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Terrorism or Heroism? The Portrait of the Rebel in French Caribbean Novels

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Introduction

Terrorism is perhaps, the biggest threat to world peace today and an ill -wind blowing across the globe. Terrorist organizations, under the guise of religious societies, liberation movements, substance cartels and other para-state entities have unleashed a reign of fear on the global community. They strike at any time and everywhere, and for all manner of reasons ranging from religious to political, from racial to ethnic, from purely nihilist to anarchist. They assassinate, poison (with nerve gas, biological or nuclear weapons or with other weapons of mass destruction), bomb (rail lines, public buildings, trade centers, etc). The groups include both the nasty and the nice.

For the purpose of this paper, we will restrict ourselves to the definition of terrorism as the "policy of using acts inspiring terror as a method of ruling or of conducting political opposition" (Bolander, 1997): 1021). The issue of who can be branded a "terrorist" is polemic and discretional, depending on one's viewpoint. For now, our attention is focused on the image of the rebel in French Caribbean fiction.

Terrorism as a universal subject has always lent itself to literary discourse over the years. For example, Turgenev and Dostoyevsky had made terrorism a major thematic preoccupation in their respective novels, *Rudin* and *The Possessed*. Dostoyevsky depicts terrorism in 18th Century Russia and paints Pyetr Nechaev as a pitiless, destructive, murderous anarchist, engaged in anti-institution terrorism. Dostoyevsky is pro-establishment, writing to discourage terrorism in all forms. Not so for Emile Zola who, in the 20th Century, rehabilitated the negative picture of the terrorist figure to the extent that

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even though the reader feels horrified by the wanton destruction of lives and mines by Souvarine in *Germinal*, one cannot help, but admire the stoutness of heart of this self-effacing revolutionary turned nihilist in the face of unbridled capitalist exploitation of the era.

In the African literary landscape, many authors have created dissident and revolutionary characters, on whom they have assigned the task of violently overthrowing repressive regimes, both colonial and post-independent. They are usually a band of fearless and defiant men and women, portrayed as heroic but firebrand revolters, using methods that elicit terror and fear. Some examples readily come to mind: Ngugi Wa Thiong'O (*Weep not, child*); Charles Nokan (*Violent était le vent*); Signaté Ibrahima *Une aube si fragile*); Boubakar Boris Diop Le temps de Tamango); Mande Alpha Diarra (*Sahel! Sanglante Sécheresse*) ; Z. G. Nokan (*Les petites rivières*) ; Amina Ka (*Le miroir de la vie*) ; Mongo Beti (*Remember Ruben* and *La Ruine presque caocasse d'un polichinelle*, etc. The rebels in these novels are underground dissidents who kill, rob, vandalize property, destroy or sabotage infrastructure, incite violent uprising, etc. They are painted as heroes, (not villains), patriotic nationalists and selfless martyrs. By portraying them with such comeliness, charm and appeal, the authors seem to be putting them up to the reader for empathy and acceptance.

The same scenario is replicated in the French Caribbean novel, except for the only fact that they operate within a particularly different historical, socio-cultural and geo-political milieu. And the psychology behind their actions and strategies can only be fully comprehended within this context.

The Antillean saga is punctuated with violence, occasioned by resistance and revolt, since the so-called "discovery" of the archipelago by Christopher Columbus in 1502 and the subsequent arrival there of Belain d'Esnambuc in 1635. The indigenous Arawaks fought violently against the European conquistadors who subjected them to forced labour in the plantations. They refused to work under the hostile climate and the prevailing inhuman working conditions.

Horrified by the suffering of the Indians, Reverend Bartolomé de Las Casas adviced in 1511 that black Africans be brought to replace them in the fields. According to him, the output of one black was equal to the productivity of four Indians (See Condé, 1977, p.6 and Cudjoe, 1980, p.8). Thus began the massive importation of Black African slaves into the West Indies.

Right from the African hinterlands, captives fought furiously to resist their capture during slave raids and they organized mutiny inside the slave ships during the infamous transatlantic voyage. Rebels incited uprisings or committed suicide by jumping into the sea to drown or to be eaten by sharks, drank poisons or slit their throats or veins with sharp objects and bled to death. This immolation or self-destruction was based on the belief that when one died, he would return to Africa to join his kith and kin in the spirit world (For more on African belief in life-after-death or reincarnation (or metempsychosis and palingenesis), see Zana Akpagu, , 2003, p.81).

Those who got ashore alive escaped into the forest as maroons, where they lived freely in reconstituted communities, just like in Africa. Etymologically, the term 'maroon' originated from the Spanish word 'cimarrón', referring to runaway animals which returned to the wild after attempts to tame and domesticate them. Later, it was extended to fugitive slaves that escaped into the forest to avoid subjugation in the slave plantations. In the West Indies, 'maroon' applies not only to the runaway slave, but also to their descendants. Those who were caught were beaten, had their hands or limbs amputated or were executed or hung in public as deterrent to those who wanted to follow suit. After Abolition of slavery in 1848, France colonized a section of the Antillean region. For a hundred years, France used brute force to keep them under colonial rule. In 1948, the law on the forcible annexation of the colonies came into force. To this day, Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guyana and the Réunion are part and parcel of France, having been completely assimilated politically, economically and culturally. Accordingly, these islands are considered as French Overseas Territories or "Department Français d'Outre-Mer" (D.O.M.).

The annexation is the object of fierce opposition by nationalists fighting for autonomy. The novelists are committed on the side of the oppressed masses against colonization by assuming the role of spokesmen, thereby helping to articulate the feelings of the people behind their struggles. The resistance has been violent with the freedom fighters adopting a bellicose course of action. Chris Egharevba's observations below capture succinctly the cycle of violence in West Indian history:

> The history of the Caribbean region is predominantly a history of the peoples' struggles and rebellion against inhumanities and oppression. The consciousness of the people has been fashioned not only by a history of enslavement and foreign domination, but a continuous resistance to that domination. From such background, a sensitive writer will have to produce a literature of resistance, a literature which arises out of a people's conscious awareness and need to forcibly renounce indignities and exploitation, a literature which embodies the struggle of a people against oppression. (Egharevba, 1989, p.52)

Perhaps, it is necessary to reiterate here that it is the interplay of socio-historical realities that inspire literary imagination and literature, which in turn shapes socio-historical events. The historical reality of bloody resistance is amply depicted in West Indian fiction. The novelists create characters that typify this struggle, be they runaway slaves of yester-years or the present day generation of freedom fighters.

One must underline the dissimilarity between the terrorism we are dealing with here, and that practiced by modern hellhounds and psychopaths, which is borne out of irascible, spasmodic, nihilist and murderous instincts. In fact, what we have in French Caribbean novels is a kind of "anti-terrorist-terrorism" which is a "reaction" to the tyranny of slavery and colonialism. The mutineers in the novels are not hard-core terrorists who kill, maim and vandalize for the sake of it or on grounds of religious bigotry. The insurgents

do so in the name of justice for the defenceless.

The Maroons: Villains or Heroes?

The maroon is an ever-present character in the West Indian novel. Apologists of slavery portray the runaway slave as a brutish, ungovernable lone wolf gone berserk. Most novelists have laundered this image by endowing him with the noble attributes of intelligence, kindness, resoluteness, survivability, chivalry and venturesomeness. He has a profound sense of justice and commitment to liberty.

A classic example of a maroon is created by Edouard Glissant in his *Le Quatrième siècle*, named Longoué. He is the ancestor to a long lineage of rebels. This personage takes on a symbolic value: that of a champion for freedom (seized, not given) achieved at enormous personal sacrifices. Abolitionists like Victor Schoelcher are unjustly showered with the glory of abolition while rebels like Longoué who arm-twisted the slavers into ending the horrible system, are denied their legitimate honour. Longoué represents these unsung heroes of slave resistance, whom his grandson, papa Longoué refers to as "les combattants sans noms" (*Le Quatrième siècle,* p. 205), the unknown soldiers of the abolitionist struggle. Glissant portrays Longoué as the authentic "father of abolition", not the William Wilberforces of Europe.

Longoué is a first day maroon, who escapes immediately on arrival. He never gave his buyer, La Roche, the pleasure of having him in captivity. He broke gaol and took flight into the forest, in spite of the danger. He opted for the precariously difficult but free life in the woods, instead of servile life. Longoué's character is idealized and his idealization stems from the desire to prove that the maroon is not the so-called animalistic hot-blooded scab, imported from Africa. His personality is instilled with dignity, fearlessness and impetuosity. Escape is a perilous and pernicious option, going by the number of pursuers, the specially trained dogs, the dark, thick sinister forest, etc. *(Le Quatrième siècle*, p. 44). One admires his obstinate refusal to submit to servitude, his refusal to give up his humanity, his dignity, his pride and his liberty.

Longoué's successful evasion represents the triumph of silent ruse over the brute force of the monstrous slave master. His heroism lies not only in the success of his escape but also in his ability to safeguard his hard-earned liberty in the forest. This bold rebel returns to the plantation to abduct and elope with his wife, Louise who had helped untie him to enable him sneak off. Described as a warrior – "la guerrière" *(Le Quatrième siècle*, p. 54), this amazonian martyr ends her life through the practice of suttee when her husband dies in order to rejoin him spiritually, in accordance with African belief.

Slavery is obnoxious, criminal, vile and bloody, the maroon ought to be ruthless, rough and tough in resisting it. Longoué is the symbol of ferocious and conscious resistance to slavery. The character of Longoué debunks the myth of the docile, submissive Negro slave (Gisler, 1981, pp.8-9). His audacity in subverting the slave code, earned him respect, even from the most unlikely quarters – his ex-owner La Roche. He

had to personally bring his magic bag to Longoué in his forest refuge, and made several subsequent visits to the forest to consult his ex-slave. It is also significant to note that La Roche also refused to give chase to and recapture Longoué's son who he symbolically names "Liberty", recognizing in advance the futility of such pursuit (*Le Quatrième siècle,* p. 136).

Longoué's portrayal reveals a conscious effort on the part of Edouard Glissant to rehabilitate the image of the runaway slave. To him, these unrecognized rebels are the real West Indian heroes, who must take their right and proper pride of place in the lives and annals of the Antillean people, for too long, ignorant of their origins and history.

Bertène Juminer's novel *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri*[11] is yet another "reply" to European propagandists who seek to justify and legitimize the execrable slave trade. Juminer offers the reader, illuminating insights into the phenomenon of marooning as a form of rebellion. The narrator states in clear terms at the beginning of the novel the objectives, strategies and consequences of marooning. The few who succeeded in absconding from the plantations swelled the ranks of other révolutionaires on the mountains: "rejoignaient les bandes révolutionaires terrées dans la montagne" (*Au seuil d'un nouveau cri,* p. 15), while those who were recaptured were subjected to horrendous punishment, the type meant to generate fear and terror in the minds of would-be escapees. But this punishment only provoked a boomerang, in that for the headstrong rebel, it rekindled his determination to try bunking off again or reinforced the urge for requital.

Some of the terrorist measures of reprisal included being subjected to bastinado, being tied upside down and smeared with honey to attract bees or ants, being branded with red hot iron or being mutilated or having one's limbs, ears, eyes, fingers or other body parts cut off. This mutilation made the recaptured slave lose all human appearance, and usually presented a dreadful but pitiful physical spectacle, just like the leader of the maroons in *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri*. As Modestin observes:

> L'homme, dit-il, qui vous commandait était hideux, sans doute avait-il déjà un oeil torve. Mais l'absence d'oreilles autour d'un crane luisant, à moitié dévoré de calvitie, enlevait toute humanité à son visage. Son regard oblique était congenital, ce vide insolite, à l'endroit précis où se rejoignaient ses tempes et ses mâchoires, était accidental. Rien de bien rare dans ce pays. Son maître l'avait naguère mutilé et marqué d'une fleur de lys à l'épaule. C'était la loi, le tarrif prévu pour toute première évasion, en attendant la section des jarrets ou la mise en cas de recidive. Le code noir le voulait ainsi. (*Au seuil d'un nouveau cri,* 16)

> [The man who was commanding you, he said, was hideous. Without doubt, he already had a menacing look. But the absence of ears around his shining skull, half consumed by baldness removed every humanity from his face. His sidewards glance was so congenital. The unusual empty space, at the particular point where his temples and jaws met was accidental. There was nothing as rare as this in this

country. His master had, not long ago, mutilated and marked him with a lily flower on the shoulder. That was the law, the prescribed price to be paid by every first escapee while awaiting amputation from the knee, in the case of second offenders. This was the negro code.]

The physical aspect of the recaptured fugitive may be bizarre, but his attempt to shake off the yoke by fleeing slavery is a heroic act of defiance. If terrorism is defined as a stratagem of "dominating by inducing terror"(Bolander et al, p.1021), then the slave master is, without a doubt, a terrorist. He, it is who is the evildoer, not the maroon. Slavery is simply evil, whether one attempted to flee from it or submitted to it, one was ill doomed.

From their forest abodes the maroons implemented the policy of obstructionism to hinder the smooth functioning of the slave plantation. Under the cover of the night, they made frequent incursions into the plantations to exact poetic justice by destroying the fields through arson. The sugarcane plants became the receptacle of their spleen and resentment because they were the very reason for their captivity. This scenario has been depicted in Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres*. Burning the fields was not only an act of sabotage but a symbolic act of pulling down the horrific, ruinous and infernal slave system, maintained through terrorist means.

On rare occasions, there were open clashes between the master and the maroons and the latter was victorious over the former, inspite of the former's superior arsenal. One admires the dare-devilry of the slave rebel, Modestin in *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri* who confronts, eyeball to eyeball, his heavy-handed boss, d'Entrefois. Humiliated, deflated of his pride and his superiority complex, dispossessed of his gun, the all-powerful slavemaster was cornered like a rat ("traqué comme un rat"), prostrate, screaming in fear and begging his conqueror, Modestin. (*Au seuil d'un nouveau cri*, pp. 24-25). One salutes the nerve, the gallantry and the valour of this superman. He is certainly a prodigy. Modestin even contemplated dragging d'Entrefois, naked and in chains, before the tribunal of the maroons. (*Au seuil d'un nouveau cri*, p. 36). Slavery is vindictive and destructive; the maroon must also be forceful and energetic in his retribution.

Achieving freedom is always at a high price and at great self-sacrifice. This explains why the authors seek to rehabilitate the image of slave dissenters, unfairly relegated to the background of history. Abolition is unduely attributed to arm-chair abolitionists like William Wilberforce and Victor Schoelcher highly disparaged by Salvat Etchart in *Le Monde tel qu'il est* (p. 46).

Idealizing the image of the slave rebel, especially the maroons, is simply a manner of giving honor to whom honor is due. Their conscientious objection to slavery became the first step in the massive revolutionary sentiment that engulfed the entire West Indian archipelago.

Violent Resistance against Departmentalization: Terrorism or Tyrannicide?

The 1948 law of departmentalization, which annexes the tiny Antillean islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guyana and Réunion as Overseas Territories (colonies) of France, is object of vitriolic and acerbic criticism and violent resistance by a few dissenters. They consider this politico-cultural assimilation as political terrorism. The dissidents are branded by the colonial authorities as terrorists. They readily point to their style and "modus operandi" adopted in conducting their resistance. The dissidents, in turn, argue that it is the gungy and fiendish local representatives of colonialism that practice terrorism through tyrannical use or abuse of power. And their counterstroke is tyrannicide.

A painstaking analysis of Edouard Glissant's characterization of the modern rebel reveals that the author relives the maroon tradition in them. It shows to what extent Glissant wants to perpetuate the memory of the maroons. One such example of a resuscitated maroon in *Malemort*, is "Beautemps". His name translates as "Goodtimes" or "Betterdays", symbolizing faith in the resistance and hope for a better future.

Beautemps is, in fact, the modern version of Longoué whose resistance is brought to life again. Just like Longoué who refused to recognize the authority of his master, Beautemps refused to recognize the authority of the police. In him, Glissant revives the spirit of revolt inherited from the maroons of old:

> (Beautemps) était comme le maroon d'hier (qui) n'attendait) ni amour, ni pitié parce que sa function réelle, bien moins que de rester libre, avait été de recuser partout l'amour et la pitié. *(Malemort*, p. 43)
>
> [(Beautemps) was like the maroon of yester years, who expected neither love nor pity, because his real duty, much more than being free, was to reject all entreaties of love and pity.]

Unfortunately, unlike Longoué, Beautemps could not sustain his freedom. He succumbed to the bullets of the gendarmes. In spite of his fall, Beautemps typifies the perennial heritage of revolt of the primordial maroon, Longoué.

Glissant's *La case du Commandeur* offers the reader, another example of the heritage of the dynamism of the maroons through the epic rebellion of another "modern maroon", known simply as "Aa-a". It is noteworthy that this name is chosen symbolically as a challenge to the white colonialist. To him, it is an act of defiance to appropriate the first letter of the whiteman's alphabet as name (Glissant, 1981a: 139). Like the fugitive slaves of old, Aa-a flees from the plantation to escape the injustices practiced there, such as raping teenage girls of barely thirteen years of age:

> n'importe quel colon engrosse une esclave, attend treize ans que le maître produit,

> soit à même d'enfanter à son tour, alors il l'engrosse pour son plaisir. L'homme a marroné, ne supportant pas cette oppression qui va plus que toutes les autres (*La Case du Commandeur*, 7 144).
>
> [Any colonialist can impregnate a slave girl and wait for thirteen years for his master to also father in turn another child from this abused teenager. So he impregnates for pleasure. The maroon does not take this kind of oppression, which he considers the worst of all forms put together.]

Again, reliving the memories of the runaway slaves in Aa-a is further testimony that Glissant is committed to vindicating the maroons. According to Glissant, the maroon is the only true popular hero of the West Indies: "le nègre marron est le seul vrai héros populaire des Antilles" (Glissant, 1981b: 104). He is the one through whom Glissant voices his pet idea of "Antillanity" (Lirus, 1979, pp. 209-219 and Regis, 1992, pp. 359-362), a pan-Antillean philosophy that seeks to promote Caribbean specificity and authenticity, of a distinctive personality implanted in his culture and land of exile (*La Case du Commandeur*, p. 139). His guts earn him the admiration of all, even the Indians who hold blacks in disdain for accepting slavery *(La Case du Commandeur,* p. 139).

Obstructionism was one step taken by the maroons to sabotage the loathsome plantation system. This approach is also being adopted by modern day rebels to disrupt work in the plantations as a way of pressing forth their demands for more humaine and better working conditions and to restore the dignity of labour. In *Malemort*, Edouard Glissant presents the inseparable trio: Dlan, Medelus, Silacier, who instigate a workers uprising and causing work stoppage in the plantation. Consequently, they became fugitive as they are pursued by the severe and dreaded police. These non-conformists and daring mutineers are hunted and hounded but are able to resist arrest by the police and their pursuit and heroic resistance reminds us, in several ways, of the breakout slaves who decamped:

> Ils entendent les gendarmes qui riaient, ces trios-là (...) sans se consulter ils calculèrent leur élan, ils jaillirent du fond du cacao tombèrentt sur les militaires trop confiants, dans l'éclair de débandade de la troupe il y en eut quand même une dizaine qui les fusillèrent à bout portant mais ils avaient déjà mouliné coutelas. *(Malemort* , p. 92)
>
> [They heard the gendarmes who were laughing, the trio (iii), without any further consultation they calculated their speed and then sprang forth from the midst of the cocoa, falling on the dispersing military men with much confidence. Among the troops were some ten soldiers shooting at them at close range but they had already crushed some with cutlasses.]

Joseph Zobel presents his readers with another "modern maroon" by the name of Justin Roc, alias Jojo in *La Rue Cases-Nègres*. Like the fugitive slaves of old, Jojo rebelled against the sequestration in his father's hellish house and marooned, dodging the cruelty and tyranny of his stepmother, Maman Yaya (Zobel, pp. 199-200, 283). According to José Hassam:

> Jojo avait marronné. Le croirais-je? Jojo s'était sauvé de chez son père. Comme un nègre marron, il s'était enfui dans les bois... (*La Rue Cases-Nègres*, p. 198)
>
> [Jojo had marooned. Do I believe in him ? Jojo was saved from his father's home. As a marooned negro, he escaped into the woods ...]

It is remarkable that Jojo is Joseph Zobel's only character that rebels violently and his solitary action consists in his taking the bull by the horn and assaulting the white foreman and inciting the workers to burn down the sugarcane fields. Jojo is a mulatto, who became a member of the "petite-bande" or child labor force. He stole away from the comfort of his white father's home, having decided that he had had enough of the abusive treatment of Maman Yaya and fed up with the atrocities and crimes perpetuated in the plantations. He recounts his story to his childhood friend, José, in these words:

> Un samedi soir, c'en était trop (...) J'ai crié devant tous les travailleurs assemblés: Qu'est – ce que vous attendez donc pour foûtre le feu dans les pièces de canne? Vous ne voyez pas que c'est ça qui fait que c'est une triste chose d'être nègre! *(La Rue Cases-Nègres*, p. 284)
>
> [One Saturday evening, I felt I had had enough (...) I shouted before all the assembled workers. What are you still waiting for before you set these pieces of sugar cane ablaze ? Don't you realise that they are the things that make being black a sad thing ?]

To the plantation owner, this is a nihilist pyromaniac, but to the suffering workers, this heroic act is pure tyrannicide. Tyrannicide because, the sugarcane field is perceived as ominous, fatal and the 'raison d'être' of their servitude. Like the maroons who undertake incendiary punitive expeditions to burn the fields, Jojo believes that destroying the farms is destroying the very essence of their subjugation and the arbitrary and absolute power of the white plantation owner.

His rage is directed, much against the sugarcane as it is against the plantation owner. This stubborn and recalcitrant rebel complains and he is threatened with arrest by the police. He remains unbowed and when he receives a kick from his harsh and baleful boss, he retaliates and gives him the beating of his life. Unfortunately, this heroic and mutinous gesture turns into a disastrous misadventure for Jojo. He is arrested tortured

by the gendarmes and gets a heavily unjust and disproportionate punishment of six months imprisonment. On regaining his freedom, he recounts his travails to his lost and found friend, José in these words:

> Oui, j'ai dit ça parce que j'avais de la peine et de la rage comme du feu dans tout mon corps. Aussitôt le géreur a suspendu la paie et il m'a crié : « si tu ne fermes pas ta gueule là, je fais immédiatement venir les gendarmes». Mais il n'y avait pas de quoi m'intimider tu sais(...) Alors il est sorti de son bureau, le géreur. Il a avancé sur moi. Toute la foule hurlait de terreur, v'lan ! je reçois un coup de godillot dans le jarret. Inutile de te dire que je ne lui donnai pas temps de bisser. Oui, avant l'intervention de l'économe et du commandeur, mes points lui avaient déjà rivé quelques bons coups dans la figure. Et, mimoh, je détale. Mais ils ont lâché les gendarmes après moi. On m'a arrêté (*La Rue Cases-Nègres*,284 – 285).
>
> [Yes, I said that because I was pained and furious like fire all over me. As soon as the jail keeper suspended payment and shouted at me ! If you don't shut that your trap, I will call in the gendames immediately. But there was nothing to indimidate me with, you know (...) so he left his office and moved towards me. The crowd was screaming with terror. Kpaah ! he kicked me with his boots behind my knee joint. Needless to say that I didn't give him a second opportunity. In fact, before the intervention of the steward and the commander, I had rained several blows on his face and I took off. They unleashed the gendammes after me and I was arrested.]

The refractoriness and the impenitence of this whiz kid make him look like a wonder, a 'rara avis' in the eyes of his peers as can be seen from José's bewilderment: "Dieu! se peut-il que Jojo soit si brave, si intrépide!" [God! Could Jojo be so brave, so intrepid!] (*La Rue Cases-Nègres*, p. 196). If Edouard Glissant relives the struggles and life-styles of the maroons in his post-abolition characters, it is a way of expressing his well-known position that nothing has changed (materially especially) since slavery. It is a clear attempt to draw a parallelism between the days of slavery and the present situation under Departmentalization. As I have said elsewhere:

> En fin de compte, l'abolition de l'Esclavage en 1848 et la Départementalisation un siècle plus tard en 1948, apparaissent comme de grand bluff, parce que ni l'une ni l'autre n'ont apporté une amélioration matérielle au petit peuple antillais.
>
> [In the final analysis, the abolition of slavery in 1848 and Departmentalisation a century later in 1948, appeared like a big bluff, because, at the end of the day, neither one nor the other brought any material improvement to the lives of the ordinary carribeans.]

Perhaps, the most vocal champion of anti-colonial struggle is Edouard Glissant and his *La Lézarde* is a virulent and gall-full attack on Departmentalization, which he considers as politico-cultural terrorism. It is pertinent to remember that at the time of writing *La Lézarde*, there was a pervading anti-colonial sentiment, especially among the youths who dreamt of independence as opposed to political and cultural assimilation. During the Second World War, the French government of the time referred to as the "Vichy regime" practiced racism and terrorism in the Antilles through the systematic use of terror inciting methods, draconian measures and intense persecution, to tyrannize the populace with the help of local cohorts.

The prevalent political situation was characterized by demagogy, brutal oppression, savage repression and intimidation of opposition. The local representatives of the Vichy regime enjoyed unlimited and uncontrolled power. These corrupt local agents dominated, through acts that induce fear and terror among the people. In *La Lézarde*, we are confronted with a band of heroic youths who see themselves as carrying the collective banner of the hopes and aspirations of their people, as instruments of liberation and catalysts of social change and progress. This gallant company of dissenters includes: Mathieu Beluse Raphaël Targin (alias Thaël), Marie Célat (alias Mycéa), Varlérie, Luc, Pablo, Gilles and Marguerite Adolé (alias Margarita). They align themselves with the struggle of the masses for a meaningful national ideal by attempting to help them form a system of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of their people to build a new society of freedom and equality. As Daniel Radfort affirms, national liberation meant the liquidation of the local representatives of the Vichy regime in the Caribbean:

> Pour les martiniquais la libération est le fait du peuple mais plus encore la liquidation du gouvernement vichyste raciste chez eux. (Glissant, cited by Radford, 1982, p.18)
>
> [For the Matiniquais, freedom belongs to the people, but much more than that, it meant the liquidation of the racist vichyst regime in the land.]

It is the procedure adopted to canvass the new political awakening and organize popular uprising that retains our attention in this paper. In the face of the constricting and suffocating socio-political atmosphere, in the face of the reign of terror, in the face of despotic abuse of authority by the police through arbitrary arrest, torture and intimidation of political opponents, the young revolutionaries come to the conclusion that pacifist and verbal political action of campaigning for the cause is insufficient to change the status quo. They introduce bloodshed to the struggle when they change from an opposition movement into an urban guerrilla outfit. This is in the full realization of the fact that colonialism can only be sustained through terrorist measures that excite fear:

> Le monde colonial lui-même est un monde qui se massacre, il n'y a partout dans l'univers que les larmes et le sang. *(La Lézarde*, p. 104)

[The colonial world itself is a world that massacres, all over the universe, there are only blood and tears.]

Under this atmosphere of sweat and blood, violent clash between the colonizer and the colonized is inevitable. This practice of terrorism provoked a backlash from the gang of spitfire picketers. The group responded to the dynamics of violence, with violence. Mathieu and his company of fire-eaters chose to assassinate Garin, a callous local representative of colonial authority, officially assigned to brutally put down mass uprising and destroy the popular party: "il avait été désigné pour étouffer les 'movements' de Lambriane"[he had been designated to stifle the movement in Lambraine]*(La Lézarde*, p. 18). Garin is an impenitent hatchet man, an odious renegade and mischief-maker whose mission is to nip in the bud the opposition movement. He is described as:

> Le renegat (...) homme à tout faire: il a tué pour de l'argent (...) il avait quitté le pays quand les menaces contre lui s'étaient précisées. Il est revenu en vainqueur, chargé d'une mission officielle ! Cet homme fruste commande, pressure, fait payer à tous le prix de sa peur passée. Plus dangereux que le serpent. (*La Lézarde*, p. 89)

> [The renegade (...) a man who can do anything : he had killed for money (...) He left the country when the threats against him became very severe. He came back as a victor, charged with an official mission ! this crude man commands, pressurises and makes people pay for his past fears. (He was) more dangerous than the serpent.]

Garin is a man of blood, an insidious, poisonous snake, an assassin, a bandit, an exploiter, a traitor, but above all, a terrorist. Mycéa aptly describes him as: "un assassin, un bandit, un exploiteur, un traître" [an assassin, a bandit, an exploiter, a traitor] (*La Lézarde*, p. 126). The annihilation of this assassin appears to say, "blood for blood". It is significant that the task of annihilating this tyrant that has usurped the people's land falls squarely on the shoulders of the peasant Thaël.

Thaël is young, audacious, mettlesome, obdurate, inveterate farmer, hardened by the land. His bravery is attested to by papa Longoué: "Le jeune homme est brave, je te le dis" [the youngman is brave, I tell you] (*La Lézarde*, p. 140). As a farmer, he fully appreciates the usefulness of land, which has been forcibly taken by Garin. Thaël seems to have been created for this assignment – "créé pour l'acte" (*La Lézarde*, p. 287) and as he asserts later, it is for this duty that he descended from the mountains. This mission is curiously identical with the maroons who descended occasionally from the woody forest to inflict harm on the plantation owners. André Ntonfo reiterates this point when he remarks that salvation, peace, liberty and courage come from the mountains while fear, submission, apathy and misery reign supreme in the plantations,

> Thaël n'est-il pas en définitive le digne descendant de ces maroons, et qui permet à

> Glissant d'illustrer à nouveau une idée qui lui est chère, à savior que le salut, la paix, la liberté et le courage se trouvent toujours du côté de la montagne, du morne, tandis que la plaine est misère étalée, apathie, crainte réelle ou couvante ?
>
> [Was Thaël not the worthy descendant of these maroons, who gave Glissant the opportunity to illustrate, once again, an idea which is very dear to him, namely, that salvation, peace, freedom and courage, are usually found on the side of the mountain, of gloom ; while the plain spreads misery, apathy and fear, whether real or imagined ?]

There seem to be an ideological significance for the coming together of Thaël (representing the "masses" who execute the action) and Mathieu and company (representing the "elites" who are the thinkers and ideologues). For any revolution to succeed, the two groups must unite. Thaël himself had eagerly anticipated this coming together and he declared:

> Voilà ce que j'attendais, pensait – il. Je suis venu pour cela,...je sentais bien la-haut que quelque chose manquait...je me faisait du théâtre tout seul... je voulais parler, être avec les autres, et je l'étais déjà, c'est pourquoi je suis venu, c'était là ma passion". (*La Lézarde*, p. 191 – 192)
> [This is what I have been waiting for, the thought. That is what I came for..., I felt well up there that something was missing.. I would like to talk, to be with the others, and I was before, that is why I came, that is my passion.]

Thaël recognizes that there ought to be a symbiotic relationship between the people and the radicalized elites (*La Lézarde*, p. 21). The masses must be active participants while the elites function as "agent provocateurs" or as catalysts. There ought to be solidarity, complementarity, collaboration and complicity in the task of national liberation. The assassination of Garin is as a result of collective effort (*La Lezarde*, p. 177). Garin is so evil that even a few patriotic police officers like Alphonse Tigamba become accomplices in his elimination. This young officer turned fifth columnist is an acolyte through willful negligence of duty, he turns a blind eye to the crime because as he declared, he had had enough of Garin (*La Lézarde*, pp. 244 – 245). The message here is that revolution unifies the people and that militant commitment encourages collective conscientization.

If the team resorts to assassination as a method of conducting political opposition, it is the reality of the moment that imposes this attitude and this choice. The choice, as Mycéa points out is between good and evil, between freedom and subjugation:

> Va-t-en! Cria Mycéa (...) Et il faut choisir : ou ce traître, ou les fusils (...) Et qui le tue, ce chien ? Nous, nous tous, (...) Parce qu'il le faut..." (*La Lézarde*, p.46)

> [Go ahead ! Mycea shouted (...) And we have to choose : either to continue in slavery or take up arms (...) And who will kill him, this wild dog ? We, we all have to, because it has become necessary to do it...]

Glissant presents Thaël in a messianic light. Not only does he instill him with virtuous attributes, he obviously paints him with comeliness and sympathy. He is acquitted for want of evidence and even the police officer, Alphonse gives evidence in his favor: "Tigamba dépose à son tour, prudent et neutre". (*La Lézarde*, p. 162). He goes unpunished. One may wonder then if Edouard Glissant is explicitly or implicitly advocating violence as a way out of oppression. What is the author's objective? The author seems to be saying there is no evil in eliminating an evildoer. Garin is an acknowledged assassin, so it is tit for tat. As Mycéa ponders the high moral grounds for the assassination of Garin, she exonerates the group and indeed congratulates them for successfully accomplishing such important task:

> d'une telle œuvre d'utilité: abattre un traître. Un qui avait tué et qui s'était préparé pour l'exploitation" (*La Lézarde*, p. 200)

> [from such a good, job of killing a slave-master, one who has killed severally and who had prepared himself for exploitation.]

While one cannot deny the evilness in plunging a knife into the throat of another man ("plunger un couteau dans la poitrine d'un homme" - *La Lézarde*, p. 90), one is tempted to see the elimination of Garin as the symbolic destruction of an unjust order, perpetuated by him. Garin is a man, actuated by intense wickedness who has become the very incarnation of the fiendishness of colonialism and personification of the injustice of domination. Getting rid of him therefore, is getting rid of a dreadful nuisance.

Bloodletting here is purely literary and redemptive, it is sacrificial (*La Lézarde*, p. 90) and purifying. It is to wash away the evil of state terrorism: "le sang versé, c'est pour ce que l'officier prépare pour le malheur..." (*La Lézarde*, p. 146). For Edouard Glissant, todays' struggles must have a revolutionary character as enunciated in fanonism (Fanon, 1974). In the fight for socio-cultural and political rights, if violence is necessary, then use it! Such appears to be the message put accross. Colonialism is terrorism; to fight it in its own terms is tyrannicide.

Like Glissant, Salvat Etchart also presents militant, dare devil and fearless characters who confront violently the oppression of colonialism in *Le Monde tel qu'il est*. In this novel, Galba Alicanthe adopts the direct, aggressive and bloody approach in his rebellion. As far as his character sketch is concerned, Galba is painted as a marquis with bulldog courage, a pitiless fire-eater with the heart of stone, an awesome superman, an enigmatic killer, considered by the colonial exploiters as a bloodthirsty, terrorist.

There is no question that Salvat Etchart embellishes the image of Galba by ascribing

to him, the admirable heroic quality of martyrdom, apparently recommending Galba to the readership for sympathy and acceptance. The reader begins to gloss over the negativism of his crime and begins to admire his chivalrous intrepidity and selflessness.

Besides the tyrannic repression of the colonial authorities, two factors are responsible for his violent militancy: a personal motivation to avenge the killing of his half-brother, Alin Alicanthe whose assassination is instigated by a despotic white exploiter by the name of Le Pontet des Courneaux; the state of extreme poverty and powerlessness of himself and many others in whose name he fights. The truculence of the socio-political reality is such that Galba, the young mulatto cannot even feed his family, thereby constrained to beg for survival, in the face of the insolent opulence of the whites: "son impuissance de nègre presque incapable de nourrir sa propre famille" [his powerlessness as a black, almost incapable of feeding his family] (*Le Monde tel qu'il est*, p. 170).

The mutinousness and rebelliousness of Galba is hereditary, "la colère héréditaire accumulée en lui" (*Le Monde tel qu'il est*, p. 171). His brother Alin, is also a dissenter: he is a medical doctor turned unionist and journalist and leader of "Spartacus". This is a group of Marxist idealists and modest, hybrid revolutionaries who adopted an intellectualist approach. However, he was a thorn in the flesh of the white exploiter against whom he wrote spiteful, pungent and acrimonious articles in his newspaper *La Voix des Travailleurs* (*The Voice of the Workers*).

Galba's method is radically different; driven by venomous anger, baleful resentment and bitter disenchantment, he chose to take head-on his targets: "une simple affaire personnelle d'homme à homme, corps à corps"[a simple personal affair, man to man, face to face] (*Le Monde tel qu'il est*, p. 171). Armed with his pistol, he shoots and kills Le Pontet des Courneaux who paid hired assassins to annihilate his brother, Alin.

Galba's heroism lies in his prolonged resistance to arrest by the police. For his daredevilry and indomitability, he is branded a "devil" by the Police Chief: "ce Galba est un diable:" (*Le Monde tel qu'il est*, p.202). He is yet another example of a "modern maroon". Salvat Etchart takes advantage of Galba's exploits, escape from police and his flight across the locality to resuscitate the memories of the fugitive slaves. He follows in the footsteps of Edouard Glissant's Aa-a and Beautemps and Joseph Zobel's Jojo. Consciously or unconsciously, Galba reinvents their tactics and reenacts their flit and flight into the woods.

Like the maroons of old, Galba "terrorizes" the white community when he kills the despotic plantation proprietor and disappears into thin air. Free and unchecked, he is considered even a bigger threat to security and the mere thought of this precipitates great fear in them. The white community regards Galba as a mad dog, a hysterical hooligan or ruffian, an armed gangster, a criminal delinquent, a bloody nigger and a ravening terrorist on rampage.

> Il (Galba) n'est plus qu'un individu dangereux un assassin un fou un sale nègre... son fusil de chasse sur l'épaule. Il renoue malgré lui avec la tradition des esclaves

> fugitives, des nègres marrons, des incendiares, des fantômes maîtres de la nuit. Sans le savoir, il retrouve leurs caches et leurs sentes ; sans le savoir il réinvente leur tactique; sans en avoir conscience, il inspire aux blancs la même peur(...). C'est l'imitation à l'ordre à l'unison des bêtes qu'il vit. Au-delà de sa mère et sa grand-mère, c'est l'aïeule d'Afrique qui lui dicte son chemin, lui fait éventer l'ennemi et ressuscite en lui l'animal-totem de sa tribu dispersée et trahie (*Le Monde tel qu'il est,* 163).
>
> [He (Galba) is no more than a dangerous individual, an assasin, a mad man, a dirty negro ... his hunting gun on his shoulder. Despite this, he still reunites with the tradition of fugitive slaves, the maroons, the arsonists, the ghost-masters of the night. Without knowing it, he discovers their hide-outs and their scent ; without knowing it, he reinvents their tactics ; without being conscious of it, he even inspires the whites with the same fear (...). It is the life of the orderly imitation of beasts in unison that he lives. Apart from his mother and grand mother, it is the spirit of « Mother Africa » that dictates his path, that makes him invincible to the enemies and ressucitates in him the animal-totem of his dispersed and betrayed tribe.]

The bravery and courage of Galba is comparable only to those of the maroons. In spite of the monstrosity and enormity of colonial power, he stubbornly decides to confront it, one-on-one. He then disappears into the forest where he sojourns for 40 days. He is indomitable to the end instead of surrendering alive to be humiliated and executed by colonial authorities, he commits suicide like the maroons who preferred self-destruction to submission: "Il n'aimait pas qu'on le prenne-même mort!...à la grace d'homme de la loi." *(Le Monde tel qu'il est*, p. 158).

Galba chose the part of martyrdom by committing 'felo de se' instead of giving up his freedom and placing himself at the mercy of his persecutors. To this hardened, brazen insurgent, 'hara kiri' is a more honorable option than defeat: "(le suicide) lui apparaît comme l'ultime chance de sa révolte" [suicide appeared to him to be the ultimate opportunity for his revolt] (*Le Monde tel qu'il est,* 159). It was the final phase of his revolt. Galba remains the unbowed unblushing martyr, not a desperado. One has to have a heart of oak to open up one's veins, watch one's blood flow, grin and bear the sight and confront death with stoic calm. Immolation is not for cowards but for spunky and plucky fellows. And Galba is one of such fellows.

Conclusion

A few conclusions can be drawn from our discussion above. The portrait of the rebels in French Caribbean novels is sympathetic, attractive and glossy. They are depicted as round characters: wise and weighty, valiant and mettlesome, chivalrous and resolute,

prodigious and extraordinary. The actions of figures of resistance are presented as "reactions" to the tyranny of slavery and the unjust and repressive domination of colonialism. Indeed, they are portrayed as innocent victims (not perpetrators) of terrorism and as if it is the noxiousness of the system that is fertile ground for breeding, what I have termed in this paper, "anti-terrorist terrorism". They are presented as people not responsible for their crimes, but as heroes, consciously reacting to and seeking to correct the unfavorable stimulus in their environment.

In the light of this obvious idealization, the question that comes to mind is: are the authors prescribing violence or terror-inducing tactics as appropriate deterrents to oppression? Of course, their portrayal is not gratuitous. We see this portraiture as a "reply" (not necessarily a denial of the evilness of this method) to the European propaganda that seeks to justify slavery and colonialism. It is in fact, a reply in kind to those who terrorize the people. It is also a request for sympathy in understanding why the dissenters behave the way they do.

In the context of fighting for freedom, violence purifies man and the blood spilled cleanses the land. Blood here is sacrificial and this point is what Ngugi Wa Thiong'O alludes to when he says that:

> Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery, it purifies man. (Wa Thiongo'O, p. 28)

For example, Edouard Glissant's band of revolutionaries see the assassination of Garin as a "sacrifice" (*La Lézarde*, p. 90), a baptism of blood meant to cleanse the land, pave the way for freedom and put an end to state terrorism: " Il (Garin) ne pourra plus voter, terroriser, tuer" (*La Lézarde*, p. 146). Violence begets violence, so says the old adage. Slavery and colonialism are vicious and gruesome; resistance to them must equally be vicious and gruesome. Garin and Le Pontet des Courneaux are unshriven tyrants, who, perhaps, needed to be administered a dose of their own medicine. It is in the heat of violence perpetrated by the slave master and the colonial tyrant that a rebel evolves from being just a docile being into a destructive assassin.

Terrorism is the use of strategies that induce fear as means of dominating or of resisting domination. Going by our discussion thus far, who then is the terrorist? Clearly, both sides adopt violent strong-arm tactics. But our sympathy lies with the rebel who reacts by opposing terrorism with tyrannicide. This in our opinion is an act of heroism.

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