

The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus
Faculty of Humanities and Education
Caribbean Studies Project
HUMN 3099

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Title of Thesis:

Créolité and the Shaping of the French-Caribbean Cultural Identity in the Selected Works of Patrick Chamoiseau

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COURSE CODE – HUMN 3099

COURSE TITLE - CARIBBEAN STUDIES PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Cultural identity is a central theme in understanding the people of the French Caribbean. Through the selected works of Patrick Chamoiseau, *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, *Texaco*, and *School Days* language, cultural conflict and the theme of the fantastic and imaginary have been analysed in order to demonstrate their importance and influence in the shaping of the Martinican, Creole identity. The first chapter of this research paper focuses on language, both French and Martinican Creole and their roles in Martinican society as cultural identifiers. The subsequent chapter examines the cultural conflict present in the society stemming from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the Martinican people being primarily French and African. Finally, the last chapter deconstructs the imaginary and fantastic and their significance to the theme of cultural identity. This thesis asserts that cultural identity is dynamic and is contingent upon factors such as language use, societal dynamics and literary devices.

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INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Thesis and Thesis Statement

Identity has always been a multidimensional concept, specifically to the people of the French Caribbean. Identity, as defined by Parmasad, “has more to do with how a people think than how they look. It has to do not with masquerading as someone else but discovering and revealing the true self” (12). The cultural identity of Martinique is a diverse one. It is an identity which has been fashioned from the historical and past socio-political contexts of the island country. As a result, the Créolité literary movement was conceived by Martinican writers, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, in the late twentieth century. One of whom being Patrick Chamoiseau, in order to delineate the African people from being misidentified as solely African when they had been “brutally uprooted and transplanted in an environment where they had to reinvent life” (Bernabé et al. 88) Additionally, Créolité is in fact, a celebration of the racial and language diversity, and individuality of the French Caribbean.

Martinique has developed its own culture through the process of creolization, referring “the processes of ‘cultural and linguistic mixing’ which arise from the entanglement of different cultures in the same indigenous space or location” (Hall 12). A direct contrast to the ethnocentric monoculturalist pride of Europe. The fundamental reason for this study is to understand how the rich cultural identity of Martinique has been created by different ethnic groups despite experiencing one of the most heinous systems in human history, slavery. The creolization which followed slavery therefore, acted as a unifier of the Martinican people in forming their cultural identity. The thesis seeks to answer the question of the modern, Martinican individual as to what their cultural identity is. Créolité and how it has shaped the cultural identity of Martinique in the

French Caribbean shall be examined through the themes of language and cultural conflict, and the analysis of the imaginary and fantastic in three of Patrick Chamoiseau's novels *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, *Texaco*, and *School Days*.

Parameters of the Thesis

The thesis shall focus on the on Martinique which is located in the eastern Caribbean Sea and is a country that is an overseas department of the Republic of France. The setting of Martinican author Patrick Chamoiseau's novels, is also geographically located in Martinique. The study analyses the impact of Créolité in twenty-first century from literature originating in the twentieth century.

Objectives of the Thesis

This study aims to give prominence to the Créolité movement and demonstrates how it has created a still-relevant legacy. Furthermore, this study seeks to emphasize the relevancy of Creoleness and Creolization to the generations of Martinicans living in the twenty-first century in the Martinican society and to illustrate that Créolité is one of the most prominent pillars upon which the Martinican cultural identity is forged.

Methodology of the Thesis

All the research done for this study was of the qualitative nature. A combination of primary and secondary sources was utilized in gathering information for the research paper. Primary documentary and oral sources such as Patrick Chamoiseau's three novels and interviews with the author, and secondary documentary sources such as research papers from academic journals and textbooks were analyzed for their relevance and validity to the topic and subsequently utilized.

Chapter Outline of the Thesis

The thesis will be comprised of four thematic chapters, each distinguished by a title based upon the nature of the content contained therein. The first chapter will describe the conceptual framework of the thesis explaining how the project was chosen and how it intends on contributing to existing scholarship. The second will detail the importance, use and impact of language in Patrick Chamoiseau's novels. The subsequent chapter will investigate the cultural conflict present in all three of Chamoiseau's works and the final section will study the imaginary and the fantastic by the author in the novels *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, *Texaco*, and *School Days*.

CHAPTER ONE: The Conceptual Framework of the Thesis

This area of research was decided upon through various influences from the fields of French Literature and Language and Linguistics. Identity, regardless of the century, will always remain a relevant theme to human experience. Creoles, languages formed through language contact, is a polemic field of study in Linguistics, with some scholars being divided into the two dominant categories of being for or against Creole exceptionalism. An argument which supports Creole being regarded as reduced or incomplete languages, or result of natural language change, respectively. Similarly, Créolité, a cultural and literary movement that aims to recognize the hybrid culture and language as legitimate, and its influence on the cultural identity of the Martinican people has been a topic of contention to scholars within the field of Language and Literature. Creolists Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, the founding fathers of the literary movement, and fellow Martinican author Édouard Glissant sought to distinguish the cross-cultural French Caribbean through “an external identification” from Africa (Scott 7).

Centuries later, Créolité prove to be as controversial concepts as it was since its inception. This study aims to situate Créolité in the present context of the twenty first century in Martinique and the wider Caribbean. Its relevance to peoples today is as pivotal as when the aforementioned scholars formed an entire movement to validate and ratify the Martinican cultural identity. Interviews and the novels *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, *Texaco*, and *School Days* from author Patrick Chamoiseau, the literary manifesto *Éloge de la Créolité* (In Praise of Creoleness) written by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, books such as *Caribbean Discourse* written by Édouard Glissant and scholarly articles written are heavily referenced and cited.

The key concept of this study is the role of Créolité and/or its impact on culture, chiefly language, and literature in the formation of the identity of the people of Martinique. The primary variable presented during the study was that of time. In the twentieth century, the technological advancements present today were unavailable. Factors such as the Internet's impact on Créolité due to the rapid diffusion of information would have significantly influenced culture, language and subsequently, identity of many individuals around the globe. As Martinique is a Creole society, (a culturally hybridized society), this duration of time in which the world has technologically advanced, it can be assumed that the Internet would continue to contribute to its further cultural mixing. However, this aspect of the Internet and Créolité is beyond the scope of this study which seeks to focus upon the culture, language and literature of Chamoiseau's selected novels. Notwithstanding, Créolité permeates the fabric of Martinican society and is therefore the manifestation of the adaptation of it, further proving its relevancy in the current socio-cultural context.

CHAPTER TWO: Language

Language is one of the most important definitive characteristics of the human race. It is the embodiment of identity as well as its social construction. Identity as a social construction relies on being “relational” through the “real sense identity formation” which is based upon comparisons in race, religion, culture or language (Premdas 813). Language is particularly pertinent to the subject and movement of Créolité. One of the objectives of the movement was to establish Creole languages as legitimate languages, deserving of equal prestige and recognition that is given to their European counterparts. In the three novels of Patrick Chamoiseau, *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, *Texaco*, and *School Days*, language and its utilisations are crucial to understanding the undercurrents of Martinican society and how it impacts the country’s cultural identity. This chapter seeks to ascertain to what measure language grounds the Martinican’s cultural identity through the examination of the country’s historic socio-linguistic situation and the tradition of orality in the three selected works of Patrick Chamoiseau.

Firstly, the French presence has been prominent and has contributed to the socio-linguistic situation of Martinique since 1635, when it was first colonised. To the present day, Martinique is officially an overseas department of the Republic of France, and not an independent nation. Additionally, French is the sole official language of the island, despite most inhabitants speaking Martinican Creole. Creole languages are usually linked to territories which have been colonised by foreign powers, although this is not exclusively the case. One of the most common originators of a Pidgin which then develops into a Creole language is by a newly developed need to communicate with speakers of other languages through the creation of a new one. It is also important to note that Creole languages, by definition can be the mother tongues of a societal group, as they would have been established sufficiently to be imparted to succeeding

generations. Martinique's history with France has been painful and tumultuous, as the French invaded the island and introduced the practice of slavery to the Africans they had bought and brought primarily, through not exclusively, from Senegal. These French colonisers brought the French Language with them, while the Africans spoke their own languages from Africa. Language varies in its functionality to certain communities, such as being a tool of communication and collaboration, power, and an overarching symbol of a nation.

Language, as a tool utilised to manipulate the balance of power on the administrative, educational, and social levels is substantiated in the three novels of Patrick Chamoiseau's. The employment of both Standard French and Martinican Creole in Chamoiseau's novels reveal the uncomfortable dichotomy existing in Martinican society, the *de jure* language – French, and the *de facto* language – Creole, and present two streams of consciousness born from these languages one of European history and one from an African lineage. A factor which is particularly pertinent, as the setting for most of these novels is during the period of postcolonialism on the island, which is seen as a fragile environment because the consequences of this heterogenous society are vast and unknown.

In the hierarchised society of Martinique, the French language used by the French colonisers was a means to consolidate and retain authority. Bruns explains that “the aim of discourse is control over reality in the interests of the speaker and his pleasure” (27). As previously stated, language confers with it a substantial degree of power based on the individual speaking and what that person may be a representative of. The French language was used in Martinican administration to differentiate those who were literate and educated in the lingua franca and language of diplomacy at the time (Wright 2006). This rigidity in language policy would not have allowed any room for linguistic diversity, which would have been an accurate reflection of the society.

Firstly, in *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows*, the second half of the novel entitled “Expiration” recounts the beginning of the complete integration of French Metropolitan influence into the Martinican society and lifestyle. The titles of both parts of the novel are telling in measuring how the quality of life had been perceived prior to and during the French departmentalisation of Martinique. “Inspiration” and “Expiration” are the titles of the bipartite structure, and there lies a double meaning within them, inhaling and exhaling in positive and negative light in the sense of asphyxiation. That is to say, the period before departmentalization titled “Inspiration” served as an undiluted preservation of Martinican culture. At the beginning of the second part of the novel, “Expiration”, a displacement is quite noticeable by the negative connotation of the word. Therefore, the intention of entitling the latter half of the novel “Expiration”, is indicative of impending doom and a loss of all which is familiar to the Martinicans.

The departmentalisation of Martinique was seen from the perspective of France as the beginning of Martinique’s “civilisation”, like “the world had finally reached them” (Chamoiseau 97). With it, industrialisation was on the rise and the advertisements in store windows such as “neon signs” would have been in French (Chamoiseau 97). Additionally, the “mass migration” facilitated by the BUMIDOM¹ from Martinique to France would have required proficiency in the French language. Similarly, in the novel *Texaco*, Ti-Cirique who composed employment applications for the residents of Texaco and would have had to have French language proficiency to send the applications to the Mayor. Further into the novel, in a chapter entitled “The Muscles of Civilisation”, which echoes the belief of a French-modelled society being vastly more civilised and cultured than Martinican society without their influence, the physical culture club

¹ BUMIDOM, “*Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer*” was a French governmental migration programme which encouraged migration from the French Antilles to France, providing applicants with a one-way ticket and a job.

called “La Française” was utilised solely by the most affluent members of the society, such as honorary members and businessmen. This club, being financially supported by statesmen and the French administration, its namesake and being “electrically lit” were all signifiers of France’s compounding “superiority” in the French Antilles. The electricity needed to run the shops in Fort-de France in both novels arrived with the French presence and would have been suited and available to the French who governed the society. The French would have exclusively utilised their language in these locations and during their discussions of “sport and intelligence” or “the democratic spirit”, as they were considered more refined topics worthy of discussion in the official language (Chamoiseau 233). Another example is found in *Texaco*’s “Other City People” of the importance of French in politics and its effect on the Martinican character Esternome, a representative of the Creole community. Aimé Césaire who was elected to the city’s town council delivered his speech in French, which would have been mandatory for a person in his governmental position. As Esternome hears the “French, words, voice, energy” of Césaire, he quickly leaves the gathering as he deems the politician a “mulatto”, definitively regarding him as more European than African, his reason based solely on his language choice.

Furthermore, the establishment of the French language was still threatened by the newness of the departmentalisation of Martinique and its flourishing Creole language, therefore the language of instruction and practice in schools was French. As it is stated in the chapter “Other City People” in *Texaco*, Césaire received a well-rounded education in numerous subjects, “a black blackman who knew French better than a thick French dictionary” and more learned than “the most learned master of the Whites of France” (Chamoiseau 249). His education would have been completely delivered in the French language and by being both literate and educated, these assets enabled him to attain his esteemed social position. On the other hand, Creole was not

tolerated in the educational system under any circumstances. Confiant explicates that the “avowed” aim of the French national language policy has been to eradicate the Creole language (Chamoiseau et al. 153) *School Days* demonstrates how the Creole tongue was utilised in wider society without having any writing system and being regarded with contempt, while French was reverently employed through speech and text in the classroom. Monsieur le Directeur in the first half of *School Days* entitled “Longing”, pronounces the Creole-speaking children “shameless moneyshines”, a derogatory, offensive remark anchored in his negative language attitude towards Creole, and he terminates his discourse by telling them to, “speak properly and behave in a civilised manner” (Chamoiseau 45). In these examples it is made abundantly clear that Creole is regarded as useless and shameful in comparison to French, which is deemed the only suitable language to be spoken. This statement is further supported as the teachers deliberately spoke French exclusively, which would not have aided the children in better learning the language as they were lost amidst this foreign tongue. Chamoiseau details that, “His (the teacher) words floated above them (the children) with the magnificence of a ruby-throated hummingbird hovering in the breeze” (Chamoiseau 48). Additionally, Creole usage became “dangerous” as Big Bellybutton who only knew his name in Creole was bullied mercilessly by the other children for only knowing the Creole language (Chamoiseau 43). French language attitudes held by teachers and other members of the higher echelons of society disparaged the novelty and freedom of expression that Creole afforded its speakers. Racine and Morisseau assert that a greater acceptance of Creole and its unstigmatized use for the improvement of conditions would end the prestige and socio-economic advantages of the educated minority (497). Excluding the *de facto* language of Martinican society, in one of the most influential sectors in its society,

Education, naturally handicaps their students and progressively corrodes their sense of identity and self-worth.

Socially, language can also be utilized as a vehicle through which class divisions are made and sustained. As *School Days* has demonstrated, the differentiation between Creole and French was too distinct even though Martinican Creole is a French-based Creole. This indicates that the Creole utilises predominantly French vocabulary (Racine and Morisseau-Leroy 492). The little black boy realises that both languages belong to two contrasting spheres in society. However, in his class he sees “little black children like himself” and his “world spread out before him prospects of complicity” (Chamoiseau 26). Ethnic identity, which is central to cultural identity is formed through what Geertz defines as “the givens of social existence” (1961) such as an individual’s homeland, race or language. The little black boy’s feeling of belonging and familiarity with these children are markers of identification with this group of children based on their age and language, creating a distinction in society between those who utilise Creole and those who do not. This method of identification of aligning oneself with a particular group develops what is known as the “‘we-they’ dynamic” (Premdas 814). This clear delineation between peoples can either produce negative repercussions or be harmless to either group, confirming that cultural identity is a social construct.

Moreover, in the chapter entitled “In the Made in France Dresses and the Four Books” in *Texaco*, French is the language of upper classes and a tool for social mobility. Chamoiseau recounts the “aspiring mulattos from up close, their taste for France’s tongue and love of knowledge” (216). In the chapter “Other City People” mulatto ladies all spoke “the same French” (Chamoiseau 241). French, as it has been established, was the language spoken by those who were educated and of lighter complexions; if someone were not lighter in skin tone then it

became of utmost importance that they be educated, as in the case of Aimé Césaire. French became unsurprisingly synonymous with wealth, possibility, knowledge, and superiority stimulated by the language attitudes and behaviour of the upper classes towards those who did not speak French and were of darker skin tones.

Further differences are outlined in the chapter “Basile at Heart”. Distinctions between two types of women “Ma” and “Madame” are illustrative of the contrasting groups in the city’s society depicted through lexical choice. Either lexical item describes the attitudes and temperament of the woman who would use either language such as, “Ma’s nice, she’s come a long way. Madame is severe and goes on about the Law. Ma remembers hills, countrysides, and fields. Madame only knows about City (or so she claims) (Chamoiseau 229).

The quarter of Texaco in the novel, before its destruction, was a geographical delineation between most Creole speakers and those from lower echelons of society, and those who lived in the city Fort-de France, who were governors or parish priests (Chamoiseau 59). However, after the volcanic eruption in Saint Pierre, Fort-de-France is transformed by the influx of persons from its suburbs and begins developing “the roots of a new identity: multilingual, multiracial, multihistorical, open, sensitive to the world’s diversity” (Chamoiseau 220). This anchoring and flourishing of the Creole language through its people signify a considerable shift in the culture of the society. Although, it may still be stigmatised and disregarded, its effects on the identity of the Martinican people would be substantial.

According to Munro, in the novel, *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows*, “this linguistic sensitivity produces a hybrid language – not French, not Créole, but a literary meeting of the two, an attempt to remain largely readable to a French readership while retaining the rhythms, opacity and inventiveness of Creole” (1103). This hybridity is physically manifested in the character of

Héloïse who is symbolic of this notion as she grew-up with her mother tongue being Creole and she also went to school and learned French. A crucial point is the contrast between languages where, as Martinique's *de facto* language, Creole is regarded as a dynamic, living language. For example, reading "Les dix-huit mots rêvés" we observe that Afoukal uses the standard French "while retaining the rhythms ... of Creole" (Munro) to explicitly illustrate his life in Pipi.

Moreover, the narration of *Texaco* and *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows* reflects the liveliness of African culture through the non-linear manner in which the narratives are recounted. This approach is reminiscent of the tradition of orality. In the novel, the narrator begins *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows* with this unmistakable sign at the beginning of it "Gentlemen and ladies of the company" (Chamoiseau 7). According to Seifert, "Creole folktales...according to Chamoiseau: they present "a system of counter-values, or a counterculture, that reveals itself as both powerless to achieve complete freedom and fiercely determined to strive for it forever" (220). Chamoiseau has used orality as an African technique that masterfully includes the past, present and future to relay a narrative. For example, we see the stories of the characters are told from varying angles of the past, "...his mother, the one we'll call Man Elo and who will become the undisputable queen of *macadam*" and "...Pipi, master-djobber, king of the wheelbarrow" (Chamoiseau 8-9).

This technique is unique because the West Indian people did not have the resources to document and preserve their history "because written literature has long been the domain of the colonial master" (Munro 1103). What is characteristic of orality are the mythological elements, which function as a means of bridging the gaps of unknown activities in a timeline. Orality and Creole coalesce as both the tradition and the language are defined by their changeability and their creativity which emerged from the lack of a formal writing system. Confiant has stated that his imagination, utilised in his storytelling comes from diversity (Chamoiseau et al. 145). The

Creole language and its people were the source of inspiration for storytellers like Chamoiseau, Bernabé and Confiant. Orality and Creole language are both characterised by a shared, bloody history however, they are linguistic celebrations of survival and a true reflection of the spirit of the Martinican people.

According to Korneeva et al., “Thanks to language the thought is formed, the language participates in the process of the thought emergence” (2). It can be argued that Creole needed to be created in order to conceptualise and convey new ideologies and expressions which were not befitting the homogenised Creole people of Martinique. Language is a powerful assertion which can be used to divide or unify a society depending upon the manner in which it is used. Both French and Martinican Creole are seminal to the linguistic situation of Martinique and its tradition of orality. Both languages: one of the enslavers and the other of the enslaved, have shaped history and cultural identity of Martinique. The fullest expression of ownership and identity of the Martinican people is through the Creole language which Vincent Placolty has said that it is, “*The language which more than any other language belongs to us*” (Chamoiseau et al. 900).

CHAPTER THREE: Cultural and Social Conflicts

In Martinique, just as language is a prominent branch of identity, so too is its multifaceted culture. As defined by Premdas, identity is an “area of change and contestation” which is subjective and multidimensional (811). It, therefore, relies upon a society’s culture to develop, evolve, and become established. In Martinique, the focus on cultural identity has been an important subtheme to the country’s inhabitants and one of contention, most notably due to its French colonial history and the aftershocks of the brutality of colonisation which would have undoubtedly transformed the society. Cultural conflict is understood through the separations that exist within a society and the perseverance of incompatible and opposing ideologies and ways of life. Therefore, as observed in the works of Chamoiseau, cultural conflict is ever present due to the cultural diversity of the ethnic groups on the island: Békés, Mulattos, Indians, Syro-Lebanese, Chinese, Africans and descendants of former slaves and the “fractionalizations” amongst them. Due to the nature of how the identity of the Caribbean person was formed from being forcibly taken from their homeland and from their culture, with which they would have identified to, this identity construct would have been instantly eviscerated in travelling from country to another while being subjugated to dehumanizing treatment. In this way, Premdas recognizes these immigrants as “new arrivals” entering a foreign and empty New World who would have had to “reconstruct” their own identity (817). Certain societal dynamics that drive this conflict include power relations, and racism, compounded by “historical precedence” and “the degree of assimilation of the cultural values” of a colonial power (Premdas 820). This chapter explores these opposing ideologies and power imbalances in the political, economic, and social sectors due to the racial and classist divisions in the Martinican society.

In the novel *Texaco*, like in *School Days* and *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, cultural conflict is exacerbated by the remnants of a colonized society such as certain preserved and cancerous ideologies. The most glaring conviction of the French imperial power was that of slavery, which is one of the pillars on which the modern Martinican society was first founded upon. This can be supported by *Le Code Noir (1685)*, a French administrative decree stipulating the conditions by which to own slaves. Some of which were that African individuals were considered property, to be bought owned and sold, without any right academic, financial, political, or individual freedom. The concept, itself is a direct violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was only established after the Second World War in 1948, almost three hundred years later, in which it states, “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms” (UN General Assembly 1948). The European belief of their racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic supremacy, entitlement to foreign lands and their resources and self-righteous justification of the dehumanisation of peoples were condoned by the French until the Final Abolition in 1848 when slavery was officially abolished in Martinique. Despite the fact that the repercussions and practice of this slavery were already deeply rooted in its people and would be sustained through covert measures for generations to come. Chamoiseau affirms in *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows* that “aside from the chains, nothing was really different” (106). The chapter entitled “Other City People” in the novel *Texaco*, colonialism and by extension slavery, is noted by the character Mr. Alcibiade, a deputy secretary at the Public Works Bureau of African ancestry as being advantageous, responsible for “bringing civilisation everywhere” and that “the natives’ humanity is elevated by being forced to live in peace, in fraternity and in universal concord” (Chamoiseau 245). Differentiate between « universel » and « diversel » (Glissant/Chamoiseau) In fact,

Chamoiseau's use of the verb "forced" is apt, as anything which is born of forcefulness is not of peace. The use of the term "universal concord" demonstrates the egotism of the European mentality in believing that this ideology would accomplish harmony as they would be the benevolent race governing society. This is directly the opposite of what the Creolists endeavour to do in their literature. Chamoiseau's literature is both autonomous and ideological, both of which seek to "move forwards an internal analysis to better express Créolité" as "world literature" (Chinien 4). The distinguishing factor between the French and Creolist approach to universality is that while the French ideology is based on prejudice and supremacist ideologies, Chamoiseau's works are founded in the truth of the diversity in human experience. Furthermore, it is mentioned in the same paragraph that Jean-Jacques Rousseau's, "conception of the Good Savage opposed to the "Corrupt Civilized Man"" was called "lamentable" (Chamoiseau 245). In this scenario, the "Good Savage" refers to those of non-European descent, in this case, Africans, and the "Corrupt Civilised Man" refers to those of European descent. This condescending ideology brought forth by the Swiss philosopher, though jarring and circuitously pejorative, would have offered opposition to the dominant European ideology of the time. In the latter half of the novel *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows*, "Expiration", the slave Afoukal chooses to remain loyal to his slave master which he defines as "service", although he is offered his "freedom", despite the abuse he would have endured at his master's hands (Chamoiseau 105). Afoukal's freedom is later revealed to be his death as his master brutally murders him for his own gain.

Interestingly, in both these situations in *Texaco* and *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows* both men of African descent are the characters who are supporting these European ideologies in society, whether by their own choice, or rather through staunch social conditioning. In *Texaco*, it is clear that acquiescing to the demands and the moulding of Mr. Alcibiade's convictions to

further himself and be favoured by the oppressors of his own people, with whom he does not identify based on his language use and beliefs, is for his own survival. In *Chronical of Seven Sorrows*, Afoukal survives in a state of perpetual subjugation to his master. He even begins to believe his enslaved state is a service to his master and not the tyranny it is. Wahabi asserts that through slavery, identity is under attack as the slave, the object, survives and lives for ‘otherness’ (8). This leads to identity erosion and the individual being in a constant state of self-degradation and assumed worthlessness, as is echoed in the theory of “*désêtre*” by Césaire. Although these characters may not have wanted to support this European ideology and practice through slavery, they have inadvertently though the imminent societal pressure and threat of death, and the psychological trauma (which compound to formulate the ‘otherness’) that would have brought these two characters to that point. They have therefore accepted the colonised state imposed upon them by their European colonisers through “the memory of slavery as a social institution transmitting values of order and hierarchy” (Hel-Bongo 1). A society founded on systematic cruelty and oppression is one whose independence is crippled thereby misinforming its identity. Culturally, the impact of slavery is not one which would be readily overcome, but one whose undercurrents would certainly influence other societal factors.

Furthermore, the unbalanced power dynamic of Martinican society is glaring. Politically, the society is placed at a disadvantage both in the past and in modern times by being a department of the Metropolitan France. Their governing system is based on France, based on their French policies and on their foreign perception of Martinique. The latter half of *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows* entitled “Expiration”, states that departmentalisation brought with it a complete upheaval of life as it would have been known prior to the historic event. In the previous half of the same novel, called “Inspiration”, Chamoiseau details the simpler more vibrant way of life of

the market and its people (8). This market and the extended family and communal culture which existed between these vendors, djobbers and customers would have been unequivocally altered due to France's increased exports to the island. As previously mentioned in *Texaco*, persons afforded opportunities for societal advancement like Mr. Alcibiade, who were determined to enter into administrative positions in society adopted and subscribed to the imported French culture and customs, which belonged to the governing body of all Martinique.

Subsequently, another area which held substantial influence over society was that of education. In *Texaco*, Aimé Césaire was rewarded for his scholarly prowess and later championed the literary movement of Negritude dedicated to the acceptance of his African heritage through those same abilities. Conversely, in the novel *School Days*, the French and Antillean cultures collide for the little black boy « négrillon » at young age, resulting in identical obscurity from the secondary cultural, French material taught alongside the curriculum. In the second half of the novel entitled "Survival" he assimilates "apples trees", "wolves" and "pointy castles" into his reality (Chamoiseau 57). The juxtaposition of the absence of these European flora, fauna, and architecture, against the vibrant, tropical Fort-de-France indicates a conflict of identity of a foreign ideal that a little boy is told he should emulate and embody against the ethnic, cultural and racial reality of what he has been raised with and is accustomed to. The school system in *School Days* does not seek to integrate the Antillean culture into its curriculum but rather, eviscerate it by psychopathically denying the school children's reality and their environment. These actions supported cultural alienation and reinforced the notion that education should be Europe-centric in its *modus operandi*, its students' ideologies and behaviour, and its curriculum. For example, this was the case for Bellybutton who was forced to leave school as he could no longer understand anything.

On the economical level, wealth was acquired and accumulated by those of the upper echelons of society like the Békés or Mulattos, and certain occupations were solely occupied by those same members. In the novels *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows* slavery would have generated income for plantation owners who would have been the Békés. As previously mentioned, even after the abolition of slavery, the African people of the island continued to be enslaved, the Béké recouped “his fortune on the back of free niggers (which he did...within less than a generation of niggerlings)” (106). Additionally, either of the aforementioned groups were storeowners in Fort-de-France and were able to transact business pertaining to land ownership (Chamoiseau 97). Additionally, in *Texaco*, the Békés on the island kept their finances within their racial and classist fraternity as “the plantation wanted to deal only with the white master artisans” (Chamoiseau 60). This overwhelming European privilege and advantage that one half of the society had over the other based on the degree of skin pigmentation and European features, placed the other half in contempt of the injustice. In *Texaco*, “blackmen” take advantage of the chaos after the volcanic eruption and pillage the houses of rich Mulattos, stealing property (Chamoiseau 152). These cyclic events would continue to occur and only nurture the discord between the two main societal groups: the Békés and the Blacks.

Socially, there are clear distinctions between the people of Martinique based on the pigmentation of an individual’s skin. Chamoiseau affirms in *Texaco* that each person was labelled “according to his degree of whiteness or unfortunate darkness” (Chamoiseau 70). Those who were of African ancestry, no matter how little the heritage was, were stigmatised as having “slavery’s color”, dreaming of “whitening themselves” or being “humanised with a ray of whiteness” (Chamoiseau 70-71). This toxic obsession with skin colour was propelled to the forefront of the mind of the society, as it was explicitly understood that the more you imitated the

French in appearance, mannerisms and customs, the better your societal prospects would be. Marie- Sophie confirms this by saying, “And what color was slavery's skin? What color? Not mine in any case . . . Long live SWEET-MAMA FRANCE!” (Chamoiseau 71). Comparatively to the distinctions made by language in the Martinican society, those made by skin pigmentation and subsequently, class were synchronous. While France was praised for its whiteness and “prestigiousness”, Africa was perceived as being “a place of barbarism” (Chamoiseau 249). In light of the preference of European standards and lifestyle in the wider society, there is a forsaking of the African heritage and culture partially due to the sullied heritage of the African countries which sold their own people into slavery first and wanted to disassociate themselves from it. This feeling of betrayal and hurt eventually translates into a denial of self and eventual identity crisis, which futilely strives for European racial purity.

The extreme manner in which both territories, France and Africa, and their peoples and cultures is treated is informed through positive or negative discrimination, predispositions to certain beliefs and their subsequent imbalances of power. Redefined, being Creole is not synonymous with “inferior”, “cultural inferiority” or “one-dimensionality”. Rather, it is the room in the freedom of the imaginary and of the world which embraces the immense cultural diversity of Martinique and the wider region through “exploration and affirmation of self, referring to the authentic experiences of the lives lived by Martinicans and the subsequent acceptance of them and ownership of self (Chamoiseau et al. 149). Confiant reinforces the truth that, “Créolité has contributed to the resolution of the conflict, to a reconciliation between French and Creole” (Chamoiseau et al. 153).

Therefore, as long as cultural conflict exists cultural identity will be multifaceted and dynamic and should be reflective of the society’s growth and shedding of their embedded

colonial ideologies whilst embracing the uniqueness of their blended Afro-European Antillean cultural identity.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Imaginary and the Fantastic

In these three works: *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, *Texaco*, and *School Days*, the belief and the inclusion of fantastical elements are central to Chamoiseau's writings. The theme of the imaginary, "a virtual space of wandering" and the fantastic provide the aforementioned works with cultural depth and are utilised as cultural identifiers of Martinican society (Knepper 181). Magic and folkloric elements in Chamoiseau's selected novels is an acknowledgement of and dedication to the African heritage of the Martinican people. Similarly to the tradition of orality, magical realism, magic and folklore are used as filler elements in the complex history of Martinican people and are mediums through which culture and identity are expressed and established in Martinique. The inclusion of these supernatural elements serves as a means by which a fantastic reality is made real through an alternate plane of reality. This chapter seeks to determine the employment of magic, folklore, and magical realism in each novel and how they contribute to a more holistic understanding of the Creole identity.

Firstly, magical realism is a literary device which is frequently employed by Chamoiseau in the selected works of *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, *Texaco*, and *School Days*. This literary device serves as a unifying factor in the thematic exploration of cultural identity of Martinican people by providing narrative room in which the complex and nuanced nature of Creole society is explored. Magical realism, like magic and folklore, is utilized to reflect elements of African culture of the Martinican people. It is a literary instrument, emblematic of both reality and fantasy. Luis Leal defines magical realism through a broad lens, stating that "in magical realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it" (62). In doing so, magical realism becomes the background of a paradoxical hyper-reality intent on capturing the contradictory realities of the real and the fantastic. Through his utilization of magical realism, Chamoiseau blurs the lines

between reality and the imaginary in his storytelling, which is reflective of the many socio-cultural shifts the society would have undergone as a postcolonial one.

Therefore, magical realism becomes a means of rationalizing and processing the stark and often painful, emotional realities of life. In *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows* the genealogical lineage of characters from the novel are dubious and shrouded in the magic of the literary technique. Ancestry is clearly of paramount importance, as it ensures a feeling of belonging, aligning an individual with a particular social group. For Pipi, in *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, one of his troubling realities was the “distress” and “misfortune” he experienced due his father, Anatole-Anatole, being a “dorlis” (Chamoiseau 82, 107). Anatole-Anatole’s immoral, carefree behaviour as a supernatural figure resulted in Pipi being without a father-figure during his childhood. Behaviour such as visiting numerous women, being absent and conducting himself mysteriously and dangerously left Pipi to sink “into a kind of permanent whirlpool carrying himself away... from life, and... from himself” (Chamoiseau 51). Every time Pipi’s father appeared, his presence was foreboding and often resulted in a calamitous turn of events for anyone within his proximity. This consistent disappointment of a father and his “larger-than-life” negative presence would have undoubtedly impacted Pipi’s mental health, leading him to perhaps rationalize his hurt, shock and confusion in response to his father’s actions as those of a supernatural creature.

Furthermore, in “Expiration”, the buried, golden treasure of Afoukal’s jar was coveted by many, especially Pipi. However, when the contents of the jar were revealed, it was the memories of the history of the African people. The treasure of the jar was not one which was tangible, but it was an intimate look at history from the perspective of a slave. A slave who never saw any period of time free from slavery and had the fragments of a past crushed into his skull, both

literally and figuratively. The unbridled pain which Afoukal would have felt in the last moments of his life, warranted a softened relaying of the events by Chamoiseau, both as a gesture of respect of the sensitive content of the scathing past of the African people as slaves, both in the narrative and in Martinique's history. Moreover, the fact that Afoukal's voice was heard by Pipi and served as a guiding force, through being dead for many years, "became a significant part of his life" (Chamoiseau 171). This is indicative of the ways in which Pipi had begun to cope with life, believing that through trusting a zombie in his metaphysical reality, he would be rewarded with a treasure that would soothe the constant sorrows of his life. He is subsequently eviscerated at the end of the novel without a trace and without an explanation by Mam Zabyme, a "jablesse" (Chamoiseau 171). Although Pipi tried to share these memories with everyone at the market, one may presume that he was "done for" due to his disrespect of the ancestral memories protected within the jar, a treasure so precious, he was blind to its value (Chamoiseau 172). This conclusion can be drawn based on Mam Zabyme's reaction to Pipi's boasting of his abilities. Or perhaps, his demise may have occurred due to another disappointment ultimately snuffing out his will to live. Similarly, Chamoiseau's magical realism speaks of the Martinican people and their historical struggles. In doing so, he validates the arduous experiences of daily life experienced still by Martinicans through fictional literature. This allows the narrative to be justly guided in exploring existential issues. Such examples include ancestral ambiguity from uncertain parentage, a lack of a sense of belonging in a new land amongst hostile colonizers, the mentality influenced by the reality of slavery and of a life being replaceable and equitable to a piece of "property" (Le Code Noir). Chamoiseau's magical realism offers an insight into the psyche of the Martinican person, through the eyes of a story's protagonist or narrator and illustrates how

magical realism in a fictional world can mirror the coping mechanisms and fail-safes of the brain in the real world in response to emotional upheavals.

Furthermore, magic, in Chamoiseau's works is utilised as an agent of liberation and becomes synonymous with power through the efforts to establish the Creole identity. The magic utilised by the school children in *School Days* to try to murder their teacher is a reflection of the African contributions to Martinican culture concerning practices of magic, as well as a demonstration of the assertion of power against a tyrannical force. In their resistance to the French oppression in the educational system, the "Creole magic" acts as the physical manifestation of rebellion against a colonial oppressor and a cultural identifier of the schoolchildren (Chamoiseau 124). Swanson affirms that "the use of magic is clearly positioned as a form of creole cultural resistance against the teacher's attempts to colonize the children's minds" (28). Although seemingly bizarre and extreme, as injustice seemed to prevail under the rule of French authority on the island, the necessity of supernatural aid suited the children's situation, as they would have been aware of the dangers and grave nature of their Creole magic practices from the society's elders. The mistreatment of these school children by the school master engendered this extreme reaction of theirs in an attempt to seek justice and thereby reclaim and vindicate their Creole identity. This incident is reflective of the rigid and imperious conditions in which these children lived, both in and out of school as the tyranny of the French authority infiltrated all sectors of society.

In contrast to the immediate and effective nature of Creole magic, folklore is no less powerful in its influence due to its ability to remain and thrive through memory and legacy. The belief in supernatural, higher powers orally passed on throughout generations solidify over time, bestow upon them an established status, not dissimilar to European Christianity. Societal

ideologies are therefore informed by these cultural beliefs and become the foundations upon which identity, both individual and cultural are constructed, and when these cultural aspects are nurtured and preserved, they surpass daily life and become magical.

To this extent, folklore becomes a therapeutic way to heal the Creole society. According to Waskul, branches of supernatural beliefs such as folklore “may be used as a source of self-empowerment in the face of personal troubles or social problems” and “as a powerful source of meaning, community and identity” (10). In the three selected works by Chamoiseau, folklore and its magic have consistently retained an important position in society whereby folklore is seen as a tool of guidance and a beacon of hope for the Martinican society. In all the novels, the ancestral home of Africa becomes folklore. In *Texaco*, it is referred to as “the forgotten wonders: the Frist Land, the Great Land” and this information is categorised as the “stories beneath History” honouring the African legacy and depth of culture, but also reflecting how their culture and history was knowingly and forcefully buried, designed to be forgotten by European colonisers (Chamoiseau 35). Comparably, in *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, Africa has nearly been erased from the collective consciousness of the society and is scarcely mentioned in the novel. The conversation between the old man and Pipi in *Expiration* treats the subject of Africa like a lost hope, one whose significance has been lost on Pipi. Although the old man asserts that in Martinique the people are “like pottery still to be fired” with “blood and races all jangled up together”, Africa with its ancestral culture and historical knowledge could lead the Martinican society towards understanding themselves by acknowledging and accepting their legacy without the European imposed slavery convoluting their perception of themselves (Chamoiseau 153). Chamoiseau has skillfully demonstrated the importance of honoring the cultures and histories which have informed the customs and traditions of the Martinican society. The novel ends by the

discovery of Afoukals's historical memory of Africa, which echoes the sentiment of allowing the past and its emissaries to be uncovered in order to heal societal, cultural and racial wounds. Wounds made by Africans complicitly selling their own people into slavery for monetary profit. Folklore acts as one of these emissaries allowing the unmarred truth of Martinican people, comprised of a multifaceted origin, to be a hope which offers solace from the tumultuous and painful historical events of slavery in a new land. One which tethers the past, present and future of Martinique and its people through the honoring and understanding their past. Folklore represents the ability to imbue a vital truth with a magical potency bestowed by time, so much so that it becomes a vehicle by which the powerful ripples of these truths are carried throughout generations.

To conclude, the magical and imaginary are vital to the theme of cultural identity in the works of Patrick Chamoiseau. The function of magical realism, magic and folklore is not solely due to the preference of artistic expression, but more so about relating traumatising and raw truths found in life experiences which mimic the extraordinary nature of the supernatural. These elements in Chamoiseau's literature pay tribute to Martinique's long history and its people, offering methods of coping with cultural disembodiment, methods of taking action against oppression and towards liberation and methods of healing from the lacerations made upon a people's history and culture. All of which must be done in order to begin anew, informed by a quintessential Martinican background.

CONCLUSION

Créolité has undoubtedly been an umbrella under which the cultural identity of Martinique in the French Caribbean has been defined and shaped through the themes of language and cultural conflict, and the imaginary and the fantastic in the works of Patrick Chamoiseau. Créolité in essence, is a fight for authenticity, wholeness, and inclusivity. Furthermore, this definition is crafted by the Martinican people from their “insider perspective” (Chamoiseau et al. 14-15). It is neither a fixed label which denies the changeability and adaptability of the human nature, nor is it a term which has been smeared across the face of these Antillean people by their European colonisers. Rather, through language, societal dynamics, and the exploration of the fantastic, these cultural and societal aspects of identity have revealed themselves to be cornerstones of identity – vital to the cultural identity of Martinique.

In the selected works of Patrick Chamoiseau, the author gives a voice to the complexity of the Martinicans’ socio-cultural and historical contexts and provide insight into the events which have effectuated the movement of Créolité, such as colonisation and departmentalisation. Chamoiseau and other Creolists like Bernabé and Confiant, have sought to liberate the collective consciousness of the Martinican people from the nearly unbelievable reality that these historical events have catalysed in their wake. Therefore, the literary and cultural movement of Créolité critiques the concept of Creole identity, which was formerly extremist and linear, and remodels it to proudly reflect a new heritage and history, inclusive of all peoples and their origins. It is now one which is articulated and shared from a Martinican Creole perspective through the physical documentation of a novel.

The topic of cultural identity and the way in which it is socially constructed in the Caribbean is not one which will ever lose its relevance or truthfulness to its people. By embracing the different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds of each person, Martinique is able to claim their culture without feeling like they are betraying a French or African heritage but claiming both to promote a country that boasts a diverse cultural identity.

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