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Dawn Fulton

The Disengaged Immigrant: Mapping the Francophone Caribbean Metropolis

As an exemplary locus of crosscultural contact, the city offers fertile ground for theories of hybridity, transnationalism, and globalization. Today's metropolis signals the transformative and transforming identifications, the new axes of belonging and exclusion, and the reconfiguring of national and regional borders occurring across the globe, while at the same time occupying a privileged role as the quintessential space of transnationalism. Recent work on postcolonial urban spaces has foregrounded the incidence of the immigrant in these transformations: emblem of the era's mass migrations, this cultural outsider is paradoxically *of* the new global city, fundamentally changing the fabric of the metropolis through the crosscultural exchange his or her inscription in urban daily life embodies.¹ The productive encounters generated by these intersections thus reveal a dependence on the figure of the immigrant, a need for both the presence and the dialogical engagement of the exogenous city dweller in the construction of a transnational metropolitanism. This essay seeks to examine the particular terms of this engagement through a consideration of two recent novels of Francophone Caribbean migration: Marie-Célie Agnant's *La Dot de Sara* (1995) and Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996).

As contributions to the growing canon on Francophone Caribbean exile in Western metropolitan settings, these novels recall inaugural voices such as Césaire's and Fanon's as well as later works by Michèle Lacrosil, André and Simone Schwarz-Bart, Myriam Warner-Vieyra, and Joseph Zobel.² While Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* reflects a recurrent preoccupation with the autobiographically inflected subject of French metropolitan exile, *La Dot de Sara* is Agnant's first novel and effects a Haitian-Canadian displacement of this Parisian setting in the tradition of Dany Laferrière and Emile Ollivier.³ Amongst these myr-

iad evocations of the exiled outsider, *La Dot de Sara* and *L'Exil selon Julia* offer a uniquely sustained focus on the figure of the Caribbean grandmother: each novel narrates immigration as the experience of a reluctantly displaced ancestor. Agnant's Marianna, responding to an urgent summons from her daughter, moves from Haiti to Montreal to help care for her newly born granddaughter, while the eponymous Julia of Pineau's narrative is forcefully removed from her native Guadeloupe by her military son who believes he is rescuing her from an abusive husband by taking her with his own family to live in Paris.

By anchoring the primary account of exile to the highly connotative figure of the Caribbean grandmother, Agnant and Pineau thus present the moment of crosscultural contact not only as a confrontation between differing racial, linguistic, and national affiliations but also as a juxtaposition of urban and rural sensibilities. Indeed, each author mines the space between urban and rural established by these settings to explore the critical role played by the immigrant not only in generating the transnational city but also in endorsing a *reading* of it as such. Michel de Certeau's reflections on metropolitan textual models provide a way of delineating the particular urban practices of these Caribbean grandmothers as strategies that transform both the city space and its attendant metaphors of reading and writing, bringing attention to the immigrant's own vision of the city as a crucial but overlooked factor in new configurations of urban space. The recalcitrant Julia of Pineau's novel in particular raises the possibility of resistance to the city's designated role by refusing to engage physically or ideologically in the project of crosscultural production. Ultimately this critical stance underlines the disavowed limits of the transnational urban vision while at the same time it offers a comparative and more ideologically pertinent assessment of the urban landscape, a reading of urban space whose scope is as global as the city itself.

I. Urban Practices

Michel de Certeau's *L'Invention du quotidien* has garnered attention in postcolonial criticism thanks primarily to its salient distinction between the "strategies" employed by institutional and structural powers and the "tactics" of individuals who negotiate their own unsanctioned trajectories through these structures. While de Certeau's particular inscription of this analysis in an assessment of the urban landscape has

remained largely under the purview of cultural studies, his attention to language and textual metaphors in this regard suggests the relevance of his work to more recent discussions in transnationalism.⁴ The extent to which de Certeau's work on the whole speaks to moments of transformation and shifting paradigms, moreover, opens the way to revisiting and revising the city-as-text model through the lens of a culturally or linguistically exogenous navigation. The barriers or "interdictions" evoked in "Pratiques d'espace," for example, that shape and inform the city walker's movements intersect in the case of the urban immigrant with questions of citizenship, nationality, and literacy in ways that compound the possibilities of spatial restriction.⁵ Where de Certeau's *Wandersmänner* realize the urban landscape as practiced space in a metaphorical mode of reading and writing, appropriating the topographical system through determinative "speech acts," the foreign-speaking and illiterate navigator points to literal acts of reading and writing as activities fundamental to the practice of everyday mobility. To the extent that such immigrant speech acts draw new lines of interdictions on the urban topography, the superimposition of literal and figurative acts of reading also suggests an intermediary layer of translation: the city dweller who translates while walking (or in order to walk) offers not only the uniquely creative if ephemeral enunciations of de Certeau's walkers but also the palimpsestic mappings of multiply inflected signs and meanings, readings and translations.

Marianna, the Haitian protagonist of Agnant's *La Dot de Sara*, initially balks at her role as urban translator, revealing in her very immobility the necessity of such lexical work in the successful navigation of urban space. Triply bound by linguistic, cultural, and sociological unfamiliarity, she remains for the most part timidly indoors, protecting her mythical grandmotherliness in the space of the home. For her, physically circulating outside this domestic sphere is undesirable above all in that the coldness of her social surroundings extends to the city streets themselves, resulting in a sensation of physical detachment:

Je m'en allais [. . .] sans but, par ces rues dont je ne connaissais rien du passé, ces rues où je me sentais étrangère, habitée par une autre histoire, une histoire écrite et contée dans une langue dont on ne connaissait pas la musique ici. Qu'est-ce que je fais, je me disais, à marcher sur ces trottoirs qui ne reconnaissent pas les hésitations de mes pas? (81)

This metropolitan encounter thus is one of mutual non-recognition: Marianna finds the streets illegible and likewise feels opaque and unfamiliar to the urban landscape. The possibility of translation in these circumstances is moot, as walker and topography remain resolutely severed. In a sense, then, Marianna proposes here a peculiarly *non-urban* vision of the metropolis: through Marianna's eyes Montreal is a non-contact zone, a space notable for its absence of reading, writing, or exchange.

This experience of confinement is relatively short-lived, however, thanks to the arrival of Chimène, Marianna's long-lost friend from the island. Another of a number of Haitian grandmothers summoned to rescue their overworked daughters from the burdens of motherhood, Chimène intervenes to free Marianna from her isolation and by the same turn to release Montreal from its static condition. In response to Marianna's skepticism regarding her ability to navigate the city, Chimène triumphantly reveals two tactics that have allowed her to read, write, and ultimately translate her way to church on Sundays while her daughter is at home resting. She recounts that upon her first attempt to find a church in her neighborhood, as if through divine intervention, a young man pulled up in his car next to her on the street, offering his help. This man, "un jeune homme très bien, un jeune de chez nous, un compatriote," (83) drove her a few blocks to the local church, at which point Chimène asked him, for future reference, how to get to the Saint-Joseph oratory. In response, the man wrote detailed instructions for taking the bus to Saint-Joseph onto a small piece of cardboard, including instructions for the return trip on the back. What is particularly compelling about this exchange is that it evokes a navigation of city space that is literally founded on an act of reading: the reading of the card generates Chimène's path through (or writing of) the city. Since Chimène cannot read the card herself, that reading is displaced to a third party: Chimène initially—often wordlessly—shows the card to the driver as she gets on the bus, so that he will tell her when they have reached the stop for Saint-Joseph. Later Chimène learns the way to the oratory by heart and no longer needs to ask for help, but the card she keeps with her "just in case" remains a reminder of the transactions that formed the basis of her initial movement through the city, transactions that demanded a graphical mapping of pen on paper and subsequent acts of reading and translation, of spoken or wordless exchange.

Chimène's next revelation provides an even more striking illustration of the urban space as intercultural exchange, a space that both transforms her and is transformed by her: having received the felicitous ride to the local church, Chimène makes her way there the second time on her own and on foot, but has the forethought to equip herself with a small kitchen knife, which she uses to carefully mark the trees along her way so that she will have no fear of getting lost on her way back home. This explicitly non-lexical navigation of the city thus weaves reading and writing, showing and telling, urban and rural, to inscribe an alternative set of visual signs, a visible and transformative trace that is significantly less ephemeral than the virtual calligraphies of de Certeau's walkers.⁶ Chimène's translation of the city space not only revives the trademark mobility of the modern metropolis that had faltered in Marianna's experience, but at the same time produces an exchange that rewrites the city's lexical system. In this respect Chimène's tactics seem to align themselves with the more hopeful visions of the urban paradigm proposed in recent writings, where the city's heterogeneity, despite or in part because of its internal divisions and stark inequities, offers fruitful ground for transnational axes of identification, for the newly asserted visibility of subjacent groups, and for the transformation of the very inequalities that helped forge the modern metropolis. Chimène's portable translations and topographical inscriptions of the city map out what Philippe Barbé has termed a "translinguistic territory" (130), a landscape in which Creole and French, speech and text, concrete and vegetation might converge to produce a legend decipherable to the illiterate Caribbean grandmother. In turn this translinguistic interaction attributes an unprecedented visibility to the immigrant's movement, inscribing a stateless language onto the global urban landscape.

II. Blank Landscapes

Pineau's eponymous Julia also lives in a state of extreme confinement, but upon her rare excursions into the city enacts an urban practice that is at once more opaque and more subversive than Marianna's. In part this is due to her staunch resistance to change: having been displaced from her home in Guadeloupe entirely against her will, she has no interest in exploring the unfamiliar metropolis and resists learning French or learning to write despite the concerted efforts of

her grandchildren. As a result she comes to embody, for her family and especially for the French society around her, precisely the kind of mythical figure brought to life in earlier French Caribbean literature, the wise Guadeloupean peasant who denotes “un état ancien, l’époque reculée d’avant où l’on ne connaissait pas la ville, ses tournures de phrases, ses souliers vernis à hauts talons, ses beaux habits, toutes ses lumières, ses fards” (Pineau, *L’Exil selon Julia*, 114).⁷ Intriguingly, then, the mutual lack of recognition that we saw in Marianna’s case between city landscape and foreigner is replicated here along temporal lines: the Caribbean grandmother is not only the antithesis of the urban on epistemological grounds, but relegated to a timeframe in which the city does not exist.

The return of this gaze provides a striking instance of what might be termed a reverse exoticism, an overturning of the self-referential discourse of orientalism. When Julia pronounces judgement upon her new surroundings, she sees “un pays de désolation” (73) peopled by “une race drôlesse” (95) with little to redeem it. The white people on the family’s television set speak an incomprehensible language and gesticulate (140–41), the trees have no leaves, the sky has no color (74). Above all Julia’s reaction is one of mild horror and indignation at the absence of critical elements of the natural landscape, elements that for her are not culturally specific features of a distant terrain but the fundamental and universal material of everyday life. Rather than seeing—much less reading—the concrete and metal structures that form the urban and suburban neighborhoods around her, she sees only what is not: the truncated tree branches, the missing roots and herbs for medicinal treatment, the stifled grass beneath her feet (169, 174).⁸ Ultimately, Paris “according to Julia” is a tragic *absence* of text, compounded by a shameful collective ignorance of the suppressed natural landscape.

As for Chimène, Julia’s initial motivation for venturing into this lifeless landscape is the desire to go to church: taking her very young grandson Elie by the hand, she fearlessly follows her sightline to the luminous Sacré-Cœur basilica visible from her window, as the panic-stricken child desperately rehearses the name of the apartment building where they live in preparation for what he sees as their inevitable need for assistance. When Julia does indeed falter at one point, she approaches a group of nuns for help, calling them “Sister” in Creole and

asking for directions to Sacré-Cœur. The nuns, however, put off by the sight of “cette négresse qui s’exprime dans une langue africaine, tout en faisant de grands gestes qui menacent leurs voilures immaculées” (125), only hasten their step to distance themselves from the unfamiliar interpellation. These “sisters,” then, fail to present the kind of felicitous encounter—to borrow Mireille Rosello’s phrase—provided by the young Haitian man in Agnant’s novel: religion fails to substitute for culture as a means to facilitate the exchange of immigrant and city space. Instead of offering a text or translation, the nuns exhibit only the blank page of refusal.

Julia nonetheless manages to find Sacré-Cœur despite this lack of hospitality, and, even more unexpectedly, makes her way back home without losing her way (and without the visual landmark that guided her on her departure). Pineau is intriguingly vague concerning the details of this journey: while the anxiety of Elie and the family waiting at home is palpable, thus highlighting the extreme nature of the cultural and physical hazards Julia has undertaken, Julia’s successful return acts as a refusal of that anxiety, pre-empting even the questioning or reproach with which they instinctively wish to greet her: “Quand ils sont revenus, entiers, sans avoir demandé à quiconque leur chemin, maman avait envie de sermonner. Mais une lueur étrange brillait dans les yeux de Julia. Une lueur qui disait: ‘J’ai cru, j’ai vaincu! Je suis parée pour les autres épreuves . . .’” (127). While this description specifically points out that Julia did not ask for directions back to the apartment, that she did not make a second attempt to receive a hospitable response from the forbidding metropolis, the details, the *physi-cality* of how Julia made her way through the Paris streets to her destination are provocatively absent, leaving instead the suggestion of a spiritual basis for her success. The “strange light” shining in Julia’s eyes, her declaration of faith, the fact that she seems not to experience physical sensation at all during the journey (“Est-ce qu’elle sent encore la petite main d’Elie dans la sienne?” (120)), seem to point to a transcendent vision of her passage through the space of the city, one that significantly takes her corporeal existence as a city dweller out of the equation. This shift towards mystification thus fundamentally impairs the metaphorical framing of the relationship between city space and city dweller: Julia’s “absence” points out the importance of physical contact in this encounter—of the walker’s movement through

space as the basis for both text and reading—, and therefore undermines the possibility of a new urban mapping generated by her experience. By refusing to provide the details of her navigation, the right or wrong turns, the successful or misguided choices, Julia in a sense refuses to engage the urban landscape at all, refuses her implicit role as a reader—culturally distinct or not—of the city space.⁹

Indeed, the contrast between Julia's experience and Marianna's hinges on the operation of reading: rather than encountering a text for subsequent translation, as Agnant's Chimène does in the Western metropolis, Julia sees a blank page. While this blankness is at one level a sign of the grandmother's alienation (as we see in the exchange with the frightened nuns, or in Julia's inability to tell time without a sense of the sun's location in the sky), there are also suggestions in the novel of something more than a passive illiteracy, of a measure of intentionality on Julia's part in the conception of the *métropole* as a blank page. In one of Pineau's most memorable passages, for example, Julia's grandson announces that he needs a new notebook because he has filled his up, and Julia responds by simply washing each page individually under the faucet until the notebook is once again "clean": "[Elle] laisse l'eau emporter l'encre violette des paroles couchées là, pour faire un cahier vierge" (165). While the event points most immediately to Julia's refusal of the written word as a manifestation of the colonial education that is indeed a devastating force in her grandchildren's life, it seems that, read alongside Julia's disengaged encounter with the city, the gesture also suggests the refusal of her own role as a reader, both literally and metaphorically: the blank pages of Elie's notebook signal less her inability to understand the language of her new surroundings than the active conceptualization of this foreign culture as the absence of text.

This more active or even aggressive vision of the blank page thus recalls another of de Certeau's meditations on the textual metaphor, in *L'Écriture de l'histoire*, where the blank page is not that of the immigrant or the city navigator but that of the New World explorer first setting eyes on the "undiscovered" territory. In discussing the colonial encounter as a violent act of writing, de Certeau points here to the ways in which the colonizer uses the New World as a blank "savage" page primed for the inscription of Western desire.¹⁰ What this writing also disguises, of course, is the prior *creation* of the blank page

as a necessary basis for this discursive violence, the fact that the pre-existing text of the New World must first be conceptually erased in order to present the writing of colonial history as an inaugural gesture. Julia's "cleansing" of Elie's notebook seems strikingly similar to this moment of colonial appropriation, in that her gesture too refuses the prior or contemporary existence of text in this unfamiliar setting, viewing the *métropole* through a culturally exclusive lens that sees only absence. Rather than reading Julia's "exile" as a failure of cross-cultural urban exchange, then, we could read it instead as an explicitly anti-colonial gesture, a reversal of the unilateral rejection of discourse that characterized the colonial encounter. What Julia's non-corporeal experience of the city also reminds us is the extent to which the idea of the urban as hybrid implies and depends upon a desire for engagement on the part of the culturally exogenous figure: Pineau's mythical grandmother ultimately resists not only the textuality of the city, but also the undue expectation that she actively participate in the realization of transnational metropolitan space.

III. Expiation

The Parisian monument around which Julia's miraculous outing occurs offers important parallels both geographically and historically to the relationship between Caribbean grandmother and French metropolis. While the Sacré-Cœur basilica's exceptional visibility establishes the initial contact between Julia and her destination, the noticeable absence in her narrative of the "reverse shot" for which the monument is almost equally famous—its all-encompassing vista of the Parisian landscape—would seem to confirm the irrelevance of such totalizing views to her urban practice. More importantly, as David Harvey reveals in his detailed account of the monument, the tangled history of both the basilica and its site traces a long narrative of ideological and political discord in Paris. The expiatory symbolism of Sacré-Cœur has its ties, for example, to the Bourbon monarchy's message of repentance for revolutionary excesses, a political strategy that helped solidify the cult of the Sacred Heart (224). Half a century later, the city and the nation were to face the Franco-Prussian War, the chapter with which the basilica is most immediately associated, but, as Harvey points out, lengthy conflicts over the construction and financing of Sacré-Cœur also put significant strains on internal unity, pitting provincial and rural

France against the capitalist industrial plans to make over Haussman's city (227–8). Meanwhile the rising working class concentrated in the Belleville quarter, now the site of some of Paris's largest immigrant neighborhoods, generated class divisions that created uneasy national alliances in the face of external enemies. As Harvey puts it, "fear of the 'enemy within' was to prevail over national pride" (230), when the reluctance to accept the aid of working class battalions led to capitulation to the Germans. Given this turbulent history, the basilica seems a particularly fitting site for Julia's (non-)appropriation of the city scape, standing as it does at the crossroads of multiply inflected national identifications and allegiances.¹¹

Indeed, Julia's presence in the streets of the hexagon, if fleeting, underscores her pivotal status in the post-war French identity crisis provoked by the increasingly visible but still drastically isolated immigrant populations in the *banlieues* of the 1960s, where the family lives briefly before moving to Paris. One outing in particular generates an illuminating altercation between Antillean outsider and French legal system, as Julia, having ventured out to collect her grandchildren at school, attracts a small crowd and two policemen thanks to the fact that she has hurriedly put on her son's military overcoat as protection from the rain:

Le village entier nous dévisage. Des yeux en quantité, effarés. Pourquoi les gendarmes? A cause du képi de l'armée, du manteau militaire? Pourquoi ces visages graves, ces grands airs offusqués? Man Ya n'a pas voulu outrager la France, seulement barrer la pluie. Elle n'a pas vu le mal qu'il y avait à marcher en manteau militaire dans les rues d'Aubigné. Elle l'a fait juste à cause de la pluie [. . .] Hélas, la loi n'a que faire des bons sentiments. Qu'on se le dise: il y a manteau et Manteau! (98)

Although the distinction between "manteau" and "Manteau" is the ostensible issue here, Julia's crime being the "improper" use of military garb, the exchange underlines how much more is at stake than the juxtaposition of civilian and military uniform. The policemen take particular offense at Julia's inability to speak French, revealing their derailment as they splutter: "'Nous n'entendons pas son langage. Si vous parlez le français, LE FRAN-ÇAIS!, dites-nous comment il se fait qu'elle soit en possession de ce manteau et de ce képi de l'armée française?'" (99). Julia's two grandchildren become crucial mediators in this incident, the equivalence between language and morality

underscored by a voice from the crowd that assures the authorities: “Eux, ils parlent comme nous! [. . .] Ils ne sont pas méchants” (99). The perceived need to make this clarification, moreover, stems from the automatic connection that has been made between Julia and the only two black children at the school, an association that both underscores the racial isolation of this family and condemns the children to a disdain that can only be mitigated by their own linguistic conformity and later by their mother’s confirmed ability to speak “le français de France” (102).¹²

As this exaggerated attention to language makes clear, the anxiety provoked by the sight of Julia in military garb brings into sharp focus the everyday state of alienation experienced by this Guadeloupean family living in post-war France.¹³ Indeed, the flustered reaction of the crowd and authorities, like the racist treatment the narrator receives at school, speaks to an instinctive reaction of fear and rejection that on the large scale characterizes a country in the throes of one of its greatest periods of immigration. As recent studies have noted, these post-war waves of new non-European or racially other migrants gave rise to fantasies of military invasion, a conviction that the former colonies were now infringing upon the internal terrain of the hexagon.¹⁴ The presence of the postcolonial immigrant, moreover, is threatening not only as a sign of racial difference but also as a reminder of a colonial past that, in a mode of modernization that Kristin Ross has cogently explored, the French nation would prefer to forget.¹⁵ Indeed, Julia’s foray into the rainy suburban streets unleashes an apprehension that is explicitly military in mood: those she encounters wear afflicted expressions,

comme si la France venait d’être envahie par un de ses sempiternels ennemis, comme si l’honneur de la Patrie était piétiné, là, devant leurs yeux, comme si la guerre était déjà entrée dans le village et qu’ils doivent à leur tour sortir leurs pétoires de derrière les fagots, brandir leurs fourches pour que le sang impie abreuve les sillons. (97)

Beyond the donning of inappropriate clothing, Julia has committed the far more serious crime of treading on enemy territory.

Since Julia is a native of Guadeloupe, this tense altercation with the crowd and with the police points further to the particularly unsettled position of French Antilleans after departmentalization in 1946.

Julia's metaphorical replacement as an "eternal enemy" of France, in other words, comes sharply up against her legal status as a French citizen. As Alec Hargreaves has noted, migrants from the Overseas Departments bear the irreconcilable burden of being legal insiders who are treated as outsiders.¹⁶ The Antillean is thus all the more threatening in that he or she is from birth an "enemy within": race and language take on an overdetermining force, as we see in Julia's interaction with the police officers, in establishing lines of national affiliation, even as the very insistence betrays the fallacy of colonial barriers that can no longer be maintained. The *gendarmes'* condemnation of Julia's offense protests too much precisely because it is attempting to censure a disjunction that does not in fact exist: as distasteful and frightening as the notion may be to them, this Creole-speaking black peasant is not a foreigner desecrating the French nation, but a French civilian wearing her son's coat.

The contradictions wrought by the question of national identity for natives of the DOM-TOMs are not, however, one-sided, as Pineau poetically demonstrates through the character of Julia's son Maréchal. Like many of his fellow Antilleans, Maréchal has asserted an unswerving devotion to the French nation, buttressed by a military service that has taken him from France to Africa to Indochina. This military cosmopolitanism signals a lifelong commitment not only to the French nation but more specifically to its colonial project, as we hear in the narrator's description of her father and the Caribbean soldiers who fought at his side in the Second World War: "L'esprit d'une fidélité quasi mythique les a menés, autrefois, en temps de guerre, à des actions héroïques indélébiles en leur mémoire. L'armée est leur credo, la France et ses et caetera de colonies leur univers" (13).¹⁷ Maréchal even goes so far as to integrate his "rescue" of Julia into the French national narrative he has constructed, citing as his instigation for the move to Paris a vivid dream of deliverance:

Le général de Gaulle lui est apparu étreignant une Marianne de pierre soustraite à la malédiction de Hitler [. . .] Enchaînée, bâillonnée, meurtrie, humiliée, Man Ya est une Marianne aussi, ou plutôt une idole africaine—parce que noire et taillée dans un bois d'ébène comme il en a vu au Sénégal. (41)

This superimposition of Marianne and Julia, of French national icon and African *objet d'art*, suggests a striking emblem of the colonial

project itself, of the professedly benevolent desire to save the Other by replacing its symbolic field of reference. The *doubled* displacement of this image, moreover, points to the missing term of French departmentalization: Africa functions here as the default category for the black colonial subject, revealing that in the substitution of African wood for French stone there is no symbolic space for the internal outsider represented by Julia's (or Maréchal's) departmentalized status. Maréchal's unconscious appropriation of the French colonial project thus speaks eloquently to the conflation of nation and empire that is undone by the Antillean immigrant's as yet unrealizable incorporation into the Parisian urban landscape.

IV. New World City

The return to the West Indies that closes Pineau's novel signals not only the end of Julia's exile but also an explicit rejection of the neo-colonial assimilationist project embodied by Maréchal. As Julia has reiterated throughout her experience in France, for her Guadeloupe is a country—her country—not a subsidiary coordinate on the map of the French empire. In stark opposition to the absence of knowledge she beheld in the hexagon, she showcases in her native land a wealth of information, sights, sounds, and smells, a complex text that she is uniquely positioned to decipher and the site of an alternative education whose underdeveloped state she quickly begins to amend in her grandchildren. The novel's parting image is that of the grandmother at last restored to her position as reader and writer of a well-studied landscape:

Elle nous montra les feuilles et fleurs, nous les nomma. Pour notre apprentissage, elle ouvrit la terre de ses mains et planta des graines, enfouit des jeunes tiges. Nous étions à son école. Et les petites lettres si faciles qu'elle ne savait écrire, l'alphabet infernal, lui demandèrent pardon pour l'avoir tant de fois criée grande couillonne, imbécile, illettrée (305).¹⁸

This, then, is Man Ya's revenge: a defiant reversal of the system of education imposed in France, and the affirmation of an unassimilated territory to be taught and translated for her foreign, metropolitan grandchildren.

But between the nation and the colony, between city and country, Pineau inserts an intermediary space, a brief interlude in the return to

the native land that troubles the stark oppositions set up by Julia's encounter with the Parisian landscape. On the way back to Guadeloupe, the narrator's family is stationed briefly outside the capital city in Martinique, where the children in particular are amazed to find themselves in the place that for so long had seemed like a distant fantasy maintained only by Julia. Suddenly the Creole they had heard emanating from a single lonely grandmother is "dans les rues, au marché, à l'école, en liberté" (244). While they find such discoveries exhilarating, they also must confront their own status as outsiders, linguistically and culturally derailed by the unfamiliar. Pineau's novel thus definitively rewrites the canonical "return to the native land" by juxtaposing the grandchildren's initial encounter with the Caribbean to the grandmother's exile in Paris.¹⁹ In an ingenious parallel to Julia's *Sacré-Cœur* pilgrimage, the narrator and her siblings set out on their own through the streets of Fort-de-France to reach the sea. Like Julia, the children are drawn by the visual accessibility of the sea that nonetheless seems to recede as they approach it, and like Julia they ask for help only to be greeted by what might be considered a non-verbal translation of the Parisian nuns' fearful retreat: the old man to whom they appeal simply laughs, a laughter "qui dégrèn[e], sac de billes jetées par exprès dans [leurs] pieds" (249). Inspired by memories of their grandmother's triumphant journey, the children persevere, but ultimately their fear and confusion force them to retrace their steps, in a defeat effected not only by the inhospitable stranger but by the city itself:

Bâtiments hauts, neufs et blancs apparus après les cases. Poteaux électriques mêlant leurs fils dans le ciel. Fort-de-France. Des constructions hardies poussent sur un flanc de morne. Tôles et bois, bric et broc, pilotis, poutres rachitiques soutenant les maisons inachevées, trous béants des portes et fenêtres manquantes qui promettent de venir, un jour, par la volonté. Toits justes. Pièces uniques. Abris déposés en une nuit. Fort-de-France. Un grouillement de vies. Des cris. Des gens pressés qui commencent et vont à leurs affaires d'une manière décidée. Des négresses noires marchant comme des hommes. (249–50)

This urban landscape, in striking contrast to the blank page we saw through Julia's eyes, represents if anything a *surplus* of text, a dense and unruly tribute to linguistic, racial, economic, and material diversity for which these Paris-raised children are completely unprepared, a place where earth and metal, wealth and poverty, male and female converge.

“Non,” affirms the narrator, “Nous ne sommes pas acclimatés à ces débordements, à ces visages parlants, à cette fièvre qui habite la rue. Et puis, il y a tous ces Noirs autour de nous. Tellement de Noirs, plus ou moins noirs . . .” (251). Rather than replicating a model of colonial conquest, or even the reverse exoticism of their illiterate grandmother, the narrator and her siblings behave more like country mice in the big city, scurrying back home in over-stimulated exhaustion. The Old World education they received has taught them only one model of the urban terrain, one that, in its rejection of racial and linguistic difference, reveals itself here as comparatively backward, stymied in the mire of its colonial amnesia.

The Caribbean grandmother’s ultimate revenge may thus be this vision of the corporeal, tactile, visible city: while the novel’s closing image affirms Julia’s inscription in the rural landscape, her voice and language resounding in the children’s heads from the moment they set foot in Martinique write an implicit affiliation between the grandmother and the linguistic and racial diversity of the New World metropolis. This affiliation in turn shifts the criteria that oppose city and countryside, imagining a palimpsestic vision of urban and rural Caribbean geographies that seems a more defining transformation of urban paradigms than the unique focus on culture might produce. More importantly, Pineau’s novel situates the transnational city elsewhere than in post-war Paris, locating textual density, translanguistic exchange, and cultural heterogeneity instead in the Overseas Department, and thus describing a postcolonial city that, as outrageously as Julia in her French *képi*, makes its intransigent claim on metropolitanism. In return, Julia’s native land casts an insubordinate gaze on her temporary home in the hexagon: framed through the prism of Julia’s success and her grandchildren’s failure, the Parisian landscape—city of lights, capital of modernity—emerges as static, bland, and uncannily behind its time on the global stage of postcolonialism. Pineau’s contemporary juxtaposition of two urban landscapes suggests that if Paris in the late twentieth century has, like Agnant’s Montreal, achieved a transnational *élan* through the increasing engagement of its immigrant populations, it is in part because this hybrid cosmopolitanism already existed outside its borders.

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Notes

I am grateful to Vinay Swamy and his colleagues and students at the University of Washington in Seattle for their helpful comments and questions on an earlier lecture version of this essay.

1. See for example Holsten and Appadurai, Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality*, and Sassen. While my use of the term “metropolis” in this essay intends a dialogue with this wider discussion on transnational urban spaces, in examining Pineau’s novel in particular I use the French term “métropole” to exploit the added layer of meaning in the context of French Overseas Departments, where the “métropole” also signals the colonial space of the hexagon, or “mother country.”

2. See in particular Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Lacrosil’s *Cajou*, André and Simone Schwarz-Bart’s *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, Warner-Vieyra’s *Le Quimboiseur l’avait dit. . .*, and Zobel’s *La Fête à Paris*.

3. Pineau’s *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*, *La Grande dérive des esprits*, and *Chair Piment* also present reflections on metropolitan exile, and the topic figures, if in a more abstract mode, in Agnant’s *Le Livre d’Emma*.

4. Mireille Rosello has also brought de Certeau’s analysis into a consideration of hypertext, which she argues should not be rejected as constitutively separate from the analysis of nationalism, culture, gender, or storytelling (“The Screener’s Maps” 123).

5. See *L’Invention du quotidien*, 171–227.

6. Chimène’s markings also shunt into visibility and functionality the otherwise decorative or symbolic elements of the “repressed” vegetative landscape upon which the city is built, the “remains,” as Claudine Raynaud puts it, “of the country within the city” (37).

7. Lydie Moudileno has explored the particular symbolic framework surrounding the Antillean grandmother, whose infusion in the rural landscape parallels a mythical conduit to history and community formation (1151). Along with Pineau’s Julia, Moudileno cites such avatars as Reine Sans Nom in Simone Schwarz-Bart’s *Pluie et vent sur Têlémée Miracle*, Man Tine in Zobel’s *Rue Cases-nègres*, and Marie-Sophie Laborieux in Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*. On the deployment of this symbolism in Agnant’s and Pineau’s novels respectively, see Lequin, 206–07 and Sourieau, 174.

8. On Julia’s displacement and her vision of a sterile Parisian landscape, see also Ormerod, 214 and Loichot.

9. Julia’s physical detachment and the non-spatial relationship delineated by her experience suggest a refusal of *both* the totalizing visions of the city posited by aerial views and scopic mappings *and* the below-radar yet hyper-receptive derivations of urban experience elaborated by Guy Debord and the Situationists. See Debord, Jameson, and McDonough.

10. “[C]e qui s’amorce ainsi, c’est une colonisation du corps par le discours du pouvoir. C’est *l’écriture conquérante*. Elle va utiliser le Nouveau Monde comme une page blanche (sauvage) où écrire le vouloir occidental.” (*L’Ecriture de l’histoire* 3)

11. See also the discussion of the conflict associated with Sacré-Cœur in Langlois.

12. This phrase, as well as the critique of the assimilationist project in the novel as a whole, invokes French Guyanese writer Léon-Gontron Damas’s poem “Hoquet”: “Taisez-vous/Vous ai-je ou non dit qu’il vous fallait parler français/le français de France/le français du Français/le français français” (*Pigments* 37).

13. The very frame of Pineau’s narrative is an evocation of the racial discrimination that forms the fabric of the young narrator’s existence in the *métropole*, as the novel opens with a series of phrases that acts as a perverse greeting on the part of this new host country: “Négro/ Nègresse à plateau/Blanche-neige/Bamboula/Charbon/et compagnie. . .” (11).

14. Tyler Stovall defines the transition from colonialism to postcolonialism as a moment in which the racial split drawn by the geography of colonialism is replicated through internal boundaries on metropolitan territory (14). See also Ireland and Proulx, Hargreaves, Carroll, and Smith and Brinker-Gabler.

15. Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*.

16. Hargreaves, 84; see also Sourieau, 171–73.

17. Richard Burton discusses the steadfast commitment to claiming French identity among French Antilleans, particularly as it translates through military engagement (2–3).

18. Françoise Mugnier reads this moment as a restitution of the conventional parent-child relationship that had been reversed during Julia's exile in the *métropole* (68).

19. Pineau's implicit parallel also affirms the transnational status of this new "second generation" of Caribbean immigrants, asserting the mutual imprint that, despite the efforts of their Parisian teachers and peers, defines their relationship to the hexagon. On this inversion of the departure for the *métropole*, see Githire, 85.

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