Remembering the Duvalier era:
Resistance, Exile, and Solidarity in the Life Stories of Haitian-Montrealers

Geneviève Riou

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By: Geneviève Riou

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____Chair
Dr. Elena Razlogova

_____ Examiner
Dr. Stéphane Martelly

_____ Examiner
Dr. Andrew Ivaska

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Steven High

Approved by _____
Dr. Andrew Ivaska, Graduate Program Director

_____ _____
Date Dr. Effrosyni Diamantoudi, Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

ABSTRACT

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Geneviève Riou

From 2008 to 2012, Haitian survivors in Montreal were invited to share their memories of the Duvalier dictatorship for the oral history project the "Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Violations." In their interviews, they recalled memories of life in Haiti before and during François Duvalier's rule, as well as their experiences of exile after fleeing the country. In most cases, the stories they shared revolved around violence and the hardship they experienced after forced displacement. Other times, however, they recounted stories of resilience, resistance, and hope. This thesis explores this aspect of their life stories and asks how Haitian-Montrealers challenged the history of the Duvalier dictatorship in their interviews for the Montreal Life Stories project. As first wave Haitian exiles, some of these individuals took part in resistance against the Duvalier regime in Haiti, while others became involved in political and social causes after fleeing into exile. While their journeys as political activists varied, the ways in which they told their life stories as survivors shared striking similarities. In focusing on how they recounted their experiences of activism and exile in their interviews, as well as the reasons why they recounted them as they did, this thesis offers a more complete account of how Haitian-Montrealers remembered the Duvalier era for the Montreal Life Stories project. Additionally, it also explores the transnational connections and political solidarities they forged after fleeing Haiti, revealing the ways in which their lives and experiences have since extended beyond the legacy of the Duvalier regime.

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Introduction

In his political platform for the 1957 elections, the noirist ideologue Dr. François Duvalier promised major change for the people of Haiti. If elected, he proclaimed, les noirs[1] would get their first representative government and a chance to rise above the country's ruling mulâtre elite.[2] Although Duvalier was not an experienced politician, the optimism of his campaign and his close ties with the Haitian army won him support.[3] His discourse, which promised improved living conditions and the eradication of class exploitation, resonated especially strongly with the country's peasant population.[4] According to the historian Elizabeth Abbott, however, Duvalier had "an ability to lie and break promises with stone-faced regularity." [5] This would prove to be a key factor in his long-standing rule. Duvalier never followed through with his promises after winning the election.[6] As a result, political opposition mounted against his regime. To remain in power, the Duvalier dictatorship launched a campaign of terror against political opponents, first with the help of the Haitian army and later with the secret police force, the Tonton Macoute.[7] Members of this organization worked

[1] In Haiti, racial descriptors are more nuanced than the binary "black" or "white" commonly recognized in the West. In fact, according to the 1805 constitution, all Haitians are Black regardless of skin color or country of origin. Although colour prejudice would gradually become a divisive factor in Haiti, what constitutes "black", "white" and "mulatto" is still up for debate to this day among Haitians. For more on the construction of race in Haiti, see: David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; Revised edition, 1996).

[2] Haitian mulâtre (mulatto in English), who constitute less than twenty percent of the population in Haiti, have historically maintained a dominant position in the state largely due to their lineage as descendants of the privileged bourgeoisie of the colonial period. Their powerful role in the Haitian economy was also the result of cooperative deals made between them and neo-colonial powers like the United States which, under President Johnson, financially supported the Duvalier regime. For more information, see: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990).

[3] David Nicholls, "Haiti: The Rise and Fall of Duvalierism" *Third World Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1986): 1239.

[4] Marvin Chochotte, "The History of Peasants, Tonton Makouts, and the Rise and Fall of the Duvalier Dictatorship in Haiti" PhD diss., (The University of Michigan, 2017), 71.

[5] Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2011), 148.

[6] Numerous sources confirm voter intimidation and electoral fraud by Duvalier's government. See, for example: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 136; and Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2011), 175-176.

[7] Part of the reason why Duvalier was able to consolidate power was because of the support he received from influential noirists within the Haitian army. Three months after he was sworn in as president, however, he issued a decree that restructured the army to prevent the possibility of a military coup. In 1959, the civilian militia the

together to suppress political opposition, perpetrating horrendous violence against innocent civilians. This campaign continued throughout the 1960s, causing thousands to flee abroad. Those who remained in Haiti endured hardship even after Papa Doc's death in 1971, with the rise of his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, to power. The Duvalier dynasty would not fall until 1986 after an uprising supported by anti-Duvalier activists and later a military coalition. By then, Haitian exiles could be found in dozens of cities around the world, with Montreal, Quebec, having one of the largest expatriate communities.

Twenty years later, Haitian survivors in Montreal were invited to share their memories of the Duvalier dictatorship for the oral history project the "Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Violations." Among those who were interviewed were political opponents who had actively engaged in resistance against the Duvalier regime. The stories they shared in their lengthy life history interviews included first-person accounts of some of their most difficult life experiences, both in Haiti during the dictatorship and in their lives since as exiles. In most cases, these stories revolved around violence and the hardship that followed forced displacement. Other times, however, they recounted instances of remarkable courage, solidarity, and hope. For Haitian-Montrealers, this represented an important part of the story about what happened during the Duvalier era.

This thesis uses previous work done for the Montreal Life Stories project as a jumping-off point to explore the ways in which the narratives of four Haitian-Montrealers demonstrate a re-imagined understanding of the history of the Duvalier regime beyond its burdened past.[8] Based on the insights these sources provide, this study aims to expand the

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Tonton Macoute were formed to secure Duvalier's power even more. For more information, see: Michel S. Laguerre, *The Military and Society in Haiti* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 1993.

[8] I was first introduced to this idea of moving on from Haiti's difficult history from members of the Montreal Life Stories members who write in the Group Haiti research report on "[ce desire de] dépasser cet héritage de violence." For more on this notion of moving beyond a burdened past, see Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 409–28.

project's frame of reference to explore how the life stories of Gary Klang, Élizabeth Philibert, Frantz Voltaire and Alexandra Philoctète diverge from the original research framework of violence under Duvalier. What this study will demonstrate is that within the composition of their life stories, there is a narrative that challenges the legitimacy of Duvalier's dominance over Haiti's history and its people. Among the many ways this narrative has been articulated throughout history, I argue that we can see it manifest itself visibly in the life stories of Haitian-Montrealers who mobilized against the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti and abroad as exiles. Analyzing this aspect of their life stories invites us to consider not only the historical significance of the Haitian experience during the Duvalier era, but also its symbolic representation from the perspective of those who lived it. By undertaking a comparative narrative analysis of the select life story interviews, this study finds that the shared desire to overcome the legacy of the Duvalier dictatorship was articulated through a common emphasis on resistance and solidarity interviewees used to describe their experiences before fleeing Haiti and in exile.

About the CURA life stories project

The oral history interviews examined in this thesis are those of Frantz Voltaire, Élizabeth Philibert, Alexandra Philoctète and Gary Klang, all of whom were displaced between 1956 and 1973 by the political violence inflicted by the François Duvalier regime in Haiti. Their life stories belong to a collection of 19 oral history interviews conducted between 2008 and 2012 with Haitian exiles in Montreal for the Life Stories of Montrealers oral history project at Concordia University. The project, which focused on the use of oral history both as a historical research method and pedagogy, collected the oral testimonies of nearly 500 survivors of mass violence in places like Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime, in Rwanda during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, the Holocaust in Hitler's Europe, and in Haiti

under the Duvalier's 29-year long dictatorship. Group Haiti, one of the seven focus groups of the project, focused primarily on the Duvalier period with an emphasis on how the violence committed by his regime impacted the lives and memories of individuals from Haiti now living in Montreal. The group's research focus did however expand later in the project to include the post-Duvalier era in Haiti and the experiences of Haitian youth in Montreal.

On methodology and sources

As this thesis focuses exclusively on archived oral history material, it was important that the analysis comprised a multilayered perspective that took into consideration the following: the historical and narrative aspects of the selected interviews, the context in which they were created, and the position the current study occupies within this context. To this day, secondary analysis of previously used data remains a disputed method across the humanities and social science, mainly for reasons of authenticity and credibility. Yet scholars have recently questioned these debates, arguing instead for a greater need for contextualization and reflexivity in research. In her article on revisiting interviews, oral historian Joanna Bornat makes the point that reinterpretation of oral sources comes in many guises, and that issues relating to the method often comes down to a methodological level. She suggests that when theoretical and methodological intentions are justified, secondary analysis can be a practical tool for expanding existing research to include new complimentary areas of study. In the context of oral history research, this method can prove particularly useful for exploring perspectives of the past that may have changed over time, like the meaning of memories in various contexts.[9]

[9] Joanna Bornat, "A Second Take: Revisiting Interviews with a Different Purpose" *Oral History* 31, no. 1 (2003): 52.

With this in mind, I have chosen to base my analysis off of a collection of post-interview reflections written by members of the Montreal Life Stories project. Grounding my analysis on an understanding of the sources' original context was an important component of my methodology because it helped align the direction of my research with certain aspects of the project that required further investigation. Taking my cue from several Montreal Life Stories' references to the horizon of future research on the project's collection,[10] I decided to ground my analysis in insights from written accounts by members of the project's research group "Group Haiti." These accounts detail a handful of members' shared thoughts on the project's interviews and the value they brought to the project's research interests. This includes a collection of three post-interview reflections written by Group Haiti member Dr. Stéphane Martelly and the official Group Haiti research report presented by Dr. Lise Gantheret, Dr. Ernst Jouthe, and Dr. Carolyn Fick.

Written at different points over the course of Montreal Life Stories, these sources offer an expanded view of the project from an insider perspective. Stéphane Martelly's post interview reflections, for example, offer valuable insight into the experiences and challenges she faced while conducting interviews for the project. She also details the dynamics, silences, and hesitations that surfaced during interviews, and the barriers she encountered in the research process. What particularly interests me about these accounts is the way she approached the recorded life stories in her reflections. Specifically, I am interested in her interpretations of the participants' narratives and the historical insights their perspectives offer on how Haitian-Montrealers remembered their experiences in Haiti and their journeys as exiled activists. In my opinion, these sources offer exclusive insight into the context of

[10] Carolyn Fick, Lise Gantheret and Ernst Jouthe, "Rapport de recherche présenté par l'équipe Haïti," for Projet ARUC/CURA Histoires de vie des Montréalais déplacés par la guerre, le genocide, et autres violations des droits de l'homme, June 30, 2012, 73.

Haitian emigration and merit closer attention in research beyond the Montreal Life Stories project. What follows is my own interpretation of these accounts as they relate to the focus of this study.

I begin with Stéphane Martelly's reflections on the interviews she conducted with former Haitian activists Raymond Chassagne, Monique Dauphin and Ghislaine Rey Charlier. These accounts were written shortly after their individual interviews took place and consist of initial thoughts on the content and meaning of their narrative discourse. The trait these reflections share in common is that they all emphasize the value of approaching personal narratives from the interviewee's own ideological point of view. Values — in particular those pertaining to matters of human rights and social justice — played a central role here as they related directly to the participants' lived experiences in Haiti and their engagement in oppositional movements during the Duvalier years. What I found interesting about Stéphane's reflections is the emphasis she placed on the participants' own subjectivity in forming the way they told their life stories. What was important, she stressed, was not so much the experience of significant historical events but the meaning they assigned to them that informed their narratives. In Raymond's interview, for example, the search for meaning in the aftermath of Duvalier was so powerful that it became the guiding force behind his life story narrative; a type of map that traced the man's lifelong journey towards self-emancipation and justice: "une profonde et exigeante recherche de sens et de justice sociale [était] le moteur même de son évolution et de son parcours"[11] observed Stéphane. Moments of solidarity with fellow compatriots and finding safety and freedom in exile were also common memories among the three participants, revealing the value of their individual stories as representations of historical truths.

[11] Stéphane Martelly, "Interview Reflection," interview with Raymond Chassagne, 23 June 2010.

Similar conclusions were reached in the 2012 Group Haiti research report, a document presenting the results of a study that looked at the effects of violence in the narratives of select participants interviewed for the project. Guided by the overarching research framework of Montreal Life Stories, the report focused on the macro- and micro-level impact of Duvalierist violence on the identity and memories of seven participants who fled Haiti after experiencing varying degrees of repression under the Papa Doc regime. The criteria for the selection of individuals for the study was based on a qualitative sampling approach on the degree of experience with violence expressed in the recorded interviews. This was achieved by an analysis of various narrative elements of the interviewees' life stories, such as aspects of their discourse and the thematic content of their narratives.

In their study, Lise Gantheret, Ernst Jouthe, and Carolyn Fick were able to identify characteristics and the consequences of Duvalierist violence in the general history of Haiti and in the lives of those that had experienced it first-hand. Based on their findings, the report revealed that violence experienced by selected Haitian-Montrealers had influenced numerous aspects of their lives: this included their spatial trajectories in various parts of the world, their identity construction, and their social relations. As these findings suggest, the violence perpetrated by Duvalier's dictatorial regime had unquestionably left its mark on the individual and collective identity of the Haitian community. But the reality of how these circumstances played out, across different contexts over the course of the participants' lives was far more complex. And as the authors of the study note, the articulation of the consequences of Duvalierist violence were in fact fairly nuanced in the life stories. At times, they even appeared contradictory to the study's research framework.

In their interviews, while stories of repression under Duvalier and being forcibly displaced were usually described in terms of hardship, aspects of their narratives alluded to greater themes of resilience. One aspect that repeatedly came up in their interviews was the

theme of Duvalier opposition and the participants' engagement in local activist circles during Papa Doc's reign. Moments in their interviews where they went on to discuss difficult situations they faced in Haiti, like being arrested or imprisoned, were related to their personal motivations and values against social injustice. Their narratives of displacement also pointed to the nuance of their life stories, from having to constantly move around the city to escape the surveillance and persecution of the Tontons Macoutes or to organize militant activities, to experiencing the loss of their home after fleeing and eventually finding community abroad among other Haitian exiles. These ruptures were certainly marking moments in the participants' lives and overcoming them often took the long and difficult journey of a lifetime. Beyond its personal significance, however, these lived experiences were part of a much larger story: one that spoke to the collective Haitian experience of survival and solidarity.

Reading about these life stories, I was reminded of what Alessandro Portelli once wrote about the subjectivity of oral sources and their deeper meaning as personal narratives: "oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did" and that this is indeed "a historical *fact* (that is, the fact that they believe it)."[12] In their interviews, how witnesses situated themselves within the larger history of violence in Haiti depended on a range of factors from their past, such as the experiences they lived back home and the circumstances in which these experiences were remembered, told and retold over the course of their lives. Influenced by the questions posed by the interviewer, their recollections were also a product of the present and the particular context of the Montreal Life Stories project.

[12] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?" In *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Ithaca: SUNY Press, 1991), 50.

Recognizing the subjectivity of the interview certainly brings up questions about where the project's life stories are historically situated, specifically to what extent they reflect the narrator's perspectives on the past and how much they were influenced by the project's research framework. How participants negotiated this tension in a way that met the collective narrative of the project while still staying true to their own understandings of the past is an aspect of the collection's life stories that I believe deserves a closer look. As authors of the Group Haiti report stated in their conclusion:

> Ces réflexions débouchent sur une perspective éthique et politique, qui pourrait servir d'horizon à plusieurs recherches futures. Elles ont été en partie exprimées lors d'une table ronde organisée le 10 mars 2012 à l'Université Concordia, avec la participation de plusieurs des personnes interviewées : il s'agit de la nécessité de réfléchir sur le sens et les implications de la violence, du devoir de mémoire collectif, et de la responsabilité de transmettre cette histoire aux générations futures. Indissociables de cette prise de conscience, ont été également exprimés le désir, le besoin et l'espoir de dépasser cet héritage de violence, sur les plans social, politique et culturel, pour penser autrement le développement de la société haïtienne.[13]

The ideas proposed here in the Group Haiti report offer an entry point to the areas this thesis examines. How exactly did Haitian-Montrealers express this "desire, need and hope" to overcome the legacy of the Duvalier dictatorship in their interviews? More specifically, how might we analyze and interpret this aspect of their life story narratives? Some of the key theories that I used to answer these questions maintain that a narrator's subjectivity can reveal a lot about how they tell their life story. As Lynn Abrams explains in her book *Oral History Theory:* "It is how we choose to represent events and experiences from our life in order to communicate our sense of self, who we are, to others."[14] Among many other insights from her book, I found Abrams' take on "the self" to be particularly insightful for understanding more deeply how Haitian-Montrealers made sense of their lives as survivors. Her discussion about

[13] Carolyn Fick, Lise Gantheret and Ernst Jouthe, "Rapport de recherche présenté par l'équipe Haïti," for Projet ARUC/CURA Histoires de vie des Montréalais déplacés par la guerre, le genocide, et autres violations des droits de l'homme, June 30, 2012, 71.
[14] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 41.

the search for coherence specifically, helped me understand the reasons why they constructed their narratives the way that they did, given the particularly traumatic experiences they faced in their lives. As Abrams writes in her chapter on the self, "the life story interview invites the narrator to dig deep, to reflect on the inner self, to reconcile any conflicts and then to reconstruct the self as a coherent whole in the form of a single narrative." For those featured in this study, the opportunity to share their life story was not easy, but it did offer them a chance to restore a sense of stability in the narrative of their life.

Choice of interviews and analysis

The research process began by searching the CURA Montreal Life Stories collection of archived interviews with Haitian-Montrealers at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University. The sample consisted of 19 interviews with English- and French-speaking Haitian refugees who had been displaced from their country between 1956 and 1983. The focus of my analysis was on finding commonalities in the interviewees' narratives, specifically in the way they reconstructed the story of their lives before and after fleeing Haiti and how they interpreted their experiences in the context of the interview. My inquiry mainly consisted of exploring structural elements of their narratives, such as general themes and patterns, areas of emphasis, and patterns in language use.

A major theme to emerge from my analysis was the interviewees' interpretation of exile as a form of agency. While forms of agency were expressed at various parts in their life stories, what I noticed was the prominence it gained in their narratives recounting their time abroad during the '60s and '70s. In these narratives, Gary Klang, Alexandra Philoctète, Élizabeth Philibert and Frantz Voltaire relied on their experience of overcoming repression under Duvalier to tell their story of exile. Their political engagement also informed their narratives, specifically their participation in anti-Duvalier efforts and their affiliation with

social justice movements abroad. When asked to describe their experiences of being forcibly displaced in their interviews, they often referred back to these aspects of their past, alluding to the freedom and solidarity they found abroad among fellow exiles. For them, exile had presented them the opportunity to find political freedom and safety, to reclaim the sense of individual and collective liberty they had lost in Duvalier's Haiti. By introducing them to people around the world facing similar struggles, the difficult experience of exile took on a new significance for them, becoming instead a pivot point in their lives leading to collective action and solidarity. As all four interviewees stressed in their life stories, however, going into exile did not mean severing ties with Haiti. On the contrary, it allowed them to maintain a connection to home in a new way which the exiled Haitian community played an important part.

To arrive at these findings, I focused on parts of the interviewees' life stories that revealed how they made meaning of their experiences. My analysis focused on the linguistic features of their narratives, specifically patterns in word usage. In narrative inquiry, the frequent use of particular words can be indicative of the values storytellers hold about how they wish to remember the past in the present.[15] Gary Klang, Frantz Voltaire, Alexandra Philoctète, and Élizabeth Philibert all recounted the Duvalier era using words related to the language of social justice. Words like *power*, *injustice*, *rights,* and *battle* appeared often in their accounts describing their experiences under Duvalier and their journeys through exile. The most common word invoked, however, was freedom, which carried the greatest weight for its meaning and relevance to them as Haitian political exiles. Aside from capturing the sense of liberation they felt after escaping the dictatorship, it also alluded to the freedom they fought for in their host countries, as well as their collective understanding of freedom as

[15] Marianne LeGreco, "Discourse Analysis" in *Qualitative Methodology: A Practical Guide* ed. Jane Mills and Melanie Birks (London: SAGE Publications, 2014), 74.

Haitians. For them, liberation did not mean the initial moment they left Haiti, but was rather tied to their lifelong dedication to the ideal as both Haitian militants and people of the Haitian nation.

For Frantz Voltaire and Élizabeth Philibert, the pursuit of freedom began in Haiti under Duvalier. Shortly after his election, they became involved in political activities in Port-au-Prince where they went to school. By the time they neared their late teens, both had personally experienced repression and violence, pushing them to join oppositional groups fighting against the dictatorship. They did not know each other despite their similar trajectories, which continued to evolve after they fled Haiti. Following a series of difficult setbacks, they arrived in Allende's newly democratic Chile. They recalled feeling struck by the lively climate of Santiago in their interviews, as well as the opportunities the country's capital offered to fellow exiles like themselves fleeing nearby dictatorships. From collective organizing to simply being able to circulate the streets in relative safety, freedom for them meant reclaiming a sense of place in public life.

The search for oneself in the aftermath of repression and displacement was another defining feature of the interviewees' stories of liberation. In their interviews, Gary Klang and Alexandra Philoctète explained feeling torn between worlds in their country of residence. Witnessing the charged political climate of 1960s New York and Paris while being constantly reminded of events in Haiti over the news, made understanding their conditions as exiles confusing. Their desire to belong to a community that understood their struggles as Haitians in the greater context of the era led them to join political causes, eventually introducing them to other Haitians and leftist-leaning individuals. It was through the leftist group Jeunes Haïti in New York and the community of activist students in Paris during Mai '68 that Alexandra and Gary found meaning in their experiences. Like Frantz Voltaire, Élizabeth Philibert and

many other exiled Haitians, Gary Klang and Alexandra Philoctète found freedom in the spaces of politics of the Duvalier era.

The Haitian diaspora: an overview of its history and current scholarship

The individuals in this study are part of the Haitian-Montrealer community, one of the largest Haitian communities in the world. Today, there are over 120,000 Canadians of Haitian descent living in Montreal, the third-largest group in North America after New York City and Miami.[16] When Alexandra Philoctète, Gary Klang, Élizabeth Philibert and Frantz Voltaire arrived in Montreal in the 1970s, they found a city that was home to an already well-established Haitian population. Because of new immigration laws in Canada, and Haiti's close ties to French-Canadians,[17] Haitians had been arriving steadily since the early 1960s with the rise to power of Duvalier. This first wave of Haitian exiles mostly came from the upper-middle class of Haiti and were fluent in the French language. Consequently, they integrated relatively well into Quebec society, with many of them finding steady employment and opportunities in the local literary and cultural scene.

Migration from Haiti continued well into the late 1970s, with the arrival of poorer and less educated Haitian migrants. Members of this second wave faced greater discrimination in housing and employment, despite the support of friends and family who had immigrated to Montreal a few years before. In response to ongoing discrimination, many of these exiles formed their own associations and mobilized across the city to demand social change. The

[16] Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Origin Population in Montreal, 2016* [Infographic]. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=POPC&Code1=0547&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=montreal&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All.

[17] Haiti's shared history with French-Canada dates back to the 1940s with Quebec's missionary work abroad. As the historian Sean Mills extensively shows in his book *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec*, language and race played key roles in such efforts. For more information, see: Sean Mills, "Missionaries and Paternalism" in *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 51-73.

collective Maison d'Haïti, le Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haïtiens de Montréal (CCHM), and later the Association of Haitian Taxi Drivers, were among the most active groups to participate in the decade's struggles.

The Haitian community had a profound impact not just on the political and cultural life of Montreal, but also around the world in the countries many Haitians moved to before coming to Canada. As scholars such as Micheline Labelle, Linda Green Basch and Nina Glick Schiller have pointed out,[18] Haitians in the United States, Paris, and Latin America became deeply involved in political and social causes after fleeing the Duvalier regime. While their political motivations did vary, they noted, their actions helped open important debates and shape policies around issues of race and immigration on a global scale. In addition to mobilizing against the Duvalier dictatorship, which largely defined their political struggles in 1960s New York and Montreal, Haitians became increasingly involved in reconstruction efforts in Haiti from their country of residence. These transnational activities ranged from retaining membership in local oppositional movements and sending money to their families and grassroots organizations. Their contributions abroad were so great, in fact, that in 1994 the Aristide government created a *Ministère des Haitiens vivant à l'étranger*, wrote Labelle in 1999, to acknowledge the participation of Haitians living abroad in the country's affairs.[19] More recent studies on the Haitian community abroad, such as Regine O. Jackson's *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora*, have increasingly begun to adopt this transnational lens to study the complex realities that define the broad experiences of members of the Haitian diaspora.

[18] See: Micheline Labelle and Franklin Midy, "Re-reading citizenship and the transnational practices of immigrants," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999); Nina Glick Schiller and Thomas Faist, *Migration, Development and Transnationalization: A Critical Stance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.)
[19] Micheline Labelle and Franklin Midy, "Re-reading citizenship and the transnational practices of immigrants," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): 224.

The importance of belonging to the Haitian diaspora was in fact one of the most common themes that emerged in Haitian-Montrealers' interviews. Comparatively, some interviewees were more direct in articulating this sentiment, like Frantz Voltaire and Élizabeth Philibert who often turned to the collective Haitian experience to make sense of their own lives. In their interviews, both expressed a strong sense of belonging to the Haitian diaspora and emphasized its important role in shaping their lives after fleeing Haiti. To provide an example, I have included a short excerpt from Frantz Voltaire's interview where he discusses his experiences in exile. We can see the value he places on his connection to the Haitian diaspora clearly in this excerpt, as well as the unique circumstances of his transnational life:

> J'avais vécu un peu partout et je connaissais des gens qui avaient vécu à Miami, qui avaient vécu 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.

The connections revealed in this passage and in other life stories are not coincidences. As Regine O. Jackson points out, they are part of the vast network that makes up today's Haitian diaspora. This is the focus of her book *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora,* an edited volume containing thirteen case studies on the Haitian community abroad. The case studies in the volume are thorough, ranging from ethnographic research on Haitian communities in the Caribbean and North America, including Montreal, to scholarly work on Haitian community building across borders. Her book not only brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars, but also includes references to the work of the legendary Haitian-Canadian geographer Georges Anglade. His attention to the transnational aspect of Haitian migration in

L'espace Haïtien (1975) was advanced for his time, serving as an inspiration to Jackson's book.[20]

In thinking about the big picture of my own research, the scholar who brought me the most inspiration was the late Martinican poet and thinker Édouard Glissant. Though his work is based in the Martinican context, I found a great deal of relevance to my thesis topic within his writing, particularly in his ideas on the Caribbean's global presence. In his book *Poetics of Relation*, for instance, Glissant challenges Western theorizations of space and nationality by arguing against the idea that the Caribbean region is a fixed geographical entity. He contends that the prevalence of displacement throughout its history – from slavery to the forces of neo-colonialism – has established a new kind of connection among the region and its peoples, wherever they may be in the world.[21] To illustrate this, Glissant introduces the concept of "Relation" to highlight the significance of encounters between different people, places, and non-human forces in the development of the Caribbean's past and present. The concept acts as a starting point for conceptualizing the underlying forces responsible for the evolution of cultures from the Caribbean that now make up a prosperous community of people with different origins across the world.

These ideas felt particularly relevant to me in the initial stages of my research when I was attempting to find the deeper meaning I was hoping to get across in this thesis. The individuals I chose to write about all expressed a profound connection they felt with Haiti in their interviews. But they also revealed unique connections they shared with each other, be it through their life story narratives or in meeting points in their trajectories. Though "Relation" for Glissant is an idea much larger than a diaspora way of thinking, his elaboration of the

[20] Regine O. Jackson, Introduction to *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora* ed. Regine O. Jackson (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.
[21] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997) 33-34.

concept as "a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open"[22] inspired me to weave the life stories into their own kind of relational network within this thesis. You will see this most clearly in the way this thesis is structured and how the life stories are put in relation with each other through personal ties or transnational linkages. While at the same time giving each life story its own space, I found this approach to be the most complimentary for framing the interviewees' lived experiences.

I also found that my approach differed from that of other scholars who have written about these same life stories. In his master's thesis "Telling Lives, Making Place: The Narratives of Three Haitian Refugees in Montreal," for instance, graduate student Jonathan Roux takes a more straightforward approach by analysing the life stories of Élizabeth Philibert and Frantz Voltaire within their own separate chapters. His reasoning behind this was that in treating each account as a separate story, readers could get a better "sense of each particular discourse construction."[23] I believe this approach to oral history does have merit but does not go far enough in uncovering what is hidden beneath the top layer of the interviewees' narratives. In listening to their conversation collectively, I found that Élizabeth Philibert and Frantz Voltaire had not only created their own narratives with Jonathan in their respective interviews, but they had also created ones with each other through the Montreal Life Stories project as well as with themselves over the course of their lifetime. These dynamic relationships between the form and content of the interview and its interaction with the past, present, and future is what makes oral histories so invaluable, which is why I tried to bring the voices of the interviewees into a conversation with each other in this thesis.

[22] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* 34.
[23] Jonathan Roux, "Telling Lives, Making Place: The Narratives of Three Haitian Refugees in Montreal," MA diss., (Concordia University, 2009), iii.

My thesis also builds off from the work of the Canadian historian Sean Mills, namely his book *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec*. Published in 2016, the book draws on archival documents and Group Haiti's collection of interviews to examine the important role Haitian political figures played in shaping the province since the 1960s. More broadly, it also explores Haiti's shared history with Quebec, starting with the French-Canadian Catholic missions during the 1940s to the waves of Haitian migration to the province in the wake of the Duvalier regime. It is a book that offers a fresh perspective on the history of Haitians in Quebec but unfortunately does not do justice to the life stories themselves. Rather than engaging with them collectively, Mills peppers the collection's life stories at the beginning of his chapters, placing them in service to his reconstruction of the past. What his study loses, then, is not just the centrality of the oral histories but that of the interviewees themselves. It is my hope that through this thesis I can offer a more nuanced and imaginative reading of Haitian-Montrealers' life stories in the way that I have come to understand them over the course of this research project.

While it was in graduate school that I was first introduced to Group Haiti's collection of oral histories, my interest in the history of the Haitian diaspora traces back to my time as an undergraduate student at the University of Winnipeg. In an honours-level course I took on Borderlands history, I remember learning about the history of Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic for the first time. I read books like Maria Cristina Fumagalli's *On the Edge: Writing the Border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic* and wrote research papers on Afro-Caribbean artists like Firelei Báez who live in America. Their work touches on many of the same themes that inspired me to move to Montreal and learn more from the local Haitian community's history through the Montreal Life Stories collection. Going into this project, however, I knew that I would face my own limitations as a White settler doing research on the Haitian community. There were many times when I doubted whether this was

a subject I should even write about, regardless of the amount of research that I did. What I learned from writing this thesis, however, was that like any other research, my work will always be biased and that denying this will only add to the silence. I also learned that by grounding my thesis in the work of Haitian scholars, whose work resonate with the voices of those who are featured in this study, my commitment to doing justice to the stories and experiences of Haitian-Montrealers could not only be expressed but recognized. What follows is my interpretation of the life stories of Alexandra Philoctète, Gary Klang, Frantz Voltaire and Élizabeth Philibert – four Haitian-Montrealers who dedicated their lives to the freedom and defence of their community.

In Chapter 1, I begin with the life story of Alexandra Philoctète, a former political activist who left Haiti the year before François Duvalier's election. Very few Haitians fled the country during this time, but as her life story reveals, the context that brought Duvalier to power was in fact a long time coming. Focusing on key moments in her life, I begin by tracing her experiences in Haiti during this period of political instability to New York City where she settled as a young Haitian exile. Her recollections of this period testify to the complex journey of many Haitians who, like her, turned to political activism for guidance during the Duvalier era. I then move to the life stories of Gary Klang, Frantz Voltaire and Élizabeth Philibert who witnessed the rise to power of Duvalier. Focusing on their lives before and after fleeing Haiti, I examine their personal accounts of navigating state repression under Duvalier and their pursuit of freedom which would lead them into exile. From these accounts, I demonstrate that interviewees stressed their capacity to resist the abuse of power of the regime, challenging the possibility of their victimization. In Chapter 2 I take an extended view, following their transnational journeys in exile before moving to Montreal. I explore their involvement in political movements in countries like the United States, France, Chile, and Cuba, and the ways that these experiences shaped their lives abroad. In focusing on

this aspect of their life stories, I consider more closely the empowering role their political engagements played in informing their narratives of exile. Similar to Chapter 1, I examine how their past experiences stressed their sense of agency in their life story and their capacity to affect change in their lives.

Chapter 1

"Et puis on milite":
Stories of political resistance and exile during the Duvalier dictatorship

In 1956, Alexandra Philoctète fled Haiti. The government, which was still under General Paul Magloire, was on the verge of collapse and there was concern of rising political violence in the country. It had been like this for some time, she recalled in 2011. After the coup d'état in 1950, the situation in her hometown grew unstable, she remembered. "Il y'avait des soldats partout partout partout. Il disait aux gens de pas sortir dans les rues."[24] Four years later, after Hurricane Hazel, President Magloire was caught in a scandal over alleged misuse of relief funds.[25] This turned the tide against his government, further deepening the country's social and political divide. "À un moment donné, mes parents trouvaient que la situation politique en Haïti commençait à aller mal" Alexandra explained. She fled her home at the age of fourteen and arrived in New York City two weeks before the fall of the government. She was the second of her family to flee Haiti, following her mother who left the year prior.

Philoctète revealed very few details about what the experience was like fleeing the country in her interview. There was her life in Haiti and then the United States but nothing in between; two chapters of her life separated by exile. Looking back on her first years in New York, she spoke often about this feeling of dislocation and being caught in-between worlds. When she arrived in 1956, she had to quickly learn how to navigate this liminal position at home and in her surroundings. She was constantly reminded of Haiti, while at the same time being confronted by the world around her.

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[24] Alexandra Philoctète, interviewed by Grace Sanders, 30 March and 6 April 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.
[25] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 143.

She was living in the Bronx when the first wave of Haitian political refugees began arriving in New York. Most of them had been persecuted under the Duvalier regime and knew her mother through political ties. They came to visit her home often, usually on Sundays for dinner where they safely discussed politics. She remembered these years clearly, describing the lively ambiance of these gatherings and how she felt overhearing their conversations. She felt conflicted hearing about the political turbulence back home, she remembered. Not only did it bring back hard memories of the reality she tried to escape, but it also reminded her that much of her family remained in Haiti – her father and sister who remained until 1958 when violence broke out earlier that year. The tension between these two poles of her life made her first years in New York difficult. As she described in her oral history interview, it was like a constant tug-and-pull:

> Ma mère était très ouverte, on avait quand même des amis que ma mère avait connus, des Américains, en Haïti […] Le dimanche chez nous c'était toujours des réfugiés haïtiens, y'en avaient y'en avaient, ils mangeaient pi ils parlaient d'Haïti, parlaient politiquement… J'écoutais […] C'était comme un tiraillement, j'voulais être américaine.[26]

Attending these gatherings, however, she found herself distracted by other matters. What was happening in Haiti felt distant, and there were important changes taking place around her: "C'était un rêve. C'était pas réaliste. Ça ne m'intéressait pas trop parce que y'avait des choses qui se passait aux États-Unis aussi."[27] She remembered reading the news, trying to make sense of the civil rights movement. Coming across the story of the Little Rock Nine was particularly marking, as she too was a young Black student in America. Bridging this story to her own lived experiences, she talked about her high school years and how during this time

[26] Alexandra Philoctète, interviewed by Grace Sanders, 30 March and 6 April 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.
[27] Alexandra Philoctète, Montreal Life Stories, 2011.

she was set apart from the rest of her classmates. It was clear she felt an affinity to these nine young African Americans in Little Rock and their story of navigating racial discrimination:

> "On était en tout quatre noirs dans cette école. D'ailleurs même dans la ville j'voyais jamais de noirs. C'est là où j'ai fait toute la fin de mon primaire parce que j'avais laissé Haïti… Ça été de belles années là aussi. Ces trois filles là on est devenu très très amies. Mais c'est sûr que ça été un choc aussi."[28]

Recalling these memories, Philoctète pointed to the nuance of her lived experiences in her interview. For her, what defined her experiences was not just the challenges she faced as a young Haitian exile but also other moments where she found hope and solidarity. Bringing awareness to these aspects of her past was not her way of "seeing the bright side" of her story of exile. It was about making space for the narrative she had built around it; for putting her "voice" at the center of history.

How do the life stories of Haitian-Montrealers complicate the history of the Duvalier era? Alexandra Philoctète's life story provides a starting point for this discussion, and for exploring the experiences and memories Haitian exiles like herself have in common. Like many of her generation, she began her life in political activism after experiencing hardship and injustice in her life. Her search for safety and belonging in New York was challenging, leading her to explore the struggle for racial justice of the civil rights era. After graduating high school, she became active in Jeune Haïti, a group of young Haitian revolutionaries in New York planning the overthrow of the Duvalier regime. She took part in the group's activities until 1964, when thirteen of the group's members were killed after their unsuccessful invasion in Haiti. The death of her friends took a long time for her to accept, eventually leading her to move to Montreal in the 1970s. She continued her fight for social justice and equality there alongside many other Haitians.

[28] Alexandra Philoctète, Montreal Life Stories, 2011.

Philoctète's path to activism is a determining force in her life story, shaping her experiences and how she remembered her life in her interview. Memories of her time in New York, even those recalling difficult moments, constantly return to this narrative of her working towards overcoming injustice. This desire to break away from one-dimensional narratives of a "damaged past" resonates with the words of Eve Tuck, who in "Suspending Damage," writes: "desire is involved with the not yet and, at times, the not anymore... Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and future."[29] Tuck's words point to important aspects of memory and how people make sense of them in the present. By focusing on the ways people articulate their desires about how their stories should be remembered, she suggests, we can begin to better understand the "complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" and "complicate our understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance."[30] Alexandra Philoctète's life story is a powerful example of this complexity, serving as a reference point for exploring more deeply this discussion.

Drawing on the remaining life story interviews, this chapter now turns to the lives and memories of Gary Klang, Frantz Voltaire and Élizabeth Philibert – three Haitian-Montrealers who were still in Haiti when Duvalier rose to power. Although different in many respects, their life stories recount similar tales of navigating state repression and seeking justice in exile. By focusing on this aspect of their life stories, this chapter aims to bring understanding into the unique circumstances that led these individuals to pursue political activism before and after fleeing Haiti. More specifically, it hopes to establish the main components of the narrative around which they constructed their experiences and memories of their lives as survivors of the Duvalier regime. Serving as a precursor to Chapter 2, which

[29] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 417.
[30] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage," 420.

explores in detail how all Gary Klang, Frantz Voltaire, Élizabeth Philibert and Alexandra Philoctète found the meaning of life in exile through political activism, what follows is a glimpse into the beginning of this journey: their pursuit of freedom and justice in Haiti during the Duvalier era.

Port-au-Prince, 1959.

Gary Klang pulls up to the Supreme Court Palace in a police vehicle. He had just been arrested by a Tonton Macoute while on his way to run errands. He had not committed any crime, but in the eyes of the Haitian police his arrest needed no justification. Under Duvalier, anyone was an enemy of the state until proven otherwise.[31] Looking back on this incident in 2011, Klang was still in disbelief over what he had experienced that year. Although he stood firmly against the regime, he explained that he had never dared to criticize it publicly like students and activists did at the time. He kept his opinions to himself – mostly in writing – and within his immediate circles. After all, he knew the severity of the repercussions. Not only had he seen people murdered by members of the Tonton Macoute, but he had also lost some of his closest friends:

> J'étais totalement contre. Ah ouais, je crois que j'affichais déjà pas mal mon opinion. Mais il fallait pas trop l'afficher parce qu'on vous tuait. On vous tuait pour sans raison d'ailleurs… J'ai vu mourir des amis et j'ai vue mourir des gens que je connaissais.[32]

After his arrest, he was taken to a prison in Port-au-Prince where he was locked up in a cell with people who had committed violent crimes. The living conditions in prison were deplorable, and yet the inmates he spoke to were frank and open about their experiences. Some even offered him gifts to make him feel welcome and seen. It was an absurd contrast to

[31] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 173.
[32] Gary Klang, interviewed by Witnise Estimable, 5 July 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

witness acts of kindness from the most villainized people in society, he said in his interview. Whatever crimes they had committed, it did not compare to the brutality of the regime: "Je tombe dans Kafka.[33] On va m'enfermer en prison des criminels […] Là, vous arrivez avec ces assassins… Parce qu'ils m'ont raconté ce qu'ils ont fait. Ils ont été tellement aimable avec moi. J'me souviens un type qui m'a offert un V8…"[34] Weeks went by before he was released from prison for questioning. Brought before a military tribunal, he was tried by members of the Macoute army including those responsible for his arrest. According to his account, he was freed later that day after convincing a Macoute he was wrongly convicted, using humour to agitate his persecutors. Maintaining composure in the face of violence, he argued, is what got him out of the situation alive: "J'ai pas perdu mon sang froid heureusement et j'ai gardé mon esprit ironique. Ça sauve hein, l'esprit ironique?"[35]

Shortly after his release from prison, he began planning his departure. Nearly killed by the regime, it was clear that staying in Haiti was no longer an option. After graduating high school in 1959, he applied to the Literature program at Sorbonne University in Paris. He left later that year after being accepted, which had been a dream of his as a young writer. He might have even gone to Paris in any case but given his experiences under Duvalier he understood it as going into exile.

One of the points Gary Klang emphasizes often in his account of his arrest is how absurd life was under the Duvalier dictatorship. It's a point he makes throughout his interview but elaborates on it here in more detail. For him, what he experienced in Haiti said a lot about the true nature of the Duvalier dictatorship. His arrest and time in prison, for instance, were

[33] This is a reference to *The Trial*, a novel written by Franz Kafka in 1914. Humour and existential absurdity are utilized in this book to capture the irrationality of totalitarian rule.
[34] Gary Klang, interviewed by Witnise Estimable, 5 July 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.
[35] Gary Klang, Montreal Life Stories, 2011.

clear manifestations of the regime's abuse of power and incompetency. The Tontons Macoutes were given free rein to suppress dissent however they pleased. This illogical side of the Duvalier regime, with its unrestrained use of violence and complete disregard of human rights, played an important role in Klang's narrative. As the following passage from his interview makes clear, pointing to the absurdity of the dictatorship allowed him to put in question the validity of "Duvalier" himself. This was his way of standing up against the legacy of the dictatorship in his life story:

Figure 1. Gary Klang being interviewed by Witnise Estimable on 5 July 2011. The interview recording is open for consultation at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS).

> Cette histoire vous montre ce que c'est une dictature qui est à la fois cruelle et bête… Cruelle et totalement stupide. Et c'est ça que Duvalier a introduit dans le pays. Ces choses absurdes, ces choses cruelles, ces cruautés sans raisons c'est ce mal qui s'installait partout. Ces gens qui avaient des revanches à prendre sur tout le monde… Pour peu que le type avec un p'tit fond sadique et que maintenant il pouvait faire tout ce qu'il voulait, ce p'tit fond sortait et pi il devenait un monstre parce que moi j'ai vue des gens que je ne reconnais plus […] En quelques mois ce n'était plus les mêmes personnes. On leur avait donnés le droit de tuer… de faire n'importe quoi.[36]

Klang's stance against the Duvalier regime is well captured in this passage. You can even see the influence of certain aspects of his past inform his narrative, particularly his reference to major themes in absurdist fiction – a popular genre of literature he likely read while studying in Paris. But one of the most interesting points raised here, and in several other moments in his interview, is the sense of social justice he imparts in recounting his story. Rather than distancing himself from the past, he confronts the injustice of the Duvalier regime head on in his recollections. He points to the dangers of totalitarian thought and puts it into question,

[36] Gary Klang, Montreal Life Stories, 2011.

asking boldly: “Comment croire que votre pensée, est la seule pensée au monde qu’on va imposer à tout un peuple ?”[37] He wrestles with this question during his interview, searching for a way to understand the weight of injustice he experienced under Duvalier.

He begins to find answers as he remembers his time in Paris after fleeing Haiti. The first years there were difficult, but he came across other Haitians in the city quickly. They were also fleeing the dictatorship and understood the daily challenges he was facing: “[C’était] très difficile. Pas parce que les choses [en France] étaient différentes, parce qu’on vivait… dans l’esprit on était en Haïti. Comprenez ? Les parents étaient là, on savait pas qu’est-ce qui pourrait arriver c’est qu’on avait toujours toujours des inquiétudes.”[38] Living in fear was also a defining feature of the times, he explained, which saw the rise of the Cold War and the climate of paranoia that accompanied it. It was madness living in Paris as an exile, he remembered. There was always conflict between duvaliéristes et anti-duvaliéristes, and with the threat of being passed as a communist people had to be extremely careful.

In May ’68, however, he felt a shift in the atmosphere. There was new hope that in a world of war and injustice, young people did have the power to bring about lasting change. Student-led protests against the Vietnam War and the inequalities of capitalism spread like wildfire throughout Paris that year. On the night of the May 10 demonstrations, police violence broke out in the Latin Quarter where students had put up barricades. Klang was at his apartment on rue Gay-Lussac that night, helping students who had been wounded in the attack. He was proud to have lived through this moment. After experiencing the terror of the Duvalier dictatorship, he explained, the utopia of May ’68 brought him solidarity and hope: “Ça été une grande violence, mais en même temps une immense fraternité.” Looking back on what he learned that year, he said: “J’ai compris que cette vie dont laquelle nous vivions était

[37] Gary Klang, Montreal Life Stories, 2011.
[38] Gary Klang, Montreal Life Stories, 2011.

dans un sens totalement fausse." The walls lifted during May '68, he said, and it revealed something he had not felt before: freedom, "une liberté qu'on avait jamais connues."[39]

In addressing the link between memory and identity, oral historian Alistair Thomson writes: "Memories are 'significant pasts' that we compose to make a more comfortable sense of our life over time, and in which past and current identities are brought more into line."[40] This reveals a lot about how Gary Klang and Alexandra Philoctète remembered their past and what this means in the context of their life story. How did they see themselves as survivors of political violence and forced displacement? How did they "compose" the story of their lives? A lot of the memories they shared in their interviews revolved around the challenges they faced in Haiti and in their lives as exiles. The stories Gary Klang told always followed the same redemptive arc of overcoming adversity, which gained new significance with his experience of exile. This was also the case for Alexandra Philoctète, who in her interview never spoke of herself as a victim of forced displacement. Instead, she shifted the focus to what she overcame in exile and the person she became from these experiences. Like the life story of Gary Klang, a narrative of her life unfolded over the course of her interview about her quest for self-discovery and justice in exile.

As one of the primary structural elements of a life story,[41] coherence plays an important role in how we make sense of our past. When we remember, we draw upon aspects of our past that allow us to articulate our memories in a comprehensible way for us and others to understand.[42] This is the focus of much of Lynn Abrams' work on the act of "composure" in her book *Oral History Theory*. In the book, she defines composure as "the striving on the part of the interviewee for a version of the self that sits comfortably within the social world

[39] Gary Klang, Montreal Life Stories, 2011.
[40] Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1994), 10.
[41] Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14.
[42] Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 118.

[…]."[43] By focusing on the shape and content of a life story, she argues, we can begin to uncover the ways in which people define themselves from their memories and past experiences. The intimate connection between memory and identity is accentuated even more when we consider the life stories of survivors of the Duvalier regime, and how their memories can be disrupted by the difficult experiences they lived through in the past. As Steven High notes, the search for composure has the potential to regenerate new meaning in the lives of survivors, whose personal experiences may have made it difficult for them to fit their memories into conventional narratives.[44] In any case, Lynn Abrams reminds us that a life story told is in some way, always a construct of broader cultural understandings.[45] The section that follows takes this into consideration, exploring how two Haitian-Montrealers made meaning of their life stories from their experiences in anti-Duvalier activism.

Port-au-Prince, 1961

Frantz Voltaire was in Port-au-Prince when violence under Duvalier intensified: "C'était une époque extrêmement difficile" he recalled, "c'était une époque où moi j'ai eu des engagements très jeune. Vers l'âge de 15, 16 ans en politique."[46] Even though he was only 16, it was quite common for young people to become politically active at the time. After all, many had been engaged in the struggle against oppression for most of their lives. For Voltaire, this path towards activism began at the collège Saint-Martial, an all-boys Catholic school he was attending in downtown Port-au-Prince. In his first years there, he was introduced to political ideas from his teachers who opposed the dictatorship. As members of a progressive clergy,

[43] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 59.
[44] Steven High, "Regenerative Possibilities," in *Oral History at the Crossroads* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 142.
[45] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 66.
[46] Frantz Voltaire, interviewed by Jonathan Roux, 4 December 2008, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

many of them held strong political views and resented the regime's repression of civil rights. Their approach to education moved along similar lines and reflected their commitment to providing an inclusive and accessible learning environment for students in a period of intense political repression. Through their work, extracurricular activities like the school newspaper, discussion groups and debate clubs were developed and became an important source of information and dialogue between students and faculty. Not only were students like Frantz Voltaire able to stay informed about the political climate of the country, they were also given the chance to defy the authority of Duvalier's regime. As Voltaire explained in his life story, these spaces of debate created openings for students to become involved in political resistance:

> 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 […] Au moment où le régime étendait ses tentacules, il y avait des espaces de libertés.[47]

In 1964, the college was forced to suspend these activities from fear of political repression. Teachers working at the school were detained for their involvement in political opposition and deported from the country, marking a tragic end to a hopeful period for Voltaire. This pushed him to seek out new possibilities elsewhere with his classmates. They started meeting regularly outside of school, usually during their lunch breaks, to discuss the political situation in Haiti. One place they went often, and where other students and intellectuals in Port-au-Prince frequently met, was *La Patisserie aux Enfants*: a little teahouse owned by an old Haitian woman from the South. Tucked away in the corners of a popular neighbourhood, the place was lively and always full of people discussing politics. "C'était un milieu un petit peu hétéroclite" Voltaire explained, referring to its somewhat isolated nature from the dictatorship.

[47] Frantz Voltaire, Montreal Life Stories, 2008.

Over time, Voltaire became more involved in political activities. After becoming close with young Marxists in the city, he started taking part in their discussions and meeting their leading members. He became implicated in anti-Duvalier activities soon after, undertaking small actions here and there against the regime: "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."[48] Given the particularly dangerous context, these efforts remained largely underground and were, for the most part, relatively ineffective. As Voltaire explained, the political climate in Haiti had simply become too oppressive for active resistance. People were starting to go missing and there was real fear that this would also happen to them:

> La dictature allait durer peut-être plus longtemps qu'on ne le pensait. II 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 […] 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.[49]

Around this time, people in Frantz Voltaire's life started fleeing the country. It was as if at one point the urge to escape suddenly became urgent, he said in his interview. Pressured by the eventual disappearance of his close friends and the general state of terror under Duvalier, he decided to leave the country too, arriving in Paris in 1967. He provided no detail on how he had come to leave the country, or what the experience was like in his life story. As his interviewer Jonathan Roux noted in his own master's thesis, the way he recounted this event resembled an account of the Haitian experience, "placing himself as one amongst many others, talking about social realities in Haiti but not giving personal details."[50]

[48] Frantz Voltaire, Montreal Life Stories, 2008.
[49] Frantz Voltaire, Montreal Life Stories, 2008.
[50] Jonathan Roux, "Telling Lives, Making Place: The Narratives of Three Haitian Refugees in Montreal," MA diss., (Concordia University, 2009), 134.

Élizabeth Philibert was still in Haiti at the time of Frantz's exile. She was exploring her own political consciousness in Port-au-Prince, where she moved from Pétion-Ville for school. She was nineteen years old and going through a difficult period in her life, following the unexpected passing of her father earlier that year. After losing him, she was forced to abandon her studies to help her mother raise the family. It was like losing part of her childhood, she said while choking back tears in the first minute of her interview. She continued to speak of her father and the rupture his death caused in her life, leading her to the story of her political activism during the Duvalier dictatorship. She often spoke of her personal experiences in this chronological manner, jumping forward to marking chapters in her life and merging them into the greater historical context.

She found clarity when she joined the Parti Populaire de Libération Nationale (PPLN), a communist group that had been banned under the dictatorship. A friend had urged her to join, she explained, who at the time was working as a union leader for the party. She quickly became an active member herself, taking part in the group's efforts against the regime. Having been around since 1953, the PPLN was by then an already well-established political party. They had several publications, which Philibert helped distribute during her time there. As was the case for all political opponents of the regime, she had to keep a low profile to avoid being targeted by the Tonton Macoute. "She put herself in an enormous risk" Sean Mills wrote in *A Place in the Sun*, "but in doing this work, she also came alive…"[51]
She fell in love with one of the leaders of the political party, a young man named Arnold Devilmé. As two people committed to the greater anti-Duvalier struggle, the couple grew close very quickly. At the time, Élizabeth Philibert was living with other PPLN members in a home in Piéton-Ville. She would often spend time there with Devilmé, where they also held

[51] Sean Mills, *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 109.

occasional group meetings. During those years, she explained, the situation was becoming increasingly difficult. Members of the group were being arrested or disappearing, and strange people were appearing near her home: "…ça commencé à être très dur pour nous parce qu'on voyait dans le quartier des choses pas normales." She continued: "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… À chaque fois qu'il fumait on voyait le bout de la cigarette."[52]

On May 2, 1969, the house was violently raided by the Macoute army. Élizabeth Philibert was pregnant at the time, attending a training session with Arnold Devilmé and other PPLN members: "On a commencé à tirer, et j'étais la première à être blessé" she remembered. "J'ai eu une balle à 1'épaule et je suis tombée."[53] The head of the secret police – a man named Lori Smet – took her while the army shot the remaining people inside. Those who were killed included Arnold Devilmé and her best friend Yannick Rigaud. She was taken to the Dessalines Barracks, a well-known prison where political opponents were kept. Prisoners who were ill or had been injured were sent to the Military Hospital located in the same complex.[54] Before receiving treatment for her wound, however, Élizabeth was taken in for questioning. Telling the story in her interview, she described in detail the abuse she was subjected to during the session. "Et puis, un type a commencé à … j'ai encore les traces… Ce type, il m'a vraiment battue, effectivement comme on lui a demandé de faire…"[55] Once the session was over, she was taken to a room upon further questioning. That same officer followed her to the

[52] Élizabeth Philibert, interviewed by Jonathan Roux and Frantz Voltaire, 17 February 2009 and 20 April 2009, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.
[53] Élizabeth Philibert, Montreal Life Stories, 2009.
[54] Carolyn Fick, Lise Gantheret and Ernst Jouthe, "Rapport de recherche présenté par l'équipe Haïti," for Projet ARUC/CURA Histoires de vie des Montréalais déplacés par la guerre, le genocide, et autres violations des droits de l'homme, June 30, 2012, 51.
[55] Élizabeth Philibert, interviewed by Jonathan Roux and Frantz Voltaire, 17 February 2009 and 20 April 2009, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

room and quietly said to her in Kreyòl: “Madame pardonne-moi. Je vois que vous êtes enceinte. C’est mon travail, j’y suis pour rien.”

Élizabeth Philibert was incarcerated as a political prisoner at the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince. She shared a cell with five other women who, unlike her, were being held as common law prisoners. After giving birth to her daughter, her cellmates took advantage of their status to help her, smuggling medicinal plants and food they received from visitors. The birth had been extremely difficult for Philibert, and she was struggling to care for her child in prison: *“*On voulait rien lui donner” she explained. “…elle ne pouvait pas avoir la même nourriture que nous autres, et quelle nourriture qu'on nous donnait !” As her daughter’s health worsened, a former high-ranked officer named Carmen Caillard witnessed the situation and intervened. Although an inmate herself, she used her high rank and status to get a doctor to check on the baby. She was fed and vaccinated shortly after, and her baby was freed from prison at the end of 1971. Philibert would not be freed for another two years. “Il fallait avoir beaucoup de courage en tant que femme” she said as she recounted her time in prison in her interview. It was clear that solidarity between her and female inmates had played a crucial role in her and her daughter’s survival.

Given the personal and painful nature of this experience, it is hardly surprising that Élizabeth Philibert remembered her time in prison in such detail. “It was important for her to be thorough, and to record as few errors as possible” her interviewer Jonathan Roux noted, including naming “those who made

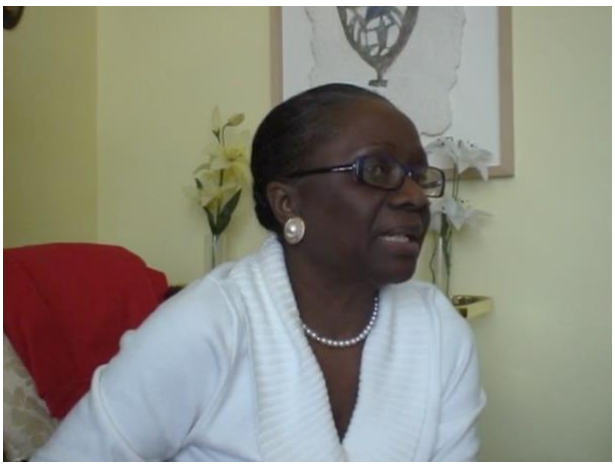

Figure 2. Élizabeth Philibert being interviewed by Frantz Voltaire on 17 February 2009. The interview recording is open for consultation at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS).

her suffer."[56] As is often the case in oral testimony, the naming of perpetrators can be a powerful act of reclamation and recognition of past injustice. Philibert made such intentions clear throughout her interview, often by pointing directly to those who committed violence or to the greater injustice that was the Duvalier dictatorship.

Recounting the abuse she endured in prison, for example, she acknowledged that what happened to her was not personal but rather part of a larger system. This is particularly evident in the part where she mentions the apology she received from her abuser, after what he did which was "what he was told to do." Philibert would pronounce Duvalier himself as the main author of violence later in her interview, however, while she reflected on her time in prison. At one point she asked herself: "Qui était cet homme ? Je me pose la question parce qu'il pouvait jouer avec nous comme il voulait. Quand je dis « nous » je dis le peuple haïtien hein. Comme il voulait."[57] It was clear that she understood her experiences as part of the larger history of Haiti under the dictatorship. The commitment she demonstrated across her interview to addressing the scale of Duvalier's actions is an undeniable reflection of her politics as a former anti-Duvalier activist and survivor of the regime.

Like Élizabeth Philibert, Frantz Voltaire exhibited a strong identification with the collective struggle against the Duvalier dictatorship. In fact, he often paid more attention to this side of Haiti's history than on his own personal experiences. As his interviewer Jonathan Roux noted in 2009, when it came to answering personal questions, Voltaire gravitated to more general responses anchored in his historical or intellectual interests. On several occasions, he even had to be reminded to bring the story back to his personal experiences after having gone on about the "the Haitian experience" under Duvalier and its greater

[56] Jonathan Roux, "Telling Lives, Making Place: The Narratives of Three Haitian Refugees in Montreal," MA diss., (Concordia University, 2009), 64.
[57] Élizabeth Philibert, interviewed by Jonathan Roux and Frantz Voltaire, 17 February 2009 and 20 April 2009, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

historical significance. Because he held an important role in the Montreal Life Stories project, Roux explained, "the power structure was therefore completely different" and that instead of trying to empower Frantz to tell his story, he often found himself "trying to guide the discourse back to his individual trajectory."[58]

As scholars in memory studies have noted, individual memories are shaped by social interactions and tend to reflect common beliefs and understandings about the past. Geoffrey Cubitt, for example, makes the point in his book *History and Memory* that memories are not only "embodied" traces of the past, but they are also "embedded" in cultural and social contexts: "If [memory] is a constituent of what we consider to be our individuality" he writes, "it is also a vital part of our social equipment – part of what enables us to position ourselves in relation to others, and to function effectively in social settings."[59] In oral history interviews, one of the ways in which this is manifested is in the narrative a person constructs from and uses to make sense of their lived experiences. Though distinct in form, the narrative can reveal a great deal of insight into a person's relationship to the personal and collective, the past and present. Writing about the narrative voice in *Oral History at the Crossroads*, for instance, Steven High explains that people tend to speak in wider terms when they think of their lived experiences as being a part of a larger collective experience. This was the case for many anti-Duvalier activists who participated in the Montreal Life Stories project and who often spoke of a collective "we" in their interviews. As High noted: "the fact that so many anti-Duvalier activists told their stories as part of a wider historical chronology reflected their sense of centrality at this historical juncture. These were moments when individual lives were confronted by history."[60] What this implies, is that while the experiences of each Haitian

[58] Jonathan Roux, "Telling Lives, Making Place," 119.
[59] Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 119.
[60] Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 162.

activist were personal, the patterns in their narratives – be it the repetition of certain words and experiences or the use of a collective viewpoint – played a role in conveying meaning.

The collective Haitian experience under Duvalier spoke to Frantz Voltaire's lived experiences on a personal level, which partly explains the reason why he gave them such crucial significance in his interview. But it should be noted that his affiliation with Montreal Life Stories also played a part, affecting not just his interview with Jonathan Roux but also his narrative. Going into his interview, Voltaire already had a good understanding of the project's research objectives. He had worked closely with Group Haiti members during the project's initial stages, given his expertise in Haitian history and being a Haitian exile himself.[61] After conducting the first few interviews with Haitian survivors, he switched roles and became an interviewee for the project. Occasionally, however, his authoritative role re-emerged, using the interview to offer analyses of the social realities under Duvalier and ultimately advancing the project's research goals. Whether this occurred consciously or not is not important for understanding his narrative. Like Élizabeth Philibert, Frantz Voltaire connected his personal stories to the collective history of Haiti because he identified strongly with what it represented. Although Haiti's history had been marked by the Duvalier dictatorship, the struggle and resistance that emerged in response was just as an important part of its story that for him that was worth telling. His life story offered an opportunity to share this side of history he personally experienced with other young Haitian activists during the Duvalier regime.

If remembering is an active process, then oral testimony is the means by which this process is carried out and where meaning of the past is created.[62] We can see this play out

[61] Frantz Voltaire holds an important role in Montreal's academic circle and Haitian community. He is a writer, filmmaker, director, producer, and international public speaker as well as the founder and director of "CIDIHCA," the first and only international archive on Haitian, Caribbean and Afro-Canadian history.
[62] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?" in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Ithaca: SUNY Press, 1991), page 52.

particularly in Élizabeth Philibert's interview, which was conducted by Frantz Voltaire himself back in 2009. They already knew each other before the interview and shared similar experiences, which made the interviewing process more comfortable and collaborative. In fact, working collaboratively proved to be their interview's greatest advantage. Because of their shared experiences, moments of connection revealed themselves at times unexpectedly in their discussions. This happened at a point in the interview when Philibert was recalling her time in Chile after her release from prison. She arrived there in 1973, the same year of the Chilean coup d'état against President Salvador Allende. Voltaire had been living there for a few years already, working towards a bachelor's degree at the Universidad de Chili and taking part in student right-wing mobilization. After the coup d'état of September 11, 1973, however, he found himself on the wrong side of the country's political divide and was arrested by military officials. Many of Philibert's compatriots, including Frantz Voltaire himself, were taken to the National Stadium where they were tortured. In the excerpt that follows, we are taken to this moment in their conversation when both realize just how closely their memories aligned with their experiences from that year. The solidarity they find with one another here is undeniable, proving just how strong old political ties remained despite the rupture of exile:

F.V.: Mais vous n'êtes pas resté longtemps [au Chili] parce que…?
E.P.: On n'est pas resté parce que le groupe s'était scindé aussi.
F.V.: Le groupe s'est scindé parce que moi, je sais… j'étais au Chili à l'époque…
E.P. Oui oui ! Le groupe s'est scindé et y'a eu un groupe qui voulait [aller] à Cuba, l'autre en Europe. Et moi j'ai fait partie du groupe qui voulait aller à Cuba donc… Ceux qui sont restés pour aller en Europe ont connu… [looks at Frantz Voltaire for the answer]
[Together] La prison Chilienne… Le Stade!
F.V.: Oui ils ont connu la même prison Chilienne avec moi.

In their respective interviews, political solidarity played a central role in their narratives. This was made clear in their stories of political activism and the prominence they gave them in their interviews. For Voltaire, the solidarity he found among students and left-wing activists

played an important part in his recollections of his time in Haiti. He often emphasized this aspect of his life in his interview and used it to open broader discussions about the Haitian experience under Duvalier. Philibert also articulated a strong identification with the story of her political activism and the possibilities it offered her in the years after her father's passing. Similar to Alexandra Philoctète's story, she turned to the PPLN for guidance during a difficult time in her personal life and in her country. "Vous savez qu'à cet âge on est toujours en quête de changement" she explained in her interview. "D'autant plus qu'on entrait dans cette période: le duvaliérisme, qui n'était pas vraiment de tout repos..."[63] She held on to this theme of solidarity throughout her interview, using it to describe her experiences in prison and in her life in exile.

Drawing on their stories of political activism, Frantz Voltaire and Élizabeth Philibert gave their life story a direction, which allowed them to find coherence in their understanding of their past. This was made possible by their sharing of memories, which they did both as individuals and as part of a team in the interview. Going back to the "regenerative possibilities" of oral history,[64] it becomes clear that through their sharing of stories, Voltaire and Philibert found in each other mutual understanding which allowed for further reflexivity. In this process, new stories about their political resistance emerged, adding meaning to their life stories. In *Beyond Healing*, historian Sean Field writes: "Oral history will neither heal nor cure but offers subtle support to interviewees' efforts to recompose their sense of self and regenerate agency."[65] We have seen how Gary Klang, Alexandra Philoctète, Frantz Voltaire and Élizabeth Philibert recounted their time in Haiti under Duvalier. But what remains to be

[63] Élizabeth Philibert, interviewed by Jonathan Roux and Frantz Voltaire, 17 February 2009 and 20 April 2009, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.
[64] Steven High, "Regenerative Possibilities," in *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 142.
[65] Sean Field, "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration," Oral History 34, 1 (2006): 31.

explored in greater detail is the continuation of their narrative in exile. The next chapter provides an opening into this discussion and into their stories of how they found freedom in exile.

Chapter 2

"Les espaces de libertés": Transnational activism and the pursuit of freedom in exile

On January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as the thirty-fifth President of the United States. In his presidential address, he spoke of the need for Americans to rethink their role as citizens, famously challenging them to actively contribute to the public good of their country. His words, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country" resonated with millions, including Alexandra Philoctète who was living in New York at the time. As a young Haitian woman, however, Kennedy's words rang differently for her. "Je crois qu'en prononçant ce beau discours" she said in 2018, "le président ne pensait pas aux milliers de Noirs victimes du racisme aux États-Unis. Il avait vite oublié que ces personnes-là avaient donné beaucoup de leur force de travail au pays, en ne recevant que très peu en retour."[66]

The injustice of racism in the United States was a sensitive topic for Philoctète, and one that she felt on a personal level. As she explained in her interview, it was "la cause noire américaine" that inspired her political activism and the reason she found community in exile. This is a marking aspect of her life story, which this chapter seeks to explore in the following section. Starting with her political activism in New York, the chapter will follow the story of her involvement with the revolutionary group Jeune Haiti and reflect on how the political organization shaped her experiences of exile. Focusing on this aspect of her narrative will open up a broader discussion about the importance of political activism in her life story and that of other Haitian-Montrealers. Guided by the question: "How do Haitian-Montrealers make meaning of their experiences of exile?" this chapter draws on the life story narratives of

[66] Alexandra Philoctète, "Rencontre avec l'autre : Tranches de vie d'Alexandra Philoctète," 10. Mapping the Life Stories of Exiles, Geomedia Lab at Concordia University, 2017. Montreal Canada.

former activists Alexandra Philoctète, Gary Klang, Élizabeth Philibert and Frantz Voltaire to examine how they succeeded in building a coherent life after being displaced from Haiti; one of many aspects of their life stories that challenges the history of the Duvalier regime.

New York, 1960

Alexandra Philoctète's political story begins in New York City during the early 1960s when she met members of Jeune Haiti, which back then was called le Mouvement Révolutionnaire Haïtien. She was trying to connect with Haitians across the city, she explained in her interview, in the hopes of finding a sense of community in New York: "… il fallait que j'me trouve une identité. Et c'est en fréquentant ce milieu-là que j'ai rencontré des jeunes hommes Haïtiens qui étaient dans un mouvement révolutionnaire."[67] She joined Jeune Haiti shortly after, becoming one of its first active female members. Only ten women comprised the group of thirty and were assigned to peripheral jobs within the male-dominated occupation. "Nous autres on nous faisait faire du travail clérical. On nous donnait un travail de deuxième rôle en fait." Despite the gendered limitations, she kept attending meetings and remained involved until the group's dissolution in 1964. What was more important was the sense of community she felt being a part of this group.

It had been a hard couple of years for her, making the change to life in America. In her interview, she talked about the shift in social class her family experienced upon their arrival, and this new dimension of racism she had never experienced. "Le racisme américain que j'ai vu dans mon enfance il faut le vivre pour le croire" she said looking back. "C'était quasiment l'Afrique du Sud." Her personal experience and the highly publicised civil rights movement

[67] Alexandra Philoctète, interviewed by Grace Sanders, 30 March and 6 April 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

Figure 3. Alexandra Philoctète with Gérald (Géto) Brièrre, leader of the group Jeune Haïti on 72nd Street and Broadway. Source: Rencontre avec l'autre Tranches de vie d'Alexandra Philoctète

encouraged her to explore her political consciousness in the world in which she lived. She would have to face the dilemma of how to navigate this world being a young Haitian woman, which brought her into conflict with her family during this time. From their perspective, being Haitian immigrants meant they did not belong to the United States. They fled Haiti as a last resort and even believed in the idea of returning home someday. It was for this reason that they usually kept to themselves within the local Haitian community, leaving little space for Philoctète to explore her complex reality. It was not until she joined Jeune Haiti that she would find meaning in her experiences and even learn about herself in a new way. As she explained in 2011, the group made her feel a sense of belonging for the first time in her life. They encouraged her to speak French and Creole, two languages she was taught to unlearn in America. "Comment l'expliquer c'est comme on t'apporte quelque chose que tu n'as pas connue" she said in her interview. They affirmed her Haitian identity in ways she had not been able to before, while at the same time encouraging her passion for social justice.

Jeune Haiti was a group of young Haitian exiles in New York during the 1960s. Their central office was located at the Hotel, now called Le Michelangelo located on West 51st Street.[68] They held meetings there regularly where they discussed plans to overthrow the Duvalier dictatorship. Philoctète attended these meetings from time to time but started going less often after finding a job at a telephone company. She revealed very little about Jeune Haiti's political work in her interview, but outside sources claim the group shared ties with

[68] Alexandra Philoctète, "Rencontre avec l'autre : Tranches de vie d'Alexandra Philoctète," 11. Mapping the Life Stories of Exiles, Geomedia Lab at Concordia University, 2017. Montreal Canada.

the U.S. government. As Carl Lindskoog wrote in his 2013 PhD dissertation, "As part of its program of opposition to Duvalier, the US State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency worked to identify, maintain contact with, and support leaders of the anti-Duvalier opposition in exile."[69] This is confirmed in an official government document from 1964, which states that the Kennedy Administration offered financial assistance to Duvalier opponents living in the Unites States.[70] Jeune Haiti was receiving funding from the Kennedy Administration Alexandra Philoctète wrote in "Rencontre avec L'autre" in 2017, but these plans were scraped under President Johnson[71]: "Le président Johnson, remplaçant de Kennedy, ne voudra plus financer le groupe, donc plus question de garder un bureau à l'Hôtel Taft."[72] When François Duvalier declared himself President for Life in 1964, members of Jeune Haiti started planning their escape. The CIA tried to dissuade them from going ahead with the invasion that would ultimately cost their lives.[73]

Philoctète likely knew about Jeune Haiti's plan to overthrow the regime before it happened. But the news still came as a shock once it made its way to her in New York. It was one thing to hear about the atrocities committed by the Duvalier regime over the news, she said in her interview, but an entirely different experience to see them cover the death of her friends. "On était loin de penser qu'il connaîtrait une fin aussi horrible en Haïti," she wrote in

[69] Carl Lindskoog, "Refugees and Resistance: International Activism for Grassroots Democracy and Human Rights in New York, Miami, and Haiti, 1957 to 1994," PhD diss., (The City University of New York, 2013), 18.
[70] Lindskoog, "Refugees and Resistance," 17.
[71] Unlike the Kennedy administration's aggressive anti-dictatorship policy, Johnson adhered to a policy of not "rocking the boat" during his presidency and directed his attention more on the American involvement in Vietnam. This would change with the Nixon administration who would resume economic aid to Haiti in 1969, thus supporting the Duvalier regime. For more information, see: Carl Lindskoog, "Refugees and Resistance: International Activism for Grassroots Democracy and Human Rights in New York, Miami, and Haiti, 1957 to 1994," PhD diss., (The City University of New York, 2013).
[72] Alexandra Philoctète, "Rencontre avec l'autre : Tranches de vie d'Alexandra Philoctète," 12. Mapping the Life Stories of Exiles, Geomedia Lab at Concordia University, 2017. Montreal Canada.
[73] Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 190.

2017.[74] She provided few details about the invasion in her interview, but a passage in Dr. Brenda Gayle Plummer's book *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* confirms the significance of the event: "Duvalier faced his gravest military challenge in the summer of 1964 when rebels staged an amphibious landing in the southwest peninsula and worked their way into the hills" Plummer wrote in 1992.[75] During the three months they were in Haiti, Jeune Haiti succeeded in fighting ten engagements and even took down a military plane, she noted, at the same time Hurricane Cleo was passing through. Papa Doc's forces faced difficulty in fighting the revolutionary group, and there is reason to believe that Duvalier himself considered them a real threat.[76] The army eventually killed eleven of Jeune Haiti's members and captured the remaining two, however. Louis Drouin and Marcel Numa, the men who were captured, were brought to Port-au-Prince where they were publicly executed. "Ils seront tous tués par les troupes de Duvalier et, en guise de représailles, les familles de ceux d'entre eux qui étaient originaires de Jérémie seront torturées et massacrées."[77]

The death of Alexandra Philoctète's friends in 1964 marked the hardest period of her life. "It felt like the world was falling apart" she said in her interview. "There were a lot of things going around in my head."[78] She fell into a deep depression and spent the next year staying at her parent's home. Her father encouraged her to return to school during this time, but it was difficult for her to accept such tremendous loss. "Je dis pas qu'ils étaient parfaits

[74] Alexandra Philoctète, "Rencontre avec l'autre : Tranches de vie d'Alexandra Philoctète," 12. Mapping the Life Stories of Exiles, Geomedia Lab at Concordia University, 2017. Montreal Canada.
[75] Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 190.
[76] Carl Lindskoog, "Refugees and Resistance: International Activism for Grassroots Democracy and Human Rights in New York, Miami, and Haiti, 1957 to 1994," PhD diss., (The City University of New York), 22.
[77] Alexandra Philoctète, "Rencontre avec l'autre : Tranches de vie d'Alexandra Philoctète," 12. Mapping the Life Stories of Exiles, Geomedia Lab at Concordia University, 2017. Montreal Canada.
[78] Alexandra Philoctète, interviewed by Grace Sanders, 30 March and 6 April 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada (translated from French).

mais ils m'ont donné un sens d'appartenance, un sens d'identité" she said looking back. "Ça laisse quelque chose parce que y'a aussi tout le contexte américain de l'époque. C'est un contexte où voilà le noir américain, lui-même il cherche une identité…" What was happening around the country was also weighing on her. The death of Malcom X in 1965 was a particularly difficult event and made clear to her that racial change was not coming anytime soon. She recalled watching news coverage of his assassination and the broader civil rights movement at the time, describing how shocked she was by the violence Black people were facing across the country: "C'était la lutte, et puis j'avais comme l'impression y'avait pas de place pour moi." With the recent death of her friends, the grim prospect of living in the United States was enough to prompt her to leave in 1967. She left under the impression that "y'avait comme un manque de liberté." She settled in Montreal but would return to New York to visit her family from time to time.

Figure 4. Alexandra Philoctète being interviewed by Grace Sanders on 30 March 2011. The interview recording is open for consultation at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS).

"For Alexandra, like many in the first wave of Haitian exiles to Montreal, moving to the city was a conscious choice" writes Sean Mills in *A Place in the Sun.*[79] This is an important fact to consider when reading into her narrative and the pivotal role her sense of agency plays in it. In diaspora studies and related fields, scholars have called attention to this in their work, making the point that agency still remains an often overlooked aspect of experiences of exile: popular understandings tend to portray migrants as victims of tragic

[79] Sean Mills, *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 95.

circumstances rather than as actors of social change.[80] In *Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice*, Suzan Ilcan notes that these understandings have also given rise to misinformed narratives of migration as a discrete, one-way event. In the case of Syrian refugees, she argued: "movements from Syria to nearby host states [were] not linear, but highly fluid political processes that involve[d] migrant demands to move and leave."[81] Their exile was also driven by their desire for "inclusion or recognition in host states." Alexandra Philoctète's experiences relate closely to the struggles presented in Ilcan's work. On the one hand, Sean Mills makes the point that her decision to leave the United States was in many ways impacted by circumstances, such as "shifts in immigration regulations" and "the relatively privileged background from which she came."[82] But moving to Canada was also a choice she made on her own, which in her interview she made clear was in pursuit of personal safety and political freedom.

Leaving New York was not easy for Philoctète, but in Canada there was hope and a chance to rebuild her life. "ll va sans dire que je suis consciente que New York me manquera énormément" she wrote in "Rencontre avec L'autre."" D'ailleurs, l'une des grandes qualités que le pays de Lincoln me permettra de développer, ce sera la débrouillardise."[83] She reached out to her sister who was living in Montreal and made the decision to move to the city in 1967. The next few years would mark a period of self-discovery and new beginnings in her life. She did not experience any problems with immigration or finding employment and was fortunate enough to find a place with her sister in a shared apartment. But a year into her

[80] See, for example, Glick Schiller, Nina, and Thomas Faist, eds. *Migration, Development and Transnationalization: A Critical Stance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010) and Marcel Paret, and Shannon Gleeson, "Precarity and Agency Through a Migration Lens," *Citizenship Studies* no. 20 (2016): 277–294.
[81] Suzan Ilcan, "Fleeing Syria: Border Crossing and Struggles for Migrant Justice" in *Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice*, ed. Nancy Cook and David Butz (New York: Routledge, 2018), 63.
[82] Sean Mills, *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 95.
[83] Alexandra Philoctète, "Rencontre avec l'autre : Tranches de vie d'Alexandra Philoctète," 16. Mapping the Life Stories of Exiles, Geomedia Lab at Concordia University, 2017. Montreal Canada.

move, she started making frequent trips to New York to visit her parents. They had recently bought a house in Queens, which upon arriving there made her realize she still clung to life in America: "Je me rendais compte que je n'arrivais pas totalement à m'en décrocher. En fait, j'étais un peu dépaysée." She took advantage of the proximity of the U.S.-Canada border and spent the next two years going back and forth visiting her family. "Je ne connaissais pas de québécois" she explained, "d'où ce besoin de retour dans un milieu familier."

In her interview, Alexandra Philoctète admitted to having trouble leaving the United States and settling in Montreal. Pointing to the struggles she overcame in exile, however, she recognized her ability to face challenges and even shape the world in which she lived. Like many Haitian-Montrealers, her experiences of exile played a central role in her narrative and were often emphasized to show her capacity for resistance.[84] Authors of the 2012 Group Haiti research report have noted this aspect of many Haitian-Montrealer narratives, arguing that: "Admittedly, this way of life, marked by instability and insecurity […] enabled [Haitian-Montrealers] to develop their capacity for resistance, their resilience and their fighting spirit."[85] Alexandra Philoctète continued to take part in political movements after settling in Montreal. In the early 1970s, she enrolled at Concordia University (then Sir George Williams) and participated in the Anglo-Caribbean student protests following the historic Sir George Williams affair. She also protested the Vietnam War and the assassination of Salvador Allende in 1973 before joining the Woman's Liberation Movement in Québec. She would

[84] The observations made here are drawn from oral historian Lynn Abrams's theories of the self from her book *Oral History Theory.* In her chapter on the self, she notes that in the life story interview there is always a "tension between the power of culture and the power of individual agency" and that as oral historians, "We must assume that respondents are able to actively engage with discourses, rejecting some, accepting others" in their narratives. Recalling her experiences of exile, Alexandra repeatedly demonstrated this negotiation of the hardship she experienced adapting to her new surroundings after fleeing Haiti. Drawing on publicly available discourses of resistance and self-development — discourses derived from or influenced by her political activism — she was able to redefine her experiences into a story of determination, self-discovery and becoming in exile.
[85] Carolyn Fick, Lise Gantheret and Ernst Jouthe, "Rapport de recherche présenté par l'équipe Haïti," for Projet ARUC/CURA Histoires de vie des Montréalais déplacés par la guerre, le genocide, et autres violations des droits de l'homme, June 30, 2012, 71 (translated from French).

spend the next decade devoting her life to human rights causes, notably through the feminist organization for Haitian women in Montreal, the "Point de ralliement des femmes d'origine haïtienne."

A key theme that emerges from Alexandra Philoctète's narrative is the role political activism played in shaping her experiences of exile. There are many aspects of Gary Klang's interview that also point to this theme, specifically the empowering role his political participation during May '68 played in informing his narrative. Like Philoctète, Klang's experiences as a political activist highlighted his sense of agency in his life story. He drew on the liberating experience of May '68 to help convey this in his interview, pointing to the opportunity it offered him and many young people to affect change and experience "freedom like never before." By focusing on his political involvement abroad, exile became a liberating experience for him and one in which he played a central role. He would come back to this idea several times in his interview to tackle bigger questions surrounding the condition of being a Haitian exile.

Paris, 1968.

The protests of May '68 were in many ways a transnational experience. In the months of May and June 1968, students from around the world came together throughout France to demand radical change in society. With their professors and many prominent intellectuals, they occupied classrooms and organized massive demonstrations, calling an end to the injustices of the Vietnam War, capitalism and traditional institutions. Workers from across the country also took part in the movement. In the first month alone, millions of factory workers walked off the job in protest of low wages and poor working conditions. They organized general strikes and nationwide factory occupations, bringing the economy of France briefly to a halt. Their actions were met with fierce repression from the police which drew attention around the

world. “Ça été un moment extraordinaire, je dis pas seulement pour Paris ou pour nous mais pour le monde en général” said Gary Klang in his interview.[86]

May ’68 also presented an opportunity for international students to find their place in the growing world of exiles. For many, the protests represented a moment within a much larger period of turbulence: the anti-war protests spoke to the violence and repression simultaneously taking place in their home countries, while those against imperialism revealed the causes of their migration and marginalization in French society. “Paris became something of a showcase for international insurgency,” writes Daniel Gordon in *May 68: Rethinking France’s Revolution.*[87] Focusing on migrant activism during May ’68, Gordon provides many examples of how students from Senegal, Mauritania and the Caribbean took advantage of the precarious situation in France to demand change in their everyday lives. They were “among those who used the exceptional circumstances to draw attention to their grievances”[88] he writes. And demand “public recognition of the conditions in which they lived.”[89] While some of their demands revolved around issues of equality and access to social services, the majority were concerned with change abroad in their home countries. Their actions during May ’68 revealed just some of the ways that they navigated and challenged the political and social forces that worked against them.

Political affiliations during May ’68 were not always clear cut, however. Because of the broad nature of its protests, many who took part in May ’68 participated in various forms of opposition, and as a result often found themselves at the crossroads between different social

[86] Gary Klang, interviewed by Witnise Estimable, 5 July 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.
[87] Daniel Gordon, “Reaching Out to Immigrants in May 68: Specific or Universal Appeals?” In *May 68: Rethinking France’s Last Revolution* ed. Julian Jackson, Anna-Louise Milne, James S Williams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 98.
[88] Gordon, “Reaching Out to Immigrants in May 68,” 93.
[89] Gordon, “Reaching Out to Immigrants in May 68,” 105.

groups. As Julie Pagis reveals in her book *May '68: Shaping Political Generations*, it was not uncommon for workers to join students in demonstrations because of their shared discontent over the state of the country's economy and political direction.[90] She also adds that students from abroad often "found themselves doubly displaced" in the events of that year,[91] which they showed by participating in various demonstrations and fighting for different causes. These observations from Julie Pagis' work on the oral history of May '68 are certainly helpful for understanding the different forms of protests that emerged in France that year. But perhaps more importantly, they also give a sense of what drove people to participate in the event and what it meant to them at the time.

For Gary Klang, May '68 was very much an idealistic collective experience. Using the collective "we" in his interview, he would describe his participation in the movement by saying "we all wanted to change the world, we wanted to change life…And we believed we could do it too."[92] He took part in student uprisings that year including the famous protest of May 10 "la nuit des barricades." It was one of the most violent protests Paris would see that year, but it was also "an immense dream" for him to participate in it. When he spoke of that night— as he often did of May '68 — he described a time of coming together and immense solidarity. He would not provide any detail about his affiliation with political groups in his interview, however, nor would he describe the actual causes he fought for that year. There are many reasons that could explain this, but perhaps the simplest answer is that these details were simply not important to his narrative.[93]

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[90] Julie Pagis, *May '68: Shaping Political Generations* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 111.
[91] Pagis, *May '68,* 54.
[92] Gary Klang, interviewed by Witnise Estimable, 5 July 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada (translated from French).
[93] In *Oral History Theory,* Lynn Abrams reminds us that in the life story interview, one of the ways a narrator creates "an ordered account" from the "disordered material or experience" is by "inserting stories into the interview, dramatizing important points in the narrative and incorporating into […] account[s] more extended passages which relate [the narrator's] thoughts and feelings" (117). In the case of Gary Klang's life story, his account of his time in Paris was less concerned with the particularities of the May '68 protests because of the

But there are elements of his narrative that do indicate that his activism was personal. As discussed in Chapter 1, like many of his friends Klang struggled with coming to terms with his exile after moving to Paris. He did not go into much detail about how long this difficult period would last, but he did make clear the weight it had on his everyday life: "On apprenait qu'un ami était mort mais c'est tout le temps. Ça n'arrêtait pas donc on vivait…mentalement en Haïti, vraiment." It appears the solidarity he found in the local Haitian community did help him find a sense of comfort during this time. But what really shifted his life were the protests of May '68, or more specifically the freedom that came from being a part of the movement. As he described it himself, "Mai '68 était le rêve absolu. Vraiment le rêve, l'utopie dans les rues." The word "dream" or "utopia" can mean different things here. But as far as his narrative is concerned, his use of the words could imply the unbelievable sense of freedom he experienced during the protests. Having come from a country under a brutal dictatorship, to exercise freedom of expression and to participate in public affairs without fearing of being persecuted was especially important in his case. And while he does not mention this specifically in his interview, the following excerpt does support the belief that just like other students from abroad, his involvement in the protests was very much tied to his personal experiences:

> Mais c'était un rêve immense… Je suis heureux d'avoir vécu… Et en même temps j'avais connu l'horreur aussi. J'ai connu les deux. Mes enfants n'ont pas connu tout ça, la plupart des jeunes actuellement n'ont pas connu ce genre de choses. Bon, c'est peut-être mieux en un sens…. Mais moi j'préfère avoir connu ce que j'ai connu c'est-à-dire que j'ai tout vécu toutes les émotions possibles. La terreur Duvalieriste, la tragédie, la mort, la souffrance, l'absurde. Mai '68 le rêve absolu.

For an event as surreal as May '68, the meaning it held for Gary Klang was clear: freedom was possible not only through collective action, but also through his own capacity to affect

narrative he had built around the event: what mattered less were details like his political affiliation, and more on how he had come to find freedom in exile.

change. When he discussed his move to Canada in 1973 later in his interview, he emphasized this sense of agency to describe his experiences, insisting that despite the challenges it presented, the move was made on his own terms. For example, when he was given the opportunity to teach in the United States before moving to Canada, he explained he had to refuse for reasons of personal safety: "Je ne regretterai jamais le choix que j'ai fait" he said about choosing Montreal instead. "Et je ne regretterai surtout pas de ne pas aller aux États-Unis. Vivre dans un pays qui veux pas donné de sécurité sociale aux gens ? Non je veux pas vivre dans un pays comme ça."

He expressed in his interview that Canada also offered something that few other countries in the world could: a connection to Haiti. As a Francophone writer, living in a country where French was commonly spoken was important, he explained, but it was the idea of being closer to family that mattered more. "Mes parents vivaient encore [en Haïti] et les parents de ma femme en France… à Montréal on est à peu près au milieu." Many Haitian-Montrealers said much of the same thing in their interviews. Élizabeth Philibert, for example, described her move to Montreal in 1979 like a "natural passage" from Haiti.[94] She even went as far as saying that in coming to Quebec, she would find herself in "Haiti's courtyard." As was the case for many Haitian-Montrealers, however, adapting to life in Canada would not be easy even for those who knew the right people or language. "Tout ce qui concerne l'emploi et tout ça été moi seule. Personne ne m'a aidé" Gary Klang explained. "J'ai fait mon chemin seul ça pas été facile."

Klang would eventually find his place in Montreal, first through the University of Montreal where he started teaching in 1973, and within the local Haitian literary scene. He

[94] Élizabeth Philibert, interviewed by Jonathan Roux and Frantz Voltaire, 17 February 2009 and 20 April 2009, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

would go on to write more than a dozen novels and poetry books over the decades, several of which looked into the freeing experience exile.[95]

Port-au-Prince, 1973

On January 23, 1973, around the time Gary Klang was planning his move to Canada, an unusual event took place in Haiti. The US Ambassador Clinton E. Knox, and friend of newly elected President Jean-Claude, was kidnapped outside of his office in Port-au-Prince. He was abducted by three opponents of the Duvalier regime and taken to a nearby residence where he was held at gunpoint. The kidnappers demanded the following: the release of all 31 of their comrades from prison and a way out of the country. After negotiating with the Duvalier administration, they secured a deal the next day. The US Ambassador was released by his captors unharmed after paying a ransom of $70,000 US dollars.[96] At the same time, twelve political prisoners were released in Port-au-Prince, which included Élizabeth Philibert. "On nous a fait monter la voiture" she recalled in 2011. "Et je voyais qu'on filait directement pour l'aéroport."[97] When she boarded the aircraft, she saw the three familiar figures waiting for her and understood that she was now free.

Philibert and her comrades were flown out to exile in Mexico. But despite the promising circumstances, she recalled feeling unsettled during her flight. "Je ne suis pas de nature pessimiste parce que je suis une femme vraiment qui aime la vie" she said. "Mais des fois tu vois une certaine situation et tu te dis: Hmm ! Ça sent mauvais." When she landed in Mexico, she was confronted by a swath of journalists and photographers. Apparently, it was only then that she found out about the kidnapping. She was taken to an undisclosed location

[95] See, for example, Gary Klang, *Ex-île* (Montréal: Mémoire d'encrier), 1988.
[96] "U.S. Envoy in Haiti Freed by Captors," *New York Times,* January 25, 1973.
[97] Élizabeth Philibert, interviewed by Jonathan Roux and Frantz Voltaire, 17 February 2009 and 20 April 2009, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

from the airport and remembered thinking how long it took to get there. “Je me suis dit : Ah ! Écoutez, nous allons encore dans une autre prison, et effectivement on est allé directement dans une prison.” Fortunately, she only stayed for about a month in prison before being transferred to Chile. Arriving in Santiago, she was finally liberated.

Élizabeth Philibert’s first day in the capital was spent walking around her neighborhood, doing some sightseeing and making purchases in local shops. Activities that may seem mundane to some, this was freedom for her after sixteen years of living under Duvalier. As she made clear in her interview, Chile was for her synonym of freedom and happiness: “Arrivés au Chili c'est là vraiment que j'ai ressenti ce qu'on appelle la li-bé-ra-tion, la LIBERTÉ, là, là, c'était vraiment quelque chose, c'était le bonheur.” For the first time in her life, she was able to walk around the streets in peace without fear of violence. She was even able to make her own purchases, which she explained was significant having spent years of her life in prison: “C’est un apprentissage, parce qu'après quatre ans tu as oublié ce geste d'aller acheter, d'aller chez des amis.” At the time, Chile was still under the leadership of President Salvador Allende, which was a good time to be in her position. She was welcomed in the country with open arms, as did many other exiles fleeing dictatorships, and even received some money from the government. She expressed gratitude for the support she received from Allende that year, even if her stay in Chile was short.

Frantz Voltaire was in Santiago at the same time as Philibert. Though they did not know it yet, their lives had become intertwined and would remain across the spaces of their exile. He arrived in the capital a few years earlier in 1967, after a rather tumultuous journey through South America. Before that, he was in Paris and Montreal. He only stayed there for a few weeks, affording him some time to recover from the turmoil he experienced under the Duvalier dictatorship. But given the lack of real prospects, he set out for Argentina. “J’avais quelques contacts en Argentine, au Chili et au Brésil” he explained. “Quand je suis arrivé au

Brésil c'était déjà la dictature militaire comme en Argentine donc j'ai décidé que je n'allais pas sortir d'Haïti pour rester dans cet univers dictatorial."[98] Voltaire arrived in Chile that same year, where he would also find freedom "…c'était pas encore le gouvernement socialiste d'Allende" he explained, "Mais il y avait une atmosphère… j'ai trouvé une bourse, et je suis resté."

Figure 5. Frantz Voltaire being interviewed by Jonathan Roux on 4 December 2008. The interview recording is open for consultation at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS).

He became involved in social organizing and student activism during his first years in Santiago. It was an exhilarating experience, he recalled. The city was "bubbling with ideas, reflections and people from all over Latin America" and there was an openness towards political mobilization. While studying at the Universidad de Chile, he worked as a student delegate and got involved with political movements, both on and off campus. He became especially close with the Socialist Party, where he met students from South America who were also fleeing dictatorships. "On était en pleine réflexion permanente, activisme permanent" he recalled, "y'avait des mobilisations partout." The student movement they led organized during the summer months as well. When school was out, for instance, him and his comrades would take the train to the countryside to do community work, like teach in literacy programs and help reconstruct villages. All political parties at the university did this kind of work, in fact. And as Voltaire confirmed in his interview, these groups were many. "C'était quelque chose pour nous très mobilisateurs" he said looking back on those years. "Mais

[98] Frantz Voltaire, interviewed by Jonathan Roux, 4 December 2008, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

surtout pour moi qui venait d'ailleurs c'était un apprentissage permanent. Un apprentissage de la démocratie, de débat, et aussi participer à la vie quotidienne… On pensait qu'on faisait des fois une petite différence."

For many exiles, Chile during the Allende years represented a time of hope. "Allende a soulevé un énorme espoir" remembered Frantz Voltaire. "C'était une coalition politique qui soulevait un espoir que le pays allait changer… Qu'il était possible de faire le Socialisme en liberté." His campaign promised socialism "La vía chilena" (the Chilean way): equality, economic liberty and unlike previous governments, political freedom. But for U.S. policy makers and Chilean oppositional movements, this posed a threat to their interests and world order. Following a period of civil unrest in 1973, armed forces led by General Augusto Pinochet staged a coup on September 11 in the capital, putting an end to Salvador Allende's government and ultimately his life. "Donc pour nous après, on s'est retrouvé en grande partie en désarroi" explained Voltaire, who was arrested after the coup in his house in Santiago. His friends who were there were also arrested, and all taken to the National Stadium, where suspected opponents of the Pinochet regime were kept. While him and his friends were in prison, the United Nations requested the extradition of students who were in Chile on their scholarship. Frantz Voltaire was one of those students and was shortly granted exile. Two of his friends, however, never made it out alive.

After losing some of her own comrades to the coup, Élizabeth Philibert and a few other Haitians fled to Cuba. They were welcomed with open arms and integrated immediately, finding work in the vibrant community of local activists. "Je ne suis pas restée là-bas comme un étranger" she said in her interview. "Et j'ai travaillé là-bas comme tous les

cubains… *como todos los Cubanos.*"[99] She became a Cuban resident and member of two feminist organizations, the Association of Cuban Women and the Casa de Las Americas. Her companion Daniel-José Bernard, who she met on her flight to Mexico earlier that year, also worked there before becoming president of the local Haitian association. Their time together was short, but they did meaningful work for the organization. They arranged residencies for writers and activists, for example, and even travelled abroad for conferences. Élizabeth Philibert recalled meeting female activists from around the world during these conferences, where she would learn about the feminist movement for the first time in her life.

Before Daniel-José Bernard's passing, Philibert gave birth to their daughter Yannick. She named her in memory of her friend who died in Haiti. Or how she put it in her interview: "…pour que les autres savent qu'ils ne sont pas tombé dans l'oubli. Ils sont tombés sur le champ de bataille." Daniel-José Bernard died in Havana in 1978 from injuries he sustained during his time in Haitian prison. His death, and the painful memories it brought back, was devastating for Philibert, so she left Cuba a year later. Like Gary Klang, she moved to Montreal to be symbolically closer to Haiti and surrounded by her loved ones. "C'était ce glissé Haïti, Cuba, Canada parce que je vais retrouver aussi au Canada une ambiance haïtienne" she said, describing the smooth journey she made through exile.

Élizabeth Philibert's journey to liberation was certainly far from easy. But for her, there was more to this experience. Besides her political activism, what defined her experience of exile was her connection to the Haitian community and the "passage" this connection opened for her across space and time. One of the most consistent themes in her narrative is precisely this idea that exile had been a smooth and pleasant experience for her because of the

[99] Élizabeth Philibert, interviewed by Jonathan Roux and Frantz Voltaire, 17 February 2009 and 20 April 2009, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

support she received from the community. Recalling her first years in Montreal, for example, she insisted that "there were no ruptures" easing into her new life, owing in large part to the help of old friends from her days in Haiti:

> II 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 1'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.

Her friends Max Chancy and his wife Adeline Magloire were the first to welcome her upon landing in Montreal. As active leaders in the local Haitian community, they helped her make connections and find a job at *La Maison d'Haïti,* the feminist community organization they founded a few years earlier in 1972. Working there taught Élizabeth Philibert a lot about establishing herself in Montreal as a newcomer, not just within the workforce but also with other Haitian women in the city. She explained in her interview that this had a big impact on her life, especially as a mother: "Je ne voulais pas que mes enfants soient traumatisés et que mes enfants perdent aussi leur culture. Mais y'avait tout ça, bien établie ici [à Montréal], y'avait des activités communautaires et culturelles." *La Maison d'Haïti* opened its doors at a time when the growing Haitian population was facing challenges in accessing social services in Montreal.[100] They became one of the first organizations in the city to help Haitian mothers like Philibert find support and resources to facilitate their integration, playing a huge part in the life of the community still to this day.

[100] The majority of second wave Haitian newcomers, arriving to Montreal in the 1970s and '80s with little formal education and work experience primarily in low-status jobs, faced significant challenges while settling into their new environment. Challenges included racial discrimination in housing, employment and essential social services. Interlocking factors that lead to further isolation of Haitians were the city's economic and racialized boundaries, which set apart the downtown cultural life of Montreal from the peripheral neighbourhoods of Saint-Michel and Montréal Nord where the Haitian community had predominantly settled. These neighbourhoods remain one of the poorest and most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Montreal. For more information see for example: Sean Mills, *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016).

Port-au-Prince, 1984.

In 1984, Alexandra Philoctète returned to Haiti for the first time in nearly three decades. "It was a question of finding my roots, of seeing my native country again" she said, "and to also make a decision about my future."[101] Being back was a bittersweet experience for her. The places she visited as a child were still there as she remembered, but the poverty and environmental degradation had left a visible mark. She recalled feeling struck by these changes and how much her surroundings differed from the memories she had kept of her past. It was like she had dreamt of an idealized version of Haiti over the course of her life, she explained. And when she arrived, "on se rend contre c'est loin de ce rêve-là."[102]

Coming to terms with this in 2011, she described feeling unsure of her place in the world. She explained that when you are forced to leave your country at a young age and to live in exile, "on est nulle part chez soi," you are nowhere at home. She appeared to accept this in her interview, going on to describe how she fostered new connections to Haiti from her home in Montreal: "… Je continuerai jusqu'à ma mort à m'occuper d'Haïti" she said. "À faire du bien pour mon pays, à continuer à envoyer des argents pour certaines institutions qui sont sérieuses." Nearing the end of her interview, she tried to situate herself in all of this, acknowledging that she "will always be attached to Haiti" because that is where she had roots. It seems that at this point in her life story, she was finally able to come to terms with her exile, taking comfort in her understanding of what it means to be Haitian and a part of a diaspora: "Je trouve que y'a énormément de potentiel dans cette communauté là j'regarde, ce soit ici, que ce soit en France, que ce soit n'importe où au monde on laisse nos traces, et ça j'trouve ça extraordinaire de ce p'tit peuple là… c'est ma fierté." Like Élizabeth Philibert, she found

[101] Alexandra Philoctète, "Rencontre avec l'autre : Tranches de vie d'Alexandra Philoctète," 38. Mapping the Life Stories of Exiles, Geomedia Lab at Concordia University, 2017. Montreal Canada (translated from French).
[102] Alexandra Philoctète, interviewed by Grace Sanders, 30 March and 6 April 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

strength in the idea of being part of the Haitian global community; one of the many ways she reconciled with the rupture of her past.

The question of identity for Haitians and other groups of the Caribbean diaspora has preoccupied the minds of many scholars. In his book *Poetics of Relation*, for example, Édouard Glissant has argued that rather than being fixed, Caribbean identity has always been dynamic because of the region's long history of contact and conflict: "[The Caribbean] has always been a place of encounter and connivance and, at the same time, a passageway toward the American continent" he writes. "A new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open…"[103] Implicit in this understanding of the Caribbean is the role its history of migration has played in shaping people's sense of place and identity, a topic that has informed the work of Haitian-Canadian geographer Georges Anglade. Among his many contributions,[104] Anglade became well-known for introducing the notion of the *Tenth Department:* the external province of Haiti where Haitian exiles reside. This idea of a "new Haitian space," which originated in his case studies of Haiti early in his career, is now widely used in transnational studies to explain the duality of Haitian diasporic identity and the multi-locality that characterize the lives of Haitians abroad.[105]

For scholars like Micheline Labelle and Franklin Midy, Georges Anglade's contributions to the field have proven useful for thinking through the emancipatory potential of cross-border activities and solidarity between Haitian exiles. In their article on the

[103] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997) 144.
[104] Anglade was a founding member of the Université du Québec in Montreal. He also served on the board of Quebec PEN for over ten years and wrote several books on the Haitian oral tradition of *lodyans* and the history of Haiti's fight for freedom.
[105] According to Micheline Labelle and Franklin Middy, the notion of the *Tenth Department* first appeared in 1986 after being introduced by Georges Anglade. Although the origin of the concept remains unclear, it is generally believed that it originated in Anglade's early case studies of Haiti, including *L'espace Haïtien* (1975), *Atlas critique d'Haïti* and *Espace et liberté en Haïti*, which were both published in 1982. For more information, see: Micheline Labelle and Franklin Midy, "Re-reading citizenship and the transnational practices of immigrants," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999) and: Regine O. Jackson, Introduction to *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora* ed. Regine O. Jackson (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.

transnational lives of immigrants in North America, for example, the authors highlight the political struggles that emerged in New York City and Montreal during the Duvalier dictatorship, arguing that like other instances of immigrant activism, the Haitian community's actions translated "into positions of resistance" against domestic affairs of their home country and the country where they resided.[106] "Ambient racism, economic insecurity, the selectivity of immigration policies, and the negative effects of greater penetration of global capital" all factored into their political actions, they argued, as did their struggles for recognition as a community with dual nationality and global affiliations.

These concerns are exactly what motivated Frantz Voltaire to found CIDIHCA in 1983, the first and only Haitian, Caribbean, and afro-Canadian archive in Montreal: "[À la base, nous avons créé le CIDIHCA] pour que la communauté haïtienne puisse avoir accès, ait des références" Frantz explained in 2009. "[…] une sorte d'interface aussi avec la communauté globale." Initially, the information center was conceived as a place for local Caribbean artists and intellectuals to work together and collaborate with members of the larger Haitian diaspora. But as the years passed, the center expanded alongside the growing Haitian-Montrealer community, becoming a platform for publishing, film production, and a center for exhibitions.

Beyond its cultural significance, CIDIHCA played an important role in bringing the local Haitian community together, especially during times of uncertainty. As Voltaire explained in his interview, after fleeing Haiti, Haitian-Montrealers needed a place to process what had happened to them, "parce qu'en situation d'exil, en situation de dictature en Haïti la pensée n'était pas très libre." Access to resources about the history and present context of Haiti was certainly key to the community's process of moving forward. But as he clarified, it

[106] Micheline Labelle and Franklin Midy, "Re-reading citizenship and the transnational practices of immigrants," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): 217-222.

was also about learning how to adapt as a community and embrace life abroad: “II n'était pas question de dire « écoutez, il faut rester à tout prix haïtien »” he said, explaining the reason he founded CIDIHCA. “Il fallait qu'il y ait des lieux [...] un espace de débat public sur les problèmes qui concernaient Haïti ET la communauté haïtienne.”

In recounting the story of CIDIHCA, Frantz Voltaire reflected on the cohesiveness of the local Haitian community and its visible presence across the diaspora. Through the work of countless community organizations, he explained, Haitian-Montrealers had managed to develop a unique ability to unite Haitians around the world, using their shared history and close relations to foster these connections. These reflections led him to consider his own place within the Haitian community and diaspora, specifically the unique circumstances of his exile and identity as a Haitian-Montrealer. As discussed in Chapter 1, speaking in wider terms was a strategy he used throughout his interview to make sense of his experiences, as well as do justice to the complexities of his sense of self. In the following excerpt from his interview, Voltaire reflects on the shifting nature of his identity and the networks he created over the course of his life abroad. Drawing on intellectual insights about the Haitian diaspora, it is clear that this idea of Haitian belonging and global togetherness had come to shape his narrative of exile:

> Je vis avec ces identités multiples, et pour moi elles 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.

Writing about the meaning of the life story interview, Lynn Abrams notes in *Oral History Theory* that while narrators include experiences in their life stories because they were “landmark life event[s],” they may also feature them because they were “salient in that person’s own understanding and interpretation of his or her life.”[107] For Frantz Voltaire and

[107] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 41.

the other interviewees, the experience of exile played a crucial role in their life stories for a few notable reasons. Apart from leading them away from the dangers of the Duvalier dictatorship, which was the main factor in their decision to leave Haiti, the significance of their exile was also found in a much larger story they told about their lives as survivors.

On the one hand, a lot of the stories they shared in their interviews revolved around the challenges they faced in their lives as exiles. As interviewees made clear, coming to terms with the rupture of exile was not an easy process and often involved making difficult decisions like moving to another country and accepting the loss of loved ones. But as this chapter has shown, Haitian-Montrealers also found ways to redefine the meaning of these experiences by shifting the focus to their role as political actors and agents of their own journey through exile. This is precisely why the story of their political activism abroad was so important in their narratives: by focusing on their participation in the decade's social movements, Haitian-Montrealers were able to construct an empowering account of their displacement from Haiti in their interviews. Within the context of the Montreal Life Stories project, this was especially important given the nature of the Haitian working group's research focus, which was to examine how violence under the Duvalier regime impacted the lives and memories of Haitian-Montrealers. Although central to their past, Gary Klang, Alexandra Philoctète, Frantz Voltaire and Élizabeth Philibert showed that there was much more to their life stories than the legacy of the Duvalier dictatorship. The following excerpt from Gary Klang's interview supports this claim, bringing closure to this discussion on how Haitian-Montrealers made meaning of their experiences of exile:

> Cette terre, que je foule, elle n'est à personne en particulier […] Elle est à nous tous. Donc ceci me libère de beaucoup de choses, c'est-à-dire que j'arrive en Chine, j'arrive au Mexique, j'arrive en Afrique, je me dis je suis chez moi. Bien sûr je n'ai pas la nationalité du coin, on peut me mettre à la porte, on me dit: vous n'êtes pas chinois, vous n'êtes pas mexicain, vous n'êtes pas malien, vous n'êtes pas béninois (des pays où j'ai été) […] mais dans ma tête, partout je suis… dans ma maison, sur la terre […] c'est tout à fait utopique je répète mais… je préfère penser comme ça que de

m'enfermer dans un… j'ai horreur de la pensée nationaliste […] Je pense qu'on vivrait bien mieux si tout le monde pensait comme ça. Ne rejetterait pas l'autre, ne l'excluait pas parce qu'il n'est pas de…on n'est pas entre nous.[108]

[108] Gary Klang, interviewed by Witnise Estimable, 5 July 2011, Transcriptions and Chronologies Folder, Montreal Life Stories Archives (MLSA), Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University (COHDS). Montreal, Canada.

Conclusion

This thesis examined how Haitian-Montrealers challenged the history of the Duvalier dictatorship in their interviews for the Montreal Life Stories project. In particular, it explored how Alexandra Philoctète, Gary Klang, Élizabeth Philibert and Frantz Voltaire turned to their experiences of political activism and exile to tell their life story as survivors who endured and actively resisted the Duvalier regime. The inspiration for this topic came from a handful of post-interview reflections written by Group Haiti member Dr. Stéphane Martelly and the official Group Haiti research report presented by Dr. Lise Gantheret, Dr. Ernst Jouthe, and Dr. Carolyn Fick. While representing only a small subset of existing literature, I have argued that these studies offer important insight into Haitian-Montrealer narratives and, more broadly, narratives of survival. In the introduction of this thesis, I pointed to the ideas the authors shared about the value of approaching life story narratives from the interviewees' own subjectivity and the broader social relations within which they are embedded. To this, I have suggested in the first and second chapter that focusing on Haitian-Montrealers' experiences and their sense of self as political actors can provide insight into how survivors of the Duvalier regime remember the past and give meaning to it over time. As I have made clear, however, the meaning Haitian-Montrealers gave to their past experiences was influenced by many factors, which played a decisive role in shaping their life story narratives. One of the most important was the interviewees' identities as members of the first wave of Haitian exiles. Though some admitted to finding their first years in Montreal difficult, Gary Klang, Alexandra Philoctète, Frantz Voltaire and Élizabeth Philibert revealed in their interviews that the experience of exile was for them relatively positive. Their experiences confirm this from the ease with which they found employment and social security within their first years of living in the city. In addition to these circumstances, they also belonged to their generation's intelligencia, which greatly influenced their experiences abroad and, more specifically, how

they described themselves as exiles (instead of refugees, for instance) in their interviews. Class differences therefore played a major role in their life stories, shaping the way they saw themselves as survivors within the greater history of the Duvalier era.

The life stories of Alexandra Philoctète, Gary Klang, Élizabeth Philibert and Frantz Voltaire represent a small part of the history of the Haitian community in Montreal. And yet, while differences do distinguish their journeys from those of others, they reveal the powerful ways in which Haitian-Montrealers have sought to mend the ruptures of their past. In every single one of their interviews, Haitian exiles expressed the desire to overcome the legacy of the Duvalier regime and to challenge damaging assumptions about Haitian society as a whole.[109] Given the open-ended nature of their interviews, such desires were expressed by interviewees in their own ways and about their own understanding of their lives. As authors of the Group Haiti research report stated in their conclusion, the life story interview was in fact "a way for them to contribute to revealing, beyond their individual stories, a historical truth that is hidden behind this so tragic period in the history of Haiti."[110] In revisiting the oral history interviews from the Montreal Life Stories project, this thesis sought to highlight this aspect of Haitian-Montrealers' life stories and examine more carefully how this historical truth found significance in both their individual and collective lives. Among many other insights, I believe this to be the most important message we can glean from their life stories and experiences as Haitian-Montrealers.

Since the Montreal Life Stories project, new research has been carried out on the Haitian community in the post-Duvalier era. To date, such research has focused primarily on the experiences of younger members of the Haitian diaspora and the ways in which they

[109] Carolyn Fick, Lise Gantheret and Ernst Jouthe, "Rapport de recherche présenté par l'équipe Haïti," for Projet ARUC/CURA Histoires de vie des Montréalais déplacés par la guerre, le genocide, et autres violations des droits de l'homme, June 30, 2012, 73.
[110] Carolyn Fick, Lise Gantheret and Ernst Jouthe, "Rapport Haiti," 72.

negotiate the challenges of their generation. Some local studies have already taken steps in this direction, such as the work of Louis Herns Marcelin, Toni Cela and Henri Dorvil in *Les jeunes Haïtiens dans les Amériques.* As first-generation Haitians prepare to "pass the torch" to the next generation, these authors are responding to the pressing need to document how the legacy of violence in Haiti is being passed down intergenerationally. Second, and perhaps more importantly, they are seeking to better understand how today's Haitian youth are challenging this legacy and the risks with which they are confronting every day to build themselves a better future. Studies like *Les jeunes Haïtiens dans les Amériques* and Group Haiti's work on Haitians in Montreal have opened up new areas of inquiry about going beyond trauma in research on the aftermath of mass violence. Much like these studies, the observations that I make in this thesis contribute to this "wider rethinking" that is currently taking shape across the humanities and social sciences.[111] Following this line of inquiry, I have suggested that by focusing on how Haitian-Montrealers told their life stories, as well as what they revealed about their experiences of resistance, we can develop a deeper understanding of the often blurry boundaries between survivor and victim. I believe this to be an important step in honoring the courage and determination of individuals like Alexandra Philoctète, Gary Klang, Élizabeth Philibert and Frantz Voltaire who have travelled a long road before arriving to this city known as Montreal.

[111] Steven High, *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 10.

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