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**IN THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE: ANTILLEAN
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, POSTCOLONIALITY, AND THE
UNEASY REIMAGINING OF THE SELF**

presented by

JILL M. GAETA

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Ph.D. degree in French, Classics, and Italian



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**IN THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE: ANTILLEAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE,
POSTCOLONIALITY, AND THE UNEASY REIMAGINING OF THE SELF**

By

Jill M. Gaeta

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of French, Classics, and Italian

2008

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ABSTRACT

IN THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE: ANTILLEAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, POSTCOLONIALITY, AND THE UNEASY REIMAGINING OF THE SELF

By

Jill M. Gaeta

How might children's literature, an agent of socialization, contribute to the enduring presence of colonial discourses in French Antillean societies, or how might it serve as a challenge to that presence? In this "postcolonial" landscape still pressured by French cultural hegemony, examining the values and attitudes normalized through media, in particular children's books, is essential. Are Antillean children still inculturated with colonial ideology, or are the dominant discourses being directed away from French authority through these youths' socialization? The relatively recent emergence, within the past two decades, of a specifically Antillean body of children's literature provides insight into these questions; insight I attempt to develop in this work.

Its categorization as children's literature, yet its inherent inclusion in the realm of postcolonial studies, makes this body of literature a rich subject of study for understanding the development of French Antillean discourse and subjectivity. Yet scholars within both fields have tended to overlook the role children's literature plays in the constitution of francophone postcolonial identities. Because much of postcolonial studies focus on the establishment of identity (re-defining oneself and negotiating between a pre/colonial past and a postcolonial present and future), it seems obvious that how these societies' children are socialized merits considerably more attention. My research, which appeals to literary, sociological, and anthropological disciplines, carves a new niche in postcolonial literary scholarship.

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My primary focus is to explore the recent emergence of Antillean children's literature while attempting to uncover 1) whether this literature represents an increasing awareness of French hegemony, 2) how and if this literature challenges French authority, and 3) how this literature may affect Antillean children's perspectives, and thereby the future of Antillean societies. Specific questions guiding my analysis revolve around how representations of "race," class, otherness, and memory/culture support, undermine, or re-evaluate dominant discourses. Are ideas surrounding "race" as supported by colonial discourse present in the literature, and if so, do they undermine said discourse, or do they reflect the author's integration? How might representations of class, as defined by socio-economic and/or national status, affect self-perception and future social policy? Do representations of Others encourage children to embrace or reject established stereotypes, and do they reject the idea of otherness as "bad"? How have authors begun to reshape Antillean memory, and how have they incorporated that memory in defining a cultural identity in the present? Comparing and contrasting the various works, I attempt to discover how, and whether, this literature seeks to alter individual and collective perceptions of the discourses informing Antillean societies.

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PREFACE

The eye of a hurricane is an illusion of calm, of being out of the storm. Yet in reality, to be in the eye of a hurricane is to be at the very center of the storm, with destructive chaos swirling all around. If you fall victim to the illusion, you will inevitably fall victim to the storm. I see this as a metaphor for the current situation facing the French Antilles. Centuries of slavery, colonization, and departmentalization, as well as an assimilationist policy and continuing hegemonic pressures, have created an illusion of French superiority – the eye of the hurricane. Those who fall victim to that illusion often deny their heritage, even their “race,” and strive to become something colonial ideology will never allow them to become. They are caught in a maelstrom where their identity is in constant contradiction – the hurricane itself. This metaphor could also be applied to those who fight against French dominance. In this case, the illusion is the idea that one could ever wholly separate him or herself from French influence, denying France’s role in defining Antillean social structures, subjectivities, and identities. Yet because France is innately involved in the development of Antillean societies – beginning with the island’s initial colonization, and the institution of the slave trade to the Americas – it is questionable that one could ever entirely disassociate from France. Attempting to do so leads to a similar maelstrom as experienced by those who embrace assimilation, where identity resides in a state of contradiction and negotiation. The hurricane is, essentially, a metaphor for this relative chaos that is Antillean identity, or identities.

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INTRODUCTION

How do we account for the enduring presence of colonial discourses in Antillean societies? How do we explain the apparent impossibility of a single Antillean identity, and the conflicting notions about what being Antillean or Creole means or should mean? In this “postcolonial” landscape still pressured by French cultural hegemony, one must examine the values and attitudes normalized through media, particularly children’s literature. Are Antillean children being inculturated with colonialist ideology? Or is there an attempt to direct dominant discourses within these societies away from French authority through the socialization of Antillean youths? The recent emergence of a specifically Antillean body of children’s literature may help us answer these questions. Its belonging to the categories of both postcolonial and children’s literature makes it a very rich subject of study in understanding the development of discourse and subjectivity in the French Antilles. In the past, however, postcolonial studies have overlooked the fundamental role of children’s literature in the constitution of postcolonial identities, which is surprising given its importance in inculcating values and beliefs. Because many scholars of postcolonial studies focus on how postcolonial societies attempt to establish an identity (re-defining oneself and negotiating between a pre/colonial past and a postcolonial present and future), it seems obvious that the acculturation of these societies’ children merits considerably more attention. This project will serve as a step in closing that scholarly gap.

The French Antilles comprise one of the most complex francophone postcolonial regions in terms of culture and identity, underscoring the significance of a body of children’s literature created by and for Antilleans. I explore how this literature may

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affect Antillean children's perceptions of self, others, and the world in which they live, particularly in relation to several key elements influencing Antillean identities – “race,” class and socio-economic division, otherness, and the relationship between memory and culture.

Children's exposure to literary discourse during their formative years has undeniable socializing effects. Because their senses of self and society are still in the process of developing, they are more vulnerable to ideological messages found in literature and other media. According to Adams, children are born more or less “neutral” and are greatly influenced by what they read, unconsciously absorbing lessons and attitudes (107). Thus from picture books to young adult novels, children's literature possesses tremendous power in perpetuating or rejecting dominant social structures, and plays a key role in a child's ideological development and self-image. Such literature facilitates the inculcation of values and beliefs representative of the society into which a child is to be initiated. Much of contemporary children's literature can therefore be termed didactic, premised on Rousseau's philosophy of education: a process of growth, adaptation and a modification of the child's nature for social ends (Adams). Through its normalization of a society's “common” values and perceptions, children's literature “trains” the child to become an acceptable member of that society. It is through their reading and understanding of the literature that children are conditioned into ways of seeing themselves and the world around them.

While initial forms of children's literature in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries included primarily cautionary tales, illustrating repercussions for “bad behavior,” contemporary literature also plays a fundamental role in shaping

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children's perspectives of self and Other¹. Research has shown how representations of certain social, cultural, and ethnic groups influence a child's way of seeing. For example, in her book *Print and Prejudice*, Zimet outlines two studies conducted to analyze the psychological effects of ethnic and racial discourse on children. In the first study (1947), Kenneth and Mamie Clark gave a black doll and white doll to a group of black and white American children who were then asked to choose the doll resembling them. All of the white children and 33% of the black children chose the white doll. According to Zimet, this result shows a "reluctance in Black children to accept their own racial identity" (109). In 1975 another study was conducted by Milner, examining differences in "self-attitude" between West Indian and Asian immigrants in Britain. As in the previous study, a group of 300 children were given dolls and asked to choose which one resembled them. While all white children chose the white doll, so did 24% of Asians and 48% of West Indians. This study went a step further by asking these same children if given the choice, which doll would they choose to be? Again, all white children chose the white doll while an astonishing 65% of Asians and 82% of West Indians did as well. Zimet points out: "The factors behind this rejection of racial self-identity in British immigrants are much too complex to assign to any one cause, but Milner and others regard literature, particularly children's literature, as an important influence" (109). While there exist numerous contributing factors to a child's sense of self, it is believed that literature plays a central role in developing self-perception.

¹ One must acknowledge that the genre of children's literature as it is studied today reflects European forms of children's literature. While these forms are employed by various postcolonial societies, this is in direct correlation with colonization and the imposition of such literary structures on the colonized populations. Such use may indicate on the one hand internalization of discourse proclaiming the superiority of European literature, or on the other hand, an appropriation of this literature as a means of empowerment.

Zimet continues by commenting on the power of literature: “Even if literature is only reflecting attitudes prevalent in our society, the authority of print can either legitimize or challenge them” (109). One finds in literature the power to influence dominant attitudes, whether by perpetuation or challenge. This assertion is particularly relevant to the study of “postcolonial” Antillean children’s literature, where colonial discourses continue to impede children’s development of self-worth and knowledge. In postcolonial societies inculcating values, beliefs and ways of seeing is more problematic than in dominant, western countries. This is because children’s literature is typically produced by the dominant culture, perpetuating that culture’s ideology. Because this literature is considered a socializing force, aiding in the formation of an individual and collective identity, the impact of colonialism on that literature and on what children are exposed to cannot be ignored. Inevitably children in postcolonial societies like the French Antilles regularly encounter books and other child-targeted media produced for children of the dominant, i.e. French, culture. If left unchecked, these media have the power to normalize dominant values for the colonized child, potentially normalizing a specific subject position. This normalization could create in the child a sense of inferiority and a desire to “become” one of the colonizers (Fanon, *Damnés* 16)².

² Reading many of the autobiographical accounts written by Antillean authors (*Chemin d’école* by Chamoiseau, *La rue cases nègres* by Zobel, *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* by Condé, among others), one is struck by the pivotal role education plays in the Antillean subject’s sense of self. After the abolition of slavery in 1848, primary school became obligatory for all children, including Blacks. Condé tells us that the inclusion of Blacks in the education system was intended to “aid” them in their emancipation (*Bossale* 47). In other words, former slaves were conditioned into a vision of the world reflecting French colonial ideology. Secondary school was not available to Blacks until much later, and even then, only a few were able to attend, creating an intellectual elite and thus division among black Antilleans. Today the education system in the Antilles continues to be largely dictated by a French curriculum, contributing to the perpetuation of colonial discourse and posing a formidable obstacle to the inculcation of a discourse oppositional to the former.

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Examining some accepted theories on how children's literature serves as a socializing force is important. While I will be using a postcolonial framework in this study, the literature's specificity concerning the socialization and inculcation of discourses in children makes theories of children's literature indispensable.

In a book by the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC), *Human (and Anti-Human) Values in Children's books*, the question is asked: "What happens to children from the racial group depicted when they look in that mirror and see sameness, ugliness, dependency on whites, lack of resistance, acceptance only on the basis of an endless willingness to suffer? What happens when they see something they can never have – whiteness – embodied with superiority and desirability (9)?" How are children affected by representations of "race" in children's books? First, it is believed that values, beliefs and ideas are successfully instilled when the child identifies with the story's protagonist(s). Though this affirmation is relevant, it is also potentially problematic. If a black child is exposed to literature with only white protagonists s/he may come to identify with the latter, potentially resulting in self-negation as s/he strives to attain what is presented as good or normal (i.e. white), or s/he may feel alienated, inferior, and dehumanized. In addition, the presence and/or absence of certain images can and will impact a child's perception of self and others. Zimet tells us: "The evidence of omission and distortion of people of colour and of different cultural and social class backgrounds is unequivocal. The sense of rejection and alienation felt by the forgotten and denigrated cannot be underestimated" (69-70). For the black child mentioned above, repeated exposure to heroic white and vilified black characters, or the absence of black characters altogether, can solidify feelings of inferiority, alienation, and self-negation. Theories

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such as these are significantly relevant when considering the French Antilles. The presence of inferiority complexes, self-hatred, and assimilation is, as Fanon says, the result of an absence of Black expression: “Dans la société antillaise, où les mythes sont les mêmes que ceux de la société dijonnaise ou niçoise, le jeune Noir, s’identifiant au civilisateur, fera du nègre le bouc émissaire de sa vie morale” (*Peau noire* 155). Because Antillean societies share a French collective vision, black children will come to blame their “race” for their misery. However, images of “race” or ethnicity are not the only ones with which to be concerned: class, religion, gender, history and so on are also important elements of society, their representations equally relevant to the development of a child’s self-perception.

In considering the portrayal of these social and cultural elements, we must acknowledge the importance of the authorial role. What language does the author use to influence the ideological development of the child? How might the author’s unexamined assumptions (values taken for granted or accepted unthinkingly)³, which may support or contradict his original intent, affect his or her message? What position does the author seem to take: is s/he supporting assimilation, or challenging colonial discourses, being subversive by encouraging a set of ideas oppositional to the dominant? Can an author writing in the dominant culture’s language, using the dominant culture’s literary structures, be truly subversive?

³ Hollindale tells us in *Ideology and the Children’s Book*: “The values at stake are usually those which are taken for granted by the writer, and reflect the writer’s integration in a society which unthinkingly accepts them. In turn this means that children, unless they are helped to notice what is there, will take them for granted too. Unexamined, passive values are widely *shared* values, and we should not underestimate the powers of reinforcement vested in quiescent and unconscious ideology” (13). Thus when examining the messages conveyed in children’s literature, one must take two approaches: 1) what is the intended message and 2) is that the message ultimately communicated or is the intention undermined by the author’s unexamined assumptions?

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Since I shall be addressing how specific beliefs and ideas are represented in Antillean children's literature, this dissertation might be classified as a study in "international" and/or "multicultural" children's literature⁴. This merits some discussion. Current studies of "multicultural" children's literature, though addressing fundamental issues around ideas of culture and ethnicity, tend to overlook significant cultural differences between literature written by or about a non-white minority (in a predominantly white society) and literature produced by a non-white "majority population of an independent nation" (Ashcroft et al. 19)⁵. Ashcroft points out as an example the difference between texts written by or about black Americans, considered a minority population, and texts written by black Africans or West Indians (19). Moreover, several critics of "multicultural" children's literature (eg. Cai, Vandergrift, Zimet among others) claim to varying degrees that there is a need for cultural "accuracy" or "authenticity" in children's books in order to "justly" represent non-white peoples⁶. While derogatory stereotyping must clearly be avoided, I disagree with uniformly representing or homogenizing a particular culture, and negating its subjects' varying experiences. This is especially true when speaking of literature produced in the French Antilles, where cultural and ethnic plurality and diversity of individual experiences are the very fabric of society. Exposing children to a homogenized representation of Antillean cultural experience, not to mention the meretricious artificiality of such a

⁴ The area of "international" children's literature refers to literature produced around the globe, but is usually associated with cultures outside those of Western superpowers. "Multicultural" children's literature and theory is a broad categorization of literature dealing with questions of culture, ethnicity, interracial relations, etc.

⁵ Ashcroft et al. is referring to postcolonial studies in his comparison of such literature, but the same is true for studies of "international" and "multicultural" children's literature.

⁶ According to "multicultural" theory, these representations are meant to foster cultural sensitivity (in the majority population) and pride or self-awareness in the minority population.

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representation, threatens and undermines their ability to negotiate their own space and identity.

The question of identity in francophone postcolonial societies is at best complicated. One of the most efficient colonial powers, France relied on the process of a carefully limited assimilation to maintain its empire and the subordination of its subjects. Through the installation of the French educational system, many colonized subjects were brought up to think of themselves as French, minimizing the risks of dissent (Young). Joubert tells us that the teaching of and in the French language was instrumental in “peacefully” conquering colonial subjects’ hearts and minds. Thus much of francophone postcolonial writing has focused on political and cultural self-definition, while at the same time expressing the assumption of remaining part of French culture (Young). In the French Antilles, however, the complexity of self-definition differs from that of other francophone postcolonial regions such as West Africa or the Maghreb. Where peoples of these latter regions experienced colonization on their own land, Antilleans experienced dislocation, slavery, and alienation from their ancestral African ties. As Anne Malena tells us: “The questions [regarding Antillean identity] have mostly revolved around how to create roots for an uprooted people” (4). In addition, the Antilles remain dominated as *Départements d’Outre-Mer*⁷, meaning that while they are no longer colonies, they remain subjugated to French cultural hegemony.

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, the Caribbean is comprised of a variety of ethnic groups “all more or less in ancestral exile, and all still subject to the

⁷ In the years following World War II (1948-1974), several French colonies or territories were given the option of independence or of becoming an official part of France as departments. Four colonies, Martinique, Guadeloupe, La Guyane and La Réunion, voted for departmentalization, meaning they are officially considered citizens of France with all associated rights and privileges.

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hegemonic pressures of their former European owners [...]” (144). This is clearly the case in the Antilles where French assimilationist policy has proven successful. The voluntary alignment with France, brought by a favorable vote for departmentalization in the mid-20th century, is proof of such success⁸. At that time a majority of Antilleans could be considered what Michel Pêcheux calls “Good” subjects, or subjects who “‘freely consent’ [...] to the discursive formation which determines them” (Ashcroft et. al 168). They had internalized an identity afforded them by colonial discourse. The minority and opposing group of “Bad” subjects is described as those who reject entirely colonial culture and discourse. Finally, subjects associated with “dis-identification” are those who recognize that while dominant discourses are inescapable, they can be transformed. These various subjectivities are still present in Antillean societies, problematizing attempts to re-define or construct a collective Antillean identity.

As with most postcolonial societies, literature in the Antilles has become a source of self-discovery and definition. According to Malena, Antillean literature forms part of a cultural discourse where questions of identity are presented as a process of perpetual negotiation (3). While the presence of a “littérature d’assimilation”, or a literature adopting the academic norms of metropolitan literature is clear, the majority of contemporary Antillean literature, as Joubert points out, attempts to recuperate the reality of the histories informing Antillean society. It attempts to raise a national consciousness and fights to establish or recover a collective memory suppressed by centuries of slavery, oppression, and colonial discourse – key elements if Caribbean identity depends on the

⁸ According to Edouard Glissant, the belief strongly held by Antilleans that it would be impossible to survive outside of the control of the Center (France) is a matter of ideology (see Picanço 71). While clearly the maintenance of the Antilles could be seen as a financial burden on France, the inculcation of colonial ideology in the Antillean population lead to the negation of one’s potential autonomy.

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relationship of the self with locale, history, memories and other selves (Malena 3). Over the past one hundred years, literature's appropriation has led to large literary and cultural movements aiding postcolonial subjects' search for identity. These movements include Négritude, Antillanité, and Créolité, which have served to question and influence how postcolonial identities are formed.

The 1930s brought the first, widespread movement addressing Black identity. Négritude, as this movement came to be known, is largely attributed to authors Aimé Césaire, Léon Gontran Damas and Léopold Senghor. Inspiring Black solidarity and a return to an African heritage, Négritude rejected the identity imposed on Blacks by colonial discourse, taking an important first step in re-examining and re-defining Black identity. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out that Négritude was "the most pronounced assertion of the distinctive qualities of Black culture and identity" (20). It gave Blacks the opportunity to sever in part the power of the white gaze and reject its influence on their sense of self. Yet its binary system of belief, its failure to acknowledge the inevitable appropriation of European culture, its tendency to adopt attitudes reflective of European prejudice, and its specious universalization of a Black experience ultimately undermined the movement. Moreover, a "return" to Africa proved, and continues to prove, problematic for Antilleans. Through dispossession and displacement, slaves brought to the Americas and the generations that followed experienced alienation from their African heritage. This alienation meant that the Africa to which Antilleans would return has become a myth, an imagined space. A return is both disappointing and, ultimately, impossible. Various Antillean authors (Maryse Condé, for example, with her novels *Hérémakhonon* and *Moi, Tituba...sorcière noire de Salem*) illustrate the

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psychological impossibility of fully immersing oneself in a culture no longer one's own. An individual may physically return to the continent of their ancestors, but the emotional and psychological alienation from African culture(s) and politics creates a barrier, preventing the "return" initially sought. Négritude's attempt at recovering and embracing one's *africanité* is repeatedly undermined by the cultural and political realities (or differences) between the Antilles and Africa.

Négritude was largely based on "race," yet the subsequent movement developed by Edouard Glissant, Antillanité, sought cultural, economic and political unity within the Antilles (Picanço). Though Glissant recognizes Négritude's role in opposing white oppression, he disputes the lack of cultural consideration and its focus on "race." Antillanité focuses less on racial composition and more on being "Antillean." In his *Discours Antillais* Glissant highlights issues he perceives as integral to the constitution of Antillean identity: the recuperation of a collective memory for example. Such memory is intrinsic to a society's perception of the world and its comprehension of its place within it (Picanço 56). It is the groundwork of a nation. For Glissant, this recuperation begins with a re-examination of Antillean history. Luciano Picanço tells us: "Des tensions de groupe découlent de l'acceptation d'une histoire subie, imposée par le colonisateur, et de la méconnaissance de la vraie histoire, effacée de la conscience collective" (51). Antilleans have accepted a history imposed by the colonizer, erasing the truth of misery, revolt, and dehumanization accompanying centuries of slavery and colonization. Glissant addresses this problem by defining a new historical space, beginning with the contact between European and African histories (Picanço 51).

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Glissant also insists on achieving “désaliénation coloniale” by rejecting illusions created by the “arrières pays,” or Africa and Europe (Picanço 63). Antilleans must stop looking outside for solutions or answers and into themselves, creating autonomy. In his quest for Antillean unity and autonomy, Glissant openly opposed departmentalization. He and Paul Nègre developed *le Front Antillo-Guyanais*, which advocated for an end to this status, and placed him among a new generation going beyond the literary to achieve social transformation. In addition to promoting economic and political independence, Glissant examined the Antilles’ relation to the world. In his *théorie de la relation*, “Glissant cherche ainsi à saisir l’originalité du discours antillais par l’analyse des rapports et des différences que cette partie du globe entretient avec d’autres parties du monde” (Picanço 65). He seeks to define the originality of Antillean discourse in relation to other parts of the globe.

Within Glissant’s conception of Antillanité, he addresses the notion of *créolité*. The term *l’étant*, in opposition to *l’être*, signifies temporality, an existence in the here and now, and that the present reality can be altered through (cultural) contact. This term embodies adaptation, flexibility, and change while the term *l’être* signifies fixity and is perceived as a constant. *L’étant* and *l’être* correlate with Glissant’s concepts *Divers* and *Même* respectively. The latter refers to expansion, homogenization, and the ideology behind colonization. *Divers*, on the other hand, is the opposite of the fiction created by the *Même*. Picanço points out: “L’étant est l’essence de l’humain et c’est ce que Glissant appelle la *créolisation*” (69, emphasis added). Humanity’s essence is its diversity, which should not be undermined by a desire to categorically define an individual, ethnic group, society, and so forth. It seems that, for Glissant, *créolité* is the diversity of cultures and

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ethnicities found in the Antilles. *Créolisation* is the process of those cultures and ethnicities coming together to create a new cultural entity, not bound to preceding peoples and histories.

Inspired by Glissant's *Discours Antillais*, Martinican authors Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant founded the most recent literary movement, Créolité, in the 1980s. In their well-known manifesto, "L'éloge de la Créolité," these three men define Créolité as a "kaleidoscopic totality" (28), an existence within diversity and the embrace of inherent otherness. They argue that the differences comprising Caribbean identity are to be celebrated and not marginalized or compromised by discourses painting difference as a sign of inferiority. They also argue for the incorporation of Creole as a national standard, characterizing Antillean writing. For these *Élogistes*, the use of Creole language in Antillean literature (pure Creole or creolized French) rejects the imposition of standardized, "pure" French, reflecting a cultural combat (Schon 212). Because Creole language(s) can be defined as hybrid, combining aspects of African, French and other languages, the *Élogistes*' push for its standardization represents their call for unified diversity and a celebration of difference.

Yet the concept of Créolité as defined by Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant has met with considerable opposition. It would be difficult to establish a national program of Creole, as there exist several Creoles, not one⁹. Furthermore, creating a "nouvelle norme créolisante" would institutionalize resistance and establish a negation of all differences within Antillean society itself (Schonn 217). Attempting to unify Antilleans through the standardization of their language leads to the very loss of the diversity that project claims

⁹ The idea that the Antilles should adopt Creole as the national language proves problematic in that there exist various forms of the Creole language. Choosing one over the others would not promote the unity sought in Créolité but would rather result in the alienation of a large portion of the population.

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to celebrate. As an ideology, this concept of Créolité is a utopian illusion based on a Manichean logic. Its binarism, its preference of “indigenous” values in contradiction to “French” values, and its opposition to the Occident places Créolité in close proximity to its predecessor, Négritude.

On the other hand, Créolité is not without valid points. Consider, for example, the Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé, who while critiquing Créolité also acknowledges its assets¹⁰. In an interview with Françoise Pfaff, she recognizes that within diversity, there exists a unity among Caribbean islands, the affirmation of a personality neither African, American, nor European, terms she credits to “L’éloge de la Créolité” (109). She also points out that Créolité allows writers to re-evaluate their relationship with the French language. Yet she cautions against its becoming a sort of “cultural terrorism,” within which writers become confined. She also strongly protests its utopian ideals and the permanent comparison of the Antilles with France (Schon). For Condé, “to each his or her own Créolité” meaning everyone should have their own way of expressing themselves in written literature (Condé, Pfaff 114). For non-writers in Antillean societies Condé’s assertion is equally relevant; they too must develop their own *créolité* or way of expressing and identifying themselves within their society.

Conflicting visions of identity, as we see in comparing Négritude, Antillanité, and Créolité, are visible in the works of Antillean authors. Because Antillean identity and subjectivity, on both an individual and collective level, are still in the process of developing, studying this literature can reveal what informs that development. Yet scholarship in this area has been uniquely focused on literature produced for an adult readership. Indeed, children’s literature in the francophone postcolonial world has a

¹⁰ I will further discuss Condé’s and others’ views on Créolité in Chapter four.

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similar function to literature created for adults: it is an important source of empowerment and self-discovery. Individually and collectively, much of this literature examines colonialism's effects and consequences. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain that language is a medium of power, creating "truth" and "reality" (*Empire*). If postcolonial societies are to dismantle false or unjust assumptions about their cultures, it becomes necessary to appropriate the language perpetuating those assumptions. Through appropriation of language and literary forms, postcolonial authors have attempted to undermine colonial discourses while re-defining an individual and collective identity. Many of the issues addressed and explored in this literature are of a social, cultural, and political nature: it is within these realms of existence that colonialism has had some of its deepest impacts. Postcolonial children's literature reflects similar issues, yet takes on the added responsibility of inculcating and normalizing beliefs surrounding those issues in younger generations.

Given the social and cultural significance of children's literature, the importance of developing a specifically Antillean children's literature is apparent. Normalizing French metropolitan values, via continual exposure to literature written by and for the dominant (i.e. French) culture, undermines efforts to challenge colonial discourses. Moreover, failing to instill in Antillean children a sense of their heritage and past will only contribute to what Ernest Pépin, Guadeloupean author and critic, considers the degeneration of the Antilles. In his *Lettre ouverte à la jeunesse* (2001), Pépin speaks about the current situation involving Guadeloupean youth, but which is relevant to the youth of all Antillean societies.

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A direct confrontation, this “letter” accuses the youth in Pépin’s country of being responsible for the decomposition of Guadeloupean society and its “grands principes,” among which are: “La solidarité engendrée par la conscience d’appartenir à une même histoire, à une même géographie et à un même destin. [...] La préservation de l’identité et son épanouissement dans l’expression collective” (11-12). He accuses Antillean youth of being “débranchés de tout ce qui compte,” referring to history, geography, family, scholarly life, politics, culture, and so forth (26). In the young generations of Guadeloupe he sees a lifestyle of escapism through apathy, assimilation (dressing like suburban Americans and French), cultural amnesia, drugs, violence, irresponsibility, and superficiality. Pépin accuses youths of these “crimes,” but highlights what is necessary to counteract such destruction. He states the need and undertakes the task of reminding Guadeloupean youth of their heritage: “Quelle que soit la couleur de ta peau, tu viens d’une société engendrée à l’origine par la colonisation et l’esclavage” (28). He reminds them of being heirs to resistance against colonialism, racism, collective marginalization and ignorance as well as resistance for a viable society, to define and make radiant a plural identity and for collective emancipation (30). In his *Lettre ouverte*, Pépin forces children to face themselves and their responsibility. He calls on them to “return” and take responsibility for their country’s future.

Pépin’s letter reveals an alarming situation, no doubt the product of perpetual encounters with cultural hegemony. He illustrates the alienating effects colonial discourse and policy have had on Antillean youths: the self-hatred turning youths away from their culture and toward that of the hegemonic powers, or toward violence and

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apathy¹¹. There is a need for Antillean children to witness positive representations of their own societies and culture if such devastating effects are to be counteracted. Pépin's *Lettre ouverte* underscores the importance of an emerging body of children's literature created specifically for Antilleans.

Several Antillean authors who have actively engaged literature in social critique and empowerment, such as Pépin, Condé, Pineau and others, have begun to acknowledge the significance of what their children read. In their works for children, these authors attempt to shatter the oppressive social limitations born of colonialism, which have informed the subordinate subject positions of the Antillean people. My dissertation will focus on this attempt at liberation and on how these authors address, and potentially affect, the ideological development of youth in their given societies. Several issues must be addressed in such an undertaking. How has the experience of oppression informed the messages conveyed by Antillean authors of children's literature? How might this literature interplay with the dominant culture (i.e. does it challenge colonial discourse or does it promote assimilation)? In what ways do these authors attempt to influence a child's identity formation in terms of "race"¹², class division, otherness, and cultural/historical memory?

The social construct of race, perpetuated by colonial discourse and imposed on the Antillean population, has long informed the dynamic of Antillean societies. Martinican author and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon explains that "race" plays a vital role in Antillean subjects' sense of self. He points out that racial categorization, or the imposition of racial hierarchies, has led to inferiority complexes and assimilation. Many

¹¹ See Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* and *Damnés de la terre*.

¹² I put "race" in quotations as I am referring to the socially constructed concept of race. That is, the pseudo-scientific categorization of people by colonial discourse.

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black Antilleans have internalized notions that French, and thus “white,” culture is superior, leading to self-negation and the attempt to obtain respect from the white world by assimilating to and adopting French values, attitudes, and behavior. If examining children’s literature helps us understand how certain discourses are developed and maintained, representations of “race” in Antillean children’s literature are important. Are ideas surrounding “race” as supported by colonial discourse found in the literature? If so, are these intentional representations meant to undermine said discourse, or do they reflect the author’s unthinking acceptance of it? Do there exist representations conspicuously contradicting the dominant discourse on “race”? Chapter one focuses on such representations, particularly in relation to the theories of Fanon. I will look at how, and whether, Antillean children’s literature encourages a discourse fostering complexes such as those discussed here. Included in my discussion will be how certain texts represent and/or reflect the black and white gaze, and the perception of each in relation to the other. As Denis Williams says, how does one “racial group” qualify and diminish the self-image of the other (Ashcroft et al. 146)?

As important as it is for adult readers and critics to understand the ideological messages conveyed in the literature, exploring how these messages may impact the emotional and psychological development of Antillean children is fundamental. For instance, understanding how children are exposed to the gaze of the other can reveal how their self-perception is developed. Equally significant are representations of how certain racial or ethnic groups see themselves. Have the characters internalized constructed notions of what is superior and inferior based on physical appearance? Exploring

representations of “race” significantly reveals an author’s perceptions and, more importantly, how the child reader’s self-perception will be influenced.

Racial categorization and hierarchies have also influenced class structures in Antillean societies. According to Robert Young, French colonial discourse on “race” has simultaneously been integrated with cultural class distinctions based on the degree of assimilation. However, class division in the Antilles is further complicated by the social structures resulting from assimilation and continued French dominance. While ideologically “race” is a determining factor in social status, the socio-economic system, reflecting a long history of elitism and capitalist policies, fosters yet another, more concrete divide among Antillean peoples. Racial and socio-economic boundaries overlap in the Antillean class system, creating complex, if not confusing social division. Because chapter one focuses on racial division, chapter two takes a closer look at the economic and political policies informing Antillean class structures, and how children’s literature may play a role in influencing those structures. This chapter adopts an anthropological and literary approach, examining Antillean social policy and how literature reflects and challenges the attitudes behind it. I am interested in how authors present class division to their readers, and how the latter is encouraged to understand their own role in a classicist society. An important question to bear in mind is who constitutes the target readership for these texts? The answer to that question highlights the literature’s potential social function. Exposing Antillean children to the realities of class structure could greatly influence how these structures develop, and perhaps evolve, in the future. Examining representations of class in the literature provides some of the more concrete examples of how Antillean authors may play a role in influencing the direction of Antillean societies.

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Inherent in both racial and class-based discourses is prejudice – prejudice against those who are different from oneself. Otherness is an important, revealing element informing Antillean societies and subjectivities. Stuart Hall implies with his term “doubleness” that an Other is necessary to the Self, or that the definition of oneself hinges on what he or she is not (“Old and New Identities”). For example, if one is white, one is *not* Black or if one is French, one is *not* African. In Antillean societies, however, given their diversity, attempting to define oneself within binary logic is problematic. Centuries of cultural contact between Africans, Europeans, Amerindians, Indians, and so forth problematize attempts to define oneself as completely one or the other. Moreover, basing self-definition on the politics of otherness both reflects French hegemony, and risks further racial and class stratification. Chapter three focuses on how Antillean children’s literature represents otherness, and on the intended or potential consequences. I look at whether authors encourage binary division, cooperation, or tolerance. I examine also how otherness of the self, reflecting the plurality of Antillean (and Caribbean) societies, is addressed in the literature. If the literature dismantles negative stereotypes of Others, dividing boundaries may be deconstructed as children learn to appreciate their societies’ plurality, and recognize their own prejudiced attitudes. On the other hand, if the literature perpetuates binarism and negative stereotypes premised on difference, we may better understand why social division persists.

The fourth and final chapter explores the relationship between memory, French hegemonic pressure, and cultural identity. Many of the issues discussed in chapters one through three result from decades of social conditioning by the dominant power. Much of this conditioning took place, and continues to take place, in the classroom. French

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History, coupled with a desire to forget slavery's horrors, has prevented the Antillean people from defining their own, autonomous national and cultural identity. It has also fostered disconnection between Antilleans and peoples of other Caribbean islands, despite a shared past. I look at how Antillean authors have begun to reshape Antillean memory, and how they incorporate that memory in the present. I examine whether these authors encourage rupture with French discourses, or if they go further, reinstalling Antilleans in the *créolité* of the region. The concept of *créolité* is widely debated, however I am interested in how these particular authors define *créolité* in relation to the past, and as a cultural identity in the present. I am interested in the potential empowerment of young readers to resist French hegemony today by embracing a history in which their ancestors played an active role.

The complex social, political, and cultural climate of the Antilles underscores the importance of this dissertation, a study in both postcolonial and children's literature. Because studies on "international" children's literature have failed to pay more deserved attention to non-white majority populations, and theories of "multicultural" children's literature have yet to recognize the "authenticity" of varied cultural experiences, my research will contribute to these areas of study. Oversights such as these in institutional scholarship highlight the importance and necessity of examining a body of children's literature created by and for a non-western, predominantly non-white society still subject to hegemonic pressure. To avoid accusations of preserving colonial mentalities by privileging white, western cultures, the fields of "international" and "multicultural" children's literature must include more fully examinations of literature produced by and for oppressed, non-white, postcolonial societies. It is true that some such studies exist,

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yet they appear to be the rare exception and not the rule. Moreover, these studies tend to focus on Anglophone, not Francophone societies (in Africa or the Caribbean for example). My exploration of children's literature produced by a culturally complex, ethnically diverse region, the French Antilles, provides a new perspective in "international" and "multicultural" children's literature.

Antillean children's literature has been neglected as a subject worthy of in-depth analysis, not only by scholars of children's literature but by those of postcolonial studies. It is therefore not only in the former field that this dissertation is significant: in postcolonial studies as well, where the role of children's literature has been overlooked, my research carves new avenues of exploration. It provides new ways of looking at postcolonial subjectivities, identities, and the re- or self-definition of postcolonial societies. Individually, the texts convey "lessons" pertaining to specific values, attitudes, and behaviors, while collectively, this literature plays a fundamental role in shaping individual and social perspectives. The authors may attempt to influence, perhaps alter individual readers' self-perception, and the collectivity's perception of society. Are they successful, however? One might interpret the emergence of this literature in recent years as a response to a growing concern regarding Antillean youth, as outlined in Pépin's *Lettre ouverte à la jeunesse*. This emergence might also respond to a desire for cultural and political independence, the seeds for which must be planted in future generations. In this study I intend to examine how and whether Antillean authors of children's literature take responsibility for the direction their societies take, helping their youths understand and negotiate their position in a culturally complex, diverse region. I shall focus on how these authors may influence the ideological development of Antillean youth, and it will

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CHAPTER 1

READING “RACE” IN THE ANTILLEAN CHILD’S BOOK

*“Nous ne devenons ce que nous sommes que par la négation intime et radicale de ce qu'on a fait de nous.” (Sartre, *Damnés de la terre* 25)*

In his introduction to Fanon’s *Damnés de la terre*, Sartre suggests that self-discovery and coming into being are dependant upon rejecting what has been imposed by others. In French Antillean societies, however, the persistent imposition of colonial ideology, under the guise of departmentalization, has inhibited Antilleans’ ability to achieve this. As Martinican author and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon has argued, racial discourse within this ideology has created a wealth of inferiority complexes through its establishment of a racial hierarchy.¹ The integration of such a discourse in the Antillean collectivity has inevitably affected individuals’ self-perception and subjectivity. Its perpetuation has been facilitated by media (books, films, television) that either privilege the “white race” or portray non-whites as exotic or primitive.² Children’s books are no exception and, if we accept this literature’s significant role in shaping a child’s social, emotional, and psychological development, representations of “race” in these texts may be considered among the most damaging or beneficial. That is, the presence of racial discourse in children’s literature can perpetuate feelings of alienation and inferiority, or it can challenge the ideology fostering such feelings. One might assume that the recent emergence of a body of children’s literature created by and for Antilleans would challenge the integration of colonial discourses, however this is not necessarily the case.

¹ See particularly *Peau noire, masques blancs* in which he provides a detailed psychological analysis of black Antilleans.

² An excellent example of a children’s book promoting such values during the colonial era is *Tintin au Congo* by Belgian author Hergé. We are also made aware of this dilemma in autobiographical accounts such as *La Rue cases nègres* (Zobel), *Chemin d’école* (Chamoiseau), and *Le Coeur à rire et à pleurer* (Condé). Other media such as travel books, like *Antilles* by Claude Bernabé et al. and written in 2000, promote exoticized imagery of the Antilles and the black population.

In this chapter I will examine two young adult novels and one picture book written by Antillean authors Ernest Pépin, Gisèle Pineau, and Alex Godard respectively. These three texts represent varying perspectives and representations of “race,” illustrating to what extent colonial ideology and racial discourse have influenced individual and social thought, as well as identity formation in young Antilleans. We must therefore look not only at how “race” is represented, but at what lies behind racial representations, such as the intentions and/or reflections of the author’s subject position. We must determine to whom the texts are directed, what “lessons,” if any, are presented, and whether they are efficiently conveyed. What are the consequences of these representations and their potentially conflicting messages for the Antillean child? That is, to what discourse(s) is the child presented? Is there a common thread found in these texts that may suggest a general movement in Antillean children’s literature? How are their similarities or differences significant? As this chapter will demonstrate, within Antillean children’s literature one finds both challenges to as well as the perhaps unintended perpetuation of colonial ideology, racial discourse, and assimilation. I intend to explore these inconsistencies and their potential impact on Antillean children’s developing perception of self and society.

Ruth Frankenberg³ tells us: “Race, like gender, is ‘real’ in the sense that it has real, though changing, effects in the world and real, tangible, and complex impact on individuals’ sense of self, experiences, and life chances” (11). “Race” must be considered “real” because of its very real impact on an individual’s selfhood. In the

³ An associate professor at the University of California at Davis, Ruth Frankenberg’s inspiration for her book *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* stems from her own experiences as a white feminist, and her developing understanding of different meanings of racism and racist behaviors.

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Antilles, where “race” lies at the root of many social structures (for example class), this reality of racial influence is undeniable. One of the most comprehensive analyses examining the complexities of racial discourse in Antillean societies, though reflecting to an extent patriarchal values⁴, is Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs*. His analysis of the relationship between Blacks and whites attempts to discover the various positions adopted by black Antilleans with regard to the white world: “Nous essaierons de découvrir les différentes positions qu’adopte le nègre en face de la civilisation blanche” (9). He forces those Antilleans imprisoned by their own internalization of values “germé au sein de la situation coloniale” (24) to confront themselves. By presenting a critical observation of how colonial racial discourse has distorted one’s identity, he attempts to reveal the hidden mechanisms maintaining the oppression of Antillean populations. As Fanon argues, the imposition of racial, social and cultural hierarchies was what allowed colonialism to thrive. For the French, preserving the illusion of superiority was intrinsic to maintaining control over colonized peoples as well as support in metropolitan France⁵. The media and educational system became necessary accomplices, fostering a fascination with the exotic and forcing the colonized populations to face artificial, often degrading representations, or stereotypes, of themselves⁶. In her *Civilisation du bossale*, Condé attributes the origin and perpetuation of these stereotypes to written accounts such as those by captain John Adams, who described black Africans as a beautiful, homogenous “race,” or Ca’da Mosto, who saw in these same peoples savagery, absurdity, filth and a total lack of moral fiber (12). Over the centuries, these essentialized images of Blacks

⁴ See his chapter discussing relationships between black women and white men.

⁵ See *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Landau, Kaspin) for a detailed exploration of colonial mentalities.

⁶ See “The Colonial and Postcolonial Francophone novel” (Lionnet) for further information on colonized populations’ confrontation with their own degradation by colonial powers.

were perpetuated by written accounts of slave owners, travelers, and missionaries⁷. The privileging of the white voice coupled with the silencing of black and other non-white voices made possible the perpetuation of cruel and derogatory stereotypes.

Europeans' internalization of an imagined hierarchy premised on such stereotypes eventually served to justify the slave trade and a slew of Africans being forcefully and brutally brought to the Americas. Importantly, whites in the Antilles perceived African "bossales," or slaves having arrived directly from Africa, as superior to black Creoles, slaves born in the colonies. Condé explains: "[...] les générations de colons précédents haïssaient le 'nègre créole'. Nous l'avons dit, elles le jugeaient inférieur à l'Africain bossale, doux et soumis et voyaient en lui qu'un 'mauvais singe', une 'grotesque caricature' des Blancs dont il aurait appris les vices tout en développant ses instincts les plus dangereux" (*Bossale* 48-49). The white population's contempt for this "singerie" may be explained by Homi Bhabha, who defines mimicry as the representation of difference that is itself a process of disavowal. If the power of the colonial state depends on difference, mimicry becomes a threat as it disrupts the authority of colonial discourse (159-60). In other words, if Europeans depended on an "inferior Other" (the black African) to validate their own superiority, the "Other's" mimicry of European culture and behavior would undermine that superiority. There exists, however, a paradox in that after abolition French colonial discourse encouraged assimilation among former slaves. Condé points out: "Lors de l'abolition de l'esclavage [...], la seule route proposée aux noirs est celle précisément de l'imitation, en d'autres termes de la singerie!" (*Bossale* 49) The educational system became a means of transitioning Blacks into the "civilized"

⁷ See for example the *Journal de la campagne des îles de l'Amérique, qu'à fait Monsieur D**** (Tronchoy) or *The Memoirs of Père Labat, 1693-1738*.

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world, meaning they were expected to learn and accept French ideology. According to Joseph Jos, education became an effective tool for a new social order and was promoted as “préparation de la jeunesse à la vie morale, civile et politique” (61-62). All Antillean children, including former slaves, between the ages of six and ten were required to attend school, thus beginning the collective integration into French ideology. Black Antilleans were essentially left with little to no choice, as they slipped from the bonds of physical slavery to the ideological and cultural repression fostered through “education.”

Note, however, that the educational system to which black children were subjected after slavery did nothing to re-evaluate the dominant racial discourse (Condé, *Bossale* 48). Victor Schoelcher⁸, whose fight against slavery was admirable, insisted on making obligatory the education of all Antillean children, yet did not insist on including within that education an examination of pre-slavery era history. Instead of encouraging young black Antilleans to discover their African heritage, to develop their own creativity that had been repressed for centuries (Condé, *Bossale* 48), the educational system acted as a new means of control and oppression. French culture and social discourses were at the core of this education, while Creole and African cultures were portrayed as savage, primitive, and ultimately inferior. We learn that primary school curricula consisted of subjects such as morality, religion, reading, writing, French, history, geography, math,

⁸ Victor Schoelcher, a white French abolitionist, was long regarded as a hero in Antillean societies for having put an end to slavery. Certainly his actions were admirable, as he vehemently opposed slavery, fought against the death penalty, and in favor of women and children. He also contributed to the development of a library in Martinique and a museum in Guadeloupe. Nevertheless, despite his “heroic” and humanitarian actions, Schoelcher must still be acknowledged as representative of French ideology, as he did not oppose racial prejudice and his support for the education of slaves stemmed from a belief in the superiority of French culture. While during the nineteenth century Schoelcher clearly made a positive impact on the lives of the oppressed, the fact that he remains a hero (a statue of him remains as an iconic figure in Martinique) is problematic in that it reflects the degree to which French colonial ideology has been absorbed into the Antillean collectivity. See *Victor Schoelcher en son temps: Images et témoignages* (Schmidt), *Civilisation du Bossale* (Condé) and *Karukéra* (Rice-Maximin) for further information.

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singing, languages, and physical education (Jos 72)⁹. Because of this apparently European agenda, generation after generation became victims of a fraudulent assimilationist project. I say fraudulent because French colonial ideology would never allow “true” assimilation among black subjects. Their “race” was an insurmountable barrier, barring them from equality¹⁰. The pretense of assimilation seemed instead to be a maneuver maintaining submission among the “inferior.” If the former slave population accepted French culture and discourses as superior, preserving control in the region would be easier.

The perpetuation of a European agenda, and thus of the assimilationist project, continued over the years. Joseph Jos tells us that the educational system (meaning curriculum and pedagogical structure) in the Antilles has been the same as that in the metropole since 1903 (149). In fact, from the time of departmentalization until 1973, the Antilles and La Guyane were part of the Académie de Bordeaux, and were not considered independent in terms of their educational administration. It wasn’t even until 1975 that all Martinican children were required to attend secondary school regardless of gender, class, or “race.” Of course, the previous discriminations proved to hinder rather than help the intended progress, because grouping children with varied educational experiences did not allow for an effective overall education. (Jos 365). In Guadeloupe, a seminar has

⁹ There were differences based on gender and class as well. For many years schools were divided by sex. Girls, in addition to the regular curriculum, learned sewing. For working-class children (black and white), special schools offered an “appropriate” education for their condition, meaning they were trained for jobs as servants and other similar jobs.

¹⁰ During colonization, Blacks could be trained or educated, but could not obtain professional positions deemed socially superior, such as an architect or doctor. Instead they became masons or veterinarians.

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been developed focusing on slavery and its effects. Yet it is not an integrated aspect of the curriculum, which remains a reflection of metropolitan heritage¹¹.

How does an educational system, which reproduces colonial/racial discourse, negatively impact a child? Let us examine Fanon's analysis of colonial education, and its socializing effects for children in the Antilles. He speaks of a collective catharsis referring to each society's means of releasing accumulated energies: "Dans toute société, dans toute collectivité, existe, doit exister un canal, une porte de sortie par où les énergies accumulées sous forme d'agressivité, puissent être libérées" (118). He refers to children's games, psychodramas¹², and illustrations, noting that "chaque type de société [exige], naturellement, une forme de catharsis déterminée" (119). Stories and illustrated magazines, comics, etc. portraying such characters as Tarzan, young explorers, and Mickey Mouse are representative of the white world, written by whites and geared toward white children. However, Fanon points out that in the Antilles and other colonized societies, the young non-white populations devour these same stories and illustrations¹³. He tells us: "Et le Loup, le Diable, le Mauvais Génie, le Mal, le Sauvage sont toujours représentés par un nègre ou un Indien, et comme il y a toujours identification avec le vainqueur, le petit nègre se fait explorateur, aventurier, missionnaire 'qui risqué d'être mangé par les méchants nègres' aussi facilement que le petit Blanc" (119). Because of their exposure to negative portrayals of Blacks and Indians, black

¹¹ For further and detailed information on this program see the website www.education.fr.

¹² Psychodrama, or "psychodrame" is defined as group psychotherapy in the form of theatrical improvisation based on real or imagined scenarios.

¹³ We must also acknowledge the impact of such media on the non-white populations living in the predominantly white societies that produce it. For instance, in the United States, there are numerous children's texts that vilify both Blacks and Native Americans, thus fostering a negative self-image.

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Antillean children eventually come to identify with the white heroes, and to accept the vilification of the “black race.”

Games and stories, however, constitute only one aspect of this “catharsis collective” imposed on Antillean societies. School, as suggested above, plays a tremendous role in the young Antillean’s psychological development. The French curriculum helps solidify the young black population’s identification with whites, and the negative perception of non-whites. Fanon points out: “Aux Antilles, le jeune Noir, qui à l’école ne cesse de répéter ‘nos pères, les Gaulois’, s’identifie à l’explorateur, au civilisateur, au Blanc qui apporte la vérité aux sauvages, une vérité toute blanche. Il y a identification, c’est-à-dire que le jeune Noir adopte subjectivement une attitude de Blanc” (120). The perpetual encounters in the classroom with French History, culture, and literature concretize for the young black Antillean a specifically French reality with which he inevitably identifies. Coupled with the stories, illustrations, and games discussed above, one may easily accept Fanon’s assertion that: “Peu à peu, on voit se former et cristalliser chez le jeune Antillais une attitude, une habitude de penser et de voir, qui sont essentiellement blanches” (120). Antillean children’s continuous exposure to media representing dominant French discourses has distorted their self-image. Negating their “race,” culture, and ancestry, though not necessarily a choice, Antillean children, as Fanon contends, have internalized an entirely French way of thinking, seeing and being.

Given the significant role “race” plays and has played in identity formation, it is not surprising that references to racial discourse, either its perpetuation or subversion, are inscribed in postcolonial Antillean children’s literature. Many authors of children’s

literature, as Jill P. May explains, write to help their audience(s) cope with similar situations as those experienced by the protagonists (52). For protagonists who encounter racist discourses, the author likely intends to provide readers with coping strategies applicable to similar experiences. May also states that literature contains implied meanings within literary patterns that are “clues to the author’s purpose for writing, his background, and his tone” (16). The messages are informed by the author’s subject position. For Antillean authors, whose relationship with French culture and ideology may differ, their attempts to assist young readers in coping with racist discourses may prove problematic or empowering. Their representations of “race,” informed by this relationship, will inevitably affect how readers perceive, and react to these issues. For instance, in the first text to be examined, Ernest Pépin’s¹⁴ *La coulée d’or*, the author’s powerful references to assimilation and the resulting inferiority complexes clearly establish his relationship with colonial racial discourse.

As Fanon says, the black man suffers from not being white due to the white man’s imposition of discrimination, and his elimination of the value and originality of the former. In addition, the white man accuses Blacks of being parasites, and insists on rapidly embracing the white world (79). Over time, as the media and the educational system normalized these assertions, Antilleans ceased to perceive themselves as Blacks: “l’Antillais ne se pense pas Noir; il se pense Antillais. Le nègre vit en Afrique. Subjectivement, intellectuellement, l’Antillais se comporte comme un Blanc” (Fanon 120). The assimilation project left its mark on Antillean societies, where to be “black”

¹⁴ Ernest Pépin was born September 25, 1950 in Lamentin, Guadeloupe. A former professor, Pépin is currently the Conseil culturel de la Guadeloupe and a literary critic. *La Coulée d’or* is his first children’s book, written in 1995, followed by *L’Ecran rouge* (1997), *La Soufrière* (2001), and *Lettre ouverte à la jeunesse* (2001, see introduction). I have chosen *La Coulée d’or* for this study because of its focus on racial issues as well as its being the most widely available of Pépin’s children’s books.

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meant to be African, while to be Antillean was to be “white.” Yet as we shall see in Pépin’s work, many Antilleans who believed themselves to have escaped their “blackness” are often confronted with a troubling reality. Despite one’s efforts at assimilation, at “becoming white,” many black Antilleans must eventually confront the impossibility of escaping their “blackness.”

La coulée d’or, a young adult novel, is an autobiographical account revealing various realities of growing up in Guadeloupe. Pépin’s memories of childhood and his adult understanding of racism and colonial ideology come together to inform the implied author, Ernest’s voice. The story does not subscribe to a “traditional” structure in that there is no central problem to be addressed or “solved.” There is no series of events leading to a climax, which then acts as a catalyst for resolution. Rather, its reflective narrative and overlapping plot lines reflect the complexities of Antillean identities and together constitute an effort of raising consciousness in the young Antillean mind. The didacticism of Pépin’s work lies in his suggestive re-tellings of childhood experiences. That is, the various portrayals and discussions of his experiences suggest a certain perception, insinuating “right” and “wrong.” For instance, Pépin’s harsh criticism of M. Raymond, his former music teacher and a black man who has rejected his “blackness” attempting to attain “whiteness,” suggests to the reader that such behavior is unacceptable.

Although the story is situated in the 1950s, it is likely, given the continual presence of racist discourses, that many Antillean youths will share on some level young Ernest’s experiences. As I have previously discussed, the ability to identify with a story’s characters is important in informing a child’s self-perception as well as his perception of

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society and others. Thus for a black Antillean child to read about a young black “hero” who experiences racism, classicism, etc., such a book has obvious potential value for challenging dominant racial discourses. Representations of colonialism, white heroes and wealth are no longer normalized.

To begin with, young Ernest is highly aware of the racial hierarchy dominating his society, which is emphasized through his thoughts at church: “D’après tout ce que je vois ni les Nègres, ni les chabens, ni les mulâtres, ni les Indiens, ni les *batazindiens* ne peuvent prétendre aller au paradis” (42). In observing the various representations of Christ, God, and other biblical figures, Ernest sees only whites, suggesting to him that non-whites are unwelcome in Heaven. Yet he rejects any possibility of being admitted: “Je n’ose imaginer cela: moi tout seul au paradis, perdu dans un océan de Blancs! Ah Seigneur, l’enfer plutôt!” (42) Note that while he dismisses an afterlife among the “superior” race, illustrating his perception of assimilation, he does not dismiss in itself God or the idea that non-whites will be denied access to Heaven. Even for Ernest, who rejects “becoming white,” colonial racial discourse has been normalized. He does not accept imposed “inferiority,” however, and mentally “re-makes” Heaven in such a way that individuals otherwise rejected would be unconditionally welcomed: “Et tandis que j’appelle les souffrants, les disgraciés, les éclopés, les subissants et les gémissants dans le monde de l’en-haut, une sorte d’extase illumine mon vouloir de justice. Je contemple mon oeuvre. C’est bel!” (44). As Ernest’s creation develops, so too does his desire for justice, understood as equality, but not on the terms of becoming “white.” It is rather a human equality, where difference (racial or cultural for example) does not dictate worth.

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What is interesting in this particular passage is the contradiction between the protagonist's apparent acceptance of a discourse refusing the moral or spiritual salvation of his "race," and his rejection of "becoming white," as so many Antilleans have done. Indeed, his rebuff of admittance into a "whites-only" Heaven, his mental creation of an impartial Heaven, and his desire for justice underscore his, and the author's, vehement dismissal of assimilation. The overlapping voices of real and implied author explain the reconciliation between Ernest's acceptance of racial discourse and rejection of assimilation. Though as a child Pépin may have accepted to some extent racist discourses, his adult self does not accept that "whiteness" leads to salvation, happiness, or both social and economic success. His numerous commentaries criticizing assimilationist attitudes and behaviors illustrate this. We must also recognize that Pépin's criticism overpowers references to Ernest's ideological integration. Pépin's position is fundamental in directing Antillean societies away from discourses fostering self-negation, alienation, and inferiority complexes, as he impresses upon his young readership the mistake of assimilation.

Among the text's various black characters striving to become "white," M. Raymond is perhaps the clearest example of internalizing colonial racial discourse. In a detailed commentary on racial hierarchies and power, we learn of M. Raymond's past and his "ascent" toward "whiteness." Born into misery and to a mother who sought companionship through numerous sexual relationships, Raymond imagined himself the descendant of a great noble African whose passage into slavery was a mistake. Fanon tells us that economics is at the core of black Antilleans' inferiority complexes (8), and Condé sustains this argument in part in her *Civilisation du Bossale*. According to the

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latter, the economic disparity between black slaves and white masters led to negative self-images as Blacks came to perceive their “race” as a malediction. She explains that in the slave’s mind there existed a correlation between appearance and mediocrity, and thus between the slave’s miserable appearance and the mediocrity of the black “race.” Condé then asserts that this eventually led to proverbs (she does not specify any in particular), an integral part of Caribbean life and culture, reflecting both the masters’ clichés and the slaves’ negative self-perceptions. “Race” indeed became a malediction (*Bossale* 30-31). M. Raymond embodies this argument, for in his mind, his poverty directly indicated his shortcomings as a human being. Only by assimilating to the white capitalist world, by “becoming white” in a sense, would he overcome his mediocrity.

When he managed to escape what he considered humiliating work with “les équipes de ti-nègres tout juste bons à enlever des pierres sur les terres de M. de la Clémentine [a white plantation owner]” (54), M. Raymond’s journey toward “whiteness” took a concrete step forward. Disassociating himself from his fellow black workers, Raymond saw them as worth no more than their degrading job. Through sacrifice, devotion, and ruse, Raymond managed being appointed as “gérant,” a title fostering a sense of arrogance, and the illusion of having transcended the prescribed social position of black Antilleans: “[il] crut qu’il avait atteint la vallée de miel où l’estimable devient l’estimé et où l’estime, d’une grande enjambée de générosité reconnaissante, traverse les murailles mentales du racisme” (55). Pépin’s protagonist demonstrates a well-developed understanding of how whites were perceived in Antillean societies, and what Blacks hoped to gain through assimilation: esteem, respect, recognition. Yet his damning remarks directed toward M. Raymond also repudiate this false reality: that is, the

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pretended superiority of whites, and Blacks' ability to ever attain that "superiority." He tells the reader:

Comme tout le monde sait, les Grands-Blancs faisaient, défaisaient et refaisaient la loi quand ils ne l'enjambaient pas telle une barrière trop basse. Ils n'avaient pièce considération pour la négaille quémandeuse répartie en domestiques, nègres-savanes, gardiens d'animaux, coupeurs-cannes, cabrouettiers. S'ils précautionnent avec les géreurs, les économes et autres profitants, ce n'était qu'un semblant de macaquerie. (55)

Harshly criticizing whites, or Békés, Pépin illustrates his belief that beneath every one of their actions lies a motive reflecting hate, prejudice or ridicule. He insists that despite any outward amiability between whites and Blacks, inequality persists. Even seemingly "friendly" relations are either an illusion or the result of a cruel joke, which Pépin makes clear to his readers through M. Raymond.

When the author, both real and implied, directly addresses M. Raymond, it is to convince him of this illusion and cruelty: "Que non point Raymond! Que non point! Pièce pas! Jamais ne verra! Et même si Mme de la Clémentine te hèle par ton prénom, ne va pas croire l'heure venue de confondre la vie avec un bol de graisse" (55). Pépin tries to dismantle the illusion Raymond has created, or rather fallen victim to. The latter's belief of having achieved equality is based in part on a fraudulent generosity. Though Mme de la Clémentine, wife of the plantation owner, has shown signs of hospitality, there is no reason to "confondre la vie avec un bol de graisse," or confuse reality with illusion. On the contrary, we should expect that she will destroy the glass Raymond used, or assume that the glass had initially been used for the cat or birds (55). Pépin provides

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other examples as well, stressing the falsity of Raymond's relationship with the Clémentines. For instance, he speaks of how M. de la Clémentine's intentions in bringing Raymond's son to see a sickly yet important white man, M. des Rosières, do not reflect sincere generosity. Rather, Clémentine's motivation stemmed from his desire to humiliate the latter (M. des Rosières), and thereby the former (Raymond's son), by forcing him to tolerate the presence of a black boy in his bedroom: "ce n'était, cher Raymond, *que pour humilier M. des Rosières!* Ah comme [M. de la Clémentine] a ri de la rougeur suffocante de des Rosières d'avoir à supporter *dans sa chambre* l'odeur du négillon!" (56) What Pépin tries to convey to M. Raymond, and therefore to the reader, is the impossibility of gaining equality to the white man within the confines of colonial discourse. He illustrates both the absurdity and the consequences of using assimilation as a means of earning respect from others and for one's self.

The music teacher realizes these consequences when forced to confront reality. M. de la Clémentine publicly shames and humiliates his female black workers when, drunk, he demands that those women with whom he has not had sexual relations raise their hands. We are immediately reminded of the relationship between "race" and gender within colonial ideology. Maryse Condé has acknowledged the sexual objectification of black women by white men, who expected to experience the myth of sexual lasciviousness. Black women were and continue to be valued for their exoticism, and for the myth of their sexual prowess (*Paroles* 36). Pépin makes this disturbingly clear in Clémentine's display of objectification¹⁵. Among these women is Raymond's partner,

¹⁵ Pépin's portrayal of black women's degradation by a Béké reveals a reality experienced by many black Caribbean women, but which has remained largely silenced. That is, Antillean literature has traditionally either overlooked women's experiences or they are presented in a patriarchal context, thus reflecting the male domination of literary creation in the Antilles. Pépin, though he does not dwell on this

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l'Artémise-de-Raymond. In his fantasy of mutual respect and admiration, Raymond enjoyed a false sense of security, believing Artémise to be free from Clémentine's sexual appetite. Yet when Artémise lowers her eyes instead of raising her hand, Raymond is so shamed and humiliated that, from then on, he lives "à l'extrême pointe de la flamme du rhum" (58). This brutal *prise de conscience* concerning black/white relations triggers in Raymond habits of loudly condemning the "Grands-Blancs," and committing blasphemy against God. More importantly, his adoption of these habits reflect what Pépin intends to communicate to his reader. He emphasizes the illusion that is assimilation, and the eventual and unavoidable self-destruction that will follow.

M. Raymond makes tangible the arguments of Fanon and Condé that economics can be found at the root of inferiority complexes. Yet as Pépin continues exploring racially-centered experiences in Guadeloupean society, the reader is made to understand that there are other factors behind the desire to become "white."

Where M. Raymond sought "whiteness" through attitude, behavior and economic success, there are others who sought physical likeness. As Ernest describes his relationship with an elderly *mulâtre*, M. Myrtil, Pépin comments on physical characteristics as defining elements in deciding one's "pedigree." We are told: "En ce temps où tout le monde était si tellement regardant sur la qualité des cheveux, M. Myrtil soignait les siens avec l'attention d'un boursicotier qui surveille le cours de ses actions. Les cheveux correspondaient à un pedigree" (84). Hair type signaled one's position in the white world, and thus within the social/racial hierarchy. The straighter, smoother one's hair, the closer to white s/he was. M. Myrtil, aware of this, took great care of his

particular event, does make an important step as a male author, forcing the reader to acknowledge the injustices experienced by black women.

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prized possession to ensure his “status.” For those who did not possess smooth, “white” hair, however, great efforts were made to obtain it. Pépin uses his relationship with M. Myrtil as a jumping-off point to comment on black Antilleans’ efforts to whiten their appearance.

He once again refers to the public humiliation and degradation of black women, this time due specifically to their appearance: “‘Casque-en-fer’, hurlait-on aux jeunes filles dont la tignasse se recroquevillait en un chiche ornement. Et la honte voilait leur regard pour toujours...” (84) Having been publicly shamed and demeaned because they lacked the “superior” hair type, young black girls would adopt, often permanently, distorted perspectives. Humiliation led to the internalization of a supposed inferiority, which in turn led to desperate attempts at obtaining that one important characteristic:

Négresses brûlaient leurs cheveux au fer et trimbalaient avec elles une odeur de roussi. Avec le secours des produits américains, elles défrisaient, décrépaient, se lamentaient ou se réjouissaient selon le résultat. Elles avaient beau faire, elles ressemblaient à une armée humiliée à laquelle on avait imposé le port obligatoire de perruques mal assorties (85).

This brief yet impressive anecdote shows the psychological effects of continually confronting shame and disgrace, not because of personal fault but a shortcoming determined by a racist discourse rooted in Antillean societies. Here, instead of correlating economics and inferiority complexes, Pépin illustrates another of Fanon’s arguments underscoring the power of words in developing a negative self-image¹⁶. In addition, his critical description of these women, and their failure to achieve physical

¹⁶ See Chapter 1, “Le Noire et le langage”, in Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs*.

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“whiteness” can be interpreted as Pépin’s intent to discourage his readers from such behavior¹⁷.

The final passage I would like to discuss from *La coulée d’or*, while addressing “race,” does not focus on attempts of becoming “white,” as is typical of this text. Rather, this passage underscores the “success” of colonial ideology’s integration in the Antillean collectivity. That is, Pépin calls attention to black Antilleans’ own adoption of racist and prejudiced attitudes. While I will return to this passage at length in chapter three, where I discuss representations of otherness, I would like to point out here its significance as a reflection of racial discourse. Using his childhood friendship with a young Indian boy, Pépin discusses the relationship between Blacks and Indians in the Antilles. Fanon has told us: “Un Antillais est blanc par l’inconscient collectif, par une grande partie de l’inconscient personnel [...]” (156). As mentioned previously, Fanon argues that black Antilleans see themselves as whites, a result of internalizing the latter’s ideology and discourse on race. Pépin draws a striking parallel between whites/Blacks and Blacks/Indians. He tells us: “Dans des temps anciens, mais pas trop lointains, les Nègres se plainquirent des coutumes que pratiquaient les Indiens à l’égard de leurs morts. Ils leur offraient des repas le jour de la Toussaint et cela dérangeait les Nègres déjà peu enclins à aimer les Indiens. Pour eux, ce n’était ni plus ni moins qu’une profanation du cimetière” (168-69). In short, Blacks saw the Indians’ practices as savage. The irony is undeniable; this attitude is reminiscent of that held by white colonists with regard to Africans. Equally reminiscent are the derogatory songs and expressions directed at the Antillean Indian population. For example, Ernest recounts: “Vyé malaba la/ vyé malaba la / Mwen

¹⁷ This assumption is premised on Pépin’s continual criticism throughout the text of those who turn to assimilation for self-validation, and his criticism aimed directly at Antillean youth in his *Lettre ouverte à la jeunesse* (see introduction).

hay mal la / Mwen enmé fimel la”¹⁸. This is a direct reflection of colonial sentiment toward Africans, where black males were seen as vicious savages from whom the exotic black women needed saving. Yet there is also the patriarchal, and equally colonial distrust or wariness of the exotic female¹⁹: “Pwel a fanm zendyen ka koupé lolo aw!”²⁰ The mimicry of whites’ racism against Blacks, reflecting patriarchy, romanticism/exoticism and wariness, is clear, as is Pépin’s intent for his readership.

The words and images included in this passage of the text may seem “inappropriate”²¹ for a children’s book, but Ernest plainly communicates the author’s message: “De pareils propos empuantissaient la bouche des Nègres, eux-mêmes méprisés par les mulâtres et les Blancs, et semaient la haine contre les Indiens créoles. Révolté par tant d’injustice, je décidai de les aimer de toutes mes forces d’autant plus que mes parents m’élevaient sans une miette de racisme” (170). Pépin emphasizes that Blacks, who have for centuries endured racism, are in turn reproducing the hateful behavior. Ernest’s disgust at such injustice, and his decision to love Indians with all his might underscore how wrong this racism is²². For children who are currently confronting these racial conflicts, Ernest’s dramatic position conveys what Pépin sees as the proper way of behaving.

¹⁸ “Indiens affreux / Je hais le male / J’aime la femelle” (169)

¹⁹ See Carol Boyce Davies’ article, “‘Woman Is A Nation...’ Women in Caribbean Oral Literature,” for a detailed analysis of patriarchal proverbs and songs in the Caribbean.

²⁰ “Les poils de la femme indienne te coupent le pénis!” (169)

²¹ The viciousness of this passage and the controversial subject matter could be considered by some children’s literary theorists as inappropriate for young readers, either because of a belief that children should be allowed to remain innocent or a belief that children are incapable of dealing with such complex issues. Yet the refusal to expose children to harsh realities may in fact hinder their ability to deal with these issues.

²² There is also a problematic essentialization of Indians in this blanket statement of loving “all Indians.” But the dramatic element could be construed as a more effective means of communicating the author’s “lesson.”

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Throughout the book, and as we have seen in the various representations of “race” discussed here, Pépin proves to be acutely aware of the social dynamics in Antillean societies, and of the role colonial racial discourse has played in individuals’ self-perception. His intended messages appear barely, if at all, hindered by unexamined assumptions. On the contrary, his understanding of colonial ideology and the consequences of its internalization is what motivates him. The specificity of his criticism, the presence and adoption of said ideology in the Antilles, makes it clear that Pépin speaks to a particular audience. In a 2004 interview, Pépin solidifies this assertion: “Et si j’ai un message fondamental à lancer, premièrement au niveau des Antillais, c’est qu’il faut que nous commençons à prendre en charge, nous-mêmes, nos problèmes²³.” Also considering his attack on Antillean youths’ apathy and disconnection with their heritage in *Lettre ouverte à la jeunesse*, one may assume that in his *La Coulée d’or* Pépin purposefully takes on the matter of racial and cultural assimilation. He clearly desires to direct Antillean children away from the idea that “whiteness” is the key to success and happiness – first by illustrating the realities of “race” encountered daily, and second, by suggesting the consequences of adhering to a euro-centric frame of mind.

However, the experiences found in Pépin’s text are specific to the Guadeloupean context. Children living outside this geographical context may find relating to these experiences more difficult. What of black Antillean children living abroad as immigrants/exiles? Are their experiences with racism and colonial ideology the same? Moreover, can an author born abroad, in France for example, provide black Antillean

²³ This interview was with Afrik.com and took place at the third festival Gospel et Racines in Benin. www.afrik.com/article7507.html

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children with the tools to understand and cope with their potentially alienating experiences as immigrants?

Author Gisèle Pineau spent her childhood moving between France (her birthplace), Guadeloupe, and Africa²⁴, admitting that she and her family were *Néropolitains* without knowing it (Sebbar 160). Yet many of her texts demonstrate awareness for intolerance and prejudice. According to her short *récit* in *Une Enfance outre-mer*, France became for her the land of exile. One might therefore expect her young adult novel, *Caraïbes sur Seine*, to focus on the struggles and alienation faced by her young Guadeloupean protagonist spending a year in the Parisian suburbs. Because children's literature in many cases serves to provide young readers with guidance, it is logical that Pineau intends her text to assist young Antilleans facing these issues. However, as we shall see, there exist underlying, contradicting messages that undermine the text's subversive efficacy.

If authors of children's literature write to help their audience cope with similar situations (May 52), Pineau's attempt to depict the experiences of a twelve-year-old Antillean immigrant may pose a challenge since the author's perspective is that of a woman born and raised in France for the first years of her life. The young reader, according to May, wants and perhaps needs "a vicarious experience" in which characters act and talk like the reader would. While Pineau has expressed feeling alienated upon moving to Guadeloupe, can she effectively provide a vicarious experience to non-white

²⁴ Born in 1956 in Paris, Gisèle Pineau is the fourth of six children. Her father left Guadeloupe in 1943 to join the military. She attended the Université de Paris X Nanterre for two years and then became a psychiatric nurse in 1979, at which time she also married and returned to Guadeloupe. She returned to Paris in 2000 where she currently works as both a writer and nurse. Her grandmother (Man Ya) played a significant role in her life, teaching her of Guadeloupe, and thus became a significant figure in many of her works. Pineau's daily encounters with racism, intolerance, and other prejudices also fueled much of her work.

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immigrants in metropolitan France, and more importantly, one that combats racist discourses?

According to Schon, Pineau paints the suburbs as idyllic and without significant social or cultural conflicts: “Car, même si [ce récit est destiné] à un public très jeune, l’absence de conflits et de situations sociales extrêmes traduisent [son] caractère utopique” (264). While the text references racism, it is not presented as significantly affecting Lindy’s sense of self. The general lack of difficulties she faces – social, emotional, or psychological – raises questions about Pineau’s intentions and/or her unexamined assumptions.

Many narratives written by or about Antilleans and Africans coming to France reveal feelings of alienation, belonging to an in-between space, or to neither one culture nor the other²⁵. While Fanon has argued that many Antilleans in some way see themselves as white or attempt to become such, he also argues that many Blacks in France feel “different”: “[...] le nègre en France [...] se sentira différent des autres” (121). Despite one’s self-perception in the Antilles, coming to France brings inevitably alienating experiences. For example, Fanon claims many black students studying in France feel alienated from themselves as they confront discourses associating “blackness” with “savagery.” He tells us: “On refuse de [considérer les étudiants] comme d’authentiques nègres. Le nègre c’est le sauvage, tandis que l’étudiant est un évolué” (Fanon 56). Students, because of their education, are not considered “authentic” because they are not “savage.” Nor are they seen as “white,” stigmatizing them as

²⁵ See for example *Le Coeur à rire et à pleurer* (Condé), *L’Aventure ambiguë* (Kane). The first is an autobiographical account of Condé’s childhood, in which her experiences in France are both alienating and eye-opening (to the exoticization of Blacks, her own selfhood, etc.). The second text provides insight into the experiences of a young African attending school in France, and dealing with the fact that he can never be fully accepted in French society, nor can he truly return to the culture he knew before.

different²⁶. This contradictory space, where one is neither “black” nor “white,” represents a challenge to identity faced by many individuals from colonized or formerly colonized societies. In *Caraïbes sur Seine*, however, Lindy seems not to experience such alienation, problematizing any intended attempt by Pineau to help young immigrant children cope with prejudiced encounters.

The text begins with Lindy and her family leaving Guadeloupe because her father had been ostracized by his brothers, and now seeks refuge in France. Associating his problems with Guadeloupe, France becomes for him the land of promise, where success and happiness are inevitable. Lindy, whose perception of France has been shaped by television and other media, shares her father’s illusions. We see first the image of France presented to Antilleans, and second, the role media play in solidifying that image in the Antillean collectivity²⁷. Imagine Lindy and her father’s disappointment when France failed to live up to its reputation: “La France que je voyais à la télévision, lorsque nous vivions à la Guadeloupe, ne ressemblait en rien à Noisy-le-Grand” (16-17). Her father, devastated, confronts his “mistake”: “Papa semblait atterré. On aurait dit qu’il avait reçu un grand coup de poing sur la tête ou bien qu’il venait de se réveiller en plein cauchemar” (18). Reality catalyzes a nightmarish awareness, emphasizing many immigrants’ experiences with disillusion. He immediately wants to return to Guadeloupe, but Lindy’s

²⁶ As we shall see a bit later in this chapter, many Antilleans coming to France had to cope with being grouped among other Blacks, such as Africans. This contradicts the notion discussed earlier that Antilleans saw themselves as “white” and that when one spoke of “Blacks” they referred to Africans.

²⁷ The power of the media in constructing one’s perception of others is a recurring motif in this text. For example, when Lindy becomes involved with an American boy as a “pen-pal,” we learn that, first, Lindy’s conception of American culture is entirely based on the television series “*New York Police Blues*” (52). Andrew, the American boy, also proves to have been influenced by the media in constructing his notions of France, which we shall see a bit later in my analysis when his concept of a “vraie Parisienne” is revealed (149). It would seem that Pineau’s intentions in her various portrayals of cultural misconceptions are to raise awareness with regard to media’s power in shaping perceptions of others. She underscores both the inevitability as well as the danger of judging a culture/individual/society based entirely on what one sees on television, in books or magazines, etc.

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mother refuses another sudden upheaval. Her father returns alone, promising to come for his wife and children after settling the situation with his brothers.

Lindy and her father's disappointment in the "real" France (though what is meant by "real" is unclear), as well as the latter's immediate return to Guadeloupe, evokes Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Beverley Ormerod states that Césaire's work: "...ostensibly refers to a return to the poet's own island of Martinique after years in a state of exile in France. But as the poem unfolds, that state of exile is increasingly identified with the inner experience of alienation, and the 'return' of the title becomes a return to the poet's true self through a rediscovery of his African roots" (2). Césaire's movement between Martinique and France parallels that of Lindy's family. Her father embodies, both literally and metaphorically, self-discovery and a return to one's roots. Given Pineau's criticism of France as the land of exile, it is logical that Lindy too experiences her own "journey"²⁸ of exile and self-discovery. Yet Lindy does not in fact follow her father's example. Though she occasionally mentions returning to Guadeloupe, the lack of inner or social conflict implies homesickness, not self-revelation. Examining representations of Lindy's experiences will reveal their failure to address fully alienation and exile, particularly as it pertains to racial discourse. It will become clear that this text, despite positive intentions, has the potential to further alienate immigrant children, instead of helping them.

²⁸ Elizabeth Wilson argues that much of women's writing in the Francophone Caribbean takes the form of "journey-as-alienation," with the acquirement of self-knowledge often leading to self-destruction (45). This "journey" is often represented in the form of a physical, and thus psychological voyage. That is, within this literature the character experiences a journey symbolizing her "journey" of alienation and/or self-discovery. In this context, then, Lindy's "journey" to France appears to promise a young girl's experience of self-discovery.

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To begin with, Lindy's friendships in France are anything but reflective of cultural and/or ideological differences. Her relationships with her two closest friends in Paris provide a potential space within which to explore interracial relations, the impact of birthplace and assimilation on identity, and so forth. Carola, Lindy's "best" friend is white, from Corsica, and lies extensively. Hamidou is a French-born Senegalese boy who dreams of becoming a famous musician and whose mother clings to her African heritage. The opportunity to explore varying viewpoints on what it means to be a Black or white immigrant in France is clear. Yet the complexities of these characters' identities and interpersonal relationships remain overlooked, or at least underdeveloped. Instead, we follow Lindy, Carola and Hamidou through their relatively "normal" life, where the struggle for self-definition is largely absent or lacks worthy attention. For instance, Lindy and Carola's relationship is based on a "mysterious" connection and commonalities between the two girls:

Nous sommes amies depuis le premier jour. Nous avons été attirées l'une par l'autre d'une manière mystérieuse. Et nous nous sommes trouvées par la suite de nombreux points communs. Nous venons toutes les deux d'une île. Nous habitons la même ville. Nous avons exactement le même sac à dos. Nous aimons chanter. Et le plus extraordinaire, nous voulons devenir hôtesses de l'air. (45)

This "mystery" and their having come from "other" places (Corsica and Guadeloupe) underscore the mutual sense of exoticism and situate both girls, in a sense, as immigrants. Pineau hints that for Blacks and whites, the opposite "race" holds exotic appeal, explaining the "mysterious" connection between Lindy and Carola. In addition, the idea

that the two girls build a bond based on coming from islands points to their mutual sense of not entirely belonging. Yet instead of focusing on these aspects of the friendship, the author has chosen to portray Carola and Lindy in “typical” pre-teen situations: they shop, share secrets, obsess over facial blemishes and discuss their various crushes. These activities are relatable and speak to many children, drawing them into the story, important in gaining readers’ attention. However, I take issue with the apparent imbalance between these “innocent” aspects of childhood and those causing alienation and uncertainty, which are equally real. Despite their initial “mysterious” connection, Lindy and Carola’s bond throughout the text is based on having the same backpack, living in the same city, liking to sing, and wanting to become airline attendants. That they are both “other,” and might share similar feelings of alienation, is not acknowledged. Indeed, it is only Lindy who is ever portrayed as “other” (though minimally) while Carola remains part of the dominant (white) social group.

Lindy’s otherness is racially based, indicating the one area of social discord in *Caraïbes sur Seine*. Yet this space of conflict, “race,” is only brought into the narrative midway through the text. Lindy recalls how at the beginning of the school year, several racist students questioned Carola about her friendship with a black girl: “‘Hé! Carola. Qu’est-ce que tu fous avec cette Black?’” (97). Carola’s response reveals a certain mindset among even anti-racist Whites: “[Carola] leur avait répondu que j’étais sa meilleure amie et qu’elle détestait les racistes. Quand on s’était retrouvées chez moi, Carola m’avait dit qu’elle s’en fichait de ma couleur et qu’on n’avait à parler de ça” (97). Despite Carola’s good intentions and her opposition to racism, her declaration of not caring about Lindy’s color and that one need not speak of it reveals both consciousness of

racial difference and at the same time a position of “color-blindness” or “color-evasion” (Frankenberg). First, her remark about not caring almost demonstrates a “superior” attitude. It is not that Carola consciously believes herself superior to Lindy, as she most certainly is trying to comfort and reassure her friend. Yet remarks such as these, typical of Carola throughout the text, reflect an underlying ideology emphasizing difference, and placing whites in a position of control. Here, it is Carola who “controls” the situation, deciding not to care about Lindy’s “race.” This decision also places Carola in a position of “color-blindness.” According to Ruth Frankenberg, not acknowledging “race” while emphasizing sameness is the “polite” language of “race” (142-44). She speaks specifically of white women, who separate selfhood from “race” and insist that what is “under the skin” is what truly matters (148). Yet as Frankenberg points out, within the discursive repertoire of “color-blindness”:

[...] people of color are “good” only insofar as their “coloredness” can be bracketed and ignored, and this bracketing is contingent on the ability or the decision [...] of a “noncolored” – or white – self. Color-blindness, despite the best intentions of its adherents, in this sense preserves the power structure inherent in essentialist racism (147).

Examining Carola’s behavior within this context it can be argued that Carola *decides* that Lindy’s “coloredness” is not important. She inadvertently perpetuates a hierarchy premised on racial difference, undermining to an extent her own good intentions.

Moreover, the absence of Lindy’s response to these racial slurs reestablishes Carola’s control over the situation, further solidifying the hierarchy. The potential consequences of Lindy’s silence for the reader, in particular the young black reader, are

devastating. This silence takes away the reader's voice, leaving him or her powerless when facing racist discourses, and without tools to deal with similar situations. The author, because she does not give voice to Lindy nor does she in any way contradict Carola's position, appears to either accept a racist ideology, or is unaware of the racist implications in a point of view such as Carola's.

The hierarchical relationship between Carola and Lindy (Carola as the voice of opposition to racism and the archetype of "white sensitivity," and Lindy as the mostly silent, subordinate product of an ideologically constructed hierarchy) is seen throughout the text. "Race" itself is conveyed in a manner consistent with the author's integration, only if partially, into colonial ideology, while experiences with alienation or internal exile are largely absent. However, there is one significant instance where Lindy is allowed an emotional response to racism. When her correspondence with the American boy Andrew abruptly ends, Lindy learns from his friend Tim, Carola's correspondent, that his silence is premised on the fact that: "*SHE IS BLACK*" (148). Tim tries to argue that Andrew is not really racist, but had thought he was corresponding with a "vraie Parisienne" (149), highlighting a constructed notion of nationality in which "race" obviously plays a part. For Andrew, "[i]l avait en tête une France toute blanche" (149). Frankenberg, when discussing a mother's dismissal or forgiveness of racist remarks by her son's Aunt Jean, points out that within a racist discourse, "Adults may be found 'not guilty' by reason of lack of intent" (146). Ignorance and goodness in other aspects of life are grounds for forgiving someone else's racist attitude, an argument clearly present in Tim's defense of his friend's racist behavior.

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As for Lindy, it is the first time in the text that she expresses emotion when confronted with racism: “J’avais encore ri un bon coup de la bêtise de Andrew et j’étais rentrée à la maison, la tête basse et le pas long” (150) Outwardly laughing it off, she feels the sting of Andrew’s ignorance. Nevertheless, Lindy remains quiet. She puts up a brave front, unwilling to reveal the hurt he has caused her. For the reader, this refusal to admit the effects of racism could be understood as the need to repress pain, or to absorb the shock of painful and unjust judgments. These ideas hold dangerous implications, as they promote the internalization of racist discourse. Additionally, Lindy’s undeveloped response and Pineau’s failure to point out more fully the injustice of Lindy’s experience blurs once again the author’s ideological position. While Lindy’s relationship with Andrew, and its abrupt end, is the one reference to racism provoking a response, it is far from empowering.

Carola and Lindy’s roles in colonial racial discourse tend to simplify our interpretation of Pineau’s position. The character Hamidou occupies a more ambiguous position, however, in which he is neither openly opposed nor subordinated to racism. Given his Senegalese roots and being born in France, this ambiguity represents the very ambiguity of his own identity. We might also acknowledge the parallel between Hamidou’s situation and that of Pineau: they are second-generation immigrants in France. This parallel complicates our interpretation of Pineau’s ideological position in this text, and makes her point of view regarding racial discourse decidedly less clear.

Hamidou’s admiration of black singers is apparent: “Les murs de sa chambre étaient recouverts de posters de chanteurs: Bob Marley, les Fugees, Michael Jackson, le groupe I AM...” (94). Hamidou’s musical idols are Blacks from around the world,

indicating at the very least a positive perspective of his “race.” Or perhaps this idolization reflects an essentialized conception of Blackness: he may accept a stereotype that all Blacks are good at music, just as another stereotype, for example, claims that all Asians are good at math. On the other hand, this essentialization may be construed as strategic, and used as a means of empowerment²⁹.

The maternal influence in Hamidou’s household implies a relationship between Hamidou and his country of origin, even though he was born in France: “La mère de Hamidou vivait en France depuis vingt ans. Elle n’avait jamais porté de vêtements achetés dans les magasins français. Elle faisait tout venir du Sénégal. C’était sa fierté” (95). Despite having lived in France for nearly twenty years, Hamidou’s mother refuses to become French, or “white,” a refusal embodied in her refusal to wear French clothing. Her sharp criticism of Lindy’s mother for doing so reinforces her own position in relation to her heritage and ancestry: “Dis plutôt qu’elle préfère s’habiller à l’occidentale! Elle crache sur ses origines africaines...” (95). Yet despite the strength of his mother’s convictions, Hamidou never defends or mentions his Senegalese heritage, indicating a sort of “in-between” space. He is not ashamed of the “black race,” demonstrated by the posters on his wall, nor does he maintain closeness with his ancestry, considering himself French above all else.

Hamidou’s response to Lindy’s experience with Andrew is a single line of comfort: “T’occupe, il y a des ignorants partout” (152). This statement, while brief, is significant, illustrating his awareness of racism as well as the ignorance behind it. A

²⁹ Marginalized groups have used essentialization as a means of empowerment or to achieve something. For example, the Black Panthers employed a sort of strategic essentialization when promoting concepts such as negritude or pan-Africanism. By minimizing cultural and national differences, they were more able to promote unity and notions of Black Pride.

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song Hamidou had rapped to Lindy when she arrived in France is brought to the reader's attention, revealing Hamidou's conception of life in France as a Black. Though its length prevents me from citing it in full, I have included several key verses:

Il y a de tout ici

Des bons et des méchants

[...]

Moi je viens d'Afrique

Toi des Antilles

Ici on est des Blacks

Point à la ligne

C'est pas méchant

Faut faire avec

[...]

Toi t'es une Black

Version originale

[...] (152-53)

In the first two lines, Hamidou references different viewpoints on "race." He does not condemn all whites as inherently bad, recognizing that among the "bad," there is some "good." In the following lines, "Moi je viens d'Afrique / Toi des Antilles," the one reference he makes to his ancestry, illustrates Hamidou's awareness of origin. His roots are African, Lindy's are Antillean. Yet he is also aware of France's negation of origin, apparent when he says "[i]ci on est des Blacks." He refers to people's categorization based strictly on "race," and the dismissal of culture and nationality. One is no longer

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Guadeloupean or Senegalese, but “Black.” Fanon has said that there awaits a rude awakening for black Antilleans arriving in France: “Or, c’est un nègre. Cela, [l’Antillais] s’en apercevra une fois en Europe, et quand on parlera de nègres il saura qu’il s’agit de lui aussi bien que du Sénégalais” (Fanon 120-21). Fanon refers to an Antillean’s perception of self as “white” and the discovery upon arrival in France that s/he too is indeed a “Black.” Hamidou speaks of the erasure of cultural and ethnic or national differences, while Fanon’s affirmation underscores French mentalities toward “race.”

Skipping to the last two lines, (“Toi t’es une Black / Version originale”) Hamidou correlates “authenticity” with coming directly from Africa or the Antilles. Because Lindy is from Guadeloupe, she has more direct ties with her heritage or ancestry, implying something Hamidou has lost. This notion of “authenticity” contrasts with what Fanon argues is whites’ perception of being an “authentic” Black. Where the white French, or western, population associated “authenticity” with “savagery,” Hamidou suggests that “authenticity” relates to one’s relationship with their ancestral ties. Yet claiming that Lindy is an “authentic” Black based on a “close” relationship with her roots is interesting and problematic. Nothing in Lindy’s character suggests a deep connection with her African ancestry or her native Guadeloupe. Moreover, her being from Guadeloupe undermines in itself her “authenticity” because Guadeloupean society is generally well assimilated, as is outlined in Fanon’s psychological analyses and other Guadeloupean writers’ accounts, such as that of Maryse Condé³⁰. On one hand, Hamidou negates the colonial correlation between Africa (or the Antilles) with savagery. On the other hand, he perpetuates an essentialization of “authentic” Africans or Antilleans, equally colonial in nature.

³⁰ See Condé’s autobiographical story *Le Cœur à rire et à pleurer*.

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Nevertheless, the two most problematic lines of Hamidou's song are "C'est pas méchant / Faut faire avec." He excuses the French for perceiving immigrants only in terms of their "race," believing that the French have no hostile intent. One must simply deal with their attitude. As with Tim, the white American defending his friend Andrew's racist behavior, Hamidou concedes that racism may be forgiven in the absence of ill intent, or the presence of general goodness. This defeatist attitude parallels the absence of Lindy's voice in the face of racism, and contributes to the voicelessness and disempowerment of non-white readers. This contribution is further solidified by Hamidou's mirroring of Carola: like her, he unwittingly helps maintain colonial racial discourse(s).

Hamidou's vague position – as seen in his awareness, negation, and dismissal of racism – makes vague his didactic role as well, both in relation to Lindy and the readership. Though he exhibits a certain amount of pride, self-awareness, and consciousness of social dynamics, important in situating him as a "role model," his acceptance or dismissal of racism undermines his efficacy at playing this role. The author's apparently positive intentions are betrayed by Hamidou's internalization of racial discourse. Clearly within Hamidou's character there is a tension between his Senegalese origin and his integration into French society, a situation quite probably experienced by the author. Yet his didactic inefficacy brings into question the potential counter-productivity of such a situation in terms of directing readers away from racist discourses.

Pineau did not take full advantage of Hamidou's status as a second-generation immigrant to address more thoroughly experiences of racial and cultural alienation³¹. He is presented as a well adjusted, popular, motivated kid who occasionally makes reference to his Blackness, but who experiences no racially or culturally-centered prejudice. Coupled with Lindy's problematic response (or lack thereof) in the face of racism as well as with Carola's "color-blindness" and position of control, Hamidou's attitude emphasizes the author's own problematic position with regard to "race."

This problematic position resurfaces when Lindy's father returns to France to help move his family back to Guadeloupe. After experiencing the text's one moment of racially based pain (the relationship with Andrew), Lindy returns to her native land. Recalling Ormerod's discussion of Césaire – a long stay of exile and alienation in France followed by a re-discovery of self and a "return" to one's roots – and Elizabeth Wilson's notion of "journey," it seems that structurally speaking Lindy has achieved this self-awareness and is ready to "return." She plainly asserts the impact her stay in France has had on her: "J'étais arrivée noire et je n'avais pas blanchi. A Noisy, j'étais devenue une Black" (164). She implies that "race" has shaped her, because she arrived "noire" and did not "blanchi" but rather became "Black." The parallel drawn between this text and the work of Césaire might lead us to assume that this statement refers to Negritude, implying pride. Yet nowhere in the text does Lindy respond to situations in a manner indicative of growing self-awareness or pride of this sort. Furthermore, the various

³¹ Alec Hargreaves explains that there exist in France lingering neo-colonial reflexes, which affect second-generation immigrants. Though most of these individuals see themselves as French, they often continue to be stigmatized by many "native" French because of their culture and/or heritage, causing inevitable experiences of alienation. While Hargreaves refers to Maghrebis in this particular essay, the racism toward all non-white peoples inscribed in colonial discourse makes his statement relevant to other non-white immigrants and their families.

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connotations associated with the word “Black” are generally derogatory in the text: racist remarks about Carola spending time with a “Black” or “Blackette”; the use of “Black” as an identifier instead of “Guadeloupean” or “Senegalese”³²; and Andrew’s disillusionment at discovering that “*SHE IS BLACK*”. These particular situations makes it seems that being “Black” is not a positive thing. Lindy’s assertion, rather than demonstrating self-discovery, demonstrates integration in colonial discourse. If there is a “lesson” to be found in Lindy’s sojourn in France, it is unclear, or at worst is undermined by an unconscious subscription to racist discourses.

Given Pineau’s inattention to the potential, and probably inevitable, difficulties of being a black immigrant in France, as well as the presence of underlying references to colonial racial discourse, makes one wonder whether her “lessons” are more effective not for black Antillean (or African, Maghrebien, and other non-white) children of immigrant families, but rather for white French children. The childhood activities she portrays reflect a life free of significant worries and focus on the more “innocent” aspects of childhood. One could argue that by portraying Lindy as a “normal” girl, adjusted to French culture, Pineau diminishes her exoticism, and thereby the exoticism of other immigrant children. The black child Lindy, as well as Hamidou, is really no different than any of the white children. She shares their interests and concerns, and is subject to many of the same social structures. The inclusion of racial conflict could be construed as instructive, demonstrating to a young white readership the injustice of racism. Moreover, Carola’s response to racism directed at Lindy speaks more to white children, suggesting

³² Again, this erasure of cultural and national differences could be understood in terms of strategic essentialization. However, the contradicting connotations of “Blackness” elsewhere conveyed undermine this possibility.

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the “proper” response to derogatory racial slurs, and encouraging them to “protect” their black peers.

In *Caraïbes sur Seine*, it indeed appears that Pineau in large part adopts a French perspective, despite the fact that many if not all her other texts reflect keen awareness of social ills. It is true that while numerous elements of the text suggest Pineau’s integration, at least to an extent, in colonial discourse, she does acknowledge racism’s presence. However, analyzing this text has revealed that an apparent and probably unaware adherence to colonial discourse has undermined Pineau’s potentially empowering representations of racist experiences. Intentions and entertainment value aside, this text holds potentially devastating consequences for the Antillean immigrant reader, whose actual experience(s) may be negated or over-simplified, and whose sense of self may be alienated by the text’s narrative.

As with *La Coulée d’or*, *Caraïbes sur Seine* highlights the author’s perspective on the relationship between racial discourse and identity. Though the latter text’s messages are often betrayed by unexamined assumptions and/or inexperience, it contains information vital for understanding identity formation among Antilleans. Pépin, whose perspective in the text is informed by experiences in a specifically Antillean geographical context, takes a more aggressive approach, illustrating to his young readers an inherent presence of racism and the negative consequences of adhering to a racist ideology. His messages are clear, his own ideas unquestioned. Pineau’s text, on the other hand, is meant to represent the perspective of an Antillean abroad, living as an immigrant and whose experiences with racist discourse differ from those had by individuals living in the Antilles. Though her well-meaning intentions are often apparent, Pineau’s relationship

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with French ideology tends to negatively impact those intentions. Despite any intended attempt to address racism's injustice or the difficulties immigrants face in France, Pineau's having been born and living in France appear to influence how her messages are conveyed: they become more or less ineffective.

Pépin and Pineau's differing perspectives, and the inconsistent portrayals of dealing with "race," may in part explain the difficulty in establishing a collective Antillean identity. Many of Pépin's and Pineau's readers will have experienced racism in one form or another. How these texts' protagonists deal with prejudice constitutes a "lesson," informing readers on how to deal with or understand their experiences. Differences in portraying such "lessons" – challenging or accepting racist discourse, for example – may foster confusion. The contradictory space where "Antillean identity" resides is passed down unaltered to future generations. Yet also to be acknowledged is that these two texts, *La Coulée d'or* and *Caraïbes sur Seine*, are targeted for a pre-teen/young adult readership, meaning that readers likely understand "race's" stigmatizing nature. In contrast, how might authors "instruct" the youngest readers, who are still developing awareness of "race"? This next text serves just such a purpose: its intended audience consists of children around five or six years old. The author, Alex Godard, portrays "race" and culture with yet another, different perspective.

In many societies, picture books provide a child's first literary encounter. Penni Cotton tells us: "The intended audiences for picture books are, by definition, relatively inexperienced and need to learn how to think about their world and how to see and understand themselves and others" (30). Jill May describes picture books as a training ground for dealing with everyday experiences (40). These books provide a space

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allowing very young individuals to absorb cultural structures and norms that will inform their personal and cultural identity. Through word and image, together creating layers of meaning, a child is confronted with representations of a social and cultural reality, sometimes achieved through fantasy and metaphor, which will affect how their perceptions of self and others develop. Cotton also points out that despite these texts' simplicity of word, picture books often convey important human issues and complex ideas (27-28). Such is the case with Guadeloupean author Alex Godard's³³ *La Forêt de Coeur-Bouliki*, which depicts the dream of a young white boy in love with his friend, a young black girl. I have chosen this particular picture book because of its strong racial undertones. The story, though entertaining and beautifully illustrated, represents to a degree a perspective reflecting Fanon's psychological analysis of Antilleans. The sympathetic portrayal of an interracial relationship and approving references to anti-colonialism are often overshadowed by the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, and the privileging of the white male character's voice. There exists a contradiction between Godard's intended message(s) and his unexamined assumptions.

We begin by examining the relationship between Sam and Mona, the two young protagonists. Though representing an interracial couple (Sam is white and Mona is black) attempts to overcome racial boundaries, the relationship's relatively patriarchal undertone puts it in proximity with colonial ideology, which emphasizes patriarchal assumptions between gender and "race"³⁴. The first image the reader encounters presents

³³ Alex Godard was born in 1965 on the island Marie-Galante (part of the Guadeloupe archipelago). His father was a "marin" who had hoped his child would follow suite. Godard, however, preferred drawing super heroes and even started a monthly comic, which was enjoyed by his friends. Finally in 1984 Godard left for France where he attended the school E. Cohl to learn comic art and illustration. He finally published his first illustrated stories in 1990 and 1992. In subsequent chapters we will explore more of Godard's books for children.

³⁴ See my discussion regarding M. Raymond and M. de la Clémentine in Pépin's *La Coulée d'or*.

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Sam and Mona facing each other on an even level, implying equality between the two characters³⁵. Yet the text, told from Sam's point of view³⁶, positions Mona as an exotic, black female: "Avec ses yeux de perles noires, Mona avait l'air d'une princesse" (8). While in itself this statement seems to reflect only admiration, its articulation by a white male about a black female reestablishes white men's exoticization of black women.

When the pair flees into the forest, they come upon a castle constructed of pink marble, guarded by two crocodile statues. First, this transition into a fantasy world degrades the interracial romance between Sam and Mona by negating its reality. Moreover, stereotypes of gender and "race" are brought to the forefront of their relationship. Mona, fearful of the statues, cautions Sam, warning him that where she comes from, crocodiles capture their prey by remaining as still as can be. She then mischievously suggests they throw stones to discover whether the crocodiles are in fact made of stone. Mona's comment here is her largest contribution in the story's narrative, and the author's presentation of her as mischievous ("Mona me regarda l'air malicieux" (12)) points to a sexist association of women with wickedness. Reinforcing Mona's sexist portrayal, the text's accompanying illustration shows her standing behind Sam, her hand on his shoulder (see Figure 1). He is the protector, putting himself between Mona and the potentially dangerous crocodiles. Not only does this posture represent patriarchal ideology where the helpless female must depend on males for protection, but because the male is white and the female black readers confront the colonialist notion that white men

³⁵ As Cotton tells us, positioning and/or size in images may denote the status, emotions and relationship between characters (57).

³⁶ That the story is told from the point of view of a white male is both revealing and problematic. In the first place, it could be argued that Godard sees himself as "white" or accepts the racist notion that proclaims the superiority of "whiteness." In addition, the privileging of a white male voice and the near total absence of the female character's voice (a black female) perpetuates racial and gender-based stereotypes as well as reveals a potential patriarchal frame of mind on the part of the author.

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must protect or “save” black women from “savagery,” either their own or that of black men (here represented allegorically by the crocodiles).

The following scene shows that this protection extends from physical to moral. The crocodile, who is indeed alive, explains that the castle is empty since its owners have died and that the children should seize their chance to claim the castle and its riches as their own. Sam, playing the role of reasoning, pulls Mona from temptation, her eyes shining as the crocodile speaks: “Plus le crocodile parlait, plus les yeux de Mona brillaient. – Non!...Non merci! Ai-je dit en saisissant Mona par le bras” (14). Mona is again presented with negative attributes associated with women in sexist discourse: in this case greediness. Sam must save her from herself: he pulls her away into the forest where he tries to assess their situation, continuing to play the white and male hero.

At this point in the narrative Mona disappears, returning only near the book’s end. Sam, whose adventures during Mona’s absence will be discussed shortly, finds her crouched and crying in the corner of a cage where he too has been imprisoned. Despite their mutual fear, the image portrays Sam bravely standing, looking for a way out while his beloved Mona remains sitting behind him, helpless. Their positioning, where Sam, because he is standing, remains at a higher level than Mona, also points to inequality (see Figure 2). Sam’s height and implied bravery indicates his superiority both as a male and even more so as a white male. His role as protector is re-enforced when he frees them by using a magical phrase: “LIBERTE GRI-GRIIII!” (28)

Sam then awakes from his dream, learns Mona is downstairs waiting to walk to school, and finds clarity. Brushing his teeth, a ghostly apparition of Mona in his mirror, Sam decides he is going to tell her how he feels: “Finalement, cette journée ne

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commençait pas si mal! Aujourd'hui, c'est décidé: je dirai à Mona que je l'aime. Que je l'aime de tout mon cœur et que mon amour vaut bien plus qu'un château de marbre rose" (35). This touching scene hints at the possibility of traversing racial boundaries with love, leading us to the story's final illustration.

This illustration, with no accompanying words, shows Mona and Sam holding hands, looking out at the vast, dense park through which they will walk. The idealized image speaks for itself, and the reader understands what Godard wished to convey: the possibility of a relationship unfettered by prejudice. Yet certain underlying, probably unconscious values undermine this desire and instead the relationship perpetuates patriarchal, colonial stereotypes. Sam is the white hero who 1) puts himself between harm and his distressed, black female companion, 2) guides her away from temptation thus saving her soul, and 3) takes on the role of responsibility in their relationship. Mona on the other hand, speaks only three times in the narrative, nearly eliminating her voice as both a female and a black individual. The illustrations consistently present her as weak, frightened, and helpless. This is not to speak of her absence throughout the book's entire middle section, which is what I wish to discuss here. Sam's adventures sans Mona solidify his position as a white hero and at the same time reveal an incongruous attempt at promoting anti-colonialist values.

As we shall see, Sam's encounters and experiences throughout this section of the book appear to criticize attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs consistent with colonial and imperial ideology. For instance, the moment Mona disappears from the text, Sam hears a familiar voice calling him. Following this voice, he discovers a pair of pelicans playing cards. One of the birds, a Monsieur De Bec-en-Sabot, is a marabout, referencing African

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and Caribbean cultures. He offers Sam various services such as potions to grow taller, to fall in love, or to forget³⁷. He also proposes to make Sam rich for the small sum of five hundred fifty-five dollars and fifty-five cents. Sam's response: "Payer pour devenir riche? C'était bizarre!" (18). This cultural reference to the marabout and his role in society is important as far as transmitting and maintaining cultural knowledge among younger generations. Yet Godard's representation of the marabout and Sam's incredulous response reflects a negative perspective regarding this cultural aspect. At first glance, Bec-en-Sabot is seen as corrupt, his plausibility compromised by Sam's critical questioning.

The marabout makes an important and revealing point, however, when Sam refuses these offers, wanting only to leave the forest: "Ah! la liberté! s'exclama le marabout. C'est une denrée bien rare de nos jours" (18). On one hand, this statement illustrates Bec-en-Sabot's (and thus Godard's) awareness of colonial and imperial power. Freedom's "rarity" can be understood as one's being "enslaved" by the various tools of colonial/imperialist authority: the media, the economy, the educational system. On the other hand, because it is also implied that freedom is something a person can "purchase," like potions to grow taller or to fall in love, the marabout becomes a tool of that authority. He can control an individual's freedom. It begins to become evident here that Godard, in this particular scene of the book, paints an ironic portrait, where oppressed and oppressor switch identities. The supposedly "bad" African or Creole culture takes on

³⁷ This notion of "forgetting" is also important in Caribbean culture. Because of slavery, a desire to forget the horrors and dehumanization associated with it, and the imposition of French History, there is a lack of or gap in Antillean collective memory. The brief reference here seems intentional, and its being directed at a white boy is somewhat ironic.

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the inherent corruption and greed of capitalist societies. As Sam's experience with Bec-en-Sabot continues, this irony becomes even more apparent.

The pelican-marabout gives Sam a necklace, supposedly to bring luck, and the phrase "LIBERTE GRI-GRI," which, as we have seen, Sam would later use to free Mona and himself. The necklace, however, leads to circumstances alluding (again) to the marabout's corruption and his oppressive role. As soon as Sam puts it around his neck, the bird calls loudly, bringing hunters who mercilessly chase the boy through the forest with bows and arrows. The irony of the situation is apparent: the white "hero" becomes the hunted in a scene reminiscent of the slave era, when slave escapees were brutally pursued. Again, Sam and Bec-en-Sabot play roles opposite of those prescribed by colonial ideology. Yet Sam's betrayal can also be construed as further emphasizing the falsity of the marabout and thus of African cultures. While it appears that Godard intended to use the irony as a means of criticizing colonial/imperial power, the sympathetic portrayal of Sam in the text as a whole undermines its efficacy. While Godard does not necessarily subscribe to the western world's construction of African and Creole cultures, supported in his ironic portrayal of the relationship between western and non-western characters, there is nevertheless a presence of colonial ideology, rendering this ironic representation more problematic than anything else. Godard's unwitting acceptance of racial discourse within that ideology is seen repeatedly, and this scene is no exception.

Sam's experience as the hunted does not end until the necklace breaks, nullifying the marabout's "black magic." The ironic role reversal between Sam and Bec-en-Sabot ends, and Sam takes on the role of a "hero" revered in Antillean history, Victor

Schoelcher³⁸. After the hunters have disappeared, Sam finds a golden cage filled with colorful birds, their voices silenced. These silent prisoners make a clear metaphorical reference to oppression as well as to slavery. Godard again demonstrates awareness of injustices confronted by non-white peoples who have been silenced and imprisoned, either physically or ideologically. Yet the positioning of Sam outside the cage and his role in the birds' freedom are problematic, underscoring the author's unexamined assumptions. By ascribing the role of liberator to Sam, Godard encourages readers to believe in the heroism of the "white race": Sam, and thus the white male, has ultimate power over the destinies of others. Sam's intolerance of the birds' imprisonment and his role in their freedom mimic, in metaphorical form, Schoelcher's own actions at the time of abolition in the nineteenth century. This scene is significant in that it maintains Schoelcher's heroism in the Antillean collectivity, and places the white male (once again) in a dominant, powerful position.

However, in another ironic twist, Sam's power is challenged by a figure evidently representing racist, colonial ideology. A large harpy, considerably larger than Sam, appears and says of the birds' liberation: "- Qui a ouvert la cage de ces misérables oiseaux bariolés?" (27) The harpy had imprisoned the "wretched colored birds," and is infuriated by their unexpected freedom. The illustration shows the harpy filling the entire page, while Sam remains a tiny, hidden face in the bottom right hand corner. This bird and his menacing position reflect the power and domination of western/colonial superpowers. Despite Sam's heroism in liberating the oppressed and silenced, he is

³⁸ It is almost as though Godard presents the role reversal between the two characters as improper, since Sam takes his "rightful" place as a hero, a role he emulates throughout the text with the exception of the scene with Bec-en-Sabot. The power exchange is seen as a spell, which was broken with the necklace. It seems this series of events contradicts Godard's use of irony as a means of criticism, underscoring his unexamined ideological position.

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victimized by this overwhelming threat. He finds himself suddenly in the cage where the birds had been, which may be interpreted as the victimization of white abolitionists who contradicted social norms to bring “justice” to the “colored” populations. Sam nevertheless prevails, as it is at this moment that he is reunited with Mona and succeeds at freeing them both from their bondage. It seems Godard’s intent in this particular scene was to; 1) illustrate the relationship between “good” and “evil” (Sam representing “good” as he frees the birds and because of his “goodness,” he defeated the harpy), and 2) associate “evil” with those who oppress and enslave. Yet while Godard acknowledges colonialism’s injustice, the fact that Sam remains the hero, saving not only the birds but himself and Mona as well, problematizes these “lessons.” The underlying presence of colonial ideology and racial discourse undermines their true aversive potential for educating children. The white male is the courageous, cunning, and intelligent rescuer while the “others” remain helpless and completely dependant on his ability to free them.

Contradictions between Godard’s intentions and his unexamined assumptions appear throughout the text. The “idealized” representation of an interracial relationship is undermined by patriarchal imagery, the absence of the female voice, and the perpetuation of “white” discourse regarding black women. African and Creole cultures are inadvertently degraded, despite their ironic portrayal with regard to western discourses. Messages against oppression, enslavement, and colonialism conflict with the racial discourse conveyed. For young readers, both black and white, who are learning how to think about “race,” the potential consequences are serious. Instead of fostering a true breakdown of oppressive racial/cultural discourses, this text tends to solidify them.

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As with the previous two texts discussed in this chapter (*La Coulée d'or*, *Caraïbes sur Seine*), *La Forêt de Coeur-Bouliki* contributes to developing an Antillean child's sense of self with relation to his or her "race." Yet as I have shown, the three authors' perspectives, informed by their respective ideological positions, differ, sometimes significantly. Together, their ideological diversity reflects the Antilles' current situation. However, in terms of directing Antillean children away from a racial discourse fostering feelings of alienation, inadequacy, and/or inferiority, these texts do not constitute a collective effort. Pépin's text was the only one vehemently opposing Antilleans' assimilation to French culture and ideology. The other two authors, Pineau and Godard, did not seem able to challenge effectively colonial racial discourse, as their own ideological stances, though to different degrees, prevented it. For children then, self-definition may remain difficult, as they confront on one hand militantly anti-racist discourse (Pépin) and on the other, a "utopian" existence devoid of true conflict (Pineau), dismissing the reader's own experiences of alienation, or a patriarchal and in essence colonial portrayal of interracial and gender relations (Godard). The hope of developing a discourse in Antillean societies fostering self-respect and a rejection of racist hierarchies, the seed of which would need to be planted in future generations, appears dim, though certainly not impossible. The subsequent chapters will examine various other discursive elements of the literature that may affect a child's perception of self, society, and others. This will allow us to better judge or understand this literature's full potential in challenging, perpetuating, or appropriating colonial ideology within the Antillean collectivity.

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CHAPTER 2

CLASS DIVISION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Colonialism and its supporting ideologies saturate individuals' perspectives as well as many of postcolonial societies' dominating social structures. In the Antilles, where a relationship of dominance and dependence with France persists, perspective and social structure have combined, creating a system of socio-economic stratification mirroring colonialism itself. The wealthy's exploitation of the Antillean poor is highly reminiscent of the colonizer exploiting the colonized.¹ Class division and economically based prejudice in these societies are visibly present. The wealthy maintain their "superiority" by exerting power over those unable to defend themselves, or who live in such desperate circumstances that they have no choice but to accept their own exploitation. Ironically, this system mimics the relationship between the Antilles and France, as the latter continues to exert over the former its cultural, political, and economic power. While France and its imposed ideology continue to dominate, a cycle of exploitation and prejudice will continue on both levels, unless those Antilleans who will someday lead their societies and influence prevalent discourses are socialized to challenge that ideology and the prejudice it fosters. Said has explained: "Opposition to a dominant structure arises out of a perceived [...] awareness [...] that, for example, certain of its policies are wrong" (*Culture* 240). Children's literature, with its normalizing and didactic effect, can help Antillean children understand what is "wrong" in their societies. The awareness fostered through literature may encourage these youths to question the dominant social structures perpetuating prejudice and inequalities. Guadeloupean authors

¹It appears that the power struggle and exploitation fostered through colonialism has been absorbed into the postcolonial Antillean social structures, which will be seen in my discussion of the past and current social situations in the Antilles and France.

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Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau have written several young adult novels² dealing with the issues raised above, serving to influence young Antillean readers' attitudes toward class-conscious ideologies. Providing realistic representations of how Antillean societies have adopted alienating and exploitative social systems, Condé and Pineau attempt to develop awareness and compassion in Antillean youths. Addressing issues such as prejudice against immigrants, the bourgeois role in stratification, and the political role in maintaining class division, these texts offer young readers insight into the ills plaguing their societies. Important questions are raised: what could force a young Haitian girl to leave her family and risk everything for an uncertain future? How do the attitudes and lifestyle of a black bourgeois child help perpetuate socio-economic stratification? How does a "ghetto" child cope with the injustices of poverty and the domination of the upper classes? Most importantly, how does exposing child readers to these scenarios challenge current practices fostering inequality? How might raising awareness, if that is the authors' intent, improve society? Are the messages meant to affect the individual reader, society as a whole, or both? Examining Condé's and Pineau's three young adult novels will reveal the significance of presenting socio-economic realities to Antillean children, and how these authors make a statement about where they wish their societies to go.

In the previous chapter, we saw how "race" fosters feelings of inferiority and a desire to assimilate, both culturally and physically, to metropolitan France. The hierarchy correlating a person's "superiority" with his or her appearance may be internalized, leading to complicated and often contradictory senses of self. In the literature, this internalization is seen in several characters, and the hierarchy, at times, appears unwittingly perpetuated by several of the authors. For young readers, the

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presence of contradictory and sometimes racist representations in the books they read is problematic. Children, through continual exposure to media advancing colonial and racist discourses, are still in many respects socialized into a pattern of self-negation or self-hatred. Michel Giraud, reiterating Fanon's theories of Antillean children's socialization, tells us: "From early childhood, young Martinicans are invited by the strip cartoons they read, the films they watch and the stereotypes which prevail in their social environment to accept this identification" (78). They are invited to identify with the ideal (the "white race") in order to move up in the social hierarchy. As we saw in the previous chapter, however, such attempts at "becoming white" are generally futile, as assimilation is shown to mask, or even exacerbate social inequalities. At the same time, Giraud points out that a black person may be called "white" if he possesses a recognized social position, since money, education, and social success have a whitening effect (79). Yet this assertion has a direct correlation with socio-economic status and colonialism. Social success is limited to a select few privileged by the system, and who are given the opportunity, because of wealth and/or "race," to access the type of education needed to obtain a recognized social position. What of those individuals who are not only stigmatized by their "race," but also by their poverty? The emergence of a black bourgeoisie in tandem with the educational system³ has further complicated (and continues to complicate) the racial hierarchy, alienating the poor non-white population, and fostering stark economic division that does not always correspond with racial division.

³Only those black children who were able to attend secondary school were able to transcend their social position, as it instilled in them the proper "values" (metropolitan French values) and allowed them to pursue more economically sound positions. Eventually, the educated black population became an elite black bourgeoisie.

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The educational system in the Antilles fostered division along lines of “race” and of economic class. For instance, schools designed specifically for the working class, comprised primarily of Blacks but also of poor Whites and *Mûlatres*, promoted an education “appropriate” to their status. Poor children, considered within society to be “inferior” or “unworthy” of holding the more prestigious jobs, were educated for positions perpetuating class inequalities and division. These children were prevented from climbing socially because their experiences in the school system destined them to remain in poverty. The *Ouvroir pour les jeunes filles*, for example, established in Fort-de-France, provided young working class girls with tools to secure a position appropriate to their station:

Destinées à embrasser plus tard les professions d’ouvrières, de bonnes d’enfants, de domestiques, les jeunes filles admises dans cet établissement sont principalement affectées à des travaux d’aiguille, aux soins du ménage, à la cuisine, à la buanderie, au repassage. Une heure seulement [...] est consacrée à l’instruction religieuse et à la lecture. (Jos 83)

These girls were not taught geography, writing, math, and other such subjects. Instead they were taught how to fill positions reestablishing their social “inferiority” and contributing to the reproduction of poverty and social stratification. The problem here is twofold: inequalities are fostered not only by economic status, but by gender as well. Already disadvantaged by sexist discourses, the “inferiority” of the girls attending schools such as the *Ouvroir pour les jeunes filles* is solidified. They are female, often non-white, and, essentially, uneducated, putting them at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The establishment of schools such as the *Ouvroir pour les jeunes filles*

illustrates in part how the complex system of hierarchies in Antillean societies is created and maintained. We also see it in other sectors of society – plantations for example. On plantations, children had difficulty accessing education because, despite the obligatory elementary level education, the demand for child labor in this sector remained strong. In addition, poverty prevented some parents from sending their children to secondary schools, where they would have received an education allowing them to climb socially. It is not ideology alone encouraging prejudiced discourses, but ideology in practice within the social structures – structures where the population is given little opportunity to break out of the constraints imposed on them. Whether the children are girls, needed for child labor, or just extremely poor, the social structures, particularly the educational system, reproduce a system of inequalities and discrimination.⁴

Michel S. Laguerre tells us: “[...] the school legitimises the values that sustain power relations in society and produces the individuals to fill the positions that sustain those power positions” (14). In other words, the school system reproduces class relations, as it “selects and filters the future leaders of society through rules of admissions, rules of performances, rules of qualifications, and rules of etiquettes” (14). The ideology fostering elitism is normalized through curriculum and administration, made apparent with the establishment of the “ghetto” school. Poor children living in either inner city slums or peripheral migrant neighborhoods attend a school built specifically for them – the urban poor. As Laguerre points out, this practice is intended to prevent these children of “inferior” status from disrupting or interfering with the

⁴For over one hundred years, discrimination in the educational system produced social division. Not until 1975 were all Martinican children between eleven and eighteen required to attend secondary school without discrimination. Unfortunately, the sudden grouping of children who had thus far received different types, not to mention unequal quality of education, created more problems than it solved (Jos 365-67)

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education of bourgeois children (44). This systematic exclusion of poor children from good schools explains in part why even today youths of the poorer classes remain severely under-educated.

According to the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques* (INSEE), 44% of the Antillean population in 1999 between 16 and 29 were educated (though it is not specified to what level), while nearly one half of the population 30 and older had no diploma. According to the INSEE, several factors determine the success rate of young Antilleans in the educational system, such as language and parents' education, yet it does not make a correlation between income and education: the "niveau d'études du chef de ménage joue un rôle primordial, notamment hors scolarité obligatoire: plus le niveau atteint par les parents est élevé, plus les taux de scolarisation des enfants sont élevés" (Parment 19). In addition, "les enfants issus d'un ménage francophone (dont le chef est Français ou Haïtien de naissance) ont des taux supérieurs à ceux des enfants issus d'un ménage non francophone (dont le chef est Surinamais ou Brésilien de naissance)" (Parment 19). Despite the INSEE's failure to link education with wealth or poverty, the reasons they do give for success and failure rates are easily related to economic inequalities and cultural barriers. First, if the parents' level of education is indicative of a child's success in school, or how far s/he will go, consider that over the centuries many young Antilleans were denied an education beyond the elementary level, as the parents lacked the financial means to send their children to secondary schools. Generation after generation would have been caught in a cycle of poverty and lack of education. In addition, given that many immigrants to the Antilles are poor, often forcing the children to attend "ghetto" schools, and given the euro-centric

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nature of the educational system (the official language and culture being French), it is apparent that immigrants are immediately disadvantaged. In either case, without a solid education, the possibility for gainful employment diminishes, and once again we see that the poor are kept poor via social institutions.

The disparities in success in the school system are mirrored on a larger scale with relation to the metropole. According to the French ministry of education, great efforts are made to ensure that all citizens of France receive equal access to education: “Il s'agit de permettre à tous les élèves l'acquisition des savoirs, la construction d'une culture commune, l'éducation à la citoyenneté et la formation en vue de l'insertion professionnelle.”⁵ The *éducation prioritaire* was established to better guarantee that all youth benefits from a solid education. Yet in general, Antilleans remain less *scolarisés* than those living in metropolitan France. Today, both in France and its departments (DOM), children between 6 and 16 are required to attend school, yet the levels of success with regard to the BAC are inconsistent between France and the Antilles. For instance, in 2005 the INSEE reported that 73.8% of students in Guadeloupe taking the general BAC passed, while in France, that number was considerably higher, with a passing rate of 84.1%. Additionally, the number of students pursuing *études supérieures* was higher in France than in the Antilles, with approximately seven out of ten Antilleans and eight out of ten French youths between 19 and 24 continuing with higher education. These numbers demonstrate how the educational system maintains inequalities, not only within Antillean societies, but between the Antilles and France. By imposing a euro-centric curriculum and by “forcing” many Antillean students to come to France for their higher

⁵This quote is found on the INSEE website in a section discussing the *éducation prioritaire*: www.education.gouv.fr/syst/education_prioritaire.htm

education (more opportunities are available), the Antilles are kept both subordinate and dependent on their “former” colonizer.

It is important and even ironic, however, that both authors discussed in this chapter spent a large portion of their lives outside the Antilles, and pursued an education in France. Superficially, these women’s paths exemplify that taken by many privileged Antilleans, leading many of these individuals to adopt euro-centric perspectives. Yet instead of embracing ideological assimilation, both women go on to criticize in many ways the relationship between France and the Antilles, as well as the impact of that relationship on Antillean social structures, which we see in their young adult novels. Ironically, their privilege has allowed these women to see past the façade of French “superiority.”⁶ In their texts to be discussed here, Condé and Pineau focus largely on social inequalities, particularly in relation to economic class. It is therefore necessary to first discuss the conditions faced by the poor and their relationships with the wealthy, as this contextual understanding aids in appreciating the authors’ intended “lessons” in their works.

After abolition in 1848, three general waves of migrants from rural areas and eventually immigrants from neighboring islands flocked to the outskirts of urban cities, such as Point-à-Pitre and Fort-de-France. These quickly developing peripheral neighborhoods, which Nicolas Rey calls “villes spontanées” and Laguerre refers to as “squatter settlements,” came to resemble an inundation of HLM type housing and shantytowns. These areas, having arisen from the illegal occupancy of public or private land, are makeshift neighborhoods existing in the physical margins of the city, and are

⁶See Condé’s collection of autobiographical stories in *Le Coeur à rire et à pleurer*, and *Une Enfance outremer* provides some insight into Pineau’s childhood.

breeding grounds for disease as well as a source of votes for greedy politicians (Laguette 26-27). Inhabitants live in shacks built with any materials available and are either owned or rented, depending on one's economic ability. As these neighborhoods became increasingly occupied, the government began to "modernize" them by providing basic necessities such as running water and electricity. This improvement led to the government's attempt to "integrate" peripheral neighborhoods into the city landscape. Yet, as Laguette makes clear,

This integration effort is in conformity with the city's strategy of helping the squatter settlements as well as the slums to reproduce themselves as functional units within the city, as marginal neighbourhoods, and as dependent on the dominant sector of society. [...] Integration is a case of engineering spatial inequality and reproducing poverty by design, however unconscious it may be. (44)

Laguette speaks here not only of peripheral neighborhoods, but also of inner-city slums, which have existed considerably longer than "squatter settlements." Slums are the traditional centers of urban poverty, products of a history of dependent relationships between the poor and the local bourgeoisie, and the exploitation of those living in these areas has been a constant throughout time (Laguette 29). Both inner-city slums and peripheral neighborhoods exemplify how the poor are perpetually stigmatized and trapped within the lower classes:

The slum or the squatter settlement reproduces poverty because the people in its midst suffer from both unemployment and underemployment. [...] [B]ecause the state either does not care much about the poor who live

there or does not translate its concern into a genuine and sustained effort to eradicate the causes of the slum. [...] [B]ecause the state fails to help them escape from the situation. (48)

In other words, the poor are kept poor by circumstances dictated by the dominant powers.

The rate of unemployment in the Antilles, particularly in comparison with metropolitan France, further illustrates the maintenance of class stratification. In 2004, according to the INSEE, 22.4% of the active population in Martinique and 24.6% in Guadeloupe were unemployed. Most profoundly touched in these numbers were those under 30, with 39.8% and 43% unemployed in Martinique and Guadeloupe respectively. This is in comparison with a 9.9% overall unemployment rate in metropolitan France, while those between 20 and 24 experienced a 22% rate and for those between 25 and 29, a 12.9% rate. The disparity between France and its Antillean departments extends further into matters of salary and social assistance. In 1999, 15% of the salaried Antillo-Guyane population was receiving the national minimum wage (le SMIC), while in France that number was only 6%. *Allocations familiales*, in the same year, were distributed to 15% of the population in Martinique and 17% in Guadeloupe, while to only 12% in France. The *Revenu Minimum d'Insertion* (RMI), or what might be referred to as welfare, was distributed to approximately 11% of the population in Martinique, 12% in Guadeloupe, and 2.3% in France. Essentially, these figures illustrate that conditions in the Antilles are considerably less affluent than in the metropole. Jean-Paul Eluther argues that social security fosters a perpetuation of this situation because unemployment benefits are higher than the wages of available jobs (52). First, this assumption places blame on the Antillean population, labeling them as lazy or greedy. Moreover, many individuals who

remain unemployed are receiving the RMI, putting them in a precarious position that almost inevitably prevents them from ever escaping their circumstances. Delile Diman-Antenor points out: “Peu d’entrants, assez peu de sortants, mais beaucoup de ‘permanents’. Environ 85% des rmistes recensés à une date donnée, le sont depuis plus de six mois. [...] Une explication de cet état de fait se lit dans le parcours social des bénéficiaires. L’origine modeste des rmistes antillais ne fait aucun doute, qu’ils viennent de la terre ou du monde ouvrier” (26). Many of those accepting the RMI are of the working, poorer classes to begin with, and as such tend to have lower qualifications making them less “employable” as it were. “Six allocataires sur dix sont sortis du système scolaire avec au plus le niveau de la quatrième, en Guadeloupe (niveau VI). Autant dire que leurs chances d’insertion par le marché du travail sont maigres. [...] Autre constat, peu de rmistes ont un niveau proche du bac ou supérieur. C’est la preuve, a contrario, qu’un bon niveau de formation garantit bien contre la grande précarité” (Diman-Antenor 27). The problem of unemployment and underemployment returns to the fundamental question of education. The poor, systematically excluded from the benefits of higher education (with some exceptions), are destined for menial, low-paying, and exploitative jobs. Should they lose their jobs, and receive the RMI, their chances of social ascension are essentially eliminated.

The state, through its establishment of “ghetto schools” and its “integration” of slums and peripheral neighborhoods, appears complacent with its role in the reproduction of poverty. Though Eluther argues that social security may in some cases encourage unemployment, and while the percentage of the Antillean population receiving social assistance is greater than in France, there appears to be a lack of assistance to families

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and individuals living in poor urban areas. Rey describes a visit to several peripheral neighborhoods in 1983, such as Canal Alaric, Cour Zamia, and Lacroix, where he witnessed the misery experienced by the poor, especially of immigrant status, and their neglect by the State:

[...] des habitants par manque de moyens ne se soignent pas et ils n'ont pas non plus les moyens de réparer leur case tombant petit à petit en ruine. A la cour Zamia, j'ai rencontré un vieillard, sourd et malade, qui habite une telle maison. L'assistance sociale ne le prend pas suffisamment en charge et il ne mange pas tous les jours à sa faim. [...] J'ai rencontré un vieil homme qui avait été renversé par une voiture [...]; on l'a amputé d'une jambe. Vivant dans un taudis (pièce de 3 m sur 3 où règne une odeur de putréfaction) et insuffisamment pris en charge par la Sécurité Sociale [...], il a dû perdre depuis sa deuxième jambe, tant la gangrène qui la rongait semblait avancée. (169-70)

As Rey states, "l'Etat républicain français" is not fulfilling its role or duty toward these communities, obligating many of their inhabitants to survive in conditions that are "extrêmement pénibles" (170). Fred Reno explains that approximately one half of the local budget in the Antilles is spent in social aid and personnel expenses, hinting at an adequate amount of assistance, though he makes no mention of what percentage goes to each of those two sectors (38). He does, however, acknowledge conflict between the people and political actors (45), which may result from the government's failure to assist the urban poor in escaping their extreme hardship. Laguerre in fact blames the state's "aid" as a primary factor in perpetuating poverty, though not in the same manner as

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Eluther. He tells us: “State interventions through various allocations tend to maintain the poor at the threshold of poverty” (48). We are reminded of the RMI, trapping many of the poor or working class in a perpetual state of unemployment and poverty. While “assistance” is provided, it is not nearly enough to help the poor escape their miserable circumstances.

The “ghetto” indeed reflects exclusion: “Le ghetto est le reflet sur l’espace des exclusions [...]” (Rey 143). According to Laguerre, “The urban space is divided up into areas of inequality where the poor have access neither in their home nor in the neighbourhoods to the resources that could encourage their upward mobility” (47). People living in these areas are marginalized, living outside the metropolitan French standards of “normal” or “civilized” society, a situation cemented by excluding the poor from that society. Yet despite their marginalization by upper classes, within these urban areas of poverty one finds solidarity. Suspicious of thieves, “Babylones⁷,” and government workers, inhabitants of these areas exercise a certain social code protecting against those whose intentions may be dangerous. Scrutiny of unfamiliar faces and harsh interrogations constitute a form of defense, both of oneself and of one’s space. In many ways, inhabitants maintain more control over their neighborhoods than do the police, whose presence is generally limited. Still, slums and peripheral neighborhoods tend to be plagued by violence and drug trafficking, and while the inhabitants of these areas band together when confronted by outside threats, everyone is a potential danger: “Si l’on s’entraide entre habitants pour se protéger contre ‘l’extérieur’, en revanche à l’intérieur du quartier entre voisins on peut aller jusqu’à se tuer. [...] Le voisin qui empiète sur

⁷ “Babylones” refers to Babylonia of the Old Testament, which represents a system perpetuating the state of submission among Blacks and other oppressed peoples in general (Rey 35).

notre espace privé en y disposant par exemple une tôle peut être tué pour ça” (Rey 193). Even neighbors pose a potential threat to one’s wellbeing. Living in these poverty stricken urban zones clearly takes not only an economic and physical toll on inhabitants, but a psychological one as well.

One may wonder how this cycle of dependence and reproduction of extreme poverty may be counteracted, particularly through literature and even more so through literature written by authors of the bourgeois milieu. How can reading a book have any effect on something so concrete as class division or poverty? According to the Weberian tradition, poverty reflects social domination, which can be solved through social reforms and better integration of the poor into societies (Laguerre 11). Many social scientists who write about the poor hope to find solutions such as creative urban policies by identifying causal problems (Laguerre 7). Perhaps Marx’s stance on economic inequality, however, remains the most relevant for this study of the relationship between children’s literature and the Antillean urban poor: “[...] Marx argued that it is not enough to philosophise about the issue; what matters is to transform the societal reality, or at the very least, to explain the problem in such a way that policies for change can be put forward and implemented” (Laguerre 10). Talking about poverty is not enough: something must be done to enable a transformation. Given the socializing nature of children’s literature, it becomes a valuable tool for such enablement. I have previously discussed how children are greatly influenced by what they read, absorbing the various lessons and attitudes portrayed in the texts (Adams 107). Furthermore, the authority of print can either legitimize or challenge prevalent attitudes found in societies (Zimet 109). Representing socio-economic stratification to children in a comprehensible and relatable

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fashion will in some way affect young readers' attitudes. It should be understood that most readers of Condé and Pineau's texts will be predominantly of the middle and upper classes, since the literature is more readily available to these children. This is significant considering that the educational system's structure destines these same children to be those who make future social and political policy. How the authors portray socio-economic stratification may influence whether current inequalities facing the Antillean poor will persist.

Jill May tells us: "Authors of realistic fiction want their readers to live through the experiences in their books and see the problems another person or culture faces. [...] Good authors hope that the narrator's voice will haunt the reader enough to cause a second reading [and a new] interpretation to the questions their stories pose" (137). Some might argue that Condé's and Pineau's middle or upper class backgrounds hinder their ability to "accurately" convey hardships faced by the poor, and instead their messages will continue fostering the division they attempt to eliminate. Yet both authors have shown themselves in other works to be aware of the injustices present in Antillean societies and in the French-Antillean relationship. Moreover, because the target audience consists mostly of upper class children, the authors' privileged childhoods may enable them to more effectively create relatable characters or "lessons," which we see in their young adult novels.

The first text, *Rêves amers* (2001) by Condé, provides young readers with a detailed, often disturbing portrayal of life for a young, poverty-stricken Haitian girl, Rose-Aimée, whose attempts to find a better life end in tragedy. For Antillean children, this story is important because Haitian immigrants in Guadeloupe as well as in

Martinique and French Guyana are often regarded with great disdain.⁸ Lydie Moudileno tells us:

Decades of cultural, political, and economic repression have led to successive waves of emigration towards North America and other Caribbean islands, including the French D.O.M. [...] the images of Haitians abroad takes on an increasingly negative tenor [as] media representations fix the Haitian people in the collective mind as illegal immigrants, boat people, and bloodthirsty rulers, when they aren't AIDS carriers. (241)

Condé herself says: "In Guadeloupe, they are primarily low-paid migrant workers who work in the sugarcane fields and in private gardens. Therefore, the local population despises them" ("Pan-Africanism" 57). Condé's exposing young readers to Rose-Aimé's story is intended to dissolve prejudice against these immigrants, and promote awareness and tolerance as well as sympathy for the plight of those far less fortunate. As Condé points out: "[...] in the schools of Guadeloupe and Martinique, our kids sit next to the children of Haitian immigrants without understanding them. In fact, they are filled with contempt that they learned from their parents" ("Pan-Africanism" 58). For her, writing a book such as *Rêves amers* (initially published in 1988 as *Haïti chérie*) "would be a way of fighting prejudice at its roots" ("Pan-Africanism" 58). Prejudice is taught and becomes a vicious cycle, which Condé attempts to thwart with her children's book, because it is the children who will either carry the legacy of prejudice, or dismantle it.

⁸Ironically, Antilleans' attitudes toward Haitian immigrants are reminiscent of whites' attitudes toward Antilleans, both in France and abroad. They therefore reproduce that same pattern of prejudice and discrimination that they themselves once experienced and still do on many levels. It is perhaps the success of ideological assimilation that has allowed this disassociation between themselves and Haitians.

The narrative of *Rêves amers* exposes young Antilleans to the hardships faced by poor Haitians and to the role played by “race” and economics in social stratification. Marie-José N’Zengo-Tayo explains: “In *Haiti Chérie*, Condé uses the child protagonist as a mouthpiece to question injustice in the world economy, social abuse, and economic exploitation. As the young protagonist ‘discovers the ways of the world,’ she is struck by its ‘mis/dis-functionment’ and exposes it” (96). This is true, but N’Zengo-Tayo does not examine the text and its implications as an example of didactic children’s literature. While Condé’s young adult novel has evident social messages, we must also explore how and why these messages are important for enhancing the social sensitivity of a juvenile audience. For instance, at the beginning of the text, when Rose-Aimée and her family are introduced, the harsh and unimaginable conditions they live in weigh heavily on the reader’s mind. This impression affects both adult and child equally, but for children, the potential consequences of such an experience are more profound. They are more deeply affected because they are less experienced. The reader is forced to acknowledge the misery forcing rural inhabitants to flee for cities or other Caribbean islands, even to the United States. Rose-Aimée’s fate, being sent at thirteen years old to work as a domestic servant, is inconceivable to a child from a family of comfortable means. Yet the child reader must realize that this situation is not uncommon, which Condé emphasizes in the similar stories of Rose-Aimée’s two sisters and brother – like her, her sisters worked as servants, and her brother was sent to the Dominican Republic to work in the sugar cane fields, and never returned. That Rose-Aimée’s only solace is the hope of receiving an education is humbling.⁹ Within the text’s first few pages, young Antillean readers are

⁹Due to the family’s poverty, neither Rose-Aimée nor her siblings are able to attend school, reflecting the inequalities discussed previously with regard to economic impact on who receives an

drawn into Rose-Aimée's story, beginning a "journey" that may shape their attitudes and ideas concerning both poverty, and the circumstances bringing Haitians to their countries.

Mme Zéphyr, Rose-Aimée's employer, is a *Mûlatresse* whose views on "race" and class are obvious: "Regardez-moi cette petite négresse, cette petite paresseuse qui dort! Est-ce que tu crois que je t'ai prise à mon service pour dormir?" (25).¹⁰ Rose-Aimée is repeatedly insulted and beaten by the woman she had once hoped would help her improve her life-station. Yet despite her disappointment, she stays, realizing that returning home would burden her parents, and hoping that if she is obedient her employer will eventually respect her. The relationship between these two characters illustrates the economic disparity and social relationship between classes. As Laguerre points out, three sets of actors interact to maintain structural inequality: the exploiter group (the elite), the exploited group (the masses), and the broker group (the "middlemen") (7). Mme Zéphyr and Rose-Aimée represent the exploiter and exploited groups respectively. As such, the child reader is encouraged to empathize with Rose-Aimée, while despising Mme Zéphyr, whose cruel character embodies the prejudiced and exploitative elite. This distinction makes an important step toward normalizing a more empathic point of view in readers. In addition, Rose-Aimée's display of immense strength of character while facing such mistreatment encourages readers to admire those who struggle for the most basic rights, such as respect.

Ironically, Rose-Aimée's one moment of "weakness" – the one time she embraces her child self and plays with other children in the sea – is what leads to further misery and

education and the quality of that education.

¹⁰The relationship between Mme Zéphyr and Rose-Aimée represents the presence of racial hierarchy, which explains the former's exploitation of the latter. Rose-Aimée is seen as inferior not only because she is poor, but because of her "race" as well.

eventually death. For the first time in her life Rose-Aimée feels like a child, at least in the sense felt by children who have the luxury of a “childhood”: “Ah, que c’était bon de crier, de courir dans tous les sens, de partager l’excitation de garçons et de filles de son âge! Il semblait à Rose-Aimée que depuis qu’elle avait quitté les siens, elle n’avait pas ri, chanté, communiqué avec autrui” (34). Yet these brief moments of joy are not without a price: she loses the money she was to deliver back to Mme Zéphyr. Fearing the consequences of returning empty handed, Rose-Aimée decides to take her chances on the streets, believing – perhaps naively – that she will find better employment.

Rose-Aimée’s experiences on the streets, partially a result of her inability to return to her parents, are eye opening for young readers. Through her eventual realization of economic inequality’s brutality, Condé clarifies the message to young readers: “Rose-Aimée savait déjà que son pays était un des plus pauvres de la terre. Cependant, elle ne se doutait pas que tant d’hommes et tant de femmes n’y possédaient pas *ce bien auquel tout homme devrait avoir droit: un toit au-dessus de sa tête*” (42, emphasis added). For those readers unaware of their privilege, taking for granted the comfort of a home and family, this revelation is significant. Antillean youths of the upper classes must acknowledge their good fortune if they are to exhibit compassion in their future choices that may impact the poor. Condé’s explicit statement saying that all people have a right to a roof over their heads is openly didactic, intended to guide readers toward such an acknowledgement.

When Rose-Aimée reunites with a friend, Lisa, they set plans in motion for a better life. The two girls embrace the idea of the “American Dream,” believing that in the United States children of any age may find employment and that the simple act of

touching American soil will bring happiness and success. Yet they make their “escape” only after attempting one last time to remain in Haiti, which is what I shall discuss here.

Rose-Aimée finds work at a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant, again exemplifying the exploitative and often cruel relationship between the classes. One of the most unqualified applicants, Rose-Aimée is given the job precisely because of her lower class status and lack of education. Her economic and social position prevents Rose-Aimée from being able to defend herself, leaving her entirely at the mercy of her employer. Her desperation to work and inability to fight against potential injustices benefit the *patron mûlatre*, which Rose-Aimée recognizes: “Curieusement, Rose-Aimée s’apercevait, malgré son chagrin, que tous ces éléments négatifs jouaient en sa faveur. Elle le sentait, elle allait être engagée précisément parce qu’elle était sans défense et qu’on pouvait tout exiger d’elle” (53). Yet her determination to stay in Haiti forces her to accept what she realizes will be a degrading experience. As with Rose-Aimée’s former employer, Mme Zéphyr, the employer at Kentucky Fried Chicken, M. Modestin, also a *Mûlatre*, expresses regularly his disdain for his young black workers: “Sale petit nègre! Est-ce pour rire que je t’ai engagé? Lave-moi ce carreau” (57). These words, addressed to a young black boy who is the sole provider for his family, Jean-Joseph, resonate with the same condescending disgust found in Mme Zéphyr’s words for Rose-Aimée.¹¹ A pattern of behavior emerges, representing an unthinkable situation where children, who should be free to be young and enjoy life, are physically exploited and mentally demeaned by those who should be protecting them – adults. Of course, it is adults from the upper classes, those with power and money, who are exhibiting such disgusting

¹¹Again, the exploitative relationships between the *mûlatre* employer and the black children represents the presence of racial hierarchy.

comportment, which is important for readers to understand. If they do not wish to become one day like the story's "villains," they must rethink their own attitudes on the relationship between the rich and the poor.

Revealing the humanity and dignity of the poor, who suffer at the hands of the wealthy, constitutes an important lesson, underscoring the need for compassion among readers. Jean-Joseph's refusal to continue tolerating M. Modestin's abuse is one example: "Non, Monsieur! Je ne suis pas un chien. Je suis pauvre, je n'ai rien, mais je ne suis pas un chien" (59). Condé again clearly highlights an important message – poverty does not equate with inferiority. Lower class status does not deprive one of his humanity or right to be treated with respect. Nor does it entitle the wealthy to physically and verbally degrade those who are without. For Rose-Aimée, Jean-Joseph's display of dignity and his refusal to remain victimized by M. Modestin is inspiring, leading her to take a stand against her own exploitation:

À sa manière, elle revivait le combat de Makandal, de Boukman qui hurlait:

Bon Dieu, qui fais le soleil,

Qui soulèves la mer,

Qui fais gronder l'orage,

Écoute la liberté qui est dans nos coeurs!

Ah oui, redressons la tête pour défendre notre dignité!

Elle se mit debout et, regardant monsieur Modestin, fit simplement, jetant sa serpillière:

- Frottez vous-même! (60)

Rose-Aimée describes herself as possessed by her ancestors, who gained freedom from their oppressors (the French), and as reliving their fight.¹² This powerful reference reminds readers of what Haiti endured, and what it gained through its fight for freedom. Because Condé is considered an *indépendantiste*, advocating the independence of the Antilles from metropolitan France (see Blérald-Ndagano), her incorporation of this historical reference as a source of empowerment may reveal her position with respect to what Haiti has that the Antilles do not – freedom.¹³ For Rose-Aimée, incarnating the spirit that once freed her ancestors from colonial oppression allows her to rise up against the present day repression of socio-economic inequalities.

Unfortunately, Rose-Aimée's strength of character is not enough to erase oppressing realities. Though she found empowerment against M. Modestin's exploitative attitude and behavior, Rose-Aimée remains trapped by her poverty and inability to return home. Her decision to flee for the United States places her among so many other Haitians before her searching for a better life through immigration: "Lisa avait raison. Il fallait partir pour Miami où, à n'en pas douter, la vie aurait un autre goût" (62). The girls find a boat transporting several other Haitians, illegally, to Florida. Their experiences on this boat and throughout the voyage contain numerous commentaries concerning the injustices pushing Rose-Aimée, Lisa, and the other refugees, including men, women, and even infants, to take this dangerous risk.

¹²In 1804, after nearly a decade of fighting against the French colonizers who had broken their promise of ending slavery in Haiti, the slaves' revolution succeeded and Haiti gained its independence.

¹³Haiti's "freedom" from France is tempered by the continual repressive forces that have dominated Haiti, such as the United States, Haitian dictators such as Duvalier, etc. It seems, however, that Condé gives merit here to their struggle to gain and maintain independence throughout time., and juxtaposes it with the Antilles' continued dependence on France.

Displacement, whether by force or by “choice,” often reflects a larger social problem that has led to certain members of the population being unable to live in their own land. The devastation and injustice of leaving all that is familiar is made clear in *Rêves amers*:

Qui a fait le monde? On dit que c'est Dieu. Alors, pourquoi n'a-t-il pas donné à toutes les créatures les moyens d'en savourer la beauté? *Pourquoi certains ne songent-ils qu'à se nourrir, se vêtir, survivre*, sans pouvoir jamais relever la tête afin d'admirer le feuillage des arbres, l'éclat des fleurs, la splendeur des rivières? Son pays était un des plus beaux du monde [...] et elle, elle devait le quitter! (73-74, emphasis added)

Pulling from and questioning her spiritual beliefs, Rose-Aimée wonders how God, who should have the power to alleviate His people's suffering, could allow such misery and inequality to persist. Why may some enjoy all of life's pleasures, while others struggle to survive? What Condé puts into question, however, extends beyond spirituality and religious beliefs. “Qui a fait le monde?” Though Rose-Aimée understands it to be God, the contradiction between His benevolence (according to Christian doctrine) and the world's misery points to something more human: the dominance of the powerful and wealthy over the poor and weaker masses, which lies at the center of the world's social inequalities and injustices. The situation created through these power struggles and the exploitation of the poor is what has forced Rose-Aimée and the others to flee for the United States. For young readers, who have likely never known similar hardship, this emotional passage conjures sympathy and forces the question of why there exists such blatant inequality.

In hiding at the Bahamas, several of the girls' companions share stories about other refugees being caught by police while attempting to flee for America. An elderly gentleman, Monsieur Saint-Aubin, shares his own story:

On nous a entassés dans des camions. On nous a fait descendre dans un centre clôturé de barbelés, avec des soldats et des chiens. [...] Le soir, on nous a fait entrer dans un grand bâtiment, sans lits, sans matelas, et nous avons dormi par terre. Pour tout repas, du sucre. [...] Alors, certains se sont révoltés et on leur a dit qu'ils avaient été vendus. Vendus par le gouvernement. Vendus comme des esclaves! (75-76)

Saint-Aubin's story is doubly significant. It reveals the desperation behind a decision to risk everything, and the potential consequences of being caught: being arrested, sent to a concentration camp, deported back to Haiti. It also references the "failure" of the first Black colony, Haiti. On one hand, the failure of Saint-Aubin and the others represents allegorically the country's failure to achieve total independence and prosperity, while on the other, the very fact that Saint-Aubin and the others feel the need to flee Haiti demonstrates the country's failure as a prosperous and just society. It is the first significance, however, that is most relevant in relation to the author's "lessons." The potential consequences of illegally immigrating raise questions in readers' minds, a form of reflection and a result much desired by Condé. Why do people of all ages flee Haiti (or any country) and face significant odds to arrive and live in another country? The conclusion one hopes young readers of this story will reach is found in the stark inequalities leaving a majority of the people destitute, living in extreme poverty and misery. Perhaps if young Antillean readers understand this, they will look on immigrants

trying to make a better life for themselves with compassion, which may one day lead to policies lessening the disparities between classes.

The most disturbing reality confronting young readers comes in the text's final pages, when Rose-Aimée, Lisa, and the other refugees are forced into the sea. As their boat nears the Florida coast, the captains order all on deck. The coast guard is approaching, and to avoid arrest, the captains force their passengers to jump into a stormy sea:

Et comme le groupe, interdit, demeurait immobile, chacun parcourant des yeux l'immensité de l'océan, les hommes d'équipage se précipitèrent en avant, prenant au collet les hommes, les femmes, les enfants et les poussant vers le bastingage. Monsieur Saint-Aubin dit encore:

- Mais nous ne savons pas nager... (79)

Moudileno tells us: "[...] the final scene is reminiscent of the methods employed by illegal slave traders in the nineteenth century who disposed of their shipment in a similar manner when pursued by naval patrols. [...] As illegals, the [Haitian] passengers become insignificant" (244). Considered only as cargo, the passengers are forfeited to the sea. Their fates, including those of the infants and children, are tragically sealed by the greed of men:

[La mer] para leur corps d'algues, ouvragées comme des fleurs, suspendit à leurs oreilles des boucles d'oreilles de varech. Elle chanta de sa voix suave pour calmer les terreurs des enfants, de Rose-Aimée et de Lisa, et, les yeux fermés, ils glissèrent tous dans l'autre monde. Car la mort n'est

pas une fin. Elle ouvre sur un au-delà où il n'est ni pauvres ni riches, ni ignorants ni instruits, ni Noirs, ni mulâtres, ni Blancs... (80)

Though the refugees die, their death is not truly the end, nor did they die in vain. The sense of hope inscribed in this last scene implies that life continues after death under a different form, free of the vices and inequalities present in human societies. Thus Rose-Aimée and the others do in fact attain the better life they strived for. According to Blérald-Ndagano, Condé portrays death not as a failure but as a step toward martyrdom (176). In this case, death did not prevent the refugees from experiencing a better life but rather facilitated it. It also promoted their station to that of martyrs, at least insofar as the reader is concerned. Their tragic end sheds light on the social and political situations leading to devastating situations such as this, and develops readers' awareness.

Yet is death an appropriate means of conveying these truths to children, who are the target audience of this book? This upsetting ending almost causes one to perceive *Rêves amers* as an anti-children's book: it does not conform to some critics' ideas on how children's literature should communicate with the young readership. According to Carolyn T. Kingston, ending a children's book with death may result in the loss of the text's significance, as it may foster hopelessness or a fear of going against "acceptable" behavior (10). Throughout *Rêves amers* the child reader has been exposed to many cruel experiences, yet they are all very real: being sent to work at thirteen; being denied an education; being repeatedly insulted, beaten, and exploited by the upper classes; fleeing a life of misery and dying in the process. Rose-Aimée, in keeping with the accepted definition of what constitutes a "heroine," meets these obstacles with strength and dignity. Yet what should we make of the tragic ending? Kingston insists on the need for

a “happy ending” to make the “message” significant. For instance, she tells us: “[In] stories for children, the larger significance of the tragic moments might have been lost by presenting heroic efforts as useless. The hero’s will to resist is strengthened by catastrophe in these stories and the end result is an underscoring of a kind of Steinbekian faith in the dignity and durability of man under duress” (59)¹⁴. By allowing the hero in tragic tales to prevail over catastrophe, the reader’s desire to resist will be re-enforced. If the hero dies, his efforts will have been useless and the reader will be less inclined to resist. While I agree to a point, it also seems that at times an upsetting ending is necessary, particularly when the aim is to raise awareness for harsh social truths. In this case, the reader should be shocked out of complacency. Condé, by allowing Rose-Aimée to die, thus leaving young readers sad or angry, provokes reflection on the world’s injustices. Why did these people, who sought only to escape their misery, have to die? What would have needed to change in order to prevent their deaths?

This text, through its realistic portrayals of life for the Haitian masses and the consequences of stark inequalities encourages appreciation among Antillean youths for what their Caribbean neighbors have endured. As Moudileno says:

And it is ignorance that promotes disdain for the Haitians. The task of the writer is to provide new generations with intellectual means to go beyond ignorance and prejudice. [...] At the same time, young readers should begin to see the diversity of social and economic conditions in the Archipelago: they should recognize ‘brothers and sisters’ who have similar cultural and linguistic practices as themselves, but also be aware of

¹⁴ While Kingston is speaking here of several specific texts she analyzes in her book, the idea that the character must live in order to inspire the reader is present throughout her text.

their own privileged economic status and the suffering of their neighbors (246).

Condé's children's book opens the eyes of young generations in the Antilles to a world beyond their own. In doing so, she begins to carve a path that may one day lead the readers of her text to make positive, influential decisions regarding the plight not only of the poor but of the masses of immigrants who flee from their suffering.

Condé wrote *Rêves amers* from the perspective of the oppressed, embodied in Rose-Aimée, allowing young readers to empathize with her experiences. Yet in another of her children's books, *Hugo le terrible* (1991), the implied narrator is a young boy belonging to the black bourgeoisie of Guadeloupe. This text, as with the former, addresses issues of socio-economic inequalities, and the relationship between classes. Yet its being told from an upper class child's perspective lends new significance to the text for Condé's young readers. If, as I mentioned previously, the majority of readers come from Antillean upper classes, this story's messages will have more impact because of readers' ability to relate with the protagonist, Michel. Thirteen years old, Michel has never experienced hardship. His culturally assimilated and well-employed parents have created a life of comfort and security, including possession of a car, a hair salon, a washing machine, and even a servant. Unaware of his privilege, Michel enjoys a life free of significant worry and full of pleasures such as reading Victor Hugo¹⁵ and *Astérix*. Yet the approach of hurricane Hugo acts as a catalyst, upsetting all that Michel has taken for granted.

¹⁵ We will see that the text's title holds a double meaning, as it refers not only to the hurricane Hugo that wreaks havoc, but also implies Michel's eventual realization of the injustices caused, directly or indirectly, by the domination of metropolitan France, symbolized here by his love for Hugo and *Astérix*.

The relationship between Michel and his family's servant, Gitane, represents an evolving relationship between classes that eventually transcends the boundaries created by structural inequality. Gitane, having immigrated with her husband and children from la Dominique, represents the masses of poor immigrants living in the outskirts of cities and thus the exploited group (see Laguerre). Michel and his family, by contrast, represent the exploiter group, or those members of society largely responsible for the perpetuation of poverty and prejudice. Though Gitane speaks little of her country to Michel (the one family member with whom she feels the most comfortable), she says that it is very poor and that life is difficult, explaining her family's immigration to Guadeloupe. Similarly to what we saw in *Rêves amers*, immigration is presented as the result of overwhelming hardship, and the desire or need to better one's life.¹⁶ Yet in this text, instead of focusing on the life leading up to immigration, Condé focuses on life after immigration, and even more so on how Guadeloupeans perceive immigrants as well as the poor. Readers will share Michel's experiences and revelations in an empathic manner, meaning they will relate readily to Michel's circumstances, and will be more susceptible to the lessons conveyed.

As Blérald-Ndagano tells us, Condé has, in several of her texts such as *Hérémakhonon* and *La Vie scélérate*, taken the opportunity to accuse the black bourgeoisie. "Elle met l'accent sur l'exploitation de l'Antillais par l'Antillais" (293). While in *Hugo le terrible* Gitane is an immigrant to the Antilles, it is apparent that Condé accuses here too the behavior of the black upper classes. From the beginning of the text readers witness Gitane's mistreatment by her adult employers – Michel's parents. As

¹⁶Also pointing to *Rêves amers* is Michel's memory of his brother's trip to Haiti. This trip led both boys to wonder about why so many Haitian citizens were so poor and why they emigrated to other countries.

many people prepare their homes and families for the impending storm, Gitane remains in the service of Michel's family. Her needs are ignored, or treated with disdain by Michel's mother and father: "Gitane était en pleurs et Papa la rudoyait. [...] Petite Mère a dit: - [...] Aujourd'hui Gitane, tu arrêteras ton travail à onze heures. Comme cela tu pourras aller à la quincaillerie te procurer des clous et des feuilles de contreplaqué" (19-21). The father's response is one of condescending superiority, maintaining the distance between classes and reminding Gitane of her inferior status. The mother, though she *allows* Gitane to leave work early, also demands that she return the next day, embodying as well the "role" of the upper classes. That is, she exerts her power over the employed, maintaining her status as a bourgeois and Gitane's as an inferior domestic. Yet the latter makes no outward argument, nor does anyone question the parents' refusal to acknowledge Gitane's needs because as Laguerre points out: "Domestic service [...] is a form of socially tolerated exploitation" (94).

Even Michel, though he exhibits some compassion for Gitane's situation, does not question the social order. He does not question his mother's insistence that Gitane continue to work, nor does he recognize the inequality imposed on Gitane. It isn't until he hears Gitane herself speak out against her employers that Michel begins to understand:

Tous les mêmes! Est-ce qu'elle ne comprend pas que j'ai beaucoup de choses à faire chez moi, moi aussi? Avec mon mari qui a mal aux reins et personne pour nous aider à consolider le toit et les cloisons. Est-ce qu'elle n'aurait pas pu me donner la matinée et une petite avance pour que je puisse acheter des provisions? On se tue pour eux et ils vous traitent comme des chiens. (67)

Gitane's exploitation is made explicit and her personal account of it underscores the injustice she faces from the upper classes ("Tous les mêmes" referring to a generalization of the Antillean bourgeoisie). Michel's ignorance is suddenly and bluntly revealed. His naïve belief in Gitane's happiness working for his family crumbles under the reality that the latter has been treating her "de manière égoïste" (68). It is perhaps hoped that by exposing readers simultaneously to the realities of domestic servitude and exploitation, they will begin to develop awareness for class structure and roles. After all, it is such awareness that may lead these young readers to make more compassionate, and responsible, choices concerning their societies in the future.

For Michel, the shame he feels for his parents' treatment of Gitane provokes a series of events leading to his eventual rupture with social conventions. First, he accompanies Gitane to her neighborhood (a poor immigrant neighborhood, Gachette) intending to help her prepare for the hurricane, representing his first steps toward new awareness and perspective. There he repeatedly confronts poverty such that it forces him to acknowledge his own privilege. For instance, waiting in unbearable heat for the bus with Gitane and many other individuals unable to afford the luxury of a car, Michel realizes his good fortune to be able to travel in his parents' air-conditioned vehicle. His arrival at Gachette and his exposure to the extreme poverty there shakes him to the core. This neighborhood, described by Condé similarly to how Rey and Laguerre have described Antillean slums and peripheral neighborhoods, reeks of society's neglect. Narrow, winding streets flanked by culverts containing dirty water and rubbish are lined with wood shacks, covered in sheet metal and open to the sidewalks, hiding nothing from passers by. This "ghetto's" population consists primarily of immigrants from Haiti and

Dominique, imposing awareness on readers for what immigrants must endure. Upon seeing this, Michel recalls a young Haitian boy in his elementary class that hardly spoke, and to whom hardly anyone addressed a word. Michel is overcome by a sense of guilt, realizing that this boy must have felt extremely lonely and unhappy, alienated by his peers because of his “inferior” status as an immigrant.¹⁷ Finally, when Michel meets Greg, Gitane’s husband, who attempts to re-enforce the roof of their shack, the latter forces Michel to acknowledge his own naiveté regarding socio-economic stratification. Responding to Michel’s comment about Greg being physically unfit to be on the roof, Greg utters a few simple words that shatter whatever illusions Michel may still have harbored about certain social realities: “Qui va le faire pour moi?” (72) Both Michel and the reader are made to see the alienation, in addition to the exploitation, of lower classes. They are forced to recognize what they most likely take for granted, such as being able to recuperate after being injured, or having a car and a comfortable home. Michel, consumed by guilt and shame, verbalizes this revelation, clarifying the message intended for young readers:

“Pour la première fois, je comprenais à quel point j’étais un enfant gâté et combien les petites misères dont je me plaignais étaient secondaires. Mes parents travaillaient tous les deux et étaient en bonne santé. J’habitais une maison confortable et je ne manquais de rien. Je sentais la grande

¹⁷Recall also that Haitians are despised by many Antilleans according to Condé (“Pan-Africanism”) and Moudileno. This particular memory of Michel’s is likely something that many of Condé’s young readers can relate to. It seems then that this small anecdote speaks directly to those students who alienate their peers based purely on their status as an immigrant, or as a poor member of society. By revealing the possible feelings of these alienated children, perhaps the students will be more likely to reach out and break down the barriers that create such alienation.

injustice du monde et je me demandais ce que je pouvais faire contre elle.

Que peut un garçon de treize ans et demi pour changer le monde?” (75)

For children who relate to Michel, this self-deprecation cannot go unnoticed. They too, through Michel’s revelation, are made to acknowledge their own fortune and to see the misfortune of so many others. In addition, Michel is struck by the desire to change the circumstances behind such inequalities, raising the question about how to change society. As with *Rêves amers*, where Rose-Aimée’s tragic end provokes reflection and raises questions about how to change circumstances in order to avoid the repetition of Rose-Aimée’s fate, *Hugo le terrible* provokes similar reflection. In this case, however, young readers are purposely guided toward this reflection through Michel’s explicit questioning of socio-economic stratification and what he can do to change it.

The arrival of Hurricane Hugo just after Michel’s experiences in Gachette is significant in that it coincides with his developing sense of awareness for his role, as well as that of his family, in the difficulties facing immigrants such as Gitane and other poverty stricken Antilleans. The hurricane’s cataclysmic effects represent the complete *bouleversement* of all that Michel had known. He describes the scene as a landscape of nightmares, of ruin that likely resembled that left by American soldiers after the Vietnam War. Everything that they (inhabitants of his neighborhood) had been proud of was now destroyed. Just like the neighborhood, the complacency with which Michel viewed his life and society was also destroyed. Yet out of the shambles, as his neighborhood begins to rebuild itself, Michel too begins to reconstruct his life as well as his worldview. He is no longer blind to the realities of class division, and begins to recognize more readily the signs of his society’s inequalities. For instance, a few days after the storm Michel’s

mother begins to complain about Gitane's absence, despite the fact that poor sections of town are more than likely completely demolished: "[...] Petite Mère réchauffait et servait en se plaignant de l'ingratitude de Gitane qui depuis Hugo n'avait plus donné signe de vie" (113). While his mother proves unaffected by the devastation and is still firmly rooted within the ideology fostering class division and prejudice, Michel is consumed with guilt. In contrast to his mother, whose arrogance prevents her from considering Gitane's well being, Michel criticizes himself for not having gone to check on Gitane and her family immediately following the hurricane. We see the beginning of his rupture with the life and values he had before: no longer does he imitate without question his parents' attitudes. For readers, this harsh portrayal of Michel's mother and the contrast between the two perspectives provides them with guidelines, so to speak, as to what is "right" and "wrong." Michel is the altruistic, "good" character whereas the mother has become the self-centered and egotistical "bad" character.

Michel's altruism develops further when he disobeys his parents to answer a plea heard on the radio for volunteers. Still concerned for Gitane and her family, Michel sneaks out of the house to assist those who had been left homeless. Though his desperate search to find Gitane fails, he comes to realize that he has changed, and that the boy he was no longer exists:

Je n'aurais pas pu expliquer clairement pourquoi je pleurais. Peut-être à cause de la punition injuste à mes yeux que mes parents m'avaient infligée. Peut-être à cause d'Hugo et des bouleversements qu'il avait apportés. À cause de lui, un certain garçon était mort en moi. Un garçon qui ne remettait jamais rien en question, un garçon timide, respectueux,

aveuglément obéissant. Il me semblait que cette nuit-là marquait la fin de ma vie d'enfant et que [...] ce même matin-là, je m'étais réveillé adulte.

(123)

Michel's childish "innocence" has been demolished along with his neighborhood and much of the rest of the city. The minute he took action in contradiction with his life station (a bourgeois seeking to help the poor) Michel became, symbolically, an adult. Hurricane Hugo both acted as a catalyst for and represented the evolution within Michel, leaving in its wake a new, vivid awareness for certain social truths. He would no longer follow without question the example set by his parents, who despite everything remain very much grounded in their bourgeois perspective, which we see at the end of the text when Gitane finally does resurface:

Hier, Gitane aussi est venue nous voir, le gros Georges entre les bras, Patience et Gloria à la queue leu leu derrière elle. Sa maison du quartier Gachette est complètement détruite. Elle habite sous une tente près de l'aéroport. Elle ne pourra pas revenir chez nous tant qu'il n'y aura pas d'école pour Patience et Gloria. Petite Mère a inutilement discuté avec elle, puis l'a payée. Quant à moi, je l'ai longuement embrassée pour lui dire au revoir. (127)

Again, the contrast between the attitudes of Michel and his mother represent the former's rupture with the conventions he had previously heeded. Whereas the mother shows no compassion whatsoever for Gitane's loss, trying instead to force her back to work (exemplifying her attempt to maintain control and re-establish her superior position), Michel acts with genuine kindness and friendship. This friendship is significant because

it transcends socially acceptable boundaries. Through his experiences and growing awareness Michel breaks free of the ideological constraints imposed by his society. Condé's young readers, who have likely been able to relate to Michel's circumstances thus far, are here guided in what the "proper" behavior and attitude is. They are encouraged to look beyond class and see the poor, as well as immigrants, as human beings with lives and concerns equally significant to those of the rich, and who are equally if not more subject to hardships in life. Michel's gesture of friendship and his complete lack of prejudice or arrogance at the end of the text demonstrate what Condé sees as the ideal. As the author she is writing with the intention to promote a certain way of behaving, which is communicated through Michel. He represents what is "right" and appropriate in terms of interpersonal relations across social boundaries, and comes to signify what the future may hold, symbolized in his refusal to perpetuate his parents' bourgeois attitude.

Condé demonstrates to her young, impressionable readership how lives are affected by socio-economic stratification by highlighting the privilege enjoyed by upper classes and the stark contrast between the bourgeois lifestyle and that of the poor. By employing the voice of a relatable bourgeois protagonist, she impresses upon them their role and responsibility with respect to the economic struggles and structural inequalities embedded in their societies. Moudileno, as established previously, has stressed that an author of children's literature has the task of providing new generations with the means of moving past ignorance and prejudice (246). Condé herself, in speaking of *Rêves amers*, says that writing a children's book is a way of fighting prejudice at its roots ("Pan-Africanism"). By educating children to look beyond socially constructed

inequalities, and to appreciate their own role in these constructs, the ignorance fueling prejudice will eventually diminish significantly, if it is not entirely eliminated. This position is reestablished in *Hugo le terrible*, which counters the prejudice passed on to younger generations, as we see in the evolution of Michel's relationship with his parents. Condé speaks directly to children of the Antillean bourgeoisie, seeking to change their perspective and therefore end the cycle of prejudice. As discussed earlier, the significance of Condé's addressing the Antillean upper classes is tremendous, as these are the individuals who will create policies and make decisions directly impacting their societies and how they function in terms of class and socioeconomics. Condé encourages, as with *Rêves amers*, a more sympathetic and informed perspective, providing young readers, the future generations of leaders, with tools to alter the circumstances perpetuating social inequalities.

In terms of reproducing poverty, this text addresses that very issue. Many people may acknowledge the injustice of economic inequality while at the same time disassociating themselves from their own role in its perpetuation. Attitudes such as those of Michel's parents greatly contribute to the maintenance of class division and the exploitation of the poor. Even Michel, who did not consider himself superior but who was nevertheless integrated in a lifestyle and ideology normalizing class division, was guilty of propagating the cycle of dependence between classes and the resulting social and economic inequalities. Michel's "escape" from that ideology, or rather his experiences provoking that escape, serves as a wake up call to readers. Understanding one's own contribution to others' misery through passive acceptance of the status quo is an important first step in changing societies and altering the class-conscious ideologies

that permeate them. It is equally important for young readers to understand more fully what those members of society living in abject poverty experience daily. *Hugo le terrible* makes clear the bourgeoisie's role in maintaining socio-economic stratification, and exposes stark, troubling contrasts between the living conditions of the wealthier and the poor. Providing bourgeois readers with a more in-depth look at the poor sections of their societies can foster compassion and awareness. In *Rêves amers*, the text's significance lay in its appeal to readers' sensitivities, promoting a compassionate outlook on immigration and on what immigrants must endure. *Hugo le terrible* draws readers' attention to their own place in society and how that position may contribute to others' misfortune.

Gisèle Pineau's young adult novel, *Case mensonge* (2004), also provides readers with a realistic representation of poverty in Antillean societies, yet from the poor's perspective. A detailed portrait of the Antillean "ghetto," this text both exemplifies Rey's and Laguerre's description of peripheral neighborhoods, and encourages awareness for the realities faced by the poor every day. The ghetto depicted in the text, Roucou, has a bad reputation, is the incarnation of misery, has no lights at night, and no police. Violence and drug trafficking are commonplace, and families of eight live in two-room shacks, while the majority of dwellings are either in ruins or lacking in basic comforts. Roucou's inhabitants have been abandoned – abandoned by the authorities, abandoned by the world. Clearly, this portrayal intends to impress on the reader a reality faced by a large number of people in his or her society. Yet making this reality more available to young readers, the implied narrator, twelve-year-old Djinala, invites the readership into her struggles with both society and family. Though upper class readers may not be able

to relate specifically to Djinala's circumstances, the fact that the story is told in the first person makes her life and the issues she faces considerably more accessible. Moreover, Djinala gives voice to the poor: readers have no choice but to recognize their humanity and the misery they suffer at the hands of upper classes and authorities.

The story revolves around two main issues – the lottery system for housing, which will be discussed, and Djinala's discovery of who her "true" mother is. As events unfold, Djinala discovers that the woman she knew as her mother is actually her grandmother, while the woman she knew as her sister is in fact her birth mother. Her grandmother, Camille, had decided to raise Djinala as her own to spare Laurence, the birth mother, the humiliation and inevitable social rejection of being a mother at fourteen. While this situation reveals certain social structures, Djinala's revelation, which takes place toward the end of the text, occupies a relatively brief portion of the narrative. While I will address this revelation a bit later, the more pressing issue related to young readers is the situation facing Guadeloupe's poor.

Life for Roucou's inhabitants is difficult and suspended in a waiting game: "Ici tout le monde attend quelque chose et surtout demain, comme un bon morceau de fruit à pain. Il y en a, c'est une allocation du gouvernement. D'autres, c'est un travail. Et la majorité, c'est un logement neuf dans les immeubles en construction [...] que monsieur le maire a promis aux 'défavorisés' pendant la dernière campagne électorale" (8). The almost gloomy tone of this description reminds us of the misery facing poor Antilleans, such as the lack of education and social aid, or the fears imposed by rumors of renovations. Yet the hope the inhabitants harbor, as seen here, depends entirely on the government. We see how the cycle of dependence, and the reproduction of poverty, is

facilitated. Djinala, who observes the desperate situation of those living around her, is herself waiting, along with her mother¹⁸ for a new home through the lottery system. Interestingly, however, Camille perceives the other inhabitants of Roucou as lazy, irresponsible, and preoccupied with drinking and dancing, which is the motivating factor behind her desire to move. She has internalized an ideology correlating poverty with a lack of morality or ethics. Camille's attitude mimics the worst of the bourgeois attitude, despite her own position as a member of the lower classes. She remains ignorant that she and the other Roucou inhabitants stay poor precisely because of the decisions and perspectives of the upper classes, while she maintains the belief that the poor are poor because they do not try hard enough. Her attitude recalls that of the colonized subject who has internalized colonial ideology, and who looks to the colonizing culture as superior while denigrating her own people. Through Camille we see that class relations within Antillean societies are both a result and a reflection of colonial influence, and also reflect on a smaller scale the relationship between the Antilles (the colonized) and France (the colonizer). Yet for Camille, the question remains whether she will be able to escape her station in life, and climb the social hierarchy. Ironically, the answer lies entirely in government hands and its lottery system, which in reality does nothing to alleviate the misery for many living in poverty.

The lottery system is presented more as a mechanism of maintaining control over peripheral neighborhoods, such as Roucou, than as a true solution. By providing a glimmer of hope, the government pacifies potential uprisings and maintains cultural domination by normalizing metropolitan French standards of comfort in the minds of

¹⁸ To avoid confusion throughout my analysis, Djinala's "mother" will refer to Camille, while Laurence will remain her sister.

peripheral populations (Rey 205). In the text, the lottery system is the most prominent mechanism serving this purpose, *allowing* the Roucou inhabitants to embrace the comforts of metropolitan standards of living. Yet on the other hand, being chosen brings for some feelings of uncertainty, communicating the consequences of having lived in abject poverty for so long:

Ils attendaient de voir pour croire. Parce que la chance n'avait pas souvent croisé leur route. Ceux-là n'osaient pas s'approcher des immeubles, de peur qu'ils ne disparaissent, tel un rêve brisé par la sonnerie du réveil-matin. Ils gardaient la lettre du maire pliée en quatre dans leur chemise et sursautaient au moindre bruit, comme si des méchants pouvaient surgir à tout moment pour les déposséder. (62)

Reestablishing the fact that Antillean poor suffer a severe lack of social assistance, Pineau provides readers with insight into how, even in the face of fortune, the poor have been conditioned into “accepting” a life of extreme poverty and hardship. Just as Condé attempts in *Rêves amers* and *Hugo le terrible* to provoke reflection on the part of the reader, Pineau too shows a desire to force acknowledgment among young readers for their advantages in life. She accomplishes this by evoking sympathy and even shame.¹⁹ This sense of shame is re-enforced as letters informing families of their fate in the lottery system continue to be passed out.

¹⁹ For centuries shame has been a major factor in the socialization of children (see Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process*). The association between certain attitudes or behaviors and a feeling of shame or guilt guides children toward the “proper” attitude or behavior. We see evidence of this dating back at least to the sixteenth century in writings such as those by Érasme and Rabelais, and which has continued over the centuries in literature for children. Pineau's evocation of shame, though not explicit or accusatory and perhaps even unintentional, can be construed as an effective means of inculcating in her young readers compassion for the Antillean poor and an awareness for their own tendency to take their comforts for granted.

Djinala's family consists of herself (the youngest of three), her older brother and sister (both of whom will be leaving soon), and her mother. Djinala's closest friend in Roucou, Mildred, lives with five brothers and sisters as well as both her parents in a two-room shack. Yet it is Djinala and her mother, not Mildred and her family, who receive housing through the lottery system. As Mildred's mother, Olga, sees it: "On a donné les appartements aux mieux lotis!" (67) Families in less desperate situations were chosen to move into the new constructions, revealing the inefficacy and injustice of a system that ignores individual circumstances. Furthermore, the government's lack of consideration reestablishes the lottery system as a means of control, rather than as a genuine attempt at alleviating the misery experienced by the poor. Young readers are led to understand both the dependency of the poor on the authorities, as well as how these same authorities fail the people of poor neighborhoods. It is important for these readers to see the government and upper classes from the point of view of the oppressed so that they might come to look on current social practices with a critical eye. As we shall see, Pineau provides plenty of examples in the text that infer corruption or weaknesses among authorities in Antillean societies, and strongly encourages readers' adoption of a critical perspective.

For instance, in response to her rejection, Olga circulates the neighborhood collecting signatures and openly accusing those who were chosen, such as Djinala and her mother, of using dishonest means or witchcraft. Olga directs her anger at her fellow inhabitants instead of at the real guilty party, the government. This reaction indicates an unthinking acceptance of an ideology placing the upper classes in a superior position, while laying blame on the lower classes for any social ills. In this sense, her mentality is close to that of Camille, who blames the poor for their own misery. Yet Olga, who has

been denied the possibility of climbing socially, lashes out and helps create an atmosphere of anger, hatred, and resentment so strong that a threat of an uprising becomes decidedly more real. It is only then that the outside world takes notice, again proving how overlooked poor Antillean neighborhoods are.

In response to Roucou's outrage, political figures seize the opportunity to further their own agendas and gain public support. M. Réaudoir, the current mayor's adversary, becomes the spokesperson for Roucou's disillusioned masses. It is interesting, however, that he should choose this particular moment to embrace the poor and their cause. This choice indicates an underlying desire to discredit the present government while advocating his own rise to power: "Oui! Vous avez été trompés, messieurs et dames! [...] Le maire a fait des préférences. Et si j'avais été à sa place..." (67). Even in their attempts to gain some control over their circumstances, the inhabitants of Roucou continue to be exploited, as their anger is manipulated for political gain. Pineau explicitly condemns such behavior, speaking through the inhabitants: "Menteur! Voleur! vociféra un dénommé Bulgou, un père de dix enfants qui logeait dans une case bancale à la sortie de Quartier Roucou. On n'attend rien de vous autres, les politiciens!" (68-69) Pineau's readership once again encounters a perspective where authority is an oppressive force, and readers are made to understand that current governmental means of dealing with class are impractical. As Réaudoir realizes his ignorance with respect to Roucou's situation (that months of bureaucratic red tape do not constitute a practical solution to the inhabitants' immediate needs), it is brought to the readers' attention that perhaps new solutions need to be created, provoking reflection on how they themselves might make changes.

Equally culpable in exploiting Roucou's anger is the mayor himself, who immediately attacks Réaudoir. He presents an array of charts and tables, illustrating how all the "défavorisés" will receive new lodging: "Tout le monde aura un logement neuf! scandait-il en frappant du poing sur la table. Je suis victime d'une cabale, orchestrée par mes adversaires politiques" (85). Attempting to maintain public support, the mayor makes grandiose promises that all families living in poverty will receive new housing. He even goes so far as to knock on every door in Roucou, draped with a tri-color scarf and trailed by his council.²⁰ He promises every family a place on the next list, insisting he is familiar with their personal circumstances. To begin with, these promises are impossible to keep if he intends to continue using the lottery system, which supposedly chooses families at random. One can assume that such promises are empty, serving only to pacify the growing resentment in Roucou. As Laguerre has pointed out, peripheral neighborhoods and slums are a source of votes for political figures (5), and it is clear here that the mayor wishes to maintain their support by playing on their fears and emotions with no intention of re-examining his current policies. For the mayor, the people living in poverty in Roucou are game pieces to be manipulated so that in the end he comes out on top. His compassion for the poor is insincere, as we see when he encounters Djinala and Camille: "Lorsqu'il s'est présenté dans notre cour, il a jeté un regard lourd de dégoût aux carcasses de voitures avant de faire un grand sourire à manman" (86). He falsely congratulates Djinala's mother for having been chosen, wishing her a "bonne intégration" (86), acknowledging her current marginalized existence outside the boundaries of

²⁰ The mayor's decision to wear a scarf resembling the French flag indicates his assimilation to France, and his internalization of colonial ideology. In addition, Pineau illustrates once again, through this representation, how the Antilles have been affected by such ideology in terms of class division, and how the social structure resembles the dependency relationship not only between classes within Antillean societies, but between the Antilles and France.

“normal” society. His refusal of the drinks Camille offers and his parting words in the form of a campaign slogan solidifies our impression of his villainous character. Pineau’s representation of the mayor situates him as an exemplary embodiment of the exploiter group as well as of corrupt government officials. As in Condé’s two texts, Pineau creates a stark contrast between “good” and “bad” characters. The “bad,” seen in such characters as the mayor, illustrate to young readers what is wrong with their society. The “good” are presented as those who are oppressed and who fight against that oppression.

This scene between the mayor and Camille also illustrates how the *regard* of the upper classes can have psychological impacts:

Elle s’est assise un moment sur son lit. Son regard flottait dans la case comme à la recherche d’un objet dont elle aurait pu tirer quelque fierté, une pendule héritée de ses parents, un tableau de maître, une cafetière électrique neuve, un buffet verni, des livres reliés, un vase en cristal...

Elle semblait effrayée par ce qui l’entourait. *Elle voyait soudain l’intérieur de la case avec les yeux du maire et de ses conseillers, et il lui apparaissait dans sa brutale pauvreté.* (87, my emphasis)

Camille, who has so far considered herself above Roucou’s other inhabitants, finds herself humiliated when the mayor’s conduct reminds her of her inferior social position. The emotion conveyed in Djinala’s observation of her mother at this moment pulls the young reader into the point of view of the poor, creating empathy. As with Pineau’s descriptions of those who have been conditioned to accept an unequal social structure, here she fosters a sense of shame in young readers. Perhaps the reader recalls moments when he or she behaved similarly to the mayor, looking down on those less fortunate than

themselves, or of behaving in an alienating or condescending manner. Demonstrating to readers the potential consequences of such behavior (humiliation, shame, and a sense of worthlessness), this scene forces them to reflect on their own attitudes regarding social class and poverty.

For Roucou's inhabitants, however, the attitudes and behaviors of the upper classes prevail. The uprising is quashed and the anger subdued by political ploys:

Après l'offensive du maire en place, les choses s'étaient tassées comme par enchantement. Finalement, personne n'avait pris d'assaut les appartements neufs. Les meetings organisés par Olga avaient attiré de moins en moins de monde. Et les gens étaient retournés à leurs occupations en surveillant d'un oeil le nouveau chantier qui avait débuté sur une ancienne plantation de bananiers. Tout était rentré dans l'ordre.

(90)

The government's response to Roucou's anger, or rather their refusal to find a viable solution, demonstrates the extent to which marginalized people living in peripheral neighborhoods, or in slums, are neither taken seriously nor considered important enough to be paid serious attention. Despite the validity of Roucou's grievances, their situation is manipulated and turned into a political tool. The only actual problem according to authorities is the threat to their power. This unsettling end to the upheaval is reminiscent of Condé's endings to *Rêves amers* and *Hugo le terrible* in that the social structure does not change. It is instead made clear to young readers that current social practices in Antillean societies perpetuate division between the classes, and foster a relationship of

dependency. They are again guided to reflect on their societies and on their own role in how those societies function.

As for Djinala, she experiences a sort of coming into being, not completely unlike that of Michel in *Hugo le terrible*. Yet for Djinala, instead of becoming aware of her contributions to the exploitation of the poor, she comes to better understand herself. The revelation of who her real mother is²¹ brings about reflection and a need to define herself. She is confused about her identity, which can be interpreted not only as confusion about her biological roots and the decision to hide the truth from her, but as her conflict in being caught between her mother's values and the reality of the situation she sees everyday in Roucou. Her compassion for her neighbors and friends is often contradicted by Camille's bitter perspective and sense of superiority. Yet in the end, coinciding with the end of Roucou's uprising, Djinala finally finds resolution. She comes to understand that a mother is not necessarily defined by biology, nor is one's identity.²² She is also able to find a balance between her new, "better" life and her life in Roucou. For instance, at the end of the text we see Djinala two years later and although she has left the hardship of extreme poverty behind, she has not turned her back on the people who remain there. She and Mildred remain close friends and she often joins in Roucou's regular festivities alongside her former neighbors. Even Camille has come to appreciate to an extent the life she left behind. She and Olga make peace, and two years later a photo of the two women remains in a place of honor in the new apartment. Perhaps

²¹ As Olga attempts to rile up the neglected inhabitants of Roucou, she lashes out at those who were chosen for the new apartments. Because Camille is one of those individuals, Olga reveals in her anger the story behind Camille's move to Roucou – that Laurence is in fact the real mother of Djinala and Camille wanted to start over in an area where they were unknown and where she would be able to pass Djinala off as her own.

²² In many ways, all of the novels discussed in this chapter challenge many myths or socially accepted "norms" regarding families, "race," and identity. This is important in challenging young readers to re-evaluate their pre-conceived notions of what is and is not, or what should and should not be.

Camille's altered perspective is a result of her degrading experience with the mayor, which forced her to see herself as those she detested – the poor and “trashy” inhabitants of Roucou. Or perhaps having to deal with her daughter's hurt and confusion is responsible for the change. In either case, her transformation and, more importantly, Djinala's refusal to abandon or ignore where she comes from is significant for young readers. In this case, Pineau seems to speak more directly to the poor who have managed to climb socially, as opposed to children born into the upper classes. She suggests that even if one is able to escape absolute poverty, it is crucial not to adopt the attitudes fostering socio-economic stratification. It is necessary to remember where one comes from, and not to turn one's back on the past. In terms of upper class children, this message could be understood as allegorical. She encourages upper class youths not to forget that they share a history of exploitation, enslavement, and objectification with their poor compatriots of today. While it is uncertain that a child will grasp the subtlety of allegory, her intentions seem clear, given her interest in Antillean history. She says, while speaking of another of her texts for adults, *Femmes des Antilles* (1998): “I wanted to let today's Antilleans speak to express what is most profound, what is most remote, in terms of history. It's always the same process, which consists of learning to come to terms with one's past. As living human beings, [...] we cannot remain in the past” (RAL 183). This notion of understanding and coming to terms with the past while living in the present is equally relevant for *Case mensonge*, where on one hand she portrays a poor family able to better its circumstances without forgetting its past, and where on the other she appeals to upper classes not to forget their past, encouraging class solidarity. The text's tendency to draw readers into the pain and anger experienced by the poor also

facilitates a more compassionate awareness in young readers for what the poor of their societies must endure, and the manipulative power of authorities that leave the poor essentially helpless. It is hoped that, for the sake of Antillean societies' future, today's young readers will reflect on how society both is and how it should be, and that such reflection will positively influence their choices and decisions.

Case mensonge, as with *Rêves amers* and *Hugo le terrible*, provides a realistic, touching representation of how socio-economic stratification has affected the lives and psychological as well as physical well-being of so many in Antillean societies. Yet none of these stories allow society as a whole to change in the end. There is no dramatic resolution to the gap between rich and poor, or between misery and comfort. According to Stephens, "[e]ndings reaffirm what society regards as important issues and preferred outcomes [...] even when [...] 'good' fails to win out, simply because readers formulate their sense of the ending in those terms" (43). While clearly the perpetuation of stratification is not a desired outcome in real life, the provocation of reflection and perhaps even an altered perspective are. By allowing only the circumstances of the protagonist to change, the authors maintain a realistic portrayal while highlighting the ignorance and exploitation so ingrained in socio-economic division. This realism is important in inspiring readers to become active in their awareness, or to seek changes in the current situation. As discussed previously, readers of Condé and Pineau's text are likely to be predominantly from upper classes, who have means of accessing the literature. These children, in turn, are those who, precisely because of their upper class status, will one day create, implement, and change policies currently in place. Condé and Pineau attempt to convey social truths, fostering in these readers awareness and

compassion – the most efficient way to influence how such decisions will affect Antillean societies. Moreover, once children recognize the exploitative power structures continuing to oppress the poor in Antillean societies, they will perhaps be able to also challenge the Antilles' continuing dependency on France. These texts, while focusing on situations specific to Antillean societies, also reflect situations that have existed for centuries between France and the Antilles. Antilleans in France are often regarded with disdain, and not as French citizens. In addition, many white French men and women both knowingly and unknowingly perpetuate social stratification between themselves and Antilleans, particularly black Antilleans, through their attitudes and behaviors. Finally, the dominance of French political, economic, and cultural structures further maintain social stratification between the countries. A child's awareness for the inequalities addressed in the texts will hopefully extend to the inequalities between the Antilles and France, perhaps bringing an eventual end to the relationship of dependence.

In terms of Antillean children's literature as a whole, the previous chapter regarding "race" left open questions as to the potential of this literature to challenge French hegemony and the enduring presence of colonial ideology. However, in the works by Condé and Pineau just discussed, the criticism of such ideology is clear, as the authors have attempted to cut short the prejudice and cycle of dependency ridden with colonial mentality. In the chapters that follow, it will become clearer whether this criticism is generally favored, or if in fact Antillean children's literature simply perpetuates conflicting and contradictory senses of Antillean selfhood.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING OTHERNESS

Edward Said has said of Orientalism that it “was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”)” (*Orientalism* 43). He speaks here of western dominance over the East, and the ways in which that domination is maintained. Promoting otherness, or the differences setting an individual or people apart from oneself, is one such mechanism. Much of the power found in this notion lay in its tendency to foster fear of what is different, or to solidify feelings of superiority and inferiority. Yet otherness goes beyond the comparison of West and East. Fear of difference, as well as fascination with the “exotic,” can be found in all societies, not the least among which are postcolonial societies. In the French Antilles, where ethnic and cultural diversity as well as *métissage* and a continuing relationship with France lay at the heart of the social makeup, otherness is ingrained into the everyday. The question is whether these societies’ perceptions of difference can be influenced so as to promote a tolerant and cooperative environment? Literature has, as Said asserts, been a force in reinforcing otherness and power structures. He says that literature, a supposedly neutral cultural form, disguises its power by focusing on subordinate or dominated cultures and interpreting them in the light of unchanging European and non-European essences (*Culture* 191). That is, the cultures are represented as either European (the familiar) or as non-European (Other and strange), thereby imposing on the reader this same binary sense of what is “normal” and “abnormal.” Can there be a literature, however, that challenges these ideas, and promotes instead both acknowledgment and acceptance of difference as

“normal”? The didactic, normalizing nature of children’s literature provides a significant opportunity to foster such tolerance, or to perpetuate fear. In this chapter, I will focus on representations of otherness in several Antillean children’s books, the presence of which demonstrates that Antillean authors have recognized the importance of shaping their children’s perceptions of difference. Indeed, understanding that difference is neither bad nor to be feared is instrumental in diminishing prejudice and intolerance. Throughout this chapter, I will address the representation of otherness in texts by writers such as Alex Godard, Yves Pinguilly, Ernest Pépin, Gisèle Pineau, Maryse Condé, and Patrick Chamoiseau while attempting to answer several fundamental questions. First and foremost, why is it important to think about how children, particularly Antillean children, are exposed to difference? What types of difference are being represented (i.e. ethnic, cultural, economic)? What might such representations reveal about the authors? Is there a difference between how very young children and older adolescents are presented with notions of otherness? Can it be said that these texts, and their creators, contribute to a binary perception of self and other, or do they succeed in blurring the lines that dictate what is “normal” or not? It is my intention in this chapter to explore how and why various Antillean authors have chosen to include representations of otherness in their children’s texts, and how that choice may affect both the individual child and society.

The spread of the Western world’s fascination with “Others” and the exotic can be traced to the nineteenth century French Exhibitions, in which cultures, particularly African cultures, were put on display in an effort to introduce Europeans to an “authentic” Africa. Catherine Hodeir observes that the Parisian public “had the impression of being privy to an authentic African experience. The visitor’s attention to

the African architecture on display was focused on its stylistic vagaries and novelty, its exotic otherness” (241). Yet this “authentic” version of African life was in reality no more than a performance, and an ideological rendering. Hodeir points out: “The model of a sanitized African village actualized ideas in colonial hygiene and offered an imagined African landscape for European visitors who might be discomfited by a real trip to Africa” (241). The organizers no doubt wished to promote a positive view of colonialism, and in doing so promoted an artificial “authenticity” of an “other” culture, provoking a near obsession with otherness, particularly the so-called exotic. In addition, by constructing knowledge about “Others,” albeit doctored and stereotyped, these Exhibitions contributed to the creation and maintenance of certain power relations. As Isabel Santaolalla tells us: “[...] power is exercised through the production itself of knowledge about the Other” (10). In other words, the *creation* of the Other results in a power imbalance favoring the creator, as it is through that creation (of the stereotype) that they gain control.

As Homi Bhaba argues, stereotypes give “access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it” (107). That is, the stereotype acknowledges difference, but “packages” it, so to speak, in a way that renders it less threatening. Bhaba goes on to say that the stereotype is a means by which to maintain an originality threatened by the differences of “race,” culture, and so forth (107). Hence, an “original” identity can only be achieved in terms of the Other. Yet how do another person or culture’s differences actually contribute to the stability of one’s own (original) sense of self? Stuart Hall contends that identity

“means, or connotes, the process of identification of saying that this here is the same as that, or we are the same together, in this respect. [It is] constructed through splitting. Splitting between that which one is, and that which is the other” (“Old and New” 47-48). In other words, the self is defined by identification with a group, culture, ethnicity that is the “same” or “normal,” and by contrast with those that are “different” or “abnormal.”

Much of what distinguishes “same” from “different” lay in the ideologies imposed on societies, a mindset typically inculcated today through media such as books, articles, and television or film. That is, the words and images form ideas in the social collectivity of what is normal and familiar, and what is not. For instance, Said speaks of a textual attitude, in which a person comes to relate what is found in a book with reality, pointing out the authority of text in fostering stereotypes (*Orientalism* 93). When confronted in a text with “something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant” (93), a person can come to rely on the text’s depiction, which may very well be biased, derogatory, or exoticized. Travel books are a perfect example of such authority: “The idea [...] is that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality” (Said, *Orientalism* 93). The culture is diminished to an overly simplified and “accessible” representation, thereby fostering a skewed perception among the readers. Problems such as this can be and often are found as well in fiction for both adults and children, especially if the author or publisher hails from a dominant (i.e. colonizing) society. In these societies, such representations reinforce both the reader’s identification with his or her own (superior) culture, and the different or exotic nature of “other” cultures. Yet in colonized or postcolonial societies, and even among “minority”

populations in dominant societies, such representations may pose a significant challenge to individuals' senses of self as well as to the society or group's collective identity.

For example, Fanon recounts in *Peau noire, masques blancs* his experiences of being objectified in the eyes of Whites:

‘Sale nègre!’ ou simplement: ‘Tiens, un nègre!’ [...] Enfermé dans cette objectivité écrasante, j’implorai autrui. Son regard libérateur, glissant sur mon corps devenu soudain nul d’aspérités, me rend une légèreté que je croyais perdue et, m’absentant du monde, me rend au monde. Mais là-bas, juste à contre-pente, je bute, et l’autre, par gestes, attitudes, regards, me fixe, dans le sens où l’on fixe une préparation par un colorant. Je m’emportai, exigeai une explication... Rien n’y fit. J’explosai. Voici les menus morceaux par un autre moi réunis. (88)

Seeing oneself through the eyes of the Other (the white man) is explained here as a validation of self, though in this case it is not a validation of self-worth, but of one's inferiority. Fanon's difference, as is observed and understood by the Whites he encounters, is projected back on himself, fostering a self image mirroring that of those whose impressions of him have been strongly influenced by exotic, and often degrading, representations of non-white peoples. As Anne Malena says: "Seeing oneself through the eyes of the other, one learns to perfect an image of oneself in constant dialogue with that other" (53).¹ Self-definition becomes in part a reflection of the Other's gaze. The

¹Malena goes on to discuss the presence and/or absence of visibility. That is, the image of oneself (a specific ethnicity, class, and so on) in the everyday, such as in literature, is important to one's sense of self. The absence of such images, whether it is due to indifference, racism, or discrimination, makes it difficult to maintain a dialogue with others. She also speaks of language in the same terms. For instance, she tells us: "By having to speak French in school, the language of the other, children are denied the very support of the semiotic chain constitutive of their selves" (53). This argument is indeed relevant in

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experience Fanon describes is exemplary of how significant the notion of difference is in social discourses. Familiarity and strangeness can play a tremendous role in defining oneself, or in being defined, and such definition takes place not only in everyday interactions with people, but in the books read and films seen. Literature does indeed normalize certain attitudes and beliefs specific to the culture in which the literature is produced. In children's literature, where ideas are conveyed with the specific intention of normalizing them, and of socializing the child reader into a certain ideology, representations of difference can have a strong impact on the child's self-image as well as on his or her perceptions of others. What happens, for example, when a young reader finds himself confronting representations of his or her culture, ethnicity, or class that reflect exoticism, or inferiority? Or what might be the consequences if the binary of familiar/strange is consistently reinforced through word and image? Otherness is not an "adult" concept, as it is taught to children who then grow up and perpetuate those same ideas of what is strange or abnormal, and what is familiar and therefore normal by teaching them to their own children. Children's literature may then provide the tools to either assist in this perpetuation, or to intervene. It is this question of literature's role in developing attitudes surrounding difference in the Antilles that is at the heart of this chapter.

Like most children, those in the Antilles must confront differences between people on many different levels. Yet in the Antilles these confrontations are made more complex by a history of opposition between African and European values, the inherent diversity of culture and ethnicity, and *métissage*. As Maryse Condé tells us: "Ce postulat

Antillean societies, where not only are the majority of media consistently biased toward French or "white" attitudes, but where French is the official and accepted language in schools and administration.

de base, Afrique contre Europe, est en réalité un postulat raciste hérité des premiers temps coloniaux, et qui recouvre le suivant, Sauvagerie contre Civilisation” (*Bossale* 6). Colonialism branded the African continent and all its cultures and peoples as savage and in desperate need of Europe’s “moral” instruction. By promoting the inferiority of African peoples through their physical and cultural differences (e.g. Exhibitions), colonialists were able to remain at the top of their constructed hierarchies. This hierarchy passed to the Americas with colonization and slavery, and continued to flourish over time as racist and intolerant ideologies were imposed on generation after generation. Now, as Condé points out, many Antilleans feel they need to choose between Africa and Europe, as though it were that simple (*Bossale* 6). The ideological stress of difference between the two continents and their cultures has affected many Antilleans. Assimilation, a result of the successful inculcation of colonial ideology, can problematize identification with a group and ideas of what is “other” as it fosters division among groups that are otherwise similar. For instance, colonial racial discourse has, as I have discussed in chapter one, fostered various levels of inferiority complexes among the non-white Antillean population. Those who have internalized this discourse perceive the “white race” as superior, and make every attempt to achieve “whiteness” through cultural assimilation. As a result, those individuals who have not fully adopted the French way of thinking and being become Others in the eyes of the assimilated, in spite of their physical similarities. For children, the struggle to negotiate between their identification with a particular ethnic group and the negation of that identity through assimilated values can challenge their sense of self.

Métissage as well has created situations in which some children do not belong to one particular group, thus complicating their identification with something that is “same.” For example, a child whose father is white and mother is black could be considered to belong to both or neither of these “races.” Either way, the child may face uncertainty as to which group he should or can identify with, and may be left feeling alienated from both himself and those around him. Complications found in assimilation and *métissage* coupled with the everyday differences in cultural practices, physical appearance (not only “race” but handicaps, gender, and so forth), and ideology create in the Antilles an urgent need to assist the youth of these societies to understand, accept, and negotiate the differences that both divide and unite them. Taking advantage of a convenient and effective tool, children’s literature, several Antillean authors attempt to socialize in their societies’ youth awareness, understanding, and tolerance for difference – not only that of Others, but that of oneself as well.

For very young Antilleans, picture books provide a space in which they might come to understand and embrace difference. Illustrations can externalize and make evident differences within societies, whether they are physical (i.e. ethnicity or gender), or internal (i.e. culture, ideology). As I have established in previous chapters, picture books are a “training ground for everyday experiences” (May 40), and in spite of the apparent simplicity of the words, the combination of word and image can convey important human and social issues. At the same time, the “intended audiences for picture books are, by definition, relatively inexperienced and need to learn how to think about their world and how to see and understand themselves and others” (Cotton 30).

Therefore, the complexity of the issues conveyed must also be accessible to young minds,

establishing a general but solid idea about a complicated topic such as otherness. In the two picture books to be discussed here, *Le Petit Hippopotamtam* by Alex Godard and Yves Pinguilly, and *Maé et le lamantin* by Alex Godard, we shall see that young readers are drawn into stories of unconventional relationships, survival, and subversiveness, but which communicate these messages through accessible characters and trigger images.² The first follows a young hippo who himself is “other” due to his abnormally small size, and who forges a friendship with a giraffe. The latter text explores the unlikely friendship between a young alienated girl and a manatee living in the mangrove. Both of these picture books emphasize difference, while at the same time insist on the ability, if not the need, to accept and embrace it.

In *Le Petit Hippopotamtam*, Katsi, the baby hippo, is born to loving parents who believe he will one day grow into a big and beautiful hippopotamus like them. Yet as time passes, Katsi remains small, never growing larger even at one year old: “A peine un an après sa naissance, de près ou de loin, on voyait bien que Katsi n’était toujours pas plus grand qu’une petite herbe de la brousse” (unpaged). By virtue of not changing, he is becoming “other,” as he is different from the standard or “normal” hippo. The illustrations consistently call attention to Katsi’s stature in relation with his parents, who are by all accounts “normal,” thereby stressing the young hippo’s otherness in the reader’s mind (see Figure 3). Also setting him apart, and which perhaps compensates in a way for his size, Katsi proves to be an outstanding musician who uses his belly as a drum, earning him the nickname “Hippopotamtam.”³ Despite his odd appearance, Katsi’s talent draws many of the animals to him, demonstrating to the young reader that

²Trigger images are images that activate a reader’s response to the whole narrative (Cotton 30).

³Katsi’s nickname references African drums, which are often referred to as “tam tam,” thereby calling attention to the African musical tradition.

differences, their own included, do not need to be perceived with negativity. Indeed, Katsi's otherness stems from both his smallness and his musical ability, as both are traits not "normally" found among the hippo, or animal, populations. Nevertheless, Katsi remains loved and appreciated by those around him, both in spite of and because of his differences.

Acting as a catalyst triggering Katsi's eventual growth, a devastating fire leaves the young hippo abandoned and helpless. On the one hand, because his size prevented him from fleeing with the other animals to escape the flames, one might assume that Godard and Pinguilly are presenting the hippo's otherness as a sign of weakness, or as a hindrance to his own welfare. The images of a barren wasteland and a tiny hippopotamus left to fend for himself provokes worry, sadness, and even fear in the reader's mind. Yet by fostering sympathy for Katsi, the authors draw the reader into a frame of mind where difference should not exclude one from receiving compassion or assistance. That is, while it is Katsi's physical limitations that have left him alone, the reader is led to "root" for Katsi, to wish him assistance in his situation. His otherness does not prevent the reader from perceiving him as a being with value and the right to live.

In addition, as Katsi's otherness is defined not only by his size but by his musicality as well, the reader is encouraged to understand that differences, though there may be some drawbacks, may also prove beneficial. As Katsi's life slips away, he turns to his music in one desperate attempt to make his presence known to anyone who might hear: "Et puis, sans force, pleurant, il s'allonga et se mit à tamtamer le plus fort possible" (unpaged). Hearing this, a giraffe approaches and, seeing Katsi's failing body, scoops him up without hesitation: "Elle prit Katsi et l'installa sur son dos, un peu comme le font

les mamans dans les villages, avec leur bébé” (unpaged). The little hippo’s otherness, his musical talent, has saved him, although the giraffe’s response must be equally acknowledged. While Katsi’s drumming brought the giraffe to him, she made a choice to help a being different from herself, an important lesson communicated to the young readers. One’s willingness to assist another living creature in need should not be limited to the parameters of sameness.

As the relationship between the giraffe and Katsi develops, its significance in terms of promoting a positive conception of otherness becomes increasingly clear. It is a relationship of cooperation and generosity, where the giraffe takes on a maternal role, providing her young charge with affection and nourishment. Images such as that depicting the giraffe feeding Katsi impresses this relationship on readers (see Figure 4). Katsi’s diminutive stature hinders his ability to reach what available food there is, and he must depend on this Other to help him. Without her, the young hippo would not survive, emphasizing a need on the part of both individuals to be understanding, trusting, and compassionate. Both must look beyond physical differences if they are to survive and find happiness, a lesson that can be related in particular to the diverse societies of the French Antilles.

Cooperation among Others is vital to the health and existence not only of individuals but of societies as well, which is made clear to the young readers when Katsi, because of such a relationship, begins to grow. Little by little Katsi grows larger, mirroring the developing relationship between himself and the giraffe. His physical limitations or his “otherness” diminishes as the boundaries dividing what is different are blurred and eventually eliminated. The irony of Katsi’s success at “normalness,”

facilitated by an Other, cannot be overlooked, as it is this very situation that embodies the message of cooperation and tolerance.

When Katsi and his parents are finally reunited with the arrival of the rainy season, the message of tolerance is made concrete for the young reader. Despite the overwhelming joy of finding one another, Katsi and his parents are shown to represent two perspectives with regard to otherness. The mother and father are overjoyed that their son has achieved “normalcy,” but are shocked when Katsi confides that he must grow even larger so that he might kiss the giraffe on her nose: “Mais pourquoi? Embrasser une giraffe, ça ne se fait pas!” (unpaged) Adhering to social norms that dictate what is and is not appropriate in terms of relationships, Katsi’s parents represent a point of view that sees difference as inherently problematic. The idea of a hippopotamus and a giraffe becoming close and one’s desire to kiss the other is unthinkable. Yet Katsi insists: “Si, ça se fait: c’est elle qui m’a sauvé!” (unpaged) Not only does Katsi prove to be unaffected by social conventions and what is or is not “normal,” he recognizes the role played by the giraffe, the Other, in his survival, thereby placing her in a position of honor. That these words are the last of the text is significant, as is the image accompanying them of Katsi and the giraffe together (see Figure 5), in that they reinforce what lesson young readers are intended to absorb – that otherness is not to be feared and that on the contrary, it is to be entirely embraced.

Similarly to *Le Petit Hippopotamte*, Godard’s picture book *Maé et le lamantin* emphasizes the need for understanding and compassion through a relationship between an unlikely pair. A young girl, Maé, is upset by her relationship with her stepmother⁴,

⁴The stepmother, whose name reflects her character, Piranhas, embodies the “evil stepmother” present in many European fairy tales such as “Cinderella.” The absence, mental if not physical, of the

and forges a secret friendship with a manatee, Yaya. From the beginning Yaya is described as different: “Lentement, tel un vaisseau, *un étrange animal* était sorti des eaux troubles de la mangrove” (unpaged, emphasis added). In addition, he warns Maé not to speak of him, or he will be in great danger, thereby calling attention to society’s fear of the unknown. Both characters are in their own way rejected, yet their relationship, like that between Katsi and the giraffe, represents the interdependence of all individuals, no matter the differences, which we see as their friendship develops.

Yaya is Maé’s link with a different world, and she depends on him to protect and guide her in the unfamiliar and at times overwhelming surroundings: “Maé découvre alors l’immensité bleue de la mer. De grosses vagues frappaient avec fureur la barrière de corail. Maé se serra contre son ami, pour se sentir moins petite” (unpaged). The hierarchy established by humans over their environment is overturned, as Maé exhibits no sense of superiority over the waters and its inhabitants. On the contrary, she looks to Yaya, an Other deemed inferior by this hierarchy, for support, just as Katsi looked to the giraffe for survival. In fact, even among the brilliant diversity of the reef dwellers, she is herself “other.” Her human presence, “unnatural” to the reef, is othering, which we see in images illustrating sea inhabitants looking at Maé and Yaya together with curiosity (see Figure 6). Her grace in the water, due largely if not entirely to Yaya, both extends that otherness – it is not a “human” characteristic, thus setting her apart from other humans unable to swim with equal capabilities – and bridges the gap between human and animal. Maé’s ability to thrive in a different world because of her friendship with a being

father is also characteristic of this genre, indicating Godard’s incorporation of these literary structures. Maé must endure her stepmother’s treatment and her father’s lack of support, which leaves her alienated from her family and more open to unconventional relationships, such as with Yaya.

different from herself encourages young readers to embrace the possibilities that come with breaking down conventional barriers between “normal” and “abnormal.”

When sudden panic grips the reef, the image of Maé and Yaya hiding, apparently, from Squalle-le-Terrifiant, a shark whose intimidating dorsal scar marks him as a formidable opponent, leads the reader to believe that the danger lay with Squalle. However, in truth; “le danger venait d’ailleurs...” (unpaged). As the reader turns the page, s/he understands that it is not Squalle but Maé’s own father who poses the real threat: “Maé le comprit seulement lorsque le coup de harpon fit disparaître Yaya sous l’eau. Elle aperçut alors la pirogue et Sinahi, furieux d’avoir raté une si belle prise” (unpaged). Yaya’s difference, and Sinahi’s inability to look beyond that difference, creates in the latter a lack of understanding. His attitude mirrors an ethno-centric frame of mind, where Yaya, with whom he cannot relate because of such difference, is simply a commodity.

Godard plays on the sympathy of his readers here, and in the pages that follow, fostering compassion for Yaya, and disapproval of Sinahi’s behavior. Yaya’s injury does not kill him, but his spirit is deeply affected, the reason for which provokes empathy and, most importantly, awareness:

“- Il y a longtemps, un harpon a tué celle que j’aimais. Grâce à toi, mon chagrin s’est peu à peu apaisé, mais aujourd’hui, il n’y a plus de place ici pour les lamantins.

- De place? Il y en a plein! rétorqua Maé.

- Oui, la mangrove est grande,... mais les hommes ont le coeur si petit...”

(unpaged)

The smallness of men's hearts, as is understood in Yaya's criticism, indicates their inability to coexist with beings different from themselves, whether it is animals or people. Their greed and fear of the unfamiliar lead them to commit unjust and sometimes violent acts against these Others, just as Sinahi has done. Despite the vastness of the mangrove, perhaps allegorical for the world, the inability, or unwillingness, of man to look beyond difference makes it a dangerous space to inhabit. When an Other is subject to a more powerful being's cruelty – fostered by their fear of the unknown – there are few places that are safe. Yaya's criticism of man, and his as well as his companion's encounters with a harpoon serve to enlighten young readers on the dangers of making judgments based on difference alone. The readers, who have by now come to know Yaya as intelligent and kind, are led to "root" for him, just as they are led to "root" for Katsi in *Le Petit Hippopotamte*. They are led to understand that Yaya's difference does not entitle Sinahi, or others, to kill him, and that instead he should live in peace and happiness.

When Yaya is attacked again, this time by Piranhas, his criticism of men is solidified: "Ah! Un lamantin! De l'huile de lamantin, hurle Piranhas, voilà qui me rendra la jeunesse! Harponne-le! Tue-le! Comme Sinahi hésitait, elle s'empara du harpon" (unpaged). The viciousness of Piranha's expression, and her selfish and ignorant motive, reflect men's greed and smallness of heart. Once again, Yaya is targeted and objectified by his otherness. However, while Godard encourages strong disapproval of Piranhas and Sinahi's behavior, he allows redemption as well.

Moments after Piranhas' attack on Yaya, Squalle-le-Terrifiant capsizes the small boat; his ferocious jaws nearly engulfing the two adults, who had only just appeared as large and imposing figures. The roles between human and animal, or between "normal"

and “abnormal,” are reversed, and the human parents are forced to re-evaluate their previously established ideas. Indeed, this event acts as the catalyst that helps Sinahi and Piranhas overcome their intolerance. Despite their behavior toward Yaya, the latter chooses to save the human adults by luring Squalé into the mangrove, putting his own life in danger. His decision to help those who have mistreated him because of his difference both portrays Yaya as superior (his “humanity” is greater than that of Sinahi or Piranhas), and reiterates a message of cooperation. The experience alters the parents’ perspectives, and ultimately brings the family together⁵, which is demonstrated when they all look for Yaya, and, when they find him, help nurse him back to health: “ Nous allons prendre soin de ton ami, ajouta Piranhas. Dans quelques jours, vous pourrez à nouveau vous promener dans la mangrove” (unpaged). The Other’s bravery and selflessness brings about a *prise de conscience* in the human adults; they realize that Yaya’s difference is not indicative of disposability or expendability, and that the friendship between this being and their daughter is a positive and “normal” relationship.

The friendships forged between Maé and Yaya, and between Katsi and the giraffe, are unconventional, and are perceived at times by other characters in the stories as “wrong” or socially unacceptable, particularly between the latter pair. Yet in both cases, conventions are dismissed, and readers are shown how relationships can develop between individuals or groups that are different, and how these relationships should be regarded in a positive light. They are also encouraged to see these relationships as necessary both to

⁵Immediately after Yaya disappears into the mangrove, Maé sings to bring him back. Although the image conveys distance between the three family members (they sit away from one another and look in different directions), Piranhas joins Maé in singing, and Sinahi tenderly brings both of them back to the house. They are now a family.

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the self and to society⁶, as they exemplify cooperation, tolerance, and interdependence. Turning one's back on another because of his or her differences can result in danger: Katsi, Yaya, and Maé's parents would have died if not for cooperation and compassion. Sarah Mahurt has argued that in Caribbean picture books, there tends to be a theme of survival that has grown from resistance to slavery and colonial oppression (278). This significant assertion supports a notion that Antillean authors are making an explicit effort to rally their youths against the ideological oppression that persists today. By inculcating values centered on survival, youths are better prepared to become part of a complex, ideologically tumultuous society, while at the same time are equipped with means to resist said oppression. In Godard's and Pinguilly's texts, we do indeed see that element of survival in the face of great odds. Survival is dependent on the ability to overcome socially established boundaries and "acceptable" behavior, or in other words, to overcome the politics of otherness.

In these picture books, there is little doubt that Godard and Pinguilly focus on fostering tolerance, and challenge the divisions created by differences. The young readers are consistently confronted by images that highlight difference (the obvious dissimilarities between a hippopotamus and a giraffe, and between a girl and a manatee), and at the same time showcase the cooperation and interdependency of these different beings. The words, reinforced by these images, demonstrate the need for such relationships, and allow readers to understand that questioning social structures,

⁶The necessity of the Other to the self, in this respect, does not reflect Hall's argument that one needs an Other in order to define oneself. Rather, the child reader is expected to see that Others are an integral and important part of life and society, and, as is shown in the relationships between the books' protagonists, their presence fulfills gaps that one single group or individual cannot fill (i.e. Katsi's inability to get food because of his size is made less of a problem because of the giraffe's large stature).

particularly when those structures call for prejudice or intolerance, is acceptable and even “normal.”

Rather than delve into the harsh and complex Antillean social realities, however, these books inculcate a more basic value: respect for differences. As the readership consists of small children who are essentially inexperienced with life and society, the authors attempt to instill a strong base on which to build as the readers grow and become aware of the realities around them. By helping shape the minds of the youngest Antilleans, and by fostering in them a sense of equality among all who are different, Antillean societies will face a brighter future in terms of intercultural and interracial relationships: the inherent diversity in these societies means that compassion, tolerance, and awareness are necessary in order to develop and thrive. Yet as these children become older, how does literature reinforce or expand this awareness and tolerance for otherness? In picture books such as those by Godard and Pinguilly, otherness is externalized and made obvious through the images. The “lesson” is conveyed clearly so as to impress it on the inexperienced mind. Yet as these children grow, so does their understanding of society and social inequalities, and their personal experiences with difference and the prejudice it may foster increase in number. It makes sense, then, for authors of young adult novels to include more directly applied representations of otherness. That is, provide juvenile readers with representations that they can relate to their own experiences with difference, either their own or that of “others.” Some texts might weave various notions of otherness into the storyline, as in Pineau’s *Les Colères du volcan*. Other texts may make passing but pointed references to cultural otherness, as in Pépin’s *La Coulée d’or*. Still other texts might focus primarily on diversity and otherness, drawing attention

specifically to those issues, such as in Condé's *La Planète Orbis*. In all cases, the texts provide young readers with representations that allow them to make connections between what they are reading, and what they experience every day. If, as Zimet points out, the process of attitude change through reading is related to the ability to identify with the characters (and their experiences) of a story, the author's representation both of the character and his or her responses in the face of difference reveal what change might take place.

In Pépin's *La Coulée d'or*, much of the plotline focuses on racial relations, and the impact of French ideology on the Antillean collectivity. The racist undertones of that ideology certainly imply that ethnic otherness is a motif continually present in Pépin's work. The negative "otherness" of the black Antillean according to colonial discourse is clearly illustrated, as is the desire to reject it. As I discussed in chapter one, much of the text focuses on the degradation of the "black race" by colonial racial discourse, and on how many black Antilleans attempt to cast off their otherness by achieving whiteness. Those who do not conform physically or culturally to the French standard of "normal" are looked down upon by not only Whites, but by assimilated Blacks and *Mulâtres* as well. Here, however, I would like to focus on one particular chapter in the text that specifically focuses on the exoticization of an "other" culture and ethnicity, and which clearly conveys how difference permeates one's perspective.

Ernest's experiences with the Indian population in his neighborhood provide him, as well as the reader, with insight into a "strange" and "exotic" culture. Initially Ernest has a superficial understanding, at best, of Indian cultures and customs, and outside of their ceremonies he shows little interest: "Après les fêtes, je les oubliais car elles

reprenaient l'apparence banale de tous les malheureux de la Guadeloupe" (167). What attracts Ernest is not an actual interest in Indian culture, but the brilliant and exciting aura of their celebrations and ceremonies: "J'étais hanté par les cérémonies indiennes. Robert m'en parlait souvent. Je voulais voir! Je voulais savoir! Je voulais comprendre!" (171) His eagerness to learn and experience this culture is apparent, yet when the colorful ceremonies become for him the "reality" of Indian culture, his perspective becomes a bit problematic. Ernest seems to believe that by seeing or attending their ceremonies he understands the complexities of their culture:

C'est à Saint-François que je découvris la réalité indienne. Elle chantait avec des noms qui sonnaient comme des poèmes tamouls. Je les apprenais par coeur et je les récitais pour le plaisir de l'oreille. [...] Ces noms interminables se déroulaient dans ma tête comme des rubans multicolores. Je les peignais en jaune safran, en rouge sang, en vert colombo, en bleu ciel et ils devenaient des noms cérémonieux, longs et brillants comme des queues de paon. (167-68)

Consider Said's explanation of how texts often ignore the complexities of a culture and diminish it to its outward, exciting, and ultimately different customs. One might argue that Pépin is contributing to misconceptions of Indian culture by allowing his protagonist to indulge in this exoticization, thereby placing him among those criticized by Said. Perhaps to some extent this is true, but as we shall see, the situation is not nearly so simple.

Because of his Indian friend, Robert, Ernest is made aware of the racial and cultural tension between Indians and Blacks in the Antilles. He is both surprised and

confused to learn that in a place where there are many different ethnicities, Indians would experience such harsh racism. Understanding the similar relationship between black, white, and *mulâtre* Antilleans, Ernest criticizes Blacks' attitude toward Indians, expressing his disgust for its injustice and his pride at having been raised without "une miette de racisme" (170). Though Ernest embraces an exoticized image of Indian cultures, he does not accept that because of their differences Indians are inferior. At the same time, however, his attendance at the Indian *maliémin*, a ceremony in honor of the black Virgin (*la Vierge noire*), challenges Ernest's ideals. In spite of his anger at the hypocritical treatment of Indians by Blacks, Ernest honors socially constructed boundaries: "Je hélai la protection divine en demandant à Dieu de me pardonner l'offense que je lui faisais d'être là dans ce monde de statues à quatre bras et à trompes d'éléphant" (176). Although he does not accept outward discrimination against the Indians, his prayer for forgiveness demonstrates his own, perhaps unconscious, prejudice. He is Christian, and believes his presence at the Indian ceremony to be a sin thereby implying the sacrilege or "savagery" of the Indians' beliefs. Ernest's apparent disapproval, at least in terms of morality, is reinforced during the ceremony when he witnesses the sacrifice of goats: "Une mort sans cri, sans pardon, qui s'éparpille en rosée de sang dans le rituel de la cérémonie. Autant de cabris, autant de cadavres! Les têtes sont rangées les unes à côté des autres, sagement, stupidement, absurdement. Elles viendront hanter mes mauvais rêves. Secoué jusqu'à la nausée je me réfugie sous la véranda et j'essaie d'avaler mon épouvante" (176). Horrified by what he perceives to be a brutal and absurd massacre, Ernest faces an acute difference between his own culture and that of his friend Robert. His admiration of the latter's culture does not extend beyond the brightly colored and

melodic celebrations as he comes to realize the actual realities of it. Although Ernest is able to rejoin the festivities, what he has experienced leaves a permanent mark. Pépin acknowledges that the ceremony and the knowledge he gained from it became an unforgettable part of his childhood: “[...] tout cela dans le tray de mon enfance et je ne l’oublierai pas” (178).

On one hand, Pépin does challenge to some extent the exotic perception of Indian culture. The sacrificial ritual, for example, forces Ernest to see that the culture is more than beautiful celebrations, and that there are aspects he may never understand or even accept. On the other hand, Pépin does not counter Ernest’s disapproval of Indian cultural practices (his prayer for forgiveness, and his disgust at the rituals), which may be problematic in terms of promoting a tolerant and cooperative frame of mind among his young readers. That is not to say that Ernest *must* accept the sacrifice of goats as “right,” but rather he should accept that the Indians’ culture is different from his own, and that in their eyes, he too may partake in practices viewed as strange or even unacceptable. As such, he should try to understand, even if he doesn’t agree. Unfortunately, although the narrative is autobiographical, and Ernest’s perceptions and interpretations of events result from his inexperience, Pepin does not provide the critical reflection present elsewhere in his text. That is, it is generally clear when Pépin wishes to discourage or encourage certain ideas or attitudes, as his own adult voice overlaps that of Ernest to foster such reflection. Yet that clarity is lacking here, where contradicting messages – the exotic beauty and exciting nature of Indian ceremonies, the brutal reality of sacrificial rituals, the belief that these ceremonies are sacrilegious and even “savage” – make it difficult to ascertain whether Pépin himself is clear on what he wants to convey to his readers. He

has effectively represented cultural differences, thereby fostering awareness. Yet at the same time, he paints an unsavory picture of Indian practices with no mention of Ernest's (potentially negative) otherness in the eyes of the Indians. Thus, while there is no doubt he expresses strong disapproval of racism against the Indians by Blacks who are themselves targets of racism, in terms of cultural difference his message is ambiguous.

Despite such ambiguity, it is more than likely that readers will relate to Ernest's situation. He faces internal conflict: he detests racism against the Indians, but cannot accept certain of their cultural practices, perceiving them as sacrilege. Given the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Antilles, this is a situation that many Antillean children may have to confront. Where Godard's and Pinguilly's picture books inculcate appreciation of difference on a more general level, Pépin provides readers with an opportunity to relate specifically with Ernest's experience. Whether that experience will aid readers in acquiring cross-cultural tolerance remains uncertain. In addition, its contribution to an exoticized conception of Indians and their cultural practices renders any potential message in that vein decidedly less effective.

What problematizes Pépin's depiction of cultural otherness in order to develop his readership's awareness is the lack of explicit reflection on how Ernest's experiences have shaped his attitude and vice versa. There is also no exploration of the larger social consequences of his attitude. Thus, while Pépin clearly advocates challenging the racist discourses of colonial authority, his stance on the complications of cultural otherness seems a bit less decisive. This is not the case, however, in Pineau's young adult novel, *Les Colères du volcan*, where references to difference and the exotic are woven into the storyline. Contrary to Pépin's ambiguous representation of cross-cultural contact (at least

in terms of its intended message), Pineau's numerous representations of otherness on various levels clearly constitute an "instructive" approach to the issue.

In an interview, Pineau tells Nadège Veldwachter: "In my novels, there are often people who are marginalized, pushed aside, different. I am interested in difference and in how we look at others – it brings me terribly close to my profession of psychiatric nurse" (181). *Les Colères du volcan* exemplifies her interest in exploring difference, as it simultaneously reveals how differences and the exotic permeate Antillean societies, and attempts to encourage tolerance in young readers.

The story follows a young girl, Cynthia, as she begins what will become one of the most significant school years in her educational career. Her friendship with the elderly Père Francis, a social misfit in his own right, immediately introduces young readers to what will become the center of Pineau's most visible message: looking beyond and accepting differences to find unity, both human and Caribbean.⁷ Although Cynthia feels alienated from her family and peers, she acknowledges that with Père Francis, an "Other" in relation to herself, she feels "normal," and accepted for who she is with no expectations or disappointments. Each allows the other to be himself, and because of this mutual acceptance and appreciation, their relationship thrives, which, in turn, represents to readers how interactions between "Others" *should* be. As the story progresses, Cynthia encounters numerous situations in which otherness, to some degree, plays a part. For instance, a teacher at her school, who moved from metropolitan France, sees Guadeloupe as an exotic paradise, and spends her days grading papers on the beach. Though brief, this reference brings to mind the exoticization of "other" places,

⁷The idea of solidarity that coincides to some extent with Pineau's exploration of otherness does reflect a view of *créolité*, however we can also interpret it as a counter to the divisive nature of "otherness" because it deflects an "us and them" mentality between Antilleans and people of other Caribbean islands.

particularly when they offer a beauty entirely different from one's familiar landscape. For this teacher, Guadeloupe *is* paradise, and the political or ideological issues are of little, if any, concern to her. Also referencing a sort of othering is Cynthia's avoidance of a girl based entirely on the latter's wardrobe and appearance. Not unlike the dismissal of "other" cultures or ethnicities, Cynthia rejects this girl because she does not approve of the way she looks or dresses. Pineau is quick to counter this attitude by forcing her protagonist to recognize that she had misjudged the girl, who proves to be a warm and kind-hearted individual. Yet Cynthia's most prominent encounter with otherness and exoticization lay in her class trip to the neighboring island of Montserrat.

Readers are introduced to this island through Père Francis's desire to see what this "other" place is like: "Est-ce qu'il y avait les mêmes genre de nègres, là-bas? Est-ce que les plages déroulaient le même sable? Est-ce que le volcan 'la Soufrière', qui portait le même nom que celui de Guadeloupe, couvait la même ardeur et le même feu?" (17) These questions reflect the curiosity surrounding the different or strange, and at the same time act as a jumping off point from which to explore the mechanisms behind otherness, and the significance of confronting those mechanisms. When Cynthia's English teacher announces a class trip to Montserrat to visit the students' pen pals, he sets in motion a series of events leading, ultimately, to such a confrontation.

First, however, let us look more closely at Cynthia's new English teacher, John Douglas, who proves to be a driving force in Pineau's lessons on otherness. He immediately challenges his students to look beyond the confines of their society and way of life: "Eh bien! Francky, commença John Douglas, tu n'as pas envie de connaître la Caraïbe? *The Caribbean!* Tu n'es pas curieux d'aller voir ces gens qui vivent autour de

toi, *you know*... Tous ces peuples qui parlent des langues qui te sont étrangères, *english*, *Spanish [sic]*..." (23-24) At first, it seems John's promotion of "discovery," a notion intimately linked with that of "conquering," reflects a colonialist frame of mind, and may also reflect the author's own position. To some extent this may be true: Guadeloupe's status as a department of France, the latter's continued cultural, political, and economic influence, and the author's having spent much of her childhood in metropolitan France may have in some way influenced Pineau's own perspectives, unknown to her. However, as the dialogue between John and his students continues, it becomes increasingly clear that through the "discovery" of Guadeloupe's neighboring islands, Pineau encourages a sense of appreciation for and solidarity with the "other" islands of the Caribbean.

The students, at first, feel no need to explore these islands: "Je pense que la Caraïbe est trop petite. Nous vivons déjà sur une île minuscule. Nous devons aller sur les continents. L'Europe, l'Amérique... Paris, New York..." (25) Their view reflects acculturation, assuming that only the Western or "superior" societies and cultures are worth visiting. Yet John questions this desire, explaining that discovering what is around oneself should precede exploring the far reaches of the planet. He also criticizes their disinterest in and dismissal of any significance in the Caribbean region: "C'est comme si tu ne t'intéressais pas aux terriens, que tu n'accordais d'importance qu'aux extraterrestres, aux *aliens*" (25). John references a fascination with the totally exotic ("*aliens*"), and criticizes his students' inability, or lack of desire, to see what is around them. He also implies that these young Guadeloupeans need to understand and appreciate their fellow Caribbeans before they can explore and understand the rest of the world. While clearly one could interpret this dialogue as representing Pineau's view on

créolité, we must also acknowledge that through fostering awareness of “other” Caribbean peoples and cultures, Pineau negates the politics of otherness: she rejects the idea that one is defined solely by what one is not. In encouraging a sense of solidarity, Pineau implies an inevitable inter-connectedness among and between “other” peoples, particularly in the Caribbean, just as we saw in Godard and Pinguilly’s picture books.

This sense of solidarity is verbalized by John toward the end of the text in response to the eruption of Montserrat’s volcano, and his students concern for their new friends: “Les peuples des Caraïbes sont solides. Ils ne baissent jamais les bras. Ils reconstruisent après les cyclones, après les tremblements de terre, après les éruptions volcaniques...” (110) John provides a pointed lesson in the strength of Caribbean peoples, thereby encouraging both characters and readers to appreciate their own region. Yet, his declaration primarily provides closure to the lessons learned by his students. What I wish to explore here is precisely what in those lessons has led to the students’ growing awareness and sensitivity.

As I mentioned previously, John’s decision to orchestrate a trip to Montserrat sets in motion his students’ eventual confrontation with otherness, and with their own prejudiced perspectives. Pineau illustrates how the imagination plays a role in one’s perceptions of Others through nearly all of the leading characters in the moments leading up to and during the trip. For instance, Père Francis, who is invited to join the class, and his host “family,” a single woman named Stacy, exemplify mutual exoticization in that each sees the other through a lens created in the imagination. Without “reality” to inform their ideas, they rely on what they *imagine* the “other” to be. For Stacy, Père Francis is a *real* Frenchman, which, as a new experience, she finds exciting. Père Francis, in turn,

sees Stacy as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, far more beautiful than any Guadeloupean, despite the fact that her face is hidden in shadows in the picture she sends him. She is from the island he has dreamed his whole life of seeing, and he makes an association between that dream and this woman. Pineau, however, does not immediately question or challenge these illusory perspectives, but rather builds on them in depicting her younger characters.

When the students arrive on the island, the level to which imagination has solidified certain ideas, and therefore certain expectations, is revealed, and not in a manner favorable to the Guadeloupean children. The reader follows Cynthia as she meets her pen pal, Shirley, and her family, sees their home and place of business, and admits (to the readers) that she was shocked: “À cause des lettres de Shirley, j’avais imaginé un somptueux salon de coiffure. En fait, il n’était pas plus grand que ma chambre. Les casques étaient vétustes. Le plancher, incertain, était recouvert d’un lino usé” (70). Her expectations, based on her interpretations of Shirley’s letters, are unfulfilled, and she finds herself disillusioned by reality. She fails to appreciate Shirley’s poetic imagination. The new, exotic, exciting place she had expected to see does not exist. For the young readers, her disenchantment, as well as that of the other classmates, discourages assuming absolute knowledge about an “other” culture or society based on limited and superficial interactions, such as watching films, reading books, or reading letters, all of which can be misrepresentative or misunderstood. Whether Shirley had misrepresented her reality, or Cynthia misunderstood Shirley’s words, what is important is that one not make pre-judgments with so little understanding, and that one not confuse material wealth with emotional warmth and moral value.

Kateryna Olijnyk Longley tells us: “The moment of unmasking is the moment at which the other is robbed of the allure of mystery and the desire which feeds upon the play of the imagination is stopped in its tracks by the exposed ‘reality’” (34). The enticing mystery of Montserrat is no longer, and what the students had imagined, and consequently expected, is shattered by the “reality” of Montserrat’s poverty and utterly “un-exotic” lifestyle. As Longley contends, the exotic is the “alluring and potentially entrapping aspect of otherness” (28). Thus, when that exoticism is gone, what remains is still “other,” but without the appeal. For Cynthia and her classmates, the removal of that appeal results in their adoption of an equally colonial perspective; rejecting that which differs from their sense of “normal” or “proper.” Their complaints and unmitigated expressions of disapproval for how the once exotic “Others” actually live illustrate the effects of French dominance over the Antilles. Living in a society that has “benefited” from French cultural, political, and economic influence has led the students to both perceive “other” cultures with the same imaginary exoticism found in Western colonial discourses, and to reject standards of living that do not reflect their own. Clearly the author’s *porte-parole*, John responds immediately and fiercely to his students’ behavior: “Vous êtes au-dessus des Caribéens ordinaires, c’est ça? *Frenchies! I think so... indeed. I’m sure of it... God! Qui vous a mis ça dans la tête?*” (74-75) John’s words contextualize their attitudes as assimilationist, and bring to the forefront problems of inculcating French values in Antillean youths.⁵ According to Rice-Maximin, until very recently terms such as “Congo” or “Moudongue” were used in the Antilles as insults to refer to those considered to be “non-civilisés” or “non-assimilés,” indicating that the

⁵It is not unimportant that it is a “foreigner,” or non-“Frenchie” that realizes and calls attention to this important fact, thereby underscoring how distanced the assimilated youths of the text are from the social realities that surround them.

general population had internalized the “superior” European values embedded in Antillean societies, while considering Africans, and “other” people of African descent, to be inferior (26). The students in Pineau’s text clearly embody this frame of mind, considering themselves superior to the people of Montserrat. Yet, through John’s vehement condemnation of his students’ behavior, Pineau denounces uninformed judgments of “other” people that result in the self-centered, spoiled, euro-centric attitudes exhibited by her young characters. The readers, who are led to feel ashamed of the students’ disparaging remarks about their host families, as they too are vicariously reprimanded through John’s lecture, are forced to examine their own attitudes and ideas of Others, as well as of themselves.

It is Cynthia who verbalizes the lesson catalyzed by John’s criticism: “[...] ce séjour à Montserrat était une étape qui nous ouvrait le monde. Notre regard avait changé et continuerait à changer. Nous nous rendions compte que la Guadeloupe n’était pas le centre du monde et que nous ne connaissions rien. Il fallait voyager encore et encore, regarder encore et encore, pour apprendre encore et encore...” (82) Pineau once again emphasizes curiosity and the “discovery” of “other” cultures, and at the same time a less self-centered and more open point of view. Perhaps we might better understand this seeming contradiction if we consider Said’s assertion that “[the] more one is able to leave one’s cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment *and* generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and detachment” (*Orientalism* 259). Add to this Bernard Smith’s words regarding the South Pacific: “If we are to understand the Pacific world we must also accept the reality

of the objects out of which the concept of the Pacific was constructed, together with the reality both of those European minds that sought to understand it and those Pacific minds that found themselves at once the objects and victims of their understanding” (qtd by Nandan 79). Both Said and Smith imply that in order to understand an “other” place, one must accept how the concept of that place was constructed – the versions and visions perpetuated by narratives of the European imagination. Travel can help one understand these places *if* it is done with the right frame of mind and awareness. Because the students in Pineau’s text continue to grow in terms of cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness after their experience on Montserrat, it would appear that Pineau promotes this very conception of traveling, and the idea that travel should lead to the appreciation of “other” ways of life as well as to cooperation across national and cultural boundaries.

Cynthia’s experiences and attitude after Montserrat demonstrate the desired outcome to readers, reinforcing Pineau’s message of compassion, tolerance, and even solidarity. For instance, in a conversation with a Haitian woman, Gina, Cynthia exhibits empathy, and a desire to understand everything surrounding Gina’s life and devastating history. As she learns, she develops a feeling of closeness with Gina: “Je me sentais proche de Gina lorsqu’elle racontait Haïti, cette île de la Caraïbe qui avait connu la gloire et la ruine. Même si son créole était différent du nôtre, je comprenais tout ce qu’elle disait” (116). As Cynthia “discovers” a part of Haiti, she also begins to discover a sense of solidarity, symbolized in her ability to *understand* all that Gina says, in spite of the difference in language. It is significant that the woman with whom she feels solidarity is Haitian, as there has long been tension between Haitian immigrants and Antilleans (see chapter two). The fact that she senses sameness between them indicates a dissolving

prejudice against Haitian “others,” and conveys to young readers notions of common humanity, and more specifically, a shared bond between peoples of the Antilles and Haiti. Indeed, the lesson Cynthia learned on Montserrat stays with her, enabling her to reach past differences to see this common humanity and the shared experiences or histories among peoples of different societies, particularly in the Caribbean. Her experience with Gina, one among many, exemplifies this, and encourages readers, once again, to develop an interest in the world beyond their immediate surroundings and familiar lifestyle.

Ironically, however, Cynthia’s decision to become a journalist, motivated by her experiences on Montserrat and a sense of responsibility toward the smallest of countries often forgotten or overlooked by the world, could be interpreted as a contradiction to Pineau’s message against the exoticization of and discrimination against “Others,” as could Cynthia’s decision to pursue journalistic studies in France. Journalism, whose roots lie in the colonizing world, has often been a major contributor to the exoticization and archotyping of “other” cultures and peoples, as it represents a “reality” of a situation to otherwise unknowing observers. The supposed objectivity of journalistic reporting makes it considerably more powerful as a purveyor of “truth” because it claims a certain authority in providing undisputable “facts.” That Cynthia pursues her education in journalism in France is equally problematic because the métropole is a major center of “othering.” Her education in the mechanisms of exoticization or othering implicit in (Western) journalism may hinder Cynthia’s “mission” of bringing cultural awareness to the world. Yet the question I am most interested in here is whether Cynthia’s decision will diminish the effectiveness of Pineau’s previously established lessons. That is, are her young readers, who have thus far been invited to share Cynthia’s experiences and life

lessons, going to be inspired to pursue a similar course of action, and if they do, does it mean that they will be re-absorbed into the cycle of exoticization and otherness, in spite of their good intentions? There is, of course, no “good” way to answer this question, but if we are considering how Pineau’s young adult novel, as well as the other children’s literature of the Antilles, may influence the future of Antillean societies, this somewhat problematic ending to her story invites reflection.

Despite this potential obstacle, Pineau’s text provides a pointed and generally effective message advocating the acceptance and appreciation of differences, and draws attention to the dangers and injustices of allowing one’s imagination to dictate one’s perceptions of otherwise unknown cultures and peoples. Whereas Pépin’s portrait of Indian culture in *La Coulée d’or* provides very little direction in terms of the attitudes he wishes his readers to adopt, Pineau clearly establishes and reinforces her message through her characters and their experiences.

Surpassing both Pineau and Pépin, however, in terms of “instructing” young Antilleans on otherness, is Maryse Condé. Whereas the previous two authors focus, for the most part, on the Other external to the self, and the contact between different people and cultures, Condé expands her exploration of otherness to include that of and within the self. In her young adult novel, *La Planète Orbis*, we shall see that Condé is the most comprehensive in guiding her readers through the various implications of otherness, and providing empowering tools to change the current state of society, particularly within the Antilles and the Caribbean. Her science fiction story, following a young sheltered Guadeloupean boy through his adventures as an elected emissary on the planet Orbis, is the perfect backdrop for encouraging cross-cultural communication and sensitivity, as

well as awareness for oneself and Others. As the story progresses, the young protagonist, José, loses his previous identity in a sense only to have it re-constructed through revelations of social “reality” exposed to him through his experiences on Orbis.

For instance, immediately upon arrival, José is told he will no longer be referred to by his name, but by an assigned number, TM 0590. Not only is he denied his “individuality,” but the significance of the numbers, the telephone code for Guadeloupe, implies that he, and therefore the reader, is being drawn out of a self-centered perception of the world, and into one that is more community-centered. In addition, José is forced to confront situations that challenge his ideas of “normal” or “proper”, such as being asked to undress in front of his mentor, whom he hardly knows. His sensibilities, informed by his society’s norms and conventions, are questioned as the mentor points out that men have perverted the human body through their vice, desires, and concupiscence. José must essentially acknowledge an “other” point of view concerning nudity and the human body, foreshadowing the many lessons in diversity and otherness he will receive during his stay on Orbis. It appears in these first moments of his journey that Condé is preparing him, and the reader, to relearn ways of thinking and being. If the mission he and the other children have been elected to carry out is to change the world, then they must first learn to look beyond what they “know.”

Condé begins by illustrating for her readers the ethnic diversity of the Caribbean, from where the *Élus* have come, and brings to their attention how in spite of this diversity, many Antilleans remain ignorant of it:

José n’avait jamais autant remarqué la diversité du peuple des Caraïbes.

Les peaux offraient une palette de couleurs. Les cheveux étaient de toute

nature. On comptait des chabins, des nègres rouges, des mulâtres, des câpresses. Plusieurs [...] ressemblaient à des Indiens [...], certains à des Asiatiques. Il y avait même des blondinets aux yeux couleur d'eau de mer (27-28).

In spite of how questionable it may seem, given the inevitable visibility of these ethnicities in José's society, his reaction is a telling reminder of how influential the presence of French or colonial ideology has been. His previously assimilated and even ethno-centric perspective blinded him in a sense to the diversity around him, of which he is a part. Condé stresses this point, which at the same time insinuates her "message" to readers, by negating any sort of racial hierarchy or categorizations through the children's equality as elected officials. Monique Blérald-Ndagano tells us that lists of nouns identifying persons of varied skin color such as that cited above is common in Condé's works, and serves to denounce societies "ruled" by color: "Par le jeu des contrastes, la romancière stigmatise ce mode de pensée" (268). Moreover, by multiplying the categories, Condé implies the absurdity of ranking them on a scale of social acceptability, or of stigmatizing any one of them. Because racial categorization as determined through colonial ideology has contributed and continues to contribute significantly to the othering, and thus the "inferiority", of non-white peoples, Condé's representation communicates an important lesson to the young readers: Every person living in the Caribbean is part of a diverse network, and should not discriminate against ethnic "Others," as they too can be considered "other."

Condé develops this last point when José is forced to confront his own otherness in the eyes of the Orbisians. When José is told that he may not see anyone while

traveling through the Orbisian cities, and when it is explained why, he is obligated to face an image of himself constructed through the gaze of the “Other”: “La couleur de vos peaux, de vos cheveux, la forme de vos traits, risquent d’étonner ceux qui n’ont jamais vu d’humains. Les enfants pourraient avoir peur et faire des réflexions en vous montrant du doigt” (42). José’s sense of selfhood is destabilized as he sees himself through Orbisian eyes, and the prior relationship between subject and object (José as subject, Orbis as object) is turned upside down. He had never considered himself as “other,” which is both ironic and revealing in terms of his “race” and position in a society plagued by racist discourses. Now he must acknowledge the reciprocity of otherness. Compounding this lesson, José is told by his mentor that “notre peuple lui aussi risque de vous déconcerter. Petits, les garçons comme les filles vont nus” (42). Revisiting José’s previously established negativity concerning nudity, Condé provides an opportunity for redemption, making visible to the reader a lesson learned. After having confronted his own “strangeness,” José is less inclined to degrade, at least vocally, the cultural practices of Orbis. While he does not let go of his personal views, he does not condemn the Orbisians for theirs. Readers are therefore encouraged to put aside their prejudices, and to understand that otherness and strangeness are not unidirectional, but multidirectional. The superiority with which one sees oneself can be quickly and easily destroyed through the *regard* of the supposed “Other.” This lesson, intended for Antillean youths, is particularly significant if we consider the sense of superiority felt by many Antilleans with regard to other Caribbean islands or Africa. By making these youths aware that they too are subject to the potentially negative *regard* of “outside” peoples and cultures,

Condé fosters the blurring of fixed and divisive perspectives, which may, in turn, lead to a more tolerant and open Antillean (and global) community.

Condé expands this otherness of the self to include an otherness *within* the self, which is demonstrated in her descriptions of the Orbisians themselves. Upsetting the (Western) need to define through absolutes, the people of Orbis cannot be neatly categorized: "...on ne pouvait déterminer si c'était un noir, un blanc, un mulâtre ou un indien. Tout dépendaient de l'angle d'où on le considérait" (11). Stuart Hall has stated that the self can be defined only in relation to what it is not ("Old and New" 47-48). Yet in this case, there is no clear line between what the Orbisians are or are not (and we should consider the textual focus on ethnicity to symbolize diversity in general). Does this lack of precise definition problematize the Orbisians' sense of self or identity, when each individual clearly embodies various "opposing" selves? On the contrary, the Orbisians' multiplicity has provided them with a strength and stability far superior to that of the humans they seek to help. We can read this in several ways, the first of which relates to seeing oneself through the eyes of the Other. When José confronted his image as seen through the eyes of Orbisians, he was forced to acknowledge a different version of himself. The narrowness of his previous perspective was thrust wide open, and he realized that within him there exist several Josés, all of which are defined by and dependent on the *regard* of whoever is looking at him. This idea is made visible in the Orbisians, which may in turn make the message more accessible to Condé's readers. In terms more specific to the Antilles or Caribbean, the internal multiplicity of the Orbisians both reflects the ethnic and cultural *métissage* present in the region, and insists on the inter-connectedness of the various Caribbean peoples. The superiority of the Orbisian

civilization, coupled with this multiplicity, encourages readers to embrace the diversity, or otherness, that constitutes their societies and themselves.

Understanding that otherness exists between and within all peoples and cultures is intrinsic to developing openness and tolerance. As José and the other *Élus* discover, a perspective reflecting these ideal traits is the primary means of altering a violently conflicted world. Applying these abstract lessons of otherness to life includes co-existing, adapting, and learning from one another, virtues demonstrated by the Orbisians and taught to the *Élus*. Some readers may be inclined to liken this education to the French assimilationist policy; however the only culture to be changed is that which fosters fear, hatred, and intolerance, and which has produced violence and misery on Earth:

Aux quatre coins du globe, ce n'était que guerre sur guerre, pillage sur pillage. À défaut d'armes, des adolescents prenaient des pierres dans leurs mains. Les adultes leur répondaient à coups de mitraillettes. Des rivières de sang coulaient. Des monceaux de cadavres s'entassaient. Même les enfants étaient entraînés dans ces conflits. Ils devenaient des soldats et mouraient avec leur aînés. [...] Les femmes fuyaient, leurs bébés dans les bras. Les hommes à peau blanche méprisaient ceux qui avaient une autre couleur. Et ceux qui avaient une autre couleur ne s'entendaient pas pour autant entre eux (61-62).

A world torn apart by its biases, arrogance, and fear of difference is the missionaries' target. It is of course the reader who is the true "missionary," and while the lessons in accepting otherness and the role it plays in one's sense of self are important, they must be made to feel capable if they are to pass on that knowledge in an effort to rid their world

of intolerance, and bring to it a sense of peace and unity. The last pages of Condé's text are intended to empower her young readers.

The Orbisians' decision to use children for the mission is not at all unimportant, and underscores Condé's desire to impress on her readers their role in shaping the future. The Orbisians feel that children are the only individuals whose hearts have not been corrupted by materialism or greed, and would therefore be the only ones capable of succeeding in their mission: "Ils sont seuls capables de réinventer la vie" (67). It is important for the reader to believe that s/he possesses the power and ability to reinvent the world, and if we consider once again the authority of text in solidifying or normalizing ideas (Zimet), Condé's assertion, via the Orbisians, contributes to that sense of empowerment. Contributing to Condé's message is the representation of Orbisian leader, Wyriamu, who, in contrast to the imposing appearance of other Orbisians, is a small, fragile, elderly man. Yet his influence and command of respect is tremendous, which in turn leads the children, and readers, to understand that even the seemingly meek can possess great power. Condé therefore counters any notion her readers might have that children are powerless against the world, and tries to instill in them awareness of their potential to change societies.

As José's experiences on Orbis come to an end, we see that he has reached moral maturity, and that where there used to be a sheltered, assimilated boy ignorant of the realities of difference and their social/individual effects, there is now a boy whose open and informed perspective has allowed him to break free of hegemonic pressures and to partake in the betterment of his world. The young readers who have shared these experiences, and who are the true recipients of Condé's "re-education," have also

received the lessons in diversity and otherness. Her intriguing science-fiction story, and a character with whom the reader can easily identify, effectively draws the young readership into current social problems, and provides them with a space to better understand the lessons she tries to convey. Condé clearly emphasizes the injustice of dismissing a person or culture based on difference, and stresses the need to acknowledge that nobody is exempt from otherness. She encourages her young readers to grow and look beyond what they have accepted as “normal,” and to help create a stronger future by inhabiting a space of awareness.

In contrast to Pépin and Pineau, Condé delves more deeply into the “problem” of otherness, exploring not only the relationship between the protagonist and the Others s/he encounters (from the point of view of the protagonist), but the reciprocity of that relationship and the duality or multiplicity that constitutes the self. She therefore provides her young audience with a more complete “lesson” in otherness, which is more likely to effectively diminish self-centered or ethno-centric attitudes. While it is imperative to guide youths, particularly in the Antilles where French domination has distorted many children’s perspectives, toward understanding how their own views can be prejudiced and inaccurate, it is equally important that they understand their own otherness in the eyes of those they consider different. Otherwise, they may maintain a belief that although they should not discriminate against “Others,” the latter is still *the* “Other,” and therefore is “abnormal.”

So far, the only author to truly address all facets of otherness and being or seeing “other” is Maryse Condé. Granted, in the picture books discussed previously, Godard and Pinguilly did present an otherness of the self. Hippopotamtam was clearly described

and illustrated as “other,” as he remained abnormally small and possessed a unique, if not also “abnormal,” musical talent. The relationship between he and the giraffe demonstrated a mutual otherness, as both were viewed by the other as an “Other.” Maé and Yaya were also presented as “other” when interacting with the Other’s world: Maé in the ocean and Yaya among humans. However, their representations are geared toward a much younger and inexperienced reader; they do not contain the same specificity with regard to Antillean social issues as are found in the young adult novels. Pépin provides a clearly unilateral perspective on Indian cultural practices, which makes sense if we consider that the story is autobiographical in nature, but which fails to expose readers to the possibility that their cultural practices, vicariously represented by the protagonist, may be viewed as equally strange. Pineau also focuses primarily on the protagonists’ perspective regarding “Others,” and while she does bring attention to a history shared among Caribbean peoples, she does not present the same complexities of otherness as Condé does to her readers. Condé seems eager to inculcate in her older or adolescent readers a thorough understanding of otherness as something inherently complicated, and which goes beyond the appreciation of differences in other people or cultures.

This level of complexity and the desire to communicate it to young Antilleans is not unique to Condé, however, as we see in the Martinican author Patrick Chamoiseau’s collection of short stories, *Émerveilles* (1998). A founder of the *Créolité* movement, Chamoiseau addresses a unity within the self of various Others in several of his tales. Yet, while his view on *Créolité* is certainly a valid, important lens through which to read these tales, I am more interested here in how he encourages the child reader to understand and accept the otherness that exists within him or herself, as Condé does with her

representations of the Orbisians. Chamoiseau tells us in his *Ré-OUVERTURE*: “Les peuples, les cultures, les races, les dieux, les traditions, les langues, les explications de l’univers, sont aujourd’hui connectées entre elles, s’influencent, se relativesent, et se changent mutuellement” (126). This connection between cultures, peoples, and so forth, as well as the mutual changes and influences that it produces, implies the existence of multiple selves in each individual. We might consider Derrida’s explanation that within each self there exists a past and future self in relation to which the present self is defined, as the present self is neither the past nor future, and it can be defined only by its relation with what it is not (Toumayan 11). In this context, we can interpret that there exists a self influenced and changed through its contact with “other” cultures, peoples, and traditions, leading to the present self, which is no longer what it was before. There is also the possibility, if not the inevitability, of future change, leading to another self, also different from both the past and present selves. In addition, we can consider that through this contact, elements of the differences encountered are retained, thereby implying that there exist multiple Others within the self. Yet this diversity of the components of selfhood is a complicated concept to try to convey to young, inexperienced readers. Further, what would be the benefit of helping Antillean youths understand this complex otherness within the self? I have chosen to examine here one of Chamoiseau’s tales that exemplifies his work, and which makes this complex idea accessible to young readers.

In “Mabouc l’âne-chien,” a dog famous for his herding abilities dreams of becoming a donkey. Having confronted all manner of potential enemies to the herd, Mabouc begins to feel that the world has nothing left to offer him, and departs for thirty-three days and nights. During his *fugue*, he is unrecognizable, and finds himself at the

mercy of those who would do him harm. Once returned home, Mabouc remains in a state of hopelessness, and imagines transforming into something else, such as a goat, a sheep, a cow, a snake – anything other than what he was. His desire reflects a feeling of being incomplete, limited, and oppressed, and foreshadows his eventual transformation, physically and internally. This “original” self, in keeping with the idea of change discussed above, is externalized in Mabouc’s character, which will allow young readers to comprehend more easily Chamoiseau’s message(s).

Mabouc’s decision to become a donkey, despite never having seen one before, is surprising given the negative stereotypes and clichés associated with the animal, the significance of which I shall discuss shortly. Yet it is described as a result of Mabouc doing what is within his power to transform himself. That is, physically transforming into a donkey is more conceivable for a dog than transforming into a snake. At the same time, though he nearly achieves total transformation, it is a process not without difficulty or awkwardness: “Mabouc semblait n’avoir pas d’idéal, ses métamorphoses se tentaient selon les aléas d’un vouloir sans système. En le regardant courir ou marcher parmi les cabris et moutons, le maître avait tantôt l’illusion de voir un éléphant, ou tantôt un chameau, ou encore une pintade, ou même un crapaud innommé” (27). Chamoiseau implies the impossibility of immediately and entirely casting off one’s previous self, as that self will always be present, even if it is not who one currently is. In addition, by entering into this transitional phase, Mabouc has upset the stability of his prior self or identity, and has entered a space of difference through which his subjectivity will be forever modified or altered. For young readers, these ideas are embodied in the awkward moments where Mabouc is no longer a dog, but is also not entirely a donkey, helping

them understand that becoming “other,” whether by choice, as in Mabouc’s case, or by force, meaning through someone else’s eyes, is a complex situation that never truly erases who one was before.

When Mabouc does finally “become” a donkey, his perception of life changes as he embraces in its totality his subjectivity as a donkey. Nevertheless, he notices his human’s troubling gaze: “Sous le décret de son regard, Mabouc se sentait devenir une bête malfaisante, sortie toute rouge d’une vieille apocalypse, un vrai puits d’ignorance, d’obscurité et de bêtise” (28). There is a double significance in Mabouc’s feelings. First, the negative connotations associated with donkeys problematize his transformation: Mabouc transitioned from a respected, loved animal to one that is seen as stubborn and lazy. This change contradicts what many would consider empowering for young readers: overcoming degrading, essentializing stereotypes to become loved and respected. What, then, could Chamoiseau have intended to communicate? By transforming Mabouc into a donkey, Chamoiseau highlights the power of the *regard*, and that of falling prey to the unthinking dissemination of prejudiced beliefs. Additionally, the human’s negative *regard* reflects the author’s own critical view of rejecting a part of one’s self. Let us not forget that *Créolité* is premised on a unified diversity, implying that Creole identity consists of many “selves.” Mabouc’s attempt to define himself as either/or contradicts Chamoiseau’s theoretical perspective. Indeed, we see that Mabouc begins to struggle with his identity as a donkey, and comes to understand that “il y perdait toujours une part de sa conscience” (28). As a result, he occasionally reverts to being a dog, embraces the power and cunning ability of a dog, then returns to being a donkey. Eventually, these two parts of himself converge, as he begins to “jappebraire et à brairejapper, à mélanger

l'herbe juteuse des savanes aux os de son écuelle, à se serrer les griffes pour qu'elles laissent sur le sol des empreintes de sabots" (28). He is no longer defined by one particular state of being (dog vs. donkey), as both have become integral parts constituting his selfhood, thereby illustrating his duality. Through contact with the Other, achieved by his attempt/desire of becoming "other," Mabouc emerges a different being, in all senses of the word.

Not unimportantly, however, the destabilization and modification of Mabouc's subjectivity has enriched him with a power exceeding that which he would have had as simply one or the other creature: "Les prédateurs ne savaient plus quelles vices utiliser. Les nègres-à-méchouis parlèrent de sorcellerie. Les prêtres-koulis stoppèrent leurs sacrifices. Les serpents préfèrent s'éloigner de ce dérèglement du monde" (28). Just as Condé's Orbisians possessed great strength and stability in their multiplicity, Chamoiseau's Mabouc comes to possess those same traits through his new unstable yet harmonious subjectivity, promoting a positive understanding of the multiplicity that exists within the individual.

For children, Mabouc's transformation makes an abstract, complicated concept significantly more accessible. That is, they see the transition from one self to another (dog to donkey), and the final self within which both of the previous selves play off one another to define that present self – a sort of donkey-dog that is at once neither and both of the previous beings. This seemingly simple representation of otherness within the self succeeds at communicating the complexity of the notion, exposing children to a fundamental concept that, as Antilleans, they must inevitably confront. The inherent diversity and interconnections of so many Others within Antillean societies make it

important to help youths of those societies understand how they are personally affected by and a part of that diversity and interconnection. As I stated previously when discussing the work of Condé, Pineau, and Pépin, it is not enough to tell children not to discriminate against Others. They must understand that they too are Others, and that within them they carry the connections among various Others. Only then will be they be able to truly appreciate why assuming an innate difference between themselves and someone or something else is “inaccurate,” and, as such, why discriminating against Others is wrong. Chamoiseau beautifully illustrates this lesson through Mabouc and his ever-evolving transformation that does not leave behind any one identity, but rather includes it somehow in his new identities.

Like most of the authors discussed in this chapter, Chamoiseau does not represent every facet of otherness, only that which exists within the self. Should we look at these seeming “inconsistencies” in what otherness is, or what parts of it should be addressed, as problematic for Antillean youths? I contend that, on the contrary, these texts as a whole provide young readers with a wide range of important lessons, and complement one another. None of the authors, with one possible exception being Pépin’s ambiguous message regarding cultural sensitivity, promote intolerance or an ethnocentric perspective. Their works should therefore be seen as constituting a whole that strives to push young Antilleans out of the dominant, colonially influenced perspective of Others, and into a more open, accepting, and ultimately aware point of view. It is true that individually, we might critique these texts as incomplete in targeting the individual and social effects of otherness. However, together they work in harmony, providing a well-rounded approach to socializing tolerance and appreciation for difference in Antillean

youths, and therefore bringing about change in the Antillean collectivity. We have seen in this chapter how, from picture books targeting the very young to young adult novels targeting older adolescents, Antillean children are encouraged to perceive themselves and behave in or perceive their encounters with the “different,” “strange,” or “unacceptable.” In stark contrast to the exoticized imagery of *le bon sauvage* promoted through events such as Exhibitions or colonial era literature (for children and adults), and in contradiction with the dominant French ideology present in Antillean societies, these texts provide children with new ways of seeing their world, as well as their place within it. They are shown a positive view of difference, and are pushed to become aware of and cast off the negativity toward Others fostered by colonial influence. Indeed, the binary opposition fostered in colonial discourse of same/different, familiar/strange, or “normal”/“abnormal,” which allows prejudice and intolerance to thrive, is generally, and decisively, rejected by the authors and their texts discussed in this chapter. The dividing lines are effectively blurred, if we look at the ensemble of works and the lessons they communicate to the young readership, thereby promoting a future of cooperation, compassion, tolerance, and awareness.

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL IDENTITY: RECONSTITUTING CRÉOLITÉ

The internalization of colonial racial discourse, the adoption and normalization of French social structures, the adherence to a politics of otherness ingrained in colonial ideology – all are issues stemming from Antilleans’ assimilation to imposed discourses. But where does it all begin? Why has French dominance continued with little resistance in Antillean societies? Chapters one and two highlighted the role played by the educational system in fostering assimilation. Children are continuously exposed to official French discourses, legitimized by the authority of the classroom and school texts. Yet is there a particular aspect of the curriculum that facilitates more than any other the normalization of French social discourse? One could argue that History is a central factor in easing Antillean children into accepting French “superiority,” and therefore assimilating with little or no objection. What Fanon tells us is still relevant today¹: “Aux Antilles, le jeune Noir, qui à l’école ne cesse de répéter ‘nos pères, les Gaulois’, s’identifie [...] au Blanc qui apporte la vérité aux sauvages, une vérité toute blanche” (Fanon, PNMB 120). Ignoring African history and denying an Antillean history allows students to identify only with the French. They are forced to negate a part of themselves, or to wonder what is their true cultural identity. Because history can help people understand where they come from, and who they are today, access only to French History problematizes cultural identity in the Antilles. Moreover, without a history of which they are a part, Antillean children are perhaps unaware of their oppression. They are continually fed a Eurocentric perspective, and know little or nothing of the strength and

¹See chapter one’s discussion on the Antillean educational system’s curriculum, both in the past and present.

resistance of their ancestors. Even if these children were to encounter “new” historical stories, they need to be shown how to apply that knowledge in their present-day situation for it to have positive effects. This chapter seeks to explore the role of children’s literature in both the recuperation of Antillean historical memory, and the application of that memory in resisting French hegemony and in defining an Antillean cultural identity.

The idea of a collective Antillean identity is widely debated, to be sure, but I am interested in how Antillean authors of children’s literature address the issue, and how they incorporate historical memory. Do they attempt to define such an identity, or do they encourage readers to discover it on their own, after having rejected the oppression of French dominance? Do authors recuperate identification with a Creole society? Do they promote a balance between readers’ repressed *créolité* and French cultural influence? Do they establish positive images of *créolité* oppositional to those found in History and colonial discourse? There is indeed a connection between history and culture, which we see in examining various children’s books by Jean-Jacques Vayssières, Lucie Julia, Maguy Bibrac, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Alex Godard. We shall explore how these authors challenge the master historical narrative and the situation it has fostered. We shall look at how their various approaches to memory and society reflect their position in establishing Antillean cultural identity.

First, however, let us briefly examine in more detail the cultural and individual impact History has had on Antillean societies. Glissant explains that before being able to construct or reconstruct an Antillean history, one must ask where that history begins, a question which he sees as independent of European or African histories. Luciano Picanço rightly points out, with respect to Glissant’s perspective, that

même si [les Antilles] ont été créées à partir de l'apport d'une multiplicité de peuples, elles sont devenues, par la mise en contact entre ces peuples, une entité nouvelle et non pas un prolongement des peuples et des histoires précédents. Le noir devient le noir plus le blanc plus l'indien plus d'autres. Le blanc devient le blanc plus le noir plus l'indien plus d'autres, et ainsi de suite. (55)

This *métissage culturel* results from the coming together of various cultures and ethnicities to share a common reality and a common history independent of those from before slavery and colonization. At the same time, Glissant acknowledges in his *Poétique de la Relation* that this *métissage* is not in opposition with *culture pure* (Picanço 66). It is not the disappearance of individual cultures, but the belonging to a space where multiple cultures inform the social fabric. Unfortunately, for Antilleans of African descent, French hegemony and the imposition of History have problematized their participation in *la Relation*: “Toutefois, la participation dans la Relation ne peut se concrétiser pour un peuple que s’il découvre sa place dans le monde” (Picanço 66). If the Antillean people are to have a voice, and to participate, they must establish their own place in the world – it is in essence self-discovery. Yet gradual assimilation via the educational system, collective amnesia, and various other media promoting French “superiority” have repressed such self-discovery, which we see in Antilleans’ struggle to define a cultural identity in relation to a distorted past.

Creole culture as defined by anthropologists Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price (*The Birth of African-American Culture* (1976)) includes the cross-cultural contact brought about by slavery, and the mutual cultural influence among African slaves and

European colonizers: “All slaves must have found themselves accepting, albeit out of necessity, countless ‘foreign’ cultural practices, and this implied a gradual remodeling of their own traditional ways of doing many things” (47). Their respective cultures were creolized as they created a new, specifically Creole cultural identity, marking the start of a new history – one that because of displacement and cultural *métissage* cannot be considered an extension of either African or European histories. However, in the French Antilles, this type of Creole culture, and the establishment of an “Antillean history,” has been repressed, while the imposition and normalization of French memory has left Antilleans little choice but to adopt French perspectives, and to see themselves as “French.” Consequently, they learn to see France as superior, and strive to become “white,” unable to see themselves as part of a diverse region with a shared past. Yet because Antilleans can never “truly” assimilate, as discussed in chapter one, the imposition and acceptance of French discourses have led to feelings of alienation. Assimilation arrests the possibility of an Antillean cultural identity, because it represses a significant part of who they are, of their *créolité*. Picanço explains: “La Martinique étant une extension française, il ne reste plus au Martiniquais *émigré* que de mimer la conduite stéréotypée d’un *vrai* Français virtuel [...] Le Martiniquais, lui, est français et ne l’est pas tout à la fois” (47-48). This argument that Martinicans, or Antilleans, mimic the archetype of “real” Frenchness is reminiscent of the “bad copies” discussed by Eric Gable. Gable points out that in Africa, the “bad copy” is “the native who wears your suits, but the style is a little too flamboyant, and you laugh at his imperfect attempts at imitation. Yet you are often anxious because you are never quite sure whether he mimics you to make fun of you” (299). Conversely, “bad copies” have also “upset the enemies

of colonialism, for the ‘black man who wants to be white’ is proof positive of colonialism’s pathological effect” (Gable 299). Gable underscores the fact that on both sides of the argument, for and against colonialism, the “bad copy is often an aesthetic abomination – an embodiment of a troubling inauthenticity” (299). In the French Antilles, French hegemony and the inferiorization of *créolité* have had a similar effect on the population: Antilleans are French because “Frenchness” has been thrust upon them, but are not French in that they are, to an extent, “bad copies” within the scope of colonial ideology.² Without a movement toward reclaiming their *créolité*, and establishing a “new” Antillean history, Antilleans will continue to be subject to this duality in which they have little control over their self-definition.

Anne Malena argues that “Caribbean identity depends on the relations that the Caribbean self establishes with a locale, history, memories, and other selves” (3). Assimilation and hegemonic pressures manipulate this relationship, leaving Antilleans in a perpetual state of negotiation and contradiction. As a result, their cultural identity remains ill defined. Perhaps the most effective way to alter that confusion is to target Antillean children, challenging the efficacy of French hegemony. Normalizing alternative discourses may diminish the negative representations of Creole culture inherent in colonial discourse. It may re-connect Antilleans with their region, allowing them to realize their *créolité*, which, in keeping with Glissant’s definition, is informed by a plurality of cultures and ethnicities. This chapter will focus first on several texts that challenge the master historical narrative by installing the Antillean voice in that narrative. We will examine how these “new” histories contribute to a sense of empowerment, and

²Alain Brossat tells us: “Ce que nous devons travailler à reconnaître et faire reconnaître, dans sa dimension pleine et entière, en levant, au fil du chemin, les pièges de la fausse identité: ‘Les Antilles. c’est la France’” (10).

the re-creation of a specifically Antillean memory. We will then turn to several texts illustrating the internal struggle between this empowerment and assimilation. These latter works put the empowering narratives into action, thereby provoking readers' re-examination of their identity as members of a plural community with a shared history of brutal displacement, exploitation, and struggles against oppression.

In previous chapters, I have discussed how children's literature functions as a socializing agent through the normalization of attitudes and beliefs, the inclusion and exclusion of various peoples, the author's choice of language or political position. In historical fiction, these same influences operate because history is, after all, a story. But as Michel-Rolph Trouillot says: "At best, history is a story about power, a story about those who won" (5). How authors in dominated societies represent history in their books can further legitimize the master historical narrative, legitimizing as well the superstrate's power, or it can provide children with different perspectives, recuperating parts of a past that have been distorted or ignored, and mounting a subversive attack on the dominant culture's power. Given that Antillean societies remain subject to the dominance of French History, these questions of why and how the authors I will be discussing re-write or use history are central. Do they continue to normalize the historical discourse taught in school, privileging the heroism of white French nationals? Or do they attempt to normalize a new, specifically "Antillean" history, giving voice to those overlooked by the master narrative? If the latter, how is memory recuperated or created? And of course, why would that be important?

Micheline Rice-Maximin insists that History does not reflect the historical reality of the Antillean islands. It reflects the colonizer's perspective, and she attributes

Antilleans' persistent acceptance of this History to both a collective amnesia, and to French hegemonic pressures, two influences which, it goes without saying, are intimately linked. Rice-Maximin states:

La violence, la repression, les nombreux sacrifices, les trahisons, ont été refoulées dans la mémoire collective, particulièrement après 1848.

L'accès à la citoyenneté, l'euphorie qui s'en suivit, le désir d'oublier tout ce qui pouvait rappeler les humiliations et les souffrances du passé ont contribué à un certain degré d'amnésie individuelle et collective dans la mémoire populaire (20-21).

Yet she also calls attention to the increasing presence of specifically Antillean heroes, such as Solitude, Delgrès, and Ignace, rooted in a local Antillean reality. Their replacement of History's non-Antillean heroes, such as Napoléon, represents what she calls a "phénomène de démythification et de démystification" (Rice-Maximin 22). Their re-installation into Antillean historical memory signifies a growing *prise de conscience* among persons of color, and the creation of new myths, which contribute to establishing a national identity.

Echoing Rice-Maximin, Luciano Picanço contends that the Antillean people is an evolving people still forming an identity that must be addressed by writers and theoreticians, and that must be discovered by Antilleans themselves. This discovery, according to Picanço, depends on re-evaluating a common Antillean past, and recognizing how ideological barriers imposed by a colonial system have repressed a collective memory (55). The imposition of colonial History, and the gaps in memory it has caused, have robbed the Antillean people of a collective voice, and a sense of

national unity. This historical wound has, in turn, inhibited the establishment of a collective Antillean identity. Glissant likewise argues that all writers in the Americas are duty bound to reconstitute the past (Simasotchi-Bronès 230), an argument adopted and developed by the *Élogistes* of Créolité – Chamoiseau, Confiant, and Bernabé: “Le deuxième objectif de l’esthétique de la Créolité est la mise au jour de la mémoire vraie, c’est-à-dire continuer la lutte glissantienne pour transformer la *chronique coloniale* en *chronique martiniquaise*” (Picanço 84). As Chamoiseau and Confiant tell us in their *Lettres Créoles*, story-tellers give voice to the group, and act as “*gardien[s] des mémoires*” (62). Rice-Maximin concurs: “Le conteur c’est une partie de la mémoire et de l’histoire enregistrées et représentées devant ceux et celles qui étaient exclues [sic] de la mémoire et de l’histoire officielles” (12-13). She goes on to establish the connection between the traditional *conteurs* and today’s authors: “Le conteur a ainsi passé la parole aux écrivains d’aujourd’hui qui ne cessent de se ressourcer à son héritage” (13). It is only through the re-establishment of Antillean historical reality, and a collective Antillean memory, that Antilleans today will be able to make sense of their present, and to reclaim their own agency both as individuals and as a community.

It is fair to assume, however, that the writers, or story-tellers, about whom Rice-Maximin, Picanço, and the others speak are those who produce literature for adults, because while attention has been paid to the significance of French dominance in the educational system, little attention has been directed toward the literature produced for Antillean youths. The educational system continues to adhere to the metropolitan curriculum, and promotes a conception of history that neglects the social realities of the slave and colonial eras, as well as the history that pre-dates slavery (i.e. pre-colonialist

African history). We see evidence of this bias in narratives such as Chamoiseau's *Chemin d'école*, in which he describes how views placing white Europeans as the founders of History are inculcated in Antillean school children. Yet, given the continually growing production of contemporary, mainstream Antillean children's literature, can these hegemonic pressures be challenged? While adult literature may act to demystify, or demythify, the Antilles' relationship with France and its past, children's literature tackles French hegemonic discourses at their point of inculcation. Through its normalizing, socializing nature, literature that targets Antillean youths may provide a counter-measure to History as it is promoted in the classroom. Attempting to instill historical agency in those individuals who are still developing a sense of who they are and where they come from is perhaps the most effective way to establish a collective memory and a cultural identity.

As Stuart Hall tells us: "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. [They] are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (CID 225). Identity in relation to the past goes beyond mere recovery, as there is no fixed, factual past. It is constantly being re-invented, rediscovered, and retold as observers add their visions to the historical story over time. Michel-Rolph Trouillot tells us that, in fact, there can be no past without the present: "Indeed, the past is only past because there is a present, just as I can point to something *over there* only because I am *here*. But nothing is inherently over there or here. In that sense, the past has no content. The past – or,

more accurately, pastness – is a position” (Trouillot 15). The past is informed by a particular social or cultural position in the present, shaping historical narratives, and defining their purpose, which as Trouillot argues is what gives history its meaning: “Historical representations [...] cannot be conceived only as vehicles for the transmission of knowledge. They must establish some relation to that knowledge. [...] What we know about slavery or about colonialism can – should, indeed – increase our ardor in the struggles against discrimination and oppression across racial and national boundaries” (Trouillot 149-50). History should empower individuals and cultures to engage as actors, not only narrators in historicity. In the texts we shall discuss here, for example, renewing cruel realities of slavery, and representing the many forms of resistance speaks from and to the present-day oppression of French hegemony. History is told in a way that eliminates victimized and vilified Antillean, or Creole³, populations, and re-establishes these same peoples as important actors in their own fight for freedom. Readers are encouraged to embrace a tradition of strength and resistance, making the purpose of history, in this case, empowerment.

In *Les Fabuleuses aventures d'Equiano*, author and illustrator Jean-Jacques Vayssières shares the story of Olaudah Equiano, a slave whose success in gaining freedom in the eighteenth century makes him a symbol of hope as he represents the possibility of defeating slavery, but whose assimilation to English culture problematizes his subversive potential in the present-day. The book's introduction explains that

³The term “Creole” has been used in various contexts. It can refer to a white person born in the Caribbean, to a black or mulatto person born in the Caribbean, or generally to anyone born in the Caribbean. Creole has also been used to define Caribbean culture, built on the contact of various African and European cultural practices, or to reference the idea of being “in-between” – in between cultures, in between races, and so forth. I do not attempt to ascribe a specific meaning to the term here, but use it to imply that the significance of the literature discussed in this chapter extends beyond nationalistic boundaries. The concept of *créolité*, as we shall see, is often depicted as a way of being, and does not adhere to such boundaries, though the target audience is Antillean.

Vayssières, originally commissioned to illustrate Equiano's autobiography, became impassioned with this ex-slave's story: "Convaincu qu'il devait faire partager, par des jeunes en particulier, cette nouvelle amitié, il s'est fixé pour but de le ressusciter sous sa plume et ses pinceaux" (2). Vayssières's picture book is the only text in this study based on actual historical figures, and the author's rewriting of Equiano's history makes a strong connection between past and present.

The book is divided into three sections, each chronicling different stages of Equiano's life, and the illustrations seem intended to lend an "authentic" feel to the story. They are reminiscent of sketches, resemble snapshots, and include images of hand-written letters and posters. For example, next to the account of Equiano's arrival in Barbados, a poster reads: "To be sold [...] A cargo of ninety-four prime, healthy negroes [...]" (17).⁴ In addition, Vayssières includes a portrait of Equiano, found in the Library of Congress, at the end of the story, emphasizing its "truth." Truth, of course, is open to interpretation. Consider that Equiano's autobiography is approximately 396 pages in length, clearly too long for a child's picture book. Vayssières's choice of which events to include and exclude reshapes the story of this historical figure. Images play an important role in this respect, because they relay information not included in the text, and also provide interpretations of certain events. For example, when the real Equiano arrives in Virginia, he is ordered to fan his ailing master, and becomes fascinated by a clock, which he sees as a magical item intended to spy on him and inform the master should he misbehave. In Vayssières's text, this information is included in the form of a picture. Equally intriguing, Equiano appears angry in this picture, whereas in his autobiography

⁴It is also important to note that despite the text's being written in French, the wording in this poster remains in English, furthering the "authenticity" of the image since Barbados, where Olaudah was being sold, was an English-speaking colony.

he was terrified, and often wished for death. We can see how Vayssières uses imagery to evoke certain ideas about Equiano's character in readers' minds. Equiano becomes a strong character, foreshadowing his eventual involvement in abolition.

Vayssières introduces a similar twist to the autobiographical narrative at the beginning of the book, when Equiano encounters the slaveship off the coast of Africa. The autobiography tells us that Equiano was filled with astonishment and terror. He believed he had entered a world of bad spirits that would kill him, a belief solidified by the strangers' long hair, different complexions, and strange language. Yet in Vayssières's work, the white men are described merely as "curieux," with skin that is "bizarrement rosâtre" (13). Their physical examination of Equiano's body, which was seen as absurd by the text's character, had made the real person fear being eaten. Equiano is not presented as the historical figure who fainted on deck from fear, but as a person whose ability to adapt will enable him to survive the impending horrors with ease. The only allusion made to fear is in "l'inquiétude de ce qui les attendaient" (13), and the image of Africans chained together with frightened expressions. Comparing these representations with the autobiography, we see that Vayssières reinterprets history in a way that normalizes the strength and tenacity of his readers' ancestors.

When Equiano is sold to a British lieutenant, Henry Pascal, his life changes forever, as he willingly integrates into English culture. The order of events in Vayssières text and in Equiano's autobiography differ, but both highlight the latter's friendship with an American, Richard Baker, his conversion to Christianity, and his many adventures on the sea. Vayssières's exclusion of several significant experiences leading to conversion is not unimportant in terms of his readership. Equiano was fascinated by white customs,

and after becoming friends with a young white girl, became painfully aware of his different complexion. He looked on the English as men superior to “them” (meaning Africans), and in a desire to resemble and imitate the English, he took every opportunity for “improvement.” When he was told he could not get into Heaven without being baptized, he chose to convert and become a baptized member of the Church of England. Because assimilation is one of the major dilemmas facing Antillean autonomy and a collective identity, Vayssières no doubt faced a difficult decision in how to represent this figure, who had obviously embraced the colonizer’s culture. Though he faithfully reports Equiano’s willing integration, he excludes its most damning aspects, such as wishing, and even attempting, to change his appearance. Instead, Equiano’s cultural assimilation is portrayed simply as a strategic decision to gain freedom and success.

When Equiano is sold to a Quaker in Montserrat, Vayssières evokes a *prise de conscience* in his character regarding the true horrors of slavery in the Americas. Vayssières reworks the autobiography’s philosophical reflection and detailed description of slavery’s abuses from which his character learns, and develops a stand of principled resistance. Vayssières evokes atrocities such as the iron muzzle, branding, being sold by the pound, and being flogged to the point of mutilation, but it is through a “vieux nègre créole” (31) that his character fully appreciates such cruelty. This man shares with Equiano the policies perpetuating this cruelty, such as a slave owner’s right to kill a slave for the slightest fault. In reality, the “vieux nègre créole” did not exist, at least not in the capacity depicted by the author. There was an elderly man from whom Equiano heard stories, but it was not he alone who informed Equiano’s knowledge of slave culture. Vayssières’s reinvention of this history is not simply an alteration made to accommodate

limited space. Such knowledge passed down orally by an elder preserves the tradition of oral histories and the *conteur*, and therefore references *créolité*. This storyteller figure is an important representation: it renews specific Creole traditions in young readers' minds.

When Equiano does finally succeed in purchasing his freedom, we are led into the second section of the book, where the events are generally faithful to the autobiography, though abridged. Equiano remains in Montserrat for a while out of respect for the "kind" master who had allowed his manumission, then heads to England. He seeks employment with a doctor and learns to distill water, learns the French horn, dresses hair, and finally, needing a larger income, returns to the sea. Already a seasoned sailor from his experiences as a slave, Equiano goes on many adventures to Turkey, Italy, Jamaica, Grenada, Honduras, and so forth. He is nearly kidnapped and again enslaved; he also participates in a glory-seeking expedition to the North Pole. For young readers, this black adventurer provides a significant counter to the white adventure stories criticized by Fanon. Instead of normalizing white heroism, Vayssières fosters pride in being African-American.

It is at this point, after Equiano's many adventures, that Vayssières's re-writing of Equiano's history departs dramatically from the autobiography. In this third and final section, the author has his character go to America, where he becomes an important figure in the abolition movement. In actuality, Equiano remained in England, and though he spent most of his time fighting for his "injured countrymen," he was not a part of the militant American groups. The entire section is a conversation between Equiano, and two presumably fictitious characters, Major Charles Henry Sraight and Clément Desnoisette. Through this conversation, it becomes clear that Vayssières's intention is to

challenge the histories taught to Antillean children. Two perspectives are represented; one held by Desnoisette, who applauds figures such as l'Abbé Grégoire, Condorcet, and the group *La Société des Amis des Noirs*, and the other held by Equiano and Straight. These latter two question the claim that those praised by Desnoisettes are heroic in their fight against slavery. Equiano criticizes figures such as Grégoire and Condorcet for their lack of a precise understanding of slavery and its social conditions: "Vois-tu Clément, je me méfie un peu de ces philosophes des Lumières, honnêtes gens s'il en fut, mais n'ayant pas une exacte connaissance de la réalité de nos îles. Ce furent bien souvent de grands marchands de discours mais de bien peu de poids face aux planteurs influents [...]" (56). He also criticizes the *Société*, whose position against slavery is premised on their assertion that Blacks are neither ready nor mature enough for freedom. Though contextually different, here Vayssières honors Equiano's belief in the hypocrisy of slavery, as the latter criticizes the colonizer's claim that, for example, Blacks are not intelligent enough to learn, while simultaneously refusing them an education.

When Desnoisette mentions the U.S. Declaration of Independence, which in theory declares all men equal, Equiano responds, emphasizing how History has manipulated truth: "Tu veux parler de l'article sur l'égalité des hommes? Jefferson fut, en fait, un politicien prudent doublé d'un habile légiste. Relis le texte: les esclaves nègres en sont exclus!" (57) History glorifies Jefferson as a defender of human rights, ignoring the "small" detail of how black Americans were excluded from such rights. These references to traditionally accepted versions of History, and their negation through Vayssière's characters, destabilize knowledge learned in schoolbooks, and provide young readers with a critical viewpoint on familiar "historical" events. Vayssières rejects

illusions of the past (namely the white heroism in fighting slavery) that have hindered Antillean autonomy, and have fostered Antillean dependence on France.

At the end of the book, the Guadeloupean revolutionary Louis Delgrès arrives outside where the men are speaking. Nowhere does Equiano's autobiography mention Delgrès, but Vayssières wanted to associate Equiano with one of the most courageous black abolitionist rebels. Delgrès was an experienced military officer, and a *mulâtre*, who led a violent resistance movement in Guadeloupe against the reoccupation and reinstitution of slavery. When trapped by the French, he and many of his men mined the fort to which they had retreated, killing themselves along with many French soldiers who had overrun their refuge. This is a tragic but symbolic move validating the heroism of Guadeloupean figures. Given that History had ignored Delgrès's heroic actions against the French for decades, Vayssières's reference is significant. The author contributes to the reinstallation of this figure in the Antillean collective memory.

Vayssières's representation of Equiano's history has important present-day implications. Based on his choice of which aspects of Equiano's life and character to include in his children's story, he has created a hero who survived by overcoming an oppressive system. Described as extremely able to adapt, passionate in his determination against oppression, and always aware of his "Africanness," Equiano embodies a Creole subjectivity, at least insofar as the author wishes it to be. In reality, although he recognized and strongly condemned the inhumanity of slavery, Equiano was a well-assimilated man who accepted many of the discourses imposed by colonization. This was not how the author represented him, however, and given the continuing struggle in the Antilles against French dominance, we see the purpose of this children's book. The

present informs why, and therefore how, Vayssières recreates Equiano's person and history. For Antillean youths, who must negotiate their own space in a society still subject to French hegemony, this story has important potential consequences. Vayssières represents a black historical figure in a way that instills pride, and counters the normalization of "white" heroes. He stresses the figure's symbolic significance, while eliminating or strategically altering problematic situations and qualities. He promotes a view of Antillean, or Caribbean, ancestry as strong and dignified. And finally, he refutes the master historical narrative that has prevented a collective Antillean memory and autonomous, national identity. Reading this book provides young readers with new perspectives on their culture and history that may inspire resistance against present-day oppression.

Vayssières's text provides us the most transparent insight into re-writing history based on our ability to compare its representation of Equiano with Equiano's own story told in his autobiography. However, effective historical realism is not only applicable to stories based on specific persons or events, as in *Les Fabuleuses aventures d'Equiano*. Other texts can provide equally challenging opposition to master historical discourses. Lucie Julia's short story, *Montrésor à Mantidou* (1992), is one such example. Though her characters are fictitious, their situation is real – the cruelty and oppression of slavery. I should first point out, however, that Julia uses both French and Creole to tell the story. This multilingualism represents a challenge to French dominance, and the role of the French language in constructing Antillean history. In an interview, Glissant says: "L'histoire occidentale s'est faite sur la base de l'impérialisme linguistique. [...] Nous entrons dans une période du monde où l'impérialisme monolingvistique commence à être

combattu à fond. A l'heure actuelle, il faut se battre pour le plurilinguisme" (Brossat, Maragnes 99-100). Julia both embraces this *plurilinguisme*, privileging neither one language nor the other, and adds dimension to the historical significance of her story. If language imposition has complicated self-expression in colonized peoples, it is inevitable that it has shaped to some extent historical narratives. Julia, by employing Creole, reclaims a certain amount of control over how history is told, linguistically speaking, and destabilizes French control over historical discourse.

Moreover, Julia inscribes aspects of the oral tradition – she begins her story with: “Krik! Krak! Il y avait une fois, longtemps, longtemps, longtemps...” (7)⁵, and ends it with: “Je veux croire que vous l’avez bien comprise! Krik! Krak!” (59) As Vayssières did with his use of the “vieux nègre créole,” Julia brings a part of Creole tradition into the present-day, connecting past and present in readers’ minds. Moreover, her use of orality, according to the *Élogistes*, establishes her as a *conteur*, and therefore as a purveyor of Creole culture and memory. As an author of children’s literature, this role takes on greater significance in that not only is she giving voice to *créolité*, she is inscribing that voice in Antillean youths who may embrace and develop it throughout their lives.

In her narrative, Julia attempts to re-write definitions of “heroism” and “resistance” during the slave era, and contributes to an alternative Antillean history. Attentive to the realities of slavery, she highlights its brutality, and encourages young readers to appreciate what their ancestors endured. She shows them how resistance, in modes other than revolution, was heroic. More importantly, she attempts to normalize a

⁵“Krik! Krak!” is the equivalent in African or Creole oral traditions to the phrase “il y avait une fois” in French fairy tales. The difference is the audience participation in the former – the second word, “krak,” is the audience response to the storyteller’s “krik.” This is an interesting use of both in Julia’s text, implying the mutual contribution of French and African structures in Antillean (oral) literary forms.

discourse oppositional to those that have dictated who was heroic in the fight against slavery, thereby subtly challenging the current hegemonic powers.

The story revolves around a slave woman, Mantidou, and her young son, Montrésor, who she refuses to allow to be sold into slavery. She tells anyone who will listen: “Je préfère le tuer, comme je tue un coq” (8). Even after the slave owner announces that Montrésor’s ears will be cut off, and his name changed to “Zorey koupé” (in an attempt to preserve his authority), Mantidou responds by laughing. Helpless before her master’s physical authority, her only defense lay in her refusal to be intimidated by it. Then, when Mantidou is informed that Montrésor will be branded and put to work in the fields at age seven, she makes a drastic and devastating decision. She leads her son to a steep cliff, and leaves him, telling everyone he is dead. Readers may at first question this action, but in truth, Mantidou frees her son: “Montrésor, heureux comme un jeune cabri en liberté, se mit à descendre dans le gouffre qui deviendrait désormais sa demeure” (27).⁶ Her sacrifice makes her character heroic. She resists slavery the only way she can – not allowing her son to become a part of it, thus undermining the slave owner’s authority.

How realistic is this? If we look at Equiano’s writings, for example, the cruelty of slavery knew no limits. Stories like a small boy having his ears cut off, or being branded by hot iron were only some of the tortures slaves endured. Rarely, however, do History books go into such detail when discussing slavery. Usually it is simply characterized as dehumanizing, humiliating, and oppressive. There is certainly discussion about policy,

⁶We should note also that Montrésor’s “escape” from slavery and his existence in the wilderness makes vivid allusions to the legend of *marrons*, who embody the notion of resistance. I say legend because although *marrons* did indeed live outside “established society,” they sometimes forged pacts with slave owners, relinquishing new fugitive slaves to their white pursuers in return for being left alone.

how slaves were forced to convert, the cruelty of slave owners and overseers, but the specific, horrifying details are generally omitted. In this respect, Julia's story, though fictional, fills an important gap in the memory of slavery. Resistance as well is shown in a new light. History often attributes resistance to revolutionaries who rose in arms against the owners, or the *marrons*, who fled into the mountains. In this story, resistance is more subtle, but reveals an important reality of how slaves survived and resisted on a daily basis. For readers, these personal struggles highlight strength, tenacity, and perseverance, similarly to the history of Equiano as represented by Vayssières.

From this point in the text, Julia emphasizes the relationship between religion and resistance. Because everyone believes her son is dead, they do not question Mantidou when she says her son's spirit will return each night. When they are desperate to escape the increasing cruelty of the slave owner, they join Mantidou in invoking Montrésor's spirit, creating a religious figure that serves their needs. Although readers know he is neither dead, nor a supernatural entity, it is the people's belief in him that is important. They see his spirit as the embodiment of strength and knowledge with the ability to free them. He becomes, in a sense, deified. Mintz and Trouillot tell us: "Almost all religions include what some anthropologists call 'transformative practices,' that is, acts which, when performed properly by humans, mobilize 'supernatural' forces in order to affect human life" (129). They further contend: "We believe that the religious orientation of many or even most of the slaves played a part in their resistance to the horrors of slavery" (138). In Julia's text, the slaves attempt to "mobilize" Montrésor's spirit to obtain freedom, underscoring not only the importance of religion, but how it functioned in tandem with slaves' growing need for hope.

When Montrésor finally speaks to his followers, the correlation between resistance and revolution is once again challenged. He does not call on them to take up arms, but encourages them to remain steadfast in their faith: “Ah! mes frères, mettez du lait, des oeufs, il y a un jour où il n’y aura plus d’esclaves (bis). Tenez bon, bon courage et surtout faites tout ce que je vous dis de faire” (41). He establishes his authority by re-establishing his position in the slaves’ minds as a supernatural entity. When he returns, months later, he instructs his followers first to demand pay from the slave owners, then later to burn the fields. Unfortunately, his instructions do not result in freedom, and instead, the slaves endure floggings, and even executions, among which is that of Mantidou.⁷ It is at this moment that the reader can truly appreciate the power of religion among slaves. Defeated by the slave owners, beaten, killed, and tortured, the slaves do not abandon their belief in Montrésor, despite his unrealized prophecies and unfulfilled promises: “Les esclaves étaient trop malades ou trop affaiblis pour parler et chanter. Ils n’attendaient que la voix de l’esprit pour réagir” (51). Their unwavering faith in Montrésor strengthens the slaves to mobilize and endure by giving them hope that things will change. With the arrival of the abolition movement years later, the slaves in Julia’s text succeed in receiving pay for their work, and though a small victory, it testifies to the validity of such hope. Montrésor’s heroism lay in his ability to inspire resistance on

⁷ This latter incident is significant in itself, while lending credibility to Montrésor’s “failing” leadership. Though tragic, Mantidou’s death should be seen as a testament to her strength, and to how resistance leads to freedom. Despite her lack of physical strength, Mantidou summons the courage to reject the *commandeur*’s cruelty: “[Elle] se leva péniblement et se tenant droite et fière devant le ‘commandeur’ lui dit: ‘Commandeur’, si tu me fouettes aujourd’hui, c’est la dernière fois que tu fouetteras un nègre” (49). She is executed, but this should be seen as liberation. Her will to resist, strengthened by the belief in her son, led her to death, and thus to freedom from physical bondage. It is not the conventional freedom we often associate with escaping slavery, but Julia’s point in writing this text is to re-write the conventional, and to present her young readers with alternative views on heroism, and now freedom.

various levels; not so much physical resistance as resistance against the psychological and spiritual oppression that often accompanied physical enslavement.

As with the detailed horrors of brutality, Julia expands what has long been the definition of resistance and heroism. Though this story is fictitious, its realism concerning the everyday struggles and modes of survival or resistance makes it an integral part of re-writing the past. Perhaps even more so, given there is no actual person to base the story on. Julia has creative freedom, and she creates a story that specifically fits what she wants children to know about their history, exemplifying the kind of re-writing discussed by Hall and Trouillot. The story's meaning, or that of the history she represents, lay in its purpose – to fill gaps in Antillean memory, and to foster appreciation for the individuals whose names will never be known, but who nevertheless were heroes. Moreover, the focus on resistance, and the allusion to the heroism of “normal” individuals speaks to the challenges faced by Antilleans today. Julia normalizes a “new” view of history, while inviting readers to become inspired by her characters, and to embrace a culture of strength and survival.

Like Vayssières, Julia establishes perspectives on a specific time period, and stresses the tenacity and strength of her society's ancestors. She questions how History has depicted slavery, and attempts to re-write the fight against its cruelties. Her purpose is evident, just as it is in Vayssière's text: to provide young readers with a view of their past that positions Antilleans as important actors in that fight. She rejects the one-sided history depicting slaves at the mercy of white Europeans, with whom their salvation supposedly lay. By inscribing strength in her readers' ancestors, and representing their

role against slavery as important, she challenges the sense of inferiority fostered through the master narrative.

These same traits are emphasized in Maguy Bibrac's young adult novel, *Histoire d'Ougga, chien créole* (2001). More important, however, is the representation of adopting these traits in the present-day. Unlike Julia and Vayssières, Bibrac uses allegory instead of historical realism: Her story centers around a puppy named Ougga, believed to be the descendant of Motoun, the creole dogs' heroic god, and provides young readers with entertaining, yet instructive insight into a past of resistance and survival. Some might argue that Bibrac's use of allegory does not effectively contribute to a collective memory – how are youths supposed to decipher the historical elements from the imaginary, contemporary setting? The significance of her narrative, however, does not lie in its re-actualization of a particular time period, such as slavery, but in its amalgamation of all historical instances involving oppression, and its resistance, as well as in the author's emphasis on embracing the past to successfully challenge oppression in the present.

For instance, according to legend, Motoun was a dog able to speak with humans, with whom he and others lived peacefully until armed men attacked and destroyed the village. Though Motoun fought with extraordinary power, killing over two hundred men, he was forced to retreat into the forest, where he was enveloped in light and lifted into the sky. We can read this as an allusion to slavery and *marronnage*, but because Bibrac does not ascribe historical specificity to the situation, readers are permitted to associate Motoun and his experiences with oppression in all forms, as well as the will to resist.

When Ougga is born, he strongly resembles Motoun, and is proclaimed the clan's hope for the future: "Il est albinos et c'est le portrait vivant du Grand Motoun, notre dieu. Mes amis, je suis sûr que ce petit va devenir un chien extraordinaire et que ses pouvoirs seront immenses! Il deviendra très puissant et c'est lui qui nous protégera de tous les dangers qui nous guettent!" (12) It is expected that at his first birthday, Ougga will receive Motoun's powers, and defeat any threat to his clan, or *canicel*.⁸

Prior to this, however, Ougga must undergo an *apprentissage*, and survive the many tests Motoun will put him through until his first birthday. If he makes it, "il deviendra le chien le plus fort du monde!" (13) He and his family are sent to the city where Ougga is forced to adapt and survive in harsh circumstances. Dodging cars, avoiding people with unkind intentions, and searching for food toughens Ougga to the point that he confronts a much larger dog that stole his food. He loses, but is motivated to continue surviving in order to return one day, and defeat the dog that had humiliated him. Ougga's experiences allegorize a history of persistent oppression, while the inspiration provoked by those experiences to grow stronger and defeat current oppressive forces speaks to Antillean societies' present-day situation. Whether they associate trials and tribulations with a past as represented by Vayssières and Julia, or with their own life experiences, Bibrac encourages readers to see them as a necessary step toward empowerment. It is a learning process from which one should draw strength and

⁸The images in the text depict Ougga as being light in color (see Figure 7). He is described as a clear gray, but because the images portray him as nearly white, they might undermine the empowering potential by, perhaps unintentionally, promoting racial hierarchies. On the other hand, white animals in legend are often of supernatural origin, which strengthens Ougga's character and underscores his divine ancestry. We read that: "In many prophecies, the birth of rare animals represents a rebirth for humanity, the sacred animals being harbingers of peace, as foretold by the ancients" ("Animals and Prophecy"). In this respect, Ougga's significance goes far beyond racial hierarchies, as he embodies both hope for the future, and the relationship between past (the ancients who foretold his coming), and the present. He symbolizes a "rebirth" for the Antillean people, who must reclaim their history, culture, and agency.

inspiration. This process exists not only on an individual level, but on a collective one as well, the latter of which is found in the collectivity's past. We therefore understand why the re-creation of Antillean memory is important. If readers are never challenged to question History as presented by the dominant culture, they will never be challenged to resist that culture's dominance. There will be nothing from which to become inspired. Although Bibrac does not re-write history like Vayssières or Julia, she emphasizes the need to recognize and re-examine the past, and to draw on it in resisting present-day oppression.

When Ougga is called back to the *canicel* for his birthday, he learns for the first time of Gorok, a large, vicious dog killing everything in its path. He is described as “le diable en personne” (91).⁹ Ougga rushes to confront Gorok as soon as he turns one and his powers show signs of developing. Unfortunately he fails and is severely injured, while another dog is killed, and his sister is taken prisoner. Ougga had not been ready, but his failure was also a learning experience, as had been his struggles in the city. He would not make the same mistake again, as we will see. First, however, because Ougga's injuries are beyond the dogs' capabilities to heal, he is left with a human family.

With these humans, Ougga experiences a life of comfort, and eventually begins to question whether he would return to the clan. Bibrac is here allegorizing a major obstacle

⁹ Though Gorok is brindle, his darkness, in comparison with Ougga's lightness (see Figure 7), may again raise issues of racial hierarchies. Is there a correlation between Ougga's goodness and light color, and between Gorok's evilness and darkness? Perhaps, but if we consider a French “mythological” figure (she is believed to have existed), we might see beyond the binary of light/dark, and see instead the opposition between the Antilles and France. This figure, La Bête du Gévaudan, was an elusive, dark, wolf-like creature that, in the eighteenth century, terrorized the former province of Gévaudan in south-central France, in the Margeride Mountains, killing over one hundred people. Her story bears striking resemblance to that of Gorok, who terrorized and indiscriminately killed creatures living in the mountains. If we consider the confrontation between Ougga and Gorok as representing legends of historically oppressed peoples (Native Americans, Africans, Creoles, etc.) and of France respectively, Ougga's success is more a subversive rejection of French hegemony than it is a preservation of racist hierarchies.

to Antillean autonomy – assimilation and departmentalization. Ougga’s initial failure could be interpreted as that moment in 1946 when the Antilles willingly became a department of France. It is this sort of assimilation that has allowed French dominance to continue, re-establishing the point made earlier about the relationship between history, assimilation, and resistance. If Bibrac were to simply retell history adopted to the present day, and hope young readers comprehend her message, the story would be over, with Ougga left negotiating between his comfortable life and his duty to his clan. This is because the Antilles remain today in this contradictory space between the comfort of assimilation and the search for cultural identity.

The story does not end here, however, and Ougga, enraged at learning of his sister’s capture, chooses to return. This time, however, Ougga does not rely on the knowledge alone that he *should* have Motoun’s powers, and this time invokes the latter’s spirit: “Oh, MOTOUN, Dieu des Chiens! Oh, MOTOUN, mon père! Aide-moi, je t’en supplie... Oh, Grand Albinos! Donne-moi le pouvoir qui tue!” (135) Clearly there is a reference to magico-religious beliefs, similar to what we saw in *Montrésor à Mantidou*. At the same time, however, Ougga’s invocation of an “historical” figure’s fighting spirit and power underscores Bibrac’s message concerning how past and present interconnect. A contemporary individual invokes the past, empowering him to fight successfully against present-day oppression. We can ascribe various historical meanings to the personages and interactions between Ougga, Motoun, and Gorok, but essentially Bibrac seeks to re-inscribe the fighting spirit of the past in today’s youths. She encourages them to see that knowing about a past is fine and good, but it is invoking that past, embracing it, and letting themselves be defined by it that leads to success, as it did for Ougga.

In addition to her unique approach in engaging young Antilleans with their history, Bibrac also makes a correlation between the text's messages, and cultural, or Creole identity. The dogs in her book are *chiens créoles*, a concept addressed in the text's post-face, written by veterinarian Maurice Hodebar:

“Que l'on parle d'eux de manière scientifique ou de façon plus romancée comme dans l'histoire d'OUGGA, il nous semble important de souligner les qualités exceptionnelles de ce chien: sa ténacité face à l'adversité (malnutrition, maladies), et surtout une opiniâtreté qui semble lui être presque naturelle et qui lui a permis de se fondre sans difficultés dans un environnement a priori hostile” (150).

Hodebar underscores these dogs' exceptionalness, praising their tenacity and unrelenting nature as innate qualities permitting them to survive in the harshest of conditions. If Ougga and the others allegorize the Antillean people, Bibrac's praise is not only for the animals – educating readers about dogs is clearly one purpose given the veterinarian's contribution – but for the resilience of Antilleans as well. She applauds, on both fronts, the survival of a group who has faced and continues to face enormous and oppressive obstacles. Hodebar reestablishes Bibrac's position, leaving readers with a highly positive, inspiring description of Creole dogs – they are physically capable, well adapted to their milieu and to man, resistant, tenacious, and intelligent. The author's description of and praise for such qualities in what are specifically Creole beings provides a definition of *créolité* as well – the dogs are Creole precisely because they embody these traits. In applying this definition to the narrative, we see the link between *créolité* and the past. For instance, Ougga's experiences in the city allegorized a history of persistent

oppression, which he overcame by his tenacity, adaptability, and intelligence – his *créolité*. Yet these traits were not only already present, they were developed as his experience grew. As such, *créolité* both defines and is defined by Antillean histories of oppression and resistance. When Ougga questions whether he wants to pursue a life of resistance when residing with the humans, that *créolité* is threatened, just as it has been threatened by assimilation and departmentalization. He begins to lose sight of who he is – the descendant of a hero – as he enjoys the comfort and ease of being dependent on someone else. Finally, his invocation of Motoun (the past), and success over Gorok (oppression), re-establishes Ougga as strong, tenacious, and adaptable. Bibrac implies that cultural identity resides in recognizing and embracing the past.

Of course, we know that the past is constantly being created and re-created, reflecting and serving the needs of the present. As we have seen in all three texts, the past is presented in a way that is empowering to young readers. It is something to be proud of, a place where oppressed peoples resist and survive under the harshest circumstances. Young readers are also shown that sometimes the oppressed were able to achieve extraordinary success in spite of those circumstances. Thus, according to Bibrac's definition, all of these individuals embody *créolité*. If the narratives are meant to foster readers' pride in their ancestors, and empower them to resist present-day oppression, then this embodiment is highly significant. The authors not only promote a history oppositional to the master narrative, but a cultural identity rooted in the past; more specifically, a past defined by survival and resistance. In other words, memory shapes identity. The normalization of French historical perspective, or memory, in Antillean children has greatly complicated their self-definition. They often come to think

of themselves as French, accepting French history and memory as their own, thereby negating, unintentionally, a part of their cultural identity. Books such as those by Vayssières, Julia, and Bibrac serve to reconnect Antillean youths with that past. No longer are they positioned within historical narratives by those more powerful. These texts allow Antilleans to position themselves within those narratives, reclaiming agency and empowering readers.

However, while these texts challenge dominant discourses, children need to understand what to do with that information. Clearly fostering a sense of pride in one's ancestry and "forgotten" history enables readers to resist present-day oppression. The next step is to show them how to incorporate that awareness in their personal and collective identities. History and colonial discourse have fostered inferiority complexes, and the desire to become as French as possible. Through their empowering historical narratives, Vayssières, Julia, and Bibrac lay the foundation on which authors Patrick Chamoiseau and Alex Godard build to solidify a message against assimilation, self-negation, and passive acceptance of French dominance.

Patrick Chamoiseau¹⁰ provides children with a tale embodying unified diversity. He allegorizes merging cultures and/or ethnicities in the creation of a plural yet unified body in his children's tale, "Bouboule tête-à-crapaud" (1998). His characters become one while retaining individual qualities of who they were prior to their union. This union emphasizes the need to recognize and embrace the part of oneself denied through

¹⁰The theory of *Créolité* as established by the *Élogistes* is widely criticized as both homogenizing and potentially alienating. This theory seeks unity through diversity, supposedly achieved by standardizing Creole as the national language. However, the imposition of a single language amounts to no less than linguistic colonization, something the *Élogistes* criticize with respect to French. The presence of various Creole languages means that choosing one would alienate those who do not speak it, undermining any attempt at unity. Moreover, the theory of *Créolité* seeks to define Creole societies as entirely separate from France, promoting the binary logic it claims to reject (the "kaleidoscopic totality" inherent in *créolité*).

colonization, and, presently, departmentalization. As we shall see, Chamoiseau challenges assimilation and the inculcation of French discourses, while promoting a cultural identity embracing the many parts of a whole.

It is the story of Bouboule, a boy whose joy in life is based entirely on his red belly, which he associates with France (he compares it to a beautiful French apple). He is the epitome of an assimilated Antillean who has internalized colonial discourse: “Ce qui provenait de France était (pensait-on par ici) mieux que tout ce qui pouvait exister au pays” (41). Rejecting his society as inferior, Bouboule looks to France as the source of all that is good. His attitude develops into narcissism, and he consequently spends most of the time admiring his belly in a pond near the ruins of an old plantation, oblivious to what surrounds him. What happens to Bouboule encourages readers to reclaim the part of themselves repressed by imposed discourses (such as History). Chamoiseau also emphasizes that Antillean, or Creole, identity is based on accepting the cultural and ethnic plurality that lay at the foundation of Caribbean societies.

Bouboule’s self-admiration sends waves across the pond, disturbing an old, ugly frog, the meaning of which is subtle but significant.¹¹ Bouboule’s presence in and oblivion to the old plantation reflects, again, his assimilation, while the old frog represents the “forgotten” origins of Creole culture and history. He is “ugly” precisely because that is how discourses promoting assimilation portray him. Importantly, Crapaud, ugly as he is, and in spite of his vehement protestation, remains unseen by Bouboule, until he leaps on to his head. Crapaud can only make his presence known through drastic action, because his protests are not enough to gain the attention of

¹¹The frog is a common figure in Antillean tales, and represents the Antillean peasant (Rice-Maximin).

someone so large, powerful, and self-absorbed. Chamoiseau allegorically represents the current relationship between France and the Antilles. Antilleans may speak out against their societies' dominated status, but only through action will things change. Authors such as those previously discussed attempt to challenge the dominance of French discourses, and normalize a view of the past that positions Antilleans as important actors, not as those who are acted upon. Moreover, these narratives force Antillean youths to confront a painful, yet courageous past, which the master historical discourse prevents them from doing. Crapaud's move, then, signifies not only the empowerment of the marginalized, but represents the forced confrontation between assimilated children and the Creole part of themselves they had until then been taught to reject.

The result of this confrontation illustrates how Chamoiseau intends readers to conceive of themselves. Although Crapaud initially intended to force Bouboule out of his territory, he changes his mind when he glimpses himself in the pond's reflection for the first time: "Crapaud hideux [...] ne se contemplait jamais dans l'eau-miroir du marigot. Il évitait d'ailleurs tous les miroirs. Il ne se promenait que les jours de pluie sombre, ou aux heures de soleil où les ombres s'estompent. Cela lui évitait d'avoir à contempler son profil allongé près de lui" (43). If Crapaud represents the repressed part of Antillean cultural identity, his own self-rejection is important. The attitudes positioning French culture and discourse as superior have become normalized, even among those not fully assimilated (i.e. have not economically or socially benefited from assimilation). Crapaud may despise Bouboule's happiness and red belly (therefore disliking the latter's "Frenchness"), but he does not like himself any better. It is therefore

significant that only after attaching himself to the “enemy’s” head that he sees himself in a new light:

“Or, surprise, Bouboule en se penchant toutes les trois minutes au-dessus de la mare, obligea Crapaud à se voir. À se voir lié à Bouboule. À se voir faisant partie de ce splendide ventre rouge qui, vraiment, était un comble de beauté. Crapaud se sentit soudain partie prenante de cette beauté. Il perdit sept cents ans d’amertume et un reste d’aigreur. Alors, il décida de ne plus quitter le crâne de Bouboule” (43).

At first it appears problematic that Chamoiseau should allow Crapaud to see the belly as truly beautiful, because that detail validates the formerly implied superiority. However, we shall see that Chamoiseau emphasizes finding balance, while rejecting the correlations France/beauty and Creole/ugly.

As time passes, Bouboule “se désola d’être devenu si laid,” while Crapaud “se réjouissait d’être devenu si beau” (43). Each becomes the opposite of what they were: Bouboule becomes angry, offensive, and jealous; Crapaud becomes amiable, philosophical, sensitive, tolerant, and open. The former is appalled by how Crapaud has tarnished his perfection, yet Crapaud sees their union as complementary to himself. If Crapaud represents *créolité*, Bouboule’s disgust at his presence represents the moment when the illusion of “true” assimilation is shattered. Chamoiseau allegorically illustrates the painful process through which Antilleans become aware that they are not “French.” Whether that process is provoked by rejection (as in Pépin’s *Coulée d’or*), or through education (as in the historical narratives discussed previously), Antilleans must acknowledge that their cultural identity resides elsewhere than in a strictly French

context. Bouboule's failed attempts to remove Crapaud, signifying Antilleans' attempt to forget their past, or reject the Creole part of themselves, represents an imposed *prise de conscience*. Yet what of Crapaud, and the problematic realization that he is more attractive when associated with Bouboule? Is Chamoiseau undermining his message to children by implying that Antilleans need France in order to see themselves positively?

The answer lay in the two characters' eventual acclimation, where each plays a mutually enhancing role in forming their collective identity: "L'un prit conscience que toute beauté suppose l'acceptation d'une part de laideur; l'autre, que toute laideur initie aux présences secrètes de la beauté" (44). Bouboule understands that no matter how beautiful his belly seems, ugliness is inherently present, even if subtle. Because he has represented the internalization of colonial discourse by praising all things French as superior, this revelation is significant. The ugliness of assimilation lay in necessarily denying a part of one's cultural identity in favor of another. The presence of Crapaud, who represents that repressed identity, illustrates the impossibility of completeness with such self-negation. Bouboule's evolution from narcissism to dejection to a sense of equilibrium indicates that the process of self-awareness is complete. He is no longer blinded by assimilation, and through forced confrontation, he accepts the part of his culture he had rejected.

Crapaud on the other hand comes to understand that underneath his ugliness there is beauty. Because he represents not only repressed cultural identity but also the inferiority complexes associated with colonial discourse, his developed self-appreciation signifies an important renewal and validation of *créolité*. However, his new sense of self-worth does not so much reflect association with Bouboule (France) as Bouboule's role in

allowing Crapaud to see himself. Prior to his union with Bouboule, Crapaud rejected himself, and remained unseen and ignored. When he jumped onto Bouboule's head, he was able to truly see himself for the first time. This motif speaks to Antilleans who have internalized an inferior self-image, or who dislike French dominance but have nevertheless accepted it as "normal." Chamoiseau implies that these individuals do not see themselves, and are therefore incomplete. Consider first that individuals who have internalized a sense of inferiority see themselves through the oppressor's eyes, and their "inferiority" is merely a projection of this "other's" viewpoint. Their self-image is defined by how others see them, not their own self-awareness. Consider as well what Glissant has argued to be the reason for one's inability to participate in *la Relation*, or the presence of multiple cultures in a unified space: a lack of self-discovery. If Antilleans of African descent continue to "accept" French dominance, they will be unable to recover and define their own culture as a part of this plural society, and it will remain hidden beneath the hegemonic pressure of French culture. Confrontation, as Chamoiseau argues in this tale, permits Antilleans to reclaim their agency, helping them realize the value of their *créolité*. While Crapaud's change in behavior might seem to validate French superiority, it in actuality represents another process of self-awareness, and the re-invigoration of Antilleans' *créolité*.

Crapaud and Bouboule's union is doubly significant: it draws attention to problems of assimilation and colonial discourse, and promotes Chamoiseau's theory of *Créolité*. Clearly the characters go through a process of demystification. Their paths to self-awareness converge, and they realize that who they had been was but a shadow of who they truly are or who they could be. Together, they represent enlightenment, and

encourage readers to question their position in society. Are they self-absorbed, like Bouboule, looking to France for self-validation? Are they miserable and self-loathing, like Crapaud, desiring change but too passive to achieve it? The physical merge between Bouboule and Crapaud represents that space in which balance is found. One sees the illusion of superiority, while the other attains self-worth. Moreover, their equilibrium represents necessarily accepting the plurality of Caribbean societies. We know that Chamoiseau advocates a single Creole culture and identity, in which diversity is celebrated as a unifying element, and in spite of the opposition to Chamoiseau's theories (their homogenizing, binary nature), his tale exemplifies such unity. He emphasizes the strength and fulfillment found in discovering, and embracing multiplicity: "On les écouta avec respect et dévouement, tant il est vrai qu'ils avaient quitté les joliessees d'une simple condition, ou les horreurs d'une désespérance, pour atteindre ces profondeurs humaines où l'ombre et la lumière (emmaillotées ensemble) génèrent des coeurs vivants" (44).

Both Bouboule and Crapaud are better off in all respects because they no longer reject a part of themselves. Embracing who they are, both the "beautiful" and the "ugly," makes them strong. More importantly, they find fulfillment in their union, and revitalize what has been long forgotten, the pond, or allegorically, the origins and plurality of Creole culture: "Imaginons qu'ils furent inséparables. Qu'ils devinrent plus qu'amis. Que le bonheur de l'un fut relié à la présence de l'autre, et qu'ils transformèrent ce petit marigot triste en un carrefour de vies" (44). This is important for Antillean children in particular, because their societies are even more "stagnant" and in need of "rejuvenation" due to their political, economic, and social dependency on France. Seeing that Bouboule and

Crapaud are happier and stronger, and breathe life into what was otherwise miserable and pathetic may make readers more accepting of their own plural self and society.

Chamoiseau uses a great deal of metaphor and allegory in this tale, raising questions about its suitability for children. He conveys important messages through his characters and their actions, but are they lost on readers whose ability to interpret metaphor is less developed? Chamoiseau externalizes all of the messages – the “ugly” frog associated with a stagnant pond on an old plantation; the correlation between Bouboule’s red belly, France, and narcissism; the permanent union of two obviously different creatures, and so forth. He therefore allows children to make connections without having to deeply analyze meaning. Even if readers understand only that two beings, different in appearance and attitude, come together to live a more fulfilling life, Chamoiseau has planted the seeds of accepting plurality. “Bouboule-tête-à-crapaud” is an extension of the historical narratives that provide a base on which to re-evaluate the Antilles’ current social situation. He challenges French hegemony by encouraging readers to accept who they are and where they come from, and to appreciate the multiplicity informing Antillean cultural identity. Moreover, he allegorically re-incorporates Antilleans into the *créolité* of the Caribbean region. If Bouboule represents Antillean assimilation, his union with Crapaud indicates recognition of a shared history and cultural identity with the Caribbean region. He is, in a sense, creolized.¹²

¹²One of the criticisms against Chamoiseau’s theories on *créolité* is that he constantly seeks comparison with France, indicating a binary that undermines his claim of embracing all cultures informing the Caribbean. Yet his tale for children does not reject France outright, but rather insists that in all beauty, or the assumed superiority of France, there is ugliness, and vice versa. He rejects the effect French dominance has had on Antilleans’ self-image and cultural identity. Furthermore, the criticism that within Chamoiseau’s theories diversity is negated through unity is also applicable to this tale. Though Bouboule and Crapaud become one, they nevertheless preserve their original selves. They are merely enhanced versions of those selves, working together as a united front, earning respect and enjoying a sense of completeness. So while in practice Chamoiseau’s theories prove questionable, his tale successfully

Chamoiseau goes a step beyond Vayssières, Julia, and Bibrac by stressing the consequences of French hegemony, and the need to resist it in order to find a sense of completeness. Tales like his balance the historical narratives discussed previously: the latter normalize alternative histories, directly countering hegemonic pressure, while Chamoiseau tackles hegemony by exposing it. He forces readers to see how they are negating a part of themselves, and pushes them to reclaim that part in order to feel complete.

In a similar vein, Guadeloupean author Alex Godard pushes readers to acknowledge the effects of French dominance, and to break free of the subordinate subjectivity it imposes. His picture book, *Idora* (1997), focuses on the relationship between France and the Antilles, and on normalizing the plurality of Antillean cultural identity. He renews ideas of heritage, while empowering readers to resist French hegemony. His book brings together the significance of memory with the need to reclaim one's agency as an actor in one's life stories.

It tells the story of Idora, a giraffe, who lives among various other animals in a stylized Parisian context, illustrated through architecture, the river and quays, the Eiffel tower, and so on. Importantly, these animals are primarily found in Africa: giraffes, elephants, rhinoceros, zebra, and ostriches. Equally important is the variety of animals, allegorizing the various African peoples brought to the Americas, as opposed to homogenizing them as belonging to a single culture or identity. There is a clear reference to cross-cultural contact since the colonization of the Caribbean region. Godard's

presents those theories as logical, positive, and necessary. It is that success which is important, because it normalizes the attitudes and perspectives associated with Chamoiseau's theories in children's minds. Despite the continuing dialogues on *créolité* among adults, children will accept what Chamoiseau claims as ideal in the literature he creates for them.

representation of this relationship, and how both “sides” have come together, echoes the theory of Mintz and Price, according to which peoples of Africa and Europe founded a new, Creole culture. Note that his representation of “origin” differs from that of Chamoiseau, who associates Crapaud, representative of origin, with an old plantation. Instead, Godard asserts his theory that Creole culture and history is entirely independent of African roots, as well as from France. The origin of Creole culture, for him, lay in the history of survival during slavery, whereas for Godard, it lay in the cross-cultural relationship between African and European peoples.

The images juxtaposing African and European elements normalize this relationship in children’s minds. For instance, the first image in the text shows Idora sitting in her apartment at a table, listening to the radio, and looking out her window at the river. Her pet cat is sleeping on a nearby chair (see Figure 8). The African animal, a giraffe, is removed from what we consider a “natural” environment, and is placed in a seemingly “abnormal” setting. Giraffes do not live in apartments, nor do they listen to radios or have pet cats. Another image shows Idora answering her door to Mme Bossanova, an elephant, who stands on her back legs, like a human, and who is carrying a letter. Again, the situation defies what we might consider a “normal” environment for these animals. Yet Idora and the others have adapted, or perhaps as some might say, they have become “domesticated.” This “domestication” makes an important reference to Caribbean histories, and the evolution of cultural identities. The displacement of African peoples through slavery resulted in their removal from familiar landscapes. As time passed, Antilleans in particular became increasingly assimilated as France imposed its ideas and attitudes on the population. Considering the motives behind the *mission*

civilisatrice, Antilleans' assimilation could be read in colonial terms as their "domestication." Some might argue that because Godard's characters are well integrated in their surroundings, he supports an assimilationist viewpoint. Although several of Godard's texts have raised questions regarding assimilation and integration in colonial discourse (i.e. *La Forêt de Coeur-Bouliki*), I would argue here that this is not the case. The animals retain their "Africanness," in spite of the European context, reminding readers that no matter how "French" they think they are, they cannot deny the part of themselves that derives from an African heritage. Moreover, as we shall see in the storyline, Idora's integration is necessary to making the author's point. In actuality, like the other authors, Godard seeks to restore a part of cultural identity repressed through years of ideological conditioning, and to empower readers as actors in their life stories.

Idora's residence in Paris, rather than being seen as literal, should be read as representative of French influence, just as the animals represent various African peoples. The author certainly references feeling exiled as an immigrant, but this is a limited interpretation. When considering the story in its entirety, Godard clearly allegorizes the situation facing Antilleans today.

Idora, who generally represents the Antilles, spends much of her time dreaming about things she would like to have, such as no longer being alone, having children, and seeing the ocean. Her ambitions may seem simple, but they symbolize the basic desires prevented by colonization and departmentalization. For example, many Antilleans desire freedom from French dominance. This goal is ambitious because there are large obstacles to overcome, but the desire itself is simple. Unfortunately, Idora, like so many Antilleans, remains passive and doesn't take the initiative to realize her dreams. She

allows society, circumstance, and other influences to dictate her fate. When Mme Bossanova tells Idora the apartment building has been sold, and they must move, Idora worries that she is financially unable to do so. Yet instead of strategizing, she goes to the river: “Pour apaiser ses inquiétudes, elle descend contempler le fleuve, tandis que les péniches l’entraînent au loin vers de nouveaux rêves” (unpaged). At this point, the author interjects a significant assertion: “Tu vois, Sindbad, le monde est un grand théâtre. Il suffit de savoir regarder” (unpaged). The significance is twofold. In comparing the world with the theater, Godard implies a lack of “authenticity,” or that everything is rehearsed, calculated, and directed by unseen forces. It is therefore important to know how to “watch,” or be discerning, a key lesson for Antillean children. The imposition of French discourses over time has quietly manipulated Antillean societies, which continue to be controlled by “unseen” powers (i.e. France). Being able to recognize this hidden influence is an essential prelude to empowerment.

At the same time, because it is Idora who speaks the words in the text, Godard implies passivity and distance. The two page spread framed by a theater curtain with Idora and her cat Sindbad positioned as audience members creates a barrier between herself and the rest of the world (see Figure 9). She observes life, but does not participate in it. The comfort she finds in this spectatorship illustrates why her dreams remain only dreams. She appears afraid or unwilling to take the necessary risks to realize them, allegorizing common fears among Antilleans concerning independence. For example, their status as a department of France is economically beneficial, and independence may lead to hardship. Or if there are Antilleans who continue to see France as culturally superior, severing those ties might, in their minds, eliminate much of their “worth.”

Mostly, the fear in seeking independence stems from a conditioning that has long enabled France to maintain its dominance.

Idora remains in her building while everyone else leaves. The image of her looking out the window in a building inundated by the sea evokes a sense of complete isolation, and the feeling of being forgotten. This feeling escalates in the spring: not only does her cat disappear, but a building is erected, blocking Idora's view of the river – her connection with the rest of the world. Her inability to “escape,” whether due to fear, unwillingness, or a sense of helplessness, has trapped her completely, just as assimilation has “trapped” Antilleans. A prisoner through her own doing, Idora begins to fade: “Comme ses plantes vertes sans lumière, Idora sent ses forces l’abandonner. Qu’est-ce qui pourrait lui redonner le goût de vivre?” (unpaged) The accompanying image of Idora sitting at her table, hugging her dying plant, head down and eyes closed, with no view outside, is dark and somber, evoking hopelessness. Readers are forced to empathize with and hope for change in Idora's situation. The text's efficacy depends in part on fostering this state of mind, which catalyzes that change. If readers are not shown the consequences of allowing oneself to be controlled by external forces, they will never see the need to challenge them.

Reaching a breaking point after nearly succumbing to her desolation, Idora suddenly decides to take matters into her own hands. She leaves her house and enters a world described as “un gigantesque tourbillon” (unpaged). She passes the river without stopping, because “il est devenu bien trop petit pour noyer son chagrin” (unpaged), and heads straight to the train station where she buys a one-way ticket south to the sea. Godard acknowledges that taking control and actively participating in life can be

frightening, symbolized by the whirlpool. Idora takes a risk in confronting that whirlpool, but she survives. The river, where she once took comfort in watching others experience life, is no longer adequate. Her situation had become so desperate that her only choice was to die or become an empowered actor in her own life. Standing on the sidelines is no longer an option for Idora. This reaction speaks strongly to the Antilleans' present-day situation. Godard allegorically shows readers that if they fail to resist the ideological, psychological oppression inherent in hegemony, remaining silent observers, they will face a choice similar to that of Idora. If they allow it, their cultural identity will suffocate under the hegemonic pressures of France, or will thrive and be renewed only if they claim ownership of it.

As Idora travels south, she begins to dream again: she finds she is no longer alone, but has a family. In following one dream, she finds another, illustrating to readers the power of actively pursuing desires. Though Godard acknowledges the fear involved in taking control, he does not accept it as a reason to remain passive. Instead, he highlights the positive:

Idora a longtemps rêvé d'une vie différente et aujourd'hui, c'est la grande aventure. Plus question d'être triste! Le jour qui s'éveille sera le premier de sa nouvelle vie. Elle est dans l'express qui l'emmène voir la mer! [...]
Le monde est rempli d'espoir... Alors, Idora respire profondément son bonheur. (unpaged)

Idora's decision to pursue the life she had dreamed of, and the resulting sense of adventure and fulfillment speaks strongly to Antillean children. Godard emphasizes that satisfaction in life can be achieved only if the individual, or society, takes responsibility.

Though Idora's empowerment may relate to readers' personal ambitions, it also speaks to Antilleans' present-day social and political situation. The prevalence of assimilation, and fear of the risks posed by independence, has allowed French dominance to persist, in spite of growing sentiment against it. If Idora initially represents the passivity of Antilleans, her "daring" move to go south toward the sea represents a fight for political and ideological freedom. She dares to pursue her dreams, and to seek individual independence, while leaving behind her passive life. She reclaims her agency, intrinsic in fighting for freedom. Similarly to Maguy Bibrac, Godard does not relay things as they are, but challenges readers to see the possibilities in the unsatisfactory present situation of dependency, empowering them to enable positive change. If Idora can break free of her repressed subjectivity to pursue what she had until then only dreamed of, then Antilleans can challenge and overcome the oppression inherent in French hegemony. This liberation can be achieved, however, only if Antilleans as a collectivity can make the decision to achieve it.

At this important point, the writings of all the authors discussed in this chapter converge. Antilleans must collectively choose to reject French hegemonic pressures, and to reexamine and redefine their cultural identity. To do this, they must be empowered, and given tools of self-definition not controlled by hegemonic discourse. One of the most important steps toward this goal is to intervene in Antillean youths' ideological conditioning, which has been facilitated by teaching schoolchildren a history they were not a part of, while telling them they were. The learned idea of "nos pères les Gaulois" highlighted in texts such as Chamoiseau's *Chemin d'école* or Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* illustrates how Antillean children are introduced to and taught to accept

assimilation. Unless they are provided with alternatives, asking these children to define themselves in terms other than as purely French is problematic at best. If they are not “French,” who are they? If they have been taught that *créolité*, or the part of them repressed by French discourses, is “bad,” why would they want to define themselves as anything but French? Authors like Vayssières, Julia, and Bibrac tackle both issues with entertaining yet significant narratives. They provide new visions of History, while correlating *créolité* with strength, tenacity, and intelligence. They begin to build in young Antilleans’ minds a new attitude toward Creole societies, and their own cultural identity.

Chamoiseau and Godard then urge readers beyond attitude, and encourage action. They emphasize the preservation and acceptance of one’s origins, yet differ as to what “origin” refers. Chamoiseau, in keeping with the theory of *Créolité*, defines the Antilleans’ origins as the plantation. Similarly to Glissant, Chamoiseau sees Antillean history as originating at the moment of colonization and cultural contact. The unified diversity his theory celebrates is premised on the idea that Creole culture was born and developed out of slavery and the need to survive – slaves of various backgrounds came together to inform a new, unified, albeit diverse and often subversive culture. Godard, on the other hand, judging from his representations of African animals in a European context, sees Antilleans’ origins as still tied to Africa. Creole culture, in this case, is the blending of African and European cultures, and not a subversive counter-culture. Both authors, however, insist on the need to embrace plurality as inherent in a complete Antillean or Creole identity. These authors attempt to alter how Antillean youths see themselves and their position in society by encouraging action, although in different

ways. One insists on actively reclaiming a part of the Antillean self repressed by French hegemony – the Creole culture born out of the most severe oppression. The other emphasizes the imperative to become an actor in one's life, to cast off the passivity fostered by assimilation. Only action, not desires, will catalyze change, which both authors suggest is necessary in Antillean societies.

The five texts discussed in this chapter work together to illustrate how Antillean children's literature actively seeks to counter hegemonic discourses still present in Antillean societies. The first three texts challenge historical discourse directly by rewriting it, and reinstalling the Antillean voice. The latter texts show youths how to employ that voice, and to apply their developing self-awareness to social critique. It is as though the texts were working in harmony to dismantle the power of French hegemony, reclaim Antillean agency, and reposition the Antilles in their region's *créolité*. Does this literary "harmony" imply, however, that the authors promote a single Creole identity? Does the fact that they urge Antillean children away from hegemony and toward *créolité* mean they all see Antillean cultural identity in the same way? Some authors are explicit as to what they believe such an identity is – Chamoiseau is a perfect example, as we have seen above. He has a precise idea of what *créolité* is and what role it should play in Antillean societies today. We might also argue, with respect to Vayssières, Julia, and Bibrac, that rewriting historical narratives for the purpose of empowerment, and reversing the damage of imposed History, serves to define cultural identity, but in less specific terms than are seen in Chamoiseau's tale. They seek to reclaim a lost element constituting Antillean identities, *créolité*, and their consistent portrayal of it as strength and tenacity shapes how youths should be encouraged to see that part of themselves. By

correlating these positive qualities with Creole peoples, these authors normalize for Antillean children a positive view of their cultural identity, and counter the negativity imposed on it by French discourses. Godard also contributes to the definition of an Antillean identity, but only in terms of cross-cultural influence operating between African and European peoples. Beyond that, he encourages readers to no longer accept an identity that has been defined and imposed by others, such as the French. He incites readers to reexamine and take control of their self-definition, and to reject a position of a subject that is never an actor in their life stories. Whether these authors promote a single Antillean, Creole identity depends on how specific one wishes to be. There are indeed differences among the authors, most notably between Chamoiseau and Godard concerning *créolité*. Yet the common presence of resilience, adaptation, and assertion highlight a common view of what Antillean culture is at its foundation, which translates into a vision of Antillean identity. Most importantly, the five texts discussed in this chapter constitute, together, an important message for Antillean youth: to embrace what has always been made “inferior” by French culture and History. The authors attack the inculcation of specifically French discourses, while normalizing a specifically Antillean memory, worldview, and social discourse. These alternative views help neutralize the effects France, colonialism, and assimilation have had on Antillean self-definition. If children draw inspiration from these texts, and the author’s intention to empower them succeeds, these children will grow up to shape a new set of discourses informing Antillean societies. The normalization of Antillean histories and the integration of the Antilles in the region’s *créolité* will persist and pass down to future generations. Perhaps one day these children will take part in defining a collective Antillean identity,

independent of French authority and dominance. Texts like those discussed here illustrate the possibility of such a definition.

CONCLUSION

Criticizing the lack of “traditions anticolonialistes” in the Antilles, and the assumption that the question of colonialism has been settled once and for all, Alain Brossat declares: “C’est maintenant ou jamais qu’il faut poser le problème dans sa dimension cardinale; celui du droit de ce peuple à réaliser son identité nationale, sociale, culturelle, à vivre par lui-même et pour lui-même, libre, indépendant” (14-15). Brossat’s call to action, to question and renounce France’s authority over Antillean societies, responds to a perpetual apathy, where Antillean people seem content to accept their “Frenchness,” while continuing to feel exiled in their own countries. Colonial dominance in Antillean societies, which Brossat contends is still fully present and camouflaged beneath the idea of assimilation, has prevented Antillean peoples from claiming their own identity on various levels. He argues that “Le redéploiement de la domination coloniale projette les masses de ce pays hors de toute identité, les atteint au coeur même de leur être, au-delà d’une figure simple et brutale de l’exploitation, de l’oppression coloniale. Jamais domination coloniale n’a rendu un peuple plus étranger à lui-même” (16). Such inhibiting effects on Antilleans’ agency requires, according to both Brossat and Daniel Maragnès, a drastic realization of self-worth leading to a meaningful, determined movement away from French domination. Yet realizing self-worth after centuries of colonial dominance will itself likely require a movement normalizing that worth before a further movement against French domination can take place. We read: “Dans un pays colonial [...] les masses ne peuvent mobiliser leur énergie historique, s’élancer de l’avant, au-delà de leur misère, de la méconnaissance d’elles-mêmes et du monde où les confine le colonialisme, que si elles sont armées de la certitude de lutter pour leur propre

destin, du dessein de faire triompher leur identité historique, sociale, culturelle” (Brossat 19). However, this “certitude” depends on a certainty that one’s historical, social, and cultural identities are valid and worth fighting for. Achieving such certainty is problematic because it relies on self-realization, which is difficult to obtain in societies dominated by hegemonic discourses. Emancipation movements depend on a certainty of self-worth, yet self-worth depends on self-realization and the ability to distance oneself from hegemonic pressure. Assimilation has nearly eliminated the possibility for an effective and complete rupture with France and its historico-cultural impositions through various mechanisms, which we shall explore shortly. How, therefore, might Antilleans begin to foster a sense of self-worth and persuade themselves that Antillean culture and identity do not reside within France’s power? How can one foster the attitude necessary, as argued by Brossat, to initiate a larger movement away from neocolonial authority?

If social mobilization depends on acknowledging the validity of Antillean cultural structures and histories, it then also depends on cutting into the hold assimilation has had on Antilleans’ self-awareness and self-definition. There must be a catalyst triggering a new awareness that can eventually develop into a larger movement against French colonial dominance. The emergence of a body of literature targeting Antillean youth, which has been the subject of this study, demonstrates a prime possibility for attaining this awareness. Because children are impressionable, learning how to see and think about their societies as well as themselves, the discourses and ideologies they are presented with are important. In Antillean societies, such exposure may determine whether these children carry on legacies of assimilation or grow up to challenge colonial domination. Antillean “postcolonial” children’s literature provides a space within which a movement

away from French hegemonic powers may be initiated, as it offers an opportunity to normalize values oppositional to those perpetuated by colonialism. One of the primary goals of this study has been to examine didactic literature for children in that capacity, determining whether it reflects that trend, and evaluating its potential in establishing Antillean historical, social, and cultural identities.

There are, according to Maragnès, various strategies of assimilation in Antillean societies, which, when compared against the discourses represented in Antillean children's literature, reveals how the latter factors into the relationship between France and its "departments." I will discuss two of these strategies, *le masque* and *l'énigme scolaire*, in an effort to answer the important question of whether Antillean "postcolonial" children's literature participates (effectively) in an anti-colonialist, anti-assimilation movement. Does the literature, whether it claims to resist colonial ideas or not, reinforce these strategies described by Maragnès?

Le masque distorts reality and creates a favorable illusion of colonial power (Maragnès 58). The imposition of institutions that promote colonization as having contributed favorably to Antillean societies – fostering economic prosperity and the illusion of self-government – masks the oppressive truths inherent in colonialism. Antillean peoples are led by this well-designed ruse to embrace assimilation, believing it can only benefit their financial and social situations. Maragnès argues:

L'assimilation est le moteur du système idéologique de la société coloniale aux Antilles. Par elle, se modifient le regard et la conscience des êtres, le nom des choses. Mais elle ne saurait se réaliser. Son travail est efficace dans la mesure même où elle demeure une promesse jamais tenue. [...]

[E]lle affirme à la fois l'identité des Antilles et de la France, dans le même temps qu'elle proclame leur différence. (59)

Despite what colonial power claims, assimilation is both a mechanism for maintaining dominance and an assertion of hierarchy between France and the Antilles. The idea that assimilation benefits the Antillean people is itself a major strategy in its propagation, and a significant example of how colonialism manipulates its role in domination. To challenge the masking strategy of assimilation requires destroying the mask:

“Démâquer, c’est briser le masque; plus précisément peut-être, *défigurer* le masque: lui ôter sa force de semblant” (Maragnès 58). Only by revealing the falsity of the mask, and the truth it conceals, will take away its power to dominate Antillean and other colonized peoples. Yet the question remains, how does one destroy, disfigure, or remove the mask?

If children’s literature normalizes ideas, attitudes, and values, breaking the mask might mean normalizing views of Antillean societies oppositional to those created within assimilation. It might mean overtly criticizing assimilated perspectives, or promoting pride in an Antillean culture and history independent of colonialist versions. Many texts that have been discussed in this study illustrate to varying degrees a desire to reveal the inherent negativity of assimilation: *La Coulée d’or* by Ernest Pépin, *La Case mensonge* and *Les Colères du volcan* by Gisèle Pineau, and *Idora* by Alex Godard are some examples. These texts point out openly or via metaphor the contradictory effects assimilation has had on Antillean identity – granting an assumed superiority over “others,” internalizing inferiority complexes, submitting to French culture and social structures. The authors shed light on the truth behind the mask, while chipping away at the latter. On the other hand, some texts fail effectively to “remove” the mask, as

subversive discourses are overshadowed or undermined by the presence of discourses enmeshed in assimilationist ideology. The most notable example is *La Forêt de Coeur-Bouliki* by Alex Godard, where racial and gender hierarchies, reflecting colonialist thought, greatly damage the author's anticolonial messages. In this case, the mask remains firmly in place because Godard, perhaps unwittingly, perpetuates an assimilated perspective – white males are heroic, and the saviors of non-whites, particularly women. Gisèle Pineau's *Caraïbes sur Seine* is another example, though more subtle. In this latter text, colonial perspectives on "race" prevail in that the power to decide human value resides with white characters. Pineau's efforts to combat racist discourses are undermined by the inability to fully remove the mask, or to fully recognize the nuances of racism. Contradictions such as these, which exist not only between authors but within authors, problematize the normalization of anti-assimilationist values and attitudes, hindering the mask's disfiguration but reflecting its solid positioning in Antillean societies.

Contributing to assimilation's masking strategy is the celebration of French heroism in History, which helps create an illusion of French superiority and a desire to belong to that heroic culture. Hidden beneath History's imposition is the negation of an Antillean history, and the denial of Antillean voices in the historical narrative. History's oppressive nature is masked, and its de-masking requires normalizing new, alternative histories that showcase French brutality. At the same time, this question of historical discourse overlaps with Maragnès's discussion of *l'énigme scolaire* – the role of the educational system in assimilation.

As discussed repeatedly throughout this study, the educational system has played an integral part in assimilating Antillean populations. *L'énigme scolaire* is, according to Maragnès, the second strategy of assimilation, which he describes as: “[une] réplique exacte de la structure scolaire française, l'École antillaise fonctionne à l'assimilation” (59). By its very nature, the school system maintains power and control, producing knowledge that privileges French authority. Whether through curriculum or administration, the uniquely French educational system prevents Antilleans from realizing or even questioning their position in society. History, a central component of the curriculum, produces knowledge about France, the Antilles, and the relationship between the two that fosters pride in being “French.” The relatively recent publication of several Antillean children’s books that rewrite historical narratives illustrates an effort to redirect knowledge production in Antillean youths. These texts – *Les Fabuleuses aventures d'Equiano* by Jean-Jacques Vayssières, *Montrésor à Mantidou* by Lucie Julia, and *Histoire d'Ougga, chien créole* by Maguy Bibrac – both disfigure colonialism’s mask by highlighting France’s brutal role in Antillean history, and contribute to new knowledge production by reinstalling Antillean actors in that history. By challenging the assimilating knowledge learned in a colonial educational system, these authors challenge assimilation itself.

Maragnès goes beyond curricular knowledge production, however, stressing the relationship between Creole, the educational system, and ideological domination. Because Creole was forbidden in school and continually depicted as representing inferiority, children eventually adopted critical judgment not only of the act of speaking Creole, but of the social space within which it was spoken – at home, for example, where

the children's mother and father often spoke the language. The school system, by imposing and normalizing a negative view on an Antillean local reality (the Creole language), fostered French dominance by turning young Antilleans against their own heritage. Even today French is the official language in schools, and the use of Creole, regarded only for its "vertus pédagogiques," is less a reflection of changing perspective than of "l'assujettissement continu aux normes de distribution des codes linguistiques" (Maragnès 60-61). Given Maragnès's focus on language as a primary function of assimilation within the educational system, how can a body of literature, which is mostly written in French, challenge the *énigme scolaire*? Lucie Julia's use of Creole in *Montrésor à Mantidou* legitimizes its value beyond a pedagogical tool in the assimilating process. She rejects the linguistic colonization that has facilitated Antilleans' assimilation. Yet Julia is also the only author to privilege Creole in her story, while the others, though some may integrate Creole words, write strictly in French. Does this language choice reflect the authors' assimilation? Does it imply that despite whatever messages the authors convey, their being written in French will ultimately undermine their subversive potential, and perpetuate linguistic colonization?

The answer depends on one's position with respect to how language functions in a "postcolonial" society. From Maragnès's perspective, the use of French reflects an ongoing rejection of Creole, and the *énigme scolaire*'s continual success. Proponents of the Créolité movement would also argue that the use of Creole is paramount to achieving a cultural identity independent of France. It is interesting, however, that Chamoiseau, a founder of Créolité, writes his children's tales in French as well. In spite of arguing for a linguistically Creole literature, and attempting to produce such works, the general

population was not interested in “écrits en ‘langue locale’” (Blérald-Ndagano 190).

Other authors, such as Maryse Condé, believe in literary freedom, expressing “un certain réalisme langagier, c’est-à-dire cette volonté de rendre réel par le langage” (Blérald-Ndagano 192). Condé explains: “À chacun sa créolité, c’est-à-dire à chacun son rapport avec le matériel oral et son rapport avec la tradition, et à chacun sa façon de l’exprimer dans la littérature écrite” (Pfaff 165). Language itself does not determine Antillean realities, nor does it define Antillean identity. In this context, it is the author’s subject and how he conveys it that matters, and that determines the *créolité* or *antillanité* of the literature. Maragnès’s point is, however, no less valid in light of these latter arguments, as he rightfully points out the simultaneous degradation of Creole with assimilation. Establishing a strong Creole voice, as Julia does, constitutes an important step away from such degradation. The integration of Creole words and expressions in various other authors’ works is equally important in subverting French linguistic colonization. However, when asking whether the use of French in Antillean children’s literature is counter-productive in challenging assimilation, we must first consider Condé’s definition of *créolité*: “Je crois que la créolité d’un individu se définit par autre chose: son rapport au monde, sa présence au monde, son rapport à beaucoup de choses plutôt que son rapport à une seule chose qui est la dimension linguistique” (qtd. by Blérald-Ndagano 190). While language is a part of being Creole, the more important elements reside in one’s relationship with Antillean societies, the world, and so forth. By this logic, it is how authors engage discourses and represent Antillean realities in their children’s books that bear more significance in challenging assimilation than the language they use.

On the other hand, the varying degrees with which Creole is, or is not, incorporated across the texts can be seen as another space of contradiction passed on to children. If their books are written predominantly in French, how do children negotiate between the degradation of Creole in the classroom, and the texts' anticolonial messages? Couldn't one argue that, in spite of how language is believed to play a part in identity, the use of French validates the educational system's inferiorization of the Creole language, and thus of *créolité*? This validation could seriously undermine the texts' potential to challenge assimilation. When considered next to the empowering historical narratives reclaiming an Antillean history and cultural identity, language has a potentially neutralizing effect. Authors such as Vayssières and Bibrac, who write only in French, offer powerful histories intended to reestablish the Antillean voice. Yet one could argue that the use of French, if seen as legitimizing the inferiority of Creole, negates the authors' positive messages, and neutralizes the empowering potential.

Between revealing discursive representations, historical rewritings, and language, the body of literature examined in this study sheds light on where Antillean societies may be headed with respect to assimilation and Antillean identity. On one hand, a majority, if not all, of the authors show interest in challenging colonial discourses. Yet the presence of contradictions similar to those already informing Antillean societies implies that the literature may contribute to maintaining that contradictory space. For instance, contradictions within a specific author's body of works reflect how competing ideologies have complicated Antilleans' sense of self and society. Consider the works of Alex Godard: he offers children a strong message against assimilation and various colonial discourses in texts such as *Idora*, *Maé et le lamantin*, and *Le Petit Hippopotam*, but

his text *La Forêt de Coeur-Bouliki* perpetuates colonial attitudes on “race” and gender. Gisèle Pineau’s works generally reveal troubling realities of Antillean societies, and the relationship between the Antilles and France. Yet her text *Caraïbes sur Seine* is problematic in its representation of racial relations. Ernest Pépin vehemently rejects assimilation in his *La Coulée d’or*, but in the same text he creates a puzzling depiction of Hindu culture reminiscent of colonial exoticization. Then there is the lack of consistency in message between authors, whether they promote discourses on opposite sides of the spectrum, or that are simply different, creating potential confusion. For example, Chamoiseau represents *créolité* in “Bouboule-tête-à-crapaud” as having roots in slavery, where it was developed as a subversive counter-culture, while in Godard’s *Idora*, it remains attached to African roots. Both authors subvert hegemony, but represent different points of view on Antillean cultural identity.

Contradictions such as these raise important questions about the literature’s efficacy against French domination. However, on many levels the literature also takes a clear step away from colonial authority. Though authors may stumble over unexamined assumptions, many characters and plotlines break with the French or colonial standard. Most of the heroes are black Antilleans, or represent black Antilleans (Crapaud in “Bouboule-tête-à-crapaud” for example), challenging the normalization of white heroism, as Fanon discusses in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (again, a clear exception being Sam in *La Forêt de Coeur-Bouliki*). Many stories are set in a Caribbean geographical context, contesting the focus on France as the cultural, moral, and political center. Authors draw attention to the readers’ own countries, validating the Antilles’ worth as important sites of action. The exceptions, *Caraïbes sur Seine*, *Le Petit Hippopotamtam*, and *Idora*,

represent respectively the Parisian *banlieues* (an important reference to immigration and poverty, although overshadowed by the story's problematic, underlying messages), Africa (highlighting Antilleans' pre-slavery heritage), and a hybrid location bringing Paris and Africa together (though not Caribbean, a clear reference to the region's hybridity or *créolité*). Finally, many stories illustrate young Antilleans overcoming obstacles, or coming to terms with their identity – racial, national, cultural, and so forth. The obstacles themselves are less important than that protagonists overcome them, because their success, coupled with their being black and of Caribbean origin, paints a strong image in the reader's mind.

This body of “postcolonial” Antillean children's literature both reflects a difficult and contradictory situation in the Antilles, and, in very general terms, subverts French hegemony. Brossat has argued that in order for the Antillean people to effectively challenge French domination, they must be armed with the certainty of fighting for their own destiny and identity. Yet this certainty can only come from a realization that a destiny and identity independent of France are important and deserved. There must be an awareness of one's worth, both as individual and society. This study has explored a body of literature that might act as a catalyst for that awareness, normalizing anticolonial values and attitudes while fostering a sense of pride in being Antillean. Could this literature provide a space to cultivate the attitudes necessary to move into a larger social movement against French dominance? Many Antillean authors of children's literature are aware that colonial oppression persists, and imply their wish to aid youth in resisting such oppression. Yet the contradictions in the literature pose potential problems to the success of their efforts, and raise questions about literature's role in defining a collective

Antillean identity. How can a body of literature whose messages at times subvert and at others promote colonial discourse effectively foster the kind of awareness needed collectively to challenge colonialist oppression? At the same time, we cannot deny that much of this literature does challenge powerful colonial discourses, and will likely have a positive effect on young readers' self-image. Perhaps we should not try to confine the literature to a binary of successful/unsuccessful, and instead accept its significance as a reflection of Antillean societies today, but also as an important step toward Antillean autonomy.

Still, there is much to be explored in this area of study, and while this project has served as a starting point, numerous further issues should, indeed must, be examined in order to truly understand the implications and potential of Antillean children's literature. Future studies might include a more detailed examination of the various discourses discussed here. As more books become available, one will better be able to gauge any trend in the authors' messages, with "race" for example: will the same confusion represented by the texts discussed in chapter one continue to dominate, or will there be a shift toward a more clear-cut affirmation of an autonomous Antillean identity? There is also the important issue of gender, a significant space of discussion in not only Antillean but in African and other African Diasporic societies as well. Do authors promote patriarchal gender roles, or do they question them? For instance, a short story by Patrick Chamoiseau, "Kosto et ses deux enfants," provides an interesting reevaluation of dominant gender roles and family structures in the Antilles: a father is left to care for his two children and must accept his parental role. This story offers insight into a potentially shifting discourse surrounding gender.

Moreover, this study serves as a stepping-stone, bridging gaps in postcolonial and literary scholarship, and inviting further exploration of postcolonial francophone children's literature. This exploration, if it is to truly make inroads in these areas of scholarship, must extend beyond the French Antilles. Comparative approaches can reveal how different societies involve their children in the postcolonial experience. Do similar challenges to French colonial discourses appear in the literature of other postcolonial societies: are they more (or less) resolved by the messages conveyed? Can we even claim that other francophone postcolonial societies have a strong body of children's literature created by and for their own peoples? Some interesting comparisons might include the Antilles and Haiti, which have very different histories and current socio-political situations, but which both have a strong body of children's literature. One might also consider comparing Antillean, Haitian, or African children's literature with that of metropolitan France, particularly that which represents francophone peoples. How are French children encouraged to see African or Caribbean cultures and people, and how are African and Caribbean children encouraged to see themselves? Is there a significant difference in how these children are presented with cultures and cultural identities, and what might that mean for future French/Francophone relationships?

There are tremendous opportunities for important scholarship in the field of postcolonial children's literature. It is my hope that this study makes such opportunities apparent, and that scholars in both postcolonial studies and children's literature will recognize the significance of such literature. Such heightened awareness could lead to a closer look at how social discourses and identity are influenced in francophone postcolonial societies.

APPENDIX



Figure 1: Mona and Sam, illustration by Alex Godard, *La Forêt de Coeur-Boulki* (Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2002), p. 12



Figure 2: Mona and Sam in the cage together, illustration by Alex Godard, *La Forêt de Coeur-Boulki* (Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2002), p. 28



Figure 3: Katsi with his “normal” parents, illustration by Alex Godard, *Le Petit Hippopotamam* (Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2004), unpagé

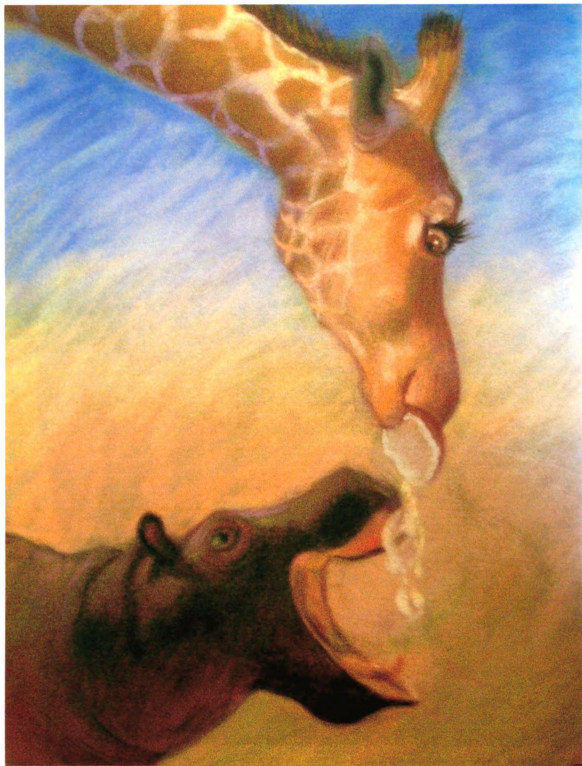


Figure 4: The giraffe feeding Katsi, illustration by Alex Godard, *Le Petit Hippopotamiam* (Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2004), unpagged

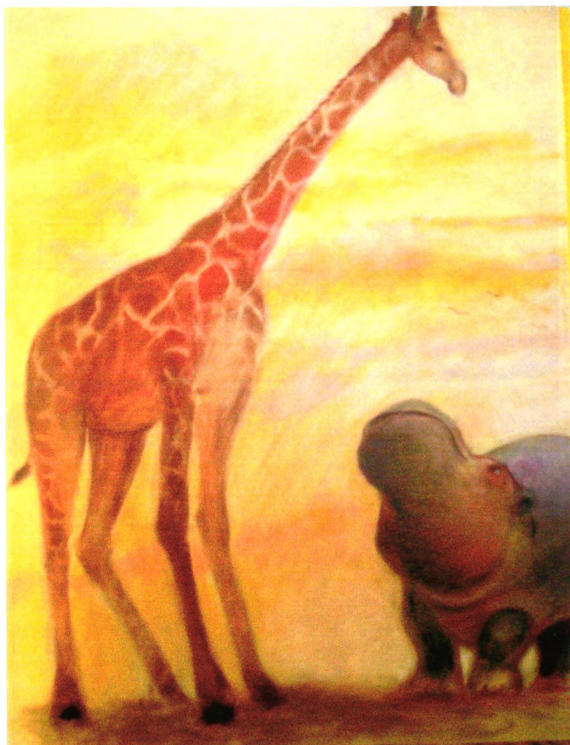


Figure 5: Katsi and the giraffe, illustration by Alex Godard, *Le Petit Hippopotamam* (Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2004), unpagged



Figure 6: Maé and Yaya in the sea, illustration by Alex Godard, *Maé et le lamantin* (Paris, Albin Michel Jeunesse, 2000), unpagé



Figure 7: "Ougga se jette sur Gorok", illustration by Thierry Jwaluka Martel, *Histoire d'Ougga, chien créole* (Pointe-à-Pitre, Éditions Jazor, 2001), p. 108



Figure 8: Idora in her apartment, illustration by Alex Godard, *Idora* (Belgium, Éditions du Seuil, 1997), unpaginated



Figure 9: The world is a theater, illustration by Alex Godard, *Idora* (Belgium, Éditions du Seuil, 1997), unpagé

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