
>
> Now I see, after we just sang "Los Clavelitos",[29] a gypsy tendency [a spirit with a Spanish gypsy countenance]. A gypsy, with a pink polka-dotted skirt. Of many colors. With large hoop earrings. She does not play the castanets, she does not have castanets. But, I see her circling you [a medium/participant]. With that full, ruffled polka-dotted skirt. That gypsy has her own tendency [to work spritually] with *Oya*,with *Centella*.[30]

José Días Casada then interrupted, adding:

> Y donde ese espíritu que lo ves tan alegre, yo lo veo, a su vez, como si tenía un redoble. Como un espíritu de una monja… Esa espíritu la gitana como hace un redoble con un espíritu que es una monja. Una monja que yo la recibo vestida de carmelita, con la capa blanca. Como si hubiera sido una monja misionera. Una de Las Hermanitas de la Caridad – dedicada a ayudar enfermos, hacer obras.
>
> And whereby that spirit, that you see as joyous, I see, as well, as if she had a double. Like a nun's spirit….That gypsy spirit has a spirit double that is a nun. A nun that I am receiving as wearing brown, with a white hood. As if she was a missionary nun. One of the Sisters of Charity – dedicated to helping the sick, doing good works.[31]

The *gitana* spirit guide is described in both the past and present tenses – uniting the narrative memory of her living days with the phenomenological

moment of the *misa*. Elizabeth Pérez sees participants in a *misa* as "living *bóvedas*" (spirit tables) reflecting the idea that the self is a "dividual" rather than "unitary" being for participants.[32] I would move these suggestions further based on my above reading of the spirits and say that the self in Espiritismo is conceived as always becoming in multiple ways and attached to diverse dimensions of seen and unseen worlds in moments that challenge the present in layered associations. The difficulties, tensions, and unresolved representations of race, ethnicity, religious difference, sexuality, and gender in the *misa* direct us towards contemporary issues in Cuban society that also require special attention. Like Rivera-Servera's analysis of moments of queer Latina/o "utopian performatives," the *misa*'s moments of spiritual unity are fraught with racial, ethnic, sexual, and class-based tensions that underlie the idea of *cubanidad*.[33] These tensions can be extended to reflect performances where *Afrolatinidad* emerges from fissures created by cultural convergence. Thus, the liminal space of the *misa*, and its potentiality for transformation, reveals some of the social and cultural sites whereby larger Latin American and African diasporas meet and negotiate community at crossroads and borderlands.

Fig. 3.1 Bóveda and spirit medium Tomasa Spengler at a misa spiritual, Havana, Cuba, May 2013. Photo by Héctor Delgado. In the private collection of the author.

A brief exploration of the *gitana*'s accompanying spiritual associations is helpful to consider here. First, I would like to discuss how the Spanish *gitana*, the Yoruba deity Oya, the Congo spirit Centella, and the Catholic *monja* are sensed as a shifting amalgam at the *misa*. This kind of layering is relational, associative, and reflects a complex menagerie of spiritual entities that also correspond to different geographical and religious valences that perform spiritual *trabajo* (work). The different spirit guides can be experienced through and with each other in the performative moment of becoming in the *misa*. Their subsequent appearances and associative framing at the *misa* illustrate a moment of Afrolatina/o transculturation that specifically comments on the tense borrowings between the distinct religious and cultural traditions that are based on Cuba's colonial past. The flow of associations and doublings also create a kind of spiritual palimpsest that reflects cultural and political attitudes towards the past particular to Cuban contexts.[34]

The Spanish *gitana* rather than "whitening" the performance of Afrolatina/o spirituality actually represents a different manifestation of Afrolatinidad whose site is rooted in the Black Atlantic in several ways.[35] *Gitanos*, as a Mediterranean offshoot of the Rom, are a nomadic and persecuted group in Europe that are racially coded and culturally tropicalized in specific ways that suggest their alterity.[36] Indeed, as R.L. Román uncovers in looking at *espiritistas* in Cuba's Republican era (1901): "Not only do African orishas masquerade as Catholic saints, … but seemingly European spirits also 'camouflage' their hybridity in a variety of guises."[37] I would argue that the *gitana*'s position in Espiritismo's spiritual universe represents this kind of slippage in terms of being a racial, religious, and cultural hybrid figure in the *misa*.

The addition of the Yoruba deity Oya and the Congo-inspired entity Centella represents an intra-ethnic and cross-referenced Africanization of the *gitana* spirit guide. Oya and Centella are already linked to each other in various forms of symbolism and combined ritual practices in the religions of *Palo* and *Santería* that illustrate a deep history of mixing in Cuban vernacular religious performance.[38] These creolized Afro-Atlantic crossings and additions to the *gitana*'s spiritual universe represent a kind of Afrolatinidad that carries with it a density of potential spiritual work that can be done with the *gitana* through these associations. In other words, references to future performances of *misas*

and rituals based on these spiritual palimpsests are embedded in the descriptions of the figures, especially in the emphasis of their spiritual *poderes* (powers).[39] The inter-oral nature of how José and Soñia build upon each other's sensations of these powers create an ephemeral tapestry that invokes how interrupted listening and remembering create an important component of Caribbean poetics.[40] In this regard the cyclical, polyphonic, and polyvocal rhythms of the *misa* mirror other orally-inspired genres of Caribbean narration in fiction, poetry, theory, film, and historiography that emphasize postcolonial concerns like race, gender, and sexuality.[41]

José's addition of the companion *monja* spirit to the *gitana* further marks the religious efficacy of the associated spiritual guides (see Figure 3.2). The *monja* represents a figure of empathy and of healing that is also connected to a specific Catholic religious order, the Sisters of Charity. Her appearance creates a *redoble* (double), as José puts it, to the *gitana* in terms of signaling another kind of nomadic aesthetic, albeit in this case one that operates within Catholic representations of sanctity and sacrifice. I also see the *monja* as a celibate sexual subject[42] that adds to and interrupts the sultry, exotic depictions of typical *gitana* imagery. In many instances, the aspect of a *gitana* spirit guide's sexuality is connected to her mixed racial position, much like the *mulata* figure in Cuban transculturation.[43]

A majority of the dead that conjoin with mediums in the *misa* clearly emerge out of the performance of the legacy of slavery and race in Cuba. Guides like Ta José, Nica Ela, and Francisca appear out of the context of a remembered slave past that is also marked by the performance of Congo and Yoruba religious references.[44] Yet, I would argue that these spirit guides manifest as *Afro-Cuban* Congo and Yoruba religious workers, culturally creolized and ambiguous in their associations to both an African and Cuban past. The process of transculturation especially touches Afro-Cuban spirit guides as they appear with their companions of multiple religious, racial, and ethnic origins. The mobility of transmigration is implicated in their emergence at the *misa*, however their ethnic and racial conglomerations complicate the routes of the spirit world as theorized by Ortiz and Kardec.

The *redoble* spirits in a *misa* create complex cultural and religious textures that touch the mediums through the senses.[45] There are several

definitions of the word *redoble* in Spanish—to reinforce, intensify, redouble. These multiple meanings come into play in looking at the multiple ways spirit guides stand next to each other in Espiritismo. None of them are completely merged into one image, but act as separate yet connected forces that reveal themselves to the material world in different acts that are felt, especially in the body. As José clarifies in one instance,

> Y no te equivoques. [Diciendo te que] <<tengo que ir al médico porque tengo problemas en los huesos.>> Y, no [señala que no con el dedo]. Ya sabes que es la propia acción del espíritu que es un protector tuyo. Muy fuerte. Que a la vez es *nganguluero* [y] me hace un redoble con un indio.
>
> And don't make a mistake [Saying to yourself], "I have to go to the doctor because I have problems in my bones." And, no [waving no with his finger]. You already know that it is the very act of the spirit that is your protector. [He is] very strong. He is at the same time a nganguluero [and] appears to me as a redoble with an Indian [spirit].

Here, José is specifically referring to how the medium in question suffers from pains in her feet and that it is the spirit and his *redoble* that are communicating with her through that very cramping. He also reconfirms that certain symptoms of ailments in the body may also have spiritual rather than material causes, and that multiple interpretations of that feeling of pain should be explored. In this manner, then, communication through embodiment does not solely occur through spirit possession of the head, per se. It can also be focused on different parts of the body that may hold specific meanings and intimate connections infused with cultural and historical significance.

For the above protector spirit who is identified by his ritual work with Palo traditions in Cuba, the movement side by side with a Native American companion relates to historical tropes of spiritual work in nature and parallel colonialisms in the Americas. The foot as the site of their communication with the medium is connected to West African and Afro-Caribbean beliefs that see the ancestors entering their horses through the left foot specifically, as the dead live inside of the earth.[46] The pain in the foot also insinuates a shared pain of enslavement, of the shackling of the foot being relived by the medium as a reminder of the spirit's past life as a Congo [slave] living in Cuba. Since the spirit himself is seen as a *palero* who works with an *nganga*, he also has his own dead he attends to and is affected by.

Fig. 3.2 José Casada at a misa spiritual, Havana, Cuba, May 2013. Photo by Héctor Delgado. In the private collection of the author.

In considering the side-by-side aspects of *redoble* spirits, as well as the shared sensory experiences between mediums and their guides, Eve Sedgwick's concept of "parallel initiations" come to mind. In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick looks at the pedagogical implications of affect in Western interpretations of Buddhism. For her, the "parallel initiations" found in Tibetan Buddhist views of the reincarnated self apply the affect logics of "side-by-side" relational thinking to promote the construction of a "transindividual" self through spiritual pedagogies.[47] I would argue that José Casada's revelation of the *redoble* spirits and their effect on the medium's body relate a similar logic of affect whereby the spirits are working side by side to touch a specific part of the medium's body in order to make her recognize their shared existence through both *touching* and *feeling*.

The boundaries of the material and physical plane are constantly shifting in "transindividual" performances that extend beyond the *misa* and into the daily life of mediums. In terms of multiple incarnations of the dead, the *nganguluero* protector spirit, as mentioned above, has his own dead inhabiting and touching him from another realm that resembles the infinity of re-emergence that Sedgwick reveals in the "transindividuality" of the pedagogical teachings of Tibetan monks and their densely layered existence. Similarly, *redoble* and other spirit guides are constantly touching the mediums through temporal and phenomenological planes. In Espiritismo's context, it is a push for recognition, acknowledgement, and acceptance of their side-by-side existence with and in the body of practitioners. The interoral aesthetics of the performance of cultural and historical interpretations of migration, colonialism, slavery, and disenfranchisement shape the very texture of that touch.[48] The sensory reminders that spirits inflict on their mediums in and out of the *misa* also offer a kind of pedagogy as to how to continue working and living with the past.

In this regard, Rivera-Servera's work on Latina/o communities of affect is particularly useful in thinking about the productive frictions that emerge in the performance of the *misa*'s Afrolatina/o spirituality.[49] In particular, Rivera-Servera's view that Latina/o performatives express "moments where the aesthetic event becomes, temporarily, a felt materiality that instantiates the imaginable into the possible" correlates to what is happening on many levels with the *redoble Ngaguluero*/Indio spirit, as well as with the other guides becoming known through affecting/touching/feeling participants at the *misa*.[50] At the heart of this spiritual work is the challenge to see the potential for consensus building in fleeting, ephemeral moments made manifest that are also deeply reflective of social and

cultural difference, contestations, and pitfalls. Espiritismo seeks to heal communities of affect through performances of *misas* and other rituals in ways that do not homogenize, but rather, embrace conflictive pairings.

The performance of multiple kinds of blackness and indigenous-ness in the above example is embodied through translocating ethnicity, place, and religious registers. Both the mediums and the spirit guides at the *misa* complicate static racial and religious positions by performing a kind of transculturation that purposely crosses multiple boundaries. Misas are spiritual sites where a unique kind of attention to difference becomes a microcosm of the routes and sites where these different registers of race and ethnicity meet. The interoral and hybrid aspects of performances that create these spiritual "borderlands" are central to how mediums co-construct their narratives and interpret the sensations they are experiencing.[51]

Interorality also encourages linguistic spontaneity and experimentation at the *misas* as mediums code-switch from speaking in Spanish, to Lucumí, to Kikongo, and in *lengua* (tongues).[52] Bodily enactment of postures and facial expressions also include afflictions and particular physical attributes of spirit guides. They perform this polyvocality *with* the spirits. The mediums' shared expressions of embodied cultural and religious terrains illustrate yet another level of performative emergence that co-produces certain kinds of aesthetic agency.[53] In this regard, we can historicize the creative flow of visions, feelings, perceptions and embodiments in Glissant's terms, as "an imposition of lived rhythms."[54] These lived rhythms, deeply connected to Cuban patterns of folk speech and folklife, move to a polyphonic beat that may at any time also include aspects of transculturated African, European, Asian, Semitic, Rom, Amerindian, Caribbean, and Latin American punctuations. The vernacular aesthetics of the *misa*, then, necessarily express a desire for the variegated because of their fluid, spontaneous, and ever-transformative character. Practitioners' preference for this kind of non-linear ritual approach also resists the kinds of transcendence implied in Ortiz's progressive characterization of Espiritismo.[55]

The transcultural merging and tensions represented by the above constellation of spirits connects the present to the past in a co-construction of spiritual life histories for the living and dead. In voices that are doubled and quoted, the participants in the *misa* show us that the dead are watching, listening, and asking us to engage with the past in visceral and real ways.[56] The revelatory narrative process of the *misa* reaffirms the relationships, conflicts, warnings, powers, and work yet to be done with spirit guides and the (colonial/past) worlds they represent. Here, the ontology

of co-existence pushes past the boundaries of the binaries of self and other, of body and spirit, into dense compilations of associations that emphasize spiritual movement, negotiation, and creativity.

Raquel Romberg has referred to the associative work that Espiritismo does as a kind of "ritual piracy" that reflects a "creolization with an attitude" based on the very conflicts found in the religious colonial history of the Caribbean itself.[57] I would add that this "piracy" actively co-creates performances as openings where religious admixtures are *happening* as a kind of "piracy" by the spirit guides as well. José Casada and Soñia Bustamonte reveal that multiple ethnic, racial, and religious versions of spirit guides are traveling together based on a Caribbean trajectory – one that mirrors the colonial routes of cultural creolization in the region. Thus, the discursive registers of the *misa* also situate how ethno-historical transculturation transforms the spirit plane—and how this transformation is a continual process of re-assessing ethnic, racial, gendered, sexual, and religious difference and tension. Espiritismo, as its own set of religious practices, creates a site whereby religious and socio-cultural boundaries are pushed to their limits, and in doing so, are reconstructed through metaphors of historical hybridity. In a sense, Espiritismo disrupts the supposed authority found in the symbolic and material economies of Santería and Palo because it so boldly disregards claims of a mono-cultural religious authenticity through its transnational boundary play.

In comparing Ortiz's early (1924) consideration of transmigration in Kardec's doctrine of Espiritismo to the enacted practices of contemporary *espiritistas* in Havana we see continuities and departures. Ortiz admired Kardec's theories on the movement of spirits, the nature of spiritual worlds, as well as the temporal complications that both of these imply. His articulation of transculturation purposely challenged the assimilationist theories of acculturation that were popular with North American anthropologists and sociologists in the 1940s. Some twenty years after reading and analyzing Kardec, it seems that Ortiz moved away from his social evolutionary thinking on religion, culture, and time towards concepts that embraced complex and interdependent processes that interlinked the three.

Espiritistas are also marking and performing multiple locations of religiosity, race, ethnicity, and temporality through transculturation at *misas espirituales*. Their creative and conflictive pairings of spirits as *redobles* stretch across the globe in polyglot oral formulations that are dense and confound notions of purity. The side-by-side movement of *redoble* figures such as the *gitana*, Oya, Centella, *monja*, *ñganguluero* and *indio* from the

spirit world into the ritual site of the *misa* relate affective bonds that also undo linear conceptions of spiritual mobilities, temporalities, and manifestations. In this manner, they take the proposed work of Ortiz's concept of transculturation and complicate it further by highlighting the lasting spiritual ramifications of racial and ethnic creolization and colonization. The spirit mediums in this chapter also engage in an interoral aesthetic that connects the *misa* to vernacular Caribbean and Latin American histories that are mostly enacted and often ephemeral.[58]

Similar kinds of performance in Latin American, Latina/o, and Caribbean contexts also engage in re-purposing transnational figures from a shared historical imagination in ways that disrupt and re-order colonial pasts.[59] The performance of the *misa espiritual* employs bricolage and the creation of palimpsests to complicate notions of Cuban history and belonging. In a sense, Ortiz continues José Martí's critique of neoliberal American hegemonic ideologies in the coinage of transculturation.[60] This critical and vigilant work also occurs in contemporary Latina/o and Latin American Studies, especially in anthropology.[61] In paying attention to these performative and scholarly approaches that push against social Darwinism and manifest destiny, I am also aware that there are cycles of cultural flows and consumption that can tell a different story.

Even, or especially within, Cuban contexts, the performance of blackness in many different genres of cultural production in Cuba is fraught with societal appropriation and cultural silences. In this regard, my findings on the performance of race in the *misa* are in conversation with Kristina Wirtz's analysis of Cuban public spectacle in which performative modes of blackness create chronotopes that may flatten Afro-Cubanness.[62] Her articulation of the relationship between performing blackness and the construction of a civil society is particularly illuminating in how the rhetoric of nationalism has begun to replace the rhetoric of the revolution in regards to Afro-Cuban religiosity in particular.[63] The performance of blackness in Cuba as social theater that deals with national identity goes back to the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dramatic traditions of *el teatro bufo* and *el teatro vernacular*.[64] As feminist drama critic Inés María Martiatu has noted, these theater performances were often sexualized, and also put on stage multiple ethnic groups for ridicule. These included Spanish, Asian, Native American, Mexican, mulato characters – indicating different kinds of impersonations: blackface, yellowface, redface, brownface, and so on.[65] The impersonations also made fun of different types of employment, allegorical figures from classical theatre, class, and urban and

rural differences, thus complicating the idea of a theater based solely on racial representations. *El teatro bufo* illustrates a deeply problematic and complex historical and cultural phenomenon in Cuba that also included reflexive satirical legacies of performance by Afro-Cubans in both the island and in the Cuban diaspora.[66] The Cuban aesthetic of irreverent satire, critique, and mimicry known as *choteo* is a vernacular quality of humor central to these theatrical productions, as well as many forms of Cuban and Cuban diasporic performance.[67] Performances of *choteo* seek to offend polite sensibilities, urging audiences not to take anything too seriously.

Differently, Espiritismo's *misas* have moments of joy and laughter, but the communion with spirit guides is taken very seriously. Although the *misa* does have instances in which mediums are touched and inhabited by different racial and ethnic spiritual entities, these performances are mostly made *with* the spirit guides and not *about* them. The interoral aesthetics and practices of these performances also tie them to deep values held in the community's understanding of vernacular culture, folklore, and folk belief. That being said, I also see that the transculturation that occurs in the *misas* analyzed here certainly moves race, ethnicity, religiosity, and sexuality in multiple and conflicting directions. Ritualized cultural mixing provides us with affective links to historical components of Cuban performance that reflect the enduring nature of race and ethnicity as a central concern for Cubans. The *misa* may also behave as a spiritual disidentification of embodied racial and ethnic codes, expressing how these attributes may move between bodies and metaphysical planes in a way that lasts beyond "liveness" and spills onto the dead.[68] Thinking about *misa espirituales* in this manner has implications for translocating performances of Cuba globally. Since spiritual interlocutors arrive as doubles, multi-raced, ethnically ambiguous, and religiously promiscuous they question and push against an isolated and "authentic" Cuban nationalism. In this way, spirits and mediums form transnational communities of affect that move boundaries of nation, place, race, and becoming.

Notes

1. "I am not a Spiritist." All translations from Spanish to English are the author's unless indicated. Fernando Ortiz, *La Filosofía Penal de los Espiritistas* (San Juan, PR: Editorial Nuevo Mundo, 2012 [1924]), 11.

2. Allan Kardec, *El Libro de los Espíritus* [*Le Livre Des Esprits*], trans. Gustavo N. Martínez (Brasilia, Brazil: Consejo Espírita Internacional, 2011 [1857); Stephen Palmié, *The Cooking of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); Reinaldo M. Román, *Governing Spirits* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Raquel Romberg, "'Today, Changó Is Changó': How Africanness becomes a Ritual Commodity in Puerto Rico," *Western Folklore* 66, no.1/2(2007): 75–106; Solimar Otero, "*Entre las aguas/Between Waters*: Interorality in CubanVerna cular Religious Storytelling," *The Journal of American Folklore* 128, no. 508 (2015): 195–221; Elizabeth Pérez, "Spiritist Mediumship as Historical Mediation:African-American Pasts, Black Ancestral Presence, and Afro-Cuban Religions," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 41 (2011): 330–365; Ysamur Flores-Peña, "'Candles, Flowers and Perfume': Puerto Rican Spiritism on the Move," in *Botánica Los Angeles*, ed. Patrick Arthur Polk (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum, 2004), 88–97; Andres I. Perez Mena, "Cuban Santeria, Haitian Vodun, "Puerto Rican Spiritualism: A Multiculturalist Inquiry into Syncretism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 1 (1998): 15–28.
3. I am using "performative" following Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, and J.L. Austin in terms of these being "events of speech" that create a method of citation for the construction of subjectivity within cultural, social, and legal contexts. See especially Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*: *A Politics of the Performative* (NewYork: Routledge, 1997).
4. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. and ed. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 97–100; 105–108.
5. Kardec, 42–48; Ortiz, *La Filosofía*, 16–20.
6. Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y azúcar*, Intro. Bronislaw Malinowski (Madrid: Cátedra 1963 [1940]), 99. English translation is by Harriet De Onís, *Cuban Counterpoint*: *Tobacco and Sugar* (London and Durham: Duke University Press 1995 [1947]), 98.
7. Ibid.
8. Ortiz, *Contrapunteo*, 98–100; Alicia Arrizón,*Queering Mestizaje*: *Transculturation and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 4–6.

9. Ortiz, *La Filosofía*, 18.
10. Allan Kardec is the pen name for the French writer Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail.
11. Ortiz, *La Filosofía*, 15, emphasis in original.
12. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 1–28.
13. Kardec, 164–167, 159; Ortiz, *La Filosofía*, 69–74; Reinaldo M. Román, "Governing Man-Gods: Spiritism and the Struggle for Progress in Republican Cuba," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37 no. 2 (2007): 212–241.
14. Ortiz, *La Filosofía*, 14, emphasis in original.
15. Román, "Governing Man-Gods," 223.
16. Ortiz, *La Filosofía*, 14.
17. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*: *Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 180, 182, 189, 191.
18. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 133; José Estaban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)," *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 1 (2000): 67–79. In "Feeling Brown," Muñoz conceptualizes a "performed manifestation of consciousness" to relate how emotive connections create signification in the human world through relational connections (71).
19. Arrizón, 92.
20. Todd Ramón Ochoa, *Society of the Dead* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 49–50.
21. Otero, *Entre*, 203; Wirtz, *Performing*, 166–69.
22. Glissant, 96–102; Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *La Isla Que SeRepite* (Hanover: Ediciones del Norte, 1992[1989]), xvi–xxiii.
23. These *misas* were performed on May 16 and 22, 2013. All of the specific ritual details of the *misas* are too lengthy to describe in this piece. However, a meticulous analysis of the role of the *misa* and its significance to gendered religious cultures in Cuba is forthcoming in a larger volume.
24. Raquel Romberg, *Witchcraft and Welfare*: *Spiritual Capital and the Business of Magic in Modern Puerto Rico* (Austin: University of Texas

Press, 2003); Carrie Viarnés, "Cultural Memory in Afro-Cuban Possession: Problematizing Spiritual Categories, Resurfacing 'Other' Histories," *Western Folklore* 66 no. 1/2 (2007): 127–160, esp. 140–141.

25. There is a desire to represent what is understood as the "seven nations"—or (sometimes stereotypical) chacterizations of different races, ethnicities, nationalities, and religious roots present in Latina/o and Caribbean societies at a *misa*, see Román, "Governing Man-Gods," 123. Seven is a significant ritual number in *Palo*, *Santería*, and *Espiritismo* and has magical properties associated with specific spiritual beings and the work they do. For *Palo* see KennethRouton, "Conjuring the Past: Slavery and the Historical Imagination in Cuba,"*American Ethnologist* 35, no. 4 (2008): 632–649, esp. 642–643; for *Santería* see Lydia Cabrera,*Yemayá y Ochún*, (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1980), 276, 302, 316; for *Espiritismo* examples including the *Siete Potencias Africanas* (Seven African Powers) see Romberg, *Witchcraft*, 134: 245, 267.
26. Román, "Governing Man-Gods," 111; Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones, "Fernando Ortiz y Allan Kardec: Espiritismo y transculturación," *Catauro*: *revista cubana de antropología* 1, no. 0 (1999): 14–31.
27. Díaz Quiñonez, 16; Ortiz, *La Filosofía*, 21–22.
28. José Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 21–23.
29. The songs and prayers that accompany a *misa* provide a unique perspective—they are sung in the voices of the spirit guides, see Pérez, 342. Songs invoke the names of spirits common to Cuban *espiritismo*, i.e. "Francisca," as well as the Archangel Michael, and the Virgin Mary. The song, "Los Clavelitos" (The Little Carnations), prompted the spirit guide of the *gitana* (gypsy) to appear in a crucial moment at the *misa de coronación* (coronation).The voices, perspectives, and spiritual work that the songs do require more analysis than can be provided here in this chapter.
30. The *oricha Oya*, known for her association with the river Niger, hurricanes, and the rainbow is associated with the *Palo* entity *Centella*, who has her own fierce and protective characteristics in Cuban vernacular religious crossings, see Ochoa, *Society*, 88, 140, 145, 220–221.

31. Soñia Bustamonte and José Días Casada, *Coronación* ritual, May 22, 2013, Havana, Cuba.
32. Pérez, 355–356.
33. Ramón Rivera-Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 193–203; Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, eds., *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad* (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1997), 5–7, 11–14.
34. Solimar Otero, "The Ruins of Havana: Representations of Memory, Religion, and Gender," *Atlantic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2012): 143–63; Quiroga, 197–222.
35. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (New York: Verso Books, 1993), 25–32; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rideker, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 57.
36. Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, 10–13; Carol Silverman, *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics and Balkan Music in Diaspora* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 48, 243–244, 260.
37. Román, "Governing Man-Gods," 235. Here Román explores the depiction in periodicals and legal documents of two *espiritistas*—Hilario Mustelier, who was Afro-Cuban, and Juan Manso Estevéz, who was Spanish.
38. Instances where these traditions cross or are *cruzados* occur frequently in the negotiation of religious praxis based on individual contexts and situations, see Ochoa, *Society*, 193.
39. Both Oyaand Centella are associated with the cemetery and the dead in specific ways that render them especially potent spiritual beings.
40. Glissant, 104–107, 124–127, 229, 237.
41. Benítez Rojo, xxxv–xxxviii; Thomas Glave,"Fire and Ink: Toward a Quest for Language, History, and a MoralImagination," *Callaloo* 26, no. 3 (2003): 614–621; Victor Hernández Cruz, "Geography of the Trinity Corona," in *Maraca: New and Selected Poems* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2001), 66–67; Lucía M. Suárez, "Consuming Cubanas: *¿Quién diablos es Juliette?*" *Cuban Studies* 24 (2011): 155–171; Glissant, 100–102.
42. Benjamin Kahn has argued for an understanding of celibacy as a kind of sexuality with its own parameters of experience, see *Celibacies: American Modernism and Sexual Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 14–16.

43. Arrizón, 88–89.
44. Pérez, 337; Kristina Wirtz, "Divining the Past: Linguistic Reconstruction of 'African Roots' in Diasporic Ritual Registers and Songs," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37, no. 2 (2007): 242– 274; Diana. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 1–52.
45. Aisha Beliso-De Jesús, "Santería Copresence and the Making of African Diaspora Bodies," *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (2014): 503–526.
46. Pierre Fatumbi Verger, "Trance and Convention in Nago-Yoruba Spirit Mediumship," in *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*, eds. John Beattie and John Middleton (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 2010 [1977]), 50–66; Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 1983).
47. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 8, 17, 21, 158–60.
48. Flores-Peña, 90–92.
49. Sedgwick, 19.
50. Rivera-Servera, 35.
51. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*: *The New Mestiza*, 2nd ed (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999[1987]), 76–77.
52. Wirtz, *Performing*, 166–168.
53. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, "Poetics and Performances as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life,"*Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 59–88.
54. Glissant, 109.
55. See Beliso-De Jesús' discussion of spiritual transcendence in Afro-Cuban in *Electric Santería Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 31–38, 43, 71–78.
56. Ochoa, *Society*, 13; and Todd Ramón Ochoa, "Prendas-Ngangas-Enquisos: Turbulance and the Influence of the Dead in Cuban-Kongo Material Culture," *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 3 (2010): 387–420, esp. 390.
57. Raquel Romberg, "Ritual Piracy or Creolization with an Attitude," *New West Indian Guide* 79, no. 3/4 (2005): 175–218, esp. 199–201. Romberg takes her lead from Roger Abraham's view of creolization whereby the conflicts that arise from the perceived "contagion" of

cultural mixing and miscegenation recast Caribbean history and folklore against other perceived authenticties, purities of culture. See Roger Abrahams, "Questions of criolian contagion," *Journal of American Folklore* 116, no. 59 (2003): 73–87.

58. Glissant, 122–124; Taylor, 18, 21.
59. Taylor, ibid.; Esparza Laura, "I DisMember the Alamo: A long Poem for Performance," in *Latinas on Stage*, eds. Alicia Arrizón and Lillian Manzor (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2000), 70–89; Alina Troyano (Carmelita Tropicana), "Milk of Amnesia" (Leche de amnesia), in *Latinas on Stage*, 118–137; Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here*: *Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 159–168.
60. José Martí, *Inside the Monster*: *Writings on the United States and American Imperialism*, vol. 1, trans. Philip Foner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).
61. Arlene Dávila, *Culture Works*: *Space*, *Value*, *and Mobility Across the Neoliberal Americas* (New York: New York University Press 2012), 2–3.
62. Wirtz, *Performing*, 219–256.
63. Christina Ayorinde, *Afro-Cuban Religiosity*, *Revolution and National Identity* (Tampa and Miami: University Press of Florida, 2004).
64. Jill Lane, *Blackface Cuba*, *1840–1895* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Inés María Martiatu, "Introduction: Sin similcutancia posible. Una mirada otra al teatro bufo cubano," and "El Negrito y la mulata en el vórtice de la nacionalidad," in *Interpelaciones Desde el Presente*, ed. Inés María Martiatu (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2008), 1–28, 68–104.
65. See Jorge Anckermann and Ferico Villoch, "La isla de las cotorras," in *Teatro Alhambra Antología*, ed. Eduardo Robreño (La Habana, Cuba: Editorial Letras Cubanas 1979 [1923]), 303–372; and Eric Mayer-García, "Reconfiguring Race and Citizenship: The Teatro Vernáculo of La Unión Martí-Maceo," in Experiments in Democracy: Interracial and Cross-Cultural Exchange in American Theatre, 1912–1945, eds. Cheryl Black and Jonathon Shandell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press 2016), 49–66.
66. Martiatu, 68–104; Antonio López, *Unbecoming Blackness* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 18–60.

67. José Estaban Muñoz, *Disidentifications* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1999), 119; Jorge Mañach, *Indagnación del Choteo* (Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969 [1928]); Gustavo Pérez Firmat, "Riddles of the Sphincter: Another Look at the Cuban Choteo," *Diacritics* 14, no. 4 (1984): 67–77; Solimar Otero, *Afro-Cuban Diasporas in the Atlantic World* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010); Alexandra T. Vazquez, *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 4–10, 39, 145.
68. Muñoz, 189.

CHAPTER 4

Orality and the Slave Sublime

John Drabinski

> Creole orality, even repressed in its aesthetic expression, contains a whole system of countervalues, a counterculture; it witnesses ordinary genius applied to resistance, devoted to survival.
>
> Bernabé et al., *In Praise of Creoleness*

The problem of orality raises a cluster of important questions. For cultural politics, orality establishes precisely the sort of locality that resists transaction across borders and the ever precarious travel of globalization. This is the sort of resistance that allows Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, in one of their strongest moments as a theorist-collective, to draw a rather bold line between *créolité* and diasporic writing. In this sense, orality gathers together a full range of theoretical problems that, in turn, transform questions of home, language, history, and meaning. For epistemology, and this works intimately with a cultural politics of resistance, orality represents a mode of knowing and transmitting knowledge that is subject to a time other than the global. To be sure, orality is sustained by national cultural borders in a manner that is productive to expression and cultural formation while at the same time engaging the global forces at work in,

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say, the chaotic dialectic of creolized and vernacular languages. And this epistemology draws on a metaphysics which in turn produces an important, nuanced ethical sensibility: if the ultimate reality of orality lies in the unfolding dynamics of local speech acts and exchanges, then an openness toward the otherness—simply *the Other*—of language is not only an interesting frame for thinking orality, but actually an imperative without which the meaning, knowing, and cultural politics of orality is impossible.

What concerns me in the remarks that follow is how the cultural project of orality, underwritten by an epistemology and metaphysics of Chaos in Édouard Glissant's sense, embodies and draws upon what we could call a *haunted aesthetics*. In the Creole and creolizing context, orality partakes of memory, broken off from history, at the very moment orality makes futurity in and out of the present. Orality of course has a dialectical relation to writing in Glissant's work, and this is an important relation to note from the outset. For Glissant, writing is critical for literary meaning and history; with the written word, literature *enters* history in a certain manner, but always, in the case of Creole languages, with a peculiar moment of betrayal of the oral. The oral is pulled back into the world, to the dynamics of the *chaos-monde*, and so writing bears a debt to this *monde* and thus operates with a kind of contamination. Writing calcifies, even when it is most alive and erratic. The oral from which it draws is therefore both the condition for the possibility of writing Creole *and* the condition of impossibility. So, as we here think about the relation of orality to Paul Gilroy's conception of the slave sublime in *The Black Atlantic*,[1] we will also have to keep in view the relation of orality to memory. For, just as memory withdraws from and sustains history, orality, because it is itself so engaged in memory-work, withdraws from and sustains writing. This is Glissant's dialectic. And, as I want to argue across the pages that follow, this dialectic draws its force and meaning from an animating presence of the sublime that carries social memory of pain and its haunting across time, a carrying to which key moments in the African-American intellectual tradition bear witness—an ordinary genius of resistance, as the creolists would have it.

So, I here want to explore a simple relation, guided by the following question: how can we understand sound and orality as the element of memory? And, if we link orality and sound to memory, then how is our understanding of creolization and vernacular cultural forms transformed by a metaphysics of expression that locates Gilroy's slave sublime at the heart of mixture, resistance, survival, and chaos? In order to make an

argument to that end, I begin with two encounters with memory, pain, and sound: Frederick Douglass' memory of slave singing and W.E.B. Du Bois' reflections on the sorrow songs—a witness to ordinary genius and the sublimity of a resistance spoken simultaneously with the moment of violence and death. What emerges from this reading of Douglass and Du Bois is a sense of the sublime transmitted in sound. Gilroy's notion of the slave sublime, treated in the second part of what follows, adds important contour and texture to Douglass and Du Bois by linking memory, pain, and sound to questions of identity, social memory, and diasporic cultural production. With the slave sublime in view, I return at the close of the essay to Glissant's theorization of the Creole language and vernacular aesthetic forms in order to ask how the slave sublime might be said to animate, perhaps even in its absence, the dynamic structure of orality and its particular form of chaos.

The Unexpected Song

Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is rightly famous for its account of the terror of plantation life, the violence of the initiation into slave subjectivity, and the decisive moment of transition into the post-slavery subjectivity. Indeed, the fight between Douglass (the enslaved) and Covey (the enslaver) that unlikely two-hour physical match that shifts *Narrative* from its many repetitions of scenes of violence to a vision of resistance and escape, is the pivot-point of a story that brings all of the rhetorical power and reputation of Douglass the abolitionist to the page. Gilroy identifies the arc of the story as a reversal and confounding of Hegelian dialectic, severing the reversibility of the lord and bondsman relation in the name of liberatory violence. Douglass' *Narrative*, in that moment of reversal, draws out the boundary between the infrahumanity of plantation slavery and the emergence of humanity—the postmark of post-slavery subjectivity—in an act of violence. Recognition demanded not through the exposure of dependency, but instead through the possibility of vengeance and the violence of self-assertion. This form of recognition, which is simultaneously the formation of subjectivity, also prompts Angela Davis to theorize black subjectivity *as* (and so not transitioning *through*) resistance in her famous lectures on liberation.[2]

Amidst the sharp rhetoric and horrifying stories of plantation violence in the opening two chapters, Douglass' *Narrative* is interrupted by a strange and compelling pause in the second chapter. The second half of the second

chapter interrupts his depiction of slave life with haunting descriptions of slave songs—haunting not for their unfamiliarity, but for their proximity and sublimity—heard across a plantation field. The dramatic context of this interruption is remarkable; the entire tone of *Narrative* changes, just for a few pages, shifting from the righteous outrage of depictions of slave-owner violence to a sense of wonder and melancholy at the sound of slave songs sung in the field. Douglass recounts how slaves returning from work:

> While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out – *if not in the word, in the sound*; – and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone.[3]

The chapter-and-a-half before this and the following paragraphs through the remainder of the text are noteworthy for their adherence to linearity and clear lessons. Douglass' sufferings at each point of the autobiography deepen the pain of slavery, each moment of witness gives depth to rage and despair. *Narrative* leaves no doubt that it is an abolitionist text concerned with communicating the particular violence of plantation life and articulating of the conditions of liberation through violent resistance. The confrontation with Covey, which shifts the arc of the story from suffering toward an emerging freedom, is followed by glimpses of light and increasingly open horizons, all of which culminate in Douglass' freedom from both the literal bonds of slavery and the decimation of subjectivity made through its violence. The singing of the slaves, however, changes everything in terms of tone and orientation. Space and time break with linear models and the aesthetic sensibility of the song and singer is confounded and confounding. Douglass is moved by the song, especially the *sound*, but cannot, for once, make sense of what he sees and hears. This is a singular moment in the text. That is, for all the astonishment in Douglass' prose about slavery's violence, for all the clear moralism and outrage one expects from an abolitionist's text, the songs of the slaves open up, if only for one moment, a massively different horizon in *Narrative*. He instrumentalizes the songs in a brief remark, noting: "I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some

minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do."[4] But his instrumentalization is an interruption only of a longer pause in the swirl of pain, suffering, and hope the songs bring to word and sound.

What are we to make of this moment? To be sure, unlike the first witness to slavemaster violence—the beating of his aunt, which initiates him into slave subjectivity—or the fight with Covey—the moment of psychic liberation—the songs of the slaves confound Douglass' own vision of himself and the cruel institution of slavery. The slaves sing without didacticism; there is no lesson to be drawn from the words or the communicative action of collective singing. In fact, the slaves sing from and to a lesson-less place. Without a didactic moment, Douglass is left only with the impossible mixture of despair and hope, pathos and rapture, sadness and joy. Even the sound itself does not make sense; Douglass describes the music as disobedient to time and tune, although the strangeness of the sound does not inhibit or limit the *power* of sound. Indeed, the distortion of rules and the abdication of moral lesson and instruction can be said to imbue the songs with their own special power—a power that transcends the uncomplicated moral arc of *Narrative*. The transcendence of moral arc thereby opens up another dimension of slavery—a non-instrumentalizable dimension, to be sure—that is otherwise absent from Douglass' account of the plantation. And, further, what this brings into view is how *Narrative* largely eschews the melancholy of slavery, the meaning of the sound of the slaves' song, in favor of the outrage and wound of violence. What that violence leaves behind, the memory of pain and unredeemed suffering, does not appear in the text *except in the slave songs overheard in the field*. Douglass' lack of clear vision and description when recounting the songs, his absorption in the strange spectacle of it all, is, in its own way, an authentic mode of describing the melancholic site. Melancholia can only interrupt a didactic narrative, deriving from the intimacy of his relation to the pain and the transcendent witness-memory in sound. And so the slave songs interrupt Douglass' autobiography with the very theme of *Narrative* itself: the memory of slavery's pain and suffering. Without lesson and without resolution, the songs stall Douglass' dialectic and posit what is, for *Narrative*, the text's outside and unassimilable enigma.

In the closing chapter to *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois echoes Douglass' encounter with the peculiarity and intractability of memory in the sorrow songs. Like Douglass, Du Bois' account of hearing memory-music, of his

discerning the *sorrow* in the so-called sorrow songs, is animated by a kind of wonder. It is a wonder that draws the listener in, to be sure. That is the character of wonder-as-affect. But it is also a wonder that marks a difference between the memory carried by the song and the capacity of the listener to comprehend the meaning of that memory. In other words, it is a wonder begun in the trauma of slavery. Sorrow is unassimilable to the narrative of uplift that threads the various chapters of *Souls* together. And yet that wonder, that memory whose pain draws the reader and listener back from the looping story of freedom, is inseparable from the meaning of the *place* in which the sorrow songs were gestated, then born. Du Bois writes:

> The Music of Negro religion is that plaintive rhythmic melody, with its touching minor cadences, which, despite caricature and defilement, still remains the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil. Sprung from the African forests, where its counterpart can still be heard, it was adapted, changed, and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip, it became the one true expression of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope.[5]

Thus, Du Bois claims, and this is no small intervention in the question of home and place, that the *Americanness* of the sorrow songs comes from their embeddedness in a particular history and memory. The songs make place and home through the soul-life of the slave—a kind of founding ghost, perhaps, and certainly a kind of identity out of shared historical memory. They begin as the Americas begin: pain, suffering, exile without promise of return, and the endless trials of what Du Bois called the color-line, the veil, and double-consciousness. The sorrow songs are a gift, but not one that edifies or even makes sense. Indeed, part of Du Bois' commentary on the songs in Chapters X and XIV of *Souls* consists of a certain astonishment at the *sound* of the music, a sound we might identify with memory and its unfathomable character. Du Bois' reflections on the sorrow songs always come back to this astonishment and wonder, and how sound makes memory's ineffable character present in sound, even as the sound of suffering's memorial asks us (or induces the questions in us): *What do the songs mean? How has sound become so melancholy, yet crucial for the meaning of present and future?* Begun in slavery, the melancholic sound is the sound of the other founding father, the "father" who passes along

sadness and hope at one and the same time. In that sense, Du Bois argues, the slave experience is *in* the song. Du Bois writes:

> What are these songs, and what do they mean?...I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world…They are the music of unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways.[6]

The temporality of this passage is key. All of the affects and conditions of subjectivity described in this and other passages on the sorrow songs trail off into the past. In that sense, the song is a *clue*. The song directs the listener to the trail of the past, draws the one who hears the message and memorial into the moment, but then withdraws into the sorrowful memory it bears. That memory is elliptical. We are never brought to the experience of slavery itself, but only the melancholy of its wake.

The crucial element of the sorrow song as memory song is sound. And it is sound that provokes Du Bois' deepest anxiety about the future of memory. Sound, in *Souls*, is linked to authenticity in ways that are inseparable from the capacity of the song to carry memory of pain, suffering, longing, and hope; the sorrow songs are the slave's message to the world, and that message is ever precarious. Du Bois will therefore constantly remind us of the threat of caricature, defilement, and imitation. If the songs lose the purity of *sound*, the songs lose the sanctity of memory. Authenticity is therefore not only a question of performance and the aesthetics of reception (although it is certainly that), but also, and perhaps firstly, a question of the preservation of founding wounds and their strange gift of life to the future. Du Bois writes:

> Since their day they have been imitated – sometimes well, by the singers of Hampton and Atlanta, sometimes ill, by straggling quartettes. Caricature has sought again to spoil the quaint beauty of the music, and has filled the air with many debased melodies which vulgar ears scarce know from the real. *But the true Negro folk-song still lives in the hearts of those who have heard them truly sung and in the hearts of the Negro people.*[7]

Every iteration of the sorrow songs traffics in imitation, so the critical issue is how imitation is able to summon and evoke the ghostly past. That is, Du Bois' question is how we can discern the *haunted aesthetic* of

the Hampton and Atlanta University singers and, in that discernment, understand both the potential of authentic performance to call forth memory and the potential of caricature to pervert memory, identity, and the sanctity of both. Du Bois therefore marks an important distinction here between authenticity and mass-produced, mass-consumable musical expression. Caricature appeals to vulgar ears. But the authenticity of the sorrow songs is ensured in part by the performance, in the main by the listener: the Negro people. This is a key moment in *Souls*, for it tells the story of memory and history and sound without naïveté about the modern world. Mass production and mass consumption transform the aesthetic character of any given object—the *mass* of mass consumption requires the leveling of cultural production. Du Bois worries about the future of memory in this moment, and yet that concern is eased through an appeal to his notion of race and racial identity. The common spiritual striving of black people, which ranges in his early work from essentialist claims about blood to the promise of shared history and culture, ensures that the song will be *heard* and that the *sound* will carry somewhere. Transmission of pain and memory, then, has a future, even as caricature and vulgar ears remind us that every cultural production is exposed to mass production and its perversions.

What are we to make of Douglass' and Du Bois' encounter with the music of slavery? For both, it is a moment of profound disturbance. The songs in both *Narrative* and *Souls* interrupt stories of resistance and liberation with memory, trauma, and its ghosts. This disturbance then evokes a kind of devotion—for Douglass, the memory of the moment stands as a sacred space of pain that exceeds the abolitionist program of the text, and, for Du Bois, it situates black subjectivity in the strange, haunting interval between the painful past and the future of the color line. Douglass and Du Bois tell compassionate ghost stories: concerned about the ghost, worried that the ghost will wander rather than be summoned and loved, but also wary of any attempt to inscribe the ghost into logics of comprehension and description. The songs come *to* Douglass and Du Bois, and their appearance in the text is always marked by a kind of astonishment at the ineffability, yet affective communicability, of what is brought to presence in sound. In that sense, we can call the presence of the sorrow songs in both texts as moments of the sublime. The sublime has a specific history in Western philosophy, of course, and it is often used to mark the limits of the intellect. God nature, infinity,

perhaps even the soul—these moments of the sublime underscore human finitude by noting, through the boldness of the examples, the limits of knowledge. The excess of pain and memory in the sorrow songs, however, does not dazzle or astonish in that same manner. Rather, the intensity of the slave experience, as Douglass and Du Bois both argue, astonishes with the unthinkable and unsayable of centuries of cruelty and suffering without pause. That is, rather than astonishing us with the power of what exceeds human finitude and thinking as a kind of exaltation, the sublimity of the sorrow song evacuates the world of meaning and redemption, leaving the sadness of memory of suffering in sound and word. And yet that evacuation is itself the condition of being and another kind of future. A strange double, yes, but such doubling is sustained by the sublime's power to disrupt and re-orient according to its own logic. Human finitude is marked, underscored, and moved to the center of the world in order to make another order possible or thinkable, even in its unthinkability. The irrevocable paradox of the sorrow songs—the sadness that is joyful, the hope that is impossible—makes the Americas possible. Memory of possibility is sound itself.

This, I think, is something akin to what Jean-François Lyotard describes as the negative sublime in *The Postmodern Condition* and *The Differend*—a peculiar and disturbing sense of the sublime that interrupts narratives of the good and the beautiful with unthinkable, unsayable, and unrepresentable of what he simply calls "this shit."[8] The negative sublime brings a world into being, but without the shit of history and memory re-entering that world as a living presence; the negative sublime is a haunted and haunting interruption, just as the slave songs interrupt Douglass' and Du Bois' long meditations on transformation and liberation. The difference here is that, unlike Lyotard's negative sublime, the sorrow songs *do* bring pain and memory to presence in an aesthetics of sound. Sound is capable of more than word and the binding of expression that language typically proscribes. As well, if Du Bois is right, painful memory in sound is transformed by its entry into the time of the present, then future, into the complexity of black identity in the Americas; the disturbance of slave songs in Douglass' *Narrative* and the aesthetic sublimity they produce in *Souls*—in those texts and in history—become at one and the same time the unthinkable *and* the possibility of life. This is a negative sublime, we might say, that bears a gift in the midst of terrifying memory work.

Ghostly Sublime

What is the meaning and significance of this moment of sublimity? How are we to configure and name the sublime as sound? It is a complex moment, to be sure. The history of the sublime in the West is largely a mathematical or religious phenomenon, exceeding categories of thought in order to re-order (or disorder, in prophetic moments) the universe according to the higher good, a foundational purpose, or the apex of knowing. Across that excess, manifest in such variety, is the question of the limits of thinking and the thinkable. The sublime is always that *more* which upsets all attempts to quantify the human.

It is here that the final chapter to Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* becomes absolutely crucial for our reflections. That chapter, perhaps his most famous, elaborates what he calls *the slave sublime*. The notion of the slave sublime emerges out of Gilroy's long and patient rethinking of the meaning of diaspora in which he seeks to wrest the notion of diaspora free of strategies of "compensation" and "aphasic power" that underlie nostalgic and mournful conceptions of diasporic unity. Against the yearning for a lost past, Gilroy proposes what we might call the *productive melancholia* of diasporic life. Gilroy's conception of the past is melancholic insofar as he locates a radical sense of loss at the center of the black Atlantic, a loss that does not have a name and therefore cannot be seized as a site of mourning. Instead, loss is pure death and the repetition of death—all the while keeping open those horizons which express and respond to the repetition of death and, in that repetition, the summoning of a haunting, melancholic past. And so, the melancholia of diasporic life draws on the intersection of memory, pain, and the production of aesthetic forms and sensibilities that transmit such peculiar memory. Gilroy writes that the rapport with death emerges continually in the literature and expressive cultures of the black Atlantic. It is integral, for example, to the narratives of loss, exile, and journeying which, like particular elements of musical performance, serve a mnemonic function: directing the consciousness of the group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and its social memory.[9]

In this passage, Gilroy tells an interesting and compelling origin story. The origin story is both the beginning of diaspora—loss and exile—and the repetition (of a prior repetition) of that origin as the aesthetic principle of cultural production. The consciousness of the group is both produced and reproduced in the mnemonic function of summoning history and memory's pain.

This is not to say that Gilroy sets up an impossible measure for authenticity, even as his theory of diaspora is largely compatible with theories of authentic cultural and political expression. Mass production and mass consumption—and here Gilroy echoes Du Bois on the same—challenge authenticity, and yet diasporic continuity, such as it is, lies embedded in the sound of tradition. *Tradition* is the key term here, for in it is the thread of continuity in diasporic identity in what Gilroy calls "the living memory of the changing same." The changing same, the repetition of death, imbues diasporic memory with the pain that lies at the very origin of the black Atlantic: slavery. The complexity, of course, is that the living memory of this origin is the genesis of melancholia in the immemorial and unimaginable pain of slavery. Thus, the living memory of the repetition of death, saturated with the immemorial and the unimaginable, produces the slave sublime as an aural *tradition*—the continuity *in sound* of the black diaspora. He writes:

> Even when the network used to communicate its volatile contents has been an adjunct to the sale of black popular music, there is a direct relationship between the community of listeners constructed in the course of using that musical culture and the constitution of a tradition that is redefined here as the living memory of the changing same.[10]

This is an exceptionally rich passage. In it, Gilroy is able to seize upon the doubling of the slave sublime as a memory project *and* a projection into the future—the changing same—and, out of that doubling, produce something very close to a sense of authenticity and measure. That is, with the notion of the slave sublime, Gilroy connects the past to the present and the future in such a way that we are able to deploy this haunting, melancholic sublimity as a thread of identity. Identity is at once the cultural production of a ghostly, memorial sound and the creation of a community of listeners. Again, it is worth recalling Du Bois' comment that the meaning of the sorrow songs is known "in the hearts of the Negro people." Perhaps Gilroy and Du Bois are not too far apart on this crucial point of historiography and memory studies.

The slave sublime produces political and aesthetic community out of sound. Political community is formed as a sense of need particular to the group, a sense of need that is expressed and evoked in the sound structure of the same community's aesthetic sensibility. Gilroy writes:

> It points specifically to the formation of a community of needs and solidarity which is magically made audible in the music itself and palpable in the social relations of its cultural utility and reproduction. Created under the very nose of the overseers, the utopian desires which fuel the complementary politics of transfiguration must be invoked by other, more deliberately opaque means.[11]

With the association of terms such as "audible," "palpable," "social relations," and "desires" Gilroy links the extreme social conditions of the originary foundations of black cultural production—*under the very nose of the overseers*—to a community forged out of a solidarity between those whose suffering, as both memory and repetition, is forever unsayable. The living memory of the slave sublime is an expression of resistance, to be sure, but also a method and form of survival. Sublimity, like memory, is productive of so many elements of human meaning, which makes survival more than bare life or even just a clinging to life in messianic hope. The slave sublime produces *desire*, then the *life* of community, then *desire* again. Aesthetics of sound therefore play a double role, producing a first community through social memory, then reproducing community in the repetition of the sound of the unsayable. And so Gilroy concludes that this politics exists on a lower frequency where it is played, danced, and acted, as well as sung and sung about, because words, even words stretched by melisma and supplemented or mutated by the screams which still index the conspicuous power of the slave sublime, will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth.[12]

Gilroy here deepens the paradox of the changing same. The changing same of the slave sublime names the temporal interchange of pain and memory, an interchange that makes novelty and innovation possible without the loss of the past. It is a thread of diaspora, discerned in the sounds of the new. In theorizing the inception of the slave sublime as the unsayable's claim to truth, Gilroy reminds us that the sublimity carried through musical traditions—or, more generally, through the memory carried by sound—draws on something that can never quite be called to presence in speech, lyric, or any other form of making transparent and publicly accessible. The originating event of the slave sublime withdraws itself from presence at the very moment that it makes possible, and then sustains, the sound of memory and the expression of pain, hope, and promise.

The slave sublime, then, functions as a kind of subconscious in vernacular forms of expression. The sound of memory or memory as sound is summoned to expression without becoming a theme of expression; the slave sublime is not spoken *about*, but instead haunts and gives contour to an aesthetic. The production and reproduction of community in the slave sublime is important as an account of identity. For Gilroy, this changes our conception of diaspora—forging it without nostalgia—and it also builds a conception of sound into the foundations of identity. But at the same time that the slave sublime names the thread of identity in diaspora, it also makes a metaphysical claim about expression and its media. Across the expressive media in the diaspora, the sound of memory haunts, not just in explicit evocation or the boldly audible, but in any reality of authentic forms of diasporic life. The slave sublime, we might say, makes black Atlantic life possible and *real*. In that sense, it should recall for us the remark made by Bernabé et al. in *In Praise of Creoleness*, when they write that, after the Plantation, "[o]rality began then to be buried in our collective unconscious…but not without leaving here and there the scattered fragments of its discontinuous contours."[13] From Douglass and Du Bois, supplemented here by Gilroy's notion of the slave sublime, we can give an elemental name to the fragment and contour: the *sound* of memory.

In addition, Gilroy's naming of the slave sublime allows us to revisit Douglass' and Du Bois' encounters with the slave song with a particular intensity and investment. The intensity of those encounters lies in the sublimity of sound—how the song outstrips, in the pain it brings to sound, the human capacity to understand. The investment is metaphysical and epistemological, which in turn is social and political in aesthetic expression. Consider the temporality of Gilroy's claim: in the wake of melancholic loss, the time of social memory is folded into past and future without opening irretrievable and irreversible gaps and losses. Sound carries social memory and identity, even as historical knowledge of other sorts might fade or undergo transformative revisions. The slave sublime is not revised. Rather, the slave sublime is brought to expression with is opacity fully intact; opacity gives life, through its evocation of death and the repetition of death, to expression and yet is never itself *seen* or *thematized*. The lament of the soul singer, the pleading of the gospel singer, or the melancholic sounds of the jazz trumpet are neither *repetitions* nor *revisions* of the slave song. The slave song's meaning remains inaccessible and unsayable. But the sound of that pain, which is in no

small part the pain of not being able to say pain, inhabits aesthetic forms that summon and reproduce identity and meaning in a community of listeners. This is how the sublime works when mixed with memory. The message of the slave to humanity—Du Bois' characterization of the sorrow songs—becomes the sound of memory bequeathed to the present and future by the slave as *ancestor* and originator of diasporic identity. The ultimate reality of that identity, ranging from vernacular forms of speech to music to poetry and literary habits, lies in the slave sublime's "conspicuous power."

In this metaphysical moment, this glimpse into the relation between sound and reality, we are quickly returned to the problem of orality. Bernabé et al. set out the manifesto's claim in just such broad terms: the fragments of memory give birth to orality. How are we to understand the logic of this birth? What facilitates the transition from the fragments of archipelagic thinking, as Glissant put it, and the manifold cultural productions, artifacts, and forms of resistance gathered under the rubric of orality? Perhaps sound functions as womb and birth canal, in much the same manner as Glissant ascribes to the abyss in the opening pages of *Poetics of Relation*. That is, perhaps orality draws its power and sense of (multi-)rooted specificity from the social memory borne by sound. If we can see a relation between orality and sound—a relation that reinscribes the slave sublime into the medium of expression and expressive culture—then the productive, life-sustaining ghost of the past Gilroy names settles into the metaphysical infrastructure of orality as a form of resistance and life. Orality *and* the slave sublime, not orality *as* the slave sublime. In this fold of the slave sublime into orality, we can, in addition to metaphysical questions of origin and identity, perhaps begin articulating the enigmatic, yet critical relation between orality and home in a diasporic and not solely local context.

Orality as Memory Work

What, then, is the slave sublime to orality?

To be sure, this is an impossibly large question and requires real specificity regarding orality and its vicissitudes. But we can venture some general claims about orality and its relation to the metaphysical aspects of the slave sublime. To begin, the oral functions as a kind of ante-chamber excess to any linguistic economy. Orality is situated outside the boundaries of conventional transmission and exchange, which, in turn, tempts

the critic to absorb orality into a story about writing and composition—the ante-chamber of the novel and the philosophy treatise, as it were. Left to itself, however, there is a certain anarchy at work in orality, an anarchy that resists even the most strident efforts at flipping the oral and the vernacular into the linear, progressive temporality of the ideology of writing. Without the fixity and conventions of indices, dictionaries, and grammar rulebooks, the oral moves in sound, rhythm, and other associative logics that remain, in their essence, unassimilable to rules. "An idiom like Creole," Glissant writes in *Poetics of Relation*, "cannot be analyzed the way, for example, it was done for Indo-European languages that aggregated slowly around their roots."[14] Sound, the aural of the oral, marks the anarchical memory *in* the oral, and therefore the sense in which orality, in the Creole context, establishes itself outside the conventional economy of language.

The excessiveness of orality begins, for Glissant, as an emergent phenomenon of the plantation. Orality therefore begins in that mixture of pain and joy, suffering and hope, and defeat and resistance to which Douglass and Du Bois bear such important witness. Beginning and futurity are inseparable, so the beginning of certain forms of orality—however abyssal—is absolutely critical for our understanding. Glissant writes:

> When we examine how speech functions in this Plantation realm, we observe that there are several almost codified types of expression. Direct, elementary speech, articulating the rudimentary language necessary to get work done; stifled speech, corresponding to the silence of this world in which knowing how to read and write is forbidden; deferred or disguised speech, in which men and women who are gagged keep their words close. The Creole language integrated these three modes and made them jazz.[15]

Creole language, as an emergent speech and speaking, brings strategies of *and witness to* resistance, survival, and *marronage* into word and sound. Born in (and into) this moment, creolized and vernacular forms operate in a very different historical and memorial space, which means that such forms are always precarious and always sit on the boundaries of our comprehension. Sound, as we saw in Du Bois' expression of anxiety around performance and reception, is subjected to the world and, in that subjection, resists only insofar as authenticity is protected and sustained by both performance and the constitution of a proper

community of listeners. In describing the very same kind of precariousness in the Creole language, Glissant links language, identity, and chaos. He writes:"But it is not simply because the Creole language is a component of my identity that I am worried about its possible disappearance; it is because the language would also be missing from the radiant sparkle, the fluid equilibrium, and the ability to endure in disorder of the *chaos-monde*."[16]

Creole as a kind of orality, then, draws its vitality—its radiant sparkle—from fluidity and a special ability to *endure*. Enduring in sound has that very particular and utterly crucial feature of precarity, but also the crucial feature of adaptation to chaos and a long *histoire* of resistance. At this moment, Glissant adds an important dimension to Du Bois' anxiety about authenticity by noting that, not unlike Gilroy's theory of diaspora in *The Black Atlantic*, travel, movement, and contact are *part* of the persistence of memory in sound, and so authenticity *might* be endurance (and even transformation) in Chaos.

It is of course precisely this intertwining of language and speech that provokes a special anxiety about the future of Creole. So, whatever the productive character of Chaos and the peculiar notion of globalization at work in the later Glissant, creolized and vernacular forms are also always at risk of disappearing. Endurance and survival turn on forms of resistance. *Marronage*, we might say, is not just an historical fact of resistance, but also an aesthetic feature of Creole and creolizing logic. Further, as Du Bois points out in *Souls*, resistance in sound depends simultaneously on performance and reception; repetition is everything in this moment, so the localized (and not globalized) practice of creolized and vernacular forms proves crucial and decisive. Relation, in Glissant's sense, is a poetic principle that risks so much. Glissant writes:

> These are the forms we must use to contemplate the evolution of the Creole language: viewing it as a propagation of the dialects that compose it, each extending toward the other; but being aware also that this language can disappear, or un-appear, if you will, in one place or another.
>
> We agree that the extinction of any language at all impoverishes everyone. And even more so, if that is possible, when a composite language like Creole is in question, for this would be an instant setback for the processes of bringing-into-relation. But how many languages, dialects, or idioms will have vanished, eroded by the implacable consensus among powers between profits and controls…[17]

Glissant here draws an important line around language preservation and the precarious character of orality; dialect and idiom, irreducible as they are to the *sound* of language, resist consensus and draw only on difference and differentiation. The compulsion—political, cultural, economic, and aesthetic—toward uniformity and mass distribution threatens the *chaos-monde* of orality precisely because it reduces speaking to a repetition of the same. If it is forged out of a dynamic, ethical relation of one-to-the-Other, then the repetition of sameness neutralizes Creole language to the point of disappearance. And we can here see a certain intersection of Glissant's urgency with Du Bois' worry that the sorrow songs might become transmittable, reproducible, and compromised for the sake of mass consumption.

Returning Glissant and orality to Du Bois (and even Douglass), we catch sight of an important structural element to orality revealed in the link between sound, memory, and home: the ghost of the past whose presence and presencing figures much of the question of authenticity in creolized and vernacular expression. Where is the slave sublime in Creole orality? And how does the sound of orality depend upon—or could, at the very least, draw upon—the slave sublime for the continuity of tradition *even across the dynamics of Chaos?*

For me, this is where we can join together two of Glissant's most compelling and complex moments as a theorist in *Poetics of Relation*. The book opens with a moving meditation on the abyssal sense of the Middle Passage, drawing the experience of loss into the *creolized* negative sublime: death and memory give nothing to the future, but only drown history in passage to the New World. This is Gilroy's melancholia. Begun on the shoreline, Glissant's theorizing is measured at once by this abyssal beginning and the globalizing power of so many forces at work in the Caribbean context. Beginning and futurity are obstinate. No matter the pain of the past, the future happens and the creation of new, dynamic, even chaotic imaginaries begins. A future is made out of what remains—those broken remnants that moved Derek Walcott to the image of a broken vase, made new through the love of reassemblage—and out of what is given and taken from the scattered, odd elements of the New World. *World-making as a theoretical job and creativity as a kind of* marronage. Creolization is therefore made possible by this abyssal beginning *and* sustained by the fragmentary field of contact(s) Glissant calls archipelagic thinking. But the opening chapter to *Poetics of Relation* ends with a reminder that, even though it is a book about history and the future, it is also a memory project. Or at least a book that calls us to a memory project. Glissant

writes: "Beyond its chasm we gamble on the unknown. We take sides in this game of the world. We hail a renewed Indies; we are for it. And for this Relation made of storms and profound moments of peace in which we may honor our boats."[18] We witness an important shift and loop of temporality in this passage. It begins with post-abyssal thinking, seizing upon, as Glissant always does, the strange and ineluctable gift of a painful past—a future wrested, through unsayable suffering, free from atavism and nostalgia. But that future wrested free is also a moment of honor, a moment for memorial work at one and the same time as cultural production, independence, liberation and political urgency.

In the end, then, I think we can read in orality a kind of slave sublime, not in that the pain of the past drags language down or limits its cultural expression with traumatic after-effect—that would be the implication of the European negative sublime—but instead as a chronotopic metaphysics. That is, the ultimate reality of the Chaos afforded to orality is playful, creative, and open as a horizon of aesthetic and epistemological expression (orality is as much method as medium), but the chronotopic moment—that glimpse into the internal structure hidden from the external play of word and gesture—reveals something older than the commitment that creoleness and creolization make to the future. The role played by sound in creolized and vernacular practices brings that internal structure, which I am suggesting here is the element of haunting memory that produces a haunted aesthetic, into a compelling presence. The authenticity of this presencing, the honoring of the boats and the past and the paradoxes of the slave sublime, lies in a haunted aesthetic. But like any aesthetic dedicated to the future, the disturbance of memory bides its time in the interest of so many of the aspirations of the sorrow songs: hope, joy, promise. If, as Glissant urges, we are to honor the boats, then I think a fully developed theorization of orality needs this moment of the sorrow song and its haunted aesthetic in order to register what the songs always want heard: whatever this pain, whatever this past, whatever the memory of our geography, *always say yes to life*.

Notes

1. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
2. See, for example, Angela Davis, "Unfinished Lecture on Liberation—II," in *The Angela Davis Reader* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 53–60.

3. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2010), 120.
4. Douglass, *Narrative*, 120–121.
5. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91.
6. Du Bois, *Souls*, 123.
7. Ibid., 122. Emphasis in original.
8. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute,* trans. George Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 98. See also discussion of this point in Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 148n4.
9. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 198.
10. Ibid., 198.
11. Ibid., 37.
12. Ibid., 37.
13. Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant, *In Praise of Creoleness*, trans. M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 95.
14. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 96.
15. Ibid., 73.
16. Ibid., 98.
17. Ibid., 95.
18. Ibid., 8–9.

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CHAPTER 5

Utterance, Against Orality, Beyond Textuality

Michael Birenbaum Quintero

> …we sing it to our children, knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music.
> W.E.B. DuBois[1]

After singing along with it for years, it is something of a disappointment to discover that there is an actual semantic meaning to "chumbalacatera maquinolandera." These cryptic phonemes are the lyrics to the anthemic Puerto Rican bomba "Maquinolandera," performed by the Afro-Puerto Rican Ismael Rivera with Cortijo y Su Combo in the mid-1950s, and composed by Rivera's mother doña Margot Rivera.[2] But the lexemes "sube la candela máquina holandera" (turn up the stove),[3] even with their fairly formulaic metaphorics of heat and energy, are a paltry paraphrase for Rivera's infectiously phrased "*CHUMbalacateramaquinolanDEra*," let alone for the pleasures of singing or dancing along with it. As an utterance, the lyrics of "Maquinolandera" have sonorous, temporal, and sensual elements that very clearly exceed its semantic content. On the other hand, the pleasures of "Maquinolandera" do not in themselves derive from the fact that they exceed semantics. They are in the movement of lips over teeth and shouting along with friends on the dancefloor. They are what they are.

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Music is attractive as a model for the relationship between human expression and the unfixedness of meaning. This is particularly so for scholars of orality who, as a means of setting their chosen object of study against written literature and the hierarchy it claims over orality, find in music a transcendence of written text or notation, a privileged relationship with the body and with the temporal conditions of utterance, and a kind of human authenticity that music has held in the Western imagination, for better or for worse, from at least the era of the Romantics. Thus, Walter Pater's well-worn maxim[4] has it that all art aspires to the condition of music; that is, that the boorish literal-ness of content seeks to merge with the transcendently ambiguous play of form. If it is any consolation for the literary scholar or art historian, music scholarship has also wondered about the green-ness of the grass on the other side—flirtations with semiotics and attempts to stabilize the slippery semantics (or at least systematize the syntax) of music abound in the history of the musicologies.[5] The truth, of course, is that music has no monopoly on formal autonomy or semantic ambiguity, nor is it free from highly conventionalized, almost semantic, sets of meanings in certain contexts.[6] Indeed, as a discipline, the academic study of music (even of non-textual, improvised music) has as direct a historical line of descent from textuality as does the study by the literary disciplines of what is called (revealing its internal contradictions) "oral literature."[7]

Therefore my place as an ethnomusicologist in this collection might not shed as much interdisciplinary light as might be hoped on the question of orality in the Caribbean. I'm fairly unaccustomed to engaging critically with words—ethnomusicologists are generally concerned with utterances whose meaningfulness is less semantic than gestural. And my research site, Colombia's southern Pacific coast, is definitively not the Caribbean—and not only geographically. It *was* founded, like the Caribbean in the crucible of slavery and subsequent creolization. However, its isolation, unlike the Caribbean, from the dynamics of global modernity for all of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries makes its engagements with both Europeanized modernity and black cosmopolitanism, and its intellectual, historical and political projects rather different from those of the Caribbean.

It's a little coy of me to suggest both the marginality and the centrality of my contribution, but my hope is the fact that I must approach the topic of orality in the Caribbean from the disciplinary and geographic margins means that I can ask unfamiliar questions (or at least familiar questions in

unfamiliar ways) of assumptions held at its center. For one thing, notions of orality can benefit from consideration of its outer limits where literal semantic meaning fades into the gestures and exhalations of sound, bringing us closer to the easily-overlooked kinds of meaning that cluster around the experience of orality. At the same time, the long-standing ideological deployment of orality to countervail the literate/modern/Western episteme demands an infusion of fresh air that an understanding of its sounded and gestural aspects may be able to supply. The view of the Black Atlantic from its Black Pacific hinterlands can help to illustrate the diversity of experience tht the project of Black political solidarity and aesthetic circulation includes—or should include. After all, the question of what Black music signifies is an important one for Black musical practitioners, and the question of what the Black Pacific has to say to the Black Atlantic is meaningful one for the black inhabitants of the Colombian Pacific themselves.

As I've suggested, the notion of orality has proven useful as a foil to Europeanizing modernity and literate forms of knowledge in describing colonial and postcolonial settings such as the Caribbean. The participant in orality is represented as social rather than isolated, active rather than passive, creative rather than memorializing; the oral art as free-flowing rather than bounded, changeable rather than fixed, collaborative rather than exclusive, participatory rather than objectified; meanwhile the literate realm to which the oral is opposed is frequently laden with all the baggage of European colonialist modernity, as if writing were exclusive to European, or as if orality were entirely exterior to it (see Vété-Congolo, this volume). The discourse of orality has become saturated with the notion of Afrodiasporic sociality, creativity, fluidity, and, in a word, *humanity*, situating it as a powerful resource for the ethical indictment of a Europeanized logocentrism coded as static, objectifying and deadening. All of this provides a serious moral criticism of European scientific modernity, which after all was predicated on displacing oral tradition (represented as superstitions and old wives' tales) in favor of the objective description of reality.

Nonetheless, the argument I make aims to shift the emphasis in orality. I want to offer a scholarly approach to Black expressive culture that, while not rejecting the treatment of orality for the project of reconstructing Black history or that of validating Black alterity vis-à-vis Euro-modernity, does put the past and the West on the back burner in favor of an understanding of the work that Black expressive culture does for its practitioners in their own spaces in the present.[8] This is an invitation to look at Black aesthetics less through a hermeneutics of depth—that is, for its underlying

syntagmatic structures and hidden historical meanings—than by observing its surfaces, its gestures, the effects it has as bodily, social and spiritual *work*—that is, as a social activity with the concrete political ramifications of building communities and articulating their values out of disparate individuals. If the hermeneutics of depth treat orality as text to be plumbed, my suggestion is that utterance be understood as a gesture to be traced. This argument overlaps with the anti-essentialist approach to Blackness,[9] but my concern here is less with essentialism (which, after all, has its place as a political tactic) than with the important ramifications of Black expressive practice that, in our haste to generate what we might perceive as our value-added academic contributions of unearthing the hidden, we may overlook at the surface level of people's practice.

In what follows, I examine some of the ways in which this takes place. I want to trace the genealogy of the anti-colonial project of recovering Black historicity and peoplehood in European Romantic nationalism, and to tie the concerns of that project with the extraction of a clearly texted, semantically meaningful communicative message from the sounded, affective, or social aspects of musical and oral practice. I then tack in from the opposite direction, by discussing how accounts of Black alterity that validate Black orality as a cure for the lack inherent to Euro-modern textuality are themselves beholden to Eurological formulations of difference, reproducing the same coordinates—irrationality, embodiment, collectivity, spirituality, and their respective opposites—on which the racial and temporal hierarchies of modernity are mapped, reconceiving the values attached to these coordinates rather than remodeling them as criteria. Finally, I want to indicate the ways in which the project of deriving historicity and alterity from Black orality as its primary sources of meaningfulness colludes with what has been called the "paranoid" impulse in critical theory.[10] This "hermeneutics of suspicion"[11] has been very useful for describing those instances of Black orality that are most in keeping with Romantic narratives of peoplehood, such as some aspects of Haitian, Afro-Cuban, and Surinam maroon religious practice. However, this particular constellation of critical theory, Black cultural politics, and text-based methodology also establishes canons from which some Black cultural practices are more likely to be excluded. Those Black oral and musical practices that are less text-based remain correspondingly less available for political claims. Since the musical system that I study among Black Colombians is an example of this kind of practice, I offer an alternative way to understand those uttered practices, through a methodological orientation toward ethnographic

attention to their sounded, felt, and socially meaningful elements, and a theoretical orientation favoring the immanence of community over the transcendence of peoplehood. toward the immanence of community.[12] My object is to renew an understanding of orality which does not consign it to an echo of the past or a shadow of Euro-modernity. After all, for its practitioners, orality is most properly savored in its own right.

Orality as Texuality: The "Oral Archive" and Black Historicity

Writing on what he calls "Afro-Modernity," Michael Hanchard describes the colonial project through which African and African-descended peoples were cast as bereft of history and human time, if not humanity itself, as a blank slate upon which Euro-modern civilization must be inscribed. Therefore, he notes, "a reconstruction of the past was one of the first pedagogical projects undertaken by Afro-Modern activists and intellectuals,"[13] among whom we can include, in the early and mid-twentieth century, Black thinkers in the US from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts movement, Afro-Americanist anthropologists, members of the Francophone Négritude movement, and proponents of Afro-Cubanism in Cuba. For all of these groups, demonstrating a historically significant past was a central component in the construction of Black "peoplehood."[14]

This historical project, however, must confront what St Lucian poet Derek Walcott has called the "absence of ruins" characterizing Caribbean, and broadly Afro-diasporic, historiography—the expansive unknowability of the Black past.[15] While there are numerous written primary accounts about slavery and enslaved peoples' African past, they are generally documents that were complicit in the very process of dehumanization that the Afro-Modernist project seeks to overturn. Therefore, in the historical project of constructing Black peoplehood by recovering the Black past, Afro-Modernist intellectuals sought in the oral practices of everyday life—musical forms, folktales, linguistic constructions, naming practices, and the like—an archive of non-written historical narrative compiled through the study of oral and expressive culture. Thus, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, a seminal tome on the study of New World Black culture, was written not by a historian, but by anthropologist Melville Herskovits. Its title pointedly acknowledged the myth that there was no past and aimed to disprove it through its traces in present-day Black orality and expressive practices.[16] The sources for this study, and others across the hemisphere, came largely

from everyday speech practices (spoken and sung) which intellectuals had begun constructing as an oral "archive." Such was the case for Haitian Jean Price-Mars' tellingly titled *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (*So Spoke the Uncle*) of 1928, the Afro-Cuban religious narratives collected by Rómulo Lachatañeré[17] and in Lydia Cabrera's publications of the 1940s and 1950s,[18] Lorenzo Dow Turner's linguistic study of the Georgia Sea Islands (published as *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* in 1949), and such works on music as in Fernando Ortíz's *La Africanía de la música folklorica de Cuba* (*The "Africanity" of the Folkloric Music of Cuba*) of 1950, and sections of Alejo Carpentier's *La música en Cuba* and Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka's *Blues People*.

Understandably, given their goals, researchers began early on to work to consolidate their oral archives from those elements that most explicitly lend themselves to the project of retelling a historical narrative reaching past-wards to Africa. Herskovits, for example, carried out fieldwork among the Saramaka maroons of Surinam, who maintain a corpus of stories about events in the lives of "Old-Time People" who were born in Africa, escaped from slavery, and engaged in struggle against the Dutch colonial authorities in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Herskovits also carried out fieldwork in Haiti, as did Jean Price-Mars, particularly with practitioners of Afro-Haitian religion, in which references to Ginen (Africa) abound. Students of blackness in Cuba also found similar references in neo-Yoruba and neo-Kongo religiosity, and especially in the oral tradition of the Abakuá ritual fraternity of Cuba, which narrates the history of Abakuá in the Cross-River region of west-central Africa and the genealogy of its lodges in Cuba.

As such, the method of scholars was, firstly, the collection and transcription of narratives and, secondly, textual analysis to mine layers of metaphor for what could be regarded as historical evidence. This focus on textuality, transcription, and message at the beginning of the twentieth century does not differ radically from the efforts of German nationalists a century earlier, in the collections and transcriptions of song lyrics and folktales by Johann Gottfried Herder and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.[19] Indeed the influence of Herder in particular and German Romanticism in general on Black intellectuals in the US, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and later Alan Locke, has been well documented.[20] Herderian Romantic nationalism also had at least indirect influence on Négritude via contact with the Harlem Renaissance and through the writings of historian Leo Frobenius, among others.[21]

Both these Afro-Modernists and their European intellectual forebears engaged in a relentless textualization of orality, as if the spoken word were merely a medium for conveying text. This unnoted translation from the oral to the written had the advantage of putting transcribed oral practices into evidence for the kind of historical depth that claims to Black peoplehood needed, but it also effectively isolated them from the contexts and conditions of their utterance. Many of the accounts cited above, for example, deal with musical song by transcribing the lyrics to search for historical references or African lexemes,[22] generally ignoring their sonority, their embodiment, or the social relationships which emplaced their actual utterance. This mirrors the trenchant observation of David Scott, in a provocative critique of Richard Price's *First Time*, that the emphasis is on raw historical facticity rather than the present-tense act of memory.[23] As Regina Bendix has argued, the sounded, embodied, and affective aspects of expressive practice have a long history of being invalidated as objects of academic inquiry, even in the humanities. Given the potential for skepticism about the study of the Black past or even the notion of Black culture, especially by Black writers, many scholarly texts of the mid-twentieth century are marked by the performance of an academic scientism that tended to emphasize precisely the most textual aspects of Black orality.[24] This was, however, not the only use of Black orality; paradoxically, it was also pressed into service as a critique of the European rational epistemology that undergirds the very textuality in the image of which it was molded.

Orality Against Textuality: "Rhythmic Attitude" and Black Alterity

We have seen how the construction of Black peoplehood required the purifying textualization of Black orality. What is particularly striking about the textualization of orality as an interpretive move is that it is precisely those elements of Black orality that *exceed* the text that are simultaneously pressed into service as markers of Black alterity. By Black alterity, I mean the positing of Black cultural difference by Black intellectuals and their allies not as the lack or incompletion of civilizing modernity, as in the colonialist formulation, but as a valid cultural and epistemological alternative to (even remedy for) a European-modernity whose self-designated universality was explicitly called into question. If the archiving and textualization of oral expression that we saw in the previous section aimed to show that there is such a thing as Black history and establish Black

peoplehood, it is non-textual elements that represent the difference that undergird the Black present and emphasize Black alterity against a broadly conceived constellation of values associated with Euro-modernity and represented through the kind of reification of which textualization is one example. Thus, orality does double duty for the Afro-modern intellectual project; it is the textualized object of scientific study, even as it is imbued with the deep and intangible essence of a *Volksgeist* that exceeds or transcends textuality or the purifications of science.[25]

Excess—sonic, affective, corporeal—has been central to twentieth century accounts of Black orality. References to musicalizing tropes of embodied sound, joyous or melancholy affect, and syncopated rhythm of Black expression abound in the texts of English-, French-, and Spanish-speaking Afro-modernist poets, playwrights, musicians, and intellectuals for most of the twentieth century and earlier. A notion began to emerge of an ineffably particular Black expressive culture, characterized by heightened emotion (whether joy or sorrow), rhythmic dynamism, and intense corporeality, and often described in terms most often associated with musicality, even for non-musical forms of expression. Léopold Sédar Senghor, for example, highlighted rhythm (or "rhythmic attitude") as the "ordering force that constitutes Negro style."[26]

As such, Black music specifically and Black orality generally provided a body of formal techniques through which Black writers engaged in the (inherently paradoxical) project of literature that transcended the mute textuality of the written word. That is, contrary to and simultaneous with the processes by which social scientists and folklorists textualized orality, Black poets and novelists aimed to "oralize," as it were, the written word. Brent Hayes Edwards notes that much Anglophone and Francophone Black writing of the early twentieth century—the blues poems of Langston Hughes, Claude McKay's *Banjo*, Suzanne Lacascade's *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, and various contributions to the monumental 1934 anthology *Negro*[27]—transplant musical form onto the written word. This musicalization of writing was perhaps most fully realized during this period in poetry by Cuban Nicolás Guillén, whose *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro casongo* ruptured semantic meaning through the rhythmically engaging use of the neo-African linguistic elements of much Afro-Cuban music and onomatopoetic representations of its drum sounds, an approach shared by his Francophone contemporary Léon-Gontran Damas.[28] Thus, while we saw, in the previous section, the textualization of orality, work like Guillén's and Damas' aimed to make text read as if

it were oral. Indeed, Damas once noted that "My poems can be danced. They can be sung,"[29] and Guillen's *Motivos de son* was musicalized by a number of Cuban composers.[30] Making text oral was a necessarily contradictory goal, but one that produced a rich frisson between the spoken word and its muteness on the page that was as much a comment on the limits of text as an attempt to leave text behind.[31]

As this tension between text and orality in much Black writing of the twentieth century suggests, the kind of musicalized, deeply emotional expressive particularity that these writers were trying to get across through Black orality and musicality were posited as an epistemological foil or counter to North Atlantic modernity. Léopold Senghor stated this opposition most succinctly and provocatively: "Emotion is Negro, as reason is Hellenic."[32] Black particularity, then, was hypothesized as the product of a fundamentally different sensibility. This was a rhythmic, affective, corporeal, and instinctual alterity in contrast with the relentless rationalism and alienation from corporeality and emotion attributed to Euro-modernity. This Black alterity was conceived as persisting among the descendants of Africans over time (whether for cultural, historical-material, or biological reasons). In relation to European modernity, Black sensibility was understood to exceed, to subvert, and to be, in a word, incommensurate.

Formulations opposing Black difference to modernity became, paradoxically enough, central to the project of modernism in the early twentieth century as Black intellectuals found common ground over the limits of European modernity with non-Black intellectuals disenchanted with the narrative of the rational progress of Western civilization, given the alienation of modern capitalism, the ennui of bourgeois life, and the apocalyptic scale of slaughter in the Great War. The new artistic and intellectual modernism that arose in the inter-war period, from the derangement of perspectivism in painting to ruptures with tonality and rhythmic experimentation in art music, was, as is well known, influenced by Black aesthetic models and the understandings of Black alterity that were associated with them. Within this field of cultural production, notions of Black alterity (specifically those associated with the Black music increasingly present in the public sphere through mass culture) fit into the landscape of lack Euro-modernity saw in itself. Ronald Radano, writing on the rise of the complex notion of "hot rhythm" at the time, notes: "African-American musical practices now revealed a natural creativity that stemmed from a pre-conscious, intuitive level [understood as antithetical to] the perceived normalcy of a civilized, unemotional, and hence

inauthentic white populace."[33] This made possible not only the valuation of Black expressive culture in its own right, but its championing as the way for a self-destructive modern society to renew itself by reconnecting alienated subjects with the forces suppressed at their interior. For the poets of Négritude, for example, irrationality and instinct, encapsulated by rhythm ("it is incarnate in sensuality that rhythm illuminates the spirit"), were precisely "What the Black Man Contributes" to the world, to cite the title of a well-known essay by Léopold Senghor.[34] Or, quoting Césaire: "Those who invented neither gunpowder or compass/ Those who never knew how to conquer steam or electricity/But who abandoned themselves to the essence of all things."[35] In other words, even as Blackness became essential to Euro-modernity, an opposition to Euro-modernity became central to intellectuals' constructs of Blackness.

I do not want to—nor am I disciplinarily equipped to—trace discrete lines of influence between Black and non-Black intellectuals in various nodes on both sides of the Atlantic, let alone the texts (and recorded music) that circulated among them; nor to engage in debates over (for example) the power dynamics involved in the relationship between Négritude and Surrealism;[36] nor do I want to overstate the centrality of Négritude-style auto-essentialism. But I do want to make the point (not a terribly original one, I would concede) that this formulation of transcendent, excessive Black orality, cited in sound and in the body and opposed to European reason and the processes of reification and textualization, is inscribed on coordinates that are themselves deeply indebted to European thought, a notion of which Black intellectuals in the second half of the twentieth century (Édouard Glissant in particular) were quite aware.[37] Certainly, this Afro-Modernist/Modernist notion of the uncovering of irrational instinct was more alike than different from the formulations of the white racists and conservatives, who also implicated the popular dissemination of Black musics with the stripping away of rationality, sexual self-restraint, and bourgeois convention, albeit with an entirely different moral judgment.[38] It's also worth noting that the notion of the liberating potential of the kind of emotional authenticity ascribed to Black music has deep genealogical roots in German Romanticism and patently European notions of peoplehood. Herder himself, in works explicitly attacking the scientific rationality of the Enlightenment, rhapsodized extensively on the "pleasures of the ear" and the profundity of sound in contrast to the superficiality of the visual.[39]

All of this goes to say that the role of orality in the reclaiming of Black peoplehood is deeply fraught. We saw in the previous section that the wielding of orality for the purposes of establishing Black historicity reduces the richness of orality to the reification of the text in service of a scientism and notion of peoplehood that is deeply Euro-modern. I hope I have shown in this section that the opposite operation has a similarly ambiguous political valence. That is, the use of orality for the purposes of constructing Black alterity (through the "oralization" of text) ties Black alterity by negation ("alterity to what?") to the Euro-modernity that it is not, and accordingly does so in terms produced by Euro-modernity itself.

At best, as a number of Latin American and South Asian scholars of postcoloniality[40] have suggested, this notion of alterity acts as a mirror image or photo negative that, in the process of setting itself in opposition to what is constructed as European rationality, sets that construct at the center, leaving the rest of the world to define itself in negative reaction to Europe rather than conceiving itself in its own local terms. These scholars have suggested that subaltern realities be conceived with the modifier "otherwise," that is, based on their own understandings of their own ways of being, rather than through a fundamentally reactive formulation of alterity that, by merely countermanding the Eurological epistemology, leave its structures and its centrality intact and central. I believe that it is possible to conceive of Blackness "otherwise," and I believe that orality can in fact be central to that project. What is crucial to doing so, I will submit, is a consideration of Black expressive culture in its own terms.

I want to emphasize those last four words. I will be the first to acknowledge that the double bind presented between Black mimesis of/alterity to Euro-modernity is surely a bit over-rigid. A notion of orality conceived in terms borrowed from Euro-modern intellectual lineages and in keeping with Euro-modernity's own understandings of itself is not necessarily illegitimate. After all, given the increasing integration of world systems (to which the transatlantic slave trade was so central), "local" epistemes are far from impregnable to some relationship to Euro-modernity, although not necessarily a central one. (I'm also aware that the essentially ethnographic method I am advocating for the study of the utterance has its own, deeply problematic, intellectual and political lineage.) After all, the entanglements between Africa and Europe date back half a millennium, if not back to Antiquity, and Blackness as it is conceived and lived by Blacks and non-Blacks alike is the product of that history—at the center of which lies the incalculably catastrophic rupture of Atlantic slavery. It is, however,

one thing to try to put the proverbial cat back in the bag in the name of cultural purity or ease of academic analysis, and another to focus on Black expressive culture as it is lived by those who practice it in its own terms, rather than to make the reductive assumption that the principle importance of Black orality is to contravene Euro-textuality. Quoting Glissant again: "We must return to the point from which we started … not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement."[41]

Historicity and Alterity in Black Expressive Practice

I should take time here to make a fairly lengthy caveat: there are clearly some Black expressive forms that are locally understood in terms of their historicity or alterity. In regards to historicity, the narratives of the Saramaka maroons of Surinam and Cuban Abakuá practioners are not only expressive forms marked by particular African aesthetic principles, but are explicit narratives about the people of the past—the lineage of the different Cuban and Cross River (Cameroon/Nigeria) Abakuá lodges from the nineteenth century and their establishment in mythical time, and the "First Time" spiritual and martial exploits of the first maroons to establish Saramaka society in the eighteenth century. The Abakuá and Saramaka oral bodies of historical knowledge, although highly esoteric and coded with ritual language and metaphors, are specifically and self-consciously denotative of particular historical events and personages, as Richard Price has shown for the Saramaka and Ivor Miller for the Abakuá, and are understood as historical narratives by those who practice them.[42] In this sense, they constitute a kind of utterance that is very close to the sense of orality outlined above: "orality *as* textuality." An approach that regards them as historical is by no means misplaced, even if that approach remains incomplete. I do agree with David Scott that these kinds of expressive practices need to be—and have generally not been—grounded in their meaning as present-tense utterance, in their importance as history being retold at the present moment, but that does not invalidate an approach that regards them as history as well.

The Abakuá and Saramaka cases are, however, rather exceptional. We might imagine them as the most literally narrative and self-consciously historical pole of a spectrum of Black orality. Further along the spectrum, and far more common in the Black Americas, are accounts that do not

narrate history in a literal sense as much as they are *marked by* history. For example, *langay*, the sacred language used in some ceremonies of Haitian vodou is, in Karen McCarthy-Brown's words, "theoretically untranslatable," the "partially remembered fragments of African language" that nonetheless include, for example, ritually important place names from Dahomey.[43] As such, they are self-consciously understood as historical, but not quite literal in being so. In a more everyday register, languages such as Haitian Kréyòl and Jamaican patois (or Black English in the US) maintain African influences in their syntax, and are available for the project of historical reconstruction by academics, but are not ritualized as historical as is *langay*. (Indeed, before the historicizing interventions of the Afro-Modern project, they were more commonly understood negatively, in the colonial mindset, as deficient versions of the dominant European languages—Hanchard's "blank slate"—than positively as continuations of African cultural heritage.) At the far end of the spectrum are iconographies, aesthetic tendencies, gestural and musical repertoires, bodies of herbal and culinary knowledge, and the like, that may or may not be self-consciously used as tools for memory or understood as comprising a historical narrative by those who practice them.

In some cases, those present-day utterances might be conceived by their practitioners in terms of alterity and, as such, as genuinely including opposition to or contrast against Euro-modern epistemologies. There, too, the hermeneutics of depth are not necessarily misplaced. Scholars have made use of methods such as James C. Scott's "hidden transcripts." The approach to Black orality is one of reaching underneath the surfaces presented to dominant society to examine the hidden messages they obscure. These approaches move beyond historicity to lend themselves to Black accounts of more recent events. In the Cuban case, for example, Black expressive culture, especially in the cities, took place under the surveillance of disapproving authorities and continued well into the twentieth century (if not up to the present). Thus, the watchful hermeneutical approach of scholars reveals not only sly references to Afro-Cuban communities, institutions, and beliefs (say, Abakuá history and neo-Lukumí religiosity), but also the use of Kongo mystical weapons by Afro-Cubans during Cuba's independence wars.[44] The deliberate use of coded language and what might be conceived as "double performances" that are understood in different ways within and outside the community, as attested by the corpus of Cuban popular music containing generally esoteric but deliberate references to neo-African communities by popular musicians also initiated in Palo mayombé

(such as Arsenio Rodríguez),[45] Abakuá (Chano Pozo and Ignacio Piñeiro), and the Lukumí religious practice usually called Santería or Regla de Ocha (Miguelito Valdés).[46] Again, these are cases in which the alterity paradigm is palpably a central element structuring the nature of the utterance in question. Alterity may not be the only central structuring principle, or its role may change over time in response to different historical concatenations of official repression, shame, political and economic opportunities outside the ritual community, or the commercialization or folklorization of ritual practices. But alterity as a heuristic is not necessarily misplaced.

I am rather more wary of applications of historicity and alterity that lead to canons and hierarchies of authenticity, by which some Black populations are understood as somehow more legitimately themselves than others. Herskovits' famous ranking of "Scale of Intensity of New World Africanisms," in which aspects of various Black populations such as "Magic," "Music," and "Kinship Sytem" were graded, as it were, from A to E for their relative Africanism, from "Guiana (Bush)" (the Saramaka who got an overall B) through rural and urban locations in Jamaica, Mexico, the Virgin Islands, the Colombia Chocó region (second to last with a D), all the way down to "US (urban North)," which received an overall "grade point average" of D–.[47] The ramifications of these kinds of hierarchy go beyond the mixed blessing of anthropological attention; rather they are implicit in the availability of political claims that can be made with recourse to cultural difference under current mechanisms structured around multiculturalism. In Colombia, for example, while the Black populations of the Pacific coast have parleyed their cultural alterity into collective land rights, Black populations that have occupied territories for generations but do not have spectacular and easily-recognized indexes of alterity remain bereft of even the feeble protections of the state against the increasingly brutal incursions of multinational mining, agro-industrial, and hydroelectric concerns.[48] That is, both historicity and alterity, as ways of understanding Black orality and related expressive practices, can also domesticate Blackness in terms easily metabolized by Euro-modernity.

Orality Beyond Textuality: Utterance, Gesture, and Black Community

The problem I am identifying with constructions of Black orality is that they tend to revolve around Euro-modern epistemologies. Orality, as a term, seems to always be haunted by the textuality that it is not (or worse

still, is plaintively hoped to be equal to). Indeed orality, as often considered, *is* textuality, whether it is transcribed textually to give it and those who utter it historical depth (at the expense of the present of those utterances themselves), or whether it is conceived as exceeding the text in which it is nonetheless rendered by Afro-Modernist writers (at the expense of orality as spoken and heard). By extension, this construction of Blackness is constituted by Euro-modernity in two senses. Firstly, by being conceived as "alterity," it is limited by being defined negatively by the whiteness it is not, just as orality is constructed in reference to the textuality it is not. Secondly, Blackness is constructed along classically Eurological models of peoplehood by dint of a transcendent historicity, just as orality is given historical depth through its textualization.

Unlike Black narrative, vernacular Black music does not have this kind of relationship with textuality hanging over it; its relationship with musical notation is rather more casual and it can generally do without it or use it as needed. (Not so for the reifications of recorded sound or the relationship of recordings to the culture industry, but that is another topic entirely.) Returning to Pater's maxim, I would offer that if, in our treatment of Black orality, we aspire to render it as we'd render the condition of music, then it is not to the metaphysics of musical transcendence of textual meaning that we turn, but rather to vernacular Black music's convivial disregard for text. As a term, "utterance" seems to me to do that more effectively than orality. "Utterance," as I will use it here, simply describes an act—the expenditure of human energy in sound. (In using it this way, I take the liberty of stretching its common usage to include the non-vocal human sounds produced through the manipulation of musical instruments.) I like the fact that an utterance is simply an act, that it can be eloquent or inarticulate, purposeful or involuntary. "Utterance" does not advocate for or against textuality. Nor does it represent or preclude its own historicity. What utterance does do is get uttered and apprehended by people's bodies and brains, and it is to that baseline level that I'd like to return.

This is not easy for academics. We tend to view the value-added, as it were, that our interventions contribute as our capacity for plumbing depths, for revealing the hidden, and for looking beneath surfaces, a tradition that is deeply inscribed in our practice from the Nietsche, Freud, and Marx lineage that teaches us to distrust surfaces and to limn that which underlies them. And certainly, music criticism and music theory, as disciplinary practices, have also long sought after underlying formal structures and the depths of human subjectivity that music—at least music

of any value—is supposed to have.[49] And yet the assumption that depth is fundamentally more meaningful than surface can be called into question. Anthropologist Daniel Miller came to question it in himself upon reflecting on his ethnographic interlocutors in Trinidad:

> Different people have an extraordinary power to delineate surface and substance differently. I was brought up with a concept of superficiality that denigrates surfaces as against a greater reality. I was taught that "the real person" was supposed to lie deep within oneself. But … other people simply don't see the world this way. They may regard the reality of the person as on the surface where it can be seen and kept "honest" because it is where the person is revealed. By contrast, our depth ontology is viewed as false, since for them it is obvious that deep inside is the place of deception. There are many versions of this cosmology of depth and surface. (D. Miller 2005, 32)

I would argue that the general contours of the same "depth ontology" that Miller identifies are in operation when Black orality is plumbed for historical profundity and epistemological alterity.

An influential essay by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has addressed precisely this problem, in terms that are directly applicable to my concerns here. Riffing on Ricœur's formulation of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," she advocates for an academic practice that moves beyond a "paranoid" critical stance to a "reparative" one.[50] Without rejecting the plumbing of depths entirely, she does qualify that there are limits to the kinds of things that can be known from a paranoid stance.[51] Significantly for my purposes, one of her critiques of the paranoid stance as applied to her field—queer sexuality and literature—is its "anticipatory, mimetic" tendency to organize its interpretations around the axis of alterity. Deliberately overstating her case a bit, she offers that this paranoia is notable for:

> asserting the inexorable, uncircumnavigable, omnipresent centrality, at *every* psychic juncture, of the facts (however factitious) of "sexual difference" and "the phallus." From such often tautological work, it would be hard to learn [about] … richly divergent, heterogenous tools for thinking about aspects of personhood, consciousness, affect, filiation, social dynamics, and sexuality that, while, relevant to the experience of gender and queerness, are often not centrally organized around "sexual difference" at all. Not that they are necessarily prior to "sexual difference": they may simply be conceptualized as somewhere to the side of it, tangentially or contingently related or even rather unrelated to it.[52]

This relationship between human practice and the notion of sexual difference is structurally homologous to that of Black expressive culture with Euro-modernity, and orality with textuality, in which Euro-modern epistemologies and doctrines of being are posited as central organizing principles in Black expressive phenomena that are just as often not particularly concerned with them. On the subject of queer readings in fiction, Sedgwick advocates for "a fresh, deroutinized sense of accountability to the real" by which she means "very marked turns … away from existing accounts of how 'one' *should* read and back toward a grappling with the recalcitrant, fecund question of how one *does*."[53]

This is essentially the same place that I want to go with the notion of utterance. In doing so, like Sedgwick, I do not want to jettison the notions of historicity or alterity, provided they are part of the "real" to which one should be "accountable." I hope I explained this in the previous section. Nor is this an attempt to de-politicize Black expressive practice—quite the opposite: it is an attempt to bring the question of Black difference into the field of the everyday in terms that confound the narrow limits to which it remains confined. In doing so, I want to engage aspects of Black ways of being in the world that go beyond the terms of historicity and alterity.

I've found the French political philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy extremely useful for thinking this question through (which is not the same as believing that his work captures all the possibilities of Black Pacific utterance). What I do borrow from his dense and complex thought is his suspicion of any primordial, permanent or unitary *identity*, either of the collective (he associates primordial collective identity with the Nazis) or the individual (which is for him, too incomplete to be a "subject," but is more akin to a singularity). Instead, he borrows from and expands on Georges Bataille's notion of *community*. Nancy's inoperative (*desœuvrée*) community is a contingent state, tense with the differences among its constituents, and apt to dissolve and reconfigure itself at any moment. Thus, rather than assume that *identity* is always operating in human activity, already shared between group members, already inhering to subjects, and capable of being affirmed or not betrayed, *community* is in the constant process of coming into existence through social interactions that co-produce both communities and individuals: "Community is what takes place always through others and for others."[54]

This is a useful way to consider Black expressive practice because it allows us to ask not "what does this mean?" but "what 'takes place'?"

Since the early days of modernism, the emphasis on Black expressive culture has been about channeling its depth of meaning into accounts that are appropriately historical and characterized by alterity to validate not only the political possibilities of Black peoplehood but the human worth of Black personhood, by textualizing oral expression or by bringing the aesthetics of Black orality into the medium of the text. But the metaphysics of depth that underlie this particular concatenation between academia's "paranoid stance" and the casting of Black expressive culture in the molds of historical profundity or the subterranean epistemologies of alterity may not actually be what is most important to its protagonists. To get at what is, I turn to utterance as pragmatic, socially marked gesture, and, as we will see, what I find in the particular case of the southern Pacific coast is an articulation of what Nancy calls "community."

Utterance as Gesture in Colombia's Black Pacific

I want to take a moment to contextualize the Colombia's southern Pacific coast before continuing. The region itself is a long north–south strip of dense rainforest nestled between the westernmost chain of the Andes and the Pacific Ocean. The region is crosscut on an east–west axis by scores of rivers, along which people, almost entirely of African descent, live in small villages and a few larger cities. The total population is about 1.5 million people. Their ancestors, of diverse African origins, were brought in chains to mine gold in the rivers from the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Work gangs of enslaved laborers were generally managed by a single representative of the slaveholder and enslaved captains and moved along the rivers searching for gold and working any strikes that were made. The slaveholders lived outside the region if they could, or if they had to in a few small urban nuclei that were the seats of the civil authorities and the Church, which sporadically sent missionaries to the mining camps. Only the very poorest slave-owners, including some free Black slaveholders, lived in the mines with the enslaved. With the outbreak of the independence wars in the 1810s, most enslaved people simply left the mining camps and established their own settlements along the banks of the rivers, where they live today. (There are also a few indigenous villages on some rivers.) This was essentially autonomous territory, barely visited by the authorities and with even priests visiting smaller communities only every few years.

Since at least as early as 1734 (when it first appears in the historical record), Black mineworkers, free Black and mixed people, and their present-day descendants engaged in a particular kind of musical practice. Men play a marimba, hand and bass drums (called *cununos* and *bombos*, respectively), and female singers called *cantadoras* sing in tight, interlocked harmony. The marimba dances are secular, and there is also sacred drumming dedicated to the worship of the Catholic saints and to the ritual held to dispatch the soul of a dead child. In lieu of drumming, the more somber funerals of adults feature the singing of unaccompanied dirges.

Given its extreme isolation and the almost total absence of the agents of Euro-modernity in the region, the hidden transcripts and coded narratives that characterize the tense co-existence of Blacks and non-Blacks in Cuba or the US do not apply to the Colombian Pacific. Nor do the projects of history or the place of slavery and Africa in collective memory figure in the same way. Anthropologists searching in vain for explicit references to them in the Pacific oral archive found only a "hollow place," as Anne-Marie Losonczy describes it, a deep silence.[55] After walking out of the mines while the slaveholders were occupied with the wars of independence, and attacking whatever sporadic military forces the authorities could muster, the Black river-dwellers began to call themselves *libres*, free people, essentially banishing both Africa and slavery from the collective memory. As recently as the early 1990s, a public television documentary that linked the musico-religious observances of a town on the Timbiquí River with Africa provoked outrage on the part of offended townspeople. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s when Black activists, the first generation with general access to post-secondary education, conducted workshops in the villages on slavery and Africa that these concepts were taken up by local people. The resulting notion of *Afrocolombianidad* was crucial in establishing juridical mechanisms such as cultural protection and collective territory in the face of the region's collision with global capitalism through violence. This includes national and global agro-industrial and mining concerns seeking to extract resources and the violent actors in Colombia's long-running civil war, who have found in the isolation of the Pacific a haven for illegal activities, with disastrous consequences for the local Black population.

Clearly, historicization, the figure of slavery (as a moral charge), and a reclaimed Africa (as a cultural legitimizer) were crucial to the project of intellectuals and activists in establishing an Afro-Colombian identity. This is necessary and good. But I want to focus on the practice not of activists

and intellectuals, but of the people undertaking such utterances as musical practice. This means first of all recognizing the internal heterogeneity of the people of the Black Pacific. But it also means attention to a set of meanings for orality that are not easily conceived through the optics of depth and historicity. Instead, as I have suggested, local expressive culture can be better understood in terms of a repertoire of sounded and embodied gestures, which work to articulate different kinds of social connection—that is, community. The outside or Other of this kind of traditional practice is not textuality or an abstractly conceived set of Euro-modern epistemological values, but the more immediate effects of the arrival of capitalist modernity in the area—dancing to recorded music in urban spaces defined by the relative anonymity of the participants and generally in pursuit of sexual coupling,[56] or relations of self-submission and adoration dedicated not to the spirits and saints but the armed actors and drug traffickers who can provide material resources. Faced with the high price of access to this brand of modernity, traditional musical practice and its articulation of community provide a set of spiritual and social resources, a particular configuration of social relations of trust and mutual aid, and a clear set of ethical models that govern that sociality. The exact configuration of the communities that arise from these practices is contingent—people may opt out of traditional communities, for example, if a gold strike puts money in their pockets, or if they migrate to a more anonymous urban environment where the rules governing the articulation of community apply differently. But the same people might have need later for the social networks of kin, hometown, and patron saints, and traditional musical practices are the way in which they can reintegrate themselves.

For example, anthropologist Norman Whitten notes that a person who sings or plays a drum at a *chigualo* ritual for the death of a child reaffirms his or her kin status in relation to the family of the dead child. If the child's death cuts off the relationship between, for example, the child's mother and the deceased or absent father's brother, that brother may signal his inclusion in the family network by playing a drum at the dead child's funeral, reaffirming his relationship to the mother's family as the dead child's uncle.[57]

Yet if traditional music articulates communities, these communities should not be understood as ideal. They are, after all populated by people—jealous or selfish, generous or kind. Thus, musical practice is also a means by which people jockey for position within their communities. The female singers called *cantadoras*, stalwart and formidable matrons,

often improvise, gloss, or interpose lyrics in ways that are related to the propagation of social norms. Like gossip, a tool for social control and moral normativity, a *cantadora*'s improvised song might comment and pass judgement on such happenings as unanticipated pregnancy or adultery using metaphors that nonetheless are clear to the community that forms around individuals' recognition of the references.

Music also models the ethical behaviors that community requires and the place of the individual within the community, a modeling of collectivity through musical practice. In the music of the Colombian Pacific, there is also a good deal of rhythmic improvisation, by which individual musicians diverge from repeating cycles of a basic patterns to execute fills. The practices of improvisation and adornment are valued as part of a cultivation of a musician's personal style and as a public projection of self.[58] *Cununeros*, for example, have a distinctive bodily aspect when playing their drum, raising a hand or occasionally both hands high above their heads, particularly before executing a fill. A particularly inspired *cununero* will jokingly show off by playing fast passages while simultaneously making gestures with the raised hand—gesticulating at people or pretending to comb his hair.

Nonetheless, improvisation as an individuating practice can only be understood in relation with what the other musicians are playing. In this sense, both the blending or interlocking characteristics which structure the basic musical pattern and the deliberate divergences and returns that improvisation signifies can perhaps be understood as a play between blending voices, and differentiating them. Aside from superb musicianship, this requires deep listening for what the other musicians are playing and a sense of the other musicians' styles and repertoires of improvisatory elements. To put it differently, in the dialogues of improvisation, there is a constant tension between blending into the collective and differentiating one's particular voice within it—a musical practice with ethical corollaries.

A notable example is the musical relationship between *glosador*, the male singer in marimba music (who is usually the *marimbero* as well), on the one hand, and the lead *cantadora*, on the other. In the "deep" section of a marimba dance, they sing in alternating phrases that are frequently extended so as to coincide. One swoops into a higher register or a held note while the other descends or marks beats along with the percussion. They may push or goad one another to sing better—one recording, improvised in the recording studio, has the *glosador* (José Antonio Torres, known as "Gualajo") and *solista* (María Juana Angulo) inciting one another with the admonition: "Te estoy mirando" (I'm watching

you). There are other techniques that musicians use both to challenge or push each other and to adorn or comment on one another's playing. *Marimbero* and *cununero* Diego Obregón often describes this as "filling the holes (tapando los huecos)" deliberately left by the other musicians. On the other hand, a musician might deliberately step on another musician's toes by playing the primary beats of his pattern, taunting him to vary what he is playing in order to be heard.

This collective improvisation generates what is called "*calor*," or heat. In religious music for the worship of the saints, the generation of heat warms the saint from the frosty chill of the world of the divine, bringing him down to occupy his image in the hot world of humans that he lived in when he was himself human. These religious ceremonies involve the ritual creation of a circuit of heat produced by the musicians and singers and refracted through the saint's presence to inspire them to create more heat through their increased exertions.[59]

As the instrumentalists and singers increasingly mark cross-rhythms and implied patterns, and the singers trace ornamented variations and new possibilities for the melody in interaction with one another, they are all nonetheless bound by a kind of centripetal pull toward the basic pattern to which all of the other musicians, despite their soaring improvisations, eventually return.

A similarly dialogic kind of interaction is manifested by the dancers. Much as the musicians are impelled both to individuate themselves through improvisations and to support their fellows by maintaining the rhythmic base, the dancers are also impelled by two opposing but simultaneous kinds of directionality. The first is a pull that brings them closer to one another and the second a kind of repulsion which, like the identically charged poles of two magnets, never allows them to touch. Therefore, as one steps forward, the other yields, stepping back; if they step forward simultaneously, they will wheel around one another and end up changing places.

These sonic practices, then, derive their power from a kind of constantly maintained set of tensions, between the individuating (but potentially disruptive) centrifugal act of improvisation and the cohering (but potentially enervating) centripetal pull of stability. These mutually countervailing forces of individuation and communalization are expressed in local discourses around music, as well as its practice. When that playfully goading challenge among the musicians to improvise and adorn does not take place, the music is described as "flat" (*plano*) or as "staying behind" (*dejado*).

However, the other extreme is also dealt with explicitly in local musical meta-discourse, in which the extreme exuberance of the musicians reaches such a point that chaos and disorder ensue; indeed the devil himself may appear.

One well-circulated story, for example, concerns a marimba dance to celebrate the building of a new house. In this story, the *currulao* is so hot, the house so full of people, and the music and the foot-stamping *zapateo* of the dancers so strong that the house (which in the Pacific is traditionally built on stilts) tilts to one side as the supports give out. That story may or may not be told along with another archetypal *currulao* story about the appearance of the devil, who loves marimba music and occasionally arrived uninvited at *currulaos* to hide under a table. When he is finally recognized (first by a child, whom no one believes), the ensuing chaos is such that people start jumping out the windows into the river and the house itself falls over. Friedemann and Arocha cite song lyrics which describe the threat of the devil's appearance at a dance:

Los que están bailando	Those that are dancing
Bailen con cuidado	Dance carefully
A debajo de casa	Under the house
Está el diablo parado	The devil is standing[60]

These references link the specifically sonic sphere of musical practice to the broader field of socially normative behavior. While a "flat" and uninspired musical event disappoints through its lack of energy, an excess of energy, heat, or individuation from the collective can result in disorder that not only undermines musical coherence, but is also a deeply social disruption. This disruption is powerful enough to cause the physical destruction of a home.

Black Pacific musical practice is not only a way of calling out ruptures in the community or modeling the ways in which ruptures can happen; it is a means of suturing those ruptures, of knitting the necessary incompletion of individuals into one another. Nancy writes, citing both another ethnomusicological example and Bataille:[61]

> The mouth is not a laceration… It exposes to the "outside" an "inside" that, without this exposition, would not exist. Words do not "come out" of the throat (nor from the "mind" "in" the head): they are formed in the mouth's articulation. This is why speech—including silence—is not a *means* of communication

> but communication itself, an exposure (similar to the way the Inuit Eskimos sing by making their own cries resonate in the open mouth of a partner). The speaking mouth does not transmit, does not inform, does not effect any bond; it is—perhaps, though taken *at its limit*, as with the kiss—the beating of a singular site against other singular sites: "I speak, and from then on I am—the being in me is—outside myself and in myself."[62]

Traditionally, Pacific *cantadoras* sing standing tightly together, face to face rocking into to one another's open mouths,[63] singing in consonant harmonic intervals (fifths, often, and neutral thirds neither major nor minor) in such an intense intermeshing of sound that each can almost feel as though her own throat is producing all of the notes that are present even as she works to make her own note heard, not losing herself in the collective but encountering her own voice as an incomplete part in the (also incomplete) voices of others.

The inherent lack that for Nancy figures both the individual and her use of her community as a resonating chamber for that lack is particularly dramatized at the moment of ultimate lack—death. "Community does not … make a work out of death… Community is calibrated on death as that of which it is impossible to *make a work*… Community occurs in order to acknowledge this impossibility."[64] This notion of a community as the taking in and recognition of individuals' common lack in the face of that most irremediable lack is not dissimilar to ways in which the Black Pacific death ritual for adults has been described by anthropologist Anne-Marie Losonczy.

Losonczy describes how death is understood as a kind of gray oblivion in which the identity is fragmented beyond coherence. The funeral rites aim to prevent the soul from suffering by ensuring that this fragmentation of identity takes place to the point where the soul can no longer feel the bitter suffering of being separated from life. The suffering of the dead soul, as it is slowly ripped from the life it still desires to have, is expressed in dirges called *alabados*, which beg the mediating figures of the saints, Christ, and the Virgin to help the process of separation of the soul, and to God to have mercy on the soul when it is presented for judgement. They also depict the situation of both the living as they confront their own future death and of the soul of the dead person which has yet to depart on the final night. Losonczy describes the situation of this soul as "the anguish, sadness, rebelliousness, and resignation of human consciousness which, separated from its flesh but in complete lucidity, contemplates its life and its own death."[65]

For Losonczy, the use of the voice in the *alabados* has the function of distributing this lack—the lack within each of the living and the total lack into which the dead disappear. The soul of the dead person lodges in the body of the *cantadora* to ride her sung exhalations to the realm of the dead:

> [T]he funeral songs constitute the very word of the soul of the dead, spoken by the voice of the living. To sing an alabado means then that this spirit, in the axis of two worlds, should be taken up in the interior of the singer, there where the [soul] itself leaves its mark in memory and language.[66] It is a particular exercise of self-unwinding destined only for persons "with strong understanding" ... in order to thus be capable of contracting into her own body without separating from it, leaving a place for the spirit of the dead person to fill with its painful presence and its words.[67]

I want to propose that what happens in musical performance in the Colombian Pacific, and perhaps in those kinds of oral practices that exceed not only textuality but also semantic meaning, is this kind of ritualized encounter between individuals (potentially including even the dead or the sprits), this inter-subjectively instrumental expenditure of sounded human energy. As such, they can be conceived not as orality, in the sense of the untexted word (making the texted word a ghostly presence through its being counteracted by orality), but a kind of sounded gesture that happens to involve the use of words. Thus, the question of their non-textuality is a red herring that only comes into play when Black Pacific practices are compared with Euro-modernity—a juxtaposition with which the practitioners themselves are not particularly concerned. Rather than any kind of opposition to the distant forces of modernity and textualization, Black Pacific musical practices are more properly to be understood in the present-tense activity of constantly recreating and ritualizing community and its normative comportments.

I do not want to limit the ramifications of this process to the present, but to point to the fact that the past and future community can only be—must be—articulated in the present. What have to endure over time, from the past into the future, are the formal conventions through which this kind of present-tense articulation of community can take place. But this kind of pedagogy also takes place in the present and is itself built into aesthetic form. For example, in *alabados* and *salves* (the *a capella* funeral and religious hymns), the lyrics are often rather obscure and the songs quite long. After the first few verses, most singers do not remember all the

lyrics; they are reminded as they repeat and harmonize with the lead *cantadora* as she begins each verse. This form, aside from being fundamental to the aesthetic of antiphony, is also the means by which the memory of musical lyrics is conserved and transmitted. This has allowed for the continued survival in the southern Pacific of melodies and lyrics from the Franciscan missions of the eighteenth century. The form also valorizes the role of women in keeping and transmitting oral knowledge—it is a respected *cantadora* who sings the lead part of an *alabado*. And the form facilitates collective music-making around musical pieces which may not be remembered by the entire collectivity, and serving as the means by which the *respondedoras*, who may be younger *cantadoras*, learn to sing.

This kind of pedagogy through participation in a given aesthetic form is also, I think, a point of contact between past-focused memory and present-focused articulation of community. In order for these aesthetic mechanisms to work, people need to have rules in common, a form, and it is precisely this form that is transmitted across time to permit the renewal of the Black river-dwellers as communities.

Finally, I want to be clear that everyday people's lack of focus on *peoplehood* (in the anthropologically and politically over-determined senses that require particular mobilizations of historicity and alterity in any expressive manifestation) in the sphere of the everyday or my call to attend to surface does not mean a denial of the *personhood* of the people of the Black Pacific, an assertion that the poïesis of gesture has no intentionality, or that cultural practitioners are incapable of reflexivity, or that politics is inherently artificial or exterior to aesthetic practice. It is, indeed, the opposite of the dehumanization of local people; it is a call for researchers to take seriously people's intentions in their own local terms—the assertion of personality, the reinforcement of normative gender roles, the articulation of community, perhaps—rather than imposing upon them what the researchers feel to be a more meaningful political project.

Transduction and Interorality

I hope that by now, I have been able to introduce and critique how Black expressive practices have been cast as "orality" in a bid for the validation of Black peoplehood as authentically historical and as different from Euro-modernity. I hope to have problematized the potential for this process to set textuality at the center of Black expressive culture. I view a somewhat idiosyncratic notion of "utterance" as a way to move understandings of

Black expressive culture away from being constructed through a reactive relationship to textuality and Euro-modernity, and I hope that what I have presented about Black southern Pacific music offers a clear notion of utterance as a generally present-oriented set of sounded poetics that as gestures work to configure the social relationships between the individuals who utter them.

The supreme but irremediable irony of this chapter is that it is presented to you, reader, as text. This begs the question of what exactly we do as students of Black expressive practice. If the analytical practice of plumbing depths and exposing them to the light of critical scrutiny need not be what we do, then what *do* we do?

In the first place, it is useful to temper the academic urge to read "the surface as if it were a symptom of hidden depths."[68] Rather, what really happens in utterance, the things we search for when we search for depth, might be present in all their complexity on the surface of those utterances themselves. "Depth is continuous with surface and is the effect of immanence."[69]

To get at this, attention to the mechanics that guide the form of these utterances (in this chapter, the patterns of interaction between different drum patterns, for example) helps give understanding on how these formal logics work. In linguistic terms, this suggests a shift from semantics toward syntax. However, the importance of syntax is mostly methodological. An understanding of syntax is necessary to the extent that it helps the researcher to understand the social instrumentality of utterance, its pragmatics, in the "terms" of the particular system within which it operates. An important element of these formal logics is what Alan Dundes called "texture," which he drew out from text and context to highlight as what might be called the bodily pleasure, the taste in the mouth, of utterance, which, like the right balance between the "hot" and the "flat" in Colombian southern Pacific music, is essential to its aesthetic functioning.[70]

As I've suggested, history and alterity are both built into the surface of the sonic poetics of Black Colombian Pacific expressive culture. But what is more at the forefront of its practitioners is the ethics of sociality it entails, a kind of sociality from which results a more reliable sense of self for people on the ground, which is community, in Nancy's sense. The role of musical utterance here is as gesture—the exertion of human energy that is transduced by the hand's slap on a drum's skin or the push of air through the throat into sound, which is taken in by those present and reacted to, transduced even, through their own expenditures of energy,

bringing a bare foot to the wooden floor or a mallet to a marimba key. I use the metaphors of energy and transduction deliberately. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "transduce" as: "To alter the physical nature or medium of (a signal); to convert variations (in another medium) into corresponding variations in another medium."[71] Anthropologist Stefan Helmreich, borrowing from Michael Silverstein's differentiation between translation and transduction, offers transduction as a means of understanding the heterogeneous expenditure and absorption of human energy in all its disjunctures and capacities for the production of noise, distortion, turbulence, and excess. Transduction, then traces actual human practices in a way that "is neither inductive nor deductive but rather transductive, meaning that it corresponds to a discovery of the dimensions to which a problematic can be defined."[72] As a "mode of attention," it engages in the discovery of what is taking place, rather "model[ing] them in advance"[73]—for example, through the urge to unearth historicity or alterity. Thus our academic endeavors also transduce, through our medium, the expenditure of energy that the utterance implies; as my mind's ear transduces memories of the musical events in which I have participated in Colombia into this chapter; as you read it, as you transduce it yourself, reader, as you will.

It is this possibility for transduction, both ours as academics and those of the people of the Pacific as cultural practitioners and historically situated human agents, that links this essay with Vété-Congolo's notion of interorality, both critiquing and confirming it. I am not concerned with the mixed European and African pedigree of the Pacific (the "inter" of Vété-Congolo's interorality), or indeed, with pedigree of the historical at all. Nor am I particularly interested in orality as such, either as an ostensibly African foil to supposedly European literacy, or as constitutive of both, or as a way to identify the persistence of an African epistemology in the Americas. Yet, even a glance at the surface of cultural production, with an attention to transduction, confirms the historical work Vété-Congolo wants interorality to do. If the sugar plantation and the slave mine were where humanity was sent to die, where kidnapped Africans were sent to be stripped of their inherent personhood and their vital force canalized into the production of surplus value as their own selves could be worn away into shambling and impoverished specters of "bare life," the existence of a complex of aesthetic practices in places such as the Pacific show that that canalization was incomplete, that human thought and action could be transduced not only into gold nuggets and milled sugar but also into aestheticized utterance.

Notes

1. DuBois 2008, 164.
2. Figueroa Hernández 1993, 19. Audio recordings of "Maquinolandera," composed by Margarita Rivera and recorded by her son Ismael with Cortijo y Su Combo, are easily found online.
3. The "Dutch machine" in question is a stove in the mid-century working-class Puerto Rican slang doña Margot Rivera used in composing the song.
4. Walter Pater, 135.
5. Meyer 1956; Nattiez 1990; Schenker 2004–2005.
6. Kaemmer, 108–144; Samuels, 3–22.
7. I refer to historical musicology and its attention to that singular obsession of Western European art music, the score, but I also do not wish to elide ethnomusicology's derivation from the transcription and categorization of "exotic scales" that was fundamental to the project of comparative musicology and its intellectual heirs (see Adler 1981, Ellis 1885, Lomax 1968).
8. This is how I understand Glissant's declaration (which might have been more of a wishful imperative) that: "Today the French Caribbean individual does not deny the African part of himself; he does not have, in reaction, to go to the extreme of celebrating it exclusively… He is no longer forced to reject strategically the European elements in his composition, although they continue to be a source of alienation, since he knows he can choose between them. He can see that alienation first and foremost resides in the impossibility of choice." Glissant, 8.
9. Glissant, again, certainly, but also Gilroy.
10. Sedgwick 1997.
11. Ricœur, 33–34.
12. Nancy 1991.
13. Michael Hanchard, 271.
14. Wallerstein 1991.
15. Walcott 1992; Price 1985; Melas 2007, 128. Without, however, the sense of possibility that this pastlessness provides for Walcott.
16. Herskovits 1990.
17. Published 1938 and 1942.
18. Gutiérrez 2013.
19. Bauman and Briggs 2003.
20. Bell 1974; Solbrig 1990.

21. Edwards, 72–4; Lewis, 27–30; Clarke 2000.
22. Ortíz, 52–72.
23. D. Scott 1991; Price 2002.
24. Indeed, the performance of scientism may have been acutely felt in the nascent discipline of cultural anthropology, the qualitative methods of which have been called into question by those seeking to emphasize the science component of "social science." See Golden 2013 for a recent example of this dispute.
25. Cf. Baumann and Briggs 2003 on the work of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm.
26. Léopold Sédar Senghor 1964, 296.
27. Cunard 1934.
28. Thanks to Hanétha Vété-Congolo for bringing Damas and his work to my attention.
29. Damas 1988, 24.
30. Manabe 2009.
31. Ana María Ochoa Gautier's book *Aurality* (2014) theorizes the disciplining of the sonic to the written in nineteenth-century Colombia in terms sympathetic to my argument here.
32. Senghor, 288.
33. Ronald Radano 2000, 464–465.
34. Senghor, 212.
35. Césaire, 206.
36. Richardson 1996; Edwards 2003, 192–194.
37. Domination "provides, on its own, models of resistance to the stranglehold it has imposed, thus short-circuiting resistance while making it possible" (Glissant 1989, 15). This idea also brings Foucault to mind.
38. See examples from throughout the Americas in Leal 2004, Quintero Rivera 1996, Radano 2000, Wade 2000, Walser 1999.
39. Watkins, 29-32.
40. For example, Castro Gómez 2005, Castro Gómez and Grosfuguel 2007, Chakrabarty 2000, Escobar 2008, Mignolo 2000, Moreiras 2008.
41. Glissant, 26.
42. Price 2002; I. Miller 2009.
43. Karen McCarthy-Brown 1991, 392.
44. Palmié 2002.
45. Arsenio Rodríguez.

46. García, I. Miller 2009, Sublette 2004.
47. Herskovits, 53 and 61.
48. Ng'weno 2007.
49. This lineage, in German music criticism, is traced in a brilliant new text by musicologist Holly Watkins (2011). To the genealogy she outlines, I would add that the metaphysics of depth have often run into problems upon confronting the interiority and subjectivity of Black musicians, especially when Black music has been imbricated, as it frequently is, with the culture industry—Adorno's thoughts on jazz are a case in point. See also Daniel 1989–1990, Walser 1997.
50. Ricœur 1970.
51. Sedgwick, 8.
52. Ibid., 10.
53. Ibid., 2.
54. Nancy, 15. Nancy's formulation is similar to Glissant's formulation of the construction of personhood and peoplehood out of relation rather than as inherited essence a quarter century earlier (cf. Dash 1989).
55. Losonczy 1996, 1999; Restrepo 1997.
56. Whitten 1994.
57. Ibid., 144.
58. The particular nature of these performances of self is, it should be noted, structured by gendered notions of personhood.
59. Losonczy 1999.
60. Friedemann and Arocha, 416.
61. Nancy, 197.
62. Ibid., 30–31.
63. Look and Triana 1983.
64. Nancy, 14–15.
65. Losonczy, 223.
66. In Losoczny's (2006) rendering of the Black Pacific cosmology, the human soul, manifested in the shadow, is the person's identity, constituted by memory and language in particular. This is separate from its spirit, which is its life force.
67. Ibid., 223.
68. Ibid., 9; Cheng 2009.
69. Ibid., 11.
70. Dundes 1964; Dundes and Arewa 1964.
71. Cited in Helmreich 2007, 622.

72. Simondon, 313, cited by Helmreich 2007, 632.
73. Helmreich, 632.

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CHAPTER 6

Boukman in Books: Tracing a Legendary Genealogy

Paul B. Miller

In a recent lecture I attended, Patrick Chamoiseau spoke of the origins of his—Martinican, Caribbean, Creole—literature. He located these origins in the Antillean *conteur* or storyteller, the nineteenth-century slave or ex-slave who addressed an assembly of his peers to narrate, with improvisation and enhancement, the tales already heard and recounted many times over. It is not uncommon to attribute the origin of literature to oral sources. But Chamoiseau added a counter-intuitive twist to this common association: he claimed that this oral tradition has as one of its major sources a written text: the Bible. The tales told by the slaves or ex-slaves often hearkened back to the stories from the Hebrew Bible about the Garden of Eden, Moses and the exodus as well as New Testament stories. So, according to this genealogy, if we go back in time far enough, contrary to intuitive belief, the origins of storytelling are perhaps written rather than the other way around.

I doubt that Chamoiseau would deny the centrality of the African contribution to the Creole oral tradition (despite the fact that in the same presentation, Chamoiseau asserted that, in agreement with Édouard Glissant,

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the origins of Creole culture were not so much Africa properly speaking as the hold, *la cale*, of the slave ship). Although we might take issue with Chamoiseau's claims, the binary paradigm of the written Bible and oral storytelling, and the struggle for primacy that emerges between the two, emblematizes a quintessential opposition in our culture. If the written Bible is a starting point, do the biblical parables and tales not have their own oral origins? Chamoiseau's parable of the biblical sources for the oral tradition does not at a stroke merely reverse the commonly assumed sequence of oral traditions informing written texts, but rather exposes the intertwined history and continual mutual displacement of writing and orality.

One could venture to say without much risk of contradiction that this scenario of the biblical origins of the Creole oral tradition might take on different contours in the Haitian context. But even within a larger Antillean setting, this account downplays the role of African oral and spiritual traditions and also the latter's ambiguous relationship with the Judeo-Christian traditions and liturgy. Maryse Condé demonstrates the adaptation of the "profane," ludic West African oral tradition, especially proverbs, riddles and stories, to the West Indian milieu. (Perhaps the term coined by the Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, *transculturation*, captures more aptly than "adaptation" the violent changes reflected by the West African proverb once relocated to the West Indies.) As Condé explains, the West African proverb in its place of origin emphasized above all a code of conduct geared towards cohesion to the community (and self-effacement of individuality), respect for the family and extended parentage, including a special deference to the elderly and one's departed ancestors, as well as a concomitant interdiction of calumnious discourse regarding neighbors. The West African proverb was also, according to Condé, a "depository of wisdom, an invisible link between the present and the past."[1] The transplantation and transculturation of these proverbs to the Caribbean echoed a violently overturned reality in which the individual, as opposed to the community, was now the sovereign unit, where *chacun pour soi* became the predominant survivalist credo; communitarian cohesion has now given way to ruse and flattery, chicanery and denunciation. In what is, perhaps, Condé's most surprising observation about the Caribbean reality reflected in the proverbs associated with slavery, she says the following about the slave: "car dans le monde où il apprend à se mouvoir, il découvre que 'la parole est du vent' et que seul compte l'écrit. Cette oralité, dépréciée, devenue cauri sans valeur, il saura donc l'utiliser, jongler

avec les faits et les manipuler à sa guise."[2] What's interesting here is not only this idea that, for the Bossale slave in the Caribbean, talk is cheap, facts don't matter and only textuality, like printed money, has purchase; but rather the fact that even if we enlist Condé's remarks as contextualization and historicization of Chamoiseau's claim about the putative biblical origins of Creole storytelling, there emerges anew the dichotomy between writing and orality as persistently as a return of the repressed. It is not so much a question of representing *écriture/oralité* as false dichotomies that are deconstructed, unraveled or de-dichotomized by an inquiring scholarly mind. Rather, I believe that we may venture to say that the tendency to understand our cultural ethos in a binary arrangement is not so much akin to a forked road in which we are obliged to choose one direction or another. Instead, *écriture/oralité*, history and myth, fact and legend are like Borges' "Garden of the Forking Paths" in which separate spatial and temporal paths can be chosen either consecutively or simultaneously. Or perhaps it might be more appropriate to visualize them as threaded strands in a double helix of our cultural DNA, as inseparable and equally complementary as our inherited understanding of ego and id, consciousness and the unconscious.

Condé claims that the so-called religiosity of the Bossale slaves has been greatly exaggerated. The often-cited reference to the "Bon Dié," for example is a vague notion for Condé, "imperfect and ill-defined."[3] And the reasons for such irreverence can hardly be surprising: for who could worship a god that tolerates and even sanctions the myriad brutal crimes of slavery and its enforcement? In what seems to me an extremely realistic portrayal of what must have been an "ironic religiosity" for many, and at the risk of digression, in one of the greatest films by the greatest of all Cuban film directors, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena* (*The Last Supper*), a late eighteenth-century sugar plantation is depicted. In an event that can only be grounded in historical accuracy, since no one would give credence to such a scenario were it merely fiction (the events are in fact based on an historical episode described in Manuel Moreno Fraginals' *El ingenio*), Gutiérrez Alea represents a plantation owner who, in his extreme religious devotion, re-enacts the last supper of Christ at the table with ten of his slaves in a Holy Week feast. The slaves on the Count's plantation respond to his and the parish priest's piety and catechisms with a double-edged sword of irony whose rhetorical intent is illuminated by Condé's remarks: on the one hand, the slaves feign miscomprehension of the allegorical frame of reference in Christian parables. The Count—in a tour de

force performance by the Argentine actor Nelson Villagra—relates in an almost mystic transport the parable of Saint Francis de Assisi's "perfect joy," occasioned by neither wealth nor knowledge, but rather by suffering itself, in silent homage to the passion of Christ.

Needless to say, the slaves in the film respond to the parable of "perfect joy" with extreme skepticism. One of them, Ambrosio, interrupts the weighty silence following the parable with a comic bathos that is also an effective rebuttal to Christian logic. "Let me see if I understand. When the overseer beats me, slave should be happy?" Gutiérrez Alea reveals cinematographically what Condé describes essayistically, so to speak, that for these slaves, talk is indeed cheap, and redemptive discourses hearkening to an allegorical past or future fall on deaf ears. If, according to Condé, the West African oral tradition was a link of continuity with the past, the West Indian slave's preoccupation is more immediate. The present time is a lived experience of iniquity demanding immediate reparations in the form of justice, revenge, compensation.

Condé's remarks about the "Bon Dié" and Sebastián, the hero of *The Last Supper*, can be conveniently constellated to evoke the main topic of this chapter. I plan to outline the events, circumstances, context and legacy of what is known in Haitian history and culture as the Bois Caïman ceremony, and attempt to situate it partially within this intricate knot of history/myth, writing/orality, fact/legend. In Gutiérrez Alea's film, Sebastián (whose name rhymes on the tonic syllable with Boukman) is a recidivist runaway slave who is punished as the film opens by having his ear cut off by a sadistic overseer (a punishment sanctioned in article 38 of Colbert's *Code Noir*). Sebastián, whose blood-soaked head bandage forms a visual counterpart throughout the film to the Count's powdered wig signaling the century of Enlightenment, refuses all dialogue with the Count (indeed, he spits in the master's face when a Hegelian "recognition" is demanded), leads a bloody rebellion against the plantation and achieves maroonage as the film closes. During the bacchanalia with the master, Sebastián remains silent and taciturn until the drunken Count falls asleep. At that moment, Sebastián recounts a Yoruba creation parable about the dialectic of truth and lies. Olofi, the creator, engenders Truth, who is beautiful, and Mendacity, who is sickly and repugnant. Mendacity, however, possesses a machete, with which it cuts off the head of Truth. Truth, groping blindly for its own head, happens upon the head of Mendacity, dislodges it and places it where his own head was. Are Sebastián's fellow slaves going to believe the hollow and fleeting gestures of the Count's

largesse, this wolf in sheep's clothing? As an accoutrement to his performance of the parable, Sebastián seizes the head of a pig on the table and holds it up in front of his own head, arguably in homage to the sacrificed pig of the Bois Caïman ceremony. Leo Brouwer's minimalist yet dramatic musical intervention "sanctifies" Sebastian's words as a conspiratorial conjuration.

Anyone familiar with the story of the Haitian Revolution has no doubt heard of Bois Caïman and its essential components: the indomitable rebel slave and avant-garde of the uprising, Boukman (reputedly from Jamaica and eponymously christened thanks to his literacy), the dark and stormy night, the pig that was sacrificed and whose blood was drunk in a proto-vodou ceremony, the presiding priestess who appears in some versions, and finally the oath or prayer allegedly uttered by Boukman to sanctify the proceedings. Bois Caïman is both historical fact and mythical legend, writing and orality, national and religious origin; but it does not occupy these discursive sites harmoniously. Rather it inhabits the interstice of these realms and exposes the cleavages between cultural antinomies with heightened tension.

Most readers in English were first introduced to the Haitian Revolution through C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins,* written in 1938 and revised in 1962. Given the increasing interest in this topic in recent years, and as new research has enriched our understanding, especially of the sociology of slavery (for example, Carolyn Fick's fine study), it is natural that criticisms of James' seminal work would emerge. Bernard Moitt's reproach seems fair enough: "One may therefore take James to task for not reading more of the general literature that would have sharpened his understanding of the nuances of slavery in the French Antilles."[4] James himself expressed some regret, in a series of lectures given in 1971, that his approach to the Haitian Revolution was overly "trickle down." Were he to rewrite the book he would focus more on the masses *as* leaders in an attempt to bridge the chasm between the black masses and the black Jacobins that informed his approach ("Lectures on the Black Jacobins"). Given these legitimate criticisms, and the parricidal tendencies of scholars, it is mildly surprising to read the following judgement about James by one of the most prominent contemporary historians of the Haitian Revolution, David Geggus: "Relying heavily on secondary sources, *The Black Jacobins* has its share of factual errors, but probably fewer than most of its competitors." Geggus' final pronouncement about James' study is laudatory indeed: "Nevertheless, if the book is written with passion

from a pronounced political viewpoint, James's judgments were in general remarkably sound. For well over half a century *The Black Jacobins* **has remained** a very hard act to follow."[5]

It is noteworthy and perhaps ironic (as I will show) that Geggus would use the words "has remained" to characterize the staying power of James' tome. In another chapter of his *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, about the questionable historical veracity of the Bois Caïman ceremony, Geggus inserts a small criticism of James based precisely on the word "remain." Here is the passage from *The Black Jacobins* that describes the Bois Caïman ceremony and quotes the so-called oath or prayer uttered by Boukman:

> On the night of the 22nd a tropical storm raged, with lightning and gusts of wind and heavy showers of rain. Carrying torches to light their way, the leaders of the revolt met in an open space in the thick forests of the Morne Rouge, a mountain overlooking Le Cap. There Boukman gave the last instructions and, after Voodoo incantations and the sucking of the blood of a stuck pig, he stimulated his followers by a prayer spoken in creole, which, like so much spoken on such occasions, **has remained**.[6] "The god of the white inspires him with crime, but our god calls upon us to do good works. Our god who is good to us orders us to revenge our wrongs. He will direct our arms and aid us. Throw away the symbol of the god of the white who has so often caused us to weep and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks in the hearts of us all."[7]

In James' version of the events, we find an admirable and dramatic synthesis of the constituent elements of the Bois Caïman narrative: the stormy night, the sacrificing of a pig and the drinking of its blood and, of course, the words of Boukman's prayer. Among these narrative elements, that which is most vulnerable to the claim of historical inaccuracy are the words in Creole spoken by Boukman. And it is precisely this with which Geggus takes issue: Boukman's prayer "invites particular skepticism and hardly justifies C.L.R. James's comment that the speech 'like so much spoken on such occasions, has remained.'"[8]

What precisely did James mean when he said that these words "remained?" James, whose research was remarkably thorough given his training and circumstances (that he explains at length, including the first-class education that he received in Trinidad, in "Lectures on the Black Jacobins"), understood that the words attributed to Boukman were part of the lore surrounding the event, but that, as part of the oral tradition of Bois Caïman, Boukman's words cannot be severed from a popular heritage and understanding of the meaning of the event.

The cultural heritage of Boukman's prayer, that which James designates as "having remained," bears a relationship to official accounts of the slave rebellion in the North of Saint-Domingue in 1791 as "remainder." (In this context it is not unlike the arithmetic remainder that bears an "untidy" relationship to the quotient—the remainder never quite "fits in.") Another way to conceptualize this notion is Robert J.C. Young's discussion of the postcolonial *as* remainder: "Derrida used to argue that there will always be something 'left over' and in that sense the postcolonial will always be left over. Something remains, and the postcolonial is in many ways about such unfinished business, the continuing projection of past conflicts into the experience of the present, the insistent persistence of the afterimages of historical memory that drive the desire to transform the present."[9] It is not my intention to introduce the category of the postcolonial into the discussion of Bois Caïman (although it could certainly be illuminating and appropriate to read the legacy of the event and Edwidge Danticat's story through a postcolonial lens). However, Young's assertion that the postcolonial persists or remains is analogous to the relationship I am asserting between writing and orality, official history and myth, with the latter term acting as a remainder or excess of the former. Historiography asserts itself hegemonically on or over oral transmission as though locked in a colonial rapport. Almost every account of the Bois Caïman story contains a "remainder," an excess, a runoff of meaning that overflows from the official event. More importantly, if we interpret James' reference to the Bois Caïman sermon, and perhaps the Bois Caïman ceremony itself, as a "remainder" of official history, there emerges anew the dichotomy between writing—official history—and oral history.

The Bois Caïman ceremony itself is overshadowed in official historiography, and often conflated with another event: "but it was on the night of the fourteenth, one week before the actual outbreak, that the final scheme was drawn up and the final instructions were given out. Numbering some two hundred in all …, covering the entire central region of the North Province, they were assembled to fix the date for the revolt that had been in the planning for some time."[10] James is certainly not the only one to commit the common error of grafting metonymically two separate but closely related events: the assembly of the slave elite at the Lénormand de Mézy plantation at Morne Rouge on August 14, 1791 to strategize, organize and schedule the uprising; and the Bois Caïman ceremony which was the sanctification of the "official" event, its shadowy remainder, occurring some time after August 14 but before the general outbreak of August

22 (according to Geggus, probably on Sunday, August 21). Another way of conceptualizing this dichotomy or binary relationship between the "logocentric event," if you will, and its remainder is to borrow the terms from Gayatri Spivak, who speaks of the distinction in the German language between two types of representation: *Vertretung*, meaning political representation, "treading" in someone's place, and *Darstellung*, poetic representation or portraiture.[11] If the assembly at Morne Rouge was the political event, *Vertretung*, then Bois Caïman was its poetico-religious consecration, or *Darstellung*. But even within the Bois Caïman narrative, Boukman himself is a historically documented figure whose fearsome prowess as a slave insurgent was widely reported (see a recently published eyewitness account of Boukman in Popkin's *Facing Racial Revolution*). On the other hand, the oral tradition attributes an important role in the religious aspect of Bois Caïman to a vodou priestess or *mambo*, Cécile Fatiman. Despite the reputed prominence of her role in the Bois Caïman ceremony, she had been relegated to Boukman's shadow until her identity was "confirmed" in 1954 when Étienne Charlier transcribed the testimony of Fatiman's grandson.[12] The nineteenth-century Haitian historian Céligny Ardouin attributed a prominent role to the *mambo* priestess in the proceedings of Bois Caïman:

> Boukman eut aussi recours à la terrible[13] influence du fétichisme. Il conduisit ces hommes crédules au bois nommé *Caïman* situé sur cette habitation Lénormand: là, une prêtresse plongea le couteau dans les entrailles d'un cochon noir; la victime bondit, le sang ruissela; les conjurés en burent avec avidité. A genoux, Boukman prêta le terrible serment de diriger l'entreprise, serment commandé par la prêtresse: les assistants jurèrent après lui, dans la même attitude, de le suivre et d'obéir à ses volontés.[14]

In this version, the unnamed priestess (identified 100 years later as Cécile Fatiman) has almost as prominent a role as Boukman, and is designated as the performer of the sacrifice and she who "demands" the oath. And yet there is no doubt that this elusive female counterpart forms a silent remainder to *Lapriyè Boukman*. As Céligny Ardouin's more well-known brother Beaubrun states : "C'est une femme qui servit de prêtresse, le 14, dans la conjuration du Nord. Dans tous les grands événements de l'histoire des nations, une femme apparaît presque toujours pour exercer une sorte d'influence sur les résolutions des hommes".[15] Further elaboration on the role of women in historical events would have been valuable,

but Beaubrun Ardouin's language—"exerts a sort of influence"—is a reiteration of the relation of the remainder to the "real thing" in a complementary relationship.

Finally, as I will show, there is also the question of the language of Boukman's so-called prayer. Although spoken in Creole, as James acknowledges, it was originally represented in French by Hérard Dumesle in 1824 who then relegated—as remainder?—the original Creole to a footnote. This reversal leads at least one critic to a bewildering and telling error, as I will discuss presently.

One of my multiple points of departure for speaking about Boukman is neither history nor the oral tradition per se, but rather an example from another genre—the modern short story—that in this instance borrows heavily from both traditions while providing an implicit and poetically profound commentary on the meaning of these intertwined genres. I am speaking of Edwidge Danticat's "A Wall of Fire Rising" from her 1996 collection *Krik Krak*. In the deceptively simple story, a husband and father of a poor household in Haiti, Guy, comes home to his tiny, impoverished shack wishing to announce some significant news to his wife and son: "Listen to what happened to me today."[16] From the start Guy's imperative to *listen* is a foreshadowing of Boukman's presence, for this injunction is also the first word of the phrase most commonly associated with the slave rebel: "*Couté la liberté li palé nan coeur nous tous*" (Listen to the voice of liberty which speaks in the hearts of us all). This applicability of "*nous tous*" to Danticat's story is underscored by the names of the protagonists, Guy and Little Guy, which, in a bilingual pun, indicate that these characters represent everyman, Any Haitian Guy. However, the announcement of Guy's big news is not that the long-awaited day of freedom has at last arrived but rather that he has acquired one day's work cleaning the toilettes at a nearby sugar mill. But before he can even announce this noteworthy information to his family, his "news" is superseded by another, apparently more momentous family announcement. Lily and Little Guy reveal that the boy is going to star in a school theatrical production and that he is to play the part of Boukman, one of the legendary forefathers of Haitian independence, a leader of the initial slave uprising in the Saint Domingue's Northern Plain in August of 1791. "I am Boukman," declares Little Guy, in a telling rhetorical slippage between representation and embodiment. I will return to this theme later in the chapter, for now I would like to merely emphasize the lines that Little Guy is struggling to memorize as the story begins. While the expectant parents look on, the boy takes a deep breath,

and, in a subtle metaphorical reference to the legendary meteorological conditions of the Bois Caïman ceremony, the narrator describes the words attributed to Boukman that come out "like a burst of lightning out of the clearing sky" (and after the speech, "the applause thundered"): "*A wall of fire is rising and in the ashes, I see the bones of my people. Not only those people whose dark hollow faces I see daily in the fields, but all those souls who have gone ahead to haunt my dreams. At night I relive once more the last caresses from the hand of a loving father; a valiant love, a beloved friend.*"[17] Of all the historical versions of the words supposedly uttered at Bois Caïman, starting with those published by Hérald Dumesle in 1824, none bear the slightest resemblance to these lines uttered by Little Guy. As though to hammer home their incongruous, perhaps absurd inauthenticity, the otherwise omniscient narrator intervenes with a commentary that is probably the most significant passage in Danticat's story: "It was obvious that this was a speech written by a European man, who gave to the slave revolutionary Boukman the kind of European phrasing that might have sent the real Boukman turning in his grave. However, the speech made Lily and Guy stand on the tips of their toes from great pride."[18] The closest historical parallel to Danticat's version of Boukman's oath, in tone at least, is an even more transparently apocryphal and lengthy speech attributed to an anonymous participant (Boukman is not mentioned) by Antoine Métral, indeed a European man, in his *Histoire de l'insurrection des esclaves dans le Nord de Saint-Domingue* from 1818. Here is a small excerpt: "Le feu, le terrible feu ne sauroit ni trop tôt, ni assez purifier ces contrées infectes, afin qu'il ne reste de la servitude, ni monument, ni homme, ni génération. Alors seulement, chers camarades, nous jouirons de la liberté".[19]

The lines that Danticat attributes to Boukman (and indeed, Métral's over-the-top version) are even more extravagantly apocryphal than Boukman's traditional prayer. Presently I will review some of the history and historical debates regarding the questionable veracity of many elements of the Bois Caïman ceremony that have been ingrained, through repetition, as part of the "official" historical record. But suffice it to say for now that Danticat provides an ingenious twist to the debate about the historical veracity of Bois Caïman. For, though the battle rages as to which elements of the tale can be historically documented and which cannot, the underlying assumption among most historians who debunk the narrative is that those who have internalized the Bois Caïman narrative as a foundational stone in the edifice of national identity have somehow been duped. In the final sentence of a long, well-documented essay whose single-minded purpose is

to unravel the historico-mythical fabric of the Bois Caïman ceremony, the critic Léon-François Hoffmann declares (somewhat unsatisfactorily): "La cérémonie du Bois Caïman aurait très bien pu avoir eu lieu mais, s'il me semble valoir la peine montrer qu'en toute vraisemblance ce ne fut pas le cas, c'est qu'il importe à la liberté des peuples de savoir comment sont nés et comment peuvent être manipulés les mythes sur lesquels ils fondent leur indentité".[20] Hoffmann's underlying assumption here is that the Haitian people have swallowed hook, line and sinker the "lie" of Bois Caïman and that their notion of freedom and national identity is therefore founded on a sham. Hoffman may have a point that national myths can be manipulated toward sinister ends: one only need think of the erstwhile folklorist Jean-François Duvalier's regime and its revindication of *Indeginiste* tropes to legitimize its own tyrannical power. Jean Jonassaint elaborates on this danger: "car l'indigénisme littéraire qu'il se nomme négritude, antillanité ou créolité n'est que théorie. Par contre, l'indigénisme réel, duvaliérisme ou mobutisme (ces fascismes tropicaux sous couvert de revendications ou d'affirmations raciales), qui fait corps et suite à l'indigénisme littéraire, théorique école des Griots, école indigéniste (Haïti), négritude (Afrique, Antilles) pour reprendre une terminologie consacrée par la critique littéraire—est politique, agissant quotidiennement sur toutes les sphères du corps social avec des conséquences très néfastes".[21]If Jonassaint alerts us to the danger that literary discourses of freedom translate into political regimes of repression, Hoffman could and should have similarly made this point by more explicitly elaborating on the uses and misuses of the Bois Caïman narrative.

For both Hoffmann and Geggus, the accurate or apocryphal reporting of the Bois Caïman ceremony has an impact on national and educational policies in a way that affects the Haitian national ethos much more tangibly, it seems to me, than a similar debate might impact another nation. Geggus, for example, claims (somewhat anticlimactically) that (dis)cerning the knowable facts about Bois Caïman is important because "knowing the exact location of Bois Caïman…may be of importance for the future development of tourism in Haiti"[22] and for the location of national landmarks. Knowing the precise *date* of the ceremony—August 21 and not August 14, as is often reported—is significant because "it concerns what may one day become in Haiti a national holiday."[23] Whereas Geggus limits the import of his research to a statist level, Hoffman is concerned that the myth of Bois Caïman, in both senses of the term, has been misused as an ideological tool in

the program of national education. Speaking of a particularly dramatic version of the events of Bois Caïman portrayed in Dorsainvil's *Manuel d'histoire d'Haïti*, Hoffmann observes : "Apprise par coeur depuis 1924 par des générations d'écoliers haïtiens, elle sert de texte de référence à la plupart des historiens amateurs et des idéologues modernes".[24] The forced memorization of historically dubious material is the product of an ideological national program of which Hoffmann disapproves, and this image of the *écolier* forced to memorize romanticized narratives of national founding brings us back to Danticat's story.

How does Danticat respond to Hoffmann's claim that propagating belief in historically inaccurate myths is somehow insalubrious? First of all she portrays modern Haitians as *fully conscious* of the possibly apocryphal nature of the words attributed to Boukman—"It was obvious that this was a speech written by a European man"—and yet still claiming as their own the meaning of Boukman himself as a figure of national transcendence. For Little Guy the words that he struggles to memorize are less important than his sense of identification with the man; he "is" Boukman, and the figure of Boukman rhetorically embodies certain national qualities that are more than the sum of the associations—words, vodou, pig's blood, and so on. Nevertheless, I do believe that there are other aspects of the national myth that manifest themselves with more ambivalence in Danticat's story, and I will return to the story in the conclusion in an attempt to gauge how Danticat views the nature and historical trajectory of this identification.

Hoffmann's essay reviews with impressive scope practically all—or at least dozens—of the historical depictions of Bois Caïman from the early nineteenth century through the twentieth. Along with other renowned specialists in Haitian history, such as Geggus, Hoffman demonstrates with documentary rigor that many of the common places associated with the Bois Caïman ceremony were in fact "fictional" inventions penned 30, 40, 50 or even 100 years after the events of August 1791. Subsequent writers and historians gathered up and propagated these fabrications that then became ingrained in the unconscious record. And yet Hoffmann begins his essay by discussing in successive paragraphs two notions of myth that are not necessarily compatible:

> La cérémonie du Bois-Caïman, présentée dans tous ses détails aux écoliers avec les premiers éléments de l'histoire d'Haïti, est un des mythes fondateurs qui sous-tendent l'image de soi des Haïtiens.[25]

The idea of myth used in this paragraph—"foundational myths"—is at odds, if not incompatible, with Hoffmann's use of the word "myth" in the following paragraph:

> Je me propose néanmoins de montrer qu'en l'occurrence il est très probable qu'il s'agit non pas d'un événement historique mais plutôt d'un myth...[26]

Hoffmann's use of "myth" in the second quotation is tantamount to an untruth, a commonly held misconception, whereas "foundational myth," in the first quotation, on the contrary, is an unverifiable narrative that supplies a common origin for the national ethos, a "deeper truth." Research intended to expose the historical inaccuracy of the narrative of the Chanson de Roland at Roncesvalles or Aeneas in Rome or George Washington at the Rappahannock would have little bearing on the place of these epics in their respective national traditions and consciousness. And yet, revealingly, this is apparently not the case regarding Haitian nationhood.

Given the controversy surrounding the religiosity of the Bois Caïman ceremony, it is worth reviewing these aspects.[27] There are no first-hand written accounts of the Bois Caïman ceremony. A contemporaneous second-hand account was written by Antoine Dalmas, a plantation doctor who lived in the Northern Plain of Haiti when the rebellion broke out in 1791. Dalmas' *Histoire de la Révolution de Saint-Domingue* was published 1814 in the United States, but Dalmas claims to have composed the manuscript in 1793. Therefore it is hard to take issue with Geggus that Dalmas' volume "is easily the most important with regard to questions of time and place. As a resident of the northern plain, he must have lived through this crisis; his information was collected probably hours after the ceremony.... It is odd therefore that this crucial source has been overlooked."[28] Dalmas' book reads like an anti-Enlightenment compendium of reactionary platitudes. Reflecting on the case of Vincent Ogé, a light-skinned wealthy mulatto who militated for political rights for mulattoes in Saint-Domingue and who was brutally executed on November 20, 1790, Dalmas, the colonial physician, reflects that human rights, or in the parlance of the time, "natural rights" were a "destructive principle" that endangered "the solidity and duration of the social edifice" and his justification for laws of racial distinction in Saint Domingue is that they "had always existed" in the colony. It is hardly surprising, then, that the proto-portrait of Bois Caïman painted by this colonial reactionary is executed with what were intended to be unflattering strokes. Dalmas reports

that the leaders of the rebellion met at the plantation of Lénormand de Mézy, as is widely known, to plan the insurrection. Before carrying it out however,

> …ils célébrèrent une espèce de fête ou de sacrifice, au milieu d'un terrain boisé et non cultivé de l'habitation Choiseul, appelé *Caïman*, où les nègres se réunirent en très-grand nombre. Un cochon entièrement noir, entouré de *fétiches*, chargé d'offrandes les plus bizarres les unes que les autres, fut l'holocauste offert au génie tout-puissant de la race noire. Les cérémonies religieuses que les nègres pratiquèrent en l'égorgeant, l'avidité avec laquelle ils burent de son sang, le prix qu'ils mirent à posséder quelques-uns de ses poils, espèce de talisman qui, selon eux, devoit les rendre invulnérables, servent à caractériser l'Africain. Il étoit naturel qu'une caste aussi ignorante et aussi abrutie préludât aux attentats les plus épouvantables par les rites superstitieux d'une religion absurde et sanguinaire.[29]

In this account, which must be taken of course with kilos of salt, there is no mention that Boukman was even present at the ceremony. This is a significant omission, since Boukman does appear elsewhere in this section of Dalmas' account once the general insurrection is under way: "Le nombre des victimes eût été bien plus considerable si Boukman avaoit pu se trouver partout;"[30] nor is there any mention of a prayer or oration. The so-called *Lapriyè Boukman* would not become part of the textual and loric record until Hérald Dumesle's 1824 book, *Voyage dans le nord d'Haïti*. Given the absence of many of the narrative's vital components in Dalmas' account, it is even more noteworthy to focus on what is indeed mentioned in the text (and which is often elided in subsequent accounts). First of all, Dalmas mentions (and other contemporaneous accounts confirm) a fact that confuses the timeline of events and is therefore often inaccurately represented up to this day, but which is extremely important for the way that the Bois Caïman narrative will evolve in the popular imagination. Dalmas notes that the plans for the rebellion were divulged at Morne Rouge at the Lénormand plantation, as is well known. But he then adds that "before putting it into action" they celebrated the "feast or sacrifice" at Caïman. This clearly denotes that in fact two events took place, the widely documented assembly at the Lénormand plantation on August 14,[31] political, strategic and public in nature; and the Bois Caïman ceremony, probably one week later on Sunday, August 21, which was religious, sacred and private. The other aspects of the narrative that can plausibly be considered real are the religious practices described: the

sacrifice of the pig, and the drinking of its blood as a ritual to seal the pact of insurrection.

While it seems credible to conclude that Bois Caïman was indeed a vodou ceremony and therefore takes on additional founding signification in a religious, and not only political, way, it is far less evident that Boukman himself was a Vodou priest or "Zamba" as Carolyn Fick suggests. A common detail in the early renderings of the narrative, that is just as often suppressed from more modern versions, is the presence of an officiating Priestess, an elderly African woman "with strange eyes and bristly hair."[32] In his *Aperçu sur la formation historique de la nation haïtienne,* Etienne Charlier identifies the priestess, or *Mambo*, as Cécile Fatiman, the wife of Louis-Michel Pierrot, President of Haiti from 1845 to 1846. In an excellent example of how the oral tradition can be a rich source for the historiographer, Charlier acquired this information from Fatiman's grandson, who authorized the historian to transcribe it from the family oral record.

But if the oral tradition is a reliable source of historical knowledge in the case of Cécile Fatiman—as Geggus somewhat reluctantly acknowledges—it is apparently less so in the case of Boukman's prayer, possibly the most famous popular legacy of the event. Both Geggus and Hoffmann insist on the historically improbable tenor of Boukman's prayer, first mentioned and "transcribed" (or composed) at length by the Haitian writer and senator from Les Cayes, Hérald Dumesle, in his *Voyage dans le nord d'Haïti*, published in 1824. Traveling in Northern Haiti in the early 1820s, Dumesle apparently gathered information during his travels from speaking to locals. Nevertheless, if Cécile Fatiman's oral tradition over two generations passes muster as historiography for Geggus, he is less generous with Dumesle, despite the fact that the Haitian writer collected his information from sources in the general environs of where Bois Caïman would have been only 30 years after the event, when second- or even first-hand observers or participants might still have been accessible. Although some aspects of Dumesle's version of Bois Caïman may have been inspired by an 1819 volume published by a Frenchman, Civique de Gastine, such as the stormy night, there is no indication that this is the case with the Bois Caïman prayer reported by Dumesle that Geggus says "invites particular skepticism." Here is Dumesle's text of the prayer:

Bondié qui fait soleil, qui claré nous en haut,
Qui soulévé la mer, qui fait grondé l'orage,
Bon dié la, zot tandé? caché dans youn nuage,

Et la li gadé nous, li vouiai tout ça blancs faits!
Bon dié blancs mandé crime, et part nous vle bienfets
Mais dié lá qui si bon, ordonnin nous vengeance
Li va conduit bras nous, la ba nous assistance,
Jetté portrait dié blancs qui soif dlo dans gié nous
Couté la liberté li palé cœurs nous toùs.[33]

I believe that one reason why neither Geggus nor Hoffmann take these words as serious beacons of oral history is that Dumesle, fascinated by Greek myths and the epic poems, presents his uniquely hybrid text—part prose, part verse; part travelogue, part history—in what might be seen as rather pompous-sounding and somewhat incongruous rhyming alexandrines. I believe that consciously or unconsciously, the use of rhyming verse is what disqualifies Dumesle's account as history for a historian such as Geggus, and even a literary critic such as Hoffmann reveals an even more surprising and ideological blind spot when discussing Dumesle's text.

Dumesle presents the well-known poem cited above in a footnote. The body of the text presents Boukman's speech in French alexandrines:

Qui soulève les mers et fait gronder l'orage
Ce Dieu, n'en doutez pas, caché dans un nuage
Contemple ce pays, voit des blancs les forfaits;
Leur culte engage au crime, et le nôtre aux bienfaits.
Mais la bonté suprême ordonne la vengeance
Et guidera nos bras; forts de son assistance,
Foulons aux pieds l'idole avide de nos pleurs.
Puissante Liberté! Viens. Parle à tous les coeurs.[34]

It is interesting to note that the French verses Dumesle cites in the body of his text are not particularly resonant in the *Lapriyè Boukman* tradition, whereas the "remainder" text, the footnote, in a curious reversal, presented in a somewhat Gallicized Haitian Creole,[35] has become the key text in the tradition. Yet just before introducing the Creole verses in the footnote, we find the following key sentence of explanation: "Voici le sens de l'oracle dans l'idiome qu'il a été prononcé."[36] To my mind, Dumesle's implication is clear, and certainly not outlandish. He heard reports of the words that were allegedly spoken at Bois Caïman in Creole during his travels in the Northern Plain of Haiti in the 1820s. Strongly influenced by classical epics and mythology, Dumesle took this raw material of oral transmission and fashioned with it his neoclassically inflected alexandrines.

And yet, in a curious and revealing inversion Hoffmann declares: "Ces vers constituent le premier exemple de traduction en créole d'un poème français, et la première composition sérieuse dans cette langue."[37] Hoffmann reverses the clear relationship of original text and translation. Whether or not the exhortation to war that Dumesle cites was actually spoken at Bois Caïman by the *mambo* priestess Cécile Fatiman, by someone else or not at all, I reiterate that it is certainly plausible that he might have heard testimonials to this effect thirty years after the events of August 1791. On the other hand, it seems to me highly unlikely that Dumesle would compose the alexandrines in French and then later go back and translate them into Creole. Hoffmann's assertion that the French text is the original and the Creole is the translation, when the author clearly indicates the Creole was the "idiom in which they were pronounced" strikes me as peculiarly ideological. The same applies to Geggus's assertion that Dumesle's version "invites skepticism," especially when the historian begrudges credence to Etienne Charlier's identification of Cécile Fatiman as the priestess of Bois Caïman two generations after the fact, based solely on oral testimony.

What's the difference, then, between Charlier's report of the oral testimony of Cécile Fatiman's grandson and Dumesle's version *Lapriyè Boukmann*? Why is the former worthy of historical credence while the latter invites only skepticism? The answer can be supplied in a word: verse. For the historian's consciousness, verse is apparently a "remainder," a less valuable appendage to verifiable documentation and linked to an extravagant literary imaginary. Such a view overlooks the practical and mnemonic advantages of scansion and rhyme to facilitate oral transmission as well as the historical impulse behind Dumesle's "epic" expression.

Needless to say, the struggle of interpretation over Bois Caïman is even more stridently partisan regarding the religious significance of the event. One of the reasons for the tenuousness in the unfolding of the national narrative is the struggle of interpretation surrounding its religious or spiritual dimension. Irrespective of what precisely happened at Bois Caïman or if it actually happened at all, the importance of vodou in the proceedings is one the major bones of contention, and continues to be so up to the present time. Colin Dayan observes: "Until the American occupation—and one could argue, the 1928 publication of Jean Price-Mars's *Ainsi parla l'oncle*—the Haitian elite looked upon Vodou as an embarrassment. Even Duverneau Trouillot—who published his 'esquisse ethnographique' in 1885—while listing (for the first time, as far as I know) the individual

spirits, felt that vodou in Haiti demonstrated the inevitable degradation of ancestral practices, reduced to a 'tissue of rather ridiculous superstitions'".[38] Angela Naimou points out that a recent manifestation of the religious controversy surrounding Bois Caïman centers on Haitian and US evangelicals—and not only in the spectacularly public instance of Pat Robertson—who reinterpret the narrative "as a scene in the unfolding drama between God and Satan on a cosmic stage. For these Haitian and United States evangelicals, Bois Caïman represents not a signal achievement but rather an originary catastrophe, in which Boukman calls on pagan spirits to free the enslaved in exchange for the future nation's loyalty, prompting the devil to draw up a contract for Haiti's soul."[39]

Franck Sylvain, who served as interim president of Haiti (for only 56 days) in 1957, gave a lecture in 1979 comparing the Bois Caïman ceremony to the Pentecost. Needless to say, for this devout Catholic, the comparison does not go very far. There are certain epic and "literary" similarities between Bois Caïman and the Pentecost, such as the remote, rural location where they took place, the legendary violent storms that accompanied them, and of course their status as inaugurating ceremonies: "Les deux événements declenchèrent deux véritables révolutions qui brisèrent des chaînes séculaires."[40] But Sylvain's comparative theology stops there. While acknowledging the role of Bois Caïman in breaking the chains of slavery, he considers that it was a secular development and denies any role that vodou may have played in the unfolding of historical events. Why vodou at Bois Caïman he asks, when it was notably absent from the other key revolutionary moments, such as 1803 Congress of Arcahaie, or the moment when Dessalines ripped the white out of the French tricouleur and declared independence? He then goes on to deny entirely that Vodou is a Haitian religion at all. "C'est une identité *strictement dahméene*,"[41] a strictly Dahomian or West African religion. At the other end of the spectrum, the filmmaker Charles Najman, with an outsider's perspective, describes his journey to the North of Haiti during the bicentennial of Bois Caïman in 1991. "La route du nord défile à nouveau sous mes yeux. Presque tous les kilomètres, je remarque la présence obsédante d'une église protestante."[42] He remarks that, as early as 1991, diverse Protestant organizations had launched a "full frontal assault" against Vodou. Contrary to Sylvain's contention that vodou is an "artificial" religion, Najman points out that Bois Caïman inaugurates vodou as a "dialectical religion" that synthesizes the multiple and diverse African elements into a common spiritual language.[43] For Najman, Haiti is the only place on the planet where "Africanité" has achieved this synthesis.

To conclude, in Danticat's story, some references to superstition (such as the unluckiness associated with Guy's angular hairline) notwithstanding, there is a notable absence of spirituality or religious practice; in fact the spiritual dryness of the story reflected in the climate and atmosphere might be discerned as one of its underlying themes. At the end of her story, Guy, trapped in an economic cycle in which his only hope and "good news" is the occasional possibility of a day's labor at the local sugar factory, steals the hot air balloon belonging to the mill owner, pilots it and, with all eyes upon him, leaps to his death as Lily and Little Guy look on. Standing over his father's corpse, Little Guy delivers a defiant recitation of Boukman's words that he has been struggling to memorize throughout the story. Needless to say, perhaps, the final scene of the story is also to a certain degree a secular re-enactment of Bois Caïman, with the blood of the sacrificial victim—Guy's—and the Boukman's alleged words now reiterated by Little Guy. But these words, the apocryphal soaring rhetoric that I cited at the beginning of this essay, in my view, ring no less empty in the final scene and certainly offer no specific remedies to the ills that plague Guy's, Little Guy's and Lily's lives in Haiti. I believe that, counterintuively, Danticat is to a degree agreeing with Léon-François Hoffmann. The "myth" of Bois Caïman, in all senses of the word "myth," may offer a sense of national pride to Haitian citizens, but that the cycle of sugar, poverty and political repression signaled by the re-enactment of Boukman's prayer has begun anew and that the revolutionary aspirations represented by Boukman will only prolong this cycle. In the final instance I believe that Danticat, like Maryse Condé, expresses a suspicion about the transformative powers of historico-mythical discourses of national liberation and favors instead an "intimist" point of view that emphasizes practical solutions to social problems.

Notes

1. Condé, 28.
2. Ibid., 30. "Within this world in which he learns to maneuver, he discovers that 'words are air' and that only what's written matters. He knows how to use this disdained orality, now a worthless empty shell, and how to juggle the facts and to manipulate them in his favor."
3. Ibid., 32.
4. Moitt, 138.
5. Geggus, 33. Emphasis added.
6. Emphasis added.

7. *The Black Jacobins*, 86–87.
8. James, 88.
9. Young, 22.
10. Fick, 91.
11. Spivak, 108.
12. Charlier, 49n.
13. As Geggus perspicaciously observes, the one noticeable difference between Céligny's text cited here, published posthumously in 1865 by his brother, and Beaubrun Ardouin's transcribed version published in 1858, is this passage. Whereas Céligny uses the expression "la terrible influence du fétichisme" Beaubrun substitutes "magique" in lieu of "terrible." It is a point worth reiterating, and also worthy of a prolonged reflection on the stakes of this subtle transformation in the tradition of the "*réel merveilleux haitien*."
14. Ardouin, 17–18. "Boukman had recourse as well to the terrible influence of fetishism. He led the incredulous men to some woods called *Caiman* located near the Lénormand plantation: there, a priestess plunged a knife into the entrails of a black pig; the sacrificial victim leapt up, the blood flowed, and the conspirators drank it greedily. Upon his knees Boukman preached a terrible oath to lead the endeavor, an oath commanded by the priestess. The attendees swore in turn, and with the same attitude, to follow and obey his orders."
15. Ardouin, 255. "It was a woman who served as a priestess in the northern conjuration on the 14th. In all the great events in the history of nations, a woman almost always appears to exert a kind of influence on the resolutions of men."
16. Danticat, 53.
17. Ibid., 79.
18. Ibid., 55–56.
19. Métral, 19 . "The fire, the terrifying fire, could not purify either soon or sufficiently enough those revolting lands, so that there remain neither servitude, nor monuments, nor men, nor generation. Only then, dear comrades, shall we enjoy freedom."
20. Hoffman, 301. "The ceremony at Bois Caïman might very well have taken place, but if it seems to me worthwhile to demonstrate that in all likelihood it probably did not, it is because it is important for a nation's freedom to know how the myths around which they found their identity are born and can be manipulated."

21. Jonassaint, 55. "Literary indigenism, whether it is called negritude, *antillanité* or *créolité* is but a theory. On the other hand, real indigenism, Duvalierism or Mobutism (tropical fascisms under the cover of racial affirmation or vindications) which flesh out and are the continuations of literary indigenism, the theoretical school of the *Griots*, the indigenist school (Haiti), negritude (Africa and the Caribbean)—is political, acting on a daily basis upon all the spheres of the social body with disastrous consequences."
22. Geggus, 84.
23. Ibid., 84.
24. Hoffman, 293. "Memorized by heart since 1924 by generations of Haitian schoolchildren, it serves as a reference text for most amateur historians and modern ideologues."
25. Ibid., 267. "The Bois-Caïman ceremony, presented in all its details to schoolchildren along with the first elements in the history of Haiti, is one of the foundational myths that underwrites Haitians' image of themselves."
26. Ibid., 267. "I nevertheless propose to show that in fact what we are dealing with is most probably not a historical event but rather a myth."
27. Although not directly pertinent to my argument, it is certainly worth mentioning the plausible conjecture that Boukman was of Muslim origin. According to Sylviane Diouf, "Boukman was a 'man of the book,' as the Muslims were referred to even in Africa—in Sierra Leone, for example, explained an English Lieutenant, the Mandingo were 'Prime Ministers' of every town and 'went by the name *Bookman*'" 152–153.
28. Geggus, 85.
29. Dalamas, 117–118. "…they celebrated a kind of festival or sacrifice, in the middle of an uncultivated wooded terrain on the Choiseul plantation, called *Caïman*, where blacks congregated in great number. An entirely black pig, surrounded with *fetishes*, and decorated with a series of increasingly bizarre offerings, was the holocaust offered to the all-powerful god of the black race. The religious ceremonies that the blacks practiced in slitting the pig's throat, the eagerness with which they drank its blood, the value they attached to possessing some of its hair (a kind of talisman that, according to them, made them invulnerable), all serve to characterize the African. It was natural for such an ignorant and brutalized cast of people to fore-

shadow the most violent attacks with superstitious rites of an absurd and bloody religion."

30. Dalmas, 121. "The number of victims would have been more considerable had Boukman been able to be everywhere at once."
31. Dalmas got the dates wrong, according to Geggus, 86.
32. Fick, 93.
33. Dumesle, 88.

"The good lord who makes the sun, that shines on us from above,
Who raises the seas, who makes the rumbling of the storm,
The good lord is there—do you all hear?—hidden among the clouds,
He is watching us, he sees everything the whites do!
The god of the whites orders crimes, but our god wants only goodness,
But our lord there who is so good demands our revenge,
He is going to guide our arm and provide our aid,
Throw away the portrait of the white god, who thirsts for our tears,
Listen to the freedom that speaks in the hearts of us all."

34. Dumesle, 88.
35. Dumesle's Creole version, the Gallicized spelling notwithstanding, is very close indeed to the "Lapriyè Boukmann" presented in Benjamin Hebblethwaite's 2012 *Vodou Songs*. Hebblethwaite unfortunately does not provide the source.
36. Dumesle, 88. "Here is the meaning of the oracle in the idiom in which it was pronounced."
37. Hoffman, 283. "These verses constitute the first example of a translation in Creole of a French poem and the first serious composition in that language."
38. Dayan, 30.
39. Naimou, 173.
40. Sylvain, 11. "The two events unleashed two veritable revolutions that broke secular chains."
41. Sylvain, 19.
42. Najman, 153. "The northern route unfolds before my eyes. With almost each passing kilometer, I notice the obsessive presence of a Protestant church."
43. Najman, 157.

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Afterword

Lewis R. Gordon

I once heard an African scholar lament that African people don't invent anything. We supposedly simply use technologies developed by Asians and Europeans, and remain intellectually and technologically dependent on them.

My response, let us say, wasn't delicate. After listing the long stream of gifts—ranging from the human species to language and the technological foundations for our survival—that Africa has given the world, I lambasted the scholar for his woeful lack of historical knowledge. It is, unfortunately, a response I've found myself repeating, and sadly often to scholars from Africa.

How did Africans and their diaspora become so ignorant of their history? The answer—colonialism and racism—seems to have no effect on those who believe either in the intrinsic inferiority of black people or the absence of African history, since even Franz Boas, a white physicist turned cultural anthropologist, offered such a response to W.E.B. Du Bois more than a century ago, even though it was Boas who brought Du Bois to the careful study of African history. At least in the Boas–Du Bois relationship, discussion led to historical scholarship.

A development of recent times is the realization that language is more than a tool or practice. It is also a condition of possibility for the human world, the world understood as the complex disclosure of meaning and the relationships that it nurtures. The upsurge of language is the world of communicative practice, wherein social relations become the condition for

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the production of more social relations. A significant relation among these is that of power, wherein the reach of human endeavors exceeds the physicality of the body. Power is, after all, the ability to make things happen, and where it is limited to the body, there is no distinction between power and force. All that happens depends on what can be touched, as it were.

Language, however, changed the game. In its oral form, all that can be affected becomes what could be heard and, eventually, remembered. Thus, wherever the body stands need not be what and where the body affects. And although early technologies, such as stones, spears, and arrows could traverse distances and affect another across space, language affords a transformed reach of effect. Communication could travel across space and time to wherever there is someone who could process its meaning, and thus power, as a social phenomenon, was born.

The ability to make things happen has, however, taken many forms. One of them, as Sigmund Freud observed, was the prosthetic god we call "culture", Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontent, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989). Why a prosthetic god? The metaphysical exemplar of power was historically a god or the gods. Gods make no sense without such abilities, and humanity has historically imagined and appealed to those abilities in the hope of protection over at least three precarious elements of life: natural catastrophes, biological limitations, and, a consequence of social reality itself, each other. The first two come with good fortune, and the last emerges through divine prohibitions. Culture has pretty much taken the place of the gods that have receded. In the human world, there are technological advances producing shelter and regular sources of nutrition, medical technologies over the body, and laws to restrict harmful behavior. Each of these, where transmitted orally, depends on a form of intimacy, by which the transmitter at least speaks to those who use what is offered. Writing, however, afforded a different relationship, for even where authorship is attributed, there is a form of anonymity. And, indeed, anonymity has been the rule throughout, because each innovation, whether the first deliberately produced spark onto embers, the first word, the first sentence, the first written message, and all the technologies we have subsequently inherited, belong to that paradoxically intimate yet impersonal relationship we call "humankind."

Culture and humankind therefore come together, although the former serves as a transcendental condition of the latter. A transcendental condition is that without which a thing cannot meaningfully emerge as what it is. Humankind cannot serve as the transcendental condition of

culture because culture could conceivably emerge from other kinds of beings, and their ways of meaning and existence needn't be translated or translatable into ours (human forms). Yet, and this is an important insight from the Ghanaian philosopher Kwazi Wiredu, it doesn't follow that we couldn't learn to communicate such untranslatables. That which is not translatable is not necessarily that which cannot be learned.

The important task of learning challenges the limits of what could be called "closed theory," the gatekeeper who warns against attempting what cannot be done. Oddly enough, there is also the fetishizing of the ineffable, the unthinkable, and mysterious. Learning, however, poses a problem to this model. Over the ages, people have persistently found ways to do what was till then thought impossible. Despite claims of radical difference, human beings manage to communicate.

A distinction needs to be made, then, between the project of incommunicability and the reality of nonperformance.

The path of structuralism and poststructuralism raises such concerns. As is well-known among theorists of those approaches, structuralism takes rules and relations seriously, and the question of spoken language (*parole*) and its relationship to writing (*écriture*) shifts according to how one is understood as a condition of possibility for the latter. Where thought and oration become textual, writing is the condition of possibility for culture itself. Where meaning is brought *to* sound, the audible or the uttered precedes conceptualization as the proverbial existence that does the same before essence in existentialism. The phenomenological bearing adds consciousness *of* as a condition *for* meaning, instead of meaning *for* consciousness, as the hermeneuticists such as Paul Ricoeur posed with hermeneutical phenomenology versus phenomenological hermeneutics, and this back-and-forth could continue through to the semiological concerns of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction.

There is, however, an alternative tradition. Hanétha Vété-Congolo offers the meeting of Africa and Europe in the place through which Euro-modernity and Afro-modernity were born—namely, the Caribbean. This historical convergence led to misrepresentations in terms of a Manichean binary of European writing versus African oration with a genealogy of power that privileges the former. The privileging of writing raises the question of text and context, through which intertextual communication is raised. Changing the orientation, Vété-Congolo raises the question of the underside, of what is suppressed by the written word, in terms of orality and interorality. This turn raises the question of the Afro-Caribbean point

of view, and, she argues, the logic of rejecting conceptualization before existence, writing before speech, and more, because even the terms of description should be different. She thus poses the unique location of the Afro-Francophone *pawòl* instead of Ferdinand de Saussure's *parole* (speaking), which, in turn, makes me think of the Afro-Caribbean Anglophone term *patois.* Her point is not exactly one of translation but recognition, in that the use of these terms requires entry into the world of *pawòl* and *patois* when the normative logic of the system is to render them external, without subjectivity or points of view. In effect, this is what she means when she regards the practice of interorality as an assertion of humanity in the struggle against degradation in the Caribbean.

Recognition, however, raises many questions. Paget Henry, in effect thinking through Fanon's concerns on the subject, reminds us that the European presence in the Caribbean was not one of interorality but non-recognition. Fanon, we should remember, argued that racism undermines dialectics of Self and Other. Such a relationship is left between or among Whites or between and among Afro-Caribbeans. Across the racial lines, there is a unilateral structure which has a supposedly non-human presence below. Worse, as the dominating Europeans privilege written communication, interorality is left for relations that utilize oral speech. Such a relation, born of intimacy, he argues belongs to Afro-Indo-Caribbean relations.

A crucial consideration here, however, is what may emerge if recognition is rejected. The Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean would be compelled to evaluate themselves in alternative terms. Would those terms then be *oral* communication?

I do not wish here to rehearse the debate on what counts as textual or inscription. What is certain is that part of the dehumanization process has been historical erasure. Thus, the African offered in an academy that has produced the concepts of primitive, primordial, tribal, and oral—that is, an academy built on colonialism and its epistemic needs—should also be subject to critique. The fallacy of non-writing takes many forms. One is the expectation of inscription born *ex nihilo* while not applying such to Europeans. We should remember that, whatever writing preceded the emergence of Christendom, the forms used by the people who became European carry the distinct stamps of Arabic, Greek, and Latin variations—in short, Mediterranean scripts. Such privileging would make the Northern peoples who came to call themselves European "oral," wouldn't it? Why, in other words, do the Africans who use those scripts

not count as inscriptive? If writing is the issue, shouldn't doing so in any form count? The other consideration is historical. It's simply not true that African peoples didn't write and that African forms of writing didn't work their way to the diaspora. The story of forced non-writing would require more space than is permitted in an afterword. Let us simply consider this: it is fallacious to render the absence of power behind certain forms of writing to mean the absence of writing. Henry makes that clear in his discussion of Adinkra signs in African sage philosophy. There is, however, the additional danger of failing to respect the humanity of cases where writing is indeed absent. In other words, the difficulty involves acknowledging writing, where present, without privileging writing itself. In effect, writing and non-writing are yoked to competing philosophical anthropologies.

Conceding interorality, I should like the reader to consider an important element from research on intertextuality and intersubjectivity. The transcendental argument rejects what could be called textual or subjective solipsism, where *a* text becomes *the* text and thus *the* world. The same goes for *the* subject. Thus, for orality to emerge as an object of reflection, there must be *inter*orality in the first place. This consideration speaks to the intrinsic *sociality* of oral communication *even to the self*. One speaks, even to oneself, as a *relationship* with another. As Henry ultimately defends Indo-Caribbean transcendentalism, I very much doubt he would object to these transcendental movements and critiques of the argument. And as Vété-Congolo's claim is for *pawòl* as a community-forming practice across generations to be fundamental to the formation of Afro-Caribbean reality, the points of difference here become ultimately one about the status of European agents and their privileged epistemic position. On this matter, I would simply say this. Disorientation, at least at the level of theory, requires rejecting the dialectics of recognition. The European, as a privileged subject, must become irrelevant. As a participant in a larger, unfolding story of what it means to be human, however, it is another matter.

The irony of all this, however, is that this entire volume *is a written text*, and it is so in the form of occidental inscription. We thus face a paradox. If the argument is correct, then English or French inscription *must not be the entire story*. In other words, what is said *through* these forms must be, to some extent, independent of its mode of expression. In other words, *pawòl* must be possible even by the means of *écriture*. Otherwise, this entire exercise falls apart.

And why shouldn't we accept its falling apart?

Here, the fact of the reader, the fact of communication, already offers the paradox of understanding. As the *how* of communication is established, its communicability brings along the *what* or *content* of communication, which, in this case, means the normative value of *pawòl*. And what is communicated includes, as Solimar Otero argues, the spiritual; the horrors of enslavement and its haunting, as John Drabinski avers; transcendence via music in Michael Birenbaum Quintero's reflections; and concerns of origins in sacred texts, reflected upon in claims to orality, in Paul Miller's genealogical accounts.

The Anglophone and Francophone Afro-Caribbean meet in these reflections. Irony and paradox abound as they differ and defer through methodological tropes, phenomenological, hermeneutical, structural, and poststructural, since this text is also a metatext, a text about texts and even itself as text. As a debate *in* Caribbean thought, another layer of what it means to speak is here announced through *parole*, *patois*, and *pawòl*.

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Note: Page number followed by 'n' refers to endnotes.

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