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INTRODUCTION

Little emblem of Africa and of its diaspora located within the blue Caribbean sea, Haiti is at the same time an epic and tragic symbol of liberty, turmoil, bravery and black emancipation. It is in 1804 that the first country birthed of the successful revolution of black slaves, gained independence from its European colonizers, in this case the metropolis of France. Haiti's fight for freedom initially came under the stewardship of leaders such as Toussaint Louverture, the great tactician who famously led the 1791 Haitian Revolution, Jean-Jacques Dessalines the first head of state of a free Haitian Republic until his assassination in 1806, and Henry Christophe the "constructor" King, (who served as general under Toussaint Louverture and reigned in the northern kingdom (from 1811) until his tragic demise by suicide in 1820). The island with its eventful past has inspired artists and writers well beyond Haitian frontiers including one of the greatest poets of French and Francophone literature, the Martinican playwright, essayist and politician Aimé Césaire.

The Tragedy of King Christophe was written in 1963, and forms part of a trilogy of plays written by Césaire; along with *A Season in Congo* (1966) and *A Tempest* (1969). It must be noted that these three political plays emphasize the problematics of Blacks within the colonial and / or postcolonial environment, ranging from the Caribbean region, Africa, and America respectively. In an interview with K. Chraïbi about Haiti's importance in particular, Césaire remarked: "I was fascinated by Haiti, because it is a sort of "magnifying eye" for all the Antilles, and for Africa as well, and by studying the history of Haiti, one can understand all the problems of the Third World." (Césaire "Le Roi Christophe de Haïti: « On nous vola nos noms »") Although not directly meant to be a didactic play as asserted by the playwright,



the focus of this study, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, ultimately traces the rise and fall of Haiti's first and only king, at the dawn of the 19th century. Considered Césaire's theatrical masterpiece, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* was first performed in Salzburg on the 4th of August 1964, and pays tribute to Haiti's early post-colonial dilemma: assassinations, exploitations, civil unrest, destruction of tangible resources such as cotton plantations and the ensuing economic debt.

In Césaire's own words, Haiti represents "Negritude-in-action. Yes, Negritude in action. Haiti is the country where Negro people stood up for the first time, affirming their determination to shape a new world, a free world." (Césaire 1967: 29). Such was, and continues to be Haiti's plight for successful self-governance, after the residual traces of slavery and colonialization continue to produce after-effects such as: poverty, dependency, under-development and cultural alienation. Not without his selection of critics, one scholar states; "the concept of Negritude, revolutionary within the years 1940-1950 is today only fit for the museum of literature." (qtd. in Irele 84). One may however argue that Césaire's Négritude movement continues to remain relevant in the 21st century, especially with regards to the "Black Lives Matter" movement in the United States and the continued segregation between America's White and Black populations along racial lines. In this thesis, I contend that Césaire utilizes his Haitian play as a mirror, which allows its audience to see the problems of Blacks in the postcolonial environment.

Rationale

This thesis seeks to add to the body of work presently written on *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, namely those which examine the didactics, or as Aimé Césaire himself states,



lessons which can be learnt from the play. Notwithstanding the excess of writing on the central themes and motifs, my thesis aims to fill a scholarly gap related to a few of the teachings, implicitly rather than explicitly embedded in his theatrical masterpiece: (*The Tragedy of King Christophe*). Moreover, Hunt Hawkins exclaims: “Césaire obviously chose to portray the difficulties following Haitian independence because of their similarity to problems involved in the ongoing decolonialization of Africa at the time the play was published in 1963. Thus, in dramatizing Christophe's unfortunate rule, Césaire's purpose was at once didactic and hortatory.” (Hawkins 1986: 145).

Parameters

Attention has been turned to online repositories for the collection of scholarly material which have aided in my understanding of the play and the composition of my thesis, “Examining the didactics of Aimé Césaire’s *The Tragedy of King Christophe*”. The important parameters considered included: who writes what to whom, and for what purpose? Césaire’s contribution as a post-colonial statesman and writer, uses an example of Haiti’s tragic past in order to deliver a warning to Third World citizens, many of them yet oppressed by neo-colonial habits and structures of governance. Césaire instructs both leaders and masses about the dangers of absolute power, colonial mimicry and eurocentrism. Through their shared knowledge of the past humiliations of slavery and before it, the slave trade, both the writer and his audience create an open space for instruction and dialogue of Africans, the African diaspora and also other oppressed peoples around the world who had been previously subjected to European domination due to their socio-cultural, “assimilationist” upbringing.



Methodology

The thesis was approached using postcolonial theory as an angle of examination, as well as through a deconstruction of central issues I found to be highlighted by the playwright himself. According to Savrina Chinien: “This (postcolonial) theory intends to take as its object of study the link – often symbolic or material and not fantasized – that the ex-colonized maintain with their own traumatic past.” (Chinien 2008: 2). It analyses the social, cultural, economic and political aftereffects of colonialism, and critiques the way newly liberated countries act (and develop) following national independence. “Postcolonial critique focuses on forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world: the politics of anticolonialism and neo-colonialism, race, gender, nationalism, class and ethnicities define its terrain.” (Young, 2001). Additionally, reference to key texts most notably Aimé Césaire’s prior works, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (considered by many critics as his manifesto of Negritude), *Discourse on Colonialism* (his severe disapproval of colonialism and capitalism over the (Blacks and / “Other”) proletariat, and *Discourse on Négritude*, have helped cement critical lessons (to be further discussed) emerging from Aimé Césaire’s play *The Tragedy of King Christophe*.

Chapter Outline

In the introduction, I have examined the socio-political context of post-independent Haiti and in the Literature review, I have considered research material which analyses the importance that Aimé Césaire placed on Haiti’s revolutionary history as ‘Negritude-in-action.’ The first chapter of the thesis draws from the problems faced by early 19th century Haiti, namely the metaphysics of race and the issue of identity, freedom and collective responsibility



of Haiti's population after independence, as well as the politics of nation building. The second chapter examines the problematics of a decolonization corrupted by colonial mimicry. The third and final chapter explores the notion of insidious trauma at present in the work, and how it can come about when colonial trauma is not sufficiently dealt with.

Literature Review

*Of my once-servile race, (I) clench my
fist! I clench! Our fists!*

(Césaire, *The Tragedy of King
Christophe*, 1963: 24).

Deputy for Martinique in France's National Assembly, Aimé Césaire (as previously mentioned), is also the author of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, *Discourse on Colonialism*, and *Discourse on Negritude* among a host of other works (including poems, novels, plays and historical essays). These works have shaped my understanding of the play, as they have shone light on concepts demonstrated in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, such as decolonization. Césaire was undoubtedly known as one of the founding fathers of the concept known as Negritude, a call to a concrete awareness, pride, and acceptance of black culture and identity, and a resistance to the politics of assimilation as witnessed within the Francophone diaspora and in other oppressed communities around the globe. For Césaire, Haiti serves as the "mecca" of his cultural, aesthetic and political project: "Poor Africa! Or rather, poor Haiti! It's the same thing anyway." (Césaire 30). According to Hegelian discourse, the African was "natural man in his completely wild and untamed state." (Adegbindin 21.)



In his *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire contends that Europe has barbarically portrayed Africa and the Orient, through the rejection of their status as human beings, and moreover as sub-human or primitive beasts. Thus, the Blacks of Haiti could not be seen in equal terms to the European whites, their former colonial masters. Historically, Blacks were a people thought of having no history, no culture, “and destined to occupy a subordinate (subaltern) position with regards to the European colonizer...” (Figueroa 2009: 1017). They were regarded as people in need of civic instruction and spiritual intervention, for the civilizing mission of the West, has always been to bring the “Other” to the European level, that of modernity. “Ah, what a job: to set a people upright! And here am I, like a schoolmaster brandishing his rod at a nation of dunces!” (Césaire 53). Throughout the period of colonization, Article 44 of Colbert’s *Le Code Noir* relegated the African slave to the status of a piece of “furniture”, or a “thing”, capable of being sold just as an object, or an animal.

“This was colonial society: better than a hierarchy, it was an ontology, at the top, the white man – the *being* in the fullest sense of the term-, at the bottom, the negro, with no juridical personality, a piece of furniture; the thing, one may as well say *the* nothing; but between this all and this nothing, a formidable in between: the mulatto, the free man of colour.” (Césaire 1961: 31).

According to European codes, Blacks were therefore not quite capable of conjuring civic progress to the degree of industrialization due to their animalistic nature and tendencies. Even following their independence, Blacks were subsequently deemed as inferior and unable to govern their own affairs unless fully assimilated to the European model. This train of thought can partially be observed in the mindset of Toussaint Louverture, as he sought to replicate the ideals of the French Revolution (1789), not severing full ties with the Hexagon, but only seeking more autonomy for the island of Saint Domingue. In an interview with René Depestre, Césaire exclaims:



“Europeans despised everything about Africa, and in France people spoke of a civilized world and a barbarian world. The barbarian world was Africa, and the civilized world was Europe. Therefore, the best thing one could do with an African was to assimilate him: the ideal was to turn him into a Frenchman with black skin.” (Césaire 2000: 52).

According to Hegel, the African was said to be (an) “unhistorical; undeveloped spirit – still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, religions and political constitution.” (Adegbindin 20). Also, in so far as Haiti remains African, (in socio-political consanguinity with the pre-colonial motherland, as opposed to the European colonizer), it will continue to remain ahistorical, inert and sprawling in mud and dust. This point of view comes in opposition to the opinion of philosophers like Leo Frobenius, who reached the conclusion in his ethnological work that Africa is the cradle of civilization, and the birthplace of mankind itself. For Frobenius, Africa was the generative lieu of great civilizations in its past, until European conquest changed the course of its collective history.

In many of his works, Césaire not only created a counter-discourse to the notions of History and being, but more importantly attempted to forge a new self-constructed identity and its acceptance for Africans and Afro-descendants around the world, much like the figure of Caliban in his play *A Tempest* (1969). Similar to the character Kunta Kinte in the movie *Roots*, Caliban robs the slave master’s appropriation of the black subject (by reclaiming his right to his own name). Such is Christophe’s own problematic in Act I, Scene 3 of the play: “Long ago someone stole our names! Our pride! Our nobility, someone stole them from us! Pierre, Paul, Jacques, Toussaint! Someone branded us with these marks of humiliation, someone destroyed our true names.” (Césaire 21). In many of his historical fictions Césaire also attempted to address Black people’s successes and failures as a community, especially within the post-colonial era. His works have been anti-colonial, with the aim of reversing the ‘symbolical



violence' (Pierre Bourdieu's term) which Europe had instigated in order to achieve its undeniable superiority over Africa and the Orient. Césaire thus symbolically "deconstructs" (Jacques Derrida) the European Centre and places the marginal third world state, or even the black subjugated man at the forefront of his work, before privileging a more equitable relation between the two. This attempt can be also observed by Césaire's effort to reconcile the universal civilization based on the European model with the particular experience (and identity) of that of the "Other" (in this instance Blacks). In his article entitled "Between Louverture and Christophe: Aimé Césaire on the Haitian Revolution", Victor Figueroa states: "So, in the end, Césaire's "integrative" perspective is so carefully qualified by his corrections to the European model that, although the necessary integration of universalism and particularism is not questioned, their conjunction can only be proposed as an unfulfilled aspiration, as a space of hardly reconciled conflict." (Figueroa 2009: 1016).

During Haiti's early postcolonial period, the nation was indeed divided into two neighbouring states: with a Democratic Republic in the South governed by President Alexandre Pétion and other Mulattoes, while the North mostly occupied by Blacks, was turned into a Monarchy, led by the former slave-chef, former general, and self-proclaimed King Henry Christophe. Césaire still admits that we can take lessons from the play. Starting his mission on earnest terms to pluck his fellow countrymen from the pit of slavery, King Christophe soon evolves into a despot and returns his people to the sort of bondage he first sought to drive away from the nation. In an interview with G. de Preville concerning the significance of the play, Césaire elaborates:

"I wanted to evoke three problems. (1) The metaphysical problem of race itself;



(2) The human problem: the adaptation of a people to a new social state, passage from dependency to independence and ... to responsibility; (3) The political problem: the charge of having a State to construct as now currently recognized by Heads of Governments ... (de Preville 8).

It can be said that in this address, Césaire sternly speaks to the newly emerging African and Caribbean nations about the dangers of political independence without proper reassessment of their choice of governing structures and leadership styles, as well as trust and active support from the nation's populace. For him, political freedom must be accompanied by a great degree of cultural independence and a proper decolonization of the minds of the nations' leaders and of its population. Haiti thus valiantly serves as a catalyst for change, and as an example of what should and should not be done, when dealing with the fights, hopes and desires for black autonomy in a world of European imperialism and the implications of that struggle for the (particular) Black race.



Chapter 1: The problematics of a Newly Independent Haiti and a Warning to Africa and its Diaspora.

*Poor Africa! Or rather, poor Haiti! It's the same thing anyway.
Back there, the tribes, the languages, rivers,
castes, forests, town against town, village against village.
Here, blacks, mulattoes, quadroons, obeah-men, God-knows-what,
clan, caste, colour, distrust and rivalry,
cockfights, dogfights over a bone, louse-fights!*

(Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 1963: 30).

The first problematic Césaire grappled with during his assessment of Haiti, concerns the metaphysics of race. Indeed, the Haitian nation even during the time of colonialism had been scourged by the virus of tribalism mainly between two feudal classes (along racial lines). Under French rule, the two major ethno-classes, Blacks and Mulattoes had been separated in order to divide and conquer, and subsequently prevent any sort of unification of the masses. This social cleavage made it harder to topple the plantation system controlled by the Whites, and bring about any semblance of an official end to slavery on the island of Saint Domingue. At that time, the Whites of the colony enjoyed full rights (both civil and political), whilst the Mulattoes enjoyed civil rights and the Negroes by nature of being an accursed “Other”, were historically left without any.

During the Haitian Revolution of 1791 however, and seeing that no power would be obtained just through fighting alone as a solitary ethno-class, the Mulattoes joined forces with the Blacks in order to reverse the social, economic and political hierarchy enforced by



Napoleon and the colonial French authorities. In the post-independent context, observed through the allegory of a cockfight (in the Prologue), the play introduces the socio-political rivalry between the two major leaders after the death of Dessalines: Pétion the Mulatto President of Port-au-Prince, and Christophe the Black general, turned King of the Northern Kingdom. Distrust also became a central tenet of their relations between one another as observed in Act I, Scene 1:

“Pétion: The Devil! Why would I accept what you disdain? Why should that which your sensitive teeth reject as bitter fruit taste in my mouth like a sweet apple?

Christophe: Because Pétion is clever. Terribly clever! As soon as the mulatto Pétion has accepted the empty power that you have just offered me, the miracle will occur. Our good friends in the Senate, the Mulattos of Port-au-Prince, will admirably play the compassionate- not to mention lucrative- fairies and refill his basket. Take it, Pétion, take it! You’ll see, it’s a magic beggar’s-bowl!” (Césaire 11).

In the play, Césaire also importantly dramatizes the postcolonial condition of Blacks, in order to show their predicament in a newly independent Haiti. Césaire poignantly employs the neologism “raque” (Césaire 61) here meant to describe the thick mud at the edges of a riverbank. He uses this to allude to the historical pit or quicksand from which Blacks must resurface. Far from being a place of comfort, this “raque” is symbolically one from which there must be a valiant effort to escape in order to move Blacks forward from the wretches of History and slavery. As a consequence, the main character King Christophe, admits that citizens of black race, by virtue of their identity as a subjugated “Other” must work substantially to grasp equality with Whites on the world stage. In one of his monologues to his wife about the state of his citizens, King Christophe exclaims:

“Who will have us believe that all men, I say all, without privilege, without special exemption, have known deportation, trafficking, slavery, collective debasement to the status of beasts, total outrage, enormous insult, which all who have suffered it wear,



plastered over their bodies, their faces: the all-annihilating spit! We alone Madame, you understand, we alone, we blacks!” (Césaire 37).

For Christophe, the “labour” that Blacks must actively participate in, is necessary for the regenerative task of restoring their lost pride and stolen freedom. As seen within Article 3 of The Royal Dahomeyan’s proclamation, King Christophe is of the opinion that “*liberty cannot exist without labour...*” (Césaire 46). The King sees his Negro subjects as lazy, disrespectful, undisciplined and lethargic, following the discourse of the imperial Centre with all its colonial prejudices. Blacks, as a consequence, must hunger for more faith and action, in order to bring about positive change as a community of oppressed individuals, who the King certainly wants to teach to stand firm and proud as a dignified Haitian family.

The second problematic Césaire evoked through use of the play, involves the human problem of the adaptation of a people to a new social state, and to its collective responsibility following independence. Observed within the newly independent Haiti, the ordinary people were tasked with the momentous responsibility of transitioning from dependency under the French imperial order, to self-governance from 1804 onwards. King Christophe saw himself as steward of the Haitian Blacks and avowed to raise his people to a national consciousness, “with his magnificent potter’s hands, kneading the clay of Haiti...” (Césaire 18). He exclaims during his accession to the throne:

“I swear to maintain the integrity of our territory and the independence of the kingdom: I will never permit on any pretext whatsoever the return of slavery or any measure contrary to the freedom and full exercise of civil and political rights by the people of Haiti, and I will govern with only one end in view: the interests, happiness, and glory of the great Haitian family of which I am the head.” (Césaire 23).



Witnessed in the aforementioned passage, Christophe's starting mission had been to maintain the independence and unrestricted exercise of Haitians' civil and political rights. As time progressed and the lack of checks and balances on his extent of power, Christophe transformed from "a charismatic leader sensitive to the oppression of his people, to an oppressor himself." (Manheim). The peasants of Christophe's kingdom go from singing praises to him about his negritude-inspired leadership, to abandoning him at the climax of the play. In effect, there had been no real transition from colonial enterprise, to the post-independent Black Kingdom. The people only saw themselves as his subjects, (moreover as slaves), and just as Metellus (chief of the rebels) spoke of King Christophe and President Pétion both as tyrants, Metellus' plan of agrarian reform for the benefit of the Blacks perished along with him as he is assassinated for his strong opinion and insurrection.

In Act II scene 1, another peasant also alludes to Christophe's lack of agrarian reform as opposed to *Corvée* labour. In fact, the *Corvée* labour constituted unpaid, forced labour by the peasants, for the purpose of enriching Christophe's Kingdom and serving his other self-centred interests. Such hard labour for a country in convulsion would exclude the rural Black proletariat from land ownership, and they would increasingly revolt against their extreme mistreatment. "But I say to myself: when we beat the whites back into the sea, that was to have this land for ourselves, not to toil on the land of others, even if they are black, but to have it for ourselves like a wife, no?" (Césaire 45). In the play, this came through constructing the King's grandiose Citadel, as well as his royal palaces. In its own right, the Citadel served as Christophe's ability to engineer a fortress that would rival those found in Europe at the time. It took the labour of many; men, women, children and elders to have it constructed in the shortest time period.



In addition, it served to attest to the momentous achievement of Blacks, showing resilience and capacity to out-do the former colonizers. However, throughout its construction many lives were lost and the rural proletariat would revolt against this exploitation of the masses who only see their work within Christophe's Kingdom as an "alienating labour" (Fuyet et al. 1106), no different from the colonial plantation system instituted by the French. According to critic Hunt Hawkins, "The failure of the people to support Christophe is not due to their 'irresponsibility' and 'laziness' but rather to their rightful rebellion against the perpetuation of colonial structures." (Hawkins 1986: 146). For them, the time for a new leader at the head of the nation had come. The peasants of the nation ultimately rise up against King Christophe, and he has no other choice but to commit suicide or be killed at the hands of the insurgents, even some of those who previously formed part of his royal fiefdom.

The final problematic highlighted by Césaire is that of the political problem: the issue of having a State to construct, as presently recognised by leaders of governments (especially with reference to "Third World" countries). Now that freedom has been attained through independence, the leader must look at form (structure) and path taken. The latter opinion can be observed through the commentary of the Raft Keeper Captain during the Interlude at the ending of Act I: "The big truth is not in the going, but knowing which way to go." (Césaire 42). Here begins the real struggle for not only autonomy (in official terms) but for proper self-governance, guided not by the spirit of haste, but of prudence and political compatibility. As mentioned many times during the play, the King is of the belief that anarchy may invade his kingdom, unless stern measures are taken to prevent it from roaring its ugly head. To again mention, Haiti at the dawn of the 19th century was divided into two rival states following the death of Dessalines. As opposed to the Democratic Republic in the south, run by the Mulatto



Pétion, Christophe choses to identify his exploits with the slavish system adopted from the colonial master. Christophe refers to his fellow Blacks as “transplants”, of course uprooted through the process of the slave trade (the first trauma), and relocated to the island of Saint Domingue where he believes they ought to progress expeditiously, and also without abnegation. Referring to the nature of the nation-State (Act I Scene 7), William Wilberforce advises: “A nation is not a creation, but rather a gradual ripening, year by year, ring by ring... sow the seeds of civilization.” (Césaire 36).

Wilberforce’s commentary indicates the almost organic nature of nation building, and warns Christophe of his leadership decisions over the masses. According to the British abolitionist, this ought to be a timely progression, just as it took centuries to officially abolish slavery. For the king, form trumps substance, and for that matter, European form equals civilization. “This black kingdom, this court, a perfect replica in black of the best old Europe has to offer!” (Césaire 17). As supported by the King’s secretary (Vastey), Christophe is ultimately obsessed with the Western model, and its imposition over the Haitian State is doomed to be tragic due to its imported variety. By nature of his status as a “quasi-assimilé,” (Gant-Britton 1996: 46), King Christophe sought to portray (due to his Eurocentric thoughts and tendencies), the equal value of his intelligence to the Whites of Europe and the grandeur of his Black State by virtue of the people’s collective labour and his iron-fisted leadership:

“And the voice complains that for centuries Europe has force-fed us with lies and bloated us with pestilence, for it is not true that the work of man is done that we have no business being on earth that we parasite the world that it is enough for us to heel to the world whereas the work of man has only begun and man still must overcome all the interdictions wedged in the recesses of his fervour and no race has a monopoly on beauty, on intelligence, on strength and there is room for everyone at the convocation of conquest...” (Césaire 2013: 50).



Chapter 2: Haiti's Decolonization and the Dangers of Colonial Mimicry

As previously stated, the switch from a colonial system to a Monarchy, implied no real transition from colonial enterprise to a post-colonial state. Due to King Christophe's cultural upbringing as a talented Black, and also his influence from the tenets of Haiti's revolutionary leaders, his mimicry was only the unfortunate result of his eurocentrism, internalization and importation of France's ideals and forms, (as well as its socio-political measures).

“Christophe's intention in establishing a monarchy ... is not so much to establish himself with the aspirations of his own people as to justify them, with the outer forms that contemporary ‘respectable’ manners and opinions both offered and approved, in the eyes of the world, especially the former colonial master.” (Irele 1968: 101).

In the prologue at the beginning of the text, the Announcer-Commentator states: “Yes, Christophe was a king. A king like Louis XIII, Louis IV, Louis XV, and some others. And like all kings, I mean all *white* kings, he created a court and surrounded himself with a nobility.” (Césaire 8). This idea appears to be again supported by Christophe's secretary (Vastey), as a dignified Black State must follow not only the replication, but also the out-doing of Occidental models and methods, as well as *savoir-faire*. “The whole world is watching us, citizens, and its multitudes think that black men lack dignity. A king, a court, a kingdom – that, if we want respect, is what we must show them. A leader at the head of our nation! A crown on that leader's head.” (Césaire 15). Before looking at Césaire's conception of decolonization, we must first look at his reckonings surrounding colonialism.

“In other words, the essential thing here is to see clearly, to think clearly—that is, dangerously—and to answer clearly the innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization nor philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. (Césaire 32).



King Christophe sees in Haiti's (early) post-independent era, the after-effects of France's exploitation, and cultural imperialism over the island and its feudal social fabric. The King is also unable to properly construct a system, for the benefit of all the Kingdom's populace due to his colonial mimicry, which he himself is unaware of. "Indeed, I hate nothing so much as servile imitation..." (Césaire 33). European conquest as argued by Césaire, produced lasting impressions over the formerly colonized, especially due to neo-colonial trains of thought which have essentially been internalized, learnt and re-produced in the Third World arena, by Third World leaders. According to French scholars surrounding what a good decolonization did and did not entail:

"True decolonization presupposes the suppression of the economic and social structures instituted at the time of colonization to serve the sole interests of the metropolis, and to divide the enslaved nation." ... "It is obviously not a question, under pretext, of decolonizing, of effecting a simple transfer of powers, a kind of Africanization of the cadres and leaving intact a structure which will serve the local elite and neo-colonialism." (Fuyet et al. 1973: 1105).

For Césaire, King Christophe's beginning assignment had been to create a counter-discourse towards colonialism, to demonstrate the problematics of the Black (subjugated) man within the postcolonial environment, and to decolonize the minds of the 'Haitian family' of which he constituted the Poteau-mitan. By extension, this also concerns the predicament of both the African diaspora and Africa itself (the pre-colonial motherland). It also meant that no longer would there be "a young black woman ashamed of the colour of her skin, who finds her colour an obstacle to the realizing the wishes of her heart." (Césaire 50).

In the international congress: "*The man of culture and his responsibilities*," Césaire remarks: "Our duty as men of culture, our double duty is there: it is to hasten decolonization,



and it is, within the very present, to prepare for a good decolonization, a decolonization without consequences.” (Césaire 1959: 117). A decolonization without consequences implies a shift in consciousness away from eurocentrism and neo-colonialist measures. In spite of Christophe’s negritude-inspired discourses, his actions state otherwise. As a post-independent monarch, Christophe is incapable (as a leader) to grasp his responsibility over his black state.



Chapter 3: Insidious Trauma as a By-Product of Colonial Trauma

Kreyon pèp pa gen gonn

-The Pencil of the people has no eraser.

(Haitian Proverb)

The Tragedy of King Christophe by Aimé Césaire relays the unravelling of a dramatic political situation in Haiti, and the years of Haiti's first and only monarchical regime before its downfall. Much like his previous works, this theatrical production is inseparable from the trauma experienced by the characters in the play, whether it be through subtle, aggressive, physical, psychological, or complex manners. In this example, the action surrounds that of an omnipresent trauma, well-hidden yet quite profound: insidious trauma.

The etymology of the word "trauma" stems from Greek origin, and designates any type of injury (physical), which provokes a sensation of pain. Within the modern academic space, the term can also be understood as a psychological shock. According to trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, trauma represents "a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time" (Caruth 1996: 61).

Notion first coined by Maria Root, insidious trauma as explained by Laura S Brown, entails "the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit." (Root in Brown: 1995: 107). Historically, the Black man has always been a broken and traumatized individual in some way, by the authoritarian figures and the colonial forces of the past. Aimé Césaire' remarks that he is an abandoned being "deprived of his own self, of his history, of his traditions, of his beliefs." (in Sephocle 1992: 360). This predicament comes subsequent to the experience of the first trauma, that of the uprooting of the black subject from mother Africa, as well as the trauma of slavery which follows it. Even in the aftermath of



independence, the Black man lives in a space of systematic oppression as well as repression. It is a vicious circle which only leads to the attentive negotiation within the societal hierarchy. This fact is also effectively represented on screen by the cinematographers of the “Third World Cinema” (which focuses on the experiences of the Global South) and similarly in writings by authors of Francophone literature much like Aimé Césaire. These scriptwriters employ a kaleidoscope of theatrical techniques to transmit many subconscious ideas. The opening stage directions of the first Act is one such example of stage directions exhibiting trauma: “The entire first act is in a clownish and parodic style, in which the serious and tragic suddenly dawn in rendings of lightning.” (Césaire 9).

In combination with the stage directions, the characters of the play allude to this trauma. One can state that the first victim of insidious trauma evident in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* is that of the Haitian population. Through brief sequences, the play presents the cruel image of a population traumatized by its despotic King, very much isolated in his royal palace. While he gives extravagant announcements regarding national unity, and appeals for his citizens to “labour for a nation in peril,” (Césaire 14), the people turn towards a “pudding stone of assorted gossip” (Césaire 15) in order to break the tension of their lived experiences. Observed in certain instances, there are over-exhausted peasants and in response to this, the usage of government guerrillas (Royal Dahomets) to re-establish peace, work and order. The individuals who witness this cruelty by their Gestapo-like compatriots, must carry the memory of an “intolerable gift” (utilizing the term of Teshome Gabriel) which no doubt adds to the insidious and psychological trauma.



One also observes the laissez-faire attitude of a large majority of people whilst they take care of their daily tasks. This is seen through the example of the vendors in the opening act. Are they really conscious of the abuses of the Kingdom's monarch? This attitude can be compared to that of the chorus who sings in the festivities at the day of the coronation. Satire is employed in the mundane conversations regarding the state of the country, and especially concerning their somewhat caricatural King as seen by the ladies in the bourgeois salon in the beginning of the second act. At this point, nothing can save his image in the eyes of his Haitian people. "First Lady: So the path of liberty and the path of slavery would be one and the same. Second Lady: A charming paradox! In effect, King Christophe would serve liberty by the means of servitude." (Césaire 49).

The entourage of King Christophe demonstrates to us another dimension of insidious trauma. The progressive effect of psychological shocks can also ravage the individuals with a foot in the authoritarian circle. The fact of witnessing the abuse of authority (in silence) delivers a permanent handicap to the mind of these fragilized individuals. The example of Corneille Brelle, the Archbishop in Christophe's kingdom is perhaps representative of the linkage between micro-aggressive trauma and people at their breaking point. Conscious of his collaborative stance, or of his silent complicity in the oppression of the Haitian peasants, he turns towards the idea of abandonment as an attempt to escape his disastrous future. Brelle appeals to return to France and mentions his exhaustion over his ecclesiastical duties. He is ultimately killed by another of the king's subjects, for his refusal to continue working. "At first the drips will seem to have no impact, but as the years go by the stone will begin to wear away until a hole is finally created." (Schreiner).



Also a part of this entourage, female characters are implicated in the lot of victims of this degrading phenomenon. In the play, the audience observes the secondary character of Madame Christophe, wife of the King. As soon as she appears, the first lady strikes us by her frankness of character, her proverbial cautions to King Christophe, but also by the powerless circumstance within which she finds herself at times. Her warnings are ignored by her tyrannical husband: “Sometimes I ask myself – Because you try to do everything, To control everything – if you aren’t instead The great fig tree that takes all the plants Growing around them and strangles them!” (Césaire 38).

Even as a tower of strength in her relationship, she is unable to climb the walls of the egocentric fort that is King Christophe. At the end of their arguments, Madame Christophe is forced to accept his rebuttals and return to her quiet corner. Her breaking point eventually comes at the ending of the play when she reproaches her now defunct husband for his fatal flaw; his “stony pride” (Césaire 96). If words reveal the secrets of the soul, this woman can show us the widespread reach of these traumatic micro-aggressions, which often touch couples, including that of political couples. These women are traumatized for they receive the psychological abuse of their stressed husbands. And it is this repetitive act which corrodes the spirit and mind of the loved one with increasing intensity.

The greatest manifestation of insidious trauma in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* can be found in the portrait of the man at the centre of all the action, King Henry Christophe. People are often unaware of the impact of trauma, particularly on the figures who hold power.

“But psychological inquiry into the nature of sadistic power relationships shows that a person who inhabits the role of sadist also suffers tremendously in all aspects of life, including close relationships. He sees his entire life in terms of power over others. Discrimination and control are his highest values [...] He jealously defends his



privileges without recognizing the tremendous toll this stance takes on his psyche. Feelings of community go out the window. Selfishness and greed replace concern for growth and the well-being of others, and in the process his own growth and spiritual development are stunted.” (Schreiner).

Similar to the secondary characters, the audience observes this degradation in a long and chronological order. In the final act, King Christophe suffers from a physical trauma (paralysis) which is also symbolic of his auto-mutilation. When in an advanced stage, the trauma observed is masked by a state of pure folly. He develops a maniac-depressive psychosis (as observed in patients medically diagnosed with either Bipolar or Schizo-affective disorder), and reverts to suicide as an escape from his hallucinations, psychological paranoia, physical capture and as a result, imminent death. This is the hardened image of a mentally ill man who has lost his battle with the forces of reality. Is this trauma an example of a severe reprobation directed at King Christophe and other Black leaders?

In brief, we see that the concept known as insidious trauma is one that is difficult, and it contains a widespread reach. This phenomenon is effectively reproduced in literature, notably by the contemporary authors whose writings concern the lived experiences of individuals within the “Third World,” as also within the Francophone setting. Aimé Césaire is part of this exceptional group and his play *The Tragedy of King Christophe* is full of situations where one finds this omnipresent force. Although he does not necessarily aim to make a plan on the subject, the experiences of the characters regroup a certain traumatic genealogy which reunites with the collective memory of Haitians, and many other oppressed individuals around the entire world.



Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that Aimé Césaire utilizes a traumatic part of Haiti's post-revolutionary past, in order to inscribe his concept of "Negritude-in-action." Through *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, Césaire outlines some of the implied problems of Third World countries and regions, who must now govern their own affairs. This includes their own choice of created, or replicated structures and forms. The playwright reflects wisely on the reign of King Christophe, so that Black people's post-independent governance does not become a tragedy, by way of the resurrection, or imitation of the old colonial system. Césaire's work is also in alignment with the project of reprogramming the minds of neo-colonized subjects, as a remedy for the psychological ailments of cultural borrowing (as well as the new danger of a European fashioned decolonization). "Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are, so that they can more wisely build the future." (Freire, 1993: 84). As Aimé Césaire believes, his theatre is ultimately the drama of "Negroes" within the contemporary world, who are able to reclaim their "black" identity.

Through all of his political plays, Césaire's aim is to pave the way for a more egalitarian relationship between the dominator and the dominated. As a self-professed humanitarian, he explains that he has no hate in his heart towards the oppressor: "... you know that it is not from hatred of other races that I demand of myself to become a hoer for this unique race that what I want is for universal hunger for universal thirst." (Césaire 2001: 44). For the playwright, this is the refusal of inversed racism and his message can make reference to the watchwords of the French motto: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.



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