

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: REWRITING THE FRENCH COLONIAL
 TOPOS OF THE ISLAND IN THE WORKS OF
 MARIE FERRANTI, JEAN-FRANÇOIS
 SAMLONG, AND CHANTAL SPITZ.

Silvia U. Baage, Doctor of Philosophy, 2012

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The island trope is a recurring theme in colonial travel literature but how do contemporary authors of the French-speaking world conceptualize the island in the 20th and 21st century?

My project examines the complexity of the notion of islandedness in the works of three contemporary authors of Francophone islands outside the French Caribbean: Corsican author Marie Ferranti, Réunionese author Jean-François Samlong, and Tahitian author Chantal Spitz. Drawing on different discourses of postmodernity including intertextuality, supermodernity, the hyperreal, the time-image, and violence, I argue that the island becomes an important site from which ethnography, the crisis of time and meaning, and techniques of resistance are negotiated and constructed. In my analysis, I build on various foundational theories of cultural contact from the French Caribbean and Francophone Africa to account for the diversity and difference of the non-French Caribbean island text. Particular attention

will be given to the literary text as a tool to reflect upon a colonial past and neo-colonial present in three different contexts of the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the South Pacific.

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WORKS OF MARIE FERRANTI, JEAN-FRANÇOIS SAMLONG, AND
CHANTAL SPITZ

By

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Grandma, Dora Baage, and my first French teacher, Simone Waibel.

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This thesis would not have been possible without the help, guidance, and support of numerous individuals.

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Introduction: Francophone Island Literature of Corsica, Réunion, and Tahiti.

1 La littérature ultramarine, existe-t-elle ?

This intriguing question was launched by France Ô journalist Christian Tortel to open a round table discussion at the *Festival des Outre-Mers* in Paris, May 14, 2011. The panel consisted of three French-speaking authors of different temperament who all originate from a different Francophone island and who currently write and publish in French: the New Caledonian author Frédéric Ohlen, Tahitian author Chantal Spitz, and Réunionese author Jean-François Samlong.¹

Having published at different rates, each of these authors remains relatively unknown outside the geographical confines of their island, as the scarcity of academic research about their works indicates. Although these authors are heritage speakers of a regional language other than French, they have spent time in France and learned speaking French through the process of institutionalized assimilation on their island, despite the geographical distance that separates their islands from Metropolitan France.² The three panel members are committed to increasing the circulation of overseas cultural forms of expressions. Their desire to create a space for their works

¹ Located in the South Pacific, New Caledonia consists of a main island and several small islands at the Northern top of the main island. Tahiti is a part of French Polynesia, which consists of several archipelagos. The archipelago that Tahiti belongs to is the Society Islands (Archipel de la Société) and within this archipelago, Tahiti is the largest island of a group islands known as the Windward group (Les Iles du Vent). Réunion is located in the Indian Ocean and consist on one island. For maps of French overseas islands and archipelagos, see Gay, Jean-Christophe. *L'outre-mer français: Un espace singulier*. Paris: Belin, 2008.

² On a plane, it takes 11 hours to get from Paris to Saint-Denis de la Réunion, and 24 hours to get from Paris to Tahiti or New Caledonia.

within the battlefield of an on-going controversy about the implications of politically charged concepts like the terms ‘overseas’ (‘*outré-mer*’ or ‘*ultramarine*’) and ‘literature’ elucidates central issues of the French-speaking world. As expected, Chantal Spitz strongly reacted to the moderator’s introductory comment about her being a speaker of a *regional* language. She did not hesitate to remind the panel chair that she does not consider her native language, Maohi, as a *regional* but a *national* language. In response to the question of whether or not *la littérature ultramarine* exists, Spitz observed that the adjective *ultramarine* (overseas) conveys a Eurocentric perspective to classify and to categorize French-speaking texts written outside of Metropolitan France. According to Spitz, « la littérature d’outré-mer, c’est la littérature française » (« Littérature ultramarine »).³ Spitz furthermore expressed some amusement about the mere question of whether or not overseas literatures existed and stated that she had already dedicated a complete issue to the topic of French Polynesian literature in 2002 when collaboratively publishing a collection of essays in her literary magazine, *Littérama’ohi*.

Spitz is not alone in her battle for recognition, as the remarks of New Caledonian author Ohlen and Réunionese author Samlong show in their contribution to the panel discussion. A quick glance at the long list of works, awards, and accomplishments of Réunionese author Jean-François Samlong quickly confirms the contradictory situation of French-speaking overseas authors whose publications literally go unrecognized outside the island. Samlong’s first work appeared in the late 1970s and he has been publishing poetry, novels, short stories and essays regularly ever since. Grouping this author’s past and contemporary works from a period of over

³ Translation: “[For me], the literature of Metropolitan France is overseas literature.”

three decades within the arbitrary category of “emerging” literature, simply defies logic, even more so if one takes into consideration Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo’s helpful introduction to *Le Champ littéraire réunionnais en questions* in which she points to the problematic attempts to schematize and conceptualize non-canonic texts of the French-speaking world.⁴ Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo critiques attempts to group Réunionese literature and other overseas cultural productions by French standards of literary movements and periodization: “Whether or not these notions to non-canonical literatures should be applied to French-speaking as well as Anglophone literatures of the West Indies and Africa is a recurring one. It just goes to show that they are thought of as sharing similar situations which pertain to literatures of colonial and postcolonial zones” (xi).⁵

The question of whether or not overseas literature exists clearly goes beyond the number of editions and literary prizes, as Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo observed. Spitz’s comments particularly illustrated this problem by simply defining any written text as ‘literature’ because the literary space, according to Spitz, is made for people to express themselves. Ohlen and Samlong provided further insights when they reminded the audience of the problematic status of the novel for it represents an

⁴ “un simple examen de ces textes soulève un ensemble de problématiques que masque le ‘naturel’ de leur composition [...] Romuald Fonkua [...] parle d’une ‘francophonie interne’ ultramarine [...] d’une France extérieure qui n’est pas tout à fait la France [...] La cohabitation de La Réunion avec les autres îles de l’océan Indien dans l’ouvrage de Jean-Louis Joubert suggère la mise en place d’une unification des littératures de l’Océan Indien [...] *L’Encyclopédie de La Réunion*, en revanche, ouvre sur un autre questionnement. Elle prend en considération la littérature orale, qu’elle place au préalable de la littérature écrite, comme une forme de soubassement, mais ne problématise pas cette antériorité. Plus qu’elle n’interroge la courte sous-partie qu’elle consacre à la littérature en créole » (v-vi).

⁵ “La question de l’application de cette notion aux littératures non canoniques se retrouve posée pour l’ensemble des littératures antillaises ou des littératures africaines tant francophones qu’anglophones, signifiant bien que sont mises en commun les situations propres aux littératures des zones coloniales et postcoloniales” (xi).

imperialist and somewhat incompatible form of expression for certain cultures based on oral traditions. Samlong is far less rebellious in his claims and strongly discourages overseas authors from imitating canonic writers to find their own voice. As far as contemporary literary productions of so-called peripheral regions of the French-speaking world are concerned, Samlong strongly confirms Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo's arguments for writers from Réunion and other island regions, who are obliged to

make constant, permanent, and regular efforts so that our literatures do not lapse into memory in an era where one event is followed by the next in a couple of days only, so that we always feel fragile and always have the unfortunate impression that our work is ephemeral. Hardly pronounced and written, already forgotten. This forces us to take advantage of the least occasion to promote our literatures in Metropolitan France. One has to constantly start over, be a teacher and a literary critic.

[faire des efforts constants, permanents, réguliers, pour que nos littératures ne sombrent pas dans l'oubli, à une époque où un événement en chasse un autre en l'espace de quelques jours, si bien que nous avons toujours le sentiment d'une fragilité, toujours cette fâcheuse impression de travailler dans l'éphémère. A peine dit, à peine écrit, à peine oublié. Ce qui nous oblige à profiter de la moindre occasion pour promouvoir nos littératures en métropole. Il faut sans cesse se remettre à la tâche, faire un travail de pédagogie, de critique littéraire (« written interview »⁶)].

As the previous passage indicates, compared to Spitz and Ohlen, Samlong imposes rather high standards and expectations as far as the quality of literary works are concerned. A sample reading of a passage from Chantal Spitz's 2011 novel soon demonstrated his appreciation of her eloquent combination of poetry and prose that endows the text with a rhythm and interior rhyme that does not exist in the traditional French novel. The particularity of her style solicited praise and admiration from various members of the audience as well.

⁶ See the Appendix for the interview in full-length.

2 From outre-mer to outre-mers and beyond: spotlight on la francophonie ultramarine

The 2011 Festival des Outre-Mers is not an isolated event to promote overseas literature in Metropolitan France, where the majority of overseas productions go unnoticed. In his 2011 plenary speech at the annual colloquium organized by the Conseil International d'Études Francophones (CIEF) in Aix-en-Provence, Guadeloupian author, poet, and critic Daniel Maximin further examined the contradictory situation of tropical islands of the French-speaking world.⁷ In his talk, Maximin situated the conundrum of these authors first and foremost within the problematic institutional cut that falsely divides Metropolitan French literature from the French-speaking literature of its *outre-mer*.

In his position as the *Commissaire général de l'année de l'Outremer* (2011), Daniel Maximin aimed towards bringing these two worlds together. Both his speech and his involvement in the preparation of the *Festival des Outre-mers* intended to showcase the diversity of overseas cultural productions. Advertised as the first edition of a series of cultural events that will be held annually in Paris starting in 2012, the 2011 series of events, from April 29 - May 15, 2011, was the first occasion to discover the diversity of France's overseas departments and 'territories' and their multiple forms of cultural expression during the *année de l'Outremer*.⁸ Although the panel *La littérature ultramarine existe-t-elle?* did not quite draw a crowd the same way public appearances of cult figures such as Guadeloupian author Maryse Condé

⁷ Maximin was also participated in the *Festival* in Paris. He was also invited to speak on a panel about "Littérature Créole: enjeux et défis" ["Creole Literature: stakes and challenges] at the *Festival du Livre de Nice 2011* June 17-19, 2011, but could not attend due to sickness.

⁸ The 2012 festival was scheduled to be held June 5-10, 2012 but has been postponed due to a lack of funds.

who spoke the next day,⁹ it was, as Samlong indicated, an important opportunity for the three authors mentioned above to promote their own and their compatriots' works.

I was pleased to see the growing interest in Francophone island literature which became the focus of my research in 2010. The fact that two of the authors I had decided to work on for my dissertation, were placed on the same panel by the organizer of the event confirmed that Chantal Spitz and Jean-François Samlong are, despite the lack of circulation of their works in Metropolitan France, recognized within the Francophone community amongst the leading literary figures. I had decided to work on Jean-François Samlong's texts in 2009 when I discovered two of his recent novels which both deal with the question of Creole identity and culture on a Francophone island: *L'Empreinte française* (2005) and *Une île ou séduire Virignie* (2007), with the latter novel providing the topic of my qualifying paper.¹⁰ In 2010, I came across the works of Chantal Spitz through two critics who specifically referred to her works due to the fact that she was the author of the first Tahitian novel written in French: one being Jean-Marc Moura, the other one being the website "Ile en île" which has been an invaluable resource for my research on French-speaking island literatures outside the French Caribbean.¹¹ After reading her first novel, *L'île des*

⁹ "Une heure avec... Maryse Condé" was animated by *Africa n°1* and *France Ô* journaliste Anasthasie Tudieshe. During the question and answer session, Jean-François Samlong asked Condé how she reconciled the field of tension [champ de tension] between the feeling of being imprisoned on the island and the desire to escape.

¹⁰ Both of these novels are currently not translated. I would suggest the following titles: *French Marks* and *An Island to Seduce Virginia*.

¹¹ Maintained by Professor Thomas C. Spear of Lehman College and Undergraduate Center at CUNY (City University of New York), this multi-media website is currently the most comprehensive database of French-speaking island literature, covering island cultures in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean, as well as the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. This site contains information about more than 200 French-speaking island authors whose information has been compiled with the help and collaboration of specialists in the field. The site can be accessed by visiting <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/>

rêves écrasés [Island of Shattered Dreams] (1991), I was struck by the representation of the continuous struggle between traditions and modernity as imposed through French culture in her as well as Samlong's texts. Both authors function in a multicultural space in which the regional culture, Creole for Samlong, and Maohi for Spitz, is threatened by assimilation to Western standards and traditions.

The *Festival des Outre-Mers* in Paris helped me put into perspective my own ideas about Francophone literature and the French-speaking world where the issue of showcasing is central. Overseas cultures are virtually invisible in Metropolitan France while Frenchness is central to the daily life on the overseas island, as the adjective 'outré-mer' indicates. Within the context of French overseas departments, Réunionese Hugues Maillot's essay, *Avec la France d'outre mer*,¹² reminds us that the term "ultramarine" defines what should be a mutual feeling of bond and unity between Metropolitan France and its DOMs: "the destiny of my island and the overseas departments is a vivid illustration of the center's unity beyond the sea and the population's unity beyond their differences"¹³ (11). Valérie Madgelaine-Andrianjafitrimo skillfully demonstrates other levels of the complexity of the qualifying adjective 'outré-mer' when she argues that 'outré' evokes a colonial fact, the hyphen a state of surplus, and 'mer' conveys a hardly fitting situation for a territory that spans across several oceans.¹⁴

¹² Hugues Maillot's essay was published in 2009. He refers to four overseas departments (Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guyana, and Réunion Island); however, since January 1, 2011, there are actually five overseas departments of France because Mayotte changed its status.

¹³ "le destin de mon île et de l'outré-mer est l'illustration vivante de l'unité de la France au-delà des mers et de l'unité des Français au-delà de leur différence" (11).

¹⁴ « La nation d'outré-mer est pour le moins anachronique et obscure : de quelle 'mer' s'agit-il, pourquoi ne parle-t-on pas d'Outre-France' [...] » (« littératures des DOMs » 35).

She furthermore explained the different implications of the singular and plural forms that only exist in the French-speaking world: “Considered as a whole, it refers to spatial identity. This allows erasing historical, spcial, anthropological, economical, and judicial disparities of zones it designates. It is most often used in a context of administration and remains an official classification of these spaces and of their relationship to their metropolitan center”¹⁵ (« Paroles » 11). By contrast, the plural form could, if used, go beyond the idea of anachronistic demarcation by evoking the idea of multicultural diversity as “discourses [...] *from* overseas”¹⁶ (“littératures DOMs” 35). These ideas are recurring problems in the domain of Francophone Postcolonial Studies that strategically theorizes ways to deal with the problem of perspective and will be further discussed in chapter 1.

Within this context, the act of showcasing literature or other forms of cultural expressions similarly becomes a problem of perspective. What is at stakes for Metropolitan France when it decides to display (or refuses to display) cultural productions of its overseas islands that used to play an important role on the imaginary of colonial writers such as Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Denis Diderot, and even pre-postcolonial travel writer Victor Segalen? Yvan Combeau highlighted the transitional points in the imaginary of the French by quoting the delegate representative of French Guiana who in a speech pronounced on November 10, 1943, exclaimed: “From now on, there will only be one France. We are the ones who want to build a brandnew homeland and we banish the word Empire [...] Call us

¹⁵ “Perçu comme un tout, il se réfère à une identité spatiale. Il permet ainsi de gommer les disparités historiques, sociales, anthropologiques, économiques, juridiques, des zones qu’il désigne. Utilisé dans un contexte le plus souvent administratif, il demeure une classification officielle de ces espaces et de leurs rapports à leur centre, la métropole” (« Paroles » 11).

¹⁶ “paroles [...] *issues de l’outre-mer*” (“littératures DOMs” 35).

overseas France. Show the indivisibility of the fatherland in your choice of words and in your actions”¹⁷ (59). Hugues Maillot similarly added: “From my point of view, the choices that were being made for overseas France indicate the leanings of the entire country. Abandoning the ambition of turning the overseas departments into a French showcase all over the world means, simply put, to give up on the strong ambition that our country be radiant in the world. Do we have to accept this?”¹⁸ (11-12). Chantal Spitz’s firm denial of her French identity serves as an enlightening answer to this question. Known for her problematic relationship with her French culture and identity, she told Christian Tortel during the panel discussion in Paris: “I don’t see any similarity between the two of us other than the fact that we are both human beings. You are French, I am not” (“Littérature ultramarine”).

Yet, a French-speaking text does not exist in a vacuum and it reflects the imaginary of the local culture it is produced in. The topos of the island is of particular importance as it is central to the construction and negotiation of geo-political, socio-cultural, and affective affiliations to its *métropole* or center.¹⁹ Anne Meistersheim reminds us that islands symbolically represent a “microcosm” of the world. However, on a micro level, overseas departments and islands of France seem to be more than just a “microcosmic [...] French territory”²⁰ (Maillot 41). In that sense, Daniel Maximin’s plenary speech depicted the complex situation of overseas authors by

¹⁷ « Désormais, il n’y aura plus qu’une France. Nous qui voulons bâtir une Patrie nouvelle, bannissons ce mot d’Empire [...] Appelez-nous la France d’Outre-mer. Marquez dans les mots, comme dans les actes, l’indivisibilité de la patrie » (59).

¹⁸ “Les choix faits pour l’Outre-mer Français sont, à mes yeux, révélateurs des orientations prises pour la France entière. Abandonner l’ambition de faire des départements d’outre-mer une vitrine de la France aux quatre coins du globe, revient à abandonner, à terme, toute ambition forte de rayonnement de notre pays dans le monde. Devons-nous nous y résoudre?” (11-12).

¹⁹ The word metropolis, ‘métropole,’ comes from Greek, *mêtêr*, *mother*, and *polis*, city (*Larousse* 643).

²⁰ “territoire français de [...] caractère microcosmique” (Maillot 41).

referring to the exceptional geopolitical conditions of their islands that bear marks of French and Creole culture, and of the world at large. These multiple dimensions have an impact on the way each author perceives the Self and the Other. Although Maximin does not specifically mention Corsica and the Mediterranean Sea in his speech, it seems that the case of French-speaking literature produced in Corsica further exemplifies the predicament of island literature produced outside of continental France and outside the French Caribbean for their circulation is confined to the geographic confines of the island.²¹ A recent post on the blog *Pour une littérature corse* laments the fact that Corsican publishing houses are not even present at the *Salon du livre* that is held every March in Paris (“Pour une littérature corse”).

3 Corsica as exemplary showcase of French-speaking literature?

During my first trip to Bastia, Corsica in the summer of 2010, I discovered the novels of Marie Ferranti and other contemporary Corsican-born authors in a local bookstore. This bookstore specifically featured literary representations of Corsica in continental and local texts of the past and the present. Upon my return to continental France, I was intrigued by the limited circulation of these texts in bookstores, despite Corsica’s geographically close position to the continent. While Michel Biggi goes as far as to deny the island’s isolation based on the fact that “[Corsica] has never been and is not even overseas because the Sea has definitely been erased by continental

²¹ Valérie Magdaleine-Andrianjafitrimo’s comment about the beginning of printing in Reunion in 1793 leads us to wonder about the circumstances behind the relatively delayed acquisition of printing technology on overseas French-speaking islands (“Introduction” xii). In comparison, Mauritius (formerly Ile de France) started printed in 1773, whereas the archipelago of Tahiti started printing for the purpose of distributing religious works, as Robert Nicole observed.

continuity” (Biggi 19),²² Hugues Maillot considers the case of Corsica as equally complex as that of overseas islands: “Apart from the physical continuity of territory, the proximity of the continent is not even a guaranty for belonging. One day, the Corsican islander, too, might pay for it”²³ (57).

This description is particularly relevant for Corsican literature written in French but also, other cultural forms of expression that are specific to the island. Alain Di Meglio pointed out that Corsica produces a relatively low number of novels each year and is yet to make it to the verge of being able to claim an active field of literary production (“regards croisés”). At the same time, it is interesting to note the Corsican perspective on this issue of showcasing continental France, as many texts present an almost unbearable absence of references to French culture and civilization but highlight their own cultural specificities instead. This is why I chose Marie Ferranti to counterbalance Spitz’s and Samlong’s positions.

The works of the Corsican critic Jean-Louis Andreani helped me established links between Corsica and that of other overseas islands of the French-speaking world. Andreani claims that the destiny of Corsica and overseas departments are closely intertwined as Corsica widely supported French troops, not only during the war in France, but also, during multiple colonial missions abroad.²⁴ Andreani stresses that

²² “elle [la Corse] n’a jamais été et n’est même pas outre-mer, puisque la mer a été définitivement effacée par la continuité territoriale” (Biggi 19).

²³ “Hors la continuité physique du territoire, la proximité du continent n’est pas même une garantie d’appartenance. L’insulaire Corse risque d’en faire elle aussi un jour les frais » (Maillot 57).

²⁴ « La francité, forgée ou renforcée par deux siècles d’histoire commune, est d’abord une évidence : comme les autres Français—et parfois plus qu’eux--, les Corses sont morts à la guerre pour la patrie. Ils ont fourni en nombre record des cadres à l’armée et à l’administration coloniale [...] » (Andreani 32 ; 136).

In reality, contemporary Corsica is the result of a double failure: first of all, there is the failure of the State who proved by contradiction that it did not care about Corsicans during the episode of the sixties when it decided to set up the Oriental Plain for the return of the Algerian repatriates; and that of the Corsican elites out of which a good portion was capable of engaging with Gaullism's power but abandoned all ambition for the island (12).

[Au fond, la Corse d'aujourd'hui est le produit d'une double démission : celle de l'Etat d'abord qui, lors de l'épisode des années 1960 où il entreprit d'équiper la plaine orientale pour accueillir les rapatriés d'Algérie, fit la preuve par l'absurde du peu de cas qu'il faisait des Corses d'eux-mêmes ; celles des élites corses ensuite, dont une bonne partie sut s'investir dans la gaullisme de pouvoir en abandonnant toute ambition pour l'île (12)].

Although Corsican nationalists argue for the Corsican exception to essentially gain a status similar to that of overseas departments of France,²⁵ Corsica is, administratively speaking, not an overseas department, which is why *2011 Festival des Outre-Mers* in Paris did not showcase Corsican literature written in French. A quick glance over the 2011 program of 21 activities for the closing weekend of the festival alone indicates the large variety of cultural forms that the event brought together: French-speaking authors and other artists from the Indian Ocean (Réunion), Oceania (Tahiti, New Caledonia), and the Atlantic Ocean (St Pierre and Miquelon, Guadeloupe, Martinique) all of which share a common colonial history of French conquest, occupation, and/or subsequent independence but with different repercussions as far as their current status is concerned. Many French-speaking overseas authors would have been excellent candidates for a comparative analysis on overseas literature. When it comes to French-speaking literature from islands outside the French Caribbean,²⁶ the

²⁵ « On murmure alors que c'est en accord avec les conseillers de Charles Pasqua que les nationalistes avancent l'idée d'un statut de territoire d'outre-mer pour l'île » (Andreani 235).

²⁶ Scholars already produced critical works on Francophone African and recently, Quebec. Apart from a short reference in Édouard Glissant's *Le Discours Antillais*, few scholars mention the influence of Ile de Gorée on the imaginary which has been listed on UNESCO's World Heritage List since 1978 ("UNESCO").

literary production of Mauritian authors such as Ananda Devi or Shenaz Patel tends to get a lot of attention by scholars and critics due to the exceptional fact that Mauritius, after having been ruled by the British, claimed its independence from the United Kingdom in 1968 but the island still produces texts in French.

A focus on Francophone islands of different status facilitates the process of geographically limiting the choice of potential candidates to the representatives of French-speaking island regions in the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, the South Pacific, and the Mediterranean Sea which, again, is not considered “overseas” due to its closeness to the continent. However, within the large number of French-speaking island authors that currently write and publish, Corsica, a Mediterranean island constituting two of France’s regional department, shares a common history with both continental France and its overseas departments and collectivities. Within this context, the names of Marie Ferranti, Jean-François Samlong, and Chantal Spitz are recurring references among mainly local specialists and critics. My dissertation will demonstrate the validity of these theoretical and critical positions. These authors have in common a similar status on their islands. Although the writing of these three authors is practically excluded from the literary canon of French literature, their names appear as standard references in specialized anthologies of regional, French-speaking literature of Corsica, the Indian Ocean, and French Polynesia. Despite the obvious link of French history, culture, and language the three authors share, it is important to remember that they exist within the specificities of their own culture and speak other regional languages such as Creole (local language of Réunion), Maohi or

Tahitian (regional language of Tahiti), and Corsican (one of the regional languages of Corsica).

4 From peaks of French to 'la Francophonie insulaire'

Another important aspect is the circulation of these texts. As Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo points out for the Réunionese novel, publication with local publishing houses virtually limits the distribution of the texts to the geographical confines of the island. This is also the case for the texts of Marie Ferranti and Chantal Spitz. Both Marie Ferranti and Jean-François Samlong published several texts with Parisian publishing houses, Gallimard and L'Harmattan respectively. Despite the limited distribution of their works, both Samlong and Spitz have participated in the annual March book exposition in Paris known as the *Salon du Livre*, where publishing houses and authors present their latest works.

All three authors have left their native island at least once for an extended period of time before returning back home. The contact with the metropolitan French and French culture have had a particular impact on the literary career and construction of identity for Jean-François Samlong and Chantal Spitz whereas for Marie Ferranti, the continent appears as a distant geographic entity with minimal impact on Corsican life and identity. In her texts, continental characters bear a minimal, if any textual presence at all. However, Spitz and Samlong contextualized their intercultural contact in their writings. In a written interview, Jean-François Samlong explained:

During my first stay in France, in 1970, as part of my mandatory military service in Lyon, I discovered a France that had nothing to do with the way

the father land 'France' was described in the books. All the French I met along the way were neither all of white skin, nor handsome, intelligent, rich, or experts of the French language. On the contrary, I had the pleasure of seeing snow for the first time in my life, un unforgettable sight; and I had the unfortunate experience to discover that people did not think of me as a Réunionese French but rather, like an Arab, an Algerian, or a Moroccan because of my matte skin, my matte teint, my curly hair, my accent... I was everything but French; or a different French person, almost a stranger; never a real French person. All of this does not have any importance today but back then, this deforming mirror effect led to ask myself certain questions: who am I? What does it mean to be French? What is my real identity? How does one construct one's identity within the realm of French culture without rejecting one's mother tongue (Creole), one's culture, one's traditions? How does one become French without neglecting one's origins? How does one become French without forgetting who one is, without shutting oneself off from the rest of the world? How does one invent history? And most importantly, how does one make the other, the Parisian French, understand that we have our history, our language, our culture? This was when I started to write and to publish my first poems, and I started to become involved in culture and in 1978, I founded the association Udir (Union pour la Défense de l'Identité réunionnaise), and a publishing house that thirty years later still publishes textes of Réunionese authors ("Written interview").

[Lors de mon premier séjour en France, en 1970, dans le cadre de mon service militaire obligatoire à Lyon, j'ai découvert une France qui n'avait aucun lien avec la France, « la mère patrie » décrite dans les livres puisque tous les Français rencontrés sur ma route n'étaient pas tous blancs de peau, ni beaux, ni intelligents, ni riches, ni experts en langue française. Par contre, j'ai eu le plaisir de voir la neige pour la première fois de ma vie, un spectacle inoubliable ; et j'ai eu le déplaisir de constater que je n'étais pas perçu comme un Français de la Réunion, mais davantage comme un Arabe, un Algérien ou un Marocain, à cause de ma peau mate, de mon teint mat, de mes cheveux frisés, de mon accent... J'étais tout, sauf un Français ; ou alors un Français à part, presque un étranger ; en aucun cas un Français à part entière. Aujourd'hui, tout cela n'a plus aucune importance, mais à l'époque cet effet de miroir déformant m'a amené à me poser certaines questions : qui suis-je ? C'est quoi être Français ? Quelle est mon identité propre ? Comment se construire dans l'espace français sans renier sa langue maternelle (le créole), sa culture, ses traditions ? Comment devenir français sans trahir ses origines ? Comment être français sans rien oublier de ce qu'on est, sans se replier également sur soi-même ? Comment s'inventer une histoire ? Et surtout, comment faire comprendre à l'autre, le Français de Paris, qu'on a notre histoire, notre langue, notre culture ? C'est à ce moment-là que j'ai commencé à écrire et à publier mes premiers poèmes, puis je me suis engagé sur le plan culturel, et en 1978

j'ai fondé l'association l'Udir (Union pour la Défense de l'Identité réunionnaise), et la maison d'édition qui, plus de trente ans après, continue à publier les textes d'écrivains de la Réunion (« Written Interview »)].

Similar narratives can be found in Chantal Spitz's *pensées insolites et inutiles* (2006), a collection of exceptional articles and speeches the author gave over the past couple of years.²⁷ A short introduction and summary of each author's works and accomplishments will help elucidate fundamental similarities and differences in the styles of these contemporary French-speaking island authors and their exemplary ability to showcase the diversity of French literature produced outside of continental France.

4.1 Corsican author Marie Ferranti

Born in 1962, Marie Ferranti currently lives in and mainly writes about Corsica. While Ferranti is not a central public figure and little information is available on her private life, her publications never go unnoticed, as standard announcements of new publications by her publishing house and several interviews indicate. A former literature professor and author of a total of eight novels and one essay, Ferranti's works can be divided into novels with a Corsican theme, fictional and historical biographies, and her literary essay, *Le Paradoxe de l'ordre*. This essay deals with the works of novelist, essayist, and literary historian Michel Mohrt (1914-2011) to whom Ferranti dedicated her third novel, *La Fuite aux Agriates* (2000).²⁸ Her most recent publication is a biographical essay entitled *Une haine de Corse: histoire véridique de Napoléon Bonaparte et de Charles-André Pozzo di Borgo* (2012), which focuses on

²⁷ An English equivalent for this title would be *Uncommon and pointless reflections*.

²⁸ More work needs to be done to determine the possibility of influence Mohrt might have had on Ferranti's style.

the relationship between two historical Corsican figures that played a different role in the imaginary of Corsicans. Compared to the texts of the two other authors this dissertation focuses on, the latter work is currently sold and readily available through regular book stores in Metropolitan France.

In her Corsican novels, fictional biographies, and fictional historical novels, Ferranti tends to deal with the exceptional position of women in the context of a patriarchal society that is governed by hatred and violence. This approach becomes very clear through the somewhat exclusive titles of some of her works. In France, Ferranti is most known for her non-insular *Princesse de Mantoue* (2002) for which she received the *Grand Prix du roman de l'Académie Française*. In 2005, this work was translated into English for Hesperus's series on modern voices by Andrew Brown with title *The Princess of Mantua* and two years later, Uwe Timm published a Spanish translation (Amaranto, 2007). *Lucie de Syracuse* (2006) is another example of a fictional biography of a female saint that unfolds not in Corsica but on the Italian island of Syracuse. The novel recounts the mischievous actions of a supposedly virtuous woman.

Ferranti combines her focus on women with a representation of male characters that are textually less present than females while their actions bear an important weight on the atmosphere and create dramatic tensions. Ferranti started publishing in 1995 with *Les Femmes de San Stefano* (Gallimard), for which she received the François Mauriac prize. In this novel, she depicts the trajectory of a man who retreats into the Corsican swamps after losing his wife. With this type of portrayal of the female community, Ferranti set the tone for similar subsequent works

such as her 2004 novel, *La Chasse de nuit*, or her 2008 novel, *La Cadillac de Montadori* in which tension and violence are recurring themes. The island community is described from the perspective of outsiders who observe the critical divide between different social background, age, and gender of a population that is oftentimes reunited in the face of death.

La Fuite aux Agriates (Gallimard) is her third novel in which she talks about the emotional roller coaster of a young and rebellious woman, Francesca, who becomes involved with her sister Marie's fiancé, Julius.²⁹ When her lover Julius is forced to leave town to hide in the Corsican Agriates, Francesca decides to join him on an adventurous escape through the Corsican desert. They eventually go separate ways; shortly after Francesca returns back home, Julius is shot by a supposedly unknown individual, who turns out to be a jealous childhood friend who is passionately in love with Francesca. The novel contains crude scenes that depict the atmosphere of an unrefined and uncivilized island community plagued by political instability. The traits of her characters and their unease in the face of critical situations show the process of denial that entangles their public and private lives.

While the theme of rewriting is a recurring strategy in Ferranti's texts, this novel is of particular interest to my work because of its intertextual echos of Prosper Mérimée's romanticized representation of Corsican nature and island culture in his short story "Colomba" (1840). The contemporary novel highlights the consequences of female sexuality in a hypermasculine world of hunters and political activists that are new to the sphere of French-speaking literature, including Francophone Africa. While the novel critiques the patriarchal structure of the Corsican society from the

²⁹ The English equivalent of this title would be *Escape into the Agriates*.

perspective of local women, *La Fuite aux Agriates* resists Hélène Cixous's concept of *l'écriture féminine* that tends to serve as a foundation to study the texts of marginalized women of the French-speaking world as observed by Valérie Orlando.³⁰ In addition, Ferranti's novel goes beyond the Anglo-Saxon concept of the anxiety of influence deployed by Sandra Gibert and Susan Gubar's *Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* while transgressing Simone de Beauvoir's concept of female subjecthood.³¹ Francesca resuscitates the literary memory of Mérimée's Colomba only marginally as Ferranti's Francesca becomes an active figure of a politically charged context of tensions in contemporary Corsica in which she pursues her quest for creative expression and erotic desire inside and outside a room of her own. She suffers from the consequences when she loses her lover Julius but ends up recovering.

In that sense, Ferranti blends nostalgic images of the past with a depiction of shocking details about the current brutal reality of the daily life of her island. This approach differentiates Ferranti from the poetic writing of Tahitian author Chantal Spitz.

4.2 Tahitian author Chantal Spitz

Born in 1954, Chantal Spitz is one of the most militant Tahitian voices

³⁰ "In order to study the environments in which women live, the traumas and conflicts that their societies cause for them, as well as the dementia to which they often succumb, a purely feminine language—*une écriture féminine*, to use Hélène Cixous's concept—must be developed and nurtured. Yes, access to the pen and to the language that ensues from it has been problematic for francophone African and Caribbean women" (Orlando 3-4).

³¹ "On ne naît pas femme : on le devient" (Beauvoir 285 and 286).

currently writing and publishing in French.³² Contrary to Marie Ferranti, Spitz actively participates in cultural and political events and speaks out against domination and discrimination in various contexts. The collection *pensées insolites et inutiles* functions as an important testimony to the wide range of topics of her poems, talks, and critical reflections between 1989 – 2005 which include la Francophonie and nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean. Sylvie André argued that Spitz’s identity discourse does not align itself with the theme of the quest for identity of other Francophone texts (*Voix francophones* 24).

In addition to her editorial activity for *Littérama’ohi* which began in 2002, Chantal Spitz published three novels in French: *L’Ile des rêves écrasés* (1991),³³ *Hombo: transcription d’une biographie* (2002), and *Elles, terre d’enfance, roman à deux encres* (2011). Written in a fairly similar style as blends of prose and oral poetry into polyphonic structures of interior rhythms and rhymes, these novels were published with two local Pacific Ocean publishing houses and are not available in Metropolitan France unless ordered through the editor’s website. Apart from Ferranti’s *Princesse de Mantoue*, Jean Anderson’s 2003 English translation of Spitz’s first novel is currently the only translation available of these authors, while one of Samlong’s recent texts, « Sitarane ou la gueule du monstre » (*Horizontes Insulaires*, 2010), was translated into Spanish and Portuguese.

When critics refer to Spitz’s literary activity, they tend to evoke her style of writing and the recurring theme of autochthonous traditions. In her novel, *L’Ile des*

³² On the book cover of her second novel, *Hombo: transcription d’une biographie*, the publishing house presented Spitz as “l’enfant terrible de la littérature polynésienne [qui] témoigne, provoque, interroge la nature humaine et en premier lieu les Polynésiens sans concession.”

³³ This novel was first published in 1991 in Papeete, Les Éditions de la plage, and reedited in 2003 for publication with Au vent des les in Pirae.

rêves écrasés, Spitz focuses on the emotional impact of acculturation in Tahiti as a consequence of the construction of the French atomic testing in the South Pacific. The plot traces the progressive loss of cultural roots, a theme that Sylvie André has related to the plot of Amadou Kourouma's 1976 novel, *Les Soleils des Indépendances* that traces the dramatic impact of independence on the imaginary of Ancient tribes in Africa (*Continuité* 238). While Kourouma stages the pretentious battle of his main character, Fama, as the last descendant of an influential ancient family without progeny that eventually dies out, Spitz describes the process of acculturation through various forms of contact with the French in Metropolitan France and at home. Her narrative focuses on a family of three generations but particularly engages with the encounter between Terii and a French-born white female technician, Laura Lebrun, who fall in love with each other, despite all ethical and cultural differences. The couple is forced to end their relationship when Laura must return to Metropolitan France at the end of her mission for the nuclear testing site.

This novel becomes particularly interesting from an intertextual perspective. Spitz categorically denounces Gauguin's paintings and rejects literary representations of Tahiti by Pierre Loti and Victor Segalen, in particular his 1907 ethnographic novel, *Les Immémoriaux [A Lapse of Memory]*. In her novel, she relegates the political question of guilt and responsibility to the sphere of the colonizer while Segalen, for example, introduced Térii as guilty for imposing a curse on the island when forgetting the order of names of ancestors in an important recitation. Within that context, Sylvie André compared the status of the French Polynesian novel to other paraliterary writing of female writers of Francophone Africa about the situation of women that are

trapped in a patriarchal society of misogynist traditions and polygamy. In her novel, Spitz reverses the colonial myth of the exotic female to place the burden of desire on a French female that, contrary to Mariama Bâ's protagonist in *Un chant écarlate*, is accepted by her Tahitian partner's family.

Spitz's militant activism needs to be distinguished from the literary activity of women in other parts of the French-speaking world because her novel is a testimony of the literary activity of female writers that, compared to their Francophone African counterparts, have more access to education than men. Contrary to Ferranti's novels which depict physically violent details, Spitz opts for a seemingly romanticized, poetic vision of a nevertheless alarming reality, which Réunionese author Jean-François Samlong approaches from yet another angle.

4.3 Réunionese author Jean-François Samlong

Born in 1949, Jean-François Samlong has actively contributed to the development of Réunionese literature and culture on his island since the late 1970s. The most successful author in this comparative analysis, he particularly stands out due to his polyvalent literary contributions as poet, novelist, essayist, translator, critic, and even co-editor of literary anthologies of Réunionese and Indian Ocean literature. His texts have been published with both local as well as internationally renowned publishing houses, including Editions Jacaranda (Le Tampon), L'Udir (Saint-Denis), L'Harmattan (Paris), Grasset (Paris), Le Serpent à Plumes (Paris), and Ibis Rouge (Matoury). Samlong received several important accolades which include the *Prix de Madagascar* for *Terre Arrachée* (1982), the *Prix des Mascareignes* for *Madame*

Desbassayns (1985), the *Prix Charles Brisset* for *La Nuit cyclone* (1992), and the *Prix de la Société des Gens de Lettres* for *L'Arbre de violence* (1995).

Starting with what he calls introspective poetry, Samlong continued working on the history and legends of the island, publishing a series of historical essays and intertextual novels, before dedicating himself to more literary texts and historical fiction about his island. While Samlong continues to work on novels, he is currently working on several photography albums of his island which are partially accompanied by poetic fragments and reflections about the island, for example *L'Île insolite d'un jardin créole* (Surya, 2011). This photo album features uncommon photographs from his private Creole garden to celebrate the beauty of the flora and fauna. On a symbolic level, these photographs also point to potential links between the biodiversity of a garden and the socio-cultural diversity of the island.

Samlong's 2007 novel, *Une île où séduire Virginie*, illustrates the author's commitment to the history and culture of the Indian Ocean. A Creole adaptation of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's 1788 *Paul et Virginie*, this novel retells the exotic 18th century novel from Paul's perspective. Paul's narrative sets out to discredit the legendary version of the old man and narrator of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre novel, by insisting on his desire for Virginia and his ambitions for the future. Although the novel ends with the same tragic denouement of Virginia's shipwreck, Samlong situates the sequence of fictional events within the context of colonialism, slavery, and fugitive slaves. Blending the 18th century socio-political context of the Creole plantation island of Mauritius and the contemporary imaginary of Réunion, Samlong reduces the colonial representation of Indian Ocean pastoral love to a parody. The

strategic deployment of a postcolonial narrative structure allows for the true history of the island to be told.

What makes Samlong an even more remarkable author is his active involvement beyond the geographical confines of Réunion. In 2009, he collaboratively published a text with Guadeloupean author Suzanne Dracius and Gérard Théobald from Martinique, entitled *La crise de l'outre-mer français: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion* which examines the current situation of overseas departments from three perspective to negotiate the value of the historical attachment to France. Samlong's contribution can be read as an extension of his 1992 historical essay, *Le Défi d'un volcan: faut-il abandonner la France?* in which he analyzed the implications of French colonization on the imaginary of the colonizers and the Réunion islander.

In addition, as indicated during the oral interview with RFI in May 2011 and the written interview conducted by myself, he continues to be an active promoter of *Creole culture* and *la Francophonie insulaire*. His continuous contributions to collaborative works regularly leads to new publications, with the latest being *Partir sans passeport* (2011, Idem). He is currently planning on publishing a collection of short stories on the theme of violence in collaboration with Chantal Spitz and other overseas authors in 2012.³⁴ This project will build on their 2011 panel discussion during the *Festival des Outre-mers* around the question *La littérature ultramarine existe-t-elle?* One cannot help but notice the progression from the rhetorical question (*Faut-il abandonner la France?* [*Do we have to abandon France?*]) to the explicit

³⁴ As of January 2012, Chantal Spitz confirmed her participation in the project and is planning on visiting Réunion this September.

confirmation of the state of crisis in *La crise de l'Outre-mer français* [France's Overseas Crisis] culminating in the thematic thread of a collaborative work on anger [la colère]. Samlong's exceptional interest in and commitment to transinsular collaboration confirms the need to transgress geographical, material, and mental boundaries through writing and reading island literature of the French-speaking world comparatively, which is what this project will set out to do.

5 Rewriting the French colonial topos of the island

I argue that Corsican, Réunionese, and Tahitian literatures not only exist, but that these texts can function as essential foundations for an analysis of the complexity of imaginary of overseas authors writing in French. I posit that these texts produce important local but also transinsular and transoceanic discourses that facilitate an understanding of the diversity and richness of the French-speaking world. The texts in question address local, national, and international issues that go beyond the geopolitical issues of colonial frameworks. My project examines overseas literature of three Francophone islands from an interdisciplinary, comparative perspective to highlight similarities and differences between these authors that can contribute to the on-going discussions about *la Francophonie insulaire* outlined in Maximin's CIEF plenary speech in 2011. Given the presence of these island regions in the imaginary of French travel writers during the colonial era, a comparison between the literary colonial representation of Corsica, Réunion, and Tahiti with its contemporary conceptualization are revealing. They point to the presence of implicit and explicit intertextual references that are particularly relevant in Ferranti, Samlong, and Spitz's

novels, due to the popularity of island adventures written by Prosper Mérimée (“Colomba”), Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (*Paul et Virginie*), and Victor Segalen (*Les Immémoriaux*).

While intertextual echoes are an important starting point to examine mirror effects between colonial and postcolonial texts, one should remember that the works of Ferranti, Samlong, and Spitz function within a geo-political and socio-cultural context of its own. Each insular region faces different stakes and challenges that become absorbed in the imaginary of the island and therefore, literary as well as other cultural forms of expression. In that sense, the act of rewriting the French colonial topos of the island should be understood through conceptual points of convergence and divergence between historical, cultural, and literary memories between Metropolitan France and its overseas islands, and amongst overseas islands of the French-speaking world. In that sense, my dissertation will add to the on-going discussions about the forms and functions of intertextuality, parody, and the pastiche as discourses of postmodernity and as particular forms of postcolonial literature.

Chapter 1 will start out by situating the act of rewriting the island within the literary canon of French-speaking literature before attending to the problematization of these texts in literary theory of the post-colonial era. This chapter will provide a foundation for understanding the development of island tropes in the imaginary of the continent that is necessary to contextualize a reading of the French colonial topos of the island through Francophone and Anglo-saxon Postcolonial Theory. Chapter 2 will consider the conceptualization of the island through historical and ethno-cultural referents to chart a path through the diachronic structure of time in contemporary

island novels, compared to their synchronous counterparts. Chapter 3 will examine the specificities of space-time relationships through a variety of postmodern concepts to highlight the specificities of Corsica, Réunionese, and Tahitian approaches to dealing with the crisis of time and meaning. In Chapter 4, the theme of violence will provide another vantage point from which to consider the rewriting of the French colonial topos of the island as either reaction to colonial history or characteristic of the post-colonial condition.

Abbreviations:

F.A. = *La Fuite aux Agriates (The Escape into the Agriates)* (Marie Ferranti)

I.S.V. = *Une île où séduire Virginie (An Island to Seduce Virginia)* (Jean-François Samlong)

I.R.E. = *L'Île des rêves écrasés (Island of Shattered Dreams)* (Chantal Spitz)

C. = « Colomba » (Prosper Mérimée)

P.V. = *Paul et Virginie (Paul and Virginia)* (Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre)

L.I. = *Les Immémoriaux (A Lapse of Memory)* (Victor Segalen)

P.M. = *La Princesse de Mantoue (The Princess of Mantoua)* (Marie Ferranti)

The translations for French critics are mine unless otherwise noted and they are as literal as possible. I decided to leave all quotes from the contemporary novels in their original version to preserve the literary style of each text. I believe that comparing the three primary texts in their original form is more beneficial than drawing on

translations because Chantal Spitz's rhythmic language and vivid imagery do not produce the same effect in Jean Anderson's English translation, as he himself points out in the preface. All quotes from "Colomba" and *Paul and Virginia* are drawn from English translations, as are the translations of critical texts whenever they were available.

Chapter 1: France, Francophone islands, and *la Francophonie*

1.1 The scope of islands in literature and visual culture: A small introduction

Throughout history, islands have been important literary frameworks for analyzing societal structures and moral systems. At first, it can be challenging to make connections between the adventures of the protagonists of Homer's *Odyssey*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and the participants of the TV reality shows *Survivor* or *Temptation Island*, let alone an academic project in the field of Modern French Studies. However, in today's globalized world, island settings continue to inspire adventures in writing, art, and popular culture. The island trope has become a recurring theme in digital forms of visual culture as well where it transcends national boundaries and illustrates its adaptability to what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin refer to as new "accounts of textuality and concepts of 'literariness'" (194).

From the Renaissance to the present, faraway islands have been a site of utopian and dystopian visions, dreams, and playful reenactments of the continental imaginary in various genres of French literature, as Frank Lestringant's *Le Livre des îles: atlas et récits insulaires de la Genèse à Jules Verne* [*The Book of Islands: Atlases and Island Narratives from the Genesis to Jules Verne*] and Jean-Michel Racault's *Robinson et compagnie: Aspects de l'insularité politique de Thomas More à Michel Tournier* [*Robinson and Co: Aspects of Political Insularity from Thomas More to Michel Tournier*] indicate. The geographical distance and isolated position of islands became associated with a host of fundamentally different moral codes and cultural traditions that Renaissance writer Rabelais's *Quart Livre* (1552),

Enlightenment dramatist and novelist Marivaux's trilogy of island plays (*L'Île des esclaves* in 1725, *L'Île de la raison ou les petits hommes* in 1727, and *La Colonie* in 1750), as well as colonial authors such as Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (*Paul et Virginia*, 1788), Pierre Loti (*Le Mariage de Loti*, 1880), and Victor Segalen (*Les Immémoriaux*, 1907) explored.³⁵ Their works depict far-away or even fictional island communities. But this tradition took an even more peculiar direction in the 19th century when continental novelists and authors of short stories eagerly contributed to the diversity of these pre-colonial and colonial representations of far-away islands through their own romanticized versions of close-by exoticism. The new focus on Corsica as a geographically close island in the Mediterranean Sea allowed Guy de Maupassant ("Les Bandits Corses"), Alexandre Dumas ("Les frères corses") and Prosper Mérimée ("Colomba" and "Mateo Falcone") to create a foundational network of mythical references and imaginary depictions of ruthless bandits and outlaws.³⁶ The setting of the Corsican desert soon became synonymous with plot structures that evolved around the vicious cycle of the violent *vendetta* tradition. Contemporary Corsican authors and critics make different usage of this myth. Paul Silvani is one of the numerous critics who aim to debunk these romanticized myths about Corsica. In his collection of authentic biographies, he draws on archival resources and authentic descriptions of the life and fate of real Corsican bandits, while Marie Ferranti

³⁵ The English titles of the books listed above are as follows: Rabelais's *Forth Book*, Marivaux's *Slave Island*, *Island of Reason or the Little Men*, and *The New Colony or the League of Women*, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul and Virginia*, Pierre Loti's *The Marriage of Loti*, and Victor Segalen's *A Lapse of Memory*.

³⁶ The English titles for the novels and short stories mentioned above are as follows: Maupassant's "Corsican Bandits," Dumas's *The Corsican Brothers*, and Mérimée's "Colomba" and "Mateo Falcone."

continuously returns to the representation of the stereotypical outlaw as the epitome of evil on the island.

From the pastoral exoticism of Paul and Virginia's innocence to the dramatic Corsican codes of honor, these island plots, characters, and settings continue to shape the imagination of French-speaking authors, artists, and even filmmakers of the 20th and 21st century in numerous ways. Some of these traditional plots and characters mentioned above have undergone significant structural transformations during the process of being adapted to various formats. As a result, the affiliations with the original text oftentimes become seriously blurred in that they retain only vague structural elements. The characters of Paul and Virginia are a classical example of this phenomenon that dates back to French colonial writer Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's exotic pastoral. In the preface to the 1788 edition, he described his goal the following way:

I know that certain travelers who are also men of taste have given us enchanting descriptions of several islands of the southern ocean; but the manners of their inhabitants, and still more those of the Europeans who land there, are often a blot on the landscape. I wished to join to the beauty of nature between the tropics the moral beauty of a little society. It was also my purpose to exhibit a number of great truths, among them this one: that our happiness consists in living according to Nature and virtue (*P.V.* 37).

Randal Kleiser's and William A. Graham's romantic South Pacific dramas, *Blue Lagoon* (1980) and *Return to the Blue Lagoon* (1991) illustrate his point for the context of the Victorian era. The screenplay is a cinematographic adaptation of the Irish writer Henry De Vere Stacpoole's trilogy, *The Blue Lagoon* (1908), *The Garden*

of *God* (1923), and *The Gates of Morning* (1925), which are directly inspired by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's pastoral.³⁷

Jean-François Samlong's rewritten version of *Paul et Virginie* is a more explicit but nevertheless complete metamorphosis which intends to rectify the lies and myths spread about Paul's and Virginia's childhood and adolescence innocence by endowing Paul with a voice to express his burning desire for his beloved Virginia. Although *Une île où séduire Virginie* (2007), as many other texts written outside of France or the French Caribbean, has not been translated into English or other languages yet, it is important to stress here that this French-speaking text is rich in structural and conceptual elements. They manifest themselves in other popular culture island narratives, including film, reality TV, and the multiplayer online simulation game, *Second Life*. Due to their prevailing popularity in new digital media, my analysis will return to these other modes of representations in other genres such as cinema, reality TV, and virtual worlds in the conclusion where I will analyze the island as a site of games and plays that transcend the boundaries of regionalism and nationalism but align themselves with a specific vision on cultural particularities.

Islands are particularly prevalent in 20th and 21st century French and Francophone novels, plays, and essays. Without being exhaustive, contemporary novels with an island theme range from the depiction of fictional islands such as Amélie Nothomb's *Mercury* (1998), Michel Houellebecq's *Possibilité d'une île*

³⁷ For a more detailed analysis, please see Baage, Silvia. "Paul et Virginie dans le monde occidental anglophone du XX^e siècle : l'île comme terrain de jeu des 'enfants de la nature' ?" *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre et l'océan Indien*. Eds. Jean-Michel Racault, Chantal Meure, and Angélique Gigan. Paris: Classiques Garnier, May 2011, p. 535-550.

(2005),³⁸ or Erik Orsenna's series of fictional novels which are set on an imaginary island of French grammar (*La Grammaire est une chanson douce*, *Les Chevaliers du Subjonctif*, *La Révolte des accents*, *Et si on dansait*; 2001, 2004, 2007, and 2010 respectively) to real islands.³⁹ While Canadian writer Antonine Maillet resuscitates Acadian life on a small fictional island off the shores of Bouctouche with *L'Île-aux-Puces: commérages*, Ivorian writer and playwright Bernard Dadié's *Iles de tempête* (1971) was inspired by historical figures of the Haitian Revolution in the French Caribbean. Other modes of representation blend several levels of reality, such as magic surrealism and its derivatives. These other forms can be found in French-speaking novels of authors that originate from an island but are not limited to the French Caribbean or island authors exclusively.⁴⁰

Various studies and critics from France and other cultural horizons attempted to analyze the particularities of islands in French writing and art from numerous perspectives. Calls for papers and published conference proceedings such as Jean-Pierre Doumenge's *Iles tropicales: Insularité, 'Insularisme'*, Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimoutou and Jean-Michel Racault's *L'insularité thématique et représentations*, Françoise Létoublon's *Impressions d'îles*, Eliseo Trenc's *Au bout de voyage, l'île: Mythe et réalité*, testify to this vivid and diverse interest in islands and contain at least one if not several investigations of islands in Greek mythology. Frank Lestringant and

³⁸ Michel Houellebecq was the recipient of the prestigious Prix Goncourt in 2010.

³⁹ The English translation of the novels mentioned above are as follows: Nothomb's *Mercury*, Houellebecq's *Possibility of an Island*, and Orsenna's *Grammar is a Sweet, Gentle Song; The Knights of the Subjonctif, The Rebellion of the Accents*, and *Let's Dance!*

⁴⁰ Magical surrealism is an integral part of many 20th century English-and Spanish-speaking authors of the Caribbean islands and beyond. The combination of magical surrealism and the island can be found in American novelist William Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929), Guyanese writer Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), and the Cuban Alejo Carpentier's *Kingdom of this World* (1949), to name a few.

Jean-Michel Racault focus on the classics of French literature across the centuries while simultaneously evoking commonalities and differences between these and other canonical representations of islands and island adventures across countries, from Thomas More to Daniel Defoe and beyond.⁴¹

For the purpose of this study, it is essential to point to immediate implications of the abundance of French studies about the topic of *insularité*. While French critics use the term *insularité* to analyze what Corsican critics Jean-Louis Andreani and Anne Meistersheim refer to as the sociopolitical and economic consequences that come with the geographical fact of being an island,⁴² the immediate equivalent in the English language, *insularity*, has rather negative connotations of isolation and seclusion. These negative connotations, however, tend to be expressed by two separate words in French, *insularisme*⁴³ and *iléité*.⁴⁴ Within the context of this study, I will be using the English translation of *insularité*, *insularity*, to refer to the condition of islandedness, which is experienced differently by Corsicans, Réunionese, and Tahitians.

Despite the apparent abundance of studies about insularity in the classics of French literature, literary representations of French islands outside the French

⁴¹ Diana Luxley's *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands* focuses on the realm of children's literature with an island theme. The pervading point of Diana Luxley's work is the importance of the island in children's literature as well as cross-cultural influences and adaptations of trope of the Robinsonade.

⁴² "L'insularité a des conséquences économiques, culturelles, psychologiques assez bien identifiées" explains Andreani (27).

⁴³ "L'insularisme, qui concerne les caractéristiques de sociétés insulaires les poussant à adopter des comportements de fragmentation et d'isolement intéresse particulièrement la géopolitique et peut s'analyser à partir des catégories et des concepts de national, de local, de centre et de périphérie, de décentralisation, d'autonomie... et d'indépendance, etc. » (« Insularité » 162).

⁴⁴ "L'iléité est cette qualité de la perception et du comportement influencés par la forme spécifique de l'espace insulaire. À l'île s'attache l'idée de limite. L'île est contour. Limite de la surface, limite de la population, frontières marquées. L'insulaire vit dans des frontières sûres et naturelles [...] » (167).

Caribbean have largely been disregarded in both theory and literary criticism. Therefore, focusing on island regions such as the Occidental Mediterranean, French Polynesia, and the Mascarenes will help shed some light on peripheral areas and authors of the French-speaking world that are deprived of the attention they actually deserve. Marie Ferranti, Jean-François Samlong, and Chantal Spitz are contemporary authors of Corsica, Réunion, and Tahiti who write in French; however, their intellectual contributions to the French canon are conceptualized selectively, to say the least. Although their approaches to representing the island and/or insularity vary widely, their texts illustrate invaluable models of the perception of the Self and the Other in a globalized world in which the concept of the island, isolation, and tropical exoticism have taken on a new meaning. In that sense, a comparative analysis of the representation of these islands is a first step towards breaking what Adlai Murdoch and Pascale de Souza describe as “homogenizing discourses of nation-state and national parameters to evaluate events” (136). The challenge consists in analyzing the particularities of each island’s literature while at the same time, situating the texts in a complex network of insland discourses, as demonstrated for the Francophone section of the Caribbean, particularly Martinique, by Édouard Glissant’s foundational *Le Discours antillais* in 1981.

With this goal in mind, the study of Mustapha Trabelsi provides the most fitting methods to approach the representation of islands in the French-speaking world. Trabelsi goes beyond so-called metaphorical representation of islands as often suggested for the analysis of 18th and 19th century colonial texts. He differentiates between two branches of island literatures: the first constitutes texts that emanate

from the geographic location of a formerly colonized French island and is commonly referred to as island literature (*littérature insulaire*).⁴⁵ These authors and texts are to be distinguished from literature with an island theme or about the island (*littérature à thématique insulaire*), written by authors located in continental France.⁴⁶ Drawing primarily on Trabelsi's first branch of island literature and its representation of *real* islands, my analysis introduces a variety of methods for interpreting a selection of contemporary texts produced in the French-speaking world by situating them not only within the framework of French literature, but also, within the broad and diversified continuum of the literary canon of the French-speaking world at large.

The idea is certainly not to argue or even underestimate the importance of one group of authors over another. Rather, the goal is to think about the various strategies deployed in island literatures that were or are currently being produced within this complex network of relations that is worldwide being referred to as “French literature.” The institutionalization of French literature has been severely criticized in the manifesto of 44 authors around Michel Le Bris, including Francophone island authors such as Maryse Condé, Jean-Luc Raharimanana, and Ananda Devi in 2007.⁴⁷ This study particularly focuses on comparing and contrasting similarities and differences in the conceptualization of the island through frequent references to the second branch of literature with an island theme that serves as a critical vantage point

⁴⁵ Trabelsi bases the subgenre of island literature on the somewhat problematic assumption that all island authors write about their islands. For the purpose of this study, I specifically selected authors who are committed to this endeavor; however, it should be noted that island authors are by no means confined to the island theme.

⁴⁶ The French adjective *insular* tends to be used in English critics such as Chris Bongie but bears the same negative connotations when directly translated to English. I therefore decided to settle for “island literature” and “literature with an island theme” respectively.

⁴⁷ I will explicitly engage with the ramifications of the idea of *une littérature-monde en français* in section 6 of this chapter.

from which to consider the prevalent strategies of island adventure emplotment in colonial, pre-postcolonial, postcolonial, and neo-colonial texts.

This distinction between island-based literature and literature with an island theme is certainly pertinent for filmic texts as well. French globetrotter Daniel Drion's documentaries *Les Mascareignes: Réunion, Maurice, Rodrigues* (2003) and his *La Corse: Belle et rebelle* (2006) show island cultures from the perspective of the fascinated continental traveler. Drion hails the ocean as the only valid pathway to approach an island. The beaches of geographically close islands are a personal and recurring theme in filmmaker Agnès Varda's works, particularly *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008). By contrast, Réunionese filmmaker Alexandre Boutié is driven by the desire to show the particularities of his island from the perspective of the islanders. In one of his documentaries, *La Boutique des temps modernes* (2008), he retraces the material and historical changes in his community through a series of informal interviews to show the religious and cultural diversity of Réunion in the 21st century.

In this chapter, I will outline relevant key concepts that help broaden our understanding and awareness of the various forms of writing from and about islands in the French-speaking world. These theoretical frameworks will serve as a foundation to examine the works of Marie Ferranti, Jean-François Samlong, and Chantal Spitz. Before analyzing these works within context of the island environment, I will situate them within the context of contemporary trends in literary critical theory and in relationship to other problematic notions in the field of Francophone studies that include the French-speaking canon, the Glissantian project of the *tout-monde* and its subsequent developments into a *littérature-monde en*

français [World literature in French] as outlined by Michel Le Bris's manifesto *Pour une littérature-monde*.⁴⁸ In that sense, this chapter explicitly deals with politically charged concepts such as Francophone/French canon; postcolonial/post-colonial; hybridité/ Créolité; and islands/exoticism, to set the stage for a discussion of ethnotextuality, supermodernity and the hyperreal, the time-image, and violence as particular forms of intertextuality, postmodernity, space-time relationships, and the aesthetics of resistance in the context of the island. I posit that the theories and subsequent developments of Ricoeur, Clifford, Augé, Baudrillard, Deleuze, and Maximin yield important starting points for this comparative analysis of island discourses that will systematically explore the specificities of the Corsican, Réunionese, and Tahitian ways of conceptualizing the island, in comparison to Glissant's foundational concept of French Caribbean archipelization and his vision of *la mondialité*, globality, which are both expressed through the topos of the island.

Island literatures written in French can be instrumental in pointing out some ambiguities in the field of Francophone Studies. With the exception of French-speaking authors in Francophone Africa, the French Caribbean islands are currently the hub of Francophone theory, as Peter Hawkins indicates. Reading the fictional texts of Marie Ferranti, Jean-François Samlong, and Chantal Spitz through the theoretical frameworks mentioned above, inevitably point to convergences but also, differences. This forces readers, critics, and scholars to rethink and to challenge prevailing theoretical paradigms to create a space for these works that are produced in

⁴⁸ The manifesto of the 44 was signed in 2007. Initiated by Michel Le Bris at the Salon du Livre festival in Paris, this revolutionary document united Francophone authors as "étonnants voyageurs" and was to promote the idea of a world literature in French. While this concept is problematic for the texts in question, it marks a critical moment for French-speaking literature that attempted to move away from postcolonial terms of the Anglophone world, particularly hybridity.

the geographically and economically marginalized parts of the French-speaking world. These regions and authors tend to receive less attention by Francophone specialists in general and in particular, editors of manuals of the French-speaking world such as Denise Brahimi's *Langue et littératures francophones* and literary anthologies of Francophone literature.⁴⁹ The goal is therefore to reveal the paradoxical status of the canon of French-speaking literature through the ambiguous classification and reception of Francophone island literatures and authors. At the same time, my analysis of the French colonial topos of the island will point to ongoing internal contradictions that govern literary criticism and theory in Francophone Postcolonial Studies in the 20th and 21st century and consequently produce blurred visions of contemporary cultural topographies in the context of the island.

1.2 Francophone Literature as the Other of French Literature

The status of Francophone literature inside and outside of France has undergone dramatic changes over the past couple of years. Charles Forsdick and David Murphy argue that currently, universities in the United Kingdom as well as the United States⁵⁰ are more invested in promoting the diversity of French-speaking literature and theory than France itself,⁵¹ which is reminiscent of Hugues Maillot's

⁴⁹ In addition to the commonly studied regions of the Maghreb, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean, Patrick Corcoran's *Cambridge Introduction to Francophone Literature* (2007) features a complete chapter on Canada while Mauritius, Réunion, Madagascar, and the Middle East are studied as a joint category. He does not make any mention of Corsica.

⁵⁰ As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin indicate, the United States was particularly invested in the status of its authors as independent entities rather than off-shoots of the British Empire.

⁵¹ Forsdick and Murphy observe significant delays in the translation and distribution of foundational postcolonial theories and texts relating to these issues.

study, *Avec la France d'outre-mer*.⁵² Although specialized publishing houses in Paris such as *Présence Africaine* and *Maspero* and its successor, *La Découverte*, facilitated the publication of foundational ideas such as the concept of anti-colonialism that later become associated with postcolonial theory and thought, these works were, according to Forsdick and Murphy, primarily promoted by specialists outside the canon of strictly continental French authors.

Forsdick, Murphy, Moura, and others confirm that the commitment to authors who write and publish outside of continental France remains a problematic issue within Metropolitan France. This divide has a crucial effect on the production, circulation, and reception of texts produced at the geographical margins, particularly peripheral islands such as Corsica (in relationship to continental France and the European Union) and ultra-peripheral island regions such as Tahiti and Réunion (in relationship to the Western World, Metropolitan France, and the European continent).⁵³ The ideological debate over the classification and status of literature written outside of France, and its concomitant distinction between different regions of literary production, create a myriad of hierarchies and criteria which represent critical but yet subjective markers of Otherness within the realm of literature essentially written in the same language though each region might show regional variations in vocabulary and syntax.⁵⁴ Within that context, Robert Nicole rightly pointed out that particularly for French-speaking texts produced in Tahiti, this issue

⁵² For more information on Maillot's study, see the introduction.

⁵³ For other marginalized regions of the French-speaking world, see the contributions of Franco-Vietnamese author Anna Moï, Slovenian author Brina Svit, New Orleanais author Fabienne Kanor, and others, in *Pour une littérature-monde* (2007).

⁵⁴ Geographic hierarchies of Europeanness and non-Europeanness are complexified by other geopolitical structures such as colonialism and postcolonialism and current administrative statuses that

brings into consideration the place that Other texts occupy in the study of literature. When mainstream Western critics are confronted with such a different view—a nuisance—an embarrassing reality that departs so significantly from the dominant discourse, the Orientalising tendency is enacted. [...] Because very few Maohi writers stick to dominant parameters based on Western conceptions of ‘standards’ or some ‘canon,’ the literature has been widely dismissed or ignored (198).

Consequently, despite the stylistic beauty and literary qualities of her works, Tahitian writer Chantal Spitz has not received any accolades (yet).

These somewhat paradoxical markers of Otherness are particularly relevant in the realm of island discourses on, from, and about French-speaking islands. An analysis of these complex discourses is furthermore complicated by political, economic, and cultural corollaries of colonialism that will be discussed in part 5 of this chapter. As a first approach, we will follow the lead of Denise Brahimi’s manual that considers the meanings and implications of the notion of “Francophone literature” through the lens of geography, language, and culture as a principle of structuration for French literature before analyzing the underpinnings within the context of its geo-political difference and cultural diversity, as indicated by Jean-Marc Moura.

Denise Brahimi foregrounds the development of French language and culture in and outside of Metropolitan France to trace the appearance of Francophone literature throughout the French-speaking world. Within the context of this study about the Mediterranean Sea, the French Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and the South Pacific, Brahimi’s study helps establish key dates to trace the presence of the French in some of these regions. The French gained control of Martinique and Guadeloupe in

vary from region to region. Forsdick and Murphy also remind us that Belgium and its former colonies, including islands, should not be neglected.

1625 and 1635, respectively, obtained part of what is today known as Haïti in 1697, and founded Cayenne in Guyana in 1637. To practice the slave trade, “the French establish themselves in Senegal and on Gorée island where a language develops that takes French as its roots”⁵⁵ (10). To meet these ends, the French land in Madagascar in 1643 and on L’Ile Bourbon (Réunion) in 1638. Having gained control of the Ile de France (Mauritius), they eventually lose it during the Napoleonic Wars to the British.

Although Brahim’s study essentially shows the same results as Jean-Marc Moura’s *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniales* (1999), it is important to note Brahim’s focus on historically important events in Metropolitan France and their linguistic implications in French colonies, as today’s use of the French language throughout the world indicates. The scope of her analysis is wide enough to consider, of course, major writers of Switzerland, Belgium, and French Canada, next to those working from the ‘margins’ such as Africa, Madagascar, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Francophone Creole islands such as the French Caribbean and the Mascarenes. One is surprised to discover the absence of any reference to or acknowledgement of Corsican or South Pacific⁵⁶ writers where French is spoken and where authors write and publish what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called *une littérature mineure* or minor literature as works constructed by minorities or marginalized groups in a dominant language, that is, French. Consequently, these

⁵⁵ “les Français se donnent un établissement au Sénégal et dans l’île Gorée où se développe un langage à base de français” (10).

⁵⁶ Robert Nicole explains the presence of Tahiti in the European imaginary the following way: “Although the Spanish navigator Balboa has sighted it in 1513, and the Portuguese Ferdinand de Magellan had sailed right through it in 1520, the Pacific did not sustain in Europe the interest America had in terms of riches, trade, and exploitation of local resources both human (slaves) and material (gold and riches). But by the turn of the century, Portuguese ships [...] began drawing more line across their barren maps” (26).

expressions of community outside a community are realized in different shapes and forms throughout the French-speaking world and these contributions are rather relevant complements to the French canon. Within the context of the Francophone island literatures of the regions this project deals with, these authors of minor or paraliterature include but are not limited to Marie Ferranti, Jérôme Ferrari, and Jean-Louis Andreani for Corsica, Chantal Spitz, Flora Devatine, and Michou Chaze for Tahiti,⁵⁷ and Jean-François Samlong, Axel Gauvin, and Monique Agénor for Réunion. While some of them are currently working with renowned local and national publishing houses such as Gallimard or Actes Sud.⁵⁸

The case of Corsica is difficult to define but it is far from being an isolated example in the world of French-speaking islands. If we argue with Forsdick's and Murphy's rationale of juxtaposing 'Francophone' (French culture) with the notion of 'French-speaking' (French language), France itself will become Francophone, and by its extension, Corsica, which contains two of the now 101 departments of France. However, Corsican authors are not represented in literary anthologies of either French or Francophone literature,⁵⁹ which in a way is exacerbated by the fact that

⁵⁷ Didier Lenglaré's doctoral dissertation focuses on the concept of paraliterature of French Polynesia and New Caledonia. See Lenglaré, Didier. "Reconnaissance de l'Autre et métissage culturel à travers les littératures et paralittératures de la Polynésie Française et de la Nouvelle Calédonie : contextes et textes." (2011).

⁵⁸ Island authors, who exclusively published with local publishing houses, confine their works to a local readership. Anne Robin's doctoral dissertation in progress focuses on these types of French-speaking texts for Mauritius which she classified as "une littérature qui ne voyage pas" (Robin). Similarly, a large number of Corsican authors, for examples those writing in Corsican, currently publish with regional publishers only, with local Corsican works circulating mainly on the island.

⁵⁹ The best way to discover the richness of Corsican literary production is a trip to a bookstore in Corsica in which, next to the shelves of Francophone literature (encompassing all French-speaking texts), separate sections are devoted to Corsican history, literature, culture, and theory. Here, numerous anthologies of Corsican authors or representations of Corsica in literature are commonly found. Some typical examples are Jean-Dominique Poli's *La Corse de Guy de Maupassant: nouvelles et*

geographically speaking, Corsica is closer to Italy than to continental France.

Similarly, Peter Hawkins argues that the Francophone Indian Ocean islands

have often been regarded as a peripheral zone of the African continent [... although] the smaller islands such as Mauritius, Reunion, and the Seychelles are geographically a long way from the African coastline. The history of their population is very different from that of the supposed ancestral home of the human race: they have only been inhabited since the seventeenth century (1).

At the same time, the term ‘French-speaking’ does not accurately describe the situation of Corsica, Réunion, and Tahiti, as I will explain shortly, and ‘Francophone’ seems more appropriate, but likewise politically charged as these islands are the home of multilingual and multicultural communities. Corsica is not the only French-speaking / Francophone island with this type of paradoxical situation because Haiti, Madagascar, and Mauritius are only partially Francophone, as far as the degree of assimilation to French language and culture are concerned.

Haiti claimed its independence from France after the Haitian revolution in 1804 and Mauritius has been independent since 1968, following the example of Madagascar’s independence in 1960. Yet, all of these islands are currently still producing French-speaking texts, with Haiti being one of the most successful Francophone but non-French islands with authors like René Depestre, Jacques Roumain, and Marie Chauvet. For Mauritius, Shenaz Patel, Natacha Appanah, and Ananda Devi, are as common of a reference as Michèle Rakotoson and Jean-Luc Raharimanana for Madagascar.⁶⁰ One must therefore wonder how the criteria of

récits (2007), Roger Martin’s *Corse noire* (2010) and Marie-Jean Vinciguerra’s *Chroniques littéraires: la Corse à la croisée des XIX^e et XX^e siècles* (2010).

⁶⁰ Jean-Luc Raharimanana contributed to the *Pour une littérature-monde* book version of the 2007 manifesto (“Le creuset des possibles”) and was invited to speak on a CIEF round table discussion about “Silences et violence des mots,” along with Franco-Romanian writer Liliana Lazar, at the annual conference in Aix-en-Provence, France, on June 2, 2011.

geographic origin can serve as a valid indicator for the inclusion in or exclusion from the canon.

In that sense, Jean-Marc Moura's work generates a more critical investigation of the multifold dynamics and complexities prevalent in literary texts of the Francophone world. His analysis posits the importance of the ambiguous relationship between literary production of a text and its ability to articulate, disarticulate, and rearticulate these relationships through the construction of its plot and paratext. Moura provides a detailed account to explain the origin of the term "Francophone" as a geographical concept used to refer to a group of countries that share linguistic and cultural traits of the French language and culture to extremely varying degrees, but are located outside of France. In that sense, Moura seconds Brahim and other critics' observations with regard to the presence of the French language and culture in countries where French is either the first language, second language, administrative language, or the language of privileged education, as many maps of the French-speaking world visually demonstrate, particularly when it comes to representing ultra-peripheral island regions such as French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Fatuna.⁶¹ Yet, Corsica is not visibly marked in any of the linguistic examples but rather, represented as an integral part of France bearing the same color despite the fact that there are other regional languages spoken in Corsica, which include

⁶¹ Islands tend to appear in boxes, out of scale, whereas for other countries of the French-speaking world, for example, Northern Africa, no visual manipulations are required. In addition, neighboring islands to Martinique (Sainte Lucie) or Mauritius (Rodrigues) oftentimes visually disappear, depending on the scale of the map.

Corsican, Sardinian, and Italian dialects.⁶²

Within this selection of French-speaking countries, Moura differentiates between various types of *Francophonies* that are further outlined in Forsdick and Murphy's study as "a variety of French-language contexts [...] a wide spectrum of Francophone [...] or] partially Francophone locations, including but not necessarily privileging France itself" (5). Moura particularly insists on the case of the French Caribbean and Indian Ocean islands as example of what he calls a "*Francophonie insulaire*" which conceptually regroups linguistically and culturally similar communities on the grounds of their geographic insularity. In most cases, these communities show diglossic, if not triglossic characteristics, that is, the use of two or more languages such as French and Creole within the same community.⁶³ It is beyond the scope of this study to engage with the implications of this complex situation for *all* countries of the French-speaking world. However, the example of Corsica, Réunion, and Tahiti shows the complexity of what Jean-Louis Andreani calls Frenchness (*la francité*), "forged or reinforced by centuries of shared history" (32).⁶⁴ For Andreani, this Frenchness is part of an island identity that is articulated through language and culture *other than French*. Island communities like Corsica take great pride in their regional languages. This is also the case for the Réunionese Creole

⁶² According to Jean-Louis Andreani, Corsican is first and foremost an oral rather than a written language that is "facilement compréhensible pour les Italiens [...] le corse actuel est défini comme une langue 'à part entière, faite de bas latin, de toscan et de tournures françaises [...]" (37).

⁶³ As the Guadeloupian author Maryse Condé points out, not every member of the community is proficient in both languages, particularly if the parents are assimilated to French culture like her own parents. Her mantra is as follows: "je n'écris ni en français ni en créole. Mais en Maryse Condé" ("*Liaison*" 205.)

⁶⁴ "forgée ou renforcée par [des] siècles d'histoire commune" (32).

community around Jean-François Samlong, and militant activists like Tahitian author Chantal Spitz who defends Maohi culture and traditions.

The case of Corsica, Réunion, and Tahiti will help uncover the fate of Francophone islands that were conquered and colonized by the French in the past. The literary productions of these islands provide regional variations of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's notion of "writing back to the Empire." If the act of "writing back" is a quintessential aspect that defines the notion of the Francophone author and Francophone literature at large, it is, at the same time, not restricted to island communities. However, out of all former colonies, Francophone islands are in somewhat of a neo-colonial situation because they are still experiencing the consequences of the French colonization, despite the controversial 1946 *départementalisation* which is critically analyzed by Hugues Maillot and Yvan Combeau, among others.

Another factor that complexifies the distinction between French and Francophone literature and thus, the place of French-speaking island literatures at large, is the notion of the French-speaking author. Mastery of French remains just as an ambivalent criterion as the geographic origin because within the canon of French literature, there are some authors who are clearly considered "more French" than others. For example, foreign-born authors Samuel Beckett, Nancy Houston, Milan Kundera, or even Elie Wiesel serve as striking examples of how the act of writing in French as a non-native speaker becomes an act of political importance. For these authors, writing in French was a strategic step to success whereas on the other side of the continuum, Francophone authors are frequently confronted with questions as to

why they chose to write in French rather than their *native* language.⁶⁵ This conundrum is particularly relevant for the study of texts written by authors who live on islands because their works in and contribution to the French canon tend to be overlooked by critics and readers alike.⁶⁶ The popularity of and accolades received by French Caribbean authors Maryse Condé and René Depestre indicate a slow shift in attitude towards the *Other* of French literature. However, a lot of work still needs to be done in this domain as the notions of literariness continue to shape assumptions about writing within the French canon.

Moura and Nicole identified Chantal Spitz as the first author of French Polynesia to have published a novel in French more than 20 years ago. While for Spitz, French is a mother language and she had to learn Tahitian similar to the way Condé described her problematic relationship to Creole due to her parents speaking French at home, Samlong and Ferranti speak and write French as a second language, in addition to what they consider their mother tongue, that is, Réunionese Creole and Corsican. For Alain Di Meglio, the decision to write in French does not appear as striking for Corsican writers as there is a very small minority of authors who wrote and are still currently writing in Corsican, Italian, or a blend of Corsican, Italian, and French, for reasons of cultural integrity and tradition.

The central question then is how readers, scholars, critics, and to some extent, publishing houses, can actively work towards a new canon of literature that includes Francophone islands. But do these islands take issue with the French canon to

⁶⁵ See Anna Moï observed : « Je publiai. On m'étiqueta écrivain francophone. J'étais encore *l'autre* » (249).

⁶⁶ By contrast, Leconte de Lisle is an example of a Réunionese Creole poet who was torn between the island and France. He is commonly referred to as a French rather than Réunionese poet.

transform into sites where *une littérature monde en français* is produced, or do we need to conceptualize them differently? Within the context of Tahiti, Robert Nicole explained that there is a need for “constant revaluing of the Maohi canon and its reading practices, accepting multiple literacies, tolerating cultural alternatives, and continuing the active search for spaces where oppression continues to be the norm in order to support and help articulate those voices that are dominated, displaced, or silenced by the authority of a dominant discourse” (202).

This ambivalence is particularly problematic when it comes to authors of French nationality who wrote about cultural diversity in ways that are typically associated with Francophone literature. Silke Segler-Messner and Gilles Manceron argued that Victor Segalen’s position in the French canon is highly contested as his ethnographic novel, *Les Immémoriaux [A Lapse of Memory]*, written in 1907, remains a contested example of a colonial French writer who parses out the effects of colonialism through the arrival of missionaries in Tahiti. The case of the contemporary author Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio (born in 1940) serves as yet another, though contemporary example, to illustrate the paradoxical attitude of the French towards authors who were born in France but write in French about problems typically associated with Francophone literature and beyond.

Born in Nice, France, Le Clézio currently resides in the United States while he continues to publish with major publishing houses in Paris, as Bruno Thibault observed. Le Clézio’s ancestors, however, originate from Mauritius and he himself has travelled to and lived in numerous places in all parts of the world. His experiences are materialized in the large body of his works which leads Claude Cavellero to

classify Le Clézio's writing as that of what he refers to as a *témoign du monde* [witness of the world]. This quality seemed to have been one of the key factors in the decision of awarding Le Clézio's commitment to diversity with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2008. However, Le Clézio's socio-cultural interest in diversity yields conceptually different results when compared to Marie Ferranti, Jean-François Samlong, and Chantal Spitz's works.⁶⁷

The skillful and at times highly affective materialization of his bonds with Mauritius within the canon of French literature makes Le Clézio one of the representative authors of Mauritian literature and literary production. In one of his latest essays, *Raga: Approche du continent invisible* (2006), which attempts to debunk the myth of the paradisiacal tropical island by opposing it to the harsh reality, history, and tradition of the South Pacific islands as a whole. But Le Clézio's focus on marginalized places can also be interpreted as yet *another* Eurocentric representation of Otherness, perpetuating the colonizer's vision of the world under the guise of ethnic diversity. Therefore, *Raga* is a rich and invaluable resource for cross-cultural comparison of discourses about traditions between other insular authors such as Samlong, Spitz, and even Glissant.⁶⁸

If Francophone literature is the Other of French literature, the literary production of Francophone islands has an even more problematic status due to the manner in which aspects or degrees of narrative structure and plot are developed and

⁶⁷ Le Clézio is the author of a Mauritian trilogy *Le Chercheur d'or* (1985), *Voyage à Rodrigues* (1986), and *La Quarantaine* (1995), a collection of exotic short stories *Coeur brûlé et autres romances* (2000), and an ethnographic essay, *Raga: Approche du continent invisible* (2006) that demonstrate the exceptional interest of a contemporary French author in the topos of the island as ethnically diverse site of a culturally diverse population.

⁶⁸ Glissant's *Terre magnétique : les errances de Rapa Nui, l'île de Pâques* is an essay he co-authored with his wife Sylvie Séma. This essay was published in the collection "Peuples de l'eau," which also published *Raga*.

deployed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey refers to the existence of more than 500 island adventure stories in England between 1788-1910 that are based on the myth of the deserted island, which is inspired, amongst others, by Daniel Defoe's 1719 *Robinson Crusoe*. Island authors, on the contrary, either imitate Western styles and structures, thus affirming the Fanonian phenomenon of "mimicry," or by contesting European colonial discourses to insist on their *Otherness* against the infamous French "aura d'exclusivité" (Moura 20) through non-European narrative practices and island tropes. Silke Segler-Messner quoted Glissant's remark to show the ambiguities of the "Francophonie paradigm" to insist on the problem of perspective: « You say: overseas (and we said it with you), but you, too, will soon be overseas" (78).⁶⁹ In shifting towards representations that parlay European notions of literariness and textuality, authors of the French-speaking world systematically engage with visions of Otherness that foreground local specificities. However, these trends do not always become absorbed in literary criticism and academic research (and teaching) of Francophone texts.

Pascale de Souza criticized these internal ambivalences within the field of Francophone studies. She takes issue with the way contemporary scholarship primarily focuses on a selection of certain popular regions of the French-speaking world while depriving others of the attention they actually deserve: "African Caribbean, North African/Beur and Quebecquois subjects, while authors from the Mascarene and the South Pacific remain un(der)explored [...] While the Caribbean is given extensive coverage, the Mascarenes and the South Pacific are absent [in the 2003 *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* edition and beyond]" (240). Therefore, De

⁶⁹ "Vous dites: outre-mer (nous l'avons dit avec vous), mais vous aussi êtes bientôt outre-mer" (78).

Souza advocates for a shift towards *other islands* and *insular regions* of the French-speaking world to establish relevant similarities and differences between island literatures of what Peter Hawkins called the other hybrid archipelago. This dissertation seeks to facilitate the quest for not only one but several other hybrid archipelagos *au pluriel*; more precisely, I will be looking at the composition of other island regions outside the French Caribbean by reading Corsican, Réunionese, and Tahitian novels comparatively.

The focalization on Francophone islands outside the French Caribbean is only one of the many changes that are currently taking place in the area of Francophone Studies to single out “many different situations [...] a variety of contexts [...] periods [...], forms and fields” (Forsdick and Murphy “Situating” 23). The fact of being an island represents one of the numerous contexts that serve as a foundation for assumptions and speculations about the French language and culture. In their editorial to their 2005 collection of articles for two special issues of the *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, “Oceanic Dialogues: From the Black Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific,” Pascale de Souza and Adlai Murdoch foreground the complexity of the notion of diaspora which they define as “a condition and discursive space, a plurality of cultures as well as their ways of seeing; a compound, often fragmented framework that is often characterized by patterns of hybridity [...]” (135). Arguing on the grounds of what they perceive as a scarcity of creativity in the approaches deployed by scholars who specialize in one particular region or author of the French-speaking world, de Souza and Murdoch see the need to break with these traditions: “In their focus on, for example, the French Caribbean or Haïti within in Caribbean basin,

Mauritius or Réunion in the Mascarenes, French Polynesia or the anglophone Pacific islands, it could be said that they are perpetuating the artificial boundaries and geopolitical entities established during the colonial era” (138). In other words, the specialization in *other island literatures* needs to be paired with a willingness to read and analyze islands through the “more diversified, if not globalized perspective” (135) of comparative literature or even interdisciplinary studies. Before going along with De Souza and Murdoch’s suggestion, it is important to understand the ramifications of a comparative analysis as an analytical tool for French-speaking literatures of the Occidental Mediterranean Sea, Indian Ocean, and South Pacific.

1.3 France, the French Caribbean, and other French Islands as the Other’s Other?

A comparative literary analysis between Francophone islands of multiple geopolitical regions outside the French Caribbean poses many risks and challenges that begin with the simple definition of the geographical phenomenon of the “French” island. On the one hand, France is directly surrounded by a large number of islands that are geographically close to the continent. These islands host a myriad of historic landmarks which are an integral part of French cultural patrimony.⁷⁰ Corsica is generally praised as “the most beautiful island *of France*” although it is geographically closer to Italy. From the closest continental ports and airports in Toulouse, Marseille, and Nice, Corsica is four to ten hours away from the continent by ferry, and by plane, less than an hour. On the other hand, as Jean-Christophe Gay

⁷⁰ For more information on the islands directly surrounding France, see Antoine’s collection of 16 documentary films *Ile... était une fois* out of which one focuses on several regions: Bretagne and the Channel, the Atlantic, Provence, and Corsica (*Ile... était une fois les îles de France*).

points out in *L'outre mer français: un espace singulier*, apart from geographically close islands, France consists of a complex ensemble of extremely diverse overseas departments and collectivities that are dispersed in the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean. These overseas departments and collectivities account for a significant part of the French population living outside of Metropolitan France and the Occidental Mediterranean. Gay's coherent study literally takes the reader on a trip through the landscape of France's overseas islands and their history of conquest, colonization, and present situation but in the end, all DOMs (*département d'outre-mer*) and COMs⁷¹ (*collectivité d'outre-mer*) have only two characteristics in common: their islandedness, and their political, economic, and cultural ties to France and the French language, French history, and the European Union.⁷²

Starting with the insularity (in the positive sense of the term I described above) of these 'far-away' French islands, Gay and De Souza stress the importance of geo-political implications that come with a strategic denomination of departments and collectivities, or countries as being '*outre-mer*' or 'overseas.' In fact, any attempt to single out one or several isolated landmasses of a certain size, regardless of its location on the map or its distance to France, automatically implies a continental vision of the world in which islands are associated with *Otherness*. Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues that

⁷¹ The COM category replaced the TOM (territoire d'outre mer) in 2003.

⁷² However, Gay does not specifically deal with the phenomenon of dispersion that points to the displacement and migration of overseas populations, particularly those of overseas islands. According to Jean-Louis Andreani, there are currently more Corsicans living in diaspora than on the island. Similarly, Peter Hawkins refers to the dispersion of the Réunionese population in the French metropole.

Although islands are scattered all over the globe, the spaces that signify as islands are generally the small landmasses close to the equator, lands associated with tropical fertility, former colonies and outposts of empire that are deemed remote, exotic, and isolated by their continental visitors. By recognizing this often arbitrary division between islands and continents, we can pinpoint how geography has been used to uphold a series of cultural and political assumptions (2).

DeLoughrey's comment confirms that the geographical notion of the island as a body of land surrounded on all sides by water, has political implications which are contingent upon colonial and neo-colonial hierarchies, just like the 'outre-mer' category for Francophone island literature, as I pointed out in the introduction.

These denominations turn out to be particularly relevant when locations such as the three Caribbean overseas departments (consisting of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana) are compared to their two Indian Ocean departmental counterparts, Réunion and the latest addition, Mayotte.⁷³ French Guiana is the only non-insular overseas department but according to Gay, tends to evoke the idea of metaphorical islandedness due to its border with rain forest territory. Comparisons between islands of different maritime areas become even more tedious due to regional differences in the degree of islandedness, tropicity, economic structures, and cultural assimilation to the Metropolitan center. To show the extent to which insularity is relativized on maps through the use of enlarged squares and circles on the margins, Gay shows a series of detailed maps of both French overseas countries, former territories, and its ultra-peripheral regions. Within the main *multi-island territories* of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon (Atlantic Ocean), the French Antilles (Atlantic Ocean), French Oceania or French Polynesia (South Pacific), Wallis-and-

⁷³ Mayotte became an overseas department in 2011 and is now the 101st department of France.

Futuna (South Pacific), and New Caledonia (South Pacific), he makes every inhabited island under French control visible.⁷⁴

In addition, Gay examined the ambiguous attitude of the French towards their overseas islands. Whilst maintaining this rigid geo-political hierarchy to single out former colonies which are today more or less heavily assimilated to French culture, the French are the most representative group of European tourists in their overseas DOM and COM islands which are rarely visited by foreign tourists, as Hugues Maillot pointed out.⁷⁵ However, sometimes the French have difficulties locating their overseas departments on a map and easily confuse the Indian Ocean DOMs with the Atlantic Ocean DOMs. The Francophone islands located in the South Pacific are traditionally associated with paradise on earth for continental tourists whereas the everyday reality for the inhabitants of some overseas departments and collectivities may be far away from being paradisiacal, which is precisely what Chantal Spitz posits in her novels.

The lack of knowledge about the DOMs goes as far as to show the ambivalent attitude of the French. In *Après l'exotisme de Loti: le roman colonial*, Marius-Ary Leblond argue that the colonial Empire played an important role in the imaginary of continental France, particularly during the post-revolutionary period and after the 1870 defeat against Prussia. From the climax of the French Empire to the advent of the World Wars, the colonized island served as a signifier for exoticism and

⁷⁴ Gay lists 5 districts of the TAAF (Terres australes antarctiques françaises / French Southern and Antarctic Lands) that are uninhabited and used for scientific research only: îles Saint-Paul and New Amsterdam, the archipelago of Crozet, Kerguelen, les îles Eparses, and Terre-Adélie (162).

⁷⁵ «Une part de touristes étrangers encore minoritaire mais significative, qui confirme le potentiel touristique de ces deux départements situés à proximité des puissances économiques et des marchés de premier ordre que sont encore les Etats-Unis et le Canada » (75).

adventure in a geographically distant place. But to hone the image of the civilized world, continental France has strategically sought out help from its island colonies, as Chantal Spitz describes in her novel. In moments of crisis, the French strategically recruited members of island communities within the French-speaking world in the process of building and strengthening the colonial Empire at various points throughout history.

Corsicans consider France somewhat of a stepmother because “the contemporary history of the relationship between Corsica and the Republic is a chronicle of disillusion, of a relationship that continues to degrade”⁷⁶ (Andreani 135). Andreani critically remarks that Corsicans largely became French through the colonial adventure: “The colonial Empire [...] was the best and the worst thing to happen to Corsica, in any case, it was an essential phenomenon in its history”⁷⁷ (136). Anne Meistersheim’s collection of studies point to numerous implications of the commitment of the Corsicans in the process of building the French Empire, particularly in overseas colonies that include but are not limited to islands that were colonized by troops that consisted of a relatively high number of Corsican *marsouins*.⁷⁸ One of the recurring themes in this collection of studies is the complexity of the results of this involvement, particularly during the moment of decolonization, which forces us to consider the island as a site of multiple colonial histories: the island underwent colonization when it was first colonized but the island also colonizes other peoples.

⁷⁶ « l’histoire contemporaine des relations de la Corse avec la République est une chronique d’une désillusion, d’une relation qui ne cesse de se dégrader » (Andreani 135).

⁷⁷ “L’empire colonial [...] a été [...] la meilleure et la pire des choses pour la Corse, en tous cas un phénomène essentiel de son histoire » (136).

⁷⁸ *Marsouins* are Corsican volunteers in the colonial army.

Andreani, Meistersheim, and others, point to the discrepancy between the disproportionately high numbers of young Corsican men who debarked, willing to actively contribute to the French colonial mission, in relation to the degree of acknowledgement they deserve today for their participation in the colonial adventure, despite the fact that “Condemned by History, this ambiguous past is nevertheless visible in the contemporary Corsican society through the presence of two avatars that are somewhat opaque: the nationalist movement [...] and the strong presence of immigrants from Maghreb”⁷⁹ (Meistersheim *Alors* 12). Marie Ferranti’s novels accurately situate tensions and conflicts within this intercultural landscape, particularly the aspirations of the nationalists, with *La Fuite aux Agriates*, without paying lip service to any of them. Even in Corsica,

Thinking about ‘Corsicans and the overseas space’ is certainly an interesting debate and new field of study but the events are insignificant if they do not bear meaning and if they are not being appropriated. Independence goes back more than forty years but the memory of this colonial history—be it personal memories or big societal debates—still hant our lives because the transition from historical memory to collective memory is a slow process (6).

[S’interroger sur les ‘Corses et l’outre-mer’ est certainement un débat intéressant et un champ nouveau d’études mais les événements ne sont rien s’ils ne sont pas porteurs de sens et d’appropriation. L’indépendance date maintenant d’une quarantaine d’années mais la mémoire de cette histoire coloniale—qu’ils s’agisse des souvenirs personnels ou de grands débats de société—hante encore nos vies car il y a entre la mémoire historique et la mémoire collective est un lent travail à réaliser (6)].

claims Françoise Durant-Evrard.

Andreani situates Algeria’s independence as one of the many polemic situations between Corsica and France for the following reason: The paradox of the

⁷⁹ “Ce passé ambigu et condamné par l’Histoire est cependant très présent dans la société corse d’aujourd’hui sous la forme de deux avatars un peu opaques: le mouvement nationaliste [...] et la présence d’une forte immigration maghrébine” (Meistersheim *Alors* 12).

Gaulliste Corsica is indeed the strong, almost irrational connection to De Gaulle [...] Only the Algerian Independence broke the ties between De Gaulle and a the majority of the island community that violently refused to give up French Algeria: during the grand era of colonial adventures, numerous islanders established a line there”⁸⁰ (99).

Surprisingly enough, a similar trend can be observed in other French overseas islands, *les îles colonisatrices*, such as the French Caribbean and Réunion. In Réunion, numerous islanders voluntarily left the island in search of economic profit but they did not establish the same fierce ties to the colonial Empire as Corsicans who were partially driven by the fact that military duty had been a tradition for many centuries.⁸¹ The Industrial Revolution succeeded in neither Corsica nor the Indian Ocean. Jean-François Samlong’s historical essay briefly mentions the departure of Réunionese colonizers to the neighboring island of Madagascar where they, too, became *coloniaux colons*.

With these paradoxical connotations of the geographical phenomenon and implications of the “French island” in mind, one cannot help but wonder about the different degrees of insularity (in the negative sense of the term) that also manifest themselves within the domain of Francophone island literature. Anne Meistersheim referred to underlying geo-political and cultural similarities that connect the islands of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the South Pacific. Yet, some islands are just considered more “insular” (in the French sense of the term) than

⁸⁰ “Le paradoxe, en effet, de la Corse gaulliste est cet attachement puissant, presque irrationnel, à la personne de De Gaulle [...] Seule l’indépendance de l’Algérie créera une fracture entre de Gaulle et une grande partie de la communauté insulaire, qui refuse viscéralement de renoncer à l’Algérie française : de nombreux insulaires y font souche à la grande époque de l’aventure coloniale » (99).

⁸¹ “Le rôle des troupes coloniales est un des prismes à travers lesquels les liens, à la fois collectifs et intimes, unissant l’île à l’espace colonial peuvent être appréhendés » explains Sylvain Gregori (18).

others due to their tropical temperatures, sea shores, and pleasant climates. This leads us to the quintessential question of how to account for the impact of varying degrees of islandedness on the one hand, and the off-centeredness of these regions with respect to the geo-political, economical, and socio-cultural ties that govern the relationships Metropolitan France maintains with them. This issue also affects islands that are only partially Francophone. At the same time, the controversial situation and status of overseas islands outside the French Caribbean is reflected in the literary productions and scarce availability of these texts in Metropolitan France and therefore rather instrumental in elucidating my choice of authors as well as the way I structured my work.

De Souza and Murdoch's critique of the hypervisibility of some Francophone literatures compared to others intends to discourage repetitive dogmatic approaches to the same popular regions of the French-speaking world. Their shift towards reading islands outside the French Caribbean comparatively opens up a space for *other* island narratives of French language and culture, including women writers such as Madagascan writer and dramatist Michèle Rakotoson, Guadeloupean author Gisèle Pineau,⁸² and French author Marie-France Pisier.⁸³ At the same time, the similarities and differences in the nature of experiences of these *other* French-speaking islands

⁸² Michèle Rakotoson has lived in France for more than two decades now. In her 1988 novel, *Le Bain des reliques*, she portrays the harsh reality of a Madagascan filmmaker who accepts to work on a documentary about the last city performing religious rites. Although this particular novel is not easily available in France, I was able to obtain a German translation, *Die verbotene Frau*, which allowed me to familiarize myself with Rakotoson's writing. Through the portrayal of islanders first contact with the Metropolitan France and its contemporary life, *Elle, au printemps* (1996) resembles both French author Didier Daeninckx's *Cannibale* (1998) and Gouadeloupean author Gisèle Pineau's *Un papillon dans la cité* (1997).

⁸³ Her New Caledonian novel, *Le Bal du gouverneur* (1984) is a classic that should not be neglected, even more because of its cinematographic adaptations. It relates the adventures around friendship, jealousy, and the discovery of the self and the other in the milieu of a French administrator right before the change of status.

are malleable for cross-cultural comparisons with the French Caribbean as a possible but not exclusive, critical vantage point. Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues that this trend points to a reversal of traditionally common denominators for comparative literary studies such as national difference or other imperial hierarchies such as ethnicity, gender, and class, to move towards more global and relevant comparisons between island regions or between islands and the continent.

Several academic works, ranging from interdisciplinary studies to literary comparisons, illustrate De Souza's and Murdoch's attempts to study island literatures comparatively. To begin, scholars in the field of Caribbean literature such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Kathleen Gyssels have adopted an interdisciplinary, intercultural approach to include non-Francophone literatures of the Caribbean islands. Benítez-Rojo focused on Caribbean narrative practices in English, French, and Spanish-speaking texts of the Caribbean islands. Gyssels's study reminded us that even within the Caribbean, it is difficult to find commonalities between Francophone, Anglophone, or Hispanophone authors and texts. Likewise, Marc Gastaldi takes the Glissantian notion of the Relation a step further when looking for its commensurability with texts of the Mascarenes, particularly French-speaking texts of Mauritius. His dissertation entitled *Littérature des mondes insulaires créoles francophones en émergence dans l'espace transculturel* (2008) draws on a comparative approach to investigate the influence of Francophone key thinkers of the Caribbean and their respective theories on insular discourses for Mauritius. Lastly, Peter Hawkins's study of *The Other Hybrid Archipelago: Introduction to the Literatures and Cultures of the Francophone Indian Ocean* posits that the

Francophone Indian Ocean island literatures “are not merely lesser examples of the same [French Caribbean] themes [...] This literature is older, in fact, and arguable more substantial” (x).

The French Caribbean also served as an important base for Claude Cavellero that led him to launch a call for papers in 2010 in which he suggested studying various forms of cross-reading adventures in the writings of Le Clézio, Glissant, and Segalen.⁸⁴ As I suggested in my talk and article, the island space functions quite differently in the texts of these three authors who approached the ‘French island’ from different angles. In particular, drawing on Segalen’s notion of exoticism as aesthetics of diversity and its subsequent developments by Glissant who insists on the political dimensions of Segalen’s works for the French Caribbean, can be an effective method for comparing colonial and postcolonial literary representation of islandedness in French-speaking texts of several regions: the French Caribbean for Glissant, Tahiti for Segalen, and Mauritius for Le Clézio. This technique also proves to be effective for the works of the authors in question.

However, one of the key sources for and often cited references in any comparative literary analysis of island literatures is the work of Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (2007). In her study, DeLoughrey looks at the fragmentation of the British colonial empire throughout all maritime oceans of the world. Her comparison of Caribbean and Pacific island literatures interrogates non Western epistemologies of time and space to account for non-European island tropes. She explains that “The rationale for

⁸⁴ The conference proceedings were published in 2012 under the title *Le Clézio, Glissant, Segalen: la quête comme déconstruction de l'aventure*.

this mode of inter-island comparison is to move beyond restrictive national, colonial, and regional frameworks and to foreground shared histories, particularly as they are shaped by geography” (3). A supplement to European geography, the maritime routes and roots that surround and connect islands shape important trajectories that help account for the complex history of Caribbean and Pacific insular communities. The paradigm of insularity and oceanography create metaphors of roots for localness, and routes for experiences of cosmopolitanism. These types of juxtaposition turn out to be more appropriate in that they interrogate local notions of identity, culture, and language for an analysis of island literatures. The combination of these two metaphors assures a comparative analysis of island literatures based on the awareness of the socio-political differences and varying degrees of assimilation or rejection to, and modification of European history and culture.

At the same time, one must acknowledge potential drawbacks to a comparative approach to island literatures, particularly of the French-speaking world. Moura observed the singularity of Francophone overseas departments compared to their English-speaking counterparts because the United Kingdom Commonwealth does not have an equivalent system of assimilation in place. Besides the comparability, it is often noted that continental researchers working on island literatures outside the French Caribbean tend to focus on one particular island, while local specialists are more willing to expand their field of expertise, with the exception of Corsica, that is. Anne Meistersheim and Jean-Louis Andreani focus on the island figures and cultures to primarily explain Corsican specificities. The numerous contributions of Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimoutou and Valérie Magdelaine-

Andrianjafitrimo, however, provide helpful insights into Réunionese and culture while occasionally drawing on helpful comparisons to the French Caribbean; only one of Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo's studies focuses on Jean-François Samlong. Robert Nicole's *The Word, the Pen, and the Pistol*, Sylvie André's *Le roman autochtone dans le Pacifique Sud: penser la continuité*, and her collaborative study, *Littératures du Pacifique: Voix francophones contemporaines*, serve as helpful introductions to the specificities of South Pacific texts. These studies facilitate the approach to the history of ideas of relatively remote and unknown regions that require, as DeLoughrey, de Souza, and Murdoch point out, a high level of cultural sensitivity and language skill to interact with the texts, despite them being written in French. This could explain why most critics working on these relatively remote islands, tend to be specialists focusing on the productions of local authors.

Another drawback to this transoceanic mission of reading French-speaking islands comparatively is the availability of texts or even research for either Francophone or Anglophone readers. Réunionese author Jean-François Samlong tries to bridge this gap through translations and compilations of anthologies to promote Creole literature in French. This issue also raises the question of what type of audience an author is writing for and whether or not an author should choose to adapt his or her style, use glossaries or footnotes, to contextualize the particularities of the geographical setting and its customs to Western readers. Although this situation poses a quandary for many other authors of the Francophone diaspora, what is unique about the situation of island authors as the other's Other is their relative invisibility with regard to their geographical distance to the 'center.' Likewise, with the exception of

one novel and one short story respectively, Marie Ferranti and Jean-François Samlong's works have not been translated into English.⁸⁵ Therefore, individual studies or monographs of these authors in languages other than French are rare.

According to Elizabeth DeLoughrey, comparing several island regions defrays “assumptions about these literatures’ lack of translatability, their profound localness, and, most worryingly, their lack of significance to global discourse that is, presumably, concerned only with the literatures produced by northern metropolises and continents” (ix). However, thus far, very few scholars have explored this route, let alone gone as far as to compare these three islands of the French-speaking world. In that sense, Corsican, Réunionese, and Tahitian literatures largely benefit from this transinsular literary comparison. The three authors chosen for this project were singled out because the techniques of resistance that manifests themselves in their writings, are instrumental tools to foster an understanding of how identity is constructed and negotiated, and how these discourses articulate and challenge previous colonial representations of Corsica, Réunion, and Tahiti. These contemporary texts articulate relevant points and counterpoints that illustrate their ability to participate in and contribute to contemporary global discourses as Ferranti, Samlong, and Spitz’s characters situate the Self in the sociopolitical reality of the island while at the same time, reaching out to the Other and humanity at large.

⁸⁵ Apart from some specialized bookstores other than large chains that happen to carry some of Marie Ferranti’s texts, the works of Chantal Spitz and Jean-François Samlong are not easily available in Metropolitan France until the annual Salon du Livre in Paris. Whereas all of Samlong’s texts can easily be ordered over the Internet, Chantal Spitz’s works are more difficult to track down but have become more available recently through the publishing house’s website. Her most famous novel, *L’île des rêves écrasés*, can easily be ordered online whereas other texts become available only occasionally, through second hand sales via Amazon.

Before turning to the aegis of postcolonial scholarship as an analytical tool for interdisciplinary, comparative analysis of French-speaking island literatures, it is important to understand the ways in which island communities of different Francophone regions perceive their islandedness, Otherness, or even Frenchness. It will therefore be beneficial to first turn towards the French Caribbean islands which are, as Ottmar Ette indicates, a site where “a transcultural experience of life is outlined [...] a site of an extremely intense globalization”⁸⁶ (141). As the hub of contemporary Francophone theory (outside Francophone Africa), this region continues to be hypervisible in Francophone Studies. The following section will examine how French Caribbean authors portray their own islandedness and how these Caribbean discourses (rather than *the* Caribbean discourse) affect discourses of other peripheral and ultra-peripheral islands of the French-speaking world and their literary productions.

1.4 Island discourses of the French Caribbean

The Caribbean islands or West Indies consist of a series of archipelagos that first became visible to the imaginary of the Western travelers with Christopher Columbus’s trip to the New World in 1492. His description of what he claimed to be India can be considered as one of the first European discourses on the specificities of a region that is today known for its enormous complexity, as far as its geo-political and socio-cultural make-up are concerned. Contemporary Caribbean discourses

⁸⁶ “s’esquissent [...] une expérience transculturelle de la vie [...] lieu d’une globalisation d’intensité extrême” (141).

continue to grapple with these specificities of their geographic fragmentation that was taken by the European travelers as a sign for easy conquest and colonization, as Frank Lestringant explained.

To understand the characteristics of contemporary Francophone Caribbean island identity discourses, their “hypervisibility” in contemporary Francophone Postcolonial Studies, and the underpinnings for non-Caribbean French-speaking islands, it is essential to comprehend the ideas that shape Caribbean identity through what Benítez-Rojo describes as “unrepresentability of Caribbeanness.” Javier Rodriguez Sancho coined this phenomenon as the absence of European equivalent sets of signifiers. Recurring reference points that continue to inspire 20th and 21st century novels, plays, essays, and even poems are historical and geo-political specificities of the insularity of this region as well as mythical figures and key thinkers of Caribbean history and politics. The most influential events that have contributed significantly to the understanding of Caribbean identity in the 20th and 21st century, are the Haitian Revolution and the advent of prescriptive and even contradictory identity discourses, formulated by local specialists such as Aimé Césaire, the Creoleness trio, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, Édouard Glissant, and Chris Bongie, while other local authors of Martinican origin such as Frantz Fanon are more popular for their contributions to Francophone Africa.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Glissant explains that out of all Antilles thinkers, Fanon is an exception: “Il est difficile pour un Antillais d’être le frère, l’ami, ou tout simplement le compagnon ou le ‘compatriote’ de Fanon. Parce que de tous les intellectuels antillais francophones il est le seul à être passé à l’acte, à travers son adhésion à la cause algérienne » (*Discours* 56)

When analyzing discourses of the French, Hispanophone, or Anglophone Caribbean, it is important to remember that contemporary discourses and narratives are a result of an on-going struggle to define the essence of Caribbean culture and identity. The first Caribbean author to single out the experiences of Caribbean Islanders was the Martinican poet, playwright, and essayist Aimé Césaire. In his foundational work, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* [*Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*] (1939), Césaire insists on the powerful impact of the discovery of the traces of African ancestry. His narrative poem juxtaposes African origins and the violent history of slavery on Martinique while moving towards an identification with the non-harmonic topography of the island in a Surrealist style.⁸⁸ His play *Une Tempête* [*A Tempest*] (1969) illustrates the problem of the colonial encounter in its adaptation of the Shakespearean play, *The Tempest*, to a Caribbean colonial setting, thus demonstrating the drastic reversal of Western epistemologies to a Caribbean and thus local vision and context.

This phenomenon becomes even more explicit in the works of the Martinican novelist, playwright, poet, and essayist Édouard Glissant. Glissant is the author of *Le Discours antillais* [*Caribbean Discourse*] in which he foregrounds figures and tropes of “eliminated peoples who today pit a defeaning multiplicity of Diversity against the universal of transparence imposed by the Western World” [“des peuples néantisés qui opposent aujourd’hui à l’universel de la transparence, imposé par l’Occident, une multiplicité sourde du Divers”] (14). As Silke Segler-Messner indicates, Glissant is oftentimes considered the “heir and upholder of a discourse of

⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Glissant deplors the paradoxical status of this masterpiece in the French-speaking world. According to Glissant, *Notebook of a Return* was written by one of the most well-known authors of Martinique, however, his work is more popular in Senegal than it is in Martinique (54).

alterity” [“héritier et continuateur du discours de l’altérité”] (85) for the very fact that he follows Victor Segalen’s direction in taking the position of the marginalized in a colonized country. For Glissant, insularity becomes a rhetorical tool to claim an identity that becomes much more political than the former’s aesthetics of diversity.⁸⁹ Building on Segalen, Glissant posits that “the poet Segalen pitted the Diversity of the world against the domination of the Same” [“le poète Segalen [...] a opposé le Divers du monde à la domination du Même”] (236). This opposition between diversity and the repetition of the Same authorizes difference to counter the effects of “a fake resemblance between overseas departments” [« fausse semblance des Départements d’Outre Mer”] (21), as if the same overseas island were to repeat in the exact same form all over the French-speaking world. However, apart from local islanders, this difference and diversity remains opaque to the outsider: “we claim the right to be opaque” [“nous réclamons le droit à l’opacité”] (14). These notions functioned as the building block for the Glissantian notion of the drifting island that will be discussed in more detail in several chapters and subsequently be compared to the Corsican, Réunionese, and Tahitian vision of insularity.

Pascale de Souza and Adlai Murdoch argue that Glissant’s work “plays a critical role in contextualizing and elucidating possible approaches to these dual

⁸⁹ Segalen wrote his foundational *Essay of Exoticism* to revamp traditional models of French colonial literature by developing a concept of exoticism that is based on two conditions. On the one hand, it requires “la perception aiguë et immédiate d’une incompréhensibilité éternelle [...] cet aveu d’impénétrabilité” (44) while at the same time, this rather significant attribute of unavoidable incomprehensibility is compensated by a feeling of sameness: “C’est dans la Différence que gît tout l’intérêt. Plus la différence est fine, indiscernable, plus s’éveille et s’aguisse le sens du Divers” (80) on the other hand. Although Segalen’s approach to exoticism as both discomfort due to difference and similarity due to minimal diversion, is rather contradictory, it is nevertheless of particular importance for an analysis of texts that use variations of Segalen’s approach to the dynamics and complexities of contact between different cultures.

postcolonial patterns of oceanic displacement and transformation. As a product of and as a witness to difference and diversity, Glissant's work seeks to define a people through the re-representation of their experience" (136-137). Within the context of the French Caribbean, the authors view the Glissantian notion of diaspora on the Antillean archipelago as a "transnational concept [...] to explore the migrations, discontinuities, fractal patterns of exchange and hybrid glory that join the black cultures of America, Britain, and the Caribbean to one another and to Africa" (134).

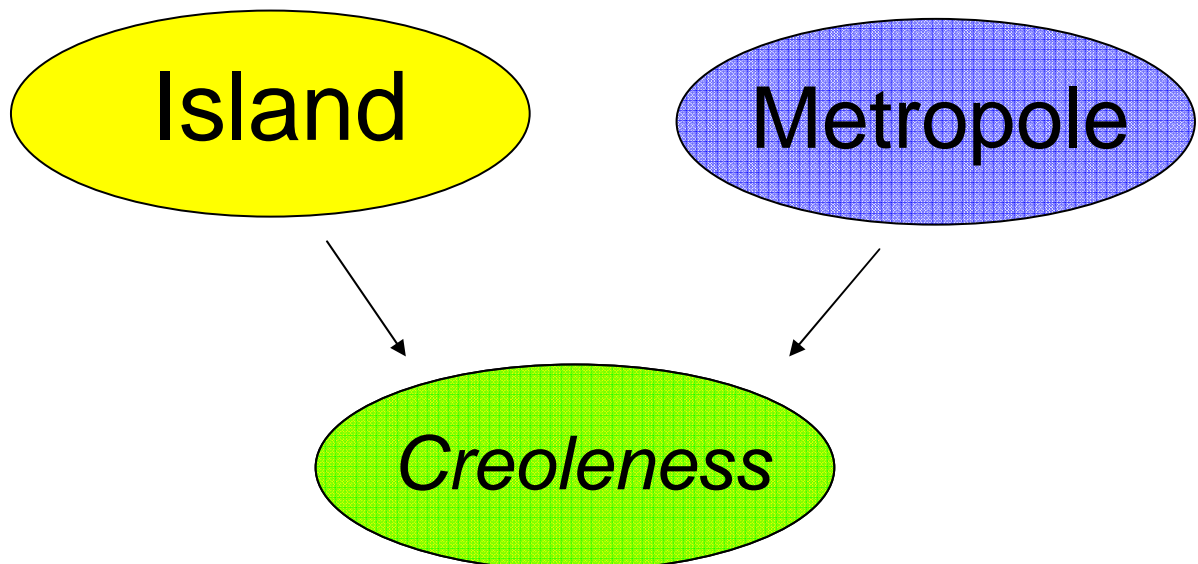
The 1989 Creoleness manifesto *Eloge de la Creolité [In Praise of Creoleness]*, written by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant, was yet another step towards a more accurate definition of Caribbean *Otherness* which defined Creoleness as an identity that comes to the fore due to "brutal interaction of culturally different populations" (92) that is specific to the colonized island. French Caribbean Creoleness foregrounds the idea of difference based on the "annihilation of false universality" (90) which leads to the renowned Creole manifesto slogan: "*Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles*. This will be for us an interior attitude—better, a vigilance, or even better, a sort of mental envelope in the middle of which our world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world" (75; my emphasis).

This approach of asserting a new identity in the absence of a discourse or perspective that properly articulates the historic and geopolitical specificities of their culture illustrates the desire to demystify one's origins in search for an identity that fully embraces the *authentic* roots of *Otherness*. In particular, the use of the correlative conjunctions, *neither... nor*, shows a strong rejection of imposed myths or

unfitting exterior values that stage Otherness on a new level that performs in quest of a new space of translation where untold stories are written as new

white pages of the chronicle [...] Our chronicle is behind the dates, behind the known facts: *we are Words behind writing*. Only poetic knowledge, fictional knowledge, literary knowledge, in short, artistic knowledge can discover us, understand us and bring us, evanescent, back to resuscitation of consciousness (98-99).

Creoleness is not only a quest for authenticity; it is a “defense –illustration [...] of repressed authenticity” (106) and a declaration of independence in terms of techniques, style, and intellectual grounds. To visualize this process through geometric forms, we can think of two circles, one representing the Island and the other one, the French metropole; Creoleness constitutes a separate entity that does not merge or touch other forms.



Typhaine Leservot critiqued the seemingly universal definition of Creoleness to all formerly colonized communities: “Although the creolists borrowed from Glissant’s *antillanité* its linguistic focus on Creole, their definition of *creolité* goes beyond Glissant’s exclusive focus on Caribbean Creole culture and includes any people

across the world born out of the violent mixing of European, African and Asian cultures” (43). In their article “Shadowboxing in the Mangrove,” Richard and Sally Price similarly take issue with other shortcomings of the Creoleness movement on the grounds of its exclusiveness. Focusing on the implications of essentialist notions and competing metaphors, the authors show how the primarily male promoters of Creoleness created internal contradictions by failing to find meaningful ways to engage with the contributions of female authors as well as authors of non-Francophone origin. Similar issues were already brought up two year prior to the Prices’ publication in *Penser la créolité* which was directed by Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage.

Some researchers suggest that contemporary postcolonial Caribbean discourses started moving away from overly dogmatic approaches such as race, ethnicity, and history, in favor of more relevant signifiers of Caribbeanness. These issues provide a dynamic driving force in Maryse Condé’s 1989 novel, *Traversée de la Mangrove*,⁹⁰ which Thyphaine Leservot reads as a much needed modernization of an exclusively male vision of Creolist insularity in the French Caribbean.⁹¹ While Adlai Murdoch singles out Maryse Condé and René Depestre as inaugurators of facile love plots, Typhaine Leservot praises Maryse Condé’s 1989 novel as the epitome of perfection to illustrate the importance of *other* qualifiers such as gender, sexuality, and displacement, in contemporary Caribbean discourses.

⁹⁰ This novel was translated in 1995 by Condé’s husband, Richard Philcox as *Crossing the Mangrove*. Philcox creates the neologism ‘French France’ as English equivalent for ‘la métropole.’

⁹¹ See also Stéphanie Bérard, “Pour une littérature-monde et Éloge de la créolité: deux manifestes, deux visions de la littérature incompatibles, concurrentes, consécutives ?”

These new tendencies are instrumental in showing the growing interest in more globalized perspectives of discourses of Caribbean insularity in order to situate the Caribbean subject in the transnational context of a multicultural society. Thypaine Leservot sees in Maryse Condé's fiction and essays a contestation of Caribbean values that refute dogmatic labels of Caribbean *Otherness*. She argues that Condé seeks "neither Negritude, nor *antillanité*, nor *créolité* [...]" (43) but something else besides. In that sense, a comparative analysis of island literatures, be it inside and outside the French Caribbean, needs to not only address the issue of linguistic labels and cultural stigma, but also challenge them in order to properly situate narratives within the globalized context of their production and the French-speaking world at large. This factor is of outmost importance when comparing identity discourses from Corsica, Réunion, and Tahiti, as all three island regions have been exposed to historically different eras of colonization and different forms of colonialism that affected the political, economic, and socio-cultural development of the island to varying degrees.

This attempt to increase the visibility of French-speaking island literatures outside the French Caribbean is reminiscent of the emergence of the first novelists of Francophone Africa before, during, and particularly after the period of decolonization in the 1960s. For Carmen Husti-Laboye, this phenomenon is a result of the reformulation of transmitted visions that were deemed inappropriate within the socio-political context of the time. Husti-Laboye's analysis of the emancipation of four African writers or *enfants de la colonie* [*children of the colony*] in France is relevant for this comparative study of Francophone island literatures because of the structural,

socio-cultural, and aesthetic similarities that govern this type of *contre-littérature* [counter-literature] that island literature of the French-speaking world seems to be a part of. From French-speaking Africa to the French Caribbean, authors of the African diaspora use pen and paper to articulate, define, and redefine themselves and the Other in a variety of contexts. What started as the sprouts and off-shoots of the continental African *Négritude* movement was soon adapted and appropriated to the French Caribbean island setting by Aimé Césaire and subsequent redefinitions by Édouard Glissant's notion of *Antillanité*.

However, the complexity of the history of conquest and colonization, and the different political statuses do not exactly allow for facile comparison, even within the region of French-speaking Caribbean islands, as Kathleen Gyssels describes in her research. In *Images et mythes d'Haïti*, the Caribbean and specifically Haiti are singled out for their *Otherness* with regard to Western history and geography. Compared to the French-speaking neighboring island, Martinique and Guadeloupe find themselves in a more advantageous position than Haiti because they became overseas departments in 1946. Priscilla Maunier stresses the socio-political similarities between Martinique, Guadeloupe, and their overseas counterpart in the Indian Ocean, Réunion: "The imposition of the 1685 *Code noir* in all three codified the treatment and punishment of slaves; it aimed to keep the slave population 'in check' but also to sever ties with their cultures of origin. Following the abolition of slavery in 1848, the islands remained French colonies until they were assimilated as French *départements* in 1946" (167). As a consequence, French overseas departments in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean are somewhat isolated from their Francophone neighboring islands and

oftentimes find themselves in a socio-economic more privileged situation than their neighboring islands. Peter Hawkins points to the educational system of Réunion which draws students from the Indian Ocean region to the island while Réunionese students migrate towards the French metropole.

Haiti has been the cradle of numerous identity discourses that part from the Glissantian path of *Antillanité* because it differentiates itself from the French Caribbean identity of overseas departments: Franco-Haitian author and poet René Depestre explains in *Métier à métisser* that the Caribbean discourse is not applicable to all regions of the French Caribbean. Haiti has its own version of identity discourse that, according to Depestre, is rooted in a more eroticized version of life Haitians refer to as *l'érotisme solaire*. Similarly, the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier situates *lo real maravilloso*, *marvelous realism*, in the context of Haitian history.

Within the dichotomy of these Caribbean discourses, the deployment of a comparative rhetoric opposes Caribbean *Otherness* to French or European standards. Apart from challenging intellectual ideas, these Caribbean identity discourses primarily rely on a new aesthetics of visual imagery that is closer to Segalen's approach to exoticism than to the colonial conceptualization of the island: "Exoticism is therefore not that kaleidoscopic vision of the tourist or of the mediocre spectator, but the forceful and curious reaction to a shock felt by someone of strong individuality in response to some object whose distance from oneself he alone can perceive and savor" (Segalen 20-21). The French Caribbean approach to insularity conjures up the geographic situation of the archipelago in relation to the Atlantic

Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, which will be examined in more detail in chapter 2 and 3.

The emergence of prescriptive norms and concepts from the French Caribbean has important repercussions on France's vision of its former colonies and the world at large. Mireille Rosello's analysis of Caribbean insularization suggests a reading of the world that turns each region into an island. Typhaine Leservot sees French Caribbean identity discourses of the 20th and 21st century as new center of Francophone theory and insists on the socio-political implications: "Francophone postcolonial studies [...] negates the centre/periphery relationship between France and the French Caribbean" (47). This important shift in focus towards the perspective of the former colonies in general, and the colonized in particular, has an important effect on the artistic and literary depictions of islands in the French-speaking world.

The premise of postcolonial theory is to show the transformation of traditional European tropes of exoticism that are no longer valid representations because they do not reflect the complex genealogies of their colonial past and neo-colonial present. A reading of island narratives from the critical and theoretical standpoint of Francophone Caribbean postcolonial theory and its Anglo-Saxon counterpart can therefore help shed light on the socio-political and historical realities of non-French Caribbean island regions of the French-speaking world from within the contexts of the same language and culture (Francophone) or different languages and cultures (Anglophone), as Murphy and Forsdick observed. How do postcolonial readings of transnational and globalized relations articulate the postmodern condition in island narratives of literary worlds?

1.5 The island through the lens of postcolonial scholarship

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin stress that the common element in all Caribbean texts is their “shared history of plantation-based economies fuelled by slavery and indenture” (242). In their study of the literature of the British Empire, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin point to the British Caribbean as the “crucible of the most extensive and challenging post-colonial theory [...] In the Caribbean, the European imperial enterprise ensured that the worst features of colonialism throughout the globe would all be combined in the region” (145).

To better understand the premise of postcolonial theory and its theoretical underpinnings for French-speaking islands, it is important to situate it within the conceptual framework of discourses of alterity with regard to France’s colonial past. Robert Nicole quotes Leroy Beaulieu to explain colonialism as “one of the most complex and delicate phenomena of *social physiology* [...] Colonization is the expansive force of a people; *it is power of reproduction. It is its enlargement and its multiplication through space*“ (61). Jennifer Yee sees Edward Said’s concept of orientalism as a “milestone in the postcolonial denunciation of literary exoticism’s role as an instrument of the West’s construction of the Other” (186) while Silke Segler-Messner defines postcolonial theory as methodologies that transgress models of cultural perception.⁹²

Véronique Porra attributes a certain number of thematic and formal characteristics to postcolonial literatures: “This marking [...] functions like an expression of the aspiration of authors to render cultural values that the colonial

⁹² “déplacer de manière subversive ces modèles de perception culturelle” (5).

system managed to erase, or at the very least, to push to the background, particularly through strategies deployed at the detriment of local cultures”⁹³ (30). As discourses of alterity with a cultural base, they became a common ground for postcolonial literary theory in the 20th and 21st century.

Charles Forsdick and David Murphy define ‘postcolonial thought’ as “a broad range of theories and ideas, articulated explicitly as such or emerging more indirectly from various situations and movements, associated directly with the postcolonial or otherwise linked to the genealogies of its emergence” (5). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin describe the ability of post-colonial writings and theories of Britain and other former colonial powers such as France, Portugal, and Spain to “cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day [...] during and after the period of European imperial domination and the effects of this on contemporary literatures” (2).

Jean-Marc Moura, however, adds the important distinction between the *post-colonial* period on the one hand, which is absent in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s study, and *postcolonial* writing strategies that question dogmatic colonial discourses, on the other hand. According to Moura, this distinction accounts for special cases in the French-speaking world such as contemporary Haitian literature that has been post-colonial since 1804 but has not reached a level of postcoloniality (5). Likewise, Corsica does certainly have a long history of conquests; however, it does not share the same experience of colonialism and slavery that is prevalent in the French Caribbean or the Indian or Pacific Ocean.

⁹³ “Ce marquage est [...] comme exprimant l’aspiration des auteurs à rendre compte de valeurs culturelles que le *système* colonial avait contribué à effacer, ou tout au moins à renvoyer à l’arrière-plan, en particulier au travers des stratégies mises en faite aux dépens des cultures locales” (30).

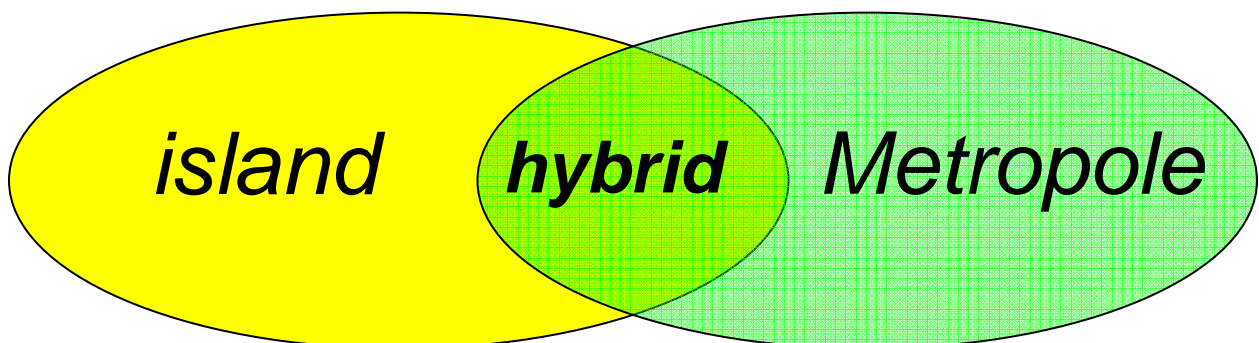
Within the theoretical paradigm of postcolonial thought, the varieties of situations that are representative of the complexity of the French-speaking world provide food for thought. Focusing on the context of the Francophone island, as opposed to other parts of the French-speaking world such as the African continent, Canada, or Louisiana, facilitates an understanding of and engagement with the effects of colonialism in far-away and oftentimes tropical places that tend to become associated with visions of paradise. Models for reading France's DOM and COM islands from the critical and theoretical standpoint of postcolonial theory were formulated by scholars and key thinkers in both the English-speaking as well as the French-speaking world.

Jean-Marc Moura situates the origins of postcolonial thought in the United Kingdom and notes France's delay in latching on to these paradigms to analyze questions of race, migration, identity, and gender in former colonies.⁹⁴ Charles Forsdick and David Murphy associate the emergence of postcolonialism in France with the publication of French-speaking anti-colonial discourses through specialized publishing houses in Paris to circulate Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme* [*Discourse on colonialism*] (1950), Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masque blancs* [*Black Skin White Masks*] (1952), and Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisateur/colonisé* [*The Colonizer and the Colonized*] (1957). These anti-colonial texts are the foundation for modern Black consciousness, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin point out. Contemporary Francophone postcolonial discourses are particularly shaped by authors from the French Caribbean who foreground diversity, whereas the English-

⁹⁴ Both Jean-Marc Moura (*Littératures francophones et théories postcoloniales*, 2005) and Jacqueline Bardolph (*Etudes Postcoloniales et littératures*, 2002) are the first French specialists to engage with postcolonial thought in French-speaking literature.

speaking approach to postcoloniality is based on binary oppositions and hybridity, as outlined in Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1984).

A foundational ground work for a discussion of post-colonial theory from the Anglo-Saxon perspective, Bhabha's theorizing the Other in spaces of transcultural encounters and multiethnic interactions advocates the demystification of disenfranchised minorities through a recuperation of these voices from the borderlines and margins of colonial and post-colonial spaces. The recuperation of marginalized voices is a countermovement against the homogeneity of texts that historicize the colonial experience from the perspective of the colonizer. Thinking outside the epistemological framework of ethnocentrism, he advocates moving away from the "singularities of class and gender as primary conceptual and organizational categories [... towards] the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains" (2). To visualize this idea, theorizing identity means to locate it in the overlapping third space of two circles, espousing "elements that are *neither the One* [...] *nor the other* [...] *but something else besides*, which contests the terms and



territories of both" (41):

With Bhaba's notion of hybridity, postcolonial theory is based on the image of the mirror while Francophone postcolonial theory draws on the notion of the fragment to insist on diversity. In other words, the island either becomes a mirror image of the Metropole (Anglo-Saxon approach) or a diverse fragment that takes on a new form (Francophone approach).

While Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define post-coloniality as a **reading strategy** that brings about a “replacement of some texts by others, or the redeployment of some hierarchy of value within them, but equally crucially [... a] reconstruction of the so-called canonical texts through alternative reading practices” (189), other critics such as Jean-Marc Moura define postcoloniality as a **writing strategy** to “challenge the foundational dogma of colonial expansion [...and] European superiority” [“remettre en cause le dogme fondateur de l'expansion colonial [... et] la supériorité européenne”] (5).

While the French colonial topos of the island can be interpreted through both the lens of Francophone as well as Anglophone postcolonial theory, each approach yields different results. This opposition between a monolingual Francophone and multicultural Anglophone postcolonial theory points to what Typhaine Leservot calls “theoretical barriers” (51) that are reflected in the representation of the island space and time as opaque and diverse on the one hand, hybrid and multicultural on the other hand. Reading the postcolonial island through the figure of the mirror and the image of a radiating diversity has different implications on the perspectives of the colonial past and neo-colonial present, as Charles Forsdick and David Murphy explain:

Drawing together ‘Francophone’ and ‘postcolonial’ in this way is not to shy away from the deeply problematic nature of these terms [...] our aim might be

seen as the prising open—or even the active ‘decolonization’—of the terms ‘Francophone’ and ‘postcolonial’: using ‘Francophone’ in a fashion that encompasses France itself seeks to underline the complex, intertwined nature of relationship between the former empire and its former colonies; equally, to underline the existence of a ‘Francophone’ postcolonial field is to seek to wrench the field away from its previous, almost exclusive Anglophone focus (4).

My project posits that Francophone islands are what Marie Louise Pratt refers to as contact zones. I propose to explore trajectories within these contact zones through a critical comparison of the texts of Ferranti, Samlong, and Spitz, using the lens of both Anglosaxon and Francophone postcolonial scholarship while at the same time, situating these discourses within the era of postmodernity that do not exclude other discourse formations. More specifically, I argue that moving beyond the lens of postcolonial scholarship as a common denominator can allow us to explore, link, and even challenge notions of Francophone literary spaces for ‘alternative language authors’ writing within a dominant language to get a better idea of community imperatives in the Francophone island.

1.6 Postcolonial discourses and the postmodern fragment: new community imperatives

Jean-Marc Moura, Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo, and other critics such as Chris Bongie list intertextual relationships as a common structural feature of postcolonial literature which seeks to question hierarchical structures imposed by the colonizer through “stunning intertextuality as common tool to express diversity by combining the supernatural with local legends and stereotypes produced in societies

that are deconstructed by invasion, occupation, and political corruption”⁹⁵ (145). The works of Marie Ferranti, Jean-François Samlong, and Chantal Spitz fit these paradigms of postcolonial reading and writing strategies as their texts implement various forms of intertextual echoes through techniques Gérard Genette described as transtextuality, which he loosely defined as any evidence of explicit or implicit relationship between two texts. These contemporary Francophone island texts illustrate how “postcolonial literatures react to colonialism with discursive counter-strategies”⁹⁶ (Segler-Messner 5-6). My analysis will contribute to these on-going discussions by highlighting various forms of intertextuality that are not limited to the Anglo-Saxon model of writing back to the Empire. Rather, my analysis engages with the multiplicity of discourses of postmodernity outlined by Husti-Laboye to demonstrate that in the post-postmodern era, the Francophone island functions as a site where the moment of crisis is being negotiated: “Allied by common thoughts and interested in forms of marginality, ambiguity, strategies of refusing the binary, and in any form of the pastiche, parody, and reduplication [...they] maintain a specificity of terms which is essentially the result of geographical area and their history of application”⁹⁷ (37).

Postcolonialism is only one of the discourses of postmodernity, as Husti-Laboye indicates. Caribbean critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s concept of the “repeating

⁹⁵ “une intertextualité étourdissante sont les moyens usuels d’expression de cette diversité en ce qu’ils permettent de combiner le surnaturel avec des légendes locales et des stéréotypes produits dans des sociétés déstructurées par l’invasion, l’occupation et la corruption politique” (145).

⁹⁶ « littératures postcoloniales réagissent au colonialisme avec des contre-stratégies discursives » (Segler-Messner 5-6).

⁹⁷ « Alliés par une pensée commune, s’intéressant ‘aux formes de la marginalité, de l’ambiguïté, aux stratégies de refus du binaire, à toute forme de pastiche, de parodie et de redoublement [...ils] gardent par exemple leur spécificité terminologique due essentiellement à leur aire géographique et leur histoire d’appellation” (37).

island” demonstrates a reading of the island as a postmodern fragment. The fragment functions as an illustration of the apparent chaos and unrepresentability of the (Hispanophone) Caribbean reality to the Western imaginary that lacks a corresponding system of signifiers to account for the plurality of Caribbean referents. While this idea has been highly contested, it finds echo in the Pacific Ocean with Epeli Hau’ofa’s notion of Oceanian identity as a “sea of islands” which draws on the local perception of an insularity that is neither inhibiting nor restrictive.

While for Benítez-Rojo, it is impossible to find the authentic origin (or original island) of the Caribbean carnivalesque plurality, Epeli Hau’ofa traces Oceanian authenticity back to the ancestral imaginary: “our ancestors, who had lived in the Pacific for over two thousand years, viewed their world as a “sea of islands” rather than “islands in the sea” (32). In his 1993 foundational essay “The Sea of Islands,” he takes an encouraging stance towards Oceanian identity and culture by strategically debunking preconceived notions about the remoteness of islands in the Pacific:

The idea that the countries of Polynesia and Micronesia are too small, too poor, and too isolated to develop any meaningful degree of autonomy is an economistic and geographic deterministic view of a very narrow kind that overlooks culture history [...] tens of thousands of ordinary Pacific Islanders right across the ocean [...] make[] nonsense of all national and economic boundaries, borders that have been defined only recently, crisscrossing an ocean that had been boundless for ages [...] (30).

Hau’ofa posits that the Pacific Ocean is an important pathway for what Glissant would have called the Relation. Furthermore, the Oceanian imaginary is a microcosmic representation of Glissant’s and Chamoiseau’s notion of globality within the Pacific:

If we look at the myths, legends, and oral traditions, [...] it becomes evident that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions. Their universe comprises not only land surfaces but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named stars and constellations that people could count on to guide their ways across the seas. Their world was anything but tiny. They thought big and recounted their deeds in epic proportions (31).

These notions are essential to understanding Chantal Spitz's notion of insularity but differ widely from the Corsican vision of the self and the world.

The idea of migration and movement is particularly relevant in contemporary models of cultural identity and cultural contact, as Stuart Hall indicates. His study of the notion of diaspora has different consequences within the context of the three island regions I will be exploring in this project as it shifts geographic centers of the globe and has the potential to turn Francophone islands into Islands of reference that replace the French metropole.

As several critics indicate, authors in postcolonial contexts of the French-speaking world are in the process of constructing a new space of literature in increasingly global contexts, including geo-politics, ecocriticism, and Afropolitanism. To account for these new contexts, the notion of ethnography and ethnotextuality, supermodernity and the hyperreal, and the conceptualization of violence become recurring themes that point to the specificity of island writing in the Francophone world.

Michel Le Bris posits a move towards French-speaking World Literature, *une littérature-monde en français*, which particularly accounts for the diversity in islands literatures of the French-speaking world and their vision of the Other. Within that context, Jean-Marc Moura observed that despite the decline of the *roman*

d'expression française for Francophone Africa and the French Caribbean islands, there is a trend in peripheral and even ultra-peripheral regions of the French-speaking world to resort more and more to other forms of artistic expression. The rise of popular theater and the electronic media such as the documentary film have become reliable forms to express the malaise in the contemporary society. Moura uses the example of Chantal Spitz to show a reversal of this trend in the Pacific Ocean to illustrate that French Polynesia's recent commitment to writing, a phenomenon which Robert Nicole addresses in his study *The Word, the Pen, and the Pistol: Literature and Power in Tahiti*.

If we assume with Anne Meistersheim that “the past imposes itself more strongly on the island than elsewhere, it shows itself everywhere on the surface: the island is a palimpsest”⁹⁸ (70), what does the island as a palimpsest tell us about itself and the world at large? How does the concept of the island reflect what Reinhard Krueger calls the Mediterranean ability to reflect a world that is heavily marked by “the history and dynamic of cultural and ethnic exchanges that constitute the history of globalization in this geopolitical and cultural space”⁹⁹ (169)? Is the postmodern notion of the repeating island a valid concept to describe *la Francophonie insulaire* in the texts of Merie Ferranti, Jean-François Samlong, and Chantal Spitz?

⁹⁸ « le passé s'impose dans l'île plus fortement qu'ailleurs, qu'il affleure partout: l'île est palimpseste » (70).

⁹⁹ « l'histoire et la dynamique des échanges culturels et ethniques qui constituent à l'histoire de la globalisation dans cet espace géopolitique et culturel » (169).

Chapter 2: Islands as ethnographic sites

2.1 An epistemology of good and bad islands

Islands were an integral part of the Western imaginary since the early of beginnings colonial expansion. In his review of representations of islands in the Western world, Robert Nicole explains this relentless fascination as follows:

The island was associated with a set of inherited mythological, intellectual, poetic, and psychological factors. Being by definition close and remote, islands big or small could appeal to the Western imagination and over time there evolved a literary tradition of floating, desert, icy, and other unlikely islands inhabited by strange beings. For the European continental culture, endless possibilities for discoveries, exploration, adventure, and mystery could now be taken up by the imagination (16).

According to Daniel Drion, Homer's *Odyssey* appeals to the imagination with his description of exotic islands, including Corsica. Diana Loxley assumes that from the perspective of continental European imperial powers, islands were thought to be sites for discovery and conquest for they are traditionally associated with geopolitical, social, cultural, and even gender difference. The depiction of their Otherness produced visions of island space and life that range from the deserted islands to islands and their enchanted inhabitants, and naturally, anachronistic models of insularity that host various perfections. Jean Peyras claims that every island has a sacred quality:

The island can be located in the ecumene or on the edges of the world, it can lead beyond or limit the earth, promote civilisation or, on the contrary, conceal monsters. It is nevertheless loaded with sacrality and it is not a coincidence that Christian author of the late Antiquity used the Latin word *insula* 'island,' to designate a temple (27).

[L'île peut être dans l'œkoumène ou aux confins du monde, elle peut déboucher sur l'au-delà ou borner la terre, promouvoir la civilisation ou, tout

au contraire, recéler des monstres. Elle est pourtant toujours chargée de sacré et ce n'est pas par hasard que les auteurs chrétiens de l'Antiquité tardive utilisèrent le mot *insula*, 'l'île', en latin, pour désigner le temple (27)].

Nicole associates the sacred with the symbolic form of the island: "Being isolated and approaching the ideal figure of a circle (a symbol of perfection), it was presumed that the inhabitants of such distant islands probably kept social systems that were therefore better preserved and simpler" (Nicole 16).

These more or less utopian depictions of perfect islands also have rather negative equivalents. Homer endowed Mediterranean "far-away" islands with dangerous and mysterious superhuman powers that Ulysses had to defeat on his journey back to Ithaca. Throughout European literary history, Mediterranean islands were typically depicted as inhabited by rebellious and dangerous beings. Corsica conjured up negative and positive representations of insularity alike, out of which malicious images prevailed. After his trip to Île de France, Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre drafted a letter to the King of France in which he strategically reiterates stereotypes about Corsica and its inhabitants while insisting that the island can potentially turn into a "European garden" through strategic French colonial intervention. These assumptions continued to take a central role in the imaginary of 19th century Metropolitan French authors, which is particularly well illustrated by Claude Moliterni's playful opening to his anthology of the 19th and 20th century literary representations of Corsica: "Starting in 1840, Flaubert wrote: 'Everything that is being said about Corsica is wrong.' So let's put literature first"¹⁰⁰ (5). This led

¹⁰⁰ « Dès 1840 Flaubert écrivait: 'Tout ce qu'on dit sur la Corse est faux.' Alors, laissons la place à la littérature » (5).

Robert Nicole to point to the political function of such descriptions of perfect and imperfect islands because they helped justify imperial ventures to far-away places.

Textual constructions of islands continued to be prevalent when European explorers started to venture outside the Mediterranean Sea and ended up “discovering” new territories which eventually led them to the “New World.” Having landed on vastly different islands all over the globe, European travelers proceeded to describe the inhabitants of islands based on preconceived notions of Otherness. These maritime voyages and multi-cultural “encounters” were meticulously reported in numerous accounts that range from perfectly secluded to floating or even underwater islands. Entire perfect cities and empires such as Atlantis or Lemuria were thought to be submerged in the Atlantic or Indian Ocean, respectively. Forever out of reach for European conquest, these mythical islands inspired creative works in literature and visual culture.

Tracing the history of the depiction of exotic peoples from Rabelais to the current era, Nicole particularly focuses on the variations of the myth of the noble savage and its “displacement” to French Polynesia. After the “New World” was taken by the Spanish, this relatively unknown part of the world was a welcome treasure to satisfy colonial desires but fueled the European imaginary more than ever before: “By the beginning of the eighteenth century, maritime activities became much more intense with France sending forty-two ships to the Pacific within three years [...] mysterious desert islands, unknown paradise islands and floating islands were beginning to appear [...] Other articles theorized about floating isles, sea monsters, and unicorns” (27).

Within these categories of singular island landscapes, observations of nature and inhabitants soon converged. Islands and its inhabitants would soon be evaluated through biological indicators such as race and gender to classify insular territory on a scale of potential profit that came with imperial expansion or conversion. Nicole draws on the biological factor of race, the myth of racial inferiority, and the Foucauldian relationship between discourse formation and power to explain that Tahiti received a rather positive treatment by French colonial authors:

Tahitians and Tahiti became a reference point from which to judge other Pacific Islanders. Bougainville would strive to distinguish the great gulf he thought existed between the inferiority of the darker races (Melanesians) and that of the lighter races (Polynesians). Melanesians were automatically linked to ‘nos nègres’ of Africa, while Tahitians were thought to be worth the more handsome Europeans! [...] Jules Sebastien Dumont D’Urville (1790-1841), another French navigator, would call Tahiti ‘a European isle in the middle of a savage ocean’ (56).

In her study, Sylvie André confirms this account with regard to the relatively positive colonial representations of Tahitian women (*Continuité 77*) that revolts contemporary author Chantal Spitz as misogynist objectification:

Non.
Décidément
je n’aime pas ‘le mariage de Loti’
best-seller fondateur du mythe
roman exotique par excellence
alibi de tous les fantasmes
toutes les hypocrisies intellectuelles
tous les paternalismes
tous les racismes
qui excuse toutes les exactions
tous les mépris
toutes les vexations
tous les cynismes (*insolites 87-88*).

The aesthetics of the Tahitian female beauty continued to be perpetuated by French explorers, historians, scientists, philosophers, authors and painters, particularly Pierre

Loti and Paul Gauguin, who, despite several trips to other parts of Oceania, were supposedly less interested in New Caledonia because the “Kanakas came too close to the negative cultural heritage and sense of aesthetics produced by Africa” (Nicole 126).

The branch of travel writing dealing with adventures on faraway islands continued to flourish with Charles Baudelaire and Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle¹⁰¹ while authors like Prosper Mérimée and Guy de Maupassant were drawn to geographically closer and racially more equal Corsican territory. As the plethora of short stories about the extraordinary encounters and observations of almost existential importance on Corsican soil indicates, the island was thought to be dramatically more “real” than those far-way exotic places in the Pacific and Indian Ocean that would haunt the imagination of other 19th century Metropolitan French writers.

On the continuum of positive and negative images associated with islands and their inhabitants, the actual encounter with locals or with the island’s savage nature represented a functional tool to elaborate ideas about otherness in preposterous dimensions. Based on Paul Ricoeur’s notion of the readability of actions, the ‘discovery’ of the island and its inhabitants becomes a narrative event with epistemological status (*I*, 93-96). Focusing on the structural components of events, Ricoeur distinguishes between the creation of ethnographic and other texts through the functionality of concepts:

we must not confuse the texture of action with the text the ethnologist writers, the *ethno-graphic* text which is written in categories, with concepts, using

¹⁰¹ Sonia Faessel’s small anthology of Polynesian poets lists, among colonial French and contemporary Oceanian authors, the Réunion-born writer Leconte de Lisle and his work on Polynesia : « Genèse Polynésienne » (*Poèmes barbares*, 1862) and « Dernier des Mourys » (*Derniers Poèmes*, 1895) (23-34).

nomological principles that are the contribution of the discipline and that must not, consequently, be confused with those categories by which a culture understands itself (58).

The symbolism of good and bad islands provided a meaningful structure to organize the event of the ‘discovery’ of the island and the encounter with its inhabitants based on biological markers such as race.

If indigenous Tahitians were thought to resemble Europeans more than the Kanaks, the situation was quite different in the Indian Ocean because Réunion and Mauritius were uninhabited at the moment of the arrival of the first Europeans in the 17th century and therefore quite commonly described as being Eden-like. Njeri Githire explains that “Like its Mascarene sisters, Mauritius and Rodrigues, and nearby Seychelles, Réunion Island—referred to as l’Ile Bourbon until 1793—had no indigenous population when in the mid-seventeenth century a dozen deported French mutineers from Madagascar made their first settlement on the island” (518). The absence of a truly indigenous population at the moment of its discovery sparked an increasing interest in this part of the world that is today inhabited by a multiethnic and racially diverse community composed of “Africans, Chinese, Indians, and Malays, some of them [came] in the aftermath of slavery, or as indentured laborers at the abolition of slavery in the French colonies in 1848” (519).

While the paradisiacal representations of Tahiti were based on relative “racial similarity,” the deserted island tropes for the Mascarene were thought to function as a tropical variation of Eden waiting to be conquered by Europeans. As Martine Mathieu indicates,

From the beginning of the 16th century, Europeans [...] were looking for a route towards the Oriental of spices and gold [...] Fantastical projections were

superposed onto these concret strategic values and they manifested themselves in the narratives that numerous travelers of these unknown regions published upon their return: the description of deserted but prodigious islands soon transformed into a representation of a primitive Eden (153).

[Dès le début du XVI^e siècle, les Européens [...] se cherchèrent une route vers l'Orient des épices et de l'or [...] À leur valeur stratégique concrète, se superposèrent des projections fantasmatiques, manifestes dans les relations que divers voyageurs en ces contrées nouvelles publient à leur retour: la description de ces îles désertes mais prodigues se mue assez vite en la figuration d'un Eden primitif (153).]

Similar descriptions of what used to be Ile de France, Mauritius, can also be found in Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's exotic pastoral *Paul and Virginia* (1788) which Njeri Githire quite fittingly suggests reading as a depiction of "a utopian paradise of idyllic tranquility fated to revert to its 'desert-island' status after a catastrophe which leaves only the narrator of the story in its wake" (519). However, as Jean-Michel Racault points out, this position does not correspond to the negative conceptualization of the island Bernardin de Saint-Pierre puts forward in his 1773 travel journal, *Voyage à l'Ile de France* ("Avant-propos" 10).

These broad sketches of early ethnographic activities on the island illustrate the multiple reasons behind the growing interest of the French in islands during the colonial era. Building a parallel with Marc Augé's rationale of associating the beginning of ethnological activity with "the first colonial expedition, the first voyages of discoveries" (*Contemporaneous Worlds* 2), I argue that the representation of island cultures is of particular interest in the literary history of French-speaking island literature as well as French literature with an island theme. Based on the dichotomy of good and bad islands illustrated above, this chapter will probe the epistemological function of the island in the contemporary novels of the Corsican author Marie

Ferranti, Tahitian author Chantal Spitz, and Réunion author Jean-François Samlong. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's concept of the referential dimension of narrative (*I* 64), I will compare and contrast the conceptualization of each island through the framework of history and ethnography, as well as the fusion of these disciplines with literature through what Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo calls the mimetic qualities¹⁰² of historical and ethnographic referents.¹⁰³

One of the underlying questions of this chapter is to understand how these three French-speaking island authors use different referential dimensions of fiction and ethnography to articulate certain realities of the geo-political, socio-cultural, and economic condition of the island within the formal and structural constraints of the French-speaking novel. If Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau are right in claiming that biological markers of Otherness are no longer valid indicators for Otherness,¹⁰⁴ what markers do Ferranti, Spitz, and Samlong deploy to conceptualize their islands and to (re)construct their histories? I am particularly interested in the depiction of cultural contact within the history of the island and how these representations affect the representation of the island by itself and as part of the French-speaking world, especially in relationship to their Antillean counterparts such as Édouard Glissant's notion of the Relation as a model of cultural contact "that reveals in the relation between oneself and the other a surprising diversity" ["qui

¹⁰² « Toutefois, malgré la naïveté de la plupart de ces récits à vocation informative, les divers niveaux d'élaboration, de reconstruction et de mythification de ce réel sont particulièrement importants » (« Ethnotexte » 95-96).

¹⁰³ I will explicitly analyze the function of spatio-temporal referents through postmodern concepts in chapter 3.

¹⁰⁴ « La mondialité (qui n'est pas le marché-monde), nous exalte aujourd'hui et nous lancine, nous suggère une diversité plus complexe que ne peuvent le signifier ces marqueurs archaïques que sont la couleur de la peau, la langue que l'on parle, le dieu que l'on honore ou celui que l'on craint, le sol où on est né » (*L'Intraitable beauté* 15).

découvre dans la relation entre soi-même et les autres une diversité étonnante”] (Spiller 154). In what way is the act of conceptualizing the island through historic and ethnographic material a self-referential, descriptive, or prescriptive process? What are the commonalities and differences in response to unsettling events and how does the imaginary of each island deal with them?

2.2 *Story/history of the island: historical referents and the passage of time*

In *Temps et récit* (originally published between 1983-85 and translated into English as *Time and Narrative* between 1984-88), Paul Ricoeur analyses the relationship between time and the narrative based on what he calls “referential function[s]” (I 11) of language that construct the plot. Linking “the narrative character of history” (91) and the structure and “readable continuity between time of action and historical time” (92), Ricoeur focuses in the second volume on an evaluation of these claims in relationship to truth. This epistemological break also plays an important role in the texts of Marie Ferranti, Chantal Spitz, and Jean-François Samlong, who conceptualize the island through referents that indicate the passage of time. Their focus on a diachronic structure of time diverts from the notion of time in the deserted island or paradise island trope that built on the discovery and classification of the unfamiliar exotic at a particular moment and time while failing to “situate oneself in the same time as the people [...] studied,” as Marc Augé indicates (*Contemporaneous Worlds* 44). These three contemporary novels embed the story of the plot within the narrative of a specific historical event which enables the author to consider the current situation of his or her island from the vantage point of history.

Ricoeur defines historical narratives as “[s]ome major achievement or failure of men living and working together, in societies or nations or any other lastingly organized group [...] This is why, in spite of their critical relation to traditional narrative, histories that deal with the unification or the disintegration of an empire, with the rise or the fall of a class, a social movement, a religious sect, or a literary style, are narratives” (I 151). His definition is central to the narrative structures of Ferranti, Spitz, and Samlong’s novels as they strategically invert Ricoeur’s definition of historical narratives. It is therefore important to understand the effects of convergence between the time of action and the historical time and how each author situates the text with respect to the constraints that were brought on by an unsettling historical change.

2.2.1 Narrative understanding and narrative explanations

Published in 2000, Marie Ferranti’s *La Fuite aux Agriates* develops a problematic relationship between the historical and political aspects of time in Corsica and the narrative time of the story. The plot considers several pathways of excessive devotion to a cause without the least consideration of any type of consequences. The tragic denouement, which leads to Julius’s assassination by an unknown individual, does not spare anyone and depicts all characters as guilty. Even Francesca’s sister Marie is not an innocent victim, despite the fact that Julius cheated on her with her sister. Although the narrator does not specify the actual time frame or identify the victim Julius cold-bloodedly assassinated, the verisimilitude of this act of violence is reminiscent of the complex socio-political reality of Corsica’s

contemporary history¹⁰⁵ while at the same time, serving as a pivotal moment around which the sequence of fictional events is constructed. The plot creates what Ricoeur calls a “gap [...] between narrative explanation and historical explanation, a gap that is inquiry as such. This gap prevents us from taking history [...] as a species of the genus ‘story’” (Ricoeur *I* 179). This gap entices the reader to look for information in the narrative structure as well as the historical narrative.

The novel opens *in media res* with Francesca’s return from the Agriates¹⁰⁶ where she was hiding with her lover Julius because he committed a murder. The plot progressively reconstitutes the sequence of events prior to Francesca’s return home and eventually closes with a dialogue between Francesca and Julius in which Francesca asks her childhood friend Joseph why he killed Julius in the Agriates. After a moment of silence, he confesses: “C’est toi qui me l’as demandé, Francesca” (*F.A.* 149).

The plot is broken down into six consecutive but non-linear sections that strategically blend the historical moment of crime and the fictional love affair that develops between Francesca and Julius who are both engaged to a different partner. With the help of numerous temporal markers, the narrator situates each chapter in relation to two central events that feature the shepherd and political activist Julius as an assassin, a lover, and a cheater. The opening passage of each chapter is particularly

¹⁰⁵ I will talk about this act of terrorism in more detail in chapter 4.

¹⁰⁶ The *Guide du routard: la Corse 2011* introduces the Agriates as an area located between the Northern tip of Corsica known as the “Cap Corse” and the Northwestern mountainous “Balagne” (99, 134-138). This desert-like swamp West of Marie Ferranti’s home town, Saint-Forent, is famous for its thorny cliffs and torrid conditions and savage beaches along the coast. Apart from geographical facts, this travel guide frames the introductory information about the Agriates with a literary reference to Pierre Benoit’s *Les Agriates* that describes the area as “terre écartée et inquiétante [...] les dolmens sont des vaisseaux de l’ogre et les ponts des constructions du Diable” (134).

relevant to that effect. While chapter II opens with a flash back to events that led to Francesca and Julius's complicated affair « Il **avait dit** 'mon amour' » (*F.A.* 37; emphasis added), the following chapters develop moments prior to and right after the crime: Chapter III and IV evoke the build up to Julius's transgression, "**L'été précédant le meurtre**, au début du mois d'août, Francesca avait demandé à Marie de poser pour elle [...] Un mois plus tard, à la fin de l'été, au même endroit, Francesca avait fait la **photographie de Julius, celle qui avait paru dans le journal**" (*F.A.* 71; emphasis added) and « Ce fut **quelques jours plus tard que le meurtre fut commis** » (*F.A.* 105; emphasis added), while chapter V and VI return to the moments of the opening scene to focus on the events that took place after Francesca left Julius in the Agriates and the latter was assassinated.

The author alternates between dialogues and narration to reconstitute the events that led to the actual escape of Julius and Francesca from different perspectives. The passages that consist of short dialogues and exchanges create a theater-like setting and function as a commentary to relate the particularities of daily events, which include the shocked reactions of local women upon hearing the news of Julius's assassination and the fact that Francesca was involved with a criminal: "Abuser sa soeur de la sorte, toute de même, il ne faut pas avoir de pudeur..." comments an elderly woman in town, Santa Marietti, and her friend Julie Ludovici adds: "Ni de honte" (*F.A.* 17). As this short passage indicates, the news of each tragic event has a significant impact on the town of Bastia, particularly on the women. Joseph's frank confession in the end indicates that he was similarly affected by the course events took. Without knowing the identity of Julius's murderer, uncertainty

and fear take hold of the town and lead one of the female characters to sadly wonders: “Ah! Mon Dieu! Quand tout cela finira-t-il? Tous ces meurtres, cette folie! Que de morts! » (*F.A.* 143). The lack of control and the absence of temporary boundaries that delineate a future direction for the island become the central themes of the novel. Ferranti demonstrates the tragic consequences of a nostalgic view of the past that is incompatible with the current state of violence ravaging an island, despite its apparent ability to absorb the seasonal invasion of “touristes en mal de nature sauvage et d’exotisme” (*F.A.* 74), as it drifts towards chaos.

Building on Ricoeur’s notion of the gap between narrative understanding and historical explanations, Ferranti takes an extremely critical stance towards the situation, as the internal logic of the plot and the reasoning of her characters indicate. When months after the shooting, the police suspect the involvement of Pierre and his friends and arrest them, Julius had managed long ago to disappear. At that point and time, Joseph’s slate is wiped clean by the fact that the police consider him to be innocent, despite the fact that he is morally guilty because of his involvement with a suspect group he personally considered harmless. The narrator argues:

Beaucoup de ses amis furent inquiétés, certains envoyés à Paris, sauf Joseph, qu’on avait pris et relâché quelques heures plus tard. Il avait un alibi. Des témoins l’avaient vu. Il avait passé sa soirée au bar du village. Il ne pouvait pas être sur les lieux du crime. Personne n’avait vu la voiture de Pierre arriver vers minuit chez Joseph et en repartir avant l’aube. Si on l’avait vue, on n’en aurait rien dit. Si la police pensait que Joseph était innocent, **ce n’était pas à nous autres de l’accuser** (*F.A.* 108 ; emphasis added).

The use of the pronoun “on” collectively refers to the female community on the island and the conditional past tense of the first if-clause reiterates a hypothetical situation in the past that does not longer bear meaning on the present and the future. By contrast,

the second if-clause puts emphasis on the impact of local authorities that overrule the collective knowledge in the female community.

After Francesca's painful recollection of her lover's actions, the family's servant Clorinde is able to put things into perspective as far as her son's involvement with the nationalists is concerned. She clearly remembers having noticed empty bottles and cigarette stubs in the kitchen the morning of what seems to have been the day after the attack. These traces of the consumption of alcohol and tobacco testify to nocturnal gatherings in which her son Joseph actively participated: "Clorinde se rappela que Pierre, Julius et Giovanni étaient venus chez elle. Joseph les attendait. Au matin, elle avait vu les verres sur la table de la cuisine, les bouteilles vides, les mégots de cigarettes dans une assiette. Elle comprenait tout à présent » (*F.A.* 36).

The strategic confusion between politics and emotions lead to political crimes and crimes of passion that culminate in two deaths in the novel. Clorinde is the only person to act by questioning her son Joseph but she does not pursue the matter once told that there is no reason to be worried:

Clorinde l'avait entendu. Comme elle n'arrêtait pas d'aller et de venir, ils n'avaient pas fait attention à elle.

Clorinde n'avait pas bien saisi toute la conversation, mais le soir même elle avait demandé à Joseph si ses amis ne préparaient pas un mauvais coup. Il l'avait rassurée : 'Penses-tu ! Ils en sont incapables. Ils se montent la tête', avait dit Joseph, avec une moue de mépris (*F.A.* 77).

Similarly, Julius manages to hide his affair with Francesca until Marie becomes suspicious and decides to spy on her sister. As the story unfolds, both types of crime become a tragic reality that drives two men to become killers: Julius and Joseph. Francesca describes her memory of the days following the attack when the news reported the event: "Le lendemain même du meurtre, Julius et Pierre dinèrent à la

maison Montadori. Ils suivirent avec Francesca le journal télévisé. Ils virent le drap sur le cadavre et la flaque de sang noir autour ; Francesca avait détourné la tête” (*F.A.* 106). While the crime scene repulses her, she condemns the crime until two days later when the television news broadcast of the victim’s funeral and the mourning family. To create images that go with the newscast, the camera zooms in on the face of the mourning widow to better relate the impact of her husband’s tragic death:

Au cimetière, la femme se tenait debout près du cercueil. On aurait dit qu’elle allait défaillir sous le poids de la douleur, elle avait un regard empli d’effroi et d’angoisse [...] À l’enterrement, la foule applaudit au passage du cortège. Alors la femme cacha son visage dans ses mains. L’image était si furtive qu’ils l’avaient passée **au ralenti**, comme pour qu’on jouisse du spectacle mais personne n’avait joui du spectacle et mieux aurait valu ne rien voir du tout (*F.A.* 107; emphasis added).

A comparison between this visual display of mourning in slow motion and the actual premise of the act of visually deconstructing movement for chronophotographer Étienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904)¹⁰⁷ points to the contradictory nature of this visual sequence in the sense that there is no particular motion to capture. While Francesca identifies with photography as a tool to capture life, she cannot relate to the visual images of the spectacle of mourning on television. These images are furthermore complemented by more trivial reactions within the local community that reacts with intense gossip about and complete indifference to Francesca’s and Julius’s affair.

For the women in town, Francesca’s affair turns into somewhat of a historical, singular event that diverts from their own paths of disappointing marriages and stories of unfulfilled love. As for Francesca’s actual fiancé, Pierre thinks of the affair as nothing but a minor inconvenience, compared to his responsibilities and involvement

¹⁰⁷ Étienne-Jules Marey was primarily interested in deconstruction the movement of animals such as the flight of birds or a galloping horse. He designed his own tools to record images. For a small introduction, see Agnès Varda’s documentary *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* [*The Gleaners and I*].

in the political sphere of the island. While Pierre does not see a dire need to confront Francesca or his best friend Julius, several members of the female community try to come to terms with what happened by advancing a series of maxims about the virtue of love. One of these maxims quite fittingly expresses the moral of the novel as follows: “Un amour sans morale ne vaut rien” (*F.A.* 144).

The narrative does indeed point to problematic relationships as a source of violence and conflict that originates even within the context of the institutionalized family. In his study *Comprendre la Corse*, Jean-Louis Andreani confirms that the island permanently faces a situation of internal and external violence, with political assassinations being a common occurrence leading to periods of interior turmoil and insecurity. Based on the year of publication of Ferranti’s novel in 2000, it can be assumed that the blurred references to political terrorism and the shooting undoubtedly refer to the assassination of prefect Claude Erignac February 6, 1998 (Andreani 169). Therefore, the quotes about the virtue of love can also be understood within the context of Corsica’s socio-political instability and the complicated relationship between France and Corsica. In that sense, Ferranti’s novel becomes historical because it reiterates the idea of tensions as the source of historically created conflicts. But rather than dealing with the consequences of historical violence, the narrative creates another gap through a problematic system of conflict resolution.

Organized political crimes from what could symbolically be considered the “undergrounds” of the island have a significant impact on the daily life of the population that inhabits the visible surface. The novel ends without truly resolving either the problem of political instability or the unfortunate situation for the love-

struck Joseph. After a lengthy period of convalescence, Francesca leaves the room fully recovered while Joseph stays behind without gaining anything. With the alignment of political, personal, and moral matters, Ferranti questions the logic behind the unreasonable match between the commitment to and involvement in the political realms of the island.

Men like Julius and Pierre want to change the world whereas women do not feel like they have a say. Hence the narrator's critical reflection to insist on the burden of knowledge as a shared responsibility:

Ainsi, pour Clorinde, la politique était une affaire d'homme jusqu'au jour où ceux qu'elle considérait toujours comme des enfants étaient devenus assassins. Alors, Clorinde, Mathilde, et peut-être Francesca, avaient dû penser qu'elles avaient tort de ne s'être pas intéressées à la politique, de n'avoir rien tenté pour faire cesser cette barbarie, qui n'était pas nouvelle, mais avait dégénéré en guerre civile. Elles étaient coupables d'avoir été indifférentes au monde et elles payaient le prix du sang versé (*F.A.* 78)

Disinterested in politics, Francesca is the only female character willing to try new things and to take risks. Although she is adventurous and drawn to new places,¹⁰⁸ she does not get involved in organized crime and politics and in the end, she loses Julius forever. However, whereas the women in town speculate that her sister Marie will be better off starting over on the continent, they are keenly aware of the fact that the rebellious Francesca is emotionally strong enough to move on with her life in town. As the last scene shows, Francesca is not affected by the implications of Joseph's confession the least. She is about to leave the room, ready to close that chapter of her life which makes the narrative conclusion of the story rather unsatisfactory.

¹⁰⁸ Despite the on-going political tensions, Francesca left the island for a short trip to the Naples in order to complete a project for work and Pierre refuses to let her go on a second trip to Greece. Francesca's fascination and her impressions from her trip to Italy are indicative of the affiliations Corsicans continue to maintain with Italy.

This unsatisfactory conclusion is inherently linked to the way Francesca views the island after a failed attempt of taking pictures in the Agriates on a foggy day when the surrounding are blurry due to the lack of light. By contrast, the shot during windy conditions turns out well because Julius shielded her body from the harsh gusts while she is working with her camera. However, Francesca likes the photographs of her trip to Naples the best: “Les rues ne sont pas vides. Ne vois-tu pas les ombres des gens qui marchent? Et cet enfant qui court, en ouvrant les bras, il s’amuse à faire l’avion dans l’amphithéâtre. Moi, j’ai trouvé tout cela très gai, très vivant. Et les jardins, le silence, le ciel vide, une lumière ! Je n’ai pas fait une seule photo en intérieur. Tout sous le soleil, très tôt le matin, jusqu’à midi » (*F.A.* 102). Julius, on the other hand, prefers pictures of the Agriates despite the fact that getting good shots there is a physically challenging endeavor due to the strong wind that make it impossible for Francesca to take pictures unless Julius shields her body. Her first attempt to take pictures fails because of a fog and mist and she complains: “La lumière n’est pas bonne [...] Il y a une brume qui pèse sur tout, empêche la netteté. Moi, je veux du contraste. On n’est pas à Venise! » (*F.A.* 73). In other words, the narratives of and around Francesca’s photographs confirm the pessimistic vision of the island’s history and the permanent tensions. Francesca contrasts the foggy image of Corsica with the bright and lively scenery of Italy. The clarity of images on the continent refers back to Ricoeur’s concepts of narrative understanding and narrative explanations that provide information rather than disseminating doubt and uncertainty.

Contrary to Ferranti’s novel, the texts of Chantal Spitz and Jean-François Samlong focus on a historical past that is more distant than the rather recent events in

Ferranti's novel. Spitz and Samlong describe the moment of contact between the colonizer and the colonized, which represent a socio-political reality in the history of both Tahiti and Réunion Island. However, both islands underwent two different forms of colonization which left behind a plethora of visible and invisible traces on the imaginary of each island. These traces are of particular importance in the process of reconstituting the past in the novels of these authors. Similar to Francesca's photographs from her trip to Italy, Ferranti's novel provides somewhat of a snapshot of contemporary Corsican history by focusing on the tensions currently dividing the population. Contrary to Ferranti's novel, the Tahitian and Réunionese novels strategically follow the complex historical development of the island from the colonial past to the post- or neocolonial present. As a result, both authors materialize the relationship to the history of their island in their narrative which puts emphasis on different aspects of the historical reality, that is, Samlong focuses on the tragic reality of slavery in the 18th century while Spitz considers the devastating impact of atomic colonization and nuclear tests performed by the French in 1965 and 1995 although she does not provide any specific dates in her narrative (Ramsay 16).

2.2.2 Historical time and the time of the narrative: commenting historical explanations

Chantal Spitz's 1991 novel, *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, deals with the consequences of successive arrivals of European colonizers on the culture of the indigenous people of French Polynesia. The narrator focuses on a series of unsettling moments in Tahitian history to describe the transition from its original, harmonious

pre-colonial state to a modern and technologically savvy world. Each sequence increases in intensity to relate moments of involuntary and voluntary cultural contact abroad and at home, thus illustrating the incompatibility of two very different visions of the world. Although the historical time frame stretches from the pre-colonial to the postcolonial era, the narrative moments are fictional. References to both spaces are vague because they function as artificially constructed stand-ins for the real, that is, Metropolitan France and Tahiti. The current consequences of this contact continue to have a significant impact on the island:

Vingt ans après, les bouleversements sont irréversibles, tant dans le paysage et l'économie que dans les mentalités [...] Ruahine effectue en vingt ans le parcours que la métropole a mis deux mille ans à faire. La folie de l'homme blanc frappe une nouvelle fois cette île tranquille, rendant déments ses habitants qui n'ont pas su se protéger du torrent dévastateur de la modernité occidentale (*I.R.E.* 189).

The sequence of events is distributed over the course of fourteen consecutive sections out of which eleven chapters deal directly with the three generations of characters of the main plot while the preface, the prologue, and the epilogue situate the plot in the imaginary of indigenous Tahitians.

Overall, the changes on the island are described in four steps that are broken down into the preface's genesis, the ancestors' early premonition which announces the arrival of the first Europeans in the prologue, the reactions of three generations of local family, and finally, in the epilogue, which deals with the aftermath of nuclear missiles in Tahiti in the 20th century. The eleven chapters that form the plot of the novel are either named based on the characters that meet against all odds ("Emere et Tematua" and "Laura and Terii") or they draw on temporary or permanent result of these intercultural encounters ("Tematua" abroad, the transformation of "Emely-

Emere,” and the couple’s children as “children of love,” the transformation of “Laura Lebrun” to Laura, Laura and Terii’s “pain of love” and the unavoidable “rift”) as well as cross-cultural impacts created through nuclear colonialism (“the news,” “useless combat” and “the launch of missiles”).¹⁰⁹ Emily’s mother whose relationship with the Anglophone colonizer William failed, does not textually occupy the space of a complete, autonomous chapter by itself, but rather, their failure functions as a prelude to common problems in interracial and intercultural relationships, as experienced by Tematua and Emily, or later by Terii and Laura. Within the sequence of events leading to the construction of the nuclear testing center, each significant sequence is announced by a title that insists on the effects of strategic disintegration of a harmonious world (e.g. “the news” or “useless combat”).

The children eventually decide to fight against the dramatic changes brought to French Polynesia through the French nuclear testing program. The disproportionately growing influence of Western culture leads to acculturation and loss of identity in the autochthonous population. The characters depicted in the novel have differentiating perspectives of this problem and verbalize their feelings in spoken poems which implement the oral traditions of indigenous people. The sequence of actions is structured around the impact of historical events rather than their precise temporal references or dates which Paul Ricoeur fittingly summarizes this way: “A story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people. These people are presented either in situations that change or as reaction to such change” (*I* 150). However, the effect remains the same because the island turns into a space where time seems to speed up

¹⁰⁹ The preceding translations are my own.

as the autochthonous Tahitians continue to lose touch with their ancestral origins and become strangers to themselves.¹¹⁰

The time of the narrative and the historical time converge and allow for retrospective commenting on a past the indigenous people had been warned about through their ancestors' predictions. The plot retraces a series of events that were responsible for the current situation. The first significant moment relates the arrival of European boats as an event that is temporally distant from the moment of enunciation:

Ils sont arrivés **un jour**, sur leur vaisseau sans balancier, donnant raison à la parole oubliée. Nous les avons accueillis, ces étrangers frères venus d'ailleurs, annoncés longtemps auparavant. Nous les avons aimés, ces rameaux inconnus du tronc, enfants de Ta'aroa l'Unique.

Nous avons partagé notre terre avec eux, grande maison créée par Ta'aroa, pour que tous ses enfants y grandissent. Nous leur avons offert notre amour. Amour confiant, qui nous a fait oublier la suite de la prédiction. Amour infini, devenu douleur et larmes.

Ils se sont approprié notre terre, aidés par certains hommes de notre peuple, assoiffés de pouvoir immérité. Ils ont déstabilisé notre ordre nous imposant leur monde.

Ô mon peuple, la parole est devenue réalité, et **nous pleurons** (*I.R.E.* 20 ; emphasis added).

To a certain extent, Spitz insinuates the fatal mistake of the Maohi people by underestimating the tragic impact of the arrival of "leur vaisseau sans balancier" that had been predicted by their ancestors. The second significant moment is the arrival of a recruiter who enlists young Tahitian men to fight for France in the war. The text is taken beyond its narrative function as it lets narrative and historical explanations collide to show the weakness of arguments deployed by the colonizers:

¹¹⁰ One stanza of the anthem Tetiara writes, reads as follows: "La déchirure de notre peuple orphelin / Exilé sur notre Terre d'éternité / Ensemencée des rêves d'or de nos pères / Nous a rendus étrangers à nous-mêmes" (*I.R.E.* 197).

Il suffit de donner son nom et la date approximative de sa naissance. L'état civil n'existant pas encore à Maeva, pas d'autorisation parentale pour les enfants mineurs, notion étrangère au monde *ma'ohi*, pourquoi en parler ? Pas de visite médicale, Maeva n'ayant ni infirmier ni médecin. Quelle différence d'ailleurs d'être en bonne ou en mauvaise santé quand on éclate sous un obus ? (*I.R.E* 38)

The incorporation of rhetorical questions is a powerful tool to insist on the polemical nature of comments. This strategy also permeates to other parts of the texts where Spitz intentionally deploys extremely sarcastic narrative explanations to draw attention to the irony and even perversion behind historical reasoning that seemingly justifies the ties between Tahiti and continental France.

Où donc peut bien se trouver cette mère patrie et qui peut bien être cette Allemagne? Pourquoi défendre ce pays qu'ils n'ont jamais vu et dont ils ont dû entendre le nom une dizaine de fois dans leur vie, et encore ! Pourquoi donc ce *Papa'a* les a-t-il traités d'enfants de notre grande nation, eux qui sont et seront toujours *Ma'ohi* ? Pourquoi vient-il les chercher pour chasser l'étranger de chez eux, alors qu'eux-mêmes se sont installés ici sans aucun droit? Décidément, quels drôles de gens, ces *Papa'a* ! Bien sûr qu'ils vont accepter de partir, ces *taure'are'a*, jeune hommes, non pour aller défendre cette Mère Patrie inconnue, mais pour sortir de chez eux, voir ailleurs. Ils n'ont pas peur, eux qui n'ont aucune idée de ce que peut-être une guerre, eux qui n'imaginent pas qu'il peut exister un pays sans soleil, sans mer, sans *'uru*. Ils n'hésitent pas un instant, eux qui ont grandi entourés des leurs, ignorant qu'ils auront froid, qu'ils auront mal, qu'ils ne comprendront ni ce qu'on leur dira, ni où ils seront, et encore moins pourquoi ils y seront (*I.R.E.* 36-37).

In this passage, the omniscient narrator blends two types of judgment. The series of rhetorical questions refer to the evaluation of facts based on the information available in the past. The arguments briefly enumerate descriptive details about how the indigenous people view the world prior to their departure, not knowing what they are about to get themselves into. At the same time, the narrative drifts into a different mode of explanation that draws on a reflective reevaluation of the past. This critical opposition helps advance arguments that should have held these naïve young men

back in the first place. Contrary to Ferranti's novel, Spitz strategically fills gaps by commenting on the weakness of historical explanations to create a new narrative history.

The last significant narrative moment is the construction of the nuclear testing center. The French nuclear engineer Laura Lebrun discovers the past of the motu for the first time through a series of photographs that illustrate the condition of the motu before and after the construction of the nuclear testing center, similar to "des clichés, pareils à ceux que les publicités racoleuses en mal de client paumés affichent dans certaines revues, en particulier celles qui vantent les opérations de chirurgie esthétique miracles qui changent la vie et qui montrent: 'AVANT-APRÈS'" (*I.R.E.* 124). Her colleague explains:

Ma chère Laura, quelle sensiblerie typiquement féminine. Ah, les femmes! La rêverie poétique n'a pas de place dans le sanctuaire du progrès technologique militaire. Ces photographies ne servent pas à nous rappeler avec attendrissement cette bande de terre sans valeur. Ce sont les témoins flagrants de ce progrès, ceux qui déposeront en faveur de la grandeur de notre pays" (*I.R.E.* 123-124).

The photographs of the motu illustrate that the time of action and historical time are superposed, thus erasing all traces of the past. Spitz's commenting on historical explanations indicates her militant position against colonization. The polemical nature of Spitz's comments about historical events is indicative of the author's position with regard to historical knowledge and progress. Her narrative explanations put emphasis on the importance of traditional knowledge to know the past which is central in Ricoeur's opposition between historical knowledge based on testimony of lived experience or scientific knowledge about the past (*I* 98).

In narratological terms, Spitz's narrative opposes two incompatible times. On the one hand, there is the indigenous people's vision of time of traditions and their storytelling Gods who constructed a narrative about futuristic events such as colonization. On the other hand, the era of modernity and its Eurocentric vision of white superiority on the other hand. Spitz's narrative underlines the verisimilitude of indigenous people's early premonitions that stand in direct opposition to the Metropolitan vision of progress and "Valeurs, tradition, identité. Des notions sans doute étrangères à leur monde [...]» (*I.R.E.* 125). Her arguments put additional emphasis on the dramatic consequences on the imaginary of the Maohi "dans cette période incertaine et mouvementée qui connaît Ruahine, saison de violence latente du désespoir d'un peuple qui se perd" (*I.R.E.* 202).

Contrary to Ferranti's gaps between narrative understanding and narrative explanations, Spitz strategically comments on and critiques historical explanations that allowed for these unsettling changes to happen, alternating between prose poems and rhetorical questions. This also has an impact on the form of the text. While Ferranti implements narrative techniques of a traditional novel, Spitz clearly transgresses the boundaries of the Western novel by mixing genres. In that sense, she skillfully transforms the genre of the novel into a Trojan horse by having it absorb local forms of cultural expression to reconceptualize French Polynesian history from the perspective of the indigenous people. Despite their similar focus on the perspective of the indigenous people, Spitz differs from post-postcolonial author Victor Segalen's *Les Immémoriaux*. Written in the literary past tense, Segalen's novel traces the advent of evangelization by relating the subsequent disappearance of

indigenous people's traditions, particularly that of memorized recitations, « les beaux parlers originels : où s'enferment, **assurent les maîtres**, l'éclosion des mondes, la naissance des étoiles, le façonnage des vivants, les ruts et les monstrueux labeurs des dieux Maoris » (*L.I.* 11). The indirect discourse functions as an explanatory commentary rather than a speech act, compared to Spitz's performative recitation of narrative poems that again, divert from the format of the traditional novel. Even the short recitation of Segalen's *Térii* is textually set apart by cursive font as if it were a citation rather than a part of the text. While Segalen puts emphasis on *Térii*'s responsibility and guilt as he converted, Spitz, on the other hand, places the blame on those who brought atomic colonization to Tahiti.

2.2.3 Narration as an event: reconfiguring narrative and historical explanations

Published in 2007, Réunion Island writer Jean-François Samlong's novel, *Une île où séduire Virginie*, strategically uses the epistemological break between historical and narrative time to reconfigure both descriptions and explanations of the passage of time on the island. The plot deals with the trauma of colonization on the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius by emphasizing the urgent necessity to come to terms with the past: "si on a pu se servir des mots pour enfermer l'homme dans des lois barbares, c'est un devoir de les utiliser comme des armes pour le libérer de la servitude" (*I.S.V.* 135) concludes Paul towards the end of his narrative. The author systematically combines the destiny of the legendary French Creole couple, Paul and Virginia, by juxtaposing their situation with that of two fictional fugitive slaves, Omar and Lala.

Contrary to Spitz's novel, Samlong does not evoke a situation prior to colonization due to the fact that the island was deserted when the first colonizers arrived. Although the topographical referents clearly situate the plot in Mauritius, the treatment of historical facts from the colonial past indicates commonalities shared by its sister island, Réunion, which, as Samlong pointed out to me, were both overseen by the same governor, Mahé de La Bourdonnais.¹¹¹ In his novel, Samlong draws on historical facts and figures of colonialism on both islands to frame fictional and literary episodes that superpose a contemporary Creole imaginary of Réunion Island, as Valérie Magdaleine-Andrianjafitrimo indicates ("Décalage"). This blend affects all three chapters of the plot which constitute a combination of four fictional developments: It deals with the legend of Paul and Virginia, their interactions with the fugitive slave couple Omar and Lala, the development of these relationships after Virginia's death, and eventually, the repercussions of these interactions on the life of Paul after the death of Virginia, Omar, Lala, and the old neighbor who is actually the former narrator of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's exotic pastoral. These developments take root in socio-cultural and historical facts of the island, that is, slavery and the persecution of fugitive slaves. The final episodes of the literary development are reminiscent of the historical date of the abolition of slavery December 20, 1848.

In the epilogue of the novel, Paul reflects upon his own life as a master of his slaves and the realization of his dream:

¹¹¹ « [...] historiquement l'île de France et l'île Bourbon ont été longtemps considérées comme des « îles sœurs », avec de fréquents échanges, et faut-il ajouter, par exemple, que Mahé de La Bourdonnais fut en même temps gouverneur de l'île de France et de l'île Bourbon, participant au développement de l'une et de l'autre, durant la période esclavagiste ; ensuite, ce sont deux espaces insulaires qui sont assez proches, même si l'île de France est moins montagneuse [...] » (« Written interview »).

[...] j'ai rédigé des lettres d'affranchissement pour tous mes esclaves, à la grande stupeur du contremaître qui m'a remis sa démission sous prétexte que j'étais en train de saborder le domaine de la Montaigne-Longue [...] je voulais vivre mon rêve, quelque chose qu'il ne pouvait pas comprendre. Là où progressent les idées, il y a quelquefois perte de profit [...] Cloîtré dans la bibliothèque, j'ai pu écrire mon histoire, la Bible ouverte sur le livre du *Siracide* [...] (I.S.V. 135)

Paul closes his narrative with a modern reflection on progress (which he defines as loss of profit) that seems to set the stage for the resolution of a historical conflict (which he defines as the liberty of slaves). However, this vision is clearly situated outside the narrative frame of historical explanations, with the historical development being anachronous to the closing scene of fictional events. Using the legendary dates of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's exotic pastoral, *Paul et Virginie* (1788), the narrator Paul blends the narrative present of the plot--the end of April of the year 1745¹¹²--with the moment of enunciation, which situates the speaker in Saint-Marie de la Réunion, during the month of June 2007 when Samlong actually finished writing the novel.¹¹³

This type of reframing turns the act of narrating into a functional event to reconfigure narrative and historical explanations which allows for several times and spaces to coexist. The narrative reconfiguration of the past therefore becomes an act of existential importance, as Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimoutou indicates:

Memory is subject to a rewriting by groups. The conflict between memories oftentimes leads to a competition as if *one single* memory had the status of truth. Creolisation including the narrative and textual dimensions of this process, consists not only in constructing a rivalry that erases the multiplicity of memories and looks to impose a hegemonic narrative but it shows how memories fragment memory and **reconstruct it differently** (« contes » 367; emphasis added).

¹¹² "Fin avril 1745" (I.S.V. 120)

¹¹³ "Saint-Marie de la Réunion, juin 2007" (I.S.V. 135)

La mémoire est sujette à une réécriture par les groupes. Le conflit entre des mémoires entraîne souvent une compétition comme si *une seule* mémoire avait le statut de vérité. Le travail de créolisation, y compris dans ses dimensions narratives et textuelles, consiste non pas à construire une rivalité qui efface la multiplicité des mémoires et cherche à imposer un récit hégémonique, mais à montrer comment des mémoires fragmentent la mémoire et la **reconstruisent autrement** (« contes » 367; emphasis added).

This is precisely what happens in Samlong's novel. Comparing the time of action and the historical time, the plot brings together fragmented memories of a difficult personal and historical past that are specific to the island. The fragmentary function of memory takes on a metaphorical function that mirrors the construction of the space of the island and its status as a fragment of the mainland.

While both Ferranti and Spitz foreground a nostalgic vision of the pastoral and autochthonous past that favors a sentimental return to a moment when harmony governed the island, Samlong intentionally conjures up negative images of the island's historical past that tend to be neglected and even suppressed. Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo and Carpanin Marimoutou wonder "how to interpret silences of Réunionese literature, for example, the black whole of the abolition of slavery in 1848 and the silence around the disenfranchised and those committed to a post-abolitionist Réunionese literature that prefers to fall back on the quest for a foundation (viii).¹¹⁴ Samlong confirms this problem by pointing out that

it is still possible to find the true colors of the island, provided that there be different points of view because there is not doubt that the way history was written is a controlled transformation of reality, even a deformation in certain cases [...] we have to find the other side that leads to the island's hell [...] to try and understand the reason for the silence, slyness and gambit [...] The desperate need today is to want to see the island the way it is, and not the way

¹¹⁴ « Comment interpréter les silences de la littérature réunionnaise, par exemple le trou noir de l'abolition de l'esclavage en 1848 et le silence qui entoure les affranchis et les engagés dans une littérature réunionnaise post-abolitionniste qui préfère se replier sur la recherche d'une fondation [...] » (viii).

it has been shown to us through paradisiacal and deceitful visions, an enchanted island, a sunny island that differs through the Olympian architecture of its mountains (*Défi* 190).

[il est encore possible d'arriver à retrouver le vrai visage de l'île, à condition de faire

varier le point de vue, car il ne fait aucun doute que l'histoire telle qu'elle a été écrite est une transformation contrôlée du réel, voire une déformation en certains cas [...] il nous faut retrouver l'autre versant qui conduit à l'enfer de l'île [...] pour tenter de comprendre le pourquoi des silences, des ruses et des subterfuges [...] L'urgence aujourd'hui est de vouloir voir l'île telle qu'elle est, et non pas telle qu'on a voulu nous la montrer dans une vision paradisiaque et menteuse, une île enchantée, île hellénique qui se distingue par l'architecture olympienne de ses montagnes (*Défi* 190)].

Une île où séduire Virginie illustrates this necessary process that Paul Ricoeur specifically defined as the act of “rewriting of stories” when he explained: “History is not the writing but the rewriting of histories” (*I* 157). In other words, for Samlong as for Ferranti and Spitz, writing histories has a historical function in that it helps them recuperate the History of the island.

With this goal in mind, Samlong articulates and challenges Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's romanticized vision of the island's past through an amplification of certain historical facts and related socio-political details. The narrative relates the atrocious treatment of slaves on the island. According to Francine Clavé-Vesoul

we are definitely in a world of here and now, in the real universe [...] The established link between the present and the past through speech comes under the search for identity, a desire to find one's origin. Slavery took away the roots of our ancestors and orality lacks the willpower to keep in contact with, or to at least look for, the past that remains a black hole that speech attempts to fill in (332)

[on est bel est bien dans le monde de l'ici et maintenant, dans l'univers réel [...] Ce lien établi par la parole entre le présent et le passé relève d'une quête identitaire, d'une volonté de s'originer. L'esclavage a déraciné nos ancêtres aussi le oral manque-t-il une volonté de garder le contact ou du moins, de chercher le contact avec un passé qui demeure un trou noir que la parole essaie de combler (332)].

In that sense, his 2007 novel attempts to fill that void of silence. But at the same time, Samlong goes beyond the narrative function of the text by replacing the Aristotelian concept of mimesis for historical time with a creative imitation of lived, temporal experiences on an island where the chaste Virginia can be seduced, as the title indicates.

Throughout the novel, Samlong goes beyond the imitation of actions and characters as he systematically deploys caricatures of historical and institutional representatives of the island such as the master of slaves and the priest. Paul describes the governor Mahé de la Bourdonnais during the storm as “le représentation du Roi et de la France en cette île si lointaine [...] Il était imposant dans son bel habit aux boutons d’or, n’hésitant pas à mouiller la chemise. Sa sérénité, son ton ferme et solennel, ses intuitions parlaient mieux qu’un long discours » (*I.S.V.* 106). By contrast, these figures tend to be depicted as mere stock characters in Spitz’s novel¹¹⁵ while they do not occupy any narrative space as characters in Ferranti’s text. However, Samlong uses historical descriptions to denounce the metaphorical function of the mask, “le masque de bonhomie” (*I.S.V.* 10), and the effect of masquerading one’s self, to set the scene. These masks are reminiscent of the paradise island trope that is still used by Metropolitan writers and filmmakers alike to hide the true face, or history, of the island. Samlong has elsewhere explained the urgent need to modify

¹¹⁵ “[...] le *tavana* et le pasteur traversent la grande salle et s’avancent jusqu’à l’estrade, accompagnés d’un *Papa’a* d’une quarantaine d’années, qui porte un uniforme militaire. Il passe de sa démarche raide et hautaine, sans un regard pour ces gens qu’il ne voit pas, mais qui remarquent tous qu’il n’a pas daigné de quitter son képi avant de pénétrer dans le *fare putuputura’a*. Il ne sait donc pas que seules les femmes sont autorisées à porter un chapeau dans ce lieu? [...] L’étrange militaire ne prend pas la peine de remercier Dieu, ni d’accueillir l’assemblée, et encore moins de se présenter. C’est pourquoi jusqu’à présent, il est dans la mémoire du village comme ‘celui qui porta la terrible nouvelle, *Papa’a* aux yeux bleus, sans nom et au visage oublié’” (*I.R.E.* 35).

the postcard image by committing to a more authentic representation of what he calls the “flipside of the postcard image” (“L’Envers”).

The whole plot is geared towards unmasking characters, including the chaste Virginia by revealing that she leisurely takes sensual baths with Paul. Samlong especially does not spare the old narrator of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s exotic pastoral as Paul’s pejorative descriptions reduce him to mediocre, self-centered liar: “Je répète que je ne rapporte pas ces faits par ouï-dire (méthode trop souvent appliquée par l’homme au bâton, mon parrain), ça ne m’intéresse pas, je dis ce que j’ai entendu, vu, vécu. C’est ma légende. Je regrette qu’elle ait été déformée par ce vieux fou qui a fait le tri des paroles et des gestes” (*I.S.V.* 25).

Paul particularly amplifies the process of unmasking the slave owner who was already portrayed as dubious in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s pastoral. Samlong’s portrait of the slave owner Maloute consists of a caricatural blend of carnivalesque masks that grotesquely deform his physiognomy. In that sense, the strategy of unmasking consists here in multiplying and emphasizing the masks worn by Maloute. The slave owner functions as a scapegoat on which Paul blames all the misfortune of the island, particularly the suffering of the fugitive slaves. Paul claims to have seen a caricature of Maloute inside the caves of fugitive slaves:

les Marrons avaient gravé la figure de l’habitant dans la pierre, la caricature d’un esclavagiste qui essayait leurs plaisanteries, leurs quolibets, leurs crachats. Grâce à la fraîcheur du trait, la caricature était plus ressemblante que le meilleur de tous les portraits. J’imaginai sans peine la voix qui, à la lueur d’un feu de bois, criait : ‘Maloute, c’est l’heure de ton procès !’ (*I.S.V.* 27)

The subsequent simulacrum of Maloute’s imaginary process and corporal punishment clearly points to a voluntary break between narrative and narrated time (*I* 96) through

what Ricoeur called games with time (*II* 61-62). These fictional games with time stage imaginary scenes of redemption without changing the actual historical sequence of events.

L'un des noirs, le visage blanchi avec de la poudre de riz, quittait l'ombre, une pipe grossière à la bouche, un bâton à la main, il s'avancait vers les juges assis en rond pour entendre les crimes dont le blanc s'était rendu coupable : punitions corporelles, agressions sexuelles, viols, meurtres, mensonges, faux serments... Chaque abomination était ponctuée d'un 'hou ! hou!' vengeur. L'accusé ôtait la pipe de sa bouche, puis il la reprenait, le regard lointain. Tout cela ne le concernait pas [...] Et lorsqu'il tenait tentait s'enfuir, les hommes en faction à l'entrée de la grotte le ceinturaient, le ramenaient de force devant le tribunal pour entendre la sentence prononcée par le juge : cent coups de bâton, le pillage de ses magasin et de ses champs, et qu'on libère les esclaves. Mais pourquoi pas la peine de mort ? (*I.S.V.* 27).

In this simulation, the carnivalesque reversal of roles and authority gives fugitive slaves the exceptional chance for vengeance by causing physical harm to the master and by making him suffer. At the same time, this scene functions like an important counterpoint to the virtuous pantomime reenactments of biblical scenes that Paul and Virginia perform with both of their mothers at the beach.

The preceding analysis of narrative and historical explanations has demonstrated that the reflection on and representation of the passage of time is a foundational building bloc in constructing the island adventure. Each author uses a different approach to engage with and situate himself in relation to the historical past and present of his or her island. Samlong's text explicitly illustrates the refiguring of narrative and historical explanations through its palimpsestic structure. Paul's narrative strategically destabilizes and challenges the colonial myth of the tropical island paradise; however, by rewriting the end of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's pastoral

in which Paul dies, Samlong enables Paul to redeem himself as a humanist and savior of humanity as he restores calm and serenity on the island.

Along the same lines, Spitz's narrative is a clear contestation of what Elizabeth DeLoughrey refers to as "the perpetuation of [the] image of island isolation [which] can best be described as a European myth that seeks to erase the colonial intentionality of the past" (12). In her novel, Spitz challenges colonial ideology by recontextualizing colonial desire on the modernized island through the female figure of Laura, French technician, who falls in love with a man of indigenous origin. Compared to Samlong, she not only reconfigures but defies historical explanations and denounces those who become westernized. By contrast, the characters of Ferranti's novel do not get a chance to redeem themselves. Ferranti strategically erases literary affiliations with Mérimée's diligent treatment of historical information as the contemporary Corsican author intentionally creates gaps between the narrative understanding and historical explanations.

Ferranti's blend of nostalgia and provocation, Spitz's militant activism, and Samlong's parody convey attitudes towards what Hayden White calls the "epistemological status of historical *explanations*, as compared with other kinds of explanations that might be offered to account for the materials with which historians ordinarily deal" (81). Each plot establishes a particular relationship between the credibility of the source and the verisimilitude of the historical facts it materializes. As White puts it, "no historical event is *intrinsically tragic*, it can only be conceived as such from a particular point of view or from within the context of a structured set of events of which it is an element enjoying a privileged place [...] Historical

situations are not *inherently* tragic, comic, or romantic. They may all be inherently ironic, but they need to be emplotted that way” (84-85).

Spitz and Samlong specifically incorporate the moment of enunciation as a part of the narrative, juxtaposing the historical development with a subjective mode of speech.¹¹⁶ Spitz’s romanticized vision of autochthonous traditions emphasizes the importance of embracing cultural roots¹¹⁷ and traditional forms of knowledge about the present and the past that do not have the same function in the Corsican tradition. At the same time, Spitz moves towards new modes of transmission such as Western writing to recuperate and tell the lost history of her people. Samlong particularly focuses on the importance of actions as a means to remedy the silencing of a difficult historical past. By contrast, Ferranti primarily concentrates on the transmission of socio-historical facts without explicitly acknowledging the role of the text as a medium to communicate historical knowledge.

French ethnologist Marc Augé considers the relationship between power and the image within the context of time. Drawing attention to the pathways of contact and circulation of knowledge, he considers

confrontations of the imaginary accompanied by the clash of nations, conquests and colonizations, and [...] resistances, withdrawals and hopes [that] took shape in the imagination of the vanquished for all that it was lastingly affected by, and in the strict sense imprinted with, that of the victors [...] In fact the image is not the only issue in this register of change which we are invited to establish today. More precisely, it is the conditions of circulation between the individual imagination (for example, the dream), the collective imagination (for example, the myth) and fiction (literary or artistic, visually constituted otherwise) which have changed (*Ethno-Fiction* 5-6).

¹¹⁶ The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary terms* distinguishes between “discours” or “subjective mode of speech” (92) and “discourse” (“extended use of speech”) (Baldick 92).

¹¹⁷ Her second novel, *Hombo: transcription d’une biographie*, describes the itinerary of an indigenous youngster who becomes a victim of rigid French assimilation.

Augé goes beyond the materialization of historical referents to focus on the construction and conceptualization of cultural categories: “fiction can indeed be defined as socially regulated regime of perception, it follows on the one hand that it has a historical existence which is expressed in institutions, methods and practices, and on the other hand that it amounts to a socio-cultural fact which plays a part in relations to alterity, and interconnections of different kinds” (95). Augé offers helpful insights that particularly pertain to geographically confined spaces such as islands. As the novels of Marie Ferranti, Chantal Spitz, and Jean-François Samlong indicate, island literatures of the French-speaking world reiterate the conditions of their marginal existence in different ways than continental novels. Having explored the dimension of historical referents in the texts of Ferranti, Spitz, and Samlong, I will now analyze the functionality of ethnocultural material and its referentiality to the island culture, overseas culture, and Metropolitan French culture.

2.3 Cultural referents and ethnotextuality

2.3.1 Ethnographic intertextuality

Cultural ethnographers collect narratives that account for the particularities of a community. Marc Augé considers the ethnographer as a “myth collector” while James Clifford defines ethnography as the act of describing, translating, and interpreting customs (Clifford 28-29). Clifford explains: “Modern ethnography appears in several forms, traditional and innovative. As an academic practice, it cannot be separated from anthropology. Seen more generally, it is simply diverse ways of thinking and writing about culture from a standpoint of participant

observation” (9). He critically analyzes the broad range of approaches to the representation of cultures in the 20th century and essentially insists on semiotic similarities between surrealism and cultural ethnography.

Drawing on Clifford’s notion of ethnography, Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo considers “ethnotextuality”¹¹⁸ as a representative feature of narratives that use local, non-Western cultural practices as “intertext” to constitute a blend of sequences in which characters are “actors of culture and social universe” [“acteurs de la culture et de l’univers social”] (107). This characteristic is particularly fitting for the three novels in question in which the authors re-appropriate the Western notion of ethnography for the construction of characters that become observers of their own culture during a moment when cultural difference becomes visible.¹¹⁹ I will first probe the relationship between the position of the characters as participant observers and their actual observations about local cultural practices that function as “intertext” for the conceptualization of the island in the writing of Ferranti, Spitz, and Samlong.

Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo critically examines the literary representation of local cultural practices in texts produced outside the “Western”

¹¹⁸ Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo defines the notion of « ethnotexte » as follows : “la notion d’ethnotexte [...] désigne une tendance fréquente à décrire, dans des séquences visibles et soigneusement délimitées, des pratiques propres à une culture—non-occidentale [...] Nous ne sommes plus dans le cadre de l’*ut pictura poesis*’ qui fonde la structure réaliste. Ces romans outrepassent largement les principes de la *mimesis* en se faisant accompagner à outrance de leur métatexte culturel, en mettant en relation organique la littérature avec son contexte socio-historique [...] au risque de devenir peu efficace ” (« Ethno-texte » 94-95).

¹¹⁹ Within the context of the Francophone island, it is important to note that every island has a different Other. Suzanne Dracius indicates that for the French Caribbean, for example, the American continent is the Other, while for Corsica, the European continent serves as a reference point but not “métropole.” (Dracius et al 14). While the Other for the islander is geographically defined through the distance that separates the island from the continent, the continent defines islanders as the Other based on a different scale of preconceived notions, as I indicated in section 1.

World by reading their “ethnotextual sequences as a particular narrative form” [“séquences ethnotextuelles comme forme narrative particulière”] (“Ethnotexte” 99). She assumes that non-Western, Creole texts contain a high level of ethnographic descriptions of cultural practices and rituals that are not intelligible to the Western reader because s/he does not share the same cultural lexicon and experience of time and space.¹²⁰ Her study concludes that in the field of non-Western, “emerging” literature, ethno-textuality functions as an explicit indicator of the status of literary production. While “minority” cultures tend to recreate a culturally authentic “ethnotexte” through the “hypothetical transfer of reality” [“hypothétique transfer de la réalité”] (132), more confident communities, particularly those of Indian communities on Anglophone islands such as Mauritius, favor the possibility of literary creation through the metaphorization of ethno-cultural material in “ethnofiction.” Ethnographic fiction, as opposed to the “ethnotext,” draws on ethnographic elements for aesthetic purposes, as Magdelaine-Adrianjafitrimo indicates (133).

This differentiation between “ethnotext” and “ethnofiction” is a valid paradigm for the contemporary island texts in question. However, some of Magdeleine-Andrianjafitrimo’s criteria demand minor adjustment and clarification. From the socio-linguistic point of view, we need to extend the parameters of “créolophone” to the context of all formerly colonized, now multi-lingual islands of

¹²⁰ “[...] la culture dont émane le texte ‘émergent’ se verra rapproché du lecteur par effort de l’auteur [...] Le ‘Lecteur modèle’ prévu par le texte [...] n’est pas ici le lecteur local qui partagerait l’encyclopédie, le savoir de l’auteur mais un lecteur occidental » (99).

the French-speaking world in which French serves as a lingua franca.¹²¹ From the geo-political perspective, the approach of situating these cultural productions in the non-Western world is similarly problematic: Geographically speaking, overseas departments and collectivities are located outside of Europe, whereas politically speaking, these islands are, due to their ties to continental France, official members of the European Union. This paradoxical situation is further illustrated by the fact that they represent (with the exception of Corsica) the last remains of an administrative organization inherited from the colonial empire, despite the new designation as “overseas” islands. In addition, the former presence of the French and the strategies of (forced) assimilation to the French language and culture left visible marks on these islands. For Pacific Ocean cultures, Raylene Ramsey stresses the multiple routes and roots of “transformations and (re)constructions of traditional Pacific identities” which manifest themselves through various “layers of hybridity and [...] the specificities that mark individual literary texts, ‘national’ or group literatures” (11, 24). Corsica, on the other hand, is geographically close to continental France (and even closer to Italy) and Europe. Jean-Louis Andreani argues that despite the geographical proximity to the continent, the island continues to absorb various cultural influences from all sides of the Mediterranean Sea, that is, Europe and Northern Africa.

These complex situations make the representation of local culture of Francophone islands a challenging task. For Clifford, 20th century ethnographers

¹²¹ Carpanin Marimoutou quotes Chaudenson to remind us that “creole” is a language that is the result of the coexistence of several languages in the context of colonization. Creole languages are subject to geographical variations; every island or geographical region has its own Creole, including regional variations between “le Créole des hauts” and “le Créole des bas.” (« créolité » 30). Didier Lengle argues though the notion of creolophonie is not commensurable with French Polynesia and refers to the notion of intermingling (brassage) instead.

constantly face the challenge of situating themselves between their cultural origins and their target culture. But the “predicament” of Ferranti, Spitz, and Samlong is not necessarily the epistemological status of their ethnographic descriptions but rather, the way they construct and negotiate their multiculturalism in relationship to continental France. In addition, their reception outside the geographical confines of their island remains problematic, despite the fact that their novels are written in French and reflect a certain degree of what Jean-Marc Moura calls “Frenchness [...] a language and spirit of French civilization, French Culture” [“la francité [...] une langue, l’esprit de la civilisation française, la Culture française”] (2). I therefore argue that the novels in question use stylistic variations of ethno-textuality to articulate, disarticulate, and rearticulate the cultural and historical reality of the French-speaking island, as Clifford explained in his study: “After 1950 peoples long spoken for by Western ethnographers administrators, and missionaries began to speak and act more powerfully for themselves on a global stage [...] Distinct ways of life once destined to merge into ‘the modern world’ reasserted their difference, in novel ways” (6).

Marie Ferranti, Chantal Spitz, and Jean-François Samlong deploy a diachronic structure to emplot ethnographic observations onto a narrative of change and transformation. On each island, these changes become visible through the descriptions of specific places and cultural practices. In order to evaluate the functionality of ethnographic material for the imaginary of each island, these descriptions of difference need to be situated within the system of the island’s local or indigenous culture on the one hand, and within the pathways intended for the transmission of knowledge about these changes, on the other hand, which is

intrinsically related through the value of writing as a means to communicate cultural knowledge (as opposed to other forms of transmission) (“Ethnotexte” 133).¹²²

Last but not least, it is important to acknowledge the implications of the term “local” culture in the context of the Francophone island. I will be distinguishing between two situations to measure and express cultural difference through various forms of ethno-textuality: on the one hand, I will consider changes brought about on Corsica and Tahiti as inhabited islands, and on the other hand, I will focus on Réunion as uninhabited island when the first colonizers arrived. This distinction facilitates a demonstration of how the imaginary of the island combines referents of several successive cultural realities, times, and spaces to compensate for the absence of imaginary referents prior to the arrival of the first colonizers.

2.3.2 Local culture on the inhabited island

2.3.2.1 Vignettes of local culture¹²³

The novels of Marie Ferranti and Chantal Spitz depict disappearing traces of the past through the perception of changes of what Bourdieu called *habitus*. In *La Fuite aux Agriates*, Mathilde reflects upon the changes in town, particularly the harbor of Bastia:

Elle se rappelait le chemin, la route jaune sous le soleil, les peupliers qui tremblaient dans la lumière, le cimetière immense devant lequel elle ne passait

¹²² Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo quotes Marc Augé to refer to the importance of the “analyse du statut de la fiction ou des condition de son apparition dans une société à un moment historique particulier, ainsi que l’analyse des différents genres fictionnels, leur rapport avec les formes de l’imaginaire individuel ou collectif [...]” (133).

¹²³ I am borrowing this term from Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo and Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimoutou who compare ethnotextuality to an “ensemble de vignettes explicatives consacrées à la réalité ethno-culturelle.” (« roman-feuilleton » 71).

pas sans se signer et dire la prière des morts. C'était la rase campagne. Ce n'était pas comme aujourd'hui, hérissé de tours et d'immeubles [...] Elle aimait descendre jusqu'aux quais où les pêcheurs ravaudaient leurs filets et où les femmes, assises sur des petits tabourets de fêrule, faisaient des tresses d'ail, préparaient les anchois, surveillaient les enfants en bas âge, qui jouaient ou dormaient dans leurs jupes. Les filets côtoyaient les monceaux de légumes, du maïs ou des haricots, qui séchaient au soleil [...] Tout était changé désormais [...] Les quais étaient bordés de commerces, de cafés, de restaurants; il n'y avait presque plus de pêcheurs. Les années avaient passé si vite (*F.A.* 63).

The advent of modernity literally erased the still life of this harmonious representation of activities in the harbor of Bastia where manual labor is now replaced by modern buildings and businesses. The majority of descriptions in this passage focus on the past. The narrator situates Mathilde as a knowledgeable observer of an emblematic space in which she has witnessed ample changes.¹²⁴ Mathilde suddenly realizes having been unaware of the changes taking place around her over the course of time.

As a counterpoint to the modernity of Bastia's harbor, the desert of the Agriates mysteriously resists any type of contemporary change. Ferranti's Agriates bear minimal traces of civilization but are an integral part of the Corsican imaginary. For men who are passionate about hunting and shepherding, the Agriates are a solitary territory. Julius and Joseph know the woods and the desert like the back of their hand¹²⁵--unlike "ceux de la ville [...] [i]ls n'y connaissent rien [...] à la montagne" (*F.A.* 82). This area is represented as a never-changing solitary, even

¹²⁴ The peaceful depiction of activities in the harbor stands in direct opposition with what happened to Mathilde during the same time in the house of the Montadori family where she was working. When she was 17 years old, the head of the family starting sexually harassing her, and she eventually got pregnant. When his wife found out, she convinced her son David who was already shyly wooing the even more timid Mathilde, to save her honor by getting married.

¹²⁵ Julius « gravit la montagne par les petits sentiers qui n'étaient plus pratiqués depuis longtemps et qu'il était encore l'un des rares à connaître » (*F.A.* 109).

mysterious territory in which coexist occasional archeological remains of the Genovese civilization and “l’ombre, le silence et la paix” (*F.A.* 82) of a harmonious but self-sufficient nature. A bath in the secluded mountains eventually brings calms and serenity to the exhausted fugitives. By contrast, in the imaginary of Mathilde, the world of the Agriates does not play a role at all, while Marie and Pierre have been exposed to its savage nature. Unlike Francesca, they do not share the same fascination for Julius’s discovery of an abandoned cave in the mountains and are depicted as indifferent to the immemorial time of Corsica.

When crossing the Agriates, the fugitives arrive at an abandoned olive grove where they can observe the marks of the passage of time but also those of a hostile nature:

Comme Julius empruntait des sentiers muletiers désaffectés, ils avançaient lentement [...] ils arrivèrent dans une oliveraie. Elle était abandonnée depuis longtemps. Les arbres avaient poussé en travers. Certains, à moitié calcinés, avaient des troncs qui faisaient des colonnes torsées. Le manque de soin avait donné naissance à une quantité de formes étranges. Il fallait faire attention où on posait le pied, les branches enchevêtrées, qui avaient poussé au ras du sol, obligeaient à avancer avec précaution [...] Dans l’aube claire, Francesca eut l’impression de pénétrer dans un labyrinthe semé d’embûches par une nature hostile (*F.A.* 119)

The presence of charred tree stumps shows the self-sufficient side of nature because it can only be transgressed with extreme precaution, as Maryse Condé indicates for the swamp-like territories of mangrove structures on her island that are damp and wet, compared to the dryness of the Corsican Agriates.¹²⁶ The escape into the Agriates becomes a dangerous endeavor for Francesca and Julius because of the fire that is

¹²⁶ Guadeloupian native Vilma explains to the outsider Francis Sancher: « On ne traverse pas la mangrove. On s’empale sur les racines des palétuviers. On s’enterre et on s’étouffe dans la boue saumâtre » (192).

continuously spreading.¹²⁷ The flames will block and kill them rather than impaling and then causing them to drown. The comparison between the Guadeloupien mangroves in the swamps and the Corsican Agriates shows that ethnotextual elements symbolically represent the condition of insularity. While the dangerous impact of this area is visible on the surface, this is not the case for the swamp territory where the danger is well hidden.

The descriptions of hostile nature also impact the narrative point of view in the novel. Contrary to Ferranti's dangerous perspective of the hostile and self-sufficient nature of the Agriates, Spitz's *motu*¹²⁸ Maeva in Ruahine eventually succumbs to the influence of French atomic colonization. Throughout the novel, the *motu* is described from three perspectives. When Emere first decides to move to Maeva, her modernized Maohi mother reacts with surprise and shock: "Elle n'a pas préparé sa fille à cette vie pénible des îles lointaines. Elle a rêvé pour elle la vie moderne aisée, espérant que l'homme qui l'épouserait lui offrirait confort et femme de ménage" (*I.R.E.* 61). Her mother has been living in the capital ever since she broke up with her daughter's Anglophone father, the rich Charles Williams, who is not pleased, either, to find out about Emere's decision. While her mother argues based on the difficulty of life on the *motu* from a female perspective, Charles's point of view foregrounds geographical proximity to economic and cultural capital:

Il a vainement tenté de la convaincre d'habiter au moins le village et non le *motu*, loin de tout, mais Emere a tenu bon [...] [Emere] sait que là, au moins, elle pourra vivre à son idée, enfin libérée de tout ce beau monde qui la regarde presque avec pitié, ne comprenant pas pourquoi elle part, quittant cette capitale qu'il faut habiter si l'on veut espérer une rapide promotion (*I.R.E.* 65).

¹²⁷ "A l'ouest, il était d'une blancheur opaque, striée de nuages rouges : de l'autre côté de la montagne, le désert était en feu » (*F.A.* 122).

¹²⁸ A "motu" is a particular form of a small island.

This short but rather significant passage depicts the rationale behind Emere's father's attempts to dissuade his daughter from moving to Maeva, as well as her personal reason for choosing Maeva over two other options of a tri-partitioned world.

As a *demi*, that is, a person of both European and indigenous blood, her options are the modernized capital Rahiti, a village as a happy medium, or a more distant but more traditional small town like Maeva. The change of perspective from the father's to Emere's point of view put additional emphasis on Emere's vision of the cultural difference between the capital and Maeva. The conscious step towards embracing values of a world she feels more comfortable with, demonstrates Emere's strength and appreciation of "la langue de la terre, de la mer et des étoiles [...] la magie des gestes simples de tous les jours, gestes de leurs pères, gestes de leur monde" (*I.R.E.* 68). Unlike Ferranti's rebellious Francesca, Emere is rational and conscious of her choices at all times, willing to embrace the traditional roots her own mother abandoned to be able to afford to raise her only daughter.

The second description of the *motu bodes* of a process of change that is already set in motion. Contrary to Ferranti's character Mathilde who is insensitive to change, Emere's husband, Tematua, senses¹²⁹ the onset of a series of transformations that his newly-born children Terii will confront right after his first son is born in Maeva. According to the Maohi tradition, he voices his worries in a prose poem:

Ô Terii mon fils premier né,
Je te regarde et voici que je vois
Naître un nouveau monde
Qui vous ressemble, mes fils,

¹²⁹ « Il sent confusément dans ses entrailles que ses enfants préfigurent le monde nouveau qui se lève à l'horizon, monde écartelé dans lequel, espère-t-il, chacun pourra trouver sa voie et son bonheur » (*I.R.E.* 77).

Toi et les autres à venir.
Toi et les autres déjà nés.
Un monde qu'il faudra apprivoiser,
Fait du monde de l'étranger
Que vous devrez apprivoiser,
Fait du monde de notre monde
Que vous devez perpétuer.
Vous souffrirez beaucoup
Partagés entre deux univers
Qu'il vous faudra marier (*I.R.E.* 76).

Although the format and content of the poem do not quite correspond to the methods of cultural ethnography of the Western world, Tematua's poem expresses important concerns in a world of change. As the repetition of the word "apprivoiser," to tame, indicate, Tematua insists on the urgent need for Terii and other children of his generation to find their place in a new world in which they have to become accustomed to both new and old traditions alike.

Similarly to Ferranti's novel, material transformations eventually manifest themselves in the enlargement of the harbor, which in Spitz's novel, functions as visual evidence of what Tematua had predicted before it even happened:

La vie semble soudain s'accélérer à Ruahine. Un quai pouvant accueillir trois goélettes a remplacé l'antique ponton de bois et, chaque semaine, deux caboteurs, privés du charme des voiles gonflées de la *Bénicia*, accostent à la ville, nourrissant l'esprit des habitants de besoins nouveaux [...] il se demande si un jour Maeva ne ressemblera pas à un de ces nombreux villages qu'il a traversés, aux maisons repliées sur elles-mêmes (*I.R.E.* 78).

Although his three children live in Maeva until the maternal grandmother, Toofa, lodges them when they have to transfer to the capital's middle and high school to continue their education, the children's different attitudes towards the capital show the rapid change in the imaginary of the population, as particularly the younger generations perceive their modest origins as a cultural burden, "bouleversant les

esprits, installant insidieusement dans les cœurs la honte du monde *ma'ohi* et l'admiration des pâles reflets du monde de l'étranger" (*I.R.E.* 81).

The third and last description of how the motu transforms into an antithesis of the indigenous Maohi world is the actual moment of the construction of the nuclear testing center on the motu. Pale reflections assume a harsh, material reality and Maeva morphs into a heaven of technology and science from which all traces of previous life are brutally erased. While the modern world of the capital and the traditional world of the motu used to be confined to different geographical spaces that were separated by the ocean, the rapid modernization of the motu brings change into immediate proximity and introduces material boundaries that did not exist before. Laura and Terii's worlds are separated by a small bridge Laura has to cross every time she wants to join him, whereas Terii and his family rarely set foot on or near the bridge to join her on the motu. Having been forced to relocate, Tematua and his family observe the drastic transformations of the motu from a distant position. Laura, however, is a participant observer of both worlds, namely, the traditional world of the Terii's family and ancestors, and the modern world of Western civilization and technology. Both worlds use different methods of cultural expression that are not necessarily compatible, as Laura's journal entries illustrate.

The Tahitian imaginary draws on a strong spiritual connection between the (mother)land and its people, according to the Maohi tradition. Titaua Porcher explains that Tahitian land and spirit are interconnected since the parents symbolically bury the placenta in the ground after each baby is born (144-145). When the nuclear testing center is constructed on the motu and missiles are launched from this formerly sacred

territory, the indigenous population is forced to leave its home land. Also, inside the new center, everything is to evoke “intelligence” rather than sentimental values, as the engineers proudly explain. Laura is a female technician from Metropolitan France and she is the only one to ask about the actual history of the nuclear project.

Both the motu and the Agriates function as the site where pivotal encounters and significant events take place and time becomes visible, as Bakhtin puts it to describe the artistic fusion of space and time in what he calls the chronotope.¹³⁰ But what these vignettes of local cultures show is not a juxtaposition of the present and the past but rather, a complete displacement in time as the present and the past cannot coexist in either the motu or the Agriates. In Ferranti’s novel, the prehistoric Corsican desert is a temporary hiding place where Julius and Francesca have to improvise to be able to survive. The couple’s joint escape is a new variation of Mérimée’s Agriates as a hypermasculine world in which Miss Lydia feels uncomfortable.¹³¹ After the departure of Ferranti’s Francesca, Julius is shot outside his sheepfold in the mountains and his dead body is brought back to town.

The displacement in time is also an important concept for *L’Ile des rêves écrasés*. With the construction of the nuclear testing center, traces of local culture are completely erased on the motu which consequently turns into a desert-like infertile land for the indigenous people. For Spitz, these vignettes of local culture focus more on the loss of individual ties to the land than Segalen’s fragmentary and even sporadic representation of the loss of indigenous traditions. However, the two novels differ in

¹³⁰ I will explicitly discuss the notion of the chronotope in chapter 3.

¹³¹ This discomfort is indicative of the incommensurability of the honor codes of a lady and a group of bandits. The couple is reunited shortly after once Orso’s reputation is restored and he is declared guilty. However, they decide to leave the island for good.

their perspective on the displaced time. In Spitz's novel, the modernized motu is incompatible with the prehistoric times which it eradicates. For Ferranti, the Agriates functions as an autonomous entity of a prehistoric time that is incompatible with modernity but that continues to exist on the margins.

2.3.2.2 The functionality of ethnographic elements

Despite their fairly similar approach to the selection of places of encounter or hubs of cultural activity that make time visible, Spitz's and Ferranti's novel differ in their descriptive use of cultural traditions. Ferranti's novel features a limited density of cultural references such as hunting or traditions of mourning that bear a significant impact on the construction of characters. The act of commenting on different traditions and customs becomes a link between secondary characters, particularly women, while Julius, Pierre, and Joseph are generally more concerned with the status of activities in the political realm. Due to her stubbornness and determination, Francesca has the privilege of becoming a participant observer of both worlds that nevertheless remain incompatible with her own aspirations as an independent woman. During photo shoots, she has multiple women pose for her and they end up sharing with her their sad experiences: "Chaque matin, des modèles se présentaient et Francesca passait une heure ou deux avec elles. Les femmes lui racontaient leur vie, les grossesses successives; les enfants à élever, et les maris : tous jaloux, avarés, coureurs de jupons, mécontents et bons à rien" (F.A. 55). While she is barely affected by their stories and proceeds to work on the photographs, she has a hard time coming to terms with Julius's past when finally alone with him in the Agriates. She finds

herself hopelessly entangled in his life and his violent past begins to haunt her, despite her feelings for him.

All comments and observations about culture are related through the pattern of direct speech which seemingly reenacts what Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo calls a hybrid “game of fluctuation, in the position of the author or the narrator, between the position of the insider and outsider”¹³² (“ethnotexte” 102-103) to explain the strategic confusion between the interior position of the informant, and the exterior position of the anthropologist/ethnographer. The comments about the mourning families are particularly revealing: “Au fait, sais-tu que Rosalie a fait mettre un drap noir sur toutes les fenêtres de sa maison ? –D’où tient-elle cette coutume ? dit Clorinde. –Elle est du Sud, il paraît que là-bas, ils le font. On ne retire pas le drap que lorsqu’il a été blanchi par le soleil. C’est le signe que le deuil est fini » (*F.A.* 25) However, references to cultural specificities actually have an important narrative function. For the preceding reference about the whitening of the sheets that indicate the end of the period of mourning for Julius’s mother, it becomes obvious during the course of the novel that Julius is not as innocent as the color white might symbolically indicate. This misplaced symbolism adds tension to an already violent atmosphere as the end of the period of mourning does not necessarily correspond to the end of violence and hatred.¹³³

Ferranti strategically exploits ethno-cultural material for narrative purposes, that is, to develop either the characters or the narrator (Magdaleine “Ethnotexte” 132). This approach is particularly revealing for the events that unfold on the day of the

¹³² « jeu d’oscillation, dans la position de l’auteur ou du narrateur, entre le dedans et le dehors » (“ethnotexte” 102-103).

¹³³ Inevitably, one thinks about the 19th century literary depictions of the *vendetta*.

“fête de la Saint-Jean,”¹³⁴ the very same day Francesca and Julius go to the beach and end up getting closer than planned. The festivities of the religious procession are described from Francesca’s perspective as she sadly considers her own feelings of impurity because she betrayed her sister. Despite her being immersed in the religious festivities, she again is unable to actively participate beyond the level of observation and thus remains in a rather exterior position. From outside, she watches the reflections of praying, pious females inside the houses around the harbor.

Similarly, when the grown-up Francesca reflects upon her childhood adventures with Joseph, she recalls evenings during which the two of them were imitating old women telling scary stories. This reflection clearly serves a memory of innocent moments where she and her friend Joseph would find plenty of reasons to laugh their hearts out: “Au village, le soir, à la veillée, les vieilles femmes se réunissaient et racontaient de terribles histoires qui effrayent les deux enfants. Francesca et Joseph se serraient l’un contre l’autre. Il arrivait aussi qu’ils n’écoutent rien, ils mimaient les vieilles édentées dont le visage, à la hauteur de la lampe, paraissaient grotesques. Ils étaient pris de fous rires [...]” (*F.A.* 56-57).

Despite the fact that Ferranti’s novel blends both elements of “ethnotexte” and “ethnofiction,” the strong dominance of ethnographic material for narrative purposes indicates that her novel leans more towards the category of “ethnofiction.” Ferranti instrumentalizes the ethnographic approach to create a diachronic structure that

¹³⁴ According to calendar of religious manifestations and holidays in Corsica, the actual name of this religious holiday is “Saint-Jean Baptiste.” While a Corsican website of resources for tourists lists this holiday for the month of June and associates it with the town of Bastia for it is the town’s “fête patronale de la ville,” Daniel Drion claims that it is commemorated in several locations, precisely on June 24, that is, the beginning of the summer (64).

facilitates the plotting of the narrative of Francesca's adventure in the Agriates.¹³⁵

Within the text, there are no specific references to the speech situation or the act of writing which tended to be clearly defined for colonial short stories about extraordinary trips to Corsica. These stories pretended to provide authentic reports about the singularities of the island.¹³⁶ In other words, Ferranti is neither a participant observer nor a colonial observer but rather, she selectively uses ethno-cultural elements to help fill some of the gaps between narrative and historical explanations.

In her novel *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, Chantal Spitz takes the use and contextualization of ethno-cultural material one step further than Marie Ferranti. Spitz's novel heavily draws on the specificities of indigenous traditions, that is, the varying degrees of continuity between practices of everyday life and practices from the pre-colonial past. To describe the Tahitian vision of life, Spitz foregrounds a non-Western system of references and sensibilities that transgresses literary and discursive strategies of the French-speaking Western novel.¹³⁷ In her first novel, Spitz strategically blends written and oral codes and draws on more than 75 Maohi terms all of which are explained in the glossary at the end.¹³⁸ The hybridization of what Paul Ricoeur refers to as "cultural stock" (*I* 47) for a French-speaking Tahitian reader

¹³⁵ This is also the case for Ferranti's last novel, *La Cadillac des Montadori*, which focuses on the preparation of the funeral of a powerful man in town who, on his deathbed, told the main character, Sandro, a secret, just before passing away. The plot deals with the reactions of his young wife, friends, and the deceased's family, friends, and employees as they attempt to find out what the actual secret is and what the implications will be.

¹³⁶ "C'est pour me conformer au précepte d'Horace que **je** me suis lancé d'abord in *media res*. Maintenant que tout dort, et la belle Colomba, et le colonel, et sa fille, **je saisisrai ce moment pour instruire mon lecteur** de certaines particularités qu'il ne doit pas ignorer, s'il veut pénétrer davantage dans cette véridique histoire » (C. 37 ; emphasis added).

¹³⁷ This is particularly the case for her last novel, *Elles, terre d'enfance, roman à deux encres* in which she opposes two narrative voices.

¹³⁸ All Maohi terms are printed in cursive. Spitz explained during her participation at *Le Festival des Outre-mers* that for her latest novel, *Elles, terre d'enfance*, she rejected the editor's request to use cursive font for Maohi terms.

is further illustrated through Spitz's selective use of periphrases within the body of the text:

Tematua prend soin de leur vie, cultivant avec amour cette terre qui lui rend son amour en produisant avec abondance. Il capture les *pa'apa'a* du lac, gros crabes qu'ils mangent avec délices, ramasse des *tū'a'i*, coques que Emere prépare avec du vin blanc, pêche selon la lune et les courants, *tarao*, *pa'ati* ou *to'au*, poissons dont ils raffolent et qu'ils préparent de mille façons, celles de Tematua et celles de Emere [...] ils attendaient, créant un monde nouveau à la mesure de leur amour, de leur rêve (*I.R.E.* 72)

While the periphrases technique flows quite well with the narrative configuration of the text, it nevertheless distinguishes Spitz quite clearly from those French Caribbean authors who came to the fore with the Créolité movement, particularly Patrick Chamoiseau. In their 1989 manifesto, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant foreground their right to opaqueness to set themselves apart from French metropolitan forms of cultural expression. Chamoiseau therefore deploys creole terms without any attempts to translate them for non-Créolophone readers.¹³⁹

As the previous passage indicates, Spitz's plot particularly focuses on the impact of changes on the imaginary of an indigenous population in the process of becoming increasingly hybridized. In that respect, the plot describes three moments of voluntary intercultural contacts to relate the incompatibility of traditions and modernity. While Toofa and Charles Williams do not end up living together due to the fact that Charles is actually married, Emere and Tematua manage to build a new world for themselves that fuses both of their ideals. While the parents managed to overcome obstacles, Laura Lebrun and Terii's relationship is doomed to fail because

¹³⁹ It would be interesting to continue following Spitz's current militant activism to determine if her writing will eventually move into a similar direction to adopt Chamoiseau's approach. Chamoiseau categorically rejects the notion of insularity, as Spitz does. In addition, this type of militant attitude towards French culture in the childhood of Créole children in Martinique in Chamoiseau's *Chemin-d'école* takes on different forms in Samlong's *L'Empreinte française*.

she has to go back to Metropolitan France at the end of her mission for the nuclear testing center.

These changes manifest themselves in the Maohi vision of life of a people described as “unis dans la passion du Verbe [...] ces orateurs hors du commun, qui [...] parlaient pendant des heures sans que jamais leur concentration ne faiblisse” (*I.R.E.* 47). The narrative configuration particularly demonstrates the Tahitian lyrical sensibility through the symbolic ritual of giving words.¹⁴⁰ Throughout the novel, there are several explicit references to the importance of spoken words in the tradition and imaginary of the indigenous people of Tahiti. Although Spitz’s novel is written in French, the structure of her narrative deviates from Western standards, as Sylvie André demonstrated beautifully in her study, and every emotionally charged moment calls for the need of a prose poem which functions like a subjective commentary in verse. The plot is structured through narrative passages, dialogues and indirect discourse, and poems.¹⁴¹ There is a direct correlation between dialogues and poems, particularly for emotionally charged moments where the referentiality of the sign goes beyond denotative function. While local politicians and technicians use language as purely referential tool and thus come across as rude and insensitive, the imaginary of Tahitians is depicted through its sensitivity.

When Tematua and his children try to explain the dangerous consequences of the construction of a nuclear testing center on Maeva, they have a hard time finding

¹⁴⁰ By contrast, Mérimée’s *Colomba* explicitly elaborates on the Corsican tradition of oratory performance of women who improvise lyrical poems of vengeance.

¹⁴¹ For her short anthology of Tahitian poets, Sonia Faessel selected two poems of Chantal Spitz’s *L’île des rêves écrasés* to exemplify Tahitian prose texts.

words to express themselves, whereas in moments of distress, they verbalize their feelings in poetic form:

Quand Tetuamarama inonde son ventre d'une insurmontable nostalgie d'elle, Tematua traverse Fauna Nui et va sur sa terre, reste de longues heures face à cet océan qui le sépare de Emere. Il dit au vent et aux étoiles les paroles qu'il n'osera jamais lui dire à elle:

Tu es entrée dans ma vie
Le ciel est plus bleu tout à coup
Le soleil brille plus fort
Les couleurs du monde éclatent
Le vent du nord chante l'amour
[...]
Mon ventre crie sa douleur infinie (*I.R.E.* 58).

The narrative function of the poem is reminiscent of the choir in the theater of the Ancient Greeks where they provide narrative summaries rather than descriptive summaries of emotions. The prose poems temporarily interrupt the narrative and tend to be preceded by a statement of the value of the poem. While poems give a certain rhythm to the narrative, the absence of a poem is also striking. When Tematua hears the news about the construction of the testing center in Maeva, he is terrified. His reaction is related through a dialogue with his family rather than a poem: "La douleur me tord les entrailles, étouffant les paroles que je ne sais libérer, et je manque à la mémoire de notre peuple parolier" (*I.R.E.* 104). In this context of hearing the horrible news of the construction of the nuclear testing center, his silence expresses more than words could say. Likewise, towards the end of her stay in Tahiti, Laura's last journal entry is in poetic form.

In addition to the spoken word, another ethno-cultural element that takes on a particular importance is the act of writing. Although Tematua's family is aware of the eminent danger of the nuclear testing center, the attempts of Terii and his sister to

prevent this project remain fruitless. They therefore devote themselves to the material accumulation of archeological remains of their ancestors to make the story of their people known. In addition, Tetiare's grandmother encourages her to write to

évacuer le bouillonnement qui est en toi. Si tu veux que nous connaissions notre histoire, fais un livre que nous lirons. Tout ce que nous lisons a été écrit par des étrangers. On en arrive presque à croire qu'on est vraiment comme ils nous décrivent, alors que tu sais bien qu'ils n'ont rien compris. Un véritable lavage de cerveau. Il est temps d'écrire notre histoire vue par nous-mêmes. Lavage de cerveau à l'endroit (*I.R.E.* 161-162)

After her parents' death, Tetiare eventually starts writing again, a desire she had been suppressing for a long time due to the fear of critique. "Tu dois publier ton histoire" says Terii to encourage his doubtful young sister, "Peu importe les critiques que tu en auras, n'en doute pas. Le rêve transmis d'oralité se meurt faute de mémoire et nous devons lui redonner vie par l'écriture. D'autres après toi écriront une parcelle du rêve qui finira par devenir réalité » (*I.R.E.* 201).

This contextualization of the act of writing in Spitz's novel is central to the function of ethno-cultural elements. But Spitz goes beyond Ferranti's narrative approach to the functionality of these elements. Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo's approach to the metadiscursive function of « ethnofiction » that seeks to materialize its status as fiction is enriching when she assumes with Marc Augé that fiction « se définit selon les deux significations qu'[Augé] lui donne. Elle désigne, selon lui, l'analyse du statut de la fiction ou des conditions de son apparition dans une société à un moment historique particulier, ainsi que l'analyse des différents genres fictionnels [...] » ("Ethnotexte" 133). As the preceding references indicate, the act of writing becomes a practice of fundamental importance to recuperate traces of the past and to keep alive and to pass on the dream of the Maohi ancestors. Sylvie

André associates the act of writing with the advent of nuclear colonialism because “the majority of Polynesian writers use the construction of the CEP/CEA nuclear testing center in the sixties as a foundational event leading to the emergence of identity discourses” [“la plupart des écrivains polynésiens font de l’installation du CEP/CEA en Polynésie française dans les années 1960 l’événement fondateur de l’apparition d’un discours identitaire”] (*Voix* 19). I argue that Spitz’s text functions as a *mise-en-abyme* of the author who writes an ethnofiction of a character, Tetiari, who writes an ethnotext in the guise of ethnofiction.

Jean-François Samlong’s novel also ends on a positive note with regard to the importance of texts as a means to transmit dreams. In the end, Paul reflects on the importance of reading and writing: “[...] je voulais vivre mon rêve [...] Cloîtré dans la bibliothèque, j’ai pu écrire mon histoire, la Bible ouverte [...] Le passage soulignait de [la main du narrateur] disait que c’est au feu qu’on éprouve de l’or. L’or de l’âme. De l’amour. » (*I.S.V.* 135) Given the complex past of the island that was uninhabited when first colonized by the French, one has to wonder if « ethnotextuality » can be a valid concept to analyze Samlong’s approach to the materialization of the cultural reality of the Indian Ocean insular world.

2.3.3 Conceptualizing a silenced past: a collage of various elements of local culture

Samlong’s novel demonstrates yet another degree of involvement of a local participant observer in the act of describing traditions of an island that was uninhabited when the first colonizers arrived. Contrary to Spitz, the imaginary of Samlong’s island lacks the linkage to an ancient civilization or native continent to

mediate current problems. While the French Caribbean islands envision the transportation, arrival, and movement of African slaves to the West Indies as an obvious traumatism and strongly insist on their right to draw on an imaginary that is specific to their experience, the imaginary of the multiethnic Réunionese society has a more difficult relationship to this painful period of the past. To compensate for the absence of imaginary referents to evoke the consequences of the colonial past, the Réunionese system of reference foregrounds a coexistence of multiple, complementary perceptions of cultural realities which Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo describes as a creative attempt to endow Creole culture with ancestral dimensions (xxvi). Through this process, the imaginary freely borrows and blends a variety of cultural and socio-historical referents¹⁴² from the past and the present, which is not to be confused with the juxtaposition of different sheets of time that I will explicitly analyze in chapter 3.

Cultural referents of five spaces are assimilated in a narrative present and thus enmeshed into the plot structure. While the act of deciphering the rich symbolic meaning can become a challenging task for the non Creole reader, it will not impede his or her overall comprehension of the text. The ethnographic blend of referents is further complicated by the narrator's vision of his own position on the island. Although the novel manifests several intermittent levels of ethnotextuality that are quite similar to those of the texts of Ferranti and Spitz, the selection of ethnocultural material for documentation is clearly guided by a narrative that evolves around the narrator's subjective experiences and desires: "je dis ce que j'ai entendu, vu, vécu.

¹⁴² See Séverine Rebourcet's doctoral dissertation, *Les voix du volcan: l'écriture du mal-être dans le roman féminin de l'île de la Réunion*, University of Maryland, 2010.

C'est ma légende [...] Ma seule préoccupation, c'est de faire vivre la vérité sous vos yeux" (*I.S.V.* 25) claims Paul. He thus reiterates Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo's explanation of the ethnotextual function by which "ethnographic material shows itself in the text without the mask of scientific truth" ["le matériau ethnographique s'y montre sans le masque de la vérité scientifique" ("Ethnotexte" 132). Paul functions as a subjective observer of the situation of contact of different worlds that literally collide within the geographic confines of the same island. While his life with Virginia is guided by the desire to live up to her expectations, his interactions with the fugitive slave couple, on the contrary, are rather sporadic, similar to those of a tourist who occasionally visits. Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo interrogates this curious relationship to ethno-cultural material in her work:

Conceived as a matching up of heterogeneous genres, intertextuality gives the novel this didactic dimension that is both cumbersome and exotique. Similar to a tourist, the reader enters a world that tricks him into thinking that it is being presented as a whole and that he can no longer question. However, this mode of writing mastery and transmission link the ethnographic novel to the origins of anthropology that came about during the colonial era ("Ethnotexte" 113).

[L'intertextualité conçue comme mise en rapport de genres hétérogènes, donne au roman cette dimension didactique à la fois pesante et exotique qui permet au lecteur de pénétrer, à la manière d'un touriste, dans un monde qui lui donne l'illusion de lui être totalement présenté, et qu'il ne peut, dès lors, mettre en doute. Or ce mode d'écriture de la maîtrise et de la transmission rattache la pratique du roman ethnographique aux origines même de l'anthropologie, née durant l'époque coloniale (« Ethnotexte » 113)].

Paul's position as a sporadic participant observer thus differs from the understanding and perspectives of the narrators of Ferranti and Spitz's texts.

But at the same time, Paul's descriptions transform the island into a metaphorical space that functions beyond its geographical definition, that is, the

island as a space completely surrounded by water. Contrary to Ferranti and Spitz who primarily depict the ocean as calm body of water with refreshing qualities for body and soul, Samlong also insists on its monstrosity without compassion, particularly during the shipwreck. The bathing scene of Paul and Virginia takes place in a more secluded location of the island.¹⁴³ As a matter of fact, the interior of the island functions quite similarly. As the plot unfolds, several seemingly peaceful spaces turn into places of pain and suffering before eventually deteriorating into ruins. One place of particular interest is the cave in the confines of the mountains that serves as a hide out for fugitive slaves.

Paul's perception of the island resembles a conceptualization of the author defined prior to the publication of his 2007 novel as the intoxicating effects of verticality of the island. He situates these effects between the sky and the ocean:

It's about [...] showing—never about proving—a possible direction that never excludes another direction. The most important thing to read, and of course to decipher, is this space-time that exists between the heaven and the ocean, in **the vertigo of verticality, transcendence**, in the necessity of surpassing oneself, to be able to find oneself again, due to a change of perspective and permanent questioning of the self. Therefore, the notion of the 'fragment' [of writing] reflects less the splitting of ideas than **a maelstrom of meaning**, where the vertigo comes from [...](*Entre ciel et mer* 87; emphasis added).

Il s'agit [...] de montrer—jamais de démontrer—une direction possible, qui jamais n'exclut une autre direction. Le plus important à lire, et bien sûr à déchiffrer, c'est cet espace-temps qui existe entre ciel et mer, dans **le vertige de la verticalité, de la transcendance**, du nécessaire dépassement de soi, afin de mieux se retrouver, grâce à un changement de point de vue, à une remise en cause permanente de soi. Donc, la notion de 'fragment' [de l'écriture] renvoie moins à l'éclatement de la pensée qu'à **un tourbillon du sens**, d'où le vertige [...] (*Entre ciel et mer* 87; emphasis added).

¹⁴³ Ferranti's characters also take a bath in the Agriates which is a nostalgic moment during which Julius talks to Francesca about his childhood. For Paul and Virginia, however, the bath is a ritual that leads to the discovery of the self and the other.

In that sense, Paul's vision of the island replaces the geographical dimension of the island with notion of time that draws on elements that are situated in a virtual, multi-dimensional space that extends like a nebulous cloud of matter where anything can happen. This vertical, multidimensional space of Samlong's island turns into a stage for Paul to perform on. As the title indicates, Paul is extremely focused on the performative aspects of his actions, their effects on, and consequences for his relationship with Virginia. When relating the scene of the shipwreck, he states:

Non, je n'exécute pas une dernière pantomime sous le regard de la foule qui retient le souffle, je ne suis pas au théâtre mais sur la scène de ma propre vie. Je joue un rôle écrit sur mesure pour moi par quelqu'un qui a pénétré mon âme. Qui savait que je n'aurais pas le temps de me mettre dans la peau de mon personnage, d'apprendre mon texte par cœur, de répéter une fois, deux fois, afin de corriger l'intonation et les gestes ; que je n'aurais pas le temps de panser mes blessures, de tergiverser, car la vie de Virginie serait entre mes mains. C'est le plus beau rôle que j'aie eu à jouer à ce jour (*I.S.V.* 110-111)

Paul envisions seducing both, the island and Virginia, and the narrative of this adventure is portrayed as if the island were a stage. However, as Paul indicates several times, this stage is divided by boundaries. During the storm, Paul is keenly aware of the power of the governor and wonders if his authority can suffice to put an end to the apocalyptic weather condition of the sky and the ocean: "Cet homme méritait la victoire. Que lisait-il dans le livre d'un ciel apocalyptique? Quelle était l'étendue de ses pouvoirs? Car si le gouverneur possédait l'art de **l'ordre sur la terre**, nul doute que le diable possédait l'art du **désordre sur la mer** » (*I.S.V.* 106; emphasis added). The antithetical opposition between order/disorder, land/ocean, is a recurring structuring figure in the novel that is mirrored through a similar type of configuration of the island topography and community, both reinforced through natural and mental borders that create a distance.

The adventures of the fugitive slaves Omar and Lala and their encounters with Paul and Virginia further illustrate this point. While the narrative insists on the pain and suffering of fugitive slaves inside the island, all Paul can think of within the realms of his protected community of white Creoles is how to get closer to the virtuous Virginia. Morally speaking, Paul's narrative proves that disorder reigns in both the outskirts and the interior, however, law and order are brought back by the instructions of the governor as well as the priest. Paul is obliged to take responsibility for his actions to protect Virginia and her reputation. After a seemingly long interlude with Lala and her voodoo practices in which Paul submerges himself into the invisible world of spirits and trance-like dances to temporarily join Virginia, he recovers, restores his status, and even ends up cultivating the land with the help of slaves. The negative image of the island is eventually overridden by a feeling of optimism about the future when Paul frees his slaves from the shackles of slavery. In the epilogue, he concludes: "Si on a pu se servir des mots pour enfermer l'homme dans des lois barbares, c'est un devoir de les utiliser comme des armes pour le libérer de la servitude" (*I.S.V.* 135). But does the belated disenfranchisement of the slaves restore the original status of the once uninhabited, paradisiacal island through the ethnofictional dimension of the text in the sense that it portrays a world as what it could have been like?¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Valérie Madgelaine-Andrianjafitrimo proposes the following answer to this

¹⁴⁴ « Dans le monde et dans le fonctionnement ethnofictionnel, le monde décrit est une figure plus ou moins ressemblante de ce que le monde aurait pu être mais qu'il n'est pas. » (Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo 136).

question: “In the world and the functioning of the ethnofictional, the world describes a figure that resembles more or less that what the world could have been like but what it is not” [« Dans le monde et dans le fonctionnement ethnofictionnel, le monde décrit est une figure plus ou moins ressemblante de ce que le monde aurait pu être mais qu’il n’est pas »] (« Ethnotexte » 136). Her comment takes us back to the starting point of this chapter in which I proposed to analyze the functionality of historical and ethnographic material. As the preceding analysis demonstrates, cultural referents function on various levels to absorb the complex dynamics of conceptualizing the space and time of the narrative of the Francophone island and its relationship to a geographic center or imaginary reference point. While Samlong does not attempt to erase the past, his reconfiguration of historical time and cultural referents clearly serves as an attempt to view his island from a different perspective. Samlong’s novel bears hope for a better future but this aspect is completely absent in Ferranti’s text. Her portrayal of Julius as a nostalgic shepherd points to a field of permanent tension on the island and creates a feeling of imprisonment in a situation characters want to escape from. Patrick Sultan shows Spitz’s text negotiates their neo-colonial situation through nostalgia for a different time rather than a different space: The writings of Chantal Spitz point to a painful reflection about the events that turned Tahiti into an ‘island of shattered dreams’” [“Les écrits de Chantal Spitz offrent une méditation douloureuse de ces événements qui ont fait de Tahiti une ‘île aux rêves écrasés’”] (« Parler la Polynésie »).

The novels of Ferranti, Spitz, and Samlong align themselves in their strategic reversal of the Western perspective and are oftentimes praised for the power of

representing foreign cultures. Didier Lenglare argues that the literary works of French Polynesia “allow readers from anywhere in the world to discover cultures and societies of this region of the Pacific that are represented and analyzed by Oceanians themselves. Oceanian literature therefore gives an invaluable perspective to those who are looking to get to know societies beyond the deforming mirror of exoticism”¹⁴⁵ (5). Lenglare’s comment reminds us of Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio’s Nobel Peace Prize of Literature speech in 2008 in which he argued that “**we are today in an era that follows the period of decolonization** during which literature is one of the means by which men and women of our time express their identity, claim their freedom of speech, and are heard in their diversity. Without these voices, without their scream, we would love in a quiet world (« forêt paradoxes »; my emphasis).¹⁴⁶

Although ethnic diversity is central to Le Clézio’s literary production, his statement remains problematic as not all French-speaking countries are independent. In his preface to the *Anthologie de la littérature réunionnaise*, Carpanin Marimoutou cautions the reader of Réunionese texts to:

Let things be clear: whatever language they are written in and whatever the modality of the encounter of languages is, Réunionese literary texts are not ethnographic documents or linguistic eyewitness accounts, foreign and folkloric objects. Neither are they ‘counter-literatures’ that are summoned upon to situate themselves in relationship to literatures that postulate as historically or socially dominant. If these texts **enter into a dialogue** with the social discourse, with myths and discourses that come from all populated

¹⁴⁵ « permet aux lecteurs du monde entier de découvrir les cultures et les sociétés de cette région du Pacifique représentées et interprétées par les Océaniens eux-mêmes. La littérature océanienne offre donc un éclairage précieux à ceux qui cherchent à connaître ces sociétés au-delà du miroir déformant de l’exotisme » (5).

¹⁴⁶ « Aujourd’hui, **au lendemain de la décolonisation**, la littérature est un des moyens pour les hommes et les femmes de notre temps d’exprimer leur identité, de revendiquer leur droit à la parole et d’être entendus dans leur diversité. Sans leur voix, sans leur appel, nous vivrions dans un monde silencieux » (« forêt paradoxes »; my emphasis).

spaces, with the literatures of the entire world, if they depict puns, if they apply a splitting or multiplication of narratees and recipients, like every other literary text, they do so to **construct their own fictional universe** and to elaborate their own language. With every single work, they are the works of authors that bear a unique world, a unique language (3; emphasis added).

Que les choses soient claires : les textes littéraires réunionnais, quelle que soit leur langue d'écriture, quelles que soient les modalités de la rencontre des langues ne sont pas des documents ethnographiques ou des témoignages linguistiques, des objets étrangers et folkloriques ; ce ne sont pas non plus des 'contre-littératures' sommées de se situer par rapport à des littératures postulées comme historiquement ou socialement dominantes. Si ces textes **dialoguent** avec le discours social, avec des mythes et des paroles venus de tous les espaces du peuplement, avec des littératures du monde entier, s'ils mettent en scène des jeux de langues, s'ils postulent un dédoublement ou une pluralisation du narrataire ou du destinataire, comme tout texte littéraire cependant, **ils construisent leur propre univers fictionnel**, élaborent leur propre langage, sont l'œuvre d'écrivains porteurs, à chaque fois, d'un monde unique, d'un langage propre (3 ; emphasis added).

Sylvie André's study on *Littératures du Pacifique: voix francophones contemporaines* similarly insists on the ability of French Polynesian authors to move beyond the stage of documentation "to think about a multicultural future" [« pour penser un avenir multiculturel »] (44). André reads the hybridity of Polynesian texts as "interaction and dialogue that produces new meanings and a new distribution of power" [« interaction et dialogue qui produisent de nouveaux sens et une nouvelle distribution de pouvoir »] which will be the focus of the next chapter (56).

In chapter 3, I will challenge the notions of postcolonial and postmodern insularity in the French-speaking world by focusing on the non-linear relationship between space and time as a new poetics of postmodernity on the island.

Chapter 3: Postmodernity on the island: a poetics of *different* spatio-temporal realities

3.1 New signs of reality on the island

In *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai argues “One of the most problematic legacies of grand Western social science [...] is that it has steadily reinforced the sense of some single moment—call it the modern moment—that by its appearance creates a dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present [...] this view has been shown repeatedly to distort the meanings of change and the politics of pastness” (2-3). As discussed in the previous chapter, Ricoeur’s and White’s non-linear techniques of rendering time allow for the construction of important alternative views that break with the Western master narrative, including colonial synchronic structures of time in the context of the island. The emergence of new narrative techniques reflects what Arjun Appadurai called the “work of the imagination” (3) which he defined as “organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility” (31).

Postcolonial and postmodern studies have taken a particular interest in theorizing these breaks from alternative perspectives, as Carmen Husti-Laboye, Ato Quayson, and Jean-Marc Moura indicate.¹⁴⁷ The junction between postcolonial and postmodern concepts of time and space are particularly important for Francophone

¹⁴⁷ « [...] la pensée postcoloniale et postmoderne [...] se partagent, à partir du milieu du XX^e siècle jusqu’à aujourd’hui, le champ idéologico-philosophique et esthétique dans toutes les parties du monde. Reflets de la pensée en crise, de la disparition des hiérarchies et de la mise en question des valeurs, le postmoderne et le postcolonial soulèvent le problème du rapport de l’individu au pouvoir, à l’identité et à l’appartenance » (Husti-Laboye 33).

island narratives where the crisis of time and meaning takes on particular forms to give voice to more functional accounts of modernity. Martinican author, poet, and essayist Édouard Glissant explained the workings of the French Caribbean islander's imaginary, a concept that Appadurai defined as “constructed landscape of collective aspirations” (31).¹⁴⁸ Rather than quoting commonly evoked references to explain Glissant's approach to dealing with the crisis of time and meaning, I will briefly refer to a short but relevant interview with Philippe Artières that was published in the 2007 manifesto, *Pour une littérature-monde*. In this interview, Glissant reiterated the notion of a *relation poésie-politique* [relationship between poetry and politics] (78) which expresses his vision of writing based on the idea that “the highest object of poetry [is] the world: the world in the state of becoming, the world the way it is obscure to us, the world the way we want to enter into it. In political matters, my highest preference [is] also the world, not the world the way it is perceived as internationality of the proletarians but as a site of encounter”¹⁴⁹ (77).

In this chapter, I will challenge the idea of global encounter and exchange in the context of the colonized island to show an alternative reading of the world and the topos of the island through a different perspective on time-space relationships. My analysis will pay particular attention to how these new narratives align themselves with Appadurai's vision of modernity as coexistence of deterritorialized communities

¹⁴⁸ Appadurai distinguished “the image, the imagined, the imaginary” as foundational building blocks of imagination in a globalized world (31).

¹⁴⁹ « l'objet le plus haut de la poésie [est] le monde: le monde en devenir, le monde tel qu'il nous bouscule, le monde tel qu'il nous est obscur, le monde tel que nous voulons y entrer. En matière politique, ma préférence la plus haute [est] aussi le monde, non pas le monde conçu comme l'internationale des prolétaires mais comme le lieu de rencontre » (77).

in a geographical space and historical time.¹⁵⁰ I argue that in the novels of Chantal Spitz, Jean-François Samlong, and Marie Ferranti, the topos of the island takes on a particular function in that it contributes to the existence of a poetics that distinguishes itself from other novels of the French-speaking world. I will draw on Husti-Laboye's analysis of the manifestations of postmodernity¹⁵¹ to provide a reading of new signs of reality on the Francophone island through two Francophone concepts, Marc Augé's notion of supermodernity on the one hand, and Jean-Baudrillard's concept of simulation, on the other hand. Section 2 will examine postcolonial discourses of History and time as a form of postmodernity while section 3 will engage with Deleuze's notion of the time crystal as an alternative to the Bakhtinian chronotope.

3.1.1 Supermodernity: The Francophone island as a non-place?

French ethnologist Marc Augé has studied the effects of modernity on contemporary worlds, particularly in his most recent works.¹⁵² Augé foregrounded the interconnection of temporal and spatial relationships to theorize the contemporary crisis of time and meaning as the onset of supermodernity (*surmodernité*) which he

¹⁵⁰ « Ce phénomène tributaire de l'importance grandissante prise par le lieu dans le monde contemporain et du nouveau type de relation qu'il engendre. Les relations ne se construisent plus sur le modèle de la filiation identitaire, mais sur le modèle du partage d'un présent commun, circonscrit à un lieu commun dans lequel se déroule la vie de tous les jours » (Husti-Laboye 32).

¹⁵¹ Husti-Laboye's analysis contests François Lyotard's notion of the postmodern condition to show that postmodernity is a historical period leading to the awareness of the complexity and disorder of the world, which is to be distinguished from the adjective 'postmodern' that qualifies a host of characteristics to describe the condition of postmodernity (33-36). Anthony Appiah explained that "[p]ostmodern culture is the culture in which all postmodernism operate, sometimes in synergy, sometimes in competition" (342).

¹⁵² Anthropologist Marc Augé first described the indicators of supermodernity in his 1992 essay *Non-lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (translated as *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* in 1995) which provides the building block for several consecutive projects such as *Pour une anthropologie des mondes contemporains* (1994) and *La Guerre des rêves: exercices d'ethnofiction* (1997) which were translated as *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds* and *The War of Dreams: Exercises in Ethno-Fiction* in 1998 and 1999 respectively.

defined as “an acceleration of history, a shrinking of space, and an individualization of references, all of which subvert the cumulative processes of modernity” (*Contemporaneous Worlds* 110). He derived from this idea of supermodernity the notion of the non-place as “a space where neither **identity, relation, or history** are symbolized” (110; emphasis added). In Bakhtinian terms, the “non-place” becomes the chronotope¹⁵³ of the era of supermodernity. How do contemporary Francophone island texts absorb and reflect the increased dimension of time and the decreased relation of space in the construction and conceptualization of their time and space?

Although originally associated with highways and airports in the Hexagon, the supermodern chronotope of the non-place turns out to be particularly relevant for the context of the postcolonial and neo-colonial French-speaking world. According to Augé, the first effects of supermodernity were perceived in colonized territories.¹⁵⁴ On the colonized island, the phenomenon of supermodernity started with the arrival of the first colonizers who strategically assimilated local cultures, as Edouard Glissant explained.¹⁵⁵ This observation is particularly fitting for Chantal Spitz’s novel, *L’Ile des rêves écrasés*.

The novel skillfully illustrates the various steps that eventually lead to the phenomena of ‘accelerated time’ and ‘shrunk space’ in Tahiti. An indigenous Maohi family loses access to their cultural capital as they are being forced to relocate. Unable to create new forms of meaning, they turn into what Spitz called “hombos” in

¹⁵³ “Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charges and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope” (84).

¹⁵⁴ “We can go a little further and say that prophetic movements as such constitute an anticipation [...] of what is today a situation we all share—the internationalization of the planet. Colonized people were the first to have this experience because they were the first to suffer it” (101).

¹⁵⁵ “Bien évidemment, la rencontre la plus fondamentale fut le colonialisme” (“Solitaire” 77).

her second novel which essentially engages with the same topic from the perspective of a young Tahitian.¹⁵⁶ The latter novel particularly explains how time is measured through the periodic construction of material capital, including nuclear missiles, rather than the cycles of nature. Former spatial dimensions are fragmented and replaced through natural, material, and mental demarcations. As a consequence, colonization introduces the geographic notion of insularity that did not previously exist in Tahiti.

The arrival of the colonizers is associated with emotional distress that even the French expatriate Laura is not spared of. This emotional distress is related to the fragmentation of time and space on the island. Before, the family lived on the motu, which essentially is a place that resembles “les îles bienheureuses” of Western mythology. « C’est une île tranquille, corolle émeraude posée à l’aube des temps sur l’océan sans limite [...] Perdue comme toutes les autres îles de ce grand Pacifique, collier de fleurs égrenées sur l’éternité liquide, elle a été peuplée longtemps avant que l’Europe ne découvre que la terre est ronde et que, comme une folle, elle tourne inlassablement autour du soleil » (*I.R.E.* 31). Despite the apparent geographical fragmentation,¹⁵⁷ the Maohi universe is a protected ‘sea of islands,’ as Epele Hau’ofa explained. Their sea of islands remains secluded and protected from the outside world. Unity and coherence reign in this autonomous world that is characterized

¹⁵⁶ In the preface to the novel, Jimmy Ly explains the meaning of the word ‘hombo’ the following way : « Dans son insoumission instinctive, un home ressemble beaucoup à un hobo : mot américain très en vogue dans les années de la grande Dépression aux Etats-Unis, qui signifie un vagabond, vaguement clochardisé, synonyme d’errance sur les routes ou les voies de chemin de fer de l’Ouest, toujours en rupture de ban avec la société bien pensante” (12).

¹⁵⁷ Jean-Christophe Gay states that « le monde le plus fascinant est bien la Polynésie, étymologiquement le ‘pays des îles nombreuses’ situé presque au milieu de l’océan Pacifique et de ses 180 millions de km². L’émiettement est ici maximale, les distances importantes et la surface océanique l’emportant largement sur les terres émergées » (68).

through its interior harmony, its contrast to the Western world, where Europeans are constantly driven by the desire to sail around the world. Sylvie André argues that distance was a contributing factor that ensured on-going stability and cultural authenticity, both of which are guaranteed through the transmission of the « gestes immémoriaux de leurs pères » which allow the characters to continue living « au rythme calme de la nature, des étoiles, de la mer » (*I.R.E.* 33). With the onset of modernity, characters gradually lose all *points de repères* of traditions and customs; as Augé would put it, “neither identity, relation, or history are symbolized” (110)¹⁵⁸ in this chronotopic non-place of the South Pacific.¹⁵⁹

The notion of insularity has also taken on a new meaning in era of globalization. From the continental perspective, with the current speed of methods of communication and travel, the notion of the island as an isolated entity becomes somewhat paradoxical, particularly in anthropological terms. On the one hand, anthropology developed into the “study of the present as lived by distant societies” (*Contemporaneous Worlds* 4) and as a result, any definition and even identification of what is considered spatially or temporally distant, becomes problematic (2-5). On the other hand, Francophone islands such as Corsica, Réunion, and Tahiti continue to hold a geo-political and culturally marginal position, in comparison to the continental metropolitan center. In a nutshell, the topos of the island has become a rhetorical

¹⁵⁸ The concept of the non-place is a direct antithesis of the place which Augé, drawing on Michel de Certeau’s definition of “space as a practiced place”, conceptualizes as a location where “a certain number of people recognize themselves in it [...] read in it the relations that unite them [...] and find various traces of an old, former presence” (109)

¹⁵⁹ Glissant further illustrated these notions in *L’Intention poétique* where he foregrounded community, intention, and relation: “Trois fois l’œuvre concerne. En ce qu’elle est pulsion d’un groupe d’hommes: communauté; en ce qu’elle se noue au vœu d’un homme: intention; en ce qu’elle est ouvrage et drame d’humanité qui constitue ici: relation » (*L’Intention* 24).

device of colonial and postcolonial literature to refer to a place that is far-away for the colonizers and close for the colonized—that is, the islanders. Anne Meistersheim confirms this paradoxical situation:

If we already know that the island for continentals is not like the island for islanders, maybe we have to wonder about the difference between these images. We actually notice that for islanders, the island is first and foremost land; the very land of the island, the father-land. On the contrary, for continentals, the island is first of all the ocean. The ocean which they have to cross to access the land of the island. The shore to approach the island, the shore to leave it. This permanent tension in with which islanders live: the desire to leave the island and the desire to come back to it when they left it, this tension shows the paradoxical character of the island space (« insularité » 171).

[Si l'on sait déjà que l'île des continentaux n'est pas l'île des insulaires, peut-être faut-il s'interroger plus avant sur ces images différentes. On observe en effet que pour les insulaires, l'île est avant tout la terre ; la terre même de l'île, la terre-mère. Pour les continentaux, en revanche, l'île signifie d'abord la mer. La mer qu'il faut franchir pour accéder à la terre de l'île. Rivage pour aborder l'île, rivage pour la quitter. Cette tension permanente dans laquelle vivent les insulaires : le désir de partir de l'île et le désir d'y revenir quand ils l'ont quittée, cette tension révèle le caractère paradoxal de l'espace insulaire (« insularité » 171).]

This paradoxical situation was also the focus of a recent ethnographical essay entitled *Raga: Approche du continent invisible*, in which Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio explains the predicament of Oceania the following way: “They say of Africa that it is the forgotten continent. Oceania is the invisible continent. Invisible because the travelers that ventured there for the first time did not notice it, and because today, it remains a site without international recognition, a passage, somewhat of an absence”¹⁶⁰ (9). The trope of (in)visibility becomes a functional paradigm to theorize the relation between France and its insular overseas departments. In this section, I

¹⁶⁰ “On dit de l’Afrique qu’elle est le continent oublié. L’Océanie, c’est le continent invisible. Invisible parce que les voyageurs qui s’y sont aventurés la première fois ne l’ont pas aperçue, et parce que aujourd’hui elle reste un lieu sans reconnaissance internationale, un passage, une absence en quelque sorte” (9).

will reframe the idea of (in)visibility by insisting on the relationship with Marc Augé's concept of supermodernity and the chronotope of the non-place. In other words, the notion of invisibility picks up on the idea of how markers of identity, relation, and history have become erased which makes it difficult to manage the space and time of the island.

Édouard Glissant has extensively written on the difficulty of relating to space and time within the context of the French Caribbean islands. In his foundational essay, *Discours Antillais*, Glissant deplors the consequences of forced assimilation on the imaginary of Martinican islanders: "here, the subconscious and collective feeling of non-adaptation to a space-time takes on traumatic and indelible proportions" [« le sentiment inconscient et collectif de la non-adaptation à l'espace-temps y prend des proportions traumatisantes indélébiles »] (147). However, contrary to Spitz's rejection of the notion of insularity as a geographic concept,¹⁶¹ Glissant seems to conceive the Caribbean archipelago as a profoundly unmanageable system due its tropical nature:

Limiting to a point that it cuts down the human being, the Martinican space is an anti-space but it's diverse to a point that it multiplies infinitely. Ambiguity. It is an island that is like an anthology of landscapes that are called tropical. But it is not unimportant to get back to the observation that the Martinican never has neither the premonition nor the shalking subconscious to master this space (471).

[L'espace martiniquais est un anti-espace, limité au point de rogner sur l'être, mais divers au point de multiplier infiniment. Ambiguïté. C'est là une île qui est comme une anthologie des paysages qu'on appelle tropicaux. Mais il n'est pas indifférent de reprendre ici la constatation que jamais le Martiniquais n'a le pressentiment ni l'inconscient tremblement de maîtriser cet espace (471).]

¹⁶¹ When I introduced myself to Chantal Spitz in Paris and told her that I was working on the concept of the island in French-speaking literature, she was not impressed at all. As expected, she firmly reiterated that she does not consider Tahiti insular. I already discussed her concept of insularity in Chapter 1.

Glissant's concern about the lack of ability to master space and time has an interesting implication with regards to Augé's notion of the non-place: while for Augé, space shrinks and time speeds up, Glissant argues for a disproportionate dimension of Antillean space which blurs and distorts all reference points. For Glissant, the consequences of this condition are detrimental on various levels: "Every collectivity that feels the rigid impossibility to master their surroundings is a collectivity in danger" [« Toute collectivité qui éprouve la raide impossibilité de maîtriser son entour est une collectivité menace »] (471).

The Glissantian notion of the "anti-space" can be rather functional to read the island in the works of Ferranti, Samlong, and Spitz. In *La Fuite aux Agriates* and *Une île où séduire Virginie*, the space of the island is not a uniform entity since it does not function according to the same temporal dynamics; in *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, the entire island turns into an "anti-space". As Marc Augé would put it, there are locations that are "set apart spatially and temporally from everyday life" (*Contemporaneous Worlds* 72). According to Anne Meistersheim's analysis of island figures, the 'labyrinth' is one out of nine figures the scholar describes as what she calls a "particular manner the islanders have to live in the finite space of their islands" ["manière particulière qu'ont les insulaires de vivre l'espace fini de leur île"] (*Figures* 83). Contrary to Glissant's notion of the "anti-space," Meistersheim's vision of the finite space of the island as a labyrinth is based on the following assumptions: the finite space of the island is sometimes perceived of as a labyrinth, a labyrinth that would have two functions [...]: prolonging the itinerary, protecting [the islanders]

against invaders by complicating and thus prolonging their progression”¹⁶² (*Figures* 84). While Meistersheim primarily lists the Corsican Agriates as an example of how to overcome the geographic constraints of space and its relationship to time, I will probe its commensurability with Réunion and Tahitian by drawing on Foucault’s characteristics of heterotopia.

3.1.1.1 The labyrinth as a space of illusion

The expectations for the labyrinth hold true for the novels of Marie Ferranti and Jean-François Samlong where the Corsican Agriates¹⁶³ and Mauritian calderas¹⁶⁴ (French: *cirques*) disproportionately enlarge the space of the island by turning it into a maze. Within this maze, the flow of time is slowed down or stopped altogether. What is particular about these spaces is that they are not artificially constructed through staging and spectacle and that they represent somewhat of a prehistoric time: even popular or commercial text such as the *Guide du routard* refer to the Agriates as “*Corsica before Corsica, as many sites as the time has not defigured*” [*“la Corse avant la Corse, autant de lieux que le temps n’a pas défigurés”*] (134). Both the Agriates and the calderas are uninhabited regions, with some minor exception in the case of the calderas that are, in comparison to the coastal cities around the island, much less densely populated but nevertheless renowned for their savage flora and

¹⁶² « l’espace fini des îles est parfois vécu comme un labyrinthe, un labyrinthe qui aurait deux fonctions [...]: celle d’allonger un itinéraire, celle de se protéger des envahisseurs en compliquant et ainsi en retardant leur cheminement » (*Figures* 84).

¹⁶³ The Corsican Agriates are a Northern stretch of 40 km of scrubland between the Cap Corse and La Balagne.

¹⁶⁴ The plot takes place on Mauritius but the destiny of fugitive slaves is similar in both Mauritius and Réunion.

fauna. Contrary to Augé's prediction, time does not accelerate and space does not shrink here but rather, "identity, relation, or history" take on a new meaning.

In Ferranti's novel, the Agriates are an exclusive site for Julius and Francesca to spend time together as a couple. Although Julius initially threatens to leave her behind if she is unable to keep up with him, Francesca gets to experience a different side of him than in town. In the Agriates, Julius is meticulously organized, as Francesca observes when seeing his sheepfold. "Elle regarda autour d'elle et fut étonnée de l'ordre dans la remise et du souci de confort de Julius. Il avait un lit pliant, des couvertures, un réchaud. Elle ne s'attendait pas à une telle minutie de la part d'un homme comme lui » (*F.A.* 86). In the beginning, Julius devotes himself entirely to the illusion of being able to reconstruct an authentic cabin to bring back to feel of pastoral times:

Julius avait restauré les vouîtes en encorbellement, refait à l'identique la charpente en bois d'olivier, reconstruit le muret de soutènement en pierres sèches, planté des oliviers, des figuiers, mais aussi des citronniers et les lauriers roses. Chaque année, en septembre, il rebouchait les lézardes de la toiture en terre rouge [...] Il avait rajouté des pierres plates sur le bord du toit qui servaient de gouttière, comme il avait pu en voir dans d'autres paillers abandonnés des Agriates (*F.A.* 75).

While his intense devotion pays off during the first couple of years, he eventually gets tired of the endless amount of dedication to this project "qui ne lui laissait ni trêve ni repos" (*F.A.* 75).

He hires Giovanni to take care of the required chores to maintain his pastoral sheepfold while he himself only goes up there for the pleasure of hunting and the solitude. These leisure activities are an extension of the duties and leisure of the shepherding job and he immediately heads back to town afterwards: "On le voyait

souvent en ville. Il avait repris ses habitudes de jeune homme oisif. Il allait au café retrouver ses amis, il avait renoué avec Pierre et par la même occasion avec la politique. Ils en parlaient souvent » (*F.A.* 76). While in both realms, Julius attempts to replicate a mirror image of an illusionary vision of each world, his involvement in politics is guided by the desperate need to control the ‘identity, relation, and history’ to prevent it becoming a non-place in the Glissantian sense.

The Agriates, however, represent a true battlefield between nature and humanity because those who are unprepared, and do not know how to survive in the wild, will succumb. Therefore, during their escape, the city dweller Francesca is completely dependent on Julius for guidance. The latter has meticulously prepared numerous pit stops throughout the Agriates. Despite the physically and psychologically challenging circumstances of their escape across the Agriates, Francesca accepts these exceptional conditions to be with him. For the time being, their relationship takes on a new meaning. Julius shares nostalgic childhood memories with Francesca and she cherishes the moments of silence between them: “Elle prenait un plaisir singulier à le regarder fumer: la tête renversée en arrière, les yeux mi-clos, perdu dans ses pensées. Francesca savourait ces moments d’intimité où elle pouvait contempler Julius à son aise” (*F.A.* 120). Likewise, Julius considers : « On est bien, tout de même » (*F.A.* 120). When their ways part, Julius confirms that he has never experienced the same feelings with anybody before which could lead us to assume that he has achieved a connection between the past and the present in this place through the presence of Francesca.

Contrary to Julius, Francesca has more problems entering into the illusion of the non-place. Reality catches up with her because she is constantly reminded of the hopelessness of their precarious situation. Francesca is well aware of the fact that their escape is only a temporary solution for romance:

Francesca était épuisée, elle ne savait plus que penser. Jusqu'alors, elle s'était imaginé qu'ils étaient **seuls au monde**, que la connaissance que Julius avait du désert les rendait **invulnérables** [...] **elle avait oublié le monde** mais le monde s'était rappelé d'eux : l'avion en était le signe et le signe aussi que le meurtre avait existé. Ce qui avait pu ressembler à **une fugue d'amoureux** revêtait un sens tout différent désormais: Francesca était **la complice d'un assassin**; elle risquait sa vie, sa liberté, pour un homme qui lui semblait un étranger (*F.A.* 123; emphasis added).

Initially, Francesca suppresses the fact that Julius is a wanted criminal, but eventually, fear takes over and she realizes that she endangers her own life and well-being for someone who is worried about his own safety more than their future as a couple.¹⁶⁵ In metaphorical terms, the desert-like region functions, as other researchers have pointed out, like a *mise en abyme* of insularity that comes with a high price to pay. The Agriates cannot be compared to the romanticized topos of the secluded Eldorado that has only one point of access and exit; however, while the Agriates can easily be accessed, it is even more challenging to traverse it safely, which is not the case for the Eldorado.¹⁶⁶ In the Agriates, time itself takes on a new meaning because of the tedious nocturnal marches and the diurnal periods of rest and recovery that

¹⁶⁵ « Il est trop tard, tu le sais bien, non? » dit-il, et il colla sa bouche contre celle de Francesca jusqu'à ce qu'ils n'aient plus de souffle » (*F.A.* 133).

¹⁶⁶ In Voltaire's *Candide ou l'optimisme*, the narrator describes how Candide and Cacambo gained access to the secluded but not geographically insular Eldorado by accident. The stream of a river drives their canoe "sous une voûte de rochers épouvantables qui s'élevaient jusqu'au ciel. Les deux voyageurs eurent la hardiesse de s'abandonner aux flots sous cette voûte. Le fleuve, resserré en cet endroit, les porta avec une rapidité et un bruit horrible. Au bout de vingt-quatre heures ils revirent le jour, mais leur canot se fracassa contre les écueils ; il fallut se traîner de rocher en rocher pendant une lieue entière ; enfin ils découvrirent un horizon immense, bordé de montagnes inaccessibles » (102).

structure the days and nights of the fugitives. In comparison, paradisiacal locations are governed by a lost notion of time because the visitor becomes disconnected from the passage of time.

Within this context, Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia quite fittingly illustrates the function of the Agriates as "places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of the society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (24). In Foucauldian terms, the labyrinth-like Agriates function as a "space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory" (27). This is also the case for the calderas where fugitive slaves are hiding from the wrath of the slave hunters. This hiding spot provides shelter for a collective group rather than an individual.

Although this labyrinth-like hiding spot changes temporal coordinates in the narrative structure of Samlong's novel and seemingly enlarges the space of the island, the starting point is different than the situation in the Agriates. In the calderas, fugitive slaves seek safety from torture, pain, and suffering inflicted upon them through colonialism, slavery, and the *Code noir*. As a result, the motivations for hiding can by no means be compared to those that are described in Ferranti's novel.

3.1.1.2 The labyrinth as a space of compensation

Contrary to Ferranti's novel, Samlong's description of the calderas takes the reader back in time to the colonial period. The narrative insists on the functionality of the calderas for the community of *esclaves marrons* (fugitive slaves) who attempt to

establish a solitary network of support in the interior of the island. Within the realms of this secluded area, fugitive slaves partially restore and recuperate their identity and relation.¹⁶⁷ The calderas are relatively difficult to access and to cross¹⁶⁸ which explains them being chosen as a hiding spot in the past.

In the novel, Paul's meeting the fugitive slaves Omar and Lala enables him to gain access to an unfamiliar world that fascinates him. But at the same time, he is painfully reminded of the cruelty of human beings that drives the slaves into hiding: "J'étais fier de me retrouver en face d'un chef de noirs marrons, dans une île où on chassait, traquait, tuait les fugitifs comme des bêtes" (*I.S.V.* 33). In addition, Paul is drawn to Lala's magical chants and dances for their therapeutic function as he attempts to cope with Virginia's death. Despite his fascination for their world of voodoo magic, he remains very keenly aware of the urgent need for his friends to hide: "le premier héritage que les Marrons se transmettent d'une génération à l'autre, c'est la vengeance ; le second, c'est la quête de la liberté" (*I.S.V.* 21).

During the last part of the novel, Paul develops the details of Omar's tragic fate when being caught by a group of cruel slave hunters:

Il avait perdu beaucoup de sang en chemin. Car les miliciens l'avaient castré comme un chat [...] après pareille mutilation, rien ne pouvait plus être comme

¹⁶⁷ Today, the Réunionese calderas bear the names of leaders of fugitive slaves: Mafate, Cilaos, and Salazie.

¹⁶⁸ The Réunionese calderas still play an important part in the island's contemporary imaginary as Réunion is renowned for an annual trail race across the island, *Le Grand Raid de la Réunion* and its half-distance version, *La Diagonale des Fous*. The *Grand Raid* leads from a Southern city, Saint-Philippe, through the three calderas to end at the La Redoute stadium in Saint-Denis. According to the *Guide du routard*, this race is held every November and draws more than 2,000 participants (216). In 2011, the course was 160 km long but the total distance of the itinerary varies slightly each year based on the nesting habits of local birds and other animals. The organizers are currently preparing the 20th edition of this popular sporting event that is publicized in Metropolitan France during the Running Expo for the annual Paris Marathon every April, amongst other events. Similar races can be found on other islands throughout the Indian Ocean. The implications of this and other similar events will be analyzed more explicitly in the conclusion.

avant. Sans doute danserait-il de nouveau avec les âmes errantes, mais la danse elle-même ferait partie du passé, sans savoir pourquoi, ou peut-être si, à cause d'un sentiment de perte le submergeant, le ballotant, lui donnant la nausée, la sensation de faire naufrage chaque matin [...] Omar s'en alla cacher sa honte dans les bois. Les tisanes [de Lala] avaient guéri le corps, pas l'âme (I.S.V. 125-126).

For Omar, the enlargement of space and time in the calderas gives him time to physically heal from the attack and torture he would have succumbed to without Lala's help. For Omar and Paul, the calderas function as what Foucault calls a "space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged [...] This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation" (Foucault 27).

The representation of the Agriates and the calderas of Réunion (and Mauritius) are functional for the characters of each novel for the very reason of them being abandoned or relatively remote and savage.¹⁶⁹ While the nostalgic Julius seeks compensation from a disillusioned pastoral life in the Agriates by getting involved in local politics, fugitive slaves head for the calderas to seek safety and compensation. The idea of safety and compensation plays an interesting role in colonial representations of the island. For Prosper Mérimée's foreign travelers who return from a disappointing trip to Italy, the island becomes a space of compensation in the sense of entertainment and spectacle: "[Miss Lydia's] main criticism of Italy was that the place lacked local color and character" (C. 162) and for her father, "Italy had

¹⁶⁹ According to the *Guide du routard*, there were plans to construct a nuclear testing center in the Agriates and to make this space more attractive for tourists until the *Conservatoire du littoral* bought 5,500 hectares of this territory (134). This transformation is illustrated through Meistersheim's island figure # 7, the island as a conservatory: « La finitude de son espace, son isolement, font tout naturellement de l'île un conservatoire. Conservatoire des espèces végétales ou animales auquel s'ajoute une variante originale avec le phénomène de l'endémisme, mais aussi conservatoire des sociétés humaines, avec leurs formes d'expression, leurs modes de vie, leurs formes sociales » (Figures 111).

committed the heinous crime of boring his daughter” (C. 163). Upon hearing Corsican takes of the vendetta and of hunting, Miss Lydia wants to go to Corsica to sketch the cave of Bonaparte and because “no Englishwoman had ever been to Corsica, so she had to go there” (C. 162). Similarly, her father is drawn to the island for an adventure rather than for existential needs such as safety: “If you like shooting, Colonel, go to Corsica, where, as one of my hosts put it, you’ll be able to shoot every possible variety of game, from a thrush to a man” (C. 163).

By contrast, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre associates the island with a space of compensation within the context of socio-political difficulties. The narrator presents the compensatory qualities of the island as functional for those whose ambitions remain fruitless in Metropolitan France due to lack of status or money: “In the year 1726 a young man from Normandy, Monsieur de la Tour, after fruitless attempts to obtain a commission in France and vain requests for the assistance of his family, determined to come to this island to seek his fortune” (P.V. 41). The island functions for him and his wife in a similar fashion than the Agriates for Julius and Francesca because the couple hopes to be able to have a bigger chance of getting by financially than in Metropolitan France: “She belonged to a rich and ancient family of his province, but had married him in secret and without dowry; he was not of noble birth and her relations had opposed their union” (P.V. 41).

3.1.1.3 The labyrinth as a laboratory

While there is no such place for refuge in the advent of supermodernity in Tahiti, the site of the nuclear testing center functions the opposite way for the Metropolitan French technicians in that it represents the antithesis of Augé’s notion of

the ‘non-place.’ Artificially constructed by specialists flown in from Metropolitan France, the nuclear testing center transforms the motu into an uncanny labyrinth for the indigenous people because it functions through coded language and signs, as do “non-places” of Augé’s supermodernity. French female technician Laura Lebrun worked hard to obtain a high-ranking position on the nuclear testing center base where her job is to “programmer les vols des missiles nucléaires. Elle avait été si fière, une fierté sauve” (*I.R.E.* 119). The main building is under constant supervision to protect what the narrator labels as “les secrets top secrets” (*I.R.E.* 123). This pleonasm stands out for its needless repetition of words to insist on the exclusiveness of this type of environment, which is furthermore described by a detailed list of the inventory of the base:

plans d’aménagement avec emplacement des silos, matrices bétonnées des missiles, greffes **monstrueuses implantées après le viol sauvage de la matrice de la Terre**; salles de commande des tirs; zones interdites à toutes personne non autorisée; radars de détection de l’ennemi (**on n’en manquera certainement pas**), salles diverses aux multiples desseins; plan **de la glorieuse présence protectrice de la mère patrie et de sa force de dissuasion à défaut d’être une force de frappe sérieuse**. Dans la salle principale, immense, centre **névralgique de ce grandiose et pathétique projet**, de grandes photographies [...] (*I.R.E.* 123; emphasis added).

As the added emphasis indicates, the enumeration is interrupted by frequent sarcastic comments that reflect the attitude of the speaker towards the nuclear testing as both spectacular and pathetic. The speaker is not impressed with the estrangement of this coded world.

When arriving in French Polynesia, Laura masters the skills required to carry out her job on base but she is unable to establish meaningful relationships with any of her colleagues who are all male. “Quand enfin son corps commence à s’adapter, c’est

son esprit qu'elle sent plonger. Elle est dans un monde artificiel fait par l'homme pour un monde d'hommes. Seule femme de la base, elle réalise soudain sur cette île perdue du Pacifique que si le principe de l'égalité paraît être admis dans son pays, il ne l'est qu'en théorie » (*I.R.E.* 122). She is profoundly disillusioned with her mission because

la vie grouillante de la grande ville lui manque [...] Elle a bien essayé les nombreuses possibilités du site, mais y a vite renoncé : la salle de cinéma aux fauteuils inconfortables et au public bruyant, le bar des officiers où elle s'est attardée après un dîner à prendre quelques verres avec ses collaborateurs, d'une haute compétence professionnelle, mais d'une affligeante supériorité mâle dans la vie ; le billard où son arrivée a provoqué un silence et une immobilité réprobateurs. Dieu qu'elle se sent perdue ! Seules la passion de sa mission et sa discipline militaire l'empêchent de sombrer dans une terrifiante dépression nerveuse (*I.R.E.* 122).

The village constructed for the technicians on base does not accommodate the social and cultural practices of a woman in a male world. Laura is not accepted by her primarily male colleagues although her skills and knowledge have enabled her to gain access to their coded world of scientific progress described as “sanctuaire du progrès technologique militaire” (*I.R.E.* 124). This feminist dimension of Laura's lack of integration is particularly interesting due to the fact that the French created a technologically advanced laboratory on the motu that does not exist in Metropolitan France while at the same time, resorting to a patriarchal structure of society that already evolved the equality abroad.

Laura's attitude towards the laboratory activities on the motu and her curiosity about the natives of the motu illustrate her rejection of the master narrative that is, technician Yan's vision of European superiority: “Si on se met à laisser les indigènes de nos colonies tenir des discours de ce genre, on risque d'avoir des ennuis. Il suffit

de voir l'exemple des colonies anglaises. Je dis qu'il faut les maintenir à leur place pour qu'ils n'oublient jamais leur infériorité, au lieu de les laisser jouer avec nos grandes idées de liberté » (*I.R.E.* 125). His account of his unsuccessful attempts to learn more about the indigenous is similarly negative: "Ne m'en parle pas. J'y suis allé quelquefois mais je n'ai pas été enchanté. Eux que l'on nous a dits accueillants, ne m'ont pas paru sympathiques [...] si tu veux un bon conseil, ne t'en approche pas et tu te porteras bien » (*I.R.E.* 126-127).

Yan's comments point to the existence of two manifestly incompatible visions of the world, with one being conceived through intellectual capacities (*intelligence de l'esprit*, *I.R.E.* 84) while the other one is constructed through emotional sensibility (*le coeur*, *I.R.E.* 84). As signs for 'the real,' the French bank on fragmentation, particularly nuclear technology, because the nuclear testing center cannot exist anywhere else but in French Polynesia. From the Maohi perspective, the excessive valorization of certain artificial fragments of civilization such as « toutes ces choses extraordinaires, l'électricité, les voitures, les bateaux, les avions » (*I.R.E.* 85), becomes obvious, particularly language and education as an institutionalized system, but also, the small fake Maohi style type of house that accommodates the French technicians on base.

In the maze-like laboratory of the supermodern motu, the French intellectual superiority reaches its culminating point when the nuclear defense project is able to launch the first missiles as epitome of an "oeuvre magnifique" (*I.R.E.* 116). Nuclear power does indeed endow the French with somewhat of a supernatural, if not, superhuman power, which in symbolic terms, brings them closer to Todorov's

perspective of the fantastic, due to the fact that the modernized French world is unintelligible for the indigenous people. However, Laura is not impressed with the signifiers of supermodernity around her.

Suspicious, Laura decides to venture outside the confines of the testing center village where she will meet Terii and his family. Due to the ties of their friendship, Laura familiarizes herself with the codes and signs of the Maohi reality and starts attaching more significance to the events that occur during the time she spends outside the center. She discovers culture through trial and error and meticulously records her findings in her journal. The Maohi perspective on life and the world appeal to Laura who becomes a « prisonnière de la magie de l'inexplicable » (*I.R.E.* 134) which, according to her, translates into the natural style of the Maohi culture. She becomes sensitive to « musique de leurs paroles qui dansent entre eux » (*I.R.E.* 137) and she and Terii fall in love, despite all the differences between them. During their relationship, Laura, in desperate need to « savoir plus, expliquer, comprendre, raisonner » (*I.R.E.* 139) always attaches more importance to her inner voice of reason rather than gestures that come from the heart. Naturally, she constantly asks him to reassure her of his love because she needs to actually hear him tell her that he loves her. Terii patiently explains to her the nonscientific manner of Maohi life and culture in the following way: « Mon pays ne se raconte pas. Il se vit. Je porte mon pays en moi et mon peuple en moi. Et comme je ne cherche pas à expliquer mon cerveau, mon cœur, ou mes membres, je ne cherche pas à expliquer mon pays non plus. Un jour peut-être tu le sentiras » (*I.R.E.* 140)

However, despite the strong feelings between Terii and her, Laura has difficulties relating to the sequential markers of indigenous culture. When she is about to celebrate her second anniversary of her arrival on base and wants to invite Terii and his family to join her, she does not realize that this date symbolizes the tragic loss of traditional roots for Terii's and other indigenous families who lived in Maeva prior to the arrival of the French. In Anne Meistersheim's terms, supermodernity disseminates meaning and creates a maze-like reality of everyday life for the indigenous people that remains incomprehensible for Laura.

At the end of her mission, Laura explains the complicated dashboard to the *Général-Président* who flew in to attend the launch of the first missiles: "Laura est chargée de lui expliquer l'utilité des multiples pupitres et tableaux aux clignotements multicolores. Elle connaît à fond le dispositif. Des écrans de télévision indiquent les opérations du compte à rebours que le Général-Président enclenche d'un geste assuré" (*I.R.E.* 185). The testing center operates based on measured and precisely calculated gestures that are no longer comparable to the indigenous rites described in the beginning of the novel, when Tematua and his own children were born. When the center is ready to operate, Laura is no longer fascinated by the spectacular machinery at her finger tips whereas the parents of new-borns carry out the gestures with pride and exactness. They are overcome with fear and apprehension about the future of their children as they sense modernity slowly creeping into the most remote corners of the archipelago whereas the technicians need a screen display to evaluate the situation.

The dashboard of the nuclear testing center blinks and shines as if the technicians were to operate a play station console. The screen functions as a material object to project what Robin DeRosa has called a “screened reality” (4). The launch of the first missile initiates the beginning of the era of nuclear testing that transforms the motu into a screened world on base where digitized images play a bigger role than in ‘the real.’ This distorted relationship to reality bears some resemblances with Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulacrum/simulation. The similarities and differences can help us to rethink the literary construction of the ‘real’ on the Francophone island in postmodern terms.¹⁷⁰

3.1.2 Hyperreality: fantasies, dreams, and the aura of the postmodern world on the island

Within the context of the island, labyrinth-like spaces of illusion, compensation, and laboratory experience, unsettle the perception and boundaries of real space and time in the postmodern era.¹⁷¹ Jean Baudrillard considered the increasing number of narratives not as the onset of supermodernity but rather, as the era of the hyperreal where realities are simulated without there being any complementary referents or precedents in the real world. According to Baudrillard, in hyperreality, “the age of simulation [...] begins with a liquidation of all referents [...] It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself [...] which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes” (4).

¹⁷⁰ I will explicitly analyze the similarities between the concept of the simulacrum in literary representation of islands and visual forms of popular culture in the conclusion.

¹⁷¹ As Anthony Appiah indicates, postmodernity functions differently in the Western world than it does in former colonies.

While Baudrillard's concept of simulation is most commonly associated with virtual media images and digital technology, it can also be functional in a literary depiction of technology-enhanced environments such as the island in Chantal Spitz's novel. In the main building of the nuclear testing center, the technicians treat the images on the screen as more real than the real world. The indigenous people watching the launch from the outside observe the explosion of the rocket "dans une magnifique boule de feu, qui paraît plus lumineuse encore que le soleil lui-même" (*I.R.E.* 186). The mechanics of atomic colonialism can be identified as artificial constructions but they are more powerful than the most powerful natural elements of the Maohi world that used to evolve around indigenous traditions that were contingent on the natural cycles of nature rather than an artificially constructed electronic dashboard. Similarly, with the on-set of wealth and power for the happy few, the cleansing function of the ocean is replaced by the desire to own a "piscine bleu-bonheur" while the sacred function of land holding the afterbirth of new-borns are replaced by vast properties with "jardins régulièrement entretenus" (*I.R.E.* 191) to signify social status and class.

Robin de Rosa's explanation of the premise of Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation showed the crisis of meaning the following way: "The relationship of the simulation to reality shifts as the simulacra develops: at first, it reflects reality; next it hides it; then it hides that it is hiding it; and finally, it replaces it so completely that the original is impossible to decipher. What the simulacra yields then is a reality that appears more real than the real itself: a *hyperreal*" (ix-x). What makes the modernized Maohi world divert from the notion of the simulacra is that the process of

assimilation fully replaces referents to an indigenous past rather than providing a temporary, compelling reality that is not or hardly distinguishable from the original. In other words, Tahiti turns into an artificial landscape to satisfy a longing for Westernness. Henri Hiro strongly denounced these types of interactions with simulated environments and remake cultures.¹⁷² Using the example of housing, he urges for the reversal of what could be compared to the ‘Disney-fication’ of the island: “[Polynesians] are terrified because they see that the path we are on will only bring them more and more loss. That’s why they recognize that their only chance to prevent such as future is to return to their roots [...] They’ve already taken the first step by building and living in Polynesian-style homes” (74). In other words, Hiro advocates for a future that reverses the Westernization of the Maohi word by erasing what Walter Benjamin called the ‘aura’ of Western modernity.¹⁷³

In Jean-François Samlong’s novel, Paul partakes in the act of playing games with reality that can be interpreted as simulation in Baudrillard’s terms. While Robin de Rosa argued that simulated games can function as a mirror of reality (4), Paul’s underwater vision of the world represents a playful but controlled still life of reality. He is perfectly capable of distinguishing the boundaries between the game and the real (de Rosa 5) but has to make do with the constraints of time when holding his

¹⁷² Despite their rejection of Maohi traditions, the French technicians are housed in fake style type of Maohi houses.

¹⁷³ As the tragic end of Spitz’s novel indicates, Emily and Tematua are the only people to make this transition when they realize that their visions of housing style and decor collide. Tematua experiences the feeling of what Sigmund Freud calls the *unheimlich* when he looks at the Westernization of his house: « Il n’arrive pas à comprendre comment on peut manger, dormir et se baigner dans la même maison, avec tous les murs, ces rideaux aux portes et aux fenêtres qui empêchent la lumière et l’air de circuler librement, qui coupent les gens du monde, les enferment dans une espèce de jolie boîte vitrée, sans esprit et sans vie » (*I.R.E.*, 72-73). The couple manages to negotiate a fusion of their different worlds so that Tematua feels comfortable in their home.

breath under water to admire Virginia's naked body: « La respiration bloquée, on mettait la tête sous l'eau, puis on comptait un, deux, trois, pour savoir qui remonterait le premier à la surface. La plupart du temps, je frôlais l'asphyxie parce que je ne parvenais pas à détacher mes yeux du corps de Virginie vu **à travers une bulle** » (*I.S.V.* 63; emphasis added). This playful description of Virginia's nude body destabilizes Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's master narrative that advocates for the innocence and chastity of the two pastoral children. The male gaze upon Virginia's body is confined to the underwater world as Virginia will succumb in the tragic storm when refusing to take off her clothes, as described in the master plot., but it has an important impact on his perception of time and 'the real.'

When it comes to Virginia's body, Paul narrative introduces several other developments to relate his fantasies and desires. After asking the slave owner for the grace of his fugitive slave, Paul and Virginia are rescued by Domingue and his friends. When they get back home, Virginia's feet are bleeding. At this point in time, Samlong's narrative interferes to convert Paul into the savior of her injured feet. He collects plants to heal her feet and exclaims: « **Franchement, je n'en revenais pas d'être là devant Virginie**, avec cette chance inouïe de relever moi-même le bas de sa robe [...] Qu'on me laisse seul avec elle me dis-je, le jour, la nuit, à lui chuchoter que j'aurais aimé **qu'elle ait dix, vingt, cent jolis pieds à soigner**, je les soignerais à genoux, sans boire ni manger, comme s'il s'était agi des pieds d'un ange » (*I.S.V.* 36; emphasis added). Paul's care drifts towards a comical obsession with her feet to maximize his pleasure in healing a multi-legged Virginia.

Likewise, when surprising her during a bath, he is so fascinated by her body that he wonders if he is seeing a mirage:

Pour la première fois, je la voyais nue, les cheveux mouillés sur les épaules ; le cœur battant, je retenais mon souffle pour remplir mes yeux de ce corps qui me subjuguait [...] **il me semblait la voir danser avec la lumière**, sa main glissait sur son visage, son cou, ses seins. Geste gracieux, parfait. Elle faisait confiance aux cocotiers qui montaient la garde au pied du rocher, si bien que j'eus cette révélation : **je ne m'étais pas trompé de jour, d'heure, d'île** » (*I.S.V.* 57-58; emphasis added).

Paul's narrative strategically draws on critical moments when he is more attentive than the most attentive of all gentleman; however, during these moments, his perception of time becomes distorted, without him losing sight of 'the real.' In postmodern terms, Paul's narrative is focused on deforming the master narrative of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's island topos that excludes love, to a more natural version of a love story with a tragic end, in a tragic historical context.

Marie Ferranti's novel can be read as a particular form of the hyperreal in a masculine world. Contrary to Paul's *playing* with reality, Julius and Pierre's *game* has a clear mission which all participants pursue.¹⁷⁴ In Ferranti's novel, the island turns into a game board: Francesca compares the escape into the Agriates to a "jeu extraordinaire, qui n'avait aucun lien avec tout ce qu'elle avait vécu. Francesca vivait dans le rêve d'une nature sauvage où ils passeraient le reste de leur vie ; elle avait oublié le monde [...]" (*F.A* 123). She is thus participating in the game of escaping

¹⁷⁴ As pediatrician and psychologist Donald Winnicott pointed out, the French verb 'jouer' does not make this distinction between a *play* and a *game* which are two realms that Winnicott distinguishes because a play is a timeless imitation while a game is guided by rules, has a mission, and is oftentimes subject to time constraints. I will get back to this distinction between playing and participating in a game for an analysis of the island in reality television and digitized island communities in my conclusion.

from the police and she perceives it as an intense feeling. At the same time, she drifts of into a timeless imaginary world.

As far as Julius and Pierre are concerned, one of the foundational questions that drive the political activists is the idea of defending their political ideals, leaving clear signs, and overall, showing that one is able to be more Catholic (or Corsican) than the Pope. The narrator describes Pierre the following way: “Il était obsédé par la cause qu’il défendait, le reste lui importait peu. Parfois, il semblait dans de profondes rêveries : il se voyait à la tête d’une armée d’hommes purs et dévoués, vivant dans la clandestinité, n’en sortant que pour faire des coups de main audacieux, comme celui qu’il préparait avec Julius, continuant ainsi, jusqu’à la prise de pouvoir » (*F.A.* 79). While Julius turns towards politics for compensation, Pierre views the political realms as his only real world and he expects commitment as he himself proceeds to strategically prepare a list of names in his black notebook, underlining in red ink the names of those “condamnés à mort” (*F.A.* 79).

Nevertheless, the victim of the terrorist attack is said to have expressed no fear of threats because “cela faisait partie du jeu” (*F.A.* 105). He continues to host parties while his wife is scared: “On l’appréciait pour ses manières de grand seigneur. Il avait quelques amis dont il se vantait qu’ils étaient ‘sa garde rapprochée.’ Ils ne plaisent pas à sa femme.” (*F.A.* 106). While the victim’s wife refuses to partake in her husband’s dangerous games, Julius and Pierre continue to look for other signs of actions that have to be decoded; new clues have to be carefully disseminated. The men and Francesca briefly comment on the different methods of interpreting them:

--Il paraît qu’ils ont laissé des empreintes, comme s’ils se moquaient de prendre les précautions les plus élémentaires, dit Francesca.

--C'est peut-être le cas, en effet, dit Pierre, mais ces négligences sont peut-être volontaires...

--Qu'est-ce que tu racontes ? l'avait interrompu Julius. Cela n'a pas de sens !

--Bien sûr que si. Les traces laissées en évidence sont parfois un appât et peuvent servir une action d'une plus grande envergure...

[...]

-Je ne comprends rien à ces finesses, dit Francesca (*F.A.* 76-77).

Terrorist attacks are meticulously planned and timed but the narratives to interpret them vary whereas in the vendetta tradition of the colonial novel, the passage of time does not erase the past. The young and proper Miss Lydia hears about the violent vendetta tradition during the transfer from the mainland to the island because there is a folklore master narrative that relates the specificities of the events that lead to the hostilities between the opposing parties. As Mérimée and other colonial authors described, acts of retaliation can span over several decades and generations whereas Ferranti compresses acts of terrorism into a short period of time and events. In a way, these acts of terrorism function as the hyperreal of the vendetta.

In his article, Anthony Appiah used a contemporary African sculpture to explain the brutal encounter of postmodernism and the postcolonial. As the preceding analysis illustrates, the rewriting of the French colonial topos of the island can similarly articulate and challenge these notions. Ferranti, Samlong, and Spitz's texts reconcile the heterotopic nature of the island¹⁷⁵ by using variations of the maze and the hyperreal that do not play the same role in colonial literature. Postcolonial through their focalization on the perspective of the islander and their reference to colonialism and colonality, these contemporary authors become 'postmodern' in their strategic

¹⁷⁵ With the fourth principle of heterotopia, Foucault posits that "heterotopias are most often linked to slices of time [...] First of all, there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time [...] Opposite these heterotopias that are linked to the accumulation of time, there are those linked, on the contrary, to time in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect [...] they are rather absolutely temporal" (26).

attempt to deal with the crisis of time and meaning by subverting the meaning of ethnographic colonial descriptions of the primitivity of linear island time and space (rather than modernity).¹⁷⁶

While Samlong strategically adds actions that do not change but increase the depth of the overall plot structure of the colonial text, his modifications delegitimize Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's rationalization of the world by reducing it to a sarcastic parody. Chantal Spitz's blend of precolonial and postcolonial narrative techniques is what Appiah called a 'space-clearing gesture' (348) to illustrate an almost postmodern "retheorization of the proliferation of distinctions that reflects dynamics of cultural modernity" (346). Her depictions of the modernization of the motu aim at critiquing the colonizer as well as the converted indigenous people but her commitment to the indigenous Maohi community is exclusively anti-colonialist. Marie Ferranti does not delegitimize previous models of Corsican counter-culture but rather, reappropriates them for the contemporary era. The next section will examine how these new narratives of spatial and temporal relationships help recuperate the History of the island and in what sense the authors' approaches resemble or differ from the Glissantian remedy to the loss of History for the French Caribbean.

3.2 The Relation as a new pathway to History on the island

Discourses of postmodernity, postmodernism and postcolonialism share a contradicting vision on History. Postmodern discourses include the analysis of the crisis of time as Augé's study of the results of supermodernity and the potential

¹⁷⁶ Appiah defined postmodernism as "the project of some species of modernism, which is to say some relatively conscious, self-privileging project of a privileged modernity" (343).

influence on the disciplines of ethnography and history. The shifts that influence the perception of spatial and temporal distance lead Augé to deplore the implications of an ethnocentric approach to the study of the present (anthropology) and the past (history) of a society that is relatively proximal, in supermodern terms:

But we can also consider, as has often been done, the place occupied by historical consciousness—what I also call historicity—among the various peoples whom it has traditionally been given to social anthropology or ethnology to study. At the extreme—and this limit has itself been overstepped—we have those who have suggested that the degree of historical consciousness or historicity is low, even nonexistent, among these peoples, and that the **discipline of anthropology is condemned to disappear with its object once all societies have ‘entered history.’** In this view, the distinction between the disciplines comes down to that between their respective objects: one studies **history-charged societies**, that is, societies endowed with historical consciousness; the other, **history-less societies**, those without historical consciousness (*Contemporaneous Worlds* 3; emphasis added).

The postcolonial writings of Édouard Glissant particularly focus on the complex idea of historicity in the Caribbean Sea. In his 1981 *Discours Antillais*, Glissant decries the historical predicament of the Caribbean islands due to the preconceived notion of their lack of historicity: “the historical structuration of social subgroups that can traditionally be spotted has not been the intrinsic works of the Martinican community but the result of an imposed history they underwent (not only of domination but of non-history”¹⁷⁷ (147-148).

Reversing Augé’s notion of the non-place, Glissant finds the notion of a ‘history-less society’ to be quite problematic for a colonized society: “The West Indies are the site of a history that is made of ruptures with a beginning that is a brutal extraction, slave trade. Our historical consciousness was not able to ground reality

¹⁷⁷ « la structuration historique des sous-groupes sociaux traditionnellement repérables n’a pas été l’ouvrage ‘intrinsèque’ de la communauté martiniquaise, mais a résulté d’une histoire imposée, subie (non pas seulement d’une domination, mais d’une non-histoire) » (147-148).

progressively and continuously, if one could say it this way [...] but aggregated under the auspices of shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosion”¹⁷⁸ (223). To fill the institutionalized gap of European History that affects all French-speaking islands, the French Caribbean need to assemble all fragments of French Caribbean history because “History finishes wherever come together histories of peoples yesterday knowns as history-less’ (With a capital H.) History is a highly functional fantasy of the Western World, present precisely of the time when it was the only one to ‘write’ World history” [“L’Histoire finit là où se rejoignent les histoires des peuples hier réputés sans histoire’ (Avec un grand H.) L’Histoire est un fantôme fortement opératoire de l’Occident, contemporain précisément du temps où il était seul à ‘faire’ l’histoire du monde”] (227).¹⁷⁹ This idea is central to the mission of Francophone postcolonial studies in the 20th and 21st century.

As Christa Stevens points out, Édouard Glissant is one of the foundational key thinkers of Francophone postcolonial theory to engage with the issue of the non-history: “he considers it necessary to work on a vision of the world that he calls the *Tout-Monde* which accounts for the cultural interaction that are from now on functioning in all parts of the world [...] every identity expands through the relationship to the other”¹⁸⁰ (224). Glissant quite evidently dismisses the idea of the non-place which, to put it in Augé’s words, erases identity, relation, and history.

¹⁷⁸ « Les Antilles sont le lieu d’une histoire faite de ruptures et dont le commencement est un arrachement brutal, la Traite. Notre conscience historique ne pouvait pas ‘sédimer’, si on peut ainsi dire, de manière progressive et continue [...] mais s’agrégeait sous les auspices du choc, de la contraction, de la négation douloureuse et de l’explosion» (223).

¹⁷⁹ Glissant expresses a similar idea in *L’Intention poétique*, p. 215.

¹⁸⁰ « il estime nécessaire de travailler à une conception du monde, qu’il appelle le Tout-Monde, qui prend en compte l’interaction culturelle qui est désormais à l’œuvre partout dans le monde [...] toute identité s’étend dans un rapport à l’autre » (224).

Stevens suggests reading Glissant's concept of the Relation as a way to overcome the inability to control and manage the space and time of the formerly colonized island: "In his first essays, Glissant mentions the Caribbean as key-example of the Relation. In the societies that come about through the encounter and intermingling [brassage] of cultures, the Relation manifested itself in the process of crossing [métissage], of multiculturalism and of creolization that for already five centuries, turn the Caribbean basin into a laboratory of 'new world'"¹⁸¹ (224).

Stevens highlights the importance of Glissant's contributions to Francophone postcolonial theory in that he categorically rejects the idea of hybridity in the context of a multi-language, multi-culture society that is to embrace its Creoleness. To disseminate Creoleness, Glissant foregrounds diffraction as the "as much as an elementary figure of an Antillean poetics" ["figure de base même d'une poétique antillaise"] (Stevens 233). Diffraction is indeed an important notion in Glissant's construction and conceptualization of the space and time of the island that breaks with Foucault's heterotopic vision of spaces that are « in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (24). Stevens specifically mentions Glissant's "erupted conception of time that repairs the linear and hierarchical (Western) vision of History" ["conception éclatée du temps qui répare la vision linéaire et hiérarchisée (occidentale) de l'Histoire"] (233). Glissant's approach to time also manifests itself in his perception of spatial relationships, that is, "the archipelagic reference [that] proves

¹⁸¹ "Dans ses premiers essais, Glissant évoque les Caraïbes comme exemple-clé de la Relation. Dans ces sociétés nées de la rencontre et du brassage des cultures, la Relation s'est manifestée dans les processus du métissage, du multilinguisme et de la créolisation qui, depuis cinq siècles déjà, font du bassin caraïbe le laboratoire d'un 'nouveau monde'" (224).

the spatial and historical unity of the Caribbean basin [...] the idea of the archipelago and the dispersion takes precedence to the point of pursuing itself to the microcosmic level, to the images of the island and its nature”¹⁸² (232). His image of the diffracted ocean is only one of the extensively used references to illustrate this point: “The Ocean of the Antilles does not narrow, it diffracts [...] It does not impose the One, it radiates Diversity” [« La mer des Antilles ne resserre pas, elle diffracte [...] Elle n’impose pas l’Un, elle rayonne du Divers »] (*Discours* 427).

Jean-François Samlong seems to align himself with the Martiniquais notion of insularity and diversity when he describes the condition of his island in the Indian Ocean:

[...] the island space only exists because it takes roots in other, smaller and vaster spaces, close-by or far-away, of history, culture, traditions, languages, beliefs. The island is linked to an ensemble of countries that participates in the emergence of [the island’s] imaginary, and it continues to nourish this imaginary, to enrich it with new, unquestionable contributions. From this perspective, the island can be considered like a **réceptacle** (“written interview”, my emphasis).

[...l’espace insulaire n’existe que parce qu’il s’enracine dans d’autres espaces, plus petits ou plus vastes, proches ou lointains, de par l’histoire, la culture, les traditions, les langues, les croyances. L’île est liée à un ensemble de pays qui ont participé à l’émergence de son imaginaire, et qui continuent à nourrir cet imaginaire, à l’enrichir de nouveaux apports indiscutables. De ce point de vue, l’île peut être considérée comme une sorte de **réceptacle** (« written interview »; my emphasis).]

In philosophical terms, Samlong’s statement illustrates the similarities between the French Caribbean and the Indian Ocean which is to say that in both spaces, the island cannot exist in and by itself, contrary to Mediterranean islands such as Corsica. These islands are surrounded by what Glissant calls the “interior sea that centralises” [“mer

¹⁸² « la référence archipélique [qui] met l’unité spatiale et historique du bassin caraïbe en évidence [...] l’idée de l’archipel et de l’éparpillement prime à ce point qu’elle se poursuit jusqu’au niveau microcosmique, dans les images de l’île et de sa nature » (232).

intérieure qui concentre”] (*Poétique* 46-48). In that sense, for Glissant, Corsicans are locked in a non-evolving space and time of the island. Drawn to the continent, they perceive their insularity as a prison¹⁸³ similar to what Stevens described as Deleuze’s notion of insularity by contrasting continental and oceanic islands. Despite the particularities of Glissant’s vision of the Relation, Stevens particularly highlights the influence of Deleuze on the former’s conceptualization of the island:

The rhizome, nomadic mindset, minor literature, deterritorialization: these concepts of (Guattari) / Deleuze prove to be a precious reading tool as well as tool for political query that analyzes new literatures that **came about outside or on the margins of political centers and Western cultures** [...to] break the deadlock of the fossilized **binary query that focalized** on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the center and the periphery, and to move beyond the out-dated discourse of identity (223 ; my emphasis).

Le rhizome, la pensée nomade, la littérature mineure, la déterritorialisation: ces concepts (guattari-) deleuziens se sont révélés un précieux instrument de lecture ainsi que d’interrogation politique sur l’analyse des nouvelles littératures **nées dehors ou en marge des centres politiques et culturels occidentaux** [...pour] sortir de l’impasse où une interrogation **binaire centrée** sur les rapports entre le colonisateur et le colonisé, le centre et la périphérie, la tenait figée et de dépasser l’ancien discours identitaire (223 ; my emphasis).

This refers back to the idea of the island as a supermodern non-place.

Marie Ferranti’s novel, *La Fuite aux Agriates*, Francesca is constantly driven by a desire to leave the island but she does not take any action to set this plan in motion. At the same time, there are few references to the ocean and the only scene that actually takes place at the beach is the scene Francesca tries to forget for the sake of her sister, that is, the moment when she discovered that Julius was attracted to her and she succumbs to his seduction. Generally speaking, all characters seem profoundly alienated from each other and from the space and time of their island,

¹⁸³ « C’est seulement pour ceux qui sont amarrés au continent Europe que l’insularité constitue prison » (*Discours* 427).

which is a recurring theme in most of Ferranti's novels, including *La Cadillac des Montadori*.¹⁸⁴ In this type of void of the continental island, a Relation in Glissantian terms cannot be established.

However, for Samlong, the conceptualization of the space and time of the Indian Ocean island is more descriptive than prescriptive in that the image of the receptacle reflects several layers of diversity, as is the case for Réunion. Glissant's idea of the Relation is more prescriptive in that he attempts to move forward by promoting the recuperation of identity, relation, and history while at the same time, eradicating the idea of heterotopias within the space of archipelago.

Stevens does not make this particular connection between the archipelagic vision of French Caribbean insularity by opposing it to the Mediterranean islands, however, she skillfully demonstrates the influence of Deleuzian concepts on Glissant's thinking I quoted above. These notions are to some extent valid for and transferable to other islands of the French-speaking world. I therefore suggest using the concept of diffraction as a segue to further engage with the idea of the representation of time and its relation to memory and history through Deleuze's crystal of time which foregrounds diffraction as a key component. Although this particular vision of time was conceived to account for new narrative structures of commercial cinema after WWII, I posit that Deleuze's approach to the conceptualization of different temporalities in French New Cinema bears significant resemblances to the contemporary developments of the conventional *récit de voyage* [travel narrative]. While the island topos in travel literature was embedded in an

¹⁸⁴ In this novel, Sandro and Adriana are married but they do not know a lot about each other. Adriana is young and naïve and tends to put her foot in her mouth. Sandra tries to please her with small surprises but gets irritated easily.

action-based synchronous structure based on clichés, contemporary island texts avoid these type of action-images to engage with the idea of the passage of time in non-traditional ways that yield a poetics of time and space. This engagement goes beyond the narrative techniques deployed by Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White, and others to construct alternative narratives to the master narrative.¹⁸⁵

I argue that this shift towards the time-image can be read through the Deleuzian cinematic concepts of temporality that considers that “[h]istory is essentially longitudinally, memory essentially vertical. History essentially consists of passing along the event. Being inside the event, memory essentially and above all consists of not leaving it, staying in it, and going back through it from within » (297). Based on Bergson’s groundbreaking writings, Deleuze’s approach to memory as a vertical vision of time allows an accounting for what he calls a new narrative structure based on three implicated presents: “there is *a present of the future, a present of the present, and a present of the past*, all implicated in the event, rolled up in the event, and thus simultaneous and inexplicable [...] the three implicated presents are constantly revived, contradicted, obliterated, substituted, re-created, fork and return. This is a powerful time-image » (100-101). But how does this particular vision of temporality function for ethnohistorical texts of Francophone islands?

3.3 The time-image: temporality on the Francophone island

Gilles Deleuze’s cinematic concept of the time-image replaces the movement or action-image based on his new perception of time:

¹⁸⁵ For an analysis of these concepts, see chapter 2.

the form of what changes does not itself change, does not pass on. This is time, time itself, a 'little time in its pure state': a direct time-image, which gives what changes the unchanging form in which the change is produced [...] for everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change, it could itself change only in another time, indefinitely (17).

Deleuze insists on the importance of time as a contingent element of a plot structure that moves away from action as a predominant component: "time is no longer a measure of movement but movement is perceptive of time [...] The image had to free itself from sensory-motor links; it had to stop being action-image to become a pure optical, sound (and tactile) image" (22-23). The direct time-image becomes the foundational building block of what Deleuze calls the crystal of time, a model which helps illustrate the dynamic interplay of various elements in the operation of time. Deleuze concludes that "this is what happens when the image becomes time-image. The world has become memory, brain, superimposition of ages or lobes [...] The image no longer has space and movement as its primary characteristics but topology and time" (125).

The concept of the crystal of time illustrates the nature of the time-image that is composed of juxtaposed sheets of the past and peeks of the present. For Deleuze, the challenge in the conception of time consists in distributing different presents that are continuous and interconnected; in other words, the narrative needs to "show how spatially distant and chronologically separate regions were in touch with each other, at the bottom of a limitless time which made them contiguous: this is what depth of field is used for, the areas which are the furthest apart are in direct contact in the background" (114). This contiguity can also be applied to the visual analysis of the time-image which functions in the three literary representations of the island in that

they display a variation of the Bakhtinian version of the spatial representation of time. While the Bakhtinian chronotope purports a linear succession of time, Deleuze's time-image accounts for a reality that, according to Glissant, "includes a dimension of history (of unclear history) that realism alone does not render [...] Our quest of the temporal dimension will therefore not be neither harmonious nor linear"¹⁸⁶ (*Discours* 342-344).

Amy Herzog points to the utility of Deleuze's concept of the time-image in "demonstrating radical affectivity [...] and moreover, the political capacity of the time-image" (87) as it foregrounds the movement and temporality to break with what she calls the meaning at the level of signifiers for

moments of rupture, hesitation, irrational cutting, or prolonged duration. Movement that is aberrant (i.e. not rational or sensory-motor) can be seen, according to Deleuze, to be caused by time itself. Built through irrational movements and op/sonsigns, the time-image exists thus not as a chronology, but as a series of juxtaposed "presents." What is achieved is exceedingly rare: a direct image of time (84).

Based on Herzog's interpretation of the political capacity of the time-image, I suggest that the act of rewriting the French colonial topos of the island in the French-speaking world is related to the act of cinematic montage which Thomas Poell designates as the "creat[ion of] entrances not only in sheets of personal life [...] but also in historical or even archeological time [...] by bringing] together in one image persons, objects, and settings not only from the present and past of the character, but also from his fantasies, dreams, and fears" (19). To analyze the implications for narrative, I will

¹⁸⁶ « comporte une dimension d'histoire (d'histoire non évidente) dont le seul réalisme ne rend pas compte [...] Notre quête de la dimension temporelle ne sera donc ni harmonieuse ni linéaire » (*Discours* 342-344).

differentiate between the reconciliation/alignment of different times in one image and strategic misalignment of different times in one image.

3.3.1 Reconciling the past and the present in one image: tableau vivant and ekphrasis

Samlong's narrative is most explicit in constructing a time-driven plot through the coexistence of different time lines rather than a linear succession of moments. Paul establishes a relation with the image of the island he narrates by accessing different time lines that seemingly coexist in his narrative. The topography of the island is composed of an intersection of personal and historical experiences that are connected through a non-causal chain of events. These different experiences are superficially linked through Paul's reflections, flashbacks, and comments. Although focalized on Paul's desire and desperate attempt to please his beloved, the plot primarily features events that depict his passive involvement rather than active engagement in actions: he waits for Virginia to tell him to join her while she is taking her bath, or he accompanies her on the walk towards the property of the slave owner to ask Maloute to forgive the fugitive slave Lala (although he claims that he was planning on going back there to actually save her). Last but not least, the narrative unfolds as Paul crosses the island to follow a slave to the house of the moribund neighbor. The latter had asked to talk to him before his death and Paul simply tags along, despite the fact that he is not interested the least in the fate of his elderly neighbor and purposely delays his arrival by stopping at Virginia's grave.

Within the context of the new narrative structure of Deleuze's time-image, Poell also emphasizes the alternative role of the actor as a viewer rather than agent

which fittingly illustrates the configuration of a series of auto-portraits which Paul relates to depict several *tableaux vivants* or living pictures of himself (Baldick 331). The introduction of a “living person caught in static attitudes” (331) interrupts the time of the narrative as if Paul were to step outside the frame of action to describe his previous position as if he were an outside observer. Throughout the novel, Paul draws several parallels between the moments of his life and professional non-acting. For the scene of the shipwreck, he claims that having had to save Virginia was his most beautiful role that he was not able to rehearse for:

je ne suis pas au théâtre mais sur la scène de ma propre vie. Je joue un rôle écrit sur mesure pour moi par quelqu’un qui a pénétré mon âme. Qui savait que je n’aurais pas le temps de me mettre dans la peau de mon personnage, d’apprendre mon texte par cœur, de répéter une fois, deux fois, afin de corriger l’intonation et les gestes ; que je n’aurais pas le temps de panser mes blessures, de tergiverser, car la vie de Virginie serait entre mes mains. C’est le plus beau rôle que j’aie eu à jouer à ce jour (*I.S.V.* 110-111).

This literary variation of cinematographic frames implements theatrical aspects as if the action took place on a stage. The composition of these frames can be interpreted through the Deleuzian aesthetics of the action-image and the time-image that are deployed to *reframe* the narrative sequence of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s exotic pastoral by *rearranging* the depth of field of a variety of pivotal scenes. Thomas Poell explains the Deleuzian concept of the virtual-image by insisting on the combination of “constant streams of associations relating present to the past and future, combining memories with images of the present, but also with fantasies, dream-images, and premonitions. Mixing all these, we enter into a spiritual and temporal universe. This is not the case in the movement image, which only invokes temporality” (20).

These rearrangements become visible through a comparison of pivotal scenes between Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's narrative and that of Samlong. Paul's narrative makes visible one important location of the island that did not exist in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's island topography. As the new plot structure indicates, Paul is not the only center of the narrative because the adventures of Omar and Lala take up significant narrative space. Focusing on the events in Lala and Omar's cave has significant narrative implications as it turns the location where Paul and Virginia live into the backdrop of historical but also narrative events. Furthermore, due to the change of narrative perspective, Samlong particularly focuses on the re-positing of the narrator within the time and space of the island, particularly during the sacred moments of bathing with Virginia because Paul does not want to be removed from this *tableau vivant*.

Throughout the entire narrative, Paul is constantly preoccupied with the current whereabouts of the old man and former narrator of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's exotic pastoral. He comments on the narrator's approaching from a distance as if the latter were about to crash a party he is not invited to. It therefore seems as if Paul's narrative is composed of several *tableaux vivants* that depict scenes in which Paul and Virginia are in the foreground, and the narrator is in the background. This focus on the depth of field explains all attempts in delaying the arrival of the narrator, which is meaningful in that it allows for the scene to be restored to its original composition, that is, the version of the 18th century exotic pastoral.

Chantal Spitz's novel similarly uses the technique of the *tableau vivant* but in her novel, these living pictures are related through prose poems that amplify the

narrative rather than to rearrange it. Sylvie André compared this specificity of her works to theatrical technique that express a “sensation of shared, exchanged, given, received speech” [“sensation de la parole partagée, échangée, donnée, reçue”] (*Continuité* 56-57). Her novel constitutes a series of poems, announcements, and short passages of speeches or laws that align the past, the present, and the future. The narrator juxtaposes sheets of time or narrative moments to increase the depth of field of the prose narrative that reconcile the past and the present in one image.

Focusing on style, Sylvie André argued that the technique of blending French and Maohi syntax and terms turns the French text more into a translation rather than an adaptation (*Voix francophones* 27). I argue that the act of reading a French Polynesian text can become an illustration of the *tableau vivant* technique, as the following passage indicates: “**Angoissante négation brûlante condamnation lancinante révocation terrifiante marginalization intolérable excommunication.** Quelque chose de nouveau qui n’était arrivé à personne avant **eux qui** n’arrivera à personne après eux. Être étranger. Exilé parmi les siens » (*Hombo* 80 ; emphasis added). The amplification of the narrative moment through the actual time of reading synonymic structures or scarcely punctuated sentences is particularly different for the Western reader. André explains: In this discursive flow through which punctuation does not guide the reader, the correction of syntax is sometimes carried out wittingly and neologisms appear, all of which is conceived as a victory over the rigidity of written language”¹⁸⁷ (*Continuité* 69). In his last interview that was published a day after his death, Henri Hiro explained that the poetic language makes the speaker

¹⁸⁷ « Dans ce flux discursif au travers duquel la ponctuation ne guide pas le lecteur, la correction syntaxique est parfois malmenée à escient et surgit le néologisme, tout ceci conçu comme une victoire sur une langue écrite figée » (*Continuité* 69).

“enter a dimension that is not ordinary, that is not the dimension of everyday language” (74). This is true for all of her novels. In *Littératures du Pacifique: Voix francophones contemporaines*, Sylvie André provides an excellent detailed analysis of the rhythm and structure of *Hombo: transcription d'une biographie* that illustrates what I call here the technique of the *tableau vivant*.

Marie Ferranti's Corsican novels frequently describe vivid scenes but they are not related from the perspective of an observer. Therefore, the most fitting example to illustrate a variation of the *tableau vivant* technique is her fictional biography *La Princesse de Mantoue*. As the front cover of the novel indicates, the text is an ekphrastic¹⁸⁸ or verbal description of the frescos that Mantegna composed for the *Chambre des Epoux*. The novel elaborates the tedious process of working for Louis de Gonzague's residence during the Italian Renaissance:

Dans l'Italie du XV^e siècle, il était d'usage que les princes possédassent une salle peinte d'apparat, la *camera* [...] Dans la pièce d'apparat, toute la richesse était exposée sur les murs où de somptueuses tentures, des tapisseries aux couleurs éclatantes, suspendues à des tringles, couraient au-dessus des parois et des portes. Elles ne manquent pas dans la Chambre des Epoux, mais elles sont peintes : la Chambre des Epoux est celle des illusions (*P.M.* 71-72).

The novel illustrates the creative rearrangement of the depth of field for a set of frescos depicting pivotal moments of the life of the family, including the nomination of their son Francesco as cardinal and his return home: « Les scènes, comme on pourrait le croire, n'ont pas été saisies sur le vif, mais composées, voire corrigées sur l'ordre de Louis ou de Barbara » (*P.M.* 83). The narrative suggests that due to the physical ailments of several children, the artist aligned several moments of the past before the past and thus depicts those of the children who supposedly already were

¹⁸⁸ I am drawing on the notion of ekphrasis based on its use as descriptive discourse in the Antiquity, with the most famous being the fresco of Antilles weapons.

hunchbacked when the fresco was being done, in healthy condition. These scenes were thought to play an important role for the future of cardinal Francesco and his ambitions to become a Pope which never became a reality: “Ces peintures [...] le serviront mieux que des ambassadeurs zélés [...] Mais Francesco ne sera jamais pape. Il en restera dans la famille Gonzague une amertume et une sorte de défiance vis-à-vis de Rome” (*P.M.* 97).

The plot particularly engages with the process of establishing meaning and creating usage of an image that is central to the notion of the Deleuzian time-image, by imagining the circumstances under which the painter had to work to satisfy his master. To accomplish this goal, the plot is constructed through a linear narrative of life at court but it also incorporates fragments from fictional epistolary exchanges to develop plot and characters: “Tout cela est un jeu, du ‘roman’ dont les personnages ont été peints dans le milieu du XV^e siècle » (*P.M.* 135). The strategic arrangement of random epistolary fragments mirrors Mantegna’s mastery in the art of manipulating the image, despite the dimensions of the room that make his mission almost impossible:

Quand Mantegna découvre ce qui est destiné à être la chambre d’apparat, il est atterré par les dimensions de la pièce, les ouvertures mal placées, le peu de lumière qui y pénètre.

‘J’ai laissé entendre à Sa Seigneurie, Barbara de Gonzague, que la chambre d’apparat est mal placée.

‘He bien, m’a-t-elle rétorqué, faites-nous-le oublier ! (*P.M.* 85)

Mantegna’s frescos thus illustrate the virtue of the Deleuzian time-image in that it visually has different planes and moments converge within the space of the room. The observer standing in the center of the room sees different moments in time without being guided.

3.3.2 Misalignment of the present and the past: the real as trompe l'oeil

Although the technique of reconciling the past and the present in one image is familiar to Ferranti, ekphrastic descriptions in *La Fuite aux Agriates* pose a challenge to the characters. The plot is complemented by a series of photographs taken by Francesca that function differently than the fresco. These portraits show the incompatibility of components that make this type of fusion impossible and thus create somewhat of a deceptive vision or even illusion as the observer fails to identify the photographed object. Throughout the novel, several characters comment on photographs, some of which were taken by Francesca, who inherited the passion for images from her deceased father David: “Il était passionné par la trace des êtres et des choses. Dans la photographie, il aimait, disait-il, les signes de la présence décelée, l'allusion de l'ombre” (*F.A.* 53-54). A material object of the past, the photograph functions as a tool that represents particular moments of a past that will never be again although the visual referents continue to exist. But Francesca's mother Mathilde does not believe in the self-reflective nature of photographic images as for her,

[c]es photographies, qu'elle avait sous les yeux depuis des années, Mathilde songea soudain que les moments particuliers qu'elles retraçaient n'avaient eu aucune importance dans sa vie. C'est David qui en avait fait des événements mémorables, ce qu'ils n'étaient certes pas pour elle. Sans doute les regarderait-on après sa mort comme l'expression même de ce qu'elle avait été et de ce qu'elle était maintenant, alors qu'elle avait été toute différente : étrangère à ces poses, elle n'y avait participé que d'une manière détachée et c'était tout ce qui restait d'elle, de sa jeunesse, de sa vie de femme et de mère. David lui avait dit que c'était les images de leur bonheur (*F.A.* 22).

Unable to enter into the material sheets of the past that are aligned in front of her, she rejects the image's referential nature and finds herself in somewhat of a marginal position without any roots or points of reference. What distinguishes this

misalignment from the process of reconceptualization in *tableaux vivants* or *ekphrasis* is the absence of referentiality, in other words, the image refers to a time and space that never existed. She condemns Francesca's actions without even considering her daughter's motives, even prior to the latter's escape into the Agriates.

In addition, Francesca's access to the recent past is a difficult endeavor. During her period of convalescence, she slips in and out of consciousness. Clorinde fears for Francesca's life and dedicates herself entirely to taking care of Francesca's weak and almost lifeless body. Francesca feels Clorinde's holding her hand but her perception is distorted:

Tout était blanc: les murs, les stores, les draps, le lit. Francesca leva les yeux, vit la poche transparente de la perfusion qui s'écoulait lentement [...] La porte s'ouvrit. Francesca ne distinguait pas les visages qui se penchaient sur elle. Elle entendait des mots dont elle ne comprenait pas le sens [...] Des doigts se refermèrent sur sa main comme une conque. La paume sèche et calleuse serrait sa main, la tenait ferme. Francesca crut voir sa main devenir un grand coquillage strié dont les trous laissaient voir à l'intérieur la petite corne dure, qui s'ouvrait comme un éventail et se refermait sur les plus de la spirale, fixée dans un mouvement, nette, découpée (*F.A.* 27).

The narrative is built around the gradual reconstruction of events that seems to crystallize around the portrait of Francesca, Julius, and Joseph as contemporary Corsican *hommes et femmes fataux*. However, due to the different levels of involvement, these portraits become deceptive since every character is guilty of silence. As indicated, the conflict remains unresolved because of the failure of the crystal to align regions of the past and the present in a meaningful way.

Conclusion

The crisis of time and meaning brings about a diversity of narratives in which time and space is negotiated in postmodern terms. In his interview with Philippe

Artières, Edouard Glissant argues that poetics cannot be conceived “in a mechanical or theoretical manner” [« d’une manière mécanique ni théoricienne »] (« Solitaire » 78). Analyzing the colonial topos of the island through Augé’s concept of supermodernity and Baudrillard’s vision of ‘the real’ have led me to consider the two of the three dimensions that are essential to Glissant’s poetics, that is, time and space. Within the confined space of the island, Ferranti, Samlong, and Spitz deploy narrative techniques to strategically enlarge space-time relationships of islands. The specificities of the island imaginary become particularly obvious through the rapprochement with cinematographic concepts such as the Deleuzien time-image in which different times are reconciled and aligned in a *tableau vivant* or ekphrastic image or they are strategically misaligned in a *trompe l’oeil*.

In the face of the crisis of time and meaning, the imaginary of the island has found new ways of dealing with the violence of the colonial situation as well. Discourses on violence are particularly descriptive of geographical and ideological differences in the approach to rewriting the French colonial topos of the island in the contemporary French-speaking island novel as they introduce moments of ruptures that are central to postcolonial studies. In chapter 4, I will examine the representation of violence in the texts of Ferranti, Samlong, and Spitz through the perspective of what Carmen Husti-Laboye calls a postcolonial aesthetics (39-40) that “bear witness to a certain commitment of writing, the desire of the author to defend the values of a culture that used to be undervalued by domination, and to realize thereby a symbolic liberation of peoples and cultures” [“témoigne d’un certain engagement de l’écriture, du désir de l’écrivain de défendre les valeurs de la culture autrefois minorée par la

domination et de réaliser ainsi une libération symbolique des peuples et des cultures”]

(40).

Chapter 4: Discourses on violence from and violent discourses about the Francophone island

4.1 Mediterranean and French Caribbean Paroxysms: Similarities and disjunctions

4.1.1 The phenomenon of the colonized island

Scholars have already produced critical works to explain the effects of colonization on the contemporary imaginary of a limited number of Francophone islands, particularly the French Caribbean.¹⁸⁹ In this chapter, I will probe histories, contexts, and situations that derive from various forms of French colonization which Aimé Césaire and anticolonial authors of the French-speaking world have described as de-civilizing effects: “colonization *decivilizes* the colonizer, literally *numbs* him, degrades him, and awakens in him a hidden instinct for covetousness, violence, racial hatred, moral relativism [...]”¹⁹⁰ (*Discours colonialisme* 12). This analysis will focus on comparing and contrasting potentially recurring patterns of violence between the French Caribbean and the Mediterranean to prepare a discussion of other archipelagic areas in the South Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. I will be distinguishing between the narrative function of violence on the colonized island on the one hand, and violent discourses about the island on the other hand.

¹⁸⁹ Some of these works include but are not limited to Édouard Glissant’s *Discours Antillais* (1981), Jean Bernabé Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité* (1989), Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *La isla que se repite: el Caribe y la perspectiva postmoderna* [1989] which was published as *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, and Kathleen Gysells’s *Passes et impasses dans le comparatisme postcolonial caribéen: cinq traverses* (2010).

¹⁹⁰ « la colonisation travaille à *deciviliser* le colonisateur, à l’*abrutir* au sens propre du mot, à le dégrader, à le réveiller aux instincts enfouis, à la convoitise, à la violence, à la haine raciale, au relativisme moral [...] » (*Discours colonialisme* 12).

4.1.1.1 Geographic similarities: colonization, assimilation, alienation

In *Les Fruits du cyclone: une géopoétique de la Caraïbe* Guadeloupean author, poet, and critic Daniel Maximin provides a more contemporary explanation than Glissant for the different accounts of West Indian history and culture. He starts out by aligning himself with Glissant's notion of *drifting islands [la dérive]* that ideologically speaking exist in and by themselves: "Caribbean cultures are therefore characterized by the complete rejection of encirclement, aesthetic or ideological injunction other than the claim for freedom. Against the prisons of styles, languages, genres, manifestos of literature, plastic arts, or music. And victory of the gravity of resentments"¹⁹¹ (17).

Maximin situates the region's vigorous attempts to express its specificities and claims for autonomy within the historical context of political and economic inequalities that, paradoxically, allow a rapprochement to the aesthetics of French-speaking Corsican literature. However, apart from occasional references that predominantly come from French Caribbean authors and critics (and less frequently from other overseas islands throughout the Francophone world), little research has been done outside the Corsican university system and the Mediterranean Island Institute IDIM (*Institut du développement des îles méditerranéennes*)¹⁹² in Corte to

¹⁹¹ "Les cultures caribéennes se caractérisent ainsi par le refus total de tout encerclement, de toute injonction esthétique ou idéologique, autre que l'exigence de liberté. Contre les prisons des styles, des langues, des genres, des manifestes littéraires, plastiques ou musicaux. Et de la victoire sur la pesanteur des ressentiments" (17).

¹⁹² Located at the Université Pascal Paoli in Corte, the IDIM gave itself the mission to find common denominators between islands in the Mediterranean as more accurate indicator than continental comparisons to further the overall development of European islands in the Mediterranean. The former President of the institute explains that "L'originalité de l'IDIM tenait au fait qu'il se définissait par un champ de recherches—les îles de la méditerranée—plutôt que par une discipline." It brought together researchers and specialists and collaborated with other organizations, councils, and

further explore these commonalities and differences. Corsican scholars Anne Meistersheim and Jean-Louis Andreani indeed do insist on the specificities of the Corsican island community as opposed to the continent by insisting that Europe's most mountainous island bears significant commonalities with Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean islands.

Maximin's study also takes into consideration the history of French assimilation and places a specific emphasis on the antithetical nature of certainty and doubt as foundational building blocks of a new form of cultural expression:

one can easily measure the weakness of such as birth initiated during four centuries of oppression, locked into the narrow passageway of a geography of insularly isolation, with the temptation of alienation from sometimes one, sometimes other imposed European debris or lost Africa, and the creation of a culture based on the alternation between doubt and confidence, hope and dispise: *mystery from the seas* (215)!

[on peut mesurer sans peine la fragilité d'une telle genèse initiée en quatre siècles d'oppression, enfermée dans l'étroit passage d'une géographie d'isolement insulaire, avec la tentation de s'aliéner tantôt à l'un, tantôt à l'autre des débris d'Europe imposée ou d'Afrique perdue, et l'édification d'une culture bâtie sur l'alternance du doute et de la confiance, de l'espoir et du mépris: *énigme parmi les eaux* (215) !]

As this passage indicates, against all odds, the marginalized and oppressed islanders managed to overcome the cumulative effects of forced alienation from an incompatible present and their lost ties to the past. For Maximin, the experience of alienation and the somewhat belated determination to finally build a new culture from remaining fragments, are fundamental steps toward the constructive act of "*building self-esteem*" [*"se bâtir une dignité"*] (217-218).

commissions, and regularly published articles in the *Cahiers de l'IDIM*, starting in 1983, but eventually closed in 1989 (Meistersheim "Petite Histoire" 11-17).

4.1.1.2 The island as a transitional space: from debris to roots

Although uncertainty and disdain will remain inherent parts of this constructive experience, Maximin argues that they are effectively counter-balanced by a more positive, self-assertive attitude. This approach towards a newly reborn culture facilitates the transformation of the French Caribbean's status from mere transitional space [*lieu de passage*] into a solid space where to take roots [*terre d'enracinement*]:

paradoxically, the French Caribbean islands have the ambiguous status of being deserted islands that are too narrow to take roots, and of being treasure island that are receptacles of the most extreme forms of greed. As transitional islands, they were able to transform themselves into islands of refuge for those who did not have any hope of returning to their continent, that is, deported Africans, in a space of reception for the exiled, their resistance, and their revival. Those who did not expect anything, on the ground of the ship's hold, were able to take roots here and to find the energy to re-create. This is the difference between the African voyage and the European voyage [...] All African Robinsons became Fridays, while Daniel Defoe's Robinson did nothing but prepare his return that left him richer with everything he had taken and everything he had learned. The last one who was forced to come decides that he is at home (84-85).

[paradoxalement, les îles caraïbes ont eu un statut ambigu d'îles désertes trop étroites pour les enracinements, et d'îles aux trésors réceptacles des plus extrêmes cupidités. Îles de passage, elles ont pu se transformer en îles refuges d'abord pour ceux qui n'avaient aucun espoir de retour sur leur continent, c'est-à-dire les Africains déportés, en un espace d'accueil pour leur exil, leur résistance et leur renaissance. Ceux qui n'attendaient rien, au fond de la cale, ont pu s'y enraciner et y trouver les forces de la re-création. Là est la différence entre le voyage africain et le voyage européen [...] Tous les Robinsons africains sont devenus des Vendredis, tandis que le Robinson de Daniel Defoe ne préparait que son retour, qu'il effectuera plus riche de tout ce qu'il aura pris et appris. Le dernier arrivé de force décide qu'il est chez lui (84-85).]

Drawing on the *lieu commun* of Western literature,¹⁹³ Maximin strategically inverts the Anglo-Saxon narrative of the island adventure to account for the historico-political specificities of life for African slaves in the French Caribbean. Comparing the figures of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, Maximin highlights that for deported slaves, the return to the native African continent was neither planned nor carried out the same way Robinson Crusoe was able to accumulate economic and cultural capital during almost three decades before eventually returning home. While the British Robinson managed to overcome his condition by imposing his European superiority on the island and its inhabitants, African slaves, on the other hand, became aware of the paradoxical situation they had been forced to endure and decided to fight back by getting control over the land they had been cultivating, yet without gaining access to economic ownership.

This symbolic act of taking roots in a supposedly insignificant place has inspired numerous Caribbean-born writers, including Aimé Césaire whose 1939 *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* [*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*] specifically deals with the aesthetics and political dimensions of this type of rebirth in a space filled with negative connotations and experiences. Césaire's 1969 play, *Une Tempête* [*A Tempest*], furthermore appropriates the role-playing metaphors of Prospero and Caliban through a rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.¹⁹⁴ Both

¹⁹³ « [...] l'île lointaine a été longtemps pour l'Europe le lieu du spleen causé par l'idéal perdu ou rêvé, dès les escales insulaires du *Quart Livre* de Rabelais et l'île d'Utopia de Thomas Moore jusqu'aux nombreux voyages poétiques à Cythère, en passant par les scènes de théâtre du XVIII^e siècle, où le décor de l'île nue permettait le spectacle des dénonciations à distance autant que des utopies morales et des recommencements d'après naufrages, comme dans l'emblématique *Ile des esclaves* de Marivaux, à mille lieues marines de celle de Robinson et de celle de Virginie » (Maximin 82).

¹⁹⁴ I already examined the function of role playing metaphors in Jean-François Samlong's novel in chapter 2 and I will get back to this point for visual forms of popular culture in the conclusion.

texts are exemplary in their deployment of European surrealism and adaptation of key figures as means to their ends: “because of the origin, politics and culture do not primarily work like a creative expression of a collective identity but above all, like a deformed representation of this identity, with an attention given to the mirror of Europe and Whites”¹⁹⁵ (Maximin 144).

The act of taking root becomes a particularly relevant paradigm for Maximin to consider the reconfiguration of French Caribbean socio-political and cultural epistemologies. While dispersed fragments are commonly found in a *lieu de passage*, in a *terre d’enracinement*, these dispersed pieces of debris are salvaged to form new, somewhat more meaningful units: “Everything that has been lost, stolen, forgotten, rejected, has secretly been reincarnated into a *poetics of the relation*, the way Glissant defined it, between slaves and the island accomplice”¹⁹⁶ (81-82). Maximin underscores the creative use of seemingly rejected fragments: The Caribbean invents a human forme [...] on the grounds of the colored snippets it [...] grazes from nature and from humans. It’s a fiddler of nests [...] the building of our peoples with the *debris of synthesis*: gleaned fetuses, pieces of stolen string, trimming, recuperated leftovers”¹⁹⁷ (21-22).

Though gleaning of leftovers becomes an extremely creative alternative to assimilation and facilitates the negotiation of a long and difficult history of

¹⁹⁵ « à cause de l’origine, la politique et la culture ne fonctionnent pas d’abord comme une émanation créatrice d’une identité collective, mais surtout comme représentation déformée de cette identité, par l’attention portée au miroir de l’Europe et du Blanc » (Maximin 144).

¹⁹⁶ « Tout ce qui avait été perdu, volé, violé, oublié, renié, a pu se réincarner secrètement dans une *poétique de la relation*, comme la définit Glissant, entre l’homme esclave et l’île complice » (81-82).

¹⁹⁷ “la Caraïbe s’invente une forme humaine [...] à partir des bribes colorées qu’[elle] picore tant dans la nature que chez les humains. C’est un bricoleur de nid [...] il s’agit d’une] édification de nos peuples avec des *débris de synthèses* : fétus glanés, bouts de ficelle volés, rognures, restes récupérés” (21-22).

oppression and inequalities, it has led critics to draw different conclusions about how French Caribbean islanders manage their insularity.¹⁹⁸ These conditions are also present in the Mediterranean island of Corsica where the acts of doubting, transitioning, and assembling debris take on a particular function.

4.1.2 The Corsican exception: singularity, roots, and difference

Contrary to the sugar cane plantation economy system of the French Caribbean that heavily relied on the labor of imported slaves, Corsica was converted into a colony early on by the Romans and the Greeks for strategic purposes. The island saw numerous devastating battles that translate the desperate attempts of successive rulers to gain control, including the Italian rule and war of independence in the 18th century. Numerous local historians and critics including Janine Renucci indicate that these tensions regularly pitted outside powers against the inhabitants of Corsica: “With the rebellions of little people, shepherds and bandits, [Corsica] was soon monopolized by noteworthy people who took charge without ever being able to take control due to personal rivalries. Unable to control the sedition, Genova asked for foreign help”¹⁹⁹ (14). Janine Renucci underlines the island’s remarkable history of resistance as it has always refused to be submissive and “has crossed the centuries without losing its sense of self” [“a traversé les siècles sans perdre le sentiment d’elle-même”] (4).

¹⁹⁸ Quoting Boomert and Bright, Matthew Boyd Goldie argues that “insularity is a concept created and manipulated strategically by the islanders themselves” (11).

¹⁹⁹ « révolte de petites gens, bergers ou bandits au début, elle fut rapidement accaparée par les notables qui en prirent la tête, sans jamais pouvoir la dominer à cause de leur rivalités personnelles. Gênes, incapable de maîtriser la sédition, demanda l’aide étrangère » (14).

Janine Renucci argues that today's claims for a Corsican identity [*une identité corse*] and the right to be different [*le droit à la différence*] are deeply rooted in the problematic relationship between the island and the continent (4). The Corsican author, critic, and journalist Jean-Louis Andreani follows the same rationale when describing contemporary Corsica as an exploited French colony:

With regard to Corsica's situation at the end of the 20th century, the reference to the colonialism can seem anachronistic or irrelevant. But it is not tacked from nowhere on to reality of the island's past. During the entire Genova era, the island experienced a colonial situation, in the strict sense of the meaning: exploitation of natural resources for the exclusive benefit of the metropolitan center, discrimination and bullying regarding the native population. France herself continued until the 20th century to tax exportations of island productions that were coming to the continent, which is an unquestionable sign of an unequal relationship (161).

À propos de la Corse de la fin du XX^e siècle, la référence au fait colonial peut paraître anachronique ou hors de propos. Mais elle n'est pas plaquée de l'extérieur sur la réalité du passé insulaire. Pendant toute l'époque génoise, l'île a vécu une situation coloniale, au sens strict du terme : exploitation des ressources naturelles au profit exclusif de la métropole, discrimination et brimades à l'égard des autochtones. La France elle-même continuera jusqu'au début du XX^e siècle à taxer l'exportation de productions insulaires à destination du continent, signe incontestable d'une relation inégalitaire (161).

Andreani argues that these economic inequalities and political tensions are not uncommon for an insular space like Corsica that has traditionally functioned as “transitional space between several countries and two continents” (201)²⁰⁰ thus transforming the island into an “object of desire for all peoples competing for the Empire of the Sea” (55).²⁰¹ These descriptions clearly point to important parallels between the complexity of the geopolitical situation of the Mediterranean and the French Caribbean in their relationship to Metropolitan France. These parallels can

²⁰⁰ “passerelle entre plusieurs pays et deux continents [...] lieu de passage de multiples civilisations” (201).

²⁰¹ “objet de convoitise pour tous les peuples qui se sont disputé l'empire de la mer” (55).

provide new vantage points from which to consider the diversity and difference of the French-speaking world and to conclude islands which have been so far neglected by academic studies of Francophone literatures and cultures. While four different continents²⁰² build the basis of French Caribbean history and culture, the composition of Corsican culture reveals a blend of Mediterranean characteristics that Andreani defines as follows:

Being ‘Mediterranean’ can be defined as a set of common characteristics that are more or less persistent, and that the *mare nostrum* marked the civilizations with which live around it [...] ‘its geographic and climatic harshness is the reason for the fragmentation of peoples and the emphasis on their particularities. Unity therefore exists through the sea’ (31).

[La ‘méditerranéité’ peut-être définie comme l’ensemble des caractéristiques communes, plus ou moins rémanentes, que le *mare nostrum* a imposées aux civilisations qui le bordent [...] ‘sa rudesse géographique et climatique est cause de la fragmentation des peuples et de l’accentuation de leurs particularismes. C’est donc par la mer que l’unité existe’ (31).]

Going back to the metaphorical function of the ocean, the aquatic surroundings of the island impose unity through diffraction in the Caribbean, and through refraction in the Mediterranean, as Glissant indicates when he describes the Atlantic and the Mediterranean diffracted [*diffractée*] and narrowed [*reserrée*] respectively. Building on Maximin’s arguments, I argue though that these patterns of fragmentation are exacerbated through other political factors that will be discussed shortly.

Janine Renucci explains that “Corsica did not have a more tragic destiny than Minorca, Sardinia, or one of the big Greek islands but maybe this island was, more than many others, subject to the contradiction between a colonial situation and the

²⁰² « Il ne s’agit donc pas de faire le tri des trous de mémoire avec l’Afrique, avec l’Europe, avec l’Asie, en Amérique. Il s’agit encore moins de refuser l’un ou l’autre de ces héritages [...] Mais il s’agit au contraire de renier toute espèce de mutilation de ces nombreux héritages imposés ou choisis, et de les dépasser » (Maximin 16).

existence of a vigorous personality that resists total assimilation”²⁰³ (5). In the opening passage of her study, Renucci wonders if the uniqueness of the Corsicans can be compared to the case of Martinique:

‘... This is not a landscape, this is a **country**. This is not a population, this is a **people**...’ Can Aimé Césaire’s judgement about Martinique apply to Corsica? Probably yes if we stress the unusual character the habitants have given the land on which they live a long time ago [...] Corsica, like its Sardinian neighbor, has been an island of land-bound folks, of shepherds, and farmers that are **strangers to the sea**, despite the exception of the Cap Corse. [...A] rural society that is withdrawn, archaic, and upholds customs from a different era, associating vendetta and banditism, and a sens of honor and violence. This was the summary description through which the majority of the population was identifying Corsica and Corsicans for a long time (3; emphasis added).

[‘... Ce n’est pas un paysage, c’est un **pays**. Ce n’est pas une population, c’est un **peuple**...’ Ce jugement d’Aimé Césaire sur la Martinique peut-il s’appliquer à la Corse ? Sans doute, dans la mesure où il met l’accent sur les caractères singuliers que les habitants ont depuis longtemps donnés à la terre sur laquelle ils vivent [...] la Corse a-t-elle été comme sa voisine sarde, une île de terriens, de bergers et de paysans, **étrangère à la mer**, malgré l’exception du Cap Corse. [...une] société rurale repliée, archaïque, mœurs d’un autre âge associant vendetta et banditisme, sens de l’honneur et violence. Tel était le portrait sommaire à travers lequel le grand public a longtemps identifié la Corse et les Corses (3 ; emphasis added).]

With both of these island regions being subject to French invasion and colonization, the histories of their conquest, particularly the effects of the French colonial rule and forced assimilation, show similar patterns of violence that cannot be ignored.

4.2 *Violence in history, nature, and colonization*

4.2.1 Violent islands: a sociopolitical reality

In *Entre ciel et mer, l’île*, Jean-François Samlong states that “Every island is a paradise before it sees the conquering step of mankind”²⁰⁴ (19). Although based on

²⁰³ « La Corse n’eut pas un sort plus tragique que Minorque, La Sardaigne, ou l’une des grandes îles grecques, mais peut-être subit-elle, plus que beaucoup d’autres, la contradiction entre une situation coloniale et l’existence d’une personnalité vigoureuse, rétive à l’assimilation totale » (5).

the promotion of a prototype vision of a primal, untouched island, this statement is reflective of a new effort to move toward a discourse that shows the flipside of what Samlong has called exotic postcard images (“L’Envers”). The Réunionese concept of the primal island locates harmony in the pre-historic past of a completely uninhabited island and associates the process of colonization with violation and disruption of this natural harmony.

Tahitian author Chantal Spitz adapts the model of the primal island for French Polynesia. Her novel relates the disruption of peace and harmony of the indigenous community on her island by the very arrival of the European colonizers that brought crime to what they considered the ‘new world.’ Spitz rejoins Samlong’s critical vision of the excruciating challenges the island currently faces to solve problems of illiteracy and unemployment. In the French Caribbean and Indian Ocean, violence was not only a by-product of the arrival of the colonizers, it was institutionalized through the *Code Noir* that defined the conditions of slavery and legalized acts of atrocity to punish any kind of misconduct or deviant behavior of slaves and fugitive slaves. White colonizing forces brutally opposed deviant slaves which rarely led to peaceful conflict resolutions.²⁰⁵

The case of Corsica confirms that the island is and has always been a site of violent confrontations and even crime, from the early traces of human settlement in Corsica prior to the arrival of the Greek and Romans settlers. Andreani confirms that his island has found itself in the precarious situation of not being able to rid itself of

²⁰⁴ « Toute île est un paradis, avant qu’elle ne rencontre le pas conquérant de l’homme » (19).

²⁰⁵ Algerian-born author Mohammed Aïssiaoui’s historical essay, *L’Affaire de l’esclave Furcy* (2010), tells the exceptional story of a Réunionese slave who took his master to court to fight for his liberty. The trial lasted 27 years. The essay is based on historical archives that document the poor treatment of slaves during that period (“Histoires et destins d’Outremer”).

an unceasing vicious circle of violence because the island “continues to drag around its secular tradition of violence like a canonball. ‘In the island’s history, notes Nicolas Giudici, confrontation is a rule and freedom in an exception”²⁰⁶ (45). Corsican traditions have made the vendetta a common cultural practice of the past.

The recurring presence of violence in the context of the geographically confined space of the colonized island takes on a particular form when it becomes contextualized by Francophone island authors.²⁰⁷ In order to situate these representations, it is beneficial to understand that the ideological premise of colonialism as a civilizing mission finds its roots in geographical and pseudo-cultural specificities. These ideas go back to theories about the relationship between the exotic climate and the proneness of its inhabitants to angry outbursts and terror.

4.2.2 Climate, nature, and society

Prior to the climax of the French colonial expansion, numerous French writers and thinkers theorized about the impact of climatic differences on human conduct for several reasons, from the Middle Ages to the Romantic period and beyond. Matthew Boyd Goldie charts a path through the Western ways of thinking about islands in far-away places as antipodes. It was thought essential to try and communicate with these populations and to find a way to circumnavigate the world. Boyd Goldie shows that the Middle Ages “came to different conclusions about the antipodes based on other evidence about the equatorial zone and the southern region [...] If habitable regions

²⁰⁶ « n’en finit pas de traîner comme un boulet sa tradition séculaire de violence. ‘Dans l’histoire de l’île, note Nicolas Giudici, l’affrontement est la règle et la paix est l’exception »(45).

²⁰⁷ Valérie Orlando’s *Of Suffocated Hearts and Tortured Souls: Seeking Subjecthood through Madness in Francophone Women’s Writing of Africa and the Caribbean* (2003) studies the theme of madness.

lie in the temperate zones, then ‘all that is temperate for the human body ought to be habitable’” (19). Ideas about climate and temperament continued to be important during the Enlightenment period when different theories were advanced about the influence of nature and society in the Western World. In his 1754 *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* [*A Discourse upon the Origin and the Foundation of Inequality among Mankind*], Jean-Jacques Rousseau demonstrated the benefits of returning back to nature to save oneself from the corruptive forces of civilization. The Caribbean islanders became his model of the noble savage because “jusqu’ici [il] s’est écarté le moins de l’état de Nature, [ils] sont précisément les plus paisibles dans leurs amours, et les moins sujets à la jalousie, quoique vivant sous un Climat brulant qui semble toujours donner à ces passions une plus grande activité” (88). Rousseau concludes that the Caribbean islander would be amazed by the sad spectacle of “assemblages d’hommes artificiels et de passions factices qui [...] n’ont aucun vrai fondement dans la Nature [...] L’homme Sauvage et l’homme policé différent tellement par le fond du cœur et des inclinations, que ce qui fait le bonheur suprême de l’un, réduiroit l’autre au désespoir » (122).

To further prove the islanders’ superiority over the so-called civilized world, Rousseau situated the origin of language use and community life on islands:

De grandes inondations ou de tremblements de terre environnérent d’eaux ou de précipices des Cantons habités ; Des revolutions du Globe détachèrent et coupèrent en Iles des portions du Continent. On conçoit qu’entre des hommes ainsi rapprochés, et forcés de vivre ensemble, il dut se former un Idiome commun plutôt qu’entre ceux qui erroient librement dans les forêts de la Terre ferme. Ainsi il est très possible qu’après leurs premiers essais de Navigations, des Insulaires aient porté parmi nous l’usage de la parole ; et il est au moins très vraisemblable que la Société et des langues ont pris naissance dans les Iles, et s’y sont perfectionnées avant que d’être connües dans le Continent (98-99).

Rousseau's vision of community imperatives and progress on the island strongly contrasts with the myth of the primitive islander Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's exotic pastoral depicted in 1788. *Paul et Virginie* draws on Rousseau's thesis of the noble savage to portray the life of a small, secluded matriarchal society on a far-away island in the Indian Ocean that came into being with the arrival of two French women. One of them had left France with her husband "determined to come to this island to seek fortune" (41) while the other one had sought to "hide her misdeed in the colonies far from the country where she had lost the only dowry of a poor and honest girl, her good name" (42). Contrary to Rousseau's vision of the perfectibility of community life on the continent through the islander, the Creole life style of the matriarchal society is portrayed as simple but orderly. The myth of idyllic nature is destroyed with the tragic shipwreck that has the pure and chaste Virginia drown. Her dramatic death causes the matriarchal society around Paul to fall apart; even those parts of land and nature of the island that were carefully cultivated by Domingue and Paul, resort back to being a wild place.

In *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales [On Literature Considered in its Relationship to Social Institutions]* (1796), Germaine de Staël comments on the way both Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre depict the tropical landscape of Ile de France: « Un nouveau genre de poésie existe dans les ouvrages en prose de J.-J. Rousseau et de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre ; c'est l'observation de la nature dans ses rapports avec les sentiments qu'elle fait éprouver à l'homme » (358-359). Madame de Staël is particularly fascinated with the extreme

contrast between violent, unsettling storms and the abundance of nature on the tropical island:

La nature féconde de l'île de France, cette végétation active et multipliée que l'on retrouve sous la ligne, ces tempêtes effrayantes qui succèdent rapidement aux jours les plus calmes, s'unissent dans notre imagination avec le retour de Paul et Virginie revenant ensemble, portés par leur nègre fidèle, pleins de jeunesse, d'espérance et d'amour, et se livrant avec confiance à la vie, dont les orages allaient bientôt les anéantir (358-359).

She reiterates Rousseau's idea of communal life on the island by making it a model of perfect harmony which, over the course of many rewritings and adaptations, has shifted dramatically. Drawing on contemporary Indian Ocean adaptations, Valérie Madgelaine-Andrianjafitrimo's study goes as far as to posit the "death of the mythological possibility and of redeeming virtue of the island's nature" [« mort de la possibilité mythologique et de la vertu rédemptrice de la nature insulaire » (« Décalages » 488)].

Rousseau's notion of the intellectual superiority of the North is also central in Germaine de Staël's writings that similarly draw on the influence of moderate climate.²⁰⁸ Germaine de Staël further developed the idea of climatic influences on temperament and its relation to cultural productions to compare Italy, France, and the United Kingdom.²⁰⁹ In her novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* [*Corinne, or Italy*], the narrator

²⁰⁸ "[...] en général les Peuples du Nord sont plus industrieux que ceux du midi, parce qu'ils peuvent moins se passer de l'être, comme si la Nature voulait ainsi égaliser les choses, en donnant aux Esprits la fertilité qu'elle refuse à la Terre » (Rousseau 73-74).

²⁰⁹ Her novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807) opposes the sentimental character of Corinne and the cold character of the British Oswald in a romantic tête à tête that has them observe, discover, and challenge different ways of artistic expression. The Northern climate is described as rude like a wrong key in a concert:

Quand on contemple un beau site dans le nord, le climat qui se fait sentir trouble toujours un peu le plaisir qu'on pourrait goûter. C'est comme un son faux dans un concert, que ces petites sensations de froid et d'humidité qui détournent plus au moins votre attention de ce que vous voyez ; mais en approchant Naples, vous éprouvez un bien-être si parfait, une si

situates differences in the temper of a people within the context of nature and climate: « Tous les rapports de l'homme dans nos climats sont avec la société. La nature, dans les pays chauds, met en relation avec les objets extérieurs, et les sentiments s'y répandent doucement au dehors [...] ici [...] la surabondance des sensations inspire une rêveuse indolence dont on se rend à peine compte en l'éprouvant » (287-288).

Moving beyond the realm of cultural forms of expressions, these theories about nature and climate particularly appealed to those who sought to describe the complexity of encounters between two types of temperaments in colonial and postcolonial contexts. In *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1955), Aimé Césaire specifically mentions the geographer Pierre Gourou's work, *Les Pays tropicaux*, in which he finds a series of problematic assumptions that form the premise of French colonization:

[...] there has never been a grand tropical civilization, [and] there have only been grand civilizations in moderate climate, [and] in all tropical countries, the sprout of civilization comes and can only come from an extra-tropical outside location and [...] in tropical countries, what bears weight is, at the very least, a biological and racial curse, and as a result, one or more efficient geographical curses (39-40).

[[...] il n'y a jamais eu de grande civilisation tropicale, [et] il n'y a eu de civilisation grande que de climat tempéré, [et] dans tous pays tropical, le germe de la civilisation vient et ne peut venir que d'un ailleurs extra-tropical et [...] sur les pays tropicaux pèse, à défaut de la malédiction biologique des racistes, du moins, et avec les mêmes conséquences, une non moins efficace malédiction géographique (39-40).]

As the preceding passage indicates, Césaire decries the premise of colonial conquest based on the geography, climate, and social harmony which was also important for

grande amitié de la nature pour vous, que rien n'altère les sensations agréables qu'elle vous cause (287).

explains the narrator to highlight the pleasant climatic conditions of Italy that make sightseeing a true delight.

the expansion of the colonial Empire to far-away islands. In his conclusion, Césaire urges the European colonizing forces to reconsider their approach to colonisation in Africa, Oceania, Madagascar, and in the French Caribbean, otherwise Europe will lose its last *opportunity* and will be guilty of pulling the deadly sheet of darkness over its own head” [« l’Europe sera enlevée à elle-même son ultime *chance* et, de ses propres mains, aura tirée sur elle-même le drap des mortelles ténèbres »] (74).²¹⁰

4.2.3 History, climate, and nature: colonialism and the aesthetics of resistance

Colonial and postcolonial discourses tend to describe the brutality of multicultural encounters in oftentimes exotic contexts. Albert Camus shaped discourses of colonial violence in which they gave nature a key role to articulate the politics of colonial domination and brutality. He argued that physical and material violence are inherently related to colonization and had a very unique approach to dealing with the tropical nature in the colonial situation.

Camus’s *L’Étranger* [*The Stranger*] (1942) described the indifference of the main character, Meursault, who remains insensitive to the traumatic experiences in his own life as well as the lives of other people around him. He takes pleasure in the calm and serene moments of dawn and dusk but fails to relate to otherwise significant events such as his mother’s death, his relationship with Marie, and the way his neighbors resolve conflicts such as jealousy or solitude through violent means. The novel opens with the funeral of his deceased mother on a day that gets progressively hotter as the procession approaches the neighboring village:

²¹⁰ Césaire seems to be referring to the Indian Ocean when he talks about the « portes de l’Afrique du Sud »

Quand je suis sorti, le jour était plein de rougeurs. Et le vent qui passait au-dessus d'elles apportait ici une odeur de sel. C'était une belle journée qui se préparait. Il y avait longtemps que j'étais allé à la campagne et je sentais quel plaisir j'aurais pris à me promener s'il n'y avait pas eu maman. [...] Je respirais l'odeur de la terre fraîche et je n'avais plus aucun sommeil [...] (22).

The progression of narrative events seemingly naturally juxtaposes extreme climatic conditions and dangerous tensions that arise between characters, that is, Meursault's friend Raymond and the group of Arabs, which ultimately turn Meursault from being a passive bystander into a brutal murderer. His indifference and extremely poor judgment lead him to commit manslaughter he later justifies through the excessive heat of the sun. In the second part of the novel, he follows the natural cycles of the sky and the sounds of nature to keep track of time from the confines of his prison cell, where he finds comfort in looking at the blue color of the sky.

Numerous authors from French-speaking Africa have dealt with the topic of violence²¹¹ but in an attempt to focus on Francophone islands, I would like to draw particular attention to Daniel Maximin's study as it explicitly draws a connection between the history and nature of the Mediterranean and the French Caribbean. His recent essay sets out to explain recurring patterns of violence by combining the analogy between the rude temperaments of people living in hot countries on the one hand, and Camus's vision of violence on the other hand. While Camus finds comfort in the soothing nature in the beginning or at the end of hot days, Maximin posits that the tropical nature and climate of his archipelago is far away from providing calm and serenity to the distressed human observer:

²¹¹ For foundational anti-colonial essays, see Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950), Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisateur/du colonisé* (1957), and Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire masques blancs* (1952) or *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

We can make a very productive comparison with the *Southern thought* [*pensée de midi*] of the Mediterranean that we find this one sentence of Albert Camus that has long been engraved in my memory: ‘Misery does not hinder the belief that everything under the sun and in history is good; sun taught me that history is not good at all.’ This thought is very Mediterranean and comes from a space that is African, European, and also Oriental, with a powerful balance between the forces of nature in relationship to the temperate North and to the desert that serves as its border in the South, and that shares ties with the Caribbean, our American Mediterranean Sea. What is similar is that we are also a space where misery and sun attack. Nevertheless, Camus distinguished between two worlds that, according to him, were drastically different: violence is a part of history and nature counterbalances it as a sign of hope and craving for pleasure, exhaustion. But in the Caribbean, calamities are also natural (101).

[On pourrait ici faire une comparaison toujours très fertile avec la *pensée de midi* de la Méditerranée, que l’on retrouve dans cette phrase d’Albert Camus depuis très longtemps gravée dans ma mémoire : ‘La misère m’empêcha de croire que tout est bon sous le soleil et dans l’histoire ; le soleil m’apprit que l’histoire n’est pas du tout’²¹². Pensée très méditerranéenne, venue d’un lieu au monde à la fois africain, européen, oriental, avec un puissant équilibre entre les forces de la nature par rapport au Nord tempéré et au désert qui le circonscrit au sud, et qui partage bien les cousinages avec la Caraïbe, notre Méditerranée américaine. La ressemblance, c’est que nous sommes aussi un lieu entre misère et soleil à leur paroxysme. Cependant, Camus oppose deux mondes selon lui radicalement distincts : la violence est dans l’histoire, et la nature vient de la contrebalancer, elle est porteuse des espérances, des soifs de jouissance, d’épanouissement. Or, dans la Caraïbe, les cataclysmes sont aussi naturels (101).]

Maximin thus challenges Camus’s theory of the balance between a calm, tropical nature to soothe the violent history of Camus’ North Africa, to consider the cumulative effects of the destructive forces of nature and climate of the French Caribbean which are magnified by its violent history: “The islands fold up under the storms, drown under tidal waves, break through earthquakes, and are burned by volcanos. With a history that keeps imitating these four geographical

²¹² This last sentence should probably read: “le soleil m’apprit que l’histoire ne l’est pas du tout]” (my emphasis).

calamities”²¹³ (14). In other words, Maximin counters the stereotypes of the exotic island trope that were present in Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s representations of the far-away island. With Camus replacing climatic difference by the argument of colonial history, Maximin goes even further than Camus in that he himself challenges stereotypes associated with tropical climates as a natural occurrence.

While Corsica does not have a direct equivalent to the destructive forces of nature in the French Caribbean, the island finds itself in another extreme situation that is directly related to its geographical situation rather than its climatic influences or natural catastrophes. Janine Renucci is not the only researcher to explain the singular demographic distribution of Corsicans throughout its mountainous surface as “the mountain takes up most of the space. A true mountain, with sommets of Alpinist appearance, perpetually covered in snow, mountain pastures, dense conifer and leafy forests, numerous villages on top of steep mountain hills” [“la montagne occupe le plus de place. Une vraie montagne, avec des sommets d’allure alpine, une couverture nivale prolongée, des alpages, des forêts épaisses de conifères et de feuillus, et une multitude de villages campés sur les éperons au accrochés aux pentes”] (3). Jean-Louis Andreani emphasizes that the combination of mountainous seclusion and geographic insularity would have had a similar impact on “any population in the world, be it white, black, arduous, urba, rural, lazy, meditative, industrialized [...] any population would have created, or would create within a couple of generations,

²¹³ « Illes pliées sous les ouragans, noyées sous les raz-de-marée, fracturées par les séismes, grillées vives par leurs volcans. Avec une histoire qui s’est acharnée à imiter en tout point ces quatre cataclysmes de la géographie » (14).

behavior patterns that are in many ways identical with those that developed over the course of the centuries in Corsica”²¹⁴ (17-18).

Andreani furthermore states that different forms of violence have been ravaging the island, with one being related to an interior, internal system of particular honor codes, and the second being the violence of successive waves of invasion. The question then becomes how contemporary island discourses deal with these occurrences of violence in the colonial history and to appropriate them to what Maeve McCusker and Anthony Soares refer to as a “supposedly postcolonial context [where] islands offer perhaps the most potent, distressing, and anomalous images of the neocolonial project, and can thus be seen to exemplify the complex afterlives of empire” (xv). Madame de Staël already demonstrated that the literary and artistic productions of a country clearly reflect the temperament of the climate and nature they are produced in. As the novels of Marie Ferranti show, violence is a recurring theme in the context of the island in which terror becomes a common place.

4.2.4 Violence as a narrative event: From the Mediterranean to the French Caribbean and beyond

When considering the commonalities and disjunctions between the French Caribbean and Corsica, it is important to take into consideration the aesthetic function of violence in French-speaking texts of both regions. Glissant pointed to the epistemological limits of Occidental realism to account for the excessive dimensions

²¹⁴ « n’importe quelle population du monde, quelle fût blanche, noire, laborieuse, urbaine, rurale, paresseuse, contemplative, industrialisée [...] n’importe quelle population aurait fabriqué, ou fabriquerait, en quelques générations, des comportements en tous points identiques à ceux qu’au fil des siècles les Corses ont fabriqués »(17-18).

of French Caribbean discursive patterns “the **scream** the singularity of the world and of the human being” [“pour **crier** cet unique du monde et de l’être” (*Intention* 11; emphasis added)]. Glissant specifically defines this scream as a “contradictory [...] poetic established in an emergency situation: the scream that was experienced when coming to terms with the duration, the experience of durations in a scream that was rationalized”²¹⁵ (39) and explains its purpose to be as follows: “transform the scream into speech on the ocean front”²¹⁶ (44).

This transformation from scream to *parole* is further analyzed in the 1989 Creoleness manifesto, *Eloge de la Créolité [In Praise of Creoleness]*, where Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant underlined the self-defining and affirmative qualities of the French Caribbean *cri d’appel*. Maximin specifically insists on its organizational structure and rhythmical nature:

And everywhere music made its way through silence to liberate **the scream** [...] Not to **scream**, but to **create** [...] And this transformation from **scream to song**, from chains to dance, the artist, the slave of the law of reality, improvises an art whose new aesthetics are to depict a possible form of hope by showing to the community through the example of aesthetic commitment that follows the example of the fugitive slave, that the possibility of emergence between doubt and faith, brings about nocturnal creations at the sound of the drum (41-42; my emphasis).

[Et partout la musique a traversé le silence pour délivrer **le cri** [...] Non pour **crier**, mais pour **créer** [...] Et par **ce passage du cri au chant**, de la chaîne à la danse, l’artiste, l’esclave de la loi de réalité, improvise un art dont la nouveauté esthétique a pour fonction de donner forme possible à l’espoir, en manifestant à sa communauté par l’exemple de son engagement esthétique, à l’instar de l’esclave enfui en marronnage, la possibilité d’émergence, entre doute et croyance, des genèses nocturnes renaissantes au son du tambour-Ka (41-42 ; my emphasis).]

²¹⁵ « une poétique [...] contradictoire nouée dans une urgence: cri vécu dans la durée assumée, la durée vécue dans le cri raisonné » (39).

²¹⁶ « muer le cri en parole devant la mer » (44).

Although the theme of violence is heavily materialized in continental and insular representations of Corsica, it does not have the same poetic function as narrative event. When referring to the presence of violence, Andreani quotes Admiral Antoine Sanguinette to explain that “the violence of the nationalists is simply materializes the despair of a small group that does not want to extinct.’ This type of anxiety brings about violence and is always present. We must not forget about that”²¹⁷ (308). In that sense, Marie Ferranti becomes one of many important *paroles* of the despair and violence of her island that might be rather rare; however, her voice is a significant contribution to my research on Francophone island literatures. As far as literary productions of Réunion are concerned, Jean-François Samlong warns that a scream alone does not suffice because “we have to move from screaming to writing” [« il faut passer du cri à l’écrit »] (« Histoire »). While this approach reiterates the notion of the French Caribbean scream in the Creolistes’ and Maximin’s terms, it needs to be understood within the contemporary context of Réunionese literary production that has stagnated over the last decade. The nuance between screaming and writing can also be found in the opening of Césaire’s *Peau noire masques blancs* [*Black Skin White Masks*]:

The explosion will not take place today. It is too early... or too late.
 [...] I think that it would be good for certain things to be said.
 I will **talk** about these thing, but not **scream** about them. Because the scream has left me for a long time now. (*Peau* 5; my emphasis).

L’explosion n’aura pas lieu aujourd’hui. Il est trop tôt... ou trop tard.
 [...] je pense qu’il serait bon que certaines choses soient dites.

²¹⁷ « la violence nationaliste n’[est] ‘que la matérialisation du désespoir d’un petit peuple qui ne veut pas mourir’. Cette angoisse-là, porteuse de violence, n’est jamais très loin. Il ne faut pas l’oublier » (308).

Ces choses, je vais les **dire**, non les **crier**. Car depuis longtemps, le cri est sorti de ma vie (*Peau 5* ; my emphasis).

The remaining discussion will place methods of conceptualizing violence on the island into the sociopolitical and institutional context of the 20th and 21st century by analyzing the ontological priority of violence as what Jean-Marc Moura calls a culture of aesthetics of resistance (56-58). I want to follow his lead in considering the construction of an independent “*champ littéraire à créer*” that posits “a difficult negotiation between the space and the non-space, a parasite-like localization that is based on the very impossibility of stabilizing itself” [« une difficile négociation entre le lieu et le non-lieu, une localisation parasitaire qui vit de l'impossibilité même de se stabiliser »] (58). Are the representations of violence in the writing of Chantal Spitz, Marie Ferranti, and Chantal Spitz compatible and if not, in which ways do they mutually challenge and even contradict each other? At the same time, I want to challenge the idea that violence is purely a reaction to the history of colonization by pointing to recurring characteristics of violence as a postcolonial, post-colonial, and postmodern condition.

4.3 Narrating violence as an ontological priority

The plot of each of the three novels is heavily driven by depictions of emotional hardship and physical violence that decondition the body, heart, and soul of the islanders as well as the island. Each novel features a semi-romantic relationship with a tragic end that is directly related to the space, community, and identity of the island (McCusker and Soares xvii). Analyzing the use and function of violence in each text points to important similarities and disjunctions as discourses about and

from the island “take on a particular charge when read in a postcolonial context” (xi).

In the introduction to their excellent collection of studies on postcolonial insularity across the globe, McCusker and Soares argue that

claims to stability and homogeneity point to the desire to ‘island’ the self and the other, placing an ideological sea between both parties that prevents the less privileged from gaining access to the space of the privileged [...]; others [...] analyse the (post)colonial tension that arises in cases where the ‘islanding’ of an identity is a reaction to attempts to impose what are regarded as ‘external’ social, economic or cultural features (xvii).

This section will differentiate between patterns of violence that characters display in their search for identity and in their relationship with others on the one hand, and the structure of violent discourses about the island, on the other hand. The novels of Spitz, Ferranti, and Samlong fit both categories in that they show three types of manifestations: destruction and resistance in Tahiti, vengeance in Corsica, and rebellion in Reunion.

4.3.1 From the placenta to the nuclear missile: destruction and resistance in Tahiti

Spitz’s novel shows how European conquest, colonization, and subsequent assimilation first disrupt and then turn upside down the order and logic of the indigenous world in Tahiti. The contact between the two civilizations brings about radical, irreversible changes in the landscape of the material, mental, and imaginary boundaries of the Maohi world.²¹⁸ The metamorphosis of the calm and peaceful island into a haven of progress and technology where “la rêverie poétique n’a pas de

²¹⁸ By comparison, Maohi culture and traditions have very little impact on the imaginary of the colonizer who is initially attracted to the beautiful Tahitian women but then feels the desperate need to “se protéger de cette nature *ma’ohi*, si étrange et excessive pour leur monde usé, [qu’]ils firent appel à leurs *tahu’a*, afin d’exorciser le mal et le péché” (*I.R.E.* 23).

place” (*I.R.E.* 124) is enthusiastically hailed by the French technicians while the indigenous people resent the “la violence de la passion farouche qui [les] attache à ce monde né de l’amour de Ta’aroa Te Tumu” (*I.R.E.* 40). These dramatic transformations drive a wedge between the Maohi and the referents of their spiritual world and trigger a move from cultural literacy to cultural amnesia, rejection, and self-destruction. The various stages of transition are related through a discourse that amplifies the devastating effects of cultural contact on the Maohi land and soul through a particular set of violent imagery that is specific to French Polynesia.

4.3.1.1 Conquering an island, destroying an imaginary

The narrator primarily draws on the semantic field of “destruction” to deploy a series of poeticized images that show the traces and impact of violence. The use of descriptive and narrative elements denotes the effects of violence, demolition, and devastation. One of the recurring words in this semantic field is “déchirer” and “déchirure,” which appears several times throughout the novel to illustrate how the Maohi sensibility initially perceives of the dramatic changes that are taking place in their sacred world. Losing sacred land is the equivalent to being an orphan. Early on, the Maohi God describes the immediate consequences of the arrival of the colonizer on the imaginary of the indigenous as “une fêlure souterraine s’ouvrit” (*I.R.E.* 26 and 72). The image of the underground fissure becomes an important recurring metaphor for the increasing gap that splits a formerly harmonious world in half. Contrary to the French Caribbean approach to the underground terrain as “an alternative to the surface, and superficial, spaces of historical and cultural amnesia” (McCusker and Soares xix), the post-conquest French Polynesian image of the underground refers to

an infertile desert-like terrain from which indigenous cultural roots become extinct. In the imaginary of the Tahitian, the maternal metaphor is very explicit, as the recurring references to wounds, sterility, and the symbolic burial of afterbirth indicate. This turns the surface into a productive place for the colonizer. Spitz takes this metaphor a step further by showing how, with the beginning of nuclear testing in Tahiti, this underground fissure becomes a dangerous, powerful gush from which the “intelligence [des Français] fera surgir du ventre du *motu* les missiles” (*I.R.E.* 135).

Conquest and colonization bring various forms of destructions to the indigenous people’s world. Before joining her future husband in Maeva, Emere sadly describes the early beginnings of a new type of imaginary that develops in the city. She bemoans that “dans cette société féroce [...] il faut vivre conformément aux règles, et non aux sentiments” (*I.R.E.* 60) and decides to live in Terii’s village where they build roots multicultural and raise their children. One generation later, modernity sweeps into their secluded village like a non-stoppable “torrent dévastateur” (*I.R.E.* 189) that engulfs material and spiritual possessions of the ancient Maohi world. When hearing the news, they immediately sense that this event will seal their destiny once and for all, with “chaque mot, coup de poignard dans la chair. Flot de douleur dans les veines. Nuit qui recouvre la lumière du soleil quand la mort glace l’âme » (*I.R.E.* 97). The harmful impact of harmful words is depicted through sharp objects such as chards and knives that attack their sensitive bodies and souls. Finally, nuclear missiles are perceived of in the Maohi imaginary as “porteurs de Mort sur [la] Terre d’Amour” (*I.R.E.* 110) that eventually turn their home into an island of shattered dreams:

La déchirure de notre peuple orphelin
Exilé sur notre Terre d’éternité

Ensemencée des rêves d'or de nos pères
Nous a rendus étrangers à nous-mêmes (*I.R.E.* 197)

This short stanza of a prose poem renders a feeling of complete alienation from the 'golden dreams' of the ancestors.

The construction of the nuclear testing center represents the ultimate act of violence because the indigenous have to relocate. Although French atomic colonization is responsible for the destruction of indigenous culture and traditions, the novel rarely deploys descriptions of physical violence to evoke the tragic consequences of atomic colonization on Tahiti. Spitz amplifies descriptions of the emotional state of being and superimposes poetic descriptions in prose and verse.

The only references to physical hardship are used within the context of acclimatizing the bodies of the French technicians to change on the nuclear base. Upon their arrival, they experience difficulties adapting to the wind and are constantly being pestered by mosquitos. While the first contact between Laura and Terii is initiated through her bleeding knee due to a minor accident which caused her to fall off her bike, their unusual contact eventually becomes natural and their interactions are guided by their feelings for each other. The very same stages of destruction that are at works during the process of desacralization of the Maohi land and imaginary, also govern the romantic relationships between characters of multicultural backgrounds that span across three generations. With the exception of Terii's parents Tematua and Emere who overcome cross-cultural boundaries, the suffering of these couples is related to issues inherited from the colonial past and globalization Spitz clearly associates with "l'alcool, la violence, la drogue et la délinquance [... un] peuple *ma'ohi* qui se prolétarise et s'analphabétise et une

minorité de privilégiés qui s'enrichit" (*I.R.E.* 191). The plot of the novel is structured through a rhythm of violence that is rendered through different events. Spitz's aesthetics of violence eventually culminates with a realization of primary importance that translates a form of alienation that is specific to the situation of the colonized island.

4.3.1.2 Self-destruction and alienation

The accumulating effects of modernity lead to a progressive disfiguration, fragmentation, destruction, and subsequent disappearance of the sacred Maohi world that is already described in Victor Segalen's *Les Immémoriaux*. While Segalen's Terii completely converts to Christian values without regrets, Spitz's Terii sadly tells Laura: "Je suis né sur une terre qui n'existe plus que dans nos cœurs, rayée du monde par l'orgueil démesuré d'un homme. J'y ai grandi » (*I.R.E.* 138). Likewise, Spitz's narrator describes a progressive move towards the desacralisation of Maohi land that does not physically disappear but that metamorphoses into a space that houses technology and military secrets of the modern world rather than roots of the indigenous people: "Quand les travaux seront achevés, cinq années plus tard, seule une épaisse haie de 'aito, plantée par ces mêmes soldats, cachant un honteux mur de béton, courra, le long du *motu* [...] pour garder les dérisoires secrets militaires de l'Etat » (*I.R.E.* 117-118).

One of the narrative poems reiterates the idea of desacralization when Emere goes as far as to denounce those who betray their origins for the prospect of material benefits, "rendant déments ses habitants [...] dans un monde où profit et corruption sont maîtres des esprits » (*I.R.E.* 189). She blatantly calls this type of behavior an act

of voluntary prostitution: « Aujourd’hui nous te vendons/ Te sacrifiant au Dieu Argent/ Maeva éternelle,/ Aujourd’hui nous te perdons / Te prostituant à l’étranger” (*I.R.E.* 99). While this type of unethical behavior with regard to their sacred land is perceived as prostitution, the professional activity of French technician Laura is also referred to as ‘rape’ which makes Laura « un de ces étrangers qui violent [la] Terre [de Terii] » (*I.R.E.* 135).

The personification of land takes on a particular role in the writing of this island that reappropriates the sexual metaphor commonly deployed in postcolonial texts of the French-speaking world, including Victor Segalen’s pre-postcolonial ethnographic novel. Rape is usually viewed as a typical act of violence against the female body in a rigidly structured patriarchal society in which women are marginalized, exploited, and abused. The deployment of the sexual metaphor within the context of the society of the indigenous people puts additional emphasis on the dramatic changes in the imaginary of greedy indigenous individuals who betray their origins for financial profit or power. This situation is described through the inversion of the colonial gaze. In the beginning, the male colonizer gazes upon the Tahitian women whereas the colonial project redirects the gaze of the converted Maohi towards symbols of power. This metamorphosis perfectly corresponds with Segalen’s descriptions of the transformations in Terii’s community when Terii ends up selling his own daughter to the French sailors to obtain a box of nails. This inversion destroys the strong spiritual ties that link Spitz’s characters to what the colonizers

view as nothing but a “placement immobilier” (*I.R.E.* 111-112)²¹⁹ and leads them, like Segalen’s characters, to woe a new God: “Les *Ma’ohi ho’a’ai’a* sacrifièrent nos dieux pour en courtiser un nouveau, assoiffés d’un injuste pouvoir, s’alliant aux étrangers pour l’obtenir” (*I.R.E.* 26).

Spitz pushes this process of alienation even further in the epilogue where the narrator puts an interesting spin on the issue of racial differences by outing the ‘frenchified’ Tahitians as a new species. Spitz’s plot describes the dangerous appearance of something like a new race among the indigenous that eagerly assimilates to Western standards: “C’est le Demi à peau claire ou le *Ma’ohi* à peau foncée, tous deux, tripes blanches et langue bleu-blanc-rouge. Il n’est pire ennemi que l’ennemi de l’intérieur » (*I.R.E.* 200). This powerful series of synecdoches uses both body parts and the colors of the French flag to describe behavioral changes in the discursive patterns of the indigenous people. This figure of speech functions as the localized variation of the Fanonian white mask metaphor. The whitening of the guts and the tri-coloring of the tongue brings about a symbolical amputation that prevents the converted Maohi from finding “les paroles au fond de ses entrailles” (*I.R.E.* 70) to talk about “la couleur du monde, la beauté de la vie, l’amour de leur Terre” (*I.R.E.* 47). This process of alienation culminates in racist behavior against and betrayal of their indigenous origin:

Le Demi parle la langue de la mère patrie, il a le savoir, l’école est faite pour lui, pour qu’il réussisse. Mais plus encore, le Demi a une mentalité particulière. Habitué dès la prime enfance à se considérer comme supérieur à tout ce qui n’est pas de sa race, il est affligé d’un orgueil à toute épreuve et d’un profond mépris pour ceux qu’il nomme péjorativement ‘*Kaina*’, *Ma’ohi*

²¹⁹ The Maohi imaginary, however, ignores the economic and material value because of the symbolic ties that connect them to their land when their parents bury the placenta of a newborn into the ground.

qui n'ont pas su se débrouiller pour blanchir, sous-produit d'un monde qu'il domine (*I.R.E.* 192).

This disconnect is a typical characteristics of the neo-and post-colonial society that Chantal Spitz severely critiques. This transition from the feminist to the Fanonian metaphor expresses a specific treatment of cultural and racial alienation in the writing of Spitz.

4.3.1.3 Resistance, re-activation, and reconfiguration

Sylvie André has suggested that these issues have led Spitz to construct her character Tetiare according to her idea of what it means to be a writer in French Polynesia:

Tu devrais écrire pour évacuer le bouillonnement qui est en toi. Si tu veux que nous connaissions notre histoire, fais un livre que nous lirons. Tout ce que nous lisons a été écrit par des étrangers. On en arrive presque à croire qu'on est vraiment comme ils nous décrivent, alors que tu sais bien qu'ils n'ont rien compris. Un véritable lavage de cerveau. Il est temps d'écrire notre histoire vue par nous-mêmes » (*I.R.E.* 161)

Spitz is driven by a similar urge to French Caribbean writers as she seeks to materialize untold stories and advocates for an active recovery of pre-historic roots as practiced by Terii. Resistance in French Polynesia thus differs from the French Caribbean attempt to recreate culture with what Maximin describes as despicable fragments from a painful past in the attempt to be reborn. For Tahiti, this process of renewal is promoted as re-activation of a lost past and reconfiguration of fragments. Spitz refrains from the use of explicit violent imagery which sets her writing apart from other island authors of the French-speaking world whose commitment to harmony and violence create different visions of islandedness. By contrast, Haitian

René Depestre's 1988 novel, *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*, conjures up a preposterous display of outrageous, unsettling voodoo practices to celebrate a Creole culture that takes its roots in African traditions and strategically desacralizes referents of French culture. While Depestre drifts towards mockery and satire of the French, Spitz clearly drifts towards contestation. As Didier Lenglaire observes, "with the exception of Chantal Spitz, all authors [...] whether they are Polynesian or New Caledonian, share the ideal of the construction of a country that is reconciled with the cultural diversity" ["à l'exception de Chantal Spitz, tous les auteurs [...] qu'ils soient polynésiens ou calédoniens, partagent cet idéal de construction d'un pays réconcilié avec sa diversité culturelle"] (14). Rather, Spitz insists on the feeling of shame that is associated with indigenous traditions in a modernized world. She thus argues for the necessity of the battle against acculturation which puts the indigenous writer in somewhat of a situation Roland Barthes described as writing degree zero (*le degré zéro de l'écriture*): "writing is an ambiguous reality: on the one hand, it questionably arises from a confrontation of the writer with the society of his time; on the other hand, from this social finality, it refers the writer back, by a sort of tragical reversal, to the sources, that is to say, the instruments of creation [...] language is never innocent" (16).

In her novels, Spitz creates a new discourse against colonial and neocolonial violence. Her discourse provides a similarly dull view of the postcolonial reality of French Polynesia than Mauritian author Ananda Devi who, according to Ritu Tyagi, writes against the Lemurian myth.²²⁰ Contrary to the Lemurian genealogy of the lost

²²⁰ "Mauritius is the principal focus of the literary projects of Devi's predecessors, who constructed a number of myths based on the foundational myth of Lemuria [...] Lemuria is the name of a

Indian Ocean continent that draws on the mythical destruction and disappearance of a harmonious point of origin, Spitz's highly poeticized narrative provides a holistic but sad view of the attachment to traditions of the indigenous people by a small group of activists, including Terii. But these ancient traditions continue to disappear like Lemuria which functions, according to McCusker and Soares, as "powerful counter-narrative to [the] lived history of multiple colonial and postcolonial settlement[s] [...]. Instead of a painful past marked by slavery and racial prejudice, the Lemurian myth made those living there the prestigious ancestors of all peoples" (xx). This opposition between the loss and recovery of foundational myth on the one hand, and complexity of contemporary cultures of the island on the other hand, are an important complement to the catalogue of issues postcolonial studies typically deals with. Spitz categorically rejects the contradictory notion of emergence²²¹ and the French Caribbean notion of the *tout-monde* is not compatible with Spitz's vision of the Maohi world.

Hybridity becomes a conscious and selective process rather than a random endeavor. By contrast, Hargreaves and Forsdick quote Françoise Lionnet who described the *tout-monde* as the act of "becoming transnational" (2) or the attempt to embrace a "rhizomatic hybridity and mobility over rooted national identities" (3). Coined by Edouard Glissant, the Francophone notion of *tout-monde* has influenced numerous writers and critics in the field of Francophone Postcolonial Studies. It

hypothetical 'lost land' located in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and certain nineteenth century geologists and zoologists imagined it to be the first home of humanity" (Tyagi 93).

²²¹ Sylvie André observed that the notion of emergence is rejected by indigenous writers because it does not account for the cultural forms of expression that existed in these communities prior to the advent of writing. Chantal Spitz confirms: « Notre littérature existe parce que nous existons [...] Elle n'a pas à être qualifiée classifiée étiquetée par d'Autres qui ne la lisent qu'au travers des filtres de critères rassis éculés. Elle n'est ni insulaire ni émergente ni postcoloniale » (*pensées* 167)

represents an attractive alternative to the binary oppositions that divide the French-speaking world into a French center and a Francophone periphery which have been interpreted by Jean-Marc Moura as a newfound possibility for “perspectives that were until now neglected [and that] were approached due to the appearance of new authors: authors with authentic indigenous origins [...] and female authors” [“perspectives jusqu’alors négligées [qui] ont été abordées grâce à apparition de nouveaux auteurs : les écrivains véritablement autochtones [...] et les écrivains féminins”] (140). Michel Le Bris further challenged this notion in the context of literature with his polemical manifesto entitled *une littérature-monde en français* (world-literature in French)²²² to contest the approach of thinking the postcolonial world through the geographic confines of borders and its inhabitants as belonging to the world rather than a specific location. This idea is reminiscent of Maeve McCusker’s analysis of the difference between Glissant’s and Chamoiseau’s approach to the island as deterritorialization and ‘concerted effort to ground, to locate, to bring home,’ respectively (44). Spitz insists on the incompatibility of the *tout-monde* and Frenchness with the *motu*, as the plot seeks to highlight differences in the imaginary of the indigenous and the French. To put it in Condé’s terms, Spitz proposes that the *motu* should not have been crossed by the French. The French Caribbean idea of the *tout-monde* resists the idea of islanding the self and the other that is particularly present in the Mediterranean context of Corsica where Marie Ferranti is invested in showing the effects of the Fanonian idea of physical violence in the colony.

²²² “The Saint-Malo event rapidly evolved to include postcolonial authors from a range of language traditions, although most notably from Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa and the French Caribbean” (5).

4.3.2 Gendered violence and terror in Corsica: a female perspective on vengeance

With the exception of the actual terrorist attack, Marie Ferranti's novel engages with the theme of violence on a more physical and graphic level than Chantal Spitz. Contrary to the heroic qualities of resistance against national and personal enemies in Mérimée's "Colomba," *La Fuite aux Agriates* represents violence and terror in Corsica exclusively from the female perspective. All descriptions highlight the idea of crime as ontological priority in a masculine world where male heroes, hunters, and killers are glorified. This type of atmosphere permeates all realms of island life and particularly affects women whereas in Mérimée's short story, *Colomba* is portrayed as the fearless leading figure of a group of ruthless male outlaws.

In Ferranti's novel, the reader is confronted with the radical decisions of characters without there being any specific explanation to account for the origin of or motifs for their actions. While the violent behavior patterns of the male protagonists matches the gallery of extraordinary figures typically displayed in colonial discourses about the Corsican tradition of the vendetta, Ferranti combines her characters' disposition for violence with a violent discourse about the island that leaves very little room for poetic sentimentality. This characteristic distinguishes her from Mérimée's descriptions of landscapes, sites, secluded towns as well as his construction of Corsican honor and dignity through the gentleman Orso and his rebellious sister *Colomba*. But Ferranti's account of the relationship between honor and violence do not quite match the anti-colonialist discourse on violence as a means to fight colonialism that psychiatrist, philosopher, and author Frantz Fanon hailed in his 1961 essay, *Les Damnés de la terre*. In this text, Fanon argued that violence is a necessary

evil for the colonizer to accomplish the task of forceful colonization and for the colonized to liberate himself from the shackles of oppression. He concludes that decolonization can only be achieved if the colonized subject resorts to violence as a strategic means to fight the colonizer. Ferranti clearly denounces the use of violence by showing the tragic consequences on the human body.

4.3.2.1 Violence and the human body

The inhabitants of the island Ferranti depicts in *La Fuite aux Agriates* express the attachment to their origins differently than Spitz's indigenous people of the island. Ferranti's characters are far away from collaborating with or paying lip service to those who do not fit their own vision of the future. Julius, Pierre, and Joseph are strong-minded young men who are guided by their beliefs of an interior system of justice. They congregate around Francesca's fiancé Pierre: "il savait tout mener de front: les affaires, la politique et les femmes" (*F.A.* 45). Pierre skillfully instigates acts of violence that spread fear and terror on the island but he heavily relies on Julius's willingness to help carry out the deed. The young men describe the terrorist attack as a heroic deed because it sends a message to the enemy and marks their territory. By contrast, Francesca condemns the acts and is even more appalled upon finding out what her lover had done. The town reacts similarly shocked when discovering what happened between Francesca and Julius, as the on-going gossip shows.

Besides political and collective violence, the novel shows how acts of violence debase the individual as they fight for their own vision of right and wrong. Although Joseph shows more interest in and ambition for hunting than local politics,

his disposition for cruelty becomes obvious when he tells Francesca that he likes to be in control of the prey he hunts. The plot is constructed from the perspective of the young and rebellious Francesca whose turbulent love affair with the political activist Julius takes her on an emotional roller coast that culminates in their escape into the desert where Julius hides after the terrorist attack. Due to the scarcity of information that relates details about the actual shooting, the tone of the novel is primarily set by the abundance of rather detailed descriptions of the human body and the traces of bodily fluids such as tears, saliva, sweat, and blood.

The story begins with a set of detailed descriptions that center around the poor physical condition of Francesca's pale body that is covered in blood: "Elle n'avait pas ressenti la douleur tout de suite mais maintenant, elle était brûlante de fièvre. Sa bouche était pâteuse. Elle grelottait [...] elle avait les mains en sang" (*F.A.* 12). When her mother finds her in her room, she beats her and locks her in the attic, where Francesca attempts suicide and is taken to the hospital. Since the young woman violently rebels against the medical treatment, she has to be strapped to her bed for her body to be able to heal. The family's maid, Clorinde, interferes to save Francesca who is "dans un état de maigreur effrayante [...] Francesca vivait à peine [...] avec] les cicatrices épaisses et rouges aux poignets" (*F.A.* 31-32). She takes care of Francesca in her own house where she has to spoon-feed the girl and is being woken up by her screams every night until her patient is able to psychologically process what

happened. Once she is able to talk to Clorinde about the traumatic experience of Julius's account of the attack,²²³ she falls asleep and her body starts to heal.

Francesca's body bears the marks of anti-institutional violence that transcend all levels of interpersonal relationships, including physical relationships. Passion and love are highly problematic in this novel, particularly for women, as they tend to derail into rather brutal contacts and interactions. Francesca's turbulent adventures with Julius prior and during their escape in the Agriates stand in direct opposition with the sad story of her mother's life. Raped by Jean Montadori, who is the rich and powerful master of the household she worked for when she was a young girl, she is too shy to speak up and to defend herself, despite the fact that there is a budding relationship between the son David and herself. While Mathilde is able to clean the traces of blood off the sheets, she eventually finds herself pregnant. When her aggressor's wife finally realizes what happened, she asks her son David to repair his father's fault by getting married to the maid, not knowing that the two of them are already romantically involved. Mathilde is able to start over with a young and caring husband she had been getting close to prior to getting pregnant. Her former aggressor passes away shortly after the couple's wedding,²²⁴ however, her first-born child's is Francesca and the latter's rambunctiousness reflects Jean Montadori's violent character while their second child, Marie, is fragile and asthmatic and easily suffers from attacks.

²²³ «Francesca demanda à Julius de lui raconter le meurtre. Julius ne se fit pas prier. Il raconta tout. Il n'éprouva aucun regret : 'Ce n'était pas un homme, dit-il, ce n'était rien.' Francesca, à ses mots, tressaillit » (F.A. 123-124).

²²⁴ "À peu de temps de là, on trouva Jean Montadori mort dans son cabinet de toilette. Il n'avait même pas eu le temps de remonter son pantalon. Il avait eu un étouffement qui lui avait laissé la figure bleue" (F.A. 69).

Francesca is more resistant than her sister Marie whose body naturally responds to moments of anxiety and panic. The onset of attacks can be observed in unstable environments such as the smoky atmosphere of a crowded restaurant or the confines of an abandoned cave Julius found in the mountains. Beside her physical response to the unease of certain settings, she is unable to cope with certain aspects of reality and constantly has to be protected. She is overcome by a violent attack when she hears about Julius's and Francesca's first outing at the beach:

Francesca n'eut pas besoin d'ouvrir la porte. Marie était devant elle, lui barrait le passage.
'Que faisais-tu avec Julius ?'
Marie avait du mal à parler ; sa respiration était saccadée.
'Calme-toi, dit Francesca, Tu vas avoir une crise.
--Que faisais-tu avec Julius ?' répéta Marie.
Francesca [...] repoussa sa sœur.
'Où êtes-vous allés? Réponds !'
--Nulle part. Laisse-moi tranquille!
Marie saisit Francesca par le bras.
'Où êtes-vous allés ? Je ne te lâcherai pas tant que tu ne me l'auras pas dit !'
[...] Marie respirait de plus en plus mal. Francesca la fit asseoir et courut dans la chambre chercher son médicament. Marie le lui arracha des mains ; elle mit le tube dans la bouche et en respira de longues goulées (*F.A.* 41-42).

A similarly violent exchange takes place between the two sisters the morning Marie gets suspicious about Julius's whereabouts and nearly suffocates: "Marie venait de se lever. Elle était à la fenêtre. Sa chambre donnait sur le jardin. Elle vit Julius sortir. Elle appela Clorinde. Elle eut juste le temps d'ouvrir la porte, les yeux exorbités, la bouche ouverte: elle suffoquait. Clorinde la soutint, la fit asseoir et lui donna son médicament. Marie reprit peu à peu son souffle. Elle s'endormit » (*F.A.* 93). Yet, between Francesca and the servant Clorinde, neither one tells her the truth about her fiancé's liaison. Marie and Julius get engaged and are depicted as a peaceful and harmonious couple, compared to Francesca and Pierre:

Pierre lui prit la main et ils se cachèrent derrière des fougères. Francesca avait les jambes toutes griffées par les ronces.

Quand ils revinrent, ils virent Julius et Marie qui dormaient côte à côte, comme deux enfants (*F.A.* 83).

In that sense, Francesca is a relatively complex character, compared to her sister Marie. Like Colomba, Francesca is extremely brave and adventurous but she also has romantic interests she pursues with similar vigor than her artistic inclinations. Ferranti's Francesca fully devotes herself to her hobby, photography, spending entire nights in the dark room to develop her pictures. Clorinde starts to get worried about the young woman's perseverance: "Francesca passait ses soirées et même une partie de la nuit dans la chambre noire. Elle avait les mains abîmées par les produits, les yeux rougis par les veilles » (*F.A.* 61).

Her approach to taking and developing pictures is guided by a search for violent contrasts which do not make her shy away from extreme measures to accomplish her artistic missions even during extreme climatic conditions: "Francesca se mit à plat ventre. Elle chercha une position où le vent ne la gênait pas trop. Julius se tenait à côté d'elle. Il ne bougeait pas. Parfois les rafales de vent étaient si fortes que Francesca devait tourner la tête: l'air lui manquait" (*F.A.* 84). She is able to make people pose for her camera outside in the garden to capture authentic images of her photographic subjects while the people being photographed break the silence about certain events in their lives by telling Francesca fragments of their stories. In the dark room where she awaits a miracle:

Cette prédilection pour le secret lui venait peut-être de ces heures passées dans le noir avec [son père], penchée au-dessus du bac où flottait le papier: elle attendait le miracle de la révélation lente de l'image, des formes à peine esquissées qui se précisaient si vite qu'il fallait prendre garde à ne pas laisser les photos tremper trop longtemps dans le liquide: elles devenaient

complètement noires; combien de fois s'était-elle laissée surprendre par ce soudain obscurcissement inattendu (*F.A.* 52-53) !

Francesca masters the subtle game of contrasts, filters, and masking techniques to obtain the desired aesthetic effects in the dark room. These methods serve as postcolonial metaphors for the patterns of physical violence and terror that govern the political realm of the island in which Julius and Pierre are actively involved.

Francesca learned to master techniques to control visual contrasts based on tricks with time and chemical substances, which she acquired from her deceased father, who used to discuss the outcomes of her work. Long conversations until dusk between father and daughter used to be an integral part of the process of capturing images:

Son père allait chercher dans sa bibliothèque des livres de photographes dont, pour la plupart, elle avait oublié les noms. Ils regardaient les photographies en silence, Francesca tournait les pages. Parfois, son père l'arrêtait et lui montrait un détail, expliquait un point de vue, l'originalité d'une perspective. Il était passionné par les traces des êtres et des choses. Dans la photographie, il aimait, disait-il, les signes de la présence décelée, l'allusion de l'ombre (*F.A.* 53).

These conversations are a derivative of images that make a violent impact on the imaginary of the observer. In the world of Julius and Pierre, similarly lengthy discussions over liquor and cigarettes take place. However, in the political realms, these exchanges are a means of resistance as the men place a strong emphasis on actions rather than discussions: "ils causent ils causent... Il faut leur montrer que nous sommes prêts à agir" (*F.A.* 49). The disposition of these young men for violence is a new form of terror that is carried out in a masculine world which is governed by the law of silence.

4.3.2.2 The law of silence: loose lips sink ships

Anti-institutional violence takes place in the public sphere. Consequently, the results of these acts are visible to the entire community. According to Jean-Louis Andreani, Corsica operates on a law of silence:

This propensity to violence is indeed, like in other Mediterranean society, accompanied by the famous law of silence that is a blend of fear and instinctive solidarity in a context of permanent mistrust in the face of justice: the first reflex of the victim of an anonymous terrorist attack has [...] is to decipher the 'message' to then attempt to possibly solve the problem alone, if necessary, with the help of family members (53).

Comme dans les autres sociétés méditerranéennes, cette propension à la violence s'accompagne en effet de la fameuse loi du silence, mélange de crainte et de solidarité instinctive, dans un contexte de défiance persistante vis-à-vis de la justice: le premier réflexe d'une victime d'attentat anonyme [...est] de décrypter le 'message', pour ensuite tenter elle-même, éventuellement avec l'aide de proches, de régler le problème (53).

While Francesca and Clorinde talk, Julius and Pierre operate on these principles when it comes to politics and women alike. Although Pierre knows that Francesca is cheating on him, he has other things to worry about "les armes n'étaient pas arrivées; il faudrait trouver un autre moyen pour s'en procurer [...] Ce n'était pas le moment de remettre tout en cause avec cette histoire de Francesca" (*F.A.* 97). Likewise, in the female world, Marie does not tell Francesca that she knows the whole truth, which causes Francesca to feel humiliated: "'On ne connaît jamais les êtres', dit-elle" (*F.A.* 99). In that sense, despite her fragility, Marie acts according to the law of silence that operates in the male world.

Although Francesca is driven by an ambition for mobility and progress, she does not fully embrace her desire for independence. Realizing that she does not love Pierre anymore, she drags out the relationship rather than breaking up with him. In

postcolonial terms, Francesca can be stigmatized as neither heroine nor victim of the island's historical past and contemporary conundrum. Although her body clearly bears the marks of physical violence on the island, can she really be blamed for the shocking events on the island as some women suggest when talking about Francesca as evil: "Une femme peut être la cause de tels malheurs. Surtout si elle est belle. Francesca se promenait toujours à moitié nue, et cette façon de marcher! Tous les hommes du quartier la regardaient » (F.A. 18)? To account for her situation, the question then becomes if the violence of her behavior patterns and actions can be read in an equally post-postcolonial approach that Typhaine Leservot suggested for breaking with the dogmatic approach to race, gender, culture, and history in postcolonial contexts by accounting for female sexuality and desire in Maryse Condé's writing?²²⁵

Francesca clearly does not initiate the turbulent affair with her sister's fiancé the same way Maryse Condé's female characters in *Traversée de la Mangrove* [*Crossing the Mangrove*] are drawn to the criminal outcast, Francis Sancher. She is plagued by regrets for abusing her sister's trust. But at the same time, she is not able to face reality, to tell the truth, or to resist Julius once and for all. Their stubbornness and need for both adventure and solitude make them compatible in many ways which is why she follows him into the desert. Although Francesca is far away from

²²⁵ In her study, Leservot makes the following remark « By refusing to confine characters to the French islands or pursue the Creole-versus-French debate that is so central to creolist theorization, [Condé opens up her work to] questions of race, migration, identity, and gender as they are traditionally explored in Francophone postcolonial studies [which] lose their geographic specificity [...] and acquire transnational significance." She concludes her post-postcolonial reading of Condé by suggesting that "postcolonial subjects are not defined solely by their postcolonial condition [...] Francis Sancher's death in *Crossing the Mangrove* [...] is not a result of postcolonial crimes motivated by race [...] but] the result of accidents." (47 and 50-51).

approving of Julius's romanticized life style, they do not need words to talk to each other: "Elle se gardait bien de rompre le charme de ces silences. Elle pensa que c'était à cause de cela que Julius l'avait emmenée avec lui dans le désert, pour sa capacité à se taire, à le regarder, à le comprendre en silence. Ils n'avaient pas besoin de mots" (F.A. 120).

But at the same time, this imposed silence reflects Julius's contradictory attitude towards Francesca. On the one hand, he tells her that "c'est la dernière nuit que nous passons ensemble... [...] Je n'ai jamais été comme ça avec personne, Francesca" (F.A. 135) but on the other hand, he constantly pushes her away. His rather unpredicable cruel and unrefined behavior turns her into a helpless victim: « Il est trop tard, tu le sais bien, non ? » dit-il, et il colla sa bouche contre la sienne jusqu'à ce qu'ils n'aient plus de souffle" (F.A. 133). Already prior to their escape, after passionate sessions of love-making, he yells at her and brutally pushes her away. When they eventually break up and decide not to see each other anymore, he shows up at her house in the wee hours of the next morning and they reconcile. While Francesca's sister Marie does not catch the cheaters *en flagrant délit* in the kitchen, the latter sees her boyfriend driving off in the car and gets seriously offended. Julius then takes Marie on a trip to a close-by desert island and proposes to her and thus makes it very clear to Francesca that he will never get married to her: "Julius ne vivrait jamais avec elle. Il le lui avait dit. Il voulait épouser Marie, avoir des enfants, être tranquille et avec elle, Francesca, il ne le serait jamais, voilà ce qu'il avait dit » (F.A. 91). However, their trip to an infertile desert island is reminiscent of the

experience of acculturation in Chantal Spitz's representation of the metamorphosis of the indigenous island community that loses its roots due to atomic colonization.

The specific reasons for Julius's violent behavior are difficult to place. On the one hand, his violence is not directly related to the context of colonization but on the other hand, Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to *Les Damnés de la Terre* [*The Wretched of the Earth*] explained that colonization puts in place and perpetuates a patriarchal system of dominance and oppression which describes Julius's harsh treatment of Francesca. In the Agriates, Julius even threatens to leave her behind if she cannot keep up with him and getting physically violent with her when she walks around by herself:

Soudain, elle sentit la main de Julius sur son épaule, il la serrait comme un étau; il relâcha son étreinte et la saisit par les cheveux avec une telle violence que Francesca poussa un cri de douleur. Il la força à remonter à la bergerie. Il la tenait ferme, l'insultait à voix basse. Francesca ne comprenait pas tout ce qu'il disait. Elle se mit à trembler, crut que Julius voulait la tuer. Il la jeta sur les sacs. 'Ne bouge pas' dit-il. Il se déshabilla à la hâte. Il s'appuya sur elle de tout son poids. 'C'est ça ce que tu voulais ?' dit-il. Et il répétait toujours ces mots alors qu'il lui mordait la nuque ; que ses mains lui enserraient les poignets à les briser [...] Francesca pleurait doucement, le visage dans les mains (F.A. 132).

Torn between passion and fear, Francesca's emotional roller coaster screeches to a halt when she comes to terms with the extent to which she is actually scared of his violent past and the fact that he had killed someone: "Elle avait peur de cette barbarie qui était en lui, qu'elle avait assoupie, mais prête à se réveiller et elle se dit que la politique était une excuse à sa férocité" (F.A. 129). They eventually decide to go separate ways for Julius to have a fair chance to keep hiding for longer and she returns back home. Like Mathilde's aggressor, Julius experiences a violent death that finds him defenseless: "Le corps était étendu de tout son long à l'entrée de la grotte.

Le fusil se trouvait à son côté, Julius n'avait pas eu le temps de s'en servir. Sans doute avait-il mis quelque temps à mourir, car la blessure, en pleine poitrine, n'était pas grande [...] des oiseaux tournoyaient au-dessus du cadavre » (*F.A.* 138). The construction of plot and characters point to an internal system of what we could call 'narrative justice' that Ferranti deploys to make the quotidian violence more bearable. While Samlong's novel is driven by an even more explicit desire for retaliation and vengeance, this type of 'narrative justice' is completely absent from Spitz's *motu* where the indigenous people either become alienated or resort to mimicry.

The body of Francesca's childhood friend Joseph also bears the marks of physical exhaustion. During the time of Francesca's convalescence in his house, he has to stand guard and barely gets any sleep. In a way, Francesca is to blame for not being open with the young man in telling him that she is not interested in a romantic relationship with him. In the end of the novel, "Il n'y avait plus trace de la morsure de Julius. Presque deux mois étaient passés depuis la mort de Julius dans le désert" (*F.A.* 148) so she walks out of the room, leaving the love-struck Joseph to himself, without any further explanations. She already knew that Joseph had killed Julius before he admitted to it. This exchange is problematic because it indicates that the motif for killing has shifted from the vicious cycle of political violence and terrorism to romantic interests and jealousy.

Between the complicated relationship that govern the interactions of Francesca and Julius on the one hand, and the political upheaval around the terrorist attacks on the other hand, the atmosphere on the island is charged with dramatic tension. The landscape of the Agriates is hostile and dangerous for those who do not

know their way around. All crime and violence is clearly motivated by the geopolitical situation of Corsica that has degenerated to atrocious hatred.²²⁶ This tension eventually comes to a climax during Julius's funeral:

L'air était brûlant [...] Il y avait cet oiseau qui chantait. Le bruit des pas. Le grincement des cordes sur le bois. Le froissement des tissus à chaque mouvement [...] les murmures et le bruit des pelletées de terre, qu'on a fini par ne plus entendre comme s'il s'était étouffé, et le long cri de Rosalie. C'était effrayant cette plainte qui ne cessait pas, montait de ses entrailles, ce cri rauque, animal (*F.A.* 141).

The metaphorical aspects of the landscape remind the reader of the treatment of colonial violence and paroxysms of nature in Camus and Maximin's texts.²²⁷ Ferranti adds the depiction of the mother as a suffering victim to underline the tragic effects of violence that is expressed in an ear-piercing scream. This scream is not poetic like the one of the male Creolistes but rather, it is debasing and animal-like. By contrast, Camus's Mersault is profoundly alienated to the point that he expects to be welcomed by screams of hatred on the day of his execution: "Pour que tout soit consommé, pour que je me sente moins seul, il me restait à souhaiter qu'il y ait beaucoup de spectateurs le jour de mon exécution et qu'ils m'accueillent avec des cris de haine" (186).

4.3.2.3 From silence to speech: voices from the underground

Rosalie expresses her emotions through a scream-like monotonous chant that almost dehumanizes her. This is a dangerous sign which foreshadows the ferocious tradition of internal violence known as *la vendetta*. Jean-Louis Andreani argues that

²²⁶ « [...] cette barbarie, qui n'était pas nouvelle, mais avait dégénéré en guerre civile » (*F.A.* 78).

²²⁷ In the beginning of this chapter, these notions allowed me to establish a connection between the American Mediterranean and the Occidental Mediterranean based on climatic and historical similarities in the context of the colonial island.

the chant of women takes on a particular function in Corsican traditions in that they perpetuate an internal system of violence:

In sacred values, the Corsican society still has the culte of the mother figure and that of the dead. Women do not have an easy life [...] Oftentimes locked up in their homes, **the woman of ancient times is submissive to the man**, even though she has a lot of influence on her husband, and more generally speaking, on family life. The rules of the code are merciless, especially for her [...] Contrary to what one could assume based on the contemporary appearance of movements of women against violence, women in the Corsican tradition, like elsewhere in the Mediterranean, do not play a peacemaking role. **She is the one who makes the call for the vendetta**, particularly during funerals of assassinated men, through her improvised chants and lamentations, the *lamenti* and *voceri*, that can be incredibly violent (42-43; emphasis added in bold).

Au titre des valeurs sacrées, la société corse a encore le culte de la mère et des morts. La femme n'a pas la vie facile [...] Le plus souvent cloîtrée à la maison, **la femme des temps anciens est soumise à l'homme**, même si on lui prête une grande influence sur son mari et, plus généralement, sur la vie de la famille. Les règles du code sont impitoyables, surtout pour elle [...] Contrairement à ce que pourrait laisser penser l'émergence actuelle de mouvements de femmes contre la violence, la femme, dans la tradition corse, comme ailleurs dans la Méditerranée, ne joue pas un rôle pacificateur. **C'est elle qui appelle à la vendetta**, en particulier lors des obsèques des hommes tués, par ses chants et ses lamentations improvisées, les *lamenti* et les *voceri*, qui peuvent être d'une incroyable violence (42-43; emphasis added in bold).

Contrary to Mérimée's character Colomba who excels in the Corsican *voceri* and constantly instigates her brother Orso to take vengeance on their neighbors for their father's death, Francesca's mother has no artistic inclinations, let alone cultural ambitions. When finding her daughter naked in her room after returning from the Agriates, the mother immediately resorts to physical violence by beating Francesca.²²⁸ A group of women in town comment on the paradoxical position of Mathilde: "Pauvre Mathilde! Une fille perdue, presque folle, et l'autre qui croyait se

²²⁸ At the same time, Colomba's agency becomes problematic because Mérimée desexualizes her character. Colomba does not have any romantic inclinations and her brother Orso's intention of returning to Corsica to marry her to a wealthy man fail. Colomba becomes the object of the female gaze, that is, Miss Lydia.

marier en blanc, à l'église, avec fleurs d'oranger et tout le saint-frusquin! 'C'est prévu pour l'été', elle m'avait dit. Elle m'avait même montré la robe » (*F.A.* 18). They also make sarcastic comments on Marie's mourning « qui sait pour qui elle s'habille en noir ? » (*F.A.* 20).

The masquerade, feistiness, and perseverance of Ferranti's characters capture the essence of the history of the island that Corsican journalist and author Jean-Louis Andreani describes in simple words the following way: Corsica did not have a more tragic fate than Minorca, Sardinia, or one of the big Greek islands, but it is possible that [Corsica] is, more than many others, subject to the contradiction between the colonial situation and its vigorous personality that is resilient to complete assimilation"²²⁹ (55). Ferranti's novel is extremely provocative in her representation of daily life in Corsica. Neither open to change nor difference, Ferranti constructs a narrative around characters who are ferocious and untamable like Julius, or stubborn and passionate like Francesca, or a combination of both as it is the case for Joseph who is described as "celui-là ! Il attend son heure. Il veille sur Francesca, il la guette, il la suit comme son ombre... » (*F.A.* 143). Joseph is the perfect example of a love-struck young man who goes too far to conquer the woman he is passionately in love with. He follows his urge to act and crosses the line, like Julius who fights relentlessly for his political ideals. The construction of Ferranti's male characters shows that they are willing to do everything it takes to achieve their goals and that nothing can stop them from putting their plans into action. For men, violence is, as Sartre indicates, the only way to change the colonial situation; however, Ferranti

²²⁹ « La Corse n'eut pas un sort plus tragique que Minorque, La Sardaigne ou l'une des grandes îles grecques, mais peut-être subit-elle, plus que beaucoup d'autres, la contradiction entre une situation coloniale et l'existence d'une personnalité vigoureuse, rétive à l'assimilation totale » (55).

constructs a female world that counters domination with different responses: Marie's body naturally revolts against the confinement of space or emotional pressure, Julius's mother screams, and Francesca intentionally ignores Joseph's feelings for her.

The combination between the explicitness of physical violence and the fierce determination of Ferranti's characters presents an interesting variation of the poetic and aesthetic descriptions of violence, destruction, and resistance in Chantal Spitz's novel. Spitz's characters tend to resort to verse as an outlet to express joy and pain which creates a polyphonic structure that distinguishes her novel from other polyphonic texts such as Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la Mangrove* where different acts of violence are related from different perspectives to constitute an overall rich and complex narrative. While Spitz herself is known for the radical positions she publically defends, she constructs a gallery of characters that display different attitudes towards the issue of fighting back. The older generation sadly observes the irreversible destruction of the landscape and changes in the imaginary of the indigenous people, but the younger generation is willing to defend their rights and to take a leap of faith.

4.3.3 Cruel intentions: Rebellion and virtue on the island

Shifting to a different Francophone island that is situated in the Indian Ocean, how does violent passion pan out for Jean-François Samlong's contemporary Creole version of *Paul and Virginia* and how does he deal with the implications of the complex situation of the island?

Out of the three novels, Jean-François Samlong's 2007 novel, *Une île où séduire Virginie*, most explicitly shows the slippery slope between evilness and virtue, which is central to Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's exotic pastoral. Drawing on the pastoral codes of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's 1788's *Paul et Virginie*, Samlong adapts the former's « conte à dormir debout, avec ce qu'il faut comme mensonges pour que la vérité ne blesse pas les âmes vertueuses » (*I.S.V.* 9) to a format that matches the contemporary geopolitical and sociocultural context of a Creole island in the Indian Ocean. He describes how the island is inherently divided "en camps ennemis: les blancs et les noirs, les riches et les pauvres, les bons et les méchants » (*I.S.V.* 61) and wonders how to navigate between this triptych landscape of races, classes, and good and evil on the island: « comment faire table rase d'un si lourd héritage sans détruire une partie de soi ? » (*I.S.V.* 61). This new emphasis on ethical principles as a third division adds a new shade to traditional postcolonial issues of race and class and makes Samlong's text stand out from the ones of Ferranti and Spitz.

4.3.3.1 Innocence, guilt, and original sin through the colonial prism

From the very beginning, Paul's narrative diverts towards violence that divide the island as a stage of a ceaseless "lutte entre le bien et la mal, sous l'oeil de la lune accrochée à la cime des arbres" (*I.S.V.* 54). His remarks provide a critical reflection about the cruelty of destiny in the face of social and racial injustice that go beyond the context of colonial violence. He specifically insists on the harms these divisions cause:

Que faire pour que l'île ne devienne pas un espace invivable avec ses préjugés sociaux, sa passion pour la chasse aux Marrons, la façon dont les blancs se procuraient et se partageaient plaines et vallées, la façon dont l'église accommodait la religion avec plaisirs et richesses, enfin la façon d'interdire les unions serviles et de poursuivre la traite des esclaves ? (*I.S.V.* 69)

His account is driven by the recurring desire to see Evilness punished. He vehemently rages against the fact that this is not the case, neither for slaves nor for his beloved Virginia:

Regarder, trembler, prier, espérer encore, et de nouveau la révolte, un sentiment d'injustice, toujours les mêmes questions : pourquoi mettre en péril la vie de Virginie ? Elle n'a jamais fait de mal à une mouche et n'en fera pas, je le jure. Pourquoi ne pas s'en prendre aux Maloute, aux chasseurs de noirs, aux esclavagistes ? C'est plus facile d'effrayer les pauvres gens. Moins risqué. Pas de retour de coups de bâton, ni de représailles (*I.S.V.* 108-109).

The litotes of the fly introduces an expression of spoken rather than elevated French to underline the subjective dimension of the free indirect discourse in which Virginia becomes an epitome of innocence and absence of evil because she wouldn't hurt a fly. Traditionally though, the colonial situation opposes the colonizer and the colonized, which Samlong represents through the figure of the slave hunter as the antithesis of good on the island, particularly in comparison to Virginia. He abuses his authority over his work force and gets away with punishing and torturing those who depend on their mercy. Beyond the traditional colonial model, Samlong also builds on Christian morality that opposes good and bad, and the value of the Metropolitan class dichotomy of *gentilhomme* and *paysans*.²³⁰

In his digression about Virginia's destiny in a society that does not respect the religious principles of any shape or form, Paul points to the injustice of colonial violence by showing the convenience of attacking those who are less likely to fight

²³⁰ Ferranti's novel also builds on this dichotomy to talk about Mathilde's background.

back or to retaliate. Samlong's Paul critiques the unethical behavior of gentlemen like his birth father who take advantage of incredulous lower class women and basically destroy their reputation:

Je m'appelle Paul. Mon nom? Je l'ignore. Tout ce que je sais, c'est que je suis fils bâtard d'un gentilhomme qui s'éloigna de ma mère après l'avoir mise enceinte. Au diable la promesse de l'épouser. Il ne cherchait qu'à satisfaire sa passion en abusant de la crédulité d'une paysanne. Et ma mère, née en Bretagne, ayant perdu sa réputation—seule richesse d'une femme pauvre et honnête, décida alors de venir cacher sa faute dans cette île où je suis né (*I.S.V.* 9).

From a Metropolitan perspective, Paul's frank introduction points to the unequal application of moral principles between classes and genders. The interspersed subtle curses become somewhat of a recurring theme in his discourse about unjustified violence against innocent people that tend to lead back to the initial wrong-doing against his mother: "ma mère a été abusée de si belle manière par un gentilhomme que le diable en rit encore. Il rit si fort que le ciel crépite de tous ses feux" (*I.S.V.* 110).

Within that context, Paul's descriptions of the climatic conditions show an equally strong consistency in the presence of religious imagery in which the personification of the Devil functions as the epitome of Evilness. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's narrative moments of heavy rain and the tragic storm that lead to Virginia's death, are particularly revealing to these ends. The rain that floods the island "comme pour la laver de ses péchés" (*I.S.V.* 77) symbolically coincides with Virginia's awareness of her sexuality while causing destruction on the island: "Désolation. Solitude. Ce qui se passe dans le ciel échappe à l'homme qui se croit être un dieu sur terre" (*I.S.V.* 77). The feeling of frailty becomes even more obvious during the scene

of the storm which, in its contemporary version, draws heavier on the religious register than its 18th century counterpart: « Mais la mer est si méchante qu'on n'a pas pu mettre un bateau dehors pour aller vers [le vaisseau en pleine mer] » (*I.S.V.* 104) because the sky is like a « livre d'un ciel d'apocalypse » (*I.S.V.* 106) that causes the ship to perform a « danse macabre » (*I.S.V.* 108).²³¹ According to Loriane Drillot-Pédurant, these religious references translate « a reality where magico-religious beliefs blends with the imaginary but they keep the mark of the legacy of literature and that of the Western world »²³² (279) that does not function the same way in the works of Marie Ferranti and Chantal Spitz.

While Ferranti embeds her narrative with occasional references to religious holidays and traditions of Corsica, she does not endow these descriptions with a similarly powerful effect on the imaginary of male characters which some women refer to as 'barbarians.' For women, however, virtue takes on the religious connotation of chastity that is already present in Mérimée's *Colomba* as well as Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*. Notably, both Ferranti and Samlong break with the religious virtue of chastity for women in the context of the island by endowing their female characters with an active sexuality and search for pleasure. As for Spitz, virtue is not solely derived from a religious context but also exists in humanistic terms. The novel is framed by a Maohi version of the Genesis and what seems to be a French equivalent, followed by the warning of the Maohi God to warn the indigenous people about the imminent danger of the arrival of the colonizer.

²³¹ The allegorical figure of the dance of Death was used in the Middle Ages to bring across the idea of a slow rhythmical movement with which Death invites victims to follow along.

²³² « un réel où se mêlent croyances magico-religieuses et imaginaire, mais qui garde la trace d'un héritage de la littérature et du monde occidentaux » (279).

Prayers to the Maohi and the Christian God are presented as rites and are textually rendered through moments of speech when each prose poem is pronounced.

For Samlong, moral principles assigned by Christian faith become particularly important when it comes to the question of sin and absolution. Paul decries how religious principles are enforced by institutional representatives to drive a wedge between himself and Virginia, due to his status as an illegitimate child. This becomes particularly obvious in Samlong's addendum to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's scene of Virginia's confession. In Samlong's narrative, Paul and Virginia both confess their sins. The priest brutally lays out the facts for Paul to urge him to quit pursuing Virginia:

Il n'y a pas de mais [...] Cette **farce** a déjà trop duré. Qu'elle cesse! Et vous aurez droit à mon indulgence. Vous avez **une très grande responsabilité** dans la souffrance morale de Melle de la Tour qui n'a fait qu'écouter la bonté de son cœur et la noblesse de son âme. Eloignez-vous d'elle! Oui, disparaîsez **si vous n'êtes pas capable de vous rapprocher de votre condition de blanc!** Fuyez si vous pensez que l'esclave n'a pas à considérer son maître comme **digne d'un entier respect**, afin que le nom de Dieu ne soit pas blasphémé [...] Fils de Marguerite, je pardonne vos mensonges, vos mœurs dépravées, vos gestes obscènes. Je pardonne vos péchés capitaux, les fautes que vous avez commises et celles que vous ne manquerez pas de commettre [...] Si j'ai un dernier conseil à vous donner (il avait rapproché son haleine de mon visage) c'est de mériter la main d'une fille aussi vertueuse que Melle de la Tour. **Si son origine noble a été salie, c'est entièrement votre faute. Votre très grande faute. Une folie.** Partez dans la colère de Dieu [...] (*I.S.V.* 75-76; emphasis added).

The priest uses the wrath of God as a threat and symbol of punishment for Paul's frivolous behavior. In trying to seduce the pure and innocent Virginia, Paul crosses social boundaries that must not be crossed in the colonial system where the slave has to respect the master. While Paul's narrative reveals Virginia's secret passion and desire, he does not interpret her tragic death as capital punishment for their sins. Paul

admits: “Oui, j’ai le sentiment d’avoir commis des péchés. Nous avons fait des choses qui ne se font que dans le mariage” (*I.S.V.* 69). But at the same time, he interprets his losing Virginia as yet another strike of bad luck. He resorts to physically attacking a weaker link in the chain which, essentially, are the trees he planted:

Puis je donnai un coup de pied et de poing à un papayer chargé de fruits, ne maîtrisant plus ma rage, ni ma douleur. Je fulminai contre l’arbre [...] Je m’affaissai la mine défaite, pleurant, gémissant, vaincu. J’étais ce gosse aussi robuste que pleurnichard, du genre à marcher sur la seule crotte de chien placée sur la route, parce que je n’avais aucune intuition de ce qui se tramait contre moi (*I.S.V.* 98-99).

Contrary to the principle of anti-institutional violence and terror in Corsica, Paul’s attempts of retaliation remain fruitless, as do those of the fugitive slaves. Although Paul’s narrative provides summative flashbacks of these rare occasions, they do not have a narrative function in the plot itself. Paul thus finds himself in a vicious circle of fear and hope that follows the model of teenage rebellion rather than Fanonian organized, political violence. The methods of his rather infantile model of resistance oftentimes results in emotional breakdowns that make Paul realize that “il me fallait envisager la question sous un autre angle pour que les larmes tarissent et ne troublent plus mes yeux. Le vieil homme racontait [...] que j’étais un *Paul-pleureur* [...] et pour que se développe en moi le caractère d’un homme, un vrai, il me fallait naviguer sur les mers de l’Inde” (*I.S.V.* 17). He tends to break out into tears rather than to fight for his life and honor like the fugitive slaves are forced to do. Paul’s maturity level evolves with the progression of the plot and he proudly highlights small moments of glory to relate his acts of charity. These moments are clear addendums to the original pastoral novel and build on the idea of shielding Virginia from Evil, such as healing her bleeding feet or saving her from the ferocious waves of the ocean.

Samlong develops a trajectory for Paul that takes him to a level of realization far beyond the one of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's Paul. Samlong's Paul becomes insensitive to the pseudo-moral arguments put forward by the church and decides to take control of his destiny by rearranging ethical principles of charity. His narrative indicates that he views the notions of innocence, guilt, and original sin no longer through a strictly colonial, patriarchal, and hierarchal prism but rather, through the eyes of Fanon's famous conclusion in *Peau noire masques blancs*: "Oh my body, make of me a man who always questions" ["O mon corps, fais de moi toujours un homme qui interroge!"] (188). Paul's humanist vision of himself also affects his perspective on the island.

4.3.3.2 The reversal of guilt, innocence, and original sin: a postcolonial perspective on violence

Paul's narrative strategically alternates between descriptions of brutal violence to counterbalance them with imaginary acts of retaliation that are equally crude. Building on Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's pastoral novel, Samlong's plot particularly develops descriptive details of the old narrator and the slave owner to describe their misdeeds and to amplify their poor character traits. For the old narrator, Paul draws on the recurring metaphor of the "masque de bonhomie sur le visage" (*I.S.V.* 10). Paul displays an almost unhealthy degree of hatred by referring to him as a pathological liar « qui s'est imposé entre Virginie et moi comme un miroir déformant » (*I.S.V.* 53) and specifically refers to his evil gaze: "personne ne songerait à venir troubler une amitié si pure, pas même le vieil homme qui se contenterait d'épier notre bonheur de loin, loin de nos caresses et de nos rires, en se rongant les sangs » (*I.S.V.* 29).

Paul is emotionally unaffected by the news of the old neighbor's physical condition and expresses anger about the fact that he has to cross the island to see the man who has been lying to him all of his life. He just wants him to die:

Je n'ai qu'une pensée: **qu'il crève**. Peu m'importe la route qu'il a suivie, l'essentiel c'est qu'il ait eu sa part de souffrance, n'ayant pas trouvé la paix lui aussi. Il ne la trouvera pas non plus en enfer. J'estime qu'il ne mérite pas un autre châtement que les flammes. Autour de lui, je verrai bien un grouillement de rats, de tangles,²³³ de rongeurs de toute espèce, si nombreux que son corps sera recouvert de plaies ; au-dessus de lui un vol de papangues²³⁴ [...] des rapaces généreux dès qu'il est question de fienter sur un scélérat de cet acabit qui a éloigné de moi les deux êtres que j'ai aimés le plus au monde après ma mère : Virginie et Omar (*I.S.V.* 128; emphasis added).

This scene illustrates that at times, Paul envisions himself in a powerful, almost God-like spectator position to judge the old narrator and to watch him do repentance. This rather vivid vision of hell blends Christian and Creole values to depict a scene of deserved punishment. Paul breaks with the register of the pastoral codes by slipping into colloquial forms of expressions that stand in direct opposition to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's description of a virtuous and innocent Paul. His imaginary acts of violence break the Golden Rule: "Envie de vomir, de hurler, de se révolter, d'injurier Dieu et diable" *I.S.V.* 108). His ill will manifests a clear desire to unsettle and to challenge moral Christian principles and turns the island into a baroque-like scene of anti-colonial violence.

Following the principles of the Golden Rule, Paul envisions himself doing good deeds but rarely acts upon his intentions. He plans on liberating Lala from the

²³³ This rodent is a local animal of Indian Ocean islands that is somewhat of a cross between a hedgehog and a porcupine.

²³⁴ This prey bird is the local version of the eagle and its sight is a special occasion because the 'papangue' used to be on the list of extinct animal in Reunion. In Creole tales, this prey bird is associated with danger and punishment and it is the local equivalent of the wolf in Western fairy tales.

shackles of the cruel slave master Maloute but then discovers that her friends already liberated her. He also envisions burning down the old narrator's library to make the latter suffer:

j'imaginai ce qui pourrait être le pire pour lui, pas le saccage du jardin ou la mise à sac du champ de maïs, rien du tout cela qui ne saurait l'émouvoir, mais plutôt l'incendie de sa maison. Je me donnai un regard fixe pour mieux contempler les flammes qui lécheraient d'abord les parties basses [...] qu'il expérimente donc la violence qu'il avait déchaîné contre les noirs marrons ! Je ressentais au fond du cœur la joie de la voir lutter contre les flammes, n'ayant qu'un livre à la main pour tenter de le repousser (*I.S.V.* 97).

His descriptions of violence become more defined with Paul's vision of the hatred that drives fugitive slaves to escape and to fend for their lives, which shows the problem of abiding to Christian principles in the context of colonial violence.

Another important element that reveals Paul's cruel intentions, thus breaking with the idealization of pastoral life and characters and Christian principles, is his own perspective that particularly influences the way he describes the slave master and slave hunters on the island. The portraits of these secondary characters take center stage because of the interesting blend of physically and mentally unattractive traits that go beyond the anticolonial descriptions of Memmi's colonizer. Paul primarily draws on Christian and Creole references to expose the slave master: "Grand et sec, il ressemblait à une papangue—petit rapace diurne au bec arqué et aux doigts armés d'ongles crochus; teint mat et foncé; ses sourcils noirs et joints lui donnaient un air fourbe qu'il tentait de cacher [...] Les esclaves l'avaient surnommé Maloute, un individu sale, malpropre et répugnant » (*I.S.V.* 25). Omar's final encounter with his aggressors is a sad proof of the poor character predicted in Paul's portrait as the fugitive slave is subjected to gross atrocities committed by the slave hunters. Paul's

narrative exaggerates Albert Memmi's descriptions of the physiognomy of the colonizer as hideously ugly but quite accurately relays the colonizer's disposition to cruel treatment.

This becomes particularly obvious with the flashbacks of Omar's recalling the painful moment when the slave hunters caught and killed his father after the latter had managed to safely hide the little boy in a ravine:

Il se souviendrait toujours du matin où il avait entendu, qu'ils avaient entendu le guetteur crier [...] 'Fuyez! Fuyez! Ils sont là...', qu'il l'avait vu basculer dans le vide, le crâne fracassé par une balle. Son père le tenait par la main, et il courait avec sa lui, avec sa mère et les autres qui ne voulaient pas mourir [...] son père le poussait dans le ravin, avant d'entraîner sa mère dans le sentier, haletant, pestant, conseillant aux autres de s'éparpiller en petits groupes. Mais il parlait trop fort, il faisait trop de bruit, ruinant toutes ses chances de sortir vivant du traquenard. Claquement de fusils, une fois, deux. Puis Omar perçut des voix, des rires. Soudain la mort si proche (*I.S.V.* 43-44).

This hideous crime scene is culminated by the ultimate act of violence of Omar's capture when a young and inexperienced slave hunter is too scared to shoot Omar and actually falls to the ground: "Omar se dit, écœuré: 'Que ne faut-il pas faire pour mourir dignement dans ce pays?'" (*I.S.V.* 123). Paul relies on Omar's description of the event and deploys the metaphor of chasing animals rather than the colonial metaphor of chasing slaves. Once the rest of the group shows up, they cruelly mutilate him: "Tiens! Le chasseur est terrorisé par la bête. Et quelle bête! La tuer c'est se montrer trop bon avec elle. Ce qu'il faut, c'est la torturer de telle sorte qu'elle ne puisse plus faire des petits" (*I.S.V.* 123). The violence of the slave hunters clearly display what Sartre refers to as the problematic values of Western humanism that turns the colonizer into a cruel and heartless monster (18).

Contrary to the Sartrean concern that the colonizers turn into ferocious animals to fight back, Samlong's narrative clearly insists on the unequal battle in the deadly cat and mouse game between the slave masters and the fugitive slaves, despite the legitimate reasons that give them right over the soil they have been laboring:

Qu'allait-il faire de cette haine qui l'étouffait? [...] il avait participé aux razzias, pillant les maisons et les champs des blancs. Parfois ils descendaient sur le bord de la mer, là où le vent gonflait leur poitrine, là où ils rêvaient de voler une barque et de retourner au pays natal [...] Finalement, quelque peu résignés, ils avaient fini par se dire que cette île était aussi la leur par la sueur accordée à la terre, et surtout par le sang perdu dans le combat pour la liberté (*I.S.V.* 44).

In that respect, Samlong's novel takes an interesting stance on the issue of reclaiming—or reconquering—the colonial island by endowing it with new, postcolonial characteristics. The fugitive slaves decide to fight back to claim the land they labored, as suggested by Maximin, while Paul is stuck between imaginary worlds of violence created by religion and Metropolitan values.

References to Creole culture illustrate new ways of transcending Catholic religious principles to find peace, calm, and serenity in the invisible world of voodoo spirits and related practices. Paul comments that having benefited from Lala's power over the spirits of the invisible world, he got fed up with the reality around him. While Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's island was determined by the epitome of the chaste and virtuous Virginia, Samlong's new virtue of the island are constructed around the issue of agency as Paul makes an effort to “escape the effect of those forces that construct him” (Ashcroft “Agency” 6-7). Paul does indeed re-create his own persona, will, and desire, in Maximin's sense of the term. However, after the death of the old narrator, he inherits all of the latter's material goods, including a status that allow him

to cultivate land with the help of slaves. His neo-colonial identity reflects problematic nuances that are reminiscent of Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity²³⁵ as Paul condemns the cruel treatment of slaves and commits to educating them while at the same time, resorting to cruel punishment: « j'ai appris à lire et à écrire à quelques-uns de mes nègres les plus doués, ce qui ne les dispensait pas de vaquer à leurs travaux dans les champs... je l'ai obligé à construire un hôpital et une école pour mes serviteurs » (*I.S.V.* 134).

Conclusion

The Réunionese novel therefore distinguishes itself from those of Marie Ferranti and Chantal Spitz. While all three authors exclude what Fanon referred to as the possibility of a “rational confrontation of perspectives” [“confrontation rationnelle des points de vue”] (44), they each view pathways of violence that are directly related to the island's history of conquest and colonization. Samlong and Spitz insist on sociopolitical and affective ties to land based on pre-historic connections for French Polynesia, and the history of the labor of those who cultivated land in the Indian Ocean, that is, the history of deported slaves that traces back several centuries. For neither one of them does rebellion have the same prophetic function as for the Francophone African colonies and the French Caribbean where the notion of violence took center stage during the period of the French-speaking African colonies in the 1960s. Fanon states in *Les Damnés de la Terre* that “The colonized liberates himself

²³⁵ “[...] the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One... nor the Other... but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both” (41).

in and through violence. This praxis enlightens the agent because it shows him the means and the goal. Césaire's poetry endows the explicit perspective of violence with a **prophetic meaning** [...] The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the colonized even themselves out and echo each other in an extraordinary reciprocity"²³⁶ (83; emphasis added).

The purging scream that marked the French Caribbean's literary production is more than just an echo of its violent history, nature and climate. Rather, it is a powerful tool that points to a high degree of confidence in dealing with a painful past that for the Corsican imaginary, however, has been absorbed for many traditions now.

Jean-Louis Andreani observes that

The island experienced [...] a history that is made of madness and battles that are probably more tragical and moving than the ones of other regions of France [...] All these events nourished tales, legends, and chants on the island and even created a 'national' conscience. But apart from Corsicans, few French know for certain about this particular past that contributes nevertheless to the specificity of the island throughout France; not to mention that Corsica is not the last addition to the Hexagone—Nice and Savoy did not become French until 1860--, Corsica was the last to be forcefully conquered through weapons in the 18th century (56).

[L'île a vécu [...] une histoire faite de fureur et de batailles, plus tragique et mouvementée sans doute que celle des autres régions françaises [...] Dans l'île, tous ces épisodes ont alimenté contes, légendes et chants, voire forgé une conscience 'nationale.' Mais en dehors des Corses eux-mêmes, peu de Français ont quelque idée précise de ce passé singulier, qui participe pourtant de la spécificité de l'île dans l'ensemble français ; sans oublier que si la Corse n'est pas la dernière adjonction à l'Hexagone—Nice et Savoie ne devinrent françaises qu'en 1860--, elle fut la dernière à devoir être conquise, au XVIII^e siècle, par la force des armes (56).]

²³⁶ « L'homme colonisé se libère dans et par la violence. Cette praxis illumine l'agent parce qu'elle lui indique les moyens et la fin. La poésie de Césaire prend dans la perspective précise de la violence une **signification prophétique** [...] La violence du régime colonial et la contre-violence du colonisé s'équilibrent et se répondent dans une homogénéité réciproque extraordinaire » (83; emphasis added).

Although Ferranti seemingly bypasses the question of legitimacy that drives Paul's narrative, thus making violence an ontological priority to eliminate difference, she does give voice to the female community that unanimously comments on the disempowering effects of terrorism on the island community: "Tu as vu ce qu'ils ont fait? Ce sont des barbares, maintenant, on peut le dire. C'est affreux de tuer un homme, comme ça, de sang-froid, pour la politique... » (F.A. 18).

This type of radicalism is also present in colonial literature, particularly short stories of the Romantic and pre-postcolonial era. Jean-Louis Andreani's argues that

By the way, passions that become unleashed as soon as we deal with Corsica, probably divide less continentals from Corsicans than those who know about the complexity from those others who do not suspect it—but who still have split opinions about it... This specificity has been described, analyzed during all eras, by observers coming from all horizons (24).

[Les passions qui se déchaînent, dès qu'il s'agit de la Corse, opposent d'ailleurs peut-être moins les continentaux aux Corsiques que ceux qui en connaissent la complexité à d'autres qui ne la soupçonnent pas—mais n'en ont pas moins une opinion tranchée... Cette spécificité a été décrite, analysée à toutes les époques, par des observateurs venus de tous les horizons (24).]

Both Prosper Mérimée's as well as Victor Segalen's descriptions of local culture draw on the presence of physical violence that was relegated to the realms of nature in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's exotic pastoral. In "Colomba," the narrator glorifies historic battles on the continent and has Colomba commit the ultimate act of crime when she cuts off Orso's horse's ears to make him believe that his enemy tried to insult him. Segalen, on the other hand, contextualizes the arrival of the colonizers in French Polynesia within a system of ancestral traditions and sacrifices: "derrière l'autel, vers le charnier où viennent, après le sacrifice, tomber les offrandes: les

cochons égorgés en présages; les hommes abattus suivant les rites ; les chiens expiatoires, éventrés” (*L.I.* 19).

While Samlong recuperates the violent history of the past to create a violent discourse of its functioning, Ferranti goes beyond colonial descriptions of history outside the island and legendary acts of violence on the island itself, thus creating a discourse on violence that reflects the violence of discourses about the contemporary situation of violence on island. Spitz clearly demonstrates that violence is a characteristic relating to the colonial and post-colonial situation rather than the pre-historic situation of a harmonious island, spurring the discourse from the island.

Conclusion: Reinventing Participant Observation

1 La Francophonie insulaire and the globalized world: a repeating island?

In *Raga: Approche du continent invisible*, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clezio wrote: “Le métissage culturel, à propos de quoi le poète Edouard Glissant dit que les gens des îles ont cent ans d’avance sur tous les autres peuples de la terre” (130). Island communities of the French-speaking world have developed unique ways of dealing with cross-cultural contacts that first started with the advent of colonization. Contemporary forms of cultural expression articulate and challenge these experiences, as the novels of Marie Ferranti, Jean-François Samlong, and Chantal Spitz indicate.

In a time of instant communication, satellites, and improved airline connections ensuring regular contact and exchange between the French Metropole and its overseas islands, the notion of insularity has lost its radical connotation of isolation, which brings about what DeLoughrey called a radical remapping and increased political and economic viability. Islands become increasingly less ‘distant’ in the imaginary of the Western world where notions of insularity and islandedness are oftentimes conflated. Besides their geographic situation of insularity, overseas departments of the French-speaking world show local variations of particularities, especially in their literary representations of the self and the other.

While the Oceanian imaginary has traditionally foregrounded mobility in a ‘sea of islands,’ this notion is a new buzz word in the era of globalization. The ubiquity of technology and communicative devices facilitates the development of

transnational and global relations all over the world. Elizabeth DeLoughrey noted the effect of cosmopolitanism on remote islands in that the world of formerly far-away islands has grown seemingly close and attainable while, at the same time, the worldliness of islands seems to increase constantly. In other words, islands are no longer truly isolated which leads Gay to underscore the dangers of globalization by pointing to the implications of cultural assimilation with regard to the effect on autochthonous communities in areas like French Polynesia. This issue is central to Chantal Spitz's novel, *L'Île des rêves écrasés*, in which Spitz looks at atomic colonization as a global but also local issue even prior to the new millennium. Richard and Sally Price further illustrate this observation by referring to contemporary consumerism and the trend of rejecting Martinican culture as effects of rapid modernization on a forcibly assimilated island. Jean-François Samlong voices similar concerns for "society that runs in two gears" [*la société à deux vitesses* »] (*Défi* 256) of his island, Réunion. Both Samlong and Spitz reject the mirror image of the island as a reflection of the Metropolitan center. Spitz sarcastically describes Metropolitan France « like a wonderland » (« la France comme pays des merveilles » (*pensées* 11)) and she refuses to play Alice (« passer comme Alice de l'autre côté du miroir » (11)). Samlong similarly takes issue with the mirror image by referring to the idea of showcasing that I mentioned in the introduction as he deplores the incompatibility of French commerce with local practices of everyday life on the island where France becomes a "showcase that is not accessible [for us]" (« vitrine qui ne [nous] est pas accessible »] (*Défi* 260).

The rewriting of the French colonial topos of the island goes beyond counter-writing strategies against France. The island topos has an epistemological function that enters into a critical relationship with the postmodern notion of the fragment on the one hand, and the figure of the mirror image on the other hand. The opposition between the figure of the mirror and the image of radiating diversity poses geopolitical, socio-cultural, and economic challenges for Francophone authors of the overseas departments and collectivities. For the Mediterranean Sea, Jean-Louis Andreani explained that after many centuries of immigration, Corsica consists today of “dispersed societies [...] there are not many places in the world where races and blood are mingled the same way and cultures enriched each other [...] the ‘Mediterranean miracle’ resides in the capacity of each people to preserve their identity: over the centuries, it is certainly not the same anymore, but it is not a different one, either”²³⁷ (31). Despite the apparent potential for diversity, Corsicans rarely embrace the Glissantian Relation, as described by Ferranti’s novels. The notion of Corsitude becomes an exclusive model to describe identity discourses of this island that insist on its insularity and seclusion rather than the French Caribbean vision of harmonious diversity or *diversalité* that “brings back to what is natural in the world, outside the *Same* and the *One*, and because it opposes to Universality the great opportunity of a world diffracted but recomposed, the conscious harmonization of preserved diversities” (114). In that sense, Réunionese culture embraces roots without being exclusive as Samlong considers diversity as a foundational base of *la*

²³⁷ « ces sociétés éclatées [...] il est peu de régions au monde où les races se sont autant mélangées, les sangs mêlés, les cultures mutuellement fécondées [...] le ‘miracle méditerranéen’ réside dans la capacité de chacun des peuples à préserver son identité : au fil des siècles, celle-ci n’est certes pas plus tout à fait la même, mais elle n’est pas non plus tout à fait une autre » (31).

Francophonie. Samlong that reiterates René Depestre's concept of Francophone island which Chantal Spitz, by contrast, critically uncovers as a "sophistication of a new fraud" ["sophistication d'une nouvelle imposture"] (33).

The growing complexity of contemporary genres and plot structures in Francophone literature indicates that authors no longer limit themselves to issues related to their postcolonial condition. There is a growing consensus about the fact that postcolonial thought is no longer limited to the act of writing back, as Eric Mwangi demonstrates, or the genre of the novel but rather, that it becomes absorbed by other forms of expressions, including technology and digital media. Veronique Porra reminds us about the ambivalent nature of postcolonial literary theory: "today, it seems to be necessary to underline the heterogeneity of literary phenomena that are commonly referred to through the qualifying label of 'postcolonial'" (27).²³⁸ This is an important aspect to keep in mind for island narratives of a postmodern world. In *Inventing Popular Culture*, Storey defined practices of popular culture as a blend of textualities which permanently reproduce and reactivate cultural intertexts. But what is the epistemological function of the colonial topos of the island in the contemporary French-speaking world outside the Francophone island?

With the exception of Gorée island, the topos of the island is absent from the imaginary of Francophone Africa.²³⁹ 20th century island authors brought about fundamental changes in that French Caribbean literary and critical theory drew on the exclusiveness of the islands' local culture and history. From Aimé Césaire's *Cahier*

²³⁸ « il semble qu'aujourd'hui nécessaire de souligner l'hétérogénéité des phénomènes littéraires couramment réunis sous le qualificatif de 'postcolonial' » (27).

²³⁹ In Ousmane Sembène's movie, *Faat Kiné* (2001), recent graduate Aby wants to reward herself with a trip to Gorée island and her mother is excited for her and responds that she wishes she could come along.

d'un retour au pays natal (1947), Édouard Glissant's 1981 *Discours Antillais*, to Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant's essay *Eloge de la Créolité* (1989), these Francophone island authors successfully put forward a variety of ideas that focused on a strategic rewriting of the myth of a paradise-like island by fully embracing one's geo-political and cultural specificities. In *La terre magnétique: les errances de Rapa Nui, l'île de Pâques*, Édouard Glissant argues that in the globalized world, there are new forms of visiting and rewriting a far-away island even for the island author. Collaboratively published with his wife Sylvie Séma, this book narrates her discoveries on the island while he reads the notes to her journal, « visiter ou imaginer de loin » (21) or « fréquenter en vrai et en genre de virtualité » (34).

Suzanne Dracius suggest yet another relationship between the imaginary of the island and the foreign visitor when pointing to a parallel between regional differences in France and regional differences between Metropolitan France and its overseas departments:

Le film *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* qui a battu tous les records de succès populaire dans l'Hexagone a pour thème la difficile adaptation d'un fonctionnaire du Sud muté dans le Nord de la France. Un pastiche de ce film, réaliste à défaut d'être comique, pourrait montrer un Français blanc de France muté en Martinique s'imaginant vivant à l'intérieur d'une carte postale en relief avec mers chaudes toute l'année et doudous non moins chaudes ad libitum. Ce *zorey* découvrirait vite, sur place, qu'en réalité les Martiniquais [...] travaillent dur, travaillent sérieusement: ils sont même parfois plus royalistes que le roi, moins laxistes que la plupart des fonctionnaires hexagonaux (14-14).

The works of Corsican author Marie Ferranti, Réunionese author Jean-François Samlong, Tahitian author Chantal Spitz illustrate these points through the construction of plot and characters in a narrative that constructs the contemporary imaginary of the island. The fragment takes on a particular function in their

narratives²⁴⁰ only to demonstrate that there is no repeating island in the French-speaking world but rather, a sea of islands.

While shifting towards commonly marginalized regions of the French-speaking world is a first step to consider changes in these complex realities, there is a constant need for innovative approaches that help account for the new conditions and influences of modernity in rapidly evolving formerly colonized territories, including islands. The advent of technology and its absorption in island narratives moves traditional readings of island narratives into a new direction. The junction of technology and postcolonial worlds creates what Typhaine Leservot calls “post-postcolonial possibilities” (51) that call for more performative, interdisciplinary vantage points from which to consider these works.

2 Technology and the postmodern island: Island adventures in French popular culture

The concept of the island has a paradoxical status in the Western world, particularly visual forms of popular culture such as cinema, television, and digital media. As John Storey indicates in *Inventing Popular Culture* (2003), popular culture is glocalized, that is, global and local alike:

Globalization is not simply the production of a homogenized American global village in which the particular is washed away by the universal. The process is much more contradictory and complex, involving ebb and flow of both homogenizing and heterogenizing forces and the meeting and mingling of the ‘local’ and ‘global’ in new forms of hybrid cultures [...] glocalization (a term borrowed from Japanese business) [...] describe[s] globalization as the simultaneous interpenetration of the global and the local (112-113).

²⁴⁰ I explained the function of bodily synecdoches and metaphors in chapter 3 and 4 but more work needs to be done here to study these representations comparatively and in relationship to the island as a fragment of the Metropolitan France.

This “global mélange” similarly affect the composition and structure of popular culture through techniques of “‘re-writing’ or ‘re-viewing’ and in terms of the spectator’s experience, of the ‘re-activation’ and ‘reconfiguration’ of a given generational ‘structure of feeling’ within a more dynamic and varied set of histories” (71). This section will briefly elaborate on the continued presence of the island adventure in the technological context of games in Western forms of popular culture by reading these postmodern island adventures with respect to the postcolonial creative fictional works of Marie Ferranti, Chantal Spitz, and Jean-François Samlong.

Using screen technology as a vantage point to constitute the island adventure narrative, I will examine the structure of two reality television shows or games, *Koh-Lanta* and *Ile de la Tentation*, as contemporary forms of French popular culture, by describing the fundamental role of the relationship between the screen, the participants of the game, and the spectator. In the last section, I examine another form of popular culture in digitized form, *Second Life*, as a creative “play” in what Donald Winnicott calls an intermediate space, the pixilated island on the screen.

2.1 The island in television

Koh-Lanta is the French adaptation of an American CBS reality television show called *Survivor* that started in 2000 in the US as an adaptation of the European Robinson Adventure, producing two seasons / year. The US show aired its 23rd season in the fall of 2011 in the South Pacific. According to Denis Mermet, the French version on TF1 has been adapted to French culture through the strategic replacement of the American “struggle for life” and its focus on “survival” by an

increased emphasis on adventure and competition.²⁴¹ *Koh-Lanta* started to air in 2001; as the name indicates, the game was originally designed to take place on the island KOLANTA (this is a compound name in Thai, KO means 'island', LANTA is the name of an archipelago located South of Thailand). Originally, the game consisted of 16 participants who have to survive in a faraway, uninhabited, tropical island between 40-50 days. Grouped in tribes, they regularly compete in challenges to gain certain tools or privileges, and vote off the weakest person in their tribe until only one survivor is left on the island. The winner returns back to civilization with a huge cash prize.

Although insularity used to be an integral part of the game, non-insular geographic locations turned out to be as equally challenging as island venues. However, these non-insular locations still convey the feeling of isolation to the participants, and the location of each season is kept a secret to prevent zealous fans from interacting and thus interfering with the actual game and its participants, as Henry Jenkins indicates in his book *Converging Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006)²⁴². Contrary to postcolonial island novels of the French-speaking world, *Koh-Lanta* is based on erasing the geographic specificity of the venue by using minimal details to evoke geographic or cultural particularities; locals only play a marginal role in assisting the staff of the show and in advertising the show abroad.

The premise of postcolonial literature, however, is to tell untold stories in geographically specific and doubly marginalized locations, and about the locals.

²⁴¹ « Notre version de *'Survivor'* correspondra à l'esprit français », Denis Mermet, *Le Monde* 8 octobre 2000.

²⁴² See also: *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (2006) and *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture* (2007).

Edouard Glissant stressed in his *Discours Antillais* that “colonization divided the world [...] created geographical scattering” (21) and “historical balkanization of islands” (792). Within these scattered worlds of Francophone islands, the perception of insularity differs significantly, which is reflected in the attitude and writing of Spitz, Samlong, and Ferranti who naturally produce different island adventures. Whereas Spitz does not consider herself insular or “ultra-marine,” and suggests that French literature is overseas literature for her, Samlong situates insularity on a continuum between two extremes, imprisonment and desire to escape, while Corsican author Ferranti seems to resort to an extremely local writing that foregrounds the idea of isolation and characters that do not evolve.

Another important aspect of *Koh-Lanta* is the identity of the participants and the formation of teams which is also a well-kept secret until the first episode of a season airs. Casting focuses on recruiting participants that are representative of all walks of society—men, women, different ethnicities, religious affiliations, subcultures (vegetarians, the guy with the tattoo, the piercing, etc). The island adventure temporarily turns them into noble and bad savages that fight for survival. However, the particularity of the island adventure is related to the camera’s role in capturing moments that are reminiscent of colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial island literature and its focalization on truly marginalized characters who are forced to face the daily challenge of surviving in a permanently alienated world.

L’Ile de la Tentation is another reality television game that was designed to take place on an island. It has been broadcast in France since 2002. The integration of this show into the TF1 program encountered some criticism because a reality

television game with the venue of the island seemed to already exist with *Koh-Lanta*. The concept of this game, however, is to give four unmarried couples the chance to put their relationship to an ultimate test by having them live apart from each other, in two tropical locations, exposed to and surrounded by exotic features Jean-Christophe Gay describes as the three S's—"Sea, Sand, Sun" (44)--to which other critics would add the fourth S: sex. For the duration of 12 days, both groups of men and women live on different islands, surrounded by many attractive singles of the opposite sex, 11 in France, 14 in the US, whose mission it is to seduce the participants.

Naturally, multiple cameras, some of which are actually hidden, scrutinize the participants and follow their every step. Each participant is regularly informed about their partner's actions through specially edited videos that feature short clips of what already happened. Television spectators see a mixture of the images from these clips on full screen as well as shots of the participant's face while looking at the small screen in front of them. These moments of confrontation or *mise en abyme* are decisive moments for the participants as it changes the way they will devote themselves to the adventure of living on the island, either giving in to temptation, resisting, or leaving the island adventure altogether. Only a few couples make it to the end of the game without cheating on their partner and leave the island as a couple.

In this controversial reality television show, the island adventure reproduces fragmented aspects that are reminiscent of Homer's *Odyssey*. Yet, writing the physical and emotional ordeals are artificially produced as an integral part of these type of games which are defined by Donald Winnicott as "organized" (71) in that they are structured activities based on rules. According to anthropologist Daniel

Dayan,²⁴³ the success lies in the rigidity of rules and their creative manipulation which function like a machine facilitating somewhat of an automated process in which a story literally writes itself. As Michel Grundsatz²⁴⁴ explains, games, movies, and reality television produce commodified emotions that for Anne Vidalie²⁴⁵ are a fundamental part of our contemporary society: “*Our society functions based on empathy [...] We need to recognize ourselves, find bearings in the lives of famous people for an emotional rapport to be established*²⁴⁶” (24). The popularity of the venue of the island in reality television games such as “Fort Boyard” (the French version of Fear Factor) illustrate this point.

2.2 The island in digital media

Second Life is a digital form of popular culture which fosters an active and creative participation in an activity Donald Winnicott would classify as a creative play without rules in an intermediate space which is the pixilated world of islands on the screen. However, every participant has an individualized mission or approach and thus follows his own set of rules or principles while *in world*. Claire Moulène and Anne-Claire Norot²⁴⁷ explain that in the beginning, participants have to create an avatar: women and men, animals, angles, robots, and learn how to use the tools, move around, and communicate. According to the journalists Marie Lechner and Annie Rivoire (*Second Life: Un monde possible*, 2007), the concept of *Second Life* consists

²⁴³ “Shakespeare sans Shakespeare” *Télérama* 16 aout 2000

²⁴⁴ “les poids de l’émotion” *Le Monde* 31 mai 2001

²⁴⁵ “Vie privée: le grand déballage” *L’Express* 19 juillet 2007

²⁴⁶ Notre société fonctionne à l’empathie [...] Nous avons besoin de nous reconnaître, de trouver des repères dans la vie des personnages publics pour que l’adhésion émotionnelle opère »

²⁴⁷ “Second Life: une vie rêvée en pixels » *Inrockuptiles* 13 février 2007

in “the acts of colonizing, populating, developing, constructing together an untouched world [...] as an avatar (which is something like a double that can be personalized)” (13).

In the pixilated world, this process of exploration has multiple facets, one of them being the central perspective of the avatar. As Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright explain in *Practices of Looking: An introduction to Visual Culture*, this form of digitally mediated environment foregrounds “a multiplicity of perspectives, interactions with other players and technology itself [...] which produces a physically embodied experience beyond the sensory experience of looking” (174-175), thus adding a psychological component that did not exist in other multiplayer games such as *The Sims*. In addition, sociology professor Carole-Anne Rivière summarizes it this way: «Second Life is one of the new technologies [...] that conjugate the virtual aspect of material and physical dimensions (space and time) with the actuality of the real time and written conversations [...] the individual behind the screen has the feeling of continuity between what is seen and projected on the screen and between what he or she feels at the same time in reality” (91). As a matter of fact, continuity is an integral component of the island adventure which will unfold, according to Donald Winnicott’s predictions about the interior psychological world of the child or adult as being the source of creative play. *Second Life* residents therefore act the same way the hero of colonial literature did when he explored and “discovered” unknown territories and civilizations, justifying his presence through the colonial ideology, whereas the avatar is guided by psychological motives of his user.

Although critics and journalists like Marie Lechner²⁴⁸ insist on the fact that this virtual world of islands is “performative”, dynamic and in permanent reconfiguration, Annie Gentès refers to the mechanical dimension of the virtual experience due to “the repetition without variation, an absence of a difference/gap between the hand and the mind, the alienation of a freedom, that of exploiting or *remettre en jeu*” (121). Participants do not justify but play with and exploit various dimensions of their impersonated identities in what Glissant calls the Relation with a selected group of residents which, in fact, participate from all over the world.

Last but not least, *Second Life* is an impersonated but hyperreal world, as defined by Jean Baudrillard. In addition to the *in world* physical movement, actions, and interactions all *in world* signifiers have to be identified and *made to mean*, as Stuart Hall would call this process of reappropriation of a virtual world that demands a high level of creativity and sometimes financial investment which Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright explain this way: “the realism of the virtual stems from the embodiment of ideal or composite elements and not the correspondence with an actual referent [...] virtual technologies include mundane and real-world augmentations of reality, simulations, computer-imaging, sound and sensory systems” (177). This is not the case for two-dimensional worlds in postcolonial creative works of the islands unless they are produced on a stage.

In Postcolonial literature of island authors, there is a strong desire to dismantle what Edouard Glissant calls something “mechanically encrusted on the reality [...] through stereotypes that emanate from the Continent” (170). He gives several examples: “mechanical recitation” and “irresponsible consumption of cultural

²⁴⁸ “Reality, territoire d’avatars” *Libértation* 31 octobre 2008

elements from the outside.” The goal of island authors of the French-speaking world is to break these mechanisms by writing back to the center, as Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin explain, by not copying from French literature, to quote Réunionese author Jean-Francois Samlong or by strategically mixing Tahitian terms into a French syntax, as employed by Chantal Spitz. Writing the island from the postcolonial perspective turns into a creative play with the strict rules imposed by metropolitan publishing houses, concepts and ideas about multicultural contact on the island. Homi Bahba’s hybridity on the Anglo-saxon side can be opposed to the Francophone concept of diversity to stop the “chosification” or thingification of the island.

In the technological context of reality television and *Second Life*, it is worthwhile questioning the representation of reality in postcolonial island literature, as opposed to the constructed realities portrayed on television and computer screens. We have to wonder what the island has come to mean in popular culture of the Western world, where island adventures are constructed through artificial images, texts, and sounds, and the way these stories will be interpreted by future generations.

My analysis of the rewriting of the French colonial topos of the island in the works of Marie Ferranti, Jean-Francois Samlong, and Chantal Spitz contribute to an understanding of the theoretical and conceptual boundaries that divide the ways in which the continent imagines the island, which is not the way in which the islander imagines his or her island. Recent discussions about *la littérature ultramarine* and the activities around *l’année des outre-mers 2011* in Paris indicate that there is a growing interest in Francophone island authors but this is not enough. Abdourahman Waberi nicely put it this way: « It’s about proving that the literature of France is just

one noisy island, chanting and producing in French in the midst of the archipelago of the French language » [« Il s'agit de mettre en évidence que la littérature de France n'est qu'un îlot qui bruit, psalmodie et crée en français au milieu d'un archipel de langue française »] (72).

Appendices: Written Interview with JF Samlong

This interview was conducted by Silvia Baage with the Réunionese author Jean-François Samlong during the month of August 2011.

1. Les événements qui ont été organisés dans le cadre du Festival des outre mers français 2011 à Paris ont-ils contribué de manière satisfaisante à mettre en valeur la littérature des pays « ultramarins » ? Selon vous, y a-t-il un lien entre les littératures « insulaires » d'expression française ?

Réponse : Je pense que les événements organisés dans le cadre du Festival des outre-mer français ont permis de mettre en valeur la littérature des pays « ultramarins », peut-être pas de manière satisfaisante, mais plutôt encourageante, dans la mesure où nous devons faire des efforts constants, permanents, réguliers, pour que nos littératures ne sombrent pas dans l'oubli, à une époque où un événement en chasse un autre en l'espace de quelques jours, si bien que nous avons toujours le sentiment d'une fragilité, toujours cette fâcheuse impression de travailler dans l'éphémère. A peine dit, à peine écrit, à peine oublié. Ce qui nous oblige à profiter de la moindre occasion pour promouvoir nos littératures en métropole. Il faut sans cesse se remettre à la tâche, faire un travail de pédagogie, de critique littéraire. A cette occasion, j'ai eu la chance de passer dans une émission littéraire sur RFI, ce qui m'a permis de présenter aux auditeurs le projet littéraire né à cette occasion : un recueil de nouvelles sur le thème de la colère, et qui regrouperait des textes d'auteurs de la Réunion, de la Guyane, de la Nouvelle Calédonie, de la Polynésie, de Saint-Pierre et Miquelon. C'est un projet qui me tient beaucoup à cœur, justement parce qu'il prouverait qu'il existe bien un lien, et même des liens, entre les littératures insulaires d'expression française, au-delà du style propre à chaque écrivain. Peut-être y a-t-il une sensibilité spécifique aux littératures insulaires, un souffle, un questionnement, une quête de l'ailleurs ! Peut-être y a-t-il la nécessité d'un métissage des langues, des traditions, des cultures !

2. Quel rôle jouent les journaux électroniques ou les sites Internet dans la diffusion des textes sur la Réunion et sur l'océan Indien/ la littérature « ultramarine » ?

Réponse : A ma connaissance, les journaux électroniques ou les sites Internet ne jouent pas encore un rôle important dans la diffusion des textes sur la Réunion, sur l'océan Indien ou sur les littératures ultramarines. Tout cela reste encore très confidentiel, voire timide. Mais dans les prochaines années, il nous faudra utiliser à bon escient ces outils de communication afin de mieux faire connaître nos littératures ; cette démarche me semble cruciale, incontournable, mais pour

l'instant elle n'apparaît pas encore comme une priorité tant au niveau des éditeurs régionaux que des écrivains eux-mêmes.

3. Je ne savais pas que vous êtes passionné de la photographie. Qu'est-ce que le support visuel vous apporte-t-il ? D'où vient-t-elle, cette passion pour les images ?

Réponse : J'ai commencé à écrire très tôt, et très tôt je me suis intéressé à la photographie. A l'époque, jeune professeur, c'était pour moi une façon intéressante d'aller à la découverte de mon île ; et puis je développais moi-même mes films et mes photos, je les agrandissais, les encadrais, les offrais. J'ai publié un premier album de photographies en noir et blanc, sous le titre : *Visages de mon île* (1979), et puis j'ai fait beaucoup de photos pour illustrer les livres publiés par ma maison d'édition. Dans l'un de mes manuscrits inédits, un personnage dit ceci : « *Focheux avait pris la parole, il se délectait à discourir sur le génie de la photographie qui, selon lui, se différencie du cinéma parce qu'elle se dérobaient sans cesse, quoique l'image soit fixe...* » ; ou encore ceci : « *Je rejoignis Focheux qui rêvassait. Tel est l'artiste qui se sent seul dès lors qu'il touche du regard le beau, l'inédit, l'ineffable. Subjugué par le paysage, plus rien d'autre n'existait à ses yeux. J'aurais parié que, dans sa rêverie, tout avait changé par magie, et qu'il se promenait maintenant dans le paysage de la Genèse : la terre était déserte et vide, les ténèbres recouvraient l'abîme, le souffle de Dieu survolait la surface des eaux, et Focheux, l'artiste photographe, voyait la terre se couvrir de verdure, de prairies, de fleurs odorantes, d'herbe qui rendait féconde sa semence, d'arbres qui, selon leur espèce, portaient des fruits ayant en eux-mêmes leur semence.* »

La photographie m'a également permis de me regarder comme dans un miroir, de me questionner sur le principe de la dualité : jour/nuit, ombre/lumière, mal/bien, sans compter le jeu des lignes, des oppositions, des contrastes, des changements de prise de vue, en plongée ou en contre-plongée, de face, de profil, etc. Tout cela montre que la photographie est un art proche de l'écriture, les changements de prise de vue correspondant à des changements de points de vue, focalisation interne, externe ou zéro. Qui photographie qui ? Qui parle au nom de qui ? Qui est le regardant ? Qui est le regardé ? Notamment lorsqu'il s'agit de faire un portrait ? En lisant un roman, ou en admirant une photographie, il ne faut pas se poser la question de ce qui est vrai ou pas, mais de ce qui est beau ou pas. Quête de lumière. Quête d'émotion. La vérité ne pouvant être qu'en soi. Dans *La chambre claire* (Seuil, 1980), Roland Barthes énumère nombre de surprises qu'offre le photographe : la surprise du rare, la surprise d'un geste saisi dans sa course, la surprise de la prouesse, la surprise offerte par les contorsions de la technique, la surprise de la trouvaille.

Pour illustrer cette cinquième surprise, celle de la trouvaille, j'ai mis dans mon album-photo à paraître le mois prochain sous le titre *L'île insolite d'un jardin créole*, la photo d'un minuscule crabe blanc qui dispute à de petites mouches le cadavre d'une abeille, sans que la photo ait été retouchée !

4. La réécriture : au-delà de l'intertextualité... Vous dites que « la littérature insulaire/ultramarine existe tant qu'elle ne copie pas » et que l'écrivain doit beaucoup travailler sur le style pour trouver sa propre voix.
- a. Comment abordez-vous cet « exercice » de réécriture (ou transtextualité) pour faire d'un texte antérieur (que ce soit une légende ou un roman colonial ou un mythe) vos propres textes, et quels sont les enjeux ?

Réponse : Je pense que vous faites allusion à mon ouvrage *Une île où séduire Virginie*, qui est une réécriture de *Paul et Virginie* de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. L'enjeu de la réécriture consiste à vouloir dire autre chose dans un style différent, avec une liberté d'écriture qui respecte toutefois la règle du jeu : que le lecteur puisse reconnaître le texte antérieur tout en se disant qu'il a un autre texte sous les yeux. Ce qui est intéressant, à mon avis, c'est une lecture en miroir : un texte renvoie en permanence à l'autre ; tous les deux, indissociables, et pourtant différents. Tous les deux ayant leur existence propre, et leur propre avenir.

- b. Comment vous avez découvert *Paul et Virginie* quand vous étiez petit ? Qu'est-ce qui vous a interpellé dans le texte de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, afin d'en créer une version créole (moderne) en 2007 ? Votre roman, *Une île où séduire Virginie*, est-il la version que vous auriez aimé lire à la place de la pastorale exotique de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre ?

Réponse : J'ai découvert *Paul et Virginie* au lycée, donc assez tardivement, mais contrairement à ce que l'on pourrait croire, ce n'est pas un roman pour les petits, mais plus les adolescents, voire les adultes. Ce n'est pas tant la pastorale exotique de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre qui m'embarrasse mais les nombreuses digressions, qui ne sont pas sans intérêt, sur le social, le politique, le religieux. Il est vrai qu'à l'époque, ces digressions « faisaient partie du style ». Le maître en la matière, c'est Victor Hugo, mais beaucoup de romanciers du XIXe ont émaillé leur discours romanesque de considérations autres qui touchaient aux préoccupations de l'époque, notamment historique et politique. En ce qui concerne Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, ce qui m'a surpris, et me surprend toujours dans son discours, c'est sa réflexion sur l'Europe. Sur de nombreux points, il était en avance sur son temps. Et puis, au fil des ans, on a abandonné les digressions de tous ordres pour ne s'intéresser qu'à l'intrigue romanesque. C'est ce que j'ai essayé de faire avec *Une île où séduire Virginie*, à considérer comme le roman d'un rêve ou même le rêve d'un roman, pourquoi pas.

- c. Dans la réécriture, vous avez mis l'accent sur les croyances magico-religieuses et imaginaires de l'île (le diable, le mauvais sort, les malédictions) qui relèvent plutôt de l'imaginaire contemporain, me

semble-t-il, mais où situez-vous ces croyances et pratiques—dans l'espace insulaire de votre île ou plutôt dans l'imaginaire indianocéanique (« indianocéanisme » selon Camille de Rauville) ?

Réponse : Bien entendu, je situe ces croyances et pratiques sorcières à l'île de la Réunion, puis dans l'imaginaire indianocéanique, et pour avoir effectué plusieurs séjours à l'île Maurice, aux Seychelles, à Mayotte, par exemple, il n'est pas exagéré de prétendre cela, d'autant qu'il y a des liens historiques soutenus entre les îles de l'océan Indien, notamment avec Madagascar, sans oublier les Comores et Rodrigues. Et que dire du continent africain ? On s'aperçoit, en fait, que l'espace insulaire n'existe que parce qu'il s'enracine dans d'autres espaces, plus petits ou plus vastes, proches ou lointains, de par l'histoire, la culture, les traditions, les langues, les croyances. L'île est liée à un ensemble de pays qui ont participé à l'émergence de son imaginaire, et qui continuent à nourrir cet imaginaire, à l'enrichir de nouveaux apports indiscutables. De ce point de vue, l'île peut être considérée comme une sorte de réceptacle. L'île, comme la femme, est constituée en creux : elle reçoit, puis redonne tout ce qu'elle a reçu sous d'autres formes. Séduire l'île pour mieux séduire Virginie, ou séduire Virginie pour mieux séduire l'île, c'est le jeu du miroir ou de la mémoire, le fait de pouvoir se dire que *ça pourrait être*.

- d. Pourquoi le texte de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre joue-t-il un rôle aussi important dans l'imaginaire des Réunionnais (certains croient que l'intrigue a lieu à l'ancienne île Bourbon) ? Si j'ose - comment votre texte a-t-il été reçu à la Réunion ?

Réponse : Non, l'intrigue n'a pas eu lieu à l'ancienne île Bourbon : topographie et toponymie ne laissent aucun doute à ce propos. D'ailleurs, le roman débute par cette phrase : « *Sur le côté oriental de la montagne qui s'élève derrière le Port-Louis de l'île de France, on voit, dans un terrain jadis cultivé, les ruines de deux petites cabanes* », ou encore ceci : « *De ce lieu on voit une grande partie de l'île avec ses mornes surmontés de leurs pitons, entre autres Piterboth et les Trois-Mamelles avec leurs vallons remplis de forêts ; puis la pleine mer, et l'île Bourbon, qui est à quarante lieues de là vers l'Occident.* » Plus sérieusement, le texte de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre joue un rôle important dans l'imaginaire des Réunionnais (tout au moins pour ceux qui l'ont lu entièrement dans le texte intégral, non des extraits) pour plusieurs raisons : tout d'abord, historiquement l'île de France et l'île Bourbon ont été longtemps considérées comme des « îles sœurs », avec de fréquents échanges, et faut-il ajouter, par exemple, que Mahé de La Bourdonnais fut en même temps gouverneur de l'île de France et de l'île Bourbon, participant au développement de l'une et de l'autre, durant la période esclavagiste ; ensuite, ce sont deux espaces insulaires qui sont assez proches, même si l'île de France est moins montagneuse ; enfin, le fait que le romancier

raconte une histoire d'amour impossible dans un espace clos ne peut que donner des ailes à l'imagination, et nourrir l'imaginaire, avec de temps en temps un clin d'œil philosophique, du genre : « *Les objets que nous voyons habituellement ne nous font pas apercevoir de la rapidité de notre vie ; ils vieillissent avec nous d'une vieillese insensible : mais ce sont que nous revoyons tout à coup après les avoir perdus quelques années de vue, qui nous avertissent de la vitesse avec laquelle s'écoule le fleuve de nos jours...* » L'éternelle interrogation sur la fuite du temps, et, en même temps, ce bref passage nous fait penser à « la madeleine » de Proust, avec la quête du temps perdu, avec la problématique de l'absence, etc.

Sincèrement, je ne sais pas de quelle(s) façon(s) mon texte a été reçu à la Réunion, vu qu'il a été édité à Paris par L'harmattan, avec une diffusion réduite aussi bien dans l'île que dans l'espace indianocéanique où les gens ont tellement de problèmes sociaux à résoudre qu'ils n'ont plus le temps de lire. La Réunion elle-même compte 100 000 chômeurs et 120 000 illettrés, des chiffres qui donnent à réfléchir, pour ne pas dire qu'ils donnent froid dans le dos.

Autres points communs : les Français qui ont colonisé l'île Bourbon viennent également de France, de Normandie, de Bretagne, ou d'ailleurs, comme madame de la Tour, ou encore Marguerite ; et puis, dans les deux îles il y a eu l'esclavage et le marronnage – la fuite des esclaves dans les bois. Enfin, pour revenir à M. de La Bourdonnais, il faut noter qu'il intervient en tant que personnage dans le roman de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre ; il joue un rôle important dans l'intrigue puisqu'il encourage Mme de la Tour, et Virginie elle-même indirectement, à quitter l'île de France pour Paris : « *Vous avez, ajouta-t-il, madame, une tante de qualité et fort riche à Paris, qui vous réserve sa fortune, et vous attend auprès d'elle.* »

e. Dans votre roman autobiographique *L'empreinte française* vous décrivez le trajet nocturne que vous (le « je » qui parle) avez fait avec votre grand-mère pour aider la fille du contremaître qui était possédée par de mauvais esprits. Pour illustrer la traversée d'une forêt sombre, vous avez intégré un poème sur les « filles du roi des yangs » qui m'a rappelé un poète allemand : Goethe, « Le roi des Aulnes »²⁴⁹ (18^e siècle) que j'ai dû apprendre par cœur au collège. Quelle est la fonction de ce poème dans l'imaginaire de la Réunion (voire français/créole) ?

Réponse : La citation crée un nouveau champ littéraire propice à l'évasion dans un monde de l'ailleurs, elle élargit l'espace par la mise en place d'un autre univers, sans qu'elle ait une fonction quelconque dans l'imaginaire de l'île elle-même.

f. [Avec Daniel Honoré, vous vous avez tous les deux traduit les textes de l'autre en créole /français - y a-t-il des projets pour des traductions

²⁴⁹ <http://www.musicologie.org/theses/erlkonig.html>

en d'autres langues (je pose cette question parce que j'ai enseigné un cours de littérature d'expression française en anglais en 2010 et j'aurais aimé intégrer un de vos texte dans le programme mais hélas je n'en ai pas trouvé) ? (... et à ce moment-là, la traduction a-t-elle une valeur de réécriture ?)]

Réponse : A ma connaissance, il n'existe pas de projets pour des traductions en d'autres langues. J'ai un texte : « Sitarane ou la gueule du monstre » (Horizontes Insulaires, 2010), qui a été traduit en espagnol et en portugais, et c'est à peu près tout. La traduction, évidemment, peut avoir une valeur de réécriture, dans les limites de l'acceptable par rapport au texte original. Traduire c'est trahir ; mais ne pas trop trahir quand même, c'est-à-dire ne pas trop s'écarter du texte original en lui enlevant toute sa saveur originelle ; on doit retrouver dans la traduction les effets de style, les jeux grammaticaux, les métaphores, l'atmosphère d'un lieu, le suspense, bref, tout ce qui nous fait entrer dans l'intrigue, dans un univers avec ses codes spécifiques.

5. Etre créole/français, Réunionnais/métropolitain.

- a. [*Comment le rêve d'être français, « un Français à part entière », (ou de ne pas être français) se manifeste-t-il dans la vie quotidienne à l'île de la Réunion (pour les jeunes et pour les écrivains) ?*] Quels sont les enjeux pour la pratique des croyances créoles dans la vie quotidienne de l'île ? Et quelle est la place de la religion et des croyances créoles qui d'ailleurs, semblent jouer un rôle très important dans *Une île où séduire Virginie* ?

Réponse : Personnellement, compte tenu des circonstances catastrophiques sur le plan politique et économique, franchement on ne se pose plus la question d'être un Français à part entière, d'être un français tout court, ou de ne pas être français, toutes ces questions sont reléguées à un second plan : elles ne comptent plus ; on s'aperçoit aujourd'hui que tous les pays européens ont besoin de l'Europe (plus précisément de la zone euro, une monnaie forte), et que la Réunion a besoin de la France en cette période de crise qui risque de durer pendant une bonne dizaine d'années. Justement, en période crise, on aurait tendance à se réfugier dans l'irrationnel, d'où un retour aux croyances et autres superstitions ; ou alors, on se réfugie dans la religion ou des croyances religieuses plus ou moins douteuses. Comme le roman se veut être, dans une certaine mesure, le reflet de la réalité, il donne à lire toutes ces pratiques de fuite du réel, tout en demeurant une œuvre de fiction.

- b. Dans votre roman *L'empreinte française* vous évoquez plusieurs représentations de la France métropolitaine (la langue, le lyrisme romantique, le théâtre, les institutions et les symboles, la guerre du

Vietnam). Quelle « métropole » avez-vous découvert lors de votre premier séjour en France et comment cette France-là a-t-elle changé depuis ?

Réponse : Lors de mon premier séjour en France, en 1970, dans le cadre de mon service militaire obligatoire à Lyon, j'ai découvert une France qui n'avait aucun lien avec la France, « la mère patrie » décrite dans les livres puisque tous les Français rencontrés sur ma route n'étaient pas tous blancs de peau, ni beaux, ni intelligents, ni riches, ni experts en langue française. Par contre, j'ai eu le plaisir de voir la neige pour la première fois de ma vie, un spectacle inoubliable ; et j'ai eu le déplaisir de constater que je n'étais pas perçu comme un Français de la Réunion, mais davantage comme un Arabe, un Algérien ou un Marocain, à cause de ma peau mate, de mon teint mat, de mes cheveux frisés, de mon accent... J'étais tout, sauf un Français ; ou alors un Français à part, presque un étranger ; en aucun cas un Français à part entière. Aujourd'hui, tout cela n'a plus aucune importance, mais à l'époque cet effet de miroir déformant m'a amené à me poser certaines questions : qui suis-je ? C'est quoi être Français ? Quelle est mon identité propre ? Comment se construire dans l'espace français sans renier sa langue maternelle (le créole), sa culture, ses traditions ? Comment devenir français sans trahir ses origines ? Comment être français sans rien oublier de ce qu'on est, sans se replier également sur soi-même ? Comment s'inventer une histoire ? Et surtout, comment faire comprendre à l'autre, le Français de Paris, qu'on a notre histoire, notre langue, notre culture ? C'est à ce moment-là que j'ai commencé à écrire et à publier mes premiers poèmes, puis je me suis engagé sur le plan culturel, et en 1978 j'ai fondé l'association l'Udir (Union pour la Défense de l'Identité réunionnaise), et la maison d'édition qui, plus de trente ans après, continue à publier les textes d'écrivains de la Réunion.

Aujourd'hui, cette France-là n'a pas beaucoup changé, et j'en veux pour preuve les débats récents sur la laïcité, sur l'identité, sur les langues régionales (proposition de reconnaissance des langues régionales rejetée en 2011 par le Sénat), sur les immigrés, sur les pratiques religieuses, notamment l'islam. Et vu les circonstances économiques aggravées, il n'y a aucune raison pour que cette France-là change de visage, en dépit du discours encourageant de certains hommes politiques qui souhaitent une France plus juste, plus fraternelle, plus accueillante, plus tolérante, fière de sa diversité et du rôle prépondérant qu'elle joue au sein de l'Europe.

Je suis pour une France respectueuse des Droits de l'homme, apportant son soutien aux peuples qui veulent renverser les dictateurs comme en Tunisie ou en Lybie ; je suis pour une France en devenir, en quête d'elle-même, de sa place dans le concert des Nations Unies, une France telle que l'avait imaginée Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, un peu naïvement : « *L'Etat est semblable à un jardin, où les petits arbres ne peuvent venir s'il y en a de trop grands qui les ombragent ; mais il y a cette différence que la beauté*

d'un jardin peut résulter d'un petit nombre de grands arbres, et que la prospérité d'un Etat dépend toujours de la multitude et de l'égalité des sujets, et non pas d'un petit nombre de riches. » Il s'avère que la France d'aujourd'hui, telle que nous sommes en train de la découvrir à travers les médias, à travers la dégringolade des bourses européennes, à travers la fébrilité des marchés financiers, fait mentir outrageusement Bernardin de Saint-Pierre qui pensait qu'une justice universelle gouvernait le monde. Y croyait-il vraiment ?

6. Les îles « créoles » :

- a. Comment vous vous situez aujourd'hui par rapport à la « Créolie » (« L'hymne à la Créolie ») et par rapport à la « Créolité » des Antilles francophones ? La Créolie, dans quel genre littéraire trouve-t-elle son essor ?

Réponse : Le mouvement littéraire de la Créolie, que j'ai lancé en 1978 avec le poète Gilbert Aubry (évêque de la Réunion), était une réaction positive par rapport à la vague d'assimilation culturelle subie depuis les années 1960, niant notre histoire, notre langue maternelle, notre culture, et même notre littérature. En même temps, nous voulions rassembler tous les acteurs culturels autour de quelques grands thèmes que Gilbert Aubry a développés dans son « Hymne à la Créolie », à savoir que la France ne pouvait pas ne pas respecter notre droit à la différence : *« D'un même élan et de plusieurs fois cent mille mémoires jaillira une seule conscience. Ce sera l'hymne des cœurs et des gestes accordés. Ce sera l'hymne pour ton pays et nos îles retrouvées. Créolie à la vie dure, sois encore plus coriace et, rebelle aux infamies, ne te laisse pas juguler. »* Et on ne s'est pas laissés juguler. Et depuis, les choses ont beaucoup changé sur le plan politique, culturel et identitaire. Nous avons des ouvrages qui parlent de notre histoire, de notre langue, de notre littérature. La langue créole et enseignée dans les écoles, collèges et lycées. Notre destin est désormais entre nos mains : le mouvement de la Créolie a joué son rôle à une époque donnée. Par rapport à la Créolité des Antilles francophones, disons qu'on n'a pas mis l'accent uniquement sur la langue créole ; volontairement, on a voulu élargir le champ de la conscience sans entrer en conflit direct avec les décideurs parisiens, parce qu'on avait un travail à faire sur nous-mêmes d'abord, afin de reconquérir notre fierté, notre dignité, notre parole oubliée sous le silence de l'assimilation culturelle. Cela a été une époque exaltante, et le mouvement de la Créolie a trouvé son essor dans la poésie et la musique, investissant peu le roman ou la nouvelle qui ne s'écrit pas beaucoup en langue créole. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes fiers d'être créoles, et *« à l'arsenal des langues nos langues populaires disent une créolie française aux antipodes de la Gaule et de ses Gaulois »*. C'était très osé d'écrire cela en 1978.

Aujourd'hui, nous avons à lutter contre nous-mêmes ; nous avons à nous dépasser dans l'effort, à aller vers l'autre, dans la mesure où le monde est devenu un village planétaire et que tout repli sur soi est suicidaire.

- b. Le passage au fantastique/surnaturel créole - à ne pas à confondre avec le « réalisme magique » des Caraïbes - est-il le signe d'une perte de repères culturelles dans un monde qui se modernise (Alain Bertil parle d'une « île à la dérive ») ? (En ce qui concerne vos textes, je pense particulièrement à deux scènes, celle dans la case du guérisseur dans *L'empreinte française* ainsi qu'aux descriptions de Lala dans *Une île où séduire Virginie* lorsque Paul - créolisé - danse avec Virginie, grâce à la boisson magique préparée par Lala) ? Cette opposition entre le monde visible/invisible, nous renvoie-t-elle à une autre conception religieuse de l'océan Indien ou s'agit-il d'une contestation de codes romanesques occidentaux ?

Réponse : Si Alain Bertil ne précise pas davantage sa pensée, sa formule une « île à la dérive » renvoie à un discours poétique ou fantasmatique, non à une réalité sociopolitique. En tout cas, il n'y a ni contestation, ni revendication sociale. Et les intellectuels sont étrangement silencieux. Le problème c'est que l'île est gérée depuis Paris en fonction des obstacles que rencontre en ce moment le gouvernement français, et les mêmes décisions, les mêmes lois sont appliquées à l'ensemble des départements et régions, sans tenir compte des spécificités locales et régionales. Un exemple : la suppression systématique des postes d'enseignant et des classes, alors que nous avons une population très jeune à la Réunion, et il nous faudrait davantage d'enseignants et de classes. Si l'île est à la dérive, je dirais que c'est une dérive contrôlée par nos hommes politiques (maires, conseillers généraux, conseillers régionaux), d'une part, et d'autre part, par les ministres du gouvernement français.

Je ne pense pas non plus qu'on ait perdu nos points de repère. Au contraire, on revient de plus en plus à ce qui fait l'authenticité de la culture réunionnaise. Par exemple, depuis 2005 l'Udir organise une formation de « rakontèr zistoir » (conteurs) qui, d'année en année, connaît un succès grandissant ; au tout début, on faisait une formation par an avec plus de vingt stagiaires, et aujourd'hui on en fait deux par an, et les soirées contes se multiplient dans l'île. On continue à se battre pour promouvoir la langue et la culture régionales (LCR) dans les établissements scolaires. Il appartient aux Réunionnais de faire en sorte que l'île n'aille pas à la dérive, si jamais elle était confrontée à un tel danger.

En conséquence, le fantastique créole, ou ce qu'on pourrait appeler l'opposition entre le monde visible et invisible n'est pas, et ne peut pas être une contestation des codes romanesques occidentaux ; c'est plus un souhait de décrocher du réel, de nourrir l'imaginaire de l'île (sans dire que le roman a une fonction sociale ou pédagogique, ce serait regrettable de tenir un tel discours), le souhait de tendre vers un ailleurs de la pensée

susceptible de créer une émotion, de donner au lecteur son plaisir de lire. Toute autre lecture du roman porterait fatalement la marque de l'idéologie, et donc d'un mensonge qui ne veut pas dire son nom. La littérature engagée, c'est fini ; le nouveau roman, c'est fini. L'écrivain porte-parole du peuple, c'est fini, et sa voix est d'autant plus faible qu'elle est authentique. Le surhomme, c'est fini. Il n'y a pas plus de contestation dans le discours romanesque que dans la société réunionnaise ou dans la classe politique. C'est doucement amorphe.

La littérature est l'expression d'un individu, avec ses émotions propres coupées de la tentation de s'aliéner politiquement : « *Quand la littérature devient ode à un pays, étendard d'une nation, voix d'un parti, porte-parole d'une classe ou d'un groupe, quels que soient les moyens utilisés pour la diffuser, aussi puissant que puisse être son rayonnement, même si elle va jusqu'à recouvrir ciel et terre, elle ne pourra éviter de perdre sa vraie nature, elle ne sera plus littérature, mais un objet utilitaire au service du pouvoir et des intérêts* » (Gao XinGjian). L'autre danger qui guette la littérature, c'est qu'elle est devenue peu à peu un objet de consommation dans le monde économique ; on lui demande d'être utile, d'être vendable, d'être rentable, quitte à appauvrir la pensée créatrice. Or l'écrivain ne doit écouter que sa conscience qui lui dicte de respecter autrui, le lecteur.

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