A Field of Islands: The Intertextual Geography of the *roman de la canne*

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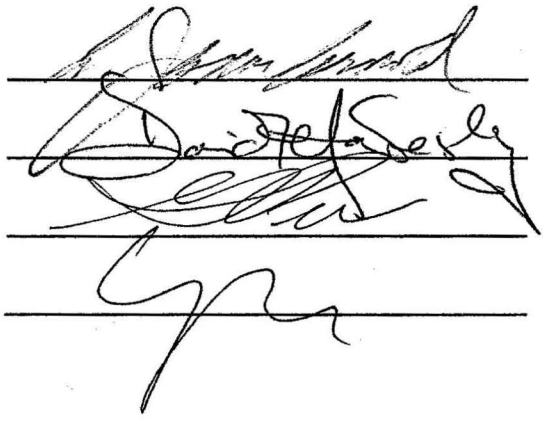

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Dissertation Abstract

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"A Field of Islands: The Intertextual Geography of the *roman de la canne*"

My dissertation, a comparative study of literary and critical texts in four languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, and English), examines the transnational and transcolonial connections among works belonging to a genre I refer to as the sugarcane novel. Pairing novels by the contemporary Martinican writer Raphaël Confiant with works from different time periods and literary traditions in Martinique, Guadeloupe, Brazil, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, I argue for the need to decenter the prevailing center-periphery paradigm that informs most scholarship on *créolité*, the literary and cultural movement of which Confiant is a cofounder. I propose the concept of intertextual geography as a means of approaching the region to which Edouard Glissant refers as Plantation America as a type of text made up of parts and wholes (nations or islands that are both their own entities and parts of a cultural region) and in order to place texts into dynamic dialogue with one another regarding the sugarcane plantation experience and its far-reaching cultural legacies. This conceptual methodology reveals striking continuities between Confiant's sugarcane novels and those by other New World writers on the basis of their physical and cultural geography (the landscape of the sugarcane plantation system and the Creole societies emerging from it), and the aesthetic and ideological dimensions of their imagined textual sugarcane worlds. Chapters address

geography's significance for the creolization process; definitions of Creoleness and questions of East Indian integration into Caribbean life; the influence of French nineteenth-century realism and naturalism on New World writers' conceptions of genre and history; and ecocritical epistemologies of the sugarcane plantation landscape. The recurrence of the sugarcane novel in the literary history of the New World signals a persistent and obsessive search for autochthonous identity that is deeply rooted—historically, environmentally, and culturally—in the plantation landscape. My work reveals these various tensions—between parts and wholes; specific islands/nations/regions and Plantation America; individual texts and broader genres—which make it possible to apprehend the sugarcane novel phenomenon as a larger literary landscape without losing sight of the elements that compose it.

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Preface

While I do not discuss Édouard Glissant's poetry or novels in this study—none would qualify as *romans de la canne*—Glissant's various theoretical and philosophical conceptions of Martinique's complex cultural history and the island's relationship to the other islands of the Caribbean archipelago and to the continental Americas—have consistently inspired my own much more modest interrogation of the relationship between the novels, islands, and nations in my dissertation. Needing a bit of respite from research when I was about nearing completion of my third chapter, I decided to read some poetry, and began perusing a copy of Glissant's *Un champ d'îles* (A Field of Islands, 1952) — not that reading anything by Glissant, novels, essays, or poetry can be called relaxing, since it demands so much from the reader. However, I was surprised to find that I could lose myself for more than an hour as I attempted to connect the title of the collection with the poems contained within them. And it was this almost instinctive exercise (*almost* because it was the result of the arduous work I had been doing in my third chapter in order to understand the relationship between individual novels in a literary saga and how the saga functioned as a whole in the construction of Brazilian and Martinican identity) that led to the sudden "Eureka!" moment when I realized that the tension between parts and wholes had become more than just a way to geographically conceive of Plantation America as a collection of individual islands and nations within a regional whole. It was at this moment that the idea of an "intertextual geography" began to germinate. I am therefore indebted to Glissant's poetry for much more than just the title it inspired.

As in Glissant's *Un champ d'îles*, I attempt to place the novels in my own corpus in a dynamic dialogue with one another regarding the sugarcane plantation experience and its far-reaching cultural legacies. Therefore intertextuality, as I define it—intertextual geography—serves as a vehicle for the exploration of the continuities and discontinuities of the sugarcane novel of the New World, in terms of characteristics and functions of the sugarcane plantation imaginary, especially as they relate to the production of cultural knowledge and of national identity. The tension between parts and wholes has also influenced my desire to break apart and analyze different aspects of these literary plantations, from the way in which the portrayal of East Indian migrant laborers stands in for Confiant's and Moutoussamy's visions of Martinican and Guadeloupean society at large to the interaction between individual novels and the literary sagas they belong to in the creation and validation of a revisionist version of Brazilian and Martinican cultural history to the way in which environmental representations of the sugarcane plantation in Martinique and the natural landscapes sugarcane plantations erased in the Dominican Republic contribute to an overall conception of the history and cultural identity of these nation-states.

Introduction

My dissertation, a comparative study of literary and critical texts in four languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, and English), examines the transnational and transcolonial connections among novels belonging to a literary genre I refer to as the sugarcane novel. This designation has been applied separately in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Brazil to novels about sugarcane plantations published in Spanish and Portuguese during the 1930s and 1940s, but has never been applied outside that time frame, to literary works in the French Caribbean, or in broader geographical and comparative contexts. Pairing the sugarcane novels by the contemporary Martinican writer Raphaël Confiant with texts from several other traditions, both French and comparative, I argue for the need to decenter the prevailing center-periphery paradigm that informs most scholarship on *créolité*, the cultural movement of which Confiant is a cofounder. By positing France as the sole source of cultural influence and creative output, much of the scholarship I seek to revise ignores Martinique's geographical and cultural proximity to the area to which Caribbean theorists such as Edouard Glissant and others refer as Plantation America. I propose the concept of *intertextual geography* as a means of approaching the region as a type of text made up of parts and wholes (nations or islands that are both their own entity and part of a cultural region) and in order to place texts into dynamic dialogue with each other regarding the sugarcane plantation experience and its far-reaching cultural legacies. This conceptual methodology reveals striking continuities between Confiant's sugarcane novels and those by other New World writers from the Spanish Caribbean and Brazil on the basis of their physical and cultural geography (the landscape of the sugarcane plantation system and the Creole societies that

emerged from it), and the aesthetic and ideological dimensions of their imagined textual sugarcane worlds.

Chapter One, "Toward an Intertextual Geography of the Sugarcane Novel," explains the methodological, metaphorical, and material concepts of geography and their application to my larger project, and discusses the persistent teleological associations between the sugarcane plantation and a "hybrid" or "creolized" cultural identity in the New World. By analyzing texts from Martinique, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, I illustrate how the plantation functions simultaneously as a microcosm and as a synecdoche for the island or nation it represents, and how in turn, each of these representations reproduces the central characteristics of Plantation America at large.

Chapter Two, "Intertextuality and Indianness: Revising Literary, Historical, and National Narratives in *Régisseur du rhum*, *La panse du chacal*, and *Aurore*" explores the process of revision as a literary and a historical praxis in the sugarcane novel. Through an examination of Confiant's novel *Régisseur du rhum* (*The Rum Steward*, 1999) and its rewriting of Joseph Zobel's novel *La rue Cases-Nègres* (*Black Shack Alley*, 1950), and subsequently in terms of Confiant's representations of East Indian migrants and their descendents, this chapter reveals how his literary practice and definition of *créolité* have gradually expanded to include ethnic groups that were previously not considered to be Creole. Finally, through a comparison of Confiant's novel *La panse du chacal* (*The Belly of the Jackal*, 2004) and *Aurore* (*Dawn*, 1987), a novel by the Indo-Guadeloupean writer and politician Ernest Moutoussamy, I reveal how each of the plantations portrayed in these novels models its author's ideas about ethnic diversity and East Indian integration in the island culture at large.

My third chapter, "Sugar's Sequels: Inventing Traditions in the Plantation Saga Novels of Raphaël Confiant and José Lins do Rego," compares the literary structure of these plantation saga novels to that of the nineteenth-century French realist and naturalist literary cycles of Balzac and Zola. I argue that this structure, which is both self-contained and self-referential, enables these New World writers to create and validate their own defensive, revisionist versions of Martinican and Brazilian cultural history.

My fourth chapter, "A Field of Islands: Environmental Desire and Destruction in *Commandeur du sucre* and *Cañas y bueyes*," is an ecocritical comparison of the representation and function of landscape in the first novel of Confiant's sugarcane trilogy and in a 1936 novel by the Dominican physician and writer Eugenio Moscoso Puello. In the first part of the chapter, I compare *Commandeur du sucre* to Émile Zola's novel *La Terre* (The Earth, 1887), focusing in particular on the similarities between Confiant's and Zola's eroticized representations of the landscapes of sugarcane and wheat. In the second part of the chapter, through a close reading of the opening passage of *Cañas y bueyes* (Cane and Oxen, 1936), I approach the landscape as a type of palimpsest that registers the impact of different environmental, historical, cultural, and political experiences in the Dominican Republic. An analysis of the environmental descriptions in *Commandeur du sucre* and *Cañas y bueyes* reveals contrasting epistemological claims, while underscoring the central role the sugarcane plantation landscape plays in the production of knowledge across the New World, and linking this knowledge with representations of the nation-state at large.

The recurrence of the sugarcane novel in the literary history of the New World signals a persistent and obsessive search for autochthonous identity that is deeply

rooted—historically, environmentally, and culturally—in the plantation landscape. My work reveals that these various tensions—between parts and wholes; specific islands/nations/regions and Plantation America; individual novels, literary sagas, and broader genres—makes it possible to apprehend the sugarcane novel phenomenon as a larger literary landscape without losing sight of the elements that compose it.

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Dissertation Chapter

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Chapter One

Toward an Intertextual Geography of the Sugarcane Novel

> Le trajet intellectuel…est voué à un itinéraire géographique, par quoi la 'pensée' du Discours explore son espace et s'y tresse.
>
> The intellectual journey is destined to have a geographical itinerary, through which the "intention" within the Discourse explores its space into which it is woven.
>
> - Édouard Glissant (*Le discours antillais* 13; trans. J. Michael Dash, *Caribbean Discourse* 4)[1]

Introduction

This chapter explores material and metaphorical concepts of geography as a means of connecting a corpus of novels set on sugarcane plantations in Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Martinique, and Puerto Rico, on the basis of their *real* physical and cultural geography (the landscape of the sugar plantation system and the Creole societies that emerged from it) and the aesthetic and ideological dimension of their *imagined* textual sugarcane worlds. Previous studies at the crossroads of literary criticism and

[1] Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Martinican Creole are my own.

geography have tended to separate representational spaces and material spaces, as Andrew Thacker discusses in "The Idea of a Critical Literary Geography (2006)." Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800-1900* (1998) is a noteworthy example. Moretti, who coined the contemporary use of the term literary geography,[2] defines it as comprising two distinct forms of inquiry: "the study of *space in literature*" (fictional space) or the study of "*literature in space*" (historical space), which "may occasionally (and interestingly) overlap" (Moretti 3, original emphasis). Whereas Moretti insists on separating the two, I advocate an interconnected approach to analyzing historical and fictional space, precisely the "interesting overlap" to which Moretti refers.[3]

To understand how social spaces (the materialist or historicist domain) and literary spaces (the metaphorical domain) mutually act upon each other, a dialectical approach is necessary (Thacker 63).[4] Alison Sharrock proposes intratextuality, "with its emphasis on the interaction of detail and big picture, and the renegotiation of apparently natural segmentation" as a means of "contribut[ing] to the reading of the text of the world and the world as a text" (4). Although the study of both literary geography (within literary criticism) and cultural geography (on the disciplinary median between anthropology and geography) share theoretical terrain, particularly in terms of examining the cultural dynamics of transnationalism, cultural geographers consistently reproach literary critics for being too abstract, for not grounding their research empirically, and for

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[2] In 1904, the Scottish poet and writer William Sharp wrote *Literary Geography*, a travelogue of literary landmarks in the English countryside where famous British works by authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson and George Eliot were set. Prior to Moretti's definition, a literary geography was in essence a travel sketch of literary heritage sites.

[3] Thacker argues that the only effective critical literary geography is one that bridges both historical and textual spaces.

[4] See Thacker's discussion of textual space and his critique of postmodern approaches, which tend to neglect material spaces (62).

not making use of contemporary geographical knowledge and methodologies to frame their work (Mitchell 84). A truly critical literary geography—what I term an intertextual geography—must therefore mediate between geography—specifically the field of cultural geography—and literary criticism. In the pages that follow I will suggest a methodological approach that seeks to bridge the fields of literature, geography, and cultural studies, that will enable us to bring Raphaël Confiant's sugarcane trilogy into the orbit of the *novela de la caña* phenomenon in Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, that anticipated the Martinican author's sugarcane trilogy by sixty years.[5]

Benedict Anderson has proposed that what connects events in a novel or a newspaper to real life episodes is the "imagined linkage" of the two based on temporal coincidence—the perception of the forward march of "homogenous empty time"—and the relationship between the text as a type of commodity and world markets (Anderson 33). If, in accordance with Anderson's formulation, a novel's ability to represent real life is contingent on its own circulation as a product along with the reader's awareness and sense of belonging to a community of readers—an imagined community—, then literary works that document and enact the production of sugar—one of the most important agricultural commodities to have been traded globally since the sixteenth century—appear doubly inscribed in a relationship with capitalist forces. Through a combined emphasis on literary and historical approaches to the study of space in the sugarcane novels of the New World, I encourage rethinking traditional categories of geography, culture, and genre underlying the concept of national literatures. These categories are a

[5] I use the verb "anticipate" here in its formal sense of doing something before it becomes fashionable or widespread. I do not mean to imply that Confiant was directly influenced by these earlier regionalist novels.

great deal more fluid, in the same way that national and cultural boundaries are more porous than we tend to represent them. As the cultural geographer Nigel Thrift asserts, "[t]he literary meaning of the experience of place and the literary experience of that meaning of place are both part of an active process of cultural creation and destruction. They do not start or stop with an author…They are all moments in a cumulatively historical spiral of signification" (12). A reconfiguration or remapping along geographical, temporal, and aesthetic borders allows for alternate patterns and linkages to emerge, or in Édouard Glissant's words, for new and dynamic forms of "relation"—literary, cultural, and historical — to arise.

1.1 Mapping the Sugarcane Novel

A marked tension exists between conceptions of what is local and what is transcultural in the production and reception of twentieth-century regionalist works in the New World. Such is the case with a group of novels alternately referred to in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean as the *criollista* novel (the creolist novel) or, more commonly, as *la novela de la tierra* (the novel of the earth, land, or homeland, depending on how it is translated).[6] Examining literary works that are seldom studied beyond their own national or geographical borders, let alone as part of a transnational literary phenomenon, is complicated by questions of geography, language, and genre, all of which serve to divide rather than bring together works that in many instances share

[6] Carlos J. Alonso explains that the terms *criollista* novel and *la novela de la tierra* (the novel of the land) are basically interchangeable in Spanish America and the Caribbean. See Carlos J. Alonso, "The Criollista Novel" (1996). C*riollista* seems to highlight the autochthonous aspect not only of the setting of the novels, but also of their production, i.e. the fact that the authors are Creoles who were born in the New World.

strikingly similar aesthetic and ideological concerns. The authors primarily address these concerns by highlighting the uniqueness of the culture—with an emphasis on folklore and regional dialect—that arose from the sugarcane plantation system in the New World. It is my contention that the very insularity that defines these works, both in terms of a limited readership and the narrow geographical focus of the novels, constitutes a transnational feature of literary production in the cultural area that Caribbean theorists such as Rex Nettleford (Jamaica) and Édouard Glissant (Martinique) call Plantation America (Nettleford 149; Glissant 1981: 229, n. 1). As J. Michael Dash succinctly states, "[u]niversality paradoxically springs from regionalism" (Dash 1999: xxxix).

Although viewed as a minor genre and generally overlooked in contemporary criticism on Latin American literature, the *novela de la tierra* dominated the literary scene in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean with an "explosive intensity" during the first thirty years of the twentieth century (Alonso 1996: 196).[7] The stigma of the minor literature adheres to these works in three different ways. First of all, though ubiquitous during this period, the *novela de la tierra* (or regionalist novel, if we want to attach a more universal label to it) has received little scholarly attention in recent years, having been totally eclipsed by the literary phenomenon broadly referred to as modernism or the Latin American Boom (which includes *lo real maravilloso* or magic realism) which emerged in the Americas and the Caribbean shortly thereafter.[8] The

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[7] Alonso identifies the period of production of the *novela de la tierra* as 1910 to 1945 (200).
[8] The distinction between modernism and *modernismo* is critical. Latin American *modernismo* came into being before the more global and longer lasting modernism. The use of the term *modernismo* is generally attributed to the Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío (1867-1916). Under the influence of French Parnassianism, Darío, and the Cuban poet and revolutionary José Martí, among other poets in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, sought to modernize both the language and the themes in the national poetic repertoire.

second reason the *criollista* novel is considered outdated and seen as belonging to a lesser genre is that it is does not represent a departure from traditional so-called realistic modes of representation aesthetically or in terms of narrative structure. Seeing these works as lacking in innovation, literary historians and critics consequently tend to dismiss *criollista* novels, lumping them together under the rubric of local color fiction.[9] Finally, the restricted settings of these rural novels, particularly the ones I discuss here, which take place within the confines of the patriarchal sugarcane plantation, contribute to the image of these works as little more than nostalgic agrarian idylls. The regionalist, nationalist, and pro-independence social, cultural, and political agendas underlying individual texts emphasize the local and detract attention from cross-cultural commonalities.[10]

Generalized notions of what constitutes local color fiction further obscure the transnational and transcultural links between works that function as literary responses to similar historical experiences across the greater Caribbean and the Atlantic coast of the Americas. In an attempt to circumvent national, linguistic, and aesthetic boundaries, I prefer to group the novels in question under the subgenre of *novelas de la caña* ([sugar]cane novels), a literary category used in the Dominican Republic to refer to a

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[9] In the United States, as far back as 1932, Robert Penn Warren encouraged critics to discern between local color and an innovative and vibrant [southern] literature of place. See "Not Local Color."

[10] A number of New World regionalist writers were authors, signatories, or supporters of literary and cultural manifestos. The most recent and well-known example is Raphaël Confiant's involvement in *Éloge de la créolité* (*In Praise of Creoleness*, 1989), which he coauthored along with the writer Patrick Chamoiseau and the linguist Jean Bernabé. Earlier examples include *Insularismo: Ensayos de interpretación puertorriqueña* (Insularism: Interpretive Essays on Puerto Rico, 1934) by the novelist and literary critic Antonio Pedreira in Puerto Rico and *O Manifesto Regionalista* (The Regionalist Manifesto, 1926) by sociologist and would-be novelist Gilberto Freyre.

group of neo-realist novels published between 1930 and 1970, which document life on the island's sugarcane plantations. The main exponents of the Dominican *novela de la caña* include Francisco Eugenio Moscoso Puello (*Cañas y bueyes* [Cane and Oxen], 1936), Ramón Marrero-Aristy (*Over*, 1939), and Manuel Antonio Amiama (*El Terrateniente* [The Landowner], written in the 1960s and published in 1970). Very few studies have approached the *novela de la caña* as an actual genre; fewer still have considered the *novela de la caña* in transnational terms.[11] When applied to the plantation novels of northeastern Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Martinique, the narrower *novela de la caña* designation enables us to move beyond the "local" in the local color, in order to explore the overarching elements that unite these insular and inward-gazing novels.[12]

The sugarcane novel designation is an appropriate choice for another altogether obvious reason: it has been applied locally in French, Portuguese, and Spanish as a descriptive category to all the novels in this study. In Brazil, José Lins do Rego's five-novel series, *Menino de engenho* (*Plantation Boy*, 1932), *Doidinho* (Crazy Guy,1933), *Bangüê* (the term for a small [pre-mechanized] labor-intensive sugar plantation and mill; 1934), *Usina* (Refinery, 1936), and *Fogo Morto* (Dead Fire, 1943), is collectively referred to as the author's "sugarcane cycle" (*o cíclo da cana-de-açúcar*). In Puerto

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[11] Berta Graciano's doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Los Angeles, published in the Dominican Republic as *La novela de la caña: estética e ideología* (1990), examines three Dominican novels: *Cañas y bueyes*, *Over*, and *El Tierrateniente*. A master's thesis by Sofía Solis Monteagudo at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, *La novela de la caña en el Caribe: Un acercamiento sociológico a las novelas "Over" y "La Llamarada"* (1998), compares a Dominican and a Puerto Rican *novela de la caña*.

[12] The Créolistes, the authors and signatories of the *Éloge de la créolité* (*In Praise of Creoleness*, 1989), advocate "self-knowledge" ("se connaître") and "interior vision" ("la vision intérieure") in contemporary Martinican literature (Bernabé, et. al. 23).

Rico, Enrique Laguerre wrote two novels about sugarcane plantations, *La llamarada* (The Blaze, 1935) and *Solar Montoya* (The Montoya Plantation, 1941), which some consider to be a sequel due to the presence of the protagonist of *La llamarada*. *Marcos Antilla: Relatos de cañaveral* (Marcos Antilla: Tales from the Cane Field, 1932), an unfinished collection of short stories by Cuban writer Luis Felipe Rodríguez (published posthumously), has also been called a *novela de la caña*. Finally, more recently, Martinican writer Raphaël Confiant's novels, *Commandeur du sucre* (The Sugar Driver, 1994), *Régisseur du rhum* (The Rum Steward, 1999), and *La Dissidence* (Dissidence, 2002), have alternately been described as *la trilogie de la canne à sucre* and *la série Commandeur du sucre*.[13]

Although Creole culture initially developed on a local level with the establishment of the first sugar plantations in the New World in the sixteenth century, it eventually acquired a "regional character" (Benítez-Rojo 2003: 21). Antonio Benítez-Rojo qualifies the transition of the plantation from a local institution to a regional "machine" with a repetitive character, as a movement from "the plantation to the Plantation" (1996: 1-3). Building on the "relation of cause and effect" between "the Caribbean plantation and the phenomenon of creolization" observed by Benítez-Rojo (2003: 18), I argue that the sugarcane novel provides a privileged vantage point for an examination of literary and cultural cross-fertilization in the New World. If the colonial plantation was the matrix of Creole culture (Burton 123), then the sugarcane novel in its multiple manifestations can be seen as a laboratory for burgeoning expressions of national culture. Moreover, I

[13] While *Commandeur du sucre* is described on the cover as a novel (*roman*), *Régisseur du rhum* and *La Dissidence* are designated as *récits* (stories, accounts), a term that can apply to works of fiction and non-fiction. I argue that the ambiguity of *récit* implies that these are works of historical fiction, deliberately blurring the lines between fact and fiction.

maintain that the recurrence of the insular plantation novel in the literary history of the New World signals a persistent and obsessive search for autochthonous identity that is deeply rooted symbolically, culturally, and historically in the plantation landscape.

1.2 The Stories Behind the Maps

In the introduction to *Handbook of Cultural Geography* (2003), the editors of the collection invoke the spirit of what they call a "geographical imagination" to inspire new discoveries and interpretations in the field (8). Above all, they explain, a geographical imagination involves the ability to simultaneously conceive "geography as a story and a story as geography" (8). Before delving further into the sugarcane novel as a literary *topos* —the Greek etymology refers literally to a "place"— a brief overview of previous geographic and literary configurations (the material borders as they have been defined) of comparative Caribbean and Latin American literature is in order.

The geographical and disciplinary divisiveness of recent studies highlights the complexity of the ever-growing field of transnational literary and cultural analysis, particularly that which bestrides the Americas and the Caribbean. This is exemplified by the varying academic designations applied concomitantly to an area encompassing the Caribbean and continental North, South, and Central America, an area whose epistemological and physical boundaries are essentially the same: the Atlantic World, the New World, the Americas, the Black Atlantic, Plantation America, Postplantation America, Postslavery America, etc. These denominations illustrate the interdisciplinary direction of contemporary literary and cultural studies as they seek to break out of rigid geographic, linguistic, colonial and epistemological confines. Communication among

various academic disciplines has made it possible to discover new relationships by redefining and expanding the cultural map of the New World. Although by definition these new paradigms are both more malleable and self-reflexive than the geohistorical[14] categories they seek to replace or even displace, in their systematizing thrust they too inevitably impose a certain vision or organizing principle on the territories they mark. While geography cannot and should not be dismissed in these theoretical debates, acknowledging that geographical and epistemological categories express a particular worldview in themselves, is an important first step for those engaging in transnational literary studies.[15]

In an essay "Expanding the Caribbean," Peter Hulme explores the use of three regional geographic terms to subdivide the Americas: the Caribbean, Latin America, and the "other" America. As he explains, they "offer three different approaches to the question of regional nomenclature: roughly speaking, the racial, the linguistic and the metaphorical" (Hulme 29). The term "Caribbean" is at its basis a racial term because its namesake refers to the original inhabitants of the Lesser Antilles, the Carib Indians, who today exist only in name (29).[16] "Latin America" proves to be an unsuitable designation in that it is really an instrument of cultural politics under the reign of Napoleon III, an attempt to create a cultural alliance between French and Spanish territories in the colonies in opposition to the Anglo-Saxon presence (the Dutch and the English) (29). "The Other

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[14] I borrow the term "geohistorical" from Peter Hulme's essay *Expanding the Caribbean*, which I will be discussing at length in this chapter.

[15] For a detailed discussion of the politics of maps, see J.B. Harley. *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (2001).

[16] This designation could be disputed, since it does not apply to all the islands that comprise the Caribbean; Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico for instance, were mainly inhabited by Arawak and their relatives the Taino; Cuba also had a substantial Arawak population (Curtin 63).

America" functions alternately as a metaphorical and as a metaphysical term according to Hulme, and its multifarious associations inspire not only his exploration of the cultural geography of the New World, but also those of Glissant, who employs the expression "l'autre Amérique" in *Le discours antillais* (1981) and J. Michael Dash in *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (1998) (Hulme 30).

Calling for "the unthinking of all kinds of Eurocentric categories, not least geohistorical units such as continents" (31), Hulme examines the ideological underpinnings of divisive geographical constructs such as North America and South America, showing how these larger regional entities rely on binary oppositions to define themselves in contrast to each other along cultural and linguistic lines often expressed through a dialectic of superiority-inferiority. The Other America exists in opposition to and on the margins of a main or dominant America. A case in point is French historian Fernand Braudel's treatment of the Americas in his *Grammaire des civilisations* (1963). Braudel splits "l'Amérique" into "l'autre Nouveau Monde: l'Amérique latine" and "l'Amérique par excellence: les États-Unis" (Braudel 457). While acknowledging the inaccuracy of the adjective "latine," Braudel nevertheless creates a dichotomy between a successful and prosperous land of the future to the north (the United States and Canada) and what he refers to as a land of "humanisme de haute qualité" (high quality humanism) to the south, an America that is "une et multiple, haute en couleur, dramatique, déchirée, divisée contre elle-même" (one and multiple, full of color, dramatic, torn apart, divided against itself) (457). This other New World once triumphed over its neighbor to the north, he explains, when it was "la première Amérique riche" (the first wealthy America), thanks to the booming sugar enterprise (457). In this bare-bones account, the Other New

World's demotion to second-place America, if not second-rate status, can be charted along with the rise and fall of economic markets; in other words, this is the story of the demise of the sugar industry.

The geographic conundrum created by the opposition between North and South, America and the Other America, reappears when one examines the situation of Central America. Although subsumed under the two continents approach, the islands of the Caribbean and Central American nations like Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, are designated as macroregions of Latin America according to the United Nations official world map of macroregions, while the United States and Canada belong to Northern America (Hulme 32). As Hulme demonstrates, these neat categories fail to appropriately accommodate the complex cultural, linguistic, and social configuration of the New World, for how can the "Anglo-Saxon" islands of the Caribbean be part of "Latin" America (32-33)? Re-dividing the Americas into North and South so as to create a true "hemispheric" separation along the equator or at the continent's narrowest point would in either case result in Mexico's inclusion in Anglo-Saxon Northern America, yet another culturally and linguistically incompatible arrangement (32). Hulme proposes instead a "chronotopical" approach, starting in the Caribbean, the original "entry point to both North and South America" (33).

Hulme's chronotopical approach, informed by Russian Formalist Mikhael Bakhtin's appropriation of the chronotope (originally a scientific term) as a literary term, refers to the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are

artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 84).[17] American writers and literary critics have also stressed the importance of the time-space connection in crafting literary landscapes that bear the imprint of the places and people who inhabit them. In 1932 Robert Penn Warren, the renowned southern U.S. writer and cofounder of the school of New Criticism, declared that "the writer in a tradition"—here he infers the literary tradition of the South—could not capture the "ideal in art," the essence of a people's identity and the symbiotic relationship with their environment, "without consideration of both time and space in a very special sense." Furthermore, he stressed, "these two considerations cannot be separated unless the meaning of both is destroyed…Time and space is one thing" (Penn Warren 154). Another American writer, Ralph Ellison, makes a similar observation, imbuing it with an urgency that goes beyond the realm of realism in literature to real life existential questions: "If we don't know where we are, we have little chance of knowing who we are, that if we confuse the time, we confuse the place; and that when we confuse these we endanger our humanity, both physically and morally" (Ellison 74). By approaching the confluence of time and space in literature as a form of "synchrony," Glissant envisions Martinique as the "point of reference" in a regional cross-cultural poetics (Dash 1999: xxxix).

Hulme's chronotopical point of departure for expanding the area we call the Caribbean is a discussion of Martinican poet Aimé Césaire's "extended allegory of the

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[17] While Hulme does not explicitly mention Bakhtin in his essay, it can be inferred that he subscribes to Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope. Hulme's chronotope proposes literature as a vehicle for exploring geography (a historically constructed place where time and space are intertwined). The etymology of the word chronotope comes from the fusing of the Greek words for "time" and "space." Bakhtin discusses his concept of the chronotope at length in "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," proposing several types of chronotopes based on the relationship of time and space in the narrative (Bakhtin 84-258).

Atlantic," where the Caribbean islands are "triangulated by America, Europe, and Africa" in the poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Hulme 35).[18] Focusing on the verse, "…l'archipel arqué comme le désir inquiet de se nier, on dirait une anxiété maternelle pour protéger la ténuité plus delicate qui sépare l'une de l'autre Amérique…" (the archipelago arched with an anguished desire to negate itself, as if from maternal anxiety to protect this impossibly delicate tenuity separating one America from another…) (Qtd. in Hulme 34),[19] he traces the ways in which Caribbean writers and critics have imagined the Caribbean archipelago as either a link to the Americas or as barrier keeping the two Americas apart—the ambiguity and complexity of the relationship so poignantly conveyed in the poem. In Hulme's reading of Césaire, North and South America are separated by the Caribbean islands, while Dash's interpretation of Césaire in *The Other America* and Antonio Benítez-Rojo's vision in *La isla que se repite: El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna* (1989) posit the Caribbean as the bridge that connects the Americas (Hulme 34-35).

It is Glissant who best articulates the relationship between the Caribbean and the Americas, even if Hulme correctly observes that the Martinican writer-philosopher's use of the term "the Other America" denotes South America rather than the Caribbean (as in Dash's reading) (Hulme 37). What brings parts of North and South America into the Caribbean experience is the legacy of the plantation system, which was the basis of the

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[18] First appearing in 1939, subsequent editions of *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, published in 1947 and 1956 are markedly different. While most Césaire scholars have treated the 1956 Présence Africaine edition as the definitive version, A. James Arnold advocates approaching the *Cahier* as "a palimpsest, where each new layer of writing tends to obscure the one that preceded it" (Arnold 2004: 134).

[19] I used the Brentano's edition of the *Cahier* (1947) to check the French verse, and the same English translation by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (2001) quoted by Hulme to check the English version.

colonial enterprise. European imperialism and emerging global capitalism—expressed as an appetite for sugar—fuelled the demand for a cheap labor force, ultimately leading to the enslavement and transplantation of millions of Africans to the New World. The encounter of three races, Amerindians, Africans, and Europeans, in the Plantation Americas serves as the foundational cultural bond between the nations along the Atlantic coast of the Americas and the islands of the greater Caribbean region (Glissant 1981: 229-230).

Hulme's essay leads the reader to a vital footnote in *Le discours antillais*, one that features a number of references to ethnographic theories from Brazil, Cuba, and Jamaica that use the plantation system in conjunction with certain Indian and African cultural and agricultural practices to define the extended Caribbean as a cultural region.[20] The most pertinent of these references, the one that best demarcates the literary geography of the sugarcane novel, and from which Glissant derives the term "Plantation America," is to Rex Nettleford's book, *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica* (1978). Although the book focuses on Jamaica, as the title indicates, Nettleford advocates first and foremost a trans-Caribbean cultural approach to understanding Jamaican identity; the word "Jamaica" appears only in the subtitle of the book. "The case of Jamaica" figures as one installment in a series of linked experiences, as one example among a number of instances in which the individual experience of a Caribbean island fits into a broader regional pattern of experience. Implicit in this and any other comparative cultural approach is the necessary presence of a common denominator, whether geographical, historical, cultural, linguistic, or theoretical. Far from predicating an identical identity or

[20] See *Le discours antillais* (229, n.1).

destiny for the societies in question, a rigorous investigation of this type can reveal the uniqueness of each society's response to similar historical phenomena,[21] a point Nettleford seeks to underscore. In the fourth chapter of *Caribbean Cultural Identity*, entitled "Cultural Integration and Cooperation in the Wider Caribbean and Latin America," Nettleford stresses the "common history…and experiences in the process of creoli[z]ation" as a means of communication between Latin America and the Caribbean that transcends very real linguistic and geographic barriers (Nettleford 149-150). Dividing the Caribbean and Latin America into three cultural spheres, Plantation America, Meso-America, and Euro-America, Nettleford nevertheless designates Plantation America as the common cultural sphere and locus of authentic creolized culture in the New World, for it has absorbed elements of Meso-America, Africa, and Europe.

Although they expressed it differently, Nettleford and Glissant essentially drew the same cultural map of Plantation America. For Nettleford, "[a]ll the Commonwealth Caribbean, Haiti, Cuba, Santo Domingo, as well as the Eastern littoral of the American continent from Nova Scotia to Northern Uruguay are good examples of Plantation America where Europe has met Africa on foreign soil" (Nettleford note 233, p.149). For Glissant, a certain cultural continuity exists between the people of *l'autre Amérique* and the Caribbean as a result of the plantation system.[22] The perimeter of this cultural confluence consists of three spaces:

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[21] It is important to stress that the phenomena are similar, not identical. Transnational literary studies sometimes run the risk of generalizing or oversimplifying national histories for the sake of demonstrating continuity.

[22] "Il y a pourtant continuité, de l'archipel au continent…," (There is nevertheless continuity between the archipelago and the continent), writes Glissant. (229).

> …les hauts des Andes où la passion indienne perdure, le Mitan des plaines et des plateaux où le métissage s'accélère, la mer Caraïbe où les îles présagent. J'ai dit en introduction à ce livre que le paysage martiniquais (le Nord et le mont, la plaine du Mitan, les sables au Sud) reproduit en résumé de telles ambages.
>
> […the heights of the Andes, where the Amerindian world passionately endures, the plains and plateaus in the middle, where the pace of creolization quickens, the Caribbean [S]ea, where the islands loom! I have said it in the introduction to this book that the Martinican landscape (the mountains in the north, the plains in the middle, the sands to the [s]outh) reproduces in miniature these spaces] (*Le discours antillais* 229; *Caribbean Discourse* 115).

Thus for both Nettleford and Glissant (more explicitly for Glissant), their native islands of Jamaica and Martinique contain *in miniature* not only the topographical elements of Plantation America at large, but also the imprint of the cultures that have converged there, Amerindian, African, and European. A sense of *mise en abyme* inflects these perceptions, as if the Caribbean could stand in synecdochically for the New World at large.

I use two literary terms to illustrate the relationship between the Caribbean archipelago and the Continental Americas, mise en abyme and synecdoche. The mise en abyme is "a literary recursion" or the "literary effect of infinite regression," according to

J.A. Cuddon in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. The mise en abyme is more commonly seen as an image that contains within it a smaller copy of itself.[23] Plantation America, as reflected in the sugarcane novel, consists of a representation of the nation, which is echoed in the structure of the plantation world of the novel. As a figure of speech, the synecdoche involves the use of a "part" of something to refer to the "whole" or the thing itself. In my example, the Caribbean archipelago—a part of the New World—, expresses through its topography and landscape, economic history, and cultural hybridity, the experience of the New World at large.

Seeing the Caribbean as a microcosm for a broader "asymmetrical" cultural dynamic across the Americas, Benítez-Rojo assigns an "archipelic character" to the extended Caribbean—including the continental Americas—, the metaphor of the archipelago conveying the "discontinuous unity" of the region (Benítez-Rojo iii).[24] Glissant, in turn advocates what he calls "archipelic thinking" ("la pensée archipélique"), in volume IV of his *Poétique* series, *Traité du Tout-Monde* (1997) as a means of understanding not only creolization in Martinique, the Caribbean, and in the New World, but as a way to envision a dynamic and on-going process of creolization and cultural cross-fertilization worldwide. Like Benítez-Rojo, Glissant conceives his archipelago in

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[23] An analalagous situation can be found in Gérard Genette's examination of the function of metonymie within Marcel Proust's use of metaphor in "Métonymie chez Proust" (1972). Chantale Claverie has also stressed the role of the plantation as a metonym for France's colonies (2000).

[24] See *La isla que se repite*: "…las Antillas constituyen un puente de islas que conecta…de una manera asimétrica Suramérica con Norteamérica. Este curioso accidente geográfico le confiere a toda el area, incluso a sus focos continentales, un carácter de archipelago…" (The Caribbean constitutes a bridge of islands that connects…in an asymmetrical manner North and South America. This curious geographical accident confers upon the entire area, including the more visible continental entities, the character of an archipelago) (iii).

metaphorical terms, as an archipelago of the mind, as a liberating way of thinking that "opens up these oceans to us" (31). The figure of the archipelago evokes "ambiguity, fragility, and the derivative drift" ("le dérivé")[25] and is opposed to "les pensées de système" (systematizing or universalizing thought). Glissant's open-ended archipelic thinking seeks to free the Caribbean subject from the burden of (an impossible) continental unity and provide an alternative to linear, grand historical narratives that are incapable of representing Caribbean peoples' discontinuous histories of wandering and exile (31).

1.3 Parts and Wholes: Plantation America as Text

Colonialism, slavery, a capitalist economy based on the sugar monoculture, intense assimilationism, miscegenation and cultural blending, political dictatorships or military occupations, economic dependence, endangered cultures and oral languages, these experiences transcend linguistic and territorial boundaries in the Plantation America of the sugarcane novel. Whether independent as in the case of Brazil, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, or still under neo-colonial control, as in the American "Free Associated State" of Puerto Rico and the French *région monodépartementale* of Martinique, each of these islands and nations has expressed its hybrid, multivalent national identity discursively at one point or another through a literary enactment of the sugarcane plantation experience.

In places where the reification of miscegenation was or continues to be part of official cultural politics, as in Brazil and Martinique, the sugarcane plantation, despite the

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[25] I borrow Gordon Collier's translation of "le dérivé" in Andrea Schweiger Hiepko's essay "Creolization as a Poetics of Culture: Édouard Glissant's 'Archipelic' Thinking" (2003).

horrors of slavery, is seen as the cradle of a truly unique New World culture that blends elements of Amerindian, African, and European cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions. José Lins do Rego's sugarcane cycle in Brazil's northeast (five novels published between1932 and 1943), Raphaël Confiant's Martinican sugarcane trilogy (three novels published between 1994 and 2002), and a later novel, *La panse du chacal* (2004), belong broadly to this tradition. *La panse du chacal* (The Belly of the Jackal) spotlights Martinique's East Indian population, including this often neglected segment of the population as active participants in Martinican cultural life.[26] In turns nostalgic for and critical of plantation life, Lins do Rego's and Confiant's novels decry the erosion of local culture, traditions, and story-telling which are native to plantation societies and warn of a time when the demise of the sugar industry will signal not only the end of economic self-sufficiency for the region/island, but also the loss of identity.

Conversely, the plantation can also serve as a space of contestation from which writers criticize the presence of colonial occupiers, international investors, and foreign migrant workers. These elements are typical of Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican *novelas de la caña* from the 1930s. American-owned sugar companies and their *centrales* (huge sugar refineries) are the cause of the exploitation of Cuban, Dominican,

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[26] In *La panse du chacal*, Confiant borrows heavily from an earlier work, *Le Galion: Canne douleur séculaire ô tendresse* (2000). Confiant includes East Indians alongside Afro-Martinicans as essential contributors to Martinican Creole culture in *La panse du chacal*, but does not mention them at all in *Le Galion* (published four years earlier). Not just in Martinique, but across the Caribbean, East Indians are often not considered to have contributed to Creole culture because they began to arrive after the abolition of slavery to work as indentured laborers on sugarcane plantations. For an example of this broadly held perception in Barbados, see Edward Brathwaite's *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean*. Kingston: Savacou, 1974. A. James Arnold points out that "Brathwaite in fact considers the Indo- and Sino-Caribbean populations 'Post-Emancipation Problems,' thus signifying that they cannot be true Creoles" (Arnold 1997: 235). Chapter Two discusses representations of East Indians in Confiant's and Ernest Moutoussamy's fiction.

and Puerto Rican workers and pose an imminent threat to the local way of life in *Marcos Antilla: Relatos de cañaveral* by Luis Felipe Rodríguez (Cuba), *Cañas y bueyes* by Francisco Moscoso Puello and *Over* by Ramón Marrero Aristy (Dominican Republic), and *La llamarada* by Enrique Laguerre (Puerto Rico). Resentment towards American sugar companies in *Cañas y bueyes*, *Over*, and *La llamarada* parallels anti-American sentiment in the Dominican Republic, which experienced a U.S. military occupation from 1916 to 1924, and in Puerto Rico, which has been under some form of American control since troops occupied the island in 1898. Haitian migrant workers laboring alongside Dominican *peones* in the cane fields endanger and corrupt local culture in the Dominican novels, adding another layer of xenophobia to the plot.

Through a series of *mises en abyme* the sugar plantation stands in synecdochically for the region, and by extension, for the nation, and as such it embodies either an idealized or dystopian vision of the nation. The plantation functions as the self-contained representation of the nation, a stable signifier or microcosm that simultaneously bridges the "historical" past and the narrative present.[27] As Benedict Anderson explains, "[i]f nations states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nation states to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past…and glide into a limitless future" (19).

I propose that an intertextual reading of Confiant's *romans de la canne* alongside the twentieth-century sugarcane novels of Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, provides a useful framework for understanding the literary and cultural history of Plantation America. Viewing the sugarcane novel as an ensemble—as an

[27] [Colonial] History in the New World—at least the linear Western conception of it—begins with the arrival of European explorers and *Conquistadores*.

intertextual geography—that is, as a series of episodes or segments within a larger literary phenomenon, also reveals how nineteenth-century European literary modes such as Spanish and Portuguese *costumbrismo* and French *régionalisme*, the novel of manners and local color fiction, respectively, were adapted and "creolized" in order to convey specific conditions—and a particular worldview—in the New World. The tension between parts and wholes, specific islands/regions and Plantation America, individual novels and broader genres, makes it possible to perceive the sugarcane novel of the extended Caribbean as a larger literary landscape without losing sight of the elements that compose it.

1.4 Intertextual Geography

The necessary tension between parts and wholes, which I have stressed in the previous section in terms of the relationship between individual novels and my main corpus (especially Confiant's novels within the context of the earlier sugarcane novels of Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico) also applies to the reading of individual texts. As Alison Sharrock explains, "[i]t is only when we pull texts apart, and look at the myriad ways of their putting-together and their points of view, that we can fully engage with the whole range of epistemological, historical, philosophical, aesthetic, and critical exegeses that constitute our response to literary texts and cultural poetics" (3). To illustrate the importance of this textual practice toward exercising a geographic imagination (reading a story as geography), I propose a close reading of two very different short texts, an ethnography and a book of photographs.

1.5 The Flower of the Sugarcane: A Symbol for Puerto Rico and the Caribbean

The first page of *Worker in the Cane* by Caribbean anthropologist Sidney Mintz opens with a puzzling meditation on the part of the author. Below an illustration of a young sugarcane stalk crowned with two blossoms that seem to be swaying in a gentle wind, appear the upper-case Spanish words "FLOR DE CAÑA" accompanied by the following observations:

> …the flower of the sugar cane, is usually called GUAJANA in Puerto Rico. The sugar cane plant is very tall. The GUAJANA consists of feathery spikelets which blossom above it in the late fall, shimmering violet and silver when the breeze stirs them.
>
> The sugar cane itself, like most of the people who work in the Caribbean area today, is descended from Old World stock. But the name GUAJANA is American Indian, Taino, and hence indigenously Caribbean. The flower of the cane is a symbol, then, of the mixture of peoples and cultures, of old and new. It is a fitting symbol for the people of Puerto Rico (Mintz 1960: Unnumbered page following the table of contents and list of illustrations).

Mintz begins by translating the Spanish term then supplies a local Puerto Rican term, a *native* word used by the Taino Indians, the original inhabitants of the island, he subsequently explains. Descriptions of the plant's physical characteristics shift from a general explanation in plain language (the height of the cane, the appearance of the spikelets, the season in which the cane flower blossoms) to an almost poetic depiction of the visual effect of the breeze blowing through the fields of flowering sugarcane (they

"shimmer…violet and silver"). The second portrayal, nuanced and sensorial, takes the anthropologist on a brief detour from objective description to more symbolic terrain where nature and man reflect each other: the people of Puerto Rico, like the sugarcane, are a cultural and racial mix of the Taino Indians, European transplants ("Old World stock," mainly Spanish in this case) to the New World, and Africans who were uprooted from their homelands and brought to work as slaves on colonial plantations. Taking root in Puerto Rico, sugarcane and man forever altered the natural and cultural landscape of the island, and were in turn influenced by their new surroundings, eventually taking on new identities and names, like *guajana*.

Besides the oscillation between material and metaphorical description, the opening passage of *Worker in the Cane* is characterized by another dynamic: the movement from a specific geographic location to broader regional one. In Mintz' symbolic reading of the sugarcane flower, a correspondence exists not only between the sugarcane and the people of Puerto Rico, but "most of the people who work in the *Caribbean area*" (my emphasis). By virtue of its Taino roots, the word *guajana*, frequently used by Puerto Ricans, is therefore "indigenously Caribbean," in Mintz's estimation. "Puerto Rico" and "the Caribbean" thus become interchangeable, with Puerto Rico acting as a synecdoche for the Caribbean region at large.[28] Although the passage closes with the assessment that the sugarcane flower "is a fitting symbol for the people of Puerto Rico," we may conclude, by the same token, that it represents the people in the sugarcane-growing regions of the broader New World.

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[28] Here additionally, the flower of the sugarcane can be read as a synecdoche for the sugarcane itself (the whole plant).

Mintz's interpretation of the flower of the sugarcane as a symbol for Puerto Ricans and other Creole societies in the Caribbean is not in fact without precedent, not even among social scientists and anthropologists. Cuban anthropologist and public intellectual Fernando Ortiz dedicated an entire work to the question of the "Cubanness" of sugar and tobacco. *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (*Cuban Counterpoint Tobacco and Sugar*, 1940; trans. 1947), not only explores the role of colonial sugar and tobacco plantations—specifically the different social and economic structures underlying the sugar and tobacco industries—, in the formation of Cuban society, culture, and traditions, but actually casts sugar and tobacco as allegorical figures in Cuban history, ascribing to them contrasting physical (including racial) and moral characteristics that together compose Cuba's contrapuntal cultural landscape.[29]

Some of Ortiz's personifications of sugar and tobacco include racial traits ("dark tobacco and 'high yellow' sugar"; " the one is white the other dark") and specific gender-related attributes ("[s]ugar is a *she*; tobacco is a *he*" and sugar is "sweet," "the delight of the flesh," "virtue," and "the gift of the gods" while tobacco is "bitter," "delight of the spirit," "vice," and "[the gift] of the devils") (Ortiz 3, 6). Vera Kutzinski has carefully examined Ortiz's treatment of race and gender in *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* in *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (47-48). As she

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[29] "Counterpoint" and "contrapuntal" are terms primarily associated with music. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines counterpoint as (1a) "one or more independent melodies added above or below a given melody"; (1b) "the combination of two or more independent melodies in a single harmonic texture in which each retains its linear character: POLYPHONY"; (2a) "a complementing and contrasting item: OPPOSITE"; and (2b) "use of contrast or interplay of elements in a work of art (as a drama)." Pursuing the rhythmic allusion used by Ortiz, Benítez-Rojo characterizes Cuban culture as deeply influenced by polyphonic rhythms in *La isla que se repite: El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna* (1989).

[29] "Polyphony" and "counterpoint" are synonyms according to definition (1b) stated above.

demonstrates, the poetic gendering and racialization of sugar has a long tradition in Cuba. A reading of the poem "La Flor de Caña"[30] by Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (known as Plácido) reveals the "portrait of…a woman of uncertain color and origin…[as] an almost uncannily precise commentary on Cuban history and society" (86). Here too, a teleological link exists between "nature" (the sugarcane flower) and national identity.

Similarities between Ortiz and Mintz notwithstanding,[31] the most perplexing aspect of the opening passage of *Worker in the Cane* is its placement within the book. How are we to read it in the context of the narrative that unfolds, the Puerto Rican life story of Anastacio (Eustaquio) Zayas Alvarado ("Don Taso")? Situated after the acknowledgements, preface, table of contents, and list of illustrations and maps, on a unnumbered page preceding page one of chapter one (the introduction of the book), the *Flor de caña* passage appears suspended beyond the concreteness of labels, titles, and page numbers. Rather than diminishing its significance, I suggest that the analogy between the sugarcane and the people of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean is vital to the overall understanding of the entire text precisely because of its positioning: it hovers over the entire book, framing the cane worker's life story that has been transcribed, translated, rearranged, and contextualized by the anthropologist, whose role alternates between that of writer, narrator, and interlocutor. Much like an epigraph—even if the passage does not consist of an actual quotation—, Mintz's first observations set the tone for the story that follows.

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[30] Plácido, himself a mulatto, wrote "La Flor de Caña" in the 1830s; he also wrote two other allegorical poems about Cuba, "La Flor de la Piña," and "La Flor del Café."

[31] It should be noted that Mintz does not mention Ortiz in *Worker In the Cane*, and mentions him only twice and very briefly in a work published 26 years later, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1986). I believe that Mintz's metaphorical digression was entirely spontaneous and not influenced by Ortiz.

Mapping the contents of a book and examining its *layout*—the word itself carries connotations of planning, surveying, and charting—reveals more than mere editorial decisions. As a close reading of the first passage of *Worker in the Cane* demonstrates, the arrangement of texts of different provenance or purpose within a single body of work influences the connections readers make between these texts (the intratext); and it can also guide a reader's attention in a particular direction or focus as he or she reads. Kent D. Palmer defines intratextuality as a process that involves "treating the given text or set of texts as a fractal landscape which we explore in detail with the full realization of their overlapping and interpenetrating internal contexts and signs that express concepts and archetypal motifs" (Palmer 1). Intratextual relationships are not limited to writing (a text and an epigraph, for instance); they may exist in connection with illustrations, photographs, captions, book titles, chapter titles and headings, to name a few examples. In the case I have just discussed, Mintz's observations about the hybrid origins of people and sugarcane in the Caribbean are laid out facing the introduction to the book, and as such they become the "archetypal motif" that we as readers find already woven into the very first words of the book: [32] "This book is the story of a man's life."[33] Our reading—provided we do not skip directly to the introduction—is conditioned by the intratextual reading of the *Flor de caña* passage and the ethnographic biography that follows it.

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[32] Kent D. Palmer states that the signs, concepts, and motifs that arise from intratextuality are "haunt[ed] [by]… the unconscious of the text itself, not our unconscious, but the unconscious of the otherness of the text that comes from the dimensions of the artifact that are not fully controlled consciously by the author nor fully interpreted by the critic."

[33] In the preface, Mintz stresses that *Worker In the Cane* "is the *autobiography* of an average man" (ix, my emphasis). This categorization emphasizes Mintz's role as transcriber and chronicler, rather than writer. Mintz also insists that Taso is not "typical," representative of others, or ordinary" (ix).

1.6 Plantation Pictures: the Intertextuality of Text and Image in *Le Galion: Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*

After examining the intertextuality of the flower of the cane in Sidney Mintz's anthropological study of a Puerto Rican sugarcane worker, I will now discuss a book of photographs by David Damoison, accompanied by the writing of contemporary Martinican author Raphaël Confiant, which was published about forty years later. Somewhat difficult to classify, *Le Galion: Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!* (2000) (Le Galion: Cane, age-old pain oh tenderness!) is a large-format book of black and white photographs taken on Le Galion plantation in La Trinité, in the north of Martinique during research trips in 1995 and 1998. A working plantation and refinery, Le Galion dates back to the late eighteenth century (the plantation house is indicated on local maps from 1770) and has produced sugar and molasses rum since 1865, ("Patrimoine de France"). Of the twenty-seven photographs in the book, plus two additional images that appear on the front and back covers, all except one (a picture of two straw hats and a cutlass on the ground strewn with cane leaves) feature laborers ostensibly going about ordinary activities: working in the cane fields and the refinery, waiting in line to collect their wages, eating, resting, listening to music, washing their clothes, and playing dominos. The pictures have an ethnographic quality to them, even those that are unmistakably posed portraits. Considered on their own—that is, independently from the accompanying text by Confiant—, Damoison's pictures would likely be classified as photojournalism or works of social realism, in that their subject is the lives and labor of the rural working class. Although the men and women in the pictures, the *coupeurs* and *amarreuses*—the male cane-cutters and female tiers who gather the cut cane and fasten it

in *paquets* (bundles)—, struggle and perspire in their tattered clothing (one shot in particular is trained on the torn and patched sleeve of a worker's uniform in the refinery) as they carry out their tasks, they appear to do so with a quiet dignity. None of the photographs shows the laborers smiling, nevertheless there is an intensity in their gaze and a subtle confidence in their stance that stems from a keen awareness of their environment and the knowledge of how to function within it. The images neither glorify nor demonize the capitalist plantation system to which the lives of these men and women are tied. Rather, the plantation and refinery appear more as a backdrop. Although the portrayal of the workers is sympathetic, it does not appear to sentimentalize their labor or their poverty.

A marked contrast exists between the photographer's framing of Le Galion Plantation and how Confiant captures it in writing. The antonymic adjectives in the book's title, *douleur* and *tendresse*, express this representational duality.[34] As one reads Confiant's text, however, any uncertainty about the book's perspective on the legacy of the sugarcane plantation in Martinique fades away and its position comes into sharp focus.

The title is the best place to start examining Confiant's writing in *Le Galion*, not only for chronological reasons, but because it encapsulates and defines the work as a whole.[35] The title brings to light a different set of priorities from those one might glean

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[34] I use the term "antonymic adjective" rather than "antonym" to convey a sense of contradiction between these opposing sensations and because "pain" and "tenderness" are not true antonyms.

[35] Confiant's 2004 novel, *La panse du chacal* (The Belly of the Jackal) contains no less than three three-page segments titled "Canne, douleur séculaire ô tendresse!" The full text of *Le Galion* is subdivided into these three sections and is almost identical to the original, with the exception of a few word changes. The most notable difference is the inclusion of field workers of East Indian origin among the Afro-Antillian workers in *La panse du chacal*, whereas they are not mentioned

from Damoison's pictures alone. While people are at the center of most of the images, the title emphasizes the locale (Le Galion) and the focal point within that locale is the cane, not the men and women who tend it, even though their presence is indicated by the emotions of *douleur* and *tendresse* only they can experience. Damoison's pictures on their own serve as a stark reminder of the physical and material hardship endured by the majority of Martinicans in the past, especially in the 1930s (the narrative period of Confiant's sugarcane trilogy) when the livelihood of ninety percent of the population depended on the cultivation of cane (Lépine 26). In its pageantry, Confiant's writing glosses over the toil of those who keep up old agricultural traditions not by vocation or as members of a select guild, but out of economic necessity. Relics of another era, the working men and women of Le Galion were left behind, eluded by the promises of assimilation, education, and a diversified economy that would free them from the grip of the sugar monoculture in a post-1946 departmentalized Martinique.[36]

1946 marks the year—the *fatal* year, for the Créolistes and other pro-independence groups[37]—in which Martinique's Négritude poet and deputy to the French National Assembly, Aimé Césaire, made an impassioned plea for a change in Martinique's status from colony to department (an administrative sub-region of France) and for French financial support in "repair[ing] the colonies' infrustructure and

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at all in *Le Galion.* See Chapter Two for a sustained examination of Confiant's historican and literary revisions to the earlier text.

[36] France's four *plus vieilles colonies* became departments in 1946, Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guyana, and la Réunion.

[37] Michael Dash points out that only a small minority of *békés* and "a handful of prescient spirits" who were anxious about the future of local economies (particularly sugarcane and its derivatives) and concerned about the weakening of local influence on important political decisions, opposed Departmentalization at the time (Dash 1995: 3).

improv[ing] the well-being of the poor" (Qtd. In Hintjens 23).[38] For most Martinicans, departmentalization held the promise that the island's residents would receive the same social benefits and treatment as French citizens (23). However, one generation later, embittered by the loss of local industry, culture, traditions, and the Creole language, and unwilling witnesses to the rapid encroachment of French cultural and consumer products (and Martinicans' dependence on them), the influx of tourism, and increasing environmental degradation, many Martinicans view it as the source of these varied problems. The title, *Canne, douleur séculaire ô tendresse!*, therefore suggests not only a sense of continuity with the past (the sweet sorrow of centuries of cane), but also a form of historical erasure. Thus, the men and women in the fields and on the pages of Le Galion appear untouched by time, not only through their age-old occupation and contact with the land, their adherence to a more "natural" or seasonal calendar, their traditional work clothes—the khaki trousers, *madras* headdresses, and plantation uniforms—, and the typical Creole dishes of salted pork and red beans they eat, but because they are a fragile link to a self-contained local economic and cultural structure that has all but vanished.[39] In a prescription reminiscent of Ernest Renan in "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation" (1882), Glissant describes the "obligation [of a Caribbean subject] to remake oneself every time on the basis of a series of forgettings" ("Creolization" 86).[40] None of the

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[38] Hintjens is quoting and translating from transcripts of Césaire's speeches at the *Assemblée Générale* (Césaire 1945: 455).

[39] My descriptions of traditional Martinican clothing and food come directly from the pages and pictures of *Le Galion*.

[40] "L'oubli et, je dirai même, l'erreur historique sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation, et c'est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger" (Forgetting, and I would go so far as to say, historical errors, are an essential factor in the creation of a nation, and it is thus that advances in historical studies are often dangerous for nationality) (Renan 174).

aftereffects of Departmentalization are visible in Confiant's refashioning of history in *Le Galion: Canne, douleur séculaire ô tendresse!* It is as if it never happened.[41]

The centenary implied by the word *séculaire* marks a commemoration, the honoring of the memory of the sugarcane experience. Like many official tributes, however, Confiant's literary homage in *Le Galion* and in his sugarcane trilogy undergoes a selective process of representation by which certain historical episodes—and certain versions of those episodes—are privileged over others in order to produce a seamless historical narrative or first-degree reading which transforms a particular experience into a universally shared experience. As A. James Arnold explains, all of these selective moments in Martinican history that are present in the fiction of the Créolistes "constitute what the French historian Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, each one a locus of collective memory, which together sustain a certain idea of the past and invest it with ideological significance" (Arnold 1998: 42). Confiant has himself applied the term *lieu de mémoire*, in his words, "paradoxically," to refer to "the ruins of our [Martinique's] factories" (Gosson 144). By marshaling cultural and popular history and folklore, Confiant recuperates the experience of the Martinican masses in the first half of the twentieth century into the island's official history, giving it weight in the public and political spheres. Although commemorative ceremonies can serve as occasions to right past wrongs or to recognize communities or segments of a population previously relegated to the margins of history (the "official" linear Western conception of history in the sense of Édouard Glissant's *Histoire* with a capital "H"), they run the risk of consigning new groups to oblivion, or simply re-visioning and re-writing the past.

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[41] 1946 becomes a parenthesis in Martinican history and in much of Confiant's fiction.

The political and cultural arenas are not at all separate in Martinique, as Fred Réno affirms: "culture gives meaning to (political) action" (Réno 1997: 406).[42] (Re)telling the stories of the masses through the medium of fiction and the autobiographical novel is consistent with the endeavors of many other Caribbean writers.[43] In the new introduction to the 1988 Shocken Books edition of his autobiographical novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1954), Barbadian novelist George Lamming explains that

> [t]he novel has a particular function in the Caribbean. The writer's preoccupation has been mainly with the poor; and fiction has served as a way of restoring these lives—this world of men and women from down below—to a proper order of attention; to make their reality the supreme concern of the total society. But along with this desire, there was also the writer's recognition that this world, in spite of its long history of deprivation, represented the womb from which he himself had sprung, and

[42] In his essay, "La créolisation de l'espace public à la Martinique," Fred Réno cites anthropologist Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Culture* to explain that people communicate, carry out, and develop their knowledge and attitudes about life through structures of understanding whose privileged arena is the political one (Geertz 15; Réno 406). Réno: "[L]a culture donne du sens à l'action. Dès lors il importe d'éviter d'en faire une sphère isolée des autres sphères sociales et de la concevoir à la fois comme facteur de résistance au changement et moteur de l'innovation" (Culture gives meaning to action. Therefore it is important to avoid treating it as a separate sphere that is isolated from other social spheres, and to conceive it as both a factor of resistance to change and a motor of innovation) (406). A number of scholars have drawn attention to the inherent contradiction between Confiant and the Créolistes co-option of a revisited and revisionist past toward political ends.

[43] While my research focuses primarily on Confiant's fiction, it is noteworthy that Confiant has also written two memoirs, one of childhood and one of adolescence: *Ravines du devant-jour* (1993) and *Le cahier de romances* (2000), both published in Gallimard's "Haute Enfance" series. *Ravines du devant-jour* received the Cuban literary establishment's most prestigious award, the *Premio Casa de las Americas*, in 1995.

> the richest collective reservoir of experience on which the creative imagination could draw (xi).

The major difference between Confiant's and Lamming's "restorative" strategies lies in the narrative period of their novels. *In the Castle of My Skin* accompanies the author's own life trajectory from his childhood in Barbados to his experiences as a secondary school teacher in Trinidad, and his return to his native land. Lamming's *bildungsroman* springs from personal experience and describes a milieu with which the author was intimately familiar. Much of Confiant's fiction, as well as that of fellow Créoliste Patrick Chamoiseau, is set before his birth in 1951, during "a few privileged moments in Martini[c]an history" (Arnold 1998: 42). Confiant confirmed this fact in a 1993 interview in the French weekly entertainment magazine *Télérama*:

> My imaginative world stops in the mid 1960s when the sugar refineries closed one by one, beat out by the [sugar] beet. When we started stripping the cane [fields]. I would be incapable of writing [the word] "highway" or "television" in one of my novels. It's this sugarcane society that interests me, from which the Martinican people and their culture was born. Even if it's not clear what it is to be Creole. Everything is a mosaic,[44] everything is complex here (Qtd in Sabbah 1994: 86-87).[45]

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[44] The mosaic also conveys the notion of a whole made up of many parts.

[45] The original comments in French are: "Mon imaginaire s'arrête au milieu des années soixante, quand les usines à sucre ont fermé une à une, concurrencées par la betterave. Quand on a commencé à arracher la canne. Je serais incapable d'écrire 'autoroute' ou 'télévision' dans un de mes romans. C'est cette société de la canne qui m'intéresse, c'est d'elle que sont nés le peuple martiniquais et sa culture. Même si ce n'est pas une évidence d'être créole. Toute est mosaïque, tout est complexe ici." For the complete interview see *Télérama* 2273, (August 4, 1993).

Confiant's exposure to what he refers to as *l'univers de la canne* took place during visits to his grandfather's farm as a six year-old boy. "[I]'m nostalgic for my grandfather who carried me on his horse, and for a whole world," he declared in an interview, reiterating his attachment to the period before the 1960s and "that universe, the sugarcane plantation" (Anglade, "Beauté de la canne").[46]

1.7 Plantation Mythologies

The *Galion* album provides a condensed overview of the symbolic and almost mystical power that the plantation world wields over the imagination of *Créoliste* writers. Whereas Patrick Chamoiseau transposes the memory and traditions of the plantation to an intermediary space he calls *l'En-ville*, the working-class hillside neighborhoods of the Martinican capital Fort-de-France in his novels *Chronique des sept misères* (1986), *Solibo Magnifique* (1988), and *Texaco* (1992), Confiant often chooses rural settings for his novels.[47] Once again, the title *Le Galion: Canne, douleur séculaire ô tendresse*, offers a glimpse into the process of mythification of the plantation experience which is so central to the Créoliste literary project from an aesthetic, cultural, linguistic, and political perspective.

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[46] Confiant's original statement was "[J]'ai la nostalgie de mon grand-père qui me prenait sur son cheval et de tout un monde…C'est cet univers-là, la plantation de canne à sucre, cet univers qui a disparu dans les années soixante, qui correspond à mon imaginaire" ("Beauté de la canne").

[47] Chamoiseau's *l'En-ville* is similar to the Trinidadian "yard" evoked in works such as V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* (1959) and Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979). Examples of other Confiant novels set in rural areas besides, those of the *trilogie*, include *Le barbare enchanté* (2003) and *La panse du chacal* (2004). Most studies of place and space in *Créoliste* novels have focused on urban space, particularly marginalized or interstitial urban spaces that mediate between the city and the country, such as the *bidonvilles* (slums) situated on the hillsides of Fort-de-France and the marketplace.

According to Roger Toumson, the complicated relationship between language and culture, two unstable and ever-changing systems of representation, emerges from a "double mythology of race and language" in the Caribbean and New World context (Toumson 1998: 116-117). Any attempt to elucidate a concise definition of the word Creole reveals the interdependence of culture, race, and language, and their constitutive roles in any conception of Creole identity. [48] As Toumson explains, collective identity in the New World is tied to the pivotal event of African slavery, and every local and regional expression of cultural identity derives from specific biological, linguistic, and cultural positions (Toumson 1996: 72-73). The etymology of the word "Creole" is inherently "bivalent," originally (in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) designating the plantation societies along the Atlantic coast of the New World as an administrative region of the Europe, and anyone of European, African, or mixed-race descent who was born in the New World (77-78). As affective ties to Europe weakened among American-born elites and anti-colonial sentiment grew in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term Creole became a marker of racial difference that only applied to the white landowning class (78). The definition eventually evolved to where it signified "autochthonous blacks," and to the broadly accepted contemporary meaning of a "vernacular language spoken by insular blacks." (77). The creational myth of the plantation accommodated and gave rise to all of these definitions of Creole and Creoleness (75).

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[48] Roger Toumson studies the etymology of Creole as a linguistic and a racial term in "Blancs créoles et nègres créoles: Généalogie d'un imaginaire créole" (1996). See also *Plantation Society in the Americas* 5.1(1998), especially Michel-Rolph Trouillot's article, "Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context" (8-28).

Reading the title of Confiant and Damoison's book as "a play on words" opens up new interpretive possibilities not only for the *Galion* album, but also for the sugarcane trilogy, and I would argue, for the Créoliste project as a whole. The actual name of this working plantation and sugar refinery, "Le Galion," is heavy with symbolism. A "galleon" is a heavy square-rigged sailing ship used mainly by the Spanish for both war and commerce between Europe and the Americas from the late fifteenth to early eighteenth centuries (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary). Such a vessel and the transatlantic journeys associated with it evoke the memory of slavery, in particular, the harrowing voyage of millions of African slaves aboard slave ships to the New World. In the first essay of *Poétique de la relation* (1990), "La barque ouverte" ("The Open Ship"), Édouard Glissant presents the journey aboard the *bateau négrier* as metaphor for a "no-place" where all ties with identity were severed,[49] and the suffocating belly of the ship itself as *une matrice* (a matrix or a womb) and *un gouffre-matrice* (abyss-womb), the generative source of internal clamor ("ta clameur") and of an unknown collective destiny ("de toute uninanimité à venir") (Glissant 1990: 18). As J. Michael Dash explains, the slave ship and the plantation are both "exemplary places where the unknown is part of the shared experience" (Dash 1995: 176). Both these sites of memory are envisioned as *gouffres-matrice*. The uncanny (or fortuitous?) namesake of Damoison and Confiant's plantation further underscores the link between the ship and the plantation system as "wombs of the world" (*des ventres du monde*) for people of African descent in the New World (Glissant 1990: 89).

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[49] "Cette barque ne vogue-t-elle pas en éternité aux limites d'un non-monde, fréquenté de nul Ancêtre?" (Does this boat not drift eternally on the edge of a non-world, inhabited by no Ancestors ?) (Glissant 1990: 19).

1.8 The Sacred Ritual of Sugar

As I have stressed, Confiant's text in *Le Galion* does not serve as the unobtrusive caption for Damoison's images. In fact, there is a clear narrative disjuncture between the writing and images: Confiant's words dress the pictures, adding on layers of meaning that deflect from the sobriety of the photographs: they do not tell what we see, but rather *retell* and *recontextualize* the experience of the *laboureurs de la canne*. In Confiant's rendition, the cane field is a sacred place, where the workers commune with the surrounding environment and the millions of stalks of cane that await their tender harvesting through "des gestes d'une extrême douceur" (movements of an extreme gentleness) (1).[50]

Pathetic fallacy abounds in the text: "L'usine, elle, gémit" (The refinery, [she] groans) (8) and the cane leaves harm the workers with their "implacable méchantise" (implacable meanness) (6), for the cane is alive, "chaque pied de canne vit" (each stalk of cane is alive), the writer asserts, "chaque touffe de canne crie la souffrance du nègre…" (each tuft of cane cries out the suffering of black people) (1). Representations of the cane swing unpredictably between *douceur* (gentleness) and *rancune* (vengefulness), in keeping with the contradictions evoked in the words "douleur" and "tendresse" in the title. The cane field can also be a battlefield where the *coupeur* must lay siege to "des battaillons de canne" with his *coutelas* (cutlass or machete) (1), and the task of cutting is "un grand combat" (2).[51]

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[50] There are no page numbers in *Le Galion*. My page numbers refer only to pages of the written text.

[51] The metaphors of doing battle with the cane do not appear to be a literary invention by Confiant. Mintz also transcribes the use of similar expressions by Puerto Ricans in *Worker in the Cane*. A Brazilian documentary film directed by Jorge Wolney Atalla about sugarcane workers,

The labor of cane in *Le Galion* is represented as a noble struggle for life and for art, "un combat à la mort-à la vie" (2). He who accomplishes this work is "un nègre savant" (5), a master of "l'art de plier la lame du coutelas jusqu'en son point de distorsion tandis que la meule crécelle comme au jour du Vendredi-Saint" (the art of bending the blade to the point of distortion, while the grindstone rattles as on Good Friday) (1). Stratified by color, class, and gender, Le Galion Plantation (the "real" and the literary plantation), like the plantation complex in Martinique and in the rest of the Americas, reflects these distinctions through the different types of jobs in the fields and in the refinery. Confiant maintains these distinctions, especially the "sharply gendered" (Arnold 1994: 5) aspect of the work, in *Le Galion*. Working in pairs, the male *coupeur* and the female *amarreuse*, carry out their separate tasks, the men cutting, the women gathering and tying the cut cane into piles. Sometimes the intimacy of this work relationship leads to romantic trysts in the fields, adding a reproductive layer to the cultural-nationalist discourse of the plantation: the male and female archetypes unite to ensure the survival of their cultural knowledge. The plantation landscape in *Le Galion* and Confiant's sugarcane novels is imbued with a powerful symbolism that evokes a timeless connection with "a people's 'national soul'" that emerges and is solidified through the daily interaction of a people (a collectivity) with their environment (Alonso 202).[52]

A vida em cana (2001), shows workers using these types of expressions to describe the job of cutting cane. Besides "cane," the word *cana* is used colloquially in Portuguese to refer to a "prison." The film's title means both "Life in the Cane" and "In Prison for Life."

[52] I believe that Confiant's conception of Creole identity is very similar to nineteenth-century European cultural nationalism, which holds that each nation possesses its own unique culture and language that results from a people's connection to their native landscape and their knowledge of how the nation and culture came to be. Cultural nationalism relies on the idea of a shared culture

Religious imagery permeates the text, from the depiction of the *amarreuse* as "une déesse nocturne" (a nocturnal goddess) (2) to the description of the refinery as "une cathédrale sombre" (a dark cathedral), to the reference to Good Friday, and culminating with the transubstantiation of raw cane into fresh sugar: "Il est vénérable ce sucre neuf comme le sang clair d'une passion qui n'aura jamais de fin" (This new sugar is venerable like the clear blood of a passion that will never end) (5). In keeping with the conflicting *douleur*/*tendresse* vision of the sugar cane experience, Confiant simultaneously applies negative and positive adjectives to describe the worker, the cane, and the world of the plantation, so that "la canne sécrète tendresse et rancune" (the cane secretes tenderness and resentment) (1) and the khaki uniforms of the *coupeurs* become "l'uniforme de la grande misère et de l'absolue grandeur" (the uniform of the greatest wretchedness and absolute grandeur) (5).

Finding beauty and dignity in one of Martinique's oldest and most disdained professions, Confiant seeks to ennoble[53] the "lowest of the low" in *Le Galion*, for cane is the work of yesterday's slaves and of today's most impoverished segment of the population.[54] The tribute he pays to the men and women of Le Galion Plantation—the book is dedicated to "les hommes et femmes rencontrés lors des campagnes 1995 et 1998 sur l'habitation et l'usine du Galion" (title page)—and to those who work in the fictional

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or collective identity. See Alonso and Arnold (Créolité) for a discussion of the links between European *volksgeist* and Caribbean and Latin American fiction.

[53] Chamoiseau's use of the preposition "de" in the name Oiseau de Cham, also has this ennobling effect.

[54] As previously stated, there is a shift in how Confiant defines this population. In *Le Galion* (2000), the *laboureurs de la canne* are described exclusively as Afro-Antillean ("Nègres, Négresses"), while in *La panse du chacal* (2004), "Indiens" is inserted alongside "Nègres."

cane fields of his *romans de la canne*, is a painstaking reconstruction of a lost time, of a world that, as Confiant acknowledges, has ceased to exist since the 1960s.

Confiant's restorative strategy is an example of what critic Elizabeth Ezra refers to as "salvage ethnography":

> The redemptive nature of salvage ethnography, its claim to preserve the "authentic" or "essential" elements of cultural identity in writing, is based on a pastoral model of prelapsarian harmony, which assumes that corruption and decay have been brought about by increased contact with industrial culture (134).[55]

Inspired by anthropologist James Clifford's use of the term in his essay "On Ethnographic Allegory," Ezra identifies the strategy of "salvage ethnography" in the works of the French novelist, diplomat, and travel writer Paul Morand, although it can also as be found in the writing of earlier *fin-de-siècle* travel writers like Pierre Loti and Victor Segalen. Fearing the disappearance of ethnographic diversity in a rapidly modernizing—and, they believed, *homogenizing*—world, Loti and Segalen went to great lengths in their search for people and places as yet untouched by global tourism and capitalism.[56] This was of course a great challenge even in their time, and their writing often reflects their disappointment and pessimistic outlook. While Segalen created a sense of distance and strangeness from his foreign subject through a poetics of opacity in

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[55] Alonso notes this same "nostalgia for an agrarian past" in the *novela de la tierra*, explaining that this landowning elites felt threatened by immigration, industrialism, and new economic markets (196).

[56] See Segalen's unfinished *Essai sur l'exotisme* (originally titled "Notes sur l'exotisme"). The homogenization of which he foretold was not only cultural, but also racial. The increased contact between cultures, he felt, would inevitably dilute the racial distinctions between the world's populations. He was therefore against miscegenation, and not in favor of it, as Glissant and Confiant—by way of Glissant—have affirmed.

his poems and prose,[57] Loti, on the other hand sought to exile himself from modernity by living and associating only with what he deemed the most "authentic" people and elements in his foreign surroundings, cutting himself off from any possibility of dynamic cultural contact. In his discussion of "Sameness and Diversity" ("Le Même et le Divers") in *Le discours antillais*, Glissant acknowledges that in spite of Loti's caricatured portrayals of otherness, along with Segalen, Paul Claudel and André Malraux, he deserves credit for his attempt to breach the limits of Sameness (the West) in order to explore Diversity (193; trans. 102).

Of the two variants of salvage ethnography, Confiant's strategy in *Le Galion*, with its nostalgic outlook and carefully selected historical backdrop, more closely resembles Loti's than Segalen's. Unlike Loti, however, Confiant's novels do not entirely eschew industrialized settings. As Confiant explains, "industrialization is not a danger for Martinique because Martinique used to be an industrialized country" (Gosson 143). In fact, he asserts, the ruins of factories (sugar refineries) constitute a vital part of the Martinican landscape, without which the plantation landscape is incomplete, since "you can't transform it [sugarcane] without a factory" (144). The end of Confiant's narrative chronology coincides with the demise of the sugarcane industry in the mid-1960s, when in Confiant's words, "Martinique became de-industrialized" (144). Although the

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[57] The Créolistes, by way of Glissant, claim an affinity for Segalen's poetics. While Glissant redefines the Segalenian poetics of "diversity" ("le divers") to suit his own poetics of textual opacity in *Le discours antillais* and *Poétique de la relation*, the Créolistes quote Segalen out of context. *Éloge de la créolité* features a quote from *Essai sur l'exotisme* as an epigraph, interpreting "diversity" as a call for multiculturalism and cultural cross-fertilization, something it most certainly was not. Terms used by Segalen such as "bovarism" appear in the *Éloge* without explanation. Similarly, the authors re-use Glissantian "diversity," renaming it "la diversalité;" Glissant's dynamic process of "créolisation" becomes "la créolité," an essentialist multicultural identity theory.

inclusion of the refinery may appear contradictory to the concept of salvage ethnography, I maintain that its subsequent disappearance makes it as legitimate a space of memory as the agricultural landscape to which it was tied. We find the last vestiges of this interdependence between agriculture and industry documented both visually and narratively in *Le Galion*.

1.9 Writing Landscape

"Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye," writes Homi Bhabha in his introduction to *Nation and Narration* (1). This "romantic and excessively metaphorical" image of both the nation and narration, he goes on to explain, is the result of the West's "cultural compulsion…[toward] the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force" (1). I would like to extend this idea of an obsession with unity or wholeness, to the representation of landscape in the sugarcane novel. Because the plantation as an institution is characterized by its self-sufficiency (like a medieval fiefdom) and the literary plantation functions as a microcosm of the region or the nation, both aspire toward unity.

Bhabha's expression "[the] horizons in the mind's eye," recalls the connection between vision, the imagination, and the cognitive process. Denis Cosgrove summarizes this connectedness in terms of "the modern usage of landscape," which for him "denote[s] a bounded geographical space and the exercise of sight or vision as a principle means of associating that space with human concerns" (Cosgrove 249). For Alonso, the cultural landscape or "the autochthonous" aspects in the *criollista* novel are a "rhetorical

figure" encompassing three elements: "spoken language, geographical location, and a given human activity," which are "intertwined in a complex synecdochical fashion" (206-207). While Cosgrove focuses primarily on European landscape painting at home and in its colonies in the essay "Landscape and the European Sense of Sight: Eyeing Nature," his observations concerning the visual transformation of material space into landscape are useful for an understanding of the literary landscapes of the sugarcane novel.

A good place to begin is by examining words generally associated with vision rather than writing, such as geography, topography, and landscape.[58] To speak of these three terms is to evoke the visual. However, a study of their etymology reveals that the act of seeing and representing how we view the world around us is a culturally mediated interpretive process. The word geography is composed of the Greek *geo* (earth) and *graphie* (writing). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it primarily as "the science which has for its object the description of the earth's surface, treating of its form and physical features, its natural and political divisions, the climate, productions, population, etc;" it is also "the study of a subject in its geographical aspects," as in the study of linguistic geography. While similar to geography, topography focuses on a smaller area or locality. Its roots are the Greek *topos* (place) and *graphie* (writing). Topography is "the science or practice of describing a particular, place, city, town, manor, parish, or tract of land." In a sense, topography involves mapping, representing, and delimiting "the features of a region or locality collectively." Originating from the Dutch *landschap* ("land" and "ship"), the noun landscape "was introduced as a technical term for painters." Landscape designates a pictorial representation of "natural inland scenery, as

[58] All the definitions and etymologies of geography, topography, and landscape are taken from *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

distinguished from a sea picture, a portrait, etc." The background scenery within a portrait or subject painting can also be called landscape. More than geography and topography, landscape emphasizes a limited scope of vision or point of view through the prism of the one who represents it. The *Oxford English Dictionary* specifies that landscape is "a view or prospect of natural inland scenery, such that can be taken in at a glance from one point of view" (a vista). Landscapes are essentially rural, but they can be both natural and agricultural, or somewhere in between the two; often they are "considered a product of modifying and shaping processes and agents (usually natural)." To landscape (as a verb) involves representing something as a landscape by picturing or depicting it. A second meaning of the verb highlights the act of arranging, shaping or transforming something into a type of landscape (as in laying out a garden). Landscaping also involves "conceal[ing] or embellish[ing] (a building, a road, etc.) by making it a part of a continuous and harmonious landscape."

The idea of composing a seamless landscape by selecting the elements that should be included (as well as those to be excluded) is analogous for both painter and writer. It is not at all surprising to find Confiant's *trilogie de la canne* described as "une fresque foisonnante" (an abounding fresco) of Martinique's plantations during an historic moment of colonial unionization and Vichy occupation.[59] Far from being merely scientific, natural, or ethnographic, the historical fresco that emerges is an allegorical portrait of a time and place—a vital site of memory—inhabited by archetypal characters

[59] See back cover of the second book in the series, *Régisseur du rhum*. The first novel, *Commandeur du sucre*, is set in 1936, during the brief tenure of France's *Front Populaire* government. *Régisseur du rhum* and *La Dissidence* show the build-up to World War II, the Vichy occupation and the mounting Resistance movement from the perspective of Martinique's sugar plantation society.

that embody the ideological and aesthetic tenets of the *Créolité* movement. Confiant's depiction of the plantation world resembles attempts by nineteenth-century French and German geographers and painters to represent a landscape, *pays*, or region, as "an ensemble of physical and human forms as they appeared in the field or on the topographical map" (Cosgrove 251). As Cosgrove explains, the rural *tableau* visually conveyed "the expression of the nation's soul" (251). Confiant's *romans de la canne* and the earlier *novelas de la caña* are the expression of an imagined plantation (a written landscape). Although these works promote a fiercely autochthonous aesthetic, they nevertheless remain deeply rooted in nineteenth-century European scientific and literary discourses.[60]

[60] In Chapters Three and Four, I discuss some of the similarities between Confiant's novels and novels by Balzac (Chapter Three) and Zola (Chapter Four).

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Chapter Two

Intertextuality and Indianness: Revising Literary, Historical, and National Narratives in *Régisseur du rhum*, *La panse du chacal*, and *Aurore*

> Revision poses a curious problem for the theorist because it is as difficult to define as it is to direct. Not only does it imply and require re-vision, or re-seeing, but also the prior existence of a vision, a "seeing," encoded in text. – Phoebe Davidson and Naomi Stephen ("Toward a Social Theory of Revision").
>
> Everything which made the Indian alien in the society gave him strength … More important than religion was his family organization, an enclosing self-sufficient world … as difficult for the outsider to penetrate as for one of its members to escape. It protected and imprisoned, a static world, awaiting decay. – Edward Kamau Brathwaite (*Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* 50).

Introduction

This chapter explores the process of revision as a literary and historical praxis in the sugarcane novel, concentrating primarily on the work of Martinican writer Raphaël Confiant (b. 1951) and making comparisons to novels by another Martinican writer,

Joseph Zobel (1915-2006), and by Guadeloupean writer and politician Ernest Moutoussamy (b. 1941). As I shall discuss, Martinican literary and cultural history avail themselves as major, and often, inseparable preoccupations for Confiant. In his fiction, Confiant frequently makes reference to and revises the works of other writers (most notably, Zobel) as a means of situating his own work—and the *créolité* movement, more generally—within a carefully constructed Creole literary history. This dual process of making literary revisions (the process of editing and adapting the work of other writers) and reinterpreting Martinican history and foundational myths through fiction can also be observed within Confiant's evolving corpus, particularly through his portrayal of cultural diversity and integration in Martinican society. Focusing on representations of East Indians (who arrived in the French Caribbean after emancipation) and their descendents, I trace how Confiant's treatment of this minority group has changed in his works of fiction, mainly, as well as in his non-fiction texts, showing how his literary practice and definition of *créolité* have gradually expanded to include ethnic groups that were not previously considered to be Creole.

As I explained in the introductory chapter, when applied to the *roman de la canne*, intertextuality is a textual, geographical, and metaphorical conception. In the first part of this chapter, I place *Régisseur du rhum* (The Rum Steward, 1999), the second novel in Confiant's sugarcane trilogy, in an intertextual dialogue with the Martinican writer Joseph Zobel's novel *La rue Cases-Nègres* (*Black Shack Alley*, 1950; trans. 1980), the novel that arguably serves as the cornerstone of the sugarcane novel genre in the French Caribbean. Indeed, it would be impossible to write about the genre in the French Caribbean without discussing Zobel's contribution. Although *La rue Cases-Nègres* does

not in fact address the subject of East Indian integration in Martinique, an analysis of Confiant's adaptation and incorporation of elements from Zobel's semi-autobiographical novel in *Régisseur du rhum* provides a vital overview of Confiant's interest in engaging with and revising Martinican literature. That impulse is not limited to the work of other writers such as Zobel, but actually takes place within his own expanding corpus. In order to illustrate the latter, in the second part of this chapter, I document Confiant's revisions to one of his own texts, from an earlier version (*Le Galion: Canne, douleur séculaire ô tendresse!*, published in 2000) in which he defines Martinican plantation culture solely in terms of the contributions of black Creole culture, to a later version (the novel *La panse du chacal*, which was published four years after *Le Galion*) in which he includes Martinicans of East Indian ancestry along with those of African heritage as active participants in *créolité*.

In the final part of this chapter, I compare Confiant's *La panse du chacal* (The Belly of the Jackal, 2004), a novel about two generations of Indo-Caribbeans working on sugarcane plantations in Martinique, and Ernest Moutoussamy's novel *Aurore* (Dawn, 1987), which recounts the struggles of East Indian indentured laborers who came to work on sugarcane plantations in Guadeloupe in the mid-nineteenth century. While both works are ostensibly historical novels, the visions of the past in *La panse du chacal* and *L'Aurore* are informed by and engage with contemporary political and cultural debates about national culture and who (that is, which cultural and ethnic groups) contributes to it. As Chantal Clavier explains, while the plantation has an enduring presence in literature, it nevertheless "se révèle comme un signifiant ambivalent, épousant les mutations de l'histoire, mais prenant par ailleurs une signification archétypale" (reveals

itself as an ambivalent signifier, incorporating the mutations of history, but also taking on an archetypal signification) (Clavier 689). Consequently, the plantations in *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* function as microcosms for Martinique and Guadeloupe, respectively, and accordingly, each models its author's ideas about ethnic diversity and integration in the island culture at large. Indeed, as I stress throughout this dissertation, the defining trait of the sugarcane novel genre is the embodiment of the nation through a plantation microcosm that accommodates a range of representations, from utopian to dystopian.

Microcosms for the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, the insular environments of the mid nineteenth-and early twentieth-century sugarcane plantations in Confiant's and Moutoussamy's novels mirror—anachronistically, at times—the tensions and challenges faced by East Indians and their descendents in past and present day Martinique and Guadeloupe. Within the broader literary, cultural, and geographic context of the inward-gazing sugarcane novel genre, Confiant's and Moutoussamy's fictional sagas of East Indian migration and settlement in the New World bring to light the challenges of reconciling a dual sense of belonging both to a specific ethnic or cultural minority group and to a larger multicultural and multiethnic society, and of negotiating between insular (Martinican or Guadeloupean) and transnational (East Indian) identities.[61]

In identifying the sugarcane novel as a transnational literary phenomenon of the Americas and the Caribbean, I have simultaneously stressed that each island and nation

[61] Richard D. E. Burton describes Indo-Caribbeans' position of exteriority to the dominant white French and *béké* culture and to the Creole culture of the black Martinican majority as a "double altérité" (Burton 1994: 207).

has produced its own variant of the genre, hence the importance of being attentive to cultural, historical, political, linguistic, and environmental factors in each case. (After all, these are all novels of place.) Martinique and Guadeloupe share both French and closely related spoken Creoles as common languages, have similar histories of colonialism, slavery, and indenture, and a parallel postcolonial (and even, postmodern) sense of identitarian malaise in their status as *régions monodépartementales* of France.[62] Nonetheless, a comparison of *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore*, particularly of the representations of the Indo-Caribbean communities in these islands, reveals different histories and ways of representing those histories of East Indian migration and settlement in each place. The perspective of a Guadeloupian writer of East Indian ancestry is not the same as that of a Martinican writer who does not belong to the East Indian community. In a geographical and metaphorical sense, I envision *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* as two examples of a larger literary pattern of "discontinuous unity" (Benítez-Rojo iii) in the post-plantation Americas in which the plantation imaginary functions as a space in which authors tackle thorny questions of national identity and cultural integration.

2.1 Literary Antecedents: Rewriting *La rue Cases-Nègres* and Martinican Literary History in *Régisseur du rhum*

A classic of Martinican literature, Joseph Zobel's *La rue Cases-Nègres* is also considered the first "roman créole francophone," according to Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant in *Lettres créoles: tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature*

[62] In *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (2008), Christopher L. Miller refers to this condition as the "obliteration of the Caribbean" (328). See especially the section "Return and Returns" in Chapter Two (54-55) and Chapter Thirteen, "Césaire, Glissant, Condé: Reimagining the Atlantic" (325-363).

(Creole Letters: The Caribbean and Continental Literary Landscape, 1991) their selective literary history of Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyana from 1635 to 1975 (190).[63] With the publication of *La rue Cases-Nègres*, the *créolistes* credit Zobel with being one of the first writers to describe the *monde plantationnaire* (world of the plantation) in Martinique from the perspective of the workers in vibrant detail "sans concessions à l'exotisme" (without making any concessions to exoticism) (192). Included in a section titled "Temps-roman: réalistes martiniquais et réalistes merveilleux haïtiens" (Era of the novel: Martinican realists and Haitian magical realists), Zobel's novels, in particular *La rue Cases-Nègres* and *Diab-'là* (1946), are portrayed as peerless examples of social novels because they expose the exploitation of black plantation workers by the *békés* (white Creoles) and the injustice of the colonial system as it is manifested in the urban setting of Fort-de-France as well (193). In *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (2008), Christopher L. Miller cites *La rue Cases-Nègres* as one of three important texts—alongside Aimé Césaire's introduction to Schoelcher's *Esclavage and colonisation* (1948 edition) and Daniel Boukman's play *Les Négriers* (1971)—that "assert simultaneous revolt from below and emancipation from above in Martinique" (88).[64] In other words, both through its content and form, the novel gives voice and agency to the experience of black Martinicans.

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[63] Cécile Van den Avenne aptly describes *Lettres créoles* as a "literary history manifesto," ("L'élément indien de la créolité").

[64] I suspect that Christopher Miller may in fact have confused Zobel's novel with the cinematic adaptation by Eulzhan Palcy. Palcy's film presents a much sharper critique of colonialism and assimilation than Zobel's novel. Perhaps the best and most concise example of these different perspectives, involves Monsieur Médouze's memories and his historical presentation of the end of slavery. In the novel, abolition does not signift change or improve the lives of plantation workers, and there is no mention of blacks participating in the events that led to their liberation (57). However, in the film, it is the violent revolts of black workers that force the white masters

As one of the most popular works of twentieth-century French Caribbean fiction, *La rue Cases-Nègres* is essential reading for anyone seeking to explore the *roman de la canne* in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Additionally, the novel serves as a useful counterpoint to *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* for an examination of the genre as it evolved in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. First of all, while *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* are both works of historical fiction, the Martinique portrayed by Zobel in *La rue Cases-Nègres* is not from the distant past, but from the (then) young author's childhood memories. Secondly, unlike Confiant and Moutoussamy, who are ideologically and politically invested writers, Zobel never directly aligned himself with a specific literary or cultural movement (such as *négritude*, *créolité*, or *indianité*). Finally, while Confiant and Moutoussamy are both postcolonial writers who matured in the 1950s and 1960s[65], Zobel (who was born in 1915), did not really address distinctly postcolonial questions of identity, but rather those that he experienced as a French colonial subject.

La rue Cases-Nègres is the semi-autobiographical story[66] of the young boy José Hassam, who is being raised by his grandmother M'man Tine[67] on the outskirts of a sugarcane plantation. Through its geographical designation, the novel's title simultaneously emphasizes the narrator José's familiarity with the lives of the plantation workers—since his grandmother and all the adult residents of "la rue Cases" work on the

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to free them. In the former, the tone is one of hopelessness, whereas in the latter, the end of slavery is a triumphant narrative.

[65] Moutoussamy was born in 1941; Confiant was born in 1951.

[66] Zobel was inspired to write *La rue Cases-Nègres* after reading Richard Wright's semi-autobiographical novel *Black Boy* (1945) (*Black Shack Alley* xiii).

[67] For the *créolistes*, M'man Tine serves as the literary and cultural "archetype of the Martinican mother" (*Lettres créoles* 193).

plantation—and his position of exteriority to the hardship of working in the cane fields.[68] Although José is an intelligent child and a gifted student, M'man Tine plays a vital role in helping her grandson thwart his fate, making many sacrifices to send José to school, while most of José's childhood friends end up as child laborers in *les petites bandes* (small groups of child laborers), and are thereby condemned to work in the cane fields for the rest of their lives. In fact, the novel can be read simultaneously as a chronicle of José's escape from a future as a sugarcane worker and as his intellectual journey as a student, and later, as a writer, who recuperates the stories of the plantation workers whose experiences and "color" he had never encountered in the French novels he read at the colonial *école laïque et républicaine* (the secular republican school) he attended in Fort-de-France.[69]

Zobel's novel decries the limited opportunities for black Martinicans of his generation and the sense of entrapment in the *monde de la canne*. For the young protagonist, the sugarcane is responsible for the death of Monsieur Médouze, an old cane cutter and *conteur* who enchants José with his tales of an ancestral Africa known as *La Guinée*, and it is the cause of his grandmother's many debilitating ailments. Readers are not shielded from the pathology of this environment of danger and deprivation, which is described in a tone of outrage:

> [U]n champ représentait toujours à mes yeux un endroit maudit où des bourreaux qu'on ne voyait même pas condamnent des nègres, dès l'âge de

[68] Part one of the novel presents life on the plantation from a child's vantage point, while parts two and three focus more on city life in Fort de France, showing how the protagonist and his vision mature, both through experience and through education (Julien 782).

[69] Thinking about the absence of black writers [in French], the narrator José worries that no one will want to read such stories, because as he explains "Je n'avais jamais lu de cette couleur-là" (I had never read about this color) (*La rue Cases-Nègres* 181).

huit ans à sarcler, bêcher, sous des orages qui les flétrissent et des soleils qui dévorent comme feraient des chiens enragés; des nègres en haillons, puant la sueur et le crottin, nourris d'une poignée de farine de manioc et de deux sous de rhum de mélasse, et qui deviennet de pitoyables monstres aux yeux vitreux, aux pieds alourdis d'éléphantiasis, voués à s'abattre un soir dans un sillon et à expirer sur une planche crasseuse, à même le sol d'une cabane vide et infecte.

Non, non! Je renie la splendeur du soleil et de l'envoûtement des mélopées qu'on chante dans un champ de canne à sucre. Et la volupté fauve de l'amour qui consume un vigoureux muletier avec une ardente négresse dans la profondeur d'un champ de canne à sucre. Il y a trop longtemps que j'assiste, impuissant, à la mort lente de ma grandmère par les champs de cannes à sucre (210-211).

[A] field still represented in my eyes, a [cursed] place where executioners, whom you couldn't even see, condemned black people from as young as eight years old, to weed, to dig, in storms that caused them to shrivel up and in the broiling sun that devoured them like mad dogs—blacks in rags, stink[ing] [of] sweat and dung, fed on one handful of cassava flour and two cents' worth of molasses rum, who became pitiful monsters with glassy eyes, with feet made heavy by elephantiasis, destined to collapse one night in a furrow and to breathe their last breath on a dingy plank on the ground of an empty, grimy hut.

> No, no! I wanted no part of the splendor of the sun and the charm of the work songs sung in a sugar cane field. And the wild sensual delight of the love that consumed a vigorous mule-driver with a fiery black girl in the heart of a sugar cane field.[70] For too long […] I had witnessed, helpless as I was, my grandmother dying a slow death in those fields of sugar cane (*Black Shack Alley* 122).[71]

Sounding like an advocate for workers' rights, in this passage, Zobel denounces the inhumane conditions endured by the field workers. Although he acknowledges that there are also stolen moments of beauty and joy to be found in the cane fields, he willfully shuts them out. As Françoise Simasotchi-Bronès observes in her reading of this passage, Zobel criticizes the facile exoticism and bucolic images often associated with the sugarcane fields (Simasotchi-Bronès 42). The days of suffering and misery far outweigh any fleeting experiences of happiness and passion. The daily experience of his grandmother's gradual physical decline overshadows the romantic visions in his budding imagination.

While *La rue Cases-Nègres* is celebrated for its realistic yet tender portrayal of country life in Martinique during the 1920s and 1930s, and serves as a model for subsequent *romans insulaires*, the conclusion of the novel and Zobel's own trajectory conflict programmatically with more recent literary and cultural movements such as *créolité* (as Confiant would later indirectly confirm). The postscript of the novel,

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[70] For Confiant, on the other hand, a tryst between male and female workers in the fields, especially one that takes place between a foreman or a cane cutter (always men) and a binder (the type of fieldwork most frequently done by women) is a mainstay of his plantation novels, while very little attention is paid to the insalubrious aspects of plantation life.

[71] I slightly modified Keith Q. Warner's translation of this passage in the English-language edition, as indicated in brackets.

"Fontainebleau, le 17 juin 1950" (240), reflects the departure from Martinique to France of the character José and the author Joseph Zobel's—a choice that runs counter to *créolité*'s aesthetic and ideological rootedness in the Martinican soil and its "attitude intérieur" (interior attitude) (*Éloge de la créolité* 13).[72] Additionally, as Haseenah Ebrahim notes in her article "Re-reading Race, Class and Identity in Zobel's *La rue Cases-Nègres*" (2002), the novel was written in the early years following departmentalization, and thus it reflects feelings of optimism that assimilationism into French society—most notably through education—would help to put an end to racial discrimination (148). As Ebrahim explains, "José works within the colonizer's system to proclaim his own identity to become a writer" (Ebrahim 147). This vision stands in stark contrast to the film adaptation by Eulzan Palcy (1982) and to the novels of the *Créolistes*, which represent 1930s Martinique from a perspective that is critical of assimilationism and departmentalization.[73]

Confiant, whose scathing biography-cum-"règlement de compte"[74] (settling of scores) with Césaire, *Aimé Césaire: Une traversée paradoxale du siècle* (1993), is an

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[72] Zobel left Martinique in 1946, and moved to France with his wife and three children, in order to continue his study of literature, theatre, and anthropology at the Sorbonne, while teaching at the Lycée François Ier in Fontainebleau. From 1957-1974 he and his family lived in Senegal, where he taught at two different lycées, before he became a producer of educational and cultural programs at Radio Sénégal. Zobel returned to France in 1974, settling near the village of Anduze in the south of France, where he remained for the rest of his life.

[73] While Confiant is critical of departmentalization, which accelerated linguistic and cultural assimilation with the French *métropole*, his treatment of colonialism is often contradictory. Without colonialism there would be no *Créolité*. Colonialism instituted plantation slavery in the tropics and orchestrated the encounter of different peoples in the Caribbean and the Plantation Americas.

[74] Cécile Van den Avenne describes Confiant's book about Césaire as part biography, part "règlement de compte ("L'élément indien de la créolité").

indictment of the co-founder of *négritude*'s political and linguistic attachment to France[75] and his cultural and aesthetic affinity for an imagined Africa, is far more benevolent in his assessment of Zobel's contribution to Martinican letters. Upon Zobel's death in 2006, Confiant composed a eulogy entitled "Josèf ZOBÈL: chapé nan péyi san chapo" ("Joseph Zobel: "the country from which there is no return" as it is translated from the French "le pays d'où on ne revient pas").[76] However, the manner in which Confiant memorialized Zobel reveals his own agenda vis-à-vis Zobel's and his own literary legacies. First, Confiant chose to write Zobel's eulogy in Creole, a language that Zobel no longer mastered towards the end of his life (Zobel spent more than sixty years living outside Martinique, in Senegal and in France), as he admitted in a filmed interview three years before his death ("Joseph Zobel: Le soleil d'ébène").[77] Second, and more significantly, Confiant credits Zobel as "an vwè-douvan an lot mouvman litérè, an mouvman yo ka kriyé…La-Kréyolité" (the precursor of another literary movement we call…*Créolité*)[78] ("Chapénan péyi san chapo"), surely a great compliment from one of

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[75] As I discuss several times throughout this dissertation, Confiant largely holds Césaire responsible for championing the law that made Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guyana, and La Réunion overseas departments of France while he served as a Martinican deputy to the French National Assembly in 1946 (instead of pursuing independence for these former colonies).

[76] The literal translation into French is "Joseph Zobel: Échapper d'un pays sans chapeau" or "Escape from a country without a hat" (Translation from Creole to French by Jacqueline Couti). "Pays sans chapeau" is a Haitian expression that describes the afterlife. It is also a reference to Haitian writer Dany Laferrière's 1996 novel of the same title.

[77] This short documentary (twenty-four minutes long) produced by TV Francophonie in 2003, was re-released in 2006, following the writer's death. In the interview, Zobel stated that although he could still fully understand Creole, he was no longer able to construct coherent sentences in Creole. Zobel's linguistic oblivion could be interpreted as Zobel forgetting his culture and losing his Martinican identity. In writing Zobel's eulogy in Creole, Confiant was either symbolically returning Zobel's original Martinican Creole identity to him, or revising Martinican literary history through a bold (and potentially insensitive) linguistic gesture, repackaging Zobel as a *Créoliste* avant la lettre.

[78] The Creole translation in French is "le précurseur d'un autre mouvement qu'on appelle…la Créolité" (trans. Jacqueline Couti).

the founders of the movement, but an inaccurate statement, nevertheless, since Zobel was never affiliated with any literary, cultural, or identitarian movements. By designating Zobel as a precursor of *créolité*, Confiant is in fact emphasizing Chamoiseau's and his own literary lineage as Zobel's descendents rather than celebrating Zobel's contribution to *créolité*. Additionally, in specifying that Zobel laid the groundwork for *créolité* in two of his novels, *Diab-'là* and *Les jours immobiles*[79] (1946) ("Chapénan péyi san chapo"), Confiant diminishes the importance and influence of *La rue Cases-Nègres*, which he had greatly praised seven years earlier in *Lettres créoles*.

In his fiction, Confiant has made a similar gesture as well, directly engaging with Zobel's literary legacy, both honoring and challenging it. *Régisseur du rhum* (The Rum Steward, 1999), the second novel in Confiant's *trilogie sucrière* (sugarcane trilogy), which I discuss extensively in the following chapter, exemplifies this "filial" ambivalence toward Zobel. *La rue Cases-Nègres* is first invoked as a means of mapping the rum distillery—the main setting of the novel—both geographically and in the Martinican literary imaginary through this rather naturalistic description à la Zola:

> … l'usine était un monstre dévoreur d'énergie et de vie humaine, mais aussi une creature généreuse car sans elle les nègres d'ici-là, c'est à dire de Petit-Bourg et de Rivière Salée, et même ceux qui venaient de plus loin, des Trois-Îlets ou du Diamant, n'auraient même pas eu les deux francs quatre sous de la coupe de la canne pour tenir la brise (*Régisseur du rhum* 39).

[79] *Les jours immobiles* was republished thirty-two years later, in 1978, with the new title *Les mains pleines d'oiseaux*.

> … the distillery was a monster that devoured energy and human life, but also a generous creature without whom the blacks from here-and-there, in other words from Petit Bourg and Rivière Salée, and even those who came from further away, from Trois-Îlets or Diamant, wouldn't even have had the two Francs four cents to grasp the breeze.

Petit-Bourg is of course the village where Zobel lived as a boy and the setting for *La rue Cases-Nègres*; along with Grand-Bourg and Trois Îlets, it belongs to the *commune* (district) of Rivière Salée in the south of Martinique. Later in the novel, José Hassam, the main character of *La rue Cases-Nègres*, appears as the classmate and best friend of the young Pierre-Marie de la Vigerie, the protagonist of *Régisseur du rhum*. Pierre-Marie's mother Edmée's disapproval of the interracial friendship between her son and José serves to highlight the racism and hypocrisy of Pierre-Marie's family and *béké* caste; for Pierre-Marie and his mother are themselves *békés kalazaza* (békés of "dubious" racial origins who "pass" for white) and a source of gossip concerning their own carefully guarded mixed-race heritage:

> Elle redoutait tout particulièrement l'amicalité qui s'était développée entre Pierre-Marie et ce José Hassam, petit-fils d'une amarreuse de canne de l'habitation Petit-Morne, qui ne semblait pas avoir peur de regarder les Blancs dans les yeux. Le matin, il osait approcher du perron de la maison des La Vigerie … pour attendre Pierre-Marie. Si d'aventure, Edmée de La Vigerie se trouvait à son balcon, il ôtait bien bas son chapeau trop grand pour lui et lui lançait une sonore "Bien bonjour, Madame Aubin !" auquel elle ne répondait pas. On disait ce petit négrillon très brillant à l'école et

> cela agaçait Edmée pour qui la seule et unique place des gens de couleur se trouvait soit dans les champs de canne, soit à l'usine (86).
>
> She was particularly concerned about the friendship that had developed between Pierre-Marie and this José Hassam, the grandson of a sugarcane binder from Petit-Morne plantation, who didn't seem to be afraid to look white people in the eye. In the morning, he dared to approach the flight of stairs leading to the La Vigerie house … to wait for Pierre-Marie. If by chance, Edmée happened to be on her balcony, he removed his hat, which was too big for him, and greeted her with an enthusiastic "Why good morning, Madame Aubin!," to which she did not respond. This pickaninny was said to be very brilliant at school, which irritated Edmée, who believed that the only place colored people belonged was in the cane fields or in the refinery.

With more surprise than disdain, Pierre-Marie's father also marvels at this "négrillon qui parlait le français comme un dictionnaire et qui faisait de tête des calculs compliqués" (pickaninny who spoke French like a dictionary and who could do complicated equations in his head), and credits the way José was raised by M'man Tine (181).

Confiant weaves these and other elements from the plot of *La rue Cases-Nègres* into *Régisseur du rhum* as an *hommage* and as a type of conversation with this Martinican classic. José's academic achievements in *Régisseur du rhum* mirror those in *La rue Cases-Nègres*: the character goes on to pass the entrance examinations for a *lycée* (high school) in Fort-de-France and receive a scholarship. But his success is portrayed as the triumph of individualism over communal life, and marks the end of a time when he

and Pierre-Marie walked together down the "chemin de l'école communale" (path to the district school) (182). The term "chemin" can be seen here as more than just the route to school, but as an existential path or destiny; similarly, the adjective "communale" here indicates more than the Rivière Salée district, but also one's ties to a community. José's aspirations are beyond the scope of the plantation world of Rivière Salée, and in order to fulfill them and forge a new identity he must part ways with Pierre-Marie, his community, and his past.

José's destiny in *Régisseur du rhum* serves as a counterpoint to Pierre-Marie's, and it is ultimately revealed as inferior to Pierre-Marie's. Like *La rue Cases-Nègres*, *Régisseur du rhum* can be read as a type of *bildungsroman*, recounting Pierre-Marie's quest for identity in professional, social, and racial terms (all three are interconnected and almost inseparable in the novel). Initially bored at the thought of following in his father's footsteps as the director of the Génipa Distillery, Pierre-Marie undergoes a conversion experience during his apprenticeship in the business. Through his contact with members of different ethnoclasses at the distillery (itself organized in hierarchical terms as on the plantation), he gains a stronger sense of his own identity and comes to accept, and even celebrate his mixed-race heritage, no longer thinking of himself as a *béké* (or *béké kalazaza*), but as a "mulâtre" (332). While Pierre-Marie's soul-searching journey ultimately brings him full circle and back to his roots, this more modest vision is held to be more authentic and noble than José's lofty goal to become "un grand monsieur" (181) in Fort-de-France and in the larger world:

> Pour moi, il n'y avait pas eu l'ombre d'une hésitation : je serais régisseur de rhum à l'usine de Génipa, comme l'avait été mon père avant moi.

Continuer, quel qu'en fût le prix, à fabriquer ce qui était, s'agissant de ma personne, une eau-de-vie au sens propre du terme, c'est-à-dire une eau qui m'avait ramené à la vie le jour même de ma naissance, m'était plus qu'un devoir de fidélité : une véritable passion. Lorsque j'appris que mon ancien condisciple José Hassam avait réussi à son brevet supérieur à Fort-de-France et qu'il ne tarderait pas à embrasser la très admirée carrière d'instituteur, je n'éprouvai aucune jalouseté à l'instar de ceux de ma génération. J'étais content pour José, mais pour rien au monde je n'aurais brocanté sa destinée avec la mienne. Je demeurerais attaché à l'usine comme l'arbre à ses racines, jusqu'à la fin de mes jours … (308).

For me there wasn't a shadow of a doubt: I would be a rum steward at the Génipa Distillery, as my father had been before me. To continue to produce what had been, what I myself was, regardless of the cost, the *eau-de-vie* spirits in the literal sense of the word, the "water-of-life" that had brought me back to life on the day I was born was more than an act of devotion: it was a true passion. When I learned that my former classmate José Hassam had earned his *brevet supérieur* [secondary school diploma] in Fort-de-France and that it wouldn't be long before he joined the highly-esteemed rank of *instituteur*, I didn't feel any jealousy like others of my generation. I was happy for José, but nothing in the world could have made me exchange his destiny for mine. I would remain attached to the distillery like a tree is to its roots, for the rest of my days …

The first two novels in Confiant's sugarcane trilogy *Commandeur du sucre* (The Sugar Driver, 1994) and *Régisseur du rhum* present a quest for identity that is finally resolved at the end of the novels. However, the long passage from *Régisseur du rhum* quoted above differs from its predecessor in that the main character's commitment to the *usine de rhum*, and morever to tradition, is expressed in opposition to José's rejection of both place and tradition. Lacking in psychological depth, Confiant's José does little to propel the plot forward in *Régisseur du rhum*; rather, his presence serves a clear ideological purpose that reveals Confiant's unwillingness to accept both the conclusion of Zobel's novel and the course of Martinical history.

In *La rue Cases-Nègres*, José Hassam (like Zobel himself) abandons his plantation roots, and eventually, Martinique, during the waning days of the plantation economy, before the Vichy occupation during World War II and the island's change from colonial to *départemental* status as an overseas territory of France in 1946.[80] In *Régisseur du rhum*, the author pits his own more robust protagonist against the poorly developed José (a flat character who functions like a straw man in the ideological battle Confiant stages within the novel) in a manner that suggests the ultimate victory of Pierre-Marie, and by extension the triumph of Confiant's imagination over the ending of *La rue Cases-Nègres* and the outcome of history. Intertextuality in *Régisseur du rhum* provides a means for Confiant to connect with and challenge Zobel's literary legacy in order to position himself as Zobel's natural successor (as corroborated in his eulogy to the author of *La rue Cases-Nègres*, "Josèf ZOBÈL: chapé nan péyi san chapo"). Pierre Marie's ambition and Confiant's own "will to power" (in a Nietzschean sense) are also revealed

[80] In Chapter Three, I discuss the period of Vichy occupation in Martinique as portrayed in *Régisseur du rhum* and in *La Dissidence* (2002), the final novel in Confiant's *trilogie sucrière*.

in the novel's title, wherein the etymology of *régisseur* (a "manager" or "steward") is *celui qui régit* ("the one who rules or governs" from the verb *régir*).

2.2 Previous Incarnations and Textual Conversions: Confiant's Palimpsestic Creole Journey

Just as Confiant has engaged intertextually with the writing of other authors such as Césaire and Zobel (among others), an examination of Confiant's own corpus reveals how the author's views on a number of linguistic, environmental, religious, cultural, and political issues have changed over the years. Confiant's shifting attitudes toward the population of East Indian descent in Martinique can be traced through an intertextual reading of two of his own texts, *La panse du chacal* and his contribution to an earlier book of photography by David Damoison, *Le Galion: Canne, douleur séculaire ô tendresse* (Le Galion: Cane, age-old pain oh tenderness!, 2000), which I also discussed in Chapter One.[81] While the books represent two different genres, a novel and an art book, both nevertheless present portraits of plantations in Martinique, and in both cases the detailed descriptions of the people and the environment are of fundamental and archetypal cultural significance. Furthermore, although *Le Galion* and *La panse du chacal* were published just four years apart, the small, but meaningful editorial changes Confiant made when he transposed the original text from the art book to the novel illustrate a transformation in Confiant's thinking about Creole history and culture, and about the role East Indians play in them.

[81] In Chapter One, I discussed *Le Galion: Canne, douleur séculaire ô tendresse* in terms of an intertextual (or even, intermedial) reading of David Damoison's photographs and Confiant's writing, showing how the writing contributes to a different perception of the images by recontextualizing them.

In *Le Galion*, Confiant's text accompanies twenty-seven photographs (and two additional photographs, plus those on the front and back covers) taken at the plantation of the same name, which is located in the district of la Trinité on the eastern shore of Martinique. The sugar factory (*usine*) attached to Le Galion plantation is the last one that continues to operate in Martinique. It is therefore it is invested with great patrimonial significance, as the final link to an economic activity, a culture, and a way of life that have all but disappeared. As I argued in the previous chapter, Confiant's text both describes and recontextualizes Damoison's photographs: while Damoison's images are stark examples of photojournalism or even social realism, Confiant's impressionistic passages embellish the photographer's unadorned images, adding layers of new meaning in an attempt to bring honor and pageantry to the long-disparaged occupation of the worker in the cane field and the refinery. At times, Confiant conflates the workers with the landscape (often feminizing the landscape) in a manner that resembles the exoticism of the colonial narratives he so stridently denounces throughout *L'Éloge de la créolite* (1989) and *Lettres créoles*. In addition to the native landscape (in particular the sugarcane, which becomes a central figure in the narrative), Confiant appropriates the workers and their traditions into his *défense et illustration* of Martinican creoleness in its cultural, racial, and linguistic dimensions.[82]

In *Le Galion*, Confiant also plays the role of tour guide, leading the viewer/reader through the rural and industrial landscape of the plantation and factory in Damoison's

[82] In many ways, *Eloge de la créolité* harkens back to the poet Joachim du Bellay's manifesto *Défense et illustration de la langue française* (1549), in which he proclaims the importance of salvaging and enriching the French language, so that it may become the language used in what du Bellay considered to be the noblest art form, poetry. By elevating the status of the language and ennobling it, Du Bellay also implied that France might achieve a greater destiny.

photographs; pointing out sites of interest[83] and cultural traditions (food, music, dress); providing an overview of the daily work and life routines of the workers; and explaining the "mystical" process of converting sugarcane into sugar.[84] In keeping with the subtitle of the book "*Canne,* douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!" (age-old pain, oh tenderness!), these activities are all presented as timeless actions and movements, and as such, they link the present economic and existential conditions of the plantation workers with the past of slavery. Confiant's use of the present tense throughout also implies the continuity of this world and way of life —uninterrupted by economic, technological, political, or cultural changes—as in the book's closing sentences: "La canne ne lâche jamais le Nègre d'une semelle. Elle fait corps avec sa douleur séculaire" (The cane never loosens its hold on the Black [man]. It is grafted onto his ancient pain) (*Le Galion*).

"La canne" and "le Nègre" are the main protagonists of *Le Galion*, and together they provide the environment and the cultural foundations for Martinican *créolité*. However, in transferring these written passages almost verbatim to the pages of *La panse du chacal* four years later (except for one long paragraph that was added to the final installment in the novel), Confiant invites one more member to join his essential Creole cast: *l'Indien*. Whereas *Le Galion* provides a continuous narrative, in *La panse du chacal* the narrative is broken into three three-page segments titled "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*," which appear after the first chapter, between the second and third chapters,

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[83] Among these sites is the "Rue Cases-Nègres" where the workers live; the description also contains a reference to "Soleil cou coupé" ("Solar Throat Slashed"), a collection of seventy-two surrealist poems written by Césaire (1948): "À la debauchée, quand le faire-noir s'affaisse cou coupé sur la terre, la Rue Cases-Nègres s'ébroue …" (At the end of the work day, when the darkness sinks throat-slashed over the earth, the Rue Cases-Nègres shakes itself…" (*Le Galion*).

[84] Confiant uses reverent language to describe the process of converting raw sugarcane into sugar as if it were a religious experience, the type of transubstantiation involved in the eucharist. For a specific example, consult the section "The Sacred Ritual of Sugar" in Chapter One.

and between the third and fourth chapters. The title and the writing in these segments are italicized in order to distinguish them from the main narrative in the novel, and the reference to Le Galion plantation disappears in *La panse du chacal*, since the Martinican segment of the novel takes place on Le Courbaril plantation. (Similarly, a short italicized passage appears at the beginning of each of the chapters in the main narrative, serving as a type of transition between the internal and external narratives.) In each instance where "le Nègre" is invoked in the original text, Confiant systematically inserts "l'Indien" alongside it in the later version. For instance, in *La panse du chacal*, Confiant adds on to the last two sentences from *Le Galion* quoted above: "La canne ne lâche jamais le Nègre d'une semelle. Elle fait corps avec sa douleur séculaire. La canne ne lâche jamais l'Indien. Elle s'insinue au plus profond de ses songes, territoire de la nostalgie …" (The cane never loosens its hold on the Black [man]. It is grafted onto his ancient pain. The cane never loosens its hold on the Indian [man]. It slips into his deepest thoughts, the territory of nostalgia …) (*La panse du chacal* 92). The description accompanying a photograph of the workers standing in line to collect their pay in *Le Galion* must also be adapted in the novel (where there are no photographs) to include a chorus of East Indian names interspersed between those of black Martinicans:

> Des enveloppes à la blancheur immaculée, ventrues à souhait, tiennent serré le fruit de la sueur du Nègre et de l'Indien. Leurs noms, calligraphiés en noir solonnel, sont pleins de belleté: Bellonie Marc-André, Venceslas Allain, Vinesh Dorassamy[85], Baradin Fréderic, Singa

[85] Vinesh Dorassamy is the name of the main character of *La panse du chacal*. By including his name among the list of workers collecting their wages in the "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô*

> Vellayoudon, Téramène Hyppolite, Ladouceur Sidonise (*La panse du chacal* 66).
>
> Immaculate white envelopes, bulging accordingly, contain the fruit of the sweat of the black and the Indian. Their names penned in solemn black ink are full of beauty: Bellonie Marc-André, Venceslas Allain, Vinesh Dorassamy, Baradin Frédéric,[86] Singa Vellayoudon, Téramène Hyppolite, Ladouceur Sidonise.

The most significant editorial change occurs in the final installment of "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*" in *La panse du chacal*, where one long paragraph (approximately one-and-a-half pages long) is added. Inspired by actual historical events, this final paragraph describes violent workers' revolts not mentioned in the original text, involving blacks and East Indians who set fire to plantations, and in one case, decapitate one of the two *béké* plantation managers named Patrice de Fabrique[87] (*La panse du chacal* 92).[88] These collective acts of rebellion put "Indiens et Nègres," as Confiant

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tendresse" narrative, Confiant links this collective oral history to the events in the novel. This is one of very few instances in which the two narratives are explicitly linked.

[86] The spelling of this name is different from *Le Galion*, where it is written as "Bayardin Frédéric."

[87] The man who was stabbed to death in this incident was named Guy de Fabrique, not Patrice de Fabrique as in *La panse du chacal* ("De l'héritage culturel").

[88] Except for the decapitation, the description of one of these events closely resembles an actual incident that took place in 1948 (a year marked by social upheaval in Martinique), which is referred to as the "Affaire des Seize de Basse-Pointe" (The Incident of the Sixteen of Basse-Pointe; Basse-Pointe is the district with the largest Indo-Caribbean population in Martinique, and it is also the setting of *La panse du chacal*). During a meeting of striking plantation workers (comprising black, Indian, and multiracial workers) on the Leyritz Plantation, a scuffle ensued between the workers and one of the two *békés* who managed the plantation. When the other Béké showed up armed and accompanied by members of the police, the workers attacked and fatally wounded him with their machetes. Aided by sympathizers, several of the workers went into hiding, but were eventually caught and arrested. Under intense pressure from Caribbean immigrant groups in France, the Communist Party, and the unions, the accused were acquitted

himself emphasizes, "pour une fois, sur le même plan" (for once, on the same level) (*La panse du chacal* 93).[89] By underscoring the remarkable nature of this collaboration between East Indian and black workers—he also refers to it as "un acte innouï" (an unprecedented act) (92)—and by characterizing this event as a turning point in the relationship between the two groups, the author reveals—perhaps inadvertently—that he previously subscribed to the dominant cultural construction of East Indians as inferior to the Creole majority.[90]

In this new passage in the "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*" segment in *La panse du chacal*, Confiant provides a list of these "héros" (heroes), where the names of blacks and East Indians once again appear side by side as a testimony to their joint participation in a tradition of revolt against the injustice of the exploitative and inhumane plantation system. Additionally, the author uses sarcasm as a device to undermine Martinican stereotypes concerning the "submissiveness" of East Indians and the "sexual availability" of the East Indian women, as demonstrated in the following passage, which precedes the descriptions of the workers' rebellions and of East Indian and African *marronage*:

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two years later ("De l'héritage culturel"; Manville 86). A documentary film about the incident, "Les 16 de Basse-Pointe," directed by Camille Mauduech was later released in 2008.

[89] Gerry L'Étang explains that the "Affaire des Seize de Basse-Pointe" put East Indians in the spotlight for the first time as rebels fighting the injustice of the plantation system, even though they had in fact protested against their conditions on multiple occasions and through various forms of resistance, such as setting fire to cane fields and refineries, refusing to work, fleeing the plantations where they worked (and thus breaking the terms of their contracts), and even by committing suicide ("De l'héritage culturel").

[90] In order to truly advance his positive agenda for East Indian inclusion, Confiant ought to highlight the fact that this event was not unique, but rather that it was the first time such an incident became the focus of widespread public attention through newspaper articles, and thus helped to change prevailing perceptions of East Indians.

> Parmi les auteurs de cet acte inouï furent désignés des Indiens, ô stupeur! Une race si docile, si serviable[91], et leurs femmes toujours prêtes à entrouvrir les cuisses pour recevoir la semence des maîtres. Impensable non? (92-93).
>
> Among the perpetrators of this unprecedented act were some Indians, oh astonishment! Such a docile race, so obliging, and their women always willing to spread their thighs to receive the master's seed. Unthinkable no?

By placing these clichés in a new context (before a passage describing of the bravery of East Indians), the author attempts to discredit the negative vision of East Indians as the obedient pawns of the *béké*, and substitutes for it a positive one of East Indians as strong, rebellious, and as committed to fighting injustice as their black brothers.[92]

In spite of the bravery of both *Nègres* and *Indiens*, the cane gets the last word in the final installment of *Canne*, *douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!* in *La panse du chacal*; for it is "rancunière" (resentful) and has always been "du côte du Blanc et quand il arrive au Nègre et à l'Indien de l'oublier, eh ben la peau de leurs fesses se trouve soudain mise à l'air libre, foutre!" (on the side of the white [man] and when the black [man] or the Indian

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[91] Writing about Césaire's childhood in Basse-Pointe in *Lettres créoles*, Chamoiseau and Confiant hint at the importance of Césaire's contact with Martinicans of East Indian descent and their absence in Césaire's work. Their descriptions of East Indians sound very similar to the stereotypes Confiant presents in the passage quoted above: "Sa Da, sa nounou, sera une vieille Indienne car le quartier où il vit est peuplé de cette race apparemment soumise et frêle qui se courbe dessous les quolibets." (His *Da*, his nanny, would be an old Indian woman for the district where he lives is inhabited by this apparently submissive and frail race that tolerates these jibes (*Lettres créoles* 156).

[92] However, the heroic acts of these East Indian men fail to redress the stereotypes about the promiscuity of East Indian women, stereotypes that Confiant himself perpetuates throughout of *La panse du chacal*. Furthermore, by even mentioning these stereotypes, Confiant reveals a narrative perspective that is outside the East Indian community.

[man] happen to forget it [the cane], well they find themselves all of a sudden with their bare asses flapping in the breeze, hell!) (93).[93] The heroism of their earlier acts has been replaced by humiliation as a punishment for forgetting the cane, the source of their common Martinican roots. Even though the ending of the third "*Canne*, *douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*" segment in the novel undermines the agency of both blacks and East Indians (the cane's power over them underscores their economic dependence on plantation work), it is nevertheless consistent with Confiant's attachment to this insular world as represented in the *trilogie sucrière*, and particularly in the passages from *Régisseur du rhum* discussed earlier in this chapter. While Confiant's literary universe accommodates criticism of the plantation system and its injustices, abandoning this world is strictly forbidden. For the plantation, with its confluence of nature, people, and agricultural work (which is portrayed as a series of timeless and repetitive gestures) within a clearly defined landscape and social hierarchy, is the fragile ecosystem of *créolité*.[94] Thus for Confiant, the departure of any of the plantation's constituents represents a threat to this oppressive, but nevertheless deeply interconnected Creole environment. With *La panse du chacal*, East Indians are at last (or as Confiant would say, "for once") brought into the rigid fold of *créolité*'s plantation imaginary.[95]

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[93] Confiant frequently uses the device of pathetic fallacy as a means of portraying the sugarcane's power over the lives of the sugarcane workers and its critical role in determining their fate. As Françoise Simasotchi-Bronès explains, place is much more than a simple backdrop in French Caribbean novels: "l'espace fonctionne souvent comme un personnage à part entière" (Space often functions as a full character) (74).

[94] Carlos J. Alonso has expressed the importance of these three elements (nature, people, and a human activity, such as farming), in creating a sense of autochthonous national culture in the Spanish American *criollista* novel (or *novela de la tierra*) (Alonso 1996: 200).

[95] I would like to specify that while the characters in Confiant's sugarcane novels (the *trilogie de la canne* and *La panse du chacal*) are bound to the plantation, most of Confiant's other novels are set outside the confines of the plantation, namely in the liminal space the *créolistes* refer to as

Examining the intertextual connections between *Régisseur du rhum* and *La rue Cases-Nègres* earlier in this chapter revealed Confiant's complicated, and at times, contradictory relationship to Zobel's literary legacy, especially his need to rewrite and criticize Zobel via the character José Hassam in *Régisseur du rhum*, and also to redefine Zobel's contribution to Martinican literature in *Lettres créoles* and in his eulogy to Zobel in order to position himself as Zobel's literary successor. An intertextual analysis of Confiant's own writing in the context of his reutilization of and revisions to an earlier text allows for an excavation of two different layers of Confiant's writing, which together show how his definition of Creole society has expanded to include Martinicans of East Indian descent; it also provides a better understanding of the effects of this type of textual displacement from a book of photography to the different medium of the novel.

While the continuous narrative in *Le Galion* fits seamlessly with Damoison's photographs—and was clearly written to describe them—in its fragmented form, the "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*" narrative in *La panse du chacal* functions quite differently. Discontinuous not only because it has been divided into three sections that appear between different chapters in the novel, but because it is almost entirely extradiegetic (or outside the main narrative), and for the most part, does not make reference to events in the novel,[96] the "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*" segments

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l'enville, usually an urban hillside neighborhood in Fort-de-France, which functions much like the Creole yard in the literature of the Anglophone Caribbean. Confiant has also written several rural novels, which are not set on sugarcane plantations.

[96] There are only two references to characters and an event from the main narrative of *La panse du chacal* in the "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*" segments. The first appears in the passage in which the plantation workers stand in line to collect their pay (the passage that was adapted from *Le Galion* by adding the names of East Indian characters) (*La panse du chacal* 66). The second, and only other connection between the main plot and the shorter narrative, is the

simultaneously interrupt the main narrative and draw it into a broader discourse or metanarrative on tradition. The absence of temporal markers in the "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*" segments coupled with the use of the present tense to describe both the process by which sugar is made and the work routines and lives of the field and refinery workers contrasts with the precisely situated narrative time frame of the main narrative of *La panse du chacal*, which is, after all, a work of historical fiction. The juxtaposition of the main narrative (the Dorassamy family saga) with the extradiegetic narrative (the three short *Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse* segments) gives the novel both an episodic and archetypal quality, and in fact reverses or transfers the importance from the main narrative to the minor narrative. In tone and style, and with their emphasis on oral narratives expressed through a collective voice or narrator, the short italicized sections that appear at the beginning of each of the chapters in the main narrative and the "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*" segments read like passages from a long epic, and contrast with the more conventional, realistic fictional prose of the main narrative. With this reversal, the experience of the Dorassamys (who serve as an archetype of the East Indian family), and by extension, of East Indians in Martinique, is instead relegated to one episode in a longer Creole epic. The relationship between these two types of narratives within *La panse du chacal* resembles the intertextual relationship between individual novels by Confiant and his broader literary project to compose a vast mosaic of Creole society.[97]

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description of the workers' rebellions (a new section Confiant added to the novel, which was not present in *Le Galion*) (92-93).

[97] The relationship between individual sugarcane novels and larger sugarcane novel cycles is the subject of Chapter Three. Like Balzac, Confiant uses recurring characters in his novels, a technique that creates the impression of narrative and historic continuity within his many novels.

La panse du chacal should be understood as the East Indian "chapter" of Confiant's Creole cycle. Since its publication, new composite chapters have been added to Confiant's "Comédie créole"[98] such as *Nègre marron* (Black Maroon, 2006), a novel about communities of escaped slaves and their descendents, which takes place between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, and explores the history of slavery and revolt on the island; *Case à Chine*[99] (Chinese Shack, 2007), a novel about Chinese immigrants, who like the East Indians, came to Martinique as indentured workers; and *Rue des syriens* (Syrian Street, 2012), a novel that tells the story of the mostly Lebanese, but also Syrian, Palestinian, and Jordanian immigrants to Martinique in the early part of the twentieth century who established themselves as Martinique's merchant class, focusing on those who settled along the rue François Arago, which is referred to locally as "la rue des Syriens." (*Syrien* is a generalized term to designate all these groups.)

While in his earlier work, East Indians, Chinese, and "Syrians" are mentioned in passing (perhaps to add a touch of exoticism), only occasionally appearing as minor characters, in his later novels, starting with *Le barbare enchanté* (2003), these Martinican minorities begin to emerge from the background.[100] Given Confiant's prolific literary

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[98] This term is used by Carine Gendrey in her 2007 review of *Case à Chine*.

[99] The creolized French title *Case à Chine* carries several references and resonances. It sounds like the Creole expression used to designate a dwelling where Chinese people live, much like the term *case à couli* to indicate a house where East Indians live. Like the term *couli* (rather than the term *Indien*), using *Chine* rather than *Chinois* is both colloquial and offensive. By choosing *Case à Chine* as a title, Confiant highlights the popular and folkloric qualities of his novel. As in the title of Zobel's novel *La rue Cases-Nègres*, *Case à Chine* refers to an archetypal setting (a single Chinese shack that stands for all the Chinese shacks in Martinique, and for the experiences of an entire community of Martinican ancestry) that also serves as a *lieu de mémoire*.

[100] Confiant's historical novel about the painter Paul Gauguin's five-month stay in Martinique, *Le barbare enchanté*, published one year before *La panse du chacal*, includes a chapter about East Indians, entitled "Détresse Tamoule" (Tamil distress) (147-168). The chapter, which describes Gauguin's surprise at discovering a large East Indian community in Martinique, seems like a rehearsal for *La panse du chacal*, since it allows Confiant to describe the East Indian community

production, it is not unlikely that the transposition of the original "*Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!*" narrative from *Le Galion* to *La panse du chacal* served as a successful time-saving measure (not unlike strategies applied by Balzac): successful both in expediting the writing process and as a formula for garnering awards: *Le Galion* was awarded the Prix du Livre Insulaire (in the category "beaux livres"), while *La panse du chacal* received the Prix des Amériques Insulaires et de la Guyane. Beyond the pragmatism of this statement, I would also like to suggest that Confiant's broadening definition of Creoleness has occurred in tandem with the expansion of his literary project to include ever more segments and milieus of Martinican society (even as he continues to portray his subjects within a precise historical and cultural framework that usually predates the 1960s). The two versions of *Canne, douleur séculaire, ô tendresse!,* the earlier one focusing on the experience of black Martinicans, and the later one revising the text to include Martinicans of East Indian descent, provide a glimpse of this palimpsestic textual journey on a smaller scale.

By following his literary output, we can in a sense accompany Confiant's own "conversion narrative" from a more restrictive racial conceptualization and practice of *créolité* along a black-white ethnoclass continuum in his earlier novels, to a more flexible

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and its experience of migration and settlement in Martinique as they are told to Gauguin (a foreigner) by Sinaganallé, an aging Hindu priest. Sinaganallé's story reads like a condensed version of the *La panse du chacal*, focusing on the tragic events that led him to leave India (droughts, poverty, a corrupt colonial government, and dishonest recruiters of indentured workers, who lie, kidnap and sell the workers for profit) and on the horrific journey by sea to the New World. The chapter even contains a reference to a jackal (as in the title of the later novel), when the *mestri* (recruiter) threatens to abandon the workers in his captivity to hungry jackals: "Vos corps seront livrés à des chacals!" (*Le barbare enchanté* 160).

and diverse racial and ethnic vision of Martinican society.[101] My use of the term "conversion narrative" here plays on Confiant's religious and literary conversions to Hinduism and *indianité*, respectively, and on a possible connection between the two, as Cécile Van den Avenne has implied in her article "L'élément indien de la créolité: une reconstruction identitaire" (2006). Van den Avenne notes that Confiant defines the *hindouisme créole* or *bondyékouli*[102] that he himself practices as "un hindouisme de converti" (a convert's Hinduism) that promotes cultural *métissage* rather than as a traditional form practiced in isolation by the population of East Asian descent ("L'élément indien de la créolité"). In *Éloge de la créolité,* Confiant also distinguishes between the syncretic *bondyékouli*[103] of the French Lesser Antilles as a "culte créole" (a Creole religion) and what he deems the non-creolized Hinduism of certain cane-growing regions of the British Caribbean, especially Trinidad (*Éloge de la créolité* 32; *In Praise of Creoleness* 94).[104] In a later article discussing polytheistic and syncretic burial

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[101] Conversely, one should also ask why Confiant didn't mention the East Indian presence in the *Le Galion* art book (unless there were no Indo-Caribbeans working there at the time Confiant and Damoison visited the plantation and refinery). In an article he contributed to a collection honoring the Martinican anthropologist Gerry L'Étang the same year *Le Galion* was published, he actually mentions the Hindu temple in a former shed at Le Galion plantation as a place where East Indians could openly practice their religion in full knowledge of the *béké* ("Savoir et pouvoir des morts"). This seems to suggest a deliberate omission by Confiant.

[102] The word *bondyékouli* that Confiant uses is considered to be a very offensive term to describe Hindu rituals and ceremonies (the correct term is *Hindouisme martiniquais*). Use of this Vernacular term in Martinique dates to the early twentieth century. In the *France-Antilles* article "Il y a 157 ans arrivaient les engagés indiens," *bondyékouli* is referred to as a "mot abominable" (a horrible word). (http://www.martinique.franceantilles.fr/actualite/culture/il-y-a-157-ans-arrivaient-les-engages-indiens-04-05-2010-70939.php)

[103] In contrast to Confiant's representation of Martinican Hinduism as a creolized or syncretic religion, Mervyn C. Alleyne denies the presence of a syncretic religion in Martinique, stating that "[t]here is nothing paralleling Vaudoun of Haiti or Pukumina Revival and Rastafarianism in Jamaica, or Santería of Cuba and Puerto Rico" (181).

[104] It is important to note that the population of East Indian descent is far greater in the British Caribbean, particularly in Trinidad, where Indo-Trinidadians make up 40.3% of the population, surpassing that of black Trinidadians (39.6%) and the mixed population (18.4%) (Population

practices[105] of Martinicans in Basse-Pointe, the district with the strongest Indo-Caribbean presence and cultural influence on the island (and also the setting for *La panse du chacal*) Confiant explains that most people in the area are

> ni chrétiens ni hindouistes ni adeptes du *tjenbwa*[106] mais une communauté qui fait allégeance de manière ouverte au christianisme, semi-ouverte à l'hindouisme et masquée aux pratiques sorcières "nègres." Trois continents religieux s'entrechoquent dans l'imaginaire religieux des Pointois: celui de l'Europe, de l'Asie et de l'Afrique.
>
> Neither Christians nor Hindus nor *tjenbwa* followers but a community that pledges its allegiance openly to Christianity, semi-openly to Hinduism, and secretly to the practice of "black" magic. Three religious continents collide in the religious imaginary of people from Basse-Pointe: those of Europe, Asia, and Africa ("Savoir et pouvoir des morts").

The first sentence, "Neither Christians nor Hindus nor *tjenbwa*," of course, bears a striking resemblance in tripartite structure and style to the opening sentence of the *Éloge de la créolité* manifesto, "Neither Europeans nor Africans nor Asians … " (*In Praise of Creoleness* 75).[107] And while in *Éloge de la créolité*, a "proclamation" of Creole identity

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Statistics) (http://www.populstat.info/Americas/trinidtg.htm). By contrast, Martinicans of East Indian, Chinese, and Lebanese descent make up about 3.7% of the population of Martinique (http://www.populstat.info/Americas/martinig.htm).

[105] The Hindu practice of burning the dead is illegal in Martinique and Guadeloupe. French Caribbean Hindus have therefore had to adapt traditional Hindu funeral practices and rituals, and like all Martinicans and Guadeloupeans, they must bury their dead (Swami 1183 note 6).

[106] *Tjenbwa*, according to Confiant, in "Savoir et pouvoir des morts," is a "bastardized" form of *vaudou*.

[107] The *créoliste* declaration, "Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles" seems to have been inspired by René Ménil's formulation of Martinican culture as being "ni africaine, ni chinoise, ni indienne, ni même française, mais antillaise en fin de compte.

follows the denial of singular belonging to Europe, Africa, or Asia ("we proclaim ourselves Creoles"), in the article "Savoir et pouvoir des morts," following the renouncement of an adherence to one religion, a similar religious oath is made by a "community that pledges its allegiance" to all three faiths in the absence of a single term such as *créolité* that can absorb all three. Among the three religions of the French Caribbean, the "semi-open" practice of Hinduism, which has absorbed elements of Martinican Christianity and *vaudou*—the middle term between the "open" (or official) practice of Christianity and the "disguised practice" of *tjenbwa*—more than any other religion seems to symbolize the spiritual practice, or even ritualized presence, of *créolité* in the everyday and the survival and continuity of Martinican Creole traditions.[108] In a 1995 documentary film about Confiant produced by TV Francophonie entitled "Portrait d'une île," the writer once again emphasizes the absorption and embodiment of multiple faiths in Martinican Hinduism. Standing inside a small, rural Hindu temple (which he refers to as "un temple hindouiste martiniquais"), bowing before the statues of Hindu gods, he explains that

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Antillaise est notre culture pour avoir réuni au cours de l'histoire et combiné dans un syncrétisme original tous ces éléments venus des quatre coins du monde, sans être aucun de ces éléments en particulier" (Ménil 32).

[108] Michael Dash has made a similar observation about the importance of East Indian culture in the context of a broader French Caribbean identity, stating that "en tant que non-Africain et non-Européen à la fois, le Martiniquais d'origine indienne—lui dont l'histoire avait fait le non-Martiniquais par excellence—s'est vue paradoxalement promu en archetype d'Antillanité…" (as both non-African and non-European, the Martinican of Indian descent—he who history had treated as the quintessential non-Martinican—has been paradoxically promoted to the status of an archetype for Caribbeanness) (Dash 1994: 211). He goes on to explain that "protéger l'Indianité … c'est donc revendiquer l'hétérogène contre l'homogène, c'est defendre la '*diversalité*' antillais contre le faux universalisme qui n'a de cesse de l'absorber …" (To protect Indianness … means to proclaim heterogeneity over homogeneity, to defend Caribbean '*diversality*' over the false universalism that never ceases to absorb it …)(214).

> [c]ette religion s'est adaptée, metissée, a accepté des apports chrétiens, africains, des croyances africaines. Ce qui veut dire que des Noirs, des Mulâtres, des Hindous, des gens de partout, viennent faire des cérémonies, participent aux cultes, et font vivre ce culte. Donc l'élément culturel indien, à l'instar de l'élément culturel caraïbe, de l'élément culturel nègre, de l'élément culturel blanc, et bien cet élément-là, ce quatrième élément est l'un des pivots … de la culture antillaise. Et dans mes romans, je ne peux pas m'empêcher d'évoquer cette communauté, d'évoquer ce culte, dont je suis l'un des fervents (*Portrait d'une île*).
>
> [t]his religion adapted itself, became culturally mixed, accepted Christian and African characteristics, African beliefs. Which means that blacks, mulattos, Hindus, people from all over, come to take part in ceremonies, participate in religion, and keep this religion alive. Therefore the Indian cultural element, like the Carib cultural element, the black cultural element, the white cultural element, well, this Indian element, this fourth element is one of the pivots … of West Indian culture. And in my novels, I cannot keep from evoking this community, evoking this religion, of which I am a fervent believer.

Martinican Hinduism as described above by Confiant is a "religion métissée," a hybrid religion that has taken on the characteristics of a creolized cultural environment in which multiple faiths coexist and coalesce. In a sentence that describes members of different races who take part in Hindu ceremonies, Confiant uses the noun *Hindou* rather than *Indien* to refer to East Indian people, suggesting that for him Hinduism is the defining

characteristic of East Indians in Martinique. Yet according to Confiant, Martinican Hinduism is not practiced exclusively by "Hindous," but by "des Noirs, des Mulâtres, … des gens de partout," which means that the Hindu religion (which stands in for the "East Indian element" that the writer maintains is such a "pivot" of West Indian culture) largely functions as an open signifier for Creoleness rather than as a stable sign of Indianness.

This semantic slippage between *Hindou* and *Indien* reveals the writer's own internalization and prioritization of religious hierarchies over racial hierarchies inherited from colonialism in his conception of East Indian identity in Martinique. As Confiant himself explains in his study of religious burial rites in Basse-Pointe, the East Indian's position within these two hierarchies is not the same. Over time, *bondyékouli* has risen within the Martinican religious hierarchy to become the middle religion, between Christianity and *tjenbwa*. Within the rigid ethnoclass hierarchy, however, the *kouli* has remained at the very bottom of the social order, below the *béké*, the *mulâtre* (and other *métis*, including those of partial Chinese or Levantine heritage), and the *Nèg* ("Savoir et pouvoir des morts"). In the literary domain, by extension, Confiant's practice of *indianité* also reflects the confusion and disparity between these two hierarchies, between a strictly symbolic Indianness (which exemplifies Creoleness) and Indo-Caribbean reality. Inscribed within the *créolité* literary and cultural movement, Confiant's *indianité* does not focus on the specificity of the Indo-Martinican experience, but rather it illustrates the process of East Indian acculturation in Martinique (in other words, the process of East Indians becoming Creoles) along with the appropriation and adaptation of certain East Indian practices (religious, culinary, sartorial, etc.) in Creole culture. It is

this *indianité créole* in *La panse du chacal* that I will explore and compare to Ernest Moutoussamy's Guadeloupean *indianité* in *L'Aurore*.

2.3 Belly of the Ship, Belly of the Jackal: African and East Indian Middle Passages

Confiant's attempt to recuperate the experience of East Indians into the broader cultural and historical narrative of *créolité* in *La panse du chacal* is consistent with his effort to bring positive attention to the long-disparaged sugarcane worker in *Le Galion* and in his sugarcane trilogy (*Commandeur du sucre*, *Régisseur du rhum*, *Dissidence*). Much mocked and maligned by the culture at large and often portrayed as unassimilated into Caribbean life—not just in Martinique and Guadeloupe, but throughout the Caribbean—East Indians have frequently been scapegoats for economic problems, particularly labor disputes between Afro-Caribbean plantation workers and white Creole plantation owners ever since they began arriving in the region in the mid nineteenth century. Brought to the New World as a cheap source of labor to replace the newly-freed former slaves, East Indian indentured labor drove down the wages of the other plantation workers and reduced the number of jobs available to them. For instance, in Martinique, anti-*couli* sentiment among the black Creole majority reached its peak around 1884, thirty years after East Indian immigration to Martinique and Guadeloupe had begun, and the year before it would end. There was a surplus in sugar production, and plantation owners in Basse-Pointe decided to lower their workers' wages; when protests erupted, the planters chose to rely almost exclusively on their East Indian laborers (Adélaïde-Merlande 13; "De l'héritage culturel"). These events led to "le rejet des Indiens par la majorité des autochtones" (the rejection of East Indians by the majority

of the local population), according to Gerry L'Étang, which manifested itself through a proliferation of mean-spirited "chansons, proverbes, contes" (songs, proverbs, folktales) about East Indians on a scale that had not been experienced by any of the other post-emancipatory arrivala, such as the Chinese and Congos ("De l'héritage culturel").

Confiant does not exclude these negative stereotypes about East Indians from his novels, but rather integrates them into his fiction, albeit not unproblematically, as representative of the uglier side of Martinican ethnoclass relations, and presumably, as an authentic part of the cultural memory and experience of East Indians in Martinique. In fact, the first passage of the main narrative of *La panse du chacal* opens up with an insult to the main character of the novel Vinesh Dorassamy: "Hé! Couli, mangeur de chien!" (Hey! Dog-eating Cooly!) (13). A passage from another of Confiant's novel, *Le barbare enchanté* (2003), in the chapter about East Indians called "Détresse Tamoule," provides a basic introduction to some of the popular insults, epithets, and stereotypes applied to East Indians:

> [La] femelle coulie … a les poils du sexe plus tranchants que des lames de barbier[109] … Coulis mangéurs de chien! Coulis qui puent le pissat! Coulis, dernières des races après les crapauds ladres! Coulis mediants! Les bras des Coulis sont rattachés à leurs corps avec de la colle de papayer!" (147-148)
>
> The female Cooly's pubic hair is sharper than a razor blade … Dog-eating Coolies! Coolies who reek of piss! Coolies, the lowest race, below the

[109] This same stereotype also appears in *La panse du chacal*: "les poils de leur foufoune c'est de véritables rasoires!" (286).

> toads! Cooly beggars! The Cooly's arms are attached to their bodies with the glue from the papaya tree!")

Some of these same racist Creole sayings can also be found in Confiant's autobiography, *Les ravines du devant-jour* (Gullies of the Dawn, 1993), passed on to him by his beloved grandmother Man Yine. Man Yine, described by the author as "la générosité faite femme" (generosity in the form of a woman), has a sharp tongue when it comes to subject of East Indians, and it is she who describes the *couli* race to her grandson as the "lowest race," in this case, "below the toads," and even "worse than the Nègres-Congo, which says it all" ("pire que les Nègres-Congo, ce qui est tout dire") (*Ravines du devant-jour* 38-39). According to A. James Arnold, the use of negative stereotypes in Confiant's fiction as well as in his autobiographies, in particular those based on "superstitions intended to establish a taboo against miscegenation" between East Indians and those of African descent (for example, the claim that sex with an East Indian women is dangerous because her razor-sharp pubic hair), serves as evidence, that "[East] Indians (*coulis*) are beyond the pale of Creole society" (Arnold 1998: 46). While this is certainly the case in his earlier novels and in his autobiography *Ravines du devant-jour*, I believe that beginning with the chapter "Détresse Tamoule" in *Le barbare enchanté*, which is almost an "esquisse" (a rough sketch) for *La panse du chacal* (published just one year later) ("L'élément indien de la créolité"), Confiant makes his first real attempt to represent the experience of East Indians and their descendents in Martinique. Although offensive and caricatural, his employment of East Indian stereotypes fits into Confiant's general obsession with color and ethnoclass, an obsession that drives his disturbingly detailed

descriptions of the phenotypes and physical and psychological traits associated with each ethnoclass, including his own as a *chabin*.[110]

Without wanting to diminish Moutoussamy's literary contributions to representing East Indians' experiences in Guadeloupe, it can nevertheless be said that Moutoussamy's personal, political, and literary investment in Indo-Caribbean culture in Guadeloupe is a lot more straight forward than Confiant's shifting interest in East Indians in Martinique. The son of former sugarcane workers, and the descendent of East Indian migrants and indentured workers, not unlike those about whom he writes in *Aurore*, Moutoussamy was the first person in his family to pursue a formal education and advanced studies; he worked for several years as a high school literature teacher before entering politics in 1981 as a Guadeloupean Deputy to the French National Assembly.[111] While Moutoussamy's literary career has existed somewhat in the shadows of his demanding political career (his novels and poems are not well known outside Guadeloupe and Martinique), the two frequently overlap in his novels and poetry, not to mention in his essays and other works of non-fiction.[112] In both his novels and in his political career,

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[110] *Chabin* is a French Caribbean racial term used to describe a very light- skinned person of color, whose hair and eyes are not black, but may be of a color generally associated with white people. The term itself, like the term "mulatto," has an offensive connotation since it refers to the offspring of animals of two different species, the sheep and the goat, and therefore implies an "unnatural" racial union. For an overview of the term, and its usage in *créoliste* novels, particularly in the work of Patrick Chamoiseau, see Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux (2000).

[111] Moutoussamy has also held a number of local political offices in Guadeloupe, most notably serving as the mayor of the district of Saint-François from 1989-2008. He currently serves as Vice-president of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe and as President of the Commission of Tourism, the Environment and Sustainable Development of Guadeloupe (TEDD) (Personal website of Ernest Moutoussamy).

[112] Moutoussamy's novels *Aurore* and *Il pleure dans mon pays* (My Country is Crying; 1979) contain many passages of scarcely veiled Marxist discourse (Moutoussamy was a member of the Parti Communiste Guadeloupéen [PCG] until 1991; he later co-founded the Parti Progressiste Démocratique Guadeloupéen [PPDG]). During his time as a Guadeloupean Deputy to the French

Moutoussamy addresses questions of mutual respect and solidarity among different cultures, as well as issues of human dignity, which he arguess are dependent on the equitable distribution of natural resources (Personal website of Ernest Moutoussamy), in particular, land rights and sustainable farming. However, as I shall discuss in the following section of this chapter, Moutoussamy's illustration of these principles in *Aurore* is not without its own set of complex issues and contradictions.

In order to understand the significance of Confiant's and Moutoussamy's literary contributions to changing the perception of East Indians and their descendents in Martinique and Guadeloupe, it is important first of all to briefly examine East Indian migration, settlement, and integration in the French Caribbean, both past and present.[113] East Indians, of course, were not the only migrants who arrived in Martinique and Guadeloupe when the plantocracy sought to make up for labor shortages after slavery was abolished in 1848; Chinese and "Congos"[114] also came to the islands to work on plantations as indentured laborers. However, as the anthropologist and Confiant's GEREC[115] collaborator Gerry L'Étang explains, East Indian culture is the most visible of the three because East Indians migrated to the French West Indies over a longer period of

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National Assembly (multiple electoral appointments from 1981-2002), he also published a collection of poems entitled *Des champs de canne à sucre à l'assemblée nationale* (1993).

[113] For an excellent comparative overview of racial constructions and race relations between Indo-Caribbeans and other races in the Caribbean, see Alleyne (2002), especially chapter five, "The Caribbean" (80-113); Alleyne focuses on Martinique in chapter seven (152-190).

[114] The majority of "Congos" or *Nègres-Congo*, were Africans from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo-Kinshasa) and the neighboring Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville); a small minority were from Sierra Leone and Gabon; about two percent of the African migrants could not be identified ("De l'héritage culturel").

[115] GEREC stands for "Groupe d'Études et de Recherche en Espace Créolophone" (group for study and research in the Creole-speaking area). The group was founded immediately following the publication of *Éloge de la créolité*, and was spearheaded by its three signatories. It is primarily concerned with the development of an official written Creole language in Martinique and Guadeloupe and with promoting the publication of works of fiction in Creole, as well as dictionaries and glossaries of Creole vocabulary, idioms, and expressions.

time (and thus had contact with new arrivals from the homeland, which helped to preserve and strengthen cultural ties to India), in larger numbers (more than double those of the Congos and more than twenty-five times greater than the Chinese settlement), and their population was more homogeneous in terms of culture, language, religion, and ethnicity than the other two immigrant groups ("De l'héritage culturel").[116]

Between 1854 and 1885, approximately 42,236 East Indian immigrants arrived in Guadeloupe, compared to 25,404 in Martinique (Roopnarine 30). Although the majority of East Indians who came to Martinique and Guadeloupe were Tamilians from the southern Indian state known today as Tamil Nadu[117] (and therefore spoke the same language and were mostly from the same ethnic group), departed from the same port of origin in the city of Pondicherry,[118] were members of the same Sudra[119] social caste (and therefore practiced the same variant of Hinduism), and were bound to the same terms as

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[116] It should also be pointed out that while very few Chinese and Congos returned to their native lands following the completion of their contracts, East Indians returned in much higher numbers. For instance, a census cited by Gerry de l'Étang from December 31, 1900 in Martinique (which also includes second generations), shows that 3,764 Indians remained in Martinique, while 11,951 were repatriated. By contrast, only one Chinese migrant of a population of 430, returned to China; and just two Africans of a population of more than 5,345 Congos returned to Africa ("De l'héritage culturel").

[117] There were nevertheless differences between the ethnic composition of East Indian migrants to Martinique and Guadeloupe. According to Brinda Mehta, "while a majority of Tamilian Indians were sent to Martinique, Guadeloupe on the other hand, as an exception to the general trend of indentured migration to the French Caribbean, initially received more North Indians. However, a larger number of Tamilians were sent to the island in the later years of indenture, which accounts for the presence of southern Indian customs, even though these traditions are very culturally mixed today" (Mehta 2010: 2-3).

[118] Pondicherry is the capital of a union territory comprising the four former territories of French India, Pondicherry, Karaikal, Yanam, and Mahé.

[119] The Sudra caste is the lowest of the four castes or *varna* in the traditional Hindu caste system, (although additional subdivisions exist among the different castes). Sudra performed "menial tasks," and were generally "laborers and servants" (Dirks 21; 19). A small minority of migrants from different castes and other regions of India also arrived in Martinique and Guadeloupe**,** and while they are featured in both novels (Muslims in *La panse du chacal*; Brahmins in *Aurore*), very little historical documentation of their presence exists.

indentured workers on sugarcane plantation, the way these populations eventually adapted to and integrated into Caribbean society and the degree to which they preserved their East Indian cultural heritage was different in Martinique and in Guadeloupe.

Ernest Moutoussamy and the Guadeloupean critic Sita Swami have stressed that today East Indian culture is both more visible and vibrant in Guadeloupe than in Martinique, where they claim that all aspects of Indianness have been diluted due to a higher rate of racial and cultural *métissage* (Moutoussamy 1989; Swami 2003).[120] As I mentioned earlier, and shall discuss in more detail, these distinctions are also to be found in Confiant's and Moutoussamy's fictional Martinican and Guadeloupean Creole societies. The more discernable presence of East Indians in Guadeloupe can largely be explained in terms of demographics. As Richard D.E. Burton explains, Guadeloupe has a "very substantial East Indian minority making up one in six of the total population,[121] in contrast to the small East Indian minority (one in thirty) in the 'sister island'" of Martinique (Burton 1995: 9-10).[122] Another way to compare the size of the two East Indian minority groups is by looking at the combined population of East Indians on the two islands: five-sixths live in Guadeloupe, while just one-sixth lives in Martinique (Moutoussamy 1989: 28). Thanks to a more robust community in Guadeloupe, East

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[120] In Swami's words, "les Indiens de Martinique ont presque perdu leur identité à cause du métissage et de l'acculturation" ([East] Indians in Martinique have almost lost their identity due to miscegenation and acculturation) (1176).

[121] The population statistics provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees conflict with those provided in Richard D.E. Burton's article "The French West Indies à l'heure de l'Europe" quoted above. While Burton states that East Indians make up "one in six" (or nearly 17%) of Guadeloupe's population (Burton 1995: 9), the UNHCR claims that East Indians male up nine percent of Guadeloupe's population ("World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples" online database) (http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain).

[122] Even though East Indians only make up about 3% of Martinique's population, they are still the largest minority group on the island.

Indians there have been more successful than their Martinican counterparts at preserving and reviving Hindu religious traditions (Swami 1177), which are an essential component of East Indian cultural identity. East Indians in Guadeloupe also encountered fewer obstacles in their quest for recognition and French citizenship than those in Martinique (Moutoussamy 1989: 27). However, in both places East Indians were not offered "political rights" as French citizens until 1904 (twenty years after the period of East Indian immigration ended), and it wasn't until 1923 that East Indians were first permitted to serve in the French military (Alleyne 162; Burton 1994: 208).

Characterized as an insular community in which endogamy is frequently practiced and where the family plays a foundational role in the organization of the community, for more than a century East Indian life in Martinique and Guadeloupe was centered around agricultural work, both during and after the period of indentured labor. The social hierarchy of the sugarcane plantation contributed to the perception of East Indians as outsiders, as did the plantation owner's deliberate separation of East Indian and Creole workers' living quarters and work gangs. Although the sugarcane plantation was a space of trauma, confinement, and suffering for East Indian indentured workers, who encountered horrific living and work conditions much like the African slaves before them,[123] it nevertheless serves as the starting point for the new Indo-Caribbean culture that developed in the West Indies.

While undoubtedly the most important site of memory for both cultures, Indo-Caribbean and Creole, the plantation nevertheless serves as a contested space of identity,

[123] In his article, "Indianness in the French West Indies," Moutoussamy states that "the Indian immigrant in Guadeloupe and Martinique was confined to his sugar plantation quarters, not unlike a slave" (27). In fact, East Indians had to obtain consent and a special travel document from the plantation owner in order to travel outside the plantation (Roopnarine 32).

and as such reflects social tensions between the East Indian minority group and the larger Creole society in Martinique and Guadeloupe. In order to highlight the similarities between the experiences of exile and oppression of these two groups, Confiant and Moutoussamy turn to nineteenth-century India as the chronological starting point for their historical novels of East Indian migration and settlement in the Caribbean. (*Aurore* proceeds chronologically, while the narrative in *La panse du chacal* navigates back and forth between the experiences and memories of two generations of one family.) Both describe the desperate material and existential conditions that prompt the main characters to leave India for Martinique and Guadeloupe. In *La panse du chacal*, Adhiyamân Dorassamy's parents are devoured by starving jackals during a period of drought and famine; in *Aurore*, Râma, a brahmin, is banished by his mother for rejecting an arranged marriage and becoming romantically involved with Sarah, a member of the dalit caste, an "untouchable." Exposing the treachery of Indian recruiters (*mestres*) and French colonial authorities in Pondicherry, the two writers show how East Indian workers were bought and sold, not unlike African slaves before them. Additionally, more often than not, the terms of their five-year contracts were impossible to meet, therefore most East Indian workers, whose wages were much lower than those of native Martinicans and Guadeloupeans, toiled in vain, never managing to "reimburse" the plantation master for their expenses and thereby obtain freedom and repatriation to India.[124]

In *Aurore*, Moutoussamy depicts the East Indian workers treading "dans des sillons encore inondés du sang, des larmes et de la sueur d'esclaves venues d'Afrique" (in furrows that continue to be soaked in the blood, tears, and sweat of slaves who came from

[124] Indentured workers' contracts stipulated a "fixed wage" for the duration of their contracts, and therefore did not adjust to "increases in the market value of labour" (Roopnarine 33; Carter 101).

Africa (62). In *La panse du chacal*, Confiant describes the fate of East Indian indentured laborers in the same terms that one would describe what happened to the African slaves before them. Placing the blame squarely on France, Vinesh Dorassamy decries the misery endured by Martinique's East Indian population: "Ne nous avait-elle pas arrachés sans vergogne à notre terre natale, nous, les Indiens, pour nous jeter dans cette île, cette antichambre de l'enfer ….?" (Had she [France] not shamelessly torn us away from our homeland, us Indians, only to throw us on this island, this antechamber of hell … ?) (221). Additionally, as Richard D.E. Burton states, most Martinicans made a clear distinction between migrant workers from China and those from India: "Chinese were [seen as] contractual" while "East Indians were [considered] slaves" (Burton 1994: 209). At the same time, and in contradiction to the perception of East Indians as a weak and servile race, East Indian migrants were also viewed as cunning and deceitful because they were thought to deliberately steal work from local plantation workers by accepting lower wages and by not taking part in strikes organized by workers' unions. These conflicting perceptions are both illustrated and confronted in *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore*, with both novels revealing the plantation owner's role in stoking the animosity between his black workers and *coulis*, effectively employing a strategy of "divide and conquer" in order to keep all wages low and to limit support for workers' unions and their organized strikes. For example, *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* both feature violent episodes in which the plantation owners lie to the East Indian workers, ordering them to arm themselves and defend the plantation against the protesting workers, whom they portray as a murderous, thieving band of blacks, thus using East Indians to quell the protests, which further exacerbated the antagonism between the two groups.

Another important parallel experience of African slaves and indentured workers from India described in Confiant's and Moutoussamy's novels is the harrowing three-month journey by sea both groups made to the Caribbean from their native lands. Large sections of *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* are dedicated to describing the confinement and discomfort endured by Indian passengers, as well as their mistreatment (beatings, rapes, neglect) by the ship's officers and crew.[125] For instance, passengers were locked in overcrowded cabins where they lived in unsanitary conditions and suffered from malnutrition; when a passenger became gravely ill or died aboard the ship, his or her body was simply thrown overboard; and couples and families were frequently separated during the journey, and sometimes upon arrival, were assigned to work on different plantations. These conditions would have been similar to those experienced on a much larger and more dramatic scale by generations of African slaves, who of course did not have the option of buying back their freedom and returning to their homeland.

Both Confiant and Moutoussamy refer to this East Indian "middle passage" is as *la traite des Indiens* (the Indian slave trade), the same French expression that is used to describe the African slave trade (*la traite des Africains*). According to Brinda Mehta, "the beginning of *kala pani* as another form of premeditated economic servitude … coincided with the end of African slavery" (Mehta 2010: 1). The term *Kala pani* (or "black water" in Hindi), which refers to the departure from India and the journey across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans to go work in the Caribbean, in other islands in the Indian Ocean (such as the Mascareignes), or even to British colonies like South Africa, came to

[125] In *La panse du chacal*, the first generation of Dorassamy's travels to Martinique aboard the British ship that brought the final convoy of East Indian indentured workers to Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1885. Vinesh, the first born of the second generation, is born on the ship, and the other children are born on Martinican soil.

be seen as a taboo or a curse. As Mehta explains, "traversing … large expanses of water was associated with contamination and cultural defilement as these crossings led to the loss of tradition, caste, class, and a generally 'purified'ideal of Hinduness" (1). A departure from India also made it impossible to follow the traditional Hindu burial practice of spreading the ashes of the dead in the "regenerating waters" of the sacred Ganges River, and thus was believed to prevent reincarnation and the "possibility … of reaching a higher caste status" (Mehta 2009: 3). Furthermore, "the severing of ties from India [was believed to condemn] … the Hindu soul to a perpetual state of errancy in the absence of ancestral roots" (Mehta 2010: 3), a condition analogous to the psychological and existential state of rootlessness experienced by African slaves and their descendents in the New World, and which Édouard Glissant so poignantly describes in the short essay "L'errance, L'exile" in *Poétique de la relation* (23-24).

These comparable experiences of slavery and indenture, traumatic journeys and dislocations, exile and errantry—not to mention racial prejudice, physical and psychological violence, and the loss of language, religion, and cultural identity—endured by Afro- and Indo-Caribbean people, are relayed in these historical novels about East Indian indentured workers in Martinique and Guadeloupe as didactic exercises in social solidarity and citizenship. However, despite attempts to dissolve the cultural boundaries between the East Indian minority and the Creole majority in these novels, a close reading of the conceptions of Indianness along with the societal constructions of Martinican and Guadeloupean identity in *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* reveal their authors' distinct visions of cultural integration and isolation in their respective islands.

2.4 The Island from Within: Confiant's "Interior Vision" and Moutoussamy's "Insular Lens"

The East Indian communities of *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* are represented as insular and segregated from the Creole societies of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Having arrived after the emancipation of slavery, East Indians were considered outsiders because their identity could not be apprehended in terms of pre-existing epistemologies of Creoleness (in their linguistic, cultural, religious, and racial dimensions), which are defined exclusively along a continuum of African and European (and to a lesser extent, Amerindian) attributes and contributions. While the insularity of these East Indian communities to a certain extent enabled the migrants and their descendents to preserve their heritage, at the same time their isolation—which was deliberately orchestrated by colonial administrators and the plantocracy—contributed to the ostracism of East Indian migrants by the Creole majority. Confiant's and Moutoussamy's historical novels about East Indian migration and settlement in the New World bring to light the challenges East Indians faced as they attempted to adapt to and survive in their new environment, while also keeping the hope alive that they might meet the terms of their five-year contracts and return home to India (something only a minority of them managed to do). Unable to fulfill their contracts within one term of indenture, none of the main characters in *La panse du chacal* or *Aurore* is ultimately able to return to his/her homeland. Thus, Adhiyamân and Devi, the first generation of Dorassamys in *La panse du chacal,* and Râma and the eponymous Aurore, in Moutoussamy's novel, must learn to preserve their ancestral East Indian identities while also putting down new Martinican and Guadeloupean roots.

The East Indian community's isolation from Creole society and their legal and social status as outsiders, of course, made the process of integration all the more formidable. The degree to which the East Indian communities in *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* are portrayed as living in isolation from society at large, and how much the East Indian characters in the novels interact with members of other communities, are indicative of Confiant's and Moutoussamy's ideas about cultural integration both in the past and in the present. Furthermore, the close-knit family structure that so defines the East Indian community in the Caribbean, which the Barbadian poet and critic Edward Kamau Brathwaite describes as "an enclosing self-sufficient world" (Chapter Two epigraph; Brathwaite 50), in fact functions as a microcosm for the East Indian community, which in turn can be subsumed within the larger microcosm of the sugarcane plantation in these *romans de la canne*, which represents the island itself. Vinesh Dorassamy's geographical-metaphorical-existential conception of the restricted lives of East Indian workers in *La panse du chacal* encapsulates this vision: "cette île … n'était à bien regarder, qu'un gigantesque champ de canne à sucre, qu'on descendît vers le sud ou qu'on la parcourût d'est en ouest" (this island … upon examination, was nothing more than a gigantic sugarcane field, whether one headed south or traveled from east to west) (221). Thus, the interaction between these different social structures (the East Indian family, the East Indian community, the plantation) resembles the tension between several circumscribed segments of Creole society and the entire society (the intertextuality of parts and wholes).

Turning to the texts themselves, I will examine the implications of Confiant's and Moutoussamy's insular literary aesthetics as their way of describing their islands'

cultures. With its associated meanings, such as something or someone belonging to an island, a person or a population living in isolation, and a narrow perception or point of view, the adjective "insular" already suggests the interconnections between the writers' perspectives and the places and cultures they portray.

La panse du chacal

As I discussed earlier in this chapter in my intertextual reading of *Le Galion* and *La panse du chacal*, the East Indian experience as represented in *La panse du chacal* corresponds to one episode or installment within Confiant's broader collective vision of Martinican *créolité*. Thus, *indianité* à la Confiant (in other words, Confiant's portrayal of East Indian life in Martinique) serves primarily as a means of illustrating the process of East Indian acculturation to the dominant culture of *créolité*. One of the ways in which Confiant uses the East Indian experience to exemplify the Martinican Creole experience in *La panse du chacal* is by comparing the East Indian caste system and the Martinican ethnoclass hierarchy. After a conversation with Théophile, the French socialist school teacher, Vinesh Dorassamy, who is arguably the central figure in the novel because he is the character whose identity has seamlessly absorbed elements of both East Indian and Creole cultures[126], comes to see caste and ethnoclass as the same thing:

> Au fond, le monde créole était pareil au nôtre avec ses castes et interdits, c'est-à-dire tout en haut, les Békés-brahmanes, au mileu les mulâtres-

[126] I elaborate on Vinesh's dual East Indian and Creole identity in my final discussion of *La panse du chacal*.

> *vaishya*[127], en bas les Nègres-*shudra* et encore plus bas, nous autres, les Indiens-pariahs (197).
>
> In essence, the Creole world was the same as ours, with its castes and taboos. In other words, with the Béké-brahmanes at the top, the mulattoes-*vaishya* in the middle, the blacks-*shudra* at the bottom, and even lower, we the others, the Indian-pariahs (197).

Confiant's compound caste-ethnoclass categories equate each of Martinique's main ethnoclasses with the four primary Indian *varna*; however, in doing so, the writer in fact distorts the reality of East Indian migration in Martinique. The majority of East Indian migrants were not *dalit* ("untouchables"), but *sudra*. What the passage reveals is that this intermingled categorization prioritizes ethnoclass over caste, and a Creole vision over an East Indian perspective (again reveling a narrative perspective from outside the East Indian community being portrayed in the novel). For the East Indian *sudra* migrants only became "pariahs" through the process of *kala pani*, when they traversed the "black waters," arrived in the Caribbean and were banished to the margins of society.

Confiant establishes a whole series of equivalences between East Indian culture and Creole culture, many of them centered on representations of race. In another passage, the owner of the Courbaril Plantation, the Béké Houblin de Maucourt, reveals how his perception of East Indian racial nuances is informed by his own Caribbean ethnoclass prejudices, when he angrily steps in to distinguish between his light-skinned East Indian lover Nalima and the darker skinned Indians who work in his sugarcane fields:

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[127] The *vaishya* caste is the second lowest of the four traditional Indian *varna*, just above the *sudra* (or unskilled workers).

> —Jamais! explosa le Béké. Jamais! Tu m'entends? Nalima n'est pas de la même race que ces gens-là, messieurs. Peut-être ne vous en êtes-vous pas encore rendu compte mais elle n'a rien avoir avec ces Tamoules noiraudes qui se percent le nez et se mettent des bracelets aux chevilles. Rien à voir! Elle vient du nord de l'Inde et c'est pourquoi elle a ce ton de sapotille. C'est une princesse bengalie (89).
>
> Never!, exclaimed the Béké. Never! Do you hear me? Nalima is not the same race as those people, gentlemen. Perhaps you haven't yet noticed that she bears no resemblance to those blackish Tamilian women who pierce their noses and wear bracelets around their ankles. Nothing to do with them! She comes from the north of India and that's why she has the skin tone of a *sapotille*.[128] She's a Bengali princess.

After De Maucourt's outburst, his four non-Indian workers look at him with "étonnement et admiration" (astonishment and admiration), impressed with his knowledge and worldliness. For they themselves perceive the undistinguishable mass of East Indian workers who arrive year after year in Martinique as "des cohortes de créatures taciturnes" (groups of taciturn creatures) (89-90). The Béké's "lesson" in East Indian ethnicity allows Confiant to simultaneously mock the De Maucourt's purported erudition and the workers' inability to detect the same racial constructions they themselves are subjected to in the plantation owner's speech, while also saluting Nalima's ability to convince the status-seeking Béké that his East Indian lover is a North Indian princess. (In this respect,

[128] The *sapotille* or mamey sapote (*pouteria sapota*) is a brownish fruit with a peach tint that grows in the Caribbean, Central America, and Asia. In the French Caribbean, the skin tone of a light-skinned woman of mixed race, might be compared to a *sapotille*.

Confiant is perpetuating the colonial stereotype of the beautiful, crafty mulatto lover, who uses her wiles to gain favor with the white plantation master.) Even De Maucourt's positive assessment of his lover's peachy skin tone is compared to the native *sapotille* fruit, which is another way of familiarizing, or even translating Nalima's foreign beauty into Creole terms.[129]

Another way in which Confiant connects the two communities in *La panse du chacal* is by framing the discussion of the Indo-Caribbean condition in terms that are very similar to that of Afro-Caribbean slaves and their descendents, especially by highlighting their state of material and political disenfranchisement and their marginalization. One could easily substitute the word "Nègre" for the words "Indien" or "Couli" in any of these descriptions with virtually no need to recontextualize the passage. For instance, when Adhiyamân Dorassamy proposes buying a plot of land so that the family can raise cattle rather than work in the fields of the Courbaril plantation, his wife Devi's reaction is:

> Tu t'imagines que les Blancs vont laisser les Coulis leur marcher sur les pieds? … Il n'y a aucun avenir pour nos enfants sur l'Habitation. Aucun. S'ils restent ici, ils vont continuer à couper la canne jusqu'à la fin des temps … (219).

[129] The interesting paradox in Confiant's description of Nalima's "peau de sapotille" is that while the reference to local flora gives the East Indian beauty an air of Creoleness, it nevertheless remains a very exotic image for Confiant's readers, most of whom reside in France. This is one of many examples in the novel where something exotic or foreign (East Indian) becomes local color (Martinican or Creole).

> Do you really believe that the Békés will let a Coolie step on their toes? … There is no future for our children on the Plantation. None. If they stay here, they will continue to cut cane until the end of time …

Devi's perspective reveals the lack of social mobility available to East Indians, whose position is deeply entrenched within the rigid ethnoclass and plantation hierarchies. (The capitalized spelling of "Habitation" underscores the connection between the two, and the broad institutional character of the latter and its godlike authority over the fate of the East Indian workers.) In another passage, Vinesh Dorassamy is faced with a critical choice to either follow Houblin de Maucourt's orders to encourage the East Indian laborers (who have been armed with machetes) to resist the workers' strike organized by the plantation's black workers (who are joined by a lone rebellious East Indian, who is referred to as Moutoussamy le Couli), or defy them and join forces with the striking workers. (The decision is made more difficult when the plantation owner proposes to promote Vinesh to the position of *commandeur* or plantation driver if he successfully defeats the protesters.) In a moment of clarity, after being pressed by Moutoussamy le Couli to either put down their machetes and join the strikers or fight them, Vinesh realizes that as East Indians

> nous étions seuls au monde, abandonnés dans cette île que deux océans séparaient de l'Inde de nos ancêtres, cette Martinique où ne régnait qu'un dieu unique et inique: la canne à sucre.
>
> "*Nou… nous la épi zot...* " (Nous… nous sommes avec vous…) (207).

> we were alone in the world, abandoned on this island, which two oceans separated from the India of our ancestors, this Martinique where only one iniquitous god reigned: the sugarcane.
>
> "*Nou… nous la épi zot...* " (We… we are with you…).

As Vinesh and the East Indian laborers join the striking workers, "Nègres et Indiens fraternisèrent sur-le-champ" (blacks and Indians rush to fraternized with each other) (207). But the celebration is short lived. Without any warning, the strikers are overtaken by armed police, and Moutoussamy and Anthénor, the plantation driver, are killed. Just as they came together in solidarity to fight for better pay and work conditions, now "Nègres et Indiens" find themselves "dans la même irréfragable[*sic*] détresse" (in the same undeniable distress) (207). With the strike suppressed, the grieving workers must "reprendre le chemin des champs de canne" (make their way down to the sugarcane fields) the next morning, "au premier chant de l'oiseau piri-piri" (at the first call of the piri-piri bird), as if nothing had ever happened (207-208). United in their hopelessness, the black and East Indian workers in Confiant's novel have no choice but to remain on the plantation, where they must tend to the fertile but fragile environment of *créolité*.

A final example from *La panse du chacal* may help to flesh out my assertion that Indianness for Confiant serves primarily as a case study for the larger process—or rather, ideology of *créolité*—derives from an examination of the character Vinesh Dorassamy, who embodies the marriage of East Indian and Creole cultures more than any other character in the novel. Although Vinesh Dorassamy is ethnically East Indian, his status as an orphan (he is raised by Devi and Adhiyamân Dorassamy after his own mother dies as she gives birth to him on the journey from Pondicherry to Martinique) frees him from

the obsession with origins and ancestry that plagues most of the East Indian migrants in the novel, and Adhiyamân, in particular. Vinesh's birth midway between India and the Caribbean aboard the ship carrying the last convoy of East Indian migrants to Martinique places him at the intersection of the two cultures. Furthermore, his birth on the ship can be interpreted in terms of Glissant's reading of the African slave ship in the essay "La barque ouverte" (the open ship) in *Poétique de la relation*, which Glissant describes as a "no-place," where slaves (or in this case, indentured workers) lost their ties to their homeland. Glissant's description of the African slave ship as "une matrice" (a matrix or a womb) (Glissant 1990: 89) also supports this symbolic reading of Vinesh's birth at sea as well as the position of the ship and the sugarcane plantation as the two most important *lieux de mémoire* for the Caribbean descendents of African slaves and East Indian indentured workers.

Throughout *La panse du chacal*, Vinesh Dorassamy attempts to reconcile his two identities, East Indian and Creole. This struggle is symbolized by the duality between day and night as expressed through Vinesh's more conscious Creole identity during the waking hours, and his East Indian identity, which manifests itself on a more subconscious level each night in the form of a recurring dream that takes him to the banks of the sacred Ganges river: "Le jour donc, je vivais ici, dans ce pays de Martinique …. La nuit, par contre, dès que le sommeil m'emportait … je voyageais en rêve dans l'Inde de mes parents " (During the day, I lived here, in this land of Martinique …. At night, on the other hand, as soon as I drifted off to sleep … in my dreams I traveled to the India of my parents) (222-223). Throughout the novel, Vinesh's sense of belonging to Martinique is repeatedly expressed in terms of a filial connection, which seems to be stronger than the

ties between Vinesh and his adopted parents, Adhiyamân and Devi. Vinesh feels attached to Martinique in a way that his father Adhiyamân does not: "j'étais fils de cette nouvelle terre, de cette Martinique pour laquelle il [Adhiyamân] éprouvait une sourde et ténace défiance" (I was a son if this new land, this Martinique which he [Adhiyamân regarded with an ever growing and tenacious defiance) (211). Even as Vinesh acknowledges that the life of the sugarcane worker is a living hell, he is nevertheless portrayed as being completely absorbed by his work in the sugarcane fields; Vinesh's ultimate ambition is "de remplacer, dans quelques années, Sosthène, au poste de commandeur" (to replace Sosthène in his position as [the plantation] driver) (206). However, as long as East Indians and their Martinican-born descendents continued to be considered foreigners, his identity would remain divided. (This segment of the novel takes place during a time of patriotic fervor, when Martinican men were leaving the island to fight for France in World War I.) As Vinesh explains,

> je mène depuis ma haute enfance, une existence double … Le jour je suis le fils de ce pays, de cette terre généreuse de Martinique, cent fois plus généreuse que celle de Madurai, là-bas en Inde … Je parle le créole et un peu le français (212).
>
> since my late childhood, I have led a double life … I am a child of this land, of this generous Martinican land, which is a hundred times more generous than the one in Madurai, over there in India … I speak Creole and a little French.

Despite the hardship endured by Vinesh and the other members of the East Indian community in Martinique, this new land is considered more bountiful than the India of

their ancestors, the famine-plagued India where Adhiyamân Dorassamy witnessed his own parents being devoured by jackals. Thus, the East Indian identity that Vinesh is so eager to encounter each night after returning from work would seem to be more spiritual than concrete.

Vinesh's nocturnal search for India becomes a ritualized quest for a state of inner peace after a day of hard work during which he no doubt experienced a great deal of aggression and discrimination. Nighttime provides the opportunity to cleanse himself spiritually, to center himself, and to recover his own humanity: Every night, "dès que l'obscurité commençait à tomber sur notre hameau, je redevenais peu à peu Indien" (as soon as darkness began to fall over our hamlet, little by little I would become Indian again) (223). Vinesh's sharply contrasting Creole and East Indian identities, which are distinctly associated with day and night, become more nuanced at twilight, as Vinesh contemplates his environment on his walk home from the canefields. As he distances himself from the canefields, the stables, the fields of manioc, the big house—all the symbols of his earthly struggles on the plantation—and returns to the isolated hamlet ("hameau") where the East Indians live, he feels "apaisé, prêt pour la méditation" (appeased, ready for meditation) (223). Vinesh's contemplative state, this ability to leave behind the problems of his real existence, is represented as a spiritual quality that is shared by the entire community:

> Bien qu'aucun d'entre nous n'en parlât, j'avais la certitude que tous les Indiens, même ceux qui avaient fini par s'habituer à l'Habitation Courbaril … éprouvait le même transport que moi (223).

> Although no one ever spoke of it, I was certain that all the Indians, even those who had become accustomed to life on Courbaril plantation …. experienced the same type of spiritual transcendence.

Vinesh's, and by extension, the Indian community's ability to cope with the extreme conditions of life on the plantation through Hindu meditation, makes it possible for them to survive and stay the course in the inhospitable plantation and island environments that were nonetheless becoming their home.

Confiant's semantic slippage between *Hindu* and *Indien*, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, can also provide some insight into the characterization of Vinesh's dual identity. Vinesh's Indian identity functions as a purely symbolic one. Having forgotten his ancestor's Tamil language, Creole has become his native tongue. Toward the end of the novel, as the eldest son, Vinesh is asked to don an East Indian ceremonial robe and offer a dance to the Hindu goddess Shakti, as his father Adhiyamân lies on his deathbed. Surrounded by his family members, Vinesh begins to dance with abandon, until he is interrupted by his father, who exclaims, with what could be his last breath, "C'est pas notre danse à nous, ça! … Tes pas sont des pas de Nègre … (That's not our dance that you're doing. You're dancing like you are black) (363). Vinesh soon realizes that he has in fact been doing the steps of a type of warrior's dance from Africa that he and his parents had learned from watching the other sugarcane workers engage in this type of combat dance while standing in line to collect their weekly pay. This episode demonstrates that Vinesh's acculturation is complete. Just as Confiant describes Martinican Hinduism as a syncretic religion, so the *combat dansé* has become part of

Vinesh's culture. Once East Indians have at last been granted their political rights as French citizens in 1923 (shortly before the conclusion of the novel), the last obstacle seems to have been removed from their complete absorption into Confiant's *univers créole.* By the same token, all that is visibly East Indian in Martinican culture—Hindu festivals and temples, madras cloth, *Colombo* sauce, etc.—must melt into the great callaloo of *créolité.*

Aurore

The East Indian characters in Moutoussamy's novel *Aurore* are a great deal more isolated than those in *La panse du chacal*. This can be partly explained by an effort to represent the experience of East Indian settlement in Guadeloupe in an accurate historical context. As I discussed earlier, East Indian migrant workers were deliberately kept apart from Creole workers, living in separate quarters and working in different groups (in contrast to Confiant's East Indian characters who frequently come into contact with members of different ethnoclasses). However, this isolation of the community in Moutoussamy's novel is also the result of the writer's emphasis on representing and preserving East Indian culture in Guadeloupe, rather than on telling the story of East Indians adapting to life in Guadeloupe. Despite Moutoussamy's personal connection to and familiarity with East Indian culture in Guadeloupe, some of his literary choices in *Aurore* contradict his attempts to accurately tell the story of the East Indian experience there.

Perhaps the most significant of these choices is Moutoussamy's much greater insistence on portraying East Indian culture from the Indian subcontinent, rather than its variant in Guadeloupe. Although nineteenth-century India (and Pondicherry in

particular) figure prominently in both Confiant's and Moutoussamy's novels for the purpose of explaining the reasons why the characters in their novels undertook their *kala pani* journeys to the Caribbean, Moutoussamy's attention to the culture of ancestral India occupies a central part of the Guadeloupean portion of the novel as well. Even though approximately one-third of the narrative takes place in India (while one third describes the East Indian "middle passage," and the last third takes place on a plantation in Guadeloupe), the memory of India is ever-present in the lives of the characters of *Aurore*, even when they are on Guadeloupean soil. Additionally, by choosing to portray his main character Râma as a member of India's most elevated Brahmin caste, Moutoussamy privileges the representation of a more exotic or foreign Indian culture over the a more accurate and relevant representation of the Sudra caste majority that settled in Guadeloupe and Martinique. Therefore, unlike Vinesh Dorassamy in *La panse du chacal*, who serves as an archetype for Confiant's Martinican Indianness, through his caste, Râma is exceptional rather than typical of East Indian migrants to Guadeloupe. Râma's difference, his status as a Brahmin, is a sign of his "authentic" Indianness, which is linked to India rather than to Guadeloupe.

While Moutoussamy encourages the idea of mutual tolerance and acceptance between peoples in his novels and in his non-fiction, at the same time, he appears to promote a separate identity for Indo-Guadeloupeans. According to Karyn Anderson in her article "Ernest Moutoussamy's *Aurore* and the Construction of a Split-Level Home," Moutoussamy uses *Aurore* "to exhort contemporary descendents of Indian indentured immigrants to resist the process of acculturation within the French West Indian Creole culture, effectively positing a center/periphery dichotomy within the heart of the

periphery" (30). Although Râma, like Vinesh in *La panse du chacal*, ultimately becomes a community leader who works to bring East Indian indentured laborers and Creole workers together to fight for better working conditions, Râma remains firmly rooted in his East Indian identity even after he decides to build his future in Guadeloupe instead of returning to India.[130] In this respect, *Aurore* illustrates one of Moutoussamy's central claims in his essay "Indianness in the French West Indies" (1989) that

> [t]he Indian in Guadeloupe and Martinique belongs to his island. Neither can he, nor does he want to go back to India. India remains a faraway solace. It is the point of reference without which his life would be meaningless, or become assimilated to the life of the Other (30).

If we attempt to explain Râma's attachment to India according to Moutoussamy's formulation above, we will see that his Guadeloupean identity is incomplete without the East Indian component. Moreover, while Râma decides to settle permanently in Guadeloupe he has no plans to abandon his Indian identity, since he does not desire to "become assimilated to the life of the Other," presumably the Creole majority.

How then, according to Moutoussamy, does one simultaneously preserve one's East Indian heritage while also putting down roots in the Caribbean? Again, his essay "Indianness in the French West Indies," provides some clues by describing the

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[130] According to Karyn Anderson, Râma's activism in the novel "follows the modern-day prescriptions of Moutoussamy in his non-literary writing" (34). Râma's mentor in Guadeloupe, a man named Gopi, who arrived with the first East Indian convoy aboard the *Aurélie* in 1854 (some thirty years before Râma's arrival), advises Râma to "[c]herche[r] à réconcilier les Nègres et les Indiens, rend[re] tes frères à eux-mêmes … et [de] n'oublie[r] pas ton pays (strive for reconciliation between blacks and Indians, and help your brothers to find themselves again) (*Aurore* 129). Gopi's advice also underscores the importance of preserving East Indian cultural memory.

importance of establishing a connection not so much with the inhabitants, but with the New World landscape. This connection with the landscape is also linked to the Indo-Caribbean history of indenture. As Moutoussamy explains,

> Indians were the last group to be brought to the Caribbean, and are primarily concentrated in the agricultural sector. All their vital energies are invested in the land, which has become for them both a factor of self-identification and an agent for socioeconomic advancement (28).

Thus, the landscape connects Indo-Caribbeans to their past and present identities. Moutoussamy also states that it is through agricultural labor that they participate in West Indian life:

> Theirs is a concrete existence in which they weed out bushes, and work and plant crops in solidarity with their brothers of African descent. The degree to which Indians love their country is in direct proportion to their love for the land (30).

Moutoussamy's assertion that East Indians' attachment to their landscape is the primary factor in their integration reveals itself as problematic in both his essays and in his fiction. For example, in the same essay he highlights the importance of family in the organization of the East Indian community in Guadeloupe, emphasizing the rural character of the community (33). In the past and in the present, East Indian life has been centered around agriculture, and at the same time, it is through this sector that they have most contributed to Guadeloupean society at large. In Moutoussamy's words,

> There is no doubt, however, that in … [Martinique and Guadeloupe], the Indian immigrant took part in the humanization of nature, helped to cultivate the fertile land, invigorated animal farming with his love of the sacred cow and, in the process, came to love and accept Martinique and Guadeloupe as home (27).

What Moutoussamy explicitly does not address is the fact that East Indians' involvement in farming has essentially been a segregated activity. In the past, East Indian indentured laborers were forced to work and live in isolation from other Guadeloupean Creole workers; after the period of indenture, most Indo-Guadeloupeans continued to work in the agricultural sector, and those who could, bought or leased land and starting their own family farms. Land ownership continues to be very important to East Indians in Guadeloupe, with "sixty percent of [East Indian] households depend[ing] on farming"; and while East Indians make up about nine percent of Guadeloupe's population, they own sixteen percent of all farmland on the island (28).[131] Farming therefore allowed East Indians to maintain close ties with their families and their insular communities. It is not clear from Moutoussamy's statements just how East Indians in the French Caribbean have absorbed Creole culture, since he only discusses East Indian contributions to farming in the Caribbean (for example, how the East Indian "invigorated animal farming with his love of the sacred cow" from the Indian Hindu tradition) rather than a reciprocal exchange between East Indians and Creole ideas and practices.

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[131] Moutoussamy states that East Indians "occupy one sixth of all arable land" in Guadeloupe. Their main areas of farming are "sugarcane, banana, vegetable plantations and animal farming." He also maintains that "[i]n Martinique, the economic impact of the Indians is not as strong [as in Guadeloupe]. Seldom landowners, they are more often than not, peasant workers" (Moutoussamy 1989: 28).

Strangely, the agricultural landscape in Moutoussamy's non-fiction, which is of such vital importance to Indo-Gaudeloupean identity, plays a very minor role in *Aurore*. Although the entire Guadeloupean portion of the novel is set on a sugarcane plantation, the landscape receives far less attention than in *La panse du chacal*, where the sugarcane practically becomes a character in the narrative, especially through Confiant's use of pathetic fallacy. While in Confiant's novel Vinesh experiences a strong connection to his landscape, and his work in the sugarcane fields plays a major role in his acculturation through contact with other ethnoclasses, Râma's solidarity with his fellow East Indian workers in Moutoussamy's novel is primarily established through contact outside the scope of agricultural work, usually in a specific Indian religious or cultural context. Having virtually no contact with Creole workers either on or off the plantation, Râma must meet secretly with Vitalien, one of the leaders and organizers in the black Creole community, in order to work toward the goal of bringing the East Indian and black Creole communities together to fight for improvement in their work conditions and pay. The only hint that the Caribbean landscape plays a role in Râma's, and by extension, the East Indian community's gradual acceptance of their new home, is in terms of the secret provision grounds on the outskirts of the plantation (like the *jardin créole* or Creole yard cultivated by former African slaves and their descendents throughout the Caribbean) where Râma and other members of the community begin to grow their own vegetables and fruits, and thus to contribute to and build a relationship with the physical landscape; they also gain a small degree of autonomy by growing their own food and reducing their dependence on purchasing food from plantation-owned shops. Nevertheless, this remains a very minor part of the narrative.

Moutoussamy's emphasis on preserving an ancestral Indian culture and on maintaining a separate unassimilated East Indian identity leads him to illustrate "good" and "bad" examples of this social model through his own East Indian characters in *Aurore*. While Râma and his mentor Gopi are the standard-bearers of Indianness, other East Indian characters who abandon traditional East Indian values and become "creolized" are unequivocally represented as weak, selfish, or morally corrupt. The character who is most representative of this type of assimilation is Maya, a young East Indian woman who is portrayed as a type of automaton, and whose loyalty toward the plantation master and his family has led her to forget her own identity, as she makes it her life's ambition to increase the planter's wealth. As the omniscient narrator explains, Maya is an "[e]sclave avec un titre d'engagé, elle avait liquidé sa dignité pour la cause du sucre" (slave with the title of indentured servant, she had sold her dignity for the sake of sugar) (*Aurore* 122). Maya's fault is all the more egregious because it appears to be unremorseful and voluntary. By disregarding Moutoussamy's "one-size fits all" prescription for maintaining a closed, exclusively East Indian identity, Maya is in fact stripped of her entire East Indian identity, and is finally categorized by the narrator as the undifferentiated non-Indian "other":

> Elle était l'autre. Son coeur irrigué par le vésou battait au rythme des moulins et des matins de soleil levant devant les Pauvert. Papillon des cannaies avec des yeux d'hibiscus ouverts sur la rosée des aubes toujours plus belles, … et renforçait sans cesse son armure en face de la solidarité des gens de sa race (145).

> She was the other. Her heart, nourished by the liquid from the sugarcane, beat to the rhythm of the mills and the morning sunrise in the Pauvert universe. Butterfly of the sugarcane fields with hibiscus eyes opened to the dew of the ever-more beautiful dawn, … she constantly reinforced her armor against the pull of solidarity with the people of her own race.

In this passage, Maya is represented as the "other," and as such she has been transformed into a creature of this new Caribbean plantation environment.[132] Although she is portrayed as a beautiful being, as a "butterfly … with hibiscus eyes," she is also an abomination: her veins course with liquid sugar rather than with human blood; and her heart "beats to the rhythm of the [sugar] mills." Seduced by Toto Pauvert's capitalist vision, Maya is blind to anything beyond the scope of this world in which nothing but financial profit matters; her world, her horizon, is circumscribed by the sugarcane fields and the Pauvert's property lines.[133] By denying any possibility of "solidarity" with other East Indians, with "the people of her own race," Maya also loses her humanity, and becomes a type of monster.

Moutoussamy is more forgiving toward characters who make concessions to their new environment and adapt to Creole culture out of the basic impulse to survive, as in the

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[132] Maya is one of the Indian characters who is most attuned to her physical environment, even developing a symbiotic relationship with the landscape (she is a "butterfly" pollinating the Pauvert's sugarcane fields). While in his non-fiction Moutoussamy discusses the importance of the Caribbean landscape for Indo-Guadeloupeans, in *Aurore*, the sugarcane fields represent a type of hell. So long as the East Indian characters are exploited and bound to their contracts as indentured workers, the landscape is a prison. Moutoussamy suggests that a connection to the landscape and a love of land can only happen when East Indian workers are free, when they can plant their own crops in their own separate community.

[133] In the novel, Toto Pauvert is the governor of the district of Basse-Pointe, and one of the richest men in Guadeloupe.

case of the novel's namesake, Aurore. At the beginning of the novel, Râma rejects his arranged marriage with Aurore, a woman from his same Brahmin caste, in order to pursue Sarah, an untouchable. Banished by his mother, Râma has no choice but to leave India with Sarah in order to pursue an illusive "freedom" in the New World, where they will no longer be bound and defined by their castes. But upon arrival in Guadeloupe, Râma finds himself alone (Sarah dies during the journey) and essentially enslaved. After more than eleven years in Guadeloupe, Râma discovers that Aurore is also on the island, having made the journey five years earlier in order to search for him.[134] Having abandoned all hope of finding Râma, Aurore is forced to become the mistress of the powerful plantation owner Auguste Pauvert (the brother of Toto Pauvert, who owns the plantation where Râma works), and eventually gives birth to a mixed-race daughter. Aurore's rape becomes an allegory for the experience of East Indians in Guadeloupe, primarily in terms of their forced acculturation:

> Le sperme et les caresses d'Auguste Pauvert fermèrent définitivement le livre qu'elle avait ouvert au nom de la dignité de l'Inde et pour l'amour de Râma sur cette terre (170).
>
> Auguste Pauvert's sperm and his caresses permanently closed the chapter that she had begun in the name of the dignity of India and for the love of Râma in this land.

Aurore's humiliation and regret absolve her of any blame in her situation when she and Râma finally meet at the conclusion of the novel, and manage to escape during the chaos of a violent workers' strike in which East Indians, who were duped by the plantation

[134] Like Vinesh in *La panse du chacal*, Aurore arrives with the last convoy of East Indian indentured workers.

owner, are forced to fight the striking black Creole workers. Together they and Aurore's *échappée-coulie*[135] daughter will build new future together:

> Ils s'étreignirent. Le silence des bois les absorba. La fillette questionna sa mère. À l'Orient le ciel devint rose …. Un autre siècle commença" (174-175).
>
> They held each other, absorbed by the silence of the woods. The young girl questioned her mother. To the East, the sky became pink. A new century had begun.

In contrast with Maya's restricted world, where the sun rises and sets on the Pauvert's plantation, Aurore's horizon is limitless, extending all the way across the seas to the distant Orient of Moutoussamy's exoticized and orientalized India, full of its "sagesse orientale" (Eastern wisdom), a phrase that is repeated countless times throughout the novel.

While the conclusion of *Aurore*, and of course, the title of the novel itself, proclaim the beginning of a new era for East Indians in Guadeloupe, the novel's abrupt ending does not tell us what that future will be. But the mention of the sun rising in the East suggests that Râma, Aurore, and the unnamed little girl will be searching for answers in the Orient, in a timeless, ancestral India, even as they put down new roots in Guadeloupe. The preservation of their Indian culture depends on the establishment of a separate community for East Indians within Guadeloupe, as illustrated through the union of Râma and Aurore. Earlier in the narrative, when Râma approaches Maya with a proposition of marriage (which she rejects), the concept of marriage and reproduction is

[135] This is a term for a mixed-race white and East Indian girl or woman, literally meaning "escaped Coolie."

framed in terms of founding a community in order to forge a connection with his adopted island:

> [I]l souhaitait laisser un héritier à cette terre sachant qu'inévitablement l'émancipation de toutes les races était inscrite dans l'histoire. En fondant une famille ici, la Guadeloupe deviendrait véritablement sa patrie. Cette union mettrait fin définitivement aux tentations de retour, transformerait l'exil en asile et dégagerait encore plus nettement les perspectives d'intégration dans la société locale (145).
>
> He wanted to leave an heir in this land, knowing that the emancipation of all races was inevitably written in history. By founding a family here, Guadeloupe would truly become his country. This union would definitively put an end to the temptation of returning [to India], would transform his exile into a refuge, and would offer clearer perspectives on integrating into local society.

Paradoxically, Râma's tainted *kala pani* journey to Guadeloupe leads him to embrace the very same rigid, traditional Indian values he once sought to escape. Alongside his Brahmin wife Aurore, Râma will produce a future heir of pure Brahmin caste, thereby establishing a strong connection with Guadeloupe. It is not at all clear how these two actions are connected. Nor is it clear what the future will hold for other people of East Indian descent. Even though she has been accepted into the fold by Râma, one can only wonder what will happen to Aurore's nameless biracial daughter.[136]

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[136] It is not irrelevant to ask whether or not Aurore and Toto Pauvert's half-white and half-East Indian daughter would have a fate similar to that of the tragic mulatto (a nineteenth-century literary convention), or if by virtue of her East Indian heritage and her acceptance into Râma and

2.5 *Indianité* and *Créolité*: Contradictory Omens

In my discussion of *La panse du chacal* and *Aurore* I have attempted to understand the function of Indianness for these two authors, and how Indianness in these two historical novels about East Indian indenture relates to the authors' contemporary visions of cultural integration in their respective islands. At the same time, I have explored the extent to which one ethnic and cultural group within the multiethnic and multicultural Creole societies of Martinique and Guadeloupe can reflect the social fabric of the entire society (the tension between one segment of the population and the entire population; the tension between parts and wholes).

For Confiant, Indianness adds an exotic touch to his local color portrait of Martinique. More importantly, however, East Indians become a case study for *créolité.* The experience of the Dorassamys illustrates the irresistible dynamics of *créolité*.[137] Acculturation into creoleness is irresistible because it cannot be resisted; it is imposed on all the inhabitants of Confiant's literary universe. Moreover, it is irresistible because the ultimate expression of *créolité* is interracial sex. As A. James Arnold explains,

> Sex is used in the narrative not only to describe how the various ethnoclasses came into being biologically, which Confiant does in greater detail than any predecessor, but, more importantly, to suggest that the

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Aurore's traditional East Indian family unit, she would survive, and even flourish in Moutoussamy's Guadeloupean enclave of *indianité*.

[137] This idea is very similar to Doris Sommer's concept of the "national romance," whereby romantic relationships serve as allegories for nascent republics in nineteenth-century Latin American literature. (Sommer 1991: 5-6). "Irresistible romance" is the title of the first part of the first chapter of Sommer's book, *Foundational Fictions: The Romances of Latin America*. An important distinction, however, is that Confiant's novels deal with a contemporary postcolonial or even neo-colonial relationship between Martinique and France, which Confiant addresses by re-interpreting and re-writing earlier foundational myths. For an extensive analysis of the function of sexuality in Confiant's fiction, see Couti (2008).

> hierarchy that characterizes traditional Creole society is kept in place by sex (Arnold 1998: 45).

La panse du chacal concludes with several consensual interracial unions, which purportedly demonstrate the "natural" course of Creoleness, while also reinforcing the ethnoclass hierarchy that was created by the plantation system. The first one is between Devi Dorassamy (whose husband Adhiyamân has abandoned her to live in town with his own non-East Indian lover) and the black socialist leader Anthénor.[138] The final one, and arguably the most important interracial relationship of the novel, takes place between Vinesh and Firmine. Vinesh, the East Indian character who best illustrates the process of becoming Creole, had previously been involved simultaneously with the Béké Duplan de Montaubert's two lovers, one East Indian (Nelima) and one mulatto (Firmine). His final choice of Firmine over Nelima, a woman outside his own ethnoclass, reveals that he has become a Creole man *à part entière*. (His earlier pursuit of multiple women also underscores the virility of the Martinican man, who cannot be satisfied by just one woman).

Confiant's multiracial interior vision of Martinique as articulated through the experience of two generations of the Dorassamy family on the Courbaril plantation, contrasts with Moutoussamy's construction of an insular world inhabited solely by East Indians in the Guadeloupe of *Aurore*. East Indian identity is dependent on the preservation of ancestral East Indian culture and memory, which in turn relies on East Indian racial and cultural purity. East Indians in *La panse du chacal* exemplify the

[138] Earlier in the novel, a forced interracial union takes place when Devi is raped by another indentured laborer, a *Nègre-Congo* named N'Kanza, who is then killed by Adhiyamân.

broader social, racial, and cultural dynamics of *créolité*, which involve every ethnoclass in Martinican society, according to Confiant's vision of Martinican history (a vision that imposes an essentialized multiracial view of the past and is unable to accommodate difference). On the other hand, the Guadeloupe we see through the prism of the East Indian community in *Aurore*, reveals Moutoussamy's truncated vision of the East Indian experience in Guadeloupe (a vision that forbids contact and meaningful cultural exchange between different cultures and ethnic groups).[139] However, in both Confiant's and Moutoussamy's fictional worlds, the East Indian segment of these island populations stands in for each of the authors' views of cultural integration in Martinique and Guadeloupe at large.

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[139] While Michael Dash reads Moutoussamy's "demands for recognizing East Indian culture" in Guadeloupe as "en toutes parts conciliable avec une solidarité inter-ethnique fondée sur la classe" (entirely compatible with inter-ethnic solidarity based on social class) (Dash 1994: 209), by chastising East Indian characters who favor adapting to their new environment over preserving a separate East Indian identity, and by privileging endogamous and same-caste marriages in *Aurore*, I believe Moutoussamy reveals that his first priority is the preservation of a separate East Indian identity, as Karyn Anderson cogently argues in her article "Ernest Moutoussamy's *Aurore* and the Construction of a Split-level Home" (30).

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Chapter Three

Sugar's Sequels: Inventing Traditions in the Plantation Saga Novels of Raphaël Confiant and José Lins do Rego

> "L'histoire est un roman qui a été, le roman est une histoire qui aurait pu être." (History is a novel that has been lived, the novel is history that could have been.) – Les Frères Goncourt (*Idées et sensations* 147)
>
> "J'ai mieux fait que l'historien. Je suis plus libre" (I have done better than the historian. I have more freedom) – Honoré de Balzac (Avant Propos à la *Comédie Humaine* 15).[140]

Introduction

Building on observations from the previous chapter concerning the ways in which plantation culture—and by extension, national culture—are reflected in French Caribbean *romans de la canne* in Martinique and Guadeloupe, this chapter investigates the connections between these interpenetrating representations in a broader geographical context, comparing the sugarcane sagas of Raphaël Confiant (b. 1951) to those of the Brazilian regionalist writer José Lins do Rego (1901-1957). The format of the saga novel, or roman fleuve—that is, a series of interlinking novels which together form a

[140] Unless stated otherwise, all translations from French, Portuguese, and Martinican Creole are my own.

larger self-contained representational universe—makes it possible to explore the intertextual relationship between individual novels and the overall unity of the series. In Chapter One, a similar dynamic was invoked to study national and transnational intertextuality in terms of the cultural geography of the sugarcane novel.[141]

The narrative and temporal continuity of Confiant's *trilogie sucrière* (sugarcane trilogy) and Lins do Rego's *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar* (sugarcane cycle) provides particularly fertile terrain in which to explore the function of repetition and self-referentiality as they relate to literary production and the construction and promulgation of Martinican and Brazilian national identity. Through a combined emphasis on close reading and attention to the metaphorical, ideological, and historical underpinnings of these Martinican and Brazilian plantation sagas, I will continue to probe the overlap between literary and social space in order to reveal the similarities and contradictions of these imagined and real spaces. In doing so, I continue to stress the cultural, historical, environmental, and literary "continuity between the [Caribbean] archipelago and the [American] continent" (Glissant 1981: 229).

3.1 Geographies of Isolation

Examining literary works from what are generally considered two distinct culture zones highlights the transnational reach of the intersecting discourses of sugar and creolization,[142] and the enduring presence of the sugar plantation in the cultural

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[141] See Chapter One, specifically the section "Parts and Wholes: Plantation America as Text."

[142] Creolization and *métissage* are sometimes used synonymously with terms such as acculturation, transculturation, and hybridity. I use them more generally here to imply the process by which socio-cultural practices develop and continuously evolve through the contact of different cultures and influences. Édouard Glissant used the term *métissage* in conjunction with

imagination of the New World.[143] In both Martinique and Brazil questions of production, self-sufficiency, survival, and autonomy rooted in the plantation past continue to resonate on material and metaphorical levels, and contribute to ongoing economic, political, cultural, literary, and identitarian debates.

As the Martinican writer Édouard Glissant stated, from its inception nearly every aspect of life in colonial Martinique was organized according to the imperatives of the sugar monoculture. Consequently, the decline of the island's sugar industry in the early 1960s signaled more than economic failure for the French overseas department[144]:

> [E]n ce pays s'est livrée une lutte intense (souvent inaperçue), sanctionnée par la victoire des betteraviers français sur la canne à sucre. Si on ajoute que celle-ci s'était développée en monoculture, on comprendra que la Martinique soit devenue en fin de compte une terre de change, où il ne se produit plus rien. Terre sans production, la Martinique devient de plus en plus incapable de déterminer son devenir (Glissant 1981: 315)
>
> In this country, an intense battle took place (often unnoticed), sanctioned by the victory of the French [sugar] beet farmers over the sugarcane. Add to that, the fact that sugarcane was a monoculture, and it is easy to understand why Martinique became a wasteland where nothing is

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antillanité (Caribbeanness) in *Le discours antillais*, and subsequently defined *créolisation* as a global process rather than one that is restricted to the Caribbean and the Atlantic coast of the New World.

[143] Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1993). In her pioneering study, Kutzinski examined the convergence of the discourses of sugar and creolization (both cultural and racial) in literary articulations of Cuban identity and the way in which archetypes, allegories, and myths originating in the plantation landscape contribute to a collective sense of national culture.

> produced any longer. A fallow land, Martinique is increasingly unable to determine its own future.[145]

Glissant's statement reveals the inherent malaise in Martinique's geopolitical and postcolonial situation. Physically separated from the other Caribbean islands and the continental Americas, and dependent on France for nearly everything it consumes—from food to consumer products to gasoline, and culture (television programs, films, and books)—Martinique continues to pay the price for three hundred years of near-exclusive sugar cultivation (monoculture), long after the decline of that industry.[146]

Glissant's characterization of Martinique as "une terre sans production" has multiple resonances, all of which are interrelated: a land where not enough food is grown locally to feed the population; a territory with no self-sustaining industry[147]; a place where artistic creation is stunted; and finally, an island where ideas for transformative political and social change lie fallow. Having replaced the patriarchal plantation system with the paternalistic French political system, Martinique remains materially, politically,

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[145] This very important passage in the segment "Langues, langage" under the subheading "Créole et production," was omitted from the abridged English edition of *Le discours antillais* (*Caribbean Discourse*).

[146] Throughout the month of February and March 2009, huge protests were staged in Martinique and Guadeloupe to bring attention to the elevated cost of living in these French islands, where nearly all consumer products (close to 90%, in fact), especially food, are imported from France, many of them sold at two to three times the price in France. These recent events highlight the departments' ongoing material dependence on France. According to the economist Pascal Perri, the economic system of the two islands remains colonial in character and in practice. See "Un système économique qui reste colonial," *Libération*: http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/0101320656-un-systeme-economique-qui-reste-colonial (Consulted May 25, 2010).

[147] Currently, approximately 70% of employed Martinicans work in the service industry and the public sector, followed by 12% in commerce, 7% in industry, 6% in construction, and 5% in agriculture (Source: "Estimations d'emploi salarié et non salarié par secteur d'activité et par département au 31 décembre 2006," *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques: http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=23&ref_id=emptc002%C2* [Consulted May 25, 2010]).

and creatively entrenched in the past, and is thus unable to envision and participate in its future.

Brazil's Northeast, with its arid, drought-prone landscape, bordered by the Sertão (the desert "backlands") and the Atlantic Ocean, has long been portrayed as a remote and unforgiving place in the Brazilian cultural imagination.[148] Geographic, social, and economic isolation contributed to the perception of the region as an island within the larger Brazilian nation, and also forged an insularism among its inhabitants.[149] Though Brazil became independent from Portugal in 1822,[150] by the end of the nineteenth century, the cane-growing region of the *nordeste* (Northeast)[151]—which like Martinique, was shaped by the sugar monoculture—had become increasingly dependent on the industrialized regions of the Southeast to supply it with technology and capital. With the abolition of slavery in 1888, the establishment of the Brazilian Republic the following year, the dominance of the Southeastern states of Minas Gerais and São Paulo in politics,[152] and the introduction of mechanized agriculture, the balance of power and

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[148] For a comprehensive study of the construction of Northeastern regional identity, particularly in terms of race that also juxtaposes environmental, cultural, political, sociological, and medical ("pathological") influences, see Blake (2011). Some of the topoi of novels set in the Northeast include droughts, the violence and depravity of the plantation environment, and religious fanaticism. A few examples of the most well-known novels include *Os Sertões* (*Rebellion in the Backlands*) by Euclides da Cunha (1902), *A Bagaceira* (*Cane Trash*) by José Américo de Almeida (1928), and *O Quinze* (The Drought of 1915) by Rachel de Queiroz (1930).

[149] Outsiders have often painted a stark picture of both Brazil's Northeast and Martinique's mired attempts at self-sufficiency, and blaming the sugar industry for perennial social, economic, and environmental problems. See for instance, Taylor (1978) and Dessarre (1965).

[150] Although Brazil declared independence from the Portuguese crown, it replaced it with a constitutional monarchy.

[151] The Northeastern sugar producing states are Paraíba, Pernambuco, Bahia, Alagoas, and Sergipe. Bahia and Pernambuco were the dominant producers.

[152] This period of Brazilian politics was called "Café com leite" (coffee with milk), in reference to the influence of politicians from the wealthy states of São Paulo (coffee-growing state) and Minas Gerais (a dairy state). Although Brazil was officially a constitutional monarchy, implying that it was founded on democratic (constitutional) grounds, rampant corruption prevailed; from 1889 to

wealth in the region began to shift from the rural landowning class to urban industrialists and investors from cities in the Northeast and outside the region, gradually putting an end to the quasi-feudal sugar *latifúndio*, the estate system which had been in place since the establishment of the first colonial plantations in the sixteenth century. As Lins do Rego was composing his sugarcane saga, Brazil was undergoing a significant political transformation toward more centralized governance in the 1930s (although political power was still concentrated in the nation's most prosperous Southeastern region), which would culminate in the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, and would further contribute to a loss of political autonomy in the Northeast. While sugar production continued in the Northeast after the smaller family-owned estates and mills were bought out and consolidated into larger sugar plantations and refineries, these changes dealt a powerful economic and psychological blow to the plantocracy, who saw the world they knew—in particular, the rigid social order they controlled—coming to an end.[153]

In the Brazilian *nordeste* as in Martinique, the imperilment of an insular way of life tied to the sugar plantation sparked specific cultural responses, even as the legacy of the plantation continued into the postplantation and postcolonial eras in the form of the ethnoclass system and its attendant racial and socio-economic inequalities.[154]

1930, presidential power alternated between the two States, hence the expression "café com leite." The period ended when the military, which backed Getúlio Vargas, came to power.

[153] While the Northeastern states continue to produce sugar today, most of the production in now concentrated in the Southeast, primarily in the states of São Paulo and Paraná. At the time José Lins do Rego's sugarcane cycle was published in the 1930s and 1940s, the Northeast still produced most of Brazil's sugar.

[154] Geographic isolation in Brazil and Martinique contributed to the replication of the colonial plantation model in terms of the social order, long after the traditional sugar estates ceased to exist. I use the term ethnoclass in order to highlight the correlation between race and social class, particularly in societies of the Caribbean basin, which inherited the race/class continuum from the social hierarchy of the plantation.

Confiant's *trilogie sucrière* and Lins do Rego's *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar* constitute two sustained literary attempts to recreate (in a dual sense: to capture and to reinvent) a specific time and place in the cultural history of Martinique and Brazil, by writers from very different backgrounds: one, the multiracial descendant of plantation slaves (Confiant); the other, the white grandson of a plantation owner and former slaveholder (Lins do Rego).

3.2 An Insular Worldview: Balzacian Unity of Composition and the Plantation Saga

In a review of Confiant's novel, *Case à Chine* (China Shack, 2007), Carine Gendrey aptly compared the author's prolific publishing schedule and sweeping historical portrait of the island's different social and ethnic groups to Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*, calling the ensemble of his novels (more than thirty at present), "La Comédie créole."[155] A small saga within Confiant's larger novel cycle (which is mainly set in the hillside communities in and around the capital, Fort-de-France; just as Balzac's novels are primarily set in Paris),[156] Confiant's sugarcane trilogy (1994-2002) would perhaps correspond to Balzac's scenes from country life. The three novels in the *trilogie sucrière* take place on the fictional plantations and distillery of Bel-Évent, Val-d'Or, and Génipa, respectively, in the rural district of Rivière-Salée in the southern part of Martinique during the 1930s and 1940s. These were Martinique's final years as a colony of France,

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[155] In the title of her review, Gendrey also refers to *Case à Chine* as an epic, a term that conveys both the lengthiness of the work as well as the idea of episodic accounts or events associated with historical novels. Carine Gendrey (2007) <http://www.potomitan.info/confiant/casechine.php> (Consulted on May 1, 2012).

[156] One of the major paradoxes of these urban novels is that the characters seem to endure even worse tragedies than the hardships they chose to leave behind on the plantation.

prior to "official" legislative integration as a *département d'outre-mer* (overseas department) of France in 1946, and before the sugar industry's demise.

José Lins do Rego's sugarcane cycle (1932-43), has, in turn, been compared to the work of Balzac as well as Marcel Proust's *À la recherché du temps perdu* (1913-1927).[157] The writer José Cândido de Carvalho described Lins do Rego as "o Balzac do nosso patriarcalismo moribundo" (the Balzac of our moribund patriarchy); another prominent intellectual, Paulo Prado, famously remarked to the Swiss writer Blaise Cendrars, who was visiting Brazil, that he would introduce him to "nosso Proust" (our Proust), a writer who "encontrou o tempo perdido" (found lost time) (*Menino de Engenho* xxxv, xv). While the aesthetic claim to Proust is tenuous (for example, there is no use of stream-of-consciousness narration in five of the six novels in the series[158]), on an emotional level, the reference to Proust resonates with the nostalgic tone of the novels and the Brazilian writer's attempts to recapture a lost time and place. Much more modest in scope than Confiant's ambitious project, the six novels in Lins do Rego's cycle,[159] focus almost

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[157] César Braga-Pinto has traced José Lins do Rego's literary and ideological trajectory prior the publication of his first novel in a recent article, "Ordem e Tradição: A Conversão Regionalista de José Lins do Rego" (Order and Tradition: The Regionalist Conversion of José Lins do Rego). In *Revista IEB* 51 (Set.-mar. 2011: 13-42). While Anatole France was a major literary influence during Lins do Rego's youth and early career as a journalist, Braga-Pinto explains (citing the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre) that the Nobel Prize laureate Romain Rolland's novel *Jean-Christophe* (a ten-volume roman-fleuve, or novel cycle, published between 1904-1912) had a huge impact on the writer. The *Jean-Christophe* cycle has a very similar structure to the Balzacian and Zolean novel cycles, but unlike *La Comédie humaine* and *Les Rougon Macquart,* the novels proceed chronologically, since they focus on the life of one character (modeled after the life of Beethoven and combining events from Romain Rolland's life).

[158] *Fogo Morto*, the last novel in the series, is the only novel in Lins do Rego's saga in which stream-of-consciousness narration is occasionally used.

[159] Many critics only include four novels in the *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar*. I discuss the composition of Lins do Rego's saga in terms of themes, critical reception, and the ideological implications of including or excluding specific novels in detail in this chapter, in the section "Sugar's Sequels: Rewriting the Nation, One Novel at a Time."

exclusively on the archaic *engenho* system[160] (family owned sugar estates where the cane was processed in a mill on the premises) in the Northeastern state of Paraíba. That system was on the verge of extinction in the early twentieth century.[161]

The plantation saga novels of José Lins do Rego and Raphaël Confiant share many of the general characteristics of the nineteenth-century French realist and naturalist cycles of Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola, which were widely read, imitated, and adapted throughout Latin America and the Caribbean towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[162] Consisting of a series of interrelated novels in which a family, social group, society, region, or nation are represented during a specific timeframe, and with careful attention to local customs, the novel cycle genre (or roman-fleuve, as it came to be called in the early twentieth century[163]) lends itself to the construction of a literary universe on a panoramic scale.

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[160] *Engenho*, the archaic term for "machine" in Portuguese, refers to the sugar mill in which the sugarcane was processed and refined (*ingenio* in Spanish). The *engenho* system was the traditional system of family-owned sugar estates (*latifúndio*), in which all aspects of cultivation and production were carried out on the premises, prior to the establishment of large-scale mechanized refineries, which were owned by urban industrialists.

[161] Two novels in the cycle, *Doidinho* (Crazy Guy, 1933) and *O Moleque Ricardo* are mainly set outside the plantation. However, the main characters' identities and fates are inextricably tied to their childhood experiences on the Santa Rosa plantation, and their memories of life there are frequently evoked.

[162] The American writer James Fenimore Cooper, published novel cycles in the United States in the nineteenth century (*The Leatherstocking Tales* was the most famous cycle) and also influenced Latin American writers, as well as Balzac. I will discuss the influence of European literary genres such as romanticism (in particular, local color sketches), realism, and especially naturalism, on New World writers in Martinique, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, focusing on how these foreign aesthetics (and epistemologies) were adapted and creolized by insular writers to address local realities in their respective plantation and post-plantation societies.

[163] The novel cycle (or saga novels) continued to be a popular in the first half of the twentieth century for more traditional realist novels as well as more experimental modernist ones. Here are a few examples in France, in addition to Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, which I already mentioned: Georges Duhammel's *Vie et aventures de Salavin* (1920-1932) and *Chronique des Pasquier* (1933-1945); Roger Martin du Gard's *Les Thibault* (1922-1940); Jules

Particularly remarkable for its novelistic scope and influence on writers around the globe, Balzac's colossal *Comédie humaine* (1842-50) can be seen as an archetype for the genre. Grouped into three broad categories of *études* (studies of manners/morals, philosophical studies, and analytical studies), which were each divided into six *scènes* (scenes from private life, provincial life, Parisian life, political life, military life, and country life), the more than ninety novels in *La Comédie humaine* feature a cast of thousands of characters and hundreds of recurring characters. Assembled, these literary portraits resemble an enormous fresco of interlocking canvasses, or as Balzac put it, "une vaste peinture de la société" (a vast painting of society) (Balzac 19) in Paris and its provinces during the years between the Restoration and the July Monarchy.

In his description of the project in the preface to *La Comédie humaine* in 1842, Balzac cast himself in the triple role of quasi-scientific social observer, historian, and prodigious creator, capable of founding his own literary universe modeled after the France he so carefully studied. Referring to the Scènes de la vie privée, Scènes de la vie de province, and Scènes de la vie parisienne, he explained that

> Chacune de ces trois parties a sa couleur locale … Non seulement les hommes, mais encore les événements principaux de la vie, se formulent par des types. Il y a des situations qui se représentent dans toutes les existences, des phrases typiques, et c'est là l'une des exactitudes que j'ai le plus cherchées. J'ai tâché de donner une idée des différentes contrées

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Romains's *Les hommes de bonne volonté* (1932-1947); Louis Aragon's *Cycle du monde réel* (1933-1951); and Jacques Chardonne's *Les destinées sentimentales* (1934-1936). In the United States, William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga (1929-1962) was particularly notable in its complex mapping of the fictional Yoknapatawpha county and its inhabitants.

> de notre beau pays. Mon ouvrage a sa géographie comme il a sa généalogie et ses familles, ses lieux et ses choses, ses personnes et ses faits; comme il a son armorial, ses nobles et ses bourgeois, ses artisans et ses paysans, ses politiques et ses dandies, son armée, tout son monde enfin ! (18-19).
>
> Each of these three parts has its [own] local color … Not only people, but also main events in life are formulated through types. There are situations that are represented in all lives, typical phrases, and therein lies one of the exactitudes I most sought [to recreate]. I strived to provide an idea of the different regions of our beautiful country. My work has its own geography just as it has its own genealogy and its own families, its places and things, its people and events; just as it has its own armory, its nobles and its bourgeois, its artisans and its peasants, its politicians and its dandies, its army, its own world, after all!

By utilizing terms like "local color," "geography" and "genealogy," making reference to political and military institutions, and invoking different social classes and types, Balzac highlighted the "exactitudes," as he put it, or mimetic foundations of his textual world. His repeated use of the varying forms of the third-person possessive adjective "its" before each of these categories ("sa géographie," "son armée," ses paysans," etc.) emphasize the realistic qualities and completeness of this literary world ("tout son monde") as well as its textual sovereignty,[164] its ability to exist on its own terms, independently of the outside

[164] The sovereignty of Balzac's literary universe is underscored by the reference to a government and an army in the preface to *La Comédie humaine*. The conversations between the textual world and the "real" world the novels represent, and how readers connect the two together constitute the

world (even as Balzac claimed to be nothing more than French society's "secretary," recording history as it happened) (10).[165]

One of the greatest challenges for a prolific writer of such varied stories set in different times, locations, and social milieus would be to find a way of bringing together a potentially disparate collection of novels into one unified corpus, and thus provide a cohesive picture of a broader society or nation represented within it. Balzac was able to resolve the problem and "realize his social and historical vision" through the systematic use of *les personnages réapparaissants* (reappearing or recurring characters), who would resurface or be mentioned from one novel to another and in different locations and contexts, alternating between important and minor roles (Preston 225). This technique, allowed him to do what the historical novelist Walter Scott, whom Balzac greatly admired, had neglected to do: "relier ses compositions l'une à l'autre de manière à coordonner une histoire complète, dont chaque chapitre eût été un roman, et chaque roman une époque (to tie his works together in such a way as to assemble a complete story in which each chapter would be a novel, and each novel would be a [historical] period) (Balzac 11).

Readers of *La Comédie humaine* were expected to make connections between the novels in the cycle. As Ethel Preston explains, "[a]ucun roman ne doit rester isolé comme une page détachée d'expérience humaine. Chacun pris en particulier doit toujours être considéré dans ses rapports avec l'ensemble" (No novel should be set apart

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"imagined community" par excellence, according to Benedict Anderson. For specific references to Balzac and the structure of the realist novel, see Anderson (25-26).

[165] He famously declared in the "Avant-propos" of *La Comédie humaine* that "La société française allait être l'historien, je ne devrais être que le secrétaire" (French society would be the historian, I would be but the secretary) (Balzac 10).

as if it were a page removed from human experience. A particular one should always be considered in its relationship to the whole) (19). By extension, the relationship between individual novels in a novel cycle and the novel cycle as a whole implicitly involves an intertextual, or even, intratextual, dialectic, since the cycle can simultaneously be perceived as a collection of individual novels (to be read independently or in an intertextual manner with each other) and as one wide-ranging, continuous text (to be read intratextually, as if breaking apart a single text). Therefore, through its very structure, the roman-fleuve—whether Balzac's, Zola's, Confiant's or Lins do Rego's—provides a sense of continuity and expansiveness through overlapping connections between novels, characters, events, and fictional space; through the presence of recurring characters; and by retelling or invoking events from earlier novels. Inherently self-referential, the literary cycle at once creates and validates its self-contained reality.

Although Raphaël Confiant's and José Lins do Rego's sugarcane novels draw on all of these Balzacian principles, due to their reduced representational scope (the *série Commandeur du sucre* is a trilogy, while the *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar* contains six novels[166]), I prefer to refer to them as saga novels.[167] The term saga novel conveys the idea of a long story or account (or even an epic) on a smaller scale than a novel cycle, but with an important distinction: saga novels always involve a chronological progression. While the Balzacian literary cycle model encouraged readers to make connections

[166] There is no consensus among critics in terms of how many novels Lins do Rego's sugarcane cycle comprises. For a more detailed explanation, see the section on Lins do Rego's sugarcane cycle in the section "Sugar's Sequels: Rewriting the Nation, One Novel at a Time.

[167] In the epilogue of *La Dissidence*, Confiant refers to his sugarcane trilogy as "la saga de la canne à sucre" (278).

between different novels in *La Comédie humaine* in order to facilitate a larger imaginative co-construction of French society during the mid-nineteenth century, it did not impose a particular sequence for those readings. (Since the novels were set in so many different locations and social milieus, there is a temporal overlap in many of the novels, a strategy that helped to create the impression of a bustling literary universe where things were happening simultaneously.) The novels in Confiant's sugarcane trilogy and Lins do Rego's sugarcane cycle, on the other hand, were both written and set in a precise chronological timeframe; even when the settings or main protagonists change from one novel to the next, the novels move forward sequentially, often making reference to occurrences in the preceding novel. Although each novel in these Martinican and Brazilian sagas can be read independently from the rest of the series as a complete novel (as with individual novels in *La Comédie humaine*), a reading of the entire series provides a multidimensional portrait of plantation life in Martinique and Brazil during pivotal moments in the history of these places. Most significantly, a complete chronological reading of Confiant's and Rego's sugarcane sagas, with an eye toward understanding how the different novels work together on aesthetic, structural, and ideological levels, reveals the historical vision (a type of metanarrative) undergirding each of these nationalist literary projects.

3.3 Inventing Traditions: Textual Performances of Nationhood

As Roland Barthes observed in his essay "Les choses signifient-elles quelque chose?" (Do things really signify something?), literary realism lends itself to the representation of "une société bien définie, bien structurée" (a well-defined, highly structured society), such as that of nineteenth-century France in the works of Balzac and Stendhal (Barthes, *Oeuvres Complètes* V. 2: 45). Barthes goes on to state that the novels of these authors were "réalistes, ces romans signifiaient, un réel et parfois, ce qui n'est pas souvent souligné, un réel avec un regret du passé (realistic, they signified a reality and sometimes, what is not often emphasized, a reality with a regret for the past) (45). The genre is also particularly suitable for depicting the intensely stratified plantation societies of late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century Brazil and Martinique. As with the relationship between individual novels in the series and the entire saga, the representation of the complex social hierarchy of plantation society in these neo-realist Martinican and Brazilian sugarcane sagas is also characterized by the interdependence of individual segments and a larger entity, in that each ethnoclass is defined both in relation to other groups and within the ethnoclass continuum as a whole. This is most clearly demonstrated in the Martinican trilogy, where the plantation workers view themselves and each other as members of a self-regulated caste system (aligned along the ethnoclass continuum) that reinforces both the racialized hierarchy and the racist discourses of colonialism.[168] This is significant in that the self-referentiality of the saga novel is

[168] Take for instance this passage from *Commandeur du sucre*, which reveals the thoughts and racial attitude of the main character, who is a mulatto foreman on the plantation, towards the darker skinned workers he supervises: [Firmin] aimait à…[s']imposer aux cabrouettiers qui s'imaginaient appartenir à une caste supérieure aux coupeurs de canne et aux amarreuses. Il venait exprès pour leur rappeler qu'à ses yeux ils demeuraient toujours des nègres, rien que des

echoed in the self-sufficient feudal framework of the New World plantation system: both are self-contained systems of representation and production, respectively.[169] These structural similarities between the saga novel genre, the ethnoclass system, and the traditional plantation complex constitute a significant overlap between the textual space of Confiant's and Rego's plantation novels and the social space portrayed within them, both enriching and complicating our understanding of the interplay between the two. By taking these characteristics of self-referentiality and self-containment into consideration, along with the concomitant insular vision they promote, I propose that the plantation sagas of Confiant and Lins do Rego engage in a type of textual performance of Martinican and Brazilian culture that seeks to legitimize itself by making reference to and establishing continuity with and within its own body of work. This textual performance can be seen as a literary instance of what the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm termed "invented traditions," which he defined as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1). The past to which invented traditions refer may be real or invented, but in either case, Hobsbawm stresses, "the continuity within them is largely factitious. The smooth, uninterrupted surface of invented traditions disguises not only a rupture or moment of crisis, but "the constant

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nègres, en dépit de leur vêture kaki propre et repassée à l'escampe" (38) (Firmin liked to wield his authority over the *cabrouettiers* [wagon drivers], who believed they belonged to better caste than the cutters and [female] binders. He was there precisely to remind them that they were niggers, nothing more than niggers, despite their clean, hastily ironed kakis).

[169] According to Philip D. Curtin, the colonial plantation model in Brazil, which became the basis of future plantations in the Caribbean, absorbed elements of late European feudalism as well as early Capitalism (46).

change and innovation of the modern world" to which they respond by making reference to the past in order to preserve certain elements of social life, and make them appear constant and "unchanging" (2).

The crisis to which Confiant's and Lins do Rego's plantation sagas respond, the collapse of the sugar industry in Martinique and the decline of the family-owned sugar estates of Brazil's Northeast, triggered the demise of an insular social order and way of life dating back to the days of slavery (even as racial, economic, and social inequalities persisted thereafter). Both writers feared that the erosion of this tightly bound social world would lead to the disappearance of linguistic, religious, and cultural practices, which developed in the constrained "contact zone" of the colonial plantation, where African, European, and Amerindian peoples and traditions converged.[170] Since the referent of all invented traditions, according to Hobsbawm, is the historical past (real or made up), by turning back the clock in their novels, the authors were able to omit—or at least, delay—the events and transformations that would bring about the end of these insular agrarian societies. By setting their novels prior to these changes, through the connections between events and recurring characters, and through the linear progression of their saga novels Lins do Rego and Confiant were able to create the illusion of what Benedict Anderson, borrowing from Walter Benjamin, called the "forward march of homogeneous empty time" (Anderson 33). In other words, the "calendrical" passage of time in Confiant's and Lins do Rego's novels, which is marked by references to historical

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[170] Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (34). See Pratt, Mary Louise. *Profession 91*. (New York: MLA, 1991): 33-40.

events, serves as the "precise analogue of the idea of nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily through history" (26). The plantations in Confiant's and Lins do Rego's sugarcane sagas serve as vital sites of national memory, what the "new historian" Pierre Nora termed *lieux de mémoire.* Nora is clear in distinguishing between *lieux de mémoire* and all other forms of history:

> Contrary to historical objects, *lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs … [W]hat makes them *lieux de mémoire* is precisely that by which they escape from history. In this sense, the *lieu de mémoire* is … a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name (Nora 23).

As I will demonstrate through a chronological and thematic overview of these Martinican and Brazilian sagas in the following section, each sequel in these literary sagas validates not only the previous installment, but contributes to collectively rewriting both the history and the cultural landscape that these neo-realist novels claim to represent, transforming them into national narratives.[171]

3.4 Sugar's Sequels: Rewriting the Nation, One Novel at a Time

Confiant's Sugarcane Trilogy

Confiant's *trilogie sucrière*—which has alternately been referred to as *la série Commandeur du sucre* (The Sugar Driver series), in reference to the first novel in the

[171] My use of the term "national narrative" is similar to the conception of a "master narrative." The sugarcane novel genre, which is characterized by its emphasis on realistic description, attempts to represent the reality of a place, a people, and an experience. Modernist literature and postmodern literary theory both question and seek to destabilize literature's ability to reflect reality.

trilogy—fuses ethnography, history, archival materials (especially excerpts from personal letters and journals), and fiction to produce its self-described *récits*. The designation *récit* appears below each of the titles in the series, where ordinarily one would expect to see the category *roman* (a novel): for instance, *Commandeur du sucre: Récit* rather than *Pluie et vent sur Télumée miracle: Roman*. The term *récit*, which has multiple meanings such as "story," "narrative," "account," "report," and "chronicle," lends itself to the ambiguous relationship between fact and fiction in these works. Moreover, the publisher of the *trilogie sucrière*, Éditions Écritures (which has published ten books by Confiant), specializes in "anthropofiction," a category that blurs the lines between documentary and fantasy (Spear 1060). In writing about the multidisciplinary investment required to convey the experience of Caribbean people, Glissant specifies the need for contemporary Caribbean artists to alternate between the roles of writer and "ethnologist" (as well as those of "historian, linguist, painter of frescoes, and architect") (Glissant 1981: 439). Although he consistently argued that the literary mode of realism was incapable of conveying distinctly Caribbean realities and concerns (198-200), Glissant's conception of the multifaceted role of the Caribbean artist is not far removed from Balzac's vision of the writer as polymath.[172]

Utilizing as a backdrop a labor and hunger strike of sugarcane workers that took place in Fort-de-France in January 1936,[173] *Commandeur du sucre* (1994) is the story of

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[172] Another contemporary Martinican writer and editor-in-chief of the weekly newspaper *Antilla* (founded by Confiant), Tony Delsham (whose real name is André Petricien), who has also published two literary sagas about Martinique entitled *Le Siècle* (The Century) and *Filiation* (Lineage or blood line), has fashioned a literary identity based on Glissant's view of the writer as ethnologist, as an "ethnologue de nous-mêmes."

[173] For a historical examination of a massive strike that took place one year earlier, see Édouard de Lépine.

Firmin Léandor, the mulatto foreman[174] of the Bel-Évent plantation, who takes it upon himself to dissuade the agricultural workers under his command (the descendents of slaves and of Africans who came to work on plantations after emancipation, and East Indian and Chinese "Coolies") from participating in the strikes (organized by French colonial unions), even though they would be acting against their own interests and civil rights. Saving the year's crop at this critical moment in the planting season is only the beginning of the struggle for Firmin. Soon he devises an even more quixotic quest, given the social upheaval brought about by the labor strikes: to harvest a record yield of sugarcane. The challenge of convincing the unwilling workers to join his cause forces the overseer, portrayed as an uptight and pretentious mulatto with a penchant for the florid language of Victor Hugo (even his first name, Firmin, suggests this firmness and obstinacy) to reconnect with the fieldworkers and the Creole language and culture he shunned for so long.[175] Through this trial of sorts, he gains a heightened sense of his Creole identity in its cultural, religious, linguistic, racial, and national dimensions; he also makes a parallel journey toward collective consciousness (from a vertical conception of society to a horizontal sense of community), in which he begins to identify with the workers to whom he once felt superior. At the conclusion of the novel, while drinking *tafia* with some cane cutters in Dame Yvette's rum shack, Firmin suddenly sees himself

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[174] The term "commandeur" corresponds to "slave driver" in English. After emancipation the term "commandeur" would have been replaced with "contremaître" (it is hyphenated in Confiant's trilogy, appearing as "contre-maître), or even "conducteur," which in English corresponds to "work foreman" (17). The choice to use the antiquated "commandeur" illustrates the *créolistes* (Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau's) position as postcolonial writers for whom the plantation is conceived as a pre-emancipation entity (Arnold 2006: 640). Also see Fick and Arnold 2006.

[175] Plantation managers and owners hired an intimidating and fearsome overseer or foreman to manage their workers.

as one of them, and declares: "Je suis un nègre-canne!" (I'm a cane-nigger!) (*Commandeur* 327). In this final identitarian pronouncement, a Eureka moment for the once distant *commandeur*, he reappropriates the pejorative use of the word *nègre*, which he previously used in order to denigrate these same workers, transforming it into a code word of inclusion and solidarity, a sign of his acknowledgement—and celebration—of his own plantation slave roots. The expression "nègre-canne" was undoubtedly chosen by the author as a marker of Martinicanness, and more specifically, Creoleness, since it displaces the original geographic association of blackness from Africa to the Caribbean sugarcane plantation.

The actual historical event in *Commandeur du sucre* (the sugarcane workers' strike) serves as a point of reference—almost as a discursive affectation or an *effet de réel*—for the ensuing search for identity, which paradoxically involves contesting the validity of that historical event. (In a sense, the workers defy the historical outcome of these events by not participating in the strikes.) As readers, we accompany Firmin on his path of self-discovery, which conveniently provides a screen for our own cultural (re)education, thanks to the author's didactic efforts. Firmin's pedagogical role is hardly hidden, as demonstrated in the protagonist's self-introduction at the beginning of the novel: "Je suis le maître d'école des champs de canne à sucre, le commandeur d'habitation." (I'm the schoolmaster of the sugarcane fields, the plantation driver.) (9).[176] Reminiscent of Émile Zola's careful attention to the language and way of life of his characters and their milieus, Confiant's minute descriptions of agricultural and industrial

[176] In an acerbic review of three Confiant novels, Thomas C. Spear states that *Commandeur du sucre* "reads like a manual to teach plantation life through pedantic fiction" (1061).

processes and their terminology, also provide a bird's eye view of the inner workings of the plantation and the lives of those who work the land and run the refinery.[177]

Likewise, the two other novels in the saga, *Régisseur du rhum* (The Rum Steward, 1999) and La *Dissidence* (Dissidence, 2002) also rely on a historical backdrop as a pretext for their plots. *Régisseur du rhum* takes place mostly during the final months leading up to France's engagement in World War II, and ends with the protagonist's departure to join the French army. *La Dissidence* is set during the war and Vichy governance of the island. As in *Commandeur du Sucre*, the main character of *Régisseur du rhum*, Pierre-Marie de La Vigerie, a *Béké kalazaza* (a member of the powerful white Martinican-born Creole families who "passes" for white, but has "dubious" mixed-race ancestry), must overcome numerous obstacles such as proletarian unionization, political repression, ostracism from his own *béké* caste, and most of all, his own ambivalence toward the rum business, before he learns that the métier signifies more than just his livelihood.[178] The larger thesis of the novel echoes the pronouncements of Glissant in *Le discours antillais*: in the absence of sugarcane, rum, or any other significant industry, and through its material, economic, and psychological dependence on France, Martinique (incarnated here by Pierre-Marie de La Vigerie) is nothing more than a passive spectator

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[177] Examples of Zola's detailed depictions of different types of work abound in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. To name but a few: both laundresses and roofers in *L'Assommoir* (1877), miners in *Germinal* (1885), and peasant farmers in *La Terre* (1887). Carlos J. Alonso discusses the importance of anthropological attention to the description of work on the land in the *novela de la tierra* (Alonso 1990).

[178] Pierre-Marie might also be called a Béké-goyave, or a country Béké. (The *goyave* or guava suffix implies that he is not a Béké of high standing.) In the novel, the sickly infant Pierre-Marie was reportedly revived on the very day he was born by being baptized with rum: "une eau-de-vie au sens propre du terme, c'est-à-dire, une eau qui m'avait ramené à la vie au jour-même de ma naissance…"(spirits in the proper sense of the term, in other words, spirits that brought me back to life on the day of birth) (308).

of its own demise. Pierre-Marie's awakening, much like Firmin Léandor's *prise de conscience*, occurs through his contact with the cane cutters and distillery workers during his apprenticeship in the family business. By immersing himself in the operations of the distillery, he imbibes the Martinican culture, falls in love with the beautiful Negrèsse Laetitia[179] (who is Firmin's *fanm dèwò* or "outside woman" in *Commandeur du sucre*), and finally comes to terms with his own racial identity. As in *Commandeur du sucre*, the self-revelation of the main character's identity occurs at the very end of the novel: "Un mulâtre, voici ce que je suis, oui!" (A mulatto, that's what I am, all right!) (*Régisseur* 332).[180]

La Dissidence, the final novel in the trilogy, begins at the historical point where *Régisseur du rhum* ends, at the moment when many Martinican men are preparing to escape Martinique via the British island of Saint Lucia to join the French Resistance. The title reveals a different narrative perspective from the two previous novels whose titles indicate the presence of a main protagonist (*le commandeur*, *le régisseur*). In keeping with its title, *La Dissidence* proposes all those who were involved in resistance efforts in Martinique—but especially the Martinican people—as a collective protagonist, as the voice of a shared experience.[181] The narrative perspective shifts between two main characters, Firmin Léandor, who continues to work as a *contre-maître* (foreman) at Bel-Évent, and a French enlisted navy man from Angers named René Aucque, who works as

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[179] Firmin refers to Laetitia by her first name, rather than as "la Negrèsse Laetitia," reflecting perhaps a difference in perspective between a mulatto (Firmin) and a Béké (even a Béké kalazaza).

[180] The narrator (Pierre-Marie, referring to himself as "tu") adds that Pierre-Marie might not have avowed his racial heritage were it not for his imminent departure to join the Resistance in Europe, where he might be killed. Here the narrative perspective emanates from a position of exteriority.

[181] Glissant is credited with pioneering the "roman du nous" (the novel of us) in the French Caribbean with *Malemort* (1975).

a *télémetreur* (telemetry technician) aboard the Émile Bertin. The Émile Bertin was an actual navy ship that was anchored outside Fort-de-France from 1940 to 1942, decommissioned by Vichy, and then eventually used by Allied forces from 1943 to 1945. René Aucque eventually decides to join "la dissidence" along with the Martinican men he befriended during his three-year stay on the island. The novel also includes the narrative perspectives of other characters such as the Béké Germain de Gourmainville and Éléonor, Firmin Léandor's wife (among other minor characters); at times, a collective narrator addressing the reader from the perspective of *nous* (us), also relates thoughts and experiences that are shared by the characters. All three novels in the sugarcane trilogy alternate between first- and third-person narration as a means of communicating the views of the main characters from positions of interiority and exteriority. *La Dissidence* also includes a series of regular journal entries written by a René Aucque.[182] The fictional René Aucque is in fact based on the experiences of the real René Aucque whose journal Confiant discovered in the archives of the Schoelcher Library in Fort-de-France. In an epilogue to the novel, Confiant explains that *La Dissidence* is the result of combining René Aucque's "European epic" with Firmin Léandor's "Creole vision" (278-279), or the marriage of reality and fiction.[183] Having written two earlier novels set in the

[182] These journal entry segments are invariable titled "Carnets d'un engagé volontaire" (Notebooks of a volunteer enlisted man).

[183] Confiant provides additional information about the real René Aucque and his experiences in Martinique during the war in an epilogue entitled "Une incroyable rencontre" (A remarkable meeting). After reading *La Dissidence*, Aucque contacted Confiant, and the two exchanged letters and arranged to meet in Martinique several times. In what he claims to be an entirely coincidental overlap between fiction and real life, Confiant explains that Aucque demanded that he reintroduce him to Philomène, the Fort-de-France prostitute who is one of Confiant's most frequently recurring characters. Aucque insisted that the Philomène described in Confiant's novels matched the description and personality of the woman named Philomène who was Aucque's lover during his time in Martinique.

north of Martinique and in the slum of Morne-Pichevin Fort-de-France during "le Temps-Robert"[184] (the period when Martinique was governed by Admiral Robert, Vichy's representative in Martinique), after the publication on *Commandeur du sucre* and *Régisseur du rhum*, Confiant realized that he had neglected to portray the period as it was experienced on the large sugarcane plantations (278).

The novel in fact presents a dual *dissidence*: on the one hand, the efforts of the Resistance to liberate France and Martinique from the German occupation and the Vichy regime, respectively (the historical pretext); on the other hand, a seemingly more subversive, clandestine operation to hide, cultivate, and protect the age-old sugarcane tradition in order to assure its survival (the ideological motivation), thus ensuring the continued vitality of the Creole culture, language, and identity. Opposition to Maréchal Pétain and his representative in Martinique, admiral Robert, assumed a multitude of forms, depending on social class and status, through passive and armed resistance, and often discretely through daily routines.[185] Repressive, paternalistic, and reactionary, Vichy's autocratic rule reminded many Martinicans of the First and Second Empire when slavery was reinstated after a brief period of emancipation (Jennings 56). As the historian Eric Jennings explains, Vichyism in the collective imagination came to be associated with a potential return to slavery (56). It might therefore seem paradoxical for the plantation workers in *La Dissidence* to choose to devote themselves to the arduous and unforgiving work of planting and harvesting sugarcane—a Martinican tradition founded on African slavery, the indentured servitude of East Indian and Chinese laborers

[184] The two earlier novels set in "Le Temps-Robert" are the Creole-language novel *Jik dèyé do Bondié* (1979; republished in French in 2000 as *La lessive du diable*) and *Le nègre et l'amiral* (1988).

[185] For a historical appraisal of Martinican and Guadeloupean resistance to Vichy, see Jennings.

(after emancipation in 1848), and capitalist exploitation—as a form of resistance against a repressive regime. However, the novel portrays the production of sugarcane and rum as an act of defiance because it ran counter to the Vichy government's strict orders to strip the cane fields and replant them with much-needed "cultures vivrières" (subsistence crops) to help overcome shortages on the island due to the wartime blockade, which limited shipments of food and supplies from France.

Vichy repression in the French West Indies also assumed the form of censorship and cultural sanitization. According to Jennings, the regime "exported" its practices of "paternalism, demonization, and puritanism," and ran a campaign to eradicate "social sins," especially the local "esprit de jouissance," which it deemed disruptive to the rule of order (59). Rum was perceived as a major contributor to chaos and debauchery, as were popular celebrations like *carnaval* and *les bals populaires* (public dances) (59).[186] In the eyes of the colonial Vichy government, anything that evoked traditional Caribbean culture could contribute to a sense of disorder; even the sight of a traditional *case* (hut) with a corrugated iron roof could be seen as a blemish on the immaculate visage of Pétain's outpost in the tropics (59). The protection of Martinican cultural heritage, or *patrimoine*, in the time of Admiral Robert, therefore sheds its potentially reactionary connotations, and constitutes instead a form of revolt in *La Dissidence*.

Consequently, the struggle on the Martinican home front, particularly the one that took place among *les classes populaires*, acquires a prominent place in Confiant's novel. At times, safeguarding the production of sugarcane and rum is prioritized over the

[186] The Vichy government's campaign of cultural sanitization in Martinique and Guadeloupe was an extension of the one it ran in the *métropole* (Jennings 59). No public gatherings were permitted, hence carnival and *les bals populaires* were strictly forbidden.

defense of the *mère-patrie* (homeland) and the war being waged on the European continent. Sounding much like a General barking orders to his troops, Firmin announces to the workers under his command that "Hitler ou pas Hitler, la canne poussera normalement à Bel-Évent et nos usines marcheront dare-dare comme si de rien n'était. En tout cas, mon usine de Petit-Bourg! C'est un ordre!" (Hitler or no Hitler, the cane will grow as usual at Bel-Évent, and our refineries will operate at double time as if nothing is wrong. At any rate, [at] my Petit-Bourg refinery! That's an order!) (*Dissidence* 20). In a meeting of local *contre-maîtres* to discuss Admiral Robert's orders to plant food crops in the place of sugarcane, Firmin implores his boss Simon Duplan de Montaubert to remember the importance of continuing to grow cane: "Oui, il fallait replanter la canne, guerre ou pas guerre! On ne pouvait pas laisser tant d'hectares languir de la sorte et tomber en jachère. (Yes, the cane had to be replanted, war or no war! That many hectares could not be left to languish and lie fallow.) (28).

Although historically the term *dissidence* refers to French Caribbean armed resistance to Vichy by joining the free French forces in the neighboring British Caribbean islands of Saint Lucia and Dominica, its usage in the novel applies primarily to everyday acts of subversion carried out by ordinary Martinican people, acts which were necessary for their survival and to assert their dignity. As Richard Burton explains in "Vichyisme et vichyistes à la Martinique," "une histoire d'esclavage et de colonialisme a appris aux Antillais l'art pénible et ambigu d'allier l'acquiescement apparent à la révolte intérieure, à opposer l'intelligence satirique ou le repli en soi à des formes d'oppression qu'ils ne sont pas toujours en mesure de contester physiquement." (A history of slavery and colonialism taught Antilleans the difficult and ambiguous art of combining outward acquiescence and

internal revolt, of utilizing satirical intelligence or withdrawal to oppose forms of oppression that they were not always in a position to contest through physical force.) (3). Despite their limited mobility and agency, through artful dissimulation during their daily work routines, the characters in *La Dissidence* participate simultaneously in two traditions: the tradition of surreptitious revolt described by Burton, whereby the colonized descendents of slaves adapt their expressions of protest to the constraints of their environment; and the tradition of agricultural, artisanal, and cultural production on the sugarcane plantation, the traumatic and triumphant locus of Creole identity.

Confiant also seizes upon the continuing tradition of plantation work as a symbolic opportunity to expunge the traumas of slavery through the community's intense involvement in the arduous collective labor of planting and harvesting sugarcane (Clavier 692).[187] The sense of secrecy, reverence, magic, and heroism surrounding the cultivation of cane and the production of rum in Confiant's *trilogie sucrière* includes both agricultural and industrial processes (in contrast with the pastoral and local color traditions, which eschew industrial and mechanical processes), which are celebrated as a sacred "hymne au travail" (hymn to work). Physical labor becomes a form of "alchimie qui transforme les souffrances en joies" (alchemy that transforms suffering into joy) (Clavier 693), a triumphal vision that seems to override the occasional fatalistic refrain of "canne c'est maudition" (cane is a curse) in the three novels. The commemorative tone of Confiant's trilogy serves as a counterpoint to the sobriety of Zobel's novel, *La rue*

[187] Clavier claims that the period of the 1930s an 1940s "marque symboliquement le rassemblement d'une communauté qui s'exonère enfin des pesanteurs de l'esclavage dans la fièvre de produire du sucre et du rhum" (symbolically marks the rallying of a community that finally frees itself from the burden of slavery through the feverish production of sugar and rhum.") (Clavier 692).

Cases-Nègres, as we discussed in the previous chapter, effectively rewriting the ending of Zobel's novel. Confiant finds a local answer—rooted in Martinique's sugarcane economy—to the intellectual, financial, existential, and identitarian challenges Zobel's semi-autobiographical character faced in Martinique, challenges which forced the Zobel and his character Jose to turn to France in search of solutions.

Additionally, the ritual of sugarcane serves as a justification for the social hierarchy resulting from colonialism and slavery, which is preserved in the trilogy, and functions as a microcosm and an organizing metaphor for Confiant's vision of Martinique as a cultural mosaic. As Thomas C. Spear remarks in a review of *Commandeur du sucre*, "[e]ven when embedded in the discourse of unenlightened characters, the accepted hierarchy is reinforced throughout" (Spear 1061). The plantation is indispensable in conveying a sense of the multiple, and often conflicting, memories, associations, and meanings behind the notion of Creoleness, as confirmed in the following statement made by the author in an interview in *Télérama*, the weekly arts and entertainment supplement of *Le Monde*: "C'est cette société de la canne qui m'intéresse, c'est d'elle que sont nés le peuple martiniquais et sa culture. Même si ce n'est pas une évidence d'être créole. Toute est mosaïque, tout est complexe ici." [188] (It's this sugarcane society that interests me, from which the Martinican people and their culture was born. Even if it's not clear what it is to be Creole. Everything is [a] mosaic, everything is complex here.) (Qtd. in Sabbah 86-87). Repeatedly, the male protagonists of *Commandeur du sucre*, *Régisseur du rhum*, and *La Dissidence*, are reminded—regardless of their race and station—that sugarcane is both their identity and their destiny, a link to their past and their future, and the reason for

[188] The mosaic also conveys the notion of a whole made up of many parts.

their tragedies and triumphs.[189] Moreover, the characters' conceptions of Martinique, its socio-ethnic groups, and its economic sectors, also rely on the presence of sugarcane. In *Commandeur du sucre*, for instance, Firmin is incapable of imagining a world without sugarcane:

> Non! La canne ne pouvait pas mourir car c'est la canne qui a fait ce pays de Martinique, qui l'avait construit. C'est elle qui fournissait le manger et le bien-être qui au Blanc-pays, qui au nègre, qui au mulâtre, qui à l'Indien-couli. C'est la petite monnaie que nous distribuaient planteurs et usiniers qui faisaient marcher le commerce de tissus du Syrien Abdallah à Grand-Bourg, les boutiques de morue salée, de tête de cochon, de pois-rouges-lentilles-riz, margarine et conforts dont nous avions si indispensablement besoin. Nous jacquot-répétions tous: "Canne c'est maudition!," mais nous savions bien que derrière cette maudition-là, il y avait la vie (*Commandeur* 29-30).
>
> No! The cane could not die, for it was cane that made this land of Martinique, that built it. It provided food and well-being to the island white, to the black, to the mulatto, to the Indian coolie. It was the petty change distributed to us by the planters and refinery owners that gave business to Abdallah, the Syrian textile merchant in Grand-Bourg, to the

[189] The plantations of Confiant's sugarcane trilogy are a man's world. Not only are all the protagonists men, but Confiant has fashioned a literary identity based on the heritage of the male *conteur* (storyteller). See A. James Arnold, "The Erotics of Colonialism in Contemporary French West Indian Literary Culture," *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* (68.1-2 1994): 5-22. As Arnold explains, in the "sharply gendered" literary landscape of the French-speaking Caribbean, the Créolistes belong to a "masculinist" tradition.

> shops selling salted cod, pig's heads, red-beans-lentils-rice, margarine and other com[f]orts which were so indispensably needed. We all African-parroted: "Cane is a curse!," but we knew well that behind that curse, there was life.

This passage also reveals Confiant's strangely horizontal conception of plantation society in terms of its shared (mutual, but not equal) economic dependence on sugarcane, which contradicts the intensely hierarchical (and therefore, vertical) social structure, described by Glissant as a "pyramidal structure" (Glissant 1981: 422). If the plantation in the New World sugarcane novel functions as a microcosm of the nation, as I have discussed earlier, then the social presentation in Confiant's sugarcane trilogy is consistent with Benedict Anderson's formulation of an imagined community in which "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation, … the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7). Shared goals, challenges, struggles, and wars in Confiant's trilogy create the illusion of a horizontal alliance across ethnoclass lines.

The impulse to memorialize and perpetuate the legacy of the plantation at all costs derives from an attachment to this space as the locus or site of origin of the Creole language and culture, or a *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory), despite the "problem of the embodiment of memory in sites where a sense of historical continuity persists" (Nora 1989: 7). As Nora explains, "[t]here are *lieux de mémoire* … because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory" (7). In the absence of an active sugarcane industry (and a national economy based on sugarcane exports) at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first century, the "monocultural" memory of the plantation experience—that is, a unified memory that is represented as belonging to the entire

culture—continues to be reflected in the inequalities of the Martinican social body.[190] As A. James Arnold has noted, in the case not only of Confiant, but also his *créoliste* colleague Patrick Chamoiseau, "the plot of the *créoliste* novel returns to a few privileged moments in Martinican history" (Arnold 1998: 42). He argues that each of these "*lieux de mémoire* … [is] a locus of collective memory, which together sustain a certain idea of the past and invest it with ideological significance" (42). Therefore, even as characters such as Firmin Léandor find creative ways to exert their power and shape certain events, they do so within the constraints of the social hierarchy of the plantation. For this hierarchy not only shaped the characters' identities and defined their relationship to one another, but also sustained the plantation and island economy for so long. Thus, the presence of a racist and fascist colonial occupier on the island is utterly necessary in order to portray characters such as Firmin Léandor and Pierre-Marie de La Vigerie—and by extension, the Martinican people—as righteous dissidents. Such an identity, predicated on the idea of resistance, but that somehow accepts the unjust, pre-Vichy, colonial status quo, could not exist in the absence of the injustice and oppression of Admiral Robert's regime in the tropics. This may be the single greatest paradox of this anti-colonial writer's sugarcane trilogy.[191]

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[190] I am of course taking poetic license here with the definition of monoculture to imply a mandated definition of cultural identity based on a specific version of Martinican history.

[191] Another paradox, which is connected to Confiant's (and Chamoiseau's) (re)vision of the past is the recasting of the role of the villain in Martinican history from the *béké* (the white Creole planter) to the racist metropolitan Vichy government, which spent three and a half years ruling Martinique compared to the more than three-hundred and sixty years during which the békés have possessed most of the wealth and power in Martinique. As A. James Arnold has cogently shown, a subsequent displacement has also occurred: "In the new context of the bureaucratic oppression exercised in the metropolitan French in the post 1946 *département,* they have reconfigured the dynamics of Creole society, so as to include the *béké* (especially the male planter figure) as a full member of the creolophone culture" (Arnold 1996: 43-44).

More than a mere affinity for local color—traditional food, dress, religious traditions, archaic French and Creole expressions, the rural landscape dotted with flowering sugarcane stalks, etc., which are depicted in such minute detail in the *créolistes* fiction, non-fiction, and autobiographical works—Confiant's attachment to a more insular Martinique that existed prior to 1946 is also tied to the idea of resistance. By stopping the clock at 1945, as he does in the sugarcane trilogy, Confiant chooses not to deal with what he and his *créoliste* brothers in arms consider to be Martinique's greatest political failing, the decision (championed by then-Député Aimé Césaire) to establish Martinique as an oversees department of France rather than seeking independence. The transfer from *colonie* to *département d'outre-mer* broke with the image of a defiant and self-sufficient colonial Martinique during World War II, ushering in a time of passivity and dependence on the French state.[192] Moreover, I believe that this period, as represented by Confiant in the sugarcane trilogy, and especially in *La Dissidence*, embodies the path of resistance, creativity, and resilience that Martinique might have—and the Créolistes believe, ought to have—taken toward independence in 1946. Confiant's description of the period in the epilogue of *La Dissidence* says it all:

> J'étais … fasciné par ce moment unique en trois cent soixante ans de présence française, au cours duquel la Martinique avait dû s'assumer elle-même, ne disposant plus d'une métropole secourable pour lui fournir vivres, vêtements, médicaments et carburant. Entre la fin de 1939 et le début de 1945, le pays avait dû compter sur ses propres forces, faire

[192] A. James Arnold explains that the "strong element of nostalgia for bygone days that pervades both *créoliste* fiction and autobiography" manifests itself in the "desire to reconstruct the past of creole society as self-sufficient and sustainable in opposition to the neo-colonial realities of the present" (Arnold 1998: 44)

> preuve d'ingéniosité tout en résistant à l'oppression des marins de l'amiral Robert (273).
>
> I was … fascinated by this unique moment in the three-hundred-and-sixty year French presence during which Martinique had to take care of itself, since there was no dependable *métropole* to provide food, clothes, medicine, and fuel. Between late 1939 and early 1945, the country had to rely on its own strength and ingenuity, all the while resisting the oppression of the sailors in Admiral Robert's navy.

In a prescient article from 1996, A. James Arnold corroborates Confiant's statement from 2002 by showing that the *créolistes* retrospective constructions of Martinique during the Vichy French navy occupation in World War II clearly emerge

> "forty years and more after the fact. They are conditioned by what followed almost immediately upon the liberation of the islands from Vichy French control … The present generation of *créolistes* were all born after the war and have never known any political status other than that of the overseas *départements* … It is against an intolerable neo-colonialism in the present that the *créoliste* looks back with scarcely veiled nostalgia at the hardships of the World War II occupation" (Arnold 1996: 43).

In light of this examination of the cane fields of Confiant's *trilogie sucrière*, when we return to Glissant's characterization of Martinique as "une terre de change, où il ne se produit plus rien" (a wasteland, where nothing is produced any longer)[193], it is easier see the political, economic, psychological, linguistic, and cultural consequences of

[193] I discussed at this passage from *Le discourse antillais* at the beginning of the chapter.

departmentalization and the demise of the sugarcane plantation—which occurred within fifteen years of departmentalization—and understand Confiant's attraction to and nostalgia for this period of Martinican history.

Lins do Rego's Sugarcane Cycle

Perhaps due to his own bittersweet personal experience of growing up on a plantation, Lins do Rego's *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar* does not cast plantation life as unproblematically heroic as Confiant's *trilogie sucrière* does. Heroism is a quality associated with the past glory of the *engenho*, not with the narrative present and the declining days of the sugar estate.[194] Writing about the first novel in the saga, David Haberly characterizes *Menino de Engenho* (*Plantation Boy*, 1932) as "an elegiac account of a lost world and an etiology of personal perdition" (Haberly 1983: 165). Haberly situates *Menino de Engenho*, which is perhaps the single most widely read Brazilian novel of the twentieth-century, within a dominant late-nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century Brazilian literary tradition whose central metaphor is a "biblical account of Eden and humanity's expulsion from an earthly [Brazilian] paradise … based upon several fundamental ideas about the nation and its culture" (167). The paradise lost in *Menino de Engenho* is the innocence of childhood; when left to their own devices in the decadent environment of the plantation, children are easily corrupted and initiated into an adult world of sex, disease, and dissipation. Each novel in the sugarcane cycle wrestles with themes of loneliness, alienation, and perdition; collectively, the novels in the saga

[194] Although José Paulino, Carlinhos's grandfather, hovers heroically throughout *Menino de Engenho* as one of the last grand *senhores de engenho* (plantation masters), neither Carlinhos nor the protagonists in the other novels in the series are portrayed as heroes or particularly noble characters.

function like a chronological case study of the conflict between tradition and modernization and its consequences on the region and its inhabitants.

In his *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar*, Lins do Rego attempts to represent different aspects of the Northeastern plantation experience from the point of view of various characters; nevertheless, the heavily autobiographical protagonist of *Menino de Engenho* is present in all the other novels in the series (albeit at times in minor roles). *Menino de Engenho* begins with the main character Carlos de Melo's ("Carlinhos") arrival at his maternal grandfather's plantation of Santa Rosa at the age of four, following his mother's violent death at the hand of his father. As Carlinhos, the semi-autobiographical narrator, explains in the first pages of the novel, with the move to Santa Rosa "[u]m mundo nôvo se abrira para mim" (a new world opened itself up to me) at Santa Rosa (*Menino* 7). The novel transports readers to the self-contained world of the sugar estate as Carlinhos discovers it. Through careful didacticism, much as in Confiant's sugarcane trilogy, *Menino de Engenho* and the other novels in Lins do Rego's sugarcane cycle introduce readers to many archaic Northeastern linguistic and cultural practices (folktales, songs, religious ceremonies, etc.) preserved there due to the region's isolation. Lins do Rego imparts this knowledge with familiarity, drawing heavily on his own experiences growing up on his grandfather's working sugarcane plantation—whereas Confiant was born at a time when the sugar industry had already collapsed in Martinique, even though his grandfather planted some sugarcane in his rural home as well. The second novel in the saga, *Doidinho* (Crazy Guy, 1933), which takes place after Carlinhos has lived on Santa Rosa Plantation for eight years, primarily chronicles the main character's difficulties adjusting to life at boarding school (where his nickname is "Doidinho"), focusing on his

infirmity, his homesickness for Santa Rosa, and his loss of identity in this unfamiliar environment. While the city of Recife (in the state of Pernambuco) is many miles away from his grandfather's plantation in Pilar (in the state of Paraíba), Carlinhos's thoughts and the root of his psychological, sexual, and existential problems all lie in Santa Rosa. Three other novels in the series, *Bangüê* (the term for a small pre-mechanized and labor-intensive sugar plantation and mill; 1934), *Usina* (Refinery, 1936), and *Fogo Morto* (Dead Fire, 1943) deal more explicitly with the decline of the traditional *latifúndio*.

Critics are divided over whether to include *Fogo Morto* and another novel, *O Moleque Ricardo*[195] (The Urchin Ricardo, 1935), in the sugarcane cycle. For instance, in the 1966 introduction to *O Moleque Ricardo*, M. Cavalcanti Proença argues that the novel is a "romance satélite do ciclo da cana-de-açúcar" (a satellite novel of the sugarcane cycle) (*Moleque* xiv). Nevertheless, he situates the novel chronologically between *Bangüê* and *Usina*, and his thirty-two-page introduction places Ricardo's childhood on the Santa Rosa Plantation in a dialectical relationship with later experiences in the city of Recife and on the island of Fernando de Noronha; everything is brought into the orbit of those first foundational moments, in an "evocação de todos os momentos" (an evocation of all moments), with Cavalcanti Proença emphasizing the importance of the "longo recordar" (long memory) in understanding Ricardo's character, his desires, and ultimately, his fate (xiv).[196] Despite the intertextual connections between *O Moleque*

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[195] The term *moleque* (from the Angolan Kimbindu word *muleke*) in Portuguese also has racial overtones, just as the term "boy" in the United States south has pejorative and racist connotations. Perhaps a closer translation might be The Pickanniny Ricardo. Pickanniny, a racist term in English, comes from the Portuguese word *pequeninho* (little one).

[196] Even as he pushes *O Moleque Ricardo* to the margins, Cavalcanti Proença is advocating a reading strategy that in fact contradicts his judgment of *O Moleque Ricardo* as a "satellite novel":

Ricardo and *Menino de Engenho*—which I will shortly address in more detail—most notably the childhood friendship between Carlinhos and Ricardo at Santa Rosa as portrayed in the two novels, and the presence of several recurring characters,[197] Cavalcanti Proença, among other critics,[198] excludes *O Moleque Ricardo* from Lins do Rego's sugarcane saga because it breaks with the autobiographical style of the first three novels in which Carlos de Melo is both the main character and narrator. I maintain, however, that the exclusion of *O Moleque Ricardo* from the series not only runs counter to the author's own vision of the *mundo da cana*, but reveals the prejudice of the predominantly white Brazilian literary establishment—and readership, which were essentially one and the same at the time[199]—who relegated the story of the Afro-Brazilian

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each novel in the saga needs to be understood in the broader context (or "longer memory") of the entire series.

[197] José Paulino, and Carlos play minor roles in *O Moleque Ricardo*, along with several characters from *Menino de Engenho*.

[198] In the book and article by David M. Jordan, the author vaguely refers to Lins do Rego's "three realistic novels chronicling plantation life in the Northeast" (same quotation for both), not naming the three novels, and then explains that the author "returned to the plantation theme with his [modernist] novel *Fogo Morto*" (same quotation for both). It can be deduced that the three novels are *Menino de Engenho*, *Bangüê*, and *Usina*, since the three titles refer explicitly to types of plantations (the first two) and a refinery (the third); Jordan therefore excludes *Doidinho*, which is set mostly in a boarding school in Recife, and *O Moleque Ricardo* from the sugarcane cycle (even though he doesn't name the saga or conceive it as such). He treats *Fogo Morto* as a completely separate work and does not bring the three earlier plantation novels into his examination of *Fogo Morto* (Jordan 1993: 67; Jordan 1994: 66). Jon S. Vincent is one of the few critics to include all six novels. He emphasizes that *O Moleque Ricardo* is "closely related to the cycle," and for him, *Fogo Morto's* exclusion from the cycle is somewhat of a mystery … since it has many thematic similarities to the novels in the cycle" (Vincent 281).

[199] Writing about abolitionist literature, which began to appear in the mid nineteenth century, but whose influence, both aesthetic and political, continued into the twentieth century (he mentions Lins do Rego specifically), Haberly explains that very few Brazilians knew how to read; those who could both read and have access to novels and periodicals were "generally those with the greatest investment in the slave system" (Haberly 1972: 31). Although slavery would no longer exist some forty years later, readers and critics would likely have been from the same ethnoclass as the previous generation.

Ricardo to the margins.[200] Although the plot of the following novel in the saga, *Usina*, finds Ricardo returning to Santa Rosa after an eight-year absence (in fact, the novel begins with Ricardo's train ride back to the plantation following his escape from prison), Carlinhos fleeing the plantation and his obligations there, and features a third-person omniscient narrator (as in *O Moleque Ricardo*), it is unanimously considered to be part of the series.

Perhaps because Lins do Rego proclaimed *Usina* to be the final installment in his plantation saga, most scholars have taken him at his word, and have considered *Fogo Morto* to be an independent work.[201] Like *O Moleque Ricardo* and *Usina*, it also breaks with the autobiographical style and first-person narrative of the first three novels in the cycle. The most experimental of Lins do Rego's novels, and widely considered to be his *obra-prima* (masterpiece), *Fogo Morto* was published in 1943, seven years after *Usina*.[202] The novel features several recurring characters; however, the plantation owner Lula de

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[200] Lins do Rego explains in the "Note on the First Edition" of *Usina* (1936), that Carlinhos and Ricardo are prototypes for the lived experience of so many other "plantation boys" like them, and that the two had much in common, having perhaps shared the same wet nurse ("bebido o mesmo leite materno") and spent so much of their childhood in proximity to each other. Carlos, Ricardo, and Santa Rosa are so "intimately bound" ("intimamente ligados") that the three ultimately share "the same fate" ("tem o mesmo destino") (xiii). In his article, "Abolitionism in Brazil: Anti-Slavery and Anti-Slave," David Haberly examined the near complete absence of Afro-Brazilian characters, "good or bad, light skinned or dark," in Brazil's latent and sparse abolitionist literature. As Haberly explains, Lins do Rego's fiction, especially *O Moleque Ricardo*, is rife with the racial anxiety and negative stereotypes that characterize the late-nineteenth-century naturalist strain of abolitionist literature (Haberly 1972: 32; 45).

[201] See for example Lins do Rego's "Note on the First Edition" of *Usina*, in which he listed the novels in the sugarcane cycle in chronological order: *Menino de Engenho*, *Doidinho*, *Bangüê*, *O Moleque Ricardo*, and *Usina*. The author declared that "with *Usina* the series of novels that I over emphatically called the *Ciclo da cana-de-açúcar* comes to an end" (xiii).

[202] Lins do Rego published the first five novels in the saga in rapid succession, one each year from 1932 to 1936. Between 1936 and 1943, he published four novels: three independent novels (*Pureza*, *Riacho Doce*, and *Água Mãe*), and one novel (*Pedra Bonita*) that would be included in a two-novel saga, the *ciclo do misticismo e do cangaço* (mysticism and banditry cycle), which he completed in 1953.

Holanda (who appears in *Usina*) is the only one who figures prominently.[203] The primary setting in *Fogo Morto* is the declining Santa Fé Plantation of Lula de Holanda, although the Santa Rosa Plantation, the nucleus of the earlier novels in the saga, appears and is mentioned by characters in the novel.[204]

Fogo Morto is a triptych, an uneasy narrative trinity between the intersecting lives and fates of three characters, each of whom embodies a representative Northeastern "social type": the Santa Fé Plantation tenant and saddle maker José Amaro, who suffers from paranoid delusions and is eventually evicted from the property (Part One); the decadent plantation owner Luís César de Holanda Chacon (Seu Lula), an "outsider" who lacks the tenacity to properly manage the plantation (Part Two); and Captain Vitorino Carneiro da Cunha (Capitão Vitorino), a Don Quixote figure who strives for social justice in a morally corrupt universe (Part Three). Spanning a much broader time period than any of the previous installments in the *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar*—from the *Segundo Reinado* (a timeframe of fifty-eight years, from 1831-1889, that includes the periods of regency and the first Brazilian empire, and ends the year after the abolition of slavery) to the first two decades of the twentieth century—this final work reads like a tragic, modernist epic of the Santa Fé Plantation. Despite the fact that the novel does not proceed chronologically as do the first five novels in the saga (with certain events taking place earlier than those in the first five novels in the series), and in terms of the narrative timeframe, it actually precedes *Usina*, the "dead fire" of the novel's title along with its

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[203] Some of the other recurring characters include José Paulino, Carlinhos's grandfather in *Menino de Engenho*, *Doidinho*, and *Bangüê*, Carlos de Melo (who is a very minor character), and José Passarinho, a former slave and loyal plantation worker (a character who facilitates Lins do Rego's portrayal of the Northeast's benevolent patriarchy, especially prior to abolition).

[204] In fact, the success of Santa Rosa and its owner provoke much envy in Lula de Holanda, Santa Fé's owner.

narrative strategies situate the end of the Northeastern sugarcane saga and the world it attempted to keep alive.[205]

Even a cursory chronological look at the titles of novels in the *ciclo da-cana-de-açucar* with references to plantations reveals the inevitable progression from small family-owned sugar estate with its own sugar mill (*Menino de Engenho*) to pre-mechanized sugar mill (*Bangüê*) to mechanized refinery (*Usina*), and finally to the "dead fire" of the plantation mill that is no longer in use, a metonym for the now useless chimney of the mill on the Santa Fé plantation. (The chimney and the plantation need not be named, for they no longer exist.) The (morally) bankrupt Santa Fé plantation is, of course, also a metonym for all the defunct *engenhos* in the Northeast, for the region itself, and for the real soul of Brazil,[206] all of which have been irreparably lost at the conclusion of the novel.

Fogo Morto and *Usina* share parallel endings[207]: they are accounts of the biblical destruction of two plantations, whose disappearance is a punishment for the oft-quoted "decadence," weakness, and sinfulness of the people living there; the devastation can therefore be blamed on the plantations' inhabitants for forsaking Bom Jesus (Good Jesus)

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[205] Events and references at the beginning of Part Two precede those in Parts Two and Three, but later events in Part Two overlap with those in Parts One and Three (the section that presents Seu Lula's story goes back in time to pre-1848 Brazil, the earliest period portrayed in any of the novels in the saga).

[206] Brazil's Northeast was the site of the first colonial plantations, which were the primary contact zones of Europeans, Africans, Amerindians; for this reason, the region was believed to contain the "essence" or "true character" of the original Brazil, according to Brazilian geographers like Agamemnon Magalhães and the sociologist Gilberto Freyre (Blake 1-2).

[207] According to the critic Jon. S. Vincent, *Fogo Morto* might even be considered "a re-write of *Usina*, since … it is about the decline of the old plantation system and the rise of the industrialized sugar mills" (281).

and Santa Fé (Sant(ly)/Holy Faith).[208] In *Usina*, after the financial ruin of Bom Jesus plantation (previously Santa Rosa, until Carlos de Melo fled the plantation and left it to his Uncle Juca), the plantation is sold to an *usineiro* (the owner of a refinery) and becomes part of the vast São Felix plantation and refinery complex. Following the sale of Bom Jesus, the neighboring Paraíba river floods, and all the plantation's remaining inhabitants are banished from the once mythical, edenic, Brazilian plantation, and flee to the *sertão* (the dessert backlands) In *Fogo Morto*, the day Santa Fé's mill ceases to operate, José Amaro, the former tenant and saddle maker, who earlier conspired with outlaws to pillage and destroy the plantation, commits suicide. The loss of Bom Jesus plantation in *Usina* and Santa Fé plantation in *Fogo Morto*, accompanied by a flood, an exile in the dessert,[209] and a mortal sin, completes the morality tale of perdition that Lins do Rego began with *Menino de Engenho.*

Thematically, stylistically, and programmatically, *Fogo Morto* ought to be considered the final installment of Lins do Rego's plantation saga. The novel is in many ways a synthesis, a "retomamento" (a reclaiming) (de Andrade, *Fogo Morto*: xxi) or a "re-write" (Vincent 281) of the other novels in the *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar*. It also contains many repetitions and references to previous events both within the novel (a retelling of events from the perspective of the three main characters) and in the other novels of the cycle; many expressions and phrases are reused; and of course, several recurring characters from the other novels in Lins do Rego's saga are also present.

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[208] Lins do Rego underwent a conversion from his interest and commitment to international and experimental literary aesthetics to regional and traditional ones, and from progressive political leanings to conservative ones, during the decade prior to writing *Menino de Engenho*. These changes were accompanied by a rekindling of his Catholic identity (Braga-Pinto 40-41).

[209] Antonio Villaça writes that the act of Carlos's Tio (Uncle) Juca fleeing the flood and abandoning the plantation at the end of *Usina* is a "synthesis" of the novel (*Usina* xx).

Perhaps the most emphatic proof that *Fogo Morto* is the "final chapter" of the Northeastern sugarcane saga is revealed via the device of repetition; the novel's ending is in fact announced twice. At the end of Part Two (Seu Lula's story), a third-person omniscient narrator communicates Dona Amélia's reaction as she stumbles upon the corpse of José Amaro. This event is followed by the last sentence of the chapter, which is the only sentence of a new paragraph: "acabara-se o Santa Fé" (Santa Fé had come to an end) (171). At the end of Part Three (Capitão Vitorino's story), following the description of José Amaro's dead body and a passage about the need for proper attire for the funeral (For the body? For José Passarinho? For Vitorino? It isn't clear.), the novel ends with Passarinho, his wife Adriana, and Vitorino gazing up at the smoke billowing from the chimney of Santa Rosa's mill, then at the motionless smokestack of Santa Fé's mill, now covered with branches and blue flowers, as Vitorino asks when the Santa Fé mill will be running, and Passarinho, the former slave, replies, "Capitão, não bota mais, está de fogo morto" (Captain, it doesn't go any more. Its fire is dead) (245).

Having established the connections between the fictional worlds of *Menino de Engenho*, *Doidinho, Bangüê, O Moleque Ricardo*, *Usina, and Fogo Morto,* and argued in favor of the inclusion of all six novels in Lins do Rego's sugarcane saga, I shall now turn to the novels that tell the stories of two very different "plantation boys," Carlinhos and Ricardo. The dialogic interaction between them, especially between *Menino de Engenho* and *O Moleque Ricardo*, provides important insight into the ideological vision undergirding the plantation world in Lins do Rego's saga.

Place plays a vital role in *Menino de Engenho* and *O Moleque Ricardo*. Although, as I have discussed, many critics do not consider *O Moleque Ricardo* as officially part of

the *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar*, the novel—like its main character Ricardo—is never entirely dissociated from the Santa Rosa plantation. Ricardo may have abandoned Santa Rosa for life in Recife, but he is forever haunted by his little brother Rafael's plaintive call of "Cardo Cardo" (*O moleque Ricardo*, 6; 209) and by memories of the life he left behind at Santa Rosa. The presence of Carlos de Melo in the novel as well as the chance meetings that take place between the two characters in Recife also serve as reminders that the plantation is never far away. The fate of both characters, moreover, has been determined by the legacy of Santa Rosa. Ricardo, a child laborer, the son of a Santa Rosa Plantation worker, and the grandson of slaves, flees the plantation in search of a better life. Nonetheless, like his childhood friend Carlos, Ricardo experiences an identity crisis outside the environment of Santa Rosa. In the literary universe of the ciclo da cana-de-açúcar, Carlos, the descendent of the masters, and Ricardo, the descendent of slaves, have both been "corrupted by … [the plantation] environment and its inhabitants" (Haberly 166)[210]; both appear lost and "out of context" in the modern coastal city of Recife; both seem unable to function as individuals outside the perimeter of the plantation; and both their stories involve a loss of innocence and a fall from grace. Thus, the famous last line of *Menino de Engenho* describing Carlos's state of being in the world, "menino perdido, Menino de Engenho" (lost/fallen boy, plantation boy), applies equally to Ricardo.

Another echo of Carlinhos's and Ricardo's related experiences, occurs in the second novel in the saga, *Doidinho*, when one of Carlinhos's classmates at the boarding school insults him by calling him a "moleque de bagaceira"[211] (essentially, "cane trash"), an epithet with both racial and social overtones that equates him with plantation workers

[210] The original quote from Haberly's *Three Sad Races* refers exclusively to Carlos.
[211] *Bagaceira* is the waste product of the sugarcane after it has been processed in a mill.

like Ricardo (the black or multiracial descendents of slaves) rather than with his true station among the white Luso-Brazilian plantocracy (*Doidinho 95*). Although Carlinhos has benefited from the privilege of his social class—and from the oppression of generations of Afro-Brazilian slaves and workers like Ricardo—both men have been forever marked by their environment and by their common childhood experiences.[212] The cane fields, the mill, the Paraíba River, the big house, and the *senzala* (former slave quarters), comprise their "shared" universe, a space in which a precise role has been assigned to them by pre-existing historical conditions. Lins do Rego's anachronistic decision to maintain this archaic plantation model in *Menino de Engenho* and *O Moleque Ricardo* gives his writing an undeniably nostalgic and fatalistic quality, especially in light of the fact that the final two novels, *Usina* and *Fogo Morto* deal with the large-scale industrialized plantations which supplanted the old sugar estate system. The *engenho* de Santa Rosa in these novels functions like a type of museum housing the collective memory of Portuguese colonialism, serving also as the sacred site of the founding myth of the Brazilian people from a cultural and racial standpoint.

Heavily influenced by the sociologist Gilberto Freyre, Lins do Rego's novels reinforce the perspective of Brazil's exceptionalism in terms of its "benevolent" form of slavery. Lins do Rego's sugarcane cycle in many ways parallels Gilberto Freyre's ambitious socio-historical study-cum-paean of Northeastern plantation manners and relations in *Casa grande e senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*, 1933) and *Sobrados e*

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[212] Carlinhos and Ricardo, along with some of the other *moleques de bagaceira*, not only spend their early years playing together, but also go through many formative experiences and rights of passage together, many of them of a sexual nature. Their precocious first sexual awakenings and experiences frequently occurred with the same women or with each other on the plantation. In fact, in *Menino de Engenho*, Ricardo and Carlinhos have both contracted a venereal disease from the same woman, Zefa Cajá.

Mucambos (*The Mansions and the Shanties*, 1936). The author in fact credited Freyre with introducing him to literature and "ideas," acknowledging in the preface to Freyre's *Região e Tradição* that "Para mim tivera começo naquela tarde de nosso encontro a minha existencia literaria. O que eu havia lido até aquele dia? Quase nada … É assim Gilberto Freyre. É o revelador de vocações, o animador. Posso dizer sem medo que a elle devo os meus romances … For me on that afternoon of our [first] meeting my literary existence began. What had I read until then? Almost nothing … That's what Gilberto Freyre is. He is the revealer of vocations, the animator (Freyre 1941: 10).

In *Menino de Engenho*, most of the Afro-Brazilian characters appear not only to tolerate their position at Santa Rosa, but also show loyalty and affection toward José Paulino, the former slave owner and master (a topos of most plantation novels written by white authors). In the following passage Carlinhos describes the former slave quarters (*senzala*) at Santa Rosa and a few of the former slaves, now old women who continue to live there:

> Restava ainda a senzala dos tempos de cativeiro. Uns vinte quartos com o mesmo alpendre na frente. As negras do meu avô, mesmo depois da abolição, ficaram todas no engenho, não deixaram a 'rua,' como elas chamavam a senzala. E ali foram morrendo de velhas … E elas trabalhavam de graça, com a mesma alegria da escravidão. As duas filhas e netas iam-lhes sucedindo na servidão, com o mesmo amor a casa-grande e a mesma passividade de bons animais domésticos (*Menino de Engenho* 54-55).

> The slave quarters still remained from the time of captivity. Some twenty rooms, with the same porch out in front. Even after abolition, my grandfather's Negresses all stayed on the estate, they didn't leave the 'alley,' as they referred to the slave quarters. And they gradually died there of old age … And they worked for free, with the same happiness as in the days of slavery. Their two daughters and granddaughters succeeded them in servitude, with the same love for the big house and the same passivity of good domestic animals.[213]

Carlinhos's worldview stands in contrast to Ricardo's own awareness of and anger about the unfairness of his own situation at Santa Rosa compared to Carlos's (although his outrage is tinged with nostalgia for certain moments in his early childhood when he spent time at the big house):

> Não sei proque naquela noite êle teve vontade [de] ver o coronel. Nascera para ser menor que os outros. Em pequeno vivia pela sala com os senhores lhe ensinando graça para dizer. Os meninos brancos brincavam com êle. Mais tarde viu que não valia nada mesmo. Só para o serviço … (*O Moleque Ricardo*, 13).
>
> Who knows why on that night he felt the urge [to] see the *coronel* [José Paulino, the plantation master]. He was born to be less than the others. When he was little he was often in the living room where the masters

[213] In *Menino de Engenho*, José Paulino, the protagonist's grandfather and the plantation master of Santa Rosa, insists that things actually got much worse for former plantation slaves once they were freed, since plantation owners could no longer afford to provide for the workers material needs or feed them as well as they could prior to abolition and their wages were insufficient (91).

> would teach him funny things to say. The white boys played with him. Later on he realized that he wasn't worth anything. Just for serving …

By the same token, he is fully aware of Carlos de Melo's unmerited advantages in this world. Carlinhos had no chores or obligations, and people were always hovering protectively around him. Ricardo worked hard and was "better at everything", but he would never have what Carlos de Melo had:

> E sabia mesmo fazer tudo melhor. E apesar disso, quando o outro crescesse, seria dono, êle um alugado como os que via na enxada. Não tinha raiva de Carlinhos por isso, mas sentia enveja, vontade de ser como êle, de andar de carneiro e poder comprar gaiola de passarinho … (*O moleque Ricardo*, 13).
>
> And he really did know how to do everything better. And in spite of this, when the other boy grew up he [Carlos] would be the owner, and he [Ricardo], the indentured one was like the other indentured workers in the fields. He didn't hate Carlos for it, but he envied him, wanted to be like him, to walk around with his own pet lamb and be able to buy a birdcage …

Although his evolving consciousness inspires Ricardo to flee Santa Rosa at the age of sixteen for the opportunity of a better life in the city of Recife, he is soon confronted with the unexpected hardship of city life. Gradually, the character begins to lose hope in finding a better life, and comes to equate being a *negro alugado* (a rented/hired Negro) in the city with the work of a slave or a field worker on the plantation. As time passes, he

begins to miss the sense of community he felt on the plantation, and concludes that the quality of life on the plantation is in fact better than in the city, for no one went hungry in Santa Rosa: "Pobre não nascera para ter direito … Ricardo achou então que havia gente mais pobre que do que os pobres de Santa Rosa. Mãe Avelina vivia de barriga cheia na casa-grande" (The poor were not born with rights … Ricardo believed, then, that there were people who were poorer than the poor at Santa Rosa. Ma Avelina's belly was always full over at the big house) (*O Moleque Ricardo* 35). Thus Ricardo's experiences outside the plantation lead him to revisit his earlier criticism of his situation at Santa Rosa, and eventually the character begins to profess opinions that are very similar to those of his childhood friend Carlos.

Although the *ciclo da cana-de-açúcar* is ultimately a saga about the gradual disappearance of a time and place where a unique culture once existed—a disappearance it acknowledges, unlike Confiant's *trilogie sucrière*—one of the biggest consequences of the collapse of plantation society for Lins do Rego—and for Confiant—was the loss of communal ties binding the inhabitants of the *engenho* to one another through colonialism, slavery, and even after abolition. These communal ties, however, were really a euphemism for the highly stratified plantation hierarchy and the social paternalism to which the author and his mentor Gilberto Freyre were so attached. Lins do Rego believed that "tradition and order" were the cornerstones of Brazilian identity (Braga-Pinto 40). The Northeastern *engenho* with its diverse and "ordered" population embodied this ideal. Even though examples of cruelty, violence, and depravity—the result of the effects of slavery on both slaves and their masters—also abound in the

novels, the world of the sugar estate still appears more humane than the sprawling city, with its social chaos, impersonal institutions, and cold modernity.

Although Lins do Rego attempts to give voice to the plight of those at the very bottom of the plantation hierarchy in the sugarcane saga, such as Ricardo, the distinctions in narrative voice between the novels *Menino de Engenho* and *O Moleque Ricardo*, further undermine any such attempt. Carlinhos, the narrator of *Menino de Engenho* (and also of *Doidinho* and *Bangüê*, the two other semi-autobiographical novels written in first-person narrative) is essentially the author's double; while Ricardo's story is communicated by an omniscient narrator in the novel that bears his name as well as in *Usina* (where he is a major character). Despite Lins do Rego's avowal that both Carlos and Ricardo are archetypes for plantation boys in his "Note on the First Edition" of *Usina*, calling them "os Carlos" and "os Ricardos" (the Carloses and the Ricardos) (xiii), the *bildungsroman* style of the novels in which Carlos is the protagonist emphasizes the character's subjectivity, whereas the third-person narration of Ricardo's thoughts and actions in *O Moleque Ricardo* and *Usina*—predicated on "objective" observation—promotes the impression of Ricardo as a social type for the Afro-Brazilian *moleques* the author befriended on his grandfather's plantation as a child, rather than a multidimensional character.

Despite Lins do Rego's sometimes sympathetic portrayal of Ricardo, his treatment of the character inevitably betrays his own dominant position as a member of the plantocracy. Defying and abandoning his place and role on the plantation eventually prove fatal for Ricardo. In the hope of experiencing the sense of community and solidarity he associated with the *engenho*, Ricardo becomes involved in a labor union in

Recife, is arrested along with other union members for participating in an illegal strike, and is sent to the prison island of Fernando de Noronha. Ricardo's desire for freedom outside the *engenho* ultimately leads to forms of confinement and perdition (in this case, homosexuality) that are far worse than those he sought to flee. Even when he escapes from prison and returns to Santa Rosa at the beginning of *Usina*, Ricardo is beyond Salvation. Ricardo is killed by his own people at Santa Rosa, and the new mechanized plantation is renamed Bom Jesus.

The consequences of Ricardo's departure from the plantation reveal Lins do Rego's determinist social vision, perhaps the literary inheritance of both European and Brazilian naturalism. Ricardo is punished for his original fault: abandoning Santa Rosa and disregarding his place within plantation hierarchy. Ricardo's death, Carlinhos's disappearance, the flood, the loss of Santa Rosa, Bom Jesus, and Santa Fé, are all forms of punishment for forsaking "order and tradition." All the characters in the sugarcane saga are "menino[s] perdido[s], menino[s] de engenho," to paraphrase the last sentence of *Menino de Engenho*. And as "plantation boys," they carry the seeds of their own destruction and contribute to the erosion of the plantation, the *nordeste*, and the Brazilian nation. Lins do Rego's plantation saga is therefore the twentieth-century equivalent of a morality play in six acts. A cautionary tale, the Brazilian saga chronicles and clearly demarcates a period of Northeastern civilization that comes to an end (even though it refuses to acknowledge a future, however grim, beyond it), in contrast to the Martinican saga, which celebrates the plantation past while also creating the illusion of continuity.

3.5 Repetition, Dialogism, Didacticism: Plantation Pedagogy in the Formation of National Identity

In a 1964 article about the *nouveau roman* titled **"**Une societé sans roman" (A society without the novel), Roland Barthes discusses the connections between earlier French literary traditions and reality, arguing that these works obligatorily portray societies on the brink of extinction, and therefore inherently engage in historical production:

> Quel est l'objet de nos grands romans passés? Presque toujours une société qui *se défait*, comme s'il y avait accord entre la durée romanesque et le temps historique qui ruine, ensable, élimine, futilise. *La Comédie humaine, Les Rougon Macquart, Le Temps perdu* sont des histoires d'une classe qui meurt (l'aristocracie de Balzac), qui pourrit (la bourgeoisie dans *Nana*) ou s'irréalise (chez Proust). S'il n'atteint cette dimension, le roman manque directement l'histoire (565).
>
> What is the object of the great novels of the past? Almost always a society that *undoes* itself, as if there were an agreement between the literary timeframe and the historical timeframe, which are both being destroyed, covered by sand, eliminated, and rendered futile. *La Comédie humaine*, *Les Rougon Macquart*, *Le Temps perdu* are all stories of a class that is dying (the aristocracy in Balzac), rotting (the bourgeoisie in *Nana*), that is entering the realm of the imaginary (in Proust). If it doesn't achieve this dimension, the novel does not directly engage with history.

While Barthes doesn't directly discuss these works by Balzac, Zola, and Proust in the context of the literary saga, his remarks about the novel and its dialogue with or even commentary on history seem particularly cogent.

Throughout this chapter, I have examined how the neo-realist sugarcane sagas of Confiant and Lins do Rego engage with the legacy of the plantation in Martinique and Brazil in ways that reveal their authors' obsession with the preservation of a particular version of this cultural history, which is so central to their definitions of nationhood in the present. I have argued that the saga novel genre is the ideal tool for inculcating national identity, particularly these "national novels … which are plainly identifiable as national anthems" (*Foundational Fictions* 4). There is no question that *Menino de Engenho*, the first novel of Lins do Rego's "sugarcane cycle," has played such a role; it is frequently required reading in the nation's schools, and has been the subject of plays, films, and documentaries. Confiant's "sugarcane trilogy"—along with author's many neo-realist historical novels about different Martinican milieus—may well serve a similar function one day.[214]

Confiant's and Lins do Rego's national sagas feature several literary devices that play a didactic role in promoting the ideologically driven historical visions fictionally created by their authors (what Eric Hobsbawm calls "invented traditions"). As I have demonstrated, repetition is the most important of these devices, for it allows each novel in the sagas to engage intertextually with the others in the saga and with the entire series, which creates a sense of continuity and the illusion of factuality. (The self-referenciality

[214] For now, however, Confiant's primary readership is outside Martinique, in metropolitan France.

of the sagas means that events are retold and corroborated by various characters and narrators in the different novels.)

What is the lasting history lesson of Confiant's and Lins do Rego's sugarcane sagas? The answers are very different. Confiant's trilogy is a triumphalist historical novel. The author attempts to prevent the present from trespassing on his literary construction of Martinican identity, in complete denial of the loss of the traditional Creole plantation. The last novel in the saga, *La Dissidence*, promotes the idea of a possible, albeit vague, epistemological transmission of Creoleness to future generations of Martinicans. At the very end of the novel, following a conversation between Firmin, the foreman of the Bel-Évent plantation, and his wife Mathurine about their son's future, the narrator (Firmin) ponders the situation: "Je resongeai à la proposition que m'avais fait monsieur Simon avant-guerre: faire de Jean-André le prochain commandeur de Bel-Évent. Cela me plonga dans une perplexité" (I thought about Mr. Simon's proposition before the war: to make Jean-André the next *commandeur* of Bel-Évent. This plunged me into perplexity) (*La Dissidence* 272). While the novel's conclusion breaks with the overall celebratory tone of the trilogy, it nevertheless offers a glimmer of hope of keeping Martinican Creole culture alive, if the current generation accepts the important role of passing on Martinican traditions. Lins do Rego's saga, on the other hand, paints a stark picture of Brazil's future. This morality tale illustrates the consequences of disregarding the rigid ethnoclass system of the early colonial *engenhos*, particularly in terms of the effects of miscegenation (blamed on the hypersexuality of black women and *mulatas* like the characters Luísa and Zefa Cajá). As David Haberly has pointed out, despite Gilberto Freyre's strong influence on Lins do Rego, the *ciclo da cana-de açúcar* is a pessimistic

illustration of Freyre's problematic attempts to celebrate Brazil's multiethnic cultural roots (Haberly 1983: 164). Thus, the title of the last novel in the Northeastern sugarcane saga, which is a synthesis of all the others, creates a causal link between the "dead fire" of the Santa Fé plantation mill and the impotence and sterility of the Luso-Brazilian plantocracy, who have also been punished for their decadence and disrespect for order, tradition, and racial purity.

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Chapter Four

A Field of Islands: Environmental Desire and Destruction in *Commandeur du sucre* and *Cañas y bueyes*

> "Land" is yearning for nation and nationhood. Land, whose owners draw in and blur the boundaries between *haciendas* and *latifundios* they inherit and sell, make and remake, and plot and till and replot, makes a history which is not the history of one narrative but of several, the history of an uninterrupted continental narratology, the history of a map of disputed borders, limits, and frontiers in the ever-polemical discussion of nation and nationality.
>
> – Ileana Rodríguez (*House/Garden/Nation* 5)

> De un cañaveral criollo pueden surgir recuerdos hermosos para la consciencia vernácula, pero en la noche, tambien pueden surgir brazos, cuyas vidas se extinguieron, huérfanas de toda justicia en el seno enorme de los campos de caña.
>
> Beautiful memories may emerge from a Creole cane field for the local conscience, but at night, arms whose lives were extinguished, orphans of all justice in the enormous bosom of the fields of cane, may also emerge.
>
> – Luis Felipe Rodríguez (*Marcos Antilla* 52).

Introduction

The critic Ileana Rodríguez writes that in Latin America "the question of nation-formation always revolves around the concepts of ground, of agriculture and the distribution of agricultural land" (Ileana Rodríguez 5). In this final chapter, I will examine representations of the plantation landscape in two sugarcane novels from Martinique and the Dominican Republic. These landscapes, like the plantation world within which they are inscribed, also contain within them many of the characteristics associated with these islands and their societies at large. An analysis of these works' environmental descriptions reveals a wide range of epistemological claims, underscoring the central role the sugarcane plantation landscape plays in the production of self-knowledge and in shaping national identity across the New World.

I will begin by comparing the first novel in Confiant's *trilogie de la canne*, *Commandeur du sucre* (The Sugar Driver, 1994), to Émile Zola's novel *La Terre* (The Earth, 1887). Close readings of passages from both these novels reveal striking aesthetic similarities between Confiant's eroticized depictions of the sugarcane fields in the Martinican district of Rivière Salée and Zola's sexually charged descriptions of wheat fields in the French region of Beauce, even as these landscapes function very differently within Confiant's and Zola's broader projects to represent Martinique and France, respectively. In the second part of this chapter, I will examine a novel by the Dominican writer Eugenio Moscoso Puello, entitled *Cañas y bueyes* (Cane and Oxen, 1936), approaching the landscape as a type of palimpsest that registers the impact of different experiences from Spanish colonialism to the American occupation to the presence of Haitian migrant workers, and which provides a glimpse into the dictatorship of Rafael

Trujillo (the treatment of Haitians in the novels portends the Haitian Massacre would take place one year after *Cañas y bueyes* was published).

While the agricultural landscape plays a vital role in all these sugarcane novels, the sugarcane enterprise is treated very differently by these two writers. Microcosms for Martinique and the Dominican Republic, the sugarcane plantations in *Commandeur du sucre* and *Cañas y bueyes* provide distinct portraits of these places in terms of their geopolitical situations, as a "neocolony" of France, in the case of Martinique, and as an independent nation prone to political and economic intrusions and military occupations by the United States, in the case of the Dominican Republic. Even as the sugarcane novel can be seen as a regional phenomenon of the New World, the genre nevertheless accommodates a range of representations, from utopian to dystopian visions of these islands and nations. The landscape functions as a space in which to remake or reimagine national identity, either by looking back to an idealized past, or by criticizing the past in order to make way for a new vision for the future.

4.1 New World, New Naturalism? Environmental Desire in *Commandeur du sucre* and *La Terre*

Several critics have shown myths originating in the sugarcane plantation landscape to be central to the construction of eroticized nation-building narratives in the Americas and the Caribbean. In her book *Foundational Fictions: The Romances of Latin America* (1991), Doris Sommer interprets romantic relationships in a number of nineteenth-century Spanish American novels as "national allegories" for the nascent republics that their authors—who were also often statesmen—hoped to found. While

"erotic passion" is a persistent theme in the Puerto Rican nation-building novels studied by Zilkia Janer, the title of her book, *Nation and Gender in Puerto Rican Fiction: Impossible Romance* (2005), reveals that these Puerto Rican writers shared a pessimistic outlook of romance and nation building in their national novels. In *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (1997), Vera Kutzinski examines the convergence of the discourses of sugar and creolization (in its cultural and racial dimensions) in literary articulations of Cuban identity, tracing how the woman of color (the *mulata*) came to embody this cultural synthesis. A doctoral dissertation by Jacqueline Couti, "Archéologie de la sexualité: Recolonisation du corps de la femme noire dans les discours antillais" (Archeology of Sexuality: Recolonization of Black Female Bodies in Caribbean Discourse, 2008)[215], argues that French Caribbean male writers distort and undermine French writers' exoticized representations of black Caribbean women in order to reclaim these women's bodies for their own nationalistic aims. In *House/Garden/Nation: Space, Gender, and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Latin American Literatures by Women* (1994), Ileana Rodríguez discusses the importance of and the interconnections among "agriculture," "lineage and family," and "the ethnic groups associated with them" in the masculinist tradition of nation-building literature of Latin American and Creole societies, emphasizing that "neither Indians nor blacks nor women have a space" within these representational spaces for the nation (5). "If they have it," she adds, "it is akin to *Costumbrista* literature, where the rural world and the space of women are romanticized" (5). Thus in her own work, Rodríguez analyzes how Latin American women writers work within the representational confines of women's domestic

[215] Couti actually translates her dissertation title differently from the original French, to "Sexual Edge: Re-Colonization of Black Female Bodies in Caribbean Studies."

spaces of the house and the garden in their novels in order to express larger social and political issues from which women and other subaltern groups have been excluded on a national level.

Ileana Rodríguez is not alone in pointing out the persistence of the male-dominated genre of *costumbrismo*, which is associated with other Spanish American literary genres such as the *criollista* novel and the *novela de la tierra*, and with the Brazilian and French Caribbean strains of *regionalismo* or *régionalisme*, respectively.[216] Most significantly, A. James Arnold situates two of Confiant's *romans de la canne* from the 1990s, *Commandeur du sucre* and *Régisseur du rhum* within this same tradition of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century *novelas de costumbres*, which he aptly describes as "romans de moeurs campagnards" (novels of rural manners) (Arnold 2006: 646).[217] Arnold has also examined the ideology and aethetics of the *créolité* movement as part of a long succession of "masculine" and "masculinist" literary movements in the French Caribbean, from French colonial literature to *négritude* to *antillanité*, and most recently to *créolité* (Arnold 1994; Arnold 1995). However, he also insists that this tendency "is not … unique to the French West Indies. It can be found, *mutatis mutandis* across the Caribbean archipelago" (Arnold 1994: 5). Among the central preoccupations of these

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[216] In the first chapter I discussed the prevalence of these genres in Latin America and the Spanish Caribbean during the first thirty to forty years of the twentieth century. For a sustained and incisive analysis of the Latin American regional novel and its role in the development of subsequent literary movements and genres in Latin America, see Alonso (1996).

[217] While most scholars have tended to view the genre as exclusive to Brazil and the Spanish-speaking area of the New World, Arnold bypasses these colonial and linguistic parameters in order to point out broader regional literary patterns. Arnold has also argued that the *Créolistes*' linguistic and narrative strategies harken back to the nineteenth-century tradition of French provincial novels, as exemplified by George Sand's *François le champi* (The Country Waif, 1848), in which a landscape and a peasant society are portrayed as "timeless" (Arnold 1994: 40, 42, 47).

predominantly male writers has been to define the national characteristics of their people and their landscape, creating an inseparable connection between the two. In doing so, these writers make every attempt to distinguish themselves from their European colonizers by emphasizing the hybridity of these New World societies.[218] Ridding themselves of the underlying colonial epistemologies and aesthetics that have shaped the representations of these societies and landscapes for so long has been a particularly pernicious, if not an altogether impossible, undertaking, as scholars have stressed in terms of the inheritance of the "erotics of colonialism" (Arnold 1993; Arnold 1994) and of "colonial desire" (Young 1995). Arnold explains that the "erotics of colonialism" fit within the mode of Orientalist discourse described by Edward Saïd, in that they feminize foreign subjects (Arnold 1994: 8; Said 1978).

In order to define national culture, writers from the Caribbean and the Americas, both past and present, colonial and postcolonial, have often "posited a close relationship between nature and cultural identity, finding the roots of the distinguishing characteristics of Caribbean culture(s) in the environment" (Heller 392).[219] Moreover, in their attempts to elucidate these complex and distinctive environmentally-influenced characteristics, they have "the tendency to figure the shaping environment as female … or with qualities

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[218] While Confiant's novels, and the *créolité* movement more generally, share these aspirations, it is important to point out that the writers of these earlier nativist novels were almost exclusively members of the white Creole elite, and therefore, their depictions of a multiracial and hybrid society, were often purely symbolic constructions. Depicting Martinique's racial and cultural diversity for Confiant, on the other hand, is of primordial importance, and it is constitutive of his Creole aesthetics.

[219] Eric Prieto goes so far as to say that "[i]t has become a commonplace assertion of post-colonial cultural theory that the landscape and geography of colonized or formerly colonized territories have provided an especially potent source of symbols for the cultural identity and nationalist (or protonationalist) aspirations of the people who inhabit those territories" (Prieto 141).

… that have often been associated with women, femininity, or the female body … [with] both positive and negative effects … ascribed to this feminized landscape" (392).[220] Surveying the symbolic lay of the land in French Caribbean fiction, Arnold contrasts representations of the remote hillside *mornes* as a masculine space of heroic maroon resistance with the alluvial plains of the "plantation and the smaller *habitation* … [which] expresses itself in literature through a feminized sensibility" (Arnold 1994: 9).[221] In Zola's work too, according to Joy Newton, "[l]andscape is often given female overtones," and she specifies that in *La Terre*, in particular, "the land is described as a woman, to be possessed and inseminated" (Newton 53). In addition to their marked tendency to ascribe feminine qualities to rural landscapes in their fiction, both Zola and Confiant also take great pains to document agricultural practices, technology, and terminology in minute, quasi-scientific detail in *Commandeur du sucre* and *La Terre*. The agricultural landscapes in both novels function as highly charged erotic spaces in which agricultural production and human fertility are intimately, and often, violently entwined. Consequently, the environmental descriptions of sugarcane in Confiant's *romans de la canne*, and especially *Commandeur du sucre*, provide the ideal terrain for an examination of the convergence of these two critical frames of eroticized nation-building narratives and feminized landscape-inspired cultural narratives. Additionally, I

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[220] Ben Heller explains that while many twentieth-century Caribbean writers were exposed to these ideas by reading Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918), he also cites Hippolyte Taine as one of the proponents of this particular "line of thought" (392). It is this connection to Taine, and more specifically, to French naturalism, that I would like to explore by comparing Confiant's and Zola's eroticized agricultural landscapes in *Commandeur du sucre* and *La Terre*.

[221] Although the plantation space is characterized by its "feminized sensibility," (9) *créolité*'s "gendered master narrative" emanates from the perspective of the male figure of the *conteur* (storyteller), who is himself a product of the "violent, but intimate world of the *habitation*," and whose cultural memory he is charged with preserving and transmitting (Arnold 1994: 11-12).

propose that a close reading of these passages in *Commandeur du sucre* reveals that Confiant's nostalgic attachment to the landscape of the sugarcane plantation signals a yearning for a Martinique of the past, which is akin to Ileana Rodríguez's assertion that "land" as a construct of New World literature is an expression of a "yearning for nation and nationhood" (5).[222]

Turning now to the novels themselves, I would like to highlight the overarching similarities between the function of the agricultural landscape in both *La Terre* and *Commandeur du sucre*. The characters in Zola's and Confiant's novels are not only bound to their landscapes, but are essentially defined by them. Hippolyte Taine's nineteenth-century sociological positivism, and his belief that by applying scientific rigor to the portrayal of "race, milieu, moment" in their literary works writers could provide an objective historical portrait of society, greatly influenced Zola. Thus, Zola's attention to regional manners, customs, dialect, dress, religion, architecture, topography, as well as the local social hierarchy, and the division of labor within a local economy, reflect this "scientifically-oriented" approach to the creation of characters within a precise socio-cultural environment.

In the world of *La Terre*, the Fouan family's obsession with agricultural production and land ownership—or the possession of land, as I prefer describe it, because of its overtly double meaning—takes over the every aspect of the characters' lives. The lives of the main characters, and the structure of the narrative itself, revolve around the seasons, and all aspects of the planting and harvesting activities, which are also attached to the seasons. Each of the novel's five parts is set during a specific season (winter,

[222] See the epigram of this chapter.

spring, summer, autumn, winter), beginning and ending with winter, which highlights the cyclical nature of planting. In a sense, the Fouans' stubborn, short-sighted, peasant mentality has brutalized them, turning them into farming animals, and their arduous physical labor in the fields, where men and women work alongside each other, creates a very basic, animalistic physical need to procreate.[223] (This seems to be a trope of many rural novels. Sexual encounters between agricultural workers, especially between the male-female pairs of cutters and binders, *coupeurs* and *amarreuses*, are a staple of Confiant's *romans de la canne*). But there is one catch: the production of offspring for the Fouans would have the negative consequence of further dividing and diminishing their meager inheritance of property. The characters therefore possess these two contradictory urges: an earthy desire for sex and the wish to avoid producing offspring.

For instance, when Jean Macquart and Françoise Fouan have their first sexual encounter in the fields (Françoise's first), even in her confusion, Françoise involuntarily utters these words: "Pas d'enfants… ôte-toi…" (No children… get off…") (*La Terre* 270). The omniscient narrator goes on to describe Jean's actions:

> Il fit un saut brusque, et cette semence humaine, ainsi détournée et perdue, tomba dans le blé mûr, sur la terre, qui elle, ne se refuse jamais, le flanc ouvert à tous les germes, éternellement féconde.

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[223] The animality of the characters comes across through descriptions such as the one of Buteau as "un mâle brutal, habitué à trousser les filles au fond des fosses" (a brutal male, accustomed to having his way girls in the bottom of a ditch) (225). Unlike in English, the use of the word "mâle" in French is only used for animals. The omniscient narrator is in fact reporting Françoise's perception of Buteau, which reveals the depth of her own familiarity with sex, which is also due to her exposure to animals mating and her involvement in animal husbandry through her farm work: "Elle savait tout, instruite par les bêtes …" (225).

> He abruptly pulled away, and his human seed, thus diverted and lost, fell into the ripe wheat, into the earth, who never turns away, her womb open to all the seeds, eternally fertile (270-271).

The earth in this passage is described as a woman who will lie with any man, and in contrast to Françoise's "unnatural" rejection of Jean's sperm, the earth absorbs all that is planted in her.

The inhabitants of the Beauce region in Zola's novel have been shaped by the landscape around them, and they have forsaken their own natural instincts in order to tend to their fields. A correspondence exists between the characters and the landscape, which is described in the following terms: "Cette Beauce plate, fertile, d'une culture aisée, mais demandant un effort continu, a fait le Beauceron froid et réflechi, n'ayant d'autre passion que la terre" (This flat, fertile Beauce, easy to cultivate, but demanding constant effort, had made the native of Beauce cold and shrewd, with no other passion than the earth) (61). The region thus becomes a major female character whose traits derive entirely from the agricultural landscape.

Although desire for land manifests itself as a stronger urge than the purportedly natural instinct to reproduce for the characters in *La Terre*, planting in the novel becomes an intensely sexualized occupation, taking on a sense of intense urgency, as in this rather crude description of Buteau and Françoise working side by side in the fields, which provokes Jean's jealousy:

> Il les regarda comme s'ils les surprenaient ensemble, accouplés dans cette besogne chaude, d'accord pour cogner juste, au bon endroit, tous les deux

> en sueur, si échauffés, si défaits, qu'on les aurait dits en train plutôt de planter un enfant que de battre du blé.
>
> He watched them as if he had caught them together, coupled in this hot labor, working together to strike just the right spot, both of them covered in sweat, so worked up, so disheveled, that they appeared to be planting a child rather than threshing wheat (305).

By the same token, traces of dirt, wisps of straw, and the scent of the fields impregnated on a character's skin or clothes are often the source of sexual arousal. In the scene discussed above, the wisps of straw in Françoise's hair figure among the other titillating elements (hot skin, heavy breathing, open mouth, hips and breasts accentuated by her movements in a tight-fitting dress, etc.) that cause both Buteau and Jean to desire Françoise.

Even in the absence of another human presence, the landscape is capable of inflaming the passions of the characters through a type of olfactive seduction:

> La puanteur du fumier que Jean remuait l'avait un peu ragallardi. Il l'aimait, la respirait, avec une jouissance de bon mâle, comme l'odeur même du coït de la terre.
>
> The stench from the manure that Jean was spreading had cheered him up a bit. He liked it, breathed it in, with a manly pleasure, as if it were the smell of the coitus of the earth (433).

Here it is Jean's interaction with manure and compost, which he is preparing to fertilize the fields, that quickens his senses. Perhaps more than any other character, it is the aging, and most likely, impotent, Hourdequin, whose lust for land as he surveys his own

property, evokes the most intensely erotic feelings in the novel. Obsessed as he is with earth, he fails even to notice that his maid and lover Jacqueline has been sewing her wild oats almost in plain sight, as she increasingly takes on more and more lovers, demonstrating that she, too, has been affected by the frenetic activity of the harvest season.

> Hourdequin ne voyait rien, ne savait rien. Il était dans sa fièvre de moisson, une fièvre spéciale, la grande crise annuelle de sa passion de la terre, tout un tremblement intérieur, la tête en feu, le coeur battant, la chair secouée, devant les épis murs qui tombaient.
>
> Hourdequin saw nothing, knew nothing. He was in the throes of his harvest fever, a special fever, the huge annual crisis of his passion for the earth, a whole series of internal tremors, his head burning, his heart beating fast, his flesh quivering, before the ripe sheaves of wheat (262).

As the owner of one of the largest parcels of land in the Beauce region, Hourdequin's intense passion for the land is stronger than any other character's. Land ownership is a main source of identity for the characters and it propels the action in *La Terre*; it is the cause of jealousy, lust, rape, and murder. Zola provides a historical context for this desire and obsession for the possession of land, a history whose roots lie in slavery and in the oppression and inequalities of feudalism. By tracing the history of land ownership in the region—which is mirrored in the nation at large—Zola is able to create a genetic link between those slaves and serfs of the region's past and the nineteenth-century characters of *La Terre*'s narrative present. While Père Fouan, the feckless but tenacious patriarch of the Family, struggles to summarize this experience in a

few words ("en quelques mots lents et pénibles"), the narrator transmits Père Fouan's unconscious expression of this history ("il résuma inconsciemment toute cette histoire"):

> … la terre si longtemps cultivée pour le seigneur, sous le bâton et dans la nudité de l'esclave, qui n'a rien à lui, pas même sa peau; la terre, fécondée de son effort, passionnément aimée et désirée pendant cette intimité chaude de chaque heure, comme la femme d'un autre que l'on soigne, que l'on étreint et que l'on ne peut pas posséder; la terre après des siècles de ce tourment de concupiscence, obtenue enfin, conquise, devenue sa chose, sa jouissance, l'unique source de sa vie. Et ce désir séculaire, cette possession sans cesse reculée, expliquait son amour pour son champ, sa passion de la terre, du plus de terre possible, de la motte grasse, qu'on touche, qu'on pèse au creux de la main. Combien pourtant elle était indifférente et ingrate, la terre! … (106).[224]
>
> … the earth cultivated for so long for the lord, under the threat of beatings and in the nakedness of the slave who owns nothing, not even his own skin; the earth, fertilized by his effort, passionately loved and desired throughout the hot intimacy of each hour, like another man's woman who

[224] This passage is remarkably similar to Confiant's writing in *Le Galion: Canne, douleur séculaire ô tendresse!*, especially the passages I discuss in Chapter One. Confiant also uses the words "séculaire" and "passion" to describe the painful attachment to the sugarcane plantation landscape. Within this same passage in *La Terre*, Père Fouan goes on to describe how the land is like an unfaithful woman who moves on to the next man without any warning, leaving the first feeling unfulfilled and hungering for more: "[I]l s'était donné tout entier à la terre, qui, après à peine l'avoir nourri, le laissait misérable, inassouvi, honteux d'impuissance sénile, et passait aux bras d'un autre mâle, sans pitié même pour ses pauvres os qu'elle attendait" ([H]e had given himself entirely to the earth, who, after barely feeding him, left him miserable, unsatisfied, ashamed of his senile impotence, as she moved on to the arms of another man, showing no pity even for his tired bones that she would eventually take in) (*La Terre* 106).

> one cares for, who one embraces, but cannot possess; the earth, after centuries of this tormenting concupiscence, obtained at last, conquered, become his thing, his pleasure, the only source of his life. And this age-old desire, this possession constantly out of reach, explained his love for his field, his passion for the land, for as much land as possible, for the moist clump of earth that one touches, that one weighs in the palm of one's hand. But oh, how indifferent and ungrateful she was, this land!

Once again, the land is feminized in this passage, described as another man's woman, to be coveted, and eventually possessed. The use of terms like "motte," which in informal French, refers to a woman's "pubic mound," further sexualizes the descriptions. The Fouans' hereditary obsession with land is likened to a form of sexual addiction, and their psychology is explained in terms of compensating for a previous lack, the inability to own land.

The past of slavery and the history of dispossession are both important themes and refrains in *Commandeur du sucre* as well, even if they are not used to explain a societal, regional, or even familial attachment to the land. Instead, Firmin Léandor, the eponymous *commandeur* or driver of Bel-Évent plantation, channels all the passion for the agricultural landscape of sugarcane in the Rivière Salée district in Martinique. In *Commandeur du sucre*, Firmin oversees the work of dozens of agricultural workers, and like them, he is following in the footsteps of a long line of plantation workers and slaves. Although the novel suggests that he is unlikely to ever own his own plantation, let alone his own plot of land, these realities don't seem to weaken Firmin's bond to the land. And despite the fact, that the sugarcane is the reason for his unequal status—indeed, it

provided the primary impetus for the colonial sugar venture in the New World and for the transatlantic slave trade—and prevents him from owning land and benefiting from the same rights and privileges as *békés*, all of which are summarized in the refrain, "canne c'est maudition" (cane is a curse), it nevertheless provides a historical, economic, and existential *raison d'être* (as in Père Fouan's conception of his ties to the Beauce landscape in the final passage quoted above).

As in *La Terre*, the lives of the characters and the structure of the novel are organized around agricultural work: the first four chapters of the novel are set during the harvest ("En-allée de la récolte"); chapters five through eight are set during an idle period, and therefore reflect the seasonal nature of this type of work ("L'arrêt des pâques"); chapters six through twelve revolve around the process of enriching the soil with manure ("Temps de fumure"); and chapters thirteen through sixteen culminate with the germination of the sugarcane ("Germination de la canne"). In contrast to *La Terre*, where the novel begins and ends during the winter (a period of inactivity), the agricultural cycle of *Commandeur du sucre* is incomplete, but hopeful, beginning with the harvest and ending during a period of new growth and with the promise of a future crop.

The depth of Firmin's knowledge and love for the sugarcane is unsurpassed by anything or anyone else; it is more intense than his love for his wife or lover, and greater than his affection for his children. The sugarcane reinforces not only his authority as *commandeur* over the cane cutters and the other agricultural workers, but also his power and manhood: "c'est une fois plongé dans l'enfer de la canne que l'on sait que l'on possède deux graines entre les jambes et qui n'est au contraire qu'un sacré petit ma-

commère" (When you are deep in the hell of the cane field you find out who has balls between their legs and who, on the other hand, is nothing more than a bloody, little pansy) (*Commandeur du sucre* 61). The cane field allows Firmin, and the male *coupeurs* to prove their masculinity through a display of their physical strength and dexterity as they work the land, and these skills also signify their heteronormative virility.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the plot of *Commandeur du sucre* centers around a major challenge for Firmin: his goal to produce a record yield of sugarcane just as the entire sugarcane planting season is threatened by a labor strike of epic proportions, as agricultural workers across Martinique unite to demand better pay and an improvement in working conditions. As Firmin becomes increasingly obsessed with this seemingly unattainable objective, his pursuit of it takes on the aura of a chase for an unattainable woman. Each morning, he rushes to the cane fields to find the landscape that arouses quasi-erotic feelings. These intimate encounters with the landscape are presented almost like a secret, nocturnal rendezvous with a lover:

> Les flèches de canne prenaient des allures de pubis soyeux sur la terre dont les mornes semblaient figurer des jambes repliées. Posture femelle qui insufflait à Firmin un émoi qui ne le quitterait qu'aux premiers assauts du soleil (37).
>
> The sugarcane arrows took on the appearance of silky pubic mounds on the earth whose hills resembled bent legs pulled up. A womanly position that provoked a turmoil that would not leave Firmin until the first bursts of sunlight.

The seductive, feminized landscape, which awakens Firmin's desire and his imagination in the previous passage, resembles that of *La Terre*. Like Zola, Confiant frequently makes recourse to pathetic fallacy, and even when he doesn't, he uses simile to describe the appearance of the sugarcane and its ability to simultaneously haunt and beguile Firmin:

> Les cannes ressemblaient à des êtres humains accroupis en septembre, agenouillés en novembre et debout en janvier, occupés à chuchoter dans le vent ou à se chamailler. Il m'arrivait de sursauter et de me retourner. J'étais sûr d'avoir entendu les cannes parler. Me parler. Alors je m'approchais d'une touffe pour la palper … (167-168).
>
> The sugarcane stalks looked like human beings crouching in September, kneeling in November, and standing in January, busy whispering to the wind or squabbling with each other. I found myself being startled at times, and looking behind me. I was sure I had heard the sugarcane talking. Talking to me. So I would get closer to a tuft and touch it …

This passage conveys the strong sense of intimacy and familiarity the protagonist of *Commandeur du sucre* has with the landscape. Firmin's commitment to achieving a record harvest during the planting season of 1936 becomes very personal, and is reflected in the highly subjective narrative descriptions of the sugarcane. While for the most part, the narrative of both *Commandeur du sucre*, and its predecessor, *La Terre*, falls within the parameters of realist and naturalist description, the frequent use of pathetic fallacy and metaphors of the female body in the depiction of the sugarcane landscape, are closer to the aesthetics of romanticism. Neil Evernden argues that the use of pathetic fallacy

and "metaphoric language" signals that the "speaker has a place, feels part of a place" (Evernden 101). He adds that by "animating" the landscape, it becomes possible to "extend the boundary of the self into the 'environment'" (101). Far from a neutral setting, the landscape serves as much more than a backdrop in both novels; the landscape permeates the Fouans in *La Terre* and Firmin Léandor in *Commandeur du sucre*. The eroticized landscape and the characters' intense desire for it reflect the lack of distinct boundaries between the characters and their environment. Moreover, the landscape is what links all the elements of the plot and it connects all the characters to one another.

The agricultural landscapes of Zola's and Confiant's rural novels also contribute to the basic characteristics of the local culture, and in keeping with one of the central tenets of both realist and naturalist fiction, they play a determinant role in the development of the characters' individual temperaments, hereditary psychological and physiological traits, and social values. But in emphasizing the strong connections between nature and culture in the formation of a distinct regional character, Zola and Confiant configure a literary universe that closely resembles the formulation of *kulturländschaft* (cultural landscape), a late nineteenth-century idealized and ideological German sub-discipline within the field of geography, which posited a close relationship between a "German *Volk* and its soil, a social psychology captured in the concept of *Heimat* … [and] defined the true German landscape as an ecological unity of nature and people" (Sandner, quoted in Cosgrove: 263).[225]

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[225] The word *Heimat* in German has several different connotations such as "home," "hometown" or "home village," "homeland" (as in the French word "patrie") and "natural habitat" (*Oxford-Duden German-English Dictionary*). As Cosgrove explains, "this tradition of landscape and settlement geography yielded dire consequences in the 1940s with the replanning of captured eastern lands to resemble German *kulturländschaft*" (263).

Zola and Confiant create a counterpoint between the feminized agricultural landscapes of wheat and sugarcane and the masculinist domain of culture in *La Terre* and *Commandeur du sucre*.[226] However, it is important to distinguish between Zola's and Confiant's very different theoretical applications of the connections between people and their natural environment in these two novels. Zola studies the Fouans' obsession with landscape as a pathology or disease with which the family is afflicted, turning *La Terre* into a type of treatise or case study of their sexual abnormality. Confiant, on the other hand, essentially creates a gendered opposition between landscape and culture in *Commandeur du sucre* in order to forcefully impose his masculinist cultural vision of Martinique.[227] The central paradox of his effort to subvert exotic, colonial representations of Martinique via the aesthetics of *créolité* is that he continues to work within the framework of eroticized imperial discourses by creating a gendered dichotomy between nature and culture.[228] Thus, Firmin's manifestly "aggressive heterosexual desire" (Arnold 1994: 8) for the sugarcane fields in conjunction with his position as a *commandeur* who supervises the subjugation of the natural landscape for the cultivation of sugarcane, can be interpreted as a continuation of the civilizing, patriarchal discourse of colonialism.

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[226] Denis Cosgrove notes that the construction of landscape "with female attributes" and culture "with male attributes" can be traced as far back as "Aristotle's theory of animation," but it also belongs to a "patriarchal chain of being [that] was being reinforced in the early years of the seventeenth century, most notably by Francis Bacon" (261).

[227] For an in-depth analysis of the *créolistes*' use of eroticism to deploy a culturalist vision of Martinique, see Couti (180-232).

[228] The construction of a dichotomy between "women as nature and men as culture," according to L.J. Jordanova, was "conceptualized as a struggle between the forces of tradition and those of change" (61). Although Confiant seeks to alter colonial epistemologies of Martinique, he nevertheless remains within this same mode of representation through his adherence to the opposition between a female landscape and a male culture.

I have attempted to show how in terms of its gendered environmental aesthetics, *Commandeur du sucre* has much in common with *La Terre*. However, other similarities exist between the construction of Confiant's and Zola's fictional landscapes and their influence on character development and the conception of regional characteristics such as temperament, culture, and dialect. Furthermore, the authors' use of language, and even certain elements from the plot, also closely resemble each other. I would like to briefly mention these because they reveal how close the two novels, and arguably, Zola's and Confiant's larger literary projects, are to each other.[229]

In their conceptions of the rural culture of Beauce and Martinique, both Zola and Confiant focus on a type of rustic peasant culture that is both earthy and comical—what Jacqueline Couti refers to as Confiant's "écriture rabelaisienne hautement sexualisée" (Couti 7)—in order to convey a sense of local color. Both *La Terre* and *Commandeur du sucre* contain heavy doses of a type of *humour champêtre vulgaire* (ribald country humor), which serves as a marker of regional character.[230] Storytelling is another important element of these rural novels, with both writers paying considerable attention to the tradition of the *veillée de contes* (nighttime storytelling).[231] Another similarity between the two novels is that they both illustrate the insularity of their communities (and

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[229] It is important to remember that *La Terre* and *Commandeur du sucre* both belong to more extensive novel cycles, and therefore the regional specificity of Beace in Zola's novel and of Rivière Salée in Confiant's should be understood in conjunction with the novelists' larger aspirations to create a series of portraits of different geographical and social milieus of their native France and Martinique, which could ultimately be read as a multidimensional representation of the whole nation and island.

[230] Maurice Lecuyer has argued that Rabelais and Balzac deploy the technique of farce (grotesque humor and sexuality) as a means of criticizing social restrictions (Lecuyer 88), and I believe his assertion is pertinent to Zola and Confiant as well.

[231] The role of the *conteur* is central to the *créolistes*' conception of Martinican culture, which they trace to the sugarcane plantation, so it is somewhat surprising to discover similarities between the representations of *veillée de contes* in *Commandeur du sucre* and *La Terre*.

their "backwardness," in the case of Zola) through the local people's refusal to introduce non-native varieties of wheat and cane into the local agricultural production and through their suspicion of modern (non-artisanal) agricultural technology.[232]

Finally, I would like to briefly return to the treatment of the agricultural landscape as an erotic space where agricultural production and human fertility often overlap. Ultimately, agricultural production is revealed as the central preoccupation of the characters in *La Terre* and *Commandeur du sucre*, and sex is displaced from the private sphere to the social realm of work. In Zola's case, the Fouans' obsession with the possession of land is represented as a disorder, one that will possibly lead to the family's extinction. While the outcome of *Commandeur du sucre* is more open-ended, Firmin Léandor's passion for the landscape embodies Confiant's (and *créolité*'s) obsession with the issues of productivity and self-sufficiency which are associated with the era of sugarcane production prior to *départmentalisation*.[233] Moreover, by defining agricultural production as a male occupation, Confiant diminishes the participation of women, just as he has done in his assessment of their contribution to cultural production as storytellers and as writers.[234] Although this dual process of documentary and sexualized presentation in *Commandeur du sucre* speaks to broad aesthetic and socio-political assumptions about the construction of knowledge (or self-knowledge in terms local cultural identity) in

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[232] In the case of *Commandeur du sucre*, industrial processes associated with sugar are not treated as inherently bad. As I mentioned in Chapter One, Confiant does not consider the sight of a former sugar refinery in the rural Martinican landscape as a blemish. Rather, he treats the ruins of these factories as *lieux de mémoire* (Gosson 144).

[233] The narrative period of *Commandeur du sucre*, the mid 1930s, corresponds to the period Édouard de Lépine calls "l'âge d'or de la canne à sucre" (the golden age of sugarcane) (Lépine: 27). For a sustained discussion of the importance of the theme of self-sufficiency in Confiant's *trilogie sucrière*, see Chapter Three.

[234] See especially Arnold's discussion of "Créoliste Literary History and Women Writers" (Arnold 1994: 15-19; Arnold 1995: 35-40).

French Caribbean fiction, the uncanny similarities between the eroticized agricultural landscapes in Confiant's and Zola's fiction call into question the originality and the premise of subversiveness of *créolité*'s literary aesthetics. In fact, rather than merely coincidental, I would like to suggest that the abundant similarities between *Commandeur du sucre* and *La Terre* are the result of Confiant's familiarity with Zola's novel. As an erudite scholar and reader, Confiant seems to have adapted and "creolized" elements from *La Terre* in the composition of his Martinican neo-naturalist rural novel.[235]

4.2 Mixed Landscape Legacies in *Cañas y bueyes*

Along with *Over* (1939) by Ramón Marrero Aristy and *El Terrateniente* (1960) by Manuel Antonio Amiama, *Cañas y bueyes* by Francisco Moscoso Puello is among the best-known examples of the *novela de la caña* genre of the Dominican Republic.[236] Although it was published just three years before *Over*—and one year before the Haitian Massacre on Dajabón River in the Dominican Republic—Puello's novel was actually written over several years, between the 1920s and 1930. The narrative period of the novel (1910-1930) coincides with the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic and Haiti (1916-1924), and ends with Rafael Leonidas Trujillo's ascent to power.[237] Set on the Colonia La Inocencia, the plantation of *Cañas y bueyes*, and especially the *batey*[238] (an area with designated dwellings for sugarcane workers) function as a "microcosm" for

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[235] J.V. Arnold has argued that in *Brin d'amour* (A Little Love, 2001), Confiant has reutilized many elements of the plot of Madame de Staël's novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (Corinne or Italy, 1807).
[236] It is important to remember that the readership for these novels was local.
[237] The novel was published during the first year of Trujillo's dictatorship.
[238] Interestingly, this term, which is used in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, is actually a Taino word, even though the word predates colonialism and the sugarcane plantation.

the cohabitation of "different ethnic, racial and cultural elements of the working force," which include Dominicans, Haitians, Americans, and people from other parts of the Caribbean (Méndez 120).[239]

Within the broader representation of Dominican history in the novel, the landscape also registers many of the environmental, political, economic, and cultural changes that have taken place in the Dominican Republic. While *Cañas y bueyes* contains many descriptions of the landscape, the most important of these passages is the first one, which takes up approximately the first six pages of the novel. The novel opens with an environmental history of an indeterminate area just north of the Provincia de Macorís (in the southeastern part of the Dominican Republic on the Caribbean Sea coast, east of the capital of Santo Domingo), where the sugarcane plantation La Inocencia is located. The central landscape figure in the passage is a "monte centenario" (a hundred-year-old forest) (*Cañas y bueyes* 5). Puello goes on to describe the forests of the region in idyllic terms, as landscapes of beauty and natural abundance, and also as leafy spaces of refuge from the heat of the desert and plains. Even the sight of the *monte* provides relief: "Cuando el viajero lo alcanzaba a ver respiraba" (When the traveler reached it he breathed easy) (5).

However, from the very beginning, the reader is filled with a sense of foreboding, for these descriptions are all written in the past tense, and it is clear that this landscape no longer exists in the narrative present. Once a habitat teeming with life, "[d]entro de este monte se escuchaba el canto de una infinidad de pájaros, desde el colibrí hasta la paloma silvestre, y los cotorras y los pericos …" (in this forest could be heard the song of

[239] The term for plantation in Spanish, *colonia*, expresses the tendency for the plantation to be seen as a representation of the larger island, region, or nation.

countless birds, from the hummingbird to the wild dove, and the parrot and the parakeet" (6). The *monte* is portrayed as a completely self-sufficient ecosystem, with plenty of food for all the species living within it. Still, the forest could be dangerous and "imponente" (imposing), requiring caution and respect for its topography and the wild creatures inhabiting it (7). Mostly, however, the *monte* was a rich, temperate, and fertile land, where "toda semilla que allí caía germinaba con vigor" (every seed that landed there sprouted vigorously) (7).

One paragraph in particular focuses simultaneously on the sacredness of the *monte* and its importance in nurturing the lives and developing the identity of those living in proximity of it.

> Cuando se ha nacido a la vera de un monte no se puede vivir sin él. El monte es como una nodriza. Nos provee de alimentos. Nos da la madera para el fundo, nos da la leña, cría nuestros animales, protege el agua que bebemos, atrae la lluvia, modera el calor … Escuchamos sus ruidos … Siempre ahí, inmóvil, como una cortina, como un muro, como una montaña, dándonos la sensación de lo permanente, del inmutable. Por eso el hombre lo ha considerado en otras épocas sagrado (8).
>
> When you were born on the edge of a forest you cannot live without it. The forest is like a wet nurse. It provides us with food. It gives us wood for the farm, firewood, raises our animals, protects the water that we drink, attracts the rain, moderates the temperature … We listen to its sounds … Always there, immobile, like a curtain, like a wall, like a mountain, giving

> us a sense of permanence of immutability. That is why in other times people had considered it sacred.

In this passage, the forest is feminized, as in the landscape passages from *Commandeur du sucre* which I discussed earlier. However, rather than erotic, the *monte* in *Cañas y bueyes* is represented as a nurturing maternal figure, a wet nurse, who nourished and cared for all its children—of all species—indiscriminately. Once again, the forest is conceived as a harmonious ecosystem, where all its inhabitants, flora, fauna, rivers, air, and humans lived in balance and in mutual respect for each other; even the temperature within the forest and in the surrounding areas was moderate, with the *monte* regulating the temperature. The *monte* is also described as having been solid, unchanging, and eternal like a mountain. Puello creates a chain of comparisons between the forest and a curtain, a wall, and a mountain. While the mountain conveys the idea of permanence and immutability, the curtain and the wall—images from the built environment—aren't necessarily associated with the idea of permanence. Rather, they connote the idea of separation, of dividing a space or even an island, of separating the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

As the reader suspects, and abruptly learns, the idyllic world of the *montes* no longer exists, for it has long been supplanted by a very different landscape: "Hace años que la caña de azúcar reemplazó este monte y borró aquel camino" (It has been years since the sugarcane replaced this forest and erased that path) (9). In the wake of the axes ("las hachas"), the *monte* disappears, an entire ecosystem perishes, leaving the environment unbalanced, and entire species of wild game and waterfowl become extinct in the region. But the forests and their flora and fauna were not the only things that were

destroyed to make way for the cane. Palm trees were felled, hundreds of fields of plantains were destroyed, along with provision grounds belonging to the local people, the *campesinos*. The peasants lost their sacred *montes*, the pastureland for their cows, and their ability to live independently off the land; many were evicted from the land they had lived on for centuries. With the loss of their livelihood, they began to lose their traditions, their culture, and even their local dialect. The whole landscape changed. Soon there was nothing but sugarcane. Without the shade of the *montes* and the trees, there is "una claridad que corta la vista. Todo de un solo verde que cansa, que fatiga. Y un calor que no se puede soportar" (a blinding brightness. Everything is the same monotonous shade of green. And the heat is unbearable) (11).

La Inocencia was the first of many plantations: "Las colonias se multiplicaron con asombrosa rapidez. Todas las tierras apropriadas fueron puestas en estado de cultivo" (The plantations multiplied at a frightening pace. All the appropriated land was turned into farmland) (11). As the sugarcane monoculture took over the horizon and the economy, the opposite phenomenon occurred demographically: as the *campesinos* were displaced, new populations arrived to work on the plantations. The largest of these groups were the Haitians or *haitises*. (The use of italics gives the impression of a local dialect and is intended to signify a local perspective.) In the novel, the *bateyes* of La Inocencia are described as being filled with

> tanta gente mala, entre las cuales muchos no parecen cristianos … la mayoría no era del lugar. Casi todos de otras partes … Muchos de esos trabajadores fueron tan perversos que amacheteaban a los animales por

> cualquier cosa … Estos amigos de don Marcial y de la caña eran muchos por desgracia (13).
>
> so many bad people, most of whom didn't seem like Christians … Most were not from there. Almost all were from other places … Many of these workers were so wicked that they slaughtered animals for no reason … Unfortunately, these friends of don Marcial[240] and of the cane were many.

The contrast between these violent, uncivilized foreigners who "slaughtered animals for no reason," stands in sharp contrast with the simple, peaceful *campesinos* who lived in harmony with their native landscape. Although scholars such as Danny Méndez have argued that Puello presents a more nuanced portrait of Dominican-Haitian relations during this period of heavy Haitian migration and xenophobia than other Dominican writers such as Ramón Marrero Aristy (Méndez 2011), the passage above contains many offensive stereotypes. For example, the slaughtering of animals by these "wicked" people who don't "seem like Christians" obviously refers to the practice of *vaudou*, which is treated as a barbaric religion.

Even without discussing the larger plot of *Cañas y bueyes,* it is possible to gain deep insight into Puello's larger thesis and the eventual outcome of the novel from the opening descriptions of the environmental devastation of the forests and the native habitat. Presented like a tragic fairytale, these environmental passages encapsulate and foreshadow the events in the larger narrative; this small part of the novel in fact contains in miniature all the elements of the novel. The environmental tale at the beginning of the novel serves as an allegory for Dominican history during the first thirty years of the

[240] Don Marcial is the manager of La Inocencia plantation.

twentieth century. Thus the rape of the land and the disappearance of the *montes* signify the intrusion of destructive non-native peoples and their values (Haitians and Americans). Although not directly mentioned in these early environmental descriptions, American capitalism is blamed for the rapid expansion of the *colonias* (especially through the particularly villainous character Mister Moore, whose name signals his greed), for the miserable wages, and for creating the need for a cheap, foreign labor force (an American sugar company owns all of the *colonias*). However, Puello does place some of the blame on Dominicans for their nation's political, economic, and cultural woes (and he seems to blame the Dominican establishment for its greed and for rushing to participate in the myth of American progress). In a later passage in the fifth chapter of the novel, which explains the division of labor on the plantation, the narrator states that even though La Inocencia is smaller than some of the other plantations in the region, "en ella hay de todo" (it has all kinds [of people]) (100). While Haitians are primarily involved in cutting the cane and cleaning, and sometimes do the same work as Dominicans, they do not drive the *carretas* (the carts pulled by oxen), because the drivers (*carreteros*) are required to speak Spanish. The narrator then declares that

> Los haitianos tampoco tumban monte. Esta es la ocupación favorita de los dominicanos. Son éstos las jentes del hacha, del machete y del clavo (100).
>
> Haitians don't cut down the forest. This is the favorite pastime of Dominicans. They are the people of the axe, the machete and the nail.[241]

[241] Danny Méndez has made this observation, using the same passage I quote. Méndez writes that "[t]he *monte* presence returns in these lines to point a finger to the architects of its continued

The destruction of the *montes* thus signifies the irretrievable loss of much more than the native landscape and Dominican culture as embodied by the *campesino*. It foretells of a clash between cultures, politics, and ideology, and of the growing prejudice against Haitians, which would eventually lead to the Massacre on the Dajabón River, just one year after *Cañas y bueyes* was published.

4.3 Conclusion

Through an examination of *Commandeur du sucre* and *Cañas y bueyes*, just two sugarcane novels from a tradition that spans the Plantation Americas, I have attempted to demonstrate the diversity of the genre, which has often been generalized and dismissed as local color fiction, a label that does not take into consideration the broad range of symbolic functions of the plantation in these works. While the plantation worlds of Bel-Évent and La Inocencia function as microcosms for Martinique and the Dominican Republic, I have argued here that the representations of the landscape within the plantation microcosm—one segment within the larger representation of the plantation world—provides vital insight into the cultural dynamics illustrated in the novel at large. Furthermore, an analysis of these works' environmental descriptions reveals a wide range of epistemological claims, underscoring the central role that the sugarcane plantation landscape plays in the production of knowledge in Martinique and the Dominican Republic, and linking this knowledge with representations of the nation-state at large.

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destruction, *los dominicanos*. Dominicans are associated with cutting edges and a blind ambition to chop down, or destroy" (Méndez 120).

While I did not set out to write a dissertation about a masculinist literary tradition, as I culled my corpus of sugarcane novels, beginning with Confiant's *trilogie de la canne*, I could not find any examples of novels by women writers in which the sugarcane plantation plays such a determinant role, almost as full character in the novel. A. James Arnold has argued that the *créolistes*' obsession with certain locales (first the cane fields, then to the *bidonville*, and onto new urban settings) and their "ideological overdetermination to conform to the same teleological project" stands in stark contrast to the "far greater freedom on the part of women writers" in terms of the *mise en scène* for their novels (Arnold 1995: 39). Although it is not possible to speak of an aggressively unified literary movement such as *créolité* across the region—after all, the sugarcane novel is what I refer to as a form of "transnational insularism"—I would like to extend those observations beyond Martinique to the countries and literary traditions I examined in my dissertation. For here, too, it is possible to interpret this gendered literary production as a tension between men and women, between parts and wholes.

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