
"FORGETTING THE PAST" FOR "CITIZENSHIP": BARTER AND RESENTMENT IN MARTINIQUE (1848-1946)

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"All memory is manipulated by society."

Roger Bastide in *L'année sociologique* (1970)

"The history of all public deceptions that were hidden under the emphasis of ill-defined words would be, for the most part, the peoples' martyr-speech."

Courrier de la Martinique (1850)

Introduction

One of the first measures proclaimed by the Second Republic on February 25, 1848 in Paris was to abolish slavery in the French possessions. The initial decision was made final on March 4th and the law enforcing its application was ready on April 27th. Within two months, slavery was to be abolished in the French colonies. Except for its terseness, this measure had nothing surprising about it. News of the Emancipation had been circulating for months amongst the populations of the French colonies, terrifying some and rejoicing others. In the feverish atmosphere of the cities, it was becoming obvious that the government had delayed too long in applying the decree. Impatience gained the upper hand and bloody uprisings exploded. Under pressure from the slaves' workshops in Fort-de-France and Saint-Pierre in Martinique, the Governor, Claude Rostoland, decided to apply the decree as of the 23rd of May, before the official arrival of Commissaire-Général Perrinon.¹ The Republicans thus offer the newly liberated slaves, who constituted 60% of the total population of Martinique,² political and social equality, full citizenship, the right to salaried work, access to land, education and respectability, as defined by the criteria of the period.

The most significant aspect of this event from the point of view of the mindset of the age-old colonizing nations is without a doubt that as of Emancipation, universal suffrage was concurrently and immediately established in the French Colonies. In 1848, in fact, in a movement of "social inclusion" (according to Pierre Rosanvallon's term for it) the right to vote was unconditionally granted to all men above the age of twenty one years. This practice of citizenship remains inextricably linked to the Republic since it is upheld when the Third Republic was established on September 4, 1870 after the end of the Second Empire.

¹ Likewise, the decree took effect on May 27, 1848 in Guadeloupe and, according to the official calendar, on June 10, 1848 in Guyana.

² Freed slaves accounted for 68% of the population in Guadeloupe, of which 61.7% were adults.

The evolution of civil status was rapid. A society founded on slavery, that is, on the domination of one group by another, without transition, was changed into one based on the civic equality of its members without taking into account previous conditions. The Republic theoretically eradicated all differences amongst its citizens. It erased the history of slavery even though the past inequalities remained present in daily practices and in the mentality of peoples, both in the colonies and in France ("*la Métropole*"). Forgetting slavery became the source of this new citizenship, yet the all-consuming experience of slavery could not disappear from memory. What kind of plan for society could emerge from this? How can one explain the disparity which takes root in Martinique after the Emancipation between political aims and lived social experiences?

Citizenship and forgetting: Consensual barter - or necessity?

The Republic of 1848 established civic equality according to specific criteria. What was the content of citizenship? What were the underlying values that went along with this citizenship? And who could adhere to these rules?

How the legislators developed forgetting through the definition of citizenship

The moral content of the status of citizen was paradoxically inherited from the philanthropic monarchy. Since 1828, the abolitionists who were preparing the Emancipation legislated over colonial societies. They did not know whether Emancipation should be gradually introduced, accompanied by the "patronage" of former slaves, as when freeing prisoners or workers in France, or whether it should be introduced abruptly and immediately, without prevarication.

In the context of the general moralization of French society, the Welfare State ("*l'état Providence*") took on the job of re-socializing all marginalised outcasts including workers, prisoners and slaves. Slavery then becomes a social evil which must be remedied.³ The same evils are then stigmatized: loose morality, vagabonding, vice, the absence of marriage...The same rules are applied. The same men (de Broglie, Guizot...⁴) debate these problems and the results take the same form on both sides of the Ocean. In 1832, legislation outlaws branding prisoners and subjecting them to humiliating punishments and amputations. A year later, on April 30th, 1833, the punishment of mutilation and branding slaves were also outlawed. When liberty was at issue, prisoners and workers as well as slaves were "patroned".⁵ Moreover, the same models were employed to structure, organize and correct these populations by distancing them from vice. At the centre of this system is the "family," considered the highest value for moralists of the nineteenth century. The family is attributed with a rehabilitative function, curing social evils, and a normative function, enabling society to find its unity.⁶ The individual was supposedly able to be treated through applying mechanical rules and simple causal relationships such as those linking the repression

³ The economic variable is certainly part of this development as shown by researchers such as Robin Blackburn in *The overthrow of colonial slavery* (1988).

⁴ Moreau de Jonnés can be added to the list for he wrote on slavery (*L'esclavage et les moyens de le supprimer*) as well as on poverty and delinquency in laborers.

⁵ See the Penal Code of 1810 on liberated criminals.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, (1975), pp. 300-301; and Patricia O'Brien, *Correction ou châtement. Les prisons en France au XIXe siècle* (1988).

of deviance, the organization of work and marriage in the abolitionists' discourse. The path towards so-called full citizenship was traced along these lines.⁷

The constitution of the patriarchal family is the first element in establishing liberty.⁸ This is the main thrust of the reports and papers on the slave population established by the abolitionists. "Slavery is the negation of the family," writes Cochin,⁹ and marriage is "(...) the basis for all improvement and all true sociability." In this very paternalistic perspective, promiscuity and cohabitation are denounced for usurping male power! The colonial laws conceived of in France were intentionally aimed at re-establishing and affirming their power over women. These measures were nothing more than adaptations of laws in France such as, for example, the 1848 Order on Marriages, which repeats the main clauses of the Civil Code and applies it to the particular situation in the colonies.¹⁰ The female slave, just as in France, is a "permanent minor" who has to be directed. Not only does she lack civic status because of her enslavement, but she automatically loses all autonomy with regard to her possessions and her children.

In the minds of these legislators, the establishment of the family would lead to liberty and citizenship. Between 1845 and 1848, slaves on state properties (*du Domaine*) felt the effects of this politics whose main tenets precepts (religion, marriage, family) had already been inscribed in the overseers' notebooks by 1824.¹¹ A few years later, before being emancipated, slaves had to prove their moral qualities by being married and living in a regular family. A prize of 200F, or 489.5kg of sugar, was the reward for this achievement. The State required that they practice religion, work hard and remain frugal. These in turn were the necessary conditions for an early emancipation.¹²

Two other virtues allowed someone to merit civil rights. In the abolitionists' and Republicans' mentality, citizenship took on the form of a triptych representing the Family, Work and Property.¹³ These values were considered universal¹⁴ but did not take

⁷ See Myriam Cottias, "De la moralisation des esclaves à la citoyenneté dans les Antilles françaises (Martinique, Guadeloupe)", numéro spécial: "Historia de la mujer y la familia en América Latina y el Caribe," AHILA, 1996.

⁸ On this topic, see Arlette Gautier, *Les Soeurs de Solitude* (1985).

⁹ It is interesting to note that he does not mention the precipitous emancipation of the slaves in Santo Domingo, which had become the independent state of Haiti in 1804. *L'abolition de l'esclavage*, (1979).

¹⁰ The high court (*Conseil supérieur*) of Martinique and Guadeloupe, in its analysis and observations on the proposed Order, indicated on July 19, 1846 that "in some articles of the Code, the word State has been replaced by Master in order to apply to the Colonies." See Myriam Cottias, Annie Fitte-Duval, "Femmes, famille et politique aux Antilles françaises depuis 1848," *The Caribbean Studies Journal/Étude des Caraïbes*, University of Puerto Rico, 28, 1 (January-June, 1995).

¹¹ ANSOM, carton 86 (anc 117), dossier 714.

¹² ANSOM, Fonds généralités, carton 372, dossier 2197.

¹³ "The best way of creating a legitimate family is to establish the love of territorial property and agriculture for the Free," Special Council of Martinique, Procureur-général's responses to the Commission's questions, under the presidency of the Duke of de Broglie, meeting of June 24, 1841.

¹⁴ These variables are rooted in the conceptions of the Emancipation period in Jamaica as well, as shown by Thomas Holt, "The essence of the Contract: The articulation of race, gender, and

the history of colonial societies into account. Consequently, in the colonies, they resulted in an attempt to erase the history of slavery with the pretext of building a melting pot for all the actors. However, although the Republic did not know it, these values were not quite so permanent! In 1848, the majority of the population born into slavery had low marriage rates (nuptiality¹⁵ for slaves was 0.9 per 1,000 in 1839, 1.1 per 1,000 in 1847), limited work and reduced property holdings.¹⁶ Spreading the abolition of slavery and Republican values was not taking place in a homogeneous society. The disparity in status was extreme and all the social actors could not benefit from the values of equality to the same degree. This plan to develop citizenship, while unifying in its intent, could only contribute, in fact, to divisiveness in society and the exclusion of those members who could not participate in this globalizing project, that is, the majority of the population.

On the other hand, Republican values that constituted the moral duties of the citizen, defining the moral content of the term "a good citizen," were paradoxically reinforced by the Church and allowed for this appellation to be used (almost exclusively) in connection to the population previously referred to as "of colour." By adhering totally to these themes, the Republican Martinique islanders completely confused the issue of the "legitimacy" of unions with their political legitimacy. The adoption of this ideology is total and something of a caricature. For example, in the Saint-Pierre newspaper, *Les Colonies*, birth announcements take on a highly specific form: the names of legitimate children are published along with the total number of "natural" children, born outside of marriage, who represent 79% of live births!¹⁷ Citizenship and family are indivisible concepts, linked throughout the entire nineteenth century¹⁸.

The laws and rules developed to accelerate social progress mainly allowed the "free population of colour" access to political life, a life which required forgetting the past. What were the foundations of this choice?

The need to forget for politicians in Martinique

The new political force was therefore Republican, a motor for Emancipation and almost entirely constituted by "men of colour" or rather "mulattos," as they were called by land-owning Whites.¹⁹

The reversal of the term is sudden and only serves to deepen the divisions since,

political economy in British emancipation policy, 1838-1866," *Historia Social*, Valencia, 22 (1995).

¹⁵ The nuptiality index used is the number of marriages corresponding to the adult population (14-60 years of age), multiplied by 1,000.

¹⁶ Marie-Christine Guilhem-Chivallon, "Tradition et modernité dans le monde paysan martiniquais. Approche ethno-géographique." Thesi, Université de Bordeaux III, January 1992, I, p. 142.

¹⁷ The theme of legitimacy is dealt with in the newspaper on a regular basis. For example, the novel by Paul Rouget, *La Faute de Jeanne*, is published in two installments in this same paper.

¹⁸ Richard Burton, *La Famille coloniale. La Martinique et la mère-patrie, 1789-1992*. (Paris, 1994).

¹⁹ Note the term "mulatto" in English (of Spanish origin, meaning a hybrid beast such as a mule) indicates mixed Black/White parentage in the first generation. "Mulatre" in French seems to be a more inclusive term to refer globally to descendants of freed slaves and people "of colour" in general.

between 1830 and 1885, for a term indicating the transition of status, "free people of colour," a "closed" racial denomination is substituted which refers to the origins and past of a group between servitude and freedom through the 1830's.

The definition of this category of "mulatto" is clearly a fluid one but it identifies a social reality experienced by the different actors involved.²⁰ The "barriers of prejudice" referred to by the Royalists, land-owners, whites, find their foundation in these determinations. The Republicans in Martinique were obliged to confront the antagonisms and problems residing in this opposition of colour.

The "new politicians" did not recognize themselves in this imposed categorization, as is emphasized by an editor in *la Défense Coloniale* who, in outcry, implies that they desire to be white:

The great politicians are mulattos, which is a great misfortune for us, for if they were white, all division would readily disappear. Why is it not in our power to make them white? We would do it immediately, if only to end their incessant hostility which impedes life and perturbs social relations. The unfortunate thing is not that they are mulatto, but that they regret being so.²¹

The mulattos are designated as "people of colour" and the attribution of the qualifier "mulatto" is for them a symbol of their exclusion. Louis-Thomas Husson, a White Creole, temporary Director of the Interior for the Republic, known for his speech to the slave farmers on March 31, 1848, is considered "ridiculous" by Whites in the country²² and as "belonging to the mulatto caste" because he recognized his coloured children. The mechanism of rejection is consolidated while the "people of colour" are in a process of constituting a preeminent political force. They become a feared group because they are established as a group. It is the "people of colour" who are organized as an opposition force that the Whites will refer to using the qualifier "mulattos." In the *Défense Coloniale*, we read that:

...mulattos are those who believe themselves to be and call themselves [mulattos]. That is an excellent definition. There are numerous examples of mulattos who are not mulattos, solely because they did not want to be. All those who want to belong to a caste and impose themselves by their numbers and force are and will remain mulatto. All those who will come to us naturally, without hate or attachments, will see that the barriers of prejudice will fall before them.²³

²⁰ On the definition of "racial" categories, see Jean-Luc Bonniol, *La Couleur comme maléfice. Une illustration créole de la généalogie des Blancs et des Noirs*, (1992.)

²¹ *La Défense coloniale*, 30 January 1884.

²² Dessalles, 33.

²³ *La Défense coloniale*, 30 January 1884.

Obligated to fight against the categorization that was attributed to them, confronted with the "barriers of prejudice," Republicans who favoured the abolition of slavery, "men of colour," thus accepted moral qualities as the "rules of citizenship." These rules defined respectability in the nineteenth century and their function was to forget the past where all did not fulfill the conditions of "family, work and property." To forget the past was to create a new society from the ground up which would consolidate their success and fulfill the promise of their social recognition.

The issue is not to describe the political events that took place from 1848 on (the well-known opposition between Bissette and Schoelcher which characterized political life)²⁴ but rather to see the content of political discourse and the position of those who were called "mulattos." These were those who left "the signs through which a society thinks of itself, expresses itself and makes its own history."²⁵ Nonetheless, these signs were truncated.

It is therefore necessary to observe how, as Lucette Valensi calls it, a "therapy of forgetting"²⁶ was practiced. The objective of the struggle to become French citizens included this compromise of forgetting the past. New citizenship was thus supposed to cure the resentment accumulated throughout the period of slavery. It was supposed to act as the counter-balance to the founding event of Martinique's society, that is, colonial slavery.

From the establishment of the Second Republic, these political compromises were developed by the main actors "of colour" in Martinique: Bissette, Perrinon, Pory-Papy.

For all of these, becoming French citizens and integrating into the Republic were possible on the condition of eradicating the past. The Republic unified differences and Martinique's Republicans had to erase individual differences and historical anomalies. Bissette heralds this theme. On August 2, 1848, he declares himself a partisan of "indemnity, pardon and forgetting."

Liberty has been soiled with blood in Saint-Pierre and at Prêcheur... Tell all our brothers...that they should throw a veil over the past.²⁷

As a system of exploitation, slavery must be forgotten ("Friends, let us not dwell in the past.")²⁸ Moreover, no bitterness should be expressed: "Let us master all resentment so that the age of liberty is solidly constituted and inalterably founded."²⁹

The cultural content of the past must also be negated. "In 1848, as of the abolition of slavery, Pory-Papy, Judge and Deputy, instructed the population to abandon this custom [charivari] and declared...that "the habits of slavery had to disappear with the

²⁴ See Nelly Schmidt, *Victor Schoelcher*, (1994).

²⁵ François Bédarida, "Les responsabilités de l'historien expert," *Passés recomposés, Champs et chantiers de l'histoire* (1995), p. 143.

²⁶ Lucette Valensi, *Fables de la mémoire* (1992.)

²⁷ *Les Antilles*, 2 August 1848.

²⁸ *Courrier de la Martinique*, 5 February 1850.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

look of liberty."³⁰

Today, the charivaris, the bois-bois, the banboulas, the piaves and the rest of the violence is no longer in fashion. They recall a past that has been forgotten and devoured by time; they are undignified anachronisms for the present and especially for the future.³¹

Forgetting slavery - from its cultural practices to bitterness about it - was part of the social and political fusion³² promoted by Bissette in the newspaper *Les Colonies* and a policy maintained through 1946 when Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyana became departments (or states).

In the first phase, until the return of the Empire, this fusion was political:

Before thinking of making the colonies into one single family, it was first necessary to create a single people: in order to fuse them socially, it was necessary to fuse them politically.³³

The desire was to unify forces in the country for "harmony and fraternity."

in the second phase, after the Whites' retreat from the political scene and the hardening of their positions, the theme of fusion no longer seems sufficient to erase differences. Assimilation, promoted since the end of the eighteenth century, becomes the generalized credo of political forces from the end of the 1870s on in order to always "ensure peace and harmony between the formerly divided classes of colonial society" as well as "order, reconciliation and progress."³⁴

The measures used to determine this objective are significant: one of these was the "blood tax" paid during the 1914 war. Fifteen thousand of Martinique's inhabitants and 10,000 inhabitants of Guadeloupe paid this tax. Assimilation represented "in a word, more than indigenous! Law and justice for all, without regard for origin or skin colour."³⁵

Nevertheless, the so-called Law of Assimilation was not passed until March 19, 1946. All politicians, especially Aimé Césaire, demanded this law to combat economic and social problems in Martinique. The law consolidated the choice to forget slavery, without proposing any social remedy for the feelings developed during the period of slavery which had been fortified due to the relationship of dependency that continued to exist

³⁰ André Delaunay-Belleville, *Choses et gens de la Martinique* (1963), p. 236.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² The term "fusion" is widely used in French in sociol-psychological, scientific and spiritual contexts to indicate union, unification and unity. Here it is used to refer to the product of the complete assimilation of the melting pot. In French, one can speak of the "fusion" of man and God, the couple in love or (as in English) of melted metals or atomic particles. We keep the term "fusion" (instead of translating it as "union") to refer to these other meanings common to the French usage (NDT)

³³ *Courrier de la Martinique*, 5 February 1850.

³⁴ Conseil Général de la Martinique, 1874, cited by Chauteau, Liliane, *La Vie quotidienne au temps de Schoelcher* (1979), p. 87.

³⁵ E. D., *L'Aurore*, 14 December 1927.

afterwards. This dependent relationship between the majority population and the former White masters was soon reconstituted into resentment.

The contradictions in forgetting: Shared resentment

Even though resentment³⁶ has never been situated historically, it has been the foundation of the history of social relationships. Beyond the political speeches advocating unity and harmony, resentment played out on a daily basis. The sum of individual experiences and familial and social heritage, resentment abounds in the history of Martinique. It is more easily identifiable than in other societies, perhaps because the social oppositions are so strong. Resentment was born in slavery, from unexpressed or barely expressed rage, from the domination of individuals over other individuals, from misunderstanding and spite, from mutual fear and suspicion perpetuated on both sides, from the constant struggle to survive and the weariness it produces.

If the historical origin of resentment is the same as that of the slave-holding system, its scope is wider. Politicians in Martinique in the nineteenth century did not deal with these feelings since they were quite busy ensuring their political and social position, fighting the power of White Royalists and ensuring Martinique's place within the French Republic. They favoured forgetting, burying the past, "wiping it out" ("*raturage*"), as Edouard Glissant would say. Consequently, resentment was consolidated to an even greater degree due to the disparity between the memory of slavery maintained by the majority of the participants in this history and its negation by politicians. Historical resentment could not be forgotten and politicians demanding this of the population could only produce the opposite effect. The wounds were not healed, they could only become deeper during a transitional period of social transformation. The Emancipation, the establishment of universal suffrage and its re-establishment in 1870, are particular events through which the expressions of resentment can be studied. They are often characterized by acts of violence where there are symptomatic name-calling, as in "Vaniteux Africains!" ("Uppity, vain, conceited Africans") or threats such as "Death to the Whites!"

Fears and resentment

Whereas Martinique was officially in a period of negating this history, the mental universe was constantly referring to slavery.

The new state of liberty elicits fear in Whites and Blacks. The newly freed men and women fear revenge on the part of their former masters who were forced to free them. They fear being killed in the countryside. Thus, during the conflict opposing Pierre Dessalles and his former slaves, while the issue of the distribution of land reserved for the workers' gardens stipulated in the new written contract of association is a matter of contention, the former slaves also fear the vengeance of their former master who wrote:

Then, brandishing their knives and letting out horrible screams, they repeated that they did not want anything to do with me because I had

³⁶ The term resentment is used throughout the period until Aimé Césaire transforms it into hope (*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Présence Africaine: 1983, p. 49.)

given orders to kill them.³⁷

The fear of the re-establishment of slavery was increased during the first elections. The following example shows how a man of colour marked down the names of the Republicans on the voting card of a new freeman registering to vote. To his surprise, he tells him:

Listen to what the Governor writes: he recommends all newly freed men to name the five individuals marked here above if they don't want to run the risk of voting in a general who would come here with the white battalion and re-establish slavery.³⁸

For the owners, the radical change of Emancipation provoked just as violent fears and also recalled other ancestral hatreds. They remembered not only the 1710 Fête Dieu affair where dark-skinned slaves had been accused of fomenting a plot to kill all the Whites in Saint-Pierre, but also the massacres of colonists in Guadeloupe in 1793. These fears marked the minds of many.

I see the horizon full of dark clouds, and all the first actions of the provisional Government diabolically resemble those of '93. Up until now, the scaffolds have been silent...³⁹

Rumours spread which heightened terror felt by Whites:

The Preacher's Blacks have told all the Whites that they have to go if they don't want their throats slit: they all evacuated, even the priest.⁴⁰

Loss of status and resentment

The Emancipation of 1848 can be posited in terms of a loss of patrimony or in terms of the disappearance of the privileged status of White owners. By the decrees of 1848 affirming the equality of all men, all inhabitants of the French Antilles became French citizens.

The instructions of the provisional Government on elections in the colonies specified this in the execution of the decree of March 5, 1848. Under the chapter on "Nationality", it is written that:

The condition of being born or naturalized French can be justified, either by the possession resulting from previous votes, or by the representation of acts of naturalization delivered by the preceding governments, written opinions, or other official acts.

While social equality was official, the racial barriers developed throughout history were no longer guaranteed and theoretically became illegal. Therefore, it became necessary for the group of Whites to re-found their separation on a new basis, or rather to maintain the civil exclusion of ex-slaves. The debate on the issue of citizenship had

³⁷ Pierre Dessalles, *La Vie d'un colon à la Martinique au XIXe siècle. Journal 1848-1856*, presented by Henri de Frémont and Léo Elisabeth, diary entry dated July 17th, 1848.

³⁸ Dessalles, diary entry dated August 7th, 1848.

³⁹ Dessalles, diary entry dated March 30, 1848.

⁴⁰ Dessalles, diary entry dated June 2, 1848.

already begun before Emancipation. The special Council of Martinique had written about this on 24 June 1841, foreshadowing the attitude it would adopt after Emancipation:

260,000 slaves will suddenly penetrate into civil life, without any conditions or tests, with the title of French citizens, when the law is so very careful about giving this same title to foreigners? The new law will therefore be more liberal and much easier with regard to the African race than common law is with regard to civilized Europe.

After Emancipation, the debate is openly a matter of race. Until the nineteenth century, the debate on citizenship was publicly bound by the issue of legitimacy, after the hope of a return to the Monarchy was lost. At the end of the century, in France there is a radicalization of opinion against universal suffrage and in Martinique, the Whites' attitudes and political expression hardens: "There are no French here but us, the Whites. Understand this well, uppity (conceited, vain) Africans, for we are French from birth, whereas you are only French by decree."⁴¹

The political legitimacy claimed by the slave-owning class relied not on the opposition between Whites and Blacks, but rather on the opposition between Whites and Africans, that is, foreigners to Martinique, foreigners to France, ineligible as French citizens. This new division perpetuates that between Colonists and Slaves by insidiously imposing a new identity on the newly freed ex-slaves which excluded them even more. Further, this new identity negated the process of creolization recognized by the colonists as early as the end of the eighteenth century. The exclusion of ex-slaves on the basis of their being "Africans" exposed them to further deprecation. Marius Hurard, Deputy of Martinique, wrote in 1882: "In opposing, as you do, the surprise decree which escaped the provisional government in 1848, you deny Africa to which you owe your origin, you are African renegades!"⁴²

The objective was to prevent the disintegration of the white race as predicted in the newspaper *Les Colonies*:

[In the future] This is when we will see this phenomenon which to some may appear highly exaggerated, but which is nevertheless quite natural: the descendants of those who are the most fervent apostles of the exclusion of the black race will engineer a way to find in their family papers in order to get a title for themselves, any trace of blood that today is derided.⁴³

This crystallization of racial thought was opened up in the newspaper, in embryonic forms, hidden in day-to-day life. Underneath these apparent modifications of social relationships, the same relationships are maintained. For the entire colonial period, the terms "nègre" (Negro/nigger) and "esclave" (Slave) were synonyms.⁴⁴ The semiology

⁴¹ Quoted from the *Moniteur des Colonies* (1882), reprinted in Victor Schoelcher, *Polémique coloniale*, (1979), p. 29.

⁴² *La Défense coloniale*, 1882.

⁴³ *La Défense coloniale*, 30 January 1884.

⁴⁴ The equivalency between the terms "Negro" and "Slave" goes back to medieval times.

was supposed to change with Emancipation. However, the habits and reflexes remained the same. The term “*nègre*” should have disappeared since slavery was abolished, but the equivalency was too much of a habit. Two months after Emancipation, its use seems to be an anachronism which takes on the value of an insult. Here is an incident important enough for Pierre Dessalles to note it in his diary. It is clearly a significant event for the newly freed slave and one of those many incidents which, taken together, produces resentment. Here is the account. Pierre Dessalles, in thanking the man for a service rendered, lets this word slip out: “Give a glass of punch to this *nègre*.”

Immediately, the reflection is noted that the word is inappropriate and insulting. A word that this man has the right to denounce (“In departing, he says to Louis Littée that this word had been repeated before him.”) Dessalles could then evaluate the consequences (“he didn’t get offended, but this proved how mean we were...”). In openly showing his displeasure, the newly freed slave preferred to keep his feelings to himself, burying them and keeping them inside. Nonetheless, the fact of indicating the incident emphasizes both the leniency of the newly freed slave with regard to his former master, but also the possibility of violent consequences. The threat does not escape Pierre Dessalles who notes: “I’d better watch myself!”⁴⁵ He continues, however, to use the term throughout his diary.

Recurrent resentment

If in an individual and minor incident - still part of the collective level, but not as an individual experience which only reinforces the wound - resentment is constantly manifested in a latent way, it is also expressed openly and is at times the motivation for repeated collective actions.

With regard to the issue of the land, resentment explodes brutally and then is pacified during periods of negotiations between owners and workers, sometimes through intermediaries. Immediately after Emancipation, contracts of association between owners and farm-workers were developed with various disadvantages, inequalities and disagreements between the parties. In this framework, the resurgence of resentment, resulting from the repression of past slavery, could be expected frequently. The political discourse on forgetting the past was completely invalidated by daily experiences, and especially by the work experience.

As we have seen, encouraging freed men to go to work was a theme developed by all the political forces since the preparation of Emancipation. The Republicans reiterate the idea of national unity founded on the eradication of the past:

Let us work then and have faith! May the wealth and happiness of all give birth to the wealth and happiness of each one of us. Let us be actively producing and let us propagate harmony: let us apply our forces to multiply our needs and our relations, to augment the revenues of the country and the mass of our future joys.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Dessalles, diary entry dated July 23, 1848.

⁴⁶ *Courier de la Martinique*, 5 February 1850.

Nevertheless, the nature of the work itself changed little except for becoming paid work. The newly freed formulated their own claims to the land for the attraction of a salary was not enough to retain the populations. Preoccupied by an absence of trust, the newly freed slaves were:

wary of the owners in general - a wariness that was perhaps rooted in their memories of slavery (...) Following these councils, communist ideas that they did not understand any better than the rest were spread about and many at present still dream of splitting up and sharing the land.⁴⁷

The demand for land was strong, a fundamental demand during this period of emancipation. The struggle to obtain land was fierce while former slaves and slave-owners were establishing contracts of association. For this reason, the examination of these contracts is particularly important for it posits the issue of the meaning of liberty for the emancipated slaves in the limited framework of the old plantation.

Most of these contracts had the same provisions. For example the contract for the *Nouvelle-Cité* plantation which belonged to Pierre Dessalles stipulates a nine-hour work day. Saturdays, Sundays and holidays were rest days. The owner would give each worker a garden and a small one room house (a hut) as long as the worker was a party to the contract of association. The farm-workers had the right to a third of the gross of sugar farmed and "delivered in kind all through the process of manufacturing."⁴⁸ The owner was to furnish "the land to live on, the farm buildings to work in, the one-room houses for the workers, all utensils and tools."⁴⁹ The landowner was required to pay medical expenses and medicine as well as those due to injuries incurred on the job. Absence from work was severely punished as the owner could demand the double of the monetary equivalent for the length of the absence.

A week after Emancipation, the association planned between Pierre Dessalles and the ex-slaves was evoked by Dessalles as an act "that must bind the former slaves to work."⁵⁰ Their contract of association was signed on August 18, 1848 with the slaves being represented by a "businessman of colour." If all of the clauses of the contract were not discussed, the clauses concerning the distribution of lands was fiercely debated. The resentment of the newly freed slaves was expressed in violent discussions on the subject of the division of lands, the attribution of gardens and the price of sugar. The newly freed slaves directly comment on all the aspects of organizing production, negotiating the price of sugar and refuse, for example, that the sugar leave the plantation. At the same time as they are directly becoming involved in the affairs of the plantation, the meaning that the newly freedmen gave to liberty was not to leave the plantation, but rather to work there in the way they chose to, at their own pace. If the act of association contained measures which "resembled the past" and constituted a continuation of slavery, the workers attempt to get involved in the new organization of labour to defend the lands that guaranteed their subsistence.

⁴⁷ Dessalles, 339. (Letter from Pierre Dessalles to the Director of the Interior.)

⁴⁸ Dessalles, 340. (Article 14 of *Nouvelle-Cité's* contract of association.)

⁴⁹ Dessalles, 340. (Article 2 of *Nouvelle-Cité's* contract of association.)

⁵⁰ Dessalles, diary entry dated July 26, 1848.

Violent resentment: The insurrection in the South

In September 1870, the fearsome cry of "Death to the Whites" was sounded in southern Martinique. Following the Lubin affair where a Black mistreated by two Whites was condemned to five years in prison because of his rebelliousness, resentment exploded into revolt. Codé, bailiff of the Court, is assassinated. In a few days, the insurrection spread throughout the south of Martinique and in particular into the Rivière-Pilote area. Many hundreds of rebels take up arms, houses are burned down, four people are killed, two of them Whites. The repression enacted to suppress this revolt was particularly severe: a War Council condemned and executed the six leaders, eight others were condemned to death in their absence, twenty-eight were condemned to a life of forced labour and thirty-three to terms.

The social explanations for the movement are numerous. There was widespread fear and resentment due to the failure of the contracts of association, the division of land, and the misery of the daily wages. Lacaille, the main leader, was blamed for having said "the Whites had enjoyed things enough, it was time to share the properties."

Fear and resentment are intermixed. In a case before the War Council, Suky Thalès was accused of having set fire to a hut, a windmill and a donkey enclosure on the Beaugard Plantation on September 23, 1870 and screaming out: "Long live the Prussians!" Even though he admits not knowing "those people there," fear pervades the courtroom: a fear of the return to the Republic, fear of uncontrollable violence, fear of political organization. A little more than a month earlier, there had been the troubling incident where Alain de Moneys was accused of being a Prussian because he screamed out: "Long live the Republic!" The peasant-farmers had tortured him out of their own overwhelming sense of rejection by society.⁵¹ Resentment had exploded in the same way as at Rivière-Pilote.

Citizenship avoided

The ephemeral Republic of 1848, despite its plan of social unity, produced the exclusion of the majority of the newly emancipated population. As for the exercise of citizenship through voting, the result was massive electoral abstentions. In October of 1881, 75% of the men in Martinique abstained from voting in the legislative elections; in 1884, 82% of the voters in Lamentin did not participate in the municipal elections.

Moreover, the Republic was not as generous as it pretended to be. In 1870, the colonies were not benefiting from the same laws and administration as in the *Métropole*. The colonies remained the exceptions, its citizens bereft of complete equality with citizens in France.

Between this specificity which would impede any attempt at social homogenization and the failure to transform working conditions, surreptitiously, the relationships of dependency between owners and workers had been reconfigured into a scheme not very much different from the servile model. Rather than a transmutation of the past onto

⁵¹ See Alain Corbin, *Le Village des Cannibales*, (1990).

the path of progress, the continuous remembrance of resentment continues to this day within the heart of Martinique's society. Without it becoming an object of study, there is no way to get beyond forgetting the unforgettable past.

* Translated by Lysa Hochroth.