



EARLY MODERN CULTURAL STUDIES 1500–1700

# Points of Entanglement in French Caribbean Travel Writing (1620–1722)

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CHRISTINA KULLBERG

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# Early Modern Cultural Studies 1500–1700

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*In memory of J. Michael Dash*

## NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

All translations from French to English are mine unless otherwise stated. The translations are as literal as possible and the original versions are quoted in a footnote when the primary literature is cited, i.e., the travelogues. In the case of secondary sources translated from French to English, the original versions are not given for the sake of space.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: Tracing Entanglements in the Seventeenth Century Caribbean

In 1619, Captain Fleury and his crew suffered shipwreck outside Martinique. Among the survivors was an anonymous writer who was set out to account for Fleury's exploits in the Caribbean Sea and on the South American continent, but accident led him elsewhere. Fleury had abandoned parts of the crew in his search for a new ship. Stranded on the island, the anonymous writer gave a unique account of European intrusion in the archipelago (Anonymous of Carpentras 2002). Instead of writing about the heroic adventures of the captain, he tells about everyday exchanges with the Indigenous peoples on whom he and the rest of the men depended for their survival, about how they learned each other's languages, about how the Natives made fun of the French way of doing things and commented on their white, starved bodies.<sup>1</sup> This is the first known account of French interventions in the Caribbean. Soon after, French privateers would initiate territorial claims, leading to the first official French establishment in 1626 on Saint-Christophe (today St. Kitts), parts of which was already settled by the British and inhabited by enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples.

Almost a century later, in 1722, the Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Labat, who was stationed in Martinique between 1694 and 1706, published

<sup>1</sup>The account was never published. Jean-Pierre Moreau found it in the archives of a library in Carpentras in southern France and edited it with the title *Un Elibustier français dans la mer des Antilles* (2002). For information about the anonymous writer Captain Fleury and the travels, see Moreau's introduction.

*Nouveaux voyages aux isles de l'Amérique*. His take on island society differs dramatically from the anonymous writer's. Upon arriving in Martinique, Labat described colonial constructions that did not exist when Fleury and his men ran aground on the islands. There were no Indigenous peoples around. Instead, Labat was received by enslaved persons whose backs were covered with scars from lashes "to which one soon gets used to" (1722 t1, 63). Indeed, he grew extremely accustomed to the violence of slavery. In time, he would himself become an enslaver, involved in the development of new techniques for sugar refinement at Fonds-Saint Jacques, a Dominican convent that had turned into a plantation by the time of Labat's sojourn. As opposed to previous missionaries, he was not committed to converting Indigenous people to Catholicism but instead focused on keeping order in the colony and converting enslaved persons. His account of his sojourn in Martinique reveals that the ways the Caribbean was represented were in the process of changing. During the years that separate him and the Anonymous of Carpentras, a number of narratives about the islands were written, mostly by missionaries who evangelized among the Indigenous population, documented events, and gathered cultural and natural knowledge about the islands. Labat's account draws on yet criticizes these texts. Whereas his predecessors constructed knowledge based on direct experience but filtered through Ancient models and embedded in formal conventions, Labat speaks in his own voice, carving out an authoritarian narrative about the islands, which had now been fully occupied, exploited, and increasingly tied to colonial centers in Europe. And whereas they wrote the history of the settlement, with all its violent implications expressed in ambivalent terms, he wrote about Martinique as a French island.

The moment of consolidation of plantation society and the slave trade described by Labat has become the point of origin for French Caribbean thinking and literature. The formation of what Nick Nesbitt (2013) calls Caribbean "immanent critique" (3), from Aimé Césaire and C.L.R. James to Frantz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé, Kamau Brathwaite, and Wilson Harris, is about thinking through the plantation and the Middle Passage as nexus for reconsidering Caribbean resistance, subjectivity, and creativity.<sup>2</sup> Pan-Caribbean literary histories have questioned the

<sup>2</sup>Nesbitt considers the Haitian Revolution as the initial formulation of such immanent critique. This moment, along with other slave uprisings, have been crucial for rethinking the legacies of colonialism from the point of view of the subalterns. See Marlene L. Daut (2015); Laurent Dubois (2004a, b, 2006); John D. Garrigus (2006); Brett Rushforth (2014). See Paul Gilroy (1993), Christopher L. Miller (2008), and David Scott (2004) for the importance of the French Atlantic triangular trade for the articulation of (black) modernity.

compartmentalization of the literatures of the region by (colonial) language and instead suggested that the common history of creolization that stemmed from plantation culture constituted the grounds for a shared literature (Arnold et al. 1994, Torres-Saillant 1996; Dash 1998). The reasons for this emphasis are well grounded. The plantation system was built on the extinction of Indigenous society and arguably marked the most brutal and transformative European intervention in the archipelago. It still affects lives and bodies today through structural racism, class hierarchies, and neo-colonialism, which all can be linked to the history of slavery and to the negation of the past and of being produced by this history. Caribbean expressive forms—music, dance, literature, art—build on that heritage of suffering, survival, and creative inventiveness. Texts from the seventeenth century are intertwined with this history. They tell about the insidious historical and representational ramifications of this violent part of global modernity. They also evoke how writings forged a narrative of French colonial conquest through tangled relationships with Indigenous peoples, diasporic Africans, and other Europeans. In so doing, and often against their own intentions, they also evoke other possible beginnings for French Caribbean literature, which were not primarily dictated by France. This is what *Points of Entanglement in French Caribbean Travel Writing (1620–1722)* sets out to explore.

This book argues for a literary reexamination of the representation of the period leading up to high colonialism in order to question a colonial scale of literary history, where representations of the past are measured in terms of their importance in and to France. The centrifugal forces of French coloniality and France's literary history are no doubt more powerful than others, fueled by high cultural prestige in the global field of literatures but also by continuous political command over the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. Yet that structure of power was not imposed on the newly established colonies from the outset; rather, it was shaped through and by historical movements in the archipelago. The complexity of this juncture warrants an approach to travel writing as simultaneously determined by the locus of its distribution (France) and of its creation (the islands). And since these travel narratives engage in representing an ongoing process of shaping a society for which they had no model while at the same time being limited by codes for writing as well as by political, economic, and religious interests, their informative value is fraught. They call for layered readings and—the contribution I want to make here—should be considered as part of a (French) Caribbean literary trajectory. Indeed,

the problem with relying on the colonial construction of history, forged by the travelogues studied here, is that it makes us unable to estimate the complexity in these narratives. Most importantly, it takes attention away from the exploration of how enslaved and Indigenous peoples actively contributed to shaping early colonial society and, indeed, the representations of it.

Taking a synoptic approach to travel writing in French, from 1620 with the Anonymous of Carpentras up to the publication of Labat's *Nouveaux voyages* as a transitional text to the eighteenth century, this book excavates traces of such impacts by examining textual instances where the islands and the peoples of this period unsettle dominant European narratives. The claim here is that the historical, social, and political messiness of the Caribbean seventeenth century makes for complex representations and expressions, generating textual instability despite the travelers' apparent desires to domesticate the islands. Between the lines of their authoritarian narratives, disruptive elements coming from everyday exchanges in early colonial society enter productively into the construction of knowledge and for sure also into the representations of this world. This book's contribution is to read these texts *in situ* in order to interrogate both the formation and the limitations of discourses of power. And while we cannot, from today's vantage point, create a site in the narratives where Indigenous and enslaved agency could emerge without inserting and overemphasizing our own, it is both possible and necessary to interrogate the narrative *effects* and *echoes* of their presences by means of literary attention to the texture of travel writing.

My reading here takes as its point of departure the conjecture between the contextual and the textual. The period leading up to what Christopher L. Miller (2008, 25) has called the "sugar revolution" in 1715 was in many ways a time of crisis. That sense of crisis permeated not only the historical context but also representations of it. Starting with the contextual aspect, the most striking and devastating forms of crisis obviously hit the Indigenous and enslaved populations. For Europeans, who no longer approached the region with newness and wonder, the period was characterized by a lack of social structure and territorial stability. Relations of power were fragmented rather than centralized: settlements were initiated by privateers, and the French monarchy had little influence on the region until the second half of the century. Forced labor existed in the form of indenture and slavery, which involved Indigenous peoples and deported persons from Africa, but there were no large-scale plantations. The islands



were sites of struggle between various groups driven by profit, self-interest, or self-preservation, and in the clashes, new societies, cultures, and languages would take form.

Crisis also marked those writing on the islands and the narratives they produced. Travel writing was a hybrid genre in the seventeenth century (Requemora-Gros 2012; Ouellet 2010). It contained a plurality of discourses and was determined by the circumstances of their location of publication—France—as well as by the world they depicted—the islands. Consequently, the representations of the Caribbean were strikingly diverse, almost shifting, written in a variety of styles, and formed during a period when the French language was in the process of being standardized and the construction of knowledge was torn between ancient ideals of bookish knowledge and modern ideals of empiricism. The texts sustained and contributed to constructing discourses of domination. Yet, they did not form a univocal colonial narrative; rather they made up an eclectic library, comprised of natural and moral histories, unpublished accounts by buccaneers and traders, missionary narratives, Jesuit letters about the evangelization of enslaved populations, and works on Caribbean vernacular languages.

Judging both by the contextual and by the textual, the travel narratives and the world they describe were forged in what we may call a liminal time-space where neither politico-economical power nor aesthetic-epistemic forms were consolidated. But instead of bringing order into such messy and brutal liminality, I propose to make it operative as an incitement to read the texts against the grain of a linear authoritarian colonial historical discourse. Travel writing constructs narratives of interventions with the various groups of peoples that inhabited the region and with the changing nature of the island. They start at a site of amalgamation, pointing backwards to past times and other spaces (Europe, Africa, and the larger Americas) and forward to brutal global modernity, which, in a sense, highlights their Caribbeanness.

Saying this, I am not suggesting that colonial travel writing should be considered a forerunner to the radical and important reconceptualization of subjectivity and identity coming from twentieth-century Caribbean literature. My point is rather that the historical forces put in motion with which travel writing engages warrant an approach that allows for thinking with rather than against liminality. The cue for this argument is taken from the essay “Reversion and Diversion” by Martinican thinker and writer Édouard Glissant (1989). He claims that the Caribbean historical experience builds on an absence of origins and a series of rifts, due to the slave

trade, slavery, the extinction of Indigenous peoples, and the mixing that occurred in violent cultural encounters. To understand this history, Glissant argues, the desire for an origin, which he saw expressed, for example, in Pan-African thinking such as in the Négritude-movement, needs to be counter-balanced with an acknowledgment of the fractures and of the impossibility of a reversion to the past or a return to an origin. Setting up a dynamic relationship between return [*retour*] and detour [*détour*], he outlines a different historical trajectory inhabited by ruptures:

We must return to the point from which we started. Diversion [Détour] is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by Reversion [Retour]: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization, or perish. (1989, 26)

The Caribbean should not be understood in terms of linearity, with a starting point and a single direction, nor should the region and its cultures and histories be understood as a complete negation. The Middle Passage represented rupture, Glissant contends, but memories in form of traces lived on, taking other shapes and expressions. Caribbean cultures are a non-beginning, as they emerge from clashes and encounters, intertwinements and frictions, intersecting in a “point of entanglement” that Glissant urges the reader to work through and activate in order to actualize the past in the present and see how competing forms of knowledge production and representation coexist, converge, and diverge. These are “forces of creolization,” which Glissant conceptualizes both as a historical process of mixing engendered in the Caribbean context by migratory movements and propelled by colonization, and as a figure of thought that accounts for processes of uncontrollable mixing with unpredictable outcomes (1997, 34). I will use the notion of “point of entanglement” as a critical tool for reading and rethinking textual connections between past and present. Not only does this notion chime with the liminality of the period, the transformational society, and the complexity of travel writing at this time; it also works as *ansatzpunkt*, to use Erich Auerbach’s (1969) term, to localize sites in the text where ambivalence and tensions are played out.

I will focus on three points of entanglement, starting with the relationship between text and geography. From there I will move to interrogating the travelers’ selves and end with an examination of the presence of other

languages and the inclusion of others' speech. Geography, self-construction, and language are major vectors for domination in the process of settlement and colonization: land is exploited and produced as a social space; the (European) self-mediate power and constructs knowledge over the islands and the peoples; and language is a tool for domination, as the medium through which knowledge is constituted and for policing other languages. Glissant's notion allows for reconfiguring these vectors as textual conjectures where conflicting interests cross, where differences are at once subjugated and generated. The island geography impacts on the representations. The travelers fabricate a self under influence of the rapidly changing and intermingling Caribbean early colonial society. Languages and inclusions of speech cannot be contained within the frames of monolingual French. Approaching the texts by means of points of entanglement will allow me to draw conclusions about how travel writing made and unmade structures of power and domination in a processual movement working with and against the "forces of creolization" that permeate the seventeenth-century Caribbean.

### READING THROUGH THE WORK OF SILENCING

At stake in *Points of Entanglement in French Caribbean Travel Writing (1620–1722)* is the discourse of silencing that has dominated research on French Caribbean colonization. Before addressing travel writing from this period, I want to ask what silence means in this context, how it has been constructed, and what it does.

The French Caribbean seventeenth century has been overlooked as part of what has been analyzed as a silencing of the colonial grounds of Western, and particularly French, modernity. Nobody wants to know the price paid by others for the sugar we consume in Europe, to rephrase Voltaire's character in *Candide*. Following Michel-Ralph Trouillot's important work on the effacement of the Haitian revolution in the European consciousness *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995) and Louis Sala Molin's *Les Misères des Lumières: Sous la raison, l'outrage* (2008), Sue Peabody's *'There are no Slaves in France': The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (1996 and Peabody 2004), Christopher L. Miller's *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (2008), Madeleine Dobie's *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture* (2010), and Sara Melzer's *Colonizer and Colonized: The Hidden Story of Early Modern French Culture*

(2012) have, with a focus on the eighteenth century, mapped and discussed various domains where such silencing has played out and what the implications have been for the construction of both historical and literary discourses. First, it is worth noting that these studies center on the eighteenth century when plantation colonialism was established on the islands. Second, the silencing that Trouillot spoke about mainly refers to the impossibility for European thinkers and writers to conceive of what happened in Saint-Domingue because of their racialist gaze and colonial predicament. Quite rightly, scholars have pointed to the fact that rather than silence there is an abundance in documentation around the Haitian Revolution from its beginnings in 1791 to the declaration of independence in 1804 (Daut 2015, 1–3). But the Lesser Antilles, notably Martinique, Guadeloupe and indeed other islands exploited by the French, faced different futures compared to Haiti.<sup>3</sup> From cultural invisibility in France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to political assimilation to France in the twentieth century, the lived experience of Martinicans and Guadeloupeans has been marginalized not by fear or denial of Black agency but by indifference it seems, at least from a French (high) colonial point of view.

However, this does not mean that nobody wrote about the islands in the seventeenth century. In fact, there is a relatively large number of French texts on the islands from this period compared to British and Dutch sources since France combined settlement with missionary work, and the missionaries wrote the history of the islands and documented society and nature. While it is indeed true that enslavement was a secondary topic if it was broached at all, the narratives did not silence the settlement and its violent implications. Hypothetically, it would possibly have been less silent around slavery and the eradication of Indigenous cultures in France had these texts been more widely read. Considering the little research that has been devoted to the seventeenth-century Caribbean up

<sup>3</sup>This study mostly concerns the Lesser Antilles, the long arc of small volcanic islands between the Greater Antilles and the coastal areas of Central and South America. However, I will refer to the Caribbean, comprising the archipelagic region in its entirety. Even though the texts mostly focus on the Lesser Antilles, the peoples involved moved across the entire region. The larger Caribbean context is needed to conceptualize these narratives.

to this day, notably from literary scholars,<sup>4</sup> I suggest that it is not only enslavement and the slave trade that have been muffled but the entire period. If this history has been subject to silencing, which I believe it has, it is important to note that the source of this silence is less from those who experienced the islands during this period and more about the reception of their texts, not only historically but also in our contemporary moment, particularly from a literary perspective.

In France, twentieth-century research on the American colonial context has long been oriented toward texts from the sixteenth century that described first-hand experiences with Indigenous peoples and that developed cartographies and models for writing the New World. My point is not to criticize these studies for not doing something they never set out to do. Nonetheless, the sixteenth century has been given priority in the French discourse of the Americas, perhaps unconsciously influenced by the imaginary of the “Noble Savage,” so that it has focused almost exclusively on first contacts, whereas more complex cultural intertwinements of establishment, colonialism, and slavery have been ignored. Not even in the seventeenth century did the Caribbean islands “fit into the savage slot,” to borrow from Trouillot’s criticism of how traditional anthropology constructed the Other, leaving the Caribbean as a blind-spot in anthropological research up to the mid-twentieth century (1992). Peter Hulme in *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean (1492–1797)* (1986), and Anthony Padgen in *European Encounters with the New World* (1993), followed up by Dobie (2010) and Miller (2008), have convincingly demonstrated that in France, idealized encounters between Europeans and Native Americans turned into a trope repeated over time. One of the problems with this framing of French intrusion in the Americas is that it constructs the image of the initial phases of colonization as dualistic while it was, in fact, as Serge Gruzinski pointed out in his examination of the Mexican colonial context, a brutal process of mixing (1999). The fascination with the first encounter indirectly downplays the violent but also intricate relationships between French, Creoles, other

<sup>4</sup>Historians have done important work to shed new light on the seventeenth-century French Caribbean; see Jean-Pierre Moreau (1992); Liliane Chauleau (1993); Paul Butel (2002); James Pritchard (2004); Christian Bouyer (2005); Philip Boucher (2008, 2009); Kelly Wisecup (2013); Éric Roulet (2017); Michael Harrigan (2018); Céline Carayon (2019); Frédéric Régent (2007, 2019).

Europeans, Indigenous peoples, and diasporic Africans during the period of settlement.

Interestingly, this contemporary silencing has historical ramifications. Ever since it started, French involvement in the Caribbean was subdued, partly due to a similar desire to ignore the violence to which they contributed, and partly due to the fact that the settlement was far from being a success story. Peabody argues (1996) that conflicting national self-images made France silence its own colonial enterprise, particularly slavery, since it contradicted the idea of the country as the mother of liberty. This narrative has been nuanced in a recent book by Meredith Martin and Gillian Weiss (2022), who analyze the presence of forms of enslavement in France during the Ancient Regime by looking at the galley slaves in Marseille and the complexities of conceptions of ethnicity in French society. But it is important to acknowledge that in France in the seventeenth century there was a general lack of interest in the Americas. Focusing on the cultural visibility and impact of colonialism in early modern France, Dobie has argued the absence of influence was, in fact, a strategy of displacement of the colonial heritage (2010, 6). Antillean references tended to be absorbed into the generic category *les Indes*, which in the seventeenth century referred to anything non-European from the global south. There are some episodes involving important people that prove that the Antilles were not entirely absent from the cultural life of Paris, such as the poet Paul Scarron's failed project to embark for Cayenne, which was accompanied by his much younger wife Françoise, Ninon de Lenclos, a famous *courtisane*, and Jean Regnault de Segrais. Scarron was sick and hoped to find remedy in the tropics, seduced by the myth of earthly paradise and the fountain of youth. His wife Françoise, known as *l'Indienne* and later as M<sup>me</sup> de Maintenon, Louis XIV's favorite mistress, had spent her childhood years on Marie-Galante, off the coast of Guadeloupe, and then in the village Prêcheur in northern Martinique. But according to one of the most influential voices of the times, M<sup>me</sup> de Sévigné, M<sup>me</sup> de Maintenon did not want to speak about her years on the islands, as if they had left a "scar in her heart" (Merle 1971, 115). She would nonetheless later buy property there in order to get a noble title, and she is said to have influenced Louis XIV's centralization of colonial politics and had commercial interests in the plantation industry and in the slave trade.

But stories like these are anecdotal. Rather than placing the Caribbean on the map, they affirm its marginality in regard to French culture around the mid-seventeenth century. There was an interest in objects of

curiosity—shells, pearls, hummingbirds, pineapples, and wood. In 1649, the aristocracy of Paris attended the baptism of a young native Caribbean by the name of Marabouis, brought to France by Dominican missionary Pierre Coliard (Roulet 2017, 75). By the end of the seventeenth century a few Antillean novels were published: in 1678, the anonymous *Nouvelles de l'Amérique ou le Mercure Américaine* came out, and around twenty years later Pierre de Corneille de Blessebois published a libertine novel called *Le Zombi du Grand Perou ou la comtesse de Cocagne* (see Garraway 2005, 172–191; Antoine 1994, 61–63). About the same time, the translation of French buccaneer Olivier Exquemelin's *Histoire des aventuriers flibustiers de l'Amérique* (1686), originally published in Dutch, had tremendous success. Generally, however, contemporary readers did not associate pirate stories with the Caribbean but with captivity in the Mediterranean context due to a flow of books about such adventures, which had attracted the French audience for over a century (Requemora-Gros and Linon 2002; Rediker 2004; Moreau 2006). In fact, long-distance travel narratives did not have a given place in Parisian culture, despite the success of the genre. The renewed interest in travelogues among French readers by the middle of the seventeenth century concerned mainly travels to the Middle East and the Mediterranean. One traveled to Jerusalem, Istanbul, and Rome for education and erudition, leaving texts written by travelers with more literary ambitions that could appeal to the Ancient Regime's cultural life. Travel writings from the islands had other motives that were mainly practical, intimately linked to settlement, mission, and commerce. A few of these texts were, of course, also addressed to a larger, cultivated audience, but it is not by coincidence that there were two times as many travel books from the "Orient" than from the Americas (Gomez-Géraud 2000, 10).

Dobie is thus arguably right to conclude that while the colonies had economic importance, they were not culturally visible during the Ancient Regime (2010, 5–6). However, we should be careful not to over-interpret the meaning of the silence around the Antilles and attribute the politics of silencing to travel writing itself. The historical context also played its part. In fact, not even the prospect of strengthening France as a naval power or making a personal fortune could attract the French to the Americas. The British settlers were three times as many as the French. Only 60,000 to 100,000 persons left from French harbors to the Caribbean during the seventeenth century, a small number compared to the 678,000 Spanish who sailed for the Americas (Bouyer 2005, 24, 35). In 1664 the Dutch

had 150 ships securing trade with the Caribbean islands; England had 35 and France, only 18 (Régent 2019, 90). Even the religious orders were reluctant to send missionaries to the islands because of high costs and risks (Roulet 2017, 102). When Jean-Baptiste Colbert became Secretary of State for the Navy and later Comptroller-General of Finances under Louis XIV, he had the ambition to change this situation, but it was not until well into the eighteenth-century that the plantation and the triangular economy would become significantly profitable. Arguably, rather than a strategy of displacement, the French responded to the project of settlement, colonization, and transatlantic trade with skepticism or indifference, an indifference which echoes four centuries later when President Charles de Gaulle referred to the islands as “specks of dust” in the Atlantic (Glissant 1989, vii). It is in this context that we must understand the minor role travelogues telling about France’s establishments had at the time. From a French horizon, they were as ignored as the world they described. We cannot posthumously give them a space in history that they did not have.

The contribution of this book is to look at travelogues from *another* perspective and not let the French context determine how we understand them. Considering that many of the writers included in this study stayed a longer time on the islands—some of them more than ten years—and were deeply involved, for good and for bad, with all of the peoples living there, they were not mere outsiders to the region they describe. Their longstanding engagement with the archipelago is indeed one of the explanations as to why the narratives were inevitably impacted by this world and its inhabitants, by violent conflicts and everyday exchanges between different cultures, classes, and languages, and between people and the archipelagic nature and geography of the Caribbean. The impetus for shifting focus from France and the transatlantic to the archipelago thus comes from the texts themselves. It would also be historically misleading to solely consider them as “French” texts; travelers mediated the islands to a French audience, but the conditions for writing and the events they described brought them closer to the archipelago than to France.

In other words, I am arguing for a similar reconfiguration of how we navigate the formations of *a* (national) literature that has been proposed by scholars within the American literary field. Exploring new scales for configuring literary history, researchers have turned toward geographical thinking to rearticulate the constitution of American literature, as in Wai-Chee Dimock’s *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep-Time* (2008) and, more recently and inspired by Glissant, Brian



Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens' (2017) attempt to reconsider American literary history in archipelagic terms (see also Stephens and Martínez-San Miguel 2020). Equally important for this project has been Elizabeth DeLoughrey's (2007, 2018, 2019) work, which takes the ocean as a point of departure to read new flows between literatures. I do not eschew the fact that the travelogues were written for a European audience, with a colonial intention, but I am interested in moments where the codes of representation dictated by the French context encounter their limitations.

This implies joining those researchers within Caribbean Indigenous studies who have shifted toward an internal perspective to reveal the dynamics of those cultures (Murphy 2021; Reid 2009), and within studies of the Black Atlantic whose work on the archives of enslavement have made them return again and again to the problem of how to read texts which both sustain uneven power relations and hint at other presences. I am notably thinking of the work of Saidiya Hartman (2008), Nicole Aljoe (2012), Aljoe et al. (2015), Simon Gikandi (2015), and Marisa Fuentes (2016).<sup>5</sup> Their work to decolonize sources pertaining to Caribbean history and literature has been of extreme importance in rethinking the notion of the archive as such, from seeing it as a collection, obliterating the selection upon which it was made, to approaching it as a "*generative* system [...] that governs the production and appearance of statements," to quote David Scott (1999, 82; see also Thomas 2013). At the core of their queries is the theoretical and methodological possibility to excavate from colonial discourses other "voices," the epistemic status of such "voices," and the ethics of such readings. As Christina Sharpe (2016, 12–13) and Saidiya Hartman (2008, 2) put it, engaging with histories of enslavement—and we can add the history of expulsion of peoples and of radical transformations of nature and lands—histories that still affect lives today, runs the risk of repeating the fundamental acts of violence upon which the archives build. Could we ever hear something other than suffering? Would the knowledge we could retrieve by revisiting the archive simply be a projection of our own presentist gaze, whether it is about a desire to break the silence of subjugated ancestors and forge new stories or whether it is a desire to appease white guilt by finding ways to make those who suffered for the construction of our wealth and welfare talk back?

<sup>5</sup> See also Imtiaz Habib (2008); Kelly Wisecup (2013); Jenny Sharpe (2020); Jennifer L. Morgan (2021).

I think that there are no clear answers to those questions. In fact, I believe that it is more productive to leave them unresolved, which is not the same thing as avoiding them. On the contrary, what scholars such as Sharpe suggest is that they need to be asked again but differently. *Points of Entanglement in French Caribbean Travel Writing (1620–1722)* is an exploration of the possibility of reading traces of others and how they might affect dominant narratives. In so doing, it taps into the emergent field of Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies, which also shifts perspectives to “put black lives in the center of inquiry [...] to provide answers to how black people affected and were affected by various social, political and cultural institutions” (Smith et al. 2018, 2). In this book, diasporic Africans share that place with Indigenous peoples and also with geography. However, they do so within the regimes of travel writing, within embedded representations of life. This means that rather than centering on these lives, I analyze how they intervene and disturb those representations. Hence I am not making any claims of revealing how anyone experienced life in the early colonial Caribbean; I can merely scratch the surface for possible answers from echoes of voices. Nonetheless, this field of study offers a new approach to the silences upon which texts like the travelogues I study here build because it does not only see silence and repression; it proposes a different way of listening to the texts. Thereby they challenge a long tradition of thinking, which has been crucial for revealing colonial inequalities. Since Stephen Greenblatt’s (1988) famous analysis of the structure of power in discourse in early modern England, in which he demonstrates the embeddedness of representation of speech, the presence of otherness has been configured in terms of a muted, disfigured voice, in Anglo-American academia as well as in French universities, though the latter case has focused on power dynamics in the uneven translation process from orality to writing (de Certeau 1992; Mignolo 1995; Said 1993; Todorov 1999). Like scholars in Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies, I am not contesting the fact that the expressions of agency of others are embedded in layers of codes of representation, ideologies, and underlying motives. The problem with over-emphasizing these dimensions is not only that it is profoundly Eurocentric, as it lets the power structure colonial discourses have imposed onto the world continue to determine what we see when we read and how we read them. It also presumes that, in order to have value, the excavation of other forms of knowledge or experience requires an autonomous space where expression may emerge freely, independent of any outside interference. Creating such a space from our

present vantage point would be another form of deformation and displacement.

So what would a reading that listens differently do? Instead of circumscribing people's "experiences within those systems," Cassander L. Smith (2016, 5) opts for an interrogation of what she calls narrative disruptions, "offering clues about the source material from which a writer crafts his or her narrative" (5) to create other colonial narratives. She argues that presences and experiences of others cause scatterings, tremblings, shifts in perspectives within the narratives. Inspired by this approach, I, too, claim that the identification of instances of unsettlement within the texts allows for analyzing active interventions by Natives, enslaved people, and geography. What I particularly take from Smith is the recognition that the rhetoric codes that frame language and representations contain limitations that constitute sites where the structure of power is questioned (5; 22). This approach resonates with Simon Gikandi's discussion of the figure of the slave in early American archives (2015). Warning against the attempt to recuperate expressions of subjectivity or authentic experiences of enslaved people from the colonial archive where they inevitably hold "a place of pure negativity," from which we can only retrieve "an occasional stammer in the cracks of European speech or in 'the great confused murmur of a discourse' that sought to exclude them [...]" (86), Gikandi proposes a "symptomatic reading" (99, 100). Rather than carving out a representational and ultimately fictional space where the enslaved subject would speak freely, he urges us to work through the messiness of colonial representations. Taking up Gayatri Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak or not, Gikandi argues that even if the subaltern was enchained in a position from which they could not speak, they can still be heard. "Indeed, the challenge of the archive [...]," Gikandi writes, "is how we can read the lives of the slaves in the archive of the masters, not to recover the authentic voices of the enslaved, but to witness new voices and selves emerging in what appears to be the site of discursive interdiction" (92). A way to do this work with coded and layered texts such as travel writing is to look carefully for *impacts* and *effects* on the narratives of others.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>I refrain from using the term "voice" because of its link to various forms of subjectivity, such as the subject of enunciation in discourse analysis and to a "consciousness" in Bakhtin's theories of polyphony and dialogism. Moreover, voice had other meanings and was linked to philosophy and rhetoric in seventeenth-century France (Rosenthal 1998), which adds further layers to the notion, making it difficult to use operatively in my analysis.

Following Gikandi, I take the lesson from subaltern and postcolonial studies, namely that the discourse of “control and regulation, which seeks to remove all traces of difference and resistance, still leaves in its wake important signs of that which it tries to control or erase” (93). The textual effect is not necessarily an expression of resistance, but it leaves traces of friction, short-circuiting the flow of the early colonial narrative.

This book is in many ways a continuation of Doris Garraway’s thorough and thought-provoking book *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (2005). Her analysis of representations of “cross-cultural negotiations within and between ethnic groups” (20) to see how “culture cross[es] boundaries of power and violence” (21) was ground-breaking. There is a certain form of colonial *libertinage*, she argues, “undergirding exploitative power relations” (26), which alternatively reinforces and subverts regimes of violence in the early modern Caribbean. My book is also written in dialogue with Michael Harrigan’s recent historical study of enslavement during the period of the settlement and early colonization in *Frontiers of Servitude: Slavery in the Narratives of the Early French Atlantic* (2018). In detailed analysis of some of the travelogues I study here, Harrigan explores how power was structured (4) and what slavery meant in the context of early colonial society by using the contemporary term “condition” (15). Another book that has informed my project is *Engendering Islands: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Violence in the Early French Caribbean* (2021), where Ashley Williard reads burgeoning racial and colonial discourses by focusing on the body (7). Her study shows how gender and race are produced as interrelated categories and how racial discourses are permeated with “instabilities” (9), which make them malleable and adjustable to context. Both Harrigan and Williard work from a premise similar to mine, namely that colonial narratives “are somehow haunted by the whispers of the slave” (Harrigan 2018, 230; quoted in Williard 2021, 15), suggesting that the disclosure of the formations of power structures can reveal such “whispers.”

The work I am suggesting here requires a literary methodology of close reading. I follow Frédéric Tinguely’s (2020) argument that there is an epistemic value in using a literary method when approaching travel writing. Textual analysis proceeds with a slow reading of these often informative and repetitive texts that are usually simply skimmed through. It is a methodology that is sensitive to contradictions, tensions, and details that would escape a purely informative reading. This is precisely the kind of reading strategy that enables attention to unequal power relations while at

the same time remaining sensitive to creative aspects and to the ways in which travel narratives are influenced by the world they are trying to control. Surely, travelogues do not fully belong to what we conceive of as literature (not in the seventeenth-century sense of *belles lettres* or in the modern notion of literature as tied to fiction in a larger sense). Nonetheless, they are partly fictive constructs with elements of literariness (usages of literary tropes and narrative constructs); this is a kind of literature in which the “sound of the world” is more directly present than in fiction or poetry.<sup>7</sup> My methodology also finds inspiration in what Terence Cave calls an “archipelagic approach” to literature, which concentrates on the fragments of the texts to identify places where signs of trouble or “epistemological incertitude, an ontological or axiological anxiety” (1999, 15) appear.

What I hope to achieve through this reading is the actualization of resonances between the disruptive effects of others and today’s thinking and writing from the archipelago. In his seminal essay “Caribbean Man in Space and in Time” (1974), Barbadian writer Kamau Brathwaite proposed that in order to reassess Caribbean literary heritage as a complicated, conflictual articulation of cultural crossings, we need to rediscover the writings of the “inner metropole” (8). Along the same lines, Keith Sandiford (2018, 3) notes in his exploration of the *longue durée* of Anglophone Caribbean literature that early colonial texts need examination as part of a work of re-remembering. Interestingly, twentieth-century French Antillean authors do just that: they imbricate fragments from the eclectic travelogue corpus and turn to travel writing not only for mere information but for exploring a certain sensitivity toward the island space and the processes of violent cultural and linguistic mixing. Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre’s multifaceted description of the now-extinct acoma tree resurfaced four centuries later when Glissant founded a journal to articulate what he would later call a “Caribbean discourse” He named the journal *Acoma*. Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé’s character Aristide in *Crossing the Mangrove* (1989) immerses himself in the dense jungle and reads Labat’s travelogue to make sense of the vegetation. Labat appears in Glissant’s epic poem *The Indies* (2019) as the torturer of enslaved people and later in *Poetics of Relation* (1997), but now as a person influenced by

<sup>7</sup>I borrow this expression from Jérôme Meizoz (2007, 11), who argues for a way to “read literature sociologically in terms of a ‘discourse’ in permanent interaction with the sound [rumeur] of the world.”

the people on whom he exercised his violent authority. References such as these fold the early colonial into writings of the present; they suggest that this history still has an impact today but that this influence is fragmentary, breaking through rifts of time and complicating the contours of French Caribbean literary history.

### FRENCH NEW WORLD BAROQUE

One of the challenges with the concept of point of entanglements is that it implies working with temporal overlaps. As I hope to have shown, actualizing twentieth-century Caribbean and Black diasporic thinking in my readings opens the possibility for a different approach to colonial silencing. It also helps to situate travel writing in the distinct context of the seventeenth-century island space while reconsidering Caribbean literary history in terms of discontinuities, and it helps to understand the period prior to the boom of the plantation system from a non-teleological standpoint: it cuts through time rather than following in a linear chronology. When doing this work, I have come back to a concept which resonates in both the seventeenth and the twentieth century, namely the Baroque. The travelogues were written during the Baroque period, and the notion has been revisited by twentieth-century Caribbean authors like Glissant. In fact, Glissant's non-linear way of thinking the past recalls Delphine Denis' characterization of a Baroque notion of origin, which aims to "describe that which emerges from a process of becoming and disappearance" (2019, 474). Likewise, a recent article on the re-workings of the Baroque stresses that the concept entails a "radical rethinking of historical time" liberated from linearity and historicism (Farago et al. 2015, 43).

The fascination with changeable nature, uncertainty, and ceaseless conflict characteristic of the seventeenth century, Christopher Braider argues (2018, 10), can be seen as a reconfiguration of the convulsions that marked the Renaissance after the discovery of the Americas—from the wonders of the first encounters to the delusion that followed the extinction of Indigenous peoples. Ignoring the "baroque instabilities" (Braider 2019, 140) that this caused is another form of denial of French imperialism. Significantly, even if there is a historical rationale for turning to the Baroque—French settlement and early colonization coincide with the period from the seventeenth century up to the eighteenth century, which has been called the "age of the baroque" in France by Jean Rousset

(1953)<sup>8</sup>—the notion has not been used to understand French early coloniality and overseas involvement. In Lois Parkinson and Monica Kaup’s *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest* (2010), France is mentioned in passing, as part of the Catholic counter-reformation. Apart from Glissant’s essay “Concerning a Baroque Abroad and in the World” to which I will come back, only one critical study in this volume by Dorothy Z. Baker investigates the notion in relation to French seventeenth-century American texts, but it focuses on Jesuits in New France and not on the Caribbean. It is indeed difficult to place French writings on the settlement and early colonization in any movement. Contrary to Spanish early modern American literature, the French only have colonial texts written in Europe. There is no French colonial *mestizo* text from and about the Caribbean that could represent a New World Baroque in the same sense as one can find in the Spanish colonial context.<sup>9</sup>

For me, the Baroque has been productive for thinking through the tensions and contradictions that permeate travel narratives. A seventeenth-century understanding of the Baroque as an instrument of empire and power (Maravall 1986) has been useful for capturing the intention to discursively control the archipelago and its people. A twentieth-century Caribbean understanding insists on an openness to transformation and instability and sees the Baroque as a profoundly inter- and transcultural concept, which enables me to seize moments of unsettlement that are produced in the narratives despite the travelers’ desires to domesticate, as an effect of the impact of the outside world. The term thus comprises several, sometimes contradictory, orientations, commonly captured by referring to its etymological roots in the Portuguese term *barróco*, uneven pearl. However, in the context of my study, a different etymology proves to be more pertinent, derived from the Tuscan vernacular words *barocco*,

<sup>8</sup>The notion of classicism has long been and still is preferred to describe French seventeenth-century culture and society, including travel writing (Dorion, 1995). Classicism no doubt captures the majority of travels of the time, but mostly for those conducted in less foreign and faraway spaces. American voyages, particularly those imbricated in the colonization process, faced other challenges and were often more heterogeneous in motives, arguments and style. On this note, see Christopher Braider’s *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth* (2019, 5).

<sup>9</sup>The Baroque has been used to theorize various conversion strategies of amazement and exaggeration to attract people to Catholicism (Calfope 2013; Shrum 2017). In the French Caribbean, as I will explain later, missionary work among the Indigenous population failed and missionaries seem to have had little material at hand when working among them.

*barrocolo* or *barrochio*, which designate uneven systems of transactions; a usurer's contract (Malczynski 2009, 305). French presence in the Caribbean was initiated by privateers, doing more or less illicit commerce. Interactions with Indigenous populations were mainly configured through the words *troc* and *traite*, trade exchanges. From the European perspective, Indigenous people would give them anything in exchange for what they called *pacotille*—junk—suggesting that the exchanges were uneven, though we have no sources telling us how the Indigenous interpreted these interactions. The word *traite* will soon move into designating the French Transatlantic slave trade, *la Traite*. The Baroque exchange was indisputably unequal, but it also contained an unpredictable element, a sort of collateral creativity, which finds its echoes in Glissant's notion of creolization.

In this sense, the concept allows me to frame the desire to dominate, which structures travelogues, at the same time as it suggests that the cross-cultural basis of the exchange destabilized that structure of domination. The editors of *Baroque New Worlds* describe the Baroque as an instrument of power that derailed:

The Baroque was exported wholesale to areas of the world colonized by Catholic Europe throughout the seventeenth century, and well into the eighteenth. It is one of the few satisfying ironies of European imperial domination worldwide that the Baroque worked poorly as a colonizing instrument. Its visual and verbal forms are ample, dynamic, porous, and permeable; thus, in all of the areas colonized by Catholic Europe, the Baroque was itself eventually colonized. In the New World, its transplants immediately began to incorporate the cultural perspectives and iconographies of the indigenous and African laborers and artisans who built and decorated Catholic structures. (2010, 3)

The Baroque was a vector of empires at the same time as it was transformative, making it useful to address colonization as domination *and* cultural transformation and creation. Following Parkinson and Kaup, my reason for turning to the Baroque is thus not primarily periodical or stylistic. The critical usefulness of this notion is that it can help problematize representational as well as epistemic transformations and instabilities within a structure. It enables me to frame passages where travel narratives that aim to assert power and empire become unsettled, and it is here that I can trace the impact of the foreign: sites where travelers are entangled with



island geography, with Indigenous and enslaved peoples, despite the will to separate themselves from this world and thereby control it. Such an approach is particularly relevant when investigating an entire body of eclectic works spanning almost a century. The travelers use different registers and have different agendas, and it would be a misunderstanding to assume that they spoke from one single position of power. Rather, the colonial discourse they produce is shifting, even within a single text, as we shall see in the analytical chapters that follow.

Glissant claims that while the Spanish Baroque manifested power in architecture and in visual representations using fear and desire, the Baroque in the French context operated through language (1989, 250), both in terms of policing languages and sustaining a linguistic hierarchy and of representations. Travel writing would thus constitute a key-site where the French Caribbean Baroque is manifested. In an essay entitled “People and Language” that appeared in *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant juxtaposes what he calls a “baroque rhetoric” of the French colonial world with the linguistic development that took place in France at the same time. The standardization of French into a “pure national language,” propelled by the creation of the French Academy and the forging of classicism, would either fall short or morph into something else in the encounter with the Caribbean: “It is the unknown area of these relationships that weaves, while dismantling the conception of the standard language, the ‘natural texture’ of our new Baroque, our own. Liberation will emerge from this cultural composite” (1989, 250). There are echoes between Glissant’s insistence on language and Cuban writer Severo Sarduy’s notion of the neo-Baroque. The two writers belonged to the same circles connected to the *Tel Quel* group in Paris, though I do not know if they met, and Sarduy was more involved in the group than Glissant, who was closer to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Nonetheless, both stress the importance of language in conceptualizing the counter poetics of the American Baroque. But whereas Sarduy insists on the artificiality of the Baroque, which goes against other Cuban authors, notably Alejo Carpentier’s interpretation of the Baroque enabling an analogous relationship between language and primordial nature, Glissant focuses on power structures in language and on language’s ability to perform domination while also exploring its creative potentiality.

The question of language runs through each point of entanglement that I address here, not only in the ways in which travelers account for the various languages of the islands and their speakers, but also in the

multiplication of names of islands and in the negotiation between self and the world where language mediates influence. The emphasis on the foundational violence in language explains why Glissant keeps thinking *with* early colonial texts. He does not elaborate on the connection between today's counter poetics and the early modern, which contrasts with the ways Sarduy (2010a, b), for instance, reads the Baroque period, as if he was reluctant to celebrating the early modern creativity because it runs the risk of obliterating that the Baroque is also an instrument of domination. Rather, he underscores the inherent contradictions in writings from early colonization. Taking the example of Labat, he writes in the essay "Concerning a Baroque Abroad and in the World":

Despite the insistent cold ferocity of Father Labat's writing, for example, beneath the words of this seventeenth-century chronicler of the Antilles one can feel a curiosity, riveted, anxious, and obsessive, whenever he broaches the subject of these slaves that he struggles so hard to keep calm. Fear, fantasies and perhaps a barely willing flicker of complicity from the undercurrent of the revolts and repressions. The long list of martyrdoms is also a long métissage whether involuntary or intentional. (1997, 67)

In a typically Glissantian manner, he does not deepen the analysis of Labat, but he uses the seventeenth-century missionary to show that historical and geographical circumstances forge writings on the Caribbean from this time. He is interested in that which appears despite the authoritarian posture. Otherness seems to draw the writing of this missionary in unexpected directions, and it is in this movement that the Baroque occurs. We hear the echo of Gilles Deleuze's (1993) notion of the Baroque fold as producing a creativity, but Glissant reads it in direct relationship to the contact with the New World. Here, Glissant suggests, the Baroque ceased to be a reaction to Classicism and became naturalized, taking on other meanings and forms (1997, 116). On the islands, he writes in *Caribbean Discourse*, it was extended "into the unstable mode of Relation; and once again in this full-sense, the 'historical' baroque prefigured, in an astonishingly prophetic manner, present-day upheavals of the world" (1989, 79). It was an effect of early colonization, which produced overlapping identities and languages that travelers put into strategic use to construct knowledge and create representations of the islands. By confronting different geographies, languages, and perspectives we can see how travel writing is drawn into the "unstable mode of Relation" that Glissant claims to be

characteristic of the Baroque. I will not look at specific stylistic figures that pertain to the Baroque, nor do I claim to prove that these texts *are* Baroque. But the concept has helped me to work through the points of entanglement where plurilingualism and plurivocalism are actualized, where engagement with geography influences writing, and where the travelers, acting as mediators between the islands and France, become themselves sites for negotiations between cultures.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF A SUCCESSFUL COLONIZATION

The Windward Islands Guadeloupe and Martinique have been French longer than Nice and Brittany. Whereas other Caribbean islands gained independence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these islands remained under the French flag. Since 1946, they are *départements d'outre-mer* and no longer colonies, but as argued by Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse* (1989), rather than spurring self-sufficiency, departmentalization strengthened the links to the former colonial metropole, as France implemented a politics of assimilation. When traveling from St. Lucia to Martinique, one has the impression to have crossed the English Channel and not the Caribbean Sea, as V.S. Naipaul sardonically remarks in *The Middle Passage: The Caribbean Revisited* (1962, 199–203). Like in France, every little town has a post office, a *mairie*, and a monument commemorating those who gave their lives to *la mère patrie* in the two world wars. Today one can be sure to find well-known French *hypermarchés* on the outskirts of more populated areas, and tourists think that the beer “Lorraine” is a French import and not a local brew named after a brasserie in Lamentin where it was first made. These manifestations of what Glissant with biting irony has called a “successful colonization” (1981, 15) have a history that stretches back to the second half of the seventeenth century when Colbert centralized colonial politics to Paris and Louis XIV.

However, initially France’s presence in the Antilles was precarious and even rebellious. To distinguish between the different phases of this history, I will call the period up to 1669 “settlement” or “establishment.” During this phase, French involvement in the Caribbean was mainly the result of individuals. As Éric Roulet (2017) convincingly demonstrates in his study of the first French American trading companies, the colonies and the trade companies were supported by powerful men with political influence in France. Nevertheless, the settlement was not officially a state run enterprise until 1668 when Colbert was appointed Secretary of State for

the Navy and placed the colonies directly under his administration. The period from the 1670s up to 1706, when the last writer in my corpus, Labat, left Martinique, will be referred to as early colonization. These thirty years mark the beginning of a centralized colonial system, where the slave trade and the plantation society took shape and gradually came to dominate life on the islands but had not yet reached the dimensions that are to be found later in the eighteenth century (Petitjean Roget 1980).

During the sixteenth century, France randomly appeared in the Americas: French adventurers and privateers roamed the Caribbean Sea and made some unfruitful attempts at claiming American southern territories beginning in the sixteenth century (Lestringant 1981, 1987, 1994; Moreau 2002). The most well-known colonial enterprises were Vice Admiral Villegagnon's expedition to Brazil in 1555, with the objective to establish a colony, and Jean Ribault and René de Laudonnière's expeditions to Florida between 1562–1565, encouraged by Admiral Coligny as a way to challenge Spain's monopoly in the Americas (Lestringant 2017). Both expeditions were failures. The colony in Florida was attacked by the Spanish after they had already been decimated by Natives. The island that Villegaignon occupied in Rio de Janeiro Bay (Guanabara Bay) lacked fresh water and was uninhabitable. In the decades that followed, there would be no serious French attempts to settle in the Americas, only a few missionary expeditions (Daher 2022) and traders, buccaneers, and privateers leaving from France to the islands with the objective to find adventure and profit, rather than to colonize territories. In 1623, one of them, Pierre Belain d'Esnambuc who had travelled in the region since he was 18, found refuge on Saint-Christophe. The island was already inhabited by Indigenous peoples, four hundred Englishmen led by Thomas Warner, eighty Frenchmen, and around twenty enslaved people; the French settled with the Caribs in the north and the south, whereas the English took possession of the middle of the island (Régent 2019, 23). At this time Richelieu was looking to strengthen France's naval impact, so when Esnambuc sailed to Paris in 1625 to ask for permission to settle on every island in the Caribbean that "was not inhabited," he immediately gained it. The following year, Richelieu created *La Compagnie de Saint-Christophe*, France's very first trading company, modeled after the Dutch. Lacking a solid structure, the company soon went bankrupt. Nonetheless, it paved the way for French global trade, and Richelieu recreated it in 1635 under the name *La Compagnie des Isles de l'Amérique*, which marked the beginning of more serious imperial claims to the islands.

The start of settlement was difficult for the French. The colonies—here referring to groups of settlers rather than to territories—were small and suffered from not knowing how to use the land. The chroniclers tell about how choosing bad locations for settlement could lead to the death of entire colonies. Frenchmen passed away from starvation, sickness, or in combat against other Europeans or Amerindians. They were dependent on exchanges with Natives for food and for information in order to identify plants and learn how to hunt, cultivate, and navigate the sea in canoes. Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre’s map of Martinique, included in *Histoire générale des isles de Saint-Christophe...et autres dans l’Amérique*, shows an island divided between French and Natives (Fig. 1.1).

The islands were indeed multicultural and multilingual at this time. Each ethnic group was largely heterogeneous regarding class, language, and religion, although it should be mentioned that most Europeans were male.<sup>10</sup> French-speaking Protestants could be found among the Dutch. There were people of mixed race, such as the famous Thomas Warner’s son with the same name who would be appointed governor of Dominica by the English. In the beginning of the settlement enslaved peoples of African descent were mostly bought from other American colonies (Barbados and Brazil) and intermingled with poor Europeans—*engagés*, indentured servants who originated from Northern France (Boucher 2008, 268–272). Indentured laborers worked to lay the ground for the settlements and small-scale plantations. The large majority of the *engagés* would die during their service, some would never escape servitude or return to France, and others got away by joining the Indigenous communities or buccaneers (Boucher 2008, 270–271).

Indentureship and skilled white laborers would be the most important workforce for the French up until the 1660s when the scale shifted toward enslaved Africans, who were from then on considered to be the key to profit (Boucher 2008, 273). Frédéric Régent states that in 1654 there were three indentured workers and one enslaved person and ten years later the numbers were reversed (Régent 2019, 70; Banks 2006, 18). However, there is little information about the enslaved population prior to the 1660s and most numbers are estimates (Boucher 2008, 275). One of the missionaries in the corpus claims that there were around 300 enslaved people

<sup>10</sup>For studies about women in the seventeenth-century Caribbean, see Bernard Moitt (2001) and Ashley Williard (2021). The following studies focus on gender in the context of enslavement: Hilary Beckles (1998); Sylvie Meslien (1999); Arlette Gautier (2009a, b, 2010).



**Fig. 1.1** Du Tertre *Histoire générale des isles de Saint-Christophe* (1654). Map of Martinique divided between French and Indigenous. (Source: [gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France](http://gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France). Public domain)

in Martinique in 1639, but it is difficult to know for sure. Black people were referred to as “Nègres,” “Mores,” “eslaves,” and less frequently “Noirs” or “Ethiopiens” or other vague references to country origins such as “Congos,” “Angoles,” or “Aradas.”<sup>11</sup> Most individuals captivated and enslaved by the French in the seventeenth century originated from Senegambia and the Bight of Benin where French slave vessels were most active at the time. The first officially recognized French slave ship set sail in 1643 (Régent 2007, 41, 43), but as David Geggus contends there is little data from this period (Geggus 2001, 123; Pritchard et al. 2008; Régent 2007, 45). Before 1650, about fifty to sixty enslaved peoples arrived yearly to the French settlements in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint-Christophe. Then the numbers increased radically, totaling

<sup>11</sup>According to Frédéric Régent, the people referred to as “Arada” spoke the same language but were from different ethnic groups (2007, 45 n. 3). Congos originated from Central Africa (today’s Cameroun, Gabon, and north Angola) (Régent 2007, 45 n. 4).

around six to seven hundred captives annually in the 1650, and by the end of the century there would be around four thousand (Régent 2007, 55).

The Natives comprised a hybrid group as recent Caribbean archaeology and ethnohistory has shown (Hofman and Duijvenbode 2011; Hofman et al. 2014; Lenik 2012; Verrand 2001). The travelers refer to them by using the generic and highly exotic term, *Sauvages*. Sometimes they use more culturally specific denominations, such as *Callínago*, *Caribs*, *Galibis*, *Arawak*, and alternatively *Cannibals*. Which denomination a traveler used says as much about the effect they tried to have in a particular passage as about the people they actually portrayed. It is worth noting that those missionaries who were involved with the Indigenous people adequately point out that this is not how the Natives referred to themselves. The Protestant traveler Rochefort notes that they do not like the European terms even if they had adopted them supposedly to facilitate communication with Europeans (1658, 324). He most likely drew this information from Dominican missionary Raymond Breton, who in his Carib-French dictionary published in 1665, claims the Indigenous peoples called themselves Callínago:

*Callínago, It's the real name for our insular Caribs; these are those cannibals or anthropophagus of which the Spanish complain so much, as the persons that they have not been able to tame and who have devoured so many of them and their allies (to judge by what they say in their books); as far as I am concerned I don't want to defame them more; I have never had a reason to complain about their cruelty, on the contrary, I would complain about their goodness toward me. (1999, 55)<sup>12</sup>*

Like all travelers, Breton still refers to them as Caribs, probably not to confuse the readers, but also because he does not seem sure about which people or nation the inhabitants of Dominica, with whom he lived, spoke about when using the term Callínago.<sup>13</sup> The question is whether this

<sup>12</sup> *C'est le véritable nom de nos Caraïbes insulaires; sont ces cannibales et anthropophages dont les Espagnols se plaignent tant, comme des personnes qu'ils n'ont pu dompter, et qui ont dévoré un si prodigieux nombre des leurs et de leurs alliés (à ce qu'ils disent en leurs livres); je ne les veux pas diffamer davantage; quant à moi, je n'ai pas sujet de me plaindre de leur cruauté, au contraire, je me plaindrais volontiers à leur douceur à mon égard.*

<sup>13</sup> See Breton's *Relation* (1978, 52) where the question of what they call themselves is linked to that of their origin. He ends by stating: "We call those who come from the continent and who are friends with our savages Gallybis and our savages Karaïbes" (Nous appelons ceux de terre ferme qui sont amis de nos sauvages Gallybis et nos sauvages Karaïbes).

designation only referred to inhabitants of Dominica. Erin Stone notes that it did not appear in the Spanish records in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries but is likely “a product of the Indian diaspora that was created by the violence and movement of the earliest indigenous slave trade” (2017, 140, n3). As Peter Hulme and Neil Whitehead underscore in the introduction to the collected volume *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day* (1992) there is no way of knowing exactly what they called themselves, and it is not always clear to which group the travelers are referring. Ultimately, they opt for the term Carib as the least exoticizing vernacular nomination of these populations, and I will do the same even if researchers such as Ashley Williard argue for using “Kalinago,” noting that the term is still used in Dominica today (2021, 18). For my purpose here, settling for Carib is a way to acknowledge the gaps in our understanding of these peoples and their languages: what we have is merely a construction, like the term “Carib.”

Breton’s quote reflects that French missionaries generally portrayed Indigenous people in good terms, for missionary and political reasons. They were obviously keen to foster good relationships with the Natives to benefit the evangelical work. Moreover, their texts often exaggerate the friendship in order to promote the mission or praise France’s civility in comparison to the cruelty of the Spanish or the brutality of the English. As Doris Garraway rightly argues, the French forged a fiction of reciprocity when representing Franco-Carib relations (Garraway 2005, 42). Periodically, the French lived indeed peacefully side-by-side with Caribs, and it seems plausible that the French did have a different relationship with many tribes as a result of years of trading without territorial claims. For instance, French buccaneers and privateers would typically do commerce at sea, on their ships, rather than on land. Whether this practice complied better with local culture or whether the sea was perceived as a more neutral space is hard to know, but it seems to have affected the reports. Nevertheless, stories about reciprocal exchanges are rarer to find in the travelogues than those who tell about brutal massacres by the French. And as French governors and *colons* wanted more and more land, the killings increased even if it was sometimes to the detriment of the colonies since it meant they could no longer count on support from the Caribs. Wars between Natives and Europeans raged until 1660, when French, British, and Natives signed a treaty dividing the islands between them. From then on the Caribs were chased from all islands and were only allowed to inhabit Dominica and Saint Vincent.



It took years for the French to assure territorial control over the islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint-Christophe.<sup>14</sup> The more lasting establishment did not start until 1640, two years after Philippe Lonvilliers de Poincy from the order of Malta was named lieutenant general of Saint-Christophe. Poincy was a strong leader who managed to resist attacks from enemies and keep the colonies in check. Taking advantage of the chaotic situation in France after the death of Louis XIII in 1643, Poincy soon took full authority over the islands and undermined both the Crown and *La Compagnie des Isles de l'Amérique*, which was now near bankruptcy. The regency of the queen mother Anne of Austria, supported by Cardinal Mazarin, and the civil war known as *La Fronde* (1648–1653) were turbulent times for Caribbean settlers. In his *Histoire générale des Antilles*, Du Tertre reports on torture and random executions ordered by governors who sought absolute power over their territories. Most missionaries stood on the side of the Crown against governors and *colons* with whom they often had conflicting interests. Poincy made sure that nobody contested his authority. At the same time, he exempted the inhabitants of the islands from the heavy tax load that French authorities imposed on the people in France. But most of all, for the proprietors in the Antilles it was a time of relative independence from the Crown and powerful men in Paris. Governors bought islands from the company—Charles Houël took Guadeloupe and its neighboring islands; Du Parquet took Martinique, Grenada and the Grenadines; and Poincy kept his position at Saint-Christophe, from where he exercised full control over the islands, refusing to resign his powers to Patrocles de Thoisy sent by the regent queen mother and Mazarin in 1645. This “era of proprietors,” as historian Philip Boucher calls the period between 1648 and the death of Poincy in 1660, is the burgeoning of the sugar economy and the plantation system (2008, Chap. 4). Now plantation owners, later known as *békés*, became important political players who weighed in against both the companies and the governors.

With Poincy’s authority gone, a race began for islands and trade, which was complicated by conflicts in Europe—France was now enemies with the Dutch, who were the main traders in the Caribbean. Colbert issued a law of commercial exclusivity, forbidding trade with nations other than France, and the islands were at the brink of civil war. The crisis incited

<sup>14</sup>For studies on life in the early colonies, see Oruno Lara (1999); Léo Elisabeth (2003); Marie Polderman (2004).

Louis XIV, through the intermediary of Colbert, to change colonial politics. In 1664, the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* was created to centralize colonial authority, putting an end to the long period of settlement with its diffuse forms of power. Alexandre de Prouville de Tracy was sent to the islands to resist the English, end illegal trade with the Dutch, and ultimately buy back the islands. In 1669, Colbert made sure to place colonial affairs directly under his administration.

Colonization now turned into a “machinery,” to use François Regourd and James E. McClellan’s expression, a governmental and administrative apparatus, with Paris as its centrifugal force, in which all agents contribute as cogs to make it work better (McClellan and Regourd 2011; Regourd 2008). As the sugar economy grew, so did slave trade. The first census is from 1660 when they counted 2642 enslaved Black people, compared to 2783 whites in Martinique, and in Guadeloupe in 1670, 4482 enslaved and 3444 whites (Boucher 2008, 238–239). By the turn of the century the number of enslaved peoples in Martinique had more than tripled; 14566 to 6567 whites (Boucher 2008, 239). Most enslaved Africans were brought to the French islands by buccaneers or bought from Portuguese ships and colonies (Roulet 2017, 409). The French triangular trade expanded starting in the 1670s at the same time as Colbert laid the ground for the *Code noir*, a set of laws regulating trade and treatment of slaves that was promulgated in 1685. The number of enslaved people on the French islands grew rapidly after 1715 when plantation production increased with the so-called “sugar revolution” (Miller 2008, 25). From then on, slavery and plantation society determined colonial society and politics.

## THE EARLY FRENCH CARIBBEAN CORPUS

*Points of Entanglement in French Caribbean Travel Writing (1620-1722)* looks at “curated” texts, texts that for the most part have been published or appear to have been written with the intention to get published. The reason is not primarily because there are still few thorough literary studies of these texts, but because I attribute an epistemic value to the embeddedness that such publications entail. They remind us of the enmeshed representation of the early modern Caribbean, forcing us to work through it and search for disruptions from within. They give no illusion of transparency but present us with frictions, layers, and folds. I will refer to the set of texts as a library in order not to confuse my approach

here with the archival criticism undertaken by decolonial scholars that has inspired my work.

The corpus covers a period from 1620 to 1722, starting with the travels of the anonymous writer, probably a Parisian soldier (Moreau 2002, 15–16) whose manuscript was found in Carpentras, and ending in 1722, the year Labat published his account fourteen years after he had left Martinique. I consider Labat's work to be transitional: he stayed on the islands at the turn of the centuries, but his account was published after the sugar revolution in 1715. His account is in many ways singular, as will become evident throughout the chapters, but it is also intimately entwined with its predecessors thematically, stylistically, and politically. Instead of letting historical events determine the timespan, I have decided to start from the travelers and their texts. In broad strokes, the accounts can be categorized as (1) longer published accounts, including natural and moral histories, (2) linguistic works, (3) published buccaneer stories, and (4) unpublished narratives that were visibly written for a readership but never got published for reasons the present study does not have the space to investigate.<sup>15</sup>

All of the texts were written in France, after the traveler's sojourn in the islands. There are some manuscripts available, but log books or notebooks have not been found, which means that we have very few if any direct notes from life on the islands. The majority of the texts were published and reached an audience by the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, six years after Richelieu's death. The reason why few texts circulated during the period of the initial settlement up to the peace treaty was that texts about French taking over land recently claimed by Spain could deteriorate the already bad relations between France and Spain. In fact, Richelieu's initiative to trade and settle in the Caribbean from 1626 and onwards coincided with his decision to enter the Thirty Years War, siding with the Protestants of Northern Europe against Catholic Spain. In order to silence severe criticism from fervent Catholics at home, he asked the Pope, who shared Richelieu's fear that Spain was too strong in the Americas, for

<sup>15</sup> I would like to call attention to recent editorial works that are part of the extended corpus: literary scholar Réal Ouellet has edited two volumes with texts from this period, both published and unpublished, written by a number of different authors: *La Colonisation des Antilles. Textes français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle I-II* (2014). These volumes include excerpts from missionary texts and letters; others are written by governors, traders, and buccaneers. A similar but more extended series called *Corpus antillais* (2013, 2014, 2016, 2021) has been initiated by historians Bernard Grunberg, Josiane Grunberg, and Benoît Roux.

permission to embark on missions in the New World, thus convincing his critics that he was a true Catholic after all (Boucher 2008, 68). The Pope gave France the authorization to send missionaries to the Antilles who were directly under the “conduct, jurisdiction and authority” of the superior at the Noviciat Général in Paris (Deslandres 2003, 691). Clearly, as historian Philip Boucher claims the reason why France’s colonial campaign included missionaries had more to do with European politics than with converting souls. It left a distinctive trait on French settlement since neither English nor Dutch ships brought missionaries along their expeditions. This meant that there are more French sources from this period are relatively extensive.

The corpus reflects the variety of the travel writing genre from the 1640s to the turn of the century. A few travelers give more or less chronological first-person accounts of their sojourns. Natural and moral histories, such as Du Tertre’s *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François* (1667)<sup>16</sup> and Rochefort’s *Histoire naturelle et morales des îles Antilles de l’Amérique* (1658) have a thematic structure, following the Ancients (Herodotus, Pliny) and the Spanish accounts from the sixteenth century (Oviedo, Acosta, Las Casas) as models for writing. There are unique studies of life among the indigenous, such as Moïse Caillé de Castre’s *De Wilde ou les sauvages caribes insulaires d’Amérique* (2002 [1694]),<sup>17</sup> following an unknown man whom he named “De Wilde” stranded with the Caribs, much like the anonymous soldier in Fleury’s crew who lived among them about seventy years earlier. There are a few longer narratives written by traders: Guillaume Coppier (*Histoire et voyages des Indes Occidentales* 1645), François Froger (*Relation d’un voyage fait en 1695, 1696, et 1697 aux côtes d’Afrique, détroit de Magellan, Brésil, Cayenne et isles Antilles* 1698), and Sieur de Laborde (*Relation de l’origine, mœurs, coutumes, religions, guerres et voyages des Caraïbes sauvages des Isles Antilles*

<sup>16</sup>The original manuscript is called *Histoire de la Guadeloupe* (1648), and the first version was published in 1654 under the title *Histoire générale des îles de Saint-Christophe... et autres dans l’Amérique*.

<sup>17</sup>According to the Bibliothèque Mazarine, in charge of Marcel Chatillon’s collection of texts from the early modern Antilles, the manuscript was lost after it had been transcribed and published by the *Musée Départemental d’archéologie précolombienne et de préhistoire de la Martinique* in 2002. See: <https://www.bibliotheque-mazarine.fr/fr/evenements/actualites/a-la-recherche-d-un-manuscrit-perdu>. Consulted August 8, 2021.

*de l'Amérique* 1674).<sup>18</sup> Writings by buccaneers appeared by the end of the seventeenth century and were read widely, notably Exquemelin's *Histoire des aventuriers flibustiers* (2012 [1686]) but also Jacques Ravenau de Lausanne's *Journal du voyage fait à la mer du Sud avec les flibustiers de l'Amérique* (1699).

Writings by missionaries constitute the core of the study. They are the ones who stayed longest in the region and whose work is, up to this day, considered the major sources of knowledge about the early settlement. But we know little of them or about the other travel writers.<sup>19</sup> The Jesuit texts are by Jacques Bouton (*Relation de l'établissement des François depuis l'an 1635 en l'isle de la Martinique*, 1640) and Pierre Pelleprat (*Mission de Cayenne et de la Guyane française*, 1658, and *Introduction à la langue des Galibis*, 1655), along with unpublished letters by Mongin (1984) who wrote about conversion of enslaved peoples in the 1680s, and Adrien Le Breton, who in the 1690s was the last missionary among the Indigenous population on Saint Vincent (1982). The Dominican missionaries' texts testify to the span of the genre in the Caribbean library. One of the first Dominican missionaries who came to the islands in 1635, Raymond Breton, is of crucial importance. Against the will of governors, Breton went to live with the Caribs on Dominica in the 1640s. During his long sojourn, he gathered linguistic and anthropological information that would result in a travel narrative, *Relations de l'île de la Guadeloupe* (1978), and two books on language: *Dictionnaire caraïbe français* (1999 [1665]) and *Grammaire caraïbe* (1666). His work—the published books along with manuscripts, notes, and conversations that Breton had with other travelers—was the major reference for all travelers to come and is still to this day an indispensable source for linguists working with Caribbean vernaculars. Both Du Tertre and Labat were Dominicans, and their work constitutes the most important historical and scientific contributions. The Dominicans also used other literary registers: André Chevillard wrote in a

<sup>18</sup> Sieur de Laborde's account is included in a volume of travel writing edited by Henri Justel, *Recueil de divers voyages faits en Afrique et en l'Amérique qui n'ont point esté publiés* (1674). This volume mostly contains translations of English voyagers, notably Richard Ligon's *Histoire de l'Isle des Barbades* (1657).

<sup>19</sup> For information about Breton see the introduction to the 1999 edition of his French-Carib dictionary, for information about Du Tertre see Christina Kullberg (2020), for Exquemelin see Richard Frohock (2010), for Pelleprat see Eric Roulet (2013), and for Rochefort see Benoît Roux (2011). See also Roux (2008) for a general presentation of the missionaries and their work.

precious style, directed to the salon culture in France (*Les Desseins de son éminence de Richelieu pour l'Amérique* 1659) whereas Mathias Dupuis offered a more straightforward shorter account (*Relation de l'établissement d'une colonie françoise dans la Gardeloupe isle de l'Amérique, et des moeurs des sauvages* 1652). In addition to the Dominicans, the initial settlement brought missionaries from the Capucin order (Pacifique de Provins *Briève Relation* 2014) and from the Carmes order (Maurile de St. Michel *Relation des Isles Camercanes en l'Amérique* 1652). Antoine Biet was a priest from the diocese of Senglis who traveled the region in the beginning of the 1650s and published *Voyage de la France equinoxiale en l'isle de la Cayenne* (1664). Rochefort is the only Protestant in the library, and the only women writing from this period were Ursuline nuns, but they left no longer narrative, which is why they are not taken into account in the present study.<sup>20</sup>

The travelogues often communicate intertextually, either by borrowing observations from each other or by critiquing one another. Yet each travelogue bears the mark of the author. For example, Biet left for Cayenne in 1652 on a ship with five- to six-hundred persons under the command of Balthazar le Roux de Royville. Mistreated by Royville, the passengers committed mutiny and killed him. The ship made it to the Caribbean, but the people were not welcomed onto the islands until 1655, which might explain the negative tone of Biet's narrative. Another example is the Protestant Charles de Rochefort. He shows an interest in North America in general and expands his narrative to include comments on Indigenous people of Florida and the Appalachian Mountains and even Inuit populations. As a Protestant he did not engage in the social life of the islands to the same extent as the Catholic missionaries; he was more of a traveler in the general sense, following an itinerary rather than staying in one place, as did the other missionaries for most of their travels. Concerning the buccaneer accounts, both the anonymous writer of Carpentras and Exquemelin write about the exploits of their captains.

Two books stand out in the corpus: Du Tertre's *Histoire Générale des Antilles habitées par les François* and Rochefort's *Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles de l'Amérique*. Their accounts were published in the 1650s; they are both illustrated, longer natural and moral histories, intimately linked to each other due to circumstances. In the prefaces to the two editions of his natural history of the Antilles, Du Tertre accused the

<sup>20</sup>For studies about the Ursulines, see Heidi Keller-Lapp (2005, 2017).

Protestant of plagiarism, claiming that “pirates” stole his manuscript (Du Tertre 1654, NP). This indirect incrimination of Rochefort, who served as a minister on Tortuga, known as the pirate island (Roux 2011), became explicit in the publication of the second edition of Du Tertre’s history. Historians or literary scholars have not been able to settle the affair—most travelers sampled from others, and the concept of authorship had a different meaning in the seventeenth century, more detached from the individual than it is today. What is known is that Rochefort was not an armchair traveler—Du Tertre himself admits that the Protestant was in the Caribbean. Rather, borrowing from others was part of his writing style: he also took from other travelers, most notably a certain Mr. Bristol who had written about North American Indigenous populations. By juxtaposing Bristol’s account with his own observations in the Caribbean, Rochefort developed a comparative method of description and analysis. However, his method has never received much attention, as did for instance Joseph-Francois Lafitau’s book *Moeurs des Sauvages Américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (1724) about the Natives in New France. In fact, Rochefort’s work is to this day either forgotten or confused with Du Tertre’s book.

One of the main rationales for writing about the islands was to attract investors and to convince the laypeople that the colonies offered not only profit but also a different kind of life than in Europe. Indirectly and without risking irritation from those who supported their publications, missionaries depicted colonial society as less oppressive than France, suggesting that here hierarchies were not as relevant and even laypeople could become proprietors. However, in order to assure support, it was equally important *not to* represent the islands as earthly Eden. The church and powerful men who wanted to support the mission could only be convinced if they saw that the mission was either profitable or in need of help. Direct solicitations to rich patrons were backed up by stories about starving colonies praying for help or about pious, newly converted non-Europeans. Such passages are examples where fiction tends to take over, but we must remember that they were included partly to give a plausible account of life in the colonies and partly to show that the mission could not persist without support.

In some cases, the missionaries sought assistance from powerful people in Paris to defend their interests against governors and colonizers. Raymond Breton, for instance, went back to Paris in 1657 explicitly to ask the Crown to secure the Dominican diocese in Guadeloupe, arguing that

the governors had unjustly taken parts of their land (Fournier 1895, 15–16). This happened the year before Du Tertre published the first edition of *Histoire générale des Antilles*, which is not a coincidence. Du Tertre was closer to the secular powers than the other Dominicans, and his book should partly be read as an effort to sustain Breton's claims. Apparently the publication had an effect: In 1662, Louis XIV seized the land and returned it to the Dominicans. On other occasions, powerful men with an interest in buying land would use the expertise of missionaries. Du Tertre's last trip to the Caribbean, for example, was sponsored by count Cérillac who wanted to settle in Grenada. Charles Rochefort's *Relation de l'Isle de Tabago ou de la nouvelle Oüalcre, l'une des isles antilles de l'Amérique* (1666) was written for Adrien Jean and Gelin Lampsins, who both had ambitions in Tobago.

In a similar vein, the accounts served to recruit and inform future missionaries. In this context, it was important to demonstrate that the mission had a purpose in regard to the evangelical goal to convert Natives and enslaved peoples. It was equally important to show that the mission kept the Reformation from spreading across the Americas and that the missionaries had a role to play in securing the colonies. However, the conversion of Natives failed in most cases. Father Breton, who stayed with a Carib community for a longer period, admits to only having converted four souls. The last missionary to live close to the Amerindians, Father Le Breton, a Jesuit stationed on Saint Vincent in the 1690s, does not mention any successful conversion. Considering the ineffectiveness of the evangelical work with Natives, the religious orders began to focus on converting enslaved people when Caribs still lived on the French islands, before 1660. But even if the mission in itself was far from a success story, the missionaries played an important role in the settlement and early colonization. Missionaries were crucial for maintaining order in the colonies, and they protected settlers and sometimes Caribs from abusive colonial governors.

However, in reality it was difficult to maintain supervision from France. This was particularly so since the missionaries did not necessarily comply with central politics if it came from governors or from sites of both earthly and spiritual powers in France. The Dominicans have a particular position here. At the moment of the first official settlement, Cardinal Richelieu had a special connection to their Noviciat at Faubourg Saint-Honoré: the Friars had recently gone through a reform, in which he was himself involved, and because of their austerity, the Cardinal considered them



most suitable for missions in the Caribbean (Deslandres 2003, 690), perhaps hoping that the Dominicans' new centralized organization would give him better insight into the settlements. But not only was the head of the Friars, Father Carré, reluctant to accept the task to work in the Antilles; the distance separating the islands and Paris presented an obstacle for regulation. Moreover, the missionaries themselves were critical of the Noviciat since their orders were not adapted to life in the colonies. Many missionaries acted on their own behalf and defied both spiritual and worldly orders, at least in the beginning of colonization when they still worked close to the Indigenous populations. For instance, when Father Carré heard that Father Breton had challenged the governors and secretly traveled to Dominica to live close to the Caribs, he sent a message to Breton to have him return to Paris. It was the same for other religious orders on the islands. In fact, Jesuits, Capucins, Dominicans, and Ursulins would often cooperate rather than compete with one another. Ultimately, Rome would ease these tensions by forbidding all missionaries to interfere in politics.<sup>21</sup>

So while acting as extended arms for various political and economic interests in France, the missionaries' engagement in life on the islands brought them to act on their own behalf. In a way, they enacted and reflected the liminality that characterizes the period. Most importantly for my reading here, their writing is affected by that engagement. The representations not only tell about French exploits or construct knowledge on the basis of French superiority; they also testify to a deep involvement in everyday life. Quotidian exchanges allow them to weave an image of the islands and the inhabitants, and it is here that other presences tend to transpire. I am not trying to idealize the moment of messiness that characterized the seventeenth century—it is as much a result of greed and exploitation, as they wanted more and more land, as of necessity. Nevertheless, while we have to condemn the ethics that were forged during the early colonization that would ultimately lead up to racially based and extremely violent human exploitation in the plantation system, the political and geographical contexts were different during the seventeenth century. What happened on the islands was more a result of *local* events than of orders from the colonial centers, even if that mattered too. The settlement and early colonization mark crucial moments in the history of

<sup>21</sup> See *Instructions aux Missionnaires de 1659 de la Sacrée Congrégation de la Propagande*. These instructions are discussed by Georges Goyau in *Missions et missionnaires* (1931, 68–69; 97–98).

French imperialism in which new social forms and new forms of knowledge and representation took shape simultaneously. There is not one representation of the Caribbean but, rather, experiences of the islands embedded in the folds of narratives.

I have organized this book in three longer chapters with sub-sections, according to the idea of points of entanglements. The first chapter engages in the geographic point of entanglement. It shows that whether driven by the prospect of profit, self-interest, or self-preservation, people involved in the early colonial Caribbean were influenced by the islands at the same time as they forged them as a social, historical, and imaginary space. To examine how the archipelagic geography impacted the construction of the travel narratives and, hence, their presentation of the islands, I will use Glissant's notion of archipelagic thinking alongside Henri Lefebvre's and Michel de Certeau's theories of the construction of space. The chapter starts with an analysis of how travelers negotiated their representation of space with an existing island imaginary. The next section offers an examination of the limitations of discursive acts of control, such as naming, at the point of encounter of the histories, cultures, and geographies of the region. The last two sections look at spatial practices following de Certeau's distinction between mapping and touring space. It pays attention to movements between islands and interrogates how ways of practicing space both draw from and are contrasted with other, notably Indigenous, ways of living the archipelago.

The second chapter investigates the traveler's self as a point of entanglement. It highlights the travelers and the conditions determining writing in order to show the complexity of the representational layers through which other experiences emerge as echoes and traces. The aim is to understand how the narratives contain gaps in the mediation between France and the islands, between the travelers and others, between codes and experience. These discursive cracks, the chapter argues, contain elements of disturbance. It will start by investigating how the traveler-narrator is hidden in layers of auctorial voices and codes that are put into strategic use in the narratives. The next section looks at more closely at the writings of Labat in order to analyze how the self becomes an object of knowledge where the outside world is tested. The last two sections examine how the self negotiates encounters with others. By interrogating the figure of the commentary, it questions the construction of a discourse of ambivalence, bordering on sentimentality, with regard to enslaved peoples and enslavement as an institution. The last section looks closer at engagements with

Indigenous peoples in terms of an anxiety of influence: the narratives configure that influence through style. The travelers, it claims, both underscore and distance themselves to uphold an intermediary position.

The final chapter deals with languages as a point of entanglement. Starting out with mapping the linguistic diversity of the region, it investigates how languages are interrelated in narratives and texts on languages. Focusing principally on Breton's dictionary, it argues that the texts work through a tension between linguistic bordering and language crossings. Rather than a situation marked by linguistic oppression or communicative difficulties, the travelogues testify to the inherent creativity in language crossings. Having mapped language diversity in the archipelago, it moves toward the examination of how speech is included in the narratives. Travelers tended to dramatize Indigenous and enslaved peoples, staging them for particular purposes and following rhetorical conventions. The examples will show that the inclusion of others' speech is framed within codes of representation but that these are transgressed in scenes from everyday life. Throughout the chapter, Glissant's thoughts on the role of language in the shaping of French Caribbean Baroque as well as Sarduy's reading of Baroque language will be made operative together with theories around hetero- and translingualism.

The question of language runs through all three chapters. Likewise, the grounding in the diffracted space of the archipelago will return in all chapters. Thus, there is something overlapping, repetitious in the way in which I have structured the book. I believe that in order to take the idea of entanglement seriously, the analysis must allow a strategy of reading in layers that reverberates in other layers, where times and spaces converge, creating unexpected meanings.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# Navigating Archipelagos

*Starting from an island...*  
—Édouard Glissant

When Guillaume Coppier arrived in the Antilles in 1645, he first set sight on Barbados but did not stop there. Instead he continued to Grenada, where the crew stayed for a short period before the Natives drove them away. The trader then narrates the journey from Grenada, via Saint Lucia and Martinique, passing by Marie Galante, Desirada, Antigua, Marguerite, and Montserrat to reach Saint-Christophe, localizing each island in relation to the ship moving through the Caribbean Sea. The time frame is not specified, but the narrative leaves no doubt: these islands are connected by resemblance and geographical proximity.

Much has been said about island imaginary, how early modern travelers were governed by preestablished images of insularity that cast their shadows onto the encounters with supposedly remote, desert islands. What appears in Coppier's and in many other Caribbean travel accounts is a narrative of island *experience*. This is more than geography; it is what Henri Lefebvre famously called a *Production of Space* (1991). Space, Lefebvre contends, is lived before it is conceived (34). His point is to conceptualize space not as an empty or abstract category out there to be filled with meaning but as produced through practice in which imagination as well as ideology, natural space, social space, material conditions, and modes of

production intervene (7). Such interlapping between experience and imaginary emerges in the passage describing Coppier's arrival in the Caribbean. His narrative reveals a desire for profit by taking space on the islands, but again and again peoples and geography short-circuit his intentions. Such tensions are at the heart of this chapter. Can we see effects of the archipelago in travel writing? Or, to put it in the words of Édouard Glissant, what would starting from an island mean in this context?

This first chapter aims to locally ground seventeenth-century travel writing in the Caribbean island space through a reading inspired by Glissant, taking as a point of departure his proposition that the geographical space as well as the imaginative conception of islands impact on the conceptualization of the Caribbean. This is not in itself a radical proposal. However, to acknowledge that travelers not only described island space as an object of knowledge and a place to be exploited but also found themselves influenced by this space implies a shift in perspectives on the early modern Caribbean. Put differently, starting from an island is a way to avoid using the colonial center or the Atlantic as an entry point for analyzing writings on the Caribbean.

The claim I make here is that while settlement and early colonization were forms of territorialization represented in travel writing in terms of spatial possession and control, narrative disruptions allow the tracing of how geography unsettled those processes. Descriptions of geography are circumscribed by political ambitions and by an existing island imaginary, but they also reveal the limits of such circumscriptions. The narratives show how the French were often drawn into island movements that go against the construction of a successful colonization narrative. They include accounts of indigenous ways of living in the archipelago, which hint at other presences and other forms of knowledge. Investigating the archipelagic geography is thus a crucial point of entanglement for understanding how discourse constructed power spatially but also for tracing moments of disruptions. For various reasons that will be investigated in the pages that follow, the travelers conceived of the islands in terms of a connected spatiality (Tolias 2017, 23). In the idea as well as in the object "island," a Renaissance world view informed by the early discoveries was connected with an Enlightenment conception of insularity, shaped by global explorations and colonization. Moreover, the island in itself was seen as geographically linked to other islands. In the travelogues, as we will see, this connectivity appears in passages narrating movements—journeys across the sea, between islands and islands, between islands and continents.

Because of the productive oscillation between history, geography, and imaginary, it seems in fact that the travelogues constructed the region as an archipelagic space, which finds an echo in contemporary Caribbean authors' exploration of a geopoetic thinking and writing that takes its cue from the archipelago. The concept of the archipelagic was coined by Glissant as an attempt at finding a way out of the fixity of systematic Western models for thinking. The archipelago, Glissant observes, is "diffracted," yet it constitutes a unity (2009, 47). This geography does two things for Glissant. First, it allows him to reconfigure the relationship between parts and whole while doing away with the notion of center. Second, the archipelago suggests a mobile arrangement of entities. Constellations take form depending on perspectives and positions, meaning that they are constantly reshaped even though they remain a totality. Transposed into thinking, this geography becomes for Glissant a *modus operandi* for another way of being in the world and of relating to oneself, others, and the surroundings (2009, 45). In a way, archipelagic thinking is the geographic articulation of Glissant's poetics of Relation, based on Guattari and Deleuze's concept of the rhizome (1997, 11), carving out different ways of conceiving the diversified totality by emphasizing relational singulars. Yet, working through the idea of a diversified interconnectivity of differences rather than thinking in terms of networks, which is the guiding idea in the concept of the rhizome, Glissant diverges in part from Deleuze and Guattari in that his spatialization of thought is anchored in places. The archipelago can act on thoughts as well as on people. This also impacts on form.

Glissant himself never tested the archipelagic in the context of early modern writing or history. However, he did note that what he calls the "thinking of the Atlantic Ocean," as a "symbol and a reality of power," developed later during the eighteenth century, in conjunction with "the abyss of the Slave Trade" (Glissant 2009, 49). One could argue that prior to the triangular trade, even colonizers lived Caribbean space differently. What this means is difficult to deduce from Glissant's allusive comment, and it is not up to me to speculate whether he would go as far as suggesting that seventeenth-century travel writing could be archipelagic. Nonetheless, he does, as Richard Scholar has shown (2015, 34), indirectly refer to an early modern imaginary and argues that the archipelagic is determined by societal, historical, and material aspects. On this point there are connections between Glissant's theorization and late-twentieth-century spatial theories developed by the previously mentioned Lefebvre



and, later, Michel de Certeau (1984), according to which space is primarily a construction, produced in the social sphere (Lefebvre) or through practitioners moving through a space (de Certeau). Similarly, for Glissant the archipelagic is not simply a geographical fact; it has to do with how space and time are conceived and lived, whether they are open and drawn into a process of change or not. “The archipelago,” Michelle Stephens and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel write in *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking*, “calls for a meaning-making and rearticulation that responds to human experiences traversing space and time” (2020, 3). Archipelagic thinking, too, conceives of space as a construction, produced in terms of overlappings between the natural, the social, and the imaginative. The Glissantian approach, read through the lens of Lefebvre and de Certeau, offers a way to capture how travelers writing about the settlement period for different reasons, which I want to identify and analyze here, opt for a “push and pull between the metaphorical and the material,” to construct the islands as a scene where the settlement unfolds as practice and action (Roberts and Stephens 2017, 7). The quote comes from the introduction to *Archipelagic American Studies*, used by the editors to methodologically characterize the archipelagic approach. Viewed from the crossroad between imaginary visions and material geographical entities, “the archipelago,” they argue, “emerges as neither strictly natural nor as wholly cultural but always as at the intersection of the Earth’s materiality and humans’ penchant for metaphoricity” (Roberts and Stephens 2017, 7). This double articulation between imaginary conceptions and the actual experience of islands resonates with Lefebvre’s idea of space as a production and makes the archipelagic approach particularly apt for interrogating how seventeenth-century travelers who were caught between conflicting codes of representation wrote the Caribbean archipelago.

I recognize that there are problems with this approach. Scholars of contemporary archipelagic thinking and writing attempt to trace radically new epistemologies of the archipelago in terms of “anti-explorations” (Roberts and Stephens 2017, 19).<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, another important contribution to rethinking islands, Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (2007), considers island writing in terms of a counter-discourse. The underlying rationale in the travelogues is quite the opposite; in one way or another, all the

<sup>1</sup>The idea of the anti-explorer comes from Édouard Glissant. Michael Dash develops this theme in one of the articles included in *Archipelagic American Studies* (2017, 356).

travelers participated more or less directly in slavery and the expulsion of Indigenous people, and their texts discursively supported the colonial enterprise. Settlement that leads to colonization is a cruelly palpable example of the production of a space in terms of appropriation of a physical space and, ultimately, of a mental space. Nonetheless, even if the archipelagic is not here anti-explorational in the ways it is usually understood, this line of thinking allows for tracing other resonances in their writings. Regardless of how ideologically driven these texts are, travelogues show that even in the context of colonial discourses, islands should not be reduced to projections of desires or successful appropriations of territory.

In fact, such a reading would accept the premises of a colonial text and hold the story of heroic settlement as true. For this reason historian Tessa Murphy has proposed that the Caribbean should be approached as an “interconnected region rather than a set of discrete territories,” which, she argues, would allow us “to understand the islands’ intertwined social, economic, and political trajectories in ways that existing imperial and national histories often fail to convey” (2021, 4). Murphy reads the islands in terms of borderlands, as sites of contestation and struggle (13), constructed by the movements and interventions by the peoples active in that space. Shifting the focus from empires and nations to agents present in the region as shaping forces of the archipelagic space, she suggests that it is more relevant to speak of a “Creole archipelago” articulated between geography and the “hybrid community” that took shape on the islands. Murphy’s historical study offers an important change in perception not only of the early colonial Caribbean but also of early creolization, as she brings in Indigenous interventions as productive in these processes (6–7).

The travelogues are full of passages that describe and also narrate how the region is experienced and practiced—how people act and do in space. Such passages complicate the promotional message that permeates the narratives, in showing that the way that these texts actually produce space obeys other constraints and codes. They construct the Antilles by converging spatial dimensions, including the imagination of islands (mental space) and the geographical entities (physical space), along with social forces, local, African, and European contexts, as well as material and natural conditions. The ambition here is to read the travelogues against the grain of their own colonial narrative and approach them in an archipelagic way, confronting them with the geographical and historical context that they set out to territorialize and dominate. By drawing on theories of spatial construction in narratives and in line with Jonathan Pugh’s

characterization of thinking with the archipelago, I will demonstrate that the ways in which the travelers write about geographical movements of and in between islands highlight tropes of “the adaptation and transformation of material, cultural and political practices” (2013, 9). Archipelagic thinking inspires me to approach these texts in terms of island movements rather than to assign them a static form and meaning. It is a tool to unlock them and understand how they dealt with an archipelagic reality as well as to explore strategies to rethink early colonial discourses on the Caribbean from an inner perspective. The argument builds on the hypothesis that exploring the ways in which travelers linked to and accounted for geographic space can offer an understanding of how they sought to represent settlement as both domination and process, both a space for cultural mixing and for cultural domination, by bordering and mapping. Their writings are profoundly anchored in geography, and their engagements with social and natural space often destabilize the narrative of colonial control and compete with the imaginative space of insular representations that also inform the texts.

The malleability of travel writing allows for one text to contain several forms and structures in one, turning the text itself into a zone of diversity. My contention is that, whether conscious or not, the traveler-writers use this internal formal multiplicity to think through and experiment with the experience of space through writing. In “Experience and Knowledge in the Baroque,” Anthony J. Cascardi asks what the connectivity between the world, thinking, and forms of expression would imply for the construction of knowledge and experience (2019, 459). Following Cascardi, in this chapter I will make the Baroque operative as a concept to investigate those links between geography, the ways in which it is lived and expressed, and the formation of knowledge. Geographical form, a certain “archipelagraphy,” to use Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s term (2001), becomes one of the expressive forms of the early colonial French Caribbean. Similarly, Glissant uses the notion of the Baroque in convergence with archipelagic thinking and creolization by underscoring proliferating differences, movability, and transitional assemblages lacking a fixed center. But more importantly, the Baroque allows me to see the travelogues’ transformative potentiality as an effect of the archipelagic while at the same time not eschewing the power dimensions inherent in this writing. Perhaps these early modern colonial texts can even shed light on our own presentism and other theoretical fallacies. If these narratives can be considered as part of the longer history of this archipelagic region, then clearly the concept entails processes that

might turn ferocious and oppressive too. Writing from the settlement enables us to measure the violent grounds of archipelagic thinking and thereby perhaps distance it from the utopian turn it sometimes takes. It can be a careful reminder not to eulogize archipelagic thinking.

This chapter is divided into four parts. In the first section, I will map out the seventeenth-century island imaginary in order to demonstrate how the travelers put it to strategic use. This will lead me in the second section to focus on dimensions of that strategy that both sustain and unsettle territorial claims, looking at naming in particular. The third and fourth sections investigate the representations of experiences of island space, starting with an analysis of topographic writing, which I align with de Certeau's notion of mapping and, moving on toward an investigation of how the travelers displayed an engaged perspective of island movements. This approach recalls de Certeau's notion of spatial practice and draws the narratives to an exploration of other people's, notably Indigenous, experiences of the archipelago.

### REPRESENTING AND THINKING WITH ISLANDS

Connected mainly to the idea of transformation, the island was a highly polysemic topos in seventeenth-century French culture. For Pascal it represented imprisonment, whereas for M<sup>me</sup> de Sevigné it was a refuge (Plazanet 2017, 238). Jean Rousset places it as an exemplary site for the Baroque: it was the “image of metamorphosis” (1953, 29), capturing and emanating Baroque themes such as change, inconsistency, appearance, fugitivity, and instability (8). Other scholars also confirm that, in Baroque aesthetics, the island was often depicted as the place of pleasure but also of illusions and uncertainty (Ernest 1995; Fougère 1995). The insular chronotope was an isolated time-space prone to description rather than narration, making room for a parenthetical story within the story, where space often turned into a mirror of the slippery terrain of morals and human desires. The island was thus a place either for pleasure or for reflection, due to the undecideability of its nature. Such an aesthetic conception of insularity was deeply anchored in ancient natural history, notably in the theories of Pliny the Elder according to which the island was associated with inconsistency (Lestringant 1993, 42). As a model for thinking, the island was turned into a societal laboratory, famously in Thomas More's *Utopia* or Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and these social articulations of island imaginary were, as pointed out by Richard Scholar in his reading of

Glissant, associated with the sixteenth-century European presence in the Americas (2015, 38). In short, with its malleable and changing characteristics, Frank Lestringant argues, island space lacked a coherent symbolic meaning and could be transformed into anything; it was the perfect space for projections of desires and fears as well as the construction of knowledge (1993, 304, 320).

A quick survey of dictionaries from the time confirms that, for a seventeenth-century traveler, islands and insularity could mean many things. The entry *Isle* in the French Academy's dictionary from 1694 gives the following definition: an island is a "piece of land surrounded by water on all sides."<sup>2</sup> The almost ontological connection with water further underscores the island as a site of instability, as if it always floated and moved like the liquid surrounding it (Rousset 1953, 143). Another definition from an earlier dictionary, *Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que moderne* (1606), establishes a metaphorical link between the island and the house: "Both islands and insulary houses are those around which one can circle the four directions without being hindered by other structures."<sup>3</sup> An island-house stands alone. One can reach it from all sides, suggesting an openness and an invitation to exchange. The very nature that distinguishes islands from other geographies is the absence of "obstacles" (*empeschement*), not their isolation from other places. The persistent use of the plural *Isles* testifies to this tendency. An island is not circumscribed by its apparent spatial limits because it is a multiple and open spatiality, understood in relation to a set of islands and to the water that surrounds it, which opens toward all possible orientations. The evocation of *one* island always points toward other islands, toward the archipelago.

As the spelling changed from *Isle* to *île* in the second half of the eighteenth century, the island gradually became defined in terms of isolation. In European literature the island was increasingly imagined in terms of insularity, as a deserted place, cut off from its surroundings, yet always ready to receive another Robinson Crusoe; an imaginary that holds a central place still today, as islands are becoming increasingly vulnerable due to the climate crisis. When Grant McCall in 1996 made the case for nissology, he did so on the grounds that "[c]ontinental dwellers have always sought to control and possess islands and the very word conjures romantic

<sup>2</sup> Espace de terre entouré d'eau de tous costez.

<sup>3</sup> Isles aussi ou maisons insulaires, sont celles à l'entour desquelles on peut tourner par quatre voyes, sans empeschement d'autre edifice.

ideals, the simple life and almost mythological charm” (1996, 75). Likewise, in early modern times, as Jean-Michael Racault (2010) rightly observes, the equation between insularity and isolation quickly became prevalent in fictional texts as well as in the writings of real travelers. Racault takes the example of French voyagers to the Mascarene Islands and shows how they drew from biblical and ancient myths to build their conception of the island as an unpopulated space—a confined area where European man may start anew, reinvent himself, or use it for profit.

Travel writers to the Caribbean borrowed elements from the utopic and combined them with biblical references to the earthly paradise and ancient myths of paradise about the Hesperides and the Golden Age. Hyacinthe de Caen, the first Capucin missionary to travel with Ensambuc and the *Compagnie des Isles de l’Amérique* in 1626, depicts Saint-Christophe as the land of honey and gold:

One may very well call paradise a delicious place where there is an eternal summer, always green fields, flowers and fruits in trees that are always ripe, the months and the seasons always equal, animals always in love and breeding continuously and without getting tired, much like the earth in her production of plants.<sup>4</sup> (2014, 157)

Indirectly referring to Columbus’ assertion that he had found paradise in the Americas, Hyacinthe de Caën promotes the newly established colonies to an audience in France, hoping that the imaginary of the Cockayne country would seduce commoners to settle in the islands and wealthy men to invest in the companies. Further in the same text he compares life on the islands to that of the Golden Age, using the economy of exchange that dominated indigenous island cultures as an argument for his comparison (2014, 160). The irony is, of course, that while texts like this flourished in Paris, they did not have a significant impact on migration to the islands or on the literary imagination, as I discussed in the introduction. Nevertheless, the passage can be counted among the most striking examples of what Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant in their 1989

<sup>4</sup>[On peut bien] appeller paradis un lieu délicieux où est un été perpetuel, toujours la verdure aux champs, les fleurs et les fruits aux arbres qui sont toujours en seve, les mois et les saisons toutes esgales, toujours les animaux en amour, qui engendrent continuellement sans se lasser, en plus que la terre en la production de ses plantes.

A copy of this passage appeared later in a promotional text published in *Mercur de France*.

*Créolité*-manifesto called a “paradisiac writing,” which they hold as typical for (colonial) representations of the region (1989, 15).

Clearly, island imaginary gave travelers certain forms that they could use in their representations of a foreign yet not unknown region like the Caribbean. However, looking closer at longer, published travelogues, it becomes apparent that the island imaginary does not function as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense. Rather than providing the basis for the construction of knowledge and power formations, this imaginary is used by the travelers to frame the text or parts of it. Island imaginary is better considered as a malleable trope that appears in particular passages and serves specific purposes. In publications from the 1640s to the 1660s the philosophical and scientific debate around whether the tropical zone was habitable or not was still accurate, and to validate their observations on the islands, travelers alluded to this debate. At the same time, insularity was presented as a space of adventure or horror, where travelers were tested like heroes in a novel.

In other words, there was not one but many island imaginaries that could be actualized within the same text. More importantly, island imaginary, both as *locus amoenus* and as *locus horribilis*, was present but did not permeate or structure the travelogues. De Caen’s text is a significant exception since it was published in a journal with the explicit intention to promote the islands and attract future settlers. In longer texts, passages alluding to paradise or tapping into visions of utopia tended to be brief and disconnected from the main narrative. Island imaginary thereby appears as an identifiable element; it stands out and operates on another register than the account of the very experience of sojourning in and travelling to the islands.

The evocation of paradise can, for instance, have a specific narrative function, like when the travelers first catch sight of the Antilles. Automatically, paradise is mentioned to create a sense of discovery and resurrection. When Du Tertre sets eyes on the islands after the long and dangerous voyage across the Atlantic, he vividly paints an image of people rising from the dead and dressing up in a pompous ceremony to land on the shores of Martinique, as if they entered the gates of Paradise (1648, 24). Even when the experience of arrival was presented on a more personal note, like in Biet’s account, the image of Eden appears: “I can’t express the people’s joy when they saw this beautiful land, because one couldn’t use a better comparison to depict that which appeared to us from the sea than the paths of a beautiful garden, very well kept, all this great land from

Cape Orange all the way to Cayenne seemed very flat to us, but without culture and little inhabited” (1664, 71).<sup>5</sup> Caribbean nature is described through a comparative lens. Geography is represented in terms of a pastoral landscape, signaled in the mention of “paths” recalling a “beautiful garden,” but a landscape that lacks culture and people, as if God alone had intervened in this land for the Europeans to cultivate. Allusions to a paradisiacal island imaginary are fundamentally colonial: the landscape resembles a garden but needs the perfectibility of the European settlers to become one. Clearly then, island imaginary is imbricated into the history and future of the settlement without being directly referential: it is not actualized by describing the space that lies before them but, rather, an idea of this space. When Biet alludes to gardens to capture the emotions of the passengers seeing land and to point forward to the settlement to come, those gardens do not necessarily reflect the landscape that actually lay in front of him. Rather, they allude to a preestablished image of an ideal insular space. Island imaginary functions as an ornamental addition to the body of the travel narrative and can in most cases be localized in prefaces and introductory passages that favor a more literary register.

Rochefort begins his natural history by quoting the idyllic poem “Moïse sauve” and then states that the lands in the Caribbean archipelago are as beautiful and as fertile as any place in France (1658, 5). Du Tertre paints the image of a terrestrial Eden as an introduction to the chapter on the “natural inhabitants of the islands”: “The air in the torrid zone is the purest, the healthiest, & the most tempered of all airs,” he claims, adding that “the land is a little paradise always green, & sprinkled with the most beautiful waters in the world” (1667 t2, 356–357).<sup>6</sup> The passage serves to create an exotic décor, an entry that signals Du Tertre’s position vis-à-vis

<sup>5</sup> Je ne sçaurois exprimer la ioye de tout nostre monde, à la veuë de cette belle terre, car l’on ne peut mieux comparer ce qui nous parut tout le long de la mer, qu’aux allées d’un beau Iardin, tres bien entretenuës, tout ce grand païs depuis le Cap d’orange jusques à Cayenne paroist fort plat, mais il est sans culture & fort peu habitë.

<sup>6</sup> The passage in French is worth quoting at length:

Or comme j’ay fait voir que l’air de la Zone torride est le plus pur, le plus sain & le plus temperé de tous les airs, & que la terre y est un petit Paradis tousiours verdoyant, & arousé des plus belles eaux du monde, il est à propos de faire voir dans ce traité, que les Sauvages de ces Isles sont les plus contens, les plus heureux, les moins vicieux, les plus sociables, les moins contrafaits, & les moins tourmentez de maladies, de toutes les nations du monde.



the Indigenous: what the reader can expect is a portrait of a noble people. The idyllic geography functions as an argument with a religious and aesthetic rationale: the beautiful nature reflects good character and proves that God has not abandoned these peoples even if they do not know Catholicism. Contrary to what some researchers have suggested in passing (Tocanne 1978, 199), the passage has nothing to do with describing the missionary's lived experience with Natives or island nature. Instead, it serves to place the Caribs in a paradisiacal nature in order to inject himself into the contemporary debate around the status of the Indigenous population. In the 1654 edition of *Histoire générale des Antilles*, Du Tertre explicitly takes a stand against those who considered the Amerindians to be monstrous and affirms the discourse of the "Noble savage," inherited from Montaigne's "Of Cannibals" and "Of Coaches" as well as Jean de Léry's voyage to Brazil, even though none of these sources are cited in the text. Seventeen years later, in the 1667 edition, the same arguments are underpinned by a spatial imagination, rooted in the idea of the tropical island as an earthly Eden. This is crucial: enhancing the beauty of the islands enables Du Tertre to craft geographical and natural arguments for considering the Natives as humans and equally protected by God as Europeans. But they are circumscribed by this imaginative spatiality that evacuates all actual experience of that place.

Introductions like these serve as a *captatio benevolae*, attracting the reader and setting up a discursive environment that allows the missionary to develop his anthropological description of the Natives. The narrator speaks directly to the audience, who expected something ornamental—as an echo of the frontispiece and other illustrations included in the book—obeying visual rules that required the writer not to shock. It is part of what Sylvie Requemora calls a "prefacial game" (*jeu préfaciel* 2012, 227), following a rhetorical register and not the register of the natural and moral history itself. In fact, both the historical and the anthropological parts of Du Tertre's immense book would contradict the idealized picture of the Carib world given in the introduction to the section, as he does not refrain from telling about the complications in Indigenous society and about often violent and unequal interactions between Caribs and French (Fig. 2.1).

But if the island imaginary is a literary construction to either move the reader or intervene in a debate, it has little to do with travelling and sojourning in the Antilles. It is not the traveler who filters his direct experience with the island through this imaginary. Rather, it is an interface,



Fig. 2.1 Du Tertre *Histoire générale des Antilles* (1667). Sebastien Leclerc. Visite des Sauvages aux François. (Source: [gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France](http://gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France). Public domain)

negotiating the subjective and the objective, destined to help the reader process the representation of faraway lands both aesthetically and cognitively. It serves as a code to make that which is described identifiable and enjoyable. The travelers were aware of this, and so was the audience. Eden obliges when writing from the tropics. Some travelers even express irritation in the face of the imperative to evoke paradise when writing about the

tropics. In a clever turn Pelleprat mentions paradise only to say that the islands are not paradisiacal: “It is not that this temperature omits everything that is crude and irritating in the Americas: but where can one find one country on the earth that doesn’t have incommodities? There are no more earthly paradises, or places where one doesn’t suffer” (1658, 3).<sup>7</sup> He knows what the reader wants and while meeting these expectations Biet concludes that they are wrong; the Antilles is like any other place.

As imaginative as these kinds of introductory passages are, they play an important part in the representational fabrication of the Caribbean. Arguments like the one from Du Tertre’s introduction quoted above, anchored in island imagination, were at the basis for the entire mission. Yet they only articulate *one* dimension of spatial representation, which encountered its limits in front of other dimensions, historical but also geographical. Such limits, together with the transgression of them, appear if we look at the ways in which the region is designated in the texts. Naming is a way to assert discursive control. The imaginary plays into those performances, but at the encounter with the multiplicity of islands and with the social construction of the island space through history as well as politics, that control fails to assert itself. Instead we see the emergence of what Brian Russel Roberts describes as the “multilanguage historical processes that undergird the archipelagic narrative” (2020, 85).

### NAMING ISLANDS

The small islands, placed as an arch between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, are called the Lesser Antilles. Views on the etymology of this toponymy were divided (Babcock 1920; Crone 1938). According to some, the name comes from the myth of the island of Anthilia. When Du Tertre sets out to explain the naming of the region he starts from a descriptive ellipse, avoiding going into detail because others have dwelled on this before him. What he does note is that the islands are not only named after the myth. Geography also plays its part. “There are not many peoples who don’t know,” he writes, “that [they are called Antilles] because they are the spaces first encountered by those who make the journey to America, & that composing with other islands with which they are entangled, like an oblique

<sup>7</sup>Ce n’est pas que ce temperament oste tout ce qu’il y a de rude, & de fâcheux dans l’Amérique: mais où trouvera-t-on un pays sur la terre qui n’ait ses incommoditez? Il n’est plus de Paradis terrestre, ny de lieux où l’on n’ait rien à souffrir.

barrier, [the islands] cover the entire stretch of this vast Gulf of Mexico” (1667 t2, 2).<sup>8</sup> Du Tertre here draws from the Portuguese etymology, later noticed by Humboldt (Babcock 1920, 113–114), compounding the words *ante* and *illa* (island), understood as “the island out before,” an interpretation also accepted by Labat fifty years later (1722 t4, 332). When choosing this interpretation over others, more symbolically charged and tied to European island imaginary, he emphasizes the importance of island geography and of the region as a produced space. The “Caribbean” or the “West Indies” are other names—fraught with uncertainties and cognitive mistakes—that hold history, imaginaries, and (dis)locations. In the travelogues we also find the alternative naming “Cannibal Islands” (*Isles Cannibales*), which testifies to yet another misconception about the Indigenous populations. Evoking the supposed presence of man-eaters draws attention to danger and adventure while morally and ethically justifying the expulsion of these supposedly unlawful, “barbaric” people. Moreover, the evocation teases the curious reader and provides intertextual references to island imaginary directly linked to the Americas. Together geography, mythology, and desire play into the representation of the region, suggesting that the islands were indeed regarded as social spaces rather than blank isolated entities onto which anything could be projected.

In fact, during the initial period of the settlement it was politically risky to represent the Antilles as empty spaces, free for anyone (European) to conquer. Such representations could be seen as a direct insult to Spain, who still had claims on the territory. In 1635, the same year as the creation of the *Compagnie des Isles de l'Amérique*, France had entered in the Thirty Years War against Spain, siding with the Protestants. In this context, Richelieu did not want any accounts from the settlement to be published to avoid further complications with Spain (Boucher 2008, 67). When the accounts were finally published after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the political situation was different. Even so the Caribbean was still a domain of sensitive political debates, and travelers could not ignore the colonial history that preceded the French involvement in the region. This partly explains why Du Tertre begins the 1667 edition of his *Histoire Générale des Antilles habitées par les François* by speaking of the Spanish conquest.

<sup>8</sup> Il y a peu de personnes qui ne sçachent, que c'est parce qu'elles sont rencontrées les premières par ceux qui font le voyage de l'Amérique, & que composant avec les autres, parmi lesquelles elles sont meslées, comme une barriere oblique, elles couvrent l'estenduë de ce vaste golfe du Mexique.

He recognizes Spain's first territorial claims but then moves on to dispute them on the grounds of their negligence. The Spanish, Du Tertre argues, might have "discovered" the islands, but being too ferocious and too hungry for gold, they failed to see the treasures hidden in the details and simply left the archipelago in chaos. This narrative undergirds the entire text. Throughout the pages of his natural and moral history, Du Tertre demonstrates that the French *rediscovered* the islands, thanks to missionaries such as himself. They took the time to extract knowledge and saw much more than the Spanish ever did since they were blinded by their thirst for profit and expansion. His argument is spatial and cultural: the desire and more or less systematic search for knowledge will lead to an intimate relationship, not only with the people, but with the land. This set the tone for and justified the history of French settlement, and similar ideas were voiced by other travelers.

Such "fictions of reciprocity" as Garraway (2005, 42) calls travelers' depictions of Franco-Carib relations at this time, were indeed also geographically motivated. The travelers displayed an image of an engaged relationship to the lands, which would give them not only an epistemic but also a moral priority over the Spanish in particular and, in extension, over the Dutch and the British to claim the islands. Breton's dictionary, for instance, contains various indigenous expressions for the different types of islands. He highlights vernacular words testifying to a history of the island as a space of conflict that both includes and precedes the European intrusion: "you yourself, inhabit this island," "I have inhabited it first," "they left to get provisions from another island" (1999, 207).<sup>9</sup> Expressions like these show that the islands were perceived as contested spaces; travelers, and particularly missionaries, knew that the Indigenous people claimed priority based on the argument that they were there first. Needless to say, Europeans did not buy this argument, and it mattered little in the territorial conquest, but they were visibly aware that they intruded in islands inhabited by others. In the section on the morals of the natural inhabitants, Chapter Eleven, following a short "vocabulary" in vernacular language, Rochefort underscores that the Natives voiced criticism against the Europeans for having occupied their native lands:

<sup>9</sup>Habite-toi même cette Ile; je l'ai habité premier que toi; ils sont allés à la provision dans une autre Ile.

You have chased me [...] from Saint-Christophe, Nevis, Montserrat, Saint Martin, Antigua, Guadeloupe, Barbados, Saint Eustache, & c., which do not belong to you and to which you could not have any legitimate claims. And you keep threatening me every day to take the few lands I still have from me. What will the miserable Carib become? Will he one day have to live in the sea with the fish? Your land must without any doubt be very bad for you since you leave it to come here and take mine: or are you so malicious that you come like this to persecute me out of pleasure? This complaint does not sound very savage.<sup>10</sup> (1658, 403)

The critique is directed toward European expansionism. The collective voice of the Caribs talks to the collective body of Europeans taking over their lands. In this vocabulary, as in Breton's, it becomes clear that Carib language expresses a possessive relationship to land, even if the conception of possession differs from the French and is more related to the used value of the land than with property. Nonetheless, Natives claiming territorial possession is at odds with the general European preconception, tied to island imaginary and to notions of Paradise and the Golden Age as discussed earlier, that these people had no sense of property. At the same time, it is not clear what possession meant in this context. Vocabulary for going to other islands for provisions indicates that the meaning has less to do with owning than with inhabiting a space. Islands were used for different purposes, suggesting that they did consider the region to be interconnected rather than constituted by separated islands that belonged to a particular group. Marie Galante is a case in point. Well before the French succeeded in settling on the island, they were aware of its role for the Indigenous populations; several travelers mention that in vernacular language the island is called the garden. So even islands that were not populated when a colony of settlers arrived were seen as part of a Native and a colonial space.

This seemingly lucid and sensitive reading of the islands and the ways in which locals lived them clearly did not hinder the French from seeing

<sup>10</sup>Tu m'as chassé [...] de Saint Christophe, de Nièves, de Monserrat, de Saint Martin, d'Antigua, de la Gardeloupe, de la Barboude, de Saint Eustache, & c. qui ne t'appartiennent pas & où tu ne pouvois légitimement prétendre. Et tu me menaces encore tous les jours de m'ôter ce peu de païs qui me reste. Que deviendra le misérable Caraïbe? Faudrait-il qu'il aille habiter la mer avec les poissons? Ta terre est, sans doute, bien mauvaise, puisque tu la quittes pour venir prendre la mienne: Ou tu as bien de la malice de venir ainsi de gayeté de cœur me persecuter. Cette plainte n'a pas un air trop Sauvage.

themselves as entitled to possess and spatiality restructure the archipelago. The question of the Natives' origin is of importance here. In the sixteenth century, knowing where they came from had a religious dimension: were they God's children or not? During the seventeenth century this question transitions into becoming a political issue of rights to a territory. In proving that the natives were not "the natural inhabitants" of the islands and that they came from the North or South American continents, Europeans had a claim to the territories. They no longer appeared as brutal conquerors; they simply took over islands that had no natural inhabitants. This is crucial for the construction of a colonial discourse that would not run counter to the idea of France being the country of liberty that would not enslave or chase other people from their lands. Labat, in his travelogue from 1722, gave voice to this political transition: "the peoples Christopher Columbus found on the small islands of the east, which have been called Antilles, because they are windwards from the large islands and because coming from Europe one finds them first, were not natural inhabitants of the land" (1722 t 4, 332).<sup>11</sup>

The tension between recognition and possession is played out in one of the most fundamental gestures of travel and domination: topographic naming. This performative speech act of possession and of knowledge is at the core of the colonial Caribbean experience: Columbus going from one island to another, raising a cross and renaming them according to Old World social orders. "The baroque is engendered by the need to name things," as Alejo Carpentier writes (2010, 262) referring to naming as an act of power leading to linguistic excess and a sense of doubling. However, even if this performance was effective and real, another, local naming remained in use for at least two centuries. The brutal conquest by the Spanish did not eliminate Amerindian toponymy in one blow; Caribs kept their way of speaking about islands and the French believed that the vernacular naming could give important insights about the lands. Breton's dictionary testifies to this, not only concerning toponymy but also when considering the quantity of terms relating to the archipelagic space. What is interesting is that while vernacular names lived on (at least for a while), other European nations would in fact revisit the local naming as a means

<sup>11</sup> Les Sauvages que Christophle Colomb trouva dans les petites Isles de l'Est, qu'on a appellé Antilles, parce qu'elles sont au vent des grandes Isles, & qu'en venant d'Europe on les trouve les premieres, n'étoient point les naturels du país. Murphy underscores that this origin story has been confirmed by modern archeology (2021, 19).

to question Spanish dominance and put it to strategic use. In the travelogues, Spanish names are acknowledged as official, but they are juxtaposed with the vernacular names, indirectly contesting Spain's legitimacy. In his short account, Hyacinthe de Caën writes that "Gardeloupe" [sic] and "Martinique" were names that the Spanish had imposed upon the islands when they passed by "without even descending on the islands or inhabiting them" (2014, 153). He accuses the Spanish of having claimed territorial possession simply by naming islands. The name in itself is not enough to have the right to a territory, Hyachinte de Caen suggests, and their neglect leaves a lacuna, which paves the way for French settlement.

Paradoxically, rivalry with Spain opened up for an exploration of vernacular naming, which also has a disruptive effect in the travelogues. Some travelers drew from local toponymy in order to construct a story of a more intimate relationship with the archipelagic reality of the region. They acknowledged the Spanish presence but sought toponymic knowledge from the Natives, thus showing that their physical and epistemologic claim of the islands was more complete and, most of all, more engaged. In his dictionary, Raymond Breton starts with the entrance for "island, my island," *Oùbao, noubáoulou*, and then goes on to give the local names of all of the islands of the Antilles in alphabetical order (1999, 204–207). Less knowledgeable travelers, too, were clearly informed by local toponymy. The anonymous soldier-writer in Fleury's crew, who had no territorial agenda, gives a list of the islands with the vernacular name juxtaposed with the Spanish: "Dominica, *Holotobouli*; Martinia, *Yoannacaira*; Saint Lucia or Saint Allouzie, *Yoannalau*; Mariglianti, or land of cotton, *Aulinagan*; Guadeloupe, *Caroucuira*; Saint Vincent, *Yoalamarqua*" (2002, 115).

Whether intended or not, lists like this one demonstrate that the archipelago was perceived as a place of cultural crossings and power struggles. Juxtaposed names transform into sites of contestation, revealing how the islands are deeply embedded in history. In the section containing the topography of the islands, Du Tertre claims that he had the intention of describing Saint-Christophe as it appeared prior to the arrival of the Europeans. However, a description of nature in its "wild" state would only repel the reader, so instead he opts for depicting the island as it was at the moment when the English and the French began their settlement. From there he places the island on the map and then discusses the island's name:



The Savages call it in their Carib language *Liamaiga*. The common opinion is that Christopher Columbus, this illustrious Argonaut who discovered the island imposed his name onto it: even if people have tried to persuade the simple minded that one imposed the name of Saint-Christopher onto it because one sees in the middle of this island a small mountain on the top of one of the highest mountains, & that one could say that one mountain carries the other on its back, like the painters represent Jesus Christ on the gigantic shoulders of Saint Christopher; but those who charge these reveries onto credulous people, do not have better foundations for their stories than those who perceive a thousand chimeras in the clouds.<sup>12</sup> (1667, vol 2, 6)

The vernacular name comes first, then the story of Columbus imposing his own name onto the island. Du Tertre then recalls another, bibliogeographical explanation to the name, which he quickly refutes. The anecdote leaves traces of an environmental logic to naming that reoccurs in several travelogues. While naming was an act of possession, it was also a subject of debate, which suggests that the islands were not necessarily conceived as virgin or paradisiac. On the contrary, there is a fundamental contradiction here, which reveals how the islands intervene in the oscillatory movement between control and unsettlement. This aim to dominate a European power by the means of the language of those who previously inhabited the islands plants a seed of doubt in the French's claim.

In these toponymic layers of islands, space resonates in the text as if the process of history set another movement in motion, that of disruptions. For rather than stabilizing the referent, the multiple names that accumulate in the archipelago tend to destabilize the link to the referent. Instead of a single colonial narrative, the layered naming gives the texts archipelagic multidirectional orientations. We see it again in Du Tertre's topography of Guadeloupe. He starts by evoking the island that the Caribs call *Karukera* and the Europeans name Guadeloupe, and then he explains that this toponymy comes from the many fresh water sources that are found there. These recall an ancient and famous author named Lopez, so "*agua*

<sup>12</sup>Les Sauvages l'appellent dans leur Langue Caraïbe *Liamaiga*. La commune opinion est, que Christophe Colombe, cét illustre Argonaute qui l'a découverte luy a imposé son nom: quoy qu'on ayt voulu persuader aux simples qu'on luy a imposé le nom de saint Christophe à cause qu'on aperçoit au milieu de cette Isle une petite montagne sur la croupe d'une des plus hautes, & qu'on diroit qu'elle la porte sur son dos, comme les Peintres représentent Iesus-Christ sur les épaules gigantesques de saint Christophe; mais ceux qui débitent ces resveries au peuple assez credule, ne sont pas mieux fondez, que ceux qui se forgent milles différentes chimères dans les nuës.

*de Lopez*” transformed into Guadeloupe. But this etymology is uncertain, Du Tertre notes. Others claim that the island got its name because it resembles the Notre Dame of Guadeloupe in Spain (Du Tertre 1667 t2, 10). Once again, the origin of the name disappears through the accumulation of names and naming. The only stable toponym is that of *Karukera*, but this name belongs to the past. Surely, the passage is no doubt an example of how the missionary, by using his knowledge of the region, can contest the Spanish domination. Nevertheless, the result here is also that the connection between name and place is uncertain.

Several semiotic and orthographic transitions occur when an oral name is transcribed into another, written language in the early modern Caribbean context (L'Étang 2000). Raymond Breton often admits having misunderstood the Natives and taken one island for another. Sometimes, linguistic confusion was the source for indirect criticism of other travelers, such as when Biet recounts the anecdote of Yucatan, a word that presumably means “What are you saying?” in the vernacular but that the Spanish mistook for a toponymy. The anonymous soldier of Carpentras confused the word *huoragano*, meaning hurricane, with a geographical location (2002, 310). Breton, again, cites *sulaniga*, which supposedly meant “land of salt” and stood as the Natives’ name of an island close to Saint-Christophe (possibly today’s Saba), as an example of another type of topographical error. In fact, *sulaniga* is not an Indigenous name, according to Breton. It is a creolized name, derived from the Spanish “sal.” On another occasion, he suggests that the Natives do not distinguish Saint Martin, Saint Barthélémy, and Saba from one another, but in the next sentence, he admits that he does not know what the Caribs call these islands. As far as he understands, they seem to be designated with the word for “eel” (Breton 1999, 206). Names of things and places merge, and the missionary is left to guess.

Even in these colonial texts, naming is not only an act of possession; it becomes a site of uncertainty and hybridity, and it is an act that has different functions and effects. The vernacular name, for example, connotes a strong local attachment, attesting to the knowledge of the traveler in question at the same time as it allows the reader to temporarily transport him or herself to the faraway places described. On this point, real and imagined space converge in the name. For other travelers who would consult the texts before embarking for the Caribbean, toponymy is useful information. However, for a reader unfamiliar with the sound of the local language and not acquainted with cartography, the role of the local name

would be different. To such reader it would not first and foremost denote a place. Rather, it would tickle the imagination so that the reader can picture a tropical island. In this particular reception context, the vernacular toponymy loses its deictic function and produces imaginative spatialities.

In other words, the desire for domination motivates the act of naming, but as the names multiply, the referent—the islands—seems to escape. The names often connote an elsewhere. This is valid not only for the European toponymy imposing an order on the Old World but also, differently, for the native names. Studying Breton's dictionary, Julian Granberry and Gary Vescelius conclude that the semiotic of vernacular names in the Caribbean often reveal a directional quality, indicating the position of the island in question in relation to other islands, the winds, and the water that surround it (2004, 68–75). Here, the islands are conceived not as isolated entities but in an archipelagic sense, contained in the name. What the French voyagers add is a temporal dimension. In so doing, they also conceptualize the islands in relation to the surroundings in an archipelagic fashion but for reasons that are ultimately colonial: mapping the territory in order to get an idea of how to better control the region, identifying which islands are interesting for exploitation, and so on. Nonetheless, the conglomeration of names in various languages, and more precisely the accumulation of performative acts of naming, which reveal competing etymologies, inscribe the geographical archipelagic sensibility into a historical archipelagic sensibility: these are sites of cultural and linguistic crossings that carry traces of the peoples claiming the space. The islands become floating signifiers in a language game of power but also of uncontrollable mixing. The vernacular name points here *and* there but also translates into a spatial practice of island hopping.

In fact, if, as suggested by Severo Sarduy, during the sixteenth century the notion of the Baroque “confronted with the intertwining languages of America (the codes of pre-Columbian knowledge) [and] Spanish (codes of European culture) found itself duplicated” (2010, 281), the seventeenth century travel writing proliferates and repeats the doubling. The process is geographically inscribed, provoking a Baroque expressivity in the travelogues. Adding the doubling and the repetitions, such Baroque expressivity disconnects the word from the referent while connecting to the world. It becomes a kind of “island grammar” or a geographic creolization process in Glissant's sense of the term, constructed as a series of overlapping additions. Behind the attempt at naming to give form and control looms a transformativity born out of the encounter with the

islands. I will investigate the linguistic implications of such crossings in Chap. 4, but here pertaining to island space, we can note that the abundance of languages is deeply enmeshed with both politics (territorial competition) and geography (the islands repeating themselves in the archipelagic chain) and has implications for the conception of the region. Through these acts of naming, the Caribbean emerges as a social and historical space, produced in the encounters between imagination, geography, and practices, and not as a set of isolated islands ready to be conquered. Indeed, when opening up travel writing to the archipelagic, it becomes possible, as Michelle Stephens and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel suggest, to see that the “pluriversal etymology” not only decenters the colonial narrative; it also allows us to think about various locations as simultaneously acting “in concert” (2020, 9).

The writing of the islands is thus constituted as a palimpsest, where names are interchangeable and written onto each other. We are far from the imaginary of the deserted, feminized, and “virgin” island, which is undoubtedly one of the strongest features of insular visions in the early modern era notably in literature (Lestringant 2002, 62). As Georges Toliai rightly observes, the equation between insularity and isolation has overshadowed our understanding of islands (Toliai 2017, 22). Such readings confuse representational space with lived space. And yet, we tend to take this dominating imaginary of the island as an indicator of how travelers experienced it as social and natural space. But the archipelagic approach allows us to trace how early modern Caribbean texts simultaneously point toward another conceptualization of the insular space, which is both determined by the imaginary and by the geography. In fact, whereas the island trope was mainly directed toward the reader, the establishment in itself was lived and depicted as profoundly contradictory. When the French travelers came to the islands in the wake of the Spanish conquest, they entered into territorial dynamics that were already put into motion well before the arrival of Columbus, even if the *conquista* decisively and violently intervened in Indigenous society and intensified the process of cultural crossings. In the production of space, the travelers themselves as well as other French people who figure in the narratives had to engage with already-existing forms of social life (Spanish, Indigenous, buccaneers, and a new but at the same time part of social life: slavery), and with geographies and natures barely known to them. So while travelers sought forms to circumscribe the islands, the intervention of geography and social space disrupted the solid construction of a French Caribbean.

## MAPPING ISLANDS

For those sailing to the Americas, the first islands travelers encountered were not Caribbean: ships going from Northern Europe first stopped at Madeira, the Azores or the Canary Islands. Some sailed as far south as Cape Verde. The Antilles were also perceived as the “opposite islands” (Babcock 1920, 117); as part of a globally encompassing archipelago. Islands, Guillaume Coppier writes in his account from 1645, are harbors on the dangerous ocean (1645, 4). The stops allowed travelers to restock the ship with fresh water and food; passengers could rest and trade. Or, from the perspective of enslaved Africans who did not yet know the extent of their misfortune, the first island in the Atlantic became a port to hell.

By the first half of the seventeenth century, commercial and political structure determining transatlantic interrelations appeared as disorderly and diffuse rather than triangular. There was not yet a continuous flow between Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe, with France as its center, which would shape the French Atlantic Triangle (Miller 2008). The reason was both material and epistemological. Navigation was challenging in the early seventeenth century. Even experienced travelers like Du Tertre, who had served in the Dutch marine and had sailed to Greenland before entering the Order of the Friars, dreaded the sea. Man is not made for navigation, he notes in the passage detailing his travels back and forth between the islands and France (1654, 90). Hyachinte de Caen writes that going to the Caribbean is like the voyage beyond (2014, 157). Coppier calls the ship a tomb and dreams of islands as the ship crosses the ocean (1645, 3–5). Travelers were under the impression of facing a double void in the abyss of the ocean and in the unknown that was ahead of them, a fear and excitement that they acted out through a rite of passage called the “baptism of the tropics,” described by all travelers in more or less detail. In a carnivalesque ceremony, those who had never crossed the tropics were baptized with sea water and had to pay a symbolic sum to the captain. Commenting on the history of the rite, Du Tertre suggests that its true motive was psychological, a performance to sublimate the fear of passing to the other side (1667 t2, 46–47). Like a baptized child, the person crossing the line is born again and ready to face the new world.<sup>13</sup> Drawing

<sup>13</sup>That this explanation had validity is clear: the passage where Du Tertre analyzes the rite is reprinted in the French translation of Exquemelin’s adventures of the buccaneers in 1686; see my analysis (2020, 137–141). For further studies of the *baptême des tropiques*, see Sophie Linon (1990); Simon J. Bronner (2006); Michael Harrigan (2019).

such symbolic borders that needed to be transgressed is another way to break down the immensity of the Atlantic. Likewise, thinking with islands made it possible to grasp the infinitely multiplying world and experiment with fragments in order to better conceptualize the unknown (Lestringant 2002, 153).

Elizabeth DeLoughrey claims that European colonialism has constructed the trope of the isolated island by overemphasizing the importance of the sea (2007, 2). Following this line of argument, it seems indeed like this trope has erased the history of a different reading of the Atlantic, not so much as oceanic space but as a sea of islands. To activate a different reading of the early modern Caribbean, we need to acknowledge that seventeenth century travelers' world views, in part, remained within a Renaissance world view. But they also looked ahead, toward imperialism to come, thus preparing for the dominant discourse of globalization where islands were (and still are) conceived of as isolated from centers of power. An anonymous traveler relating the voyage of Samuel Champlain in the early seventeenth century contends that the Americas could be divided into two islands (2014, 82). He was not the only one. In the Renaissance mind, the world was an island that in itself was thought of as being constituted of islands.

The Renaissance had a form for this: the *isolario*, the book of islands (Lestringant 2017, 9). Here each island was described and pictured as a microcosmos, as independent spatial entities that together made up the world and added to the marvelous diversity of the universe (Tolias 2017, 21). Islands had a joint purpose. They provided the curious mind with material and reflected the divine creation as global and multiple, but also, as argued by Tom Conley (1996, 169), where the cosmographies failed to offer a complete image of totality, islands aroused a need for productive fragmentation that allowed for celebrating difference. This new expression of divine celebration was, as demonstrated by Frank Lestringant's research (1993, 17), a way to simultaneously deal with both the formal and address the epistemic question of how to represent the globe at a time when the world expanded and new strategies for representation were needed to account for its diversity. With the *isolario* no coherent narrative was necessary; writers could accumulate everything and present them as fragments in a disorderly collage (Lestringant 2002, 153). The fragmented nature of representation echoes the polysemic character of islands, where "reality and fantasy are tested together" (Conley 1996, 179). Thrown onto the page without any apparent order, islands appear at once as paradoxically

infinite and finite: they multiply infinitely on the page yet are in themselves limited and thus give themselves to the illusion of measurability. Without alluding to Glissant, Lestringant goes as far as suggesting that the island and the archipelago constitute a “form of thinking” (2002, 31) and not simply a form to contain and reduce the world. In a sort of backwards way, the *isolario* posits the island as an object of knowledge but is clearly also influenced by the object it sets out to capture.

The genre of the *isolario* died out during the seventeenth century, and, while the travelogues share the expression of “island hopping” with this particular genre, they lack the imaginary and the pictorial dimensions. Nevertheless, whether it was due to the archipelagic geography of the region or to a philosophical and religious heritage, the travelogue to the Caribbean had not entirely abandoned the “book of islands” mindset. Du Tertre explains in the preface to his *Histoire générale des Antilles* that his intention was to write a *history* and not offer a chronicle of the region. The argument not to organize his history chronologically is, of course, legitimate in so far as it places him in the tradition of natural history writing in the illustrious lineage of Herodotus and Pliny. But his choice equally derives from geography: it would be too confusing to follow a linear structure. This is one of the reasons why he does not “scrupulously follow [...] the order in which the events happened” (1667 t1, 107).<sup>14</sup> The other is that a chronologic structure would have forced the narrative to “jump from one island to another” (1667 t1, 107).<sup>15</sup> He lets space determine the historical narrative. Contrary to the seemingly disorderly *isolario* of the Renaissance, Du Tertre wants to contain the fragments and give them coherence. The thematic structure of the natural history genre is constitutive on this point, but instead of stressing this classical heritage, he refers to his knowledge of the geographic space.

Thus, what we have is a combination of a representative mode that imposes an order onto space and another mode of relating to space that is determined by the experience of this space. It follows roughly de Certeau’s distinction between a textualization of space that operates through movements on the ground, through spatialization and touring (1984, 97), and another representative modality that operates through the visual,

<sup>14</sup> Comme j’ay seulement entrepris d’écrire une histoire & non pas faire des annales, je ne m’attacheray pas aussi scrupuleusement à suivre l’ordre du temps auquel les choses sont arrivées.

<sup>15</sup> Afin de ne’estre pas obligé de sauter continuellement d’Isle en Isle.

localizing and mapping out space (118). De Certeau famously takes his example from twentieth-century Manhattan, juxtaposing the distant panorama of the city that one could get from the top of the World Trade Center and the walker's perspective of the bustling city. The distant view is that of order and power, whereas the walker creates the city from below, using tactics as he moves on the streets. One watches space; the other practices it. One is a visual mode of representation; the other is an embodied way of experiencing space. It is here that we can trace the making of spatiality: "Stories," de Certeau reminds us, "carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places" (118). Travelogues also alternate writing modes: some passages give priority to the map whereas others prefer the tour. The question is what the transitions between them say about the construction of insular space.

Let me begin with the map. Topographic descriptions recall the *isolarario*; they follow a similar pattern, starting with naming and situating each island on the map and in relation to other islands. This is clearly a discourse of control. The cartography is, in this context, not aimed at spurring the imagination; the aim is to delineate the islands with the intention to exhaust and control space. Size is always estimated. The localization of settlements often served as a point of departure for the rest of the description. Other useful localizations mapped out the island: where there was freshwater, good soil, and fine wood and if it provided hunting opportunities. We are informed about weather conditions and incommodities (mosquitos, hurricanes, lack of water, aggressive inhabitants, and so on), where it was best to anchor, and which sites could be developed. Even if they are governed by visual mapping, topographies contribute to what de Certeau calls practices of space. Several passages in the travelogues tell about everyday life exchanges and the necessity of drawing knowledge from other islands. Comparisons between plants observed on different islands, for instance, help to specify various plant types. When Exquemelin sets out to tell about his adventures, he begins by describing the region. How else, he asks, should the reader be able to follow the adventures of the buccaneers (2012, 104)? Following roughly the same order as the natural histories, he begins by localizing the area and discusses the competing names of the region, noting, for instance, that the buccaneers "corrupt" the name and say *Maracaye* instead of *Maracaïbo*. The islands are then described socially: he tells of fishing, cultivation, navigation, and the native inhabitants who speak Spanish but are now controlled by the Dutch.



All travelers in the seventeenth century were seeking other islands to explore, inhabit, and exploit. There is thus a direct link between exploration—even if it was on a small scale in the Caribbean at this time—and the text. This partly explains why the principle for topographic descriptions is practical; they are both representational and social. Spatial precisions of an island served to situate it in relation to other islands so that future travelers and colonizers would know how to navigate and what is around them. Whether the island had water or not is crucial information alongside descriptions of places to embark. So are descriptions of what one can do in various places on the island: here you can fish for oysters; this bay is good to disembark the ships, here water is shallow so you have to row, and so on. Except in buccaneer stories, the practical rationale is linked to the development of the colonial machine that will dominate the second half of the century. Here, too, geography impacts on the form: the representation of expansion and settlement in this region implies a narrative of island-searching. In this context, the archipelagic is not characterized by a counter-movement to exploration. Rather, settling or trading motivates linkages to other islands and continents; the archipelagic routes constitute the foundation of colonization.

Yet, while intended to capture singular traits of each island for the benefit of interested settlers and proprietors, the rhetorical construction of the descriptive discourse also has another effect: it gives the impression that we read about one island that is repeated in a series and, in that repetitive act, a multitude is created. On the page of the seemingly dry and iterative descriptions emerges a sense of repeating islands, as conceptualized by Antonio Benítez-Rojo (1997). As Richard Scholar argues, paying attention to the fragmented structure, borrowed at once from the *isolario*, natural history, and the geographical and social context, is a way to make the early modern reverberate in contemporary Caribbean thought, “not just by revealing its residual trace in the language of the archipelago, but also by setting out a more powerful challenge to the dominant discourse of globalization than globality is at present able to offer” (2015, 23). What the seventeenth-century travelogues add to insular representations is a structural coherence that links the islands together, enforcing the archipelagic over insularity. The catalogue structure provides that coherence, constituting the islands as one space, and the accounts of travels between the islands underscore the proximity between them and grant a geographical unity that is transposed onto the narratives. It further shows how, although each constituent of an archipelago can at first seem isolated, the

currents between and among islands reveal a wider horizon. The proximity between islands and to the sea is a reality that missionaries and inhabitants have to learn to operate.

### TOURING THE ARCHIPELAGO

To analyze the way spatial practices might operate I will now shift focus and take on an internal archipelagic perspective. Moving beyond the topographies, it becomes productive to borrow from DeLoughrey's theorization of how the archipelago can be constructed from below and not from a given position of power. Instead of starting from the "bird's eye view" of the explorer, she chooses a Brathwaitian "tidalectic" approach that enables the analysis of "a dynamic and shifting relationship between land and sea that allows island literatures to be engaged in their spatial and historical complexity" (2007, 2–3).<sup>16</sup> The approach resonates with de Certeau's notion of a spatializing practice, where description gives the reader a tour, following movements in space. The motives were exploitative, commercial, and evangelical, but travelers ended up navigating between the islands for reasons that they did not always control. And while producing knowledge about the insular space, a knowledge motivated by a drive for domination, the result was often instability. This, I argue, has to do with the fact that the early travel writings were deployed on unstable terrain, epistemologically, politically, and representationally: they investigate how a new space can be practiced. In this context, topographies alone do not suffice. The islands need to be spatialized and narrated from the point of view of users moving in space. Through this perspective, the narratives can turn them into a stage where the history of settlement unfolds.

In some passages, the islands turn into active players, determining the rapport with others and the conceptualization of colonization. We can notably detect such tendencies when the travelers relate the chaotic period that Philip Boucher has called the "era of proprietors" (2008, 88), which roughly coincides with the Regency in France (1643–1651). Let me briefly review the historical context: the Queen mother Anne of Austria

<sup>16</sup>Kamau Brathwaite famously defined tidalectics as a kind of Caribbean dialectics modelled after the constant turbulent movements of the ocean, proposing a chaotic yet unified notion of time and space: "instead of the notion of one-two-three, Hegelian, I am now more interested in the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic, I suppose, motion, rather than linear" (Brathwaite cited in Mackey 1995, 14).

and Mazarin tried to retake control over the islands by sending their governor, Noël Patrocle de Thoisy, to replace the governor of Saint Christophe de Poincy, Knight of the Order of Malta, in 1645. Their attempt failed. Poincy refused to leave his position, and Thoisy had to return to France. According to Du Tertre, proprietors and governors used France's internal conflicts to seize more power and land, often to the detriment of the settlers, indentured laborers, and other commoners, who suffered under their despotic rule. During this time, the Antilles were like "very troubled waters," he writes, and it took long before the waves of emotions had calmed down and French islands were stabilized (1667 t1, 396).

Du Tertre includes a story within the story of the era of proprietors which illustrates how the archipelagic production of space unfolds between French politics and Caribbean geography. Upon returning to Paris, de Thoisy had informed the Queen Regent about Poincy's refusal to accept her commission. Rumors then spread back to the islands that the queen disapproved of Poincy's politics (1667, t1, 401). In Du Tertre's version, this put Poincy in a difficult situation: he wanted to expel those proprietors whom he suspected of having plotted against him from Saint-Christophe. The problem was that he could not send them back to France since they might report back to the Queen Regent and add to Poincy's bad reputation in the circles around the Crown. While waiting for the tensions between the Crown and the Order of Malta to ease, he decided to send his adversaries to the Virgin Islands under the pretext that they should look for new territories to explore for the Crown.

In 1647, sixty men embarked from Saint-Christophe on the order of Poincy. The voyage was difficult. Luckily, one of them, whom Du Tertre identifies as Jean Pinart, had traveled to the Virgin Islands before and knew about an English settlement where the group of banished Frenchmen could anchor. This is where their archipelagic adventure commenced. The island was mosquito-infested, making it difficult to rest. Hoping to find a better place to settle, a group of experienced men was sent out to explore the island. Upon their return to the others they found the place covered with dead bodies and all the equipment, including their boats, was gone. Since the island where they had landed was close to Saint Jean de Portric, inhabited by the Spanish, they immediately suspected them. For the next three to four months, the Frenchmen had nothing to live on, no tools, and no boat. They barely survived, eating crabs and things they could pick with their bare hands. Ultimately, they found a fallen *acoma* tree and started building a raft, using the woods, liana and leaves from the forest.

With sails made out of their own shirts, a selected few of the survivors set sail to find “another island inhabited by Christians” (1667 t1, 404). Du Tertre gives the reader a pathetic scene of departure: the shipwrecked men organized a final meal before the tearful farewell. Both those who stayed on the island and those who left were equally afraid of dying. Rowing “à la façon des Sauvages,” the group first arrived at a small island, Virgino Goarda, where they ate and left their mark, like explorers. Repeating the European gesture of possession, they named the island and called it “Violette” with reference to a person unknown to them, buried with a cross where it was written “the one who rests here is called Violette, habitant of Saint Christophe” (1667 t1, 405).<sup>17</sup> Once the ceremony of naming concluded, they carried on to the island of Saint Thomas, where they found fresh water and fruits. From there, they continued to a nearby island, where they found wild animals to hunt. Still they pursued their search for fellow Christians and moved on to another small island on the coast of Puerto Rico. However, this was a bad decision: with unpredictable currents and rough waters, they had to row for three days before reaching the shore. Finding remains of a human settlement, they decided to stay and wait for people to arrive. Finally, one Sunday “as they were saying their prayers,” they spotted a ship. Luckily, their “pitiful” story touched the captain, who gave the survivors clothes, food, and wine, promising to take them to Puerto Rico after fifteen days of fishing, which he did. On the route they noticed another raft carrying the rest of the group that they had left on the Virgin Islands. The entire colony was thus finally united, saved, and brought to San Juan, where they were allowed to stay, living off small jobs to gain enough money to return to Europe (1667 t1, 408).

Throughout the story, Du Tertre follows the crew from their point of view as they float on the Caribbean Sea; there is no center, only multidirectional movements. Yet the narrative is inhabited by a significant textual tension. Du Tertre’s account reveals how the French were forced into an archipelagic way of experiencing space. They could not control the islands nor the seas between them. However, Du Tertre turns their destiny into a sentimental adventure, charging it with significance. It is simultaneously a critique of the regime of de Poincy and an argument for centralizing colonial control. It can be read as an attempt at integrating that uncertainty into a larger story of power over the islands. But the passage does more

<sup>17</sup> Celuy qui gist icy se nomme Violette, habitant de Saint-Christophe.

than that. Looking at the ways in which the passengers survive reveals their dependence on other types of knowledge. They have learned how to construct rafts from endemic trees from the Caribs. Du Tertre does not overtly make the connection, but indirectly through the Eurocentric terms used to describe how the men row standing *à la façon des Sauvages*, the Caribs appear as the prerequisite for their survival.

What an “archipelagic” reading like this allows us to do is, in Murphy’s words, to emphasize “how individuals used maritime routes to forge connections across islands and therefore across multiple Indigenous and European domains” (2021, 5). The movements of peoples engaged in life on the islands forged this space as much as empires and nations. European wars and alliances also have determine the events, of course, but in the texts it becomes evident that they were not the major determinants of the Caribbean at this time. In most cases, conflicts between nations on the islands were behind the archipelagic way of experiencing the Caribbean at this time. The archipelagic emerges in these descriptions of war and conflict in verbs of orientation that actualize the geographic space through movement. An officer “arrives” with his men, calls on the Natives to come, tension arises, and the Natives retire to a nearby small island. In other cases, people “take refuge” on islands, they are ready to embark on canoes, the French set sail, and so on. Vision and hearing also come into play, as when somebody spots a stranger approaching or hears the Indigenous call to assemble their people. The history of one island cannot be isolated from another; it is an archipelagic history that unfolds in the routes between the islands. Several actors intervene, and actions occur through an engagement with other islands, without passing through official channels or through Europe or the Atlantic.

Similar signs of ambivalence appear in other archipelagic passages. This was the consequence when the Spanish destroyed the fortress in Saint Martin to make the island inhabitable for other nations, and chased the Dutch off the island. Hearing about the destruction, governor Poincy planned to take over Saint Martin and convinced a group of French settlers to try their luck and sail for Saint Martin and Saint Barthelemy (Du Tertre 1667 t1, 409). Du Tertre’s negative attitude toward Poincy comes out clearly in this passage: people inhabit the islands for the wrong reasons, he claims. They sought to please Poincy, not to make a profit and in so doing improve the settlement. Consequently, they were not motivated enough to resist the hardships that come with such a project. The Natives quickly noticed this, according to Du Tertre, and attacked the French,

leading to “carnage” in 1656. For several years the French did not want to set foot on the island. Another example is the establishment on the islands of Saintes and Marie Galante in 1648, which is related in many of the travelogues. The French colony had just recently settled when Natives from Dominica attacked English settlers on the nearby island of Antigua. Charged with war booty, the Natives stopped on Marie Galante on their way back. Not knowing about the attack, the French welcomed the victorious men. But as the Natives returned to Dominica, they were assaulted by a group of Frenchmen from Martinique who knew about the attack on the English colony and sought revenge. This in turn provoked the Natives to return to Marie Galante and attack the same settlers who had just welcomed them. As they set fire to the French fortress, inhabitants of other islands were alerted. Other Natives from Dominica, friends of the French, were the first ones who came to the rescue and informed Houël, the governor of Guadeloupe, of the assault committed by their fellow islanders (Du Tertre 1667 t1, 419). The entire episode led Houël to declare war on the Natives and send men to Dominica, among which we find ten to twelve Caribs who “served as guides to our French & fought bravely against their compatriots, preferring usefulness (*utilité*) instead of alliances of friendship and blood” (1667 t1, 421).<sup>18</sup>

Looking at the narratives of settlement in terms of touring rather than mapping does not contradict what we already know: the establishment was brutal. But the archipelagic reading enables us to capture the *process*. Settlement was rarely definite; it was operational and dependent on geography. Du Tertre tells about how he was sent by the count of Cérillac to make an account of Grenada and had somebody else sent to make an initial estimation of the lands. This person reported back and gathered people before settlement began. They used carpenters from Martinique, other specialists from different islands, and enslaved peoples bought from Brazil and started negotiating with the Natives. All this unfolds in 1658, meaning that thirty years of French presence had gone by. This history also affects the turn of events. The Native captain explains that he is not ready to receive the French the way he had welcomed Monsieur du Parquet: “If he wanted to have their island and become its master, they had to give

<sup>18</sup> Servirent de guides à nos François, & se battirent vaillamment contre leurs compatriotes, préférant leur utilité à toutes les alliances de l’amitié et du sang.

something in return” (Du Tertre 1667 t1, 428).<sup>19</sup> After eight peaceful months of settlement, conflicts arose, and the French tried to chase the Caribs from Grenada, violating the contract of exchange. Angered, the victims of the attack allied with other Caribs on Saint Vincent and Dominica (429). War was now inevitable. The French massacred the Natives, and the few survivors committed collective suicide by throwing themselves into the sea from a rock now called the “Leapers’ Hill” (*Morne de Sauteurs*) rather than falling into the hands of the French. The settlement on Saint Lucia, on the other hand, was accidental. Leaving Grenada to go to Paris for negotiations with the *Compagnie des Isles de l’Amérique*, Du Parquet accidentally noticed that Saint Lucia had been abandoned by the English. Instead of sailing to Paris, he tried his luck and settled on the island. Enjoying a good relationship with the Natives, Du Parquet stayed longer than two years, the usual timeframe before something went wrong (harvest turning bad, disease, Natives, other Europeans), and the settlement turned from profit to fiasco, prompting the settlers to leave and search for yet another place. Clearly, what all these examples show is that the establishment at this point was not yet a territorial colonial enterprise. Du Parquet extracted as much as he could from the lands and then left.

The oceanic space also played its part. Many times the search for new islands went wrong and forced the settlers into the archipelagic geography. At one point, Pelleprat recalls, the French settlers were “dispersed on the islands,” and one had to make difficult journeys should they need assistance (1658, 14). In fact, staying on an island was in itself a challenge. The Carpentras manuscript reveals how wind took the schooners off course (2002, 97–98). Captain Fleury and his crew were desperately looking for a way to reach Peru, but as the ships were in bad shape, they were stuck on the islands, which inevitably led to famine. Stopping always meant exposing oneself to the risk of attack by Natives or other Europeans. Like sharks, travelers needed to move to survive, especially before 1626 when the official settlement was initiated. But unlike sharks, the French did not master the Caribbean Sea and ended up floating aleatorically between islands, on which they tried desperately to embark. Symptomatically, boats were sometimes given more agency than the travelers in the texts: “The canoe [...] took its route towards the island of Tobago to retake the wind from the islands; the boat made up to two *lieues* under the wind from Grenada,

<sup>19</sup> S’il voulait avoir leur Isle & s’en rendre maistre; il falloit qu’il leur donnât de la traite en échange.

that one could easily have reached with the help of oars if one would have wanted to thanks to an unexpected calm, but having lost this occasion, the breeze rose and pushed the boat with the winds...” (La Vigne 2014, 270–271).<sup>20</sup> At other times, a desire for profit drove the French to take hazardous risks, like when a group of settlers left Tobago for the South American continent, where they hoped to find precious stones or metals (Rochefort 1658, 403–404). But they misjudged the scope of the voyage. After four days of sailing without seeing land, they ran out of provisions. Luckily, they were saved by Natives. Weak boats combined with a lack of knowledge of geography and nature occasionally turn the settlers into puppets floating on the Caribbean Sea.

All these stories show the uncertainty that was at the foundation of the insidious exploitation of peoples and lands. While the topographies and stories about successful settlement give the impression that the French knew the geography well, passages governed by the spatializing tour mode show that they were not always in control. Even if the texts are ruled by colonial intentions, it is possible to speak of such passages in terms of an “island migration” that functions as “a vital narrative trope” (DeLoughrey 2007, 24). Space is not flattened but lived and explored as touring: “Attention to movement offers a paradigm of rooted routes, of a mobile, flexible, and voyaging subject who is not physically or culturally circumscribed by the terrestrial boundaries of island space” (DeLoughrey 2007, 3). In these narratives of routes, the history of the settlement unfolds processually between the islands.

Moreover, the ground perspective calls attention to how the narratives produce differences between French and Caribs. For while the desire is to domesticate island space, travelogues indicate that there are other ways of practicing the archipelago, thus revealing effects of other types of experience and knowledge. The main difference is that settlers sought to map and control the region but were unintentionally drawn into the practice of routes, whereas the indigenous population produced space in relation to their movements in the archipelagic space. The anonymous writer of *Carpentras* attests that whereas being stranded on an island was

<sup>20</sup>Le canot [...] prit sa route vers l'île de Tabaco pour regagner le vent des Îles; le bateau fut jusqu'à deux lieues sous le vent de la Grenade, qu'on aurait facilement gagnée à force de rames si on avait voulu, à cause d'un clame qui surprit; mais ayant perdu cette occasion, la brise, s'étant levée, poussa le bateau à vau-le-vent, de sorte que, n'ayant pu gagner l'île de Saint-Croix, il arriva aux Vaches proche de l'île de Saint-Domingue, où l'on prit de l'eau.



life-threatening for Europeans, the Natives kept gardens on each island so that they could stay for some time if weather or enemies prevented them from leaving (2002, 213). In his dictionary, Breton contrasts the French colonies' misery on the islands with the Caribs' way of living in an interesting entry. He enters the word for "famine" only to observe that the Caribs have no term for starvation because they have never suffered from it.

*The Savages cannot starve because their habitations are not closed, so they can quickly perceive danger or if they suspect danger, they can retire to the mountains where they have gardens for this necessity; or if they are at sea, they find on the rocks or under the rocks Belébuera, Ebépoulou, mábália, Burgaux, and other shells, fish tadpoles, crayfish, small snails that they call coulême, in the rivers, which make them survive. In the forest, they know the fruit trees and the roots that are large as thighs (they are Ignames) that they also eat in their camps.*<sup>21</sup> (1999, 114)

After this description of the Caribs' knowable nomadic social structure, in sync with the archipelago, Breton underscores that "the French are not as skillful when they first arrive to the islands" and then goes on to describe the famine that plagued the settlers of Guadeloupe in 1640.<sup>22</sup> The entry is an illustrative example of the complexity of Breton's dictionary, to which

<sup>21</sup> *Les Sauvages ne peuvent être affamés, parce que leurs habitations n'étant point fermées, sitôt qu'ils aperçoivent le danger, ou qu'ils s'en méfient, ils se retirent dans les montagnes où ils ont des jardins pour cette nécessité; outre qu'ils sont au bord de la mer, ils trouvent sur les roches, ou sous les rochers des Belébuera, Ebépoulou, mábália, des Burgaux, et autres coquillages, pêchent dans les rivières des têtards, des écrevisses, des petits escargots, qu'ils appellent coulême, qui les font subsister. Ils connaissent dans les bois des arbres fruitiers, et des racines qui sont grosses comme la cuisse (sont des Ignames) qu'ils mangent même dans leurs habitations.*

<sup>22</sup> Breton notes, "The French are not so skilful when they are new to the islands. In the beginning of the settlement of the colony of Guadeloupe, we had the Savages on our backs. They besieged us for some hours, after which, even though they lifted the siege, they nevertheless kept prowling the woods and the coasts in their canoes where they killed those who might find themselves there; the shortage of bread and fresh water made the other ones dry out in their house and residences, in such way that they were more yellow than quince, dryer than Brazil wood, having but skin and bone, they fell into agony while taking tobacco, when talking and walking, without any other malady than the pure need and loss of energy. (*Les Français ne sont pas si adroits quand ils sont nouveaux dans les Îles. Au commencement de l'établissement de la Colonie de la Gardeloupe, nous avions les Sauvages sur les bras, qui nous assiégeaient quelques heures de temps, au bout desquelles, quoui qu'ils levassent le siège, ils ne laissaient pas néanmoins de rôder dans les bois, et le long des côtes dans leurs Canots où ils tuaient tous ceux qu'ils pouvaient trouver; la disette de pain et d'eau faisait sécher les autres dedans leurs habitations et demeures, en telle sorte qu'ils étaient plus jaunes que des coigns, plus secs que bois de Brésil, n'ayant que la peau et les os; en prenant du tabac, en parlant, et marchant ils tombaient en agonie, sans autre maladie que la pure nécessité et défaillance.*)

I will come back in detail in Chap. 4. Here we can notice that the entry does several things at once. It points to a linguistic discrepancy between Carib and French—the latter having no word for famine—which he then links to social contexts. On this note the reader gets an anthropologic description of the Caribs' archipelagic way of life. Indirectly, Breton presents this description as a model for how to construct social life with the islands. The text then transforms into a historical discourse, telling about a situation of crisis for the French colony. The short narrative is filled with strong pathetic scenes expressed in an exaggerated style, including direct discourse and ending with a religious sentence praising those who die serving God. Such stylistic features stand out in regard to other entries in the dictionary and also from the anthropologic discourse that preceded the description of the famine. European social structure and the sedentary and exploitative ways of inhabiting land are not sustainable in this context, the entry underscores with emphasis. The colony needs to be integrated into an archipelagic way of life, but it also needs a solid structure. Again control and unsettlement dictate the mediation of the archipelago as a transitional social space between cultures.

Almost all of the travelers comment that the Native Caribbeans inhabited the archipelago differently than the Europeans, and this was to their advantage. They did not single out islands but consider the entire region to be their home (*demeure*), the anonymous writer of Carpentras writes (2002, 115). Several accounts testify that during the 1630s different Native peoples collaborated with each other against French settlers. They allegedly attacked colonies in the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, Grenada, and Martinique. Navigating in “pirogues” or canoes, the Natives used the archipelago to surprise the French. It is impossible, Pelleprat states, to estimate how many Caribs would show up in the case of a confrontation because the numbers were impossible to discern from afar (1658, 90). Unlike the French, the Caribs were familiar with the geography, knew how to hide in creeks with their canoes, and conducted a guerilla-like warfare. Inexperienced, the French were unable to calculate where the enemy might appear, which seems to have haunted the settlers, on occasion provoking a phantasmagoric conception of space, like when the French in Guadeloupe had suffered a long famine by the end of the 1630s. Ravaged by hunger and malady, they began to hallucinate, Du

Tertre writes in a vivid style: “The red leaves in the woods looked liked Savages to them, and made them sound the alarm across the entire island; a piece of wood drifting on the ocean was taken for a canoe filled with enemies; so they had no rest, & didn’t know where they were safe” (1654, 47).<sup>23</sup> Fear, hunger, and sickness change the perception of island space. Rochefort also describes how the Natives would hide in vegetation, on mountains, and in the water (1658, 458). Yet most of the time, death was more of a threat at moments when the Natives kept their distance. Du Tertre repeatedly points out that war with the Natives led to famine because trade would stop, and the French would no longer get the Indigenous assistance necessary for cultivating the lands. Likewise, the anonymous writer of Carpentras tells that the most miserable Europeans were those who found themselves stranded on an island that was not inhabited by Natives (2002, 106).

To some extent the native Caribbeans were thus in control of the archipelagic space because of their aquatic and archipelagic knowledge. They could swim and navigate much easier between islands in their small canoes and pirogues. One voyager tells about a Carib man who, despite the fact that he had been shot, managed to flee. The French chased him down but could not kill him, “because he kept on swimming between waves [...] he finally reached the open sea, & saved himself on a neighbouring island” (Du Tertre 1667 t1, 422).<sup>24</sup> The anonymous writer of Carpentras advances the hypothesis that the reason why Caribs preferred to travel by water was the volcanic geography of the Antilles. It was simply easier to go to the other side of an island by canoe. The settlers gathered some of this archipelagic knowledge from Natives: from them they learned how to make canoes or rafts, as seen in the example discussed earlier. He further explains that the Caribs could decipher the ocean and the winds; they knew how to navigate according to the stars and the sun and could localize lands well beyond the archipelago. They decided on where to camp depending on weather predictions, and they navigated,

following the moon and the stars, of which they have an extended knowledge about their orbit as well as their names, and, which is incredible, they

<sup>23</sup> Les feüilles rouges du bois, leur sembloient estre des Sauvages, & leur faisoient donner l’allarme à toute l’isle; un arbre flottant sur la mer, estoit pris par eux pour une Pirogue chargée de leurs ennemis; de sorte qu’ils n’avoient aucun repos, & ne sçavoient en quel lieu ils estoient en assurance.

<sup>24</sup> Parce qu’il nâgea toujours entre-deux eaux, [...] qu’enfin il gagna le haut de la mer & se sauva dans une Isle voisine.

can name differently a large quantity [of stars], which they showed us, and they also know where lands and kingdoms such as Brazil, Peru, France, and others are situated, and judge all situations following the sun's course and this way they never go astray. A blind man, father of the captain of the village where I stayed, showed me all the places of these lands after I had told him in which direction the sun rises and sets.<sup>25</sup> (2002, 223)

Conceptually, the missionaries were attentive to Indigenous practices of space. Rochefort particularly underscores that the Natives thought of language in spatial terms. They interpreted writing, for instance, as language crossing the oceans, he notes. Since they themselves could not write, they needed to travel much more; oral culture could explain their nomadic lifestyle (Rochefort 1658, 362). This, in turn, made them great diplomats. They deliberated and negotiated orally, facing their adversary. Their "sagacity" drove them to see others, Le Breton, the last French missionary who lived with the people of Saint Vincent, suggests, adding that this is why he calls, "these indigenous people itinerary rather than sedentary" (1984, 42).<sup>26</sup> They even arrange social life in relation to the islands and their proximity. Le Breton writes,

In fact, the island, open on all sides, with many bays and creeks, gives easily to each family father a propitious occasion to choose to settle down, in a space where, far from the burden of serving others, in safety, a unique access road is open all the way up to his residence, and only by sea, he can live with his woman, his children, his close ones, in a way that most suits his desires.<sup>27</sup> (42)

<sup>25</sup> Ils se guident selon le soleil et les étoiles, desquelles ils ont une grande connaissance tant de leurs noms que de leurs cours, et nomment diversement une grande quantité qu'ils nous montraient, chose qui est presque incroyable, et savent aussi dire les situations des terres et royaumes, comme du Brésil, du Pérou, France et ainsi des autres, et jugent toutes les situations selon le cours du soleil et par ainsi ne se fourvoyent jamais. Un aveugle, père du capitaine du village où j'étais, me montrait tous les endroits des susdites terres après que je lui ai dit où était le soleil levant et couchant.

<sup>26</sup> C'est pourquoi j'appelle ces indigènes itinérants plutôt que sédentaires.

<sup>27</sup> De fait, l'île, ouverte de tous côtés, pleine de baies et de criques, fournit aisément à chaque père de famille une occasion propice pour choisir de s'y établir, en un lieu où, loin du joug de tout asservissement à autrui, en sécurité, une voie d'accès unique étant ouverte jusqu'à sa demeure, et seulement par mer, il pût vivre avec sa femme, ses enfants, ses proches, de la façon la plus conforme de ses désirs.

The archipelago is here presented as a contributing factor to the liberty of the Indigenous people. Thanks to their ability to master the surrounding sea, they could settle on any island, thereby avoiding ever becoming any authority's subject. Another traveler, Le Breton, suggests that they were not traveling between the islands and inhabiting different islands due to physical necessity or by force of nature. Instead, boredom was as strong of a reason to move from one island to another: "sometimes experiencing a sort of lassitude in the native land, they undertake journeys to the other islands that are not far away" (Le Breton 1982, 57).<sup>28</sup> Traveling gave material for new conversations and could, according to Le Breton, last several months. The archipelago turned the Natives into local cosmopolitans.

In other words, these early modern travelers noted what contemporary historians of the Indigenous population of the Antilles have affirmed: the Indigenous way of inhabiting the archipelago nomadically questions stable notions of natural frontiers between spaces as well as cultures (Bérard 2013, 160). Rochefort describes how the Natives always paid attention to the surrounding sea. Commercial and other types of social exchanges often occurred on water, between islands.<sup>29</sup> Contrary to the French settlers, who stayed secluded on their island in fear since they did not know how to read the archipelagic space, the Natives actively sought those who were approaching their island. They identified visitors by voice since they did not trust the signs given by Europeans (Rochefort 1658, 457). The anonymous buccaneer details how the Caribs saved him from being drowned, as he was too exhausted to drag himself from the beach. They took his bag and his sword and helped him up, let him rest, and gave him food. Inspired by the Natives, some French men even used the geographic space to escape their servile condition as indentured labor. They fled one island and settled with the Natives on another (anonymous writer of Carpentras 2002, 223).

Enslaved people only occasionally were given the chance to use the archipelago for such liberational purposes. The most significant example is the shipwreck of a Dutch slaveship on the coast of Saint Vincent. The episode is often alluded to in the travelogues, but only Le Breton describes

<sup>28</sup>Éprouvant parfois comme une lassitude du sol natal, ils entreprennent de faire des voyages dans les autres îles qui ne sont pas éloignées.

<sup>29</sup>Trading on ships is a French practice, no doubt a result of the fact that the French for a long time did not possess territories. According to some historians this practice might have facilitated the relationships between the French and the natives. They might have felt less threatened on the sea than on land.

it more extensively. In the passage, we learn that the Caribs of Saint Vincent received the shipwrecked diasporic Africans in the same way as they welcomed other Caribs (1982, 38). He further notes that some “Ethiopians know very well how to swim”.<sup>30</sup> The African survivors settled on the island and lived side-by-side with the Natives. According to Le Breton, they integrated entirely with Indigenous society, “used the same rules” and behaved “almost like masters, remembering and abhorring their ancient servitude” (38–39).<sup>31</sup> There are few traces of these exchanges between Caribs and free and enslaved black persons in travel writing, but the brief allusion by Le Breton to this society formed by stranded diasporic Africans, who by the forces of nature and geography gained liberty, and the Indigenous, who had been circumscribed by the forces of history to inhabit Saint Vincent, hint at other processes of creolization occurring on the margins of colonial island space. The increased brutality of the plantation system along with the systematic exclusion of Indigenous peoples forced these individuals to live the islands as a space of competition for survival, leading to allegiances between these groups (Indigenous supporting maroons; enslaved peoples turning against the French in alliance with Caribs or vice versa: they would align with the French to secure peace or personal profit). These alliances are sprinkled out in the historical narratives in passing as we have seen. They do not constitute the core of history from the perspectives of the travelers, but they mark travel writing, fragmenting the narratives and manifesting other conflicts. Along with Murphy (2021, 50), we can thus claim that indigenous people and diasporic Africans also intervened in the spatial struggle of early colonization while constantly under the threat of being expelled, enslaved, or killed.

\* \* \*

The early colonial Caribbean travel narratives contain several modes of production of the archipelagic space. There are involuntary movements between islands, triggered by external circumstances (storms, wars, hunger, and so on). There are also movements provoked by commercial and evangelical interests. Finally, there are echoes of a local archipelagic way of life, more integrated and adapted to the geography, that the travelers

<sup>30</sup> *Quelques Ethiopiens sachant très bien nager.*

<sup>31</sup> *Et même ils font presque les maîtres, en hommes qui, se souvenant de leur servitude ancienne et l’ayant en horreur.*

observe and from which they sometimes try to learn. All these aspects are interrelated in the narratives, confirming that “island movements are generative and interconnective spaces of metamorphosis, of material practices, culture and politics” (Pugh 2013, 10). We have seen how travelers adapted to the geographies but also how the islands and the everyday life of the Natives radically changed under the pressure of these movements.

Thus, the narratives of settlement show that archipelagic space may foster interrelational epistemologies and poetics, though not automatically and, more importantly, such “archipelagraphy,” to use DeLoughrey’s term, is not univocal. Rather, travel writing like the French texts on the Caribbean from this period stem from what Glissant calls an “arrow-like errantry,” focused on an object of desire, but geography and nature come into play and disturb that movement toward the desired object (1997, 12–15). This is an important reminder not to essentialize or project morals onto either errancy or geography. Nomadic movement or archipelagic thinking are not good per se, nor does the archipelago necessarily foster archipelagic writing. These are products of various cultural, natural, and geographical influences. This is also how these texts allow us to de-center our contemporary moment. They teach us that we should not essentialize archipelagic space as something that would necessarily lead to creative metamorphosis. More importantly, the archipelagic reading has allowed us to examine how others’ knowledge and others’ practices have entered productively into travel writing, leaving marks of other presences and experiences, which disrupt the narratives of conquest. Their movements align with the archipelagic nomadism or “errantry”, to use Glissant’s terms, at the same time as they are invasive; displaying what we might call an “arrow-like errantry” (Glissant 1997, 11–15). Indirectly the travelogues attest to what Murphy (2021) describes as Caribs living the archipelago as an interconnected space, which allows us to estimate the brutal impact the 1660 treaty between the English, French, and Caribs must have had on Indigenous life. From that point they were circumscribed to Saint Vincent and Dominica. Even if, as Murphy argues, Indigenous people kept playing an active role in the history of the Caribbean, their impact was radically diminished.

As the French settlement was stabilized and the wheels of colonial machinery started to turn more steadily around 1670, the representation of archipelagic space gradually changed. When Labat arrived in the Antilles in 1695, he mostly traveled on horseback by land and visited all of Martinique. In the middle of his sojourn, in 1703, he did voyage throughout the region as far as the larger Antilles to visit a new French possession:

Saint Domingue (Haiti). As we learn in Volume Six of his recollection, the voyage was planned and proceeded accordingly. The exception was an adventure that occurred at sea: he and his crew were put adrift and temporarily lived like buccaneers confined to their ship. They were captured and liberated, and there was a rumor of a treasure on the island of Negade (Labat 1722 t6, 338). Labat himself smuggled and “saved” enslaved people (who presumably were Catholics) from their cruel protestant owners. The adventure is dramatic and interesting in many regards, but it is not marked by the archipelago where it took place. Rather the entire narrative is conceived within a pirate imaginary that seems to belong to romance. There is never any impression of real danger or uncertainty.

In this context, the *isolario* as a form of thinking and writing is not relevant to the same extent, nor is there any sense of submission to landscapes and seascapes, and no dream of moving on to the next island with the intention to settle is present. Surely, conflicts over who colonized which island were not over and free Blacks and enslaved peoples migrated between the islands, especially in the Lesser Antilles (Thomasson 2022, 154), but the islands were presented in French travel narratives as national territories rather than open spaces. Labat operates in a period when the archipelago has almost been taken over by continental blocks of power. He described most of the islands from his ship as he passed them, together with information collected from other voyagers. He stayed for a longer period on some islands, like Jamaica, where he, for example, learned about the British’s supposedly crueler way of treating the enslaved population. But he describes island societies, the European nation that possesses the island in question functions as determinant in that society whereas the interconnective forces are moved to the background. Most notably, at this point Caribs no longer had the possibility to practice archipelagic life, as they were limited to the islands of Dominica and Saint Vincent. In a way, Labat, too, was sensitive to the Native Caribbean way of living the islands, but his observations are based on other voyagers rather than on personal experience. Speaking about a small cul de sac, he refers to Rochefort and notes that the lands must have been inhabited or at least cultivated “either by the ancient Indians or by the Caribs who succeeded them, because one can find very few big trees on this island even if the earth is good, deep, and fresh” (1722 t6, 300).<sup>32</sup> Natives had been decimated by ruthless massacres, and those who survived no longer appeared in creeks unknown to the Europeans or navigated between the islands. Instead, they too had

<sup>32</sup> Ou par les anciens Indiens ou par les Caraïbes qui leur ont succédé; car on n’y trouve que très-peu de gros arbres, quoique la terre y soit bonne profonde & fraîche.



become sedentary. As a matter of fact, Labat did not encounter any Natives until after two years of living in Martinique, when he made a trip to Dominica with the explicit intention to “see Savages,” as if he was visiting a live zoo or doing site tourism. He stayed in Dominica for a few days, learning about their cultures and costumes while shopping for souvenirs.

The texts from the 1650s and 1660s hint at what is to come: the shift from spatial production determined by the archipelago toward the one that will dominate the French Caribbean from the end of the seventeenth century forward. One clearly notices that there is now a coherent colonial Caribbean culture based on slavery, plantation, and triangular trade. Island after island, colonization gradually takes on a continental form, determined by the colonial power that possessed them. It did not happen overnight, but successively from the 1670s the modes of production and the organization of space changed. Triggered by sugar agriculture and industry, with better techniques for refinement, the importation of enslaved people from Africa increased, and these men and women became the prime instrument of production. At the same time, an ideological space of discourse produced a political and social space where this could evolve: the *Exclusif*—prohibiting all French from trading with anyone other than French—the *Code noir*—the legal document regulating the slave trade and slavery—and absolute monarchy. Taken together, these elements led to a double closure of the islands: the plantation in itself was, in Glissant’s terms, a “closed space” (1997, 63), an isolated island within the island, and exchanges with the outside world were now oriented toward and determined by the French Atlantic triangle, aiming toward creating a closed system of circulation between France, Africa, and the Antilles. If Colbert initiated the colonial “*exclusif*” to centralize colonial power by integrating the islands in the French economic system, Labat engages in a literary worldmaking of the islands as a *French* Caribbean space. The archipelagic undercurrents of the texts from the establishment disappear as the islands merge into plantation societies and travelogues into “plantation books.” The shift shows how the signification of the archipelago can change (Stephens and Martínez-San Miguel 2020, 1). In the moments of early colonization the islands were layered like palimpsest, intertwining past and present as a simultaneous trembling. No melancholia loomed over the ways in which the travelers were drawn into the archipelagic space; instead the tensions between control and unsettlement made them explore contradictory temporalities, pointing backwards yet striving forward to an even more violent future.

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- Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que moderne* (1606) <http://portail.atilf.fr/dictionnaires/ACADEMIE/PREMIERE/premiere.fr.html>
- Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1694) <http://portail.atilf.fr/dictionnaires/ACADEMIE/PREMIERE/premiere.fr.html>

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## CHAPTER 3

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# Constructing the Self Between Worlds

Travelers, says François Hartog in his analysis of Herodotus, are “passers of differences” (1980, 249–259). Yet writing had to obey rules, and travelers wrote for an audience consisting of patrons on whom the publication depended. Not only did “difference” in whatever shape it took not have a given place in this context; travelers’ authorial room for maneuver was clearly limited and enmeshed in a web of discourses. Take the case of Du Tertre. He sometimes speaks in favor of the Crown. At other instances, he acts as spokesman for the inhabitants, settlers as well as Natives. Furthermore, like in most travelogues, the narrative is not based on the traveler’s own observations alone. It relies on what he himself observed and went through on the islands as well as on historical documentation along with accounts told by others through various different sources. The archipelagic grounding of travel writing thus clearly has its limits, dictated not only by political and economic aspirations but also by the circumstances of reception. Precisely because of this embeddedness, the traveler’s self emerges as a site where representational negotiations were played out.

This chapter investigates these limits of representation by examining how the travelers’ self functions as a mediator between worlds. The claim made in this chapter is that travel writing from early colonization is structured around an unstable, transitional self that mediates the representations of new island societies in the making. Speaking in the voice of people in France with interests in the islands, the traveler-writer performed

control and fueled the economic exploitation of the islands. At the same time, in order to construct knowledge, they played on proximity with the archipelagic society, putting other perspectives to use. The chapter argues that the self turns into a site where the effect of otherness can be detected; it becomes the narrative locus of unsettlement.

I consider the self in terms of a textual product, which has an operative function in the representation of the islands and is articulated between the world described (the islands) and the world addressed (France). The concept “the self” was a new invention in France in the seventeenth century, and even though the travelers themselves did not use the expression *le moi*, it is productive for me here because it enables a wider understanding of personhood, subjectivity, and consciousness in relation to the outside world (Carraud 2010, 169–173).<sup>1</sup> Even if travel writing did not present a theory of the self and was not an introspective discourse at the time, it was considered a vector for self-knowledge. Descartes’s *Discours de la méthode* begins as a travelogue, but the philosopher warns the reader not to venture too far and return once knowledge of the world had been achieved. The Cartesian model, which has dominated theories of the self from Immanuel Kant to Charles Taylor, might then hint at a connection between travelling and self-construction, but the articulation between the two is complicated and hardly evident. Put bluntly, Descartes’s conceptualization of the *ego* starts when travel ends. He turns his back on the world. Travelers do the opposite; they work with the world, but whether the world helps understanding the self or vice versa, if the self becomes a vector for understanding, the world depends on the traveler and on the context. This is what I will be discussing in the introduction to this chapter in order to place Caribbean early colonial narratives in a larger discourse of travel and the function of the self.

In *The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France* (1996), Tom Conley argues that the seventeenth century’s “invention of the self” stems from the emergence of cartographic writing in the wake of European discoveries during the Renaissance, which in turn is connected to an emergent sense of nationhood. Travelers to the Caribbean can be situated on the margins of the development charted by Conley. Rather than a clear sense of nationhood, the narratives reveal the anxiety of societal formations. The establishment was motivated by profit and power, but

<sup>1</sup>In his discussion of the nominalization of “the self” in French [*le moi*], Vincent Carraud observes that the invention of this category proceeded through a paradox: Pascal both objectified the ego by turning it into a self, but in so doing he emptied it of all substance (2010, 40).

the interactions set in motion by the colonial imperative were inevitably susceptible to producing “heresy, immorality, and violence” (Garraway 2005, 25). Geographical and cultural distance challenged the ambitions of extending France in the islands, and the self reflects such anxieties. Moreover, none of the Caribbean travelers inhabit an authorial position. Even if there are moments of self-heroization, writing the Caribbean world does not correspond to the “self-birthing” that Conley detects in cartographic writing (10–11). Rather, the self is a shifting category with a range of rhetorical and epistemic functions. Some passages heroize the traveler; others show how they are seeking information that they might or might not get. In travelogues written in the first person singular, the traveler often appears as a marginal observer and not as the agent of historical events. Even within the same text, the traveler may take different positions and emerge through various modalities of writing. This suggests that rather than seeing the traveler’s self as a fixed narrative instance or as a coherent agent, we need to conceptualize it as a figure of transaction between different modes of knowledge and of writing.

Early colonial travel writing to the Caribbean is further problematic to frame within the genre, as it took shape during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It represents a particular form of voyage that, because of its entanglements with the early colonial project and because of the cultural and geographical distance to France, is forced to struggle with generic codes and conventions. Caribbean travels appear to have been at odds with existing models for travel, which made the structure and organization of travel writing confusing. Missionaries did not observe, collect, and then moved on; they were travelers who sojourned in one place rather than following an itinerary. As for buccaneers, their travels were erratic and circumstantial. These are locally and historically determined types of voyaging, which depart from the general conception of traveling as a method for thinking that developed during the late-seventeenth century. According to this model, which referred to much more travelled spaces and resonated with the humanist tradition, traveling gave a discursive frame for empirical knowledge in so far as the voyager’s itinerary and movement forward suited the *disposio* of classical rhetoric (Dorion 1995, 84–85). The itinerary was mirrored in form, and the narrator’s observations and experiences made it possible to construct the account as a plot and individualize the story (Dorion 1995, 73). Contrary to such structures, itineraries in the Caribbean context, if we can speak of any itinerary at all, were random and could hardly be mirrored in the structure of *disposio*. Even accounts structured linearly insert descriptive passages



pertaining to natural history writing and, generally, the texts appear as patchworks of generic influences.

It is equally difficult to find a space for them within later models of grand explorations to new lands (Stagl 1995, 82). While the European explorer situated himself in a solitary space, as the undiscovered lands and peoples were considered the antithesis of sociability (Lamb 2001), those travelling to the islands intervened in an already-discovered space and engaged in the formation of a new society. Yet, this society was not comparable to the French world of sociability where the texts were to be received. So in relating events, objects, and experiences and transforming them into objects of curiosity, the narratives forged a passageway in order to inscribe the sojourn into the social space in France. Travelers to the Caribbean were thus in between two major models for travelling. They were simultaneously solitary in a supposedly “savage” space and also social in the sense that they partook in the formation of early colonial society. This liminality affected the construction of the figure of the traveler, which brings me to a particular textual tension, namely that the question of the self cuts across several domains implied in travel writing, notably that of sociability and epistemology.

Friedrich Wolfzettel has demonstrated that the seventeenth century marked the birth of the modern traveler who systematically disenchanting faraway places, parting from earlier models of travelling, where observations were presented with the aim to seduce the audience by convincingly showing the marvels of the world (1996, 151). As the mode for construction of knowledge changed, so did the role of the traveler, both as a narrative subject and an epistemic object. We may call it the birth of a realist mode of telling that would from then on dominate travel writing and partly distinguish it from literary writing. Subjective experience and observation as means for establishing empirical knowledge was from then on part of the apodemic method of describing the world as an instrument of investigation and not itself as an object of inspection (Dorion 1995, 64). Yet, such a shift in the construction of knowledge did not directly lead to an emergence of the self. Quite the contrary, empirical observation still had to be backed up by bookish knowledge, based on Ancient Greek and Roman sources. The travelers’ experience could not alone constitute the foundation of knowledge (Licoppe 1996, 10–14). As argued by John Gascoigne (2013, 226), the period was actually marked by a decline in the reliance on the senses to gain knowledge of the world. Adding to these epistemic reasons for downplaying the self, travel writing was fraught with

a bad reputation. There is a French expression that the farther one goes the easier it is to lie. Indeed, in the seventeenth century there was a general idea that all travel narratives were mere fiction, precisely because first-person narration was not considered trustworthy (Stagl 1995). In other words, the “epistemic situation” in which travel writing was shaped was profoundly contradictory, and in this genre, perhaps more than in others, competing ideas concerning how knowledge was acquired, constructed, and presented evolve around the function of the self.

The uncertain role and status of the self created a discursive situation, where the traveler-narrators were obliged to show themselves as worthy narrators who could master their impulses and organize methodologically the amount of information and knowledge gathered; they were reasonable and capable of adapting to the demands of the public while remaining true to what they observed. There is a constant effort to show the reader what kind of travelers they were. In particular, missionaries sought to distance themselves from adventurers and colonizers. To them travel was not an adventure or an impartial observation of foreign peoples and land; it was seen as a test of endurance (Wolfzettel 1996, 168). This confirms Gascoigne’s point: the self was not considered a solid reference for the construction of knowledge. To hold that position it had to perform a narrative that could insert it in a social network. But it is precisely by cutting across empirical and bookish knowledge, sociability, and religion that the traveler’s self can function as a site for negotiations between epistemic models and different modes of relationality to the outside world.

Considering all these factors, we have to think of these texts as permeated with ambivalence; they are simultaneously authoritarian, distancing themselves from the world described while imposing an order of interpretation, but also self-reflective on a personal (the direct experience of traveling and the positioning of the travelers in their home context) and societal (reflection on how their own society is organized or, in the case of settlement, how to organize a new society) level. This put Caribbean travelers in a double-bind position that is constantly reflected in their writing. As foreign knowledge brought back home could be regarded as disconcerting, even dangerous, potentially leading to the destabilization of social order, the travelling self becomes the site of tensions, where the foreign world is tested. It is here in this kind of double orientation, outwards and inwards, that power is both constructed and threatened.

In order to pay attention to these ambiguities and tensions, my reading relies on research that argues for a reconsideration of the construction of

the self in the seventeenth century. Terrence Cave (1999, 112) claims that the *grand récit* of the modern self is that of the Cartesian ego, shadowing the diversity and complexity that characterized the discussion around the self during the seventeenth century. Christopher Braider (2018, 14, 42; 2012) also suggests that the centrality of Descartes's theorization of the cogito has been over-estimated. Indeed, Vincent Carraud's (2010) thorough examination of the birth of the idea of the self shows the complexity of this process. Notably the dualistic separation between body and mind was far from representative for the period. Instead the works of these scholars underscore in different ways more uncertain formulations of the relationships between man and the world, based on Montaigne's heritage. It is not my intention to situate each individual traveler's position in regard to the philosophical traditions in France—such mapping would risk obscuring the Caribbean dimension of their texts. My argument is that the travelogues work through experimental modes of subjectivity in order to account for an early colonial world of transition. The writers were not dislocated from this world but took direct part in the shaping of settlement and early colonial society; sameness and otherness were subjects for negotiation. It is here that the travelers' *I* is an important category to analyze to understand the effects of otherness on the narratives: the traveler-narrator turns into a figure of transactions between the old world and the new, in terms of both a narrative instance and a material body. The manifestations of the travelers' selves signal anxieties and tensions, and such troubled traces in the texts both sustain and sap the construction of a dominant discourse.

I will start by looking at the conditions that determined travel writing, including both the external circumstances for publication and the representational conventions. The objective is to investigate how the travelers manipulated the codes to forge ways to mediate the island world by working through perspective shifts in the narratives. Next, I will investigate examples where the self is objectified in order to configure knowledge, drawing on physical experience. The analysis of such an experimental self, as I call it, will be followed by an analysis of interactions with enslaved and Indigenous peoples. Looking at the figure of the commentary, I will investigate how travelers put the self in strategic use to negotiate enslavement, in terms of both a topic and a reality. Relationships to Indigenous peoples will be examined as an issue of cultural influence. This will ultimately lead me to a critical discussion of how the travelers take on the posture of an intermediary between worlds that are both under the influence of and distant from the tropics.

## SELF AS MEDIATOR

Early modern published texts are embedded in paratexts (Maclean 1991; McCabe 2016; Smith and Wilson 2011), constituting what Dominique Maingueneau would call the conditions for the traveler-narrators' enunciation, conditions that run through the narratives (2004, 34). In particular, larger published travelogues organized in sections, more or less based on the model of Plinian natural and moral history, contain internal paratexts such as introductory passages to specific parts, giving them an architectural structure with various entrances (Kullberg 2020, 80–92; Ouellet 1990). The idea of paratexts traversing the narrative implies that they are integral to it; they are not artificial ornaments separate from the body of the texts. The relationship between the frames and the content should rather be considered in terms of interaction. In a way they concretize the gap between codes for representation and the represented world, and at the heart of that interaction, we find the traveler-narrator, moving between the rhetorical (textual) and the contextual conditions of the narrative. This setting frames travel not as an account of solitary adventure but as a space of sociability.

Yet that space of sociability was not uniform. This was indeed typical for travel writing at the time: travelers spoke for different interests and addressed various audiences. Travel writing is thus always to some extent based on a multiple-narrative voice. Moreover, it is not just composed of the travel-narrator's observations; the entire structure builds on other sources (letters, edicts, memoirs, and so on) and other discourses (cited passages from other voyagers, savants or from locals). This way, the traveler-narrator is as much a distributor of discourses as an observer of foreign places. But even if the genre of travel writing was malleable and allowed for experimentation, the dynamics between generic rules and the world described were complicated in the context of early colonialism. Combining erudite descriptions of nature with *galant* adventures, for instance, was not in itself problematic, but travel writing in France had been formed through encounters with other, less faraway places, with other political contexts than what was about to take shape in the Caribbean. The newly established colonies entailed an amalgamation of interests. Patronage could extend not only to financiers of the book proper but also to investors in the trading companies and to religious orders, whose roles and interests were not yet clear. Concerning the multiplication of stylistic registers mirroring the implied audiences, the dominating register ties into

observation and description of the natural world and of society, but without following a fixed model for organizing the information. My point here is to suggest that travel writing in the Caribbean worked to carve out a conceptual but also an economic, a political, a religious, and an aesthetic space for the islands in France.

To understand what this entailed on a representational level, I will start by mapping the audiences and their functions. Patrons validated the content, both in terms of the quality of the writing and of its truthfulness and relevance, and promoted it to specific audiences (Regourd 2008). Missionary accounts, often placed among scholarly, religious, and courteous discourses, had to be scrutinized and confirmed by the head of the Orders of the Catholic Church that would validate the moral and political content as well as the utility for future missions. Yet, for the majority of published accounts from the Caribbean, including those written by missionaries, it seems more important to acknowledge worldly patrons over spiritual ones in the paratexts, suggesting that the political and economic tended to override the spiritual in the larger context. Jesuit missionary Bouton (1640) dedicated his text to the “messieurs de la Compagnie des Isles de l’Amérique,” indirectly evoking Nicolas Fouquet. Dominican Du Tertre depended on Achille de Harlay, father and son, who were important investors in the establishment of the islands and also held central positions in France’s political life and erudite circles. The publication of the last volume of his *Histoire générale des Antilles* in 1671 appeared under the patronage of Bignon, newly appointed as head of the Royal Library and close to Colbert, which could facilitate a favorable reception of Du Tertre’s book in scholarly circles and in the center of political power (Kullberg 2020, 47–49). According to the anonymous author of a short biography of Du Tertre (1844, 16), Colbert made additions to the final volume that came out in 1671. In other cases, the embedded structure of travel writing had several functions at once, as in mission accounts determined by both religious and political discourses.

Missionary texts constructed an evangelical rationale behind the settlement, which allowed for distinguishing French colonial claims as supposedly less driven by profit than the English and the Dutch, and tied them to the Counter-Reformation in Europe. The travelers would then use this narrative task to indirectly justify and promote their own work. As priest for the Order of Senglis, Biet, for instance, was sent as chaplain for the settlers and not as a missionary. His critique of the failures of evangelization should be read as a way to advocate for a new religious strategy in the

islands: that the role should be not to convert Caribs but to serve the monarchy by surveilling the colonies. Biet writes in the preface that he is not afraid to be taken for an imposter “because Monsieur Bigot godson of the late Monsieur de Roiville our General, a good and flawless man, can assure that he has helped me to write all the things that the Reader will see in all the rest of this voyage” (1664, NP).<sup>2</sup> Of course, Monsieur Bigot may not necessarily have intervened in the actual writing, even if the quote leads us to believe that that was in fact the case. His role as a “ghost writer” to use an anachronistic expression figuratively, is conceived of as being direct in so far as his presence solidifies the account and thus gives weight to Biet’s endorsement of a mission that would focus on keeping order in the new colonial society rather than converting Natives.

Clearly, the auctorial position is not only multiple; it is also malleable. The travelers inhabit what Jérôme Meizoz (2007) calls a literary “posture,” both within and outside the texts. Drawing on literary discourse analysis, Meizoz argues that such a posture is created at the crossroads between a text (through rhetorical modalities) and its institutional, aesthetic, and epistemic context (17). The point is obviously to say something about twentieth-century authors in regard to the late modern literary field, but the notion of posture is indeed relevant for early modern writers as well although the stakes were different. The way the travel-narrators positioned themselves could change from one edition to the next depending on the patron, even if it is the same trip that is being accounted for. Rochefort’s *Histoire naturelle des Isles de l’Amérique* was re-edited three times during the seventeenth century—1658, 1667, and 1681. This happened even if the status of the book in France was unsure, due to him being a Protestant and to the accusation made by Du Tertre that he had stolen Du Tertre’s manuscript (Roux 2011). But Rochefort apparently found a way to manage his marginal position, precisely by presenting himself differently in the prefaces and by activating useful patrons. When Rochefort republished the book in 1667, the same year as Du Tertre’s second edition came out, he included four letters from key actors in the establishment—two letters from Poincy the governor of Saint-Christophe who had passed away in 1661, one from de Val Croissant de la Palme en Amérique, and one from Édouard Graeves, governor of the French colony in Florida—to assure the reader of his eligibility as a *relateur*.

<sup>2</sup> Je ne crains point que l’on m’y puisse accuser de fausseté, puisque Monsieur Bigot filleul de feu Monsieur de Roiville nostre General, homme de bien & sans reproche, peut assurer qu’il m’a aidé à écrire toutes les choses que le Lecteur verra dans toute la suite de ce Voyage.

The preface quarrel between Du Tertre and Rochefort is important. It demonstrates how travel writing in the Caribbean worked to shape a discourse—a network of texts constructing a body of knowledge—through the positioning of the travelers in relation to one another, to their protectors, and to the circles where their texts would be received (Regourd 2008). Both were read by participants of one of Paris's most important scientific circles, the Montmor Academy, consisting of mathematicians, astronomers, and physicians (Brown 1934; Cunningham and Roger 1996; Regourd 2008; Stroup 1990). Du Tertre refers to his protector's cabinet of curiosity and library as sites of distribution for his book. Rochefort explicitly explains which sources he has used as a model for the form of his account. Illustrations also play a role here: Rochefort states that he has received charts and architectural drawings from Monsieur de Poincy. Du Tertre's engraver, Sébastien Le Clerc, is at the beginning of his career but was probably at the time of the publication of *Histoire Générale des Antilles* already associated with the newly established *Académie des Sciences et de l'Art* (Préaud 1983). Throughout the narratives, traveler-narrators will manifest themselves and refer to important figures within erudite circles, such as unspecified professors at the University of Paris or, more specifically, the King's gardener, and directly address the curious reader.

Taken together, the paratexts and the preface games are textual spaces for flattery that can be regarded as exercises in classical rhetoric, where the traveler situates himself in relation to other travelers and to the different societies and people on whom they depend. At the same time, they form a kind of epistemic pillar in that they validate the account, thus assuring the reader that the text that will follow is not pure fiction but a reliable source of knowledge. But there is more to it. The traveler-narrators appear as a multiple narrative voice, and this in turn makes for a play with perspectives and with various discourses on which the narratives build. All of this will affect the representations of the islands. I am suggesting that while travelers might have limited auctorial agency, they use their embedded position strategically in the narratives.

The first articulation of such strategy appears in the interaction between paratext and text and infuses the narratives with dialogism, staging a direct communication between text and context. It resurfaces throughout the narratives each time the traveler mentions circles or individuals in France. Du Tertre encounters ginger for the first time in Paris and recalls that moment when he tastes and describes it in the context of Guadeloupe. References to debates and mentions of specific readers inscribe that link to

Europe in the body of the texts. Knowledge is thereby constructed through a double spatiality, secured by the traveler-narrator. In Maurile de Saint-Michel's account, for instance, the manifestation of the self frames the image of the islands as a speech act that reverses the perspectives: France is "over there" even though it is made clear in the preface that the text was written a long time after Maurile de Saint-Michel had already returned to France. *Icy*—"here"—refers to the Caribbean as if the account was written *in situ* from a local point of view: "In France, our Frenchmen slept in good beds, & and here in beds hanging in the air that the Savages make themselves and name Hamats [sic]: I have shown one to our Fathers in Paris..." (1652, 30–36).<sup>3</sup> Life in France is rendered in the past tense, whereas the Caribbean practices are in the present. The spatial adverb shifts the perspectives and displaces the narrator, making him a traveler within the text while at the same time clearly linking him to the archipelago.

Distance between the worlds is incrustated in the texture of the narrative by means of the dialogic structure. What differs between travelers is how this distance is worked through in the narratives. Maurile de Saint-Michel, in the example above, displays a dynamic between the two time-spaces, producing difference and tension. In other cases, the considerable cultural and geographical distance between France and the islands may cause disturbances. The traveler-narrator holds the position of mediating that distance, either using it as dynamic fuel or overcoming it. Borrowing from Philippe Lejeune's terminology for autobiographical writing, Ouellet (2010, 12, 20–21) theorizes the web of voices surrounding and determining travel writing in terms of "pacts" first between the traveler and his protector, then between the traveler and the world he describes, and finally between the traveler and the reader. What may be noted in early colonial Caribbean travelogues is that not only do these pacts overlap; they also include the reader and the Caribs as (fictive) travelers. This leads to the second strategic use of the paratexts in the representations of the islands: the traveler-narrators *activate* the worlds they describe so that mobility becomes part of a representational strategy that connects the "savage" space of the islands with that of sociability in France.

This strategy is particularly prominent in Dominican Chevillard's *Les Dessins de l'éminence de Richelieu* (1659), published under the protection

<sup>3</sup> Dans la France nos François couchoient dans de bons lits, & icy dans des branles en l'air que les Sauvages font eux-mêmes & les nomment *Hamats*: l'en monsté un à Paris à nos Pères.



of M<sup>me</sup> de Montmoron, a famous *préciseuse*, who assured that the book would be welcomed within the salon culture. The narrative is framed through a discourse of desire in a language embellished with precious style. Chevillard's narrative is presented as a travelling book that transports the people of the Caribbean to France. Like lovers, the Caribs supposedly adored the Catholic religion unconditionally and the patroness is placed as their guide in the mysterious land of Christianity. M<sup>me</sup> de Montmoron is pictured as the guiding star for the book in France; it was she who made the passage to America possible: "You have already been a lighthouse for the book as it crossed the oceans" (1659, NP).<sup>4</sup> This is part of the rhetorical frames of the preface game, where the narrator presents the foreign world as a gift to the patron.

The passage sketches out a triangular structure—the reader/patron, the narrator, and the foreign lands—within which the narrative voice negotiates. It draws up a closed system of circulation, projecting structures of power fundamental to European society that will be repeated throughout the centuries in different settings and violently enacted through the trans-Atlantic triangular trade (Miller 2008, 4–5). There is thus a political motivation undergirding the dialogic structure, paired with the ambition to move the reader. Here lies a representational challenge: travel writing should not only inform about foreign worlds; it should be able to transport the reader. The editor of the French translation of *Histoire des flibustiers aventuriers* writes in the preface that Exquemelin "expresses himself so vividly in regard to everything that appears so that those who do not feel like leaving their country think that they travel with him."<sup>5</sup> The idea, then, is to bridge distance through means of movement: metaphorically to bring the reader along but also rhetorically to move them and thereby spur the imagination and seduce them. The dialogic stance set up by the embeddedness becomes a narrative tool to activate the imagination and better showcase the islands.

The most illustrative example can be found in the unpublished letters of Jesuit missionary Le Breton, who was stationed in Martinique and evangelized among the Natives on Saint Vincent in the 1680s. He directly addresses his reader:

<sup>4</sup>Vous lui avez déjà servi de phare pour repasser l'Océan.

<sup>5</sup>S'exprime si vivement sur tout ce qui se presente, que ceux qui n'ont poins envie de quitter leur país, croyent voyager avec luy.

if you board a boat to get closer, insensitively, progressively, [the island] will expose itself to your eyes. Oh! What a spectacle it offers in this moment, one can hardly believe it, and what beauties and what marvels, by successive paintings so to speak, it touches the mind! [...] I hear you: sickened after a painful crossing, you suggest that you would land over there. Right, I would like to very much; if you take away all the North region (and a bit of the East while you are at it), which ruffled by a long line of reefs, shivers in winds that blow in a sinister way, beaten by the random movements of a very agitated sea, in any bay of the south or in the west it is possible to set anchor securely, without any risk, because all of this coast line lacks sea beds and reefs. Without any delays then, let us land. (1982, 36)<sup>6</sup>

Le Breton constructs the reader as a traveler and a protagonist who has just seen land after a long, tiresome journey. The islands reveal themselves gradually as the reader approaches the coast in a pinnace along with the narrator. From the pinnace, the coast lines of Saint Vincent are unveiled until they finally reach a peaceful harbor. The mental state of the reader/traveler adds a layer to the description: the island is even more appealing through the eyes of an exhausted traveler who has finally found a haven, contrasting the hardship of the journey with the calmness and luxury of the islands. And whereas dangers are hinted at (reefs, strong winds, agitated sea), they are securely contained in the image thanks to the knowledgeable guidance of the traveler-narrator.

The passage is a striking example of a strategy of doubling the perspectives and working with contrasts. The temporal perspective is deferred: by using direct invocation, the temporal distance that separates travel from writing is transcended. Narrative enunciation and visibility coincide on the pages of the book, giving the impression that the traveler takes the reader by the hand and brings him along to the faraway places. The present is carved into the narrative as a temporary vanishing point where the reader

<sup>6</sup> Si vous montez sur un bateau pour en approcher davantage, insensiblement, progressivement, [l'île] se découvrira d'elle-même à vos yeux. Oh ! quel spectacle elle offre à ce moment, on aurait peine à le croire, et quels agréments et quelles merveilles, pour ainsi dire par tableaux successifs, elle touche l'esprit ! [...] Je vous entends: éccœuré par une pénible traversée, vous vous proposez d'aborder là-bas. Soit je veux bien; si vous exceptez toute la région du Nord (et tant soit peu celle de l'Est) qui, hérissée d'une longue file d'écueils, frissonne aux vents soufflant de façon sinistre, battue aussi par les mouvements en tous sens d'une mer prodigeusement agitée, dans n'importe quelle baie du Sud ou de l'Ouest il est possible de jeter l'ancre avec assuranc, sans aucun risque, car toute cette côte est dépourvue de bas-fonds et d'écueils. Sans délai donc, abordons.

and the narrator can merge and (re)experience the travel: the narrative perspective is not that of an all-seeing but absent eye, but that of a present, seeing body. The traveler deploys what Maurice Merleau-Ponty would have called an embodied vision, which Christine Buci-Glucksmann holds as typical for the Baroque (2013, 39). In Le Breton's case, it is a rhetorical construct rather than a result of direct observation. But even as narrative perspective is here used to tease the imagination, the vision it engenders is, in the words of Buci-Glucksmann, "*an operation*, an act that generates a multiplicity of perspectives, the division of the visible, the invention of an aesthetic within a rhetoric that will stage it and control its effects in order to better convince and seduce" (2013, 5). Le Breton does not simply picture a reader; he invents the reader as an agent, asking what they see as they travel along. In so doing, he manipulates both the world of reception and the world described.

There is a profound ambivalence here. Focusing on seducing the audience, the embodied perspective evacuates lived experience on the islands. It is used to animate a coded imagery of paradisiac islands to promote the new establishments. Not only is distance erased, but the brutal aspects of settlement are wiped away. The mediation secures a fiction, a desire for control over the island world. Yet in staging reader and traveler together, the narratives leave traces of this fictionalization they construct, suggesting that there is no direct, transparent translation of the world of the islands to the world of Europe. The literary devices thus expose the need for a passage between worlds so that disturbances can be avoided. The narratives simultaneously mark and bridge these ruptures. This also says something about the epistemic basis of the texts. Knowledge of foreign worlds is constructed through a dialogic invocation of the senses, propelling imagination and creativity, which recalls Ofer Gal's and Raz Chen-Morris's qualification of the "baffling paradox" of Baroque science, where "objective knowledge relied on the mind's creative, *poetic*, engagement" (2013, 7). Through this lens, the inclusion of the reader operates as an epistemic passage: it enables engagement with the place through a fictive construction of travel. It is on this note that the interaction between the paratextual and the textual turns into a representational strategy. By enacting the relationship to the audience, the narratives actualize multiple perspectives. This is a way to redirect the narratives toward the Caribbean and simultaneously construct the traveler-narrators as mediators between the worlds. From this point, they can also distribute the narrative to other voices and discourses to further strengthen the sense of engagement.

What we may conclude from these analyses is that distant observation is not enough; the mediation between worlds requires narrative embodiment, whether to exoticize or to engage in the foreign world. That embodiment is created through structure and style in order for the narrator to fill the function of a guide who leads the readers, so that they observe and live the places described together. Or he posits himself as a reader, affected by the representation of the islands. Taken together, the rhetorical seduction, the passages provoking the senses, form a narrative that can contain the islands within recognizable frames while constantly bordering on the uncontainable otherness (storms, earthquakes, passing the ocean, “Savages”). And whereas this position may be carved out in highly coded narratives, it exposes an underlying tension, hinting that the prerequisite for the narrative is the experience of difference and distance.

### EXPERIMENTAL SELF

When Du Tertre describes the *acoma*, one of the largest endemic trees of the Caribbean, he writes that the fruits are almost like olives but bigger, and the leaves are large and long like pine trees [*bois épineux*] but they are smooth and wide. He further includes a brief anecdote about a free Black man taking the sap from the *acoma* to cure Du Tertre of his toothache (1667 t2, 158). The tree is vision, touch, taste, and practice, constructed through knowledge from Europe, his own experience, and the exchange with others. In this setting, the traveler’s self assures the transmission of knowledge. But it does so by another kind of embodiment than what we saw in the first section of this chapter. Du Tertre uses his own body as a laboratory. It is through his touch, smell, and direct experience of the tree and its effects on the body that knowledge is constructed. There are several examples of this method to gain knowledge, where the body helps to textualize strange phenomena and plants. Travelers describe how they react after eating a certain plant to give examples to future voyagers. Maurile de Saint-Michel tellingly ends his narrative with very hands-on advice to the reader who wants to undertake the same journey. He warns them not to eat certain fruits, not to nap after dinner (to avoid fevers), and so on (1652, 287). I argue here that these examples constitute the self as a site for knowledge production where the effects of the other world can be detected.

This observation leads us from rhetoric embeddedness and embodied perspectives to an analysis of instances where the self is constituted in such a way that it can serve as a basis for epistemological claims. As a narrative

instance, the first person is a meta-narrative marker, which underscores the links to the audience. Expressions like “I forgot to inform you...” or “as I mentioned earlier” tie the narrative web together while enhancing the bond with the reader. The traveler also intervenes in the first person singular to justify certain narrative and stylistic choices and to announce what will be covered in the section in question. Moreover, the traveler-narrator appears in encyclopedic passages to ensure the link between description and empirical observation. These manifestations are often generic and expressed in phrases such as “I noted” or “I saw,” tying observation to narrative voice. The *I* serves as a veracity marker, sometimes accompanied with brief evocations of how a “curious” object was localized and collected as well as how others have described it.

As rightly observed by Ouellet (2010, 18), the emergence of the self, both as a meta-narrative marker and as a veracity marker, testifies to the difficulty of textualizing the foreign world. It cuts through the narrative, fragmentizing the story, and in this movement these interventions show that the travel-narrator cannot create a coherent and smooth narrative out of the heterogeneous elements in island society. Instead, knowledge is presented as it is acquired in the moment, as processual rather than established. Moreover, in many cases, the subjective markers only open the description; following “I have seen...” the traveler-narrator fades away. In other words, the visual presence of the narrator-traveler reveals little of how knowledge is constructed via the self. The texts clearly confirm Gascoigne’s (2013) claim that empirical observations of the natural world did not alone foreground the scientific revolution that would take place in the eighteenth century. Rather, the senses are used by the travelers to motivate the categorization of the world based on the Ancient Greek and Roman world view and contributed with enriching the numbers of details rather than forging a new episteme.

In the tensions that arise when empirical observations of the islands based on the senses are subsumed under existing models for writing and thinking, another aspect of the self becomes apparent. Not just the body but the self of the traveler becomes the site for experimentation. The self is, in other words, objectified. What we have is not solely an embodied vision but a construction of knowledge that is embodied and yet distanced from the narrative *I*. It is precisely in the position of an intermediary that the traveler expresses a desire for mastering this complex world. Yet in the same movement, the traveler becomes a site for experimenting with ideas of self as affected by otherness: an embodied mind that not only has seen but has experienced the islands he describes.

We can find evidence for such an experimental self, positioned at once as subject and object of the narration, in Labat's account from the end of the seventeenth century. As mentioned earlier, his *Nouveaux Voyages aux Isles de l'Amérique*, published for the first time in 1722 and re-edited six years later, is quite different from the others particularly in regard to the subjective stance: here we have a voyager who places himself in the center of the narration and who speaks assertively from his subjective position. After having included the usual praises for the protector, Labat proceeds in the preface to present his narrative as a journal whose form is not modelled on previous travelers nor the Ancients; it follows his own "natural inclination." To some degree he still works within the coded genre of the paratexts, but he uses them as a site to refute the Plinian structure of natural and moral history, calling it dogmatic and tedious. Aesthetics prevail as a rationale for the construction of the narrative: Labat advances that a "classic" natural history would not only bore and confuse the reader but also the writer: "I thus preferred to follow my journal and write things down as I saw, learned or practiced them [...]" (1722 t1, xxxv).<sup>7</sup> What is interesting is that not even here, where the narrative is built around the perspective and voice of the voyager, does subjective vision assert knowledge. Quite to the contrary, Labat claims that many travelers have *seen* the islands, but only he has *known* them.

What does this mean, knowing the islands? On the one hand it is for Labat a question of presence and immersion in the life of the islands. Biet and Rochefort are both refuted on this basis: they never really lived or took part in island society. On the other hand, the object of the narration seems to matter. Labat applauds Du Tertre for having told the history of the islands but criticizes him for not focusing on nature. The argument hints at what will be constitutive for European thinking about nature: it is separate from history. However, Labat further notes that the nature worth describing consists of colonial implants, notably sugar production. In the context of the colonies, nature is paradoxically excluded from history and inscribed in cultivation. Labat basis his argument for writing on the islands on his own position in regard to the colonies. He *knows* the islands because he *practices* sugar production, he observes nature in time, and, most importantly, he experiences life on the islands.

<sup>7</sup>J'ai donc mieux aimé suivre mon Journal, & écrire les choses à mesure que je les ai vûës, apprises ou pratiquées.

Tellingly, Labat's book is ornamented by a frontispiece with a portrait of himself and not with an allegorical representation of early colonial encounters, as is the case with Du Tertre's and Rochefort's (Fig. 3.1).



Fig. 3.1 Labat *Nouveaux voyages aux Amériques* (1742). Frontispiece. Source: [gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France](http://gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France). Public domain

The frontispiece from the 1742 edition shows an authoritative traveler, whose sharp gaze penetrates the environment as well as the inner thoughts of the people he encountered. Labat is not a missionary who speaks in the name of somebody else. This is indeed *his* story, and his links between the colony and France are symbolized by the schooner that can be spotted on the ocean in the background. Yet nobody can fail to see that Labat is carried by an anonymous enslaved man who looks straight at the beholder. The man holds Labat's portrait in his arms and uses his bended knee to support the weight. There is no ambiguity here as to what labor enabled his practice and motivated missionary activity on the islands. The presence of the enslaved man is a double signifier, for it hints both at the objective and at the material condition of Labat's mission—convert Africans who were sold and forced to work for them. The snake that is placed under the frame is interesting. Martinique was known as the snake island, so it could be a geographical indication. However, there is more to it. Snakes were the one thing Labat feared more than anything during his years on the island. The serpent's presence in the portrait could be read as a symbol of the missionary's triumph over deadly creatures and other threats in the Caribbean. Alternately, the frontispiece captures that which cracks his authoritarian control over the depiction of the islands. The fear of snakes is related to the vulnerability of the (white) body in the tropics. Thus, the snake points at the multiple facets of the self in a narrative constructed around the first person singular: Labat is both authoritarian and subjected to the environment, subject and object at the same time.

While most travel accounts from the islands contain numerous descriptions of people suffering from all sorts of ills, with long digressions concerning different kinds of remedies and medical plants and stones, no other traveler stages himself when sick to the extent that Labat does. *Maladie* is the word opening his book. A contagious disease had killed a large number of missionaries, and due to these fatalities the then-30-year-old Labat got the opportunity to be stationed as a missionary in Martinique. Even before embarking for the Caribbean he fell ill. While waiting for the ship in La Rochelle, he was struck by a fever so “furious that one thought I was heading for a journey where one doesn't need a ship” (1722 t1, 20–21).<sup>8</sup> Thanks to his rhetorical skills and the ignorance of the other missionaries, who thought that the vivid red color of his cheeks was a sign of health rather than high temperature, he managed to persuade the captain

<sup>8</sup> Si furieux qu'on crut que j'étois à la veille d'un voyage où je n'aurois besoin de vaisseau.



to let him board the ship despite his condition. The fever continued for several days and people assumed him dead. But Labat survived and remained healthy during the rest of his journey across the Atlantic. The initial scene detailing Labat's own disease and recovery (and even pseudo-resurrection) is repeated throughout the travelogue; several subsequent passages describe how the missionary falls ill and recovers. Medical discourse was still in the seventeenth century considered to be part of the description of nature and therefore a given theme in travel accounts. Such imbrication between medicine and natural description would suggest that, in describing their own illnesses, travelers indirectly placed themselves within the foreign natural world (Wisecup 2013). There is thus no fixed distinction between nature and culture; it is a fluid zone where the self seems to be the instance separating or merging the two.

Labat's first auto-description of illness serves to give him a space and a role within the early colony. He fell severely ill during his first year in Martinique: one Thursday after mass, he writes, "I suddenly was attacked by a headache as strong as if I had received a blow from a hammer" (1722 t1, 435).<sup>9</sup> The headache was followed by back pain, and he had to be carried to bed, where he developed a high fever. The symptoms were immediately recognized as yellow fever,<sup>10</sup> and Labat received treatment: blood was drained from his feet in order to prevent the disease from reaching his brain. Labat relates how he vomited blood, was covered with black spots and fell into a deep sleep, during which he sweated "the rest of the venom." Even if the sickness has a clear place in the passage, the description is first and foremost an account of the care he received from fellow missionaries and other friends, all of them named in the passage. This is not a heroic recovery: he survives thanks to a community of people who know the Antillean environment, the inconveniences, and the remedies. When Labat ultimately arises from his sick bed, he has been transformed: he has "changed skin." The idea to slough off his skin not only associates Labat himself with the snakes he loathes; sickness becomes a trope for a kind of acclimation process: by surviving the fever Labat has proven himself worthy of belonging to a Caribbean community. He was not born on the

<sup>9</sup>Je me sentis tout d'un coup attaqué d'un violent mal de tête comme si j'eusse reçu un coup de marteau.

<sup>10</sup>For a study of the historical agency of sickness, notably tropical disease in the context of colonization, see J.R McNeill's *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (2010).

islands but through malady he stages a re-birth and Labat posits himself as “creole.”<sup>11</sup> As Adlai Murdoch points out there is an ambiguity in the French understanding of the word creole since it referred to both whites and blacks born in the colonies (2016, 103). Labat is neither of those but strangely, as we shall see later on, he appears, with Kamau Brathwaite’s terms, as “a committed settler” (quoted in Murdoch 2016, 103) who feels an alliance with the island, an alliance which gives him insight into Caribbean life and provides him with knowledge inaccessible to outsiders. According to the theories of the time, Creoles were immune to yellow fever, so surviving this dangerous illness was the ultimate proof that he had become an inhabitant of the islands. He himself thus partly asserts those theories of acclimation in which he was interested (Garraway 2005, 134). Being in the Caribbean transforms his tastes, habits, and physical constitution, enhanced by his love of food—he digests the Caribbean, so to speak, without succumbing to the illness in the process. It is as if he desires to become other but only in so far as he can control the process.

In other words, the description of sickness unfolds into a narrative of how Labat finds his place and integrates into Martinique’s early colonial society. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the story of his slow but steady convalescence is intertwined with descriptions of the landscape and, more particularly, of his own plantation, Fonds Saint-Jacques. During his convalescence, Labat cares for his garden, so not only does he himself recover; he reanimates his plantation. But he does not stop there: by telling about how he gives an orange tree from his garden to one of his beneficiaries in Paris and has it sent across the Atlantic, Labat manages to weave an intricate pattern between the islands and the imperial center. Via his own recovering body, he thus turns sickness into a narrative motor in the story of how his self painfully but successfully becomes an intermediary between France and the islands. The sick body functions as a modality, linking the voyager to the outside world, giving malady purpose and meaning. Interestingly, the subsequent chapter also deals with illness but addresses the illness of the enslaved Africans and Creole young women. In contrast with Labat’s physical endeavor, Black people and women are linked to inner suffering (melancholia and mental illness). As opposed to Labat’s own “real” illness, their maladies are classified as silly superstition,

<sup>11</sup> The word *créole* is used in French for the first time in 1670 and is rarely used in the texts studied here. I will come back to the linguistic and identitarian implications of the term in the next chapter.

and the physical pain and even deaths due to these “fantasies” are described as self-imposed by eating dirt. There is a particular topology of illness that is worth studying, and a lot could be said about the links between the body of the self and the body of the other in this context (see Williard 2021b, 89–90). Here I am interested in Labat’s framing of women’s and enslaved peoples’ diseases in relation to his own endurance. By describing their illnesses as imaginary and due to anti-social behavior and placing this description next to the chapter dealing with his own recovery from yellow fever, Labat succeeds in using sickness to narrate how he himself merges with the colonial landscape and community while, at the same time, emphasizing his *difference* in regard to women and enslaved peoples. While his difference is beneficial to colonial society, theirs is socially disruptive. Indirectly then, by centering on himself and his ability to overcome a disease, he actually frames the malady that women and enslaved peoples inflict upon themselves as an expression of refusal. For sure, he condemns it as illusionary and a result of impaired minds, nevertheless the evocation of the practice of eating dirt, along with the fact that this practice will be a repeated trope, introduces an embodied presence of the enslaved in the text, hinting not only at a conscious strategy to end one’s gruesome condition, but also at a different world view, based on alternative knowledges and experiences that do not enter into Labat’s writing.

Disruptions thus haunt even the most self-assuring narrative sequences. Labat’s own body will eventually turn into an experiment so that his control is again challenged. The second time Labat was afflicted by yellow fever, sickness takes on a different role. In these descriptions body and mind are objectified in order to construct medical knowledge. When Labat got ready to return from a brief sojourn in the city of Saint-Pierre in 1697, he felt “attacked by a violent pain in the head and in the kidneys, accompanied by heavy fever, sure signs of yellow fever” (1722 t4, 2).<sup>12</sup> Like the first time, yellow fever *attacks* the missionary, only this time he knows what will follow. Using the reflexive *je me sentis attaqué*, Labat inserts a split between the writing subject and the body experiencing the violent pain caused by the disease. The same sentence structure reappears later on when he details his physical reactions: “I was taken by a cough, or rather by a very strong vomit of blood that made me fall

<sup>12</sup>Je me sentis attaqué d’une violente douleur de tête & de reins, accompagnée d’une grosse fièvre.

into convulsions” (2).<sup>13</sup> Instead of portraying himself in the act of vomiting, Labat makes the physical reaction the very agent of the sentence. The vomit takes over the writing subject. The narrative choice of writing the symptoms as agents underscores how the disease takes control. So if the “classic” travelogue is structured around the connection between the observing eye and the writing *I*, the one developed by Labat in this passage depends on the narrative split between the sick body and the writing subject, where the experience of the disease connects the one to the other. The visual autopsy of the outside world is now replaced by an autopsy of sensation and physical experience. Labat is “surprised by lethargy,” again suggesting that he is reduced to a mere object ruled by the disease. A similar structure reappears in the passage describing an unidentified disease from which Labat suffered a year later.

This illness is given an entire chapter, starting with a simple observation that on the third of November, “I was attacked by a long and dangerous disease,” and ending on a scientific note with a description of the *ipecacuanha*.<sup>14</sup> Fever is personified, and caught in a state of somnia the missionary loses his agency. The descriptions of illness are thus governed by observation and deduction, but the constitution of knowledge is no longer based on the visual, as in the first descriptions of illness. Now it stems from the realm of physical and sensuous experience: Labat does not see the signs as much as he *feels* them. In all of the depictions of illness the narrative “suspense” lies in the details of the unfolding disease since we already know the outcome. Labat will survive, but the description is so vivid that the reader is drawn in by the disease and momentarily forgets that it will pass. However, the motive is not to move the reader sentimentally. Rather, the sensational aspects seem to serve as support for empirical knowledge: they are part of the disease; they speak about the disease and help to identify and define it. Once he has recovered, he can rationalize and turn the sensations into knowledgeable discourse. Thus, in the travelogue, Labat’s self is conscious and physical at the same time due to the split, created in the narrative, between the narrated and the narrating subject.

<sup>13</sup> Il me prit un crachement, ou plutôt un vomissement de sang très fort qui me faisait tomber dans des convulsions [...] j’étais obligé de jeter des grumeaux d’un sang épais et recuit.

<sup>14</sup> Samir Boumediene offers an analysis of fever and of the use of *ipecacuanha* (2016, 210).

This way illness turns into a struggle for knowledge, placing the disease and the body at the center, in contrast to the first case of yellow fever when he was dependent on the people around him: malady is not a fixed trope but evolves along with Labat's sojourn. Having spent three years in Martinique, with knowledge of the environment and the climate, he portrays himself as capable of acting as his own doctor and master of his own body, and he questions the expertise of his fellow missionaries, surgeons, and doctors.<sup>15</sup> For example, he refuses to take the *ipecacuanha* even though this particular plant had a very good reputation at the time and was ordered by a royal doctor who had just arrived in Martinique from France. Instead, Labat preferred to rely on the vernacular knowledge he had acquired during the years on the islands.<sup>16</sup> This adds a dimension to the botanical descriptions that are linked with disease: by virtue of his own illness, Labat not only objectively depicts the plant; he also narrates the prescription, how the medicine is taken, and what effect it has on the body and mind. He initiates the description using the impersonal pronoun "one" and the present tense in the opening sentence, then subtly glides into the subjective mode, announced by transitioning from the present to the past tense. The focal subject comes back after a long digression, depicting the characteristics of the plant to describe its internal effects. The experimental self supplements the distant neutral observation. Being both the descriptor and the object for description puts Labat in a unique position for diagnosing and understanding illness. There are several passages underscoring his ability for self-diagnosis: "I myself discovered two days after that I had lost an increasing amount of blood, which augmented my appetite" (1722 t4, 3).<sup>17</sup> Again Labat uses a reflexive syntax to enhance the privileged position of being at once part of the disease and able to describe it from a distance. The medical experts only have access to visible signs, whereas Labat follows the internal, sensuous manifestations of the disease.

Yet, deducting knowledge from sensuous experience implies several difficulties on a narrative level. As the disease progresses he loses

<sup>15</sup>Doctors were common in the Antilles until the eighteenth century with the growth of sugar economy. See Pierre Pluchon *Histoire des médecins et des pharmaciens de marine et des colonies* (1985, 90–93, 98).

<sup>16</sup>There are many examples of him testing Amerindian or African cures or cures he himself made using local products, such as using grease from turtles to relieve chest pain (1722 t4, 232).

<sup>17</sup>Je m'aperçus deux jours après que je rendais du sang dont la quantité s'augmentait de jour en jour, faisait croître mon apétit.

consciousness, from which he ultimately “returns as from a profound sleep” (1722 t4, 2). Here Labat is entirely at the mercy of the disease’s ravages: he falls into spasms, losing all track of time and space, and soon after, he falls deep into sleep, not noticing how he sweats abundantly or how his staff moves him from one bed to another, changing sheets and washing his feverish body. The description is thus structured around a narrative eclipse. The narrative subject is entirely absent in this passage; only the experiencing body remains. Labat then returns as a narrative voice and point of view. After having quickly observed that the room is not furnished the same way it was before he passed out, he can deduce what happened. The entire eclipse puts into focus the very physical and asubjective experience of illness. In this moment, Labat, who usually separates object and phenomenon in order to think and describe clearly and distinctly, constructs knowledge from a more dynamic form of experience, intimately tied to an uncontrollable body. Here, we are beyond empiricism as observation and move toward a Baroque form of experience (Cascardi 2018, 459).

In Labat’s account, the momentary absence of the reasoning mind does not exclude the production of knowledge. On the contrary, valuing physical experience allows him to constitute a new kind of thinking based on a process of decentering the self in order to better understand the illness as an object of knowledge. Being an object of both scientific and anthropological knowledge, the body is integrated into the depiction of alterity and becomes a constitutive part in the process of understanding. Labat’s experience of malady is then the site for a radical form of empiricism that has not yet been translated into the discourse of philosophy but remains explored only within the limits of his chronological travelogue. By turning his own body into a stage where the drama of transatlantic contacts unfolds, Labat is stressing the importance of sensuous experience for thinking about the self in relation to the world. This recalls what Cascardi describes as the “dynamic ontology of the baroque” that seeks to avoid “schematizing our relationship to the world as one between a ‘knowing’ subject (a subject of consciousness) and an object-world to be known” (2018, 458–459). The self emerges in the tension between physical experience, unconsciousness, and conscious analysis of the episode.

On the one hand, Labat’s experimental self translates into a discourse of knowledge and power: he investigates himself in order to assert an authoritative voice. On the other hand, what the narrative analysis has shown is that the fabrication of such authority depends on a momentary

loss of control and a moment of fusion, an openness to the foreign world. This contradictory articulation echoes Christopher Braider's observation about the notion of the self in the seventeenth century: "[...] person itself is experiment: we are what we learn, and then become, as an expression of our interventions in the empirical order of things" (2018, 78). The idea of a separation between self and the world, which is at the basis of modern concepts of subjectivity, is indeed a construction "to interpret a relation in which no such thing is possible" (2018, 78). This is profoundly troubling. Illness is perhaps the most concrete example of how alterity not only enters into the body of the traveler but shapes the self. The martial vocabulary describing sickness (*je me sentis attaqué*) in Labat's text suggests that malady is localized outside: it is the *exo* intruding on body and mind. Here the islands are depicted as foreign and contagious, passing through different channels: climate, nature, and nutrition. The moment when the individual traveler overcomes these threats provides a story of the French community progressively overcoming the dangers of the tropics.

In a way, Labat affirms both the idea that mobility can cause damage to the individual as well as the collective body and the conviction that such damage can be regularized. The traveler's self thus needs to be multiplied and transformative in order to assert that control of the potential threat of foreignness. Labat's experiences of malady and his transformation of this experience into a discourse of knowledge only works because the apparently coherent subject is slippery: it is objectified and becomes a site for experimentation. Perhaps it is not by mere coincidence that Labat's "experimental autopsy" developed in this particular context when the islands transitioned from early to high colonialism. In the confined space of Martinique already mapped out, there is no absolute alterity, so he pushes his chronological travelogue to its extreme, where he himself, by exposing his sick body, ultimately turns into an object for exploration. A traveler engaged in the place for sojourn such as a missionary to colonies is indeed a particularly interesting case for thinking about the self in relation to the world since the goal was also to think through not just the individual traveler's experience but the social body's experience, asking the question of how it would be possible to form and sustain a French society in the Caribbean.

## COMMENTING ON SLAVERY

Writing about Caribs and enslaved peoples brought forward that upon which settlement was built and which was held as fundamentally distinctive from France itself: the expulsion of indigenous peoples and the enslavement of Africans. This implied having to confront, whether directly or through strategies of avoidance, violent dimensions of the early colonization that would jeopardize the construction of the fiction of French involvement in the Caribbean. In the next two sections, I investigate how the traveler-narrator negotiates enslavement and missionary work, arguing that these topics constitute particularly complex sites where influence is played out, both in terms of French influence on the island world and its peoples and the impact of these people on the travelers. Indigenous peoples and enslaved peoples were not presented as autonomous categories in the narratives but are presented in relation to contexts of reception, history, and the development of early colonial society. My point of departure is that otherness is not an absolute category in the travel narratives; rather it is represented as relational, deeply enmeshed in historical and textual contexts: Caribs and diasporic Africans provoke different anxieties in the travelogues. Their othernesses imply different relationships to space, time, and place and function within the burgeoning colonial society.

Texts written before the Franco-British treaty with the Caribs in 1660, like Du Tertre's and Rochefort's, are directly concerned with territorial rights and engage with Caribs as agents in the course of historical events. In this context, it is not surprising to see that Caribs tended to occupy a larger space in the narratives than enslaved people. After 1660, territorial disputes with Natives were no longer an urgent question, and interrelations between them and the French were no longer a part of the societal fabric on the islands to the same extent. But the decreasing Carib impact on the islands occurred in parallel with the increasing presence of the "Savage" as a cultural trope in France. Books such as Du Tertre's contributed to turning the Native Caribbean into an important *objet de curiosité*, leaving the realm of knowledge to enter into the sphere of philosophy, literature, and the arts, grounding the strong French discourse of the "noble savage" that would flourish during the eighteenth century (Chinard 1911, 1913; Atkinson 1924). Travelers knew they would please the audience when writing about Caribs. They also knew that writing about enslaved persons would not attract as much attention as Caribs, and this was not just because they would remind the reader that France did allow enslavement on their territories.



Diasporic Africans did not have a coded frame of representation. They belonged to the lowest cast in Caribbean colonial and settler society and lived in a place to which they did not belong. So while there was a representational scene for describing the “natural inhabitants of the islands,” writing about diasporic Africans implied integrating them into colonial society. What I suggest here is that facing the Caribs, who are native to the region that the French are in the process of territorializing, travelers express an anxiety of influence. Existing as a topos, the Caribs can be integrated into writing, but this process also reveals and puts into text the fear of becoming other, of assimilating with the archipelagic tropics. Enslavement implied other anxieties pertaining to the construction of colonial society and an emergent discourse on racial differences. I will start by looking at how the traveler-narrators express an anxiety about representing and being part of a society built on enslavement and then examine the anxiety of influence in the last section of this chapter.

A comparison between Du Tertre’s two editions demonstrates how the representation of enslavement evolves with the context. In the 1654 edition, he voices critiques against slavery, citing both Ancient sources (Plato) and religious arguments. Slavery is not a defensible institution, neither from the point of view of political philosophy nor from the point of view of the church. Nevertheless, he concludes, it is impossible to force the settlers to abolish the “shameful trade” (1654, 474). The vocabulary is telling: he condemns the practice while seeing it as a part of the emerging colonial capitalist system. Slavery is a trade and not yet a societal structure. At the publication of the 1667 edition, the number of slaves had increased significantly, and plantations prospered. The Dominican mission had also begun to shift its focus from converting Natives to converting enslaved persons. In this context, Du Tertre states that he will only approach the subject as a “historian” and not express any opinion regarding the jurisprudence of the practice. Most notably, the comment suggests that he will no longer speak as a religious person or even in his own voice. In other words, Du Tertre takes on a role in order to write about a topic toward which he is clearly hesitant on a personal, religious, and philosophical level, but which he considers a political and societal necessity. The stand is profoundly contradictory, as he is prompt to comment on both the practice and the people involved in it at the same time as he seems to eschew it, as if he wanted to give the impression that they did not really constitute an important part of early colonial society. Thus, between the lines emerges a profoundly troubling aspect of (early) global modernity that anticipates the violence it has set in motion but denies it in the name of progress.

There was indeed an unwillingness to engage directly with the subject of enslavement; the topic was fraught with “fundamental absences” (Harrigan 2018, 2) and “representational displacements” (Dobie 2010, 5). This calls for an investigation of how enslavement, filtered through the travelers’ self, becomes a textual site where both power over and exploration of the new society are displayed in terms of what has been identified as ambivalence (Miller 2008; Dobie 2010; Harrigan 2018; Williard 2021a). All travelers defend slavery in one way or another. Most missionaries had slaves in their parishes, and as representatives for the interest of the French habitants working for the maintenance of the settlements, they are trapped between a moral abstract reasoning and direct involvement in the island societies.<sup>18</sup> Even Labat, who bought and owned enslaved persons and did not refrain from detailing severe torture that he sometimes carried out himself, raised the issue of the profound immorality of keeping converted souls in slavery (Harrigan 2018, 145). The role of religion, not institution of slavery itself, is the issue of Labat’s concern. Nevertheless, his comment tells that there was indeed a fundamental ambivalence undergirding the theme. I read that ambivalence not as a sign of silencing slavery but as an expression of an ongoing conceptualization of the societies in formation that disturbed the traveler’s ability to perform as a mediator between worlds.

I propose approaching the topic at the intersection between abstraction, direct experience, and context by looking at an important feature in travel writing (Ouellet 2010, 4), namely the commentary. Furetière’s dictionary (1690) defines *commentaire* as an “interpretation” and “addition” to the core text, in travel writing often in the form of *exemplum*, a brief anecdote exemplifying the statement made. *Le commentaire* was considered necessary when a text was too difficult or when a particular subject was too obscure, which explains their given place in travel writing to far-away locales: strange phenomena required clarification. The commentary thus constitutes an important modality, where writing is weaved into context and ultimately where the self of the traveler emerges in order to navigate between existing discourses and personal experience. Whereas most commentaries simply serve as explanations to descriptions or narrations of historical events, comments pertaining to the inclusion of enslavement

<sup>18</sup>The link between slavery and burgeoning global capitalism has been studied extensively; notably, see Caroline Oudin-Bastide’s *Travail, capitalism et société esclavagiste: Guadeloupe, Martinique (XVIIe-XIXe siècle)* (2005).

and diasporic Africans are more complex; they are deeply enmeshed in ongoing debates, and competing views exist within the same narrative.

In fact, enslavement seems to warrant more comments than other themes, illustrating that this was a subject with multilayered conceptual frames that could not always be adjusted to what the travelers lived and observed on the islands. Travelers did not yet have a fixed idea of what that early colonial society was; quite on the contrary their travel narratives contribute to exploring this society in the making. Part of that complexity is the fact that slavery distorted the mirror between the islands and France, mediated by the travelers' self. Sue Peabody has convincingly demonstrated in her research that France in particular lauded itself for being the nation of liberty, abhorring slavery (1996). There was also a critical debate in France against slavery that began in the sixteenth century (Harrigan 2018, 55; Rushforth 2014, 88–95). Yet, as we know far too well, neither the debate nor the concern with national self-image hindered the French from engaging in transatlantic slavery, and while the topic was perhaps more problematic here than in other European nations, only Rochefort, the Protestant whose books on the islands were published in Rotterdam, stresses that the practice deviates from French and European laws (with the exception of Spain and Portugal, he points out) and that there is “no slavery in France” (1667, 132). The quick reference to Rochefort's discussion shows that slavery is conceptualized as a global contemporary practice but that France cannot inscribe its own practice of slavery into that model.

The idea of slavery as a global phenomenon had been circulating in France since the sixteenth century, and it was understood in a web of religious discourse, ancient philosophical and juridical sources, contemporary debates around natural law, historical and contextual circumstances (Harrigan 2018, 52–64). Since engagement in the burgeoning colonies was motivated by self-interest and profit and the patrons had in most cases invested in the companies or in the missions, there was little discursive space for the travelers to strongly object to either enslavement or the expulsion of peoples. Criticism or doubt had to be voiced indirectly, embedded in personal anecdotes and opinions, backed up by other sources and authors. So rather than tracing a coherent conceptualization of enslavement that could be inferred in a specific voice, the self operates as a relay in a multifaceted web, seemingly functioning as a guarantee that competing perspectives remain, thus hindering the construction of a coherent conceptualization of slavery. It is not that they worked against it.

Quite to the contrary, they set up the threads for modern expressions of racism and for discourses surrounding slavery as a practice.

The travelers used commentary to construct slavery through a prism of comparisons with ancient and contemporary forms of slavery in the Old World as well as in the New. The comparisons allowed precisely for that which Dobie calls representational displacements, enabling the travelers to engage in the controversies around the topic in France. Travelers comment on Indigenous forms of slavery, mostly bondage of war captives, but they also note that Natives bought and kept diasporic Africans enslaved.<sup>19</sup> They further relativized their own practice as enslavers with descriptions of forms of enslavement existing in Africa, as if the European trade simply tapped into already existing societal orders. Pelleprat comments extensively on Africans' habit of selling their wives or children (without specifying the source), whereas nothing is said about the French part of the transaction. Moreover, the material conditions of African societies were juxtaposed to those of the islands. Harsh living conditions forcing parents to sell their children and brutal forms of government allowing sovereigns the right to sell their subjects were presented as reasons why diasporic Africans were better off in the Caribbean, where they were fed.<sup>20</sup>

Another type of comparison is the focus on other European nations' involvement in slavery and the slave trade. Biet, for instance, does not say much about enslavement in the French context but describes in detail British slavery on Barbados, pointing out that this nation treats their slaves worse than everybody else. Here the self emerges in a scene of torture that Biet witnessed: a "poor woman" around thirty-five years old treats the wounds she had received from being burned; Biet is "horrified" (1664, 291). He continues to detail punishments so horrendous he had to intervene himself to stop the course of action (291). The enslaved man who was about to be tortured supposedly threw himself at Biet's feet to thank him. The scene constructs the self as compassionate and humane, which is

<sup>19</sup> Ashley Williard examines the enslavement of indigenous women as a foundational gendered trope in seventeenth-century texts on the Caribbean (2021a, 31). For the relationship between colonial and indigenous slavery, see Brett Rushforth's *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (2014).

<sup>20</sup> This argument will be rebranded by Germain Fromageau in 1690s (Harrigan 2018, 59). He ruled in 1698 that an enslaver had to guarantee that slaves had been acquired by legitimate means (Davis 1966, 197). Implied here is the role of the mission in general, since the religious orders active in the French islands had abandoned the goal of converting Natives by the middle of the century.

precisely the views that Biet will voice in defense of a French “civilized” form of slavery that would also, contrary to the British who did not convert enslaved peoples since English law forbade enslavement of Christians,<sup>21</sup> take care of their souls (292). These “sorts of people,” he states, referring to Africans, had to be treated with “rigor” but there is a limit to the cruelty, for Jesus suffered for them too (291). The politics of the conversion of slaves turned into an operative difference in order to defend French slavery in light of other, supposedly crueler contemporary forms of enslavement, a trope that will persist and evolve during the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries. It still echoes in discourses on race in France up to this day.

The crux is that the comparison intended to promote the French system of inclusion of enslaved persons through evangelization lay bare the most problematic dimension of enslavement, especially from a missionary point of view. The narratives are haunted by the question of whether it is right to keep fellow Christians in slavery (Harrigan 2018, 56). The repeated argument is that enslavement rescued diasporic Africans since it provided them with the opportunity to be converted into Christianity (Miller 2008, 18–19). But this argument inevitably led to the question of whether converted slaves should be freed. This was the opinion of the Capuchin order; they argued that an enslaved person who had been baptized had to be considered a free person. According to them such a system would be beneficial for the entire colony since it would prevent revolts, suicides, and abortions. It would also bring more souls to the church, but the basis of the idea is that transatlantic slavery would engender new free Christians who would make up a society based on cooperation. The Capuchins’ desire to implement such radical missionary politics was met with skepticism, but it was not entirely refuted.

Some resolved the issue by claiming that baptized individuals would indeed be free but not in this world. Conversion had liberated them from enslavement under Satan, but they would remain slaves in flesh until the

<sup>21</sup> On this point, see Richard Ligon’s *Histoire de l’Isle des Barbades* (1657, 84–85). Ligon tells about Samo who wants to know how a compass works. According to the narrative, Samo finds it difficult to understand and after some reflection he expresses the desire to be converted to Christianity, hoping it would provide him with the key to knowledge. Ligon accounts the episode to Samo’s enslaver, who explains that this is impossible due to the English law. The narrative ends with Ligon criticizing the basis for British conversion policies since enslaving a Christian is not the same thing as converting an enslaved person, echoing the French discourse around the issue.

afterlife. Others, like Du Tertre, were caught between the two models. Throughout Du Tertre's comments, one can trace the presence of Aristotle's ideas of natural slavery as a means to forge a new form of slavery. He could thereby separate French slavery from the enslavement of prisoners of war, practiced by Native Caribbeans as well as Africans, according to the travelers' sources, which for Aristotle was monstrous because it forced individuals into servitude. Natural slavery, on the other hand, existed in the interest of community, was based on mutual relationships, and would ideally develop into friendship (Harrigan 2018, 54). However, since Aristotle's philosophy of natural slavery was used by the Spanish to justify the slavery of Indigenous peoples in the sixteenth century, few travelers cited this source.<sup>22</sup> The Spanish arguments were generally refuted in France at the time (Rushforth 2014), and in the context of the early French colonization it was crucial to avoid being associated with Spanish history in the Americas (Harrigan 2018, 55).<sup>23</sup>

But there was another problem with the Aristotelian model: it did not fully adhere to transatlantic slavery in so far as diasporic Africans were indeed forced into slavery, following what Aristotle saw as the monstrous practice of enslaving prisoners of war. It is clear that travelers single out transatlantic slavery as being particularly cruel and dehumanizing: slaves were treated like "beasts" (Rochefort 1667, 135); while horses were used in France, settlers used humans for the same kind of work (Pelleprat 1658, 50; Du Tertre 1667 t2, 475). Du Tertre includes an entire section on the ways in which enslaved individuals were punished but comments that he cannot possibly give an exhaustive picture since there were no codes regulating punishments. The lack of form seems to help him broach the subject, for it prevents him from being exhaustive. He can thus evoke the issue, which is in and of itself an expression of the condemnation of slavery, while avoiding the most gory details so he would not compromise those with interests in the slave trade or the sugar production. Travelers

<sup>22</sup> Maurile de St. Michel uses this binary model to justify transatlantic slavery. He distinguishes between forms of slavery and elaborates on a scale among these forms. There are barbaric forms of enslavement that are contrary to Christianity and civil society, he claims. In so doing, he concurs with anti-slavery arguments circulating in France at the time while at the same time proposing that transatlantic slavery is of a different kind and has its commercial *and* moral (or religious) *raison d'être*.

<sup>23</sup> Clearly, the slave trade and the enslavement of diasporic Africans are thought about together with the history of the *conquista*. When the French repeat Spanish practices, the narratives of these exploits have to present French conduct as different from the Spanish.

also considered transatlantic slavery as being historically produced. Du Tertre in particular is sensitive to the residues of colonial capitalism, which he regards as the foundation of the colonies. At the same time, he argues that the thirst for profit is causing the brutal exploitation of enslaved persons, which he holds as unique to transatlantic slavery. Since the French only went to the islands for the sake of profit, they would inevitably push their slaves to death (1667 t2, 523) and show no compassion, even when individuals were sick (1654, 475). From the perspective of the enslaved individual, it is the prospect of working all their life for another person and not retaining anything for themselves that turns slavery into such a cruel destiny (1667 t2, 525). And, as suggested by Harrigan, here lies the most coercive effect of enslavement in Du Tertre's opinion, namely the awareness of being caught in a condition built on an "unbreachable gap that separated his labour from capital and time" (Harrigan 2018, 185). Du Tertre's main concern is not liberty, but the nature of a person's condition. The slave works for life without the possibility of changing that condition or gaining anything from it. Whether the enslaved persons would make similar conclusions is of course impossible to know from the travelogues. However, the mention of suicides and escapes tell about strong desires to free oneself from that condition.

In other words, the comparative lens is a sign that enslavement was not yet a fixed concept, nor did it have a fixed form. The travelers work through it and try to make sense of it as part of the early colonial society. Yet this exploration also testifies to a desire to construct a new, "good" form of enslavement, meaning that the relational construction of slavery is simultaneously an example of representational displacement. Du Tertre, for instance, seems to suggest that in transatlantic slavery the two forms of slavery identified by Aristotle are intertwined. He explores the possibility of turning an act that was initially monstrous and refutable into a natural condition. On this note, Du Tertre oscillates between a Christian rationale, suggesting that the deportation from Africa enabled conversion, which was a gift; in exchange for perpetual and cruel servitude, they would be granted eternal liberty in the afterlife. More importantly, Du Tertre seeks to configure a social fabric that would keep enslaved peoples in check without abusing them and allow for mutual relationships between enslavers and enslaved, as if the idea of slavery as "social death" could be overcome by inserting another form of sociability, affirming Orlando Patterson's argument that slavery exists and is sustained by an intricate web of social structures and cultural imaginations (1982). Instead of

citing Aristotle, Du Tertre frames the idea of slavery based on friendship, with references to Seneca, supported by personal anecdotes in order to integrate ideals of a form of slavery based on mutual confidence into his own experiences. He pairs this with observations regarding diasporic Africans' infinite love for each other (1667 t2, 500).

Yet the reference is equivocal. While the communitarian bond could be a prerequisite for developing strong relationships between enslaver and enslaved, it also suggests the opposite, that enslavement strengthened internal bonds between diasporic Africans as an expression of protection against enslavers. What is particular with Du Tertre's account is that he inscribes enslaved peoples as agents in the construction of the fraternal model of slavery. Out of his examples emerges a fusion of Catholic religious ethos and what he identifies as diasporic Africans' sense of community. While suggesting that enslaved individuals were an integrated part of early colonial society, Du Tertre's Senecan framework also tends toward a fictionalization of enslavement. Fictionalization function as a Derridean supplement when the social reality of slavery—his direct observation—runs counter to the model he is trying to forge. Curiously, Senecan references become pastoral background scenery, turning the islands into a theatre of illusions, where the reader can imagine a societal fabric of mutual relationships between those who dominate and those who are dominated.

Du Tertre continues to understand enslavement in direct relationship to what he observed on the islands as an enslaver and a missionary. Still he cannot help but question this experience, and he grapples with the injustice of enslavement throughout the chapter. It is significant that Du Tertre explicitly takes on the role of a historian in this context. By taking this posture and by citing the Ancients rather than speaking directly for himself, he can hide his own voice while addressing the issue (Ouellet 2010, 76). It allows for an abstract construction of slavery, which seems necessary in order for him to fully pursue the argument that it is needed in the colonies. A similar shift toward distance can be detected in Labat, who would himself buy slaves and contribute significantly to the plantation industry by developing new techniques for sugar refinement. One of the first things he notes when embarking on the islands is the scars on the backs of the enslaved people who unload the cargo. He speaks in the first person, saying that he is startled, as if these marks signal to him that he is now entering into a new social order. Then he quickly disowns his initial reaction stating that "one gets used to it" (1722 t1, 65). But, in order to



get used to it, the traveler must shift from the first person to the third, thus distancing himself from the emotions the cruel practice provokes. The necessity to create distance when facing the cruelty appears as an indirect effect, a disturbance in the narrative suggesting that even if the narrative generally supports enslavement, the observer had to turn the eye away when faced with the actual practice.

The abstraction of slavery as a topic thus seems to build on a split in the traveler-narrator's self. Yet, we note that when the abstract comment then turns to the *exemplum*, the self reemerges. Rather than a split, this manifestation of the self here mediates experience. Much of the ambivalence seems to stem from these tensions. This becomes more evident when juxtaposing Du Tertre and Labat, oscillating between abstraction and engagement, with Maurile de St. Michel, where experience never interferes with reasoning. Maurile de St. Michel enters in direct conversation with his presumed reader, deploying expressions like "you will say" and "if you suggest..." when arguing for slavery. In a most assertive way, he refers to life on the island to discredit anti-slavery arguments, yet he frames this life as fiction, as a construction from a distanced narrative perspective. Mixing Aristotelian ideas of natural slavery with the Biblical myth of Ham, Maurile de St. Michel concludes the passage on slavery by speaking directly to a group of undifferentiated Africans, identified only by the evocation of the color of their skin: "No longer be surprised, poor Negros, if you are born to servitude and if your bloodline will be slaves until the Last Judgement; it is a punishment for your father's ingratitude" (1652, 91).<sup>24</sup> This is a discourse of authority, though it shares the formal features of dialogism. Direct exchanges with enslaved people are never included in his account.

So on the one hand, we have a pro-slavery argument solidly based on abstraction, mediated by a distanced self. On the other, passages where travelers include experience in their comments open up for ambiguities that may even contradict the pro-slavery stance and rely on an engaged self. The moral dilemmas of travelers who were face-to-face with the cruelty of the bondage they supported turns into a representational dilemma. Du Tertre, for instance, shows at various occasions a consciousness of enslaved peoples' suffering by means of empathy and identification. "It is as if", Du Tertre writes, "the blackness of [Africans'] skin was the trait of their misfortune, one treats them like slaves, one feeds them as one wants

<sup>24</sup>Ne vous etonnez donc plus, pauvres Negres, si vous estes nez à la servitude & si vostre lignée sera esclave jusqu'au jour du Jugement; c'est pour punir l'ingratitude de vostre père.

to, one pushes them to work like animals, and one draws as one wishes until their death all the service of which they are capable” (1667 t2, 493).<sup>25</sup> The comment stems from a troubling sense of empathy, and Du Tertre projects this feeling onto the reader, appealing to identification and pity with the diasporic Africans, at the same time as the mention of blackness serves to signify these individuals’ “condition.” Only black people are treated this way; Du Tertre says it bluntly, and in so doing he is simultaneously racializing their condition and recognizing their suffering.<sup>26</sup> In another passage, he writes, “I don’t know what this nation has done, but it’s enough to be black to be taken, sold, and engaged in a ferocious servitude that lasts all of life” (1667 t2, 494).<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Biet noticed the “trembling” of their voices as a sign of their humanity and compared their faith with that of galley slaves, judging the condition of enslaved Africans as much worse (1664, 291).

Passages building on experience such as these encircle the important role of the shifting self in the construction and maintenance of conflicting views around enslavement. Travel writers became increasingly aware of the unsettling effect of their emotions in relation to enslaved individuals and to the slavery system. But instead of suppressing the emotional effects, they use them in the articulation of a “human,” Catholic form of enslavement, thus catering to those involved in the settlement for profit and at the same time saving France’s ideal as a nation abhorring slavery. This can be seen, for example, in a passage in Pelleprat’s account from 1655. This Jesuit missionary is mainly focused on narrating an evangelical mission to

<sup>25</sup> Comme si la noirceur de leur corps estoit le caractere de leur infortune, on les traite en esclave, on les nourrit comme on veut, on les pousse au travail comme de bestes, & l’on tire de gré ou de force jusqu’à leur mort, tout le service dont ils sont capables.

<sup>26</sup> While race was primarily a category of filiation, referring to bloodlines in the aristocracy in seventeenth-century France, a racist discourse began taking shape. It is not yet tied to a biological rationale but rather to climate and character. Commenting on skin color is symptomatic for the ambivalence here. It singles out the trans-Atlantic slave trade since it pertains only to blacks, whose internal difference is rarely recognized, but evolves into a justification of it. The “nature” and “temper” of Africans make them more suitable for enslavement than other groups, meaning that the bondage of blacks would be less cruel. For studies on early modern race, see Guillaume Aubert (2004); Pierre H. Boule (2007); Andrew S. Curran (2009, 2011); Arlette Jouanna (1975); Mélanie Lamotte (2014), Noémie Ndiaye (2022), and April G. Shelford (2013). For race and gender, see Elsa Dorlin (2006) and Ashley Williard (2021a).

<sup>27</sup> Je ne sais que cette nation a fait, mais c’est assez que d’estre pris, vendu, & engagez à une servitude facheuse qui dure toute la vie.

the Galibis on the coast of today's Venezuela, and his comments on enslaved peoples are mostly distanced. However, when seeing the deported Africans come out of the ship when arriving in the Caribbean, his own voice emerges: the sight fills him with "horror and compassion" (1658, 55).<sup>28</sup> A bit further down he writes, "I admit that the slaves' condition is extremely crude and that it is infinitely difficult for these poor peoples to see themselves sold, often by their own fathers and their seigneurs, to strangers..." (55).<sup>29</sup> The enslaved Africans are referred to as "people" in the quote, and their feelings are taken into account when Pelleprat voices his view on slavery. However, the passage takes another turn when the missionary starts justifying the practice. Here he mobilizes the argument that conversion to Catholicism levels out the pain of enslavement, but he does so by speaking through the impersonal "on" (one) and the collective "nous" (we). Again, we note that when the self—present in the beginning of the passage—encounters its limits and becomes incapable of engaging directly with what they clearly identify as horrendous consequences of enslavement on human beings, as a result, it fades away into impersonal pronouns and abstraction. However, in the case of Pelleprat, the self will reappear. In a twisted argument he starts by negatively commenting on these people's appearances, only to use the comments as a point of departure from which the diasporic African could ameliorate: "I do not know if my eyes were charmed," Pelleprat comments, "but I usually found them in good shape and pleasant after their baptism" (1658, 57).<sup>30</sup> There is the unsettling notion that somebody might have cast a spell on him, but the main point is that the newly converted individuals have an effect on the travel-narrator's self. The latent racism expressed in descriptions essentializing the Africans into a *type*, which will turn into a racist trope contributing to modern forms of biological racisms, serves to justify the positive effects of enslavement. Interestingly here, for the enslaved individuals the effect is external, whereas it effects the missionary internally.

<sup>28</sup> The scene can be compared with descriptions of arrivals of Europeans for whom entering the archipelago is a triumphant resurrection after the transatlantic crossing. Glissant also speaks of the slave ship and the Atlantic in terms of death and rebirth, but this occurs through suffering and denial of connections with the African continent. The second birth in the Caribbean leaves a heritage of traces and echoes (1997, 5–9).

<sup>29</sup> P'avouë que la condition des Esclaves est extrêmement rude & qu'il est infiniment sensible à ces pauvres gens de se voir vendus, souvent par leurs peres, & par leurs seigneurs à des estrangers.

<sup>30</sup> Je ne sçay si mes yeux estoient charmez mais ie les trouvois pour l'ordinaire bien faits, & agreables après leur Baptesme.

What we have is a subtle shift in the narratives: enslavement concerns the observer, and this conscious or unconscious engagement shows in a change of register in the comment from description to sentimentality, which in turn becomes an instrument of control. On this note there is something particular with Du Tertre's expression of ambivalence. His narrative holds these unresolved tensions, which allows him to take opposite stances while trying to conceptualize the new island society. But there are also passages where his self seems directly implied. The most striking image is his comment on the pleasure he takes in watching Black toddlers play about while their mothers are at work.

It is an incomparable pleasure to watch three or four Blacks play together while their mothers work, because they mess around, fall down on each other, one is on top one minute the next on bottom, still without hurting each other, so well that they do not cry or scream and do not distract their mothers from their tasks, if it's not to breastfeed them. (1667 t1, 509)<sup>31</sup>

This is at once a comment and an example, drawn from everyday life on the islands, at the same time as it is phantasmagoric. The scene is unique: only when commenting on the splendors of natural springs in Guadeloupe (1667 t2, 20) does Du Tertre come out with such an intimate observation directly tied to his personal experience. But what is the pleasure here? The passage comes right after describing how diasporic Africans care for their children. Du Tertre states their practices as good examples, compared to European habits. There is then an admiration or desire for robust young bodies that survive.<sup>32</sup> In this snapshot, the missionary animalizes the toddlers, and he will indeed say that French newcomers to the islands sometimes take them for monkeys. But he ascribes their strength to cultural practices, stated as examples for Europeans. The desire for strong, surviving Black bodies cannot be disconnected from a colonial desire for the laboring body. These are bodies that in the future will work for the good of the colony. It is on this point that this scene of everyday life glides into

<sup>31</sup> C'est un plaisir n'importe lequel que de voir trois ou quatre Nègres se jouer ensemble pendant que leurs mères travaillent, car ils se barbotent, se renversent, & tantost dessus, tantost dessous; sans pourtant se faire aucun mal, si bien qu'ils ne crient point, & ne détournent point leurs mères de leurs besognes, si ce n'est pour leur donner à téter.

<sup>32</sup> For an analysis of a desire for enslaved women's reproductive bodies in Du Tertre, see Williard (2021a, 58).

a phantasmagoric mode: the image of toddlers playing while their mothers work gives an ideal vision of enslavement, which echoes in other passages, as when Du Tertre suggests that their houses are like those in the Golden Age, as described by Seneca, only then to say that the sight of their beds is frightening (1667 t2, 517). The example illustrates how classical sources are adapted to fit the argument made and work in tandem with direct observations, but also it shows how that experience can be distorted by desires. In the tension between knowledge and experience, fictionalization comes into play.

What does this tell us? It shows that the self mediating between context, experience, and knowledge paved the way for the sentimentality that will come to permeate debates and texts on slavery from the eighteenth century onwards (Festa 2006). It is in this indefinite zone that power is constructed. It also shows that while ambivalence toward enslavement is an expression of coming to terms with new societal forms, commentaries on enslavement increasingly tend to annul the ambivalence, repressing that tension upon which it builds. Obviously, passages such as these do not reveal the experience of the enslaved persons, but they do leave an imprint in the narrative, forcing it into fiction and contradiction. Yet their point is to enhance the emotional effects on the traveler-narrator. Rarely if ever do travelers turn to the enslaved individuals to sound out the effects of the lived experience in brutal bondage. Instead, the self of the traveler is constructed as a reflection of the effect of God on enslaved Africans. This is indeed most obvious in texts by Jesuits, who considered themselves to be defenders of enslaved and free Black peoples (Harrigan 2018, 10).

Let us look closer at a text by Mongin, who arrived in Martinique in 1682, when Louis XIV had reinforced Colbert's colonial politics and sent his first royal intendant to the islands to administer and control colonial affairs. The French slave trade was about to expand considerably, and the number of slaves had doubled since Du Tertre wrote his general history of the Antilles. Mongin was assigned to work exclusively with converting enslaved peoples on Saint-Christophe, where approximately 2500 individuals were under his supervision. Yet judging by his initial letters, where he tries to persuade his superiors in France of the value of working with slaves in the Caribbean, this task was not as valued as evangelization among Natives. In this context, it appeared more important than ever for Mongin to stress that evangelical work among the slaves was fruitful and spiritually rewarding. Throughout his letters, Mongin underscores the devotion with

which the enslaved people sing to the glory of God and how the songs bring him to tears. He tries to convey these emotions to readers. “I admit that their gatherings with the songs they sing, surprised by their very pleasing voices, seem as new and as touching as the first day and that I find it very difficult to hold back the tears on these occasions” (1984, 52).<sup>33</sup> Mongin is overwhelmed by the expressive force of their voices, which causes a physical and mental reaction: he cries. The image is that of a successful conversion, in line with Jesuit ideology (Lauzon 2010, 84). What is interesting is that it is not the enslaved people per se that cause emotion. Mongin is touched by *his own* work: hearing them sing the gospels moves him and is proof that they have become Christians.

Even when he sets out to illustrate Africans’ natural inclination to embrace Christianity, Mongin includes his own sentiments in the description, saying that he is “emotionally touched” each time that he thinks of the enslaved people’s generous actions. Also, in examples where he aims to show the good effects of Christianity on enslaved peoples’ conditions, it is ultimately the missionary’s own reactions that are central. This is the case when Mongin tells of encountering an enslaved woman whom he recently had married and whose “sentiment” he “cannot forget” when he “met her on the road laden with a burden that was too heavy for her strength” (1984, 95).<sup>34</sup> The passage continues to perversely contrast the heavy load with the lightness of Christian life. “She whimpered in pain beneath her burden,” Mongin writes, “but as soon as she saw me her sorrow disappeared, she threw her burden on the ground and came to me snapping her fingers, for that is the sign of their joy. And, coming up to me with a cheerful face, she said ‘Oh! Father,’ she said, ‘Louis is good for me!’”<sup>35</sup> He then continues to comment that her reaction is a direct effect of the Christian institution of marriage among the enslaved population. His example constructs a chain of affect that ends with the traveler-narrator, who presumably can transmit the emotion to the reader: “The

<sup>33</sup> Je vous avoue que leurs assemblées avec les chansons qu’ils y chantent, étonné par des voix très agréables, me paroissent aussi nouvelles et aussi touchantes que le premier jour et qu’il m’est bien difficile de retenir les larmes dans ceste occasions.

<sup>34</sup> Mais je ne puis oublier les sentiments d’une bonne négresse [...]. Je la rencontraï en chemin chargée d’un fardeau au-dessus de ses forces.

<sup>35</sup> Elle gémissait sous la charge lorsqu’elle m’aperçut, mais aussitôt son chagrin disparut, elle jette son fardeau à terre, elle vient à moi en claquetant les doigts, ce qui est la marque de leur joie, et m’abordant d’un visage gai: ‘Ah ! Père, que Louis est bon pour moi!’

naïveté of this creature drew tears from my eyes, and as she perceived the consolation that her words had given me, she repeats them whenever she sees me.”<sup>36</sup> Through “naïve” gestures and simple words, which the young woman repeats after seeing the effect they have on the missionary, Mongin constructs a scene where Christianity’s supposedly softening impact on the cruelty of slavery is literally performed by this enslaved woman: she suddenly forgets the heavy burden she carries and only feels the emotion of gratitude toward the church for making her a wife.

The narratives reveal that observing enslaved peoples’ suffering had an effect; between the lines, the experience of bondage transpires as a profoundly disruptive element. What happens as slavery is increasingly naturalized is that instead of suppressing these effects, a traveler like Mongin will work with them. He enhances sentimentality as a fundamental ingredient in the social fabric of slavery. Whereas sympathy may evolve into a religious *ethos*, it never leads to a profound questioning of the social system of slavery. Quite to the contrary, the religious ethos provoked by pity and compassion reinforce the political system by mitigating its inherent inhumanity and cruelty, paving the way for the mechanism of avoidance that will characterize France’s relationship to slavery in its territories. The engaged self is thus insidious: it operates through emotions of bonding (sympathy, identification, empathy) only to construct the fiction of good slavery. It also introduces a slight shift in perspectives so that the identification with the enslaved other is never complete. While showing an awareness of the enslaved peoples’ agency, Du Tertre underscores that their notion of freedom is not the same as Europeans. These persons suffered in Africa due to famine and wars, he states, claiming that their captivity has to be relativized. Further, he suggests that Africans do not attach the same value to the homeland but are happy wherever they are as long as they have food and are not treated badly (1667 t2, 526). Statements like these testify that while enslavement provoked ambivalence, the travelogues contributed to forming the “social specificity of slaves” (Harrigan 2018, 319). Race will become part of that social specificity, as history will show, and the seventeenth-century travelers’ commentaries laid the ground for the articulation of such discourses of bordering and separation.

<sup>36</sup> La Naïveté de cette créature me tira des larmes aux yeux, et comme elle s’aperçut de la consolation que ses paroles m’avaient donnée, elle me les répète quand elle me rencontre.

## INDIGENEITY AND STYLE

There was already an imaginary of American indigeneity in place in France in the middle of the seventeenth century that the travelers had to mediate while also channeling their encounters with Caribs and the impact of these encounters on the formation of early colonial society. What is clear is that travel narratives negotiate between the two extremes of Indigenous imaginary: the “Nobel Savage” and the “Barbarian Cannibal.” Throughout the accounts, relationships with Caribs vary depending on the context, revealing complex interactions rather than a dualistic rapport. Much like the French, the Caribs intervene in an intricate web of history and culture where they use the French against the Spanish. The French play along with this strategy since they, too, compete against Spain. The Caribs thus represent many things at once and are tied to imagery as well as to history. This might explain why the Caribs appear to have an impact that goes beyond the experience of encounter. What interests me here is to analyze how the interactions with Caribs are played out on the level of style, thus examining another type of effect of others. The travel-narrators display both fear of and desire for the Indigenous people and their way of life; they are torn between playing with the proximity to the Indigenous and, at the same time, holding the promise of control over the untamed forces of island cultures and nature.

In a preface dedicated to Nicolas Fouquet, who financed the Jesuits, Pelleprat identifies himself as an American, meaning an Indigenous man: “This kindness, Monseigneur, which gives a poor American the liberty to offer you this small book [...]” (1658, NP).<sup>37</sup> The book and its author belong to the New World, they are intertwined with the subject of the account destined to please Fouquet. It is a posture and a fictionalization of the traveler no doubt. Nevertheless it is significant. When Pelleprat claims to be “American” he signals a latent concern in all travel writing, that of the foreign world having an influence on the self and on society. Even if the tone is partly playful, Pelleprat does indeed say that he has undergone a change during the course of his sojourn among the indigenous on Saint Vincent. He is now a mixed self who belongs to two worlds.

Raymond Breton takes on a similar role in the preface to his Carib-French dictionary. Writing after his return to France, Breton posits himself

<sup>37</sup> C’est cette bonté, MONSEIGNEUR, qui donne la liberté a un pauvre Ameriquain de vous offrir ce petit ouvrage.



as an old man who gathers his memories. There is a nostalgic note in Breton's preface that is quite rare for Caribbean travelers and instead echoes Jean de Léry leaving the Tupinambá in Brazil a century before or, three centuries later, Claude Lévi-Strauss describing his feelings when departing from the Nambikwara in *Tristes Tropiques*. "For how long have I been savage among them," Breton asks, "withdrawn on a shore, waiting for their good graces, which are quite difficult to win, their quite rare generosity and very strange occasions" (1999, iii).<sup>38</sup> In Breton's passage acting like a Carib corresponds to being anti-social. We are thus at the antipodes of Rochefort's and Chevillard's paratextual courtly exchanges between the patron and the Caribs that were discussed in the first section of this chapter. And whereas Léry expresses nostalgia and regret for having to leave life with the Tupinambá, Breton focuses on his own situation and transformation: he "was savage among them." He suggests that he was at their mercy, dependent on whether they wanted to interact with him or not. He also suggests that being savage is a relative term: in Carib society it is he, not them, who is undomesticated one.

In these cases, the traveler-narrator emerges as an unstable self under influence as a result of engagement with otherness. A traveler who lived among the Caribs on Dominica in the 1680s takes on the pseudonym "De Wilde," as if he sought to underscore the transition he claimed to have undergone during the years in the islands. In the preface, Moïse Caillé de Castres, who is the writer behind *De Wilde ou les sauvages caribes insulaires d'Amérique* (2002 [1694]), briefly summarizes the phases of transcultural contact, leaving out the uneven power relations that dictate these contacts. At first, De Wilde was shocked by the "horrible things" he witnessed, but, he argues, as the human mind is fashioned in such a way that it gets used to situations, soon enough he was no longer surprised (81). Going "wild" is here equivalent to adopting acts, habits, and cultural practices that are not specified in the preface but are described as "barbarian."

Not far from De Wilde's mental transformation, Du Tertre comments in the first edition of his general history of the Antilles that, during the stay in the islands, his writing underwent radical changes and had not followed the development of the French language. Upon the return to France, he writes, "I found the French language in such a high degree of politeness that I had reasons to believe that the rudeness of my style would throw off

<sup>38</sup> Combien de temps j'ai été Sauvage parmi eux, retiré sur une grève, attendant leurs bonnes grâces assez difficiles à gagner, leur commodité assez rare et l'opportunité très bizarre.

even the most vulgar reader and would make him consider my discourse as savage as the lands that I describe” (1654, NP).<sup>39</sup> In terms of a rhetorical strategy, the claim made by Du Tertre in the preface says something about the conception of the representation of foreign places. It expresses a desire to make otherness both visual and audible through writing. Abiding by the codes of writing, the traveler asks for permission to speak, but he finds himself in a contradictory position. Writing brings Du Tertre joy because of the subjects treated (the islands, their history and peoples), echoing Breton’s nostalgia, at the same time as he is taken aback by linguistic fallibility. The French language had been radically refined (“high degree of politeness”) and Du Tertre is incapable of adapting the codes of good writing as a consequence of his Antillean sojourn. The representational dilemma is not located in a linguistic discrepancy. The problem is not so much that the French language did not have the terms to describe the Caribbean but that his style—and as an extension, himself—has become influenced by the outside world, and this jeopardizes his ability to act as a mediator between worlds. I will look into the complex question of languages in the following chapter. Here the problem is rather that of influence: Du Tertre’s style has become as *savage* as the islands, which is why it will be difficult to seduce the reader.

The strongest image of how language mediates radical and potentially dangerous transitions is given by the Caribs in the Carpentras manuscript. The anonymous buccaneer relates that the Natives were eager to learn French and to teach their language to the French. To them, if we are to believe the narrator, language learning equaled a metamorphosis. They encouraged language learning,

by telling us ‘learn it well and when you know it, you will go naked like me, you will paint yourself red, you will have long hair like me, you will become Carib and you will never want to go back to France. And I, speaking like you, I will take your clothes and go to France to your father’s house and I will take your name and you will take mine.’ (2002, 117)<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Je trouvai la langue Françoisse dans un si haut degré de politesse; que j’avais raison d’appréhender que la rudesse de mon style ne rebutasse même les plus grossiers, & ne leur fit estimer mon discours aussi sauvage que le pays que je leur décris.

<sup>40</sup> Nous exhortant d’apprendre leur langue, en nous disant ‘apprends-la bien et lorsque tu la sauras, tu iras nu comme moi, tu te feras peindre en rouge, tu porteras des cheveux longs comme moi, tu deviendras caraïbe et tu ne voudras plus retourner en France. Et moi, parlant comme toi, je prendrai tes habits et m’en irai en France à la maison de ton père et je m’appellerai comme toi, et toi comme moi’.

The passage gives a rare glimpse of a Carib philosophy of language, even if the information and context given are too scarce to draw solid conclusions. What is interesting is that it finds an echo in the preface trope of a style influenced by “savageness.” Learning another language is taking on that culture, inhabiting the other person’s name, and the linguistic exchange is also physical, as they ask the Europeans to spit in their mouths and in their ears.<sup>41</sup> In the Caribs’ eyes, as told by this anonymous pirate, the linguistic metamorphosis appears as exciting, whereas it seems more problematic in Du Tertre’s version, hinting at the anxiety that the traveler’s self also might be inhabited by the world they mediate through writing. Du Tertre’s linguistic transformation is simultaneously a *litotes*, downplaying his authorial pretensions (he is a traveler not a writer) and eulogizing French sociability, and a way to voice the concern of foreign influence on the traveler, on language, and on society.

It could be argued that it is precisely the artifice of such stylistic claims that support the argument that neither the travelers nor their writings have been influenced by the other, supposedly “uncontrolled” nature at all. Instead, the exotic scenes in the prefaces displaying Natives addressing the patrons through the intermediary of the traveler, along with claims of having become Americans or writing in a style “sauvage,” illustrate Normand Dorion’s contention that the art of travelling in the seventeenth century was classicist, modelled after gardening (1995, 92). A good travel writer was someone who possessed the skills to take “savage plants” and “civilize” them by including them in the harmonious structure of a garden. Maurile de Saint-Michel uses this common metaphor, depicting his *relationship* as a garden from the Indies: “where I show America’s flowers and fruits, the troubles and the melancholia as well as the cypresses will not be out of season” (1652, 276).<sup>42</sup> Style includes the “savage” by virtue of perfecting it, not by turning “wild.”

This captures the impact of contemporary aesthetic notions, notably *bienséance*, requiring that expression reflects good conventional behavior and is designed to please, on the conception of alterity in itself and also of

<sup>41</sup> “In order to understand [their language] better they made us spit in their mouths and in their ears, believing that this would make them learn French sooner, taking information from us about how we named each thing and they told us how they named it in Carib.” Afin de le mieux comprendre ils nous faisaient cracher dans leur bouche et dans leurs oreilles, croyant par ce moyen apprendre plus tôt à parler le français, s’informant de nous comment nous nommions chaque chose, et ils nous disaient aussi comment ils les nommaient en carai-be.

<sup>42</sup> Où l’ay fait voir des fleurs & des fruits de l’Amérique, les soucis & melancolies aussi bien que les cypres n’y seront pas hors de saison.

how otherness could be represented by the second half of the century. Indeed, Du Tertre testifies to the importance of such codes when evoking the level of “politeness” of the French language. Ideals of a clear, moderate, and pleasing style, of *bienséance* and good taste, developed as a way to release writing from the ridged rules of rhetoric based on the Ancients and inscribe it in the social web of the *salon* culture (Vialleton 2018). But while “stylistic gardening” might be necessary to attract the audience, evocations of cultural and linguistic transformations indirectly question the classicist impulse. They point to the possibility that otherness nonetheless had an impact on the representation, which thereby goes against the domestication of otherness so that it could fit into existing norms for representation. As the editor of Exquemelin’s book states in the preface, the merit of this particular pirate story is that “it is not the words’ radiance that reflects on the objects but the radiance of the objects that reflects on the words” (1686, NP).<sup>43</sup> Words are subordinated to exterior reality and testify to the narrator’s ability to adapt the writing to the subject. Consequently, otherness was not and could not be entirely domesticized or excluded from the narratives. To act like a Carib, to describe one’s style as “savage,” and other such rhetorical tricks suggest that to best account for foreign reality, writing had to be influenced by it. A world that does not confirm to the order of French society is not only there to be adapted to that order. Quite on the contrary, otherness acts productively on the travelogue, on its very core: writing itself.

This duel orientation enables the construction of the traveler-narrator as being at once same and other: the traveler turns himself into a modality to configure the unresolvable tensions between writing norms and experience, between fiction and empiricism. Buccaneer accounts provide an interesting illustration of this paradoxical posture. Exquemelin, for instance, struggles with the plausibility of his account. The life of a buccaneer is in itself so extraordinary that even a truthful witness such as himself will appear as a *romancier*, an author of fiction (131). In saying this, Exquemelin anticipates the readers’ skepticism as a way to side with them and to pose himself as belonging to their world, not to the islands. He is thus duel—the one who has been on the other side, lived incredible things, but also who has returned and can speak with the voice of the reader. The success of his story depends on the distance between the

<sup>43</sup> Ce n’est point l’éclat des paroles qui rejaillit sur les choses, mais l’éclat des choses qui rejaillit sur les paroles.

narrator writing and the pirate he himself once was, assuring the reader that he has not become entirely transformed by otherness.

The tension cuts through language too: the incredible stories of adventures in lands with strange nature and peoples should evoke that strangeness but in a language that does not go against norms of sociability. In other words, both as a narrative instance and as a category for experimentation, the travelers express a self caught between the world of the Caribbean islands associated with associability, the polite sociability of France, and the society that the French were in the process of building in the archipelago. Rather than detecting a divide between uncontracted nature and culture, as in the case of the travelers of the great explorations according to Stagl (1995) and Lamb (2001), the narratives testify to a kind of colonial liminality. They recognize and manifest otherness while at the same time try to control it. This tension runs through the texts and is revealed in the ways in which the construction of the traveler-narrator's self is constantly contrasted with other actors who interact with and are thus also under the influence of otherness, notably translators.<sup>44</sup>

Translators are mentioned in some narratives but often in passing, like ghosts assuring a link of communication. Father Raymond Breton, widely known for being the most knowledgeable missionary in the culture and language of the Caribs, writes that he was residing “alone” among the people of Dominica. At the same time, he mentions on several occasions that he has an interpreter by his side. Others recognize the translator and some are even named. Biet writes that he and the crew were received “quite favorably” by the Natives thanks to a young man called Vendangeur, “who had been there before and knew their language well, and had the skill to make himself loved by these people” (1664, 74).<sup>45</sup> Without Vendangeur they would not have survived, Biet admits. His information is an exception in point. Generally, travel writers do not waste time on interpreters. Sometimes they appear in scenes of negotiation as mediators. Sometimes we learn that an interpreter was sent to another island or to the mainland to bargain with the Natives. Some of them were sent out with the explicit task to train as translators among the Caribs. Pelleprat

<sup>44</sup>For studies on the role of translators, see Céline Carayon (2019) and Federico M. Federici and Dario Tessicini eds. (2014), as well as Philippe Jacquin (1987), who focuses on translators in New France.

<sup>45</sup>Qui avoit esté autrefois, & sçavoit bien leur langue, ayant d'ailleurs l'adresse de se faire aimer de ces gens là.

mentions that Father Méland brought a boy with him on a trip to the mainland with the intent to leave him with the Indigenous people so that he could learn their language. Méland calls the boy or the expedition – it is difficult to decide what he is referring to exactly – an “experiment” (1658, 4).

From scattered pieces of information such as these, it is possible to deduce that in most cases the interpreters were commoners who, for various reasons that often remain obscure, had stayed with the Natives for a longer time and thus learnt their language or knew how to communicate with them by means of gestures or mixed languages. Their actual skills or the circumstances around their recruitment as translators are rarely if ever mentioned, and only rarely do they occur as persons in the narratives. The same goes for other crucial intermediary figures such as Indigenous women. Those travelers who stayed longer with the Caribs—the anonymous buccaneer, de Wilde, and Breton—survived and acquired knowledge about Indigenous life and language thanks to women. The support they describe gives an idea of women’s room for manoeuvre in Carib society and how they could influence decisions generally allotted to men. It also shows that European travelers were far from penetrating Indigenous society; they lived on the margins and were not part of the social fabric. Nevertheless, the narratives give an impression of proximity at the expense of these other intermediary figures whose presences are obscured, absorbed into that of the traveler-writers who made use of them.

The absence-presence of interpreters inserts two layers into the narratives. First, it implies that the communication with peoples and the construction of knowledge about the islands rely on others. Again, the narrative voice proliferates, only this time the other voice is downplayed and not highlighted, as it was in regard to patrons. It would be tempting to consider the removal of the interpreters in terms of replacement and self-heroization: travelers would silence their reliance on other peoples’ skills in order to better posit themselves as the real translators of the New World. Such an interpretation is no doubt accurate: there was no need to cite all sources, especially not those that were based on subalterns. However—and this leads us to the second layer—while the traveler-narrators indeed wanted to act as intermediaries between the Islands and France, they did not want to be confused with interpreters. *Truchement* is the term usually employed to designate the interpreters in the seventeenth century. A word derived from Turkish (Gomez-Géraud 1987, 333), it contains the foreign within the designation, suggesting that the person

doing the interpretation has incorporated the foreign world. Many travelers to the Caribbean underscore precisely this—the incorporation of alterity—as characteristic of interpreters. These figures were not always regarded as trustworthy, especially if they spoke too well of Native society (Gomez-Géraud 1987, 320), and their contacts with foreigners were sometimes lethal. Biet tells about a translator who was killed for having trusted the Natives too much (1664, 155, 158). In short, while there are similarities between travelers and interpreters in so far as they belong to two worlds at once, the interpreters are one step closer to otherness (Carayon 2019, 301). The act of writing holds the line between self and otherness in place.

The line between the traveler and the figure of the interpreter reveals a particular anxiety, namely that of transculturation. I chose Fernando Ortíz's concept transculturation because it takes into account unequal power relations but is focused on the interactional dynamics of cultural encounters rather than on the result of such encounters (Ortíz 1995, 102). Ortíz's concept does not emphasize the merging of different cultural elements. Instead it insists on the generation of productive differences: cultural encounters do not necessarily entail the repression of one culture, even when produced in extremely unequal situations of power. There is thus an element of Baroque, "contrapunct" (99), maintained while transculturation takes shape. He further argues that a "vital change" occurred as a consequence of intense cultural encounters of colonialism on the island spaces. Despite colonial powers trying to police and suppress people and their cultures, the (violent) encounters entailed "the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena..." (102), which became part of the economic motor and has determined historical events. Ortíz writes,

[...] these continuous, radical, contrasting geographic transmigrations, economic and social, of the first settlers, this perennial transitory nature of their objectives, and their unstable life in the land where they were living, in perpetual disharmony with the society from which they drew their living. (101)

What we have are tensions, violences, uprootings, and disharmony rather than one dominant discourse of power separating groups; the transcultural clash happens in between. His theories find echoes in later conceptualizations of creolization. Kamau Brathwaite draws from Ortíz and localizes creolization to plantation society "as a transformative productive space not only for tropical exports but also for cultures and languages" (cited in Garraway 2005, 17). Glissant's theorization of the term also

builds on the historical experience of plantation society, and his insistence on the process rather than the result of cross-cultural encounters is close to Ortíz. Creolization, in Glissant's view, puts emphasis on the unpredictable dimension in such processes, which he turns into a philosophy of Relation, a non-systematic mode of thinking that is not built on binary exclusions but on dynamic, uncertain processes that create new differences rather than erasing them (1997, 11; 89).

What is useful in the context of seventeenth-century Caribbean writing is that rather than seeing cultural mixing as one-dimensional and linear, Ortíz and, later, Glissant and Brathwaite maintain elements of tension. In fact, Ortíz underscores the importance of historical contextualization and argues that the "transmutations of cultures" (*transmutaciones de culturas*) began with the *conquista*, thus pre-dating the plantation society. Transculturation is thus not exclusive to Cuban society or to a particular historical period. Rather, Ortíz's concept requires situational readings in order to be operative. Looking at the French context of the settlement with its locally determined power structure, the traveler performing the role of a "savage" figure at the same time as he asserts his power over writing and knowledge gives a space for a configuration of transculturality that is never resolved. In these texts, the self becomes at once an agent of control and a modality through which the agency of others is mediated. The narratives abound in passages evoking Frenchmen in the process of transforming and becoming other.

In 1640, Bouton warned that the French lost all sense of sociability in the settlements as a result of lack of spiritual guidance. Du Tertre paints in vivid colors how a colony of Frenchmen succumbed to cannibalism as a result of extreme famine in Guadeloupe. They did not kill each other but opened graves to eat their dead friends. In Du Tertre's narrative, they are animalized, tearing up the earth "like beasts" and eating "their own excrements" (1667 t1, 77–80). "Othered" French go "all naked," swim like the Natives (Biet 1664, 235), and paint their faces (Coppier 1645, 4). Biet writes of a French man who joins the Caribs in their festivities to get over his "melancholia" (1664, 106). Maurile de Saint-Michel writes that there are French people who "become Savage, hiding in the woods, living off fruits, and like owls and night birds do not come out except at night to go peck around" (1652, 38).<sup>46</sup> The capitalization of the adverb suggests an

<sup>46</sup>Il y a icy de nos François qui deviennent Sauvages, se cachans dans les bois, vivans des fruits d'icieux, & comme ces Hiboux & oyseaux nuictiers, n'en sortans que la nuict pour aller picorer.



association with the Native Caribbeans, whereas their behavior is linked to animals. The difference between human and animal is articulated in terms of scale through the insertion of the Carib as a third term of comparison. He continues to explain that some people have even chosen this life: “I know some of our passengers who have more or less chosen this life over enduring the pain of being poor servants and living freely with those who paid their passage to the islands” (38).<sup>47</sup> Far more inhuman than an “animal-like” life as practiced by the “Savages” is the subjugation of indentured work and servitude. De Wilde supposedly “saved” an English girl who had been taken by the Caribs. The adventure is framed as a romance: the girl, naked and covered in *roucou* like the Caribs, is devastated that she has to leave a young Carib whom she loves (Caillé de Castres 2002, 113). In a similar vein, the Carpentras manuscript tells of four soldiers from Languedoc who settled among the Caribs to have more liberty (2002, 220). In fact, when Captain Fleury finally managed to restore the ships and was ready to return to France, the majority of the crew wanted to stay with the Natives (243).

In these cases transculturation is always framed as resulting from a lack of control in the social order.<sup>48</sup> Becoming other is a critique against governors who treated them badly or as a critique against France, saying that the colonies and/or the missions were in need of much more support. There is thus a political motivation behind many of these descriptions that partly explains the exaggerated style and sometimes speculative content. Transculturation is configured as a consequence of history, as being inherent to early colonization. And indeed it was a collateral result of territorial expansion and a deliberate politics through missionary work. The anxiety of influence is therefore always also turned inward; it is a reflection of the implication of settlement and colonization.

But transculturation goes in both directions, though it is articulated differently when Caribs are concerned. When Du Tertre tells about his first meeting with a Carib who spoke a little Spanish and immediately came up to him to ask for a necklace with a crucifix, his narrative trembles

<sup>47</sup> Je çay quelques uns de nos passagers qui ont plustost choisy cette vie, que de supporter les peines des pauvres serviteurs, & de vivre privément avec ceux avoient payé leur passage.

<sup>48</sup> See Atkinson (1924, 32–33). The French revolts against the authorities were considered to be inspired by the local societal structure. Missionaries played a particular role in counterbalancing such influence. At the same time, Natives enjoyed a higher degree of liberty, and compared to compatriots living under absolute monarchy in France, French islanders had more liberty (35).

(1667 t1, 59). He cannot read the other person and immediately thinks the man is an impostor who only desires the material object. The inability to interpret the other leads Du Tertre to, momentarily at least, doubt himself and the role of the mission. Here the potential failure of influence is threatening. Yet we are still far away from the politics of assimilation to the colonial culture, which will come to dominate French imperial policies. For example, most Caribs who were converted carried double names: a Christian name and a Carib name. The practice of the double name suggests a certain acceptance of belonging to several cultures at once, in line with the idea of the unresolved. A Carib captain called Baron by the French is an example of this. Baron appears in several accounts, and his ability to navigate between French and Caribs was crucial for the Dominicans' work in the region. At one point, he is said to have prevented a major war between the Caribs and the French. The content of his discourse of persuasion escapes the missionaries, no doubt due to linguistic incompetence. But Du Tertre portrays his discourse as transcultural performance. According to Du Tertre, Baron wore European clothes, notably a skirt supposedly stolen from an English woman, at the occasion (1667 t1, 64). The scene is ambivalent. Baron, dressed in a woman's skirt while "haranguing," is ridiculous. At the same time, his cross-cultural dressing is described as a stroke of genius, thanks to which the war can be avoided. So even a central figure such as Baron is not presented as a missionary or diplomatic success. He was never fully converted, it seems.

The travelogues contain many examples of Natives who claim to have converted to Christianity but who have in fact not changed their ways of living at all. For some travelers it is a question of geography: a Native may act like a Frenchman in France, but once he has returned to his family on the islands he goes back to his "natural" way of being. Labat relays a similar account about an African man returning to his old habits as soon as he came back to Africa (1722 t4, 129). Differences between peoples are here sustained and linked to culture and geography. Yet that production of difference simultaneously sets up the limits, for missionary work in particular. The fear of not being able to fully impose Catholicism is a persistent trope in discourses dealing with early colonial encounters. All kinds of local influences, be them climatic, cultural, or linguistic, are framed with expressions pertaining to treason, lies, and performativity. Persons living between two or several cultures are necessary but met with suspicion. In a way, they enact the uncertainty of cross-cultural encounters, an uncertainty expressed in the variety of terms used to capture such processes. *Truchement* was in

itself a foreign term. Syncretism derives from Greek “syn” (“the convergence of two opponents with a third”), *oὐν* (“with”), and “cret,” which means “to act or speak like a Cretan, i.e., an impostor” (Malczuzynski 2009, 298). Interpreters and converted Natives could potentially betray the French allies and deceive their spiritual fathers. Biet writes: “When they showed us more affection, it was when they thought about massacring us and killing us” (1664, 353).<sup>49</sup> However, such deceptions could also be read as a sign of agency. In her analysis of the figure of the *truchement* in the Oriental context, Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud concludes that theatricality is a way to question transculturality. In “playing a role, the interpreter keeps his distance from the foreign culture that he imitates,” she writes and concludes by saying that it seems like the theatrical dimension of interpretation “reveals a resistance to transculturation by staging a fake acculturation” (1987, 327). Following this argument, passages revealing Caribs’ consciousness toward transculturality may be read as indirect expressions of disturbance.

Returning to the case of Du Tertre, who cannot understand the first Carib man he encounters, we may in fact say that indirectly the agency of the Carib man leaves a mark in Du Tertre’s writing. It shows that we cannot limit our understanding of the construction of the travelers’ self by letting French codes of representation over-determine the reading. It also articulates itself in an entangled relationship with the world described, and this entangled relationship shows that power relations, no matter how unequal they may be, were fluid. Instances open up a crack in the narrative of a self that can master the world described. This also explains why missionaries notably seem haunted by the idea of a faked conversion: it would indirectly question their role in the early colonial society. It testifies that the politics of domination by imposing French culture may derail and that they have little power to control the other’s refusal. Expressions of fear and vulnerability destabilize structures of power, even if the unsettling may be temporary and ultimately perhaps contribute to further enhancing the construction of a rigid hierarchical structure of domination. When facing Baron and other peoples living between cultures and languages, the traveler-narrators are momentarily unsettled. These people are neither/nor, meaning that the narrative of control encounters its own limits. Indirectly, the various instances of influence mediated through comments

<sup>49</sup> Lorsqu’ils nous témoignoit plus d’affection, ç’a esté pour lors qu’ils songeoient à nous massacrer & à nous faire mourir.

on writing or through narration of particular experiences of otherness express social anxieties: what happens when cultures and languages intermingle? They appear as modalities to think through the possibilities and dangers of the new colonial social order without offering a model. In this situation they themselves start playing with the possibility of cross-cultural relations; they operate in the in-between.

\* \* \*

When Hispanophone Caribbean writers rearticulated the notion of the Baroque in the twentieth century, the notions of *mestizaje* and *criollo* were central. Alejo Carpentier speaks of a “self-awareness” within what he identifies as the “American man” as “Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a criollo,” and he concludes in saying that, “the criollo spirit is itself a baroque spirit” (1995, 100). By virtue of its mixed character the American Baroque contains a processual and anticipatory dimension. Its “spirit” is that of pointing forward. Glissant suggests something similar in seeing creolization as an unpredictable process; it points forward but is connected to that which is present and past. Paradoxically, one could say, there is this kind of spirit or striving processuality in the early French Caribbean archive through the anxiety of influence mediated by the travelers’ selves. But whereas Glissantian creolization maintains uncertainty—it is what is just happening—the striving processuality of travel writing is caught up in (early) global modernity driving forward, policing the forces of creolization for the sake of progress and profit. French colonialism, as Doris Garraway shows, deliberately sought to avoid becoming as mixed as the Spanish islands (2005, 211). In her analysis of creolization in the early modern Caribbean, she observes that in the French context, discourses of power kept “colonial populations artificially separated and contained along lines of race and class” (2005, 21). She reads this in the light of racial mixing and argues that there is “a libidinal economy undergirding exploitative power relations among whites, free nonwhites, and slaves in the colonies” (26). Colonial power operated by policing and bordering ethnic relations so as to control the forces of creolization, even if these operations could never fully work.

My analysis has shown that although the French travelers did not overtly identify themselves as Creoles in the ways the Spanish in the American context did, they write a self in conjunction with island experiences and practices at the same time as they were shaped by the setting

where they were published. Travelers exercised authority in discourse and practice while they themselves were being subjugated to authority. The double-bind position makes way for a writing that constantly encounters the limits of control. Configured through the traveler's self and expressed as anxiety of influence, creolization and *mestizaje* haunt these texts.

Yet those expressions of anxiety and ambivalence that the travelers played out deliberately or not through the construction of the self are indirect signs of the effects of others. The travelers reflect and are reflected in societal experiments, in aesthetic and epistemic constructions, and in direct experiences with peoples and environments. The figure of the traveler-narrator does indeed traverse the narratives in shifting nature and function. It is by virtue of handling the inherent diversity of the early colonial island world that the traveler-narrator can posit himself as a transatlantic mediator, not to resolve the tensions but as someone who can uphold a plurality of perspectives. This explains why travelers fashion their selves through various strategies of representation and that these strategies may open up rifts in the narratives, where impacts of others may emerge. They use the geographical double-bind and the formal constrains, and—whether it is intentional or not is less important—their writing becomes a site for thinking and experimenting with new social forms in the early colonial context. They invent themselves between these worlds, play with their roles and display fears while setting up the illusion of control or power over the forces of transculturation unleashed when several worlds meet. So while the traveler-narrator utilizes perspectives and sensibilities in order to constitute himself as an authority of the islands, those instances open up uncertain sites of dialogism, self-experimentation, and the possibility of performative transculturation. This is where the discourse of authority slips, and we can trace others operating in the shaping of island society.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# Other Tongues

In the preface to his Carib-French dictionary, Breton stresses how working to compile a dictionary was troublesome due to the taciturn nature of the Caribs. During moments of festivity, when the indigenous men were intoxicated enough to talk, he would steal (*dérober*) the words from their mouths to present them for the European reader (Breton 1999, iii). There is an ethical dimension here: the missionary comes from the outside and takes words and stories of individuals (and in extension entire cultures) without their consent. The image Breton gives of himself, alone among reticent Caribs, plays in with the general trope of Native Americans that circulated in France. At the same time, it also suggests a certain active resistance to giving the missionary their language so that he can transform it into a piece of writing for the French audience to enjoy. The Caribs interacted with him on their terms. Moreover, Breton's anecdote or avowal indirectly posits the question of his dictionary's reliability: if the missionary only could gather information from these individuals when they were drunk, one can ask how well his translations reflect that language and that society. Indeed, Breton's anecdote discloses the uncertain basis for the transcription of orality into written text and the limits of agency. The Caribs may be quoted in the travelogues, but the subject of the enunciation behind the words remains elusive. And if the traveler is indeed the Hermes of the New World, the question is whether he incarnates Hermes the translator and messenger or Hermes the thief. Perhaps it is both.

This chapter engages in the uncertain terrain of other tongues in travel writing as a third point of entanglement, where writing encounters its limits and yet manifests its desire to control. While travelogues mostly rely on testimonies from other Europeans, other people are also included in direct or indirect speech. Moreover, other languages make their way directly or indirectly into travel writing as yet another manifestation of the plurivocality of these texts, which we studied in the previous chapter in relation to the travelers' self. Indeed, the writings of Caribbean travelers, to use Réal Ouellet's expression (2010, 2), have "a high enunciative or dialogic tenor," which always implicitly or explicitly signaled the presence of other languages. It could be a local word designating a plant, a short, direct discourse of somebody agonizing in sickness to the caring missionary, brief commands from buccaneer captains, sentences often rendered in a simplified version of French supposedly uttered by enslaved peoples, or words spoken by the Natives in languages that most travelers barely understood but nevertheless transcribed and translated or reported in French. What we have are narratives that build on layers of discourses and languages. This chapter aims to examine this narrative practice, looking at the ways in which linguistic elements of otherness are imbricated into the texts, what function they have, and how they are manipulated but occasionally disrupt the narratives. Undergirding the analysis is again a tension between power and unsettlement: quoting others is a form of domination of speech. At the same time, these tongues impregnate the writing with otherness, with other languages that might, in some way, hint at other narratives.

Etymologically, to cite someone means to call upon or summon another person as a testimony or as support to one's claim. To cite is then to recognize someone's opinion (voice), but this occurs within the frame of another person's (the one who cites) narrative, prompting the question of whether the traveler-narrator's voice is centrifugal, absorbing other tongues. In the very idea of citing there is thus a conflict between acknowledgment and subjugation. Moreover, in the context of the early colonization in the Caribbean, citing must be addressed as a problem of linguistic plurality. Citations of other peoples' speech appear in transcribed versions of indigenous vernaculars, in French or in a simplified version of French, and in a form of pidgin used for communication. In this context of domination, inclusions of other tongues are inevitably embedded in other discourses, filtered through the narrative voice of the traveler and entangled in processes of transcription, translation, and representation, making it difficult to

use the concept of “voice.” Utterances from Indigenous and enslaved peoples can rarely be referred back to an identifiable subject of enunciation, and the medium through which they speak is manipulated in most cases. So if “voice” in the seventeenth century mostly referred to spoken discourse (i.e. rhetoric), it becomes difficult to use that term because of the textual fictionalization of languages and speech (Dandrey 1990). Even the rendering of the sound of their voices has been filtered through transcription.

This is confirmed in a letter by Breton, inserted in the paratexts to his Carib-French dictionary. Breton shared his documents with Du Tertre so that the latter could include it in his natural and moral history of the region. But Breton states that Du Tertre was not satisfied with the Latin translations of the Carib language:

Following RP Du Tertre’s (who took on the task as historian of the Antilles with dignity) pressing demands I gave him a part of my translation of *Savage* into Latin, but he did not accept them, he wanted something in vulgar language that would make known the imperfection of the Carib language. This obliged me to change the Latin translation into a French construction that he placed at the end of his book as a translation. I gave it to him as a test of language and not, whatever people might say, as an orthodox thing of French. The Carib text seems good to me, those who will have gone through the jargon of children and the dialect of women, will know it with time, if they give [the text] its true pronunciation.<sup>1</sup> (1999, vi)

Words and things are separated, and the connection between them is mediated through the weave of writing between languages. Du Tertre plays with style and translation to get as close to otherness as possible, which explains why he wanted to use another vernacular—French—instead of Latin to represent the languages of the Caribbean. “Pronunciation” is crucial here. The traveler-narrator works through translation to distribute a visual and auditory idea of the foreign speech. Sound then is imbricated in semantics.

Further, the rendering of foreign languages is mediated through the linguistic shifts that the travelers’ own vernacular underwent at the time.

<sup>1</sup> J’ai donné aux pressentes importunités du RP du Tertre (qui s’est dignement acquitté du devoir d’historien des Antilles) une parcelle de mes traductions de *Sauvage* en Latin, mais il ne les agréa pas, il voulut quelque chose en langue vulgaire qui fit connaître l’imperfection de la langue Caraïbe, ce qui m’obligea de changer la traduction Latine, en construction Française qu’il arrangea à la fin de son livre comme une traduction. Je lui donnai pour un essai de la langue et non pas pour une chose orthodoxe quoiqu’on dise du Français, le texte Caraïbe me semble bon, ceux qui auront passé le jargon des enfants et les dialectes des femmes, le connaîtront avec le temps, s’ils lui donnent sa vraie prononciation.

Note that Breton is hesitant to call the vernacular he uses “French” because it deviates from the grammar of standardized French. He writes in the introduction to his French-Carib dictionary,

In the history, I have neglected the orthography, and I have spoken as a frank Bourguignon, which I am, and I often used the language of the islands even if it goes against the politeness of the French language, in order not to make myself appear and pass for someone other than I am; other than that I do not profess here to learn the French but the Carib language.<sup>2</sup> (1999, v)

Breton constructs his writings by speaking like someone from Burgundy, using vernacular French and the “language of the islands.” Orality clearly has a central role in his conception of language and of writing. He expresses loyalty to the “reality” of the Caribbean rather than to the “politeness of the French language” as it developed during the mid-century, much in line with Du Tertre, discussed in the previous chapter, stating in the preface that his French had been tainted by the languages and geographies that he describes in his history. The use of his own vernacular performs a double approximation, bringing the text closer to the world of the islands and their inhabitants and the writing closer to Breton himself as a person. He thereby explicitly signals a split between the codes of writing (following the standardized French) and the endeavor to represent other tongues, which is part of representational conventions in travel writing. Paradoxically, the inclusion of other tongues is a struggle between embeddedness in codes and discursive creativity, deployed in a space not only of foreign language encounters but of linguistic transitions that affect French too. In his reflections on Baroque language, Severo Sarduy identifies such inclusions as vectors for transformation. “The foreign,” Sarduy writes, “melds indistinguishably with the original [...] modifying its geology with its textures” (2010, 282). Citations build reminiscence into the narrative, Sarduy suggests, by pointing to an outside and creating strata in the text. It is undoubtedly a trope that generates disruptions. The question is how we can conceptualize the diversity that stems not only from a transcription of oral languages to another, written language, but also from an exchange

<sup>2</sup> Dans l’histoire, j’ai négligé l’orthographe, et ai parlé en franc Bourguignon tel que je suis, et je me suis souvent servi du langage des îles, quoique contre la politesse de la langue Française, pour ne pas me faire accroire, et me faire passer pour autre que je [ne] suis; outre que je ne fais pas profession ici d’apprendre la langue Française, mais la Caraïbe.

determined by extremely unequal power dynamics, embedded in rhetorical codes.

The explicit problematization of language, translation, transcription, and transmission of voices that can be found, notably in Breton's texts but also in others, testifies to the impossibility of restoring any authentic situation of enunciation from the accounts of the sojourns. Languages and speech are negotiated within the embeddedness of travel writing as a form. They are thus played out in the realm of artificiality; while connecting to real languages and interactions, they represent these within a set of codes they must juggle in order to create an illusion of another language. This is at once a construction of a poetics and also an act of epistemic violence. Yet, while paying attention to such violences, we must also be careful not to be caught in a modern, essentialist bias here, regretting the loss of the "authentic" Carib words. In fact, seventeenth-century travelers resisted the fallacy of authenticity that has haunted many modern anthropological discourses, in which the Eurocentric gaze places the other in a stagnated time-place cut off from mixing and change. They consciously operated within the realm of artifice and did not pretend to transfer the "authentic" voice of other people. The inclusion of other tongues is not a claim to representing the "true" nature of an object, be it a person, an idiom, a voice, a culture, or a scene, but to create a convincing illusion.

However, claiming that the travelers did not succumb to the fallacy of authenticity does not in any way resolve the fundamental ethical problem of including other voices. Along the lines of this argument, Dominique Bertrand (1998) contends that the language and voice of the other were reduced to a practical transparency and subjugated under the evangelical goal. In a more detailed analysis of the colonization of New France, Marie-Christine Pioffet suggests that Native American speech is "contaminated" with missionary discourse (1997, 250–252). The contamination, Pioffet shows, is less linguistic than formal. Narrative structure and motives, for example, in stories of victimhood supposedly told by Natives chime a bit too well with the missionaries' own narratives of the establishment. In a similar vein, Isabelle Moreau and Grégoire Holtz point out that travelogues "instrumentalize" the speech of others (Holtz and Moreau 2005, 2–3). Rather than reflecting another person's words, the quotes served an underlying purpose, such as signaling the success of the mission or showing the narrator's knowledgeability. Holtz and Moreau conclude that in travelogues, cited persons are dispossessed of their own words on the level of enunciation as well as semantics. Looking at the context of New France, Peter Murvai (2016) identifies two possibilities: either we are facing a



monologic situation, where the other's speech is appropriated in order to serve the mission, or else the citation of the other results in heterologic writing where the "last word does not necessarily belong to the enunciator" (66). In regard to the travel writing I am dealing with here, both these models of interpretation are accurate, often within the same text. In either case, the travel narratives exude an impression of linguistic diversity and discursive heterogeneity.

This is where we need to start—in the contextual and textual heterogeneous and transitional space permeating travel writing from the early colonial Caribbean—not from the notion of voice as tied to agency. The texts propel *differences* that are not necessarily expressions of a conscious subject. Yet these differences are fluid, as languages mix and change. Travelogues operate in a transitional zone between actual exchanges with and textual constructions of other voices and languages. As readers, we need to navigate that zone. Even if the "true" voices of indigenous and enslaved individuals may be gone, they remain in traces, embedded in layers of rhetoric, ideology, and translation. Analyzing what he calls the "black rhetoric" in French travel narratives out of Africa, David Diop (2018, 42) argues that the inclusion of vernaculars in travel writing indirectly makes African voices resonate. These other tongues convey that the representation of African societies, cultures, and natures was built on knowledge gathered from others. The European voyager's pen, Diop notes, "mediates the word of the African without completely repressing it" (2018, 13). In her archival research on enslaved women's lives, Marisa Fuentes relies on the "fleeting glimpses of enslaved subjectivity" hidden in the archives (2016, 1) and asks how researchers can "exhume the [enslaved] buried under this prose" (138) using a methodology of listening that pays attention to silences as well as distortions and allows for shifting the perspectives (2–4).

Echoing Cassander Smith's (2016) analysis of disruptions and Simon Gikandi's (2015) symptomatic readings as discussed in the Introduction, I adopt a similar approach here, while recognizing that these travel narratives can never be fully decolonized. The entangled structures of the discourses that make up travel writing allow for tracing impacts and effects that might short-circuit the centrifugal force of the travelers' narrative voices while avoiding the illusion of seeking manifestations of subversive agency. Such notion of agency has no textual space in these narratives. As Diop remarks "the Other's speech" (*le dire de l'Autre*) is inevitably

governed by the formal rules of the written word (2018, 13). Instances where other voices and languages transpire are, as underscored by Ashley Williard (2018, 85), doubly coded: they are simultaneously sites where early colonial discourses are produced and where disruptions to these discourses emerge. Or indeed, as Céline Carayon highlights in the introduction to her *Eloquence Embodied: Non-Verbal Communication Among French and Indigenous Peoples in the Americas* (2019), communication was not simply fraught with difficulties, nor was there a situation of one-directional linguistic imposition (4); early colonial exchanges also spurred “creative misunderstandings” from all sides (5–6).

In line with such observations, a decolonial reading of other tongues in these texts prompts a dual strategy: they are both manipulated entities and elements of disruption. The insertion of other languages testifies to the desire to learn about and record other languages, a knowledge that slips away at the very moment these languages enter into the realm of writing and become something else. Citing others is a way to manipulate the narrative of colonial control, yet the strategy inevitably leads to other forms of exchanges, inclusions of everyday life that unsettle that story of control and open up to other unexpected engagements. Thus, seeking to challenge the idea that travel narratives are either entirely suppressing other tongues or allowing sites where resistance or agency may emerge, the chapter is divided in four sections. The first two sections analyze the modalities for inscribing other languages and account for linguistic encounters, starting with charting the linguistic landscape of the early modern Caribbean and then moving in the second section to examining language crossings and the emergence of Creole. The third and fourth sections study the inclusion of direct discourse and the representation of exchanges in terms of dramatization. It begins by analyzing how the other’s speech is staged in various conventional scenes. The last section investigates the tensions between these highly coded articulations of the other’s speech and representations of everyday exchanges.

### PLURILINGUAL CARIBBEAN

In a study of direct discourse in seventeenth-century literature, Edwige Keller-Rahbé (2010) detects a change in attitude in regard to the mediation of both direct speech and other languages in narrative prose that occurs after 1660 as a reaction to the convoluted poetics of the Baroque. Writers sought to exclude elements that would disturb the flow of their

prose in order to refine the narrative and homogenize its structure (4).<sup>3</sup> The decrease in use of direct discourse and foreign words could also be interpreted as a consequence of the increased standardization of French, which led to a transition from oral to print culture (Louvât-Molozay and Siouffi 2007, 6; Carayon 2019, 118). Fragments of foreignness, whether speech or language, were even more challenging to include in this newly emerging culture of writing. Tellingly, Du Plaisir wrote in his 1683 treaty on style that a “barbaric word alone is capable of making people detest a well written story” (1975, 45).<sup>4</sup> Readers were barely interested in learning about unknown countries or hearing other languages; they wanted an aestheticized version of the foreign. Interestingly, travel writing follows the evolution of literary prose on this point: the insertion of other languages and voices was a rare and short-lived practice (Murvai 2016, 69). By the end of the seventeenth century, few travelers gave space in their narratives for dialogues, vernaculars, and other forms of citation. Faraway tongues progressively lost value, both as a site for constructing knowledge and as an aesthetic. Local languages became classified as “useless curiosities” because they were illegible, difficult to pronounce and the audience usually only had a vague idea about the objects or phenomena to which the vernacular vocabulary referred (Launay-Demonet 1987, 499).

At the same time, the seventeenth century was very much still a culture of the spoken word, and there was an awareness of local and global linguistic diversity and of the difficulty in communicating with, let alone representing, other languages. Most people spoke several dialects and languages in France: French, in the process of becoming standardized, and Latin, along with local vernaculars. Linguistic diversity was conceptualized in terms of genealogy and sociability, not territory, and language was a relational rather than ontological or essential term. For the urban elite, the cosmopolitan Latin was favored; speaking with a fisherman from Bretagne was more foreign than communicating with a nobleman from Rome. Thus, plurilingualism was part of everyday life in France, in the Mediterranean but even more so in the Caribbean. Here, standard “monolingual” French was not as dominant (Relouzat 1999, lxxviii). Rather a plurality of “Frenches,” constituted of a large spectrum of variations from

<sup>3</sup>The importance of *la parole* and rhetoric in seventeenth-century French culture and literatures has been extensively researched; see Olivia Rosenthal (1998), Jean-Philippe Salazar (1995), Marc Fumaroli (1980) and Aron Kibedi-Varga (2002).

<sup>4</sup>Un nom barbare est seul capable de faire haïr une histoire bien écrite.

regional dialects (notably from northern France) and sociolects from different popular spoken forms, were used (Prudent 1980, 24) alongside Caribbean vernaculars, comprised of Indigenous, African, and mixed languages.

I use the term plurilingualism to account for linguistic diversity in this context, following Suresh Canagarajah and Indika Liyanage's argument that this notion "allows for the interaction and mutual interaction of the languages in a more dynamic way" than multilingualism, which "keeps languages distinct" (2012, 50). The Western monolingual paradigm, which has defined how we think of languages in relation to modern nation-state formations, took root in France during the seventeenth century with the standardization of French, a process aligned with an increasing political centralization. But as we shall see, neither the promotion of one language nor the separation of languages dictated early colonial society and the texts representing that society. Rather, languages were integrated according to plurilingual dynamics.

The issue then is that the plurilingual logic determining early colonial society stands in stark contrast to the codes of representation determining travel writing at the time. Even in travel writing, an excess of vernaculars would be disturbing for the reader, always running the risk of ruining the harmony and the clarity of expression. Travelers writing from faraway places such as the Caribbean had to negotiate between two contradictory regimes of writing, implying different power dynamics: on the one hand, the formal impetus to exclude other tongues and comply with ideals of expressive clarity and stylistic flow, and on the other hand, the epistemic motivation to include them in order to construct an accurate representation of the Caribbean. The challenge was to harmonize other spoken vernacular languages into written French while accounting for them and for forms of linguistic transitions that were taking place. It was also important to highlight linguistic diversity within the frame of the French language since it reflected back on France through the country's emergent imperial ambitions. It portrayed the voyagers themselves as capable of mastering the disorderly world of the islands and forged ways to express the burgeoning empire's ability to rule over the world's diversity. Nonetheless, not only did that diversity complicate the shift toward linguistic transparency, according to which one language—French—would mediate science, politics, and literature; it also challenged the discourse of control since it could not be entirely contained within the narratives.

Travelers, especially missionaries, were encouraged to learn languages in order to facilitate evangelical work and secure the settlement. The main source for linguistic knowledge was Dominican Father Raymond Breton, who had learned Carib through language immersion during his sojourns among the Caribs on Dominica between 1642 and 1654. The Jesuits filtered their understanding of island vernaculars through a larger network of Jesuit missionary work. Both Pacifique de Provins and Pelleprat for example, refer to Denys Mesland, a Jesuit and friend of Descartes who had journeyed to the South American continent but never in the Caribbean (Ouellet 2010, 249–250). Despite this lack of direct contact with island languages, Breton states in his travelogue that he also used Mesland as a source for languages beyond Dominica (1978, 51).

Indigenous vernaculars were oral and had no writing systems, which complicated Europeans' language acquisition, transcription into the Latin alphabet, and translation into French and Latin. Breton himself points out in the preface to the dictionary that his linguistic knowledge of the tongue spoken by the people of Dominica was far from complete.<sup>5</sup> Eleven years passed between Breton's return from the islands and the publication of his dictionary. Though he may have worked continuously with texts about the Antilles during this period, there is a considerable gap between his language immersion on Dominica and his linguistic work, suggesting that parts of it were constructed through fragments of recollection (1999, v). In fact, it is almost impossible to establish the exact language to which the travelogues refer, particularly because Caribbean languages had gone through various processes of mixing at different periods due to exchanges and migrations, which had intensified as a result of the European intrusion (Granberry and Vescelius 2004, 60). Julian Granberry and Gary Vescelius (2004, 62) go as far as calling the tongues that made it into the notes of travelers a mixed language composed of Kalíphuna (today Garífuna; Granberry 2013, 65) or Kalinago (Granberry 2013, 66), Karina Carib, Eyeri/Island Carib, Taíno, and Arawakan.<sup>6</sup> While most travelers were aware of the local plurilingualism, they could not always distinguish one language from another. Pelleprat was convinced that the Galibi he learned in the village along the Orinoco River was a "quasi-universal language and

<sup>5</sup> See Breton's *Relation* (1978, 55) where he underscores that it is difficult to learn their language because there are no written references. Listening is an unreliable source demanding a lot of patience and a good memory, Breton claims.

<sup>6</sup> For research on the languages spoken on the islands at the time of the arrival of Columbus, see Granberry and Vescelius (2004, 123).

almost as common on the meridional continent as Latin is familiar in Europe” (1655, 87).<sup>7</sup> The anonymous writer of Carpentras claims the contrary and alludes to a vast linguistic variety (2002, 126). Rochefort mistook new words, formed from the encounter between languages in the region, for Indigenous lexica. In the preface to his French-Carib dictionary, Breton confirms that he was present with Rochefort as the Protestant wrote the Carib vocabulary included in *Histoire naturelle des Isles de l’Amérique*. Then Breton lists nouns that did not come from him and that were not “Savage words.” He explains, “Those who gave them to him could very well have heard them from Caribs and French, but as jargon used to make oneself understood and not a true Carib language.”<sup>8</sup> However, this observation did not prevent Breton from himself including the words in explanations to a number of entries in the dictionary. Furthermore, it shows how the misconceptions of tongues reflect that those engaged in Caribbean life existed in plurilingual dynamics: they interacted with all languages.

The incitement to learn vernaculars was linked to power for direct, practical colonial, and ecclesiastic reasons. Breton states that language is the key to evangelism: “our barbarian Caribs are ready to open their ears to listen to our speech in their language” (1999, iii).<sup>9</sup> Rather than imposing French, the missionaries sought ways to transfer the teachings of the Bible in the vernacular as a means to ensure that Catholicism was internalized.<sup>10</sup> Instructions to travelers include full sentences directly related to missionary work, such as “ahoée chesus layouloucatimhem huenocatem *Jesus Christ died for the satisfaction of my sins*” (Breton 1999, 34).<sup>11</sup> But this fundamental motivation for language acquisition quickly became secondary as a consequence of the failed evangelization among the Caribs. Instead, texts on language had a larger role to play as manuals for future

<sup>7</sup> Quasi universelle & presque aussi commune dans la terre ferme Meridionale que la Latine est familiere en Europe.

<sup>8</sup> Ceux qui les lui ont donnés les peuvent bien avoir ouï-dire aux Sauvages et aux Français, mais comme un jargon pour se faire entendre et non pas pour un véritable langage Caraïbe.

<sup>9</sup> Nos Barbares Caraïbes sont prêts de nous ouvrir leurs oreilles, pour écouter nos paroles en leur Idiome.

<sup>10</sup> This was the general policy of the French missions, but Caribbean travel narratives are not imbued with martial metaphors to the same extent as Jesuit accounts from New France are. Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit missionary to Canada between 1632 and 1639, writes that language acquisition was a means to “attack the enemy on their grounds with their own weapons” (attaquer l’ennemy sur ses terres par ses propres armes), as cited in Pioffet (1997, 45).

<sup>11</sup> *Jésus-Christ est mort pour la satisfaction de mes fautes.*

travelers other than missionaries. They were conceptualized as guides for communicating with peoples of the islands and covered everything from lexica, basic grammatical rules and pronunciation, to cultural observations and descriptions of codes of sociability. Pelleprat's introduction to Galibi starts with the most useful terms, roughly following the same hierarchy as the natural histories (1655, 3). Anthropological descriptions of Carib hospitality, containing expressions of greetings, served as instructions helping travelers to avoid social missteps. Welcoming rituals, for instance, could be subtly included in the narrative. This was crucial knowledge for trade and for political and territorial negotiations.

Texts on languages only constitute a small part of the Caribbean archive, and their concrete impact was minor: few of those going to the islands actually learned Indigenous, let alone African, languages. There is no evidence that Du Terre ever made an effort to speak or understand any Indigenous vernacular. Rochefort presents himself as a person versed in Carib, but his knowledge is based on what he retrieved from Breton, not on a personal investment in learning their language. Biet had strong opinions about the importance of learning Indigenous languages in order to secure missionary work, citing lacking language skills as the reason for low numbers of converted souls (1664, 322). The Galibi he himself describes in the travelogue was, in fact, a pidgin (Renault-Lescure 1999, lxiv). The one language he learned during his voyage was English (1664, 276); since he could not convert Natives, he would rather see to Christian teachings for other Europeans (particularly trying to convert Protestants to Catholicism). Labat was the only traveler who explicitly states that he wanted to learn what he calls "Arada," which, according to him, was spoken by the majority of the enslaved people at his plantation Fonds Saint-Jacques (1722 t4, 136). He forced an enslaved person to teach him the basics of the language and claims that it was easy to learn. Yet there is no evidence in the travelogue that he actually did learn it. In fact, with the exception of Breton, who had explicit linguistic ambitions during his long stay in Dominica, those who did learn Indigenous vernaculars did so by accident. The anonymous writer was stranded on Martinique; Pelleprat suffered from swollen legs and found himself trapped in a village in Venezuela close to the coast, where he learned basic Galibi (1655, 87–88).

It would indeed be more pertinent to consider the grammars and dictionaries as shortcuts, giving quick insights into local languages while sparing future traveler from the hazardous and difficult trouble of immersing

themselves in Carib, than to look at these writings as linguistic teaching manuals. What the travelers take from the linguistic sources are mostly nouns, approaching language as words, not as discourse. Typically, vernacular words designate places and objects, notably food, plants, animals, and cultural or religious phenomena that had no French counterpart and which contributed to constructing a collection of knowledge about the islands.

In this setting, language is not connected to a speaking subject; its modality is encyclopedic, to use David Diop's expression (2018, 21), with a functional value of supplying additional information about the objects described. This implies a conception of language where words are seen as carriers of knowledge. We recognize this line of thinking from Michel Foucault's famous analysis of language in the age of Classicism (1966, 117): language was considered a representation of thought and thought a representation of language (98). Foucault argues that this paradigm relies on two different but intersecting articulations of language. Language did not manifest itself until it became discourse, forming complete propositions (107–108), yet its essence could be found in naming. A similar conceptualization permeates the travelogues, though something happens to the essential value of nouns in the process of transcription. Breton writes in his *Relation*,

One would need a painter to extract the forms and the colors of the leaves and the fruits of the country and have much leisure to learn from the Savages the names and the virtues of plants, trees and other things from these lands. Surely they have much knowledge and experience the rare virtues of many things of which we don't know the names in Europe. If there is no one who will take on this task, maybe one day when we are a bit peaceful among them, we will use our leisure for this research.<sup>12</sup> (1978, 49–50)

Language and knowledge are here interdependent, recalling Foucault's observation that the main task of "classicist" discourse is to "attribute a name to things, and in this name designates [nommer] their being"

<sup>12</sup> Il faudroit avoir un peintre pour tirer les formes et les couleurs des feuilles et des fruits du païs et avoir un grand loisir pour apprendre des sauvages les noms et vertus des plantes, des arbres et des autres choses de ces terres. Ils ont saunement de grandes cognoissances et expérimentet de rares vertus de plusieurs choses dont on ne scait le nom en Europe. S'il ne se trouve personne qui prenne cette tâche, peut-être qu'un jour lorsque nous serons un peu paisible parmi eux, nous employerons nostre loisir à cette recherche.



(136).<sup>13</sup> Knowing the name of a plant implies insights into its qualities; the name reflects the object and transmits knowledge: the French can learn from the Caribs about island nature by virtue of deciphering their language. Yet that transposition produces difference rather than analogy. Breton's last sentence reveals the fragile contextual basis of language acquisition. Repeated conflicts hindered missionaries and others from seeking out vernacular knowledge and languages "among them." Further, as the French acquired that knowledge and delocalized the noun to another setting, the vernacular source would be silenced or at least altered; that which starts as engagement and recognition of vernacular knowledge ends up as appropriation by means of validation, first by the travelers performing the role of the mediator, then by the location where knowledge is constructed and incorporated into a discourse. Categorization in itself is secondary to the construction of a larger knowledge, including cultural practices. These could not be captured by the vernacular lexica alone but needed to be *explained* or illustrated. Rochefort's description of the coco plum uses a compound word, combining the local term *icaque* and the French *prune*. It centers on the sweetness of the fruit and includes an anecdote about how the Natives who live in the Gulf of Honduras place "soldiers," armed with arcs, to guard the trees when the fruit is ripe (Rochefort 1658, 157) (Fig. 4.1).

The initial deictic function of vernacular words is thus quickly discarded in the process of creating knowledge as discourse. Travelogues turn the word into an artefact. Displaced from both source and context, words in Indigenous vernacular become material, like the textual equivalences of stones or plants for the various academies in Paris, with an additional surplus value of teasing the curious audience with foreignness. As Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud (2000, 102–103) remarks in her study of sixteenth-century voyages, as much as foreign lexica are objects of knowledge, they are presented as a "spectacle." Epistemology and exoticism meet in the vernacular words, as if they had the capacity to bring forth the islands to the readers (Linon 1988). Such singling out of the word-object unsettles the "classical" conceptualization of languages as defined by Foucault: whereas nouns and things hold up in analogy, words can be delocalized by means of transcription into the Latin alphabet. The analogical relationship holding words to things is thereby assembled and dismantled in the same movement. Further, the word-spectacle signals the

<sup>13</sup>D'attribuer un nom aux choses, et en ce nom de nommer leur être.



**contrée, d'y venir faire aucun dégast, ils tiennent durant tout ce tems-là aus avenues de leur terre, des Corps-de-garde, composez de l'elite de leurs meilleurs Soldats, qui les repoussent vivement avec la fléche & la massuë, s'ils ont l'assurance de se presenter.**

Fig. 4.1 Rochefort *Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles* (1658). Illustration to support the description of the coco plum, *Icaque prune*. (Source: [gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France](http://gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France). Public domain. Illustration to support the description of the coco plum, *Icaque prune*.)

interdependence between language and the larger geographical, historical, and aesthetic context; vernaculars were not interesting per se.

We notice this when comparing Indigenous Caribbean languages to diasporic African vernaculars, which also floated around in the area at this time as a consequence of deportation and enslavement. But whereas African vernaculars had an encyclopedic function in travelogues out of Africa, they lost that function in relation to the Caribbean. Such absences speak of a longer, insidious process of silencing, intimately tied to the dispossession of enslaved persons. Dislocated and destined for labor, enslaved Africans were also considered to be deprived of language as the means for

creativity, agency, and culture: on the islands they were circumscribed within a system of bondage, where they would only exist in relation to the enslavers, at least in the eyes of Europeans. The logic relies on an erasure of languages that occasionally interrupts the travel narratives, as we shall see further on. What interests me here is that the silence suggests that the beginning of the slave trade coincided with a process of differentiation in the (European) conceptualization of language. While European languages represent thought, faraway tongues become increasingly conceptualized primarily in terms of essence; they are valued in regard to territory and culture (encyclopedic modality) at the same time as those Europeans who learned these languages could extract them and use them to construct knowledge elsewhere. Thus, what we have is a spatialization and culturalization of languages with a burgeoning racialization of tongues, which developed in tandem with an increased separation of languages.

The construction of the word-spectacle thus operates a boundary-making within language that has corrosive effects. Travel writing engages with plurilingual dynamics, but when textualized, that dynamic is subjected to what we can define as a heterolingual regime. Heterolingualism, according to Rainer Grutman's definition, refers to the presence of foreign tongues, in whatever form or variety, in a mainly monolingual text (1997, 37). The concept is useful for capturing the linguistic structure of power underpinning the encyclopedic inclusion of languages: French dominates the narratives, and vernaculars are harmonized in order to fit into that language. They appear as *dissecta membra*, singled out according to a heterolingual grammar, but seem to evolve on what Myriam Suchet calls the "continuum of alterity" (2014, 19) of heterolingualism, constructed by and through the narrative discourse. This is important in order to theorize the burgeoning racialization of languages. The notion of heterolingualism allows us to see which modalities in the narratives operate by policing languages, singling them out and thereby isolating them from linguistic interaction. Put differently, the texts submit plurilingualism to the domination of monolingualism.

Yet the heterolingual grammar in these travelogues relies on a contradictory premise. It sees the vernacular word as both situational *and* transferrable. As Michel de Certeau reminds us in his reading of Jean de Léry, even if the foreign word is contained and altered within the heterolingual grammar, it points to other places and infuses the texts with "disturbing otherness" (1992, 255–256). But this does not occur naturally; it is a textual effect produced in the gaps between words, referents, codes, and

narration. In the Caribbean travelogues, that disturbing otherness emerges in the narratives as soon as the vernacular is represented in situ, or as what Foucault would have called “action-language” (120), implying a speaking body, manifest in gestures and non-linguistic expressions. These language actions transgress the heterolingual bordering regime, alluding to that which cannot be captured in writing. We can see how it happens when analogies based on encyclopedic modalities fail. Addressing the reader in the preface, Breton writes: “I cannot communicate to you what the Savages have taught me: they could not teach me what they don’t know and they don’t recognize that which they don’t see and that which they can’t use” (1999, n.p.).<sup>14</sup> Breton depicts a scene where the deictic mode simply does not work; how do you point at something that is not there? It also hints at a pool of Indigenous knowledge beyond the nouns that Breton has acquired during his sojourn but which he cannot formulate into discourse. He asserts both lack and saturation (he has learned a lot but is incapable of communicating this knowledge). This creates a textual disruption, which indirectly manifests Indigenous presence and the depth and breadth of their knowledge that the text will never be able to account for. There is thus a radical discrepancy between the underlying rationale of the dictionary—providing travelers and future missionaries with language skills so that they can pass on the gospels—and the language exchange. Making connections between languages inevitably leads to interpretations, where one has to adjust the target language and fold in the source language; they become overlapping.

#### LANGUAGE ENCOUNTERS

Clearly, we cannot read other tongues in early colonial Caribbean texts strictly from the point of view of European, seventeenth-century ideas of language. Something happens with the conception of language when studied *in situ*: it becomes important not as a representation of thought but as praxis. Within the text, a praxis of writing allows for the inclusion of the different tongues. Within island society, communicational praxis facilitates exchange and territorialization. Different languages and dialects cross each other, and new languages take shape, breaking with the

<sup>14</sup>Je ne puis vous communiquer que ce que les Sauvages m’ont appris: ils ne m’ont pu apprendre ce qu’ils ne connaissent pas et ils ne reconnaissent pas ce qu’ils ne voient pas et ce dont ils n’ont pas l’usage.

heterolingual grammar. As pointed out by Michael Harrigan, texts on languages crossed the temporal and the religious (2012, 124), and such crossings turn languages into sites for distortion, complications, and creativity.

Throughout Breton's dictionary, the entries change register, raise doubts, and unsettle the relationship between language and the world. The differences produced in the process of transcribing, translating, and interpreting introduce folds where languages are not fixed but constructed through negotiations. When Breton evokes Carib deities, he calls them devils but specifies that the Caribs see them as God, or the opposite happens: he writes God only to correct himself "or rather the Devil." Breton hints at an Indigenous perspective in aligning Carib deities with God. He then shifts to the Eurocentric point of view and refers to them as manifestations of the devil. In other entries, the difficulties he encountered emerge in the definitions, as in the following passage: "coüatic, *point*. *Here is a word that gave me headaches, I had to sweat to learn it* (1999, 91).<sup>15</sup> The dictionary reveals that linguistic shortcomings were mutual. One entry gives the expression for "our languages are not alike, our discourses are not related" (1999, 106),<sup>16</sup> suggesting that the Caribs, too, were concerned with linguistic discrepancy. Another entry offers the sentence, "Chéoüallayénrou enétapa bómpti timále huéolam càchi enétapa noubali héolam, *you are as ignorant and badly versed in our language as I am in yours*" (70).<sup>17</sup> The sentence captures the mutual struggle with learning each other's languages. Here we have the Caribs reacting to the French inability to master their language and ultimately to understand them. The dictionary opens gaps where the local island interlocutors intervene as subjects.

Words expressing abstract thinking were most difficult to capture precisely because the language exchange relied on the deictic mode (pointing out things and saying the word). Rather than detecting a didactic problem, travelers saw an inherent lack in the Indigenous language, which in extension reflected intellectual, cultural, and social absences. But when

<sup>15</sup> Coüatic, *point*. *Voici un mot qui m'a bien donné le martel en tête, j'ai bien ressuié pour l'apprendre*.

<sup>16</sup> Ménega ométou oüariágonnê ou mènega oüámétou ariangonnê, *nos langages ne se ressemblent pas, nos discours ne se rapportent point*.

<sup>17</sup> *Tu es aussi ignorant et mal versé en notre langue comme je le suis en la tienne*. Rochefort testifies that the Caribs are better at learning French than the French are at learning indigenous vernaculars (1658, 394).

accounting for this lack, Breton has to resort to additions, as when he includes two words that would supposedly translate into both “writer” and “painter” (1999, 47) only to state that Carib society does not have either one of these categories. What he actually designates is the word for “pencil” (*plume* or *pluma*, from the Spanish) that they have seen Europeans use to write letters and that they themselves use to paint bodies and pottery.

*Aboulétouti, Abuoletacati, Writer, Painter, the Caribs are either one or the other, concerning the first they can't read or write; yet because they think they are knowledgeable in painting and sometimes get mixed up, they thought that there was a great likeness between the one and the other and consequently they have named the feather [pluma] to write the same as the word for their brush; writing for the word for painting; when they go to festivities, a man washes himself carefully and the woman begins her patterns and lines from the shoulders all the way down to the buttocks and fills the back, the arms, the chest with fantasies that are not unpleasant to watch; yet I have more admiration for the patience of the man, who stands still for twelve hours, than for the painting; moreover, the women draw lines on their beds, on their calabasses, though painters should have the right to question this quality.*<sup>18</sup> (47)

The entry starts by describing the Indigenous peoples' interpretation and appropriation of Europeans' cultural practices and ends with an anthropological observation about how body-paintings are carried out and how women transfer this practice onto pottery. So while expressing the desire to show the Caribs' lack of certain practices and, therefore, the lack of words to describe these practices also in a larger symbolic and cultural meaning, the entry instead shows a creative ability to pick up another culture and language, transform it, and add to it. The entry seems to take on a life of its own, adding one discursive register to another, creating a series of micro-differences. In fact, Breton's Eurocentric perspective relies on a

<sup>18</sup> *Écrivain, Peintre, les Caraïbes ne sont ni l'un ni l'autre, pour le premier ils ne savent ni lire ni écrire; pourtant parce qu'ils croient être savants à la peinture et qu'ils s'en mêlent quelquefois, ils ont cru qu'il y avait grande ressemblance entre l'un et l'autre et ainsi ils ont nommé la pluma à écrire du mot de leur pinceau, l'écriture du mot de peinture; quand ils doivent aller à quelque festin, un homme se lavera bien et la femme commencera ses traits et linéaments depuis les épaules jusqu'aux fesses et remplira le dos, les bras, le sein de fantaisies qui ne sont pas désagréables à voir; pourtant j'ai plus admiré la patience de l'homme qui demeure debout des douze heures, que la peinture; les femmes tirent encore quelques traits sur leurs lits et sur leurs calebasses et nonobstant les peintres auraient le droit de leur contester cette qualité.*

semantic slip. While presenting his reductive view that meaning can only be conveyed from letters, which he interprets as a sign of the Caribs' cultural inferiority, he puts his own interpretation on display. Thereby he presents not just the construction of Eurocentrism; in so doing he also *shows* the reader Indigenous cultural practices, and these are open for reinterpretations.

Thus, the dictionary curiously works against its own presumption about the other language as lacking. Breton's own work of deciphering and translating is reflected in the entries, sometimes leading to spiraling definitions. When defining the word *boyé*, commonly used in the travelogues, Breton first adds two other terms: *boyáicou* and *niboyeiri*. (44–45). Then he gives the explanation, “doctor, preacher of the Savages, or to put it better, magician, my doctor, etc.”<sup>19</sup> The first association, “doctor,” seems to come from Breton's understanding *in situ*. The next association is Christian, but he corrects himself to adjust to the Church for which it would have been blasphemy to call a non-Christian, notably a non-Catholic, spiritual leader a preacher. Finally he finds the term “magician,” only to return to the initial definition, probably because a *boyé* might have been a healer of souls and bodies. The spiraling definitions allow for Breton's method and misunderstandings to enter into the dictionary, conveying a complex story of language acquisition and of language crossings.

The languages reflect one another but never completely, leading to discursive detours. Rather than a binary, parallel construction that one finds in modern dictionaries, Breton's book has an open structure that not only diversifies language but also opens it up to other languages. Breton writes that, in exchanging with the French, the Caribs have been using the word for “pathway” (*chemin*) to say stairway (*escalier*) and ladder (*échelle*) because “they had never seen anything like it and they still don't use it; and if they climb everywhere, that does not surprise me more than the ways in which they climb (maybe not everyone mounts in the same fashion), because I have seen them with two hands grasp trees against which they put their feet to go up, which cannot be done without much effort” (1999, 104).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, cultural practices linked to certain words are not

<sup>19</sup> *Médecin, prêtre des Sauvages ou pour mieux dire, magicien, mon médecin, etc.*

<sup>20</sup> Némali, ou némeli, *mon chemin*; depuis qu'ils communiquent avec les Français ils se servent de ce mot pour dire un escalier, des degrés, une échelle, car auparavant ils n'avaient rien vu de semblable, ni n'en usent pas même encore à présent; et s'ils grimpent partout, ce qui ne m'étonne pas tant que la manière (peut-être que tous ne montent pas de la même sorte) car j'en ai vu empouguer l'arbre avec les deux mains contre lequel ils mettent la plainte des pieds pour y monter, ce qui ne se peut faire sans une grande force.

restricted to Indigenous habits. Descriptions of how the French and the diasporic Africans prepare food from manioc, how enslaved peoples use oil from the palm tree, how they cook turtle, and so on are also included in the dictionary.

Indigenous words in some cases help Breton to conceptualize phenomena linked to colonial island culture. There is a Carib word for “ennui” called *ichi*, which he uses to describe cases of French women suffering from severe depression, according to him, due to homesickness (1999, 142). Dictionaries and grammars of Indigenous languages contain entrances with local words for imported European terms like “wine” and “hammer” but also words pertaining to interactions in early colonial society. “Cachionna,” for instance, is the word for “child born from a white man and a black woman” (1999, 52). Pelleprat notes that alongside borrowings from European languages, the Indigenous themselves invented words to designate things coming from Europe (1655, 11). Breton testifies to the same phenomena by including words like “caniche,” which translates into “sugar cane” with the explanation that the Caribs took both the plant and the noun from the Spanish (1999, 126). Some transcriptions of indigenous languages incorporated into the travel narratives contain traces of Spanish, like when one of the Caribs in Chevillard’s account says “*Mira calinago Mabobia ouiatou*” (1659, 128). The translation that follows does not take any note of the Spanish word “mira” and simply translates it as “look.” In most dictionaries and grammars, island vernaculars are also “contaminated” by the European encounter on a semantic level. A great number of expressions in Breton’s dictionary reflect the violence that undergirds relations with Europeans: “That one is a Pirate who captures Caribs and puts them in iron” (1999, 5), “Are you the one who has always been alone with the French” (1999, 18), and “You irritate the French against us” (1999, 71).

These linguistic borrowings and mixings are not surprising nor unique to the early colonial Caribbean; they are consequences of language and culture contact. Yet the fact that they appear in travel narratives as well as in dictionaries, grammars or “introductions” to island vernaculars suggest that, at this time, the travel writers did not restrict Indigenous vernaculars or reduce them to a fixed form. On the contrary, context pushed them to explore the ways in which indigenous language changed as a consequence of contact. The motivation may have been that they wanted European languages to affect Caribs to facilitate religious teaching by being able to express abstract, religious concepts (Hanzeli 2014, 45). Nonetheless,



while working on delineating *a* language (Carib), the dictionary inevitably actualizes plurilingualism because travelers had to work through linguistic tensions in order to create meaning. Thus breaking with the heterolingual grammar, the narratives enter into a zone of translingualism, where languages interact and influence one another on a textual level. Contrary to societal plurilingualism, the textual language interaction occurs *within* the French; the texts actualize what can be defined as translingual events (Helgesson and Kullberg 2018, 137), which enhance the plurilingualism that defines the event's context. When a translingual event is produced, it is not apparent what is foreign and what is familiar (138). This happens when language shifts functionally, from representing essence (the word as artefact) to becoming related to action or praxis.

When Du Tertre contrasts the refinement of the French language with his own writing, saying that his rough style, influenced by the time he spent on the island, might offend a reader versed in polite French, he frames the narrative within the translingual zone. Likewise, when Breton argues that he will use his own vernacular version of French from Bourgogne because the main objective is to learn Carib, not French, he localizes language in practice, which draws writing toward the translingual. In this sense, the travelogues indirectly capture complicated processes of language formations of the period. They reflect the standardization taking place in France where people were subjected to “francization.” At the same time, they are deeply enmeshed with the language dynamics on the islands, where the concern was to learn local vernaculars and to communicate between languages (Relouzat 1999, lxxiii).<sup>21</sup> What we learn from this is that power did not begin by operating through language bordering. Isolating one language from another or imposing a language—which will later become a crucial part of French colonial politics—was not considered relevant on the islands during the first period of settlement.

This brings us to languages emerging from the European intrusion and the importation of enslaved Africans, namely early forms of Creole (Prudent 1980, 23; Relouzat 1999, lxxix). Speaking about the Caribs, Bouton writes,

<sup>21</sup>The scarce information can be compared with the linguistic work carried out by missionaries in New France during the same period. Hanzeli describes it as a form of field work, where missionaries would record speech repeatedly, revise and read it back to the “informants” (2014, 51).

They have a certain pidgin (*baragouin*) mixed with French, Spanish, English and Flemish. The exchange and familiarity that they have had with these nations have made them learn some words from their language, in a way that in a short period of time one can both understand them and make oneself understood by them, which will be a great advantage for us to be able to instruct them.<sup>22</sup> (1640, 130)

Bouton puts the emphasis on the advantages when instructing the Caribs about the Christian faith. The reverse was most likely more relevant, namely that mixing languages to communicate was useful for the French, who were dependent on instructions from the Caribs. In any case, the formation of *baragouin* testifies to the communicational skills put in practice in the context of exchange.

The term is derived from a Celtic vernacular—Breton—*bara* meaning bread and *gwin* meaning wine—and had been used pejoratively since the Middle Ages to designate an improper language. The missionaries speak of it in terms of jargon or corrupt language, a familiar, oral language with no grammatical rules, reminiscent of Dante’s notion of vulgar languages, except that these are not mother tongues. Rochefort gives a positive connotation to *baragouin*, which he finds “pleasant,” and identifies it as used for friendly exchanges and based on French and another tongue, which he calls a “bastard and mixed” language, derived from Castilian (1668, 392). The exact linguistic definition of *baragouin* thus remains unstable, but in most cases it refers to Caribs’ use of mixed languages to communicate with Europeans and sometimes to describe enslaved peoples’ language. When Labat had just arrived in Martinique, he expressed frustration about not understanding the “jargon” spoken by enslaved people because he wants to learn from them about the island. The mention is quick yet indicates that the traveler valued their knowledge and understood that it was deeper and more useful than what Frenchmen could instruct him. However, once he does learn the language he has been on the island long enough that he no longer needs their help. The anecdote illustrates that even though the travelogues only account for enslaved and Indigenous people speaking *baragouin*, Europeans spoke it too; it is, to use Breton’s words, a “language of the islands.”

<sup>22</sup> Ils ont un certain baragouin mêlé de français, espagnol, anglais et flamand. Le trafic et hantise qu’ils ont eus avec ces nations leur ayant fait apprendre quelques mots de leur langage, de sorte qu’en peu de temps on peut et les entendre et se faire entendre par eux, qui nous sera in très grand avantage pour les instruire.

*Baragouin* is considered to be an early form of Creole, even though this particular term was rarely used in the seventeenth century, and when it was, it referred to an ethnic category of both Blacks and Whites born in the colonies (Murdoch 2016).<sup>23</sup> The first attributed use of Creole to denote a language is from 1685 when La Courbe, during his voyage to Africa, describes a language composed by different languages, spoken by Black and brown people, which he compares to the mixed *lingua franca* used in the Mediterranean area (Baker and Mühlhäusler 2007, 85). When Creole transitioned from being a racial term into becoming a linguistic term, it only referred to language spoken by Blacks. The racial component was thus sustained. Surely white Creoles could speak it, but it was not considered to be *their* language. Creole, in other words, alludes to a different linguistic context than *baragouin*, in which languages were more clearly separated between racial lines and became an expression of the French Atlantic and the plantation system rather than the intraregional archipelagic space of early colonization.

Baker suggests that there are similarities between the Carib *baragouin* reported in the travelogues and the earliest linguistic data from Africans in the islands (1996, 97). The observation is interesting because it supports information from quotes included in the travelogues. And since the French were used to communicating with the Caribs in pidgin, they probably performed the same communicative strategy when approaching deported Africans who spoke various West African vernaculars. We also know, thanks to the travelogues, that deported Africans lived and interacted with Indigenous peoples. Moreover, a majority of enslaved people on the French islands during the period of the establishment were bought from Brazil or from neighboring islands and probably already spoke a version of pidgin. There was thus a continuum of *baragouins* created out of different languages. According to Sybille de Pury-Toumi (1999, 59–72) the Caribs also used an internal language that mixed various local languages in order to facilitate communication. Caillé de Castres, who identified a large variety of Indigenous peoples (2002, 75), confirms Pury-Toumi's observation claiming that there was a "war language" spoken among men (86). This language was, according to Caillé de Castres,

<sup>23</sup>Robert Chaudenson (2001) holds Creole to be directly derived from French, including its many regional dialects that were in motion during the establishment. With the increasing number of Africans, the newcomers would infuse Creole with African languages while learning Creole from those enslaved people who were already there. Nevertheless, French still provided the determiners for the development of Creole (Baker and Mühlhäusler 2007, 97).

used for deliberations and discussions, functioning as a regional cosmopolitan language, shared by the male population. Breton, too, testifies to the existence of such language used for “deliberations and exchanges” (1999, 55), a form of pidgin used for minimum communication (Granberry and Vesceius 2004, 62). Taken together, these descriptions suggest that *baragouin* referred to a fluid inter-Caribbean language, covering many forms of interactions between all peoples. Travelers interpreted it in light of similar types of relational and practical language mixing that existed in the Mediterranean. Pelleprat, for instance, eulogizes *baragouin* as the germ of a regional *lingua franca* that recalled Mediterranean language-mixings and thus would facilitate both evangelization and commerce (1658, 89). Regardless of the motivation, life on the islands required a “medium for interethnic communication” (Baker 2000, 48). Mixing languages would thus not appear as threatening to the colonial endeavor.

In fact, there are reasons to consider *baragouin*—the linguistic point of entanglement; the cross-cultural language without a single origin, to paraphrase Glissant (1989, 127)—as a starting point for thinking about languages in the Caribbean. Without this language, which enabled encounters and was shaped by these meetings, other languages would never have made it into the narratives. It is through language-mixing that communication begins. The anonymous writers of Carpentras makes this explicit as he captures the linguistic complexity undergirding situations of communication in the context of the seventeenth-century Caribbean: “In the beginning of our arrival at their home, [the Caribs] made us understand what they wanted to tell us in two ways. The first by a few words in Spanish or French, and the second by signs, and one often had to guess, and we could not understand anything until we had stayed with them for a long time” (2002, 118).<sup>24</sup> The brief passage quoted here outlines the display of languages and interactions shaped by a unique combination of curiosity and necessity, not dictated by territorial claims. It captures the Indigenous people’s desire to communicate with the French, suggesting that the French used a similar strategy to pass on messages, using sign language and gestures. It also testifies to Céline Carayon’s conclusion that “the flaws of linguistic understanding between groups might have often been

<sup>24</sup> Au commencement de notre arrivée chez eux, ils nous faisaient entendre ce qu’ils nous voulaient dire de deux façons. La première par quelque mot espagnol ou français, et l’autre par signes, et souvent il fallait deviner, et ne pûmes rien comprendre qu’après être demeurés longtemps avec eux.

balanced out by the continuous use of another, non-verbal lexicon” (2019, 356). Gestures along with the senses were instruments of communication that provided the bones for the formations of new languages. Clearly, the encounters between travelers and Indigenous and enslaved peoples were not marked by a complete linguistic opacity but rather as a translingual event.

The modality of inscription of *baragouin* in the travel narratives is different from Indigenous vernaculars. Mixed languages are exclusively evoked as speech, tied to the body and the speaking subject; they are not linguistic objects per se. The French missionaries in the Caribbean were not interested in the forms or grammar of *baragouin* since they saw it as an oral language connected to labor and transactions. The texts present it as a fluid language that belonged nowhere and did not express thought or emotions, only needs; it was seen as a natural language, which was not singled out as a material object and was not considered to constitute knowledge. It mostly appears incorporated into the narratives in terms of linguistic characterizations—“he said in *baragouin*,” “he said in corrupt Spanish,” “using jargon”—describing situations of active exchange, indirectly serving as historical markers. Such formulations add a temporal aspect to early colonial interactions by signaling previous exchanges and dialogues that had taken place on the islands and testifies to the linguistic creativity emerging out of the brutal and violent encounters of the settlement.

Even in its most basic manifestations in the travelogues, *baragouin* thus signals a Caribbean sensitivity; a poetics of creolization as it were. It intervenes as an expression of translingualism emerging in moments of interaction. It unsettles the monolingual narrative by actualizing other registers as opposed to the essential quality of the vernacular word, which in the heterolingual grammar could be displaced, altered, and contained. The travelogues show that this early form of Creole was widely used and shaped by various groups in the Caribbean. Framing it in relation to situations of exchange, they demonstrate that *baragouin* was the result of communicative needs and not, as it is generally articulated, of a failed acquisition of French. The travel narratives thus confirm arguments advanced by contemporary creolists (Baker 2000, 48) who question the idea that early forms of Creole were derived from European languages and thus a form of simplified Indo-European reflecting an “initial” phase of language development. If creole languages, as argued by Baker, were shaped by the necessity to exchange in a particular context, they were “in essence what

those who constructed them wanted them to be, rather than being the result of imperfect second-language learning” (Baker 2000, 48). Those who constructed these tongues were Indigenous, diasporic Africans, and Europeans together. Indirectly then, travel narratives help to rewrite the entire genealogy of Creole, as a creative language emerging from a “point of entanglement” and not as a language determined by lack and incompleteness.

This is not to say that *baragouin* is free of traces of violence and hierarchies. Travelogues contain numerous references to speakers of *baragouin* being inferior as well as lacking in intelligence and morality. They further produce fine borders between different versions of the “language of the islands.” Whereas exchanges between Indigenous and French were presented as two (or more) languages that meet, when it comes from the mouths of enslaved individuals, it appears as a language supplementing for not having a language proper. The various versions of early Creole spoken between Black people, which were not necessarily understood by white people, are absent from the travelogues. Only the language created to communicate within the regime of bondage and forced labor is considered. In this framework, Black *baragouin* is oriented toward French, as if it was indeed a phase in a language acquisition that would never be completed.

This is crucial for the increasing racialization of languages in the islands. Pelleprat configures Black *baragouin* in relation to evangelization and, thus, to French.

We nevertheless adjust our way of speaking to theirs, which is extraordinarily by using the infinitive of the verb, for example, *me pray God, me go to Church, me not eat*, to say *I have prayed to God, I went to Church, I have not eaten*: and adding a word that marks future or past tense, they say, *tomorrow me eat, yesterday me pray God*, and this means *I will eat tomorrow, yesterday I prayed*.<sup>25</sup> (1658, 53)

Two tropes are forged in this movement. On the one hand the paternalist structure is clear assuring the missionary a place in colonial society—he is

<sup>25</sup> Nous nous accommodons cependant à leur façon de parler, qui est extraordinairement par l’infinitif du verbe, comme par exemple, *moy prier Dieu, moy aller à l’Eglise, moy point manger* pour dire *l’ay prié Dieu, ie suis allé à l’Eglise, ie n’ay point mangé*: Et y adjoignant un mot qui marque le temps à venir, ou le passé, ils disent *demain moy manger, hier moy prier Dieu* & cela signifie, Je mangeray demain, hier ie priay.

there to instruct individuals who, by their ways of speaking, show that they need that instruction. On the other hand, a racist linguistic differentiation germinates in these utterances that will ultimately lead to the conception of Creole as a not-quite language that resulted from a failed acquisition of French (and Spanish, Dutch, or English), where the latter is considered the superior language. Black *baragouin* turns into a continuum, more and more measured in relation to French. Enslaved peoples newly arriving from Africa spoke one version of *baragouin*; those born in the colonies spoke another form.

Where does this lead us? The wide range of languages at play in the early colonial period do indeed directly shape writings on the islands. And in this setting language does not mean only one thing. The narratives show a display of languages as spectacular objects, differentiated from one another, creating a heterolingual space at the same time as languages interact with one another, showing the presence of languages-in-the-making in a translingual zone. The return of the “unsettling foreignness” evoked by de Certeau is evident in the translingual event, interrupting a discourse of monologism, which is trying to put other tongues on display while controlling them. They appear in folds and interrupt the grandiose colonial narrative by inserting disturbing elements that give the reader the sense of other perspectives and voices. But the uncertain translingual zones not only produce disruptions; they are sites in the text where borders between languages are made and unmade in a meandering prose. In *The Poetics of Relation*, Glissant writes: “It is essential that we investigate historicity [...] in the extension of the Plantation, in the things to which it gave birth at the very instant it vanished as a fictional unit. *Baroque speech, inspired by all possible speech*, was ardently created in these same extensions and loudly calls out to us from them” (1997, 75). So far I have investigated that historicity of languages beyond the plantation, localizing it in the archipelagic space where exchanges were multiplied and extended. The translingual forces that permeate the travel narratives release that moment of all possible speech, leaving it open to bordering and domination or creativity and exchange.

### STAGING SPEECH

Two travelers in particular experiment with both direct discourse and languages, namely the anonymous writer of Carpentras and Chevillard. The anonymous soldier’s unpublished manuscript tells about his sojourn

among the Caribs, during which he learned their language by necessity. The Dominican Chevillard was only in Guadeloupe for a brief period, during which he did not learn the language, and his book was published under M<sup>mc</sup> de Montmoron's protection in praise of Richelieu. Despite the radically different contexts determining their narratives, both use a similar strategy of inclusion of other tongues: the vernacular is first transcribed and put in quotation marks and/or in italics in the printed text and then translated into French. When describing the Caribs' ways of drinking and eating, the anonymous writer of Carpentras inserts direct speech: "...and not wanting to turn away from their occupation, yelled to their woman, '*antennin tuna ritim magrabatin matoto oïa oïa lamaa antin*', which is to say 'my woman bring me drinks and food because I'm hungry'" (2002, 164).<sup>26</sup> Later in the same anthropological section of the account, he describes a rite of passage for young men. Here the food and beverage request reoccurs but in different words: "...and he asks with a raised voice '*antennim tuna retem magra bantim matoto oua oua*', which is to say 'bring me drinks and food because I'm hungry'" (208).<sup>27</sup> The quote is almost identical to the previous one, yet the transcriptions are not the same, suggesting that the soldier did not have a coherent methodology when collecting vernacular language. This matters less. Regardless of the method used—whether he took notes or quoted from memory—the insertion of an entire phrase in Carib into the French narrative flow has an effect. The quote is unreadable, but it allows for the creation of a soundscape that embodies Indigenous languages.

Chevillard turned this citing technique into a style. It is as if he sought to forge a bridge for heterolingualism to enter into the precious register of writing in order to connect the world of faraway travels and early colonization to the urban salon culture. He frames linguistic and cultural encounters in poetic décor, taking inspiration from the pastoral genre, extremely popular at the time in France, which revolves around the idea of salvation and healing. The Caribs supposedly chose Christianity, as if there were no force or negotiation involved. Writing within a literary register, Chevillard fictionalizes anthropological information and sprinkles it into the

<sup>26</sup>Et ne voulant détourner de leur besogne, crient à leur femme, '*antennin tuna ritim magrabatin matoto oïa oïa lamaa antin*', c'est-à-dire 'ma femme apportez-moi à boire et à manger car j'ai faim.'

<sup>27</sup>Et il demande tout haut '*antennim tuna retem magra bantim matoto oua oua*' c'est-à-dire 'apportez-moi à boire et à manger car j'ai faim.'



narration. The same goes for language. When he tells about the installation of the mission in Dominica, he quotes the devil exhorting the Natives in Carib to kill Breton: “*Si homi homan balanaglè lixbayouti mohé ayca caou nanborlabo banalé loulaxai xbia nitou malin mhé: which is to say, Give me this French man so that I can eat him and make myself a pepper pot with his guts and his brain*” (22).<sup>28</sup> The passage is almost humorous in all its exoticizing crudeness. It includes both foreign language transcribed in French characters and the translation, along with local references such as *pimentade* and anthropophagic imaginary.

The question is how instances of hetero- or translingualism, mediated through citations in the narratives in French, emerge, and how are we to read them? Réal Ouellet has suggested that quoting others, especially in the vernacular, functions as both a veracity marker and an exotic marker at once (2010, 98–99). It makes the other present in front of the reader and animates an otherwise dull historical discourse (Keller-Rahbé 2010, 10–11) by adding an element of strangeness into the text while also indirectly singling out the transcultural skills of the traveler-narrator. Jean-Michel Racault follows the same line of thought and proposes that the reality effect is an illusion of presence: the written vocalicity of the Natives and Africans would render them present in front of the reader (1998, 434). The words enunciated by the “characters” who inhabit these narratives are foreign, and the texts tend to enhance this otherness. Thus, the rendering of their words simultaneously seeks to give the reader an accurate idea of speech *and* to adjust that idea to contemporary theatrical and often idealized images of Native Americans (Pioffet 1997, 36). In her study of enslaved peoples’ voices in early modern travelogues, Ashley Williard (2018, 84–85) reads the inclusion of others’ speech as mimicry or as an effort to translate vernaculars. Yet Chevillard’s inclusion of quotations operates through two seemingly contradictory modalities. He creates linguistic mimicry by including transcribed versions of Carib. However, the speech act itself is framed as *imitatio*, as if the estrangement effect spurred by the sentences in a foreign lingua that the reader could not easily pronounce needed to be mitigated.

Rather than reflecting actual exchanges that took place, Chevillard’s quotes reproduce scenes where Indigenous peoples are staged according to literary codes; in the words of Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud, Carib

<sup>28</sup> C’est à dire. *Donnez-moy ce François que ie le mange & que de ses tripes & de son cerveau on m’en fasse une pimentade.*

characters are “put in a situation of speech” (2000, 102). Here Caribs are dramatized, not only because their discourse is reported but also because the passages where they are quoted and the words they express are impregnated with “majestic tonalities” and “dramatized rhetoric” (Requemora-Gros 2012, 223).<sup>29</sup> Their interactions with the French are configured as a play, where they become actors. Speech enters into a logic of exposure: Caribs are put on display in order to show the integration of diversity into a regime of Frenchness. From this perspective, representations of speech acts do not necessarily belong to the realist register of travel writing. Quite to the contrary, in the eyes of a contemporary reader, they risked denaturalizing the narrative by making the foreign world too theatrical. Direct discourse was, in fact, considered more “imaginary” and fictive than indirect speech. It did not belong to a poetics of mimesis but was seen as a construction, creating an impression of spoken words. In that sense it is constructive to theorize the inclusion of direct discourse in the travelogues by turning to today’s research in discourse analysis. Sophie Duval (1999) calls direct discourse a “fallacious mirror,” a narrative set-up, which hides that the quoted discourse is not autonomous but is embedded within another discourse (265). Similarly, Emmanuelle Prak-Derrington speaks of the “false simplicity of direct discourse” (2004) when it is taken to be “objective” and “loyal” to the source. The “recorder” theory fails to consider the ambiguity of this narrative mode, which, according to Prak-Derrington, lies in its capacity to harbor not two distinct voices but two embedded voices: a voice within the voice of the narrator. Direct discourse, Prak-Derrington claims, quoting Antoine Compagnon’s work on citation in literature, is at once “a repeated and a repeating enunciation [and] a denunciation” of itself (2004, 7). Direct discourse is always reproduced, signaling difference as well as resemblance.

It is here—in reproduction and repetition—rather than in the question of truth or fallacy, mimesis or *imitatio*, that speech turns into a particularly rich and complex modality in travel writing. When fictionalized, the other’s speech is recognizable for the reader—Chevillard’s theatrical Caribs

<sup>29</sup>There is a direct link between reported speech and dialogues and theatricalization, which are stylistic while also conveying a certain world view. The *theatrum mundi*—the world as theatre—was also a persistent trope in travel writing (Moureau 2005), and humans were thought of as characters on a stage in a play, which they only partly controlled (Stagl 1995, 157). Chevillard, for example, makes use of this metaphor in the preface to his travelogue, signaling that the world is as mercurial and shifting as the peoples inhabiting it, and the events that make up our lives are but a scene in a larger drama (1659, 27).

reflect a general idea of the “Noble Savage” and become a figure that repeats itself. Elements of appropriation, denaturation, and control thus inevitably shape the expression, turning direct speech into an entirely conventional language. Here, artificiality is not a transformative generator, as in Sarduy’s conception of neo-Baroque language (2010, 272). On the contrary, it is the submission to codes of representation, which dislocates the expression, that produces artifice and power, silencing the plurilingual Caribbean. Yet, other elements of instability come into play precisely because the imitation never succeeds; it always exposes itself as *fiction*. As sites where difference, resemblance, and repetition are produced, quotations in travel writing do not always do or mean the same thing; their operative functions change depending on the structural setting in which they occur. In the section that follows, I will look at three coded forms of inclusion of others’ speech: epic anecdotes, melodramatic scenes, and harangues.<sup>30</sup>

A particularly dense passage in Du Tertre’s history belonging to the epic register, which I have studied elsewhere (Kullberg 2020, 179–185), is worth revisiting to question the meaning and function of the dramatization of speech. The episode is central to the construction of French Caribbean history, to the point where one would need an “amphitheater larger than the ones found in Rome” to do justice to the events (Chevallard 1659, 281). It covers the period following the death of Du Plessis in 1635, when Martinique fell under the governance of Monsieur de l’Olive. Du Tertre frames the events in terms of a conflict between good and bad governance, where Du Plessis is portrayed as a caring, paternal leader who supposedly passed away from melancholia after the death of his beloved wife and the decimation of his beloved colony (1667 t1, 82). Monsieur de l’Olive, on the other hand, is presented as an unstable ruler. To further enhance his lunatic character, Du Tertre adds a description of him suffering from spasms—he fell into a “frenzy,” “rolling his eyes” and “grinding his teeth” while his body was tormented by “appalling convulsions” (1667 t1, 144)—in the second edition of *Histoire générale*. De l’Olive had for some time tried to get permission to take more land, but others, notably Du Plessis, considered the good relationship with the Caribs more

<sup>30</sup> Research in travel writing in France has long discussed overlaps between travel writing and literature; for the period that concerns this study but dealing mainly with other contexts, see Pioffët, *La Tentation de l’épopée dans les relations des jésuites* (1997), and Requemora-Gros, *Voguer vers la modernité* (2012).

important than risking another conflict. When Du Plessis passed away, de l'Olive saw the opportunity to expand French territory. He returned to Guadeloupe and immediately sent his men to the Caribs' village. However, the village was empty with the exception of an old "good" Carib captain named Yance, three of his sons, and two other young persons (85). They were just about to leave, but when Yance noticed the French, he tries to reach out to them. Du Tertre quotes the man on this occasion to strengthen his plea: "*France no angry*" (*France point fasché*). But the quote is followed by an explication, supplementing to the meaning of the quote, saying that "he couldn't explain himself better" (85).<sup>31</sup> Du Tertre then continues to narrate the devious tactics used by the French: "someone told [Yance] that he only had to come with his children in all safety and one would do him no harm" (85).<sup>32</sup> Yance's direct discourse in *baragouin* is italicized, but rather than being the expression of an individual, it is a trope, victimizing the Carib, which allows the reader to visualize the frightened, infantilized Native, who should be pitied. The point here is that the quote reveals the trust Yance bestows upon the French.

What follows is a drama of brutal betrayal, and the scene is reported in indirect discourse. De l'Olive tries to force Yance to reveal where the other Caribs are hiding. He calls Yance a traitor and threatens him. Yance is not given a voice; he does not speak but expresses himself through broken language and gestures. Yet here the lack of speech serves to enhance the impression of pressure: he loses his ability to articulate himself as a result of the menacing interrogation. The narrative perspective is entirely on the side of Yance; it is his thoughts we follow. And like him, the reader could not have imagined that the French would treat him this way. As the events unfold, one of Yance's sons is ordered by de l'Olive to go find the rest of the Caribs. But the young man disobeys, warns the others and flees with them. The revenge is brutal: the French stab another son to death, tie up Yance, and force him into a pinnacle, where he is stabbed too. He manages to jump from the boat but is killed when the French beat him with the oars. The cruelty continues toward the other Caribs, one of whom Du Tertre names Marivet, son of Baron. Throughout the passage, the French are dehumanized: they are called "tigers," "barbarians," and "assassins."

<sup>31</sup> *France non point fasche*, ne se pouvant mieux expliquer.

<sup>32</sup> On luy dit qu'il n'avoit qu'à venir avec ses enfants en toute assurance, & qu'il ne luy seroit fait aucun tort.

The episode closes with a scene of remembrance: Du Tertre speaks to a young Carib, a relative to those who died in the massacre. The young man shows no desire for revenge, only reflects incomprehensibility in the face of the deeds of the French.

I [Du Tertre] can't forget the natural goodness and sweetness of this young Savage, which clearly shows that they are only savage by name and that the deregulation of rage made our people more savage and more barbarian than them. After he had met among all these Savages a French boy he did not show any sign of resentment because of the outrageousness that he had suffered from the peoples of this boy's nation; and instead of seeking revenge on him for the blood that they had so cruelly spread, he only told him in his baragouin, *oh Jacques, France very [mouche] angry, they killed [matte] Karibs*.<sup>33</sup> (1667 t1: 86–87)

This particular paragraph exists in the original manuscript from 1648. It was not included in the 1654 edition but added later in the 1667 edition. The passage is marked by evangelist ideology: it demonstrates to the French audience that Caribs were to be pitied, as it placed them as God's lost children in need of missionary help to find God. Direct discourse serves to enhance the humanity of the Caribs, as opposed to barbarian French actions, and here it is framed as an exchange implying the traveler-narrator. In the first case, Yance was a victim to be pitied. In the second case, the young Carib shows proof of forgiveness; he excels in rhetoric *humiliatas*. As Sylvie Requemora-Gros has pointed out, whereas barbarian qualities were for the most part projected onto foreign nations, especially in travel writing, these were not exclusively ethnic traits; they also reflected an ethical stance (2012, 441). From that point of view, the highly theatrical and formal words put in the mouths of these two Caribs could be said to enhance their *ethos* rather than to seek to reproduce a discourse that had actually been uttered.

<sup>33</sup> Je ne puis oublier la douceur et la bonté naturelle de ce jeune Sauvage, qui montre bien qu'ils ne le sont que de nom, & que le dérèglement de la cholere rendoit nos gens plus sauvages & plus barbares qu'eux. Ayant rencontré au milieu de tous ces Sauvages un garçon François; il ne luy témoigna aucun ressentiment de l'outrage qu'il avoit reçu de ceux de sa nation; & au lieu de se venger sur luy, du sang qu'ils avoient si cruellement répandu, il se contenta de luy dire dans son baragouin, *ô Jacques, France mouche fâche, l'y matté Karaibes*, c'est-à-dire, ô Jacques, les François sont extrêmement fâchez, ils ont tué les Sauvages.

Giving a voice, even in as highly coded terms as these, was a way “to humanize primitive man into a *homo loquens*, meaning a speaking and thinking being” (Pioffet 1997, 701). Yance is indeed summoned (i.e. quoted) as a human being to testify to the cruelty of (French) barbarians. Du Tertre, listening to the young man who gives his statement in *baragouin*, is a reader, listener, and judge. The evidential value lies in the young Carib’s human capacity to forgive and not give in to passion and revenge. This is expressed in the few words quoted, filled with emotions and moral dignity. However, while the Carib rises above the French morally, the simplicity of his words frames him as an innocent child with no complete language. The narrative evicts his mother tongue, as he is not quoted in that language and therefore does not control his tongue. There is thus a rupture between language and speech act: the quotation emerges in a zone of translingual instability. In this context, the translingual event produces a line of difference between the speaking subject and the words. Cited as a naïve victim, the Carib can never fully occupy the position as *homo loquens*; his words appear as repeated rather than original. This difference can be theorized by working through the Aristotelian distinction between voice as sound (*phonè*) and as *logos* (reason/speech) as well as the relationship of both to meaning (*sèmantikos*). Du Tertre strengthens the message by staging language as sound filled with reason by means of another language, which the speaker does not fully master. The quoted Caribs fill the in-between space, separating voice as *logos*, rational speech, and voice as *phonè*, sound lacking meaning: it is voice as *pathos*. Here, as in many other examples, direct discourse conveys an ambivalence in the spaces between agency and submission, difference, and exotization.

The sliding scale between *logos* and *phonè* serves to assert control over the representation of other voices. This comes out clearly in melodramatic scenes, driven by *pathos*. In fact, when Du Tertre quotes the young Carib, the epic register has been replaced by a melodramatic tonality, suggesting that missionary control operates within the sphere of the intimate and the pathetic, where the missionaries picture themselves as saviors. Such a paternalistic stance underpinning the religious fathers’ relationship to island societies (Miller 2008, 5; Garraway 2005, 127–128) is propagandistic. It serves to promote the need for missionaries on the islands for the sake of French settlers as well as for Caribs and enslaved peoples. Yet the need is differently articulated depending on the group. The French need assistance and an orderly society. In the case of Caribs and enslaved people, they are staged as aspiring to enter into the community of Christians.

We see this in scenes of conversion, which are repeated in one travelogue to another. Most scenes of conversion of Indigenous individuals include persons in vulnerable positions, as if facing death made them realize the truth of Christianity. A man named Inoüach is ravaged by fever, which finally “unties the Pagan’s Indian tongue,” and he begs to be baptized: “*Xhibana xeu Baba naoeny hely baptizé bahamou cané loubaré xhiaouïa naoüen*: which is to say. I am dying, my Father, I beg you to baptize me before my spirit leaves the earth” (Chevallard 1659, 110).<sup>34</sup> Missionaries tended to enhance the emotional effect of the Caribs, which manifests in physical appearance. Their faces change; they enter in a state of utter joy and no longer fear the *maboya* (spirit or deity). One of the most important aspects here is to show the reader that the conversion is sincere and profound, which is a response to the critique that missionaries baptized people too quickly. Conversion turns into a melodramatic conflict where the Carib must persuade the missionary of the authenticity of his beliefs.

Direct discourse plays a crucial part in such scenes. Chevallard constructs what Edmund Morgan has called a “morphology of conversion” (1963, 66). He stages a series of phases that intensify, ultimately leading up to a peripeteia where the subject is converted. The Carib seeking conversion expresses his desire to be baptized, but the missionaries refuse to baptize him. As a result, the expressions of desire grow in intensity:

in every moment he burst into tears (but sobbing and wet with tears) *Ab Baba baptize calinago*, and noting that they gave him catechism but didn’t baptize him, he could get no rest and doubled his holy ardor, saying *Si ancaïé bobatinan Baba binalé bouca etinan boné loachout baptizé* meaning *You are making fun of me, my Father, I have been pressing you to baptize me for a long time, alas! Show me, poor Carib, pity, I have my soul on my lips.*<sup>35</sup> (1659, 108)

<sup>34</sup> C’est à dire. *Je me meurs, mon Pere, je vous conjure de me baptiser avant que mon esprit sorte desus la terre.*

<sup>35</sup> Il éclatoit à tous momens (mais sanglottant & tout baigné de larmes) *Ab Baba baptizé calinago* & voyant qu’on le catechisoit & qu’on ne le baptisoit pas, il n’avoit aucun repos redoublant ses saintes ardeurs pour le Baptesme disant *Si ancaïé bobatinan Baba binalé bouca etinan boné loachout baptizé*, voulant dire *Vous vous moquez de moy mon Pere il y a long temps que ie vous presse de me baptiser; hélas! Ayez pitié de moy, pauvre Caraïbe, car i’ay l’ame sur les lèvres.*

Convinced, the missionary finally baptizes the man, who thereby goes through a physical transformation: his “dry and pale” face become “smiling” and his “calmed mind revealed the inner joy of his soul through the grace of the Sacraments.”<sup>36</sup> Facing a crucifix, he exclaims: “*Xhissen niche-ric Christian Baba, yerxceti nicheric calinago* which is to say *I like the God of the Christians my Father, the gods of the Savages frighten me*” (1659, 109).<sup>37</sup> Conversion distanced the Carib from his original culture, framed as frightening. The missionary becomes a savior. Glorifying the colonizer is a topos of Native speech in travelogues. Indigenous individuals are used as speaking characters to promote evangelization and enslavement. Putting missionary ideology into the mouths of Indigenous and enslaved peoples is also an insidious way to denigrate local culture, as Marie-Christine Pioffet has shown in the context of Jesuit missions in New France (1997, 252). Similar strategies can be detected in the Caribbean context. But contrary to the “eloquent converted Native” studied by Matthew Lauzon in the context of New France (2010, 73), the Carib remains infantilized. Even within a narrative that idealizes a mission that failed, the Carib can never reproduce Catholic eloquence.

This politics of quotation becomes more entangled and problematic in regard to enslavement. In the case of Indigenous people, their culture has an informative value. Even when it is denigrated and underwritten, their presence hovers over the texts as an indirect retort. As with the absence of engagement with African vernaculars, diasporic African culture is framed in relation to colonial culture. Chevillard includes a brief scene of conversion of enslaved individuals, which unfolds in a teaching situation, where the enslaved people address the missionary: “*Father, you say that good Christian when dying, he go upstairs with God and mean go downstairs to burn: where is the big ladder to go up and the hole to fall and go down?* This ladder, one tells him, my friend, is baptism...” (1659, 146).<sup>38</sup> The melodramatic scene of Indigenous conversation has shifted to a domestic scene taking place on the plantation or in the church, where the missionary quietly and patiently explains to the enslaved individuals the teachings of

<sup>36</sup> Le visage du Caraïbe atenué sec & palle, devenu riant, & son esprit appaisé firent voir la joye interieure de son ame par la grace de ce Sacrement.

<sup>37</sup> C'est à dire *i'ayme bien le Dieu des crestiens mon pere les Dieux des Sauvages me font en horreur.*

<sup>38</sup> *Pere, toy dire que bon Chrestien quand mourir, luy aller en haut avec Dieu & meschant en bas pour brûler: où est-il grande eschelle pour monter, & le trou pour tomber & descendre? Cette échelle luy dit-on, mon amy, c'est le Baptesme.*



the Christ. The infantilization of enslaved peoples goes through direct discourse and is semantic; the fictionalized person here speaks in a heavily Frenchified *baragouin*, signaling their inferiority while domesticating the text for the reader. The naivety of the question, with the concrete elements, gives the scene an allure of charm, convincing the reader of the necessity of converting diasporic Africans. Enslavement is present but entirely distorted into a pastoral image; visible labor is restricted to the work of the missionary “saving” souls.

Passages where an enslaved person appears as an interlocutor can be read as textual sites where the reification of the enslaved is both questioned and reconstructed, both acknowledging the slave as human and constructing him as a different human being. Here, too, *pathos* occurs as the third term between *logos* and *phonè*. Yet, whereas the construction of the Indigenous is mediated through epic *pathos*, the construction of the enslaved person passes through the sentimental register, both as a consequence of the intimate bonds between enslaver and enslaved and as a strategy to negotiate the tension provoked by a system that was morally refutable and economically profitable.

The exploitative and entangled social relationships incited by enslavement are put to strategic use in the narratives through the means of quotation. Du Tertre evokes speech to portray the enslaved persons as moral human beings, for instance, by reporting their compassionate behavior toward the missionaries. In 1640, when the French colony in Guadeloupe suffered from extreme famine, enslaved people helped them survive: “they told us in their baragouin that they were good Negros, & that they wanted to give us food” (1667 t2, 498).<sup>39</sup> Describing the way they spoke and indirectly citing their words in a French tainted with *baragouin*, he stages the enslaved people’s generous simplicity. Interestingly, their assistance is only conceived as a sign of the inclination to do good deeds, as a direct reaction to the missionary’s suffering. Du Tertre explicitly seeks to stage their human and civil sides, opening up rifts in the text. It shows that the enslaved persons had skills for survival that the French did not possess. It also hints at the possibility of the enslaved people hereby actively shaping social relations.

Later in the same chapter, he lets Dominique exchange in direct discourse with an enslaved person from a nearby plantation:

<sup>39</sup> Ils nous disoient en leur baragouin qu’ils estoient bon Nègres, & qu’ils vouloient nous bien donner à manger.

One day I noticed with much satisfaction a slave from one of our plantations come out from our Dominique's hut carrying meat and cassava. This led me to ask him why he gave all these things to this man, he answered in his jibberish that the man's Master *was not good Captain, not good to Negro, did not give him anything to eat* and that this poor slave was from his country and that he always kept a bit of what we gave him so that this poor man could come and get it on Sundays.<sup>40</sup> (1667 t2, 528)

The focus is here on Dominique actively intervening to ease his friend's burden, hinting at a set of relations between the enslaved to which missionaries only had limited access. Saying that his friend comes from the same land as he, Dominique's words suggest that their social fabric extended both spatially and temporally as opposed to the dominant narrative in the travelogues circumscribing them to the world of the plantation, as we have seen earlier. In examples like these, the transcription of enslaved peoples' speech could "expose a certain instability in colonial culture" (Harrigan 2018, 214). Yet this experience is but an echo in the narrative. The evocation of *baragouin* for communication with their enslavers and between themselves builds on the indirect suppression of the other languages they speak. These scenes both recognize enslaved peoples as speakers and exclude them from having a language proper. They are confined to only having the language that mediates basic communication with their enslavers. Indirectly then, the citation constructs them as human beings and as subjects who only exist within the system of slavery.

In other words, enslaved peoples' speech emerges as a theatre of absence, where it serves the arguments of travelers. This becomes particularly obvious in the use of longer discourses or *harangues* to put proslavery arguments in the mouths of diasporic Africans (Rushforth 2014, 78–110; Williard 2021a, 128). The full range of contradictions in the representations of Caribs and enslaved peoples emerges in these long, often tedious and solemn discourses they supposedly pronounce. The term *harangue* is linked to argumentation and persuasion but is derogatory, carrying with it the sense of a discourse that cannot maintain the ideal of moderation. But

<sup>40</sup> Je remarquay un iour avec beaucoup de satisfaction un Nègre d'un de nos habitans sortir de la Case de nostre Dominique, chargé de viande & de Cassave, ce qui m'ayant obligé de luy demander pourquoy il luy donnoit toutes ces choses, il me répondit en son baragouin, que son Maistre *n'étoit pas bon Capitan, pas bon à Nègre, luy point donner à manger*; que ce pauvre esclave estoit de sa terre, & qu'il luy gardoit tousiour un morceau de ce que nous luy donnions, que ce pauvre Nègre venoit querir chaque Dimanche.

in the travel narratives the term appears to include any kind of speech uttered by enslaved or Indigenous individuals. So while their speech is framed with a common term, it clearly does not have the same meaning as European discourse. These passages thus become sites where tensions between sameness and difference are played out; here, the speech of the other is articulated between nature and culture, codes of honor and bestiality, simplicity and eloquence. It turns into a textual site for productions of subtle differences: it repeats European discourses, it tries to mimic European rhetoric, or it becomes the term for a different eloquence that is not quite European.<sup>41</sup>

Starting with enslaved people, the Black harangue emerges, like their languages, as a theatre of absence. Pelleprat claims that a young Black man on Martinique told him “*that he preferred his captivity to the liberty he enjoyed in his home country because had he remained in liberty he would have been a slave under Satan instead of being a slave under the French and a child of God* (1658, 55).<sup>42</sup> The italics signal direct speech, which serves as a conclusion to a longer passage where he described the extreme suffering of the individuals exiting the slave ship. Rhetorically the passage seizes the ambivalence of the entire enterprise by the use of the conjunction *néanmoins* (nevertheless), as the narrative transitions into a pro-slavery argument based on Christianity. Pelleprat admits their individual pain but reads it in light of the greater “benefit” that enslavement would supposedly offer, namely the opportunity for these persons to be saved by God. Quoting an individualized yet anonymous diasporic African solidifies the argument. Similarly, Du Tertre uses an image of a miserable life in Africa as a backdrop for presenting the benefits of transatlantic slavery, claiming he learned this “from the very mouthes of many Black persons who admitted that they did not want to be obliged to return to their homes” (1667 t2, 498).<sup>43</sup> The paraphrase includes traces of an exchange—he has heard from the mouthes of diasporic Africans—reinforcing the degree of veracity by means of the relational bond, created through the allusion to an original dialogue. Yet the dialogue is indirect and anonymous, citing a hypothetical discourse and lacking specific context. Interestingly, the

<sup>41</sup> For thorough discussions of “savage” eloquence, see Lauzon (2010) and Carayon (2019).

<sup>42</sup> *Qu’il préféreroit sa captivité à la liberté qu’il auroit eüe en son pays, parce que s’il fust demeuré libre il seroit esclave de Sathan au lieu qu’estant esclave des François il avoit esté fait enfant de Dieu.*

<sup>43</sup> C’est ce que ie sçay de la bouche mesme de quantité de Negres qui m’ont avoué qu’ils ne voudroient pas estre obligez de retourner chez eux.

argumentation shifts to a persuasive mode by means of the intrusion of two voices—the first-person narrator and the anonymous slaves, quoted indirectly—that presumably annulled the obvious paradoxes in Du Tertre’s discourse, creating the fiction of a morally defensible slavery.

Writing in the 1680s, Mongin continues and strengthens this trope. He explains that the second generation of Africans was already monolingual, speaking only French (1984, 55), which facilitated the teachings of the gospels, and the children of slaves were taught together with white Creole children.<sup>44</sup> Following Mongin’s argument, Sue Peabody claims that relations between missionaries and enslaved people “softened” as a consequence of more frequent interactions that were not limited by languages (2004, 114). It is true that the tone softens, but this is a literary and dramatic effect rather than a sign of a changing attitude toward enslaved peoples. The shift in tonality testifies to a relationship marked by an increasingly patronizing attitude and a control of the enslaved peoples’ discourse. As Ashley Williard notes, “the intimate and nuanced portraits of enslaved individuals gave way to a focus on social control” (2021a, 46).

Mongin’s letters contain numerous examples of fictionalized encounters, where he supposedly “gives voice” to the enslaved peoples in his parish, quoting them in simplified French, thus underscoring the unequal power relations. At one instance, he recalls that “rather wittingly one of them told me one day that God had made them into slaves because they do not have the mental capacity to find food, which is a task taken care of by the master” (1984, 77).<sup>45</sup> He ends the passage by evoking an enslaved woman who “recently told him that she did not want to exchange her condition” with that of her free mother and sisters (77).<sup>46</sup> In another scene, he engages in a conversation with an old man about his people’s ancient beliefs and lets the “native informant” articulate a supposedly African version of the myth of Ham, which was commonly used to explain diasporic Africans’ cruel destiny:

<sup>44</sup> Others writing in the eighteenth century complain about the difficulty of instructing diasporic Africans because of the multitude of languages (Harrigan 2018, 210–211).

<sup>45</sup> Cela me fait souvenir de l’un d’entre eux qui me disait un jour assez spirituellement que Dieu les fait esclave parce qu’ils n’ont pas d’esprit pour chercher à manger qui est un soin dont le maître se charge.

<sup>46</sup> Aussi il arrive assez souvent aux nègres qui sont libres d’être plus misérables que les autres et pour cette raison une negresse esclave et des moins étourdies, qui a sa mère et ses deux sœurs libres, me disait dernièrement qu’elle ne voudrait pas changer de condition avec elles.

He told me that Reboucou had three children, two boys and a girl; that the oldest had found their father exposed in an indecent way, while he slept, told the others in order to mock the father, but that the siblings covered him with a kind of tissue from his country that [the old African] named for me, and that Reboucou who had woken up compensated the younger son making him his successor and punished the older making him the slave of the first. Those who believe that these people's dark color comes from the malediction that Cham drew upon himself at a similar occasion, can say that the Negros do not completely ignore the origin of their color.<sup>47</sup> (1984, 85)

Saying that this person *told him* the story, Mongin conveniently transposes the subject of slavery and its rationale to African mythology. As pointed out by Michael Harrigan, the speech of this anonymous character is used as *exempla* (2018, 75). Thereby Mongin can distance Catholic colonizers from moral responsibility and, as a consequence, ease the emotional burden that slavery could cause for readers who might be skeptical toward the mission in a plantation context. However, in contrast with Du Tertre and Pelleprat, we can note that Mongin creates a rational, rather than sentimental, discourse for his enslaved character. The old man uses mythology, holds knowledge, reasons, and draws conclusions. Yet this *logos* repeats a biblical story, paired with contemporary ideas about racial difference.

In this example, Mongin actualizes the harangue linked to exotic scenery: an old enslaved person addressing the missionary, and in his discourse he turns to mythology to explain his condition. The same form is commonly activated to stage Indigenous speech, but in those cases the scenery is often withdrawn, staging an old man conversing with a European on a rock overlooking the ocean or a forest. In most cases it mediates Native mythology alongside descriptions of the organization of social life before and after the intrusion of Europeans from a staged internal perspective. Displacing the harangue to the context of enslavement means both repeating it and changing its implications. The implicit criticism of the Native harangue transitions into a discourse of explanation, justifying the unjust

<sup>47</sup> Il me disait que Reboucou avait trois enfants deux garçons et une fille; que l'aîné ayant trouvé son père découvert d'une manière indécente, durant son assoupissement, avait les autres pour s'en moquer; que ceux-ci l'avaient couvert avec une espèce de toile de son pays, laquelle il me nommait, et que Reboucou, s'étant réveillé, avait recompensé le cadet, le faisant son successeur, et punissant l'aîné en le faisant esclave du premier. Ceux qui croient que la noirceur de ces gens vient de la malédiction que Cham s'attira dans une pareille occasion, pourront dire que les nègres n'ignorent pas tout à fait l'origine de leur couleur.

destiny of enslaved Africans by inscribing racial hierarchies into a myth of origins. Racialization takes shape and is mediated through already existing forms; it slips into discourses so that it is not directly identifiable as racialization.

Indigenous speech, on the other hand, is constraint in a different way since it is linked to an existing imaginary. Within the frames of that imaginary, travel narratives explore the idea of a Carib eloquence. Le Breton, for instance, claims that they have an articulate and rich way of speaking that can stir the sentiments and appeal to the imagination (1982, 94). Others claim that they were simplistic and lacked terms for abstract thinking or the imagination. A repeated discursive trope is the Carib war captive who is getting prepared to die and be eaten. Travelers often quote these characters in French without any comment on language or transcription, uttering sentences in defiance like: “poor peoples I see you all burning with desire to fill your bellies with my flesh, but believe that I have eaten a lot of flesh from you” (Caillé de Castres 2002, 112).<sup>48</sup> Here direct discourse chimes in with the imaginary of the cannibal, placed within a frame of vengeance and courage, which could be recognized as codes of civility within an uncivil practice (Lestringant 1994).

Other reoccurring scenes for Indigenous eloquence are deliberations and welcoming rites. A common feature here is that when one person speaks, nobody interrupts (Biet 393), suggesting that Indigenous eloquence is structured in relation to silence rather than dialogue and debate. This appears notably in rites of welcome where the code is to let the guest rest before entering into conversation. Rochefort cites their usage of the Spanish “*Cala la boca,*” or “Shut your mouth” (1658, 466), to insist on the importance of respecting silence when a guest arrives. The use of a Spanish expression lets us imagine repeated situations where the Caribs have corrected foreigners, or more precisely Europeans, unfamiliar with their culture. Le Breton tells about welcoming rites like the ones evoked by Rochefort by using the figure of relativist exoticism, where the Caribs expose their habits and practices by showing the absurdity of French civil codes, all this expressed in a soliloquy modelled after French eloquence (1982, 47).

Playing with the double display of otherness and familiarity, the harangue turns into a mode of expressing relativist critique against

<sup>48</sup> *Pauvres gens je vous vois tout brûlants du désir de remplir vos estomacs de ma chair, mais croyez que j'en ai beaucoup mangé des vôtres.*

European intrusion. An old Carib man remembers the beauty of their society prior to European arrival, or else he looks with astonishment on European culture, exposing the absurdity of conquest. Rochefort constructs a scene where a Carib addresses a depressed European:

Friend you are miserable for exposing yourself to such long and dangerous voyages, to leave yourself eaten by so many troubles and fears. The passion to have possessions makes you endure all these pains [...] and you are also worried for the possessions you have already gathered rather than for the ones you are still searching for. [...] Hence you age quickly, your hair turns white, your forehead is wrinkled, and a thousand incommunities work your body [...]. Why aren't you happy with the possessions your country produces for you? Why don't you despise riches like we do?<sup>49</sup> (1658, 402)

The passage is another example of Indigenous eloquence, anticipating modern European nostalgia over a “simpler life” and the construction of the idea of colonization as a form of “burden.” This trope will be reformulated and adjusted in complex and disturbing ways throughout the history of Western imperialism, paving the way for colonial nostalgia. That futurity of this particular trope underscores for sure that the missionary controlled the voice behind the harangue, as Peter Murvai points out (2016, 73). Indigenous sociability is expressed as a distorted speech, fictionalized to fit a pre-established image of “primitive” exchange, recalling the strategies of quotation used in the epic anecdote and the melodramatic scenes of conversion. All three expressions of speech build on the reproduction of one of the major forms of linguistic exchanges in the seventeenth century, namely *discours*, defined by Furetière’s dictionary (1606) as *viva voce*, expression of a person’s thoughts on certain issues and matters that the speaker would like other people to hear. The difference between discourse in a European context and in a Caribbean is that, when aligned with a Carib or an enslaved person, the identification of a speaker is not important. Caribs and enslaved peoples alike were undifferentiated,

<sup>49</sup> Compere [...] tu es bien miserable d'exposer ta personne à de si longs & de si dangereux voyages, & de te laisser ronger à tant de soucis & de craintes. La passion d'avoir des biens te fait endurer toutes ces peines [...] Et tu n'es pas moins en inquiétude pour les biens que tu as déjà acquis que pour ceux que tu recherches encore. [...] Ainsi tu vieillis en peu de tems, tes cheveux en blanchissent, ton front s'en ride, mille incommodez travaillent ton corps [...]. Que n'es tu content des biens que ton païs te produit ? Que ne méprises tu les richesses comme nous?

speaking in one voice, behind which hovers the voice of the traveler-narrator; the enunciatory position of the *viva voce* is vacant. The characters speaking an imposed discourse are bodiless; they appear as holders of a discourse, which does not resonate with a bodily experience of extinction, bondage, and forced labor.

In other words, the dramatization of enslaved and indigenous speech serves to decorporalize speech in order to connect it to a *logos* that is not theirs. Interestingly, in another passage in which Rochefort quotes a Carib speaking to another traveler, he comments that the harangue was not “very barbaric,” recalling Diderot’s famous ironic dictum from *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* that the Tahitians spoke with a slight French tonality. Even if Rochefort thereby recognizes the Caribs’ capacity to articulate a discourse, he ends up questioning the validity of such eloquent critique. The revelation of the fictionality of the quote does not undermine its truth or relevance, nor does it completely evacuate the foreign element. So while these distorted fictionalized speech acts do not express agency, even when the topic of the discourse is an anti-colonial critique, they do leave a mark, a slight disruption in the narrative flow that allows us to imagine the effects of others’ experiences. Quotations confuse the message, question the intentions, and reveal the ever-increasing racial borderings.

### SCENES OF EXCHANGES

Caillé de Castres lets a Carib tell about the 1660 peace treaty between the French, the English, and the Indigenous. “I will report it word for word according to the way I have written it,” he notes, underscoring the unreliability of transfers from the oral to the written. Then he follows with a long quote, where the Carib gives his version “in few words” of a “war that has been as disadvantageous to the English nation as to ours.”<sup>50</sup> The Carib briefly accounts for the historical actions, then draws conclusions concerning possible future outcomes of the treaty, which he fears will not put an end to the hostilities between the nations but, rather, increase the thirst for vengeance. The harangue is by all evidence adjusted to the model of French eloquence: echoing Rochefort, Caillé de Castres signals that the discourse of the anonymous Carib character quoted in French is “not very barbaric.” But he also adds a dimension which momentarily cracks the

<sup>50</sup> Je veux vous dire en peu de mots, commença le bonhomme, les particularités d’une guerre qui a été si désavantageuse à la nation anglaise et à la nôtre.



underlying monologism of the form of the harangue. The discourse becomes personal, expressing despair, frustration, and accusation: “I have many reasons to mourn my past strength,” says the man and continues to individualize the losses: “this one lost his father, this one his son, this one his brother. You have lost everything and you lose and you will lose” (2002, 103).<sup>51</sup> Caillé de Castre’s Carib appeals to identification by evoking experiences of loss and mourning. The quote recasts these feelings onto the interlocutor and displays engagements with the social texture of early colonial island life. An exchange takes place.

This example suggests that the inclusion of speech operates on a scale of monologic control. The more formalized the structure in which the quotation appears, the stronger the discursive domination. One way to analyze such differentiations in the strategies of quotation is to pay attention to what linguist Dominique Maingueneau calls the “scene of enunciation” (2004, 190). For Maingueneau, direct speech in narrative discourse does not record actual speech; the communication is always *represented* at the same time as it manifests a strong link to speech acts. It is paratopical, situated between text and context. Insisting on such paratopies, it becomes possible to identify passages in travelogues that are more entangled with context than others. These passages operate on another level of experience, often representing glimpses of everyday life or encounters that do not enter into the coded strategies of quotations. Context, and thereby interaction with others, dictate the representation more than the order of a pre-established form, which entails that the production of meaning draws toward contingency and open-endedness. An example in point is when Breton advises the reader to pronounce Carib language as if they read French, only to say in the next sentence that if they ever were to go to the islands and have an exchange with the Caribs, it would be wiser to pay attention to the speakers’ pronunciation and “do like them” because “without this you will not be formed by the language, they will not understand you or they will make fun of you” (1999, 8).<sup>52</sup> Carib language sounds and means something different in France than it does in the islands. There is a clear split in the text between codes of representation and experience.

<sup>51</sup> Et que j’ai de raison de pleurer mes forces passées [...] un tel y a perdu son père, un tel son fils, un tel son frère. Vous y avez tout perdu et vous perdez et vous perdrez.

<sup>52</sup> Prestez seulement l’oreille à la prononciation des Sauvages, & dites comme eux; à moins que cela vous ne formerez pas au langage, ils ne vous entendront pas ou ils se railleront de vous.

Moreover, the quote gives a glimpse into the Carib perspective on the French acquiring their language, suggesting that the inability to master not only the other's language but also the codes of conduct governing their society is potentially unsettling. The Carib can look back at you and laugh. Reading the dictionary in France might give an impression of linguistic mastery, but this would be challenged if not lost in the context of the islands. Breton's remark suggests scenes of enunciation underpinned with disruption; the narrative trembles through the evocation of others' speech.

In order to analyze such vocal tremblings, I will focus on paratopic scenes of enunciation that build on interaction. The degree of paratopy articulates a tension between submission to form and engagement with context; it both reflects and produces cultural, linguistic, and spatial differences that undergird the narratives. These are instances when the text asserts a certain control and reveals a loss of it. It occurs, for example, in passages that include cited discourses, where Indigenous and enslaved peoples share knowledge in everyday life, or in passages that evoke others as embodied presences and thereby insinuate other knowledges and experiences.

This can occur in brief allusions, such as when an anonymous Carib notices that Du Tertre suffers from a toothache and gives him a plant to ease the pain (1667 t2, 86). It also occurs in a longer anecdote from Labat's travelogue, telling of how one of the enslaved persons working for Labat is bitten by a snake, and another enslaved man who was known for his medical knowledge comes to Fonds Saint-Jacques to treat the snake-bite. Labat had already tried to cure the man without success. Fearing that the man will die, Labat describes their exchange as he gives him the last salvation. He asks how the man feels and interviews the enslaved doctor about the prospectus of the man recovering. The man finally survives thanks to the enslaved doctor's intervention. But when Labat tries to elicit the recipe for the cure from him, the exchange comes to a halt: "he asked to be excused not to say the names of all the herbs that went into the composition of his remedy because he made a living off this secret and did not want to make it public. He promised to treat me with all care possible if I was bitten, I thanked him for his offer, wishing strongly that I would never need it" (1722 t1, 163).<sup>53</sup> The man is not quoted in direct speech, yet his experience resonates through the narrative. We can deduct the

<sup>53</sup> Il s'excusa de me dire le nom de toutes les herbes qui entroient dans la composition de son remede, parce que ce secret lui faisant gagner sa vie, il ne vouloit pas le rendre public. Il me promit de me traiter avec tout le soin possible si je venois à être mordu, je le remerciai de ses offres, souhaitant très-fort de n'en avoir jamais besoin.

reasons behind his refusal to transfer knowledge to Labat, and the exchange lets us understand that Labat also respects these reasons. For a brief moment, knowledge remains unreachable, held by the other's silence. However, as the narrative develops, it replaces the initial uncertainty with a discourse of knowledge. The scene of exchange transitions into an objective description of remedies against snakebites.

In exchanges like these, it becomes apparent that the inclusion of discourse has a textual effect: it shows that the source of knowledge is located with the other and is transmitted to the traveler-narrator through negotiations. It creates a moment of trembling when knowledge is not necessarily exposed or even transmitted; it is there, but the traveler, and by extension the reader, has no direct access to it. The enslaved doctor argues that he has to keep his secret to insure his income, but his answer reveals that he also detects Labat's fear of snakes. Certainly, the narrative perspective is not overthrown by such scenes, but they insert folds of a momentary stutter where another voice resonates.

The degree to which textual disruptive effects emerge depends on the context, thus illustrating the importance of paratopic links. The anonymous writer of Carpentras more than any other traveler depended on the knowledge and the acceptance of the Caribs for survival. This marks his narrative:

And approaching us to flatter us, they said, 'on the ocean your captain Fleury made you eat your shoes from hunger', and we answered yes. They said: 'your captain Fleury isn't good. You have to throw him in the sea, that's what I see, they said, since your body is so skinny', which they told us with a ridiculous gesture, opening with the right hand the right eye from above [...], and sometimes both of them to let us understand that they wanted to see our scrawniness [...]. They showed with their gestures that they were very surprised, always repeating these words, which are signs of astonishment, '*cai, cai, cai*' and the women said '*bibi, bibi, bibi*'. After this they gave us something to eat, saying 'here you go, eat this, it will give you a big stomach like I have and if you want to come to my house you will find all kinds of nutrition there that will soon make you fat.'<sup>54</sup> (2002, 120)

<sup>54</sup> Et nous approchant pour nous flatter, ils nous disaient, 'ton capitaine Fleury t'a fait manger tes souliers à la mer par la faim', et nous répondions que oui. Ils disaient: 'ton capitaine Fleury n'est point bon. Il le faut jeter dans la mer, ce que je vois, disaient-ils, comme tu es maigre par le corps', ce qu'ils disaient avec une action ridicule, car ouvrant avec la main droite l'œil droit par-dessous [...] et quelque fois les deux pour nous faire comprendre qu'ils voulaient bien voir notre maigreur, l'ayant fort longtemps contemplée sur tout le corps. Ils montraient à leurs gestes d'en être fort étonnés, répétant toujours ces mots, qui sont signes d'étonnement, '*cai, cai, cai*', et les femmes disaient '*bibi, bibi, bibi*'. Après cela ils nous donnaient quelque chose à manger, en disant, 'tiens mange cela il te fera gros ventre comme à moi et si tu veux venir à mon habitation tu y trouveras de toutes sortes de vivres qui te feront bientôt devenir gras.

The anonymous writer inserts gestures, words, and sounds to capture the interaction. The French appear as objects here: the Caribs touch them, look at them while they are at their mercy. The crew members do not retort when the Caribs question Fleury's leadership; they have to follow their rules, take what they offer, and give signs of amicability in return. Over the entire scene floats a tone of light mockery, as if the Caribs enjoy their superiority, perhaps delighted to know these Europeans failed. The passage can be read as a recuperation of scenes of welcoming that display Native hospitality as a trope, showcasing an image of primitive generosity and sociability. Here the formalized framework has been transgressed, communication is unstable, hospitality not transparent or even direct, and the interaction marked by uncertainty. More importantly, the Caribs are given a degree of agency as they look back and comment on the members of the crew. Another example of a paratopic reconfiguration of the scene of welcoming can be found in Caillé de Castres' account. The Caribs run toward him in "a crowd" and immediately remark on his whiteness. "I told them that if they put clothes on their children from the moment they were born, they would be as white as I am," he writes. "But instead of answering to my reason they laughed at me and made an effort to persuade me that it was more honorable and advantageous to be of their color" (2002, 94).<sup>55</sup> Here, cultural relativism is put in the words of the Caribs as they laugh at de Wilde.

Similar glimpses of Indigenous active presence transpire in Breton's dictionary, often when the missionary's quest for linguistic knowledge comes into conflict with his evangelic task: he both registers cultural practices and corrects them. One entry gives the word for the effect—a "strange extremity" (*étrange extrémité*)—of a poison linked to a particular crayfish, then transitions into an anecdote:

<sup>55</sup> Ils accouraient en foule pour me voir et ne pouvaient comprendre pourquoi je suis plus blanc qu'eux et je leur disais que s'ils revêtaient leurs enfants dès la naissance, sans les teindre de roucou, ils seraient aussi blancs que moi. Mais au lieu de répondre à mes raisons, ils me riaient au nez et s'efforçaient à vouloir me persuader qu'il y avait plus d'honneur et d'avantages à être de leur couleur que de la mienne et d'être nu que de se cacher d'un fardeau embarrassant d'habits et que cela n'était bon que pour cacher tous les défauts, d'un corps bien fait, il y aurait de l'injustice à vouloir cacher son ouvrage.

*I learned one day that the Savages had grilled and sold [this crayfish] maliciously to the French, who became very sick. Others asked me about this, saying Inále énroukia etétali nhámani balánagle toromán aoto líka bouléoüa eboú-coulou? líkia láné Kabaócourati, is it true that some French men have been dangerously ill after having eaten the fish called bouléoüa eboú-coulou, which intoxicates all those who eat it? I admitted to them that this was the case and did it so well that they confessed the truth: nobody died, I alerted their Captain who addressed it for the future.*<sup>56</sup> (1999, 111)

The scene captures quotidian exchanges between peoples in the archipelagic space. The Caribs use their local knowledge against the French, not to kill them but as an act of defiance. They also ask Breton if the prank worked. Here Breton restores order—or at least he thinks he does. He clearly is aware that his influence is limited as he asks the Carib captain to prevent such pranks in the future; his own authority does not count for much in Dominica. Revealing mockery and play rather than subversion, the entry hints at social relations and French dependence on Indigenous peoples. It points at the possibility of discrete resistance from within the process of settlement and forced conversion, only to manifest the return to control.

Another entry relates how Breton once intruded in a cabin where the Caribs practiced a ritual led by a priestess. He brought a torch to frighten the evil spirit, but as he heard a voice, he could not decide whether it was an imposter (which he wanted to believe) or the actual voice of the spirit. Armed with a cross, he went back to the site and heard how the enraged spirit fell and “cried, screamed [...] for about a quarter of an hour” (1999, 111). The Caribs also were confused and unable to localize the voice, but they stayed on the premises whereas Breton left, saying that God did not inspire him to intervene anymore and that he was convinced that it was a real devil and the song of the priestess, a pact between her and the devil, which he did not want to “hear or write.” As soon as he retired, the spirit started talking about him, and Breton quotes his words:

<sup>56</sup> *Je sus un jour que des Sauvages en avaient fait boucaner et vendu malicieusement aux Français, qui en furent grandement incommodés. D'autres me questionnèrent là-dessus en cette sorte: Inále énroukia etétali nhámani balánagle toromán aoto líka bouléoüa eboú-coulou? líkia láné Kabaócourati, est-il vrai que quelques Français ont été dangereusement malades pour avoir mangé du poisson nommé bouléoüa eboú-coulou, qui empoisonne ceux qui le mangent? Je leur avoua et fis si bien qu'ils me confessèrent la vérité; personne n'en mourut, j'en avertis leur Capitaine qui y mit ordre pour l'avenir.*

tíken tíken crácoüia hómain noubára touária chímêpoüi lanúari, cáho bonále, boupou bonale ouéche bonale ouáttè bonale, chíou bonále, *ever since this moment the Savages would often repeat these words to me imitating her fury (but while laughing); these words mean: quick, quick, tie him up for me so that he doesn't escape, so that I can eat him, head, shoulders, feet, even his droppings, so that I can grind him up, so that I can reduce him to broth, and so that I can swallow him.*<sup>57</sup> (111)

The initial action to control the ritual falls short and turns Breton into an object of mockery. The Caribs laughing and repeating the words supposedly uttered by the spirit ridicule the missionary using the European stereotype, shaped by Europeans' fear of the unknown foreigner. They turn the distorted European image of themselves against the missionary in a gesture of defiance. In this scene, Breton not only posits himself as an observer of Carib life; he also intervenes. Yet the intervention fails. It seems, in fact, that it is in the cracks between observation and engagement that we may trace echoes of others. They do not necessarily express agency. Rather these cracks allow for them to emerge and voice a momentary counterpoint.

Scenes like these operate through tensions of power where the threat of losing one's own power and the uncertainty that the other possesses unattainable knowledge are mediated through the evocation of the other's laughter. Mockery entails a particularly interesting scene of enunciation because it entails contact but not necessarily dialogue. It is an expression of social relationships that are not necessarily dictated by mutual understanding and can be pleasant but also disturbing (Dorion 2007, 57). It establishes a disjunctive relationship where the one being mocked does not interact on the same premises as the other interlocutors. Such scenes further transgress the linguistic and include looks, gestures, laughter, and other non-verbal expressions. Moreover, mockery has an open-ended structure, which makes it difficult to control in a narrative. In the travelogues it is framed as a struggle of competing world views, which fundamentally translates into a site for struggle over knowledge. A crucial point here is that mockery does not speak the language of revolt. These scenes

<sup>57</sup>Tíken tíken crácoüia hómain noubára touária chímêpoüi lanúari, cáho bonále, boupou bonale ouéche bonale ouáttè bonale, chíou bonále, *ce que depuis les Sauvages me répétaient souvent imitant sa furie (quoiqu'en riant); ces paroles veulent dire: vite, vite qu'on me le lie crainte qu'il ne m'échappe, que je le mange, tête, épaules, pieds, sa fiente même, que je le broie, que je le réduise en bouillie, et que je l'avale.*

cannot easily be idealized as sites of radical resistance onto which we can project the (white) desire of a free subject overcoming bondage. Like Williard (2021b, 93), I am hesitant to ascribe such heroism to any voices that emerge in these embedded texts. What scenes of mockery privilege are other disrupting perspectives, momentarily talking back or pointing at alternative understandings.

To investigate this further, I will turn to Labat's inclusion of interactions with enslaved peoples. The structure of power dictating these representations are, of course, much more asymmetric than in the case of Breton alone with the Caribs on Dominica. At the same time the relations between enslaved and enslavers were more intimate, revealing other forms of paratopic links. Enslaved peoples' speech is rarely quoted directly in Labat's account, and when we do hear them speak, it is not often in scenes of compassion and pity, as in Du Tertre's and Mongin's writings. Labat does not follow a coded form. He constructs scenes where his narrative voice directs others' speech. The presence of direct discourses thus serves not to represent other persons but to contribute to the construction of the narrator as an astute observer. In fact, this is precisely the objective: Labat needs to construct himself as a dominating narrator both through and because of others' speech. Indirectly, others thus expose the vulnerability inherent in the desire for power.

There is an obsession in Labat's travelogue: he does not like to be fooled or ridiculed by anybody and particularly not by enslaved peoples. This personal sentiment finds resonance in a general imaginary of Black people making fun of whites, which evolves into a trope during the seventeenth century, a trope where control and resistance, power and fear are intertwined. Du Tertre pointed out that diasporic Africans were "big banterers, they bring up the slightest flaws of the French" (1667 t2, 465).<sup>58</sup> Labat repeats almost the exact words in his account, saying that they are "excessive banterers" who are particularly good at detecting faults in white people and making fun of them between themselves (1722 t4, 172). Commenting on Africans' practice of inventing nicknames often based on the person's weakness, Labat states:

This moniker used among them is a mystery, which is very difficult for whites to penetrate, if not by knowing their language, one discovers it when overhearing them. I have often been surprised by the flaws that they had

<sup>58</sup> Comme ils sont grands railleurs, ils relevent les moindres défauts de nos François.

noticed and the ways in which they made fun of them: this obliged me to learn the language of the Aradas.<sup>59</sup> (1722 t4, 173)

Mockery is above all an internal discourse among enslaved persons, which is precisely why it is threatening. The passage hints at a counter-discourse, but Labat is himself excluded from it. Nevertheless, he quotes common expressions that he has overheard: “It’s a poor wretch, who swears like a white, gets drunk like a white, who is a thief like a white, etc.” (1722 t4, 178).<sup>60</sup> Labat’s explanation for this discursive practice is that they have a “high opinion of themselves”; then he moves on to demonstrate that Blacks are in fact “very simple.” The narrative gives reasons for their behavior but reveals the narrator’s fundamental ignorance: he fills in the blanks to not make it obvious that there are dimensions from which he is excluded. Tellingly, Labat’s motivation for learning “Arada” is to know what is going on between the enslaved peoples at his plantation (1722 t4, 136).

If Labat can show the reader that he controls the enslaved people’s speech, then his authority is underscored. And this is what he seeks to stage in creating domestic scenes of enunciation, where he lets enslaved people speak. As an example of Black peoples’ flaws, he tells about an enslaved boy who works in his house. He much appreciates the boy, citing his intelligence and good manners (1722 t4, 175). When the boy makes a mistake, it is enough to punish him with denigrating words, Labat explains, since he is so proud: “I sometimes told him to try to humiliate him, that he was a poor Negro with no reason.”<sup>61</sup> The adjective “poor” hurts the boy more than anything, and when the boy realizes that Labat’s anger is fake, he says “that only white people are poor and that one never sees black people begging” (175).<sup>62</sup> Labat lets his reader know that nothing

<sup>59</sup> Ce sobriquet est parmi eux un mistere, qu’il est bien difficile aux Blancs de penetrer, à moins que sachant leur Langue, on ne le découvre en les entendant se divertir des personnes dont ils parlent par des railleries piquantes, & pour l’ordinaire très justes. J’ai souvent été surpris des défauts qu’ils avoient remarquez, & de la maniere dont ils s’en mocquoient: ce qui m’obligea à apprendre la Langue des Aradas.

<sup>60</sup> C’est un miserable, qui jure comme un Blanc, qui s’enyvre comme un Blanc, qui est voleur comme un Blanc, etc.

<sup>61</sup> Je lui disois quelque fois, pour tâcher de l’humilier, qu’il étoit un pauvre Negre qui n’avoit point d’esprit.

<sup>62</sup> Il prenoit la liberté de me dire, qu’il n’y avoit que les Blancs qui fussent pauvres, qu’on ne voyoit point les Negres demander l’aumône.



pleased the boy as much as when a white beggar stopped by the house, and he would immediately inform the missionary. Here he is quoted as saying, “My Father, there is a poor white man at the door.” Labat pretends not to hear just to have the pleasure of listening to the boy saying, “But my Father, there is a poor white man at the door, if you don’t want to give him something, I will give him something, me who is a poor black man” (176).<sup>63</sup> The story ends with the words of the boy addressing the white beggar because, Labat writes, “he thought I would hear” and that he would thereby have his revenge for the denigrating words the missionary had said to him. Labat allows the boy to vocalize himself, but the passage builds on Labat’s ability to manipulate and interpret him. The boy only *thinks* he speaks freely and has the room for resistance; in reality Labat masters the scene, provoking certain words and certain actions.

The passage with the boy displays theatrical control, where Labat acts as director. Sometimes he uses his own close relationship to enslaved people to expose the ignorance of white people. At these occasions, it may be well said that Labat’s narrative denounces the reducing gaze of the French, but he only does so in order to enhance his own knowledge and ability to read the enslaved people who surround him. Tellingly, Labat often implies himself in these scenes of interaction. When he discovered a group of enslaved children playing “obscene” games, he ordered the head of his house to whip them. But an older enslaved man interfered and told Labat a morality tale with examples from the plantation: the same way as an apprentice has to learn how to make barrows, the children have to learn how to make babies, the old man argues. Labat first quotes the man in *baragouin*: “‘You have reason,’ he told me, ‘for the barrow maker, but you stupid, for the little kids there why you make beat them’” (1722 t4, 168).<sup>64</sup> Mimicking *baragouin*, Labat states that he wants to give the reader the soundscape of their “pleasant” and “natural” language (169). However, the old man’s extended reasoning following this quotation is in standard French, as if the initial *baragouin* set the tone but Labat’s prose could not hold it. As soon as another voice emerges from his writing, Labat brings it back under his control by refusing to respond to the arguments given by the man and reducing the quotation to exotica. In Williard’s reading, the

<sup>63</sup> Mon Père, il y a à la porte un pauvre Blanc qui demande de l’aumône [...] Mais, Mon Père, me disoit-il, c’est un pauvre Blanc, si vous ne lui voulez rien donner, je vais lui donner quelque chose du mien, moi, qui suis un pauvre Negre.

<sup>64</sup> Toi tenir esprit, me dit-il, pour Tonnelier, mais toi, bête, pour petites hiches là pourquoi toi faire battre eux.

quotation allows Labat to stage a moralistic missionary stance side by side with a pragmatic slave holder position, both encouraging sexual interaction for profit and discouraging it for moral reasons (2021a, 46). The quotation, sliding from *baragouin* to French, obscures the enslaved man's expression. He articulates his views, and hereby his tongue is linked to *logos*, but the passage underwrites his discourse and shifts to the heterolingual grammar of domination. Thus, it is difficult, as Williard also suggests, to pin down the quote as properly staged by Labat or if it is indeed an intervention to prevent the beating of the children (2021a, 46–47).

Clearly, theatricality is a patent manifestation of power directly linked to the machinery of the plantation. “When I saw our slaves work badly or with negligence,” Labat writes, “I told them that during the time when I was a Nergo, I served my master with much more diligence and good will than they did and that was why I became white. Afterwards I had the pleasure of hearing them discuss the possibility or the impossibility of this metamorphosis” (1722 t4, 177).<sup>65</sup> The ultimate triumph is when he can observe the effects of his own performance. He becomes director and audience at once, as a libertine voyeur who gets pleasure out of control.

Scenes like this one exhibit the depth and range of the colonial desire for control as it developed in the French Caribbean context through politics of assimilation. Not only do people live in bondage, but they have to submit to the enslavers' language, religion, and cultural practices, meaning that not only their bodies had to be controlled but also their minds. Labat warns that many diasporic Africans keep their “ancient superstition” while seemingly adhering to Catholicism (1722 t4, 132). When he was faced with converted enslaved persons whom he suspects to never have abandoned their original belief, his reaction was to play them back. He converts one man and tells him to hand over his “marmoset,” a small bag containing sacred objects. After a few weeks the man shows up and wants to offer Labat a few hens. Labat wants to pay him, but the man retorts that he's not interested in money but that he could perhaps get his marmoset back. Instead of simply refusing, Labat starts acting to learn more about the man's motives and about the power he bestows upon the object: “in order to know better what he had in his heart, I pretended not to have any

<sup>65</sup> Quand je voyois nos Negres travailler mal, ou avec negligence, je leur disois que dans le tems que j'étois Negre, je servois mon Maître avec plus de diligence, & de bonne volonté qu'eux, & que c'étoit à cause de cela que j'étois devenu Blanc. J'avois ensuite le plaisir de les entendre se disputer sur la possibilité ou l'impossibilité de cette métamorphose.

problems with giving him what he asked” (1722 t2, 55).<sup>66</sup> Labat’s tactics were motivated by *libido sciendi*; it was an expanded desire for knowledge, covering not only the ways of the world but the hearts and minds of those who surround him.

Labat’s *libido sciendi* was a desire for complete transparency. Glissant theorizes such transparency as the most corrosive influence of colonial politics and ideology (1997, 190). To claim to fully grasp or understand the other is an exercise of domination and an affirmation of one’s superiority while reducing the other. But this is a double-edged sword. The enslaved peoples’ words are no longer read as direct expressions of their feelings or their character. Rather Labat evokes how they use language for specific purposes. Language becomes a tool for manipulation—speakers do not say what they mean or what they think. Yet, this also implies a recognition of Black peoples’ ability to use language as discourse, like Europeans. The fact that Labat had to stage his control suggests that the structure is underpinned by the fear that there are dimensions of knowledge that escape him.

At one point he claims that all men newly deported from Africa are sorcerers. He strongly advises those who buy enslaved people to bring “someone who speaks their language” in order to thoroughly interview persons before buying them (1722 t4, 136–137). In these situations, when Labat’s linguistic knowledge runs short he has to rely on persons he keeps in bondage. The strategy clearly has its faults but Labat disregards his enslaved subjects’ capacity for solidarity or resistance in this specific context. No doubt because such discussion would undermine his supposedly informed advice. Further, we can note here that the more foreign the people he interacts with were, the more potentially dangerous they became. Labat’s theatre of control produced scales of Blackness, where the potential danger lays with those individuals who had not been subdued to colonial language and culture. Sorcery in particular became a site of Black knowledge in his narrative. An often analyzed passage from the first volume of his *Nouveaux voyages* (Dobie 2010; Garraway 2005; Harrigan 2018; Peabody; Williard 2021a) commenting on sorcery among diasporic Africans is worth revisiting in this regard (1722 t1, 495–499): it tells about a woman at Fonds Saint-Jacques who had fallen ill. One night Labat learned that a sorcerer from another plantation had come to treat

<sup>66</sup> Afin de connoître mieux ce qu’il avoit dans le cœur, je feignis de n’avoir pas grande difficulté à lui accorder ce qu’il me demandoit.

the woman. Labat went to the woman's cabin, but instead of bursting in to stop the ceremony, he watched from the outside, actively taking the position of a voyeur, observing and controlling the scene. Suddenly something was uttered that made the woman scream and cry. Labat could not hear what was said, nor could he identify who said it. Nonetheless, he took it as his cue to intervene. Pressing the woman to tell him what she heard, he found out that it was the marmoset saying that she would die in four days. Labat severely punished the man—300 lashes—and put chilies and lemon on the wounds, causing additional unimaginable pain. The enslaved peoples at Fonds Saint-Jacques were forced to witness the outrageous violence “trembling and saying that the devil would make me die,” Labat writes (1722 t1, 498).

The sense of the indirect discourse is uncertain: they use a Christian rationale that a man should be punished for his sins, but it remains unclear whether the devil here refers to an African deity or Satan. Labat seems to think that they allude to the marmoset, which would carry powers strong enough to punish the missionary. To demonstrate that he did not fear anything, he crushes the marmoset, observing that it seemed to him that this action reassured the enslaved, here forced to be spectators (498).<sup>67</sup> But the reflexive form suggests that he is not sure. He cannot fully grasp or interpret their thoughts or their feelings. There are more twists in this story. Labat states that he would have preferred not to destroy the marmoset. He wants to keep it. The reason why remains allusive: did he want it as an artefact, a curiosity, or did he actually believe in its powers, hoping that by keeping it he could use those powers? He concludes the story by observing the “annoying” side of it, namely that the woman did in fact die on the fourth day “either because [the woman's] imagination was hit by the devil's response, or because the devil knew that her malady would take her within this time” (499).<sup>68</sup> So the passage ends with a hint at Black disturbance of order and justifies abuse to keep the disturbance from turning into revolt. The issue was deceit, which harbored a latent subversive potential not only threatening religious order but also social order and, as a consequence, economic gain.

This story is followed up with an anecdote told to Labat by a Monsieur Vandel about a Black man who had made a walking stick speak. The man

<sup>67</sup> Il me parut que cela rassura nos Nègres.

<sup>68</sup> Soit que son imagination eût été frappée par la réponse du Diable, soit que véritablement il eût connu son infirmité la devoit emporter dans ce tems-là.



The resonance of these deviating presences and expressions draws attention toward another linguistic point of entanglement: the knot from which the formation of what Glissant calls a “forced poetics” or a “counter poetics” (1989, 122) emerges, forged out of a situation of extreme limitation, where speakers have a desire to express but neither the language nor the form to articulate the expression. In theorizing such poetics, Glissant traces a counter-genealogy of Creole that breaks with the communicative strand that initially shaped this language by insisting on the “intensity of the scream,” interpreted as meaningless sound but which transformed into a rhythm of language: “This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise” (1989, 124). Glissant describes a process of appropriation, where the reductive representation of enslaved peoples’ speech as childish and simplified is pushed to the extreme by those subjugated to that reductive representation. The complete transparency turns into an “impenetrable block of sound” (124). The move reconfigures Creole from being both a simplified version of French and a tool for communication; Creole, he writes, has as “its origin this kind of conspiracy to conceal meaning” (125). Travel narratives contain echoes of such expressions of anti-enunciation, carrying the seeds of a Creole counter poetics, which break with the clarity of meaning. Here lies the force of other tongues: they make undisclosed experiences resonate without ever being spoken.<sup>69</sup> Rethinking those expressions as an impact that we cannot entirely grasp, makes for an imaginative, literary, decolonial reading of speech within discourses of total control.

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Through the work of missionaries, France explicitly paired territorial power with writing. While this was happening in the colonies, France certified its cultural control in Europe by elevating its own standardized tongue to becoming the new cosmopolitan language. It is in this context that we must read Glissant’s claim that the French Caribbean Baroque operates through language or *langage* (1989, 128), inscribing domination in peoples’ bodies. In an essay in *Caribbean Discourse* entitled “People and Language,” he writes:

The time for us has come to return to the question of the baroque [...]. In the evolution of our rhetoric, the baroque first appears as the symptom of a deeper inadequacy, being the elaborate ornamentation imposed on the

<sup>69</sup>This interpretation is in line with Williard’s reading of black melancholia (2021b, 96).

French language by our desperate men of letters. [...] But for us it is not a matter today of this kind of excess, which was wrapped around a vacuum. The unconscious striving of baroque rhetoric, in the French colonial world [*dans le monde colonial antillais*], is dogged in its pursuit of the French language by an intensification of the obsession with purity. We will perhaps compromise this language in relationships we might not suspect. It is the unknown area of these relationships that weaves, while dismantling the conception of the standard language, the ‘natural texture’ of our new baroque, our own. Liberation will emerge from this cultural composite. The ‘function’ of Creole languages, which must resist the temptation of exclusivity [*la tentation de l’unicité*], manifests itself in this process, far removed from the fascines (linked to fact, fascination) of the fire of the melting-pot. We are also aware of the mysterious realm of the unexpressed, deep in all we say, in the furthest reaches of what we wish to say, and in the pressure to give weight to our actions. (1989, 250)

Throughout centuries of colonization, the Baroque style of flourished and eloquent language developed into an instrument of alienating assimilation—the Antillean would perform their belonging to France by showing their ability to master French language to the point where language becomes exaggerated and Baroque: its will to power inhabits the colonial subjects to the extent that they repeat it, creating an empty expression. Frantz Fanon, too, identifies language as the major vector of French colonialism. To speak, he writes, “means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of civilization” (2008, 2). The Caribbean speaker does not inhabit French. Instead they position themselves to French as the civilizing language meaning that the relationship to this language is alienating, which in turn affects the very expression of that language. To overcome the inferiority complex, which is produced and sustained in the use of the French language, the Caribbean speaker distorts it, exaggerates expressions using “bombastic phrases” (Fanon 2007, 9). What we have is an internalization of the Baroque manifestation of power through language.

Travel writing from the early colonization period allows us to trace how those insidious mechanisms that create the linguistic alienation theorized by Fanon and Glissant take form in the making and unmaking of borders between languages. The fictionalization of reciprocal exchanges, of a more humane version of enslavement, and of amicability, along with the dramatization of certain passages that give the gruesome and brutal history an adventurous and heroic allure, as well as the melodramatic tendencies

evoking pathetic scenes of gratefulness and generosity—all this is rhetoric excess “wrapped around a vacuum.” However, against their own intentions, travel writers also engaged in the plurilingual archipelagic space, working with and against it simultaneously and to different degrees. It is by playing out these tensions in the narratives that these texts testify to the formation of linguistic hierarchies and racial demarcations, which delineate languages on temporal, spatial, and cultural scales. Indigenous languages become “primitive” languages, fixed in what Johannes Fabian famously identified as a “denial of coevalness” (2014, 47), as a present reminiscence of how civilized languages used to be structured. Creole languages become non-languages, seen as simplified versions of other languages, toward which they strive but never catch up. Seventeenth-century travel writing reflects and builds the foundations for these different processes.

Yet while language in the realm of writings from the settlement and early colonization intensifies an obsession with domination, the representations of island society, by means of their obligation to show the archipelagic world, steer away from the obsession of purity that characterized writing in French from France at the time. Inevitably, the plurilingual reality of the Caribbean emerges in the narratives, creating folds within the writing where other languages and discourses pierce the discourse of control. As we have seen in the readings of the travelogues, language borders established by the desire to dominate keep traces of the translingual fluidity they were trying to suppress. The predicament for expressive forms—writing as well as speech—in the early colonial Caribbean is an extreme situation where languages are forced into processual dissolutions and reformations. We find a singular artificial and brutal language in its *statu nascendi* that points forward toward the unfolding of callous global modernity.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# Conclusion... or Alternative Beginnings

“What the Mapmaker Ought to Know”

On this island things fidget.

Even history.

The landscape does not sit

willingly

as if behind an easel

holding pose

waiting on

someone

to pencil

its lines, compose

its best features

or unruly contours.

Landmarks shift,

become unfixd

by earthquake

by landslide

by utter spite.

Whole places will slip

out from your grip.

(From *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* by Kei Miller © Kei Miller, 2014, published by Carcanet Press, reproduced by kind permission by David Higham Associates.)

In this poem from *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (2014), Kei Miller depicts islands as places of perpetual mobility. The first lines evoke social instability—things and history “fidget”—then the poem shifts to geography as an agent of movement. Nature and culture are intertwined, reminding us that the world always escapes absolute measurement. The poem projects the cartographer’s desire to find a place that passively waits to be discovered and measured, but it counterbalances this desire with the firm knowledge that “whole places will slip / from your grip.” The island is neither empty nor fixed; it is a point of entanglement, where the past is taking place, shaped by natural forces and human interventions. It goes on. It will go on. The cartographer’s attempt to draw lines and delineate space is nothing but an interlude in a longer continuity of alterations.

In the first cycle of poems that opens *The Indies* (2019), Glissant explores similar temporal and spatial layers and overlaps as Miller does by working through a dynamic between imagination and the world. The poem captures colonial temporality as that of a projection forward toward an imaginative object of desire contrasted with the brutality of real events that occur in its wake. In an unexpected turn, Glissant aligns the projection forward with those subjected to the violence of colonization. Turning to that memorable and cruel scene from Labat’s account analyzed in Chap. 4 in this book, Glissant invokes the missionary and the man he tortured after having accused the man of sorcery. However, instead of centering on Labat’s violence, Glissant focuses on the unnamed Black man and portrays him as a prophet. Suddenly it is as if the man held the destiny of brutal global modernity in his hands that fatal night when he came to Fonds Saint-Jacques to help the sick enslaved woman. In the poem, this anonymous person holds the future because he is carrying the memory of a past left in the abyss of the ocean—the experience of the slave ship—and is able to project this into unknown creations and expressions. Questioning Labat, the poem states that the Black man “is forgetful of your chili,” alluding to the hot pepper the missionary put in the wounds left by the three hundred lashes. There is much to say here about strategies of remembrance and of opposition to colonial oppression. What does forgetfulness entail in these lines? Certainly not to forget the violence. But there is more to it. I suggest that the passage implies the possibility of a methodology that will do away with the colonial French measuring of the past. Labat may hold the power but the singular formation of Caribbean culture lies elsewhere: the anonymous man and the things we do not know about him are what matter.

The poem could, in fact, be read in conjunction with the official chronology that Glissant highlights in *Caribbean Discourse*, which ironically



reduces Caribbean history to nine dates, each one of them pertaining to European interventions from Columbus to the imposition of the “Doctrine of assimilation” on Martinique and Guadeloupe after 1975 (1989, 13). The pointing irony is, of course, that this way of measuring history *does* matter: the chronology unveils a process of dispossessions. Precisely for this reason, Glissant concludes, “the whole history of Martinique remains to be unraveled. The whole Caribbean history of Martinique remains to be discovered” (13). Martinique’s past remains obscured by a colonial scale of history established at a distance and not in connection to the island’s immediate surroundings. It is a scale of history that needs to be remembered so that it can be forgotten and leave space for other pasts.

The colonial chronology evoked by Glissant is a testimony of silencing. This book set out to challenge such silences by relocalizing early colonial travel writing to the Caribbean by means of paying attention to textual disjunctions and temporal overlaps. Time is indeed a destabilizing force. As Wai Chee Dimock points out in her seminal article on time and resonance in literature, texts always extend beyond the moment when they were written (1997, 1061). To be sure, there are several temporal and spatial gaps cutting through travel writing: the time-space between the sojourn and the writing, and the temporal-spatial rifts in the events told where history points back to other times (pre-columbian Caribbean deep-time; African times; European mythological time) and places (Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia). My aim here has been to actualize that destabilizing force by making use of contemporary concepts, confronting them with dynamics of transformation. In so doing I have teased out another relationship to the past, not in terms of loss nor a search for a site where an alternative subjectivity unsullied by colonial discourse could emerge, but as an unstable moment of entanglement, an amalgamation where power and creative disruptions occurred simultaneously. Textual disturbances cause the texts to “keep [...] vibrating” (1063), not necessarily as expressions of resistance or authenticity but in terms of dynamic productions. In line with what the poems by Miller and Glissant explore, time becomes a factor for renegotiating what early colonial travel writing might mean.

Coming to the conclusion, I would like to put this method of reading and its findings in relation to a larger concern. What I have been teasing out throughout the pages of this book is the possibility of alternative beginnings for (French) Caribbean literature. I am gesturing at a longer tradition of rethinking beginnings pertaining to postcolonial and, later, decolonial theory. According to Simon Gikandi the reason why we want

to break historical silences is precisely because we are looking for alternative beginnings. For sure, the localization of a beginning depends on the ways in which that moment resonates with the contemporary, the moment of reading, so to speak. David Scott reminds us about “the curious, puzzling ways in which, as idea and as activity, beginnings always constitute a sort of paradox: a point of departure that—simultaneously—affirms *and* disavows, acknowledges *and* displaces, creates *and* repeats” (2009, 1). Scott’s reflection, pertaining to the journal for Caribbean thinking *Small Axe* and its relationship to critical thinking and to the construction of history in the region, literary as well as intellectual, naturally owes much to Edward Said’s seminal book on beginnings (1985) as a joining of key issues in critical theory: language, creativity, intention, authority, style, authenticity, and mimesis. Beginnings, Said argues, are creative because they are marked by invention and thereby also introduce their own methodology, producing difference (from other beginnings) by reusing the familiar and recombining the known (1985, xvii). The operative mode of beginnings is thus paradoxically the return and the repetition rather than a “linear accomplishment” (xvii).

However, what more is at stake is the configuration of revisiting beginnings; how much of the past will be distorted so as to fit with our presentist prejudices? Gikandi asks in his article on the archives of enslavement, “Can we isolate literary beginnings that are not mere projections of our own desire for a singular archive and a seamless cannon of letters?” (2015, 81). Central to Gikandi’s discussion is the critical and creative potential in reaching beyond what have been constituted as foundational moments in history in order to engage with the past while, at the same time, avoiding looking for a restorative new beginning. Gikandi’s motivation lay in what he identified as a particularly U.S. American problem of modernity: the search for a “free voice” that could restore the memory of the repressed beyond the discourses and institutions of power that have held and still hold those voices captured. Caribbean intellectuals have long been sensitive to the impossibility and even unnecessary of carving out a space where free voices would emerge, precisely because they think modernity through the Middle Passage and the plantation as spaces of violence and rupture, but also of continuity and creativity. French Caribbean thinkers in particular have mostly theorized identity shaped by that experience in terms of alienation, looking less for expressions of freedom and emancipation than for the creative exploration of entangled sufferings of Caribbean history, leaving them unresolved. Consequently, in French Caribbean literature,

discourses around foundational moments have evolved on a different scale. Here the dilemma is about the *actualization* of an expression that has no form and no means to be heard. So, to the question of what the history of French Caribbean literature is, the answer is negative: *la littérature antillaise n'existe pas*, Antillean literature does not exist. It is as if the absorption of the French Caribbean into the reductive colonial chronology annuls the possibility for literature to emerge. Indeed, negation in itself appears as the foundational moment for French Caribbean literary history.

This is, of course, not an objective description of French Caribbean literature but a diagnoses also created by that literature. If, simply put, a “national” literature emerges as an expression of a sense of community through a creative form of poetics, the birth of Caribbean literature would then indeed be localized to Paris in the 1930s, when writers of African descent began engaging in modernist writing techniques to denounce the colonial order and articulate a black Pan-African identity. The desire to find a literary form that would mirror a Black Caribbean sensibility and sensitivity stemmed from a stark critique of the Black and mulatto local bourgeoisie, assimilated to French culture and cultural values and incapable of self-criticism as well as of criticism of the colonial order. Writers like René Ménil, Suzanne Césaire, and Aimé Césaire constantly reminded their readers in the 1930s and 1940s that Antillean literature is yet to come and that the writers were in the process of making it happen. Somewhat differently, in the 1970s Glissant diagnosed Martinican alienation as a result of having interiorized the other’s gaze to the extent to which he thinks that this external gaze is his own. In the polemical manifesto of *Créolité* from 1989, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant revise Glissant’s analysis, suggesting that even Césaire, the Négritude movement, and even Glissant himself have not managed to produce a literature that truly captures Caribbean reality and the Caribbean being.

This negation runs deep and is based on the premise that this culture is entirely colonial, forged in the abyss of the Middle Passage but also in the extinction of the Native Caribbeans. Yet the creative force of French Caribbean literature has been to consider that negation while insisting on a kind of fragmented, diffuse continuity. This, I contend, is where travel writing can offer an alternative beginning as an intrusion in that diffuse continuity, which makes the fragments of the past vibrate.

The point of making seventeenth-century travel narratives resonate today is that they make us vigilant for foundational moments. To revisit the past by means of their embedded representations inevitably confronts us with

layers through which we have to work in order to hear echoes from the shadows and margins of the colonial chronology and to trace the intertwined junctures that shaped the articulation of power. Throughout the pages of this book, I have sought to demonstrate that there is an archipelagic sensibility that weaves contemporary Caribbean literature with writings about the islands from the seventeenth century. To be sure, there are formal aspects that seem to define the twentieth as well as the seventeenth centuries that have to do with the exploration of new ways of being in the world. Travel writing, as we have seen, had no model for representing societies-in-the-making and deployed a variety of strategies for representing Caribbean reality and the people living there. Somehow, their eclectic structures find an unexpected echo in the early texts of Caribbean contemporary literature, which navigate a space in a larger, dominating literary canon (literature from France). Travel narratives mold discourses of domination, but while doing this they unveil the confrontation with their own limits, as if writing had to be fragmented, broken and put together again, requiring a work of mixing and layering. So in the gap between the world and its representation, travel writers were forced into invention and creativity. This, contemporary French Caribbean thinking teaches us, is the other side of the Caribbean's brutal trajectory into modernity (Dash 1998). There is something about the plurivocality, the shifting perspectives, the open-endedness in early colonial accounts that suggests that sense of belongings and sense of self is always and always will be entangled and negotiated along a shifting scale. So the messiness that I have sought to work through without resolving may perhaps, as suggested by Gikandi in his reading, pave the way for fiction, "one in which the truth of meanings is to be found not in what is described but in what it cannot, or is unable to say" (97).

I am not suggesting that early colonial travel writing should be categorized *as* Caribbean literature as we understand it today, but that through these texts the deep history of the islands reverberate in ways that speak to our contemporary moment. Surely, it would be problematic to configure a beginning for French Caribbean literature referring to texts deeply involved in the settlement and early colonial projects. No doubt, the travel narratives show in their texture what Kathleen Donegan has characterized as a split between "colonization as an imperial project and becoming colonial as a lived condition" (2016, 4). My readings here have shown how that textual split makes for narratives, which both eulogize the colonial project and tell about lived conditions. A juncture occurs in that long history of instability and crisis, whether in terms of epistemic transitions or

loss of origins, leading not to new beginnings but, on the contrary, to complex ruptures and continuations. Yet I am not convinced that we should configure early colonial travel writing as part of Caribbean literary history by stressing colonial settlement as an act paired with a deep and confusing sensation of “unsettlement” (Donegan 2016, 2). Despite shared concerns about a sensation of loss, the unsettling lived condition of becoming colonial should not be aligned with today’s politics of rethinking the past or with the poetics of re-writing the self and the world, which has preoccupied much of French Caribbean literature through the twentieth century. Moreover, such a configuration of beginnings would repeat that false chronology criticized by Glissant; it would create a linearity of the brutal complexity of the history it was set out to reflect.

In fact, it would be more productive to use the notion of beginnings to do away with that sense of melancholia and nostalgia, which have long loomed over the (post)colonial gaze. Grieving “lost voices” presupposes an event of eradication, propelled by a will to destroy and a moment of extinction, when we know too well that disappearance mostly happens without us noticing; it is in most cases gradual, happening as other new things occur in their wake. Melancholia or nostalgia will not prevent this from happening. Quite to the contrary, it re-enacts the fundamental gesture of erasure; it is “thought committed to the presencing of roots, even in the experience of absence” (2019, 8) as John Drabinski puts it when juxtaposing the thoughts of Glissant to the “continental” thinking of Heidegger. Indeed, as the analysis has demonstrated, the annulment of the other’s language, for instance, presupposes a heterolingual grammar that would configure other languages as lost. Travel writing testifies to another linguistic logic where languages informed one another, changing, not dying. Here the ambivalence is expressed in the translingual rather than in contained differences. The plurilingual echoes that emerge in travel writing express a latent potentiality rather than a loss of an original voice. Throughout this book, I have insisted on impacts and effects, deliberately avoiding speaking about voices coming back to haunt discourses of control, which suppressed them. These are not ghosts, looming over texts. Rather, echoes of past presences are *there* in the texture of the narratives manifest in various disruptions and tremblings; they are not gone but entangled with control. We have to work with and against the embeddedness of these texts to hear them.

This kind of reading clearly does not give the whole story; it does not retrieve the past. All the while, it can prevent us from pretending to be able

to reconstruct lives that cannot be reconstructed, only imagined. But we can follow the undertows and trace a different vitality that operated by disrupting and fragmenting the story. As Drabinski shows in his analysis of what he calls Glissant's philosophy of beginnings, the impression of loss is not objective to the phenomena in itself; rather, it is a forestructure: the past is only experienced as lost "*because we expect connection*" (9, italics in original). In working through overlaps of time with concepts invented by or reinvented by Caribbean twentieth-century thinkers and with a period where the idea of the new was indeed secondary (as compared to its importance in late modernity), the beginning I offer here is that of a continuity, of opening the possibility of further points of entrance that may deepen and widen the investigation of those traces which have long been held as "lost." I am not concerned with origins but with a historicizing project that seeks to situate the writings of Biet, Breton, Pelleprat, and others.

The analysis of interactions with geography and other peoples, of the ways in which travel narratives construct languages through writing, allows the conclusion that, however strange it might appear, the artificiality of the early modern offers another perspective on approaches to the brutal processes of early colonization. These travelogues display no mourning and melancholia of loss. Instead of circumscribing others in a stagnated time, the texts leave space for how brutality lived on and formed narratives and politics. The narratives retell stories of how settlement and early colonization undulated, displaying tensions and ambivalences on a shifting scale of domination. And these very complex and messy movements speak of the effective presence of indigenous and enslaved peoples in the shaping of early colonial society. These dimensions would pass unnoticed as long as we keep seeing these narratives as solely French colonial discourses of control. We would then not only repeat the violence committed; we would also sustain the silence and uphold the displacement of representations coming out of the Caribbean to France.

Saying this, I am not proposing that the writings by Du Tertre, Breton, Labat, the anonymous soldier, and the other travelers constitute an absolute beginning of (French) Caribbean literature; this literature further implies oral literatures of the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe that the travelogues merely hint at. What I am suggesting is that we rethink these texts and use them as instruments of exploring Caribbean literary history as constant violent and creative negotiations between languages, spaces, and times, a zone of resonance where beginnings make sense from the starting point from which we enter into reading. That resonance can only occur by

relocating them to the islands; in France they remain mute or are reduced to documentation. As Saidiya Hartman (2008, 13) reminds us, the most productive way to engage with a complex and violent past is to refrain from filling the gaps and provide closure.

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