



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Tracing Entanglements in the Seventeenth Century Caribbean

In 1619, Captain Fleury and his crew suffered shipwreck outside Martinique. Among the survivors was an anonymous writer who was set out to account for Fleury's exploits in the Caribbean Sea and on the South American continent, but accident led him elsewhere. Fleury had abandoned parts of the crew in his search for a new ship. Stranded on the island, the anonymous writer gave a unique account of European intrusion in the archipelago (Anonymous of Carpentras 2002). Instead of writing about the heroic adventures of the captain, he tells about everyday exchanges with the Indigenous peoples on whom he and the rest of the men depended for their survival, about how they learned each other's languages, about how the Natives made fun of the French way of doing things and commented on their white, starved bodies.¹ This is the first known account of French interventions in the Caribbean. Soon after, French privateers would initiate territorial claims, leading to the first official French establishment in 1626 on Saint-Christophe (today St. Kitts), parts of which was already settled by the British and inhabited by enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples.

Almost a century later, in 1722, the Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Labat, who was stationed in Martinique between 1694 and 1706, published

¹The account was never published. Jean-Pierre Moreau found it in the archives of a library in Carpentras in southern France and edited it with the title *Un Elibustier français dans la mer des Antilles* (2002). For information about the anonymous writer Captain Fleury and the travels, see Moreau's introduction.

Nouveaux voyages aux isles de l'Amérique. His take on island society differs dramatically from the anonymous writer's. Upon arriving in Martinique, Labat described colonial constructions that did not exist when Fleury and his men ran aground on the islands. There were no Indigenous peoples around. Instead, Labat was received by enslaved persons whose backs were covered with scars from lashes "to which one soon gets used to" (1722 t1, 63). Indeed, he grew extremely accustomed to the violence of slavery. In time, he would himself become an enslaver, involved in the development of new techniques for sugar refinement at Fonds-Saint Jacques, a Dominican convent that had turned into a plantation by the time of Labat's sojourn. As opposed to previous missionaries, he was not committed to converting Indigenous people to Catholicism but instead focused on keeping order in the colony and converting enslaved persons. His account of his sojourn in Martinique reveals that the ways the Caribbean was represented were in the process of changing. During the years that separate him and the Anonymous of Carpentras, a number of narratives about the islands were written, mostly by missionaries who evangelized among the Indigenous population, documented events, and gathered cultural and natural knowledge about the islands. Labat's account draws on yet criticizes these texts. Whereas his predecessors constructed knowledge based on direct experience but filtered through Ancient models and embedded in formal conventions, Labat speaks in his own voice, carving out an authoritarian narrative about the islands, which had now been fully occupied, exploited, and increasingly tied to colonial centers in Europe. And whereas they wrote the history of the settlement, with all its violent implications expressed in ambivalent terms, he wrote about Martinique as a French island.

The moment of consolidation of plantation society and the slave trade described by Labat has become the point of origin for French Caribbean thinking and literature. The formation of what Nick Nesbitt (2013) calls Caribbean "immanent critique" (3), from Aimé Césaire and C.L.R. James to Frantz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé, Kamau Brathwaite, and Wilson Harris, is about thinking through the plantation and the Middle Passage as nexus for reconsidering Caribbean resistance, subjectivity, and creativity.² Pan-Caribbean literary histories have questioned the

²Nesbitt considers the Haitian Revolution as the initial formulation of such immanent critique. This moment, along with other slave uprisings, have been crucial for rethinking the legacies of colonialism from the point of view of the subalterns. See Marlene L. Daut (2015); Laurent Dubois (2004a, b, 2006); John D. Garrigus (2006); Brett Rushforth (2014). See Paul Gilroy (1993), Christopher L. Miller (2008), and David Scott (2004) for the importance of the French Atlantic triangular trade for the articulation of (black) modernity.

compartmentalization of the literatures of the region by (colonial) language and instead suggested that the common history of creolization that stemmed from plantation culture constituted the grounds for a shared literature (Arnold et al. 1994, Torres-Saillant 1996; Dash 1998). The reasons for this emphasis are well grounded. The plantation system was built on the extinction of Indigenous society and arguably marked the most brutal and transformative European intervention in the archipelago. It still affects lives and bodies today through structural racism, class hierarchies, and neo-colonialism, which all can be linked to the history of slavery and to the negation of the past and of being produced by this history. Caribbean expressive forms—music, dance, literature, art—build on that heritage of suffering, survival, and creative inventiveness. Texts from the seventeenth century are intertwined with this history. They tell about the insidious historical and representational ramifications of this violent part of global modernity. They also evoke how writings forged a narrative of French colonial conquest through tangled relationships with Indigenous peoples, diasporic Africans, and other Europeans. In so doing, and often against their own intentions, they also evoke other possible beginnings for French Caribbean literature, which were not primarily dictated by France. This is what *Points of Entanglement in French Caribbean Travel Writing (1620–1722)* sets out to explore.

This book argues for a literary reexamination of the representation of the period leading up to high colonialism in order to question a colonial scale of literary history, where representations of the past are measured in terms of their importance in and to France. The centrifugal forces of French coloniality and France's literary history are no doubt more powerful than others, fueled by high cultural prestige in the global field of literatures but also by continuous political command over the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. Yet that structure of power was not imposed on the newly established colonies from the outset; rather, it was shaped through and by historical movements in the archipelago. The complexity of this juncture warrants an approach to travel writing as simultaneously determined by the locus of its distribution (France) and of its creation (the islands). And since these travel narratives engage in representing an ongoing process of shaping a society for which they had no model while at the same time being limited by codes for writing as well as by political, economic, and religious interests, their informative value is fraught. They call for layered readings and—the contribution I want to make here—should be considered as part of a (French) Caribbean literary trajectory. Indeed,

the problem with relying on the colonial construction of history, forged by the travelogues studied here, is that it makes us unable to estimate the complexity in these narratives. Most importantly, it takes attention away from the exploration of how enslaved and Indigenous peoples actively contributed to shaping early colonial society and, indeed, the representations of it.

Taking a synoptic approach to travel writing in French, from 1620 with the Anonymous of Carpentras up to the publication of Labat's *Nouveaux voyages* as a transitional text to the eighteenth century, this book excavates traces of such impacts by examining textual instances where the islands and the peoples of this period unsettle dominant European narratives. The claim here is that the historical, social, and political messiness of the Caribbean seventeenth century makes for complex representations and expressions, generating textual instability despite the travelers' apparent desires to domesticate the islands. Between the lines of their authoritarian narratives, disruptive elements coming from everyday exchanges in early colonial society enter productively into the construction of knowledge and for sure also into the representations of this world. This book's contribution is to read these texts *in situ* in order to interrogate both the formation and the limitations of discourses of power. And while we cannot, from today's vantage point, create a site in the narratives where Indigenous and enslaved agency could emerge without inserting and overemphasizing our own, it is both possible and necessary to interrogate the narrative *effects* and *echoes* of their presences by means of literary attention to the texture of travel writing.

My reading here takes as its point of departure the conjecture between the contextual and the textual. The period leading up to what Christopher L. Miller (2008, 25) has called the "sugar revolution" in 1715 was in many ways a time of crisis. That sense of crisis permeated not only the historical context but also representations of it. Starting with the contextual aspect, the most striking and devastating forms of crisis obviously hit the Indigenous and enslaved populations. For Europeans, who no longer approached the region with newness and wonder, the period was characterized by a lack of social structure and territorial stability. Relations of power were fragmented rather than centralized: settlements were initiated by privateers, and the French monarchy had little influence on the region until the second half of the century. Forced labor existed in the form of indenture and slavery, which involved Indigenous peoples and deported persons from Africa, but there were no large-scale plantations. The islands

were sites of struggle between various groups driven by profit, self-interest, or self-preservation, and in the clashes, new societies, cultures, and languages would take form.

Crisis also marked those writing on the islands and the narratives they produced. Travel writing was a hybrid genre in the seventeenth century (Requemora-Gros 2012; Ouellet 2010). It contained a plurality of discourses and was determined by the circumstances of their location of publication—France—as well as by the world they depicted—the islands. Consequently, the representations of the Caribbean were strikingly diverse, almost shifting, written in a variety of styles, and formed during a period when the French language was in the process of being standardized and the construction of knowledge was torn between ancient ideals of bookish knowledge and modern ideals of empiricism. The texts sustained and contributed to constructing discourses of domination. Yet, they did not form a univocal colonial narrative; rather they made up an eclectic library, comprised of natural and moral histories, unpublished accounts by buccaneers and traders, missionary narratives, Jesuit letters about the evangelization of enslaved populations, and works on Caribbean vernacular languages.

Judging both by the contextual and by the textual, the travel narratives and the world they describe were forged in what we may call a liminal time-space where neither politico-economical power nor aesthetic-epistemic forms were consolidated. But instead of bringing order into such messy and brutal liminality, I propose to make it operative as an incitement to read the texts against the grain of a linear authoritarian colonial historical discourse. Travel writing constructs narratives of interventions with the various groups of peoples that inhabited the region and with the changing nature of the island. They start at a site of amalgamation, pointing backwards to past times and other spaces (Europe, Africa, and the larger Americas) and forward to brutal global modernity, which, in a sense, highlights their Caribbeanness.

Saying this, I am not suggesting that colonial travel writing should be considered a forerunner to the radical and important reconceptualization of subjectivity and identity coming from twentieth-century Caribbean literature. My point is rather that the historical forces put in motion with which travel writing engages warrant an approach that allows for thinking with rather than against liminality. The cue for this argument is taken from the essay “Reversion and Diversion” by Martinican thinker and writer Édouard Glissant (1989). He claims that the Caribbean historical experience builds on an absence of origins and a series of rifts, due to the slave

trade, slavery, the extinction of Indigenous peoples, and the mixing that occurred in violent cultural encounters. To understand this history, Glissant argues, the desire for an origin, which he saw expressed, for example, in Pan-African thinking such as in the Négritude-movement, needs to be counter-balanced with an acknowledgment of the fractures and of the impossibility of a reversion to the past or a return to an origin. Setting up a dynamic relationship between return [*retour*] and detour [*détour*], he outlines a different historical trajectory inhabited by ruptures:

We must return to the point from which we started. 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; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization, or perish. (1989, 26)

The Caribbean should not be understood in terms of linearity, with a starting point and a single direction, nor should the region and its cultures and histories be understood as a complete negation. The Middle Passage represented rupture, Glissant contends, but memories in form of traces lived on, taking other shapes and expressions. Caribbean cultures are a non-beginning, as they emerge from clashes and encounters, intertwinements and frictions, intersecting in a “point of entanglement” that Glissant urges the reader to work through and activate in order to actualize the past in the present and see how competing forms of knowledge production and representation coexist, converge, and diverge. These are “forces of creolization,” which Glissant conceptualizes both as a historical process of mixing engendered in the Caribbean context by migratory movements and propelled by colonization, and as a figure of thought that accounts for processes of uncontrollable mixing with unpredictable outcomes (1997, 34). I will use the notion of “point of entanglement” as a critical tool for reading and rethinking textual connections between past and present. Not only does this notion chime with the liminality of the period, the transformational society, and the complexity of travel writing at this time; it also works as *ansatzpunkt*, to use Erich Auerbach’s (1969) term, to localize sites in the text where ambivalence and tensions are played out.

I will focus on three points of entanglement, starting with the relationship between text and geography. From there I will move to interrogating the travelers’ selves and end with an examination of the presence of other

languages and the inclusion of others' speech. Geography, self-construction, and language are major vectors for domination in the process of settlement and colonization: land is exploited and produced as a social space; the (European) self-mediate power and constructs knowledge over the islands and the peoples; and language is a tool for domination, as the medium through which knowledge is constituted and for policing other languages. Glissant's notion allows for reconfiguring these vectors as textual conjectures where conflicting interests cross, where differences are at once subjugated and generated. The island geography impacts on the representations. The travelers fabricate a self under influence of the rapidly changing and intermingling Caribbean early colonial society. Languages and inclusions of speech cannot be contained within the frames of monolingual French. Approaching the texts by means of points of entanglement will allow me to draw conclusions about how travel writing made and unmade structures of power and domination in a processual movement working with and against the "forces of creolization" that permeate the seventeenth-century Caribbean.

READING THROUGH THE WORK OF SILENCING

At stake in *Points of Entanglement in French Caribbean Travel Writing (1620–1722)* is the discourse of silencing that has dominated research on French Caribbean colonization. Before addressing travel writing from this period, I want to ask what silence means in this context, how it has been constructed, and what it does.

The French Caribbean seventeenth century has been overlooked as part of what has been analyzed as a silencing of the colonial grounds of Western, and particularly French, modernity. Nobody wants to know the price paid by others for the sugar we consume in Europe, to rephrase Voltaire's character in *Candide*. Following Michel-Ralph Trouillot's important work on the effacement of the Haitian revolution in the European consciousness *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995) and Louis Sala Molin's *Les Misères des Lumières: Sous la raison, l'outrage* (2008), Sue Peabody's *'There are no Slaves in France': The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (1996 and Peabody 2004), Christopher L. Miller's *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (2008), Madeleine Dobie's *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture* (2010), and Sara Melzer's *Colonizer and Colonized: The Hidden Story of Early Modern French Culture*

(2012) have, with a focus on the eighteenth century, mapped and discussed various domains where such silencing has played out and what the implications have been for the construction of both historical and literary discourses. First, it is worth noting that these studies center on the eighteenth century when plantation colonialism was established on the islands. Second, the silencing that Trouillot spoke about mainly refers to the impossibility for European thinkers and writers to conceive of what happened in Saint-Domingue because of their racialist gaze and colonial predicament. Quite rightly, scholars have pointed to the fact that rather than silence there is an abundance in documentation around the Haitian Revolution from its beginnings in 1791 to the declaration of independence in 1804 (Daut 2015, 1–3). But the Lesser Antilles, notably Martinique, Guadeloupe and indeed other islands exploited by the French, faced different futures compared to Haiti.³ From cultural invisibility in France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to political assimilation to France in the twentieth century, the lived experience of Martinicans and Guadeloupeans has been marginalized not by fear or denial of Black agency but by indifference it seems, at least from a French (high) colonial point of view.

However, this does not mean that nobody wrote about the islands in the seventeenth century. In fact, there is a relatively large number of French texts on the islands from this period compared to British and Dutch sources since France combined settlement with missionary work, and the missionaries wrote the history of the islands and documented society and nature. While it is indeed true that enslavement was a secondary topic if it was broached at all, the narratives did not silence the settlement and its violent implications. Hypothetically, it would possibly have been less silent around slavery and the eradication of Indigenous cultures in France had these texts been more widely read. Considering the little research that has been devoted to the seventeenth-century Caribbean up

³This study mostly concerns the Lesser Antilles, the long arc of small volcanic islands between the Greater Antilles and the coastal areas of Central and South America. However, I will refer to the Caribbean, comprising the archipelagic region in its entirety. Even though the texts mostly focus on the Lesser Antilles, the peoples involved moved across the entire region. The larger Caribbean context is needed to conceptualize these narratives.

to this day, notably from literary scholars,⁴ I suggest that it is not only enslavement and the slave trade that have been muffled but the entire period. If this history has been subject to silencing, which I believe it has, it is important to note that the source of this silence is less from those who experienced the islands during this period and more about the reception of their texts, not only historically but also in our contemporary moment, particularly from a literary perspective.

In France, twentieth-century research on the American colonial context has long been oriented toward texts from the sixteenth century that described first-hand experiences with Indigenous peoples and that developed cartographies and models for writing the New World. My point is not to criticize these studies for not doing something they never set out to do. Nonetheless, the sixteenth century has been given priority in the French discourse of the Americas, perhaps unconsciously influenced by the imaginary of the “Noble Savage,” so that it has focused almost exclusively on first contacts, whereas more complex cultural intertwinements of establishment, colonialism, and slavery have been ignored. Not even in the seventeenth century did the Caribbean islands “fit into the savage slot,” to borrow from Trouillot’s criticism of how traditional anthropology constructed the Other, leaving the Caribbean as a blind-spot in anthropological research up to the mid-twentieth century (1992). Peter Hulme in *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean (1492–1797)* (1986), and Anthony Padgen in *European Encounters with the New World* (1993), followed up by Dobie (2010) and Miller (2008), have convincingly demonstrated that in France, idealized encounters between Europeans and Native Americans turned into a trope repeated over time. One of the problems with this framing of French intrusion in the Americas is that it constructs the image of the initial phases of colonization as dualistic while it was, in fact, as Serge Gruzinski pointed out in his examination of the Mexican colonial context, a brutal process of mixing (1999). The fascination with the first encounter indirectly downplays the violent but also intricate relationships between French, Creoles, other

⁴Historians have done important work to shed new light on the seventeenth-century French Caribbean; see Jean-Pierre Moreau (1992); Liliane Chauleau (1993); Paul Butel (2002); James Pritchard (2004); Christian Bouyer (2005); Philip Boucher (2008, 2009); Kelly Wisecup (2013); Éric Roulet (2017); Michael Harrigan (2018); Céline Carayon (2019); Frédéric Régent (2007, 2019).

Europeans, Indigenous peoples, and diasporic Africans during the period of settlement.

Interestingly, this contemporary silencing has historical ramifications. Ever since it started, French involvement in the Caribbean was subdued, partly due to a similar desire to ignore the violence to which they contributed, and partly due to the fact that the settlement was far from being a success story. Peabody argues (1996) that conflicting national self-images made France silence its own colonial enterprise, particularly slavery, since it contradicted the idea of the country as the mother of liberty. This narrative has been nuanced in a recent book by Meredith Martin and Gillian Weiss (2022), who analyze the presence of forms of enslavement in France during the Ancient Regime by looking at the galley slaves in Marseille and the complexities of conceptions of ethnicity in French society. But it is important to acknowledge that in France in the seventeenth century there was a general lack of interest in the Americas. Focusing on the cultural visibility and impact of colonialism in early modern France, Dobie has argued the absence of influence was, in fact, a strategy of displacement of the colonial heritage (2010, 6). Antillean references tended to be absorbed into the generic category *les Indes*, which in the seventeenth century referred to anything non-European from the global south. There are some episodes involving important people that prove that the Antilles were not entirely absent from the cultural life of Paris, such as the poet Paul Scarron's failed project to embark for Cayenne, which was accompanied by his much younger wife Françoise, Ninon de Lenclos, a famous *courtisane*, and Jean Regnault de Segrais. Scarron was sick and hoped to find remedy in the tropics, seduced by the myth of earthly paradise and the fountain of youth. His wife Françoise, known as *l'Indienne* and later as M^{me} de Maintenon, Louis XIV's favorite mistress, had spent her childhood years on Marie-Galante, off the coast of Guadeloupe, and then in the village Prêcheur in northern Martinique. But according to one of the most influential voices of the times, M^{me} de Sévigné, M^{me} de Maintenon did not want to speak about her years on the islands, as if they had left a "scar in her heart" (Merle 1971, 115). She would nonetheless later buy property there in order to get a noble title, and she is said to have influenced Louis XIV's centralization of colonial politics and had commercial interests in the plantation industry and in the slave trade.

But stories like these are anecdotal. Rather than placing the Caribbean on the map, they affirm its marginality in regard to French culture around the mid-seventeenth century. There was an interest in objects of

curiosity—shells, pearls, hummingbirds, pineapples, and wood. In 1649, the aristocracy of Paris attended the baptism of a young native Caribbean by the name of Marabouis, brought to France by Dominican missionary Pierre Coliard (Roulet 2017, 75). By the end of the seventeenth century a few Antillean novels were published: in 1678, the anonymous *Nouvelles de l'Amérique ou le Mercure Américaine* came out, and around twenty years later Pierre de Corneille de Blessebois published a libertine novel called *Le Zombi du Grand Perou ou la comtesse de Cocagne* (see Garraway 2005, 172–191; Antoine 1994, 61–63). About the same time, the translation of French buccaneer Olivier Exquemelin's *Histoire des aventuriers flibustiers de l'Amérique* (1686), originally published in Dutch, had tremendous success. Generally, however, contemporary readers did not associate pirate stories with the Caribbean but with captivity in the Mediterranean context due to a flow of books about such adventures, which had attracted the French audience for over a century (Requemora-Gros and Linon 2002; Rediker 2004; Moreau 2006). In fact, long-distance travel narratives did not have a given place in Parisian culture, despite the success of the genre. The renewed interest in travelogues among French readers by the middle of the seventeenth century concerned mainly travels to the Middle East and the Mediterranean. One traveled to Jerusalem, Istanbul, and Rome for education and erudition, leaving texts written by travelers with more literary ambitions that could appeal to the Ancient Regime's cultural life. Travel writings from the islands had other motives that were mainly practical, intimately linked to settlement, mission, and commerce. A few of these texts were, of course, also addressed to a larger, cultivated audience, but it is not by coincidence that there were two times as many travel books from the "Orient" than from the Americas (Gomez-Géraud 2000, 10).

Dobie is thus arguably right to conclude that while the colonies had economic importance, they were not culturally visible during the Ancient Regime (2010, 5–6). However, we should be careful not to over-interpret the meaning of the silence around the Antilles and attribute the politics of silencing to travel writing itself. The historical context also played its part. In fact, not even the prospect of strengthening France as a naval power or making a personal fortune could attract the French to the Americas. The British settlers were three times as many as the French. Only 60,000 to 100,000 persons left from French harbors to the Caribbean during the seventeenth century, a small number compared to the 678,000 Spanish who sailed for the Americas (Bouyer 2005, 24, 35). In 1664 the Dutch

had 150 ships securing trade with the Caribbean islands; England had 35 and France, only 18 (Régent 2019, 90). Even the religious orders were reluctant to send missionaries to the islands because of high costs and risks (Roulet 2017, 102). When Jean-Baptiste Colbert became Secretary of State for the Navy and later Comptroller-General of Finances under Louis XIV, he had the ambition to change this situation, but it was not until well into the eighteenth-century that the plantation and the triangular economy would become significantly profitable. Arguably, rather than a strategy of displacement, the French responded to the project of settlement, colonization, and transatlantic trade with skepticism or indifference, an indifference which echoes four centuries later when President Charles de Gaulle referred to the islands as “specks of dust” in the Atlantic (Glissant 1989, vii). It is in this context that we must understand the minor role travelogues telling about France’s establishments had at the time. From a French horizon, they were as ignored as the world they described. We cannot posthumously give them a space in history that they did not have.

The contribution of this book is to look at travelogues from *another* perspective and not let the French context determine how we understand them. Considering that many of the writers included in this study stayed a longer time on the islands—some of them more than ten years—and were deeply involved, for good and for bad, with all of the peoples living there, they were not mere outsiders to the region they describe. Their longstanding engagement with the archipelago is indeed one of the explanations as to why the narratives were inevitably impacted by this world and its inhabitants, by violent conflicts and everyday exchanges between different cultures, classes, and languages, and between people and the archipelagic nature and geography of the Caribbean. The impetus for shifting focus from France and the transatlantic to the archipelago thus comes from the texts themselves. It would also be historically misleading to solely consider them as “French” texts; travelers mediated the islands to a French audience, but the conditions for writing and the events they described brought them closer to the archipelago than to France.

In other words, I am arguing for a similar reconfiguration of how we navigate the formations of *a* (national) literature that has been proposed by scholars within the American literary field. Exploring new scales for configuring literary history, researchers have turned toward geographical thinking to rearticulate the constitution of American literature, as in Wai-Chee Dimock’s *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep-Time* (2008) and, more recently and inspired by Glissant, Brian

Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens' (2017) attempt to reconsider American literary history in archipelagic terms (see also Stephens and Martínez-San Miguel 2020). Equally important for this project has been Elizabeth DeLoughrey's (2007, 2018, 2019) work, which takes the ocean as a point of departure to read new flows between literatures. I do not eschew the fact that the travelogues were written for a European audience, with a colonial intention, but I am interested in moments where the codes of representation dictated by the French context encounter their limitations.

This implies joining those researchers within Caribbean Indigenous studies who have shifted toward an internal perspective to reveal the dynamics of those cultures (Murphy 2021; Reid 2009), and within studies of the Black Atlantic whose work on the archives of enslavement have made them return again and again to the problem of how to read texts which both sustain uneven power relations and hint at other presences. I am notably thinking of the work of Saidiya Hartman (2008), Nicole Aljoe (2012), Aljoe et al. (2015), Simon Gikandi (2015), and Marisa Fuentes (2016).⁵ Their work to decolonize sources pertaining to Caribbean history and literature has been of extreme importance in rethinking the notion of the archive as such, from seeing it as a collection, obliterating the selection upon which it was made, to approaching it as a "*generative* system [...] that governs the production and appearance of statements," to quote David Scott (1999, 82; see also Thomas 2013). At the core of their queries is the theoretical and methodological possibility to excavate from colonial discourses other "voices," the epistemic status of such "voices," and the ethics of such readings. As Christina Sharpe (2016, 12–13) and Saidiya Hartman (2008, 2) put it, engaging with histories of enslavement—and we can add the history of expulsion of peoples and of radical transformations of nature and lands—histories that still affect lives today, runs the risk of repeating the fundamental acts of violence upon which the archives build. Could we ever hear something other than suffering? Would the knowledge we could retrieve by revisiting the archive simply be a projection of our own presentist gaze, whether it is about a desire to break the silence of subjugated ancestors and forge new stories or whether it is a desire to appease white guilt by finding ways to make those who suffered for the construction of our wealth and welfare talk back?

⁵ See also Imtiaz Habib (2008); Kelly Wisecup (2013); Jenny Sharpe (2020); Jennifer L. Morgan (2021).

I think that there are no clear answers to those questions. In fact, I believe that it is more productive to leave them unresolved, which is not the same thing as avoiding them. On the contrary, what scholars such as Sharpe suggest is that they need to be asked again but differently. *Points of Entanglement in French Caribbean Travel Writing (1620–1722)* is an exploration of the possibility of reading traces of others and how they might affect dominant narratives. In so doing, it taps into the emergent field of Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies, which also shifts perspectives to “put black lives in the center of inquiry [...] to provide answers to how black people affected and were affected by various social, political and cultural institutions” (Smith et al. 2018, 2). In this book, diasporic Africans share that place with Indigenous peoples and also with geography. However, they do so within the regimes of travel writing, within embedded representations of life. This means that rather than centering on these lives, I analyze how they intervene and disturb those representations. Hence I am not making any claims of revealing how anyone experienced life in the early colonial Caribbean; I can merely scratch the surface for possible answers from echoes of voices. Nonetheless, this field of study offers a new approach to the silences upon which texts like the travelogues I study here build because it does not only see silence and repression; it proposes a different way of listening to the texts. Thereby they challenge a long tradition of thinking, which has been crucial for revealing colonial inequalities. Since Stephen Greenblatt’s (1988) famous analysis of the structure of power in discourse in early modern England, in which he demonstrates the embeddedness of representation of speech, the presence of otherness has been configured in terms of a muted, disfigured voice, in Anglo-American academia as well as in French universities, though the latter case has focused on power dynamics in the uneven translation process from orality to writing (de Certeau 1992; Mignolo 1995; Said 1993; Todorov 1999). Like scholars in Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies, I am not contesting the fact that the expressions of agency of others are embedded in layers of codes of representation, ideologies, and underlying motives. The problem with over-emphasizing these dimensions is not only that it is profoundly Eurocentric, as it lets the power structure colonial discourses have imposed onto the world continue to determine what we see when we read and how we read them. It also presumes that, in order to have value, the excavation of other forms of knowledge or experience requires an autonomous space where expression may emerge freely, independent of any outside interference. Creating such a space from our

present vantage point would be another form of deformation and displacement.

So what would a reading that listens differently do? Instead of circumscribing people's "experiences within those systems," Cassander L. Smith (2016, 5) opts for an interrogation of what she calls narrative disruptions, "offering clues about the source material from which a writer crafts his or her narrative" (5) to create other colonial narratives. She argues that presences and experiences of others cause scatterings, tremblings, shifts in perspectives within the narratives. Inspired by this approach, I, too, claim that the identification of instances of unsettlement within the texts allows for analyzing active interventions by Natives, enslaved people, and geography. What I particularly take from Smith is the recognition that the rhetoric codes that frame language and representations contain limitations that constitute sites where the structure of power is questioned (5; 22). This approach resonates with Simon Gikandi's discussion of the figure of the slave in early American archives (2015). Warning against the attempt to recuperate expressions of subjectivity or authentic experiences of enslaved people from the colonial archive where they inevitably hold "a place of pure negativity," from which we can only retrieve "an occasional stammer in the cracks of European speech or in 'the great confused murmur of a discourse' that sought to exclude them [...]" (86), Gikandi proposes a "symptomatic reading" (99, 100). Rather than carving out a representational and ultimately fictional space where the enslaved subject would speak freely, he urges us to work through the messiness of colonial representations. Taking up Gayatri Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak or not, Gikandi argues that even if the subaltern was enchained in a position from which they could not speak, they can still be heard. "Indeed, the challenge of the archive [...]," Gikandi writes, "is how we can read the lives of the slaves in the archive of the masters, not to recover the authentic voices of the enslaved, but to witness new voices and selves emerging in what appears to be the site of discursive interdiction" (92). A way to do this work with coded and layered texts such as travel writing is to look carefully for *impacts* and *effects* on the narratives of others.⁶

⁶I refrain from using the term "voice" because of its link to various forms of subjectivity, such as the subject of enunciation in discourse analysis and to a "consciousness" in Bakhtin's theories of polyphony and dialogism. Moreover, voice had other meanings and was linked to philosophy and rhetoric in seventeenth-century France (Rosenthal 1998), which adds further layers to the notion, making it difficult to use operatively in my analysis.

Following Gikandi, I take the lesson from subaltern and postcolonial studies, namely that the discourse of “control and regulation, which seeks to remove all traces of difference and resistance, still leaves in its wake important signs of that which it tries to control or erase” (93). The textual effect is not necessarily an expression of resistance, but it leaves traces of friction, short-circuiting the flow of the early colonial narrative.

This book is in many ways a continuation of Doris Garraway’s thorough and thought-provoking book *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (2005). Her analysis of representations of “cross-cultural negotiations within and between ethnic groups” (20) to see how “culture cross[es] boundaries of power and violence” (21) was ground-breaking. There is a certain form of colonial *libertinage*, she argues, “undergirding exploitative power relations” (26), which alternatively reinforces and subverts regimes of violence in the early modern Caribbean. My book is also written in dialogue with Michael Harrigan’s recent historical study of enslavement during the period of the settlement and early colonization in *Frontiers of Servitude: Slavery in the Narratives of the Early French Atlantic* (2018). In detailed analysis of some of the travelogues I study here, Harrigan explores how power was structured (4) and what slavery meant in the context of early colonial society by using the contemporary term “condition” (15). Another book that has informed my project is *Engendering Islands: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Violence in the Early French Caribbean* (2021), where Ashley Williard reads burgeoning racial and colonial discourses by focusing on the body (7). Her study shows how gender and race are produced as interrelated categories and how racial discourses are permeated with “instabilities” (9), which make them malleable and adjustable to context. Both Harrigan and Williard work from a premise similar to mine, namely that colonial narratives “are somehow haunted by the whispers of the slave” (Harrigan 2018, 230; quoted in Williard 2021, 15), suggesting that the disclosure of the formations of power structures can reveal such “whispers.”

The work I am suggesting here requires a literary methodology of close reading. I follow Frédéric Tinguely’s (2020) argument that there is an epistemic value in using a literary method when approaching travel writing. Textual analysis proceeds with a slow reading of these often informative and repetitive texts that are usually simply skimmed through. It is a methodology that is sensitive to contradictions, tensions, and details that would escape a purely informative reading. This is precisely the kind of reading strategy that enables attention to unequal power relations while at

the same time remaining sensitive to creative aspects and to the ways in which travel narratives are influenced by the world they are trying to control. Surely, travelogues do not fully belong to what we conceive of as literature (not in the seventeenth-century sense of *belles lettres* or in the modern notion of literature as tied to fiction in a larger sense). Nonetheless, they are partly fictive constructs with elements of literariness (usages of literary tropes and narrative constructs); this is a kind of literature in which the “sound of the world” is more directly present than in fiction or poetry.⁷ My methodology also finds inspiration in what Terence Cave calls an “archipelagic approach” to literature, which concentrates on the fragments of the texts to identify places where signs of trouble or “epistemological incertitude, an ontological or axiological anxiety” (1999, 15) appear.

What I hope to achieve through this reading is the actualization of resonances between the disruptive effects of others and today’s thinking and writing from the archipelago. In his seminal essay “Caribbean Man in Space and in Time” (1974), Barbadian writer Kamau Brathwaite proposed that in order to reassess Caribbean literary heritage as a complicated, conflictual articulation of cultural crossings, we need to rediscover the writings of the “inner metropole” (8). Along the same lines, Keith Sandiford (2018, 3) notes in his exploration of the *longue durée* of Anglophone Caribbean literature that early colonial texts need examination as part of a work of re-membling. Interestingly, twentieth-century French Antillean authors do just that: they imbricate fragments from the eclectic travelogue corpus and turn to travel writing not only for mere information but for exploring a certain sensitivity toward the island space and the processes of violent cultural and linguistic mixing. Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre’s multifaceted description of the now-extinct acoma tree resurfaced four centuries later when Glissant founded a journal to articulate what he would later call a “Caribbean discourse” He named the journal *Acoma*. Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé’s character Aristide in *Crossing the Mangrove* (1989) immerses himself in the dense jungle and reads Labat’s travelogue to make sense of the vegetation. Labat appears in Glissant’s epic poem *The Indies* (2019) as the torturer of enslaved people and later in *Poetics of Relation* (1997), but now as a person influenced by

⁷I borrow this expression from Jérôme Meizoz (2007, 11), who argues for a way to “read literature sociologically in terms of a ‘discourse’ in permanent interaction with the sound [rumeur] of the world.”

the people on whom he exercised his violent authority. References such as these fold the early colonial into writings of the present; they suggest that this history still has an impact today but that this influence is fragmentary, breaking through rifts of time and complicating the contours of French Caribbean literary history.

FRENCH NEW WORLD BAROQUE

One of the challenges with the concept of point of entanglements is that it implies working with temporal overlaps. As I hope to have shown, actualizing twentieth-century Caribbean and Black diasporic thinking in my readings opens the possibility for a different approach to colonial silencing. It also helps to situate travel writing in the distinct context of the seventeenth-century island space while reconsidering Caribbean literary history in terms of discontinuities, and it helps to understand the period prior to the boom of the plantation system from a non-teleological standpoint: it cuts through time rather than following in a linear chronology. When doing this work, I have come back to a concept which resonates in both the seventeenth and the twentieth century, namely the Baroque. The travelogues were written during the Baroque period, and the notion has been revisited by twentieth-century Caribbean authors like Glissant. In fact, Glissant's non-linear way of thinking the past recalls Delphine Denis' characterization of a Baroque notion of origin, which aims to "describe that which emerges from a process of becoming and disappearance" (2019, 474). Likewise, a recent article on the re-workings of the Baroque stresses that the concept entails a "radical rethinking of historical time" liberated from linearity and historicism (Farago et al. 2015, 43).

The fascination with changeable nature, uncertainty, and ceaseless conflict characteristic of the seventeenth century, Christopher Braider argues (2018, 10), can be seen as a reconfiguration of the convulsions that marked the Renaissance after the discovery of the Americas—from the wonders of the first encounters to the delusion that followed the extinction of Indigenous peoples. Ignoring the "baroque instabilities" (Braider 2019, 140) that this caused is another form of denial of French imperialism. Significantly, even if there is a historical rationale for turning to the Baroque—French settlement and early colonization coincide with the period from the seventeenth century up to the eighteenth century, which has been called the "age of the baroque" in France by Jean Rousset

(1953)⁸—the notion has not been used to understand French early coloniality and overseas involvement. In Lois Parkinson and Monica Kaup’s *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest* (2010), France is mentioned in passing, as part of the Catholic counter-reformation. Apart from Glissant’s essay “Concerning a Baroque Abroad and in the World” to which I will come back, only one critical study in this volume by Dorothy Z. Baker investigates the notion in relation to French seventeenth-century American texts, but it focuses on Jesuits in New France and not on the Caribbean. It is indeed difficult to place French writings on the settlement and early colonization in any movement. Contrary to Spanish early modern American literature, the French only have colonial texts written in Europe. There is no French colonial *mestizo* text from and about the Caribbean that could represent a New World Baroque in the same sense as one can find in the Spanish colonial context.⁹

For me, the Baroque has been productive for thinking through the tensions and contradictions that permeate travel narratives. A seventeenth-century understanding of the Baroque as an instrument of empire and power (Maravall 1986) has been useful for capturing the intention to discursively control the archipelago and its people. A twentieth-century Caribbean understanding insists on an openness to transformation and instability and sees the Baroque as a profoundly inter- and transcultural concept, which enables me to seize moments of unsettlement that are produced in the narratives despite the travelers’ desires to domesticate, as an effect of the impact of the outside world. The term thus comprises several, sometimes contradictory, orientations, commonly captured by referring to its etymological roots in the Portuguese term *barrôco*, uneven pearl. However, in the context of my study, a different etymology proves to be more pertinent, derived from the Tuscan vernacular words *barocco*,

⁸The notion of classicism has long been and still is preferred to describe French seventeenth-century culture and society, including travel writing (Dorion, 1995). Classicism no doubt captures the majority of travels of the time, but mostly for those conducted in less foreign and faraway spaces. American voyages, particularly those imbricated in the colonization process, faced other challenges and were often more heterogeneous in motives, arguments and style. On this note, see Christopher Braider’s *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth* (2019, 5).

⁹The Baroque has been used to theorize various conversion strategies of amazement and exaggeration to attract people to Catholicism (Calfope 2013; Shrum 2017). In the French Caribbean, as I will explain later, missionary work among the Indigenous population failed and missionaries seem to have had little material at hand when working among them.

barrocolo or *barrochio*, which designate uneven systems of transactions; a usurer's contract (Malczynski 2009, 305). French presence in the Caribbean was initiated by privateers, doing more or less illicit commerce. Interactions with Indigenous populations were mainly configured through the words *troc* and *traite*, trade exchanges. From the European perspective, Indigenous people would give them anything in exchange for what they called *pacotille*—junk—suggesting that the exchanges were uneven, though we have no sources telling us how the Indigenous interpreted these interactions. The word *traite* will soon move into designating the French Transatlantic slave trade, *la Traite*. The Baroque exchange was indisputably unequal, but it also contained an unpredictable element, a sort of collateral creativity, which finds its echoes in Glissant's notion of creolization.

In this sense, the concept allows me to frame the desire to dominate, which structures travelogues, at the same time as it suggests that the cross-cultural basis of the exchange destabilized that structure of domination. The editors of *Baroque New Worlds* describe the Baroque as an instrument of power that derailed:

The Baroque was exported wholesale to areas of the world colonized by Catholic Europe throughout the seventeenth century, and well into the eighteenth. It is one of the few satisfying ironies of European imperial domination worldwide that the Baroque worked poorly as a colonizing instrument. Its visual and verbal forms are ample, dynamic, porous, and permeable; thus, in all of the areas colonized by Catholic Europe, the Baroque was itself eventually colonized. In the New World, its transplants immediately began to incorporate the cultural perspectives and iconographies of the indigenous and African laborers and artisans who built and decorated Catholic structures. (2010, 3)

The Baroque was a vector of empires at the same time as it was transformative, making it useful to address colonization as domination *and* cultural transformation and creation. Following Parkinson and Kaup, my reason for turning to the Baroque is thus not primarily periodical or stylistic. The critical usefulness of this notion is that it can help problematize representational as well as epistemic transformations and instabilities within a structure. It enables me to frame passages where travel narratives that aim to assert power and empire become unsettled, and it is here that I can trace the impact of the foreign: sites where travelers are entangled with

island geography, with Indigenous and enslaved peoples, despite the will to separate themselves from this world and thereby control it. Such an approach is particularly relevant when investigating an entire body of eclectic works spanning almost a century. The travelers use different registers and have different agendas, and it would be a misunderstanding to assume that they spoke from one single position of power. Rather, the colonial discourse they produce is shifting, even within a single text, as we shall see in the analytical chapters that follow.

Glissant claims that while the Spanish Baroque manifested power in architecture and in visual representations using fear and desire, the Baroque in the French context operated through language (1989, 250), both in terms of policing languages and sustaining a linguistic hierarchy and of representations. Travel writing would thus constitute a key-site where the French Caribbean Baroque is manifested. In an essay entitled “People and Language” that appeared in *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant juxtaposes what he calls a “baroque rhetoric” of the French colonial world with the linguistic development that took place in France at the same time. The standardization of French into a “pure national language,” propelled by the creation of the French Academy and the forging of classicism, would either fall short or morph into something else in the encounter with the Caribbean: “It is the unknown area of these relationships that weaves, while dismantling the conception of the standard language, the ‘natural texture’ of our new Baroque, our own. Liberation will emerge from this cultural composite” (1989, 250). There are echoes between Glissant’s insistence on language and Cuban writer Severo Sarduy’s notion of the neo-Baroque. The two writers belonged to the same circles connected to the *Tel Quel* group in Paris, though I do not know if they met, and Sarduy was more involved in the group than Glissant, who was closer to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Nonetheless, both stress the importance of language in conceptualizing the counter poetics of the American Baroque. But whereas Sarduy insists on the artificiality of the Baroque, which goes against other Cuban authors, notably Alejo Carpentier’s interpretation of the Baroque enabling an analogous relationship between language and primordial nature, Glissant focuses on power structures in language and on language’s ability to perform domination while also exploring its creative potentiality.

The question of language runs through each point of entanglement that I address here, not only in the ways in which travelers account for the various languages of the islands and their speakers, but also in the

multiplication of names of islands and in the negotiation between self and the world where language mediates influence. The emphasis on the foundational violence in language explains why Glissant keeps thinking *with* early colonial texts. He does not elaborate on the connection between today's counter poetics and the early modern, which contrasts with the ways Sarduy (2010a, b), for instance, reads the Baroque period, as if he was reluctant to celebrating the early modern creativity because it runs the risk of obliterating that the Baroque is also an instrument of domination. Rather, he underscores the inherent contradictions in writings from early colonization. Taking the example of Labat, he writes in the essay "Concerning a Baroque Abroad and in the World":

Despite the insistent cold ferocity of Father Labat's writing, for example, beneath the words of this seventeenth-century chronicler of the Antilles one can feel a curiosity, riveted, anxious, and obsessive, whenever he broaches the subject of these slaves that he struggles so hard to keep calm. Fear, fantasies and perhaps a barely willing flicker of complicity from the undercurrent of the revolts and repressions. The long list of martyrdoms is also a long métissage whether involuntary or intentional. (1997, 67)

In a typically Glissantian manner, he does not deepen the analysis of Labat, but he uses the seventeenth-century missionary to show that historical and geographical circumstances forge writings on the Caribbean from this time. He is interested in that which appears despite the authoritarian posture. Otherness seems to draw the writing of this missionary in unexpected directions, and it is in this movement that the Baroque occurs. We hear the echo of Gilles Deleuze's (1993) notion of the Baroque fold as producing a creativity, but Glissant reads it in direct relationship to the contact with the New World. Here, Glissant suggests, the Baroque ceased to be a reaction to Classicism and became naturalized, taking on other meanings and forms (1997, 116). On the islands, he writes in *Caribbean Discourse*, it was extended "into the unstable mode of Relation; and once again in this full-sense, the 'historical' baroque prefigured, in an astonishingly prophetic manner, present-day upheavals of the world" (1989, 79). It was an effect of early colonization, which produced overlapping identities and languages that travelers put into strategic use to construct knowledge and create representations of the islands. By confronting different geographies, languages, and perspectives we can see how travel writing is drawn into the "unstable mode of Relation" that Glissant claims to be

characteristic of the Baroque. I will not look at specific stylistic figures that pertain to the Baroque, nor do I claim to prove that these texts *are* Baroque. But the concept has helped me to work through the points of entanglement where plurilingualism and plurivocalism are actualized, where engagement with geography influences writing, and where the travelers, acting as mediators between the islands and France, become themselves sites for negotiations between cultures.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF A SUCCESSFUL COLONIZATION

The Windward Islands Guadeloupe and Martinique have been French longer than Nice and Brittany. Whereas other Caribbean islands gained independence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these islands remained under the French flag. Since 1946, they are *départements d'outre-mer* and no longer colonies, but as argued by Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse* (1989), rather than spurring self-sufficiency, departmentalization strengthened the links to the former colonial metropole, as France implemented a politics of assimilation. When traveling from St. Lucia to Martinique, one has the impression to have crossed the English Channel and not the Caribbean Sea, as V.S. Naipaul sardonically remarks in *The Middle Passage: The Caribbean Revisited* (1962, 199–203). Like in France, every little town has a post office, a *mairie*, and a monument commemorating those who gave their lives to *la mère patrie* in the two world wars. Today one can be sure to find well-known French *hypermarchés* on the outskirts of more populated areas, and tourists think that the beer “Lorraine” is a French import and not a local brew named after a brasserie in Lamentin where it was first made. These manifestations of what Glissant with biting irony has called a “successful colonization” (1981, 15) have a history that stretches back to the second half of the seventeenth century when Colbert centralized colonial politics to Paris and Louis XIV.

However, initially France’s presence in the Antilles was precarious and even rebellious. To distinguish between the different phases of this history, I will call the period up to 1669 “settlement” or “establishment.” During this phase, French involvement in the Caribbean was mainly the result of individuals. As Éric Roulet (2017) convincingly demonstrates in his study of the first French American trading companies, the colonies and the trade companies were supported by powerful men with political influence in France. Nevertheless, the settlement was not officially a state run enterprise until 1668 when Colbert was appointed Secretary of State for

the Navy and placed the colonies directly under his administration. The period from the 1670s up to 1706, when the last writer in my corpus, Labat, left Martinique, will be referred to as early colonization. These thirty years mark the beginning of a centralized colonial system, where the slave trade and the plantation society took shape and gradually came to dominate life on the islands but had not yet reached the dimensions that are to be found later in the eighteenth century (Petitjean Roget 1980).

During the sixteenth century, France randomly appeared in the Americas: French adventurers and privateers roamed the Caribbean Sea and made some unfruitful attempts at claiming American southern territories beginning in the sixteenth century (Lestringant 1981, 1987, 1994; Moreau 2002). The most well-known colonial enterprises were Vice Admiral Villegagnon's expedition to Brazil in 1555, with the objective to establish a colony, and Jean Ribault and René de Laudonnière's expeditions to Florida between 1562–1565, encouraged by Admiral Coligny as a way to challenge Spain's monopoly in the Americas (Lestringant 2017). Both expeditions were failures. The colony in Florida was attacked by the Spanish after they had already been decimated by Natives. The island that Villegaignon occupied in Rio de Janeiro Bay (Guanabara Bay) lacked fresh water and was uninhabitable. In the decades that followed, there would be no serious French attempts to settle in the Americas, only a few missionary expeditions (Daher 2022) and traders, buccaneers, and privateers leaving from France to the islands with the objective to find adventure and profit, rather than to colonize territories. In 1623, one of them, Pierre Belain d'Esnambuc who had travelled in the region since he was 18, found refuge on Saint-Christophe. The island was already inhabited by Indigenous peoples, four hundred Englishmen led by Thomas Warner, eighty Frenchmen, and around twenty enslaved people; the French settled with the Caribs in the north and the south, whereas the English took possession of the middle of the island (Régent 2019, 23). At this time Richelieu was looking to strengthen France's naval impact, so when Esnambuc sailed to Paris in 1625 to ask for permission to settle on every island in the Caribbean that "was not inhabited," he immediately gained it. The following year, Richelieu created *La Compagnie de Saint-Christophe*, France's very first trading company, modeled after the Dutch. Lacking a solid structure, the company soon went bankrupt. Nonetheless, it paved the way for French global trade, and Richelieu recreated it in 1635 under the name *La Compagnie des Isles de l'Amérique*, which marked the beginning of more serious imperial claims to the islands.

The start of settlement was difficult for the French. The colonies—here referring to groups of settlers rather than to territories—were small and suffered from not knowing how to use the land. The chroniclers tell about how choosing bad locations for settlement could lead to the death of entire colonies. Frenchmen passed away from starvation, sickness, or in combat against other Europeans or Amerindians. They were dependent on exchanges with Natives for food and for information in order to identify plants and learn how to hunt, cultivate, and navigate the sea in canoes. Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre’s map of Martinique, included in *Histoire générale des isles de Saint-Christophe...et autres dans l’Amérique*, shows an island divided between French and Natives (Fig. 1.1).

The islands were indeed multicultural and multilingual at this time. Each ethnic group was largely heterogeneous regarding class, language, and religion, although it should be mentioned that most Europeans were male.¹⁰ French-speaking Protestants could be found among the Dutch. There were people of mixed race, such as the famous Thomas Warner’s son with the same name who would be appointed governor of Dominica by the English. In the beginning of the settlement enslaved peoples of African descent were mostly bought from other American colonies (Barbados and Brazil) and intermingled with poor Europeans—*engagés*, indentured servants who originated from Northern France (Boucher 2008, 268–272). Indentured laborers worked to lay the ground for the settlements and small-scale plantations. The large majority of the *engagés* would die during their service, some would never escape servitude or return to France, and others got away by joining the Indigenous communities or buccaneers (Boucher 2008, 270–271).

Indentureship and skilled white laborers would be the most important workforce for the French up until the 1660s when the scale shifted toward enslaved Africans, who were from then on considered to be the key to profit (Boucher 2008, 273). Frédéric Régent states that in 1654 there were three indentured workers and one enslaved person and ten years later the numbers were reversed (Régent 2019, 70; Banks 2006, 18). However, there is little information about the enslaved population prior to the 1660s and most numbers are estimates (Boucher 2008, 275). One of the missionaries in the corpus claims that there were around 300 enslaved people

¹⁰For studies about women in the seventeenth-century Caribbean, see Bernard Moitt (2001) and Ashley Williard (2021). The following studies focus on gender in the context of enslavement: Hilary Beckles (1998); Sylvie Meslien (1999); Arlette Gautier (2009a, b, 2010).



Fig. 1.1 Du Tertre *Histoire générale des isles de Saint-Christophe* (1654). Map of Martinique divided between French and Indigenous. (Source: gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Public domain)

in Martinique in 1639, but it is difficult to know for sure. Black people were referred to as “Nègres,” “Mores,” “esclaves,” and less frequently “Noirs” or “Ethiopiens” or other vague references to country origins such as “Congos,” “Angoles,” or “Aradas.”¹¹ Most individuals captivated and enslaved by the French in the seventeenth century originated from Senegambia and the Bight of Benin where French slave vessels were most active at the time. The first officially recognized French slave ship set sail in 1643 (Régent 2007, 41, 43), but as David Geggus contends there is little data from this period (Geggus 2001, 123; Pritchard et al. 2008; Régent 2007, 45). Before 1650, about fifty to sixty enslaved peoples arrived yearly to the French settlements in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint-Christophe. Then the numbers increased radically, totaling

¹¹ According to Frédéric Régent, the people referred to as “Arada” spoke the same language but were from different ethnic groups (2007, 45 n. 3). Congos originated from Central Africa (today’s Cameroun, Gabon, and north Angola) (Régent 2007, 45 n. 4).

around six to seven hundred captives annually in the 1650, and by the end of the century there would be around four thousand (Régent 2007, 55).

The Natives comprised a hybrid group as recent Caribbean archaeology and ethnohistory has shown (Hofman and Duijvenbode 2011; Hofman et al. 2014; Lenik 2012; Verrand 2001). The travelers refer to them by using the generic and highly exotic term, *Sauvages*. Sometimes they use more culturally specific denominations, such as *Callínago*, *Caribs*, *Galibis*, *Arawak*, and alternatively *Cannibals*. Which denomination a traveler used says as much about the effect they tried to have in a particular passage as about the people they actually portrayed. It is worth noting that those missionaries who were involved with the Indigenous people adequately point out that this is not how the Natives referred to themselves. The Protestant traveler Rochefort notes that they do not like the European terms even if they had adopted them supposedly to facilitate communication with Europeans (1658, 324). He most likely drew this information from Dominican missionary Raymond Breton, who in his Carib-French dictionary published in 1665, claims the Indigenous peoples called themselves Callínago:

Callínago, It's the real name for our insular Caribs; these are those cannibals or anthropophagus of which the Spanish complain so much, as the persons that they have not been able to tame and who have devoured so many of them and their allies (to judge by what they say in their books); as far as I am concerned I don't want to defame them more; I have never had a reason to complain about their cruelty, on the contrary, I would complain about their goodness toward me. (1999, 55)¹²

Like all travelers, Breton still refers to them as Caribs, probably not to confuse the readers, but also because he does not seem sure about which people or nation the inhabitants of Dominica, with whom he lived, spoke about when using the term Callínago.¹³ The question is whether this

¹² *C'est le véritable nom de nos Caraïbes insulaires; sont ces cannibales et anthropophages dont les Espagnols se plaignent tant, comme des personnes qu'ils n'ont pu dompter, et qui ont dévoré un si prodigieux nombre des leurs et de leurs alliés (à ce qu'ils disent en leurs livres); je ne les veux pas diffamer davantage; quant à moi, je n'ai pas sujet de me plaindre de leur cruauté, au contraire, je me plaindrais volontiers à leur douceur à mon égard.*

¹³ See Breton's *Relation* (1978, 52) where the question of what they call themselves is linked to that of their origin. He ends by stating: "We call those who come from the continent and who are friends with our savages Gallybis and our savages Karaïbes" (Nous appelons ceux de terre ferme qui sont amis de nos sauvages Gallybis et nos sauvages Karaïbes).

designation only referred to inhabitants of Dominica. Erin Stone notes that it did not appear in the Spanish records in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries but is likely “a product of the Indian diaspora that was created by the violence and movement of the earliest indigenous slave trade” (2017, 140, n3). As Peter Hulme and Neil Whitehead underscore in the introduction to the collected volume *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day* (1992) there is no way of knowing exactly what they called themselves, and it is not always clear to which group the travelers are referring. Ultimately, they opt for the term Carib as the least exoticizing vernacular nomination of these populations, and I will do the same even if researchers such as Ashley Williard argue for using “Kalinago,” noting that the term is still used in Dominica today (2021, 18). For my purpose here, settling for Carib is a way to acknowledge the gaps in our understanding of these peoples and their languages: what we have is merely a construction, like the term “Carib.”

Breton’s quote reflects that French missionaries generally portrayed Indigenous people in good terms, for missionary and political reasons. They were obviously keen to foster good relationships with the Natives to benefit the evangelical work. Moreover, their texts often exaggerate the friendship in order to promote the mission or praise France’s civility in comparison to the cruelty of the Spanish or the brutality of the English. As Doris Garraway rightly argues, the French forged a fiction of reciprocity when representing Franco-Carib relations (Garraway 2005, 42). Periodically, the French lived indeed peacefully side-by-side with Caribs, and it seems plausible that the French did have a different relationship with many tribes as a result of years of trading without territorial claims. For instance, French buccaneers and privateers would typically do commerce at sea, on their ships, rather than on land. Whether this practice complied better with local culture or whether the sea was perceived as a more neutral space is hard to know, but it seems to have affected the reports. Nevertheless, stories about reciprocal exchanges are rarer to find in the travelogues than those who tell about brutal massacres by the French. And as French governors and *colons* wanted more and more land, the killings increased even if it was sometimes to the detriment of the colonies since it meant they could no longer count on support from the Caribs. Wars between Natives and Europeans raged until 1660, when French, British, and Natives signed a treaty dividing the islands between them. From then on the Caribs were chased from all islands and were only allowed to inhabit Dominica and Saint Vincent.

It took years for the French to assure territorial control over the islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint-Christophe.¹⁴ The more lasting establishment did not start until 1640, two years after Philippe Lonvilliers de Poincy from the order of Malta was named lieutenant general of Saint-Christophe. Poincy was a strong leader who managed to resist attacks from enemies and keep the colonies in check. Taking advantage of the chaotic situation in France after the death of Louis XIII in 1643, Poincy soon took full authority over the islands and undermined both the Crown and *La Compagnie des Isles de l'Amérique*, which was now near bankruptcy. The regency of the queen mother Anne of Austria, supported by Cardinal Mazarin, and the civil war known as *La Fronde* (1648–1653) were turbulent times for Caribbean settlers. In his *Histoire générale des Antilles*, Du Tertre reports on torture and random executions ordered by governors who sought absolute power over their territories. Most missionaries stood on the side of the Crown against governors and *colons* with whom they often had conflicting interests. Poincy made sure that nobody contested his authority. At the same time, he exempted the inhabitants of the islands from the heavy tax load that French authorities imposed on the people in France. But most of all, for the proprietors in the Antilles it was a time of relative independence from the Crown and powerful men in Paris. Governors bought islands from the company—Charles Houël took Guadeloupe and its neighboring islands; Du Parquet took Martinique, Grenada and the Grenadines; and Poincy kept his position at Saint-Christophe, from where he exercised full control over the islands, refusing to resign his powers to Patrocles de Thoisy sent by the regent queen mother and Mazarin in 1645. This “era of proprietors,” as historian Philip Boucher calls the period between 1648 and the death of Poincy in 1660, is the burgeoning of the sugar economy and the plantation system (2008, Chap. 4). Now plantation owners, later known as *békés*, became important political players who weighed in against both the companies and the governors.

With Poincy’s authority gone, a race began for islands and trade, which was complicated by conflicts in Europe—France was now enemies with the Dutch, who were the main traders in the Caribbean. Colbert issued a law of commercial exclusivity, forbidding trade with nations other than France, and the islands were at the brink of civil war. The crisis incited

¹⁴For studies on life in the early colonies, see Oruno Lara (1999); Léo Elisabeth (2003); Marie Polderman (2004).

Louis XIV, through the intermediary of Colbert, to change colonial politics. In 1664, the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* was created to centralize colonial authority, putting an end to the long period of settlement with its diffuse forms of power. Alexandre de Prouville de Tracy was sent to the islands to resist the English, end illegal trade with the Dutch, and ultimately buy back the islands. In 1669, Colbert made sure to place colonial affairs directly under his administration.

Colonization now turned into a “machinery,” to use François Regourd and James E. McClellan’s expression, a governmental and administrative apparatus, with Paris as its centrifugal force, in which all agents contribute as cogs to make it work better (McClellan and Regourd 2011; Regourd 2008). As the sugar economy grew, so did slave trade. The first census is from 1660 when they counted 2642 enslaved Black people, compared to 2783 whites in Martinique, and in Guadeloupe in 1670, 4482 enslaved and 3444 whites (Boucher 2008, 238–239). By the turn of the century the number of enslaved peoples in Martinique had more than tripled; 14566 to 6567 whites (Boucher 2008, 239). Most enslaved Africans were brought to the French islands by buccaneers or bought from Portuguese ships and colonies (Roulet 2017, 409). The French triangular trade expanded starting in the 1670s at the same time as Colbert laid the ground for the *Code noir*, a set of laws regulating trade and treatment of slaves that was promulgated in 1685. The number of enslaved people on the French islands grew rapidly after 1715 when plantation production increased with the so-called “sugar revolution” (Miller 2008, 25). From then on, slavery and plantation society determined colonial society and politics.

THE EARLY FRENCH CARIBBEAN CORPUS

Points of Entanglement in French Caribbean Travel Writing (1620-1722) looks at “curated” texts, texts that for the most part have been published or appear to have been written with the intention to get published. The reason is not primarily because there are still few thorough literary studies of these texts, but because I attribute an epistemic value to the embeddedness that such publications entail. They remind us of the enmeshed representation of the early modern Caribbean, forcing us to work through it and search for disruptions from within. They give no illusion of transparency but present us with frictions, layers, and folds. I will refer to the set of texts as a library in order not to confuse my approach

here with the archival criticism undertaken by decolonial scholars that has inspired my work.

The corpus covers a period from 1620 to 1722, starting with the travels of the anonymous writer, probably a Parisian soldier (Moreau 2002, 15–16) whose manuscript was found in Carpentras, and ending in 1722, the year Labat published his account fourteen years after he had left Martinique. I consider Labat's work to be transitional: he stayed on the islands at the turn of the centuries, but his account was published after the sugar revolution in 1715. His account is in many ways singular, as will become evident throughout the chapters, but it is also intimately entwined with its predecessors thematically, stylistically, and politically. Instead of letting historical events determine the timespan, I have decided to start from the travelers and their texts. In broad strokes, the accounts can be categorized as (1) longer published accounts, including natural and moral histories, (2) linguistic works, (3) published buccaneer stories, and (4) unpublished narratives that were visibly written for a readership but never got published for reasons the present study does not have the space to investigate.¹⁵

All of the texts were written in France, after the traveler's sojourn in the islands. There are some manuscripts available, but log books or notebooks have not been found, which means that we have very few if any direct notes from life on the islands. The majority of the texts were published and reached an audience by the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, six years after Richelieu's death. The reason why few texts circulated during the period of the initial settlement up to the peace treaty was that texts about French taking over land recently claimed by Spain could deteriorate the already bad relations between France and Spain. In fact, Richelieu's initiative to trade and settle in the Caribbean from 1626 and onwards coincided with his decision to enter the Thirty Years War, siding with the Protestants of Northern Europe against Catholic Spain. In order to silence severe criticism from fervent Catholics at home, he asked the Pope, who shared Richelieu's fear that Spain was too strong in the Americas, for

¹⁵ I would like to call attention to recent editorial works that are part of the extended corpus: literary scholar Réal Ouellet has edited two volumes with texts from this period, both published and unpublished, written by a number of different authors: *La Colonisation des Antilles. Textes français du XVII^e siècle I-II* (2014). These volumes include excerpts from missionary texts and letters; others are written by governors, traders, and buccaneers. A similar but more extended series called *Corpus antillais* (2013, 2014, 2016, 2021) has been initiated by historians Bernard Grunberg, Josiane Grunberg, and Benoît Roux.

permission to embark on missions in the New World, thus convincing his critics that he was a true Catholic after all (Boucher 2008, 68). The Pope gave France the authorization to send missionaries to the Antilles who were directly under the “conduct, jurisdiction and authority” of the superior at the Noviciat Général in Paris (Deslandres 2003, 691). Clearly, as historian Philip Boucher claims the reason why France’s colonial campaign included missionaries had more to do with European politics than with converting souls. It left a distinctive trait on French settlement since neither English nor Dutch ships brought missionaries along their expeditions. This meant that there are more French sources from this period are relatively extensive.

The corpus reflects the variety of the travel writing genre from the 1640s to the turn of the century. A few travelers give more or less chronological first-person accounts of their sojourns. Natural and moral histories, such as Du Tertre’s *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François* (1667)¹⁶ and Rochefort’s *Histoire naturelle et morales des îles Antilles de l’Amérique* (1658) have a thematic structure, following the Ancients (Herodotus, Pliny) and the Spanish accounts from the sixteenth century (Oviedo, Acosta, Las Casas) as models for writing. There are unique studies of life among the indigenous, such as Moïse Caillé de Castre’s *De Wilde ou les sauvages caribes insulaires d’Amérique* (2002 [1694]),¹⁷ following an unknown man whom he named “De Wilde” stranded with the Caribs, much like the anonymous soldier in Fleury’s crew who lived among them about seventy years earlier. There are a few longer narratives written by traders: Guillaume Coppier (*Histoire et voyages des Indes Occidentales* 1645), François Froger (*Relation d’un voyage fait en 1695, 1696, et 1697 aux côtes d’Afrique, détroit de Magellan, Brésil, Cayenne et isles Antilles* 1698), and Sieur de Laborde (*Relation de l’origine, mœurs, coutumes, religions, guerres et voyages des Caraïbes sauvages des Isles Antilles*

¹⁶The original manuscript is called *Histoire de la Guadeloupe* (1648), and the first version was published in 1654 under the title *Histoire générale des îles de Saint-Christophe... et autres dans l’Amérique*.

¹⁷According to the Bibliothèque Mazarine, in charge of Marcel Chatillon’s collection of texts from the early modern Antilles, the manuscript was lost after it had been transcribed and published by the *Musée Départemental d’archéologie précolombienne et de préhistoire de la Martinique* in 2002. See: <https://www.bibliotheque-mazarine.fr/fr/evenements/actualites/a-la-recherche-d-un-manuscrit-perdu>. Consulted August 8, 2021.

de l'Amérique 1674).¹⁸ Writings by buccaneers appeared by the end of the seventeenth century and were read widely, notably Exquemelin's *Histoire des aventuriers flibustiers* (2012 [1686]) but also Jacques Ravenau de Lausanne's *Journal du voyage fait à la mer du Sud avec les flibustiers de l'Amérique* (1699).

Writings by missionaries constitute the core of the study. They are the ones who stayed longest in the region and whose work is, up to this day, considered the major sources of knowledge about the early settlement. But we know little of them or about the other travel writers.¹⁹ The Jesuit texts are by Jacques Bouton (*Relation de l'établissement des François depuis l'an 1635 en l'isle de la Martinique*, 1640) and Pierre Pelleprat (*Mission de Cayenne et de la Guyane française*, 1658, and *Introduction à la langue des Galibis*, 1655), along with unpublished letters by Mongin (1984) who wrote about conversion of enslaved peoples in the 1680s, and Adrien Le Breton, who in the 1690s was the last missionary among the Indigenous population on Saint Vincent (1982). The Dominican missionaries' texts testify to the span of the genre in the Caribbean library. One of the first Dominican missionaries who came to the islands in 1635, Raymond Breton, is of crucial importance. Against the will of governors, Breton went to live with the Caribs on Dominica in the 1640s. During his long sojourn, he gathered linguistic and anthropological information that would result in a travel narrative, *Relations de l'île de la Guadeloupe* (1978), and two books on language: *Dictionnaire caraïbe français* (1999 [1665]) and *Grammaire caraïbe* (1666). His work—the published books along with manuscripts, notes, and conversations that Breton had with other travelers—was the major reference for all travelers to come and is still to this day an indispensable source for linguists working with Caribbean vernaculars. Both Du Tertre and Labat were Dominicans, and their work constitutes the most important historical and scientific contributions. The Dominicans also used other literary registers: André Chevillard wrote in a

¹⁸ Sieur de Laborde's account is included in a volume of travel writing edited by Henri Justel, *Recueil de divers voyages faits en Afrique et en l'Amérique qui n'ont point été publiés* (1674). This volume mostly contains translations of English voyagers, notably Richard Ligon's *Histoire de l'Isle des Barbades* (1657).

¹⁹ For information about Breton see the introduction to the 1999 edition of his French-Carib dictionary, for information about Du Tertre see Christina Kullberg (2020), for Exquemelin see Richard Frohock (2010), for Pelleprat see Eric Roulet (2013), and for Rochefort see Benoît Roux (2011). See also Roux (2008) for a general presentation of the missionaries and their work.

precious style, directed to the salon culture in France (*Les Desseins de son éminence de Richelieu pour l'Amérique* 1659) whereas Mathias Dupuis offered a more straightforward shorter account (*Relation de l'établissement d'une colonie françoise dans la Gardeloupe isle de l'Amérique, et des moeurs des sauvages* 1652). In addition to the Dominicans, the initial settlement brought missionaries from the Capucin order (Pacifique de Provins *Briève Relation* 2014) and from the Carmes order (Maurile de St. Michel *Relation des Isles Camercanes en l'Amérique* 1652). Antoine Biet was a priest from the diocese of Senglis who traveled the region in the beginning of the 1650s and published *Voyage de la France equinoxiale en l'isle de la Cayenne* (1664). Rochefort is the only Protestant in the library, and the only women writing from this period were Ursuline nuns, but they left no longer narrative, which is why they are not taken into account in the present study.²⁰

The travelogues often communicate intertextually, either by borrowing observations from each other or by critiquing one another. Yet each travelogue bears the mark of the author. For example, Biet left for Cayenne in 1652 on a ship with five- to six-hundred persons under the command of Balthazar le Roux de Royville. Mistreated by Royville, the passengers committed mutiny and killed him. The ship made it to the Caribbean, but the people were not welcomed onto the islands until 1655, which might explain the negative tone of Biet's narrative. Another example is the Protestant Charles de Rochefort. He shows an interest in North America in general and expands his narrative to include comments on Indigenous people of Florida and the Appalachian Mountains and even Inuit populations. As a Protestant he did not engage in the social life of the islands to the same extent as the Catholic missionaries; he was more of a traveler in the general sense, following an itinerary rather than staying in one place, as did the other missionaries for most of their travels. Concerning the buccaneer accounts, both the anonymous writer of Carpentras and Exquemelin write about the exploits of their captains.

Two books stand out in the corpus: Du Tertre's *Histoire Générale des Antilles habitées par les François* and Rochefort's *Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles de l'Amérique*. Their accounts were published in the 1650s; they are both illustrated, longer natural and moral histories, intimately linked to each other due to circumstances. In the prefaces to the two editions of his natural history of the Antilles, Du Tertre accused the

²⁰For studies about the Ursulines, see Heidi Keller-Lapp (2005, 2017).

Protestant of plagiarism, claiming that “pirates” stole his manuscript (Du Tertre 1654, NP). This indirect incrimination of Rochefort, who served as a minister on Tortuga, known as the pirate island (Roux 2011), became explicit in the publication of the second edition of Du Tertre’s history. Historians or literary scholars have not been able to settle the affair—most travelers sampled from others, and the concept of authorship had a different meaning in the seventeenth century, more detached from the individual than it is today. What is known is that Rochefort was not an armchair traveler—Du Tertre himself admits that the Protestant was in the Caribbean. Rather, borrowing from others was part of his writing style: he also took from other travelers, most notably a certain Mr. Bristol who had written about North American Indigenous populations. By juxtaposing Bristol’s account with his own observations in the Caribbean, Rochefort developed a comparative method of description and analysis. However, his method has never received much attention, as did for instance Joseph-Francois Lafitau’s book *Moeurs des Sauvages Américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (1724) about the Natives in New France. In fact, Rochefort’s work is to this day either forgotten or confused with Du Tertre’s book.

One of the main rationales for writing about the islands was to attract investors and to convince the laypeople that the colonies offered not only profit but also a different kind of life than in Europe. Indirectly and without risking irritation from those who supported their publications, missionaries depicted colonial society as less oppressive than France, suggesting that here hierarchies were not as relevant and even laypeople could become proprietors. However, in order to assure support, it was equally important *not to* represent the islands as earthly Eden. The church and powerful men who wanted to support the mission could only be convinced if they saw that the mission was either profitable or in need of help. Direct solicitations to rich patrons were backed up by stories about starving colonies praying for help or about pious, newly converted non-Europeans. Such passages are examples where fiction tends to take over, but we must remember that they were included partly to give a plausible account of life in the colonies and partly to show that the mission could not persist without support.

In some cases, the missionaries sought assistance from powerful people in Paris to defend their interests against governors and colonizers. Raymond Breton, for instance, went back to Paris in 1657 explicitly to ask the Crown to secure the Dominican diocese in Guadeloupe, arguing that

the governors had unjustly taken parts of their land (Fournier 1895, 15–16). This happened the year before Du Tertre published the first edition of *Histoire générale des Antilles*, which is not a coincidence. Du Tertre was closer to the secular powers than the other Dominicans, and his book should partly be read as an effort to sustain Breton's claims. Apparently the publication had an effect: In 1662, Louis XIV seized the land and returned it to the Dominicans. On other occasions, powerful men with an interest in buying land would use the expertise of missionaries. Du Tertre's last trip to the Caribbean, for example, was sponsored by count Cérillac who wanted to settle in Grenada. Charles Rochefort's *Relation de l'Isle de Tabago ou de la nouvelle Oüalcre, l'une des isles antilles de l'Amérique* (1666) was written for Adrien Jean and Gelin Lampsins, who both had ambitions in Tobago.

In a similar vein, the accounts served to recruit and inform future missionaries. In this context, it was important to demonstrate that the mission had a purpose in regard to the evangelical goal to convert Natives and enslaved peoples. It was equally important to show that the mission kept the Reformation from spreading across the Americas and that the missionaries had a role to play in securing the colonies. However, the conversion of Natives failed in most cases. Father Breton, who stayed with a Carib community for a longer period, admits to only having converted four souls. The last missionary to live close to the Amerindians, Father Le Breton, a Jesuit stationed on Saint Vincent in the 1690s, does not mention any successful conversion. Considering the ineffectiveness of the evangelical work with Natives, the religious orders began to focus on converting enslaved people when Caribs still lived on the French islands, before 1660. But even if the mission in itself was far from a success story, the missionaries played an important role in the settlement and early colonization. Missionaries were crucial for maintaining order in the colonies, and they protected settlers and sometimes Caribs from abusive colonial governors.

However, in reality it was difficult to maintain supervision from France. This was particularly so since the missionaries did not necessarily comply with central politics if it came from governors or from sites of both earthly and spiritual powers in France. The Dominicans have a particular position here. At the moment of the first official settlement, Cardinal Richelieu had a special connection to their Noviciat at Faubourg Saint-Honoré: the Friars had recently gone through a reform, in which he was himself involved, and because of their austerity, the Cardinal considered them

most suitable for missions in the Caribbean (Deslandres 2003, 690), perhaps hoping that the Dominicans' new centralized organization would give him better insight into the settlements. But not only was the head of the Friars, Father Carré, reluctant to accept the task to work in the Antilles; the distance separating the islands and Paris presented an obstacle for regulation. Moreover, the missionaries themselves were critical of the Noviciat since their orders were not adapted to life in the colonies. Many missionaries acted on their own behalf and defied both spiritual and worldly orders, at least in the beginning of colonization when they still worked close to the Indigenous populations. For instance, when Father Carré heard that Father Breton had challenged the governors and secretly traveled to Dominica to live close to the Caribs, he sent a message to Breton to have him return to Paris. It was the same for other religious orders on the islands. In fact, Jesuits, Capucins, Dominicans, and Ursulins would often cooperate rather than compete with one another. Ultimately, Rome would ease these tensions by forbidding all missionaries to interfere in politics.²¹

So while acting as extended arms for various political and economic interests in France, the missionaries' engagement in life on the islands brought them to act on their own behalf. In a way, they enacted and reflected the liminality that characterizes the period. Most importantly for my reading here, their writing is affected by that engagement. The representations not only tell about French exploits or construct knowledge on the basis of French superiority; they also testify to a deep involvement in everyday life. Quotidian exchanges allow them to weave an image of the islands and the inhabitants, and it is here that other presences tend to transpire. I am not trying to idealize the moment of messiness that characterized the seventeenth century—it is as much a result of greed and exploitation, as they wanted more and more land, as of necessity. Nevertheless, while we have to condemn the ethics that were forged during the early colonization that would ultimately lead up to racially based and extremely violent human exploitation in the plantation system, the political and geographical contexts were different during the seventeenth century. What happened on the islands was more a result of *local* events than of orders from the colonial centers, even if that mattered too. The settlement and early colonization mark crucial moments in the history of

²¹ See *Instructions aux Missionnaires de 1659 de la Sacrée Congrégation de la Propagande*. These instructions are discussed by Georges Goyau in *Missions et missionnaires* (1931, 68–69; 97–98).

French imperialism in which new social forms and new forms of knowledge and representation took shape simultaneously. There is not one representation of the Caribbean but, rather, experiences of the islands embedded in the folds of narratives.

I have organized this book in three longer chapters with sub-sections, according to the idea of points of entanglements. The first chapter engages in the geographic point of entanglement. It shows that whether driven by the prospect of profit, self-interest, or self-preservation, people involved in the early colonial Caribbean were influenced by the islands at the same time as they forged them as a social, historical, and imaginary space. To examine how the archipelagic geography impacted the construction of the travel narratives and, hence, their presentation of the islands, I will use Glissant's notion of archipelagic thinking alongside Henri Lefebvre's and Michel de Certeau's theories of the construction of space. The chapter starts with an analysis of how travelers negotiated their representation of space with an existing island imaginary. The next section offers an examination of the limitations of discursive acts of control, such as naming, at the point of encounter of the histories, cultures, and geographies of the region. The last two sections look at spatial practices following de Certeau's distinction between mapping and touring space. It pays attention to movements between islands and interrogates how ways of practicing space both draw from and are contrasted with other, notably Indigenous, ways of living the archipelago.

The second chapter investigates the traveler's self as a point of entanglement. It highlights the travelers and the conditions determining writing in order to show the complexity of the representational layers through which other experiences emerge as echoes and traces. The aim is to understand how the narratives contain gaps in the mediation between France and the islands, between the travelers and others, between codes and experience. These discursive cracks, the chapter argues, contain elements of disturbance. It will start by investigating how the traveler-narrator is hidden in layers of auctorial voices and codes that are put into strategic use in the narratives. The next section looks at more closely at the writings of Labat in order to analyze how the self becomes an object of knowledge where the outside world is tested. The last two sections examine how the self negotiates encounters with others. By interrogating the figure of the commentary, it questions the construction of a discourse of ambivalence, bordering on sentimentality, with regard to enslaved peoples and enslavement as an institution. The last section looks closer at engagements with

Indigenous peoples in terms of an anxiety of influence: the narratives configure that influence through style. The travelers, it claims, both underscore and distance themselves to uphold an intermediary position.

The final chapter deals with languages as a point of entanglement. Starting out with mapping the linguistic diversity of the region, it investigates how languages are interrelated in narratives and texts on languages. Focusing principally on Breton's dictionary, it argues that the texts work through a tension between linguistic bordering and language crossings. Rather than a situation marked by linguistic oppression or communicative difficulties, the travelogues testify to the inherent creativity in language crossings. Having mapped language diversity in the archipelago, it moves toward the examination of how speech is included in the narratives. Travelers tended to dramatize Indigenous and enslaved peoples, staging them for particular purposes and following rhetorical conventions. The examples will show that the inclusion of others' speech is framed within codes of representation but that these are transgressed in scenes from everyday life. Throughout the chapter, Glissant's thoughts on the role of language in the shaping of French Caribbean Baroque as well as Sarduy's reading of Baroque language will be made operative together with theories around hetero- and translingualism.

The question of language runs through all three chapters. Likewise, the grounding in the diffracted space of the archipelago will return in all chapters. Thus, there is something overlapping, repetitious in the way in which I have structured the book. I believe that in order to take the idea of entanglement seriously, the analysis must allow a strategy of reading in layers that reverberates in other layers, where times and spaces converge, creating unexpected meanings.

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