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Mesye Damn la sosyete: Honè ak Respè!

Please allow me to invoke an Ancestor. I invoke the name of Rose Elisabeth Marie-Noëlle Boisson, (1858-1952): a girl, a daughter, a grand daughter; a woman, a mother, a grandmother, my great grandmother “Nanne.” Born in poverty, never a wife, the mother of two sons brought up with the help of her older sister, Louise Hortense Iphigénie Boisson, “Nininne.” Illiterate, creolophone, a seamstress, Nanne was “*couturière de son état*,” the mother of a nation, and— to use an African-American construct—the mother of her “generations”: her sons, *le petit* Dantès et *le petit* Clément; and her great-grandson, le gros Patrick. Marie Boisson was the granddaughter of Jacques-Ignace Fresnel, a man who fought for Haitian Independence. His sons’ grandfather, Jean-Louis Bellegarde, also fought for Independence. *We are still fighting for Independence*. Our work isn’t done. I invoke her spirit today!

Ayibobo!

I am tempted to title my remarks, “Testimony and Testament: Forty Years in Academia; Years of Struggles.” Then again, another title seems a tad more appropriate, “Haiti: The Long Gestation,” with all the ambiguities attached to that phrase. The body politic has indeed suffered from a long gestation, and so has the culture, the history— both beautiful and horrific—of that land we call ours.

Once the confusion dissipates, thirty-five seconds can be ample time to give one clarity—this is what the Goudougoudou of January 12, 2010 did for me. As the structures of my life crumbled—the Palais National, the Basilique Notre Dame de l’Assomption, the Petit Séminaire Collège Saint-Martial, the store where I bought my Cola Séjourné and my Cola Couronne—I tried to hold to some shred of evidence that all was not lost. The nine palmistes fronting the Palace held on. One block away, the 150

year-old Bellegarde residence, the family homestead where all were born and most died, held on. The Citadelle Laferrière, the symbol of a defiant nationality, was not breached. I bled with millions of compatriots, but we were kept alive to fight another day.

But why not join the two titles, “Testimony and Testament,” and “The Long Gestation?” In my lifetime, I have experienced some of Haiti’s defining moments, seen a number of national events. I have met some *kokenshenn pye bwa*, influential men and women who have forged my personality and my persona. We carry inside us elements passed on by long-gone stories that live through us and that create us again and again. A proverb says, “a river that doesn’t know its source soon dries up.” I continue, a river and a life, must end in surrounding seas, a ready strength and the source of all life, the *reposoir* for troubled ancestral souls.

As a student, I took courses in political science, sociology, cultural anthropology, and cultural geography, but majored in history. Why history? I blame my great-grandmother Marie Boisson—we called her Nanne. Her withered hand in mine taught how fleeting and immediate were the generations. Nanne’s hand had held those of her parents—Auguste Boisson and Thélisma Fresnel. Her mother’s parents, Jacques-Ignace Fresnel and Anne-Marie Petit-Bois, were born in the 18th century. My small hand and theirs had joined across time. Though Nanne died in 1952, she continues to shepherd my existence, as a “*nannan*” (the core, the meat, the kernel, in Haitian). Her niece, Luce Boisson, was the family *manbo* until she discovered Evangelical Protestantism late in life. Nanne played a key role in my initiation as a priest in 1986.

These are Haitian stories, one *lakou* at a time. The fragments of bone, shards of flesh and marrow found in the Bellegardes of Arcahaie, the familial cradle, in the Plateau Central, and in villages surrounding Les Cayes, in Port-au-Prince, tell us our story: it is the story of Haiti. *La petite histoire, sinon la grande histoire des livres scolaires.*

The discipline of history is a beginning but not nearly sufficient in explaining the modern and contemporary periods, in defining the interactions between worlds, the minutiae of existence, and the international system.

Haiti was buffeted by strong revolutionary winds, many of its own making. We inherit these events. Some children inherit their parents’ wealth, while others, only their parents’ anger and their rage. There are ways to respond to social inequities rooted in history, and the history of colonialism and neocolonialism, in economic liberalism and neoliberalism. In Haiti, we found the full panoply of reactions. Sally Price argued that the anonymous African slave and the Caribbean were both “discovered,

seized, commoditized, stripped of their social ties, redefined in new settings and re-conceptualized to fit into the economic, cultural, political and ideological needs of [European] people from distant countries.” (Richard and Sally Price, “Equatoria,” NY: Routledge, 1992). We responded in all the aforementioned arenas, in the economic, cultural, political, and the ideological dimensions at once. The bane of a small state suffering from the traumata of insignificance, trying to make a difference! Haiti’s revolutionary ethos waning, but Haiti’s reputation as the original “terrorist” state intact; its powers in full retreat throughout the 19th century, its elites respond, not in the realms of industry and external commerce, but in the area of “*haute culture*”—the bastion of enfeebled nations under duress.

Questions surrounding identity have resonated throughout the national period in Haiti, and also throughout the Caribbean. No longer Africans, we were *de nouveaux indigènes*, racialized groupings who had replaced the hapless Amerindians. Culturally, we were the bastard children of French male power and African-born women whose powers would have to be exercised surreptitiously, with care. Taking one side against the other, but his declaration still pungent, the influential poet Constantin Mayard declared, “*dans l’humus africain, des semences latines*” (“In African mould, Latin seeds”) justifying the rape that had taken place. Africa was the fertile womb, but the sperm was French. Mayard also took, briefly, the side of the American occupier (Auguste Viatte, *Histoire littéraire de l’Amérique française*, (1954), p. 431).

The debates between my grandfather, Dantès Bellegarde, and Jean Price-Mars were not as acrimonious as people think. These were the culmination of earlier debates “*sur la personnalité haïtienne*,” on Haitian identity politics. “Who are we?” is a version of “Who am I?” So how do we resolve ultimate and intimate personal definitions of self and collective definitions of nation in the context of cultural impositions from an international system more racist than not? Haiti was a giant in raising early and often such fundamental issues as universal freedom and cultural integrity, but it was still a mini-state (the first) of African origin, born of western imperialism. Its children were rendered slaves, and some of them subjected to the insidious French policy of cultural assimilation. How does one adapt the pull of divergent cultural traditions, between a strong and imperious (French) father, and the enslaved (African) mother? Who is the dominant parent? One is reminded of W.E.B. DuBois’s own anguish—partly based on his own racial ascription and his class status—about the African American’s “two souls” that are forever torn asunder.

When Dantès Bellegarde was just 13, he entered the room where Mme

Laleau was giving birth to young Léon, on August 3, 1890. It was never clear as to why Dantès found himself witnessing the birth. Léon Laleau became a poet, and these cultural struggles found a place in his poems. In “Trahison” he hopes to reconcile “*ce coeur qui me vient du Sénégal*” to French ways that were equally real in his own life, in the very marrow of his soul. He concluded: “*Et ce désespoir à nulle autre égal, / D’apprivoiser, avec des mots de France, / Ce coeur qui m’est venu du Sénégal.*” Hence, it was a matter merely, of taming, *apprivoiser* these impulses, these élans inherited from mother. In case we missed the message, Laleau continued in the poem, “Hérités”:

J’écoute en moi glapir, certains soirs, le lambi
 Qui ralliait mes ancêtres dans la montagne.
 Je les revois....
 Avec le meurtre aux yeux et du sang sur le pagne.
 Mais aussitôt j’entends un air lent de Rameau
 Qui s’englue aux clameurs de haines et de guerres.
 Aux cris nègres se mêle alors un chalumeau,
 Et de fins escarpins aux savates vulgaires. (1931)

Many decades later, I sat on Laleau’s porch in Pétion-Ville in 1974 as the poet helped me with my dissertation. As I exposed my feelings of admiration for the Haitian language, he exploded with rage. I was stunned by his vehemence. Even his maids, his domestics, only spoke French, he fumed. His heart, it seemed, had been thoroughly “*apprivoiser*,” and no longer sang to the Wolof beats of Senegal.

I knew my grandfather well. He spent all his life, in the lower middle-class neighborhood of Lalue, though he could have afforded a home elsewhere. His lifelong cultural certainties dissolved as he lay dying in his *shanmòt* during the first weeks of June, 1966. In his final agony, he recognized a deeply-buried African-ness in his very marrow. As the Gede spirits of life and death, and the Ancestors got closer, he suddenly became “*un nègre*,” no longer denying it, not just a “*mulâtre*.” Life was not as simple as he had thought till his ninth decade of life.

I met Jean Price-Mars when I was a child. I remember the 1956 celebration of his 80th birthday, when the Haitian literati crowned him “*doyen des lettres haïtiennes*,” a significant Haitian title, at the Institut Français d’Haïti, at the Boulevard Harry S. Truman. I sat on the last row of the vast auditorium, clothed in my Sunday suit, sandwiched between my Tante Jane and Tante Mayotte. Tante Mayotte and her younger sister, Tante Fernande, were founders of the women’s movement, and vitally influenced my budding feminism.

I remember liking Price-Mars and his kind face, the fact that he must have looked just like my maternal great grandfather, Jean-Louis Bellegarde, who had a similar dark skin-tone. Soon, I came to like his cultural politics, too. His ideas were alien to my early upbringing, but I was already a bundle of rebellion! In 1995, I sat next to Price-Mars's son, Dr. Louis Mars, and knew that he was closer to Bellegarde in spirit than to his own father. When I pointed this out to him, he said dryly, "*oui, je sais!*" He had heard about me, or so it seemed. For me, Jean Price-Mars had become an ebony power figure, or as expressed by the famed poet Jean Fernand Brierre, "*une poupée en bois d'ébène,*" a Haitian *nkisi*.

While Brierre was referring to Haiti's sweet queen, "Miss Sugar 1960" Claudinette Fouchard, he could have meant Price-Mars:

Et vos mains de lumière et d'ombre dans l'Histoire
C'est le miracle pur qui règne au bord du temps.

I lived next door to the poet. From my mother's window, I could spy on him writing his felicitous verses in his backyard. His home had belonged to Manman Niniche (Mme Ricot), a Vieux, who shared the house with her sister, Mme Clesca, and the Brierre family via her niece, Dilia, and Dilia's sister, Liliane Corvington, who lived next door with her children, Marie-Cécile and "Mondy" Raymond. I saw Brierre again in Port-au-Prince, after his decades of exile in Sénégal, right before his death, where he waxed eloquent about French grandeur, and how grateful he was to France. Yet, his inspiration had come from *Indigénisme!* This felt like a betrayal to me. I was devastated. Another *nkisi* bit the dust!

Bellegarde and Price-Mars had never diverged as admirers of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, being both social Darwinists and positivists, both well-anchored in Western liberal and conservative thought. At it turned out, both these *poto mitan* had been deeply conflicted. When the famous French writer, Henri Béranger named Haiti "*le phare avancé de la latinité en Amérique,*" in 1935, even Price-Mars's amour-propre had been ticked by the accolade. (Bellegarde-Smith (1985), 104) Price-Mars might have liked Béranger's statement to be true; Bellegarde knew that statement to be true.

At the fall of President Paul-Eugène Magloire, the military provisional government named Price-Mars secretary of state for external affairs, and Bellegarde ambassador plenipotentiary before the United States and the Organization of American States.

After the rise of Duvalierism, Bellegarde never left Haiti, lest he be sent into permanent exile and forced to die abroad. He was then eighty years-

old. Price-Mars, who had spent time in virtual house arrest as ordered by F. Duvalier, desired to die on the shores of Lake Geneva. Both died in Haiti, three years apart.

If Jean Price-Mars was the father of worldwide Négritude, as stated by Léopold Sédar Senghor, his sons were the holy trinity: Senghor himself, Aimé Césaire, and Léon-Gontran Damas, all excellent poets, all in politics. I knew Damas, having supped with him and his Brazilian wife at his home in Washington, D.C. She belonged to the church of Auguste Comte, he said. I was immediately reminded of the Brazilian national motto, “Ordem e Progresso.” We imbibed Rhum Barbancourt for dessert. We met again on a number of occasions, notably at Howard University and at The American University. By this time, Senghor was a president of the republic; Césaire, mayor of Fort de France forever, and *député* at the National Assembly, in Paris, also forever. Though Damas had also sat at the National Assembly, young radical “Turks” in the streets of Cayenne had burned his home to the ground, he told me. Damas was bitter at his ranking. If Senghor was the *ainé* and Césaire, the *cadet*, clearly then, in his own mind, he was the *benjamin*: not as well known, not as successful in politics. Dying of throat cancer, he ventured disparaging and angry remarks on all the “greats” of the Négritude movement, in my presence. Federal City College had erected large majestic photographic portraits of these men. He had no need for these “*macaques*,” he told me. He was being honored for his role in the literary movement. Yet, I was surprised to hear him honor his black brothers and sisters when he mounted the stage.

I missed my chance to meet Césaire, unfortunately, having literally missed the boat after a long night of drinking in Fort de France. I learned later from the Guyanese novelist O. R. Dathorne that Césaire had spoken at length about his friendship and admiration for Dantès Bellegarde.

Nor did I meet Senghor, try as I might, when he visited the United States. The Senegalese embassy did not respond to my entreaties.

Eric Williams, the late prime minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, shared a hallway at Howard University with my grandfather in the 1940s when they were both visiting professors. They disliked each other greatly. The author of *Capitalism and Slavery*, my grandfather told me, was too radical and quite arrogant. Later Bellegarde would render the same judgment upon his friend, W.E.B. DuBois, when the latter joined the Communist Party. I met Williams's compatriot, C.L.R. James, repeatedly at various functions in Washington, D.C. and in New York. James's scholarship on Haiti has had worthy foreign descendants: Brenda Gayle Plummer, Carolyn Fick, Mary Renda, Laurent Dubois, Matthew J. Smith,

Kate Ramsey, among the best historians. I appreciate their scholarship, their selflessness, their deep understanding of Haitian history. Their love.

In *Breached Citadel*, I stated that Haitian writers of the nineteenth-century and first part of the twentieth, had been remarkable for their refreshing objectivity, their passion, their patriotism, and their detachment as scholars. I had added that “the emic perspective remains useful when added to the symphony of voices, and [that] Haitians, increasingly, are being heard. Their academic credentials and their positions as insiders add to [their] assessment,... and prescription for what ails Haiti. The barbarians had breached the gates and they spoke odd thoughts perhaps, but in recognizable western languages.” (Bellegarde-Smith (2004), 291) Among the newer scholars writing in English, I recognized Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Alex Dupuy, Robert Fatton, Jr., Claudine Michel, Flore Zéphir, Léon D. Pamphile, among others. All hell broke loose!

Some U.S. scholars took serious offense. Things became clearer when, on the eve of the Bicentennial, young American scholars seemed unable to identify nineteenth-century Haitian works of any significance. It seemed, as with Christopher Columbus and European discoverers of yore, Haiti, the Americas, Africa even, start existing only as these scholars took an active interest, perhaps when they landed for the first time on Haitian soil. Neocolonial ideology and cultural arrogance? Racial arrogance? Perhaps. The eye cannot see what the mind does not understand!

The Goudougoudou of January 12, 2010 seems to have exacerbated or exaggerated the tendency to ignore Haitians as masters of their own domain, or in control of the Haitian national narrative. They have replaced it instead with a colonial discourse. Some have called Haiti a “failed state,” and ignored the role of France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States in the economic equation. Illustrating this viewpoint, on April 14, 2010 while in Haiti, the actor Demi Moore told CNN’s Anderson Cooper words to the effect of “We must bring the promise of freedom to Haiti, to complete Abraham Lincoln’s dream.” I believed she said it twice; perhaps I replayed it in my mind. We know how Lincoln felt about blacks: he did not like them! This all seemed the continuation of a colonial discourse and forms of intellectual neocolonialism. How else can one view many of the 11,000 NGOs—often refusing to engage the Haitian government itself, or even to register—other than the continuation of a colonial discourse and forms of intellectual neocolonialism? Ignorance that fancies it knows everything? A line from the film “The Believers” seems à propos. A Puerto Rican maid who practices Santería is asked by her white American employer, a psychologist, “What are you afraid of?”

The maid responds, “Your ignorance! You use it against us.”

Haiti with its 11,000 NGOs has become the land of opportunism, where *un capitalisme sauvage* exists. This is a Tea Bagger’s dream! True capitalism in its 19th century form, at its most brutal. We have seen, unfurled, armies of young American academics who become instant “experts.” How can we force Haiti into the 21st century, based on the American model of civilization, deemed universal? “News flash: Haiti is a part of the 21st century, as it was a part of the 18th, rendered that way by the role assigned to it by its masters--foreign and domestic. “Arrogant as hell, these young haitianists” in the words of countless Haitians I have spoken to. These attitudes bring back unexamined and subconscious racism, while the intentions are the best in the world. The road to hell is paved with good intentions! Would these armies of young American academics treat Latvia, Kosovo, Estonia, or even Cuba in similar fashion? Their leitmotiv seems to be: We as Americans, are # 1. In what, pray tell?

I argued early in my career, that democratization in Haiti would be necessarily an africanizing process, as state structures would come to reflect national institutions. I was the first to make the point. I was glad to see others follow my lead, though not my prescriptions. An important consideration, I felt, was: who created these oppressive state structures, and to what effect, as distinct from who formed the foundational, the paradigmatic cultural institutions that created a nation? Both language and religion, for instance, “evolved” a Caribbean nationality, a nationality *apart* from the requirements of citizenship. Both the Haitian language and the Vodou religion are part of the Haitian creative genius.

And the evolution of social classes, and class systems emerging from the recipe established by colonialism, made possible the emergence of an alternative vision.. The gut-wrenching cry of Dantès Bellegarde, “*Que deviendrait un îlot dahoméen au coeur des Amériques?*” is followed by the answer of pro-western Haitian intellectuals: the recolonization of Haiti by “civilized” nations, by France, then by the United States, when that nation came of age. But to survive “physically” may involve one’s acceptance of one’s cultural death. Thus, modernization would acquire a “white” hue. That viewpoint, and the state policies that followed, were the appanage of westernized elites in power, post-independence, everywhere in the black world, notably in Liberia and pre-independent Sierra Leone.

In a recent article published in the *New York Times Magazine*, on Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the author stated that, “Not until 1980 did Liberia have its first indigenous ruler, ... an army sergeant whose coup

can be understood as a surge of long suppressed rage.” (NYT Magazine, Daniel Bergner, “An Uncompromising Woman,” October 24, 2010, page 57). In this I found an echo to the transformation of the Haitian army by François Duvalier, when upper-class members of the officer corps would be replaced by mess sergeants and quartermasters. I found further echoes in the short-lived rule of Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the bold and feeble attempts by President Dumarsais Estimé, then the brutal approach of the scorched earth policies of the Duvalier regime. And some of the efforts of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in his first incarnation in 1991.

The very existence of the Sierra Leonean Krios, the Americo-Liberians, and the Haitian oligarchs are situated at the confluence of class, culture, and color. Their literal (and neoliberal) existence due to colonialism. These bourgeois elites remain largely victorious, providing the linkage between a “higher” and a “lower” civilization, thus a road toward African and Haitian progress, as in “*européanisation*.” Their efforts link to those of these foreign “experts” I spoke about earlier. The governments established by these elites unsure of themselves, in the enfeebled states they created, were inherently weak, narrowly based, and consequently dictatorial. Dictatorships are *modus operandi* of weak governments, not of strong ones.

State-sponsored religions and languages clashed with indigenous systems in Haiti, Liberia, and Sierra Leone as elsewhere, the skin-tones of these elites in power, made it imperative that further social distance be created between the governed and themselves. Some would later call the process “*avoir la peau sauvée*.” Salvation to a white God. These elites were ostensibly Christian, a further link between themselves and the “civilized” world, connecting them to white supremacist thought. In Haiti, Baron de Vastey defended European colonization of Africa in 1817 before it took place late in the 19th century. Still in Haiti, the historians Thomas Madiou and Joseph Saint-Rémy wanted racial intermixture as the vector for progress. Beaubrun Ardouin wrote in 1854 that men issued from mixed racial background were the only ones fit to rule Haiti. They were civilized by definition. The cultural standards of Americo-Liberians were those of the American antebellum South, whose values they faithfully reproduced in the new country. Then as now, Americo-Liberians are called “white people” by the majority of Liberians. The Krios of Sierra Leone spearheaded the Western cultural advance, saw England as their spiritual home, and were labeled “Black Europeans” by all Sierra Leoneans. In Haiti, these were “*bourgeois*,” those whom Jean Price-Mars described as being guilty of “*bovarysme culturel*,” from Stendhal’s Madame Bovary. But in all three societies, we find forms of “marronage”—*foyers de résistance*—which engages the collective against the few, but not just any given individual

who *might* indeed see his salvation, say, in evangelical Christianity as a means to escape wretched poverty.

What then is the role of the intellectual in Third World societies, those analyzed by Price-Mars in "*La Vocation de l'élite*," in subsequent works by the Martinican Frantz Fanon and the Guyanese Walter Rodney. I will leave the conclusions to you.

I said earlier, that forced conversion to Christianity was a major tool of European imperialism. In fact, my exact words were, that Christianity was a powerful link in white supremacist thought. Subjugated peoples and oppressed individuals often saw wisdom in converting, if not the necessity to do so; conversion being a form of psychological safeguard for those concerned about survival, —the destruction of significant elements of any given cultures being always a desirable goal and outcome. How else will you civilize them? This inescapable consequence renders us skeptical of history taught by the victorious. Great religions are not so because of intrinsic merit or ideology, or because of their moral codes, but because they are sustained by empires and a large military, and by economic persuasion. Those of the master race do not practice the Aztec or the Yoruba religions. Many Dominicans and Cubans are good at baseball; some Haitians and Martinicans can speak excellent French. And all of us worship white deities in the form of a father, his son, and a holy ghost. We shall need to address the issue of superior religions and inferior cults, of proper languages versus inferior vernaculars, of a superior "race," and inferior "races." The United States, in reality, fully endorses these assertions for itself, as Haiti moved from Roman Catholic hegemony to American-sponsored Fundamental and Evangelical Protestantism. France was vanquished as the new paramount power in the first part of the 20th century.

I would argue that religions are faith-seeking missiles, part of a political arsenal. There comes a time when spirituality transmogrifies into religion, when Christianity dissolves into christianism, ideal into ideology, yet another "ism," to save the black world as it is damned, but in fact, it dooms it.

French-born Cap Haitien Bishop Jean-Marie Jan, in U.S. Senate Hearings held in Haiti, asked U.S. Senator Medill McCormick, "Does the United States want to impose Protestantism by force?" The Senator did not respond but said instead: "Can you provide information on voodoo (sic)... Has it diminished since the occupation?" Bishop Jan, "It has increased." The Under-Secretary of the U.S. Navy (Edwin Denby) wrote to the director of the U.S. Council of Churches (E.O Watson), "[Missionaries,] good offices would have the beneficial outcome of exciting feelings of friendship between the [Haitian] people and the United States.

Haiti is within the sphere of the United States, ... and the churches and missionary societies can be of very real help... The Navy Department will be happy to facilitate your work in any way possible.” (Bellegarde-Smith (2004), 33-34, 35). The American government’s position was to subvert Roman Catholicism for the political and economic advantage of the United States. Protestantism was in the American arsenal to advance its foreign and economic policy goals. The full-fledged U.S. assault on the Haitian indigenous religion lasts to this day.

During the Occupation, as Haitian envoy to the League of Nations, Dantès Bellegarde did all he could to lessen U.S. influence in Haiti, and strengthen that of France on the premise that France was, “*maintenant inoffensif du point de vue politique.*” I tried to play the same card at a conference held in Paris in 1991. My paper was titled, “*Haiti et les Etats-Unis: la proie et l’ombre.*” I beseeched the representative of the French Foreign Ministry present, to pay special attention to Haiti, to which he responded to the sustained boos of the audience, “Haiti is in the American sphere of influence, and there is nothing or little that France can do.” My attempt at being bellegardian had failed! Today, Haitian autonomy has never been at higher risk or weaker, Haitian agency at forging and sustaining national policies, weaker still. Who controls now the Haitian narrative? I’m afraid to answer that question.

Upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature this year, Mario Vargas Llosa said: “It is very difficult for a Latin American writer to avoid politics. Literature is an expression of life, and you cannot eradicate politics from life.” (NYT 10/8/10). All its life, Haitian literature in its global reach, has been “*une littérature engagée,*” in its comedic forms, in its theater and poetry, in its very early *magical realism*—the world’s earliest. The Haitian imaginary—literature, the plastic arts, religion—show the Haitians’ fascination with freedom ... Haiti needs to embrace a seamless transition between a traditional oral literature and its written literature, from which would emerge a dignified timelessness. I am thinking here of one of my mentors who moved from cultural and economic geography to “*lodyans,*” Georges Anglade, who died in the Goudougoudou. The French translation of my book *In the Shadow of Powers*, is dedicated to Anglade and his spouse the feminist scholar Mireille Neptune, who died with him.

When a society loses agency, its power of initiative in most realms, in setting an agenda for development based upon its own cultural foundations, there is but a small step toward cultural genocide. Culture is not just for the enjoyment of tourists in quest of exoticism, primitivism, and eroticism. Culture is an integrative system, a binding “glue” that gives a national society its personality and its *raison d’être*. I yearn for the establishment

of the Académie Haïtienne, as mandated by the Constitution of 1987, in which I would hope to play a role, if the Lwa grant me life!

As a student at Petit Séminaire Collège Saint-Martial, I did not learn Caribbean geography, nor African geography for that matter. I was, however, first in geography and history each trimester. I was, however, conversant with the 95-odd French *départements*. I had memorized, despite a bad memory, grammatical rules of Latin and ancient Greek, and lengthy passages of Racine, Corneille, and my personal favorite, Molière, as well as the fables of Jean de la Fontaine. In hindsight, I could agree with the indigenization of the Roman Catholic episcopate, but it meant the excommunication of President François Duvalier and his entire ministerial cabinet. But that very same Duvalier, to counter the Catholic Church's viral pro *bourgeoisie* stance, introduced virulent forms of Protestantism, surmising an innate conservatism. These new missionaries—as distinct from the old Breton and Alsatian priests sent by Rome who favored the upper echelons of Haitian society—in their religious, cultural and racial prescriptions, these Protestants were about “breaking” Haitian culture from its “bad” habits. As all good Protestants, they embraced the vernacular, but rejected religions not their own.

Where do we go from here? Old rum in new bottles? Or a new sweet liquor for all Haitians?

One wonders, in hindsight, what was left of the glorious Haitian Revolution of yore, except for the inescapable fear it had created in all white nations and in the souls of white individuals, slave owners or not. That fear lingered well into the 19th and 20th centuries, and to the present-day. When Cuba fought for its independence in a struggle of thirty years duration, a young Winston Churchill decried the presence of Afro-Cuban soldiers in the insurgency: “Two-fifths of the insurgents are negroes,” he said. “These men would, in the event of success, demand a predominant share in the government, the result being another black republic.” The United States intervened to forestall that kind of independent Cuba, and succeeded. (Howard Zinn, Mike Konopacki, Paul Buhle, “History of American Empire,” 2008 page 39, 51.) Much later, a mature Churchill admitted the role of imperialism and slavery in capital formation, when he stated: “Our possession of the West Indies, like that of India...gave us the strength, the capital, the wealth at a time when no other European nation possessed such a reserve. It enabled us to lay the foundation of that commercial and financial leadership which gave us a great position in the world.” (Winston Churchill addressing a banquet of West Indies planters in London, July 20, 1939). Fast forward to January 1st, 1959: the Cuban

Revolution became almost as vilified as the movements which had created Haiti on January 1st, 1804.

It is immensely difficult to forge national, collective and personal identities when all the world, the very essence of civilization, as Europeans called themselves, were against you.

The Goudougoudou of January 12, 2010 was yet one more cataclysm added to many others. The battle for Haiti still rages on. At the fall of Duvalierism, between the mid-1980s and the uprisings in Gonaïves and Cap Haïtien, and the overthrow of President Aristide in 2004, Haiti was in the throes of re-inventing itself politically and socially. Politically, by seeking an expansion of the body politic beyond the upper and middle classes, to include the urban working class and the peasantry; socially, by finding a revolutionary path whereby the common Haitian would find honor and respect in his or her homeland. Haiti's cultural re-invention, as yet incomplete, started in the 1920s, partly under the aegis of Jean Price-Mars—who created the term “*africologie*” in the 1940s—as a sequel to the cataclysm of the American Occupation.

Cultural changes came in the Constitution of 1987 when the national language and the national religion were recognized formally, and not denigrated and criminalized as in the past. One maintains that language and religion are the markers of a nation's genius; all nations have created these meta-structures that give to them their originality amongst all nations, and the conditions that create the demands for self-government.

I contend that for some, the man-made disaster of last January, on the 12th day, at 4:53 PM in the year of 2010, created confusion then clarity. It allows us to hit the re-set button, as it were, to re-think the nation, as Haiti now re-invents itself physically.

Zafè nèg pa janm piti. Dèyè mònn, gen mònn. Bourik travay pou chwal galonnen. Si travay te bon bagay, moun rich ta pran l lontan. Roch nan dlo ka kònn doulè roch lan soley. Si Kreyol trompe Ginen, se Ginen ki vlé. Lalwa toujou gen yon zatrap ladan ni. And my favorite: *Kaka kankou chen pa anyen, se tranble janm nan ki tout.* (Translation of last proverb: the people must be aware of false prophets).

One understands the despair, the seemingly unending struggles during which freedom stalls, starts, then stops again. The dualities introduced by Westerners belie human and Haitian realities, and those of the cosmos. There are few universals. One is reminded of the story of Boukman's prayer—perhaps apocryphal—in which the God of the whites demands the destruction of the enslaved and his/her culture, while the African God who rides us, requires that we “listen to the freedom that speaks to our hearts.” (Bellegarde-Smith (2004), 60). The freed American slave,

John Newton Templeton, in an engrossing morality play, “Free Man of Color,” says, “Your God brought my people here in chains. My God wept while it was happening.” (“Theater review: ‘Free Man of Color,’ at Colony Theater,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 2010).

Oftentimes, educated Americans have resorted to their own sense of mysticism, culture and race, often all three, to disparage Haiti. Pat Robertson, David Brooks, Lawrence Harrison come to mind. Often American scholars cannot easily explain economic development or underdevelopment outside their own historical parameters and the exigencies of capitalism. They are a-historical in their pursuits, hence my praise for these U.S. historians I named at the beginning. Oftentimes, in these analyses, they show disregard for economic conditions that erupt from systems of social class; expounds on American values, and ignore global capitalism. The viewpoint becomes quite literally, black or white, good and bad, civilized and primitive. This is too religious for my taste, as a practicing *oungan*. Life is never that simple. There comes the necessity for a massive paradigm shift, arising from the deep cultural reservoir of Haitians themselves. The moral of the story? We are indeed the product of creolization, the offsprings of a rape. We are neither French nor Africans, though we are reminded of ancestry: The language we speak is fine; the religions we practice are fine, if freely selected, *sans arrière pensée*.

I want to close with two statements. The first is by a British historian and philosopher. J.G.A. Pollock who argued that:

Since so large a part of men’s consciousness of environment and time is gained through consciousness of the frame of social relationships that they inhabit, the conceptualization of tradition is an important source of their images of society, time, and history. The importance of these visibly transcend the political; we are looking at one of the origins of a distinctly human awareness.

The second statement is mine, made when I gave the formal Michael Baptista Lecture at York University, in March 2010.

Sometimes we seem to need a cataclysm that set in motion these forces that shall propel us forward, disarming the certainties that hold us back. Oscillating between fear and hope, fear and longing, we may fail to realize the beauty and the horror of it all. We hope to move forward. We move forward impaled by the notion of time, by the motion of space. And while we suffer, we can still glance

at eternity. We can re-invent ourselves as the earth moved. Indeed, sometimes, we need things to be “thrown up,” as earthquakes do, to move toward new directions. I find hope in the genius of the Haitian people, collectively.

Finally, having cavorted with men and women who lived much of their lives in the 19th century, who knew men and women who lived in the 18th century, it felt right and proper to retire in the 21st century, and leave the stage to the young, upcoming scholars in this audience, those of you who understand computers, Facebook and e-mails, and to those twits who twitter.

Mèsi anpil. Praise the Lwa!