



CHAPTER 4

Other Tongues

In the preface to his Carib-French dictionary, Breton stresses how working to compile a dictionary was troublesome due to the taciturn nature of the Caribs. During moments of festivity, when the indigenous men were intoxicated enough to talk, he would steal (*dérober*) the words from their mouths to present them for the European reader (Breton 1999, iii). There is an ethical dimension here: the missionary comes from the outside and takes words and stories of individuals (and in extension entire cultures) without their consent. The image Breton gives of himself, alone among reticent Caribs, plays in with the general trope of Native Americans that circulated in France. At the same time, it also suggests a certain active resistance to giving the missionary their language so that he can transform it into a piece of writing for the French audience to enjoy. The Caribs interacted with him on their terms. Moreover, Breton's anecdote or avowal indirectly posits the question of his dictionary's reliability: if the missionary only could gather information from these individuals when they were drunk, one can ask how well his translations reflect that language and that society. Indeed, Breton's anecdote discloses the uncertain basis for the transcription of orality into written text and the limits of agency. The Caribs may be quoted in the travelogues, but the subject of the enunciation behind the words remains elusive. And if the traveler is indeed the Hermes of the New World, the question is whether he incarnates Hermes the translator and messenger or Hermes the thief. Perhaps it is both.

This chapter engages in the uncertain terrain of other tongues in travel writing as a third point of entanglement, where writing encounters its limits and yet manifests its desire to control. While travelogues mostly rely on testimonies from other Europeans, other people are also included in direct or indirect speech. Moreover, other languages make their way directly or indirectly into travel writing as yet another manifestation of the plurivocality of these texts, which we studied in the previous chapter in relation to the travelers' self. Indeed, the writings of Caribbean travelers, to use Réal Ouellet's expression (2010, 2), have "a high enunciative or dialogic tenor," which always implicitly or explicitly signaled the presence of other languages. It could be a local word designating a plant, a short, direct discourse of somebody agonizing in sickness to the caring missionary, brief commands from buccaneer captains, sentences often rendered in a simplified version of French supposedly uttered by enslaved peoples, or words spoken by the Natives in languages that most travelers barely understood but nevertheless transcribed and translated or reported in French. What we have are narratives that build on layers of discourses and languages. This chapter aims to examine this narrative practice, looking at the ways in which linguistic elements of otherness are imbricated into the texts, what function they have, and how they are manipulated but occasionally disrupt the narratives. Undergirding the analysis is again a tension between power and unsettlement: quoting others is a form of domination of speech. At the same time, these tongues impregnate the writing with otherness, with other languages that might, in some way, hint at other narratives.

Etymologically, to cite someone means to call upon or summon another person as a testimony or as support to one's claim. To cite is then to recognize someone's opinion (voice), but this occurs within the frame of another person's (the one who cites) narrative, prompting the question of whether the traveler-narrator's voice is centrifugal, absorbing other tongues. In the very idea of citing there is thus a conflict between acknowledgment and subjugation. Moreover, in the context of the early colonization in the Caribbean, citing must be addressed as a problem of linguistic plurality. Citations of other peoples' speech appear in transcribed versions of indigenous vernaculars, in French or in a simplified version of French, and in a form of pidgin used for communication. In this context of domination, inclusions of other tongues are inevitably embedded in other discourses, filtered through the narrative voice of the traveler and entangled in processes of transcription, translation, and representation, making it difficult to

use the concept of “voice.” Utterances from Indigenous and enslaved peoples can rarely be referred back to an identifiable subject of enunciation, and the medium through which they speak is manipulated in most cases. So if “voice” in the seventeenth century mostly referred to spoken discourse (i.e. rhetoric), it becomes difficult to use that term because of the textual fictionalization of languages and speech (Dandrey 1990). Even the rendering of the sound of their voices has been filtered through transcription.

This is confirmed in a letter by Breton, inserted in the paratexts to his Carib-French dictionary. Breton shared his documents with Du Tertre so that the latter could include it in his natural and moral history of the region. But Breton states that Du Tertre was not satisfied with the Latin translations of the Carib language:

Following RP Du Tertre’s (who took on the task as historian of the Antilles with dignity) pressing demands I gave him a part of my translation of *Savage* into Latin, but he did not accept them, he wanted something in vulgar language that would make known the imperfection of the Carib language. This obliged me to change the Latin translation into a French construction that he placed at the end of his book as a translation. I gave it to him as a test of language and not, whatever people might say, as an orthodox thing of French. The Carib text seems good to me, those who will have gone through the jargon of children and the dialect of women, will know it with time, if they give [the text] its true pronunciation.¹ (1999, vi)

Words and things are separated, and the connection between them is mediated through the weave of writing between languages. Du Tertre plays with style and translation to get as close to otherness as possible, which explains why he wanted to use another vernacular—French—instead of Latin to represent the languages of the Caribbean. “Pronunciation” is crucial here. The traveler-narrator works through translation to distribute a visual and auditory idea of the foreign speech. Sound then is imbricated in semantics.

Further, the rendering of foreign languages is mediated through the linguistic shifts that the travelers’ own vernacular underwent at the time.

¹J’ai donné aux pressentes importunités du RP du Tertre (qui s’est dignement acquitté du devoir d’historien des Antilles) une parcelle de mes traductions de *Sauvage* en Latin, mais il ne les agréa pas, il voulut quelque chose en langue vulgaire qui fit connaître l’imperfection de la langue Caraïbe, ce qui m’obligea de changer la traduction Latine, en construction Française qu’il arrangea à la fin de son livre comme une traduction. Je lui donnai pour un essai de la langue et non pas pour une chose orthodoxe quoiqu’on dise du Français, le texte Caraïbe me semble bon, ceux qui auront passé le jargon des enfants et les dialectes des femmes, le connaîtront avec le temps, s’ils lui donnent sa vraie prononciation.

Note that Breton is hesitant to call the vernacular he uses “French” because it deviates from the grammar of standardized French. He writes in the introduction to his French-Carib dictionary,

In the history, I have neglected the orthography, and I have spoken as a frank Bourguignon, which I am, and I often used the language of the islands even if it goes against the politeness of the French language, in order not to make myself appear and pass for someone other than I am; other than that I do not profess here to learn the French but the Carib language.² (1999, v)

Breton constructs his writings by speaking like someone from Burgundy, using vernacular French and the “language of the islands.” Orality clearly has a central role in his conception of language and of writing. He expresses loyalty to the “reality” of the Caribbean rather than to the “politeness of the French language” as it developed during the mid-century, much in line with Du Tertre, discussed in the previous chapter, stating in the preface that his French had been tainted by the languages and geographies that he describes in his history. The use of his own vernacular performs a double approximation, bringing the text closer to the world of the islands and their inhabitants and the writing closer to Breton himself as a person. He thereby explicitly signals a split between the codes of writing (following the standardized French) and the endeavor to represent other tongues, which is part of representational conventions in travel writing. Paradoxically, the inclusion of other tongues is a struggle between embeddedness in codes and discursive creativity, deployed in a space not only of foreign language encounters but of linguistic transitions that affect French too. In his reflections on Baroque language, Severo Sarduy identifies such inclusions as vectors for transformation. “The foreign,” Sarduy writes, “melds indistinguishably with the original [...] modifying its geology with its textures” (2010, 282). Citations build reminiscence into the narrative, Sarduy suggests, by pointing to an outside and creating strata in the text. It is undoubtedly a trope that generates disruptions. The question is how we can conceptualize the diversity that stems not only from a transcription of oral languages to another, written language, but also from an exchange

² Dans l’histoire, j’ai négligé l’orthographe, et ai parlé en franc Bourguignon tel que je suis, et je me suis souvent servi du langage des îles, quoique contre la politesse de la langue Française, pour ne pas me faire accroire, et me faire passer pour autre que je [ne] suis; outre que je ne fais pas profession ici d’apprendre la langue Française, mais la Caraïbe.

determined by extremely unequal power dynamics, embedded in rhetorical codes.

The explicit problematization of language, translation, transcription, and transmission of voices that can be found, notably in Breton's texts but also in others, testifies to the impossibility of restoring any authentic situation of enunciation from the accounts of the sojourns. Languages and speech are negotiated within the embeddedness of travel writing as a form. They are thus played out in the realm of artificiality; while connecting to real languages and interactions, they represent these within a set of codes they must juggle in order to create an illusion of another language. This is at once a construction of a poetics and also an act of epistemic violence. Yet, while paying attention to such violences, we must also be careful not to be caught in a modern, essentialist bias here, regretting the loss of the "authentic" Carib words. In fact, seventeenth-century travelers resisted the fallacy of authenticity that has haunted many modern anthropological discourses, in which the Eurocentric gaze places the other in a stagnated time-place cut off from mixing and change. They consciously operated within the realm of artifice and did not pretend to transfer the "authentic" voice of other people. The inclusion of other tongues is not a claim to representing the "true" nature of an object, be it a person, an idiom, a voice, a culture, or a scene, but to create a convincing illusion.

However, claiming that the travelers did not succumb to the fallacy of authenticity does not in any way resolve the fundamental ethical problem of including other voices. Along the lines of this argument, Dominique Bertrand (1998) contends that the language and voice of the other were reduced to a practical transparency and subjugated under the evangelical goal. In a more detailed analysis of the colonization of New France, Marie-Christine Pioffet suggests that Native American speech is "contaminated" with missionary discourse (1997, 250–252). The contamination, Pioffet shows, is less linguistic than formal. Narrative structure and motives, for example, in stories of victimhood supposedly told by Natives chime a bit too well with the missionaries' own narratives of the establishment. In a similar vein, Isabelle Moreau and Grégoire Holtz point out that travelogues "instrumentalize" the speech of others (Holtz and Moreau 2005, 2–3). Rather than reflecting another person's words, the quotes served an underlying purpose, such as signaling the success of the mission or showing the narrator's knowledgeability. Holtz and Moreau conclude that in travelogues, cited persons are dispossessed of their own words on the level of enunciation as well as semantics. Looking at the context of New France, Peter Murvai (2016) identifies two possibilities: either we are facing a

monologic situation, where the other's speech is appropriated in order to serve the mission, or else the citation of the other results in heterologic writing where the "last word does not necessarily belong to the enunciator" (66). In regard to the travel writing I am dealing with here, both these models of interpretation are accurate, often within the same text. In either case, the travel narratives exude an impression of linguistic diversity and discursive heterogeneity.

This is where we need to start—in the contextual and textual heterogeneous and transitional space permeating travel writing from the early colonial Caribbean—not from the notion of voice as tied to agency. The texts propel *differences* that are not necessarily expressions of a conscious subject. Yet these differences are fluid, as languages mix and change. Travelogues operate in a transitional zone between actual exchanges with and textual constructions of other voices and languages. As readers, we need to navigate that zone. Even if the "true" voices of indigenous and enslaved individuals may be gone, they remain in traces, embedded in layers of rhetoric, ideology, and translation. Analyzing what he calls the "black rhetoric" in French travel narratives out of Africa, David Diop (2018, 42) argues that the inclusion of vernaculars in travel writing indirectly makes African voices resonate. These other tongues convey that the representation of African societies, cultures, and natures was built on knowledge gathered from others. The European voyager's pen, Diop notes, "mediates the word of the African without completely repressing it" (2018, 13). In her archival research on enslaved women's lives, Marisa Fuentes relies on the "fleeting glimpses of enslaved subjectivity" hidden in the archives (2016, 1) and asks how researchers can "exhume the [enslaved] buried under this prose" (138) using a methodology of listening that pays attention to silences as well as distortions and allows for shifting the perspectives (2–4).

Echoing Cassander Smith's (2016) analysis of disruptions and Simon Gikandi's (2015) symptomatic readings as discussed in the Introduction, I adopt a similar approach here, while recognizing that these travel narratives can never be fully decolonized. The entangled structures of the discourses that make up travel writing allow for tracing impacts and effects that might short-circuit the centrifugal force of the travelers' narrative voices while avoiding the illusion of seeking manifestations of subversive agency. Such notion of agency has no textual space in these narratives. As Diop remarks "the Other's speech" (*le dire de l'Autre*) is inevitably

governed by the formal rules of the written word (2018, 13). Instances where other voices and languages transpire are, as underscored by Ashley Williard (2018, 85), doubly coded: they are simultaneously sites where early colonial discourses are produced and where disruptions to these discourses emerge. Or indeed, as Céline Carayon highlights in the introduction to her *Eloquence Embodied: Non-Verbal Communication Among French and Indigenous Peoples in the Americas* (2019), communication was not simply fraught with difficulties, nor was there a situation of one-directional linguistic imposition (4); early colonial exchanges also spurred “creative misunderstandings” from all sides (5–6).

In line with such observations, a decolonial reading of other tongues in these texts prompts a dual strategy: they are both manipulated entities and elements of disruption. The insertion of other languages testifies to the desire to learn about and record other languages, a knowledge that slips away at the very moment these languages enter into the realm of writing and become something else. Citing others is a way to manipulate the narrative of colonial control, yet the strategy inevitably leads to other forms of exchanges, inclusions of everyday life that unsettle that story of control and open up to other unexpected engagements. Thus, seeking to challenge the idea that travel narratives are either entirely suppressing other tongues or allowing sites where resistance or agency may emerge, the chapter is divided in four sections. The first two sections analyze the modalities for inscribing other languages and account for linguistic encounters, starting with charting the linguistic landscape of the early modern Caribbean and then moving in the second section to examining language crossings and the emergence of Creole. The third and fourth sections study the inclusion of direct discourse and the representation of exchanges in terms of dramatization. It begins by analyzing how the other’s speech is staged in various conventional scenes. The last section investigates the tensions between these highly coded articulations of the other’s speech and representations of everyday exchanges.

PLURILINGUAL CARIBBEAN

In a study of direct discourse in seventeenth-century literature, Edwige Keller-Rahbé (2010) detects a change in attitude in regard to the mediation of both direct speech and other languages in narrative prose that occurs after 1660 as a reaction to the convoluted poetics of the Baroque. Writers sought to exclude elements that would disturb the flow of their

prose in order to refine the narrative and homogenize its structure (4).³ The decrease in use of direct discourse and foreign words could also be interpreted as a consequence of the increased standardization of French, which led to a transition from oral to print culture (Louvât-Molozay and Siouffi 2007, 6; Carayon 2019, 118). Fragments of foreignness, whether speech or language, were even more challenging to include in this newly emerging culture of writing. Tellingly, Du Plaisir wrote in his 1683 treaty on style that a “barbaric word alone is capable of making people detest a well written story” (1975, 45).⁴ Readers were barely interested in learning about unknown countries or hearing other languages; they wanted an aestheticized version of the foreign. Interestingly, travel writing follows the evolution of literary prose on this point: the insertion of other languages and voices was a rare and short-lived practice (Murvai 2016, 69). By the end of the seventeenth century, few travelers gave space in their narratives for dialogues, vernaculars, and other forms of citation. Faraway tongues progressively lost value, both as a site for constructing knowledge and as an aesthetic. Local languages became classified as “useless curiosities” because they were illegible, difficult to pronounce and the audience usually only had a vague idea about the objects or phenomena to which the vernacular vocabulary referred (Launay-Demonet 1987, 499).

At the same time, the seventeenth century was very much still a culture of the spoken word, and there was an awareness of local and global linguistic diversity and of the difficulty in communicating with, let alone representing, other languages. Most people spoke several dialects and languages in France: French, in the process of becoming standardized, and Latin, along with local vernaculars. Linguistic diversity was conceptualized in terms of genealogy and sociability, not territory, and language was a relational rather than ontological or essential term. For the urban elite, the cosmopolitan Latin was favored; speaking with a fisherman from Bretagne was more foreign than communicating with a nobleman from Rome. Thus, plurilingualism was part of everyday life in France, in the Mediterranean but even more so in the Caribbean. Here, standard “monolingual” French was not as dominant (Relouzat 1999, lxxviii). Rather a plurality of “Frenches,” constituted of a large spectrum of variations from

³The importance of *la parole* and rhetoric in seventeenth-century French culture and literatures has been extensively researched; see Olivia Rosenthal (1998), Jean-Philippe Salazar (1995), Marc Fumaroli (1980) and Aron Kibedi-Varga (2002).

⁴Un nom barbare est seul capable de faire haïr une histoire bien écrite.

regional dialects (notably from northern France) and sociolects from different popular spoken forms, were used (Prudent 1980, 24) alongside Caribbean vernaculars, comprised of Indigenous, African, and mixed languages.

I use the term plurilingualism to account for linguistic diversity in this context, following Suresh Canagarajah and Indika Liyanage's argument that this notion "allows for the interaction and mutual interaction of the languages in a more dynamic way" than multilingualism, which "keeps languages distinct" (2012, 50). The Western monolingual paradigm, which has defined how we think of languages in relation to modern nation-state formations, took root in France during the seventeenth century with the standardization of French, a process aligned with an increasing political centralization. But as we shall see, neither the promotion of one language nor the separation of languages dictated early colonial society and the texts representing that society. Rather, languages were integrated according to plurilingual dynamics.

The issue then is that the plurilingual logic determining early colonial society stands in stark contrast to the codes of representation determining travel writing at the time. Even in travel writing, an excess of vernaculars would be disturbing for the reader, always running the risk of ruining the harmony and the clarity of expression. Travelers writing from faraway places such as the Caribbean had to negotiate between two contradictory regimes of writing, implying different power dynamics: on the one hand, the formal impetus to exclude other tongues and comply with ideals of expressive clarity and stylistic flow, and on the other hand, the epistemic motivation to include them in order to construct an accurate representation of the Caribbean. The challenge was to harmonize other spoken vernacular languages into written French while accounting for them and for forms of linguistic transitions that were taking place. It was also important to highlight linguistic diversity within the frame of the French language since it reflected back on France through the country's emergent imperial ambitions. It portrayed the voyagers themselves as capable of mastering the disorderly world of the islands and forged ways to express the burgeoning empire's ability to rule over the world's diversity. Nonetheless, not only did that diversity complicate the shift toward linguistic transparency, according to which one language—French—would mediate science, politics, and literature; it also challenged the discourse of control since it could not be entirely contained within the narratives.

Travelers, especially missionaries, were encouraged to learn languages in order to facilitate evangelical work and secure the settlement. The main source for linguistic knowledge was Dominican Father Raymond Breton, who had learned Carib through language immersion during his sojourns among the Caribs on Dominica between 1642 and 1654. The Jesuits filtered their understanding of island vernaculars through a larger network of Jesuit missionary work. Both Pacifique de Provins and Pelleprat for example, refer to Denys Mesland, a Jesuit and friend of Descartes who had journeyed to the South American continent but never in the Caribbean (Ouellet 2010, 249–250). Despite this lack of direct contact with island languages, Breton states in his travelogue that he also used Mesland as a source for languages beyond Dominica (1978, 51).

Indigenous vernaculars were oral and had no writing systems, which complicated Europeans' language acquisition, transcription into the Latin alphabet, and translation into French and Latin. Breton himself points out in the preface to the dictionary that his linguistic knowledge of the tongue spoken by the people of Dominica was far from complete.⁵ Eleven years passed between Breton's return from the islands and the publication of his dictionary. Though he may have worked continuously with texts about the Antilles during this period, there is a considerable gap between his language immersion on Dominica and his linguistic work, suggesting that parts of it were constructed through fragments of recollection (1999, v). In fact, it is almost impossible to establish the exact language to which the travelogues refer, particularly because Caribbean languages had gone through various processes of mixing at different periods due to exchanges and migrations, which had intensified as a result of the European intrusion (Granberry and Vescelius 2004, 60). Julian Granberry and Gary Vescelius (2004, 62) go as far as calling the tongues that made it into the notes of travelers a mixed language composed of Kalíphuna (today Garífuna; Granberry 2013, 65) or Kalinago (Granberry 2013, 66), Karina Carib, Eyeri/Island Carib, Taíno, and Arawakan.⁶ While most travelers were aware of the local plurilingualism, they could not always distinguish one language from another. Pelleprat was convinced that the Galibi he learned in the village along the Orinoco River was a "quasi-universal language and

⁵ See Breton's *Relation* (1978, 55) where he underscores that it is difficult to learn their language because there are no written references. Listening is an unreliable source demanding a lot of patience and a good memory, Breton claims.

⁶ For research on the languages spoken on the islands at the time of the arrival of Columbus, see Granberry and Vescelius (2004, 123).

almost as common on the meridional continent as Latin is familiar in Europe” (1655, 87).⁷ The anonymous writer of Carpentras claims the contrary and alludes to a vast linguistic variety (2002, 126). Rochefort mistook new words, formed from the encounter between languages in the region, for Indigenous lexica. In the preface to his French-Carib dictionary, Breton confirms that he was present with Rochefort as the Protestant wrote the Carib vocabulary included in *Histoire naturelle des Isles de l’Amérique*. Then Breton lists nouns that did not come from him and that were not “Savage words.” He explains, “Those who gave them to him could very well have heard them from Caribs and French, but as jargon used to make oneself understood and not a true Carib language.”⁸ However, this observation did not prevent Breton from himself including the words in explanations to a number of entries in the dictionary. Furthermore, it shows how the misconceptions of tongues reflect that those engaged in Caribbean life existed in plurilingual dynamics: they interacted with all languages.

The incitement to learn vernaculars was linked to power for direct, practical colonial, and ecclesiastic reasons. Breton states that language is the key to evangelism: “our barbarian Caribs are ready to open their ears to listen to our speech in their language” (1999, iii).⁹ Rather than imposing French, the missionaries sought ways to transfer the teachings of the Bible in the vernacular as a means to ensure that Catholicism was internalized.¹⁰ Instructions to travelers include full sentences directly related to missionary work, such as “ahoée chesus layouloucatimhem huenocatem *Jesus Christ died for the satisfaction of my sins*” (Breton 1999, 34).¹¹ But this fundamental motivation for language acquisition quickly became secondary as a consequence of the failed evangelization among the Caribs. Instead, texts on language had a larger role to play as manuals for future

⁷ Quasi universelle & presque aussi commune dans la terre ferme Meridionale que la Latine est familiere en Europe.

⁸ Ceux qui les lui ont donnés les peuvent bien avoir ouï-dire aux Sauvages et aux Français, mais comme un jargon pour se faire entendre et non pas pour un véritable langage Caraïbe.

⁹ Nos Barbares Caraïbes sont prêts de nous ouvrir leurs oreilles, pour écouter nos paroles en leur Idiome.

¹⁰ This was the general policy of the French missions, but Caribbean travel narratives are not imbued with martial metaphors to the same extent as Jesuit accounts from New France are. Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit missionary to Canada between 1632 and 1639, writes that language acquisition was a means to “attack the enemy on their grounds with their own weapons” (attaquer l’ennemy sur ses terres par ses propres armes), as cited in Pioffet (1997, 45).

¹¹ *Jésus-Christ est mort pour la satisfaction de mes fautes.*

travelers other than missionaries. They were conceptualized as guides for communicating with peoples of the islands and covered everything from lexica, basic grammatical rules and pronunciation, to cultural observations and descriptions of codes of sociability. Pelleprat's introduction to Galibi starts with the most useful terms, roughly following the same hierarchy as the natural histories (1655, 3). Anthropological descriptions of Carib hospitality, containing expressions of greetings, served as instructions helping travelers to avoid social missteps. Welcoming rituals, for instance, could be subtly included in the narrative. This was crucial knowledge for trade and for political and territorial negotiations.

Texts on languages only constitute a small part of the Caribbean archive, and their concrete impact was minor: few of those going to the islands actually learned Indigenous, let alone African, languages. There is no evidence that Du Terre ever made an effort to speak or understand any Indigenous vernacular. Rochefort presents himself as a person versed in Carib, but his knowledge is based on what he retrieved from Breton, not on a personal investment in learning their language. Biet had strong opinions about the importance of learning Indigenous languages in order to secure missionary work, citing lacking language skills as the reason for low numbers of converted souls (1664, 322). The Galibi he himself describes in the travelogue was, in fact, a pidgin (Renault-Lescure 1999, lxiv). The one language he learned during his voyage was English (1664, 276); since he could not convert Natives, he would rather see to Christian teachings for other Europeans (particularly trying to convert Protestants to Catholicism). Labat was the only traveler who explicitly states that he wanted to learn what he calls "Arada," which, according to him, was spoken by the majority of the enslaved people at his plantation Fonds Saint-Jacques (1722 t4, 136). He forced an enslaved person to teach him the basics of the language and claims that it was easy to learn. Yet there is no evidence in the travelogue that he actually did learn it. In fact, with the exception of Breton, who had explicit linguistic ambitions during his long stay in Dominica, those who did learn Indigenous vernaculars did so by accident. The anonymous writer was stranded on Martinique; Pelleprat suffered from swollen legs and found himself trapped in a village in Venezuela close to the coast, where he learned basic Galibi (1655, 87–88).

It would indeed be more pertinent to consider the grammars and dictionaries as shortcuts, giving quick insights into local languages while sparing future traveler from the hazardous and difficult trouble of immersing

themselves in Carib, than to look at these writings as linguistic teaching manuals. What the travelers take from the linguistic sources are mostly nouns, approaching language as words, not as discourse. Typically, vernacular words designate places and objects, notably food, plants, animals, and cultural or religious phenomena that had no French counterpart and which contributed to constructing a collection of knowledge about the islands.

In this setting, language is not connected to a speaking subject; its modality is encyclopedic, to use David Diop's expression (2018, 21), with a functional value of supplying additional information about the objects described. This implies a conception of language where words are seen as carriers of knowledge. We recognize this line of thinking from Michel Foucault's famous analysis of language in the age of Classicism (1966, 117): language was considered a representation of thought and thought a representation of language (98). Foucault argues that this paradigm relies on two different but intersecting articulations of language. Language did not manifest itself until it became discourse, forming complete propositions (107–108), yet its essence could be found in naming. A similar conceptualization permeates the travelogues, though something happens to the essential value of nouns in the process of transcription. Breton writes in his *Relation*,

One would need a painter to extract the forms and the colors of the leaves and the fruits of the country and have much leisure to learn from the Savages the names and the virtues of plants, trees and other things from these lands. Surely they have much knowledge and experience the rare virtues of many things of which we don't know the names in Europe. If there is no one who will take on this task, maybe one day when we are a bit peaceful among them, we will use our leisure for this research.¹² (1978, 49–50)

Language and knowledge are here interdependent, recalling Foucault's observation that the main task of "classicist" discourse is to "attribute a name to things, and in this name designates [nommer] their being"

¹² Il faudroit avoir un peintre pour tirer les formes et les couleurs des feuilles et des fruits du païs et avoir un grand loisir pour apprendre des sauvages les noms et vertus des plantes, des arbres et des autres choses de ces terres. Ils ont saunement de grandes cognoissances et expérimentet de rares vertus de plusieurs choses dont on ne scait le nom en Europe. S'il ne se trouve personne qui prenne cette tâche, peut-être qu'un jour lorsque nous serons un peu paisible parmi eux, nous employerons nostre loisir à cette recherche.

(136).¹³ Knowing the name of a plant implies insights into its qualities; the name reflects the object and transmits knowledge: the French can learn from the Caribs about island nature by virtue of deciphering their language. Yet that transposition produces difference rather than analogy. Breton's last sentence reveals the fragile contextual basis of language acquisition. Repeated conflicts hindered missionaries and others from seeking out vernacular knowledge and languages "among them." Further, as the French acquired that knowledge and delocalized the noun to another setting, the vernacular source would be silenced or at least altered; that which starts as engagement and recognition of vernacular knowledge ends up as appropriation by means of validation, first by the travelers performing the role of the mediator, then by the location where knowledge is constructed and incorporated into a discourse. Categorization in itself is secondary to the construction of a larger knowledge, including cultural practices. These could not be captured by the vernacular lexica alone but needed to be *explained* or illustrated. Rochefort's description of the coco plum uses a compound word, combining the local term *icaque* and the French *prune*. It centers on the sweetness of the fruit and includes an anecdote about how the Natives who live in the Gulf of Honduras place "soldiers," armed with arcs, to guard the trees when the fruit is ripe (Rochefort 1658, 157) (Fig. 4.1).

The initial deictic function of vernacular words is thus quickly discarded in the process of creating knowledge as discourse. Travelogues turn the word into an artefact. Displaced from both source and context, words in Indigenous vernacular become material, like the textual equivalences of stones or plants for the various academies in Paris, with an additional surplus value of teasing the curious audience with foreignness. As Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud (2000, 102–103) remarks in her study of sixteenth-century voyages, as much as foreign lexica are objects of knowledge, they are presented as a "spectacle." Epistemology and exoticism meet in the vernacular words, as if they had the capacity to bring forth the islands to the readers (Linon 1988). Such singling out of the word-object unsettles the "classical" conceptualization of languages as defined by Foucault: whereas nouns and things hold up in analogy, words can be delocalized by means of transcription into the Latin alphabet. The analogical relationship holding words to things is thereby assembled and dismantled in the same movement. Further, the word-spectacle signals the

¹³D'attribuer un nom aux choses, et en ce nom de nommer leur être.



contrée, d'y venir faire aucun dégast, ils tiennent durant tout ce tems-là aus âvennés de leur terre, des Corps-de-garde, composez de l'élite de leurs meilleurs Soldats, qui les repoussent vivement avec la fléche & la massuë, s'ils ont l'assurance de se presenter.

Fig. 4.1 Rochefort *Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles* (1658). Illustration to support the description of the coco plum, *Icaque prune*. (Source: gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Public domain. Illustration to support the description of the coco plum, *Icaque prune*.)

interdependence between language and the larger geographical, historical, and aesthetic context; vernaculars were not interesting per se.

We notice this when comparing Indigenous Caribbean languages to diasporic African vernaculars, which also floated around in the area at this time as a consequence of deportation and enslavement. But whereas African vernaculars had an encyclopedic function in travelogues out of Africa, they lost that function in relation to the Caribbean. Such absences speak of a longer, insidious process of silencing, intimately tied to the dispossession of enslaved persons. Dislocated and destined for labor, enslaved Africans were also considered to be deprived of language as the means for

creativity, agency, and culture: on the islands they were circumscribed within a system of bondage, where they would only exist in relation to the enslavers, at least in the eyes of Europeans. The logic relies on an erasure of languages that occasionally interrupts the travel narratives, as we shall see further on. What interests me here is that the silence suggests that the beginning of the slave trade coincided with a process of differentiation in the (European) conceptualization of language. While European languages represent thought, faraway tongues become increasingly conceptualized primarily in terms of essence; they are valued in regard to territory and culture (encyclopedic modality) at the same time as those Europeans who learned these languages could extract them and use them to construct knowledge elsewhere. Thus, what we have is a spatialization and culturalization of languages with a burgeoning racialization of tongues, which developed in tandem with an increased separation of languages.

The construction of the word-spectacle thus operates a boundary-making within language that has corrosive effects. Travel writing engages with plurilingual dynamics, but when textualized, that dynamic is subjected to what we can define as a heterolingual regime. Heterolingualism, according to Rainer Grutman's definition, refers to the presence of foreign tongues, in whatever form or variety, in a mainly monolingual text (1997, 37). The concept is useful for capturing the linguistic structure of power underpinning the encyclopedic inclusion of languages: French dominates the narratives, and vernaculars are harmonized in order to fit into that language. They appear as *dissecta membra*, singled out according to a heterolingual grammar, but seem to evolve on what Myriam Suchet calls the "continuum of alterity" (2014, 19) of heterolingualism, constructed by and through the narrative discourse. This is important in order to theorize the burgeoning racialization of languages. The notion of heterolingualism allows us to see which modalities in the narratives operate by policing languages, singling them out and thereby isolating them from linguistic interaction. Put differently, the texts submit plurilingualism to the domination of monolingualism.

Yet the heterolingual grammar in these travelogues relies on a contradictory premise. It sees the vernacular word as both situational *and* transferrable. As Michel de Certeau reminds us in his reading of Jean de Léry, even if the foreign word is contained and altered within the heterolingual grammar, it points to other places and infuses the texts with "disturbing otherness" (1992, 255–256). But this does not occur naturally; it is a textual effect produced in the gaps between words, referents, codes, and

narration. In the Caribbean travelogues, that disturbing otherness emerges in the narratives as soon as the vernacular is represented in situ, or as what Foucault would have called “action-language” (120), implying a speaking body, manifest in gestures and non-linguistic expressions. These language actions transgress the heterolingual bordering regime, alluding to that which cannot be captured in writing. We can see how it happens when analogies based on encyclopedic modalities fail. Addressing the reader in the preface, Breton writes: “I cannot communicate to you what the Savages have taught me: they could not teach me what they don’t know and they don’t recognize that which they don’t see and that which they can’t use” (1999, n.p.).¹⁴ Breton depicts a scene where the deictic mode simply does not work; how do you point at something that is not there? It also hints at a pool of Indigenous knowledge beyond the nouns that Breton has acquired during his sojourn but which he cannot formulate into discourse. He asserts both lack and saturation (he has learned a lot but is incapable of communicating this knowledge). This creates a textual disruption, which indirectly manifests Indigenous presence and the depth and breadth of their knowledge that the text will never be able to account for. There is thus a radical discrepancy between the underlying rationale of the dictionary—providing travelers and future missionaries with language skills so that they can pass on the gospels—and the language exchange. Making connections between languages inevitably leads to interpretations, where one has to adjust the target language and fold in the source language; they become overlapping.

LANGUAGE ENCOUNTERS

Clearly, we cannot read other tongues in early colonial Caribbean texts strictly from the point of view of European, seventeenth-century ideas of language. Something happens with the conception of language when studied *in situ*: it becomes important not as a representation of thought but as praxis. Within the text, a praxis of writing allows for the inclusion of the different tongues. Within island society, communicational praxis facilitates exchange and territorialization. Different languages and dialects cross each other, and new languages take shape, breaking with the

¹⁴Je ne puis vous communiquer que ce que les Sauvages m’ont appris: ils ne m’ont pu apprendre ce qu’ils ne connaissent pas et ils ne reconnaissent pas ce qu’ils ne voient pas et ce dont ils n’ont pas l’usage.

heterolingual grammar. As pointed out by Michael Harrigan, texts on languages crossed the temporal and the religious (2012, 124), and such crossings turn languages into sites for distortion, complications, and creativity.

Throughout Breton's dictionary, the entries change register, raise doubts, and unsettle the relationship between language and the world. The differences produced in the process of transcribing, translating, and interpreting introduce folds where languages are not fixed but constructed through negotiations. When Breton evokes Carib deities, he calls them devils but specifies that the Caribs see them as God, or the opposite happens: he writes God only to correct himself "or rather the Devil." Breton hints at an Indigenous perspective in aligning Carib deities with God. He then shifts to the Eurocentric point of view and refers to them as manifestations of the devil. In other entries, the difficulties he encountered emerge in the definitions, as in the following passage: "coüatic, *point*. *Here is a word that gave me headaches, I had to sweat to learn it* (1999, 91).¹⁵ The dictionary reveals that linguistic shortcomings were mutual. One entry gives the expression for "our languages are not alike, our discourses are not related" (1999, 106),¹⁶ suggesting that the Caribs, too, were concerned with linguistic discrepancy. Another entry offers the sentence, "Chéoüallayénrou enétapa bómpti timále huéolam càchi enétapa noubali héolam, *you are as ignorant and badly versed in our language as I am in yours*" (70).¹⁷ The sentence captures the mutual struggle with learning each other's languages. Here we have the Caribs reacting to the French inability to master their language and ultimately to understand them. The dictionary opens gaps where the local island interlocutors intervene as subjects.

Words expressing abstract thinking were most difficult to capture precisely because the language exchange relied on the deictic mode (pointing out things and saying the word). Rather than detecting a didactic problem, travelers saw an inherent lack in the Indigenous language, which in extension reflected intellectual, cultural, and social absences. But when

¹⁵ Coüatic, *point*. *Voici un mot qui m'a bien donné le martel en tête, j'ai bien ressulé pour l'apprendre*.

¹⁶ Ménega ométou oüariágonnê ou mènega oüámétou ariangonnê, *nos langages ne se ressemblent pas, nos discours ne se rapportent point*.

¹⁷ *Tu es aussi ignorant et mal versé en notre langue comme je le suis en la tienne*. Rochefort testifies that the Caribs are better at learning French than the French are at learning indigenous vernaculars (1658, 394).

accounting for this lack, Breton has to resort to additions, as when he includes two words that would supposedly translate into both “writer” and “painter” (1999, 47) only to state that Carib society does not have either one of these categories. What he actually designates is the word for “pencil” (*plume* or *pluma*, from the Spanish) that they have seen Europeans use to write letters and that they themselves use to paint bodies and pottery.

*Aboulétouti, Abuoletacati, Writer, Painter, the Caribs are either one or the other, concerning the first they can't read or write; yet because they think they are knowledgeable in painting and sometimes get mixed up, they thought that there was a great likeness between the one and the other and consequently they have named the feather [pluma] to write the same as the word for their brush; writing for the word for painting; when they go to festivities, a man washes himself carefully and the woman begins her patterns and lines from the shoulders all the way down to the buttocks and fills the back, the arms, the chest with fantasies that are not unpleasant to watch; yet I have more admiration for the patience of the man, who stands still for twelve hours, than for the painting; moreover, the women draw lines on their beds, on their calabasses, though painters should have the right to question this quality.*¹⁸ (47)

The entry starts by describing the Indigenous peoples' interpretation and appropriation of Europeans' cultural practices and ends with an anthropological observation about how body-paintings are carried out and how women transfer this practice onto pottery. So while expressing the desire to show the Caribs' lack of certain practices and, therefore, the lack of words to describe these practices also in a larger symbolic and cultural meaning, the entry instead shows a creative ability to pick up another culture and language, transform it, and add to it. The entry seems to take on a life of its own, adding one discursive register to another, creating a series of micro-differences. In fact, Breton's Eurocentric perspective relies on a

¹⁸ *Écrivain, Peintre, les Caraïbes ne sont ni l'un ni l'autre, pour le premier ils ne savent ni lire ni écrire; pourtant parce qu'ils croient être savants à la peinture et qu'ils s'en mêlent quelquefois, ils ont cru qu'il y avait grande ressemblance entre l'un et l'autre et ainsi ils ont nommé la pluma à écrire du mot de leur pinceau, l'écriture du mot de peinture; quand ils doivent aller à quelque festin, un homme se lavera bien et la femme commencera ses traits et linéaments depuis les épaules jusqu'aux fesses et remplira le dos, les bras, le sein de fantaisies qui ne sont pas désagréables à voir; pourtant j'ai plus admiré la patience de l'homme qui demeure debout des douze heures, que la peinture; les femmes tirent encore quelques traits sur leurs lits et sur leurs calebasses et nonobstant les peintres auraient le droit de leur contester cette qualité.*

semantic slip. While presenting his reductive view that meaning can only be conveyed from letters, which he interprets as a sign of the Caribs' cultural inferiority, he puts his own interpretation on display. Thereby he presents not just the construction of Eurocentrism; in so doing he also *shows* the reader Indigenous cultural practices, and these are open for reinterpretations.

Thus, the dictionary curiously works against its own presumption about the other language as lacking. Breton's own work of deciphering and translating is reflected in the entries, sometimes leading to spiraling definitions. When defining the word *boyé*, commonly used in the travelogues, Breton first adds two other terms: *boyáicou* and *niboyeiri*. (44–45). Then he gives the explanation, “doctor, preacher of the Savages, or to put it better, magician, my doctor, etc.”¹⁹ The first association, “doctor,” seems to come from Breton's understanding *in situ*. The next association is Christian, but he corrects himself to adjust to the Church for which it would have been blasphemy to call a non-Christian, notably a non-Catholic, spiritual leader a preacher. Finally he finds the term “magician,” only to return to the initial definition, probably because a *boyé* might have been a healer of souls and bodies. The spiraling definitions allow for Breton's method and misunderstandings to enter into the dictionary, conveying a complex story of language acquisition and of language crossings.

The languages reflect one another but never completely, leading to discursive detours. Rather than a binary, parallel construction that one finds in modern dictionaries, Breton's book has an open structure that not only diversifies language but also opens it up to other languages. Breton writes that, in exchanging with the French, the Caribs have been using the word for “pathway” (*chemin*) to say stairway (*escalier*) and ladder (*échelle*) because “they had never seen anything like it and they still don't use it; and if they climb everywhere, that does not surprise me more than the ways in which they climb (maybe not everyone mounts in the same fashion), because I have seen them with two hands grasp trees against which they put their feet to go up, which cannot be done without much effort” (1999, 104).²⁰ Moreover, cultural practices linked to certain words are not

¹⁹ *Médecin, prêtre des Sauvages ou pour mieux dire, magicien, mon médecin, etc.*

²⁰ Némali, ou némeli, *mon chemin*; depuis qu'ils communiquent avec les Français ils se servent de ce mot pour dire un escalier, des degrés, une échelle, car auparavant ils n'avaient rien vu de semblable, ni n'en usent pas même encore à présent; et s'ils grimpent partout, ce qui ne m'étonne pas tant que la manière (peut-être que tous ne montent pas de la même sorte) car j'en ai vu empioigner l'arbre avec les deux mains contre lequel ils mettent la plainte des pieds pour y monter, ce qui ne se peut faire sans une grande force.

restricted to Indigenous habits. Descriptions of how the French and the diasporic Africans prepare food from manioc, how enslaved peoples use oil from the palm tree, how they cook turtle, and so on are also included in the dictionary.

Indigenous words in some cases help Breton to conceptualize phenomena linked to colonial island culture. There is a Carib word for “ennui” called *ichi*, which he uses to describe cases of French women suffering from severe depression, according to him, due to homesickness (1999, 142). Dictionaries and grammars of Indigenous languages contain entrances with local words for imported European terms like “wine” and “hammer” but also words pertaining to interactions in early colonial society. “Cachionna,” for instance, is the word for “child born from a white man and a black woman” (1999, 52). Pelleprat notes that alongside borrowings from European languages, the Indigenous themselves invented words to designate things coming from Europe (1655, 11). Breton testifies to the same phenomena by including words like “caniche,” which translates into “sugar cane” with the explanation that the Caribs took both the plant and the noun from the Spanish (1999, 126). Some transcriptions of indigenous languages incorporated into the travel narratives contain traces of Spanish, like when one of the Caribs in Chevillard’s account says “*Mira calinago Mabobia ouiatou*” (1659, 128). The translation that follows does not take any note of the Spanish word “mira” and simply translates it as “look.” In most dictionaries and grammars, island vernaculars are also “contaminated” by the European encounter on a semantic level. A great number of expressions in Breton’s dictionary reflect the violence that undergirds relations with Europeans: “That one is a Pirate who captures Caribs and puts them in iron” (1999, 5), “Are you the one who has always been alone with the French” (1999, 18), and “You irritate the French against us” (1999, 71).

These linguistic borrowings and mixings are not surprising nor unique to the early colonial Caribbean; they are consequences of language and culture contact. Yet the fact that they appear in travel narratives as well as in dictionaries, grammars or “introductions” to island vernaculars suggest that, at this time, the travel writers did not restrict Indigenous vernaculars or reduce them to a fixed form. On the contrary, context pushed them to explore the ways in which indigenous language changed as a consequence of contact. The motivation may have been that they wanted European languages to affect Caribs to facilitate religious teaching by being able to express abstract, religious concepts (Hanzeli 2014, 45). Nonetheless,

while working on delineating *a* language (Carib), the dictionary inevitably actualizes plurilingualism because travelers had to work through linguistic tensions in order to create meaning. Thus breaking with the heterolingual grammar, the narratives enter into a zone of translingualism, where languages interact and influence one another on a textual level. Contrary to societal plurilingualism, the textual language interaction occurs *within* the French; the texts actualize what can be defined as translingual events (Helgesson and Kullberg 2018, 137), which enhance the plurilingualism that defines the event's context. When a translingual event is produced, it is not apparent what is foreign and what is familiar (138). This happens when language shifts functionally, from representing essence (the word as artefact) to becoming related to action or praxis.

When Du Tertre contrasts the refinement of the French language with his own writing, saying that his rough style, influenced by the time he spent on the island, might offend a reader versed in polite French, he frames the narrative within the translingual zone. Likewise, when Breton argues that he will use his own vernacular version of French from Bourgogne because the main objective is to learn Carib, not French, he localizes language in practice, which draws writing toward the translingual. In this sense, the travelogues indirectly capture complicated processes of language formations of the period. They reflect the standardization taking place in France where people were subjected to “francization.” At the same time, they are deeply enmeshed with the language dynamics on the islands, where the concern was to learn local vernaculars and to communicate between languages (Relouzat 1999, lxxiii).²¹ What we learn from this is that power did not begin by operating through language bordering. Isolating one language from another or imposing a language—which will later become a crucial part of French colonial politics—was not considered relevant on the islands during the first period of settlement.

This brings us to languages emerging from the European intrusion and the importation of enslaved Africans, namely early forms of Creole (Prudent 1980, 23; Relouzat 1999, lxxix). Speaking about the Caribs, Bouton writes,

²¹The scarce information can be compared with the linguistic work carried out by missionaries in New France during the same period. Hanzeli describes it as a form of field work, where missionaries would record speech repeatedly, revise and read it back to the “informants” (2014, 51).

They have a certain pidgin (*baragouin*) mixed with French, Spanish, English and Flemish. The exchange and familiarity that they have had with these nations have made them learn some words from their language, in a way that in a short period of time one can both understand them and make oneself understood by them, which will be a great advantage for us to be able to instruct them.²² (1640, 130)

Bouton puts the emphasis on the advantages when instructing the Caribs about the Christian faith. The reverse was most likely more relevant, namely that mixing languages to communicate was useful for the French, who were dependent on instructions from the Caribs. In any case, the formation of *baragouin* testifies to the communicational skills put in practice in the context of exchange.

The term is derived from a Celtic vernacular—Breton—*bara* meaning bread and *gwin* meaning wine—and had been used pejoratively since the Middle Ages to designate an improper language. The missionaries speak of it in terms of jargon or corrupt language, a familiar, oral language with no grammatical rules, reminiscent of Dante’s notion of vulgar languages, except that these are not mother tongues. Rochefort gives a positive connotation to *baragouin*, which he finds “pleasant,” and identifies it as used for friendly exchanges and based on French and another tongue, which he calls a “bastard and mixed” language, derived from Castilian (1668, 392). The exact linguistic definition of *baragouin* thus remains unstable, but in most cases it refers to Caribs’ use of mixed languages to communicate with Europeans and sometimes to describe enslaved peoples’ language. When Labat had just arrived in Martinique, he expressed frustration about not understanding the “jargon” spoken by enslaved people because he wants to learn from them about the island. The mention is quick yet indicates that the traveler valued their knowledge and understood that it was deeper and more useful than what Frenchmen could instruct him. However, once he does learn the language he has been on the island long enough that he no longer needs their help. The anecdote illustrates that even though the travelogues only account for enslaved and Indigenous people speaking *baragouin*, Europeans spoke it too; it is, to use Breton’s words, a “language of the islands.”

²² Ils ont un certain baragouin mêlé de français, espagnol, anglais et flamand. Le trafic et hantise qu’ils ont eus avec ces nations leur ayant fait apprendre quelques mots de leur langage, de sorte qu’en peu de temps on peut et les entendre et se faire entendre par eux, qui nous sera in très grand avantage pour les instruire.

Baragouin is considered to be an early form of Creole, even though this particular term was rarely used in the seventeenth century, and when it was, it referred to an ethnic category of both Blacks and Whites born in the colonies (Murdoch 2016).²³ The first attributed use of Creole to denote a language is from 1685 when La Courbe, during his voyage to Africa, describes a language composed by different languages, spoken by Black and brown people, which he compares to the mixed *lingua franca* used in the Mediterranean area (Baker and Mühlhäusler 2007, 85). When Creole transitioned from being a racial term into becoming a linguistic term, it only referred to language spoken by Blacks. The racial component was thus sustained. Surely white Creoles could speak it, but it was not considered to be *their* language. Creole, in other words, alludes to a different linguistic context than *baragouin*, in which languages were more clearly separated between racial lines and became an expression of the French Atlantic and the plantation system rather than the intraregional archipelagic space of early colonization.

Baker suggests that there are similarities between the Carib *baragouin* reported in the travelogues and the earliest linguistic data from Africans in the islands (1996, 97). The observation is interesting because it supports information from quotes included in the travelogues. And since the French were used to communicating with the Caribs in pidgin, they probably performed the same communicative strategy when approaching deported Africans who spoke various West African vernaculars. We also know, thanks to the travelogues, that deported Africans lived and interacted with Indigenous peoples. Moreover, a majority of enslaved people on the French islands during the period of the establishment were bought from Brazil or from neighboring islands and probably already spoke a version of pidgin. There was thus a continuum of *baragouins* created out of different languages. According to Sybille de Pury-Toumi (1999, 59–72) the Caribs also used an internal language that mixed various local languages in order to facilitate communication. Caillé de Castres, who identified a large variety of Indigenous peoples (2002, 75), confirms Pury-Toumi's observation claiming that there was a "war language" spoken among men (86). This language was, according to Caillé de Castres,

²³Robert Chaudenson (2001) holds Creole to be directly derived from French, including its many regional dialects that were in motion during the establishment. With the increasing number of Africans, the newcomers would infuse Creole with African languages while learning Creole from those enslaved people who were already there. Nevertheless, French still provided the determiners for the development of Creole (Baker and Mühlhäusler 2007, 97).

used for deliberations and discussions, functioning as a regional cosmopolitan language, shared by the male population. Breton, too, testifies to the existence of such language used for “deliberations and exchanges” (1999, 55), a form of pidgin used for minimum communication (Granberry and Vesceius 2004, 62). Taken together, these descriptions suggest that *baragouin* referred to a fluid inter-Caribbean language, covering many forms of interactions between all peoples. Travelers interpreted it in light of similar types of relational and practical language mixing that existed in the Mediterranean. Pelleprat, for instance, eulogizes *baragouin* as the germ of a regional *lingua franca* that recalled Mediterranean language-mixings and thus would facilitate both evangelization and commerce (1658, 89). Regardless of the motivation, life on the islands required a “medium for interethnic communication” (Baker 2000, 48). Mixing languages would thus not appear as threatening to the colonial endeavor.

In fact, there are reasons to consider *baragouin*—the linguistic point of entanglement; the cross-cultural language without a single origin, to paraphrase Glissant (1989, 127)—as a starting point for thinking about languages in the Caribbean. Without this language, which enabled encounters and was shaped by these meetings, other languages would never have made it into the narratives. It is through language-mixing that communication begins. The anonymous writers of Carpentras makes this explicit as he captures the linguistic complexity undergirding situations of communication in the context of the seventeenth-century Caribbean: “In the beginning of our arrival at their home, [the Caribs] made us understand what they wanted to tell us in two ways. The first by a few words in Spanish or French, and the second by signs, and one often had to guess, and we could not understand anything until we had stayed with them for a long time” (2002, 118).²⁴ The brief passage quoted here outlines the display of languages and interactions shaped by a unique combination of curiosity and necessity, not dictated by territorial claims. It captures the Indigenous people’s desire to communicate with the French, suggesting that the French used a similar strategy to pass on messages, using sign language and gestures. It also testifies to Céline Carayon’s conclusion that “the flaws of linguistic understanding between groups might have often been

²⁴ Au commencement de notre arrivée chez eux, ils nous faisaient entendre ce qu’ils nous voulaient dire de deux façons. La première par quelque mot espagnol ou français, et l’autre par signes, et souvent il fallait deviner, et ne pûmes rien comprendre qu’après être demeurés longtemps avec eux.

balanced out by the continuous use of another, non-verbal lexicon” (2019, 356). Gestures along with the senses were instruments of communication that provided the bones for the formations of new languages. Clearly, the encounters between travelers and Indigenous and enslaved peoples were not marked by a complete linguistic opacity but rather as a translingual event.

The modality of inscription of *baragouin* in the travel narratives is different from Indigenous vernaculars. Mixed languages are exclusively evoked as speech, tied to the body and the speaking subject; they are not linguistic objects per se. The French missionaries in the Caribbean were not interested in the forms or grammar of *baragouin* since they saw it as an oral language connected to labor and transactions. The texts present it as a fluid language that belonged nowhere and did not express thought or emotions, only needs; it was seen as a natural language, which was not singled out as a material object and was not considered to constitute knowledge. It mostly appears incorporated into the narratives in terms of linguistic characterizations—“he said in *baragouin*,” “he said in corrupt Spanish,” “using jargon”—describing situations of active exchange, indirectly serving as historical markers. Such formulations add a temporal aspect to early colonial interactions by signaling previous exchanges and dialogues that had taken place on the islands and testifies to the linguistic creativity emerging out of the brutal and violent encounters of the settlement.

Even in its most basic manifestations in the travelogues, *baragouin* thus signals a Caribbean sensitivity; a poetics of creolization as it were. It intervenes as an expression of translingualism emerging in moments of interaction. It unsettles the monolingual narrative by actualizing other registers as opposed to the essential quality of the vernacular word, which in the heterolingual grammar could be displaced, altered, and contained. The travelogues show that this early form of Creole was widely used and shaped by various groups in the Caribbean. Framing it in relation to situations of exchange, they demonstrate that *baragouin* was the result of communicative needs and not, as it is generally articulated, of a failed acquisition of French. The travel narratives thus confirm arguments advanced by contemporary creolists (Baker 2000, 48) who question the idea that early forms of Creole were derived from European languages and thus a form of simplified Indo-European reflecting an “initial” phase of language development. If creole languages, as argued by Baker, were shaped by the necessity to exchange in a particular context, they were “in essence what

those who constructed them wanted them to be, rather than being the result of imperfect second-language learning” (Baker 2000, 48). Those who constructed these tongues were Indigenous, diasporic Africans, and Europeans together. Indirectly then, travel narratives help to rewrite the entire genealogy of Creole, as a creative language emerging from a “point of entanglement” and not as a language determined by lack and incompleteness.

This is not to say that *baragouin* is free of traces of violence and hierarchies. Travelogues contain numerous references to speakers of *baragouin* being inferior as well as lacking in intelligence and morality. They further produce fine borders between different versions of the “language of the islands.” Whereas exchanges between Indigenous and French were presented as two (or more) languages that meet, when it comes from the mouths of enslaved individuals, it appears as a language supplementing for not having a language proper. The various versions of early Creole spoken between Black people, which were not necessarily understood by white people, are absent from the travelogues. Only the language created to communicate within the regime of bondage and forced labor is considered. In this framework, Black *baragouin* is oriented toward French, as if it was indeed a phase in a language acquisition that would never be completed.

This is crucial for the increasing racialization of languages in the islands. Pelleprat configures Black *baragouin* in relation to evangelization and, thus, to French.

We nevertheless adjust our way of speaking to theirs, which is extraordinarily by using the infinitive of the verb, for example, *me pray God, me go to Church, me not eat*, to say *I have prayed to God, I went to Church, I have not eaten*: and adding a word that marks future or past tense, they say, *tomorrow me eat, yesterday me pray God*, and this means *I will eat tomorrow, yesterday I prayed*.²⁵ (1658, 53)

Two tropes are forged in this movement. On the one hand the paternalist structure is clear assuring the missionary a place in colonial society—he is

²⁵ Nous nous accommodons cependant à leur façon de parler, qui est extraordinairement par l’infinitif du verbe, comme par exemple, *moy prier Dieu, moy aller à l’Eglise, moy point manger* pour dire *l’ay prié Dieu, ie suis allé à l’Eglise, ie n’ay point mangé*: Et y adjoignant un mot qui marque le temps à venir, ou le passé, ils disent *demain moy manger, hier moy prier Dieu* & cela signifie, Je mangeray demain, hier ie priay.

there to instruct individuals who, by their ways of speaking, show that they need that instruction. On the other hand, a racist linguistic differentiation germinates in these utterances that will ultimately lead to the conception of Creole as a not-quite language that resulted from a failed acquisition of French (and Spanish, Dutch, or English), where the latter is considered the superior language. Black *baragouin* turns into a continuum, more and more measured in relation to French. Enslaved peoples newly arriving from Africa spoke one version of *baragouin*; those born in the colonies spoke another form.

Where does this lead us? The wide range of languages at play in the early colonial period do indeed directly shape writings on the islands. And in this setting language does not mean only one thing. The narratives show a display of languages as spectacular objects, differentiated from one another, creating a heterolingual space at the same time as languages interact with one another, showing the presence of languages-in-the-making in a translingual zone. The return of the “unsettling foreignness” evoked by de Certeau is evident in the translingual event, interrupting a discourse of monologism, which is trying to put other tongues on display while controlling them. They appear in folds and interrupt the grandiose colonial narrative by inserting disturbing elements that give the reader the sense of other perspectives and voices. But the uncertain translingual zones not only produce disruptions; they are sites in the text where borders between languages are made and unmade in a meandering prose. In *The Poetics of Relation*, Glissant writes: “It is essential that we investigate historicity [...] in the extension of the Plantation, in the things to which it gave birth at the very instant it vanished as a fictional unit. *Baroque speech, inspired by all possible speech*, was ardently created in these same extensions and loudly calls out to us from them” (1997, 75). So far I have investigated that historicity of languages beyond the plantation, localizing it in the archipelagic space where exchanges were multiplied and extended. The translingual forces that permeate the travel narratives release that moment of all possible speech, leaving it open to bordering and domination or creativity and exchange.

STAGING SPEECH

Two travelers in particular experiment with both direct discourse and languages, namely the anonymous writer of Carpentras and Chevillard. The anonymous soldier’s unpublished manuscript tells about his sojourn

among the Caribs, during which he learned their language by necessity. The Dominican Chevillard was only in Guadeloupe for a brief period, during which he did not learn the language, and his book was published under M^{mc} de Montmoron's protection in praise of Richelieu. Despite the radically different contexts determining their narratives, both use a similar strategy of inclusion of other tongues: the vernacular is first transcribed and put in quotation marks and/or in italics in the printed text and then translated into French. When describing the Caribs' ways of drinking and eating, the anonymous writer of Carpentras inserts direct speech: "...and not wanting to turn away from their occupation, yelled to their woman, '*antennin tuna ritim magrabatin matoto oïa oïa lamaa antin*', which is to say 'my woman bring me drinks and food because I'm hungry'" (2002, 164).²⁶ Later in the same anthropological section of the account, he describes a rite of passage for young men. Here the food and beverage request reoccurs but in different words: "...and he asks with a raised voice '*antennim tuna retem magra bantim matoto oua oua*', which is to say 'bring me drinks and food because I'm hungry'" (208).²⁷ The quote is almost identical to the previous one, yet the transcriptions are not the same, suggesting that the soldier did not have a coherent methodology when collecting vernacular language. This matters less. Regardless of the method used—whether he took notes or quoted from memory—the insertion of an entire phrase in Carib into the French narrative flow has an effect. The quote is unreadable, but it allows for the creation of a soundscape that embodies Indigenous languages.

Chevillard turned this citing technique into a style. It is as if he sought to forge a bridge for heterolingualism to enter into the precious register of writing in order to connect the world of faraway travels and early colonization to the urban salon culture. He frames linguistic and cultural encounters in poetic décor, taking inspiration from the pastoral genre, extremely popular at the time in France, which revolves around the idea of salvation and healing. The Caribs supposedly chose Christianity, as if there were no force or negotiation involved. Writing within a literary register, Chevillard fictionalizes anthropological information and sprinkles it into the

²⁶Et ne voulant détourner de leur besogne, crient à leur femme, '*antennin tuna ritim magrabatin matoto oïa oïa lamaa antin*', c'est-à-dire 'ma femme apportez-moi à boire et à manger car j'ai faim.'

²⁷Et il demande tout haut '*antennim tuna retem magra bantim matoto oua oua*' c'est-à-dire 'apportez-moi à boire et à manger car j'ai faim.'

narration. The same goes for language. When he tells about the installation of the mission in Dominica, he quotes the devil exhorting the Natives in Carib to kill Breton: “*Si homi homan balanaglè lixbayouti mohé ayca caou nanborlabo banalé loulaxai xbia nitou malin mhé*: which is to say, *Give me this French man so that I can eat him and make myself a pepper pot with his guts and his brain*” (22).²⁸ The passage is almost humorous in all its exoticizing crudeness. It includes both foreign language transcribed in French characters and the translation, along with local references such as *pimentade* and anthropophagic imaginary.

The question is how instances of hetero- or translingualism, mediated through citations in the narratives in French, emerge, and how are we to read them? Réal Ouellet has suggested that quoting others, especially in the vernacular, functions as both a veracity marker and an exotic marker at once (2010, 98–99). It makes the other present in front of the reader and animates an otherwise dull historical discourse (Keller-Rahbé 2010, 10–11) by adding an element of strangeness into the text while also indirectly singling out the transcultural skills of the traveler-narrator. Jean-Michel Racault follows the same line of thought and proposes that the reality effect is an illusion of presence: the written vocalicity of the Natives and Africans would render them present in front of the reader (1998, 434). The words enunciated by the “characters” who inhabit these narratives are foreign, and the texts tend to enhance this otherness. Thus, the rendering of their words simultaneously seeks to give the reader an accurate idea of speech *and* to adjust that idea to contemporary theatrical and often idealized images of Native Americans (Pioffet 1997, 36). In her study of enslaved peoples’ voices in early modern travelogues, Ashley Williard (2018, 84–85) reads the inclusion of others’ speech as mimicry or as an effort to translate vernaculars. Yet Chevillard’s inclusion of quotations operates through two seemingly contradictory modalities. He creates linguistic mimicry by including transcribed versions of Carib. However, the speech act itself is framed as *imitatio*, as if the estrangement effect spurred by the sentences in a foreign lingua that the reader could not easily pronounce needed to be mitigated.

Rather than reflecting actual exchanges that took place, Chevillard’s quotes reproduce scenes where Indigenous peoples are staged according to literary codes; in the words of Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud, Carib

²⁸ C’est à dire. *Donnez-moy ce François que ie le mange & que de ses tripes & de son cerveau on m’en fasse une pimentade.*

characters are “put in a situation of speech” (2000, 102). Here Caribs are dramatized, not only because their discourse is reported but also because the passages where they are quoted and the words they express are impregnated with “majestic tonalities” and “dramatized rhetoric” (Requemora-Gros 2012, 223).²⁹ Their interactions with the French are configured as a play, where they become actors. Speech enters into a logic of exposure: Caribs are put on display in order to show the integration of diversity into a regime of Frenchness. From this perspective, representations of speech acts do not necessarily belong to the realist register of travel writing. Quite to the contrary, in the eyes of a contemporary reader, they risked denaturalizing the narrative by making the foreign world too theatrical. Direct discourse was, in fact, considered more “imaginary” and fictive than indirect speech. It did not belong to a poetics of mimesis but was seen as a construction, creating an impression of spoken words. In that sense it is constructive to theorize the inclusion of direct discourse in the travelogues by turning to today’s research in discourse analysis. Sophie Duval (1999) calls direct discourse a “fallacious mirror,” a narrative set-up, which hides that the quoted discourse is not autonomous but is embedded within another discourse (265). Similarly, Emmanuelle Prak-Derrington speaks of the “false simplicity of direct discourse” (2004) when it is taken to be “objective” and “loyal” to the source. The “recorder” theory fails to consider the ambiguity of this narrative mode, which, according to Prak-Derrington, lies in its capacity to harbor not two distinct voices but two embedded voices: a voice within the voice of the narrator. Direct discourse, Prak-Derrington claims, quoting Antoine Compagnon’s work on citation in literature, is at once “a repeated and a repeating enunciation [and] a denunciation” of itself (2004, 7). Direct discourse is always reproduced, signaling difference as well as resemblance.

It is here—in reproduction and repetition—rather than in the question of truth or fallacy, mimesis or *imitatio*, that speech turns into a particularly rich and complex modality in travel writing. When fictionalized, the other’s speech is recognizable for the reader—Chevillard’s theatrical Caribs

²⁹There is a direct link between reported speech and dialogues and theatricalization, which are stylistic while also conveying a certain world view. The *theatrum mundi*—the world as theatre—was also a persistent trope in travel writing (Moureau 2005), and humans were thought of as characters on a stage in a play, which they only partly controlled (Stagl 1995, 157). Chevillard, for example, makes use of this metaphor in the preface to his travelogue, signaling that the world is as mercurial and shifting as the peoples inhabiting it, and the events that make up our lives are but a scene in a larger drama (1659, 27).

reflect a general idea of the “Noble Savage” and become a figure that repeats itself. Elements of appropriation, denaturation, and control thus inevitably shape the expression, turning direct speech into an entirely conventional language. Here, artificiality is not a transformative generator, as in Sarduy’s conception of neo-Baroque language (2010, 272). On the contrary, it is the submission to codes of representation, which dislocates the expression, that produces artifice and power, silencing the plurilingual Caribbean. Yet, other elements of instability come into play precisely because the imitation never succeeds; it always exposes itself as *fiction*. As sites where difference, resemblance, and repetition are produced, quotations in travel writing do not always do or mean the same thing; their operative functions change depending on the structural setting in which they occur. In the section that follows, I will look at three coded forms of inclusion of others’ speech: epic anecdotes, melodramatic scenes, and harangues.³⁰

A particularly dense passage in Du Tertre’s history belonging to the epic register, which I have studied elsewhere (Kullberg 2020, 179–185), is worth revisiting to question the meaning and function of the dramatization of speech. The episode is central to the construction of French Caribbean history, to the point where one would need an “amphitheater larger than the ones found in Rome” to do justice to the events (Chevallard 1659, 281). It covers the period following the death of Du Plessis in 1635, when Martinique fell under the governance of Monsieur de l’Olive. Du Tertre frames the events in terms of a conflict between good and bad governance, where Du Plessis is portrayed as a caring, paternal leader who supposedly passed away from melancholia after the death of his beloved wife and the decimation of his beloved colony (1667 t1, 82). Monsieur de l’Olive, on the other hand, is presented as an unstable ruler. To further enhance his lunatic character, Du Tertre adds a description of him suffering from spasms—he fell into a “frenzy,” “rolling his eyes” and “grinding his teeth” while his body was tormented by “appalling convulsions” (1667 t1, 144)—in the second edition of *Histoire générale*. De l’Olive had for some time tried to get permission to take more land, but others, notably Du Plessis, considered the good relationship with the Caribs more

³⁰ Research in travel writing in France has long discussed overlaps between travel writing and literature; for the period that concerns this study but dealing mainly with other contexts, see Pioffët, *La Tentation de l’épopée dans les relations des jésuites* (1997), and Requemora-Gros, *Voguer vers la modernité* (2012).

important than risking another conflict. When Du Plessis passed away, de l'Olive saw the opportunity to expand French territory. He returned to Guadeloupe and immediately sent his men to the Caribs' village. However, the village was empty with the exception of an old "good" Carib captain named Yance, three of his sons, and two other young persons (85). They were just about to leave, but when Yance noticed the French, he tries to reach out to them. Du Tertre quotes the man on this occasion to strengthen his plea: "*France no angry*" (*France point fasché*). But the quote is followed by an explication, supplementing to the meaning of the quote, saying that "he couldn't explain himself better" (85).³¹ Du Tertre then continues to narrate the devious tactics used by the French: "someone told [Yance] that he only had to come with his children in all safety and one would do him no harm" (85).³² Yance's direct discourse in *baragouin* is italicized, but rather than being the expression of an individual, it is a trope, victimizing the Carib, which allows the reader to visualize the frightened, infantilized Native, who should be pitied. The point here is that the quote reveals the trust Yance bestows upon the French.

What follows is a drama of brutal betrayal, and the scene is reported in indirect discourse. De l'Olive tries to force Yance to reveal where the other Caribs are hiding. He calls Yance a traitor and threatens him. Yance is not given a voice; he does not speak but expresses himself through broken language and gestures. Yet here the lack of speech serves to enhance the impression of pressure: he loses his ability to articulate himself as a result of the menacing interrogation. The narrative perspective is entirely on the side of Yance; it is his thoughts we follow. And like him, the reader could not have imagined that the French would treat him this way. As the events unfold, one of Yance's sons is ordered by de l'Olive to go find the rest of the Caribs. But the young man disobeys, warns the others and flees with them. The revenge is brutal: the French stab another son to death, tie up Yance, and force him into a pinnacle, where he is stabbed too. He manages to jump from the boat but is killed when the French beat him with the oars. The cruelty continues toward the other Caribs, one of whom Du Tertre names Marivet, son of Baron. Throughout the passage, the French are dehumanized: they are called "tigers," "barbarians," and "assassins."

³¹ *France non point fasche*, ne se pouvant mieux expliquer.

³² On luy dit qu'il n'avoit qu'à venir avec ses enfants en toute assurance, & qu'il ne luy seroit fait aucun tort.

The episode closes with a scene of remembrance: Du Tertre speaks to a young Carib, a relative to those who died in the massacre. The young man shows no desire for revenge, only reflects incomprehensibility in the face of the deeds of the French.

I [Du Tertre] can't forget the natural goodness and sweetness of this young Savage, which clearly shows that they are only savage by name and that the deregulation of rage made our people more savage and more barbarian than them. After he had met among all these Savages a French boy he did not show any sign of resentment because of the outrageousness that he had suffered from the peoples of this boy's nation; and instead of seeking revenge on him for the blood that they had so cruelly spread, he only told him in his baragouin, *oh Jacques, France very [mouche] angry, they killed [matte] Karibs*.³³ (1667 t1: 86–87)

This particular paragraph exists in the original manuscript from 1648. It was not included in the 1654 edition but added later in the 1667 edition. The passage is marked by evangelist ideology: it demonstrates to the French audience that Caribs were to be pitied, as it placed them as God's lost children in need of missionary help to find God. Direct discourse serves to enhance the humanity of the Caribs, as opposed to barbarian French actions, and here it is framed as an exchange implying the traveler-narrator. In the first case, Yance was a victim to be pitied. In the second case, the young Carib shows proof of forgiveness; he excels in rhetoric *humiliatas*. As Sylvie Requemora-Gros has pointed out, whereas barbarian qualities were for the most part projected onto foreign nations, especially in travel writing, these were not exclusively ethnic traits; they also reflected an ethical stance (2012, 441). From that point of view, the highly theatrical and formal words put in the mouths of these two Caribs could be said to enhance their *ethos* rather than to seek to reproduce a discourse that had actually been uttered.

³³ Je ne puis oublier la douceur et la bonté naturelle de ce jeune Sauvage, qui montre bien qu'ils ne le sont que de nom, & que le dérèglement de la cholere rendoit nos gens plus sauvages & plus barbares qu'eux. Ayant rencontré au milieu de tous ces Sauvages un garçon François; il ne luy témoigna aucun ressentiment de l'outrage qu'il avoit reçu de ceux de sa nation; & au lieu de se venger sur luy, du sang qu'ils avoient si cruellement répandu, il se contenta de luy dire dans son baragouin, *ô Jacques, France mouche fâche, l'y matté Karaibes*, c'est-à-dire, ô Jacques, les François sont extrêmement fâchez, ils ont tué les Sauvages.

Giving a voice, even in as highly coded terms as these, was a way “to humanize primitive man into a *homo loquens*, meaning a speaking and thinking being” (Pioffet 1997, 701). Yance is indeed summoned (i.e. quoted) as a human being to testify to the cruelty of (French) barbarians. Du Tertre, listening to the young man who gives his statement in *baragouin*, is a reader, listener, and judge. The evidential value lies in the young Carib’s human capacity to forgive and not give in to passion and revenge. This is expressed in the few words quoted, filled with emotions and moral dignity. However, while the Carib rises above the French morally, the simplicity of his words frames him as an innocent child with no complete language. The narrative evicts his mother tongue, as he is not quoted in that language and therefore does not control his tongue. There is thus a rupture between language and speech act: the quotation emerges in a zone of translingual instability. In this context, the translingual event produces a line of difference between the speaking subject and the words. Cited as a naïve victim, the Carib can never fully occupy the position as *homo loquens*; his words appear as repeated rather than original. This difference can be theorized by working through the Aristotelian distinction between voice as sound (*phonè*) and as *logos* (reason/speech) as well as the relationship of both to meaning (*sèmantikos*). Du Tertre strengthens the message by staging language as sound filled with reason by means of another language, which the speaker does not fully master. The quoted Caribs fill the in-between space, separating voice as *logos*, rational speech, and voice as *phonè*, sound lacking meaning: it is voice as *pathos*. Here, as in many other examples, direct discourse conveys an ambivalence in the spaces between agency and submission, difference, and exotization.

The sliding scale between *logos* and *phonè* serves to assert control over the representation of other voices. This comes out clearly in melodramatic scenes, driven by *pathos*. In fact, when Du Tertre quotes the young Carib, the epic register has been replaced by a melodramatic tonality, suggesting that missionary control operates within the sphere of the intimate and the pathetic, where the missionaries picture themselves as saviors. Such a paternalistic stance underpinning the religious fathers’ relationship to island societies (Miller 2008, 5; Garraway 2005, 127–128) is propagandistic. It serves to promote the need for missionaries on the islands for the sake of French settlers as well as for Caribs and enslaved peoples. Yet the need is differently articulated depending on the group. The French need assistance and an orderly society. In the case of Caribs and enslaved people, they are staged as aspiring to enter into the community of Christians.

We see this in scenes of conversion, which are repeated in one travelogue to another. Most scenes of conversion of Indigenous individuals include persons in vulnerable positions, as if facing death made them realize the truth of Christianity. A man named Inoüach is ravaged by fever, which finally “unties the Pagan’s Indian tongue,” and he begs to be baptized: “*Xhibana xeu Baba naoeny hely baptizé bahamou cané loubaré xhiaouïa naoüen*: which is to say. I am dying, my Father, I beg you to baptize me before my spirit leaves the earth” (Chevallard 1659, 110).³⁴ Missionaries tended to enhance the emotional effect of the Caribs, which manifests in physical appearance. Their faces change; they enter in a state of utter joy and no longer fear the *maboya* (spirit or deity). One of the most important aspects here is to show the reader that the conversion is sincere and profound, which is a response to the critique that missionaries baptized people too quickly. Conversion turns into a melodramatic conflict where the Carib must persuade the missionary of the authenticity of his beliefs.

Direct discourse plays a crucial part in such scenes. Chevallard constructs what Edmund Morgan has called a “morphology of conversion” (1963, 66). He stages a series of phases that intensify, ultimately leading up to a peripeteia where the subject is converted. The Carib seeking conversion expresses his desire to be baptized, but the missionaries refuse to baptize him. As a result, the expressions of desire grow in intensity:

in every moment he burst into tears (but sobbing and wet with tears) *Ab Baba baptize calinago*, and noting that they gave him catechism but didn’t baptize him, he could get no rest and doubled his holy ardor, saying *Si ancaïé bobatinan Baba binalé bouca etinan boné loachout baptizé* meaning *You are making fun of me, my Father, I have been pressing you to baptize me for a long time, alas! Show me, poor Carib, pity, I have my soul on my lips.*³⁵ (1659, 108)

³⁴ C’est à dire. *Je me meurs, mon Pere, je vous conjure de me baptiser avant que mon esprit sorte desus la terre.*

³⁵ Il éclatoit à tous momens (mais sanglottant & tout baigné de larmes) *Ab Baba baptizé calinago* & voyant qu’on le catechisoit & qu’on ne le baptisoit pas, il n’avoit aucun repos redoublant ses saintes ardeurs pour le Baptesme disant *Si ancaïé bobatinan Baba binalé bouca etinan boné loachout baptizé*, voulant dire *Vous vous moquez de moy mon Pere il y a long temps que ie vous presse de me baptiser; hélas! Ayez pitié de moy, pauvre Caraïbe, car i’ay l’ame sur les lèvres.*

Convinced, the missionary finally baptizes the man, who thereby goes through a physical transformation: his “dry and pale” face become “smiling” and his “calmed mind revealed the inner joy of his soul through the grace of the Sacraments.”³⁶ Facing a crucifix, he exclaims: “*Xhissen niche-ric Christian Baba, yerxceti nicheric calinago* which is to say *I like the God of the Christians my Father, the gods of the Savages frighten me*” (1659, 109).³⁷ Conversion distanced the Carib from his original culture, framed as frightening. The missionary becomes a savior. Glorifying the colonizer is a topos of Native speech in travelogues. Indigenous individuals are used as speaking characters to promote evangelization and enslavement. Putting missionary ideology into the mouths of Indigenous and enslaved peoples is also an insidious way to denigrate local culture, as Marie-Christine Pioffet has shown in the context of Jesuit missions in New France (1997, 252). Similar strategies can be detected in the Caribbean context. But contrary to the “eloquent converted Native” studied by Matthew Lauzon in the context of New France (2010, 73), the Carib remains infantilized. Even within a narrative that idealizes a mission that failed, the Carib can never reproduce Catholic eloquence.

This politics of quotation becomes more entangled and problematic in regard to enslavement. In the case of Indigenous people, their culture has an informative value. Even when it is denigrated and underwritten, their presence hovers over the texts as an indirect retort. As with the absence of engagement with African vernaculars, diasporic African culture is framed in relation to colonial culture. Chevillard includes a brief scene of conversion of enslaved individuals, which unfolds in a teaching situation, where the enslaved people address the missionary: “*Father, you say that good Christian when dying, he go upstairs with God and mean go downstairs to burn: where is the big ladder to go up and the hole to fall and go down?* This ladder, one tells him, my friend, is baptism...” (1659, 146).³⁸ The melodramatic scene of Indigenous conversation has shifted to a domestic scene taking place on the plantation or in the church, where the missionary quietly and patiently explains to the enslaved individuals the teachings of

³⁶ Le visage du Caraïbe atenué sec & palle, devenu riant, & son esprit appaisé firent voir la joye interieure de son ame par la grace de ce Sacrement.

³⁷ C'est à dire *i'ayme bien le Dieu des crestiens mon pere les Dieux des Sauvages me font en horreur.*

³⁸ *Pere, toy dire que bon Chrestien quand mourir, luy aller en haut avec Dieu & meschant en bas pour brûler: où est-il grande eschelle pour monter, & le trou pour tomber & descendre? Cette échelle luy dit-on, mon amy, c'est le Baptesme.*

the Christ. The infantilization of enslaved peoples goes through direct discourse and is semantic; the fictionalized person here speaks in a heavily Frenchified *baragouin*, signaling their inferiority while domesticating the text for the reader. The naivety of the question, with the concrete elements, gives the scene an allure of charm, convincing the reader of the necessity of converting diasporic Africans. Enslavement is present but entirely distorted into a pastoral image; visible labor is restricted to the work of the missionary “saving” souls.

Passages where an enslaved person appears as an interlocutor can be read as textual sites where the reification of the enslaved is both questioned and reconstructed, both acknowledging the slave as human and constructing him as a different human being. Here, too, *pathos* occurs as the third term between *logos* and *phonè*. Yet, whereas the construction of the Indigenous is mediated through epic *pathos*, the construction of the enslaved person passes through the sentimental register, both as a consequence of the intimate bonds between enslaver and enslaved and as a strategy to negotiate the tension provoked by a system that was morally refutable and economically profitable.

The exploitative and entangled social relationships incited by enslavement are put to strategic use in the narratives through the means of quotation. Du Tertre evokes speech to portray the enslaved persons as moral human beings, for instance, by reporting their compassionate behavior toward the missionaries. In 1640, when the French colony in Guadeloupe suffered from extreme famine, enslaved people helped them survive: “they told us in their baragouin that they were good Negros, & that they wanted to give us food” (1667 t2, 498).³⁹ Describing the way they spoke and indirectly citing their words in a French tainted with *baragouin*, he stages the enslaved people’s generous simplicity. Interestingly, their assistance is only conceived as a sign of the inclination to do good deeds, as a direct reaction to the missionary’s suffering. Du Tertre explicitly seeks to stage their human and civil sides, opening up rifts in the text. It shows that the enslaved persons had skills for survival that the French did not possess. It also hints at the possibility of the enslaved people hereby actively shaping social relations.

Later in the same chapter, he lets Dominique exchange in direct discourse with an enslaved person from a nearby plantation:

³⁹ Ils nous disoient en leur baragouin qu’ils estoient bon Nègres, & qu’ils vouloient nous bien donner à manger.

One day I noticed with much satisfaction a slave from one of our plantations come out from our Dominique's hut carrying meat and cassava. This led me to ask him why he gave all these things to this man, he answered in his jibberish that the man's Master *was not good Captain, not good to Negro, did not give him anything to eat* and that this poor slave was from his country and that he always kept a bit of what we gave him so that this poor man could come and get it on Sundays.⁴⁰ (1667 t2, 528)

The focus is here on Dominique actively intervening to ease his friend's burden, hinting at a set of relations between the enslaved to which missionaries only had limited access. Saying that his friend comes from the same land as he, Dominique's words suggest that their social fabric extended both spatially and temporally as opposed to the dominant narrative in the travelogues circumscribing them to the world of the plantation, as we have seen earlier. In examples like these, the transcription of enslaved peoples' speech could "expose a certain instability in colonial culture" (Harrigan 2018, 214). Yet this experience is but an echo in the narrative. The evocation of *baragouin* for communication with their enslavers and between themselves builds on the indirect suppression of the other languages they speak. These scenes both recognize enslaved peoples as speakers and exclude them from having a language proper. They are confined to only having the language that mediates basic communication with their enslavers. Indirectly then, the citation constructs them as human beings and as subjects who only exist within the system of slavery.

In other words, enslaved peoples' speech emerges as a theatre of absence, where it serves the arguments of travelers. This becomes particularly obvious in the use of longer discourses or *harangues* to put proslavery arguments in the mouths of diasporic Africans (Rushforth 2014, 78–110; Williard 2021a, 128). The full range of contradictions in the representations of Caribs and enslaved peoples emerges in these long, often tedious and solemn discourses they supposedly pronounce. The term *harangue* is linked to argumentation and persuasion but is derogatory, carrying with it the sense of a discourse that cannot maintain the ideal of moderation. But

⁴⁰ Je remarquay un iour avec beaucoup de satisfaction un Nègre d'un de nos habitans sortir de la Case de nostre Dominique, chargé de viande & de Cassave, ce qui m'ayant obligé de luy demander pourquoy il luy donnoit toutes ces choses, il me répondit en son baragouin, que son Maistre *n'étoit pas bon Capitan, pas bon à Nègre, luy point donner à manger*; que ce pauvre esclave estoit de sa terre, & qu'il luy gardoit tousiour un morceau de ce que nous luy donnions, que ce pauvre Nègre venoit querir chaque Dimanche.

in the travel narratives the term appears to include any kind of speech uttered by enslaved or Indigenous individuals. So while their speech is framed with a common term, it clearly does not have the same meaning as European discourse. These passages thus become sites where tensions between sameness and difference are played out; here, the speech of the other is articulated between nature and culture, codes of honor and bestiality, simplicity and eloquence. It turns into a textual site for productions of subtle differences: it repeats European discourses, it tries to mimic European rhetoric, or it becomes the term for a different eloquence that is not quite European.⁴¹

Starting with enslaved people, the Black harangue emerges, like their languages, as a theatre of absence. Pelleprat claims that a young Black man on Martinique told him “*that he preferred his captivity to the liberty he enjoyed in his home country because had he remained in liberty he would have been a slave under Satan instead of being a slave under the French and a child of God* (1658, 55).⁴² The italics signal direct speech, which serves as a conclusion to a longer passage where he described the extreme suffering of the individuals exiting the slave ship. Rhetorically the passage seizes the ambivalence of the entire enterprise by the use of the conjunction *néanmoins* (nevertheless), as the narrative transitions into a pro-slavery argument based on Christianity. Pelleprat admits their individual pain but reads it in light of the greater “benefit” that enslavement would supposedly offer, namely the opportunity for these persons to be saved by God. Quoting an individualized yet anonymous diasporic African solidifies the argument. Similarly, Du Tertre uses an image of a miserable life in Africa as a backdrop for presenting the benefits of transatlantic slavery, claiming he learned this “from the very mouthes of many Black persons who admitted that they did not want to be obliged to return to their homes” (1667 t2, 498).⁴³ The paraphrase includes traces of an exchange—he has heard from the mouthes of diasporic Africans—reinforcing the degree of veracity by means of the relational bond, created through the allusion to an original dialogue. Yet the dialogue is indirect and anonymous, citing a hypothetical discourse and lacking specific context. Interestingly, the

⁴¹ For thorough discussions of “savage” eloquence, see Lauzon (2010) and Carayon (2019).

⁴² *Qu’il préféreroit sa captivité à la liberté qu’il auroit eüe en son pays, parce que s’il fust demeuré libre il seroit esclave de Sathan au lieu qu’estant esclave des François il avoit esté fait enfant de Dieu.*

⁴³ C’est ce que ie sçay de la bouche mesme de quantité de Negres qui m’ont avoué qu’ils ne voudroient pas estre obligez de retourner chez eux.

argumentation shifts to a persuasive mode by means of the intrusion of two voices—the first-person narrator and the anonymous slaves, quoted indirectly—that presumably annulled the obvious paradoxes in Du Tertre’s discourse, creating the fiction of a morally defensible slavery.

Writing in the 1680s, Mongin continues and strengthens this trope. He explains that the second generation of Africans was already monolingual, speaking only French (1984, 55), which facilitated the teachings of the gospels, and the children of slaves were taught together with white Creole children.⁴⁴ Following Mongin’s argument, Sue Peabody claims that relations between missionaries and enslaved people “softened” as a consequence of more frequent interactions that were not limited by languages (2004, 114). It is true that the tone softens, but this is a literary and dramatic effect rather than a sign of a changing attitude toward enslaved peoples. The shift in tonality testifies to a relationship marked by an increasingly patronizing attitude and a control of the enslaved peoples’ discourse. As Ashley Williard notes, “the intimate and nuanced portraits of enslaved individuals gave way to a focus on social control” (2021a, 46).

Mongin’s letters contain numerous examples of fictionalized encounters, where he supposedly “gives voice” to the enslaved peoples in his parish, quoting them in simplified French, thus underscoring the unequal power relations. At one instance, he recalls that “rather wittingly one of them told me one day that God had made them into slaves because they do not have the mental capacity to find food, which is a task taken care of by the master” (1984, 77).⁴⁵ He ends the passage by evoking an enslaved woman who “recently told him that she did not want to exchange her condition” with that of her free mother and sisters (77).⁴⁶ In another scene, he engages in a conversation with an old man about his people’s ancient beliefs and lets the “native informant” articulate a supposedly African version of the myth of Ham, which was commonly used to explain diasporic Africans’ cruel destiny:

⁴⁴ Others writing in the eighteenth century complain about the difficulty of instructing diasporic Africans because of the multitude of languages (Harrigan 2018, 210–211).

⁴⁵ Cela me fait souvenir de l’un d’entre eux qui me disait un jour assez spirituellement que Dieu les fait esclave parce qu’ils n’ont pas d’esprit pour chercher à manger qui est un soin dont le maître se charge.

⁴⁶ Aussi il arrive assez souvent aux nègres qui sont libres d’être plus misérables que les autres et pour cette raison une negresse esclave et des moins étourdies, qui a sa mère et ses deux sœurs libres, me disait dernièrement qu’elle ne voudrait pas changer de condition avec elles.

He told me that Reboucou had three children, two boys and a girl; that the oldest had found their father exposed in an indecent way, while he slept, told the others in order to mock the father, but that the siblings covered him with a kind of tissue from his country that [the old African] named for me, and that Reboucou who had woken up compensated the younger son making him his successor and punished the older making him the slave of the first. Those who believe that these people's dark color comes from the malediction that Cham drew upon himself at a similar occasion, can say that the Negros do not completely ignore the origin of their color.⁴⁷ (1984, 85)

Saying that this person *told him* the story, Mongin conveniently transposes the subject of slavery and its rationale to African mythology. As pointed out by Michael Harrigan, the speech of this anonymous character is used as *exempla* (2018, 75). Thereby Mongin can distance Catholic colonizers from moral responsibility and, as a consequence, ease the emotional burden that slavery could cause for readers who might be skeptical toward the mission in a plantation context. However, in contrast with Du Tertre and Pelleprat, we can note that Mongin creates a rational, rather than sentimental, discourse for his enslaved character. The old man uses mythology, holds knowledge, reasons, and draws conclusions. Yet this *logos* repeats a biblical story, paired with contemporary ideas about racial difference.

In this example, Mongin actualizes the harangue linked to exotic scenery: an old enslaved person addressing the missionary, and in his discourse he turns to mythology to explain his condition. The same form is commonly activated to stage Indigenous speech, but in those cases the scenery is often withdrawn, staging an old man conversing with a European on a rock overlooking the ocean or a forest. In most cases it mediates Native mythology alongside descriptions of the organization of social life before and after the intrusion of Europeans from a staged internal perspective. Displacing the harangue to the context of enslavement means both repeating it and changing its implications. The implicit criticism of the Native harangue transitions into a discourse of explanation, justifying the unjust

⁴⁷ Il me disait que Reboucou avait trois enfants deux garçons et une fille; que l'aîné ayant trouvé son père découvert d'une manière indécente, durant son assoupissement, avait les autres pour s'en moquer; que ceux-ci l'avaient couvert avec une espèce de toile de son pays, laquelle il me nommait, et que Reboucou, s'étant réveillé, avait recompensé le cadet, le faisant son successeur, et punissant l'aîné en le faisant esclave du premier. Ceux qui croient que la noirceur de ces gens vient de la malédiction que Cham s'attira dans une pareille occasion, pourront dire que les nègres n'ignorent pas tout à fait l'origine de leur couleur.

destiny of enslaved Africans by inscribing racial hierarchies into a myth of origins. Racialization takes shape and is mediated through already existing forms; it slips into discourses so that it is not directly identifiable as racialization.

Indigenous speech, on the other hand, is constraint in a different way since it is linked to an existing imaginary. Within the frames of that imaginary, travel narratives explore the idea of a Carib eloquence. Le Breton, for instance, claims that they have an articulate and rich way of speaking that can stir the sentiments and appeal to the imagination (1982, 94). Others claim that they were simplistic and lacked terms for abstract thinking or the imagination. A repeated discursive trope is the Carib war captive who is getting prepared to die and be eaten. Travelers often quote these characters in French without any comment on language or transcription, uttering sentences in defiance like: “poor peoples I see you all burning with desire to fill your bellies with my flesh, but believe that I have eaten a lot of flesh from you” (Caillé de Castres 2002, 112).⁴⁸ Here direct discourse chimes in with the imaginary of the cannibal, placed within a frame of vengeance and courage, which could be recognized as codes of civility within an uncivil practice (Lestringant 1994).

Other reoccurring scenes for Indigenous eloquence are deliberations and welcoming rites. A common feature here is that when one person speaks, nobody interrupts (Biet 393), suggesting that Indigenous eloquence is structured in relation to silence rather than dialogue and debate. This appears notably in rites of welcome where the code is to let the guest rest before entering into conversation. Rochefort cites their usage of the Spanish “*Cala la boca,*” or “Shut your mouth” (1658, 466), to insist on the importance of respecting silence when a guest arrives. The use of a Spanish expression lets us imagine repeated situations where the Caribs have corrected foreigners, or more precisely Europeans, unfamiliar with their culture. Le Breton tells about welcoming rites like the ones evoked by Rochefort by using the figure of relativist exoticism, where the Caribs expose their habits and practices by showing the absurdity of French civil codes, all this expressed in a soliloquy modelled after French eloquence (1982, 47).

Playing with the double display of otherness and familiarity, the harangue turns into a mode of expressing relativist critique against

⁴⁸ *Pauvres gens je vous vois tout brûlants du désir de remplir vos estomacs de ma chair, mais croyez que j'en ai beaucoup mangé des vôtres.*

European intrusion. An old Carib man remembers the beauty of their society prior to European arrival, or else he looks with astonishment on European culture, exposing the absurdity of conquest. Rochefort constructs a scene where a Carib addresses a depressed European:

Friend you are miserable for exposing yourself to such long and dangerous voyages, to leave yourself eaten by so many troubles and fears. The passion to have possessions makes you endure all these pains [...] and you are also worried for the possessions you have already gathered rather than for the ones you are still searching for. [...] Hence you age quickly, your hair turns white, your forehead is wrinkled, and a thousand incommodities work your body [...]. Why aren't you happy with the possessions your country produces for you? Why don't you despise riches like we do?⁴⁹ (1658, 402)

The passage is another example of Indigenous eloquence, anticipating modern European nostalgia over a “simpler life” and the construction of the idea of colonization as a form of “burden.” This trope will be reformulated and adjusted in complex and disturbing ways throughout the history of Western imperialism, paving the way for colonial nostalgia. That futurity of this particular trope underscores for sure that the missionary controlled the voice behind the harangue, as Peter Murvai points out (2016, 73). Indigenous sociability is expressed as a distorted speech, fictionalized to fit a pre-established image of “primitive” exchange, recalling the strategies of quotation used in the epic anecdote and the melodramatic scenes of conversion. All three expressions of speech build on the reproduction of one of the major forms of linguistic exchanges in the seventeenth century, namely *discours*, defined by Furetière’s dictionary (1606) as *viva voce*, expression of a person’s thoughts on certain issues and matters that the speaker would like other people to hear. The difference between discourse in a European context and in a Caribbean is that, when aligned with a Carib or an enslaved person, the identification of a speaker is not important. Caribs and enslaved peoples alike were undifferentiated,

⁴⁹ Compere [...] tu es bien miserable d'exposer ta personne à de si longs & de si dangereux voyages, & de te laisser ronger à tant de soucis & de craintes. La passion d'avoir des biens te fait endurer toutes ces peines [...] Et tu n'es pas moins en inquiétude pour les biens que tu as déjà acquis que pour ceux que tu recherches encore. [...] Ainsi tu vieillis en peu de tems, tes cheveux en blanchissent, ton front s'en ride, mille incommoditez travaillent ton corps [...]. Que n'es tu content des biens que ton païs te produit ? Que ne méprises tu les richesses comme nous?

speaking in one voice, behind which hovers the voice of the traveler-narrator; the enunciatory position of the *viva voce* is vacant. The characters speaking an imposed discourse are bodiless; they appear as holders of a discourse, which does not resonate with a bodily experience of extinction, bondage, and forced labor.

In other words, the dramatization of enslaved and indigenous speech serves to decorporalize speech in order to connect it to a *logos* that is not theirs. Interestingly, in another passage in which Rochefort quotes a Carib speaking to another traveler, he comments that the harangue was not “very barbaric,” recalling Diderot’s famous ironic dictum from *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* that the Tahitians spoke with a slight French tonality. Even if Rochefort thereby recognizes the Caribs’ capacity to articulate a discourse, he ends up questioning the validity of such eloquent critique. The revelation of the fictionality of the quote does not undermine its truth or relevance, nor does it completely evacuate the foreign element. So while these distorted fictionalized speech acts do not express agency, even when the topic of the discourse is an anti-colonial critique, they do leave a mark, a slight disruption in the narrative flow that allows us to imagine the effects of others’ experiences. Quotations confuse the message, question the intentions, and reveal the ever-increasing racial borderings.

SCENES OF EXCHANGES

Caillé de Castres lets a Carib tell about the 1660 peace treaty between the French, the English, and the Indigenous. “I will report it word for word according to the way I have written it,” he notes, underscoring the unreliability of transfers from the oral to the written. Then he follows with a long quote, where the Carib gives his version “in few words” of a “war that has been as disadvantageous to the English nation as to ours.”⁵⁰ The Carib briefly accounts for the historical actions, then draws conclusions concerning possible future outcomes of the treaty, which he fears will not put an end to the hostilities between the nations but, rather, increase the thirst for vengeance. The harangue is by all evidence adjusted to the model of French eloquence: echoing Rochefort, Caillé de Castres signals that the discourse of the anonymous Carib character quoted in French is “not very barbaric.” But he also adds a dimension which momentarily cracks the

⁵⁰ Je veux vous dire en peu de mots, commença le bonhomme, les particularités d’une guerre qui a été si désavantageuse à la nation anglaise et à la nôtre.

underlying monologism of the form of the harangue. The discourse becomes personal, expressing despair, frustration, and accusation: “I have many reasons to mourn my past strength,” says the man and continues to individualize the losses: “this one lost his father, this one his son, this one his brother. You have lost everything and you lose and you will lose” (2002, 103).⁵¹ Caillé de Castre’s Carib appeals to identification by evoking experiences of loss and mourning. The quote recasts these feelings onto the interlocutor and displays engagements with the social texture of early colonial island life. An exchange takes place.

This example suggests that the inclusion of speech operates on a scale of monologic control. The more formalized the structure in which the quotation appears, the stronger the discursive domination. One way to analyze such differentiations in the strategies of quotation is to pay attention to what linguist Dominique Maingueneau calls the “scene of enunciation” (2004, 190). For Maingueneau, direct speech in narrative discourse does not record actual speech; the communication is always *represented* at the same time as it manifests a strong link to speech acts. It is paratopical, situated between text and context. Insisting on such paratopies, it becomes possible to identify passages in travelogues that are more entangled with context than others. These passages operate on another level of experience, often representing glimpses of everyday life or encounters that do not enter into the coded strategies of quotations. Context, and thereby interaction with others, dictate the representation more than the order of a pre-established form, which entails that the production of meaning draws toward contingency and open-endedness. An example in point is when Breton advises the reader to pronounce Carib language as if they read French, only to say in the next sentence that if they ever were to go to the islands and have an exchange with the Caribs, it would be wiser to pay attention to the speakers’ pronunciation and “do like them” because “without this you will not be formed by the language, they will not understand you or they will make fun of you” (1999, 8).⁵² Carib language sounds and means something different in France than it does in the islands. There is a clear split in the text between codes of representation and experience.

⁵¹ Et que j’ai de raison de pleurer mes forces passées [...] un tel y a perdu son père, un tel son fils, un tel son frère. Vous y avez tout perdu et vous perdez et vous perdrez.

⁵² Prestez seulement l’oreille à la prononciation des Sauvages, & dites comme eux; à moins que cela vous ne formerez pas au langage, ils ne vous entendront pas ou ils se railleront de vous.

Moreover, the quote gives a glimpse into the Carib perspective on the French acquiring their language, suggesting that the inability to master not only the other's language but also the codes of conduct governing their society is potentially unsettling. The Carib can look back at you and laugh. Reading the dictionary in France might give an impression of linguistic mastery, but this would be challenged if not lost in the context of the islands. Breton's remark suggests scenes of enunciation underpinned with disruption; the narrative trembles through the evocation of others' speech.

In order to analyze such vocal tremblings, I will focus on paratopic scenes of enunciation that build on interaction. The degree of paratopy articulates a tension between submission to form and engagement with context; it both reflects and produces cultural, linguistic, and spatial differences that undergird the narratives. These are instances when the text asserts a certain control and reveals a loss of it. It occurs, for example, in passages that include cited discourses, where Indigenous and enslaved peoples share knowledge in everyday life, or in passages that evoke others as embodied presences and thereby insinuate other knowledges and experiences.

This can occur in brief allusions, such as when an anonymous Carib notices that Du Tertre suffers from a toothache and gives him a plant to ease the pain (1667 t2, 86). It also occurs in a longer anecdote from Labat's travelogue, telling of how one of the enslaved persons working for Labat is bitten by a snake, and another enslaved man who was known for his medical knowledge comes to Fonds Saint-Jacques to treat the snake-bite. Labat had already tried to cure the man without success. Fearing that the man will die, Labat describes their exchange as he gives him the last salvation. He asks how the man feels and interviews the enslaved doctor about the prospectus of the man recovering. The man finally survives thanks to the enslaved doctor's intervention. But when Labat tries to elicit the recipe for the cure from him, the exchange comes to a halt: "he asked to be excused not to say the names of all the herbs that went into the composition of his remedy because he made a living off this secret and did not want to make it public. He promised to treat me with all care possible if I was bitten, I thanked him for his offer, wishing strongly that I would never need it" (1722 t1, 163).⁵³ The man is not quoted in direct speech, yet his experience resonates through the narrative. We can deduct the

⁵³ Il s'excusa de me dire le nom de toutes les herbes qui entroient dans la composition de son remede, parce que ce secret lui faisant gagner sa vie, il ne vouloit pas le rendre public. Il me promit de me traiter avec tout le soin possible si je venois à être mordu, je le remerciai de ses offres, souhaitant très-fort de n'en avoir jamais besoin.

reasons behind his refusal to transfer knowledge to Labat, and the exchange lets us understand that Labat also respects these reasons. For a brief moment, knowledge remains unreachable, held by the other's silence. However, as the narrative develops, it replaces the initial uncertainty with a discourse of knowledge. The scene of exchange transitions into an objective description of remedies against snakebites.

In exchanges like these, it becomes apparent that the inclusion of discourse has a textual effect: it shows that the source of knowledge is located with the other and is transmitted to the traveler-narrator through negotiations. It creates a moment of trembling when knowledge is not necessarily exposed or even transmitted; it is there, but the traveler, and by extension the reader, has no direct access to it. The enslaved doctor argues that he has to keep his secret to insure his income, but his answer reveals that he also detects Labat's fear of snakes. Certainly, the narrative perspective is not overthrown by such scenes, but they insert folds of a momentary stutter where another voice resonates.

The degree to which textual disruptive effects emerge depends on the context, thus illustrating the importance of paratopic links. The anonymous writer of Carpentras more than any other traveler depended on the knowledge and the acceptance of the Caribs for survival. This marks his narrative:

And approaching us to flatter us, they said, 'on the ocean your captain Fleury made you eat your shoes from hunger', and we answered yes. They said: 'your captain Fleury isn't good. You have to throw him in the sea, that's what I see, they said, since your body is so skinny', which they told us with a ridiculous gesture, opening with the right hand the right eye from above [...], and sometimes both of them to let us understand that they wanted to see our scrawniness [...]. They showed with their gestures that they were very surprised, always repeating these words, which are signs of astonishment, '*cai, cai, cai*' and the women said '*bibi, bibi, bibi*'. After this they gave us something to eat, saying 'here you go, eat this, it will give you a big stomach like I have and if you want to come to my house you will find all kinds of nutrition there that will soon make you fat.'⁵⁴ (2002, 120)

⁵⁴ Et nous approchant pour nous flatter, ils nous disaient, 'ton capitaine Fleury t'a fait manger tes souliers à la mer par la faim', et nous répondions que oui. Ils disaient: 'ton capitaine Fleury n'est point bon. Il le faut jeter dans la mer, ce que je vois, disaient-ils, comme tu es maigre par le corps', ce qu'ils disaient avec une action ridicule, car ouvrant avec la main droite l'œil droit par-dessous [...] et quelque fois les deux pour nous faire comprendre qu'ils voulaient bien voir notre maigreur, l'ayant fort longtemps contemplée sur tout le corps. Ils montraient à leurs gestes d'en être fort étonnés, répétant toujours ces mots, qui sont signes d'étonnement, '*cai, cai, cai*', et les femmes disaient '*bibi, bibi, bibi*'. Après cela ils nous donnaient quelque chose à manger, en disant, 'tiens mange cela il te fera gros ventre comme à moi et si tu veux venir à mon habitation tu y trouveras de toutes sortes de vivres qui te feront bientôt devenir gras.

The anonymous writer inserts gestures, words, and sounds to capture the interaction. The French appear as objects here: the Caribs touch them, look at them while they are at their mercy. The crew members do not retort when the Caribs question Fleury's leadership; they have to follow their rules, take what they offer, and give signs of amicability in return. Over the entire scene floats a tone of light mockery, as if the Caribs enjoy their superiority, perhaps delighted to know these Europeans failed. The passage can be read as a recuperation of scenes of welcoming that display Native hospitality as a trope, showcasing an image of primitive generosity and sociability. Here the formalized framework has been transgressed, communication is unstable, hospitality not transparent or even direct, and the interaction marked by uncertainty. More importantly, the Caribs are given a degree of agency as they look back and comment on the members of the crew. Another example of a paratopic reconfiguration of the scene of welcoming can be found in Caillé de Castres' account. The Caribs run toward him in "a crowd" and immediately remark on his whiteness. "I told them that if they put clothes on their children from the moment they were born, they would be as white as I am," he writes. "But instead of answering to my reason they laughed at me and made an effort to persuade me that it was more honorable and advantageous to be of their color" (2002, 94).⁵⁵ Here, cultural relativism is put in the words of the Caribs as they laugh at de Wilde.

Similar glimpses of Indigenous active presence transpire in Breton's dictionary, often when the missionary's quest for linguistic knowledge comes into conflict with his evangelic task: he both registers cultural practices and corrects them. One entry gives the word for the effect—a "strange extremity" (*étrange extrémité*)—of a poison linked to a particular crayfish, then transitions into an anecdote:

⁵⁵ Ils accouraient en foule pour me voir et ne pouvaient comprendre pourquoi je suis plus blanc qu'eux et je leur disais que s'ils revêtaient leurs enfants dès la naissance, sans les teindre de roucou, ils seraient aussi blancs que moi. Mais au lieu de répondre à mes raisons, ils me riaient au nez et s'efforçaient à vouloir me persuader qu'il y avait plus d'honneur et d'avantages à être de leur couleur que de la mienne et d'être nu que de se cacher d'un fardeau embarrassant d'habits et que cela n'était bon que pour cacher tous les défauts, d'un corps bien fait, il y aurait de l'injustice à vouloir cacher son ouvrage.

*I learned one day that the Savages had grilled and sold [this crayfish] maliciously to the French, who became very sick. Others asked me about this, saying Inále énroukia etétali nhámani balánagle toromán aoto líka bouléoüa eboú-coulou? líkia láne Kabaócourati, is it true that some French men have been dangerously ill after having eaten the fish called bouléoüa eboú-coulou, which intoxicates all those who eat it? I admitted to them that this was the case and did it so well that they confessed the truth: nobody died, I alerted their Captain who addressed it for the future.*⁵⁶ (1999, 111)

The scene captures quotidian exchanges between peoples in the archipelagic space. The Caribs use their local knowledge against the French, not to kill them but as an act of defiance. They also ask Breton if the prank worked. Here Breton restores order—or at least he thinks he does. He clearly is aware that his influence is limited as he asks the Carib captain to prevent such pranks in the future; his own authority does not count for much in Dominica. Revealing mockery and play rather than subversion, the entry hints at social relations and French dependence on Indigenous peoples. It points at the possibility of discrete resistance from within the process of settlement and forced conversion, only to manifest the return to control.

Another entry relates how Breton once intruded in a cabin where the Caribs practiced a ritual led by a priestess. He brought a torch to frighten the evil spirit, but as he heard a voice, he could not decide whether it was an imposter (which he wanted to believe) or the actual voice of the spirit. Armed with a cross, he went back to the site and heard how the enraged spirit fell and “cried, screamed [...] for about a quarter of an hour” (1999, 111). The Caribs also were confused and unable to localize the voice, but they stayed on the premises whereas Breton left, saying that God did not inspire him to intervene anymore and that he was convinced that it was a real devil and the song of the priestess, a pact between her and the devil, which he did not want to “hear or write.” As soon as he retired, the spirit started talking about him, and Breton quotes his words:

⁵⁶ *Je sus un jour que des Sauvages en avaient fait boucaner et vendu malicieusement aux Français, qui en furent grandement incommodés. D'autres me questionnèrent là-dessus en cette sorte: Inále énroukia etétali nhámani balánagle toromán aoto líka bouléoüa eboú-coulou? líkia láne Kabaócourati, est-il vrai que quelques Français ont été dangereusement malades pour avoir mangé du poisson nommé bouléoüa eboú-coulou, qui empoisonne ceux qui le mangent? Je leur avoua et fis si bien qu'ils me confessèrent la vérité; personne n'en mourut, j'en avertis leur Capitaine qui y mit ordre pour l'avenir.*

tíken tíken crácoüia hómain noubára touária chímêpoüi lanúari, cáho bonále, boupou bonale ouéche bonale ouáttè bonale, chíou bonále, *ever since this moment the Savages would often repeat these words to me imitating her fury (but while laughing); these words mean: quick, quick, tie him up for me so that he doesn't escape, so that I can eat him, head, shoulders, feet, even his droppings, so that I can grind him up, so that I can reduce him to broth, and so that I can swallow him.*⁵⁷ (111)

The initial action to control the ritual falls short and turns Breton into an object of mockery. The Caribs laughing and repeating the words supposedly uttered by the spirit ridicule the missionary using the European stereotype, shaped by Europeans' fear of the unknown foreigner. They turn the distorted European image of themselves against the missionary in a gesture of defiance. In this scene, Breton not only posits himself as an observer of Carib life; he also intervenes. Yet the intervention fails. It seems, in fact, that it is in the cracks between observation and engagement that we may trace echoes of others. They do not necessarily express agency. Rather these cracks allow for them to emerge and voice a momentary counterpoint.

Scenes like these operate through tensions of power where the threat of losing one's own power and the uncertainty that the other possesses unattainable knowledge are mediated through the evocation of the other's laughter. Mockery entails a particularly interesting scene of enunciation because it entails contact but not necessarily dialogue. It is an expression of social relationships that are not necessarily dictated by mutual understanding and can be pleasant but also disturbing (Dorion 2007, 57). It establishes a disjunctive relationship where the one being mocked does not interact on the same premises as the other interlocutors. Such scenes further transgress the linguistic and include looks, gestures, laughter, and other non-verbal expressions. Moreover, mockery has an open-ended structure, which makes it difficult to control in a narrative. In the travelogues it is framed as a struggle of competing world views, which fundamentally translates into a site for struggle over knowledge. A crucial point here is that mockery does not speak the language of revolt. These scenes

⁵⁷Tíken tíken crácoüia hómain noubára touária chímêpoüi lanúari, cáho bonále, boupou bonale ouéche bonale ouáttè bonale, chíou bonále, *ce que depuis les Sauvages me répétaient souvent imitant sa furie (quoiqu'en riant); ces paroles veulent dire: vite, vite qu'on me le lie crainte qu'il ne m'échappe, que je le mange, tête, épaules, pieds, sa fiente même, que je le broie, que je le réduise en bouillie, et que je l'avale.*

cannot easily be idealized as sites of radical resistance onto which we can project the (white) desire of a free subject overcoming bondage. Like Williard (2021b, 93), I am hesitant to ascribe such heroism to any voices that emerge in these embedded texts. What scenes of mockery privilege are other disrupting perspectives, momentarily talking back or pointing at alternative understandings.

To investigate this further, I will turn to Labat's inclusion of interactions with enslaved peoples. The structure of power dictating these representations are, of course, much more asymmetric than in the case of Breton alone with the Caribs on Dominica. At the same time the relations between enslaved and enslavers were more intimate, revealing other forms of paratopic links. Enslaved peoples' speech is rarely quoted directly in Labat's account, and when we do hear them speak, it is not often in scenes of compassion and pity, as in Du Tertre's and Mongin's writings. Labat does not follow a coded form. He constructs scenes where his narrative voice directs others' speech. The presence of direct discourses thus serves not to represent other persons but to contribute to the construction of the narrator as an astute observer. In fact, this is precisely the objective: Labat needs to construct himself as a dominating narrator both through and because of others' speech. Indirectly, others thus expose the vulnerability inherent in the desire for power.

There is an obsession in Labat's travelogue: he does not like to be fooled or ridiculed by anybody and particularly not by enslaved peoples. This personal sentiment finds resonance in a general imaginary of Black people making fun of whites, which evolves into a trope during the seventeenth century, a trope where control and resistance, power and fear are intertwined. Du Tertre pointed out that diasporic Africans were "big banterers, they bring up the slightest flaws of the French" (1667 t2, 465).⁵⁸ Labat repeats almost the exact words in his account, saying that they are "excessive banterers" who are particularly good at detecting faults in white people and making fun of them between themselves (1722 t4, 172). Commenting on Africans' practice of inventing nicknames often based on the person's weakness, Labat states:

This moniker used among them is a mystery, which is very difficult for whites to penetrate, if not by knowing their language, one discovers it when overhearing them. I have often been surprised by the flaws that they had

⁵⁸ Comme ils sont grands railleurs, ils relevent les moindres défauts de nos François.

noticed and the ways in which they made fun of them: this obliged me to learn the language of the Aradas.⁵⁹ (1722 t4, 173)

Mockery is above all an internal discourse among enslaved persons, which is precisely why it is threatening. The passage hints at a counter-discourse, but Labat is himself excluded from it. Nevertheless, he quotes common expressions that he has overheard: “It’s a poor wretch, who swears like a white, gets drunk like a white, who is a thief like a white, etc.” (1722 t4, 178).⁶⁰ Labat’s explanation for this discursive practice is that they have a “high opinion of themselves”; then he moves on to demonstrate that Blacks are in fact “very simple.” The narrative gives reasons for their behavior but reveals the narrator’s fundamental ignorance: he fills in the blanks to not make it obvious that there are dimensions from which he is excluded. Tellingly, Labat’s motivation for learning “Arada” is to know what is going on between the enslaved peoples at his plantation (1722 t4, 136).

If Labat can show the reader that he controls the enslaved people’s speech, then his authority is underscored. And this is what he seeks to stage in creating domestic scenes of enunciation, where he lets enslaved people speak. As an example of Black peoples’ flaws, he tells about an enslaved boy who works in his house. He much appreciates the boy, citing his intelligence and good manners (1722 t4, 175). When the boy makes a mistake, it is enough to punish him with denigrating words, Labat explains, since he is so proud: “I sometimes told him to try to humiliate him, that he was a poor Negro with no reason.”⁶¹ The adjective “poor” hurts the boy more than anything, and when the boy realizes that Labat’s anger is fake, he says “that only white people are poor and that one never sees black people begging” (175).⁶² Labat lets his reader know that nothing

⁵⁹ Ce sobriquet est parmi eux un mistere, qu’il est bien difficile aux Blancs de penetrer, à moins que sachant leur Langue, on ne le découvre en les entendant se divertir des personnes dont ils parlent par des railleries piquantes, & pour l’ordinaire très justes. J’ai souvent été surpris des défauts qu’ils avoient remarquez, & de la maniere dont ils s’en mocquoient: ce qui m’obligea à apprendre la Langue des Aradas.

⁶⁰ C’est un miserable, qui jure comme un Blanc, qui s’enyvre comme un Blanc, qui est voleur comme un Blanc, etc.

⁶¹ Je lui disois quelque fois, pour tâcher de l’humilier, qu’il étoit un pauvre Negre qui n’avoit point d’esprit.

⁶² Il prenoit la liberté de me dire, qu’il n’y avoit que les Blancs qui fussent pauvres, qu’on ne voyoit point les Negres demander l’aumône.

pleased the boy as much as when a white beggar stopped by the house, and he would immediately inform the missionary. Here he is quoted as saying, “My Father, there is a poor white man at the door.” Labat pretends not to hear just to have the pleasure of listening to the boy saying, “But my Father, there is a poor white man at the door, if you don’t want to give him something, I will give him something, me who is a poor black man” (176).⁶³ The story ends with the words of the boy addressing the white beggar because, Labat writes, “he thought I would hear” and that he would thereby have his revenge for the denigrating words the missionary had said to him. Labat allows the boy to vocalize himself, but the passage builds on Labat’s ability to manipulate and interpret him. The boy only *thinks* he speaks freely and has the room for resistance; in reality Labat masters the scene, provoking certain words and certain actions.

The passage with the boy displays theatrical control, where Labat acts as director. Sometimes he uses his own close relationship to enslaved people to expose the ignorance of white people. At these occasions, it may be well said that Labat’s narrative denounces the reducing gaze of the French, but he only does so in order to enhance his own knowledge and ability to read the enslaved people who surround him. Tellingly, Labat often implies himself in these scenes of interaction. When he discovered a group of enslaved children playing “obscene” games, he ordered the head of his house to whip them. But an older enslaved man interfered and told Labat a morality tale with examples from the plantation: the same way as an apprentice has to learn how to make barrows, the children have to learn how to make babies, the old man argues. Labat first quotes the man in *baragouin*: “‘You have reason,’ he told me, ‘for the barrow maker, but you stupid, for the little kids there why you make beat them’” (1722 t4, 168).⁶⁴ Mimicking *baragouin*, Labat states that he wants to give the reader the soundscape of their “pleasant” and “natural” language (169). However, the old man’s extended reasoning following this quotation is in standard French, as if the initial *baragouin* set the tone but Labat’s prose could not hold it. As soon as another voice emerges from his writing, Labat brings it back under his control by refusing to respond to the arguments given by the man and reducing the quotation to exotica. In Williard’s reading, the

⁶³ Mon Père, il y a à la porte un pauvre Blanc qui demande de l’aumône [...] Mais, Mon Père, me disoit-il, c’est un pauvre Blanc, si vous ne lui voulez rien donner, je vais lui donner quelque chose du mien, moi, qui suis un pauvre Negre.

⁶⁴ Toi tenir esprit, me dit-il, pour Tonnelier, mais toi, bête, pour petites hiches là pourquoi toi faire battre eux.

quotation allows Labat to stage a moralistic missionary stance side by side with a pragmatic slave holder position, both encouraging sexual interaction for profit and discouraging it for moral reasons (2021a, 46). The quotation, sliding from *baragouin* to French, obscures the enslaved man's expression. He articulates his views, and hereby his tongue is linked to *logos*, but the passage underwrites his discourse and shifts to the heterolingual grammar of domination. Thus, it is difficult, as Williard also suggests, to pin down the quote as properly staged by Labat or if it is indeed an intervention to prevent the beating of the children (2021a, 46–47).

Clearly, theatricality is a patent manifestation of power directly linked to the machinery of the plantation. “When I saw our slaves work badly or with negligence,” Labat writes, “I told them that during the time when I was a Nergo, I served my master with much more diligence and good will than they did and that was why I became white. Afterwards I had the pleasure of hearing them discuss the possibility or the impossibility of this metamorphosis” (1722 t4, 177).⁶⁵ The ultimate triumph is when he can observe the effects of his own performance. He becomes director and audience at once, as a libertine voyeur who gets pleasure out of control.

Scenes like this one exhibit the depth and range of the colonial desire for control as it developed in the French Caribbean context through politics of assimilation. Not only do people live in bondage, but they have to submit to the enslavers' language, religion, and cultural practices, meaning that not only their bodies had to be controlled but also their minds. Labat warns that many diasporic Africans keep their “ancient superstition” while seemingly adhering to Catholicism (1722 t4, 132). When he was faced with converted enslaved persons whom he suspects to never have abandoned their original belief, his reaction was to play them back. He converts one man and tells him to hand over his “marmoset,” a small bag containing sacred objects. After a few weeks the man shows up and wants to offer Labat a few hens. Labat wants to pay him, but the man retorts that he's not interested in money but that he could perhaps get his marmoset back. Instead of simply refusing, Labat starts acting to learn more about the man's motives and about the power he bestows upon the object: “in order to know better what he had in his heart, I pretended not to have any

⁶⁵ Quand je voyois nos Negres travailler mal, ou avec negligence, je leur disois que dans le tems que j'étois Negre, je servois mon Maître avec plus de diligence, & de bonne volonté qu'eux, & que c'étoit à cause de cela que j'étois devenu Blanc. J'avois ensuite le plaisir de les entendre se disputer sur la possibilité ou l'impossibilité de cette métamorphose.

problems with giving him what he asked” (1722 t2, 55).⁶⁶ Labat’s tactics were motivated by *libido sciendi*; it was an expanded desire for knowledge, covering not only the ways of the world but the hearts and minds of those who surround him.

Labat’s *libido sciendi* was a desire for complete transparency. Glissant theorizes such transparency as the most corrosive influence of colonial politics and ideology (1997, 190). To claim to fully grasp or understand the other is an exercise of domination and an affirmation of one’s superiority while reducing the other. But this is a double-edged sword. The enslaved peoples’ words are no longer read as direct expressions of their feelings or their character. Rather Labat evokes how they use language for specific purposes. Language becomes a tool for manipulation—speakers do not say what they mean or what they think. Yet, this also implies a recognition of Black peoples’ ability to use language as discourse, like Europeans. The fact that Labat had to stage his control suggests that the structure is underpinned by the fear that there are dimensions of knowledge that escape him.

At one point he claims that all men newly deported from Africa are sorcerers. He strongly advises those who buy enslaved people to bring “someone who speaks their language” in order to thoroughly interview persons before buying them (1722 t4, 136–137). In these situations, when Labat’s linguistic knowledge runs short he has to rely on persons he keeps in bondage. The strategy clearly has its faults but Labat disregards his enslaved subjects’ capacity for solidarity or resistance in this specific context. No doubt because such discussion would undermine his supposedly informed advice. Further, we can note here that the more foreign the people he interacts with were, the more potentially dangerous they became. Labat’s theatre of control produced scales of Blackness, where the potential danger lays with those individuals who had not been subdued to colonial language and culture. Sorcery in particular became a site of Black knowledge in his narrative. An often analyzed passage from the first volume of his *Nouveaux voyages* (Dobie 2010; Garraway 2005; Harrigan 2018; Peabody; Williard 2021a) commenting on sorcery among diasporic Africans is worth revisiting in this regard (1722 t1, 495–499): it tells about a woman at Fonds Saint-Jacques who had fallen ill. One night Labat learned that a sorcerer from another plantation had come to treat

⁶⁶ Afin de connoître mieux ce qu’il avoit dans le cœur, je feignis de n’avoir pas grande difficulté à lui accorder ce qu’il me demandoit.

the woman. Labat went to the woman's cabin, but instead of bursting in to stop the ceremony, he watched from the outside, actively taking the position of a voyeur, observing and controlling the scene. Suddenly something was uttered that made the woman scream and cry. Labat could not hear what was said, nor could he identify who said it. Nonetheless, he took it as his cue to intervene. Pressing the woman to tell him what she heard, he found out that it was the marmoset saying that she would die in four days. Labat severely punished the man—300 lashes—and put chilies and lemon on the wounds, causing additional unimaginable pain. The enslaved peoples at Fonds Saint-Jacques were forced to witness the outrageous violence “trembling and saying that the devil would make me die,” Labat writes (1722 t1, 498).

The sense of the indirect discourse is uncertain: they use a Christian rationale that a man should be punished for his sins, but it remains unclear whether the devil here refers to an African deity or Satan. Labat seems to think that they allude to the marmoset, which would carry powers strong enough to punish the missionary. To demonstrate that he did not fear anything, he crushes the marmoset, observing that it seemed to him that this action reassured the enslaved, here forced to be spectators (498).⁶⁷ But the reflexive form suggests that he is not sure. He cannot fully grasp or interpret their thoughts or their feelings. There are more twists in this story. Labat states that he would have preferred not to destroy the marmoset. He wants to keep it. The reason why remains allusive: did he want it as an artefact, a curiosity, or did he actually believe in its powers, hoping that by keeping it he could use those powers? He concludes the story by observing the “annoying” side of it, namely that the woman did in fact die on the fourth day “either because [the woman's] imagination was hit by the devil's response, or because the devil knew that her malady would take her within this time” (499).⁶⁸ So the passage ends with a hint at Black disturbance of order and justifies abuse to keep the disturbance from turning into revolt. The issue was deceit, which harbored a latent subversive potential not only threatening religious order but also social order and, as a consequence, economic gain.

This story is followed up with an anecdote told to Labat by a Monsieur Vandel about a Black man who had made a walking stick speak. The man

⁶⁷ Il me parut que cela rassura nos Nègres.

⁶⁸ Soit que son imagination eût été frappée par la réponse du Diable, soit que véritablement il eût connu son infirmité la devoit emporter dans ce tems-là.

The resonance of these deviating presences and expressions draws attention toward another linguistic point of entanglement: the knot from which the formation of what Glissant calls a “forced poetics” or a “counter poetics” (1989, 122) emerges, forged out of a situation of extreme limitation, where speakers have a desire to express but neither the language nor the form to articulate the expression. In theorizing such poetics, Glissant traces a counter-genealogy of Creole that breaks with the communicative strand that initially shaped this language by insisting on the “intensity of the scream,” interpreted as meaningless sound but which transformed into a rhythm of language: “This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise” (1989, 124). Glissant describes a process of appropriation, where the reductive representation of enslaved peoples’ speech as childish and simplified is pushed to the extreme by those subjugated to that reductive representation. The complete transparency turns into an “impenetrable block of sound” (124). The move reconfigures Creole from being both a simplified version of French and a tool for communication; Creole, he writes, has as “its origin this kind of conspiracy to conceal meaning” (125). Travel narratives contain echoes of such expressions of anti-enunciation, carrying the seeds of a Creole counter poetics, which break with the clarity of meaning. Here lies the force of other tongues: they make undisclosed experiences resonate without ever being spoken.⁶⁹ Rethinking those expressions as an impact that we cannot entirely grasp, makes for an imaginative, literary, decolonial reading of speech within discourses of total control.

* * *

Through the work of missionaries, France explicitly paired territorial power with writing. While this was happening in the colonies, France certified its cultural control in Europe by elevating its own standardized tongue to becoming the new cosmopolitan language. It is in this context that we must read Glissant’s claim that the French Caribbean Baroque operates through language or *langage* (1989, 128), inscribing domination in peoples’ bodies. In an essay in *Caribbean Discourse* entitled “People and Language,” he writes:

The time for us has come to return to the question of the baroque [...]. In the evolution of our rhetoric, the baroque first appears as the symptom of a deeper inadequacy, being the elaborate ornamentation imposed on the

⁶⁹This interpretation is in line with Williard’s reading of black melancholia (2021b, 96).

French language by our desperate men of letters. [...] But for us it is not a matter today of this kind of excess, which was wrapped around a vacuum. The unconscious striving of baroque rhetoric, in the French colonial world [*dans le monde colonial antillais*], is dogged in its pursuit of the French language by an intensification of the obsession with purity. We will perhaps compromise this language in relationships we might not suspect. 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. The ‘function’ of Creole languages, which must resist the temptation of exclusivity [*la tentation de l’unicité*], manifests itself in this process, far removed from the fascines (linked to fact, fascination) of the fire of the melting-pot. We are also aware of the mysterious realm of the unexpressed, deep in all we say, in the furthest reaches of what we wish to say, and in the pressure to give weight to our actions. (1989, 250)

Throughout centuries of colonization, the Baroque style of flourished and eloquent language developed into an instrument of alienating assimilation—the Antillean would perform their belonging to France by showing their ability to master French language to the point where language becomes exaggerated and Baroque: its will to power inhabits the colonial subjects to the extent that they repeat it, creating an empty expression. Frantz Fanon, too, identifies language as the major vector of French colonialism. To speak, he writes, “means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of civilization” (2008, 2). The Caribbean speaker does not inhabit French. Instead they position themselves to French as the civilizing language meaning that the relationship to this language is alienating, which in turn affects the very expression of that language. To overcome the inferiority complex, which is produced and sustained in the use of the French language, the Caribbean speaker distorts it, exaggerates expressions using “bombastic phrases” (Fanon 2007, 9). What we have is an internalization of the Baroque manifestation of power through language.

Travel writing from the early colonization period allows us to trace how those insidious mechanisms that create the linguistic alienation theorized by Fanon and Glissant take form in the making and unmaking of borders between languages. The fictionalization of reciprocal exchanges, of a more humane version of enslavement, and of amicability, along with the dramatization of certain passages that give the gruesome and brutal history an adventurous and heroic allure, as well as the melodramatic tendencies

evoking pathetic scenes of gratefulness and generosity—all this is rhetoric excess “wrapped around a vacuum.” However, against their own intentions, travel writers also engaged in the plurilingual archipelagic space, working with and against it simultaneously and to different degrees. It is by playing out these tensions in the narratives that these texts testify to the formation of linguistic hierarchies and racial demarcations, which delineate languages on temporal, spatial, and cultural scales. Indigenous languages become “primitive” languages, fixed in what Johannes Fabian famously identified as a “denial of coevalness” (2014, 47), as a present reminiscence of how civilized languages used to be structured. Creole languages become non-languages, seen as simplified versions of other languages, toward which they strive but never catch up. Seventeenth-century travel writing reflects and builds the foundations for these different processes.

Yet while language in the realm of writings from the settlement and early colonization intensifies an obsession with domination, the representations of island society, by means of their obligation to show the archipelagic world, steer away from the obsession of purity that characterized writing in French from France at the time. Inevitably, the plurilingual reality of the Caribbean emerges in the narratives, creating folds within the writing where other languages and discourses pierce the discourse of control. As we have seen in the readings of the travelogues, language borders established by the desire to dominate keep traces of the translingual fluidity they were trying to suppress. The predicament for expressive forms—writing as well as speech—in the early colonial Caribbean is an extreme situation where languages are forced into processual dissolutions and reformations. We find a singular artificial and brutal language in its *statu nascendi* that points forward toward the unfolding of callous global modernity.

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