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GUADELOUPE'S *KA-RIBBEAN*
BODIES IN CONFLICT:
GERTY DAMBURY AND GISÈLE PINEAU

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Introduction

Published in 2012, Gerty Dambury's novel *Les rétifs* [*A Restive People*] and Gisèle Pineau's *Cent vies et des poussières* [*Hundred Lives and Dust* or *Hundred Lives and Counting*] create and reveal cartographies of bodily pain in the context of the island of Guadeloupe (a French Overseas Department since 1946). *Les rétifs* expressly refers to the actual massacre that occurred in Pointe-à-Pitre in May 1967, when construction workers instigated a strike for a two franc pay increase and parity on social rights that led to military barbarism when the French authorities gave the order to shoot at the protesters. Four decades later, a modern Guadeloupe is unveiled in *Cent vies et des poussières* through the portrayal of a young woman named Gina, whose life in the ghetto is punctuated by eight pregnancies and the various challenges that such arduous conditions entail. Both texts unequivocally defy the silencing of sufferings. De facto, *Les rétifs* recalls painful passé historical events that have been obscured and disremembered through a classified "top-secret defence" status. Analogously, Pineau chooses to dualize Gina's story with that of a pregnant fugitive slave woman who once lived free in what is now Gina's decadent slum. The author divulges how heroic Maroons' stories have been divested, forgotten or replaced by snippets of speculation by descendants who have now become sufferers of a consumerist society.

This study examines the theme of conflict that consumes and haunts the texts' diegeses through original employments of rhythm and bodily movements. We seek to discern the roles of rhythm, dance and music central to the mapping of bodily pain exposed in these texts, analyze the placements, dis/placements and re/placement of these bodies in movement, and conjointly examine wherewith these paroxysmal displays of pain

generate a counter discourse to Western paradigms that anchor representations of the island as exotic and ecstatic. We will also reveal the ways in which Dambury and Pineau contrast one another in their representations of bodily conflicts. Our goal is to demonstrate that these Afra-writings foster a space of transgression that disrupts the inconspicuousness of the perpetrators and reinstates a zone of encounter in which *l'ailleurs* and *l'ici* engage in a dialogue. This dialogue is rather violent, but in it transgressional writing allows a process of deconstruction and reconstruction within the collective space of testimonials, female agency and the resisting *ka-ribbean* body in movement—similar to the *ka* drum that is still the major symbol of resistance in Guadeloupe.

Displacing. Amnesia, Memory, Atemporality, Reverted Esotericism and Immediacy

Dimensions of time and space are utterly disjointed and jumbled in both texts. The amalgamation of past, present and future is combined with the maroonage of living bodies and spirits that pervade the voice and physical space of the main protagonists. This process contrives rhythmic dissonances that mirror the amplitude of the displacement of levels of consciousness, knowledge and discernment of the islanders with regard to their local history, because as Maryse Condé states in *La civilisation du bossale*: “There is no memory in the Caribbean ... No foundation myth, no genealogy of heroes or semi-legendary kings” (Condé 1978, 7–8). In this manner, in Pineau’s text, it is Gina’s mother (not a younger protagonist) who links the Guadeloupean ancestry line to that of “the Egyptians, our ancestors” (14), disrupting the false dominant paradigm of “our ancestors the Gals”—a process of historical reparation vocalized by the grandmother (the older generation).

The main protagonist of Dambury’s novel is a schoolgirl, Emilienne, who lingers in the courtyard of her Pointe-à-Pitre house as she expects the return of her father after a few days. The text is organized in a three-dimensional space; headmost, the private space of Emilienne’s house, then the public space represented by descriptions of the urban city of Pointe-à-Pitre, Emilienne’s school, and La Place de la Victoire (where the conflicts and killings will occur). These public and private spaces swivel on Emilienne’s courtyard that undeniably serves as a central paradigm of the three-dimensional structure that it completes. *Cent vies et des poussières* is constructed on a similar ternary structure with the exception that the private space encloses Gina’s belly (through her pregnancies), her private home, and particularly the ghetto of *La Ravine claire*. The public space is

l'ailleurs—everything that is exterior to *La Ravine claire*. The unknown free Maroons' mass grave located right under Gina's slum rounds off the ternary structure. Dambury's public space mirrors a prison, a repressive and oppressive locus where workers or pupils who resist unjust conditions are silenced. In opposition, it is the private space that constitutes a prison in Pineau's text. Indeed, the "belly" swallows plights relative to the ghetto and "births" children that will soon be unwanted, unloved by Gina and left to nurture the degeneration of that space.

Both novels make the same innovative use of their central axis that is in lieu of the collective. There is a wandering (*errance*) of souls haunting Emilienne's courtyard. The spirits are characters; they are given the authority to lead the "movements" that will unfold the truth. They are materialized into physical entities and are performing a *quadrille* (square dance). The author then starts to deepen the dead's amorphous nature. Their voices become instruments (violin, *chacha*, *siyak*, and *tambour d'bas*), personifying dancers or rhythms. Hence, testimonies from the living and the dead are ubiquitous in creating a unique collective voice mimicking the behemoth mystery that surrounds the tragic events of 1967. Most importantly, this represents "l'être est en commun, sans jamais être commun" (Jean-Luc Nancy 1986, 225). The multi-vocal story becomes equivocal, similar to the improvised chanting and dancing that pace the text. This atemporal framework reveals the depth of the loss of memory by locals (despite their gender, class or age). Under Gina's house lays the skeleton of Théophée (and her toddler), a pregnant slave who ran away to *La Ravine claire* to save her unborn baby from being sold and forced into slavery on a *béké* (slaveholder's) plantation. By extension, we understand that the soil of *La Ravine claire* is the grave of all the Maroons who lived there, free until colonialists murdered them. The spirit of Théophée wanders throughout the text; her voice, like a chorus, paces the text. Like a chanted incantation, her voice gives a rhythm to the story and serves as a heterodiegetic narrator (commenting overtly on Gina's endeavours, expressing premonitions or obviations, commenting on feelings, action, characters, or speaking directly to the reader).

Life and death are synthesized in the texts. The Afra-writings plunge us into the blending of material and immaterial worlds. The authors construct and pervert the traditional use of esoterism (through the unveiling of secrecy) in order to initiate the public into rare and unusual events taking place in Guadeloupe. Antoine Faivre offers an exhaustive examination of the esoteric in *L'ésotérisme* (2003), and akin to his analysis (and that of Pierre Riffard) our authors create an alternative textual cosmos, making the visible and invisible as one. Emilienne and Gina are

also guided by the presence of spirits, voices and visions that affect their knowledge, experiences and possible transmutation. The voices transmit knowledge and initiate the main protagonists and readers. The atemporal structures actualize a cosmogonical setting while also serving as the creation of a point of origin (the myth of Théophée in Pineau's case). The atemporal chanting creates cosmic cycles, the writing becomes a chain of initiation, and the text becomes terrain, the locus of secrets. But, unlike esoteric practices that keep secret writings from the majority, our authors open these symbolic spaces that are testaments to the value and tenacity of the peoples of Guadeloupe across centuries.

The timeless intervals blur the distance between then and now, as now becomes then, and then now. This spatio-temporal *errance* allows a deconstruction of past events that have been neglected by the mainstream or surmised by historians. The displacement of bodies is necessary, for recalling can only be done through the investment of those who lived through or were victims of these events. This generates authenticity to the piecing of voices that were displaced in history. These *paroles* are now *ancrées* and *enrées* to the texts that participate in the construction of the visibility of non-canonical heroes:

The present of postcoloniality can be formulated as a moment of going beyond through return to the present. Interstitiality can be understood as a temporal paradox in which looking to the future necessarily entails a return. The present, the past, and the future do not keep to their proper places, whether in the continuum or rupture, but haunt each other; making for what Bhabha calls "the unhomely condition of the modern world." (Suk 62)

Nonetheless, it also opens a troubling account of unchanging conditions for Guadeloupeans who seem to endure the same colonialist and imperialist powers from Théophée, to Emilienne, to Gina. Pineau's text does the process quite explicitly through the linkage of Théophée and Gina and it is unmistakable that Dambury's 1967's diegesis calls into play similar events that took place in Guadeloupe in 2009 (with the LKP).

Replacing. Maroonage of Words, Orality in the Feminine and the Chaos of Rhythm

In *Les rétifs*, the courtyard is the space of maroonage of words and is paced by music, dancing and instruments. The *parole* is also filled with linguistic stereotypy (metaphoric or stereotyped). These paremic forms (proverbs, sayings, apothegms) are fixed forms that symbolically reinforce

the characters' affiliations to the cultural community of Guadeloupe. In addition, the stereotyped *parole* gives an account to the chain of ancestral memory in the feminine. In *Les rétifs*, Nono (the spirit of an elderly woman who died two years before the massacre) speaks “en hauteur” (27), and recalls memory “il faut commencer par le début” (27). In *Cent vies et des poussières*, it is a woman (Marga Despigne) who transmits historical facts dating back to 1840 about Théophée, her son Théodor and Judor the Maroon, who finds her in the woods and welcomes her to *La Ravine claire*, then a “paradise” (30). In *Cent vies et des poussières*, the passage of oral histories is always done within the *femme-conteur* figure. As a woman, Théophée ruptures the super-male archetypal figure of the heroic Maroon. If Théophée meets Judor who becomes her companion (and the father of the child she will not live to give birth to), Pineau does not detail their love affair, nor does she focus on a female Maroon figure that would respond to a “femme-matador” archetype. In fact, Théophée is never envisioned in a weak/strong binary to justify a feminist/masculinist viewpoint. The Afra-writing entails a unique creative potential because the body/text mirrors the hybridity of its socio-cultural context. Homi Bhabha considers these non-binary oppositions to be a strategy that opens new ways to negotiate cultural meaning:

Indeed Bakhtin emphasizes a space of enunciation where the negotiation of discursive doubleness by which I do not mean duality or binarism engenders a new speech act... the hybrid strategy of discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an “interstitial” agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside; the part in the whole. (Bhabha 1996, 58)

Renée Larrier, in “Configurations of Voice in Francophone Caribbean Narrative,” examines the importance of storytelling within the colonial era and its ramification within the writing of French Caribbean authors. Larrier makes a correlation between *cri/écriture—conteur/écriture* and explores accounts given by the authors of the movement *de la créolité* and Édouard Glissant. She goes on to explain that the *conteur* uses a *parole* that hides the camouflaged shout of “protests that surged among the many cries of pain and agony from the hold of the slave ships” (276). In the plantation, the *conteur* functions as the holder of the collective memory,

and is a medium that transmits the collective *cri* as well as stories of survival and resistance to the slaves, “the *conteur*’s heir is the *écrivain* who inscribes the collective Caribbean voice in order to counter the distortions and erasures of official history” (276).

“Les contes créoles des Antilles [...] mettent en question ou en vertige le mythe de la Création. [...] La *parole* du conte ne peut faire semblant de ne pas savoir qu’aux origines de l’Antillais ou Caribéen il y a non une Genèse, mais un fait historique combien de fois établi, et combien de fois raturé de la mémoire publique, qui est la traite négrière. L’holocauste de la traite et le ventre du bateau négrier [...] sont une genèse d’autant plus impérative, quand même elle procède d’une démarche du composite. Cette “origine” d’une nouvelle sorte, qui n’est pas une création du monde, je l’appelle une digenèse. (Glissant 2000, 266–267)

The text becomes the voicing of the voiceless (the dead, spirits, Maroons...). The authors become the *porte-paroles* that inscribe the testimonies of the silenced collective, their pain. Dambury and Pineau are going back to the trace and use the *conteur* to deliver the *paroles* of bodily pain. If the storyteller and *marqueur de paroles* figures have been praised and theorized by the creolists, it remains through their lens, a male gendered space. *Les rétifs* and *Cent vies et des poussières* decentralize this masculinist transmission of oral culture by incorporating the voice of marginalized groups, such as children, disabled or elderly people, homosexuals, or prostitutes: “The desire to speak [and] create history is undeniable” (de Certeau 49) in both novels while bringing marginalized voices to the centre.

Yvonne Daniel’s ethnographic research on Caribbean *quadrilles* points out that *quadrille* was a European dance creolized by Africans and their descendants to assert “their human dignity”:

Africans [...] replaced the African performance that was abhorred by Europeans with imitations, parodies, and creative extensions of the [European] colonial performances that they could observe [...] across the Caribbean, African descendants perfected their versions of European body orientation, dance steps, and dance sequences, stating nonverbally that they, too, could dance socially esteemed dances. They took from the dominant group what the dominant group valued most: their elaborate dance practices [...] African-descended performers signaled good manners and impressive social standing through a variety of *contredanse*-related performances. Over time, African descendants appropriated European *contredanse*-derived performance across the entire Caribbean region. (Daniel 2010, 216)

The courtyard illustrated in *Les rétifs* is the locus of circles of *quadrille* performances (transfused with the performances of storytelling). A brief enumeration of chapter titles illustrates the *quadrille*'s vocabulary or dance formations: "1ère figure pantalon," "2ème figure l'été," "3ème figure la poule," "4ème figure Pastourelle." Dambury does not select the *gwo ka*, which comprises dancing and singing from African style movements. As we will see, the selection of *quadrille* as the central beat of the novel merits close attention. *Quadrille* is the essence of creole variations and stylizations (Cyrille 2002), described as a set of dances in line, circle and square formations. Dambury selects the *quadrille*, which is unquestionably the most hybrid dance found in Guadeloupe (linking Africa, European France to the Creole locus of Guadeloupe). It is this transcultural dance that Dambury uses to voice a conflict that involved France and Guadeloupe (that is never truly French from the dominant perspective despite its "French Department" labelling).

Most Caribbean *quadrilles* are European dances performed by African-descended performers according to European dance values, i. e. "Africanized European" dances or more properly European dance variations [...] this particular category, Caribbean *quadrilles*, does not routinely comprise "new" dance creations, which are generally recognized as veritable Creole dances: [...] Jamaica's reggae; Trinidad's calypso; Guadeloupe's *gwoka*; or the French Caribbean's *zouk*. The dance forms just named are neither African nor European, but new Caribbean creations or Creole dances; they are not variations. (Daniel 2010, 227)

In the courtyard, the spirits are the *quadrille* performers. The dance structure seems to follow the existing *quadrille* rules but as the truths are being *contées* and performed, they are deviated. The spirits become *quadrille* dancers, are then transformed into percussions, and finally the *tours de parole* are no longer respected. The *quadrille* seems to transpose itself unto a *gwoka* performance as the voices simultaneously ask to enter the circle to lead the rhythm, lead the dance, lead the chanting, lead history, and perform disobedience. In *quadrille*, the European violins and accordions usually carry the song line; Dambury respects the tradition by making each *parolier* an instrument and setting rules for a *parolier* lead (*je*). While each "je" testimony performs, they each become the singularity of a collective space "nous" that will be transformed into a *voix/voie dissidente*. The chaos of rhythm, the unmapping of rules, the hybrid creole space of encounter between the "other" and "nous" quickly become parts of an occupied and rebellious space. Just like the Guadeloupeans on strike, the text becomes a body/text—it rebels. The bodies in movement undertake a maroonage on the page. The writing is in-between genres; it is

a hybridization of poetry, prose and drama. The interstice created by the improvised *quadrille* corresponds to the storyteller/respondent interaction. It also corresponds to the musical polyrhythm of the *quadrille* that puts in place in song form a call-and-response structure. The interplay is plural—it is textual, musical and physical. Polyphony and polyvocality reflect the collective voices that create a new set of apparatus in face of the immensities of the conflict put in place with *la rencontre de l'autre*. The improvisation echoes the chaos of a constructing space of consciousness (Francis 2015).

Pineau presents Gina as a talented baker. It is that space of creation that prefigures improvisation. She tests new recipes, new ingredients and remains anxious and excited to uncover the outcome. The “process of making” is also what leads Gina to be impregnated eight times. While she does not have the space and the means to welcome new children into her home and life, it seems that each pregnancy is analogically similar to a new recipe. She never knows how the child will “turn out,” and when she is unsatisfied with the outcome she goes on to enjoy the improvising of a new recipe; a new pregnancy, with the hopes that this time it will be “perfect.” The belly (the oven) is the only space in which Gina produces in opposition to her consumerist dispositions. The maroonage is articulated in-between *l'en dedans/l'en-dehors*, inside the *aller-venir*. If Dambury's music and dance constitute a creative zone of passage to the “other” state, in *Cent vies et des poussières* alienation dominates that zone.

Placing. Cartographies of Pain

Bigotry constantly overhangs Pineau's text. Indeed, 80% of *La ravine claire*'s inhabitants are “femmes seules” (45). The author refers here to the *parent isolé* law established in 1976 that provides financial assistance to temporarily widowed, divorced, separated, abandoned or single individuals who are left alone to bear the responsibility of at least one child (this social service is also open to single women who are pregnant). The law obligates that the single parent must live alone. Gisèle Pineau raises serious concerns with regards to fathers wanting to be present in their children's lives but find themselves cast out from their children's households due to such social welfare constituencies. Marital/companionship relations are represented as penalized under governmental guidelines if a man lives in the household. Love is consequently decimated by materialistic needs, relegated to an exchange value. The more children a woman has, the more money she gets (47). “Neediness” becomes a valuable asset (by extension “scarce cities”).

In the text, the single status is more appealing to women who prioritize a guaranteed welfare check from the government. The boyfriends are portrayed sneaking into their own houses, or being kicked out for fear that neighbours would report them. The “parent isolé” status is demonized through Gina’s pregnancies. Love is replaced by sexual intercourse. Men serve as breeders (32), and when they are good fathers or partners Gina *performs* the unsatisfied girlfriend to get rid of them. State money has replaced fathers; everything is “sans pères, sans repères” (26). The plantation has been replaced by the State (*l’État*). We witness undeclared civil wars—the single status for CAF money, out of wedlock births, marriages being called off because of pernicious jealousies, suicides...:

[an] exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet “subjects” but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject...The abject designates here precisely those “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the “unlivable” is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. (Butler 3)

The female body is endangered. We see this through Phillis’ character—the father of her son tries to make her a sex slave, her motherhood is the result of rape (24) and she undergoes thirteen abortions (49). Social and sexual economics are paired. To survive, Dollis prostitutes herself, which is how she builds her “château” at the heart of *La Ravine claire* (48); the mansion will soon be home to her hanged body and the slum’s bad boys (273). We see the description of many young mothers (43), of “kids loving kids” (24). Gina’s heart is similar to a machine; she shuts off her love for her children as easily as turning the lights on or off. She does not take responsibility for her children’s slips through life. When Steeve gets eight years in prison, she is disappointed and wishes he had been given twenty years instead (80). She stops loving Steeve (77), declares him dead (80), hopes that he dies in prison (90), and does not answer his letters sent from his cell. She also “erases Mona” from her heart (84), who started taking crack at the age of fourteen. Gina repeats that she loves babies, not children (171) and choses to love them as long as they are babies.

Dambury’s textual presentation of women’s struggles differs sizably from that of Pineau. Whereas the hyper-strong matrifocal *matronne/Super Madres* images of indestructible and unbreakable women are not present in Pineau’s text, they are however transposed by oppressive structural violence causing women to have no sense of self-determination. This

dilatation of stories on pain and suffering stresses a construction of a shared fate of misery and abandonment antipodal to Dambury's standpoints. *Les rétifs* places every voice/dancer/*parolier* at the centre, challenging the dichotomist power relations of the "haves" and "have nots" seen in Pineau's novel. Conflict is therefore explored within different strategies—Pineau's writing focuses on a homelessness state while Dambury explores conflict within agency. In fact, the locals are in-between *appartenance* (belonging) and its opposite, but are subjects (not objects). In fact, Dambury's *départenance* configuration shows a sense of pride within the Guadeloupean cultural identity, while also expressing gestures of departures from repressive neo-colonialist strata (strikes and fights for equality and fairness). Women in *Les rétifs* are not super strong Black female heroes or women doomed by structural violence; they are sisters, neighbours, mothers with their personal shares of happiness and trials.

Storytelling in the feminine in *Cent vies et des poussières* is a compelling account of the erotic in the feminine. Pleasure is talked about among women without taboo. Vivi's friend masturbates (169), Vivi expresses her *jouissance* with sexual intercourse with men (171), Gina claims loving it when a man ejaculates inside her (which probably correlates to her desire to become pregnant), and Sharon masturbates (224). The vivid traces of orality do not however correspond to traditional contexts of teller-respondent. If they are done through women in Pineau's text, Dambury for her part includes the voice of a gay man, Hilaire. *Les rétifs* disrupts the heteronormative and phallogocentric aims of the traditional storyteller. Dambury incorporates the presence of the homosexual man in the collective voice. Constituting an integral part of the spirits serving as storytellers, Hilaire voices the taboos surrounding his gender and sexual inclinations. He also shares his rebellious cross-dressing act to provoke his homophobic neighbour.

The government and its illegal operations are central to both texts. It is the collective voice that raises questions of morality implicating the government. The sociopolitical conflicts reach beyond black/white/mulatto oppositions. Through *Les rétifs*, exploitation also concerns black leadership toward the "petits travailleurs noirs" or the "petit bourgeois" vis-à-vis the "petits travailleurs noirs." This is what we discover through Guy Albert's description of Emilienne's father (his boss), presented as a greedy employer. *Cent vies et des poussières* is a hysteria. *La Ravine claire*, once a land of "valiant Maroons," is now of a different lineage (23). It is a ghetto filled with firearms, gun trafficking (25), pimps, and rape (25), sex trade activities, gangs, drugs, poverty and prostitutes. The

residents seem possessed and trapped. Gina's sister Vivi is financially challenged to purchase daily necessities but cannot help buying pumps on a regular basis. The high-ceilinged buildings have nothing impressive to them, and serve as suicide sites. Vivi will jump from the fifteenth floor of La Tour Schoelcher. Pineau compares Vivi to the victims of 9/11, trapped in smoke and fire and throwing themselves from the Manhattan World Trade Center out of hopelessness. Underprivileged islanders are compared to robots pushing their shopping carts that they fill "de manière compulsive" (44). Gina takes the bus towards *l'ailleurs* to do the body performance of the wealthy woman who can afford groceries. She is described filling her cart during three long hours "to act rich," then leaving, abandoning the stuffed cart somewhere in the supermarket.

The same cacotopia is visible inside Gina's household. Steeve (in his early twenties) gets an eight-year prison sentence for an armed robbery at a gas station. Her daughter Mona is addicted to crack, wanders in the ghetto, gets pregnant, delivers Katy, a crack-baby "with one eye looking toward the left and the other toward the right" (92), and it is Gina who serves as the baby's caregiver. Sharon becomes obsessed with her possible "falling in life" when she hears a conversation between her sister Mona and their mother. In that conversation, Mona tells Gina that she called evil upon Sharon's soul by naming her "Sharon"—pronounced "Charongn" in creole, and meaning "carrion" (*charogne* in French). None of Gina's children seem to give her pride. Junior's stuttering becomes a sufficient reason to push him away, for example. Gina's rationale for not loving her children once they are no longer toddlers (and teething) becomes dubious when she rejects Billy for being an "ugly" kid (159). Likewise, it is only shame that Gina feels when she looks at Billy limping (he is shot in the knee after his attempt to take over Steeve's drug empire). To use Françoise Lionnet's expression, the text is a "phenomenology of pain." Chaotic and dystopian settings are similar to a fast spreading plague. Pineau mentions violence, consumerism, gambling, *Allocations Familiales* and *CAF* in the same sentence (44). She questions the feasibility of rehabilitation for that community by pinpointing the youth's absence of school and parenting education. Young men are not kept out of jail, and schools are ghettoized—"les gosses placés selon leur code postal" (54). The children of *La Ravine claire* are proliferating "pullulaient" (24) and are condemned from the start (26). The anaphor "passer de vie à trépas" (to move from life to death) is articulated seven times in the novel and reinforces the dystopia of the ghetto.

Cent vies et des poussières illustrates the modern challenges that poor families in *La Ravine claire* face on a daily basis. The island is not an

isolated and protected space; it is rather a sponge that absorbs everything that surrounds it. We see the negrophobia of women toward their Black skin when Dolly bleaches hers (143). Pop stars have replaced the island's Christian figures—Gina's son Steeve (the famous “bad boy”) looks at his Bob Marley poster as a source of protection and when he senses that he will soon be seized by the police and taken away for a while, he reinsures Sharon that Bob will always shield her from evil. Gina is addicted to sitcoms (47), Telenovelas and American soap operas (42–3). As a matter of fact, most of her children's names are American: Steeve, Sharon, Billy, Junior. At times, the stories give into a Jerry Springer effect. It seems that Gina wears blinders placed by a consumerist society. There is a sense of profound loss in *Cent vies et des poussières*, and we witness extreme behaviours: abusive relationships, children dropping out of school, children that are not yet eight years old selling drugs, black young men going to jail, pimps, drinking.... The children are in front of the TV watching “séries policières” (154) and reproduce the same havoc in real life. Indeed, Pineau incriminates the media for reinforcing negative images and pernicious stereotypes for the black youth.

Resisting. Transgressional Women's Writing of *Ka-ribbean* Bodies

At the end of the novel, after a long frenzied dystopia, Pineau attempts to display a filigree of hope. In that manner, when the title of the novel is used in the text it recalls that Gina's sister (who killed herself) always believed in reincarnation (229). This statement is later paired with Théopée's revelation. We must remember that Théopée was killed in *La Ravine claire* while carrying a child in her womb. It is therefore this important omniscient narrator that will disclose to the reader that Gina's eighth pregnancy is “different” and that this child will “save and heal all of Gina's children” (275). In opposition, Dambury's voicing of resistance is a most momentous statement. *Les rétifs'* multiple stories create a human web symbolizing solidarity and cultural identity, through Creole words, Caribbean music and rhythms, the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre, the traditional home decor, and the everyday run-arounds of the population:

[Gerty Dambury] nous entraîne hors de la cour, nous présente la Guadeloupe. Et l'on y est, odeurs, couleurs, paysages de grands fonds, champs de canne à perte de vue. On roule à tombeau ouvert dans l'Allée du Manoir, on cavale dans les rues étroites de Pointe à Pitre, on se perd dans l'agitation de la place de la Victoire. Elle donne du rythme, conjure l'ennui, transgresse l'ordre établi. (Leïla Leclair 2012)

We definitely observe the leitmotiv of bodies wandering in pain in Dambury's courtyard, which is similar to the courtyard presented in Abderrahmane Sissako's movie *Bamako*. It is in there that all socio-political events are narrated and where the margins put the West on trial. The courtyard allows the voicing of the *dominés* who have never been heard. Their discourse counterbalances Western imageries through which the *dominés* are constructed as passive and lacking the desire to fight for their rights and reach better economic stability. In Pineau's novel, the courtyard has been replaced by television. The storyteller has become the American TV shows. This is the exact illustration of Occidentalism that we find in Sissako's movie—children, their parents and other family members gathering at night, not to listen to the traditional *griot* but to watch an American western on TV. Like *Bamako*, the novels are similar to a *cinéma vérité* ["true cinema"], a style of documentary movie-making with long takes and little or no directorial or editing control over the finished product. This is transmitted in writing through the atemporal, the three-dimensional structures, the improvised rhythms, and plurivocal and polyphonic voices.

It is important to stress that *Les rétifs* mirrors Dambury's strong refusal to give into canonical and damaging representations of the subaltern. *Les rétifs* makes a remarkable and clear attempt to represent the subaltern as an agent of change without falling into disfigurements of gender spaces (hypersexual women, defeminized women, hyper masculine men, heteronormative relationships, *poto mitan* women) or disfigurements of geographical spaces (a ghettoized island, stereotyped lazy/happy/poor islanders). To achieve a counter-canonical discourse, Dambury's restive characters are represented within private/intimate spaces, everyday life and conversations. There is a poignant refusal by Dambury to adorn pain and recognize what comprises beauty on the island. The cartography of pain is therefore balanced with the tangible humanizing of everyday people and their characters—passive personalities (Emilienne's dad is described as a coward at times), leadership advocacies (the instructor for instance), personal and professional challenges and the neighbouring dynamics of everyday life. The events of 1967 are portrayed in their inhumanity without taking away from what makes the people a "Restive People" (within their singularity).

The creation of the collective voice is achieved in the direct and diametrical opposite to Pineau, for Dambury empowers every single character of the novel with participating agencies. Each individual seems to contribute to a chain of solidarity, which fills the text with harmonious stands. The collective voice is not buried under structural violence,

because structural violence is not the sole condition lived by locals. We understand that *Les rétifs* presents an original space of in-between; it is rather *un désordre non-subordonné*, a resisting-body that is unified within its differences and challenges. The author finds the term “rétifs” (restive) to be very representative. For Dambury, the term “restive,” used to describe a horse that refuses to move forward, is testament to the animality found during slavery. Unlike Pineau’s text, structural violence is not subject but object; pain is not inflated, the restive people are placed right at the centre of the circle, they are the core of the transcultural space of the *quadrille*, they are non-homogeneous people creating resistance.

Guadeloupe is a hybrid place caught between tradition and modernization, overpowered by France and its *képis rouges*. Indeed, we observe the difficult position of the subaltern between alienation and affiliation, the notion of *départenance*—wanting to belong, to affiliate with the representation of power. They evolve in a *third space* of separation. To paraphrase Bhabha, the third space remains a space of differentiation (Bhabha 1990, 207). Pineau’s novel is almost a Manichean mythology in which there are no rules. *La Ravine claire* is the metaphoric savage space (re) presenting the practices of globalization. Gina’s family watches violent “series policières” as they are trapped between mimicry and mockery. This metatextual presentation is quite powerful, since the Guadeloupean family watches its mimetic condition on TV. The difficult vision of mimicry between resemblance and menace is observed, as is the locals’ identity between assimilation and alienation. This process is similar to the “nero complex” introduced in postcolonial studies by Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1991). Memmi compares the relationship between Nero and Britannicus to the one between the colonizers and the colonized subjects. He explains that the more the usurpers violate and torture the usurped, the more they suppress the moral and bodily politics of the one they oppress (53). In this manner, the colonialists deny their victims’ existence and dehumanize them:

[Like the colonizer] Nero, the exemplary figure of the usurper, is thus led [in an attempt to justify his illegitimate status] to persecute Britannicus outrageously... But the greater the harm he does him, the more he comes to embody this atrocious role [of the usurper] that he has chosen for himself. And the more deeply he sinks into injustice, the more he hates Britannicus and tries to get at him. (Memmi 77)

Similar to Bhabha’s argument, the body in pain is textualized as a (de-) constructed zone, a zone of passage between death and life; a zone of (re-) birth:

[...] identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality [...] the image [...] marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split—it makes present something that is absent—and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition. (Bhabha 2005, 73)

The body in pain passes through *l'autre* in order to “be” itself and re-passes back through itself in order to be “other” than itself. This process reveals the suffering body as a rhizome. The third space is a rhizomatic space in which the body in pain seeks identity. It is through the pain, the utterance of violence, that the contact between “moi” and *l'autre* becomes possible. Therefore, the suffering body is more than a zone of passage; it is most importantly a zone of contact. Given this characteristic, it transgresses the norms of the mainstream to maintain “it” within boundaries and to separate “it,” and alienate “it.”

The origin root of the rhizomatic suffering body is itself a process similar to Sankofa, and conditions the in-between characteristic of the body. The in-between is a point of origin. Consequently, the body in pain (re) presents and (con) textualizes rhizomatic strategies and procedures within the end and the beginning (which is the characteristic of the origin). To paraphrase Daniel Sibony in *Entre-deux*, there is more than one origin in a same origin, and identity is a state of shared origin (19). Hence, within the irrationality of the rhizome is to be found rationality: “une identité qui pèse reflète une origine dont la pulsion est devenue une compulsion” (56–57). Following this rhizomatic distinctiveness, the voicing of Dambury and Pineau uses transgression, and the pain is not hidden; psychological, physical and societal sufferings are also expressed in the reality of their violence. The voicing of the rebellious rhizomatic body becomes a transgressional (con)text. Such writing is a mirror of the continuous negotiations of the body in pain.

Conclusion

In *Les rétifs*, class, race, gender and age do not count in the face of solidarity and oppression within the social dynamics operating among the local people (descendants of slaves). The modest, overworked and underpaid employee is also a hero (it is Guy Albert who brings his boss’ daughter back home through the mix of bullets and chaos). If Dambury’s “innovation” is to find a dominant voice for the story that is to be told, similar to a *quadrille au commandement* (12), all voices become a unique dominant lead. In both novels, the island of Guadeloupe is not

conceptualized as a feminized terrain (Said 1978). Opinions and beliefs surrounding silenced portions of history are exposed, dissected and clarified for and by the collective within their singularities (which is why the capitalized “Nous” voiced in Dambury’s *cour* is highly symbolic). There is a sense of solidarity in the construction of history.

The inscription of the *femmes-conteurs* defies the phallogocentric *conteur/marqueur de parole* discourse and theories presented by the creolists, Édouard Glissant or the *Négritude*’s authors. Indeed, the music lead is no longer male centred in Dambury’s novel, Nono contradicts the norms by playing the accordion (a role tradition to men) (27). By decentralizing the woman’s desire from that of men, Pineau’s main character is a mother who does not seek to be a man’s lover, nor is she defeminized; she is not in the masculine. When Dambury gives voice to Hilaire, a gay man, he does not fit the lampooned, male-less, cross-dressing *makoumè* figure found in various works of the creolists. The *makoumè* is renamed “ma-commère” (67) meaning my gossiping neighbour, which reinstates the marginalized homosexual into the collective space. Indeed, Hilaire is not passive, nor invisible, but has his own share of dissidence. The texts are resistance; they incorporate the voices of the silenced (the women, the homosexual, the children...) to a historiography that has tended to be exclusively masculine and heteronormative.

If the cartographies of bodily pain are visible in both texts, the testimony of their resistance is much more predominant in *Les rétifs*. They have survived the womb of slave ships, the inhumanity of plantations, and now that they are faced with neocolonial traps and scourges it is necessary for the author to do an “innovation,” to displace and replace, call and recall—be A Restive People and resist.

We have entered an anxious age of identity, in which the attempt to memorialize lost time, and to reclaim lost territories, creates a culture of disparate “interest groups” or social movements [...] The importance of such retroaction lies in its ability to reinscribe the past, reactivate it, relocate it, resignify it. More significant, it commits our understanding of the past, and our reinterpretation of the future, to an ethics of “survival” that allows us to work through the present. And such a working through, or working out, frees us from the determinism of historical inevitability repetition without a difference. (Bhabha 1996, 59–60).

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