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Telling Lives, Making Place
The Narratives of Three Haitian Refugees in Montreal

Jonathan Roux

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Geography, Planning and Environment

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ABSTRACT
Telling Lives, Making Place
The Narratives of Three Haitian Refugees in Montreal

Jonathan Roux

This is the qualitative study of the life-story accounts of three Haitian political refugees in Montreal. The objective of this thesis is to examine how place is told, negotiated and *made* by these individuals. This research reveals dynamic forms of place-making, where the past, present, lived and imagined overlap, putting forward ever-transforming, hybrid places.

Mrs. Elizabeth Philibert, Mr. Céradieu Toussaint and Mr. Frantz Voltaire are three Haitian political activists who were forced to exile by the Duvalier régime in the 1970s. After diverse trajectories, they have established themselves permanently in Montreal. They have recounted their stories to me in depth, taking the time to unfold each episode of their lives they found relevant. These accounts were collected using the methods of 'life-story interviewing', where interviewer and interviewee are seen as having a *shared authority* over the narrative process. These interviews are a component of a larger life-story collecting project entitled: *Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Violations*.

In this thesis, each account is treated as a narrative entity, and is therefore written as a separate story, in order to convey to the reader a sense of each particular discourse construction. Then, these stories are used as a base for a transdisciplinary interpretation of individual and cultural place-making processes.

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Je bousculais les frontières. J'avalais les bornes indicatrices. Je mâchais la prohibition. Je suçais,
goutais, à même: plis, corridors, labyrinthes, mon souffle effaçait tout.
Je cueillis des algues sur la mer très froidement démontée du microdion.
J'embrassai turbines et diatomées – comme le soir les épaves jumelles dans la stupeur des anses.
La vie faisait ciel, ou naufrage, à votre guise.

Aimé Césaire, *Histoire de Vivre*, 1942

Chapter One: Introduction

Encounters

Two people meet, and start to talk. They try to assess who the other is, what the other wants. They begin with small talk, with its formal and pre-established codes. Between the words they observe each other. Glasses of water are quietly sipped. And, slowly, the conversation unfolds. Little smiles, conniving grins, attentive listening and long, thick silences start to add up. Gradually, both actors get more and more engaged in the conversation. Together they are trying to tackle the richest and most complex narration; the story of a life. From these long hours emerged an account of indescribable horrors and incredible hopes. There were also moments where miscomprehension prevailed, where the harmony and passion were disrupted.

The outcome is an enormous, trembling, multi-faceted object. A recording of a person narrating his or her life story to another. How should it be used and worked on? What can we make of it?

I have had the immense chance to interview Mrs. Elizabeth Philibert, Mr. Céradieu Toussaint and Mr. Frantz Voltaire in 'life-story' format narratives. During several, extended sessions, we addressed the story of their lives, taking the time to develop the subtleties and paradoxes of their accounts. The themes approached were not part of a questionnaire, but the outcome of preliminary discussions in which together we decided on what we would discuss. Each encounter was flexible and allowed its own unique dynamic, as both could rebound on a point or change a perspective. Three stories were

told to me, with their highlights and their shadows. These are inscribed in a particular dialogue, based on the relationship built between the interviewees and myself. They are therefore the result of a double subjectivity – the interviewees’ and mine.

Moreover, exhaustively retelling a life is an impossible goal. However long, the narration will always be a selected agency of facts and perspectives. Any choice of word, sentence or theme implies the choice *not to say* a constellation of other possible accounts. I have had the privilege to discover and take part in this narrative process for three people.

These are stories of exile, where people say what it means to them to be forced out of their home. Stories of political engagement, in which we decipher individuals’ gradual need for activism and relations to ideology. Stories of Haiti, or the retelling of a unique nation from outside. Stories of Montreal, and the personal navigation and appropriation of a city. Enthralling stories of friendships, loves, births, losses, horrors and hopes, unceasingly fusing history and anecdote. Life stories.

This thesis will be constructed predominantly around the accounts of the three narratives, each treated as an individual chapter. I took the opportunity to recount each in a narrative form, as opposed to merely selecting examples for an academic discourse. Nevertheless, this study is grounded on research questions tackling belonging, identity and place-making, as these stories will be analyzed and interpreted through a particular perspective.

Research Question

Territorial place-based identity, particularly when conflated with race, gender, religious and class differentiation, is one of the most pervasive bases for both progressive political mobilization and reactionary exclusionary politics. (Harvey, 1993)

The first words from David Harvey's quote introduce my thesis's central issue precisely. I am interested in how identity is territorially constructed at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century. Identity and space have always been tightly interlinked, because not many people would define themselves as not being *from* somewhere. But this "somewhere" can be several places. While it is not necessarily a state or political unit, it can be far from the place one is born, far from where one lives and it can be partially imagined or fantasized. Furthermore, place is not the only structuring element in the construction of identity, as we can see in contemporary feminist or post-colonial literature.

Refugees present yet another aspect in the challenge of studying the meaning of place in identity. While the definition of "refugee" remains a contested concept, we can assume for the moment that refugees are displaced persons, forced out of one place, living in another. This adds another aspect to the identity process. We all have multiple references to what makes our identity, but refugees officially live outside their land, and have (been) moved out in a brutal manner. How do they locate identity in "place" – how do they *produce place*? Refugees are explicit and involuntary witnesses of a multi-spatial identity, as the dialectic between a "host" and a "home" land constitutes the very base of refugees' lives.

This distinction between “host” and “home” brings up another fascinating area of studies: borders. Indeed, being classified as a refugee implies a spatial boundary: at one place, people are “at home,” and then they (are forced to) cross an invisible line that allows them to claim refugee status, hence being displaced strangers. But state frontiers are only one form among many other boundaries in social life. Indeed, they become very real and crucially important for refugees, but let us not forget how borders are primarily a territorialization of identity, spatially separating “us” and “them” of which state borders are merely a political expression. Refugees in a camp not only experience the official borders involving passports and immigration officers, but the fences surrounding their camp, the clear distinction between their tents and where the humanitarian workers live, the different places within the camp (the men smoke and play cards at one place, the women cook at another...) etc.

More generally, any city – the example of Montreal is used in this thesis – can be seen as an intricate juxtaposition of many identities and social groups, with complex mechanisms of bordering. By reviewing contemporary literature on borders, my aim is to study precisely how these mechanisms affect specific individuals, and vice-versa. Refugees give us a particularly interesting angle in this study as they allow us to question contemporary nation-states due to the importance of official borders in their personal narratives.

This thesis focuses on Haitian refugees in Montreal. The Haitian nation is perhaps one of the most complex and fascinating in the world, with its intermingled history of

Amerindians, African slaves and European colonizers. It is the country of the first black rulers of the New World, and has favoured the emergence of the Creole language and identity. This country is a dense mixture of huge hopes and tremendous cruelties, crystallizing some of Humanity's most conflicting facets. These aspects are not in this research studied through the perspective of historians of Haiti, but rather examined in the interviewees' narratives. How do they *tell* Haiti, how do they negotiate their belonging to the Haitian nation and how do they affirm (or not) a Haitian identity?

This re-telling and re-negotiation of a nation takes place in a specific context, in our case Montreal in 2008 and 2009. The Haitian community is very important in Montreal, with about 50 000 (official) inhabitants born in Haiti, and about as many born in Canada of Haitian origins (MICC 2009). In this thesis I therefore analyze the links between the personal relation with the Haitian nation and the everyday connections with the Haitian community in the city.

Moreover, a common ground for the individuals I have interviewed is that political engagement has been an important, structuring element in their lives. The particular context in which their story of engagement is set – Haiti under François Duvalier – has forced them to express their activism radically, in a life-threatening fashion, suffering from the régime's intense political violence. I wish to examine the links between interiorized political violence and the narratives of place-making.

Individuals are indeed the starting point of this research. Of course, we will be discussing theoretical perspectives of interpretation, but our three stories are the backbone of this paper. Subjectivity is therefore inherent, the challenge is not to make the research look objective or empirical, but to navigate between the different levels of interpretation: to start from individual narratives to go towards broader suggestions about society, and the meaning of identity and place today. Much like the difference between a good and a mediocre novel: the latter may be entertaining but once it is closed the reader forgets about it and lives on, whereas the former can bring up a new perspective, a captivating description of a certain place and time, which will enrich the reader. After all, the best way to apprehend nineteenth century France is probably not to read university publications, but rather prose and poetry of Balzac, Zola, Proust, Maupassant, Rimbaud or Baudelaire.

To summarize my research problematic, let me present it in the form of a few key questions: How do Haitian political refugees in Montreal represent themselves in their life stories? How does this representation contribute to their cultural and social place-making? What processes shape and affect their social and spatial experiences? How do they negotiate sentiments of belonging and affirm specific identities? Does the experience of displacement and previous political violence play a role in everyday construction of place? How do they address these questions in their discourses?

Before attempting any answer to these questions, let us go more deeply into some of the key concepts, and examine how a selection authors have tackled these issues.

Literature Review

The above introduction has touched a vast number of themes, all of which have been intensively studied in the academic world. I must now go further than mentioning them, and ground them in part of this literature. Reading everything about the links between place and identity is impossible, as my thesis covers areas such as geography, history, political science, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, economy or psychology and these themes have interested academics from all over the world for decades, if not for centuries. In the following I draw upon and synthesize the books and articles I found the most relevant. I will review here the following themes:

- a) Place
- b) Identity
- c) Borders
- d) Narratives of Displacement

I have chosen to review general concepts, in order to emphasize theory, and thus to have a strong hold on it for my future analyses. Indeed, the ambition of this thesis is to let the narratives unfold as stories, but that the reader keeps in mind and plays with the theoretical perspectives offered in this review as leads for interpretation. I will then come back to these concepts and offer my stance on how the accounts can dialogue with theory.

a) Place-making

Our basic theme is how identity is spatialized. “Basic” because the rest of this literature review, and all of the theoretical concepts leading to my thesis originate in the

fascinating dialectics between place and identity. Allow me to use the word 'place' and not 'space'; both these terms are of spatial reference, but 'place' already implies a human perspective on the outside world from which we will not depart. As Tim Creswell puts it:

Space is a more abstract concept than place. When we speak of space we tend to think of outer-space or the spaces of geometry. Spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space between them. (2004, 8)

Space [...] has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning – as a 'fact of life' which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human life. When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming is one such way) it becomes a place. Although this basic dualism of space and place runs through much of human geography since the 1970s it is confused somewhat by the idea of social space – or socially produced space – which, in many ways, plays the same role as place. (2004, 10)

When discussing identity, it therefore seems more logical to speak of places. The end of this quote allows us to justify the use of terms such as 'spatialization' or 'spatialized identity' (anyhow 'patialization' would be an ugly neologism), as 'social space' and 'place' are very close concepts, and the suffix 'ization' refers to a process, therefore quite antagonist to the idea of an empty void.

To explain place as a social concept and space as a 'natural' one would be far too simple, as both are socially produced. Indeed, 'space' is a word, therefore a part of a discourse; the minute it is encompassed in human thought it is oriented in the elaboration of an argument, and is not totally 'natural' anymore. And, more importantly to us, place is of course very social, but difficult to conceive as solely social. The streets of Montreal are human constructions, but on top of a pre-existing island. For some authors place is a static frame for the dynamics of history. Creswell cites Malpas:

There is no doubt that the ordering of a particular place – and the specific way in which a society orders space and time – is not independent of social ordering (inasmuch as it encompasses the social, so place is partially elaborated by means of the social, just as place is also elaborated in relation to orderings deriving from individual subjects and from underlying physical structures).

However this does not legitimate the claim that space, space or time are *merely* social constructions. Indeed the social does not exist prior to place nor is it given expression except in and through place – and through spatialised, temporalised ordering... It is within the structure of place that the very possibility of the social arises. (Malpas 1999, 35-36 in Creswell 2004, 31)

Creswell comments:

Place, some would argue, is neither like toothpaste (which once did not exist and in the future will be redundant), nor gravity (which exists completely free of human will or consciousness). It is a construction of humanity but a necessary one – one that human life is impossible to conceive of without. In other words there was no 'place' before there was humanity but once we came into existence then place did too. (2004, 33)

We must keep this in mind while discussing the formation of identity. The philosophical debate on the pre-existence of space before humanity (however fascinating) is not as much the point as the fact that place is a fundamental aspect in the creation and re-creation of human societies. In various ways people have always *situated* themselves, and this allows me to emphasize and develop the spatial aspects of identity formation.

First, allow me to bring up a very important author in the theorization of social space:

Henri Lefebvre. He was one of the first to conceptualize space as a social construct, in his book *The Production of Space*. He writes:

'Produire l'espace', ces mots étonnent: le schéma d'après lequel l'espace vide préexiste à ce qui l'occupe garde encore beaucoup de force. Quels espaces? Et qu'est-ce que 'produire' en ce qui concerne l'espace? (1974, 23)

The most important part of his analysis are his three categories of spaces: spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation:

- a) *La pratique spatiale* d'une société secrète son espace; elle le pose et le suppose, dans une interaction dialectique: elle le produit lentement et sûrement en le dominant et en se l'appropriant. A l'analyse, la pratique spatiale d'une société se découvre en déchiffrant son espace. [...]
- b) *Les représentations de l'espace*, c'est-à-dire l'espace *conçu*, celui des savants, des planificateurs, des urbanistes, des technocrates 'découpeurs' et 'agenceurs', de certains artistes proches de la scientificité, identifiant le vécu et le perçu au conçu. [...] C'est l'espace dominant dans une société (un mode de production). Les conceptions de l'espace tendraient [...] vers un système de signes verbaux donc élaborés intellectuellement.

c) *Les espaces de représentation*, c'est à dire l'espace vécu à travers les images et symboles qui l'accompagnent, donc espace des 'habitants', des 'usagers', mais aussi de certains artistes et peut-être de ceux qui *décrivent* et croient seulement décrire: les écrivains, les philosophes. C'est l'espace dominé, donc subi, que tente de modifier et d'approprier l'imagination. Il recouvre l'espace physique en utilisant symboliquement ses objets. De sorte que ces espaces tendraient [...] vers des systèmes plus ou moins cohérents de symboles et signes non verbaux. (Original emphasis) (1974, 48-49)

One cannot analyze place without taking into consideration these three aspects of it going on simultaneously. Take a look outside the window; a big car is waiting at a red light, a woman is driving alone. The 'spatial practice' side is the observable fact that she is driving from a point to another. She has a reason for doing so, her mediums are the car, the streets, the road signs infrastructures. The 'representation of space' are the people who design, police and legitimize this practice. The obvious are the city planners, the police forces and the engineers who set up the light system. There are also the less identifiable ones who at some point decided that red meant 'stop' and green meant 'go'. It now seems trivial, but that is because a world-wide consensus was reached. There is also the fact that it is socially permitted for a woman to drive alone, as it is socially allowed to consume wasteful amounts of energy, keeping the engine of a SUV running at a halt. The former has not always been the case (and today it is not normal for women to drive in many places in the world, even illegal in some), and the latter will probably not be common in a few years. The 'space of representation' is what this woman *makes* of this space. Planners design one street, but the street will be much different to her if she is using it to go to a business meeting than for her husband who will later use it to fetch the children at school. Lefebvre explains more of this third aspect:

Les espaces de représentations, vécus plus que conçus, ne s'astreignent jamais à la cohérence, pas plus qu'à la cohésion. Pénétrés d'imaginaire et de symbolisme, ils ont pour origine l'histoire, d'un peuple et celle de chaque individu appartenant à ce peuple. (Original emphasis) (1974, 52)

To schematize, the first would be the horizontal relationships, the second the top-to-down ones and the third the down-to-top. What interests us most is the latter: the spaces of representation. Let me stress the words that Lefebvre uses: “imagination and symbolism.” People *produce* their space because they associate it with personal and cultural symbols. To Lefebvre, space and place-making are absolutely fundamental in the identity process, for they provide the necessary frame for a “real social existence”:

Si chaque société produit son espace, le sien, il s'ensuit encore quelques conséquences. Une 'existence sociale' qui se voudrait et se dirait 'réelle' mais ne produirait pas son espace, resterait une entité, une sorte d'abstraction très particulière; elle ne sortirait pas de l'idéologique, voire du 'culturel'. Elle tomberait dans le folklore, et tôt ou tard dépérirait, perdant à la fois son identité, sa dénomination, son peu de réalité. (1974, 65)

David Harvey, commenting on Lefebvre's theory, is particularly interested in what it implies in terms of power relations. If you accept that place is a social construction, the logical deduction is that place is far from neutral; on the contrary it reflects the social hierarchies expressed on the world's surface. Harvey writes:

The strength of the Lefebvrian construction [...] is that it refuses to see materiality, representation and imagination as separate worlds and that it denies the particular privileging of any one realm over the over, while simultaneously insisting that it is only in the social practices of daily life that the ultimate significance of all forms of activity is registered [...]

There is, then, a politics to place construction ranging dialectically across material, representational and symbolic activities which find their hallmark in the way in which individuals invest in places and thereby empower themselves collectively by virtue of that investment. (1993, 23)

Place is not only social, it is political. Some groups have more power than others, and they use this power to impose their interpretation of place on others. Feminist geographers for example have shown that the modern Western city is the expression of centuries of male domination (Hayden 1996; Llewellyn 2002). Cities are often designed with family housing units in the suburbs, with the direct implication that one adult

(male) will commute to the centre every day for work when the other (female) stays for domestic tasks and the children (Hayden 1996, McDowell 1999).

It is not too difficult for us to see the gendered differentiation of the city. What is important in Lefebvre's analysis, Harvey explains, is that he does not stop at this unilateral interpretation of place production. Of course women live in a sexist world, but their sense of place is not only dependent upon exterior factors like patriarchy, even though the power relation is unbalanced. Women integrate sexist visions (amongst many other social realities) in their personal interpretation to produce their own space. Therefore, two women experiencing the same gendered space could have entirely different visions of the same place. "Spaces of representation" are places where we experience social structures (relational space), but also which provide the opportunity to negotiate, transgress and appropriate ourselves.

We have seen how place can be conceived as a social product, how it must never be taken for granted, how we should always remember its political impact, but never obliterate the micro-scale – specifically individual and cultural perceptions. This is of much importance to me, as the main inquiry of this thesis is about the processes of place-making of the Haitian refugees in Montreal.

But what does 'place-making' mean today? How do people construct their identity in relation to a 'somewhere' in a globalized context? Recent analyses concentrate on the particularity of identity making in this globalized context. 'Globalization' itself is a

much too vague word. I will use it as little as possible, and focus on certain contemporary phenomena that bring up questions and paradoxes.

As I am writing these lines, members of the Serbian community of Montreal are demonstrating a few blocks away against the recent proclamation of independence of Kosovo. They live in another continent, some of them were born here. Most of them have never been to Kosovo. As much as I know, their daily routine is very much outside of Serbia: work, family, hobbies etc, with influences from all over the world. I could go on about how they work for a German company with Brazilian colleagues, eat Chinese take-away or watch American movies on a Korean DVD player. I do not know. Probably. The point is that they care, that they give a lot of importance and that they situate their identity in relation to the thirteenth-century monasteries of Kosovo, however 'globalized' their lives seem. Harvey synthesizes the question:

Why it might be that the elaboration of place-bound identities has become more rather than less important in a world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement and communication? (1993, 4)

"More rather than less" is a question that has fascinated contemporary geographers. Let us just stick with the fact that place-bound identities have not diminished during the important global mutations of the past few decades. On the other hand, these changes have certainly influenced the way identities are built. Even though place remains a central point in identity formation, it is so in a much different manner, integrating new technologies and the alteration of the world's social order. Jan Nijman writes on that subject:

This bias [seeing culture as dependent on economic globalization] often coincides with a lack of attention to the importance of locality in the globalization debate. The result may be dubbed 'double-determinism': local culture is subordinate to global economics. [...]

Cultural globalization may be defined as an acceleration in the exchange of cultural symbols among people around the world, to such an extent that it leads to changes in local popular cultures and identities. (1999, 147-148)

In his study of the reconstruction of Amsterdam, not only does he wish to give place its own importance (not just dependent on economic factors), but he introduces the notion of cultural exchange in the creation of local identities. Indeed, if place is produced in the Lefebvrian sense, it is surely not produced merely from elements within this space, but from many other places. We will use Arjun Appadurai's concept of flows to describe this:

This is a world of flows. It is also, of course, a world of structures, organizations, and other stable social forms. But the apparent stabilities that we see are, under close examination, usually our devices for handling objects characterized by motion. (2001, 5)

To him what characterizes most our world are these flows; place becomes a spatial intersection of flows of people, information, money and goods. The French anthropologists Cuillerai and Abeles very much agree on the importance of these flows:

Ce qui caractérise l'univers contemporain, ce sont avant tout les flux qui l'animent. Les théories traditionnelles semblent avoir sous-estimé la prolifération « rhyzomique » [...] préférant les références stables : territoires, organisations, institutions, Etat. Ce qui est radicalement neuf [...] c'est le fait que la planète entière est traversée par des flux : finance, marchandise, information, population, en déplacements incessants. (2002, 3-4)

Place is therefore itself a dynamic concept, changing constantly with the fluxes.

Appadurai interestingly links Lefebvre's theories to his theorization of flows, discussing the "production of locality" of an immigrant:

Rather than a simple opposition between spatial and virtual neighborhoods, what has emerged is a significant new element in the production of locality. The global flow of images, news and opinion now provides part of the engaged cultural and political literacy that diasporic persons bring to their spatial neighborhoods. In some ways, these global flows add to the intense, and implosive, force under which spatial neighborhoods are produced. (1996, 197)

b) Identity

This concept of flows might still be unclear in what it has to do with identity-making. I want to underline two central points: the idea of a dynamic process and the idea of a network, which are both very visible in Appadurai's work.

First, dynamism: thinking of place not as a simple surface waiting to be filled but as a dynamic cross point for all sorts of flows of many different scales allows us to get rid of the static connotation that we might associate with place. 'Home', 'country', 'street corner' or 'cornfield' all sound like static entities, but not when you take into consideration that everybody has a different, personal representation of these places (Lefebvre's space of representation), and that every person will have a constantly evolving representation depending on elements both inherent to the place (seasons visibly changing on the cornfield) and on exterior networks and connections (for example, we can imagine a fascinating Brazilian article found on the Internet about international cocaine traffic that makes you see the Swiss bank at the street corner much more critically*).

Therefore, identity associated with place is also an ever-moving concept: as personal and social representations of place evolve, so does the way people define themselves in relation to place. Stuart Hall also writes along these lines, about identity in general:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.
(1990, 222)

* Invented example

Secondly, networks: they are inherent to 'a world of flows'. A multi-spatial identification process is made possible because people can have access to all kinds of information very quickly through a huge grid of various networks. Eating in a Pakistani restaurant, investing money in a Russian gas company, watching a Spanish soap opera or reading an Australian newspaper online are possible things only through extensive and dense networks. The political geographer Jacques Lévy explains the signification of networks today:

Désormais notre univers est fait pour une grande part de réseaux, de transports, de communication, matériels ou immatériels. Ces espaces sont lacunaires, faits de points et de lignes. Cela ne signifie pas qu'on ne puisse pas se les approprier. [...] Les identités contemporaines peuvent donc être analysées comme une combinaison variables de territoires et de réseaux. (1998, 195)

If "contemporary identities can be analyzed as a combination of territories and networks", this can start explaining why (or at least how) the Serbian community was out in the cold demonstrating against Kosovo's independence. Linda McDowell offers an insightful summary of this type of research in current geography:

Geographers now argue that places are contested, fluid and uncertain. It is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion. (1999, 4)

She also introduces in this quote the fundamental notions of boundaries, and of exclusion. We have so far omitted the fact that a lot of the identity process is not defining who you are or where you come from, but defining who you are not, where you are not from, and who *others* are. Discussing this is essential for a thorough review of the place-identity process, as the identities and the places we are researching do not exist as independent entities, but only in relation to one another. For Gillian Rose, place is never transparent even though we think it is, there is always the underlying 'other':

The geographical imagination thinks space can always be known and mapped, and that's what its transparency, its innocence, signifies: that it's infinitely knowable; that there are no obscure corners into which geographical vision cannot penetrate. [...] Transparent space hides what it depends on for its meaning: an other. (1993, 70-71)

She is talking about gender differentiation, and in her text the other is the woman. Her quote perhaps does not fit exactly my point, as she is critiquing the unconscious sexism of geographers, but her last sentence is particularly interesting: the very fact that we talk of place implies the existence of an other. Place identification, however complex and dynamic, works as an inclusion/exclusion process.

Another French anthropologist, Marc Augé, wrote an important book about precisely that subject: *Le sens des autres* (1994). He develops the concept of "altérité" – otherness:

Le sens social s'ordonne [autour] de deux axes. Sur le premier (que l'on pourrait appeler axe des appartenances ou de l'identité) se mesurent les appartenances successives qui définissent les diverses identités de classe d'un individu. Il va du plus individuel au plus collectif et du moins englobant au plus englobant. Le second (que l'on pourrait appeler axe de la relation ou de l'altérité) met en jeu les catégories plus abstraites et relatives du même et de l'autre, qui peuvent être individuelles ou collectives. Notre hypothèse est que l'activité rituelle, sous ses diverses formes, a pour objet essentiel la conjugaison et la maîtrise de cette double polarité (individuel/collectif, même/autre). (1994, 50)

Augé questions the dialectics lived by people, at the same time identifying themselves within groups and as being different from others. It is complicated because one can be at the same time 'within' and 'other'. Someone can be from the same village as me, and therefore we connect and share a common identity when a stranger walks into the locality, nevertheless this same person (the neighbour) is not in my family, has nothing to do in my house and would be kicked out if not invited, hence becoming himself the stranger.

Augé explains that *rites* help to cope with this paradox and maintain “social sense”. We create coherence by clearly defining who belongs to what (and where) in every situation by a whole set of codes and rituals. For example, we talk differently to members of our family (and also change the way we address members within the family), to an old friend, to a colleague, to our boss, to a tourist asking for directions or to a homeless in the metro; setting different and quite clear barriers each time. Rites like family gatherings, Christmas cocktails or village dances in the West African regions that Augé studied are the identification of the other:

Au total, la médiation rituelle corrige en ambiguïté ce que l’assignation identitaire en termes d’ambivalence a de substantialiste et de définitif. Elle introduit du négatif dans les affirmations cumulées qui font l’ambivalence. (1994, 62)

What of course interests us is how he connects his theories to place:

[...] il en est des lieux comme du social en général: ils ne disparaissent jamais que pour se recomposer et c’est plus largement des rapports entre espace et altérité qu’il faut traiter aujourd’hui pour mettre en évidence quelques-unes des contradictions de notre modernité. (1994, 153)

Unlike many anthropologists who elude the question of place, he puts it right in the centre of his problematic. To him place is one of the main systems of social identification and differentiation. Actually, he interprets representations of space as the primary differentiation: the expression of “total otherness”:

C’est un fait, toutes les sociétés, pour se définir comme telles, ont symbolisé, marqué, normé l’espace qu’elles entendaient occuper [...] Dans une perspective plus historique et plus concrète, on peut remarquer que la symbolisation, et notamment la symbolisation de l’espace, est le moyen et non pas nécessairement l’expression de l’unité. Si [la symbolisation de l’espace] construit une identité relative, c’est toujours par opposition à une altérité externe et en fonction d’une altérité interne. (1994, 157-158)

L’altérité que prennent en charge les systèmes rituels est multiple. Il y a bien sûr l’altérité complète, celle de l’étranger auquel on attribue au besoin toutes les tares dont on dénie la présence chez soi. [...] Il y a l’altérité interne, l’altérité sociale, qui est à vrai dire consubstantielle au social

défini comme système de différences instituées: le sexe, la filiation, la position dans l'ordre des naissances, l'âge sont autant de critères différentiels qui composent la trame du social et ne sont pas dans expression spatiale. (1994, 159-160)

There are many ways to define oneself and to produce otherness. But to define the other as a total stranger, coming from another place, is the furthest possible difference. We have seen that the concept of place is a key factor in identification processes, along with 'othering'. One defines himself/herself in relationship to certain places, and by expressing who she/he is not. These two aspects come together and crystallize in a very large literature: the discussion of borders.

c) Borders

The most obvious way to spatialize otherness is to erect borders. The creation of a symbolic line allows people to encompass themselves within a group, to legitimize identity through territorialization. What comes to mind when thinking of borders is often national borders, or border between nation-states. Indeed, nation-states are very powerful identity generators, and the borders between them are strong marks of difference: a few steps on the earth's surface and one depends on different governments, school systems, laws, police etc.

What interests us is that nation-states – artificial, recent creations – have become immensely important in people's identification, especially in its spatial character. Where is somebody *from*? From Sweden, Thailand or Brazil. And when he/she does not indicate an existing nation-state it usually implies some kind struggle over the sovereignty of a territory: Quebec or Kurdistan. Benedict Anderson, in his famous book *Imagined Communities*, writes on this topic:

I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...]

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. [...]

It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. [...]

Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (2006, 6-7)

It is important to note that he discusses ‘nations’ mainly from the perspective of nation-states, even though it allows him to speak more of the people that compose it and less of governments. When he writes that “no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind” he rejoins Marc Augé and the human social need to create otherness (and therefore to construct borders).

National identities are therefore a way humans have found to feel a sense of *belonging*.

As Anthony Smith puts it:

A sense of national identity provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture. It is through a shared, unique culture that we are enabled to know ‘who we are’ in the contemporary world. By rediscovering that culture we ‘rediscover ourselves, the ‘authentic self’, or so it has appeared to many divided and disoriented individuals who have had to contend with the vast changes and uncertainties of the modern world. (1991, 17)

What is again implied here in the need for a “unique”, “distinctive culture” is how the creations of nation-states are the expression of the deep human need to single themselves out from other groups. If defining yourself in relation to an other is a universal human behaviour, constant throughout history (although taking many different forms), nation-

states as we understand them are a quite recent artifact – about two centuries old (Anderson 1991). Dominique Schnapper writes:

Depuis la fin du XVIIIème siècle et la Révolution française, les Etats-nations ont eu pour principe d'organisation et de légitimité la coïncidence entre le peuple - ou, en d'autres termes la collectivité historique, ou l' "ethnie" ou le "groupe ethnique" - et l'organisation politique. (2001, 4)

Nation-states are then one way to produce otherness and belonging, amongst others. There are therefore many other powerful symbolic lines of separation between people, including other territorial borders: neighbourhoods, urban/rural, private/public and so on. As we see, these borders are sometimes very unclear and elastic, as they depend on individuals' perception and subjectivity.

Borders are nevertheless absolutely *real* and important to study, as they structure everyday life. David Newman sums this up better than I would:

We live in a world of lines and compartments. We may not necessarily see the lines, but they order our daily life practices, strengthening our belonging to, and identity with, places and groups, while – at one and the same time – perpetuating and re-perpetuating notions of difference and othering. (2006, 143)

There are of course non-territorial borders also structuring social life. Indeed, the distinction between people can present many aspects: gender, class, sexuality, race, ideology etc. Sometimes these distinctions have little spatial correlation, and some scholars, especially sociologists and anthropologists, have been more interested in borders in their social sense without finding the need to always linking them to the spatial. This is the case for Fredrik Barth:

Socially relevant factors alone become diagnostic for membership, not the overt, 'objective' differences which are generated by other factors. It makes no difference how dissimilar members may be in their overt behaviour – if they say they are A, in the contrast to another cognate category B; they are willing to be treated and let their own behaviour be interpreted and judged as A's and not B's; in other words, they declare their allegiance to the shared culture of A's. [...]

The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses. The boundaries to which we must give our attention are of course social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts. (1969, 15)

Such anthropological thoughts are very interesting, as they deconstruct human behaviour and take nothing for granted, unlike many determinist traps that geographers have fallen into in the twentieth century (Holdich 1916; Kristof 1959). Contemporary geographers (Harvey 1993; Newman 2006; Massey 2007) have very much integrated the social importance of borders, and have completely transcended geo-determinism, as 'placement' is based on people's agency and movement as they negotiate Lefebvre's spatial structuring.

I am interested in place-making. I have studied how spatial and social borders are dealt with and expressed by my interviewees. In other words: how are borders interpreted? Of course, seeing that I get all my data from (subjective) interviews, my point is not to draw these borders on a map, but to analyze *border narratives*, to get a take on how these three Haitian refugees produce place, and on how they limit and encompass it. Newman sets out precisely the theoretical background which I find most relevant:

One of the challenges of border theorizers is to collect these narratives and to put them together in such a way that the different types of barrier or interaction functions of the border – be they visible in the landscape or not – are understood at this local level of daily life practices. The extent to which all borders are social constructs, partly imposed from above and, even more so, evolving from below, is played out through these border scenes. If we really want to know what borders mean to people, then we need to listen to their personal and group narratives. Bringing these case study narratives together at an aggregate level should help us understand the notions of 'difference' and 'other' in the real daily lives of people, rather than as abstract sociological constructs. (2006, 154)

Having people speak to me about their borders is to me a relevant angle to tackle the issues of place-making and belonging. As we have seen, spatial identification processes are multiple, as my interviewees refer to several places: the village or city they are from (in Haiti), Haiti as nation-state when they left it, Haiti as a nation how they represent it

to themselves now, Canada, Quebec, Montreal, their neighbourhood, their house and many others. I therefore examine large-scale 'official' borders (between states) as much as small-scale neighbourhood borders, as they are all part of specific experiences and narratives, and hence structure place-making.

Let me finish this section about borders by introducing scholars who argue that we too easily accept that places are 'bounded' on a conceptual level, specifically Doreen Massey in her famous essay *A Global Sense of Place*. She makes the point that because places are dynamic processes, it is reactionary to conceptualize place as if it were coherently bounded:

Instead [...] of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this, in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local. (1994, 154)

She proposes to transcend the static separation of places between 'outside' and 'inside' in an attempt to create a new framework at an analytical level. In our interconnected world of flows and connections, she argues that we must understand places as dynamic experiences which constantly integrate outside elements. An old, static analysis of place could only enhance reactionary and xenophobic ideas, as it would ground practices of inclusion.

We have already described places as processes, and I very much agree that no place can be described or analyzed without references to many places beyond. Moreover any

diasporic community, especially refugees, are paradigmatic examples of people living in one place with references to another.

It is in this sense that the theory of border interests me for this research; in the manner in which they are transcended and subtly played with by individuals today, in a context of globalization, displacement and diasporic identity that make these processes occur at a complex, multi-scaled and overlapping level. If my objective is to study how people *make* place, it is most relevant to examine how places are contested and experienced, thus how place is constructed and expressed in reference *and in opposition* to other places. As Daniel Trudeau writes:

The boundary between 'us' and 'them' is not just an abstract line upon which mental boundary wars are waged. This boundary is articulated on the ground, in the construction, reconstruction and contestation of spaces. (2006, 434)

Allow me now to use these theoretical concepts of place-making, identity and borders to discuss the context of displacement, and how these themes present a different light in these specific narratives.

d) Narratives of Displacement

I interview refugees, hence people with traumatic experiences of displacement and exile. This can affect their place and identity narratives in an infinite number of manners. In this sub-section, I will examine some of the relevant literature on displacement in relation with the three themes approached above – place, identity and borders.

- **Refugees and Place**

The word 'displacement' says a lot in itself. Refugees are refugees because they are acknowledged as having *lost their place*, as not being able to go back to where they are *from*. They have to deal not only with the complicated identification of places that all migrants live through, but also a tragic event which has caused their movement, and that will most probably induce a lifelong trauma, meaning that every time they refer to their place of origin they will link it to this trauma.

Douglas Porteous and Sandra Smith would call refugees victims of "domicide", their neologism to describe "the murder of home." (*Domicide*, 2001) Their research points out the great importance of home to people:

Two focuses appear to perform this integrative task [of physical, symbolic and socio-psychological aspects of home]. The first, an outward-lookingness, focuses upon *home as centre* – a place of refuge, freedom, possession, shelter and security. The second, an inward-lookingness, focuses upon *home as identity* – with themes of family, friends and community, attachment, rootedness, memory, and nostalgia. Home is thus a spatial, psychological centre in which at least a portion of an individual's or a group's identity resides. (2001, 61)

This quote shows how painful the refugee experience is, as refugees lose both homes "as centre" and "as identity". This definition of home – and the research around the concept of 'domicide' it enhances – is very close to what we have discussed earlier about the 'production of place'. Refugees (in seek of a *refuge*) have lost place (*displaced*). If place is a continuing process, it cannot simply be lost like an umbrella. Places where refugees come from are places of suffering: shattered and torn away from them. Yet, they are also places of life and joyous memories. And now their new 'home', Montreal for those I chose to study, is also a place, made and re-made everyday.

Bringing up place while interviewing refugees is therefore a more complicated (and interesting) task than merely seeing it as something lost or gone. At the contrary, it enhances discussions about memories of places, the influence of these memories today, the consequences of being forced to change places (and therefore to make new places), and the relationship between places and identity.

- **Refugees and Identity**

We have already introduced the notions of ‘multiple’ and ‘diasporic’ identities. Even though everyone uses many references in their personal and social place-making, displaced persons and groups may be paradigmatic examples of this: as refugees they have no choice but to cope with a new environment that they did not chose, and as humans they have no choice but to create new social relationships, live in this new environment, hence producing space. Jennifer Hyndman puts it this way:

Refugees and displaced people are the human barometer of political stability, of justice and order in much of the world, but they are not simply passive indicators of geopolitical conflict. The new settlement of diasporic populations affected by displacement remakes places. (2000, 151)

I therefore analyze how the refugee experience shapes the process of place-making. Furthermore, I wish to interrogate how identities are acclaimed and negotiated in this particular scope.

The refugee experience may be more or less important in the construction of an identity depending on the individuals, but my hypothesis is that it is inevitable to a certain extent: traumatic violence leading to the start of a new life in another part of the world could hardly leave anybody unmoved. Drawing on the literature about identity (and its links with place-making), I hence study some specific consequences of being a refugee,

in its effects on everyday life, on individuals' identity claims and thoughts and on place perception and production.

- **Refugees and Borders**

The most obvious connection between borders and refugees are national borders. In fact, the study of borders between nation-states becomes much more relevant from the perspective of a refugee. Borders are to wealthy Westerners often a simple routine; a passport shown to a tired officer in an airport after a vacation or a business trip. To refugees, joining another country can mean safety at last, and as borders are much more difficult to get to and pass through, they also gain a huge symbolic value. This topic is hence introduced not only discuss the symbolic value of national borders, but also to get the interviewees to discuss on national belonging and the experience of multiple, transnational identity.

It is impossible to talk about refugees and borders without bringing up thoughts about the nation-state, and its pertinence to them. Do they merely cross between nation-states at a specific line, do they always cross lines in their feelings and representations, or do they completely transcend nation-states, as humans with such a transnational status? Hyndman begins to answer by linking refugees to the broader group of 'transnational migrants':

Transnational migrants maintain multiple identities, moving across borders and often between cultures to create a single, imagined social field, politically displaced and geographically distributed. By maintaining identities that link them to more than one nation, they challenge academic orderings, territorially fixed notions of nation, and assimilationist narratives of immigration. (2001, 167)

Furthermore, as we have discussed previously, I wish to study borders far beyond national ones. David Newman's short wordplay says a lot: "(b)ordering" (2006). Bordering is ordering, and not just as a top-down state level. I wish to study borders in the sense that they are territorial consequences of social othering. Therefore, not only do I wish to listen to what the interviewees have to say about states, customs and their national identities, but I also want them to tell and show me how they (b)order places now in Montreal, how and where neighborhoods stop, who the others are. Moreover, I want to see if being a refugee has had an influence on the latter.

Literature Review Conclusion

This vast overview of an eclectic selection of scholars wishes neither to be exhaustive nor to set a detailed agenda for my thesis. The interviews being in 'life-story' format, the questions I ask are not preliminarily fixed in accordance with theory. We will see in the following chapter on methodology that the interviewees are empowered to decide on the relevant themes and chronology. The interpretive essays will then take a narrative standpoint, attempting to unfold the interviewee's discourse and thus to stay close his or her discourse. In these essays, interpretation will therefore be very present but in a suggested form, in order to alleviate the accounts and render some of their narrative beauty. This format allows multiple interpretations, and the reader is therefore asked to keep in mind the concepts developed here and use them as potential interpretation perspectives.

I will then come back to the concepts reviewed here in a more formal 'Interpretation' chapter, explicitly linking literature and the interviewees' narratives. However, this

review must be seen as a theoretical starting point. The interviewees, thanks to this liberating interviewing format, have guided me towards other directions of interpretation and hierarchies of relevance.

The goal of this review is therefore to explain in what range of thought I stood during the interviews. I wanted to understand, as deeply as possible, what place means to individuals, how they relate to it and what they make of it. In these in-depth conversations, I was particularly interested in representations and interpretations of places, identity and belonging claims and the manner in which people order and border their world, but I tried to stay completely open to detours and surprises in the rich development of these narratives.

Methodology

The Collection of Life Stories

For this research I have collaboratively worked with three individuals to record their life-stories. They are three Haitians who arrived in Montreal in the 1970s, fleeing political persecution: Mrs. Elizabeth Philibert, Mr. Céradieu Toussaint and Mr. Frantz Voltaire. I have been guided in many ways by a very special research project happening at Concordia University. The Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) supports the project entitled *Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Violations*, hosted at Concordia's Oral History Department. I am a member of one of its research sub-groups, which is specifically studying Haitian refugees in Montreal. They have provided me a theoretical framework, interviewee training and debriefing sessions, recording material, multiple contacts within academia and the community and an extensive methodological and ethical discussion.

Let us go back to the original research topic to develop a coherent methodology for the process of conducting the interviews and their subsequent interpretation. My main interest is identity; its intricate processes and its particular narratives. My focus is Haitian refugees in Montreal. The specific perspective on identity I wish to study is its links with place: the dialectical relationship between the places that one refers to and how he or she constructs his/her identity. I hence want to study individual place-makings and poetics of belonging, through in-depth, extended, 'life-story' interviews.

In this dialectical construction of both place and identity, I want to assess the influence of lived political violence. Haitian political refugees have lived in a climate of fascist, state-run physical and symbolic violence and have then gone through traumatizing experiences of displacement and exile. This has had to impact their identity – who they are – but also their perception of places: their houses back there and here, their neighbourhoods, their understanding of the countries “Haiti” or “Canada” have a specific meaning due to their refugee experience, which I wish to unfold in the interviewing process.

Moreover, I wish to examine how these narratives dialogue with place-making in general, but also with the specific urban experience of Montreal. My research is grounded in this city, that the interviewees contribute to make through their dwelling, navigation, representation and discourse. Drawing on Lefebvre (1974) and Massey (1994, 2007), I wish to scrutinize these stories as rich, complex examples of personal appropriations and re-definitions of a particular city. Stetha Low sets a theoretical framework for an ethnographic research of public space:

The coproducers of the ethnography must be given a voice and a place in the written document, and ethnographic research is increasingly judged by its ability to portray the impact of macro- and microprocesses through the “lived experience” of individuals (Appadurai 1992; Rodman 1992). Thus, an effective anthropological theory of the spatialization of culture and human experience must integrate the perspectives of social production and social construction of space, contextualizing the forces that produce it and showing people as social agents constructing their own realities and symbolic meanings. But it must also reflect both of these perspectives in the experience and daily life of individuals. (2000, 127)

My interviews are therefore close to ethnography, as I collect detailed information about people’s life through discussion and participant observation, and later write personal, subjective essays. The richness is not in the research’s statistical or representative value

but in its very details: it allows people to say their personal history and their relationship to place without the rigid structures of questionnaires, and it allows me to explore complex levels of experience – and the retelling of experience – in my writing. As Carolyn Ellis puts it:

It [ethnography] appealed to people like me who didn't want to stay stuck at the level of data. I wanted to be a storyteller, someone who used narrative strategies to transport readers into experiences and make them feel as well as think. (1996, 19)

My methodology is therefore inspired by the discussions of ethnographers such as Ellis and Bochner (1996) or Clifford and Marcus (1986) who have drawn out the subjective role of the interviewer. I also used as guidance the works of geographers who have used ethnographic techniques to write about place, such as Divia Tolia-Kelly (2004), Stetha Low (2000) or Dolores Hayden (1995). Hayden stresses the importance of interviewing and storytelling along with mapping for neighbourhoods to be understood by geographers:

Through mapping as well as interviewing, it is possible to find out what residents of a city think about the meaning of urban history in their lives and in the places they go. People in a neighborhood have unique understandings of its landmarks, its sights, sounds, smells, its pedestrian patterns and social organizations. (1995, 229)

In this work it is only people's narrations and subjectivity that interests me, as I seek not to set out agendas for urban planners or map out 'objective' information. Individual stories are therefore my primary interest, and the scholars who have theorized the most about such research are oral historians.

Oral History

I have collected three accounts in an in-depth, qualitative manner. To do so I have drawn on the technique developed by oral historians of 'life-story interviews' (Perks &

Thomson 1998; Frisch 1990; Ritchie 2003). Indeed I strongly believe in collecting a prolonged account, in which the interviewee narrates his or her own life extensively, ordering the narration in a deep, personal way. Only with such a narration are we able to comprehend some of people's subtleties and paradoxical narrations. Donald Ritchie explains:

Oral historians speak of conducting "life histories," by which they mean full-scale autobiographical accounts that allow interviewees to relate their entire life, from childhood to the present. [...] Conducting life histories usually means selecting fewer interviewees and devoting more time, and multiple interview sessions, to each one. Life histories give the interviewee enough time to relate what both the interviewer seeks and the interviewee wants to tell. The oral historian conducting even a subject-oriented project should seriously consider expanding the scope of its questions to record as much as possible about each interviewee's life. Broader questioning establishes links that neither interviewer nor interviewee may have considered in a more narrowly focused interview session. (2003, 40)

What Ritchie points out here is very important in my methodology. Indeed I have specific research questions, but I do not only orient my questions solely around place or belonging. On the contrary, the interviewee and me try to draw on his or her entire life story. This has proven to be absolutely essential in my interviews, for several reasons.

First, it has generated the production of fascinating stories. I now have enough material to start working on three important biographies or novels, as these narrations are filled with intrigue, suspense, emotions, vivid descriptions and beautiful metaphors. I have often forgotten my research questions in the interviewing process, and let myself be completely taken by the story. This was a unique experience, which I hope to share as much as possible in the following chapters.

Secondly, and this point is strongly linked to the above, this technique has indeed allowed to "establish links that neither interviewer nor interviewee may have

considered,” as Ritchie puts it. As the interviewees and I were unraveling aspects of their life, it often occurred to me that we were precisely talking about a point that strongly related to personal place-making or belonging, in terms that simply could not have been possible to get to with a blunt question. Such a method allows time to be taken and detours to be made. These detours are immensely precious, for in turn they allow the slow construction of ideas and images, and the elaboration of improbable but highly relevant connections.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, this interviewing method allowed the interviewee to feel involved in the process. This theme is central to the *CURA Life Stories Project* (2008a), and I have deeply made it mine. As generous and open-minded an interviewee may be, he or she will always be more engaged with the interview if he or she feels implicated in the process. If the interviewer sees the interviewee merely as a source of information, he or she will only “extract” so much. Indeed, if the interviewee sees his/her role as merely answering questions, he or she will only reveal a certain layer of insight, for an interviewer – however good – will never systematically ask and word the best question, nor deepen the precise theme that the interviewee is willing to draw upon most. But if this process represents more than a one-sided interview, and if the interviewee can see it as an important legacy to leave to children, grandchildren or a community, if the interviewee understands it more like a collaborative work, then there will assuredly be beautiful, unexpected sparkles.

This introduces the concepts of co-authorship and shared authority, which are central to my methodology. Indeed if my goal is make the interviewee engaged in the process of

narrating his or her life story, this asks the question of our respective roles (interviewer/interviewee) and legitimacy within the process, hence the question of power relations. We will therefore discuss this, around Michael Frisch's central concept of "shared authority." (1990 & 2003)

A Shared Authority

Interviews are processes per se, by opposition to a model where information is a 'solid,' pre-existing matter that can go from a container to another. Remembering is not a linear filling of facts, but a dynamic; linguistically putting together complex threads of emotions, which reflect on each other. Lorraine Sitzia writes:

In the oral history interview, the process of remembering does not exist in a vacuum; it develops in the course of the dialogue between the interviewer and the narrator in the context of their relationship. Through this dialogue stories come to be told in new ways, so the dialogue can help bring out new meanings (2003, 95).

During an interview, both actors therefore produce a *text*, a unique piece that would have been completely different with another interviewer. They are consequently co-authors of the text (Greenspan, 1998).

There is no magical formula, no pre-established procedure to follow in order to obtain a "good" result from such an interview, as it depends so much on the relationship established. But what is quite certain is that the best way to produce deep, passionate accounts is to involve the interviewee in the process as much possible. The interviewee must understand and appropriate himself/herself this concept of co-authorship. He or she must believe in the relevance of the produced discourse and in the importance of

expressing memory for further personal and community uses. Michael Frisch develops this idea:

We need projects that will involve people in exploring what it means to remember, and what to do with memories to make them active and alive, as opposed to mere objects of collection. To the extent this is done, we will be seizing an opportunity not nearly so accessible to conventional academic historical scholarship, whatever its virtues: the opportunity to help liberate for that active remembering all the intelligence, in the way I am using the word, of a people long kept separated from the sense of their own past. (1990, 27)

The way to do this, Michael Frisch explains, is to establish a “shared authority” between interviewer and interviewee. This is a fascinating way to question the power relation of such research. In the production of the biographical text, both interviewer and interviewee are authors because both share the power over the manner in which the text is produced. Disagreements may (and must) rise, as both guide the narration and reflect on each other’s points. The outcome is therefore a compromise, not necessarily synthesized but the result of varying perspectives. But the concept of “shared authority” encompasses more than the mere interview, it asks how (and by whom) the text will be used, distributed and interpreted. Frisch asks:

We need to understand the ways in which authorship is shared, what does this mean for understanding how interviews can actually be a source of “H”istory, as distinct from historical data or raw material – history, that is, as a synthetic reconstruction that necessarily involves story, frame, analysis, and interpretation, however implicit? What is the relation between interviewer and subject in the generating of such histories – who is responsible for them and where is interpretive authority located? How are we to understand interpretations that are, essentially, collaboratively produced in an interview, whether the relationship is one of cooperation or tension? How can this collaboration be represented, and how, more commonly, is it usually mystified and obscured, and to what effect? (1990, xx).

We see that shared authority is a rich concept, beautiful theoretically but not necessarily simple to apply. Moreover, as Frisch illustrates, the interview itself is only a *moment*, which must be included in a wider process. Therefore, even if there is great complicity and a shared and mutual consciousness of the importance of the interview while it is

happening, shared authority must also be addressed in the interpretative aspect of the process. This is I think especially an issue with this research. The power relations between the interviewee and myself changed greatly from one person to another, and even within the same interview, in the complex elaboration of a collaborative process. Of course, many improvements could be made, but the significance of the interview was thoroughly discussed with each interviewee, and I believe that each saw in the interview an important, personal outcome, much beyond my research.

This thesis is also told through my personal agency of words. I tried to respect the interviewees' hierarchies of importance and to convey their narrative flavour. But I wrote it alone, selecting the quotes, choosing and ordering the themes and adding my interpretations, hence editing their stories. Had 'shared authority' stopped as I started to write? This has troubled many oral historians, such as Linda Shopes:

The biggest challenge [...] comes in analyzing the interviews gathered and presenting them as published scholarship: on the one hand, it is all too easy [...] to manipulate narrators' words to fit our own analytic categories; on the other, a commitment to rendering narrators' perspectives, to "the voices of experience," can perhaps silence the scholar's imperative to generalize, critique and theorize. (2003,108)

Not only would it be in practice extremely complicated to write the essays collaboratively, it could also silence some of my interpretations or make me shy to express some of my points, especially if my interpretation can be perceived as critical. Of course this could be positive, as it encourages sustained dialogue about the interview, but depending on the relationship established, some interpretations could be in turn misinterpreted or misunderstood. I therefore have to balance the respect and collaboration I claim in "shared authority" and my academic distance and potential

critique. Lorraine Sitzia offers us a key, as she writes about her interviews with Arthur Thickett, and later collaboratively published works:

[If I were to start again] I would allow myself the opportunity to write about the process outside of the collaboration, or be critical of the narrator or analyze his or her stories in ways he or she may not like. I am not sure that it is possible to have a shared critical perspective with our narrators, or that it would be desirable to do so; it is the narrator's story, it is personal to him or her, and as interviewers our interpretations are affected by age, gender, and subsequent understandings of the past. But I believe now that it is important to realize that many products are possible from one project, and perhaps embracing this concept frees us from the inevitable restrictions that come with shared authority. (2003, 101)

This work is therefore *one possible product* of the interviews, as opposed to a final result. The interviewees explicitly agreed for me to work on their narrations, as they knew that it was part of my Master's thesis. But the latter is only one outcome: inscribed in the Life Stories Project, these interviews can be worked on and transformed by other researchers. For example, a theatre group studying non-verbal expressions of trauma has already used some of my recordings for their work.

Moreover, the interviewees have a copy of all the recordings. If they allowed me to work freely on their stories, by no means did they relinquish their rights on them. They can use and diffuse the tapes however they want, and pursue work and reflection with these interviews as bases. Mr. Voltaire used the interviews to question his role as an interviewer for his future documentary films, as it allowed him to inverse the positions. Both Mrs. Philibert and Mr. Toussaint saw the DVDs as legacies for their children and grandchildren.

Themes addressed

We have seen that I am more inclined to allow the discussions to unfold gradually and in unsuspected ways, letting the interviewee guide the dialogue, hence choosing the many addressed themes. Nevertheless, there are certain points that I do focus on, according to my interests and research topics. This means that I have tried to interrupt monologues as little as possible – the more the interviewee jumps himself from topic to topic the more interesting I found the discussion. But, if the interviewee was waiting for me to comment or to ask a question, I would reflect on what had just been said, trying to encourage her or him to add perspective on my research themes of place-making, sentiment of belonging, the exilic experience or their representations of homes, cities and neighbourhoods.

We must take into consideration that the interviews were a dynamic process, in which what was at stake was being transformed as the relationship (or simply the mood) evolved and shifted. Sometimes, the interviewees would be very passionate and engaged in the telling of his or her story, and both of us would momentarily forget my research objectives as we would plunge into the narration. At other times the interviewees would be more self-conscious and distant from their chronicles, and would then address more specifically my research themes – which I carefully explained to each before starting to interview.

Let us keep in mind Lefebvre's "trilectic" (1974, see p. 10-12). I concentrate mainly on what he calls "spaces of representation." Of course Lefebvre shows that all three feed on

each other to form a coherent definition of space, and “spatial practices” and “representational spaces” influence “spaces of representation.” But the latter are the most relevant in this research, as I study how people, in their everyday life, re-interpret place, and how they integrate that in a life narration.

“Spatial practices” can be studied by rigorous observation and mapping, “representational spaces” can be addressed through surveys, questionnaires and archival research, but personal “spaces of representation” – the frame in which these research themes fall into – I believe can only be examined by in-depth, qualitative discussions and narrative discourse analysis. People do not simply give out their subtle insight on belonging and place-making, as there are no correct, encompassing questions nor answers. I have had the luxury and the privilege to conduct extended interviews, hence allowing the interviewees to unravel their life stories in their own way without insisting on the research themes and gleaning relevant information on the way.

The CURA Life Stories Project

I have already mentioned the project on several occasions, but must include it as an entity in my methodology, for it has guided me in every stage before, during and after the interviews. Not only has the project provided me with a theoretical, methodological and ethical framework, but as a member of a research group I witnessed and contributed to the elaboration of the research problematization.

The research project's objective is to use oral history methods to study "Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Violations":

Oral history, we believe, has a pivotal role to play in educating ourselves and our communities about the social preconditions, experiences and long-term repercussions of crimes against humanity. Our proposed project, *Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Violations*, will use the methodology of oral history to explore the experiences and social memories of Montreal residents displaced by mass violence, ranging from the Holocaust to war and atrocity crime in Rwanda, Cambodia, Latin America, Haiti and South Asia. (CURA, 2008a)

Several aspects of the project truly enthralled me. Firstly, it is a genuinely trans-disciplinary project. Not only do researchers come from different horizons, but the explicit objective is to build bridges between academia and the community (CURA stands for Community-University Research Alliance). Each sub-research group had to include representatives of universities and community groups. This involvement, outreach and continued dialogue with the community is a rare and precious opportunity for a graduate student.

Secondly, the ethical background developed by the project is profound and rich, also thanks to the community involvement. I have been introduced to the concept of "shared authority" through the project, as they organize numerous conferences, debates, and debriefing sessions specifically on the ethics of interviewing. This makes their respect and commitment towards the interviewees deep and thought-out, which is absolutely

necessary when dealing with the accounts of such troubled life stories. This can be illustrated in the paragraph on obtaining informed consents in their ethical guideline (see Appendix 5):

Informed consent will be obtained in consultation with participants prior to and immediately following the interviews. Interviewers will inform participants of the purpose of the interview, the procedure and participants' options regarding confidentiality and the accessibility of the recording and/or transcript. Participants will be informed of the possible uses of the interview by researchers working under the auspices of this project and that coordinators will have limited control over the use of material by unaffiliated researchers once it has been archived. Although these issues will have been discussed at the pre-interview sessions, they will be addressed in more concrete terms before the interview itself and participants will be asked to sign consent forms. Participants will be given the opportunity to modify the terms of the form after the interview is finished. Finally it is to be noted that consent forms are right of use agreements, and there is no transfer of copyright. (CURA 2008c)

Thirdly, I particularly appreciated the use of time in the project. Interviews are supposed to be lengthy, and should repeat themselves in several sessions with each interviewee. Even though this is a relatively large research, encompassing hundreds of researchers, community members and volunteers, everybody seems to agree on the primary importance of each and every story collected. Moreover, the project's timeframe is five years (it started in the summer of 2007), allowing flexibility and space for reflection and redirections.

Fourthly, the project has provided me with a strong technical and human support. I have been able to borrow books and recording material, to transfer the interviews on DVD, to use their computers for transcription and to seek for advice and feedback. Their workshops on interviewing included a practical introduction to the use of the video camera, but also focused on the social and psychological aspect of interviewing. Furthermore, therapists are available for both interviewee and interviewer if a session is emotionally difficult or traumatizing.

Last, but definitively not least, the energy and the enthusiasm generated by the project are absolutely compelling and have carried me with an undeniable force. The interviews are studied and transformed by researchers, artists and community groups, which makes the process a continued stimulation.

The project is separated into research groups, one of them specifically focusing on Haiti. I have become integrated with this group, participated in its reunions and activities, taking the opportunity to construct a research question within a group of engaged scholars and community members who all work on Haiti and on Haitians in Montreal. Haitians have lived through intense political violence but no genocide, as opposed to the other research groups working on specific regions (Great Lakes Region, Cambodia and Holocaust). We have therefore elaborated a specific research question around the concept of lived political violence, and its retelling:

Nous cherchons à savoir comment s'opère cette violence [politique et symbolique] dans la vie de tous les jours, dans les relations avec la famille, avec les proches et le voisinage. Il sera important de tenir compte de la dimension psycho socio culturelle de cette expérience vécue par les individus victimes de la violence. Nous pouvons nous attendre à une grande diversité dans l'expression de leur vécu et dans les raisons invoquées pour motiver leurs départs et leur choix du pays d'asile politique, ainsi que leur manière de gérer les conditions d'insertion et d'intégration dans la société d'accueil. Plus précisément, nous explorerons avec ces personnes victimes de la violence un ensemble de thèmes nous permettant de reconstruire avec elles leur parcours migratoire et l'expérience de leur insertion en terre étrangère. À travers ces thèmes, nous chercherons à comprendre:

- Comment la violence subie dans le pays d'origine influence-t-elle l'adaptation des déplacés dans la société d'accueil? Quelle est l'ampleur de la violence remémorée et quel est l'effet de ce souvenir sur la construction de leur identité personnelle, sur leur appartenance communautaire au sein de la diversité culturelle de la société d'accueil, sur leur position et leur mobilité sociale dans la société civile.
- Comment ces personnes recomposent-elles et racontent-elles leur histoire? Transmettent-elles cette histoire à leurs enfants? La transmettent-elles à l'extérieur de leurs réseaux sociaux? Quand, comment, où et pourquoi ces histoires personnelles de violence sont-elles racontées et par qui?

(CURA Haiti Research Group, 2008b)

The CURA research group on Haitian refugees is chaired by Dr. Carolyn Fick (Concordia University; History), and includes Dr. Ernst Jouthe (UQAM; Social Work), Dr. Frantz Voltaire (CIDIHCA edition & documentation center), Dr. Gina Thésée (Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haïtiens de Montréal), Yasmine Félix (UQAM; Communication), Charlette Ménard (McGill; Education), myself and many other less regular members.

Choice of People

The Haiti research group decided to interview Montrealers born in Haiti, who entered as political refugees between 1957 and 1994. Refugees have continued coming after this date, as Haiti is still an agitated and extremely poor country, but this is the (extended) period of Duvalierist persecution (CURA Haiti Research Group, 2008), and it was decided to study the influence of this particular form of political violence. Without setting a fixed time period, it was decided that the interviewees should have lived in Montreal “for a significant time,” enough for them to have a deep and personal understanding of the city.

Our recruiting technique was to be diversified. As many group members were well connected to the Haitian community in Montreal, we started by interviewing acquaintances and hopefully generate a “snowball effect,” being directed to other interested potential interviewees. Then, as momentum would build up, collecting visibility for our project in the community, we would make more publicized interviewing offers to the community’s media and organizations.

The above is conditional, for as I write we are only in the middle of the second year for this five-year project. The Haiti working group held its first public event – an exhibition, documentary film screenings and debates entitled “Resistance, Dictatorship and Exile: Haiti under Duvalier” – in May 2009. We are therefore in the early stages of interviewing. In fact, the three accounts presented here are the three first interviews conducted by our research group.

I started by interviewing Mr. Frantz Voltaire, who is also an active member (and co-founder) of our research group, as a community representative – he is the director of the Centre International de Documentation et d’Information Haïtienne, Caraïbienne et Afro-canadienne (CIDIHCA). At first we saw this interview as a mere test for future ones, but his story was fascinating and we both got quite engaged in this narration, and we quickly redefined our interviews as being fully part of my research.

As we got to know each other better, both through the interviews and other work for the research group, we discussed on many occasions my research topics and potential interviewees. He is extremely well connected in the Montreal Haitian community, and proposed three other interviewees, whom he knew more or less personally and who would represent an interesting panel of political refugees: an militant woman from the Port-au-Prince suburbs, a communist activist from the northern rural area of the country and a novelist, poet and intellectual leader.

It is therefore through Mr. Voltaire that I interviewed Mrs. Elizabeth Philibert and Mr. Céradiou Toussaint. He introduced me and was the co-interviewer for each first encounter, and both times drew back and let me pursue the interviews by myself. The

second time I interviewed and filmed Mrs. Philibert, Rosalind Franklin, a graduate student also involved in the Life Stories Project, accompanied me as the videographer.

I will conduct the fourth interview as a volunteer for the project, but chose not to include it in this work, in order to sufficiently expand and unfold the following three stories, already immensely rich. I therefore have not included the “intellectual leader” (Mr. Raymond Chassagne), as Mr. Voltaire, although very different, comes somewhat close to this denomination.

I only interview three people, and hence do not claim to present a representative panel of the Haitian refugees in Montreal. I did look for diverse trajectories that I do not wish to rapidly synthesize into a generalizing conclusion but to treat as separate narrative entities. This research is not comparative, but descriptive and interpretative.

I have therefore organized the following three chapters as three distinct essays on each interviewee. I have particularly emphasized the narrative elements which refer to sentiments of belonging, identity formation and representations of places, but the reader will see that the essays are not thematically constructed. Indeed the stories told are so rich and fascinating that I felt the most insightful way to relay them was to present them in a narrative form, trying to convey to the reader a sense of each particular discourse construction – in other words to keep these *stories* in story form.

It is only in the chapter following these essays entitled “Interpretation” that I connect the narratives together and with literature in relation with my research themes, into a more academic form of writing. The three accounts are undoubtedly a rare presentation of results in a Master’s thesis in Geography; my ambition is to enable the reader to plunge

into the subtleties, beauties and traumas of the stories, transmitting some of the emotions that I felt in the process.

A Brief Chronology

This thesis offers no historiographic review or analysis, as it focuses on how history is perceived and retold by three individuals. The following chronological timeline's purpose is therefore simply to historically contextualize these narratives, and to indicate the links between personal and political events in Haiti referred to by the interviewees. (Sources: Diederich & Burt 1969; Labelle 1987; Weinstein & Segal 1992; Hoffman 1995; Fatton 2007; Péan 2007 and interviewees – Philibert 2009; Toussaint 2009; Voltaire 2009)

1935	Birth of Céradiou Toussaint.
1946	Dumarais Estimé is elected President of Haiti.
1948	Birth of Elizabeth Philibert and Frantz Voltaire
1949	An enormous national exposition celebrating Port-au-Prince's 200 years is organized on the waterfront.
1950	Estimé is overthrown by the army. Colonel Paul Magloire is put into office. He starts important public works throughout the country.
1956	Public uprisings force Magloire into exile.
1956-57	A year of great political instability, with many successive governments, including that of the popular leader of the Mouvement Ouvrier Paysan, Daniel Fignolé, for three weeks between May 25 th and June 14 th 1957.
1957	François Duvalier (Papa Doc), the army's candidate, is elected President of Haiti in September 1957. Originally a doctor, he had been Dumarais Estimé's health and labour minister. His propaganda insists on the <i>noiriste</i> ideology, challenging the mulatto bourgeoisie and trying to appeal to the black majority.
1959	Fidel Castro overthrows Fulgencio Batista and institutes a Socialist régime in Cuba.

- 1960 Duvalier confronts the Catholic Church and evicts Bishop Augustin and Archbishop Poirier. He is excommunicated by the pope.
- 1961 General student strikes. The University is placed under the State's total control.
- 1961 *After taking part in these strikes and demonstrations, C radieu Toussaint is briefly imprisoned and goes into hiding for a year in the Artibonite region.*
- 1962 Official creation of the *Volontaires de la S curit  Nationale* (VSN), Duvalier's political police and personal militia known as the Tonton Macoutes.
- 1964 Duvalier proclaims himself President for Life.
- 1964 A group of 13 guerilleros from the city of Jeremie, calling themselves "Jeune Haiti" enter the country by boat in an attempt to overthrow Duvalier. All of them were captured and executed. *Frantz Voltaire, like all Port-au-Prince pupils, is forced to witness the execution of two of them, Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin, on the 12th November 1964.*
- 1966 *C radieu Toussaint takes part in anti-Duvalier demonstrations in the Artibonite region, which are violently repressed. He is imprisoned in St. Marc.*
- 1967 *Frantz Voltaire, feeling under surveillance, in danger and with little prospects in Haiti, decides to leave and pursue his studies in Chile*
- 1968 A group of 35 guerilleros land in the Cap-Ha tien from the Bahamas in another attempt to overthrow Duvalier. Their attack fails: their boat is sunk, and most are killed during the battle or imprisoned.
- 1968 Willing to set an example after the above attack, Duvalier orders to execute political prisoners all over the country. *Out of the 77 political prisoners in the St. Marc Prison with C radieu Toussaint, 72 are killed.*
- 1969 Duvalier promulgates strict anti-communist laws and orders large communist purges by his Tonton Macoutes.
- 1969 *Elizabeth Philibert is a victim of these purges, as she and her companions' house is attacked. She is wounded and imprisoned in the P nintencier National.*

- 1971 Death of François Duvalier on the 21st April. He is replaced by his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc). Still authoritarian, he slowly starts to liberalize the régime.
- 1971 *Céradiou Toussaint is freed, as a result of a power shift between Zacharie Delva and Luc Cambronne in the Artibonite region.*
- 1972 *Mr. Toussaint does not find a job after his liberation because of his political past and his years of prison, and decides to emigrate to Montreal.*
- 1973 On January 23rd, three activists kidnap the U.S. ambassador in Haiti, Clinton Knox. In exchange, they demand the liberation of political prisoners. (See Appendices 2 & 3; New York Times articles on that subject) *Elizabeth Philibert is freed this way. She is escorted to a plane out of Haiti. After stays in Mexico and Chile, she decides to establish herself in Cuba.*
- 1973 On September 11th, Augusto Pinochet overthrows President Salvador Allende in Chile. All suspected political opponents are placed in the country's stadiums for interrogation and torture. *Frantz Voltaire is among them, and captured until the United Nations obtain his liberation. He moves to Montreal for further studies.*
- 1977 *Hearing of the country's liberalization and lowering of terror, Frantz Voltaire comes back to Haiti after 10 years of exile, "to try to change something."*
- 1978 *After her companion's death in Cuba, Elizabeth Philibert decides to emigrate to Montreal.*
- 1979 Jean-Claude Duvalier's liberalization is brutally stopped, and many intellectuals and journalists are evicted. *Frantz Voltaire is among the first ones to be arrested and exiled. He goes back to Montreal, establishing himself permanently.*
- 1986 Jean-Claude Duvalier is forced to exile after a popular uprising.

Chapter Two: Elizabeth Philibert

A bowl of *joumou*

I was sitting in Mrs. Elizabeth Philibert's sun-bathed living room on a Sunday afternoon. It was our second interview together and we were taking a well-deserved break in the middle of a rich, deep session. She had heated up a delicious chicken and squash soup and put on a CD from her favorite Haitian band, as we were speaking of the importance of music in her life. There was a long calm moment without talking, just the soup and the stereo. She was looking at me eating, and I felt that devouring it eagerly was better than words for me to compliment her cooking. Indeed she smiled from ear to ear and then looked pensive. She broke the silence by explaining that this soup was the Haitian national dish (*joumou* in Creole). Historically the French colonizers had reserved this dish to themselves, and it was therefore served to every freed slave on the Independence Day, the 1st of January 1804. She pointed out that although the soup we were eating was typically and fully Haitian, it would certainly not have had the same taste if we were eating it in Haiti; years abroad have made her cook with less pepper and garlic and use different spices. And she burst out laughing.

This brings us directly into the core of Mrs. Philibert's identity assertions. Haiti is her country, her origin, her nation; there is no questioning of that fact, and it is immensely important to her. However, she has lived most of her life outside of Haiti and this exile, without challenging her primary identity claim, has remodeled her lifestyle, her perspectives and in many aspects her reality. If an exile is a brutal change, these profound remodelings have occurred much more slowly: her *joumou* recipe has

gradually varied over the years. Hidden in this anecdote alone are many elements which characterize Elizabeth Philibert: her wit and constant plays with metaphors, her oratory art of finding evocative images, her maternal and reflexive ways, her sense of humor and above all her incredible strength and joy of living. Ingredients from all over the world forming a strongly Haitian dish. A smart, multi-layered reflection on herself. A quick sense of the appropriate formula. A great big generous laugh. These seem like relevant aspects to introduce Elisabeth “Bella” Philibert.

This essay on her life story and her interpretation of places is based on four open-ended encounters with Mrs. Philibert, including two filmed interviews (5 hours of tape). My estimate of the ‘off the record’ discussions is about another four to five hours, including telephone discussions. All the quotes in this essay are taken from the recorded interviews. The few English translations are mine. Although the interviews have gone back and forth with changing structures, this paper separated into three chronological sections (Haiti, Cuba & Montreal), which simply correspond to the three places in which she has lived in. We will analyze and interpret the text, but the idea is to advance through her narrative in a comprehensive way, trying to give justice to her discourse and to recreate a certain sense of her narrative, in its content and in its style.

Haiti (1948-1973)

Cette richesse-là qui est la famille

Elizabeth Philibert was born in Pétionville in 1948. Pétionville is on a hill 7 km above Port-au-Prince. It is now one of the city's most upper-class suburbs, but at the time it was clearly separated and had a dynamism of its own, with mixed classes. Her parents both came from rural parts of the country. Her father was a goldsmith and a jeweler, and her childhood house was also his workshop. Her mother was "like all Haitian women of the time" a housewife.

Her most important symbolic figure, or the one she talked about the most, is her father. She expressed toward him wholehearted admiration. She was absolutely moving as she was describing a photograph of herself with her father:

C'est une photo, qui, à chaque fois que je la regarde me donne envie de vivre, de croquer la vie. Pourquoi, parce que c'est tout ce que mon père m'avait insufflé, tout ce qu'il nous disait, tout ce qui nous entourait, alors c'est pour cela que j'ai gardé cette jolie photo. Vous voyez comment je ressemble à mon père, et puis c'est comme frère et sœur. [rire]. [...] C'est à Port-au-Prince, chez une amie à Port-au-Prince, on était invité et puis elle nous a pris en photo parce qu'elle disait : « mais vous vous ressemblez, frère et sœur ! » Et puis papa était tellement fier de faire la photo avec sa fille chérie, parce qu'il m'aimait beaucoup.

Many times she has implied that her father was not only a loving and caring figure but also an ideological mentor. He was an active supporter of Daniel Figolé, a charismatic Haitian politician of the 1950s. He [her father] even went to prison for three days at the beginning of the Duvalier regime, in 1958, as a warning that he had been marked as a Figoliste. Her house was always buzzing with political discussions:

Mon père n'était pas un intellectuel, il était un simple ouvrier ok. Il parlait tout le temps, il réunissait ses amis, tant intellectuels et ouvriers : à l'époque il y avait pas de barrière. Il les réunissait à la maison, et je vois ma mère qui faisait du café, qui servait du café à ces heures-là, et on parlait ; c'était le bouillonnement politique. On parlait de la politique : que Figolé doit un jour monter au pouvoir, mais Duvalier n'aimait pas ça. [...] Papa, c'était ça sa passion [la politique]. Il en parlait tout le temps. On était dans la maison baignés dans cette atmosphère-là. Donc pour moi la vie politique, militer dans un parti politique, n'était pas quelque chose de wow ! Non non, mon adhésion était très douce.

She therefore explains her political activism as a logical, “soft” continuation of her father’s principles. This is very interesting, because she also describes her father as deeply catholic and very suspicious towards communist ideas, whereas she rejoined the most Marxist, left-wing group of the time:

Tu sais que papa il parlait toujours de la politique. Mais quand on parlait des communistes il ne voulait rien entendre parce qu’il y a cette question, les communistes sont des athées, alors il ne voulait pas en entendre parler.

Evidently the Cuban Revolution was very much discussed during her childhood years, and her father was very much against it. Her father’s heritage is more about the great interest for politics and political debates than the ideas themselves.

What I also find interesting in the description of the ambiance in her house is the role of her mother. The words are very evocative: we imagine a group of men talking all night about politics, louder and louder, smoking, and the woman silently walking around filling up coffee cups. I haven’t obtained much more information about her mother: caring, efficient, discrete. Every time I went back to her I got the same brief answer: “O my mother was like all Haitian women.” I don’t know if it’s because Mrs. Philibert did not find it interesting to further the description of her mother or if it provokes memories that she doesn’t want to bring up. But either way I find intriguing that she spoke so little of her mother’s figure and status, especially as she [Elizabeth Philibert] later became a very active feminist.

Her childhood is undoubtedly an anchor point for Mrs. Philibert. Her eyes light up when she speaks of her father, of her school years, of her summer vacations in the countryside or of her agitated house full of music and political debates. Her childhood places are

profoundly linked to family, and the image of her idealized Haitian family has been her cultural model throughout her life:

On n'était pas riche, mais les Haïtiens à l'époque, ceux qui n'étaient pas riches, ils étaient bien, parce que pour nous, une fois qu'on a cette richesse-là qui est la famille, cet amour-là, on était vraiment bien. C'est quelque chose qui me revient toujours en tête et que j'ai essayé d'inculquer à mes enfants et que je garde précieusement. Et que je garde aussi, parce qu'il ne faut pas oublier que la famille c'est le réservoir de tout ce qu'il y a du culturel, tout ce qu'il y a de sacré, tout ce qu'il y a de bon. [...] On pouvait dire qu'on était bien à cette époque-là.

As we see, her childhood and her childhood places are reconstructed as a generally positive entity. The fact that they were not rich, or many other inconvenient are rather downplayed. The 1950s in Haiti were troubled times, on the verge of civil war. Duvalier came to power in 1957 when she was 9 years old, and quickly installed State-sponsored terror in the country. Her father was even shortly imprisoned for political reasons. Her childhood was probably more stressful than she describes, and she is willing to admit the political tension when asked direct questions. For example, when I asked about the fear of the military when she was walking home from school, she gave a very detailed insight on the general climate in Port-au-Prince and in Pétionville in the 1960s:

Moi je vais vous dire ce que je voyais, ce que je ressentais. Comme j'étais à l'école à Port-au-Prince, quand il y avait des mouvements, qu'on arrêtait des gens, surtout des mulâtres, et qu'on tirait un peu partout... Oh là je me souviens cette affaire de Benoit qui me vient en tête. J'étais chez Georges Marc [son école], et il fallait que je laisse l'école tout de suite et prendre la camionnette pour monter à Pétionville. Alors c'était très difficile pour moi, parce que je courrais dans toutes les rues de Port-au-Prince pour aller... Et puis quand je dis dans toutes les rues ! Il fallait laisser l'école Georges Marc, courir le long de la rue Chemin des Dalles, pour aller sur la rue et prendre la camionnette pour monter à Pétionville. C'était, mon Dieu, ouh là là, on tirait partout, et quand on tirait c'était à hauteur d'homme hein, n'importe qui peut être frappé par une balle. Et ensuite, arriver à Pétionville pour moi c'était... ouf ! Parce qu'à Pétionville, il n'y avait pas ce mouvement-là. On vivait intensément à Port-au-Prince. [...]

[À Pétionville] ça se faisait la nuit [les arrestations]. Et c'est le lendemain qu'on entendait de la bouche des adultes : « A savez-vous ? On a arrêté hier soir, soit M. Rigaud, soit M Untel, M. Ceci, M. Cela. Mais il n'y avait pas ce grand mouvement de DKW. Parce qu'il y a une voiture, la marque c'est DKW, dès qu'on entend le ronflement de cette machine là mon Dieu, c'était la peur. La peur hein[silence]. [...] À Pétionville, on entendait les DKW passer. Mais tous les mouvements, les tirs, les arrestations, etcetera, ça se passait plutôt à Port-au-Prince à l'époque.

However, without forgetting these details she does not express them as devastating for the young girl she was. Or more precisely, she blurs her personal chronology and associates such events with later trauma, as she blends the general history and her personal story in her discourse construction. Therefore, the principle landmark is her father's death, in 1967. This sudden death was traumatizing, not only for the loss of the loved figure, but also because it forced her to quit school to help her mother run the family business and raise her younger siblings. This date also correspond to the beginning of her political activism, and the further fright it enhanced, especially as the regime was toughening more and more, specifically on communists. In her narrative, she clearly places a before and after mark on that specific date: she abruptly switched from child to adult, she went from a little girl observing political discussions to involved activism, and in parallel (to her eyes) her country slipped to dark times.

Political activism: et ça a commencé à être très dur pour nous...

Mrs. Elizabeth actually did not have much of a teenage. She speaks herself of a "stolen youth." Her father died when she was still very protected, and she suddenly had the role of an adult. Along with the difficult responsibilities that this change of life implied, I understand that a certain freedom accompanied it. She could wander out of the house much more, and meet people that her father might not have let her. Full of questions and moved by the political tragedy of her country, she was searching for something that neither her family nor the Catholic Church (her two main pillars until then) could give her:

J'étais vraiment croyante, on peut dire. J'étais vraiment croyante et puis dès l'âge de 18 ans, 19 ans, j'ai laissé tomber cette affaire d'aller à la messe, à l'église, de communier et cetera. Donc c'est quelque chose que vraiment j'avais mis de côté pour embrasser d'autres choses. [...]

Vous savez qu'à cet âge on est toujours en quête de changement, d'autant plus que c'était une époque où on parlait de beaucoup de choses, on entendait parler de Cuba, on entendait parler de pas mal d'abus, d'atrocités dans le monde, et puis on se posait la question. Parce que surtout dans mon cas, étant donné que je suis une personne qui était complètement fermée à la maison [...] mais il y a toujours ce questionnement : qu'est-ce qui se passe ? Je posais la question aux voisins, à des amis, qui pouvaient au moins t'expliquer ce qui se passait. D'autant plus qu'on entrait dans cette période : le duvalierisme, qui n'était pas vraiment de tout repos...

She quickly found what she was looking for by joining a party: the “Parti Populaire de Libération Nationale,” (PPLN) the main Marxist party in Haiti at the time. She was introduced to it by a cousin of hers, a union leader. It was already banned when she joined it. She quickly became one of the most active female members, distributing underground pamphlets and newspapers and meeting all the important leaders. Very interestingly, she has said in our first interview (much before her detailed descriptions of her father): “The PPLN is my father.” At first she was very discrete about all her motivations that weren't solely political. But as Elisabeth and I developed a stronger relationship, she also explained that she found her first love in the party. Mr. Arnold Villemin was one of the young leaders of PPLN. As I imagine them, they were an emblematic young couple of the resistance: idealistic and dedicated.

She spent less and less time with her family, until eventually moving out of her house to live clandestinely in the party's secret accommodations, with her boyfriend (whom she either calls her “companion” or her “comrade”). I understand that this followed a serious argument with her mother, who disapproved of her lifestyle and was scared for her daughter's safety. But Mrs. Philibert, as always when it came to her mother, did not want to get into any details about that, and the latter is therefore a personal interpretation based on several hints and implications during our conversations.

In 1969, François Duvalier launched a horrific anti-communist campaign, which was to wipe out the last remaining groups of left-wing opposition inside the country. Basically, anybody who was suspected of communism was sentenced to death*, and the Tonton Macoutes and the political police were given full power.

From the beginning of the year, she felt the intensification of the political repression. Comrades were being arrested or disappearing. It became impossible not to constantly feel under surveillance. Strange people always seemed to come out of nowhere and observe her and her friends. She was living in a house with many other communist members, in Port-au-Prince:

On disait dans le quartier qu'il y avait des gens étranges. [...] Alors à ce moment-là on nous a surveillés effectivement. Et ça a commencé à être très dur pour nous parce qu'on voyait dans le quartier des choses pas normales. Comme un monsieur qui cerclait devant la maison. Pourquoi? Est-ce-qu'il a un jardin ? Mais non il était là, mais j'ai su par la suite que c'était un militaire qui surveillait tous nos mouvements. Ensuite, la nuit, comme en Haïti il y a toujours le blackout comme on dit, panne d'électricité, il y avait toujours un Macoute pas loin de la maison, on le voyait parce qu'il fumait. A chaque fois qu'il fumait on voyait le bout de la cigarette.

Every time I look back at the recording of this segment I feel a cold shiver. She makes a long pause and she mimes the Macoute, silently smoking in the dark, and the viewer feels the tension building up and the indescribable fright. This house, on the Carrefour road, becomes a character of her story: she has recounted every room and detailed the inhabitants. Forty years later after, she remembers perfectly these last days in the house, which were to be her last days of freedom in Haiti and her last days with Arnold Villemin.

* See Appendix 1: a reproduction of the anti-communist laws of April 1969

On the 2nd of May 1969, armed men surrounded the house and attacked it with heavy weaponry. The inhabitants shot back, but they were outnumbered and quickly defeated:

On a commencé à tirer, et j'étais la première à être blessée. J'ai eu une balle à l'épaule et je suis tombée. Par la suite les autres se cachaient pour au moins ne pas être atteints par les balles qu'on tirait un peu partout. Moi j'ai pu ramper un petit peu, je me suis mise à l'écart. Chacun était dans un coin. Arnold était dans un coin, Yannick dans un coin, René dans un coin si je me rappelle bien. Et ensuite, quand ils ont vu que réellement avec ce déchargement-là ils pouvaient rentrer dans la maison ; ils sont rentrés. Et c'est à ce moment-là qu'ils m'ont pris. Et j'ai entendu dire : « Il y a une femme là ! Elle est blessée à l'épaule, il y a du sang ! » Ils m'ont pris. Les autres, je ne sais pas ce qui leur est arrivé. Mais quand je suis sortie dehors, j'étais accompagnée de Lori Smet [responsable de la police politique de Duvalier]. Et il a dit : « Le travail est terminé ! On a pris cette femme, je pense que les autres sont morts ! »

Indeed, all the house's inhabitants were either arrested or killed. Mr. Arnold Villemin, Mrs. Philibert's companion, was shot dead during the assault. Ms. Yannick Rigaut, her best friend and role model, was also killed. Mrs. Philibert is brought to prison, wounded and pregnant.

In prison: il y avait aussi cette peur quand on ouvrait les portes

Mrs Philibert was first transferred to the Casernes Dessalines – the military headquarters – for an interrogation:

Alors c'est ça, je suis allée aux prisons. Pardon pas en prison. Non. Je ne suis pas allée directement en prison. On m'a conduit aux casernes Dessalines. Parce que j'étais blessée. Malgré le sang qui coulait et j'avais le bras ankylosé, on m'a passée à l'interrogatoire

Before receiving any kind of treatment, and visibly pregnant, she is interrogated and tortured by Jacques Anselme. He wanted to know the names of all communist affiliates. As she tells him that all the people she knew were in the house, he continues to whip her. She still bears the marks. The description of her arrest and torture was of course a very intense moment, nearly unbearable. The more she was detailed and thorough, the

more her gaze was unfocused and in the vague, giving the impression she was re-living the events. She is holding her wounded shoulder during the whole segment.

She was finally transported to the military hospital, to be treated. She shared her room with a man, Mr. Serge Joachim, who had been savagely tortured. She keeps a traumatizing memory of his distress, as he died in the bed next to hers during her first night of captivity. It seems as though she amalgamates the death of this stranger that she witnessed and the death of her loved one the same day, murdered by the same regime.

After a few days she got better. She is especially grateful to a doctor who saw her primarily as a patient and who gave her proper medical care. As she was healing, she could walk around her hospital room, and look at the street from her window. She spotted a comrade from her party circling around the building. She thought the man was trying to free her out of the hospital, and signaled him to go away, for the area was much too well guarded. One hour later a policeman rushed in her room and declared that if she was healthy enough to make signals from her window she didn't belong in the hospital, and she was promptly brought to the National Prison.

This episode is interesting because she is certain that this comrade on the street is a traitor who was spying on her. She knew that there were spies in her party, for they couldn't move without the police or the Macoutes knowing. But she now could associate a name and a face to one of them. She expressed no hate towards this man. He was young, irresponsible, probably starving and desperate for money or blackmailed. She conducted her hate towards the regime and its injustices, and has mercy for these weak

individuals. Quite symbolically, she refused to tell this person's name, "in case he were still alive."

She was placed in cell number five, with five other female political prisoners. As such [political prisoners], they have an even worse treatment than the other convicts. She explained that she could not have survived without the solidarity of the 'common right' detainees, who got a little food from their visitors (whereas political prisoners had no visitors).

From these early months of prison, she highlighted two major preoccupations. On the 18th of July 1969, two of her inmates were pulled out of the cell at dawn. Guards tell her they were freed, but everybody knew they were off to be executed in Fort-Dimanche. This constant fright of being brought to Fort-Dimanche and executed in the middle of the night made her suffer "more than hunger and diseases."

Her second enormous concern was of course her pregnancy, with the upcoming birth day terrifying her. She repeatedly asked to be seen by a doctor, but the demand was ignored until her waters broke, when she was finally brought to the hospital:

Mais ce qui était vraiment dur, alors là, il fallait que je fasse, je sais pas, il fallait avoir beaucoup de courage en tant que femme, étant donné que j'étais une prisonnière mise au secret avec par-dessus le marché entre guillemets le mot communiste, donc, je n'avais pas un traitement aussi... comme toutes les femmes qui accouchent. Donc le médecin qu'est-ce qu'il a fait quand il a vu que j'étais prête à accoucher : «non non non, je ne donnerai pas d'anesthésiant à cette femme, elle va accoucher comme ça » et le médecin m'a accouchée vraiment en me faisant l'épisiotomie à sang froid. C'est pas tout. Quand l'enfant est sorti ils ont pris l'enfant et ils m'ont dit de descendre de la civière et de marcher jusqu'à mon lit. Et après ils m'on apportés l'enfant. J'ai passé trois jours sans soins s'il vous plaît, et c'est en arrivant à la prison - parce que j'étais pas libérée, je suis retournée à la prison - que les infections ont commencées.

Very ill from post-natal infections, she once again owes her survival to the 'common right' women who got medical plants smuggled in. Her daughter, Marie-Carmel, was

brought to her in prison and lived her first three years in a cell. Food for her daughter became her daily struggle, and she even literally hit a guard in a desperate moment:

Je me suis battu, dans la prison, pour l'enfant, parce qu'on ne voulait rien lui donner, parce qu'elle ne pouvait pas avoir la même nourriture que nous autres, et quelle nourriture qu'on nous donnait ! Parce que moi j'ai bu cette bouillie qu'on nous donnait le soir avec de la farine, mais c'était de la farine, du sucre et des coquerelles, et il fallait le boire. Sinon qu'est-ce que t'allais boire, parce que t'as pas de visite! Et même le gendarme qui était avec nous ne voulait pas que les gens de droit commun lui donnent des choses, parce que tu sais dès qu'on voit un enfant on est attiré, mais il ne voulait pas. Et un beau jour je l'ai frappé. Je lui ai dit « vous avez des enfants ? Alors moi mon enfant a le droit de recevoir des choses. » Et je l'ai carrément frappé.

Even so, her daughter would have died without the intervention of Mrs. Caillard. Mr. Caillard, her husband, was a high-ranked officer who had plotted against Duvalier. He and his wife were both thrown in prison; Mrs. Caillard in Mrs. Philibert's cell. Because of her high rank and her status, the guards were a little afraid of Mrs. Caillard, who was scandalized by the condition of this baby, and pleaded for her to be at least vaccinated and fed a little milk.

In 1972, François Duvalier died and his son Jean-Claude took over. He stated that he would free some political prisoners, as an act of good will. Even though Mrs. Philibert explained it was out of question that “*real* political prisoners”, like herself, were freed, William Avin - one of the friendlier guards – pleaded for the child's case:

William Avin a dit « bon, écoute, étant donné que le président est en train de grâcier certaines personnes moi je vais demander au colonel non seulement pour votre fille mais aussi que votre mère vienne, au pénitencier national : tu apportes ton enfant, tu remets ton enfant à ta mère. » Jean-Baptiste Haïre [le directeur de la prison] n'a pas voulu. Donc l'enfant est parti dans les bras de je ne me rappelle plus quel officier, et elle pleurait elle pleurait en disant en disant maman, en appelant les autres personnes, mais heureusement, sous la direction de William Avin, on a remis l'enfant à ma mère. Et j'ai su aussi que ma mère m'attendait pour me parler, pour me voir, Jean-Baptiste Haïre n'a pas voulu.

In prison, Mrs. Philibert had the constant fear that she would one day be taken away and tortured or executed, like it happened often to people around her. More than the dreadful

conditions, it is this trauma – the fear of the squeaking doors at night – that seems to trouble her the most:

J'appelle ça la pêche nocturne [les gardiens qui emmenaient les prisonniers la nuit]. Parce que ce n'est pas seulement être en prison privé de tout, enfermé, privé de ses parents, de sa famille, ok, mais aussi il y avait aussi cette peur quand on ouvrait les portes, le grincement des portes, c'était quelque chose qui effrayait hein.

About prison: *et pourtant il y avait un amandier parmi tout ça*

While remembering her years in prison, Mrs. Philibert has explained how it has deeply impacted her mental state, her way to apprehend life, and interestingly how she has later organized her homes, as reminders of her “dear” Haiti, before prison and exile:

C'est ce que j'essaie de reconstruire [le Haïti coloré de son enfance], pas seulement dans la maison mais aussi mentalement. Parce que ça me tient bien. Parce que sinon, ce serait le vide, le néant. Donc comme je te disais il y a des tableaux qui viennent d'Haïti. J'ai ici des pots, des sculptures, tout ça c'est pour créer une ambiance, pour ne pas oublier ce cher pays.[...]

Je n'aimerais pas l'oublier, et je me demande comment l'oublier aussi. Parce que c'est ancré en moi. J'ai toutes sortes de choses qui me rappellent Haïti. Déjà l'accent quand on parle français, l'accent te trahit, et puis les gestes, écoute... non non non... Mais, j'essaie de reconstruire tout ça, parce que des fois on a besoin de cela. Surtout dans mon cas, après avoir passé quatre années de prison [...] Il y avait un seul arbre ! Mais écoute, enfermée quelque part, cette perte prend en quelque sorte un peu de toi, un peu de ta structure mentale, c'est dur.

What she said about there being a unique tree in prison I found particularly intriguing, and asked her further about it. She explained that it was a crucial element for her: that it “helped her to live”:

L'arbre dans la prison? Je dirais oui, [il était important] parce qu'au moins on voit quelque chose. Parce qu'on peint une prison avec de la chaux, et puis la blancheur de la chaux et tout ça, ça te donne une image unique et on ne voit plus rien. D'ailleurs ça a beaucoup d'effet sur les yeux. Et pourtant il y avait un amandier parmi tout ça. Il paraît même que cet arbre nous parlait, nous aidait à vivre.

The almond tree therefore brought her back to reality, reminded her that nature, and an outside world existed. She would contemplate the flowers blossom, fade, and reborn and it extracted her from the dreadful numbness surrounding her. Another beautiful occurrence that helped her survive is the men's mass. Every Sunday a prisoner from the

men's cell next door would celebrate mass. The women could never meet nor see the men, but they could hear them, and during that weekly hour the whole prison would quiet down; even the guards respected that moment:

Tant bien que mal on s'organisait pour survivre. Tant bien que mal... Il y avait aussi une autre chose que je voulais soulever. Les hommes étaient à côté de nous, c'était cette façon que les hommes s'organisaient, le dimanche, ils faisaient la messe. Il y avait un prisonnier, j'ai jamais su son nom, et j'aimerais bien avoir le nom de ce type, qui faisait la messe, et que tous les gendarmes, même l'officier du jour, tout le monde assistait à cette messe.

It was evidently painful to recount her years in prison, but she wished to be very precise and was willing to answer all of my questions. It was important for her to be thorough, and to record as few errors as possible, in particular people's names, whether those who helped her or those who made her suffer. In fact, even though some moments were immensely moving and reached a very high level of privacy and emotion, she was perhaps more willing to go into great detail than in other episodes or aspects of her life. I will draw on this more in the concluding section of this thesis, as this seems to be a recurring observation in my interviews: she understands that this horrible prison is not only part of her life story, but also of Haiti's history in general, and partly the reason why she accepted to do this interview was for that particular story to be told and recorded.

Mexico, Chile & Cuba (1973-1978)

Liberation: on n'a rien compris

On January 23rd, 1973, three left-wing activists kidnapped the American ambassador in Haiti Clinton Knox*. In exchange they ask for a ransom, a plane to Mexico and the liberation of twelve political prisoners. Pressured by Washington, Jean-Claude Duvalier grants all of their demands. Elisabeth Philibert is among the freed prisoners. She describes that day:

On n'a rien compris. Et je voyais qu'on filait vraiment directement pour l'aéroport. Arrivés à l'aéroport si je me rappelle bien, Breton qui nous disait « il y aura des journalistes », il fallait répondre comme quoi nous avions été libérés, comme si c'était le gouvernement une chose pareille, mais on n'avait rien compris. Mais il y avait du monde à l'aéroport, parce qu'il y avait du monde qui voulait voir s'ils avaient leur fils, un parent libéré. Et puis jusqu'à ce qu'on arrive à l'aéroport, et puis on nous a fait monter dans l'avion, et j'ai vu qu'il y avait trois personnes. Et c'est là que j'ai su que j'étais libérée, relaxée.

The story of her first days of freedom is quite confusing, for several reasons. Everything happened extremely fast, and it's difficult for her to recall the sequel of events. She was a passive actor, at the center of high-level of negotiations still somewhat mysterious. Furthermore, she evidently does not want to talk about her liberators and their motivations. In fact, on our first taped interview, she simply explained how one day she and other political prisoners were conducted to a plane and brought to Mexico. She described her sensations, the agitation and the journalists at the airport, but didn't even mention the kidnapping. All she says is: "When I saw the three people in the plane [the three kidnapers], I knew that I was free." It is Frantz Voltaire who later explained to me the context. Fascinated by this movie-like story, I searched for press clippings of the time, and for our second interview, I came with a few articles and dozens of questions. She was at first nervous and then quickly annoyed by my insisting, telling me that the

* See appendices 2 & 3; New York Times articles on that subject

exchange and the political context was not the point: “What was important for me was to get out of prison. To live. To get a grasp back on my life.” Her liberation, the most public moment of her life is also the most mysterious.

In Mexico City they were well treated but not free. Apparently the Mexican government did not know what to do with these Haitian communists and put them in a guarded house outside the city. The Mexican officials were all too happy to get rid of them when they asked to go to Chile:

On a négocié avec le gouvernement du Chili qui nous a accueilli à bras ouverts, et puis on est parti au Chili. Arrivés au Chili c'est là vraiment que j'ai ressenti ce qu'on appelle la libération, la LIBERTE, là, là, c'était vraiment quelque chose, c'était le bonheur. On pouvait circuler, on pouvait manger alors qu'à Mexico on pouvait pas le faire et le gouvernement de Salvador Allende nous a bien accueilli. Ils nous même donné de l'argent, il a même fait une petite discrimination ; il nous a donné plus d'argent que les hommes [rire], donc une discrimination positive !

Chile is for her synonym of freedom, of reconstructing herself. She has drawn on that in a later interview:

La vraie liberté je l'ai connue au Chili. [...] Qu'est-ce que c'est la liberté ? C'est de pouvoir circuler. [...] Tu vois ce que c'est la liberté. Tu avais de l'argent et tu pouvais entrer comme ça dans une boutique et acheter n'importe quoi ! [...] Pour moi, aller faire ce geste-là, acheter des sous-vêtements ou des vêtements... Tu vois, c'est un apprentissage, parce qu'après quatre ans tu as oublié ce geste d'aller acheter, d'aller chez des amis.. Alors je suis allé dans un magasin et j'ai acheté, j'ai même trop acheté. J'ai marché, j'ai même trop marché, en revenant j'étais fatigué et malade parce que j'étais trop faible.

I find fascinating what elements Mrs. Philibert associates with freedom: buying and consuming (quite paradoxical for a Marxist), eating (as we will see later a crucial aspect of her life) and above all circulating. Being free means walking around, taking random turns and building personal itineraries. She can make her own city if she is not surveilled, if she doesn't live in the fear of potential watchers.

Love: *c'est drôle on a fait connaissance... et puis on a fait connaissance*

I have yet to mention the most beautiful, poetic and inspiring fragment of Mrs. Philibert's life. Freedom didn't simply mean eating, walking or consuming. It also implied love and lovemaking. She had arrived in prison completely shell-shocked by the death of her companion, carrying his future child. The only thought of love brought back tremendously nostalgic memories and shattered her. Yet very gradually she rebuilt hope in the possibility of love, which is absolutely incredible in such a context.

On the other side of her cell wall was a men's cell. Political prisoners were confined, and during her four years in prison she never saw her neighbours. However they would communicate; talking from each side of the wall. As months went by, Elisabeth talked more specifically to one particular prisoner. He had been heavily tortured, and she was ill and worrying for her daughter, and their mutual, invisible presence carried each other. And week after week, as her wounds were slowly healing, in the hell of a Duvalier prison, Elisabeth Philibert fell in love with a voice. The first time she saw Daniel-José Bernard was on the plane to Mexico:

C'est arrivé dans l'avion qui nous amenait à Mexico qu'on a pu faire connaissance. Et c'est drôle, on fait connaissance... et puis on a fait connaissance. Le reste vous comprenez. Alors on a fait le Chili ensemble et on a fait Cuba ensemble. [...] Et puis ce n'est pas quelque chose d'insignifiant ni de laid, ça fait partie de : Est-ce que j'existe ? Je veux prouver mon existence. Voilà. C'est de cette façon là encore que j'ai prouvé que je vivais, que j'existais, et que en faisant ma fille, voilà une façon de dire : Et bien, je peux enfanter encore une fois, alors je vis, j'existe.

In this wonderful conversation she skillfully juggled with the ambiguity between the feeling of love and the act of lovemaking. Although Arnold's death was tragic and traumatizing, Mrs. Philibert is not the type to mourn forever. Loving again and making

love again was the best way to show herself and to show the world that she lived again, and hence show the regime that they had not won; that they could not win.

Cuba: *Cuba c'était pour nous...*

Although Allende's Chile was freedom, Elisabeth Philibert, Daniel-José Bernard and a few other Haitian exiles had other plans. The government had welcomed them, but they felt the strong political tensions, and she claims that she had "smelt" Pinochet's coup fostering. More importantly, they were a plane flight away from their adolescent dream country and political model:

[Cuba] c'était pour nous... [grand geste arrondi]. Tous ceux et celles qui étaient avec nous voulaient connaître Cuba. Parce que des fois tu vis en théorie les choses, mais là c'était voir l'application aussi. Voir ce qui se passe. Voilà pour moi quelque chose qui m'a forgé, et qui m'a fait comprendre ce que c'est vraiment un pays socialiste.

It took a few months to arrange, but they were welcomed by the Cuban government. Enthralled by the applied socialism and pushed by her companion, she participated in all sorts of voluntary activities and governmental programs, became a Cuban resident and is proud that her second daughter, Yannick (in memory of Yannick Rigaud, her friend killed during the house assault) was born in Cuba:

Vous le savez, dès que quelqu'un milite dans un parti quelconque, à l'époque hein, la première chose c'est Cuba. On voulait savoir comment c'était et tout ça. Pas même l'Union Soviétique c'est surtout Cuba. Et puis nous avons été bien reçus hein par le gouvernement cubain. À un certain moment moi je suis devenue citoyenne comme les cubains. Je ne suis pas restée là-bas comme un étranger. Et d'ailleurs j'ai eu là-bas ma deuxième fille, la benjamine. Et j'ai travaillé là-bas comme tous les cubains, le travail volontaire comme tous les cubains.

More specifically, she became an active feminist. She had been in prison during the first wave of 1970s feminist thoughts, and was eager to catch up. She worked in the Association of Cuban Women and in the Casa de Las Americas (a cultural, pan-

American organism). She traveled to Moscow for a conference on women political prisoners, and invited women from all over the world to share their experience in workshops:

C'est là que j'ai commencé à comprendre la situation de la femme. [...] Là on est dans le concret. Toute la politique sur la natalité, sur la revendication des femmes etcetera, j'ai vu ça à Cuba. J'étais là surtout quand on invitait les femmes étrangères à venir présenter leurs programmes, leurs actions politiques dans leur pays.

There was (and still is) a huge Haitian community in Cuba, and she had no trouble re-creating home. She is quite paradoxical about the Cubans: at different moments of our interviews she has described them as “exactly the same as Haitians: same climate, same culture – only a political and economical change,” whereas earlier she had said that “Cubans were complete aliens to me. Imagine, *they* had done a re-vo-lu-tion!” What she emphasized the most was the political and economic regime in Cuba, rather than everyday life. I think partly she assumed that I was critical of the Castro regime, and hence imagined herself in a defensive position which I had a lot of trouble to transcend, hence the relative lack of personal details.

Cuba was definitely for her a reconstructive experience. She was logically in a psychological shambles after prison, and had floated through liberation, Mexico and Chile. In Cuba she seized the opportunity to take her life back, form a family, affirm herself as a woman and act accordingly to her political beliefs. Cuba being such a meaningful place in the re-building of her being, I also think that she put aside the inconvenient details of everyday life.

Furthermore, she romanticizes her years in Cuba. Not only because of her socialist ideals, but also simply because of her love story with Mr. Bernard. He was a journalist, writing in several newspapers around the country. She loved him dearly, and thinking back to the Cuban years for Mrs. Philibert is thinking back to the only years when she has lived with her loved one, as a family, in their little house outside Havana. Daniel-José Bernard died in 1978, never completely recovering from the illnesses and tortures inflicted in the Haitian prisons.

My interpretation is that she put aside her Haitian past when she was in Cuba. Communication between Haiti and Cuba was close to impossible, and it could have been dangerous for a political exile to contact people. To overcome the suffering of not being able to contact her family – especially Marie-Carmel, her first daughter – she negotiated Cuba as a ‘fresh start’, trying not to think back too much of her relatives in Haiti.

However, her second companion’s death left her in unbearable loneliness. The descriptions of her tragedies are very different. Prison was traumatizing but it was a daily fight for survival: she simply couldn’t afford self-affliction. In Cuba, her rebuilt dreams shattered once again and she talks about it in much sadder terms:

Le malheur s’est abattu encore une fois. Suite aux maladies et aux tortures il a eu un problème de pancréas. Et tu sais que le pancréas ça pardonne pas. [...] J’ai passé un an après sa mort [encore à Cuba] mais je me suis dit non, jamais je ne resterai là, parce que je veux être plus proche d’Haïti, plus proche des amis, plus proche de ma fille, plus proche de mes sœurs qui ne pouvaient pas venir me voir à Cuba. Donc j’ai choisi le juste milieu, le Canada.

She needed to be surrounded by family and friends, which was impossible in Cuba (note that she doesn’t mention her mother). Staying in Cuba was also too painful because it always reminded her of Mr. Bernard. She hesitated between Canada and Europe, and

chose Montreal because of its relative proximity and easy access to Haiti and her contacts with childhood friends there. And off she flew, ironically going from 7 to 4000 kilometers north of Haiti to be closer to it.

Montreal (1978 to present)

Arrival: *je me suis préparée mentalement pour venir ici*

Mrs. Philibert's last year in Havana was a very difficult time, which hurt too much to draw on it in detail. She has simply mentioned that what kept her together was knowing that she would leave for Canada:

Je me suis préparée mentalement pour venir ici. [...] Je me suis dit bon, écoute, je pars et je laisse Cuba. Et puis en me disant cela je faisais mes démarches migratoires. Ça a pris du temps mais pendant ce temps j'étais ancrée là-dedans : je savais que je partais et que je quittais Cuba.

She and her daughter Yannick arrived in Montreal in September 1978, with a tourist visa. Her old friends and important Haitian community leaders Mr. and Mrs. Chancy were waiting for her at the airport. They showed her around the city and introduced her to the community, which greatly facilitated her arrival:

Arrivée à Montréal j'étais pris en main par des amis. Et ces amis-là, c'étaient des camarades. Ils m'ont aidée, j'étais chanceuse en ce sens, parce que par ces gens-là j'ai appris comment m'intégrer, parce que c'était des gens qui étaient là depuis 66, 65, et qui s'étaient déjà bien établis, bien intégrés ici, donc cette passerelle là c'était une passerelle importante et donc je n'avais pas à me casser la tête avec mes deux enfants pour devoir bien m'établir ici. Ils m'ont conduit, ils m'ont montré le chemin et cetera.

In my different interviews I liked that the interviewees recounted their first arrival in the city, their impressions driving from to the airport; I tried to make them detail their first days to decipher how their impressions then gradually changed. Mrs. Philibert was particularly unimpressed, which in itself reveals part of her personality. Montreal was

her new home and her new fight, and she had no time to sit around and observe it from the outside.

Helped by her friends, she found her first job at the Maison d'Haïti, the main Haitian community center in the city. Interestingly, she considers it her "first start in the work market," which implicitly means that helping the family business, political activism and state work in Cuba weren't "real" jobs. She also organized everything for her first daughter to come join her, about a year after her arrival. She went to the airport to welcome her little girl who she had not seen since she was taken out of prison eight years earlier:

On lui parlait toujours de sa mère, de sa mère, et elle voulait savoir qui était sa mère et qui était sa petite sœur. Ça a été vraiment quelque chose d'émouvant. [silence]

She settled in Côte-des-Neiges, a district where many of the first wave of Haitian immigrants came to live, especially the artists, intellectuals and political activists. After temporary jobs in the Latin-American Association for Human Rights and a center for battered women, she found a stable job at the Commission for Human Rights for the Rights of Youth, and obtained the Quebec permanent residency in 1989.

As I questioned her at length on her integration and the change it represented, she strongly stressed the fact that it was not abrupt. It was a profound life reordering but it by no means did it happen overnight. She smoothly "transferred" from one society to another, thanks to the large and helpful community of "comrades and friends":

Il fallait faire le transfert mais le transfert ne m'a pas détruite, ne m'a pas choquée, ne m'a pas déboussolée. Si je suis capable de le faire, je l'ai fait, je l'ai fait moi-même et je l'ai fait tranquillement. Et je dois te dire que je l'ai fait aussi grâce aux amis. J'avais des amis qui me supportaient. Ça c'était la clé hein.

Quebec and Quebeckers: *c'est à toi d'aller vers eux*

Before the climate or the cultural difference, the first contrast she brought up between Canada and Cuba was their economic and political systems. She had to find work in a capitalist society, accept the new role of money, understand a new system. She stresses the similarities: the free health care and education system, which she appreciates in Canada:

Je change de système économique effectivement [par rapport à Cuba]. Parce que là, je travaille, j'ai de l'argent en main, je peux acheter ce que je veux sans restriction. [Mais] pour toute la question d'éducation et de santé, je ne vois pas de changement. Ce que je vois ici au point de vue santé, bon on a la carte Soleil, je ne paie pas, écoute à Cuba c'est la même chose ok. Et l'éducation c'est la même chose : gratuit et tout. [...] La seule chose qui change c'est la politique. Là-bas c'est un parti unique ici il y a plusieurs partis... Donc deux formes de démocratie je peux dire. [...] Il fallait se défaire de tout ça ; de six années d'un système économique, politique et social [pour s'adapter]. Quand je dis se défaire je ne veux pas dire écraser. Mais il fallait comprendre ce changement, le faire sans choc.[...] C'est à toi de le faire.

Inevitably, we reflected on the harsh Quebec weather. Somewhat surprisingly, it is not the freezing winter that she dislikes, but the gloomy autumn, as it makes her melancholic, for in the tropics nature does not die for several months per year:

L'hiver je m'y fais. L'automne c'est trop lugubre. [...] Tu sais qu'on n'est pas habitué nous autres à voir la nature en agonie ; il y a toujours des feuilles pendant que d'autres feuilles tombent. Ça c'est un peu dur. [...] L'automne c'est comme une marche funèbre.

What she likes and dislikes about Quebec and its people is a complex dynamic, and her answers varied a lot depending on how I phrased the question, or simply on her changing mood. The study of her integration is a cogent example of the validity of qualitative research: she has gone into layers of subtlety unimaginable in a statistical report or in short interviews. On our first interview, all she basically said was that she

integrated very well, and that Montreal was a wonderful city. She was of course not lying, but she would later give more thickness and life to this explanation.

The most challenging, fascinating part of this story is her relationship with the Quebec nationalist movement. She arrived in the mid 1970s, when the movement was very strong and profoundly reshaping the province's identity. She quickly had great respect for the independentists, for whom she felt solidarity, recognizing a fellow oppressed group struggling politically. She also considers herself as a Haitian nationalist, and therefore saw a parallel between herself and Quebeckers:

Pourquoi j'aime le Québec ? Je vais vous dire, vous aller trouver ça drôle. Comme je vous dis, moi avec un père ouvrier-artisan qui avait un nationalisme sans borne, et je suis arrivée ici et j'ai vu le nationalisme du peuple québécois, et puis ça, ça m'intéressait, ok. Pourquoi aussi le Québec, eh bien je dis toujours que c'est un laboratoire. J'ai appris des choses, beaucoup de choses aussi sur la démocratie. Je pouvais vraiment avoir une idée complète entre ce que j'ai vécue à Cuba et ce que j'ai vécu ici. [...] Ça m'a permis de compléter ma connaissance sur plusieurs aspects politico-social, parce que comme je te parlais ce nationalisme qui m'intéressait, et voir comment ce peuple qui a lutté pour avoir un Québec libre avec tout ce que ça comporte[...] en s'appuyant sur le fait français comme fait culturel ok. [...] J'essaye de comprendre, et ça m'a aidé beaucoup parce qu'en tant que peuple francophone, même si créolophone mais francophone aussi, et ça m'a beaucoup aidé à comparer aussi cette démocratie.

In this rich quote, we also see the importance of the French language. Mastering it of course allowed her to quickly grasp the social mechanisms and dialogue with people, but as language is extremely political in Quebec it immediately placed her on a certain side and allowed her to celebrate the language and to place herself within the "francophone people."

Although she respects and admires the nationalist movement, she does not at all feel part of it. She understands that second or third generation Haitians join the Parti Québécois, but she could never consider herself from Québec. She does not necessarily see it as an

exclusionary process: they have their identity claims, she has hers, and she sees here room for a constructive dialogue:

Et puis ils [les québécois] ont une chose : « Je suis québécoise ! » Moi, ok, je suis d'accord, parce que personne ne peut me retirer : « Je suis haïtienne ! » Tu comprends ? Donc ils sont comme ça, moi j'ai ma façon aussi. Mais par la suite j'ai réussi à développer beaucoup d'amitiés. Surtout maintenant.

On the other hand, she also sees these nationalistic claims as a blocking factor for immigrants. Although she understands them, she described them as often confrontational, especially for visible minorities. As “times were changing” she wondered if it really made sense, and if it wasn't really an anachronistic struggle that enhanced exclusion:

Ils ont toujours cette affaire : on est québécois avant tout. C'est comme si toi tu es l'immigrant. C'est comme un nationalisme à outrance[...] Au début je regardais ça et je me disais ça ressemble beaucoup aux haïtiens, parce que nous autres on a aussi un nationalisme très profond. Mais je n'avais pas compris au début cette affaire : québécois, le fait français, le fait culturel, et qu'ils veulent sortir du Canada pour être un pays et non une province. Moi j'avais tendance à aller dans ce sens là, parce que je sais ce que c'est être un nationaliste. Mais par la suite je me suis dit les temps changent. Est-ce qu'il y a une autre façon de voir les choses ?

After thirty years, she is still unsure of what she thinks of Quebeckers. She finds them respectful and is grateful for their welcoming, but is troubled by the friendship. Especially through her work, she has met many locals, but often finds it difficult to build strong relationships. They are cordial but too often superficial, and drift away if not regularly in contact, as more often than not they will wait for the other to make an effort:

Les québécois : des gens qui te voient, tu es là, mais ils ne vont pas vers toi, c'est à toi d'aller vers eux. Et puis des gens qui, quand ils sont habitués, quand une amitié commence à naître, ils savent se montrer courtois et très intéressés. Mais il ne faut pas s'attendre à ce que le québécois aille te chercher. Et dès que tu l'as en main, ça marche, ça peut aller. Mais des fois ils peuvent être réticents.

Mrs. Philibert has had very different relationships with her two places of exile, Cuba and Quebec. The former was a dream, a romance and a political project, in which she

actively wished to be a part of. The latter was a solution; a common denominator. She has no animosity towards Quebec or Canada, and did her best to continue living and raise her daughters, but at a much more individualistic level (like the North-American model encourages). In fact, it doesn't seem as though she feels very implicated in Quebec nationalism or Quebec issues in general:

J'ai vu aussi des Haïtiens membre du Parti Québécois et très attachés à ça, comme si c'était leur patrie et cetera hein ! [...] Après toutes mes expériences politiques et après avoir traversé tout cela, je préfère rester en retrait et regarder.

She feels sympathetic but external. Above all she is Haitian, and she came close to becoming furious the day I asked her if she was Québécoise:

Je suis haïtienne, et j'adopte mon pays d'accueil. Je n'aime pas me leurrer. Je suis à l'aise ici. Mais il ne faut pas oublier ; après tout ce que je viens de dire à propos de la nourriture, de la musique, de la saveur etcetera, et vous allez me demander si j'ai changé ma culture ? J'embrasse, j'accepte la culture québécoise, mais je suis haïtienne avant tout, n'oublie pas que je suis née en Haïti, même si j'ai passé plus de temps hors qu'en Haïti. N'empêche que je suis restée haïtienne.

Recreating Haiti: *en hiver je recrée l'été avec ces arbres-là*

Indeed, what was crucial in Montreal was to conserve her identity roots and to transmit them to her daughters. She could hold this together thanks to the Haitian community and their multiple services and activities. She could not have imagined raising her children without carrying on a strong Haitian identity. This was possible in Montreal, *perhaps even more than in Haiti*, as years of totalitarianism was "slowly destroying something very deep in the Haitian peoples. By contrast, Montreal presented a "dream of Haiti":

Et moi, à ce moment-là, c'est là le passage ici, revoir cette communauté, revoir ces amis-là je me ressentais encore dans un rêve d'Haïti, ok. Et, je ne voulais pas que mes enfants soient traumatisés et que mes enfants perdent aussi leur culture. Et il y avait tout ça, bien établi, ici.

As we see, Montreal was symbolically a return to Haiti. Even though she was close to many Haitians in Cuba, she was there for what it politically, ideologically represented. Her Marxism in the 1970s was clearly internationalist. Even though Mrs. Philibert is much too subtle to separate people into comrades or enemies of the Revolution, she was in Cuba with a universalistic, socialist perspective. The combination of personal trauma, genuine ideology and the desire of a new start had made her put aside national, or place-based identity questionings.

Montreal was a clear shift from that, and she put national identity right back at the center of who she was. She expressed a strong belonging to Haiti in her Montreal narrative. After having described the city as a “Haitian dream,” she characterizes Quebec as “Haiti’s yard” (*la cour d’Haïti*):

Alors le passage, comme tu parles de triangle, eh bien c’est un triangle où les trois côtés sont égaux. [rire] Ecoute, j’ai pas eu à regretter de vivre à Cuba pour venir ici, pas du tout. C’était se glisser : Haïti-Cuba-Canada. Parce que je vais me retrouver au Canada aussi dans une ambiance haïtienne. Je me suis dit : je me retrouve dans la cour d’Haïti en étant au Québec. Parce qu’il y a une très belle communauté haïtienne où je peux trouver tout ce que je veux, et je participe à beaucoup d’activités à Montréal. J’ai plusieurs marchés à côtés de moi, si je veux aujourd’hui manger telle ou telle chose, de la même façon que je le mange en Haïti, je le fais hein ! Même les fruits et cetera. C’est toujours la même ambiance au point de vue musique aussi : on va trouver des boîtes à musique un peu partout hein ! Et des amis et cetera. Je vais souvent dans des vernissages, mais ce sont des haïtiens hein ! [...] Je baigne dans une ambiance haïtienne en étant ici.

The reasons why she explains this identity need are personal and familial. The death of her beloved companion led to a profound crisis, and suddenly Cuba made much less sense. She needed to be loved and surrounded, and she needed to rediscover who she was, by affirming where she came from, and she wanted to transmit a concrete origin to her daughters. Perhaps came also in play the fact that society in Quebec is not fueled by a socialist project, or at least not by values dear to Mrs. Philibert, as in Cuba. The

underlying ideology may not favour the type of social cohesion that she seeks, as it is based on a monetary competition. This could be linked to the lack of warmth and “true” friendships that Mrs. Philibert found among Quebeckers. She therefore felt a strong need for a national community belonging in Montreal, as it is often the case in North-American cities. An interpretation of her symbolic reproducing of Haiti in Montreal could then be that it not only responded to an initial need, but was also fed and enhanced by this specific host society.

Other than keeping close ties with Haitians in Montreal and being active within Haitian community organizations, Mrs. Philibert has had many strategies to recreate fragments of her country in her everyday life. Food is a very important one, as she has included the search of ingredients, the preparation of meals and the smell of dishes in many chapters of her narrative, and a whole new essay could be written on her relationship with food. As we have seen, food in prison was a constant anguish, and since then she has always given meals great symbolic importance. Eating has been one of the strongest ways to affirm her identity, and she takes great pride in being a great cook of Haitian dishes. What she has said about food was perhaps her most captivating words for a geographer questioning the personal meanings accompanying global cultural flows:

Comme je ne pouvais pas retourner en Haïti, j'étais toujours en quête de cette saveur là ; le goût de la nourriture haïtienne. [...] Mais ce que j'ai remarqué, c'est que le fait que les papilles ont goûté d'autres goûts, d'autres saveurs, d'autres épices, et bien retourner en Haïti comme je suis retourné en 86, et bien cette saveur-là, je ne l'ai pas comme je l'avais avant. Je sais que c'est la bonne bouffe haïtienne [...] mais ce n'est pas la saveur identique, celle de l'enfance. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'on a voyagé, on a vu d'autres pays, on a goûté à d'autres choses, à d'autres épices. [...] Nous autres dans le pâté chinois on essaye d'ajouter toujours nos épices hein ! Mais je ne peux pas te dire que c'est la bonne, la nourriture haïtienne en tant que telle, même si on met nos épices. Donc la question de saveur, c'est comme la transhumance ; ça change, ça change, ça s'adapte.
[...]

Je suis sûr qu'en Haïti quelqu'un ajouterait [à ma soupe] du piment ou quelque chose pour rendre ça plus corsé. Mais c'est une soupe haïtienne avant tout. [...] C'est la même chose pour la façon de

vivre. Il y a une façon de vivre en Haïti ; tu sais la question de survie en Haïti. [...] Les gens sont habitués des fois à mentir pour survivre, parce qu'il faut se battre pour avoir ci [ou ça], alors qu'ici on a le temps chronométré, parce que tout est structuré. Alors après avoir passé 20 ans, 30 ans, 40 ans ici, tu ne pourras pas avoir ce même comportement en Haïti. D'ailleurs les gens là-bas t'énervent. Parce que tu l'as oublié, tu n'es plus dans le même pattern. Donc c'est un peu la même chose avec le goût.

What is fascinating is that although she greatly emphasizes the Haitian nature of her food, she also describes it as (more and more) different than Haitian food in Haiti. Her personal path has allowed her to incorporate important fragments of other cultures, which make her cooking a dynamic process. It is Haitian cooking, but a new kind of Haitian: transformed and remodeled by her itinerary.

The decoration of her house can also be described as arranged like one of her dishes, Haitian and transformed. It is full of paintings and sculptures. Some come from Haiti, others are by exiled Haitian artists, whereas some come from different places, mainly Cuba and West Africa. We spent a wonderful moment going over each and every artwork, filming it while she told its history. Her reproduction of a Haitian place has become an illustration not of anything one would find in Haiti but of her personal world; Haitian in its hybridity. This world keeps her together:

En hiver je recrée l'été chez moi avec ces arbres-là [...] N'oublie pas aussi que c'est tout ça qui me tient bien hein ! Tous ces objets que tu vois, tous ces tableaux, ces sculpture... C'est la base ! Il ne faut pas retirer, piétiner, écraser le socle !

Let us remember an incredibly strong woman, a proud Haitian, proud mother, proud feminist and proud socialist who continues to juggle with her paradoxes with an outstanding humour and intelligence. A true role model, drawing her strength from “God knows where”:

J’ai une façon de me conditionner : il y a certaines choses : je les ai vécues et je suis capable de me dire : voilà, toi tu te tasses là et puis je continue. Ok ? Parce que revenir sur des choses qui vont te faire du mal, c’est comme brasser le couteau dans une plaie. Je ne suis pas de ce tempérament là. Je ne veux que rien m’écrase. J’aime pas ça. Je préfère rompre que d’être écrasée par quelqu’un qui me fait quelque chose, ou si par exemple j’ai des flashes que quelque chose va me donner de la peine. Je suis capable de subir quelques secondes, quelques minutes le coup, mais après je me réveille. Je suis comme ça. Je sais pas si c’est parce que je suis née la veille de Pâques, toujours dans mes affaires catholiques. Ma mère disait toujours : « ma fille elle est née un samedi d’eau bénite ! » Et je suis née aussi dans une époque de réveil et de renaissance : le printemps. Alors est-ce pour cela que j’ai cette force-là ? Je ne sais pas. Je suis comme ça.

Chapter Three: Céradieu Toussaint

A blind man with a piercing eyesight

This encounter began with a misunderstanding of my part. I like to think that my first impression of somebody is often quite accurate. But it certainly wasn't with Mr. Céradieu Toussaint. On March 17th 2009, I was waiting in Frantz Voltaire's office for a meeting he had set up for a first interview with this man. I saw a bent-over old man step into the office, looking confused. He was wearing dark sunglasses indoors and his steps seemed hesitant, and I assumed he was partially blind. Very fast my mind went to technical details on how to film an interview with a blind person...

My concern arose even more at the first words exchanged. Apparently Mr. Voltaire had been very succinct in his telephone explanation. M. Toussaint started in Creole, and Mr. Voltaire interrupted him, introduced me, and explained that the interview would have to be in French. This seemed to worry him deeply. At this instant I thought that the interview would end before it had even started. But he sat down, and we calmly explained the oral history project and took time to thoroughly go through the CURA agreement forms. This half-hour before turning on the camera was invaluable: his stress level went down, his interest level arose, and the photo-sensitive lenses of his glasses slowly became transparent, revealing eyes which not only saw perfectly, but would gently capture me as he unraveled his story.

His French wasn't polished and articulate like my Parisian grandmother's. Ideas and memories seemed to float around the room and he would suddenly grab one, bite into it, develop a fascinating point, forget about it, grab another one, and then go back to a

previous point. It was sometimes confusing, but often riveting to be offered this insight in his narrative and the way it was being constructed. He had no shortage of vocabulary and plenty of innovative images, and he revealed a beautiful kind of French, oral and spontaneous, rich and precise.

The following story is especially precious, as I believe it was the first time that Mr. Céradieu Toussaint told his story in such a way. Of course he had talked to people around him: his family, his ex-wife, his children, his girlfriend and his friends. But for the first time this 64 year-old man sat down in front of somebody and decided to tell his story, and to take his time, for he was the center of attention. Had he not done it before because he is a very secret, discrete man? Is he too modest to deem his story worth other people's time and interest? Certainly. Mr. Toussaint has a modest, rural background. I don't mean to explain his motives for not being very talkative about his life by such a deterministic correlation, as of course plenty of cultural and personal details come in play to elucidate (or not) Mr. Toussaint's personality – and hopefully this essay will shed light on some of them. However, class is an important issue in the narration of life stories, and the study of this particular chronicle will be clearer if we contextualize it through this lens.

Several times in our interviews Mr. Toussaint has pointed out that he was not educated enough to answer a particular question, that he was “only a little provincial guy,” or that other well-known Haitians in the diaspora were certainly more legitimate to talk about certain events. He considers himself as a working-class person, and seemed to want to

leave the analysis of Haiti's history to those he designates as intellectuals – others. It certainly didn't help that he was greeted by Frantz Voltaire, one of the leading intellectuals in the Haitian diaspora, and myself, a white boy with a French (from France) accent.

However, as he saw we were genuinely interested, and most importantly gave him time to construct his thoughts and time for silences, he gained confidence, even more so during the second interview where I went alone to his house. It was absolutely absorbing to sense that he was gradually believing that he *was* indeed part of History. His story is as breathtaking, heartbreaking and beautiful as the other two, but I particularly cherish it because it touches a very important aspect of oral history: revealing the untold or the unheard. Montreal is full of Haitians with enthralling insights about political repression and why they inhabit this city, and many of these stories are silenced. I had the immense good fortune to collect one of them.

Methodological Details: An attempt to concretize Shared Authority

I spent a total of about 9 hours with Céradiou Toussaint, 5 of which were recorded on film. This interview was separated into two sessions: 3 hours at the CIDIHCA offices with Frantz Voltaire and I co-interviewing, and 6 hours at his house in Longueuil, interviewing him alone.

This second interview was methodologically special, and needs to be explained. I had felt these complicated class issues in our first interview (see above), and although we had certainly made him more comfortable, I wasn't happy about the shared authority

process (see methodology pp. 36-40). I wanted to empower him much more and make a clear break from the first interview. So we sat in his basement, in front of his television, and I played the DVD from the previous session. I filmed him as he was watching, gave him the remote control, and told him that he could pause whenever *he* wanted and talk in more detail about a particular passage. He was evidently pleased by this idea. However he didn't pause very much, therefore sometimes I paused it as well, trying to force myself not to do it only at the passages I wanted to talk about, but also observing him and asking a question when I noticed a strong reaction.

This method was advantageous in the sense that it allowed to concretize shared authority. We were taking the remote control from each other, and it was clear who paused and who decided on the themes. I think he did feel more empowered. However it also presented disadvantages. Because he would choose when to stop, he also chose not to stop at passages where I felt he had not been detailed enough and that I found interesting. But I think this touches the very core of my methodology. The stories belong as intimately as possible to the interviewee, and therefore the themes approached should correspond to their personal hierarchy. I want to draw from their discourse into my research topic, and not the opposite. Therefore, even though there seem to be holes and shadows in his narration, I think these holes are extremely relevant. If Mr. Toussaint deliberately chose not to talk about a certain moment, this silence could be as interesting as an explanation, and opens space for interpretation. Nevertheless, on rare occasions, I did allow myself to pause and ask questions.

I have separated his story into eight different sections and a personal conclusion. Each section is chronological, but the length of each section reflects its weight in Mr. Toussaint's narrative rather than temporal length. I would not have divided his account into these exact sections (I would have included more sub-sections during the Montreal years), but as I watched the tapes these seemed to emerge as his way to break down his story.

Haiti (1935-1972)

Childhood years: *Une petite localité rurale*

This is how Céradieu Toussaint introduced himself at the start of the recording:

Bon. Moi mon nom c'est Céradieu Toussaint. Je suis né dans une petite localité rurale de Marchand-Dessalines. En 1935. C'est dire que je suis très très vieux. Et puis c'est ça. Par la suite je suis rentré aux Gonaïves pour faire certaines études. Et puis là j'ai connu des hauts et des bas. Il y a des bons moments et des mauvais moments. Et puis bon. Qu'est-ce que je peux dire d'avantage ?

A certain unease and humbleness about the interest we could have for his life are foreshadowed. He has spoken less than 30 seconds and is already asking what he could say next. Fortunately he would soon unfold, sit up, look more comfortable (and younger) and eventually become very engaged in his own story. More importantly in these first words is how they reveal a hierarchy: what facts must we absolutely know from the start. Apart from the banal name and birthday, let us look at the birthplace: "a small rural village." From the start he emphasizes his rural origins, he doesn't want to leave any doubt on that. Furthermore, *he doesn't wish to name his village*. Marchand-Dessalines is a town in the Artibonite region (north-west of Haiti), between St-Marc and Gonaïves. He therefore situates his village by naming the closest town, but doesn't let us enter and visit his village. Consciously or not, this opening is perfectly relevant to the rest of his

story: he has stated which region he comes from and that it is a completely rural place, and both of these will be of the utmost importance in his life. However, the name of his actual home village is not as significant to him, or for him to tell us.

He left his village, around 1945, at quite a young age. His mother died when he was three or four years old, and his father sent him when he was about 10 to live with his uncle in Gonaïves, the principle city of the region, in order to go to school. He was then raised by his uncle, who was his other childhood paternal figure and with whom he would later have a significant conflict. His childhood and teenage city was Gonaïves, although he often returned to his village and stayed close to his father. He describes his childhood as happy, or “not too hard”:

J'ai eu une enfance heureuse. Si je peux dire. Parce que mon oncle c'était un instituteur chez les frères de l'instruction chrétienne. On n'était pas si pauvre que ça, parce que la vie marchait plus ou moins ; relativement bien : on pouvait manger, s'habiller, c'était pas si dur. J'ai pas eu une enfance vraiment dure. Mon père était là. J'ai pas connu ma mère, elle est morte très tôt, j'avais peut-être trois ans, quatre ans. Mais mon père était là, c'est lui qui s'occupait de moi pendant que j'étais en correspondance chez mon oncle aux Gonaïves, dans la ville la plus proche de ma localité.

Again, note that he says “ma localité” and does not name it. I never asked him directly what his village was called. As the idea of placing childhood interests me enormously, I did ask him to try to describe in detail his childhood place (“le lieu de votre enfance”). Interestingly, he didn't hesitate and described Gonaïves, with more of a teenager's viewpoint than a child's. He particularly depicted the general cleanness and the enchanting smells, obviously setting a contrast with what the city would become later:

Je pense tout de suite, aux Gonaïves, au moins l'eau coulait dans les canaux. Et je pense à une ville qui était propre. Je pense à la Place d'Armes, qui était belle, fleurie. Je pense que pour la Saint-Charles, les maisons sont toutes décorées et on mangeait les pâtés. Les jeunes s'amusaient sur le waf. Le waf c'est un endroit pour les jeunes : aller se promener, courtiser les filles. Rencontrer les petites jeunes filles, les rendez-vous galants... Je pense à tout ça. Je pense à une ville très détendue, très propre, où il faisait bon de vivre, je pense à tout ça. L'entretien. Il y avait des gens qu'on engageait, ça s'appelle le service d'hygiène, c'est des gens qui s'occupaient de surveiller comment

les gens fonctionnent, est-ce que les déchets sont ramassés, est-ce que les cours sont propres. Je pense à tout ça. C'était vraiment une ville agréable. [...] Ca sentait bon [...] L'odeur de mon enfance ? [silence] Ca sentait la mangue [rire]. J'aime la mangue.

This is one of the only rich and descriptive passages on his childhood, for he was willing to answer questions about it but didn't wish to include many details himself while he was assembling the pieces of his narrative. As I explained, I tried to make him lead to what parts of his story he wanted to discuss, precise and develop, and his childhood he did not want to come back to much. What we know about his siblings, for example, is quite succinct:

J'ai une sœur du côté de ma mère, ma mère a eu deux enfants, moi et ma sœur. Et mon père par la suite s'est remarié, et a eu 5 autres enfants. 3 garçons, non 4 garçons et une fille. [...] Deux de mes frères sont ici [à Montréal], un autre qui était aux Etats-Unis, il est mort. Et puis l'autre vit en France. Ma sœur vit en Haïti.

What we must remember is that he expressed a clear dichotomy between his two paternal figures. His father was "rural" and "illiterate" (different passages). His uncle was the exact opposite: "[Mon oncle] était arrivé en ville très tôt, il était devenu professeur très tôt, professeur de primaire." This dichotomy also illustrates how Mr. Toussaint has been going back and forth between rural and urban, having from very early friends, family and deep connections both to his village and to Gonaïves, each being represented by the father for the former and by the uncle for the latter. In his discourse he has been ambiguous about situating his origins 'from the city' or 'from the country,' and we will see that this dialogue between the two has been crucial in his political life later.

His two father figures clearly had a huge impact on M. Toussaint's identity construction. I interpret it as a rebellious construction: he built himself in reaction to his father,

wanting an education and not wanting to be a farmer. His uncle was his role model, probably in comparison to his father, until he became a teenager. Then they diverged as he constructed his political consciousness against Duvalier, whereas his uncle was a “fervent Duvalierist.” He explained in detail their first argument, when Duvalier had just been elected:

Mon oncle c’était un professeur chez les frères de l’instruction chrétienne des Gonaïves. [Il est arrivé] en ville très tôt, il était devenu professeur très tôt, professeur de primaire chez les frères. Et puis par la suite il a pris sa retraite et il est devenu politicien. Il a été préfet de la ville, trois fois je crois. Oui trois fois. Il était un farouche partisan de Duvalier, et puis par la suite on s’était brouillé lui et moi. Et puis quelques années après le départ de Duvalier il est mort.

- *Et vous vous êtes brouillés pour la politique ?* [my questions in italic]

- Oui. Pour la politique mais c’est surtout pour mon idéologie politique, parce qu’il était pas du tout, du tout d’accord avec moi, et il voulait même pas... je ne pouvais même pas passer chez lui à cette époque-là, parce que j’étais considéré comme la peste [rire]. Donc c’est ça.

- *Mais quand vous étiez enfant c’était un personnage ?*

- Oui quand j’étais enfant on avait de bonnes relations.

- *C’était quelqu’un d’important pour vous ?*

- C’était quelqu’un de très très important. C’est lui qui m’a appris à lire et à écrire, et puis c’est lui qui m’a appris beaucoup de choses dans la vie. La discipline. J’étais scout, c’est lui qui m’a emmené chez les scouts, et puis c’est lui qui m’a appris à travailler, à aimer travailler la terre, parce que chaque samedi il m’emmène dans son jardin, il avait des jardins dans la banlieue de la ville. Ouais. Non. On s’entendait très très très bien.

- *Et petit à petit vous sentiez vous éloigner ?*

- De lui ? Oui. Par son idéologie et par mon idéologie. Donc.... [silence]

- *Mais il vous a fait douter ou vous étiez sûr ? Vous avez eu des débats avec lui quand vous étiez adolescent ?*

- Oui on a eu des débats. Je me rappelle la période de 57 quand Duvalier a pris le pouvoir. Et moi j’étais en campagne dans mon village, pour monter une organisation paysanne. On était jeune, on était très fougueux là. On a monté un organisation paysanne, et on voulait envoyer une lettre de protestation pour revendiquer certaines choses que je ne me rappelle pas, et on avait écrit la lettre, et on lui a apporté la lettre pour corriger. C’était là notre premier débat. Il voulait corriger la lettre, mais il était pas d’accord avec la teneur général, il voulait tout changer. Nous on n’était pas d’accord, on voulait tout simplement corriger les fautes de français, sans changer la nature de la lettre. Alors c’était comme ça, notre histoire a commencé comme ça.

- *Comment il s’appelait ?*

- Saint Pierre Excellent Elizé

This passage is fundamental, because it shows us how he first distanced himself from his uncle and doing so approached political resistance. Interestingly for this first political step, he situates himself from a very rural viewpoint, “setting up an agricultural organization” (whereas he has never described himself as a farmer) “in my home

village” (in which he has never lived in more than a few weeks after his 11th birthday). He therefore organizes the anecdote including perhaps his father’s and brothers’ perspective, maybe to situate himself more on his father’s side in opposition to his uncle’s. I believe that he was already an interface: his role in this “peasant organization” was precisely to travel between villages and the city, for example to write letters to officials and have them corrected.

Entering political activism: *la gang des jeunes qui voulaient avancer la cause du pays*

We now enter an aspect of M. Toussaint’s life about which he was much more detailed and loquacious: politics. There is a startlingly sharp contrast between the briefness of his young years and the depth of his account of his political awareness and struggles in his account.

Mr. Toussaint’s political awareness started to arise as young man, and he describes it as a very slow process. He described his childhood and early teenage as completely apolitical, in part because of his rural origins:

[La politique] c’était l’histoire des grands. Des grands hommes comme on disait. On venait de la campagne [...] comme un légume sur la soupe là. On ne parlait pas de ça, des choses politiques. C’était juste les affaires domestiques, comment ça va à la maison. Les samedi on s’en va à la campagne avec tonton, c’est tout, et puis aller à l’école.

He got interested in the political debate during the elections of 1956/57. From my other interviews and readings, it seems as though these elections were in everybody’s minds and conversations in Port-au-Prince at the time. M. Toussaint tells us how they also deeply polarized the countryside, and that political affiliation was the main factor for social group division:

Duvalier avait une certaine popularité dans les régions rurales, et dans les villes avoisinantes des zones rurales. [...] Mais moi à ce moment-là j'étais pas duvaliériste, j'étais plutôt un fignoliste timide. C'est-à-dire, je ne faisais pas d'actions pour Fignolé, je ne participais dans les meetings pour Fignolé, mais je partageais l'idée du MOP [Mouvement Ouvrier Paysan, parti de Daniel Fignolé.] à ce moment-là.

He interrupted the tape here to precise:

À cette époque lé, il y avait des poulains de Duvalier, des poulains de Fignolé, des poulains des Jumelles, des poulains de tous les candidats ; chaque candidat avait des poulains. Suivant de quel côté que tu te mets, et bien tu évolues dans ce groupe-là. Mais moi je n'évoluais dans aucun groupe. J'étais plutôt un observateur qui regarde les gens, qui écoute là. Qui écoute et puis qui voit si je dois voter de quel côté je dois voter. Et puis au bout d'un moment, j'ai accepté de rentrer dans le camp de Fignolé, sans être actif, mais c'est dans ce camp-là que j'évoluais. Je participais à des réunions avec des amis, mais sans imposer des actions publiques. J'avais quand même une certaine réticence, je ne savais pas pourquoi, mais j'avais une certaine réticence. Peut-être j'étais pas sûr de l'avenir de ces gens-là. Les arguments n'étaient pas tout à fait très forts pour me convaincre. Non j'étais pas convaincu. J'avais plus tendance à accepter les arguments du MOP. C'était pour moi plus acceptable à cette époque-là. Il y a plein de choses que je partageais avec le MOP. Ça m'intéressait mais j'étais pas actif.

We can draw a parallel between the hesitation in his words and his approach. Political activism was not crystal clear evidence to him; not a proclaimed need to change society. Rather, he wandered around from group to group, observing and listening, trying to make up his mind. I think we might be starting to see a pattern, a man often in between places and groups, always on the outskirts or traveling from one to another. I deeply appreciate his way of describing his political debut, for he is so humble about how the political kind of caught up with him, whereas he could be romanticizing about his anchored ideals. As we see, his description of his relations with the different political groups is confused, but in this relative chaos there is probably something acutely true about someone's connection to political groups and ideologies. He felt like an outsider and an interested observant, and without being able to precisely describe the stages he became more and more implicated until it became his main activity:

J'avais laissé l'école pour aller apprendre un métier. Mais, dominé par l'influence des idées politiques qui circulaient à ce moment-là, bon, on dit toujours : « On va faire avancer la cause du pays, et puis après on reviendra sur les bancs. » On disait ça, j'étais pas le seul... Il y avait

plusieurs jeunes. J'avais des amis, des jeunes qui étaient à l'université, qui ont laissé les études universitaires pour retrouver la gang des jeunes qui voulaient avancer la cause du pays.

I think a main turning point towards political engagement was the argument with his uncle (see above). Regarding Papa Doc, he quickly went from very doubtful during the campaign to clearly against, seeing what was happening in the country. The era of nation-wide democratic debate was over. The pro-Duvalier (like his uncle) were appointed to all the important public offices. The other parties were being silenced, marginalized and soon persecuted. The leader of the MOP, Daniel Figiolé, had been exiled and his party dismantled.

The situation had completely changed. Talking about politics had become suspicious, and people against Duvalier, especially the Figiolé supporters, had to either silence themselves, leave or go into underground resistance. I think that this sudden change in how politics was lived in Haiti not only profoundly revolted Mr. Toussaint, but also paradoxically corresponded him better. The MOP was a big party with a fixed hierarchy, a unique charismatic leader and was perhaps too dogmatic for him. The underground cells of the more fragmented left-wing resistance fit better with his fluidity and allowed him to do what he did best: being a messenger and a mediator between different groups and between the city and the country, moving around. In 1958 he moved to Port-au-Prince, encouraged by his political connections:

En 58, j'ai décidé d'aller à Port-au-Prince, pour aller à l'école J.B. Damier. Là, il faut dire d'avant aller en 58 à Port-au-Prince, j'étais mêlé dans des histoires politiques, vous voyez, depuis 55 je suis rentré dans des questions politiques, militer activement dans des organisations. Je ne militais [plus] dans les organisations figiolistes. Après la chute de Figiolé, moi je militais directement dans les organisations de gauche.

It is very unclear what job he was learning in Gonaïves, or what he went to study in the J.B. Damier school. As he put it himself, he had put politics before work, and what is certain is that he missed a lot of classes due to his activism. He joined the Parti Populaire de Libération Nationale (PPLN), the main communist group. One of his main tasks was to expand the party towards his native region, and to open and organize sub-units there:

[Ceux qui organisent des cellules politiques en campagne,] c'était des gens de la région, qui vivaient en ville, et qui [le faisaient] en revenant passer des vacances. Comme moi par exemple, je revenais dans ma zone natale, et j'organisais des organisations. Ça c'est des gens de tous les coins, de tout le pays qui faisaient ça. On est en ville. On retourne en campagne pour les vacances. Et puis on milite. On milite.

Communication from the capital to the rest of Haiti was a major issue for these underground resistance units, as the regime's surveillance intensified more and more. Knowing that he was under suspicion, feeling followed and observed, he organized a mailing system between Port-au-Prince and the Artibonite region, using the most banal-looking bus passengers as messengers:

[Les journaux étaient publiés à] Port-au-Prince. On les faisait rentrer par les gens qui rentrent dans les autobus. On ne les fouillait pas à ce moment-là. Quand on fouillait on arrête. Quand la répression a changé de vitesse là, on n'envoie pas de courrier, mais quand c'est loose un peu, on envoie des courriers. Il y a des gens qui sont un petit peu banal, qu'on envoie à Port-au-Prince chercher des courriers aussi. Des gens qu'on va jamais penser qu'ils sont dans la politique.

He also clandestinely distributed political newspapers, both in Port-au-Prince and in the country. This leads us to an interesting anecdote about a militiaman (Macoute) to whom he gave a copy of an illegal newspaper:

Je militais clandestinement. Il faut dire qu'on avait aussi des amis parmi les miliciens. Je me rappelle un soir je passais devant le collège Jacques Dessalines. Le collège Dessalines c'est une école privée dirigée par des professeurs de gauche là, par les intellectuels de gauche là. Ils se réunissent tous, tous les soirs, pour se donner des blagues, raconter des histoires, toutes sortes d'histoires. Alors moi je passais un soir devant le collège et j'ai jeté un tract, un journal « Haiti Demain ». Et il y a un type qui a vu. Le journal. Il l'a pris et il est venu me voir. Il me dit [chuchotement] « Donne-moi un autre, donne-moi un autre. » Puis je lui ai passé un autre journal. Le type : [voix forte] « Je ne te vois pas hein ! » Un milicien hein, il m'a dit je ne te vois pas et je lui ai donné un autre journal !

Such an account enables us to appreciate the complexity of an authoritarian régime in its complexity. Mr. Toussaint has described people with multi-faceted, often contradictory characteristics. A Macoute can be an ally one day and torture you the next, and a friend can save your life and later denounce you. My point is that although Mr. Toussaint has gone through tremendous persecution, he remains very subtle and differentiates people from one another, even in his description of persecutors. This random Tonton Macoute, terrifying him only to ask for a second copy is only one example of numerous episodes where Mr. Toussaint has guided me into a more nuanced understanding of the persecutors and their motives. I find the ambiance even more terrifying, as one never knows where the threat is going to pounce from.

Another aspect of the above quote is that it reveals Mr. Toussaint's wonderful storytelling capacities. This was said about half an hour into our first recording, in front of Frantz and myself. He was much less nervous, and was starting to get into the rhythm of his narration. In this segment he plays several roles: the narrator, speaking in a neutral voice and contextualizing, the Macoute whispering menacingly, and himself 45 years ago, discretely distributing newspapers at night and suddenly startled and terrified. His audience (Frantz and I) was completely fascinated, as this downtown office became a dangerous Port-au-Prince night in the early 1960s.

Hiding in Artibonite: *le maquis*

The danger eventually came from a young guy who he was “preparing” for the party during the student strikes of 1961, and who turned out to be too talkative, as he unknowingly denounced Mr. Toussaint to a police informer and both of them were arrested:

Et puis la première grève des étudiants. J'étais en plein... j'étais pas étudiant, mais j'étais en pleine grève [rire]. Après la grève, j'ai dû retourner. Non après la grève j'ai été arrêté en 61. Ouais j'ai été arrêté, par un type qui m'a dénoncé. Un type que j'étais en train de préparer pour rentrer dans l'organisation politique. Un type qui avait pas d'expérience, et puis il est allé parler à un ancien fignoliste qui, pendant ce temps, était devenu un informateur de la police. Il a été arrêté, j'ai été arrêté. J'ai passé quelques jours, pas au pénitencier, en face du palais là, au Casernes Dessalines. J'ai pas passé la nuit, je suis resté juste une journée, j'ai été libéré tout de suite, libéré par un certain officier ; l'officier Lamar. Là je suis parti tout de suite dans le maquis, parce que je savais que la libération était fausse. [...] Effectivement j'ai été suivi. Je suis resté un mois à peu près dans le maquis, et puis en janvier, c'était la période carnavalesque aux Gonaïves, et je suis retourné aux Gonaïves. [...] Et là j'ai été suivi encore. Pendant que j'étais en train de danser, un ami est venu me chercher et m'a dit [mime] la police est à votre trousses. Et là [claquement de mains] je suis parti, je suis retourné dans ma zone natale pour rester caché un bout de temps, puis je suis retourné encore. Et là c'était tranquille, on m'a foutu la paix, et là je suis resté aux Gonaïves pour un bout de temps.

He was immediately released but felt in danger and went in hiding in his native region. He hid for nearly a year, going from village to village, and this period was a great suffering for him. He strongly emphasized the role of his father during this time, organizing new hiding places amongst family and friends, and literally taking him by the hand. He spoke about his father in the most grateful, respectful way, describing this man risking his life to save his son's:

J'allais de village en village. Et c'est là tout le respect que j'ai pour mon père, qui avait fait tout ça avec moi. Il est venu me chercher, c'est lui qui s'arrange pour me nourrir, quand il faut se déplacer il vient me chercher, il me déplace. Des fois s'il faut traverser une rivière c'est lui qui me tient la main pour m'aider à traverser, parce qu'il est un nageur. Moi je ne sais pas nager, je sais traverser l'eau mais c'est lui qui me tient quand l'eau dépasse mon hauteur. C'était lui qui faisait tout ça. C'est bien dommage, il est mort trop tôt, je n'ai pas eu le temps de le remercier pour tout ça. [...] Personne n'était au courant que j'étais en campagne. Et puis [mon père] c'était un paysan analphabète à ce moment-là, on n'accordait pas trop d'importance à ces gens-là. Il a été arrêté une fois, mais il a été relâché après quelques jours. Il a été arrêté quelques jours par le chef de la police rurale. [...] A cause de moi.

He experienced great loneliness during this year, as he explains it was too dangerous to step outside of his hiding places. In the following segment he describes what would or what could happen if he did wander out, and I find this hypothetical chain of events very evocative of the rooted fear installed in the population in just a few years, even in remote villages:

Je ne faisais rien de mes journées. C'est ça qui est dur. Les gens sont partis, ils travaillaient. Et puis toi tu restes à la maison enfermé. Si quelqu'un vous voit : « tiens ! Lui je le connais ! » Et puis la nouvelle est partie dans tout le village. Et ça va arriver chez le commandant de la milice. Et le commandant de la milice va voir le chef de section. Et le chef de section va voir le capitaine. Et ensemble ils vont poser des questions. D'abord le chef de milice il attend pas tout ça. Il vous arrête automatiquement. Il vous arrête sans poser de question. Après on en posait des questions. [silence]

Several times he has described this hiding year as “very hard,” as much or maybe even more than his later years in prison. He evidently lived it as a kind of prison – imprisoned in people’s houses, with the constant fear of being found out. But even harder to him I think was the risks his father was taking. This episode made him considerably deepen his love towards his father, and proportionally enhanced his fright of not seeing his father come back.

Back to (political) business: *j’occupais de hautes fonctions dans le parti*

After about a year, a friend of Mr. Toussaint’s with connections with the local government and the militia told him that “things had calmed down,” and that it was safe to come back. He went back to Gonaïves. In 1964, Mr. Toussaint started to work for the first time in Haiti. He worked in the Artibonite region, for the National Service for Malaria Eradication and for a United Nations agency digging wells in the countryside. His face as he talks about these projects says it all: he is far from convinced by the ways

these organizations function. However it allowed him to navigate around his region and to meet many people without arousing suspicion:

Je travaillais, en 64, 65 au SNEM [Service Nationale d'Eradication de la Malaria]. J'avais trouvé un petit boulot au SNEM et puis je travaillais aussi aux Nations Unies. J'avais trouvé un petit boulot aux Nations Unies, un job de technicien, pour creuser des puits et arroser un peu certaines zones de la plaine des Gonaïves. Ce projet-là n'a jamais été abouti par exemple. Ce boulot me permettait de circuler dans la campagne, parler avec les gens.

In parallel he pursued his political activities, using his job to circulate in the region, recruiting people and delivering messages. He gained importance in the local PPLN party, until eventually becoming the head of the Gonaïves unit:

J'avais une responsabilité [politique] dans ma région natale d'abord. Et ensuite j'avais ensuite une autre responsabilité dans la ville [Gonaïves]. J'occupais de hautes fonctions dans le parti, dans la ville quoi. J'étais responsable, à un certain moment donné – le responsable numéro 1 du parti était parti pour l'étranger – et c'était moi qui le remplaçais.

During those years the political repression intensified in Haiti. The Tonton Macoute militia branched out everywhere, and denunciation and neighbors spying on each other became every day more part of the general climate. As I understand it became practically impossible to pursue active political resistance. People either ceased their activities, left the country, got openly arrested or mysteriously disappeared.

One day in 1966 he went to St-Marc (the second biggest city in the Artibonite region) to take part in an anti-Duvalier demonstration organized by his good friend Marc Muller:

Les circonstances de mon arrestation ? Ça se passait à St-Marc, la ville qui... St-Marc qui est à l'ouest de Gonaïves, et puis il y avait une manifestation, un soulèvement populaire, on peut l'appeler comme ça, contre Duvalier. Alors on a invité les gens. Il faut dire 3 jours avant j'étais à St-Marc, dormir chez mon ami Marc Muller il s'appelle. Il s'appelait, parce qu'il est mort. J'avais dormi chez lui, et c'était lui le responsable de l'organisation PPLN à St-Marc. [...] [Dans la manifestation] il y avait toute sorte de monde. La population pauvre c'était pas nombreux, tu vois, c'était pas nombreux. Il y avait surtout des jeunes, des employés de contribution qui étaient là, et certains professeurs aussi qui manifestaient, mais c'était surtout des chômeurs hein, des gens qui ne travaillaient pas qui manifestaient.

Prison: *l'enfer*

Instead of sparking up the movement he was waiting for, the demonstration was crushed violently by the army and militia. His friend Marc Muller was severely wounded and arrested. He managed to escape through side streets and get a ride back to Gonaïves. But the militia was able to track him down as they interrogated (and certainly tortured) captured demonstrators. Two days later, he awoke in his house surrounded by militia and soldiers, commanded by the head of the secret police Breton Claude himself:

Mon arrestation a eu lieu un samedi matin. Par Claude Breton. Avec le commandant de la milice des Gonaïves. Accompagné de ses soldats bien sûr. Et puis un matin comme ça, il sont venu chez moi, débarqué, et puis ils m'ont arrêtés. Et puis ils m'ont conduit aux casernes. Et puis arrivés là ils m'ont... Claude Breton il a commencé par me battre, par me dire toutes sortes de choses, par me torturer, me mettre des coups partout, et à un moment Claude Breton il a décrété ces messieurs-là ils sont trop compliqués pour moi je vais chercher le capitaine Romain, qui était en vacances à St-Marc. Il a demandé à un soldat de prendre une voiture et d'aller chercher Romain qui était en vacances à côté pour venir m'interroger. Mais on n'a pas arrêté de me battre, on continue à me taper. [...] Moi j'ai passé un an avec des blessures aux fesses là. [montre ses fesses] Je n'ai jamais été soigné.

He was fiercely tortured, for the militians wanted the names of all other PPLN members. This questioning of speaking under torture deeply concerns Mr. Toussaint. He paused the tape and was clearly wishing to engage in a serious discussion about this. The fact that he was denounced by comrades, probably under torture, is an issue that he wished to tackle. But it troubled him to label these people too quickly as traitors, and he interrogates why certain people speak while others don't:

On a insisté pour que je donne des noms. J'ai pas voulu. [...] Quand tu es arrêté, pour une cause ou une action quelconque [silence]. Tu ne sais pas, la résistance d'un homme, c'est pas quelque chose de physique, c'est pas une question de « moi je ne parle pas, moi je ne veux rien dire à la police. » La police a des moyens de vous faire parler. Mais c'est le fait que vous avez des objectifs clairs devant vous. Vous savez ce que vous défendez, vous savez pourquoi vous êtes là, et vous savez les raisons qui vous ont emmenées là. Et puis la cause que vous épousez, vous avez trouvé ça très juste, et vous avez dit, il faut défendre ça jusqu'au bout. Mais tout l'ensemble vous rend fort, c'est pas le fait que vous êtes plus fort que les autres : « moi je ne parle pas » etcetera, c'est la conviction de vos idées qui vous rend fort devant la police. Moins c'est convaincant [silence]. [...] Les types qui m'ont dénoncés, c'est pas qu'ils étaient des lâches, c'est pas qu'ils étaient de mauvaise foi, c'est parce que c'est des types qui ne se baignaient pas assez, qui n'avaient pas d'expérience de lutte, qui ne savaient pas exactement pourquoi ils luttaient. Ils ne réalisaient pas vraiment. Alors un

type qui ne réalise pas toutes ces affaires-là, c'est facile de parler devant la police. Moi j'étais peut-être le plus vieux militant. [...] Moi je défendais beaucoup de gens.

He describes and excuses those who betrayed him in a simple, sincere manner. Too young and inexperienced, they didn't realize the consequences of their acts. It is not an inner strength or a moral superiority that made him not talk, but the deep rootedness of his ideals and a sense of responsibility.

He was transferred to the St-Marc prison, in which he would stay the next five years of his life. The prison was packed for it regrouped pell-mell political prisoners, 'common' criminals and innocents who had been denounced by an angry neighbor or a jealous rival. Every day was a fight for survival, as they were hardly fed and illnesses were common and untreated:

C'est l'enfer. La vie dans la prison c'est l'enfer. La nourriture c'est pas mangeable. La nourriture c'est rien du tout, c'est comme de l'eau bouillie. Je sais pas comment c'est maintenant mais à cette époque-là c'était pas vivable. Moi j'étais arrivé à rester vivant tout simplement parce que je venais de la vallée de l'Artibonite. Vous savez la prison de St-Marc rassemble quasiment tous les gens qui ont des litiges pour leur terrain, ils viennent là. Ou bien les marchands de bolette, la bolette était pas légale, on les arrête. C'est tous des gens qui me connaissent vous voyez. Ou bien ils s'arrangent pour m'envoyer quelque chose à manger ou bien ils m'envoient un petit 50 kops, un petit 2 gourdes, 3 gourdes. À ce moment-là, avoir une gourde, deux gourdes, trois gourdes en prison, tu étais un riche. Ça ne vaut rien du tout hein, ça vaut même pas 50 cents canadiens, mais tu étais un riche. Alors j'arrive quand même comme ça à résister à la cuisine de la prison. Parce qu'il y a eu beaucoup de morts là, diarrhée, vomissements, lèpre, toutes sortes de maladies. [...] J'ai jamais vu de médecin dans la prison.

He explains that what saved him were his rural origins. Political prisoners weren't allowed any visits, but because he came from the region and that he had navigated it for several years, he "knew everybody" in the prison, all the common right prisoners who were allowed visits and who could get food and change smuggled in. He therefore owes his survival to people who would pass him a little food or change. Describing this, he stressed his rural origins again: his deep connections to the peasants of the Artibonite

region – through his family and his grassroots activism – saved his life, giving him shelters when he was hiding and feeding him while he was imprisoned.

Mass Execution: *On était 77 prisonniers politiques. On en a fusillé 72.*

In his prison years one event profoundly traumatized him. On the 20th May 1968 a group of Haitian opponents from the diaspora tried to invade the country and overthrow François Duvalier, allied with the local resistance. Their attempt failed completely, as the group was too small, very disorganized and deeply infiltrated by Duvalier's secret police (c.f. Péan 2007, p. 316). As a result of this, the dictator decided to set an example and ordered for the prisons to be “cleaned up of all political prisoners” (Mr. Toussaint's words), especially in the northern regions.

Zacharie Delva, the Artibonite pro-consul and one of Duvalier's closest advisors, arrived one day in early June 1968 in the St-Marc prison to do as ordered. He charged Charlotin Saint-Fort, the region's chief Macoute to execute the orders. There were 77 political prisoners in the prison, 72 of which were executed that night, including Céradiou Toussaint's best friend Marc Muller:

Un jour Zacharie a dit de libérer les prisons de tous les *kamoukims* [rebels]. Zacharie est venu à St-Marc, demander à Charlotin de vider la prison.

Frantz Voltaire : Ca voulait dire de tuer tout le monde ?

- Oui. C'est ce qu'il a fait. On était 77 prisonniers politiques dans la prison de St-Marc, on en a fusillé 72, on en a laissé 5.

The reason or reasons why Mr. Toussaint wasn't killed on that horrible night remain very mysterious. He has come back to this episode several times in a very emotive and confusing way. Sometimes he explained that he “has no idea why [he] wasn't executed, and why [he] is still alive to talk about it.” Other times he went into complicated

interpretations, speaking fast and not finishing his sentences, to offer what seems to be contradictory explanations. It could have been because he came from Gonaïves:

C'était dur cette affaire-là. Et quand moi j'étais dans ma cellule... J'ai compris par la suite pourquoi je n'ai pas été fusillé. C'est peut-être – peut-être je dis peut-être – parce que je suis venu des Gonaïves, j'ai été arrêté aux Gonaïves, tu vois, et Zacharie, quand il est venu dans la prison pour libérer les gens, il voulait pas me libérer, on m'a toujours présenté à Zacharie pour qu'il puisse me libérer. Quand il me pose la question – parce qu'il y avait un type aux Gonaïves qui n'était pas son ami. [silence] Il a dit : « enferme-le ! » On m'a retourné dans ma cellule.

Or because he knew people in Zacharie Delva's entourage:

Y'a les gens agressifs qui étaient derrière Zacharie parmi lesquels j'avais quelques amis parmi ces gens-là. Il y en avait deux qui étaient allés dans ma cellule me parler. Ils étaient allés demander à Charlotin de me faire libérer. Charlotin leur a promis de me faire libérer. Ils étaient venus me dire « Soit patient, Charlotin nous a promis qu'il va te faire libérer. » Je savais que c'était faux. Mais, écoute Charlotin c'est lui qui décide qui est fusillé et qui est pas fusillé. Et moi il voulait pas me fusiller non plus, il voulait pas me faire fusiller, pour que ça [silence], pour que ça lui apporte des ennuis, parce qu'il voulait pas avoir des ennuis, parce qu'il a remarqué les gens derrière Zacharie, parce qu'il a remarqué que j'ai des amis parmi ce gars-là. Alors je me demande si ce n'est pas cette petite nuance-là qui m'a sauvé la vie. 77 ! On était 5 à ne pas être fusillé. Et il y en avait 2 qui étaient protégés du capitaine, un autre qui était quasiment mort, il est mort trois jours après de faim. Il reste moi avec un autre là...

Although not very clear, the above quotes are representative of Mr. Toussaint's way to engage with this tragic event, traumatized and full of questions. It seemed as though he has endlessly gone through all sorts of hypotheses and explanations, revealing one at a particular moment but always uncertain and subject to change his mind. I felt a man who needed to talk, who forty years later is still in disbelief that he is alive, and feeling guilty. The underlying, crying question while he discussed this was "why me?" We will most probably never know why some men, now dead, arbitrarily decided to spare Céradiou Toussaint, absurd within the absurd.

But beyond the search of causality, what concerns us is the deep significance that this event had on Mr. Toussaint's life and on his story. There are so many banalities I could write... The truth is that it is impossible to grasp such a trauma and to explain its later effects. I can merely witness the despair I saw in his eyes as he was trying to rationalize

what we both knew was irrational. He has not explicitly exposed this to me, but I think that the idea that *he should be dead* has accompanied him ever since, sometimes depressing him deeply as he thought of his friends and sometimes making him feel intensely alive.

Liberation and post-prison struggle: *j'étais pas bien vu dans le pays*

François Duvalier died on the 21st of April 1971. He is replaced by his son Jean-Claude, who perpetuates his father's violent regime. However there is a slight policy change – or at least willingness to show a change to the international community (Weinstein & Segal, 1992). Therefore, at Jean-Claude's advent, some political prisoners are freed, including Céradiou Toussaint. He understands his liberation as being a result of the fierce power struggles between Luckner Cambronne (head of the Tonton Macoutes and number 2 in François Duvalier's regime) and Zacharie Delva (pro-consul of Artibonite). Apparently, Cambronne's main reason to empty the prisons in Artibonite were far from altruistic, but solely because "Zacharie had filled them up," and he wanted to please Delva's opponents. Mr. Toussaint found himself in the middle of that. He also explains that he nearly didn't get freed, as Arnoux Louis-Jeune, the deputy that Zacharie had designated to empty the prison, didn't want to liberate people from "Marc Muller's gang." He owes his liberation to Béard Vincent, a friend of his in the militia, who told Louis-Jeune that he was "his protégé":

Et donc deux rivaux de Zacharie s'entendent, et je ne sais pas pourquoi, vont à mon sujet demander à Cambronne – Cambronne était ministre de l'intérieur – « qu'est-ce qu'on va faire parce la prison est remplie par Zacharie ? » Alors Cambronne lui a dit je vais aux Gonaïves, au retour je vais passer à la prison pour libérer les prisonniers s'il faut. Mais Cambronne est retourné dans la nuit. Il a donné l'ordre à Arnoux [le député de la ville] de libérer les prisonniers. Mais moi j'ai failli ne pas être libéré hein. Quand on m'a présenté, on faisait passer les gens les uns après les autres : « vous, vous êtes là pourquoi, et vous vous êtes là pour quoi ? ok » [...] Moi quand j'arrive on demande au capitaine : « et lui pourquoi il est là ? » Et le capitaine répond : « lui c'est un des hommes de Marc

Muller. » Alors il dit « non, non, non, lui, on va l'envoyer à Port-au-Prince. » On m'a mis de côté pour m'envoyer à Port-au-Prince. Puis par chance, il y a un type, qui était ministre de la justice sous Aristide. Il s'appelle Béard Vincent. Béard Vincent, c'est un ami à moi. C'était un milicien aussi. Il était le secrétaire d'Arnoux qui faisait la libération des gens. Il a été voir Arnoux. Il lui a dit « lui c'est un petit protégé, il vient de l'Artibonite, je peux le prendre, je peux m'en charger. » C'est comme ça.

Mr. Toussaint was therefore freed, at the end of May 1971. I asked how it felt to walk around the streets after five years in prison. His answer was relatively short, but his body language amazing, for he relived the scene. He closed his eyes, and after all the tension of talking about prison he laid back and released pressure, with a long moment of soothing silence, preceding his acting. Going to see his father was the first thing he did, and remembering this scene made him cry silently:

Oui, marcher dans les rues, revoir du monde qui passe, marcher, voir, reprendre la vie, la vie quoi, j'étais très heureux. [...] Une des premières chose c'était d'aller voir mon père. [...] Le lendemain la nouvelle était déjà arrivée dans le village. Mon père a envoyé deux de mes frères me chercher, puis il est venu me chercher. [...] Arrivé là chez mon père je pleurais comme un animal. Je pleurais, je savais pas pourquoi mais je pleurais, je pleurais. Mon père a pleuré aussi. C'était ça, c'était très triste. [...] Jusqu'à présent je pense encore à lui, à mon père qui n'est plus là... Il était tellement bon pour moi, mon papa. [silence. Il pleure]. Oui. Non. C'était des moments très difficiles. Je pleure encore quand je me rappelle de ces moments-là.

He stayed in his village a few weeks, but his family was too poor to sustain him. He didn't bring up the possibility to stay there and work the land with his father and brothers. He went back to Gonaïves, looking for a job. Most of his friends were dead, in prison or exiled. One of his remaining political contacts was too afraid to have any kind of relation with him:

J'ai essayé de reprendre contact avec mon organisation, mais le type qui me connaissait avant d'aller en prison, qui était un habitué pour moi, j'ai essayé d'entrer en contact avec lui. Mais non, il voulait pas prendre contact parce qu'il était parmi l'un des gens qu'on a dénoncé. Donc il avait peur de moi. Et puis il pensait aussi que j'étais très suivi à ce moment-là. Donc un contact avec moi l'entravait.

He also tried to find a job in Port-au-Prince, but it was simply impossible for a political ex-convict with no money and no important contacts, for people were scared to deal with him. Even family members helped him out a little but were discomfited by his presence:

Les gens vous aiment mais ils ne veulent pas de trouble non plus. [...] J'étais pas bien vu dans le pays à cet époque. C'est pas que les gens ne m'aimaient pas mais les gens ont peur, parce que la répression était encore très forte sous Jean-Claude Duvalier. [...] J'ai passé les 8 premiers mois sans penser à quitter le pays. En essayant de trouver un job, en essayant de faire quelque chose par moi-même, une petite boutique un petit dépanneur, une affaire comme ça. Mais il y a rien qui marche dans tout ça. D'abord j'ai pas d'argent, et ça prend de l'argent pour faire quoi que ce soit. Aussi j'ai des amis qui m'ont déconseillé, parce que tu viens de la prison, tu ouvres un dépanneur, une boutique, et les gens vont dire : « d'où vient cet argent-là ? » et les gens vont poser plein de questions, et ça peut t'amener des ennuis.

He didn't want to leave his country, but found himself forced to after about a year of searching around without a hint of opportunity, living off his family's generosity.

Friends of his in Florida convinced him to leave Haiti:

Le découragement de ne pas trouver de travail, et l'ennui que ta présence cause à certaines personnes, des gens qui sont très bien placés, qui vous aiment, mais qui ont peur aussi, qui veulent vous recevoir à moitié porte ouverte et à moitié porte fermée. C'était très difficile, donc à un certain moment donné j'avais comme pas le choix. C'est pas que j'avais envie de quitter le pays, pas du tout, mais j'avais pas d'autre choix. Il faut vivre, et je n'avais aucun moyen de vivre en Haiti. [...] Finalement certains amis que j'avais à l'étranger m'ont proposé, m'ont demandé si ça me tentait de prendre la chance et d'aller à l'étranger. J'étais tout de suite d'accord parce que j'avais pas le choix.

His original plan was to go the United States, but he didn't get a visa. A friend in an airline company offered him a seat on a plane to Montreal. He had had his passport made by another friend, and made up his mind quickly. He had cousins in Montreal who could help him settle, and he borrowed a little money from his family. He emigrated from Haiti to Canada in September 1972, leaving his pregnant wife behind him.

I only mention his wife here, because that is when Mr. Toussaint chose to introduce her in his story, once we were already talking about Montreal. They had met in Gonaïves shortly after his liberation, and had gotten married on the 11th of April 1972. They would later get divorced, in Montreal. That is practically all the detail he was willing to give on that subject, obviously uncomfortable. I realize that this paragraph is short, off the chronology and truly seems to come out of nowhere. It is relevant, however, because it resembles the place of his wife in his narrative. Looking back at the tapes, it is quite surprising how much his narration of this epoch has a lonely tone, making very unexpected the appearance of a couple.

Montreal (1972 to now)

Pure laine, c'est les québécois blancs qui sont nés ici.

Mr. Toussaint arrived in Montreal on a tourist visa, with enough money for only a couple of weeks, and had to negotiate his entry with the customs officer, who retained his passport and part of his money. He was asked by the Haitian community organizations if he wanted to claim political asylum, but he categorically refused, for he was afraid not to be able to go back to Haiti if he did:

J'avais des parents ici, des cousins cousines. [...] Je suis venu comme tout le monde, sans visa. J'arrive à l'aéroport, on m'a interdit de rentrer. Non, on m'a pas interdit de rentrer. J'ai essayé de faire valoir que je suis un bon touriste, que je viens pour deux semaines, j'avais assez d'argent pour deux semaines, et puis là on a gardé mon passeport, et on a gardé une partie de l'argent que j'avais, et puis je suis rentré comme ça. [...] Ensuite je suis allé au Bureau de l'Immigration faire une demande de résidence permanente. J'ai jamais demandé le statut de réfugié. J'ai pas voulu. On m'a proposé mais non, j'ai pas voulu. [...] Parce que j'avais tellement envie de retourner au pays. Si je demande un statut de réfugié politique, je pourrais pas retourner. Dans ma tête là, je prenais ma résidence pour récupérer un peu et puis rentrer au pays. C'était ça dans ma tête. Mais 36 ans après je suis encore ici [rire]

Helped by his cousins, he settled in the Villeray neighborhood, in the north of the city.

Unlike my other interviewees who had already traveled around before arriving, Montreal was Mr. Toussaint's first experience out of Haiti, which was truly disorientating at first.

He explains that his first sources of bewilderment were the lights and the cars:

Maintenant je connais la ville. Je peux aller n'importe où. Prendre le métro, l'autobus, tout. Conduire une voiture aussi. J'ai pas de problème. Mais avant quand j'étais arrivé c'était tout un ensemble. C'était très difficile à mon arrivée. Vous savez la première chose qui m'a impressionné à mon arrivée c'était la lumière. Les lumières partout ça m'a impressionné. Et quand j'arrive dans la rue là, les rues étaient bondées de voitures, il était 4, 5 heure du matin et toutes les autos étaient là.. C'était deux choses, les lumières et les voitures stationnées sur le bord des rues, ça m'a beaucoup impressionné. C'est un souvenir que je garde, en sortant de l'aéroport Dorval. [chuchote] Voir les lumières dehors. Ouais...

For a few seconds we feel the charm of banal streetlights and lines of cars as he whispers. Apart from the poetics of this quote, what is remarkable in this quote is what he brings up as it comes to "knowing the city." Transportation is the key point, and we will see that all interviewees have emphasized it. What made him gradually a Montrealer was his faculty to orient himself and be familiar with the city; his ability to walk, take public transports and drive (in that order). Every time knowledge of the city was mentioned, the main focus was neither from a static 'from the top of the mountain' viewpoint nor about social relations with other Montrealers, but from a dynamic, navigating perspective.

His principal point about Montreal was how secure the city felt. Not only does he explain that emigration allowed him to rest ("souffler un peu") from the constant fear of the Macoutes and the dictatorship, but in general he could walk around without having to be on his guard. People "in general respect the law":

[À Montréal] é bien on se sent en sécurité. On se sent plus ou moins en sécurité. Il y a des risques qu'on espère pas arriver. Il y a des risques partout, mais il y a des risques ici qu'on peut quasiment éliminer. Je peux par exemple aller au festival de jazz avec tout ce que j'ai sur moi, portefeuille, argent, tout ça, où il y a des centaines de milliers de gens dans la rue, et après tu retournes chez toi

et toutes tes affaires sont là. Et puis même s'il y a des petites choses qui se passent, les gens en général respectent plus ou moins l'ordre établi.

He quickly found a job downtown in a plastic factory. About his first contacts with the Canadian employment market he has surprisingly few comments. He merely situated the company in which he worked:

Je suis arrivé en septembre et j'ai trouvé un boulot fin novembre. J'ai travaillé comme coupeur de plastique dans une usine ici là, sur la rue St-Paul, non la rue William, juste à côté. J'ai passé quatre ans.

Disappointed by the lack of precision in this answer, I asked him to further his thoughts on his first contacts with the Quebecois people, only to get one of the most vague answers of our whole dialogue:

L'intégration s'est très bien faite. J'ai pas de problème d'intégration. L'adaptation aussi c'était bien, c'était bien fait. Et puis j'ai rien à me reprocher, rien à reprocher à ici. [...] Les Québécois c'est du monde gentil. Vous savez dans toutes les races il y a du monde qui sont un petit peu plus... chose que d'autres, vous voyez ?

In general, I haven't included quotes which I do not find of a specific interest. However I find this one relevant, because Mr. Toussaint had a lot to say about integration and the Quebecois people, but this insight could not be expressed after a blunt question. He had to address it in his own rhythm, according to the pace of his narrative. He particularly later spoke about race and being a black man in Montreal in interesting terms, integrating the questionable concept of "Québécois pure laine" (*pure wool*; a popular image used by Québécois to distinguish themselves from other Canadians, immigrants, minorities and all sorts of others):

Me : Vous êtes québécois ?

A oui ! Je ne peux pas dire pure laine, parce que je ne suis pas né ici.

Me : Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire 'pure laine' ?

C'est pas la même chose. Pure laine c'est les québécois qui sont nés ici.

Me : Et vos enfants qui sont nés ici ? Ils sont québécois ?

Même là encore, ils n'ont pas la bonne couleur. [rire] Pure laine, c'est les québécois blancs qui sont nés ici. C'est ça les pures laines. Enfin pour un québécois je pense que c'est ça, je sais pas. [silence]

Me : Donc vous êtes un Haïtien au Québec, un Haïtien québécois ?

Bon je suis les deux. Haïtien québécois, Québécois haïtien, je suis les deux. Parce que je vis ici, et tout ce que je fais c'est ici, et mes enfants sont ici, donc je suis Québécois haïtien, Haïtien québécois. Les deux. Au même titre.

He therefore considers himself as both Haitian and Québécois, explicitly not wanting to put one before the other. His skin colour is clearly an othering factor when he starts to develop a little, quickly going beyond the “very good” integration he initially described. He paused the above segment to discuss it some more. I was comfortable enough to provoke him a little, which led to an interesting dialogue:

Oui, il faut être québécois blanc né ici. À ce moment là on est pure laine ! Même si tu nais ici mais que tu n'as pas la couleur blanche, tu n'es pas pure laine.

Me : Donc un italien blanc qui fait un enfant ici, l'enfant sera pure laine juste parce qu'il est blanc ?

Parce qu'il est blanc oui. Je pense. Je ne sais pas. Mais s'il est blanc et qu'il est né ici... Du moins il va passer pour un pure laine. [rires]

Me : C'est pas pareil [rires]

Non c'est pas pareil. De passer pour un pure laine et de se sentir pure laine c'est pas pareil tu as raison.

He brought up the question of race or skin colour several times, making it an important factor in his identity process over the years. For example he explained the difference he perceived being pulled over by a black or a white policeman:

Quand je vois un policier québécois, et après je vois un policier noir par exemple, bon écoutez, je suis noir, on dirait que je me sens un petit plus détendu avec un policier noir qui a le même tempérament qu'un policier québécois blanc. Tu comprends ? Je suis un petit peu plus détendu. Les deux peuvent appliquer les mêmes attitudes. Si vous faites quelque chose de croche, c'est pas parce que le policier est noir qu'il est plus gentil avec moi que le blanc, parce qu'un policier c'est un policier, ça reste un policier.

Or he assumed a racial prejudice from his neighbours when his (white) girlfriend listened to loud music:

Elle écoute la musique forte ! Tu sais ce que je lui ai dit la semaine dernière ? Je lui ai dit écoute, tu habites avec un noir. Les voisins qui entendent la musique très forte comme ça, ils vont penser que c'est moi. Parce qu'en général, les noirs aiment la musique forte hein ? Les voisins vont penser que c'est moi, alors qu'au contraire moi j'aime pas la musique forte [rire].

Mr. Toussaint feels “deeply attached” to Montreal, and much more at home here than when he returns to Haiti on vacation. He described the feeling of being a “stranger at home” on his return trips to Haiti, where most of his family and friends are dead or living outside of the country:

Par exemple si je rentre à Port-au-Prince là aujourd’hui, et je vais aux Gonaïves, et bien les gens que vous rencontrez aux Gonaïves, et bien c’est pas des gens que vous connaissez. Il faut refaire encore une autre vie, il faut réapprendre à connaître les gens, les gens que vous connaissez ils sont plus là. Depuis 66 je ne vis plus là, ça fait 40 et quelques années. Les gens sont partis, les gens ont voyagé, il y en a beaucoup qui sont morts aussi. C’est pas du tout du tout la même vie. [...] Mes amis, 90% ont quitté le pays, et l’autre 10% ils sont morts. J’arrive je suis comme un étranger.

His home is undoubtedly Montreal: close to his children, friends and girlfriend in *his* city. But he still positions himself as an other to the average Québécois for whom he seems to have a very clear (white) image.

Je compare souvent Haïti et le Québec

His basement, in which we drank juice and extensively discussed, appeared to me as a visual example of his hybridity. It was set out like a typical North-American basement, with a wide-screen television, comfortable couches and an indoor exercising device, but he repeatedly stared at a little painting representing a Haitian village, amongst many pictures of famous Haitians and Caribbean art works:

Ça c’est un copain qui m’a ramené ça d’Haïti. Ça me rappelle le paysage haïtien. C’est typique, la petite maison. Quand tu regardes ça, tu penses à ton coin...

He explained that he often compares Haiti and Quebec, and he showed that one was often questioning the other in his thoughts:

Je compare souvent Haïti et le Québec. Moi-même je le fais souvent. Quand il m’arrive quelque chose ici je me dis « peut-être si j’étais en Haïti ça ne me serait pas arrivé » et si il m’arrive quelque chose en Haïti je me dis « o mon Dieu au Québec une chose comme ça ça peut arriver. »

He reflected further on his Haitian diasporic culture, explaining that his children, and now his grandchildren (one granddaughter and one grandson), although very integrated in the Quebec society, still affirm a strong Haitian identity:

Mes enfants sont des Haïtiens hein. Ils mangent haïtien, ils fonctionnent en Haïtiens, ils parlent créole [...] Mes petits-enfants c'est la même chose, ils sont haïtiens. Même s'ils sont nés ici ils gardent notre culture. Ils aiment ça manger le riz, tout ce que les Haïtiens aiment, mes petits-enfants ils aiment aussi. D'ailleurs leurs parents c'est ça qu'ils mangent, donc ils ont pas le choix. [imite son petit-fils Zacharie de 2 ans qui mange du riz.]

Interestingly, food is (like Mrs. Philibert) what is first mentioned when it comes to the Haitian culture. Mr. Toussaint was much more willing to talk about his grandchildren – and their 'Haitianness' – than his children. It seems as though he wishes he saw his children more often, but he did not expand on that subject. Quite significantly, he saw these tapes we were recording as a good heritage to pass on to his grandchildren, without mentioning his children.

I would love to unfold more of his life in Montreal, especially his family life, but he was very demure about it. His wife and his son joined him in 1974, when he got a legal status in Canada. Again he did not express any desire to talk about his ex-wife, simply mentioning that the separation was very long, and that seeing his son for the first time when he was two and a half was an extremely emotional moment:

Elle est rentrée me retrouver en octobre 1974. Deux ans et demi après à peu près. Un peu moins. Ça a été très long. Je voulais voir mon fils aussi, mon petit garçon qui est né en mon absence. [...] On m'envoyait des photos, on parlait régulièrement au téléphone ma femme et moi. Et puis bon, le petit garçon je l'ai vu en photo, il était beau. Il est encore beau [rire].

They later had two other children (another son and a daughter). All three still live in the Montreal region. When he could, he left his small apartment in Villeray and settled with

his family in Outremont, neighbourhood where he has lived for close to twenty years and that he considers his above all other areas in Montreal:

Outremont c'est mon quartier je peux dire. Parce que c'est là où j'ai passé le plus de temps. J'ai passé vingt ans dans Outremont. [...] C'est un quartier, il y a une partie, c'est les riches. Mais il y a de la place pour tout le monde, dans le bas d'Outremont. En haut d'Outremont c'est autre chose. Quand tu vas au nord, à l'ouest de Ste-Catherine c'est autre chose. Même un petit peu à l'ouest Bernard, c'est autre chose. Mais avant Bernard [geste], à l'est de Bernard, tout le monde y habite. Outremont c'est un quartier formidable. Les écoles sont bonnes. Les gens sont pas compliqués, quoi qu'on dise. J'ai passé plus de 20 ans là, j'ai déménagé trois fois dans Outremont. Non quatre fois. Je n'ai jamais eu de problème avec personne.

After about four years in the plastic factory he had a long illness which kept him unemployed, and about which he is very discrete. He then worked as a mechanic in a garage, but failed to find a job in that field when the garage went bankrupt. He eventually found employment in a kindergarten in St-Michel, assisting the educators with the children in the mornings and doing housekeeping in the afternoon. He visibly enjoyed his job, which allowed him to meet a lot of people and make friends:

J'ai travaillé pendant 17, 18 ans dans une garderie là. J'étais donc aussi en contact pendant 17, 18 ans avec des jeunes enfants, qui sont devenus des jeunes adultes maintenant. Et leurs pères, leurs mères, ce sont des gens qui sont devenus des amis aussi. Des amis haïtiens, des amis québécois.

Mr. Toussaint is now retired and lives in Longueuil (south shore of Montreal) with his girlfriend Marie-Thérèse. He met her about fifteen years ago in an English class:

On a fait connaissance. Par la suite on a approfondi la conversation, et on est devenu copain-copine, comme ça, après un cours d'anglais. A la fin du cours, on a fait des échanges de téléphone et on a continué à bavarder et on est devenu copain-copine. Ça fait un bon nombre d'année. Ça fait quatorze, quinze ans.

She is responsible for his living in the suburbs, and he was quite uncertain about that idea at first, not wanting to leave Montreal. But as he explained, love prevailed and he moved there. He doesn't regret it, and has constructed a peaceful little "kingdom" in his

basement, although sometimes he misses his social life in the city, especially when he wants to go out on weekends:

J'habitais avec elle dans le quartier Rosemont. Puis elle a vendu la maison, et on s'entendait tellement bien. Moi je ne voulais pas vivre à Longueuil, j'étais enragé contre l'idée de venir habiter ici, mais je me suis dit finalement, je m'entends tellement bien avec elle, je vais essayer. Et puis je suis venu. Et jusqu'à date ça a bien marché. [...] Au début j'étais dans un monde perdu, je ne savais pas quoi faire, avec qui parler, pas parler [...] C'est la bicyclette qui m'a permis de découvrir le quartier. [...] Le seul problème que j'ai, c'est les distances et les fins de semaine. [...] A l'aller j'ai pas de problème, mais au retour il y a pas d'autobus y a pas de métro rien du tout. Alors soit je dors à Montréal, soit je trouve un lift.

Mr. Céradieu Toussaint ended our conversation by describing the photographs on his basement wall. His children and grandchildren. Admired Haitian authors and political activists. Marc Muller, his best friend killed by this ruthless regime, with a young a passionate look. And again the peaceful little painting of a rural Haitian scenery. He warmly thanked me for the interview, in the way that I would have liked to thank him...

Conclusion

As we see, Mr. Toussaint's narration leaves holes in what one could consider a standard, chronological life story. I have plenty of questions and possible interpretations of elements that I think were implied in our conversations, but I tried to refrain from adding too much of my own personal inferences. Or more precisely, as of course I have edited and retold this narrative in my terms, I have attempted to show some of the same lights and shadows as Mr. Toussaint. He chose what to draw upon and what not to talk about, and my wish is to transmit these emphases to the reader in a manner that he or she can acknowledge them in the reading process. Although my subjectivity is inherent to such a methodology and the essay, I also wish to leave some interpretations open to the reader.

We will come back to meaning of places and the importance of belonging for each interviewee the Interpretation chapter, and link this to related literature. I wish here simply to draw out what points strike me about Mr. Toussaint.

His discourse about his rural origins is deeply intriguing, as they are both a source of pride and shame to him. He feels deep connections to Haiti's agricultural landscape and its people, and his political struggle has started precisely to improve their condition. In return the farmers saved his life as they fed him in prison. Moreover he expressed deep love towards his father, for whom he is eternally grateful and had moving tears. Without wanting to push an amateur and simplistic psychoanalysis, I think that the countryside and his father are intimately linked in his memory construction, and perhaps he in a way dedicated his activism to this man.

However the urban is also an important facet of Mr. Toussaint's narrative, which he also associates with culture. He does not consider himself an intellectual, but I discovered he had a great knowledge of Haitian texts – novels, poetry and social science. He has shown a thirst for knowledge and intellectual friendships, which he found in Gonaïves, Port-au-Prince and Montreal. He is an avid and proud reader. He seems to love navigating cities, and his verbal illustrations of Gonaïves or Montreal were much richer than any description of the country, and described with a visible passion. His love for Montreal was especially strong and communicative.

Apart from this rural-urban dialectic, I also want to remember the political activist. His narrative was especially strong in the way it depicted his gradual political awareness, a

subtle blend of coincidences, encounters and genuine convictions. He offered a sincere opening on how political consciousness arose, turning an apolitical teenager into a man who took the worst risks for his fight. I cannot thank him enough for that.

Mr. Toussaint had a unique, humorous way of talking about ethnicity, difference, and his identity as a black man in a “snow” white city. It is difficult to synthesize it in a few lines, for he was extremely nuanced and spiking his observations with quick, witty irony and little provocations as we got to know each other better. He has strongly interiorized that, as much as he knows and loves Quebec, many will never see himself as ‘fully’ Québécois (see the whole episode about ‘*pure laine*’) because of his skin colour. He has a very acute appreciation for people’s potential prejudices. It is sometimes a problem, as he subtly mentions racial discriminations going on every day in Montreal. Perhaps it is sometimes a personal and social suffering. But he describes it much more as a game, as a fact that he has learned to play with and surprise people. Tropical man walking in Quebec, snow man walking in Haiti, he had already presented himself as a mediator, a *passer*, always a little exterior, somewhat proud of his original perspective, and maybe he pursues this identity as a black man in Montreal.

This affirmed “*passer identity*” introduces several interpretations. Throughout his story, he presented himself as a navigating man. Is it because of this original identity that he became engaged politically, a choice made at a young age and that changed his destiny irremediably? Or is it now, when he looks back at his life, that he chooses to explain it through this perspective, a way to retell and integrate exile? Interestingly, the next

interviewee, Mr. Frantz Voltaire, also paints himself as a “mediator” and a “frontier man,” but with a very different trajectory than that of Mr. Toussaint. Let us keep in mind this singular determination for our future interpretations of the ‘spaces of representation’ in these narratives.

Finally, I shall remember the importance this interview had for Mr. Toussaint, which was the best possible encouragement for pursuing this type of research. He was hesitant and had little confidence in his ability to speak properly, let alone to have an insightful discourse. But he participated in the interviews, more and more actively and passionately, finding himself much better than expected on tape:

Je croyais que c'était pas du tout agréable à écouter ! [rire] Je croyais que j'allais te demander d'effacer : « coupe-moi ça » mais c'est pas ça du tout ! [...] Ça me fait du bien d'en parler. J'ai l'impression que j'en parle et que je vais apprendre, qu'il y a des choses qui vont venir. Des choses que j'avais oubliées, et qui sont revenues maintenant. Peut-être après il y en a d'autres qui vont venir [...] Ça me fait réfléchir sur ma vie, ça me fait réfléchir sur les sacrifices aussi que j'ai consenti. Ça me fait revivre aussi quelque chose de mon père, oui ça m'a apporté, non ça m'a apporté beaucoup de choses.

If we have a rich life story, with an in-depth recording for future audiences, sprinkled with many subtle elements on place construction and belonging for my research interest, *and* that the interviewee feels that the process was beneficial to him in several ways, it may look like we have taken a step towards shared authority in research. We were two clumsy strangers intimated by one another, and a handful of hours, emotional moments, digital tapes and great big laughs later, I think we left each other with something very precious and delicate to carry.

Chapter Four: Frantz Voltaire

Two Buddhist Monks

It had been a long afternoon during which I had asked Frantz Voltaire many questions about his past, on and off camera. After a while, he ended the conversation and quieted me down with the following little fable:

This is the story of two Buddhist monks, an old master and his apprentice. They were on a spiritual march, walking for days in contemplation. On the first day of their march, they encountered a beautiful young lady waiting by a river. The woman seemed panicked and very pleased to see them. She said :

- O please dear monks, help me cross this river. I need to be on the other side by tonight, there is no bridge, I do not know how to swim, I am afraid of water, please help me!
- We are so sorry madam, replied the young monk, we would love to help you but our religion is very clear. We must never touch women. Please excuse us. Good luck.

The old master didn't say a word. He walked up to the woman, helped her climb up his back and swam her across the river. He politely nodded to the grateful woman and continued his march without a word, followed by his astonished apprentice.

"Master I don't understand, why did you touch this woman?" inquired the young monk as they continued walking. The old monk didn't reply and marched forward. One kilometer further, the young monk asked again: "but Master, our religion does not allow us to touch women!" Still no reply. Five kilometers further the apprentice repeated:

“Master I am perplexed, please answer me, why did you touch this woman?” Again, not a word. The young monk kept repeating his questions, every few kilometers, for three days, without ever any explanation.

Finally, after three days of walking the old master stopped and looked at his apprentice. And for the first time he talked: “Listen novice, three days ago I helped this woman. Three days ago I put her up on my back and a few minutes later I put her back down. But she has been on your shoulders for three days.”

This parable was certainly a most elegant way to stop the interview. But it tells us much more about Frantz Voltaire than his eloquence. It is very illustrative of the way he understands his life and gets back to it. His story is dense, sometimes breathtaking and often historically enlightening. But as much as memory is important to him in its cultural, social form, he does not stop to reflect on himself very often. Immobility and reflexivity do not suit Mr. Voltaire, as he is constantly buzzing with new ideas and projects, always thinking about the future.

He is far from the silent, distant and enigmatic old monk from his story. But he shares his focus on the present and the future, not letting past events torture his mind. This is the first of many paradoxes in Frantz Voltaire’s fascinating life, for he has dedicated a lot of it precisely to the past; endlessly excavating documents of Haiti’s history, interviewing people, recording accounts, collecting archives and giving a platform for novelists and essayists to analyze the Caribbean, its diaspora and its history.

Indeed Mr. Voltaire is a historian, a documentary filmmaker, a publisher and the director of the *Centre International de Documentation et d’Information Haïtienne, Caribéenne et*

Afro-Canadienne (CIDIHCA). The CIDIHCA is simultaneously a library with the most important collection about Haiti and the Caribbean (fiction and non-fiction) in Montreal, a publishing house, a documentary film producer and an exhibition organizer. It is definitely the most important cultural institution of the Haitian community in Montreal.

Mr. Voltaire is a co-founder of the Haiti research group of the CURA Life Stories project, in which he is one of the community representatives. This is how I met him, when I joined the group in 2007. He was interested by my thesis and willing to help me, and has been of the utmost importance throughout my research. His vast connections in the Haitian community not only allowed me to meet such interesting interviewees, but an introduction by him also immediately gave me legitimacy and a trust that I could never have obtained by myself. As we discussed in the research group the profile of our interviewees (Montrealers of Haitian origin who were forced to leave Haiti for political reasons during the Duvalier régime), he proposed himself as the first interviewee. He explained that it would be a kind of test for future interviews, but that it could be used directly for my thesis.

Mr. Voltaire therefore was my first interviewee. We have had formal filmed interviews three times, for a total of about four hours (it is practically impossible to have Frantz Voltaire sit down and talk about himself for more than an hour). However this chapter on Mr. Voltaire is based as much, if not more, on the many informal encounters and discussions we have had over the past two years. We have had extended, lively discussions at Concordia University with the research group, and I have spent a lot of time at the CIDIHCA in old Montreal, using the library, working on various projects or

simply 'hanging out,' as I have come to love the atmosphere in that place. Moreover the CURA Haiti research group organized jointly with the CIDIHCA an exhibition and documentary film screenings entitled "Haiti: Dictatorship, Resistance and Exile under Duvalier" in early May 2009, an event that Frantz Voltaire and I co-organized and which made us spend a lot of time together.

My point is that my retelling of Frantz's story is based a lot on participatory observation and informal discussions. In the other interviews the roles were more defined; even though we did develop relationships, the main purpose of all of our encounters was to work together on recording a story.

The situation with Frantz Voltaire was different, for we saw each other for many reasons. He knew I would eventually write about his life – and I think he kept it in mind a lot in our conversations. Also, Mr. Voltaire is extremely busy and agitated man, for whom it is complicated to free up large moments of his timetable for in-depth interviews, which is also why I had to organize his life-story in a 'patchwork' manner. Not only is his daily schedule crazy, but his character does not entice him to sit down for hours straight and talk about his life. However, I must state that given his breathtaking number of simultaneous activities he has been extraordinarily generous with his time, always there to discuss and never refusing an interview.

Along with his discourse and narrative, Mr. Voltaire's achievements will also be put in perspective, as they say a lot about his life story. This I believe could be said for anybody, but Mr. Voltaire, because of his particular job and position, leaves very visible

works, especially books and films – easier to analyze for an academic. He has written or co-authored several historical or sociological books (Voltaire 1975, 1986, 1988, 2007), and made public hundreds of others as a publisher. He has produced about a dozen documentary films. His work is highly interesting to analyze, and in many ways are enlightening about the man. However, we will concentrate here on his narrative – his story and the *way* he talks about his work.

Interestingly, the question of shared authority is different between Mr. Voltaire and me than in my other interviews as our respective roles were dissimilar and the power relations blurred and changing. Indeed often the focus is to empower the interviewee and to make him or her understand that he or she is the co-author of this discourse, and can guide the process. The interviewee must agree not to be just a source of information, but a co-worker. (see Methodology, p. 36)

The issue was different with Mr. Voltaire. Because of his knowledge of the project and his natural charisma, he did not particularly need to be empowered. He was definitely not an interviewee impressed by a video camera or by my ‘academic’ status. I did not need to measure my words to make him feel comfortable. Quite the contrary, I could have been more outspoken and give more opinions about the way he was constructing his narrative. The power structure was therefore completely different: instead of trying empower the interviewee about their story (for example giving Céradiou Toussaint the remote control), I often found myself trying to guide the discourse back to his individual trajectory, which he would soon redirect with authority to a more general historical analysis.

Regarding the content of Mr. Voltaire's narrative, there are several points that I wish to introduce before plunging into the core of his story. As I mentioned, he carries the paradox that he is deeply interested by individual memories and needs not to be convinced by the importance or relevance of qualitative life-stories. But he is very humble about *his* life. He can therefore expand in great detail on political or historical analyses, and speak with great enthusiasm of the Haitian community in general, but rarely from the explicit viewpoint of his personal experiences, speaking of a general 'we' or orally adding references in his discourse.

It is certainly part of his personality to find political analysis and historical context much more interesting than his own life. Furthermore he expresses much more interest in other people's lives than his own. This probably explains why he – with such a literary mind and a fascinating life – has never written novels nor an autobiography, but has edited and published so much from others. He was a fantastic co-interviewer, with his full attention on the interviewee. He even amused me at a CURA meeting, drawing on the fact that Elizabeth Philibert was much more expansive on her political story than her personal one, as he had been so scarce with his own. The reader will therefore see that Mr. Voltaire's story has moving perspectives, going from a personal viewpoint to a historical, sociological analysis and back.

Beyond his personality, his affiliation with the project, his precise knowledge of my thesis topic and his double function as an interviewer and an interviewee have undoubtedly affected the interviewing process and the construction of his narrative. He

is exceptionally smart, and knows too well the research objectives. Of course I have not hidden the research objectives from the other interviewees (and the ethics of the project very clearly state that we must explain them in detail). But Mrs. Philibert and Mr. Toussaint soon became comfortable and then passionately implicated in their own narrative, often forgetting the research and the camera to get into the core of their story. Mr. Voltaire rarely got to that point, his expertise within the project and his historical background making him constantly synthesize, contextualize and change perspectives.

Furthermore as a documentary filmmaker he is immensely used to recorded interviews, and knows better than anybody the importance of the image one projects. He may also be so used to post-production, and editing through hours of rush for the synthesizing moment, that he (perhaps subconsciously) 'helps' me by getting straight to points. This research is precisely the opposite of a summarizing documentary, as I am most interested in the chaotic, fragmented ways that a discourse is constructed, with all of its details and detours.

Please note that the language he uses is very relevant to his story, for it gives us information on his cultural background, his obsessions and his personality. His words are chosen with great precision and his sentences constructed in such a way that it is sometimes unbelievable that it is oral and improvised, even though he does have little verbal twitches (i.e. the repetitive use of the phrase "c'est-à-dire") and that he sometimes doesn't finish a sentence, for he thinks faster than he speaks (and he speaks very quickly).

Mr. Voltaire's discourse was far from chronological. Not only were our conversations very scattered, but he also continuously jumped from one phase and epoch to another. Furthermore, he used on many occasions different moments of his narrative to offer time-crossing analyses of the Haitian society. Even though the discourse construction and its chosen timeline is fascinating to analyze, I have chosen to restore an 'artificial' chronology, for I didn't find my original attempts intelligible enough. However I will try to present some of his extremely insightful 'transversal' thoughts.

I have chosen to present Frantz Voltaire's account last for a simple reason. His constant analysis and his vast pallet of thoughts on themes such as place-making, identity formation or the nation-state, present a very logical transition to the next chapter in which we will take elements of these accounts to reflect on these themes. Indeed, Mr. Voltaire's discourse can be seen as in between a personal life-story and a social scientist's reflections. But let us now enter this story, starting with a young boy growing up in Port-au-Prince in the 1950s.

Port-au-Prince I (1948-1967): *On était vraiment borderline, comme on dit*

Frantz Voltaire was born in Port-au-Prince in 1948, into an upper-middle class family. His relationship with his parents and his parents' backgrounds, with a great difference between his father and his mother, I think is of great importance in understanding the complexities of this man. His mother came from a small rural town in southern Haiti called Aquin:

Ma mère était une femme, elle est encore une femme parce qu'elle est encore vivante, c'est une femme d'une grande, grande tolérance, qui venait d'une famille de notables de province. Plus spécifiquement d'une petite ville qui s'appelait Aquin. Ils étaient arrivés relativement tard dans la capitale. Mon grand-père avait été député, exportateur, avocat dans la ville, donc c'était une famille qui avait perdu ses privilèges en arrivant dans la capitale. On était une famille aussi très clanesque. C'est-à-dire la famille de ma mère. Comme toutes les grandes familles de province il y avait des liens très étroits entre les cousins, les cousines, c'était une sorte de tribu, une sorte de grand clan familial où tout le monde pouvait être très solidaire.

His family on his mother's side had therefore been part of the countryside ruling class.

His grandfather, as a landowner, exporter and deputy was certainly one of the most influential men of the town. However the whole family moved to the capital for undisclosed reasons ("a reverse of fortune"), hence losing a lot of influence. His mother's family strongly links Mr. Voltaire to the country; not so much to the actual town of Aquin, but to the deep, "clan-like" relationships that are to him typically rural. His choice of words is very significant: he speaks of a "kind of tribe," with great solidarity between his numerous cousins. It seemed as though this family is deeply grounded in his imaginary of a typical Haitian family, with rural origins, untold sufferings and deep fraternity among its members.

Mr. Voltaire constructs a strong contrast between his mother's family and his father's. He considers the latter as typically urban, with fewer aunts, uncles and cousins and less solidarity. Moreover he considers them as being not as rooted in the country, for his father was a descendant of Italian merchants grounded in the French Caribbean (Guadeloupe and Martinique):

La famille de mon père c'était une famille à la fois issue d'immigrants italo-français et de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique. Donc quelque part, ils étaient très peu enracinés dans le pays. Bon c'était pas une immigration très... C'était le grand-père qui était arrivé là. Donc mon père venait d'une famille peu clanique, très urbanisée. Ils étaient trois ; mon oncle et ma tante. J'ai eu très peu de contacts en fait avec la famille de mon oncle, parce qu'il y avait, je sais pas, des divergences entre eux. Je les connaissais mais il n'y a jamais eu vraiment de socialisation. Ma tante elle n'avait qu'un seul fils, donc c'était une famille avec peu de cousins. Donc les cousins que je connaissais

étaient les cousins du côté de ma mère, qui étaient extrêmement nombreux, où les gens se fréquentaient l'un l'autre et qui étaient extrêmement enracinés dans le pays.

I find very pertinent this initial contrast and the importance that Mr. Voltaire gives to it, for this foreshadows a life of contrasts and cross-cultural dialogues. He explains that one of the key factors was the climate of tolerance that was prevailing in his house, a rare occurrence in Haiti's upper classes. He insisted on the fact that his tolerance largely came from his mother:

Je venais d'une famille relativement privilégiée, de classe moyenne aisée. Mon père était comptable, était haut fonctionnaire. C'était un milieu qui aurait pu être conservateur mais où il y avait énormément de tolérance. Par ma mère. Ma mère était une femme énormément tolérante, donc j'ai vécu dans une atmosphère privilégiée. Qui était une sorte de protection aussi. Mes frères ou moi nous avons été élevés dans une atmosphère privilégiée par rapport au reste du pays.

During his childhood years, Mr. Voltaire has lived in several neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince and especially its suburbs, varying his viewpoints of the city. His father did not like the city centre, so he found himself living in rather unusual places for his social class, by the sea in what was to become a working class area, and later on a hill that resembled more a holiday resort than an urban neighbourhood. He stressed the importance of these place dissimilarities, and especially how they made him navigate between differentiated social groups, playing soccer with the countryside kids on the beach, going to school with the elite's children, and making all sorts of friends:

Je suis né dans un quartier qui s'appelle le Bas-Peu-de-Chose. Le Bas-Peu-de-Chose c'est une sorte de quartier de classe moyenne, qui est presque au centre de Port-au-Prince. De ma maison on pouvait aller au centre ville en dix, quinze minutes à pied, au collège. Après on a déménagé, [...] j'ai été habité Chemin-des-Dalles. C'était déjà des quartiers, je dirais, frontière. C'est un peu ça peut être... Frontière entre des classes moyennes, frontière entre la bourgeoisie et les notables. Et plus tard, dans les années 50, on a déménagé pour habiter près de la mer. Mon père n'aimait pas trop la ville. Donc on a déménagé près de la mer, on est resté quelques années dans une zone qu'on appelait Côte-Plage, qui était peu urbanisée et qui est devenu maintenant un énorme quartier populaire. À l'époque il y avait des plages, il y avait d'énormes terrains. Et quand ça a commencé à s'urbaniser, on est parti vivre à la montagne dans une zone qui au départ était une zone de villégiature, Thomassin, qui est devenu une zone résidentielle. [...] Ça m'a permis d'avoir un regard très divers. C'est un peu étonnant ce que je vais dire. Pour un enfant, vers la plage, en été on fréquentait surtout les jeunes paysans. Avec qui on jouait au foot, avec qui on se rencontrait pour

aller à la pêche, pour aller à la mer. En même temps j'allais dans un collège où je fréquentais des gens qui appartenaient à la bourgeoisie. On était invité, on allait chez eux. Et en même temps je jouais au foot et je faisais beaucoup de sport, donc on rencontrait des gens de toutes les catégories sociales.

This passage is particularly interesting, because we see that he is starting to elaborate a theory, introducing the concept of frontiers in his narrative. He was evidently pleased with this idea, and drew upon it significantly. The retelling of his story would henceforth be set from this angle; a child and an adolescent in between different groups, navigating from one another and situating himself *on the frontier*. His own word to describe it was “borderline:”

J'étais dans une famille avec des membres immigrants commerçants italiens – les tantes de mon père qui avaient des commerces. En même temps j'étais lié par les amitiés scolaires avec des gens qui appartenaient à la bourgeoisie de ce pays, en même temps j'étais lié par les classes moyennes, en même temps mon père était aussi comptable de syro-libanais, donc je fréquentais beaucoup de gens qui appartenaient à cette colonie syro-libanaise. Mais dans la matinée, quand on était dans la maison – parce qu'il fallait prendre l'autobus, enfin ce qu'on appelait le tap-tap pour aller en ville – donc je fréquentais beaucoup plus de jeunes paysans, car il n'y avait pas beaucoup d'urbains. Donc entre sept ans et douze ans mes fréquentations étaient plus avec des petits gars du quartier qui étaient des paysans, mais des paysans qui étaient en train d'être transformés rapidement. Donc on a été dans ce sens-là ce que j'appelle 'borderline.' C'est-à-dire que dans la même matinée on pouvait fréquenter trois quatre catégories sociales différentes, ce qui ne se faisait pas dans ce pays où tout était rythmé, enclavé.

He then enlarged this idea, linking it to his whole life and to the construction of his general identity – what defined him. He sees himself as somebody not belonging to a fixed group, but navigating between them, and being able to feel comfortable in these different configurations. He has lived, literally and symbolically, in frontier zones, enabling the formation of multiple identities. He would only later realize how precious and liberating this was:

Donc moi je pense que ce qui me définirait, c'est qu'on était un peu à la frontière. À la frontière entre les classe sociales, entre les groupes, entre les clans. Je n'appartenais en fait à aucun de ces groupes. Donc très tôt il y avait le sentiment très diffus – je ne pense pas que c'était très réfléchi – d'être à la frontière d'une société qui avait ses codes très rigides, et nous on n'était jamais tout à fait ni dans l'un ni dans l'autre. On obéissait pas trop aux codes de la couleur, qui était un marqueur social très particulier. On venait un peu de partout. On était vraiment 'borderline' comme on dit.

[...] Je pense que toute ma vie je me suis senti un peu ce qu'on appelle à la frontière. Quelqu'un avec des identités multiples. J'étais pas tout à fait ni dans un ni dans l'autre. Je ne participais pas aux préjugés. Pas par choix, mais simplement parce qu'on vivait sur une zone frontière. [...] Tu sais pas [que c'est une certaine liberté]. Tu sais que tu passes d'un monde à l'autre, que tu circules d'une catégorie à une autre, et tu peux te trouver bien dans toutes ces atmosphères. Parce que finalement tu n'es pas complètement de l'un ou de l'autre.

We see in the above quote that this constant social navigation and “living on the frontier” is also linked to his ethnicity. Or more precisely skin colour, for Haiti is unique in its subtle differentiation of a black working class and a mulatto elite*. Mr. Voltaire, because of his mixed parental origins, never felt like he fell into one of these categories, especially because his father, who was perceived more like a stranger:

Par notre type physique on pouvait être perçus comme appartenant à telle catégorie. Mais en même temps on n'était pas tellement de cette catégorie. Oui par ma mère on pouvait être rattachés à une certaine catégorie sociale, mais de l'autre par mon père, c'était des étrangers. Enfin une immigration récente qui était devenue haïtienne.

Important places in Port-au-Prince

It is important in Mr. Voltaire's discourse that he comes from the capital city, for he defines himself as an urban dweller, and he expressed deep love for his childhood city. To him, what the city has now become is a tragedy. What was once a pleasant, mellow Caribbean town – or how he idealizes the 1950s Port-au-Prince – is now an overpopulated, polluted city constantly on the verge of an environmental catastrophe. He has actually directed a documentary film about it (*Port-au-Prince, My City*; Voltaire 2002) comparing the contemporary city with archival images.

* All three interviewees implied this and, interestingly, were quite uncomfortable to draw upon it explicitly, including Mr. Voltaire. If he did not want to expand on it in his story, he however published Micheline Labelle's fascinating book on that subject: *Idéologie de couleur et classes sociales en Haïti* (1987). She describes the history of the links between skin colour and social classes in Haiti, explaining that one is used to legitimize the other within the mulatto elite. She states that even though the relationship between black and mulatto is intricate in all the Caribbean, it is unique in Haiti for *all* political and social struggles have been linked to skin colour, since independence (1804) and before.

Every time we have spoken about his childhood and adolescence, the city was very present. Much more than when speaking of the other cities in which he has lived he gave spatial references, explaining everyday itineraries and giving accounts of important places or neighbourhoods. He described the exceptional ambience that he remembered from his childhood city:

Bon je suis né au moment où la ville s'était donnée une façade maritime. Il y avait eu la grande exposition universelle d'Haïti, donc on a vécu sur les restes de cette exposition pendant longtemps. Donc il y avait sur la façade maritime cette fontaine lumineuse, il y avait les concerts le dimanche, on nous emmenait sur le front de mer. Il y avait toute une atmosphère d'une jolie petite ville avec ses cinémas, ses parcs, il y avait quand même une dizaine, une douzaine de cinémas, pour une ville de 100'000 habitants. Certains avaient jusqu'à 1000 personnes. Il y avait du théâtre. Et c'est étonnant. Il y avait des concerts classiques. Bon. C'était une petite ville très, très, très agréable

His parents would take him every Sunday to a very popular place in Port-au-Prince, the *Bicentenaire*, which were Pavilions built on the waterfront for the 1949 Universal Exposition. He went back to that place as we were talking, explaining that it exerted a particular "magical" fascination, and he felt a special excitement every time he and his family went there, because of the concerts, the enlightened fountain or simply the crowd, especially as they lived a little isolated from the city centre:

Le lieu qui a peut-être le plus de sens pour moi, c'était ce qu'on appelle le Bicentenaire. C'était là où avait eu lieu l'exposition internationale en 1949. Donc je n'ai pas connu l'exposition, mais on en parlait et j'en voyais les traces. Le lieu d'exposition était le lieu où on nous emmenait le dimanche. Alors on sortait de la maison de campagne qui était isolée, et on rentrait dans cette atmosphère qui semblait féérique. Il y avait une fontaine lumineuse, il y avait de la musique, il y avait des concerts... C'était quelque chose d'un peu irréaliste, pour moi, c'est resté très fort dans mon enfance comme un des lieux symboliques de Port-au-Prince.

Later, as an adolescent, another area of Port-au-Prince would be very important to him. When his parents left town, or when he would stay out a little late, he would sleep at his aunt's, in another 'frontier' neighbourhood called *Ruelle Marcelin*. He would spend more and more time there as he grew older, and this central area was the stage of nights

out at the cinema, long discussions with friends and his first flirtations. He stated that “there, the city became my city”:

Il y avait un quartier dans la ville qui s'appelle la Ruelle Marcelin. Là aussi c'est une zone frontière entre des zones bourgeoises et des zones de classe moyenne. Je m'y suis forgé des grandes amitiés. Ma tante y vivait, je dormais chez elle, et donc pendant mon adolescence je fréquentais sûrement ; chaque fois que j'allais au cinéma la nuit je restais là. Et puis il est arrivé que mes parents ont du partir pendant des mois en été, deux fois, et donc je suis resté chez ma tante. Et là pour moi la ville est devenu ma ville d'une certaine façon.

School & Political consciousness

Frantz Voltaire attended the Collège Saint-Martial, a secondary school in downtown Port-au-Prince run by Catholic priests. This school would turn out to have an enormous impact on his political consciousness and his whole life. He would return to this school, his professors, and his friends many times in our discussions, truly giving it a crucial role in his narrative. He even places his encounters at school above his family in the events that impacted his life:

Je dois dire que plus que la famille ce qui m'a marqué ça été les rencontres à l'école qui ont été déterminantes dans ma vie.

Let us examine how Mr. Voltaire explains his gradual interest towards social struggles and politics, as he placed it as a crucial element of his story. To him the context was determinant, as he describes the totalitarian climate of the time as tense, violent and frightening:

J'ai grandi en Haïti. Pendant toute l'époque en Haïti, c'était l'époque de Duvalier-Père. Donc c'était une époque extrêmement difficile, c'était une époque où moi j'ai eu des engagements très jeune. Vers l'âge de 15, 16 ans en politique. Et à un moment donné beaucoup de gens qui nous entouraient vivaient des situations de disparition. Même si j'étais dans le cas d'une famille relativement aisée et protégée, tout le monde pensait qu'il va se passer quelque chose. [...] Donc c'était un moment où on établissait une sorte de violence extrême, mais il y avait aussi beaucoup de gens qui résistaient. Tout cela créait une atmosphère de tension, de violence permanente. De silence aussi, on n'osait plus parler. Donc c'était un moment très très difficile.

After Duvalier's election, he explains that his family, like many Haitian families, was split between pro- and anti- Duvalier,. His father had a high-ranking position as an accountant in a ministry and showed no sign of resistance to the régime, whereas his uncle was overt about his opposition:

À ce moment-là, il y a des opinions différentes. Mon père était un haut fonctionnaire, moi j'étais en désaccord complètement. Mon oncle a eu des divergences avec mon père, mon oncle était tout à fait contre le régime, ma grand-mère paternelle aussi. Les familles étaient relativement divisées sur toutes ces questions politiques.

What expanded Frantz Voltaire's political horizons was therefore his school, and the young priests that ran it. In a country where repression was toughening and tightening everywhere, these priests provided spaces for free debates, uncensored readings, and political discussions. Before the 1960s the country's clergy – and therefore the teachers in the elite private schools – was entirely French and rather conservative. But in 1961 and 1962 young and progressive priests arrived (interestingly many from Quebec) and more importantly Haitian priests had been educated and ordered. Especially in the Collège Saint-Martial, which was administered by the Spiritan Order (a progressive Order), these young priests radically transformed the approach to education. Mr. Voltaire describes these years, explaining that these priests were wonderful but completely unconscious, partly because they had been in seminaries in France or in Quebec during the first years of Duvalier's power, and had therefore not witnessed the rise of a brutal totalitarian régime:

J'étais dans un collège classique, le collège St-Martial, qui était dirigé par des prêtres et qui était peut-être le meilleur collège de la ville. Les prêtres aussi allaient payer le prix fort de la dictature de Duvalier. L'école, durant les années du secondaire, était je dirais une sorte de havre. Tout pouvait être discuté, débattu. Traditionnellement les prêtres du St-Esprit avaient même le droit d'octroyer l'asile, et cachaient même des gens. Evidemment ce droit leur sera retiré sous Duvalier, l'école sera fouillée de temps en temps de fond en comble, et on expulsera par deux fois les supérieurs de l'école. Les spiritains étaient un ordre de prêtres catholiques mais qui étaient des prêtres progressistes. Et il y a eu aussi dans les années 61, 62, l'arrivée des jeunes prêtre haïtiens. C'était le premier groupe de prêtres haïtiens qui arrivait dans cette école. Ils n'avaient pas connu les

premières années de Duvalier. Donc ils sont arrivés un peu tout feu tout flamme. Ils ont bouleversé les choses, ils ont créé des revues, ils ont ouvert la bibliothèque des jeunes, ils ouvraient des débats. Ils étaient marqués par le personnalisme chrétien. Donc beaucoup d'entre eux ouvraient des débats avec les étudiants – les marxistes. Ils ont commencé à faire, je dirais, des formes de prise de conscience sous forme de pèlerinage. C'était des lieux de débat, où tout le monde discutait. Évidemment tout cela va finir tragiquement dans les années 63 puisque tout cela sera arrêté et la plupart seront expulsés. [...] C'est à travers tout cela que j'ai commencé à prendre conscience, à participer à des débats. Alors c'était un peu insolite d'avoir une sorte d'océan de liberté dans un pays soumis à une dictature de pouvoir absolu. C'est quand même un cas très très particulier, où l'école représentait une zone un peu libre. [...] Ça a été une chance inouïe.

Thanks to this climate in school, Mr. Voltaire took part in numerous debate clubs, school newspapers, and lively discussions that sharpened his political consciousness. Specifically the opening by his professors of a library, *La Bibliothèque des Jeunes*, created a space for intellectual reasoning and free debates. He developed his thoughts on how these discussions allowed him to constructively question the very foundations of the régime:

Mes choix personnels ont été marqués par ces rencontres avec à la fois ces prêtres qui venaient de l'étranger et qui ont créé une atmosphère dans l'école de débats, de discussions, et qui remettaient en cause les fondements même du régime. [...] Il y avait toute une atmosphère d'émulation au collège, mais la création de la bibliothèque des jeunes a suscité aussi une émulation. Il y avait une zone de débats. C'était quand même étrange. Au moment où le régime étendait ses tentacules, il y avait des espaces de libertés. [...] Ces prêtres sont venus et nous ont interpellés. Interpellés par exemple dans nos rapports – ce collège était à côté d'un quartier populaire. Et donc on a commencé à faire des groupes d'alphabétisation en créole. On a commencé à débattre, on a commencé à faire des clubs. Donc c'est une atmosphère qui était un peu insolite par rapport au reste du pays.

In his discourse, he has been extensively detailed about not only the intellectual climate in this school, but also about its physical environment. We see above that it was situated close to a relatively poor neighbourhood, in which the teachers encouraged them to undertake social activities, like teaching to read and write in Creole to these largely illiterate populations. This area around school is of great significance in Frantz Voltaire's memory, especially one little teahouse called *La Pâtisserie aux Enfants* where he and other students would go eat lunch. There he would pursue the discussions from

class with his comrades and older Marxist students from university, and meet a very diverse crowd made of students, semi-clandestine intellectuals and workers. The house was ran by an old lady called Amélie Vitalerne, nicknamed “Manmémie” because of her mother-like relationship with all of these young boys.

We should examine the following passage about *La Pâtisserie aux Enfants*, as it unfolds a personal, significant place for the interviewee, in an unusually emotional way. Mr. Voltaire’s wording is still elaborate, but his sentences are a bit less structured than usual, and we feel that he steps into a very personal memory. For a few minutes does not try to build a coherent discourse but speaks more with his heart of this wonderful old lady who served as a mommy for all these idealistic and hungry boys:

Autre lieu important pour moi aussi c’était cette implantation du collège au milieu urbain de Port-au-Prince. Et là le collège était à mi-chemin entre le Bel-Air, un quartier populaire avec une tradition très forte d’opposition et donc moi, comme j’habitais trop loin pour retourner chez moi le midi, on allait manger dans une maison qui s’appelait La Pâtisserie aux Enfants. C’était une vieille dame qui venait du Sud comme ma mère, et qui recevait tous les étudiants qui venaient du Sud. Là aussi se sont nouées des amitiés très importantes. Là aussi c’était un milieu un petit peu hétéroclite. Il y avait des étudiants qui venaient des lycées, il y avait des étudiants qui venaient des collèges classiques de curés, c’était à la limite et à la frontière du Bel-Air, donc on écoutait toutes sortes de gens. Moi je me rappelle, dans cette vieille maison ancienne, il y avait un type qui était là en semi clandestinité. Il s’appelait Hyppolite. Et lui il était un prof d’histoire, il était figuoliste, c’est-à-dire qu’il appartenait à une tendance politique qui avait été victime sous Duvalier, donc il m’endoctrinait un peu, il me faisait des cours sur l’histoire. Il m’endoctrinait un peu. [...] Je rencontrais aussi des jeunes du quartier qui vont me faire découvrir le Marxisme. Donc ce lieu a été très, très, très marqué. Et à chaque fois que je reviens à Port-au-Prince maintenant ... le lieu n’existe plus, il a été rasé, ça s’appelait la Pâtisserie aux Enfants, c’était une vieille dame qui s’appelait Amélie Vitalerne.

Through the Pâtisserie, school and multiple encounters and friendships, Mr. Voltaire gradually became politicized and implicated in anti-Duvalier activities. He too was very influenced by the “romanticism”, as he calls it, of the Cuban Revolution, and by the older Marxist university students who would come to recruit at the college:

[Mon engagement politique] commence à ce moment-là, parce qu'on était sollicités par des groupes d'étudiants, d'universitaires. Et on avait 15, 16 ans donc c'est le moment de toutes les folies, et d'engagement politique aussi. Donc on se retrouvait avec des groupes d'étudiants. C'est le moment comme je l'ai dit de bouillonnement politique. Parce que la classe politique traditionnelle avait été décapitée. Donc c'était un moment unique. Marqué par cela, beaucoup d'entre nous étions en plus très sensibles à l'aventure de la révolution cubaine, à tout ce romantisme de la révolution cubaine de l'époque : de toute la guérilla et des chefs révolutionnaires de l'époque. Donc il y avait beaucoup de gens qui étaient fascinés par ces modèles. [...] C'était un rêve, mais nous étions marqués par ces images.

This engagement will bring him into opposition with his family, for his father worked for the government, but more generally because it led him to radically question the authoritarian family structure:

J'avais 16 ans en 64. C'est là qu'arrive aussi les prises de conscience politique. À l'époque on est tous marqués par la Révolution Cubaine, on est marqué par toute une atmosphère qui va faire qu'il y a une rupture avec la structure familiale. Il y a un engagement qui nous met en porte-à-faux avec elle. Qui me met en porte-à-faux moi avec la famille, et qui m'entraîne dans un engagement politique.

He would mainly take part in underground discussion groups, and undertake "small actions here and there," for he was only a teenager, and the older people who ran these groups were themselves young students, and while idealistic were quite disorganized:

On faisait de la distribution d'un tract par là, d'un tract par là. C'était là toutes les activités vers lesquelles on était confinés. [...] C'était pas des groupes très organisés, c'était surtout des groupes d'étudiants. [...] C'était des actions spontanées, des actions très peu préparées ; on était tous maladroits. Ce qui explique en grande partie aussi l'échec de tous ces mouvements.

Indeed, he retrospectively does not seem to believe much in the chances of the movement to succeed at that time. The groups were too fragmented, inexperienced, and with a romanticized idea of resistance, whereas Duvalier and his Tonton Macoutes were brutal, methodical and infiltrated everywhere. The climate was becoming unbearable, as every year general fright and suspicion seemed to increase in the country. The prospects for a bright and adventurous student were very dim, especially if he was already most probably spotted and noted as a potential opponent.

People around him started to disappear, there were echoes of generalized torture in Fort Dimanche. The régime was particularly ruthless in its exposing of violence. On November 12th 1964, Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin, two revolutionaries who had been part of a group who had tried to overthrow Duvalier, were executed in front of the cemetery wall. Mr. Voltaire witnessed the execution, forced to attend as was every pupil in the capital.

We have used footage and photographs of this tragic event in our exhibition, and it felt quite odd, while manipulating these horrible images with him, to realize that he was there, in the crowd. He stared at the pictures and remembered the incredible dignity of the moment; Numa and Drouin looking at their executors in the eyes and accepting their death. Duvalier wanted to impress and terrify the students by forcing them to witness this, but it seemed to have the exact opposite effect on Mr. Voltaire, who saw two heroes accepting to die for their ideals.

Because of this frightful climate, the growing tension, the lack of prospects and the disagreements with his family, Mr. Voltaire decided to leave Haiti in 1967, at eighteen years old:

Tout le monde pensait qu'il fallait prendre une décision, qu'il fallait intervenir. À un moment quelconque, comme beaucoup, je suis parti. En disant « on reviendra. » La dictature allait durer peut-être plus longtemps qu'on ne le pensait. Il y avait beaucoup de gens disparus qu'on arrêtait, qu'on torturait. Donc c'était une époque d'une violence extrême, et de peur. Aux peurs réelles s'ajoutaient aussi les peurs imaginaires, parce qu'on pensait que tout peut arriver. [...] Donc c'était un moment où on établissait une sorte de violence extrême, mais il y avait aussi beaucoup de gens qui résistaient. Tout cela créait une atmosphère de tension, de violence permanente. De silence aussi, on n'osait plus parler. Donc c'était un moment très très difficile. Donc beaucoup de gens ont décidé de partir. C'est le moment je dirais où commence cette longue fuite vers l'extérieur, qui

allait aboutir à avoir plus tard presque un dixième ou un cinquième de la population – on ne peut pas le chiffrer de façon très précise – à s'établir à l'extérieur de pays.

This is a prime example of a part of his narrative where he explained an event in a general, analytical way. When I asked him how he had come to leave the country, he answered not speaking for himself but for the Haitian exiles as a whole, placing himself as one amongst many others, talking about social realities in Haiti but not giving personal details.

Santiago de Chile (1967-1973): *Une ville bouillonnante*

Frantz Voltaire, pressured by the disappearance of people close to him, flew out of Haiti on a confusing trip, which brought him briefly to Paris and Montreal, both cities in which he had relatives. But without any close friends or concrete prospects in either place, he set out for South America – the romanticized continent of his adolescence. He got on a flight for Argentina, but hated the authoritarian climate and tried to rejoin friends in Brazil. But there he arrived in the middle of yet another military dictatorship, and explained that he hadn't left Haiti to live in the same type of constant fright and suspicion. He therefore set off to Chile:

J'ai essayé de remonter vers le Brésil. Quand je suis arrivé au Brésil, c'était déjà la dictature militaire, comme en Argentine. Alors j'ai décidé que je n'allais pas sortir d'Haiti pour rester dans cet univers dictatorial. Et finalement en arrivant au Chili – le Chili avait une longue tradition démocratique, le Chili était un pays ouvert – c'était encore la démocratie chrétienne, c'était pas encore le gouvernement socialiste d'Allende. Mais il y avait une atmosphère. Et au Chili, j'ai trouvé une bourse, et je suis resté. Donc le Chili était pour moi un choix, mais aussi une opportunité nouvelle, parce que le Chili à l'époque recevait beaucoup d'exilés latino-américains. Donc Santiago était une ville bouillonnante d'idées, de réflexions, de gens qui venaient d'un peu partout en Amérique Latine.

He deeply appreciated the democratic atmosphere in Santiago, and the extraordinary blend of people and ideas. Chile at that time was welcoming many South American

exiles who he got to meet, debate with and learn from in the capital – it is interesting to note in the above quote that he considers himself as Latin-American. He speaks of Santiago de Chile in the late 1960s as an incredibly rich experience, full of encounters and endless debates:

L'époque était pour le jeune homme que j'étais de 19 ans une époque très fructueuse, une époque d'apprentissage. Tout était objet à débats, les élections, au sein du mouvement étudiant, les cours. Pour moi c'était un énorme terrain d'apprentissage. On était à l'Institut Pédagogique où j'étudiais l'Histoire, qui était une sorte d'ancienne ferme. Là il y avait toutes sortes de gens, la cour était le lieu de toutes sortes de réflexions, de polémiques. Donc c'était une époque fascinante pour moi.

He got a scholarship from the United Nations to study History in Santiago. To him these days were fascinating, for they opened his mind in many ways. His professors were excellent, and brought the student tools for critical analysis of history; conceptual tools he claims to use every day. He met people from all over South America who made him discover different cultures, in particular South American literature, which became tremendously important to him – he can speak for hours of Gabriel Garcia-Marquez or Alejandro Carpentier.

He also got strongly involved with political movements, befriending many leftist students and with them taking part in many social activities. He would for example leave the city in the summer to go educate children in the countryside or to help reconstruct a village:

On était embarqués dans des activités de type social. On allait alphabétiser les gens dans les bidonvilles, on allait faire des activités de conscientisation des gens dans les limites de la campagne qui sont celles de la ville. [...] C'était la mobilisation permanente, l'activisme permanent. En été on partait sac-au-dos dans un train, on allait dans le sud du Chili participer à des activités de reconstruction d'un village. [...] Pour moi qui venait d'ailleurs c'était un apprentissage permanent. Apprentissage de la démocratie, apprentissage des débats. Et aussi participer à la vie quotidienne des gens, on pensait qu'on faisait des fois une petite différence. On organisait une équipe de foot, on allait dans les campagnes où les gamins connaissaient la malnutrition...

He was especially close the Socialist Party, which he differentiates in Chile from the socialists in other South American countries, as he found the Chileans less radical and more democratic:

J'étais très proche des socialistes, donc je me suis retrouvé dans le mouvement socialiste. Parce que le parti socialiste chilien était un parti je dirais très particulier. Très proche des social-démocraties européennes, avec toutes sortes de tendances. [...] C'était un parti de débats, qui allait du centre gauche à la gauche.

In Chile Mr. Voltaire linked political activism to social and cultural activism, which he insists on greatly for impacting his whole life. About the years in Santiago the same ideas came up systematically in our discussions, even the same word: "*bouillonnant*" (literally 'boiling' or 'bubbling'). Santiago was frothing and bubbling with people and ideas, constantly enriching him and widening his curiosity. Every time we talked about Chile his main focus was on this exciting political and cultural atmosphere, in a democracy which he truly believed in.

Mr. Voltaire actively took part in the campaign for the election of Salvador Allende in 1970. Even though he is nuanced about Allende's success, he describes the first year of his presidency as an unequalled wave of enthusiasm in the whole region, a much-awaited attempt of democratic socialism. He described the general hope that he had felt arouse from this election as phenomenal. However he felt the atmosphere gradually worsen in 1972. Inflation was very significant, strikes were sprouting, and moreover he noticed an increased military presence.

A few days after Pinochet's Coup on the 11th of September 1973, a military unit broke into Mr. Voltaire's house in Santiago and arrested everybody present. The soldiers brought them to the national stadium where all "suspected opponents" were being kept

and interrogated. Mr. Voltaire was severely tortured, especially as the soldiers thought he was Cuban. Two of his “colleagues” were assassinated by soldiers in the stadium:

La junte militaire a commencé immédiatement une politique de répression. Et beaucoup d'entre nous, nous nous sommes retrouvés dans un stade. [...] J'étais chez moi. On avait des gens chez nous, les militaires ont débarqué, ils ont embarqué tout le monde. C'est un phénomène qu'ils avaient généralisé. Ils embarquaient tout le monde, les mettaient dans les stades, ce qui leur permettait de fichier des milliers de gens. [...] C'était un peu kafkaïen, parce que moi quand on m'a arrêté on m'a torturé parce qu'on pensait que j'étais cubain. Malgré toutes mes dénégations, j'étais pas cubain, je ne pouvais même rien répondre. Finalement, les Nations Unies, comme j'avais une bourse des Nations Unies, ont demandé qu'on puisse relâcher un certain nombre de gens. J'ai eu de la chance. Deux autres collègues ont été assassinés avant.

The United Nations made a special request to extradite the students on their scholarship. Frantz Voltaire considers himself extremely lucky to have been freed by this means after only a few days in the stadium, and clearly considers himself as a survivor in comparison to his friends who did not have this chance.

Montreal I (1973-75): *Ça m'a permis de souffler*

A United Nations helicopter brought Frantz Voltaire to Peru, in which he had neither official status nor occupation. Through his relatives in Canada he started the administrative procedures to apply for a student visa and pursue his studies in Montreal. But the process took time and his status in Peru was very unstable and temporary. The Red Cross gave him a plane ticket to France which he was reluctantly forced to take, making him take a “long detour to go from Peru to Canada”:

Au Pérou on acceptait les gens mais on ne leur donnait pas de permis de séjour. Depuis le Pérou j'ai négocié un visa pour le Canada. Mais la Croix-Rouge m'avait donné un billet pour l'Europe. [...] Je n'avais pas besoin de papiers pour rentrer en France. Donc je suis d'abord rentré en France, et c'est un long détour de passer par la France.

Interestingly his second exile brings him to Europe again, and again he does all he can to leave Europe as fast as possible. He saw prospects for himself in the Americas – Latin,

Canada or the Caribbean – but not in France, even though he had relatives and knew a few Haitian exiles in the Parisian region.

From Paris he got his Canadian visa and entered a political science program at the Université du Québec À Montréal (UQÀM), writing his Master's thesis on the Chilean political crisis (Voltaire 1975).

He described this first Canadian stay as “formidable,” for he got to study peacefully and as he puts it “take a breath” from the intensity that his life had been to that point. He knew Montreal already a little, and had friends established in the city to welcome him. To him these two years were restorative, as they allowed him to recover from the tortures and trauma in Chile, in a city where he didn't need to constantly watch his back:

Bon moi je connaissais déjà Montréal. Il faut dire que j'étais déjà venu ici en 58 et en 67. Quand j'avais quitté Haïti j'étais passé par Montréal. J'avais des cousins ici. J'avais eu aussi des profs canadiens. Donc je n'arrivais pas en terra incognita. J'arrivais en terrain connu, j'avais des amis qui m'ont reçu. Ça a été une expérience formidable l'année et demie que j'ai passé ici. J'ai pu souffler. Je dirais que je refaisais une santé, parce que j'avais été torturé au Chili. Donc oui, ça m'a permis de souffler. Je pouvais marcher dans la rue sans me soucier, pas besoin de regarder derrière moi..

Mexico City (1975-1977)

Mr. Voltaire's Canadian visa was only temporary. Even though he retells his story in his specific way with many shortcuts, and probably leaves out the affective ties he had to people and places, it seems as though he was incredibly free in the choices he made to leave everything and go from one place to another. Friends of his that he had made in Santiago were now exiled in Mexico. They offered him a teaching job in the Popular University of Mexico City, and he set off after the completion of his Master's.

He wasn't detailed at all about his two years in Mexico. He didn't express any love nor dislike for the city, but it clearly wasn't as important to him than Port-au-Prince,

Montreal or Santiago. The important elements from his life in Mexico were the echoes and rumors coming from Haiti. François Duvalier had died in 1971, and his son Jean-Claude was being pressured by the Carter administration to (politically and economically) liberalize the country and loosen the pressure on political dissidents. Mr. Voltaire was hearing about political opponents and intellectuals returning or being liberated from prison, and he decided, with other exiled friends, that it was the right time to go back to Haiti and try to “entice a change”:

Je suis allé au Mexique en juillet 75, je suis resté jusqu'en octobre 77. Là j'ai décidé de quitter le Mexique parce qu'entre temps, sous le gouvernement de Carter, il y a eu en Haïti ce qu'on a appelé un processus de libéralisation. Et moi, avec plusieurs camarades et des gens avec qui j'étais resté en contact on s'est dit que c'était le moment de rentrer en Haïti. Et le fait que plusieurs personnes rentrent, ça créait peut-être une dynamique nouvelle, et la possibilité de faire pression et peut-être d'amorcer un changement. Effectivement quand je suis arrivé en fin 77, il y avait un bouillonnement quand même en Haïti. Un bouillonnement d'écrivains, de gens qui revenaient. [...] Donc j'ai participé à la formation de différents groupes. Avant même des opposants, nous étions des dissidents.

Port-au-Prince II (1977-1979) : au milieu de toute cette effervescence.

To Frantz Voltaire this return to Haiti was extremely important. He had always wanted to come back to his country in order to change things there. He therefore jumped on what he called “a window of opportunity” that the United States government had opened:

J'ai toujours conservé l'idée qu'il fallait revenir en Haïti. D'ailleurs quand je dis « j'ai décidé », plusieurs personnes étaient revenues. En 1977, sous la présidence de Carter, moi j'ai eu plusieurs rencontres avec des gens, ceux qui sortaient de prison, ceux qui étaient là, et on s'est dit : il y a un moment, c'est une fenêtre d'opportunité – c'est un anglicisme, a window of opportunity – mais il y a une fenêtre qui est ouverte, il faut profiter pour s'engouffrer dans cette fenêtre là parce qu'on sait jamais quand ça viendra à nouveau.

He arrived in a city that had radically changed. He didn't know many people anymore, and the population had suffered immensely from the prolonged years of dictatorship. He felt somewhat as a stranger back in his childhood city. But at the same time these were

the years of an emergence of a certain wind of hope. The system was still corrupt and autocratic, but he explains that the fright level was decreasing:

Je suis arrivé à l'époque d'une certaine ouverture après les années noires et les années dures [...] C'était une époque où les gens commençaient à souffler. Il n'y avait pas d'opposition organisée à Duvalier, mais c'était une époque où on voyait toutes sortes de paroles qui commencent à s'exprimer. Des poètes, des écrivains, dans les églises. [...] Les gens commencent à avoir moins peur.

As he formulates it, even though there was not an organized political opposition, all sorts of voices were starting to be heard. Some newspaper editorials and radio chronicles were more outspoken, people were gathering together and discussing, and he witnessed an undeniable cultural effervescence. He has fond memories of a theatre play. The great Haitian writer Frankétienne adapted a Polish play by Slawomir Mrozek, a dialogue between an exiled peasant and an exiled intellectual (Frankétienne 1978), which was quite an explicit metaphor of the country's situation. The play had seventeen packed performances before being censored.

Mr. Voltaire quickly found himself in the middle of the movement, navigating between the different groups: political activists, intellectuals, artists and journalists. Looking back at these years, he considers himself as being in the very heart of the movement, although not part of a specific "clan". He calls himself a "binder," which brings us back to his auto-analysis of a "frontier-man," from his childhood years:

Moi je me retrouvais au cœur. N'ayant pas une affiliation avec un clan politique particulier, j'étais au milieu de tous ces groupes. [...] Modestement j'étais peut-être une des personnes qui était impliquée. D'autres ici, comme le journaliste qui plus tard sera assassiné Jean Dominique, qui commençait à ouvrir un espace de débats politiques, de débats sociaux. [...] Moi je me retrouvais après toutes ces années à l'étranger, après toutes ces années d'exil, au milieu de toute cette effervescence.

He pursued this thought, explaining that his varied contacts with the Haitian diasporas all over the world and his particular social position allowed him to go from one milieu to another and multiply encounters in this context of effervescence:

J'avais vécu un peu partout et je connaissais des gens qui avaient vécus à Miami, qui avaient vécus à New York. Et en Haïti aussi j'étais rentré, et par ma posture personnelle j'étais en contact avec plein de gens. Donc je me retrouvais dans des milieux qui habituellement étaient très cloisonnés. Le moment aussi permettait ça, ce bouillonnement.

He worked for a Canadian NGO called Aide Canada-Haïti, in the south of the country, around the city called Petit-Goâves. The project was supposed to help the farmers and the region. He would soon realize that the project was malfunctioning, because the leaders appointed by the Haitian government were extremely corrupt. This showed Mr. Voltaire the limitations of any action within a State where corruption is generalized:

J'ai travaillé longtemps à Petit-Goâves au sein d'un projet que l'aide canadienne avait mis en place, et qu'on avait, à mots couverts – il n'y avait pas de dénonciation publique - mais on avait vu que beaucoup de dirigeants nommés par l'Etat, étaient liés à de la corruption. [...] C'était un projet conjoint, il y avait des gens nommés par l'Etat et des gens recrutés par l'aide canadienne. Moi j'avais été recruté pour mener des enquêtes sociologiques dans la zone. Mais plusieurs projets non seulement n'avaient aucun sens mais pour beaucoup d'autres projets l'argent était certainement détourné. On se rendait compte qu'un petit barrage qui devait être fait l'était à moitié, qu'il y avait toutes sortes de faux projets dans le développement et dans les programmes de reboisement. Au fond peu de ressources allaient aux bénéficiaires les paysans, et tout était capté par des hauts fonctionnaires. [...] Pour nous c'était un signe direct de l'inefficacité de ce genre de projet tant qu'il y avait un Etat corrompu.

The project's Canadian funding would quickly be canceled after Mr. Voltaire denounced it in the Quebec media in 1980.

In 1979, Mr. Voltaire describes a sudden shift in the Haitian repression, going back to former forms of brutality. He directly links this to U.S. politics and the election of Ronald Reagan, although he was only elected in late 1980. To Mr. Voltaire Reagan's election directly affected Haitian politics. His predecessor's pressure for liberalization was suddenly stopped. Duvalier, as an anti-communist, got full support from the White

House, and repression intensified once again. Mr. Voltaire sees himself as one of the first victims of this direct correlation between the American elections and the new wave of arrests in Haiti:

L'élection de Reagan va entraîner un retour du bâton. [...] À partir du moment où les élections américaines ont permis l'élection de Ronald Reagan, on a commencé à arrêter les gens. Et j'étais parmi les premières personnes arrêtées. [...] Tout un mouvement qui émergeait là va être victime de cette nouvelle politique américaine.

Why does he mix up the dates? This gives us an intriguing – perhaps more relevant – perspective on his perception of these events. Maybe his arrest was indeed linked to American politics, as we can imagine a policy shift during Jimmy Carter's presidency, as he was weakened by low public approval and a difficult campaign. Another possibility is that Mr. Voltaire wishes to put coherence in events impossible to explain fully, a way to make sense of the incomprehensible, a desire to narrate a clear agency of historical facts. One could also argue that he justifies Haitian political crises by exterior factors – maybe in part, but in my opinion Mr. Voltaire does not look for excuses or easy blames.

The most interesting aspect in this 'mistake' that we can pinpoint is probably the fact that Mr. Voltaire wishes to draw a correlation between American international policy and Haitian political repression and his life story. Whether 'true' or not (or to what extent), this is how he explains it, how he wishes to present it.

Mr. Voltaire suspects that, because of his presence in all of the different dissident spheres he had been spotted and followed very early by the secret police. His visibility as an opponent and a potential threat was too flagrant, especially as he seemed to have

contacts in very different social groups, which explains why he was within the first arrested:

Quelque part je peux supposer – je n'ai aucune information précise sur cela – que mon arrestation et ma déportation ont rapport avec cette présence un peu partout. Quand le régime va changer de politique peut-être qu'à ce moment-là on a identifié des personnes qui pouvaient être ces liants.

He was arrested and “pushed around a bit” but not tortured, he insists on that. To him there were two reasons for which he wasn't severely beaten in the Casernes Dessalines, where so many others had been abused. First the political pressure that the Carter administration had put on the Haitian government still had an effect on the authorities, and the new wave of political assassinations would only start a few months later. Secondly he was arrested in broad daylight, in front of many witnesses, a fact that probably embarrassed the police and militia. This was thanks to a night spent at his girlfriend's house:

Ils étaient venus pendant la nuit. J'ai pas dormi chez moi ce soir-là, j'ai dormi chez ma copine qui habitait tout près – dont ils ne connaissaient certainement pas l'existence. J'ai su après qu'ils avaient cerné la maison toute la nuit, et vu qu'ils ne m'ont pas trouvés, ils ont du m'arrêter publiquement. Le type qui m'a arrêté il s'appelait Lionel Willy, c'était un des agents du service secret du gouvernement. Ils sont venus, supposément pour une sorte d'entrevue. J'ai été emmené pas au pénitencier national, j'ai été emmené aux Casernes Dessalines, au siège de ce qu'ils appelaient les S.D. - Services Duvalier, qui étaient les services secrets etcetera. Donc j'ai eu droit... Emmené très tôt le matin, vers 6 heures du matin. Donc menotté, derrière un poteau, j'ai été interrogé peut-être vers le début de la soirée. Bousculé un peu mais pas torturé. Parce que c'était l'époque aussi, l'époque comme je disais de Carter, où on avait fait des pressions sur le gouvernement et libéré des prisonniers politiques. Le fait même que j'avais été pris devant tout le monde, bon, il y a eu, je sais pas...

He was interrogated about all of his encounters, associations and contacts, and the questions were so precise that he suspects that he had been followed quite closely during his entire stay in Haiti. What the policemen found the most suspicious was the diversity of Mr. Voltaire's acquaintances. He explained that the “circumstances were rather favorable,” in the sense that he risked less to be tortured and murdered than in the same

situation earlier or later. However there was a hurricane threat at that time, and he was afraid to be a “collateral damage,” a corpse presented by the government as an unlucky victim of a natural disaster.

This didn't happen, and he was forced out of the country after about a week in prison. I asked him bluntly how he felt during those days, but he preferred not to expand on his personal feelings, especially when unsubtly asked to. He simply went on explaining why he thought he was arrested, drawing on the political context. He was exiled to Montreal, city that he already knew and that would become his:

Je dirais c'était [mon arrestation] un truc préventif. Parce que tout de suite après ils vont s'attaquer aux gens qui vivaient en Haïti depuis longtemps, les journalistes indépendants. J'ai devancé en quelque sorte les autres. J'ai passé une semaine en prison. Puis on m'a mis dans un avion et après je me suis retrouvé, n'est-ce pas, à l'aéroport Dorval de Montréal.

Montreal II (1979-today): *Les identités s'ajoutent*

Frantz Voltaire arrived in Montreal in September 1979, after having been forced to exile three times in less than fifteen years (see Appendix 4, New York Times Article, 24th September 1979). One could imagine that he comes discouraged or depressed. Quite at the opposite, he considers himself as lucky, because he knew the city already, had close friends and was immediately offered a teaching job at UQÀM. It was Paul Déjean, the director of the Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haïtiens de Montréal (BCCHM, one of the two main Haitian community institutions in Montreal) who welcomed him at the airport, and who helped him claim political asylum:

J'arrive à Montréal. Quand je suis arrivé j'ai demandé l'asile. Il y avait à l'époque le Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haïtiens de Montréal, le BCHM, qui était dirigé par Paul Déjean. Ils étaient venus me chercher, ils étaient avisés, et finalement c'est eux qui ont donné la caution. Je me rappelle plus si c'était une caution de 10'000 dollars, ils ont signé. [...] Donc j'ai demandé l'asile politique. Evidement dans mon cas il y a eu aussi un article qui est sorti dans le New York Times, dans Le Devoir sur l'époque. Aussi j'avais déjà étudié à l'UQÀM, donc par chance j'ai pu retrouver

des charges de cours. Je suis arrivé c'était peut-être le 1^{er} septembre et j'ai commencé à travailler pratiquement le mardi [...] Donc ça m'a permis de faire je dirais une transition en douceur. J'avais déjà vécu dans la ville, je connais la ville. Je dois dire, mon adaptation s'est faite peut-être plus facilement que d'autres dû peut-être à un certain nombre de circonstances favorables. J'ai pas eu le temps non plus pour réfléchir, puisqu'il fallait quand même me réadapter, travailler, donner des cours. [...] En plus c'est une ville que je connaissais, une ville où j'avais vécu, j'avais des gens que j'aimais dans cette ville, j'avais des amis dans cette ville, donc pour moi ça n'a pas été... Ce deuxième exil à Montréal a quand même été dans une situation favorable.

I find very interesting that he speaks in such positive terms of the fact that he didn't have time to think back over his life. Doing many simultaneous activities is what seems to keep Frantz Voltaire rolling. He did not want to have the time to reflect on his situation. For himself he prefers action, and about himself he prefers talking about facts.

After every forced departure, he talked about the dozens of things he did and all the people he met in his new locations, quickly building new roots. Perhaps it is a coincidence, but Mexico City is the place in which he has lived for a significant time that he has spoken of the least, and it is also the only city that he wasn't forced into or out of.

The number of projects that Mr. Voltaire took upon at his arrival in Montreal is very impressive. He taught at UQÀM, completed a PhD in History at the University of Montreal, and immediately joined the intellectual and artistic groups amongst the Haitian diaspora. He found an exciting community, with great solidarity and many fascinating people. The community centres (Maison d'Haïti and BCCHM) were doing a lot of social work, which, he thinks, bounded people together.

Work and the CIDIHCA: *une plateforme*

However, he thought something was missing: a platform that would regroup literature, essays and documents about Haiti, that the Haitians could use as a library, but that would also reach out to the rest of the Montreal community:

[À la base, nous avons créé le CIDIHCA] pour que la communauté haïtienne puisse avoir accès, ait des références. Et le CIDIHCA était une sorte d'interface aussi avec la communauté globale. On a travaillé avec des télévisions, avec la presse, parce qu'il fallait quand même concentrer cette documentation dans un lieu, et fournir aussi du matériel à ceux qui voulaient faire des thèses des éléments d'une bibliographie. Donc c'est comme ça que c'est parti. Au départ les gens qui étaient du CIDIHCA, et qui sont encore liés, étaient des écrivains, des essayistes, des sociologues et des étudiants. Donc c'était le milieu où l'on recrutait essentiellement.

From the start the centre was designed to be an open space, idea which is already implied in its name: the Centre of Haitian, Caribbean and Afro-Canadian Documentation and Information (CIDIHCA). The idea was to provide a base for Haitian artists and intellectuals, but he immediately incorporated the entire Caribbean and the black community of the city. Moreover, he wanted the centre to act as an interface between the diaspora, the Haitians in Haiti and the Quebec society in general, collaborating with other organizations and institutions in Montreal and around the world, and most importantly to welcome any person interested to work or to research:

C'est un centre qui travaillait sur Haïti et la Caraïbe, mais ça n'a jamais été un centre ni ghettoisé, ni de fermeture. C'était plutôt un lieu d'ouverture, de débats et de création. Donc nous on a construit ça, il n'y avait pas de bureaucratie. Il y avait toutes sortes de gens qui travaillaient sur des projets. Il y a des Haïtiens, des Québécois, des Cubains, toi tu es Suisse... name it ! Et puis on a toujours travaillé en coopération avec d'autres centres. Je pensais qu'on pouvait maximiser nos efforts.

Very quickly the CIDIHCA expanded, and from a documentation centre also became a book publisher, a film producer and an exhibition organizer. To Mr. Voltaire it responded to several needs: to give a voice and a platform to the diaspora, but also to fill a cultural void in Haiti. He published authors who would have been censored by

Duvalier's régime. After the dictatorship his optic changed. He and his team could go back to the country and help with their expertise and finance to put together cultural projects. For example, all the CIDIHCA-produced documentary films were given free of rights to several Haitian television networks. But he doesn't forget that he is based in Quebec, that he has been for nearly three decades, and that it inevitably changes his perspective on Haiti in his work:

Je suis un étranger du dedans. C'est un peu un rôle de passeur. Pour nous le CIDIHCA c'est quoi ? C'est rendre disponible le savoir des institutions académiques au milieu communautaire. Donc les gens pouvaient avoir accès à de l'information qui était plutôt restreinte. Et aussi en se dotant d'une maison d'édition, en se dotant d'un lieu de publication, on n'était plus prisonnier du fait, on pouvait toujours continuer à élaborer une réflexion sur Haïti, une pensée haïtienne, tout en sachant très bien qu'on avait aussi un pied ici. Et que quelque part, il était question aussi de notre insertion au Québec. Il n'était pas question de dire « écoutez, il faut rester à tout prix Haïtien. » Non non non, il fallait quand même que la culture haïtienne – parce qu'en situation d'exil, en situation de dictature en Haïti la pensée n'était pas très libre. Il fallait qu'il y ait des lieux, pour que tout cela puisse s'exprimer. [...] Donc être un espace de débats publics sur les problèmes qui concernaient Haïti ET la communauté haïtienne.

It is noteworthy that again, he underlines his quality of a frontier-man, which allowed him to make many people interact and work together in his centre. The CIDIHCA is an undeniable success, with over 600 books published, award-winning films and exhibitions all around the world in prestigious libraries and museums. Mr. Voltaire links this success to the particular environment that Montreal enabled, and his analysis is enthralling:

First, he explained, the Haitian community is unique in the sense that it bound together Haitians of different background and social classes; groups that did not communicate much in Haiti or in other Haitian diasporas in other parts of the world. This is largely due to the continued work of the community organizations and radios:

À Montréal se sont formés des liens entre les différents milieux sociaux qui généralement se côtoient très difficilement. Montréal a été dans ce sens exceptionnel. Parce que beaucoup

d'intellectuels, beaucoup d'écrivains, beaucoup d'hommes politiques ou de militants politiques ont été aussi ceux à la tête des organismes communautaires. Ce sont eux qui ont créé les organismes communautaires comme la Maison d'Haïti, comme le Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haïtiens de Montréal. [...] Je pense que la communauté d'exil des Haïtiens de Montréal était une des rares communauté où il y avait des liens entre les intellectuels et le secteur populaire, à travers cette médiation qu'ont été les organismes communautaires, à travers les radios qui ont été animées pendant très longtemps, pendant plus de 30 ans par ceux dont la profession était d'être des enseignants, d'écrire, mais qui intervenaient aussi au niveau du populaire.

Secondly to him the Québécois culture, and the specific context at the beginning of the 1980s, was a particularly tolerant and welcoming ground for such experiments. Quebec itself was undergoing the final phases of a profound social change: the 'Révolution Tranquille'. He therefore arrived in an "effervescent" moment for Quebec (one of his favorite words). The social and moral liberalization and the multiplication of debates opened the Québécois to new ideas and works from outside. Their form of national identity was questioned in the public sphere, and for many the occasion to express it as a new concept of nation regrouped around shared values and the French language, hence tolerant and welcoming to immigrants and immigrant thoughts, or at least to those willing to accept this idea of a culture*.

Moreover, Mr. Voltaire explained, the French language played an immense role in the relationship between the Haitian diaspora and the Québécois. The latter were particularly welcoming to francophone immigrants, as the French language became a central identity claim. This also allowed the Haitian intellectuals to continue to write in French, and reach the general public in one of Haiti's two national languages, thus staying more connected with their origins than diasporic intellectuals in the United States:

* The *Révolution Tranquille* phenomenon and its cultural aftermath is described in-depth by Pierre Godin (1991). Its impact on the affirmation of the Québécois identity is also developed by Lesage & Tardif (1989).

Montréal était une ville très tolérante. C'est une rencontre aussi, parce qu'au moment où les Haïtiens sont arrivés, c'est le moment de la Révolution Tranquille. Donc c'est un moment de bouillonnement, d'effervescence au Québec. Et nous avons énormément appris du Québec. Et le Québec a été très généreux, et s'est ouvert au départ à nous aussi. Donc c'est ce qui explique ce mouvement très particulier. [...] Nous avons développé cette maison d'édition, je pense que la mise en place d'une maison d'édition répondait à ce besoin, que des écrivains d'origine haïtienne, ou des écrivains haïtiens, pouvaient s'exprimer, continuer à s'exprimer, et que le Québec, enfin surtout Montréal était une place où nous avons pu continuer à développer cette expertise. C'est-à-dire qu'aujourd'hui il y a plus de sept maisons d'édition haïtienne là à Montréal, il y a peut-être une centaine d'écrivains d'origine haïtienne à Montréal. C'est un cas très, très, très particulier. [...] À New York il y a énormément d'Haïtiens mais il y a aussi l'anglais. Donc la langue littéraire est devenu de plus en plus l'anglais, ou le créole. Ici, à Montréal, il y avait le créole et le français, donc une sorte de continuité pour les Haïtiens de pouvoir s'exprimer dans les deux langues du pays.

Thirdly Mr. Voltaire pointed out the importance of Montreal's size, comparing it to New York City, which also hosted a very large Haitian diaspora. Montreal was big enough to stage different community organizations, and have varied cultural institutions, but without being diluted in a huge metropolis:

Et il y aussi le fait que Montréal est une ville moyenne, pour l'Amérique du Nord. Mais avec une forte concentration d'Haïtiens, donc les gens étaient plus en contact, les gens ont créé des institutions qui ont duré plus longtemps, quand on pense que des organismes communautaires ont peut-être quarante ans ici. Donc il y a eu une continuité, qu'il n'y a pas eu dans le cas des organismes haïtiens à New York.

Another reason is of course financing. Mr. Voltaire seems very well connected in the Montreal cultural scene, and was a board member of the Conseil des Arts du Québec. He has certainly received many grants, and spends a lot of time applying for them. Montreal was probably also a favorable place because money was available, but he has not at all discussed with me the financing of the CIDIHCA. From the outside it looks very complex, as he shares his offices with a cinema production company and the organizers of the Montreal Human Rights Film Festival (of which he is one of the founders), and it is never clear who works for who. What is clear is that the Centre can undertake so many activities thanks to a large volunteer workforce – there are always several volunteers and unpaid interns working on projects.

The Centre, and his work in general, is a huge part of his life, and a very deep passion. The place is overflowing with books, pictures, bits and pieces of old exhibitions, posters, post-its, packages, less identifiable material and more books. The door seems to constantly swing open and random people show up to work, read or “talk to Frantz.” Everybody seems to want to ask him something, and he always takes the time to respond, although in general with a simultaneous conversation on his ever-ringing phone. One day, as I made a remark about his telephone constantly ringing, he laughed and explained that he was like a general on the battleground, not doing anything but snapping a bunch of orders.

The above pages were mainly about the CIDIHCA, as the Centre is so deeply tied to Mr. Voltaire’s story and to what Montreal means to him that I felt it had to figure in a sizable way. His work is I think what speaks most about his life, his activism, his beliefs, his passions and his paradoxes. To illustrate this I will give two examples, amongst many others possible:

In our conversations, he has never wished to detail his traumatic experiences, only mentioning that such times were terrible, but that he had to move on. One day, as we were to meet to prepare the exhibition ‘Haiti, Dictatorship, Resistance and Exile’ he showed up with a huge box from his home full of original documents of François Duvalier’s régime: correspondence with secret service, embassies, militia, and army, official communications, Macoute lists of people to follow, secret messages,

photographs of assassinated people and much more. Every trip back to Haiti since 1986, he has obsessively collected documents and photographs from emptied offices and people's cellars or basements, building up what is probably the most important historical archive on François Duvalier. Of course it is linked to his job and his background as a historian, but pushed to such an extent, in front of what represented so many hours of incessant work, I had the feeling that this was some kind of treatment; his way to deal with very deep unanswered questions...

Another example of parts of his work that reveal something about the man was when I asked him what books he was most proud to have published. Surprisingly he answered without hesitation the feminine authors and the Spanish translation of *Les gouverneurs de la rosée*, by Jacques Roumain (1944). He is very proud of the former, for women poets and authors had very little space in Haitian literature, and he believes he enabled them to a platform. As to the latter, it is one of the Haitian landmark novels. A translation already existed in Argentina, but he and a Cuban author had given it “a more Caribbean flavour...”

J'ai une géographie de la ville

As much as Mr. Voltaire wanted to talk about his work or the general situation of Haitians in Montreal, he was very reserved about his private life, which seems to become a recurring theme in my interviews. He has had two wives from whom he is now separated. One lives in New York, the other in the Montreal region. With each he had a daughter. When I asked about them, he first seemed offended, and found it

intrusive in front of the camera, but then seemed to think it through and did speak a little about them:

A non je ne parle pas de ma vie de famille. Ma vie privée je n'en parle pas là. [...] Enfin je peux en parler, c'est pas secret non plus. Moi j'ai deux filles. Je suis grand-père. J'ai une fille qui vit à St-Hubert, elle est physiothérapeute, elle étudiait à McGill. Son conjoint est aussi physiothérapeute. Il est québécois, il vient du bas du fleuve, d'un petit village qui s'appelle St-Mathieu près de Rimouski. Et ma petite-fille Alexandra, elle a un an. Ca c'était ma première fille. Donc j'ai ma deuxième fille qui elle, n'est pas de même mère. Sa mère enseigne à l'université à New York. Elle a fait ses études aux Etats-Unis. Actuellement elle est à l'école de droit à Temple, à Philadelphie. Elles sont très très liées, elle a 23 ans. Et je dirais que contrairement à ma fille aînée qui est scientifique et travaille dans la santé, elle s'est retrouvée impliquée beaucoup sur Haïti. Elle s'est intéressée à la question de la mémoire en Haïti, elle a fait des stages en Haïti, bénévole. Elle reste très liée à Haïti. [...] Elle vient souvent à Montréal

I would have obviously liked more development about his transmission (or not) of a Haitian culture to his daughters, but all he explained was that freedom of choice was important. He did draw quite significantly on his multiple identities, starting with his “personal geography of Montreal” :

J'ai une géographie de la ville [...] Montréal pour moi ce qui est intéressant c'est la diversité de ses quartiers, c'est une superposition de quartiers différents. En vivant dans tous ces endroits j'ai un peu vu la ville autrement. J'aime bien cet aspect à Montréal de passer d'un quartier à l'autre, de changer de quartier, de changer d'atmosphère.

Interestingly, this echoes strongly his previous descriptions of Port-au-Prince where he also emphasized his dwelling in different neighbourhoods. We can see that as an elaborated coherence in his relationship to the urban, where he consistently situates himself as crossing frontiers.

He went on describing a place that was particularly important to him, a street corner in Côte-des-Neiges; a book store and a café that became an unofficial headquarter of Haitian exiles, intellectuals and artists, which Mrs. Philibert had also described:

Ce que j'appellerais les lieux significatifs ? Bon je suis quelqu'un qui...j'ai fréquenté beaucoup les lieux de théâtre. La rue St-Denis, le quartier latin, je dirais la rue Ste-Catherine, et surtout Côtes-des-Neiges. Ce petit bloc qui va entre [...] Queen Mary et Jean Brillant, que je continue de fréquenter puisque tous les vendredis soirs il y a un café, à la Brûlerie, près de Renaud Bray, et je fréquente beaucoup [la librairie] Olivieri. On se réunit là pour discuter de littérature, de théâtre, de

cinéma, de politique surtout haïtienne. [...] Il y a d'autres lieux que je fréquente mais ils n'ont pas autant d'importance que ce petit coin où l'on voit passer toutes sortes de gens. [...] Et puis comme on dit, dans cette partie de ma vie où je suis un peu vieillissant, ce lieu devient plus important parce qu'il me rattache à une certaine forme de passé [silence].

He therefore describes a place in Montreal which evokes a certain form of nostalgia. I find that particularly interesting, as it shows a long-term appropriation of the city, when different layers of one's story can be superimposed as he looks at a specific street corner. We discussed that, and how the Haitian community had made Montreal theirs, and he brought up a thought-provoking observation. He explained that for a long time Haitians lived their lives in Montreal, but wanted to be buried in Haiti, saving up to send their corpse. Now he witnessed more and more Haitians planning their funeral at the Côte-des-Neiges cemetery, and that was indicative a strong rooting of the Haitians in the city:

Pendant très longtemps dans la communauté haïtienne – j'ai remarqué un changement – pendant tout un temps, les gens voulaient être enterrés chez eux, en Haïti. Enfin ceux qui étaient nés en Haïti. Et après on a commencé à voir des changements à partir des années 89, c'est-à-dire quand les gens ont commencé à vouloir être enterrés ici. C'est pour moi un des signes d'enracinement d'une communauté. Au moment où elle devient partie, présente à ici. Au moment où elle a ses morts, et où elle enterre ses morts et honore ses morts. Ça c'est des actes fondateurs. Les petits-enfants diront : « ma grand-mère est morte ici, elle est enterrée ici, elle est enterrée à Côte-des-Neiges. Elle est peut-être pas née à Côtes-des-Neiges mais elle est enterrée à Côtes-des-Neiges. Et j'irai pour honorer sa mémoire au cimetière Côte-des-Neiges, au cimetière X ou Y. » Quelque part donc il y a un enracinement, et ça se fait progressivement.

Another significant change he observed was the changing nature of the Haitian community organizations. Previously they had been generalist, religious, thematic or cultural. Now they are starting to segment according to the different districts and neighbourhoods of Montreal, which is also consequential of a rooting:

Quand les gens décident que leur lieu c'est ici... Ils ont une géographie de la ville aussi. Quand les gens maintenant parlent de Côte-des-Neiges ou de Brossard, de Longueuil, de Laval, il y a des associations locales qui commencent à se former. Avant les associations étaient peut-être autour d'intérêts, que ce soit politiques, artistiques, économiques ou autre. Mais il y a maintenant, à côté des jeunes chambres de commerce, centres de documentation, maisons d'édition, revues,

commencent à se faire des associations des résidents de Laval. Donc les gens commencent à avoir un regard qu'eux-mêmes ils habitent la ville. Et ils commencent à s'approprier la ville.

As to himself, he affirms his strong belonging to Montreal, a city that he recognizes as his home when he enters it. In our first and last recording, he has repeated the same image of him coming back from New York, crossing the Champlain Bridge and instantly feeling at home:

Je suis chez moi à Montréal. Je ne sais pas si je me sens de la même façon dans tout le Québec. Mais à Montréal je suis chez moi. Montréal est devenue ma ville. C'est devenu une ville que j'ai apprivoisée, une ville que je connais très très bien. Peu importe le quartier. Bon je peux être plus dépaycé dans tel ou tel quartier, mais Montréal, c'est ma ville. J'ai toujours cette image frappante : quand je rentre de New York, par le Pont Champlain, et je vois la ville, je sais que suis chez moi, je sais que je rentre chez moi.

And later:

Et je dois dire, même personnellement : pendant très longtemps ma fille vivait à New York et j'allais souvent à New York la voir. Et quand je rentrais, ou quand je la ramenaient pour passer l'été avec moi, à chaque fois que je traversais le pont Champlain, je regardais Montréal et je savais que je rentrais chez moi. C'est-à-dire, la ville était devenue ma ville. La ville elle me parle. Certains lieux me parlent. Quelque part il y a une appropriation de la ville. Pas simplement de quartiers mais de la ville comme ville. Et je crois que c'est le moment où on sait qu'on a poussé une racine quelque part. Même si mes racines à moi je dirais, c'est comme le banian, il y a plusieurs racines. [silence] J'aime bien la phrase de dire que je serais une sorte de nomade enraciné.

He claims this “double identity”, which constantly dialogue and enrich each other. Quite relevantly, he quotes the Haitian exiled author Emile Ollivier to illustrate his point:

Je vis avec cette identité multiple, et pour moi qui ne sont pas contradictoires. Elles se nourrissent et s'enrichissent l'une l'autre. [...] Pour moi les identités s'ajoutent. On a plusieurs identités. Je suis à la fois un père de famille, à la fois je fais des documentaires, je suis à la fois Haïtien, à la fois Montréalais. Tout ça fait partie de l'identité, d'expériences qui s'ajoutent l'une à l'autre, que je ne vois pas comme opposés. [...] Donc pour moi oui, c'est une double sorte d'identité. J'ai cette partie en moi. Pour répéter la phrase de mon ami Emile Ollivier : d'être québécois le jour et haïtien la nuit. Donc je vis très bien avec cette double identité, je ne pense pas qu'elle soit antinomique pour moi.

Quoting Emile Ollivier is particularly compelling, as he was one of the most important Haitian authors in Montreal. Haiti, Frantz Voltaire explained, has been constructed over

the years a lot in the imaginary, artistic field. In an outstanding abundance and exceptional diversity for such a poor country, artists have continuously reshaped the signification of Haiti, and Mr. Voltaire points out that this has been done within and outside the physical frontiers of the country:

Haïti c'est aussi un pays imaginaire. C'est un pays de grande créativité. Si vous regardez c'est le pays le plus pauvre mais c'est aussi un pays où il y a une littérature absolument riche, il y a une peinture extraordinaire, il y a des sculpteurs, des musiciens. Vous vous dites mais c'est pas possible, comment ce pays a-t-il pu générer une dynamique culturelle aussi forte ? Aujourd'hui même avec le cinéma qui est en train d'émerger, avec des cinéastes, alors que ce n'est pas ce qui est le plus facile. Et ce qui est intéressant c'est qu'aussi ce sont constituées des mémoires des communautés haïtiennes de l'extérieur qui survivent et qui subsistent.

To conclude our last interview, Mr. Voltaire explained that Haiti could not be seen as merely within its official borders, as it has “completely overflowed its borders.” He situates this fact far further in the past than the Duvalier régime; at the very creation of the Haitian state, for the 1804 Revolution radically questioned the whole world's domination system. He therefore explains that Haiti cannot be understood without linking it to the rest of the world, with its unique history and now greatly important diaspora:

Donc quelque part Haïti a débordé du cadre de ses frontières, Haïti occupe aussi un espace. Mais aussi il y a un Haïti qui est un grand Haïti de l'imaginaire. Haïti c'est quand même le pays où la question de la liberté a été le premier posée. Quelque part il y a notre rapport à l'Histoire universelle. C'est-à-dire, c'est Haïti qui questionne l'esclavage comme mode millénaire d'exploitation des formes de travail. Donc c'est la révolution haïtienne qui remet tout cela en cause. Hegel ne s'est pas trompé à ce sujet, ni Marx non plus. Donc quelque part les Haïtiens sont liés. Cette grande geste de l'indépendance haïtienne est liée à la grande geste émancipatrice des révolutions qui commencent peut-être 100 ans auparavant en 1688 en Angleterre, qui passe en 1776 aux Etats-Unis, avec la révolution française de 1789, et qui culmine avec la Révolution Haïtienne. Parce que la Révolution Haïtienne devient plus radicale parce qu'elle remet en cause radicalement la question des formes les plus je dirais arbitraires, les plus autoritaires, les plus terribles d'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme qu'a été l'esclavage. [...]

Mais je dirais qu'aujourd'hui Haïti on ne peut plus la voir simplement dans ses 28'000 kilomètres carrés. Haïti il faut la voir comme étendue un peu partout. Et que c'est peut-être ce qui permettra à Haïti de sortir de sa situation.

Chapter Five: The 'Place of Place' in the Narratives

An Interpretative Essay

People's lives compose the most enthralling and complex matter of observation and analysis imaginable. So much must be taken in consideration: culture, family, gender, social class, ethnicity, personality, psychology, biology, encounters, chance... Any attempt to retell or study a life will always be synthesizing and will leave enormous gaps. The previous chapters are no exception. However in-depth an interview is, it will only represent a certain number of hours, in which the topics of conversation and the ways to tell a story were carefully picked. These interviews are of 'life-story' format, they are the stories of lives, one possible life-story out of infinite possibilities, as they are the result of specific encounters at a specific time and place.

Furthermore, the above pages are themselves a personal editing, retelling and interpretation of the stories I collected, hence versions of these stories through my prism. As we have seen (pp. 36-40), I attempted to approach the interview process with a *shared authority* between the interviewees and myself over the recorded narratives. However, I do not claim this in the writing, which was a unilateral activity. Nevertheless, I attempted to render each interviewee's account in a contextualized form in the above chapters, trying to only suggest and foreshadow interpretations. There are therefore no (or very few) references, comparisons or links to theory in these chapters, as I wanted to give to the stories their own rhythm. In this chapter I wish to change

perspective on these narratives, and move toward a more directly interpretative (academic) angle.

I will draw on some of the discussed literature on place, identity, othering and belonging processes in this attempt to employ the three interviews as a basis for reflection. The stories speak for themselves, and function independently. As explained, this small sample does not claim to be representative of all Haitian refugees in Montreal. The following is hence not a synthesizing attempt, but rather a collection of suggested leads and pathways for reflection. The stories have differences and similarities, which are worth looking into. But more importantly, we here have three dense narratives that allow us to illustrate, back up, enrich or contradict some of the contemporary literature.

By “literature”, I mean not only academic texts coming from the social sciences. Indeed Haitians in general and the Haitian diaspora and Montreal in particular have an outstanding literary tradition, which this thesis brought me to discover. I am deeply convinced that a work of fiction can often be more relevant than an academic text to describe social phenomena, especially when dealing with individuals’ perspective, thanks to the power of metaphor. As Emile Ollivier (one of the greatest Haitian-Montrealer authors) put it: “La métaphore, voie détournée pour traduire le sens profond de la vie.” (1986) We will therefore also draw on novels, poetry and literary analysis coming from Haiti and its diaspora in the following reflections.

This chapter will be thematically divided among the topics that interest me most, all evolving around the central idea of place-making. First, we will discuss how these stories can be read as concrete and detailed illustrations of the place-making as the crystallization of global flows on individuals. Secondly, we will explore the issue of exile and re-location, and how this trauma has affected place-making. Thirdly, we will analyze the significance and the re-making of Montreal to our interviewees, from an urban semiotic perspective. Fourthly, we will reflect on belonging processes and the 'placing' of community identifications for our interviewees. Last we will study contemporary bordering processes through the scope of these narratives.

1) Making Place: the personal experience of globalized flows

We have seen that place must be seen as an intersection of different flows, hence as an ever-changing, dynamic concept (Appadurai 1996 & 2001; Cuillerai & Abeles 2002; Harvey 1993). This discourse is deeply inscribed in the analysis of globalization – today all places constantly interact and respond to others around the world, in various manners and unequal power relationships. The local and the global are therefore two inseparable entities. As Doreen Massey puts it:

An alternative geographical imagination would argue that the character of region, or the economy of a place, is a product not only of internal interactions but also of relations with elsewhere. Not even islands are islands unto themselves. There is a constitutive interdependence. Space is relational. Such an apparently nuanced shift of emphasis radically challenges the judgemental imagination of places competing, succeeding and failing as a result of their own intrinsic characteristics alone. (2007, 20-21)

Transnational migrants and diasporas are the most cited example to illustrate the need of a dynamic model to analyze place in a globalized context. Indeed their spatial references are by definition multiple and fragmented (Hyndman 2001; Schnapper 2001; Appadurai

1996; Massey 1994). Borders and boundaries are hence lived ordering processes rather than distinct lines (McDowell 1999; Newman 2006; Paasi 2001; Trudeau 2006), which diasporic members negotiate and reinvent every day. Homi Bhabha writes:

The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices – women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities. For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees. It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond. (1994, 4-5)

Let us therefore begin to examine some elements of our narratives that we can link to such academic discourses about place in a globalized context. Of course the three interviewees are migrants, political refugees, and can easily be defined as members of a diaspora (Bordes-Benayoun & Schnapper 2006; Hall 1990). As such, they are undeniable elements of the discussed global human flows. The only fact that they came from Haiti to Canada to establish themselves, and thus became part of a visible minority, already questions the meaning of place, as they constructed new lives while keeping or creating strong ties with Haiti, relationally and symbolically. But what does this mean on a material, everyday basis for individuals?

Frantz Voltaire once told me: “Haïti, c’est un pays qui me traverse, qui me marque profondément.” This idea of Haiti “traversing” him unceasingly, “profoundly marking” him and hence affecting his thoughts and decisions is precisely what I wished to observe in our interviews. Haiti, the originating country, the childhood smells and the memory of relatives are undoubtedly present in all three narratives, in a very strong and diverse way.

All mentioned their spatially fragmented family and friends, and their continuous links by telephone and email. Mr. Toussaint was saving up to go back to Haiti next summer. Mrs. Philibert had ritualized Sunday afternoon telephone conversations with her sister in Paris, and then with a chosen cousin, aunt or friend in Port-au-Prince who had been designated to pass on the weekly information and to in turn pass on the news from Mrs. Philibert (a system designed to avoid passing her entire weekends on the telephone – and “enriching Bell Canada!”). Mr. Voltaire, along with his innumerable telephone calls, receives over one hundred emails per day, a lot of those from Haiti or Haitians scattered around the world. He explained to me that “now with the Internet, I feel much closer to Port-au-Prince than to Chicoutimi!”

The above are simple, material illustrations of the reality of global flows. Furthermore, they are exponential. For example, Mr. Toussaint arrives in Montreal, which is an initial human flow (although the reason he arrives to Montreal is conditioned by previous flows). It generated many others. He had left his pregnant wife in Haiti, and therefore continues to communicate. They exchanged letters, photographs, they spoke on the telephone and he sent her money as soon as he found a job. He described Montreal. She described Gonaïves. He prepared the coming of his wife and son, and started going through the administrative immigration process. He imagined his family reunited in his apartment in Villeray. And so on. We see here examples of many transnational flows, which the migration of Mr. Toussaint started: communication, financial, more human

flows and perhaps most importantly imagination – the representation of distant places and their continuous connection to the present.

Indeed, Mr. Toussaint continued to represent Haiti in his everyday life in Montreal, nourished by regular communication with relatives. Montreal also became a dynamic reality to his wife while she lived in Gonaïves. Mr. Toussaint came with a memory, and carried a certain past and background in his negotiating of the present. This impacted how his identity was gradually reformulated, starting with his encounters. We must therefore understand that global, or transnational flows are not simply the material flows described above (human, financial, communication). People's representations, interpretations, symbolisms and personal making of places are not only influenced by these fluxes but also in turn influence them, and imagination becomes an inherent part of the model.

'Here' and 'there', 'Haiti' and 'Quebec', 'homeland' and 'land of exile' become not simple binary oppositions, but overlapping concepts that people meld and incorporate into their personal interpretation and expression place. This is synthesized in Pierre Nepveu's description of the "contemporary here":

L'ici contemporain se définit fondamentalement comme expérience du désordre, d'un désordre encore une fois pas contingent ou momentané, mais persistant, toujours renouvelé. Cela a pour conséquence que l'habitation du réel devient d'abord et principalement une expérience de reconnaissance, de partage entre des champs de signes hétéroclites. (1988, 207)

Place is defined as an *experience*, a process continuously renewed and renegotiated. Places therefore don't exist *per se*, they are what people make of them. People integrate cultural, financial, communicational and human flows in their lived places. The concept

therefore becomes much more a matter of imagination than of geometry, as Gaston Bachelard had already written in 1957:

L'espace saisi par l'imagination ne peut rester l'espace du géomètre. Il est vécu. Et il est vécu, non pas dans sa positivité, mais avec toutes les partialités de l'imagination. (1957, 17)

One element comes out very strongly from our three accounts: political activism. Indeed, in varying forms, the interviewees' engagement is absolutely central to their stories. Each took the most time and energy to expand on their reasons for participating in such actions and contextualize them. This theme deserves a much more thorough unfolding – in fact a whole other thesis. I mention it here as an illustration of personal stories in the conceptualization of place.

Each interviewee marked a clear difference between before and after the emergence of their political consciousness in their teenage. Haiti in their narratives is depicted totally differently through the child's gaze or through the scope of political analysis and descriptions of totalitarianism. The tone, images and (verbal and body) language used are strikingly different, hence suggesting *completely different landscapes*.

This profound shift in the negotiation and retelling of place marks a strong distancing from Haiti in their narrative. They each made the immensely consequential choice to participate in dangerous, underground political struggles. This forced them to dissociate themselves from their social environments, whether because of strong disagreements or simply to protect their loved ones. Haiti, as it became the stake of an activist ideology also became an *exile from within*, for they had to live hidden and at a distance from

many aspects of society. Then, we have seen that they have each been forced out of the country, adding a physical displacement to their narratives of exile.

A pivotal component of their representation of place was therefore the story of exile. The interviewees very often situated themselves in relation to their multiple 'places of identity,' and the tragic reasons of their moving. The next section is therefore entitled *The poetics of exile*, as we will examine how each expressed this particular narrative in his or her representations.

2) The poetics of exile

J'avoue mon amour de tous ces espaces de l'exil, et mon amour d'Haïti, la terre de mon enfance, on ne peut rien contre l'enfance. Mon avenir, s'il existe, va se jouer là. Non pas dans un déchirement. Non pas dans une ambiguïté. Non pas dans une double, une triple appartenance. Mais ailleurs. Partout. Autrement. Je n'appartiens à personne d'autre qu'à moi-même. Je n'appartiens à d'autre lieu qu'au monde
Jean-Claude Charles, *Manhattan Blues*, 1985

The dwelling process in Montreal, the belonging sentiment and the identity claims must be examined through the scope of exile. The interviewees, in their unique life stories and discourses, share the experience of being political refugees, forced out of their home. It is not their official status that matters (only Mr. Voltaire actually claimed political asylum), but their experience, and they clearly left Haiti because of political persecution.

In my research questions, I had planned to study if this original trauma had affected place-making processes, and how. To answer bluntly, I would definitely say that yes, exile is extremely present in their narratives, and has definitely impacted all aspects of place-making and belonging. However the question itself is too simplified. Exile cannot

be singled out from the many different factors at play. Moreover, there is not one story of exile, but as many as there are of exiles, and they are incorporated in the individuals' narratives. Martin Munro, drawing on Nikis Papastergiadis, explains this very well:

The sociologist Nikos Papastergiadis argues rightly that much contemporary Western understanding of migration is "still framed by a universal Judaeo-Christian notion of displacement," and that "the story of migration needs to be told in all its specificity," for "Each movement of people has its unique features." Thus the "truth" of the narrative of exile must lie in the details, the collective, general experiences broken down into the personal, the effects on the individual, and the workings of exilic memory. The "story of exile" must therefore be retold over and again in all its multiplicity, so that these narratives themselves enter into a state of Glissantian relational exchange*. The "book of exile" has no master narrative, only an ever-multiplying, unsystematically arranged series of chapters and sub-chapters. (2007, 36-37)

Exile has therefore been addressed in multiple ways by the interviewees, sometimes directly, sometimes metaphorically or in between lines, sometimes similarly and sometimes very differently from one another. Exile is not only a unique and personal narrative; it also encompasses several stories per individual. There is the traumatic story of the original reason to leave, in our case political violence and persecution. There is the nostalgic story of looking back and remembering home before the departure. And there is the story of the new home, the new place. The latter can be seen as a melancholic remembrance that continues to remind the exiled of his sorrow and his otherness. But it can also be seen as a land of hope, as the place where he or she can live without the deep fright of a tyrannical régime, a place in which to rest.

This last point is precisely where I find the three narratives meet, and where a comparison is least artificial. Speaking of their arrival in Montreal, they each used

* Edouard Glissant talks about the original exile: the massive bringing of slaves from Africa to the Caribbean (Glissant 1981). Because return was made absolutely impossible even to imagine, and because culture, language, work and values had been so violently disrupted, Glissant talks about a profound renegotiation of identity, from a state of 'being' to a state of 'relation'. The representation of the other becomes set on a new ground, with no pre-existing rigid grids of values, enabling an "entangled, unsystematic, non-reductive relationship." (Munro 2007, 7)

exactly the same expression: “ça m’a permis de *souffler un peu*.” This French expression literally means *to take a breath*. Montreal, for all three interviewees, represents a haven, a calm place at last after their tumultuous trajectories. Each explained what a relief it was not be scared of being followed, to finally be able to relax.

Interestingly Mrs. Philibert and Mr. Voltaire had lived elsewhere before coming to Montreal, but nevertheless they expressed the same idea than Mr. Toussaint about Montreal: the place to take a breath. Quebec is absolutely not a fully welcoming, paradisiacal place, but it allowed a certain peace and enabled to “charge up the batteries” (Mr. Voltaire *and* Mr. Toussaint). This idea was best expressed by the author Emile Ollivier in his last novel, *La Brûlerie*:

Migrant, si vous vous hasardez sur ce chemin [de la Côte-des-Neiges] d’un pas flâneur, d’un pas flâneur traînant, vous franchirez une espèce de frontière morale et métaphysique. On ne vous considérera pas comme tout à fait Québécois : il paraît qu’il faut l’être de naissance. Du moins, l’on vous acceptera comme un être humain. [...]

Des fois, nous nous plaignions qu’au Québec il ne se passait rien ; mais c’était précisément de cela, de ce vide, de cette absence d’évènements, que nous tirions notre air détaché : vivement le printemps, la brise, les passantes éphémères et gracieuses, les vêtements à peine posés sur le corps, l’immatérialité du vent allégeant les gestes, les pas, les rires. Était-ce un signe évident de la grâce, un signe que nous n’étions plus tout à fait de ce monde, qu’il nous pousserait bientôt des ailes et que nous nous envolerions de nouveau? (2004, pp. 16-17 & 24)

There are many elements in our three narratives that bring us back to poetics of exile. The entire discourses can be analyzed through this scope. Moreover, the substance in between lines and the silences are perhaps even more relevant. When a theme or a person was only mentioned before quickly changing the subject, or when suddenly the flow of the conversation stopped and the interviewee’s eyes dozed off into the haze for a few seconds. Such moments also reveal a lot about a person’s nostalgia and exilic discourse, although they are difficult to single out and analyze. I will choose one

example from each interview, either a moment or a recurring theme, to illustrate the importance of exile in their narrative.

Mrs. Philibert: *On pouvait dire qu'on était bien à cette époque-là.*

Mrs. Philibert is the interviewee who spent the most time talking about her family life as a child. She gave very visual descriptions of her father, of her neighbourhood, of the games she would play with her sisters and friends and of the particular climate in her childhood house. Her account was enchanting, and I was imagining a house full of people coming in and out, having endless political discussions, lively but good-natured. She painted a house full of colours, children and music, dominated by the figure of her father, calm and loving. On the film, she presents a photograph of her with her father, showing it to the camera as she describes him with great tenderness.

I believe that this description is strongly linked to Mrs. Philibert's long exile and nostalgia. I am absolutely not saying that it is not *true*; I think that it is a romanticized truth, which is to me the *only* truth in the retellings of one's past. The idea is hence to attempt to understand *why* the narrative was romanticized in this particular manner. Mrs. Philibert's description is impregnated with nostalgia. She speaks of her childhood nearly as some kind of paroxysm of love and caring between people that will never be attained again.

Why does she idealize her childhood this way? Because suddenly her father will die and in her discourse the following years in Haiti will be a downward spiral: political repression, arrest, torture and forced exile. She will not live back in Haiti after this, but we have seen that Haiti is very important in the construction of her identity and in the

assertion of her self. Furthermore she wished to “transmit Haitian culture” to her daughters, and therefore needed to think back to a strongly positive image. What she loves about Haiti, she links her childhood: family unity, tasty food, music, solidarity between people, etc. She draws from this to describe herself as Haitian, for later Haiti was a story of violence and then she was not in Haiti. Exile has therefore enhanced a nostalgic, idealized discourse on childhood.

This is certainly melancholic, but it also allows a re-creation of childhood, making it a vivid pleasure to imagine and to narrate (and to listen to). This can be illustrated by René Depestre’s poem “Vivre loin de son pays,” translated by Martin Munro:

“Poor Depestre”
says a bleary-eyed man.
Why poor me?
To live far from one’s native land
is an ordeal only for those who have
missed the blue train of their childhood.
I still take the train of my fantastic years
every morning
in the smallest blade of grass.
(in Munro 2007, 84)

Like René Depestre, exile has enabled Mrs. Philibert to recreate a fantastic childhood, rich with vivid images and emotions, for she has assuredly not “missed the blue train of childhood.” Lucienne Nicolas speaks about exilic literature, but we can adapt her words to stories in general, and Mrs. Philibert’s story in particular to conclude this point:

Cette élaboration d’une ville-fiction permet à l’imaginaire de créer un espace urbain féérique qui remplacerait celui de l’enfance. (2002, 110)

Mr. Toussaint: *J'y arrive je suis comme un étranger*

The other two had quite articulate discourses, which they were visibly not expressing for the first time. Mr. Toussaint's manner of situating himself in his belonging to Haiti was perhaps more instinctive than previously communicated, hence more thought out as the conversation flowed. He was therefore perhaps less eloquent, but used a crisp and original vocabulary.

Like Mrs. Philibert, how he recollects and romanticizes his childhood is also very revealing about his exilic sentiments, noticeably his remembrance of Gonaïves (p. 87). But I wish to examine another passage of his narrative, when he describes his feelings when he goes back to Haiti today. Leaving Haiti was only temporary in Mr. Toussaint's mind, to earn a little money overseas and return once his prospects were a little better, which is why he refused to claim political asylum. We know however that he will end up dwelling in Montreal permanently, and he was therefore distressed on a trip to Haiti to "arrive and be like a stranger" (p. 108) The country had changed tremendously, and most of his friends and relatives had died or left as well.

Moreover, he explained that he couldn't help to compare Haiti with Quebec, remarking that "such a thing could not happen in Quebec." (p. 109) Exile has therefore completely changed his perspective. He is extremely attached to Haiti, in his discourse construction, in his readings, in his everyday activities, in the decorating of his basement, or in his way to present himself to others in Montreal. However there is a profound disjuncture between this Haiti that defines him so much and the Haiti he went back to on several trips after Duvalier's downfall. Because of years of exile, his referential Haiti and the

contemporary Haiti which he observes are separate entities. This is expressed with great melancholy in Stanley Péan's text *La Plage des songes*:

Tu t'absentes de ta patrie trop longtemps, la métamorphose s'opère, l'exil fait de toi un intrus, un étranger partout même chez toi, la distance et les années creusent un gouffre-indifférence, [...] un mutant, un hybride, enfin quelqu'un, quelque chose d'autre, mais plus un Haïtien. Tu en deviens alors à oublier [...] ton créole par bribes. Oublier le visage de ton père. Il ne te reste plus d'Haïti qu'un vague parfum de cannelle, d'anis, de mangue que tu ne distingues plus très bien [...]. Une poignée de lettres que tu ne prends plus la peine de lire. Une famille-fantôme à laquelle tu envoies un chèque une fois de temps à autre et de tes nouvelles encore moins souvent. Et une image de ton pays pas tout à fait exacte, filtrée par ta propre mémoire (1988, 116-117)

Mr. Toussaint certainly shared a part of this nostalgia and deep suffering in his account. His words, but also his expression and body language as he described himself as a stranger in Port-au-Prince and Gonaïves today was sorrowful. However, I believe that his story shows us that exile is not as monolithically sad as Péan describes it. Yes, it is a traumatic experience to “arrive and be like a stranger.” But unlike Péan, he never related this experience as making him realize he had a *wrong* image of the country. His life – and his exile – has not made him see Haiti in an “inexact” way but in a different way. Indeed his perception is “filtered by memory,” but it is adding complex layers to reality rather than making Haiti less real.

Mr. Toussaint's exile was therefore immense wrenching, but also an opportunity to re-think and re-create Haiti from overseas, as he was developing a new, hybrid belonging. I think that his story consequently corresponds more to Emile Ollivier's vision than Péan's:

J'ai toujours pensé que la migration, au point de départ, est un Malheur. Si moi personnellement, comme immigrant, je la vis aujourd'hui dans une sorte de bonheur, de joie, de jubilation même par moments, il reste que la migration est un déchirement, un arrachement. (1992, 13)

Lucienne Nicolas, a Haitian literature scholar, analyzes this Ollivier passage in a manner that we can relate to Mr. Toussaint's story:

C'est cette coupure avec la terre natale qui lui a permis de retrouver son imaginaire. Il reconnaît alors que l'"exil n'est pas que malheur et malédiction, il est aussi espace de liberté, élargissement de l'horizon mental; il met en modernité." Cette possibilité de "faire bon usage de l'exil", de le rendre positif et fertile, il la trouve dans un Québec déjà engagé dans la Révolution Tranquille, et qui deviendra, dans les années 1980, un espace éclaté, marqué par un questionnement sur la culture, le déracinement, la multi-ethnicité, et "en devenir transculturel". (2002, 223)

Of course, Mr. Toussaint is not as lyrical as Emile Ollivier, nor as theoretical as Lucienne Nicolas. Nevertheless we can link his story to these texts. His exile is a trauma, and his return is the suffering of discovering himself a stranger. But much like Mrs. Philibert, this has also allowed him to negotiate his identity in a new, de-centered manner.

Mr. Voltaire, the *perpetual movement*

Mr. Voltaire is constantly in movement. He talks, he walks around, he telephones, he travels, his conversation and his focus jump around at a challenging speed. I very often had the feeling that he was not completely *there*, or rather perpetually in several places, thinking about past situations and future plans as we were talking. He would endlessly make links between a neighbourhood in Port-au-Prince, a festival in Santiago de Cuba, a company in Montreal, a friend in Chile or a project in Paris. This formed a complex narration, difficult to follow but incredibly rich, explicitly challenging static notions of identity. He has analyzed himself as being a "frontier man" from childhood. My argument is that this original "frontierness" has been greatly enhanced by his exile and incessant physical and intellectual movement.

About movement and exile, Dany Laferrière writes:

Je m'apprête à sauter dans l'inconnu, sachant que celui qui voyage ne revient jamais. Car si jamais il revient, tout aura changé. Il ne reconnaîtra rien de ce qu'il avait laissé. Et lui-même ne sera plus le même. Dès qu'on a initié le premier mouvement, on est en orbite pour ne plus atterrir. C'est la loi du mouvement perpétuel. Du moment qu'on ne bouge pas, qu'on reste dans son île, on peut dire qu'on est d'ici, de cette terre. Mais dès qu'on a quitté l'île, une fois seulement, on ne peut plus revenir. Il n'y a plus de retour possible. (2000, 163)

Mr. Voltaire seems to me indeed on this “orbit from which one cannot land,” constantly navigating between people, places and identities. Mr. Voltaire defines himself as *in-between*, his familial and cultural background have started this, and then his multiple exiles have deeply rooted not in a fixed concept of origin but in this idea of a dynamic in-between. As he puts it, he “wears different hats, and switches to one another without any difficulty.”

He has attached a lot of belonging importance to Haiti, Chile and Montreal, and has been interestingly careful not to place them into any sort of hierarchy. As my first interviewee, I was sometimes quite blunt and unsubtle in my questions to Mr. Voltaire about identity and place, for I (naively) wanted to address my research questions explicitly. His reaction to these inquiries are very relevant. I came back to it on several occasions (much like the young monk in his fable), and each time he was a little irritated. He tried hard to explain that “belonging” to him didn't really exist as such; that it was situational, depending a lot on his interlocutor. This conception of an in-between belonging affirmation can be used to illustrate some contemporary theories, such as Homi Bhabha's:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of origin and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1994, 1-2)

Indeed, where Mr. Voltaire's main belonging claim (being a frontier man) is most interesting is in its relation to the other. When he calls himself "a stranger from within," he offers a challenging way to apprehend relationships. How do we situate ourselves in front of Frantz Voltaire? How does he want to be perceived? It seemed always present and often counter-footing in our conversations.

The simplistic interpretation would be to claim that origins have little importance to him, and that he engages in people primarily as humans. But we see in his story that he has dedicated his life to memory and to unfolding Haitian and Caribbean realities, and that places of belonging are extremely important to him. He can however never fully include himself in a static group, preferring the role of a mediator.

I think that his trajectory has reinforced this affirmation of being constantly in-between. He has transformed his exile into a motive of pride, with a deep knowledge of many cultures and the necessary tools to allow dialogue between them. As Lucienne Nicolas puts it (about a novel character): "Son exil, tout en étant une traversée dans l'épreuve, rend possible la rencontre de l'Autre." (2002, 149)

I saw a man with a profound paradox. He is proud of his exile and of what he has made of it, maybe even pretentious about his mediating abilities. But he also deeply suffers from the Haitian tragedy, and engages in formidable research on the country's memory, probably revealing another aspect of the trauma that exile represents. He is therefore both nourished and torn by his experience of exile, and this is perhaps one of the keys to Mr. Voltaire's intricate complexities.

3) Montreal: The city lived, made and imagined

J'erre dans la ville curieusement muette de cloches laissant loin derrière moi les villes que je n'ai point habitués et celles, lieux de longs errements nocturnes, où j'ai couché sur les asphaltes sans brèches, comme meules alignées. J'erre avec mes pas d'errant dans la ville, grosse par à-coup, de vrombissements d'avion. Ville au bord du fleuve, glissement immobile dans l'eau, vers la mer. Ville de verre. Ville de béton. Ville d'auvent.

Emile Ollivier, *Paysage de l'aveugle*, 1977

We have seen that displacement and exile are themes that deeply affect the interviewees' narratives and identity claims. Their places of reference are hence multiple and fragmented, as their comprehension of the present and the retelling of their story are influenced by multiple perspectives. What particularly interests me in these stories is the Montreal aspect. They share this city, as a frame for their everyday life but also as an important side of their identity reference, for they have all lived here for over thirty years.

We will first envisage cities in general, as they represent a crucial element in the contemporary analysis of identity formation, and these stories offer engaging illustrations of urban theory. We will then study the specific importance of Montreal and its neighbourhoods for the interviewees, and how they and the city reflect on each other. In the contemporary understanding of places, cities have presented a paradigmatic example, especially the important ones which have been nodes for huge proportions of financial, human and cultural flows. Cities are the localized interface of these flows.

Saskia Sassen explains:

Why does it matter to recover place in analyses of the global economy, particularly place as constituted in major cities? Because it allows us to see the multiplicity of economies and work cultures in which the global information economy is embedded. It also allows us to recover the concrete, localized processes through which globalization exists and to argue that much of the multiculturalism in large cities is as much a part of globalization as in international finance. (1998, xix-xx)

Her analysis therefore takes into account people – and their multiculturalism – in her argument for localizing globalization in major cities. Allan Cochrane draws on this idea, from an urban planner’s perspective:

The urban is not a policy area in which outcomes are given, in which a single agenda is being or can be forced through. It relies on continuing the construction of different visions for the city, which also turn out to be different visions for the wider society. (2007, 145)

Montreal is not large enough to be part of Sassen’s definition of “global cities,” for it is not a major financial centre. However, its role as an important regional metropolis, its undeniable ties with all parts of the globe and its high concentration of migrants and important ethnic diversity makes it a relevant city to study as an intersection of global flows.

Authors such as Saskia Sassen (1991 & 1998) or Mark Abrahamson (2004) concentrate more on a macro level, studying and comparing “global cities.” This study is, on the contrary, at the micro level, observing the smallest unit possible: individuals. We are therefore in a position that enables us to comprehend these concepts and use them in our grid of analysis for the study of our three interviewees.

Indeed places cannot be analyzed as voids gradually filled with people, for it is people who give *meaning* to places, and who ultimately create place (Lefebvre 1974; Creswell 2004). To come back to Lefebvre’s theory (see pages 10-14) we observe in the interviewees’ discourses their “spaces of representation” (1974) – neither simply the way they navigate the urban nor what planners and officials have conceived, but what they *make* of it and with it.

If cities on a macro scale can be seen as outcomes of complex globalized flows, this is applied and illustrated by people's personal and cultural negotiations of the city. We must therefore study *what* they make of the urban. This idea is developed by numerous geographers, such as Massey (1994 & 2007) and Harvey (1993), who draw on Lefebvre's concept of spaces of representation (see p.12).

Urban semiologists explain that the city itself can be seen as a discourse, as a language its inhabitants use to express themselves. They study the complex relation between signified and signifier, applying and adapting these linguistic terms to the urban text. This idea is compelling, because it gives each individual freedom to associate meaning, in an infinite variation of ways, and therefore can formidably enrich the geographical concepts of cities being dynamic reflections of global flows. Moreover, it gives importance to people's narratives and poetics, which is to me particularly enthralling.

Roland Barthes writes:

The city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it. [...] (1986, 92)

Today semiology never supposes the existence of a definitive signified. This means that the signifieds are always signifier for other signified and vice versa. In reality, in any cultural or even psychological complex, we are faced with infinite chains of metaphors whose signified is always retreating or becomes itself a signifier. [...] (1986, 95)

The city, essentially and semantically, is the place of our meeting with the *other* [...] (1986, 96)

For the city is a poem, as has often been said and as Hugo said better than anyone else, but it is not a classical poem, a poem tidily centered on a subject. It is a poem which unfolds the signifier and it is this unfolding that ultimately the semiology of the city should try to grasp and make sing. (1986, 97-98)

Michel De Certeau also analyzes the city as a language, hence comparing the act of walking with the writing of a poem:

The walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else. And if on the one hand he actualizes only a few of the possibilities fixed by the constructed order (he goes here and not there), on the other he increases the number of possibilities (for example, by creating shortcuts and

detours) and prohibitions (for example, he forbids himself to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory). He thus makes a selection. (1984, 98)

Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it "speaks." All the modalities sing a part in this chorus, changing from step to step, stepping in through proportions, sequences, and intensities which vary according to the time, the path taken and the walker. These enunciatory operations are of an unlimited diversity. They therefore cannot be reduced to their graphic trail. (1984, 99)

The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, personal factors). (1984, 101)

Each interviewee has expressed his urban poem, retelling it in a unique and lyrical manner. Mr. Voltaire systematically feels an interior sparkle when he drives into Montreal from the Champlain Bridge, undeniably *coming home*. Mrs. Philibert goes back to shop in Côte-des-Neiges, to follow the same rituals that she has repeated over the years, even though she now lives in another district. Or Mr. Toussaint has gradually made his new neighborhood his, by taking extended bicycle rides on summer mornings, allowing him to like a suburb he originally despised.

The stories revealed extended urban poems, in intricate forms. Each had a unique approach to the city, and a unique way of expressing it. Of course, their shared history of exile means that they have several significant places, hence several urban poems. We have three detailed and different accounts of Port-au-Prince, along with a description of Havana for Mrs. Philibert, of Gonaïves for Mr. Toussaint and of Santiago for Mr. Voltaire, not to mention the villages, countryside and other cities which feed these narratives. However we will now concentrate on their take on Montreal, looking into how they reveal this city, their navigation, their insight, their words and their meeting with the other in the particular context. Let us keep in mind that the other cities and

places mentioned above affect and influence their narratives of Montreal, as do their exiles.

Navigating the streets

An important theme that comes to mind in the study of place-making in Montreal from these narratives is the idea of navigation. When speaking of Montreal, they often took the same basic perspective of a pedestrian walking around. This makes their stories very close to De Certeau's 'walking poems', although other vehicles can be attached to this rhetoric. Mr. Voltaire added his car to parts of this narrative, and Mr. Toussaint his bicycle and public transportation. My point is that they were often *in movement* when I asked them about Montreal, whereas my questions I think were vague enough that they could have adopted more static perspectives. They of course included closed and private places in their narratives, especially their homes for Mr. Toussaint and Mrs. Philibert, and his office for Mr. Voltaire. But they attached an important meaning to the streets and to navigating from one place to another.

I have not followed around the interviewees in their different neighbourhoods or important places. This would in fact be a fascinating ethnographic work complementary to this research: to analyze the links between discourse, representations and spatial practices. The following pages must be seen as an analysis and interpretation of their narratives, and we will see that navigation in the city has had a substantial influence on the way they construct their story.

It seemed as though the basic viewpoint when talking about Montreal was to be walking about in a significant neighbourhood. This intrigued me as it was a recurring theme in all three narratives. Talking about the city was inseparable from talking about the experience of the streets; the streets a means of going from a point of another but also the streets as the fundamental public space – a stage on which to play one’s everyday role.

Mr. Voltaire’s favourite street corner

One of Mr. Voltaire’s most important places in the city is a street corner in Côte-des-Neiges. (page 153) Clustered at that corner there is his favorite bookstore, a big newspaper distributor with all the international press and a café in which he and his friends met and continue to meet regularly. What is particularly interesting is that he focuses not on these places separately, but precisely on the intersection, on “this small block between Queen Mary and Jean Brillant” (p.153) These three shops are pleasant to him, and they also the evoke memories of good times. But the most important is the street, with its never-ending procession of a heterogeneous crowd. This place is particularly important because, after having bought newspapers and books, Mr. Voltaire could sit down with his friends at the terrace of the café, directly on the big avenue, and be right in the middle of the flow of people.

This street action is inextricable from his love of the place. He explained to me that this was best described in Emile Ollivier’s novel *La Brûlerie* (2004). ‘La Brûlerie’ is precisely the name of that café, from which Ollivier observes Montreal. Mr. Voltaire

was one of Ollivier's good friends, and the street corner described in the novel is the same as in Mr. Voltaire's story:

Chemin de la Côte-des-Neiges mes artères coronaires pulsent ; j'y côtoie des femmes volcaniques, aux jambes bien galbées, si parfaitement épilées qu'elles reflètent éclats de soleil et rayons des lampadaires. J'y rencontre des gens qui se disent importants : tel est cousin du roi de Thaïlande, telle fleuriste a été mariée avec un Allemand richissime, ancien SS. Sur la Côte-des-Neiges, je me sens capitaine de vaisseau de ligne doté des avantages d'un bateau de croisière. [...] Assis à une terrasse de café sur la Côte-des-Neiges, le temps coule d'une manière différente ; l'agitation du monde s'apaise, tout prend une valeur autre : la réflexion, la nostalgie, la bière, le rêve, le thé vert, la tisane à la menthe aussi. (2004, 16)

Mrs. Philibert's itinerary descriptions

The first time I went to Mrs. Philibert's house, she gave me an extremely detailed explanation of how to get there, with different itineraries and options by bus, metro or car. I remember being quite amazed by this profusion. The knowledge of the city and how to get around was undeniably a pride to her, as she would later enquire where I lived and also discuss very precise pathways. Both times I found her *too* precise to solely want to help. She made it a conversation topic, taking pleasure in debating over which metro station was closer to her house. I interpreted this as a way to show me that she was a *true* Montrealer; that she knew her way around.

The neighbourhood she identifies with the most is the same one as described by Mr. Voltaire: Côte-des-Neiges. She has lived there many years, and has stated that it was *hers*, as she "knew each and every little hidden corner." Like Mr. Voltaire, she didn't specifically describe her apartment or an enclosed place in Côte-des-Neiges, but the general climate. There she very strongly felt rooted in the community, describing the area as "Haiti's backyard" (p.78).

We will go back to the central idea of community making in the following section. Here what I want to underline is that navigating in and around the neighbourhood was very important to Mrs. Philibert. She does not live there anymore, but goes back as often as she can to shop, meet old friends or just hang around and observe, for “it makes [her] think of good times.”

We see here the importance of neighbourhoods and their social contacts for personal belonging discourses. Michel de Certeau (et al.) have described this complex problematic this way:

[L’organisation de la vie quotidienne s’articule, entre autres, autour des] *bénéfices symboliques escomptés* par la manière de « se tenir » dans l’espace du quartier : bien se tenir « rapporte », mais quoi ? L’analyse est ici d’une grande complexité ; elle relève moins de la description que de l’*interprétation*. Ces bénéfices sont enracinés dans la tradition culturelle de l’usager, ils ne sont jamais totalement présents à sa conscience. Ils apparaissent de manière partielle, fragmentée, au travers de sa marche ou, plus généralement, du mode sous lequel il « consomme » l’espace public. Mais ils sont aussi élucidables au travers du discours de sens par lequel l’usager rend compte de la presque totalité de ses démarches. Le quartier apparaît ainsi comme le lieu où manifester un « engagement » social, autrement dit : un art de coexister avec des partenaires (voisins, commerçants) qui vous sont liés par le fait concret, mais essentiel, de la proximité et de la répétition. (1994, 17)

She now lives in Little Italy, a calm area where she does not know many people. Very clearly she “engages” less with her new neighbourhood than with her former one. She described most of her neighbours as “boring retirees” with an unappealing sigh. I find very relevant to observe the decoration of her house from this perspective. In her childhood descriptions of Pétionville (p. 56) or in Côtes-des-Neiges she has felt a strong community bond, but not in Little Italy. She has therefore transposed a lot of her identity claims in the embellishment of her house, perhaps reminding herself who she was and rooting herself this way if she couldn’t do so as much in the public sphere anymore.

Mr. Toussaint's circumvolutions

Mr. Toussaint was perhaps the interviewee for whom navigation had the most significance. Unlike the other two, he expressed genuine fascination when talking about the first time he drove into Montreal (p. 105) The lights and the incessant cars both captivated him and made him feel very lost at first. He explains it as a challenge. He landed in a completely unfamiliar environment, and is quite content to have gradually mastered it. What was at first strange and exterior to him he made his.

Interestingly, his way again to describe this was also through navigation. He appropriated himself Montreal primarily by his whereabouts. Now he "knows" the city because he can "go anywhere he wants [...] by bus, by metro, by foot or by car!" (p.105)

Much like Mrs. Philibert and Mr. Voltaire, Montreal was a city where he did not have to constantly be on his guards and watch his back, a city "to take a breath." This naturally influenced his perspective on the city. As we have seen, Montreal represented both the nostalgic truth of exile but also a freeing, or a least a securing environment in which to peregrinate.

Furthermore, navigating the city, although here analyzed from personal perspectives, is not an individual process. The streets are also the meeting point with the anonymous; with the *other*. The city is where one feels observed by society, and where one scrutinizes others. This is exemplified in Mr. Toussaint's story, when he sees himself as a black man in comparison to the white majority (p. 108) Dany Laferrière makes the link

between the pleasure of walking in Montreal and the realization of being black in his novel *Eroshima*:

Montréal m'a toujours paru comme une jeune fille intelligente et audacieuse et cela, même quand ça allait mal pour moi. Je venais d'arriver ici, je n'avais rien, pas d'argent, pas de droits, pas d'amis. Je ne connaissais personne et, je m'en souviens, j'ai marché dans cette ville. Je connais tous les endroits où on donne une soupe gratuite et un manteau d'hiver. [...] Il faut ajouter à cela l'étonnement de me découvrir noir. Le noir existe qu'en présence du blanc. Avant, à Port-au-Prince, je n'étais qu'un être humain. Cette découverte m'a comme chaviré dans un univers neuf. (1996, 33)

The author links his love of the city with his long walks, and his walks with the confrontation of the other's gaze, much like Mr. Toussaint in his story.

Although personal navigation and interpretation of Montreal and its streets is a fundamental element of people's appropriation of the city, we must acknowledge that it is more often than not a social process, a collective sentiment of belonging (or not) to the city. Let us now examine how the interviewees have linked their stories to the Montreal's social groups, especially with its Haitian community.

4) Placing Community

Montréal [...] tient lieu de référent éclaté où le souvenir peut être réactualisé, la crainte de l'effondrement éprouvée sans que cela entraîne pour autant des conséquences catastrophiques. L'hétéroglie, l'hybridité culturelle, un certain inconfort peuvent alors être revendiqués. Montréal en l'occurrence est cette ville qui permet une salutaire ouverture, qui justifie en somme l'existence d'un cosmopolitisme vécu dans l'éclatement des identités. Car il ne faut pas sous-estimer chez les divers écrivains parcourus une fascination jubilatoire qui fait de la ville un lieu où l'identité peut être détruite et incessamment reconstruite. La force singulière de Montréal réside dans la souplesse de ses alliances culturelles nouées, la diversité des lieux inventés et la mémoire défaite puis reconquise de l'imaginaire urbain.

Simon Harel, *La parole orpheline de l'écrivain migrant*

Harel's quote above (1992, 418), taken from a literary analysis of migrant authors in Montreal, is remarkably enlightening, and introduces some points about the

interviewees' belonging and place-making processes in Montreal. Each of our three stories contains a vast palette of elements relating to these themes, as each interviewee significantly developed on his or her relationship with national identity and with the Haitian community in Montreal. This quote is particularly relevant to us as it links the concepts of diasporic identity reconstruction and the specific environment of Montreal.

Indeed, we have seen in the literature review that many contemporary authors have erected dynamic theories of identity questioning, remodeling or transcending the nation-state (Anderson 1991; Appadurai 2001; Castels 2004; Cuillerai & Abeles 2002; Hall 1990; Rose 1993; Schnapper 2001; Smith 1991). To support their analysis they often ground themselves on the hybridity and multiple references experienced by diasporas around the world. Our accounts allow to illustrate such theories at the most in-depth, personal scale, embedded in a specific city, diaspora and timeframe.

How are Mrs. Philibert, Mr. Toussaint and Mr. Voltaire Haitian? How have they negotiated their identity throughout their years of living in Montreal, and how do they reflect on it in the narration of their life stories? These are complex questions, for which each story offers equally complex paths for an answer. Many noteworthy points arose, among which the importance of referring oneself to a place (or places) in the affirmation of identity; the exceptionally strong and yet ambiguous relationship with Haiti as a nation-state and as an imagined homeland; and the influence of Haitian community organizations in Montreal as pivotal spaces to express a sentiment of national belonging.

These are considerations that came to me during the interview process and as I was watching the recordings. Even though there are similarities, bridges and common themes between the interviews, I do not claim to synthesize them in an empirical manner. Each enlightens us in its unique way about community feeling and the contemporary nation-state. Again, the observed points above upon which I will draw in the following paragraphs are far from exhaustive. In their structure, the three essays intended to point out these precise themes in the interviewees' narratives and open the reader to diverse interpretations.

Places of identity

Place, in its relevance for individuals and in its constructing processes, was the cornerstone of my research topics. I therefore gave it a central role, both as I was conducting the interviews and as I was going through the recordings and interpreting. Place thus undoubtedly has a greater importance to me in these narratives than it has to the interviewees themselves, or than it would have to another researcher working on the same recordings. In this type of qualitative research, we can see this as a perspective rather than as a bias.

Having said that, I was truly struck by the power and the substance of places in each narrative. Sometimes, I tried to build myself an artificially naïve mindset, asking myself why place would have to be important at all in people's identity construction. Further than questionable, rigid places such as nation-states, I tried to approach the interviewees questioning the relevance of places in general (homes, seas, islands, neighbourhoods,

paths, etc.) My hypothesis was that place and belonging were intimately connected, and this had been backed up by a number studies. But it was interesting to try not to have such a prejudice as I addressed people. Why couldn't non-spatial elements such as gender, class, ethnicity, parenthood, age or passions be far more important than places in identity affirmations?

As a matter of fact, some of these were crucial in the interviewees' discourses on belonging. But they were often *linked* with forms of identity that were spatialized. For example, Mr. Toussaint had an intricate, fascinating relationship with his father, who was most probably a decisive figure in his identity construction of who he is. This may seem as a non-spatial and yet major factor of Mr. Toussaint's identity. However this story (like all the stories I can think of) is spatialized, in a symbolically rich environment. We have seen that to Mr. Toussaint his father was part of a decisive rural-urban dichotomy – places. His father also represents a certain ideal of the Haiti of his childhood, hard-working and whole-hearted, before the Duvalier years. Again, place finds its way in the core of the narrative. From any angle, it seemed as though total 'despatialization' of identity formation discourses was impossible.

Furthermore, places appeared to be of the utmost significance as direct forms of identity references. Mrs. Philibert's house, and the objects and artworks surrounding her, seemed to speak of her and for her about who she was. She also talked in great detail of her childhood house, and of its surrounding neighborhood. One of Mr. Voltaire's most touching, profound passages was also when he portrayed the area around his school in

Port-au-Prince and the nearby *Pâtisserie aux Enfants* (pp. 131-132) describing places with a deep symbolic values.

Such examples come in great profusion in each narrative. In every stage of their stories, the interviewees have included many places at all sorts of scales, continuously negotiating and expressing their identity in relation to senses of place; describing the dwellers of a neighborhood, the smell of a house, the sound of a street, the importance of a path or the significance of a country. Places, and their remembering, were absolutely central to the interviewees' discourses, which corroborates Dolores Hayden's call for putting places at the heart of social analysis:

If place does provide an overload of possible meanings for the researcher, it is place's very same assault on all ways of knowing (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste) that makes it powerful as a source of memory, as a weave where one strand ties in another (1995, 18)

Places make memories cohere in complex ways. People's experiences of the urban landscape intertwine the sense of place and the politics of space. (1995, 43)

Haiti: a re-negotiated homeland

We have seen that places, in immensely diversified forms and scales, are deeply rooted and extremely significant in these life stories and in their belonging discourses. This opens us to an incredibly large spectrum of interpretations and potential pathways of analysis. One of the most discussed places of symbolic reference in the literature on diasporas is the 'homeland;' how it is experienced, affirmed and imagined, questioning the nation-state and introducing the challenging concept of hybridity. Let us therefore examine some of the complex relationships with Haiti expressed by the interviewees, as "Haiti", although the word does not incorporate the same meaning from one person to another, was what they all described as their place of origin.

The author Jean-Claude Charles writes his thoughts on Haiti in a thought-provoking perspective:

Moi, je suis malade de ma mère, ce morceau d'île qui baigne entre Cuba et Porto Rico. Cette maladie n'a pas nom *nationalisme*. Je ne parle pas de « retour aux sources ». La blessure vient de plus loin. Si je savais d'où, je n'écrirais plus un mot. Le voyage est une ascèse. Taraudé par la terre de mon enfance, mais homme d'écriture et de plusieurs cultures, je n'ai pas d'autres patrie que les mots. Pas d'autre pari que celui de faire connaître un espace et un exil mal connus. (1982, 19)

He explains that Haiti is his “mother” and his “illness” but that he is uncomfortable with nationalism and the concept of “roots.” This point is key for the understanding of the interviewees’ relationship with Haiti. Haiti is for them an extraordinarily important reference, and a simultaneous motif of great pride and shame. However, much like in Charles’s paradoxical statement, what the interviewees referred to was often Haiti as a political idea, Haiti as a vivid memory, Haiti as a symbolic injury or Haiti as a metaphor more than the contemporary nation-state “Haiti.” Even though they all maintained strong links with the country today, through friends, family and various activities, my point is that the Haiti they erect as such an important identity reference transcends the mere nation-state, as it is embedded in deep, personal symbols and memories. Therefore, the concept of “roots” or “homeland” must be questioned in its essence, for the strongest identity reference is situated at a symbolic, imagined level.

Mr. Toussaint, for example, described his feeling of being a stranger when he comes back to Haiti (p.108). However, if today’s Gonaïves is not his city, it remains profoundly anchored in his discourse. In general, he extensively described the smells, looks and feelings of Haitian places of his childhood and young years, implying a strong impact of

these references in his story. It is hence the memory of places that carries the most significance.

Moreover, he characterized himself strongly as a politicized individual, explaining a great deal of his teenage questionings and his later actions through this particular scope. He dedicated large aspects of his life to his ideology and activism – and this can be said of all three interviewees. What therefore oriented many of his reflections and actions was a certain idea of Haiti, primarily against the Duvalier regime, but also in a larger sense, with a more open public debate and better conditions for the rural classes. This ideal still defines him and his narration, although it corresponds more to struggles from the 1960s than today.

By this point, I mean not to simplistically divide the idea of Haiti then and now. Past and present nourish each other in intertwined manners. I mean to show that the Haiti which is so significant to the interviewees is very much a country *in memory* – an imagined country. This dissociation between the idea of a nation and the actual contemporary country is perhaps more relevant about Haiti than anywhere else. Indeed, as the first country in which a slave revolt led to a Revolution, and the first independent black country of the Americas, Haitians share an outstandingly strong sense of nationhood and historic pride. This point deserves of course to be immensely developed, and has been in many works (Voltaire 1988; Weinstein & Segal 1992; Jean-Louis 2002; Larrue 2007; Munro 2007). I simply bring it up for it seems to be a common denominator to all three interviewees. They all seem to be able to strongly detach the historic idea (and ideal) of

Haiti, of which they are proud, and its recent history, of which they are either ashamed of or indifferent.

If their Haiti is more an imagined and symbolic place, it allows them to interiorize it and to affirm their belonging to the nation from outside. Being Haitian becomes more a common history, a sense of pride and tragedy, that Haitians can share and nourish from dissociated places all around the world. This 'Haitianness' can hence be transmitted to further generations in diaspora, as it is as much (or more) connected to a collective story and history than to the contemporary country.

Indeed, the three interviewees, who each have children and grandchildren born outside Haiti, have expressed the importance to transmit the culture to their family. Interestingly, none of them saw a great difficulty in doing so from outside, it was on the contrary quite a natural thing to do. This gives credence to Appadurai's concept of 'ethnoscapes,' (1996, see p.15) as we see that cultural landscapes can superimpose and coherently imbricate themselves with other landscapes, such as Quebec.

Balancing the expression and transmission of Haitianness in diaspora was itself a spatialized process in our case in the Montreal context. Indeed, many authors emphasized the influence of media and communication in the construction of contemporary diasporic identities (Appadurai 1996 & 2001; Sassen 1998; Nijman 1999; Schnapper 2001; Massey 2007). The interviewees have confirmed this influence – especially the growing impact of the Internet – but have also particularly underlined the weight and importance of the Haitian community in Montreal for the continuing of their

national identity claims. I would therefore argue that the elaboration of ethnoscaples is greatly enhanced in urban contexts with strong and diverse community links within a diaspora.

With its particular social structure and its strong Haitian community, there were favourable conditions in Montreal that enabled newcomers to pursue their identity affirmation and to continue to share a sense of national belonging. Actually, Montreal in the second half of the twentieth century is often seen in the literature as a city that enables an original, personal kind of appropriation, where migrants can create and maintain communities without enclosing themselves in ghettos (Nepveu & Marcotte 1992; Nicolas 2002; Duviella 2007). Specifically about its Haitian community, Paul Déjean writes:

La population haïtienne de Montréal n'est pas confinée à une seule zone de la ville, dans une sorte de ghetto ou de "quartier haïtien". Elle est, au contraire, éparpillée dans toute la région montréalaise, avec des points de concentration (1990, 76)

This singular setting was complemented by the strong influence of the Haitian community institutions in Montreal, and together they permitted the elaboration of a unique expression of a Haitian identity. Indeed, all the interviewees stressed the importance of the two main organizations in Montreal (the *Bureau de la Communauté Haïtienne de Montréal* and the *Maison d'Haïti*) in how they contributed to maintain and nourish their national feeling.

Mrs. Philibert underlined these points strongly, as she was perhaps the interviewee who emphasized the most the importance to affirm herself as Haitian and to pass it on to her

daughters. She explained that she found in Montreal the necessary networks and relationships, as Montreal was “like Haiti’s backyard.” Through various social, cultural and political activities, she was able to quickly inscribe herself within the community, continuing to negotiate her ‘Haitianness.’

Not only did this context allow them to sustain and reinforce the idea of community, but it allowed a new form of national belonging assertion to emerge. The Haitian diaspora in Montreal discussed and debated their nation, and structures such as Mr. Voltaire’s CIDIHCA allowed artists and intellectuals to deepen this questioning in original ways. New ideas could be enriched and enlightened by encounters with other cultures in Montreal, and reflections could be expressed and publicly distributed in a much more open process than in Duvalier’s Haiti.

The Haitian community in Montreal consequently did not statically reproduce existing social schemes from Haiti. They discussed and reconsidered the meaning of their national belonging in a new fashion. They affirmed themselves as Haitian, and did so strongly, but played with the concept and reinvented it, as the diasporic component was becoming a fundamental element in the understanding of this identity.

This is what Frantz Voltaire calls “Haiti spilling out of its borders.” (p. 156) To him affirming a Haitian belonging is a very strong message, linked to the country’s unique history, as it is synonym to one of the earliest and most symbolic decolonizing processes, but also linked to centuries of misery and political struggle, to an outstanding art scene or to the proclamation of a Creole language and culture.

All of these he has investigated and worked on mostly out of Haiti, in collaboration with many other members of the diaspora. He therefore explains that “Haiti cannot be seen solely within its 28,000 kilometres square,” (p. 156) as the idea of nation and the community has evolved and been reinterpreted – recreated – in fragmented parts of the world, Montreal being one of the leading poles of this process.

5) Borders overflowing

Frantz Voltaire’s last point brings us at the centre of the questioning of nation-states and their borders discussed in the literature review (Anderson 1991; Smith 1991; Appadurai 1996; Schnapper 2001). He explicitly questioned the relevance of the correlation between the Haitian nation-state’s spatial, official boundaries and the Haitian nation. To him, Haitians around the world had become an absolutely central component of the nation; not the outside element one could associate with diasporas. He even stated that it was “them [Haitians in diaspora] who could help Haiti overcome its [tragic political, economical and ecological] situation.” (p.156)*

He therefore completely corroborated the view of authors who contest the relevance of nation-states in their fixed boundaries (Massey 1994; Appadurai 1996; Paasi 2001; Schnapper 2001), as to him Haiti – and its assertion as a nation – is now greatly

* This statement was especially interesting for he drew upon the questions of the Haitian nation, its diaspora and its borders in a long, historical analysis that *he* had decided would be the conclusion of his story – not an answer to one of my questions. Of course he knew my research interests and I have no doubt it oriented his discourse, but nevertheless it came as a coherent conclusion after a passionate, personal monologue, enlightening this problematic in a sharp, sincere manner that I do not think could have been possible had I simply asked questions regarding these themes.

expressed and renegotiated in its diaspora. As a historian especially absorbed by this idea, he explained that this was not a recent phenomenon, as Haitians have a long history of living outside the country ever since its independence (1804), first as workforce on plantations in Cuba and the Dominican Republic and then also immigrating to Latin American, European and North American cities.

However, as he had put it earlier, the evolution of transport and over the past 50 years has radically transformed and expanded the importance of the Haitian diaspora for the expression of a nation. Thanks to his telephone and (most decisive) the Internet, Mr. Voltaire is now, from Montreal, an actor in Haitian public life.

During the Duvalier régime Haitian exiles, concentrated in New York, Miami, Paris, Chicago and Montreal, organized rallies, community actions and diasporic press and radio, binding together and raising international awareness. All three interviewees took part in such movements in Montreal. By doing so (and thus creating communities as we saw in the previous section), Haitians transformed Haiti from outside, affirming an identity different than the one proposed by the nation-state. This created a strong national dynamic in a form that completely blurred spatial frontiers. This can hence be seen as an illustration to Homi Bhabha's words:

From the place of the 'meanwhile', where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity articulate the national community, there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, minority discourses that speak betwixt and between times and places. (1994; 158)

The idea of the Haitian nation overflowing its frontiers was made explicit by Mr. Voltaire, but was also very present in the other two narratives. Simply through their trajectories, and the affirmed importance of their Haitian identity – and their ability to

proclaim it after decades of exile – illustrates that they handle the bordering of their identities in dynamic ways. When they take part in weekly activities at the *Maison d’Haïti*, when they read *Haïti en Marche* (an online newspaper made for and by the Haitian diaspora) or when they set off to cook *joumou*, going shopping in the Haitian and Caribbean grocery stores in Montreal, we could say that they function *within* Haiti’s symbolic borders.

Indeed, when they take part in such activities, what is the foundation – the centre – of their undertakings? They express it quite clearly: it is Haiti. But *where* is this base; where is, to them, the centre of Haiti? The answer is much more complicated and fascinating than the former. Haiti is of course the island where they were born, and where they allocate much of their personal and cultural symbolism. But in their everyday practice, as they continue to concretely affirm their Haitian belonging, we can affirm that – at least in some ways – Montreal is the centre of Haiti.

What I imply here is not simply the dialectic between Haiti as a symbolic cultural reference which would be exterior, and Montreal as a concrete, everyday frame for the expression of culture. Haiti is performed, both concretely and symbolically, in the streets of Montreal. Places overlap and acquire transformed meanings through the convergence of people’s cultural and personal reworking (Massey 1994). Ethnoscapes are elaborated, fruits of the encounter and hybridization of different cultural landscapes in one city (Appadurai 1996). And borders slither and proliferate, continuously reshaping themselves, encompassing nations in *unmappable* ways, out of the nation-state’s control:

What if, as Lefort argues, the subject of modern ideology is split between the iconic image of authority and the movement of the signifier that produces the image, so that the 'sign' of the social is condemned to slide ceaselessly from one position to another? It is in this space of liminality, in the 'unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty' that we encounter once again the narcissistic neuroses of the national discourse with which I began. The nation is no longer the sign of modernity under which cultural differences are homogenized in the 'horizontal' view of society. The nation reveals, in its ambivalent and vacillating representation, an ethnography of its own claim to being *the* norm of social contemporaneity.

(Bhaba 1994,149)

And perhaps that Elizabeth Philibert, Céradieu Toussaint or Frantz Voltaire, like Emile Ollivier (in Giguère 2001, p. 49), sit in their back yard in Montreal and watch a maple tree. And silently breathe the warm September breeze. And rock comfortably back and forth. And slowly close their eyes. For a few infinite seconds. And they remember a few verses from the back of their head:

les îles aboient au cou des grèves
nos peaux calmées par des fleurs immenses
îles sous le sang
nul n'a d'yeux pour mesurer
les affres mains encore d'un peuple

ô
mortes qui respiriez les magnolias

(Joel Des Rosiers, *Savanes*, 1993, 46)

And slowly open their eyes back up. And the air is just a bit warmer. And in front of them, in place of the maple tree stands a magnificent mango tree.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Life-stories in geography and social science: fascinating and contestable

Developing these relationships, and being plunged into these three life stories was for me a life-changing experience. The process completely transcended academic interests and goals, as what became at stake for the interviewees and myself was clearly beyond the writing of this thesis. We were unraveling their stories in a manner that seemed original and relevant to each of them, even if they had told their stories many times in the past.

Indeed, the interviewees manifested very strong engagement and passion in their narrative, each in his or her personal way. I could never thank them enough for this invaluable gift. Consequently, I felt a strong sense of responsibility in the writing of “their” chapters. We have seen above that I claim shared authority in the interviewing but personal freedom of interpretation in the writing (pp. 36-39 & 46-49). However, even if I do not profess to speak for the interviewees, I felt accountable to them in the sense that it would have seemed a form of betrayal to over-simplify and synthesize their accounts according to an academic discourse, or simply not to try at least to render on paper their unique narratives. Moreover, as I have already noted, since the most relevant details come in the slow unraveling of discussions, it seemed absurd not to present some of the detours, paradoxes and mysteries of the accounts.

This format of writing, quite unconventional for a Master's thesis in Geography, therefore attempts to reflect its original methodology. The latter had a tremendous impact on all stages of the process, and should be discussed as a substantial element for further research. Indeed, the further discussion I wish to bring about with this work is as much (if not more) methodological, with implications for human geography and other social sciences.

Oral historians, from whom I developed most of my methodology, have no concerns in affirming the relevance of life-story interviews in their work. It is now widely accepted and uncontested that people's stories are a major component of history and that every witness and actor's voice and perspective is relevant, thus legitimizing such work. The Popular Memory Group writes, in a chapter of the landmark introductory book *The Oral History Reader* (Perks & Thomson 1998):

The first move in defining popular memory is to extend what we mean by history-writing [...] to expand the idea of historical production well beyond the limits of academic history-writing. We must include all the ways in which a sense of the past is constructed in our society. These do not necessarily take a written or literary form. Still less do they conform to academic standards of scholarship or canons of truthfulness. (1998, 75-76)

Furthermore, anthropology and sociology in the past fifty years have greatly evolved in the direction of studying counter-hegemonic perspectives and voices hardly present in earlier academic discourse. Feminist and post-colonial thinkers presented an immense variety of studies, but their common ground was to analyze society from the scope of a minority, less-empowered social group.

One example is the creation in 1982 of the journal (corresponding to a school of thought) *Subaltern Studies*. Around Ranajit Guha, scholars studied the Indian sub-

continent through its unheard voices and lower classes. They tried to give accounts of history from below, attempting to link Marxist and Gramscian examinations of the oppressed with post-modern frames that included (and valorized) fragmentation (Chakrabarty 2002). Dipesh Chakrabarty concludes his chapter entitled *A Small History of Subaltern Studies*:

The peasant did not have to undergo a historical mutation into the industrial worker in order to become the citizen-subject of the nation. [...] It can be seen in retrospect that Subaltern Studies was a democratic project meant to produce a genealogy of the peasant as citizen in contemporary political modernity. (2002, 19)

Methodologically, such authors very often used more personal, literary narratives. Ethnography became a central component of social analysis, hence drifting away from scientists who claimed to be neutral towards acknowledging an inherent subjectivity in the act of writing. This implied preferring to work on the composition form rather than trying to neutralize the author's perspective in the text. In the introduction to *Writing Culture*, James Clifford and George Marcus explain:

We begin, not with participant-observation or with cultural texts (suitable for interpretation), but with writing, the making of texts. No longer a marginal, or occulted, dimension, writing has emerged as central to what anthropologists do both in the field and thereafter. The fact that it has not until recently been portrayed or seriously discussed reflects the persistence of an ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience. (1986, 2)

However, legitimate questions and doubts can be raised in the use of such methods in a social analysis context. My goal has been to show important aspects of place-making and place-bound identities, but I do not have a representative sample of people to investigate such issues. Even a much wider collection of life-stories, which the Life Stories Project is collecting, cannot claim a quantitative representation, as the primary hypothesis is that each story is unique. Thus, the larger question is: can such types of

research lead to relevant social analysis if they do not reveal wider social patterns on which to ground further work?

Moreover, is this research pertinent to geography and the study of place? This question arises especially if the further ambition is to apply the research concretely. Can, for example, life-story interviews be used for urban planning? Of course, qualitative methods have been used and defended for decades, and there seems to be little doubt in their relevance and complementarity with quantitative methods (Hay 2005). But a research based on life-stories pushes the qualitative method to its furthest extent, for the interviews are not only open-ended but the interviewer surrenders his or her research themes to give priority to the interviewee's narrative. Perhaps the only supplemental step towards a 'pure' qualitative paper would have been to concentrate on only one interviewee, unrolling more extensively one account, and not allowing myself to add (sometimes artificial) comparisons.

How is such work relevant? First, there is the exploration, the telling and the retelling of these stories simply as such, working on their formal aspect – rendering the style and flavours of the narratives. Indeed novels and poetry are often more interesting and fertile than academic papers for the depiction and analysis of a particular society, for the power of metaphor (Ollivier 1992; Nicolas 2002) allows us to grasp complicated subjects with our emotions. I believe that these stories each contain the potential base for fabulous novels; novels that could enlighten their readers about the experience of exile, the Haitian diaspora in Montreal or the poetics of place.

This remains however an academic paper, although I hope to have blurred the frontiers to some extent. Even for a more formal social analysis, these stories are fascinating, and carry within them the deepest and most complex elements imaginable about exile, belonging, and personal interpretations and representations of places. Navigating between theory and these in-depth examples is hence captivating, as the stories not only provide us illustrations but original, innovative perspectives on these themes.

This is the strongest argument for the use of life-stories in social sciences. They allow us to go *beyond* statements from question and answer formats, to grasp fundamental aspects and thus to elaborate more subtle interpretations. People have complex ways of formulating their narratives, full of alluring silences, shadows and contradictions, which only the engaged account of one's life-story can begin to capture.

This method therefore gives latitude to explore individuals' complexities, and could be strongly advocated in a case against quick conclusions and simplifications based on 'traditional' interviews. When studying such intricate processes as identity and place-making, it is necessary to deepen as much as possible our understanding of the people we deal with.

In addition, life-story interviews are rooted in a transdisciplinary thought. Mostly used in history and anthropology, they have also been adopted in psychology, communication studies, semiotic analysis, education science, sociology and many art forms. Geographers, especially those who interpret urban environments in relation to

globalization theories (Massey 1994 & 2007; Low 2000; Tolia-Kelly 2004), have started to use similar techniques. The best example of an urban theorist explicitly writing about the pertinence of such an approach in her research is Dolores Hayden:

We struggled to focus on social and political issues, rather than physical ones, as the center of urban landscape history. Our teams worked hard to develop what public historian Michael Frisch has called “a shared authority,” a willingness to listen and learn from members of the public of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and economic circumstances. This approach gives primary importance to the political and social narratives of the neighborhood, and to the everyday lives of working people. It assumes that every inhabitant is an active participant in the making of the city, not just one hero-designer. It is rooted in an aesthetic of nurturing and connection. (1995, 235-237)

But we see that even Hayden has transposed some of Michael Frisch’s theory to adapt it to her studies, and explains the study of narratives that interest her, without mentioning whole life-stories. Human geography, I believe, has an immense field yet to explore in the collection and analysis of life-stories in the elaboration of future discourses on place.

Do we risk losing track of the general social picture by investigating in such detail individual narratives, omitting quantitative research samples and setting aside the idea of representation? I would answer by another question: did we really have a precise idea of the general picture and of the society we wish to study in the first place? Can it not help to go back to the core, monadic elements of society – people – to sharpen our general understanding?

Presenting a small collection of life-stories and a subjective interpretation as the only support for an urban planning policy proposition is probably insufficient. Quantitative questionnaires, statistical research or thorough mapping are important. Nevertheless, life-stories enlighten us on so many fascinating aspects of representations of places that

there are considerable arguments to be made for their use in Geography, as an essential form of complementary research.

While generalization and synthesis are sometimes crucial in the furtherance of scientific research, an acknowledgment of the risks involved when manipulating interviewees' perspectives in order to 'fit' the scholars' analysis must be seen as essential. Complementary methodologies that offer to render narratives in a less generalizing but more contextualizing manner are therefore indispensable. Allow me to requote Linda Shopes (see Methodology, p. 38) regarding the academic challenge of balancing the unique and the general:

The biggest challenge [...] comes in analyzing the interviews gathered and presenting them as published scholarship: on the one hand, it is all too easy [...] to manipulate narrators' words to fit our own analytic categories; on the other, a commitment to rendering narrators' perspectives, to "the voices of experience," can perhaps silence the scholar's imperative to generalize, critique and theorize. (2003,108)

This thesis certainly does not overcome all the difficulties and challenges posed by the process of academic writing starting from life-story interviews. I interpret, I try to prove points, I summarize, I compare, I transform – and all of these are problematic. But I have taken the opportunity to let each narrative unfold, trying to place each quote in its context and to render some of the complexities and specificities of each story.

Moreover, the fact that this work is only one outcome among others is liberating. The interviewees can continue to work with the recordings, whether it is on a personal level of exploring their memories and history or to choose to distribute them in other ways. Other scholars and artists can also use them in their field of expertise and use different grids of analysis.

This is one of the great strengths of the CURA Life Stories Project. As academics, we have a moral responsibility and a commitment to people's words, but are never the unique holders of their 'published truth'. Discourse analysis, examination of the non-verbal through theatre, conferences and debates or the production of educational videos are examples of works that have already started using 'my' interviews. Continued reinterpretation is an inherent part of the process, and this is an excellent way to break free of the dangers of synthesis.

'Memories of Displacement'

My focus of research and support for interpretation was people's memory. The recorded DVDs sitting in a library now seem fixed and archival, but remembering a personal story and telling it is a dynamic process. Memory functions in an intricate manner, and must be seen as a singular object of research. Dipesh Chakrabarty draws upon this theme, in a chapter remarkably relevant to this thesis entitled *Memories of Displacement: The Poetry and Prejudice of Dwelling*:

Memory is a complex phenomenon that reaches far beyond what normally constitutes a historian's archives, for memory is much more than what the mind can remember or what objects can help us document about the past. It is also what we do not always consciously know that we remember until something actually, as the saying goes, jogs our memory. And there remains the question [...] of what people do not even wish to remember, the forgetting that comes to our aid in dealing with pain and unpleasantness in life. (2002, 115)

The trauma studied by Chakrabarty is the India-Pakistan partition in 1947, and the narratives of displaced people following this event. His archival source is a set of essays published in 1950 in the Bengali newspaper *Jugantar*, written by anonymous Hindu-Bengali witnesses who had recently lived through forced displacement, forced out of

what was to become East Pakistan (and then Bangladesh). Chakrabarty draws upon the question of remembering trauma. He writes:

There is a particular aspect of these memories that concerns us here: the sense of trauma and its contradictory relation to the question of the past. The narrative structure of the memory of trauma works on a principle opposite to that of any historical narrative. At the same time, however, if memory is to be that of trauma, it must place the event, the cause of trauma [...] within a past that gives a force to the victim's claim. This past must be shared by the narrator and his audience. (2002, 116-117)

He therefore draws an opposition between the memory and the history of trauma, explaining that the two are irreconcilable, as the traumatized narrator will desperately search to explain the unexplainable:

Conceived within a sense of trauma and tragedy, however, these essays maintain a completely different relation to the event called *the Partition*. Their narratives do not lead up to it; it remains fundamentally inexplicable. (2002, 117)

History seeks to explain the event; the memory of pain refuses the historical explanation and sees the event as a monstrously irrational aberration. (2002, 119)

As a historian, he describes the difficulty of working with narratives of trauma for, he explains, they are fundamentally opposing discourses. History seeks for causes and explanations, whereas such narratives cannot accept explanations for people have lived through the unbearable; the inexplicable. However, the traumatic experience of the displaced is a major historic component, especially as he seeks to depict a history of the *subaltern*.

This is where the collection of life-stories is particularly compelling, as they allow to overcome the dichotomy elaborated by Chakrabarty. The three interviewees have lived through the trauma of forced exile. The telling of this experience remains tremendously intricate, and the emotions involved are often overwhelming and strenuous. But, the act

of sitting down and telling their story as a whole, giving time for detours and silences, enables us to approach the core paradoxes and subtleties of their narratives.

Mrs. Philibert, Mr. Toussaint and Mr. Voltaire have talked about their exile about thirty years later. This has allowed them to stand with a certain distance and ability to reflect on their experiences. Moreover, given that they were encompassing it in their entire life story, and were able to make their own thought associations, they could elaborate their discourse on exile from any chosen perspective and select the place it would take in their account. The life-story interviewing format allows people to deeply address sensitive issues – as time is taken for contextualization and reflection, although in an oral manner, and is hence an approach that is more dynamic and relational than writing.

Perhaps the trauma of displacement is historically inexplicable, at least as an exhaustive sum of causes. But each interviewee has chosen to tackle the matter in depth. Each offered explicit political background illustrations, each gave detailed accounts of the brutality they endured, and each thoroughly described the experience of exile. This provides rich and dense material for historians and for any social scientist, as intricate and detailed stories of exile and belonging assertions are told, combining exterior social analysis (thanks to the time, distance and reflexivity) and deep, personal thoughts and interpretations, hence transcending Chakrabarty's dichotomy.

Poetics of Place

These narratives enlighten us about how people convey their history(ies) in the negotiation of their identity. We have seen that a pivotal element of this process is how people *place* themselves. Superimposing lived, imagined and contemporary environments and overlapping physical and symbolic places, they continuously *make* place as their representation and interpretation evolves, constantly transforming borders as they ‘overflow’. Gaston Bachelard describes mankind’s essential incompatibility with immobility as people communicate, as “man is a ‘defixed’ being:

Tardieu avait écrit:

Mais au-dedans, plus de frontières!

Ainsi, l’être spiralé, qui se désigne extérieurement comme un centre bien investi, jamais n’atteindra son centre. L’être de l’homme est un être défixé. Toute expression le défixe. Dans le règne de l’imagination, à peine une expression a été avancée, que l’être a besoin d’une autre expression, que l’être doit être l’être d’une autre expression. (1957, 193)

Therefore, along with the poetics of exile (pp. 164-174) come personal poetics of place. People carry their story in their interpretation (and their ‘practice’) of everyday life. Sometimes remembering is horrifyingly distressing, overwhelming and irrepressible. Mr. Toussaint cried in silence. Mrs. Philibert painfully held the shoulder where she had been shot forty years ago. Mr. Voltaire’s hands trembled as he passed me a photograph. Jean-Claude Charles writes:

On ne vit pas avec des histoires comme celles-là. On les traîne. On les traîne en espérant trouver un jour un océan où les larguer, s’en débarrasser, on ne trouve jamais l’océan, il n’y a pas d’océan où se soulager de sa mémoire, où enfouir l’Histoire. On meurt un jour avec tout ça. De tout ça parfois. On peut tuer aussi avec ça. (1985, 83)

But sometimes exile contributes to transform place, to relocate Haiti in the middle of Montreal, and people use their (hi)stories for the elaboration of a new city. Hybridity is

asserted and celebrated in the dynamic process of place-making. A diasporic, Haitian community is created, strongly claiming a Haitian identity, which strongly differs from being Haitian in Haiti.

Mrs. Philibert, Mr. Toussaint and Mr. Voltaire could meet on the metro. Each carries his complex memory and history, each sits with his life constantly accompanying him (or her). But right now they are on the Orange Line, looking absent-mindedly at a cell phone commercial. They get off together at Villa-Maria and walk west towards the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Park. They come for the annual Caribbean street festival, and suddenly Haiti is in the middle of the street. (Perhaps they remember that mango tree they saw in their backyard the other day.) The atmosphere could be described by Emile Ollivier:

Le quartier avait résonné de rythmes endiablés, de spectacles insolites, de liesses souveraines. Leyda gardait en mémoire l'image de toutes les couleurs de peaux se côtoyant dans une débauche de costumes bigarrés, une foule riant haut et fort, une horde de corps que des coulées de sueur font luire au soleil ; cette partie de la ville devenue soudain folle : lumières éblouissantes, sirènes, girophares, voitures et autobus immobilisés, leurs passagers pris au piège ; des gens partout, dans la rue, sur les trottoirs, aux fenêtres, dans les allées, sur le gazon. Et l'on tape sur tout ce qui peut résonner : bouteilles vides, casseroles ébréchées, vieux bidons d'essence, *steelbands* d'un jour ; une cacophonie, du bruit qui soudain devient rythmes, méringue, reggae, calypso, rabordaille, rythmes célèbres qui, après avoir fait le tour du monde, échouaient là, dans ce parc de Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, incitant à des déhanchements, des assauts de fantaisie... Et des odeurs ! Des matrones, plantes plantureuses aux yeux rouges de plusieurs veilles de laborieuses préparations... distribuent victuailles et rafraîchissements : sandwichs à l'avocat, pâtés relevés de poivre, d'ail, de piments, de clous de girofle ; des punchs exotiques, bouquets de cannelle, de basilic, de muscade, de vanille, de fruits de la passion : irruption de la Caraïbe des origines ; pulsions sauvages de la violence lascive des Tropiques, tout cela vibrait sous le regard médusé des archéo-québécois... (1991, 31-32)

The city is new, the city is multiple, the city is remembered, the city is retold; the city is only imagined but the city is very real. Every layer peeled off reveals a thousand others, any minuscule trembling of the perspective completely reorders the kaleidoscope. Italo

Calvino closes his novel *Invisible Cities* with these words:

From my words you will have reached the conclusion that the real Berenice is a temporal succession of different cities, alternately just and unjust. But what I wanted to warn you about is something else: all the future Berenices are already present in this instant, wrapped one within the other, confined, crammed, inextricable. (1974, 163)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Haitian Anti-Communist Laws promulgated on the 28th April 1969 (left column). Photocopied from the CIDIHCA archives, April 2009.

Loi fasciste du 28.4.1969

Article 1 : Sont déclarés crimes contre la sécurité de l'Etat, les activités communistes sous quelque forme que ce soit: toute profession de foi communiste, verbale ou écrite, publique ou privée; toute propagation des doctrines communistes ou anarchistes par conférences, discours, bavardages, lectures, réunions publiques ou privées, par tracts, affiches, journaux, revues, feuillets, images, livres; toutes correspondances orales ou écrites avec des associations, qu'elles soient locales, étrangères, ou avec des personnes qui se dédient à la diffusion des idées communistes ou anarchistes, de même que le fait de recevoir, collecter ou fournir des fonds destinés directement à la propagation des dites idées.

Article 2 : Seront déclarés coupables des mêmes crimes tous ceux qui à un titre quelconque (libraires, propriétaires ou gérants d'imprimeries, propriétaires, locataires de salles de spectacles publiques ou privées, locataires, loueurs de maisons de résidence, ministres de culte, missionnaires, prédicateurs, instituteurs...) auront suggéré ou facilité l'exécution, hébergé ou prêté assistance à leurs auteurs.

Article 3 : Les individus poursuivis en conformité avec les articles 1 et 2 de la présente loi seront jugés par une Cour Martiale Militaire permanente.

Article 4 : Seront punis de la peine de mort les auteurs et complices de ces crimes prévus plus haut, leurs biens meubles et immeubles seront confisqués et vendus au profit de l'Etat.

Article 5 : Tout individu surpris en flagrant délit d'activités anarchistes ou terroristes est déclaré hors-la-loi.

N.B. Malgré la "libéralisation" entreprise par le gouvernement de Jean-Claude Duvalier, cette loi n'a jamais été abrogée. Et quand on connaît les critères sur lesquels se basent les macoutes pour qualifier quelqu'un de communiste ou anarchiste, on se rend compte que ce texte "légal" laisse la porte ouverte à tous les abus et vols, commis au nom de la loi!

Extraits de la Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme du 10.12.1948

Article 2 : Chacun peut se prévaloir des tous les droits et de toutes les libertés proclamées dans la présente déclaration, sans distinction aucune, notamment de race, de couleur, de sexe, de langue, de religion, d'opinion politique ou de toute autre opinion, d'origine nationale ou sociale, de fortune, de naissance ou de toute autre situation.

Article 3 : Tout individu a droit à la vie, à la liberté et à la sûreté de sa personne.

Article 5 : Nul ne sera soumis à la torture, ni à des peines ou traitements cruels, inhumains ou dégradants.

Article 8 : Toute personne a droit à un recours effectif devant les juridictions nationales compétentes contre les actes violant les droits fondamentaux qui lui sont reconnus par la constitution ou par la loi.

Article 9 : Nul ne peut être arbitrairement arrêté, détenu ou exilé.

Article 12 : Nul ne sera l'objet d'immixtions arbitraires dans sa vie privée, sa famille, son domicile ou sa correspondance, ni d'atteintes à son honneur et à sa réputation. Toute personne a droit à la protection de la loi contre de telles immixtions ou de telles atteintes.

Article 13(2°) : Toute personne a le droit de quitter tout pays, y compris le sien, et de revenir dans son pays.

Article 19 : Tout individu a droit à la liberté d'opinion et d'expression, ce qui implique le droit de ne pas être inquiété pour ses opinions et celui de chercher, de recevoir et de répandre, sans considérations de frontières, les informations et les idées par quelque moyen d'expression que ce soit.

Article 20(1°) : Toute personne a droit à la liberté de réunion et d'association pacifiques.

Supplément
à CITE NOUVELLE
n°554
CPPP n°27233 du 26.10.53

Appendix 2: New York Times, January 24th 1973 about the kidnapping of Clinton

Knox

U.S. Envoy Is Held Hostage by Gunmen in Haiti

New York Times (1857-Current file); Jan 24, 1973; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2005)
pg. 8



Clinton E. Knox

U.S. Envoy Is Held Hostage by Gunmen in Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Wednesday, Jan. 23 (UPI)—At least two gunmen burst into the residence of United States Ambassador Clinton E. Knox late last night and seized him as a hostage in what officials called an attempt to gain freedom for several Haitian political prisoners.

"The Ambassador has not been harmed," as Embassy spokesman said. "There has been no violence."

The Embassy spokesman said that negotiations were under way in an effort to obtain Mr. Knox's release. He said that the gunmen had entered Mr. Knox's residence "some time after the end of the work

day." He said he could give no other details.

The spokesman said that the gunmen wanted the Haitian Government to free several political prisoners, but he did not identify them, or say how many he wanted freed.

Washington Speaks to Envoy

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Wednesday, Jan. 24—State Department officials spoke by telephone with Ambassador Knox at least twice in his residence in the first eight hours after he had been seized as a hostage between 6 and 6:30 P.M.

The Ambassador was described as unharmed, and "under the circumstances, well."

Officials declined to go into the specifics of the telephone conversations or to assess the status of the negotiations for the Ambassador's release.

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Appendix 3: New York Times, January 25th, 1973 about the liberation of Clinton Knox and of Haitian political prisoners (including Elizabeth Philibert)

U.S. ENVOY IN HAITI FREED BY CAPTORS
New York Times (MSFC) 1973, Jan. 25, 1973; Project Historical Newspapers, The New York Times (1851 - 2025)
Pg. 1

U.S. ENVOY IN HAITI FREED BY CAPTORS

Is Exchanged for \$70,000
and Release of 12 Held
by the Government

By The Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Jan. 24—The United States Ambassador, Clinton E. Knox, was released unharmed today after being held at gunpoint for nearly 20 hours in his residence.

Two gunmen and a woman freed the Ambassador and Consul General Ward L. Christensen in exchange for the release of 12 Haitian prisoners, safe conduct to Mexico and a ransom of \$70,000.

[A Haitian plane carrying the three kidnapers and the 12 released prisoners arrived safely in Mexico City, United Press International reported.]

In Washington, the State Department said that at one point the gunmen had demanded \$500,000 in ransom from the United States and that the reply was "flatly negative" from Secretary of State William P. Rogers.

Charles W. Bray 3d, the State Department spokesman, said he did not know where the ransom came from, but that "I know it did not come from the

Continued on Page 7, Column 1

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Appendix 4: New York Times, September 24th 1979, about the arrest of Mr. Sylvio Claude in Haiti. The arrest and expulsion of Frantz Voltaire is mentioned (second column, middle)

American Aides Voice Concern Over Arrest of Haitian Politician

By JO THOMAS Special to The New York Times
New York Times (1937-Current file); Sep 24, 1979; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2)
pp. A1B

American Aides Voice Concern Over Arrest of Haitian Politician

By JO THOMAS

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 23 — United States officials here and in Haiti have expressed concern over the Aug. 30 arrest of Sylvio Claude, founder of the Haitian Christian Democratic Party, one of the first independent political parties to operate openly in Haiti in 22 years.

Mr. Claude, who is still in custody awaiting trial on unspecified charges, was shot in the hand during a raid on his party's headquarters by Haitian police, who charged that he was trying to provoke the overthrow of the Government.

According to the State Department, United States officials, alarmed by the Government's action in silencing part of its fledgling opposition, privately told Haitian officials that they were concerned about Mr. Claude's human rights and urged that his case be given due process under Haitian law.

According to Haitian Government sources, Mr. Claude's arrest was authorized by President Jean-Claude Duvalier at the request of Gen. Roger St. Albin, chief of the general staff of the Haitian armed forces.

Duvalier Ordered Arrest

According to these sources, Mr. Claude had asked General St. Albin for protection in a letter that complained that his life had been threatened by the Volunteers for National Security, a militia usually referred to by the initials of its name in French, V.S.N. The group includes many former members of the Tonton Macoutes, the personal police of the late dictator, François Duvalier.

Mr. Claude's letter was interpreted by General St. Albin as an effort to initiate armed conflict between the military and the V.S.N. At the general's request, President Duvalier directed the chief of police to arrest Mr. Claude.

When the police went to the party head-

quarters, however, Mr. Claude jumped out a window and escaped while his supporters threw rocks at the arresting officers. In the ensuing melee, he was shot in the finger.

Mr. Claude then went to a radio station in Port-au-Prince and went on the air to report what was happening. Both he and the radio station operator, Gerard Resil, were then arrested. Mr. Resil was later released and made a public apology.

Supporters Also Arrested

According to both United States and Haitian sources, a number of Mr. Claude's supporters were also arrested. Some were later released. One, Frantz Voltaire, 31 years old, a sociology professor, was expelled from the country. Others are still in jail.

After the arrests, according to Haitian exiles in the United States, reporters for the Haitian press were called in and instructed by the Government not to report on political strife.

Georges Salomon, Haiti's Ambassador to the United States, said that he was not certain how many of those arrested were still in custody. Mr. Salomon said he believed Mr. Claude would be charged with conspiracy to commit arson in connection with an alleged plot to set fire to gasoline stations on the day Hurricane David was expected. According to Mr. Salomon, the Government learned of the alleged plot after Mr. Claude's arrest.

Mr. Claude founded his political party clandestinely last year and tried to run for office. His candidacy was declared illegal, and he was arrested and deported to Colombia. He returned to Haiti, was arrested again, got out of jail, and on July 5 publicly announced establishment of his previously secret party as the Haitian Christian Democratic Party.

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Appendix 5: CURA/ARUC 'Life-Story' Project's ethical guidelines, accessible at

Concordia's Center for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (3 pages)

CURA Life Stories Project- April 2009

Ethics Guide Summary for CURA Life Stories Project

1. Mitigating harm

The experience of revisiting the painful experiences of genocide, war and displacement may prove deeply emotional and even psychologically traumatic for participants. Researchers experiences of listening to these stories may also prove painful. The publication, reinterpretation and dissemination of participants' contributions to the project may also prove to be a difficult and upsetting experience. To address this issue, the project will arrange resources for both participants and researchers to have access to the support of social workers, counselors and psychologists (see separate guidance sheet)

In the case of refugee participants, any discrepancy between the life-story narratives provided to researchers and those given to immigration officials may have negative legal consequences. To minimize the risk of legal consequences as a result of providing oral histories, it is essential that researchers help participants make informed decisions about what they choose to disclose and about confidentiality. Similarly, project organisers will ensure that everyone working with confidential material is made fully aware of their responsibilities in this regard.

2. Obtaining informed consent

Informed consent will be obtained in consultation with participants prior to and immediately following the interviews. Interviewers will inform participants of the purpose of the interview, the procedure and participants' options regarding confidentiality and the accessibility of the recording and/or transcript. Participants will be informed of the possible uses of the interview by researchers working under the auspices of this project and that coordinators will have limited control over the use of material by unaffiliated researchers once it has been archived. Although these issues will have been discussed at the pre-interview sessions, they will be addressed in more concrete terms before the interview itself and participants will be asked to sign consent forms. Participants will be given the opportunity to modify the terms of the form after the interview is finished.

Finally it is to be noted that consent forms are right of use agreements, and there is no transfer of copyright.

3. Participants' rights and options throughout interview process

A participant may choose to end the interview at any time and may ask that the recording of the interview be destroyed. This right to discontinue will be discussed with interviewees before the start of the interview and is included on the consent form. Following the interview, participants will be given the opportunity to review the terms of their participation and make any changes to the consent agreement.

Later requests to alter the interview or the terms under which it will be made available to researchers will be dealt with on a case by case basis. The time during which an interview is being transcribed and prepared for archiving will function as an effective grace period. As a rule, no participant will be able to request confidentiality or restrict accessibility to his or her interview after the interviews have been made available to researchers; such changes will

only be considered in extraordinary circumstances. Moreover, the project's organisers will be unable to control future uses of the material by unaffiliated researchers once it has been archived. In all cases, however, project organisers will work in good faith to ensure that archived materials are used in accordance with the best interests of the participants and within the bounds of the restrictions provided by their consent agreements.

4. Researchers responsibility concerning matters of confidentiality

When participants request anonymity, their recorded interviews will be kept secure and will be made available only to the principal investigator, the chair of the relevant working group and approved archivists and transcribers that have agreed, in writing, to protect the identities of the participants involved. Project organisers will ensure that researchers are fully aware of their responsibilities to confidential/anonymous participants.

Theatre workshops and refugee youth projects: Anonymity cannot be offered for these projects, but participants can ask to have their identities protected, through pseudonyms or confidentiality, when work resulting from this research is to be published, produced or performed. When a participant asks that their contribution be made confidential, researchers will work to ensure that such a request is honoured as far as possible.

5. Accessibility of the recordings and or transcripts

Participants who provide life-stories will be given a copy of their interview either on DVD or CD and will have the option of reviewing it using facilities at the Concordia Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. Participants will have the same access to the rest of the archive as other researchers. Those participants that are involved in the theatre workshops or the refugee youth projects will have near-total access to research results in that they will help determine the products of the projects themselves.

6. "Sharing authority" as the project's central principle

This project is built on the framework "shared authority" (Frisch), and is a collaborative endeavour in every sense and all levels. At the research level, the project is built on the shared authority of the oral history narratives - a collaboration between researcher and researched). Communities are collaborators, and true partners in dialogue, as well as being subjects of the research (the project has developed by a team of 37 participants in the Montreal-area, including 15 community partners representing the city's diverse immigrant communities as well as a range of heritage, human rights, and education agencies).

Furthermore, the project will devise strategies designed to share authority beyond the interview stage, enabling interviewees and community partners to help the project interpret interviews, and to participate in research production.

The project is also an explicitly collaborative one at the level of governance; it is built on a governance structure that maintains parity between university researchers and community representatives at key levels of decision-making. The final decision-making body will be the project assembly composed of all CURA co-applicants.

7. Recruitment of interviewees

Closely related to the concept of sharing authority is the importance of recruiting the participants in a variety of different ways. Various points of entry into the collaborating different communities will be sought in order to recruit as wide a spectrum of participants as

Appendix 5 (continued)

CURA Life Stories Project- April 2009

possible. The recruitment strategies will include (1) public service announcements - radio, television, newspapers within the cultural community and beyond, (2) poster and leaflets, (3) work through community groups, (4) information tables, community meetings, etc, (5) word of mouth (or snowball sampling). The interview coordinators in each working group will reflect on the nature of recruitment.

When the prospective interviewees are contacted for arranging a pre-interview, they will be given a brief description of the interview objectives, and procedures.

Appendix 6 (continued)



HISTOIRES DE VIE MONTRÉAL
MONTRÉAL LIFE STORIES

Histoire orale - Formulaire de consentement

Consentement à participer aux *Histoires de vie des Montréalais et Montréalaises déplacé/e/s par la guerre, le génocide et d'autres violations des droits de la personne*

Par la présente, je déclare consentir à participer à un programme de recherche mené par 38 chercheur/e/s travaillant en collaboration, sous la direction de Steven High, du Département d'histoire de l'Université Concordia (tél. : 514 848-2424 poste 2413, courriel : shigh@alcor.concordia.ca).

BUT DE LA RECHERCHE :

On m'a informé/e que le but de la recherche est de recueillir et conserver les récits de vie d'individus déplacés ou autrement affectés par la guerre, le génocide ou d'autres violations des droits de la personne. Les organisateurs/organisatrices du projet souhaitent faire connaître ces récits de vie aux chercheur/e/s et au public pour faire prendre conscience du vécu des personnes qui y participent.

PROCÉDURES:

L'entrevue se déroulera chez les participant/e/s, dans des locaux mis à disposition par l'Université Concordia ou dans un autre lieu approprié. Les interviewers/intervieweuses enregistreront les récits de vie des participant/e/s sur support vidéo, audio ou par écrit. Les participant/e/s peuvent parler de n'importe quel aspect de leur vie et refuser de répondre à une question. Les entrevues durent normalement deux heures environ, mais les participant/e/s peuvent prendre tout leur temps et sont libres de s'arrêter à tout moment. Si besoin est, des entrevues supplémentaires auront lieu.

RISQUES ET AVANTAGES :

Décrire des expériences pénibles peut être dérangeant et traumatisant d'un point de vue émotionnel. Si, à un moment quelconque, vous vous sentez accablé/e par vos émotions ou que vous voulez parler à quelqu'un, référez au liste de ressources que vous avez reçu avec ce document.

CONDITIONS DE PARTICIPATION:

Veuillez passer en revue les conditions et options suivantes avec l'interviewer/intervieweuse. N'hésitez pas à lui poser des questions si ce n'est pas clair.

Je comprends que je suis libre de retirer mon consentement et interrompre ma participation à tout moment, sans conséquences négatives.

Je comprends que la transcription et/ou les enregistrements de mon entrevue seront conservés au Centre d'histoire orale et de récits numérisés de l'Université Concordia et au centre de documentation de [communauté partenaire appropriée] et que les chercheur/e/s et le public y auront accès et pourront éventuellement s'y référer dans des publications futures.

Pour ce qui est de l'identification, je choisis (veuillez cocher la case de votre choix) :

L'accès libre au public – Mon identité peut éventuellement être révélée dans toute publication ou présentation résultant de cette entrevue.

La confidentialité – Les chercheur/e/s utilisant cette entrevue peuvent éventuellement connaître mon identité, mais ils ne la divulgueront pas et ne la rendront accessible à personne; ils parleront de moi en utilisant un pseudonyme.

Histoires de vie des Montréalais déplacés par la guerre, le génocide et autres violations aux droits de la personne
Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations

1455, boul. De Maisonneuve O. Montréal (Québec) H3G 1M8 Canada www.histoiresdeviemontreal.ca