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The Nexus Between Language and Identity in the Caribbean/Caribbean American Context

A Dissertation Presented

by

Isabelle Airey

to

The Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the

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in

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STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

The Graduate School

Isabelle Airey

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this dissertation

**Susan Schekel - Chair, Dissertation Committee
Associate Professor, Department of English**

**Helen Cooper - Dissertation Advisor
Associate Professor, Department of English**

**E. Anthony Hurley
Associate Professor, Department of Africana Studies**

**June Bobb
Associate Professor, Department of English (Queens College CUNY)**

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of Dissertation

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This dissertation explores the crucial role of language as it pertains Caribbean/Caribbean American identity. In doing so, I present works produced in Haitian Creole by Haitian writers in Haiti and of the Diaspora as a new literary tradition for both the history of Haitian literature and American literature. I discuss confrontations between culture, nationality and language throughout this project questioning and redefining Haiti's cultural and linguistic identity, and at the same time assessing how these confrontations present themselves within other Caribbean/Caribbean American experiences in literatures and memoirs.

This study begins with the inspiration of this dissertation project, the theatrical work of my father, Nicolas Pierre-Rollin. Against the grain of Haiti's socio-linguistic politics, he performed using mainly the language of the masses, Haitian Creole. Because of his proud determination to use the Creole language, I embraced it as a beautiful language that captured the essence of Haiti and its culture. This inspired me to bring to light, in this study, an overview of the history of Creole literature and Haitian Creole writers from Haiti and from the Diaspora who redefine Haitian intellectual accomplishments. This task is extremely important in dismantling Haiti's past prejudice against Creole when French occupied a high social status and Haitian Creole occupied a low one. As a result of Haiti's socio-linguistic situation, Haiti has been plagued by a cultural identity crisis.

Though issues pertaining to Haitian Creole and its literature dominate the dissertation, it however, still presents issues of language influencing the Caribbean/Caribbean American identity in literatures written in English by writers from Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti, Trinidad and Grenada. Overall, the Haitian Creole works, the Caribbean/Caribbean American experience in literatures plus the interview with Jan Mapou, author/cofounder of the Haitian Creole Movement confirm how language constructs/reconstructs and signifies identity both within culture and also within "other" cultures. Providing personal support to my intellectual arguments, this dissertation ends with the testimony of my repression of Haitian identity to my acceptance of public Creole expression and my Haitian self.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to, Adonai, the Father of my spirit.

And to my earthly father for being the inspiration that fostered this body of work.

To my mother, this is from me to you.

To my husband Chrisner and my sons, Aaron and Amari, I love you.

I dedicate this project to my heart for writing what my soul was crying out to celebrate:
my Haitian heritage, Creole and my father's accomplishments.

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PROLOGUE

“The Comedic Plays of Alcibiade: The Creole Language and the People”

C'est du théâtre populaire au niveau de la classe ouvrière. Le succès est dû à l'extraordinaire personnalité d'Alcibiade qui déchaîne les rires de l'assistance toutes les fois ou il joue selon son inspiration (c'est largement de la Commedia dell'arte) (Cornevin, 224)

(It is popular drama for the working class. This is due to the extraordinary personality of Alicibiade who unleashes fits of laughter whenever he is performing under inspiration.)

In the summer of 1975, the well-known Haitian comedian personality Alcibiade, whose birth name is Nicolas Pierre-Rollin, was reported to have been put under arrest under the orders of the Duvalier administration for a statement made during a theatrical comedy performance. The statement is as follows: “Lòt peyi ap devlope men Ayiti ap anvlope.”¹ While this pun generated laughter from the Haitian mass and the Haitians of the Diaspora, it was also a criticism of the Haitian government being governed by Francois Duvalier's son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, better known as ‘Baby Doc’. Under the Duvalier regime the arts and all broadcasting systems were not permitted to oppose or judge the government in any manner that the government had not approved. This story, which was told to me by a stranger in 1999, and the language in which he chooses to produce his art is what intrigued me to explore the theatrical work of Nicolas Pierre-Rollin as the character Alcibiade, who continues to have a major influence on the Haitian population in Haiti and the Diaspora.

On April third 2002, I conducted an interview with Nicolas Pierre-Rollin and learned that the incident of his arrest never truly occurred. According to Pierre-Rollin, that story is nothing but a fairy tale. Why was it not cleared up in the summer of 1975? Why

¹ Translation: Other countries are developing, but Haiti is being enveloped. In other words the country is in the process of underdevelopment. This pun means that Haiti is incapable of progressing. All translations are done by the author, unless otherwise stated.

did the Haitian mass hold on to this political fib? The only explanation I could come up with was that the Haitian masses who were bruised under the Duvalier regime dreamed of a public figure who would tell the truth about their nation's condition; a figure who would stand up and confront its leader; a figure who spoke to the masses and entertained them; a figure whom the masses loved. So was Alcibiade the voice of the people or was he positioned to be the voice of the people? Pierre-Rollin declares that through his art he is able to represent and confront unsettling problems of the Haitian mass in Haiti and the Diaspora while he connects with them through their language and comforts them through laughter, but he takes no part in politics, whether he was performing as Alcibiade or in his private life outside the theater or radio broadcasts. Although he affirms that he is an entertainer and not a politician, surfacing throughout the Alcibiade plays are deep cries for social and political reform in Haiti, which is visible through the wretched lives of some of the characters. I would argue that his plays are 'unconscious' political cries of and for the masses. For example, they tackle the economic devastation of the masses and the impact this devastation has on lower and lower middle class Haitians, which then results in immoral conduct (thieving, lying, adultery, promiscuity, and conning,) in seeking assistance in vodou religion, in longing for the United States or Canada, and/or in the prostitution of lives.

For almost forty years the dramatic persona of Alcibiade remain in the lives and hearts of Haitians in Haiti and the Diaspora². He has had more than five hundred theatrical pieces performed on radio and the stage. As of now, he is performing mainly on radio in Haiti. What keeps his work interesting to the public? His explanation is that he, on the one hand, stays out of politics, and on the other hand, he adjusts his subject to

² The Diaspora are Haitians living in the United States, Canada or Europe.

reflect/adapt to the changing culture. (Interview 2002) While Pierre-Rollin, makes it clear he stays out of politics, it is hard not to identify his plays as a reflection of the political, social and economic devastations and/or challenges Haitians in Haiti and the Diaspora face. This marker appears by his usage of the Créole language. Speaking the Créole language to publicly entertain was a political act in itself in Haiti during the nineteen-sixties, so the Haitian artists using the Creole language was automatically protesting against socio-linguistic order on the surface and covertly against the social system. Clearly through the method of laughter the Alcibiade plays display the struggle of a nation in distress on many levels.

THE ICON

...une troupe à la radio dispose d'une considérable audience et dans le milieu urbain c'est la troupe Alcibiade qui doit son nom à l'acteur-directeur [Nicolas] Pierre[-Rollin] qui en a fait le personnage principal de ses créations. (Cornevin, 223)

([There] is a troupe on the radio that has a very large audience, and the center of the attraction is the Alcibiade troupe [; the cast] got their name from actor-director [Nicolas] Pierre[-Rollin] who has made him(Alcibiade) the main character of his works.)

The character Alcibiade brings the masses to life and allows them to laugh at their cultural tradition. By displaying the reality of their everyday lives and struggles he expresses the fact that their struggle is seen and felt. And most importantly, by speaking Creole he connects to the core of Haitianness. All Haitians have an understanding of Creole. Pierre-Rollin's plays do not mainly focus on mimicking the imagined French culture like the petite bourgeoisie of Haiti; they mirror the Haitian society produced after 1804.

As an adolescent, Nicolas Pierre-Rollin loved acting and comedy, and as a joker or the typical class and neighborhood clown, he created a theatrical comedy group made

up of close pals named “L’enan Club” in 1954/1955. They performed during summer vacation months (July to September) creating story plots and multiple characters played by himself and/or with his cast. He gave his comedic character the name Alcibiade. Initially invited to perform in high schools, he was then hired by radio stations to use his Alcibiade personality to do commercials. He was a familiar voice doing commercials on the first Creole radio station, Radio Diffusion Haitienne, in Haiti, which came into being in 1962. Yet it was not until April 1967 that the Alcibiade persona, on this radio station, got his own show and began his career in comedy on the air waves and later the stage in Haiti and the Diaspora. His shows on the radio began to be Haiti’s pasttime. After a couple of months at Radio Diffusion Haitienne, he then moved to the most popular radio station at that time, Radio MBC, from November 1967 to 1988. After a twelve-year hiatus, he returned to performing on radio at Radio Caraïbes in 2000 and on stage. He performs where clusters of Haitian immigrants live in New York, Chicago, New Jersey, Boston, Florida, Spring Valley and Montreal in Canada. He symbolizes home to the Haitians of the Diaspora when he performs. In November 1995, at a Haitian Awards event for the performing arts, he was awarded the “Ballade Dominicale,” Honneur et Merite A L’un des plus Grands Comediens Haitens.³

THE PROTAGONIST/THE PEOPLE

Le rôle de séducteur, d’idiot, ou de roué (Cornevin, 224).

(The role of seducer, idiot and debauched man.)

³ Honor and Merit to one of the Greatest Haitian Comedians. Awarded October 29, 1995 and presented to him in November 1995.

Haiti's society is basically split between the poor and affluent with the middle/working class struggling amid. Alcibiade is of the poorer class, but he occasionally masquerades as a member of the middle class and always imagines, desires and tries to attain the rich life. The Alcibiade character always plays the role of an intelligent yet "ignorant" person of the poorer class. This character does all types of work to stay alive and being a trickster is one of them. Besides working in factories and as a manservant to the wealthy and working class, Alcibiade, who is also referred to as Biade, does odd jobs by running errands for family members for food and shelter. He is also a gigolo and a nomad at times, but the job he is best at performing is a con artist. Despite his crooked acts, he is always presented as the victim of poverty. Haiti is known for its poverty and the economic devastation that the mass suffers, and the Alcibiade character is able to show this in the rendition of his everyday life.

As the trickster character, Alcibiade can be compared best to Ti Malis from Uncle Bouki and Ti Malis, the most popular Haitian folktales:

Uncle Bouki and Ti Malis. Uncle Bouki is a cordial country bumpkin, often foolish but also stubbornly trying to avoid being duped. Ti Malis, a mischievous trickster, generally gets the better of Uncle Bouki. Price-Mars suggests that Uncle Bouki may have been modeled on the slave newly arrived in Saint Domingue, fresh from Africa, ignorant of his new surrounding. Ti Malis, on the other hand, represents someone born in Saint Domingue and who knows his way around. His superior knowledge of the ways things work puts Ti Malis in a position to take advantage of Uncle Bouki's naivete- and he does it at every opportunity. (Will, 77)

The adventures of Uncle Bouki and Ti Malis are reincarnated in the Alcibiade plays and practically every character that he encounters becomes an Uncle Bouki, because

Alcibiade believes he can swindle everybody. In the dramatic piece “Femme Kretienne,” Alcibiade tricks people into believing he is well established and rich by wearing his friend’s suit and borrowing money he promises his friend, who has just won 40,000-50,000 in the illegal Haitian lottery, *bolette*, he will pay back. Hanging out in the streets, he tricks people into giving him things, but in reality he is poor. There are no beds in Alcibiade’s house, so his children sleep on the floor, and glue holds the windows together in his house; the neighbors practically help his family stay alive. Alcibiade’s roles as the con artist and the bad father and husband are almost forgivable because Alcibiade does not have a machismo attitude. Money is what would make him a man of respect but he does not possess it. His turmoil reflects the real life of the masses.

As a wise character, Alcibiade performs as a vodou priest or a loa⁴ implementing solutions and help for the needy. Alcibiade’s role as a father is pathetic and irresponsible. He is infamous for abandoning his wife and children to escape the responsibilities of parenthood. As a husband Alcibiade has a few roles: the struggling provider who gets no respect or recognition for his hard work because the family is still living in poverty; or one who lives off his wife’s trade because it is hard for a man to succeed with little or no education. Michael Dash explains the difficulties faced by many poor Haitian men:

There are few jobs for the uneducated and unskilled. In any case, to get a job would require contacts among the influential. Few of the new urban poor enjoy such privilege. Therefore, they find themselves employed intermittently as laborers and cart pullers (known as boureyes) or in repairing shoes, bicycles, or motorcars. (*Culture and Customs of Haiti*, 40).

⁴ Vodou god

We could argue that the economic condition of Haiti is responsible for Alcibiade's distasteful behavior or choices, but his ego is more to blame (and bigger) than Haiti for his financial distress.

CULTURE

It is impossible to discuss Haiti without discussing the vodou religion and its role and influence within the Haitian culture. From media reports, to anthropological research and speculations, vodou and Haiti seem to coexist at all times. Though many Haitians do not practice the vodou religion, there are still a considerable number of them who observe vodou either openly or secretly. Many have continued to practice vodou rituals in foreign lands. In *The Black Jacobins*, C.R.L. James notes that vodou played an important role in slave revolts in Haiti. "Voodoo⁵ was the medium of the conspiracy. In spite of all prohibitions, the slaves traveled miles to sing and dance and practi[c] e the rites and talk; and now since the revolution, to hear the political news and make their plans" (James, 86). And on the eve of the Haitian revolution, "in the thick forest of Morne Rouge", the High Priest Boukman "gave the last instructions and, after Voodoo incantations and the suckling of the blood of a stuck pig," he "stimulated his followers by a prayer spoken in Creole..."(James, 87). Sidney W. Mintz notes that "The Haitian revolution freed not only the slaves but also their creative capacities: it was through modes of symbolic expression, including the religious, that this new found freedom was able to manifest itself" (introduction, *Voodoo in Haiti*, 11). Moreover, Catholicism, which was the religion practiced by the French masters and landowners, was viewed as the religion of

⁵ There are various spellings for the word voodoo (English), vodou and vodoun (Créole or English), vaudou (spelling used by Sidney W. Mintz in his introduction in *Voodoo in Haiti*).

oppression by the slaves, and “was accorded no special status after independence” (52). It was not until “1806 ... after Dessaline’s assassination, [that] Catholicism was adopted” (Dash, 52). The Catholic Church encouraged prejudices against the religion of the mass, which was vodou. Mintz claims that “voudou has lost its ground among the Haitian people in the course of the last half-century⁶...” as a result of “... powerful campaigns launched against it and its practitioners by the Church and the work of missionizing Protestant churches since the North American invasion...” (13). In an effort to preserve the vodou religion, “The Duvalier regime did nothing to weaken the meaning of vaudou for the Haitian masses” (Mintz, 14), and by 1971, Mintz notes that “Vaudou has received a new lease on life in the last two decades; it is probably as much the result of a deepening rural economic crisis, as of any emotional, political, or ideological predispositions of the regime in power” (14).

Vodou is an intricate part of the Haitian culture and Alcibiade’s plays best express this. They present the dramatic encounter between the people and the vodou religion. Robert Cornevin in *Le Theatre Haitien* studies the popular theater in Haiti, which showcases the culture of vodou and the Creole language. Cornevin notes the phenomenon of the vodou religion as a tradition within the mainstream Haitian theater and also in the emergent Creole theater. Cornevin briefly looks at Alcibiade’s first mainstream plays “L’enfant Prodigue” (The Prodigal Child), “Maison D’affaires Dangereuses” (House of Dangerous Affairs), “Alcibiade Personnage Dérégulé” (Alcibiade, Unruly Character), and “Il n’y a pas de sot métier” (There Is No Stupid Career) which were tremendous successes (in 1969). The plays incorporated both the practices of the vodou religion and the Creole language. Cornevin examined how these plays, as they were Alcibiade’s most

⁶ 1850’s to 1890’s?

popular at that time, exploded with excitable humor as they satirically explored the vodou religion and Haitian society.

Stock characters in many of the Alcibiade plays are the vodou priest, loas, the devil himself, and the lackey who is in fact a zombie that works for the vodou priest. The plays frequently feature invocation sessions between the vodou priest, the loas and those that come to the priest for his advice and help. Though there are female loas, like Ezulie, the Alcibiade plays always invoke the male loa, Legba. Alfred Metraux, in his anthropological research on vodou in Haiti, in *Voodoo in Haiti* notes that “Legba acts as interpreter to the gods. Without him they could not communicate with them... No loa dares show itself without Legba’s permission” (Metraux, 101). In each play when Alcibiade and/or a character is consulting the Vodou Priest, who is called a Hougan(male) or Mambo(female) in Creole, we witness a faithful replica of the invocation of the loa ceremony. The fact that the vodou priest is featured or mentioned in almost every play signifies that vodou is an intricate part of the masses’ life. The hougan is the community’s helper, the connection between the people and the loas; he/she is also both a counselor and a respected individual. He is invoked for the most important matters: money and love and betrayal. In “Nan Prin Zami,” [No Friends] the vodou priest is sought after by Rose (a main character) to aid her in keeping her husband in love with her; her needs are temporally met because Alcibaide does not give the loas the total portion he is supposed to sacrifice to them; so in the end, she loses her husband to another woman.

In the plays, the image of the loa is not presented as totally evil. The word loa is “translated as ‘god’ [or] ‘spirit’ or ... a ‘genius’” (Metraux, 84). The Loa is god that

grants the earthly wishes of the people: love, riches, revenge, power, fame. Metraux delineates vodou as a practical and utilitarian religion which cares more for earthly than heavenly things” (92), which is the primary concern of the Haitian mass. They are suffering here on earth, so they need to find an immediate tangible solution. For instance, a peasant in Haiti testifies to Metraux that:

‘The loa love us, protect us and guard us. They tell us what is happening to our relations who live far away, they suggest to us remedies which bring us relief when we are sick...If we are hungry the loa will appear to us in a dream and say ‘Take courage: you will earn money’ and the promised money comes’ (95).

In every vodou intercession, in the Alcibiade plays, it is almost always material gain being requested by Alcibiade and/or other characters because they are mainly poor, so vodou “served to [help them] develop the capacity to endure the hardships of daily existence” (Carrol C. Coates, 182).

Although, the vodou religion is mainly identified as a peasant religion, the privileged dabble in it as well. Since the peasant is more materially deprived and suffering, he is in constant need of deliverance, but the Alcibiade plays show that peasant characters as well as rich characters summon vodou priests. For example, the play “Chambre Morte”[Room of the Dead] presents the most detail on the invocation of the loas in a vodou ritual. The scenes reveal to us the process of meeting with the vodou priest, calling on the loas with invocation songs, hearing the loas give instruction to the priest to give to the soul requesting his aid, and lastly we witness the loa’s spirit possessing the priest as it gives instructions to the patron. A sacrificial offering also takes place, which is required before and after the loa has been summoned. “Chambre Morte”

also testifies to the influence of vodou a step further as it discloses vodou practice in America. It allows us to see the appeal and power of vodou not just in Haiti, but also in America as some Haitians of the Diaspora practice it and Americans take an interest. The book and movie *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985,1988) presented, in the author's and director's interpretations, a bountiful view of vodou religion to the Western world; but while the main character in *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, who is American, goes to Haiti to experience vodou as a researcher, the American character in "Chambre Morte" goes to Haiti to get involved in vodou for what the natives of Haiti themselves go for- for self-interest. To increase his riches and enhance his business in America, the American character in "Chambre Morte", who is a white American businessman, travels to Haiti to purchase a couple of zombies to work for him back in the States for free. Alcibiade, who plays the relative of the American businessman's employee in the States, serves as his guide and serviceman in Haiti. Alcibiade, who is also the lackey to the vodou priest, brings the American to the vodou priest to fulfill his request. Alcibiade cynically notes that in the US they use robots and computers to work for them, but in Haiti they have zombies and souls to work for them. This play comically pokes fun at the irony of a white man who comes to Haiti to purchase some zombies to work for him for free in America. When Alcibiade, as the lackey, says, "a white man needs a hand too." The play shows an affluent person from a powerful country submitting to a relatively small and poor island and their loas and the vodou practice for help, especially when Western culture has reservations towards the vodou religion. So in the end, the very religion that was belittled for centuries by the "white man" was the same religion the "white man" sought after to gain the upperhand.

Moreover, Alcibiade's plays introduce us to the conflict between the vodou religion and Christianity. For instance, in the play "Jugment Des Hommes" (Judgment of Men) we meet a cluster of people preaching who are members of the Protestant church who get caught up in envying the riches of the world and no longer want to endure the long suffering that Christianity encourages to succeed in life. Alcibiade is one of the main advocates who cross over to this new group of believers worshiping wealth and abandoning the belief of his Christian faith: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for [God] hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee'" (King James Version, Heb. 13.5).⁷ In contrast to his (old) faith Alcibiade argues that, "Poverty does not allow us to wait on the Lord." Metraux notes that "The word God is always on the lips of the Haitians but it would be unwise to conclude that they feared Him or even gave Him much thought... He conjures up no precise image and He is too far away for there to be much point in addressing Him"(83). God is too distant to connect to them, so the voodoo culture provides the Haitians who believe access to gods/loas that roam the earth and are more available to lend them a hand. Eventually, Alcibiade was no longer Brother Biade; he became Mr. Biade. Brother Biade is the title he held while he was poor and struggling, but with his newfound riches, he is now a man and demands to be referred to as Mister⁸. Through his serving of the loas (vodou gods) he comes to own a Jaguar and a Mercedes Benz and homes. In the end, Alcibiade pays for the price of his newfound riches by losing his soul and life, because he was unable to present innocent children as a sacrifice to the loas as

⁷ Quoted from *The Holy Bible*.

⁸ Likewise, The transformation from boy/servant hood to man due to sudden riches is also shown in the play "Floche" where Alcibiade after winning the illegal Haitian lottery, *bolette*, is no longer addressed as "garcon" Andre who cleans the yard, but Mr. Andre who becomes the lover of his boss's wife.

they had requested through the vodou priest. The words from his Christian faith warn: “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (*New International Version*, 1Tim 6.10)⁹. Unfortunately, Alcibiade did not stay in his faith long enough to hear what might become of his greed. Alcibiade’s need for instant gratification from vodou gods for his lack of resources turns out to be a curse for his poor soul that was already cursed by poverty. At last, there appears to be no other way to survive, except through long suffering and endurance.

THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

Haiti is markedly divided between the affluent and the working/poorer class, but interestingly, the family structure is relatively the same between the two classes as they aspire to set up a stable family unit; but within their superficial similarity, differences do lurk. The affluent group is more likely to get married through a lavish religious ceremony, the working class through civil marriage and possibly in church¹⁰, and the poorer/rural group creates their union through mutual verbal agreement. In Haiti, there is a high level of social and moral prestige associated with creating a nuclear family consisting of a father, mother and children, whether they are legally or verbally bonded; these unions may or may not exclude extra marital affairs, but to them creating a nuclear family is considered the right thing to do socially, morally and traditionally.

⁹ Quoted from the *Starting Point Study Bible*.

¹⁰ Because weddings were expensive, many couples waited several years before having them. In the 1960s, this pattern began to change among Protestant families who belonged to churches that strongly encouraged legal marriage and provided affordable weddings. Source: *Haiti: A Country Study*, ed. Richard A. Haggerty, 1989. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 10 Nov. 2004
<http://www.photius.com/countries/haiti/society/haiti_society_gender_roles_and_fam~39.html>.

Though single parent homes exist, they are rare. As a matter of fact, single parent homes do not technically exist. The extended family participates in the children's upbringing. The extended family tends to live with one another, which includes the mother and/or father of a household, the children, her brother, her sister and her sister's kids, and the grandparents. In most cases, they are communal families in which the neighbors and the people of the community help raise the children together. So in this case, the single parent is not alone in raising his/her children.

Alcibiade's plays explore all the types of family structures in Haiti, but in the attempt to showcase the living conditions of Haitians struggling daily, he tends to focus on the families from the middle to rural classes. For instance, in the play "Femme Kreyen" ("Christian Woman"), we are introduced to a woman living in poverty with her children and her husband, played by Alcibiade. Alcibiade is an irresponsible father and his wife looks to the neighbors for financial and emotional support. For example, near the beginning of the play, the main female character complains to her husband that they have no bed to sleep on and no money, and that their children have to watch television at the neighbor's house. She finds comfort and support from the neighbors who know her family's condition. The neighbors loan them money, give them food, and often buy supplies for the home and children. This is a typical neighborhood in the poor to lower middle class communities in Haiti.

Though Alcibiade's plays do not fully explore single parent homes, they are present in a few plays. In these single parent households, the child/ren is/are either being raised by a mother, grandmother (Gran) or an aunt (Tante or Ma tante). The tante is not necessarily a blood relative, but is important to the child or adult character. The

grandmother and the old “ma tante” are the keeper of her grandchildren and the neighborhood children, men and women. She counsels, reprimands and nurtures. In Haitian culture she tends to love with a tough love. She has learned to be tough to battle with life, but she has also learned the importance of love. She is all knowing. Grandmothers are so blessed and powerful that a myth within the culture declares that: “If the grandmother or old female figure puts her left breast towards the rising (or setting) sun, she can put a curse on the disobedient and disrespectful child.”¹¹

A biological or surrogate aunt, grandmother or godmother raising the central figure in Caribbean literature is customary. In Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie, the main character’s aunt ‘tante Atie’ and grandmother raise her as a child in Haiti, while her mother is in the States. Her tante Atie is the one who reveals the truth about her mother’s past and helps Sophie bridge the gap between her mother and herself. The aunt/tante in the Alcibiade play “Tante Carmen” is similar, yet very different from the surrogate parental figures mentioned previously. The female character under Tante Carmen’s care becomes objectified and used for commerce for Tante Carmen’s daily survival, while the other female caregivers protect and nurture the young protagonist. Even as she becomes Rosie’s caregiver, after she runs away from home, Tante Carmen also exploits her. Pierre-Rollin said that Tante Carmen is not evil, but desperate. She is a lonely seventy-year-old woman with no family or ‘husband’ to look after her (Interview. New York, 2002). Tante Carmen was able to provide comfort and support to Rosie when Rosie would run to her with her problems. Her old and lonely status positions her as the town’s wise and accessible guardian and therefore trustworthy. Unfortunately, Tante

¹¹ This is a mythical saying that was passed on to me by my grandmother, and it is, however, believed by many.

Carmen has been corrupted by her economic deficiency and has victimized Rosie in her attempt to escape her economic difficulties.

Furthermore, Alcibiade's plays depict some major cultural habitation taboos: placage and adultery. *Placage*,¹² customary mainly in Haiti's countryside, explores a domestic arrangement in which no official marriage takes place; the couple lives together with an understanding and commitment to each other for years. This is important to mention because Haitian elite society ostracizes this sort of living arrangement, but it is a widespread, secret reality of the masses. The majority of Haitian plays tend to depict mainly married couples with children in school experiencing daily middle class struggles; however, Alcibiade's plays do not hide the Haitian practice of placage. He presents us with a raw and honest portrait of Haitian family life.

Alcibiade's plays present characters living in adultery, which is another cultural/social taboo explored, without any moral convictions being displayed by the characters involved. They cheat and have multiple partners; one would declare them to be morally challenged. In the play "Untitled," we meet Alcibiade, the con artist, who leaves his family to live with another woman. The young woman with whom he lives in placage refers to Alcibiade as her husband. Though they are not legally married, they have formed a bond on the basis of which Alcibiade gave her five hundred dollars. Money was sufficient to create the union. Moreover, in the play "Floche," Alcibiade's wife insensitively removes him from the home to replace him with her new lover from New York City. This new lover is her ticket to a better life which her husband can not provide. The family structures in Alcibiade's plays are also strained by the impoverished conditions of Haiti. The arrangements of the families are formed either to secure the well

¹² Living in the same home with a lover out of wedlock.

being of the clan, or they are recreated or repeatedly readjusted (exchanging of mates) to suit the envious needs of an individual.

ECONOMICS

In the year 2000, Will notes that the "... unemployment rate [was] at a whopping 70 percent" (65) in Haiti, and most of the dramatic conflicts presented in the plays by Le Troupe Alcibiade always reflect the economic problems of Haiti, which is displayed through the hardships of the main characters, and especially those of the character Alcibiade. Dash notes that in Haiti the "Peasant society is 70 percent of the population" (35). The economic struggle of the Haitian society is well documented in the following plays. In "Mize Papa Ak Pitit," ("Misery of Father and Child") we are confronted with a single parent household where the mother is left struggling with the responsibility of raising her three children alone in an economy that is struggling to function. She takes up multiple jobs to support her children's education, because Alcibiade, in this play, is an absentee father. In the end, her children become successful embarking on some of the most respected careers in Haiti: an engineer, a doctor, and an ecologist. While getting an education is extremely important in Haitian society, in order to live comfortably, Haiti's economic deficiencies also cripple its educated. In the skit "Nan Prin Zami, ("There Are No Friends"), we meet a young woman who has four degrees but is unable to obtain a job. In her frustration, she abandons her ambition to be an independent woman and instead seeks a man to take care of her. While it is easy to say that this play reflects an antiquated society where the women depend on men for their livelihood, it would not be fair, because a huge number of women are self employed entrepreneurs, especially the

‘market women.’ These women are more like heads of households and/or provide the main source of income.

However, in Haitian society more often women stay at home to take care of the family while men go out to work. In the play “Naje Pou Nou Soti,” (“We’ve Got To Swim To Escape”), women who are educationally and economically challenged leave their spouses for hope of a more comfortable life with other men. In this play a middle-aged woman named Michelle is married to Alcibiade. She is apparently disappointed in her husband’s lack of ambition and exposure to finer things and in his unsuccessful life. While he talks about the beautiful landscapes and main attractions in Haiti, his wife imagines the big, expensive, and rich New York City life. Alcibiade repeatedly snarls at his wife’s obsession with New York City because either he is extremely fond of his country (because that’s all he has ever known) and/or his poverty has handicapped his imagination towards the United States (which allegedly offers a more luxurious life).

In the Alcibiade plays, everyone who comes from the U.S. back to Haiti is always referred to as looking beautiful and healthy, whereas Alcibiade is presented as grotesque and unbearable. The physical attributes assigned to Alcibiade and the Jiasporas¹³ compare to the masses’ view of the happy individual from America, Europe or Canada and the miserable individual in the homeland. Eventually, Michelle leaves Alcibiade for a Haitian American Jiaspora who offers her dreams of living in New York

¹³ Jiaspora is a Haitian Creole wording used in Haiti for people of the Diaspora when they return to Haiti. A term used to describe a Haitian American/Canadian, an American/Canadian child born to Haitian or Haitian American/Canadian parents. Once removed from the island you become a Jiaspora where one’s pure Haitianess is tainted and watered down by the sea that had to be crossed to leave the island. The Haitian language, meaning Creole, and culture are faint and reconnection is presented as a challenge.

City and a better life and whom she believes has a lot of money. In “Flòch”¹⁴ (“Flush”), we meet a young woman who becomes unfaithful to her husband, while he is in the States, in order to obtain economic wealth and lavish material things. She does not hesitate to turn her manservant, Alcibiade, into her lover, when he started to adorn her with gifts from his winnings from bollette (gambling). He went from being called garcon/boy Andre (the alias he uses, because he believes the name Alcibiade is cursed) to Muesuer/Mr. Andre. This is the same transformation presented in the in “Jijman Des Hommes,” which I mentioned earlier. Alcibiade as an ex-Christian man who turns to vodou for riches, goes from Brother Biade to Mr. Biade. Mister signifies that he is a man and well off and requires respect, as opposed to a Brother who is humbly struggling with no social or financial power. In the play, Mr. Biade lashes out at his old church friends stating, “I don’t need any prayer, I own a home and a car.” This incident dramatizes how many Haitians rely on or turn to vodou religion and magic for economic gain.

“Femme Kretyen”(“Christian Woman”) introduces a poor family. The Christian female character accepts and endures her situation because Christianity teaches that one must endure longsuffering. Her husband Alcibiade, on the other hand, cannot embrace this lifestyle and is living an imagined rich life by swindling, gambling, and lying. Never really having a stable job, he lives his life as a conman dreaming of winning the Haitian lotto, bollette. His riches are short lived and dishonest, but he does not turn to vodou for economic gain, he just relies on his next scam.

Furthermore, a crucial economic condition experienced by Haitians in Haiti, is the dependence on money coming from family in the States or Europe. The livelihood of the

¹⁴ Flòch or floche also means to wash out, go under or bankruptcy, which ironically defines the economical condition of the Haitian mass, but in this case it refers to Alcibiade’s gambling habit that signifies he does nothing else but flush down his money.

families “back home”¹⁵ depends on it. The financial supporter from abroad plays the role of a miniature god to their families back home; this type of codependent lifestyle is actually part of Haiti’s social economic system. Children are sent to school, food is put on the table, and/or money for everyday expenses are provided via the family member abroad. Those in the Diaspora send money and a variety of goods “back home” using Caribbean transfer systems, such as C.A.M. or Bobi Express. These realities are explored in the play “Untitled” and we see Alcibiade is living a life of luxury in Haiti from the money his brother, named Ti New York¹⁶, sends him from New York City. We hear Alcibiade constantly justifying his spending by claiming that his brother is picking money off the floor in the States. Unfortunately, the money Alcibiade’s brother sends to him is intended to go also towards building and furnishing the brother’s retirement home when he returns to Haiti, but Alcibiade fails to build and prepare a proper living quarter because he spends all the money on women.

One of Haiti’s major economic dilemmas involves children who are unpaid child servants called *restavec*,¹⁷ which is a modern form of child slave labor. Emily Wade Will notes that “this dates back to the country’s birth in 1804. For parents, it is a last resort, providing a glimmer of hope that their children will survive” (67). In the renowned autobiography *Restavec: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle-Class American*, Jean-Robert Cadet shares his experience as a *restavec*. Very often the *restavec* is a poor child living with a wealthier or successful working class family, the child of a servant that used

¹⁵ The term home /back home is almost always a reference to the island; it is used by individuals who have left their island and still hold it dear to their heart. They live in a constant state of nostalgia. Home is not where they actually currently reside, but back on the island.

¹⁶ Little New York

¹⁷ Means literally “to reside with someone.”

to or still works for a family, or a stray child that comes to offer his or her services for lodging and food. While we do not meet any main characters who are plainly restavec, in “Untitled” a female owner of the house, which was bought by Alcibiade with Jiaspora money, talks down to a young female adolescent, who is the maidservant, with familiarity and disgust, which indicates that the young girl has been working for and living in her quarters. Though the restavec issue is not the prime focus of the play, Pierre-Rollin inadvertently presents the disturbing custom of possessing restavecs in Hiati. By showcasing the lack of respect, verbal abuse and the unchanged destitute state the young restavec girl suffers through her keeper, Pierre-Rollin illustrates the master-slave relationship that is present. Since working for food, shelter and used clothes leaves no room for financial freedom or stability, a life of dependency is a restavec’s fate.

LANGUAGE

The use of mainly Haitian Creole in Alcibiade’s plays was and is still is very important to his continued success. By using the language of the masses Alcibiade declares that the Haitian people are connected. In my interview with him, in response to a question on his use of mainly Creole in the Alcibiade plays, Pierre-Rollin simply declared that “it’s easier for all to comprehend.” In other words, the use of Creole is an attempt to ensure that no one is excluded from enjoying the plays. Pierre-Rollin is not the only theatrical comedian to use Creole; another famous comedian, Langishatte, also used Creole in his performances. One important difference between the two, however, is that in the Langishatte performances the scenes retain the same main characters and we are always presented with the daily dramas of a middle class family emulating the ethical

codes of the French bourgeoisie and breaking them every so often. *Langishatte* features Langishatte (the working husband), his wife (educated housewife), daughter (student), son (lawyer) and two house servants (Azibe and Melenie). *Langishatte's* plays do not overtly present the everyday hardships of the Haitian people; the Langishatte family members are middle/working class Haitians who are financially comfortable. They do not have to resort to depraved schemes like the characters in the Alcibiade's plays, because they are not poor or miserable. Besides their servants who speak only Creole, Langishatte and his family do not confront, on a full scale, the social barriers of language, because they speak Creole and French.

Haitian Creole is the dominant language used by all the characters in Alcibiade's plays, including the city officials and bourgeois characters that use it to speak to the characters that have little or no education. In "Boss Ebeniste" and "Tonbe," ("The Fall") during court scenes, we get a view of Haiti's sociolinguistic situation. The judge, the lawyers and court officer communicate in French with each other, but the court officer and lawyer (sometimes) both use Creole to communicate with the offenders because they are the intermediators linking and aiding the masses with the justice system. Alcibiade, who is always the offender, however, can communicate only in Creole and gets very hostile in the courtroom. In "Boss Ebeniste," when Alcibiade, playing a conman, is sentenced to appear in court for his misdeeds, we witness a language duel. Every time the judge or the lawyer given to represent him speaks to him in French, he responds in Creole to something totally the opposite of what he is being asked. Alcibiade fails to present his case properly and the lawyer fails to represent him properly. This reflects how the judicial system in a small community functions, privileging those who are able to communicate in the French

language (with exceptions now in the twenty-first century), and thereby leaving the masses out, misrepresented and neglected.

Moreover, language hierarchy is attributed even to religious figures; for example, in the play “Jijman Des Hommes,” God and Jesus speak French, but the devil speaks Creole only. Creole is given the attributes of an evil and ugly figure, which is the way in which Haitian society historically has viewed it. There is also a form of French-Creole, which is not the standard French language but a broken French. This style of language is used by the poor who imagine themselves as bourgeoisie or by the uneducated/lower class citizens who try to communicate with the French speakers or imitate them. Often in Alcibiade’s plays, Alcibiade pretends to speak French to French speakers, but it is comical because his French is really Creole with a French accent. When Alcibiade pretends to be of a higher class in “Femme Kreyen,” he uses broken French, which is not Creole, but just plain misuse of the standard French language. He basically creates an imaginary language for the imaginary lifestyle he was portraying.

Alcibiade’s plays expose the many socio-linguistic situations that exist in Haiti and even within the Diaspora. When English is used in the plays, the Haitian character is trying to emulate American culture or simply identifying himself/herself with an American identity through the use of one or a few English words. The English Alcibiade speaks is as follows: he only verbalizes basic words “hello”, “bye” “see you” “okay” “Brooklyn, New York” “Miami, Florida” and “dollar”. Also a broken form of Creole-English is used to communicate with American foreigners like the patron from “Chambre Morte” (“The Room of Death”). The patron is a white businessman who has come to Haiti to use vodou to gain riches. He has some comprehension of Creole, but when he

tries to communicate with Alcibiade it becomes pure chaos. For example, when the Patron says good-bye to Alcibiade, Alcibiade misinterprets good-bye as Gourdes (which is Haitian currency for dollars) bay (the verb to give in Creole), which means give money/dollars.

Lastly, in “Naje po nou Sòti,” there are scenes where a Jiaspora returns to Haiti to visit family and old friends and is unable to communicate well in Creole. In this case the Jiaspora is speaking an American Creole where an American accent is used to speak Creole and Creole and English words are combined to express him/herself. Haitian English is used by Haitian Americans learning Créole. This is often a mixture of English words with Haitian Creole words or Haitian Creole words spoken with an English accent (3rd generation Haitian Americans) or vice versa English words spoken with a Haitian accent (1st generation Haitians). What occurs in this situation is that the language(s) which a person converses in reflects the culture, class or society or the imagined citizenship (Haitians in the shadow of France or mimicking American culture) with which he/she identifies or desires to identify with. I distinguish this language phenomenon as *Languidentity*. *Languidentity* defines the coexistence and fluidity between language and identity or cultural identity within the Caribbean/Caribbean American societies on the islands and in the Diaspora. *Languidentity* suggests the language(s) you speak or choose to speak cultivates and influences your identity in conjunction with the cultural/social identity that you profess. So basically, you are taking on the cultural identity of the language that you speak.

WOMEN

As the Haitian society is divided up into two major classes, so are the roles of women. Affluent and elite women are more likely to be educated housewives or professionals, while poorer women, with or without a spouse, work and struggle as men do. As Dash notes, “The peasant woman’s life is a life of unremitting labor.... Weddings are infrequent (in the countryside) common-law arrangements, or placages, dominate” (*Culture and Customs*, 36). Alcibiade’s plays showcase the underprivileged women struggling to make a living. For example, “Mize Papa ak Pitit,” expressed the hardship of single motherhood in Haiti with a woman who is raising her three children alone because she has been abandoned by her husband; she works a couple of jobs (as a servant) to send her children to school and provide for their livelihood. And if the women are not struggling to make a living on their own, they desperately aspire to have a man by any means to supply their material needs. They will fabricate a horrid picture of their living conditions like Tante Carmen does in “Tante Carmen” or take in Alcibiade (a loafer and a con) as a live in lover because he successfully manages to convince them, through his schemes, that he is rich in “Untitled” and “Floche”.

Women are frequently depicted, in Alcibiade’s plays, as prostituting themselves to gain material wealth or some degree of financial stability. In the process of trying to gain material wealth, these women objectify themselves in submitting to the wishes of men. They are shown very often leaving their husbands or living in placage for a man with money, as we have seen in “Floche” and “Naje Poun Soti”. Moreover, they go as far as casting vodou spells to keep a man or win him from another woman. In “Nan Prin Zami,” two former friends turn to vodou to keep the same man. One of the friends (Rose)

was a house servant until she met Phito who sweeps her off her feet to the middle class lifestyle, while the other friend (Mayot) is jobless with four college degrees looking for a man to take care of her.

The most disturbing play, “Tante Carmen,” shows women as prostitutes and objects of men’s desires. Tante Carmen is a lonely old woman who is struggling to survive in the bad Haitian economy. With no spouse to provide for her and no offspring to look after her well-being, she makes her living by lying to men about her living conditions to obtain money. When a young lady, Rosie, runs away from home and runs to her for comfort, she takes her into her home and begins making a profit by offering her to her older male friends. She convinces the men that she cannot take care of Rosie on her own, and they give her money to provide for the young girl, in hope that they will mate with her and/or marry her. In reference to this play, in my interview, Pierre-Rollin states that it reveals the need for sex education to be imparted to young women, which he feels Haitian society neglects to do. This is a familiar observation of Haitian culture and its fear of exposing young women to the realities of sex and their bodies.¹⁸ Because of abuse and/or lack of sexual education in Haiti’s predominately patriarchal society, many of these women fell prey to sexual abuse.

In Alcibiade’s dramatic world, if the women are not victims, they are self-serving and conniving. In “Floche,” “Damakaj 20,000 Dolla US” (“\$20,000 US Dollar Vanished”), and “Tante Carmen” the main women characters have tricked men into giving them either their entire life savings or wages, and in “Mize Papa ak Pitit,” where a

¹⁸ This is present in Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, when the main character Sophie confronts and takes control of her sexuality in a violent way: by rupturing her hymen. Because of her mother’s traumatic sexual experience (rape), she initially impedes and overprotects Sophie from exploring her sexuality by testing her genitals for penetration to make sure she maintains her virginity.

minor female character swindles Alcibiade, the dead-beat father, into selling his home and giving up all his money to give to her, she ends up running away to New York City to be with her boyfriend.

On the other hand, some of Alcibiade's plays do show a respectable view of Haitian women. In "Mize Papa ak Pitit," women take charge of their lives. They are independent of men, struggling to raise their children alone or along with helpful community members. Will attests:

[The] women's rights movement emerged after Baby Doc was ousted. One of its goals was to educate women about their importance to society. One way to accomplish this, the women soon realized, was to organize into groups determined to improve their situation. The first such group began in the late 1980's within the Peasant Movement of Papay (MPP)... There are now about a thousand women's groups within the MPP with the goal of helping Haitian women succeed in society... the MPP supports these groups and their social and economic programs. (99)

The positive influence of the MPP movement in Haiti's society is evident in the play "Vol Confiance." The women's movement has allowed women to speak up against irresponsible fathers, when a women's agency is introduced to Haiti. This agency is a child support agency, a center for battered women and a welfare office. The play represents a utopian Haitian society where women are treated fairly, supported by the government and have access to government programs that exist to aid the people. At the same time, the play criticizes women who aid other women to abuse the system and make men pay for children that are not theirs. While we are shown women fighting to get justice against irresponsible fathers, we observe a female character lying about Alcibiade

fathering her three-year-old child to obtain funds from him, but Alcibiade was reportedly in prison for four years. The play shows two sides to the conflict: both men and women can be victimized in paternity related situations. Pierre-Rollin emphasizes that at the center of this dilemma is the issue of greed and need.

The portrayal of women may be disconcerting at times, but it allows us to see how an impoverished society can leave very few opportunities for women to sustain themselves without a man, especially when even the educated women in the plays become desperate. But inspiringly, there are hopeful characters like the professional social worker/counselor in the play “Vol Confiance”, we witness empowered women encouraging women to take charge of their lives and get the justice they deserve.

THE DIASPORA/JIASPORA

Dash notes that “North America has become...the principle target for Haitian migration” (*Culture and Customs of Haiti*, 45). The first wave of migration in the 1950’s, which consisted of professionals, according to Dash, transpired because of the migrants’ need for political freedom during the Francois Duvalier/Papa Doc presidency; the second wave of migration in the 1970’s arose because of the economic devastation the working and poorer class were experiencing (45). While Dash showcases two vital migratory circumstances, these situations do not define the multiple reasons why Haitians migrate. Whether the Haitian migrants arrive to the Unites States, Europe or Canada by airplane or boat, they have three things on their minds: opportunity, freedom and Haiti. They share a kinship of the migration experience and an undying love for Haiti. Though Alcibiade’s creator, Pierre-Rollin, lives in Haiti, he has been traveling back and forth to

the United States and Canada since the 1970's. He travels to perform for the transplanted Haitians and to visit friends and family who have left the island. These visits allow him to recreate the Diaspora experience in his plays. Living in Haiti, he witnesses the envy of the Haitians who desire to live abroad and he observes the return of the new Haitian (the Jiaspora) from the Diaspora. His performances allow us to observe the Haitian as s/he experiences the Diaspora in United States.

One specific Alcibiade play presents the experience, both real and imagined, of the Haitian in the Diaspora as a new immigrant or as many Haitians called these new immigrants "just come." The play "Demakaj 20,000 Dola, US" encompasses the ordeals and triumphs of the transplantation of the immigrant to the States. The play takes place in Haiti as well as New York City. In Haiti, an eager couple long to go to America, and running out of patience, the couple (mainly the wife) swindles Alcibiade (who believes this young woman, the wife, loves him) out of five thousand dollars to pay for the expenses to process their visas and passports and to cover their trip to New York City. While we might be set to feel sorry for Alcibiade, we do not, because he is leaving his wife and child to pursue a new life in New York City with the young woman to whom he 'loaned' five thousand dollar. In this play Alcibiade is actually very well off, as opposed to being poor and angry. It is through Alcibiade's role we experience the mental, emotional and realistic process of migration.

In "Demakaj 20,000 Dola US," when Alcibiade longs to escape to New York City to be with his lover, his imagined view of the city is just as blind as his love for the young woman. In awe of the city lights, buildings and infrastructure, he believes he has walked into a paradise when he arrives. *Languidenty* takes effect and Alcibiade starts speaking

Creole mixed with English when he sees his lover at the airport: “I am antre,” “I am poté” quinzmil dola,” and “I am *contant*, yes, yes, yes.”¹⁹ Alcibiade’s encounter with his lover in New York propels him to start speaking in his native tongue and the new tongue at the same time because he is merging his Haitian identity with new his North American persona. As a result, upon his arrival in New York City he tries to apply the English language to manifest the new identity he is proclaiming; therefore, he does not speak only Créole because he is not in Haiti anymore.

It did not take long for Alcibiade to experience the reality that the immigrant experience is not always pleasant. The first incident occurs when his lover leaves him stranded in Manhattan to fend for himself with three hundred dollars of the fifteen thousand he brought for her. He later learns in his naiveté that all blacks are not Haitians when he tries to communicate in Creole for help/assistance. Eventually, he finds an old friend on the street and rooms with him for his stay in New York. The city he dreamed about is unwelcoming and harsh and not a drop of money is on the floors. He finds himself cramped up in an apartment sleeping on a sofa and barely receiving anything to eat. The bright city becomes a dark place to endure and the longing to return back to Haiti pains him. Because he is well-off at “home” in Haiti, he can choose to return and his final words are “I am come back Haiti, yes map²⁰ come back.”

In “Demakaj 20,000 Dola US,” the harsh reality of life in the Unites States of America was enough to send Alcibiade back home to Haiti, but unfortunately in some other plays, we witness characters back on the island still longing and envisioning the happiness and riches that are awaiting them America. In “Naje Pou Nou Soti,”

¹⁹ To arrive, bring, fifteen thousand dollars, happy

²⁰ I will

Alcibiade's wife leaves him for Phito, who comes from New York City on vacation; having a relationship with Phito brings her closer to the new and luxurious life she imagines about having in New York City. Moreover, in "Vol Confience," a young woman claims Alcibiade to be the father of her child, after he lies to her about being in 'Brooklyn, New York' for years, but he was really in jail. The young woman's actions signify the importance of being connected to one who has traveled to the USA, which personifies wealth, and/or the aspirations of migrating to the USA. Even American currency is more important than Haitian money and Alcibiade, as a poor con artist, makes that clear in "Chambre Morte," when he tells the American businessman that "Haitian money wont work only US dollars will," if he wants the vodou to work. In Haiti the imagined Haitian American is basically picking money off the floor, happy and living comfortably. Every time a Haitian American is spoken of he is imagined as rich and she is rose/pink²¹ or yellow²². When Alcibiade, the poor con artist, in "Chambre Morte," makes it to the States, he is not enthusiastic about returning to Haiti; he makes it clear when he says "No back, no back, no back" when threatened to be sent back to Haiti. Haiti is both paradise (for those who are well off) and a living hell (for those who are poor).

In conclusion, while these plays show the serious and trivial aspects of life, they do so through comedy. Alcibiade's tragic character is one his viewers love and love to hate. He can be cruel, rude, ungrateful, and deceitful, but his handicaps, which are his physical appearance: deformed and unattractive, his ignorance, and his stagnant life in

²¹ The color pink signifies healthy skin, which then signifies happy, eating and living well and at peace

²² The color yellow has the same significance as pink, but maybe used to express the persons' state with intensity.

both his community/society, makes him out to be the victim. Justice is always served and Alcibiade almost always pays for his actions.

Against the grain of Haiti's sociolinguistic politics, in the 60's and into the 70's, Nicolas Pierre-Rollin, the Alcibiade character, was determined and proud to perform using Haitian Créole, the language of the masses, as opposed to French. He captures audiences spanning the entire socio economic spectrum in Haiti and the Diaspora. His plays in Haitian Creole explore and reveal the life of the Haitian masses and their culture. They even mimic the life of the Haitian elite and they explore the imagined and real life of Haitians of the Diaspora. Each play relays a positive message at the end. In the interview with Pierre-Rollin, he states that while his Alcibiade plays depict the life of the mass, as devastating and twisted as it might be, there is always a lesson to be learned: You can't cheat people or cheat your way out in life. Life is hard but you have got to live it and live it honorably.

As an artist and as my father, Pierr-Rollin allowed me to see Haitian Creole as a beautiful language and not one to be belittled and discounted. He allowed me to see and embrace the Haitian culture.

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INTRODUCTION

“Politics of Language: Creole Under Siege”

To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture.
(*Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon, 38)

For any discussion of the Caribbean and the issue of language, the socio-linguistic concept of diglossia articulated by Charles Ferguson (1959) provides an important approach. Diglossia situates languages within a hierarchized space, and historically the Caribbean has always been a site of linguistic and cultural confrontation. The colonial/European languages (English, French, Spanish, Dutch) occupied a “high” culture position, while the languages which were created or deviated from the colonial languages mixed with African languages were categorized as “low” culture. Linguist Ferguson’s essay “Diglossia” pioneered the concept of French and Creole languages taking on a social status in Haiti. His essay analyzed the use of French and Creole in Haiti, and his research concluded that French and Creole were two distinct languages. French is presented by Ferguson as the language of high culture and the preferred language of communication among the ruling class of Haiti. It is the language taught in schools, used for government and public service, and used in all formal activities. Haitian Creole, on the other hand, is labeled as the language of the masses that are the predominantly uneducated lower class. Haitian linguist Yves Dejean describes Ferguson’s claim that Haitian Creole is:

the primary form of speech of all Haitians, the only one acquired spontaneously in the home in infancy, the only one used in ordinary conversation between parents and children, children and their siblings, adults and their relatives or friends. And it was practically excluded from school, government activities,

political meetings, religious ceremonies, relations with outsiders, and all formal activities. (Dejean, 73)

Dejean, in “An Overview of the Language Situation in Haiti (1985)” rejects the concept diglossia as applied to Haiti, because he views Haiti as a monolingual society since a vast majority of the population (mass and ruling class) speak Creole. Secondly, he argues that Creole is not lesser than or “lower” than French because

One of the main characteristics of the linguistic behavior of literate Haitians is constant code switching in lengthy and animated discussions on topics like the arts, literature, music, religion, politics, the sciences, etc. Therefore, there is no intellectual activity from which Creole is excluded. (Dejean, 74)

Dejean claims that “for 1 to 2 percent of the [Haitian] population, the balanced bilinguals, there is no compartmentalization between French and Creole and no specialization of the two languages” (Dejean, 74).

Dejean, like other Creolists Michel Degraff, Hughes St. Fort, and Jean Métellus, insists that Creole is not separate from French. However, the description of the socio-linguistic situation of Creole and French introduced by Martinican linguist Jean Bernabé (1978) is more readily accepted by Caribbean linguists. Bernabé states, “diglots exist whenever there is a concept in society between a dominant language and a subordinate one” (Dejean, 77). Bernabé’s diglossic interpretation of the relationship of the two languages defines approximately the Caribbean (racial, social and cultural) condition. The dominant languages, European French or English, in the Caribbean are always set up

against the subordinate languages, Creole and Caribbean English or Nation Language²³. Because of this interconnecting linguistic condition, I will be examining Haiti's language/identity (linguidentity) conflicts alongside other Caribbean societies confronting similar issues with Creole and Nation Language.

Kamau Brathwaite, in *History of the Voice* (1984) discusses the development of Nation Language, as it relates to the English Anglophone Caribbean; he situates European English as the imposed language, imperial language and language of power. On the other hand, Caribbean English, which he calls Nation Language, is an English that is not "standard" English, not imported and it is not educated or respected. (Brathwaite, 13) The shortcoming of the Creole and Nation Languages is that they are traditionally oral languages that were categorized as uneducated, unstructured, and mutable. Since Nation Languages and Creole were predominately languages produced during slavery by African-Caribbean people and acquired by white Creoles on the islands, and since also they are informal languages; they are not awarded the status of languages, but are very often considered sub languages. Brathwaite aware of this situation argues that Nation Language has been perceived as a dialect, inferior, and a caricature. It has a negative status which deprives its users of respect and access to social development and upward mobility in society (13). Dejean, employing the same concept as Brathwaite, in reference to the French language and the French Caribbean, acknowledges that French functions as the "pedagogy of exclusion" to French-Creole speakers, because the ruling class uses the dominant language to maintain class distinctions. (90) This scenario does not cease once the French speaker leaves his/her homeland. Michael Dash states that:

²³ A term referring to Caribbean English presented by Kamau Brathwaite in his book *History of the Voice* (1984.)

... class divisions of Haiti are reproduced abroad [and] [l]anguage is... important in establishing class divisions. For instance, because of the social stigma attached to Creole, upper class light-skinned Haitians insist on using French as a tool for achieving social mobility in the United States. It is also a way of escaping an identity as a racial minority in the United States and a way of distinguishing themselves from African Americans. (*Culture and Customs of Haiti*, 45)

Moreover, like Dejean, who believes Creole stems from European French, and Hughes St. Fort, who deems that “Haitian Creole emerged in the context of St Domingue’s plantation societies, when enslaved Africans, mostly speakers of Niger-Congo languages, were exposed to non-standard and non-homogeneous French varieties spoken by colonists...”(Hughes, 2), Brathwaite speculates that Nation Languages are African and English at the same time (13). Though Brathwaite and other Caribbean theorists and linguists see the lexical relation between Nation Language and Creole and their half-linguistic parents European English and French, they still are aware of the different status given to each, which is/was the agenda of diglossia. Though the concept of diglossia was initially presented and studied in the context of the French speaking Caribbean, it has become the crux for the study of language and identity and language and society debates among many nations and linguists. Historically, Caribbean identity was mainly defined along the lines of economic power and very often racial heritage, but diglossia has managed to situate the Caribbean’s’ compartmentalized reading of languages spoken there as another signifier of identity. Similarly, Velma Pollard’s study of Rastafarians presents language as the most intense signifier of one’s identity. In “The Speech of Rastafarians of Jamaica, in the Eastern Caribbean: The Case of St. Lucia,”

Pollard notes that the code [of speech] used by the Rastafarians of Jamaica “evolved in response to the need of a closed group to find *a means of expression* that was exclusive and that reflected the philosophical, religious and political positions with which the group chose *to identify*” (Pollard, 81).

Franz Fanon, in “The Negro and Language,” (*Black Skin, White Masks*) states that, “every dialect is a way of thinking... And the fact that the newly returned Negro [a black Martinican coming back from France] adopts a language different from that of the group to which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation” (25). Since the language he has adopted caused him to be disconnected from his culture of origin, then the use or advocacy of Creoles and Nation Languages would be an attempt to reclaim and relocate himself back to his Afro-Caribbean identity. Creole and Nation Language usage is a manifestation of heritage and difference, while to emulate the colonizer linguistically (and culturally) is to separate from or cancel out the historical identity inherited pre-colonialism or formed in a new country. In *Language Reclamation*, Hubisi Nwenmely asserts that the reclamation of one’s language is equivalent to the reclamation of one’s identity. This he illustrates in his study of French Creole language and the teaching of it in the United Kingdom and the Caribbean. He analyzes the way in which the Créolité movement in 1989 by Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé, and Rafael Confiant, presented in the text *Éloge de la Créolité/ In Praise of Creoleness*, has allowed the Creole language to take on its own identity and encouraged its speakers (from scholars, and artists to the common people) to embrace their Creole identity (along with the Creole language) publicly on any level in society. *Éloge de la Créolité /In Praise of Creoleness* argues that

“French ways forced us to denigrate ourselves: the common condition of colonized people” (86) and

Creole, our first language, we the Caribbean, the Guyanese, the Mascarins, is the initial means of communication of our deep self, or our collective unconscious, of our common genius, and it remains the river of our alluvial Creoleness. We dream in it. In it we resist and accept ourselves. It is our cries, our screams, and our excitements. It irrigates each one of our gestures. Its decline was not a mere linguistic loss, the mere fall of a branch, but a total fast of foliage, the kneeling of a cathedral. The absence of interest in the Creole language was not a mere mouth silence but a cultural amputation. (104)

While Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant profess the importance of embracing the Creole language, they also argue that it is a plus for Creole writers to be able to speak several languages (Creole, French, English, Portuguese, Spanish). They also agree that Caribbeans must accept their “perpetual bilingualism” (104), as they are confronted daily with the usage of Creole/Nation Language and French/English. Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant believe that acceptance of this “perpetual bilingualism” allows the Caribbean persona to function in its society without negating or neglecting any of its linguistic historical inheritance. But since Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant are on a mission to validate Creole and Creoleness, it is correct to say that some sort of negation of one of the languages must take place in order for the other language to be situated in that particular society. As Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant are advocating and encouraging the Creole language, French would have to be negated, since Creole was traditionally negated as French expanded and ruled the French Caribbean societies.

The proclamation of Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant on the Creole language was only part of the beginning of the revolution to upgrade and incorporate the Creole language in Caribbean and Diaspora societies. Creole was no longer to be a language just spoken at “home,” but it was a language to be used in public spaces. Nwemely affirms that (in the mid 1980’s) the teaching of Creole was being demanded by parents and students in schools in the UK and the Caribbean to prevent the language from being forgotten or even lost (55-56). To Nwemely “language is a powerful symbol of cultural identity and his own attempt [along with the dozens of students he interviewed in the UK and the Caribbean] to read and write Kwéyòl was inextricably linked with a voyage of personal discovery” (67). In addition, in Haiti, cultural researcher/analyst Emily Wade Will observes that “[a]lthough very few books in Kreyol exist, the move to teach Haitian children in their own language is a huge step forward in their education... [T]he use of Kreyol enables students to understand their teachers and should help decrease the high drop out rate” (92).

Though the concept of diglossia may be attractive, because it is undeniable that the language people use to communicate for different reasons and determines to some extent their social status in Caribbean societies, it is not entirely valid. In the case of Haiti, Creolist Dejean argues that Haitian Creole:

remains essentially what it has been for more than two centuries. It serves as the single instrument of psychological and mental activities and the single means of communication for almost all the population of Haiti. And continues to be the principle means of communication for the infinitely small bilingual minority. (Dejean, 180)

In this case, the concept of diglossia cannot be presented as a valid analysis of Caribbean society and its use of Creole because code/language switching in the French Caribbean is very common amongst the “elite” and “middle” class. Caribbean linguists have been contesting Ferguson’s concept of diglossia because the ruling class as well as the multitude are breaking down or, better yet tearing off, the mask of colonial identity which suppressed Nation and Creole languages spoken by the masses. Leaders raised from or representing the masses and a small number from the ruling class, like artists and philanthropists, have used Nation and Creole languages at the forefront for political change and political influence. These languages are also the primary languages of communication used in the mass media. For instance, Will argues that in Haiti “The use of Kreyol also allows impoverished Haitians to participate in the political arena... [Radios broadcasting in Kreyol the economic and political horrors of the Haitian society] became the vital sources of information for the mostly illiterate masses in the movement to remove Baby Doc from power” (92). Also, the French and Creole languages are used more liberally in literature and the commercial art: “One of the things Haitians are doing to solve their social and economic problems is embracing their native language and using it as a tool to bring the population closer together” (Will, 91). Haitian scholar Jean Price-Mars, according to Will, “may have been prophetic when he proclaimed in 1928 that it is through [Kreyol] that we can hope to someday close the chasm that makes of us two peoples apparently distinct and often antagonistic” (92).

The suppression of the Creole and Nation language within progressive Caribbean societies symbolized the forced suppression of the black/African identity of Caribbean people. To aspire to greatness, to have access to social and economic success,

Caribbeans were to emulate the cultural identity and psychological make-up of the French, English, and Spanish and Dutch colonial powers. With the outbreak of Independence movements (New Negro, Indigeniste, Negritude, Civil Rights, Black Power) both in the Caribbean and America from the 1920's through the 70's, people of African descent were more focused on celebrating their culture, language and ancestors.

Haiti's 1804 victory against the powerful French army of Napoleon was the first movement towards demanding physical, regional and economic freedom from European colonial powers. And during their zeal towards freedom, a second movement was immediately birthed: they also wanted cultural freedom by voicing their desire to have Haitian Creole as their nation's official language. Hubert Devonish (1986) attests that, after independence the question of which language to make official on the island of Haiti was debated. Therefore, in Haiti, language always played a major role in determining identity. Similarly, Velma Pollard's study of Rastafarians presents language as the most intense signifier of one's identity. In "The Speech of Rastafarians of Jamaica, in the Eastern Caribbean: The Case of St. Lucia," Pollard notes that the code [of speech] used by the Rastafarians of Jamaica "evolved in response to the need of a closed group to find *a means of expression* that was exclusive and that reflected the philosophical, religious and political positions with which the group chose *to identify*" (*my emphasis*, Pollard, 81).

Fanon argues that, "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (38), which Creole and Nation Language writers have chosen to do. To write in Creole and Nation Language is to claim a culture, whether it is African, Afro-Caribbean, or Caribbean, other than the hegemonic/imposed culture of the colonial "parent." Undeniably, Haitian Creole, as well as other Creoles and Nation Languages represent the

historical past and truth of the Caribbean identity, which includes a language and an identity that emerged from slavery to become an identity or multiple identities in and of its own. This could not be better expressed or made known in any other language than in Nation Languages or Creole. These two types of languages tell the tales of a people produced from a horrific and violent past. Brathwaite attests that the bourgeois of the Caribbean who tend to disassociate themselves from that history often resent Creole and Nation Languages by rejecting their use. I say, to claim Haitian Creole as a language of artistic expression is to face the dark history, transcend it, rectify and beautify the culture produced from it. In these languages the voice of the masses can be heard, their lifestyle can be recognized and explored, and their life can be valid. The popular Haitian comedian Nicolas Pierre-Rollin, stage name Alcibiade, is a representation of this situation and the inspiration of this project. Pierre-Rollin produced, presented and performed all his plays in Creole, since he first began his theater acts in schools in 1954, to the radio in 1962, to finally the stage in 1967. He managed to capture all audiences in Haiti from the masses to the ruling class and the Haitians of the Diaspora. In the 21st century he still performs in Creole and has remained connected to the Haitian population in Haiti, Canada and the United States of America. He along with many artists has, in a sense, transcended diglossia's dysfunctional social categorization of Haitian Creole. That is why this project is created firstly, to situate how the Haitian identity is manifested through its expression and celebration of Haitian Creole in Haitian Creole literatures, and secondly, to present the challenges of cultural identities existing in Caribbean texts as it pertains to language and identity.

From my discovery of Haitian literary works in Creole from the late 18th century to the present I was intrigued by the complexity of emotions expressed and the writing techniques ranging from classical poetic structures of the particular time the poem was written, to the poetic technique called ‘Zwing’ birthed through Creole poetry. Other than a few language modifications the works in Haitian Creole all together produce a love affair with Haiti, its history, its people, its struggle and its hopes. The pivotal figure in Haitian Creole literature is Felix Morisseau-Leroy (Feliks Moriso-Lewa), who is considered the father of Haitian Creole literature; he sealed his fame with his translation of the Sophocles play *Antigone* (1953) in Haitian Creole. He did this as a protest for and in praise of the Creole language. This act situated and confirmed Haitian Creole (to the world) as a legible and viable language, and some room in the literary market was made for works produced in it. Lewa later produce books of poetry, short stories, and plays in Haitian Creole. Moreover, Haitian dramatist Frank Etienne, who started his writing career in French (in the late 60’s and early 70’s), wrote the first romance novel, *Dézafi* (1975), in Creole. Will notes that this was Etienne’s and other writers “attempt to upgrade the language’s status in the eyes of the elite, [along with] a few contemporary creative writers who are producing their works in Kreyol” (92). Moreover, Etienne produced two Creole plays *Pelen-tet* in 1978, “which played to about fifty packed audiences in Port-au-Prince in 1978 and 1979 before Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier’s government shut it down” (Will, 92), and *Troufoban: Pyes Téryat* in 1978. Etienne returned to producing works in French because writing in Creole limited his circulation in the market. Because these two men have received international recognition, they are always referred to in any Creole literature discussion, but that does not dispel the contributions of many Haitian

Creole writers. Alongside Morisseau-Leroy, the other pioneers of Creole literature were Frank Fouche, Emile Roumer and many others who chose to write in Creole. Moreover, members and founders of Haitian literary movement Soyete Koukouy [Society of Fireflies] which was created to celebrate Haitian culture and Haitian Creole, Dr. Ernest Mirville, Emile Célestin-Mégies and Jean Marie Willer Denis (Jan Mapou) Michel-Ange Hyppolite, also produced a vast amount of literature in Haitian Creole. In addition, Mercedes F. Guignard (Deyita), a Haitian woman Creole novelist, author of *Esperans Dezire* (1989) and *Kont Nan Jaden Peyi Titoma* (1991), has not received as much recognition as Marie Chauvet (author of *Amour, Colere et Folie*, 1968) who wrote her novel in French. Deyita's *Esperans Dezire* is proclaimed by literacy specialist and teacher of Haitian Creole, Lunine Pierre-Jerome, to be the “istwa sosyo-politik, ekonomik ak kiltirèl peyi Dayiti, se istwa lavi tout yon pèp” [the sociopolitical, economic and cultural history of Haiti, it is the life story of all the people.] (10). Like Deyita, poets Suze Brown and Jacqueline Scott present the political, cultural and gender struggles faced in Haitian society, yet their subject matter transcends the Haitian experience and becomes the human/female experience. Maude Heurtelou, a novelist, has written series of fictional books about a Haitian family dynasty in Haiti as well as many children's books in Haitian Creole.

The number of Haitian and Haitian-American writers writing in Creole continues to grow. On the Internet, young Haitian American writers are creating web pages filled with poems written in Creole as well as English. The growth and social tolerance of Haitian Creole and its Literature in the 21st century is what I label an epidemic because Haitian Creole, for over a century, was not a valued, validated, or even an acknowledged

language to the bourgeois and government officials of Haiti who were determined to prevent Creole from being spoken and taught in schools and spoken in public arenas. Therefore to call the outbreak of the use Haitian Creole in literatures (from Haitian Americans and Haitians) an epidemic is to say that it is an uncontrollable wave like the “Jes Grew” which appeared in Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*, that was threatening to infect the whole American society with “Soul,” black rhythm, black culture, black music—blackness. Like “Jes Grew,” Haitian Creole was supposed to remain publicly unspoken and suppressed by shadows of colonial powers and the “small colonials.”²⁴ However, the disregard of works written in Creole has changed its course, with the respectable status that Creole is gaining academically and socially. The works produced in Haitian Creole range from trilogies, romance, socio-political and economic and historical realities, comedies, questions of sexuality and gender, tragedy, suspense, drama and children tales.

Furthermore, if we look for a brief moment at Caribbean novels written in English from other Caribbean nations, we see that language participates either in questioning, altering, celebrating or rejecting the protagonists’ identity/ies. In Merle Hodge’s *Crack Crack Monkey*, the young protagonist Tee comes to despise her past in the rural village where she grew up, when she speaks in nation language instead of England’s standardized English and she is made fun of by her cousins. Merle Collins’ *Angel* is written mostly in the language of the masses -Nation Language- as she documents the independence of Grenada as the masses experienced it. Language in some hispanophone literature is at the center of determining cultural identity. In Oscar Hijuelos’ *Our House*

²⁴ Term used by George Lamming in *the Pleasures of Exile* to refer to the ruling class who has taken on the role and culture of the old colonial rulers of their islands oppressing and exploiting the mass.

in the Last World, the protagonist Hector (born of Cuban parents in America) believed that to speak Spanish was to be Cuban, so he stopped communicating in Spanish so as to be less Cuban and less like his father who was the epitome of what it meant to be Cuban to him. In the poem “Puerto-Rican Obituary,” Pedro Pietri manages to verbalize the bilingual identity of a Puerto-Rican living in New York that exemplifies his Nuyorican identity. Similarly, Jamaican Dub poets Louis Bennett and Linton Kwesi Johnson use Nation Language in their works to accentuate, glorify, and mark the Afro-Caribbean Jamaican identity.

In another case, locality also reconfigures identity and language, which will bring the focus to Diaspora writers from the islands and living abroad, who write by intermingling languages (Haitian Creole/English/Spanish and English/Nation Language), which also symbolizes the intermingling of many identities they have acquired from their migration. In Maryse Condé’s essay “Chercher Nos Vérités,” she protests against the 1989 Créolité movement in Martinique pioneered by Chamoiseau, Bernabé and Confiant. She argues that writing in Creole only limits the writer from exploring or using the language of choice and the language which best suits his/her language of creativity. Condé celebrates the use of any/many languages in works of literature that best suit the writer. She notes that Haitian and Spanish writers in America are producing beautiful works in English and sometimes in English and Creole or Spanish, English and street slang (305-315). Writers of the Diaspora appear to be writing in the language(s) attained by the culture(s) that have influenced them and not just that of their homeland. Transplanted Haitian writers Edwidge Danticat and Joanne Hyppolite write predominantly in English, while author Maude Heurtelou in her books *La Fanmi Boplezi*

(*The Pleasure Family*) and *Sezisman! Pou La Fanmi Boplezi* (*Surprise! For the Pleasure Family*) uses mainly Creole with some French and Spanish. Dash proclaims:

There is less and less of a sense of uprootedness from the native land and a greater feeling of easy continuity between Port-au-Prince and Brooklyn (New York City). Haitians in the United States even have their own weekly newspapers, *Haiti Observatuer*, *Haiti en Marche*, and *Haiti Progress*, which publish articles in French, Creole, and English. (45)

In light of multilingual literary productions, Condé, unfortunately does not give Chamoiseau, Bernabé and Confiant's essay on Créolité a fair analysis. Chamoiseau, Bernabé and Confiant state that "Our aim here is certainly not to prevent writers from exploring the interstices of French and Creole. Better, we that [have] creative use of intellect might lead to an order of reality capable of preserving for our Creoleness its fundamental complexity, its diffracted referential space" (110). They believe that Caribbean writers can write in whatever language that suits their creativity, but it is important to maintain the Creoleness within the works produced. Creole has a place in Caribbean society and it must be acknowledged and explored. To fully capture and analyze the Caribbean identity within literature without acknowledging the voices of the mass in Nation Language or Creole is impossible. The mass have a story to tell and it is not always a romance narrative, but a story of struggle and survival which depicts the Caribbean condition from those 'living off the fat of the land' to those toiling to groom the land for survival.

Selwyn Cudjoe, in *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (1980), states that the "mass [are] those who retain culture [connected to an African heritage] and remain

untouched by the culture of the colonizer” (235), and Nation Language and Creoles are the everyday language of the masses which persist to be spoken freely without entirely emulating imperial languages (English, French, Spanish and Dutch). Literature whether from Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Guyana, Antigua, or Trinidad using the socially dominant language almost always inscribes Nation Language or forms of Creole to provide a legitimate picture of the mass and their respective Caribbean societies.

Condé, on the other hand, insists that “she does not believe to write a Caribbean novel [means] it has to introduce Creole” (Apter, 94). But this may be problematical to consider, because the Caribbean novel may not accurately depict the people and society as a whole without presenting, to some extent or in circumstances, the way the colonizer’s language and the Creole or Nation language co-exist between the people in the Caribbean society. Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant say it best when they claim that “Creole is linked to our very existence, and because, in the final analysis, it is as Vincent Placoly²⁵ puts it: “The language which more than any other language belongs to us” (106).

In this project, I have three goals: one is to acknowledge the contribution of Nicholas Pierre-Rollin’s, my father, theatrical works to the history of Haitian drama and commercialism through the use of Haitian Creole. Secondly, I’d like to introduce Creole works by Haitian writers from the early 18th century as it emerges into the 21st century in Haiti and the Diaspora (USA And Canada) writing in Haitian Creole. Thirdly, I want to illustrate the impact that language has in shaping identities in Caribbean literatures from Haiti and other Caribbean territories. Overall, my intention is to demonstrate and confirm

²⁵ He was a Martinican novelist and dramatist. (1946-92)

the intelligible and noteworthy existence of Haitian Creole in literary works and to profess the important role language plays in personifying, transcribing, and affirming one's cultural identity, including my own.

The Prologue conceptualizes a handful of plays produced by Pierre-Rollin (alias Alcibiade) through live recordings, stage performances and audio tapings. Many of these works have not been patented, until recently in 2006, and therefore are often reproduced illegally by vendors in North America, Canada and Haiti. The introduction presents the core theory of diglossia, the cultural conflicts within the linguistic community in Haiti and other Caribbean nations, and an overview of this project's direction. Chapter one of this dissertation discusses the problematic designation of Haiti as a French Caribbean nation. As Haiti has been independent since 1804 and not under France's rule, can we still identify Haiti as a French Caribbean nation like Guadeloupe and Martinique which are still under French government rule? Can Haiti call itself French? If not, then what is it? This chapter will also include a brief discussion on the genesis, evolution and development of the Creole Language. Chapter two presents an overview of Haitian literature written in Creole from Haiti, the United States and Canada, as it redefines the Haitian intellectual in the process. While experiencing the joys of discovering Haitian Creole works from the early 18th century, I have to admit that translation challenges were present, especially since some Haitian Creole words were aged and the spelling and definition of some of these words have evolved.

Chapter three analyzes a sample of literary works produced by Haitian/Haitian American writers and some other writers from different parts of the Caribbean. It was important for me to explore the issues of language and identity in Haiti as well as other

Caribbean regions, because I believe they share the experiences of a complex and intense colonial history/tragedy. And literature, for the most part, participates in emulating society, so as the linguistic battle takes place within a tangible space, it also permeates works of art. The analysis of these literatures will involve a discussion of the ways in which issues of language participate in the questioning, (re) defining and discovering cultural identity, and the relationship between language and the formation or destruction of the character's identity. Chapter four presents an interview I conducted with Jan Mapou (Jean-Marie Willer Denis), one of the founders of the Creole Movement in Haiti and the United States. This interview provides new information on the struggle for Haitian Creole to be established in Haiti and on the Haitian condition as it pertains to language, identity and livelihood. In the final chapter, the Epilogue, titled "Snap-shots of a Childhood in Haiti and New York City", presents a brief personal account of my childhood in Haiti and New York City, with a focus on the movement from repression and rejection of my Haitian identity, manifested through the public repulsion of Haitian Creole, to my acceptance and public expression of it and my Haitian self. This personal testimony illustrates the genuine experience of the ways language completes and signifies one's identity and culture within "other" cultures.

Leah D. Hewitt, in reference to the Haitian poet Edmond Laforest who committed suicide with the Larousse French dictionary tied around his neck as a protest against the American invasion of Haiti in 1915, argued "French appears intimately bound to the Haitian's identity" (238). However, French is easily forgotten. Many Haitians who leave Haiti by the age of 8 attest to this, but Creole is in the soul and unforgettable. It is a people. Brathwaite states (about Nation Language), "If you ignore the noise... then you lose part of the meaning" (17). If we ignore Haitian Creole, we lose part of or a majority

of Haiti, its people and history. Acknowledging literatures incorporating Haitian Creole is one of the first steps in representing the daily realities of the Haitian people.

I end my introduction with the following words/poem from the Preface of Fanketienne's Creole romance novel *Dézafi*, which speaks to the passion of this study, by the editor D. Fardin:

Dépi Christian Beaulieu té kòmansé bat djaouéton
pou rasanbléman batay lang kréyòl-la, anpil saliv
koulé, anpil chemin trasé, pou marié lavi ak vérité-
réyalité pèp ayisyin.

Apré 50 an, nou désidé sispann diskité sou òtograf
ak sou égzistan youn lang 10 milyon mounn palé.

Dé kafé an kafé, n-a kéyi rékòt òtograf-la.

Jou tout ti pèp va sòti sou lobédians pèp gran-dan,
y-a déjà konpran, nan pouin libérasion politik,
éko-nomic, san libérasion kiltirel: lang youn pèp
maré ak nannan lavi.

Bat koukourouj dèyè richès lang ayisyin,
Montré sa li ka rinmèt sou papié,
Dépasé éstad oraliti,
Krèyé youn véritab litérati ékri,
Sé chémin tout patizan land kréyòl désidé trasé.

(Since Christian Beaulieu started to beat the drums
to resemble the fight of the Creole language, a lot
of mouths drooled, a lot of roads were
traced/opened, to marry/join together the life and
truth of the Haitian population

After fifty years, we decided to stop arguing about
the orthography and the existence of the language
ten million people speak.

Many years and years, we gather the orthography
(of the Creole language)

The day the common people steps out of the control of (or obedience to) the elite population they will already understand, there is no liberation politically, economically, without cultural liberation: the language of a people is tied to the root of their livelihood.

Fight with courage after the richness of the Haitian language,
Show what it can do on paper,
Surpassing its oral/unwritten state
Create a truthful written literature,
This is the road all patriots of the Creole language decided to trace.)

As the Haitian Creole language continues to establish its status as a competent and influential language and its literature emerges, I celebrate along with the poets, novelists, dramatists who were and are proud to express themselves in their native Créole tongue.

CHAPTER 1

“Severing the Historical Cord: Haiti Without France”

But for mercies sake, my friends, let us no longer scorn our ancestral heritage. Let us love it, let us consider it as an intangible whole. Let us repeat rather the proud reprimand that old bard put into the mouth of an inhabitant of Olympus: “There is nothing ugly in the house of my father” (Jean Price-Mars, *So Spoke the Uncle*, 218).

Michael Dash claims that “Haiti was the first Caribbean state to declare itself other and define itself in terms of a new self-consciousness that required international recognition that was impossible at the time” (The Other America, 134). Yet, for over a century (between 1804 till about the 1960), Haiti has been classified under French West Indies, Francophone Literature or anything French for that matter. However, since 1804 it has been an independent state which is neither under French rule nor a department of France like Martinique or Guadeloupe. Therefore, can Haiti really be considered as part of the French Caribbean landscape? The debate as it stands is that culturally Haiti (mainly 10% of the population most likely) has claimed itself over the past two centuries as French, but has met many challenges in the process. Constructing a national identity, or more precisely, a Haitian national identity either with or without France as a model has left Haiti in a cultural limbo. Haitian intellectual and physician Jean Price Mars best expresses this cultural and psychological condition of Haitians:

... the simplest for the revolutionaries badly in need of national cohesion was to copy the only model that they comprehended. Thus, for better or worse, they inserted the new grouping into the dislocated framework of the dispersed white society and this was how the Negro community of Haiti donned the old frock of western civilization shortly after 1804. From that moment with a constancy that no defeat, no sarcasm, no perturbation has been able to weaken, she tried her utmost to realize what she believed to be her

superior destiny in shaping her thought and sentiments, by drawing closer to her former mother country, by copying her, and by identifying with her. What an absurd and grandiose task! A difficult task, if ever there was one! (8)

Haitians were, and unfortunately are still, convinced that Frenchness is a more ‘civil’ way to live than their Haitian/African lifestyle. Jean Price-Mars states that “As for the term ‘African,’ it has always been, it is the most humiliating affront that can be addressed to a Haitian” (8). Even the father of the Haitian revolution, Toussaint L’Ouverture, was “ [a] sincere Catholic and believer in the softening effect of religion on manners, he encouraged the practice of the Catholic religion... He was anxious to see the blacks acquire the social deportment of the better class whites with their Versailles manners. Struck by the carriage and bearing of a French officer, he said to those around him ‘My sons will be like that’” (James, 246). James attests that, “Despite the treachery of France he (Toussaint) still saw himself as part of the French Republic ‘one and indivisible’. He could not think otherwise” (James, 364).

Not every eighteenth century leader felt the same as L’Overture. In the Second draft of the proclamation, which met with Dessalines’ approval announces: “Peace to our neighbours. But anathema to the French name. Hatred eternal to France. This is our cry” (James, 372). But this animosity did not remain because when the Haitians collectively needed to put their government together they turned to France as their model:”For over a century after independence the Haitians attempted to form a replica of European, i.e., French civilisation in the West Indies” (James 393). In a rather extensive, yet essential speech by Haitian Ambassador, M. Constantine Mayard, in Paris in 1938, documented by James, we are presented with a bourgeoisie vision of Haitian civilization:

‘French our institutions, French our public and civil legislation, French our literature, French our university, French the curriculum of our schools... Today when one of us [a Haitian] appears in a circle of Frenchmen, “welcome smiles at him in every eye.” The reason is without doubt that your nation, ladies and gentlemen, knows that within the scope of its colonial expansion it has given to the Antilles and above all San Domingo all that it could give of itself and its substance... It has founded there, in the mould of its own national type, with its blood, with its language, its institutions, its spirit and its soil, a local type, an historic race, in which its sap still runs and where it is remade complete.’ (James, 393)

Even though in 1804 “On December 31st ... the final Declaration of Independence was read and ... To emphasize the break with the French the new State was renamed Haiti” (James, 370), the speech from Ambassador Mayard expresses that the Haitian society was unable to establish or, at least, inconsistent in activating their Haitian identity without relying on France. It would be unfair to say this is the case for all Haitians, because clearly the voices of the Haitian bourgeoisies are heard through Mayard speech. The Haitian peasants, on the other hand, unconsciously have held up the philosophy of the final declaration of independence, by accepting their African/Haitian roots through their use of Haitian Creole and the practice of vodou by some. Though they have managed to resist the cultural influences of France naturally and by forced exclusion from the social system setup by the elite of Haiti, the peasants did not escape romanticizing France. According to Leon-Francois Hoffman, in the article “Francophilia and Cultural Nationalism in Haiti”, “They (mainly the elite and upper middleclass) are still trying to define and adjust the modalities of their participation in the Francophone cultural context,

to which they often feel peripheral. Paris is the undisputed Francophony” (58). Which is why Haitian social critic Patrick Bellgarde-Smith argues that the complete break from France was not feasible because emulating Western social and political norms “seemed the only practicable course of action...” (13).

Why this loyalty to a country which had encouraged and subjected them to slavery and initially rejected their independent status? Bellgarde-Smith translates this psychological cultural dilemma Haiti’s caught between: “The policy of assimilation had created the means for an individual’s transcendence over his or her non-Western values”(12). But gaining independence means being set free from any other forms of government, and then, self- rule takes place. New social systems are set forth to accommodate the people as opposed to dominating them, and a new identity outside of the old ruling force’s influence is established. Did rejecting France as their ruler/cultural role model mean the Haitians were now Haitians or were they French-Haitians or Haitian-French? Haiti’s independence left them in a cultural limbo where the forces of African roots fought against the forces of French values. Haitian independence challenged Haitians’ and Haiti’s political and cultural stance and questions of language and identity from 1804 to our present time.

Haiti’s independence came with a price: isolation and rejection from international relations was the cost:

In July 1805 to Secretary of State James Madison, Charles Talleyrand wrote [about Haiti]---“The existence of a black people in arms, occupying a country it has soiled by the most criminal acts, is a horrible spectacle for all white nations. These must understand that in accepting the continuation of this state of affairs, they would be supporting pyromaniacs and assassins. There is no valid

reason that holds for individuals, citizens of loyal and generous government to grant support to these brigands who have declared themselves the enemies of all governments.” (Bellegarde-Smith, 8)

Bellegarde-Smith remarks that “Haiti tried to nationally [and] culturally integrate into France and Frenchmen after independence” (185). It was not until 1825 that Charles X of France acknowledged Haiti as an independent state, and Hoffman affirms that France henceforth was “regarded as a diplomatic ally as well as a cultural model; the unsympathetic stepmother was now a benevolent older sister” (185). And furthermore, it was not until 1860 that a “Concordat was signed with the Vatican and French priests and missionaries were sent out to Haiti” (Hoffman, 60). It appears that even though Haiti always felt a kinship with France, France took years to officially respect and acknowledge Haiti. Haiti’s 30th President, Sténio Vincent, described Haiti’s relationship to France “in a famous phrase: When France sneezes, Haiti has the whooping cough” (Bellegarde-Smith, 178). To continue to justify its gratitude to France, Haiti held on to the argument:

that the British have always held themselves aloof from their subjects, thereby maintaining a master/slave relationship which serves to make the British West Indian’s position slightly less ambiguous than that of his French West Indian counterpart. (Hezekiah, 29)

The French, on the other hand, outwardly committed to the principle of “liberty, equality, fraternity,” swamp their dependents with French culture and offers of equal opportunity until they become totally assimilated to the French way of life, from which they cannot escape except at the risk of losing their acquired identity and failing to create a new

image for themselves. (Hezekiah, 29) Haiti was not ready to create a new image for itself; it wanted to present an image of power and control. France demonstrated these qualities and Haitians were determined to emulate them to be equal to Frenchmen. Hoffmann affirms that “The links to France were not simply a matter of necessity but also one of choice” (59). Besides everything French being right, everything white was also right.

James Leyburn notes that:

[a]n effort was once made by the Catholic Church to train native Haitian priests, but the peasants would have none of them after they were ordained. They drove them out, saying, “Go away! How do you expect God to listen to you? You are not white; you don’t know anything.” And the Haitian priests had to be transferred to Africa.. (4)

Bellegarde-Smith states that “modes of thought and personality emerge from sociocultural situations”(xiii), and since many of the new ruling class were descendants of Frenchmen and educated in France, the “French language and the French way of life were obvious factors of differentiation” (Hoffmann, 59). In light of this circumstance, anthropologist Norma Gonzalez’s discussion on “practiced identities”²⁶, in her *book I am My Language* (2001), constructively applies. Though her anthropological research is on how Mexican women’s and children’s language construct their identities, I found it to be a relevant discovery in understanding the sociocultural formation of the Haitian identity as it relates France. One of the contexts used to situate how these women and children of Mexican origin of different generations outside of Mexico have shaped and reshaped their identities (which is picked up through their language and application of their

²⁶Norma Gonzalez notes that the actual term is called “identity in practice,” which was constructed by Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carol Cain (1998) using the work of Bakhtin and Vygotsky.

Mexican/ Mexican Texan/ Mexican American) is the “context of identity in the figured world”(77). Gonzalez explains that the “figured world” means:

a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others... These collective as-if worlds are sociohistoric, contrived interpretations of imaginations that mediate behavior and so, from the perspective of Heuristic development, inform participants’ outlooks. (77)

In the like manner, we can say the Haitian identity (implemented by elites, leaders) was formed within the context of ‘attempting’ to ‘practice’ a French identity at the risk of losing their total Haitian identity which was composed of both a diluted French and an African culture. In the long run, the practiced identity has either stayed consistent (with the traditional elites) with their constant travel to France and the application of French culture or has been meshed with some Haitian culture (birthed from the modern elite and working class). Many Haitians from the time of the Haitian Revolution had never been to France to see and absorb the Frenchmen’s lifestyle. The masters who were on the Island, the misfits of France and the French Creoles who were not wholly French because they were a mixture between the French culture and the developing Haitian culture and the Haitian elites who traveled to France were the prime sources of informing Haitians on the island what was Frenchness. But Price-Mars made it clear that a Haitian cannot be a Frenchman, “we gradually forced ourselves to believe we were ‘colored’ Frenchmen, we forgot we were simply Haitians, that is men born of determined historic conditions...“(Price-Mars, 8). Hoffmann also claims that “[f]or all intents and purposes, all Haitians are totally or partially of African descent...”(58). Jean –Jacques Dessalines himself “ ...

declared by constitutional fiat all Haitians officially 'black,' regardless of color or race, in an attempt to forestall internal division..." (Bellgarde-Smith, 15). Clearly the attraction Toussaint L'Overture had towards the French culture was not felt by Dessalines who fully embraced the second draft of the proclamation of independence which boldly stated "Peace to our neighbors. But anathema to the French name. Hatred eternal to France. This is our cry" (James, 372).

Moreover, the history of the transfiguration of the Haitian flag represents the history of Haiti's continuous confrontation with the Haitian identity, and simultaneously the Haitian flag underwent various modifications of colors as their leaders and political climate change. For Dessalines the Haitian flag primarily stood as a symbol of independence and a rejection of France then, after that, blackness. To strongly emphasize Haiti's independence:

during the peak of the Haitian revolution between December 1802 into 1803 the national army still carried the French flag and the French colours and the French were rumored to believe the battle for freedom had ceased, but Dessalines ended their misconception. From the red, white and blue of the tricolour, the white was removed, and instead of the initials R.F. (République Française), 'Liberty or Death' was inscribed. The new flag was unfurled on May 18th 1803. (James, 365)

But later to reinforce Haiti's African heritage Dessalines replaced the republican blue and red flag and established the colors black and red as the standard flag in 1804 completely detaching Haiti from France because the colors red and blue were reproduced from France's flag. Dessalines' successor, Henri Christophe, president of the north side of Haiti, retained the black and red flag, Alexandre Petion, president of the south side of

Haiti, “returned to the blue and red horizontally-placed colours which constituted the first flag of independent Haiti” (Nicholls, 33). But by the mid 19th century, Haiti became government dominated by mulattoes, so the flag colors changed to red and blue and situated Haiti as a little Paris in its own right. A century later, President Dr. Francois Duvalier²⁷ later changed the flag colors back to black and red, because he wanted to acknowledge and reconnect Haiti to its African roots; he wanted all of Haiti to accept this element of the Haitian people:

The horizontal red-and blue stripes were placed vertically, the black next to the flag staff, the red waving freely. Duvalier explained [that] Black was the true color of Haiti, and dominated the staff, while the red represented mulattoes and also their subservient position in the Haitian nation. (Abbott, 121)

From Dessalines to Duvalier, Haiti’s color politics never failed to split the country in every aspect by race and class. It is only when Haiti is faced with the extreme threat of oppression from an outside force/source do the classes and races join together, and at the height of the American occupation (1915-1934) David Nicholls argues that “At last it appeared that the demon of colour had been exorcised from national life” (142-143). Haiti was faced with protecting its cultural heritage and pride from the influence of America. Many Haitians no longer focused on or surrendered to the image of France. A new light was dawning on Haiti and Haiti’s African heritage was being considered amongst the influential people in Haitian society.

INDIGENISTE/ NEGRITUDE MOVEMENT

²⁷ Governed over Haiti from 1957-1971

Aime Cesaire, one of the fathers of the Negritude movement, declared that “it is in Haiti that Negritude has stood on its feet for the first time and said that she [Haiti] believed in her humanity” (Bellgarde-Smith, 169). The Negritude movement was long-established from Haiti’s first giant step in gaining its independence from France to establishing the path of preserving of its connection to Africa in Haiti. This pathway celebrating African heritage that was suppressed by elitism in Haiti and laid dormant to most of the outside world was revisited, documented and celebrated in Dr. Jean Price-Mars’ *So Spoke the Uncle / Ainsi Parla l’Oncle* (1928).²⁸ In this book, Price-Mars hoisted up Haitian pride in “their folkloric past and racial competence [and he] hoped to encourage a national spirit that would weld intellectual elites and illiterate peasants together and to inspire Haitians as a whole to resist oppression of any kind” (Shannon, xi). It was no coincidence that this text was produced during the American Occupation in Haiti, when the fear of oppression took its course and a nationalistic spirit was birthed. Price-Mars believed there were two types of cultural oppression that hindered the true Haitian spirit: class and the American Occupation. The United States occupation compelled Haitian scholars to rethink what it meant to be Haitian. During the US occupation the idea of being linked to Africa and embracing African elements of Haitian lifestyle began to take a popular course. While Price-Mars advocated the Haitian African identity socially, the regime of Dumarsais Estimé, Haiti’s 33rd president from August 1945-May 1950, began to express it in politics:

²⁸ Price Mars was “trained as a physician, he served his country in many capacities. In the political realm, he was a Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister to France, Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, and a diplomatic representative to other countries. As an intellectual he was the author of many books, articles, pamphlets, and other publications.... he served a president of the Congress of Black Writers and Artist” (George A. Simpson, vii).

For the first time, Africa and not simply France, became an important part of the nationalistic dialogue. The Creole language began to be studied in its own right... Folkloristic studies, emphasizing the African component in Haitian rural life, especially as expressed in religion, came into vogue... Haitians began to explore their own society as a synthesis that was as much African as it was French... (Mintz, xii).

Though Haiti's mulattos were reluctant to embrace the cultural aspect of Africa in Haiti, the Americans presence on the island persistently reminded them of their African heritage. While the elites (who were predominately mulatto) believed themselves to be representations of French culture, the Americans viewed them as, Haitian social critic Lyonel Paquin indicates, "Africans aping Frenchmen" (76). The insult towards the elites "claimed" French identity and racist conducts towards Haitians help unite all Haitians on the island. For a moment they were willing to listen and consider the African aspects of Haiti, as their very own elite member, Price-Mars, intellectualized its history, relevance to Haitian nurture and livelihood:

Through an ethnological and historical examination of African origins and of the factors influencing cultural growth and change in the New World environment [Jean Price Mars] believed it would be possible to demonstrate that the development of a socio-cultural system that was uniquely Haitian and of a political community governed by Negroes was merely a process of growth that occurred in any societal group" (Shannon, xi).

As the Negritude movement was stirring in Haiti during the latter years of the American Occupation, the fight for cultural independence took root. Young Haitian intellectuals were singing in praise of Blackness. Anti-colonial and Marxist points of

view were being adopted and connections with the African culture and its people were being explored. These changes answered Price-Mars' call for youths of the Haitian elite to "gain pride in themselves as equal to all other members of the human genre, and he hopes that this generation of the American occupation will remedy these nerveing conditions through a rejuvenization of Haitian nationalism based on pride in their folkloric past" (Shannon, xx-xxi). Simultaneously though, the majority of the traditionally elite class and older intellectuals persisted in claiming a French identity as a protest against North America. Price-Mars, however believed their imitation of the French was pure stupidity.

Negritude in all aspects is West Indian, according to James. (394) Haitians did not know Negritude because:

To them it seemed purely Haitian... The Mulattoes who were masters had their eyes fixed on Paris. Left to themselves, the Haitian peasantry resuscitated to a remarkable degree the lives they had lived in Africa. Their method of cultivation, their family relations and social practices, their drums, songs and music [,] such art as they practised and above all their religion which became famous, Vodun – all this was Africa in the West Indies. (James, 394)

Haiti's peasants' zeal to remember, encapsulate and establish the African heritage in a new world celebrated negritude and participated as Leopold Senghor asserts "as a weapon" [to defend the African self and heritage] and "an instrument of liberation" [because once you have discovered and embraced who you are and where you come from, you are free from all misconceptions and stigma]. ("Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century", 27)

Towards the end of the American occupation, a cultural rebirth or an unwrapping of the ancestral Haitian culture was spurting. This truly signified a change in the image of Haiti and its culture. James notes that "...the role of Africa in the consciousness of the West Indian people had proved itself to be a stage in the development of the West Indian quest for a national identity" (395-6). But for Haiti's twentieth century "petite colonials" or mulatto elites this quest would meet opposition. Haitian intellectual Dantes Bellgarde, who was a strong opposing voice during Jean Price-Mars' mission to reconnect Haiti back to its African roots, rejected embracing Africanism, because it showed no potential for economical, social or intellectual growth nor did it show any aspiration of connecting or responding to the global community.

The tug of war between a French dominated culture and an African related Haitian society have been taking place in Haiti at least for centuries and has manifested itself in the battle between Haitian Creole and French as Haiti's official languages. Since it was first questioned during the time of independence, debates about the Creole language and the Haitian identity began to reemerge during the American occupation (mainly by artists), and more aggressively later on among scholars, linguists, and social activist. For example, Price-Mars' *So Spoke the Uncle* influenced the writings of the *La Revue Indigène*²⁹. The writers of this journal were inspired by Price-Mars' call to revitalize national identity through exploration of the African derived culture of Haiti's peasant majority, writers experimented with personas, themes, and Creole phrases drawn from Haitian folklore. (Meehan and Léticée, 1377. Besides a few artists, some Haitians

²⁹ "*La Revue Indigène* [a monthly Haitian journal] expressed the efforts of a small but committed group of young Haitian writers to develop a self-conscious literary movement that would be simultaneously national, regional, and cosmopolitan. Foremost among the social forces driving this movement was the desire to resist the cultural and political domination of the U.S. [1915-1934]" (Meehan and Léticée, 1377).

began to consider the cultural aspects of their African heritage in literature, the arts and in Creole. Like the Negritude movement, Creole was the weapon many writers utilize in establishing their Haitian identity. French was enforced, barrowed and/or adopted, but Creole was their creation from their Haitian history. Along with the Negritude movement the campaign for Haitian Creole as Haiti's national language continued to encourage black self-awareness outside of the shadow of Europe.

CREOLE: HAITI'S NATIONAL LANGUAGE

To begin my discussion on the nature of Haiti's linguistic dilemma, I will consider Cesaire's play *A Tempest*. *A Tempest*, a radical postcolonial rendition of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, dramatizes a battle concerning language, which cannot be separated from the battle of identity, with Caliban (slave, islander) and Prospero (king, European/colonizer):

Caliban: Uhuru

Prospero: What did you say?

Caliban: I said, Uhuru!

Prospero: Mumbling your native language again! I've already told you, I don't like it. You could be polite, at least; a simple hello" wouldn't kill you.

Caliban: Oh, you forgot...But make that as froggy, waspish, pustular and dung-filled "hello" as possible...

...

Prospero: ...you could have at least thank me for having taught you to speak at all. You, a savage... a dumb animal, a beast I educated, trained, dragged up from the bestiality that still clings to you.

Caliban: In the first place, that's not true. You did not teach me a thing! Except to jabber in your own language so that I could understand you orders... (11-12)

This scene sets the stage for the social condition of the colonial language of power and the colonized language usage. The two languages are at war for dominance over a people and ultimately over their livelihood, as is the historical case of French and Haitian Creole.

The language question began to emerge in Haiti immediately after its independence was won. Devonish affirms "... soon after the declaration of independence, Etienne Gerin made a plea in favour of using Creole as the official language of the new nation" (47). Gerin put forward a proposal that was trying to convince the ruling officials that Creole should be used initially in order to effectively communicate with and administer to the population. He even presented Creole grammar usage intended for preschoolers, but Gerin's proposals and the rights of the population were ignored. (Devonsih, 48) Ironically, Gerin was from the South side of Haiti and the Southern area was mainly occupied by mulatto elites who considered themselves to be little Parisians. While Alexandre Pétion ruled the Southern part, Henri Christophe ruled the Northern part with a population of mainly blacks. Christophe and his associates were not focused on the making the Creole language the official language of Haiti, but were more interested in "preserving Haiti [']s national independence" and proposed English should replace French, as it is the emerging dominant language (Devonsih, 47). Creole along with French persisted in the new Haitian society. Neither language was ever discounted, though later they would be categorized. As a matter of fact, and "[a]fter the revolution 1804, Haiti provided a fertile soil for Creole" (Confiant and Prudent, 2). In 1792, the proclamations of the French Revolution made by Sonthonax, a commissioner sent from France who later became a revolutionary loved by the slaves, were issued in both French and Creole" (Devonish, 46). When Sonthonax wanted to communicate with the masses he often would use an interpreter to communicate

with the slaves in Creole. Moreover, the First Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte, sent a proclamation, written in Creole and dated 1801, to the rebellious blacks of St. Domingue, demanding their loyalty to the French Republic (Devonish, 46). These accounts prove that Creole was always considered as the language of the Haitians by even their then French rulers, and for educated and influential Haitian leaders and educators to later reject and discount it confirms their rejection of their Haitian identity and a thoughtless journey to obtaining a French identity. Also, the rejection and disregard for the language of the mass only predestined the sociolinguistic chaos and *languidentity* crisis Haiti faces now. The masses' situation was never fully taken into consideration after 1804. Along with their blackness, their language was denied. In the end, the decision by mainly the mulatto elites to make French Haiti's exclusive official language not only changed to character of Haiti to a self-hating nation, but it also contributed to Haiti's failure to stabilize itself as a country and progress together as people. So when De Vasty, a high official in the Christophe administration, stated that "Next to change of religion, a change of language is the most powerful method of altering the character and manner of a nation", he was prophesying Haiti's ever-increasing misfortunes (Devonish, 47).

Linguist Albert Valdman, in "Creole: The National Language of Haiti" (2000), boldly states that "Haitian Creole is the *true* national language of the Republic of Haiti. In addition to seven million people in the homeland, it is spoken by about a million Haitians living abroad. All Haitians speak the language. But even the Haitians who master French consider Haitian Creole... as a symbol of their national identity" (*my emphasis*, 36). According to Valdman, to speak Haitian Creole is to proclaim a Haitian identity and heritage, so then what claims does speaking French profess in relation to the Haitian

identity? Basically, it does not have a concrete position, other than the attempt to seal kinship with France and its “civil culture” to assert and establish intellectual and social recognition. Haitians who did call themselves French were just seen as imitators of Frenchmen. Haitians’ (the elite mainly, but not excluding Haitians from other social castes) kinship to France should not be scorned completely because of the history they share. But when the Haitian tries to suppress or reject wholly or a fraction of their inherited Haitian African identity, scrutiny towards their reasoning will arise.

While many Haitian/non Haitian linguists and critics disagree on the genesis of Haitian Creole, they definitely agree that it is the root and manifestation of Haitian identity. Valdman argues that Creole:

Resulted from the efforts of African slaves to speak the French they heard when they arrived in the colony of St.Domingue (now Haiti)... the French people in St. Domingue used French dialects and everyday spoken French. ... Since these slaves were seldom able to communicate with each other in a common African tongue, they tried to learn Popular French. ...Overtime, this form of French differed more and more from the other French varieties and came to be recognized as a language in its own right... it was picked up by the whites and came to be the language used [by] all those born in the colony. (36)

Valdman also believes Creole shares some elements of African languages. He speculates that grammatical elements of Creole might be traced to Africa. To him, “African languages served as a sort of filter between the forms slaves heard and those they reproduced” (36). And to cement his take on how Creole is linked to African languages, he uses Césaire’s assertion “Creole is a language whose body is French but whose soul is African” (36). Valdman’s speculation of the birth of the Creole tongue mirrors Haiti’s

elites' identity crisis, the merging of French and Creole. French is the exterior façade, while Créole is the essence of the true person.

Sociologist James G. Leyburn (1966), on the other hand, argues that Creole is not a messed up version of French that was created when Africans “ignorant “ of the language tried to communicate with their masters or each other. They believe Creole already existed as a language before African slaves arrive to Saint Domingue:

Creole was born of buccaneering. In the seventeenth century the French of Île-de-France had not yet supplanted the dialects of the French districts; the buccaneers consequently spoke their native speech, and since Norman sailors far outnumbered the others Norman French became the dominant tongue of the French buccaneers. Words naturally added from patois of neighboring French Provinces of Picardy, Brittany, and Anjou, but Norman remained the matrix... (298-299)

With contributions from the Indians on the mainland, and buccaneering with French and English privateers marks were left upon the Creole language, “Three quarters of Norman French was the Creole language of 1697, when France acquired Saint Domingue...” (300) But of course when Africans were being exported to the islands as slaves with their own languages, the “Negroes influenced Creole, giving it an ‘African’ character” (Leyburn, 300). Though journalists Bernard Diederich and Al Burt agree with Leyburn that Creole draws on seventeenth-century French, along with some Spanish and English, they emphasize that “it can only be described as Haitian” (28). Together Valdam, Leyburn, Diederich and Burt have all come to the conclusion that Creole with its African characteristics is unquestionably Haitian, which continues to justify why Creole is the

mark of the Haitian identity regardless of the fact that the French language was present, is practiced or has influence amongst the Haitian people.

Alternatively, writers/Creolist Ralph Confiand and Felix L. Prudent, in “Creole-Language of the Caribbean” (1983), insist that the Creole language should be acknowledged as its own language and not a by-product of any European or African language(s). They claim:

In fact, more careful analysis would reveal that Negroes and whites must have collaborated closely in creating this new language and that before the arrival of large numbers of black slaves Creole was already the vernacular of the inhabitants of the archipelago, irrespective of their ethnic origin. Discovery of the fabulous value of sugar for the plantation economies (1685) and the withdrawal of white contract workers thrust Creole into the Negro communities from the beginning of the next century onwards, and it was only then Creole would be referred to as a Negro language. (14)

According to Confiand and Prudent, Creole’s genesis was nothing more than a socio-linguistic function that preexisted between the colonials, the islanders and the slaves, yet however, they fail to realize that the creation of Creole from these collaborations still participated in the merging of languages from Europe and Africa and possibly natives. Though Creole was its own entity, multiple linguistic influences on the island may have blended together to create its uniqueness. For example, though Creole is spoken in all parts of Haiti, some towns speak it with a different accent (either French, African or Spanish tone, or more recently an American tone by 3rd generation Haitians) and place different emphasis on some words. It is still Creole. In the end they do agree that it is a Negro language. So, no matter the genesis of the Haitian Creole language, the end result

(from the linguists and my assessment) confirms that Creole is Haitian, has an African soul, is uprooted from the island's slave and black communities, and it is not French.

But as much as Haitian Creole symbolizes an intrinsic part of Haitian identity from its genesis, Haitians (mainly the elites) then (a vast amount) and now (an insignificant amount) persisted in maintaining French as their official language and fanatically continued to pursue Frenchness to ensure their link to France. Hoffman reveals that: "They emulated French cultural models and tried to adapt French political, social, and legal institutions to Haitian needs. In their eyes, no other country had developed a more admirable code of social behavior or a richer intellectual heritage" (Hoffmann, 57). But fortunately, many Haitians (mostly the masses) faithfully upheld, preserved and promoted their national culture because France did not have the blueprint to being Haitian. Thus, as Hoffman attests, "Francophilia and cultural nationalism have thus coexisted throughout Haitian history" (57). This type of split scenario is the core of Haiti's history. From electing two presidents (one for the north and one for the south) after independence, to creating two societies divided by race and class, and to having two languages (Creole and French) up against each other fighting to claim Haiti's national identity, proves that Haiti is still fighting to gain some sort of healing and independence from its brutal past, which has left Haitians struggling to establish their true national identity. The truth is France's period of rule over Haiti is responsible for Haiti's cultural mayhem, and Creole has the power to bring Haiti and its citizens together to accept their cultural heritage as Haitians.

After centuries of neglect and dishonor, in 1987, a year after Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier fled Haiti, a new Constitution was briefly written, published in both

French and Creole, and the Creole language was elevated to the status of Haiti's official language (Abbott, 343). This meant Haiti was officially ready to be Haitian and no longer lost in the shadow of France. Even though France participated in founding Haiti, Haiti is Haiti and not France.

CHAPTER 2

“Haitian Creole Writers and A New Literary Tradition”

The Creole poet writing in Creole, the Creole novelist writing in Creole, will have to be at once the collectors of ancestral speech, the gatherers of new words, the discoverers of the Creoleness of Creole. (*In Praise of Creoleness*, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, 106)

The time was gone when Haitians with a white soul “sick for their love for France”, were express[ing] their feelings A-la-Musset or a-la-Victor Hugo. Jean Brierre, Roussan Camille, Rene Depestre, Felix Morrisseau-Leroy, Frank Fouche were writing with their Black souls. (*The Haitians*, Lyonel Paquin, 100)

Edouard Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse* states, in reference to Caribbean literature, that “We do not have a literary tradition that has slowly matured: ours was a brutal emergence that I think is an advantage and not a failing... The irruption into modernity, the violent departure from tradition, from literary ‘continuity,’ seems to me a specific feature of the American writer when he wishes to give meaning to the reality of his environment”³⁰ (146). This statement makes an invaluable contribution in expressing the emergence of Haitian Creole and its literature. Creole did not just erupt abruptly, but it also cultivated itself into a language; and even as it was developing into a language, it was used to create works of literature. The reception of Créole and Creole literature in the mid 1900’s was where the irruption occurred, and many Haitian Créole writers and the readership of Haitian Creole literature increased. *Pawòl Kreyòl: Literati Kreyòl an Ayiti 1750-2000* (2000) is an historical anthology of Haitian Creole works of literature recorded as early as 1750 or 1757. This text is essential to the study of Haitian Creole literature; Christophe Charles, the editor of *Pawòl Kreyòl*, affirms that “yon istwa literati Kreyòl an Ayiti se avantou yon istwa lang Kreyòl-la an Ayiti” (“The history of Creole Literature is the history of the Creole language in Haiti”) (9). Charles’

³⁰ Taken from the section titled “The Novel of the Americas”

commentary reveals how each writer in his own time from his specific village/town articulated in Creole differently. The literature is a testimony of the historical and fundamental evolution of the Haitian Creole language.

Writers who produce literature in Creole give the Haitian population (in Haiti and the Diaspora) access to its rich colorful language. The portrait of Creole was first painted in the oral form of Contes Kreyòl, folktales or the story telling ritual of Crick Crack, the first form of oral literature in Haiti. But it was not until the colonial era that the first recorded work of literature was a poem, titled “Lisette quitte la plaine”(“Lisette Leaves the Countryside”), written between 1750-1757 by Duvivier De La Mahautière, a wealthy white planter in Haiti when it was still the island of San Domingo, and De La Mahautière was not Haitian. Charles declares that de La Mahautiere never produced another work in Haitian Creole, but at least his first work marked the influential and linguistic status of Haitian Creole. Critics have questioned whether Haitians produced other anonymous Creole poems recovered from the nineteenth century. However, it is likely Haitian writers might have written these poems because during the eighteenth century a white Frenchman, Commissioner Sonothax, an agent of the French Republic in Haiti, wrote proclamations in Haitian Creole and was ensuring that blacks Haiti had an opportunity to be to be educated. Therefore, based on this factor, I speculate that the anonymous writers might be Haitians who had learned to read and write and were choosing to write in Creole, though this has yet to be established. Charles further presents the fact that “Ecrire en Creole, en Haiti, au XIXème siècle, tenet d’un non-conformisme superbe” (“Writing in Creole in Haiti in the 19th century was a superb act of nonconformism”) (34). This was true for early Haitian Creole writers like Oswald Durand and Massillion

Coiucou who were noted as progressive writers concerned with the democracy and progress of Haiti, and their spirit re-presented itself in the twentieth century Haitian Creole writers Dieudonne Fardin, Emile Celestin-Megie and Rassoul Labuchin “Les tenors du ‘mouvman kreyòl’” (“the leaders of the Creole movement”) (Charles, 35).

Creole and its literature emerged alongside each other, but it was not until the 1960’s Creole movement that Creole literature emerged with authority in Haiti and the Diaspora. The “l’avant –gardes”, Felix Morrisseua-Leroy, Charles Ferand Pressoir, Emile Romuer, Claude Innocent, Frankétienne, Georges Castera Fils, Jan Mapou, Pierre Richard Narcisse diligently produce works of substance in Creole, which are well received (Charles, 34). Alongside the male avante-gardes, it is crucial to include Mercedes F. Guidnard (Deyita), the first Haitian Creole female poet/writer. She was the only woman writer writing in Créole at the height of the Creole movement. These avante-gardes played an important role in igniting Haitian and non- Haitian scholars’ interest in Creole poetry and its history. Correspondingly, in the text *Open Gate* (2001), the first and only anthology on Haitian Creole poetry written in Creole and English, editors Paul Laraque and Jack Hirschman, launch their collection by focusing mainly on contemporary Haitian Creole poets who wrote militant political poetry. These writers, like Felix Morrisseua-Leroy, Claude Innocent, Jan Mapou or Deyita, focus on social justice and their nation’s state of progress. Hirschman does confess that the anthology:

has not included all of Haiti’s wonderful voices, but [we wanted] to present many by way of saying: this is a real poetic force in the Americas, a language of African semantics, French word-based and an international revolutionary spectrum of feelings resonant to its own revolutionary tradition of the past as well as to the birth of rainbows and horizons in the future. (xvii)

Pawòl Kreyòl and *Open Gate* together present a wide spectrum of Haitian Creole writers. While this chapter will present an overview of the history of Creole literature to further situate my focus on Haiti and its Creole literary tradition, I will mainly discuss contemporary Haitian Creole writers in Haiti and the Diaspora.

Authenticity becomes a crucial factor when works of fiction attempt to replicate the society they represent. Many Creole works reveal how the Creole language differs with time, habitation and intellectual exposure. *Pawòl Kreyòl* reveals the richness of the Creole language in literature from the eighteenth century towards the twentieth century by Haitian authors from different parts of Haiti and the Diaspora. Thus the texts “fè nou we kijan lang-nan evolye depi tan lakoloni jouk kounye-a lane 2000” (“allow us to see how the [Creole] language evolved from the colonial times to the year 2000”) (Charles, 9). Charles argues that “se ekriven ki fè yon lang vanse, menm si yon pèp kreye-l, menm si yon akademi ak savan vinn mete lòd ladan’l. Wòl ekriven yo enpòtan, fò yo kontinye travay lang nan, kontinye ranje lang-lan san ke yo pa kouri akspte tout bagay lengwis... di yo fè pou tout kalte rezon...” (“It is a writer who helps a language advance, even if a people created it, they have to continue to work the language, continue to fix it without running to accept everything linguists... tell them to do for what ever reason”) (10). Charles is very passionate about his Creole project, in fact he wanted to name the anthology “Bon Jan Literati Dayiti” (“Real Haitian Literature”)(13), but was discouraged on account of disregarding French works by Haitians.

A century after de la Mahautiere’s poem, between 1809 and 1811, two anonymous poems about the feelings of joy and pain of being in love were composed:

“Evahim et Aza” and “Zanmi³¹ an moue”(“My Sweetheart”) (Charles, 23,34). These poems incorporated some European poetic techniques. The writer of “Evahim et Aza” uses quatrain rhymes, which is a four line stanza rhyming alternately at the end of each line in a verse:

Aza [speaker]
Mon pas capab souffri z'*encor*
Mon té mouri loin de z'*amie*...!
Vla qu' Aza nien place de *la mort*
Dans quior a toué trouvé *la vie*
(ll.15-18, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 41)

(Aza
I can't suffer anymore
I have died from being apart from my love
Put Aza amongst the dead
In you only I found life)

The use of this poetic technique is enlightening because Creole language was considered to be at its infancy then and “Evahim et Aza” appears to be an earlier form of the Creole language. Additionally, the poem “Zanmi an moue”, which reverberates a clearer and more modern version of the Creole language, uses both a traditional rhyme scheme (rhyming at the end of every other line) as well as blank verse within its six and seven line stanzas:

Tan pi zouézo n'a pas *chanté*
Pendant couer à moin dans *la peine*.
Mais gnou fois zami moin *rivé*.
Chantez, chantez tant comme *syrène*
Mais, mais, paix *bouche!*
Cher zami moin pas hélé *moin?*
(ll.8-13, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 42)

(Please birds do not sing

³¹ Zanmi can mean lover, friend or sweetheart, or my dear. Zanmi is spelled as either zanmi or zami and this is evident in the poem.

While my heart is sadden.
But once my lover arrives
Sing, sing, like a siren
But, but hush!
My sweetheart has not come to me?)

The mood of both poems also exhumes early nineteenth century Romanticism from 1785 to 1830. Firstly, both poems are lyrical poems³² in which a single speaker presents their emotional and mental state to the reader, and this was popular during that literary movement. Secondly, the subject takes over the poem, and lastly, the purpose of the poem "...serves to raise an emotional problem or personal crisis..." (Abrams, 7). Aza practically claims herself dead due the absence of her lover, and the speaker in "Zanmi an moue" finds no joy in life without his lover present. We can argue that these two early poems instantly situate Creole then as a functional literary language.

The first Creole text confirmed was written by a Haitian writer Francois-Romain Lhérisson is "Badinez bien avec Macaque (1850)" ("Badinez befriends a Monkey") but Charles clarifies that the work appeared to be more of a song than a poem, so that is why "Choucouné" (1884) ("Sweetheart") written by Oswald Durand (1840-1906) is considered the first Creole poem produced by a Haitian. Also "celuici a produit aussi des contes [C]réoles (né dans les îles) en [C]réole (la langue) comme "Oua tane totou" ["Expect the old man"] (1904)" ("it is he [Durand] who has produced Creole folktales (born from the island) in Creole (the language) like in "Oua tane totou" (Charles, 34). "Choucouné" was the most popular poem and mark of Creole literacy and legitimacy. in the literary arena, the poem. Durand was a popular Haitian poet reknowned for publishing a book of French poetry (*Rires et pluers*, 1896) (Charles, 47). However, his

³² A short poem that conveys intense feelings or profound thought.

popularity stemmed from “Choucounè,” which later became a popular Haitian song. The 8 lines of 7 stanzas is made up of 1 set of Quatrain rhymes with two sets of couplets, which indicates that Durand was an educated and sophisticated writer, in his time, with most likely a European education. “Choucounè” is a love story in the form of a lyric poem that casts a shadow on the racial complexities of the Colonial time. The speaker begins by reminiscing about Choucounè, a beautiful “marabout” (a dark complexion person) who was once his lover, but was too attractive to remain his lover or be faithful to him. The tone is of regret. His constant repetition of “la peine,” (sadness and/or pain), whether it is “grand” or overtaking him, is reinforced by the repetition of “de pied moin lan chaine!” (both my legs are chained up) which reiterates how he is imprisoned by her love. He appears to be well-off because in the fifth stanza he indicates that he has purchased furniture and other household items for the home they were going to build:

Muebl' prêt, bell' caban' bateau
 Chais' rotin, tabl' rond, dodine,
 De matelas, gnou port manteau,
 N'app', serviette, rideau mouss'line
 (ll.33-36, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 48)

(Furniture's ready, nice bed shape like a boat
 Chairs of wicker, round table, rocking chair
 Many mattresses for us to climb
 Table clothes, towels, chiffon curtains)

But money and elaborate possessions were not enough to keep Choucounè because “Gnou p'tit blanc vini rive” (“A child of a white person arrives”) (l.41, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 48). A white Frenchman comes to town and takes Choucounè from the speaker. This introduces to the psychosocial racial complexities of the colonial era. The speaker has lost all hope of ever regaining his lover back. He has been defeated by the colonial figure

of power -the 'blanc' (white man). The racial inferiority of colonial times emerges when he describes the blanc with admiration and envy:

P'tit barb roug' bell figur' rose
Montr' sous côté, bell' chivé
Malhuer moin, li qui la cuase!
Li trouve Choucoun' jolie,
Li parlé Francés, Choucouné amié –li...
(6.2-6; *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 48).

(Offspring of the red bearded, beautiful pink skin
Watch attach to his side, nice hair
Woe is me, he is the cause!
He saw Choucouné beautifully young
He spoke French, Choucouné loved him)

The blanc's beautiful rosy face, nice hair and side pocket watch (indicating wealth and importance) and, above all, his speaking the French language excludes the speaker from the battle for her love because "Li parlé Francés, Choucouné amié –li..." (He [the blanc] spoke French, Choucouné fell in love).

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Frantz Fanon dissects the issues dramatized by the condition of both the speaker who is most likely a black man and his lost love Choucouné. In "The Woman of Color and the White Man", Fanon researches the autobiography of Martinique writer Mayotte Capécia³³, a young woman who loves white Frenchmen:

Mayotte loves a white man to whom she submits in everything. He is her lord. She asks nothing, demands nothing except a bit of whiteness in her life. When she tries to determine in her own mind whether the man is handsome or ugly, she writes, "All I know is that he had blue eyes, blond hair, and a light skin, and that I loved him". (42)

³³ *Je Suis Martiniquaise* (Paris, Correa, 1948)

For Capecia, a black Martinique woman, whiteness, Frenchness and France were to be desired, but blackness, she abhorred. If the speaker in “Choucounè” had her in mind, he’d be fighting a lost cause. In mocking Capecia, Fanon describes God in the way Capecia would imagine God: “the good and merciful God cannot be black: he is a white man with bright pink cheeks... One is white as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent” (51-52). This description ironically illustrates the same description of the ‘blanc’ the speaker in “Choucounè” uses. This indicates that the imposed inferiority resounding from the speaker/creator of a poem from the late 19th century did not differ much from a modern writer (Capecia) from the mid 20th century. Moreover, Fanon states that the Negro “is full of rage because he feels small, he suffers from an inadequacy in all human communication, and all these factors chain him with unbearable insularity” (50). In “Choucounè,” the speaker has succumbed to the condition of rage that Fanon indicates. He is in such deep pain that he cannot tell a soul, so he speaks of his tragic loss to birds which he claims were his witnesses from the beginning of his courtship:

“P’tits zoézeaux ta pé couté nou lan l’air...(1.1.6)
 Jusqu’z zoézeaux lan bois té paraîtr’
 content!...(1.2.6)
 Z’ oézeaux té tendé tout ca li té dit:... (1.3.6)
 P’tits zoézeaux lans bois , couté moin
 couté!...(1.5.6)
 P’tits zoézeaux gadé! p’tit ventr’li bien
 rond!...(1.7.6) (*Pawòl Kreyòl*, 47-48).

(Child!³⁴ the birds were listening to us out in the
 open [air]...
 To the point the bird in the trees departed [or flew
 away] happy...
 The birds heard all that he said...
 Child! birds in the trees listen to me, listen!
 Child! birds look! Child! her belly is very round)

³⁴ term of endearment used during conversation.

Moreover, Durand's other Creole works were two folktales: "Oua tane Tonton" ("You will face the old man") and "Guepe ak' Marin-Guin." Their meanings are ambiguous. They are written in the tradition of Haitian Cric Crac stories, in which the speaker says Cric? and the listener responds with "Crac!", before the story begins. The title, "Oua tane Tonton," like its story is vague and open to different interpretations. "You will face the old man" can mean either when one has lived as one pleases, one eventually must come to face old age and death and cannot escape, or one must not be governed by the flesh because one will have to face the consequences. For example, after the individual feasts on fruits and vegetables from a field and tries to leave, a voice in the conte declares:

"Entrer facile
 Mais cé soti
 Qui deficile"
 ...
 To va rété; To maitre hélé
 To pa pr' allé!"(ll.16-18, 20-21, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 49)

("Entering is easy
 But it is exiting
 That's difficult
 ...
 "You have to stay; You can holler,
 You cannot leave")

The conte's central meaning is one must be ready to face what's ahead. "Guepe ak' Marin-Gouin" ("Wasp and Mosquito"), is a satirical piece which entails a conversation with a mosquito (marin-g0uin) and a wasp (guepe). This contes' goal is to enlighten its listeners about how and why the wasp has a small waistline. The answer is revealed when the mosquito, which fears being eaten by the wasp, tries to convince the wasp not to eat him:

“Passée ou mangée nous qui viande chèche
Vini la pêche
Coté-ci; faut ouè poisson;lan point
Gros passé ça, yo gros con’ jamb’ moin.
M’ta capabl’ prend mais rass’ monis l’en giunin
Pas mange ça...” (ll.25-30, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 50)

(“Instead of eating us with bony flesh,
Come hear and fish
Over here; you have to see these fish; none
Bigger than this, they are big like my legs.
I would take some, but my people from Guinea³⁵
Don’t eat that”)

The wasp laughed so hard at the mosquito’s plea, he had to hold his waist tightly for bodily support, and that’s how a wasp “got its slim waist”. Both “Oua tane Tonton” and “Guepe ak’ Marin-Gouin” did not receive the same approbation as “Choucoun.”

Massilon Coicou was another 19th century poet to produce Creole poetry. He was a dramatist who put on many plays. (*Pawòl Kreyòl*, 52) As a writer, Coicou is influenced by late 19th century Naturalism.³⁶ His poetry blatantly attacks the social and political issues of his time and he lost his life in Haiti doing so. But the cries written to exemplify the injustice people face are timeless. His poem “O zaut’ qu’ape souffri” (Others that are suffering), is the first recorded political Creole poem. While it criticizes and attacks the way poor people suffer, and is filled with Haitian Creole proverbs, it also encourages Haitians to endure and survive: “Ou m’prend si gros sauts, doubout! éya, nèguese! /Si ou penco mouri, pin’ga découragé.” (You have taken the hardest falls, stand upright! Negroes! / If you have not died yet, don’t be discourage) (ll.22-23, Charles, 52).

³⁵ West Africa

³⁶ “Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness of life, including poverty, racism, prejudice, disease, prostitution, filth, etc. They were often very pessimistic and frequently criticized for being too blunt.” (wikipedia.org, 24 October 2007)

By the beginning of the 20th century, out of Haiti, Georges Sylvain, writer, lawyer, judge, and minister of Paris, sprouted into the historical canon of Haitian literature. Sylvain, after receiving his law degree in Paris, returned to Haiti excited to stimulate his intellectual and artistic endeavors. He started organizing conferences, creating/producing and sponsoring theatrical performances and writing in scholarly journals. (*Pawòl Kreyòl*, 56) He also founded l'Ecole de Droit (Law School), la Societe de Legistlation (Legislative Society), and l'Alliance Francaise en Haiti (French Alliance in Haiti) (*Verline*, 19). The same year he became a judge in Kasasyon, he published the first Creole book, *Cric-Crac* (1901), a book of folktales. In the tradition of folktales Sylvain incorporates animals, dialogue and a lesson. His most famous folk tale is “Téta qui couè li capab gros con Bef” (The Fish that believe it can be as big as a Bull). It is a quick funny and witty tale about a small fish that tries to be a bull, and, in trying to be what he is not, ends up destroying himself. The moral is that anyone who tries being who he is not will end up living an upsetting life; Sylvain makes this clear:

Nèg sott qui vlé fait dòctè
 Apr'allé chaché doulè...
 Si bottin'-la trò jiss, frè,
 Pito-ou rété pie-a-tè! (ll.30-33, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 56)

(Ignorant men that want to be a doctor
 Are going after despair...
 If the ankle boot is too tight, brother
 You're better off staying bare foot!)

“Téta qui couè li capab gros con Bef” and most of Sylvain’s folktales are in the form of Cric? Crac! stories, which display and celebratethe significant pastime enjoyed by Haitians of all classes. Also the publication of *Cric Crac* was a high point for Creole and Creole literature, because in the early 1900’s French was the national language in Haiti

and Creole was considered to be worse than its subordinate language. As an affluent man, Sylvain's contribution to Creole literature was not a challenge, but a bold patriotic tribute to Haitian culture. However, Milo Rigaud's book of poetry *Tassos* (1933) is considered a revolutionary Haitian literary text, even though critics were indifferent to it. (Charles, 62)

Rigaud was the first Haitian to write and publish works originally in Creole as opposed to Georges Sylvain who created his Creole folktales in *Cric Crac* from the French La Fontaine folktales (Charles, 62). Rigaud has a book of Creole poetry titled *Tassos* (1933). In "Tassos", the speaker takes us on a nostalgic journey "back home" as he journeys to foreign lands. Through reminiscing and envisioning daily life in Haiti, he returns:

Cé conça
 lò m'songe monè-l'hôpital;
 Ti zoézos lan boi Saint-Antoine,
 Ti nègues qu'ape pissé lan corido-Badè,
 buss-ciquilés, jouète-zos,
 Occide,
 La-coupé,
 cochons –marron lan Postè-Machant,
 goumin,
 Paque- Lécomte,
 coue'm fait: vappp!
 (ll.1-11 , *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 62-63)

(Its like this
 when I remember Morne l'Hôpital³⁷
 Little birds in the woods of Saint-Antoine
 Young boys urinating in the back alley- Bade³⁸
 buses circulating, game of dice
 The South,
 brown pigs inside Postè-Machant³⁹)

³⁷ mountain above Port-au-Prince

³⁸ Voudou spirit of the winds

Fight
my heart went; boom)

Cultural artifacts, such as food, help the reader locate the speaker either home in Haiti or abroad. In New York City:

m'al New-yoke,
m'angé lamb stew,
m'angé hot dog
m'boué ice-creams...(ll..25-28, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 63)

(I went to New York
I ate lamb stew
I ate hot dog
I drank ice cream)

in France:

m'vine en France,
m' boué bons di-vins
m'angé camembe, pont-l'evêque,
m'nagé coulonmier
acque nòde bons bagailles...
(ll..29-33, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 63)

(I came to France
I drank good wine
I ate camembe, till I burst
I ate calamari
With a lot of good stuff)

But all the foods he has eaten from New York and Paris doesn't sway him from Haiti's cuisine:

ca pa empêché'm songé
diri-doré.
Pas mandé pou acfas, atô...
et acassans!⁴⁰
pra-diri- mélé
cé pi raide

³⁹ makèt place in Haiti

⁴⁰ Akasan (modern spelling)/ AKA100 – cornbread, milk-like drink

m'pito pa palé ca
diôle mrin couri d'leau...
(ll.34-38, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 62-66)

(that does not keep me from remembering
golden brown rice
finally, not to mention acfas, ...
and, Oh!, corn-based milk
mixed peas and rice
that's the best
I'd better not say more
my mouth is drooling ...)

Rigaud's imagery of Haiti allows him to be imaginatively in Haiti; life in New York and Paris are unable to make him feel at home. Rigaud has a magical way of bringing Haitian culture to life in "Zepes" and "Bande meringue ac bande mascarons" which were published in *Optique* (a Haitian Literary Magazine from 1954-1956). In these poems the streets in Haiti are live, loud and colorful. Zepes is a colorful description of a street fight (both verbal and physical) between two youths playing a neighborhood sport game, most likely soccer. In addition, the verbal dialogues are loud and animated and the narration is just as energetic. Similarly in "Bande meringue ac bande mascarons" there is a street fight at a Mardi Gras, but it is a cultural battle between lovers of meringue music as opposed to the music of mascarons. It is a cultural rumble jumbled with all types of people:

Di moments ou té tandé clarion Méringue ac
tanbou Mascarons ape contré, ça qu'pas gain
grainnes, c'é outer cos-yo...
Lan temps-ça-à
Pierrots,
bossis,
Masques tulle,
Quees-rachées,
diabes,
Assasins,

Rois,
Laissez frappez docteu,
Bons mounes,
Vies moun,
Fenmes deguisées en garçons
garçon deguises en femme
toutes qualities madigras lan batille...
(ll.15-30, *Pawòl Kreyòl* ,66)

(The moment you hear the musical sound of
Meringue and the drums of rara mee, those
without
balls, get out,
during this time
tall,
hunch back,
fabric masks,
broken hearts,
demons,
murderers,
king,
colliding together with doctors,
good people,
old people,
women disguised as men
men disguised as women
all kinds of people/jokers are in the fight/
quarrel/chaos)

The poem exudes a burlesque imagery that manages to bring together people from different walks of life. For example doctors, murderers, transvestites, the old, the young, kings and demons all come together at the Mardi Gras. While it unites them through the love of music, it divides them because of social class and cultural interest. This poem epitomizes the social conditions of Haiti. The lovers of meringue are more bourgeois with sophisticated instruments playing their music versus the lovers of mascarons who dance to the rhythm of the drums (tanbou) connecting more to African roots. This Mardi Gras is volatile, because it always ends with a brawl. The speaker sees it as the best time

of life in Haiti; when the musical/social rumble ended, “Haitiens pas gain sang lan vinn’ yo enco” (Haiti no longer has any blood flowing in its veins anymore) (l.42, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 66). The author confesses that conflict and chaos bring life to the city; without them there is not much living being done.

Around the time *Optique* came out in 1954, it was the peak of the Haitian Creole movement, and Haiti’s renowned Creole poet Felix Morriseau-Leroy (Moriso-Lewa), known as the father of modern Creole poetry, had already published his highly reputable Creole book of poetry *Dyakout* in 1951. *Dyakout*, along with many of the Creole texts he published, was translated into French, English, Spanish, German, Russian, Fanti, Twi, and Wolof. *Dyakout* represents an early voice of activism as issues of humanity and political injustice surfaced. “Merci Dessalines” is an ode to General Jean- Jacques Dessalines, who fought side- by-side with Toussaint L’Ouverture in battle for San Domingo’s (Haiti) independence. While Dessalines was not the only Haitian general to help free Haiti’s slaves, he strongly believed that freedom and peace could only be maintained by the “expulsion of everything French from the island... Dessalines, who had worshiped Toussaint, determined to get him out of the way, as well as Christophe, for their pro French leanings” (James, 333). It is not surprising that the father of Creole poetry would honor Dessalines who believed that Frenchness was not Haitianess. In “Merci Dessalines,” Moriso-lewa firmly iterates “ Ase pale franse, minis/Dessalines p’ap jamn mourì” (Stop talking French government and clergyman/ Dessaline will never die) (ll.95-96). He thanks and salutes Dessalines with praise for his independence, self worth and everything he is, Haiti is and the Haitians are. He sculpts Dessalines as the God of the Bible who gave man the earth to dwell on and dominate, who later as flesh in Jesus

Christ, is the light for man and redeems him from self/spiritual destruction by his sacrificial life/death:

Se ou k montre nou chimen nou
Mèsi Desalin
Se ou k limye nou
Desalin
Se ou ki ban tè n ap pile a
Syèl ki sou tèt nou an
Pweybwa, larivyè
Lanmè, letan, se ou
Desalin, sè ou k ban n solèy
Ki ban n lalin
Ou ki ban n sè, frè n
Manman, papa n, pitit nou
Se ou ki fè n yon jan, yon mannyè...
(ll.32-44, *Dyakout 1,2,3,4, 25*)

(You showed us the way
thank you Dessalines
you are our light
Dessalines
You gave us the land we walk on
The sun above our heads
The trees, the river
Dessaline, you gave us the sun
That gives us the moon
You gave us sisters, our brothers
Mothers, our fathers, our children
You made us this way, in this manner)

Dessalines is physically deceased, but he never dies in the hearts of his people and he will return: Yon jou Desalin va leve/ W a tande nan tuot llanme Karayib (ll. 116 –117, *Dyakout 1, 2, 3, 4, 27*). “Merci Dessaline” was one of *Dyakout*’s greatest poems. But the majority of the poems resonate with the honest reality of Haitian life as well as the author’s deep sense of connection to the mass and their desires. “Tourist pa pran pòtrè m” (“Tourist don’t take my picture”), sheds light on how the islander’s life and culture are exploited and vulnerable to tourists:

Touris, pa pran pòtre m
Pa pran pòtre m, touris
M twò led
M twò sal
M twò meg
Pa pran pòtrè m, blan (ll.1-6, *Dyakout 1,2,3,4, 20*)

...
Pa pran pòtre m, touris
Kite m trankil, blan
Pa pran pòtre bourik mwen
Bourik isit pote twòp chay
Bourik isit twò piti
Bourik isit pa manje
Pa pran pòtre bet mwen,
Touris, pa pran pòtre kay la
Kay mwen, se kay pay
(ll.15-23, *Dyakout 1, 2, 3, 4, 20*)

(Tourist, don't take my picture
Don't take my picture tourist
I'm too ugly
I'm too dirty
I'm too skinny
Don't take my picture, white (person)

...
Don't take my picture tourist
Leave me at alone, white (person)
Don't take my donkey's picture
Donkey's here are overstrained
Donkey's here are too thin
Donkey's here don't eat
Don't take my animals pictures
Tourist, don't take a picture of the house
My house, is a house of straws)

The speaker makes demands to the tourist, internally, for the tourist not to capture his image and life in his camera, because his life is not a spectacle, but a disaster catastrophically ridden with poverty. Instead, he urges the tourist to “Ale tire pòtre Pale” (“Take a picture of the palace”) (l.27, *Dyakout 1, 2, 3, 4, 21*) or “Ale tire pòtre Bisantnè” (“Take a picture of the Bisantine”) (l.28). The Bicentennia/Bisante was:

[t]he best known and maybe the worthiest” project the Haitian government took on. It was the much-needed aesthetic face-lifting job completed on the Capital for its two hundredth anniversary. Extravagant sums of money were spent for that purpose. [To create the Bicentennial] ...land was filled. On it they built casinos, hotels, boulevards, public buildings. An open-air theatre was also erected and around numerous open-air cafes. They were managed by writers, poets and philosophers. (Paquin, 98)

These two places are significant in Haitian history and culture and are main tourist attractions. They portray a false reality and image of the Haitian people and their lifestyle. Their extravagant beauty contrasts with the conditions of the Haitian mass/population. The poor man in the poem is troubled, dirty, and loaded down with self-esteem issues. Even though the speaker continuously makes it clear he does not like being exploited for tourists’ entertainment, he needs them to survive. The speaker’s impoverished state supersedes his discomfort, so he allows himself to be exposed for the little change the tourist can spare:

Touris, pa pran pòtre m
Ou p'ap koprann pòz mwen
Ou p'ap koprann anyen
Nan zafé m, touris
“Gi mi fay sens”
Epi, ale fé chimen w touris!
(ll.40-45 *Dyakout I*, 2, 3, 4, 21)

(Tourist, don’t take my picture
You will not understand my pose
You will not understand anything
Of my business, tourist
‘Give me five cents’
And, go about your way tourist)

By the time Moriso-Lewa created *Dyakout II* in 1974, his voice became more aggressive

and intensified when evaluating and questioning the authority and purpose of the government and church in considering the dangers of everyday life and the needs of the people. The poems “Chouchoun” and “Tonton MaKout” expose the harsh and irrational abuse of power the Tonton Macoutes, who were president Francois Duvaliers’ (Papa Doc) personal militia/”law” enforcers, used to terrify the citizens of Haiti.

In “Tonton MaKout” the speaker tells how the innocent blood of a young child is shed by a Mocute who “pretends” he is trying to help the people in the community, in reality he is destroying lives:

Yon Ti bonnonm K ap Lwe
 Grenpe sou yon branch bwa
 Manman l dil pitit desann la a
 Yon Tonton makout ki t'ap pase mande l
 Ou vle m fè l desann pou ou
 Li rale revolve l li touye ti nèg la.
 (ll.1-6 *Dyakout 1, 2, 3, 4, 49*)

A young man
 Climbs up onto a tree branch
 His mother said, child get down
 A Tonton Makout⁴¹ was passing by asking
 You want me to make him come down for you
 He pulled out his gun and killed the young man)

The following poem, “Aba” is an outcry for the extinction of all political candidates, especially those who are presidential candidates. The speaker has no confidence and trust in the country’s elections and electoral system. This view is to be appreciated in respect to the questionable and unsuccessful past elections in Haiti’s history. In “Kòbmeriken” Moriso-Lewa bluntly addresses the Haitian government, in the first two lines: “Plis gouvènman pran kòb meriken/Plis pèp ayisyen pòv” (“The more the government takes American money/The more poorer the Haitian masses become”) (ll.1-2, *Dyakout 1, 2, 3,*

⁴¹ They are the secret police officers of President Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier.

4, 69). Moriso-Lewa's voice, in this poem, is very angry and frustrated because he sees the government's greed (not necessarily a need) for American currency in Haiti destroying the people and its economy. Moriso-Lewa does not refrain from expressing his true feelings, which attest to his exile from Haiti.

A pivotal poem from Dyakout II is "Antigòn" a character from Sophocles' play *Antigone*, whom Moriso-Lewa uses as a representation for political justice in an unstable and crooked government. While Sophocles' *Antigone* takes place in Greece, "Antigòn" takes place in Haiti. Moriso-Lewa's "Antigòn" is a martyr for the people who defies the government's unjust acts, refuses to be silenced and is willing to die for justice:

Pa bezwen kriye pou Antigòn
Pou mouri l abitye mouri
Se jodi Antigòn ap mouri
Nan tout kafou
Nan tout teyat
Depi 2500 zan y ap bat bravo
Pou yon ti fi ki konn ki jan pou li mouri
(ll.3-9, *Dyakout 1, 2, 3, 4, 58*)

(Don't have to cry for Antigòn
As for dying she's used to it
Antigon has been dying for a long time
On all corners
In all theaters
Since 2500 years they've been applauding
For a young girl who knows how to die)

Polinis' dead body becomes a symbol of innocent lives slaughtered, and Antigone is the one to defend and sacrifice herself for what's right. Also in "Antigòn" Polinis' dead body was not in just one place but in many places in Haiti:

Wa Kreon fèk vòlò kadav Polinis
Ankò nan Kafou Tifou
L al vovlo kadav Polinis
Dèyè lakomin Jerimi

L al vòlò kadav Polinis
Jouk sou plas-dam Pòdpe
Koute m byen Tigòn
Se pa kapab ou menm k ap mouri tout tan
(ll.19-26, *Dyakout 1, 2, 3, 4, 58*)

(King Creon just stole the body of Polinis
Again at Kafou Tifou
He went to steal Polinis' body
Behind town hall of Jeremy
He went to steal Polinis' body
All the way in fields and town square of
Port-de-Paix
Listen well Antigone
It cant be you dying all the time)

Moriso-Lewa is also famous for his adaptation of Sophocles' play *Antigone* titled *Antigòn an Kreyòl* (1953) (*Antigone in Creole*). As the first published Creole play, *Antigòn an Kreyòl* broke the stereotypes of the Creole language. This attempt helped establish, intellectualize and add sophistication to the Creole language, through Moriso-Lewa's Dessalines spirit and national pride. In an interview in *Callaloo*, "The Dynamic Message of *Dyakout*" Moriso-Lewa, proudly states that:

Antigon has somewhat shown that it is possible to write plays in Creole that aren't just comedies or vaudeville or low class-comic things. It is possible to write a tragedy in Creole. My *Antigon*, which is written in Creole, is both tragic and a political play... I think *Antigon* is important because I was conscious of the problem of Creole. I wanted *Antigon* to be a success, a literary success. (Lafontant, 668-669)

Moriso-Lewa recreated a Greek tragedy into a Haitian tragedy. In addition to the original major characters (Antigon (Antigone), Izmèn (Ismene), Wa Kreyon (King Creon), Emon (Haemon) , Tirezyas (Tiresias) , Eridis (Eurydice), Moriso-Lewa does add some characters. Moriso-Lewa assigns to Antigon a godmother (Marenn) who is a vodou

priestess who invokes vodou spirits (at the request of Izmèn, Antigone's sister) to discover Antigone's fate. Also, the voice of a god is the Haitian vodou god Legba. Legba is the master of the crossroad, governs the spirit world and he is the connection between the living and the dead. He represents the Oracle from the Greek tragedies along with Èzili, the Haitian vodou goddess. Èzili is invoked by Tirezyas the vodou priest in Moriso-Lewa's *Antigòn*; but in Sophocles' *Anitgone*, Tiresias was the old and blind wise counselor. *Anitgone* basically has the same plot as Antigone, with the exception of the added characters, the Haitian vodou gods, and the scene of Antigòn and Emon, reuniting after their death, leaving two rainbows as a symbol of their transference in to the afterlife. *Antigòn* was performed around the world where international papers could review it thus making Creole an international language of literature. (Lafontant, 669) The play was not only translated into many different languages but it was also performed in Port-au-Prince in 1954, in Paris in 1959, in New York City (at Brooklyn College CUNY) in English for the first time, Miami, Chicago, Boston, Kingston, Jamaica; performances in Jamaica and Ghana were also produced in English (*Kont Kreyòl*, 12). He published further collections titled *Dyakout 3* and *Dyakout 4*, which later were collected into *Dyakout 1,2,3,4* in one text (1990). He wrote other plays, *Jadin Kreyòl* (1977) and *Teyat Kreyòl*, which includes six plays (1997), and also wrote *Kont Kreyòl* (which contains six short stories) (2001). He has written an extensive amount of poetry.

While many of Moriso-Lewa's poems are direct and non-compromising in confronting serious issues dealing with Haiti, its people and government, in some he employs humor or sarcasm. He loved and believed in his native tongue. He produced

exceptional literature in honor of his native tongue. In “New Testament” he made it clear that Creole is the only form of language he would accept:

An diz nèf san senkant kat
M t ekri testaman m
M te di m pa vle okenn pè
Vin pale laten nan tèt mwen.
Jounen jodi a, m pa gen pwoblèm sa a
Paske pè pa pale laten ankò
Menm Bondye
Sètoblaje aprann kreyòl
Kou tout lòt blan
Ki vin isit
Pou fè biznis ak nou.
(ll.1-11, *Dyakout 1,2,3,4*; 173)

(In 1954
I wrote my will
I said I don't want any priest
To Speak Latin over my head

I don't have that problem today
Because priests
Don't speak Latin anymore

Even God
Had to learn Creole
Like any other white man
Coming here
To do business with us)

Like Moriso-Lewa, his contemporaries and literary descendants express their deep emotional traumas in retrospect of Haiti. The following Creole writers capture the beauty, ugliness, drama, injustice, and vodou life of a people determined to live and survive despite the odds within their nation and abroad. For instance, Paul Laraque (Pòl Larak), who has written books of poetry in both French and Creole, is not numb to the plight of his countrymen. This is evident in “Do-m Laj” (“My Broad Back”). A “broad back” is a figure of speech used by Haitians to indicate that they can take the pressures of life; their

backs are broad and strong enough to carry the weight the world puts on them, whether it is humiliation, rejection, abuse or injustice. They can withstand it all. Just as the ‘bourik’ (ass), which is used by poor tradesman, is capable of carrying many loads on its back and still perform its task, so can the country/the mass do the same. Laraque lists some of Haiti’s prime resources in the trade market, from both now and centuries ago, which are cultivated by the poor masses as some of the baggage the mass/Haiti has to carry:

Kafe se mwen
 nèf pat se mwen
 pit se mwin
 koton se mwen
 chouga se mwen (ll.3-7, *Open Gate*, 22)

(The coffe’s me
 the new banana’s me
 the sisal’s me
 the cotton’s me
 the sugar is (still) me) (*Open Gate*, 23)

In the first two lines, Laraque already situates the poor and troubled conditions of his people and how they will prevail: “Tout jan kat la bat/m’bourik ak kat las” (Any way you shuffle the cards/ I’m an ass with four aces) (ll.1-2, *Open Gate*, 22/23). No matter what the cards/life deals Haiti/the mass/the underdogs, he believes they will persevere in the end, and that those who exploit and ignore Haiti/the mass/the underdog will do it no more:

Yon bon jou m’a kanpe
 M’a di non
 M’a knape lavil
 M’a kanpe lan bouk
 M’a kanpe laplenn
 M’a kanpe lan mon
 Jou sa-a n’a konpran g’on tan k’fini
 e g’on lot tan k’kòmanse (ll.9-116, *Open Gate*, 22)

One I'll stand up
I'll say no
I'll stand up downtown
I'll stand up in the village
I'll stand up in the field
I'll stand up on the hill
That day we'll know that this time is gone
and another is going to begin (*Open Gate*, 23)

Laraque's "Legzil se pen rasi" ("Exile is a stale bread") speaks for the many writers who have been removed or have had to escape to another country to keep their voice and mortal subsistence from dying. Laraque catapults the emotional and psychological trauma of the writer/person experiencing the pain and pleasure of exile. First it is detestable:

legzil se kafe anmè
yon lèt ki tounen
yonn zaboka pouri
yon mango plen vè (ll.5-8, *Open Gate*,24)

(exile is bitter coffee
curdled milk
a rotten avocado
a mango full of worms) (*Open Gate*,25)

But at the same time it is deliverance:

legzil san ou ta lanfè
ou rache-m lan bouch dezespwa
lan fredri ou pote chalè
ou se limyè lan fènwa (ll.22-25, *Open Gate*,24)

(exile without you would be hell
you pulled me from the mouth of despair
in the cold you bring fire
you're the light in the darkness) (*Open Gate*,25)

In this final stanza, exile, is personified and takes on the role of a savior; the speaker converses intimately to the situation of exile, as opposed to speaking about it with disgust in the previous stanzas. This final stanza shows how the exiles' condition is an escape for the individual under intense political problems. Laraque is speaking of himself and his fellow writers who had to leave Haiti, in order to escape the terror of the Duvalier dictatorship and his censorship laws.

Another pioneer of the Creole movement is Frank Fouché (Frank Fouché). Like Moriso-Lewa, Fouché also recreated a Greek tragedy, titled *Oedipe-Roi* (Oedipus the King) (1955). Fouché produced works in French and Creole, but it was in Creole that he made his mark. The two following poems "Jou va jou vini" ("Day by day it's coming") and "Sa Yo Te Kwè Yo Fè?" ("What Did They Think They Did?") expresses Fouché's two passions: the Creole language and Haiti. In "Jou va Jou vini," as Fouché commemorates the Creole language, he addresses and attacks those who hate and belittle it. He presents the stereotypes about Creole along with the misconceptions Haitian elites perceive about Creole:

Kréole fèt pou nèg' mon
 Kréole fèt pour pep-la
 Kréole fèt pou nèg' sot' ki pa konn' li ak ékri,
 ...
 Kréole pa fète pou piti-t boujoua!
 ...
 Kréole pa lang' non plus!
 Kréole p'ap janm' kap di sa francé di!
 Epi lang' savoy sa'a tou ap' fè yo palé nou mal!
 Lang'-giunin sa'a, fò nou mangnais blié-l ato!
 Se jodi nou kite l' Afrik...
 (ll.1.1-4; 1.2.6; ll.3.1-5, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 97)

(Creole is for folks in the mountain
 Creole is for the mass
 Creole is for ignorant people who can't read or

write...

Creole is not for the bourgeoisie children...

Creole is not a language at all
Creole can never say what French says
And this savage language will make them speak
bad of us
This African language we have to forget
We left Africa a while back...)

By the end, he paints a utopian Creole society where Haitian Creole is celebrated, loved and spoken by its Haitian citizens and internationally:

nan poin chémin baré ki pou rété-l
lo la vlé poussé branche jouk'nan ciel-la...
jou va jou viin! ...
pèp' tou patou
a konnin vré sé pa li ki rété ak ti nèg ki pale-francé
...
jou sa-a, sé p'ap francé ka va palé nan bouk-la kon
papié-mizik,
Sé nan lang' kréol-l, lang manman nou-an,
lang'pèp-la
tout'ont a gan pou'l réglé...
(ll.3. 33-51, *Pawòl Kreyòl* 98)

(There are no blocked routes that will stop it
At that time it will sprout like a branch until it
reaches the sky
Day by day it is coming...
people every where
will know it (Creole) is not subject to man who
speaks French...
This day French will be spoken in the village like
music notes
It will be in Creole, our mother tongue
The language of the people...)

Fouché cleverly mocks the French language by merging it with Creole and at the same time destroying its rules and structure: “Lang' francé, palé moa dé sa” (The French

language, speak to me about this/that) (1.3.14, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 98). He also destroys the concept of Creole not being a language; by writing this poem he dismantles the fact that Creole is a speech for the illiterate.

Moreover, in Fouché's politically charged "Sa Yo Te Kwe Yo Fe" (What Did They Think They Did), he does not hesitate to address how he detests the event(s) that took place from the onset of the American Occupation in Haiti (1915-1934). The poem begins startlingly with two vital figures, Charlemagne Peralte and Benoit Bartraville, in the war against the American Occupation in Haiti, followed by a list of famous activists. The key historical figures mentioned, whether from the political or the literary arena, were killed/martyred in the fight for freedom against some form of physical, mental, economical or territorial bondage, or even unjust political imprisonment. It is these types of oppression which many Haitians feared from slavery to the onset of the American Occupation and lastly during the Duvalier regime which plays a part in Haiti's on going history of fighting to remain free.

Furthermore, Fouché not only celebrates slaughtered Haitian revolutionary heroes (Charlemagne Peralte and Benoit Bartraville) of the American Occupation, but he also invokes Makandal who led an insurrection against the French in 1751, Dessalines who declared Haitian independence and led a massacre of the French and crowned himself Emperor of Haiti within the year of 1804, Jean –Jacques Acaau who led a "preliterate movement of peasants" (Paquin, 40), Mao Zedong a slain Chinese activist aroused the spirit of the art of cultural revolution, Patrice Lumumba who led the Congolese Independence Struggle, Jacques Alexis and Gerald Brisson killed because of their opposition to the dictatorship of Papa Doc (Francois Duvalier) , and lastly Ché Guevara

killed in his rebellion along with Fidèl Castro against dictatorship in Cuba. Fouché bluntly identifies who “they” are. They are the “American marines” who “...pran kadav de nèg sa yo bay chen manje” (were feeding the corpses of those two heroes to dogs) (l.7, *Open Gate*, 12-13) and all oppressive forms of government whether in Haiti, Cuba, China or Africa. Since the cause and passion of these figures will live on in the masses, these martyrs never really died and “they” were never really killed. Fouché clearly wants his reader to know that killing these men was a waste of time because they cannot die. This would explain the condescending tone of the title “What did They Think They Did?”. He professes that they are superhumans, who may have left the earth, but are integrated into nature and woven into people’s thoughts. For instance, Charlemagne Peralte and Benoit Bartraville are “de gwo pye gayak sa yo ki di pase fè...” (two tall gayak trees tougher than iron...) (l.2, *Open Gate*, 12-13) and Patrice Lumumba “tounen mouchavè toupatou/ li bò Somali li janbe Angola travèrse Rodezi/ li gen de pye-l ap kouri nan kat chimen” (...became green-backed flies everywhere,/ he’s around Somalia he’s crossing Angola traversing Rhodesia,/ he’s got two feet but he is running in four directions...) (ll. 12-14, *Open Gate*, 12-13). This poem is a direct verbal retaliation and resentment toward the American Occupation in Haiti. Due to the history of slavery, the fear of oppression had plagued Haitians and the spirit to fight for freedom, democracy and equality haunted the society. The revolutionaries come back to life: “Lè yon lide rantre nan mas pèp-la nan nannan lavi-a/ li tounen san tounen fòs lavi menm” (When an idea re-enters the mass of people in the essence of their life/ it becomes blood becomes strength becomes life itself) (ll. 20-21, *Open Gate*, 12-13).

Claude Innocent (Klod Inosan), a dentist and a poet, was another key figure in Creole poetry and the fight against the dictatorship of Francois Duvalier. He founded a group called “Karako Ble” which played a major role in resisting the Duvalier regime. As a poet he was able to combine the fundamental cause he stood for: his country and his language. The majority of his poems depict, in detail, the Haitian condition in the struggle of poverty and in moments of joy. This is obvious in the poems “Lavi Vye Nèg” (“The Poor Man’s Life”) and “Calinda⁴² La Poul Batte” (“We’ll be in High Spirits”). In “The Poor Man’s Life,” the speaker melodiously recounts the life of a poor man and how, no matter how hard he works, he is stuck in his destitute life:

Mason fè kay
 Li dòmi anba pon
 Voulanje fè pen
 pitit li grangou.
 Byen travay, byen swe
 Pa di byen touché (ll. 24-29, *Open Gate*, 16)

(Masons make houses,
 They sleep under bridges,
 Bakers make bread while
 Their kids go hungry
 Good work, good sweat
 Doesn’t mean good pay) (*Open Gate*, 17)

The tone of “Lavi Vye Nèg” is pessimistic and presents a stagnate existence in Haiti. Likewise, the poem “Calinda La Poul Batte,” which caused a big uproar in the 60’s (*Pawòl Kreyòl*, 102), presents Haiti’s poor living conditions. The speaker states, “Malgré tout miséréré nou .../ Gaz ap fait lago-lago sou l’estomac;” (Regardless of all our misery/ Hunger .../ Gas is playing ring-around-the rosie within our stomachs) (ll.43-45, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 103). To make matters worse, they are also victims of mother nature: “Cyclone

⁴² Calinda or Kalinda means vodou ceremonial dances before Revolution, according to *Haitian –English Dictionary*, Fifth Edition, Vol. 1, by Brian C. Freeman.

Hazel passé li lagué; 'n lan la ri ou main devant oun main dèyè/ vent passé li poté pitimi alé/ Dlo discenn li poté manman cochon alé” (Hurricane Hazel⁴³ passed by left us in the streets with nothing/ Wind came by carried off the millet/ Flood carried off our pigs) (ll.48-51, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 103). The poverty and starvation factors lead to the illegal boat journeys to North America in which the “Courant poté coralin nous decenn” (The currents take the small boats under) (l.47, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 103). But in spite of all the devastation, the poem expresses a confidence and hope in a revolution that will be stirred up “... dé lan fon govi-a...” (... from the depths of earthenware jugs...) by the spirits of past revolutionaries (Dessaline and Peralte) and vodou gods to “...rini toute ti moun...” (... to reunite all poor people...) (ll. 56-57, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 103).

Like Inosan, Rudolph Muller (Woudof Milé) creates socially conscious poetry. “Yon ti Fam Sèzan Ki Kanpe” (“A Sixteen Yea-Old Girl Who Is Standing”) introduces a young girl, who physically removing herself from her devastating life of poverty, is unable to emotionally and psychologically be free from it:

On ti fanm sèzan
 Ki kanpe kon yon I
 Anba on galeri
 Li pa p’tann kamyonèt
 Li pa p’tann pèsonn moun
 (ll. 6-10, *Open Gate*, 42)

(A sixteen year old girl
 Who’s standing like an I
 Under the arcade
 She’s not waiting for a bus
 She’s not waiting for anyone) (*Open Gate*, 43)

She stands in the streets because she cannot bear to be home with her mother who is

⁴³ Atlantic Hurricane of 1954 that hit Haiti, North Carolina, and Canada. Hurricane Hazel killed at least a 1,000 people in Haiti.

about to die from hunger, so Milé writes “li pito ret kanpe la/gwo onzè diswa/ lan fredri anba yon galeri” (She’d rather be standing there/ at 11 in the evening/ in the cold under the Grand Street...) (*Open Gate*, 42). Like Milé, Pierre-Richard Narcisse (Péy-Richa Nasis) takes the plight of the country into account. *In Dey ak Lespwa* (1979) (*Mourning and Hope*), the collection of poems swing between a hopelessness in witnessing the sickening devastation of Haiti and the undying hope in God and the morrow that lingers.

The poems actually go through a mourning period:

Depi la tè la tè
 Nap chanté chanté bondié
 Dépi solèy lévé
 Pou jouk l-al kouché
 Sé yon sèl plint nap plinyin
 Sé yon sèl rèl nap rélé
 Séyon sèl chan nap chanté
 (ll.1. 1-7, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 163)

Dépi laté laté
 Nap poté kouron mizè
 Depi soley lévé
 Pou jouk l-al kouché
 Sé yon sèl plint nap plinyin
 Sé yon sèl rèl nap rélé
 Sé yon sèl chan nap chanté
 (ll.1.56-62, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 164)

(Since the earth was in existence
 We’ve been singing to God
 When the sun come up
 Until it sets
 We have one complaint
 We have one cry
 We have on song we are singing

Since the earth was in existence
 We’ve been carrying a crown of misery
 When the sun rise
 Until it sets
 Weh have one complaint
 We have one cry)

A period of hopelessness:

Mizè adouat
Mizè agoch
Mizè anmè kou fièl
Mizè ak chèn mélé
Mizè ak chan gayé
Anba zépon péyim
Mizè ao boujonnin
Mizè badjonnin ak kras
Mizè sal kou dan piny
(ll.2. 1-9, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 165)

(Misery to the right
Misery to the left
Misery bitter as bile
Misery with chains of curses
Misery and chant spread
Under the shoulders of my country
Misery sprouts
Misery spread with dirt
Fifty misery)

And lastly, to a hopeful state: “Ala kontè mouin ta kontan/ Ala fèt mouin ta fè/ Si solèy-a té vini... (ll. 8.1-3, *Pawòl Kreyòl*, 166) (Oh how happy I’ll be/ Oh how I will celebrate/ If the Sun would come).

In *Open Gate*, writers Moriso-Lewa, Larak, Mulé, Nasis and Emile Roumer⁴⁴

(Emil Roumé) are among the labeled Haitian pioneers of Haitian Creole poetry in Part One 1950 - 1960. About Part Two (1960-1970) “Sosyete Koukouy” (The Society of Fireflies) Paul Laraque states it is “the name of the only Haitian literary movement still in existence... [It] was founded in 1965 by Ernest Mirville (Pye Banbou)” (*Open Gate*, xiv). The Society of Fireflies is currently active in Miami and lead by Creole writer Jean Marie

⁴⁴ Like Moriso-Lewa, Emile Roumer was also a pioneer of the Creole movement who vowed to never write or publish in French again. (*Pawòl Kreyòl*, 93). Roumer was the founder of *Revue Indigène* which launched and exposed Haitian literature and culture in (mainly) French and Créole to academia; his major Creole works are the translation of the book of *Psalms* into Creole and a biblically inspired book of poetry titled *Couronne Rosaire* (*Pawòl Kreyòl*, 93).

Willer Denis (Jan Mapou), by Michel-Ange Hyppolite (Kaptenn Koukouwouj) in Ottawa and by Max Manigat who reactivated its branch in New York City (Laraque, xiv,xv).

These writers are presently living in the United States or Canada, with the exception of Mercedes F. Guignard (Deyita), the first Haitian woman poet and novelist to have written in Créole, and who has returned to live in Haiti. The writers of “the Society of Fireflies” were just beginning their literary career in the mid 1960’s. It was a time in Haiti where the majority of, if not all, artists were censored or scrutinized indirectly, by the regime of Duvalier 1957-1986. Though writers of the 1950’s and early 60’s were writing candidly while Haiti was entering into this politically sensitive era, it was in the late 60’s into the 70’s that Duvalier’s private militia, “the macoutes,” were at the height of terrorizing citizens and artists. Thus many Haitian writers were threatened to control their voice; those who did not were either killed, missing, or went into exile in the US, Canada, Cuba or Africa. Some left willfully with sadden hearts in order to preserve their artistic freedom and life.

In the 60’s and into the 70’s poet, essayist, novelist, dramatist, Jan Mapou, who records the Haitian experience from within Haiti and the Diaspora, plays a vital part in establishing, preserving and validating the Creole language. Mapou, in the preface of his book *Bajou Kasé (At Daybreak)* (1974), morally and philosophically challenges Haitians to value and validate Creole. The main way he believes Creole will maintain its own right as a language (like English, French and Spanish) is through literature, which is why he founded and owns the most reputable Cultural center/book store, with works of Haitian/Haitian of the Diaspora, in Little Haiti in Miami. In his book of poems, *Bajou Kasé*, Mapou takes an in depth look at both the Haitian condition and also the human

condition. The first poem “Bon Ane”⁴⁵ (“Happy New Year”) has a misleading title because there is nothing completely happy about the New Year he presents because “Dyakout⁴⁶ li chajé ak bon/ Dyakout chajé ak movée. (It’s shoulder bag is loaded with good / It’s shoulder bag is loaded with evil) (9). The speaker cries out that in the past year(s) war, death and chaos governed the world:

Rouj, Rouj, Rouj
Pou tout sakrifis
San Koulé
Nan Vyétnam
Mouayan Oryan
Lazi, Lafrik
Lamérik ak lérop (*Bajou Kase*, 8)

(Red Red Red
For all the Sacrifice
Blood poured out
In Vietnam
Middle east
Asia, Africa
America and Europe.)

The speaker is pessimistic and paranoid about a happy new year. He warns the reader to “Véyé...” (Watch), “Prans fòs si ginyin/ Pou konbat lamizè/ Trayizon ak lipokrizi” (Take courage/ To fight against misery/ Treachery and hipocrisy) and “ An nou fout/Mété gasson sou nou!” (Damn it let us/ Be firm!). (ll.34-36,52-53, *Bajou Kasé*, 9-10) This poem is a reflection on the turbulent times during and after the Vietnam war, and the feeling of instability felt in all nations and in Haiti, as it was still being corruptly governed by the Duvalier regime. This poem also does not speak to the Haitian experience only; the speaker dramatizes how the fight for justice and peace is for all

⁴⁵ Published after the Vietnam War ended, so the author’s tone and views most likely pertain to the world events during the the early to mid 1970’s.

⁴⁶ A very large straw shoulder bag.

nations. Moreover, in the following lines from his poem “Konbit” (“Working Together”), we read what the poor man has, and what he wishes to have is such an extreme contrast that it is merely impossible:

Si lajan ou té ginyin chouchou
Ou ta demantibile tout kay pay
Detui tout mangouyan
Marigouin, Koulèv andòmi...
(ll. 4-7, *Bajou Kase*, 9)

(If your money was made of honey
You would dismantle all homes made of straw
Destroy all fraudulence
Mosquitos, sleeping snakes...)

In the poem “Panzou” (“Trick”), Mapou points out how people are concerned about fulfilling their own needs, and judges the “dog-eat –dog” world in which he testifies “Kè sansib pa jouè” (“Sensible heart does not play”) (l.7, *Bajou Kasé*, 3). “Soufrans Youn Pitit” (“The Sufferings Of A Child”) explores the deep heartfelt cries of an orphan child who is in despair without his mother’s love and presence. He deeply analyzes the poverty of some people and the overindulgence of others and makes the readers think about their morals. Mapou ends the short book of poems with “Deblozay,”⁴⁷ (“Catasrophe”). The speaker advises the reader to face the hardships of life with strength because it is the only way to survive; people will fall and suffer in life, but must stand:

Ti mou-n, houn!
Lavi –a san bout
Vire-l, tounin-l
...
Prinme so pa so
...
Leve kanpe chak foua
...
Anba chay lesperyans rekòlte

⁴⁷ Deblozay can also mean trouble or disorder.

(ll.15-17, 20, 25, 32, *Bajou Kasé*, 17)

(Children,
This life is infinite
Spinning, turning
...
First fall is not a fall
...
Get up and stand every time
...
Through trials hope resounds)

In reverence of the Haitian Creole folk culture, Mapou deposits Haitian proverbs at the end of each poem in *Bajou Kase* and in most of his writings. For instance, at the end of “Deblozay,” he states, “Se soulye ki konnin si choset gin trou” (Only shoes know if socks have a whole); this means only those close to you know your faults/weakness; as with any proverbs, multiple meanings may apply to it. Moreover, Mapou’s acclaimed Creole play, *DPM*⁴⁸ *Kannté* (*DPM Boat*), dramatizes the plight of Haitian refugees. The play is set on the journey of one of the many Haitian boats anchored for the United States, for Miami, Florida, in search of peace, wealth and comfort. We learn about each character’s life and why they risk their lives to get on this boat. Many were traveling to escape poverty and the traumatic experiences and tortures dealt by the Papa Doc’s private militia –the Macoutes. 400 adults and children are crammed into a boat fit for about 50 to 100 people. The tragic life stories turned into a tragic journey when the boat sinks with all its passengers (except for a baby born as the boat sank) and their dreams of the imagined “Promise Land”-America.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, Creole poets began identifying and organizing the literary terms that suited their poetry. The art of throwing *pwent* is a

⁴⁸ DPM spells out in Créole the words “Drét Pou Miyami Kannté (Boat Directly to Miami)”

poetic term that has been strategically used by poets, but it is also part of Haiti's linguistic history. This poetic/linguistic/literary technique rooted in the Creole language is used to unmask a truth about a person or social condition or situation by masking it in the form of a riddle, parable, or indirect criticism, writing/speaking in the third person, and often times with a twist of fake humor. It is often used in political rhetoric, competing ads, and on a regular basis in everyday conversation. The poets previously discussed incorporated this technique in their poems as well as in their longer pieces of literature, but the latter poets I will discuss utilize this technique frequently in their works. Josaphat Large consistently employs this technique. In "Teks XXX" ("Text XXX") from his book of Creole poetry *Pè Sèt* (1994) (*Unyielding*):

se sa!
 chire liv mwen nan bibliyotèk
 mete dife sou non mwen
 efase figi-m nan libreri
 touye lonbraj mwen
 se sa!
 ...
 wè pa wè
 zèv mwen ap rete la tennfas!
 ke w-vle
 ke w-pa vle! (ll. 1-6, 16-19, *Pè Sèt*, 84)

(go ahead
 tear my books up in the library
 set my name on fire
 blot out my face in the bookstore
 kill my shadow...
 come what may
 my writings will endure
 like it
 or not!) (ll.1-6, 15-18, *Open Gate*, 125)

The speaker does not specify who he is condemning for desecrating his writings, but like in a pwent, a specific message is sent forth to a indistinct audience.

Moreover, Large is famous for *wongol*⁴⁹, which Creole poets during the 1960's also experimented with. *Wongol* is “yon fòm pwezi kreyol tou kout, ki bati sou [2,] 4, 5, 6, fraz powetik, Kap lagè youn mesaj cho...nan gagann youn sistèm ki chitah sou kof lestomak youn bann ti pep sou late”(It is a short poem, or short stanzas in a longer poem, created with [2,] 4, 5, 6 poetic phrases, that releases a heated message...down the throat of a social/political system that oppresses the less fortunate people on the earth) (Large, 10). In “Tèks XXIX” (“Text XXIX”), Large deliberately attacks writers who conceal or misrepresent the truth about the injustices in Haiti or wherever:

se sa!
mete dlo nan moulen enjistis-la Mesyedam!

fè machin koripsyon-an mache nan literati-a tou

kritik tèt gridap
literati-w se pou ou
met mounn ou vle ladan-n! (ll.1-7, *Pè Sèt*, 83)

(go on! /just so!
add water to the grinder of injustice, People!)

allow the machine of corruption to work in
literature too

shabby critics
your writing is yours
include whoever you want in it!)

Like Large Dr. Ernst Mirville (Pyè Banbou), writer, linguist and a founding member of the Kreyòl Movement, is also infamous for writing wongol poems. In Mirville's poem

⁴⁹ This form of poetry came onto the Haitian Creole literary scene during Haitian Créole movement on the radio station in Haiti called “radio Karayib” (1965-1969). The program was called Emisyon Solèy. (Large, 10)

“Wongol,” Haiti’s government and the condition of its citizens gets scrutinized rigorously:

Pa ba-m manje
si m’grangou:
m’pa bezwen bezwen-ou.
Se travay m’mande.

Nan peyi d’Ayiti
ou bezwen rich
Louvri youn komès mòg.
(ll. 1-4, 16-18, *Open Gate*, 82)

(Don’t give me food
if I’m hungry
I don’t need your need.
It’s work I’m asking for.

In the land of Haiti
if you want to be rich
open a mortuary business.) (*Open Gate*, 83)

As wongol poems, “Tèks XXIX” and “Wongol”, openly attacks its subject with no apologies. And like many of the Haitian Creole writers of the 1960’s, exile was the fate of Large and Mirville for opposing the politics of Duvalier (Papa).

Like pwent and wongol, *zwing* (“bits”) is also a ventilation method used to question and demean the injustice of Haiti’s society or of people’s inhumane treatment. *Zwing* is a short poem that is fast, straight forward and offensive (Large, 12). While Large is famous *zwing*, his equally famous literary comrades Jean Dorcely Dede (Jan Doseli Dede) and Kiki Wainwright (Kiki Wennryat) both utilize this form. Dede even has a poem titled “*Zwing*” (‘Bits’). “Bits” is broken into 14 stanzas of Dede’s blatant attacks on government institutions and is especially critical of Haiti. Below is a few examples of Dede’s use of *zwing*:

1.
Pou youn ti moso demokrasi
Wachintonn fè Ayiti fialanng
Alal wachintonn chich papa!

3
Nan youn peyi
Kote pa gen jistis
Kriminèl se sèl wa
Pa gen maladi
Chaje ak lanmò!

5
Koumanman!
Je gouvènman-an chèch
Pase dezè sahara

6
Gen jeni nan tout bagay
Minis fakto prezidan
Senatè depite magouyè
Tout se jeni malfektè

11
Pami tout bèt ki konn ranpe
Politisyen Ayiti pote preme pri
(*Open Gate*, 106,108,110)

1.
(For a piece of Democracy
Washington is teasing Haiti
How stingy Washington is, papa!

3.
In a country
Where there's no justice
Only the criminal is king
There is no sickness
It's full of death

5.
O migosh!
The government's eyes are drier
Than the Sahara Desert

6.
There's a PhD for anything
Defacto minister, president,
senators, scheming deputies
All have diploma in crookedness

11.
Among all animals that crawl
Haitian politicians take First prize)

(*Open Gate*, 107,109,111)

Similar to Dede, Wennrayt utilizes zwing to criticize the state of Haiti and its people, from his poetry to his short story essays, but he rarely sticks to the numeric format so much as to the subject matter. In “Changes”, Wennrayt attacks Duvalier’s private militia, the macoutes:

lè pou chanje vye konsepsyon makout
youn kansè k’ap manje trip pey-a
kondane-l
elimine-l
ranplase-l
ranplase-l pa respè
respè pou peyi-a
respè younn pou lt
respè pou tèt nou

...
lè pou nou chanje dirijan fachis
souflantyou pou grinbak
ti sousou restavèk mouche Sanm...
(ll.12-19, 24-26, *Open Gate*, 98)

(Time to finish off the rotten macoute mentality
The cancer that’s eating at the guts of our country,
Condemn it
Eliminate it
Replace it with respect
Respect for the country
For one another
And for ourselves

Time to get rid of fascist leaders
Boot-lickers for greenbacks
Ass-kissing toadies of Uncle Sam...
(*Open Gate*, 99)

Lastly, another technique used by Haitian Creole poets is *Imajs* (Imagery⁵⁰).

Imajs is fast like a zwing poem but the abstract or inanimate object, which is the central

⁵⁰ “A word or group of words evoking concrete visual, auditory or tactile associations” (Lawn , 953).

focus of the poem, becomes an animate object or acquires human related actions (Large, 12). This form of poetry is noticeably rooted from American and English writers of the early 20th century which later appeared in French and Haitian literature. Michel-Ange Hyppolite⁵¹ as a modern writer has captured this technique in his works, and “Speech” is one of them:

Lapawòl monte bwa
 Vèvè Ogoun Feray
 chire tan-an
 ...
 Pawòl li klete
 Men rèv li
 Se latriye mo monte
 K’ap deplòtonnen fòs nou.
 (ll. 1-3, 12-15, *Open Gate*, 78)

*(Speech has crawled up a tree
 Ogoun Feray’s vèvè
 rips time to shreds

 His voice is locked up
 but his dreams
 are the artillery of words loaded
 To uncoil our strength (Open Gate, 79)*

Kiki Wennrayt’s “Lgounm” (“Phlegm”) also uses the imagery technique, along with the *pwent* style:

sou kòf lestomak peyi-m
 yon gwo lagoum lamizé
 refize detache
 chak kou peyi-a touse
 lemond antye tande
 (ll. 1-5, *Nan Tan Malouk...*, 126)

(on my country’s chest
 big phlegm of misery
 refuses to discharge its stringy mucus

⁵¹ Michel-Ange Hyppolite (Kaptenn Koukouwouj) is the leader of the Haitian literary movement “The Society of Fire Flies” (Sosyete Kokouy) in Ottawa, Canada

every time the country coughs
its coughing is heard all over the world)
(*Nan Tan Malouk...*, 127)

Furtermore, novelist, dramatist and poet Frank Etienne (Frank Etyen) has written much literature in Creole and French, but he remains famous for writing the first Haitian Creole novel *Dézafi* (*Cockfight Marathon*) (1975) and his Diaspora play *Pèlen Tèt* (*Mind Trap*) (1978). Etyen's writing style is unique. He is the innovator of the literary movement called Spiralisme that originated in the late 1960's. Spiralisme

Never openly political, advocated a literary experimentation which was totally opposed to the closed discourse of authoritarian politics. It was only during the somewhat more relaxed regime of Jean-Claude Duvalier that spiralisme began to confront the Haitian state. ("Haiti")

Also, Spiralisme was moving away from indiginiste/noirism movement; Spiralist writers were concerned with "issues of identity formation, political corruption (*Dézafi*), alienation (*Pèlen Tèt*), exile and linguistic authentication" (Glover, 3). All of Etyen's writings explore these factors using Haitian charcters in Hait or exile. The title of Etyen's *Dézafi* has a few meanings; it means disturbance, challenge or cockfight marathon. All the definitions reflect the message of the book. Disturbance applies to the lives of the characters caught up in the struggle to survive in poverty. But Etyen writes how disturbances affect all lives. The well-to-do character Jerome may be comfortable, but he is a blind man with a tormented soul who has become dependent on his poor maid to function. The definition of challenge applies to the everyday hustle the poor characters take on in order to provide for themselves. Life becomes a challenge to survive for all the characters whether rich or poor. And cockfight, the last definition of dezafi also

stands as a metaphor for the characters' lives. They are trapped in a life (cage) and with other helpless cocks to fight to live with no aide from the government. The characters are like the cocks endlessly fighting for their livelihood regardless of the outcome- death or deliverance/victory. It is obvious that Etyen felt obligated to unmask the struggles of a society engulfed by economic devastation, which is one of the trademarks of spiralisme.

Moreover, the writing technique of spiralisme is vague with no theory applied to its aesthetic. Spiral is the perfect word to describe this style of writing because it unpredictable in the order of its writing. In *Dézafi*, Etyen does not just write in prose, but in between each chapter, either prior to or after each scene, he incorporates poetry and Haitian proverbs. Also, the management of the space on the pages sparadically changes from words and sentences spread apart to the traditional paragraphs linking sentences close together. These creative mechanisms can be disturbing/challenging to a reader in comparison to traditional writing style, but *Dézafi* does mean disturbance, so the reading experience itself becomes a challenge. Within his unique style of writing in *Dézafi*, he manages to integrate the *pwent* style (as well as alliteration): “*Yo toufé-nou, toufounin-nou./ Yo chiré-nou, Chifonnin nou*” (They supress us, torment us. They tear us up/rough us up) (208). He also, using the Creole language, employs American writer Ernest Hemmingway’s short simple sentence style, called Minimalism⁵² but he makes the words play rhythmic tune:

Konplotay. Lang-nou *maré*. Bouch-nou *klété*.
Voup! Nou *kanpé*. Nou *ponpé*. Nou frapé kò-nou
até. Nou *maté*. Nou ouété kròk lan kou nou. Voua-
nou pimpée monté *nètalé*. (*Dézafi*, 212)

(Scheming. Our tongues are bound. Our mouths
are locked. Boom! We stand. We pounce. We

⁵² a lot of meaning with little words

slam our bodies onto the floor. We rise up. We
remove the shackles from our neck. Our voices are
lifted up high.)

Unlike many of his writer comrades, Etyen did not emigrate from Haiti during the Duvalier era; this is why his writings are noted for capturing the horrific experiences Haitians faced during the Duvalier regime in Haiti. This accounts for his intense rendition of the brutality and deprivation his characters faced and the rage and pain expressed in their voices. Additional Creole works published by Etyen are *Troufoban* (1977), *Bobomasouri* (1984), *Kaselezo* (1985), *Totolomannwèl* (1986), *Melovivi* (1987), *Minywi mwen senk* (1988), *Kalibofobo* (1988), which are plays, and *Zagoloray* (1983) and *Adjanoumelezo* (1987) are works showcasing spiralisme in its purest form.

I reserve my discussion of Haitian Creole female writers for the end. They are few in number. Creole literature by Haitian women authors, is quite small, but has established accreditation both from its readership in Haiti and also more so from abroad. Women writers are few, but their genius, their subject matter and writing style stands with the best male writers. For example, Mercedes F. Guignard, whose pseudonym is Deyita, is the first Haitian woman to have written and published a book of poems *Majodyol*, (1981), drama *Filibè*, 1978, and novel *Esperans Desire* (1989) and short stories and fables *Kont Nan Jaden Peyi TiToma* (1991) in Creole. She was the only woman member of “The Society Of Fire Flies” (the Sosyete Koukouy), founded in 1965. Haiti, its academia and its literary market are very much male dominated, so Deyita has created a space for Haitian women writers of the Creole language to grow and create. In the first and highly commendable critical text, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, Myriam Chancy situates and stabilizes Haitian women’s voices that have been drowned

out by Haiti's male dominated culture. Though Chancy's text discusses mainly Francophone writers, with the exception of Edwidge Danticat, Chancy does create an arena where we can place and learn the experiences of Haitian women in novels (both French and Creole) and history. Chancy shows how Haitian women writers contributed and continue to contribute in fighting for freedom and progress in Haiti. Their novels have a revolutionary tone. Chancy argues that it is not coincidental that the emergence of Haitian women writers began with the onset of the American Occupation. The wave of women writers writing feminist and politically charged texts allowed the repressed voices and experiences of women on all class levels to be heard. The silent or silenced voices were now on a microphone crafted by paper and pen/ink. *Open Gate*, which features mainly militant Haitian poetry, also includes Deyita's "Y'ap Kite Brid Sou Kou" ("They're Leaving With A Bridle Round The Neck.") Though written in the latter 1980's, the speaker communicates as if she is reliving the horrifying experience of the American Occupation during 1915-1934. She expresses the core of fear and resentment many Haitians had with the American Occupation:

Youn jou yo antre kousiprann
 daso yo te vin prann
 Yo di "Nou la pou nou ede"
 Lè sezisman pase nou rete nou gade
 nou tout te minote
 de bra de pye mare
 Tan te menmjan prèske
 ak lè Panyòl t'ap banboche
 ak lè Fransè t'ap reskiye

Konsa yo antre san frappe
 yo di "Se gwo gift nou pote"
 konsa youn jou maten
 pwomès te plen panyen
 Le panyen chavire
 LENJISTIS pran pouse

GARNGOU leve kanpe
PIYAY òganize
DEBWAZMAN mete pye
LIBÈTE te bwaze
KAKO t'ap choukete (ll. 9-28, *Open Gate*, 70-71)

(One day they entered by surprise
and tried to crash the party
They said, "We're here to help"
When the shock was over we looked around and
realized
we were all in handcuffs
arms and legs tied up
It was almost the same
as when the Spanish partied off us
and the French mooched off us

They came in with out knocking
and said, "It's a big gift we are carrying
just like that one morning
promises filled our baskets
When the baskets were overturned
INJUSTICE began to grow
HUNGER stood upright
PLUNDER got organized
DEFORESTATION took a step
LIBERTY went into hiding
The CACOS made themselves like stumps)
(*Open Gate*, 71)

Also, "Y'ap Kite Brid Sou Kou" is a pwent poem, which makes specific accusations towards the subject "yo", yet leaving "yo" to be identified by the reader. By the second stanza, the "yo" ("they") are quickly identified as America/American administrators and armed forces. As the third occupier/exploiter of the Haiti, America is compared to the Spanish and French conquerors that previously colonized the island. The unwelcomed visitors (yo/they) came under false pretense, and the speaker makes it clear that yo/they will be handled with the same deception that will lead to their departure "with a bridle round their neck/and I'll say they got what they were looking for" (y'ap kite brid soukou/

e m'a di kou pou kou.) (ll. 41-42, *Open Gate*, 73-74). This type of political poem is famous amongst the exiled Creole poets (Mapou, Moriso-Lewa, Laraq, and Fouche) Deyita, who herself left Haiti and returned after the Duvalier regime was ousted, works deal with the social, political and economical issues facing Haiti and its women, whether it is in her poetry, her kongs/riddles using animals ("Mes Solanel Pou Rat" (Solemn Service for Rats)⁵³ or in her novel *Esperans Dezire*.

Chancy claims that "Haitian women's literature should be read as a literature of revolution" and Deyita's poem, with other selected Creole works by Haitian women, sets the stage. But Chancy's definition of revolution "emerges from a radical feminist perspective in which the search for an irrevocable alteration of the status quo, not only between women and men, but among women themselves, in context of oppression, is demanded" (6). This form of radical feminism in which its "tenets [are] grounded in an awareness and open defiance of the forces of multiple oppression ... by making visible the effects of that oppression on the lives of third world women" (7) is shared by Chancy who embraced this concept, initiated by editors Gloria Anzaldua and Cherie Moraga in *This Bridge Called My Back*, in reading and re-reading Haitian women's literature.

Reading Haitian women's literature through a radical feminist lens is appropriate. In Deyita's novel *Esperans Dezire*, Deyita openly explores the prejudices and injustices within Haitian society towards women, especially poor women, the poor and underprivileged, orphans and the uneducated. It overturns all the traditional and historical make-up of Haiti's society to give birth to a female dominated and narrated

⁵³ Story plot: A large number of rats, from a boat filled with goods from France docks in Haiti (landing in Gonaïve), infiltrate the island and take advantage of the Priest (the people) and his abode. But justice is served when an army of cats from Valparaizo annihilates them to restore peace on the island. Valparaizo means a valuable paradise; a name given to the town of Port-de Paix, in Haiti, by Christopher Columbus upon his landing on the island.

herstory. Most of Deyita's male protagonists are emasculated while the female protagonists are strong, in charge and a savior to their community. *Esperans Dezire* captures women's social and political issues.

Deyita's female protagonists survive against all odds. *Esperans Dezire* has many powerful female figures. The first two female figures Gran Tazi (a meat vendor) and Rejina (non-traditional midwife) participate in empowering the protagonist, Yaya, an orphaned restavec (child slave). Gran Tazi nurtured her body and spirit. Gran Tazi takes Yaya at sixteen years old into her care after she becomes pregnant by her caregiver's son and is thrown out into the street. Yaya had the passion to educate herself intellectually; from the time she was a young restavec into her teenage years, she learns to read and write from the books of the young man who later impregnates her. Rejina equips Yaya with a skill to survive and meet the needs of her child and herself and her community. As a non-traditional midwife, Yaya not only learns the natural/herbal healing medicines from the earth of her island, but she becomes familiar with the body's science. Knowing how to read and write and obtaining knowledge of body and healing medicines, Yaya becomes a vital force and source in her community. She created, with help from her community, an informal night school where children of all ages learn how to read and write. She later, against all odds and almost being killed by macoutes, becomes a certified registered nurse.

A few vital events occurred in order for Yaya's daughter, Esperans Dezire, to fulfill her destiny. Firstly, Yaya gives birth to twins but the boy dies at birth (strangled by the umbilical cord) leaving Esperans Dezire as the centerpiece of the story. Secondly, while Yaya instructs Esperans Dezire about responsibility to her community, Yaya's

future mother-in law, Madam/Mrs. Bonjan, takes Esperans Dezire into her home in the city and grooms her for society while she receives an upscale Haitian education, which enables her to study abroad and become a lawyer. Lastly, in order for Esperans Dezire to reach her full potential, by becoming Haiti's first woman president, she rejects her lover's proposal to marry, until after she gets into office. The women unite with one another to create the perfect, determined and well rounded female character Esperans Dezire.

Esperans Dezire can be used as a critical text for a post-modern study of Creole literature. It presents Haiti's and women's issues, through profound subject matters, well rounded and complex characters and their turbulent yet victorious lives; it also shows the reader the reality of life in Haiti's cities and rural areas and that achievement is possible regardless of gender or socio-economic oppression.

Deyita began writing in the mid 1970's, along with pivotal male descendents of Creole literature. Women's voices were also emerging in Creole literature. Chancy was accurate about Haitian women's literature as revolutionary, but she is far off the mark when she, in agreement with Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature*, believes that the "novel as narrative lends itself more clearly to the political project of analyzing and redefining social norms than does poetry"(9). This is not the case for Haitian Creole poetry as we have previously observed. It is capable of conveying substantial subject matters as a lengthy novel in just a few lines (wongol). Like the Creole language, Creole poetry is raw, honest, unapologetic, political and intense. As for Creole poetry written by Haitian women, its is more than radical; it is her-story, her sexuality, her aspirations, her liberation, her country's wounds written in ink in her mother's tongue-Creole.

Jacqueline Scott (Jaklin Skot), who resides in Africa, in her poem "Loray Kale"

(“Hatching Thunder”), which was selected for the *Open Gate* anthology, sums up the continual plight of the Haitian women. The woman is both the hatcher and a hatching thunder. As the hatcher she gives birth to possibilities, hopes and dreams; and as a thunder in an egg she is ready to light up the world and loudly makes her presence known on earth. Unfortunately, she just yearns and frustratingly waits. Skot’s poem echoes the agony of being stifled as a woman who is ready to face the world head on with all its whirlwinds, but she cries out that “lavi ap boulvèse-m/m’sè on loray kale” (life’s been screwing me over/I’m like a thunder in the egg) (ll.10-11, *Open Gate*, 128-129). Her dreams and aspirations are bigger than the world/egg she is stuffed/suppressed into:

di-m tanpri souple
 si n’kwè m’kab reve,
 si n’kwè m’kab chante,
 m’twò loray kale (ll.45-48, *Open Gate*, 130)

(Tell me please
 whether you think I can Dream/
 whether you think I can sing/
 I’m too much thunder in the egg.)
 (*Open Gate*, 131)

Though her dreams maybe deferred,⁵⁴ they are not destroyed because she testifies that “yon jou va vyendra/ solèy pou klere/ tout loray kale” (a day’s gonna come/the sun’s gonna shine/on all hatching thunders) (ll.55-57, *Open Gate*, 130-131). While Scott, expressed her frustration with the restraints against women, Suze Baron (Siz Bawon), in “Tanbou Pale” (“Tom-Tom Talk”) explores the freedom of a woman (mentally, physically and sexually) through the voodoo dance ritual of spirit possession. The title invokes how the drum speaks, reinforcing that the drum and the spirit rise together, but the drum is in charge and has power over flesh. Thus all who succumb to it are not

⁵⁴ The speaker’s dream is like Langston Hughes’ “A Dream Deferred”.

responsible for their action. Being free when being controlled by a spirit is not really freedom at all, but it is a release of the female's inner desires through her body movements. Spirit possession allows the women possessed to obtain power during the moment of possession. She can be forgivingly sexual and a whore, she can be domineering and mean, and she can also be a man. In this poem the female persona named YaYa is releasing, experiencing and enjoying her sexuality as the spirit controls her:

tanbou-a pale
Ti-Roro fè
tanbou-a pale
nòt yo leve
yo mache
y'al sote
sou Sò Yaya

yo rantre
nan kòlèt li
yo jwe anba vant li
teke zantray li

...

lò mizik la fini
figi Yaya w'a di
oun fanm ki
fèk fin fè lanmou (ll.1-11, 21-24, *Open Gate*, 146)

(that tom-tom talked
Ti-Roro made
that tom-tom talk
them notes got up
walked around
an' jumped on
sista Yaya

they went through
her collar
played with her middle
tickled her guts

...

when the music stopped
Yaya's face looked
like that of a lover
who's done had some lovin') (*Open Gate*, 147)

Bawon not only wrote about women's sexuality, she also wrote sociopolitical poetry. Her short poem "Yo Di" ("They Say"), written in the form of *pwent*, is a critical judgment on the slanderous murders and exploitation of Haitians. The continuous historical traumas on Haiti's soil are so immense and the criminals are so vast they can span from the horrors of slavery, to nightmares of the Duvalier regime and to the terrorism of its citizens by its people in the 21st century:

Yo di
san kretyen
enrichi
latè

Si sete vre
Si sete vre
mezanmi

ala diri
pitimi
ak mayi

ki ta genyen
lan peyi
D'ayiti (ll.1-13, *Open Gate*, 148)

(They say
human blood
enriches the soil

If it were so
If it were so
my friends

rice millet and corn
would be plenty

in Haiti) (*Open Gate*, 149)

Moreover, Boadiba, who resides in the United States, also addresses the exploitive state of Haitians, but on foreign soil. In “Nou Pase Kay Etranje” (“We pass Though A Foreigner’s House”), the speaker sheds light on the disappointments of the new world:

Nou pase kay etranje
Nou jwenn pitit nou
Ap bale papòt (ll.1-4, *Open Gate*, 214)

(We go up a foreigner’s steps
And find our children
Sweeping his floor) (*Open Gate*, 215)

We also witness the vulnerability of the speaker’s culture and its exploitation:

Nou chita nan salon etranje
Nou wè tablo nou
Kwoke sou mi
Nou tande mizik nou ap sot nan gagann yo

N’antre nan kizin etranje
Nou jwenn toutrèl nou
Ap kuit nan chodyè yo

Yo ta chode toutrèl lavi-n
Yo ta toufe zwezo bèlte-n
(ll.5-13, *Open Gate*, 214)

(We pass through the foreigners’ house
And find our paintings
On his wall
We hear our music coming from his gullet

We enter into the foreigner’s kitchen
And find our dove
In his cooking pot

He is trying to cook our bird alive
He is trying to smother our wild dove⁵⁵) (*Open*

⁵⁵ Some forms of wild doves live in Hiati; they are tropical birds which should not be housed because poor ventilation will harm the bird.

Gate, 215)

But the spirit does not remain defeated because the speaker notes, “Men gen moun ki pase/Chodyè-a dekouvri/Toutrèl vole l’ale” (Someone’s lifting the lid/The dove’s escaping) (ll.14-16,*Open Gate*, 214-215). The dove is a representation of the essence of the people and their caged culture and its inability to soar to its height on its own terms. So lifting the pot does two things: removes the spirit of hopeless entrapment and gives it a chance to live and grow beyond its boundaries. They need to be free and in the open. Moreover, in “Autozobop” (Otozòbòp), the speaker explores the mysticism of voodoo in the practice of spirit possession. The woman speaker/victim is fighting hard not to lose her soul:

Mwen konn sa, m’oblige
Chanje lapè-m an volonte
Pu san-m pa montre kote pouyo antre
Pou kè-m pa twonpe-m, pou mwen ka reziste
(ll. 40-43, *Open Gate*, 212)

(I know that I must
Change my fear into willpower
So my blood doesn’t show them a way to enter
So my heart doesn’t betray me, so I can resist)
(*Open Gate*, 213)

She must become fearless to resist and triumph over losing herself, her identity and the very essence of her being –her soul. In “Madam la Prezidan” (“Madam President”) the speaker describes two women: one who is conscious of her country’s devastated state and another who is conscious of her selfish need. As a birthday present the first one wants:

Tout peyi-a
Kouvri ak rivyè k’rekonmanse chante
Pou tout wout dlo ap rezonnen
Ak rèl timoun k’ap benyen

(ll.26-29, *Open Gate*, 216)

(The whole country
Covered with rivers that are singing again
So that all the waterways resound
With the shouts of children bathing)
(*Open Gate*, 217)

The other woman, the “pretty lady” wants:

On “Porsche” nèf
On nouvo dyaman
On pi grp bato
On lòt pè zè
Pou vèlè lakansyèl
On annui ètenèl
Anba on syèl blan, mètèl.
(ll. 1-37, *Open Gate*, 218)

(A brand new Porsche,
A new diamond,
A bigger yacht,
Another pair of wings
To steal the rainbow,
Eternal boredom
Under a burning white sky) (*Open Gate*, 219)

Boadiba’s play on the social female characteristics/personalities questions the use of power women have and how they apply it.

Furthermore, Maude Heurtelou, who has written the series of books *Lafami Bonplezi* (1994) (*The Bonplezi Family: The story of an Haitian Family Living Abroad*) and *Sezisman! Pou Lafanmi Bonplezi* (1996) (*Surprises for the Bonplezi Family*), about a Haitian family, explores a wide spectrum of Haitian issues. From the agony of a sterile and unstable country, to awareness of class discrimination, social injustice and the plight of the transplanted (by sea and air) Haitians residing in the United States and Europe. Heurtelou’s eclectic books display all the joyous and treacherous aspects of Haitian life,

as it pertains to men and women. While her books were predominately written in Creole, she incorporates French, Spanish and English into her trilogies. *Lafami Bonplezi* takes place in America. In this text unions are created between Haiti, Europe, Canada and America (Chicago, New York, Miami, and California), white and black, poor and educated, and Creole and English, which is a replica of the fusion of cultures, the shifts between homelands and inherited identities. For example, the character Stiv (Steve), like his dad (Ti Jan) speaks in Creole-English: “Li la⁵⁶... are you coming over here, I mean, w ap vini isit jodiya⁵⁷? (135) This is the case for many second generation and third generation Haitians living in America; there is a constant shift from speaking English to Creole, thereby, almost mutating the two languages. Also, the wedding of Gaston (who is Haitian) and Margaret (who is Irish American) reemphasizes the union between the multiple identities and cultures inevitably crossed in Haiti and other Caribbean islands historically. The bride’s parents state “ We would cherish these assorted chocolates...I love mix race kids, they are the future of the world unity...” (262). Heurtelou presents candidly the social conditions and mental complexities of Haitian’s daily issues. In Heurtelou’s writing the merging of Creole, French, English, and Spanish is a reflection of the new generation of Creole writers who are incorporating their multiple identities/languages into their works. These new artists no longer write in one language, but in the language that fits their inherited or acquired identity through migration. In the following chapter, I will continue to look at the influence of spoken language(s) in works of fiction and non-fiction by Haitian American and other Caribbean writers and the interrelation of language and identity.

⁵⁶ Translation: He is here...

⁵⁷ jodiya means today

Haitian Creole writers against all odds culturally, politically and artistically choose Haitian Creole to create their work and celebrate their Haitian identity. And if Haitian art can bring Haitian life to life, then Creole is a very capable language to do so. These writers chose to embrace the Creole language. The expression of complex emotions, the intellectual capacity and the sophisticated use of poetic techniques, not only justifies Creole as a language of the arts in the 20th century, but informed early 18th and 19th century works. Creole literature taps into and expresses deep human emotions and conditions. It should not be viewed as just a revolutionary language, but as a language of intellect, which captures and seals the History of Haiti and its people whether abroad or on the island. Creole is at the core of the Haitian identity with its fluctuating melodious tones expressing Haitianess. In his effort to establish Haitian Creole and its literature, James G. Leyburn, in reference to Creole, in *The Haitian People* (1980), questions when patois or a dialects become a “true” language:

When it has definite rules of grammar, declension, and rhetoric? Creole has them all... When it acquires the dignity of a literature? Increasingly the most original Haitian authors write their novels and poems in Creole or with large passages in that tongue... When it gains wide concurrence? No Haitian is ignorant of Creole. (297)

As of now, there are countless American-Haitians⁵⁸, Haitians in Haiti, America, Canada, Europe and Africa writing in Creole. I have presented some of the key writers and figures of Creole literature, but the rest remains to be explored.

⁵⁸ Born in America of Haitian parents.

CHAPTER 3

“To Be Or Not to Be: Linguistic Conflicts in Caribbean Identities”

I have survived annihilation, both cultural and personal, by clinging to the vestiges of Creole that lie dormant in my mind... (*Framing Silence*, Myriam J. Chancy, 16)

On this island, you walk too far and people speak a different language. Their own words reveal who belongs on what side. (*Farming of Bones*, Edwidge Danticat, 304)

Farming of Bones (1998) has the daunting task of revealing the core issue of the sociolinguistic condition both in the Caribbean and also in Caribbean novels. In novels spanning from Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, Dominican Republic, Antigua, Grenada and Cuba we witness how language locates both the social and economic status of the characters, and in some incidences, even their destinies. Language also decides where you live on the island or what type of work you do. It participates in either suppressing and dismantling the protagonist(s) identity or the recovery of it; and in other cases, the very language the central character(s) may speak becomes responsible for the physical and/or allegorical death and destruction of the body (especially, in Edwidge Danticat's the *Farming of Bones* and Merle Hodge's *Crick, Crack, Monkey*) or the soul (in *Our House in the Last World* by Oscar Hijuelos). My goal in this chapter is to reveal how the language spoken by the main characters or by their relatives in *Farming of Bones*, Jean Cadet's non-fiction *Restavec*, Marie Helene Laforest's short story "Language of the Gods," *Crick, Crack, Monkey*, Merle Collins' *Angel*, Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Our House in the Last World* is responsible for either the psychological or social torment they experience as they either fight for, search for or try to define/redefine their identity.

In the gripping historical novel *Farming of Bones*, we explicitly confront the criticality of language and identity as it relates to and recounts the Massacre of 1937 in which Haitians on Dominican soil were terrorized, tortured and killed by Dominican officials who convinced themselves through the coaxing of president Trujillo that the island of the Dominican Republic needed to cleanse itself of its darker neighbor who spoke a foreign tongue. The language issue in *Farming of Bones* makes us aware of the important role language plays in distinguishing ones identity in a society. The Haitian individual incapable of communicating clearly in Spanish or with a “proper” Spanish accent, immediately jeopardizes his/her citizenship or ties to the Dominican Republic and its people. The key technique that determined and contributed to the expulsion of Haitians during the massacre was greater than race, color or class; it was about the tongue. Haitians who could not pronounce parsley with a Dominican Spanish accent were immediately signaled for terror and death. The keeper/boss of the main protagonist Amabelle, señora Valencia, recounts one of the many stories of how the Generalissimo President Trujillo discovered the secret to identifying Haitians from Dominicans: “...the Generalissimo had a realization. Your [Haitian] people did not trill their *r* the way we [the Dominicans] do, or pronounce the jota. ‘You [a Haitian] can never hide as long as there is parsley nearby,’ the Generalissimo is believed to have said.” (304)

Father Romain, a priest to the Haitian parishioners in the valley where they labor and rest, frequently, in his sermons “...reminded everyone of common ties: language, foods, history, carnival, songs, tales and prayers” (73). Ironically, two of the common ties that connected Haitians together would also destroy them: language and food. The same plant that nurtured the Haitian body would be the same one to destroy it. Amabelle

remembers, "We used parsley for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides."(203) They use the parsley in their Haitian way, but they could not own the word in its Dominican form. So the inability to pronounce parsley, "perejil," caused them to perish, so language and a food/plant became a tie that would bond Haitians in life and death. Amabelle makes it clear that while Haitians used parsley to purge themselves clean, the Generalissimo used it to purge his country of Haitians. (203) Odette's last words were "pèsi," parsley in Creole. She died Haitian by saying it in Creole; she affirmed her Haitian identity in death. She also does not die conforming to a Dominican identity:

The Generalissimo's mind was surely dark as death, but if he had heard Odette's "pèsi," it might have startled him, not the tears and supplications he would have expected, no shriek from unbound fear, but a provocation, a challenge, a dare. To the devil with your world, your grass, your wind, your water, your air, your words. You ask for perejil, I give you more. (203)

Odette obviously gives more than perejil, she gives her life trying to preserve and protect her Haitianess. To say perejil correctly signifies that the Haitians had assimilated and taken on a Dominican identity. Amabelle mentions often that she could pronounce the word like a Dominican with ease, but she chooses to be with her people. Pronouncing the word parsley in Spanish would not be hard for Amabelle because she was basically raised on the island from childhood into adulthood, since a Dominican family kept her after her parents' drowning death years ago in the same water that was swallowing souls of Haitians during the 1937 massacre. Some children of Haitians born in the Dominican

Republic were able to pronounce perejil, but whoever carried their parents' accent could not disguise their Haitianness and, therefore, they too were killed.

The word Parsley becomes the metaphor for either the claiming or rejecting the Haitian identity, and that is why the language(s) we speak represents the very essence of who we are. To say perjil with ease was a proud signifier of Dominican identity for the Dominican or Haitian who wanted to be or pass for a Dominican, while for the Haitian who wanted to be Haitian it was a curse against his identity and the death of his existence.

Taking on another language can be seen also as the art of disguising identity. This is the mask Frantz Fanon presents in *Black Face White Masks*: masking identity through language. This has been a historical and immobilizing psycho-socio factor in the Caribbean. From the Spanish speaking islands, to the French and the English islands it is the same: to master the master's tongue is to be his equal or close enough to his equal. When this new identity has been acquired (by learning/having access to the dominant language), it also changes or signifies your social milieu, not to mention access to higher means in that particular society and better living space. This case has particular valence in the Caribbean as we witness in the many novels how the characters shift from one society to the next, and as they do so, their language fluctuates along with their journeys. This journey is usually between country and city or homeland and abroad.

The Farming of Bones represents Caribbean authors' novels concerned with issues of language and identity. I will be exploring how Caribbean works from Haitian, Jamaican, Trinidadian, Grenadian, Cuban and Dominican writers bluntly expose how the language one speaks concurrently prescribes the speaker's identity, and in the process the

protagonists either choose to erase their identity, suppress it or fight to claim or reclaim it, and ultimately in most cases, against all odds, embrace it. The language issues these characters face play an intricate part in connecting the protagonists to their roots whether they want to be identified with their roots or not.

Moreover, in *Restavec* (1998), Jean-Robert Cadet recounts his life story as a Haitian slave child. After the death of his mother, he was separated from his maternal lineage in the country and was handed over (with an envelop of money) to a middle class family in the capital of Port-au-Prince by his white father. This act had two agendas: to hide and erase his identity and any link to his white father's love affair with his black mother. Cadet was a commodity because his father would pay his keeper a stipend to keep him, and his keeper, in turn, would borrow him out. While Cadet was well versed in French, he was not allowed to communicate in French. He had to speak in Creole only, because he was a house servant; the French language was left to the elite and middle working class. For example, when Cadet was playing with a young boy he worked for, his owner Florence reprimanded them both, but she addressed them in different languages: "What's going on down there? Bobby, don't you have work to do?" she asked in Creole. "And Oliver, don't you have homework to do?" she asked in French" (52). This act confirms the two children's social position. Robert was the poor slave child and his friend was of the elite. Their class status determines the language in which they communicate and are spoken to. Also, speaking the wrong language can be costly depending on when and where the speaker applies it, which includes the risk of social chastisement. When Cadet speaks to his owner's/boss' kinfolk in Creole, he is beaten for

doing so. To speak to them in Creole is to belittle their social, economical and intellectual status.

After his owner's son arranges for her to come live with him in America, a gleam of freedom comes into Cadet's life when he eventually returns to his mother's hometown. Contrary to his life in the city, in Port au Prince, Cadet, in his mother's hometown in the countryside, becomes humanized. He is no longer treated as an animal or slave. His stature also changes along with his application of language. He speaks both French and Creole freely with no social stigma or restrictions. The town people respect him because he is recognized as the son of the infamous white Frenchman: they call Blanc Philippe (White Phillip). He is no longer a degenerate child made to feel low when using Creole or spoken to in Creole. It is a safe place to speak French and Creole and he became a whole person. His French and Haitian identities were melodiously connecting. He can merge his two identities with a sense of security. Additionally, in his mother's hometown, when he articulates in French, it also simultaneously identifies him with his white French identity. His teacher, in the country, exalts him and calls him 'petit blanc⁵⁹,' which Cadet notes is "the highest praise for intelligence." (75) On the other hand, if he were to attempt to use the French language in Port au Prince, as a slave child, he would be a mockery and an insult amongst the elite, because he would be out of place socially and economically. Acquiring, mastering and using French showed his deep desire to be accepted by his father's social circle in Haiti and by his father as a person rather than being seen as a product of poverty and a socially racial taboo.

As a *restavec* he was only allowed to speak Creole and was spoken to only in Creole, which always associated him as a poor black child of a poor black servant. When

⁵⁹ little white boy

he became older and would meet with his father he would talk to him in French (and later in English also), which indicated: I have been educated, I'm not an ignorant bastard and I am your son. Though this accomplishment did not change his father's complete acceptance of him, it made Cadet feel confident and proud of himself and his determination to succeed. Also, Cadet never rejected either language. As a slave child, just like he kept the secret of having a white father, he kept the French he learned, through some public night schools for poor children and his boss' children books, as a secret also and articulated only in Creole; as a servant and Creole speaker he was not worthy of the French language or for his father to claim him, yet he never suppressed Creole after he mastered the French language. As a young boy in his mother's town, he spoke confidently in Creole and French with no resentment towards Creole, regardless of the status Creole allotted to him

Furthermore, as a young adult, in America, Cadet's acquisition of the English language erases his past circumstances and begins to change him psychologically and socially. As he acquires the language of a culture that is mainstream and represents world power, he too gains access to power and social and financial mobility. He graduates high school, goes to the army, graduates college and becomes an interpreter and educator. His use of language and the ambiguity of his identity are reassessed in America. Also, his use of French in America changed his demeanor and past identity. He was allowed to claim the French language, and in turn became a French teacher and an assistant to and the interpreter for the French consul in Tampa, Florida.

When speaking both French and Creole, his identities were both white French and black Haitian, but the English language neutralizes these identities and ended the war

between them as he felt his “black Haitian soul was being Americanized” (160). The English language is beyond his and Haiti’s historical battle of the *linguidentity* issue. America, the melting pot, manages to disintegrate the horrors connected to his multiple identities. It is also important to mention that it is in America that he sought counseling to deal with the tragedies of his childhood as a slave child and a ‘tragic mulatto.’

America/English allowed him to face his father with confidence, and also, confront and chastise his keeper, Florence for enslaving him. In America he was black, Haitian and American. All the issues in between were cancelled out like the extra accent marks in French and Creole, which help signify the differences between how words appear from how they actually sounds.

In Cadet’s story America has the task of melting/canceling past identity struggles as individuals come to the States and become Americanized, similarly, the collection of short stories from the *Foreign Shores* by Haitian writer Marie-Helene Laforest explores the Haitian life in Haiti and the States and how many of the characters identities get reassessed. She is distinctive in presenting the issues that plague Haitians in Haiti and also across the American borders: from natives living vicariously through Sears Catalogues, emulating and envying Western culture in “Wish Book”; to class and language political struggles as it concerns rearing up children speaking French only and raising them outside of the countryside in “Ma’s Household” to stories of exiles living in the States who have lost their past lives and every possession in escaping the torture of Duvalier’s dictatorship in “Exiles”; to issues of Aids and the process of de-Haitianizing in “All His Troubles Gone”; and finally, to the journey back home to an estranged and unfamiliar Haiti in “After the Fall.” While most stories tackle lightly issues pertaining to

language and the Haitian identity, “Language of the Gods” explores in depth how language participates in the creation of an identity.

The story begins at the funeral of Charles, one of the central characters. He is a Haitian man who, before moving to America, began to create his American identity by learning English. His lessons in English and in life were fostered by Pastor Joe and Pastor Phil, who his wife notes “were pure Americans” (104). Charles entrusted his life to the American pastors and to everything American. His wife, Marinette, recalls how “Charles whose greatest pleasure was to hear his children pronounce English with their lips so tight that the words echoed inside their mouths before coming out” (107). In another incident, while Marinette tells May a story about the Haitian folk hero Bouki, Charles blatantly opposes her:

“Why are you doing this to me?”...”You want to ruin all my efforts?” “What happen to *Bouki*?”
May wanted her to continue. Charles cut her ribbon of words and her mouth hung open like its unfinished end...Charles lifted May with the chair and took her away to tell her about Noah’s ark which was the first English story he had learned by heart. (114-115)

While Marinette struggles to maintain her Haitian identity by holding on to the Creole language, Charles persists in establishing an American identity for their children by requiring them to speak in English only and Marinette states that “Roger and May spoke as if they were born in New York and had not come over [to the States] when they were three and five” (107). Marinette's deepest longing was for her children to know the language of their roots:

She would have loved for Roger and May to have learned one song, one little song in Kreyol, a little

lament, a prayer or a lullaby. Not even all Kreyol, maybe with some French. But Charles was capable of saying that French was no good either. If they did not know the language, their tongues could have at least been trained to form and shape a few words. It could have given her a little comfort to hear three or four words from her own children now and again. (112)

Marinette did not allow Charles' fascination with creating his American identity to dispel her Haitian heritage which professes itself when she speaks in Creole. The narrator lets us know that "She'd given in on everything, accepted all of Charles' decisions and plans for their lives, but when it came to speaking to God, she had to do it in Kreyol"(107). Her innermost thoughts and true feeling could only be expressed in Creole. English and French were incapable of doing the task. In "Language and identity: Haitians in New York City," Susan Huelsebusch Buchanan analyzes the struggle between the use of Haitian Creole or French in the Catholic church, "Haitian Creole is identified with positive traits, such as truth, integrity, sincerity, and geniuses" (301).

Charles' death is the resurrection of Marinette's suppressed Haitian identity and the children's reconnection to their Haitian roots; this event takes place at the end of the story when Marinette starts singing voodoo songs in Creole out loud in the house as "her heart pounding in alarm. She pushed back the panic,"(114) knowing her husband would have disapproved of these songs in the house. As she allowed herself to sing, she begins to relive her Haitian life and her daughter begins to discover it in Creole:

"A song," she said "when I was a girl ...the church not yet built, dressed in white, at night, in the clearing...wrong words", she shook her head. Wrong words, wrong food, wrong clothes, wrong tears. (114)

“What are you telling the child” She could hear
 Charles’ voice intervening. (114)
 For sure she did not hold them back...She woke
 up hearing herself say the words from the voodoo
 song aloud. May holding her hand.
 “What are you saying?” May whispered.
 Atidan iboloko...May did not understand Kreyol,
 how could she understand *langaj*, the language of
 the gods?
 If you speak slow maybe I’ll understand.”
 “I was born at the foot of Mòn Kabrit,” she began.
 (115)

As we move on to another island, Trinidad, we witness the same struggle between language spoken and identity claimed in Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970). In “More than Girl Talk: Language as Market in Two Novels by Women of African Descent,” Wendy Walters aims at “demonstrating the way the characters’ speech is shaped by their encounters with the language, world, and culture they take on” (159). But it is more than the change in speech that takes place; a change in the protagonist Tee’s identity also occurs. As she is exposed to and embraces British culture through her Aunt Beatrice’s lifestyle and her school in the city, she began to despise herself and her roots; she resentfully states, “At times I resented Tantie bitterly for not having let Auntie Beatrice get us in the first place and bring us up properly” (97). ‘Properly’ in this novel is constantly associated with Britishness and everything improper is connected to the island of Trinidad. The town is designed for those who aspire to live like the British and the country is a place for those who desire to remain Trinidadian as Auntie Beatrice calls it “ordinariness” or “niggeryness”. Region along with Speech (and mannerism) play an essential part in forming Tee’s identity and Tee herself discovers this reality as she aims to discover who she wants to be.

Tee's first exposure to speech and her identity takes place in her classroom when her teacher Mr. Hinds first belittles Tee's fellow student (Duncey-Joseph) for not being able to read and pronounce his English words "properly" and all of the students:

Go home all of you, go home and never come
back here! You'll never get anywhere, you'll
never better yourselves, you'll never be anything
but...picaninnies! Here I stand trying to teach you
to read and write the English language trying to
teach confounded picaninnies to read and write..."
(29)

Mr. Hinds makes it clear to the children that to be a complete person they must master Englishness or else they will not make anything of their lives. He was not only trying to teach them to master the English language but also training them to embrace British culture and mannerisms: "Under Mr. Hinds' direction we would recite Children of the Empire Ye are Brothers All, or sing God Save the King and Land of Hope and Glory" (23-26).

The home Mr. Hinds angrily sends the children to signifies not only the structural/material home but also a return to their unrefined lifestyles and speech in the countryside to which they were born. School, as apposed to home, is where they learn English and become more British and "better" individuals. The school represented a miniscule version of England just like the capital.

The second time Tee discovers the seriousness of speech and identity is when she is living in the city with her Auntie Beatrice. In a particular incident Tee witnesses her Aunt Beatrice reprimanding the house servant Eudora for speaking Trinidadian English with the children:

The day Carol started calling her dress ‘frack’ Auntie Beatrice was near hysterical: If you can’t speak properly when you speak to these children then don’t bother to say anything to them at all!... you could very well speak properly if you wanted to! You came over here to better yourself, girl, I don’t know why you have to go on talking like Grenadian people!”(35)

Tee began to see that speaking British English is proper and more welcoming, as opposed to the country where people like her Tantie (her paternal aunt) and Eudora would “talk gaily...laugh quite boisterously...” (35)

After spending time with her Auntie Beatrice in the town and at a prestigious school, country life with her Tantie became appalling. Her Auntie Beatrice never calls her Tee; she calls her Cynthia because Tee was silly. Tee’s favorite church dress that she wore in the country was a distasteful “niggery-looking dress” (77) to her aunt and cousins. Everything she carried from her past was no good or not good enough. Tee’s ears constantly heard how Trinidadian people, their language and mannerism are not proper, first from her teacher and then from her Auntie Beatrice and her cousins who mocked her lack. At this stage in her life she begins to reconsider her Trinidadian roots, of which Tantie was the center, because they are presented as an improper way of life. For example, Tee confesses during a visit from her Tantie, uncle and cousin, after she has consciously rejected her old self, that “the worst moment of all was when they drew forth a series of greasy paper bags, announcing that they contained polorie, anchar, roti from Neighb’ Ramlaal-Wife, and accra and fry-bake and zaboca from Tantie with a few things I almost forgot existed, in short all manner of ordinary nastiness...” (106) Tee did not only detest the food, but she “declined in alarm: the very thought of sitting in Auntie

Beatrice drawing room eating coolie-food!” (107). She wishes: “If I had never lived there, if Auntie Beatrice had whisked us away from the very beginning and brought us here, then I would have been nice. I would have been one of them...” (100). By this point, Tee has chosen to die to her old self; she says, “I wanted to shrink, to disappear... I felt the very sight of me was an affront to common decency. I wished my body could shrivel up and fall away, that I could step out new and acceptable” (97). The identity she once had, the people she once felt kinship to, the language she laughed, played, loved and communicated in became detestable, and so Tee set to recreate her identity.

Tee’s desperate need to speak properly and be socially accepted by the people in her Auntie Beatrice’s social circle led her to live imaginatively ‘properly’ through books:

Books transported you always into..., the
normality of real Girls and Boys who..., ate
potatoes, not rice, went about in socks and shoes
from morning until night and called things by their
proper names, never saying ‘washicong’ for
plimsoll or ‘crapaud’ when they meant a frog.
Books transported you always into Reality and
Rightness, which were to be found abroad. (61)

It is also in a book she discovered Helen, who she claims to be “...the proper Me. And me, I was her shadow hovering about in incompleteness”(62). Helen became her double, which is quite common in the creation of the Caribbean identity because there is the fusion or collision between the colonizers influential characteristics and the colonized insignificant distinctiveness, which transfers over into all aspects of culture from language to lifestyle and food.

Moreover, in the midst of Tee’s recreating her identity, she returned for a brief visit to her Tantie in the country with the determination to remain “proper”. Her first

goal was to put her shoes on from the time she woke up until it was time for bed, because the English children did just that. She had to practice her identity or else she feared she'd return back to her Trinidadian self. She concluded that:

The whole life was like a piece of cloth, with a rightside and a wrongside. Just as there was a way you spoke and a way you wrote, so there was a daily existence which you led, which of course amounted only to marking time and makeshift, for the Proper daily round, not necessarily more agreeable, simply the valid one...(62)

Who Tee had been was no longer fitting to her; Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, explains her condition precisely:

Every colonized people-in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality-finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in portion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (18)

By this point, Tee no longer wants to be a Trinidadian; she wants to become a British subject. Tee's self hatred and torment stems from her language or cultural language that is aligned with her Trinidadian identity in its purest form without any English influence. She could no longer be carefree with her words and actions; she was now to practice her new and "proper" language and identity.

The process of the psychological and metaphorical death of her Trinidadian identity began when Mr. Hinds made her sing songs praising Britain when "Not an eyelid must bat not a finger must twitch when we honor the Mother Country"(26) and continued

daily at her Auntie Beatrice and school, and lastly, when she "...wanted to shrink, to disappear..." and "...wished that her body could shrivel up and fall away..."(97) Tee wants to be "new and acceptable" (97) and that meant putting away her old self, her Tantie, her old "home". Tee's new language, new identity and new life becomes a reality not within the imagined or recreated Trinidadian British communities and towns where her Auntie Beatrice frequented, but when leaves for England to join her father.

Like *Crick Crack, Monkey, Angel* (1987) by Merle Collins allows its reader to experience some aspects of their country's social and economical structure as it has an impact on their cultural identity. But *Angel* is a far more complex historical novel recording the events of the Grenadians' fight for political autonomy. Also, *Angel* is crucial because it affirms and protests the validity of Grenadian English, as the dialogue is written in that language. Collins claims this language which is spoken by majority of the Grenadian population to be legitimate. Also as a political/revolutionary novel it presents itself in the voice of the people because it is, through the unrest of the mass revolutions mostly take place.

Furthermore, as we put Collins' and Hodge's central characters against each other as it pertains to issues of language and identity, we would have to argue that they are very different in their views of their country and themselves. Though both characters were raised in the countryside, Collins' protagonist developed into a character that loves herself, her roots and country, as opposed to Hodge's character that came to despise herself, her native tongue, and also her country to some extent.

As Tee was coming of age, she could not wait to leave for England and erase her past identity, and when she got the opportunity she declared: "I desired with all my heart

that it were next morning and a plane were lifting me off the ground” (111). Yet Angel was committed to her country and could not wait to aid in the fight for Grenada’s political freedom. Also, even though Angel mastered British English, she still chose to speak Grenadian English. As a teacher she allows her students to speak in English and Grenadian English, and she attests the validity of both languages: “He not talkin’ bad. He’s speaking a different language, that’s all. It’s no better or no worse than English... True! So we learn English, but it isn’t better than our language” (236).

In retrospect, Angel demonstrates how one’s attitude towards the language they speak definitely affects how stable or unambiguous their identity will be. The fact that Angel embraces and confidently speaks in Grenadian English, also attests to her celebration and defense of her country. Moreover, by speaking without any reservations in Grenadian English and English in this novel, the character Angel manages to also reverse Fanon’s theory (which applied to Tee and the middle and upper middle class characters in *Crick, Crack Monkey*) that “He (the colonized) becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (18). Angel utilizes both languages without allowing/wishing her blackness to die, and thereby, she uplifts her blackness, embraces her jungle, and allows the native to stay alive by forcing it to exist within the world of the “other”.

Furthermore, the following novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) by Michelle Cliff also locates issues of language and identity. Unlike the previous characters discussed in this piece, the main protagonist, Clare Savage, in *No Telephone to Heaven* experience with her identity and language is more complex. While the previous characters are of pure African descent, born into mainly black families and communities,

Clare is born into a home where her light skin tone significantly thwarted her ties to her black relations and experience. Clare's battle with language is her battle with her identity. Clare's search for her identity does not rely on what language(s) she spoke, but the languages she needed to forget. This is why the loss of language at the end of the novel locates the completion of Clare's search for identity.

In trying to feel complete as a person and connecting back her past, Clare returns to her grandmother's abandoned and unkempt house, which is situated in the 'jungle' in Jamaica. Her journey to locate her mother's and grandmother's home was her desperate attempt to find a connection with her deceased black mother. Passing for a mulatto, raised by her father and his family, who passed for white, Clare longed to experience closeness with her black roots. Clare's life journey left her lost between multiple cultures in trying to fulfill the absence of her maternal heritage. In her mother's last letter to her from Jamaica before she died, she tells her "There is a space between who you are and who you will become. Fill it" (103). Her journeys to America, Europe and England could not help her locate her true self. She had to return to Jamaica.

At a pivotal point two things occur, in the jungle, related to her speech and identity: she recalls all the languages she had acquired as she searches for herself, and then forgot them all. The "Latin-all the way from St. Catherine's, where she had won a prize. French- [in which] she read the poetry...and letters..." (118), also the Spanish, Italian and German she spoke also went away:

O je t'adore, O je t'adore, O je t'adore
Poor-me-one, Poor-me-one, Poor-me-one
Tres-tontos-son, Tres-tontos-son, Tres-tontos-son
Kitty-woo, Kitty-woo, Kitty-woo
Whip-whip-whip-whip-whip- whip- whip- whip-
whip- whip-

Back-raw, back-raw, back-raw, back-raw, back-raw
She remembered language.
Then it was gone.

When all these language disappeared so did her turmoil. She sheds all the identities that she carried and the inherited languages disappeared. Clare admits that she "...could no longer live in borrowed countries, on borrowed time..." (193).

The loss of language frees her from identity issues. No submission to or domination of language regulations, no racial markings, no form of cultural domination, and no evidence of the conquerors or colonizers. She experiences pure freedom from Jamaica's (or the world's) social discrimination and stigmatization. Ralph E. Stedman situates Clare's condition: "'identity' is a category, not of existence, but of reflection; that is, it arises only where *recognition* is involved" (270). The racial marker of Clare's identity truly does not exist, because after she takes to the jungle, she forgets language and her race disappears. And if language participates in identification, Clare no longer exists.

The narrative is unclear as to whether Clare has lost her practical speech. It may be that she has lost human language. Sally O'Driscoll claims, in her article "Michelle Cliff and the Authority of Identity," that Cliff's novel "creates a dehumanized, almost paradoxically a historical space which ultimately removes the possibility of human agency" (64). She was no longer black, close to white, white cockroach or buckram. She was now a warrior, a maroon, not fighting for just a race, but for justice, equality and Jamaica. She becomes free of language and free of her identity crisis when she connects

back to her maternal roots and fulfills her grandmother's/mother's passion to help her people and take care of the land.

Clare's loss of language put to rest her identity issues, but the loss of and/or repression of the Spanish language that occurs in the life of Hector in *Our House in the Last World* by Osacr Hijuelos represents the insecurity and unrest of his Cuban identity, in the United States. By choosing to speak only English, Hector was choosing to secure his American identity; and canceling out his use of Spanish was his way of trying to separate from his Cuban heritage. In addition, when Hector stops communicating in Spanish, he not only stops being Cuban, but also he attempts not to be like his dad, Alejo, who is the epitome of Cubanness. As a result people thought, as his brother Horacio would tell them, that "He is just dumb when it comes to being Cuban" (165).

Unable or reluctant to perform his identity as a Cuban man leads him to fear and hate his Cuban self to the point he called himself the Cuban Quasimodo, and "...wanted to get out of his skin and go somewhere" (178). As the Cuban Quasimodo he did not belong or fit with his father, brother and the men that would gather together; for example, "When visiting men would sit in the kitchen speaking about politics, family and Cuba, Horacio would play the patron and join them, relegating Hector to the side, with the women" (161). Also, in one incident, he goes into a panic mode and fears his deformity would be revealed, when his mother's relative from Cuba, "the real Cubans" (161), comes to visit their home:

And now the real Cubans, Luisa and her daughters and son-in-law, were coming to find out what a false life Hector led. Hector could not sleep at night, thinking of it. He tried to remember his Spanish, but instead of sentences, pictures of Cuba entered into his mind. But he did not fight this. He

fantasized about Cuba. He wanted the pictures to enter him, as if memory and imagination would make him more of a man, a Cuban man. (161)

His fear has two conflicting sides: it is rooted in the fact that he does not want to be like his father or Cuban, but also in the fact that he can never be like his dad and Cuban. Even though he is of Cuban heritage he feels culturally like an outcast. He feels repulsion when he is compared to his father:

Oh you look just like your Alejo! Look like Alejo?
It made him cringe. He felt like a freak, a hunchback, a man with a deformed face. Like Alejo? At least Alejo had his people, the Cubans, his brothers, but Hector was out in the twilight zone, trying to crawl out of his skin and go somewhere else, be someone else. (175)

Hector's problem is that he looks exactly like his dad. Hijuelos writes: "They are like twins, separated by age, with the same eyes, faces, bodies. Except Alejo was from another world- *Cubano, Cubano*" (134). Even though he looked just like his father, he still could not claim his Cuban heritage. He felt like the defective carbon copy of his dad and a dysfunctional representation of the Cuban culture.

The core reason he lets go of his Cubanness occurs through the sickness he gets while visiting Cuba. This was the origin of his contentment towards Cuba and Cubanness, and more specifically, Spanish. As Hector recuperates in an American hospital from a bacterial infection he got in Cuba, he is purged clean of his "diseased kidneys, which were shaped like the island of Cuba on maps" (96), and he is also made to flush out his Spanish and his love for Cuba. His mother Mercedes kept on reminding him that Cuba made him sick. But that's not all Cuba did: "Cuba gave him the bad disease.

Cuba gave the drunk father. Cuba gave the crazy mother...Cuba had something against him. That made him sick and pale..." (94). This event provoked a bad image of Cuba in his young mind; and the nurses at the hospital, who were suppose to help his body heal, only destroyed his sense of self and his Cuban identity. The nurses are representation of colonizers whose prime job was not to help but to destroy the culture of origin of their target country and force their culture upon the people. The nurses' primary objective, other than to bring him back to health, was to teach him English. They constantly reminded him that he was "very stupid for not speaking English "(95). When he would yell out for his family and Cuba to save him, "no one and nothing came to save him"(95). So, through physical and verbal abuse from his assigned nurse, Hector eventually lets go of Spanish and clings to English. Hijuelos writes, "In time she made him suspicious of Spanish. Spanish words drifted inside him, he dreamed in Spanish, but English began whooshing inside. English forced its way through him, splitting his skin" (95). Later on "his dreams were broken by the static of English"(96).

As Hector began to heal, he became silent (if he had to speak Spanish), distant from his family, and American:

When Hector finally spoke, he used English, which surprised Alejo. Alejo asked him all kinds of questions, "Why don't you speak in Spanish?" and Hector feeling ashamed and afraid, became silent. Alejo looked at Hector, wondering if this was his son. There he was, a little blondie, a sickly, fair skinned Cuban who was not speaking Spanish. (97)

By this stage in Hector's life, he no longer wants to have anything to do with Cuba; all his associations with Cuba involved pain, sickness and sorrow. Friends and family would

say, “Oh, he looks so healthy. So American...” (110), which only reaffirms the fact that Cuba was something bad and sickly. As an American he was in “good shape” and aspiring to be happier. But unfortunately, like his ‘twin’, his father, he was out of shape and miserable, still only an American unable to culturally embrace Cubanness.

Moreover, as Hector discards Spanish and the Cuban culture, he further situates himself as an outcast and he detests himself: “He was sick at heart for being so Americanized” (160), but being American was his weapon against being Cuban and like his dad, so he pursued his American identity:

His Spanish was unpracticed, practically nonexistent. ...A Spanish sentence wrapped around his face, threatened to peel off his skin and send him falling to the floor like Alejo. He avoided Spanish even though that was all he heard at home. He read it, understood it, but he grew paralyzed by the prospect of the slightest conversation. (160)

He was harassed by the constant echoes of his father’s friends saying, “Hablame en espanol!”⁶⁰ But Hijuelos indicates that “Hector always refused and got lost in his bedroom” (160).

America is a safe space for Hector. Not only does it heal his disease from childhood, but also in America he does not have to prove his Cubanness. Hijuelos writes, “Now he looked American and spoke mostly American. Cuba had become the mysterious and cruel phantasm standing behind the door.” (98) Since he was on American turf, he was never extremely threatened by challenges to prove his Cuban culture.

Yet, bizarrely, it is in America, the very country that helps Hector suppress his Cuban identity, that Hector tries to reconcile with his Cubanness: “He wanted to be cured

⁶⁰ Speak to me in Spanish.

of his illness: inadequacy, stupidity, obesity, ignorance. He wanted to go to bed and wake up a Cuban in Havana of 1922” (183). In Miami, Florida, probably in ‘Little Havana’ the replica of Cuba, visiting his father’s family, he tries to reassert his Cuban identity. He speaks Spanish frequently and openly; he absorbs his mind with and recollects all things which signifies his Cuban heritage:

He would think about what he should have said to prove his authenticity: “Look, my mother believes in the spirits and the Devil and Jesus Christ. I know about Santa Barbara!... I know white cassava and yucca and arroz con pollo y lechón assado...Machado and Maximo Gomez...and my father came from San Pedro, Oriente province, home province of Fidel Castro, Batista, and Desi Arnaz...I know about the shadows and magic, how you court nice girls and get married, and drink only with men... You don’t cry and are very strong... Your sexes are enormous, the women are your slaves...”(186)

In New York, Hector rejects his Cubanness by severing an intimate relationship with his mom and dad, but in Miami he desires to be Cuban by connecting to Cindy who was “a virgin, so pure and Cuban” (183). Even though “He wanted more. To crawl out of his skin, get a tan, get healthy, be Cuban, forget the shit...”(187), he fails to achieve this goal and conquer Cindy’s love and Cubanness. Hector never completely reconnects to his Cuban identity in Miami, because Cindy leaves him for another man who was more Cuban, and Hector abruptly returns to New York City to learn of his father’s death, which further destroys his aspiration towards becoming more openly Cuban.

Hector has a love hate relationship with his Cuban heritage as he has with his dad. He secretly loves being Cuban, but he hates having to perform or prove his Cubanness. Likewise, he loves his father, but hates not being able to connect to or be like him, so he

rejects any level of intimate contact. Even when his father dies, he continued to feel isolated from him just as he felt in being Cuban. His first attempt at reconnecting to his Cuban culture in Miami is halted because of his father's death, so Hector returns to New York City an incomplete Cuban. The death of his father symbolizes the fact that Hector will be incapable of ever becoming purely Cuban. As an American born of Cuban parents, can Hector really be a pure Cuban? He has been integrated into the American culture. Hector says he "always felt as if he were in costume, his true nature unknown to others and perhaps even to himself. He was part "Pop," part Mercedes; part Cuban, part American-all wrapped tightly inside a skin in which he sometimes could not move" (175). Perhaps his father's death presents an opportunity for Hector to be Cuban in his own way, which would allow him to be American and Cuban without denying or repressing either identity. His journey from repulsing his Cuban identity (by speaking English only) to longing to be Cuban (by speaking in Spanish openly and thinking about things Cuban) continues to confirm how language participates in affirming and influencing one's identity.

The challenges the characters in these Caribbean novels face concerning their identity is relative to their language of expression. The protagonists' natural act of communicating verbally was directly responsible either for their death, abuse, self-hatred, deliverance, confusion, or for the rediscovery of themselves. For the Caribbean person(s) with direct or inherited experience of colonial domination over mind and spirit, claiming a language is equivalent to claiming an identity. Shakespeare's famous question "To Be or Not to Be?" is the question that Caribbeans most likely will pose to themselves as they

consider their language(s) of communication. And the language they choose answers that question. The language they choose determines who they choose to be.

CHAPTER 4

Interview

“Jan Mapou: The Love, Fight and Passion for Haitian Créole”

This chapter presents an interview with Jan Mapou (birth name Jean-Marie Willer Denis), co-founder of Society of Fireflies, conducted on August 19, 2006. As a forefather of the birth of the Creole movement in Haiti and the United States and Canada, Jan Mapou’s journey in setting a strong foundation for the promotion and education of Haitian Creole in Haiti and the United States and Canada has been responsible for grounding and increasing the circulation of Creole literature. The unfortunate event of his arrest by Haiti’s secret militia not only ignited the fire for the love of his native tongue, but also set ablaze the fire for generations to follow to respect, embrace and use the Creole language to create artistically and unite the Haitians in Haiti and Haitian communities in the United States and Canada.

IA. Why don’t you write using your birth name? It appears to be the case for practically majority of the Creole writers.

JM. My legal name is still Jean-Marie Willer Denis, but in 1969 a couple friends and myself were concerned about the education situation in Haiti [because it was centered and based on French and the France system]. So we formed the organization called ‘Movement Creole Haitienne (MCH)’. Our goal was to defend Haitian Creole, promote Haitian culture through Haitian Creole language. And it was not easy because it was like “playing behind the lion,⁶¹” which means it was during the Duvalier Regime when the nation was divided between capitalism and communism and super capitalism and super communism. The minute you started talking about the education of the masses, they labeled you communist. That was why in the 60’s a lot of students of philosophy and at the university level were arrested and labeled communist. From that point on, in forming MCH, we selected from all its members [the] writers, dancers, singers, etc. to show the beauty of Haitian culture. On the radio program “Radio Caribe” in Haiti, every Sunday

⁶¹ Proverb which applied to the dictatorship of Duvalier as the lion.

we talked about Creole, and we shared poems, stories and folktales (kont). But on April 6, 1969 we were arrested. From then we form a second movement called “The Society of Fireflies (SOF)” which is the offspring of MCH. The second movement SOF was to further promote language and culture.

Before the arrest of 1969 while we were creating the organization every member created a pseudonym to fool the authority. On the radio, we were known as Jan Tanbou, Jan Mapou, Adelina, etc. So when the macoutes, President Duvalier’s secret police, came to the radio station to arrest us, he put his gun to my head and asked me for my name and I told him “Jan Mapou” and he responded in anger and frustration, “Give me your real name.” We’d repeat the same name, so they never really knew our real names. That was a way to fool the secret police along with the people who did not want to hear about Creole. So I kept the name and everything I have written I have assigned that name to it. It became an identity for us for the Creole movement.

IA. How and why was Sosyete Koukouy “Society of Fireflies” founded?

JM. Society of Fireflies (SOF) was founded after my arrest in 1969. I was in jail for four months and three to four days, and soon after, I exiled to New York City. After I settled in New York City, I realized that there was the same problem in New York City that I saw in Haiti, but it was worst. The Haitians in New City did not want anything to do with their culture, language and roots. And they were also encouraging their children to speak English only. Parents were neglecting the Creole language and they were not passing it on to their children or speaking it with them. They themselves did not speak English. They used a broken English to speak with their children. The young children could not speak even to their grandmother when she visited from Haiti. When I realized this

problem, I founded Society of Fireflies in New York City on the radio. I did plays on the air and on the stage; there were at least 12 plays presented in a year and 50 plays in the years to follow. So I used plays a lot just like your dad (Alcibiade). He (Alcibiade) used short plays and comedy on radio and stage to attract people to Creole, [entertain them] and give them a message. But I on the other hand, I did my plays in a style called “Theatre Total.” (This means that props, music and literary images are incorporated into the stage performance.) The goal was to educate them in Creole as they were being entertained.

After founding the SOF in New York City, a couple of friends of mine from Canada founded SOF over there. When I left New York City for Miami, I founded SOF there, and currently we have SOF organizations in New York City, Canada, Connecticut, Tampa Bay and Homestead, Florida. We all have the same philosophy: educating, helping others to understand the Haitian culture, and using the Haitian language Creole that is our identity.

IA. What does writing in Creole mean to you as a Haitian and a writer?

JM. That’s my life. A good (true) Haitian can only think in Creole. When you’re talking about food, emotions, love, friendship, and fear. For example, when you are scared and you need help, you scream “an mwe” (help in Creole). In one incident, a friend of mine who was fluent in English got into trouble and the first words that came out of his mouth was “an mwe!⁶²”. Also Creole played a big role in our revolution. That’s the language that helped our forefathers.

(On the Genesis of Creole)

⁶² help!

In 1492 on the Island of Hispanola, a Spanish collision with the Indians took place, then the English, Buccaneers, and then the French who stayed longer, the Portuguese later came onto the scenes followed by the transplanted Africans and while all these cultural fusions were taking place, there had to be some form of communication set amongst them. And when the French brought the Africans to the island, they were not all from the same village or tribe, so each spoke a different language. They could not talk or express themselves. The white masters were smart; they mixed the tribes up; they put together some one from Congo with one from Ibo, and etc., so they could not communicate and cause an uprising. So the island was confronted with different African languages, the French language, which the African slaves, had to learn to comprehend in order to understand their master's commands. So from beatings and routine (giving them the same food and the same assignments daily) they learned to understand the master's language, and also, to protect yourself you better understand.

Within the melting pot of all those languages, another language emerges which was Creole with African structures mix with Spanish, Portuguese and French. Since the French stayed over two centuries, French words are more prominent in Creole. This Creole is the language that was spoken by the Haitians slaves on the island and in 1791 Historians recorded that it was the first time in history slaves gathered together and was using language for a common cause-staging freedom. After independence I can say that intellectually we were slaves because we had to speak and learn French, but was it really a bad thing?

I think it was bad, because you don't know who you are and you are still searching. The slaves were coming from different cultures/tribes with one to two things

in common, which was the Creole language and the voodoo religion. That was a good thing because it was their heritage. [But having to be forced to learn and speak only French, even after the independence was not a good thing in building a nation or a new one in the case of Haiti.] Yet, I believe, if anyone can speak French, English, Spanish that's perfect, but you have got to know who you are. That's what caused the problem of Haiti and French. We continue education in French and think that we are French. Our education was formally French and not Haitian. We know everything about France, its authors, writers, culture, and system, but we do not know anything about ourselves. We know nothing about Felix Moriso-Lewa, our forefathers and heroes, except for Christophe, Petion and then we stop there.

IA. That basically taught us not to like ourselves because French and Frenchness is perfect. [In the case of French versus Creole] Creolists aren't putting down French, but when a Haitian rejects Creole, they reject themselves. As far as the issue of identity and language is concerned, speaking French is only part of the culture, but not completely who you are. [So the Creole language must be taken into consideration, when considering who you are as a whole person and as a Haitian.]

JM. That's very true, exactly.

IA. How has the late Felix Moriso-Lewa influenced your life and literature?

JM. Moriso was one of the first writers of Haitian Creole and he translated the play *Antigone* by Sophocles in Haitian Creole, written 400 years before Christ and was translated in several languages. During the 1950's the discussion about Haitian Creole [and literature], there were two views: Creole cannot be used in literature because it is limited or literary terms cannot be expressed in Creole. But Moriso-Lewa in response to

these arguments translated *Antigone* in Creole, and it was a success. After that, he wrote *Dycoute*⁶³ 1,2,3,4. He inspired a lot of people. Me personally, he was my friend. He lived in Kendall, Miami but he hated there. He would always come to the bookstore (Librere Mapou), because he loves the ambiance of Little Haiti⁶⁴. He always had a story to tell. And as minister of education in Haiti and a supporter of Creole language, he got into trouble with the Duvalier regime, and exiled to Africa and traveled all over.

IA. Was it important for you to add Haitian Creole Proverbs after each poem in your text Bajou Kase (1975)?

JM. The proverb is a message. You can write an entire book [with just one proverb]. Haitian Creole uses proverbs in everything they say. The proverbs I use summarize the whole poem; I still use them on my radio programs.

IA. Why was it important to tell the tale of Haitians on the sea in your Creole play DPM⁶⁵ Kanntè⁶⁶?

JM. In Haiti when things are really bad they [the desperate Haitians] don't care about their life. They just find anything and get on the sea. If they die, they don't care. They have a saying, which says "the shark's tooth is sweeter than death in Haiti." [This means that they would rather die at sea being devoured by sharks than die in Haiti.] The point my play is stressing is that you cannot leave your country and get on a boat without knowing your destination or if you'll survive... [In the play,] on the boat everyone tells

⁶³ A machete case used by men working in the fields.

⁶⁴ An region in Miami where there is a cluster of Haitians living. It is also visually a small replica of Haitian life in Haiti, with a full display of Haitian culture and lifestyle.

⁶⁵ Dret Pou Miami (Straight towards Miami)

⁶⁶ small boat

their tale of why they left Haiti, but that is no reason for [them] to leave. [They] have got to keep on fighting until [they] die [in their homeland]. The message of the play, however, is to let people know that those boats are not solid. When you get to some point in the [middle of the] sea and it is roaring there is no way to get out alive, [death is the only escape]. Our history shows that out of five boats that leave Haiti, maybe one will make it. In the 70's, there were hundreds of thousands of people coming to the United States but hundreds of thousands also died at sea.

IA. Could it be history repeating itself with death at sea like during slavery?

JM. When the slaves [purposely] died at sea, they died for freedom and [with the hope of their] souls returning back to Africa. But now in the modern era, with radio and television, they are made aware of the risks and dangers of the sea. Back then [the slaves] did not know what was on the other side. Now we hear and know what on the other side and it is not safe to risk your life. They come here (United States) thinking it's El Dorado (some form of paradise), but that's not the reality of things. This play is the first in history to start on land and ended at sea.

IA. Does your writing from Haiti differ from your writings in the United States, because of the past dictatorship and censorship?

JM. In Haiti I was writing in Daki, which is a pig Latin. We were writing for our own group writing literature and giving messages with multiple meaning, so when the secret police say, "Are you saying this or that?" we would say, "No! that's not what it means". But other than that my writing has not change very much.

*IA. You are revered as one of the successful and well-received pioneers of the (Haitian, as **Open Gate** calls it, but I say Creole) Creole literary movement. How does that make you feel about your commitment for the advancement of the Creole language?*

JM. SOF motto is light in the Darkness. [It was our job to bring light to a people who had to be taught or reeducated to love their Haitian heritage and themselves by embracing the Creole language and the part of our Haitian culture connected to our African origin.]

Sometimes I say I am ready to die. I have fulfilled my obligations. The language is respected and being elevated.

IA. I'd like to thank you for your passion and commitment to the Creole language because you have preserved and protected the language not just for me but for future generations of Haitians who will face the need to know their roots.

EPILOGUE

“Little Haitian Girl”

Little Haitian Girl

Born of the rebels

Born of Freedom.

Born of Scorn

In AMERICA.

Little Haitian Girl

Fight like

The past

For your

FREEDOM

For your

SELF-WORTH

For your

Ancestors,

Successors,

Culture,

Faith,

History,

And for

Your

Self.

Little Haitian Girl

Don't

Give in

Into the

Myth

Myth that

Devalues

You

Myth that

Makes you

Fearful.

Be

Fearless

Of the

Present and

Future

Like your

Rebellious

Resilient

Ancestors.

Just Be

Haitian

Girl.

EPILOGUE

“Reconciliation: (Re) Embracing My Haitianness:
‘Snap-shots of a Haitian Childhood in Haiti and New York City’”

New York City, 1986

In the year 1986, when the Haitian mass sent Baby Doc into exile, I was not Haitian. I was not Haitian 2 years before that either. I stopped being Haitian at 10 years old. It was no longer safe and beautiful. It was humiliating and dangerous.

*Why did I do this? Why was the one thing that defined me (other than my acquired American identity) and that I loved was what I came to hate. Well, thankfully I came across the text **Pride Against Prejudice** by Alex Stepick, which dissects how “...Haitian children and youth commit a form of cultural suicide, that is, they become cover-ups, because of their perception of intense prejudice against Haitians specifically in their schools...” (60). After I wrote the recount of my childhood, and then later as I explored Stepick's findings, I saw my childhood's life portrait in New York City plastered within the text. This text was exposing my challenges and has allowed me to rationally understand the metamorphosis of my identity from Haiti to America. I have incorporated quotes from *Pride Against Prejudice* throughout my story as I reflect on some of the incidences, because it defines the experiences expressed.*

“Please don't talk to me in the streets out loud in Creole mom, please.” I would pray hard deep inside, because if she knew I felt that way she would do it, and say out loud “Se Haitenne moin ye, so, se Haitenne ou ye tou.”⁶⁷ I always figured, if I would walk a couple of steps apart from her, may be *they* won't know she is talking to me.

⁶⁷ I am Haitian and you are Haitian too.

They. The Americans. The Jamaicans and the other West Indians. The Haitians. Every nation in America. It was not safe for anyone to know. If one knew than they all will. It was me against the world. Hiding where my family came from was my way of protecting myself from a mean, unrelenting and unforgiving society.

I was born in New York City, Brooklyn, in 1974., My father was performing his plays; my mother and 3 sisters were vacationing at the time from Haiti. Soon after my birth and baptism, my family returned to Haiti with me – innocent, born in America and a Haitian. My birth in America would later be the token for my mother’s liberation, because during the time President Carter was in office, children of immigrants born in the US could give their parents green cards⁶⁸. It gave her the strength and power to leave my dad and Haiti to start a new life where she was in control of her and her daughter’s destinies. Looking back at this scenario, I never thought my mother’s liberation in America would lead to my enslavement in repressing my Haitian heritage.

America, New York City, Brooklyn- robbed me of my Haitianess. I never really got to love the Island like my parents and sisters did. Again, I was robbed of my Haitianness when I moved back for good to the USA. My childhood memories are quite faint, but snapshot images persist in feeding my heart and memory of Haiti.

1977

Six o’clock in the morning raised by crowing roosters and the bright sun piercing through my sisters’ and my room. Maid #1, speaking Creole with a French accent, “Lévé, lev twa, lévé lévé⁶⁹,” sung her rough voice every morning to start us off for school.

⁶⁸ Legal residency in America or Alien card

⁶⁹ Get up, wake up, get up, get up!

Energy, laughter, peacefulness.

Mom is setting up my clothes – red uniform with my name and class level stitched on crookedly – ISABELLE P.ROLLIN, DP 3. The bus driver picks me up to go to Turian, which is a private pre-school for families who were well off. At the beginning of the day, saluting of the Haitian flag takes place as we sing the national anthem with my right hand on my heart (along with all the girls) and the boys' right hand across their forehead.

I can't even remember what language I spoke. Even though at Turian, French was the only language spoken, I can't remember speaking in French or Creole. I can't even remember my voice.

I only see snapshot images; no voices are coming from me.

Smiling, playing on our swing set, bothering the guard dog Toro and Booby the white fluffy one, from America.

In the evenings, when my paternal grandmother creeps out of the kitchen, she always exits with the essential Haitian drink – freshly ground dark coffee. The smell is in the air. She carries this fragrance with her from sun up to sun down. “Want some coffee with bread and butter,” she would say in Creole. I could drink and eat this Haitian delight night and day, even in America for a little while. And if my sisters or I did not want to eat any real food at all, Toto, the man who eats children who will not eat their meals, would be asked to pay a visit to us, and off course we ate our meals right away. Since voodoo and mysticism has a major influence on Haiti and its citizens, the minds of the children fall prey to its very existence or inexistence. Stories about zombies eating children for

any reason were popular to get children to eat or do anything. Whether it was true or not, an ugly, washed-up, dirty old man, dark with one gray eye was worth believing.

1978

We (my mother and sisters) would often take trips to the Northern country part of Haiti to visit mother's family, when school was out. Port-de-Paix was our destination. There aren't many smooth concrete roads in this town. I see an old woman, with a half a nose and one ear, standing outside of the bus asking for money through the windows. I smell mangoes. The houses are made of wood and the doors are about 12 feet high. These were old French colonial style homes, and my maternal great grandmother's house was built the same.

Shadows of France's culture continue to persist in not just the society but in the very structure of the homes. To me it appears everything was left the way it was after the French left. These homes were 2 to 3 stories high. Most likely it was built/owned by either white master, free mulatto or black slave and later passed down to relatives or sold to those that could afford to buy them. Some people had shops in their homes where they did their trade. My great grandmother had a mini store in her home.

My great grandmother is blind, 6 feet 5 inches tall, and her skin is so light she favors an Albino. She had long braided tresses, which sometimes hang either down her back in one, at the sides of her head or pinned up in the back like a pretzel. She smelled like mint-ball candy. The ones my sister used to steal from her shop because she thought since she couldn't see, she wouldn't know. But, amazingly enough, she always knew when candy had been taken from the candy jar and would catch her sometimes, that's why we believed they lied to us about her being blind.

Laughter, peace, love, Spanish and Creole.

“Putá⁷⁰,” “Domi,” “Maticon,” “chita on côté” were words that constantly flowed from great grandma’s mouth. It wasn’t just to her neighbors, but also to us. I figured since she couldn’t see, every one was the same. I was told she picked up her Spanish in her earlier days as a tradeswomen traveling to and from the Dominican Republic or Cuba.

Nighttime arrived fast and everyone would be in by 8pm. Zombies, loas, and human-animals would soon come out, so they told all children to come in, eat supper and go to sleep. The human animals, we were told, loved to feast on children. These mysticisms were the result of some serious sweating and bed-wetting.

Fear, excitement, and closeness with my sisters.

By Morning, cocks, dogs, cars, kamyonnèts⁷¹, and the people of the town were singing their morning songs. Back to Port-au-Prince.

1980

July. We take a morning bath, have breakfast, and ride our bikes on the gallery. Fully ripened *keneps*⁷² were falling onto the gallery and the ground in numerous amounts, as a subtly harsh wind blows. Rain at 11am. 11:15, a red-orange skyline. Sunshine at 11:30am. By 2:30 pm my sisters and I take a swim in the pool, and by 5pm we are on an American Airline flight to New York City never to return to Haiti for years.

City. Lights. JFK airport. The air smelled like new leather.

Confusion.

⁷⁰ Bitch in Spanish, sleep in Creole, homosexual in Spanish, sit down somewhere in Creole.

⁷¹ They are an inexpensive public transportation system. They are shaped like a cross between a van and truck with seats, but no windows or doors.

⁷² They are a small round fruit with a hard shell and a juicy meaty center.

September. Holy Spirit School. This was my first school in America. My mother would not allow her children to go to public school. NO WAY. Catholic schools only. Public schools are no good. She was told that “The children there are bad and disrespectful and in no time your children will turn like them - the *ti-American*.” The *ti-American* was every conservative Haitian’s new to America nightmare. So off we were sent to a school one hour and half away from home to protect our Haitian mannerisms.

“Isabelle PERRY-Rollin,” the teacher said. Americans could never quite pronounce Pierre. I don’t remember what language I used to respond to her. But I am sure I must have shaken my head. There were a lot of Haitians, Jamaicans, Dominicans, Panamanians and Puerto-Ricans at the school, so I did not have a hard time adjusting to America- a strange yet familiar land. 95% of the school were immigrants, who believe private schools was best for their children, even though they had a hard time affording it.

I remember acquiring the English language with comfort and confidence, especially because my first Haitian school friend in America and I were learning English together. My friend and I would talk about our sisters, parents and of course, the Americans. It was with her I remember and began to hear my voice in Creole. Not that I didn’t speak in Haiti, but I could not hear my voice until now. Maybe the impact of the double consciousness state of Haitians between Creole and French left me deaf and dumb in Haiti, until, in America, I had the social and personal freedom to choose my language of speech. I loved my voice. The Creole words that came out of my mouth were mine and certified and concretized my Haitianness. We’d talk during the day at school, on the way home to the bus, and other kids would stare at us but we didn’t care. Creole was my

Haitian identity. Haiti was not lost. Now French never had a voice. It got lost in Haiti, at Turian, then on the 5pm flight to New York City in July 1980.

My friend and I would talk all day in Creole until we got in trouble with our teacher because we were supposed to practice our English. But, after 3 months of school, I was chosen to read in English a small book, I believe it was one of Dr. Seuss' books, on the loud speaker as a reward for learning English so fast. As my English was praised, my Creole became repressed after that in school. I couldn't remember speaking in Creole in school again, my friend and I acquired the English language and practiced it. But home life would not permit Creole to die. It would be against one of the laws of nature. Home meant grandmother, mother and Creole. In fact, they would be the ones to torment and haunt me when I stopped being Haitian publicly.

The prejudice they confronted as Haitians, however, deterred most from publicly expressing their Haitian heritage. (Stepick, 73) Becoming African American Hardly solved their dilemmas. Instead segmentary assimilation produced a double tension for them. (Stepick, 73)

I hated being embarrassed of my mom and grandmother's Haitianness, but they did not help protect me from my evil peers. They would talk Creole really loud all time, stop to talk to other Haitian friends in the streets and then introduce me to them, so their kids know I am Haitian too. In my mind I was trying to avoid trouble by not being Haitian. To my mom I was ashamed of her. They thought I hated my self and my family and wanted to be "one of them" the ones who hate your people. Though they sometimes understood they never really understood me. I was not in a Haitian/ESL class. I was in a predominately American class. There was no Haitian solidarity in my classroom; I was going to fight alone, but the numbers were too great for me, so I succumbed. I did not

treasure American lifestyle better than my Haitian lifestyle, it was just less drama and trauma. So there was no peace in the streets and no peace at home. Both cultures were tugging to claim me.

At home, I loved my “diri ak sòs pwa⁷³” and “legume ak diri blanc⁷⁴”. I love the Crick Crack tales my godmother told us at night when she spent the summer with us, instead of going to Haiti, from her Miami visits. She mainly came to New York to buy things for her business in Haiti, but we still enjoyed her company, especially me, because she would cornbraid my hair every day, and I loved the feel of her hands and soft knuckles on my scalp. As for my mother, on the other hand, combing my hair was a painful experience and I wanted the hairstyle she gave me to last for days, which would account for my first *mouchwa*⁷⁵. Most of all, at home, I liked the old proverbs my grandmother would dish out at my sisters and I when she wanted to scare us into obedience or bring us to laughter, and they often did both at the same time. My favorite one was: “I will stick out my left breast towards the sun and you will be cursed for being disrespectful.” She said it works in Haiti and the sun in America was no different. She would always put me to sleep with the songs she learned from the old days when she went to the neighborhood Catholic school in Port-de-Paix.

Strangely enough, home life was Haiti, but the New York City streets were American territory and in my childhood mind, there was no room for Haitians. At home being Haitian was something to be proud of but outdoors it was a shameful curse of heritage.

⁷³ Rice and peas sauce

⁷⁴ Sautéed mixed vegetable and white rice

⁷⁵ A scarf to tie the head with. It is worn to preserve a hairstyle.

Boat-people, voodoo people, boolé boolé speakers.

“Don’t your people speak English? We are in America.” The voices would ring out constantly. I would act like I don’t know what they were talking about. I’d say, “I don’t care cause I am not Haitian.” I was either Jamaican, Dominican or Canadian, but never was I Haitian. I would just go to the encyclopedia and find a town from the other the islands I said my family was from, so I could legitimize my fake heritage.

Haitians are more likely to cover up more than others, even the ones who hide their heritage do so with ambivalence. Haitian youth reflect an emerging multicultural America, one in which people exist side by side, but more importantly one in which some individuals simultaneously maintain multiple cultural identities. (Stepick, 60).

I was not Haitian by birthright, so I was not technically lying. They would always confuse me for a Jamaican or Trinidadian and I never denied those false heritage.

Claiming to be Canadian was the safest and less strenuous identity. Since in Canada French was spoken and they (my cultural persecutors) did not understand Creole or French, whatever they may or may or may not have heard my family speak was justified. Canada was my temporary solace, but it was too close for comfort at times, because there were so many Haitians living there, so I would still venture off to other islands. Being American was not an option; part of my last name would not permit it. How many African Americans have the name Pierre?

1983

First Communion. The curse persists to grow. My mother made me wear black shoes for my communion ceremony, even though the nun said and sent out written instructions for the girls to wear white shoes. My mother insisted that I wear the black

shoes because that's the way it is done in Haiti. I was the only girl in black shoes, out of 200 girls. I cried throughout the walk down the church aisle, not to mention the nuns reprimanded me for not following instructions. Some girls laughed, others pointed, yet from afar, I see my mother smiling with joy. I hated Haiti for that.

Anger, humiliation, resentment.

1985

10 years old. I am allowed to go to the store now because my mother said the police take children under 10 years only. This was just another myth Haitian parents told their children to keep them from wanting to roam the streets like black Americans and get into trouble. If you loved roaming the streets you would either end up pregnant, start selling drugs and dropping out of school and embarrassing the whole Haitian community. There was always trouble in the New York City streets, because it was not like Haiti.

I hated having to go to the store, especially to go buy *HAITI OBSERVATOR*⁷⁶ for my grandmother because that was a public announcement of my Haitian identity, but I liked doing things for my grandmother because she would reward me with fried sweet plantains and hot dog. By now I have become so Americanized. Speaking mainly English. Screwing up my Creole. Got rid of those hideous plaid, cotton and colorful hair-ribbons. And lastly, I had an opinion. “Ou gen chans ou nan America. Ayiti yo tap flanke anba baton⁷⁷,” my mom would say when I would disagree with her. Also, by now, I've come to realize first hand that Haitians were not liked at school and in society, by the ignorant of course. My sisters were fighting all the time to defend themselves. These

⁷⁶ Haitian newspaper.

⁷⁷ You are lucky you are in America. In Haiti, they would spank you.

were fights in school, fights in front of our building, and fights on the streets. Kids were being made fun because of their accent and the color coordination of their clothes (as if that had something to do with being Haitian.) If you ask me, mostly all West Indians had issues with their use of colors. My mother never wanted us to go anywhere. She wanted us safe inside. Her biggest, yet most effective threat to the neighborhood kids when they harassed us was “I going to Ayiti for you,” which meant she would go to Haiti to do voodoo on them, and that always scared them off.

Going outdoors was a challenge in itself, especially if the kids around the neighborhood knew you were Haitian. They always knew who was Haitian, because your parents never communicated quietly in Creole. While my sisters fought to remain Haitian and be respected, I surrendered and became the American I was by birthright. The “ti Ameriken.”

The “ti Ameriken” born in the US, speaking only English in both public and private spaces, adopted the rude American attitude and body gestures, laughing at other Haitians messed-up broken English, speaking English so fast that adult Haitians who don’t understand English will get frustrated with them, translating for their parents, their relative and parents’ friends if they did not have their own “ti Ameriken” to speak for them. At this stage in my life, Creole was no longer a treasure but a secret, just like my being of Haitian heritage. Ironically, I developed an allergic reaction to caffeine, I was devastated, but it also symbolized my dislocation from Haitian culture. No more coffee with bread and butter.

Newly arrived Haitians from modest backgrounds do not encounter the America of prime time T.V. Instead they are thrust into the underside of America, an inner city urban ghetto where everyone seems to be against them, from the highest reaches of the federal

government to their peers in school... Through the 1980's, the majority hid their roots and assimilated to the segment of America that immediately surrounded them. They adopted the appearance and styles of inner city, poor African American youth. They walked the walk and talked the talk, frequently so successfully that others did not know their Haitian roots. (Stepick, 73)

No one ever thought I was Haitian. As the ti Ameriken, I did not dress like the Haitian girls who just came from Haiti. They wore skirts most of the time; no matter how cold it was. They wore ribbons in their hair until they were 14 years old and their Haitian accent was extremely heavy. They were also quiet and polite in public. I wore pants all the time. I lost all my hair ribbons and convinced my mom that I did not need them, and I acquired a body language that screams out bad ATTITUDE. Oh yeah, no one ever thought I was Haitian, even when they heard part of my last name. I was too Americanized to be Haitian.

1986-1990

My name is Isabelle Rollin now. I know longer acknowledge Pierre as part of my last name; it was another mark for public torture. As Isabelle Rollin, I can come from any country and I can even be an American with no questions asked. I was free from the popular Haitian name.

“Isabelle... a a a?” the teacher would be trying to figure out how to say Pierre.

“Present! Present!” I would yell out quick fast before the teacher could say Pierre, because the next question would be “Is your last name Haitian?” And every time I lied and said no, I died inside. That’s when I began to hate America and its society. It made me hate my people and myself for being connected to them. Voices of the Americans and non-Haitian West Indians ignorance pierced and tortured my soul: “Pierre, Pierre, Pierre!

You Haitian. Do you know if all Haitians come by boat?” “Sak pasé. Yo! Your parents’ know voodoo?” “How come you don’t look like a Haitian?” “What does Boolé, Boolé, Boo mean?” “If you Haitian, you must have HBO- Haitian Body Ordor.” This term was given birth through the harassment of Haitians, but it later applied to all those whose underarm pits were stinking and the odor pierced through their clothes.

“An mway!⁷⁸” These words would come from the mouths of Haitian students being harassed down the school hallways, at my Junior High, when getting beat up for being Haitian, for talking, looking and smelling Haitian.

Despair.

By the year 1990, during my second year of High school, I began to stop fighting against being discovered as a Haitian. Since I was completely assimilated into the American culture, I guess I was not concerned about what they thought. I was no longer intimidated or constantly harassed or questioned about by heritage. I had one Haitian friend in my neighborhood, but now had a few Haitian friends in school, and did not care too much if others thought I was Haitian. The voices of the "they" had begun to fade.

I began High School in 1989. I knew I would be starting new, at a new school. Junior High School was very tough on the development of my cultural identity, but a year after high school, I started to be more comfortable with possibly publicly claiming my Haitian heritage. I was gaining a sense of confidence and security. I realized that every one at this stage was trying to define who they are. My attackers were just as lost in their own identity crisis. Also, at this time Haitians were beginning to fight back against those who were terrorizing them. A lot of Haitian gangs were created during this time period to defend Haitians who were being harassed or attacked. The news began to spread that

⁷⁸ Help in Creole

they better not mess with the Haitians. Haitians were taking back their self-esteem and publicly claiming their space in American society. Maybe that is what helped foster my newfound comfort in wanting to claim my Haitian Heritage. By this time, I even spoke a little Creole in the streets, but not loud and at ease. I spoke it quietly and on edge. But it was a beginning.

By the mid 1990's, assertion of Haitian pride were more common...African American styles still predominated in dress, language, and music...Expressions of Haitian culture, however, were more accepted and more frequent. More opportunities existed for Haitians to publicly express both Haitian and African American culture. (Stepick, 72)

Growing up in New York City, I was controlled by the voices of Haitians getting beat up yelling for help, the Americans ridiculing Haitians, and I suppressed my grandmother and mother's voice. I could not hear them during my war against my Haitian identity. But in 1991, I heard them loud and clear along with thousands of other Haitians.

Guilt, Repentance, and New Birth.

1991

I was sitting practically in an empty classroom, with very few students, when a substitute teacher told me, after he read my last name, "What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be at the march? I said "You are right, but my mom did not want me to miss school."(School is very important to Haitians.) But this teacher confirmed the identity I was ready to claim. I did not lie about being Haitian that day. I did not try to stop him from saying the Pierre in my last name. I did not even acknowledge the reaction

of the other students. I just let me be I. It no longer mattered whether I was Haitian-American or American –Haitian. It was not only my American peers (which included all other West Indian natives), but also the American government, the very system set up to practice justice and equality, were ostracizing my people. I was tired of fighting against my people and my self.

Nevertheless, as Haitians become successful cover-ups, as they speak, walk, and appear as African American, they gain acceptance from African Americans. The cover-up Haitian has earned the right to be part of the local society. This successful segmentary assimilation establishes the foundation for the Haitians' next step, their reassertion of pride in their Haitian heritage. (Stepick, 73)

The humiliating accusation of Haitians as carriers of the Aids virus was the catapult to my secret. This situation should have given even more reason to hide my Haitianness but it did not. It made me furious. It made me angry that I had to hide it my heritage- beautiful and powerful. Angry that we had to fight not only racial prejudice, but a cultural discrimination as well. I thought, the nerve of this society to call us an infected race. Haitians had poured their sweat and tears in building this nation then and even now with its children in the armed forces. How disrespectful and dehumanizing. It was through the social destruction of my Haitian identity and self worth, I was able to be reborn into my Haitian culture. They almost had to destroy my separate selves (Haitian and American) in order for my new double self (American Haitian) to emerge. I became one with my Haitian culture and my American identity. I was ready to fight and stand upright for my Haitian heritage.

It was the Haitian March against social discrimination by the American government and its society that grounded my identity. So many closet Haitians emerged during this period. Enough was enough. We're made of flesh and blood. We bleed, we cry, we breathe, we smile, we live, we die, we love, we hate, we give, we take, and we've sacrificed and have been sacrificed. No more blood. No more tears. No more fear. Through this march, Haitians took back the pride and self-respect they gained in 1804 and gave America a replay that year. Though I did not go on the march, I too traveled this journey with them towards socially re-humanizing ourselves, and in the process I reconciled with my ancestors.

Forgive me Lord.
Forgive me Haiti.
Forgive me Toussaint Louverture.
Forgive me rebels.
Forgive me Mother.
Forgive me Father.
Forgive me Great and Grandmothers
And Great and Grandfathers.
Forgive me when
I
Had
Forsaken
All of Thee.

Though I have come to embrace, respect and accept my Haitianess publicly, like the loss of my access to coffee, Haiti too, I thought would be lost, until I returned in 1997 to do research on Haitian women writers.

I know who I am now and I love every aspect of my cultural identity. I am an American born Haitian girl living in America. Immersed and expressing myself in the beauty of my mother's tongue.

Pride, Peace, Laughter, Creole.

Once the Haitians earn the respect of their African American peers, then they can fling off their covers and reveal their true Haitian identity. They can wear Haitian clothes, eat Haitian food, speak Creole in front of African Americans and declare to both African Americans and those Haitians who are still cover-ups, "I'm a real Haitian, girl!" (Stepick, 73) The Haitians who rediscover Haitian pride have prevailed over prejudice and pressures to assume a singular ethnic identity, either Haitian or African American. Instead they have become self-conscious, multicultural individuals. They exhibit what has been called reactive formation ethnicity, the formation of ethnicity as a reaction to prejudice and discrimination. (Stepick, 73)

It is amazing when I look back at my childhood in New York City, when I would not dare speak a word of Creole in public to now, ironically, I am writing my dissertation on Haitian Creole, its literature and its writers, and how its the essential mark of Haitian identity. Finding Stepick's book has helped me to better understand the process that I went through to establish my identity in America. Though his study focused mainly on Haitian youths in Miami, it tells the stories of Haitian youths everywhere in America during the 80's and 90's.

I thank my dad for his travels back and forth to America from Haiti; he brought Haiti with him every time. Though I was separated from the island, my dad's return trips kept me connected. He'd bring us Haitian artifacts, clothes, shoes, money, drinks, food and even the imported French perfumes and toiletries that Haitians loved. He was my connection to Haiti. My mother's Haitianness was compromised every now and then, but my father's continuous visits reaffirmed my Haitianness. To me he smelled of mangoes and the sweet humid air of the mountains in Haiti. He spoke Creole softly not loud and angry, which made it appealing and loving. My dad was my secret Haitian treasure. He

was pure and unimpeded by the American culture and social torture. He loved his country and heritage. When he would visit I think I forgot about America. I was Haitian, happy and whole.

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