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Sé Tan Nou É Pa Ta Yo: Politics of Antillian Identity Formation

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Sé Tan Nou É Pa Ta Yo: Politics of Antillian Identity Formation

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin
December 2009

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Jemima Pierre who continues to believe in me even when I don't believe in myself. Great thanks also goes out to Maria Franklin for diligent editing and encouragement. I will be forever grateful to the John L. Warfield Center for African and African American Studies at the University of Texas-Austin, without whose support and nurturing, I wouldn't have made it as far. In particular, I would like to thank Edmund T. Gordon. Thank you also to the Anthropology Department for their patience in answering my questions and readiness to assist. A special thank you goes out to Juli Grigsby, who showed me the academic ropes and offered advice and support when I needed it. To Christelle Toussaint, who sparked my interest in Guadeloupe and offered her wonderful friendship during my times in Paris. I would like to acknowledge Jacqueline Nassy Brown, a fabulous individual who encouraged me from the beginning to pursue anthropology as a career, for better or for worse. To all that encouraged me in ways small and large to keep at it, thank you.

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My report will use the 2009 Guadeloupean strikes as an ethnographic moment that reveals the complex intersection of race, culture, and nationality in the construction of Guadeloupean identity. The strikes created an environment that made even more visible the strategic negotiations of identity that are important to understanding postcolonial relationships between intimately tied nations such as Guadeloupe, Haiti, and France. I argue that Antillean identity is constructed along a racial continuum as represented by the racio-cultural extremes of Haiti and metropolitan France. Depending on the agenda—whether socio-cultural, economic, political, or any combination of the three—in politicized situations, Antilleans will highlight categories that allow for them to maximize their various, fluid positions as non-sovereign Caribbeans, as second-class French citizens, and as members of the Black diaspora with racial politics that have a complicated relationship to Blackness. By looking at how certain categories are manipulated, we can also develop a better understanding of—and even strategies for—relieving the tensions that, I believe, undermine racial and cultural cooperation for these under-researched communities in France and its territories.

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Chapter 1

I had no idea that the strikes were happening until I saw the Facebook status of a close friend state that she was “so proud of my people! Gwadeloup’ sé tan nou é pa ta yo!!! [Guadeloupe is ours, not theirs!]” On the phone, her excitement was palpable as she talked about the strikes’ potential to bring about essential socio-economic and cultural changes to the island. The labor collective behind the strikes listed over a hundred demands, ranging from pay increases to *kréyol* language education, but their variety and quantity told another story. The demands’ wide range called attention to the multiple concerns of a broad section of Guadeloupe’s population—the people’s desire to have more control over their economy, more employment opportunities, better political representation, better and more historically-targeted education, and active preservation of their culture. The tackling of these concerns, I contend, are affected by the constant play of identity politics.

Guadeloupe’s current problems are directly related to France’s history of slavery and colonial domination in the Caribbean. France began their Caribbean colonial empire in 1625 with the establishment of a settlement in French Guiana. In a few decades, France had expanded to the islands of Saint Kitts, Saint Lucia, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint Domingue. French rule, similar to that of other colonial powers, established a strict racial hierarchization that was reinforced through the structure of the plantation, and then later codified by *le code noir* (the black code), a set of laws instituted in 1685 by King Louis XIV. The code was used to define the conditions of slavery and citizenship for those on the islands who were enslaved, freed, or born of mixed race parentage. At

the top of the hierarchy were the white colonists, who were divided into two groups: the *grand blancs* and the *petit blancs*, although (collectively) these groups were known on the islands as *békés*. The *grand blancs* (*grand békés*) were the rich landowners and officers, and the *petit blancs* (*béké gouyans*) were merchants and artisans, descendants of European indentured servants (*les engagés*) with lower status and less wealth. The mixed race population (*mûlatres* or *gens de couleurs*¹) grew in spite of anti-miscegenation laws, and especially in the smaller colonies that had a lower ratio of white colonists to enslaved Africans. The *gens de couleurs* were viewed as an in-between group, excluded from full civic participation, yet offered privileges denied to enslaved Africans.

The French Revolution, which led to a period of social upheaval that questioned the conditions of citizenship and rights, intensified the debate around slavery. Abolitionists in mainland France became more vocal as a number of slave revolts erupted in the French colonies. And although white plantation owners feared losing their labor force, the government in the metropole abolished slavery in 1794. This was done in part to maintain the allegiance of the *gens de couleurs* as well as to potentially gain new, productive nationals from the newly freed Africans (Dubois 2004a). Soon thereafter, however, pressure from the white colonists and mainland investors in the colonies convinced French leader Napoleon Bonaparte to work towards reinstating slavery in the colonies. When freed Africans in Guadeloupe and Saint Domingue heard rumors that

¹ As defined by Laurent Dubois, “this ‘intermediate’ category between free whites and the enslaved was made up of those of African descent who were no longer enslaved. Many, but not all, in this group also had some European ancestry. Although their liberty guaranteed them many of the legal rights denied to the slaves, they were also subject to a battery of discriminatory legislation” (Dubois 2004: 54). I will expand on their particular situation in the following chapter.

they would be re-enslaved, they organized revolts against the French troops sent to the island to regain control (DuBois 2004*a*). By 1802, the French army had defeated the enslaved Blacks who had organized, although resistance movements continued after the suicide of Louis Delgrès, the lead general. Only Saint Domingue managed to overthrow France in 1803. The victory of Saint Domingue, newly rechristened Haiti, was a significant turning point for the future of the Caribbean, both for the relationship of the other Antillean colonies with both France and Haiti. In particular, “united for years in a Republican project of slave emancipation and all-out war against the British, the islands of Haiti and Guadeloupe would follow two completely different paths during the next centuries” (Dubois 2004*a*: 320). “Where Haiti charted a difficult course as an independent nation, Guadeloupe remained—as it remains to today—part of France,” argued historian Laurent Dubois (*ibid.*).

Historical accounts of the Caribbean post-Haitian-revolution reveal that unity between the islands—i.e. Haiti and the rest of the Antilles—declined while relations with other nations became more pronounced (Gaspar and Geggus 1997). Slavery in France’s colonies was officially abolished on March 4, 1848, but in order to compensate for the large number of freed Africans who left the plantations to work in the service sector, the government sponsored a program in the late 1800s to bring in farm laborers from the East Indies. The majority went to Guadeloupe. The introduction of an East Indian labor force exacerbated racial and class tensions on the island: the black population felt that the East Indians were undercutting their labor power, while white planters fought to maintain their steady stream of contract labor (Schnepel 2004). The French government eventually

ended the migrant program, but the East Indian presence on the island complicated the raced-based class hierarchy, as they were pitted against the black population and even used as strike breakers by French industries. At the same time, many assimilated and created families with the local white and mixed-race population.

The socio-economic and racial struggles in Guadeloupe and the rest of the Antilles also yielded cultural responses. A prominent one was the Negritude movement which emerged in the early 1930s, led by Francophone Antilleans, Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas, and West African Léopold Senghor. Negritude was a cultural response to a sense of alienation and fragmentation that emerged from France's policy of cultural assimilation. This policy is related to the ideology of French republicanism, which is premised on the political and cultural unity of the state. France permitted anyone (in theory, at least) to become French citizens, provided that they became culturally French as well. This in itself was premised on the belief of the superiority of the French (and Western) culture and civilization. The Negritude movement, in turn, celebrated African civilization, and sought to re-establish a black identity while rejecting cultural assimilation (Lewis 2006; Wilder 2005; Monro 2004). Haiti served as an inspiration for (psychological) revolt and identity, particularly for the Martinican Césaire and the Guyanese Damas. Césaire asserts Haiti as where "Negritude first stood up" (Césaire 1939: 24), referring to the Haitian revolution. Moreover, the 1915-1934 American occupation of Haiti helped foment a major literary and artistic proliferation around "Haitianism"—Haitian cultural pride—that heavily influenced the Antillean scholars. In particular, Dumas was profoundly influenced by Haitian scholar Jean Price-Mars, who

sought to affirm Haiti's African roots and criticized the Eurocentric attitudes and behavior of the elite (Munro 2004). As cited by Munro, "Damas concludes that Negritude is not an introverted, racially exclusive movement, but has essentially universality aims, and that it owes this fundamental aspect of its vision ultimately to Price-Mars" (Munro 2004: 6). Although Haiti was not directly involved in the Negritude movement, the country set a precedent for Black cultural pride that inspired generations.

The shift from colony to departmentalization of Guadeloupe (and Martinique, French Guiana, and the Reunion), however, caused profound shifts in the engagement with Negritude while spurring debates about the merits of French cultural assimilation. Departmentalization—the legal absorption of France's colonies into the French political and administrative systems in 1946—was meant to guarantee equal rights for people of color. Furthermore, it was a guarantee of economic security—and for the elite, political legitimacy (Beriss 2004)—in order, as some would argue, to avoid the fate of the independent Caribbean nation of Haiti. Yet among other issues, departmentalization caused an increase in migration from other nations, including Syria, Lebanon, Dominica, and Haiti. While the Syrian-Lebanese and to a lesser extent Dominicans worked their way up the socio-economic ladder, Haitians formed an under-class, generally involved in low-skilled, low-wage labor (Schnepel 2004; Brodwin 2001). The persistence of race-based socio-economic stratification in Guadeloupe, with white descendants of colonist, or *békés* at the top, mixed-raced, Middle Eastern and East Indians forming the middle class, and blacks at the bottom, would greatly impact Haitian immigrants, contributing to continued discrimination and marginalization. This marginalization was further

compounded by Haitian immigrants' different linguistic, cultural, and religious practices—all of which, when linked to Haiti's revolutionary history, led to the people's hyperracialization and resultant scorn and exclusion.

Indeed, it is this rejection of Haiti's kind of "blackness" that the Negritude movement sought to challenge. Its limitation, however, was its emphasis on Africa as the root of Caribbean identity—a focus that, many believed, de-emphasized the history of hybridity in the Caribbean that was fundamental to its formation. Glissant's notion of Antillanité, featuring a decentered, fragmented, and contradictory subject is what allows for the Guadeloupean to deploy a range of identities to its ultimate advantage. As Michael Dash eloquently summarizes, "Glissant sees the world and the Caribbean in particular in terms of an intricate branching of communities, an infinite wandering across cultures, where triumphs are momentary and where adaptation and *métissage* (creolization) are the prevailing forces" (Dash 1989: xxviii). Yet in this complex formulation of Caribbean identity one's blackness is diffused as the creolized and mixed Caribbean becomes a privileged site of identity over the Negritude's Black-based relationship between Africa and the Caribbean.

My report will use the 2009 Guadeloupean strikes as an ethnographic moment that reveals the complex intersection of race, culture, and nationality in the construction of Guadeloupean identity. The strikes created an environment that made even more visible the strategic negotiations of identity that are important to understanding postcolonial relationships between intimately tied nations such as Guadeloupe, Haiti, and France. I argue that Antillean identity is constructed along a racial continuum as

represented by the racio-cultural extremes of Haiti and metropolitan France. Depending on the agenda—whether socio-cultural, economic, political, or any combination of the three—in politicized situations, Antilleans will highlight categories that allow for them to maximize their various, fluid positions as non-sovereign Caribbeans, as second-class French citizens, and as members of the Black diaspora with racial politics that have a complicated relationship to Blackness. By looking at how certain categories are manipulated, we can also develop a better understanding of—and even strategies for—relieving the tensions that, I believe, undermine racial and cultural cooperation for these under-researched communities in France and its territories.

For this report, I will describe the context and events surrounding the 2009 strikes, focusing mostly on the island of Guadeloupe, where the strikes first originated. Inflated gas prices, the tipping point for the strikes, was a relatively banal issue compared with the centuries-long struggle against the exploitation of the Antilles, a point upon which I will further elaborate upon in the third chapter. I will highlight the instances when tropes of race and culture were used explicitly to distinguish the Antilleans from those they labeled as Other, such as in the slogan of the strikes, “Gwadeloup sé tan nou é pa ta yo” (Guadeloupe is ours and not theirs). I hope to demonstrate that Guadeloupean’s tricky political and economic ties to France challenge the potency of the nationalist and seemingly separatist sentiments engendered by the strikes. Moreover, the racial tensions that were intensified by the strikes speak to the broader discussion on race and global racial formation. The stratification of Guadeloupean society along race and class and the presence of not only a powerful white minority elite but also a socially powerful middle-

class bourgeoisie class made up of predominantly lighter-skinned Guadeloupeans also calls into question the color-line. As Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot points out, “color-cum-social categories operate in various spheres of urban life as part of different strategies of competition and struggle” (Trouillot 1998: 146). These categories operate on a global scale, and affect relationships between and among the African diaspora. In my conclusion I will address the implications of the strikes in community building and political identity formation.

Chapter 2

The tipping point was gas prices. People around the world watched in shock as the price of oil climbed to \$150 a barrel in 2008, causing gas prices to skyrocket. Following the law of supply and demand, the demand for oil decreased as the prices went up, but as the economy weakened further, oil prices eventually began to go down, causing a dramatic decrease in the price of gas as well. France's overseas departments, however, were still paying inflated prices (Pierot, *L'Humanite* 2009: January 29). This caused a general sense of outrage across the islands. Given their already difficult economic position, it would soon fuel large-scale anger and protest.

Departmentalization and its Discontents

The strikes were a response to a problem caused in great part by the departmentalization of France's Caribbean possessions. After the abolition of slavery in 1848, newly freed Africans left the plantations, leaving white plantation owners in a panic. They sought government help, and in 1854 France stepped in and started a migrant labor program, bringing in indentured servants from China, parts of Africa, the Portuguese territories, with the largest group from India (Schnepel 2004). This new migrant population, later known as "coolies", offered a temporary economic respite for the plantation owners. However, in 1884, Guadeloupe was hit by a sugar crisis. The competition from European beet sugar growers caused a sudden drop in sugar prices on the European market and many plantations were forced to close or sell to larger

companies (Lara 2006). France ended the indentured servants program in 1885, with the last boat docking in 1889. Guadeloupe was still facing an economic crisis, and thus expanded its crop market to better suit the European market. Planters began growing bananas, pineapples, and rice. The sugar crisis revealed how deeply intertwined the economy of Guadeloupe was tied France's success or failure.

As the economy struggled to right itself, the Guadeloupean society was also facing some major changes. Of the East Indian workers Schnepel writes

“Industrious in nature and often maintaining good relations with their white superiors, East Indian workers challenged the black labor force and effectively split the working-class ranks...by their very concentration in the agricultural industry where they performed tasks, such as cutting cane, which blacks refused to do, East Indians replaced blacks as the lowest esteemed group. Thus indirectly the group may have favored the social ascendancy of blacks into other sectors of activity” (Schnepel 2004: 46).

This “model minority” status may have served to their advantage when they eventually gained citizenship rights in 1923. Following this victory, many of them found jobs in the service industry, as merchants and bus drivers for example, thus gaining middle class status and fully assimilating to Guadeloupean life. Guadeloupe faced other challenges as well, as the socialist movement gained prominence in France and the Antilles. Socialist labor union leaders such as Achille René-Boisneuf and Hégésippe L'Égitimus began questioning the marginalized political status of Guadeloupeans, calling for more

economic justice between the factories and their workers and for political equality as full French citizens.

World War II was a significant turning point for Guadeloupe. The war caused the French economy to suffer, especially under the Nazi Vichy regime, and since the Antilles were dependent on France's economy, Guadeloupe was in turn devastated (Fransee 2007). The island remained afloat through self-sufficiency and autonomous efforts, and after the war ended, more politicians called for the decolonization of the Antilles, including Aimé Césaire. Césaire was one of the founders of Negritude, “the colonized response to cultural oppression by the French” where “the destruction of cultural assimilation was a prerequisite to the quest for black identity” (Lewis 2006: 27). Yet he advocated for the political integration of the Caribbean colonies in hopes that it would lead toward colonial emancipation without national independence (Wilder 2009). Césaire's advocacy of departmentalization was still in line with his ideology of Negritude. Césaire rejected cultural assimilation as it pertained to the French culture and its suppression of black cultures, but still believed in the potential of French Caribbean colonies to equal and treated fairly under French law. Furthermore, Césaire hoped departmentalization—or the political and economic assumption of France's oldest colonies French bureaucracy—would lead to more economic autonomy, and break up the industries owned by white French colonists and their descendants, known as the *békés*. Departmentalization entailed bringing Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, and La Reunion up to the same governmental level as France's mainland departments.

Unfortunately, departmentalization brought with it new challenges in governing. While there was an increase in the standard-of-living as a result of the rapid switch from a plantation to a service-based economy, departmentalization brought with it a number of issues, concisely laid out by anthropologist David Beriss:

“First, by bringing the Antilles in line with French social legislation, labor costs have risen dramatically since the 1940s. Coupled with growing competition for European markets by tropical products from African and Latin American countries, most of the Antillean plantations could no longer compete. At the same time, departmentalization has brought with it the implantation of large French bureaucracies to administer social services. By 1980, nearly 30 percent and city hall in Fort-de-France was reputed to be the island’s biggest employer, surpassing the sugar producers in total employees” (Beriss 2004: 60).

The cost of living in the overseas departments (also known as *département d’outre mer*, or DOMs) became significantly higher than in the French metropole, in large part due to the irregular taxation system: France’s policy was to “favor as much as possible exports [from mainland France] including subsidizing them, and restrict as much as possible imports [from overseas] through taxation” (Numa 2009: 34).² The lack of revenue from economic exchanges with France made it very difficult to establish trading relationships with other islands in the Caribbean. On the island, tensions existed between the local

² “...Favoriser autant que possible les exportation y compris en subventionnant, et restreindre autant que possible les importation en taxant.” All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

black population and the békés. Béké families were acquiring ever-larger portions of the islands' wealth. Although béké families make up less than 1% of the island's population, they disproportionately own 52% of the farming land and 40% of the major companies and supermarkets (Numa 2009). With a reduction in the small-farm agricultural industry due to the growing béké monopoly on land, and with an overall decreased interest in manual labor, Guadeloupe experienced a dramatic increase in emigration since the 1960s, particularly for those between the ages of 18-35. Their emigration was facilitated by the creation of the agency BUMIDOM (Bureau pour le développement des migration intéressant les département d'outre-mer-Bureau of Overseas Department Migration) in 1962 (Schnepel 2004; Bonilla 2009). This program eventually ended in the 80s, but the employment infrastructure in Guadeloupe was neglected, leading to higher unemployment rates. In fact, by 2007, Guadeloupe has the second highest unemployment rate (22.7%), in the European Union (Numa 2009) compared to France at 7.8%.

Inevitable Eruption

The global economic crisis had an extremely detrimental effect on the Caribbean. In 2007, Haiti had food riots over the rising cost of rice, a basic and important food staple. Rising food costs also affected Guadeloupe, and combined with higher oil costs and wages lower than that of the metropole, the situation became nearly unbearable.

On December 5, 2008, a number of labor unions, organizations and associations came together to plan a protest over the high cost of fuel. After their first protest was met

with failure, the unions and organizations continued to meet and discussed grievances that went beyond fuel costs, and members discussed including seeking general socioeconomic justice in the form of more affordable housing, lower food prices, and education reform. To achieve their goals, forty-eight various labor unions and organizations came together under a united platform, forming the umbrella organization *Lyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon* (Collective Against Extreme Exploitation-LKP), declaring “we are together in a movement of consciousness with engagement and determination to lift Guadeloupe out of its predicament”.³ LKP wrote up a list of 146 social demands of the French government and planned a general strike in order to have those demands met. At the top of their list was “an immediate pay increase of at least 200 Euros, of low-income workers, retirees, and minimum wage monthly pay increase in the effort to increase buying power, to support local Guadeloupean products and general consumption...[and] a minimum Guadeloupean salary calculated based on the cost of living in Guadeloupe.” LKP also reiterated that the cost of living in Guadeloupe is in fact about 30% higher than in mainland France.

It is important to underline that the DOMs were not seeking to adjust the prices of all products to reflect that of the metropole, but mostly the prices of imported products that were found locally, in order to provide fair market competition. The spokesperson for LKP, Élie Domota, directly addressed this issue in an interview, saying:

“Guadeloupe has become a colony of consumption of imported products sold at inflated prices. All of the legislation regarding the overseas territories these past

³ “Nou ansanm ansanm sanblé adan on bel balan a konsyans avé angajman é detewminasyon pou nou détoyé Gwadeloup.”

years obey the same logic: that of [tax] deregulation and the exoneration of businesses to pay certain national dues. Lured by these gifts, entrepreneurs come here and fill their pockets [with money] before leaving, leaving a trail of unemployed workers. These politics have permitted neither development nor protest for social change. Today, the Guadeloupeans say ‘No’” (Interview with Rosa Moussaoui, *L’Humanite* 2009a: February 9).

LKP planned their strike in two parts, beginning with the shutting down of all gas stations on the island on January 19th, and then expanding to a national strike the following day. The entire island came to a standstill: major supermarkets, businesses, banks, schools and universities were closed. The LKP even occupied the international airport for a day, taking over check-in and baggage services and delaying the majority of flights. With the support of tens of thousands of resident Guadeloupeans, the organizers demanded an audience with French government officials. Several large scale protests were formally organized the end of January, drawing between 20,000 and 65,000 participants. The protesters marched in the streets wearing red shirts, shouting and singing the official slogan of the protests, “Gwadeloup se tan nou, sé pa ta yo, yo pé fé sa yo vlé adan péyi an nou” [Guadeloupe is ours, not theirs, they can’t do what they want in our country]. “They” is overtly a reference to the *béké* population who, in turn, felt they were “scapegoated” during the protests as the root cause for the economic inequalities. The tensions between the *békés* and the rest of the population were only exacerbated with the diffusion of the one-hour documentary *Les Derniers Maîtres de la Martinique* (The Last Masters of Martinique) on February 5th. The LKP scheduled an outdoor screening as a

part of the strikes. The documentary highlighted the economic power that the békés possessed on the island, and interviewed both *békés* and non-white Guadeloupeans to hear their opinions and attitudes on the situation in Martinique. One Black Martinican interviewed told the reporter, “we are slaves. We are all slaves. Modern slaves. Go look for Aubery, Hayot, de Lucy, de Reynal, Viviers: all these, they are the big békés. It’s because of them that we are here!”

The békés expressed annoyance with the protests against their presence, stating in matter-of-fact terms that they simply know how to effectively run businesses, and do not “own” the island. Alain Huyges-Despointes, a senior béké, was blunt in his disgust for racial mixing (known as *métissage*). He revealed that long-standing béké families were cast out of the béké caste once an interracial marriage occurred. He furthermore stated he wanted to “preserve the race”. While other békés lamented the fact that one person ended up representing the racist tendencies of the whole béké caste, their presence on the island and the economic privilege and power can be considered as offensive as the bigoted comments of Huyges-Despointes. LKP projected the film at a nighttime rally before hundreds in the capital Pointe-à-Pitre and another major city, Fort-de-France. The film’s harsh findings provided further incentive for protest and revolt.

Many békés however claim Guadeloupean identity with the same fervor as their Antillean neighbors, highlighting the shared cultural aspect of Guadeloupean identity in favor of race. In one news interview on France 24, a béké told the reporter that Guadeloupe was his country too—and stated this in Guadeloupean *kréyol*, thus authenticating his identity through language. It begs the question, what does it mean for

a béké to identify as Guadeloupean, a nationally racialized category? The color-blind nature of French citizenship allows for the békés to generate sympathy for their experience of reverse discrimination. In an ambiguously sympathetic *Le Monde* article on the small white minority population, a former leader of a business association stated: “We mustn’t exaggerate the importance of the békés, they only own the leftovers” (Gurrey and Hopquin, *Le Monde 2009*: March 1). Two senior békés were also interviewed, and the authors did not spare details in order to cast a sympathetic light:

“The man boxed in his humiliation, and removed his hand. He did not shield his face, knowing well the heavy historic debt that opposes the 3,000 békés against 400,000 Martinicans. His ancestor arrived on the island in 1635, as the captain of a militia. He profited against the misery of slaves...’ We didn’t talk about slavery at home. For us, it was a burden. But today, it’s like nothing has changed. Exploiter, stingy employer, racist, endogamist.’ Roger de Jaham does not understand the disgrace that his community is currently experiencing, [the people] howling for a sacrifice. “We are scapegoats,” he suspects. “The strikers, the media, and even the president of the Republic have chosen the békés as their targets.” At his side, his brother Claude 65 years old, wants to believe that it’s only a bad moment that will eventually pass: “I think that it will go down, but in pain, in resentment. It will leave scars” (Gurrey and Hopquin, *Le Monde 2009*: March 1).

The term “scapegoats” was often repeated during the strikes by those who sympathized with the békés or the békés themselves. The béké community resented being considered as a whole responsible for the social and economic misfortune of Guadeloupe. They accused LKP of reverse or “anti-white” racism. Domota dismissed the accusation of anti-white racism as a scare tactic. Patricia Braflan-Trobo, a Guadeloupean scholar, states it plainly:

Those that denounce the movement, it is a systematic political exclusion of Guadeloupeans of African and Indigenous origins from higher-end, specialized positions. The large institutions, such as the State, are responsible for these processes of exclusion. Not one of the heads of State offices is black in Guadeloupe, except for the director of the ANPE [National Agency for Employment]...All the posts of power, of decision-making, are held by white people. For this fact, when a crisis erupts such as the one we just witnessed, the social issues intersect with racial issues, which, I insist, does not depend whatsoever on “anti-white racism” (Interview with Rosa Moussaoui, *L’Humanité* 2009c: February 28).

France was incredibly slow to respond to the crisis. A well-known puppet-animation satire (in a style similar to *The Onion News*) called *Les Guignols* produced a sketch on the strikes that was posted on a number of blogs discussing the crisis. Using a televised news format, the sketch opened up with Sarkozy’s “discovery” of the island of Guadeloupe, and then quickly turning away, claiming that the inhabitants looked hostile.

The news anchor then introduced as his “guest” the French Prime Minister François Fillon. Asking him why France waited two weeks before even acknowledging the strikes, Fillon stated that there was no point in addressing the strikes since, “Guadeloupe was an island” and due to global warming, it would soon be underwater. The segment then switched to a well-known conservative correspondent (again, in puppet form), who questioned what to do with the “savages” and calling for the revival of the lost career of the “pacifying Jesuit missionary” in order to civilize the island inhabitants. The news anchor interviewed Sarkozy as well, asking why the delay in response, and Sarkozy responded, “Oh come on, Guadeloupe doesn’t interest anyone...it’s RFO...the local news station of the DOM-TOMs. It’s has only 50,000 viewers, you must see the pointlessness...RFO can wait.” In another segment, a government worker came to see Sarkozy in order to inform him that Guadeloupe was striking, complaining that he couldn’t get his crate of “Ti-Punch” a popular rum drink from the Antilles, and without his *apèro* [drink appetizer] he couldn’t work.

The political skit touched on a number of attitudes that the French publicly carry. The overseas territories are typically viewed as a tourist destination, an exotic escape in the Caribbean (and were billed as such in the 20th century, with the founding of Club Méditerranée, or Club Med for short). Most of the gross domestic product of Martinique and Guadeloupe is generated through tourism. In 2008, 86% of tourists who visited the DOMs (Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guyana, and the Reunion) were French (*Le tourisme en France en 2008*). Because of this, the French are unable to see the departments as anything more than the exotic locale of France, a built-in resort. The

French see the Antilles as a site of consumption; they enjoy the music, the food and alcohol, but arguably cannot see beyond the material aspects of Antillean culture. For this reason, the protests could go unreported for two weeks because Antilleans are not viewed as French citizens on equal footing with those in mainland France, but as geographically, politically, and culturally distinct and less important.

In February, two weeks after the start of the strike, the French government sent the Junior Minister of Overseas France, Yves Jégo, to Guadeloupe to negotiate with the employees and strikers. Jégo sat down on February 4th with leaders of the LKP along with employers and business leaders and proposed a deal to increase the salaries of 45,000 Guadeloupean workers by over 200 Euros. Large employers in Guadeloupe said that they could not afford the salary increase and refused to sign any accord unless the French government agreed to offset the costs in some way. Jégo abruptly departed for Paris on February 9th, to the anger of the LKP representatives for abandoning them at a critical time. When he approached Prime Minister Fillon with the conditions proposed by the large companies and the labor unions, Fillon rejected the accord, refusing to contribute more state money toward salary increases.

Gwada sé tan nou!

The sudden departure of Fillon prompted a lyrical response by Guadeloupeans. It is important to look to music to uncover parts of Guadeloupean identity since music, particularly carnival, has always played a major role in Guadeloupe's history. Carnival

has always been a revolutionary form of music, used as a way for the enslaved to poke fun at their masters (Melyon-Reinette and Durpaire 2009). The 2009 carnival festival's theme, "Le Mas⁴ Kont Pwofitasyon" was key in drawing in more participants to the LKP rallies. Using the slogan heard from the beginning of the strikes, "Guadeloupe is ours, not theirs!", songwriters Akiyo and Voukoum made both overt and subtle references to the various levels of the conflict. Set to a carnival beat, the song was heard everywhere, in homes and on the streets as strikers marched up and down.

La Gwadeloup sé tan nou, la Gwadeloup sé pa ta yo
Yo pé ké fè sa yo vlé, sa yo vlé an péyi an nou.

[Guadeloupe is ours, Guadeloupe is not theirs

They cannot do what they want, what they want in our country]⁵

The song begs the question, *who* makes up Guadeloupe? To whom does Guadeloupe *not* belong? "Guadeloupe is ours, not theirs" forced French spectators to question the slogan's meaning, which evoked France's colonial past and current economic exploitation, but most importantly the racial inequality that is clearly referenced in the

⁴ As explained by Melyon-Reinette and Durpaire, "Mas is one of the formes of carnival practiced in Guadeloupe. Its parades are less policed than that of the Carnaval. The disguises and costumes often represent political messages or permit political, identity, or cultural expression. Imprinted with meaning and expressing revolt, Mas is total expression through the body. The beat is quick and determined" (24).

⁵ Translated by Jean Élisabeth Largitte. Lyrics taken from the website http://www.potomitan.info/gwadeloup/la_gwadeloup_se_tan_nou.php

“us-them” dichotomy of the slogan. The somewhat ambiguous statement allows it to work on multiple levels, including nationally, between the Guadeloupeans and the French government; and locally, between the békés and the rest of the population. These levels overlap to create a complex mapping of Guadeloupean identity. They directly attack the government as represented by the local prefect:

Misyé préfè soti rivé, jak biswen mété difè
I ja ka pozé veto, i vlé pran nou pou rigolo

Mister Prefect, just arrived, is ready to set fire
He opposes [our] vetoes, he takes us for fools

Later on, another couplet is dedicated to the prefect:

Misyé soti la i sot, i èvè nouvèl diktati
Nou adan on démokwasi, pa menm savé sa i ka di
Misyé préfè réfléchi, réfléchi byen sa ou ka di
Nou vini posé ou kessyon, a vou dè ban nou bon solisyon

The man came out of nowhere with a new declaration
We are in a democracy, he has no idea what he’s talking about
Mister Prefect, please think, think about what you declare

We came to ask you questions, it is up to you to give us the right solutions

In both sections, Guadeloupeans are asking for respect as a (non-sovereign) nation, the right to have more control over their futures, or to at least have their futures be better secured. But later on they reference their historical particularity:

Mhmm Nou sé pitit a Ignas, désandan a Solitid

Sé yo ki zansèt an nou, sé yo ki Gwadeloupéyen

I kriyé Gwadeloup-la, yo goumé pou nou soti

Alè nou ka pété chenn nou pa ka viré an ba chenn

We are the children of Ignace⁶, descendants of Solitude⁷

They are our ancestors, they are Guadeloupeans

They named Guadeloupe, they fought for our existence

Now we break our chains, we won't return to chains.

Here we have another reference to slavery and colonialism, and an allusion to modern-day bondage. The song's last verse indirectly references race through the use of the sun:

Manman la Gwadeloup sé tan nou, la Gwadeloup péyi an nou

La Gwadeloup sé la nou yé, la nou fèt an solèy-la

⁶ Figure of the Guadeloupean uprising in the 18th century

⁷ La mulâtresse Solitude (1772 - 1802) is a historical figure of the Guadeloupean slave resistance in the 18th century

Gwadada sé tan nou, péyi-la sé pa ta yo

On biten fo yo konprann, yo ké lésé nou kon nou yé.

Mother, Guadeloupe is ours, Guadeloupe is our country

Guadeloupe is where we are, where we are born in the sun

Guadeloupe is ours, the county is not theirs

One thing they must understand, they must let us be as we are

The lyrics provide insight into the complicated discourse around identity and nationality. Although race was never explicitly mentioned, references to chains and the sun certainly make it clear that Guadeloupeans have a racial consciousness that they try to reconcile with their national alliances.

The Dénouement?

Around the same time, the strike spread to neighboring Martinique. The sister umbrella organization Collectif du 5 février (The February 5th Collective) held their own protests drawing tens of thousands of participants. Demonstrators carried pro-trade union signs and wore red shirts, the official color of the local unions. All gas stations were closed as well as supermarkets and retail businesses. France deployed 130 riot police from mainland France to Martinique on 12 February 2009. Within a week, however, salary increases were already being negotiated, a marked difference in results iithan in Guadeloupe. There are a number of possible reasons for this, one of them being that the

Martinican tourism industry was not as willing to concede defeat and shut down as those in Guadeloupe did. Domota surmised that it was possibly unwillingness on the part of the employers to deal with the more uncompromising attitude of the Guadeloupeans. “They still possess the same mindset,” he said. “For them, it is out of the question that Negros [or “Niggers”, depending on the translation] rebel to claim salary increases” (Interview with Rosa Moussaoui, *L’Humanité* 2009b: March 4).

Back in Guadeloupe, over the course of a month, the protests escalated to uprisings, as roadblocks were set up throughout the country, cars and trees were set on fire, and the international airport was virtually shut down as debris was thrown on the runways, causing American Airlines to cancel all flights. The protests garnered more media attention as people from all sides analyzed the situation. In an interview with BBC, Lawyer Harry Durimel from France’s Green Party bluntly stated his opinion:

“It’s always the same tactic, all the businessman from the old ancient time of slavery, descendant of the slave master they always have the same strategy, saying that once the nigger would be hungry they would get back to work. So they have taken the habit of, let the strikes slide and people will get fed up and go back to work ... it is a failure of that strategy, the hundreds of gendarmes that have just arrived in Guadeloupe who don’t know their law, who don’t know us and who are only one thing in mind and is that they go to beat niggers. They are very racist, not people who know Guadeloupe, they are being brought down here for a mission and they don’t even understand their mission so we don’t see why they don’t use this same force for people who are marching in Paris at the Bastille,

why is it that anytime that there is a demand in the colonies that they have to send forces, is it a way of dialogue?”

Things took a dramatic turn with the first death associated with strike. Labor union organizer and activist Jacques Bino was shot by a gang of youths not tied to the organized protests. Bino’s murder may have marked a turning point in the general strikes, with both the French government and the LKP union groups beginning to take serious notice of the conflict. More than 500 French police officers arrived in Guadeloupe on February 19 in an attempt to quell the ongoing violence following Bino’s death. Bino’s funeral was held on Sunday, February 22, 2009. His funeral was attended by former French Socialist presidential candidate Ségolène Royal, who used the solemn occasion to criticize the government of French President Nicolas Sarkozy saying the government had “abandoned” Guadeloupe and urging it to find “solutions” to the crisis (*France 24*, 2009, February 22). Following Bino’s death, Victorin Lurel, the president of Guadeloupe’s regional council, demanded that the French government stop the violence and address underlying tensions. In response to the riots, President Nicolas Sarkozy announced a meeting of the elected leaders of the French overseas territories. Sarkozy held a televised press conference, where he sought to reassure residents that the government was not ignoring their concerns, saying “Guadeloupe and Martinique are part of France” and that the islands’ residents “have the sentiment that they are not always heard. We should continue to fight, every day, so that the country makes a larger place

for those who represent the diversity of France” (*Turks & Caicos Free Press* 2009, February 13).

After a series of negotiations (and cancellation of negotiations), the strikes ended on March 4, 2009, when the French government agreed to raise the salaries of the lowest paid by 200 euros and granted the LKP their top 20 demands, including the reduction in the price of water and food, and the promise to build new, low income housing. The agreement was honorably named the “Jacques Bino Accord”. The agreement was at first only signed by minority employer organizations; the *Movement des Entreprises en France* [The Movement of French Entreprises-MEDEF] refused to sign, and therefore the *Ministère de l’économie, l’industrie, et de l’emploi* [Ministry of economy, industry, and employment] had to intervene in order to mandate that the accord be applicable to all companies. Fillon expressed concern that as a result of the employers closing their doors for the duration of the strike, that there would be catastrophic consequences for those who expected to return to their jobs. To this, Domota replied in an interview:

“For 40 years, the unemployment rate is 40% in Guadeloupe. This has never worried the big companies. Anyhow the MEDEF companies prefer to hire elsewhere than in Guadeloupe. This is the first time that MEDEF has worried about the employment situation in Guadeloupe” (Interview with Rosa Moussaoui, *L’Humanité* 2009b: March 4).

The strikes served as an inspiration for Guadeloupeans of the potential for a shift in the way things functioned on the island. Some even described the strikes as a “revolution”

(Laventure 2009), proclaiming that “Guadeloupe would never be the same”. Despite the LKP winning a large number of their demands, in the end it is clear that there are deeper, more entrenched issues at play that would take more than a 44-day strike to undo. The strikes could not adequately address the divisions among non-white Guadeloupeans. The issue of the “color-line” for example, referring to the relationship between power, privilege and one’s skin color, remained untouched. The mistreatment of Haitian migrants, in part due to their perceived hyper-blackness, is a clear example of the other issues that need to be addressed.

Race and the Underclass

As marginal as the Guadeloupeans find themselves in the French nation as second-class citizens, Haitians bear the brunt of the economic crisis as a culturally inferior, economically exploited, and juridically discriminated group on the island. Although the situation of Haitian migration on the island was not on the agenda during the strikes, it is interesting to see that the strikes' protest against exploitation did not include the exploitation of undocumented Haitian workers who typically perform menial, less-than-desirable jobs for very low wages, in the same way Mexican and other immigrants are exploited in the United States. It is certainly a “paradox that Caribbean nationals [i.e., Haitians and Dominicans] going to live and work in other Caribbean countries (in this case, Guadeloupe and French Guiana) encounter a reception that is just as unfriendly as that accorded to migrants from those two countries in Europe or North America” (Giraud 2009: 51). The anti-Haitian sentiment in France in particular coincided with the anti-immigrant sentiment of the 1970s

and 1980s, when the French government introduced more work permit restrictions in the interest of reducing the foreign-born population (Giraud 2009; Hargreaves 1995). These restrictions eventually became the 1993 Pasqua laws that aimed at “zero immigration” through tighter border control and changes in who could apply for residency, and even denied automatic citizenship to children born in France of immigrant parents (Stovall and Van Den Abbeele 2003: 7). In the Antilles, these laws were taken quite seriously, with frequent deportations of Haitians who tried to enter the country or who had over-extended their visa (Brodwin 1991; Giraud 2009).

One of the main reasons Haitians felt outrage over their deportation was that many of those deported should have had a right to residency—many had been there for a decade or more. This right had been extended to the East Indian, Syrian, and Lebanese population. Yet Haitians are highly policed and denied access to citizenship rights that they are technically due. Guadeloupeans in general remain unwilling to share their space with Haitians. Are Haitians not victims of extreme exploitation? Then why was their cause not fought for during the strikes? Giraud argues that the rejection of Haitians by Guadeloupeans stems from “a desire to escape at all costs from what Frantz Fanon called ‘the great black hole’ of poverty and to get as close as possible to the enviable world of the dominant species, the ‘whites’” (Giraud 2009: 51). He goes on further to say that it is a “passion for homogeneity” (citing Haitian sociologist Laennec Hurbon), but primarily tied to their identity, based on the desire to be a culturally distinct national group. Haitians living in Guadeloupe do not have much desire to intergrate into French-Guadeloupean life. This separatist attitude does not sit well with Guadeloupeans, who thus find Haitians suspect and “vulnerable to charges of political disloyalty and economic parasitism”

(Brodwin 2001: 5).

Through the history and current events of Guadeloupe, I argue that Antilleans actively reject Haitians as a migrant community because they are also actively rejecting a particular kind of Blackness that is linked to inferiority, tradition, and poverty.

Brodwin offers one informant's take on the matter:

He asserts that the assimilation of Guadeloupe into the French nation-state outweighs any commonality between the Black residents of Guadeloupe and those of Haiti. He thus explains why migrants are humiliated by Guadeloupeans despite the two groups' shared history (former colonial plantation societies with African-descended populations, speaking similar Creole languages, etc.). A second, even more common argument seizes on a lingering ambivalence in Guadeloupeans' self-identification as French. It claims that Guadeloupeans actually envy Haitians' cultural autonomy. Guadeloupeans, who always try to imitate the French, are intimidated by Haitians' cultural autonomy and their obvious national pride.

Beriss makes the argument that rather than the category of race being used in discourses around Antillean identity, culture and nation are used instead, but more often than not serve as fronts in instances when race is really in operation. I take this argument a step further to state that one of the main ways this substitution occurs is through the marrying of hyper-Blackness to Haiti. In so doing, Guadeloupeans reveal attitudes that seem to parallel the Us-Them distinction between Guadeloupeans and white French. Haiti serves two functions in the Guadeloupean imagination: 1) as Haiti-the-rebellious-state, its history, particularly its brutal revolution that led to independence, makes the country a menacing spectre in discussions on Guadeloupean independence, and 2) as Haiti-the-failed-state, with its

increasing rate of persistent poverty and marginalization resulting in Haitian migration has led to resentment by the Guadeloupean population, who often discriminate against and actively seek to deport Haitians. Where békés represent a racist white oligarchy, Haitians represent an undesirable Black population, degrading the quality of life in Guadeloupe, while simultaneously reminding Guadeloupeans of their lost Black cultural history.

Chapter 3

It is important to properly contextualize the relationship between Guadeloupe and Haiti, to show the continuities as well as the important shifts. In doing so, I aim to show that their present day relationship is deeply connected to complexes that were developed during the period of colonization and have persisted—in different manifestations—since. As I have stated earlier, the social, political, and economic problems Guadeloupe face are a direct consequence of the colonial institution from which it was birthed. France's desire for an empire led its rulers to colonize territory in all corners of the world. Guided by the conviction that it had reached the apex of civilization, France was driven by the desire to spread civilization everywhere it conquered. France began its colonial mission in the Caribbean in 1625. Trying to colonize Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Dominica, France decimated the indigenous population of Caribs through expulsion or disease. The *Compagnie des Indes occidentales* was created in order to manage the plantation economies, and bought in a steady stream of Africans and white *engagés* (indentured laborers) from France. A few decades later, France would acquire the colony of Saint-Domingue, which would grow to become the most profitable colony of France, earning the nickname *la Perle des Antilles*. France invested more and more in the economic expansion of the Antilles, reaching a significant height in the late 1700s (Dubois 2004a: 36).

It was at this point that a number of events occurred that fundamentally altered the project of colonization. The French revolution erupted in 1789, and was a period of

political and social unrest that ushered France into a new age of governing. In the attempt to become a modern nation, France rejected absolute monarchism in favor of a government where the citizen had a direct relationship to the State. This was based on the principles of republicanism. French republicanism constitutes an evolution of the broader political notion of republicanism that has its origins as far back as 509 BC with the establishment of the Roman Republic. Over time republicanism has evolved, branching off into different, contextualized forms as interpreted by, for example, the Dutch, the French, or the United States, yet remaining a very Western ideology. Enlightenment *philosophes* and thinkers of the 17th and 18th century shaped French republican ideology. No overarching definition exists, but there are a number of factors that are considered its main characteristics. Republicanism can refer to the political system of governing and/or the ideology, ideally being “a community of citizens who were expected to practice civic virtue by participating in public life and devoting themselves to the common good” (Wilder 2005: 159). The most basic characteristics of republicanism emphasize popular sovereignty, supported by the idea that a people can participate fully and rationally in politics, a concept based in Enlightenment and Cartesian philosophy. Furthermore, the principles and values that the nation espouses are based on universality, its applicability to all. French republicanism also encourages the use of political institutions in order to promote greater equality and social justice and secure a citizen’s liberty and freedom. Education is of utmost importance in the success of French republicanism; in order to create a rational, loyal, and disciplined people who

could properly participate in French politics, generation after generation need to be taught *to be* French (Hazareesingh 1994; Conklin 1997).

French Republicanism is an ever-evolving concept, and with each Republic erected, republicanism became more refined and underwent concrete reform. (There have been no less than five republics, and sub-republics within those.) Ideologically however, republicanism can become much more idealistic, and arguably impossible to realize completely (the same could be said for communism or democracy). Yet republicanism as an ideology deeply affected those within the French empire. Republicanism represented the height of modernity, the embodiment of Enlightenment thought. In its applicability, however, republicanism was susceptible to corruption by an ever-persistent white supremacy that still viewed the African Other as less than human.

The paradox of the French enlightenment—writing and philosophizing on humanity while denying it to enslaved non-Whites—became more pronounced during the French revolution. During the early revolutionary period, everyone had access to French citizenship, as historian Patrick Weil explains. France tried to enact a vision of open citizenship: “One could not be a citizen without being French, but during a four-year period—from 1790 to 1794—everyone living in France was automatically naturalized as French...birth on French territory [was] the principle criterion for possessing the “quality of being French” (Weil 2008: 4). Yet, as Weil conveniently forgets to mention (in a text written in 2005, translated in 2008!) a different set of rule existed for the colonies. Slavery was still in full force, and France continued to import more and more enslaved Africans to work on the Caribbean plantations. By 1789, the colony of Saint Domingue

had 509,642 enslaved Africans, compared to 26,666 freed coloreds and 35,440 white colonists (Benot 1987).⁸ The island of Guadeloupe, in contrast, had 82,978 enslaved Africans, 1,877 freed coloreds, and 12,039 white colonists (the numbers for Martinique are similar). It is interesting to see differences in the population distribution: only in Saint Domingue did the number of freed coloreds rival that of the white colonists. As the enslaved and freed colored population grew, new racial concepts developed that stratified the society in ways that corresponded to the global racial hierarchy that placed white men in positions of power, freed coloreds in lesser bureaucratic positions, and generally disenfranchised those that were interpolated as black.⁹ Dubois offers a compelling example of such racial highlighting from the time period of Guadeloupe's first emancipation in 1790. It was custom to designate one's race on legal documentation,

⁸ It is important to note that this number is accurate based on what was reported during that time for tax purposes. Because slave owners had to pay taxes per head, oftentimes the actual number of slaves was undercut to avoid higher fees. See Yves Benot (1987) *La révolution française et la fin des colonies*. Paris: La Découverte.

⁹ Dubois in his historical text *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* makes a conscious decision to avoid "using racial designations--white, mulatto, black--as categories that can generate explanations rather than as social artifacts that demand them...complicated ideological and political forces often divided groups that we might be tempted to see as unified by 'race'" (2004b: 5-6). Whereas I would agree that the use of race could inhibit a nuanced analysis of that historical moment, the total avoidance of such categories takes the Haitian revolution out of the larger context of global racial formation that shaped and was shaped by the revolution. The very reason for the revolt arose out of the racialized project put forth by French colonizers. The hypocrisy of the French state in declaring its commitment to Republican ideals while denying those of who were racialized as Other the full benefit of those rights is precisely where race, and specifically Blackness, enter the picture. Philosophers such as Hegel and Gobineau were explicit in their assertion that Black beings were incapable of developing an ontology, due their inability to reason and understand conceptions of freedom; rather they required enslavement in order to become rational (Buck-Morss 2000; Wright 2004). Therefore, certain tenets of a Black consciousness were established during the so-called "Age of Revolution".

“white” being the default, unmarked category. In 1794, local officials began applying the racial designation of *European*—the use of which lasted only two weeks—and *blanc* [white] in a few national legal documents. Dubois goes on further to describe the various nuances and absences of racial designation for *gens de couleurs* and formerly enslaved Africans, concluding,

“Despite the racial egalitarianism of the 1794 decree of emancipation, the naming of race remained of central importance in the French Caribbean...the particular ways race was inscribed into the documents in postemancipation Guadeloupe differed profoundly from what had come before—and what, in the case of Guadeloupe, would come again...The mark of citizenship so powerfully asserted in 1797 would ultimately be reversed for these new arrivals baptized into the republic” (Dubois *in* Peabody and Stovall 2003: 105).

Republicanism, despite its universalist tenets, could not ignore race in the Empire. The prevalence and increasing influence of the *gens de couleurs* required that France define the terms of political engagement for non-white people. The enslaved and colonial subjects of France were exposed to the ideals of the Enlightenment, yet were deliberately denied their civil rights or worse, expression of their full humanity due to their perceived incapacity to understand and/or uphold civic duties as a full French citizen. This specific argument is what historian Laurent Dubois called “republican racism”, where “new forms of racial exclusion became interwoven with the language of the language of rights...that initiated a long French engagement with the problem of organizing colonial relationships

within a universalist framework” (Dubois 2004*b*: 167). The struggle for citizenship rights for freed coloreds opened up the debates on *who* could truly be French, and *what* being French meant. Anti-slavery activists cropped up around the same time, questioning whether slavery could still have a legitimate place in the new French republic. In mainland France, the group *La Société des Amis des Noirs* (Society of Friends of “Blacks”) was created in support of the abolition movement. Noted abolitionists such as l’abbé Gregoire and l’abbé Raynal were vociferous in their demands for the freeing of slaves. Encouraged by their efforts, many free coloreds in Paris demanded that the National Assembly live up to its commitment to its Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and even demanded spots in the Assembly (Knight and Palmer 1989: 29).

Of course, these ideas of racial inferiority were based on an investment in slavery and colonization as a major source of France’s wealth and power. Although France was in possession of some of the most productive colonies in the Caribbean, all of which were entirely dependent on their slave population, the country did not tolerate slavery in the metropole. The denial of civil and civic rights to the non-white (but mainly enslaved African) populations thus did not run counter to Enlightenment principles of universality because, “[e]ven as the colonial state presented itself as the bearer of the liberatory possibilities of democracy,” writes historian Laurent Dubois, “administrators argued that the majority of the colonized did not have the cultural and intellectual capacities necessary to responsibly exercise political rights” (Dubois 2004: 4). Thus, France could have laws banning the possession of slaves on the mainland, but allow full-fledged

slavery in the Antilles (Ndiaye 2007).¹⁰ These contradictions did not go without criticism. More often than not, rather than the flat-out rejection of such policies, the enslaved and the elite *gens de couleurs* sought to “challenge France to extend republican institutions to all colonized peoples” (Wilder 2005: 167) and more importantly, highlight and critique race—whiteness in particular.

By creating this distinction of mainland and colonies, it encased continental France as the exclusive site of Enlightenment principles put to practice; the colonies were sites of the exotic and the uncivilized, and therefore did not have to be included in the Republican ideology—they were incapable of adhering to its principles. For example, Louis XIV drew up *Le Code Noir*, a set of 60 laws that were drafted in order to control the slave and *gens de couleur* population, applicable only in the colonies. The laws forbade the practice of any other religion but Roman Catholicism, made it necessary to obtain permission in order to for the enslaved to marry, and demanded respect of freed coloreds to their former masters.¹¹ Although there were also laws in mainland France pertaining to Africans and *gens de couleur* that prohibited interracial marriage, and barred them from entering certain public spaces or carrying weapons (Garrigus 2003), such populations still had access to an education or apprenticeship. This privileging of the *gens de couleur*, however uneven, further solidified the class and color hierarchy

¹⁰ As historian Pap N’Diaye recounts: “in metropolitan France, slaves were in principle not permitted stay since French law stressed their enfranchisement, in light of the common law of “free soil” explicitly created by lawmakers in the 16th century...the king’s response was...clear: slaves brought to France for one reason or another should be liberated...” (2008: 115, *my translation*).

¹¹ Translated from original text, as reproduced in “Les 60 articles du Code Noir”, accessed July 19, 2009:
http://www.liceolocarno.ch/Liceo_di_Locarno/materie/biologia/martinica/code_noir.html

within white supremacy, but was purposely done in order to co-opt a portion of the subjugated population that would in turn act as intermediaries between the French government and the disenfranchised (Robinson 2000).

The Rise of the Black Jacobins

The political dissent of those in the metropole was in turn weakening the institutions that held the traditional sources of power and authority in the Caribbean in check (Knight and Palmer 1989: 26). Most white French slave-owners were intent on keeping their plantation economy in order to maintain their economic and political power through the exploitation of African slaves. This in itself was supported by the writings of Enlightenment thinkers. Some of the popular *philosophes* included Hume, who had an evolutionary idea of history, that declared “all other species of men...to be naturally inferior to whites”. There was also Kant, who believed that humans had certain natural dispositions and came from a “stem genus”, the white man being closest to the ideal type. And most infamously Hegel, who believed non-Europeans to be less human because they are not conscious, historical beings, and that furthermore the imperial and colonial projects carried out by Europeans were necessary and logical consequences of capitalist modernization of society.

The presence, circulation, and internalization of such racist rhetoric led to the white colonists’ demise on the island on Saint Domingue. Their staunch resistance to forming an alliance with the population of *gens de couleur* (who, oftentimes aligned

themselves with those in power and not racially) made it such that the white population was isolated and ill-informed as to how to suppress the slave revolts (James 1983, Robinson 2000). Furthermore, the white plantation owners, concerned with the situation in France and their futures, were often discussing the revolution within earshot of their slaves. When asked if they weren't concerned about continuously speaking about liberty and equality in front of their slaves, "their passions were too violent. They ran with their weapons for nothing, lynching, assassinating, and mutilating the mulattoes and their political enemies; in summary, they showed the slaves the methods for obtaining or losing one's liberty" (James, 1983: 72, *my translation*). When the slaves in Saint-Domingue did indeed revolt, it was

"the most concrete expression of the idea that the rights proclaimed in France's 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen were indeed universal....the slave insurrection of Saint-Domingue led to the expansion of citizenship beyond racial barriers despite the massive political and economic investment in the slave system at the time" (Dubois 2004b: 3).

On January 1, 1804, the slaves of Saint Domingue, declared Haiti a republic, the first and only Black nation to arise out of a successful slave insurrection. The unfortunate outcome of re-enslavement in Guadeloupe is contrasted historically against the successful outcome of the St. Domingue rebellions. With the support of their lesser Antilles neighbors, the enslaved Africans in the soon-to-be Haiti waged a violent war with French troops, refusing to be denied political sovereignty. The Black Jacobins, as C.L.R. James

would call them, learned of the possibilities for freedom arguably through the example of the French revolutionaries. Republicanism, ironically, was a guiding ideology for both revolutions. Yet deviating from an ideal practice of republicanism where racial equality (i.e., color-blindness) would exist, the non-white populations held on to those divisions, expanding their reach and multiplying the categories. Caribbeans, due to their history of discrimination and enslavement, could not deny the power of racial categories; rather, they held on to them as a way to reclaim/re-brand their subjectivity. The task was therefore not to suppress, but to seek empowerment within race-based categories. This empowerment required that “whiteness” be a visible, unneutral category. In doing so, Caribbeans were able to fight not only the French or the “European”, but also the category of whiteness itself as antithetical to their existence.

Conclusion

Throughout this report I have tried to show examples of the complexity of Antillean political identity that vacillates between racial, cultural, and national extremes. As a result of their socio-political inferiority as “subject-citizens”, Guadeloupeans are able to enjoy the privileges and rights that come with being French citizens, yet liv[e] in a “racially organized colonial society with restrictive labor regulations and diminished social legislation under the authoritarian-administrative rule of non-elected French governors” (Wilder 2005: 160). Guadeloupeans are thus able to exhibit a form of political agency that is “manifold and formed by a mosaic of subject positions that can be both discontinuous and contradictory” (Feldman 1991: 3).

Guadeloupeans operate in a complicated matrix of relations along the axes of race, class, and nationality. Schnepel lays out a number of these contested relationships, including that between békés versus the Black working classes, the békés versus the metropole, Guadeloupeans of African descent and those of East Indian descent, Guadeloupeans versus metropolitans, a class of the new petit-bourgeoisie (generally those employed by the government) and those outside of this category, Guadeloupean versus Martinicans, and Guadeloupeans versus foreign immigrants (especially Haitians) (Schnepel 2004).

A dimension that is present among most of these antagonistic relationships but undertheorized is that of the “color line”. The color line reflects the internalization of the racial hierchization that French (and other European/Western conquerors) imposed.

Social stratification in Guadeloupe is not only the white békés on top and the black masses at the bottom, but also involves the differentiation of color which typically, but not always, is related to class. Trouillot writes,

“Admittedly, aesthetic evaluations vary according to the socioeconomic class and phenotype of those who judge...generally speaking ‘white,’ for example, is not considered to be the most pleasing color. Social evaluations of phenotypes in Haiti are nonetheless generally Western dominated and, other things being equal, beyond a certain degree of increased melanin, these evaluations imply a denigration of blackness” (Trouillot 1998 148).

The color-line, despite its specificities in the Guadeloupean context, is tied to a global racial formation “in which racialization and racism continue to structure social processes with devastating material effects and in which political collectivity empowers” (Gordon 2007: 95). Racial formation looks at the meaning of race in a given location, and then to how those structures are racially organized (Winant 2001: 21). The particular history of Guadeloupe and Martinique with France has shaped a complex relationship to race and to the Black diaspora. Guadeloupean and Martinican struggles with the béké upper class and the Haitian underclass is testament to the ongoing struggle of the “denigration of blackness”, which is part of a Western discourse on identity formation. Negritude movement sought to challenge this hegemony, yet the essentialist and universalizing aspects of Negritude only served to privilege Africa as a universal cultural referent, and homogenized the subject. It furthermore reinforced the binary between subject and

history (Dash 1989). Glissant, on the other hand, preferred to root Caribbean identity in the Caribbean, while simultaneously argue for its plurality and multiplicity.

Inspired by French intellectuals Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Glissant used their concept of the rhizome to argue for the heterogeneity of Antillean identity. “There are no points or positions in a rhizome,” write Deleuze and Guattari, “only lines...all multiplicities are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions” (Deleuze and Guattari 1978). Building from their theorization of the rhizome, Glissant argues that the Antillean identity is “constantly undergoing fragmentation and rupture, always spreading out and connecting” (Lewis 2006: 86). Yet departing from the rootless rhizomatic structure as argued by Deleuze and Guattari, Antillean identity is grounded in intersecting histories and realities, which is not to say there is a central position, but that these intersections form an identity that is in turn is connected to global processes. Whereas in Deleuze and Guattari, it is arguable that identities are impossible because they require a positioning, Caribbean identity “fixes us in the truth of our existence, it forms part of the struggle for self-liberation” (Glissant 1989: 8). Using this definition, I argue that Caribbean identity is well situated for strategies of Black diasporic resistance.

The Black diaspora is not simply an inherent collectivity of those that are “scattered about”, is a site where Black identities are mutually constituted. Glissant’s Antillanité is reflected in larger discourses on the Black diaspora. Stuart Hall’s statements on identity can be applied to a complex (and arguably rhizomatic) theorizing of diaspora: “cultural identities [read: diasporas] are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of

history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*” (Hall 1994:395 *his emphasis*). For Hall, arguably, diasporas (which are a form of cultural identity, after all) are about a politics of location, the intersections of history and culture, and the use of both axes in order to position one’s self at a given moment in time. Diasporas are thus fluid concepts, “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (394). Hall seems to eschew any focus on what would be considered “roots”. In a framework similar to Glissant, Hall de-essentializes the “origin” of identity: “this ‘return to the beginning’ is like the imaginary in Lacan--it can neither be fulfilled nor required, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery--in short, the reservoir of our cinematic narratives” (402).

This brings us back to the overall argument of the fluidity of Antillean identity, and its strategic and contextualized deployment. Despite references to slavery and the outright loathing of the *béké* class, the category of “race” is not central to the Antillean identity. Rather, we must understand how the multiple and intersectional levels of interaction come out of historical processes of racialization and are not fixed but constantly re-negotiated (Pierre 2009). The subject position of the Antillean contribute to discussions and formations of community and subjectivity in the African diaspora.

For example, there are strides being taken that reflect the presence of a historical and political consciousness between the two groups, as postcolonial populations, as Caribbeans, but especially as Blacks. For example, during the summer of 2009, Eric Domota and fellow Raymond Gama, along with Haitian activist Figiolé St. Cyr (member of the Autonomous Confederation of Haitian Workers (CATH) and convener of the Third

Caribbean Conference “To Defend Haiti Is to Defend Ourselves!”) organized a Guadeloupe-Haiti tour in seven US states. The tour focused on the strikes in Guadeloupe and the UN/US occupation in Haiti, and sought international support for the resistance movements in both of those countries. The men were engaged with not only their movements, but in the political resistance movements in the States as well, including the Free Mumia Committee of NY and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. The active search and support for transnational dialogue shows that the French Antilles are certainly not in complete isolation from Black diasporic struggles, but that more effort needs to be made for those types of linkages to happen with regularity.

At the time of this writing, much of Guadeloupe has remained unchanged. The Antillean strikes did deliver its promise of an extra \$200 to low-wage workers’ salaries, lower food and gas prices, and some educational reform. On the whole, however not much has changed. The problems that Guadeloupe has cannot be discussed purely in economic terms, because as I hope I have shown, these problems are tied to categories of race and nation, which in themselves have been shaped by the colonization, the institution of slavery, and more recently, departmentalization. Guadeloupe must be able to frame their struggles in these terms, and see their resistance in the larger context of the Black diaspora.

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This thesis was typed by the author.