



University
of Glasgow

Édouard Glissant; The Voice of the Subaltern?

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In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) Gayatri Spivak famously theorized the question of whether or not the subaltern have a voice of their own and the power to exercise that voice. Her answer, was no. This dissertation sets out to argue that the 20th century poet, author and thinker from Martinique, Édouard Glissant, does indeed give a voice to the subaltern, in this case the *antillais*, when taking into account his later works, in particular his manifesto writing and interviews. This argument runs directly counter to the readings of ‘late Glissant’ by Chris Bongie and Peter Hallward as apolitical and excessively figurative and poetic. The latter’s readings have failed to take into account Glissant’s late political involvement as well as the direct style in his later manifestos, namely; ‘*l’Intraitable beauté du monde*’² and ‘*Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*’³, both co-written with Patrick Chamoiseau. Finally, an important question must be considered as to whether or not Glissant speaks up on behalf of the subaltern population. The conclusion of this discussion, which will split into two chapters, contends that he does. The first chapter will discuss Bongie and Hallward’s interpretation of Édouard Glissant’s later work as apolitical and having very few real world implications whilst the second chapter sets out to closely examine Glissant’s manifesto writing and his interviews in order to highlight to what extent his later work is properly and undoubtedly political. Ultimately, this dissertation will assert that it is through these means of political articulation that Édouard Glissant gives a voice to the Caribbean subaltern.

¹ Gayatri Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1988), Pp 22–64.

² Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, *l’Intraitable beauté du monde: adresse à Barack Obama* (Paris: Galaade/ Institut du Tout-monde, 2009).

³ Édouard Glissant and others, *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité* (Paris: Éditions Galaade/Institut du Tout-monde, 2009).

Bongie and Hallward: Apolitical late-Glissant?

In his reading of late Glissant, Chris Bongie primarily takes issue with Glissant's figurative use of language. In his essay 'Édouard Glissant: Dealing in Globality' he deconstructs some Glissantian terminology in order to illustrate the opaque nature of Glissant's writing, focusing particularly on *La Cohée du Lamentin*, one of his later novels.⁴ Glissant, as a writer, is renowned for his opaque writing style and for writing about the concept of *opacité* itself. *Opacité*, in its simplest form, is the state of being lucid and thus difficult to read, an important aspect of Glissant's political contribution, which will be discussed further in this chapter. According to Glissant's philosophy, everyone has the right to be opaque and opacity in others is not something to be wary of, in fact quite the opposite, it is something that he promotes throughout his work. At this point it would be useful to take into account some of the terms Glissant frequently uses in order to evaluate the reasons for which Bongie considers their use not to be properly political and describes Glissant's essay collections as being similar to an "archeological site" full of "terminological and conceptual debris."⁵ One of the main terms that lies at the heart of Glissant's œuvre is that of *relation*, a concept that ties together and unites those from all backgrounds and experiences without viewing them as 'other'. For Glissant, *Relation* is not about losing sight or understanding of one's specificity; rather it is being in the world, taking part in a universal exchange of cultures. *Relation* does not lead us to disregard our own culture but instead, to appreciate all that comes from the 'other', that which reinforces our differences and increases awareness of the self in relation to the other. This interaction, according to Glissant, must result in us turning away from binary differences and divisions. Celia Britton describes *relation* as a structure, which "does not try

⁴ Édouard Glissant, *La Cohée du Lamentin* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005).

⁵ Chris Bongie, 'Édouard Glissant: Dealing in Globality' in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2009), p. 92.

and impose a universal value system” but one that “respects the *particular* qualities of the community in question.”⁶ In this way, *relation* is entirely inclusive and gives a voice to all those who inevitably take part in it, even if those people groups may otherwise be considered as subaltern. For Bongie, it is precisely Glissant’s notion of *relation* that he finds not properly political and overly utopian. He criticizes Glissant for constantly referring to an “*aesthetics* or *poetics* as opposed to a *politics*, of Relation” and refuses to see *relation* as relevant to any specific political context.⁷ Commenting on this, Bongie claims that Glissant’s fixation on *relation* “began to dominate both his theoretical and fictional work, at the expense of the robust political commitments that he had so often voiced in the *Discours*.”⁸ However this black and white understanding of what is political and what is poetic, on Bongie’s part, fails to grasp the integral nature of *relation* in the wider context of Glissant’s oeuvre and the way in which he uses *relation* to address the political.

Taking part in *relation*, something unavoidable for all human beings living on the planet, thus creates the *Tout-monde*, another of Glissant’s key notions. The *Tout-monde* is a world in which cultures mix and we must rely on one another’s differences to create an acceptance of all that is ‘other’ and different. It is a world where we cease to view those different from us as ‘other’ and to categorize people in a hierarchical manner and thus it prevents any notion of the subaltern. In order to better understand Glissant’s theory of the *Tout-monde* it is helpful to contemplate Edward Saïd’s description of ‘otherness’ from *Orientalism*. Saïd writes, “the more one is able to leave one’s cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of

⁶ Celia Britton, *Édouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville and London, University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 11.

⁷ Chris Bongie, ‘Édouard Glissant’, p. 95.

⁸ Chris Bongie, *Ibid.*

intimacy and distance.”⁹ Saïd’s description fits well with Glissant’s notion of what it means to be a part of the *Tout-monde* as it illustrates what it might look like if each of us were to step out of our own sense of familiarity, steering away from viewing all that is different as inferior, lesser, or in this case, as subaltern.

The process of this fusion and amalgamation of ideas and thoughts from all colour and creed is referred to by Glissant as *créolisation*, a mighty force through which cultures are joined and experienced together in unity. It is indeed the idea of *créolisation* that Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau so deeply urge Barack Obama to reinforce throughout the United States, in their open letter, a undeniably political piece of writing, addressed specifically to the President in 2nd person, ‘*l’Intraitable beauté du monde*’.¹⁰ In his interpretation of some of Glissant’s later work, Bongie makes reference to Peter Hallward’s remark that there was no striking or defining moment in which it became anti-political and utopian. He claims there was “no sudden break in Glissant’s work, no sharply defined before and after.”¹¹ He argues instead that the writer’s priorities gradually took a large transformation in what they were focused on; losing a sense of what originally lay at the core of them. He continues to make reference to Glissant’s abandonment of ‘nation building in Martinique’ and his turn to a focus on the aesthetic nature of his writing. Hallward states “the word Martinique seldom appears in Glissant’s later works”. Firstly, Hallward’s comment on the change of focus in Glissant’s work suggests that he believed it to be previously political, indicating that a change has taken place. However, if we are to take a closer look at Glissant’s later work and in particular his manifestos, *l’Intraitable beauté du monde* and *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*, it is noteworthy that he makes reference to and mentions Martinique on several occasions.¹²

⁹ Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 259.

¹⁰ Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, *l’Intraitable beauté du monde*, p. 4.

¹¹ Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester, Manchester University Press 2001), p. 100.

¹² Édouard Glissant and others, *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*, p. 2–4.

Moreover, it cannot be ignored that the *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité* is a manifesto based entirely on the subaltern Antilles and the strikes and social movement, which took place in Guadeloupe and then in Martinique in 2009 calling for social change and lower prices on basic life essentials. Louise Hardwick describes this social movement as exploring the “multifaceted struggle to dominate the specific environment of France’s overseas departments, with a particular focus on Martinique.”¹³ In this way, Glissant gives an audible voice to the *Martiniquais* subaltern by putting to paper this appeal in a clear, urgent manner, which can only be described as political.

Hallward also notes that Glissant’s work shifts from being compatible with Sartre’s *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?*, dealing directly with political issues in a matter-of-fact and simple style to being Deleuzian and thus instead, putting the accent on a more figurative style of writing that Gilles Deleuze, who described himself as a “pure metaphysician”, was so well known for.¹⁴ He argues that Glissant’s work loses a sense of meaning due to an increased insistence on the aesthetics of the writing. Finally, Bongie similarly claims that Glissant’s later work appears to embrace a postmodern style whose “intentions are purely poetic and whose real-world implications are precisely nil”.¹⁵ What these comments fail to recognise, is the variety and tangible evidence of what Glissant was involved in during his later years: works which have real life significance and which will be discussed further in the second chapter; his manifestos. One of the texts of particular importance is, ‘*Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*’ which primarily focused on addressing the French Caribbean in an appeal for a social awakening and called for lower prices in the Antilles on life’s basic essentials. Hallward’s remarks about Glissant’s ‘change in perspective’, it could be argued, neglect the

¹³ Louise Hardwick, *Towards Biopolitical Ecocriticism: The example of the Manifeste pour les ‘produits’ de haute nécessité*, French studies vol. No. 0, 1–21, p. 2.

¹⁴ Peter Hallward, *Édouard Glissant between the Singular and the Specific*, The Yale Journal of Criticism vol. 11, number 2, 1998, p. 443.

¹⁵ Chris Bongie, ‘Édouard Glissant: Dealing in Globality’ in *Postcolonial thought in the French-speaking World*. ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2009), p. 95.

very *opaque* nature of Glissant's work and I would contend that Glissant's priorities did not change because this opaque style of writing that Hallward so openly criticizes Glissant for, is exactly the way in which Glissant divulges his political views and contributes to political discussion. The opaque style of writing, particularly in *Le Discours antillais* does not set out to be intentionally elitist in style, nor does his theory point inwards towards a sense of pride or nationalism as J. Michael Dash identifies. Alternatively, it draws upon a very political point of what it actually means to be Caribbean and is a concept so closely linked with this sense of *Martiniquan* identity and the rightful claiming of this identity.¹⁶

Bongie still takes issue with Glissant's utopian concept that the only longstanding way to solve the world's problems must come from a poetic uprising and that he so frequently makes reference to the poetic and aesthetic, at work in his later oeuvre rather than the political. J. Michael Dash makes reference to Glissant's *poétique* style of writing in the second chapter of *Édouard Glissant*, commenting on his consistent poetic meditations and pointing out that the importance Glissant places on these accentuates the integral significance of this kind of reflection when approaching problematic political issues.¹⁷ He quotes Glissant's 'soleil de conscience', "*Et s'il ne résout pas de problèmes, du moins aide-t-il aussi à les poser dans la lumière*".¹⁸ This acknowledgement that poetry cannot solve all problems confirms Glissant's wider political awareness within both the political and poetic realms. However, he stands by his central belief that poetry can bring issues to light and increase a political consciousness in those who perhaps would have not previously thought about the political. He also insists on the idea that everyone has a sense of the *poétique* and that as this is part of the human condition and a shared characteristic, then through this act of *relation*, it is something that is naturally drawn upon when considering political matters.

¹⁶ J. Michael Dash, *Édouard Glissant*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 145.

¹⁷ J. Michael Dash, *Édouard Glissant*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), p. 53.

¹⁸ Édouard Glissant, *Soleil de la conscience*, (Paris: Seuil 1956), p. 70.

Throughout his later years, Glissant took part in many interviews offering insight into the driving force behind his work and thought processes in creating and evolving some of his theories with regards to Martinique, the Caribbean people and the mixture of cultures which he so openly envisions. In considering these interviews, the way in which Glissant comes across and his transmission of information cannot be ignored by virtue of his clarity in speech. Interviews are a direct way of expressing oneself. They are in many ways like small political speeches and are in this case an underrated medium of Glissant's political expression. It is through this useful and powerful articulation that Glissant raises important political questions in a direct and straightforward manner and promotes himself as a political writer and advocate. Participation in interviews also adds to Glissant's openness in talking about some of the issues he deals with in his writing and in particular the seemingly more opaque issues. I would argue that Glissant's interviews act as real and tangible political pamphlets that convey direct messages and bring clarity to his written ideas. Not at all beating around the bush, he exclaims in one particular interview "*Je crois dans l'avenir des petits pays!*".¹⁹ This statement is weighted with political significance and is an idea that runs through the majority of his work covering *les Antilles*. Glissant's cry has a clear implication in relation to the subaltern as it plainly states that he believes in the future of the small, easily forgotten islands where the subaltern reside. For if he is to believe in their future, this implies that he must have an understanding and even a first hand experience of their oppressed and difficult past. This is not the first time Glissant has emphasized his stance on this issue, yet hearing it said aloud brings him to life as a political man and advocate and stresses his ambition in giving voice to the so often forgotten, subaltern people from these small Caribbean islands. Again in another interview Glissant states, 'Quand je dis poète, je ne veux pas parler de celui qui écrit des poèmes mais de celui qui a une conception du vrai rapport

¹⁹ Tropismes - Édouard Glissant / Laure Adler (France O, juin 2007)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gfi0nVHVQQ4> 10:57 [accessed: 2 November 2016].

entre poétique et politique’.²⁰ This is the essence of Glissant’s work and in articulating this, he affirms his belief in the close-knit relationship between the two realms and demonstrates himself as a poet who engages with the political in order to speak up for the subaltern. Glissant makes this voice loud and clear through his writing, in French, which reaches a wide audience and most importantly those in power. Furthermore, in his interviews, Glissant himself picks apart some of his more complex terminology and gives meaning and clarity to some of the key issues surrounding his work, taking away any notion of exclusivity that can often be the result of an opaque style of writing. An interview with Laure Adler reveals this accessible side of Glissant, (*L’invitation au voyage*),²¹ ‘Je suis absolument persuadé que je me souviens de ce-voyage-là’²² he says as he describes his memory as a child of travelling through Martinique in his mother’s arms. This simple description of his childhood reiterates his *Martiniquan* identity and exposes the importance of this to him. I would contend that Glissant’s relationship with his *Martiniquan* roots is a constant reminder of his loyalty to the subaltern and to his own subaltern ancestors. In relation to a political Glissant, this reference to the past reminds the viewer what he has experienced as a child growing up in Martinique and its influence on his writing. His interest in the future of countries like Martinique is related to his upbringing in a country of such political injustice and uncertainty. In disputing Bongie and Hallward’s overlooking of such a key component of Glissant’s late political involvement, I would argue that the interviews with Laure Adler and many of his other interviews are an integral part of Glissant’s later political activity. They speak frankly and openly about issues of inequality and subalternity in relation to Glissant’s theories.

²⁰ Philippe Artières, ‘Solitaire et solidaire’ Entretien avec Edouard Glissant, *Terrain* [Online], | septembre 2003, Uploaded 10th September 2008, [accessed: 2 November 2016] URL: <http://terrain.revues.org/1599>; DOI : 10.4000/terrain.1599.

²¹ ‘L’Invitation au voyage - Édouard Glissant’ (2004) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htIto1xtYBw> [accessed: 1 October 2016].

²² ‘L’Invitation au voyage’ 5:14.

Furthermore, they confirm his openness to grappling with some of the heavy socio-political issues occurring in a global context and whose impact he has witnessed and experienced since childhood. He makes the subaltern voice clear and audible through the means of these interviews.

An additional change in Glissant's approach, which Bongie notes and critiques, was the reshaping of his back catalogue in 1997 by the publishing company, Gallimard. This reform, for Bongie, marks a change in the integrity of the body of his work and even gives grounds for further questioning of its authenticity. Bongie suggests that this watershed point speaks once again about the writer's priorities and sees it as a shift in focus from a commitment to the *Martiniquais*, to a compliance with colonial rule and an engagement with a capitalist societal system. Yet this is something that Glissant encourages the Caribbean subaltern to steer so clearly away from. This remodeling does not approximate conformity, rather opens up the scope of accessibility and widens his audience in order for the voice of the subaltern to be heard more clearly. This becomes obvious by his pure criticism of any sort of capitalist society and his warning of the danger of such a societal system in *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*, not to mention the manifesto's availability online at such an affordable price.²³ I would argue that the reshaping of Glissant's back catalogue is not a sign of complacency rather that it is a positive reminder that as a writer, Glissant is constantly re-working and re-considering his ideas. He does this in order to preserve them and keep them relevant to current politics, which so frequently change and advance with a real life impact on subaltern groups. Another vital aspect of this change to acknowledge is that Glissant may not have been the sole source of the decision to remodel his work due to the likely involvement of the publishing house Gallimard, and the fact that the author does not always have full control of such decisions. It is likely that this was not something that Glissant decided to

²³ Édouard Glissant and others, *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*, p. 9.

undertake himself and that different parties were probably involved as well as other influences. Glissant did not become distracted or lose focus on the heart of his work due to this remodelling. Confirmation of this is not only evidenced by his involvement in manifesto writing but evermore by the fact that what lies at the core of his œuvre is the inseparable nature of poetics and politics. I contend that this is another example of the way that Glissant speaks up for a subaltern people whose postcolonial memory is shared and who themselves have lived through the close link between poetics and politics.

Another key example of the way in which Glissant gives a voice to the subaltern people of his homeland was in setting up the *Institut Martiniquais d'Études*²⁴. This private high school in Fort-de-France, Martinique was set up by Glissant in 1967 after being allowed to return back to Martinique in 1965 and offers a varied education to young people. An example of a political intervention made on behalf of the subaltern *Martiniquais*, the school offers young people the opportunity to be educated without relying on mainland France. Glissant's involvement in founding this school thus becomes political action. Not only in supporting his statement, "*Je crois dans l'avenir des petits pays*" with a tangible response, it also exemplifies his intentionality in acting on his theory and speaking up on behalf of the subaltern population of Martinique. Furthermore, the *Institut de Tout-monde* in Paris, set up in 2006 as a place for cultural exchange and ultimately, a place of relation between France and the *Départements d'Outre Mer*, is a living example of Glissant's political activity and responsibility. I would therefore argue that these are clear examples of properly political action whose real world implications are precisely far more than 'Nil'. Through both of these initiatives it is made clear that Glissant's concepts are not simply reserved for paper nor are they irrelevant, opaque concepts.

²⁴ <http://www.institut-martiniquais-etudes.fr/> [accessed: 31 October 2016].

Glissant's Manifesto Writing

The problematic nature of the suggestion that Glissant became apolitical during his later years becomes disputable in that he was so active in writing direct, straightforward political proclamations. As a side note, the fact that Glissant was famous, in his youth, for campaigning for the independence of the *départements et régions d'outre-mer*, so much so that he was not allowed to return to France on Charles de Gaulle's orders until 1965, cannot be ignored. Perhaps for Bongie and Hallward, these are the types of activities, which are to be considered as properly political rather than Glissant's later writing. Celia Britton credits Glissant for the scope of his political activity, in her *Guardian* obituary after his death in 2011. "Glissant, was always politically involved – whether in ecological campaigns in Martinique; the International Writer's Parliament which he and Wole Soyinka created in the 1990s; and his-high profile opposition to Nicolas Sarkozy's immigration policies."²⁵ It is evident that Glissant has consistently been politically aware and committed due to the vast range of his political engagement. It is particularly through his manifesto writing that this commitment to political action is evidenced. Two key texts that will be referenced are, Glissant and Chamoiseau's '*l'Intraitable beauté du monde*' and '*Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*' both of which are critical in understanding Glissant's contribution to political thought and action. For Glissant, it is evident that the *poétique* and politics go hand in hand. However, one of the most striking aspects of the manifestos I wish to highlight is Glissant's use of extremely simple yet affective language, which challenges and stirs as a result of its simplicity and clarity with regards to political events, in particular the election of the president of the United States of America in 2008.

²⁵ Celia Britton, 'Edouard Glissant' *Guardian* 13 February. Available online at www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/feb/13/edouard-glissant-obituary [accessed: 31 October 2016].

In their open letter, which is addressed to and celebrates the recently elected black president, Barack Obama, Glissant and Chamoiseau refer to him as the *Fils du Gouffre*²⁶ or the ‘Son born out of the abyss’. Referring to the president as being born out of the ‘abyss’ draws a link between President Obama and the subaltern *antillais* and their difficult past. This simple description is weighted with history and implies a shared memory with Obama, which is highly significant in accentuating the extent to which the authors see him as playing a critical role in representing the subaltern in a recently acquired place of political power. We know that this image is of great importance to Glissant due to his *Martiniquan* heritage as Britton states, “Glissant was shaped by his experience as a colonised subject whose African ancestors had been transported to the Caribbean and whose lives as slaves were largely unrecorded”.²⁷ It is from this experience that Glissant relates to Obama and entrusts him with the future potential of the United States. Nevertheless, this image does not end with Obama. The co-authors go on to reiterate and clarify that those who fit the description of the *fils du gouffre* are found widely spread in America as if there were an “*essence afrique, fichée en Amérique*.”²⁸ Chamoiseau and Glissant refer to ‘Yankees’ and their presence in the United States being commendable and perhaps the manifestation of the *Tout-monde*, a visible indication of the type of social and cultural amalgamation that the authors urge Obama to endorse and defend.

This type of cultural hotpot is exemplary of the social interaction and *relation* implored by Glissant in his previous work, a *métissage culturel* similar to the one illustrated in his book, *Tout-monde*.²⁹ For both of the authors, the election of Barack Obama generates hope for the future of the United States of America and opens the door to the potential that lies within the

²⁶ Glissant, and Chamoiseau, *l’Intraversable beauté du monde*, p. 5.

²⁷ Celia Britton, ‘Édouard Glissant’ *Guardian* 13 February. Available online at www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/feb/13/edouard-glissant-obituary [accessed 31 October 2016].

²⁸ Glissant and Chamoiseau, *l’Intraversable beauté du monde*, p. 23.

²⁹ Édouard Glissant, *Tout-monde* (Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1993).

country for *relation*. The mixture of cultures that already exists in the United States is something that the authors are aware of and for this reason see the country as the perfect site for a rousing of *créolisation* and a widespread recognition and acceptance of cultural differences. Continuing to address the black president the authors contend that “*Le gouffre de l’océan nous a ouvert à Relation*”³⁰ and thus re-iterate the idea that politics and shared memory are interlinked and it is through the act of recognition of one another that we can be open to *relation* in its purest form. I would conclude that through *l’Intraitable beauté du monde*, Glissant speaks up on behalf of all of those who eagerly anticipate the leadership and political influence of Obama in the United States, the Yankees and the *filz du gouffre*. On the basis of what the letter has to say about American politics and the congratulatory nature of the words composed, I contend that *l’Intraitable beauté du monde* speaks on behalf of those in society who do not have a voice to express their gratitude and appreciation of the hope carried by the prospect of what the new president may have to offer. The core message of the open letter is one of hope, however Glissant and Chamoiseau follow through on preserving the political essence of the manifesto and in their plea that Obama acts on issues of culture and social awakening throughout America.

In consideration of the second text, *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*, the *Martiniquan* poet Aimé Césaire states, “Cela ne peut signifier qu’une chose: Non pas qu’il n’y a pas de route pour en sortir, mais que l’heure est venue d’abandonner toutes les vieilles routes”.³¹ A vital text in understanding Glissant’s political role, the manifesto is clear and direct in style. In introducing the issues that will be discussed throughout the text, the *poétique* is described as “*L’essentiel qui nous manque et qui donne du sens à l’existence*”,³² an essential element in the political debate and unsettlement within the Caribbean islands.

³⁰ Glissant and Chamoiseau, *l’Intraitable beauté du monde* p. 52.

³¹ Édouard Glissant and others *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité* p. 1.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The authors therefore place a huge amount of importance on the necessity of the *poétique* in delving into these issues.

Louise Hardwick carries out a cultural and political examination of *Manifeste pour les 'produits' de haute nécessité* drawing the link between its aesthetics, which are at risk of being criticized by academics such as Bongie or Hallward, and its challenge to a capitalist modern society. In recognizing the manifesto's success, its testimony to Glissant's political involvement and his challenging of current political structures, Hardwick underlines that the manifesto "Offers an opportunity to work through a politics of culture as it emerges in the context of the social unrest of 2009."³³ The manifesto is current and pertinent to the 2009 general strikes in Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana, a recent and current situation of political unrest. According to the authors, the rupture between these departments and *La France métropolitaine* draws back to what lies at the core of Glissant's work, *relation*. The increased prices for imported products and the political structure of dependence on mainland France are challenged, drawing attention to the cultural richness and attainable self sustainability of Martinique and the small Caribbean islands. In this sense, Glissant speaks up on behalf of the *antillais* making their presence known in the world of politics not simply as victims of '*la vie chère*' but as a people of potential and the capacity to become a *petit pays* in the heart of a new world.

The manifesto criticizes the rise of capitalism in the western world and in particular the unresponsive, unreflective kind of behavior that it induces. In terms of the *Tout-monde* the presence of a capitalist centered politics is not possible as it is one that separates and categorizes individuals, promoting self-fulfillment rather than collectivity and community. However, the manifesto does not simply challenge the political structures of the Caribbean islands, it provides a thought provoking reflection and critique of the cultural norms and

³³ Louise Hardwick, *Towards Biopolitical Ecocriticism: The example of the Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*, *French studies* 70.3, 362–82.

thought processes taking place within the minds of those in power and those living under the norms imposed by these structures. An interesting comparison which is raised in the manifesto is that of the *prosaïc* and the *poétique*, the *prosaïc* being that which can be bought, basic products essential for human survival and contrasted with the *poétique*, an important part of the human condition which brings fulfillment to life and promotes creativity. In taking these two terms and juxtaposing them the authors illustrate at a basic and comprehensible level the problems that lie in a capitalist and Neo-liberal society. Everything in Glissant's oeuvre endorses community and relation whereas the political structure such as that of Metropolitan France and its control over Martinique does not encourage cultural development or any sense of *poétique* rather a widespread individualism. The effect is thus detrimental to Martinique's cultural development. Perhaps this comparison between the *prosaïc* and the *poétique* could be comparable to that of the *poétique* and the *politique* on the grounds that these two binary issues are juxtaposed side by side. In comparing the *prosaïc* to that which is political, a connection is made between the idea that politics so often involves money, is seemingly essential for human survival and is understood to be a completely separate issue than the *poétique*. Yet the authors of the manifesto implore that in order for there to be a social awakening in Martinique there must be a poetic awareness within its people which as we know, Glissant believes is already present in every human being.

In contrary to Bongie's claim that Glissant takes a turn away from engaging with political writing and vocabulary, the *Manifeste pour les 'produits' de haute nécessité* uses language, which cannot purport to be anything other than political. "*Qui est d'allier et de rallier, de lier, relier et relayer tout ce qui se trouvait désolidarisé*"³⁴ the coupling of these politically charged verbs in such a poetic fashion reaffirms the author's poetic interpretation of the political, making it approachable and accessible to the subaltern and relevant to the everyday.

³⁴ Édouard Glissant and others, *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité*, p. 2.

Although they sound aesthetically pleasing and work in the favour of all that is *poétique*, each one of these words carry huge importance in clarifying the author's vision for the future of the Caribbean islands and in understanding the message of hope that the manifesto carries. They are simple direct words, which describe Glissant's desire for the subaltern to be heard and to rise up within their place in society.

Another important aspect to consider when examining the *Manifeste pour le produits de haute nécessité* in terms of its reception is that a printed edition was sold online at a fixed and affordable price of three euros. The accessibility of the manifesto is critical in understanding its role in raising urgent questions of culture, the environment, language and society and of course, politics, making it clear that these types of issues are not reserved for the elite or for those in places of political power. I contend that in writing the manifesto, Glissant and the other authors made these issues accessible for all and encouraged a level of ambition and resourcefulness amongst the people of Martinique and Guadeloupe. In doing this, the authors are not only giving the people an audible voice, but the opportunity to exercise that voice and thus advocating not only for the autonomy and social stirring up of the *petit pays* but also for its people themselves. Ultimately, the products that the manifesto explores are not tangible in their existence but rather values and attitudes, which will support the Caribbean in spreading its wings and encouraging its freedom from France's control and the dependant relationship on the 'mother' country. Glissant understands and aims to reinstall a poetic conscience in the people to awaken the need for change. In this way he uses exactly what he believes to be the most political notion to advance and encourage a political awakening to the threat imposed on Creole culture and diversity, the *poétique*.

In *Le discours antillais*, arguably one of Glissant's most political works and recognized as such by both Peter Hallward and Chris Bongie³⁵, Glissant states, "*Je crois dans l'avenir des petits pays*"³⁶ however both Hallward and Bongie hold to the idea that after this point in his work, Glissant loses focus on these small Caribbean countries. I however would argue that Glissant's loyalty to Martinique and the political situation of the country was not deflected: rather, his method in speaking out about these kinds of political issues became more pragmatic. Through manifesto writing, Glissant had the opportunity to exploit a new medium in raising such crucial political questions and this change in tactics and approach was one which more importantly gave a voice to the subaltern in a manner at once subtle but powerful.

Contrary to Hallward's interpretation of late-Glissant as being incompatible with the work of Sartre, in particular, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature*,³⁷ both manifestos exemplify Glissant's alignment with Sartre's advocacy for a language which is unembellished and for pieces of political writing which are advanced through socialism and social awareness. Glissant's writing style was not comparable to that of Sartre who claimed that, "*La fonction d'un écrivain est d'appeler un chat un chat.*"³⁸ Nevertheless the manifestos are still direct and effective in portraying the messages they set out to communicate and do so in a poignant and powerful manner. *Manifeste pour les produits de haute nécessité* is indispensable in understanding Glissant as a political advocate who is effective in shining a spotlight on the subaltern people in Martinique as it deals directly with issues taking place in the country and how these relate to the rest of the world. In this way, Glissant not only gives

³⁵ Chris Bongie, 'Édouard Glissant: Dealing in Globality' in *Postcolonial thought in the French-speaking World*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2009).

³⁶ Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), p. 2.

³⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris, Gallimard <<Idées>>, 1964).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

a voice to the subaltern through his manifesto writing but through *relation*, he draws attention to the political relevance of such issues in a Caribbean context.

Conclusion

In response to the question ‘does Édouard Glissant give a voice to the subaltern in his later work?’ this dissertation set out, examining the evidence, to counterclaim that towards the end of his life the *Martiniquan* poet and author, Édouard Glissant, became apolitical. The evidence of Glissant’s political activism from a young age and throughout his life is widespread. Glissant played a key role in providing useful, concrete resources in cases like the *Institut du Tout-monde* in Paris and the *Institut Martiniquais d’Études* in Martinique, promoting a culture of relation and acceptance of those who are different from one another: a highly political issue in today’s day and age. The two main examples of Glissant’s political nature in his later work are evidenced in his participation in interviews and manifesto writing. Acting as a direct method of political engagement, Glissant’s interviews not only gave him an informal occasion to deconstruct many of his most well-known yet multi-faceted theories, they are exemplary of just how much these theories have to offer on a political level. It would be foolish to neglect these representations of Glissant as a political advocate for the subaltern, particularly later in his life. The manifestos he was involved in writing are political pamphlets, which bring to light key political issues with a sense of urgency and clarity and they remind the reader of Glissant’s intent to prove that the *poétique* and political are intrinsically linked. Furthermore, the opaque nature of Glissant’s earlier work (and according to Bongie and Hallward’s criticism his late work) is an innate quality of his writing. This style of writing promotes Glissant’s political nature and commitment as it marries the political with the *poétique*. It is through a reflective examination of his work that the reader is

lead to independently consider an array of political issues and it is precisely in grappling with the terms that Glissant employs that a political consciousness is installed in the reader. Critics, such as Bongie and Hallward, who claim Glissant's late work to be apolitical, precariously bypass many of these important and evident examples of his continued political engagement. Édouard Glissant's role as a political advocate for the subaltern is fundamental and as Charles Forsdick points out, "Over his final decade Glissant's productivity was prolific".³⁹ He speaks up about political issues in a way that inspires and influences, through a collaboration of politics with *poétique*. In marrying these two concepts together and presenting them distinctly through interviews and directly through manifestos, Édouard Glissant speaks up on behalf of and thus gives an audible voice to the subaltern group; the Caribbean *antillais*.

³⁹ Charles Forsdick, 'Local, National, Regional, Global: Glissant and the Postcolonial Manifesto', in *Caribbean Globalizations, 1492 to the Present Day* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 230.

Reflective Appendix

The undertaking of this dissertation project has been of huge importance to me, in particular, as a mark of the end of my university career. I previously felt that the dissertation was something to dread or be afraid of and have come to realise the satisfaction found in independently producing a piece of work on a very specific research question that I have created myself. Having the opportunity to be in Paris during the most part of my research was also incredibly academically enriching and I feel very privileged to have had such an array of material at my disposition. I was also privileged enough to be able to see a theatre interpretation of some of Édouard Glissant's poetry and his novel *Tout-monde* which really helped to bring the texts to life. Carrying out a large amount of my reading in the French National Library (Bibliothèque nationale de France) gave me the skills to feel comfortable in a large library context and the skills necessary to return to Glasgow and carry out further research at the University of Glasgow Library in full confidence. I first became interested in subaltern and postcolonial studies during the 'French Travel Writing' course in the Junior Honours year. Upon hearing the term 'subaltern' for the first time and looking at writers such as Spivak, Saïd and Segalen I was intrigued by this field of study. I feel that choosing a research question that I was already very interested in was something crucial for me. Being able to carry out academic research on a topic that I felt passionate about is something which I am very grateful for and made the dissertation writing experience much more enjoyable. I believe that the work of Édouard Glissant is of huge importance in Francophone literature as it speaks up about important political and social issues in often overlooked parts of the world. Initially, when deciding on a dissertation research question and which general topic I wanted to cover, I needed to narrow down my ideas. I set out with a rather broad scoped aim on writing about Édouard Glissant's entire œuvre and wanted to cover a large variety of his

works. For me it was helpful to discuss this with my advisor and narrow down a more specific research area. Through doing this, I was able to sift through my reading and research in order to analyse the necessary texts more specifically and understand their relevance to my research question. Finally, the two main texts that I on which I focused (the manifestos) were interesting to analyse as I have no previous experience with this type of writing.

Ultimately, writing this dissertation has been an extremely positive experience which has certainly improved my independent research skills and furthermore my confidence. I would like to believe that I have contributed something, no matter how small, to this field of research and I am grateful that my research has opened my eyes to the importance of postcolonial and subaltern studies. A special thank you to Rachel Douglas for your help, advice and support throughout the writing process.

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