

Women Staging the French Caribbean: History, Memory, and Authorship in the
Plays of Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, Gerty Dambury, and Suzanne Dracius

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The thesis seeks to contribute to the expansion of the field of French Caribbean literary and drama studies, endeavours to redress the gender balance in studies on French Caribbean literature, and aspires to add to the existing body of work on French Caribbean women's writing. Therefore, the thesis aims to reveal and to analyse the world of French Caribbean women's theatre and to study how the playwrights address socio-political issues that affect their communities and influence their own writings and careers. The corpus consists of plays by Gerty Dambury, Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, and Suzanne Dracius from the 1980s to the early 2000s. While focussing on a different theme, each chapter rests its analysis on theatrical works of a similar genre. The analysis of the plays deploys theories of the theatre pertaining to postcolonial drama and gender.

The first chapter serves as an introduction to a group of female French Caribbean writers and their predecessors. The second chapter is a study of two historical plays, focussing on the collective experience of historical events and the role played by women in those events. The third chapter analyses plays that problematize the relationship between the collective and the individual. The

fourth chapter looks at the image of the French Caribbean female artist and the multiple barriers she encounters in achieving creative independence.

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D.Phil Long Abstract

Women Staging the French Caribbean: History, Memory, and Authorship in the Plays of Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, Gerty Dambury, and Suzanne Dracius

This thesis analyses the themes of history, memory, and authorship in the works of four women playwrights from the French Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. In doing so, it aims to reveal the three levels of marginalization to which Caribbean women theatre practitioners are subjected: being a woman, being a French Caribbean woman, and being a French Caribbean woman who writes theatre. The thesis seeks to contribute to the expansion of the field of French Caribbean literary and drama studies. These fields are themselves marginal in the context of the worlds of French literary production and French theatre. There are several reasons for this. First, the French Caribbean has a strained socio-political, cultural, and historical relationship with hexagonal France; Martinique and Guadeloupe were French colonies for three centuries before becoming *départements*, or French overseas administrative regions, in 1946. Thus, the relationship between France and these overseas possessions can be described as at once colonial, postcolonial, and neo-colonial. Secondly, theoretical works and cultural creations from Martinique and Guadeloupe have contributed significantly to the growth of postcolonial and anticolonial thought and arts. The field of postcolonial studies is not as developed in France as it is in the English-speaking academic world, and the Jacobin centralist bias embedded in France's literary culture impedes the inclusion of an Antillean literature that is critical of the metropole. Key theorists that feature in postcolonial studies curricula worldwide include Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Édouard Glissant. French Caribbean literary production features figures of international renown such

as Guadeloupeans Maryse Condé, Daniel Maximin, Gisèle Pineau, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Martinicans Ina Césaire, Patrick Chamoiseau, or Raphaël Confiant. Theorists and artists alike have enjoyed significantly more success beyond the French metropole than within it.

The originality of French Caribbean artistic production is remarkable. Caribbean culture was born out of the commingling of multiple cultures, a typical example of *métissage*. The first colonizers arrived in Martinique and Guadeloupe in the seventeenth century, and slaves were transported from Africa to work on the islands' coffee and sugar plantations. After the abolition of slavery in 1848 indentured labourers from South and South-East Asia were contracted in, while in the early twentieth century Martinique and Guadeloupe saw the arrival of immigrants from the Middle-East. This composite culture is apparent in all aspects of the arts from the region. Drama is no exception, and the multiple genres and cross-genre productions to emerge from Martinique and Guadeloupe despite their small size and demographics constitutes a phenomenon that merits in-depth study.

It is perhaps no coincidence that all key French Caribbean writers and theorists known for works in other genres, have at some stage in their career written for the theatre. Aimé Césaire's dramatic works greatly contributed to postcolonial drama. Both Franz Fanon, and several decades later, Maryse Condé, wrote plays before embarking on other literary pursuits. Yet for the most part, studies of French Caribbean literature remain focussed on fiction, poetry, and the essay, and at the same time have foregrounded male authors. Over the past thirty years however, academics in North America, the Caribbean, and France have constructed an impressive canon out of the wealth of French Caribbean women's

writing. The earliest of these texts date from the 1930s when a handful of women pioneered writing about race relations, gender roles and representations, and colonial politics.

The main motivations for conducting this research consist in a desire to redress the gender balance in studies on French Caribbean literature, and to contribute to the existing body of work on French Caribbean women's writing by turning academic attention to women's theatrical work. Therefore, this thesis wishes to reveal and to analyse the world of French Caribbean women's theatre and the milieu in which it has evolved and continues to grow. It also studies how the authors address socio-political issues that affect their communities and influence their own writings and careers. The corpus consists of three plays by Gerty Dambury (Guadeloupe), two plays by Ina Césaire (Martinique), one play by Maryse Condé (Guadeloupe), and one play by Suzanne Dracius (Martinique). It brings together works from the 1980s (*Mémoires d'île* by Césaire, 1985), the 1990s (*Rosanie Soleil* by Césaire, 1992, *Lettres indiennes* by Dambury 1993, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* by Dracius, 1996), and includes more recent plays (*Comme deux frères* by Maryse Condé, *Trames*, 2007, and *Des doutes et des errances*, 2014, by Dambury). Despite differing styles and agendas, there are common themes that traverse these plays.

One of the principal themes addressed in the thesis is that of *marronnage*. A concept theorized by illustrious Caribbean writers such as Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant, *marronnage* comprises multiple levels of meaning useful to this study. It is a term used to describe the condition of escapee slaves during the period of slavery in Martinique and Guadeloupe. It also is employed in that context to denote these fugitives' banishment to the margins of what was

considered then to be normal society. Caribbean intellectuals and writers have used the term to convey the idea of a movement of rejection of established socio-cultural norms. It advocates new ways of thinking and of being in the world. Suzanne Dracius coins the term 'double-marronnage' to describe the condition of Caribbean women writers, who as well as escaping/rejecting French society as Caribbean 'French but not quite', also escape/reject the Caribbean society that would confine them to restrictive gendered norms. This thesis adds to marronnage a third component: the experience of French Caribbean women who write theatre; this is here termed 'triple-marronnage'. The analysis looks at how plays show varying degrees of the process of *marronnage* at work, be it through the portrayal of marginalized characters, the creation of alternative spaces, or the telling of unconventional stories.

While focussing on a different theme, each chapter rests its analysis on theatrical works of a similar genre. This showcases the variety of stylistic techniques applied by these writers in their theatrical works. The analysis of the plays focusses on the various theatrical techniques found in each play, which borrow from both European and Caribbean performance tradition. Theories of the theatre pertaining to drama made in postcolonial contexts have also been instrumental in locating elements of anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-exoticist critique. Elements of gender theory relating specifically to the colonial, postcolonial, and Caribbean experience are also pertinent to the analysis since the plays inevitably raise issues relating to gender roles and representations in colonial and postcolonial Antillean societies.

The first chapter introduces earlier generations of female French Caribbean writers so as to establish the lineage between more recent writers and

their predecessors. It then presents a group of playwrights identifiable as a 'wave' through the nature of their interconnected experiences and thematic interests.

The second chapter is a study of two historical plays: Ina Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil* (1992) and Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (1996). The two plays portray the same Martinican historical event, the Insurrection of Southern Martinique of 1870, through the eyes and experiences of their eponymous female protagonists based on historical figures who took part in the Insurrection: Rosanie Soleil and Lumina Sophie dite Surprise. In these works, an emphasis is placed on the collective experience of historical events, and the main characters are represented as belonging to a group of like-minded Martinican women. In these plays, Césaire and Dracius militate for the recognition of missing and forgotten chapters of local history while also foregrounding the role played by women in the shaping of that history.

The third chapter analyses plays that problematize the relationship between the collective and the individual, and the relationship between the collective and marginalized groups within the collective. Set in contemporary Martinique and Guadeloupe respectively, Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'île* (1985) and Maryse Condé's *Comme deux frères* (2007) depict character duos whose testimonies reveal the socio-political realities of Martinican society. Each duo belongs to one of two groups on the margins of society, the elderly or disenfranchised youth. Césaire's characters are two elderly women, and Condé's protagonists are two young Guadeloupean men. The interest of the plays stems from the confessional and narrative qualities of their dialogues. The duologue offers an intimacy replicated in the surroundings and sets of the plays. However,

these works are still as multimodal as the plays analysed in Chapter Two in that they also make use of movement and choreography.

The fourth chapter looks at the image of the French Caribbean female artist in three of Gerty Dambury's plays: *Lettres indiennes* (1993), *Trames* (2007), and *Des doutes et des errances* (2014). The female protagonists of these plays represent different types of artists: theatre directors, writers, playwrights, dancers, actors. The plays foreground the difficulties these characters face as a consequence of their career and life choices. Author/director characters face marginalization and rejection because of their refusal to conform to societal norms and constraints. This leads them to break away from their communities and to embrace a state of errantry that might allow them to heighten their self-knowledge. The performer characters run the risk of becoming objects of representation without autonomous self-expression, despite in some cases creating their own art. In both cases, Caribbean women artists are marginalized within their societies and the artistic worlds they belong to.

The works studied in this thesis speak for and to the plurality of Caribbean dramatic languages that appeal both to inhabitants of Martinique and Guadeloupe and to audiences elsewhere. Establishing dialogues among these works emphasizes the common themes that run through each, despite the authors' divergent aesthetic approaches. The plays bring to the fore the repressed and marginalized voices of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and the voices of the authors themselves who are still subject to the *triple-marronage* of being black Caribbean, female, and artists.

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Introduction

SUZANNE (...) Je leur propose des pièces qui parlent de nous, de notre histoire, de ce que nous vivons dans nos petites îles de poussière !
Ça n'intéresse personne !
Gerty Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances* (2014)

LUMINA Nous n'arriverons à rien si nous perdons notre temps à regarder qui est kouli, qui est négresse, qui est mulâtresse ou câpresse. Nous sommes des femmes de ce pays, des personnes humaines, et nous ne comptons qu'à ce titre. En tant que femmes, nous avons des droits, mais aussi des devoirs.
Suzanne Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (1996)

ALICE Allons-y, Martiniquaises quinquagénaires, mes sœurs et autres *has been*, reprenons courageusement l'inéluctable marche vers l'avenir lumineux !
Ina Césaire, *Molokoy* (2007)

THEODORA Tu as tellement peur de la vérité que tu métamorphoses tout. Tu as raison de te mettre à écrire. Remarque tu fais bien d'embellir la vie. De la rendre méconnaissable. Parfois, elle est tellement dure et laide à regarder en face.
Maryse Condé *La faute à la vie* (2009)

FRUCTUEUSE (...) Je me suis postée là, comme une voleuse. Je vole des odeurs, des couleurs, des sensations, des mouvements d'hommes qui chargent et déchargent des camions, des balancements de corps, des rires qui plient le corps en deux, des mains qui jettent des cigarettes au loin, des voix qui se superposent, un seul va-et-vient de fourmis folles, étourdissantes et pleines de vie. (...)
Gerty Dambury, *Lettres indiennes* (1996)

Almost every work on Antillean literature, and the theatre is no exception, comprises an element of frustration when it comes to categorising or defining a genre that combines as many styles as the multiple heritages of the Antillean people. The Caribbean island of Martinique and the archipelago of Guadeloupe were first inhabited by Amerindian (Arawak and Carib) tribes from 3000 BCE to the seventh century BCE and were 'discovered' by Christopher Columbus in 1493 (Guadeloupe) and 1502 (Martinique) respectively.¹ They were then first occupied

¹ Guadeloupe is made up of several islands, the main island is divided between Grande-Terre to the north and Basse-Terre to the south, and are adjunct to smaller islands such as Les Saintes to the south-west, Marie-Galante to the south-East, and la Désirade to the East.

A timeline of key events in Martinican and Guadeloupean history referred to in this thesis can be found in the Appendix.

by European colonisers in the seventeenth century. There then followed for more than two centuries the mass displacement of slaves from Africa to the islands until the second and final abolition of slavery on the islands in 1848. Finally, the islands saw the arrival of indentured labourers from India and China at the end of the nineteenth century, and immigration from the Levant (from the region now known as Lebanon and Syria) in the twentieth century. This ‘magma anthropologique’, as the Martinican Patrick Chamoiseau puts it, is what renders the societies of Martinique and Guadeloupe prime examples of *métissage*.² It thus follows, that the literary production from the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique should foreground, and sensitize its audience to, this cultural *métissage*. And it is theatre that brings this *métissage* to life. Caribbean drama ‘reflète la réalité kaléidoscopique de la société créole, fluctuante et incertaine, en perpétuelle mutation (et) se conçoit par-delà la séparation et l’opposition dans la rencontre et la fusion d’héritages culturels multiples’.³ The ‘kaleidoscopic’ society described by Stéphanie Bérard corresponds to Chamoiseau’s ‘magma anthropologique’ composed of descendants of African slaves and European colonizers, indentured labourers from India, China, and immigrants from the Middle East. The study of Caribbean theatre provides an extensive opportunity to understand this complex socio-cultural fabric.

Martinican and Guadeloupean theatre practitioners draw on local performance traditions developed from African dance, song, and storytelling, and from the European theatre canon, and ‘partagés entre le respect et la subversion

² Chamoiseau speaks of a ‘magma anthropologique des peuples qui s’étaient rejoints là’ in *Écrire en pays dominé* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1997), p. 110.

³ Stéphanie Bérard, *Théâtres des Antilles : Traditions et scènes contemporaines* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 2009), pp. 16-17.

des canons occidentaux, réinscrivent l’imaginaire caribéen dans la tradition littéraire européenne.’⁴ Plays by Martinican and Guadeloupean authors have therefore marked contemporary French drama, and have contributed to the formation of postcolonial theatrical forms. This thesis focusses on a particular strand of that artistic tradition: women’s theatre, specifically the dramatic works of Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, Gerty Dambury, and Suzanne Dracius. Based on a corpus of seven plays, this study seeks to draw attention to the theatrical exploration of issues of community, regional history and memory, gender relations, and artistic licence in the French Caribbean context.

The necessity to work on this constellation of issues is witnessed in key debates in Francophone and Caribbean studies stressing the need to assert the aesthetic contribution of literatures from former French colonies to French and postcolonial studies. In a recent work on Francophone literature, Christiane Chaulet Achour focusses on the literary works from colonial and post-independence periods of the francophone literary South or ‘francophonies littéraires des Suds’. In opting for this configuration, Chaulet Achour outlines her approach:

La décision a été prise de problématiser la question que posent ces ensembles littéraires, peu visibles et présents dans les circuits de transmissions en France et dans chacun de leurs pays d’origine. Quasiment absents de l’enseignement en France – si ce n’est sous forme d’incitations périphériques et grâce au volontarisme d’enseignants –, sans reconnaissance académique pérenne, ces ensembles ne surgissent dans les médias qu’à la faveur d’événements sociopolitiques particuliers : la guerre civile en Algérie, le séisme en Haïti, la mort de Césaire.⁵

Incorporating Caribbean literature into the French literary canon has proven notoriously difficult, with the exception of the works of Aimé Césaire (1913-

⁴ Bérard, p. 17.

⁵ Christiane Chaulet Achour, *Les Francophonies littéraires* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2016), pp. 5-6.

2008) and occasionally those of Frantz Fanon (1925-1961).⁶

The slow process of introducing literatures from ‘non-French’ ‘French speaking areas’ into the French literary canon is the consequence of historical and political conjuncture.⁷ In explaining the late development and/or rejection of postcolonial studies in France, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy point out that ‘the genealogies (as opposed to more reductive teleologies) of postcolonial thought reveal (...) a set of explicitly French-language roots, many of which are associated with reactions against specifically French colonial phenomena such as the universalist foundations of republican ideology, the practice of assimilation, and the propagandist alibi of the civilizing mission.’⁸ French scholars working to develop postcolonial studies in France often pit themselves against two branches of French historiography: one that outlines the French colonial project as a necessary civilizing mission with unfortunate consequences, and a Eurocentric or Gallocentric branch that marks a break between France’s colonial past after the 1962 Evian accords, ‘after which it is possible to study the nation in isolation.’⁹

The importance of the colonial period to French national identity is undeniable. The proximity of seminal events such as the Algerian war, as well as

⁶ However, efforts have been made in hexagonal France to widen and intensify the dissemination of thought and literatures from the Caribbean and the Americas by organisations such as the Institut du Tout-Monde founded by Édouard Glissant in 2006 (www.tout-monde.com) and in the context of recent interviews on France Inter of Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant.

See: ‘Les rêves de Patrick Chamoiseau’, *Boomerang*, France Inter, 28th April 2017 <<https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/boomerang/boomerang-28-avril-2017> [accessed 29th April 2017]>; ‘Raphaël Confiant en toute confiance’, *Boomerang*, France Inter, 8th June 2017 <<https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/boomerang/boomerang-08-juin-2017>> [accessed 10th June 2017]

⁷ Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, ‘Introduction: Situating Francophone Postcolonial Thought’ in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), pp. 4-5.

⁸ Forsdick and Murphy, ‘Introduction: Situating Francophone Postcolonial Thought’, p. 5.

⁹ Forsdick and Murphy, *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking world*, p. 14.

The Evian accords took place on the 18th March 1962, and marked the end of the Franco-Algerian conflict.

the persistence of a form of French hegemonic rule within remaining overseas territories in the Caribbean, South America, the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, giving France the second largest maritime presence in the world after the United States, explain the present imbrication of the French colonial project in France's political and cultural formations. The Gallocentric strain cited above is found in the term and concept 'Francophonie', officially a network of French-speaking countries and communities that promote the speaking and dissemination of French around the world. To some critics, *Francophonie* carries negative undertones of French metropolitan neo-colonialism, since many of these French-speaking communities are former French colonies or states associated with France through imbalanced political and/or economic power relations. The cultural manifestation of *Francophonie* also privileges the French language and French republican and universalist ideals as a cultural and political "natural" order. And this Gallocentrism segues into the upholding of a seminal French literary canon that remains Eurocentric.

The status of Martinique and Guadeloupe is rendered all the more complex by these issues. French colonies until the 1940s, they became French *départements* (administrative regions), along with two other French 'old colonies' – La Réunion and French Guyana – with the 'Loi Césaire' voted in on 19th March 1946. The 'Loi Lamine Guèye' on 7th May of the same year also conferred French citizenship on their inhabitants. The apparent success of the departmentalisation project has been attributed to the fact that:

...à la différence des territoires coloniaux d'Afrique et d'Asie, la colonisation des Antilles ne subjugue pas des populations existantes mais crée des formations sociales nouvelles qui sont complètement nées de l'entreprise coloniale. Aucun sentiment national ne préexiste. Les peuples antillais n'ont connu que la colonisation et le système totalitaire de l'esclavage. Historiquement, cette situation a généré deux

directions : l'adaptation et la résistance. Les complots, rébellions, et insurrections ont émaillé l'histoire antillaise.¹⁰

The trauma of slavery and colonialism, to which Favier here alludes, and the cultural, geographical, and historical proximity to independent Caribbean nations, have contributed to Martinique's and Guadeloupe's frequently defiant attitude towards the French metropole. The 'French-language roots' of postcolonial studies cited by Forsdick and Murphy frequently lead back to French Caribbean writers and theorists. Martinican and Guadeloupean literary creation suffers from existing under the aegis of the French state while interrogating the tenuous relationship between the metropole and its colonial periphery. This contradicts the assumptions outlined by Yarimar Bonilla that 'non-independent societies suffer from a form of arrested development (and) are imagined as having failed to complete their historical ascension to national sovereignty, resulting in a state of unachieved modernity.' For, Bonilla argues:

...the majority of Caribbean polities are non-sovereign societies; even those that have achieved "flag independence" still struggle with how to forge a more robust project of self-determination, how to reconcile the unresolved legacies of colonialism and slavery, how to assert control over their entanglements with foreign powers, and how to stem their disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of political and economic modernity.¹¹

And yet, Martinique and Guadeloupe, in their engagement with issues linked to the impact of colonialism and their questioning of imperial and hegemonic discourses, fully merit a place 'within the broader framework of the postcolonial Caribbean.'¹²

Though acknowledgment of French Caribbean literature in the metropolitan literary canon is restricted, a small group of French academics have

¹⁰ Olivier Favier, 'Mé 67 en Guadeloupe: une répression coloniale de plus? Entretien avec Jean-Pierre Sainton,' published on *Dormira jamais* (2 May 2011), <<http://dormirajamais.org/me67/>> [accessed 17th April 2017].

¹¹ Yarimar Bonilla, *Non-sovereign Futures: Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. xiii-xiv.

¹² Bonilla, p. xiv.

worked on Antillean literature as part of a broader study of Francophone literatures from former French colonies and current French overseas territories. Literature from Martinique and Guadeloupe has however been predominantly the object of study of Anglophone academics who have focussed primarily on seminal authors who form the ‘French-language roots’ of postcolonial theory such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), as well as on the subsequent generation of Antillean scholars such as Patrick Chamoiseau (1953—), Raphaël Confiant (1951—), Jean Bernabé (1942-2017), and Daniel Maximin (1947—) who helped develop the theories of their predecessors and fostered new directions in postcolonial thought. In the case of academics from North America the geographical and historical proximity to the Caribbean has facilitated the development of the study of Antillean literature in the USA, and has also favoured the establishment of research networks between universities in the United States and the Caribbean. Many Caribbean writers have chosen to reside, teach, and practise their art in the United States where the study of Antillean literature, theatre, and other art forms constitute emerging fields of investigation complementing the study of theoretical works from the Antilles that have dominated Francophone postcolonial studies.¹³

The majority of Antillean authors studied to date have been men, the many male theorists and politicians originating from Martinique and Guadeloupe also boasting considerable bodies of literary work. And yet, Martinique and Guadeloupe have produced a wealth of women writers and artists. Guadeloupe in particular boasts the renowned Maryse Condé – her works are better known in the

¹³ The work of United States-based academics Christiane Makward, Françoise Kourilsky and Emily Sahakian, Canada-based Alvina Ruprecht, as well as Paris-based Sylvie Chalaye and Stéphanie Bérard, have been instrumental in providing the theoretical framework for this thesis. See Bibliography.

United States and the Caribbean than in metropolitan France – Gisèle Pineau (1956—), and Simone Schwarz-Bart (1938—). What is more, Antillean women writers belong to a writing tradition that stretches back at least two generations before that of those studied in this thesis. Indeed, recent studies of the female predecessors and contemporaries of early twentieth-century Antillean thinkers have unveiled, in Sam Haigh's words, 'a "tradition" of women's writing, a maternal line of descent which at once matches and challenges "l'héritage viril" of Antillean writing'.¹⁴ Revisiting key periods of Antillean literary and theoretical development through the works of writers such as the Nardal sisters Paulette (1896-1985) and Jeanne (19? – 1993), and Suzanne Roussi Césaire (1915-1966), wife of Aimé Césaire, while at the same time taking into account contemporary women writers provides 'an important mode of intervention into, and disruption of narratives of resistance which have been consistently indifferent to, the question of sexual difference'.¹⁵ Other studies have focussed on early twentieth-century female writers such as Guadeloupeans Michèle Lacrosil (1911-2012) and Suzanne Lacascade (dates unknown), and Martinican Mayotte Capécia (1916-1955), who though critiqued by Fanon in his seminal work *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), provide nevertheless an insight into Antillean literary creativity and deep-set gender, racial, and social issues of the early twentieth century.¹⁶

In most studies of Antillean women's literature, the emphasis is placed on genres such as the novel or the essay. However, whereas these genres have constituted the privileged form of expression of male Antillean writers to the

¹⁴ Sam Haigh, "'Voix féminines/ Voix féministes?': Women's Writing from the Francophone Caribbean' in *Francophone voices*, edited by Kamal Salhi (Exeter: Elm Bank, 1999), pp. 141-156, p. 142.

¹⁵ Sam Haigh, "'Voix féminines/ Voix féministes?'" , p. 154.

¹⁶ See Frantz Fanon 'La femme de couleur et le Blanc' in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975).

point of eclipsing female authors' works of similar literary and cultural value, theatre, meanwhile, has been the genre where female Antillean artists have been most active. The high concentration of female practitioners within the domain of French Caribbean drama contrasts noticeably with the situation in hexagonal France where women directors and playwrights are still noticeably absent from the executive staff-lists and playbills of established theatre institutions and festivals. However, the majority of 'acknowledged' French Caribbean playwrights are men. These tend to be those that have received acknowledgment for literary achievements in other genres, such as Aimé Césaire, whose theatrical works are considered seminal to the field of postcolonial and Caribbean drama, or even Édouard Glissant or Patrick Chamoiseau.¹⁷ While not seeking to belittle the work of male authors, the fact remains that the contribution of female authors to the Antillean theatre canon has been considerable.

The quotations cited in the first lines of this Introduction encapsulate the concerns and ambitions this thesis aims to bring out of the dramatic works studied. The first quotation is taken from Gerty Dambury's *Des doutes et des errances* (2014).

SUZANNE (...) Je leur propose des pièces qui parlent de nous, de notre histoire, de ce que nous vivons dans nos petites îles de poussière !
Ça n'intéresse personne!

The play reveals the typical problem faced by many an Antillean artist: the conflictual choice between writing about the Antilles, and writing about more 'universal' issues marketable to a larger French audience. Despite this, the works of these playwrights ground themselves in the Caribbean, and explore Caribbean themes relating to history, identity, gender, and society. The plays studied in this

¹⁷ See Chapter Two's Introduction for an outline of the theatrical works of these authors.

thesis also explore the collective experience of the Antillean people through revisiting and reclaiming local histories. The representation of this collective experience is qualified by the foregrounding of lives and memories of different social groups and individuals that often problematize clear-cut representations of that community. The following two quotations from Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (1996) and Ina Césaire's *Molokoy* (2007) respectively, emphasize the authors' desire to speak of and for their fellow Martinican women and qualify the emphasis on local history and collective experience by their singling out of specific groups that constitute the collective, in this case Antillean women and elderly women.

LUMINA Nous n'arriverons à rien si nous perdons notre temps à regarder qui est kouli, qui est négresse, qui est mulâtresse ou câpresse. Nous sommes des femmes de ce pays, des personnes humaines, et nous ne comptons qu'à ce titre. En tant que femmes, nous avons des droits, mais aussi des devoirs.
(Suzanne Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*)

ALICE : Allons-y, Martiniquaises quinquagénaires, mes sœurs et autres *has been*, reprenons courageusement l'inéluctable marche vers l'avenir lumineux !
(Ina Césaire, *Molokòy*)

The excerpt from Césaire's *Molokòy* refers to the treatment of contemporary Martinican women, who still suffer from sexist assumptions and gendered binaries, and for whom it is 'pas trop facile de vieillir, par ici [Martinique], lorsqu'on est femme!'¹⁸ It is also a tribute to the authors' perseverance in writing works that go against expectations.

The question of how, why, and for whom to write is posed by the final two quotations from Maryse Condé's *La faute à la vie* (2009) and from Gerty Dambury's *Lettres indiennes* (1996).

THEODORA Tu as tellement peur de la vérité que tu métamorphoses tout. Tu as raison de te mettre à écrire. Remarque tu fais bien d'embellir la vie. De la rendre

¹⁸ Ina Césaire, *Molokoy*, in *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. Christiane P. Makward (Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011), p. 239.

méconnaissable. Parfois, elle est tellement dure et laide à regarder en face.

(Maryse Condé, *La Faute à la vie*)

FRUCTUEUSE (...) Je me suis postée là, comme une voleuse. Je vole des odeurs, des couleurs, des sensations, des mouvements d'hommes qui chargent et déchargent des camions, des balancements de corps, des rires qui plient le corps en deux, des mains qui jettent des cigarettes au loin, des voix qui se superposent, un seul va-et-vient de fourmis folles, étourdissantes et pleines de vie. (...)

(Gerty Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*)

In both plays female protagonists negotiate their role as writers against their social and cultural circumstances. The quotations also interrogate the nature of a writer's work. Should they represent reality by focussing on treating subjects drawn from real life and documented historical events? Or should they create a theatrical piece that 'embellishes' reality, 'tellement dure et laide à regarder en face'?¹⁹ In fact the plays do both: the writers combine aesthetic ambition with the treatment of subject matter drawn from real life or historical events, drawing on multiple artistic influences to convey stories that are often 'too harsh and ugly to face'. The use of local performance traditions, which include dance, *conte*, and song, is found in each play studied in this thesis. These popular performance forms, developed from the 'anthropological magma' that combine different cultural traditions from Africa and Europe, are cornerstones of Caribbean society. Inspired by European and African storytelling traditions, the Antillean *conte* genre uses the guise of the fairy or folk tale to transmit a deeper message relating to social and historical tensions, and is here recuperated in each play in various guises. The authors use storytelling to reclaim the voices and narrate the lives of women and marginal characters. In the Antillean *conte* tradition the storyteller is usually male, whereas in the two historical plays analysed in Chapter Two, women take on the role of storytellers in *conte*-style performances. In plays analysed in the subsequent chapters, in an act of reclaiming their status within historical narrative

¹⁹ Maryse Condé, *La Faute à la vie* (Carnières-Morlanwetz: Lansman Éditeur, 2009), p. 27.

and asserting their legitimacy as members of Caribbean society, female characters narrate, just like the *conteur*, who as well as narrating a story performs and sets the scene.

In reclaiming local and marginal histories and narratives in their plays, the authors portray the three levels of alienation they face. In effect, these quotations lead to the framing of these authors in a condition of ‘triple-marronnage’. This concept is taken from Suzanne Dracius’s coinage of the term ‘double-marronnage’ to describe her experience ‘as a Martinican who writes and as a woman who writes’.²⁰ A term originally used to define escapee slaves in the Americas, ‘marronnage’ has come to encompass a type of rebellion that is at once passively and actively marginalising.²¹ Both Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant used the term. Césaire wrote the poem to René Despestre (1926—) ‘Réponse à René Depestre poète haïtien’ – later rewritten and entitled ‘Le verbe marronner’ – ‘pour adjurer l’ami et poète haïtien de renoncer aux thèses de la “poésie nationale” d’Aragon’.²² For Césaire ‘marronner’ corresponds to an internal rebellion within the French language exercised in the writing of a Caribbean poetry that resists established literary categorisation. *Marronnage* is also referred to by Glissant as a means of creating new forms of expression. *Marronner* involves taking ‘les chemins de traverse de la pensée’ and rejecting imposed thought-systems, the ‘chemins bien dallés et bien goudronnés qui ont été tracés

²⁰ Suzanne Dracius, ‘In Search of Suzanne Césaire’s Garden’, trans. by R.H. Mitsch, *Research in African Literatures*, 41.1, (2010), 155-165, p. 156.

²¹ *Marronnage*: A term used to describe escapee slaves during the colonial era in the Americas, derived from the Hispano-American term *cimarrón* (wild, untamed). It is now seen as a symbol for questioning established social, political, and cultural conventions.

²² Aimé Césaire’s poem was published in Nicolas Guillén et al, ‘Poèmes inédits’, *Présence Africaine* 1.1-2 (1955) 109-125, pp. 113-115.

Jérôme Roger, ‘Résonances du *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*: un livre de survie’ in *Voix épiques : Akhmatova, Césaire, Hikmet, Neruda*, ed. by Olivier Kachler (Mont-Saint-Aignan : Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2010), pp. 77-91, p.84.

pour nous'.²³ *Marronner* consists in moving towards the world through self-fashioned 'traces', to find 'nos propres traces', 'notre propre manière de fréquenter le monde'.²⁴ The 'trace' is a historical, geographical, and symbolic concept. It refers geographically to pathways made in the Caribbean landscape by the Caribs and subsequently the slave inhabitants of the islands. Historically, they are, according to Yolande Aline Helm, 'lieux de mémoire [où] Caraïbes et les esclaves marrons dans leur prolongement y ont laissé leur empreinte et leur mémoire'.²⁵ For Glissant, the trace symbolises the articulation of alternative thought processes and forms of history-recording in opposition to 'la fausse universalité des pensées de système'.²⁶ The self-fashioning impulse that resides in the notions of the *trace* and *marronnage* transpires in the use of the term 'marronnage' rather than 'marginalisation' or 'exile'. Where the latter concepts convey a notion of passivity in being ostracised or forced to ostracise oneself, *marronnage* asserts a form of agency. The 'marron' is indeed removed from society, an outcast, but this removal is self-imposed, done intentionally as a rejection of established social convention.

The first level of *marronnage* experienced by the writers studied here is the choice of writing in the Antilles and accepting, to quote Sylvie Chalaye, 'de se déplacer, de se déporter par rapport à cette destination naturelle conçue et imposée par la société et son carcan d'idées reçues, d'habitudes et de contraintes'.²⁷ The second level of *marronnage* is writing as an Antillean woman 'qui ne conçoit plus

²³ *Les hommes livres - Edouard Glissant*, dir. by Jean-René Christiani (Institut national de l'audiovisuel, 1993).

²⁴ *Les hommes livres*.

²⁵ Yolande Aline Helm, 'Prolégomènes', *Métissages et marronnages dans l'œuvre de Suzanne Dracius* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2009), p. 10.

²⁶ Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris : Gallimard, 1996), p. 15.

²⁷ Sylvie Chalaye, 'Le théâtre de Gerty Dambury : un marronnage au féminin', in *Émergences Caraïbe(s): une création théâtrale archipélifique*, ed. by Sylvie Chalaye and Stéphanie Bérard (= *Africultures*, 1.80-81 (2010)) pp. 231-237, p. 233.

son accomplissement, sa finitude dans la maternité et la transmission du sang'.²⁸

Writing theatre adds a third level of *marronnage*, for the theatre is an even more marginalising experience for women both in the Caribbean and in hexagonal France. *Double-marronnage* and *triple-marronnage* are first explored in 'Chapter One – First- and Second-Wave Antillean Women Writers: Legacies, Audiences, and Interrogations' – which introduces the field of French Caribbean women's writing and the historical, literary, and social contexts of the works by Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, Gerty Dambury, and Suzanne Dracius. Links are established between this wave of writers and the previous generation of French Caribbean women writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, who inspired, participated in, or were separate from, major movements such as *Négritude*. This emphasizes the importance of recognising previously ignored voices within *Négritude*, as well as the independent work of Antillean women writers who may or may not have influenced or participated in the movement. This is followed by an outline of the ways in which this wave of authors position themselves vis-à-vis the French and Antillean literary and theatrical worlds, and how this is manifested in their dramatic and non-theatrical writings.

'Chapter Two - Staging Antillean History: Revolutionary Storytellers and Heroines' - analyses the historical plays *Rosanie Soleil* (1992) by Ina Césaire, and *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (1996) by Suzanne Dracius. Both plays depict a seminal but little-known event in Martinican history: the Insurrection of Southern Martinique of September 1870. It is historic for two reasons: it was the first major uprising since the abolition of slavery in 1848, and it was also notable for the fact that women played a major and indeed often a leading role. These plays are

²⁸ Sylvie Chalaye, 'Le théâtre de Gerty Dambury', p. 233.

analysed through the lens of the role of the community in shaping Caribbean performance forms and how these forms are used to revise history and the role of women in French Caribbean society. The act of *marronnage* is evident in both plays, with the action in *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* and *Rosanie Soleil* removed from the main stage of events. Yet the importance of the characters to the historical events taking place offstage demonstrates the writers' desire to reclaim the stories of these forgotten characters by pushing them forward. The characters forge another form of history-telling, by depicting events that do not appear in official records. The collective history of the Martinican people is reclaimed in the plays, but it is qualified by the emphasis put on the involvement of a group whose own histories have been forgotten by Martinican and hexagonal French histories alike: Martinican women. The importance of the individual, at home in or at odds with Martinican and/or French society, to the collective experience of Martinican women or of all Martinicans, is also foregrounded.

While the plays analysed in Chapter Two emphasize the imbrication of the individual in the group and the importance of the group to the individual, the plays in Chapters Three and Four, set in contemporary settings and featuring reduced casts which sharpen the focus on individual characters, problematize the relations of the individual to their particular social group or to society as a whole in the light of contemporary Antillean socio-political issues. 'Chapter Three – "Demain Sera Différent": Discussing the Personal Past' – looks at another dramatic work by Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d'île* (1983), and at Maryse Condé's latest play, *Comme deux frères* (2007). Césaire's play is the most renowned of her works and when contrasted with Condé's duologue, written twenty years later, presents interesting insights into the evolution of the thematic and theatrical

treatment of certain issues. The plays, which make use of similar stylistic and dialogic techniques, feature contrasting character duos: Césaire's work portrays two elderly women from Martinique, while two young Guadeloupean men are the protagonists of Condé's play. The plays focus on the representation of individuals ostracized by Martinican and Guadeloupean society, who despite certain differences find comfort in exchanging with persons of their age group and social class. The contrasts between characters in each play foreground the need to recognise individual experiences and warns against reducing social categories to pre-determined stereotypical representations. 'Chapter Four – Gerty Dambury: "L'espace qui m'habite": Staging the Female Artist' – focusses on the figures of the female artist in three plays by Gerty Dambury, *Lettres indiennes* (1993), *Trames* (2008), and *Des doutes et des errances* (2014), and concludes the reflections made in previous chapters on the tradition of French Caribbean female writers, the role of women in French Caribbean history, and gender concerns. The chapter analyses the third level of *triple-marronnage* through its representation of the Antillean woman artist. The plays problematize the socio-cultural status of the female French Caribbean artist and the multiple barriers she encounters in achieving creative independence.

The plays in the corpus have been selected for their thematic (historical, contemporary, introspective) and stylistic (large cast, choral structure, duologue, female protagonists) similarities. While French Caribbean theatre constitutes a category in itself, the authors who constitute it may be said to belong to differing dramatic traditions: French, American, Francophone, postcolonial, and so on. Hence a constellation of theoretical approaches has been used to explore the different potential interpretations of each dramatic work. Theories of performance

and theatre have been deployed, in particular those that focus on gender representations and spatial constructions (Una Chaudhuri, Mildred Mortimer, Patrice Pavis). Because of the subversive and deconstructive aspects of postcolonial drama that are identifiable within or across the plays under analysis here, theory relating to postcolonial theatre has been particularly useful (Christopher Balme, Gilbert and Tompkins).²⁹ The analysis focusses for the most part on dramatic representation, spatial awareness, and occupation, as well as movement and song, and is based on published play scripts and, when relevant and available, on specific performances.

With the ambition of providing a record of these writers' plays and their publication and/or performance details, an outline of each author's playography is included in the Appendix, along with a biographical note. For this information, the author is indebted to La Médiathèque Caraïbe's online archive of Antillean dramatic works in French and/or Creole, to Les Archives du Spectacle online resource, and information provided by some of the writers themselves during interviews with the author.³⁰

²⁹ See authors' details in Bibliography.

³⁰ La Médiathèque Caraïbe, *LAMECA Répertoire théâtral antillais* (2015) <<http://www.lameca.org/sommairetheatre.htm>> [accessed 17 April 2017] ; Les Archives du Spectacle, *Les Archives du Spectacle* (2017) <http://www.lesarchivesduspectacle.net> [accessed 17 April 2017].

Chapter One: First- and Second-Wave Antillean Women Writers: Legacies, Audiences, and Interrogations

Introduction

Emmanuelle Bouchez notes in her 2011 article on female theatre practitioners that

[le] milieu du théâtre n'est pas moins macho que d'autres. Le milieu du spectacle vivant, et du théâtre public en particulier, y apparaissait moins ouvert aux femmes que... l'armée !³¹

A study launched by the Société des Auteurs Dramatiques (SACD), the 'Où sont les femmes' project, concurs with this view regarding the under-representation of women in French theatre. Between 2012 and 2017, the project produced annual surveys of the numbers of women involved in the cultural sector in France, with an emphasis on the percentage of works written, directed, and composed by women, and on the percentage of women at the head of cultural institutions and venues. The 2017 edition of 'Où sont les femmes?' looked back on the past five annual reports and concluded that on average while 52 per cent of students in drama school were female, less than 30 per cent (33 per cent being the figure that makes a minority group no longer considered as such) of heads of national theatres (12%), heads of national and regional theatres (20%), heads of national stages (28%), authors (21%), and directors (27%) were women.³² Despite this absence of female figures in French metropolitan theatre practice, and the marginalisation of Antillean writers in French literary and artistic production, Antillean women writers including Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, Suzanne Dracius,

³¹ Emmanuelle Bouchez, 'Au théâtre, les femmes font école', *Télérama* (2nd February 2011) <<http://www.telerama.fr/scenes/les-filles-d-ariane,67204.php>> [accessed 12th December 2014].

³² These numbers are taken from Stéphanie Herr, *Où sont les femmes ? : Toujours pas là ! Bilan 2012-2017* (Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques (SACD), 2017).

The absence of women in theatre is also an issue in theatrical industries elsewhere, however the concern of this thesis is with the world of French and the French Caribbean theatre, and the references will therefore be to them.

and Gerty Dambury have been particularly active and prolific in the theatre. This exceptional concentration of women writers in the Francophone Caribbean theatre urges analysis of questions of the development of theatre in the Antilles, of the status of women within the Antillean performance industry, and of the impact these factors may have had on playwriting in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Before analysing the plays in depth in subsequent chapters, this first chapter will examine the artistic, historical, and political context from which the writers and their works have emerged.

The study of these writers as a group may assist in establishing a contextual and sociological understanding of the particularities of each writer's situation affected by common social, historic, and cultural factors. However, to perceive them as a literary generation, which 'permet de désigner des ensembles d'auteurs qui ont sensiblement le même âge et dont on suppose dès lors qu'ils ont été façonnés et déterminés dans le même contexte', may be seen as problematic; there is a twenty-year age gap between the youngest and eldest: Gerty Dambury is the youngest (b.1957) and Maryse Condé the eldest (b.1937); Ina Césaire (b.1942) and Suzanne Dracius (b.1951) fall in between.³³ Nevertheless, the category of 'génération' or 'wave' can, according to Benoît Denis, be useful 'si [...] elle prend en compte le moment où un auteur entre en activité, puis s'affirme, et les

³³ Benoît Denis, 'Génération littéraire' in *Le Dictionnaire du littéraire*, ed. by Paul Aron, Denis Saint-Jacques, and Alain Viala (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France), p. 316.

'[La notion de génération] peut rénover la compréhension des mouvements littéraires par la distinction des générations successives qui y ont contribué [...] et l'étude de la postérité des œuvres par la recherche des significations que les diverses générations leur ont données, [...] éclairer le problème de l'incompréhension rencontrée par l'écrivain ou l'artiste chez ses contemporains ou ses aînés immédiats, enfin, peut-être, combler l'abîme qui sépare les créateurs et leurs critiques, puisque le classement par générations est le seul acceptable pour les artistes qui ont toujours manifesté leur répugnance pour les étiquettes.' Jean Hytier, *Questions de littérature: Études valéryennes et autres* (Genève: Droz, 1967), p42. See also Henri Peyre, *Les Générations littéraires* (Paris: Bovin et cie, 1948) and Benoît Denis, 'Génération littéraire', *Le Dictionnaire du littéraire*, ed. by Aron Paul, Denis Saint-Jacques, and Alain Viala, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), pp. 316-317.

esthétiques qui le marquent alors, et pas seulement son âge physique’.³⁴ Each of the five writers whose oeuvre is the object of this thesis possesses her own distinctive style. They have had divergent professional and artistic trajectories. Nevertheless, there are commonalities to be found in the artistic, professional, and personal lives of these writers. Hence the group can be constructed as belonging to a literary and artistic wave.

This wave of female playwrights comes after the iconic figures of Antillean literary creation and theoretical writing -- Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, and Frantz Fanon -- whose ground-breaking conceptual work on blackness, and on colonial and ‘racial’ identity, executed in the years leading up to what would become known as the post-colonial era, opened up a new phase in Francophone artistic innovation. The generation that followed place themselves in the lineage of these writers while developing or questioning their theories; witness the *Creolists* Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Jean Bernabé who developed Césaire’s and Glissant’s works on cultural and postcolonial identity into their own ‘créolité’ movement. Women writers have also engaged with, and been influenced by, the first wave of writers, developing or interrogating its theories in their own artistic and theoretical work. The second wave of female writers have also inherited the theories and aesthetics of earlier women writers and thinkers, such as the Nardal sisters Paulette and Jeanne, and Aimé Césaire’s

³⁴ Benoît Denis, ‘Génération littéraire’, p. 316.

wife, Suzanne Roussi.³⁵ This second wave has also engaged with similar contemporary social, aesthetic, and political issues in their playwriting. Pursuing Aimé Césaire's 'desire to have the local population participate in some form of Martinican cultural activity while professionalizing the theatre milieu', the second wave have all written plays and used theatre as a medium to rediscover local histories, voice the unknown lives of women, the elderly and the young, and explore issues of class and 'race' that remain major factors in the social formations and interactions of contemporary Caribbean society.³⁶ Despite the difficulties inherent in their theatre-making both in the Antilles and in the metropole, namely audience indifference and lack of funding, the second wave use playwriting to deal with issues better explored on stage, since the democratic potential of theatre as a communion between artist and spectator is particularly pertinent to the Antilles where there is strong oral tradition of storytelling and where performance styles such as music, dance, and carnival are popular. The first part of this chapter will provide a comparative analysis of the earlier twentieth-century writers with those of the second wave. The second part of the chapter will

³⁵ Other writers that could be added to this list are Michèle Césaire, Ina Césaire's sister and director of the Aimé Césaire Theatre in Fort-de-France; Nady Nelzy, who collaborated with Ina Césaire on several historical plays (see *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. by Christiane Makward (Paris, Karthala, 2011); and Simone Schwarz-Bart, who adapted to the stage her novels *Ti-Jean L'Horizon* (1984) and *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (1995), and wrote a play *Ton beau capitaine* (1987), which has been studied in comparison with some of the plays of the authors discussed here.

(See Carole Edwards, 'Théâtralisation et quête de liberté par procuration chez trois dramaturges antillaises', *Women in French Studies*, Special Issue 5 (2014), 183-193 (comparison of Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Ton beau capitaine* (1987), Michèle Césaire's *La Nef* (1992) Gerty Dambury's *Lettres indiennes* (1993)]; Carole Edwards, *Les Dramaturges antillaises: cruauté, créolité, conscience féminine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008) (analyses of Maryse Condé's *Dieu nous l'a donné* (1972), *Mort d'Oluwémi d'Ajumako* (1974), *Pension les Alizés* (1988), Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Ton beau capitaine* (1987), Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'île: Maman N. et Maman F.* (1983), Michèle Césaire's *La Nef* (1991), Gerty Dambury's *Lettres indiennes* (1993), Suzanne Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (2000)]).

³⁶ Alvina Ruprecht, 'The Théâtre du Flamboyant from Aimé Césaire to Carole Fréchette : Constructing a professional theatre in Martinique', *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 13.2 (2010), 269-286, p. 270.

address the second wave and its commonalities and differences regarding theatre practice in Martinique and Guadeloupe, and the relation of Antillean theatre culture to their own theatrical creation.³⁷

³⁷ This chapter makes use of interviews given by the playwrights published over the past ten years by scholars of Caribbean theatre, as well as interviews conducted by the author herself. While taking account of the possible pitfalls of intentionality inherent in lending authority to authorial statements, these interviews nevertheless provide valuable historical information, and add a certain nuance to the survey of articles and works on Antillean theatre and histories of French theatre in the metropole and the colonies. Another advantage of using interviews is that they are revelatory in terms of the writers' experience of writing, the rehearsal process, performance, and the impact of their plays. These interviews are useful in the analysis of the plays, as most foreground political and social issues to which the writers themselves claim they are particularly sensitive and which they wish to discuss with their audience.

I The First Wave of Antillean Women Writers

In celebration of International Women's Week 2015, the Martinican *Conseil Régional* organized a two-day artistic festival dedicated to women artists: 'Quand l'art se fait femme'.³⁸ Events included theatrical performances, dance and music recitals, photography and painting exhibitions, cookery demonstrations, and performed readings. One of these readings was of Aimé Césaire and Suzanne Roussi Césaire's texts.³⁹ This homage to the Antillean literary couple of the *Négritude* movement encompasses two literary, political, and artistic heritages of Martinican culture particularly relevant to the study of the trajectories of the generation of women writers that followed the Césaires. Aimé Césaire, better known for his involvement in the *Négritude* movement alongside Senghor and Damas, is a theorist, poet, novelist, dramatist, and politician whose legacy provided the black diaspora of the twentieth century and oppressed peoples around the world with the means to articulate, artistically and politically, the identities shaped by colonialism, racial discrimination, and social inequality.⁴⁰ Suzanne Roussi Césaire is a lesser known writer and theorist than Aimé, but who was no less prolific in her lifetime. Eclipsed by the fame of her husband, her work has remained little known since her death in 1966. She belongs, however, to a generation of female thinkers who influenced and participated in *Négritude*, adding a gendered and more inclusive perspective to the movement. This generation included, as Daniel Maximin describes:

³⁸ Michèle Arretche, 'Quand l'Art se fait femme 2015', *Facebook* (3rd March 2015), <<https://www.facebook.com/events/866412596734923>> [accessed 3rd March 2015].

³⁹ Suzy Singa, *Illustration théâtre avec Suzy Singa Pawol fanm* - Extraits de textes d'Aimé Césaire et Suzanne Roussi (Fort-De-France: Hôtel de Région, 7th March 2015).

⁴⁰ Aimé Césaire was also the mayor of Martinique's capital, Fort-de-France, from 1945 to 2001, a deputy of the French Assembly from 1945 to 1993, president of the Conseil Régional from 1983 to 1986, and regional counsellor for Fort-de-France from 1945 to 1949 and from 1955 to 1970.

...de jeunes femmes antillaises conquérantes de liberté et d'égalité, comme leurs aînées les sœurs Nardal qui tenaient salon littéraire et musical, tout comme ses deux amies Jenny Alpha, la comédienne martiniquaise, et Gerty Archimède, l'avocate, future grande figure historique de la Guadeloupe, dont elle fut la première femme député en 1945, ce qu'aurait aussi bien pu devenir Suzanne.⁴¹

The work of these women drew attention to the particularities of the female experience in regard to *Négritude*, whose 'historiographie a réduit le mouvement de la négritude à une vision exclusivement masculine', and also went some way to establishing a transdisciplinary and transcultural dialogue to broaden the scope of Black artistic movements.⁴² These female thinkers also include the Martinican sisters Paulette and Jane Nardal who organized literary and cultural events in Paris in the first half of the twentieth century, and whose concepts of black internationalism ('l'internationalisme noir') and race consciousness ('la conscience de race') are close to ideas developed a decade later by Aimé Césaire and Senghor.⁴³ It has been established by recent scholarship that their ideas indeed formed the foundations of *Négritude*, and the Martinican writer Joseph Zobel named Paulette the 'godmother of

⁴¹ Daniel Maximin, 'Suzanne Césaire, Fontaine Solaire' in Suzanne Césaire, *Le Grand camouflage : Écrits de dissidence (1941-1945)*, ed. by Daniel Maximin (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2015), p.17.

⁴² Christine Dualé, 'L'émergence de la pensée féminine et féministe antillaise: Des soeurs Nardal à Suzanne Roussi Césaire', *Africultures* (26th November 2014) <<http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=12564>> [accessed 16th December 2014].

⁴³ Other literary female figures of the time are Mayotte Capécia, Michèle Lacrosil and Suzanne Lacascade. Mayotte Capécia is the better known of this group of women writers, for though little is known of her, her work was severely critiqued by Frantz Fanon as 'white-washing' in his seminal work *Peau noire, masques blancs*. See Frantz Fanon, 'Chapitre II: La femme de couleur et le blanc', *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), pp 53-70.

The term 'race' here is used in its historical-cultural context. The definition of race used by the Nardals and the *Négritude* generation is the same used by colonial and scientific discourses from the 17th to the 19th centuries, which divide human beings into racial categories. Nardal's concept of 'Race consciousness' therefore revolves around the idea of 'blackness', a recognition of the history of exploitation of Africans by Western colonialism, and the consequent reclaiming of black identity and culture. However by using these Western racist categorisations *Négritude* problematically adheres to the 'admission of the word into our language and so into the discourse [that] enables and encourages us to will the sense of natural difference into our formulation.' (Ellis Cashmore, ' "Race" as signifier' in Ellis Cashmore, and Michael Banton, James Jennings, Barry Troyna and Pierre L. Van Den Berghe, et al., *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 299).

It is now widely accepted by current scholarship that 'social races are *not* genetically bounded species' and that 'not all societies recognize social races [and] where social races exist, there is invariably an attribution of social and behavioural importance to physical matters.' The second-wave recognize discrimination on racial terms, yet fight against the potency the word acquires through its inclusion in social and cultural discourses. (Pierre L. van den Berghe, ' "Race" as synonym' *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*, p. 298).

Négritude'.⁴⁴ As for Suzanne Césaire, she was more directly involved in *Négritude*. Her analysis of Surrealism, and the ways in which it could be applied to articulate the Martinican experience, are central to the shaping of a *Négritude* literary aesthetic. Her virulent anti-colonial stance is also noteworthy. Yet, despite her seminal role as one of the co-founders and co-editors, along with Aimé Césaire, Aristide Maugée, and René Ménénil, of the journal *Tropiques*, published by and for members of the *Négritude* movement (fourteen volumes between April 1941 and September 1945), Suzanne Césaire's work has only recently been acknowledged by *Négritude* and Césairean scholarship.⁴⁵ Her husband's achievements and career eclipsed her own for several decades, her premature death at the age of fifty-one compounding the neglect she already suffered.

The generation that succeeded the Césaires, the women writers who emerged from the Antilles in the second-half of the twentieth century, or the 'second wave', share with early twentieth-century women writers the urge to write about issues relating to the Antillean woman and the woman writer's experience, in order to, as Maryse Condé put it, illustrate 'la difficulté d'être femme et Antillaise à un moment de notre histoire.'⁴⁶ These 'difficulties' could range from engaging in cultural and social movements while negotiating a Caribbean and female identity, to exploring issues of

⁴⁴ Marie-Agnès Sourieau, 'La Revue du Monde Noir (1931-1932)', *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*, ed. by Verity Smith (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), p. 453.

⁴⁵ René Ménénil (1907-2004) : Martinican philosopher and essayist, considered one of the important Martinican thinkers alongside Césaire, Fanon and Glissant. He also collaborated in *Revue du Monde Noir/ The Review of the Black World*, discussed below, and was one of the three co-founders of *Légitime Défense* in 1932.

Aristide Maugée (1913-1967): Martinican activist and writer who also contributed to Césaire's and Senghor's *L'Étudiant Noir* in the 1930s; mayor of Gros-Morne in Martinique from 1959 to 1967. Daniel Maximin published a new edition of all Suzanne Césaire's work: *Suzanne Roussi-Césaire: Le Grand camouflage. Écrits de dissidence* (1941 - 1945), (Paris: Seuil, 2009).

For more on the Nardals and Suzanne Césaire, see Bibliography.

⁴⁶ Maryse Condé, 'La littérature féminine en Guadeloupe: recherche d'identité', *Présence Africaine* 3.99-100 (1976), 155-166, p. 166.

gender. This first section will seek to demonstrate the links between first and second waves of women writers.

I.1 The First Wave: Suzanne Césaire and the Nardal Sisters

‘Je ne comprends pas pourquoi la Négritude a besoin de tant de pères. Un proverbe africain me vint à l'esprit : en Afrique, nous ne connaissons pas nos pères, mais nous connaissons nos mères.’

Léon Gontran-Damas⁴⁷

A survey of studies of twentieth-century Caribbean women's writing leaves the impression that women's writing in the Caribbean was ignored (in both senses of the term ‘ignorée’: unknown and snubbed) for two reasons: (i) anti-colonial and civil rights movements did not provide a platform for gender issues, and (ii) these women writers harboured ideas that called into question the theories of their male counterparts. Christine Dualé compares the experience of Antillean female activists and artists to that of African American women, and identifies similarities between the two. The absence of recognition of a female specificity within racial politics, the non-acknowledgement of racial difference within gender struggles were concerns that ‘les noires américaines’ and ‘les intellectuelles antillaises’ shared. Black American women ‘ne purent jamais se ranger aux côtés des suffragettes blanches dans la lutte pour l'égalité [car] seules les femmes étaient blanches et seuls les Noirs étaient hommes, seule l'expérience des femmes blanches fut prise en compte.’⁴⁸ Antillean women ‘furent ensuite confrontées exactement aux mêmes écueils, car dans leur lutte contre l'impérialisme et le colonialisme, les intellectuels qui les entouraient ne firent finalement que reproduire les mêmes schémas des intellectuels dont ils s'inspiraient, et ils marginalisèrent ainsi le rôle de ces femmes engagées.’⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Keith Warner, *Critical Perspectives on Léon-Gontran Damas* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents, 1988), p. 24.

⁴⁸ Dualé, ‘L'émergence de la pensée féminine et féministe antillaise’.

⁴⁹ Dualé, ‘L'émergence de la pensée féminine et féministe antillaise’.

The contributions of Caribbean women thinkers such as the Nardal sisters and Suzanne Roussi Césaire to early twentieth-century black movements brought questions of gender into the debate on social and racial concerns. Through this gendered lens they also first articulated an idea of race consciousness and of the ways in which a universal blackness might be related to specific experiences of the Caribbean individual, woman in particular. Yet, this emphasis on the female experience did not preclude a more general reflection on black diasporic and Caribbean experiences. The Nardals' thinking on black internationalism and race consciousness, and Suzanne Roussi Césaire's work on Caribbean identity and Surrealist poetry, mark them out as forerunners of movements such as *Négritude* and *Antillanité*. Though not recognized by their contemporaries, their ideas and writings constitute a *proto-Négritude*, an early body of ideas on blackness and the status of black people that resurface in the works of Senghor, Damas, and Césaire. Being Antillean, they also develop the Caribbean dimension of black consciousness, stressing the particularities of the experiences of each group within the black diaspora, a diaspora welded together by the common experience of slavery, deportation, and migration. This brings into question what T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting identifies as 'the masculinist genealogy constructed by the poets [of *Négritude*] and shored up by literary historians, critics, and Africanist philosophers [that] continues to elide and minimize the presence and contributions of black women, namely their Francophone counterparts, to the movement's evolution.'⁵⁰

Inspired by the Harlem Renaissance in the United States, members of which frequented their literary salons in the 1920s, the Nardal sisters explored the concept of

⁵⁰ T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, 'Femme négritude: Jane Nardal, *La Dépêche africaine*, and the Francophone New Negro', *Souls* 2.4 (Autumn 2000), 8-17, p. 10.

universal blackness, which is outlined in the manifesto of the bilingual journal *La Revue du monde noir/The Review of the Black World* (1931-1932), co-founded by Paulette Nardal. The manifesto concludes with the hope that ‘the Negro race will contribute, along with thinking minds of other races and with all those who have received the light of the truth, beauty and goodness, to the material, the moral and the intellectual improvement of humanity.’⁵¹ Jane Nardal’s black internationalism laid out in an article entitled ‘L’internationalisme noir’ in *La Dépêche africaine*, (1928), later developed by Paulette Nardal in ‘Awakening of Race Consciousness’ (1932), was open to a dialogue between cultures inspired by the dual-consciousness of *africanité* and *latinité* that shaped the Nardals’ Antillean identity.⁵² Awareness and celebration of one’s African ‘roots’, or *africanité*, was key to the acceptance of one’s identity, but the expression and exploration of the potential of black culture was to be found in ‘Latin’ culture or *latinité*. Jane Nardal wrote:

Si le nègre veut être lui-même, affirmer sa personnalité, ne pas être la copie de tel ou tel type d’une autre race [...] il ne s’ensuit pourtant pas qu’il devienne résolument hostile à tout apport d’autre race.⁵³

Paulette went further in lauding the contribution of ‘white’ culture to the awakening of black consciousness: ‘We are fully conscious of our debts to the Latin culture and we have no intention of discarding it in order to promote I know not what return to ignorance.’⁵⁴ This warning against ‘ignorance’ could be taken as an anticipated critique of some of the *Négritude* writers’ tendencies to idealize African ‘roots’, which Condé seventy years later criticizes as erasing ‘any blemishes such as domestic

⁵¹ *La Revue du monde noir/The Review of the Black World. 1931-1932 Collection complète*, pref. by Louis-Thomas Achille, vols.1-6 (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992), p. 3. [The citations refer to the English pages of this bilingual edition].

⁵² Jane Nardal, ‘L’internationalisme noir’, *La Dépêche africaine* (15th February 1928); Paulette Nardal, ‘Éveil de la Conscience de Race/Awakening of Race Consciousness’, *La Revue du monde noir*, pp. 343-349.

⁵³ Jane Nardal, ‘L’internationalisme noir’, *La Dépêche africaine* (15th February 1928), cited in Dualé, ‘L’émergence de la pensée féminine et féministe antillaise’.

⁵⁴ Paulette Nardal, ‘Éveil de la Conscience de Race/Awakening of Race Consciousness’, p. 349.

slavery, or tribal warfare and the subjugation of women' from '[e]verything prior to colonization [and consequently] from the image of Africa, the motherland'.⁵⁵

This privileging of the *métissage* of different cultures is also found in the works of Suzanne Roussi Césaire, who applies the tenets of French Surrealism to an exploration of Caribbean identity.⁵⁶ Her celebrated phrase, 'la poésie martiniquaise sera cannibale ou ne sera pas', which mimicks that written by André Breton at the end of his work *Amour fou* (1937) ('la beauté convulsive sera érotique-voilée, explosante-fixe, magique-circonstancielle ou ne sera pas'), prescribes the 'consuming' of all cultures that have shaped Caribbean identity in order to produce a distinctive Martinican literature.⁵⁷ Two decades prior to Glissant's devising of *Antillanité* to articulate the Caribbean experience, Suzanne Césaire argued for a less binary, more universal approach to the formation of Antillean identity. Her writings extolled a transdisciplinary study of mechanisms later to be found in Glissant's own rejection of vertical, 'arrow-like' academic disciplines.⁵⁸

This exploration of *métissage* has in turn been undertaken by the second wave. Suzanne Dracius constructs an 'Afro-Latin' universe in her work, as she associates 'l'Afrique, berceau de l'humanité, ... à l'Antiquité, patrimoine de l'humanité'.⁵⁹ She

⁵⁵ Maryse Condé, 'Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer', *Yale French Studies* 83. 2 *Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadisms* (1993), p. 154.

⁵⁶ *Métissage*: A term derived from the Latin *mixtus* (mixed), used first in Portuguese and Spanish colonial contexts to denote persons of mixed race. Used throughout the colonial periods to (pejoratively) denote the mixing of races, it is now more often used as a theoretical and artistic concept describing the cultural mixing and exchange in contexts such as the Caribbean that have witnessed diverse and numerous interactions between peoples. See François Laplantine and Alexis Nouss, *Métissages: de Arcimboldo à Zombi* (Paris: Pauvert, 2002) and *Le Métissage: Un exposé pour comprendre, Un essai pour réfléchir* (Paris: Téraèdre, 2008).

⁵⁷ Suzanne Césaire, 'Misère d'une poésie', *Tropiques* 1.4 [January 1942], ed. by Aimé Césaire and René Ménil (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1978), 48-50, p. 50.

André Breton, *L'Amour fou* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1937), p. 26.

⁵⁸ Glissant writes: '[t]oute théorie généralisante de l'histoire qui sous-estimerait les redoutables vécus du monde et leurs sautes (leurs impasses possibles) peut constituer piège.' Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p129.

⁵⁹ Axel Artheron, 'Suzanne Dracius: le "carrefour" du théâtre pour se hisser au-dessus du magma de l'humaine marchandise: entretien d'Axel Artheron avec Suzanne Dracius', in *Émergences Caraïbe(s)*, ed. by Chalaye and Bérard, p. 228.

even goes beyond European and African binaries, identifying herself as ‘purely’ Martinican, with the blood of all the peoples who have inhabited the island flowing in her veins. This sense of a multiple heritage is integrated into her *métisse* writing, and establishes a link with Suzanne Césaire who shares a similar notion of identity.⁶⁰

The use of French cultural codes as an instrument for expressing Antillean identity has at times been criticized as ‘assimilationist’: as favouring the specifically French colonialist project of the imposition of French culture on colonized peoples so as to incorporate them into the French empire. The Nardals, who had founded and written in journals that were seen as assimilationist, such as *La Revue du monde noir*, but who also wrote for *La Dépêche africaine* (1928/1932), ‘organe d’économie et de politique colonial’, were particularly susceptible to such a charge.⁶¹ Other, later black journals, such as *Légitime Défense* and *Tropiques*, had a more virulent anti-colonial stance. The perceived lack of political activism on the part of the Nardal sisters is another reason why thinkers of *Négritude* did not identify their works as part of the movement per se, but rather as belonging to a *proto-Négritude*.⁶² However, the lack of a strong anti-colonialist sentiment within this *proto-Négritude* did not diminish the distrust of the French government or French cultural institutions towards a group that, while open to the idea of racial equality and even laudatory of the benefits of French colonialism, praised the cultural achievements of the black race. The adaptation of

⁶⁰ Suzanne Dracius, ‘In Search of Suzanne Césaire’s Garden’, trans. R.H. Mitsch, *Research in African Literatures* 41.1 (Spring 2010), 155-165.

⁶¹ *Archives Nationales d’Outre-mer*, <<http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/ark:/61561/ml790qlksmt>> [accessed 18th April 2015].

⁶² *Légitime Défense* was founded by René Ménénil and Étienne Lérou in 1932 in Paris. Buata Bundu Malela writes that the editors had ‘pour but de marquer leur différence à l’égard de [*La Revue du monde noir*] and preferred ‘[...] les valeurs de l’imagination et du communisme dans sa version marxiste-léniniste’. The journal underlined ‘sur le plan politique’ the aversion the contributors felt towards ‘la bourgeoisie antillaise’ and ‘sur le plan littéraire’ on ‘l’urgence d’une littérature authentiquement antillaise, [qui] néanmoins incline vers les surréalisme de Breton.’ Buata Bundu Malela, *Les Écrivains afro-antillais à Paris (1920-1960) : stratégies et postures identitaires* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2008), pp. 124-125.

French humanism to African diasporic experiences contradicted official assimilationist ideology which claimed a ‘lack of colour prejudice among the French [due] to the fact that they [were] certain to transform the mind of any coloured man into a truly French one in a comparatively short time.’⁶³ The benefits of colonialism could only be understood as unidirectional, and not as an exchange, which is what the thinkers of the Black movements in Paris desired. The Nardals saw the French citizenship that was their birth right as part of their identity. Frenchness was also seen as a cultural tradition through which to define themselves before any exploration of black culture could be undertaken in the twentieth century. Frantz Fanon saw this imposition of a colonizer’s culture as problematic:

Le Noir n’a pas de résistance ontologique aux yeux du Blanc [...] Leur métaphysique, ou moins prétentieusement leurs coutumes et les instances auxquelles elles renvoyaient, étaient abolies parce qu’elles se trouvaient en contradiction avec une civilisation qu’ils ignoraient et qui leur en imposait.⁶⁴

Despite the criticism over their ‘Frenchness’ that was levelled at the Nardal sisters by many anti-colonial Francophone writers, including *Négritude* members such as Césaire and Senghor, the positive contribution of the sisters to *Négritude* and to *La Revue du monde noir* consisted in the conceptualization of French identity as fluctuating, malleable, and capable of encompassing transnational differences and interactions.

The second wave, though embracing this double-identity of Frenchness and Caribbeanness, expresses concerns over the excessive tendency to determine and categorize their work. This has led to certain writers distancing themselves from some of the major tendencies and ‘categories’ associated with Caribbean literature. For instance, Gerty Dambury considers the labels ‘guadeloupéenne’ and ‘antillaise’ to be

⁶³ Paulette Nardal, p. 344.

⁶⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1975), p. 89.

restrictive and discriminatory. She also sees this classification as obscuring the fact that Antilleans share the same interests and concerns with other peoples.⁶⁵ There is an anxiety not to be confined to a single category, for with categorization comes, in Maryse Condé's opinion when discussing *créolité*, 'a cultural terrorism within which writers are confined [and which prevents] individuals from having the relationship they wish to have with West Indian reality.'⁶⁶ What is more, the anxiety surrounding categorization is also reminiscent of the situation of early twentieth-century black women writers in the United States and the Antilles as described by Dualé. Despite sharing common political and ideological views with their male counterparts, the issue of nationalism eclipses other pressing problems related to class and gender. These problems are not only confined to the national scale, they are universal, necessitating an awareness of cultural and political specificities. Dambury and Condé's statements explicitly demand a quest for a singularity of expression that would embrace the Caribbean experience and the broader universal context with which Caribbeanness shares 'pas mal de problèmes auxquels on est confronté ici.'⁶⁷

For, as Glissant's theory of Relation outlines,

La conjonction des histoires des peuples propose aux poètes d'aujourd'hui une façon nouvelle. La mondialité, si elle se vérifie dans les oppressions et les exploitations des faibles par les puissants, se devine aussi et se vit par les poétiques, loin de toute généralisation.⁶⁸

The ability of the writer ('poète') to articulate these interactions and relations between different peoples is possible by refusing all generalization, as do Dambury and Condé.

⁶⁵ Stéphanie Bérard, "'Mon cheval de bataille est l'intime': Entretien avec Gerty Dambury réalisé par Stéphanie Bérard', *Île en île* (July 2004) <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/paroles/dambury_entretien.html> [accessed 13th January 2015].

⁶⁶ Françoise Pfaff, *Conversations with Maryse Condé* (Lincoln ; London : University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 114.

⁶⁷ Bérard, "'Mon cheval de bataille est l'intime'".

⁶⁸ Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde, Poétique IV* (Paris, Gallimard, 1997), p. 176.

Though they write from a local and personal perspective, their plays explore the multiple levels of universality present in these localized situations.

Embracing both Caribbean singularity and the universality of experience is also the ambition of Jane Nardal's 'L'internationalisme noir' (1923):

Être Afro-Américain, être Afro-Latin cela veut dire être un encouragement, un réconfort, un exemple pour les noirs d'Afrique en leur montrant que certains bienfaits de la civilisation blanche ne conduisent pas forcément à renier sa race.⁶⁹

Despite the assimilationist undertones of this statement, open to criticism on the grounds of what Fanon saw as the subjection of the black race and the inequality of racial politics, Nardal's words may be read as attempting to articulate a universalist convergence and dialogue between races and cultures. This can be read in conjunction with Aimé Césaire's questioning of the universalism of certain Western political movements in his 1956 *Lettre à Maurice Thorez*:

Ma conception de l'universel est celle d'un universel riche de tout le particulier, riche de tous les particuliers, approfondissement et coexistence de tous les particuliers [...] il nous faudra avoir la patience de reprendre l'ouvrage, la force de refaire ce qui a été défait ; la force d'inventer au lieu de suivre ; la force 'd'inventer' notre route et de la débarrasser des formes toutes faites, des formes pétrifiées qui l'obstruent.⁷⁰

As for Suzanne Césaire's writings on Martinican identity and culture, they contain a clear critique of the concept of the universalist and unilateral 'influence' of French culture on its colonies. In a similar way to Glissant's focus on the Martinican experience of colonialism and *métissage*, her work provides a theoretical perspective that is focused on Martinique. Indeed, Césaire provides an interesting thesis on the conception of Martinican identity and its place in the world. To her, becoming aware of the cultural diversity that defines Martinican society and integrating it into French society is a means of 'claiming Frenchness for the Martinican [and] showing that

⁶⁹ Jane Nardal, cited in Dualé, 'L'émergence de la pensée féminine et féministe antillaise'.

⁷⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956), p. 15.

France has been irrevocably altered and pluralized by its colonial relationships.⁷¹

Through this reassessment of French identity, the Caribbean is no longer subjected to the physical injury involved in attempting to be assimilated and in mimicking the colonizer; the West Indian feeds back into the West and the metropole. Instead of being a victim of change, Martinican identity becomes an agent of change.⁷²

The (re)insertion of Antillean society into French cultural and political life constitutes a recurrent theme in some of the non-fiction works by Gerty Dambury and Suzanne Dracius. Dambury, in her call for the right to write on universal themes unrestricted to a Caribbean audience, defends this idea of the capacity of the particular to express the universal:

Je sens qu'il est absolument capital que nous soyons, nous Antillais, des êtres humains tout court [...] on est tellement regardé comme étant particuliers, et on se regarde nous-mêmes comme étant particuliers....⁷³

Dracius adds to this by underlining the imbalance between the institutional treatment of overseas French citizens and that of metropolitan citizens:

[The French] condemn us to communalism all the while accusing us of communalism as soon as we try to unite in associations or create a radio program. Even TV. [...] Everybody in France, from the North to the South, can binge on programs from FR3 Alsace or FR3 Brittany, but if you want to follow the Overseas Estates General, you have to pay extra. Yet we pay the same revenues, the same taxes. [...] Full-fledged French, but always completely apart.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Kara M. Rabbitt, 'Suzanne Césaire's Significance for the Forging of a New Caribbean Literature', p. 544.

⁷² In regard to theatre, Aimé Césaire's plays had a similar effect of projecting back to Western audiences the effects of colonialism, as in the case of his plays dealing with colonial history and decolonization, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (1964), *Une saison au Congo* (1967), and *Une tempête*, all performed in France. This is a trait observed by Jean-Michel Serreau, who directed Césaire's plays, in other anti-colonial writers of the 1960s: 'L'humanisme traditionnel qui se voulait éternellement occidental et définitivement occidental se trouve brusquement remis en question par d'autres humanismes; qu'ils soient chinois, bantous, arabes ou américains d'ailleurs, quand je dis américain je pense à l'Amérique du sud. [...] que le français qui a été à la fois la langue de la révolution française et aussi la langue du colonialisme français, que cette langue se transforme à partir de ceux qui en ont subi la terreur et les bienfaits, ça n'est que dans la logique de l'histoire', *À propos du théâtre de Jean-Marie Serreau, En-scènes: le spectacle vivant en vidéo* (30th May 1983), <<http://fresques.ina.fr/en-scenes/fiche-media/Scenes00412/a-propos-du-theatre-de-jean-marie-serreau.html>> [accessed 14th May 2015].

⁷³ Bérard, "Mon cheval de bataille est l'intime".

⁷⁴ Dracius, 'In Search of Suzanne Césaire's Garden', 155-165, p. 156.

The question of unequal opportunities either side of the Atlantic suggested here by Dracius continues to have an impact on the literary production of the French Caribbean. Writers of both the *Négritude* generation and the second wave were obliged to travel from the Antilles to the metropole in order to make themselves known, to be published, and also so as to exchange ideas and collaborate creatively with other artists and thinkers of the black diaspora and beyond. Nevertheless, certain writers in each wave have attempted to pursue a writing and publishing career while based in the Antilles: *Tropiques* was published in Martinique, and Suzanne Roussi Césaire pursued her writing career in Martinique during the Second World War at a period when her fellow *Tropiques* editors worked against the Vichy regime in metropolitan France. Decades later, Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, Gerty Dambury, and Suzanne Dracius all produced theatre in their homelands, and attempted to make it accessible to as wide an audience as possible. The writers of both waves have been conscious of the differences between French metropolitan culture and Antillean culture, and have promoted dialogue between these cultures, while insisting on their status as French citizens with the concomitant rights and opportunities that are their due.

I.2 Comparing First- and Second-Wave Antillean Women Writers

There are numerous Caribbeans writing in the metropole, but only a few have attracted the reading public's or the literary media's attention. Women writers are faced with even greater indifference. For them, there is an additional burden in the quest for publication, or performance in the case of theatre, since they also have to contend with a universalism skewed by a masculinist perspective. Odile Krakovitch writes of feminine cultural production in France:

Dans le champ des 'humanités' traditionnelles (Lettres, Langues, Arts), l'idée même d'une orientation de recherches sur la différence des sexes reste largement taboue: pour comprendre cette situation, il faut sans doute mettre en relation la question du 'genre' et celle de la culture : la culture d'élite est encore aujourd'hui en France l'objet privilégié des études académiques, en particulier celle qui relève d'un universel (masculin) qu'il serait indécemment d'interroger en termes sexués, parce que ce serait faire peser un soupçon sur son universalité même, comme sur le caractère sacré de cette culture.⁷⁵

Another negative factor that links the second wave to the Nardals and Suzanne Césaire is their relative lack of visibility. In talking of early twentieth-century Caribbean women novelists, Maryse Condé sees the tendency to relegate 'to oblivion' these female writers not as a result of a perception of 'their lack of literary skills,' but due to the fact that 'they displease, shock, or disturb.'⁷⁶ Despite these obstacles, Suzanne Césaire and the Nardal sisters are considered pioneers of literary and theoretical movements in their own right. And just like their foremothers, the second-wave writers have taken the ideas of their male counterparts and incorporated them, rejected them, or amended and added to them, producing in each case a distinct style and extensive body of work. Suzanne Césaire virulently opposed the exoticism of many literary works inspired by, or set in, the Caribbean and written by metropolitan French visitors to Martinique and Guadeloupe.⁷⁷ In Maryse Condé's opinion, a similar tendency towards exoticization is to be found in the works of *Négritude* writers who looked to African 'roots' for inspiration. Condé herself visited and lived in Africa for many years, however her experience as a woman negatively affected the ways in which she perceived the idealization of the myth of African origins. Indeed, the idealization of an ancestral or colonial 'motherland' has also shown a tendency to

⁷⁵ Odile Krakovitch and Geneviève Sellier, *L'Exclusion des femmes : masculinité et politique dans la culture au XX^e siècle* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 2001), p. 19.

⁷⁶ Maryse Condé, 'Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer', p. 161.

⁷⁷ See Suzanne Césaire's 'Misère d'une poésie', in which she deconstructs the exotic and stereotypical imagery used by twentieth-century travel writers when writing of the Antilles. 'Misère d'une poésie', *Tropiques* 1.4 (January 1942] (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1978), 48-50.

Paulette Nardal also criticizes the tendency to exoticize one's homeland in the works of nineteenth-century Antillean authors and most famously Alexandre Dumas, in her 'Éveil de la Conscience de Race/Awakening of Race Consciousness', p. 346.

exploit and reify the female body.⁷⁸ Although Suzanne Césaire's writings have not criticized her male counterparts' works directly, her critique of exoticism is one example of how feminine writing may be perceived as 'displeasing', 'disturbing', and 'shocking'.

Addressing issues of femininity also points to wider questions affecting the contemporary social fabric of both waves. Paulette Nardal's closing paragraphs of 'Éveil de la Conscience de Race/Awakening of Race Consciousness', discuss how this awakening occurred in Antillean female students and led to the questioning of established national discourses on race and history by these same women. Indeed, Paulette Nardal's comments anticipate Fanon's reflection on the awakening of blackness in the colonial subject as outlined in *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Nardal describes the lamenting by these students in 1920s Paris of 'the absence of such interesting matters [the history of their race and of their respective countries] in the educational programmes ascribed to the Antillian schools.'⁷⁹ Similarly, Suzanne Dracius's criticism of the absence of Antillean history in the French national curriculum is reminiscent of early twentieth-century female Antillean students' interrogation of established historical narrative; the questioning and reclaiming of history being one of the major common themes shared by both women *Négritude* writers and the subsequent wave. In an observation that echoes Albert Memmi on the education of the colonized child, Suzanne Dracius, in her Preamble to her historical play *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, laments the lack of Antillean historical figures in the 'programmes d'enseignement':

⁷⁸ In Chapter Three and Four the links between exoticization and gendered stereotypes are discussed further.

⁷⁹ Paulette Nardal, p. 348.

Le ‘Connais-toi toi-même’ socratique [...] brûle-t-on d’envie de leur souffler, quand on constate que même de jeunes Antillais cultivés connaissent mieux la ‘Pucelle d’Orléans’ que Lumina Sophie dite Surprise, qui, elle aussi, à peine sortie de l’adolescence, a pris les armes pour défendre son idéal [...] Pourquoi aller chercher si loin dans le temps et l’espace, jusqu’au fin fond du Moyen-Âge, jusqu’aux confins de la Lorraine, ce que l’on a tout près de chez soi? Lumina est martiniquaise, elle vécut il n’y a pas deux siècles.⁸⁰

Much like Dracius’s salvaging of Antillean revolutionary and cultural memory through the retelling of stories of local martyrs and heroes, and heroines in particular, Nardal and her fellow students turned towards figures of Black American and Black Caribbean Literature in their studies to counteract the neglect by official academic curricula of segments of their cultural history.⁸¹

Even when second-wave writers do not associate themselves readily with any specific category of Caribbean creation, their concern with women’s issues and gender relations is always to the fore in their work. In the case of Suzanne Dracius, her feminism takes the form of political activism in public life. She takes a strong feminist stance in all her works and in her interventions on social media.⁸² As Yolande Aline Helm points out:

Suzanne Dracius propose une mythologie de l’héroïne antillaise, qu’elle soit une petite da (Léona) ; une guerrière (Lumina Sophie dite Surprise) ; une jeune femme chevauchant une virago ; une écorchée ; une amoureuse ; une écrivaine...une voix collective qui dénonce, aime, se bat et jamais ne tombe...⁸³

⁸⁰ Suzanne Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Fort-de-France : Éditions Desnel, 2005), p. 43. Memmi writes of the colonized child: ‘La mémoire qu’on lui constitue n’est sûrement pas celle de son peuple. L’histoire qu’on lui apprend n’est pas la sienne. Il sait qui fut Colbert ou Cromwell, mais non qui fut Khaznadar; qui fut Jeanne d’Arc, mais non El Kahena. Tout semble s’être passé ailleurs que chez lui...’, Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Petite bibliothèque Payot, 1973), pp. 133-134.

⁸¹ Paulette Nardal, pp. 345-346.

⁸² She is known to post on her social media pages in reaction to certain news items in opposition to misogyny and sexism the declaration ‘Au nez et à la barbe barbare des obscurantistes de tout poil, petit memento pérenne, incantatoire, propitiatoire’ followed by a poem ‘Sentir le vent dans sa chevelure’, a poem about girls’ and women’s rights from her anthology *Déictique féminité insulaire* (Paris : Idem, 2014, pp. 79-80).

See Suzanne Dracius, *Suzanne Dracius écrivain(e) – Posts* <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1413368368706837&id=227232170653802> [accessed 27 April 2017]

⁸³ Yolande Aline Helm, ed., *Métissages et marronnages dans l’œuvre de Suzanne Dracius* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 2009), p. 10.

A ‘da’ is a term of African origin used to describe the black nanny or servant of rich white or mulatto families in the Antilles.

Issues of gender and the status of women in the Antilles are also integral to the portrayal of dynamics between male and female characters in the plays of Césaire, Condé, and Dambury. This predominance of women's issues merits deeper analysis, as Krakovitch's critique of the status of, or rather the absence of, a gendered perspective in Humanities research in France has already shown.⁸⁴

There was a tendency among Western female theatre practitioners in the 1970s and 1980s in order to gain acceptance in mainstream theatre to shy away from an association with 'la notion d'un théâtre de femme' that focussed on women's or feminist issues.⁸⁵ As previously mentioned, the second wave whilst also aware of the need for a universalist dimension has neither minimized nor marginalized the importance of women's issues. Dracius claims to be '[a]lways feminine, sometimes feminist', and sees 'no clash, adhering to a *double-marronnage* – as a Martinican who writes and as a woman who writes...'⁸⁶ Awareness of gender issues is what makes this wave distinctive when considering the field of Caribbean and African women writers, and also foregrounds the issue of women in theatre in France.

As can be seen from this comparison of experiences of the two waves of women writers, an extensive study of their works may lead not only to the raising of issues

⁸⁴ Krakovitch and Sellier, *L'Exclusion des femmes*.

⁸⁵ This reluctance to embrace a 'théâtre de femmes' is still felt today, notably and perhaps curiously by established French women theatre practitioners such as Ariane Mnouchkine (director of the Théâtre du Soleil) or Bérangère Janelle, the latter expressing her distaste for 'la notion de théâtre de femmes' which she finds to be: ' [...] assez déplaisante et je préfère défendre ma légitimité de créatrice autrement ... Car la nature de l'artiste est dans son œuvre, donc dans son universalité. Elle est transgenre comme on dirait transnationale. Néanmoins, les femmes ont à réfléchir sur cette différence parce qu'elles sont minoritaires au théâtre alors que dans la danse, de grands noms de chorégraphes viennent immédiatement à l'esprit : Pina Bausch, Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker...' Emmanuelle Bouchez, 'Au théâtre, les femmes font école'.

These women theatre-makers embrace the universal dimension of their works, often out of necessity, as the theatre industry remains discriminatory towards women and suspicious of 'feminist' tendencies. For a study of the experience of female theatre professionals and the obstacles they face, see Josette Féral's book: *Mise en scène et jeu de l'acteur: Entretiens. Tome III: Voix de Femmes* (Montréal: Éditions Québec Amérique, 2007).

⁸⁶ Dracius, 'In Search of Suzanne Césaire's Garden', 155-165, p. 156.

related to the condition of women, but also to a consideration of the issues of memory and history, and how these shape contemporary Caribbean societies.

II The Second Wave of Female Antillean Playwrights

The second wave share with early twentieth-century female Antillean writers concerns about the impact of the complex and contradictory Franco-Antillean relationship on their artistic production, about the establishing of links between universal problems and local questions, and about contemporary social issues, notably in regard to Antillean youth and women. The second-wave writers explore these problems in their theatrical work. Writing theatre as a Caribbean woman writer, the writers embrace as subjects, or are effectively subject to, a type of *triple-marronnage*. *Triple-marronnage* extends Suzanne Dracius's aforementioned concept of *double-marronnage* further so as to add theatre-making to the difficult combination of being a Caribbean woman and Caribbean writer.

Theatre is a genre that each writer recognizes as suffering, in the Antilles, from a lack of both audience interest and resources, but which remains an art form they practise despite such negativity and wish to see thrive in their homeland. Theatre in the Antilles has experienced an evolution different to that of the performing arts in metropolitan France. This divergence is due primarily to the fact that politics has been imbricated in the art form since its revival in the region in the 1950s by Aimé Césaire. After the Second World War, France embarked on a theatrical decentralization (*décentralisation théâtrale*), one of the most important cultural policies in twentieth-century French history. Decentralization was motivated by theatre practitioners and the post-war cultural ministry's desire to democratize theatre and encourage challenging artistic and political production across the country. Theatres, institutions,

and festivals founded during that time remain cornerstones of French theatre culture.⁸⁷ In the 1960s, during the high tide of decolonization, Aimé Césaire wrote and encouraged the writing of a theatre that re-explored Antillean and black history, focussing on the stories of previously colonized and/or enslaved peoples. The theatre drew on local oral traditions as well as traditional French theatre codes. Césaire's own plays were performed in the decentralized theatres in France as well as in the Antilles, projecting back to the metropole Antillean and African colonial and postcolonial experiences. While the Antilles, Guyana, and other French overseas territories were not directly concerned by decolonization, theatrical decentralization nevertheless granted increased autonomy to produce dramatic works reflecting on anticolonial struggles.

Between the 1970s and the 1980s decentralization reached Martinique with the founding of the Office Municipal d'Action Culturelle in 1971 (which later became the SERMAC, Service Municipal d'Action Culturelle in 1975), the opening of the CMAC (Centre Martiniquais d'Action Culturelle) in 1974, and the inauguration of the Festival de Fort-de-France in 1971 which privileged the development of performing arts in Martinique, and opened up Antillean theatre to international performance traditions. In Guadeloupe, theatre did not experience as extensive a development as in Martinique until the 1990s with the founding of l'Artchipel, a *scène nationale*, a theatre funded by the French Ministry for Culture; the CMAC also enjoys this status. Plays were performed in centres not exclusively dedicated to theatre, such as the CAC

⁸⁷ For more information on the *décentralisation théâtrale*, see *La Décentralisation théâtrale*, ed. by Robert Abirached (Arles : Actes Sud Papiers, 1992-1995) ; Sidonie Han, 'Les politiques culturelles de l'après-guerre à aujourd'hui : la décentralisation remise en cause' *En-scènes: le spectacle vivant en vidéo* <<http://fresques.ina.fr/en-scenes/parcours/0023/les-politiques-culturelles-de-l-apres-guerre-a-aujourd-hui-la-decentralisation-remise-en-cause.html#anchor55>> [accessed 1st June 2015] and Michèle Zancarini Fournel, 'De la décentralisation culturelle à la globalisation, Lumières sur Rhône-Alpes', <<http://fresques.ina.fr/rhone-alpes/parcours/0003/de-la-decentralisation-culturelle-theatrale-a-la-globalisation.html#anchor30>> [accessed 1st June 2015].

(Centre des Arts et de la Culture) founded in 1978. The visits of major theatre figures of the second half of the twentieth-century (Jean-Marie Serreau, Ariane Mnouchkine, Wole Soyinka) also permitted a transcultural exploration of theatre practice.⁸⁸ The politicization of theatre, particularly with the development of Creole language theatre, has often resulted in a theatre focused on social problems. Therefore, questions of form and aesthetics have tended to take a secondary place. This is by no means a disadvantage, for the *métissée* culture of the Antilles provides a wealth of inspiration for theatre practitioners. An administrative decentralization in the 1980s launched under the left-wing Mitterand government allowed for further development of infrastructures, whereby ‘en les dotant d’universités et de centres de formation professionnelle, la République ne brandit plus l’arme de l’assimilation à tout prix et encourage les multiples facettes des cultures locales.’⁸⁹ However, due to wavering audience numbers, and difficulties in funding, aspiring and established theatre practitioners are often obliged to travel between their homeland and the metropole for training and employment opportunities.⁹⁰

The second wave writers’ opinions on the future of the theatre converge, as they have witnessed similar consequences of the decentralization of theatre, the founding

⁸⁸ Jean-Marie Serreau (1915-1973): French director who was one of the first theatre practitioners to introduce the work of Bertolt Brecht to France. He directed plays by a range of writers from Eugène Ionesco to Samuel Beckett, as well as African and black writers such as Aimé Césaire and Kateb Yacine, and was the head of the Théâtre de Babylone (1952) and the Théâtre de Lutèce (1951-1961), and founder of the Théâtre de la Tempête in 1971.

Ariane Mnouchkine (1939—): French director and co-founder of the Théâtre du Soleil in the 1960s, a company whose visually spectacular productions are based on collectiveness and intercultural collaborations.

Wole Soyinka (1934—): Nigerian writer and activist who received the Nobel prize in 1986. His plays offer political criticism of colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

⁸⁹ Bernard Droz, *Histoire de la décolonisation au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), p. 292.

⁹⁰ For a more detailed overview of the development of Antillean cultural institutions and theatres, see Stéphanie Bérard, ‘Panorama sur l’archipelisme théâtral de la Caraïbe’ and ‘Petite histoire du théâtre francophone et créolophone: de la scène coloniale aux dramaturgies antillaises contemporaines’, in *Émergences Caraïbe(s)*, ed. by Chalaye and Bérard, pp. 14-23, pp. 24-29, and Bridget Jones, ‘French Caribbean (Overview)’, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre 2 The Americas*, ed. by Don Rubin and Carlos Solórzano (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 276-285.

of theatres and institutions such as the Centre Dramatique Régional de la Martinique (CDRM) and l'Artchipel in Guadeloupe, which aims to offer training for future generations of theatre practitioners. The politics of Antillean theatre also resound in the content of their plays, which display a desire for social change and artistic innovation within Antillean theatrical production. Insight into each writer's understanding of the theatre in their homeland may elucidate how this affects their respective theatrical creative practices.

Ina Césaire is from a family that has been heavily involved in the theatre, from Aimé Césaire's ground-breaking historical and political plays, to Suzanne Césaire's lost play *Youma, aurore de la liberté* 'jouée avec des jeunes de Fort-de-France, dont nulle trace n'a été jusqu'ici retrouvée'.⁹¹ Michèle Césaire, Ina's sister, went to drama school in France and has written, directed, and performed in several productions. She is also the director of the Théâtre Aimé Césaire in Fort-de-France. It is little surprise therefore that Ina Césaire, despite her career as an ethnologist, is the most prolific playwright of all authors studied here, with twenty-four plays to date. Maryse Condé has over her career written fourteen plays, all of which were performed in the United States, the Caribbean, and hexagonal France. There is a hiatus between plays written by Condé in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recent plays written and performed in the 2000s. This is explained by her having an 'expérience au théâtre [...] pas très heureuse', which meant she had not 'réussi au theatre', brought about by the combined disappointments of the language barrier between her audience and her plays, and recent productions of which Condé disapproved the aesthetic choices.⁹² Gerty Dambury is after Ina Césaire the most prolific playwright studied here. Unlike

⁹¹ Daniel Maximin, 'Suzanne Césaire, Fontaine Solaire', p. 24.

⁹² Maryse Condé, in an interview with the author, Gordes, France, 20th February 2016.

Césaire and Condé, for whom playwriting is not their primary occupation, Dambury is a full-time theatre professional, and has written fifteen plays, performed in the Antilles and in France. She has also benefitted from writing residencies in France and Canada. Suzanne Dracius's only theatrical work, written in the 1980s, shows the importance of theatre to Antillean culture. Her experience of theatre on both sides of the Atlantic spurred her to write the play *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (1996).

II.1 On Antillean Theatre

II.1.i Theatre, Language, and Class

Despite Aimé Césaire's extensive efforts to revolutionize and democratize theatre in the Antilles from the 1950s onwards, there still exists a dichotomy between 'high' and 'low' theatre; arbitrary boundaries that are symptomatic of social constructs and segregation. According to authors Ina Césaire and Suzanne Dracius, the Antillean public's (mis)conception of theatre as mainly composed of comedic, low, and vulgar forms of entertainment has led to the under-performance and scant popularity of theatre in the Antilles. For them, the divide between 'bourgeois' and 'popular' theatre is problematic and emphasizes a division within society. For Dracius, the democratization of 'high' theatre is achievable:

[L]e peuple martiniquais s'intéresse au théâtre comme dans toutes les provinces de France, on a un théâtre populaire, mais le public martiniquais mérite mieux que ce théâtre clownesque [et a] besoin de sortir de l'alternative entre théâtre 'local' purement populaire et théâtre français ou étranger prestigieux.⁹³

The idolization of certain Western forms and the dismissal of comedy, often related to local story-telling traditions (*conte*) and therefore integral to Antillean culture, is misguided in Ina Césaire's opinion:

...on a essayé d'opposer le théâtre dit 'intellectuel' et le théâtre dit 'populaire'. Or Brecht, qu'est-ce que c'est si ce n'est pas un théâtre populaire? Et Molière? Un théâtre peut être à

⁹³ Artheron, 'Suzanne Dracius: le "carrefour" du théâtre', p. 228.

la fois amusant et intelligent!⁹⁴

To create a theatre that is ‘amusant et intelligent’, Dracius, Dambury, and the Césaires incorporate elements of ‘intellectual’ theatre into popular forms. Dracius applies her training in Classical studies to her theatrical writing by using elements of ancient Greek theatre. For example, she introduces a Greek-style chorus and chorus leader or Coryphaeus in her play *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (1996). And Ina Césaire uses elements of baroque theatre such as stock characters, and a fusion of music, dance, and song. Dambury borrows double-acts and surrealist situations from the Absurd theatre of the twentieth century. Pandering to the popular taste for farcical situations, the writers apply at times a comedic tone to their plays that dissimulates a deeper and more disturbing message regarding contemporary issues. Instead of attempting to confront a Guadeloupean with ‘un problème de fond qu’il connaît, qu’il vit, sur un mode grave’ which is ‘rare’, as Condé asserts, the writers pose the questions in a lighter, comical mode.⁹⁵ Yet, the social purpose of theatre is not reducible to comedy and popular forms, as the aesthetic sophistication of many of the plays attests; witness Ina Césaire’s references to Molière and Bertolt Brecht. Brecht’s practice supports the idea that an innovative form of audience-friendly theatre that sets out to subvert traditional dramatic construction so as to question social formations may be equally socially and aesthetically revolutionary. In a similar way, Molière’s plays written for a bourgeois and aristocratic audience were nevertheless a form of searing social critique inspired by the genres performed by travelling theatre companies of the sixteenth to

⁹⁴ Christiane Makward and Adam John, ‘Avec Ina Césaire, le 22 juillet 1999’, ‘Faire son théâtre en Martinique: Ina Césaire et Michèle Césaire’, *Œuvres et critiques* 26.1 *Théâtre noir francophone* (2001), p. 116.

⁹⁵ Stéphanie Bérard, ‘Le théâtre aux Antilles a toujours souffert d’être un parent pauvre: entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec Maryse Condé’, in *Émergences Caraïbe(s)*, ed. by Chalaye and Bérard, pp. 30-33, p. 31.

eighteenth centuries.⁹⁶ And Maryse Condé admits to writing plays that ‘[agressent] doucement [le spectateur guadeloupéen] en leur présentant une image peut-être qu’il n’aime pas du tout ou qu’il n’est peut-être pas prêt de recevoir’.⁹⁷

This dichotomy between farcical popular theatre and highbrow middle-class Western plays is exacerbated by language, namely the use of Creole in the popular styles and French in ‘sophisticated’ plays. The use of language is closely related to class as Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux explains in her analysis of Creole language theatre and its use of different character-specific linguistic registers:

On retrouve là, clairement manifestées dans le théâtre créole, les représentations classiques de ces sociétés qui envisagent le français comme une langue noble : s’expriment naturellement en français les personnages de la bourgeoisie, et tous les personnages, y compris ceux des milieux populaires, dans certaines circonstances [...] S’expriment en créole le petit peuple, mais également les bourgeois quand ils s’adressent à leur bonne, ou chaque fois que l’auteur veut souligner qu’ils sont bien ‘créoles’.⁹⁸

Many plays produced after the 1960s, mainly by anti-colonial political groups, do include Creole, at once as a reminder of the cultural bilingualism of the Antilles, and as a political stance against assimilationist tendencies linked to the Caribbean’s status as a ‘French’ region under metropolitan jurisdiction. However, Ina Césaire’s sister Michèle believes it is time that Creole theatre developed, along with its function as political statement, its aesthetics so as to gain its ‘lettres de noblesse’; ‘lettres’ in this expression also recalling the use of the term ‘Lettres’ to describe Literature or Literary studies.⁹⁹ In order to institute Creole as a language to equal French in richness

⁹⁶ See Chapters 3 and 7 in Alain Viala’s study of European theatre history. Of note is Viala’s locating Molière’s theatre in the development of ‘l’institution nationale du théâtre’ in the 17th century in France, with the founding of theatre houses with repertory companies such as *La Comédie Française*, an institution that remains a cornerstone of French theatre today. ‘Chapitre III: L’institution du théâtre dans la première modernité’, and ‘Chapitre VII: Omniprésence du théâtre aujourd’hui’, Alain Viala, *Histoire du théâtre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014), pp. 46-64, pp. 104-118.

⁹⁷ Maryse Condé, interview with the author, Gordes, France, 20th February 2016.

⁹⁸ Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux, ‘Le théâtre créolophone dans les départements d’outre-mer. Traduction, adaptation, contacts de langues’, *L’Annuaire théâtral : revue québécoise d’études théâtrales* 28 (2000), p. 32.

⁹⁹ Christiane Makward and Adam John, ‘Entretien avec Michèle Césaire, 23 juillet 1999’, ‘Faire son théâtre en Martinique: Ina Césaire et Michèle Césaire’, *Œuvres et critiques* 26.1 *Théâtre noir francophone* (2001), p. 112.

and complexity, the writers identify the need for a bilingual Creole-French theatre. Condé justifies this choice of bilingualism as favouring the democratization of theatre: ‘Il faut que se joue le théâtre du plus grand nombre. Le théâtre créolophone a donc une très grande place et c’est bien’.¹⁰⁰ Bilingualism is applied in the plays of the second wave to portray characters from different classes, or to create a theatrical language that is hybrid and representative of Creole culture. For instance, in Gerty Dambury’s *Trames*, French and Creole are markers of social and generational variations, with different types of French spoken by the characters. Dambury’s use of different languages and linguistic registers articulates the social commentary of her play, particularly in the case of the character of ‘La femme sur le boulevard’, a metropolitan-born Guadeloupean who returns to Guadeloupe to make a living and finds herself in an abusive relationship. She embodies, for Dambury, ‘ces jeunes qui sont nés en France et qui rentrent espérant trouver quelque chose mais qui ne retrouvent pas les repères qu’ils espèrent [et] se retrouvent donc dans la rue’.¹⁰¹ This anonymous woman is inspired by a similar figure whose voice Dambury once overheard one night in a street in Pointe-à-Pitre, ‘un personnage de femme [...] et qui n’était pas née en Guadeloupe; j’entendais à sa voix, à son accent qu’elle n’était pas du pays tout en étant noire sans être née là.’¹⁰² Hence this character, ‘PAS D’ICI ... MAIS [...] UN PEU DE CHEZ EUX QUAND MÊME’, whose voice is heard in a recording in the play, has a ‘metropolitan’ French accent and does not speak Creole:

¹⁰⁰ Bérard, ‘Le théâtre aux Antilles a toujours souffert d’être un parent pauvre’, p. 31.

¹⁰¹ Stéphanie Bérard, ‘Gerty Dambury: L’espace qui nous habite: entretien de Stéphanie Bérard, avec Gerty Dambury’, in in *Émergences Caraïbe(s)*, ed. by Chalaye and Bérard, pp. 176-183, p. 179.

¹⁰² Bérard, ‘Gerty Dambury: L’espace qui nous habite’, p. 179.

La femme sur le boulevard [...] IL RÉPÉTAIT EN CRÉOLE... *OU KA PRAN NONM SI MWEN !* TRADUIS. JE NE COMPRENDS PAS TA PUTAIN DE LANGUE. TU N'ES PAS NOIRE ? IL DISAIT, TU N'ES PAS NOIRE ? TU ES UNE NÈGRESSE, FAIS PAS SEMBLANT DE NE PAS COMPRENDRE CE QUE JE TE RACONTE [...] "*AY FOUTÉ FANM-LA DOT KOTÉ*" ... JE SAIS "*FOUTÉ*", ÇA VEUT DIRE BATTRE. MAIS JE TRADUIS FOUTRE. HEIN ! PEUT-ÊTRE QUE FOUTRE ET BATTRE, ÇA PEUT SE RESSEMBLER, EN TOUT CAS, DANS LEUR LANGUE-LÀ, C'EST LA MÊME ... MOI JE NE SUIS PAS D'ICI ... MAIS JE SUIS UN PEU DE CHEZ EUX QUAND MÊME.¹⁰³

The combining of Creole and French plays a crucial role in exploring and voicing social and cultural differences ingrained in contemporary Guadeloupean society.

However, a transposition of French language plays into Creole is an exercise none of these writers wish to attempt, doubtless due to the fact that Antillean speech, as Hazaël-Massieux puts it, is a diglossia with French as 'le pôle haut [high-brow]' and Creole as 'le pôle bas [low-brow]'.¹⁰⁴ Creole, denigrated for social reasons, is in need of heightened exposure. On the other hand, the second wave do adapt Creole styles such as *conte* [storytelling] or song into French. This is a reverse adaptation process that echoes the work of Suzanne Césaire on the creolization of French identity. Ina Césaire has translated Creole *contes* into French, an exercise that aims to transmit the richness, and the literary and performative values of Antillean oral literature. The annual 'Pawol bô kay' theatre festival which ran until the 2000s, organized by the CDRM under the aegis of Michèle Césaire, has been crucial to the legitimization of Creole language theatre, and was instrumental in making the genre known to an international audience. The festival also included plays that are bilingual, and thus representative of Caribbean cultural realities.¹⁰⁵ As well as encouraging the use of Creole in Antillean theatre, and the performance of Creole plays, these writers,

¹⁰³ Gerty Dambury, *Trames* [trilingual edition] (Paris: Éditions du Manguier, 2009), pp. 43-44. [Capitalized in the text]

¹⁰⁴ Hazaël-Massieux, 'Le théâtre créolophone dans les départements d'outre-mer', p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ Makward and John, 'Entretien avec Michèle Césaire', p. 113.

who write in Creole and French, have developed their own theatrical styles through experimentation with both languages.

II.1.ii Writing of and for the ‘petites gens’

The class politics inherent in the linguistic debate surrounding Antillean theatre is also present in the choice of characters in these second-wave writers’ plays. In their works, Carole Edwards explains:

[...] il ne s’agit pas de mettre en scène des personnages historiques mais des personnes banales qui rencontrent les aléas du quotidien et qui s’accommodent tant bien que mal de leurs drames existentiels.¹⁰⁶

These writers focus on ‘ordinary’ characters, unlike the tutelary figures found in Aimé Césaire’s and Édouard Glissant’s plays that portray historical actors such as Toussaint Louverture, the Roi Christophe, or Patrice Lumumba.¹⁰⁷ Ina Césaire claims that she prefers to write characters whose histories she knows intimately, those ‘interrogés pendant plus de vingt ans’.¹⁰⁸ Her plays feature characters drawn from her ethnological research, ‘les petites gens’ or ordinary people, the unsung heroes, ‘ceux auxquels on n’accorde guère la parole et qui n’ont soi-disant rien à dire [qui] ont au contraire beaucoup à dire’.¹⁰⁹

‘Petites gens’ also appear in many of Maryse Condé’s plays. These plays are often minimalistic, and present few characters, which allows for deeper characterization, as the plot often deals with only two or three protagonists. Condé’s plays portray a range of persons, from imprisoned convicts to old women, from

¹⁰⁶ Carole Edwards, ‘Théâtralisation et quête de liberté par procuration chez trois dramaturges antillaises’, *Women in French Studies* Special Issue 5 (2014), p. 185.

¹⁰⁷ Toussaint Louverture in Aimé Césaire’s *Toussaint Louverture : la Révolution française et le problème colonial*. (Paris: Le Club Français du Livre, 1960) [historical essay] and Édouard Glissant’s *Monsieur Toussaint* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986); Christophe from Césaire’s *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963) [play]; and Patrice Lumumba from Césaire’s *Une saison au Congo* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973) [play].

¹⁰⁸ Stéphanie Bérard, ‘De l’enracinement à l’ouverture au monde: entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec Ina Césaire’, in *Émergences Caraïbe(s)*, ed. by Chalaye and Bérard, pp. 147-150, p. 148.

¹⁰⁹ Stéphanie Bérard, ‘De l’enracinement à l’ouverture au monde’, p. 148.

retired cabaret dancers to young doctors. The plays that include older women, such as *La Faute à la vie* (2009), have them reminisce about their pasts, and provide a vision of Caribbean local history. Similar characters feature in Ina Césaire's *Mémoire d'îles*, *Maman N et Maman F* (1983), a dialogue between two old women based on her two decades of work recording testimonials of elderly people in Martinique and Guadeloupe.¹¹⁰ For Ina Césaire, and doubtless for Condé as well, the elderly are 'la mémoire vivante de ces îles', and she uses them as mouthpieces of living history.¹¹¹ Dambury also introduces alternative histories with her introduction of elderly women as well as veterans, or retired factory workers, in her plays. She also includes younger characters, often misguided and unemployed, at odds with their elders. This is a portrayal of a broad spectrum of society, already noticeable in her linguistic choices discussed previously, that draws on different ages and a plethora of experiences.

Gerty Dambury questions the interest of narrating local histories in her play *Trames* (2008), in which the female protagonist transcribes recordings of local women, which are ridiculed and misunderstood by her son.¹¹² Dambury can be said to be interrogating the purpose of examining these testimonials as part of a local oral culture, or at least the ways that they are used in scholarship, as she appears to comment on the fact that Antillean youth are uninterested in such history, and more focused on the present. The question would be how to make these histories, once collected and transcribed, accessible to an audience who would benefit from hearing the experiences described in the testimonials. One of the ways of mediating these

¹¹⁰ First published as *Mémoires d'îles : Maman N. et Maman F.* (Paris : Éditions caribéennes, 1983). First performed at Théâtre du Campagnol, Bagneux, as *Mémoires d'îles : Maman N. et Maman F.*, directed by Jean-Claude Penchenat, with Mariann Mathéus and Myrrha Donzenac (April 1983).

¹¹¹ Île en île, Ina Césaire, *entretien avec Mariette Monpierre*, online video recording *Youtube* (7th February 2014), < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bj4MhY5ftQY> > [accessed 27th March 2015].

¹¹² First published as *Trames/Shades/Sombras* [trilingual edition] (Paris: Éditions du Manguier, 2009). First performance directed by Gerty Dambury, at L'Artchipel, Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, 30th April 2008.

testimonials for a local audience would be through a historical play format, the form adopted by Aimé Césaire's plays on tutelary figures. The aim of Suzanne Dracius's historical play *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* is to present to her audience local, personal, and forgotten histories, and to show how these interact with or question official history. Suzanne Dracius has written an historical play with a female protagonist who may arguably also belong to the category of 'petites gens'. *Lumina Sophie* was written, Dracius explains, to question and rewrite Martinican history, as well as create an Antillean mythology constituted of local, human heroes.¹¹³

Though it may be said that some plays by women writers do not deal with historical events, and prefer to focus on personal and contemporary situations, this does not however preclude the possibility that historical events be discussed as part of a broader reflection on social conditions with which the characters are confronted. The divergent examples of *Mémoires d'île* by Ina Césaire and Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* deal with local Martinican history through the eyes of female characters, be they old women purveyors of the living 'memory' of the Antilles, or a real female historical figure reinstated into Martinican mythology. Ina Césaire and Dracius in their own theatrical styles continue Aimé Césaire's commitment to the telling of obscure or unknown histories.

II.1.iii Crossing Borders and Broadening Horizons

Glissant explains in his *Traité du tout-monde* that 'poets' (in the primary Greek etymological sense of the term *poësis* meaning 'make,' or 'create') possess the creative tools with which to articulate and transmit knowledge of *Relations* between

¹¹³ Dracius insists on the 'humanity' of her heroine, in opposition to the demi-gods of Western classical mythology: 'À l'université, où j'enseignais le latin et la civilisation antique, je parlais de l'étymologie du mot *héros*, qui signifie en grec demi-dieu. [...] J'ai fait de Lumina une héroïne mais pas une héroïne classique : c'est une héroïne de tragédie, elle n'est pourtant ni demi-déesse, ni reine, elle n'a rien d'extraordinaire, *a priori*.' Artheron, 'Suzanne Dracius: le "carrefour" du théâtre', pp. 224-230, p. 226.

cultures and peoples. Aimé Césaire, while writing for an audience of predominantly ‘under-developed’ countries, does not exclude that his plays may resonate with a broader audience, no less the universality of his political agenda as quoted above:

Je persiste à croire que tout ce qui se passe en Afrique doit intéresser les habitants des pays occidentaux. Je ne m’adresse pas qu’à une catégorie d’hommes, et le théâtre, s’il est du bon théâtre, naît dans le particulier, l’individuel, mais aboutit inévitablement à l’universel.¹¹⁴

Antillean theatre professionals have busied themselves with reacquainting their audience with theatre through an interaction with the wider world, socially and culturally. The authors discussed here also take part in this initiative. For Antillean theatre to thrive, it also needs this transcultural dialogue. Ina Césaire herself believes:

Il faut ouvrir le théâtre, ne pas le laisser se cantonner strictement à son petit monde mais aussi que notre monde soit décrit [...] il faut qu’on puisse s’ouvrir sur la Caraïbe et sur le monde entier.¹¹⁵

The ‘discovery’ of foreign and non-Antillean dramatic forms has broadened the theatrical knowledge of the audience. The touring of foreign companies during the Festival de Fort-de-France, and as part of l’Artchipel (Guadeloupe), the Théâtre Aimé Césaire, and Tropiques-Atrium theatre [named after the journal *Tropiques*] (Martinique) season programmes, is also an opportunity for Caribbean theatre to engage in exchanges with drama from other countries. The second-wave writers see in this a pedagogical opportunity to broaden the theatrical horizons of their spectators further. It is also a question of survival, as interaction with other companies and countries may lead to transregional and transnational collaborations, a heightened interest and demand for theatre in the Antilles, a rejuvenation or stimulation of

¹¹⁴ In a debate with Aimé Césaire, Jean-Marie Serreau, and students from H.E.C., Jouy-en-Josas, 6th November 1967, cited in Pierre Laville, ‘Aimé Césaire et Jean-Marie Serreau: un acte politique et poétique: “La tragédie du roi Christophe” et “Une saison au Congo”’, *Les Voies de la création théâtrale 2 Études de Odette Aslan et al.*, ed. by Denis Bablet (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1970), p. 240.

¹¹⁵ Christiane Makward and Adam John, ‘Avec Ina Césaire, le 22 juillet 1999’, ‘Faire son théâtre en Martinique: Ina Césaire et Michèle Césaire’, *Œuvres et critiques 26.1 Théâtre noir francophone* (2001), p. 116.

Caribbean drama, and finally the dissemination of Caribbean theatre abroad through participation in international, Francophone, or French festivals.

Another means of guaranteeing the survival and development of theatre in Martinique and Guadeloupe appears to be its pedagogical purpose, reinforced by the compiling of an historical archive of Antillean theatre. The educative potential of theatre, far from the simplistic and demagogical style used in popular theatre criticized by the second wave, lies in the creation of plays that reach out to a younger audience, respond to their interests, as well as introduce them to often unknown aspects of Antillean society and history. Maryse Condé notes from her experience of Guadeloupean theatre that the most promising audience demographic in terms of audience feedback and interaction relates to primary and secondary school children.¹¹⁶ This is something writers such as Dambury and Dracius seem aware of when they address in their plays issues aiming at engaging with children and adolescents. Their experience teaching in schools and universities in France and the Antilles has provided them with a heightened awareness of those aspects of Antillean local history lacking in their students' curricula in which is taught, according to Dracius, 'l'histoire de France et [niée] l'histoire de la Martinique et de la Guadeloupe'.¹¹⁷ As pedagogues they were also witnesses to social issues affecting their pupils directly. It is these missing aspects of history, and the critical social issues anchored in those histories, that are addressed in their theatrical work. Dambury wrote *Lettres indiennes* (1993) for, and dedicated it to, a secondary school class she taught in another French overseas territory, La Réunion.¹¹⁸ Dracius's objective when writing *Lumina Sophie*

¹¹⁶ Bérard, 'Le théâtre aux Antilles a toujours souffert d'être un parent pauvre', p. 30.

¹¹⁷ Artheron, 'Suzanne Dracius: le "carrefour" du théâtre', p. 227.

¹¹⁸ The published playtext contained a dedication to the 'élèves de Sixième [Year Seven pupils], 1991, du Collège Plateau-Goyaves, La Réunion', Gerty Dambury, *Lettres indiennes* (Paris: Éditions du Manguier, 1993).

was to introduce an historical figure close to Martinican youths, not as distant and alien as Joan of Arc.¹¹⁹ The play was well-received not only by adolescents, but by all generations, including young children, judging by the reaction of a little boy she recalls sitting next to during one of the performances:

Une fois où l'on jouait *Lumina*, j'étais assise près d'un petit garçon inconnu qui riait quand c'était drôle, était aux abois quand c'était palpitant ; à la fin, il m'a révélé qu'il avait appris des tas de choses sur le passé de la Martinique et était heureux d'apprendre l'histoire en rigolant. *Docere ludendo*, instruire en distrayant, que rêver de mieux ?¹²⁰

By exploring subjects that broaden the horizons of younger generations, Dracius thus establishes a rapport between the latter and Antillean theatrical culture, thus promoting rejuvenation and a rekindling of interest in theatre.

Education does not end with the *collège* and the *lycée*, however, and all writers of the second wave seem to agree that theatre culture in the Caribbean must be fostered through theatrical training: acting, directing, playwriting, and set design. This is particularly the case for playwriting, which provides material with which actors and directors may explore and engage with their own culture. When Ina Césaire was discussing the evolution of Martinican drama (1999), the need for a framework with which to contain the rapid development of the art form in the Antilles and train new writers, actors, and directors initiated into the tradition, was felt to be necessary. The institutions, founded during the periods of theatrical and administrative decentralization, provided this by establishing training courses for professional actors, directors, and writers. However, with few resources available to fund theatre enterprises in the Antilles, as well as the appeal of established and sponsored theatre schools in the metropole, the availability of such training courses remains limited. Michèle Césaire points out that this framework also depends on a 'mémoire du

¹¹⁹ 'Quand j'ai demandé aux étudiants de citer une héroïne, ils m'ont répondu 'Jeanne d'Arc' ! Pourquoi aller chercher si loin dans l'espace et le temps ?' Artheron, 'Suzanne Dracius: le "carrefour" du théâtre', p. 226.

¹²⁰ Artheron, 'Suzanne Dracius: le "carrefour" du théâtre', p. 227.

théâtre' of Martinique and Guadeloupe, for there is a tendency, despite the progress of Antillean theatre over the last thirty years, 'd'oublier parce qu'aucun travail de mémoire n'a été fait [...] On repart toujours de rien, du néant!'¹²¹ Several initiatives initiated in the 2000s have begun to put into place a repertory of Caribbean theatre. La Médiathèque Caraïbe [LAMECA] in Basse-Terre has compiled an online register of Guadeloupean and Martinican playwrights, and the institution also holds several manuscripts that are available to consult on site. In 2006, the Compagnie de L'Autre Souffle, based in Paris and led by Jean-Michel Martial, launched the project *Théâtre Caraïbe, le Répertoire* which through a series of publications, productions, and festivals seeks to initiate as wide an audience as possible to Caribbean theatre.¹²² In encouraging the development of this framework, these writers ensure their own legacy together with that of playwrights who preceded them.

Raising awareness of theatre in the Antilles is a means of guaranteeing the development of theatre locally. The writers achieve this through supporting the performance of their plays locally, discussing Antillean theatre abroad at international festivals and conferences, or through documenting the history of Antillean theatre production. Regardless of these obstacles to theatre production, these authors continue to produce theatre, some like Dracius having begun to write drama later than the rest. This shows a persistent belief in the theatre as an ideal medium through which to tackle issues proper to Caribbean society. These writers are also intent on pursuing their careers in dramatic creation on both sides of the Atlantic, privileging neither one

¹²¹ Makward and John, 'Entretien avec Michèle Césaire', p. 115.

¹²² For more on the LAMECA theatre archive, see Laureen Bade, 'La création d'un répertoire du théâtre antillais francophone et créolophone', *LAMECA* (15th September 2015) <http://www.lameca.org/LamecaInfo/repertoire/repertoire_theatre/intro.htm> [accessed 15th March 2017].

For more on the *Théâtre Caraïbe, le Répertoire*, see Alvina Ruprecht 'Théâtre Caraïbe – Le Répertoire : Projet sur la dramaturgie postcoloniale de la Caraïbe', *Critical Stages/ Scènes Critiques* (4th July 2017) <<http://www.critical-stages.org/10/theatre-caraibe-le-repertoire-projet-sur-la-dramaturgie-postcoloniale-de-la-caraibe/>> [accessed 26th July 2017].

region nor the other, as their *métisse* styles, combining languages and high and low theatrical genres, demonstrate.

II.2 Theatre and the Writers' Oeuvres

Despite the contrasting and distinctive nature of the careers and works of the second-wave writers, the previous discussion of their status as a wave and of their engagement with similar issues demonstrates that they constitute a group of like-minded writers, the comparative study of which may provide the basis for identifying them as an artistic wave. Exploring the interaction between the political, the poetic, the fictional, and the theatrical works within each writer's oeuvre is central to understanding the motivations behind writing theatre and the place theatre occupies in their respective *oeuvres*.

Even though Gerty Dambury is a theatre practitioner, she also practises writing in other genres. Dambury describes her initiation to literature from a young age as what encouraged her to write: 'Je crois que je n'aurais pas écrit si je n'avais pas autant lu'.¹²³ Poetry was one of the main genres in Caribbean literature she claims to have enjoyed, particularly the work of poets such as Aimé Césaire whose playing with language drew both on Creole experience and on French Surrealism.¹²⁴ The traces of this intertextual practice are discernible in the linguistic creativity of her dramatic and poetic works, which are also substantially politicized, as is her poetry in the anthology *Effervescences* (2009). The seven sections in the anthology explore the political, social, and creative concerns of the Guadeloupean people.¹²⁵ An earlier poem 'Peuple d'angoisses...' shows a political consciousness that has remained a consistent theme

¹²³ Philippe Triay, *Interview de Gerty Dambury (31 octobre 2014, Lalere.fr)*, online video recording *Youtube* (31st October 2014), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eg606Wua3jw>> [accessed 1st December 2014].

¹²⁴ Triay, *Interview de Gerty Dambury*.

¹²⁵ Gerty Dambury, *Effervescences* (Paris : Éditions du Manguier, 2009).

in her writing. The poem, published in 1982, describes an oppressed, complex, *métissé* people, presumably Guadeloupean (the poem features in a collection of Guadeloupean poetry), whose cry ‘se prépare, se moule/ sur nos siècles d’impuissance/ pour mieux prendre la mesure de notre acharnement’. The poem’s voice does not doubt whether the cry will burst forth, but rather whom it will fail to reach when it does: ‘quelle chaudière, quelles oreilles empesées/ quelle assemblée de décatis/ résistera à son éclatement?’¹²⁶ This cry did burst forth during the general strike that took place in Guadeloupe in 2009. On this occasion, Dambury wrote the play, *Les Atlantiques amers*, which forms a diptych with a later play, *Des doutes et des errances* (2014). *Des doutes et des errances* is about actors who are rehearsing for *Les Atlantiques amers*, and both plays were published together in one volume.¹²⁷

Dambury claims to have written these plays in response to the forty-four-day strike:

... j’ai commencé à vouloir travailler la mise en scène de ce texte, qui parle essentiellement des événements de 2009 en Guadeloupe, et de la manière dont de part et d’autre de ces Atlantiques, amers – puisqu’ils ont une Histoire que nous n’oublierons pas – de la façon dont de part et d’autre de cet Atlantique les gens ont vécu ce mouvement.¹²⁸

Dambury also wrote a novel on the 1967 labour strike in Guadeloupe, *Les rétifs* (2012), which establishes a link between events in 1967 and the strike of 2009.

Dambury explores this unwavering interest in social problems in the Caribbean through a politicized and poetic writing style.

Suzanne Dracius’s many poetic anthologies complete her single play, two novels, and many short stories.¹²⁹ Her language is effusive and mixes styles from

¹²⁶ Gerty Dambury, ‘Peuple d’angoisses qui roulent au fond des cœurs...’, *Présence Africaine* 121-122.1, p. 208.

¹²⁷ Gerty Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, dir. by Jalil Leclaire, (L’Archipel, Basse-Terre, 17th-18th October 2014). Publication: Gerty Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances – Les Atlantiques amers* (Paris: Éditions du Manguier, 2014).

¹²⁸ Triay, Interview de Gerty Dambury.

¹²⁹ Dracius has published short stories in several collaborative anthologies between 1995 and 2012. An anthology of her own stories was published in 2003: *Rue Monte au Ciel* (Fort-de-France: Desnel, 2003).

Her novel *L’Autre qui danse* (Paris: Seghers, 1989; Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 2007) is soon to be followed by another underway.

different literary and linguistic canons: namely Creole and Latin. This is consistent with her theory that French is a type of Latin Creole, and thus holds within it the same creative potential as Caribbean Creole:

... je lui rends ce statut de créole de latin. S'y ajoute aussi le créole qui entre là-dedans, qui squatte, car il existe des tournures latines présentes en créole.¹³⁰

Her writing reflects a fondness for using words unfamiliar to French vernacular and the creation of neologisms. The titles of her poetry anthologies are demonstrative of this: *Prosopopées urbaines* (2006), *Exquise déréluction métisse* (2008), *Déictique féminitude insulaire* (2014) - where *féminitude* is a neologism formed from 'féminité' and 'Négritude' -, and *Scripta manent* (2016).¹³¹ When explaining the title *Déictique féminitude insulaire*, Dracius defended her use of erudite, unfamiliar terms, arguing that they described concepts that were not that difficult to understand:

Mais non 'déictique' c'est pas compliqué, c'est comme quand Monsieur Jourdain fait de la prose sans le savoir, tout le monde fait de la prose quand il parle. [...] Vous employez tout le temps tout le temps [*sic*] des mots qui sont des mots déictiques.¹³²

This converges with Dracius's desire to make Antillean history accessible and ludic, as she aims at democratizing higher forms of theatre and literature.

This poetic/political aesthetic is found in Dracius's and Dambury's elliptical, non-linear, and oneiric plays. Dracius's *Lumina Sophie* transmits its politicized message of reappraisal of History in a highly poetic language and a dramatic format that combines multiple performance traditions ranging from Ancient Greek theatre (the Muse Africa, the use of a chorus) to Caribbean performance styles (*conte*, dance, song). Without referring to historical events or mythological heroes, Dambury's

¹³⁰ Artheron, 'Suzanne Dracius: le "carrefour" du théâtre', p. 230.

¹³¹ Suzanne Dracius, *Prosopopées urbaines* (Fort-de-France : Desnel, 2006), *Exquise déréluction métisse* (Fort-de-France : Desnel, 2008), *Déictique féminitude insulaire* (Paris : Idem, 2014), *Scripta manent* (Paris : Idem, 2016).

¹³² Le DEAL aka NMDEAL MAN, *Kooliss 022 - Suzanne Dracius Partie I - Deal #Nmdeal.Fr*, online video recording *Youtube* (13th July 2014) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmaQkULGLOM>> [accessed 7th April 2015].

abstract plays *Confusions d'instants* (2003) and *Trames* (2008) are socio-political commentaries that present everyday heroes crushed by fatal flaws.¹³³ Written before *Des doutes et des errances – Les Atlantiques amers*, these plays are a study of Guadeloupean society, a cross-section of all classes and ages. Indeed, in *Confusions d'instants*, the symbiosis between language and politics is present in the correlation of a character with a grammatical tense. For instance, Malonga the young man speaks in the future tense, Mimilie the matron in the present tense, and Cosmonaute the Second World War veteran in the past tense. On a set that is filled with consumer goods, in a visual critique of spectacular consumer society, the characters interact but are ultimately isolated within their own linguistic barriers. It is when a sudden psychological shift takes place, switching the tenses of each character, that they manage to understand each other and reach a semblance of common ground.

One may wonder why in the works of Dracius and Dambury, some themes inspire poetry, while others are more apt to representation on the stage. For Dracius, the reason is that to reclaim the voice of Lumina the forgotten heroine of Martinican history it is necessary to give her a voice, that of an actress.¹³⁴ In Dambury's case, the barriers between genres are problematic, and she refuses, as was discussed above, to be categorized in any way: 'La langue pour moi, dans le théâtre, la poésie, le roman, la nouvelle, c'est de la création.'¹³⁵ However, the fact that her texts are to be performed stems from her creation of a language that is proper to each of her characters:

¹³³ Gerty Dambury, *Confusions d'instants* (Paris: Éditions du Manguier, 2009). First performance directed by Gerty Dambury at Festival des Abymes, Guadeloupe (2003).

Gerty Dambury, *Trames/Shades/Sombras* (Paris : Éditions du Manguier, 2012). First performance directed by Gerty Dambury, at L'Artchipel, Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, 30th April 2008.

¹³⁴ 'Sa voix s'est tue, sa voix n'a pas eu de portée à travers les siècles jusqu'à nous. [...] Sa voix, je voulais la faire entendre, la faire vivre.' Suzanne Dracius in Artheron, 'Suzanne Dracius: le "carrefour" du théâtre', p. 224.

¹³⁵ Bérard, "'Mon cheval de bataille est l'intime'".

... le personnage parle de telle ou telle manière. Aucun de mes personnages ne parle de la même façon, aucun. [...] Je me suis retrouvée avec des personnages qui avaient envie de parler.¹³⁶

Dambury sought a dramatic medium in order to highlight these voices, a medium that offers a chance of interaction between different levels of language, as in the case of *Confusion d'instants*.

For Ina Césaire the shift from anthropological research to theatrical writing is seamless. This is mainly since her work on oral literatures is transferrable to a dramatic, 'live' setting. Her prose fiction works are mainly drawn from her study of folk storytelling traditions, which are highly performative. In Antillean traditional storytelling, for instance, the narrator is also a performer who interacts with the audience via specific linguistic and visual codes. Her two anthologies of Antillean 'contes' contain transcriptions of stories in both Creole and French, integrating the performance devices used by the 'conteur' or storyteller such as prompts to initiate audience participation and stage directions that indicate the use of a specific gesture.¹³⁷ Therefore, in *Contes de nuits et de jours aux Antilles* (1990), one finds certain phrases that are followed by an explicative note, such as 'Geste du conteur', indicating that the phrase corresponds to a certain gesture:

Son ombre ne s'était pas encore profilée dans l'entrée que ses soldats l'avaient mitraillé de telle façon que le plus gros morceau de lui n'était plus que ça!¹³⁸

"Ah! Si cette personne me tombait sous la main, je la hacherais menu, grâce à mon dan-ma, pas plus tard que ce soir même! Je ferais ça, et ça, et ça!"¹³⁹

The use of the demonstrative pronoun *ça* symbolizes an arm gesture made by the *conteur* to illustrate his verbal description. The gestures can be quite versatile, as the first sentence suggests the *conteur* may be making a hand gesture to represent the size

¹³⁶ Bérard, "Mon cheval de bataille est l'intime".

¹³⁷ Ina Césaire and Joëlle Laurent, *Contes de mort et de vie aux Antilles* (Paris: Nubia, 1976) and *Contes de nuits et de jours aux Antilles* (Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1989).

¹³⁸ Ina Césaire, 'Plus malin qu'un roi', *Contes de nuits et de jours*, p. 26.

¹³⁹ Ina Césaire, 'Julina', *Contes de nuits et de jours*, p. 88.

of what is left of the King after he is machine-gunned to pieces. The second gesture indicated by ‘ça, et ça, et ça [this and this and this]’ denotes a repetitive movement evocative of chopping.

The types of audience interaction with the *conteur* described in other notes are asides and jokes shared with the spectator:

C’est d’ailleurs cet arbre qui me fit perdre mon travail, à l’époque où j’étais gardien. [...] ¹⁴⁰

Messieurs et dames, que porte l’anoli? – Un faux col jaune. ¹⁴¹

To the first sentence is appended a note explaining that the words in parentheses in the text are an ‘*aparté du conteur*’, a comical aside made by the *conteur*. The aside has no direct relation to the story, which indicates that the storytelling experience is a performance that includes more than the relating of a single, linear *conte*. The aside also encourages interaction with the audience and is used to regain the spectator’s interest. The second quotation is also a comic aside: ‘Plaisanterie traditionnelle de fin de conte: allusion au goitre de couleur jaune qui se gonfle lorsque le lézard est en colère.’ ¹⁴² The joke is a reference to local culture (the lizard being indigenous to the Antilles) and establishes a rapport between *conteur* and audience.

The performative use of onomatopoeia is also highlighted in Césaire’s footnotes:

La nuit décline sur l’autoroute et une auto, en passant, l’envoie ‘bo’, ⁶ dans le décor. ¹⁴³

Madame Zandoli ne fit ni une ni deux, elle la poussa ‘djoukoul’ ⁷ dans le puits ¹⁴⁴

Mariza ne répondait que ‘han han’ ¹, ¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Ina Césaire, ‘Le fils du bélier’, *Contes de nuits et de jours*, p. 30.

¹⁴¹ Ina Césaire, ‘Pourquoi l’eau de mer est salée’, *Contes de nuits et de jours*, p. 106.

¹⁴² Ina Césaire, ‘Pourquoi l’eau de mer est salée’, *Contes de nuits et de jours*, p. 106.

¹⁴³ Ina Césaire, ‘Le fils du bélier’, *Contes de nuits et de jours*, p. 34.

Note 6 reads: ‘Onomatopée de la chute.’

¹⁴⁴ Ina Césaire, ‘Julina’, *Contes de nuits et de jours*, p. 96.

Note 7 reads: ‘Onomatopée de la chute dans l’eau.’

¹⁴⁵ Ina Césaire, ‘Mariza-la-laconique’, *Contes de nuits et de jours*, p. 114.

Note 1 reads: ‘Onomatopée de l’acquiescement.’

L'oiseau s'envola d'un coup d'aile 'flaw'^{2,146}

The performativity of the onomatopoeia brings the *conte* to life. The *conteur* can be imagined to mimic the action while simultaneously providing the sound effect. Ina Césaire's novel *Zonzon Tête-Carrée* (2004) follows a similar, though hybridized, format of storytelling.¹⁴⁷ Spanning the length of a bus-ride from the Martinican countryside to town, the novel follows the stories of each character riding the eponymous Zonzon's bus. The middle of the book features a *conte* told in the established storytelling manner, a homage to the tradition on which Ina Césaire is drawing.¹⁴⁸ Césaire's *conte*-inspired theatrical works show a progression from fully adapting a *conte* to the stage in her early plays, to inserting elements of *conte* or storytelling in later works, to updating certain *contes* by adapting them to a contemporary setting in more recent plays. Her first play *L'Enfant des Passages ou la Geste de Ti-Jean* (1987), for instance, is a dramatic treatment of the adventures of an archetypal *conte* character Ti-Jean. Several of her other plays feature a narrator character who echoes the figure of the *conteur* from the *conte* tradition. Her later works, such as *Le Garçon sauvage* (2006) is a modern adaptation of a story borrowed from the *conte* tradition. The power of the *conte* to bond a performer to his/her audience, and the genre's specificity to the Antilles, are found both in Ina Césaire's non-theatrical work and her dramatic works. This illustrates the importance of the dialogue between author and audience to Césaire: '[c]'est pas seulement l'auteur qui

¹⁴⁶ Ina Césaire, 'Mariza-la-laconique', *Contes de nuits et de jours*, p. 118.

Note 2 reads: 'Onomatopée du bruit d'ailes.'

¹⁴⁷ Ina Césaire, *Zonzon Tête Carrée* (Monaco: Éditions Alphée/Le Serpent à Plumes/Motifs, 2004).

¹⁴⁸ This *conte* appears in the story of Madame De and Gabriel Valdor, in which the latter on his deathbed is told by a friend, 'campagnard et conteur', which comes as a critique of marital relations, particularly the power of the wife over her husband. 'Le conte et la réalité se sont toujours, ici plus qu'ailleurs, trouvés étroitement mêlés. Il n'y a donc pas lieu de s'étonner si la tradition fourmille de tant de récits de trésors enfouis...' Ina Césaire, *Zonzon Tête Carrée*, p. 154.

fait, c'est aussi le lecteur ou l'auditeur, ou, comme on dit en Martinique, le répondeur'.¹⁴⁹

Maryse Condé's plays are part of a significant body of work that includes fiction, verse, literary essays, and criticism. There are consistent tendencies in the plays written over the span of her literary career. Her own analysis of each novel written at different points in her life provides an insight into her artistic motivations behind each book. And these motivations are also to be found in her plays written over a period of forty years. For instance, she describes changes that have occurred in the world and in society as having an impact on identity conception and formation:

Quand j'étais en train d'écrire *Ségou*, en 1984, l'identité était simple. Cela veut dire : Maryse, née au Antilles, noire, d'origine africaine, doit retourner en Afrique pour savoir qui elle est. Maintenant, en 2009, tout est différent.¹⁵⁰

Her plays at the time, *Pension les Alizés* (1988) in particular, investigate issues of identity that are semi-autobiographical.¹⁵¹ In *Pension les Alizés*, the female protagonist Emma engages in an affair with Ismaël, a Haitian political exile. She discusses her childhood, her middle-class upbringing, and her escape to France at a young age, a similar trajectory to that of the young Condé. Her latest novels, *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (2003) and *Les Belles ténébreuses* (2008), are more focused on issues such as globalization and shifting identities.¹⁵² Her more recent plays also draw on broader issues relating to the community and the individual's place in society, for '[l]'intérêt pour un écrivain (et aussi pour un lecteur), c'est de pouvoir suivre ces différentes évolutions et de les comprendre'.¹⁵³ This Condé does in her plays, which range from

¹⁴⁹ Makward and John, 'Avec Ina Césaire', p. 116.

¹⁵⁰ Giscard Bouchotte. *Maryse Condé, 5 Questions pour Île en île* [Paris, 2009], online video recording *Youtube* (8th June 2013), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IgHapbdkAA>> [accessed 20th March 2015].

¹⁵¹ First published as *Pension les Alizés* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1988). First performance directed by Sonia Emmanuel, at Centre des Arts de Pointe-à-Pitre (14th April 1988).

¹⁵² Maryse Condé, *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2003); *Les Belles ténébreuses* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2008).

¹⁵³ Bouchotte, *Maryse Condé, 5 Questions pour Île en île*.

the intimate double-act (*Comme deux frères*, 2007; *La Faute à la vie*, 2009) to the historical *fresque* (*An Tan Révolisyon*, 1989), providing a sweeping view of Guadeloupean society through the ages.¹⁵⁴ Her later plays, *Comme deux frères* and *La Faute à la vie*, are in a format similar to *Pension les Alizés*. This format includes a small cast of two characters, a single setting, and a plot based on an extended dialogue between two parties who have a shared past or present.

Comme deux frères is the story of two prisoners incarcerated for the same crime. As the play progresses, the tensions between the two men reveal a deeper dissatisfaction with contemporary Guadeloupean society and those aspects of it which shape identity: class, family, filial and gender relations. Here Condé illustrates in an everyday casual conversational register the social problems of Guadeloupean society, and of Caribbean societies in general, which she outlines also in a critical essay on West Indian literature:

[...] the plantation system in which this society evolved, the promiscuity of the white master, the arrival of new ethnic groups such as the Indians, are factors responsible for [West Indian society's] characteristics as well. Not everything can be explained through slavery.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, it is conceivable that many of the problems faced by the two men in their formative and adult years are recent developments. They are consequences of modernity and globalization that are nevertheless traceable to a more remote traumatic history of slavery, to an earlier form and moment of the West's modernity. Condé's reluctance to discuss slavery stems from her personal belief that the

¹⁵⁴ *Comme deux frères* is set in a contemporary Guadeloupean prison and features two characters, whereas *An Tan Révolisyon* is set during the Haitian revolution and has a cast of sixty characters.

Maryse Condé, *La Faute à la vie* (Carnières-Morlanwetz: Lansman Éditeur, 2009). First performance directed by Firmine Richard at La Chapelle du Verbe Incarné, Avignon (19th – 27th July 2014).

Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères* (Carnières-Morlanwetz: Lansman Éditeur, 2007). First performance directed by José Exélis at L'Artchipel, Guadeloupe, (27th January 2007).

Maryse Condé, *An Tan Révolisyon* (Guadeloupe: Conseil Régional, 1989). First performance directed by Sonia Emmanuel at Fort-Fleur d'Épée, Gosier, Guadeloupe (11th November 1989).

¹⁵⁵ Condé, 'Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer', p. 154.

magnitude of the subject cannot be contained by literary or artistic forms. Writing on contemporary issues represents an alternative to addressing the topic directly.¹⁵⁶

Nevertheless, *La Faute à la vie* demonstrates that Condé's theatre is apt at exploring how slavery remains a shaper of class and racial politics in the Caribbean. The play is less about contemporary society than the historical events that have shaped it. In this one-act play two elderly women share memories, and come to the conclusion that they both loved and were loved by the same man. One, Louise, immobilized in her chair after a stroke, is confined to her home, and writes her memoirs. The other, Théodora, is her only link to the outside world. She is more down to earth, a realist, and provides a constructed critique of her friend's often idealized memories. Another crucial fact that defines the characters is that one is black and the other white, and the difference in their upbringings reflects racial tensions. Therefore, the play is an exploration of both personal memory and historical memory, and the ways in which major historical events affect individual lives. Again, this corresponds to Condé's theory that: '[t]here is nothing West Indian society hates more than facing the reality of colour prejudice which reminds it of the days of slavery, of the time when to be black was a curse and to possess a fair skin was regarded as a blessing.'¹⁵⁷ *La Faute à la vie* is a commentary on memory, and the recording of this memory. The publication of the play also coincided with that of her autobiography *La Vie sans fards* (2012).¹⁵⁸ A dramatization

¹⁵⁶ 'L'écrivain a honte, se sent coupable d'oser imaginer, rêver sur l'esclavage. C'est une question je crois éthique. On peut bien rêver, imaginer sur n'importe quel aspect de la vie. Mais quand on arrive à un évènement aussi monstrueux [...] C'est pas que les faits soient impossibles à imaginer. Mais le fait de donner à ces faits un charme, qui est le charme de la littérature, apparaît comme une trahison.' France Culture Plus, *Entretien avec Maryse Condé, Dailymotion* (19th November 2012), <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xv7n43_entretien-avec-maryse-conde_school> [accessed 8th March 2015].

¹⁵⁷ Condé, 'Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer', p. 162.

¹⁵⁸ Maryse Condé, *La Vie sans fards* (Paris: J-C Lattès, 2012).

of the autobiography was performed at the 2014 Avignon festival together with *La Faute à la vie*, thus underlining the correspondence between non-fiction and drama.¹⁵⁹

Condé's use of theatre to explore her ideas on identity, social formations, history, and memory may be compared to her consideration of 'insularité'. Though at first she considered herself to be an 'insular' writer, that is to say a writer interested in writing about her island, its culture, and its people, she later realized that her island was just one among many, for '[l]'île est entourée par la mer et, la mer, ce n'est pas une barrière, c'est un lien'.¹⁶⁰ For one island to exist it had to 'respond' to other islands, in a way similar to Glissant's theory of *tout-monde* and *Relation*. Condé's rejection of a singular insular identity provides an explanation for her eclectic style, choice of subjects, and non-conformity with traditional theories of *Négritude*, *Antillanité*, and *Créolité*:

La seule réalité qu'on peut défendre, c'est que tout être humain est une île. Cela veut dire que vous avez votre façon de réagir, votre façon de comprendre, votre façon d'appréhender le monde.¹⁶¹

The play format, particularly that of the double-act that allows a more focused exploration of the character, is ideally suited to the representation of insular identity. Maryse Condé's theatrical work itself is an island in the archipelago of her overall literary, critical, and artistic works. Her plays respond to her other non-dramatic works, and are inspired by her theoretical reflections.

Playwriting forms a major strand in the creative work of writers who belong to the second wave. In many cases, the performative, theatrical medium is seen as a context that is less restrictive and more interactive than written literature or theoretical works. Audience interaction, democratization of theatre culture, the re-writing of

¹⁵⁹ Maryse Condé, *La Vie sans fards*, adapted and directed by Eva Doumbia at La Chapelle du Verbe Incarné, Avignon (9th – 16th July 2014).

¹⁶⁰ Bouchotte, *Maryse Condé, 5 Questions pour Île en île*.

¹⁶¹ Bouchotte, *Maryse Condé, 5 Questions pour Île en île*.

official histories through the exploration of alternative histories, incorporation of performance forms from elsewhere to loosen the rigidity of more traditional theatre forms, all inspire the theatre production of Gerty Dambury, Suzanne Dracius, Ina Césaire, and Maryse Condé.

Conclusion

The International Women's Day festivities described in the opening of this chapter celebrated the double-heritage which current Antillean women artists may draw on, surpass, or interrogate. The Festival also gave voice to female performers and playwrights of the present, or third, wave. A year later, the Fort-de-France Tropiques-Atrium theatre 2015 autumn season was dedicated to women as artists and as theatrical subjects, and included a play based on Suzanne Césaire's writings by Daniel Maximin.¹⁶² Both these events suggest that theatre in the Antilles is indeed beginning to find its 'lettres de noblesse', to use Michèle Césaire's expression. Opportunities are arising for women in multiple creative disciplines who may eventually free themselves from, or make good out of, this *triple-marronnage* of the Caribbean woman playwright.

Wider recognition of the second-wave women writers under discussion may ultimately lead to heightened interest in other 'forgotten', neglected, or excluded female literary and artistic figures, such as the *proto-Négritude* writers or Suzanne Césaire, for the issues and themes of the plays are contemporary, topical, and relevant to audiences in the Caribbean and beyond. The writers' theatrical work and experience provides a perspective from which to assess social, political, and class issues. The following chapters explore these questions, and how they relate to different levels of *triple-marronnage* in plays ranging from the historical, to the duologue, and to the semi-autobiographical drama.

¹⁶² See *Brochure Saison 2015-2016*, Tropiques-Atrium, Fort-de-France, September 2015, pp. 9-31.

Daniel Maximin, *Suzanne Césaire, fontaine solaire*, directed by Hassane Kassi Kouyaté at Tropiques-Atrium, Fort-de-France, Martinique (10th December 2015).

Chapter Two: Staging Antillean History: Revolutionary Storytellers and Heroines

The plays studied in this chapter are Ina Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil* (1992) and Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (1996). Below are the play summaries:

*Rosanie Soleil depicts the eponymous character Rosanie Soleil, her twin sister Eïsanor, their mother Mme Soleil, and their family friend, Voisine Fumée, as they go about their daily lives on the fringes of the Insurrection.*¹⁶³

The play is divided into three acts. It begins with a Prologue in which two timelines and actions are superimposed. On stage appears Mme Soleil, Rosanie's mother, going about her daily chores. A monotonous voice is overheard reading out the names, occupations, and addresses of the Insurgents imprisoned and tried after the Insurrection of 1870. The names include Rosanie, Lumina Sophie, and Magdeleine Clem, Voisine Fumée in the play. All three are historical figures who participated in the Insurrection du Sud.

In Rosanie Soleil's first act the characters are introduced. In the first scene Rosanie and her sister Eïsanor join their mother on stage following the Prologue. A brief conversation about the weather, the wind, and the heat suggests each woman has some knowledge of the Insurrection brewing beyond the house. Act I Scene 2 reveals that Rosanie is involved in the Insurrection, as she discusses with her sister her belief in fighting against injustice, and uprooting the current society to replace it with a new one that is more just. Act I Scene 3 introduces Voisine Fumée. Distracted and believed by Mme Soleil to be demented, she engages in a tirade that serves to minimize her own instability in comparison to the madness of their country, of slavery, and of religion. The whole speech is given in a trance-like state undermining the sanity of Voisine Fumée, however the truths revealed are particularly telling of the socio-political context of the play. It is also revealed that Mme Soleil is hiding a fugitive in her pantry which she promptly denies.

In Act II the women become more involved in the events beyond their home, yet continue to uphold a seemingly unconcerned and unknowing attitude in front of their peers. Rosanie and Eïsanor have been involved in plantation owner Codé's murder, something Voisine Fumée attempts to disclose to Mme Soleil in a rant that conflates the slaughtering of a pig with the killing of Codé. The twins fiercely attempt to silence Fumée, and hide the truth from their mother. Voisine Fumée also wishes to reveal that Mme Soleil is harbouring a fugitive, however Mme Soleil in turn tells her to keep quiet. In Act III, the Insurrection is ever closer, but the women pursue their everyday chores. Voisine Fumée recounts the Lubin case, another incident that sparked the Insurrection, in the form of a conte, the other women joining in. In the next scene Fumée announces the approach of the militia, and Eïsanor runs to warn her mother to hide the fugitive. Rosanie and Fumée remain, the latter starting to tell a conte to distract themselves. The final scene takes place within the house, and the women are now all aware of each other's actions and motives. It is hinted that the man Mme Soleil was hiding was the twins' father, but it is not certain. On hearing the drums of the approaching Insurgents, Mme Soleil evokes the Haitian revolution, and Voisine Fumée sheds each garish item of her clothing in a ritualistic commemoration of those involved in the Insurrection, echoing the monotonous list read out in the play's Prologue. The women then gather around the Assotor drum used by the rebel slaves in Haiti to communicate during their revolt. They express their willingness to greet and join the Insurgents on their arrival, and the play ends on the sound of the drums and with the lights dimming.

¹⁶³ First published in English as *Fire's Daughters*, trans. by Judith G. Miller in *New French Language Plays*, ed. by Francoise Kourlinsky, Cristina Stempel, and Catherine Temerson (Ubu Repertory Theater Publications, 1993) ; in French as *Rosanie Soleil* in *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. Christiane P. Makward (Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011). First performance directed by Syto Cavé, at Centre Dramatique Régional de la Martinique/Théâtre de la Soif nouvelle, Théâtre municipal de Fort-de-France, Fort-de-France, May 1992.

Lumina Sophie dite Surprise follows the moments leading to the final confrontation between the Insurgents and the government militia.¹⁶⁴ The play is set in an Insurgent camp in Rivière-Pilote, the epicentre of the Insurrection. The characters include Lumina Sophie, the eponymous protagonist, a Chorus of Pétroleuses [female arsonists] and plantation workers, and the Muse Africa, an androgynous supernatural being sent by an anonymous higher order to record the actions of the female Insurgents on a “combinoscope”, ‘combinant à la fois téléphone mobile, mini-ordinateur portable, micro-magnétophone, caméscope de poche, etc.’.¹⁶⁵ In the first Act the characters are introduced, Lumina fiercely haranguing her troops on their return from a day’s arson. The women also perform everyday tasks and busy themselves with erecting a barricade around the camp. Tensions arise between the women, leading to an altercation between the Chorus and a Pétroleuse of Indian descent, Simonise, which Lumina swiftly stifles. Lumina is also shown reading a newspaper in the scene, for as the only literate member of the group she is in charge of gleanng information about the Insurrection from the outside world. In this first act Lumina is therefore represented as possessing the qualities needed to lead the Pétroleuses, she is literate, tolerant, and a keeper of the peace. Act II properly introduces the Muse, who only appeared briefly in the first act. Lumina is the only one who sees her at first, another factor setting her apart from the other women. The Pétroleuses mistake the Muse for a bat and chase it away. The Muse explains to the audience that her mission is to record the actions of the Pétroleuses for posterity as an objective observer, thus the reason why she does not immediately reveal herself to the Pétroleuses. She claims to be the only one capable of the job, for the other Muses (Europa, Asia, Australia, and America), are not as qualified. While the Muse is introduced in this act, Lumina is relatively absent from the action, exiting and entering throughout. The Pétroleuses busy themselves with their chores and discuss the experiences of female plantation workers: the harassment of the plantation overseers, the hardship of cultivating the land. When the Muse finally reveals herself, she is chased away by the Pétroleuses. In the third act Lumina appears alone at the start of the scene, and monologues on her concerns about the progress of the Insurrection. She laments the lack of resources at the Insurgents’ disposal and worries about her lover Émile Sydney, who is also the father of her unborn child. The Muse appears and warns the Pétroleuses not to take the Insurrection for granted, and to respect others (including herself). More information on the start of the Insurrection is provided in this act, as the Pétroleuses discuss the plantation owner Codé’s running up the white flag of the detested monarchy above his house. The Muse remains misunderstood by the Pétroleuses, her esoteric and historical talk incomprehensible to the women. Lumina is conciliatory, enthralled by the Muse’s discourse on the future of Martinique and the Pétroleuses’ descendants. In the fourth act Lumina is hardly on stage, entering once in a trance-like state seeking her lover. The Muse and the Pétroleuses become better acquainted. The Muse reveals she is from Africa, which initiates a discussion about the ‘traversée’, the crossing of the Atlantic by African slaves. The Muse tries to gain information about Lumina and her baby’s father once it is revealed she is pregnant. The Pétroleuses, fiercely loyal and still suspicious of the Muse, divulge nothing. The Muse appears almost obsessed with Lumina, so much so that the Pétroleuses are worried she is a man looking to seduce her (the Muse is androgynous, genderless, or of both genders). The Muse explains the definition of ‘Lumina’, its link to light and the Enlightenment, and how the Muse itself is the only hope for this enlightened woman to be remembered. It becomes increasingly clear to the Muse however that the women fight out of solidarity and love for each other, and not for posterity.

Introduction

The Antilles have a tormented and complex history. French national history has often eclipsed Martinican and Guadeloupean local histories. Taking account of

¹⁶⁴ First published as *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Fort-de-France: Éditions Desnel, 2005). First performance of three-act version directed by José Alpha, at Préfecture de Fort-de-France, Fort-de-France, 3rd October 2000.

¹⁶⁵ Suzanne Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Paris: Idem, 2014), p. 47.

local histories also necessitates focussing on local communities, and those that constitute them. Moreover, local histories themselves may be broken down into official and non-official with women's histories falling into the latter category; little trace of the part women have played in the construction of the Antilles is to be found in official local histories, and even less in the French national historical narrative. And yet, they have played a major part in forging Antillean society and assumed key roles in Antillean historical events. Such an event was the Insurrection of Southern Martinique in 1870, the first major people's uprising since the abolition of slavery in 1848.¹⁶⁶ Like in the Paris Commune that followed it a few months later, women played a leading role in the events. Two such figures, Rosanie Soleil and Lumina Sophie dite Surprise (born Marie-Philomène Roptus), are the eponymous protagonists of Ina Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil* (1992) and of Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (1996). As part of a group of female arsonists, the *Pétroleuses*, who burned down plantations during the Insurrection, these women proved a threat to the establishment. The plays mix European and Caribbean performance styles to portray Rosanie and Lumina and the female communities from which they emerged and with whom they fought. These female characters depict the first stages of *triple-marronnage*, for even though these female communities and histories are portrayed on stage, the action is removed from the main historical events in which the female protagonists take part, underlining their marginalization from Caribbean society and history. The characters nevertheless are shown as actively rebelling against society and rejecting the social marginalization imposed on them, by treating this

¹⁶⁶ A timeline of key dates in Antillean history referred to in this chapter and the rest of the thesis may be found in Appendix 3.

marginalization as *marronnage*, an active movement of emancipatory removal. This chapter will open with an introduction to its theoretical apparatus, an outline of the historical plays of French Caribbean women playwrights, and an overview of the Insurrection of 1870. The rest of the chapter will analyse the different theatrical techniques used by Césaire and Dracius to explore and portray the figures of Rosanie Soleil and Lumina Sophie.

Re-evaluating History in the French Caribbean Context

In *Le Discours antillais*, Édouard Glissant calls on the Antillean writer to come to terms with the ‘chronologie tourmentée’ of the French Caribbean.¹⁶⁷ This chronology is not found in official French history, and cannot be encompassed by the ‘paralysing tradition’ of History as a discipline: ‘les rigueurs indispensables à la mise en schéma historicienne peuvent constituer, [...] un handicap paralysant.’¹⁶⁸ The ‘tormented chronology’ is constituted of the collective memory of the Antillean islanders and may emerge out of an ‘exploration créatrice’ undertaken by the writer, or the artist. The ‘ambition poétique’ of the Antillean writer and audience should be to ‘[r]enouer avec son histoire obscurcie ou oblitérée, l’éprouver dans son épaisseur’.¹⁶⁹

The multiple layers (*épaisseurs*) or perspectives of French Caribbean history include an official, French national, historical narrative, which Glissant sees as occulting another perspective, the Caribbean people’s ‘tormented chronology’ of slavery, colonialism, and oppression. Added to this are the histories of the different peoples who have contributed to the formation of

¹⁶⁷ Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1981), p. 133.

¹⁶⁸ Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 130.

¹⁶⁹ Édouard Glissant, ‘Préface de la première édition’ in *Monsieur Toussaint : version scénique* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1986), pp. 7-8.

present-day French Caribbean society, what Patrick Chamoiseau terms the ‘magma anthropologique des peuples qui s’étaient rejoints [en Martinique]’: Caribs, Europeans, Africans, Chinese, Indians, Syrians.¹⁷⁰

The use of the term ‘magma’, a reference to the Caribbean volcano, by Chamoiseau adds an environmental dimension to the reflexion on Caribbean history. Many works by Antillean writers and theorists show the influence of the landscape and climate of their homelands. Little surprise therefore that Glissant claims this ‘épaisseur’, or depth, of history functions on a spatial level as well as temporally and politically, for as he explains Antillean history is written into the landscape:

...il y a des temps qui s’échelonnent sous nos apparences, des Hauts à la mer, du Nord au Sud, de la forêt aux sables. [...] Notre paysage est son propre monument : la trace qu’il signifie est réparable par-dessous. C’est tout histoire.¹⁷¹

Theatre is also conceivable as a layering of different constitutive elements.

Roland Barthes’s description of theatricality is that of ‘une épaisseur de signes’.¹⁷²

Barthes uses theatricality to talk about theatre minus the text, emphasizing the other components of the theatrical illusion: the actor on stage, scenography, music, movement, and so forth. Much like Glissant urging an alternative exploration of history, eschewing official historical narrative, and therefore *text*, Barthes here proposes a reflexion away from the text to other components of theatre, to the ‘essence’ of theatre.

These concepts of theatrical and historical ‘épaisseur’ are particularly relevant to the study of Caribbean theatre. The genre superimposes different art forms, languages, and performance styles, unrestrained by, and/or undermining

¹⁷⁰ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Écrire en pays dominé* (Paris : Éditions Flammarion, 2002), p. 110.

¹⁷¹ Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 21.

¹⁷² Roland Barthes, ‘Littérature et signification’ in *Essais critiques* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964), p. 258.

the codes of Classical European theatre. These multiple influences reflect the ‘épaisseur’ of Caribbean history, for performance styles used in Caribbean theatre are born of the ‘tormented chronology’ of the French Caribbean. Dance, for instance, was one of the first art forms practised by the enslaved populations. Patrick Chamoiseau describes how dancing to the rhythm of drums allowed slaves to regain control of their bodies. Drums were permitted by slave owners for the instruments were deemed a useful tool with which to rhythm the work in the fields. And yet this permitted dance to develop into a form of resistance. Several combat dances such as the *laghia* and the *danmyé* emerged from this rediscovery of dance and its empowerment of the body.¹⁷³ Most of these new dance forms were improvised, but these improvisations bore the memories of Africa, the traces of old rituals. And so Chamoiseau describes improvisation as in fact hailing and perpetuating memory.¹⁷⁴ Dance is thus a vehicle for memory, and its performance an act of remembrance of the ‘tormented chronology’ of the Caribbean people. These dances are arguably the first endogenous art forms following the introduction of slave populations into the Caribbean islands.

Conte is another art form often used in Caribbean theatre practice. *Conte* combines African folk tales and European fairy tales and is highly performative. The *conteurs* or narrators, use multiple devices to engage with the audience and to illustrate their story, i.e. sound effects, onomatopoeia, audience participation, repetition, and song. *Contes* are also social critiques that use allegory to denounce slavery and social injustices. For instance, a tale might explain the relations between a master and slave by portraying them as animals living in the imaginary

¹⁷³ For a description of all Martinican dances referred to in this chapter, see Appendix 2.

¹⁷⁴ Chamoiseau, *Écrire en pays dominé*, p. 171.

world of the *conte*. The world of the *conte* conjures both Africa and the Caribbean, for the tales often contain specific cultural and geographical references to them. *Conte*, like dance, is a vector for emancipation, for expressing and freeing the body, and for commemorating ‘tormented’ history.

In the section ‘Théâtre, conscience du peuple’ in *Le Discours antillais*, Glissant proposes that a ‘re-evaluation’ of History should be achieved through theatrical production, for to represent (creatively) a culture or society is to re-evaluate it. Glissant stresses theatre’s initial function as a bearer of the potential for creating a communal consciousness. One should be wary of ‘traditional’ performance forms, permitted and even encouraged by an elite that wishes to maintain the status quo manifest in creative stasis.¹⁷⁵ Glissant stresses that theatre must be a form of communal consciousness representing the experience of the people. But it is a representation that necessitates the people’s acceptance for it to be legitimate.

The idea of theatre as a means of creating communal consciousness goes back to the foundations of many theatrical cultures, and is revived in postcolonial or nationalist contexts. Postcolonial critics such as Ngugi wa Thiong’O and Wole Soyinka argue for the regaining of a communal voice through theatre. But this unification through theatre is also found in more ‘established’ dramatic genres such as Ancient Greek theatre and later national theatres. These contexts are not irreconcilable. As Stuart Murray put it:

The need to write history is one that unites both postcoloniality and nationalism. The former wishes to correct the false image created by the warped logic of the colonial process. The latter seeks to provide mythologies to strengthen the sense of a collective self. Clearly the two can, and do, combine.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ See Édouard Glissant, ‘Théâtre, conscience du peuple’ in *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), pp. 395-415.

¹⁷⁶ Stuart Murray, ‘Introduction’ in *Not on any Map: Essays on Postcoloniality and Cultural Nationalism* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), p. 10.

Indeed, postcolonial, and national contexts are often combined when a colony regains, or attains for the first time, an independent status as a nation-state. A typical example is that of the Irish Literary Theatre, a movement that sought to stage Ireland's cultural heritage, its prestigious history, as well as its potential as an independent state. For Declan Kiberd the Irish revolution, and specifically the 1916 Easter Rising, started, and was devised in the theatre: 'no previous Irish insurrection had been mounted in such avowedly theatrical terms'.¹⁷⁷

Paradoxically, associating nationalism with theatre is tantamount to associating nationalism with artificiality, for theatre is a construct, and hence the nationalist narrative on stage necessarily reveals itself for what it is, a construct.

Martinique and Guadeloupe, which are not constituted as independent nation-states, have to grapple with metropolitan history as well as their own, and thus theatre functions as a means of undermining the construct of the French state and its institutions. By using art forms born of the 'tormented chronology' to question official narratives, French Caribbean theatre provides a voice for a community confined to the margins. Re-evaluating the individual subject's place within the state, the subject's belonging to a culture that is a part of, apart from, and often critical of the state, provides a better understanding of the subject's status within that state.

The historical plays written by French Caribbean writers such as Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, and Patrick Chamoiseau reappraise the history of the Caribbean and other postcolonial nations. They offer a critical view of colonization and decolonization. Their perspective comes as a counterpoint to

¹⁷⁷ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation* (London: Random House, 2009), p. 206.

more ‘proximate’ perspectives such as those of the aforementioned writers Wole Soyinka or Ngugi Wa Thiong’o.

Césaire wrote a triptych of plays exploring the politics of decolonization: *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963), about the reign of Henri Christophe of Northern Haiti following the country’s independence in 1805; *Une saison au Congo* (1966) which recounted the last months of Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo; and *Une tempête* (1969), a rewrite of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* set on a Caribbean island.¹⁷⁸ The three plays offer similar reflections on decolonization, independence, the role of the leader, and leaders’ relations with their peoples.

Similarly, Édouard Glissant wrote *Monsieur Toussaint* (1986), a play on the historical Haitian figure Toussaint Louverture.¹⁷⁹ But far from being consecrated to Louverture as a solitary figure, the play has a substantial cast, consisting of both dead and living characters. Louverture’s story is told from the perspectives of different characters and different social groups: the plantation owners, Napoleon’s men, Louverture’s gaolers, Toussaint’s generals. The play is also divided into four parts, each named after a specific group of persons: ‘les dieux’, ‘les morts’, ‘le peuple’, ‘les héros’.¹⁸⁰ Louverture has to account for his actions to each group, which foregrounds the collective re-evaluation of history that Glissant himself argues for.

Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Man Dlo contre la fée Carabosse* (1981) is an allegory of slavery and colonialism told in the form of a *conte*.¹⁸¹ The narrator is a

¹⁷⁸ Aimé Césaire, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963) ; *Une saison au Congo* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973) ; *Une tempête* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969).

¹⁷⁹ Édouard Glissant, *Monsieur Toussaint : version scénique* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1986).

¹⁸⁰ Édouard Glissant, *Monsieur Toussaint*, p. 2.

¹⁸¹ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Man Dlo contre la Fée Carabosse* (Paris : Éditions Caribéennes, 1981).

conteur, and many supernatural figures from the *conte* universe feature in the play. The play is also a reflection on the colonizing of the mind. The colonizer in the play is La Fée Carabosse, a character from French fairy tales, a symbol of French culture imposing itself over the Caribbean ‘Monde de la Merveille [Wonder-world]’. The colonizing and decolonizing of the mind is an issue that has been of increasing concern in postcolonial theory, but for Chamoiseau it is further complicated by the context of the French Caribbean that does not fit neatly into the postcolonial category and is still imbricated in the reality of a still existent colonial reality. Chamoiseau reminds his audience that Martinique may not be decolonized, and may still be France, yet not entirely so.

Chamoiseau also stresses that the African slaves brought to the Caribbean their own imaginary, to which belongs Man Dlo. Man Dlo, as the heroine of the play, will proceed to fight and defeat La Fée Carabosse. Not only does Man Dlo embody the strength and victory of anticolonial struggle, she also represents the alternative imaginary built from the many cultural components of the different peoples who inhabited the French Caribbean over the centuries. Indeed, the universe of the *conte* on which the world of the play is modelled does not pre-date the arrival of European colonizers and their slaves. It is rather a consequence of it. However, in *Man Dlo contre la Fée Carabosse*, Chamoiseau has the European Fée Carabosse invade this world of the *conte*. In opposing newly created Caribbean culture to the old European one, Chamoiseau puts them on an equal footing.

Césaire’s, Glissant’s, and Chamoiseau’s plays revolve around major moments of anticolonial fervour, such as the Haitian revolution and the decolonization of Africa, with a tendency in later plays to focus on the Caribbean.

In doing so, the authors move from a general and universal view of colonial and postcolonial history, to more specific and pressing questions relating to their own societies and communities.

The Historical Plays of Female Playwrights

The majority of the historical plays written by Ina Césaire, Michèle Césaire, Maryse Condé, Gerty Dambury, and Suzanne Dracius are, like those of their male counterparts, focussed on the French Caribbean. Maryse Condé wrote two such plays: *Les Sept voyages de Ti Noël* (1987), a retelling of the history of slavery in the form of *conte*, and *An Tan Révolysion: elle court, elle court, la liberté* (1989), a sweeping epic set in Guadeloupe, Paris, and Haiti relating events ranging from the French revolution to the first abolition, and then the reinstatement, of slavery in Guadeloupe. Condé also wrote *Mort d'Oluwémi d'Ajumako* (1973), which is redolent of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) as it portrays the clash between African ancestral traditions, colonialism, postcolonialism, and 'Western' modernity.¹⁸² Gerty Dambury's play *Bâton Maréchal ou An Tan Sorin* (1987) tells the story of Guadeloupe during World War Two under the command of Governor Constant Sorin.¹⁸³ Suzanne Dracius's play *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (1996) recounts the experiences of Lumina Sophie, leader of a group of female insurgents during a major but under-narrated historical event in Martinican history in which women were strongly implicated: the Insurrection of Southern Martinique in 1870.

¹⁸² Maryse Condé, *Les Sept voyages de Ti Noël* (unpublished, first production 1987, Centre Commercial du Petit Bourg, Guadeloupe); *An Tan Révolysion: elle court, elle court, la liberté* (Pointe à Pitre: Conseil Régional de Guadeloupe, 1989); *Mort d'Oluwémi d'Ajumako* (Paris: Pierre Jean Oswald, 1973).

¹⁸³ Gerty Dambury, *Bâton Maréchal ou An Tan Sorin* (unpublished, first production 1987, Centre des Arts, Pointe à Pitre, Guadeloupe).

Ina Césaire is the most prolific out of this group of writers in the genre of historical theatre. Her first historical play *Rosanie Soleil* (1992), relates the lives of four women preceding the Insurrection of 1870. Césaire's other historical plays feature characters from local, working, or peasant classes as well as a large number of female characters. In Christiane Makward's anthology *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques* (2011), which organises Césaire's texts following the author's own guidelines, six out of the fifteen plays in the anthology are historical and appear in the two first sections of the anthology: 'Échos du volcan [Echoes of the volcano]' dealing with the eruption of the Montagne Pelée volcano in 1902 and 'Chroniques insulaires [Island chronicles]' regrouping plays about important events in Caribbean history.¹⁸⁴ The plays in 'Échos du volcan' emphasize the impact of the Pelée eruption in the imaginaries of everyday Martinicans. Female characters dominate these plays, with the first play of the section, *La Diabliesse du Morne rouge*, rendering explicit the link between the treacherous Pelée mountain and the *Diabliesse*, a mythical figure of female seduction and deceit. The play accentuates the impact of the different layers of Martinican history on contemporary society and women in particular: the tragic Pelée eruption of 1902 and the distrust of the unpredictable landscape that arose from it, and the perennial mistrust in the dangerous seductress.

'Chroniques insulaires' starts with *Rosanie Soleil*, which appears in the title of the anthology and relates the most 'obscure' of local histories. Then follows the *Bataille du Rhum* that takes place during the conflict between the French and the Dutch in 1674. The play covers various founding events of

¹⁸⁴ Ina Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. Christiane P. Makward (Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011). 'Échos du volcan' contains the plays *Les Bourgeois de couleur* (2011), *Les Fuyardes* (2011), and *Des jours ordinaires* (2011); 'Chroniques insulaires' comprises *Rosanie Soleil*, *Le Général et le Prisonnier* (2003), and *La Bataille du Rhum* (2011).

Martinican society and culture, namely the creation of the *Code Noir* and the clearing of the swamps around the Fort Saint-Louis in the area that is now the regional capital Fort-de-France. The final play of the section, *Le Général et le Prisonnier*, is a portrayal of Toussaint Louverture's last days as a prisoner at the Fort de Joux prison in the French Jura region in 1803, presented as a series of dialogues with Napoleon's emissary, Auguste Cafferelli. *La Bataille du Rhum* and *Le Général et le Prisonnier* are male-dominated narratives. Nevertheless, these plays are preceded by *Rosanie Soleil*, a narrative that is a 'hommage à la vitalité des femmes du peuple', and 'une reformulation du grand récit fondateur de la révolution haïtienne, et un éloge du "père, ce héros"'.¹⁸⁵ In this organization of the plays the 'vitality' of unsung Martinican women is pitted against the narratives of the founding fathers of Martinican society.

The Women of the Insurrection du Sud

Unlike the above-mentioned plays which depict both female and male historical figures, the historical works by Aimé Césaire and Glissant focus for the most part on male protagonists. Chamoiseau, however does depict two female, fictional, protagonists and thus comes closer to Helen Gilbert's and Joanne Tompkins' idea of the wider potential of postcolonial theatre for representing female histories. For them,

Revisioning history also enables the reinstatement of interest groups who have been left out of the official records because they were victims of prejudice or punishment, or because they were denied an opportunity to speak. The recuperation of women's histories is particularly relevant here and has been a fundamental task for women all over the world.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Christiane Makward, 'Introduction : "Ensouché fond" : Le petit théâtre d'Ina Césaire' in Ina Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. Christiane P. Makward (Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011), p. 9.

¹⁸⁶ Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 118.

In addition to re-evaluating history through theatre by relating what Glissant terms ‘des conquêtes arrachées par les luttes populaires’, Ina Césaire and Suzanne Dracius have chosen to explore female historical figures who took part in one of these ‘conquêtes’: the 1870 Insurrection of Southern Martinique.¹⁸⁷ It was one of the first major events in which women were recorded as having played a leading role. The Insurrection was close in nature and chronology to the Paris Commune of 1871:

La révolte de 1870, radicale, menée uniquement par des Noirs, fut, comme la Commune de Paris, noyée dans le sang. Six mois après, en effet, la Commune était déclarée dans la capitale assiégée. Dans ces deux révoltes populaires, les femmes jouèrent un rôle important, et subirent des peines d’autant plus sévères que leur crime, aux yeux des contemporains, était double : elles refusaient leurs rôles et leurs devoirs en tant que prolétaires et surtout en tant que femmes.¹⁸⁸

The plays *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* and *Rosanie Soleil* are significant in that they narrate the lives of women involved in the event and give them more substance than court transcripts and the occasional historical pamphlet on the Insurrection.¹⁸⁹ For Suzanne Dracius, theatre allows a lost female historical figure to find her voice through her embodiment by a flesh-and-blood actress that resuscitates the character from ‘les limbes de l’oubli et du déni misogynie.’¹⁹⁰ This resuscitation is similar to the hailing of memory through dance as described by Chamoiseau, and therefore shows the importance of performance in

¹⁸⁷ Glissant, ‘Théâtre : conscience du peuple’, p. 409.

¹⁸⁸ Odile Krakovitch, ‘Le rôle des femmes dans l’insurrection du Sud de la Martinique en Septembre 1870’, *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 9-10 (Printemps 1985), p. 35.

¹⁸⁹ Works that refer to the Insurrection and specifically to the involvement of women in it include:

Lémy Lémane Coco, *Rôles et Résistances des femmes esclaves* (Orphie, 2013) ;
Femmes de la Martinique : quelle histoire ? ed. by Dominique Taffin, Muriel Descas-Ravoteur, and Micheline Marlin-Godier (Fort-de-France : Archives départementales de la Martinique, 2008);

Gilbert Pago, *Lumina Sophie dite “Surprise” (1848-1879) : Insurgée et bagnarde* (Matoury, French Guyana : Ibis Rouge Éditions, 2008).

¹⁹⁰ In Axel Artheron, ‘Suzanne Dracius : le “carrefour” du théâtre pour se hisser au-dessus du magma de l’humaine marchandise’, in *Émergences Caraïbe(s)*, ed. by Chalaye and Bérard, pp. 224-230 (p. 224).

commemoration and the reassessment of history. In resuscitating these women Dracius and Césaire above all confer on them personalities, individuality, and subjecthood. Indeed, the lack of official historical information, which may be deemed a possible obstacle in portraying the historical character, is here used as ground for invention for the authors who create complex and new characters.

The Insurrection of Southern Martinique in 1870 arose from social and racial tensions that persisted in Martinique after the abolition of slavery in 1848. The status of the newly liberated slaves had barely improved in what Artheron describes as :

une société, délestée du chancre de l'esclavage mais encore engoncée dans les clivages hérités de l'époque esclavagiste, le préjugé de couleur et les relents réactionnaires des nostalgiques de l'Ancien Régime demeurant toujours aussi vivaces et prégnants.¹⁹¹

This, combined with the dire economic situation, the reinstatement of a dominant white class, harsher labour laws, and the restriction of the black population's liberties, sparked the tensions that would lead to the Insurrection in September 1870. Two events in particular are noted as having initiated the Insurrection; the Lubin case, in which a black man, Léopold Lubin, was imprisoned after retaliating against the abuse committed by a white man, Augier de Maintenon; and the Béké Codé case wherein the plantation owner Louis Codé was assassinated after he ran up a white flag in commemoration of the fallen monarchy, which was taken by the affronted black community as both a celebration and a commemoration of slavery.

Lumina Sophie and Rosanie Soleil were active participants in the Insurrection; Lumina Sophie even taking a commanding role. Lumina, born

¹⁹¹ Axel Artheron, 'Propos liminaire : Dramaturgie et Histoire : *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* de Suzanne Dracius' in Suzanne Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Paris : Idem, 2014), pp. 11-40, p. 13.

Marie-Philomène Roptus, was a nineteen-year old pregnant seamstress who became the leader of a group of women responsible for setting fire to sugar plantations during the Insurrection. Like the women of the Paris Commune, they were called ‘Pétroleuses’. After the Insurrection was quelled, Lumina was arrested, tried, and imprisoned in Saint-Laurent de Maroni in French Guyana, where she died nine years later. Lumina has been the subject of popular songs, two secondary schools bear her name, one in Martinique and the other in French Guyana, and a skyscraper in Fort-de-France was also named after her.¹⁹² She is defined by Dracius as the equivalent to, and the opposite of, the French metropolitan Joan of Arc: black and pregnant as opposed to white and virginal. Another Martinican singularity differentiating the region from the metropole.

Rosanie Soleil was one of Lumina’s *Pétroleuses* and also appears in *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* under the name ‘Rosalie’. She is reported as having participated in the assassination of Codé, and appears in several trial transcripts, accused of committing various other crimes such as arson, poisoning, and pillaging, as well as participation in the assassination. Rosanie was condemned to five years imprisonment ‘pour avoir participé à l’assassinat de Codé, mais surtout pour avoir joué le rôle d’empoisonneuse [...] tant était grande la peur des sortilèges et des poisons, du pouvoir occulte des femmes et des Noirs.’¹⁹³ Even before Ina Césaire and Suzanne Dracius wrote the character of Rosanie/Rosalie into their plays, she was deemed a figure of Martinican subversion.

¹⁹² Songs about Lumina Sophie include: *Lumina* by Loriane Zacharie, and *Lumina Sophie* by Mizik Bo Kail interpreted by Lea Galva.

The schools ‘Lycée Polyvalent Lumina Sophie’ in Saint-Laurent du Maroni, French Guyana and ‘Lycée Professionnel Régional Lumina Sophie’ in Schoelcher, Martinique, bear her name.

The ‘Tour Lumina’ in Fort-de-France was inaugurated in 2012.

¹⁹³ Krakovitch, ‘Le rôle des femmes dans l’insurrection du Sud de la Martinique en Septembre 1870’ p. 48.

The Plays *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* and *Rosanie Soleil*

Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* follows the moments leading to the final confrontation between the Insurgents and the government militia.¹⁹⁴ The play is set in an Insurgent camp in Rivière-Pilote, at the centre of the Insurrection. The characters include Lumina Sophie, the eponymous protagonist, a Chorus of *Pétroleuses*, and the Muse Africa, an androgynous supernatural being sent by an anonymous higher order to record the actions of the female Insurgents on a 'combinoscope', 'à la fois téléphone mobile, mini-ordinateur portable, micro-magnétophone, caméscope de poche, etc'.¹⁹⁵ The Muse fails to interest the rebels in the posterity in which their heroic acts may be inscribed, realizing that the women fight in and for the present, with and for themselves. Throughout the play, Lumina and her *Pétroleuses* are seen exiting and returning to the stage on their guerrilla missions, however the plot is centred on the enclosed space of the camp and the lives of the female Insurgents. The play ends with most of the women dying in a struggle with the militia, and the Muse relating the fate of Lumina following her arrest.

Ina Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil* depicts the eponymous character Rosanie Soleil, her twin sister Eïsanor, their mother Mme Soleil, and their family friend, Fumée, as they go about their daily lives on the fringes of the Insurrection. All of these women 'bien que différentes, sont [...] impliquées, à des degrés divers, au sein de l'action qui se déroule à l'extérieur'.¹⁹⁶ Rosanie takes part in the Codé assassination, Voisine Fumée is the go-between between the Insurrection and the

¹⁹⁴ Hereafter *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* will be abridged to *Lumina Sophie*.

¹⁹⁵ Suzanne Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Paris: Idem, 2014), p. 47.

¹⁹⁶ Ina Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil* in *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. by Christiane P. Makward (Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011), pp. 97-130, p. 97.

Soleil family, and Mme Soleil harbours a fugitive in her pantry. The play shows a 'quotidienneté vécue par quatre femmes pendant une période politique fortement conflictuelle,' and the characters attempting to maintain this 'quotidienneté [everydayness]' before events invade their home and change their lives forever.¹⁹⁷

In both *Lumina Sophie* and *Rosanie Soleil* there is an emphasis on the collective representation of the historical event. Suzanne Dracius and Ina Césaire reclaim these individual women by representing them as part of a social, political, and cultural group. Parallels may be drawn between them and Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint* and Aimé Césaire's *Une saison au Congo* and *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*. Indeed, Lumina Sophie is a leader who is represented as part of and leader of a group, and both Rosanie and Lumina are the voices of the people's desire for change. They are, as Artheron points out in the case of Lumina Sophie, 'symbole des révoltées, mais aussi [...] métonymie de cette révolte'.¹⁹⁸ However, Dracius and Ina Césaire focus on the singularity and subjectivity of each of the characters in their plays. A collective expression emerges through these works, yet it is made up of a polyphony of women's voices silenced and marginalised throughout History. This stands in contrast to the image of the solitary male historical figure found in other Caribbean plays, while being the people's spokesperson he remains isolated.

In *Lumina Sophie*, to underline the significance of the role in the Insurrection of several women, rather than that of a single woman, and by extension the significance of women in society as a whole, particular importance is granted to the Chorus of *Pétroleuses*. The *Pétroleuses* are present longer on

¹⁹⁷ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 97.

¹⁹⁸ Artheron, 'Propos liminaire' in *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Paris : Idem, 2014), p. 21.

stage than Lumina herself, suggesting that they are as significant to the Insurrection as their leader. Women are not merely to be considered as a group presence however, for out of the collective individual voices emerge, such as that of Rosalie, fierce and loyal to Lumina; and Simonise, of Indian descent, a critic of society, and a storyteller.

Dracius claims that though Lumina is the protagonist, she does not and cannot fight alone:

... [S]i elle avait été toute seule elle aurait pu en faire moins que ce qu'elle a fait. Parce [...] qu'après il y a eu une action, les choses ont évolué. D'accord, elle s'est sacrifiée, mais pour quelque chose, il y a eu des lois, des améliorations, dans le sort des travailleurs. Si elle n'avait pas mené ce combat avec cette vigueur, rien n'aurait changé. Mais en même temps [...] je suis contre la monarchie, au sens propre le gouvernement d'un seul. Elle était avec des gens, elle était épaulée.¹⁹⁹

Lumina's solidarity and compassion for the other women is her drive, and also what sets her apart from the rest. In her final conversation with the Muse Africa, Lumina spurns the supernatural being's final efforts to record the *Pétroleuses*' acts for posterity, explaining that she is 'de cette terre, de ce temps' and must act here and now:

LUMINA, *lui coupant la parole et montrant les flambeaux qui s'éloignent*. – Chut !... Je ne saurais m'attarder. C'est moi qui dois les guider. Au revoir, la Muse ! À bientôt ! À un autre soleil !²⁰⁰

In *Rosanie Soleil* the protagonist Rosanie is presented alongside three other women: her twin sister Eïsanor, her mother Mme Soleil, and Voisine Fumée. *Rosanie Soleil* offers four complementary and individual female perspectives that provide 'depth' (*épaisseur*) to the history of the Insurrection and give a voice to the individual experiences of the women involved in the event. Interestingly, in her Preface to the play Césaire specifies that the play is not historical, emphasizing the fictional aspect of the portrayal of these characters.

¹⁹⁹ Suzanne Dracius in an interview with the author, 27th December 2015.

²⁰⁰ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 143.

She also emphasizes her interest in the everyday lives of women who lived at the time of the Insurrection. Thus, these characters may be fictional, yet they remain plausible.

In addition to diverging from their male counterparts' portrayal of historical characters on stage, Ina Césaire and Suzanne Dracius also use endogenous art forms (dance, *conte*, song) differently. Like Chamoiseau in *Man Dlo*, Césaire and Dracius use the participatory medium of the *conte*. Yet whereas Chamoiseau follows conventional *conte* techniques, in *Lumina Sophie* and *Rosanie Soleil* these conventions are upturned. This is mainly because in both plays the *conteurs* are women, and traditional *conteurs* are almost exclusively male in Martinique and Guadeloupe. What is more, while the majority of *contes* are allegorical and set in a time and place detached from the real world, Césaire and Dracius dispense with allegory and relate real-life events. The genre undergoes a feminization that allows the female characters to reflect on their socio-cultural circumstances. There is also a layering of art forms other than the *conte* in the plays, with the authors making use of the versatility of performance traditions to convey the complexity of Martinican culture.

Ina Césaire and Suzanne Dracius use the genre of historical drama to re-evaluate the historical event of the Insurrection of Southern Martinique, a 'people's victory' where women played a significant role. The authors create female protagonists and characters based on underwritten historical figures and confer on them a subjectivity. This chapter will deal with the ways in which a specifically feminine form of history-telling, and history-performing, is represented on stage through multiple layers of the theatrical device. The first layer is the set, and how it signifies the relation of home and daily life to the

historical event. The second is how the polyphony of feminine and Martinican voices is articulated through the use of art forms born out of Martinique's 'tormented chronology'. The final layer is the relation of history to landscape, and how one's perspective on an event affects or is affected by one's relation to geography.

I History on the Margins: the Sense of Home

Lumina Sophie and *Rosanie Soleil* are both set in an iconic historical location: Rivière-Pilote, the theatre of events during the Insurrection of Southern Martinique. However, Dracius and Césaire have staged the story of the women involved in the Insurrection in locations away from the historical event. *Lumina Sophie* is set in the Insurgents' camp, situated therefore in the wings, in theatrical terms, of the event. In *Rosanie Soleil* the play takes place before the start of the Insurrection, in the home of Rosanie and her family. Dracius and Césaire bring the characters in from the wings by making their home, their lifestyles, and their intimacy central to the action. This not only reveals alternate spaces where historical narratives may be recounted, but spaces where voices on the margins of official histories may be given a platform for expression.

I.1 The 'Clearing' of Martinican history in *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*

The insurgent camp of Rivière-Pilote in *Lumina Sophie* is described thus:

Martinique, 1870.

Une nuit de septembre, extérieur serein, clair de lune. Une clairière au milieu d'un champ de cannes, à l'abri d'une falaise, quelque part dans le Sud entre Saint-Esprit et Rivière-Pilote (le camp de Régale, sur l'habitation Lacaille). Une tranchée avec une

*barricade inachevée. Un cabrouet chargé de sacs de sucre. Un boucan. Deux tonneaux : un de rhum, un d'eau.*²⁰¹

The entirety of the play is set in this single locus of the clearing. This single-space device, often representing an inner space of a play, particularly a home interior in the works of early-twentieth century European dramatists such as Ibsen, Chekhov, or Strindberg, has been interpreted by Una Chaudhuri as materializing multiple layers of social, political, and aesthetic meaning.²⁰² For Chaudhuri, a simple stage set of a bourgeois home is revelatory of a playwright's underlying critique of social formations. The clearing in *Lumina* represents a cross-section of Antillean nineteenth-century society and customs, more specifically relating to the working and agricultural classes. The set is made up of various tools used in the daily routines of the insurgent community: a barricade made of sugar sacks delineates the camp; barrels of rum and water are used in food preparation or medical care, everyday tasks that offer stability to the insurgents, preserving fundamental aspects of their lifestyle and by extension the communal ties that bind them. 'Chaque Pétroleuse se livre à ses ablutions et vaque à ses occupations, lavant son foulard, buvant au tonneau, ranimant le feu du boucan'.²⁰³ Each character is assigned a task that simultaneously contributes to the maintenance of the communal space, and guarantees each character's status within that space.

As Chaudhuri has noted: 'Belonging and related concepts, such as privacy, inclusion, participation, occupy the ideological heart of modern drama, which is above all else a drama about *place*, and, more specifically, about place as

²⁰¹ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 48. [Italics in original playtext.] A 'cabrouet' is a two-wheeled cart. The 'boucan' is a type of grill.

²⁰² Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 29.

²⁰³ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 51.

understood through, around, and beyond the figure of *home*.²⁰⁴ In *Lumina Sophie*, the camp is a temporary dwelling that corresponds to this ‘figure of *home*’.²⁰⁵ It is a necessary place of solace for the characters, especially Lumina. The makeshift nature of this dwelling is not incompatible with the idea of home, for as Chaudhuri further explains in modern drama the question of home is linked to the question of exile. In many ways, these *Pétroleuses* are exiled, as their behaviour and participation in the uprising is unconventional and threatening to society. However, Dracius shows that in this unconventional lifestyle there remains a normalcy, the basis for the construction of a new subjecthood, and by showing the ease with which the *Pétroleuses* move from daily chores to preparing for battle, the playwright underlines the ability of the Martinican women to adapt to extraordinary circumstances.

The boundaries of this ‘figure of *home*’ are constructed through the building of a barricade over the course of the play. This border between the outside world of the Insurrection and the inner world of the insurgent camp delineates the safe haven of the communal space within. The Chorus work intermittently on the barricade during the course of the play. Interestingly, the building of the barricade coincides with moments of heightened revolutionary and political fervour. At the beginning of the play the *Pétroleuses* return from the battlefield to pursue the erection of the barricade to the sound of Lumina’s political haranguing. The Chorus returns thrice more to the barricade on returning from battle, in Acts II, IV, and V, working in Acts II and V to the rhythm of Lumina and Rosanie’s political tirades.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Chaudhuri, p. 31.

²⁰⁵ Chaudhuri, p. 31.

²⁰⁶ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, pp. 51-52, p. 103, p. 77, p. 129.

However, the barricade is as much a symbol of exclusion as it is of inclusion. Indeed, a dispute between the chorus of *Pétroleuses* and Simonise, who is of Indian origin, leads to the latter being pushed outside of the barricade.²⁰⁷ The Muse Africa is also pushed towards the boundaries of the camp and chased away with torches; once when the supernatural character is deemed an outsider and announcer of ‘horreurs et un lot de complications’ in Acts II and III, once as a foreigner and ‘intrus d’Afrique’ when it is discovered it is from Africa in Act IV, and as a traitor, ‘un fouineur des oppresseurs’.²⁰⁸ Lumina intervenes to prevent both Simonise and the Muse from being ostracised. This indicates her openness to difference as well as her sense of solidarity and identification with these outsiders. In many ways, Lumina is herself an outsider, an educated seamstress, as Dracius points out, who sacrificed herself for others despite her privileged position:

...[E]lle n’était pas obligée de faire ce qu’elle a fait. [...] Elle était déjà un peu sortie du malheur de la canne. [E]lle avait appris à lire, et c’est pour ça, parce qu’elle lisait les journaux, parce qu’elle avait une conscientisation politique, c’est un grand mot, mais en tout cas qui faisait qu’elle avait un sentiment qu’il fallait agir... Pour le bien-être des autres, pas le sien, parce que son bien-être était assuré, elle gagnait sa vie comme couturière, elle savait lire et écrire, et vous avez vu quand à la fin elle a été condamnée au bagne, elle a continué en tant que bagnarde à apprendre à lire, à ses compagnons. Pour moi c’était vraiment ça qu’elle avait d’héroïque.²⁰⁹

In arguing for the inclusion of these characters in the safe haven of the camp Lumina also argues to be accepted there herself. This reinforces the symbiotic link between the group and the individual, who both need the acceptance and support of the other in order to fulfil their role in the Insurrection and in the play.

The hostility of the *Pétroleuses* towards these ‘alien’ characters foregrounds their fear and suspicion of the foreign and outside world, and the fragile permeability of this safe ‘figure of *home*’. As Chaudhuri explains, ‘inside

²⁰⁷ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, pp. 55-56.

²⁰⁸ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 100, p. 120, p. 106.

²⁰⁹ Suzanne Dracius in an interview with the author in Paris (27th December 2015).

is not merely contiguous and continuous with outside but thoroughly permeated by it.²¹⁰ It is impossible to be on the outskirts of an historical event without being affected by it. At the end of the play it is shown that despite their best efforts, the *Pétroleuses* and Lumina cannot escape the final battle with the government forces. Lumina is quite aware of this, for she is the character who is the most informed of events taking place beyond the camp, being literate and portrayed throughout the play reading newspapers and letters from Insurrection leaders. She is therefore more aware than any of the *Pétroleuses* that the Insurrection may fail, and is burdened with knowledge that often pits her against the enthusiastic group of *Pétroleuses*. However, the temporary solace of the camp and the passionate community of the *Pétroleuses* alleviate Lumina's burden of knowledge and her responsibilities as a leader and historic heroine.

I.2 Everydayness, the Home in *Rosanie Soleil*

The action of Ina Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil* is removed from the main stage of events, to within and around the Soleils' home. At the end of the play the Insurrection eventually comes 'se briser sur le pas de la porte de leur demeure'.²¹¹ But this occurs after the four characters are represented in the intimacy of 'les mots et les gestes coutumiers'; and after each character's relation and reaction to the Insurrection is revealed.²¹²

The Soleils' *case* in *Rosanie Soleil* establishes a sense of home and refuge. The *case* is itself an important aspect of Martinican life. It is the name given, regardless of size, shape, or material, to the dwellings of Martinicans. Act I is set inside the *case*, then the action moves to the exterior of the *case* in Acts II and III,

²¹⁰ Chaudhuri, p. 31.

²¹¹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 97.

²¹² Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 97.

then back inside in the third and final scenes of Act III. The play's Prologue shows Mme Soleil busying herself with daily chores in her *case*, while a voiceover of a 'morne voix judiciaire' is overheard dictating the names, occupations, and places of birth of those arrested following the Insurrection, which include Rosanie and Magdeleine Clem, Voisine Fumée in the play.²¹³ This scene shows that the play takes place at once 'dans le temps et hors du temps', and that the characters 'sont propulsés hors de l'histoire dont ils sont originairement issus pour pénétrer dans le hors temps du mythe'.²¹⁴ There is no doubt as to the outcome of the Insurrection, and the play is hence to be taken as a portrayal of how and why the women become involved in the event.

The next four scenes in Act I take place within this kitchen-cum-dining-space of the *case*, where the four characters are shown doing daily chores, such as setting and clearing the table in Scenes 1 and 2, or darning in Scene 3, aspects of the everyday to which Ina Césaire refers in her preface to the play. Act II takes place both inside and outside the case. Outside, the twins, Rosanie and Eïsanor, are shown hanging out washing in Scene 1, and all four women shell peas in Scene 2, while in Scene 3 Mme Soleil and her daughters do some sewing and embroidery.²¹⁵ Pauses, silences, and songs open the scenes in each act, indicators of growing tensions outside and an awareness of the impending arrival of events within the confines of the household. However, the women continue to busy themselves with daily chores, gossiping and talking about their lives, their jobs,

²¹³ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 98.

²¹⁴ Stéphanie Bérard, *Théâtres des Antilles : Traditions et scènes contemporaines* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2009), p. 184.

²¹⁵ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, pp. 100, 103, 105, 108, 113, 116, 121.

and their family history. Ina Césaire imposes an ‘everydayness’ that prepares for life after the Insurrection.

In both *Lumina Sophie* and *Rosanie Soleil*, elements of the everyday and of home-making are highlighted to show the protagonists as part of a community that both defines and is defined by the ‘figure of *home*’. Each play is set in a peripheral, interior, domestic, usually feminine space. Mildred Mortimer has described how the gendering of space traditionally follows binaries of inner and outer space, inner being feminine and the outer masculine. In postcolonial narratives:

The female protagonist moves toward empowerment by entering space from which indigenous patriarchs and European colonizers have excluded her, and establishing a new relationship to domestic space, characterized under patriarchy as a restrictive enclosure: she posits a liberating alternative space within it.²¹⁶

The domestic spaces portrayed in the plays posit ‘liberating alternative spaces’ where history is questioned and amended. These spaces are at once interior and exterior, blurring the boundaries between public and private, social and domestic, and hence undermine the colonial and patriarchal systems that exclude these women. *Lumina* is set in a clearing, and in *Rosanie Soleil* the action takes place within and outside a *case*. The spaces are permeable, and everydayness competes with the historical event that is the Insurrection. Dracius’s and Césaire’s plays show a female history that is developed within a domestic space that also merits recognition for its being constitutive of the history of the place that is Martinique.

II Portraying/Establishing a Community

Dracius’s and Césaire’s plays emphasize that the protagonists’ accomplishments are contingent on the support of the women surrounding them. The female

²¹⁶ Mildred Mortimer, *Writing from the Hearth: Public, Domestic, and Imaginative Space in Francophone Women’s Fiction of Africa and the Caribbean* (Lanham, Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), p. x.

communities to which the protagonists belong are portrayed through the use of French Caribbean performance techniques of dance and *conte*, but there are also elements of the European theatrical tradition as is the case of *Lumina Sophie* through the dual deployment of Martinican song and dance, and of elements of Ancient Greek theatre. These communities are in fact polyphonic. In *Rosanie Soleil* four distinct voices are heard and in *Lumina* individual characters indeed distinguish themselves from the collective embodied by the Chorus.

II.1 Lumina's Chorus

The Chorus in *Lumina Sophie* recalls the Chorus from Greek theatre, as well as the revival of the technique by avant-garde, modern, and postmodern dramatic forms in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. *Lumina Sophie's* Chorus consists of local women, and they bring with them the performance traditions of their local space, namely dance, singing, and storytelling. It is therefore an example of the layering of different performance traditions from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean.²¹⁷

Lumina Sophie includes several references to Ancient Greek drama and culture: the Chorus, the Muse Africa, and the Muse's 'Deus Ex Machina' appearance.²¹⁸ Dracius herself claims she owes much to Ancient Greek drama and Greco-Roman culture, due to her multicultural heritage and her training as a

²¹⁷ Kenneth McLeish, writing about the Chorus in Ancient Greek theatre, describes how despite the difficulty of incorporating the device in modern drama, the use of choral arrangements 'articulates the entire performance and contributes tone, pace, style and mood.' Without the chorus, many Greek theatrical classics 'like *Persians*, *Peace* or Euripides' *Suppliants* would lose most of their lyrical context and energy; the choruses are essential components of such otherwise unlikely dramatic bedfellows as *Seven Against Thebes*, *Bacchae* and *Birds*.' Kenneth McLeish and Trevor R. Griffiths, *A Guide to Greek Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 2003), p. 11.

²¹⁸ Dracius specifically terms the Muse 'Apparition divine (deus ex machina)'. Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 47.

teacher of Classics.²¹⁹ The Chorus in *Lumina* is a major indicator of this Classical influence on Dracius's work. The *Pétroleuses* fulfil the initial function of the Greek dramatic Chorus as 'la voix du peuple, [...] la sagesse populaire, immémoriale'.²²⁰ Indeed in Greek drama, the Chorus is often made up of members of the protagonist's society, village or city elders, ladies in waiting, and so forth, just as the Chorus in this play is made up of Lumina's fellow Insurgents.

The Chorus adds energy, pace, and an entourage to the historical character of Lumina. In Ancient Greek drama, the Chorus moved and expressed itself through elaborate and diverse choreographies and vocal arrangements, and was used to echo and to dialogue with the protagonists. Dracius transposes local dance forms and songs in creole into these multiple permutations of choral movement and song found in Ancient Greek theatre. There are several instances of dancing and choral movement that perform multiple functions in *Lumina Sophie*. First of all, dance is used as a device to close the first three acts of the play:

Act I: *Toutes sortent en chantonnant [...] et en dansant.*²²¹

Act II: *Elles sortent en marchant en cadence.
Tambour, mélodie, danse, rideau.*²²²

Act III: *Elles la [Muse] poursuivent en riant et en dansant.*²²³

Dance is also performed as a defensive mechanism, with moves from traditional war dances *laghia* and *danmyé* used against the Muse Africa for instance, considered a threat to the *Pétroleuses* during the first three acts:

²¹⁹ 'Je me sens aussi bien héritière de Sophocle qu'une Française née dans l'Hexagone' in Axel Artheron, 'Suzanne Dracius : le "carrefour" du théâtre pour se hisser au-dessus du magma de l'humaine marchandise', in *Émergences Caraïbe(s)*, ed. by Chalaye and Bérard, pp. 224-230 (p. 224).

²²⁰ Dracius, interview with the author, Paris, 27th December 2015.

²²¹ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 62.

²²² Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 85.

²²³ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 100.

LE CHOEUR (*encerclant la Muse, menaçant [...] Une esquisse de ballet, mi-laghia mi-belya, s'engage.*)²²⁴

*Simonise se lance dans un danmyé frénétique, à l'encontre de la Muse.*²²⁵

Laghia and *danmyé*, as Chamoiseau tells us in *Écrire en pays dominé*, were born from the slaves' reclaiming of their bodies and their subjecthood. The *Pétroleuses* demonstrate that they are capable of defending and expressing themselves through these dance sequences. Since these dance forms are liberating as well as belligerent, Dracius also portrays dance as an emancipatory and cathartic gesture. In Act III, to ridicule the *Pétroleuses*' mocking of Lumina's aspiration to education and literacy, mistakenly taken for delusions of grandeur, the Muse casts a spell on the *Pétroleuses* to make them mimic the movements of 'educated' women.

ROSALIE [...] Mussieu sait écrire ! Et Manzelle sait lire. [...] Tu peux me dire ce qu'on va devenir, quand on sera toutes corsetées, enjuponnées, enchapectées, des Madames de la Haute Bonjou-our ?
[...]

*Comme hypnotisée soudain sur un claquement de doigts de la Muse, chaque Pétroleuse se pavane, mains sur les hanches, l'air hautain, puis prend petit à petit, caricaturalement, la démarche d'un mannequin.*²²⁶

To the *Pétroleuses*, education equates with belonging to a higher, white class and adopting its affected airs. The Muse contends that by making them move caricaturally it is possible for them to adopt these affected airs, and therefore they are not synonymous with education. Soon the spell breaks, allowing the *Pétroleuses* to ease away from the rigidity of French manners and reclaim their own movement.²²⁷ In this interaction between the *Pétroleuses* and the Muse in Act III, movement is hence used as a debating and dialoguing tool.

²²⁴ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 78. See Appendix 2 for description of *belya* and *laghia*.

²²⁵ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 84. See Appendix 2 for description of *danmyé*.

²²⁶ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 89.

²²⁷ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 90.

However, the Muse does not accept the dances performed by the *Pétroleuses* as a form of liberation and free speech, claiming ‘il y a un temps pour tempêter et un temps pour parlementer, en ayant l’art et la manière!’²²⁸ The Muse ‘preaches’ foresight and reflection, argues for dialogue over rash action, and aims to ‘canaliser, corriger vos errements’.²²⁹ The *Pétroleuses* reply in physical terms, going so far as to take the Muse’s term ‘corriger’ to mean to corporally punish:

LE CHŒUR C’est nous qui allons te corriger, bateleur d’enfer ! Tu mérites une palavrée ! Une bonne volée !²³⁰

In a later dialogue in Act IV, the Chorus continues to match their dialogue with the Muse with gestures,

LA MUSE AFRICA [...] Mais savez-vous ce que SIGNIFIE “Lumina” ? Des lumières, pour vous, les femmes, capables d’éclairer votre peuple, s’il consent à les regarder ! [...]

LE CHŒUR (*brandissant des torches*) Des lueurs partout !²³¹

LA MUSE AFRICA Là d’où je viens, la langue latine est notre Verbe originel. [...]

LE CHŒUR Leçon de grammaire ?! Sauve qui peut !

*Le Chœur s’enfuit en courant.*²³²

LA MUSE AFRICA Je ne plaisante pas. Je vous offre la postérité.

LE CHŒUR (*joignant le geste à la parole*) Et nous, notre postérieur !²³³

The Muse’s objectives clash with the spontaneous fervour of the *Pétroleuses*, as the latter’s dance and movement is pitted against the former’s prophetic, bombastic, and esoteric speech. The Muse Africa appears as a writer or dramatist figure who attempts to capture the elusive group of women, elusive due to their being eclipsed from history, and their absence from official histories. But the Muse’s methods are flawed, as she realizes at the end of the play:

²²⁸ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 98.

²²⁹ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 98.

²³⁰ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 98.

²³¹ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 107.

²³² Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 108.

²³³ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 116.

LA MUSE [...] Je voulais garder leur image. En pérenniser le renom. Leur parole de femmes. Leur splendeur. Ces guerrières ne l'ont pas voulu. Elles me l'ont dit haut et clair, haut comme l'éclat de leurs flambeaux déchirant le ciel nocturne, clair comme le feu dont elles incendient le vieux monde, net comme leur détermination : elles se battent pour leur dignité, pas pour la gloire.²³⁴

The *Pétroleuses*' use of movement contrasts with writing as record-keeping and conveyor of memory, for through dance the women physically inhabit a space that is anchored in the immediate present, be it their own or the audience's.

In its function as a dialectic device, dance is also used as a vehicle for reconciliation. At the end of Act III the *Pétroleuses* start to dance the *vidé*:

LE CHŒUR, ROSALIE et SIMONISE *esquissant des pas de danse et chantant.*
Chacune tente d'entraîner Lumina, qui refuse. (Tambour. "Vidé".)²³⁵

The *vidé* is a dance performed on the last day of the Caribbean Carnival, a tradition that fuses together elements of European and African religious practices and celebrations. Ina Césaire describes the Carnival *vidé* parade in her play *Man Filibo*:

Mercredi des Cendres : Voici venu le dernier jour du carnaval ! Il annonce la mort de l'année passée et la naissance d'un temps nouveau. Le vidé en noir et blanc exorcise le problème racial qui a survécu l'esclavage. Qui est blanc, qui est noir ? Et aussi, qui est homme, qui est femme, qui est riche, qui est pauvre ?²³⁶

This *vidé* dance is therefore inherently conciliatory, as it unites persons of different colours, genders, and classes. The *Pétroleuses* wish to have Lumina take part in their dance in a movement of reconciliation. Lumina finally decides to join them.²³⁷ The reconciliation between Lumina and the *Pétroleuses* relaxes the atmosphere, and renders the women less hostile towards the Muse. Act III closes with the *Pétroleuses* chasing the Muse 'en riant et dansant', ending the Act on a

²³⁴ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 145.

²³⁵ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, pp. 96-97. See Appendix 2 for description of *vidé*.

²³⁶ Ina Césaire, *Man Filibo : Pièce en neuf tableaux (pour un théâtre de rue)* in *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. by Christiane P. Makward (Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011), p. 270.

²³⁷ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 97.

lighter tone than Act II where the Muse was instead chased out of the camp with warlike dances.²³⁸

Following Act III there are fewer dance sequences, and more moments of choral unity that are closer to the tragic Chorus of Greek drama. This is mainly due to the approach of the final battle between the *Pétroleuses* and government forces. The group's choral movements and choreographies become more sober, as the Chorus acts similarly to the Chorus in Greek tragedy lamenting the deaths of the Insurrection's leaders, assisting Lumina their leader and the tragedy's protagonist in her preparations for battle, and appearing in the final battle scene, after which they rise, dead, to enter 'une autre scène de l'Histoire'.²³⁹ The Chorus adopt the role of 'pleureuses' as they lament the deaths of the Insurrection's leaders:

LUMINA : Ils les ont fusillés à l'aube. Ils les ont tous exécutés. [...]

LE CHŒUR : Mais qui, Lumina ? Qui donc ?

[...]

LUMINA : L'ensemble des meneurs, comme ils disent. Et puis les autres... Au Polygone Desclieux, à Fort-de-France.

LE CHŒUR *d'abord en pleureuses, puis montrant le poing et brandissant les flambeaux* : Malheur sur nous ! Malheur à eux !²⁴⁰

The 'pleureuses' are borrowed from the tradition of the lamenting Ancient Greek Chorus in tragedies such as Aeschylus's *Libation Bearers*, *Persians*, or *Eumenides*, and Euripides's *Suppliants* and *Trojan Women*. There is also a Caribbean tradition of *pleureuses* at funerals and at Carnival during the 'enterrement de Vaval', or the burial of Vaval, the closing ceremony of Caribbean Carnival, previously referred to in Act III with the *vidé* dance.²⁴¹ These *pleureuses* are described by Ina Césaire thus:

²³⁸ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 100.

²³⁹ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 145.

²⁴⁰ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 127.

²⁴¹ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, pp. 96-97.

[...] Diablesses, fausses veuves et fausses pleureuses se dirigent en gémissant vers le lieu de l'incinération de Vaval. Comme dans la réalité de la vie, les larmes simulées ont remplacé les vraies, dans l'espoir d'évacuer une part de la souffrance...²⁴²

After this mourning sequence, the Chorus then follow Lumina's lead in an 'unveiling' ritual. After exclaiming that the women need a banner, 'quelque chose qui parle de nous [et] pas un drapeau blanc!'²⁴³ Lumina fashions one from her red underskirt, on which she inscribes the words 'FEMMES DOUBOUTE POCO BOUTE [femmes debout pas au bout/ standing women are not beaten]!'²⁴⁴ She proceeds to cover her face up to her eyes, as with a veil, and then briskly unveils herself as a symbol speaking against the silence maintained over the abuse inflicted on Martinican women, for to hide these abuses, 'c'est les couvrir', whilst talking about the violence is a means of acting against it, 'une forme de courage'.²⁴⁵ The unveiling is symbolic of unveiling the truth about the violence perpetrated on women. By unveiling their faces, the women can express the truth themselves: 'LUMINA Pas question de se voiler la face, ni d'en parler à mots couverts.'²⁴⁶ Rosalie follows Lumina's lead, followed by the *Pétroleuses*, 'qui se voilent successivement, puis se dévoilent avec véhémence en faisant de violents signes de dénégation.'²⁴⁷ The *pleureuses* sequence is a ritual that allows the *Pétroleuses* to mourn the deaths of the leaders. With the unveiling ritual that follows, the *Pétroleuses* move on, spurred on by their own concerns and passions. The unveiling ritual allows the women to express themselves independently whilst giving collective voice and meaning to their upcoming final struggle.

²⁴² Césaire, *Man Filibo*, p. 270.

²⁴³ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 130.

²⁴⁴ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, pp. 134-135.

²⁴⁵ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 135.

²⁴⁶ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 135.

²⁴⁷ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 136.

The final choral sequence comes with the battle at the end of the play, where the *Pétroleuses* fall dead one by one, to then rise and stand on an ‘autre scène de l’Histoire’ where the Muse proceeds to narrate the Epilogue that outlines the events following the Insurrection and Lumina’s fate. This ‘autre scène’ is that of official history. The Muse’s final, monotonous speech contrasts with the energy and liveliness exhibited by the *Pétroleuses* in the rest of play, and also contrasts theatre with more didactic genres. There are multiple means with which to explore history, and despite the monotony of the speech Dracius reinstates the story of the *Pétroleuses* into official history. However, the author also reverses the roles of theatre and historical writing, and the more objective genre comes at the end of the play, as a complement. The play is not to be understood as a footnote to be added to the history of the Insurrection, but in its own right, as a free-standing account of the events.

In *Lumina Sophie*, Dracius also undermines the traditional unity of the Chorus through the individuation of other characters and by questioning certain characters’ functions within the Chorus. The protagonist in Greek drama emerged from the Chorus ‘qui donna petit à petit forme à des personnages individualisés, après que le chef de chœur (*exarchôn*) ait instauré le premier acteur qui peu à peu se mit à imiter une action.’²⁴⁸ One would assume Lumina is the Coryphaeus, the Choral leader, since she is referred to in the *dramatis personae* as ‘meneuse de l’Insurrection’.²⁴⁹ Yet Lumina is the protagonist separate from the Coryphaeus, much like in Greek plays that featured the Coryphaeus as the Chorus’s spokesperson conversing with the protagonist. The Coryphaeus in *Lumina* is in

²⁴⁸ Patrice Pavis, *Dictionnaire du théâtre* (Paris : Messidor/Éditions sociales, 1987), p. 68.

²⁴⁹ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 47.

fact a man, an ‘ouvrier agricole Martiniquais’.²⁵⁰ Despite supposedly being a leader, he does not participate much in the action, or at least not as an individual. He may take part in the collective choral sequences, yet for the most part these are performed by the women. The Coryphaeus is referred to only three times in the course of the play, twice while Lumina chastises the *Pétroleuses* for tormenting Simonise:

LUMINA [...] Ça suffit ! (*Le Coryphée, la mine fautive, s’empresse de relever Simonise.*) [...] (*Le Coryphée époussette exagérément la robe de Simonise.*)²⁵¹

The third time the Coryphaeus is referred to is when he is described as dancing erotically with Simonise:

SIMONISE (*se levant, et ponctuant ses phrases de coups de reins. Comme dans une calenda, le Chœur la suit et imite ses mimiques obscènes [...], un des hommes (le Coryphée) s’arcboutant très suggestivement derrière elle.*)²⁵²

The Coryphaeus may be shown as fulfilling an individual act, but in none of these instances does he speak. The Coryphaeus appears as the token male character in a mainly feminine universe. In not giving the male Coryphaeus a voice independent from the rest of the Chorus, Dracius reinforces the importance of the female community and lessens the manifestation of male power.

As the Greek Chorus ‘donna petit à petit forme à des personnages individualisés’, so Dracius’s Chorus allows two female characters other than Lumina to single themselves out from among the Chorus: Rosalie and Simonise.²⁵³ In the previously cited event where the *Pétroleuses* perform war dances against the Muse, it is indicated that Simonise dances the *danmyé* on her own. What is more, the characters of Simonise and Rosanie regularly express

²⁵⁰ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 47.

²⁵¹ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 58.

²⁵² Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 75.

²⁵³ Pavis, p. 68.

themselves independently of the Chorus throughout the play. Rosalie is passionate, violent, and quick-tempered. Unlike Lumina, who is a literate seamstress, she represents the majority of the *Pétroleuses*, field workers, illiterate for the most part:

ROSALIE [...] Tu as pu te débrouiller pour aller en classe au Marin. En ce qui nous concerne, à Rivière-Pilote, on a été les derniers servis. Il y a à peine quelques mois que les bonnes sœurs de Cluny ont ouvert au bourg une “Institution Primaire pour Filles”. À quel moment on a eu le temps d’y aller ?... Ma chère, on est déjà grandes !²⁵⁴

She shares Lumina’s political conscience but lacks solidarity and education, and cares little for the consequences of the *Pétroleuses*’ actions or historical renown:

LA MUSE AFRICA [...] J’aurai plus de succès dans quelques décennies, avec leurs arrière-petites-filles, les charbonnières du port de Fort-de-France. [...] “Viendront d’autres horribles travailleuses” ...

ROSALIE (*la coupant.*) Qu’est-ce que tu veux nous faire gober avec tes charbonnières de ki sa sa yé [qu’est-ce que c’est/what is that] ? Baille-nous de l’air, cher ! Pas de boniments. Si tu viens nous aider, aide-nous !²⁵⁵

Simonise is a ‘indienne créole [...] fille de l’une des premières Indiennes arrivées dans l’île le 6 mai 1853’.²⁵⁶ Because of her origins, she is prey to the prejudice against her people in Act I, when Rosalie and the Chorus attempt to ostracise her, the ‘kouli-mangé-chien [dog-eating-couli]’.²⁵⁷ Lumina puts an end to this by citing a newspaper article that claims throughout the land ‘nègres et Indiens fraternisent’, and the Insurgent camp should follow suit.²⁵⁸ After their initial altercation, however, Rosalie and Simonise form a double-act, in dialogues with

²⁵⁴ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 54.

²⁵⁵ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 140.

The ‘charbonnières’ were coalwomen in charge of carrying coal onto steamships docked in Fort-de-France. They were among the first working women to unionize. ‘La corporation des charbonnières et charbonniers de la Compagnie Générale Transatlantique’ was the union formed in Martinique in 1868. The Muse could be referring to the strike the charbonnières took part in in 1925.

²⁵⁶ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 47.

The first indentured Indian labourers arrived in Martinique on 6th May 1853, aboard the ship *Aurélie*.

²⁵⁷ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 55. ‘Kouli’ is a derogative term used in French overseas territories to describe persons of Indian descent.

²⁵⁸ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 56.

the Muse or Lumina. Simonise is also a *conteuse*, a storyteller, a role usually performed by a man. She intensifies her marginalization by taking on that role denied to women, and by so doing questions the limitations of her social and gendered status.

Rosanie and Simonise are counterweights to Lumina, and each woman has distinct characteristics and her own subjecthood. The *Pétroleuses* may be united as a Chorus, but manifest different motivations for participating in the Insurrection. Rosalie wishes to improve her and her fellow workers' lives. Simonise wishes to fight against the oppression of both women and ethnic minorities. Lumina fights for others out of solidarity. Lumina's uniqueness lies in her ability to reconcile these different objectives and lead the *Pétroleuses* into battle as a group. The gravity of *Lumina Sophie's* subject matter is alleviated and energised through use of the dance and choral formations. The Chorus of *Pétroleuses* is represented as a group, but it is also constituted of individual figures who symbolise different types of women involved in the Insurrection.

II.2 Four Linguistic Interpretations of the Outside World in *Rosanie Soleil*

Ina Césaire also deploys a polyphonic representation of the historical event in *Rosanie Soleil*. The group is made up of four women, fewer than in *Lumina's* Chorus, which allows more extensive character development and individuation. Each of the four female characters is assigned a specific oral linguistic device drawn from Antillean cultural, linguistic, and performance traditions, to express their opinions of the events. Mme Soleil's speech is laden with *creole* and French language proverbs. These expressions at first seem arbitrary, but gradually make sense over the course of the play when used in response to, or in conjunction with,

the words of other characters. Mme Soleil uses her *creole* or French sayings to silence or warn other characters, such as in Act I Scene 3 : ‘À trop farfouiller dans la fange, le cochon-planche s’y coupe le nez !’²⁵⁹ Mme Soleil’s sayings are uttered to protect her daughters when they are used in warning, or to change the subject of a conversation when it seems compromising, as in Act II Scene 3: ‘Arrête-toi, ma fille! Arrête là même ! Pas un pas de plus. Le chemin devient escarpé.’²⁶⁰ Mme Soleil’s proverbs also have a political resonance:

Act I Scene 1: Dans un pays qui connaît la faim, on ne laisse refroidir ni le boire ni le manger... Diable et Bon Dieu, que le Ciel me pardonne (*elle se signe rapidement*), autour de ce pays affamé...²⁶¹

Act II Scene 2: Qui parle le français de France se positionne dans la vie!
[...]
Le nègre est long à s’éveiller, mais il engrange jusqu’à plus soif...²⁶²

The relevance of these sayings to the political events taking place beyond the Soleil home shows how colloquial expressions are connected to socio-political circumstances. Mme Soleil’s words expose the spectator to linguistic elements drawn from Martinican dialects. They are the basis of a collective experience, and maintain the *everydayness* that is on the verge of being upturned by the Insurrection.

Voisine Fumée is ‘(folle fausse ou réelle?), traversée de pulsions de fuite et de bouleversements, cherchant à s’abstraire du monde réel qu’elle juge dénué de grandeur.’²⁶³ As in the case of Mme Soleil, her vivid language and visual imagery illustrate the power of words and imagination to criticize and negotiate social injustice and tensions. In Act I Scene 3, following a conversation between

²⁵⁹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 106.

The ‘cochon-planche’ is a type of pig.

²⁶⁰ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 123.

²⁶¹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 101.

²⁶² Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 117, p. 120.

²⁶³ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 98.

Mme Soleil and Voisine Fumée on the nature of the latter's madness, Voisine Fumée engages in a long tirade about repression, about an imaginary voyage she undertakes to and from Africa, the 'terre oubliée des Ancêtres oubliés', and about slavery.²⁶⁴ Fumée effectively relativizes the notion of madness by describing the injustice and hence 'madness' of slavery and bondage, and of the schizophrenia of Martinicans (herself included) torn between a mythical homeland of their Ancestors and the fraught land of Martinique. She ends her tirade by criticizing a God who offers no answers, and who in her eyes is dead. This tirade contains what could be taken as veiled references to events happening in Rivière-Pilote. Fumée opens the monologue relating a conversation with her cousin, who is an 'amarreuse', a sugar cane field worker. Fumée praises the wisdom of the *amarreuses*, who were also amongst the women participating in the Insurrection. What is more, Fumée's question 'Lequel est le plus fou? Celui qui écrase l'homme ou l'homme qui se laisse écraser?' and her calling Martinique 'notre île folle' and 'île isolée autour de son volcan en sommeil illusoire', can be seen as hinting at the tense socio-political situation that gave rise to the Insurrection.²⁶⁵

Fumée's next 'delirious' reference to the Insurrection, in Act I Scene 4, is more gruesome, where she describes the recent assassination of the plantation owner Louis Codé. Fumée talks of 'un cochon dépecé sur un pied-bwa', which judging by the conversation that follows about Codé's assassination is a reference to the man himself.²⁶⁶ She repeats the word 'dépecé' once more to specify whom the 'cochon' represents: 'Et on dépèce le gèreux comme un cochon à la Noël.'²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, pp. 107-108.

²⁶⁵ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 107.

²⁶⁶ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 109.

A 'pied-bwa' is a tree.

²⁶⁷ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 111.

This leaves little doubt as to who has been slaughtered. Codé, although in reality the plantation owner and not the overseer, is throughout *Rosanie Soleil* referred to as the ‘gèreur’, or overseer, of a plantation. The rest of the scene contains outbursts from Fumée relating to the event, despite the twins’ efforts to silence her.

FUMÉE Les nègres sont les premiers républicains, Codé !

ROSA Qu’est-ce qu’elle raconte ?

LA MÈRE Qui elle dérange ? [...]

FUMÉE (*ton prophétique*) Les gens du Morne-Vent, [...] avancent, vent-debout. Ce ne sont pas des assassins. Ce sont des justiciers.

ROSA (*aigrement*) Ma voisine n’a jamais la crampe à la langue, je suppose ? Elle ne la laisse jamais en repos !²⁶⁸

Act II Scene 3 shows Fumée’s mood sobering as she announces lucidly that ‘les hommes d’armes fouillent les cases du Morne-Vent’ looking for one of the Insurgents, whom it is suspected Mme Soleil is harbouring in her home.²⁶⁹ Fumée is still used as a device to distract from the reality of the Insurrection, for at the end of the scene, when Eïsanor exits to alert her mother of the arrival of the militia, Fumée starts telling a *conte* to Rosanie:

FUMÉE (*voix étouffée*) Mésié zédam, té ni an manmam ki té ni an ti gason. Manman-an té pov, sété an pòv malèrèz. Ti bolòm-la profité, i vini gran, kòm le jour au lendemain...^{30 270}

In the final scene, Fumée, who is dressed ‘de ses atours les plus fous’, discards items of her garish clothing in a ritual of remembrance and honour addressed to the Martinican Insurgents whose names are first heard read out by voiceover in the play’s Prologue: Insurrection leaders Eugène Lacaille and Louis Telgard, Lumina Sophie, Scholastique, Massamba, Jorite Moutoussamy, Astérie Boissonnet, John Bull Titote, Roro Privat.²⁷¹ Some names are cited in the official

²⁶⁸ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, pp. 109-112.

²⁶⁹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 124.

²⁷⁰ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil* p. 124.

Note 30 reads : ‘Une femme était très pauvre. Elle eut un petit garçon qui poussa bien’.

²⁷¹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 121.

trial transcripts of 1870.²⁷² The colour of each item of clothing corresponds to a physical or sartorial singularity of an Insurgent: red for Eugène Lacaille's headband; green for Lumina Sophie's last made dress; yellow for Scholastique's madras; black for the colour of Massamba's skin.²⁷³ The association of Insurgents' names with items of clothing that are part of the four women's daily lives, is a means of reclaiming these names for the present, and consequently bringing them into the women's own history.

Fumée's clothing and naming ritual is intermingled with Mme Soleil's own Haitian-inspired evocations. As well as inscribing themselves in Martinican history, the women, and the Insurgents they evoke, become associated with an overarching transhistorical Caribbean tradition of rebellion and contestation. For Bérard, this naming ritual that echoes the enunciation of the Insurgent names in the Prologue creates a circularity that transforms the historical event into myth 'pour que s'accomplisse la révolution, au sens double du terme: le cercle se referme sur le renversement du pouvoir pour permettre l'avènement d'un monde nouveau et régénéré.'²⁷⁴ By establishing parallels between Haitian and Martinican histories, Ina Césaire's characters stage their own revolution by telling their stories in a revolutionising re-evaluation of Martinican history. Voisine Fumée's discourse evolves from a seemingly delirious view of the world and its injustices, to a more sober articulation of the events, contexts, and processes of the past. Fumée represents the Martinican people's coming to terms with the troubled, traumatic, and unwritten past of their 'mad island' by acknowledging and

²⁷² Conseil de Guerre, *Insurrection du Sud (22 septembre 1870) : conseil de guerre/Martinique* (Fort-de-France : Imprimerie du journal *Les Antilles*, 1870) pp. 2-3, *Gallica* (23rd December 2012), <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5470322h>> [accessed 1st December 2015].

²⁷³ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, pp. 128-129.

²⁷⁴ Bérard, *Théâtres des Antilles*, p. 184.

celebrating that past and thus creating a new history, and by doing so making the present and future more agreeable.

Rosanie's sister Eïsanor expresses herself in a metaphorical language, and conveys her opinions through proverbs and songs, similarly to Mme Soleil. Like Mme Soleil she is a fictional character, and both provide a flipside to the historical character of Rosanie, as well as a private life and intimacy. Twin sisters Rosanie and Eïsanor each demonstrate elements of Mme Soleil's own personality and beliefs. Eïsanor's linguistic devices are similar in many ways to her mother's, whereas the inner motivations of Mme Soleil are vocalised and acted upon by Rosanie. Eïsanor is described as 'la Regardante' in opposition to Rosanie 'la Parleuse', she provides a calming, poised, and reasonable presence in her interactions with her mother and her sister. In the first scene of the play, stage directions describe Eïsanor's tone of voice and facial expressions as 'mesuré', 'calme', 'ironique', 'conciliant', thus communicating her timid and conciliatory personality.²⁷⁵

Since Eïsanor is more cerebral than her sister, she believes that the social and political change her sister wishes to see take place should begin with education: 'Tout est à reconstruire, Rosa, et d'abord dans nos têtes...' ²⁷⁶ She is opposed to destruction like 'l'Eau qui est son élément vital', an element that generates and carries life.²⁷⁷ Eïsanor offers reasonable counter-arguments to her sister's violent outbursts, and often quotes her own mother's sayings. To which Rosanie angrily replies 'Faut-il donc que notre mère se fasse entendre sa voix même quand elle est absente ?', underlining the similarities between her mother

²⁷⁵ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, pp. 100, 101, 102.

²⁷⁶ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 104.

²⁷⁷ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil* p. 98.

and her sister's conciliatory and sententious mentalities.²⁷⁸ When Voisine Fumée announces the death of Codé in Act I Scene 4, both Eïsanor and Mme Soleil try to keep Fumée from divulging too much information about the secrets they both want to hide from each other, all the while trying to glean clues as to the hidden meanings and secrets of Fumée's metaphorical talk. Therefore, Eïsanor alternately tries to silence or humour Fumée and her mother in order to keep the one from talking and the other from listening:

EÏNA (*à la folle*) Assieds-toi donc, folle luciole, tu as l'air las, et mange un peu de cette soupe-z'habitants ...²⁷⁹

EÏNA Maman, je vous sers un peu d'à-tous-maux?²⁸⁰

EÏNA (*doucement, à Fumée*) Qui a parlé de tuer, petite mère?²⁸¹

When she is not attempting to silence or appease Fumée and Mme Soleil, Eïsanor, along with her sister Rosanie, tries to hint at what is happening beyond the *case*, particularly in their discussion about Codé's murder in which they refer to him metaphorically as a pig:

EÏNA Maman dirait que chaque cochon a son samedi.
[...]

N'exagérons rien, cependant ! Un cochon ! Rien n'est perdu dans un cochon !

LA MÈRE [...] Les tripes pour le boudin, la chair pour la fricassée, les côtes pour les grillades, le reste pour la viande salée...

EÏNA Et la peau pour le tambour ?

LA MÈRE Assez bêtiser ! Qui a jamais vu un tambour en peau de cochon ?²⁸²

Eïsanor's ironic tone suggests she is referring to a different type of pig than the one killed on Christmas Eve. The drum she mentions is also a veiled reference to those used by the Insurgents and other rebels. The expression 'chaque cochon a

²⁷⁸ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 114.

²⁷⁹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 109.

'Soupe- z'habitants' is a creole soup.

²⁸⁰ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 111.

The 'à-tous-maux' is a tropical medicinal plant used to make infusions.

²⁸¹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 112.

²⁸² Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, pp. 109-110.

'Chaque cochon a son samedi' : Every pig meets his day.

son samedi' signifies 'each gets what they deserve', and hints that the pig is in fact Codé who gets his just desserts at the hands of the rebels.

The Insurrection has allowed Eïsanor to regain her voice '[enfouie] dans la mangrove de ma vie d'avant ce temps.'²⁸³ This 'regained voice' could be taken as a symbol of voices regained by the women involved in the Insurrection. From Act II onwards Eïsanor slowly shifts towards Rosanie's perspective, but maintains her rationalist demeanour and her desire to protect her mother from the events beyond the *case*. This explains why she says : 'Peut-être n'avons-nous pas seulement vu, ma mère, peut-être avons-nous fait!', in Act II Scene 3, suggesting she has been involved in underhanded activities, and also why she then adds '(doucement): Petite mère, vous voulez nous protéger et c'est nous qui vous protégeons.'²⁸⁴ Up to the end, Eïsanor follows her sister's lead, but preserves her individuality and cautious approach. She is aware that after the Insurrection 'la floraison prochaine [ne serait peut-être] pas plus féconde' and 'l'arbre, étouffé par son rejeton parasite, [laisserait] apparaître un tronc dénué de sève'.²⁸⁵

Much like her manifestation as Rosalie in *Lumina Sophie*, Ina Césaire's Rosanie possesses a bold and fierce personality: 'extravertie, rieuse image de la vie et du feu purificateur et dévastateur.'²⁸⁶ Records identify the historical Rosanie as the main instigator of Codé's murder, and in her dialogue with Eïsanor in Act II Scene 2, she does not hide her participation in the assassination. Rosanie is the spokesperson for the Insurrection, urging the destruction of the old plantation society and a revolution that will bring about a new, fairer world. This

²⁸³ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 114.

²⁸⁴ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 123.

²⁸⁵ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 115.

²⁸⁶ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 98.

she sees as her duty to her slave ancestors, describing herself and Eïsanor as ‘garantes du temps révolu’.²⁸⁷ This passionate and violent personality contrasts and coincides with those of Mme Soleil, Voisine Fumée, and Eïsanor.

This polyphony, to use Bakhtin’s term defining the participation of multiple voices and perspectives within the same narrative, is necessary to fully understand the context and community from which Rosanie Soleil has emerged. Before the twentieth-century publication of a handful of studies on the women involved in the Insurrection, and the performance of Césaire and Dracius’s plays, Rosanie Soleil was simply a name on a list of three women prosecuted for murder. In *Rosanie Soleil*, Rosanie is accorded multiple voices with which to tell her story, conveyed through the uniqueness and multiplicity of the French Caribbean language and imaginary. This polyphony provides more substance to an under-represented historical female figure and, by the same token, gives voice to other women who lived through the Insurrection.

II.3 Conte

Both Dracius and Césaire use the Martinican *conte* genre in their plays. Whether or not theatre practitioners make use of this form of storytelling merging African tribal oral traditions and French fairy tales, many recognise that the genre is at once an art form in its own right, and a tool for social critique. Gerty Dambury, for instance, resents what she senses as pressure to incorporate elements of the *conte* in Caribbean theatre:

J’en ai ras-le-bol que chaque fois qu’un écrivain antillais ou africain écrive quelque chose, on le renvoie à l’oralité, parce que vous êtes une civilisation orale, et patati patata. Donc, je n’écris pas de conte.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 114.

²⁸⁸ Stéphanie Bérard, “Mon cheval de bataille est l’intime” : Entretien avec Gerty Dambury réalisé par Stéphanie Bérard, *Île en île* (July 2004) < <http://ile-en-ile.org/gerty-dambury-mon-cheval-de-bataille-est-lintime/> > [accessed 13th January 2015].

She does, however, acknowledge having enjoyed *contes* as a child, and claims to be more interested in the ‘essence’ of the *conte* in its social critique of colonialism, slavery, social disparities, race, and so forth. As Ina Césaire explains in a preface to *Contes de nuits et de jours aux Antilles*, two important criteria in *conte* are ‘le talent oratoire du conteur et la richesse du conte proprement dit, au niveau du signifiant sociologique.’²⁸⁹ It is these performative and sociological criteria that are foregrounded in *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* and *Rosanie Soleil*.

The plays deviate from the norm of the *conte* with the unconventional use of a female *conteur*: Simonise in *Lumina Sophie* and Voisine Fumée in *Rosanie Soleil*. Despite the existence of a female-led tradition of *conte* in French literature (*Contes de Ma Mère L’Oie*, ‘contes de grand-mère’), the oral storytelling tradition in the Caribbean is for the most part upheld by male practitioners. In *Contes de mort et de vie aux Antilles* Ina Césaire specifies that:

[...] la grande occasion du conte demeure ici la veillée funéraire que l’on organise la nuit suivant les décès, dans les campagnes. Les contes sont alors toujours dits par des hommes et s’adressent à un public d’adultes ...²⁹⁰

Thus, this against-the-grain feminization of the *conte*’s narratorial voice allows women who contributed to the Insurrection, and more broadly to Martinican society and history, to participate directly in this traditional artistic form of social criticism.

II.3.i Conte in *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*

In *Lumina Sophie* there are two storytelling sequences narrated by the *Pétroleuse* Simonise, who, as mentioned above, is very much socially and racially marginalised. In Act II, her *conte* relates the abuse inflicted on female plantation

²⁸⁹ Ina Césaire, ‘Avant-propos’ in *Contes de nuits et de jours aux Antilles* (Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1989), p. 7.

²⁹⁰ *Contes de mort et de vie aux Antilles*, ed. by Ina Césaire and Joëlle Laurent (Paris: Nubia, 1976), p. 8.

workers by the white overseer. Similar abuses perpetrated by men of the *Pétroleuses*'s own class are the subject of the *conte* in Act V.²⁹¹ Each *conte* starts with the typical opening and closing formulae. In Act II Simonise announces the beginning of her tale by prompting her audience with the phrase 'Tim-tim', to which the Chorus replies 'Bois-sec', giving her the permission to tell her story. In Act V she opens with a question:

SIMONISE [...] L'histoire?
LE CHOEUR (*avide*) Raconte!²⁹²

Simonise reiterates the term 'histoire' twice more in the course of her narrative. The third and final interrogation, when asking if the audience would like her to finish her tale, is 'La fin de l'histoire?'²⁹³ The rest of her story is also punctuated by questions establishing audience interaction:

SIMONISE [...] Est-ce que la cour dort ?
LE CHOEUR Non, la cour ne dort pas !
SIMONISE [...] La suite de l'histoire ?
LE CHOEUR (*haletant*) Raconte!²⁹⁴

Simonise includes phrases that establish the veracity of her story, such as 'Récit véridique: j'ai assisté à la scène.'²⁹⁵ This technique is used by *conteurs* to certify their authority as narrator of the *conte*, and to demonstrate their legitimacy in both the world of the *conte* and the world of the audience. In Act II, Simonise follows up the opening of her *conte* with a riddle, a device to initiate audience participation:

SIMONISE Qui est-ce qui ressemble au chadron ? Comme lui, hirsute, laid comme un péché mortel, mais qui pique plus fort que l'oursin ?
LE CHOEUR Le commandeur !²⁹⁶

²⁹¹ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, pp. 75-77, pp. 133-134.

²⁹² Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 133.

²⁹³ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 134.

²⁹⁴ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 133.

²⁹⁵ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 133.

²⁹⁶ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 75.

The 'chadron' is a type of sea-urchin.

The rest of her *conte* is accompanied by gestures and is punctuated with traditional interjections from her audience, such as ‘Ni kri, ni kra’, and ‘mistikri, mistikra’.²⁹⁷

The bleakness of both of Simonise’s narratives prompts the need for them to be told in the participatory and satirical medium of the *conte*. Both stories are in fact accounts of the hardships experienced by the *Pétroleuses* themselves at the hands of their employers and their male partners. The gravity of these *contes* is not incompatible with the philosophy of the *conte* tradition, for most of the traditional Antillean stories relate tales of characters in situations identical to, or reminiscent of, those encountered by contemporaries of the *conteur*, or even by slaves in the period preceding abolition. For, as Gerty Dambury points out, the *conteur*’s role is to establish a link between:

[...] quelque chose que quelqu’un a su que les autres ne peuvent pas rapporter parce que ces autres ne sont plus là pour les rapporter. Le conteur rend finalement compte de l’ensemble de la société et ouvre la voie pour que d’autres personnages viennent s’inscrire dans cette globalité que, lui, met en œuvre...²⁹⁸

This happens on two levels: First, Simonise’s story involves characters who do not appear on stage, and her *conte* speaks for them; Dracius also allows these women to express themselves centuries later on a twenty-first-century stage through the *contes* in her play. And subsequently, the *conte*’s aim at creating a global experience shared by the listeners and *conteur*, is another goal achieved in Simonise’s storytelling; she talks to the Chorus who have similar experiences and feelings, and she also shares these problems with the audience of the play, be they Martinican or not.

²⁹⁷ Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, p. 76.

²⁹⁸ Bérard, ““Mon cheval de bataille est l’intime””.

II.3.ii Conte in *Rosanie Soleil*

In *Rosanie Soleil*, the whole of Act II Scene 2 is dedicated to telling a *conte*. It is the last scene in the play in which the characters are shown in a convivial atmosphere before the Insurrection fully crosses the threshold of their *case*. The characters collaborate in telling the *conte*, in tune with a genre that is participatory and collaborative. This central scene demonstrates how Martinican cultural performance traditions can be used to represent and question political events. The *conte* relates one of the contentions that started the Insurrection, opposing the worker Lubin, here named Lindoret, to Augier de Maintenon, a white civil servant. Despite these being separate cases – the Lindoret case and the Codé case – Fumée insists on calling Maintenon ‘Codé’ instead, a conflation that puts both cases on an equal footing vis-à-vis the Insurrection.

Elements of the *conte* tradition used here include onomatopoeia. For instance, we hear imitated the sound of galloping horses: ‘plakatak, plakatak’, and that of a horsewhip: ‘le premier coup de coutelas fait sauter la cravache! Wap!’²⁹⁹ Another element is the *conteur*’s commentary of the *conte*, usually uttered as asides, here provided by the other three women and not Fumée herself:

FUMÉE Lindoret, il répond, sans se démonter – et en français, faites-lui confiance –
[...]

LA MÈRE Sainte Mère ! Ce nègre-là s’entendait à distiller le français !³⁰⁰

FUMÉE [...] vingt ans de travaux forcés pour le Lindoret !

ROSA Pour la négresse violée et laissée pour morte l’an dernier, Codé n’avait eu qu’une amende !³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p.116, p.119.

³⁰⁰ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p.117.

³⁰¹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p.120.

Fumée also uses expressions to defend the veracity of the story, such as ‘C’est toute vérité, mon petit cœur’, and ‘Mes chères, vous connaissez toutes le verdict’.³⁰²

Conte in *Rosanie Soleil* underlines the Martinican woman’s status as ‘poto-mitan [pillar]’, the archetypal image of the woman as pillar of the Antillean family unit, borrowed from the term describing the central pillar of a voodoo ritual. For although, as Césaire points out, man ‘possède certes la maîtrise du pouvoir, [...] c’est le monde féminin qui assume la survie de la société.’³⁰³ Dracius’s and Césaire’s protagonists are indeed a part of the feminine world of the home and family traditions, which they need as an anchorage and a motivation to spur on their rebellion. But their ambition and revolutionary fervour, their destructiveness, and attachment to the ephemeral also annul their status as custodians of society. However, it may also be that the Martinican women preserve a different type of society to that which they aim to destroy. The four women in *Rosanie*, and the *Pétroleuses* in *Lumina* constitute groups that practise a culture and lifestyle in many ways intangible, yet necessary to the formation of an identity and the survival of customs that define the Martinican people. *Contes* in *Lumina Sophie* and *Rosanie Soleil* showcase the dramatic power of the genre, and apply its sociological critique to political or social issues experienced by Martinican women in the plays.

The use of local performance customs facilitates a polyphonic expression of the historical event and allows for a re-telling of the Martinican past from the perspective of the community and more specifically the female individuals that

³⁰² Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p.119, p.121.

³⁰³ Stéphanie Bérard, ‘De l’enracinement à l’ouverture au monde’, p. 147.

compose it. By fusing European and Caribbean performance styles, Dracius creates a Chorus that replicates the diverse Choral movements and gravitas of Ancient Greek drama, whilst also conveying the effusiveness and liveliness of Martinican dance and Carnival. Ina Césaire introduces four different forms of expression through each character, underlining the intricacies of Martinican language and imaginary. The *conte* is another important device that unites the characters on stage, and establishes a complicity between the characters and the audience. The *contes*' description of harsh social conditions contextualizes the struggle of the characters in the plays. Each performance style is therefore adapted to convey female experiences and concerns. The communal ties between the female communities portrayed on stage, and the protagonists who belong to these communities, are demonstrated in dance and common linguistic and performative expression. Showing the female community on stage evokes the possibility of the revisioning of history and the status of women in society off the stage.

III The Relation to Geography and the Elements

In *Rosanie Soleil*, there is an emphasis on the symbiosis between the historical event and the landscape in which it unfolds; providing a further illustration of Glissant's claim that Martinican landscape is 'all history'.³⁰⁴ This symbiosis offers a more comprehensive understanding of the Insurrection and the female characters involved. Each of the four characters in *Rosanie Soleil* is associated with one of the four natural elements (Water, Fire, Earth, Air), and more specifically with the Antillean incarnation of these elements in Martinican geography (Stone/Field, Wind). Eïsanor's element is Water, and Rosanie's Fire.³⁰⁵ Mme Soleil's element

³⁰⁴ Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 21.

³⁰⁵ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 98.

is Earth, given her steadfast and nurturing character. On several occasions she is also described as rooted to the ground and as ‘un roc’.³⁰⁶ She is also an ‘ancienne “amarreuse” de cannes à sucre’, which suggests in addition a closeness to the land.³⁰⁷ Voisine Fumée’s element is Air. She is known as ‘la folle de Morne-Vent’, and has a distracted and fleeting mind, and also describes herself as flying in her trance in Act I Scene 3: ‘la petite Fumée s’échappe à grande vitesse, filant à plus de vingt nœuds [...] a survolé le volcan’.³⁰⁸

Wind heralds the impending approach of the Insurrection to the Soleil home throughout the play. Voisine Fumée, whose element is Air, enters and exits the *case* to bring word of the same events throughout the play. A gust of wind enters the *case* at the start of the play: ‘Un violent coup de vent s’engouffre dans la case, faisant voltiger les rideaux au-dessus des persiennes.’³⁰⁹ Fire is also referred to in this first scene. Wind is ‘porteur de feu’, a possible reference to the Insurrection.³¹⁰ The element holds different connotations for each character:

EÏSANOR (*conciliante*) [...] Qu’y a-t-il de mal dans un petit feu qui soulage l’âme et le corps ?

LA MÈRE (*furieuse*) Le feu ! Je me souviens surtout de celui de mes entrailles, lorsqu’elles se sont doublement ouvertes pour vous mettre au monde...

ROSANIE (*riant*) De là à dire qu’on est les filles du feu !³¹¹

The fire and wind imagery in this first scene sets the tone for the rest of the play.

It also introduces the ‘threat’ from beyond the *case* of events taking place in the wider world, and the influence of outside events on the characters.

Each woman is associated with one of the elements, distinct from the others, but each needs the others to survive and thrive. Eïsanor as Water counters

³⁰⁶ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 97, p. 104.

³⁰⁷ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 97.

³⁰⁸ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 107.

³⁰⁹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 100.

³¹⁰ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 101.

³¹¹ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 102.

and calms Rosanie's Fire, Mme Soleil grounds Fumée whose element is Air. This interconnectedness in difference further underlines the unity of Martinican women, but also suggests that like different aspects of Martinican culture, each woman is distinctive and unique. Césaire does not reduce these women to a social and gendered category, and shows that each one with her singularities, flaws, and qualities, has the potential to participate in the interrogation, preservation, or reconstruction of Martinican society.

Reference to landscape is also a tool for connecting different Caribbean histories. The Insurrection of Southern Martinique is likened to the Haitian revolution (1791-1804) through the evocation of similarities between Martinican and Haitian landscapes. In Act II Scene 4, the final scene, Mme Soleil conjures up images of the Haitian revolution. Mme Soleil previously divulges in Act II Scene 3 that the twins' father was from Haiti, 'un pays noir et libre', and her attachment and attraction to the first free Caribbean nation becomes more apparent from that point onwards.³¹² She hums a Haitian song before Fumée's final tirade at the end of Act II Scene 4.³¹³ Fumée's enumeration of Martinican heroes comes as a response to Mme Soleil's describing the rising of the rebel slaves in Haiti:

LA MÈRE [...] Mornes et Fonds sont envahis de la rumeur soudaine de milliers de pieds nus [...] La forêt de Bois-Caïman n'est plus qu'une fourmilière de lucioles humaines qui réclament justice. Dans la clairière, en son mitan, est dressé le grand tambour, l'Assotor sacré [...] ³¹⁴

There are also 'Mornes' and 'Fonds' in Martinique, and the sound of drums is heard during the Insurrection in Martinique as it was during the Haitian revolution. The nexus between history and geography, and between landscape and culture, is made apparent in the use of imagery relating to nature and the

³¹² Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 122.

³¹³ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil* p. 126.

³¹⁴ Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, p. 127.

elements. An increasing awareness of the effects of the events on the landscape offers an original and novel means of representing history in literature and on stage. It also reinforces the anchoring of the historical event within a specific place, and how the elements and landscape are as imbricated in the event as the humans.

Conclusion: ‘Remembering Together’: Towards a New Retelling of History?

Lumina Sophie and *Rosanie Soleil* take part in a movement towards the commemoration of marginal histories on stage. Marginal in terms of the peripheral relation of the Antilles to France, and in terms of the representation of women in Antillean society. This treatment of the Insurrection of Southern Martinique opens up a dialogue with more established national historical narratives as well as regional ones, such as the Haitian revolution, to which the Insurrection is likened in *Rosanie Soleil*. A dialogue between both established French national historical narrative on the one hand and local Martinican narratives and local women’s histories on the other is also at work. In *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* a community of women interact with the Other embodied by one of their own who is of Indian descent, or by the Muse Africa. In these interactions an awareness of, and outreach, to regions that have influenced Martinican culture is achieved. Glissant writing on history and remembrance says, ‘si nous voulons partager la beauté du monde, si nous voulons être solidaires de ses souffrances, nous devons apprendre à nous souvenir ensemble.’³¹⁵ And so *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* and *Rosanie Soleil* include women in this communal experience of ‘collective remembrance’.

Chris Bongie, writing on disputes over commemorations of the abolition of slavery in Martinique, posits that ‘the lack of a definitive self-knowledge, for so long lamented by anti-colonial critics [...] can now be reconfigured as itself a potentially productive form of knowledge, and [...] the lack of one path into the

³¹⁵ Édouard Glissant, *Une nouvelle région du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 148.

future (or back into the past) may itself open up the possibility that there is a multiplicity of such paths.³¹⁶ *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* and *Rosanie Soleil*, which both emphasize the significance of the Insurrection and the role of women in the event, echo this idea of a multiplicity of paths of commemoration; a multiplicity redolent of the layering of history described by Glissant. The commemoration of the Insurrection of Southern Martinique is illustrated in these plays through the crucial and yet under-recognised involvement of women in the event. Césaire and Dracius saw in the lack of historical information about Lumina and Rosanie what Bongie described as a ‘productive form of knowledge’ allowing them to create semi-fictional yet complex portrayals of those women. Indeed, the exercise of forging a subjectivity for the female protagonist supersedes the need for accuracy in her portrayal. This creative production of knowledge also gives rise to the creation of fictional female characters to compensate for the lack of records about women other than Lumina and Rosanie involved in the Insurrection.

These female subjectivities are developed on stage through set, Caribbean performance genres, and characterization. The set in each play is located in the home, or a makeshift ‘figure of home’, to focus on the female experience. However, the ‘private feminine space’ is problematized by the fact home in both plays occupies both inner and outer spaces. Blurring the lines between public and private spheres underlines the important contribution of female members of society to history and to social formations. Each play has a distinctive style foregrounding the diversity of Martinican theatre, which fuses Caribbean and European performance styles, particularly in the case of the Chorus, which

³¹⁶ Chris Bongie, ‘A Street Named Bissette : Assimilating the Cent-cinquantenaire of the Abolition of Slavery in Martinique (1848–1998)’ in *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 216.

combines Caribbean dance and European choral movement. The Chorus is a polyphonic device that emphasizes group unity, but also allows individuals to distinguish themselves from the group. Like the first characters who detached themselves from the Chorus in Greek tragedy, the first theatrical representations of these female historical characters emerge from these female communities.

A polyphony of female voices is instituted through the use of *conte* in both plays. The elements of social critique that are specific to the Martinican *conte* genre are applied to criticise the *status quo* through the narration of stories of sexual abuse in *Lumina Sophie* and the story of a contention that led to the Insurrection in *Rosanie Soleil*. In both plays the *conteurs* are women. In *Rosanie Soleil*, Césaire quadrophonically demonstrates the richness of Martinican language and expression by way of her four female characters, and establishes a nexus between event and landscape through language.

Beyond the historically marginalized voices discussed in this chapter, are the present-day Antillean social groups and individuals who struggle to make their voices heard, or else actively dissociate themselves from a collective narrative flawed due to its lacking the input of and resonance for the marginalized. Plays by Ina Césaire and Maryse Condé that explore these other subjectivities are analysed in the following chapter. These plays, by providing counterpoints to the conception of a unified and harmonious historical and social narrative give cause for further reflection on Glissant's 'se souvenir ensemble', and on Bongie's multiplicity of paths for commemoration. They look to the future by presenting characters from different generational groups, and demonstrate multiple means of conveying personal histories, trauma, and self-knowledge.

Chapter Three: 'Demain sera différent' – Discussing the Personal Past

The plays read in this chapter are *Mémoires d'île: Maman N. et Maman F.* (1983)

by Ina Césaire and *Comme deux frères* (2007) by Maryse Condé. Below are the play summaries:

Mémoires d'île: Maman N. et Maman F. is a dialogue between two ageing women inspired by Césaire's maternal and paternal grandmothers.³¹⁷ Aure and Hermance sit and converse outside a wedding reception. It is soon revealed they are half-sisters, and though from differing backgrounds, have both led harsh yet fulfilling lives. Aure, is 'fine mulâtresse au teint clair et aux yeux bleus' of the Martinican middle class and a former schoolmistress; Hermance, is an 'haute négresse d'origine urbaine'.³¹⁸ This duologue is written in a rich mix of French and créole and draws on the colourful vivacity of oral storytelling. It begins with a Prologue drawn from Caribbean Carnival in which two characters from Caribbean mythology, diablasses (she-devils), sing and dance. The history of Martinique and of several generations of Martinican women transpire in these dialogues delineating the personal life stories of these two women. Parallel to their experiences of childhood, marriage, motherhood, and mourning, Aure and Hermance's narratives trace historical events such as the plantation workers' Insurrection of 1870, the hurricane of 1928, and the Second World War.

Comme deux frères is a short claustrophobic double-act. Partners in crime Grégoire and Jeff are in prison and reminisce about their childhoods and their crimes.³¹⁹ The pair are childhood friends, however the tensions between the two are soon revealed as are their contrasting relationships with their families. Both their mothers were prostitutes. Abandoned by his mother at a young age, Jeff was brought up by his grandmother Man Délia but yearned for his mother to return, and still dreams of her. Grégoire suffered physical abuse at the hands of successive stepfathers, and it is suspected that he and a group of other boys from his neighbourhood were sexually abused by the local constable. Grégoire and Jeff fall into juvenile delinquency, Grégoire becoming a brutal womaniser. Jeff comforts Grégoire's rejected conquests. The precise nature of the duo's crime is not known, however it involved a shooting. Grégoire tries to convince Jeff to take the blame and go to prison in his stead. Perhaps out of jealousy, since Grégoire has planned to leave prison a changed man and start a family with a woman he loves, or out of lust, since it is hinted a few times in the play that Jeff may be homosexual, Jeff accepts on the condition that Grégoire gives himself to him.

³¹⁷ First published as *Mémoires d'îles : Maman N. et Maman F.* (Paris : Éditions caribéennes, 1983). First performance directed by Jean-Claude Penchenat, with Mariann Mathéus and Myrrha Donzenac, at Théâtre du Campagnol, Bagnaux, as *Mémoires d'îles : Maman N. et Maman F.*, (April 1983).

The version used here is the second published edition of the play : *Mémoires d'île, Maman N. et Maman F.* in *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. by Christiane P. Makward (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2011), pp.199-228.

³¹⁸ Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d'île, Maman N. et Maman F.* in *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. by Christiane P. Makward (Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011), p. 199.

³¹⁹ First published as *Comme deux frères* (Carnières-Morlanwetz by Lansman, Carnières-Morlanwetz (2007). First performance directed by José Pliya, with Gilbert Laumord and Ruddy Sylaire, at L'Artchipel, Guadeloupe, (27th January 2007).

Introduction

In her study of Maryse Condé's playography, Emily Sahakian detects a shift between the styles of plays written in the 1970s and 1980s, and the two more recent works *Comme deux frères* (2007) and *La faute à la vie* (2009):

Ces dernières pièces [...] sont politiques, en ce qu'elles traitent de la violence, du racisme et des classes sociales, mais elles ne fournissent pas de représentation nationale, ni culturelle, mais une réflexion sur l'individu face à ses souffrances, ses choix et sa liberté.³²⁰

Though it is debatable whether Condé eschews a 'représentation nationale', since both plays include Guadeloupean characters and reference to Guadeloupean culture and geography, it is the case that these later plays focus on the intimate and psychological so as to raise questions of a social and political nature. Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'île* also presents a travelogue of Martinican life and history through the life-stories of the two protagonists.

Whereas the previous plays studied in Chapter Two focussed on the collective and the unifying potential of the community, the characters in *Mémoires d'île* and *Comme deux frères* are examples of the problematizing of the relationship between the individual and their community. The dialogues between the characters in each play etch out traumas and personal stories in order to tighten ties between individuals from similar social backgrounds and genders. *Mémoires d'île* depicts two elderly Martinican women, and *Comme deux frères* portrays two young Guadeloupean men. The elderly women's memories cover the period spanning the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, whereas the childhood and adolescence memories of the young men in *Comme deux frères* pertain to the second half of the twentieth century. By portraying these

³²⁰ Emily Sahakian, 'Le théâtre de Maryse Condé: une dramaturgie de la provocation du spectateur' in *Amour, sexe, genre et trauma dans la Caraïbe francophone*, ed. by Gladys M. Francis (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2016), p. 112.

testimonies both plays seem infused with a desire to improve the future of the characters themselves (*Comme deux frères*) or of the generations that will succeed them (*Mémoires d'île*).

The dramatic devices of space, dialogue, and movement are deployed in each play to explore different levels of marginalization the characters experience. However, the protagonists are also placed in a position of *marronnage* through the upturning of social conventions and stereotypes, which is brought about by the use of space questioning gendered binaries, by the portrayal of excluded voices in the dialogue, and by different types of physical movement that draw from the liberating and self-exploratory potential of Caribbean performance forms. The organization of theatrical space in *Mémoires d'île* and *Comme deux frères* undermines assumptions related to the assignation of space within Antillean society. Much like in the plays analysed in the previous chapter, the plays discussed here explore alternative gendered occupations and representations of space, to which is added a reflection on the delineation and occupation of male space using the example of *Comme deux frères*. Storytelling, as in the plays discussed previously, is a major component of the dialogue. In theatre, the duologue (a dialogue between two characters) format brings about an intimacy and shared experience between two characters at a point in a play when the 'emotional pressure springs from an existential need to "confess" – face to face in a truth-seeking trial, a private inquisition, between two people'.³²¹ This confessional aspect is fundamental in both *Comme deux frères* and *Mémoires d'île*. The desire to confess grows out of differing needs, but produces similar

³²¹ Andrew K. Kennedy, *Dramatic Dialogue: The Duologue of Personal Encounter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 29.

effects: the characters present the struggles of ordinary Martinicans and Guadeloupeans, and through them offer a broader social critique. Movement is applied in both plays to physically explore and express issues that cannot be expressed orally. The liberating and subversive potential of dance, which can be traced back to the emergence of early Caribbean performance forms during slavery, is crucial to the formation of Caribbean identity. Through these devices the playwrights foreground the trials of ordinary Martinicans and Guadeloupeans and reveal pressing social issues affecting contemporary Antillean society. These devices also serve to question social constructs such as gender relations and representation, the status of the individual, and the marginalization of the elderly, the unemployed, and the disenfranchised.

I Space

The treatment of space is an essential aspect of theatrical production, and as in the plays discussed in Chapter Two, it is used in *Mémoires d'île* and *Comme deux frères* to question established social conventions of spatial occupation. In both plays women occupy outer non-domestic spaces and posit 'alternative' ways of occupying space. The constraints of an exclusively male space that is turned in on itself in *Comme deux frères* emphasizes the entrapment of the male characters in restrictive social and gendered codes, and symbolizes the insularity of Caribbean thinking. Beyond the stage space, references to Caribbean landscape feature in the dialogue and incite a reflection on questions of colonial and gendered representations of space that dictate the lives of contemporary Martinicans and Guadeloupeans.

I.1 Set: Inner and Outer spaces

Theories of the theatre, together with recent interdisciplinary research by

geographers, sociologists, and gender theorists demonstrate that space can be occupied in a gendered manner. Writing about the increasing importance of gender studies to the field of geography, Yves Raibaud explains how analysis of certain ‘gendered’ spaces can lead to a heightened awareness of the patriarchal, masculinist forces that established such spaces:

La géographie, science de conquérants, de marchands, de bâtisseurs, ne serait-elle pas un reflet des cultures masculines hégémoniques et des désirs qu’elles projettent sur l’espace, associant exotisme et érotisme, pouvoir et sexe ?³²²

These ‘masculine hegemonic cultures’ impose power relations which are visible through this ‘gendered geography’:

Appréhender les relations sociales de genre comme des rapports de pouvoir n’est cependant pas contre-productif pour la géographie du genre. Cela lui permet de questionner des lieux qui apparaissent, de façon flagrante, comme des construits sociaux reproduisant les structures de domination et/ou de ségrégation sexuelle.³²³

This gendering of space can be and has been explored through theatre, whose stage semiotics replicate and often question existing power and gender relations in the real world. As discussed in Chapter Two, sets of many European Realist plays replicate domestic space, a ‘home’.³²⁴ The domestic space is a projection or microcosm of society, portraying power and social relations in an interior space. The female characters are often confined to this inner private space, the male characters exiting and entering from the public, outer space. *Mémoires d’île* and *Comme deux frères* play with ideas of gender and place by not placing their characters in traditional binary gendered spaces (female domestic inner and male public outer spaces). *Mémoires d’île* is set in an exterior space, rather than a conventionally female domestic interior space. *Comme deux frères* is set in a prison, an interior space, at odds with traditional conceptions of male public

³²² Yves Raibaud, ‘Introduction : “Géographie du genre : ouvertures et digressions”,’ *L’Information géographique* 76, no. 2 (2012), 7-15, p. 8.

³²³ Raibaud, p. 8.

³²⁴ See Chapter Two Part I: ‘History on the Margins, the Sense of Home’.

exterior space.

In *Mémoires d'île* the stage directions do not describe a precise place in which the action is set. In the first edition of *Mémoires d'île* it is indicated that the women are sat outside a house in which a wedding reception is being held. The opening note at the start of the second edition of the play in Makward's anthology states simply:

Deux femmes âgées de la Martinique, demi-sœurs aux vies divergentes, font, lors d'une soirée de mariage, le bilan de leur existence.³²⁵

There is no reference here to a house or any other specific stage direction, however 'une soirée de mariage' suggests the occasion and so the director, reader, and spectator may speculate as to where the wedding takes place. Aure and Hermance refer to the reception briefly in a few lines of dialogue in the opening and at the end of the play:

AURE Elles sont bien fatigantes, n'est-ce pas, ces cérémonies ?
 HERMANCE Ah, pour ça oui, ma chère ! Je ne suis plus une jeunesse !³²⁶

AURE La fête va bientôt, sans doute, se terminer...
 HERMANCE Penses-tu ! C'est une histoire de 6h du matin, ma pauvre... (*Lasse :*)
 Je vais appeler Joseph... C'est mon petit-fils... (*Elle appelle doucement*) Joseph !
 AURE Le voilà ! Allons-y, ma sœur !
 HERMANCE Non ! Attendons ici, ma sœur ! C'est à eux de venir nous chercher !
*La musique du bal se fait entendre. C'est Woy, Madiana !, morceau traditionnel des bals en Martinique.*³²⁷

These lines confirm that they are effectively on the outside of the celebration taking place within.

More detail, albeit brief, is given of the set at the start of *Comme deux frères*, which is described thus:

*Une cellule de prison. Lavabo. WC en évidence. Sur un des côtés, une lourde porte verrouillée, percée d'un judas.*³²⁸

³²⁵ Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 199.

³²⁶ Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 203.

³²⁷ Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 228.

³²⁸ Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 7.

The briefness of the stage directions hint that the emphasis is therefore on dialogue and character. In an interview with Stéphanie Bérard, Condé claimed that the first version of the play contained more stage directions concerning set and music, before Beninese minimalist author José Pliya rewrote sections of the play for its stage production. However, she also stressed the fact that the play might have gained from a more sober décor:

[la mise en scène] est belle mais peut-être aurait-elle pu être encore plus dénudée pour que le texte apparaisse davantage. Peut-être que la recherche esthétique l'obscurcit un peu, surtout au début. [...] Maintenant que c'est davantage épuré, c'est encore mieux.³²⁹

On this 'épuré' set are staged the inner musings and dialogue of Condé's two characters in a 'huis-clos' style that is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's duologues in plays such as *En attendant Godot* (1952) and *Fin de partie* (1957). The deserted, sombre stage comes as a canvas to the philosophical and aesthetic musings voiced by the characters.

It is conceivable in both cases that the plays take place on an empty stage. An empty stage or sober set would enhance focus on the dialogue and the epochs and places described therein. A non-space also bestows on the characters freedom to express themselves and present their experiences independently from dominant spatial structures. And in *Mémoires d'île* the female characters occupy a space that is non-identifiable, and therefore not conquerable, 'colonisable', or mappable. While naturalistic theatre of the Western dramatic culture engages in a sort of spatial mapping, '[n]on-naturalistic theatre, on the other hand, draws attention to its own signifying systems', and the questioning of colonial and/or Western theatrical codes, 'interventions in the conventions which govern performance space usage' is crucial 'because, until they are adapted to the expressive and

³²⁹ Stéphanie Bérard, "“Écrire est un acte un peu surnaturel”".

semantic intentions of colonised peoples, such spaces exist primarily in the dominant society's history.³³⁰ Aure and Hermance are removed from this mapping, and can therefore express themselves free from colonial or racial constraints.

If the scenography of the stage production of *Mémoires d'île* were depicting an exterior space, as it was in the first production of the play in 1983 directed by Jean-Claude Penchenat, then the interrogation of and intervention into colonial and dominant spaces take another turn: that of female emancipation from restrictive colonial and patriarchal spatial entrapment. Indeed, Mortimer describes the female protagonist in postcolonial women's writing as moving towards empowerment by reclaiming spaces denied by colonial and patriarchal systems, and forging a new relation to space by positing 'a liberating alternative space within it'.³³¹ Aure and Hermance are sat outside a building where a wedding reception is underway, and this indicates therefore that the women sit symbolically on the outskirts of society. Ina Césaire puts this outer and marginal space centre-stage where Aure and Hermance can appropriate themselves a platform for a voice that dictates many of their society's rules and cultural traditions despite being silenced by patriarchy and colonialism. Being on the fringes of society allows Aure and Hermance to create an 'alternative space' within which to express their marginal voice. The fact that it is marginal does not mean it is ignored, for Césaire brings forth this alternative space in her play, and Aure and Hermance's testimonies of their mothers' and grandmothers' histories

³³⁰ Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 158.

³³¹ Mildred Mortimer, *Writing from the Hearth: Public, Domestic, and Imaginative Space in Francophone Women's Fiction of Africa and the Caribbean* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), p. x.

suggest this space of dialogue and female exchange is passed down from generation to generation.

In *Comme deux frères*, Jeff and Grégoire are separated from the outside world, and refurbish their drab surroundings with descriptions of experiences in that outside world, which is occupied in their testimonies by women. Indeed, the women in the play, who do not appear on stage, since they are ‘outside’ the prison, are described in the two men’s dialogues as occupying outer, public spaces. Grégoire’s encounter with Lisette takes place in a pizzeria, and Jeff’s description of Lucinda also refers to outside spaces:

JEFF Elle aimait la mer. Elle allait à la nage jusqu’à l’îlet Gosier. Pour elle, nous habitions dans le plus bel endroit du monde.³³²

These women are still constrained by, and reduced to, gendered roles; Lisette is a waitress, a form of domestic, interior worker, and Lucinda is taken out of school by her mother and dies after getting pregnant. However, they belong to an outside world which makes living worthwhile for Jeff and Grégoire, and to which they aspire to return after prison. When children, Lucinda had been a comforting companion to Jeff, whose later efforts to console her after she is jilted by Grégoire end in failure. Lucinda is depicted as conveying an awareness of the island’s natural treasures, bringing back the beauty into what Jeff sees as a damaged island with few opportunities. As for Grégoire, his relationship with Lisette is a beacon of hope. He points out:

GRÉGOIRE Il me faut la réalité, il me faut Lisette. [...] la culpabilité me pèse comme un fardeau. Elle me noircit l’âme et je ne peux pas, non je ne peux pas l’emporter hors d’ici, avec moi, près de Lisette, au soleil de notre amour, sous peine de malheur.³³³

It is the prospect of being reunited with Lisette that Grégoire is most avidly

³³² Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 19.

³³³ Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 30.

anticipating on his release from gaol. Lisette is ‘reality’ and it is in an outer space, ‘under the sun’, even if a hypothetical sun, that their relationship may thrive. The women in *Comme deux frères* occupy outer spaces of emancipation and ‘liberating alternative space’ in the eyes of the play’s protagonists.

If in *Mémoires d’île* the protagonists occupy an emancipatory position outside dominant colonial and patriarchal spaces, the main characters in *Comme deux frères* occupy an inner, oppressive space, which is quintessentially single-sex: the prison cell. The focus on this inner male space unsettles the traditional binary between inner domestic female and outer public male space. While Aure and Hermance in *Mémoires d’île* occupy their space freely, the men in *Comme deux frères* have no control over the space they inhabit. This physical prison is symbolic of mental incarceration, the characters being in fact entrapped by their traumas and repressed by social institutions and colonial history. José Exélis, the director of the play’s first production, also links the play’s theme of imprisonment to Caribbean insularity:

Cette notion d’enfermement est liée aux mentalités insulaires, car les îles sont des paradis, mais aussi des enfermements. Ce sont des paradis lorsqu’on s’y suffit, lorsqu’on arrive à cultiver tout en acceptant tous les possibles que l’île possède, mais c’est un enfermement quand on se limite géographiquement à sa seule île d’un point de vue physique et mental. Or le paradoxe des insulaires, c’est souvent cette propension à vouloir être remarqué, à se plaindre et à se lamenter [...] et à se prendre aussi pour le centre du monde. Pour moi, l’insulaire doit trouver l’équilibre entre le dehors et le dedans, entre l’image et lui-même, son corps-mouvement intérieur.³³⁴

The prison cell is an island that replicates the island of Guadeloupe, its society, and its mentalities. The negative aspects of the insularity of Guadeloupean society are conveyed through the descriptions of childhood trauma, social injustice, and economic precarity in the characters’ monologues and dialogue. The self-

³³⁴ Stéphanie Bérard, ‘“Le corps permet de rendre plus sensible le verbe” entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec José Exélis, Avignon, le 18 juillet 2007’, *Africultures* (13th September 2007) <<http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=6906>> [accessed 14th July 2016]

centeredness of Caribbean island-dwellers, ‘cette propension à vouloir être remarqué, à se plaindre et à se lamenter’ is found in Grégoire’s machismo, self-indulgence, and callousness. The self-sufficiency of the island, ‘paradis lorsqu’on s’y suffit’ is demonstrated in Jeff’s happy reminiscing and Grégoire’s optimistic planning for the future. Lucinda is a character from Jeff’s past who believes in the paradisiacal quality and the self-sufficiency of Guadeloupe, which she calls ‘le plus bel endroit du monde’. She posits an ‘alternative’ occupation of space, and she is described as swimming from the mainland to a smaller island, manifesting Glissant’s notion of ‘relation’ and ‘pensée archipélifique’, an embracing of connectivity between islands, rather than their insularity.³³⁵ Condé extends *Mémoires d’île*’s protagonists’ movement outwards from gender-biased inner domestic space, and emancipation from and questioning of dominant spatial structures and ideologies. In *Comme deux frères*, what is advanced is the idea of moving outwards beyond even the emancipatory female occupation of an outer space to the exploration of other spaces opened up by women yet occupiable by men and women.

I.2 Landscape and geography

In both *Mémoires d’île* and *Comme deux frères* women are depicted as having a very close relationship with and understanding of the country and the lands they inhabit. In *Mémoires d’île*, each of the two women represents different areas in Martinique. Aure is a soft-spoken, gentle woman from the South, which borders the Caribbean Sea, ‘fief du cocotier et de l’agave, [...] où d’immenses plages du sable blanc s’étendent sous un climat chaud et sec’, calmer and gentler than the

³³⁵ The notion of *relation* and of *pensée archipélifique* can be found throughout Glissant’s works.

Atlantic Ocean to the North of the island, ‘bordé de falaises abruptes ou de plages de sable noir d’origine volcanique, au pied de la montagne Pelée de sinistre mémoire’, where Hermance was born. Hermance is herself an allegory of the harsher Northern part of the island, for she is hot-tempered and resilient.³³⁶ The women’s personalities thus echo the qualities and defects of their birthplaces. Beneath her propriety and modesty Aure hides ‘une force indomptable et la plus ombrageuse fierté’; and while Hermance may be ill-educated and hot-headed ‘sa vive intelligence, son courage et son caractère inflexibles l’ont dotée d’un étonnant charisme.’³³⁷ In *Comme deux frères*, references to the landscape are scarce, the men’s anecdotes referring to an urban setting, presumably that of Pointe-à-Pitre. However, their childhood memories are set in ‘le Morne à Cayes’, which suggests that they grew up in a rural setting, *mornes* being mountains iconic of Antillean rural geography. For Jeff, the ‘Morne à Cayes’ is associated with his grandmother and deceased mother, and for Grégoire with his abusive mother; Grégoire makes the remark that both mothers were named ‘les putains du Morne à Cayes’.³³⁸ The *morne* in the play appears to be where men seek female conquests, since it is suggested that Jeff’s mother, ‘une fillette de quinze ans qui gambade sur le Morne de l’hôpital et qui cherche des icaques’, was accosted and sexually abused there, leading to her son’s conception.³³⁹ Lucinda, Jeff’s friend, is a great lover of Guadeloupe and its natural beauty, and Jeff’s fondness for her may be translatable as a desire to reconnect with the island.

In both plays, there is a conflation of the female body with the landscape.

³³⁶ Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d’île*, p. 199.

³³⁷ Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d’île*, p. 199.

³³⁸ Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 13.

³³⁹ Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 27.

The ‘icaque’ is a Caribbean fruit.

This is resonant of the portrayal of exotic landscape as a woman in colonial writing in which the female body has frequently figured as a trope for territory to be conquered, explored, and mapped out.³⁴⁰ As David Bunn has noted, ‘exploration – be it imagined or actual – is depicted as an exclusively masculine act, a moment of penetration into a suggestively feminized locale’.³⁴¹ As for adventure narratives, they ‘reveal that the imperialist romance is primarily a male-oriented genre’, where exploring ‘hostile territory is often described in terms of sexual conquest.’ Women symbolise the ‘Earth’, ‘the eternal feminine - the body to be conquered, penetration followed by possession.’³⁴² The female body becomes a site of struggle ‘for its conquest and protection’ between the colonized man and the colonizer and marks the female body as ‘as an emblematic site for the patriarchal imaginary’.³⁴³ Behind this struggle for possession, ‘a displaced, anxious masculinity inscribes and conceals itself’, and the colonized must embrace a hypermasculine ideology so as to reclaim the body of the colonized woman, as well as preserve their own, for the objectification of the colonial female body ‘may symbolize colonial brutality, but also speaks to black men’s inability as protectors, thereby codifying their loss of patriarchal power and thus

³⁴⁰ ‘All too often, colonials represented the colonized landscape as feminine, unknowable and unrepresentable’, writes Anne McClintock. Indeed, the interaction between the colonizers and the colonial landscape was often portrayed along gendered lines. This influenced racist and gendered stereotypes that found their way into colonial literature and even scientific disciplines and psychoanalysis, and led to the conflation of women and colonized with ‘the unrepresentable, the prehistoric, the Dark Continent’. Anne McClintock ‘Psychoanalysis, Race, and Female Fetishism’ in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, Routledge, 1995), pp. 193-194.

³⁴¹ David Bunn, ‘Embodying Africa: Woman and Romance Fiction’ *English in Africa*, 15.1 (May 1988), 1-28, p. 7.

³⁴² Richard E. Patteson, ‘King Solomon’s Mines: Imperialism and Narrative Structure’ *Journal of Narrative Technique* 8.2 (Spring 1978), 112-123, pp. 116, 121.

³⁴³ Jacqueline Coulti, *Dangerous Creole Liaisons: Sexuality and Nationalism in French Caribbean Discourses from 1806 to 1897* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 13.

their feminization.³⁴⁴

Women writers such as Maryse Condé have also denounced the exoticisation and eroticisation of the Caribbean female body as sign where it signifies landscape, and conversely when the exotic landscape is employed as signifier of the colonial female body. In an essay about Guadeloupean women writers 'La littérature féminine en Guadeloupe', Condé charges the writer Suzanne Lacascade with pandering to stereotypes of black Antillean femininity:

Au lieu de mettre l'accent cependant sur les qualités du monde noir opposé aux qualités techniques et desséchantes du monde blanc, Suzanne Lacascade, antillaise, et par conséquent inconsciemment honteuse de son origine directe (même si elle prétend se rattacher lointainement à une dynastie africaine), souligne, offre les seuls trésors qu'elle soit sûre de posséder : ceux de la nature de son pays. [...] La beauté de sa terre lui permet d'ignorer les détestables stéréotypes à propos des humains. Ignorée, la doudou noire dont la seule mission est de nourrir et veiller l'enfant du Blanc ! Ignorée, la Nègresse des plantations retournant le sol sous le soleil ! Et de même la concubine forcée de céder le pas à l'épouse !³⁴⁵

In line with this indictment, Maryse Condé in *Comme deux frères* is intractable in her critique of the treatment of Guadeloupean women. The women are linked with the outside of the prison, the island they inhabit, especially Lucinda, whose fondness for and symbiosis with the landscape made Jeff 'ignorer les détestables stéréotypes à propos des humains'. Yet save for Lucinda's case, the landscape is vilified as a site occupied by sexual predators. Along with the story of Jeff's mother's rape on the 'Morne de l'hôpital', the lexical field of jungle and savagery is employed when Grégoire speaks of his machismo and sexual predatoriness. He uses the pseudonym 'King Kong', inspired by the giant ape-like monster from popular culture, renowned for its brutality and ravishing of a woman. To emphasize his sexual appetite and savagery, Grégoire declines the proper noun in a string of epithets describing his various qualities: 'King Kong, le génie du mal!

³⁴⁴ Couti, p. 13.

³⁴⁵ Maryse Condé. 'La littérature féminine en Guadeloupe : recherche d'identité', *Présence Africaine* 3.99-100 (1976), 155-166, p. 158.

King Kong la terreur! King Kong le tigre!’ and ‘King Kong Respect!’.³⁴⁶ He openly declares that he intends to rape female inhabitants of ‘La Pointe’.³⁴⁷ He uses the word ‘filles’, which is a colloquial term for women, but the use of the word also underlines the helplessness and frailty of these women against the brutality of King Kong. The jungle or forest, King Kong’s kingdom, and the *morne* are sites conducive to predatory behaviour and pose a threat to women, and are locations productive of the ‘hypermasculine’ described by Couti as a response to the feminization of the male colonized.

The men are also under threat from the landscape, and descriptions of Caribbean meteorological and natural disasters that affect Guadeloupe counter exotic depictions of island geography. Jeff describes the destruction of their ‘case’ by hurricanes and woodlice: ‘les cyclones les ont écrasées comme du caca-boeuf. Les poux des bois les ont rongées’.³⁴⁸ Disasters of the greatest magnitude and the smallest of pests are equally destructive forces that have razed their homes to the ground. The entire landscape and geography militate against the inhabitants of *le morne à Cayes* and indeed of the whole of Guadeloupe, according to Jeff’s descriptions. This elucidates why Jeff compares the violence of political upheaval to that of the Caribbean elements when he explains his motivations for the crime they committed:

JEFF [...] Il s’agissait d’une entrée en éruption, comme la Soufrière, et d’engloutir le pays tout entier sous des torrents de soufre et de lave. Que la terre tremble ! Que les vents se déchaînent et emportent la Guadeloupe !³⁴⁹

With the destruction or displacement of Guadeloupe, then the inhabitants will be free of the blights of its landscape, and the women free of King Kongs prowling

³⁴⁶ Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 23.

³⁴⁷ Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 23.

³⁴⁸ Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 11.

³⁴⁹ Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 15. The Soufrière is Guadeloupe’s volcano.

the *mornes*.

In contrast to the near-apocalyptic depiction of the landscape in *Comme deux frères*, Césaire's treatment of Aure's and Hermance's relation to landscape in *Mémoires d'île* is more ambiguous. Despite being personifications of their birthplaces, and living for the most part in harmony with many aspects of Martinican geography, the two women are nevertheless described several times as being at odds with the landscape. Their narratives signal the omnipresence of the *mornes* and the sea. Aure describes how she had to cross a *morne* to get to a christening when she was young, and Hermance talks about her daily walks down from the *mornes* to school. During the Second World War, the two women visited family in the *mornes* where food was less scarce. And Aure relates with relish her first days as a schoolmistress, riding down to school from the *mornes* on a white mare offered her by her father as a wedding present. The *morne* is a site of refuge and life, much like the sea and the ocean, which bring solace to Aure and Hermance. Aure is from the South, and remembers family outings where the sea 'était lisse comme un lac et scintillait'.³⁵⁰ Hermance recalls the tumultuous ocean north of the island, where 'toute la sainte journée, on entendait les rouleaux de mer s'écraser sur la jetée'. Hermance cannot live without the sound of the ocean, as she points out when she describes her move to Fort-de-France in the south: 'je ne pouvais pas dormir: le bruit des vagues me manquait tout bonnement!'³⁵¹

The tinge of nostalgia in these descriptions of the *mornes* and sea in *Mémoires d'île*, could be interpreted as reinscribing colonial or exoticist stereotypes about Martinique. Indeed, what is problematic in these evocations of

³⁵⁰ Césaire, *Mémoires d'îles*, pp. 226-227.

³⁵¹ Césaire, *Mémoires d'îles*, pp. 227-228.

Martinican geography is that Césaire's text may be replicating the stereotypes found in exotic portrayals of Caribbean geography in her bucolic account of life in the early twentieth-century. In the 1930s Suzanne Roussi-Césaire, Ina Césaire's mother, wrote in the journal *Tropiques* a critique of literary colonial exoticism in three essays; 'Misère d'une poésie. John-Antoine Nau' (January 1943), 'Malaise d'une civilisation' (April 1942), and 'Le grand camouflage' (1945).³⁵² She describes the pitfalls of a Caribbean literature influenced by exoticism:

De la littérature ? Oui. Littérature de hamac. Littérature de sucre et de vanille. Tourisme littéraire. Guide bleu et CGT. Poésie, non pas.³⁵³

Caribbean locals soon fall into the trap of assimilating the exoticisation of their landscape, and by extension assimilate this exoticism to their own personalities, their own 'race'. This rose-tinted depiction of the Caribbean also eclipses real social issues and economic struggles of local people:

En attendant, le serf antillais vit misérablement, abjectement sur les terres de "l'usine" et la médiocrité de nos villes-bourgs est un spectacle à nausée. En attendant les Antilles continuent d'être paradisiaques.³⁵⁴

Suzanne Césaire urges the Caribbean writer to write differently about the landscape, taking into account the culture and realities of their society:

Allons, la vraie poésie est ailleurs. Loin des rimes, des complaintes, des alizés, des perroquets. Bambous, nous décrétons la mort de la littérature doudou. Et zut à l'hibiscus, à la frangipane, aux bougainvilliers.³⁵⁵

Il s'agit [...] d'une mobilisation de toutes les forces vives mêlées sur cette terre où la race est le résultat du brassage le plus continu ; il s'agit de prendre conscience du formidable amas d'énergies diverses que nous avons jusqu'ici enfermées en nous-mêmes.³⁵⁶

³⁵² These can be found in Daniel Maximin's critical edition of Suzanne Roussi-Césaire's works: Suzanne Roussi-Césaire, *Le Grand camouflage. Écrits de dissidence (1941 - 1945)*, ed. by Daniel Maximin, (Paris : Seuil, 2009).

'Misère d'une poésie : John-Antoine Nau', *Tropiques* 4 (January 1942) in *Le Grand camouflage*, pp. 63-66.

'Malaise d'une civilisation', *Tropiques* 5 (April 1942) in *Le Grand camouflage*, pp. 67-75.

'Le grand camouflage', *Tropiques* 13-14 (1945) in *Le Grand camouflage*, pp. 84-94.

³⁵³ 'Misère d'une poésie,' in *Le Grand camouflage*, p. 64.

³⁵⁴ Suzanne Roussi-Césaire, 'Le grand camouflage' in *Le Grand camouflage*, p. 89.

³⁵⁵ Suzanne Roussi-Césaire, *Le Grand camouflage*, p. 66.

³⁵⁶ Suzanne Roussi-Césaire, *Le Grand camouflage*, p. 75.

It is not so much about rejecting the landscape, but rather rejecting an exotic and colonialist vision of it.

Ina Césaire's play asserts the importance of these landscapes to Caribbean history and society. Much of the island is rural, particularly in the periods in which the anecdotes of childhood and youth described by Aure and Hermance are set. It is also volcanic, hence the significant number of *mornes* where the majority of the population live. Therefore, describing life in these areas necessarily evokes popular experience. Ina Césaire's focus on the relationship between the Martinicans and their environment may also be inspired by her ethnographic work which engages with the lifestyles and cultural practices of communities based in rural areas. This comes across in her novel *Zonzon Tête Carrée* (2004), where 'la géographie terrestre se fait l'écho visuel de l'humaine nature'.³⁵⁷ Césaire's work also belongs to a tradition of works depicting life in rural Martinique authored by French Caribbean writers who include Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Joseph Zobel. This literature is ambivalently placed at a crossroads where, drawing on the French literary canon and French Caribbean 'doudou' literature, the replication of exoticist assumptions about Caribbean geography intersects with the interrogation of these assumptions through focussing on the 'vécu' of the inhabitants of islands that are as paradisiacal as they are treacherous. Writing the relationships between characters and their homelands may fall prey to stereotyping, but may also expose the evolution of Martinican culture and society, and of the shaping of a psyche.

Rural and mountainous landscapes also have historical resonance in Martinique. The *morne* is where maroon slaves escaped and created communities.

³⁵⁷ Charles Carrère, "Zonzon Tête Carrée", *Présence Africaine* 153.1 (1996), p. 214.

In this vein, Pascale de Souza describes the two women as placed ‘dans une lignée rebelle [qui] contrecarre les tentatives historiques de faire fi du passé aux Antilles, en particulier du passé rebelle’.³⁵⁸ Southern Martinique, *le Sud*, Aure’s birthplace, is associated with the Insurrection of 1870, the subject of Ina Césaire’s *Rosanie Soleil*, discussed in the previous chapter, and mentioned in the play:

AURE [Ma mère] était née, elle aussi, dans le Sud, vers 1870. C’était l’année de la grande révolte des nègres libres, où l’on a tué Codé, le gérant blanc qui faisait son intéressant avec le peuple !³⁵⁹

There is a filiation established here between Aure and the events of 1870, through her mother. Hence, when she is described as hiding ‘une force indomptable et la plus ombrageuse fierté sous une réelle distinction, une douceur et une modestie apparentes’, she is in fact a projection of qualities of southern Martinique, where hidden beneath white sandy beaches and a calm sea lies a tumultuous history of rebellion and repression.³⁶⁰ Hermance is from the volcanic region of the north, ‘de sinistre mémoire’ due to the eruption of the Pelée mountain in 1902. This event radically changed the face of Martinican society and culture, destroying the island’s capital, Saint-Pierre, a prosperous cultural hub renowned throughout the Caribbean. The eruption left ‘des traces indélébiles au sein du fécond imaginaire magique antillais, comme en attestent de multiples légendes orales’.³⁶¹

Hermance’s courage and strong character is not only symbolic of the Pelée but also of the inhabitants of the region, less ‘cultivated’ and refined than those of the south. The rural areas of Martinique, north and south, are depicted through the characters of Aure and Hermance, whose complex and varying life experiences

³⁵⁸ Pascale De Souza, ‘Discours carnavalesque chez Ina Césaire: déferler les *Mémoires d’Iles*’, *Oeuvres et critiques* 26.1 (2001), 122-133, p. 129.

³⁵⁹ Césaire, *Mémoires d’île*, p. 207. See Chapter Two ‘Staging Antillean History’.

³⁶⁰ Césaire, *Mémoires d’île*, p. 199.

³⁶¹ Ina Césaire, *La Diabliesse du Morne-Rouge : Pièce en trois tableaux in Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques*, ed. by Christiane Makward (Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011), p. 23.

not only symbolise the landscape they inhabit, but the cultural and social ties to these landscapes that shape all their inhabitants.

The evocation of the sea is also a link to the island's slave past. In *La Nef* (1992), by Michèle Césaire, Ina Césaire's sister, the author writes in an opening text entitled 'La mer et le bateau' that whereas in many island cultures the sea and the ship are sites of worship, in the Caribbean:

Une sorte de "tabou" entoure la masse liquide à laquelle s'attache une crainte superstitieuse, dominée par de multiples fantasmes de destruction. [...] Toutes ces craintes semblent, en fait, provenir du drame originel qui a constitué l'univers caribéen ; elles sont liées au traumatisme fondamental : celui du voyage obligé vers la déportation et l'esclavage, à fond de cale du navire négrier abhorré.³⁶²

The imagery of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean as mortuary spaces is a common trope in Caribbean literature. For instance, Derek Walcott's *Omeros* is renowned for its multiple images of shipwrecks, of skeletons, of bones, submarine reminders of the Middle Passage: '...the nameless bones of all his brothers/drowned in the crossing'.³⁶³ Raphaël Confiant, in *Adèle et la pacotilleuse*, describes the deliberate use by inhabitants of the Caribbean of terminology relating to inland landscape when describing their homeland:

Nos gens se blottissent dans la petitesse de leurs morceaux de terre, persuadés, ô dérisoire!, d'être protégés par leurs mornes abrupts et leurs ravines obscures où gîtent serpents-fer-de-lance et araignées géantes. D'ailleurs ils ne prononcent jamais, contrairement à nous le mot "île": c'est toujours "pays" qu'ils disent dans toutes les langues qu'ils se sont appropriées. País de Cuba. Country of Barbados...³⁶⁴

Ina Césaire's play counters the traumas associated with the sea and the ocean by portraying characters defined by their positive relationship with the sea.

Portrayals and interpretations of local landscapes in *Mémoires d'île* and *Comme deux frères* underline the ambiguous relationship between the inhabitants of Martinique and Guadeloupe and their homelands. Condé's negative portrayal

³⁶² Michèle Césaire, *La Nef* (Paris: Éditions théâtrales, 1992), p. 1.

³⁶³ Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 128.

³⁶⁴ Raphaël Confiant, *Adèle et la pacotilleuse* (Paris : Mercure de France, 2005), p. 59.

of contemporary Guadeloupe is a critique of social precarity and the exploitation of women. The association between woman and landscape is overturned so as to denounce the machismo of Guadeloupean men. Césaire's portrayal of her female characters as projections of their home landscapes embraces the links between Martinicans and the terrain they inhabit, and shows a female body not only as an echo of its environment, but as living within it, battling it, and transforming it. The allegorical landscape and the personalities of these characters are also used to evoke the multi-faceted history and the lifestyles of rural populations in Martinique. Contrasting *Mémoires d'île* with *Comme deux frères*, which is much more virulently critical of the exoticisation of the female Caribbean body, foregrounds the different styles and agendas of the authors. Césaire may not be as critical of the treatment of the female body, however her interests lie in conveying the female voice, and an integral part of that voice may be its relation to its environment. Moreover, Condé's work was written around two decades later, and the author's priorities in the play encompass the social precarity of the Guadeloupean working class, where machismo and teenage pregnancy continue to problematize gender relations and representations. To claim that the fact these plays written two decades apart reveal an evolution of mentalities regarding gender representations and theories would be to overdetermine these two texts. However, an increasing awareness of, and openness to, issues that perhaps are not discernible in the works of earlier women writers are certainly detectable.

II Dialogue

Critics have explored the relation of space to imagination, claiming that the interior space despite its propensity to confine may still be a space for

imagining.³⁶⁵ As has been shown above, this is particularly relevant in terms of female confinement to domestic space, for a reimagining of the interior space through creative practices and thought may lead to emancipation from patriarchal constraints and gendered binaries. Theatre is an ideal vehicle for the articulation of the relation between inner space and imagination. After all, a play is a projection of the author's imaginary, what Gerty Dambury terms 'l'espace qui m'habite' and 'l'espace qui nous habite'.³⁶⁶ In Ina Césaire's and Maryse Condé's plays characters of both genders re-evaluate their place in the world by occupying non-binary spaces, which also allow them to express themselves creatively.

The organisation of the stage space is also favourable to creating conditions facilitating dialogue between the two protagonists in both plays. In *Mémoires d'îles*, Césaire locates Aure and Hermance in a virtual and dreamlike world conjured up through the opening carnivalesque scene of the *diablesses*, as well as the narrative style of the dialogue that is reminiscent of the *conte* genre, whose fictional world is constructed through the performance of the storytelling *conteur* navigating between the real world and the imaginary world of the story. Césaire's use of the *conte* recurs in many of her plays, particularly as an exploration of what Pascale de Souza describes as 'deux aspects antithétiques du conte antillais': a

³⁶⁵ See Gaston Bachelard's reflections on imagination and inner space, and concepts of 'espace aimé', 'espace heureux' in *La Poétique de l'Espace* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1957); see also Yi-Fu Tuan, who writes of the 'sense of place' of the home and inner spaces, and the right of women to rebel from domestic space, in *Space and Place : the Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

³⁶⁶ Dambury discusses her editing of the *Cahiers de Prospéro* number on space in theatre entitled 'L'espace qui nous habite' (*Cahiers de Prospéro* 12, *L'espace qui nous habite*, March 2002) in Stéphanie Bérard, 'Gerty Dambury: L'espace qui nous habite: entretien de Stéphanie Bérard, avec Gerty Dambury', in *Émergences Caraïbe(s)*, ed. by Chalaye and Bérard, pp. 176-183 [my emphasis].

And Dambury explains how theatre allows her to represent 'le monde qui m'habite' in Stéphanie Bérard "'Mon cheval de bataille est l'intime": Entretien avec Gerty Dambury réalisé par Stéphanie Bérard', *Île en île*, (July 2004), <<http://ile-en-ile.org/gerty-dambury-mon-cheval-de-bataille-est-lintime/>> [accessed 13th January 2015].

means for ‘une culture opprimée d’exprimer son besoin d’autonomie, de s’opposer à l’héritage d’humilité et d’endurance laissée par la colonisation’ and the negligence of ‘le rôle de la femme, [représentée] dans des rôles ancillaires ou bien sous les traits d’une créature maléfique.’³⁶⁷ In the Prologue scene of *Mémoires d’île* both actresses are dressed as *diablesse* figures from Caribbean carnival and myth. This preamble, according to Bérard,

... annonce l’avènement du règne des femmes ; le déguisement en diablesses – dangereuses et maléfiques créatures de la tradition orale qui séduisent les hommes pour les conduire à leur perte - préfigure la prise de pouvoir par les personnages d’Aure et d’Hermance dans la seconde partie de la pièce : ces deux fortes personnalités féminines antillaises représentent en effet l’émancipation et l’indépendance.³⁶⁸

These ‘dangerous and maleficent’ characters often feature as objects of horror stories, but in the play Césaire makes them the narrators of their own stories. This reversal of roles is proper to the Carnival tradition in both European and Caribbean traditions, where roles and social norms are overturned for the space of a day. Ina Césaire reverses the trend of the *conte*, with the *diablesse*/female characters speaking out for the space of a play. Césaire hence reclaims the female Antillean voice by making her female characters the *conteurs* of their own lives.³⁶⁹

In *Comme deux frères*, the storytelling element resides in the recounting of childhood memories, dreams, and the constructing of a narrative throughout the play to justify the crime to a lawyer the two are to meet the next day. Jeff is also said to be a ‘mythomane’, a chronic liar, and therefore a type of storyteller. He

³⁶⁷ Pascale De Souza, ‘Discours carnavalesque chez Ina Césaire: déferler les *Mémoires d’Îles*’, p. 124.

³⁶⁸ Stéphanie Bérard, *Théâtres des Antilles : Traditions et scènes contemporaines* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 2009), p. 159.

³⁶⁹ This is the case in *Rosanie Soleil*, discussed in the previous chapter. Césaire also confers to her female protagonists the role of ‘traditional’ *conteur* in her plays *La Diabliesse du Morne-rouge* (2005) and *Man Filibo* (2007). Other characters take on a more contemporary version of the role, as narrators of their life stories, which is the case in *Mémoires d’île* as well as in *Molokôy* (2007).

also suffers from recurring dreams and nightmares, mostly about his mother or other traumatic childhood events. Dreams and fantasy are key elements that facilitate the confessional dimension within the dialogue in the play. Indeed, *Comme deux frères* opens with the characters waking from – or waking into – a dream. The lighting described in the stage directions also conveys an oneiric and surreal ambiance:

*C'est le devant-jour. Un rai, de plus en plus lumineux, filtrera sous cette porte. À la fin de la pièce, la cellule baignera dans une sorte de clarté bleuâtre.*³⁷⁰

In this dreamlike atmosphere, the stories that the characters recount in the gaol cell take the form of a confession, to each other and to the audience. Gilbert Laumord, the actor who played Jeff in José Exéllis's production, states:

On ne sait pas si la scène elle-même est réelle, s'il ne s'agit pas d'un rêve ou d'un cauchemar. Cet espace de conte, de parole, de verbe n'est-il pas rêvé, né de l'esprit d'un des personnages ?³⁷¹

The realm of the imagination and memory permeate the dialogue to such an extent that it is possible to interpret the play as an imaginary series of events dreamt up by one of the two men's psyches. Laumord's reference to the *conte* concurs with the idea that the play is an allegorical reassessment of contemporary social issues in the guise of a conversation between two prisoners. The cell is therefore, through this lens, an allegory for social conflict and inter-masculine violence. The inner world of the cell is a canvas on which the men reassess their lives and choices and move towards a heightened awareness of their personal and social situations.

Condé and Césaire's plays are made up of duologues and monologues, in

³⁷⁰ Maryse Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 7.

³⁷¹ Stéphanie Bérard, 'À propos de *Comme deux frères*, de Maryse Condé : entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec Gilbert Laumord et Rudy Sylaire, Avignon, Théâtre du Balcon, le 20 juillet 2007', *Africultures* (14 July 2016) <<http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=6904>> [accessed 14th July 2016]

which certain experiences or anecdotes resurface at different instances of the narrative. Césaire and Condé use the devices of story-telling and memory-recounting to break traditional narrative linearity and instil a cyclicity. This cyclicity is found in the *conte* genre, which in practice reiterates archetypal tales to institute a collective cultural imaginary. The *conteur* also uses repetitive devices in his performance to the benefit of the audience. Cyclicity is ushered into *Mémoires d'îles* by the *diablesses*' enigmatic dialogue at the start of the play. When discussing the uncertain nature of time, one *diabliesse* utters: 'Je serai jeune', and the other: 'J'ai été vieille'.³⁷² This, according to De Souza, 'permet le rejet de toute temporalité linéaire au profit d'un amalgame d'évènements dont les plus lointains émergent du silence pour côtoyer les plus récents.'³⁷³ In a similar fashion, the retelling of childhood memories between Jeff and Grégoire in *Comme deux frères* does not consistently follow a chronological order. Anecdotes recur several times, and certain key aspects of a memory are reiterated within another story. Repetition is thus revelatory of the characters' deep-seated obsessions and traumas that chronically resurface to inhabit their narratives.

In *Mémoires d'îles*, one of the recurring themes is Hermance's deceased children. Hermance lost two sons. Her youngest, Xénio, left home at seventeen to join De Gaulle's resistance in the British Caribbean during the Second World War, and her fifth son, ti-Ferdinand, drowned. Hermance's accounts of these losses are intermingled with other discussions: survival during the Second World War, the birth of Aure's second child, and the death of Aure's husband. Despite Hermance voicing her sadness at the loss of her sons, she is not permitted to

³⁷² Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 203.

³⁷³ De Souza, 'Discours carnavalesque chez Ina Césaire', p. 129.

linger over the memory, for Aure evokes other stories, perhaps tactically out of compassion, or simply because she makes mental associations between Hermance's stories and her own memories. Nevertheless, Hermance returns to these stories and the descriptions are among the longest sections of dialogue. She initiates a discussion on the impact of the Second World War on Martinique and in her first lines describes her youngest son's departure. The discussion then details the harsh living conditions and communal solidarity of the time. Hermance ends the discussion returning to the memory of her son Xénio, saying: 'Je pensais à mon fils parti pour l'autre-bord et je disais: "Mon enfant va mourir en pays étranger!"' ³⁷⁴ The loss of another child is evoked in Hermance's reminiscing over the death of her son ti-Ferdinand, or 'Féfé', which follows closely on her recollection of Xénio's running away from home, brought about by Aure's recounting the birth of her second child. Hermance starts her story in a similar way to Aure, with the expression 'ce jour-là' echoing Aure's 'Ce matin-là'. ³⁷⁵ It is therefore expected that Hermance too is about to tell a story of one of her births, however what she recounts is the story of her son's death. Much like Aure, who was alone with her children when she was giving birth, Hermance was alone with her son Féfé when the tragedy occurred, and it is this idea of being alone with a child that seems to have triggered Hermance's more morose story:

HERMANCE Je suis restée dedans pour laver les assiettes dans la bassine... Je ne suis pas restée longtemps, hein... J'entendais l'enfant qui jouait près de la porte, comme à l'accoutumée... Je commence à préparer mon manger. Je n'entends plus l'enfant... Je sors devant la porte. Pas d'enfant ! Je crie : "Féfé, Féfé !" L'enfant avait disparu, oui ! ³⁷⁶

Hermance spends all day looking for her son, who is later found drowned in the

³⁷⁴ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 218.

³⁷⁵ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, pp. 219, 218.

³⁷⁶ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 220.

water tank beside the house. In the closing lines of her tale, she describes the shock on discovering the child's body so close to home, and her husband Ferdinand's care and sorrow for their lifeless son: 'Ferdinand a pris le petit dans ses bras et l'a porté sur notre lit. [...] Ferdinand pleurait... Il disait "Non, non, ne fais pas ça... Ne fais pas ça !" [...] Voilà. C'est comme ça que l'enfant est mort...'. She does not refer to the event again, having released herself from the burden of the memory.³⁷⁷ The theme of dead children reappears once more in the final pages of the play, with Hermance relating her nephew's death and her sister's weekly pilgrimage to his grave to report on the football results: 'La société disait que ma sœur Alicia était folle, que la disparition de son fils avait égaré sa raison, mais moi, je dis: "Non ! On peut parler aux morts: même s'ils n'entendent pas, ils savent!"'³⁷⁸ Instead of talking to the dead, Hermance herself talks of the dead, one of many mourning devices explored in the play.

The loss of a family member is also a seminal aspect of Jeff's character in *Comme deux frères*. It is difficult to distinguish between Jeff's memories and his mythomania, for several of his childhood memories are conflated with chronic dreams and nightmares. The dreamlike environment of the night-time cell is conducive to remembering his childhood traumas. His dreams revolve around his childhood and his mother, who, Grégoire reveals, abandoned him to his grandmother Man Délia. Throughout the play references are made to Jeff's mother, whom he idolizes. She is even named 'Chimère', a reference to her dreamlike as well as her unattainable qualities. Jeff's dreams are recurring, for at the start of the play Grégoire asks Jeff which dream he had this time, as though

³⁷⁷ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 221.

³⁷⁸ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 226.

Jeff's moaning in his sleep were not an exceptional occurrence: 'je les connais, tes rêves. Je les connais tous.'³⁷⁹ Jeff dreams of his mother taking him away to France, then Africa, an idealized motherland:

GRÉGOIRE [...] Tu pars pour la France, avec elle, ta maman, ta Chimère. En France, vous suivez une famille de blancs jusqu'au Gabon. Libreville. Là-bas, elle épouse un Africain, bague au doigt. Un ministre. C'est une dame, ta maman ! Vous vivez dans la soie, l'opulence, Mercedes Benz !³⁸⁰

This dual-dream of being with his mother and going to Africa is an instance of a critique of *négritude* revealed in Sam Haigh's analysis of Condé and other Antillean women writers' work:

It is clear in the work of both African and Antillean poets that the quest for identity of negritude poetry is almost exclusively a male quest, the quest of Africa's exiled *sons* for a native land constantly figured as maternal: as "Mother Africa". More than this, the return to this "motherland" is one which is typically effected through an imagined relationship with a variously exoticised and eroticised black woman.³⁸¹

Jeff has an imagined relationship with an exoticized and eroticized black woman, Chimère his mother. His quest for his mother is also a quest for belonging conveyed by financial and family security. In Africa, a luxurious lifestyle awaits his mother and him. The choice of 'Libreville' is telling, suggesting that increased freedom accompanies the opulence of their new home.

However, these particular dreams date from before Jeff was sent to gaol. The dream he has at the start of the play is far more lugubrious:

JEFF [...] J'étais tout petit, assis sur les genoux de maman. Elle portait une robe blanche, en mousseline blanche, fermée au cou par un camée. Ses cheveux brillaient d'huile de carapate. Ils étaient coiffés en grosses "vanilles". Il arrivait. Je ne voyais pas son visage, mais je savais que c'était lui. Il me jetait à terre et il la décapitait d'un seul coup de coutelas. Le sang bondissait comme un jet d'eau.³⁸²

The detailed description of his mother's appearance makes the dream seem almost life-like, and one could believe he was describing a childhood memory. The twist

³⁷⁹ Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 9.

³⁸⁰ Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 10.

³⁸¹ Sam Haigh "'Voix féminines/ Voix féministes?': Women's Writing from the Francophone Caribbean' in *Francophone Voices*, ed. by Kamal Salhi (Exeter: Elm Bank, 1999), p. 146.

³⁸² Condé, *Comme deux frères*, p. 12.

in the tale shows it is indeed a dream, as does the anonymity of the man that contrasts with the full description of Chimère. The whole dream could be read as an allegory of the transition between the period when Jeff still had a mother, and her disappearance, presumably on the arm of a man. Subconsciously, Jeff feels whoever took her away from him as good as killed her. Towards the end of the play, following a string of evocations of alternatively happy and unhappy childhood memories, Jeff erupts:

JEFF [...] voyez-vous, une mère, c'est avant tout une femme, une pétasse, une de ces foutues salopes qu'on collectionne comme des papillons ou des timbres-poste. Une femme, on l'insulte. Une femme, on la bat. On la trompe. On la méprise. ... [...] Une mère, vois-tu, c'est bien souvent une fillette de quinze ans qui gambade sur le Morne de l'hôpital et qui cherche des icaques. Une fillette qui croise la route d'un king ou d'un kong qui, pour montrer sa puissance, se jette sur elle. Alors, forcément, la mère de quinze ans, son bébé primate, elle ne l'aime pas, elle le déteste, elle l'abandonne pour fuir au loin, à Libreville, le pays des grands singes. ... Une mère, une maman de quinze ans, ne connaît pas le nom de son fils ; elle ne connaît pas ses traits de figure, son visage. Alors le gosse, évidemment, il se pose mille questions : qui suis-je ? d'où je viens ? à qui je ressemble ? de qui je tiens ce nez en patate, cette grosse bouche ? Mais il n'y a pas de mère pour lui répondre.
 ...³⁸³

With this passage, it is difficult to ascertain what has been truth, lie, or dream in Jeff's discourse throughout the play. It can be surmised that Jeff uses elements from his dreams and experience to offer a generalized description of the fate of many Guadeloupean working class women and children. The language generalizes; the use of common nouns and indefinite pronouns suggesting that though the 'bébé primate' may refer to Jeff himself, it may also apply to all unwanted children. The use of the term 'King Kong', which Grégoire employs in the play as his macho persona, and the lexical field relating to monkeys and primates, hint at the savagery faced by young Guadeloupean women at the hands of Guadeloupean men. The reference to Libreville, mentioned previously in the description of another dream, and the expression 'Le pays des grands singes',

³⁸³ Condé, *Comme deux frères*, pp. 26-27.

suggests a return to Africa, to an ancestral homeland, the birthplace of mankind, where the 'bébé primate' yearns to follow his mother. However, the fact that there appear to be primates in both Guadeloupe and Gabon, posits the suggestion that there is no escaping the savagery of men. At this point in the play, what is truth or dream is rendered irrelevant, for the symbolism of the images matters far more as part of the manifestation of Jeff's trauma of losing his mother and of his quest for her and for his own belonging.

There are more positive aspects of remembrance and confession in these plays than the mourning of a lost family member and traumas of the past. In *Mémoires d'île*, it transpires that Aure is particularly attached to her freedom. This is manifested in different ways, of which two are her relationship with her father and her education leading to her occupation of schoolmistress. Aure was one of the first girls from her hometown to receive an education, for the first school opened in her town of Rivière-Pilote in 1900 when she was seven.³⁸⁴ Spurred on by her mother, Aure goes on to pass the 'certificat d'études' and then to study to become a schoolmistress, a rare accomplishment for a woman of her generation. When Aure discusses her education, it is with a certain pride and elation. She describes with glee her rivalry with fellow school pupil, Ludivine, who also took the 'certificat d'étude' examination but failed:

AURE [...] Manzèl Ludivine, qui avait été sélectionnée comme moi, faisait exprès de garder le livre le plus longtemps possible pour que je ne puisse pas étudier! Elle était d'un tempérament jaloux, peut-être parce que je réussissais bien à l'école...Mais rien n'y a fait, au grand dam de ma jeune rivale, c'est moi qui ai réussi le certificat ! Pour moi, les études passaient avant tout !³⁸⁵

Aure reminisces with fondness about her early days as a schoolmistress and as a young bride. This moment comes across as one of freedom and independence.

³⁸⁴ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 212.

³⁸⁵ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 212.

She and her husband move to the village where she has been posted as schoolmistress, and is it her husband who follows her, rather than the contrary. Aure's relationship with her father is linked to her success as a teacher; she depends on his recognition of her efforts, as well as his respect. When she passes her 'certificat d'études', her father complains : “Voilà qu'à l'heure actuelle, les filles veulent en savoir plus que leur père !”³⁸⁶. Nevertheless, Aure adds, 'il était bien flatté, quand même...'.³⁸⁶ Her father's acknowledgement of her achievements and his facilitating of her succeeding in her career are essential aspects of Aure's development and explain her more lenient view of Martinican men in comparison to Hermance, whose husband cheated on her numerous times. Aure's father is also the one who offers her as a wedding present a white mare to ride to school. Her description of her travelling to school on the white mare is particularly revelatory of the sentiments of freedom and independence this gift instills in her:

AURE [...] J'avais cette jument que mon père m'avait offerte...Princesse...Une belle haquenée blanche, douce comme l'agneau mais rapide comme l'éclair. Personne d'autre n'aurait pu la monter : elle ne connaissait que moi ! [...] Il fallait voir Princesse voler sur la descente : la fumée charroyait. Je montais en amazone. Je me penchais et je lui murmurais à l'oreille “En avant, ma fille ! Rattrape le temps !” et elle filait comme une flèche blanche sur le chemin caillouteux...Les paysans que nous croisions se garaient bien vite et certains se signaient à notre passage : “La maîtresse d'école va se rompre le cou !” Princesse...Ce que j'ai aimé cette bête-là !³⁸⁷

The relish of galloping down the slope on her mare may be seen as the expression of a sensation of freedom. Princesse is Aure's own exclusive property, no one else is permitted to ride her or even capable of riding her. She also rides 'en amazone' and while this signifies riding 'side-saddle', the expression also alludes to the free-spirited warrior women of Antiquity. Aure's schooling and her status as schoolmistress offer her the greatest satisfaction, joy, and freedom; a cornerstone

³⁸⁶ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 212.

³⁸⁷ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 224.

of her personality and her relations to others.

The use of a narrative style in the duologue in these plays allows for the characters to benefit from the emancipatory potential of creative expression. The plays borrow from the critical and liberating aspects of the *conte* genre that allow non-traditional storytellers to verbalise their experiences and traumas. Inhabiting a versatile imaginary world and non-space without the constraint of linearity, the characters are free to let specific memories surface in their own time, so as to better ponder on or reconsider events that have shaped their lives. As well as inducing a cathartic effect, the repetition of certain key memories in each character's dialogue reveals key aspects of their personalities, as well as the traumas and anxieties that inhabit them. The specificity of each character's memory, anecdotes, and fixations inhibit generalizations regarding the character duos, whose individual members, though of the same generation, gender, and social class, are portrayed as individuals with specific desires, obsessions, and dreams.

III Movement

Repetition of memory is part of the act of remembrance. For Karin Tilmas, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter, theatrical repetition, or 're-enactment', 'is both affirmation and renewal. It entails addressing the old, but it also engenders the new'.³⁸⁸ In Caribbean societies, this remembrance is both oral and physical. Hence, in productions of both *Mémoires d'île* and *Comme deux frères*, the dialogue has been accompanied by non-verbal performance techniques such as movement, dance, and mime. Discussing his directorial practice, José Exélis, the

³⁸⁸ *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. by Karin Tilmas, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 7.

director of the first production of *Comme deux frères*, explains the centrality of movement to his work:

Le corps ne ment jamais car c'est lui qui porte la mémoire, pas le mental. Tout corps est corps et c'est l'esprit du corps qui guide le corps. Le corps permet de rendre plus sensible le verbe, de le soutenir.³⁸⁹

Dance is of particular importance in the Caribbean context, and 'n'est pas seulement là pour alléger et pour illustrer, elle est là pour une échappée dans l'imaginaire.'³⁹⁰ This stretches back to the slave plantations, explains Exélis, where, 'c'est avec la danse, le chant et le conte que les esclaves résistaient à la douleur.'³⁹¹ The concept of body as conveyor of memory and the reclaiming of one's body through dance is similar to Patrick Chamoiseau's recounting of the development of music and dance in Caribbean slave communities.³⁹² The subversive quality of these dance traditions is found in the tradition of the Caribbean Carnival during which dancers perform local dances in the *vidé* parades.³⁹³ This is exploited in the Prologue of Césaire's *Mémoires d'île*, first published as *Mémoires d'isles* in 1985. The latter varies radically from the later version published in Makward's anthology in its emphasis on movement and the use of stage directions to convey that movement.³⁹⁴ However, the Prologue is retained in the later edition of the play, and with it 'la "réalité" antillaise se transfigure en un discours carnavalesque seul accessible à un public initié.'³⁹⁵ *Comme deux frères*'s first production depended heavily on physical theatre and

³⁸⁹ Stéphanie Bérard, 'Le "tout corps en jeu" de José Exélis', *Africultures* 80-81. 1 (2010), 122-125, p. 123.

³⁹⁰ Bérard, 'Le "tout corps en jeu" de José Exélis', p. 124.

³⁹¹ Bérard, 'Le "tout corps en jeu" de José Exélis', p. 124.

³⁹² See Chapter 2: Staging Antillean History.

³⁹³ See Appendix 2 for description of Martinican dances and a definition of *vidé*.

³⁹⁴ Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d'isles : Maman N. et Maman F.*, (Paris : Éditions Caribéennes, 1985).

³⁹⁵ De Souza, 'Discours carnavalesque chez Ina Césaire', p. 123.

accorded with director José Exelis's aesthetic line. With a more minimalist version of Condé's text edited by José Pliya, the production used movement as an exercise in reclaiming and exploring the body, specifically the male body. In both plays movement is used to foreground subversive potential of female and male representations and exploitations of the Caribbean body.

Ina Césaire in an interview with Suzanne Houyoux explains how the actresses from the first production of *Mémoires d'île*, Myrrha Donzenac (Aure) and Mariann Mathéus (Hermance) requested that the *diablesses*' dance be added to the play to assist in their inhabiting the roles of the elderly ladies. This Prologue abolishes the divide between young and old, past and present, and consequently between the elderly characters and the younger actresses who performed them. Césaire explains:

Les comédiennes qui jouaient la pièce, et qui étaient jeunes, avaient le plus grand mal à entrer dans le personnage des vieilles dames. J'ai pensé que cela les aiderait d'utiliser ce symbole de carnaval, qui est une négation de la mort et de la vieillesse. J'ai aussi voulu marquer la jeunesse interne des vieilles femmes antillaises. Elles ont une fraîcheur d'esprit, une verdeur d'âme qui est extraordinaire.³⁹⁶

Having the same actresses play both the roles of the carnivalesque *diablesses* and the elderly ladies adds a subversive element to the characters of Aure and Hermance.

The older woman, the grandmother, is a key figure in African American and Caribbean narratives, 'l'aïeule est une demi-déesse qui transforme la vie en art par son langage ensorceleur [et qui] assure la continuité familiale et la cohérence culturelle du groupe, elle est "source de vie" et "source du mot"'.³⁹⁷ She is the holder of the cultural archive that is dispensed orally, much as it is by Aure and

³⁹⁶ Suzanne Houyoux, 'Un entretien avec Ina Césaire, Fort-de-France, Martinique, 5 juin 1990' in *Elles écrivent des Antilles (Haïti, Guadeloupe, Martinique)* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 355-356.

³⁹⁷ Kathleen Gyssels, *Filles de Solitude. Essai sur l'identité antillaise dans les (auto-) biographies fictives de Simone et André Schwarz-Bart* (Paris : L'Harmattan 1996), p. 65.

Hermance in *Mémoires d'île*. The *diabliesse* is a timeless figure who inhabits the imagination, and a seminal figure of Carnival. In Caribbean superstition she represents 'toutes les angoisses et tous les poncifs liés à la féminité.'³⁹⁸

Appearing during the Mercredi des Cendres, the final day of Carnival, they also represent 'la prise du pouvoir par les femmes'.³⁹⁹ Césaire emphasizes the key roles played by both real and mythical female figures in the collective imaginaries of the Caribbean people, showing that 'derrière les apparences, se cache toujours une Diabliesse'.⁴⁰⁰ Behind each stereotyped woman hides a subversive figure.

The *diablieses* in the Prologue bring forth 'le potentiel subversif de la pièce' through haranguing and singing, and outbreaks of dance.⁴⁰¹ The *diablieses* perform the traditional Carnival *vidé* dance that Gilbert and Tompkins define as demonstrative of the liberating potential of dance in Carnival, for it 'emphasises the life-force, displaying at the same time a delight in transgressive sexuality and excessive corporeal states'.⁴⁰² Indeed, throughout the rest of the play, after the actresses have become Aure and Hermance at the end of the Prologue, the audience remembers that behind them hides a *diabliesse* and that the transgressiveness of the Carnival may seep into the dialogue, which, as we have seen, defies established gendered spatial binaries and narrative linearity. The boundaries of Carnival are extended beyond the established festive period to everyday life, and emphasize the potential subversiveness of these characters and the persons they represent, as well as the dormant subversiveness of a Caribbean

³⁹⁸ Césaire, *La Diabliesse du Morne-Rouge*, p. 23.

³⁹⁹ Stéphanie Bérard, *Théâtres des Antilles*, p. 159. See also the section 'Un spectacle visuel haut en couleurs', pp. 156-159.

⁴⁰⁰ De Souza, 'Discours carnavalesque chez Ina Césaire', p. 130.

⁴⁰¹ De Souza, 'Discours carnavalesque chez Ina Césaire', p. 123.

⁴⁰² Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama : Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 86.

‘public initié’.⁴⁰³

The *diablesses* do not reappear during the remainder of the play, though the audience remains unsure, given the unpredictable nature of these characters, as to whether they might do so. In the first production, the actresses indeed came out of character at other points in the play to mime their characters’ anecdotes. This was achieved through the actresses’s own improvisations in the rehearsal process, where Donzenac and Mathéus extended their immersion in the characters of Aure and Hermance, begun with the *diablesses*, to other aspects of their personality and history. For instance, a photograph of the performance depicts Mariann Mathéus, who played Hermance, relating a childhood memory, and Myrrha Donzenac, who played Aure, playing the role of Hermance’s mother and doing her hair.⁴⁰⁴

Another scene where the actresses perform a scene from Aure’s past also figures in the stage directions of the first edition of the playtext, whereas other improvisations were not recorded in the published version. This scene is a mimed portrayal of le ‘viol originel’, and depicts Malvina, Aure’s grandmother:

*La pénombre s’installe brutalement : Scène du “viol originel”. Malvina sursaute lorsque s’ouvre la porte. On entend le grincement d’un lit sur lequel se jette un corps. Malvina se lève lentement et se penche sur le lit. Elle lève la main, geste d’amour ou d’agression ? On entend au loin des aboiements de chiens de chasse, des cris lointains [...] Ce sera l’unique rappel de la période de l’esclavage.*⁴⁰⁵

This mime sequence powerfully evokes slavery and specifically the experience of female slaves. In portraying this scene of the ‘original’ rape that led to the birth of Aure’s mother, and thereby of Aure’s maternal lineage, Césaire traces the proximity of slavery and violence against black women in Martinique to the lives

⁴⁰³ De Souza, ‘Discours carnavalesque chez Ina Césaire’, p. 123.

⁴⁰⁴ See Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d’isles : Maman N. et Maman F.*, (Paris : Éditions Caribéennes, 1985), pp. 17-32. These pages correspond to an insert which contains several production photographs.

⁴⁰⁵ Ina Césaire, *Mémoires d’isles : Maman N. et Maman F.*, (Paris : Éditions Caribéennes, 1985), p. 51.

of Aure and Hermance. By having the actresses play in this scene, the lineage is prolonged to include the generation following that of the elderly women. These scenes and mimes constitute another device that ‘abolishes’ linearity to show past events in the present, and the impact of these events on contemporary women’s lives.

Performing the lives of older generations is a means of telling their stories and giving a voice to the individual. This accords with Chamoiseau’s vision of dance as a means of retrieving ancestral modes of performance and expression, and thus entails inhabiting the body of the ancestor and performing their movements. He writes:

La mémoire des corps remonte par bribes. Elle n’est pas continue. Elle est brisée aussi. Séquentielle. Hétérogène. Polyrythmique. Pour l’exprimer, la retrouver, et s’y livrer, il faut dénouer le corps en improvisations.⁴⁰⁶

This rhythmical and improvisational search is precisely the type of investigating the actresses of the first production of *Mémoires d’île* undertook to find the voices of the characters Aure and Hermance. The ‘sequential’, ‘heterogeneous’, and ‘polyrhythmic’ bodily memory is at work in the Carnival *vidé* the two *diablasses* perform in the Prologue, which has been preserved in the second published edition of the play, as a guide for future performers to explore through movement and dance the memories of the play’s characters. This search for the body of the past is also relevant in the reclaiming of women’s histories and is redolent of Suzanne Dracius’s emphasis on the need for theatre to represent women’s lives, specifically historical female characters such as Lumina in Dracius’s own play *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*. It literally gives a voice, that of the actress, to the

⁴⁰⁶ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Écrire en pays dominé* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1997), p. 171.

character who has been muted by official histories.⁴⁰⁷

In *Comme deux frères* there is a heightened awareness of the body and of the sensuality conveyed by the play's occasional homoerotic allusions which culminate in the struggle between Jeff and Grégoire in the final scene. Here, Jeff offers to take full responsibility for their crime in exchange for sexual favours, thereby allowing Grégoire to be released from gaol to pursue his relationship with Lisette:

JEFF Approche. Viens. Je vais te dire à l'oreille. Dans le creux de l'oreille. C'est une proposition... indécente.

[...]

JEFF Comme celle que l'on se fait entre hommes...

GRÉGOIRE Non ! Pas ça !

JEFF Entre amis d'enfance...

GRÉGOIRE Non !

JEFF Entre frères...

GRÉGOIRE Non !

JEFF Comme deux frères, au fond d'un cachot lorsque la vie, le pays, le système tout entier les a rejetés. Alors, il ne leur reste plus rien : plus de rêves, plus d'espoir, plus d'illusions. Rien que la culpabilité et un désir obscur à négocier.

GRÉGOIRE Jamais ! Jamais ! Saloperie ! Misère ! Chienne ! Chienne de vie !

JEFF Viens.

GRÉGOIRE Non ! Non ! Non !

JEFF Viens.

GRÉGOIRE ...

*Jeff le prend dans ses bras. Greg se débat. Corps à corps, secs, abrupts, fermes et feutrés à la fois. Noir brusque.*⁴⁰⁸

It is suspected that Jeff may be homosexual, for several reasons. Jeff is a counter-portrayal of Grégoire the brutal womanizer. He admits having had relations with another man, and he also has empathy for the women Grégoire mistreats and leaves by the wayside. Although he is in prison out of brotherly solidarity, it is hinted that he may also be there out of love or lust for his friend Grégoire, as is suggested by this final scene where Grégoire is forced to pay a steep price for his freedom, by letting himself be drawn into a sexual embrace with Jeff.

Despite Condé's affirmation that the play dealt with homosexuality, the

⁴⁰⁷ See Chapter Two: Staging Antillean History.

⁴⁰⁸ Condé, *Comme deux frères*, pp. 32-33.

actors Gilbert Laumord and Ruddy Sylaire, as well as director José Exélis, claim that the play goes beyond homosexuality, and may not actually be about it at all.⁴⁰⁹ They suggest that the exchange at the end of the play is a sordid reminder of the price of freedom in prison, and in society at large. The physical violation of Grégoire is also a violation of his virility and his very being, which does not necessarily condone homosexuality, but rather denounces the violence of power relationships between men, as well as between men and women, as they are translated into sexual terms. For in ‘stooping’ to sell his body in exchange for his relationship with a woman, which confers virility, Grégoire in fact sacrifices that virility. A virility that Jeff has come to despise, and uses to reverse the power-play between himself and Grégoire. Therefore, Jeff similarly stoops, to Grégoire’s level, in adopting the dominant, virile role in their relationship. *Comme deux frères* demonstrates that the relation to the other involves a violent power-play between members of society, and reducing this to an expression of repressed homosexuality may be reductive of both the power-play and of homosexuality itself.

The interplay between the rebuttal of the homosexual undertones by the production team and Condé’s own claim that it is a key theme of the play, shows how problematic the issue of homosexuality is in Caribbean society. According to Doris Kadish ‘silence and stigma surround homosexuality [...] despite the fact that same-sex relationships form as wide a swath of the sexual spectrum there as

⁴⁰⁹ See: Stéphanie Bérard, “‘Le corps permet de rendre plus sensible le verbe’”, entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec José Exélis, Avignon, le 18 juillet 2007’, *Africultures* (13th September 2007) <<http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=6906>> [accessed 14th July 2016].

Stéphanie Bérard, ‘À propos de *Comme Deux Frères*, de Maryse Condé entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec Gilbert Laumord et Rudy Sylaire, Avignon, Théâtre du Balcon, le 20 juillet 2007’, *Africultures* (13th September 2007) <<http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=6904>> [accessed 14th July 2016].

elsewhere'.⁴¹⁰ The stigma associated with homosexuality in the Caribbean is related to deeply ingrained issues relating to masculinity in former slave societies.

Ina Césaire points out that these issues stemmed from the trauma of familial dislocation in slave plantations:

Dans la famille servile, le père disparaît ou bien il ne reconnaît pas son enfant parce qu'il ne s'appartient même pas lui-même. L'éclatement des familles a entraîné un réel phénomène de déstructuration. [...] il y en a encore beaucoup qui subissent les séquelles de l'absence de responsabilité paternelle. Il faut souhaiter que cela disparaisse avec les agressions vis-à-vis des femmes, qui font partie du même processus : l'homme asservi ne s'appartient plus. Dominé, exploité, il a malheureusement parfois tendance à trouver plus faible que lui pour affirmer sa puissance qui se transforme aisément en violence contre les seuls êtres qu'il considère comme sa propriété : sa femme et ses enfants.⁴¹¹

How can a man assume his identity, let alone his sexual identity, if he no longer belongs to himself, 'ne s'appartient plus'? This fear of weakness has led to a latent homophobia and denial of homosexual practices in the Caribbean, even in intellectual production. Where female writers such as Maryse Condé, or the Jamaican Michelle Cliff, write about and discuss the issue openly, male Caribbean theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant, pioneers in the reformulation of black and Caribbean identity, denied any existence of "deviant" sexual behaviour in the Caribbean. Glissant uses homoerotic imagery in *Le Discours antillais* to describe the interplay between the white colonizer and the black colonized, criticizing both parties, the colonizer for imposing sexual dominance, and the colonized for letting himself be 'taken': 'l'Histoire ici n'est qu'une soumission de plaisirs où le mâle domine : le mâle, c'est l'Autre. Le plaisir historique est de se faire avoir.'⁴¹² In this vein, as outlined by Couti, 'rejecting the Other's [the white colonizer's] sexual dominance turns into a

⁴¹⁰ Doris Y. Kadish, 'Maryse Condé's *Comme deux frères*', presented at 'Articulations of Difference Conference at University of Illinois (September 2012).

⁴¹¹ Stéphanie Bérard, 'De l'enracinement à l'ouverture au monde: entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec Ina Césaire', in *Émergences Caraïbe(s)*, ed. by Chalaye and Bérard, pp. 147-150, p. 149.

⁴¹² Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 139.

political pursuit: avenging the historical emasculation of Caribbean men.’⁴¹³ It is possible the production team wished to pursue a reflection on masculinity in the production of *Comme deux frères*. And the taboo-like nature of homosexuality in the Caribbean may explain why the theme pursued by the production team revolved less around homosexuality than re-evaluating masculinity, which accords with the previous analysis in this chapter of gendered space and characters’ dialogues.

After outlining the contradictory interpretations of the thematics of the play drawing on her own experience of the performance, of the question and answer sessions following the production, and other critic’s opinions, Kadish concludes that José Exélis’s production was more about creating ‘a significant theatrical event’ and that the ‘powerful and evocative style’ was in fact ‘in keeping with the indirect, ambiguous way in which homosexuality is treated in the Caribbean’.⁴¹⁴ Indeed, this theatrical event, in spite of glossing over the homosexual element, did however focus considerably on the physical performance of the actors, and made use of physical theatre and an elaborate choreography to foreground:

... la relation ambivalente entre Jeff et Greg, relation faite d’amour et de haine, de désir et de rejet, d’attraction et de répulsion. L’énergie vitale qui se dégage des corps des comédiens, dont le jeu se veut extrêmement contrasté, transmet leurs états d’âme ainsi que leurs évolutions mentales et émotionnelles ; les mouvements frénétiques et saccadés de Ruddy Sylaire, qui joue Greg, homme d’action, impulsif et violent, s’opposent aux mouvements plus lents et indécis, plus indolents et lascifs de Gilbert Laumord, qui interprète le personnage de Jeff.⁴¹⁵

The actors’ movements as described by Exélis here, if they are to be interpreted as representations of intrinsic behaviour, may be deemed problematic. Jeff and Grégoire would then be manifestations of stereotypes of Caribbean homosexuality and hypermasculinity respectively. Laumord’s ‘mouvements plus lents et indécis,

⁴¹³ Couti, p. 13.

⁴¹⁴ Doris Y. Kadish, ‘Maryse Condé’s *Comme deux frères*’.

⁴¹⁵ Stéphanie Bérard, “Le corps permet de rendre plus sensible le verbe”.

plus indolents et lascifs’ to portray Jeff might have been read as representing the character’s homosexuality.⁴¹⁶ This, coupled with other assumptions about the character such as his creativity and his heightened empathy for women, repeats stereotypes about homosexuality, reducing it to the negative feminization of the male. However, the three movements that divide the play, hyphenated by choreography, unite the two men and erase their differences. The final ‘étreinte [...] directe et brutale’, is transformed into ‘une danse des corps, largement esthétisée’, and this may be an artistic choice on Exélis’s part to emphasize the unison of the two men, who have come to the end of their introspective journey.⁴¹⁷ It denotes a progression, rather than a falling back into a cycle of violence where both men become violated and violators.

The binaries do not hold. Choreography breaks the boundaries between the gendered and sexual binaries that oppose Jeff and Grégoire. Timothy Chin writes about Caribbean literary treatment of masculinity and homosexuality:

Attending to the differences that operate within as well as between cultures, these texts [by Michelle Cliff (Jamaica) and H. Nigel Thomas (St. Vincent)] simultaneously critique the sexist/homophobic and colonial/neo-colonial structures that continue to pervade contemporary Caribbean societies. [...] In contrast to these binary structures—which often imply the mutually exclusive choice of an either/or—these writers frequently deploy narrative strategies that privilege ambiguity and the ability to negotiate contradictions.⁴¹⁸

This ambiguity militates against rigid binary structures and is a first step towards ‘undoing homophobia that continues to marginalize lesbians and gay men in contemporary Caribbean cultures’.⁴¹⁹ This idea of questioning binaries can be read in conjunction with Guadeloupean choreographer Lénablou’s theory

⁴¹⁶ Stéphanie Bérard, “‘Le corps permet de rendre plus sensible le verbe’”.

⁴¹⁷ Stéphanie Bérard, ‘*Comme deux frères : huis clos nocturne pour d’obscurs désirs.*’ in *Maryse Condé : rébellion et transgressions*, ed. Noëlle Carruggi (Paris : Karthala, 2010), p. 176.

⁴¹⁸ Timothy S. Chin, “‘Bullers’ and ‘Battymen’: Contesting Homophobia in Black Popular Culture and Contemporary Caribbean Literature’, *Callaloo* 20.1 (Winter 1997), 127-141, p. 136.

⁴¹⁹ Chin, “‘Bullers’ and ‘Battymen’”, p. 136.

regarding the potential of Guadeloupean dance to deconstruct binaries and institutional, colonial, and racial structures.⁴²⁰ She uses the Creole term *bigidi*, to hesitate or vacillate, borrowed from the expression *bigidi mè pas tonbé*, to be destabilized but not to fall, to describe the capacity of the Guadeloupean body, drawing from a heritage of slavery and abuse of the enslaved and colonized body, to adapt to difficult or unsettling situations:

C'est un rapport fondamentalement ludique où l'on s'essaye dans la discontinuité du corps, du temps, à plier tel un roseau qui se ploie, qui se tord ; mais qui ne se rompt jamais. [...] le corps social a hérité de cette capacité à faire corps avec l'imprévisible, à se mouler avec l'inattendu, tel un ressort pour trouver des solutions (mêmes bancales) pour continuer d'exister.⁴²¹

The bodies of the characters as portrayed in the production of *Comme deux frères* demonstrate this capacity to 'continuer d'exister' and deal with the unexpected.

At the end of the play, Grégoire gives himself to Jeff to reach his goal. At the end of Exélis's production, the two men come together in their final ambiguous choreography, not suggesting one outcome or another, leaving the audience to interpret the final scene according to their own belief systems and structures.⁴²²

Lénablou also points out that the *bigidi*, as well as adapting to disturbances, creates chaos and disturbs the 'logiques systémiques où la cartographie de l'histoire n'a pas été modifiée'.⁴²³ The final choreography in *Comme deux frères*'s production refuses to propose a clear-cut ending to the characters' story, and by the same token does not offer solutions to the complex problems evoked in the play, such as those around the issue of masculinity or homosexuality, or more

⁴²⁰ Emily Sahakian's new work on French Caribbean women's theatre comprises a more thorough description of Lénablou dance technique and philosophy, see 'Syncretizing Performance and Moral Codes : Ina Césaire's *L'Enfant des passages* and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Ton beau capitaine*' in *Staging Creolization: Women's Theatre and Performance from the French Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), pp. 100-132.

⁴²¹ Lénablou, 'Cette injonction que l'on appelle *Bigidi*' in *Amour, sexe, genre et trauma dans la Caraïbe francophone*, ed. by Gladys M. Francis (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2016), p. 46.

⁴²² Stéphanie Bérard, '*Comme deux frères* : huis clos nocturne pour d'obscurs désirs', p. 176.

⁴²³ Lénablou, 'Cette injonction que l'on appelle *Bigidi*', p. 49.

simply and broadly, identity. Thus, as Kadish suggests, this particular choreographic finale demonstrates the ‘same cynicism that Condé holds regarding solutions to social problems in the Caribbean and society generally’.⁴²⁴ Dance and movement in *Comme deux frères* offer an exploration of issues of gender and sexual identity without delivering clear-cut solutions, rather they adapt the search for these solutions to Caribbean artistic styles and ways of expression through ambiguity and *bigidi*.

Movement is not immediately apparent when reading the scripts of *Mémoires d’île* and *Comme deux frères*. However, the authors include stage directions that outline movement that can prove instrumental for an actor or production team to uncovering the motivations of the characters. Investigating the performance histories and reception of these plays also shows that movement and dance are essential to the construction of the character and plot progression. In *Mémoires d’île*, Carnival dance, roleplaying, and mime allowed the actresses of the first production to establish a link with the older characters so as to voice the memories and experiences of past generations of Martinican women. *Comme deux frères*’s first production depended on movement to explore the protagonists’ diverging personalities and issues of sexual identity and gender representations.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the three theatrical devices of space, dialogue, and movement applied by Césaire and Condé to explore more intimate, individual, and contemporary portrayals of Martinicans and Guadeloupeans, and has shown how different levels of *marronnage* relating to contemporary gendered and social

⁴²⁴ Doris Y. Kadish, ‘Maryse Condé’s *Comme deux frères*’.

norms dictated by Martinican and Guadeloupean society can be depicted theatrically. The spaces occupied by the protagonists in *Mémoires d'île* and *Comme deux frères* interrogate gendered spatial binaries, and demonstrate through the malleability of the theatre space the potentialities of positing alternative spaces. The conflation of body with landscape is also a factor that puts into question exoticist colonial stereotypes that are often assimilated by writers belonging to exoticized, eroticized, and reified peoples. The duologue format of each play is conducive to a confessional dialogue between protagonists of the same gender and age, and of similar backgrounds. The dialogue takes on the form of a narrative that evinces linearity to allow the recurrence of specific memories and experiences in the characters' exchanges. These recurring stories are symptomatic of deeper traumas, and the cathartic power of dialogue aids the characters in their route to self-discovery and revelation. Finally, the movement and choreography used in the first productions of *Mémoires d'île* and *Comme deux frères* 'permet de rendre sensible le verbe', and explore potentials for physical experimentation around issues of femininity and masculinity, and more broadly self-representation and identity.

In the final throes of their Carnival dance, the *diablesses* in Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'île* end with a string of lines about the conception of time:

PREMIÈRE DIABLESSE Et en avant, ma commère, pour la danse !
 DEUXIÈME DIABLESSE La danse du "je serai jeune", s'il plaît à Dieu !
 PREMIÈRE DIABLESSE La danse du "j'ai été vieille", malin qui le saura !
 DEUXIÈME DIABLESSE La danse du "sé pa tou di jòdi [il ne suffit pas de parler
 d'aujourd'hui]"...
 ENSEMBLE Demain sera différent !⁴²⁵

Inverting idiomatic expressions relating to past, present, and future, and assigning them to the wrong tenses, these sentences abolish all notion of time. The

⁴²⁵ Césaire, *Mémoires d'île*, p. 203.

diablesses create a space that does not fit into traditional conceptions of time, so the characters Aure and Hermance may narrate their lives divested of chronological constraints. Other constraints are rejected, such as specific assumptions about gendered space, representations, and relations. The final sentence of this passage cited here, ‘Demain sera différent’, can be read as an evocation of Césaire and Condé’s respective aims of confronting audiences with historical and contemporary issues, in order to aspire to a better future. In both plays, there is an awareness of and concern with the future. *Mémoires d’île* comes as part of Césaire’s ethnographic work collecting oral testimonies of elderly Martinicans, and as a homage to her own grandmothers. In so doing Césaire highlights and preserves what she terms ‘la mémoire vivante de ces îles’, to be consulted by future generations. The use of theatre, an ephemeral art form, may seem to contradict these attempts at enshrining these elderly women’s voices into posterity. However, Césaire gives a voice to these characters, to be embodied by actors of future generations, and by using Antillean performance forms known by both local spectator and playwright. In *Comme deux frères*, the concern is with contemporary issues, and underlines the vicious cycle of poverty and precarity experienced by Guadeloupean youth. The ambiguities present in the text, foregrounded by its first production, only emphasize how tenuous finding the causes of and solutions to the issues presented in the play can be. Yet it sparked a debate amongst the production team and the author, and the author and her critics and audiences about sexuality, gender, and identity.

The many layers of possibilities offered by the theatrical medium has led to two very different plays that draw on socio-economic factors that still affect gender relations and roles in Antillean society, exacerbated by a history of slavery

and colonialism, and their by-products of racial hierarchies and exploitative exoticism. Similar issues are raised in other plays by Condé (*Pension les alizés*, *La Faute à la vie*) and Césaire (*Molokoy*, *Le Garçon sauvage*, *La Diabliesse du Morne Rouge*, *La Poupée ashanti*), as well as those of Suzanne Dracius (*Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*) and Gerty Dambury (*Lettres indiennes*, *Trames*, *Des doutes et des errances*, *Les Atlantiques amers*).⁴²⁶ Tackling these issues is fundamental to the understanding and potential bettering of Martinican and Guadeloupean society, or at the very least to communicating to local audiences an awareness of circumstances that directly affect their everyday lives. Such an awareness runs through the works of these playwrights, and extends to their own conception of their status as Antillean women writers and the obstacles and pitfalls they may encounter. The latter will be discussed in the next chapter which analyses Gerty Dambury's work.

⁴²⁶ See authors' playographies in Appendix One.

Chapter Four: Gerty Dambury: 'L'espace qui m'habite': Staging the Female Artist

The plays discussed in this chapter are Gerty Dambury's *Lettres indiennes* (1993), *Trames* (2008), and *Des doutes et des errances* (2015). Below are the play summaries:

Lettres indiennes is set in La Réunion, a French administrative region situated in the Indian Ocean; the main character, Fructueuse, is, however, Guadeloupean.⁴²⁷ Fructueuse spends the play 'recording' in letters to her lover in Guadeloupe the lives of the Reunionese Indian community. The play provides a wider reflexion on the Indian diaspora in all French colonies, and is revelatory of social and racial relationships on the periphery of French society and in the métropole. Fructueuse arrives in Paul's house at the beginning of the play. Paul is a mechanic at the local sugar refinery, which fascinates Fructueuse. The two strike up an unlikely friendship, and Fructueuse follows Paul around in his daily life. She meets Merchat, Paul's friend, who is married to an Indian Reunionese, Marie, who has left him. Merchat is an unemployed footballer, and is torn by his friendship with Paul and love for Marie, and the resentment of his fellow Reunionese toward the Indian community. Fructueuse becomes increasingly involved in the lives of the community, and wishes to stay in La Réunion and to leave her metropolitan lover. Paul loses his job in the second half of the play, and decides to return to his family home. Fructueuse, Marie, and Merchat go with him. Fructueuse meets Paul's family, and Paul reckons with his demanding and traditionalist parents. Paul's father dies at the end of the play, and the final scene shows all the characters united around the father's funeral pyre. Fructueuse puts her notebook in the fire, abandoning her letter-writing to her lover, and cutting all ties with him.

Trames is set in present-day Guadeloupe.⁴²⁸ Gilette and her son Christian meet once a week for dinner at Gilette's house. The cast also comprises Dabar, 'the spirit of the house', an odd surreal figure who installs the different sets on stage, does the cooking, and performs some of the recordings collected by Gilette. Neither Christian nor Gilette are aware of Dabar's presence. Gilette is an ethnologist who collects Guadeloupean women's testimonies and transcribes them. The resulting recordings are played on several occasions in the play. Christian is an aimless youth floating between his mother's house and the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre, half-heartedly looking for work and meaning. The tensions between mother and son portrayed in the play reveal the social crises of contemporary Guadeloupe, and its generational conflicts. Christian's father was from Timbuktu, where Gilette travelled as a young woman, only to return disillusioned and embittered against both Guadeloupean and African men. After a series of dinners where Gilette and Christian fall out over Christian's father, unemployment, and Gilette's lack of compassion and motherly affection, Christian burgles Gilette's house for money. Gilette reports him to the police. After a final supper where the two try, but fail to resolve their differences, Christian accidentally kills Gilette by hitting her across the head with a bowl she had made and brought back from Africa.

Des doutes et des errances is a reappraisal of questions raised in *Les Atlantiques amers*, a previous play by Dambury written in 2009 following a general strike that took place in Guadeloupe.⁴²⁹ Passages of *Les Atlantiques amers* are read out as part of the three characters' rehearsal process,

⁴²⁷ First published as *Lettres indiennes* (Paris : Les Éditions du Manguier, 1993). First performance directed by Alain Timar, at the Théâtre des Halles in Avignon, 1996.

⁴²⁸ First published as *Trames/Shades/Sombras* [trilingual edition] (Paris: Éditions du Manguier, 2009). First performance directed by Gerty Dambury, at L'Artchipel, Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, 30th April 2008.

⁴²⁹ First published as *Des doutes et des errances, suivi de Les Atlantiques amers* (Paris: Éditions du Manguier, 2015). First performed as performed reading directed by Jalil Leclair at Le Musée Dapper, Paris, 10th March 2014. First full production directed by Jalil Leclair at L'Artchipel, Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, 17th October 2014.

but also in the context of a metatheatrical reassessment of previous impressions of 2009 presented in *Les Atlantiques amers*. In *Des doutes et des errances Suzanne* the director-actor-playwright, the fictional author of *Les Atlantiques amers* (played by Dambury in the 2014-2015 productions) is increasingly disillusioned with her fellow Guadeloupean thespians, for all except Lucie and Jo dropped out of the production of *Les Atlantiques amers*. She calls herself the 'syndicat' of black actors, whom she claims are the proletariat of the art world, and whom she desperately attempts to awaken to their singular identity. Throughout the play Suzanne also tries to maintain her artistic licence as playwright and director, finding it difficult to let Jo, a younger more experimental artist, take over the production of her play. Suzanne comes to the conclusion at the end of *Des doutes et des errances* that her constant campaigning for the rights of fellow thespians and her attempt at treating Guadeloupean history in her plays is useless. In spite of this, she expresses the desire to continue her work so as to counter the violence that threatens to engulf the disenfranchised youth who see no other means of expressing an oppositional voice after the earlier failure of politicians to do so. The play ends with the trio performing the beginning of *Les Atlantiques amers*.

Introduction

Paulette Nardal in 'Éveil de la Conscience de Race' discusses the mounting awareness of race consciousness amongst young Antillean female intellectuals:

... the aspirations which were to be crystallized around "The Review of the Black World" asserted themselves among a group of Antillian women students in Paris. The coloured women living alone in the metropolis, until the Colonial Exhibition, have certainly been less favoured than coloured men who are content with a certain easy success. Long before the latter, they have felt the need of a racial solidarity which would not be merely material. They were thus aroused to race consciousness. The feeling of uprooting which they experienced which was so felicitously expressed by Roberte Horth, in "A thing of no importance", contributed to the 2nd number of "The Review of the Black World", was the starting point of their evolution. After a period of obedient imitation of their white models, they may have passed through their period of revolt, just as their American brothers. But, as they grew older, they became less strict, less ultra, since they have understood the relativity of all things. At present their position is the middle ground.

In the course of their evolution, their intellectual curiosity applied itself to the history of their race and of their respective countries. They were thus led to regret the absence of such interesting matters in the educational programs ascribed to the Antillian schools. Instead of despising their retarded brothers of laying aside all hope of possibility of the black race ever being on a par with the Aryans, they began to study. And as a matter of course, when the occasion came to select a subject for a memoir or a thesis, their choice went to the black race.⁴³⁰

Nardal presents Antillean women as subjects and agents of their own intellectual development. She refers to Roberte Horth's 'Histoire sans importance/ A Thing of no importance', which appeared in the journal co-founded by the Nardal sisters,

⁴³⁰ Paulette Nardal, 'Éveil de la Conscience de Race/Awakening of Race Consciousness' in *La Revue du monde noir/ The Review of the Black World. 1931-1932 Collection complète* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992), pp. 347-348. [The citations refer to the English pages of this bilingual edition].

La Revue du Monde Noir.⁴³¹ Horth's short story is about a young Antillean woman, Léa, who on coming to the metropole is at one and the same time both intellectually stimulated and increasingly made aware of her reification and marginalisation due to the colour of her skin. The story ends with these lines:

In this country, she will never be a woman like the others, with a right to a woman's happiness, because she will never be able to blot out, for the others, the absurdity of her soul fashioned by Occidental culture but concealed by an objectionable skin. She sighed ; she had only overlooked one little fact, a thing of no importance, the simple irony of her mixed blood.⁴³²

The matter-of-fact ending of the story clashes with the rest of the tale's emphatic prose, which Nardal describes as written 'so felicitously', that portrays Léa as an intelligent, beautiful, and independent woman. The nonchalance of the last lines emphasizes the fact that this information does not come as a surprise to the character or the narrator. It is of 'no importance' and yet of the greatest import all the same. In writing this short story, Horth brings to the fore the plight many educated Antillean women faced and do still face when in the French metropole. In citing Horth's work as the prime influence that launched *La Revue du Monde noir*, Nardal makes explicit the black feminist core of the journal.

This 'thing of no importance' resonates in the works of French Caribbean female writers writing almost eighty years after Nardal and Horth published their works. As discussed in previous chapters, Antillean women, and specifically Antillean women writers, appear to be in a constant condition of double discrimination. This discrimination is as acute as ever in a French theatre world that remains discriminatory with regard both to women and persons of colour, thus adding a third level of marginalization. While, as Josette Féral claims, the majority of women working in French theatre 'se considèrent d'abord comme des

⁴³¹ Roberte Horth, 'Histoire sans importance/ A Thing of no importance' in *La Revue du monde noir/ The Review of the Black World*, pp. 118-120.

⁴³² Horth, p. 120.

artistes et souhaitent qu'on les juge comme telles – et non en tant que femmes', there is an awareness of gendered discrimination.⁴³³ Studies on the place of women on the French artistic scene have shown that female artists are conspicuously absent from this domain, particularly in technical, executive, and authorial roles.⁴³⁴ There is also a disparity between the number of white actors and others of 'ethnic origins'. Being a woman exacerbates this discrepancy, for if there are fewer female roles, then there are still fewer roles for non-white women. However, these three levels of marginalization are upturned and used by Antillean women writers as an emancipatory means of creation through the notion of *marronnage*, which is simultaneously alienatory and emancipatory. Suzanne Dracius for instance virulently voices the need for *double-marronnage* in the case of the Antillean woman writer in a Janus-faced rebellion against a society that discriminates against Antillean women writers.⁴³⁵ In the world of the theatre, the triple-marginalisation encountered by Antillean women artists is transformed into a form of *triple-marronnage*.

Three works by Gerty Dambury, *Lettres indiennes* (1993), *Trames* (2008), and *Des doutes et des errances* (2015), offer a dramatic reflection on these issues affecting the black female artist, and illustrate the *triple-marronnage* of women from the Antilles working in theatre. In *Lettres indiennes* Fructueuse is a writer, and Marie – a Reunionese of Indian origin – is a singer and dancer. Both female protagonists seek to negotiate their identity within the repressive systems in which

⁴³³ Josette Féral, *Mise en scène et jeu de l'acteur: Entretiens. Tome III: Voix de Femmes* (Montréal: Éditions Québec Amérique, 2007), p. 12.

⁴³⁴ For more information on the SACD studies, see 'Où sont les femmes dans la culture ? Toujours pas là...', *SACD* (19th October 2016), < <http://www.sacd.fr/4711.html> > [accessed 23rd December 2016]

⁴³⁵ See discussion on *marronnage* in Introduction, and Chapter One for Suzanne Dracius's description of *double-marronnage*.

they evolve, and are similar in that they escape their partners and families to seek a sense of purpose and belonging. In *Trames*, the depiction of Gilette and Christian's difficult relationship is part of Dambury's dramatic reflection on the hardship involved in being a modern woman and a professional, and having to balance these roles with motherhood. And the plight of author-director-actress Suzanne and of actress Lucie in *Des doutes et des errances* underlines the struggles of female Antillean artists to maintain their artistic authority, integrity, and dignity in a sexist and racist industry.

The portrayal of the woman artist in theatre is a thought-provoking exercise, for the actress playing the character is at once an object of theatrical representation, portraying a character created by an author under the direction of a director, and an agent of theatrical representation, because she also puts herself on display. Add to this the idea that gender as a construct and performance may be deconstructed and interrogated on stage, and the figure of the female artist may thus be used to foreground issues of gender, of agency, and of artistic integrity.

This chapter proposes an analysis of the figure of the female artist in Dambury's three plays, which portray female agents of artistic creation in domestic, professional, and creative contexts. These figures include authors and directors who are responsible for artistic production, and performers (dancers and actresses) who convey the works of the authors and directors, as well as create their own works. The delineation between those who on the one hand write and direct and those on the other who perform is complex and often blurred in Dambury's plays. This problematizes the traditional boundaries between agents and interpreters of artistic creation. The first section of this chapter will focus on the writer and director characters, who struggle to maintain artistic independence

and to maintain separate the role of writer and performer. The second section will explore the representations of the ‘performer’ characters and how they conversely represent three alternate ways of creating and performing artistic works, beyond the constraints imposed by the writer and director characters. The final section investigates the blurring of the divide between writer/director and performer.

I *Triple-marronnage* of the Antillean Woman of Letters

The authorial or director characters in Dambury’s three plays strive to assert their voice and gain agency within the artistic world and their own societies.

Fructueuse in *Lettres indiennes*, Gillette in *Trames*, and Suzanne in *Des doutes et des errances* represent artists of different kinds and ages. This demonstrates Dambury’s concern, repeatedly voiced over the years, with the exploration and representation of the status of the Antillean woman artist. In reaction to social and gender stereotypes, the female artist character often manifests a ‘désir de se détacher’ and a ‘désir de rupture’, described by the male character Jo in *Des doutes et des errances*.⁴³⁶ This detachment is found in the characters’ struggle to maintain artistic independence, which leads to a distancing from other characters and their communities. This distancing can be artistic, with a female author wishing to maintain authorial or directorial autonomy and dissociate herself from events on stage. Female writer characters portrayed as occupying or having occupied a state of errantry or exile are also represented as experiencing such distancing.

I.1 Detachment from Gendered and Social Stereotypes

The status of the female writer or director characters has an impact on the roles they are expected to play within their respective communities and relationships.

⁴³⁶ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p. 60.

This is particularly pertinent to *Lettres indiennes* and *Trames*, where the protagonists go against gender stereotypes through the reversal of power dynamics relating to gender in the case of Fructueuse, or by rejecting ideals of motherhood associated with Antillean women in Gilette's case.

In *Lettres indiennes*, Marie's husband Merchat enumerates the blights that have befallen La Réunion and its working classes:

MERCHAT (*chantant*) Les femmes s'enfuient, les cannes pourrissent sur pied, les patrons font la grève, les usines se font la malle, les Indiens deviennent insolents, les coupeurs jouent aux dames et les dames analysent le monde ! ⁴³⁷

Women running away and women analysing, hence women exercising their free will, is commensurate with factories closing and social unrest fermenting. What is more the phrase 'les coupeurs jouent aux dames' may be taken as a double-entendre, signifying that the cutters both play draughts and play at being women ('dame' meaning both draughts and woman in French). Gender reversal occurs throughout the play and emphasizes Fructueuse's status as critical observer and holder of the objectifying gaze, traditionally associated with the male gaze. For instance, the repartition of space between inner domestic female space and outer working male space is interrogated by a reversal of the genders that occupy them. The main male character, Paul, who happens to be Fructueuse's main object of study, is more frequently portrayed in an interior space while Marie and Fructueuse are frequently shown in outside spaces. Paul does his own chores, whilst the female protagonists are not shown as performing any domestic duties at all.

Gender reversal is also present in Fructueuse's objectification of the male working body and the fusing of that body with the terrain it occupies. This recalls

⁴³⁷ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 40.

the projection of colonialist exotic landscape as a female body in colonial travel literature, discussed in the previous chapter. Here the reverse happens. Fructueuse takes on the role of the travel writer reifying the body of the Other – which in this case is male – by obsessing about and penetrating the space it inhabits. At the beginning of the play Fructueuse walks around Paul's home, which she has entered without his permission, much like the invasion of the colonized's space by the colonizer. She looks through the clutter and takes in the smells, clues to the man whose home she has invaded:

FRUCTUEUSE [...] Il n'y a pas de parfum d'homme ici, mais une Eau de Cologne bon marché qui se mêle à l'odeur surie des vêtements dans lesquels l'homme a transpiré. On devine aussi une odeur de graisse de moteur. Oui, je suis sans aucun doute chez un mécanicien.⁴³⁸

Fructueuse remains in Paul's home for most of the play, where she sleeps in a bed made from used clothing whose 'odeur surie' she previously fawned over. In a similar exoticization of the landscape, she later becomes obsessed with the sugar refinery where Paul works as a mechanic, its smells, its colours, and its sounds. She increasingly merges the male body with the factory, so much so that it is difficult to determine what excites her more:

FRUCTUEUSE [...] J'ai visité l'usine en compagnie de Paul. Elle ne m'a pas déçue. J'ai retrouvé là-dedans, plus que l'odeur du rhum et du vésou dont je te parlais au début, une impression de puissance, de muscles tendus, de sueurs qui gouttent, le désir acharné des hommes de faire toujours mieux, toujours plus. [...] J'ai aimé cette usine parce qu'elle regarde la mer au loin, de haut. Elle est sombre et puissante [...] J'ai aimé cette usine. Je ne suis pas la seule. Elle va mourir comme les autres. La puissance est tellement périssable.⁴³⁹

There is almost a morbid fascination in this vision of a decaying factory, and the decline of the power and sensuality of the male body. The final line underlines the futility of strength and power in the face of inevitable change. This amalgamation of masculinity and the degrading of masculine strength in Fructueuse's speech can

⁴³⁸ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 2.

⁴³⁹ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 45.

be taken either as a fascination for the male body and sadness at its dwindling strength, or as a morbid delectation in its decline. Dambury in *Lettres indiennes* casts Fructueuse the female protagonist as an active subject, while her male counterparts become objects of desire. The ugliness and eroticism of many of the descriptions of men and the male body provide a critique of the reified body, be it male or female.

In *Trames*, Gilette goes against the grain by refusing to give way to the stereotypes of Antillean women she claims date from the 1950s. The trope of the single working mother is embodied by Gilette and ‘La Femme au bébé [Woman with a baby]’, one of the women whose testimonies Gilette transcribes. The connection between Gilette and ‘La Femme au bébé’ is noted by Gilette’s son Christian when Gilette transcribes the testimony that relates how the woman was abandoned by her husband in 1953. At the end of the recording, ‘La Femme au bébé’ describes her youngest daughter’s christening, which was attended by her husband, who ‘a bu, il a mangé et il est reparti chez sa nouvelle femme’,⁴⁴⁰ Christian then asks his mother how she would have reacted had she been in the same situation:

CHRISTIAN Une bonne bouffe, y’a que ça pour rapprocher les gens... Le gars il a bu, il a mangé, et il est reparti... Tu aurais fait quoi, toi ?

GILETTE Je l’aurais fichu dehors avec pertes et fracas.

CHRISTIAN Oui, mais toi, tu n’es pas une vraie femme antillaise...

GILETTE De 1953... Pas une femme antillaise de 1953...⁴⁴¹

In her reply Gilette expresses her belief that things are different for Antillean women fifty years after the events related by ‘La Femme au bébé’. However, it appears, given Christian’s comments, that such behaviour on the part of Antillean men, as well as the resignation of Antillean women, remains the norm. Gilette

⁴⁴⁰ Dambury, *Trames*, p. 34.

⁴⁴¹ Dambury, *Trames*, pp. 34-35.

herself left Guadeloupe for Africa as a young woman to escape such men, and she is persuaded that of the women whose testimonies she transcribes, those that escaped and avoided such abusive relationships avoided destitution. When Gilette left Africa, she also left her husband behind, reversing the expected scenario of the man leaving the woman to fend for herself and her children. Gilette does leave with her son, however. A decision she now seems to regret, as is made apparent by her troubled and tenuous relationship with Christian and the lack of maternal sentiment that is revealed in her dealings with him and by Christian's own childhood stories.

To emphasize the deficiency in Gilette's mothering skills, Christian compares her unfavourably with the mothers of African children he read about in books and encountered on his visit to his father's relatives when he was a child, and with Gilette's own mother, 'Mamie' who provides him with the maternal care denied by Gilette. Gilette's mother comes as a counterpoint to her daughter, as a role model the latter refuses to follow. It is Mamie who convinced Gilette to let Christian go to Africa, Mamie who bails him out of jail after Gilette reports him to the authorities for burgling her home. The relationship between the two women is not filled out on stage, but the disapproval they show for each other's lifestyle is palpable in Gilette's curt responses to Christian's references to his grandmother. Gilette resents seeing Mamie succeed where she has failed, as in her relationship with Christian, for whom she represents an ideal mother-figure, and in her relationship with Gilette's ex-husband with whom Mamie gets along better than Gilette:

GILETTE [...] il lui donnait du "maman" par-ci et du "maman" par-là... Elle se sentait flattée. Elle avait le sentiment d'être plus importante que moi à ses yeux.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴² Dambury, *Trames*, p. 26.

Gilette's rejection of all maternal stereotypes is articulated in her final tirade with Christian:

GILETTE [...] Je suis libre. Je suis une femme libre ! C'est cela que tu ne veux pas comprendre, hein ? Ni toi, ni ta grand-mère ! Je ne répèterai pas l'histoire. Je ne serai pas MA mère. Je ne serai pas SA mère ! J'ai essayé... J'ai tenu ce rôle-là mais il ne me va pas. Tout ça, c'était faux.⁴⁴³

She is not, like her mother, a typical Antillean woman, and she is not like her ex-husband's mother, an African mother, who lets her husband and sons do as they please. The tirade ends with the phrase: 'TU N'ES PAS MA DESTINATION FINALE'.⁴⁴⁴ The 'final destination' could also be the final aspiration a woman is expected to have: motherhood, since if Christian is not her final destination, then this signifies her duty as a mother is not her *raison d'être*. That aspiration was not Gilette's final destination, as it might be for other women. Gilette asserts her right not to be a *poto-mitan*, 'une femme debout qui fait face aux intempéries et aux malchances, qui résiste aux mauvais coups de la vie, qui ne se ploie pas sous la double tâche parentale'.⁴⁴⁵ Gilette removes herself from her traditional role in Antillean society. Her independence and renunciation of the norm are threatening, and the other characters find her antagonistic. This in turn suggests that the choices made by Gilette remain controversial and unavailable to other women, particularly those women whose voices resound in the recordings played throughout the play. The protagonists of *Lettres indiennes* and *Trames* set themselves apart from other women of their homelands to assert agency and fulfil their professional aspirations. The marginalization and rejection they experience,

⁴⁴³ Dambury, *Trames*, p. 63.

⁴⁴⁴ Dambury, *Trames*, p. 63.

⁴⁴⁵ Kathleen Gyssels, *Filles de Solitude. Essai sur l'identité antillaise dans les (auto-) biographies fictives de Simone et André Schwarz-Bart* (Paris : L'Harmattan 1996), p. 65. See also 'Conte in Rosanie Soleil' in Chapter Two.

as well as the psychological toll their ‘unorthodox’ lifestyles and behaviours generate, underline the obstacles Antillean female artists face.

I.2 Authorial Independence

Gaining and preserving artistic agency is essential for Fructueuse in *Lettres indiennes* and Suzanne in *Des doutes et des errances*. These characters explore their role as writers in different ways and in both cases the female artists confront their male counterparts as a means of defending their status as fully-fledged writers. Fructueuse seeks recognition from her partner through her writing, and eventually discovers that her writing should and does set her apart from him. Suzanne grapples with the difficulties of preserving artistic licence in a milieu that does not always privilege the text, and must also assert her authority as a female creator when faced with the presaged interference of a male colleague, Jo.

In *Lettres indiennes*, Fructueuse sees writing as putting her on the same level as her partner whom she describes as ‘un spécialiste’.⁴⁴⁶ She addresses her letters, which are read out as monologues in the play, to her partner in Paris, the second person singular indicating that she is addressing herself to him. However, the partner is never named, nor does he appear in the play. Therefore, the use of the second person singular is ambiguous, and may refer to the audience as well as her partner who is also a spectator. Half-way through the play, Fructueuse points out how her partner’s mind and intellectual approach differ from her own:

FRUCTUEUSE [...] J’en ai assez de regarder les choses de ce regard cru qui juge, qui dissèque, qui analyse, cherche les solutions dans l’immédiat... C’est étrange que je te dise cela. À toi. Tu m’as tellement habituée à cette forme de pensée. Et moi, poète... Voilà, entre nous le mot était lâché. Je me sentais accessoire, distrayante, peut-être... Je t’écoute. Je réécoute pour moi-même tes mots qui se clarifient dans ma tête et je comprends que nous sommes à des niveaux

⁴⁴⁶ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 9.

différents de notre demeure, que tu me parles du trottoir pendant que je pense à l'arrière-cour.⁴⁴⁷

In voicing her dissatisfaction with their relationship, Fructueuse also shows her particularity and originality as a writer. Writing allows her to erect a barrier between herself and her absent partner, the better to convey her opinions to him without fear of retaliation. Indeed, it transpires that writing is a means of making him listen, whereas in their previous habitual face-to-face interactions she was the one to 'listen' and feel 'accessoire'. Writing awakens Fructueuse to her own singularity, which distinguishes her from her partner: she is a poet and he is a specialist. Writing thus comes as a form of liberatory transformation from the role of 'incidental' listener to autonomous thinker and writer.

Suzanne's character in *Des doutes et des errances* is older than *Lettres indiennes*'s Fructueuse, who has just embarked on her writing career. Suzanne has behind her a long career as a director and playwright and, to her distaste, an actor. Throughout the play, she is fiercely protective of her work *Les Atlantiques amers*, which she and the two other characters are rehearsing. In *Des doutes et des errances*, the play written originally by Dambury herself in 2009 undergoes a meta-theatrical or rather an intra-theatrical reassessment, since it is read, performed, and discussed by the three protagonists. *Des doutes et des errances* demonstrates the impact of the rehearsal process on the development of a play on stage and on the page, engendering a reflection on the status of the writer in a theatrical context. For the fictional author of *Les Atlantiques amers*, Suzanne, the benefits of rewriting her play fail to compensate for the concomitant loss of her authorial authority.⁴⁴⁸ Suzanne has at the beginning of *Des doutes et des errances*

⁴⁴⁷ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 28.

⁴⁴⁸ Interestingly, 'author' and 'authority', 'auteur' and 'autorité', share the same root, the Latin *auctor*, meaning 'promoter', 'originator'.

in fact rewritten *Les Atlantiques amers* several times, and even at one point seems ready to write a seventh version. She is not against the act of rewriting as long as she is the writer. What Suzanne is specifically reluctant to submit to is rewriting the play as part of a collective process, subsequent to a collaborative reassessment by actors and the director. When Jo and Lucie attempt to point out to Suzanne various issues in the playtext that may have been instrumental in the rest of the cast deserting the production, Suzanne remains fiercely protective of her work. Jo, the younger of the three, wishes to modernize it, by including other art forms, and changing some of the dialogue, which Suzanne resists. Jo points out that Suzanne's reticence stems from her obsession with the centrality of the text:

JO Tu as surtout peur que la place accordée aux artistes n'évince le texte ! Ton texte !
Le centre de tout ! L'irremplaçable !

To which Suzanne replies:

SUZANNE Il n'y a pas de théâtre sans texte ! Tout le reste, c'est de l'agitation !⁴⁴⁹

This is a response that would appear contradictory coming from a theatre practitioner, theatre being a multimodal art form by definition. Suzanne demonstrates her need for total control, at the expense of sounding 'old-fashioned' to Jo. For her, even a collective rewrite supplants her authority as director, and more importantly as author, a fragile status in a theatrical context. The fear of losing control over her work is in fact shown later in the play when Suzanne expresses her fear of exclusion from the creative process and the production:

JO Fais confiance à la mise en scène!
[...]

SUZANNE Mais il faut une base quand même, quelque chose ! Tu ne peux pas m'évacuer comme cela !

JO Je ne t'évacue pas, Suzanne, je garderai l'essentiel de toi, de tes mots et même de ce que tu ne dis pas, que tu n'écris pas mais que tu as glissé, ici et là, dès le premier texte.

⁴⁴⁹ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p. 44.

SUZANNE Comme... ?

JO Le besoin de se détacher. Le désir de rupture. Tu le vois ? Non, tu ne le vois pas ?

Tu refuses de le formuler, tu me laisses le soin de le faire à ta place. Moi, je suis prêt.

SUZANNE Mais j'ai tellement peur.⁴⁵⁰

Not only is Suzanne fearful of being excluded, she also is wary of Jo leading the production. Indeed, it is Jo who offers to direct the play in her stead, Jo whom she implores not to change her production at the expense of the text, Jo with whom she pleads to keep passages of the original playtext he seems to want to cut out. In fact, Jo gradually becomes the director, and Suzanne is consigned to the role of writer which thus minimises her control over the text.

Worse still for Suzanne is the fear of being relegated to a role of actor. At the start of the play, when she is asked to perform to replace one of the actors who has quit, Suzanne replies:

SUZANNE NON!

LUCIE Pas la peine de hurler...

SUZANNE Veux plus jouer.

N'ai d'ailleurs jamais souhaité jouer.

Me suis toujours portée au secours d'une pièce par défaut.

Remplacer des comédiens défaillants.

Les absents, les chasseurs de doubles contrats, les chieuses... [...] qui ne nous inspiraient qu'un désir : les foutre à la porte et les remplacer, au pied levé !

Combien de fois...

Y penser !

Combien de fois...

Hésiter !

Et puis faire ! Faire malgré tout.⁴⁵¹

The short and single-word sentences towards the end of Suzanne's speech manifest an underlying, visceral wariness of acting, a history of working in productions against her will, or out of charity. The dialogue outlines her usual reactions on being asked to act: her initial anger at her fellow thespians' lack of integrity ('les absents... les chieuses'), and her reluctant acceptance of a role she does not want to perform, 'by default.'⁴⁵² The repetition of 'Combien de fois'

⁴⁵⁰ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p. 60. Indentations in original playscript.

⁴⁵¹ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, pp. 27-28. Indentations in original playscript.

⁴⁵² Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p. 27.

demonstrates that this process of thinking, hesitating, then doing has become second-nature to her. Suzanne is justified in her anxiety at being ‘evacuated’, for she is, as a woman and an artist, on the verge of losing her artistic licence over her own creation. The vehemence with which she fights for her text, and the power play that develops between herself and Jo, foreground deeper concerns with the status of the female Caribbean artist.

I.3 Detachment as Errantry

As mentioned above, in *Trames*, Gilette, referring to the cases of the women whose recorded testimonies she transcribes in the play, declares that ‘chaque fois qu’une femme s’en est sortie, c’est parce qu’elle est partie.’⁴⁵³ These women have escaped repressive marriages and systems by leaving their families, their husbands, their homes. Gilette also refers to her own attempt at escape, when she travelled from her native Guadeloupe to Africa as a young woman. For women, travelling to the metropole or other parts of the world offers opportunities for professional advancement and personal fulfilment. This is an issue that is referred to by many Caribbean women writers, who have almost all travelled to and from the metropole. This is also true of theatre professionals from the French Caribbean. Leaving Guadeloupe, or the Antilles in general, is what many theatre professionals, including Gerty Dambury and other female artists, have been obliged to do in order to gain employment and recognition in a field that in metropolitan France is already highly competitive. The errant or exiled female artist appears in several of Dambury’s plays as a dramatic reflection on these issues.

⁴⁵³ Dambury, *Trames*, p. 62.

Travelling is integral to the lives of Fructueuse and Gilette, despite the latter having returned to Guadeloupe twenty years prior to the action of *Trames*. Gilette left, but disillusioned as she was by her travels in Africa returned, with a son, Christian. Fructueuse, at the end of *Lettres indiennes*, appears to have found her place in a community that was not her own. At the end of the play Fructueuse is on the cusp of joining that community, unlike Gilette who twenty years after having gone to Africa feels rejected by the community and leaves. Gilette's travels as a younger woman and Fructueuse's nomadism may be read through Glissant's concept of errantry, the movement that allows one to become aware of the Other and their culture and establish a relationship. Also useful here is Glissant's theory of *digenesis*, used to describe 'la Genèse des sociétés créoles des Amériques'.⁴⁵⁴ For Glissant, the mixing of multiple heritages of Caribbean individuals annul all possibility of single filiation and heritage. Embracing *digenesis* leads to the abandonment of 'l'impénétrable exigence de l'unicité excluante'.⁴⁵⁵ *Digenesis* therefore underlines the importance of multiple heritages to understanding one's place in the world and one's relation to the Other. For the female protagonists of *Lettres indiennes* and *Trames* travelling allows a broader understanding of others and of themselves. Gilette manifests an inherent desire to 'rencontrer des gens, parler, interroger...', to discover new cultures, to be *en relation*.⁴⁵⁶ Her desire to talk and engage remains evident in her work as an ethnographer, for she meets and interviews Guadeloupean women whose life stories she records and transcribes. In *Lettres indiennes* Fructueuse revels in writing and living others' lives:

⁴⁵⁴ Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde, Poétique IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 36.

⁴⁵⁵ Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, p. 36.

⁴⁵⁶ Dambury, *Trames*, p. 39.

FRUCTUEUSE [...] Mon carnet est déjà plein de la vie de ces êtres qui m'entourent et ne se doutent de rien. Ils ne savent pas que je suis là, à leurs côtés, que je note leurs moindres faits et gestes et qu'à toi, je dis et je raconte toutes ces scènes...⁴⁵⁷

To define themselves these women travel. However, the experience of both characters is often dissatisfactory and even tends to marginalize them. The younger Gilette returns disillusioned and bitter, and from that journey stem all the negative aspects of her life: her son, her lack of independence, her incessant need to denounce the barbarity of men. But this disappointment and disenchantment have shaped her personality and perspectives on the world, and have left her with an unquenched thirst for travel. The final tirade analysed above also has Gilette manifest this urge:

GILETTE [...] Moi je n'ai qu'une envie : prendre les routes, prendre les airs, prendre la mer et repartir. Toujours, repartir. Je ne suis pas arrivée à destination. Je ne peux pas m'arrêter, je ne veux pas m'arrêter. Tu n'es pas ma destination finale. TU N'ES PAS MA DESTINATION FINALE.⁴⁵⁸

In addition to suggesting motherhood is not her life's goal, as previously discussed, the exclamation 'TU N'ES PAS MA DESTINATION FINALE' may indicate either that Gilette has not yet completed her journey of self-discovery, or is inherently in need of travel and escape from the realities of her current home.

Halfway through *Lettres indiennes* in a dialogue with Marie, Fructueuse admits to suffering from solitude, and to using writing and travel as a means of surviving it:

MARIE [...] C'est pesant d'être seule. C'est trop de désarroi.
FRUCTUEUSE Le désarroi, je connais...
MARIE Vous savez ?
FRUCTUEUSE Moi aussi, j'en ai peur. Plus que de la faim ou de la soif... Enfin... je n'en sais rien !
MARIE Que faites-vous pour vous en sortir ?
FRUCTUEUSE Je prends des notes. Je garde le nez en l'air. J'inspecte les coins et les recoins, les rues, les villes, les vies. Je farfouille partout. [...] Je cherche la vie, pas l'absence. La vie !⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁷ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 1.

⁴⁵⁸ Dambury, *Trames*, p. 63.

⁴⁵⁹ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 25.

Yet it transpires that Fructueuse's solitude cannot be quelled without a sense of belonging. Fructueuse needs a place to call home. Her fascination with the sugar refinery where Paul works and the similarities she detects between the climates of La Réunion and her homeland are symptomatic of her desire to belong to this foreign island. Indeed, by the end of the play she feels as though she has become a part of the community:

FRUCTUEUSE [...] Je t'ai beaucoup parlé de cette usine. Et des hommes et des femmes qui gravitaient autour d'elle. Je n'ai pas su rester extérieure à ce qui se passait sous mes yeux. Je n'ai pas su garder la distance. Alors, je me sens toute orpheline, maintenant que l'usine s'est arrêtée.⁴⁶⁰

In interacting with other characters, in taking part in their daily lives and struggles, Fructueuse achieves recognition and overcomes her solitude. As the play draws to a close Fructueuse decides to remain, despite worrying about her reception within the Reunionese Indian community who she hopes 'ne me trouveront pas trop étrangère, qu'ils ne me poseront pas trop de ces questions qui m'effraient: Qui es-tu? Quel est ton nom? Quelle est ta lignée?'⁴⁶¹ Fructueuse as a Guadeloupean has multiple lineages, and therefore cannot be defined by one alone. Once more, Glissant's concept of *digenesis* may help with the articulation of this concern over lineage.

This final scene is also the one in which Paul's father's funeral takes place. Fructueuse concludes the play by likening herself to the Indian family, who have lost part of their lineage with the death of their father and may be in need of fashioning new ties and identities. After a long journey of self-discovery, Fructueuse also unearths the relations between herself and the Reunionese. By doing so she includes another population in the *digenesis* experienced by peoples

⁴⁶⁰ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 66.

⁴⁶¹ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 67.

of the Americas, proving that it is a global, and not just a Caribbean, phenomenon. In travelling, the women in *Trames* and *Lettres indiennes* shape their own artistic perspectives, philosophy, and identity. This detachment is necessary, particularly for women to whom the notion of Glissant's errantry as discovery of the self and Other applies. And for women there is the additional need to escape restrictive social norms.

I.4 Detachment from the Action

On a more theatrical level, Dambury's protagonists also seek a physical detachment from the action of their plays. In *Des doutes et des errances*, Suzanne finally is obliged to act in the production she and her colleagues are preparing by acting out scenes from *Les Atlantiques amers* during the play. In contrast, the female protagonists of *Lettres indiennes* and *Trames* do not fully involve themselves in the plays' action. Fructueuse's resulting solitude in *Lettres indiennes* and Gilette's bitterness and paranoia in *Trames* come across as necessary evils in their quest for their agency. In *Lettres indiennes*, Fructueuse fulfils the role of the cold, harsh observer she previously criticized her partner for playing. She does so by placing herself on the margins of the action, writing her letters or silently observing the events unfolding before her. However, she also feels drawn to the action, and believes that attraction is what sets her apart from her partner. She interacts with the other characters, stays in their homes, and eventually becomes a part of their lives. Yet throughout most of the play she does remain on the side-lines writing about her surroundings and the characters and the lives she observes. In *Trames*, Gilette is not directly involved in any physical action either. Dabar, the spirit of the house, is the one who organises the stage space, clears it up, and does the cooking. Indeed, though Gilette supposedly does

the cooking, the stage directions describe her as not accomplishing any domestic tasks. She acts more as a conductor or master of ceremonies, which confers on her significant influence over the action. Thus, she describes an action, and Dabar executes it, as these stage directions show:

GILETTE Des coquilles Saint-Jacques, de la crème fraîche, un peu de curry pour garder un soupçon d'Antilles... [...] Avec quoi je vais faire ça ? On a le choix, pommes de terre, riz, ah non ! patates douces... [...]
Toutes les réflexions à voix haute de Gillette sont transformées en acte par Dabar.
 GILETTE Un gâteau au coco ou des petites tartelettes à l'ananas ? Ou bien une glace maison, au coco ou à la goyave ? Allez, j'opte pour le gâteau au coco. [...] De la musique, il faudra aussi de la musique...⁴⁶²

In a similar fashion, Gillette's transcribing of the women's testimonies she has collected does not show her as actively engaged in dialogue with these women, despite these recordings taking the form of interviews. There is therefore a distance established between herself and the women, who are presented as isolated and separate objects of study. And when these testimonies are occasionally performed on stage by Dabar, Gillette is conspicuously absent, signifying she has removed herself from the action entirely.

And yet, somewhat paradoxically, neither Fructueuse nor Gillette can escape the urge to be a part of the action of their plays. Fructueuse progressively abandons writing, too solitary an act for her to enjoy, and too alienating with regard to the lives unravelling before her eyes. Gillette's murder in *Trames*'s finale is followed by the final image of Gillette's lifeless body in her armchair: 'On retrouve le plateau du début. Gillette dans son fauteuil', which echoes the opening scene: 'Dans le fauteuil, une femme, inerte'.⁴⁶³ The play thus can be interpreted as a cyclical narrative, which starts and ends with Gillette's corpse on an armchair. Therefore, Gillette can be seen as a spirit herself, who effectively cannot act, and

⁴⁶² Dambury, *Trames*, p. 19.

⁴⁶³ Dambury, *Trames*, pp. 64, 7.

so it falls upon Dabar to execute her actions for her. Gillette as spirit or ghostly entity has undermined all expectations, by removing herself physically from the action. In doing so she negates Dabar's words, at the play's opening, that suggest Gillette is one of the actors in a play 'QUI SE JOUAIT À LEUR INSU'.⁴⁶⁴

Fructueuse and Gillette attempt to remove themselves from the action, to assert their status as independent female professionals. However, for Fructueuse, that amounts to acting as a product of her partner's school of harsh observation, and she chooses an alternative course: to embrace and act on the urge to belong to the communities she writes about. Gillette is the most successful in setting herself apart, by refusing to act at all, and with *Trames*'s final twist suggesting she is in fact already deceased at the beginning of the play and not simply at the end, and thus in a sense not physically present throughout it. She has achieved detachment at a price that Fructueuse on the other hand is not ready to pay, and the latter therefore joins in the action in the final section of *Lettres indiennes*. The fact that in these plays there is always a price to be paid suggests once more that the status of the female artist, as autonomous creator, authorial entity, and producer of her own work, remains tenuous.

Director/author characters in these plays face different levels of *marronnage* as part of a necessary detachment to gain authorial and personal independence. This detachment also has a negative impact on the characters when their behaviour and the treatment they receive marginalizes them. The use of *marronnage* to describe the protagonists' different interactions and lifestyle choices emphasizes the complex nature of the lives of female Antillean authors.

⁴⁶⁴ Dambury, *Trames*, p. 7. Capitalization in original playscript.

II The Performing Artist

In 'A Thing of No Importance' Horth points to an issue that affects the characters in the plays analysed here. Namely, the prioritisation of skin colour, and hence of body, over mind and creative agency. Caribbean women were objectified in the intellectual scene of early twentieth-century Paris, where Horth's novella is set, because of their gender and their skin tone, and this erects a barrier preventing them from being recognized as intellectuals and artists. This remains an issue today, and no less so in the context of the French theatre where racial bias affects both male and female actors. Indeed, Michèle Césaire, Aimé Césaire's daughter and Ina Césaire's sister, who writes eighty years after the publication of Horth's story, describes a similar experience to that recounted in 'A Thing of No Importance':

C'est au Conservatoire que j'ai appris que j'étais noire. Je savais que j'étais métisse ; mais j'ignorais que cela impliquait représenter l'Afrique.⁴⁶⁵

As an actor, Césaire would be cast in 'black' roles, irrespective of the fact she could portray other characters. In an interview about her father Aimé Césaire's work and the state of multiracial casting in France, she points out:

Quand on joue du théâtre contemporain comment peut-on encore se poser la question de la couleur de peau des comédiens. On peut jouer Shakespeare avec des noirs, Peter Brook l'a fait. C'est un faux problème. La couleur de peau n'a rien à voir avec le discours du dramaturge, ni le discours politique, ni la poésie et l'univers dans lequel s'embarque le spectateur avec un grand bonheur.⁴⁶⁶

However, little opportunity is given to non-white performers to play supposedly 'white' or 'European' characters, as David Bobée, head of the Centre dramatique national Normandie-Rouen describes in a recent interview given as part of a France

⁴⁶⁵ Michèle Césaire, 'La Phrase. Michèle Césaire', *Libération* (7th April 2011) <http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2011/04/07/la-phrase-michele-cesaire_727376> [accessed 1st February 2017].

⁴⁶⁶ Stéphane Capron 'Michèle Césaire rend hommage à son père', *Scènweb* (5th March 2011) <http://www.sceneweb.fr/michele-cesaire-rend-hommage-a-son-pere/> [accessed 16th March 2015].

Culture programme on diversity in French theatre and film: ‘trente pourcent de la population française n'est pas blanche et la culture de France continue à représenter une écrasante majorité de blancs pour des blancs’.⁴⁶⁷

French Caribbean women artists face a double-discrimination. Added to this is the peripheral status of Antillean theatre, under-represented in the metropole in comparison to other Francophone theatrical traditions:

...paradoxalement les auteurs africains sont plus joués que les auteurs antillais. C’est le problème du pays qui n’est pas français, mais qui est encore français. Les auteurs algériens, africains sont plus joués que les auteurs caribéens.⁴⁶⁸

This has much to do with the ambiguous cultural and political relationship between the French metropole and its overseas territories in the Caribbean, which puts Guadeloupe and Martinique’s cultural production in a complicated position between French theatre and foreign French-language theatre. Maryse Condé, in an interview with the author, pointed out that the fact that Antillean literature is not as widespread in French literary circuits ‘tient au statut de ces pays qui n’ont jamais pu prouver au monde ce qui était leur culture, ce qui était leur force [car] on n’a jamais voulu lui permettre d’être différente.’⁴⁶⁹ In a theatrical context, when Antillean drama attempts to distinguish itself, for example as part of a collective of French overseas cultures, then this may lead to what Bernard Lagier, adjunct-director of the Tropiques-Atrium Theatre in Fort-de-France, terms the ‘ghettoization des écritures’ from overseas French territories.⁴⁷⁰ The difficulties

⁴⁶⁷ David Bobée, in ‘Le cinéma et le théâtre français à l’épreuve de la diversité (1/4) : Décoloniser les imaginaires du théâtre français’, *La série documentaire*, France Culture, 28th August 2017 <<https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/lcd-la-serie-documentaire/le-cinema-et-le-theatre-francais-lepreuve-de-la-diversite-14>> [Accessed 30th August 2017].

⁴⁶⁸ Stéphane Capron ‘Michèle Césaire rend hommage à son père’, *Scène web* (5th March 2011) <<http://www.sceneweb.fr/michele-cesaire-rend-hommage-a-son-pere/>> [accessed 16th March 2015].

⁴⁶⁹ In an interview with the author, Gordes, France, 20th February 2016.

⁴⁷⁰ In an interview with the author, Fort-de-France, Martinique, 7th April 2016.

for Antillean theatre in achieving recognition exacerbate the status of the Antillean woman artist.

Given these circumstances, in *Des doutes et des errances* it is therefore possible to interpret Suzanne's refusal to act as a reaction to the reductiveness of the role reserved to black women in theatre. She campaigns for the rights of Antillean actors to perform and direct, and has enlightened her fellow Guadeloupean Lucie to the possibilities of playing independent black women and performing black histories. Suzanne does not oppose black women becoming actors, in fact they are necessary to the establishing of diversity in an already prejudiced business. However, the example of Suzanne's character shows that Caribbean women artists can be more than just actors. Rather than docilely fulfilling the role of the actor as non-autonomous object performing the author or director's bidding the 'performer' characters Marie in *Lettres indiennes*, Lucie in *Des doutes et des errances*, and Dabar in *Trames* present another facet of the potential of French Caribbean women artists. These characters embody and voice anxieties of French Caribbean women artists and Dambury herself. They are dancers, musicians, singers, and actors, and question the distinctions between writer/director and performer by blurring the lines between them.

II.1 Awakening of the Black Female Actor's Consciousness

With Lucie's character, *Des doutes et des errances* reveals the struggles of black actors given 'secondary roles' that do not correspond to their heritage and history. For the majority of the play's action her role remains that of a secondary female character, a 'performer' who does as Suzanne or Jo instruct. Lucie does not have as assertive a personality as Suzanne and Jo, in whose conversations and arguments she does not participate. She performs the excerpts of *Les Atlantiques*

acters included in *Des doutes et des errances*, and occasionally stands up for Suzanne against Jo. Dambury does, however, include one scene ('Scène 12 – Renversement d'alliances') in which Lucie demonstrates her increasing awareness of her status as a black female actor after her encounter with Suzanne. Contained within this scene is a flashback sequence in which Suzanne makes Lucie read excerpts of African American director and playwright August Wilson's *The Ground on Which I Stand* (1996), a speech denouncing the hegemony of European and white American theatrical forms that impedes African American thespians from expressing their culture and voices on stage.⁴⁷¹ This penultimate scene is part of *Des doutes et des errances*'s reflexion on the need to represent black histories and experiences on stage. For Lucie, Suzanne's activism shapes her conception of herself as an actor, and of the type of theatre she should perform. She explains to Jo how before meeting Suzanne she could not relate to the characters she portrayed or the playwrights who had written them. The roles Suzanne offered her were liberating and took into account her origins and experiences:

LUCIE Je me suis sentie revivre, [...] j'ai eu le sentiment de trouver presque naturellement ma place dans le personnage et d'avoir la faculté de l'enrichir vraiment, de tout ce que j'étais, de tout ce que j'avais expérimenté dans ma vie.⁴⁷²

This reflection on the lack of black roles, and moreover the lack of representative black roles in French theatre, echoes the discourse of many black theatre artists of the postcolonial diaspora. Eva Doumbia, a director of Guinean origin, underlines the hypocrisy of a theatre industry that celebrates foreign authors while ignoring French authors who are reminders of France's colonial history. Doumbia points

⁴⁷¹ August Wilson, 'The Ground on Which I Stand, a Speech on Black Theatre and Performance', delivered at Princeton University McCarter Theatre (1996), transcript on *AAS21: A 21st Century Archive of African American Studies*,

<<http://aas.princeton.edu/blog/publication/thegroundonwhichistand/>> [accessed 21st March 2017]

⁴⁷² Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p. 72.

out that when ethnic actors are authorized on stage, it is often in productions that do not correspond to her own ‘connaissance de l’Histoire’ and her own cultural experiences: ‘Pourquoi, moi, je devrais m’identifier à Nora, l’héroïne d’Ibsen ? Je n’ai pas grandi dans la bourgeoisie, je ne suis pas blanche.’⁴⁷³ For her, a refoundation of ‘l’imaginaire français’ is necessary, and she foregrounds her own work as ‘métissé et hybride’ relying on ‘une autre connaissance de l’histoire’.⁴⁷⁴ Doumbia’s argument is one shared by many theatre practitioners, and is expressed with this scene in *Des doutes et des errances*.

The issue of diversity in French theatre is not intended solely for the spectator in *Des doutes et des errances*, but for Lucie the actress. When Lucie reads excerpts of August Wilson’s text, Suzanne remains upstage, in the wings, as a director not involved in the play’s action. Suzanne’s physical distancing is as an opportunity for Lucie to discover the words she reads for herself, without Suzanne’s input. Despite the two women’s differences, Suzanne is instrumental to Lucie’s awakening to her condition, and in providing her with alternative roles to which she can relate. Even though Lucie does not share Suzanne’s level of political indignation or Jo’s cynicism, she participates in a movement of rejection of oppressive theatrical and societal norms through her profession of actor. Despite the fact Lucie is not a writer or director, her performance creates meaning in a different manner. Her politics are contained within her performance, for she is the vessel through which Suzanne articulates her political opinions, but she also benefits fully from embodying these opinions, as an act of self-identification and

⁴⁷³ Emmanuelle Bouchez, ‘“Le phrasé qu’on enseigne aux comédiens les sépare des quartiers populaires” Eva Doumbia’, *Télérama.fr* (7th April 2015 [updated 8th April 2015]) < <http://www.telerama.fr/scenes/le-phrasé-qu-on-enseigne-aux-comediens-les-separe-des-quartiers-populaires,125015.php> > [accessed 4th February 2017].

⁴⁷⁴ Bouchez, ‘Eva Doumbia’.

fulfilment. Lucie's case is an argument in favour of sensitising actors themselves to the types of roles they would or should perform.

II.2 Performer as Creator

Des doutes et des errances's Lucie remains under Suzanne's direction, and is indebted to her director for raising her self-awareness of her status in the theatre world. Marie in *Lettres indiennes* is a performer who is not under the control of the writer character Fructueuse. She is an entity separate and independent from Fructueuse, despite the latter writing about her in her letters. Marie is a dancer and a singer. Her presence unsettles Fructueuse, who feels attracted by her performances and her discourse. When Marie is first introduced, she is a wanderer like Fructueuse, having first abandoned her family and community, and then having left her husband Merchat. She is more aware of social problems in La Réunion than Fructueuse, and contributes to drawing the latter into a reflexion on these problems. Marie expresses her concerns and views through various performance styles drawn from her Indian background. In her first appearance in the play, she has a conversation with Paul on their mutual feelings of solitude and marginalization. The dialogue is interspersed with sections reminiscent of a chant, such as in this section at the beginning of Scene 5:

MARIE La nuit est de plus en plus noire.
 PAUL C'est l'hiver qui commence.
 MARIE J'aurais dû partir en été.
 PAUL Tu aurais trouvé l'herbe trop brûlée.
 MARIE J'aurais mangé des mangues. Là, j'ai peur d'avoir faim.
 PAUL Tu aurais trouvé les mangues trop mûres,
 MARIE Les nuits auraient été moins fraîches...
 PAUL Tu as froid ?
 MARIE J'ai peur.
 PAUL Fais le compte de tes peurs et choisis la moindre.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁵ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, pp. 17-18.

The verse-like nature of their speech is conveyed through the repetitive rhythm (anaphora of the past conditional of 'avoir'), the lyrical imagery, and axiomatic phrases ('C'est l'hiver qui commence'). Paul and Marie are 'poets' like Fructueuse, and the synchronicity of their dialogue underlines their shared artistic sentiment and cultural background. The chants in this scene prefigure the more 'theatrical' performance comprising singing and dancing that Paul and Marie put on in the subsequent two scenes (Scenes 5 and 6). The first part of the performance consists of Marie chanting to the rhythm of Paul's tambourine a lament about the lives of workers in La Réunion, and the relationships between men and women. In the middle of the lament Marie dances to Paul's percussions. In the next scene Marie sings 'étapes de la vie d'une femme, du mariage à la séparation.'⁴⁷⁶ The performance is highly formalized : Paul and Marie are dressed in ceremonial Indian clothing, and the percussions, chants, and dances are drawn from Indian ritual. These scenes are the only instances in which Marie performs, however they suffice to draw Fructueuse into the play's action, away from her position of objective observer, and they awaken the 'poet' dormant within. The performance also affects the set. At the end of the chant section of the performance, the derelict street in which the characters stand:

*...semble transformée, envahie de lumière. Les pauvres tôles rouillées du quartier prennent une allure particulière, comme si elles avaient été redessinées par la lumière.*⁴⁷⁷

The power of Marie's movement and voice to change the characters' surroundings shows how these performance styles have the potential to alleviate the drab lives and homes of society's disenfranchised. It also demonstrates how dance and song can be forms of social critique that shed light on certain issues. It is through her

⁴⁷⁶ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 22.

⁴⁷⁷ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 22.

singing and dancing that Marie ultimately reaches Fructueuse, and this emphasizes the power of performance to engage with the spectator and sensitize them to an issue.

Marie's song on the stages of a woman's life in Scene 6 contrasts with the traditional form of her song, which initially presages a traditional vision of woman as daughter, wife, and mother. Indeed, this is the case, but Marie also adds a section on a couple's separation to her narrative, and this subverts expected stereotypes of women, both from La Réunion and from the Indian community. Once more, for Fructueuse, she comes as a model to follow, for Fructueuse also hesitates as to whether to cut all ties with home, and by extension, her partner. Though Marie does return to her husband and her community at the end of *Lettres indiennes*, she has shown in the course of the play, despite her melancholy and errantry, her independence of thought and her capacity to express this thought and freedom in her art. Like Suzanne in *Des doutes et des errances*, Fructueuse finds in the performing female character in *Lettres indiennes* a counterpoint with which to exchange ideas, draw inspiration, and question her own motivations. The 'performers' may fulfil the function habitually attributed to coloured women in theatre, that of objects that perform, however they counter these images through the specific roles they perform in Lucie's case, and for Marie in art forms such as dance and song that confer increased agency upon the performer.

II.3 Performer as Conductor

Of the three plays the one presenting the most unconventional 'performer' is *Trames* in the person of Dabar. As the 'spirit of the house', she performs domestic duties such as cooking, installing, and clearing up the set, and setting the table for Christian and Gilette. She also acts out some of the testimonies recorded by

Gilette, such as ‘La Femme au bébé’. She is a quintessentially ‘acting’ character. However, despite performing Gilette’s bidding, there is a considerable amount of agency in Dabar’s actions. When Dabar performs ‘La Femme au bébé’, for instance, unlike Lucie in *Des doutes et des errances*, she acts of her own volition, and is not doing the bidding of Gilette, who at that moment is not even on stage. Thus, Dabar resembles more Marie’s character in *Lettres indiennes*. However, Dabar does not interact with the other characters who remain unaware of her existence for the duration of the play. Dabar also blurs the boundaries between acting and directing, by seemingly ‘conducting’ the events taking place on stage. At the start of the play, Dabar is the first character to appear on stage, and she is the last character to leave at the end. After setting up the space, which she does at several other instances during the play, she utters these words:

DABAR ET TANDIS QU’ILS PENSAIENT ASSISTER AU SPECTACLE DE VIES QUI SE DÉROULAIENT SOUS LEURS YEUX, VOICI QU’EUX-MÊMES ÉTAIENT DEVENUS LES PERSONNAGES D’UNE PIÈCE QUI SE JOUAIT À LEUR INSU.⁴⁷⁸

These words are reminiscent of Fructueuse’s lines in *Lettres indiennes*, where she describes the Indian community’s lack of awareness of her writing about them in her notebook: ‘Ils ne savent pas que je suis là ... je raconte toutes ces scènes, qu’ils ne vivent pas comme des scènes, eux. Mais tu sais comme les gens sont aveugles sur eux-mêmes...’.⁴⁷⁹ Dabar’s lines also initiate the play’s action, for immediately after she pronounces them, the stage directions indicate that ‘Gilette s’anime...’.⁴⁸⁰ The play also contains biblical connotations, such as the theme of resuscitation, a final supper, and seven scenes in the lives of the character.

⁴⁷⁸ Dambury, *Trames*, p. 7.

⁴⁷⁹ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 1.

⁴⁸⁰ Dambury, *Trames*, p. 7.

Dabar's very name is also biblical, 'signifiant littéralement "parler biblique" en hébreu, instance didascalique tirant les ficelles du drame.'⁴⁸¹

Dabar's omnipresence and control of the set and the movements of the characters instil in her the role of a conductor, manipulating the characters in a play without their knowing. Dabar's role as conductor recalls that of the *conteur*, the traditional Antillean storyteller. Reference is made to the *conte* genre in the first scene by Christian ('Maintenant tu peux raconter l'histoire. Tim-tim!'), and the theme of storytelling permeates the plot, for Gilette's recordings are in fact stories and constitute an oral tradition of their own.⁴⁸² Most of Dabar's dialogue, when she plays herself rather than women from the recorded testimonies, consists of Antillean proverbs, thus reinforcing her association with traditional oral forms. Indeed, the Antillean *conteurs* punctuate their stories with calls to the audience and with proverbs. The *conteurs* do so to reignite the spectator's interest, and express their opinions on the stories they relate. Similarly, Dabar utters proverbs at the end of four different scenes to provide a concluding commentary on each scene and a critique of the interactions that have just occurred between Christian and Gilette. However, her proverbs underline her powerlessness to affect the events taking place on stage. Despite organizing their space and initiating their movements, Dabar has no power over the events that are to unfold or have unfolded, much like the *conteurs*, who despite their artistic licence cannot change the events they describe, for these are fictional or have already come to pass.

⁴⁸¹ Pénélope Dechaufour, 'Trames de Gerty Dambury : Interstices mémoriels au féminin' in *Amour, sexe, genre et trauma dans la Caraïbe francophone*, ed. by Gladys M. Francis (Paris : Éditions L'Harmattan, 2016), p. 155.

⁴⁸² Dambury, *Trames*, p. 14.

See discussion on the use of *conte* in other plays in previous chapters.

Mame-Fatou Niang sees Dambury applying a ‘poétique féminine de l’espace fondée sur la mémoire et la parole’ in *Trames*, and the same could also be said of *Lettres indiennes* and *Des doutes et des errances*.⁴⁸³ Dambury also exploits alternative theatrical codes and explores new forms of representation. *Lettres indiennes* and *Trames* propose alternative forms of expression such as song in *Lettres indiennes*, and the diffusion of recordings of Guadeloupean women’s testimonies in *Trames*. These new modes of expression are proposals for alternative oral traditions, told by women about women. By foregrounding the voices of Marie, Lucie, Dabar, and the women in *Trames*’s recordings, the plays present alternative creators and narrators of Caribbean and women’s histories. Thus, Dambury questions the authority of those who oversee creation and representation by giving agency to performers, and undermining traditional theatrical structures.

III Blurring Lines Between Agents and Objects of Representation

The performer characters in *Des doutes et des errances*, *Lettres indiennes*, and *Trames* are endowed with varying degrees of agency. Through performance, the performer expresses and reclaims her identity and her body, sheds light on social concerns, and blurs the boundaries between actor and director by performing both roles at once. Performer characters also question the status of the writer/director characters. The latter are drawn by and into the plays’ action, which stresses their desire to belong to the system of representation to which the performers belong, to

⁴⁸³ Mame-Fatou Niang, ‘Espace rêvés et espaces réels dans *Trames* de Gerty Dambury’ in *Amour, sexe, genre et trauma dans la Caraïbe francophone*, ed. by Gladys M. François (Paris : Éditions L’Harmattan, 2016), pp. 137-152, p. 151.

participate in the dramatic questioning of gender and social issues. The characters of Fructueuse, Gillette, and Suzanne cannot escape the socio-political crises that surround them. Fructueuse detaches herself to assert her independent and objective role as writer, but her distancing from the social realities around her underlines her awareness of these realities. Gillette, while refusing to comply with her society's gendered expectations, works on the living memory of Guadeloupean women. Suzanne, who is disillusioned by failed attempts to raise awareness amongst her community about politics and identity, nevertheless fights for the rights of her fellow Guadeloupeans by writing plays to sensitize younger generations to their history and culture.

In *Lettres indiennes*, Fructueuse expresses the constant pull of events unfolding around her. On several occasions she claims she feels 'que la réalité me tire et que je suis sur le point de devenir l'un des acteurs de cette pièce.'⁴⁸⁴ This indicates her awareness that she is in a play, or on the margins of one. Fructueuse's penultimate monologue demonstrates her shift in self-perception. She expresses herself as though she belongs in La Réunion, comparing the climate to that of her homeland, Guadeloupe. She is melancholic at the thought of the sugar refinery shutting down, rendering hundreds of Reunionese redundant. This melancholy shows her attachment to the factory and its workers, which has evolved from an objective fascination for the Other into sympathy and empathy. At the end of the play Fructueuse finally expresses her wish to remain in La Réunion, to become part of the play's cast. The final stage directions describe Fructueuse putting her notebook in the funeral pyre, renouncing her role as writer, or at the very least renouncing the writer she was; she declares that she cannot

⁴⁸⁴ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 27.

‘return’ to her partner, not that she cannot write. Fructueuse is fully included in the play’s action in the final image of the play, where a spotlight engulfs her and the character who had been her main object of study, Paul:

*Paul et elle [Fructueuse] échangent un long regard dans une lumière étrange qui les enveloppe et les isole du monde. Puis, on apporte une torche à Paul et le noir se fait progressivement. Il ne reste que le feu.*⁴⁸⁵

This concluding image reinforces the unification of writer Fructueuse and performer Paul. All characters, including Fructueuse, are unified in the darkness that eclipses them on the stage. Fructueuse has found her place, the place she can write about while being a part of the community, and of the play’s action.

In *Des doutes et des errances*, Suzanne’s campaigning for increased opportunities for black theatre practitioners clashes with her resentment of actors and acting itself. She laments the lack of roles for black, specifically Guadeloupean, actors in France.

SUZANNE Tu diriges un théâtre.
T’es pas à la tête d’une scène nationale !
D’un centre dramatique national !
À la tête d’un théâtre national !
Tu s’ras jamais un auteur national...
D’abord t’as pas de nation !

[...]

Je leur propose des pièces qui parlent de nous, de notre histoire, de ce que nous vivons dans nos petites îles de poussière !
Ça n’intéresse personne...⁴⁸⁶

She resents her fellow Guadeloupean thespians for not taking part in her projects, or for being professionally unreliable. She critiques their accepting, or even aspiring, to being led by ‘un metteur en scène. /Blanc’.⁴⁸⁷ Her feelings are ambivalent, for on the one hand she despises her colleagues:

SUZANNE Vais pas pleurer.
Pas me plaindre.
Non. Plutôt envie de les mépriser.
Les détester ? Non. Pas les détester.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, p. 67.

⁴⁸⁶ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p. 7-8.

⁴⁸⁷ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p. 7.

⁴⁸⁸ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p. 6.

SUZANNE La dernière pièce que j'ai jouée,
pas que jouée,
il a fallu tout changer à la dernière minute
texte, comédienne, metteur en scène...
Un metteur en scène !
Un metteur en scène inconséquent !
Disparu. Sans un mot. Sans une explication.⁴⁸⁹

And yet on the other hand she claims to feel 'Trop de tendresse pour eux, après tout':

SUZANNE Et puis, une sorte de patriotisme ridicule [...] me pousse à vouloir renouveler l'expérience, nous donner existence.
[...]
Pas du patriotisme,
non
les vieilles pitiés pour toutes les sortes de prolétariats.
Pitié pour le prolétariat
ou pour ce qu'il en reste.
Je considère que les Noirs sont les prolétaires du théâtre et je m'efforce d'être leur syndicat !⁴⁹⁰

Suzanne eventually decides that to reach the youth and teach them about the events of 2009 and their historical importance she must transmit the message herself, performing her own play:

SUZANNE [...] Je n'ai pas tenu bon durant si longtemps pour lâcher prise aujourd'hui.
[...] Eh bien, il va falloir remettre les mains dans le cambouis.
Sinon on va la voir en face, la vraie violence...⁴⁹¹

Suzanne feels she must express a politically contradictory Guadeloupean voice, 'ce à quoi notre jeunesse [peut] se rattacher'.⁴⁹² And so, *Des doutes et des errances* ends with the trio performing the first scene of *Les Atlantiques amers*, as if instituting a cyclicity between the plays, symbolic of the need for the perpetuation of historical and cultural memory.

Lettres indiennes, *Trames*, *Des doutes et des errances* underline the precariously tenable position of the writer/director characters who cannot entirely

⁴⁸⁹ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p. 28.

⁴⁹⁰ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, pp. 28-29.

⁴⁹¹ Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁹² Dambury, *Des doutes et des errances*, p.76.

detach themselves from the action of the plays in which they appear. Beyond the stage, the figure of the artist, specifically that of the Antillean woman artist, is one who feels drawn by debates on society and gender issues. But her relegation to the function of actor, to occupying a position of racialized and sexual objectification, impedes participation in these debates. The woman artist rejects participation in the 'action' in favour of a withdrawn objectivity to assert her individuality and creative licence, as is the case of the characters Fructueuse, Gilette, and Suzanne in Dambury's three plays. However, the artist cannot help but feel drawn into the action, because they effectively are part of the play, and because the issues explored strike a chord.

The plays promote a more efficacious portrayal of performer characters, who confront their discrimination and raise awareness to social issues through their performances. However, this cannot be achieved without an interaction with a writer or director character. In *Lettres indiennes*, the impact of Marie's performance is conveyed in Fructueuse's monologue and evolution. In *Trames*, without Gilette the stories of Guadeloupean women she has recorded and transcribed would not have been performed by Dabar, and without Gilette Dabar would not have a play to conduct. In *Des doutes et des errances*, Suzanne awakens Lucie's awareness to her culture. With both female writer/director and performer characters Dambury presents an image of an independent and freethinking artist, and proposes that a binary differentiation between writer/director and performer should be transcended when addressing issues of artistic agency. However, the characters in the plays of French Caribbean women artists often compromise to maintain their status, and are constantly under threat of not being recognised or at risk of being challenged. This suggests that much

remains to be done in terms of recognizing, defining, and asserting the role of the female artist.

Conclusion

Lettres indiennes, *Trames*, and *Des doutes et des errances* explore the status of the female French Caribbean artist and intellectual. The portrayals of the writer/director characters convey the image of women who struggle to preserve artistic agency. By so doing, they fight established societal codes and restrictions, and keen to defend their legitimacy and status as creator or intellectual, are often portrayed as being at odds with their male counterparts. On the other side of the artistic spectrum, the performer characters who appear in Dambury's plays blur the lines between creating and performing theatre, troubling the status of the writer/director characters. This blurring of distinctions puts the struggle of the creators into perspective by demonstrating alternative ways for the female artist to assert herself, and even be an 'actor' of social change. The performer characters in the plays also voice their experiences as objects of representation, subject to the male and white gaze. These characters are portrayed as wilful and independent, and through them gendered and exoticizing stereotypes that affect writers, directors, and performers alike are also brought into question.

Dambury voices the concerns and experiences of a wide range of creative women revealing the existence and development of a rich tradition of French Caribbean female poetics. There is an emphasis in each play on the female artist's right and need to express herself, to escape her marginality and *triple-marronnage*. Through the live medium of theatre, these characters may reach

other women in similar circumstances, who may in turn wish to make their creative voices heard.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to show the multiple ways in which Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, Gerty Dambury, and Suzanne Dracius have used theatre to explore contemporary issues relating to Caribbean society, and in particular the questions of history, memory, gender, race, and artistic licence. The plays analysed in this thesis – which represent a small portion of the theatrical creation of female Antillean authors – diverge in style and content. All have been performed, some more than others, but always to a diverse audience. They speak for and to the plurality of Caribbean dramatic languages that appeal both to inhabitants of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and to audiences elsewhere. Establishing dialogues among these works emphasizes the common themes that run through each, despite the authors' divergent aesthetic approaches. The plays bring to the fore the repressed and marginalized voices of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and the voices of the authors themselves who are still subject to the *triple-marronage* of being black Caribbean, female, and artists.

The first chapter introduced the authors in a contextual lineage, comparing them with an earlier generation of Antillean women writers. It also offered an overview of the writers' works and of their often shared interests in the condition of French and Caribbean theatre industries, the relationship between France and its overseas territories, and the status of women in French and Caribbean literature and drama. Chapters Two and Three looked at the ways in which Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, and Suzanne Dracius worked on exposing silenced voices from Martinican and Guadeloupean history and contemporary society, with an emphasis on the experiences of female protagonists in *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, *Rosanie Soleil*, and *Mémoires d'île*, and on the vexed questions of

masculinity and homosexuality in the Caribbean in the play *Comme deux frères*. The emphasis on forging a polyphonous whole from the multiple female voices within the collective in opposition, or in response to, established national discourse and official local history in Chapter Two was nuanced in Chapter Three with a discussion of the dramatization of individual narratives affected by social and (post)colonial issues. The final chapter examined exclusively the works of Gerty Dambury, *Lettres indiennes*, *Trames*, and *Des doutes et des errances*, written at different moments of Dambury's career. These plays portray three generations of female Caribbean artists, and explore their destinies and struggles and the potential means of expressing their experiences. The chapter mirrors the first chapter in that it demonstrates how female Caribbean artists move from representing others to representing themselves, paving the way for future generations of playwrights and theatre-makers.

This thesis, the final chapter especially, could not but take into account the cultural debates that took place over the past three years around diversity in the arts, as instanced by the worldwide debate 'Oscars so White', a movement of protest against the overwhelming number of white nominees in the ceremony's four main award categories, and the parallel Francophone protest, 'Les Molières de la Honte' organized in 2016 by the collective 'Décoloniser les arts'.⁴⁹³ This collective was created in October 2015 to 'lutter contre les discriminations dans le spectacle vivant et les arts à l'encontre des populations minorées et

⁴⁹³ See Rebecca Keegan and Steven Zeitchik, 'Oscars 2016: Here's why the nominees are so white – again', *L.A. Times* (14th January 2016) <<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-all-white-oscar-acting-nominees-20160114-story.html>> [accessed 23rd July 2017].

postcoloniales' and 'décoloniser les imaginaires'.⁴⁹⁴ Debates on cultural diversity in the field of theatre in France have been taking place for several years. One of the outcomes of these debates was the launch of the journal *D'ailleurs et d'ici*, celebrating and documenting the contribution of 'la diversité' to contemporary French culture.⁴⁹⁵ This fed into a reflection on the lack of representation of Caribbean theatre in the metropole engendered and perpetuated by the socio-political and cultural marginalization of these islands that are in every way crucial to the debate on French diversity. In their own way, the authors studied here create roles to 'decolonize' racist and sexist imaginaries by writing about non-white, female, working-class, or unemployed characters.

The marginalization of Caribbean theatre is also brought about by the difficulty of its categorization – French, Caribbean, American, Other? – unrecognizable to the French cultural and academic establishments, and epistemologically uncategorizable due to its *métissage* and (post)colonial location. Recognizing French Caribbean theatre is also problematic in that it raises questions of sovereignty, marginalization, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and racism stemming from the tumultuous history of France's relations with its overseas territories. Recent events show the critical state of these relations. One such event was the strike against the high cost of living that shook and spread throughout France's overseas territories in 2009, portrayed in Dambury's plays *Les Atlantiques amers* and *Des doutes et des errances*. French Guyana, possibly

⁴⁹⁴ Ryad Maouche, 'La France monochrome' in *L'Affirmation d'une France plurielle*, ed. by Marc Cheb Sun (= *D'ailleurs et d'ici*, 1 (October 2014)), 44-50, p. 50.

See also David Bobée and Yann Gael (on behalf of Décoloniser les arts), 'Les Molières de la honte', *Telerama* (20th May 2016) <<http://www.telerama.fr/scenes/les-molieres-de-la-honte,142771.php>> [accessed 22/07/2017].

⁴⁹⁵ *L'Affirmation d'une France plurielle*, ed. by Marc Cheb Sun (= *D'ailleurs et d'ici*, 1 (October 2014)).

Of particular interest was the third issue: (*R*)*évolution culturelle !*, ed. by Marc Cheb Sun (= *D'ailleurs et d'ici*, 3 (October 2016)).

the most disenfranchised of France's American *départements*, was also, in March-April 2017, the site of a movement of social protest which spread to some areas of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Also indicative of deep-set conflicts and disagreements between France and its overseas possessions was the apathy of voters in French overseas territories during the 2017 presidential and legislative elections, together with controversies surrounding the newly-elected French president Emmanuel Macron's implicit disdain for these overseas regions.⁴⁹⁶ More in-depth analysis of this theme is needed, but the scope of the thesis unfortunately did not allow for it to be explored in depth. The author has already written elsewhere on the relationship between politics and art in works by Gerty Dambury.⁴⁹⁷ However, future angles of approach would certainly need to address further the issue of class. Recent events in French Guyana have once again brought attention to the socio-economic precarity of France's overseas departments. Is the central problem of France's post-colonial population simply one of exclusion from what Étienne Balibar has called France's 'ethnicité fictive', the construction and foregrounding of a dominant national ethnicity that all modern nation-states seem to need?⁴⁹⁸ Or is the specificity of the problem to be

⁴⁹⁶ Macron was criticized for using the term 'island' to describe French Guyana during the events taking place there in March 2017. See 'Guyane: Macron moqué pour avoir parlé des blocages sur "l'île"', *BFMTV* (27th March 2017) <<http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/l-ile-de-guyane-la-bourde-d-emmanuel-macron-1130078.html>> [accessed 23rd July 2017]

The newly-elected president also made a discriminatory jibe that compared Comorian immigrants travelling on fishing boats to the French département of Mayotte to a type of local fish. See "'Kwassa-kwassa': les Comoriens exigent des excuses de Macron, qui prône 'l'apaisement'", *Le Monde.fr* (5th June 2017) <http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/06/05/apres-les-propos-choquants-de-macron-les-comoriens-exigent-des-excuses_5139073_3212.html> [accessed 23rd July 2017].

⁴⁹⁷ Vanessa Lee, 'Art and Politics in Contemporary French Caribbean Theatre: The (Re)presentation of Guadeloupe's 2009 General Strike in Gerty Dambury's *Les Atlantiques amers* and *Des doutes et des errances*', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 17.2 (November 2017).

Vanessa Lee 'Errant isles: Existential and Linguistic Wanderings in *Confusions d'instant* (2003) by Gerty Dambury', *Memory and Globalization in Artistic and Creative Practices*, Institute for Transtextual and Transcultural Studies, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3, 16-17th June 2017.

⁴⁹⁸ Étienne Balibar, *La Crainte des masses : politique et philosophie avant et après Marx* (Paris : Éditions Galilée, 1997) pp. 349-350.

found in the coincidence of race and colour, since while those of colour in the Antilles are not always the poor, the poor are always of colour? Economic precarity and its social destructiveness is woven into the fabric of several of Dambury's plays, but to what extent may this problem be better explained by a deepened understanding of the triple marronage suffered by Antillean women of colour, that of gender, race, and class?

The audiences of these plays are for the most part already sensitive to the message of their authors, and the plays are often produced in theatres and institutions that have a communal or political link to Caribbean and Francophone contexts. Without those institutions and audiences, these plays would never have been staged. Indeed, amidst a controversy around the 2017 Avignon Festival's focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, which was criticized for reducing African performance production to dance and music and for not including a single spoken theatrical piece, theatre practitioners such as Hakim Ba pointed out that the 'scènes françaises ne nous donnent pas la visibilité que nous offrent les théâtres francophones.'⁴⁹⁹ The same could be said of theatrical productions from the Caribbean and overseas French territories more broadly. What is more, had specialist theatres not existed, and specifically the 'Théâtre d'Outre-Mer en Avignon' at La Chapelle du Verbe Incarné in Avignon, France, then this doctoral project would have never seen the light of day.

Efforts to produce and publicize these works, however constrained and restricted by financial or material hardships, are to be encouraged. Even without

⁴⁹⁹ Justine Montauban, 'Le théâtre africain, persona non grata des scènes françaises ?', *Le Point* (7th July 2017) <http://afrique.lepoint.fr/culture/le-theatre-africain-persona-non-grata-des-scenes-francaises-07-07-2017-2141399_2256.php#xtor=CS2-241> [accessed 12th July 2017].

Details on the Avignon Festival's 'Focus Afrique' programme can be found here <http://www.festival-avignon.com/lib_php/download.php?fileID=2316&type=File&round=89262733>

the possibility of full-scale production, there are multiple means of having these plays heard, seen, and read. Several plays by these authors have been recited in performed readings, which have shown a resurgence over the past few years. This is an ideal compromise when faced with the costs of putting on full scale productions, for which funds are unfortunately lacking. Readings also provide a platform for the playwright to discuss the play, and establish a dialogue, with their audience. Of particular note is the Festival Kanoas, launched in 2015 by the Compagnie de l'Autre Souffle, the same company that is working on an archive of Caribbean theatre discussed in the first Chapter of the thesis. The festival included a number of play readings alongside full-scale musical, dance, and theatrical productions.⁵⁰⁰ Works by Maryse Condé, Ina Césaire, and Gerty Dambury were performed during both the 2015 and 2016 editions. There also exist various editorial and publishing processes via which these plays reach as varied and wide an audience as possible. For a recent piece on editorial practices in French Caribbean theatre, the author made an inventory of the various methods of distribution of the theatrical texts by French Caribbean women playwrights. These include publication by specialist and non-specialist publishing houses, the inclusion of manuscripts in collective anthologies, and the publishing of translations and bilingual editions of dramatic works.⁵⁰¹ Publication is key for two reasons: the establishing and recording of a theatre tradition, and the development

⁵⁰⁰ *Festival Kanoas : 1^{ère} édition*, Gare au Théâtre, Vitry-sur-Seine, 24-26th September 2015 ; *Festival Kanoas : 2^{ème} édition*, Gare au Théâtre, Vitry-sur-Seine, 11-12th November 2016, and Halle Pajol, Paris, 13th November 2016.

⁵⁰¹ For anthologies, see: *Plays by Francophone Women Writers*, ed. by Christiane P. Makward and Judith G. Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); *Plays by Women*, ed. by Françoise Kourilsky (New York: Ubu Repertory Theatre, 1988); and Christiane Makward's anthology of Ina Césaire's published and unpublished, performed and unperformed plays: *Rosanie Soleil et autres textes dramatiques* (Paris: Karthala, 2011).

Condé *An Tan Révolisyon* and Dambury's *Trames* were published in multilingual editions. See Maryse Condé *An Tan Révolisyon: édition français-créole-anglais-espagnol* (Paris: Éditions de l'Amandier, 2015); Gerty Dambury *Trames/Shades/Sombras* (Paris : Éditions du Manguier, 2012).

of French Caribbean theatre research. To record and promote the multiple possibilities for dissemination, as this author has attempted to do, also assists the reflection on the dissemination of theatrical writing more generally.⁵⁰²

When performed locally, these plays emphasize the importance of what is achievable on a community level, when world or global exposure seem beyond the reach of small, ignored, yet vibrant and creative communities. This is what the authors studied here have always done. They have worked with small audiences and limited resources, confident that there is always an interested public of peers and like-minded persons following and supporting their projects. The characters Rosanie, Lumina, Aure, Hermance, Jeff, Grégoire, Fructueuse, Marie, Paul, Suzanne, Lucie, Gilette, Christian, Dabar demand that communities embrace past heroes, and future rising stars, as well as those left by the wayside. The writers' use of traditional performance practices and their borrowing from the philosophy of these practices demonstrates their attachment to communal forms of expression, as well as underlining the potential for these forms to be segued and weaved into new artistic expressions combining Caribbean and European traditions so as to delve into and air issues of historical and contemporary significance.

The writers whose plays have been analysed in this thesis continue to be active in both the theatre and in other genres. Gerty Dambury was awarded the Prix Carbet 2015, a prestigious Caribbean literary prize, for her essay *Le Rêve de William Alexander Brown* (2015), on the first African American theatre troupe.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² Vanessa Lee, 'From Stage to Page: In Search of the Playtexts of French Caribbean Women Writers', 'Éditorialité': *Practices of Editing and Publishing*, Study Day, Maison Française d'Oxford, 25th November 2016.

⁵⁰³ Gerty Dambury, *Le Rêve de William Alexander Brown*, suivi de Carlyle Brown *La Compagnie africaine présente Richard III*, trans. by Gerty Dambury (Paris : Éditions du Manguier, 2014).

She also recently published her second novel *La Sérénade à Poinsettia* (2016).⁵⁰⁴ Ina Césaire's work *Rosanie Soleil* is to be republished in a quadrilingual edition of different languages of the Caribbean (Créole, French, Spanish, and English).⁵⁰⁵ Suzanne Dracius is working on her next novel, and pursues the promotion of her poetic and fictional works (and her theory of *féminitude*) at numerous literary and cultural events in France, Belgium, Switzerland, and the Americas. An Italian version of her short-story anthology *Rue Monte au Ciel* was published this year; an additional step in the dissemination of French Caribbean women's literature worldwide.⁵⁰⁶ Maryse Condé has just published her latest novel, *Le Fabuleux et triste destin d'Ivan et Ivana* which through the lives of a young Guadeloupean man and woman, and the gradual radicalisation of the former, examines contemporary issues relating to immigration, the colonial past, and the neo-colonial present, and importantly the concept of French national identity.⁵⁰⁷

This thesis could not discuss all female artists of the generation of the authors studied here, and still others could have been added and compared to those here discussed. There also exist other avenues via which to address the work of the authors discussed in this thesis. For instance, in terms of their theatrical techniques, more extensive analysis could profitably be undertaken; the author has an article forthcoming on the use of theatrical space, which develops further the

⁵⁰⁴ Gerty Dambury, *La Sérénade à Poinsettia* (Paris : Éditions du Manguier, 2016).

⁵⁰⁵ Ina Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil*, forthcoming from Les Éditions de l'Amandier.

⁵⁰⁶ Suzanne Dracius, *Rue Monte au Ciel*, trans. by Lea Oliveri (Milan : Edizioni Paginauno, 2017).

⁵⁰⁷ Maryse Condé, *Le Fabuleux et triste destin d'Ivan et Ivana* (Paris : JC Lattès, 2017).

‘[J]’essaie d’arriver à présenter des Antillais dans un monde différent et livrés à des pulsions différentes. Peut-être que vous n’avez pas fait attention, mais en janvier de l’an dernier a été tuée une Martiniquaise, Clarissa Jean-Philippe qui était venue à Paris apprendre, suivre des cours pour devenir policière. Elle a été tuée par un des terroristes djihadistes, Amedy Coulibaly. Donc ça veut dire qu’un Antillais maintenant peut se trouver confronté à des problèmes qui ne se posaient même pas il y a cinquante ans du temps de ma grand-mère ou de ma mère. Donc c’est finalement parler au présent, parler du changement. C’est dur. Mais j’essaie, je vais y arriver.’

Maryse Condé, interview with the author, Gordes, France (20th February 2016).

reflections on spatial politics and poetics discussed in the thesis.⁵⁰⁸ The most recent work by Emily Sahakian shows one of the many angles with which this subject matter may be approached.⁵⁰⁹ There is also a new generation of female Caribbean artists at work today, producing texts that it would be intellectually exciting to compare with the first generation of Caribbean female writers, and the subsequent wave of Césaire, Condé, Dambury, and Dracius. Two writers from different generations, Michèle Césaire (1951—) and Gaël Octavia (1977—), who did not feature in this analysis but whom the author might incorporate into a future project would be of interest, for they have both written plays that use the image of sea travel to explore themes of identity, errantry, and exile.⁵¹⁰ Works by Maryse Condé and up-and-coming author and filmmaker Fabienne Kanor (1970—) have been adapted for the stage in the production *La Traversée*, by Guinean-born Eva Doumbia, herself a key figure in a generation of French Afro-Caribbean women writers and artists.⁵¹¹ Creative effervescence in the field of French Caribbean women's theatre is to be welcomed, and it is hoped this thesis may have contributed in some small way to developing the field of French Caribbean women's theatre and to inspiring further research into it.

⁵⁰⁸ Vanessa Lee, 'Errant Isles: Dramatic Spaces of French Caribbean Women's Theatre' (Forthcoming in 2017).

⁵⁰⁹ Emily Sahakian, *Staging Creolization: Women's Theater and Performance from the French Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

⁵¹⁰ Michèle Césaire, *La Nef* (Paris : Éditions théâtrales, 1992) ; Gaël Octavia, *Le Voyage* (New York : Rivarti Collection, 2009).

⁵¹¹ Eva Doumbia, *La Traversée, d'après Maryse Condé, Jamaica Kincaid et Fabienne Kanor*, Centre dramatique national de Normandie-Rouen, Rouen, 17th-18th March 2016, and Théâtre de la Criée, Marseille, 29th March- 2nd April 2016.

Appendices

Appendix One: Author biographies and playographies

Ina Césaire, born 1942, Fort-de-France, Martinique

Eldest daughter of the writer, thinker, and politician Aimé Césaire, Ina Césaire is an ethnographer by profession and was a member of the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). Her anthropological training and research have inspired many of her writings. She is particularly interested in oral literatures and the transmission of cultural forms through orality. Her plays cover a multitude of themes, spaces, and timeframes related to Martinican local history; there is an emphasis on women's issues.

Plays: *La Saison close* (based on a work by Sevgi Soysal, 1970); *Pluie et Vent* (based on novel *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle* by Simone Schwarz-Bart, 1982); *Mémoires d'île, Maman N. et Maman F.* (1985); *L'Enfant des Passages ou la Geste de Ti-Jean* (1987); *La Maison Close* (1991); *Rosanie Soleil* (1992); *Les Nuits et les Diables* (based on novela *Folie* by Marie Chauvet, 1996); *Chorus pour un comédien seul* (2002); *Le Général et le Prisonnier* (2003); *La Diablesse du Morne-Rouge* (2005); *Le Garçon sauvage* (2006); *Maître et Valet* (based on *Mr Puntilla and his Man Matti* by Bertolt Brecht, 2006); *Le Nabab de Saint-Pierre* (based on play *Angelo, Tyran de Padoue* by Victor Hugo, 2006); *Collier chou* (based on short story *La Parure* by Guy de Maupassant, 2007); *Molokòy* (2007); *Man Filibo* (2007); *Plaidoyer pour Bug Jargal* (based on novella *Bug Jargal* by Victor Hugo, 2007); *La Poupée ashanti* (2008); *La Bataille du rhum* (2011); *Les Bourgeois de couleur* (2011); *Le Chemin des campêches* (2011); *Les Fuyardes* (2011); *Des jours ordinaires* (2011); *Jour de Pâques* (2011).

Maryse Condé, born 1937, Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe

Maryse Condé is a Guadeloupean writer known for her writings on Africa and the French Antilles. She is the best known of this generation of Antilean women writers, and has won many literary prizes in the United States and France. She was a professor at Columbia University in New York, lived alternately in Paris and New York. She now spends her time in her home in Gordes, in the Luberon. She has written extensively for the theatre, her first play *Le Morne de Massabielle* being produced in 1971. Her works explore questions of identity and subvert traditional nationalist and postcolonial theories of literature.

Plays: *Le Morne de Massabielle* (1971); *Dieu nous l'a donné* (1972); *Mort d'Oluwemi d'Ajumako* (1973); *Les Sept voyages de Ti Noël* (1987); *Pension les alizés* (1988); *An Tan Révolisyon* (1989); *The Hills of Massabielle* (English translation of *Morne de Massabielle* by Richard Philcox, 1991); *Comédie d'amour* (1993); *The Tropical Breeze Hotel* (English translation of *Pension les alizés* by Barbara Brewster Lewis and Catherine Temerson, 1994); *In the Time of the Revolution* (English translation of *An Tan Révolisyon*, 1997); *Comme deux frères* (2007); *La Faute à la vie* (2009); *La Vie sans fards* (2012).

Gerty Dambury, born 1957, Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe

Gerty Dambury, born in 1957 in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, is a poet, dramatist, novelist, theatre critic, actress, director, and English teacher who has worked both in Guadeloupe and metropolitan France. In the 1990s she started writing, directing, and acting in her own plays. She has held writing residencies at the Francophonies au Limousin (1992), at the Chartreuse de Villeneuve-lès-Avignon

(2000), and at Orford, Quebec (2001). She is founder and director of the Fabrique Insomniaque theatre company, based in Paris. She was awarded a prize by the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques in 2008 for her play *Trames*, and was given the Prix Carbet in 2016 for her essay *Le Rêve de William Alexander Brown*. She has also worked on outreach programmes in Guadeloupe from the 1990s to the present. Over a period of three decades Dambury's texts have reflected on and represented a concern with Afro-Caribbean socio-political issues, in particular in her native Guadeloupe, but also in the wider former colonized black world.

Plays: *Carfax* (1986); *Fyel* (1986); *Bâton Maréchal ou An Tan Sorin* (1987); *Rabordaille* (1989); *Lettres indiennes* (1993); *Survols* (1995); *Madjaka ou la fin du bal* (1996); *Camille et Justine* (1997); *Carêmes* (1998); *Reflux* (1998); *Cours lointaines* (1999); *Enfouissements* (2000); *Confusions d'instant* (2003); *Trames* (2008); *Les Atlantiques amers* (2009); *Des doutes et des errances* (2014).

Suzanne Dracius, born 1951, Fort-de-France, Martinique

Suzanne Dracius is an established Martinican writer who has written novels and poetry as well as articles on French Caribbean writing and art. She is the only Martinican after Aimé Césaire to be made an honorary member of the AATF (American Association of Teachers of French). She was awarded the Prix Fetkann for her poetry anthology *Exquise déréluction métisse*, and in 2010 she received the Prix de la Société des Poètes Français for the sum of her poetic works, and was awarded the Médaille d'Honneur Schoelcher for her only play *Lumina Sophie, dite Surprise*. Her works focus on the female experience in the Caribbean, issues of Caribbean identity, and the politics of diaspora.

Appendix Two: Martinican Dance Forms

These definitions are taken from Raphaël Confiant's *Dictionnaire créole martiniquais-français* (Matoury: Ibis Rouge Éditions, 2007). Confiant occasionally refers to Jack Corzani's *Dictionnaire encyclopédique Désormeaux: dictionnaire encyclopédique des Antilles et de la Guyane* (Fort-de-France: Éditions Désormeaux, 1992-1993) (abbreviated to 'Dic. Encyc. Dés.').

- **Belya/Bélia**: 'danse traditionnelle martiniquaise (variété de *gran bèlè* qui fonctionne sur trois temps)', p. 181. See **Bèlè**.

- **Bèlè**: 'Bel-air (danse traditionnelle d'origine européenne et africaine)
"Le bel-air fut en premier lieu un chant dont la dénomination provient de l'association de deux mots : le terme 'air' employé au XVIII^e siècle pour désigner une chanson et le terme 'bel' servant de qualificatif... les Noirs des champs les adaptèrent à leur rythme africain... À ce jour, les principales danses répertoriées sont : le Bèlè, le Grand Bèlè, le Bèlè pické, le **Bélia**, le Kanigué, la **Calenda**."
(Dic. Encyc. Dés.)', p. 180.

- **Calenda/Kalenda**: 'danse d'origine africaine très lascive', p. 620. See **Bélé**.
- **Danmyé/Danmié** : 'damier (danse traditionnelle d'origine africaine)', p. 302.
Danmiètè : 'danseur de *danmié*'
- **Laghia/Ladja** : 'danse-combat d'origine africaine (*laghia* en F.R.A.)', p. 757.

Glissant offers a more detailed description:

‘Laghia (Damier). Danse en forme de combat. Les deux danseurs sont dans une “ronde” de spectateurs rangés à partir du tambour. On trouve la même danse au Brésil. Le laghia est sans doute une forme dérivée de l’initiation. Il y a toujours un Major (un champion) défié par un postulant. Exercice en régression. Le laghia était lié à la production de canne à sucre.’

Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1981), p. 498.

- *Vidé* : ‘défilé carnavalesque’, p. 1364.

Appendix Three: Timeline

3000 BCE-	
7 th cent. BCE	Guadeloupe populated successively by Amerindian tribes, then Arawaks from Orenoko bassin in Venezuela.
7 th cent BCE	Caribs from same South American region as Arawaks slaughter Guadeloupean Arawak population and give Guadeloupe its Caribbean name 'Karukéra [the island of beautiful waters]'
1 st cent BCE	Arawaks in Martinique.
900 CE	Caribs (or Kalina) in Martinique naming it Iouanacaëra-Matinino.
1493	'Discovery' of Guadeloupe by Columbus, naming it after Santa Maria de Guadalupe de Extremadura.
1502	'Discovery' of Martinique by Columbus
1635	Occupation of Martinique by the first French colonizers, led by Pierre Belain d'Esnambuc, September. Occupation of Guadeloupe by French, 28 th June. Beginning of the extermination of the Caribs. Beginning of the African slave trade.
1674	Guadeloupe becomes a colony of the French kingdom. Development of plantation system in Guadeloupe.
1685	Proclamation of the <i>Code Noir</i> .
1759-1763	Seven Years' War. Guadeloupe occupied by British.
1763	Treaty of Paris, 10 th February. Louis XV surrenders Canada to the English and retains Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint Domingue.
1789-1790	Occupation of Martinique by the British.
1794	Occupation of Guadeloupe by the British. Victor Hugues wins back Guadeloupe, October. Proclamation of Abolition of Slavery by Victor Hugues, 11 th December.

- 1802 Reinstatement of slavery by général Richepance on Bonaparte's orders.
Resistance against Richepance by Delgrès, Ignace, and Solitude.
- 1848 Abolition of slavery, as proposed by Victor Schoelcher, decreed 27th April, instituted in May.
- mid-19th cent. Arrival of indentured labourers from India (and other South Asian countries) in Guadeloupe.
- 1853 Arrival of first Indian indentured labourers in Martinique on the ship 'Aurélié', 6th May.
- 1870 Béké Codé Case, 21st January.
The Lubin Case, 19th February.
Insurrection in southern Martinique, Rivière-Pilote, September.
- 1902 Eruption of Montagne Pelée in Martinique. Destruction of Saint Pierre, 8th May.
- 1946 Loi Césaire, 19th March, grants 'Département d'outre-mer' status to 'old colonies' Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, and La Réunion.
Assemblée constituante passes law that forbids all forms of forced labour in Africa
Loi Lamine Guèye, 7th May, grants citizenship to 'outre-mer' inhabitants.
- 1958 Aimé Césaire founds Parti Progressiste Martiniquais.
- 1975 Doctrine of 'economic' assimilation of Antilles.
- 1978 Founding of Mouvement Indépendantiste Martiniquais.
Founding of l'Union Populaire pour la Libération de la Guadeloupe.
- 1983 Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique, and La Réunion become mono-departemental regions.
- 2001 Loi Taubira, 21st May, recognizes the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity.
- 2004 Founding of the Comité pour la Mémoire de l'Esclavage (initially under presidency of Maryse Condé).

2006 10th May becomes official 'Journée des mémoires et de réflexion sur la traite, l'esclavage et leurs abolitions'.

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