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Agency via Simulation, Dissimulation, and Rerouting Antagonists of Creole: Marie-Sophie Laborieux as Chameleon

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ABSTRACT:The Caribbean space, moreso, Martinique, creates a tortuous space for individuals, particularly women, who must survive amidst the chokehold of masculinity and the ever-present reality of the colonizer. With an identity from France—French—andfrom the Caribbean—Creole—somewomen have cleverly teetered between their opposing ancestries and cultures in order to survive. This back and forth movement resembles the chameleon colour alternation. A frontal attack will defeat the cause of women in a patriarchal world and, therefore, through simulation, dissimulation and rerouting antagonists of Creole, women have camouflaged their way to survival. Patrick Chamoiseau, prolific Caribbean writer, has given agency to women who seek to survive by identifying this minute conveniently with the Creole cause and the next with the French cause.
KEYWORDS: chameleon, survive

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I. INRODUCTION

In *Texaco*, the author, Chamoiseau,ventriloquises Creole-legitimising battles through Marie-Sophie Laborieux, the protagonist. This paper grapples with the author's anti-*francisation* offensive embedded in Marie-Sophie's struggle to forestall Texaco's demolition. Chamoiseau enacts resistance on a literary battlefield as warrior of the imaginary. Here, securing non-confrontational agency foregrounds several victoriously contested sites. Cham*oiseau*'s alter-ego, Marie-Sophie, perches on a heuristically amassed, decade-heavy experience for a decisive showdown. She redirects the monophonic municipal agent, who harps on about razing Texaco. Her resilience earns her the hypocorism, *femme-à-deux-graines* or the matadora. Indecisive Creole male counterparts cause this 'double-balled' woman to champion Texaco's cause. An archetype of strong female characters in the Antilles and in literature, the term, *femme-matador* [female bullfighter], defines women in conventional, male-dominated roles of politics, economics, and social activism. These resilient women correspond to the Haitian *potomitans*[pillars], whose voice, strength, and skills combat poverty, a lack of education, the oppressive French language and government, and globalisation. Forced to hold sway, Marie-Sophie engages political manoeuvrings or diplomacy under the sway of patriarchy.Swayed another way, given these mountains in her way, with her ruses, she climbs a stair every day.In tandem with the camouflaging chameleon, puns are employed and leftunitalicisedin this paper.

This portion speaks to Marie-Sophie's strategically shifting colours in a Creole and French dialectic context. Ancestral knowledge and tradition, viz., her father's stories and the invaluable lessons of indirection mined from the Mentoh, enrich her diplomatic trove, and encourage ruse in Texaco's construction. The Creole woman simulates and customises African ancestral know-how, thus evoking the colour-mimicking chameleon. While Africanity boosts Marie-Sophie's enterprise, this injection is not enough for a Creole patient who shares French ancestry. So, she wraps herself in the French flag today and the African flag tomorrow, indispensable ensigns to her Creoleness. Although the author-character balance tips in favour of character in this chapter, language as Texaco's heaviest thematic contender still surfaces in discussing Marie-Sophie's Frenchness and Creoleness. Michaels proclaims: "The novel returns *obsessively* to the power, beauty, frustrations and extreme political importance of language… Marie-Sophie's living word is the heart of the novel. And it is she who raises the book's central thematic preoccupation, which is language" (italics mine) ("Mother Tongues"). Hence, to go through her ups and downs, she goes straight up and down the French and Creole streets.

As chameleon reroutes enemy after enemy, Marie-Sophie redirects four formidable foes of Creole: Mano-Castrador, Ti-Cirique, Césaire, and the town planner. She bends them for Creole intents and purposes. Naturally, Glissant's detour, which can take the form of conscious ruse (*DA*137), grounds this chapter, while Bhabha's mimicry anchors chameleon simulation. Marie-Sophie's Texaco-saving project projects survival as key chameleonic attribute: "Even the colours of a chameleon are…for survival," restates the African proverb. Violently transplanting people to a foreign Caribbean context forces them to survive in a process of creolisation or *Relation.* In Marie-Sophie's case, African and French principles that constitute her identity protect her: "Creole orality…contains a whole system of counter-values, a counterculture…[that] witnesses ordinary genius

applied to resistance [and] devoted to survival" (895). In her sojourn, she creates a tug-o-war between two of her enemies, much as chameleon in *Crafty Chameleon* pits two of his formidable foes against each other. This other lizard tail, *Chameleon and Stork*, stands out as chameleon attributes his teetering to constantly testing earth's solidness.

Figuratively, Marie-Sophie mirrors chameleon by avoiding missteps, while standing on good ground and planting her feet in her African and French ancestries. She pulls on Africa through her father, Esternome, who, before he passes, passes on valuable ancestral heritage through magical stories she later investigates. Magical realism furnishes alternate ways of knowing outside official history. Oona Patrick comments on this leitmotif in *Texaco*: "Using magical realism is the only way this story could be told in full, natural because the magic emanates from an existing culture's beliefs" ("Margin"). For Patrick, Chamoiseau'sMentoh exemplifies the *reel merveilleux.* TheMentoh emerges in three primary scenes: he influences Esternome and the slaves, oversees Marie-Sophie's apprenticeship, and directs villagers to Marie-Sophie when the city planner arrives. She understudies the magician and later reproduces his and Esternome's African stratagems. After Esternome dies, Marie-Sophie does housekeeping from family to family in City, which opens up her French culture to her. Discussing Marie-Sophie's maturation in relation to Mentoan and French education resonates with Postnegritude's Caribbean *bildungsroman*. *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, a subset of this genre, attributes José's survival, like Marie-Sophie's, to European and African education.

II. CHAMELEON GIVES BIRTH TO CHAMELEON: SIMULATION

A chameleon of sorts, the Mentoh teaches his apprentice, Marie-Sophie, stratagems she later reproduces. After the apprenticeship, for some reason, the Mentoh turns into a dummy. Notwithstanding, she calls these lessons learned from him "unesorte de reference dans ma vie" (204). Marie-Sophie is to Mentoh what chameleon is to Kalimombe. This type of chameleon plunges earthbound, bursts open to produce other chameleons that continue resistance, then dies, much like "wen banana tree waanded, it shoot" [When the banana frond wants to die, it sends out a sprout]. The Kalimombe fits like a charm in Postnegritude, Negritude's progeny. In fact, demoting the Mentoh after the traineeship prefigures Postnegritude's rise and Negritude's fall. Paradoxically, as Kalimombe's resistance lives on in chameleon, Negritude lives on,*in perpetuam memoriam*, in Postnegritude: "Epigones of Césaire, we displayed a committed writing, committed to the anticolonialist struggle" (889). Marie-Sophie grasps how passive Mentoh resistance through dissembling incapacitates a repressive plantation system. The grizzled men emblematise non-aggression. Esternomeinitially apprises Marie-Sophie of the Mentoh. One day, in the back of the plantation, Esternome espies a Mentoh standing where the "earth rolls up before plunging into a hill under a knot of thickets" (38). The Mentoh's inaccessibility recalls Confiant's representation of the *quimboiseur*, at once endearing to Adelise's mother while alienating the child. Esternome, a Negro, forges close ties with the African necromancer, calling him "son mentoh," a guardian-like angel. Esternome tells Marie-Sophie how the Mentoh's "invisible ways" tell on slaves. The slaves, like termites, live in the structure they undermine. The slaves' boss, the Mentoh, the queen ant that one never sees working, sends out signals that effortlessly spread in the eusocial framework.

That words have power is a lesson Esternome learns and relays to Marie-Sophie. Through her father's experience with the Mentoh, Marie-Sophie appreciates word power, which she later reproduces to found Texaco. Mentohs say the word, and it is done! Esternome, in recounting slave success on the plantation to Marie-Sophie, three times states: "The men of strength would *say*" [italics mine] (35). The first saying: "*No children born in chains*"[italics in text] induces stillbirths and abortions to cripple the plantation indirectly. The second utterance: "*No harvest*," sparks plantation fires, devastates crops, and delays reaping, thus allowing rats to gnaw cane roots and dryness to burn the cane, thereby cutting profitability. Thirdly, "*no strength to slavery*" from the men of strength triggers starvation and poisoning of animals; the carcass pile-up blocks the mills and obstructs the delivery of bagasse. In effect, the effete-looking men with the power of the spoken word render plantation might effete before cunning.

Mentohs and slaves rely on Creole language for camouflage and resistance. Glissant postulates in *Caribbean Discourse* that language galvanises slaves against colonialist intrusion. Generally, where slaves maintain their indigenous language, which the coloniser finds unintelligible, they receive natural protection. However, in the Caribbean, both master and slave have access to Creole. To elude the coloniser's comprehension, slaves developed a particular brand of Creole, "which the master did not understand but did not realize that he did not understand" (Britton 25). Creole's basic structure boasts camouflage. The loud, jerky, accelerated delivery secretly communicates meaning, though sounding meaningless and gibberish. Glissant finds that "Creole is originally a kind of conspiracy that concealed itself by its public and open expression…this form of non-sense…. could conceal and reveal at the same time a hidden meaning" (124-5). Understandably, the Mentoh misleads with speech that wobbles between clarity and non-clarity. Mentohscommunicate intelligibly with slaves, and unintelligibly with the master. Esternome relates to Marie-Sophie that masters cannot relate to

the Mentoh's different Creole sound and speed: "The béké spoke the tongue, the Mentohkneaded it" (54). Kneading, as with dough, renders each ingredient indecipherable or opaque.[1]

A seeming nebbish, the Mentoh continually wreaks havoc. Entrusted with husbandry because of this docile appearance, Mentohs undermine plantation profitability.Esternome continues his description of the Mentoh as "un vieuxnègre de terre, nitrès fort nitrès grand," who never suffers from the whip. Why, helivesamong men "sans bruit et sans odeur, en façons d'invisibles" (63). Michaels considers unnerving the notion of functioning imperceptibly, since one does not necessarily 'see' the Mentohs, despite their physical presence. The sorcerer becomes an occult duality, an African depicted in European language. The complex idea encompasses bilocation; the Mentoh is at once at work and with his lover, yet the overseer never sees. The Creole the Mentoh speaks to his lover differs from conversations with his master. The Mentoh resembles the powerful Legbá known for masking in rags and negotiating languages to enable border crossings. The Mentohs, like Vodou's great *loa*elocutioner, for their untiring resistance and trickery, appear as if they don't age in their dotage.

Marie-Sophie remarks how Esternome profits from the Mentoh's words. After seeing this "remnant of humanity," Esternome becomes "a believer in devilries"; he now starts viewing the wind, the light, and the blades of shadow as "sanctuaries of invisible power" (64). Secondly, theMentoh instructs Esternome to establish Noutéka, a free village, way up in the hills. The *nous*-emphasisingNoustéka, "we used to," relies on ancestral past: "C'étaitunesorte de *nous*magique." EsternomedescribesNoutéka as having "meaning of one faith for many" (122). Subsequent generations, through memory retrieval, model Noutéka's concept. Sadly, the magical Noutéka collapses. Though excellently grounded by'nous,'Noutéka acts independently of City, thus anchoring the village on shaky grounds. Marie-Sophie now learns that "il n'y a pas de *hors*-Ville"—to customise Derrida's statement, and that Creole success requires input from Africa and Europe alike.

The Mentoh survives in a contradictory space. Tantalised by her father's fabulous stories, Marie-Sophie seeks out the sorcerer for advice and mentohship. Her Dominican Creole brothers would likely tell her: "El que anda con perro a ladraraprende." After a lengthy search, she locates the dog sorcerer, Papa Totone, among dense vegetation. His crate-wood-made hutch seems to belong to another time. She cries out to him, and he meets her. He lives outdoors under the great trees, rocks, and the bottom of the waterfall. He eats cray fish and lapia fish cooked over four rocks amidst ferns, rivers, and watergrass. She becomes his novitiate and never experiences solitude in this abandonment. He assigns her daily tasks, which she willingly executes. Day in, day out, she imitates his harmony with thebiota, falling into the water's rhythm, the barks' texture, the birds' landing on the ground, falling with the mangoes, assimilating the grunting of pigs, and the hens' wings flapping. These seeming odds and ends later cause her to progress in leaps and bounds.

In this organic context, City's odious oil odour sticks out like a sore thumb to point out dialectics at work: "Papa Totone seemed to have accepted that strangeness. City whirred around but he didn't' seem to hear it" (289). Yet, Papa Totone, fully conscious of City's fetor, insists that Marie-Sophie "feel the odour to see that City is really alive" (289). Though Chamoiseau portrays a difficult-to-access African, the Creolist underscores the value of Mentoan wisdom, a metaphor for Negritude, to Marie-Sophie. While the Creolists generally limn an alienating Africanity, *Éloge* does instance Césaire's internal Caribbean focus: "African tropism did not prevent Césaire from very deeply embedding himself in the Caribbean ecology and referential space" (889). Were one to read Césaire's *Et les chiens se taisaient*, one would observe a language "more open than generally thought to the Creole emanations of these native depths" (889).

The Mentoh intimates the power of language to Marie-Sophie. As with Esternome, the Mentoh depicts the spoken word as power to the Creole woman. She calls him Papa Totone, thus cementing filial ties. Curious about Esternome's mystical depictions of the Mentoh, Marie-Sophie questions the Mentoh about having supposed powers. The teacher's strange gaze at her stupid ask invokes temporary madness in her (290). He considers himself ordinary and stresses, as the greatest form of resistance, the Word. This word is*spoken language*: "You are looking for a Mentoh. No Mentoh here. The Word! …What's a Mentoh? Nothing" (291-292). By believing in "Mentoh," Esternome empowers a word the Mentoh disempowers with a different notion of power, *la parole*. Stated otherwise, the Creole language as inspiration outweighs any Mentoh power. Papa Totone suggests that power implicit in language surpasses physical combat. He explainsthisidea to Marie-Sophie: "Une parole est tombée dans l'oreille de ton Esternome. Une parole l'a porté. C'est venu *La Parole*... Il peut tout faire. C'est plus que Force" (373-4). Marie-Sophie scampers off with the omnipotent *parole* to combat forces of modernisation.

The Mentohesteems physiological senses that later aid the Creole woman. He focuses on emotions and individual perceptions. Standing with her alfresco, he remarks the petroleum-seasoned air as integral to Texaco's existence. Marie-Sophie nowbecomesconscious of her dual status: "L'odeur de la gazoline me fit

[1] In Jamaica, while English foreigners can understand the local talk, locals can talk in a Creole that foreignerscannot understand.

ouvrir les yeux… Cette odeur ne devait jamais plus disparaître de ma vie" (315). He exposes her to the interplay of the physicalsenses; occasionally, opthalmoceptionsupplantsolfacoception in reading City: "Parfois, aujourd'hui encore, il m'arrive de fermer les yeux à fin de retrouver cette odeur composite qui pour moi nomme l'En-ville…" (315). The Mentohalso points Marie-Sophie beyondsuperficialsight: "Sens ça, Marie-Sophie, sens ça, l'En-Ville sent comme une bête, ferme les yeux pour comprendre" (316). Tactioceptionmaycomplementolfacoception: "Il répétait juste sens-le Marie-Sophie, sens-le pour voir qu'il vit vraiment…" (316). In essence, senses recapture Martinican essence, past and present. Marie-Sophie later brings past efficient methods to bear upon current reality. For her, "di same knife weh stick sheep can stick goat."

III. MARIE-SOPHIE'S MENTOAN SIMULATION

Marie-Sophie reproduces her father's building skills and 'practicalises' Mentoan instruction to build a Creole town after locating a secret name. Along with her bits and pieces, she takes Papa Tone's machete and advice, then leaves him for good, chops some bamboos, and drags them onto the oil company's domain to erect the first hutch. Walking on Texaco may appear small for a Creole person, but these steps seem great for the Creole community. On the slope, "like my Esternome had taught me, she plants the four bamboo sticks wrapped with canvas" (297). Bit by bit, her efforts inspire a whole settlement scattered here and there. As Esternome recalls the rune caller's call to build Noutéka, Marie-Sophie's remembers Papa Totone's words to adopt a secret name and build a town. She "bring[s] up one of Papa Totone's demands [:] I named myself a secret name. It came to my mind with natural simplicity" (296).The secret name constitutes "a bit of the Word" that lends her a life time of inner strength. She confesses thatthesewordsfrom the Mentoh"m'habitèrent sans même que je le sache, et sans même que je les comprenne" (296). In *Éloge*, Chamoiseau reveals the partial, yet important, knowledge in men like Esternome and the Mentoh. For the Creolists, memory flutters about in "the fragments of [these] old black people's heads" (896). By enjoining Marie-Sophie to nominate a secret name that bestows mythical identity in the fight for Texaco, the Mentoh names one of Creole's oldest weapons, secrecy, which derives from the Martinican Creole word, *misté*(Mondesir 159). Comparably, when the biblical Manoah, Samson's father, inquires of an angel about the angel's name, the creature retorts: "Why askest thou thus my name when it is a secret?" *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* declares that when Manoah asks for angelic instruction in his duty, he gets ready advice, but "there are secret things in this world which belongs not to us, of which we must be quite contented to be ignorant." Secrecy, a weapon of slaves, excludes and occults, and now becomes Marie-Sophie's weapon-in-chief to erect Texaco right under *béké's* nose. Similarly, in *The Color of the Chameleon*, secrecy becomes Stamenov's prime weapon in his system of subversive espionage against the government. Secrecy also exemplifies*opacité*, a denseness that deters the dominant from decoding the doings of the dominated. "E mistikrik," interrupts the riddle challenger, "What can you keep but cannot share, but once you share, you cannot keep."[2]

As the Mentoh-inspired Noutéka (we used to) celebrates *un esprit de corps*, the Mentoh-inspired Texaco embodies Texaco (local town) and Texaco (international oil giant),[3] thereby capturing Martinique's contradictory reality. Kimberley Bowman's thesisidentifies secrecy, a Mentoh attribute, as self-empowerment: "Moreover, each of these acts bespeak [*sic*] a self-proclaimed human existence: the self-given name; the self-chosen place on unused land; the self-built hutch… which in turn was a testimony of a self-declared existence with City" (51). Each of these acts correctly bespeaks a claim to ancestral *savoire-faire* as seen with Esternome's transferral of Noutéka's building skills to his daughter. These techniques give Marie-Sophie a foundational claim to humanity, impressing upon her the importance in owning a roof.

As the Mentoh rallies slaves, Marie-Sophie mobilises the people's collective will. Texaco, her secret name, fuses personal will with collective spirit to strengthen community. At different points in the narrative, the one-woman conglomerate overlaps *moi*/*ma*/*mon* with *nous*. She speaks of "notre cause" and "ma vie" (41) in one breath. Elsewhere, sheequates*moi* and *nous*: "Ce fut bon pour moi—et 'moi' c'est comme dire 'nous'" (402). When the twotermsdiffer, the narrative distinguishesher as Texaco'sfounder: "Mon intérêt pour le monde se résumait à Texaco, mon œuvre, notre quartier, notre champs de bataille et de résistance" (39). When the Creole leader speaks of "mescompagnons de lutte" (387), she mirrors chameleon in Oinya's*Hyena Meets his Waterloo*. There, in this *Jungle Games Book 1*, the lizard leads a team of animals to emerge leader of the jungle. Clearly, under the watch of chameleon's self-willed and selfish nemeses, Anansi and Rabbit, the community would speedily become entangled, unable to make progress. The chameleon-recalling woman, unlike Arachnid and Lagomorph, champions the inalienable right of all, including squatters, to life. Unquestionable, the Creole woman holds "these truths to be self-evident and undeniable that all men…" Despite suffering raids on and off, the phlegmatic people, convinced of human rights, re-establish their shanty dwellings, always thankful to Marie-Sophie for breaking ground.

[2]A secret.

[3]See definition of 'Texaco' in chapter 4, par. 1.

With deeper physiological senses, developed from interacting with Esternome and Papa Totone, Marie-Sophie embraces City as part of Creole reality. After leaving the Mentoh and setting up Texaco, she effortlessly inhales the once repugnant odour to become one with City's signature gasoline smell: "I began to listen to City, to better fill myself with the gasoline smell" (288). Her revelation appears surprising in light of her initial failure to understand the Mentoh's immunity to the gasoline. The situation summons Piglet that oinks to Hog: "Mama, Why yuhmout so long?" Sow grunts: "Neva mine mi dear son, yuh a grow an learn, yuh a go fine out." Marie-Sophie learns to value her big snout, one capable of processing different smells that reflect her reality. She enjoys the scentsation as the once odious wind now blows sweetly in her nostrils. Creole's air and City's gas smell combine to define the dialectic nature of both name and location of Texaco. She stands on Texaco as the winds hem in the gasoline exhalations, while picking up the scent of the soil to make the place magical. She remains until Sunday, the new and first day of the week that signals the dawn of a modern era in Creole history.

That the diminutive sorcerer diminuendoes foreshadows a diminishing Africanity. After setting up Texaco, Marie-Sophie again seeks out the Mentoh; surprisingly, she only feels the presence of the great magician buried in a shadow. He now becomes "a distant horizon" (294). Chamoiseau, in consonance with *Créolité*, allows the magician to help Marie-Sophie kick-start Texaco, thereby shaking the hand of Césaire's Negritude for initialising Creoleness. But "since di same handatbaya/ cuddle pickney is di same handat beet pickney," the Creolists seek to kick out Césaire from their movement.

Marie-Sophie's single hutch mushrooms with her Mentoh-inspiring word. After setting up her hutch with the bamboos, the hutch attracts other hutches as word about the place spreads gangrenously, reminiscent of the Mentoh's words that spread effortlessly when he says the word. Marie-Sophie admits: "What's more I went around saying it [that she is building a hutch] everywhere, along the warehouses where I did my odd jobs, hoping to get a few people" (295). The result—a land bestrewn with hovels—leaves a sordid taste in City's mouth as more country folk flock the adjacent slum. She enlists the support of Creole comrades—Carlo, Pa Soltène, and others—to erect otherTexacoan hutches. Something as basic as word of mouth carries such power in the Creole cosmos. "Yuhtel Tara an Tara tel Tara," says the Creole apophthegm. Marie-Sophie, Texaco's Tara, esteems the slum as "her Creole anchor in City [which] signals her entering an old struggle for survival" (297). Marie-Sophie's old struggle re-emerges with a two-fold newness in Texaco. Texaco's newness features the town's recent construction and the novel survival techniques of countryside-abandoning inhabitants. Texaco copies Noutéka, making Noutéka a rebranded Texaco. Marie-Sophie explains to the town agent that a transferal of spirit from Noutéka accounts for Texaco's success. Afteradmitting to bringing the countryside to Texaco, sheadds: "Nous nouscomportonscommedanscette vie du Noutéka des mornes que mon Esternomem'avaitlonguementdécrite" (317). However, Texaco's members on the periphery of Fort-de-France must also adjust to laws, urban codes, neighbour relations, and construction guidelines (406). Together, the efforts of Marie-Sophie and her people comprise un "espacecréole de solidaritésneuves" (410). Rural-turned-urban folk appropriate expert knowledge, namely, building and cultivation know-how, in addition to resourcefulness and cunning. The Creole woman, Marie-Sophie, ends up living the culture in agriculture, much as she does under Mentoan tutelage. Truth be told, you can take the Creole out of the countryside, but you cannot take the countryside out of the Creole. And with City nearby, she develops an even stronger gumption to survive. To illustrate, when the scarcity of basic goods—oil, salt, vegetables, matches, rice, salted meat, soap, garlic, and shoes—hits City, causing City folk to buckle under pressure, Marie-Sophie rides the waves. For example, when she lights fire, she ensures it keeps aglow because of the scarcity of matches; she makes candles with butter from cocoa; she washes her linen with a special foaming plant; she learns to track down crayfish under stones, to trap possum, and to do two things at once, that is to say, putting a rock to keep her space in the ration lines to attend to other things and return (238). The female autoshediastsquarely ascribes success to Esternome, Noutéka's founder: "The art of surviving which my Esternome had transmitted to me in veiled words, allowed me to hang in there without too much damage" (238). For a fact, *ichtig pa kafèt san grif*[Tiger babies are not born without claws]. Put in context, children imitate parents.

Marie-Sophie patterns Noutéka's open-space, nature-friendly concept. In following Noutéka that capitalises on lunar seasons and the sea breeze,Texacoans implement a similar meteorological system to ensure that Texaco battens down the hatches. For example, those who build in Texaco on the slopes, like Noutéka's hills opposite the sea, conveniently get the sun in front, behind the canvas windows. Otherwise, "the solar system could have roasted them but the constant shower of the alizés would come to refresh them. And we had learned donkey years ago, to pay attention to the winds like the Caribs" (318). So, the hutches do not wear under the weather; instead, they wear under the weather. The *alizés*, French name for moisture-laden trade winds, blow life-giving air, healing the pain of Texaco's arid plains. Historically, the Caribs, from whom comes 'Caribbean,' relied on these winds for boat-hunting expeditions. In the novel, the powerful baton of knowledge moves from the Caribs to Noutéka's people to Marie-Sophie, who instructs Texacoans to make holes, dormer

windows, and grids for fresh air from the sea breeze. Their space-maximising roofing technique and tile-making from plants cement an unbreakable relaytionship with her troglodytic ancestors (42). The Creole woman thus succeeds in making her network work to create her net worth.

Texaco's house frames model Noutéka's resistant structures. Both villages appreciate the disadvantages of huge rock structures. Constant municipality-inspired demolitions rivet home that bigger buildings crash harder. The converse holds that lighter structures occasion less loss, thus increasing the likelihood of reconstruction: "Our light house frames (tested in the Noutéka of the hills) allowed us to hook on to the most extreme points of the cliff" (318). The inhabitants in these hutches that sell for a song compare to Turtle, who "no want trouble, so him walk wid him house pon him back" [Always prepare for disappointments]. Prudently, these Texacoan Tortoises, in always having their roofs on their backs, become no different from the wise man who builds his house upon the rocks. Marie-Sophie, Texaco's wise woman and female copycat, luxuriates in ventilation of hanging hutches and the panoramic opening to the sky and sea. This ventilation tempers the claustrophobia of Texaco's huts. Not learnt *ab ovo*, her building techniques constitute steps back in time: "We knew how to do things like that since a cartload of time ago" (318). Since the more you take the more you leave behind, steps powerfully link past to present, and allow Marie-Sophie to find her feet in building Texaco. Sure be it that "Scientia potential est." As if acting on the authority of this powerful statement, Marie-Sophie, like Mo Tejani's protagonist in *A Chameleon's Tale* (2006), survives through amassing, copying, and skilfully applying knowledge.

What is more, Texaco patterns Noutéka's no-waste-of-space policy (318). Maximising on land space enhances survival on the small island. Practically, "every last centimeter was good for something" in Texaco (318). They build on a first-come, first-serve basis. Marie-Sophie cites Creole proverbs to regulate order: "The ox at the head drinks the clear water." Before ending this proverb, she cites another, explicating why Ox still needs to show neighbourliness: "For he who sows well, harvests well… Each hutch, day after day, supported the other and so on" (319). Texaco's imitation of Noutéka exemplifies Creolist ideology of celebrating nostalgia. This journey is, however, no blind joy ride oblivious to ancestral stumbling blocks. Reasonably, rather than copying Noutéka lock, stock, and barrel, Marie-Sophielearns from the missteps of Noutéka's shaky, independent foundation. In this way, she walks in the steps of chameleon wary of the semi-solid earth. *Éloge*praises a similar heuristic process: "Creole express[es] a kaleidoscopic totality…enriched by all kinds of mistakes" (892). Chalk it up to experience, Noutéka's crimson-coloured blunder now makes Texaco's path as white as chalk. Texaco's founder, ever aware of Noutéka, lives the I-am-because-you-are and the you-are-because-I-am mantras that favour imitating the good and learning from the bad.

Expressed in terms of an antigram, Marie-Sophie 'unites' with City where Noutéka 'unties' itself. One distinctly sees both slavery and emancipation as creators of class distinctions, which Marie-Sophie lets remain. She respects the Martinican proverb: "Chouvalrétténenzécurie, milettnensavane" [The horse remains in the stable, the mule in the field]. Neighed differently, each one must satisfy with his own station. Here, the mule represents the slave; the horse signifies the master or overseer. Like a mule, she rides on City, setting up Texaco's stable right beside City, thereby stubbornly refusing to gallop in Noutéka'sindependent steps. One day, as she stands on Texaco, reflecting, she reveals the importance of being nearby City: "Citywas the pedestal of the rare thing with better life… we shoved our way about next to City, holding on to it by its thousand survival cracks" (316). Many Texacoans work in City, drawing on plantation survival skills. Women serve as matrons, cooks, laundresses, seamstresses, linen maids, and vendors; and the men become barrel makers, carpenters, blacksmiths, locksmiths, cart drivers, bakers, and masons.

Marie-Sophie's reliance on the past serves to trope Chamoiseau's constant preoccupation with the plantation, the past, and orality. *Éloge*, which defines the plantation as the mother of *Créolité*, authorises him to treat culture as link between past and present. However, reverting to the past "should not be considered in a backward mode of nostalgic stagnation, through backward leaps. To return to [the past], yes, first in order to restore this cultural continuity… without which it is difficult for collective identity to take shape" (895). Like *LaRue Cases-Nègres*, many novels of the Creolists surround plantation Martinique, a trope for "remembering the lost and emphatically local past" (895). Notwithstanding *Éloge's* plea that reverting to the past does not equate to living in the past, Burton brands *Éloge* as a panegyric on the plantation, and scolds the Creolists for pastifying or museumifyingMartinican reality. Chamoiseau's*aide-mémoire—*avisual stimulus that reconnects one with the past—through Marie-Sophie's stellar memory performance is, in Burton's view, exactly that, a memory aide for failing memory. McCusker, in the same hearing, criticises Chamoiseau and Confiant for privileging "la memoire vraie," which promotes "nostalgic and romantic attachment to an authentic and idealized past" (78).

Regardless of these misgivings, this research relies on oscillating between past and present to represent chameleon teetering. The Malagasy proverb states exactly whatChamoiseauaccomplishes through Marie-Sophie's reliance on the past: "Behave like a chameleon: look forward but observe behind." Burton's concern is that Chamoiseau's*chef-d'œuvre*, *Texaco*, which chronicles a century of history ending in the 1980s, does not

fully capture Martinique's aroma. In other words, despite Martinique's remarkable technological transformation since the 1960s, *Texaco* remains in a reductive, retrospective narrative perspective. To potentially rid *Créolité* of this "nostalgic essentialism," Burton proposes an ecological model that focuses on the political, historical, and cultural realities in the broader Caribbean (from Cuba to Trinidad to Suriname) (24-25). When Glissant acknowledges Brathwaite and Walcott in *Poétique de la Relation*, he is essentially spearheading this pan-Caribbean charge that transcends languages and cultures to dialogue with other Antillean luminaries. This template from Glissant could reconcile the Creolists' belabouring of Martinican modernity as one "stricken with exteriority" (886). So, as times passes, finding ways past the past could encourage a cosmopolitan focus among the Creolists.

Despite colonisation's yoke on Martinique, *Créolité*generally paints the past positively. In accentuating the processual importance of the plantation, the Creolists depict French Antillean plantations as relatively 'gentle' institutions in the wider Caribbean context. In this context, masters and slaves work side by side, suffering the deprivations of displacement, while they engage in interculturation. *Lettrescréoles*, for example, displaces "harsh" slavery onto other colonisers, like the Spanish, English, and Dutch (40-1), thus suggesting a more positive contribution of French planters than previous Postnegritude writers.

IV. CONCLUSION

In addition to surviving off simulating African knowledge, Marie-Sophie accesses Frenchness for greater agency. On a basic level, the figure of the Creole Martinican, comprised of Africanity and Frenchness, comprises a double. This allows her to move between languages for agency. In his research into Creole identity in the French Caribbean novel, Murdoch addresses crucial characteristics of "doubling, disjuncture, and difference…the doubleness of the creole figure" (3). Correspondingly, in assessing *Créolité's* assessment of slavery, critic, Marie-Jose N'Zengou-Tayo, emphasises this double identity. According to her, the Creolists, rather than stressing colonial stressors, stress "a survival behaviour based on a double discourse" (177). In Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluieet vent* that *In Praise* praises, Reine-san-nom, Télumée's grandmother, suggests that Télumée, the protagonist, becomes a double-sided drum to deal with white employers. The novel shows how *Créolité*, like *Antillanité*, rejects "African lineage as the sole ontological line for the people of the region" (Priam 81).

Characters, like Marie-Sophie, have mastered the art of survival, by drawing upon her contradictory ancestry and using them to her benefit, a tool available to people, especially women, oppressed across the world. Simulation has always been at the heart of survival in the Caribbean, but the simulation, as carried out by Marie-Sophie and her Creole agents, is a type tailor-made, one that mimics yet, at the same time, maintains an identity of its own.

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