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9. To 'stay where you are' as a decolonial gesture: Glissant's philosophy of Antillean space in the context of Césaire and Fanon

Miguel Gualdrón Ramírez

What does the intensity of living in a 'paradise' do to its inhabitants? Jamaica Kincaid offers an answer in the closing pages of her book *A Small Place*: 'Antigua is beautiful. Antigua is too beautiful. Sometimes the beauty of it seems unreal. Sometimes the beauty of it seems as if it were stage sets for a play, for no real sunset could look like that; no real seawater could strike that many shades of blue at once' (1988, p. 77). The list of things too beautiful to be real in Antigua extends for two pages; it includes a detailed description of the perfection of every shade of colour in nature in Antigua, the unflawed simplicity of its small houses, the misery of those who inhabit its perfection: 'All of this is so beautiful, all of this is not real like any other real thing that there is. It is as if, then, the beauty ... were a prison, and as if everything and everybody inside it were locked in and everything and everybody that is not inside were locked out' (ibid., p. 79).

A place like this becomes a small place, where small events are cultivated and where there are no other marks or events to compare the life one has in such an environment. The people who live in a paradise (one that has been created as such, too beautiful to be real) cannot give a complete account of their land, nor their history, nor themselves; the prison determines not only the homogeneity of their territory, the dullness of life in a tourist paradise, but also the uniformity of time, the lack of marks in history ('No Industrial Revolution, no revolution of any kind, no age of anything' (ibid., p. 79)) to distinguish what was from what is from what will be. And thus Antiguan do not know who they are: incapable of making a decision, Kincaid wonders whether she comes from children, artists or lunatics, 'or an exquisite combination of all three' (ibid., p. 57).

Is it possible to escape from a prison like this? If the colonised person's own land does not belong to them, and everything inside is trapped in a paradise constructed for others, how can this space be inhabited? Moreover, is it

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possible to resist the colonial construction of space that we grasp in Caribbean paradises? What does a decolonial, spatial strategy look like? The aim in this chapter is to consider the approach to the question of territorial contestation in the Caribbean as it has been discussed by an author from another small place, Martinique: Édouard Glissant.¹ In his 1981 book *Le discours Antillais* (*Caribbean Discourse*, hereafter *DA*), Glissant states that the combination of different decolonial strategies of resistance in the Antilles requires a return to what he calls ‘*le point d'intrication*’ [the point of entanglement],² which has to occur in space as well as in time: it amounts to a seizure of the ‘here’ and ‘now’ and not of the past or an elsewhere, as is the case in other Caribbean thinkers. This focus on the present is a similar gesture to the one Glissant sees in Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon: in both of them the locus of the inquiry is also related to a ‘now’. However, they see the necessity of the ‘here’ differently: their accounts of the Caribbean (colonial) spatiality, according to Glissant, would be limited in scope and incapable of creating a proper link between nature and culture, the main reason for not inhabiting their own land.

The place of Glissant’s philosophy of decolonisation in relation to Fanon and Césaire has been theorised by some authors (Yountae, 2017, pp. 88–101). But the emphasis has not been placed on the fact that Glissant refers to both his predecessors as examples of the absence of a link between the two tactics of resistance – *un détour* [a tactical diversion] and *un retour* [a return]. For Glissant, both Césaire and Fanon are still diverters and not properly producers of a new reality, of a real Caribbean territory and history. Thus, following previous analyses by commentators, but departing from them (or adding a new layer, the layer of spatiality that should be combined with a traditional analysis of temporality), this chapter defends the idea that Glissant locates his decolonial thought between Césaire and Fanon: it neither advocates a reconstruction that points to a past located elsewhere (Africa), nor recommends the rejection and replacement of the here/now with a different, unknown spatiality and temporality. For Glissant, the locus of resistance is located in the present and in the possibilities of decolonisation already contained in the Caribbean, although concealed and understated. This chapter begins by showing what is, according to Glissant, the necessary conjunction between the different tactics of resistance, then focuses on some of Césaire’s and Fanon’s texts in order to show why they do not offer this necessary link. The final section comes back to

1 As shown in my article ‘Transversality as disruption and connection’ (2019), the question of the colonality of space in the Caribbean cannot be separated from a colonial temporality and this is also true of the decolonial form of resistance to this rule. The present chapter will focus mainly on some of the spatial aspects of this resistance, which nevertheless presuppose what will be called, following J. Drabinski’s use of the term, an ‘abyssal beginning’ of the Caribbean, a beginning that challenges a linear, continuous form of temporality (Drabinski, 2015, p. 141). This is what Glissant calls ‘the abyss’ (see Glissant’s ‘The open boat’, in *Poetics of relation*, 1997, p. 5–9).

2 Glissant, 1997, p. 56.

Glissant to analyse the notion of *l'antillanité* as the possibility of truly focusing on a here/now as a multilayered strategy of resistance.

Going back to the point of entanglement (space/time)

The relocation of African slaves brought to the Americas, as part of the slave trade organised by European powers through the Middle Passage, is described by Glissant as a *transbord* [transference] or a re-invention (1981, pp. 41–55).³ The slaves could not rely on their knowledge, heritage or tradition to deal with the horrifying situation into which they were forced because they were not transplanted as a community, but transferred to a new territory as already uprooted and disconnected, a situation their descendants inherited and just carried with them. There were no preceding collectivities on board ship, no previous common experience or expertise, usually not even a common language that would have provided a basis to cooperatively resist the new circumstances they were forced into. A collective resistance had to be created anew from this point forward.

In one of the first sections of *Le discours Antillais*, 'Le retour et le détour' [Reversion and diversion], Glissant focuses on two main historical strategies of resistance to this radical dispossession. The first is an almost automatic impulse towards reversion, to go back to the origins, a literal or metaphorical attempt to return to Africa on the part of the transported populations in the Americas. Without mentioning them directly, Glissant seems to be referring to some of the most important movements of decolonisation in the 19th and 20th centuries, at least for the African diaspora, such as the several metamorphoses of pan-Africanism and the *négritude* movement. In general, the impulse towards reversion describes the compulsion to retain and defend, in order to reconstruct, all the cultural elements of the previous life that are still alive in the communities. However, this propulsion of reversion ultimately constitutes for Glissant an unsatisfactory attempt to go back to a beginning, Africa, for example, that is no longer the origin of these populations: the Middle Passage (understood as a *gouffre* [abyss] in *Poétique de la Relation* [Poetics of Relation]) effectively breaks any sustainable connection between both shores of the ocean.

If they wanted to survive and resist the tortures of slavery (and later the despair of their lives when 'freed'), the Caribbean populations had the option of mimicking a new culture that was imposed on them and assimilating to it, to the extent that something like this was possible. In a colonial condition, however, the 'enemy' is usually not completely known, or at least not enough to bypass and go back to the 'real' origins of the communities in peril. Since colonial history is erased in the very act of being imposed, in order to be

3 In the use of the primary texts throughout this chapter, the first reference will be to the original in French and then the English translation (when available). When the published translation has been modified, this will be indicated.

replaced by a narrative that portrays the colonial situation as necessary, the source of oppression is not immediately clear to the consciousness of these peoples. Thus, Glissant states that reversion is not enough: a *détour* is also necessary in order to find the source of an oppression that cannot always be seen from the current position. The concealed character of the enemy after hundreds of years of colonial domination requires a different approach, one that Glissant calls *parallactic*: since the source of oppression is not directly visible, the community needs to move and change its position in order to see an objective that was previously covered by an obstacle.

The condition for the success of this parallactic strategy, as a means to survive, depends on the possibility of finding concrete obstacles that the *détour* can elude by shifting positions. Examples of these obstacles in Glissant's works are the infantilised French language used by the masters when they spoke to the slaves; the interdiction for the slaves of planting their own food; the crusade against Creole in a 'post-colonial' Martinique, and so on. Against all these obstacles, the enslaved communities started to oppose creolised forms of culture.

Just as with *retour* strategies, however, the forms of resistance that constitute a *détour* are also insufficient if they are the only resource used by these communities. What they need is a *retour/détour* set of strategies, a constant shift in location that does not lose sight of the fact that the ultimate goal is always to (re)construct a liberated condition, and not just to avoid a particular colonial imposition. This is a major point that commentators usually forget, who tend to focus only on diversion as strategy, without realising that Glissant studies in detail examples that are exclusively forms of *détour* and shows them as having failed.⁴ In the case of strategies of diversion that are not coupled with reversions, Glissant analyses the limitation of a series of intellectual and practical attempts to trick the enemy in order to find a different point of view from which the source of oppression can be seen; in all these cases, according to Glissant, the strategy is not linked with a *retour* strategy and thus ends up being a failed attempt.

How is it possible to link properly these two sets of strategies that Glissant has been analysing separately? How is it possible to try *retour/détour* strategies that overcome the failures of separating them? This chapter suggests the best method is to adopt the words and acts of Antillean writers and poets (Marcus Garvey, Aimé Césaire, George Padmore, Frantz Fanon) as 'diverters' and not as 'returners' (which they are usually considered to be) in order to find a way at last of attempting a real return. This is where the legacy of Martinican authors such as Césaire and Fanon is located, even in their radically different conceptions:

The poetic word of Césaire, the political act of Fanon, led up *somewhere*,
authorizing by diversion the return to the only point where our problems

4 Good examples of this approach in secondary literature are Britton (1999, ch. 1) and Yountae (2017, ch. 4)

lay in wait for us ... They illustrate and establish the landscape of a shared Elsewhere [*d'un Ailleurs partagé*]. We must return to the place [*lieu*]. Diversion [*détour*] is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion [*retour*]: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away (Glissant, 1981, pp. 56–7; translation modified).

In my view, Glissant's main contribution lies in the possibility of theorising and poetising this connection, not only in relation to the studies of Césaire, Fanon and others but also to decolonial theory in the Caribbean. Both Césaire and Fanon attempted forms of diversion (masked sometimes as forms of return) that ultimately put *us* in the position of tackling the very issue that has been concealed: *le lieu* [that place] which constitutes the *point d'intrication* out of which Caribbean peoples have been removed. For Glissant there has never been a real possession of the land for these communities; they have always been renting their own space, *de passage* [in transit or passing through] (p. 149; not included in the English edition)). Thus, just as with the Antigua of Kincaid, the inhabitants are incapable of an account of themselves: only when Martinicans can spatially return to their land (not Africa, that is forever lost, but the Archipelago, the islands, the sea and its shores, its circularity, its submarine rootedness) can the tactic of diversion finally accomplish its purpose and the *détour* turn to a form of self-expression (Glissant, 1981, p. 57). This point of entanglement is not an idealised, mythical point of origin. It is a spatial point (here) and a temporal one (now): the Antilles.

Spatial variations on the present: Fanon and Césaire

'In this inert town': Aimé Césaire and the possibilities of the Caribbean

As mentioned previously, one of the things the thought of these Martinican authors has in common is the fact that the philosophical enquiry, related to finding the possibilities of changing a social and political reality, points to the present, even when it looks for the origins of said reality. This is clear in Césaire, despite the usual claim that his intellectual activity is located in the African past of the Caribbean communities. As Drabinski (2015, pp. 148–51) shows, locating thought in the present does not mean accepting the present as it is; as we shall see, Césaire's evaluation of the colonised present leads to an almost visceral rejection of that same present, of the conditions under which the communities live in that situation, of the erasure of ancient forms of culture, in sum, of the incessant work of colonisation in replacing one civilisation with another. However, this rejection carries with it in Césaire not only a temporal meaning, but also a spatial one and this is what is emphasised here.

The connection between the 'present' and the 'here' is perhaps most evident in *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* [Notebook of a Return to the Native Land, hereafter *Cahier*], where place and moment become almost indistinguishable.⁵ From the very first strophes Césaire identifies the present of his narration (the incessant repetition of a 'when': 'At the end of first light') with a dreadful description of the place, the Antilles, where this now takes place. Thus, from the very first page this 'now' is again and again interlaced with 'in this inert town', that is, a still space, perhaps even unmovable at this particular time. And there is nothing equivocal about the impression this narrator makes upon arrival: the present time and the present space are described from the beginning of the poem as rotten, ill and dirty: 'And aged poverty rotting under the sun, silently; an aged silence bursting with tepid pustules' (2013, p. 1).

The reasons for this account are, of course, related to the conditions of misery, poverty, illiteracy, famine and so on of the region. The population's economic conditions and the particular harshness of the form of production they are engaged in in the Antilles are emphasised in the text, making it extremely difficult to envisage the 'beauty' that tourists and colonisers alike usually associate with the colonial space. And just as described sarcastically by Kincaid in *A Small Place*, any escape from this unreal situation seems impossible (*ibid.*, p. 6) because the people are not even capable of understanding and challenging their conditions; they cannot express themselves. The inert town and the mute multitude represent the real condition that renders impossible any form of redemption; denied their true cry, which is one of hunger, misery, revolt and so on (see Césaire, 2013, pp. 2–3) the people are disconnected not only from their own situation, which means that they cannot understand it and thus are unable to change it, but also from the space they inhabit. They are estranged from themselves and from their surroundings.

But what is the reason for these conditions? We know: a history of colonisation, dispossession, extraction of labour and resources and racism. However, this negative assessment of the here/now also has to do with the spatial, colonial construction of the Antilles themselves and not only with disconnection caused by the economic and social conditions imposed by the colonisers.⁶ This chapter next focuses on three instances of Césaire's contempt for the Caribbean landscape: the beach (and the sea), the island and the archipelago. In all three the poet suggests the complicity of space in the people's muteness and inert character and thus the landscape itself becomes an ally of the oppressor and not a tool for liberation and resistance.

5 For the purposes of this analysis the focus is on the first version (1939) of the *Cahier* as edited by A. J. Arnold and C. Eshleman. For a detailed analysis of the differences between the multiple editions of the *Cahier* between 1939 and 1947, see Laforge, 2012.

6 This chapter does not suggest that the space of the Archipelago is independent of its economic conditions, or that for Césaire there is an essential rottenness of the landscape. Perhaps one is caused by the other.

With regard to the first, Césaire describes the character of the beach, the incessant movement of the waves breaking, as *lecher* [licking or sucking] the life out of the land. The beach seems to be merely the remnants of the earth that will be devoured by the sea, or the material itself being chewed, licked, decomposed: 'or rather the sea is a huge dog licking and biting the shins of the beach, biting them so fiercely that it will end up devouring it, the beach and Straw Street along with it' (ibid., p. 16).

In the Antilles, a place circumscribed by beaches hysterically licked by the sea (ibid., p. 10), the landscape thus becomes an eternal reminder of the death to come, of the gradual decomposition of the region, of the inescapability of misery. A similar thing happens with the island (Martinique) and the Archipelago which are described in strophe 32, for example, as 'this little ellipsoidal nothing trembling four fingers above the line [of the equator]'. The colonial landscape is nothing but the will to self-negation, destruction and death that offers no possibilities of redemption and liberation. The reason for this, as suggested in strophe 34, is the *non-clotûre* [non-closure] of the landscape in question: the openness of the sea, the ellipsoidal shape of Martinique, the arch of the Antilles as if running away from itself. All these conditions mark for Césaire a negative non-closure incapable of keeping life within, incapable of delimiting and giving a steady identity.

What is, then, Césaire's response to this pale diagnosis of the Antillean here/now? He has at least two different answers (which sometimes seem contradictory) in some of his most important essays on the question. The first is an attempt to organise around a collective past represented in African civilisation and a certain survival of that past. That which survives, according to 'Culture et colonisation' (1956) [Culture and colonisation], is less the content, the knowledge, the culture of an African civilisation, but mostly what he calls its 'unity', one that enables a form of *solidarity in time* among African descendants from all over the world:

There is a double solidarity among all those who are gathered here: first, *a horizontal solidarity*, a solidarity created by the colonial or semicolonial or parcolonial situation that has been imposed on us from without. And on the other hand, another solidarity that is vertical, *a solidarity in time*, which comes from the fact that out of an initial unity, the unity of African civilisation, there has been differentiated a whole series of cultures that all owe something to that civilisation (1955: 129–30).

The possibility of guaranteeing this 'vertical solidarity' among cultures, this form of common origin, is thus at the source of the possibility of resisting the work of colonisation, and thus perhaps the present that Césaire had described two decades before. And this verticality is *in time*: it follows time downwards and upwards, to and from a common past of greatness that has been lost *in the present*. But, how can people organise around this common harmonious past? Although, as we shall see, Césaire explicitly denies the possibilities of a

return in texts such as *Discours sur le colonialisme* [Discourse on Colonialism; hereafter *Discours*], he sometimes explicitly uses the term when referring to the decolonial work that all those who share a 'horizontal solidarity' must carry out: '[T]his Congress is a return to origins [*un retour aux sources*] that all communities undertake at their moment of crisis, and at the same time it is an assembly bringing together men who have to grasp the same harsh reality, and hence of men fighting the same fight and sustained by the same hope' (2001, p. 130).

Despite the formulation, Césaire himself is not ambiguous regarding the possibility of continuing the process of an African civilisation at the moment of its disruption by Europe. The development of African civilisation cannot simply be continued: 'Let us say simply that it was struck at its base. At its base, and thus irrevocably' (ibid., p. 132). What Césaire suggests is thus not the taking up of a collective past, a return in the sense of continuing, but the acknowledgment of a unity in the origin, an origin irrecoverable as it was, but fashionable, shapeable, 'a return to the sources', and by creating these, a new African civilisation (ibid., pp. 51–2). It is thus not a matter of returning, going back, but of *dépassement* [going beyond] by acknowledging both a horizontal and a vertical solidarity. Césaire speaks of 'the African culture yet to be born, or in the para-African culture yet to be born' (1955: 141), perhaps as a form of future perfect.⁷

Challenging the immobility of the colonised by bringing about a new history: decolonisation in Les damnés de la terre (Frantz Fanon)

Frantz Fanon represents for Glissant a different side of a similar decolonial attitude, another form of *détour* to the one sketched in the previous section which follows Césaire's diagnosis of the present and the here. This chapter now offers an interpretation of Fanon's understanding of a decolonial strategy in a spatial sense and not just a temporal one. By emphasising two of the essays included in *Les damnés de la terre* [The Wretched of the Earth; hereafter *Damnés*], it shows how for Fanon the colonial space emerges as a political space of intervention, shaped by the colonial powers, and how the decolonial gesture is to retake these spaces which are not yet one's own. This understanding of spatiality, although from a very different perspective to that described in Césaire, would represent a similar attitude toward decolonisation: the search for an elsewhere, driving the impulse away from ourselves, in order to find liberation.

Even though Fanon does not refer explicitly to this distinction, it is possible to interpret his stance towards the temporality of decolonisation using Césaire's characterisation of two forms of solidarity among oppressed peoples in the contemporary world: a vertical one (between peoples that share a common

7 Drabinski, 2015, p. 150.

origin) and a horizontal one (between communities that share a similar form of (colonial) oppression). This is apparent in a veiled critique aimed by Fanon at Césaire, or rather at the notion of 'négritude' that the latter has defended as a form of vertical solidarity. As we see in 'Sur la culture nationale' [On national culture], an essay included in *Damnés*, 'négritude' constitutes the first answer to the question of how to resist the colonist claim that the black is a savage and lacks any form of culture (Fanon, 2010, p. 212, pp. 195–236). To this broad, unqualified judgment by European colonisers, 'l'intellectuel colonisé' [the colonised intellectual who defends 'négritude'] would oppose a similarly broad defence of a national culture in terms of a continent (*ibid.*, pp. 211–2).

'Sur la culture nationale' constitutes a demolishing critique of this approach to the possibility of 'continental' national culture. Such critique is based on questioning the possibility of what Césaire calls a vertical solidarity. Fanon states, first, that almost no common issues unite communities made up of African descendants *as African descendants*: the only thing they have in common is being defined primarily in opposition to whites: as black, that is, they only share what Césaire calls a horizontal solidarity (*ibid.*, pp. 215–6). But this horizontality constitutes an empty category for Fanon: it is never based on an actual denigration of particular peoples, traditions, languages and so on, but on a meaningless generalisation to which only an equally empty stereotype can be opposed in 'continental' terms.

Regarding the verticality that points back to a common past, as previously mentioned it would be a mistake to understand Césaire's decolonial gesture as a call for a return to Africa. Fanon also rejects the possibility of commonality in chronological terms; the verticality points more to the idea of constructing a 'myth of the black', criticised both in *Damnés* and in *Peau noire, masques blancs* [Black Skin, White Masks] (1952). In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, both in the introduction and chapter 5, embracing the idea of blackness, refining this idea in contraposition to what the white man is seen to be, amounts to nothing more than the embracing of an idea *created* by Europeans.⁸

Fanon replaces (or, perhaps, dialectically supersedes) black identity with a decolonial nation which actually shares that horizontal solidarity but now doesn't just include African descendants; we can extend this solidarity to all the wretched of the earth. In this regard, 'Sur la culture nationale' offers two insights relevant to this analysis of Glissant and Césaire: first, the decolonial

8 G. Ciccariello-Maher, in his recent book *Decolonizing Dialectics* (2017), has a different interpretation of the role of self-assertion, of black identity, in the struggle for liberation and decolonisation in Fanon. (A similar understanding can be seen in G. Coulthart's *Red Skins, White Masks* (2014), ch. 5.) For Ciccariello-Maher, the affirmation of a black identity is the first step in the dialectic, one that has the power to jump-start a movement that is otherwise foreclosed, because of the ontological difference between black and white (2017, p. 50). Although I agree with the need to see the dialectical role of *négritude* in Fanon, it is important also to show the striking criticism to it, in particular of the fact that it is an intellectual, educated endeavour, a criticism that Ciccariello-Maher leaves aside in his book.

gesture in Fanon, in a different sense from that in Césaire, points to the present: one needs to be sceptical of the intellectuals and artists who turn their gaze towards the past when trying to attack the sources of oppression (2010, p. 225), because the past runs the risk of becoming only the traces of what has been lost, of what exists no more, the corpse of history.

Second, and at a deeper level, Fanon is determined to show in this essay that we can only talk about a national culture, perhaps a national identity, after actual liberation occurs; before that, under the colonial situation, struggle itself was the only form of culture and thus only reactive, forced, oppositional. A national consciousness, even nationalistic in its nature (fervent, blind, undifferentiated) becomes the only form of national culture, a form nevertheless empty in its formulation. As such, it becomes not just national, but international, given the shared conditions of colonised peoples all over the world. And if struggle is the only culture of the colonised, the old culture ought to be replaced as well: 'After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonized man' (ibid., pp. 245–6).

This last idea can also be grasped in what Fanon developed in a different essay included in *Damnés*, 'De la violence' [On violence] (ibid., pp. 37–104). From the outset of this chapter decolonisation has been described as the basic replacement of the upper part of the colonial system by the lower part: the coloniser, settler, imperial power ought to be replaced by those who have historically been enslaved, colonised or left aside. To put it in Fanon's terms, 'decolonisation is quite simply the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men' (ibid., p. 35). This replacement, this turning of the structure upside-down does not, however, simply put the colonised in charge and erase the colonial scar: that which would be put back in place is also a creation of the coloniser. It has been materially shaped into a colonised being, a thing, and thus also has to be undone by the process of liberation.

The premise of this argument is the idea that colonialism imposes a Manichean world, a clear distinction between two 'species' of humans that are opposed to each other, two species in separate spaces or zones. This distinction has at least two levels in Fanon's works: first, we can grasp the clear opposition between the spaces these two 'species' inhabit in the well-known statement that there is a zone of non-being in which 'the black man' has been enclosed (2001, pp. 6/xii). What we have on this first level is an almost ontological plane of discussion because the separation between species, although materially graspable, is nevertheless extended to the whole being of the black subject, who cannot change from one zone to the other. The idea of a replacement of species defended in *Damnés*, however, carries another level of interpretation. It is possible to think of this new separation in terms of compartments: the colonial world is *compartimenté* (Fanon, 2010, pp. 37–8). This constitutes a more geographical, architectural level of analysis, one that Fanon sees represented in the material distinctions of buildings for settlers and natives, institutions, lines

in the cities separating neighbourhoods from slums or ghettos and so on: these are no longer ontological zones, but geographical ones.

I focus here on this second sense, the more material, geographical conception of the endeavour of decolonisation. As outlined above, Fanon's level of discussion in *Damnés* corresponds to this second one; and it is in this sense that he states that, since the colonial world is cut in two, the work of decolonisation is simply the abolition of one of these spaces (*ibid.*, p. 41). But as a result of the Manichean, colonial world Fanon describes in the text, the abolition of one of these compartments necessarily carries with it the abolition of the other, because the compartmentalisation does not precede the colonial rule. Thus, the aforementioned replacement of one species by the other (*ibid.*, p. 35) cannot be understood here as driving out the colonist to replace them by the native. This is why Fanon reaches a similar point of view here to that described in 'Sur la culture nationale': only in and through liberation is it possible to talk about a new human being who does not carry with them the burden of a past, not even a pre-colonial past (*ibid.*, p. 36).

It is only in this regard, in this spatial, geographical conception of decolonisation, that Fanon understands the role of history in the struggle. Colonisation and decolonisation are finally recognised in terms of doing or undoing history in the sense of shaping the landscape of the country, their geographical zones, in a particular way. The settler has created a peaceful, beautiful land and this particular shape becomes its history:

In this becalmed zone the sea has a smooth surface, the palm tree stirs gently in the breeze, the waves lap against the pebbles, and raw materials are ceaselessly transported, justifying the presence of the settler: and all the while the native, bent double, more dead than alive, exists interminably in an unchanging dream. The settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning (Fanon, 2010, pp. 51, 52–3).

This space, which is not the space where the natives live, becomes the truth of the land and its only destiny: the almost unreal beauty of Antigua, as described by Kincaid. But by destroying this history and replacing it with a new one, the decolonial struggle does not go back to an ancient history of the land; it does not seek the *real*, pre-colonial truth of the country. Moving out of this colonised compartment can only be achieved by crafting a new history, by creating new sections (*ibid.*, p. 51).

The consequences of this understanding of history are now clearly graspable, especially when confronted by Césaire's understanding of tradition and an African soul. The decolonial history, the only history of the nation, becomes a process of demystification in a double sense: first, as liberation from the image of the native created by the colonial forces; but, second, this also means that all the cultural practices of the native, all the dances, sensitivities, myths, magic, religion, faith, and so on, are seen as practices the native carries out in order to survive during this colonial rule, as ways to 'exorcize itself, to liberate itself,

to say itself' (ibid., p. 57; translation modified). In this way, decolonisation, the creation of a new history, also requires a detachment from these practices, a demystification of the Manichaeism of a history externally imposed that engenders, only negatively, an equally colonised history of ancient practices (ibid., p. 58).

Thus, in contradistinction to Césaire – for whom the Caribbean space is rotten and cannot be redeemed and thus it is necessary to look elsewhere, in another space but at the same time – for Fanon, the spatiality itself of the colonised territory requires a total transformation, a creative task coming out of a detoxing force. Decolonisation is, according to this perspective, a possibility arising from the destruction of one's identity and space, in totally reorganising the current identity and in constructing that of the future following the aforesaid disconnection. Only out of this displacement can the real history of the country emerge, an absolute beginning for the liberated country.

L'antillanité as poetics of Caribbean spatiality

The temporal/spatial understanding undertaken here makes it possible to re-interpret Glissant's suggestion to take Césaire's and Fanon's work as an example of *détour* and not the joint strategy of *détour/retour*. In the case of Césaire, his poetic work amounts to a form of *détour* because it is unable to come back to the lived reality of the colonised peoples. Ironically, the '*retour au pays natal*' never takes place because the poet always remains on the surface of the reality he perceives; the narrator goes back to a land that is not *theirs*, but the land of the consequences of dispossession as imposed externally on the communities that inhabit it. Thus, the only path forward seems to be to reject it completely and to look elsewhere for the source of liberation, the construction of Africanness in the present. Fanon traces a similar movement, one which looks for an *elsewhere* in order to find the source of liberation. It is an *elsewhere* perceived almost only in negative terms: Fanon looks for the source of the oppression in a different place to the one the colonised subject inhabits, and the origin of liberation comes out of the attempt of taking over such a place and replacing those who live there. Neither a free past nor the culture created out of enslavement and colonisation constitute the source of decolonisation, because they are completely lost in the work of colonisation or are tainted with its production of subalternity. Once achieved, freedom rejects the culture of the Antillean, that is, Creolisation.

For Glissant, the Caribbean space as a form of resistance begins with a multilayered territory that is inhabited by all actors and where tactics of decolonial resistance also depend on the historical presence of colonisers. Reducing the colonial world to a Manichean one would artificially reduce the actual and diverse process of Creolisation. Culture comes before liberation: culture is actually the only thing that can liberate. For Glissant, the spaces

are and are not one's own, but whatever the case, they are inhabited all the time. There is no absolute duality, as in Fanon, or absolute dispossession, as in Césaire, but space needs to be understood in all its complexity, as being home to simultaneous forms of oppression and resistance, limitations and openness, interdictions and freedom. In order to do that, Caribbean communities need to go back to this point, to this territory out of which they have been diverted. This is made possible by Glissant's notion of *l'antillanité* [Antillanity].

'The advance of America': conditions of Antillean, spatial poetics

Glissant wrote: 'Our landscape is its own monument. Its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history' (1981, p. 11). This statement, part of one of the introductions to *Discours*, is the initial mention of a motif Glissant repeatedly revisits in the book. Antillean history is spatial, not just because history does not occur outside this region's spatial conditions (perhaps true of every region), but also because those conditions configure a particular form of history as Antillean, that is, as archipelagic, insular, abyssal, etc.

This connection between landscape and history, however, does not span only the island of Martinique, or the archipelago of the Antilles; there is a form of continuity between the archipelago and the continent itself, as becomes clear in Glissant's analysis in section 42, 'Chili'. But a consideration of this continuity does not imply an absolute connection, neither a linear route (in spatial terms) nor a causal relation (in temporal terms). Rather, because of the geography of the Antilles, continuity represents a disconnection from the mainland that nevertheless does not cut its ties to it, but also the continent's expectation of regaining, following after, or simply striving for movement, for expansion:

What does this other America mean to us? What do we mean to it? Before its dense and multiple presence, we seem to fade into insignificance. Would we simply be several drops left by this immense river after it had broken up and slowed down? Could we in fact be the other source, I mean the necessary stop in the journey out of which the journey itself is constituted? In one way or another, the Caribbean is the advance of America [*l'avancée de l'Amérique*]. The part that escapes from the mass of continent and therefore participates of its weight. (ibid., p. 117; translation modified)

'L'avancée de l'Amérique', a spatial image that no longer looks at the archipelago as dead, sterile terrain (Césaire), or as a severed or occupied piece of land that must be replaced (Fanon), but as a source of movement and expansion, as openness.⁹ There is, indeed, a sense of risk involved in this understanding of an

9 The focus on this optimistic image does not intend to suggest it is the only approach to the possibilities of the Caribbean. In many ways, this region was in the vanguard of the continent as a testing site of colonialism and definitively as a first contact space out of which the whole

'advance': the Caribbean is not just a part that expands itself outside the main body; it also constitutes an element, a group of elements, that momentarily escape the limits of the volume they normally inhabit to explore and investigate what comes ahead (in time, in space) and might not come back in one piece, or even alive.

To investigate this openness, to talk about history, identity, politics, culture and so on, the poetics coming from the Antilles must be able to open up for the openness itself; listening but also voicing, what Glissant calls *l'éclat* [explosion, spark, radiance] throughout *Discours*. This means not only witnessing it, but also being able to create the reality of this expansion, this openness, this explosion (ibid., p. 109). As will be shown, such openness of the archipelago no longer means, as it did in Césaire, a negative aspect, a harmful non-closure, an incompleteness.

What are, then, the particular geographical, territorial and spatial conditions of an Antillean discourse, following its landscape? Glissant occupies himself with this question in section 36, 'Techniques', where he addresses the possibilities of true national literature, that is, one that is at last actually concerned with the conditions of the existence of such a nation and one that attempts self-expression. Trying to express the reality of a community requires, then, a meditation on a suitable way and this is patently obvious in the shortcomings of realism as a poetic 'technique' when applied to the Antillean experience. These shortcomings are perceivable in at least three functions of Caribbean spatiality:

1. The function of landscape: whereas in realistic poetics landscape always constitutes a context, a background to the action, in the Antilles landscape it can only be a character in itself. This is even more crucial given the fact that, as already shown, colonialism is defined as that which causes an alienation of communities from their territories, the separation between culture and nature (ibid., pp. 104–5);
2. The absence of seasons and seasonal rhythms: an Antillean poetics has to be one of duration, of saturation. The environmental conditions of the Antilles demand this form of poetics, in opposition to a seasonal region in which the lived experience expects resolution, moments of ecstasy, twists in the narrative. What the absence of seasons implies for the Antilles is a monotony of narration, a 'plain-chant', inscribed in the lack of harmony of life without a determined cycle to explain it or to make it predictable and linear (ibid, pp. 106–5);
3. Chaos and anxiety: because of the chaos of memory in the Antilles, the region also expresses a complexity of levels which are not clearly graspable and should not be presented that way in the poetic work. No clarity is capable of addressing this chaos because the chaos should not be

imperial enterprise emerged. During World War Two it was a space which blocked economic possibilities for the continent, as the history of Martinique tragically exemplifies.

dissolved, but expressed. Spatiality in the Caribbean exhibits the anxiety of multilinear relationships, the absence of a single way of explaining that should not be reduced to a linear narrative. Therefore, expressing such chaos of memory and space implies a function that goes beyond mere description and embraces a work of production (*ibid.*, p. 107). This new polyphony can be seen, for example, in Glissant's demand for new genres, given that novel and poem remain disconnected from an active communitarian production of this history and also privilege a written poetics.

***L'antillanité*: insularity as openness**

In this context, insularity takes on another meaning. Ordinarily, insularity is treated as a form of isolation, a neurotic reaction to place. However, in the Caribbean each island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea. It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining. An Antillean imagination liberates us from being smothered (*ibid.*, p. 139; translation modified).

In the context of the Antilles, to go back to the point of entanglement means to connect with an openness and expansion that allow a complicated set of hidden links demanding expression, but not complete clarification. It requires taking seriously the experience of landscape, the absence of seasons and the chaos of territory, but also the complicated relationship of the archipelago itself with the continent. The image of the Antilles as 'l'avancée de l'Amérique' suggests that the archipelago runs ahead of the continent, expanding it (calling it to move), but also risking losing touch with the mainland to the point that it has to be called back sometimes. As an imaginary, the Antilles mean freedom; and insularity has to become for the region's inhabitants an attitude toward liberation instead of a place of constraint and imprisonment.

Glissant refuses to define *l'antillanité* in the glossary to *Discours*, claiming that a term so extensively used has already acquired a reality. Faithful to this idea, Glissant uses it constantly as if it were already understood, as if what it communicates has already been established, or lived, or simply expressed by some communities, but on a different level. Whatever it is, it seems to be both a construction ('more than a theory, a vision', as he says in the glossary to *Discours* (p. 261)) and an already-lived attitude: 'Antillanité, an intellectual dream, lived at the same time in a subterranean way by our peoples' (*ibid.*, p. 139; translation modified).

This gesture of refusal defines the most important word in the book. As a vision, as an intellectual dream, *l'antillanité* constitutes a form of theoretical construction on the part of the one who reflects upon the presence of an already-existing connection of the archipelago. However, *l'antillanité* already

exists in a different dimension from this reflection: it is lived by Antillean peoples as the subterranean connection of the archipelago and of the island itself (Martinique). We can construct a theory, a vision, a plan for it, but it would only be tentative, because these connections cannot be exhaustively described or prefigured. Due to its opaqueness, it can never be just descriptive (it will never 'capture' its 'subject-matter' completely), but also not entirely prescriptive (it will never become a plan to be followed, or a set of criteria to be contrasted).

For the present purpose, this chapter will focus on the second sense of *l'antillanité*: the lived experience of the people. This is the subject of a brief section, number 82, 'Le vœu, le réel' [The hope, the real; translation modified]. In the title itself this notion is put at the site of an intersection between a reality and an aspiration, 'un vœu' [wish or hope]:

The notion of *antillanité* emerges from a reality that we will have to question, but also corresponds to a hope that we must clarify and whose legitimacy must be demonstrated.

A fragile reality (the experience of *l'antillanité*, woven together from one side of the Caribbean to the other) negatively twisted together in its urgency (*l'antillanité* as a hope, forever denied, often deferred, yet a strange, stubborn presence in our responses).

This reality is virtual: dense (inscribed in fact) but threatened (not inscribed in consciousness).

This hope is vital, but not obvious (*ibid.*, p. 221; translation modified).

There is thus a play between two extremes, a fragile positivity and an imperious negativity. The first of these faces is undeniable, according to Glissant: although not everyone has heard about the Caribbean, its existence is indisputable for anyone who knows about the specificities of this remarkable region of the Earth.¹⁰ But this indisputable reality, he says, is *virtual*: it has not been secured except in the common experience of these specificities and not in their conscious expression. This is why the positivity of this reality is fragile. The interesting point he adds here is that such a missing step towards expression corresponds to the necessity of transcending the élitaire aspect of manifestation, that is, the theoretical aspect *l'antillanité* (the 'intellectual dream') there has not been space for here.

The threat that the elitist, intellectual approach poses to self-expression is basically the same threat posed by the political, economic and, in general, historic conditions imposed on the Caribbean: severing the connections of transversality by imposing a deep isolation on every island. Whenever it is seen as separated, isolated from this common-lived experience of the people, *l'antillanité* runs the risk of becoming yet another external, disconnected form

10 This does not mean a simple affirmation of the ontic existence of the place: Glissant refers here to the particular character of a region whose geography, landscape, culture, historical conditions, etc. make it not only real, but noteworthy, perhaps even exceptional (pp. 221–2).

of expression, no matter how celebrated it is in international circles. In order to prevent this, it has to remain open to the insular/archipelagic character, which is in its turn an openness of the people towards its land, its experience in such a land and the connection to the rest of its inhabitants:

The distant, uncertain openness [*ouverture*] of the Caribbean is nonetheless capable of carrying forward our people to self-renewal and of providing them with renewed ambition, by making them possess their world and their lived experience (wherein *l'antillanité* is present) and by making them fall into step with those who also share the same space (this too is implied in *l'antillanité*) (ibid., pp. 223–4; translation modified).

This is the closest we come to Glissant describing *l'antillanité*, this '*ouverture*' suggested in a Caribbean take on insularity, an openness towards openness. It cannot constitute a complete manifestation (and that is why he would refuse to define it), but a form of expression as an attunement to the spatial/temporal conditions of the Antilles and the lived-experience of its inhabitants, of the people.¹¹ A poetics of *l'antillanité* has to remain caught in this insoluble tension between a vision and a lived experience, between an aspiration and a reality.

To remain in tension, however, does not mean that *l'antillanité* cannot attain true expression, or that it always remains on the verge of arriving. Self-expression is possible in the Caribbean and it is possible to attune oneself to the conditions of the landscape and temporality, conditions that demand a commonality within the islands and in relation to the archipelago. This is, then, a direct answer to the question posed by Kincaid at the beginning of this chapter: it is indeed possible for these communities to give an account of themselves, to embrace an Antillean relationality (Kincaid, 1988, p. 165), but only as an attitude while searching for multirelationality. It is precisely because the Antilles (given their geographical configuration) are revealed as a 'une multi-relation' [multiple series of relationships] (ibid.) and not as a place: it does not describe the geographical demarcation of a location in America, but a mode of relation, of connection, of transversality.

This means as well that poetics of *l'antillanité* does not exist yet and that all these analyses prefigure, or predate, at least those forms of self-expression that would allow a liberation of the territories. But the possibility of attunement prefigures this as a poetics of anti-origins, presentist, disruptive, durable, intense. And the first gesture of configuring such a reaction is, according to Glissant, to 'remain where you are': 'The first reaction against this generalizing universality is the will of 'rester au lieu' [remaining where you are]. But for us this place is not only the land where our people were transplanted, it is also the

11 Attunement understood as putting oneself in the same key by sounding and listening the same (e.g., by uttering words, by writing) as something else (a landscape, a piece of music, a painting?). In that way one starts to sound like the other person or object without actually doing so (just like two instruments can be attuned to each other without playing the same sounds).

history they shared (experiencing it as non-history) with other communities, with whom the link is still becoming apparent today. Our place is the Antilles' (Glissant, 1981, p. 139). To 'return to the place', to the point of entanglement, is truly to remain where you are, finally to connect with such a land that has always been foreign, instead of looking for an elsewhere in order to resist oppression.

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