

A Case Study of the Influence of Learning their History on a Small Group of People of
African Descent, in Guadeloupe.

Murielle Crane

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ABSTRACT

A Case Study of the Influence of Learning their History on a Small Group of People of African Descent, in Guadeloupe

Murielle Crane

In Guadeloupe, today, thanks to such people as Mitchel Clarac, the manager of the federation Amon-Ra, there are people of African descent who are learning their own history.

A qualitative case study was conducted at Amon-Ra to explore how the learning of their history influences a small group of African West-Indians' 1) awareness of their African identity, 2) interest in seeking their history, 3) image of their people, and 4) choice of their motherland. The manager plus six adult student-teachers who are learning their history at l'Arbre à Palabre (the ancestral treasure of Amon-Ra) were interviewed in order to seek answers to the following two questions: 1) "In what ways does the learning of their history influence African West-Indians? 2) How is learning about the history of their people an effective tool to enable people of African descent to overcome their malaise with their identity?"

The findings show that with the learning of their history participants have not only become aware of their African identity, but they are as well interested in seeking their history. Besides, participants have developed a positive view of their people and have connected to Africa as the motherland. These findings reveal too that learning their history is an effective tool to help African West-Indians overcome their malaise with their identity. Implications and limitations of the study are also discussed.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the children of Africa in Karukera (Guadeloupe) and due to this special lady (Tania) from Madinina (Martinique) who has taken part in the study—reminding me that we are, indeed, one people—I must, therefore, not omit Karukera's sister, Madinina. So, this thesis is dedicated to a people who, in spite of all actions taken to crush them, continue to fight in order to exist.

This people continue the struggle started by their ancestors in order to free themselves as well as future generations from the chains of slavery. This people have kept within them the spirit of the Maroon.

This thesis is dedicated to members of the LKP (Liyannag Kont Pwofitasyon; union against exploitation) who by demonstrating strength and faith to stand up for dignity, to stand up for justice, to stand up for future generations followed the footsteps of the ancestors, thereby strengthening the aforementioned words written before the beginning of the popular movement. My thoughts go to the thousands of people awakened or impacted by LKP and who actively supported the movement. My thoughts go to Marcel Lolia (a pillar of the LKP) and others who in the midst of their peaceful struggle have been the objects of vicious repression from the French. My thoughts go to one of the pillars of LKP, Jacques Bino, who has been murdered during the movement.

The thesis is also dedicated to the journalists who carried on doing their work during the popular movement in spite of pressure to stop doing so.

More than thank you and Hotep (peace) to all those men and women who jeopardised their lives for us and bravo Guadeloupe for the teachings.

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INTRODUCTION

If I can talk about the influence of the learning of their history on people of African descent in Guadeloupe, it is because we generally lack such historical knowledge. In this thesis if I have chosen to concentrate on the influence of learning their history on African West-Indians, it is not with the intent to imply that history is the only element influencing identity development—surely there are other influential elements. Knowing that “Black”/African history has been distorted and that some major chapters are missing from the official historical narrative, my intent is rather to draw attention on the importance of learning one’s history. More precisely, it is to draw attention on an element which is said, as discussed below, to be a source of self-knowledge—albeit not the only one—and therefore important for one’s growth.

“They forced him (the West Indian) to look at his skin, race and values with contempt; they created in him the desire to have a white skin, Western values, the desire to look at elsewhere” (Combé, 1980, p. 260). This may explain why if one calls a “Black” Guadeloupean “African”, it is likely that s/he will be offended. Édouard Glissant (1997) even argues that Guadeloupeans and Martinicans generally consider the word “African” to be an insult. Too many “Black” people in the French West-Indies (Guadeloupe and Martinique) deny their African identity, and yet, they are the children of the Africans torn away from Africa. On the other hand, they do not hesitate to say that they are French. In his book *Peau noire, Masque Blanc*, Dr Frantz Fanon (1952) says that as a colonised people—a people in which an inferiority complex stemmed because of the suppression of the original local culture—West-Indians (i.e. Guadeloupeans and Martinicans) identify

with the language of the metropolitan culture. The inferiority complex, which explains the malaise of West-Indians, developed during slavery, is reinforced by the education delivered to them in schools (Leiris, 1974), one of the strategic places of alienation (Glissant, 1997). Leiris (1974) stipulates that it is the French culture that is transmitted to the youth in the French West-Indies. In 2000, in her thesis, Marie Leticee makes similar comments about the role of school education in the malaise felt by Guadeloupeans in defining their identity. She contends, too, that the historical perspective taught, in Guadeloupe, is, itself, Eurocentric (“White”, French perspective).

African and West-Indian writers from the Negritude movement (including Aimé Césaire) who also acknowledged the role of the official historical narrative in African West-Indians’ malaise in defining their identity believed that the solution to the inferiority complex seen in most West-Indians lies in the return to one’s roots, that is, in valorising the link with Africa as the homeland, a link lost for many West-Indians when the Diaspora was created during slavery (Heiberg, 2006). Nowadays, an increasing number of African West-Indians are returning to their African roots by studying their people’s history not only thanks to more and more “Black” scholars gaining access to significant materials on Ancient African history, doing extensive research on “Black” history and able to travel, but also thanks to such people as the manager of Amon-Ra, for instance, within Guadeloupe, organising themselves so as the children of Africa can learn about the history of their people. It is true that I have found more information than expected about the malaise of African West-Indians and the role played by the school. However, there seem to have been no research conducted, in Guadeloupe, on the possible influences of the learning of their people’s history on African West-Indians.

It is therefore the purpose of this qualitative case study to investigate in what ways the learning of their people's history influences a small group of African West-Indians. The influence of the learning of their history is explored in relation to four themes generated from what has been said above, from theory and research on "Black"/African personality development and from scholars' contentions about the negative impacts of Eurocentric "education" on people of African descent discussed in the literature review (e.g. Wilson, 1993; Akbar, 1998; Jno-Baptiste, 1996). These four themes are: 1) awareness of their African identity, 2) interest in seeking their history, 3) their image of their people and, 4) their choice of motherland. The study seeks to answer two questions:

- How does the learning of their history influence African West-Indians?
- How is learning about the history of their people an effective tool to enable people of African descent overcome their malaise with their identity?

In the present study, semi-structured interviews were conducted at Amon-Ra to gather data. It is my position that the learning of their history enables African West-Indians to embrace their African identity, to seek the history of their people, develop a more positive view of their people and alter their perception of France. It is noteworthy that research conducted in the United States has shown that exposure to "Black" studies has a strong positive impact on African Americans' African self-consciousness (Baldwin, Duncan & Bell, 1987; Baldwin, Brown & Rackley, 1990).

As stated at the beginning of the introduction if I can talk, today, about the influence of the learning of their people's history on African West-Indians, it is because we generally lack such historical knowledge. And, to be able to make sense of the purpose of the study and to better appreciate its importance, one must first ask why such

a lack exists. Answers are found when we take a closer look at history and the “education” system.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One first gives a glimpse of a significant episode of the history of the “Black” people in the French West-Indies that is seldom talked about—which has led many of them to think that their history begins with slavery and colonisation and that nothing happened before—: The episode concerning the life of their forebears in Africa before they were torn away from the continent. Doing so enables, at the same time, to further show the relevance of the terms *African Guadeloupean/Martinican/West-Indians*. The opportunity will also be seized here to discuss common features among African cultures in order to show that it makes sense to talk about an African identity. A presentation of Guadeloupe is required too to explain the archipelago’s past and present connection with France because this link bears relevance if one is to better understand the issues dealt with here. This presentation also comprises a discussion about two elements (i.e. slavery and school education)—not the only ones though—that are believed, as aforementioned, to account for African West-Indians’ malaise with their identity. Then this malaise will be defined and discussed.

Chapter Two deals with the drawbacks of the official historical narrative in the French West-Indies and provides concrete instances from school textbooks. This look at textbooks is intended to show their alienating nature by underlining their omissions, distortions and lies. The Afrocentric approach aimed at addressing the omissions and distortions of the official historical narrative and embraced by the federation, Amon-Ra, will also be examined in this chapter.

Chapter Three shows the importance of learning one's history by discussing theories on "Black"/African personality development as well as what previous research similar to the current study has found.

Finally, in Chapter Four, one learns from a small group of African West-Indians themselves in what ways the learning of their history influences them.

Significance of the Study

African West-Indians have a tendency, as noted by Dr Jno-Baptiste (1996), to easily adopt characteristics of other people and elements of other people's culture, and reject or denigrate their own. As an African-Guadeloupean who lived in Guadeloupe until the age of 24 and going back from time to time, I admit that if there is a part of us that we do not accept, that we denigrate and even deny, it is the African part. Yes, it is aspects of ourselves or our heritage related to Africa that we tend to set aside; for instance, viewing the word African as an insult, viewing people who look like us negatively or staying away from our history. This is echoed in Combé's (1980) statement in the introduction arguing that West-Indians have learnt to look down on their "race", their skin. The interesting thing is that it is, as you will notice through the literature review, the African part within us which was often subjected to violence, denigration and denial in the past and still is today.

The study is important because we may be able to learn from the people themselves how the learning of their people's history can indeed help overcome the malaise that African West-Indians have with their identity, and increase their interest in learning their people's history. This may, in turn, give an idea of how effective the learning of our

history is as a tool to help us develop a clearer definition of who and what we are and alleviate our inferiority complex so that we become self-empowered beings to carry on bringing our positive contribution to the world.

This task is daunting and not free of obstacles for us—the children of a people who went through the traumatic and devastating experience of slavery, which ended only in 1848, in Guadeloupe; an experience, whose harmful impacts were not acknowledged, and therefore, for which no time or support were provided to heal. We are expected to carry on as if nothing happened and nurture the scars of the slave mentality, which is encouraged to prevail through the official historical narrative.

A return to the past is required now to understand not only the importance of the study but also some concepts used in the thesis as well as some issues dealt with.

Chapter 1

RECALLING

This chapter first retraces the history of West-Indians of African descent back to Africa to inform on a page of our history that has been omitted from the official historical narrative in the French West-Indies, as highlighted by Fanon (1952) and more recently by Heiberg (2006). This official historical narrative in the French West-Indies and elsewhere, (see Wilson, 1993) tends to portray our African forebears as savages, as uncivilised. This section is also intended to show West-Indians' connection with the African continent, and hence to justify the use of such words as *African-Guadeloupean*, *African Martinican* or *African West-Indian* in the study in order to distinguish people of African descent from those of other cultural backgrounds in the French West-Indies. One must emphasise that, in the French West-Indies, we do not currently use such terms, we simply say *Guadeloupean*, *Martinican* or *West-Indian*. In the French West-Indies, people of African descent have not followed the same evolution as their American counterparts with regard to "racial" identity.

It is noteworthy that "racial" identity theories do not treat "races" as biologically distinct categories but rather as a socio-political construction (Helms, 1995). This is why the terms "racial" and "race" are put in inverted commas throughout the thesis. According to Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995), "racial" identity is sometimes employed interchangeable with the concept of ethnic identity. These two concepts as well as that of

cultural identity are deemed to be closely linked or even to overlap (Rowe, Behrens & Leach, 1995). Dr Janet Helms (1995) defines “racial” identity as a person’s sense of group or collective identity derived from the perception that s/he shares a “racial” heritage with a particular group. With regard to people of African ancestry, “racial” identity is their recognition of their common “racial”-group membership with others of similar “race” as well as the quality or manner of “racial” identification with members of the in-group (Helms, 1990). Likewise, Sadowsky, Kwan and Pannu (1995) posit that “racial” identity is founded upon a socially constructed definition of “race” and concentrate on how people relinquish the influences of disenfranchisement and develop respectful attitudes toward their “racial” group. Thus, given Helms’ (1995) definition of “racial” identity, given the elements that make up the basis of “racial” identity as well as due to the nature of the study, in my view, it is more appropriate to use the term “racial” identity.

Still within the theme of “racial” identity, in the United States, the children of Africa were first called African, then negro, nigger, coloured, Negro, black, Black, Afro-American, Afric-American and today they are called African American. Given the fact that many “Blacks” in America and in the West-Indies are the children of those Africans forcibly taken away from Africa, the argument put forward by Ghee (1990) to justify the use of name *African American* simultaneously indicates the relevance of such terms as *African Guadeloupean/West-Indians*, for instance. Ghee (1990) ascertains that the concept *African American* connects the person to both pre and post slavery/America histories—from the original African to the contemporary African born in America. As I often say and as clearly stipulated by Ghee (1990): “our history did not start with slavery

and colonisation, therefore our name should not conceptualise slavery as a starting point”. Let us, therefore, turn to Africa not with the intent of providing an alternative view of history, but rather to restore one of the missing pieces of history: the history of the people before being torn away from the motherland.

BACK TO AFRICA

“Who were then these men”, asks Aimé Césaire, “whom an unprecedented barbarity tore away from their country, their gods, their families?” (Schoelcher, 1948, p. 7; the author’s translation)

One can trace the roots of these men as far back as antiquity in the vast territory, known as Ethiopia. Furthermore, Leiris (1974) provides a clue as to the type of society they may have lived in when he asserts that West-Indians owe their taste for prestigious objects, noticeable in many aspects of West-Indian civilisation, to their Negro African cultural background. One question comes to mind here: “How could West-Indians have inherited their taste for prestigious objects if they had lived in an African society that was uncivilised, barbarian, and inferior, as has often been claimed?” Mind you, concerning the barbarity of Africans, Emile Tersen (Schoelcher, 1948), a history professor at the time, informs us that the idea of Africa as a “savage continent” along with that of “savage Africans” have long fallen into disrepute. Tersen posits that numerous works have provided solid evidence about the existence of “Black” civilisations. Contrary to Tersen who talks about “Black” “civilisations”, Dr Chancellor Williams (1987) talks of “Black” “civilisation”. In what follows not only does it appear that we are one people, but also that Victor Schoelcher was not too far from the truth when he speculated that Africans

were rather a people who descended into decadence instead of being a people in its infancy (Schoelcher, 1948).

Dr Williams' (1987) *The Destruction of Black Civilisation*—a revised, expanded version of the 1971 edition—also deals with the common origin of “Blacks”/Africans. Williams' (1987) inferences in the book are the results of 16 years of research: review of world history (ancient and modern European history, and the history of the Arabs and Islamic people), formal study of Africa in Europe, documentary sources (e.g. reports of colonial administrators in Africa, letters and reports from geographers, explorers, captains of ship slaves and missionaries), and Greek and Roman sources for the earliest records on ancient Africa. Dr Williams (1987) also conducted two years of field studies in Africa which included each regions of “Black” Africa: 26 nations in East, West, Central and Southern Africa, and 105 language groups. Some of Williams' (1987) inferences about common, cultural attributes within Africa will be discussed in the following section.

Since Dr Williams (1987) studied Africans as a single people his inquiry focussed on what “Blacks” accomplished on their own, that is, without European and Asian influences. The fact that a “Black” civilisation was founded without outside influences has been established in earlier works including Victor Schoelcher's (1948).

“Negroes”, states Schoelcher (1948, p. 86) “despite all unfortunate circumstances, in spite of a climate whose fecundity invites constant rest, **alone, left to themselves, deprived of all outside support, rose by themselves**, we have seen, **to a certain degree of organisation**; they have with no doubt pass the savage state and the barbarous state.” [the author's translation and emphasis]

Schoelcher (1948) draws his inferences based on the work of ancient writers as well as Europeans who travelled to Africa, so as to demonstrate that Africa was not deprived of

civilisation. As far as Dr Williams (1987) is concerned, his study started in the vast area that used to be the Ethiopian Empire, a federation of autonomous and semi-autonomous kingdoms. The area covers the land bordering the Mediterranean on the north and stretching southward on both sides of the Nile below the 10th parallel, thus comprising Axum and neighboring kingdoms (Williams, 1987; see Appendix A). Northern Ethiopia, referred to as Lower Egypt (Williams, 1987) was inhabited by a foreign colony from Syria and Arabia referred to as “tribes of savages” by an 18th century Frenchman, Comte Constantine de Volney (1991)¹, which later developed into a nation; hence the Two lands. Lower Egypt became part of the Ethiopian Empire when African pharaoh Narmer (Menes) defeated the Asians and regained control of the land, thereby uniting the Two Lands (Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt). Thus, the name Ethiopia included much more land than present day Ethiopia—a territory which was called Abyssinia in the past. The fact that Ethiopia constituted such a vast territory in Ancient time may explain why, according to Volney, (1991), the term Ethiopian referred to a people with “Black” complexion, thick lips and woolly hair. Such ancient writers as Diodorus, Herodotus, to name a few, who visited Africa and met Ethiopians provide similar physical descriptions of the Ethiopians. Diodorus (1935) held that most Ethiopians have Black skin, flat nose and frizzy hair. The physical features of Ethiopians and their assertion that they were the first of all men (Diodorus, 1935) is consistent with research findings establishing the cradle of humanity in Africa (Diop, 1985).

Now the Ethiopians, as historians relate, were the first of all men and the proofs of this statement, they say, are manifest. For that they did not come into their land as immigrants from abroad but were natives of it and so justly bear the name of

¹ Count Constantine de Volney wrote *The Ruins of Empires* following his trip to Egypt between 1783-1785 (Browder, 1992).

“autochthones” (sprung from the soil itself) is, they maintain, conceded by practically all men. (Diodorus, 1935, pp. 89-91)

So was the anteriority of Ethiopian civilisation established by Diodorus (1935, pp. 93-94):

The Ethiopians **were the first** to be taught to honour the Gods and to hold sacrifices and processions and festivals and the other rites by which men honor the deity.... They say that **the Egyptians are colonists sent out by Ethiopians**, Osiris having been the leader of the colony.... **The larger part of the customs of the Egyptians are, they hold, Ethiopian**, the colonists still preserving their ancient manners. For instance **their belief that their kings are gods, the very special attention which they pay to their burials, and many other matters of a similar nature are Ethiopian practices, while the shapes of their statues and the forms of their letters are Ethiopian;**

Williams' (1987) field studies started in the wide area of the Ancient Ethiopian Empire because he viewed this territory as the core of the African “race” where proof of the first “Black” civilisation can still be found in spite of all centuries of efforts to destroy it. Thus, both Williams (1987) and Schoelcher (1948) talk of the precedence of Ethiopian civilisation.

Ethiopians did not merely inhabit the land but they developed a civilisation as mentioned above. This is further evidenced by Bruce's (cited in Schoelcher, 1948) testimonies:

...these Cushite Negroes with woolly hair, who after having been the most educated people of the universe, descended due to strange destiny into sudden ignorance, and see themselves chased by their neighbours at the bottom of these very same forests, where they once lived in the midst of freedom, magnificence, and luxury. (Book II, ch. 1st) **These troglodyte Negroes (Troglodyte, inhabitants of caverns), who founded the first schools of sciences,** penetrated, to escape Tropical rains which prevented them during a part of the year, to make observations corresponding to those of their brothers in Thebes and Meroe, penetrated above the southern tropics and established themselves in the high mountains called **Sofala, which held lots of gold and silver mines, and became the source of their wealth.** (Book. II, ch. 3) (cited in Schoelcher, 1948, p. 78)

...They [Cush and his children] started by building at the feet of the caverns the city of Axum, even before the birth of Abraham. Soon after they extended their colonies up to Atbara (present- day Nubia), where we know, from Herodotus'

testimonies, **that they cultivated sciences very anciently and with great success.** (Herod., book. II, chap. 29). **From there they moved further to found Meroe (called today Gerri), they wasted no time to move to Thebes, which we know was built by an Ethiopian colony. Everywhere they were fervently occupied with astronomy.** (cited in Schoelcher, 1948, p. 77; the author's translation and emphasis)

According to Schoelcher (1948), Bruce found writing within all the kingdom of Sennaar as well as within that of Abyssinia. From 1768 to 1772, during his exploration of places where once was *the civilising greatness of Ethiopians* in Schoelcher's (1948) terms, Bruce also visited at Axum in Abyssinia some prodigious fragments of colossal statues and ruins in Gerri. He states:

To me, Axum was the superb metropolis of this trading people, these Troglodyte Ethiopians, called...Cushites,... But the Negroes, the Troglodytes, the Scripture designates under the name of Cush erected in many places some very big, magnificent and costly edifices. For instance, at Azab, the monuments of this people seem to have been worthy of the wealth of a country, which was very early, the trading centre of India and Africa, and whose, albeit pagan, the sovereign serves as a model for other nations and chosen to contribute to the edification of the first temple that man has erected for the true God (book V, ch. 12) (cited in Schoelcher, 1948, p. 77; the author's translation and emphasis)

There exist similar impressive accounts about the Ethiopians who established themselves in Ancient Egypt. To Give a better picture of the height reached by "Blacks" in the Ethiopian empire let us have a look at Nowe (Thebes), which is said to be the most significant city in the history of "Black" people (Williams, 1987).

Nowe was also referred to as "the city of hundred gates"², the "University city" or "the Mother of Cities". These "Blacks" were very religious people and their religious beliefs inspired science and learning, art, engineering, architecture, history, writing, music, the healing arts, song and dance. Mathematical sciences were developed to build

² The name given to the palaces or houses of the great because the singular luxury of these buildings consists in the singular gate leading from the street into the court, at the farthest extremity of which the palace is situated (Volney, 1991, p 16)

pyramids for instance. Study took place within temples, where scholars from abroad came to be taught. From there, religious ideas and architectural designs were disseminated across the world; Greeks and Romans also borrowed from both (Williams, 1987). As far as the Greeks were concerned, Diodorus (1933) informs us that in their sacred books the priests of Egypt recorded that Orpheus, the poet Homer, Solon of Athens, Plato, Pythagoras, the mathematician Eudoxus, etc... had stayed among them. The priests stipulate that these Greeks learned in Egypt all the things for which other Greeks admired them. For instance, Ancient Egyptians would have taught Pythagoras his teachings about the gods, his geometrical propositions, theory of numbers and the transmigration of the soul into every living thing. With regard to Plato, Dr George James (2001) demonstrates the Ancient Egyptian origin of his doctrines (e.g. the real and unreal, the highest good, the ideal state). Diodorus (1933, p. 75) tells us as well that the Greeks appropriated not only Egyptian colonies but also the most illustrious gods and heroes of the Ancient Egyptians. For instance, the Heracles of the Greeks is the Egyptian God Khonsu; Zeus is Amun, Helios is Ra; Kronos is Geb; Hermes is Tehuti; Astrea or Themis is Maat, etc... (Ashby, 2002).

Readers' attention must be drawn on the fact that Dr George James' book, *The Stolen Legacy*, was not only controversial when it was first published in 1954 but, according to Dr Molefi Kete Asante (James, 2001)—professor of African American studies at Temple University, and former chair of this department as well as of the department of Black studies of the State University of New York—the book was banned from universities and colleges, in America. In Dr Asante's view (James, 2001, foreword): "What distinguished the work of George G. M. James was the fact that it struck at the

jugular of white Western notions of superiority.” Dr Gay Robins (Chitwood, 1990), an Egyptologist at Emory University at the time of the interview, may help us shed some light on the root of the problem. She stated:

...classicists persistently deny any influence of ancient Egypt on Greek society because they want to make the ancient Greek into a pure Arian race... I think modern classicists do this entirely unconsciously; I think this is the legacy of the 19th century when people really did feel that they had an investment in being inheritors of a civilisation that was purely Arian.

Dr Robins (Chitwood, 1990) maintained as well that “the Greeks went to Egypt and they wrote about it, they acknowledged their debts to Egypt” and thinks “there is no doubt that there is some influence”. Likewise, an ancient Greek historian, Plutarch (cited in Ashby, 2002), asserted that “Solon, Thales, Plato, Eudoxus and Pythagoras went to Egypt and studied with the priests. Eudoxus is said to have received instruction from Chonuphis of Memphis, Solon from Sonchis of Sais and Pythagoras from Oeniphis of Heliopolis.” Similar assertions are made by Strabo among others (see Ashby, 2002). Paradoxically, there also seems to have been an attempt to present ancient Egyptians as “Whites”. This point is argued by Dr Williams (1987).

In order to explain why the Ethiopians parted, Williams (1987) contends that after they lost Egypt and Eastern Sudan to the Asians, fleeing before conquest, Asian enslavers, famine and death, Africans parted and developed into what is referred to as tribes or societies. Those who did not manage to find secure and fertile areas to settle descended into semi-barbarism even cannibalism in some cases. Some did unite to form nations and created a high ordered civilisation without any foreign influences (Williams, 1987).

In effect, the land of “Black” people (Bilāl al-Sūdān) where gold was one of the commodities saw the rise of other empires such as Ghana, Mali, Songhay, which were

Sudanic creations. The early Sudanic states (e.g. Kanem, Songhay, Ghana, and Takrūr) were not Muslim at the onset. Muslim influence is sought in the creation of Sudanic kingdoms with the intent of attributing their foundation to “Whites” (Levtzion, 1973). According to Nehemia Levtzion (1973), historians of the colonial period generally argued that “White” nomad invaders of a higher civilisation from the north created the kingdoms based upon the premises that Sudanese were not capable of developing organised states by themselves. al-Sa’di (cited in Levtzion, 1973, p. 91) speaking of Western Sudan before the Moroccan conquest holds that Sudan was “one of God’s most favoured countries in prosperity, comfort, security and vitality”. Moreover, there is not an early Islamic source before the 12th century maintaining that the rulers of Ghana, Songhay and Takrūr were or had been in the past anything other than “Black” (Levtzion, 1973). Moreover, Levtzion (1973) tells us that the nomads were better equipped for raids and campaigns, and they, from time to time, dominated the Sudanese because they were superior military wise. On the other hand, they lacked experience in political organisation and state building. So, when they seized power they embraced the more advanced culture of the Sudanese which impacted their organisation of the state. It is noteworthy, still according to Levtzion (1973), some scholars note the influence of Ancient Egypt on West African states, which is, I must say, not amazing if we consider what has previously been said. The production of crops is one of similarities detected. Likewise, known to other African people and practiced in Ancient Egypt too is the type of royal burial sometimes viewed as a characteristic of divine kingship (Levtzion, 1973).

From Dr Williams’ (1987) extensive research into the destruction of Black civilisation it becomes apparent that if the children of Africa have to draw lessons from

history to rebuild themselves and build a better present, we must also learn from the mistakes made by our own people. Though it is not the purpose of the study a few of them highlighted by Chancellor Williams (1987) are worth mentioning here: a) a lack of unity between small African states even in front of the enemies; b) fierce wars between “Blacks” during expansion of new kingdoms and empires; c) the selling of their prisoners of war to Arabs who then used those enslaved Africans to fight Africans themselves. Mind you, African chiefs used their “slaves” in their own army (see Levtzion, 1973) so they might have been the victims of their own ways of doing and thinking. On the other hand, Levtzion (1973) stressed that it was not part of the habit of Sudanic rulers to capture and sell their own subjects as “slaves”. But, later on Africans continued to sell their prisoners of wars to Europeans (Williams, 1987). Nonetheless, their mistakes do not excuse Europeans’ massive deportation and enslavement of Africans on the American continent including the West-Indies. With regard to France, let us recall that the law itself not only permitted the enslavement of Africans, but it also encouraged masters to enslave Africans by giving them bonuses (Schoelcher, 1948). For the moment, let us continue with a discussion about common features between African cultures in order to show that it make sense to talk about an African identity.

Diversity Does Not Preclude Common Features

According to Kwame Gyekye (1996), an expert in West-African philosophy, a thorough comparative study of African cultures shows without a doubt in spite of cultural variety the presence of common features in beliefs, customs, value systems, and socio-political institutions and practices among African societies. Gyekye (1996) maintains that

the beliefs, customs, traditions, values, socio-political institutions and historical experiences of African societies make up the basis for constructing (or reconstructing) a philosophical system that may adequately be called African; African not in the sense that every single African espoused it, but in the sense that it stems from, and therefore is mainly linked to African life and thought.

Gyekye (1996) contends that many Africanists constantly concentrate on the diversities of African cultures in spite of the fact that this cultural pluralism is undoubtedly a result of ethnic pluralism in Africa. He goes on to say that the work of distinguished Western anthropologists which usually focus on specific ethnic groups in Africa have conveyed the impression, though it was not the purpose of their authors, that institutions and practices of ethnic groups in Africa are very much in contrast with one another. Conversely, Dr Williams (1987) advances that this emphasis on the diversity of African ethnic groups is aimed at keeping Africans divided. Gyekye (1996) quotes from authors who covered the topic of common features in Africa; the arguments of some of them are worth mentioning in this section.

For instance, Parrinder noted that between the diverse peoples in Africa there was a lot more connection that may be apparent at first. The eminent Ghanaian sociologist K. A. Busia contended that common religious ideas and assumptions encountered across Africa and which give a worldview that can be characterised as African emerge from previous studies conducted on the religious beliefs and rites of various communities. Similarly, Idowu states:

There is a *common Africanness* about the total culture and religious beliefs and practices of Africa. This common factor may be due either to the fact of diffusion or to the fact that **most Africans share common origins with regard to race and customs and religious practices...**; with regard to the concept of God, there is a

common tread, however tenuous in places, running throughout the continent. (Gyekye, 1996, p. 297) [the author's emphasis]

Likewise, according to Dr Chancellor Williams (1987), a continent-wide study of the traditional customary laws of "Blacks" indicates throughout all "Black" Africa the predominance of a single constitutional system as if the entire "race" lived under a single government in spite of diversities. He contends too that from a similar study of African social and economic systems, "the same overall pattern of unity and sameness of all fundamental institutions" (p. 21) can be detected.

Another interesting argument found in Gyekye (1996) quoting Forde is worth mentioning here:

Thus the linguistic distributions in West-Africa suggest several important underlying features of cultural development.... **Since all languages of West Africa appear to be ultimately derived from a common stock**, one would expect to find *significant elements of a common early tradition in the cultures of all West African peoples*...there are many indications that underlying the great regional and tribal differences in the elaboration of cult and cosmological ideas there is a very widespread substratum of basic ideas that persists in the rituals myths and folktales of West African people. (p. 296) [the author's emphasis]

The work of leading African Egyptologist and teacher of the ancient Kemetic language, Dr Theophile Obenga (1996), on the genetic linguistic ties of ancient Egypt and the rest of "Black" Africa appears to give some clarifications about this "common stock" or "common early tradition" reported by Forde (cited in Gyekye, 1996). In effect Dr Obenga's (1996) findings appear to be additional evidence for the existence of a common culture in Africa. Obenga (1996) provides numerous examples to show linguistic connections between Ancient Egypt and other parts of "Black" Africa as well as linguistic connections between these other parts of "Black" Africa. Here are just a few examples:

Ancient Egyptian : km, "black"

Coptic (evolved Egyptian)	: kame, kemi, kam, kem, “black”
Mbochi (Congo)	: i-káma, “coalman”, “darkness”
Bambora (Mali)	: kami, “to reduce to embers” (km, pile of burning wood” in Pharaonic)
Mossi (Burkina Faso)	: kim, “to burn”
Val (Liberia)	: kembu, “charcoal” (Obenga, 1996, p. 270)
Ancient Egyptian	: ba, “spirit, soul”
Coptic	: bai, “spirit, soul”
Mbochi (Congo)	: bà, “to be sound in spirit,” “to be spiritually honest”
Ronga (Mozambic)	: ku-ba, -ba, “to be”
Songhay (Niger)	: bi (bi-yo), “double of a being”, “soul”
Mangbetu (North-East Zaire)	: o-bu, “to be, to exist” (to have spirit)
Bambara (Mali)	: be, bi, “to be, to exist” (to have spirit) (Obenga, 1996, p. 279)

Similar linguistic ties are found when we take the word “dance” in some African languages. Furthermore, the particle “ka” employed in Pharaonic Egyptian to express the future is also, still according to Dr Obenga (1996), used in some other African languages to express this tense: Hausa (Nigeria), Baguirmien (Chad), Mbochi (Congo), Kimbundu (Angola), Bambara (Mali), etc....In Fang (Gabon) they use “ke”.

Dr Obenga (1996) infers that African linguistic studies do not make progress partly due to the persistent preconceived idea, which keeps on separating the rest of “Black” Africa from the Egypto-Nubian Nile Valley. He also concluded that the several morphological, syntactic, phonetic and lexicological concordances which can be undeniable demonstrated between Pharaonic, Coptic, and all modern “Black” African languages are of historical order and it may be within the possibility of sciences to do a reconstruction of the common predialectal ancestors of all these ancient and modern languages.

Furthermore, we learn from Gyekye (1996) that the cultural systems of Africa are connected because, for example, a seemingly distinct ethnic group may simply be part of a larger ethnic group. The Akan group is made of the Nzema, Ashanti, Fantes, Akwamus,

Akwapims, Akims, etc.... The Nuer and the Dinnka have cultural ties with the Shilluk of the Upper Nile. In addition, some ethnic groups that shared cultural ties were split by Europeans during colonisation (Gyekye, 1996). These separations are the result of the Berlin Conference which took place between 1884 and 1885 in Berlin, Germany (Latif & Latif, 1994), originally Africa was separated by regions (Clarke, 1996). We are informed by (Latif & Latif, 1994), that the fourteen participating European countries, including France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Great Britain decided to stop fighting each other over the ownership of Africans. The attendees, none of whom were African, divided Africa among themselves and renamed African countries. They separated old nations and brought together long time enemies all under the banner of foreign languages and cultures (Latif & Latif, 1994). Accordingly, there are Ewes in Ghana, Togo, and Benin; Akans can be found in Ghana, Togo and Ivory Coast, and Bantus are found in Central, eastern and southern Africa (Gyekye, 1996).

So, if there are common features between African cultures and languages, if we can speak of African philosophy, common Africanness, and if based on these common features and history we can be viewed as one people, the idea of an African identity is not meaningless. It is even meaningful to talk about an African identity for people of African descent from the forced Diaspora especially when one considers the tribal self. According to Na'im Akbar (1998), the latter is one of the components of the African concept of self. The tribal self is the degree of consciousness that is common to everybody belonging to a particular tribal experience. The tribe designates the collective historical and shared experiences that have given a people their specific shape. Due to history, climate, cultural practices, life challenges and survival strategies some groups have become

psychologically bound. The tribal aspect of the self is the ancestral part of one's being. It is the representation of the people who came before us, within our personality (Akbar, 1998). This is not to imply that the tribal self is the only component of one's identity, for the African concept of self as described by Dr Na'im Akbar (1998) comprises other elements. Nonetheless, for the purpose of the study as stipulated earlier the focus will be placed on the African identity. Let us now turn to a presentation of one of the lands where the Africans were forcibly deported and where the interviews were conducted.

GUADELOUPE: ONE OF THEIR NEW, FORCED HOMES

Guadeloupe and Martinique, which became the forced home of a part of the people kidnapped and deported from Africa to serve as slaves, are located in the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean. For now we will focus on presenting Guadeloupe since it is the place where the study was conducted and where all participants live. Located at 7,000 km from the country by which it is governed (France) and 4,000 km from the United States, with an area of 1,780 km², the archipelago of Guadeloupe is made of two main islands: Grande-Terre and Basse-Terre separated by a narrow arm of the sea (the salted river), Les Saintes, Marie-Galante, La Désirade, Saint-Martin and Saint-Barthélemy. Karukéra (island with beautiful waters)—as it was first called by the Caribs who supplanted the Arawaks—has been the scene of a painful and bloody history as well as a home (forced or chosen) for different peoples. In 1492, Christopher Colombus set foot on the island, opening the way for other European conquerors who continued to decimate or chased the Caribs in neighbouring islands in order to take possession of the land. In 1635, the French took possession of the island, and from 1640 they forcibly brought Africans to use them

as slaves. Among those enslaved Africans were, for instance, Ibos, Sosos, Mocós, Caplaous, Mandikas. The Map in Appendix B indicates the main sites of the slave trade. If we compare this map with the one in Appendix C we notice that there were empires on this part of the African continent. After the Abolition of slavery in 1848, Guadeloupe remained a French colony and was granted—along with Martinique, Guyana and Réunion—the status of French departments in 1946. According to the *Journal Officiel de la République Française* (1946), this meant that current and future laws and decrees applied in France would also be in these new departments. However, as we are going to see in the section entitled “Assimilation: a Social Genocide”, social and economic equalities with France were only in theory. In 1982, Guadeloupe becomes a “région” and with the decentralisation some powers are transferred from the state to the “Conseil Régional” (www.cr-guadeloupe.fr).

For a greater appreciation of the significance of the current study as well as for a better understanding of the reasons behind African-Guadeloupeans’ “racial” identity problem, it is of paramount importance to be informed about the efforts made during slavery in order to cut forcibly deported Africans from their African roots and implant in them feelings of inferiority, which later gave rise to the “malaise” (Fanon, 1952; Leiris, 1974; Leticee, 2000).

The Creation of a Slave, the Creation of the Negro

In order for the slave trade to be profitable, (remember, it’s just business), all resistance to the system had to be crushed. What was needed was a non-person, a body without a mind, a basic labourer; not a Moor, or a Mandika, or a Hausa, or a Fulani. Not a Senegalese or a Sudanese or an Abyssinian. Not the son of a university professor, or the daughter of a high government official. Just a slave... a negro. (Latif and Latif, 1994, p. 155)

The use of the word “Negro” by European enslavers to refer to Africans was deliberately aimed at controlling and subjugating the mind of Africans (Ghee, 1990). The name “Negro” attributed to “Blacks” by “White” scholars comes from the Greek “necro” which means dead. In Spanish, the word “negro” which means “black” comes from “necro”; across European history, the terms “necro” and “Negro” were, frequently, utilised to speak of the physical, spiritual or mental death of a person, place or thing. A “Negro” is an African person in state of confusion, it is an African person trying to (or being compelled to) negate the philosophical foundation of his Africanity even though s/he cannot deny the visible aspects (physiological facts) of it (Akbar, 1979; Khatib, McGee, Nobles & Akbar, 1975; Ghee, 1990). Actually, when we take into account the African concept of self, we can infer that a Negro is a “Black”/African person disconnected from his/her tribal ancestral self. It is the situation of domination and imposition of a fundamental European system of reality on African people, which denies the most convincing feature of African concept of self, which produces this state of confusion (Khatib, McGee, Nobles & Akbar, 1975), this disconnection with our tribal ancestral self.

The Word “Negro” was a convenient criterion to group all Africans by skin color. It was a deceptive means to oblige Africans to erase from their memories their original African identity and concentrate on their slave identity as well as a verbal insult that is still a main feature of racism (Ghee, 1990). Also, as one is about to see, the word “Negro” did not merely stay at the level of verbal usage, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. By self-fulfilling prophecy I mean that enslavers took actions to create the “Negro”. As African Guadeloupean singer and song writer Fanswa Ladrezeau (2007)

voiced in his song entitled Kôla: *“An entire race looked at with contempt, an entire race mistreated”*.

Already bear in mind that as a hyperstimulating experience the trauma of slavery has left African people—simultaneously deprived of instruments that can help them transcend the physical stresses—psychologically vulnerable and exposed (Akbar, 1979). According to Akbar (1979), slavery has destroyed the historical identity of African people from the forced Diaspora. This deliberate destruction, it must be emphasised, enabled to realise the prophecy: the making of the Negro, of a slave. Many of the strategies adopted to create the slave seem to have been generated from the William Lynch’s strategies. The latter will be used to explain some actions taken against enslaved Africans in the French West-Indies.

Lynch was a vicious slave owner in the West-Indies who came to the colony of Virginia, in 1712, and brought slave owners the solution for maintaining their economic prosperity. The breaking of a man, the making of a slave out of the African was the way slave owners secured good economics and slept soundly. By such means, they were spared the loss of valuable stock from hangings and the resulting trouble caused by other slaves (uprisings, run aways, burnings of crops, losses of profit due to unattended fields, fires, and killing of animals). Principles based on those used to break a horse, but greatly intensified, were introduced to do a full mindset reversal. As with horses, “Blacks” were thought to be useful only in captivity, and for the purpose of organized production they had to be broken. Slave owners found it difficult to maintain “Blacks” in captivity, and they knew they could not leave enslaved Africans without surveillance while working. They decided on the need to break their original state of mind. In other words, “Blacks”

had their mindsets broken in order to be completely controlled, their bodies left to be used for labor. Through the application of fear, distrust, and envy, dissimilarities among “Blacks”—age, skin shade, intelligence, size, sex, status on plantation, hair texture, origins in Africa—were made more flagrant. “Blacks” were set up against one another: the young “Black” male versus the old “Black” male; the light skinned versus the dark skinned; the female versus the male. “White” servants and overseers were taught to distrust all “Blacks”. On the other hand, enslaved Africans were taught to trust, love, depend on, and respect only “Whites”, even as the promotion of self-distrust and lack of self-confidence were thought to be more effective (Lynch, 1999).

One of the steps to make the “Negro” involved the removal of all signs of identities from Africans kidnapped. The latter were undressed and had their heads shaved to suppress all signs of national affiliation, individual status, and personal style. Humiliation and dehumanization were the outcomes sought by stripping them of their clothes (Latif & Latif, 1994). Up to now, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, when they show pictures of Africans captured to serve as slaves in school history textbooks, they are generally half-naked (see Appendix D).

The next step was to group Africans who did not speak the same language to set up language barriers among them, and therefore, avoid the plotting of revolts. Separation of Africans who spoke the same language also occurred in French colonies. “White” enslavers called the Africans “dumb” based on their difficulties to communicate in the master’s language. Difficulties which were due to no formal schooling in order to learn to do so because the fact is that, frequently, the enslaved Africans were more educated than their European masters (Latif & Latif, 1994; Combé, 1980; Montès, 2001). They knew

how to read and write in their own languages and in Arabic—the language used in West-African universities including the university of Sankore, in Timbuktu (Latif & Latif, 1994). A look at the strategies of Lynch enables us to shed more light on the reason behind alienating Africans from their native tongues. To have their mindset broken, “Blacks”, like horses, had to be taught to respond to a specific new language. Making “Black” people appear as fools was one of the fundamental elements for securing the slavery system. It was crucial that the African did not fully understand the “White” man’s language; if he did he would be able to read between the lines, know all the secrets, and be impossible to fool. Accordingly, Africans would no longer be “slaves” since they would be capable of speaking man-to-man with “Whites” and this would have meant the death of the economic system (Lynch, 1999). Was this the true reason for forcing “Blacks” to stay away from schools and books? Nonetheless, enslaved Africans were able to develop a common language between them: Creole in the West-Indies. Since they could not prevent Africans to create a language enabling them to resist cultural alienation, colonialists referred to Creole as language of savage Africans (Latif & Latif, 1994; Combé, 1980). Consequently, they forced Africans to deny their genius; they forced them to develop the same denigrating regard on their accomplishments as they were obliged to develop upon themselves. According to Combé (1980), Creole was also defined as corrupted French spoken by the inhabitants of the French colonies who in doing so simply used French culture as the main source of the Creole and thus helped uphold the ideology of Western superiority and African inferiority.

Still in the process of creating the “Negro” extreme fear of “Whites” was instilled in Africans by means of utter violence. Cruel measures were in place to deter rebellions

(Latif & Latif, 1994). In Reinhardt's (2006) view, disciplinary measures were harsh in the French colonies especially in Saint-Domingue (Haiti). The excesses of the slave regime in terms of cruelty were well known and denounced in France; for instance, the slow burning to death of "slaves", who were also torn to pieces with teeth. Schoelcher (1948) talks of a kind of dog used to recapture enslaved individuals in flight, which did not attack "Whites" but will instinctively jump on any "Blacks" approaching and tear them apart. To his knowledge, such horrible things do not exist in the annals of the most barbarous peoples. Providing instances of cruelty towards enslaved persons, Schoelcher (1948) speaks of two men who attached a 70 year old lady and her son on the corpse of a poisoned mule and whipped them till they bled. Or a planter who kept an enslaved woman locked and chained in a dungeon for 22 months resulting in her death. Instances of such atrocities also include attaching an enslaved African close to an ants' nest and after rubbing the person with sugar, ants were poured on her/him and carefully entered into the orifices of the body (Du Tertre, 1654, cited in Centre Régional de Documentation Pédagogique [CRDP], 2001). Even slaveholders in the French colonies testified to the barbarous nature of the regime. It should be noted that this cruelty was legalised by the French Government as articles from the *Code Noir*, quoted below, reveal. The *Code Noir* was a royal edict, adopted in 1685, concerning disciplinary measures for enslaved Africans in the French colonies.

Article 32

Fugitive slaves who would have been in flight for one month starting from the day his master denounced him in justice, **would have his ears cut and his shoulder marked with a hot iron, and if he commits a second offence** another month after the day of denunciation, **the back of his knee will be cut and his other shoulder marked with a hot iron, and the third time he will be killed.**

Article 33

The slave who hit his master or his master's wife, his mistress or their children with bruises or in the face will be killed.

Article 42

Similarly, masters will be able, when they think that their slaves deserve it, to chain them and get them beaten with rods or ropes;... (Editions Sépia, 2006; the author's translation and emphasis)

The usage of fear was one of the fundamental instruments of Lynch's (1999) strategies.

In the process of creating the "Negro", the separation of family was also instrumental, and had tremendously impeding impact on the transmission of language and culture. "Slaves" born on American soil grew up increasingly alienated without the arrival of new "slaves". Mind you, when there were new arrivals, those Africans could not communicate with those born on American soil, they came out of the ship in shock, infuriated, desperate, half-naked and their bodies bruised and badly beaten. In the meantime, "White" masters could feed the minds of slaves born on American soil with the most denigrating images of Africa, presenting Africa as a place where people are cannibals, a place where ape-like people live half-naked. The word African became associated with "savage". Indeed, the myth of the savage African also helped create the "Negro". For "Blacks" born on the American continent to be African meant to be dirty, ugly and subhuman while to be civilised meant to be "White" or European: it meant to live in a house, wear clothes, be able to speak like "Whites" (Latif & Latif, 1994). Such thinking fostered within Africans was based on a "White" supremacist theory. This is confirmed by Graham Richards (1996) who states that physically, Europeans believed that they were the successful completion of the evolutionary process. Therefore,

“Whites” were the norm from which “Blacks” deviate in terms of observable dissimilarities (e.g. skin colour, physiognomy, skull shape, hair texture, sexual parts). The concept of “race” and the psychological meaning that have grown into racial categories and their related physical characteristics have been created by modern European culture.

In the prevalent Western view, culture or levels of civilization and racial hierarchy are intertwined, with “Whites” at the top of the ladder and non-“Whites” in order of descending rungs, and Africans always at the lowest rank. Underlying this assumption has been the notion that all other racial and cultural groups are inferior to “Whites” (Kovel, 1984; cited in Carter & Qureshi, 1995, p. 242). Cultural primitiveness was first used to justify enslavement and colonial repression. Scientific racism then promoted the ideology of Europeans as superior to non-“Whites” because of racial inheritance. With the scientifically approved assumption that social achievement was chiefly a matter of inheritance, the colonial policies of European powers now found justification. Native people of color were considered as inherently primitive and incapable of reaching the level of civilization of “Whites” (Marger, 1994; cited in Carter & Qureshi, 1995, p. 242).

Those pseudoscientific theories, as Reinhardt (2006) calls them, were used in France as well to justify the enslavement of Africans. French colonialists were so convinced of Africans’ natural inferiority and lack of civilisation that they thought they could not aspire to freedom. They believed that such an ideal could only be fed in the minds of barbarous Africans by Europeans (Reinhardt, 2006). Bear in mind that freedom is the essence of human beings. In Dr Martin Luther King Jr’s (1957) opinion, within the soul of all human beings there appears to be a throbbing desire, an internal desire for freedom. Freedom is a basic thing. “To rob a man of his freedom is to take from him the

essence or basis of his manhood. To take from him his freedom is to rob him of something of God's image", stated Dr King (1957). It seems that this belief about Africans' incapacity to aspire to freedom as well as the one about the Creole being a corruption of French merely illustrate, in part, the scientific rationale for racial inequality (i.e. scientific racism) provided by evolutionary theory: "lower races" could not escape their evolutionary dead ends without the help of "Whites" (Richards, 1996).

So, in the process of trying to make Africans forget who they are and to realise their self-fulfilling prophecy, French colonialists overlooked a few facts. According to Gerard Montès (2001), in 1503, the governor of Hispaniola (Haiti), Nicolas Ovanda, with insistence asked the queen of Spain to prevent the coming of "Blacks" on the Island because they had a negative influence on the Amerindians; the Africans encouraged the Amerindians to flee and rebel. The slave trade was authorised between 1517 and 1518 (Montès, 2001). Furthermore, they had to chain and keep Africans locked in dungeons from the time they kidnapped them in Africa to prevent them from escaping and rebelling (Bélénus, 1998; Montès, 2001). They blinded themselves to another fact; they had to put in place barbarous punishments to deter flights and revolts, and in spite of those punishments revolts were widespread in the French colonies (Reinhardt, 2006; Editions Sepia, 2006; Bélénus, 1998). In addition, we learn from Schoelcher (1948) that the sole keeping of troops in the colonies to maintain "somber peace of servitude" required 6,500,000 French francs every year, excluding the cruisers used to prevent flights. He stated that in Guadeloupe 12,000 "Whites" did not feel safe in front of 93,000 enslaved Africans with 3,000 armed men and 6,000 militia men. Guadeloupe was asking for more forces. Moreover, let us not forget the violent means—which caused death or harmful

consequences on health and ability to reproduce—employed by enslaved women to abort lest their children be submitted to cruel treatments too (Bélénus, 1998). As will be discussed later the mythological images of Europeans and Africans are part of the collective unconscious of the children of Africa.

There were rapes of African women as well, which served the end of controlling their minds. Forced sexual relations with “White” masters were aimed at crushing women’s dignity and sexual integrity to ensure the success of slavery (Latif & Latif, 1994). Furthermore, it is true that the rapes of “Black” women were not clearly dictated in the *Code Noir*, but the fact that article 44 of the *Code Noir* deemed enslaved Africans to be commodities (Editions Sepia, 2006) implies French colonial power endorsement of such practice. Also, Schoelcher (1948) contends that the measure of the code forbidding masters to abuse enslaved “Black” women was never applied and could not be. It is worth noting that the birth of children from these rapes enabled the establishment of an intermediary class. The creation of a color cast system—which existed in the West-Indies (Reinhardt, 2006)—thanks to the mixed children born from the rapes, was another step in the making of the “Negro”. These mixed slaves were privileged over darker ones. They did not work on the plantations, were chosen to serve the masters’ house, keep an eye on enslaved Africans to prevent revolts, they were allowed to possess “slaves” and had access to instruction (Latif & Latif, 1994; Reinhardt, 2006; Combé, 1980). Crossbreeding or organised rapes, which was also part of the William Lynch’s (1999) strategies, produced a diversity and different categories of labor, fostering a great deal of illusions in “Black” people’s minds thereby severing them from their original historical base. Obviously, the birth of mixed children and the privileges granted to them facilitated the

application of two other Lynch's instruments: envy and use of differences to further divide the people.

Finally, one must mention the forced religious conversion of Africans (Latif & Latif, 1994). Article 2 of the *Code Noir* dictates:

All slaves who would be on our islands will be baptised and instructed in the catholic, roman and apostolic religion.... (Editions Sepia, 2006, p.13; the author's translation)

Other articles of the *Code Noir* prohibited the practice of any other religion and stated that infraction to the law would lead to punishment. Furthermore, in French colonies masters kept a close eye on religious instructions and entrusted their wives or daughters with imparting the teaching because of dangerous ideas. It was for instance dangerous to tell gathered slaves and masters that they are brothers because brothers cannot sell or buy each other (Bélénus, 1998; Leiris, 1974). Similarly, Schoelcher (1948) argued that not one priest spoke in favour of the "slaves". They simply preach resignation. They forbid everything that would harm the colonial system. Schoelcher (1948) reveals that he heard a priest, in a church, ask an enslaved African during a catechist exam which commandment of God that orders the "slave" to respect his master. The priest replied you will honor your mother and father. The truncated and distorted religious instructions generally perverted the judgement of enslaved Africans. Schoelcher confesses too that enslaved Africans did not understand God³, and used him like a charm in their least trouble. The same as French peasants they believed in ghost and evil charms.

Some people may argue that slavery belongs to the past so it does not impact the present. One of the answers to such a contention is if, to paraphrase Latif and Latif

³ From what has been said earlier we know that Africans had their own concept of God.

(1994), several disciplinary practices shared by African American parents originate from the slavery period philosophy of fostering fear in the child, it means that slavery has affected subsequent generations. Schoelcher (1948) gives concrete examples of the devastating impacts of slavery on Africans. He said that the collapse of morals among them was such that a man would lend his wife to another for eight days for the price of 50 cents. He speaks of enslaved persons poisoning their comrades and children with the only intent of harming their masters. Nonetheless, Schoelcher (1948) does admit that these vices and faults do not partake to enslaved Africans but to their masters who push them to such extremes. He reckons that the habits of slavery corrupt the mind to an indescribable extent, and in unspeakable ways make the heart familiar with despicable things.

Moreover, the harmful impact of slavery on generations to come was foreseen by articulate abolitionist and at least one former enslaved person, Sojourner Truth. She had warned freedmen that the collapse of morals between “Black” men and “Black” women due to slavery would impact following generations (Latif & Latif, 1994). Intergenerational impacts of slavery are not due to chance. The psychological effects of Lynch’s (1999) method were deemed so powerful that it was believed that after intensive application for one year, “Black” people would pass on the principles and self-develop them for hundreds, perhaps, thousands of years. However, it is important to stress that the method was not completely successful. Schoelcher (1948), himself, expresses amazement at still finding some virtues in enslaved Africans because slavery was aimed at destroying all of them. He saw, in his own words, those indomitable “Blacks” who were stronger than barbarity itself, the ones that nature endowed with such great boldness or powerful temper. Still according to Schoelcher (1948), they would have been perceived as great

men in the “civilised” world. At this point, it must be stressed that the education of enslaved Africans, which has been problematic for the colonial power from the very beginning, has today become a more sophisticated way to continue the work of the old days, as also noted by Latif and Latif (1994). This is to say that if physical slavery was abolished in the French West-Indies, in 1848, the education system functions in order to maintain the “Negro” alive in the minds of the children of Africa, in the French West-Indies.

The “Education” of African West-Indians

Michel Leiris (1974), in his book entitled *Contacts des Civilisations en Martinique et en Guadeloupe* (a study done for UNESCO), ascertains that during slavery, French colonial powers were unwilling to educate enslaved Africans. The masses themselves, whose social status was superior to enslaved Africans, were ignorant about France where education was not yet compulsory. In general, “education” of enslaved Africans was confined to religious instructions aimed at preparing them for baptism. But, as aforementioned, the colonists perceived these instructions as a danger because of feelings of equality they could impart to enslaved Africans. Leiris (1974) states also that the leaders were so preoccupied with preserving the status quo that, in 1767, the Governor of Martinique, Fénelon, wrote the following to his minister:

If instruction is an obligation in the holy religion, good politics and the strongest human considerations oppose it...The safety of Whites requires that Negroes be kept in the deepest ignorance. I have become deeply convinced that they must be treated like animals. (p. 71; the author’s translation and emphasis)

In spite of the law of August 10th, 1839, adopted under Louis-Philippe, granting 650,000 French francs to the moral improvement of “Blacks”, by December 31st, 1845, there were

only twelve enslaved children (seven in Guadeloupe, three in Martinique, two in French Guyana) in the free schools of the four French colonies (Leiris, 1974; Schoelcher, 1948). However, with the abolition of slavery in 1848, as time went by, an increasing number of children of former “slaves” could go to school. Many “Black” parents who saw instruction as the means of climbing the social ladder did not hesitate to send their children to school. Furthermore, the application of French school policy, slowed down by a lack of funding and staff, is now applied across the French West-Indies. So well that, as also noted by Leiris (1974), Martinique and Guadeloupe are fully assimilated to other French departments with regard to the modalities of instructions as well as the content of school programmes. It is the French culture, overtly presented as that of the civilising nation, which is transmitted to young West-Indians by means of official instruction (Leiris, 1974). This miseducation, part of France’s policy of assimilation which will be dealt with in the next section, is necrophilic; it kills the creativity and critical thinking of West-Indians.

Until 1982 Guadeloupe was attached to Bordeaux in France, then there was the creation of the Academy of French Antilles-French Guyana (Jno-Baptiste, 1996), and in January 1997 the Academy of Guadeloupe was created. One would be tempted to say that the French government has decentralised administrative power in order to grant more power to the departments. Nonetheless, France still remains the holder of major decisions. In effect, the content of school curriculum is decided by the ministry of education in Paris to which the Academy of Guadeloupe, like the 29 other French Academies (France and overseas departments), is attached. The Minister of national education, higher education and research has a central administration (ministry) and a

territorial administration made of 30 Academies (France and overseas) managed by rectors of academies to establish his educational policy. The rector is appointed by the President of France, and is the representative of the minister of national education, higher education and research within the Academy. The rector is in charge of the whole education system within the academy and must see to the application of the Minister's decisions as well as the implementation of all legislative and statutory measures. The rector of the Academy has authority over all staff. (www.ac-guadeloupe.fr).

As previously said, the curriculum in Guadeloupe, where the majority of the population is of African descent, is Eurocentric ("White" French perspective) as noted not only by Fanon, (1952), Leiris (1974), but also in more recent work (Jno-Baptiste, 1996; Leticee, 2000; Heiberg, 2006). To put it simply, although African-Guadeloupeans are now allowed to go to school, schools still keep them in deep ignorance with regard to their history and culture, that is, with regard to who and what they are because they receive an education based on a national curriculum that is Eurocentric. Consequently, one should expect some negative impacts on the people. So, "education" of African West-Indians amounts to what Freire (1996) referred to as "false generosity" given the importance of self-knowledge for a person's psychological growth (Akbar, 1998). Before moving any further, it is essential to look more thoroughly at the policy of assimilation in the French West-Indies because of its devastating impacts on African-Guadeloupeans and to help us better understand the function of "education" in Guadeloupe as well as the importance of this study.

ASSIMILATION: A SOCIAL GENOCIDE

To assimilate means to “absorb (people) into a larger group; make like, cause to resemble” (Oxford Compact English Dictionary, 1996, p. 54), nonetheless, the law of assimilation of March 1946 which made Guadeloupe a French department has its limitations. As demonstrated by the comments of Justice Minister, Mr Teitgen, in 1947, assimilation was not intended to set West-Indians on equal footing with “White” French and make amends for past wrongdoings.

Whether you want it or not, whether you prove that they are right or think they are wrong, in fact, when you talk about assimilation with our overseas compatriots, they first and foremost understand economic and social assimilation as well as assimilation of standards of living. And since we do not want to give equality in all political rights with economic and social equality, and we cannot, we must no longer talk about assimilation. (Teitgen; cited in Combé, 1980, p. 42; the author’s translation)

If we can no longer talk about assimilation, what should we talk about then? According to Combé (1980), cultural or social genocide were terms employed to qualify the policy. The policy of assimilation was more about the destruction of the Guadeloupean nation and its people, the pillars of Guadeloupean identity (Combé, 1980). Let us recall that Aimé Césaire, one of the fathers of the Negritude movement, was the *rapporteur*⁴ and a fervent advocate of this law that transformed the French colonies into departments—because he thought the law would bring about, in Martinique, social equality with France (Rabathaly, 1986; France Antilles, 2008a). It is noteworthy that Césaire did not ask for assimilation—which he viewed as synonymous with alienation—but for an adapted departmentalisation. To him it was about integration in the Republic while preserving the islands geographical and historical specificities (Laup, 2006). Very soon, on the ground,

⁴ A person in charge of doing the report of the parliamentary suggestions of a commission. (Larousse, 2009)

he noticed and denounced the contradictions and breach of the law (France Antilles, 2008a). Césaire realised the danger of this law because as he puts it himself: “We could lose our identity, our soul. ” (E.H-H, 1999, p. 7). So, he began to fight instead for the autonomy of Martinique (France Antilles, 2008a). Thus, Césaire realised that assimilation will push West-Indians away from the very thing he was himself advocating. He realised the necrophilic character of assimilation; a necrophilia which serves to preserve France’s domination in the West-Indies.

The destruction first started by getting rid of farming lands: The base of the economy. These lands were sold to estate companies, tourist companies, foreigners or people from the lower middle or middle class. As far as trade and craft industries are concerned, supermarkets and big furniture shops were implanted thereby crushing the traditional economy (Combé, 1980). We also witnessed the closure of some “lolos” (the equivalent of the “dépanneur” in Quebec). And, with an increasing number of people working in the public sector, Guadeloupe is better able to play its role of consumer society (Combé, 1980). The use of the West-Indies as consumer zones is nothing new. This practice dates back to the beginning of colonisation. Haitian historian, Gérard Montès (2001), says that trade between France and its colonies was regulated by a colonial pact which guaranteed France the exclusivity of the trade with its colonies. The objective of this economic system put in place in 1661 under Louis XIV by the general overseer of finances, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, can be summarised as follows: everything by and for France. The colonies were strictly forbidden to transform raw materials into consumer goods. This was done by France to develop its industry in order to send the goods in the colonies at high cost. This enabled to decrease unemployment and increase

local consumption (Montès, 2001). Guadeloupe being a consumer society it becomes much easier to introduce the European, middle class way of life (e.g. food, habits, games; Combé, 1980). We therefore end up with what Freire (1996) calls cultural invasion, which will be explained later. As more and more Guadeloupeans unable to find jobs in Guadeloupe are generally leaving for France—a country they have been taught to venerate—in search of a better life, an increasing number of “White” French are entering the island. The departure of West-Indians towards France—which parallels the massive arrival of “White” French people—was organised by the Bureau des Migrations des Departements d’Outre Mer (BUMIDOM). This migration of “Whites” towards the West-Indies and of West-Indians towards France has been called invasion as well as genocide by substitution (Combé, 1980). One must wonder what Guadeloupe can offer to “White” French that she cannot offer to her own children, and moreover within a nation which constantly boasts about its humanitarian values of liberty, equality and fraternity?

The will to kill the local economy and transform Guadeloupe into a consumer society, thereby destroying the pillars of the Guadeloupean society, can explain the will to kill the creative and critical minds of young Guadeloupeans. In fact, from a very young age in schools, Guadeloupean children’s critical thinking is killed. They are taught not to question their reality. Accordingly, most West-Indians do not question their reality; they accept it and recognise it as it is. Even when they question it they are not in touch with it because they do so through alien schemas and concepts (Combé, 1980).

Having said that it must be emphasised that Combé’s contentions cannot and must not be generalised; for there have been, in Guadeloupe, men and women fighting for their rights. It was the case for instance in May 1967 where many were killed by French police

force. The latest movement is the one discussed in greater details in the Appendix E, which is the gathering of voices about social and economic hardship, of feelings of hopelessness, exasperation and injustice as well as a longing for profound changes; all those voices that I heard, those feelings I could touch and those longings expressed during conversations with people in Guadeloupe well before the start of the movement.

With hardly anything produced in Guadeloupe combined with the erasure of the positive achievements of the children of Africa from the official historical narrative, the African Guadeloupean has “the proof” of the inferiority of his/her people, and hence “the proof” of his/her own inferiority. Just as Cross (1995) notes for “Black” Americans so is it difficult for African West-Indians in public schools not to be miseducated about the role of Africa in the origin of Western civilisation and world culture, and the role of “Blacks” in the evolution of French⁵ culture and particularly history. Still according to Cross (1995), if self-hatred is not the automatic result of such miseducation, it can surely lead to a distortion of the intra-“Black” discourse on “Black” cultural historical issues and/or “Black” challenges and problems. It is, therefore not surprising to hear an African-Guadeloupean say: Negroes are lazy, they do not create anything, not realising that s/he is denigrating him/herself. What is more startling is that those who sometimes voice such comments are very active and have people around them who are the same. I have met a young African Guadeloupean with a similar discourse in Quebec, who told me a bit later in the conversation how hard his father works. He did not realise that by generalising the negative he was putting his hard-working father and other hard-working African Guadeloupeans in the same box. This is to imply that such negative comments are too

⁵ Cross wrote “American” but I thought appropriate to replace it by French in order to apply its statement to the African Guadeloupean’s experience

common in Guadeloupe, so common that they are even reported by foreigners. An Indian who went to Guadeloupe and did business with his own people told me that Guadeloupeans do not have money and live on welfare. Having been duped in the bid by his “brother”, he drew my attention on the fact that the Indians had been living among Guadeloupeans for a long time, maybe in an attempt to imply that his “brother” had learned his corrupted way because he was living in Guadeloupe. It is bad enough that people assume the worst about us because of the myths attached to the color used to designate our group, it is worse when we validate those negative stereotypes by putting forward the negative. In doing so, we simply deny all the people who are doing a valiant job in Guadeloupe, all those people who are working so hard in spite of the destructive forces at work. Just as the image of the African was “lynched”, so is the image of the Guadeloupean. Accordingly, African Guadeloupeans must constantly look elsewhere to positively define themselves. Having been taught to look elsewhere and particularly towards France for everything beautiful, worthy or good, the young African Guadeloupean will not seek these things at home or within him/herself; they become dependent on France for this.

For twenty years, they fight with their programmes to transform the Negro into a White person. Then they let him down and say: there is no doubt that you have a dependency complex towards Whites. (Fanon, 1952, p. 175; the author’s translation and emphasis)

Again, being themselves the product of the system one can understand that it may be difficult to rely on some African Guadeloupean scholars to help their compatriots develop a more positive view of the people. Those scholars who operate from an alien (Eurocentric) framework are, what Nobles (1978; cited in Akbar, 1984, p. 396) called, “conceptually incarcerated”, and being so is more likely to make them hegemonistic

agents to use Tan's (2004) expression. And as hegemonistic agents they enable and reproduce subjection of students (Tan, 2004). For instance, they blindly teach young African Guadeloupeans that their ancestors are Gauls, and Fanon (1952) tells us:

In the West-Indies, the young Black, who at school keeps repeating "our fathers, the Gauls", identifies with the explorer, with the civiliser, with the White man bringing truth to the savages.... There is identification, that is, subjectively, the young Black embraces a White attitude. (p. 120; the author's translation and emphasis)

From what has been discussed so far it is obvious that hegemony is the approach utilised by the French to preserve their domination over African Guadeloupeans. Hegemony is a struggle where the dominant group gains the consent of the dominated, with the latter taking part in their own oppression without being aware of it. It is the moral and intellectual domination of the powerful over the oppressed through the gaining of the latter's consent. It is an organised gathering of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meanings, values and actions which are lived. Hegemony functions to saturate our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic and social world views, and the common sense interpretations we ascribe to them, turns into the world "tout court", the sole world (McLaren, 2003; Apple, 2004). To paraphrase Todd Gitlin (cited in McLaren, 2003), the hegemonic meaning of the world creeps into popular common sense and is duplicated there; that common sense may even seem to engender it. Schools in Guadeloupe have undoubtedly been and continue to be agencies of preservation and transmission of the dominant culture and as such, as argued by Apple (2004), they create and recreate types of consciousness guaranteeing the maintenance of social control. This point will become more evident in Chapter Two as we deal with history textbooks employed in Guadeloupe. But for now, we are going to

have a more in depth discussion concerning the impacts of miseducation on African Guadeloupeans.

MALAISE WITH THEIR IDENTITY

There is no doubt that education is of paramount importance for a people's advancement. However, with regard to the French West-Indies, Leiris (1974) contends that it must be done in ways that the individual who receives it becomes clearly conscious of his/her concrete situation and responsibility toward his/her community instead of being led to the demoralising conviction that s/he can measure his/her progress based on the visible resemblance achieved with "Whites". Leiris (1974)' statement underlines the role of "education" in the French West-Indies as well as the role education is supposed to play in society. When Leiris posits that education should foster consciousness about one's concrete situation and about one's responsibility towards one's community, he points to the role of education as an instrument for imparting self-knowledge. The role of education as a vehicle of self-knowledge is confirmed by Akbar (1998). He posits that every civilised group fights to maintain their shared or collective information. Every generation is accountable for preserving the degree of consciousness reached by preceding generations and moving the community to superior levels by the development of their own consciousness (Akbar, 1998).

However, in the French West-Indies education does not serve this purpose since it has led to a demoralising conviction about one's inferiority as well as to self-alienation and identification with the dominant group (Leiris, 1974; Fanon, 1952; Leticee, 2000). In analysing four textbooks used by schoolchildren in Guadeloupe in the early 1990s,

Leticee (2000) found cultural and racial bias. She found that on a total of 745 characters illustrated, 672 of them were “White” while only 50 characters were “Black”. There was no mention of “Blacks” in any of the written text of the textbooks. Furthermore, the latter were dominated by cultural element of European milieu. As it is the worldview of the dominant group (“White” French perspective) that is imposed on West-Indians (Leiris, 1974; Heiberg, 2006; Leticee, 2000), it is reasonable to agree that education serves the end of domination in the French West-Indies, and this domination is accomplished by means of cultural invasion. According to Freire (1996), “cultural invasion” serves the ends of manipulation, which in turn serves the ends of conquest, and conquest the ends of domination.” (p. 164). He argues that in cultural invasion the actors penetrate the world of the invaded by using their own world as a starting point; their own values and ideology are the source of the thematic content of their action. The actors of cultural invasion superimposed themselves on the people they deem to be mere spectators or objects (Freire, 1996). Just as the French superimposed themselves on the children of Africa in the West-Indies, so did the Eurocentric “education” they forced on the latter remains superimposed. To be more explicit, and I shall again call upon Michel Leiris (1974) here, in society where members are “educated” to believe that their only truth and traditions are those of the dominant group they tend to adopt only visible aspects of the dominant group’s culture, while deep down within one remains attached to the original culture. Fanon (1952) holds that the adoption of visible aspects of the European culture by French West-Indians is the means employed by “Blacks” to try to dominate feelings of inferiority. They adopt, for instance, the clothes, language of Europeans in an attempt to feel equal with Europeans and their way of existing (Fanon, 1952). In other words,

schools lead to the development of an alien identity in West-Indians of African descent. The fostering of an alien identity is the basis of *miseducation* (Akbar, 1998)—a term coined by Dr Carter Woodson. Dr Woodson (1998) holds that:

the same education which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people”(p. xiii).

If we apply Woodson’s comments to West-Indians, we reiterate what has been previously said about the role of education in fostering an inferiority complex in them. Bearing in mind what has already been said about education in the French West-Indies, either the word *miseducation* will be used in this work to refer to the school “education” delivered to West-Indians or the word education will be put in inverted coma.

In fact, scholars even make mention of a malaise felt by West-Indians. Leiris (1974) states:

School education as it is presently delivered to French West-Indians would result, for many people of color not in an elimination..., but in a strengthening of their feeling of inferiority inherited during the slave period and, thus the malaise created, a confirmation of the tendency...to embrace external aspects of European culture (those that overtly express that one possesses this culture: language, clothes, etc) rather than adopting it in one’s soul. (p. 71; the author’s translation and emphasis)

Leiris (1974) is not the only one, nor the first to discuss the malaise affecting French West-Indians. Leticee (2000) provides further explanations about this malaise. She ascertains that the persistent malaise felt by Guadeloupeans in defining their identity is what Frantz Fanon called the “existential deviation of the Negro”. Since both Leiris and Leticee build some of their arguments by using the work of Fanon (1952), it is important to go directly to his work and see what he says about this malaise. According to Fanon (1952), it is “White” civilisation, European culture that has forced this existential

deviation on “Black” people in the French West-Indies. Fanon’s contention confirms the negative impacts of slavery and miseducation on African West-Indians. At subjective and intellectual levels West-Indians behave like “Whites” and do not think of themselves as being “Blacks”. They will become aware of their “Blackness” in contact with “Whites” and realise that people are talking about them as well when they talk negatively about Africans (Fanon, 1952). My own experience resounds with Fanon’s word. It is in Europe that I became aware of my “Blackness”, often in painful ways. While I was still living in Guadeloupe, I once heard on the radio an African Guadeloupean top model living in Italy say the same. I remember to have been shocked by her comment unaware of my own lack of consciousness in the matter. I do not know how she defined her identity, but I know that in England I was offended and quick to emphasise that I was French whenever somebody called me African. The problem was that people always sought to understand how a “Black” person could be French. Merely emphasising that my parents are French like all Guadeloupeans did not satisfy people. Only when I explained how we came to be in Guadeloupe would I have the usual: “Now I can understand”. Fanon (1952) asserts that French West-Indians have the same collective unconscious as Europeans and due to this collective unconscious the former have embraced all archetypes of the latter. Therefore, French West-Indians’ negrophobia is understandable. In Fanon’s (1952) view, the collective unconscious which is cultural (i.e. acquired) is the sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group. In the collective unconscious “Black” is synonymous with ugly, wicked, darkness, sin, immoral, instinctive and every opposite quality is white. To have moral, black, darkness must be erased from consciousness in

order to make way for the light part. This is why “Blacks” fight their own image (Fanon, 1952).

SUMMARY

To sum up, we have seen that “Blacks” had a history well before being deported from Africa; a history which very much testifies of a glorious past. A glorious past which comprises “Blacks” building of empires such as the Ethiopian empire which included Kemet (Ancient Egypt), the empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhay, organisation of states, development of sciences, building of universities to name just a few of their achievements. Erasing this history from the minds of Africans from the time of slavery and colonisation was part of the strategies aimed at making them forget who they are in order to turn them into slaves (i.e. Negroes).

Deprived of self-knowledge by a nation which does not truly seek to assimilate them socially and economically, but which rather seeks to continue to plunge them into deep ignorance as to who and what they are through the provision of a Eurocentric “education”, African West-Indians are paying a high price for this alienation from their African roots: the strengthening of their inferiority complex which only leads to an exacerbation of the malaise with their identity and not without some ramifications (e.g. African Guadeloupeans’ tendency to denigrate their own people).

Now let us move on to Chapter Two to discuss two different historical perspectives and their consequences on individuals.

Chapter 2

THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

THE OFFICIAL HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

If the reader was less often exposed to writers so ill instructed as the one of the *Revue*⁶...; we would not have been compelled today to defend Negroes against some deplorable prejudice too lightly created; they would not have been looked upon as brute beasts, and as a generous people we would have been more indignant than we are to know that they are enslaved! To write without all the necessary consciousness is more dangerous than we think. (Schoelcher, 1948, p. 85; the author's translation)

In spite of the abolition of slavery this necessary consciousness Schoelcher is talking about is still lacking.

Chapter One has dealt with, among other things, the role of “education” in the assimilation of African West-Indians. History, one of the vehicles utilised by the “education” system to carry this enterprise, has already been briefly mentioned. This chapter discusses more thoroughly the use of history in the process of assimilation or if you prefer alienation of African West-Indians.

Previously too, mention was made of the Eurocentric (“White” French perspective) character of the historical narrative in the French West-Indies. In his book *Falsification of African Consciousness*, Dr Amos Wilson (1993) sustains that Eurocentric history is aimed at encouraging forgetting in the African personality to create amnesia, to maintain repression. Amnesia is:

an undiscovered self, an emptiness, a self incapable of self-understanding its own motivations, a self incapable of self-direction and self-determination, a reactionary

⁶ Schoelcher is talking about the *Revue de Paris*, which had written a very disparaging article on Africans.

self, a self that does not understand others or the world in which it exists—a fatalistic externalised self. (Wilson, 1993, p. 52)

Reinhardt (2006) tells us that the controlled forgetting during which former enslaved Africans were reprogrammed to view France as a generous, liberating mother is part of France's politics of assimilation intended to regenerate the colonies and integrate them into the nation. By means of organised forgetting, big powers deprive small countries of their national consciousness. In the process of losing awareness of the past, the people increasingly lose themselves as a nation (Milan Kundera, 1980, cited in Reinhardt, 2006). If France and Western nations in general are to convince themselves and others that they are superior (i.e. at the peak of humanity) and maintain the status quo, history must then be written in a way that demonstrates their superiority. When one takes Australia and France as instances one realises that in both cases organised forgetting is characterised by portraying the conqueror in a positive light and removing from the official historical narrative any information that contests the conqueror's positive image, thereby embellishing and distorting this narrative. A tendency to denigrate the colonised, to portray them as passive, uncivilised or savages is also an attribute of this organised forgetting.

This process very much resembles what Raymond William (cited in Apple, 2004) referred to as “selective tradition” which characterises that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is falsely represented as “the tradition”, the significant past. Nonetheless, all the time the selectivity is essential; the manner in which from an entire probable part of the past and present, some meanings and practices are selected to be highlighted, some others are overlooked and left aside. Even more significantly, certain of these meanings are reinterpreted, erased, or reshaped in ways that sustain or at least do

not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture (Raymond William, cited in Apple, 2004). Whether we like it or not we must recognise that France is indeed an effective dominant culture. But, before turning to France, let us first use Australia to illustrate the point about organised forgetting or if you prefer selective tradition.

This new Australian nation was said to be the outcome of the successful settlement of a progressive people and their honourable institutions and land transformation. The British colonization was presented as a peaceful act of discovery and settlement (Attwood & Foster, 2003). The history of violence that accompanied this settlement was suppressed from textbooks of national history. In earlier historical accounts, Aborigines were depicted either as inoffensive people who did not show much resistance and simply faded away in the face of British colonization or as savages whom Europeans had to fight in order to settle the land (Curthoys, 2003). In the last twenty years or more, there have been changes in the historical narrative in Australia, with the acknowledgment that British colonization occurred to the detriment of the Aborigines. This historical representation is disliked by several non-Aboriginals as well as conservatives (Curthoys, 2003).

In public debate on radio and in newspapers many non-Aboriginal Australians openly express a preference for returning to a “positive” understanding of Australian history, which assumed or argued explicitly for the rightfulness of colonization, and emphasized colonists’ struggles and difficulties, processes of ‘pioneering’ and settlement, and the hard-won achievement of economic development, political freedoms, and social harmony (p. 187).

Likewise, former Australian Prime Minister John Howard stated that he would like to see Australians comfortable and relaxed about their history. He stressed that they must make sure that their history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that Australians should apologize for most of it (Attwood & Foster, 2003). To understand their position, also bear in mind that it is in historical narratives about a nation that the

definition of nationhood and national identity are rooted. This definition is also firstly shaped by these narratives (Attwood & Foster, 2003). Besides, the personal as well as the collective histories of individuals and societies have a great deal of impact on their psychology, consciousness and behavioural tendencies. How an individual and a group perceive their history, the conclusions derived from that history concerning the type of person or group s/he or it may be, how other people and groups view her/him or it and the future that s/he or it can expect partly shape their psychology (Wilson, 1993).

The preference of Euro-Australians for a historical narrative that glorifies them as a nation echoes the French's stance in the overseas departments. As mentioned earlier, the history of the life of the forebears of West-Indians in Africa was omitted from the official historical narrative. The French seem to have followed Lynchs' recommendation: suppress the original historical base to prevent the minds of "Blacks" from correcting and re-correcting themselves. Heiberg (2006) acknowledges this omission in the official historical narrative when she states:

Indeed, the question of the link with Africa appears to remain a problematic point for the West Indian people who, as often described in pieces of work [historical literature and novels], seem unaware of this connection. (p. 14).

It would seem then that no traces of their origins were transmitted to the generations of African descent born in the West-Indies, as if the memory or even the history of the first slaves started only from their forced journey towards the Caribbean. In effect, in history, as it is usually accepted, there is a complete denial of this "before" which is Africa. (p. 14; the author's translation and emphasis).

We must emphasise that the French are not the only ones who have blotted out chapters of "Black" history. Williams (1987) informs us that this has been done on a universal scale. He maintains that the accomplishment of "Blacks" in their land was almost suppressed from memory because the first writers on Africa were successfully crossed

out, concealed or reinterpreted by modern writers. Further instances of this “great silence”, to use Williams’ (1987) terms, are to come.

Dr Jno-Baptiste’s (1996) comments may help us shed more light as to the reason behind the blotting out of parts of our history. In her Ph. D dissertation published under the title *La question du créole à l’école en Guadeloupe*, Jno-Baptiste (1996) explains the ideology which is transmitted to Guadeloupeans by means of history. She contends that general history had to leave on the minds of the children of enslaved Africans an idea of the development of humanity across ages, how France shined in the world, the great men produced by France, the generous ideas France pioneered. Jno-Baptiste (1996) goes on to say that civic education strengthened by knowledge of France’s history was intended to foster in the learner submission and devotion towards the motherland, France. It is reasonable to argue that such an enterprise could not have been successful without erasing all positive aspects of the past of “Blacks”/African history.

Controlled forgetting, mentioned at the onset of this chapter and discussed by Catherine Reinhart’s (2006) in her book, entitled *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*, is the means employed by France to ensure the success of such an enterprise of subjugation and submission. When looking closely at Reinhardt’s arguments about controlled forgetting, not only does one notice a complementarity with Jno-Baptiste’s aforementioned statement, but also one further understands why West-Indians do not learn about the history of their people. Bear in mind that African West-Indians’ ignorance of their history is aimed at ensuring their assimilation into the French nation and make them forget the past (Reinhardt, 2006). Not surprisingly, according to Reinhardt (2006), events related to slavery were suppressed

from the official historical record as they contradicted the republic's ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity (Reinhardt, 2006). For example, France's involvement in the slave trade and its wealth built on slave economy are silenced while the abolition of slavery in 1848—is believed to be the result of the work of the ideological fathers of the enlightenment and French revolution (Reinhardt, 2006). Remember that the philosophers of enlightenment are the symbols of France's memory of itself as a land of universal justice and equality. It is the act of abolition of slavery that is commemorated. As a result, the “slaves” are discarded as an abolitionary force and their powerful influence in their own liberation is omitted from the official historical narrative. The truth is that slave revolts were widespread in the Caribbean and it was even under increasing pressure from those revolts that slavery was suddenly abolished for the first time in 1794. Harsh punishment did not prevent marooning of slaves willing to die to free their people. While the official historical narrative claims the French philosophers to be the main actors of the abolition of slavery, it is nonetheless true that their position concerning slavery was unclear. On the one hand, most of them deemed slavery to be a violation of natural laws. On the other hand, economic interest seems to be more important than moral considerations (Bélénus, 1998; Reinhardt, 2006). For instance, Montesquieu (cited in Bélénus, 1998), the first French philosopher to deal with the issue of slavery (Reinhardt, 2006), stated that “sugar would be too expensive if they did not make the slaves work the plant that produces it” (Bélénus, 1998, p. 76). Nor have disparaging comments about enslaved Africans and comments that appear to be pro-slavery been included in the official historical narrative. Montesquieu stipulates:

Those who I am speaking of are Black from the feet to the head. Their nose is so flattened that it is almost impossible to feel sorry for them. One cannot possibly

imagine how God in his wisdom could have put a soul, especially a good soul, in such a black body. (Cited in Reinhardt, 2006, p. 29; the author's emphasis)

In effect, French philosophers did not hesitate to voice their beliefs about the inferiority of "Blacks" in their work. Montesquieu was not the only one to do so. So did Voltaire:

The Inhabitants [of Africa discovered by the Portuguese] were barely above animals... the race of Negroes is a human race different from ours... Their wool does not resemble our hair and one can say that if their intelligence is not of another kind than ours it is very inferior. They are not capable of much attention, they devise very little, and they do not seem to be made for the advantage and abuses of our philosophy. (cited in Reinhardt, 2006, p. 30; the author's emphasis)

Though both Abbé Raynal and Condorcet go beyond humanitarian ideals and deal with questions regarding abolition of slavery, they do express doubt as to the fitness of enslaved Africans to embrace their own freedom:

These stupid men who would not have been prepared for a change in their state **would be incapable of conducting themselves. Their lives would consist in habitual idleness or in a web of crimes.** (Abbé Raynal, cited in Reinhardt, 2006, p. 29)

Are these men worthy of being entrusted with happiness and the care of their families? Are they not in the unfortunate case of having lost their reason due to the barbarous treatment they were subjected to? (Condorcet, cited in Reinhardt, 2006, p. 29, the author's emphasis)

Having said that, we note that, in his last sentence, Condorcet somehow acknowledges the damaging impacts of the "barbarous treatment" on enslaved Africans. In France, according to Reinhardt (2006), people acknowledged and denounced the cruelty of the slave regime a great deal, yet they seldom advocate the destruction of the regime. Enslaved Africans' racial dissimilarities and France's economic wealth generated from the slave trade explain their paradox (Reinhardt, 2006). In fact, in Reinhardt's (2006) view, it was during the enlightenment years, in the 18th century that the slave trade boomed. In 1720, 70.6% of the population in Guadeloupe were enslaved Africans, in

1750 it was 82.4% and in 1790, the number reached 84%. Martinique followed a similar pattern (Bélénus, 1998).

Events showing Africans as agents of their own destiny and hence testifying of their humanity are omitted from the official historical narrative. If France's aim is to self-glorify itself through the historical narrative, if it is to uphold the ideology of "Blacks" inferiority and show French as being superior, one can understand why positive aspects of "Black"/African history have been erased from the official narrative. There is, undoubtedly, a hidden curriculum (McLaren, 2003) at work in the "education" system in the French West-Indies. This hidden curriculum will become even more apparent with a close look at the historical narrative of school textbooks.

SCHOOL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

There a people, now forgotten, discovered while others were yet barbarians, the elements of the arts and sciences. A race of men now rejected from society for their sable skin and frizzled hair, founded on the study of the laws of nature, those civil and religious systems which still govern the universe. (Volney, 1991, p. 16)

As has been discussed in Chapter One and will be discussed shortly this race of men Comte Constantine de Volney talks about is African. This race of men has indeed been forgotten, in spite of their powerful contribution to civilisation. In Chapter One, we have argued based on the work of previous writers that West-Indians are led to look elsewhere. Things do not seem to have changed much because when we examine the covers of current history textbooks for all grades at secondary level, all characters on the different covers are of Caucasian type, there is not one African face. The covers seem to be announcing whose history will be mainly dealt with in these textbooks. Then, when we scan the contents table of each book we can notice that indeed the book mainly deals

with European history with much space devoted to the history of France. We can therefore deduce that the argument of writers such as Fanon (1952), Leiris (1974) and Leticee (2000) about the Eurocentric character of school in the French West-Indies is still topical. Furthermore, Leticee's (2000) recommendation that Guadeloupeans should pay attention about who writes their children's textbooks has fallen in deaf ears. For example, in grade five, pupils study the Byzantine empire, the Carolingian empire, the kingdom of France but nowhere do we see in the contents of the history textbook African empires, and yet, we have seen in chapter one that there were empires on the continent. In grade six they study Ancient Egypt but it is not done as a part of the Ethiopian Empire. Ancient Egyptians are not presented as an Ethiopian colony. We are told that more than 5,000 years ago populations settled along the Nile to build the Egyptian kingdom but nowhere do they tell us where these populations came from. It seems to me that this is a paramount piece of information especially when they write that this population developed a powerful and original civilisation. Do we not want to know about the authors of such a civilisation?

In addition, the textbook presents Ancient Egyptian society as an agricultural one and it is said that most Ancient Egyptians were peasant. In an exercise related to the chapter pupils are even asked to show that Ancient Egypt was principally an agricultural society, perhaps in an attempt to ensure the internalisation of the information. However, scholars (e.g. Williams, 1987; Diodorus, 1933) sustain that philosophy, architecture, medicine and sciences were practiced in ancient Egypt. Astronomy was even used in agriculture. Comte Constantine de Volney (1991) reveals that the stars under which the Nile started to overflow were called stars of inundation or aquarus by the Ethiopians of Thebes. Plowing started under the stars of the ox or bull. As to the reaping season, it was

announced by the stars of sheaf or of the harvest virgin (Volney, 1991). Additionally, we learn from Diodorus (1933) that:

“The Thebans” [Egyptians], “say that they are the earliest of all men and the first people among whom philosophy and the exact science of the stars were discovered, since their country enables them to observe more distinctly than others the risings and setting of the stars.” (p. 175)

“The Ethiopians” says Lucian, page 985, “were the first who invented the science of the stars, and gave names to the planets, not at random and without meaning, but descriptive of the qualities which they conceived them to possess ; and it was from them that this art passed, still in an imperfect state, to the Egyptians.” (Volney, p. 17, the author’s emphasis)

Likewise, according to this same textbook the first cities were created in Mesopotamia in the 4th millennia B.C.. Yet, Volney (1991) calls Thebes, the metropolis of the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia, the parent of cities. He holds that “both physically and historically, the existence of Thebes was prior to that of the other cities. The testimony of writers is very positive in this respect”, says he (p. 16).

After having consulted the textbooks, when I was told that there was a History and Geography textbook (CRDP, 2001) on the West-Indies/Guyana used by teachers along side the others textbooks, I thought: what a brilliant idea. However, my enthusiasm was cut short when I found out that this book which contains only 112 pages—with history being covered from page 6 to 60—is used for all four grades at secondary level. Bear in mind that this is a textbook which is allegedly supposed to cover the history of Guadeloupe, Martinique, other West-Indian islands and French Guyana. The slimness of this textbook compared to size of the other textbooks and the fact that it is used for all grades—unlike the other textbooks—can only convey the impression to West-Indians that nothing much happened in the past among their people or that their history is not as important as that of others, thereby confirming their inferiority. Having said that, I must

say that I have found the section on departmentalisation of great interest because there is a paragraph presenting schools as a means of enabling the process of assimilation. However, I must add that a reader possessing Fanon's (1952) collective unconscious discussed in Chapter One or who views France as the saviour may not have caught this paragraph even when reading it for the first time because as we shall see the textbook does not do much to explode the myth of the savage African.

The aim of the history and geography textbook of the West-Indies/Guyana, according to the ministerial instructions of the book, is to adapt the history and geography programmes to the teachings delivered in the French West-Indies and in French Guyana. The ministerial instructions, themselves, acknowledge too what has been stressed in this paper: **“created in the Metropolis, they [the history and geography programmes], take into account, in priority, its European environment”**. In addition, it is stated that “the adaptation of the history and geography programmes does not drastically change the architecture of the current texts of which it maintains most of the contents.” To put it simply, what they are saying to us here is that though they have made some changes, the contents of the history and geography programmes still remain Eurocentric. Yet, they claim, with no hesitation, that:

Teaching the history and geography programmes in the Caribbean supposes that pupils learn to locally and regionally locate themselves and be conscious of a history that does not always merge with that of France. (CRDP, 2001; the author's translation and emphasis]

If it is so, why begin the history of people of African descent from slavery and colonisation? If pupils ought to become aware of a history which does not always merge with that of France, the historical narrative must start with the life of their forebears before being forcibly taken away from Africa. This is important particularly if, as they

themselves pretend in the ministerial instructions, “a study of the history of the peopling of the overseas departments must enable to put the past in perspective. That is, overall, help students better understand who they are”....(CRDP, 2001). The Ministry of education—which is, as a reminder located in France—seems to have understood the role of the learning of one’s history for the provision of self-knowledge, however, they have overlooked that one may end up with a skewed sense of who he/she is if the history learnt is itself skewed as it is the case in the French West-Indies. For instance, the silence about the life of Africans before being torn away from Africa means that there is no accurate information to shed light on Dutertre’s comments:

“I do not know what this nation has done, but it suffices to be Black to be taken, sold and engaged in unfortunate servitude which last all life.” (CRDP, 2001, p. 30; the author’s translation and emphasis)

It is left to the reader to imagine “what this nation may have done”. Given the propaganda against Africa, given what Fanon (1952) said about the myth of the savage, evil African being part of our collective unconscious, the absence of information may lead readers of African descent to fill the blank in ways that are detrimental to themselves. Thus, Schoelcher’s (1948) words at the opening of the chapter, reiterated below, can be applied nowadays:

If the reader was less often exposed to writers so ill instructed as the one of the Revue...; we would not have been compelled today to defend Negroes against some deplorable prejudice too lightly created; they would not have been looked upon as brute beasts, and as a generous people we would have been more indignant than we are to know that they are enslaved! To write without all the necessary consciousness is more dangerous than we think. (p. 85; the author’s translation)

So, with Schoelcher and Fanon in mind, it can be said that the reader may fail to realise the atrocity of slavery and may even justify it when s/he compares her/his life today with the image s/he holds in her/his collective unconscious.

Furthermore, the image of the naked Africans—utilised to prove that Africans were savage—has found its way in the textbook not only in a drawing but also through words, through Dutertre's words:

When they leave the ships, **being almost naked** they [slaves] trigger horror and compassion. (CRDP, 2001, p. 30; the author's translation and emphasis)

By omitting to tell us why those Africans were naked they can only perpetuate the myth of the savage African. No need to think long to comprehend what children of African descent learn about themselves through such history. As to the Maroons they are shown on a picture quietly seated around a fire giving an impression of laziness. Their role in the freedom of their people is hardly emphasised, but clearly stated in red, the title of a section reads: "the philosophers undermine the foundation of slavery, as it is clearly inscribed in red under the picture of the Maroons, "Maroon Negroes". Nowhere do they mention the philosophers' contradictions that we previously talked about, not even Condorcet's contradictions. However, they have not omitted to mention that he has written an antislavery thesis called *Reflections on the Slavery of Negroes*. So were Montesquieu's disparaging remarks on Africans omitted, but not his denouncing of the uselessness of slavery. All these instances of information chosen to be highlighted, omitted or distorted illustrate pretty well the selectivity William (cited in Apple, 2004) talks about.

With all this in mind, it should be brought to the attention of readers that in 2001 *Taubira Law* acknowledging the slave trade and slavery as a crime against humanity was adopted, in France. Article 2 of the law states that school programmes and research programmes in history, human sciences will grant the slave trade and slavery the consistent place they deserve. In article 5 it is stipulated that to the article 48-1 of the law

of July 29th, 1881 regarding the freedom of the press, the words: “defend the memory of slaves and the honour of their descendents”, were inserted after the words: “by means of these statutes, to” (www.legifrance.gouv.fr). One must wonder how this can be done with so much distortions and lies by omissions pointed out in the history textbook.

Based on what has been said so far, it is easy to understand what Freire means by “school culture functioned not only to confirm and privilege students from the dominant classes, but also through exclusion and insult to discredit the histories, experiences, and dreams of subordinate groups” (Freire, 1985, p. xv). To make students study Western empires, and nothing on African empires, not to present Ancient Egypt as a part of African civilisation for instance can only help legitimate the power of the French over African West-Indians. What British sociologists of the curriculum say about schools processing people as well as knowledge (Apple, 2004) has proven to be true in the case of the French West-Indies. After all, the processing of knowledge is part of the process of the selective tradition within an effective dominant culture; a process which, as we have already discussed, operates in the French West-Indies.

To fully understand why chapters of the historical narrative are tampered with one must also understand the role history plays for a people. Such psychologists as Wilson (1993) and Akbar (1998) went as far as to hold that history tells us who and what we are, that is, history provides us self-knowledge. Besides, we learn from Leticee (2000) that students from the dominant group who learn their history from books which solely present the dominant views may end up believing that they are in a position of power. Whereas those from other groups (“Blacks”, Hispanic and Indians) who are non-existent in those history books may develop a distorted view of the world and a false perception

of themselves (Leticee, 2000). That is why, and Dr Akbar (1998) shall be called upon once again here to emphasise that, as long as their “educational” experience allow them to learn solely the tribal history of their historical oppressors and nothing about their contribution as if Africa and “Black” hands never produced anything worthy, we cannot expect people of African descent to function at full efficiency. According to Dr Amos Wilson (1993), the intellectual structures and powers of people who suffer from historical amnesia are not developed; they are restricted and alienated (Wilson, 1993). This may well be because, as argued by Akbar (1998), history transmits a legacy of competence. Every generation should learn about its legacy of competence confirming to them that they are equipped to accomplish so as to preserve competence. Young people do not demonstrate their power for achievements when they are deprived of this self-affirming information. When children of African descent learn about the African great physician and multi-genius Imhotep, the scientific prowess of Georges Nicolo, the architects of pyramids, temples and universities in Ancient Africa, about such ancient African philosophers as Ptahhotep, Kagemni, etc..., in Akbar’s (1998) view, they learn about their own potential for similar greatness. No wonder many youth of African descent constantly exposed to image of successful “Black” people in sport and entertainment, think that these are the only fields in which they can achieve. How can they know otherwise if they do not know the history of achievements of their own people and only learn about the achievements of others? Akbar (1998) posits that it is the images of greatness that look like them which stimulate youth to become scientists, scholars and artists. This is not to imply that we should not learn about the history of others but that we should first learn about our history. It is not the learning of European history and

civilisation that necessarily knocks us down, it is our ignorance of who and what we are (Wilson, 1993). In effect, as an instrument to enlighten the self, the study of history has very straight forward and very significant psychological implications (Akbar, 1998). Besides, Dr Amos Wilson (1993) contends that “history is what creates a shared identity in a people... To take away a people’s history, to degrade their history is to degrade their sense of shared identity,...” (p. 39). According to Césaire (2004), identity is fundamental, the foundation of everything, what gives a man, a culture, a civilisation their irreducible singularity.

Wilson (1993) also argues that the distorted presentation of African history and the fact that Africans were led to believe that they were culturally invisible and savage before slavery have created shame in many “Black” people, and consequently many of them stay away from the history of the people. Bear in mind that in the textbooks employed in schools in the French West-Indies, people of African descent are still culturally invisible before slavery. Being cut off from our history, contends Wilson (1993), does not enable to escape anxiety, shame, fear, etc... but opens the personality up for self-alienation as well as self-destruction. In Akbar’s (1998) judgement, that we are not being provided information to help us recall our tribal ancestral self and have lost the rituals that could help us do so account for our miseducation and our psychological trauma. Accordingly, cultural disorientation and self-alienation have been developed. For instance, African Americans’ lack of self-knowledge combined with the propaganda against Africa also enabled to overlook the relevance of the concept “African American”, in the 19th century, in the US (Ghee, 1990).

The unbalanced and distorted portrayal of the oppressed and the oppressor has resulted in what Freire (1996) calls myths; for example, the myth of the French's superiority and our natural inferiority. As discussed earlier the historical perspective, in the French West-Indies, is Eurocentric, and when we take into account Ellen Swartz's (1992) definition of this word, the point made about the mythical aspect of the historical narrative is not only strengthened but myths can also be viewed as a main feature of the official historical narrative. The term Eurocentric designates:

an ideology or body of myths, symbols, ideas and practices that exclusively or predominantly value the world view and cultural manifestations (e.g. history, politics, art, language, music, literature, technology, economics, etc.) of people of European origin, and that denigrates and subordinates the cultural manifestations of people from all other lands of origin (Swartz, 1992, p. 342; the author's emphasis)

One might have already realised that myths serve some purposes. Freire (1996) contends that the oppressors are unable to completely crush in the oppressed their quality of consciousness of the world. The internalisation of these myths is crucial to subjugate the oppressed in order to alienate them and keep them passive. Presenting the world as a fixed entity—something to which people, as simple spectators must adjust—rather than as a problem is intended to maintain the status quo (Freire, 1996). Thus, the presentation of the world as a fixed entity is done by means of the historical narrative too. Therefore, when “Blacks” look at their standard of living today they may view it as progress achieved as a result of their contact with the French and may view the latter as their saviours and hence feel insecure at the simple thought of parting from France. According to Wilson (1993), the projection of mythological Eurocentric history gave rise to social amnesia among people of African descent. Wilson (1993) maintains that if we do not know who we are we embrace the wrong identity and identify ourselves with our enemies. Likewise, Leticee (2000) inferred that the racial and cultural bias found in

school textbooks in Guadeloupe could be harmful for Guadeloupean society if not corrected. She held that exposure to images of “Whiteness” will little by little lead Guadeloupean children to negate their own reality and relate to French ideas, customs and standards of beauty. In other words, one develops Fanon’s existential deviation or malaise discussed earlier.

It can be argued that this existential deviation or malaise afflicting West-Indians of African descent serves the French government given the fact that our assimilation into the French nation is contingent upon our forgetting the past, that is, our forgetting of what and who we are. It should be stressed once more that “to assimilate” means to “absorb (people) into the larger group; to make like, to cause to resemble” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1996, p. 54). In short, “assimilation” is synonymous with adjustment to the world, not with living up to the motto of France: liberty, equality, fraternity. This is confirmed by Combé (1980) who holds that assimilation is about imposing the values of the colonising nation on the colonised. Fanon and Azoulay (1975, cited in Combé, 1980) set the record straight about assimilation when they state:

There is no need to understand the autochthon in his cultural originality. The effort must be made by the Indigene and it is in the interest of the latter to resemble the type of man proposed. **Assimilation does not assume reciprocity of perspectives. An entire culture must disappear to make room for another.** (p. 170; the author’s translation and emphasis)

Moreover, we are told by Georges Combé (1980) that assimilation opposes emancipation of people and territories.

In taking into account what has been said in this chapter so far, one can see that Dr Wilson’s (1993) assertion can be utilised to summarise the experience of West-Indians of African descent. In tampering with history the French tampered with African West-Indians’ consciousness; in tampering with consciousness they tampered with

possibilities; and in tampering with possibilities they tampered with power. The silence about and distortion of African history have not gone unnoticed by all West-Indians of African descent. This is increasingly noticeable in popular culture. For example, the appropriation of the past as well as the stressing of the fact that historical facts were omitted in the official narrative can be heard in contemporary music as shown by the lyrics of the song from the group Original Soldat:

Ignorant / that is how they like us / Cannot bear that / They do not want to see us /
move forward / They tell us what they want us to know / They do as if we do not
know / There are great people in our race / Men who fought for us / Men who
invented good things in the past...

During slavery / "Blacks" did not have the right to get patents / They fled in the north
/ and there they started to create/ Blood bank/ Traffic light / They innovated in many
fields / But they do not tell you all this / Because they like us ignorant. (Valton &
Pommier, 2006; the author's translation)

Similarly, sculptures of slaves displayed in some towns of Guadeloupe tend to acknowledge the slaves' roles in their own freedom. This leads to the discussion on the Afrocentric perspective.

AN AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE

In Akbar's (1998) view, a main challenge of rectifying the miseducational process is to give correct information in order to enable a person to learn attributes and content of his/her ancestral self. Afrocentricity has taken up the challenge, and it is rather from an Afrocentric perspective that students learn their history at Amon-Ra. Since it is from this perspective that history is learnt at Amon-Ra, it is therefore important to present Afrocentricity. According to Dr Molefi Kete Asante (2003), Afrocentricity is a liberating ideology, to be more explicit Afrocentricity is:

a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena.... In terms of action and behaviour, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behaviour. Finally, Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that blackness itself is a trope of ethics. Thus, to be black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia and white racial domination. (Asante, 2003, p. 2)

Afrocentricity is a philosophical outlook related to the discovery, location, and actualisation of African agency within the context of history and culture. The word agency implies an attitude towards actions derived from African experiences. Afrocentricity tries to alter how we speak of ourselves and our history (Asante, 2003). It is composed of interpretation and analyses from the standpoint of African people as subjects rather than as objects on the edges of European experience (Asante, 1991). In my opinion, Afrocentricity simply conceptualises the inherent nature of “Black” history. That is why I find it to be an interesting and useful concept. The study of “Black” history reveals, as can be noted from Chapter One, that “Black” people were agents in the world rather than objects. By agents it is meant that Africans built empires (Ethiopian, West African Empires), temples, universities (Kemet, Sankore, Gao, Jenne) and developed sciences (Volney, 1991; James, 2001; Williams, 1987). Yes, they were making history well before their encounter with other peoples.

For individuals, for example Diane Ravitch (1991), who claims that “The lure of particularism [Afrocentricity] is that it offers a less complicated anodyne, one in which the children’s academic deficiencies may be addressed—or set aside—by inflating their racial pride” (p. 349), it is important to emphasise that, as far as “Black” people are concerned, the Afrocentric perspective of history appears useful in addressing their inferiority complex. That is also why, in my opinion, it can even be argued that the

fostering of “racial” pride is not a bad thing in itself provided that we do not feel the need to crush others in order to make room for ourselves, provided that we remember that everyone is entitled to have a place in the world. It is not a bad thing in itself especially for a people who have been led to believe that they come from the lowest of the low, that their people are savages, that they do not have a history and have contributed nothing to civilisation.

These are the reasons, though I can relate to several of Fanon’s (1952) points, I shall disagree when he says:

We would be very glad to know that there was a link between such “Black” philosopher and Plato. But **we absolutely do not see what this fact would change in the plight of eight-year old children working on sugar cane plantations in Martinique and Guadeloupe.** (p. 187; the author’s translation and emphasis)

Knowing “this fact” may help these West-Indian children develop a sense that they can aspire to much more than working in sugar cane fields. In other words, this type of information may help them eradicate the fatalism implanted in their mind by presenting their people as a “race” of men who have not and cannot contribute to civilisation due to their natural inferiority, as a “race” of men not capable of achieving without the help of the French. Someone from Haiti who was learning his history at the time told me something once, which highlights fairly well the role that the learning of our history can play in our improvement and empowerment.

Our history must instil in us the desire to be better. If we follow the example of our forebears who have done everything to get our independence we cannot just sit back and have the type of government that we have where the people die from hunger, misery, where the people are massacred by their own leaders. We have to follow their example and do what is right for the country instead of destroying it as is often the case. [the author’s translation]

SUMMARY

To summarise, we have seen theoretically and concretely by providing evidence from history textbooks employed in the French West-Indies how the official historical narrative has been shaped to encourage forgetting of the past and further alienate African West-Indians from their African roots thereby enabling France to maintain their domination over African West-Indians. With an official historical narrative which glorifies France, which portrays Africans as less than human, which has made them culturally invisible before slavery and which presents them as objects rather than actors of their own freedom during slavery, African West-Indians are not only pushed away from their history but are also developing a false, negative image of who they are. They are developing a wrong image because as an instrument to enlighten the self, history is supposed to provide self-knowledge including a legacy of competence. This self-knowledge should enable them to grow awareness about their own competence so as to develop them, and become fully functioning members of society.

Fortunately, the Afrocentric approach—the perspective from which Amon-Ra teaches history—has come to address the drawbacks of the official historical narrative. The Afrocentric approach, which presents Africans as subjects of their history and deals with their achievements, is in sharp contrast with the Eurocentric perspective. Although Fanon perceives the learning of “Black” history as being insignificant for shifting the plight of West-Indians, although detractors of Afrocentricity discard it as a means of inflating “Black” people’s racial pride to address or overlook their academic deficiencies, learning their history appears to be important for the growth of “Blacks”.

In what follows there will be a more thorough talk about the benefits of learning one’s history in relation to theories and research on “Black” personality development.

Chapter 3

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING ONE'S HISTORY

We have to use history as a means of reconstituting our personality and restructuring ourselves. (Wilson, 1993, p. 54)

As stated in the introduction, it is the African part in us—violated and used to make us feel inferior—that we deny and/or denigrate due to our malaise with the African within us. However, by reflecting on my personal experience, I have come to realise that the learning of African history has enabled me to reconnect with my African roots and develop a more positive view of my people, of myself and spark my interest in their history. The more I learn about our people's history the more I am interested in learning. So, reconnection to the African roots may well be, as argued in Leiris' work (1974), the antidote against the inferiority complex, and therefore, against the malaise with their identity felt by too many African West-Indians.

Wilson (1993) argues that history tells you what and who you are and connects you with your people. To discover your history is to find out your beingness (Wilson, 1993) before being made a Negro. It is an act of self-discovery as well as self-creation, that is, one resurrects from the dead (Wilson, 1993), to be more explicit one resurrects from the Negro state. It is noteworthy that such "Black" leaders as Dr Martin Luther King (1957) and Malcom X (Elias & Merriam, 2005) who embraced their African roots knew about "Black" history. It has been mentioned earlier that research conducted in the US has

revealed a strong positive relationship between knowledge of “Black” history and African self-consciousness.

To better inform this chapter, use is made of the theory and research on “Black”/African personality development generated from African American experience because, as was alluded to earlier, African Americans and African West-Indians have a similar history. Many of them are the children of the Africans deported to serve as slaves on American soil, and both groups still receive the education of the colonial power (their oppressors). But first, for a better understanding of what follows, one must not only bear in mind what has been said in Chapter One about the common features between African cultures, but one must also have a glimpse of what “Black” psychology is all about since most of the theories and research used in this chapter comes from the field. In Dr Joseph Baldwin’s (1986; cited in Azibo, 1991) definition, the African worldview constitutes the ground of the African psychology field. Dr Baldwin (1986; cited in Azibo, 1991) defines African psychology as a system of knowledge (philosophy, definitions, concepts, models, procedures and practice) regarding the nature of the social universe from the standpoint of African cosmology. It is simply the uncovering, articulation, operationalization and application of the principles of the African reality structure in relation to psychological phenomena. Moreover, still from Dr Baldwin’s (Azibo, 1991) standpoint, in the Afrocentric paradigm in social sciences, the framework of the history, culture and philosophy of African civilisation is the source from which the African social reality is constructed. Also, the paradigm acknowledges and articulates the basic continuity of the African worldview among the various African populations throughout the world, and perceives the African survival thrust as the heart of African social reality (Azibo, 1991).

In his psychological model of Nigrescence or “Black racial” identity development, Dr William Cross (1978; 1995) described the different stages “Black” Americans go through to develop a more authentic identity. The word “Nigrescence” refers to:

the developmental process by which a person “becomes Black” where Black is defined in terms of one’s manner of thinking about and evaluating oneself and one’s reference group rather than in terms of skin color per se. (Helms, 1990, p. 17).

Cross’s model of Nigrescence, which means the process of going from a Negro to a “Black”/Afrocentric identity, explains in what ways the development of assimilated as well as deracinated, deculturalised miseducated adolescents or “Black” adults into more “Black” or Afrocentrically oriented person occurs as a result of several circumstances and events (Cross, 1995). It is noteworthy that it is during the “Black” power movement that the term “Black” was given a positive connotation (Ghee, 1990). Cross’s (1978; 1995) model comprises five stages:

1) *Pre-encounter stage*: It is not a type of mental illness. It is the identity to be altered. This is a state of uprooting. The person displays attitudes that range from low salience⁷ or race neutrality, to anti-“Black”. The person worldview is determined by “White” standards, therefore, s/he may think, act and behave in ways that devalue “Blackness”. Having been socialised to embrace this deracinated frame of reference, the person will be at ease with it and may even show hostility towards any information contradicting elements of this frame of reference. With regard to people in pre-encounter stage who hold anti-“Black attitudes, their utter miseducation causes self-hatred. There is a propensity towards a distortion in their interpretation of “Black” history and in their image of the historical, cultural, economic and political potential of “Blacks”. They think

⁷ Individuals who hold low salience view do not deny being physically Black, but consider this “physical” fact to play an insignificant role in their everyday life (Cross, 1995).

that “Blacks” are from a strange, uncivilized, “dark” continent and that slavery civilised “Black” people. The attitudinal markers of the pre-encounter stage may be blended not only with different degrees of miseducation and a Eurocentric cultural frame of reference but also “spotlight” or race image anxiety⁸, a race conflict resolution model that emphasises assimilation-integration objectives, and a value system that gives preference to non-Afrocentric priorities (Cross, 1978; 1995). It should be noted that the pre-encounter stage possesses characteristics of Fanon’s “existential deviation of the Negro” which is, as a reminder, West-Indians operating with a Eurocentric collective unconscious which devalues them and romanticises “Whites”. It is thus very similar to the malaise African West-Indians experience with their identity.

2) *Encounter*: It is the stage where the person encounters a shocking personal or social event that leads him/her to reinterpret his/her old identity thereby making him/her more open to a novel interpretation of his/her identity and condition. The encounter is not necessarily as negative as a racist experience, it can be the discovery of powerful cultural-historical information about the “Black” experience (Cross, 1978; 1995).

3) *Immersion-Emersion*: The transition stage where the person seeks to destroy every sign of the old frame of reference and attempts to build his/her new frame of reference. Though the person’s level of “Blackness” is high, s/he has hardly internalised the new identity. It is the period of emergent identity or “just discovered Blackness” where the person immerses him/herself in Afrocentric activities. There is also a glorification of African heritage, anti-“White” attitudes, and pro-“Black” attitudes. In the

⁸ According to Cross (1995), “spotlight anxiety” is this anxiety about being too “Black”. It is an anxiety felt when one is among “Whites” or when the person perceives the situation as placing him/her in the spotlight.

second part of the transition stage, “emersion”, the individual is willing to seek how to level off (Cross, 1978; 1995).

4) *Internalisation*: the conflict between the old and new worldviews has been resolved. A calm, secure behaviour has supplanted tension, emotionality and defensiveness. There is a change from an anxious, insecure, rigid, pseudo-“Blackness” based upon the hatred of “Whites” to proactive “Black” pride, self-love and a profound sense of being linked to and accepted by the “Black” community. Interpersonal interactions reflect self-confidence about one’s “Blackness”, ideological flexibility and psychological openness (Cross, 1978; 1995).

5) *Internalisation-commitment*: differentiates between individuals who have only internalised the new identity and those who attempt to translate personal identity into activities that are meaningful to the group. According to Cross, the differentiation between *internalisation* and *internalisation-commitment* implies that in order for “Black” identity shift to have durable political importance, the “self” (me or I) must become or carry on being involved in the resolution of problems experienced by the “group” (we) (Cross, 1978; 1995).

Bearing in mind that a Negro is an African individual trying (or compel) to deny the philosophical basis of his Africanity though s/he cannot deny its physical attributes (Khatib et al., 1975), we can view Cross’s model as stages of reconnection with the ancestral tribal self or development of African self-consciousness. African self-consciousness is part of the core system that constitutes African/“Black” personality.

In Dr Baldwin’s (1984; Baldwin et al., 1990) Africentric model of “Black” African personality, African self-consciousness “refers to the awareness and knowledge that

“Black”/Africans have and practice of themselves as African people historically, culturally, and philosophically” (Baldwin et al., 1987, p. 28). The construct basically consists of positive “Black” identity, pro-“Black” beliefs, attitudes, priorities, awareness, knowledge, and practice by “Blacks”/Africans of African philosophy and culture. African self-consciousness is partly determined by environmental experience given that it is inherently conscious. This is so because experience is the midwife of consciousness. Socio-environmental forces (e.g. significant institutional systemic process and socialisation) nurture and shape (or modify) African self-consciousness (Baldwin et al., 1990). When socio-cultural experience reflects an alien cosmology and if this experience is dominant, then a distortion may occur in the African self-consciousness (Baldwin, 1984). Baldwin (in Baldwin et al., 1990) posits too that African self-consciousness plays a crucial role in defining the normal-natural psychological functioning of “Black” personality. Also remember that African self-consciousness possesses some basic indices or characteristics:

- A person possessing an awareness of his/her African identity and cultural heritage, and seeing value in the pursuit of self-knowledge;
- the person acknowledges African survival priorities and the real need for Africentric institutions to assert “Black” life;
- the person plays an active part in the survival, liberation and proactive development of African people and defends their dignity, worth and integrity;
- the person acknowledges the opposition and detrimental nature of racial oppression to “Black” survival and actively resists it. (Baldwin, 1984; Baldwin et al., 1990)

Earlier, mention was made of the Negritude movement, we must seize the opportunity while we are explaining the concept of African self-consciousness to pinpoint the similarity between both concepts. At first, we may be tempted to believe that there is a connection between the meaning of the term “negritude” and the concept of the “Negro”, however it is much more similar to the concept of African self-consciousness; for Césaire defines Negritude as consciousness of being “Black”, a simple acknowledgment of a fact that involves acceptance and taking charge of one’s destiny as a “Black” person, one’s history and culture (France Antilles, 2008b).

The importance of the learning of one’s history is further evidenced in two case studies described by Irene Atwell and Daudi Ajani ya Azibo (1991). We can notice from these two case studies that the learning of “Black” history is even part of the treatment strategy utilised in therapy to treat personality disorders—found on Dr Azibo’s nosology⁹—impoverishing African self-consciousness or preventing its development (Atwell & Azibo, 1991). One of these major disorders is referred to as misorientation:

when an African proceeds from or negotiates the environment with a conceptual base in which African-centered psychological and behavioural elements are not the operative ones. Rather, European-centered, Arab-centered, or other non-African centered cognitive elements are operative in the conceptual base. An African so afflicted manifests an orientation to reality that does not promote the maintenance of his or her race, but promote the maintenance of the non-African group whose cognitive elements are operative in his/her psyche, including those that are anti-African” (Atwell & Azibo, 1991, p. 4)

For instance in one of the two case studies (Atwell & Azibo, 1991), a patient of mixed heritage (European and African American) diagnosed with misorientation which had led

⁹ “The Azibo Nosology is a diagnostic system of ordered and disordered African (Black) personality functioning...that systematizes 18 of the disorders of the African personality (a) with one another and (b) with the nosological system prevalent in Euro-American psychology (DSM-III)” (Azibo, 1989b, p. 173; cited in Atwell and Azibo, 1991, p. 3).

to alienating menticide¹⁰ was encouraged to read European and African history as part of the treatment strategy. This enabled her to connect with factual reality and simultaneously exploded her utopian perception about “White” society and gave her elements so that she develops pride about US African American achievements and heritage. In the other case the patient was diagnosed with misorientation, which included negromachy (confusion and doubt about self-worth pertaining to one’s “Blackness”), and compounded by menticide. For example, Ms Johnson had no working knowledge of what it meant to be “Black”, but had conveyed to her children that indeed to be “Black” was something to be ashamed of, and to work hard and overcome. She taught her daughter survival skills by encouraging her to become consistent with the larger US culture and to imitate the traits thereof. On many occasions, her daughter informed her that she felt abused by her classmates calling her names like spook, spade, nigger, Ms Johnson responded by saying “to pay no attention to the verbal abuse” and “do nothing or tell the teacher”. Accordingly, her daughter felt unnurtured, unloved, confused, and without a source of reference of how to handle overt and covert acts of discrimination and bias. Her response to pain was to exhibit assaultive and threatening behaviour. As part of the treatment strategy, the therapist encouraged her to read about African history, too.

From what has been said so far, we can therefore imply that people of African descent who have been “educated” in the French West-Indies should be at a pre-encounter stage, which means that they lack African self-consciousness and hence awareness of their African identity, unless, for instance, they have learned their people’s

¹⁰ “Render [s] the African’s psyche void of any pro-Black orientations to life....simultaneously [there is] an instilling of (a) a pro-European orientation that commands...acceptance and admiration of and allegiance to White persons and White-dominated society...and (b) the relative disparagement of all things African” (Azibo, 1989, p. 186; cited in Atwell & Azibo, 1991, p. 8)

history because African self-consciousness is nurtured and shaped (or modified) by socio-environmental forces. For instance, Baldwin et al. (1987) found that “Black” studies exposure had a strong positive impact on African self-consciousness. They found that students who had taken “Black” studies courses had significantly higher African self-consciousness scores than those who did not. Even, students, in the predominantly “White” college, who had been exposed to “Black” studies, scored significantly higher than those in the same college who had not had such exposure. These results are not surprising if we consider that the learning of our tribal history enables us to reconnect with our tribal ancestral self (Akbar, 1998). Furthermore, as contended by Akbar (1998), in the African perspective of self, the legacy of our ancestors is acknowledged as an active component of the collective and individual personality.

It will be interesting to see in the present study if the learning of their history influences African West-Indians’ awareness of their African identity. Although an African self-consciousness scale is not used in this study, by asking people about their personal “racial” label and the personal meaning of their label we will find how they are conscious of their African identity; for one’s awareness of their African identity is reflected in their “racial” self-designation label. For example, one of the basic principles of RAAMUS (Responsible African American Men United in Spirit) is: “I pledge to define and consider myself African American for only this term comes close to the realisation of my true heritage” (Ghee, 1990). Also, bear in mind that the term African American was hardly embraced when it first appeared. Ghee (1990) argues that this may have been due to the fact that the majority of Americans of African descent was not ready to relate to their original motherland and place of origin because of psychological racism

and, as already mentioned, propaganda against Africa coupled with lack of self-knowledge. The fact that “Black” people employ Afrocentric labels (e.g. African American, African Canadian) to acknowledge their African identity has been shown in some studies. For instance, in a study conducted among 232 African Americans, Speight et al. (1996) found that 41% preferred the “racial” label “Black” and 30% the label “African American”. Participants who called themselves “Black” generally stated that it was self-evident. There seems to be no ideological reason for choosing the term. Those who called themselves *American* often recognised doing so to avoid focussing on race and to indicate their American heritage. On the other hand, those who designated themselves as *African American* generally stated that the name indicated their cultural heritage and ancestors. More recently Sharon Boatswain and Richard Lalonde (2000) conducted a similar study in Canada with 101 “Black” students. 63% of the students were born in Canada and 93% of them were of Caribbean heritage. They found that 35% of participants preferred the label “Black”. Participants who preferred “Black” revealed that it was for reasons of terminology (who and what I am), racial identity (in this case, to refer to race and/or skin color) or pride. On the other hand, only, 9% of participants said that their favourite label was “African Canadian”. In the authors’ view, the various Afrocentric labels (African, African Canadian, Afro-Canadian, Afro Caribbean, African Jamaican, and African American) have impacted this result. Nonetheless, most respondents who chose an Afrocentric label said to have done so because it referred to a blended heritage or ethnic identity. It should also be noted that those participants who preferred the “racial” label “African Canadian” also scored significantly higher on African self-consciousness scale than those who designate themselves as Canadian,

Caribbean or “Black”. It is noteworthy that such words as *African American*, *Black*, *African*, etc... are also referred to as “racial” self-designation labels which are someone’s preferred name to label him/herself (Speight et al., 1996).

Additionally, the denigrated perception of African roots also instilled by means of the official historical narrative causes people to stay away from their history as they stay away from their African identity. “Blacks” at pre-encounter stage stay away from their history because, as posited by Cross (1995), their cultural bias has convinced them that there are no other histories besides Western history and no other cultural experiences than Western civilisation. Georges Combé (1980) notes this same alienation from the Creole. He holds that the latter simply mirrors West-Indians’ alienation from their own personality. As can be noticed, from what was said concerning our history, it explodes the myth of the savage African. Consequently, learning it will not only enable African West-Indians to view their people in a more positive light and therefore be able to better embrace what belongs to their own people such as their history. If there is a positive correlation between African self-consciousness and “Black” people’s study of their history, and if African self-consciousness involves seeing value in the pursuit of self-knowledge—also acquired by learning one’s history—one can expect the learning of their history to positively influence African Guadeloupeans’ interest in seeking their history. Such an influence can be expected knowing too that it is the negative portraying of our people in the official historical narrative that pushes us away from our history and that the Afrocentric perspective also deals with the positive of our history.

In providing information about the positive in our history, the Afrocentric perspective explodes the myth of the savage, uncivilised African which is part of the

collective unconscious of African West-Indians. According to Cross (1995), among poor, anti-“Black” “Blacks” there is a belief that in some ways “Blacks” merit the misery accompanying poverty. Extreme miseducation can lead to a lot of doubts regarding the abilities and the capacities of “Black” leaders, “Black” business, and “Black” professionals, but to the same level of romanticization and near mystification of the capacities and talents of “Whites” (Cross, 1995). Moreover, we know that part of one of the characteristics of African self-consciousness is to defend the dignity, worth and integrity of African people (Baldwin et al., 1990). To do so implies that one recognises such qualities in the people, which can be difficult, perhaps even impossible, if one perceives the people as being savages or uncivilised. We can, therefore view having a positive image of the people as part of a developing or developed African self-consciousness. These are some of the reasons a positive relationship can be predicted between the learning of their history and African West-Indians’ view of their own people.

Furthermore, since organised forgetting of the past was aimed at leading African West-Indians to view France as the motherland and assimilate them into the French nation we can expect a negative relationship between the learning of their history and African West-Indian individuals’ perception of France. This means that as African West-Indians learn their history their identification with France as the motherland lessens.

SUMMARY

To recapitulate, according to Dr Cross (1995), the development of the identity of “Blacks”/Africans goes through different stages from the Negro state where one is alienated from his/her African roots and uses “White” standards to make sense of his/her

world to the development of a “Black”/Afrocentric identity. One can view Cross’ model of development of “Black”/Afrocentric identity as stages of development of African self-consciousness. African self-consciousness is the awareness and knowledge that “Blacks”/Africans possess and practice of themselves as African people historically, culturally, and philosophically”. “Black” people’s African self-consciousness can also be noticed through the Afrocentric labels they use to designate their “racial” identity.

Research reveals a strong positive correlation between African self-consciousness and “Black” studies exposure. Though the present study does not measure African self-consciousness, it explores the influence of learning of one’s history on one’s awareness of one’s African identity—one of the criteria of African self-consciousness—by making use of “racial” labels. Since the Afrocentric approach of history deals with the positive of “Black” history it explodes the myth of the savage African, so the influence of the learning of our history on another criteria of African self-consciousness, i.e. interest in seeking one’s history, as well as on one’s image of the people is investigated. Finally, with the past being remembered through the learning of history let us see whether participants still relate to France as the motherland.

The purpose of this study is to explore how the learning of their history influences a small group of African West-Indians’ awareness of their African identity, interest in seeking their history, their view of their own people and their view of France. Let us see now what we have learnt from those African West-Indians.

Chapter 4

LEARNING FROM A GROUP OF STUDENT- TEACHERS AT AMON-RA

METHOD

Design

Earlier we have discussed how the official historical narrative, which overlooks or distorts their history, further alienates African West-Indians from their African identity, as well as strengthens their inferiority complex, thus reinforcing the malaise with their identity. We have also dealt with the positive impacts of exposure to “Black” studies on African Americans. The point of this study was to explore how the learning of their people’s history influences a small group of people of African descent’s awareness of their African identity, interest in seeking their people’s history, their view of France and their view of their own people. The study also provides the opportunity to find out about participants’ experiences before they began to learn their history. A qualitative case study was conducted at the school Amon-Ra to this end. There, the focus was placed on the work done at l’Arbre à Palabre to educate people of African descent in the history of their people, and particularly, on the influences of the learning of this history on them.

Participants

Before going to Guadeloupe I had sent a letter to the manager of the centre to also be read to his students. The letter contained information about the purpose of the study, what to do in case they agreed to participate in the study, including the filling of a consent form (Appendix F)—also sent to the manager. All consent forms were signed by participants and handed to me by the manager of the centre on the first day of our meeting. The letter also stated the criteria used to identify participants: be over 18 years old, be Guadeloupean of African descent, to have been exposed to our history for over two years. It is worth noting that two of these criteria were not met: one person who is from Martinique was included in the study because she expressed her wish to be part of the study. We agreed to include her, knowing too that her participation could not distort the study since she has been living in Guadeloupe for a while now, attending university and is currently working there. Furthermore, Guadeloupe and Martinique have a similar history, are both governed by France and therefore have the same school system with, therefore, similar drawbacks. Moreover, the literature review also includes the work of writers from Martinique (Fanon, 1952; Césaire, 2004; Glissant, 1997).

Another criterion which was not met is the time participants had been exposed to their history. Not all participants had been at l'Arbre à Palabre for over two years. One respondent, Frederic, had been attending l'Arbre à Palabre for about one year and half. This did not represent a drawback for the study as will be seen later on. Another participant, Fabrice, had officially been at Amon-Ra for about six months but had been exposed to our history well before attending l'Arbre à Palabre. Fabrice was the one who had greater knowledge concerning our history before coming to Amon-Ra. By listening

to roots reggae music he knew that our history did not start with slavery, that we had a history before that, and a positive one. He knew about great “Blacks” such as Marcus Garvey, Stephen Biko. The other students reckoned that they did not know much about our history before coming to Amon-Ra.

The sample was a purposive one targeting members attending l’Arbre à Palabre, however, their participation into the study depended on their willingness and availability too. The seven adults (the manager: Mitchel Clarac; his six student-teachers, Josué, Tania, Chantal, Guerrier Gwada, Frédéric and Fabrice), who volunteered to participate in the study were indeed willing and available, therefore, everything went very smoothly. There was no need to run after anybody for the interviews, the mood was very positive, and it was always pleasant to be around the participants of whom two were women and five men.

Two participants were in their forties, two in their fifties, two in their thirties and one was in her late twenties. With the exception of two of them as is often the case in the French West-Indies most of them went and pursued their education (generally higher education) in France. Participants’ educational level ranged from high school diplomas to doctorate. The students were employed in the public sector, private sector or self-employed. This demographic information is presented below:

Table 1

Demographic information

N°	Genders	Ages	Education Levels	Occupations	Years at A-R
1	Female	27½	Master in physical sciences	Teacher in primary school	7½
2	Male	37	University diploma taken after 2 years of studies in human sciences	Photographiste & apprentice farmer	6 months
3	Male	58	International bachelor in crime investigation & Diplomas in martial arts	Amon-Ra manager & Yamabushi Ninja monk	N/A
4	Female	56	Diplome d'état in social work	Social worker	2
5	Male	37	Vocational diploma	Business employee	1½
6	Male	47	PhD	Executive	2
7	Male	42	Brevet de maîtrise in Cake-Making (Bachelor level)	Confectioner	2

Data collection procedure and analysis

Interviews, which were audio-recorded, were the main instrument used to gather data. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they enable participants to have enough space to say their own words while allowing me to explore the themes of interest. The interviews were conducted in a place where I could be alone with the participant either on the second floor of the centre or in the Manager's office. Interviews were generally conducted in French but on one occasion a part of an interview was done in

Creole at the request of one participant. As the participant told me there are things that can be better expressed in Creole.

One interview schedule was employed to interview students (Appendix G). Demographic data, about age, occupation, schooling level were gathered in a first step to see how diverse the sample was. I also inquired about where they studied to check if they studied within the French schooling system. Then, they were asked questions more in relation to the purpose of the study. As mentioned earlier, ideas for some of the interview questions stemmed from the literature, however, some were constructed based on a list of categories of questions used to stimulate responses from participants, found in Sharan Merriam's (1998) book. In either case, it is the purpose of the study which guided ideas retained to write interview questions:

- How long have you been attending the school?

(To have an idea about how motivated they are, especially because attendance is based on students' willingness).

- Why did you start to attend the school? (After interviewing the first student-teacher I realised that I should certainly also inquire about why they started to attend l'Arbre à Palabre because that is what I was interested in. So I asked them this question and the following one in relation to l'Arbre à Palabre).

- Why did you carry on coming?

(Knowing students' motivation may enable to find out if interest in learning their people's history is a motivating factor).

- What do you think of the initiative of the teaching of our history?
- How do you view the education of the children of Guadeloupe?

(To learn more about what they think of the official historical narrative and of the learning of our history).

- If I was at Amon-Ra, what would I have learnt about the history of our people?
- What did you know about our history before attending the school? Where did you get this information?
- Why come to Amon-Ra to learn history when you learn it at school?

(To see in what ways what they learn now differs from what they learnt before).

- If I call you “African” how will you feel?
- Some people would say that the learning of our history can only inflate our racial pride, what do you think?
- What label would you use to describe your identity? “Black”, French, African Guadeloupean, African or other.
- What is the personal meaning of this label?

(These questions will enable to find out if the learning of their history has influenced participants’ awareness of their African identity. Furthermore, we see from previous studies mentioned above that asking people about the personal meaning of their label informs us about their awareness of their African identity).

- If I say “Black” people what comes to your mind today?

(We have already talked about the negative image that “Blacks” have of their people let us see if their learning of their history helps them develop a more positive view of their people).

- Some “Black” Guadeloupeans would say that France is the motherland, what would you say to them?

(To see if learning their history alters how they perceive France).

The other interview schedule was used to conduct the interview with the manager (Appendix H). The manager was asked some of the questions asked to the students. However, the manager's schedule differed somewhat from the students' because we know—from his initiative to set up l'Arbre à Palabre—that the manager is working to implement changes in Guadeloupe, so we need to have more information about his work, his motives, what pushed him to act and the role played by knowledge of our history.

Questions were not always asked following the order in which they figured on the interview schedule. The order was sometimes dictated by participants' comments. On occasions new questions were also asked to further probe participants. An instance of such probes is: Would you come to Amon-Ra if they were telling you the same thing that they told you at school?

Following advice from the American Guidance Service (2000), I made sure to develop a rapport with each respondent before each interview. So, with the intent of doing so, just before each interview I reminded each participant the purpose of the study (i.e. investigate how the learning of their history influences them), that the interview would be recorded. I also explained to them that during the interview I would ask them demographic questions then proceed with questions which are more related to the purpose of the study. Participants were informed as well that sometimes I might seem to contradict what they say but it is not meant to lead them to change their viewpoints, but to obtain clarifications or stimulate responses. Once more I indicated to them that they should not hesitate to tell me whenever they feel uncomfortable with a question. They were told too that there were no wrong answers, what matters were their words and

because it was their words that mattered they should not hear my viewpoints but only questions. In addition, I also asked them permission to interview them again in case I needed further information and reminded them that they could choose to remain anonymous or not. Because participants could decide of their level of anonymity, two people chose to be called under pseudonyms.

Data collection was done alongside data analysis. I did not, as suggested by Merriam (1988; 1998), record information in interview logs after each interview because sometimes due to time constraints or depending on the students' availability I had to carry more than one interview a day, but never more than three in a row. On the other hand, I did not wait until all the data were collected either. Here are in greater details the steps used to analyse the data:

- To avoid leaving the bulk of the work to the last minute, when I returned home, after conducting one, two or three interview(s) a day, I began the data analysis by listening to a participant's recorded interview, extracted units of data and entered the units in his/her log (Appendix I). I mostly recorded, on the logs, bits of information that were relevant for the study, and as I recorded them on the log I wrote down in the column, Researcher's Notes, the theme or any idea which arose from this particular piece of information. Furthermore, in the left hand column, next to each bit of information I indicated the tape position of the information to more easily retrieve the information when needed. Once all data were gathered for the first interviews and entered in their respective interview log I organised my data for further analysis.

- To check whether I had gathered all necessary information, units of data were grouped by themes. To do so, once I had all my interview logs I created a Theme Table

(Appendix J); on the top of the table the four themes of the study were inscribed, each in a distinct column. One column was entitled “Awareness of African identity”, one was called “Interest in seeking their history”, another one “View of their people” and the last one “View of France”. At this point, the themes were named based on the phenomenon under investigation in the study. Indeed sometimes the data enabled me to rethink and modified some terms used. I have used both deductive and inductive reasoning in my analysis. I started with deductive reasoning because, at the stage of the thesis proposal, teachers most of the time asked me to justify or to become more explicit, which led me to become increasingly specific and to determine the themes in advance. On the left side of the Theme Table, in distinct rows were the respondents’ names. Afterwards, I read the log more thoroughly to see if there was additional data, if so I indicated them. Then, I refer to the column Researcher’s Notes of interview logs, and used the identified themes to locate the relevant units of data. When I deemed that satisfying units of data had been collected for a participant on a theme, on the Theme Table I ticked the appropriate column and row, and inscribed next to the tick the respective log page number(s) in order to more easily locate bits of information on the log in further data analysis. When I lacked information on a theme, for a participant I indicated it in the respective column and row of the Theme Table, and formulated on a separate piece of paper the question to be asked to the participant in a second interview in order to gather the data.

- Afterwards, I used the Theme Table to obtain the log page number(s) of a participant’s comment(s). And on new logs created for each theme and each participant, were rewritten comment(s), notes and any other ideas which came to mind. Here is an instance of these new logs:

Table 2

A new log (with an example)

<u>Awareness of African Identity</u>		
(Fabrice)		
Tape Position	Participant's comments	Researcher's notes
43 : 34	<u>Etiquette [racial label]?</u> Africain [African] (p. 12)	
44 : 25	<u>Que signifie personnellement pour toi ce label [What does this label personally mean for you]? (p. 12)</u> Ce label, pour moi ce n'est même pas un label, c'est pas un label. Le fait de l'être c'est une fierté. On ne peut pas aller contre nature. On est ce qu'on est, pour moi être Africain c'est une fierté, une grande fierté. [This label, for me is not even a label. Being an African is a pride. We cannot go against nature, we are what we are. For me, to be African is a pride, a big pride.]	
45 : 40	<u>T'es-tu toujours appelé Africain (Have you always called yourself an African)?</u> Tout à fait, je me suis toujours appelé Africain (Anecdote). [Absolutely, I have always called myself an African (Anecdote)]	S'est toujours vu comme un Africain [always perceived himself as an African]

- Somewhat inspired by Merriam's (1998) suggestion, with these newly created logs, I constituted four files; one for each theme with each participant's comments on the theme, each log bearing the name of a participant.

- Upon completion of the second interviews, I repeated the steps described above and since the needed data had been gathered, the Theme Table was updated and the files were completed.

- With the files now complete, I focussed on analysing the content of participants' comments theme by theme in order to let them talk to me some more and carry on interpreting them. The names of the themes were modified based on the findings; this is why we now have: "Aware of their African Identity", "Interested in Seeking our History", "Have a Positive image of our People", and "Africa, the Motherland".

Though data were mainly collected by means of interviews (formal and informal), I also attended three Arbre à Palabre not as a participant but as an observer and read a document on the Yamabushi to learn more about Mitchel's background.

Debriefing

Almost at the end of my stay, when the data collection phase was over, the manager made time for me to explain to the student-teachers the themes I explored in the study. I presented to them a summary of the results by highlighting similarities in their experiences and comments, and drew connections with theories on "Black"/African personality development and what previous, similar research had found. As emphasised to the participants this was only a summary, so each one of them will get a copy of the full scale study when it comes out. This will be a way to reward them for their good will and very positive attitudes.

In addition, as I know myself to be very passionate about our history, I made sure during the interview to remain as neutral in words and attitudes as possible but I also,

after conducting all interviews, handed each participant a questionnaire (Appendix K) to know what they thought about our first meeting just before the interview, about the interview and to check whether I influenced their views. They were told that they could choose to remain anonymous, but most of them chose to write down their names. Their remarks enable to further increase the credibility of the study. When asked what they thought of the first meeting just before the interview, one participant said that it was too centered on history and that the vocation of Amon-Ra encompasses much more than the teaching of history. Otherwise for the remaining participants you could read such answers as: “It was simple, without stress, direct, everything we were going to do was clearly explained, it enabled the interviewee to be at ease with his answers, useful or necessary for the interview, interesting and made me confident, we were able to get along with the interviewer.”

As to what they thought of the way the interviews unfolded, here are the comments that were expressed: “satisfactory, overall the questions were well presented with great softness, good unfolding, it went super well, very pleasant and instructive since it was within the realm of our knowledge on Negro¹¹-African culture and civilisation and Afrocentric perspectives, questions were precise and explicit, very good preparation and professionalism from the interviewer because there was no lull and I had time to answer, in a relax atmosphere.” One participant revealed that he was under the impression that there was a strong return to his past, the key periods of his youth. Another one revealed that it enabled her to clarify the changes which occurred within her. Due to the interview

¹¹ I do not agree with the usage of the word Negro, but it is going to be employed when I report the comments of the participants of the study because they often use it but with a positive connotation to stress their “Blackness”. Similar usage of the word is made by other West-Indians and “Blacks” in France too.

she realised that she still had a lot to learn, that she had to analyse some of her reflections a bit more. In this participant's judgement, only positive came out of this experience (interview). Finally, another person said she was curious and interested.

When asked whether they felt at one moment or another that I tried to get them to change their viewpoint, one participant said that he was under this impression sometimes. Another person said that I got them to be sharper. The other participants clearly answered no. Some of them stressed that they were free to express their viewpoints. One of these participants noticed that some questions were not in line with negro-African thought, but it was to have their deep thought. "This", says she, "pushed us out of our comfort zone, therefore we had to argue and get everything out of our guts".

In the last question I sought to know if I had influenced their viewpoints and all respondents answered a categorical "no" to this question. Some people emphasised that they could express their own ideas. One person said that the questions asked were precise and direct, that my intervention during the interview was measured, not excessive. She also said that her viewpoint did not change at all during the interview to the contrary she caught herself voicing opinions in a more categorical manner maybe due to the fact that she feels things more with her being, with her heart. Another person said that there was a great deal of objectivity on my part and even neutrality because I never intervene in a contradictory way. Finally, one participant wrote that he felt at ease due to the fact that he felt that it was his viewpoint that was important.

Before presenting findings, it is first appropriate to introduce the place where the study was conducted.

THE SETTING

Amon-Ra

In the heart of the city of Pointe-à-Pitre, on a street called Sadi Carnot not too far from a high school bearing the same name there is a white building. There is nothing unusual about the building itself so well that we might even miss the sign with the inscription Amon-Ra on the front wall of the ground floor. And yet if there is nothing unusual about the building itself, there is definitely something unusual about what is done within it as implied by the name inscribed on it. The name Amon-Ra which has been chosen to honor the African divinity of the same name revealed to our ancestors also stands for Arts Martiaux Organisation Ninja – Region Antilles. As a federation itself, the evaluation to go to the different levels (belts) can be done directly by Amon-Ra; no need to go through a French or European federation as is generally the case in Guadeloupe.

Created in 1993, Amon-Ra is a place where such martial arts as Ninjutsu (the art of Ninja Warriors) and Wong Kem Dangu are taught. The latter was practiced by the Zulus and the Masais who were the body guards of pharaoh. As time went by many of these techniques were shelved. With research Mitchel found some of them, restructured them and gave them the name Wong Kem Dangu which means “School of ‘Black’ Warriors”. So is the Ninjutsu within the realm of the African tradition because the basic techniques of this art are African warrior techniques. We can still find these techniques in South Africa among the Zulus and in Benin. Some of the techniques found in the Ninjutsu are found in the Wong Kem Dangu but are more developed in the latter.

Furthermore, as intended by his creator, Mitchel Clarac, youth and older people can find at Amon-Ra an ancestral treasure: l’Arbre à Palabre which will be presented later on.

Apart from the aforementioned activities, yoga, plantar reflexology are offered free of charge to students and their parents.

I use to call Amon-Ra a school but if you discuss with some of its members you realise that it is not a school in the traditional sense of the term and that by calling it a school you may fail to capture its dimension. Thus, to have a better idea of Amon-Ra's dimension let us see what some of its members are saying. Josué reveals:

I would not consider this [Amon-Ra] to be a school; I consider this to be a research center. It is not about come and sit, take notes and after say that we have information

This research center enables us to put in place what was dismantled [...]. Some people may call it the CNRS (Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques), others a laboratory.

According to Frederic, Amon-Ra is:

The only place I know where real quality work is done on ourselves. It is no joke, it is truly serious work, done with much love and seriousness.

Likewise, Chantal told me:

Amon-Ra is a school that is intrinsically complete, which helps every individual evolve towards what is already within him.

I have always told Mitchel that this was a superior course. This is a school at a superior level.

In this place the student-teachers are talking about, members must remove their shoes before entering and greet each other by placing one hand on their heart and offering it to those they greet, while simultaneously pronouncing the following words “Yo kem our” (Salut grand nègre) or “Yo sa ta” (Salut fils/fille de la terre)¹². The first room you enter—where discussions and training take place—hardly possesses any furniture; you may find in a corner one or two chairs. You will not miss the display of weapons used in martial arts on the walls, and if one desires to look at him/herself during training there are

¹² According to Mitchel Clarac, “Yo” is a term found in many “Black”-African languages. “Sa ta”, “Kem our” are words from ancient Egyptian language.

mirrors on the wall to do so. You will also see in front of you an altar with a Buddha and opposite the altar on a shelf the sculpture of the Indian God Shiva. On other parts of the shelf you can see display Michel Clarac's diplomas in martial arts—some are written in Japanese, others in English and other ones in French. The atmosphere of the place is very warm, family-like, you feel at ease, you feel at home; an atmosphere which is, in other words, an invitation to come back.

All these positive comments about Amon-Ra may have fed your curiosity about its founder, Mitchel Clarac.

The founder

One of his student-teachers confessed that he considers him to be a kind of great professor, a kind of great researcher. I can definitely say that Mitchel Clarac is a man with valuable assets who has chosen to transmit some of his assets to the people who want them, on his native land. Born in Guadeloupe—like many West-Indians—Mitchel Clarac went to France to pursue his higher education, there he joined the non commissioned officer school of Nîmes Courbessac where he started a career in the Air Force and left five years later. In the meantime, Mitchel had prepared an international bachelor in criminal investigation which enabled him to be a police investigator then, to establish his own school in France and in Guadeloupe to prepare body guards for politicians, etc....

It is in Bordeaux, France, that Mitchel Clarac met the man who became his spiritual father and taught him yoga, Ti Aga Maga, the spiritual son of Master Vedatri Maglashy in India. Moreover, Clarac spent overall 15 years of his life in Japan, where he is a

yamabushi monk, laic ninja in the Grand Imperial temple of Kyoto. But what is a Yamabushi? In an article entitled *Les Yamabushi, Templiers de l'Orient* (Karaté Bushido, 2003; The Yamabushi, Templar of the East) readers are informed that Yamabushi (Those who sleep in the mountain) are adepts of the Shugendo (the mountain religion), a Japanese, spiritual tradition in service of martial arts. Literally, Shugendo means the “way (dô) of powers (gen) obtained through asceticism¹³ (shu)”. The Shugendo is the way of acquisition of divine power by the virtuous practice of asceticism. By following a set of rules, rites, ascetic exercises, the Yamabushi seeks union with the mountain divinities. In turn, he acquires powers he can use in society through practices of divination, oracles, magic, healing. To have a better idea of what is asceticism a glimpse at some of the challenges that comprise it is required. One of these challenges includes 12 hours walk a day during several days. A walk made of relentless upward and downward slopes on crests measuring from 800 to 2,000 meters. There is the challenge of the precipice as well, which consists of hanging the Neophyte by his waist and ankle above a precipice. During this challenge the neophyte is compelled to reveal his faults and wrongdoings, and pledges to respect the rules of Shugendo. Not to mention the walk on fire as a kind of prayer and offering. During the practice of asceticism, Yamabushi must recite sacred texts and invocations. By jeopardising their lives the Yamabushi purify themselves of the stains that are part of the human condition. Through body sufferings, similar to mortifications, the Yamabushi become aware of their spiritual dimensions, thus merging with the Gods, the Buddha and the universe (Karaté Bushido, 2003).

¹³ A set of practices whose aim is the moral perfecting as well as the spiritual progress of the individual (Karaté Bushido, 2003)

One can only want to learn from a man with such precious assets—these are not all of them—and moreover, who is definitely willing to transmit them for he has created Amon-Ra because he thought that as a specialist he had to bring something to his people, and not just anything. He wanted something that came close to our anterior reality in order to better approach an interior reality. What he means is that he practices an art which is very close to us: the art of Ninjas (Ninjutsu). That is why they talk about warrior¹⁴ and not combatant, just like the African tradition. Besides, still according to Mitchel Clarac, among Ninjas there is an important esoteric part which stems from a branch of voodoo. Another of his valuable asset is his knowledge of history, which he acquired through encounters with people who have become his spiritual guides as well as by doing his own research.

It is true that Amon-Ra offers different activities, however one of the activities that is of great interest to us for the purpose of the study is, as Clarac put it, the ancestral treasure, l'Arbre à Palabre.

L'Arbre à Palabre

Set up twelve years ago, l'Arbre à Palabre is group discussions whose main goal is to enable the student-teachers to appropriate their cultural past with all its wonderful and painful aspects, and allow them to embrace their humanity. In fact, l'Arbre à Palabre is the cultural part of the Wong Kem Dangu. It is therefore attended by those who do the Wong Kem Dangu, though those who do the Ninjutsu are not excluded. Among its attendees we can, from time to time, count people who are outside Amon-Ra such as

¹⁴ According to Clarac, a warrior is the one who accepts to give his life for the majority of his people from the moment he deems his mission just, unlike the combatant who flees if there are too many bullets whistling on his head.

scientists and people from the university. Just as attendees greet each other upon entering and leaving Amon-Ra, a similar greeting also takes place before and at the end of each Arbre à Palabre.

L'Arbre à Palabre, as was done in ancient times and as it is still done today in some remote areas of Africa. Back in Africa, people gathered around a tree—baobab—which was located in the middle of the village and it was there that justice was delivered. At Amon-Ra, discussions may take place within the walls or in the midst of nature. When discussions occur within the walls, attendees use their fruitful imagination to imagine the tree in the middle of the room. This tree which becomes sacred possesses natural strength, wisdom so well that the mere fact that they are sitting around it they absorb some of its strength, wisdom and power. Sitting on the ground is also their way of becoming rooted by the coccyx so that they can draw energy from the ground.

Through this simple ritual they fully enter the cultural wealth: How African ancestors used to live and their legacy to humanity across centuries. At l'Arbre à Palabre the student-teachers learn, for example, about the origins of humanity, about the accomplishments of our people before being torn away from Africa as well as about their spirituality. Let us hear some of the student-teachers on what I could have learnt if I was at Amon-Ra:

You would have learnt that, up to now, regardless of what is being said, it is a people who are at the root of civilisation, of humanity. It is a people who were very organised, very rigorous, who lived in community, who had within their organisation schools where agriculture, dance, and diverse domains of everyday life were taught. It is a people who are at the root of everything and many people have drawn from, have adopted their ways and today officially they downright attempt to overlook the contribution of Negro-African people in the advance of humanity.

Everything. Where you come from, why you are the way you are, your history, your culture, it will also teach you to accept yourself as you are and not as others would like you to be.

A great deal, a great deal, a great deal of things. I think we are developing three domains here: religious, cultural and historical. In the religious domain we learn what our ancestors were doing before as rituals, meditation [...]. On the cultural side, we emphasise what our ancestors were doing here in the West-Indies. On the historical aspect, it is truly what happened in Africa on the motherland well before slavery, well before Europeans set foot in Africa. When we talk about Ancient Egypt, we mainly stop at everything religious.

If you were at Amon-Ra you would have learnt that we are at the root of civilisation contrarily to what they told us. They always told us that we were inferior and when we are at Amon-Ra we learn that we were the first, therefore at the origin of civilisation. These are two different pieces of information. It is as if before our chin was down and now it is high. We have access to a great deal of information teaching us what we truly are.

If you had been at l'Arbre à Palabre on evenings I had been there, you could have heard discussions on Obama's election which led to comparisons between African-Americans' and African-Guadeloupeans' history and situation as well as discussions on the honour code of the warrior of Wong Kem Dangu and the meaning of its different principles. You could have learnt during some of the talks that there are two grand initiations that we must go through: Initiation to Maat (truth, justice, balance, harmony) and warrior initiation. You could have also heard that Shintoism in Japan and Taoism in China are branches of Voodoo.

During l'Arbre à Palabre information is transmitted following the African ancestral tradition: orally. The discussions, led by Mitchel Clarac, are not boring and monotonous. From what I have seen, Clarac is a poised man, with a smooth and gentle walk. These qualities coupled with the manner he carries his chin high may be revealing of someone who feels at home in his own body, of someone who seems well established within his person. Thus, when he delivers his talks it is with much calm and assertiveness that he does so, imparting information as if he was telling a story, a great story, by throwing in, from time to time, a touch of humour especially when pointing out the contradictions of some texts, in the bible for instance. And sometimes, as also stated by Chantal, Clarac

invites people to intervene. “In inviting ethnologists, historians, writers”, says Clarac, “they learn something more because it is obvious that to always see the same person teaching, we feel like hearing someone else.” What adds to the liveliness and pleasantness of these discussions is also the fact that Clarac leaves space for anybody who desires to express themselves. More important, attendees are encouraged to say their own words, to be the author of their words. For instance, during one group discussion where students had to give their opinions about some conferences on “Black” African spirituality they attended the week before, I heard the Manager correct a student—who started her sentence by “I do not know what the others think”—by saying “never mind what others think, tells us what you think”. Indeed, Amon-Ra does not view the students as mere containers, but as student-teachers. This is also why they are encouraged to do personal readings and research on ancestral traditions and history to contribute to the discussions. For instance, some of the students are currently researching the name of the African group from which they come from.

So different is the work done at l’Arbre à Palabre from what they experienced before, some student-teachers are reluctant to call it history. For instance, one student-teacher revealed:

Ah yes, we learn a great deal, a great deal about Black history but it is not a history course. He [Mitchel Clarac] invites people to intervene [...] and they tell us about our origins, our origins that have been scoffed at. It is not a history course, it is about how we can position ourselves, it is about how we revisit our history because at school we learnt by heart our ancestors the Gauls [...]. So, about history, yes, but mainly on us, on what we are, and on our origins, on what we were....

As we have seen in Chapter Two, school children are still mainly learning about others in history classes and on the rare occasions they are allowed to learn about their own history

they receive distorted information. At Amon-Ra, as the student-teachers acknowledge, they are learning their history, they are getting self-knowledge.

Listen, what best proof we can have about the effectiveness of our work than to find out that the goal we had in mind is felt due to the work we do by those concerned. Clarac's intention in assigning the attendees the type of aforementioned activities is for them to realise that we are all potential teachers, and this Josué, for instance, has realised:

We are not necessarily students, each of us is a student and a teacher at the same time; while we receive from Mitchel we also bring for Mitchel. Our culture and knowledge allow us to exchange, evolve at different level because Mitchel has been doing this longer than us.

Furthermore, like Clarac, all participants have understood the importance of learning our history. They have understood that not only it addresses a need, but it also provides knowledge of self. What follows are samples of what the student-teachers answered when I asked them what they thought of the initiative concerning the teaching of our history:

So, I will say that this is an enlightening, wonderful initiative, and then mainly useful, useful because till today in the French schooling system, they do not teach African history as it is done at Amon-Ra, that is in a way which is true, in a way which is real, what truly happened. Therefore, I can only greet the initiative.

It is something really important for a people to know who they are and in the furthest away past as possible. So, it is important to know who we are and this is what enables us to affirm ourselves even in everyday life.

It must be emphasised that they have understood the importance of the learning of our history not only for themselves but also for the youth because they all deem that our history should be taught in schools. Some of them have even started to share their knowledge with those around them.

Now, it is time to discuss in what ways the learning of our history has influenced this small group of African West-Indians.

THE INFLUENCE OF ONE'S HISTORY

I could have chosen to investigate the influence of learning their history on a number of factors, but literature review and the heart dictated four of them, which are in my view of great importance: 1) Awareness of African identity; 2) interest in seeking one's history; 3) view of France; 4) view of their people. With the intent of seeking answers to these two questions: 1) How are African West-Indians influenced by the learning of their history? 2) How is learning about the history of our people an effective tool to enable people of African descent overcome their malaise with their African identity? the study explored the influence of learning of their history in relation to the four themes just stated.

However, the first section will be dedicated to “pride” partly because it emerged sometimes spontaneously during interviews. This theme is discussed first with the aim of voicing the opinions of those who are learning their history in order to address claims that Afrocentricity inflates the “racial” pride of children in an attempt to correct or overlook the latter's academic deficiencies.

Pride

Based on Chantal's comments, one learns that at Amon-Ra student-teachers also learn the pride to be “Black”.

So, about history, yes, but mainly on...the pride we must have to be Black.

Pride because at Amon-Ra they learn about positive aspects of their people through history, unlike school children. Bear in mind what another student-teacher said earlier: “It is as if before our chin was down and now it is high.”

Moreover, when I asked participants what they would answer to the people who argue that the learning of our history can only inflate our “racial” pride, Josué replied:

Everybody is happy to know their history. Everybody feels strong when they know their history (...). Why should we feel uncomfortable because we know our history although it is painful?

I believe that others say this because they do not want us to move forward and for us to always be the people they throw the stone at. Either they are scared of seeing us in relation to our capacities because for someone who has always been denigrated, to see them become.

Fabrice called this argument, a joke, a sham, and went on explaining:

These same people who say this know their history, so every people have a legitimate right to conduct research, to have above all, knowledge of what their ancestors have done. So, I do not understand why it would be valid for a White person and as soon as a Black person does it, it would be to inflate his/her racial side. That is where we once more realise that everybody is not placed on equal footing. With regards to this question, I have got an interrogation that comes to mind. That is, why it bothers them that a people seek their history through its own means, that is, in autonomous manner with some intellectual freedom?

Chantal stated it so clearly when she said:

But we do not have a racial pride yet since we want to resemble the other, we want to look like Whites, we are Westerners. We do not have our Negro-African pride yet. Negro-African is a word I have been using only since I have been coming to Amon-Ra.

Implicit in Chantal’s comments highlighted in bold is the role of “racial” pride to help us overcome our alienation. Thus, the development of “racial” pride not necessarily being a bad thing, as argued earlier, is supported by Chantal’s comments, but also echoed by Tania:

They are not wrong but they too are proud of their race and why we, who are Negro-African would not be. We, to whom they always said “you are at the bottom, you are not intelligent, you are no good”, why wouldn’t we be proud of our race? It bothers me a little bit, it means they have the right and we don’t. I do not agree with this at all, at all. Even as far as youth are concerned, I can see how they are completely lost, if we gave them benchmarks, things they could be proud of, I think it would change a lot of things, it would change their way of thinking, acting towards others. [...] And it would be pretty good for young people to be proud of their race. It is a pity that there is only one Amon-Ra centre, that there is only one place where we learn history.

During the interview Tania told me something about what the learning of their history could bring young people, thereby providing additional support for the possible role of pride in helping overcome feelings of inferiority:

They [young people] could become much more proud of themselves, regarding their behaviour this would change things enormously, in fact their view of the world: don't feel like outcasts, don't feel like they won't achieve much because they are Black especially in the West-Indies, don't believe that high positions can only be occupied by one category of people.

Guerrier Gwada even argued that we must be proud of ourselves, but emphasised that "it is not a kind of pride to belittle others but to be proud to be oneself, to move as a Negro-African.

To sum up, comments from some African West-Indians who are learning their history refute the claim that the Afrocentric version of history inflates "racial" pride in an attempt to correct or overlook people's academic deficiencies. They view the development of pride as something positive and important. This pride the student-teachers are talking about is not a pride to address or overlook academic deficiencies, especially when we see from the demographic data that they have rather good levels of schooling and in some case high levels of schooling. It is rather pride in the sense of being contented and happy about who one is, instead of feeling low about it and hence wanting to resemble someone else. Their comments also seem to reveal a link between learning one's history and the development of "racial" pride, however further investigations are needed before drawing any conclusions about such a relationship. Further investigations are required because this section did not seek to deal with the relationship between the development of pride and learning one's history but to inform detractors of Afrocentric versions of history.

Let us now see what the exploration has revealed about the influence of the learning of our history on each of the four themes which originally guided the study:

Aware of their African identity

Data was gathered to explore whether the learning our history influenced this small group of African West-Indians' awareness of their African identity. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the study does not use a scale to measure African self-consciousness, but people's awareness of their African identity—a criterion of one of the characteristics of African self-consciousness—can be noticed through the “racial” labels they use.

On the seven participants, only one of them revealed that he always called himself African. Fabrice revealed that even before having all this knowledge he felt proud to be called an African; in his judgement, it is all normal. On the other hand, another respondent's, (Guerrier Gwada) comments are rather revealing of his ambiguity with his identity. He said that unlike many West-Indians he never rejected his African origins and always considered himself closer to an African than to a European. Yet, paradoxically he shared a little bit “Whites” ideas on Africans. Guerrier Gwada also added “I never considered myself to be either a French man or an African.” We can, therefore, infer that though he did not outright reject his African identity, this participant did not fully embrace his African identity. Besides, his following comment, when asked the label he would use to define his identity, shows that it is the learning of his history that has enabled him to become aware of it.

Negro-African or Kamit¹⁵ born in Guadeloupe. These are expressions that suit me quite well since there is a link between the past and our origins [...] **In coming to**

¹⁵ The name of the inhabitants of Kemet (Ancient Egypt).

Amon-Ra, by pondering over the Negro-African culture one has less tendency to say that one is purely Guadeloupean.

As to the five remaining participants before learning their history, they did not acknowledge their African identity. We can deduce from their comments that it is indeed their learning of their history that has positively influenced their awareness of their African identity. As previously stated, Chantal said that she has been using the word Negro-African only since she has been coming to Amon-Ra. An expression she uses, according to her, to properly define her origins. She stresses:

I am Negro-African due to history. Due to the history I learn here [Amon-Ra]. That of the slave trade left me the history that I had French origins.

Chantal's statement illustrates the intent of the official historical narrative which we have discussed in the literature review: to cut West-Indians of African descent from their African roots. She was part of these people who would have felt insulted before if you called her African. Today, she reckons that she will not feel bad. She holds as well:

It is as if I have reconciled myself with something to be Negro-African.

When asked with what she has reconciled herself she replied with "my Negro side more than with the European side."

Like Chantal, the remaining four participants have also reconciled themselves with their African side for they did not appreciate to be called African before coming to Amon-Ra, and now they themselves stress their African origins. Josué revealed that, before learning his history he would have even felt attacked if someone called him African because he did not know. Chantal's and Josué's comments illustrate what was said in the introduction about West-Indians of African descent being offended if you call them "African" or perceiving the word as an insult. However, today, Josué defines himself as an African Guadeloupean because says he:

We have this African consonance, we must not forget it. The African side must be first, second the Guadeloupean side.

Today with the learning of their history none of them mind to be called African. For instance, Fred said that he would feel very honoured if one calls him African, but emphasised:

Before I did not see things this way, before, I view myself as a Guadeloupean. I was not fully aware yet of everything that characterises us, how we have arrived there [...] I still have a way to go but I am conscious and glad to have opened the door that brings me back home.

The fact that history provides self-knowledge is so clearly demonstrated by Frederic's comments, and by the fact that learning of their history has enabled participants to reconnect with the African within them. That Fred is aware of his African identity is further evidenced in his following comments when asked the label he would use to define his identity:

African, since I am the image of my ancestors and my ancestors came out of Africa. So, I am simply an African and proud to be.

Tania said she would call herself Negress and went on explaining:

But when I say Negress, to me, there is the African side that is accounted for. Now, I assume myself as a Negress but before no. Before I had perm on my hair...it has been six years that my hair is natural, that is frizzled like that.

As to the manager, he holds that the label "African" will best represent what he thinks of his identity because as he explains:

Personally, for me, this label has a paramount importance; somehow it gives me quasi certitude to have reconnected myself to my motherland because for centuries I had been disconnected, I had been disconnected from my people, from my family. Therefore, to say that I am an African is not an honour, we are it intimately, we are it genetically, we do not ask the question: "where do I come from?"...I was born in Guadeloupe but I am an African.

If one still finds it hard to comprehend why most participants denied their African roots before learning their history, Chantal's comments, which resonate with some

arguments presented in the literature review may help them understand. When I asked Chantal why she thinks that we find it hard to say that we come from Africa she replied:

Because what they show us about Africa is something we do not want to resemble: poor people, people who die from hunger, things like this [...] We were more oriented towards France than Africa. Even if we are dark-skinned whatever the skin complexion of the Black person, from the light-skinned with straight hair to the darkest one, we know we come from Africa but we do not want to go, we more want to go to France, we are not informed, we are not turned towards Africa.

Chantal's comments imply that because of a lack of knowledge about their history, people stay away from their African roots with the intent of dissociating themselves from the negative image given to us about Africa. The fact that participants reconnected with their African identity by learning their history supports Chantal's point.

To summarise, we can infer, as was foreseen, that the learning of their history has had a positive influence on participants' awareness of the African identity. Unlike Baldwin et al. (1987), the current study did not measure participants' African self-consciousness, nonetheless the findings can only provide further support for Baldwin et al.'s (1987) who reported a strong positive link between African self-consciousness and exposure to "Black" studies. It can only provide further support considering that awareness of African identity is one of the criteria for African self-consciousness, and of the 7 participants, 6 of them became aware of their African identity with the learning of their history. Only one of them viewed himself as an African before he started learning his history. Although some of them did not view themselves as French, they did not recognise their African identity either. Today, with the learning of their history they may use different labels (e.g. African, Negro African, African Guadeloupean, Negress) but with the sole and clear intent to highlight their African identity. It is noteworthy that this finding reinforces Speight et al.'s (1996) and Boatswain and Lalonde's (2000) findings

that people who wish to stress their African roots employ a “racial” label which will enable them to do so. Even Fabrice who perceived himself as an African before possessing all his knowledge about his history has not changed his mind today. To the contrary, not only have his awareness but also his pride of his African identity been kept well alive as he studies his history at Amon-Ra in greater depth, to use his own terms, so well that during the interview when I asked him what the label “African” personally meant to him, he rectified me by saying:

This label, for me is not even a label. Being an African is a pride. We cannot go against nature, we are what we are. For me, to be African is a pride, a big pride.

Thus, history as it is studied at Amon-Ra seems to either help people carry on embracing their African identity or grow awareness of this identity if they lack it.

Interested in Seeking our History

Our exploration shows that all participants are interested in seeking their history, and it is the learning of the positive of their history that positively influenced their interest, as can be noted from the comments below.

When the manager, Mitchel Clarac, told me that he was passionate by his history and when asked the reason, he says:

My passion comes from the fact that I have discovered that we have created the pyramids, created the sphinx, we have created temples so huge with such high ceilings at the image of the immensity of our creator, that I have found this extraordinary.

The fact that his passion is due to the learning of the positive of our history is further evidenced when I asked him what he would answer to the people who say that we do not need to know the past to function in the present. Part of his answer involved the following:

The past is part of us. The proof is that we are fighting this past because they always made us believe that we were savages who knew nothing, who had no civilisation, that if Westerners had not come we would have never known civilisation.

In other words, from the Manager's perspective, people are in conflict with the past, that is, with their history because they believe it to be negative. Just like the manager, we can infer from their comments that it is also the learning of the positive aspects of their history which encourages the student-teachers to seek their history. For instance Tania says:

If for me it was this [the image of the slave], for today's children and for a big part of the population that's what it is too, therefore they are not interested in what happened before and for many of them the history of people from Guadeloupe and Martinique begins when Africans arrived on West-Indian ground.

We understand from Tania's comment that African West-Indians stay away from their history because they are told nothing about their history before arriving on the American continent; their history starts from slavery, which gives them a negative image of their people (i.e. the image of the slave). Tania's point confirms what Wilson (1993) says about people of African descent staying away from their history because of the distorted presentation of Africans and the fact that they were led to believe that they were culturally invisible before slavery. And we have additional illustrations of Wilson's (1993) contention when I asked Tania whether she would continue to attend l'Arbre à Palabre if it was imparting the same type of information as schools:

Ah no! But absolutely not! There is no possible comparison especially because at school when one analyses what they tell us on our people, there is not much, not to say nothing at all, apart from the slave period which is very briefly and very quickly dealt with. We do not learn much on our Negro-African ancestors.

Yet again, Tania is mentioning the scarcity of historical information on our African ancestors, their cultural invisibility, and tells us that our African ancestors' invisibility in the historical narrative would have kept her away from her history.

Fabrice would not have come either if the historical narrative at l'Arbre à Palabre was denigrating our people:

But if it is what was discussed [my ancestors were savages], I would not see the use to come and listen to what the other says already because l'Arbre à Palabre is actually about showing that the history of our ancestors does not begin with slavery and that there are things which happened previously.

As for Josué when asked why he carries on coming to l'Arbre à Palabre we realise, the same as with the other participants, that his learning of the positive of our history is a motivating factor:

It is being able to tell oneself that I am not or my grand-parents, or my ancestors **were not that stupid.**

When Josué says "It is being able to tell oneself that I am not [...] that stupid." he reveals to us that by learning about his people, he is learning about himself, thereby highlighting to us the role of the learning of one's history in providing self-knowledge. The learning of the positive of our history as an element motivating his learning of our history is further evidenced when Josué narrates his beginning at l'Arbre à Palabre and his motives:

What I saw, what we did, and he [Mitchel Clarac] told us certain things, I said well may be this man is telling us his fairy tales. But when you go and seek you see yourself that the truth is in front of you, that the person who helped you see it was not insincere. And I tried to search a little bit, it is as if I have fallen in a loft, **you have one treasure, the first treasure makes you understand there are many other treasures.**

This way which is next to us that we do not see and Mitchel allowed all of us to see different ways, and I couldn't not be interested in Amon-Ra [...] But in doing research on my own race, the Guadeloupean society and little social events, even current events occurring within the Guadeloupean society and within the Black world in general, **there are things to be done and things to be discovered about this glorious past.**

Likewise, Guerrier Gwada stated:

And I do not believe that it is only today that I turn to this type of institution. **I should have found one way or another to dive into Negro-African history but well before Amon-Ra. But I wonder why I wanted to stay away from history [...]** But I tell myself that I have been stupid having lived in France why not have gone to Africa to find out my history, my origins.

We can see that Guerrier Gwada had no interest in his history before Amon-Ra. He himself acknowledges that he stayed away from our history and is puzzled by this. Furthermore, when asked if he would have continued to come to Amon-Ra if it was the same history as school, he replied:

I think that the vocation of Amon-Ra is indeed to fight all these ideas, to enable the rebirth of the Negro-African culture. **History yes, but not to throw at us all the prejudices, the clichés on the Negro-African World [...]** otherwise I would not have come [...] because Amon-Ra's interest is indeed to allow this rebirth to resource ourselves. It becomes almost like a kind of drug this need to turn to our history.

“It becomes almost like a kind of drug” says Guerrier Gwada “this need to turn to our history”, a need, we must emphasise, which did not exist before learning his history if we take his own comments into account.

Fred states too that he would not have come to l'Arbre à Palabre if it was giving similar information as school, and Chantal reveals that the history she learns at Amon-Ra makes her vibrate. When asked why come at Amon-Ra to learn history while she learnt it at school, Chantal began to laugh and added:

There is no comparison; we should not even ask the question. The history is falsified, the history I learnt and as I say it can be a nice fairy tale, it can be a story to put children to sleep. The history we learn here [Amon-Ra], the true, real history of where we come from, that is what I would have liked to have learnt earlier.

In short, as was foreseen the learning of their history—particularly of the positive of this history—has had a positive influence on the participants' interest in seeking this history. We understand from the participants that they would not have shown interest in

their history if it was the same as the official historical narrative. We must emphasise once again that this finding corroborates Wilson's (1993) contention that it is the distorted presentation of African history and the fact that Africans were led to belief that they were culturally invisible and savage before slavery which push many "Black" people away from the history of the people. None of the student-teachers would have attended l'Arbre à Palabre if it presented the negative characteristics highlighted by Dr Wilson.

Have a Positive Image of our People

A positive relationship was predicted between the learning of their history and African West-Indians' view of their own people, and it was found. Only two participants did not have a negative image of "Black" people before learning their history. The five remaining participants stated that they have developed a positive view of their people since they have been learning their history. Their comments reveal that it is the learning of the accomplishments of their people which has positively influenced the development of a positive image of their people. Even Fabrice, one of the people who did not have a negative image of our people because he has always been proud of being "Black", does recognise that his image of our people is necessarily much more positive due to the fact that today he has greater knowledge of what his people have achieved. Josué ascertains when I asked him the image that comes to his mind when I say "Black" people:

Black people, sometimes, I think that if I did not have that [this path of knowledge] I would have ended up by despising this race.

If I did not have this path, this path, which means this path of knowledge, because they debased us so much I would say like some religions would say the mere fact of having this dark skin colour is a curse.

It [the education received from the coloniser] did not offer me the opportunity to integrate, to be, and it is this nasty, dirty, cursed, rejected side which would have dominated.

According to Josué, the image he had of our people was indeed negative but it is becoming increasingly positive and he emphasises too:

I was repeating like others filthy Negro, I had demeaning attitudes towards my counterparts, but now I better appreciate. I am careful about my language.

Chantal reckons that she has a much more positive image of “Blacks”. She goes on to say that since she has come to Amon-Ra “we somehow reposition ourselves in our own worth.”

As for Tania, before coming to Amon-Ra she viewed the people as slaves, which meant in her mind: enslaved, dirty, no good, stupid, a thing, something with no intelligence, with no soul, who is nothing, who does not represent anything. Today, the image that comes to mind when she thinks of them is the image of a “Black” pharaoh and a “Black” queen. The image of the pharaoh, argues Tania, represents: “everything glorious, elegance, pride, it is the complete opposite of the image of the slave.”

Clarac acknowledges:

Before having this knowledge on the history of the people it is obvious that I had a very negative image of the people, really a very negative image of the people. I saw the people as the one by which all scandals occurred; a lazy people, that’s what we learnt.

In his view it is the learning of his history which contributed to altering this image, he also explains:

I think it is a people full of dignity, it is a people who have suffered a great deal, that despite their suffering they always sought to keep their chins high [...] But this people are so wonderful, so dignified in their misery that now I trust them entirely.

So did Fred have a negative image of our people before learning his history:

It was a people who really suffered, who had enormous problems. Because most of the time that’s what they showed us on TV, that they are always at war. It was the

strongest image that I had of African people, always dying from starvation, always begging international aid.

But, today the image has become much more positive because, in his own terms, he has the image of a really grandiose people.

To recapitulate, as was predicted the learning of their history has positively influenced how the participants view their own people. We also saw in the case of an individual who already had a positive view of the people, the learning of our history have not altered this view to the contrary, his view has even become more positive. The participants' comments show that it is indeed the learning of the positive of their history which has positively influenced the image they hold today about their people.

Africa, the Motherland

I assume in my predictions that all participants viewed France as their motherland before joining Amon-Ra; this has proven to be wrong in some cases. For example, Frederic never perceived France as the motherland, and nor was Africa the motherland:

I considered myself to be a basic Guadeloupean, I even at one time considered myself to be a Central American.

Frederic told me that he has developed his profound relation with Africa—he has really become conscious of what Africa represents for him—since he has been at Amon-Ra; in his judgement, before it was superficial.

As to Guerrier Gwada he acknowledged that he never saw France as the motherland and stipulated too:

That's something that always struck me; I never thought of myself as being French.

Furthermore, though Guerrier Gwada was attracted to Africa, it is, nonetheless, the learning of his history that has helped him think of Africa as the motherland.

Fabrice was the only one to have always viewed Africa as the motherland. Nonetheless, it is Fabrice's knowledge of his history that has influenced what he thinks of France:

"France", contended Fabrice, "represents for me the one which torn me away from my land and tried to make me become the one they would like me to be. If they had not come to Africa to remove our ancestors by force, I would not have been here, I would have been in Africa."

Has he always thought this way about France?

That is what I thought from the moment I understood the history of slavery well and even beyond the history of slavery. But it is true that the benchmark is slavery.

We can see through both comments the influence of the learning of his history in shaping Fabrice's perception of France.

If all of them did not view France as the motherland before starting to learn their history, the majority of them did not view Africa as the motherland either. We have seen that only one person has always viewed Africa as the motherland. The positive influence of the learning of our history on choosing Africa as the motherland is even more striking in case of the following participants. In effect, for 4 of them France was the motherland before learning their history, and they began to relate to Africa as the motherland with the learning of their history. For instance, when I asked Josué what he would answer to the people who say that France is the motherland, he stated:

If we are Black Guadeloupeans we should not reject this aspect of Africa [...]. We can consider that we come from Africa and so Africa is the motherland even after 500 years. I think Americans say they are American but they always have this particular aspect they reserve to Europe... With all the information available in the world, be able to select, be able to look at how things work in the world, say I am Black and I come from France there must be an awful problem.

Josué makes another interesting point in his argument when he takes the example of Americans and highlights that they do not reject their motherland, so we should not either. Has he always seen Africa as the motherland? Not according to him:

No, because, well, as we have had an education, I will say, more or less European, I will say they more or less showed us France as the mother or fatherland if we can put it this way. They showed us in our history textbooks the history of France which was not quite ours.

Josué's comments show us how learning the history of others coupled with lack of self-knowledge distorted his perception to the point of believing—like some other participants—that France was his motherland.

As for Tania, we learn that her motherland is Africa, but has she always felt this way?

“Not at all”, says she. “At the onset in my mind, Africa was the continent where there were savages well because it is how we had it in our imagination. They showed us Africa with savages, people who were not dressed, who had arcs and arrows [...] So it is this image the Europeans have divulged to us through movies so it is this image that we had, that I had too; so not anymore. So, since I have been attending l'Arbre à Palabre it has changed, but really radically.”

Tania's comments further evidenced Ghee's (1990) contention about the propaganda against Africa added to lack of self-knowledge preventing people from relating to Africa as the motherland.

Finally if Mitchel Clarac sees Africa as the motherland it was not the case for him either before learning his history:

France cannot be my motherland in any case. There was a time maybe but from the moment I became conscious, particularly when I learn who I was, I understood that they wanted to destroy us. I viewed this as a type of genocide and especially as an intentional murder. And this I have difficulty taking in. Moreover, when we discover that RFO, Tempo, planned to do a broadcast on Dr Béson in South Africa, that France, the United States, Austria, Belgium and many others paid millions and millions of dollars for not saying billions in order to find a virus that can destroy the

Black melanin¹⁶. France our motherland which pays this type of scientific mercenary to find a virus that can destroy the Black melanin [...] Even though I already had a little idea of what they were capable of doing, I told myself that we anyway, somehow, have a past in common with them. No, they do not give a damn. I cannot, I am sorry, I cannot, to me I am an African.

When Mitchel was uttering the two last sentences, changes occurred in his facial expression and tone of voice; his sentences became charged emotionally; I could read a mixture of pain and sadness in his voice and facial expression. When we analyse what Michel is saying, and his mention of this event with Dr Béson¹⁷ it is reasonable to infer that it is also the past coupled with today's wrongdoings that pushed Mitchel away from France, I can even talk about resentment towards France in his case. Some more investigation with additional people is needed here to find out if it is a recurrent pattern.

To sum up, we see that when there was no link with Africa as the motherland, the learning of our history has helped established this link. The participants (4 of them) who identified France as the motherland before learning their history, no longer do so now. It is Africa that has become the motherland. So, the expectation for those African West-Indians who are learning their history and who identified France as the motherland before has been validated. In addition, for the 2 participants who viewed neither France nor Africa as motherland, Africa has now become the motherland.

We can talk here about the positive influence of learning their history on these participants' choice of motherland because from a historical perspective it makes more sense for a person of African descent to identify Africa as the motherland rather than France. Moreover, since organised forgetting of the past was intended to erase Africa in

¹⁶ The melanin is this pigment that gives us our dark skin complexion. The melanin has different function including protecting the body against harmful ultra-violet rays of the sun. (Jablonski, 2006; Moore, 2002)

¹⁷ With regards to Dr Béson nicknamed "La mort" upon further inquiry Mitchel Clarac informed me that he was arrested in South-Africa, brought to trial and acquitted. However, information about him was removed from the net. So far I have not been able to find anything about him.

the minds of African West-Indians in order to get them to view France as the motherland and assimilate them into the French nation, it is only logical that Africa regains her place in their minds and hearts when reminded of their history.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to answer two questions: How are African West-Indians influenced by the learning of their history? How is learning about the history of our people an effective tool to enable people of African descent overcome their malaise with their African identity? With regard to the first question, we have seen that, as expected, the learning of their history has had a positive influence on the four factors investigated among this small group of African West-Indians. Though we cannot talk about causality here because this is a qualitative case study, it was found that participants have developed awareness of their African identity with the learning of their history; an awareness which is noticeable due to their use of “racial” labels enabling them to highlight their African identity. This was not the case with almost all of them before learning their history because the word African had a very negative connotation for them.

As was also predicted, the learning of their history—especially the positive of this history—has positively influenced participants’ interest in seeking their history. Bear in mind, as argued by Akbar (1998), that the study of history is an instrument to enlighten the self and learning our history helps us recall our tribal ancestral self. Dr Akbar’s point helps us further understand why participants’ awareness of their African identity grew with the learning of their history as well as why they show interest in seeking their history—another criteria of one of the indices of African self-consciousness. So, keeping

away from the official historical narrative, to use Clarac's strong language, "fighting the past", may well be an unconscious way to dissociate ourselves from the image forced in us but which does not resonate with the ancestral tribal self, which does not resonate with who and what we truly are.

As an instrument to enlighten the self, the learning of our history surely helped participants develop a positive view of the people. All participants who had a negative view of the people before learning our history, now hold a positive view of them. And, it is learning about the accomplishments of our people which has played a role on the development of this positive image. This finding confirms what has been argued in Chapter Three concerning the Afrocentric perspective refuting the myth of the savage, uncivilised African which is part of the collective unconscious of African West-Indians because it provides information about positive aspects of "Black" people. Finally, it does not come as a surprise that Africa has become the motherland of all participants who did not view her as such before learning their history. Learning a history they have been forced to forget in order to assimilate them into the French nation and cut them from their African roots, can only help them reconnect to their original land: Africa. It is worth noting, as we have discussed above, that the learning of our history appears to have an influence on the development of pride, however further investigation is needed on this theme.

So, how is learning about the history of our people an effective tool to enable people of African descent overcome their malaise with their African identity? From what has been said so far we can answer that it is indeed an effective tool. Unlike the learning of the official historical narrative which reinforces African West-Indians' collective

unconscious, exacerbate their inferiority complex and further alienates us from our African identity, the learning of our history explodes the myth of the savage African and helps us embrace our African identity. With the learning of our history we embrace our African identity as well as what is associated with this identity. Given the importance of learning one's history, given its influences on people of African descent, I do not believe that I am exaggerating when I say that learning our history is a quintessential "therapy" for many of us in the West-Indies if we are to overcome our malaise with our identity and thus, become psychologically healthier individuals and rebuild ourselves.

I must emphasise that this is a small scale study; it will be interesting to see whether we obtain similar patterns by adding more participants. Remember too that at Amon-Ra, people are not learning solely about our history, but this history is also made palpable to them through the practice of the ancestors' tradition (art, rituals) as well as by highlighting and discussing ways in the West-Indies which spring from the African tradition. This may have also influenced the results of the study because the student-teachers did highlight that Amon-Ra is not just about history. Nonetheless, to check the extend to which the findings can be generalised readers of African origins, who are learning or learnt their history somewhere else, can answer the interview questions and see if their answers match the current findings. I must also add that friends, teachers and former teachers suggested that it was a brilliant idea to compare African West-Indians who learn their history from an Afrocentric perspective and those learning the official historical narrative, however, this idea was not accepted at the university.

Further Implications of the Study

There is little doubt that this study has implications for the education system; it reinforces Fanon's (1952), Leiris' (1974), Leticée's (2000), to name a few, voices about the inadequacy of the educational system in the French West-Indies, and highlights the necessity to introduce in the curriculum the history of people of African descent who represent the majority of the population in the French West-Indies. In other words, the study calls into question the very notion of national "education".

This study indicates that we should not only have a very close look at the content of history textbooks in the French West-Indies, but also that it is more than urgent to put back the missing pieces of history in order to enable the healing process that was not allowed to take place after slavery; for the learning of these missing pieces help reconnect with a part of us erased from our consciousness (i.e. our African identity) and which is necessary for our healthy functioning.

So, the study also has implications for those who have chosen to play a direct role in the growth of African West-Indian youth. The findings point to how important it is that teachers and educators learn their history to be able to be more alert about possible distortions and omissions in history textbooks and do further research about our history in order to transmit more accurate information to students. This is needed if they are to help young African West-Indians develop into more rooted, psychologically healthier and stronger persons.

The study has implications as well for mental health professionals too in order to better understand some of the possible causes of problems related to their identity Africans West-Indians may experience, and be able to do further research in order to

make more accurate diagnosis and provide adequate treatments for their African West-Indian clients.

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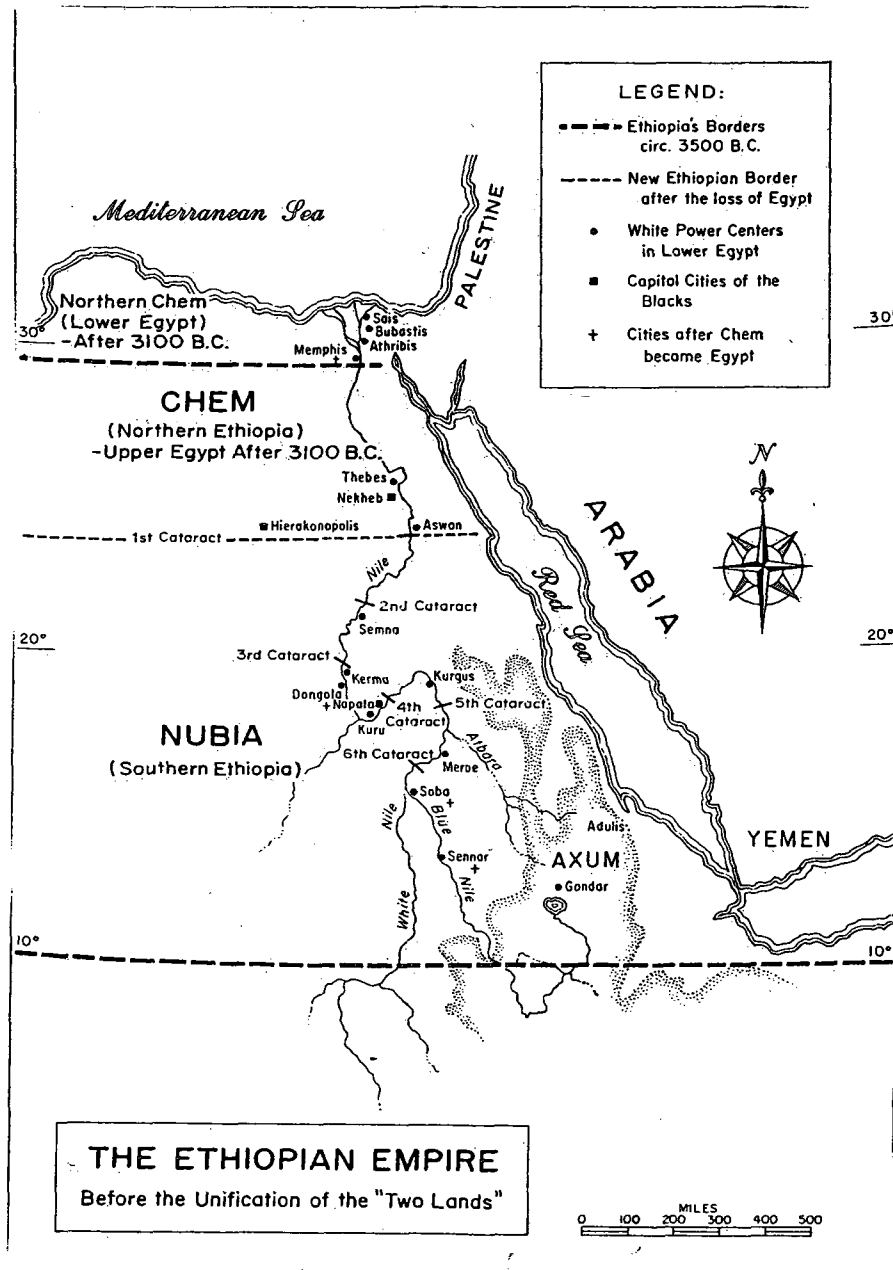
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Appendix A

ETHIOPIAN EMPIRE

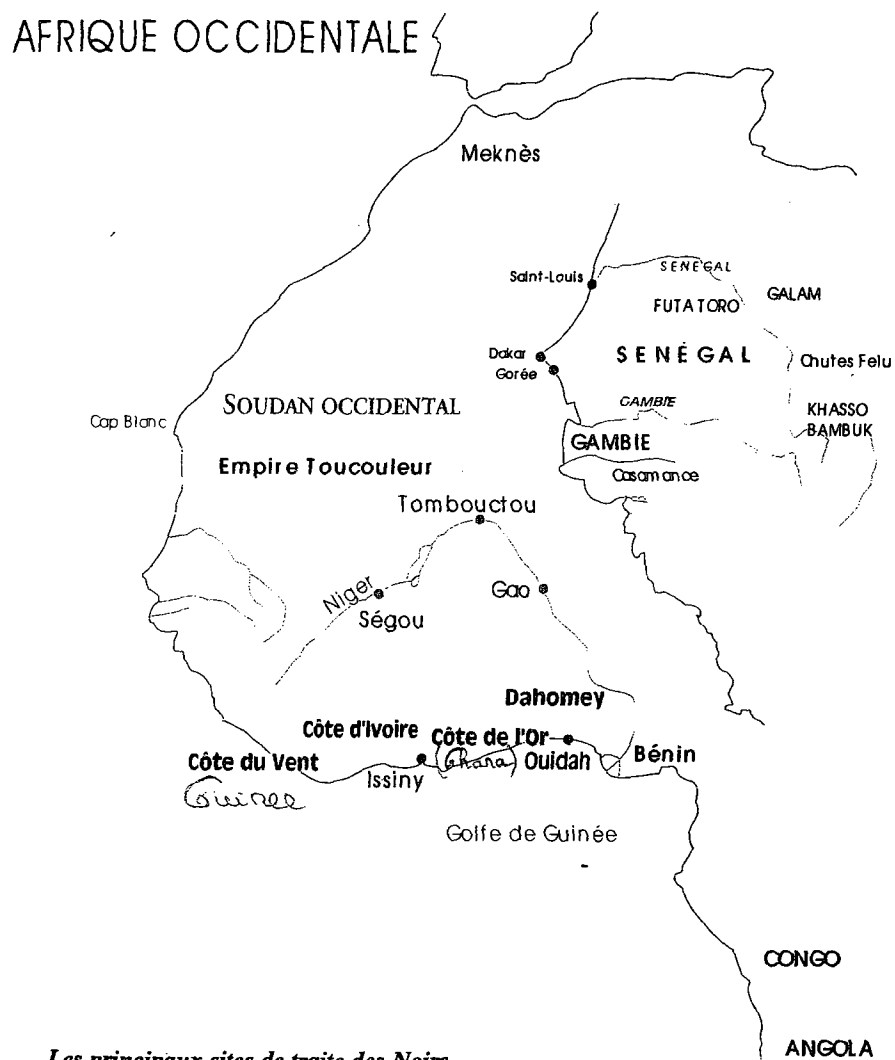
(Williams, 1987)



Appendix B
MAIN SITES OF THE SLAVE TRADE
 (Bélénus, 1998)

L'esclave en Guadeloupe et en Martinique du XVIIème au XIXème siècle

Document 5

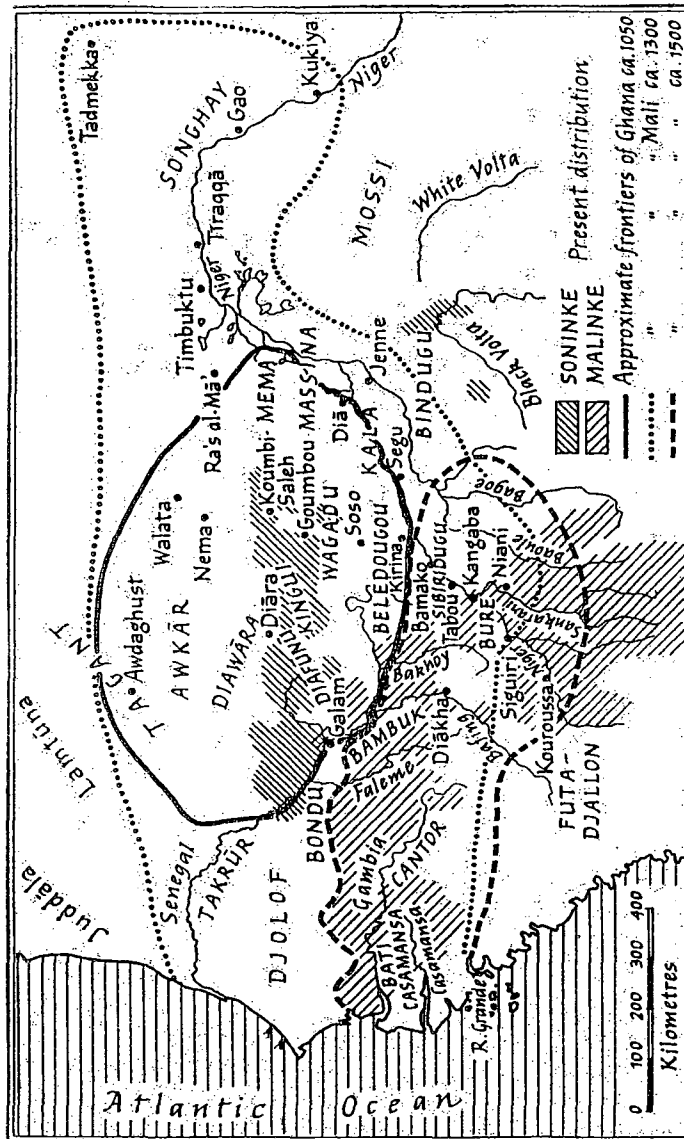


*Les principaux sites de traite des Noirs
 au XVIIIème siècle*

Appendix C

ANCIENT WEST AFRICAN EMPIRES

(Levtzion, 1973)

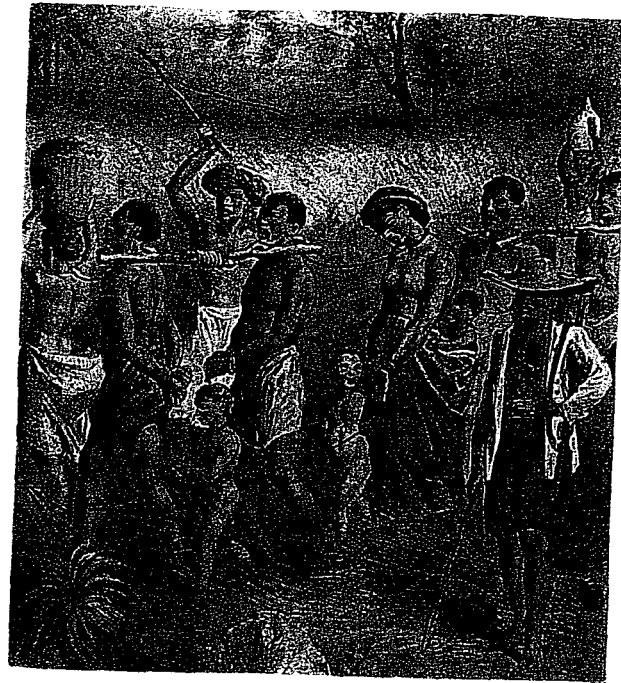


Map I. Ghana and Mali

Appendix D

A PICTURE OF KIDNAPPED AFRICANS

(CRDP, 2001)



Appendix E

A POPULAR MOVEMENT: THE LKP

On January 20th, started in Guadeloupe a popular movement led by the LKP (Liyannag Kont Pwofitasyon), a merger of union, associative, political and cultural organisations. The LKP is the union of men and women, young and old from all social backgrounds willing to build a new Guadeloupean society with its own customs and values capable of feeding itself, capable of providing education, knowledge, health, housing, work and respect to all its children. One can understand from their platform of demands that the LKP envisions a Guadeloupean society where the cost of living is more affordable, where the very few do not exploit the many, where young qualified Guadeloupeans have employment priority in order to be able to live and contribute to the development of their country and so much more.

So exemplary was it in its organisation and so just in its demands, this movement electrified thousands of Guadeloupeans and drew support from all over the world. Such personalities as Christian Taubira-Delannon (deputy from French Guyana and author of the Taubira law), Ségolène Royale came all the way to Guadeloupe in order to bring their support to the LKP. However, it was not well received by the French government who not only did not seem to care much about the demands in spite of the thousands of people marching into the streets for days. Furthermore, the secretary of state, Yves Jégo, sent in Guadeloupe to deal with the crisis left the archipelago without warning on the day he himself agreed to sign the agreement negotiated all night long by all parties involved.

The government's main answer to the movement was the usual one: the sending of its police force to quell the movement. During one demonstration a leader of the LKP, Marcel Lolia, was racially insulted, beaten, almost choked to death, and kicked by French policemen. That same day other demonstrators including women, were beaten, literally stamped on and arrested by French police force. The manager and a journalist at Canal 10—the TV channel which broadcasted every event since the start of the movement—were called in for questioning by the police and their tapes about events related to the movement requested. Later during the week Jacques Bino, one of the pillars of LKP, was shot just after having left an LKP's meetings.

The police's violence on Marcel Lolia and other demonstrators may have fuelled the anger of some people who reacted violently by burning and destroying shops just like it happened in France a few years ago.

Was the peaceful movement too beautiful to be true for some? Was it too powerful and well organised that it scared some into actions in order to discredit and destroy it? One thing for sure, attempts to stain the movement did not shake the determination of many. Bravo, Bravo Guadeloupe.

Appendix G

STUDENTS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Age?

Occupation?

Votre niveau scolaire?

Vos ancêtres viennent-ils du continent Africain?

Etes-vous né(e) en Guadeloupe ?

Où êtes-vous allé à l'école?

Depuis combien de temps fréquentez-vous l'école Amon-Ra?

A quelle(s) activités participez-vous au sein de l'école?

Qu'est-ce qui vous a emmené à participer à l'arbre à Palabre?

Pourquoi avez-vous continué à venir à l'Arbre à Palabre?

Que pensez-vous de l'initiative concernant l'enseignement de l'histoire du peuple?

Si j'étais à Amon-Ra qu'aurais-je appris sur l'histoire du peuple?

Que saviez-vous de notre histoire avant de fréquenter l'école? D'où teniez-vous vos connaissances?

Pourquoi venir à Amon-Ra apprendre l'histoire quand vous l'avez apprise à l'école?

Certaines personnes diraient que l'apprentissage de notre histoire ne sert qu'à enfler notre fierté raciale, qu'en pensez-vous?

Si je vous dit peuple Noir, qu'est-ce qui vous vient à l'esprit? Avez-vous toujours eu cette image du peuple?

Quelle étiquette utiliseriez-vous pour décrire votre identité : Guadeloupéen, Français, Noir, Africain-Guadeloupéen, Africain ou autre?

Que signifie personnellement pour vous le label que vous avez choisi?

Certaines Noirs Guadeloupéens diraient que la France est la mère patrie que leur diriez-vous?

Si je vous appelle Africain(e) comment vous sentirez-vous?

Comment voyez-vous l'enseignement scolaire des enfants de la Guadeloupe dans le futur?

Appendix H

MANAGER'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Depuis combien de temps l'école existe-t-elle?

Pourquoi avez-vous décidé de créer cette école?

Pourquoi avez-vous choisi le nom Amon-Ra?

Si j'étais à Amon-Ra à quelle(s) activité(s) aurai-je pu participer pour apprendre l'histoire du peuple?

Comment les gens perçoivent-ils ce travail autour de l'enseignement de l'histoire du peuple?

La connaissance de l'histoire de notre peuple, vous a-t-elle influencé? Si oui, comment?

Certaines personnes diraient que l'histoire appartient au passé, qu'on n'a pas besoin de connaître le passé pour fonctionner dans le présent, que répondrez-vous à ces personnes?

Si je vous dit peuple Noir, qu'est-ce qui vous vient à l'esprit? Avez-vous toujours eu cette image du peuple?

Quelle étiquette utiliseriez-vous pour décrire votre identité : Guadeloupéen, Français, Noir, Africain-Guadeloupéen, Africain ou autre?

Que signifie personnellement pour vous le label que vous avez choisi?

Certaines personnes diraient que la France est la mère patrie et l'Eldorado, que leur diriez-vous?

Si je vous appelle Africain(e) comment vous sentirez-vous?

Comment voyez-vous l'éducation des enfants de la Guadeloupe?

Appendix I

INTERVIEW LOG (Merriam, 1988)

<u>Interview details:</u> (nom date heure etc..)		
Tape Position	Participants' comments	Researcher's notes

Appendix J

THEME TABLE (with an example)

Themes Names	Awareness of African Identity	Interest in seeking their history	View of their people	View of France
Fred	√ (p.8; 6; 7) (p. 02)	√ (p. 11; 3; 2;1) (01)	√ (p.6)	√ (p. 7) (p. 03)
Chantal				
Tania				
Fabrice				
Guerrier Gwada				
Josué				
Clarac				

Appendix K

AFTER DATA COLLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

DITES CE QUE VOUS PENSEZ....

Que pensez-vous de la prise de contact avant interview?

Que pensez-vous du déroulement de l'interview?

Avez-vous senti que l'interviewer, à un moment ou à un autre, vous contraignait à changer votre point de vue?

Selon vous, l'interviewer influençait-il votre point de vue?

Une fois complété, remettre le questionnaire dans l'enveloppe, puis remettre à Mitchel.