

Symposium: How Was Caribbean Ethics Made Under Enslavement?

Vété-Congolo's challenges us to consider alternative ways of understanding the self and the world outside of racial and other hierarchies. One such alternative she examines in this symposium is formed around the Creole term "moun" (human person) and the phrase "tout moun sé moun" ("all human persons are human persons"). Developed under enslavement on Caribbean plantations, this radical epistemic resistance drove, she argues, Caribbean Pawòl or Caribbean Ethics. Vété-Congolo's respondents José Cossa and Denise Ferreira da Silva, agree that this black resilience under enslavement needs to be acknowledged as an alternative way of understanding the self's relation to the world. However, while Cossa clearly distinguishes 'moun' from its contemporary European humanistic counterparts, Ferreira da Silva argues that 'moun's' ethical moment should not be considered as belonging to the post-Enlightenment political architecture of equality and freedom, but as an act of rebely.

Key words:

Moun; Pawòl; Caribbean ethics; Mounism; Caribbean humanism; Creole-African; multiple modernities; black resilience; political emancipation; ontological repatriation; Spivak; Federici; global feminism; anticolonial capital critique

Moun as Root for Caribbean Humanism

HANÉTHA VÉTÉ-CONGOLO

Bowdoin College, USA (mvete@bowdoin.edu)

The idea of African thought, let alone African radical thought in enslavement and plantation paradigms is unthought, something we tend to conceive as not even possible. However, in light of the recent history of genocide, colonization and enslavement that unfolded in the Caribbean and their deleterious consequences on the human person, I am interested in understanding the substance of Caribbean Pawòl, that is Caribbean discourse/speech/thought or Caribbean ethics as well as, on the one hand, how Africans might have meaningfully and substantively—in the sense of “significant” and “substance/content”—contributed to it, and on the second, how this can enlighten us today to continue to build relations and the world outside of parameters that privilege exclusive hierarchies, whether racial or otherwise. *Speaking* about and on behalf of the Caribbean, whether in writing or differently, from within and without, is a speech phenomenon ingrained in Caribbean history. Explicitly or implicitly, European powers self-engaged in Caribbean history advanced speech on the Caribbean, a speech paradigm that I name “parole.” The mere fact that one of the most important instructions to officials, public and religious, was to officially record every single fact of the colony, suffices to indicate the critical importance of that point. The registered speech—parole—on and for the Caribbean is therefore colonial and the first pillar of colonial epistemology. The latter is the range of myths, beliefs, prejudices, and mystifications the enslaving system elaborates to construct what it views as “knowledge” on matters related to the colony. It affirms that there exists a de facto and

unsurmountable separation between the various groups of the human world and posits an asphyxiating view of what the human person is. That unethical speech does not just seek to pass as official, legitimate, and authoritative; it also wants to be the reflection of what is, irrefutably, Caribbean speech. Of course, great Caribbean thinkers and writers such as Baron de Vastey, Anténor Firmin, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, just to name a handful of them from the Creole- and French-speaking Caribbean have, along the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, set the record straight in writing as to what Caribbean *Pawòl* might be. However, what of those Africans of whom they spring and who endured in the crudest manner, the ordeal of enslavement without access to writing? What I term *Pawòl* is therefore, more specifically, the set of material and immaterial Caribbean signs—including (oral) discourse—that distinguish Caribbean thought and the Caribbean way of being and positioning itself vis-à-vis the human universe and that translates the conscious and determined opposition to any process seeking to annihilate the human person. It is a way of practicing, producing, and positioning vis-à-vis language and speech—“langue” and “langage”—that does not compromise the integrity of the human person and that renders Caribbean ethics and aesthetics. *Pawòl* is not “parole,” since the former sheds light on the latter’s unethical nature as plantation speech relying on plantation ideology and its attacks on the human person.

I want to stress that, under the abuses of the colonization of the lands constituting the Caribbean space, the genocide of the Indigenous people, and the enslavement of Africans, the said space became identifiable as “plantation,” since, in the most unethical way, its usage became founded in the exploitation of its soil that needed to yield economic and social benefits out of the planting of sugarcane. In the plantation, existed Africans magnifying the economic and social value of the sugarcane plant and Europeans exclusively gaining from that production.

Presenting themselves as Power through the authoritarian deployment of material weaponry, monetary capabilities, and metaphysical systems construed as compelling, justificative and legitimizing instruments, European forces perpetrated the four actions of colonizing the Caribbean, genociding the Indigenous people, enslaving Africans, and endangering human integrity. Enslavers cemented their actions in loathsomeness and a set of established ideologies that insidiously bore a semblance to thinking. These ideologies endangered human integrity and the very notions of “human person” or “humanness” and “humankind.” Per their ruling practices and thinking of the plantation, they defined “human person” and “human kind” from a lens contrary to natural and rational facts whereby all persons of humankind proffer the same human traits and therefore the same human worth. They subjected the meaning of human “person” and “humankind” to a severe redefinition, privileging a superiorizing and inferiorizing paradigm, that determined human belonging according to what was construed as their “race.” In fact, depending on its motivation of racial superiorization or inferiorization, that paradigm served to existentialize and deexistentialize human beings, this is to say, that it either rooted and legitimized the human subject into human existence or it situated said subject outside of human existence.

What characterizes the actions is their systematic and violent nature, the fact that, in the first place, they became synonymous with Power and, in the second, that Power was established by violence. In the plantation, systematic violence is then one of the primordial means for legitimacy. Ultimate violence itself is legalized through a set of plantation laws embodied in the *Code noir* [articles 32, 33, 34], the same instrument that, through article 15, forbids the enslaved from “carrying any offensive weapon or big stick,” that is, that discards for them the possibility of self-defense.

That systematic action underscores an equally systematic set of ideas translating the European philosophy of the human world as expressed in the plantation. This is one of the areas where the idea of the Caribbean as “plantation” appears astutely critical for, the type of philosophical premise this violence-laden and anti-human person ideology complex that strives to pose as ideas can “plant,” is strikingly dangerous. Given their inextricable connectivity with these “legitimatory” instruments such as violence, differentiated superior and inferior races and Power, this Plantation European philosophy advanced itself as one likely to shape and dominate the content and texture of Caribbean practices, and especially Caribbean thought and values henceforth also likely to denote Caribbean identity as intrinsically plantation identity. The most critical question concerns the way, through thought, Caribbeans would come to view, define, and relate with and to the notions of “human person” and “humankind” and their humanity.

Such questions are not to be seen as negligible for, they concern one of the objects and the subject which in the human realm cannot be bypassed to understand the latter in the same way as they concern the concept which in Caribbean history was the most brutalized and distorted: the human person, its kind and humanity. Indeed, since the beginning of the colonization of the Caribbean as we recognize the latter today, its history presents itself as an unspeakable parable of a deliberate physical and metaphysical attack on humanity. After the genocide of Indigenous people, the attempt seeks to arrive at both the exclusive de-existentialization and de-humanization of Africans, two exigencies necessary to fulfill the colonial project of uncontested submission giving way to uncontested European racial, economic, and social supremacy. The set of values giving rise to the targeting of that which is human, and thereby the human person, is profoundly “inhumanist,” that is anti-human. In starting the colonization of the Caribbean lands, committing the genocide of Indigenous people and enslavement of Africans there, European forces jeopardize the existential future of the Caribbean space and its peoples for times to come. What can become of these projected Caribbean peoples if their understanding of the human person, of human kind and humanity carries at its core the inflections of the inhumanist or anti-human European-plantation system of ideologies and Plantation European semblance of philosophy. How can they contradict the attempt to de-existentialization and de-humanization and build up (human) personhood and the latter’s derivative productions such as society in a way accounting for non-inhumanistic/anti-human parameters. Indeed, the Caribbean as we know it today arise in the so-called Modernity period which raises some of the crudest questions pertaining to moral philosophy, metaphysics and axiology, questions and critical domains of the human existence that highlight the grimness of its plight. This said, I want to bring to the surface an unexplored dimension of the work of enslaved Africans that countered the inhumanistic or anti-human result plantation values would have otherwise been likely to trigger and impose as Caribbean values. I aim at showing how their unseen, but operating work acted upon the aforementioned philosophical domains and texturized the values that were to stand at the center of Caribbean thought and practices—humanism, that is respect and love for the human person—, to extirpate the Caribbean out of the plantation-identity paradigm, to define personhood and existentialize it, and form what I term Caribbean Humanism or Mounism, a distinctive Caribbean humanistic approach to human existence.

Present in the Creole language spoken in the insular and continental Caribbean today (Dominica, Guadeloupe and her dependencies, Guyana, Haiti, Martinique, Saint-Lucia), the term “moun” and the phrase “tout moun sé moun” that respectively stand for “human person” and “all human persons are human persons” guide us to propose answers to the questions. Being part of Caribbean Pawòl, they

encapsulate much of Caribbean Mounism and the metaphysical action undertaken and accomplished by enslaved Africans to assert what is and what is not and build (the foundation of) Caribbean epistemology, and to permit, in the Caribbean, the expression of a human- or moun-centered existence, humanistic or mounist ethics and aesthetics and to redress the imposed identity of the land as “plantation” to one providing hope that a mounist existence is possible there for all. Some of the greatest Caribbean philosophers have established the essential work of the Africans in contributing to *making* the Caribbean we know today. Such is the case of Martinican Édouard Glissant who affirms: “There is no positivity to enslavement. There is only a positivity to the work of the enslaved themselves”¹ (Laventure, Élie-dit-Cosaque, and Adler, 2007: 25: 45). As for Frantz Fanon, he axed his hopes on the advent of a “new humanism” (Fanon 1952: 5). While the already profoundly mounist Caribbean Pawòl or thought benefit from the contribution of the said great Caribbean thinkers, neither of them precisely articulates the specific African philosophical input to this “humanism.” Fanon, for example, does not even realize that what he wishes for is already in existence and practice under the impulse of his ancestors’ metaphysical proposition.

1 Baudry des Lozières

Being one of the roots of Caribbean Mounism, the predicate of Caribbean Pawòl, and a precise and powerful—perhaps *the* most powerful—referential point of African contribution to Caribbean thought, my focus here is on “moun,” on its emergence, its circumstances and meaning.² To grasp the scope, density, philosophical nature of Caribbean Mounism and Pawòl as well as their distinctiveness and the density of what enslaved Africans faced to establish these paradigms, it is worth first casting light on what I call, “l’esprit du Blanc”—the mindset or spirit of the White man in and of the plantation. L’esprit du Blanc is what—and in particular, the mode of reasoning and type of thought—springs, in a systematic manner, of the values of plantation Europeans as much as what casts light on the specificities of the said values and motivates their political positioning and actions vis-à-vis world phenomena. It is what, in its crude severity, makes Caribbean Mounism and Pawòl salient, and understanding its deep-seated and persistent density can help measure the intensity and significance of the African response to anti-Mounism.

In the plantation, “Blanc” is a European-established racial category signaling the enslaver as Power, whose most defining action is to deprive a targeted group of human beings of their freedom through the exercise of systematic and multiform violence. However, plantation Blanc as I, in turn, label this category, gives way to that unethical fact of the plantation while using a terminological nexus calling upon philosophical and ethical referents such as “justice,” “reason,” “truth,” “value,” “virtue,” “freedom,” “liberty,” “equality,” “dignity,” and “humanity.” This is where transpires their dangerous stratagem to try and make ideology pass for ideas and their intentional fallacy pose for philosophy. Plantation Blanc even uses the term “philosophy” which points to the ambition to institute their “esprit” or mindset as the referential point for matters philosophical, and in particular, moral philosophy, in the Caribbean space but also for matters understood as the incarnation of Modernity.

As a Plantation Blanc, Saint-Domingue’s enslaver, Louis-Narcisse Baudry Des Lozières (1751-1841) embodies both “esprit du Blanc” and the pretense of his group to philosophy and exclusive

determination of what is Caribbean and modern. He engages in discussions prominent in his times, and in that, portrays himself as a “philosopher.” In his 1802 *Les égarements du nigrophilisme* or *The Wanderings of Negrophilia*, he offers critical insight into esprit du Blanc as he engages in a fictitious discussion with his deceased father, a discussion that does not detract from the manner in which his “parole” or plantation speech is infused with colonial knowledge and shows how enslavers manipulatively draw upon established philosophical precepts to construct colonial epistemology. I call the subterfuge used to establish colonial epistemology, “vèglaj,” that I derive from the Creole “vèglé” —to bedazzle—and that is a procedure applied to delude. Vèglaj is one duplicity prominently practiced by enslavers and one to which des Lozières does not fail to resort. A crude illustration of the parole of his group, permits to see clearly one of the roots of the anti-African/anti-Black “préjugé de couleur”—racism—and its manifestations through enslavement. We witness through his speech the building of epistemic injustice whereby African episteme are atrophied for the benefit of an overbearing hypertrophy of the voice of the enslaver, one that will spread during subsequent centuries via various means and forms.

Des Lozières spends twenty-five years in the Saint-Domingue colony out of which the Revolution drives him in 1792 to America before returning to France. In turn, he flees back to America in 1793 from the French Revolution (des Lozières 1802: XJ) where he pursues the writing of the work he had started under Robespierre and in which he castigates a class of Europeans he vows to combat, that is, “the negrophiles whose devotion [for the Africans] is neither of a moral or natural order” (des Lozières 1802: 51) and who harbor a project he deems “projet de méchants” (des Lozières 1802: 2). In des Lozières’s prism, “Negrophiles” are despicable and “hommes perfides” or perfidious men (des Lozières 1802: 2-3) emblemized by Robespierre, a spokesperson for people’s rights and advocator for the end of the slave trade. He calls philosophers who oppose enslavement the “déraisonneurs” (des Lozières 1802: 24) thus implying his standing in the camp of “raisonneurs,” that is, those who hold reason. In fact, as he puts it, his intention is to bring enlightenment on matters pertaining to the colony and therefore, he sees his endeavor within the lens of usefulness. Moreover, he views his book as an instrument participating to the building of his group’s colonial edifice: This work is not entertainment; it is merely of utility [...] One must inform about the colony [...]. The material does not offer a book, but tools that can serve in the colonies” (des Lozières 1802: XIII). But what does des Lozières want? He informs us as such: “To me, I preach everywhere only general tranquility, only the common good for as many of us, only happiness as we can have it here. I point to the dangers of change and my logic cannot cost us our blood” (des Lozières 1802: 60). Here we see how des Lozières indeed ventures into the realm of philosophical thinking oscillating between standpoints as varied and antithetical as Aristotelian happiness and Epicurean ataraxia: In fact, he introduces the idea of a philosophy of happiness—tranquility, common good, happiness—in the plantation, a happiness concerning primarily “us” that is, plantation Blancs strictly, and one obtained for free since plantation Blancs do not have to pay for it with their blood. In any case, it is not exaggerated to pinpoint in des Lozières’s want the expression of an existential quest that outlines the type and modalities of existence to which he aspires.

Additionally, des Lozières sees his work as epistemological, pedagogical and rectificatory. According to him, his is an intention to impart truthful knowledge and “unseal the eyes of commoners [...] on an object that they seldom know in France” (des Lozières 1802: 3). Knowledge, knowing and knowing with accuracy are critical for, to des Lozières, all three factors determine the right mind positioning, feeling and thought. He implies that not knowing the “truth” that Africans are evil or wrongly

believing they are not elicited on the part of “nigrophiles” the wrong emotion: “It is therefore really wrong that we affect to pity them so much: to feel sorry for their fate is to announce that we do not know them” (des Lozières 1802: 89). It is also to be understood that des Lozières aims at drawing attention to the idea of universal truth especially as it relates to the identity of Africans as, at the same time, he seeks to state the type of relationship one ought to establish with them.

Through what he wants, des Lozières establishes who he is and here, one is to understand that he views himself as an educator. Of course, his sophistic speech strategy also consists in advancing an aggrandizing self-portrait and that is how he can describe himself as sensitive (des Lozières 1802: 55). He does not discard emotion, and actually, he stresses his as the right type of emotion derived of the right type of knowledge. This is how des Lozières can now suggest that his thoughts and emotions are both the products of a philosophy turned towards sensitive human concerns and not towards an aspiration to power. Indeed, portraying himself in this light, he insinuates that the “nigrophiles” are engaged in politics: “My heart, inspired more by humanity than politics [...]” (des Lozières 1802: 59). He also projects himself as someone who will restore justice, one who desires to unmask and overthrow the “scheme erected by charlatanry that hides itself underneath the false colors of humanity and, which, under the mask of philanthropy, keeps the traits of a torturer” (des Lozières 1802: 3).

So now, why would des Lozières be so unremittingly in galvanizing his fellow enslavers and his state to maintain the status quo and not change anything? Apart from wanting to fulfil happiness for his group and himself, des Lozières also aims at urging the restoration of French rules in Saint-Domingue because, according to him, France’s entire hopes of grandeur critically depend on that colony:

The colonies provided the mother-land much metallic wealth and to our trade system and immensity of circulating wealth. [...] the colonies were a fount of wealth that poured over Europe and fertilized all what was in their way. We therefore can and we must exploit with courage all that can help us regain this land that alone contains so many treasures and goods. [...] All European gazes are fixated onto Saint-Domingue and restoring its ability to produce again equates giving back to France her hopes and her luster. An example for the colonies, defeating the brigands in Saint-Domingue will amount to allowing peace in all of the Antilles and quelling the inquietude that torments all the colonies where rebellion has not yet started (des Lozières 1802: XIV-XVI).

It is here that he anchors his answer regarding the means for the plantation happiness of the plantation Blanc in the plantation itself. We now understand that, in the philosophy of happiness of des Lozières, the plantation stands as its location of materialization and African labor, its source. That is why, ultimately, to make his point, what he purports to achieve through his written speech is, “examine what enslavement is in the colonies” (des Lozières 1802: 4). But by far, what is crucial is that des Lozières inscribes his discourse within the terms of a “proposition,” that is a statement advanced to epitomize what is and what is not, what is true and what is not true. Talking about himself in the third person he says: “he does not decide, he just makes a proposition and leaves it to the wisdom of chiefs to appreciate his ideas that they themselves would have had had they been in his place” (des Lozières 1802: XV). This is what needs to be critically borne in mind as his discourse declares the type of proposition and fate he envisages for the Caribbean. However des Lozières self-defines, addressing those he calls “nigrophiles,” he syllogistically implies that he is a “negrophobe.” As a matter of fact, des Lozières employs various means to attempt the validation of his reasoning including that he

assures us that the experience he has had and “impartial observations” he has made as a witness in the colonies are sheer factors compelling him to militate “in favor of enslavement” (des Lozières 1802: 4-5). An enslavement activist therefore, he insists on his status as a locutory and auricular witness that positions him as bearer of the truth and gives him an advantage on “all the reasonings done so many leagues away from the colonies by so-called shrewd intellectuals from Paris who have never seen neither the people nor the country on which they pretend to shed tears [...]” (des Lozières 1802: 5). Des Lozières insists: “I saw it, I have observed this multiple times” (des Lozières 1802: 7). Such is the context and aim with which des Lozières advances his positioning and reasoning on the colonies. He is not scrupulous and has no limits, for, through his declared objectives, des Lozières announces the way he wants the reader to apprehend his identity as seeker of justice and as an educator engaged in an ethical enterprise aligned with epistemology, education, truth, philosophy, and credibility. His deceptive use of terminology that conveys philosophical or moral principles has the insidious potential to sow confusion and doubt in the domain of values. One can therefore clearly see the dangerous potential for confusion. In any case, that on which des Lozières’s self-characterization and contextualization casts light is, firstly, a choice presents itself to Europeans who can either opt to be “nigrophiles” or “negrophobes.” Secondly, through the exponentially meliorative self-portrayal tactic that seeks to distinguish their own selves from “nigrophiles,” an “esprit du Blanc” surfaces some of whose most salient traits we will study later. If “nigrophiles” are held to be “déraisonneurs”—deprived of reason—and negrophobes are advanced as “raisonneurs”—reasoners—what strategies then does des Lozières deploy to attempt convincing the French people ignorant of his “truth”?

2 Esprit du Blanc

As illustrated by their fervent representative, des Lozières, it is obvious that the logic of enslavers is an illogicality that is inherently unethical and one that targets human dignity. Esprit du Blanc produces “parole” and it is not useless to scrutinize some of the specific traits of their absurd mode of thought as it purports to establish what it sees as humanity, human person, philosophy, what is, what is true, what is real, and what is just. In the same way, that mode of thought that strives to project the texture of Caribbean values and the meaning of Africans within that structure, merits further study too. A scrutiny of this “esprit du Blanc” unveils the density of the challenges facing the enslaved and amplifies the meaning of the African response for, the context is one where enslavers force upon them a state of non-freedom meant to suppress their agency in all dimensions of life.

What I call “Symbolizationism,” is the political procedure deployed to represent Africans and “nigrophiles,” and guides des Lozières’s sophism. I define “Symbolizationism” as a procedure and an act of abnormalization that consists in systematically drawing a portrayal of a person or group of persons through the process of hypertrophic racialization meant to indelibly anchor the portrayed in all minds, including their own, as the living incarnation of what is irretrievably humanly and racially unacceptable. To start with, “esprit du Blanc” does not fail to situate the Caribbean geosocial space in relation to Europeans, with Europe as the center. It is in this light that “esprit du Blanc” and the plantation discourse —parole— define the Caribbean as a place inalienably indispensable to Europeans. The relationship is one of dependency that unveils a European (unspoken) existential depression given that, according to them, their survival relies on the laborious action and production

of Africans. The Caribbean soil and lands themselves are dependent on the said action as their valor can be ensured but by the African labor. In fact, both the existence of the enslavers and Caribbean soils are inextricably appended to African dexterity and magnifying power, in that, African labor has the power to magnify Power, but for others. This is the “truth” esprit du Blanc wants to institute calling upon the very epistemological system of “nigrophiles,” but also upon general knowledge it claims is owned by all. Of course, des Lozières’s disingenuous position is not able to recognize that this is but colonial epistemology carried by colonial books and so, he makes the “truth” about the colonies a function of its inscription in books:

First of all, let’s agree on the truth. The colonies are accessory states that have become indispensable to Europeans. In the Old World, one can no longer live without cocoa, cotton, indigo and above, all without coffee and sugar. These states are of an inestimable price thanks to the riches of their soil. However, they can continue to be rich only through the quantity of laboring arms [...] The greatest nigrophiles must know that these climes are hot and humid. Consequently, they are unsound for Europeans. This fact cannot be contested. It is in all the books on the colony whomever has written them (des Lozières 1802: 5-6).

Here we see another instance of the procedure esprit du Blanc uses to fabricate colonial epistemology. Books are held as referential and incontestable authorities that determine what is “true.” Underscored by the stance on plantation Blanc’s happiness and African labor and on enslavement vis-à-vis Africans, “esprit du Blanc” also relies on the following main ideas. One, enslavement (of Africans) is humanity, and two, for Africans, enslavement equates freedom. Let’s hear, more explicitly, des Lozières’s appreciation of enslavement:

If it saves the life of billions of men who would otherwise perish of hunger or whom politics in their own patria would deliver to death, if it procures these same men with the social existence that both philosophy and religion demand on behalf of humanity, interest and reason, one must admit that it does not quite bear the odious character that the fanaticism of today’s philosophers brings them to exaggerate (des Lozières 1802: 3-4).

So, des Lozières advances himself into the realm of political philosophy pretending his group is concerned with the social well-being of Africans whom they feel compel to ‘save’ from true enslavement to a more measured and happiness-seeking institution. Of course, it is no surprise that such an “esprit” would also seek to draw on what bears all the appearances of logical reasoning and methodology: Here, syllogism is the instrument of des Lozières’s vèglaj, that is his determined intention to mislead: “If then enslavement has the usefulness it appears to bear, it should be created in the colonies if it is not yet created or it should be established again if a blind philanthropy had ever suppressed it [...] in reality it is a monster only in the eyes of some party in Europe which does not know it” (des Lozières 1802: 4-5).

In the same way as he distinguishes between negrophiles and negrophobes, des Lozières furthers his strategy by drawing a division among good enslavers and bad enslavers. Just like he had self-identified as a decisive witness feeling the right emotions, he categorizes himself as a source that can proffer reliable testimonies all the more so that others can acknowledge the veracity of his identity through reputation: he says he is seen as a “gate nègre” and protector of “mulattos”: “I have acquired the reputation of being a spoiler of the negroes and that of protector of the mullattos [...]. In all truth, I

have been thus regarded since 1776 that I own slaves and that I am a witness of the bad behavior of uneducated Whites towards free people of color (des Lozières 1802: 53). Proceeding to argue that the plight of Africans in Africa is undesirable since they are doomed to death at the hands of inhuman leaders, des Lozières undertakes to articulate a twofold legitimizing procedure resting on the idea of multiple sources. On the one hand, he personalizes his arguments thereby claiming that his resources and sources derive from his experience, a paradigm that designates him as an authority. Here, one sees how, through this first-hand and first-person take, he purports to solicit, to some extent, traits of phenomenology. On the other hand, he claims that his knowledge is corroborated by a long list of external sources and in which each item elevates him and his “parole” or (anti-human) speech as epistemologically authoritative. Therefore, the second level of authority meant to procure credence to his discourse is inscribed in what I term his “factualization” and “scientification” process. Indeed, as seen earlier, he ambitions to anchor his affirmations as facts and as a factor of scientific knowledge evinced by their inscription in “books.” Des Lozières divulges esprit du Blanc’s stance on truth. We’ve seen that, to him, truth is what is imprinted in books. Now, he tells us that what is imprinted in books is “truth” because his Greek ancestors or someone from his community wrote it and asserted that what they wrote is “truth.” Finally, it goes without saying that he cannot access this epistemological supremacy without affirming that he holds the truth about Africa and Africans from the latter themselves. Here, African knowledge becomes reliable solely when it serves the purpose of accrediting the enslaver’s anti-African prejudices. The knowledge he claims to have extracted from them is framed within the paradigm of objectivity and rigor inasmuch as it rests upon constancy itself deriving from numeric credibility. Indeed, des Lozières affirms that he has interviewed many Africans during multiple years which has allowed him to obtain from them all, an identical answer. He therefore insinuates that his is a study drawing upon formal knowledge and quantitative data leading to qualitative reasoning and inferences:

Check the books on Africa, ask all explorers, the slave ships captains, doctors, and other passengers who travelled inland, those at the trading posts, the bossal [the newly arrived] who have just arrived from the coast and when you will have, like I have, with no interest, with no prejudices reflected upon what you would have read, seen and heard, when after interviewing countless Africans over years and they would have answered the same thing, you will have to believe all the horrors I am going to tell you about (des Lozières 1802: 15-16).

Such a discursive and methodological sham is how he can answer his principal question about enslavement and posit the benefactory nature he attributes to it which becomes an “immortal accomplishment” that, to him, goes as far as being equitable. In fact, what des Lozières asserts is that enslavement is the result of a political, rational, and equitable bargain between the enslaved and enslavers:

It saved the life of billions of miserable men without ruining or slaughtering one single man to accomplish this immortal accomplishment. It accomplished even better: it turned all its interests towards this grand goal for, saving one party, it enriched the other and everyone, by this system carrying true wisdom, found their groove. [...] Let’s dare speak the truth and say that the very first act of trading negroes was a good deed (des Lozières 1802: 26).

Through this parole, des Lozières does nothing short of severely questioning the Africans’ sense of dignity. This is not the only instance where the enslaver’s *mauvaise foi* reaches an extra-ordinary peak,

for, *en conscience*, des Lozières relinquishes all human freedom to choose to be free to stand, think and act in solidarity with reason. Reverting to his plantation philosophy of happiness, des Lozières implies now that the bargain also concerns the happiness of the enslaved. As a matter of fact, to him, there is such a thing as plantation happiness since not only is enslavement philanthropy, it is also happiness. This does not happen without gradation and hierarchy of happiness though. In fact, there is a separate meaning and way for being happy and fulfilling happiness. In his scale and hierarchy of happiness, “Europeans” are free and benefit from the “greatest advantages” in contrast to the enslaved. It is this context of a “bargain” in which des Lozières inserts the idea that enslavers may be engaged in politics. However, he implies that they do so by associating politics with a philosophically-informed humanistic take: “This enslavement is, therefore, the successive happiness of generations of Africans at the same time as it provides the greatest advantages to Europeans. Never have we seen politics in such great accordance with humanity, with the most refined philanthropy” (des Lozières 1802: 97). Thus, des Lozières amplifies the density of his legitimacy procedure for, after claiming his authority from experience, books, universal knowledge, science, formalism, and Africans, resources that allow him to claim that this wisdom-laden system exudes equity, he goes as far as assuring that it additionally illuminates humanity. Moreover, to him, “The powers that have adopted these views on the slave trade had the most active sentiments of humanity and all governors owning the colonies that favored them [the said sentiments] did but imitate one of the best actions” (des Lozières 1802: 27). So, given that enslavement is humanity to the enslaved, a humanity derived out of the humanity of the enslavers, enslavement actually does provide dignity to the enslaved who now can be worthy of being part of the human universe: “From the point of view of humanity, colonial enslavement saves an infinite number of men from true enslavement, from absolute ignorance and superstition, the worst public calamity. Through it, we make men of them, worthy of this universe” (des Lozières 1802: 109).

Claiming so, he also calls upon the paramount authority, the regulatory “puissances”—the State—to shift any accusation laid on private enslavers to the ultimate enslaver that the official government is. Des Lozières’ text is allowing us to witness the way he is introducing the idea of impunity vis-à-vis known crimes as, here, he is claiming for the right to impunity. Indeed, according to him, should enslavement have been a bad thing, just like the “anciens,” that is the Greek ancestors, the State would not have practiced it. What is more, is that he adds that if ever it came to be revealed as a bad thing, private enslavers like him should not be held responsible because they are only imitating the example of the ultimate political and social power, that is, the State. He goes further when calling upon his ancestry to establish his credibility and innocence. By calling upon his ancestry and State, des Lozières acknowledges that he belongs to a community, a continuum and uninterrupted line which action, vision and (ill-acquired) profits he shares. However, in front of the question of guilt, responsibility, and reparation, he refuses to stand in solidarity with those he sees as referential and authoritative leaders of his community to which he transfers all culpability. At this point, he actually implies that reason is itself the tradition of thought and behavior in his universe, making his own thinking henceforth reliable and credible. This is where he defines philosophy, hierarchizes its categories, and insinuates that his is “good philosophy.” Contrariwise, negrophiles practice a bad type of philosophy and are consequently the enemies of social cohesion and order:

Why did our ancestors not suppress enslavement? [...] it is because our ancestors were more reasonable, more ingrained in philosophy than we are. It is because good philosophy works to correct our mores and not to dismantle what the politic of our government cement according to circumstances and localities (des Lozières 1802: 72).

Again, as an epitome of *esprit du Blanc*, des Lozières spares no cynicism. Given that, to him, Africans are ‘saved’ by enslavement, accepting the latter is but a mere contribution through which they ought to show gratitude: “In any case, it is not against humanity to say that, delivered from all these ills, these negroes had to show their gratitude by all means possible” (des Lozières 1802: 30).

Of course, for him to unfold his discourse, des Lozières has to define what a human person is, what confers humanity but also who is human. He therefore proceeds to define humanizing categories. He already set that enslavement provides happiness and now, he claims that what provides the status of “human” rests upon knowledge and civilization. Thus, he can claim that, “In our colonies, masters are usually educated and civilized, consequently they are human” (des Lozières 1802: 36).

This categorization does not just allow him to confirm enslavers as human as des Lozières defines who is human, what confers humanity, the location of humanity and the reason why Africans are not human. He inscribes Africans into an a-human mold and more specifically in one where they are infra-human, where extra-ordinarity, ab-normality, animality, hyper-singularity and deficiency become particularities that themselves form what he construes as an “Africanity.” The latter is said to incarnate the moral numbness of those captured by the mold as well as their supposed inability to mobilize “man’s reason.” Humanity is located in the colony because, contrary to Africa, there exist educated enslavers able to produce ideas springing from human reason. One seizes des Lozières’s aporia, emotion and confusion given that, in his paradigm, Africans are both a-human that is non-human and at the same time, they are infra-human, that is human but below all things human. In other words, this elicits another category mounted on the idea I term “acceptable human” whereby Africans are actually human but their being human or the way they are human is not acceptable due to their extra-ordinarity and ab-normality as humans who are savages that is, not refined by the wonders of education, and not guided by reason to be humane and not eat human flesh. What des Lozières introduces here is that doubt must govern all approaches vis-à-vis the humaness and humanity of the African. This is indeed the sole area where the enslaver shows doubt in his parole about the African for, all other statements about the latter African are proclaimed with the most peremptuous certainty. Already transpires the idea of an approximate human (*être approximatif*) which suggests that the predicate for humanity and relations between humans its hat there is no human equality since not all human persons are (really and totally) human persons.

Des Lozières’ symbolizationism here reaches its peak in the way it states a vision where pejorative uniqueness and unicity brings the African kind to confound what is human. Indeed, that kind is so much so outside or underneath what is human and acceptable, that it escapes all comparative measures. Most of all, one needs to have seen that kind to believe such infra-humanity is possible. In fact, with their Africanity, Africans, and especially those newly deported, the bossals, become themselves a category. They now emblemize what is a-critical:

They are born and live in their countries like beasts, and I speak with no exception or exaggeration [...] I can assure you that there is nothing with which you can compare them to give you an idea of the apathy, of their negation of ideas when we take them to the colonies. You need to have seen it to believe it. This is so much so that, to refer to people with no common sense even those with a natural and self-preservation instinct proper to any animal,

and who appear devoid of the most ordinary idea, we say: *he is like a bossal negroe* which means like a negroe from the slave trade who has just arrived in the colony (des Lozières 1802: 30-1).

The a-cognitivity of Africans is combined with an a-morality expressed in their being “[...] evil, indocile, excessively lazy, capable of all crimes, shameless, almost always maroons and almost always incorrigible” (des Lozières 1802: 32). Suffice to hear des Lozières’s final statement about what in his symbolizationist paradigm is certainly construed as a-moral Africanity. To him, a-moral Africanity is very much organic as it is mobilized and incarnated by skin color:

In the moral domain, we have shown that the negro is of a very singular nature. In another work, we have dissected him morally according to his anatomy where we can see how his skin warns us that his interior is incontestably different from ours. Against our will, we unfortunately had to come to the conclusion that he is from a depraved species, that he is the most imperfect class of humanity, the darkest, the most incapable, the most vicious, the most incorrigible and that the negro who elevates himself to the level of the last of the educated white men is a phenomenon among his kind. We have concluded that he is not meant for the freedom of white people and, up to now, his behavior proves this more and more (des Lozières 1802: 109).

Actually, for des Lozières, since freedom belongs to White people and is not a right Africans can claim, the deficiencies of Africanity can lessen through enslavement that provides a space for amelioration. The acclimated, that is, the creolized Africans, can thus be distinguished from the bossals—the ultimate Africans—and then give proof of the meliorative benefit of the colony. Not only does the latter ‘save’ and ‘free’ them from despotic rulers in Africa, but in addition, it procures them with the opportunity to extend the most critical and humanizing human feature which is the ability to speak and to think. In this way, des Lozières means to claim that the colony and even more so, the plantation, is a moralizing and humanizing site for the Africans. His assertion is that the colony being “chez les colons” and a humanistic site, “colon” being “hommes” and humane, it is the site where, under the educative action of the enslavers who elevate themselves as prescribed models, Africans can become “homme,” that is, human persons:

In their own country, their language is abbreviated. Barely having the ability to think, they need few words but with the slave owners they learn to speak, to expand their ability to think that is natural to mankind [...] In a word, we make of them human beings who, like us feel what is relatively pleasant about life and science and that makes you happy [...] (des Lozières 1802: 39).

Just like civilization and education provide humanity, freedom does, a state Africans do not enjoy and experience even in their original lands. In fact, there, one is never free. One is either exclusively or moderately a “slave,” but in all cases, one is assuredly a slave even those detaining clear power. In addition, features that mark the African self range from cruelty to monstrosity, two properties that also situate them outside of humanity:

In these hot lands, one does not see, properly speaking, free people. One is more or less a slave. Those who are less so, are those who help govern and who own slaves whom, through imitation, they treat horribly. The government, if ever one can call it that, is of a refined cruelty, is a monster of such a singular nature that even chiefs and kings, although they are absolute monarchs, must, although differently carry chains as ridiculous, as inhuman, as revolting as those

of ordinary slaves. Tradition and caprice are the laws of this monstrous government, and their despotism goes infinitely beyond the remote limits of Asian barbarism (des Lozières 1802: 16-7).

To des Lozières, freedom is a function of reason, a feature Africans negate hence the pertinence of their enslavement. Reason also provides equality, a status from which Africans cannot benefit still due to their being deprived of reason. Des Lozières implies this in his statement: “As a sensitive man, I would like that [...] all men on earth be free and perfectly free. It would be the proof that they are equally reasonable [...]” (des Lozières 1802: 55). Des Lozières makes a plea for reason and a reason-governed approach to the question related to the enslavement of Africans for, to him, nature and reason treat Africans as infra-human and enslaved. Africans are not “reasonable,” that is they do not hold reason. This is why freedom for them is against reason and humanity outside the realm of enslavement for them equates but death. When the nigrophiles demand the end of the slave trade and enslavement, des Lozières asks: “If this were to happen, it should be on the basis of justice for, does humanity consist in sacrificing reason to favor pure fantasy?” (des Lozières 1802: 111) Nature and reason have acted as such because not only it is in this paradigm where Africans find humanity it is also through that experience that they syllogistically acquire a social existence:

If it (enslavement) maintains the life of millions of men who otherwise would perish of hunger or who politics in their own patria would deliver to death, if it (enslavement) procures to these same men the social existence that philosophy and religion demand on behalf of humanity, interest, and reason, one must admit that it (enslavement) does not have this whole odious character despicable philosophers like to exaggerate (des Lozières 1802: 3).

Corresponding to his paradigm that Africans are but infra-humans deprived of reason which compels for them an absolute lack of freedom and social neutralization, “nègre” and “esclave” are the two referents that can name them, give meaning to the said names, and situate the meaning of their human, social and gender existence. In this paradigm, the predicate is that naming is not only truth, but it is also meaning. The word “nègre” in this case, is both ontological and axiological, and it is clear that they emblemize plantation ontology and axiology. The two labels are interchangeable and subsume des Lozières’ assertions and equation in that, [African = nègre = esclave = African]. These two words mean as much race as they mean, all men, not human, not exactly human, not acceptable human or human but not equal to other humans, “être approximatif” and socially marginal, in other words, inferior. They also mean that to the enslaver, the colonial plantation is a *society* that they form to respond exclusively to their needs and interest. The “nègre” who is irremediably “esclave” is indispensable to that society, but as utilitarian, they are meant to belong only either to the margin or the exterior. To the enslaved then, this society is nothing but an anti-society.

Finally, having defined what a human person is, that Blanc is human, that Africans are infra-human and need enslavement to border on plain humanity, that education and civilization confer humanness thanks to and through Blanc, after suggesting that the meaning of the African’ identity can be referenced but with “nègre” or “esclave,” des Lozières can now conclude on the principle of equality. This is how he is able to confirm inequality between the human group to which he belongs and the infra-human group of the Africans: “I do not regard them as my equals, both nature and reason forbid me from it. However, I treat them as I have always, that is, as nature and reason require it” (des Lozières 1802: 55).

Des Lozières' statement is about the type of human and thinking modes and products that his enslaver counterparts and he envisage for the Caribbean space and the humans within it. "Esprit du Blanc" that produces this type of plantation European semblance of philosophy, regards enslavement as a value of and for the Caribbean and the Caribbean itself as enslavement. Aporetic in that it is loaded with aporia and guided solely by plantation Blanc's unshakable will to build an existence entailing permanent, exclusive, and undisputed happiness, the esprit du Blanc speech is mounted on bad faith. In this unethical paradigm it envisions a type of existentialization for the Africans anchored in de-existentialization or in plantation existentialization.

In drawing upon its modes, terminology, and ideas, des Lozières claims European humanism to incarnate it as science, reason and human values that propel balance, self- and collective edification, and freedom. However, one understands after all this "parole" the type of educator des Lozières is, that is, he is an inhumanist master-teacher as his discourse amounts to teaching hatred not just for the African but also for the human person and inhumanity. Similarly, one understands that des Lozières assumes a pretense of and to thought and what he purports to advance is an outline for what he regards as progress in the age of modernity where enslavement is a parable for modernity and humanity and a locus and place where the moral shortfalls of Africans can be redressed into virtuous qualities leading to a new identity as Creole/Creolized/Modernity and de-Africanized Africans at the exclusive service of "les intérêts des colons."

3 Moun, tout moun sé moun

So, what of the "intérêts des Africains" and that of human kind then? Within the supremacist and power paradigm it is posited, is there an alternative to this unethical and anti-human project in which one seeks to perennially insert the mode of human existence into a paradigm and in which the human person is hierarchized into groups seen as humanly unequal and, furthermore, enslavement signifies the social institution within which the project is enacted? Of course, des Lozières sees his projection as the reflection of a value acceptable to all and one that be durable and determine all things Caribbean.

I want to point out to an intervention exercised by Africans that speak to their refusal of des Lozières' definition of the human person and placement of the latter within a scheme in which inequality and contempt for the human person reign. It is an intervention that also points to Caribbean ethics and Mounism as both were framed by African thought and value parameters on behalf of the Caribbean. This critical intervention and the complexities that circulate around it, unveil important facts about what I can term here Caribbean socio-and racio-linguistics as informed by historical phenomena. It gives insights in what can also be seen as a Caribbean Philosophy of Language and stresses how language and the complex language experience, especially for Africans, is fundamental in the mechanisms leading to Caribbean Mounism, as thought and praxis.

A year after publishing *Les égarements du négrophilisme* (March 1802), des Lozières publishes *Second voyage à la Louisiane* (March 1803). The African-led Revolution of Saint Domingue that sparked up in 1791, ended to the advantage of the enslaved. For eighteen years in the colony of Saint Domingue, des

Lozières wrote a 24-25 volume *Encyclopédie coloniale* that he sees as of “utilité publique” that is of a prime public interest and that he claims has been seized by those he calls the “brigands,” that is the African revolutionaries. Relocated in Louisiana, he seeks to reconstitute the *Encyclopédie* out of his memory including the section regarding the languages of the enslaved. By chance, he is able to find his notes on the portion of that section dedicated to the Congo language that he titles *Dictionnaire congo*. Convinced that the French “[...] are likely to conquer again this incomparable island of Saint Domingue” (des Lozières 1803: 1) and reinstitute the old enslaving order, his goal is to provide new enslavers with the knowledge about the Caribbean that would help them enslave and colonize in the ‘best’ possible way. Although des Lozières says that he merely sought to know just enough of the enslaved’s language (des Lozières 1803: 72), “as a planter, (he) felt the usefulness of this sort of science” (des Lozières 1803: 72), that is language. For, language is a pertinent enslaving and de-existentializing device for him. Especially, knowing African languages can facilitate the enslaved’s creolization that is, their acclimation to plantation values. Des Lozières’ perspective is that if enslavers know how “to speak” to the enslaved then, they can foster in the enslaved, joyfulness, trust, hope, while they can make less burdensome the memory of the country and family from which they were uprooted. To des Lozières, this strategy can lead the enslaved to see the enslavers as superior and benefactors who saved them from human degradation (des Lozières 1803: 73). Therefore, des Lozières continues his enterprise that consists in shaping and disseminating colonial epistemology and abnormalizing symbolizationism which premise is this statement: “[...] the goodness of the negro is but a negation of wickedness [...] and [...] it is never about the result of morality, a product of the enlightenment of the mind. Finally, as I maintain, the negro has but a life of sensation [...]” (des Lozières 1803: 97). Through the linguistic apparatus, what he seeks to achieve and propose is a methodology meant for perfect enslavement. Language is not just an instrument to attempt to dehumanize, it becomes itself dehumanized. For that purpose, des Lozières delivers with the *Dictionnaire congo* a Congo dictionary or vocabulary containing series of individual French words and set phrases translated in the Congo language.

The enslaved from whom des Lozières extracts his language information come from the Angola Coast and are part of the Bantou people. Here is the way he introduces both the Congo language and those who speak it:

Chance left me some notes on the Congo language. These notes set my memory back on track and allow me to compose quite an extensive set of vocabulary. It is the easiest language and often, it helps conceive of other African languages. On the other hand, its softness is pleasing, and I do not even believe that the Italian language matches it [...] the Congo are the negroes who come from the Angola coast and the best of them are from Ambrice, Gabinde, Malimbe and Loang (des Lozières 1803: 74-5)

In themselves, the individual words in *Dictionnaire congo* are not offensive as they are from ordinary, so to speak “normal” vocabulary, ranging from “aiguiller,” “ailleurs,” “allumette,” to “baguette,” “baigner,” or “bois,” and “canari” (to point, elsewhere, matches, stick, to bathe, wood, pot, respectively). What is offensive and manifests des Lozières’s will to provide his fellow enslavers with an enslaving tool on the one hand and on the other teach them how to speak to the enslaved in a way that abnormalizes the latter and makes the enslaving method efficient, is remitted in the phrases. Indeed, these phrases either are meant to give orders such as “prends garde au fouet,” (des Lozières 1803: 126)—mind the lash, in other words, “I am going to flog you,” make affirmative ontological

and axiological statements about the Congo such as, “que tu es laid!”—you are so ugly!— (des Lozières 1803: 131) or teach them their fate: “si tu ne travailles pas, je te batterai”—if you do not work, I will beat you (des Lozières 1803: 145).

Despite the general inoffensive nature of the individual words, what is interesting now is that, of the 336 individual words³ of des Lozières’ dictionary, the following two are of paramount importance:

Esclave	vika (des Lozières 1803: 123)
Nègre	montou - fioté iagala (des Lozières 1803: 134)

It is so because, when asked how to say “esclave”—slave—in their language, the Congo say “vika,” while they say “montou” for “nègre” thereby separating the respective referents and their meanings. Referencing “nègre” as “montou” they rather view “nègre” as “human person,” which in their language is the exact meaning of “montou”. This first level of answer already indicates that they operate indeed from a different paradigm of intelligibility to such an extent that they do not recognize “montou” as equating “vika” that is “nègre” as “esclave.” As a matter of fact, “vika” appears a second time in the *Dictionnaire* to still mean “captif”—captive:

Captif	m’vika, gouagni (des Lozières 1803: 116).
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The Congo are here acting on language, on meaning as much as they are acting on epistemology, idea and thought. In the operations with which they engage to give meaning to the *new* world in which they now are and that allows them to resort to their own understanding of self, that understanding does not become new but remains *stable*, so to speak, with an “African” value thereby ensuring ontological and axiological continuity. Here too, they are montou. Their certitude exert pressure onto the enslaver’s doubt. They challenge both the plantation identity assigned to them, the plantation principle of racist equating and the plantation political desire and actions to neutralize about them all will and oppositional aptitude. They actually state what, according to their understanding, is true. So, implying here that there is another understanding and knowledge than that of des Lozières’ and esprit du Blanc, inserts a crude complexity and tension in the plantation assertion, a tension that is a *remise en cause*, a serious calling into question. They directly imply that all ontological statements the enslaver makes about them are wrong. We see them actually acting upon even the hierarchy of knowledge established by esprit du Blanc and in that rests not only the idea but also the practice of epistemic justice.

In fact, the Congo recognize that, in the plantation site, the term used to refer to them is “nègre.” They do know that this term renders an assigned infra-human identity. But while they know that from the plantation order “nègre” is made to mean “Congo” in their Congo order, they know that, even in the plantation, “Congo” is “montou,” that is human person. The meaning they bestow upon “nègre” when asked is therefore one that relies on their independent Congo order and is logically at variance with that of the plantation. It is true that some level of acclimation, or creolization, or penetration of modernity pressure occurs here. However, one must also pinpoint that, through the procedure of Congo “semanticization,” the word “nègre” itself is to some extent, salvaged. In their world, the view that procures them with their understanding of self—that self which is perceived as “nègre” in the plantation—determines them plainly as “human person.” Their operation to make “nègre” intelligible outside of the plantation meaning and according to their vision, mode of thought and understanding and worldview, is not one of a mere equivalent translation. Their act is not simply one of linguistic or

semantic correction. It is one of ontological and political affirmation and of humanizing equalization as they equate “nègre” and “montou.” Even if this happens under the prompt of the enslaver, the Congo speak. And they speak from the freedom given them by their knowledge of their selves, a freedom and sure knowledge that renders Power. In their spoken answer and its ontological and political independent intelligibility is to be seen a critical and radical act and affirmation of thought, discourse, and speech. We are here witnessing the advent of *Pawòl* as, given what we see of esprit du Blanc, its hatred for africanness and humanity, its malfesance for the Caribbean and its bitter attacks on that which is human, the positing of “montou” on Caribbean soil as a word to speak and center what the human person is may arguably be the single most crucial and dignifying seed for Caribbean discourse. Both in the meaning of “montou” and that which consists in (self-)naming them “montou” in the very plantation where they are already named “non-/infra-human” and are conceived of as such, is a manifestation of Caribbean *Pawòl*. We see here being expressed, one of the origins of Black critical and radical thought and action in America.

This is even more enhanced when one considers how they remit their discerned thought about their selves in the plantation in a saying that Victor Schœlcher reports in *Des colonies françaises*. “Nege esclave, c’est poule bequé⁴” (Schœlcher 1842: 424)—Nèg èsklav, sé poul bétjé⁵—is indeed another of the enslaved’s acts of free speech not taught by the enslaver. For, “Nèg èsklav, sé poul bétjé,” which means “the nègre who is enslaved is the golden eggs goose of the enslaver” renders at least the deep political consciousness of the enslaved about the plantation dynamic, their position in that dynamic and worth in the enslaver’s existence. The statement expresses a discerned reasoning and comprehension and is as much about the enslaved’s situation of being a forced provider, as it is about the enslaver as an oppressor and exploiter. For, they know. The combination of “nege” and “esclave” to form a single noun meaning “a nege who is an ‘esclave’ ” indicates that they know that, in the relative context of the plantation they are “nege” and enslaved. They also know that there are “nege” who are not “esclave” and that their fate is exploitation, when they are in the position of “esclave” relative to the “bequé.” They know too that not only are there “nege” who are not “esclave,” in addition, “nege” is *not* “esclave,” that is, “nege” is not wholly equivalent to “esclave.” The social status of “nege” and its interrelation with “béqué” and not their supposed or assigned race is that on which the thought focusses politically. It appears then that, in that thought, what is important is the meaning they assign to “nege,” and we understand that it is one that brings us back to “montou” and its declaring the human person as center and humanness as central to the identity. We see then even in this African speech—*Pawòl*—how the term “nègre” is already being conferred meaning that escapes the rigid determination of the enslaver. “Nèg èsklav, sé poul bétjé” also works as a severe critique of “bequé” that is of the enslaver, of the disbalanced interrelation and as a blunt denunciation of what transpires as injustice. It is true that the political consciousness demonstrated through the saying does not prevent the fact of enslavement. This said, what needs to be put forth is that, in the context of the plantation where the extreme power of the enslaver makes the enslaved look powerless and conditioned to resignation, here one can capture a strong and bold awareness about and call for justice.

Perhaps the following example conveys even better the African awareness and self-awareness despite all appearances? In 1722, Jean-Baptiste Labat, a missionary in the colony of Martinique reports systematic words heard from enslaved Africans:

It is customary among the nègres to attribute to white people all the bad qualities that can make a person despicable and to say that it is they and their bad example that corrupt them. This is to

such an extent that if they see one of their own cursing, inebriated or who is doing any misdeed, they never fail to say: *This is a contemptible person who curses like a white man, who drinks like a white man, who steals like a white man etc.* (Labat 1831: 178).

Labat's goal is just to characterize the mindset of the enslaved pejoratively. However, what can be seen is that they create ontological categories from which they take ontological distance to assert their own identity. The "customary" nature of their retort suggests not just a mental positioning, but also a political one that, itself, points to an oppositional disposition. In the plantation, they know who is what and who does what. If enslavers create the category "nègre" and imply that it subsumes a sort of "africaniy" that they define as "inferior," Africans answer that there is such a category as "whiteness" and they independently make a point in signaling its meaning and properties. It is in this light of discerning ability that they inscribe their ontological position within the framework of ethics and a value statement that enunciates what they regard as good, bad, and acceptable to their terms vis-à-vis human and social behavior. Their statement is very bold as, in the context where they can suffer all reprisals, White appears as the referent and source for all things bad and responsible for any manifestation of "badness" in "nègres." It is therefore a corrupting agent that can be but proscribed and, in this light, nègres ought to resort to other social, moral, and political models.

Now, apart from the word "malanga,"⁶⁹ which is the name for a root vegetable largely consumed in the Caribbean, "montou" is the only Congo term from des Lozières's dictionary that, although not in its entirety and original form, is found in today's Creole language—in the form of "moun"—spoken in Haïti, Dominica, French Guyana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint-Lucia. This is all the more critical given that, in the Congo dictionary, "nègre" is also translated by another phrase "fioté iagala," an expression that engages with color, which is nowhere to be heard in today's Creole.

Creole was born in the seventeenth century in the French colonies when, to serve the purpose we saw des Lozières outline, enslavers simplified the French language to communicate with the enslaved who, in turn and over time, complexified it into a full-fledged language based on the French lexicon and African syntax and inflexion. Creole is very much a plantation language used to enslave and inculcate de-existentializing principles in the enslaved. Bequeathing Creole with "moun" is therefore already a mark of this African complexification of the said language. Logically, the work of the mind of these Africans coincides with their inception in the milieu but "moun" offers us a critical point of reference to apprehend concretely some of its modes and mechanisms.

Indeed, "montou" and its ontological meaning endured and found its way in Creole through "moun," its derivative. In this linguistic and semantic endurance is to be seen one of the most critical philosophical contributions of the Africans in question here as the latter are making an ontological and axiological intervention and building for the Caribbean, liberation and existentializing epistemology and language. In Congo languages, "montou"—one human person—can also be found as "muntu," "mutu" or "m'tu" as the singular form for "bantou" which is the plural noun meaning, "human persons." "Bantou" means "several muntu" or "people". In "montou," "muntu" or "m'ntu," /mo/, /mu/ or /m/ stands for the prefix while /ntou/ or /ntu/ signals the root that means "human person". What must be retained is that, in Creole, "moun" is the referent to refer to *human being* with "an moun" signifying, "one human person" and "moun," "several human persons" or "people". For now, my goal is neither to expand on a linguistic account of "montou" and "moun" nor to engage with the reasons for what seems to have been a permutation between the prefix and root as this will

appear in my ongoing monograph about Mounism. However, it is appropriate to preliminarily stress what follows concerning the semantic and etymological relationship between “moun” and “montou”. In *Dictionnaire congo*, multiple words conveying ideas related to the human person, whether negatively or positively, appear made up with a variation of “montou”. Such is the case of “benêt”—simple minded—and “Bonne personne”—good person—that respectively appear as “m’sitoukia montouko” (des Lozières 1803: 113) and “montozambi” (des Lozières 1803: 114). Now, the notions of “pronunciation,” “spelling” and “transcription” are also to be considered to grasp the linguistic filiation between “montou” and “moun.” This also points to the linguistic situation in the plantation at large, but also to the crude linguistic density experienced by the Africans. Of what the Congo tell him, des Lozières spells the word “**montou**” which has the following pronounciative transcription: /mõtu/. But why is “moun”—/mun/—the word in current existence in today’s Creole and not “mon”—/mõ/? Both “montou”—/mõtu/—and “mountou⁷”—/muntu/—are heard as pronunciation in Congo languages. It is true that, vastly ignorant of African language principles, plantation Europeans did not care about reporting African language spelling with accuracy. This said, des Lozières is likely to have written down “montou” as heard. Notwithstanding, given the diversity of Congo people communities in the colony of Saint-Domingue, it is undoubtable that both “**montou**” and “**mountou**” were variations and pronunciations in use. It is therefore not illegitimate to conjecture that, ultimately, “mountou” took precedence over “montou” to find its way into a perennial linguistic and semantic retention. The spelling Europeans used to transcribe the sound they heard is logically French as the sound /mun/ becomes “moun” in that language spelling system.

Second voyage is published in 1802 while des Lozières claims that his work to establish his encyclopedia and *Dictionnaire* respectively did last eighteen and ten years. The *Dictionnaire* must have therefore been prepared around 1792. As suggested by Moreau de Saint Méry’s published 1790s writings, “moun,” which I claim is the diminutive for “mountou” is already in full existence in the 1780s with its meaning—human person—and spelled with the current orthography in Creole, which is “moun” (Moreau de Saint Méry 1875: 57). In any case, “moun” is henceforth found in subsequent eighteenth- and nineteenth century-texts which signals its complete integration into the language system with its original Congo meaning: a person/people. Therefore, this also leads to understand that this African word with this African meaning that existentializes and ethicalizes, is already enforced but especially, established, as a defining referent in the colonial plantation space.

As much as its endurance, “moun” is Pawòl. “Moun” does not just provide a different ontological meaning to “nègre.” It also introduces what is glaringly absent from plantation paradigm and value: ethics. “Moun” bears no gender, no race and is perfectly neutral. Although the question is critical,⁸ the purpose here is not to discuss whether, under the impulse of “moun,” enslavers who actually do speak and write the term “moun” transform into showing more mounist thought and practices and stop viewing Africans as non-moun and members of humankind as fundamentally unequal. The focus here is to draw attention onto this unthought and unseen, yet real, and complex African intervention in one of the most meaningful domains and in a site where that intervention was the least expected. This, in itself, is a tour de force as ethics is, in no way, compatible with any plantation site. What is to be stressed then is the fact that these Africans manage to instill a space, however limited, where ethics can not only exist but also prevail to suggest possibilities for human life and existence. For, as seen, “moun” is established and used with its African existential and ethical meaning by all, that is, also by enslavers. Not only do the Congo speak and proffer discourse independently, but in addition, they teach the enslavers how to speak and they teach them, that is their enslavers, even unbeknownst to

them, how to speak accurately and ethically about what is perhaps *the* single most critical element of the human universe, the human person themselves. This is also a proposition as to how to think about the human person, and that the word “moun” and its meaning permeate the language of all in the plantation also indicates that, contrary to what is displayed at the surface, in the deepest mechanisms conducting human affairs, the absolute premise is that all human persons are human persons. In the realm of humans, persons need to be thought through the lens of equality. In the crudest way, that proposition sheds light onto the anti-human predicate advanced by the enslaving paradigm and its guiding esprit du Blanc enabler.

Africans read out the world, name it and give meaning to it through their specific evaluation and naming system. In itself, this phenomenon is not extraordinary. All human beings existing in organized groups in any setting do so. What I mean to identify and stress here therefore is that in the case of enslaved Africans in America, we seldom take the critical trouble to excavate this part of their accomplishments. Not doing so amounts to permitting an undisputed hegemony to “esprit du Blanc” promoting a one-lensed reductive standpoint on the fact of being human that I call humanism and on social behavior and let it claim irremissible metaphysic supremacy. Yet, we have seen that, if Africans are named “nègre” by the enslaving system that also categorizes “Africanity”, they in turn affirm that “whiteness” too is a category and its value properties jeopardize human integrity. Now, let us see that they also name French colonizers *from France* “mouton-France.”

To contradict the “nigrophiles” and assert that they are wrong, and he is right, des Lozières says that before settling in the colony he was “incrédule”—skeptical—that is, he did not know and did not believe the facts of the plantation. What are the facts of the plantation according to him? They are that nègres have but maliciousness that escalates into fury and an existence of sensations (des Lozières 1803: 97). How is this fundamental knowledge about the colony known? *Time*, which des Lozières calls “the father of truth” (des Lozières 1803: 97) allows to seize that fact. To accredit his stance, he resorts to the way “les nègres appellent les Européens”—the nègres call the Europeans—which is “mouton-France” (des Lozières 1803: 97). Des Lozières aims at accentuating knowledge and time vis-à-vis “truth” and nègres. He purports to claim that, upon arriving in the colony, ignorant and inexperienced, visitors may not grasp how perverse and mean nègres are. *Time*, which favors empiricism, is therefore necessary to the process of knowing and understanding this “truth,” which itself is as undeniable as nègres’s evilness is inevitable. He cites his own case whereby, he too was, before his acclimation to the colony, a “mouton-France,” that is, an ignorant until thanks to time, he came to cognizance about the nègres’evilness and a-cognitivity. Of course, des Lozières calls upon this name Africans assign to ignorant Europeans only to denigrate them. What is here critical is what we learn about the action of Africans in the naming processes of the plantation and the way they complicate questions of epistemology and value assigned to persons. We see them building values under duress and values that sharply challenge esprit du Blanc’s self-erected omnipotence.

“Mouton,” which means “sheep” rather labels a person who is idiotic and whose idiotism is caused by naïveté, dependency, lack of sophisticated knowledge and will. “Mouton-France” is therefore a derogatory epithet targeting character and that already challenges the enslaver’s self-appointed name and idea of “maître”/master. The Europeans are subjected to the categorial assessment of the Africans who prompt hierarchical statuses among their group. Of course, des Lozières calls upon this African assigned name to claim that time helped him acquire knowledge on the plantation and he now owns colonial epistemology and knows the “truth,” which is how evil and a-cognitive “nègres” are.

However, what is of interest here is, first, the fact that Africans also confer upon French enslavers an unflattering name that translates the French's state of ignorance and limits. The result locates the subject "mouton-France" in the plantation as much as it signals their extraneous condition and distinguishes the namer from the named. Their place is that of the Other and the marginal who is questioned in one of the very areas where they claim prevalence: omniscience and knowing. African naming here is a political objection to the racial supremacist status Whites ascribe to themselves and that Victor Schœlcher names "aristocracy of the skin" (Schœlcher 1842: 326). This said, their practice of Othering through the onomastic process is not informed by race but more objectively by a state of fact. Secondly, the extent of their insolent boldness and license in their objectional positioning appears. The intensity of this fact is to be grasped in the context of the laws (article 58 of the Code noir) and practices of the plantation whereby even while freed, former enslaved are commanded to owe "singular respect" to their former enslaver, their widow, and children on pain of severe punishment. Third, they differentiate through naming White Creoles, born and raised in the colony (they are called *béké*), with French persons settled there. In fact, the noun "mouton-France" is structured according to the African informed Creole language word formation laws. Moreover, it points to geographical provenance or ownership and means "mouton" (that is) from (or belongs to) France. In the way the name targets non-acclimated French people from France, "Mouton-France" is the equivalent of "bossal". However, what is by far to grasp is that, contrary to "bossal" that is a racial index, "mouton-France" does not engage with racial perspectives. We see here how and with what means Africans parallel the organization of the world around them through naming, and especially, through naming the humans in it and attributing meaning to them. In fact, through the meaning they assign to these French outsiders, they stress that, if it is true that they are placed at its margin or squarely outside of it, they are Creoles or creolized and through knowledge of the society's facts, they matter.

What is more is that des Lozières recognizes the accuracy of the name "mouton-France," as it applies to him and therefore, this points to the social consensus around this African naming process. Now, another point of interest regards the name itself and the phonological resemblance and proximity of "mouton" (sheep) and "montou" (human person). It may well be that des Lozières makes an error and writes "mouton" instead of "montou" which would bring about the expression "montou France," that is, person from France. In today's Creole, "mouton-France" is not heard. However, "moun Frans" is one of the ways to name French people to distinguish them from the offspring of enslavers who, in Martinique and Guadeloupe for instance, are called "*béké*". In any case, regardless of whether "mouton-France" (ignorant person from France) or "montou France" (human person from France) what is important here is that this African-led operation draws attention to the question of epistemology and shows how they participate in its formation independently and differently, through naming as well. The African naming inscribes the procedure and meaning of the name in the notion of knowledge and of colonial knowledge to signal that not only des Lozières does not know what *they* Africans know, but in addition, he does not know what they do know of and in the colony. The colonial epistemology extolled by des Lozières is faced with an African system of knowledge that draws on different values and points to a will for liberation and existentialization that I call liberation and existentializing epistemology. This does not unfold without complexity matching the untenable plantation situation imposed to Africans. Formed in, informed by and informing on the colony, anchoring the notion of knowledge that does not privilege racializing and a- or de-humanizing, the African process around "mouton-France" is still intertwined with colonial epistemology. By explicitly stressing the geo-cultural provenance of the French to specify their identity, these Africans implicitly stress their own location, which is the colony and their habituation to it, a site where the violences of

the enslaver are as explicitly as they are insidiously at work to not leave them unscathed of their impact and to lead them to neutralizing creolization. Their stance whereby they distinguish themselves from “mouton-France” to underline their familiarity with the colony indicates that creolization is at play, that is, they are acclimated to the colony enough to know and inevitably be impacted by its values. Creolization is one of the plantation phenomena prompting on the part of enslaved Africans submission to colonial values and the enslaving parameters. My point is therefore not to naively claim that actions undertaken by plantationed Africans were extraordinarily ideal and untouched by plantation pressure. My goal is to invite us all to be critically attentive to the ways they are struggling, fighting, resisting the enslavers’ designed project of combatting ethics, and the ways they have intervened in the metaphysical domain—one that is not visible and thought of/out—to create unexpected, salutary and dignifying alternatives for the Caribbean as the history of the latter engages severely issues related to the human person, the fact of being human and the fact that human integrity has been severely challenged. My goal is to invite us all to reflect critically on what such African propositions articulated at a time when they were programmed to either die or simply surrender to what was presented to them as fate, may mean to us today as we continue to evolve in a world largely relying on colonial terms. For, one of the critical questions enslaved Africans raise through the interventions described and analyzed here is, what values by which to live.

Another question raised is, if indeed, naming is meaning, what type of epistemology and meaning should be trusted and what can help to distinguish them? In its potential to liberate and permit forms of existence contrary to the one advocated by the enslavers, the African-derived system of knowledge in the colony differs from Des Lozières’s in its content, intention and meaning. Despite the complexity of the situation of the Africans, it highlights their agency. The meanings of “nègre,” “esclave,” and “mouton-France” are eloquently at variance just as are the process, perspective and gesture of naming on the respective parts. Where one name is built on the “préjugé de couleur,” which is racism — nègre—and is meant to imply an identity of ingrained conditions, the other—mouton-France—relies on character, social standing and geography and points more to an identity based on provenance.

Des Lozières claims that he ends up owning colonial knowledge and this knowledge is evidently the unethical statement he articulates in his writings. But what escapes his awareness is on the one hand the fact that Africans create critical and ethical epistemology and on the other, the way he is also actively influenced by it, for, not only do they provide an admitted name to reference him—mouton-France—but in addition, they offer one that exerts a pressure on meaning, and to some extent, on the ordering of the colony. Indeed, “moun” becomes the human way to name all persons humanly in the colony. Des Lozières does not pinpoint how the Africans shift the location of their ascribed place from one where they are at the margin or exterior to one where they indicate through their gesture and its meaning that the colonial anti-society he defends could eventually morph into one where, human equality materialized in acts would prevail, and with the redefinition of the human person, their place would not be one of non-belonging and systematic exclusion. A chance could be given then to not only humanity but also to personhood, a process each individual could undertake to erect themselves in society. “Moun,” as a practiced understanding, is the condition Africans advance for such an eventual morphed paradigm that could bear the name “society.” Des Lozières cannot pinpoint this metaphysical operation owing to his own overbearing metaphysics exclusively anchored in violence that erects it as more authoritatively powerful.

It is in this violence-laden paradigm that “nègre” remains at the core of the plantation nomenclature. In terms of naming the Africans per se, “moun” does not depose the plantation use and meaning of “nègre” nor does it the term “noir”—black—that is also used derogatorily. All three terms—nègre, noir, moun—coexist to refer to the African. However, another critical semantic transformation driven by African worldview and values occurs as to the term “nègre.” “Nèg” in Creole means “Black man” thereby still carrying the plantation racial and masculine inflection. In their understanding of “nègre,” enslavers encompass both enslaved African men—nègres—and women—négresses. The term “nègre” that should normally be gender neutral is actually heavily genderized to be exclusively masculine. In today’s Creole, “nèg” contains this gender meaning although “Black” is ridden of its colonial pejorative sense. “An nèg” can mean “a Black man” or “un homme noir.” However, “nèg” also means “person” so that “an nèg” stands for “a person” and “nèg,” for “people”. If “moun” does not stop the use of “nègre” in the plantation, it certainly exerts ontological and axiological pressure onto its meaning. We can see here how “nèg” is synonymous with “moun,” in the way it is used, “nèg” actually equates “moun” which circles us back to the Congos’ answer to des Lozières’s question, and especially to the meaning with which they (the Congo) infuse the term “nègre”: “what is nègre/nèg?” “Nègre/nèg is montou/moun.”

4 Tout moun sé moun

I want to propose another example—tout moun sé moun—which is perhaps *the* most viable and pertinent African vision of the human person inscribed in Creole and that indicates the legacy of “montou” through “moun” today, and especially, the African longstanding legacy of critical meaning, epistemology and thought in the Caribbean. It points to the African contribution in the philosophical “semanticization” of the ecosystem phenomena on the one hand, and on the other, to the fact that, not only did a system of thought and of speech emerge under the influence of African liberatory and existentializing epistemology, but in addition, it ensures a system of moral thought and moral language running counter to the unethical slave system of ideology. In terms of thinking and thinking product, we see how the work of the mind of these Africans sets away from unethical ideology to posit itself in the domain of critical and ethical thought and philosophy sustained by and in Creole, the Caribbean language par excellence. We similarly see how they shape value and speaking instruments to characterize what Caribbeans speak and the way they proffer Pawòl.

The way Pawòl is elaborated by Africans and points to their epistemological, axiological and metaphysical fight to create and set for the Caribbean dignifying values also transpires through their work and statements on and in language, speech, discourse and speaking. In fact, as Pawòl, “tout moun sé moun” calls to order des Lozières’s statement on racial and human inequality in the way it affirms “Palé français fait pas l’esprit.” The latter phrase is another saying enslaved Africans would assert as signaled by Victor Schœlcher (Schœlcher 1842: 433). In use in the Creole-speaking Caribbean today under the formulation, “palé fransé pa ka ba-i lèsprì,” it carries a complex positioning vis-à-vis language, knowledge, intelligence, and ethics. It means “speaking French does not endow you with intelligence.” By the time these thoughts are emitted, Creole has long been set as a language more associated to the enslaved than to the enslavers who, although they are also Creole speakers, bend towards French that syllogistically, is assigned their racial value. French is then the language of all

powers and above all, of racial power. In addition, one of the recurring terms employed by enslavers to systematically disqualify the cognitive and intellectual dispositions of the enslaved is, “stupid.” *Lèspri*, that is moun’s critical and cognitive ability becomes a critical paradigm. To this, Africans will also elaborate a value informed response which space does not allow me to develop here. I can nevertheless say that, in this context, one should not be surprised by the African response combining issues pertaining to language and the mind with “palé fransé pa ka ba-i lèspri.” One sees how the French language is as demystified as it is de-essentialized since its power does not overcome another that the enslaved regard as paramount, which is “lèspri”. They recognize *lèspri* as meaningful. However, it is so only if the values that speak and mobilize it are appropriate. *Lèspri* is not a function of the language moun speaks and however hegemonic it may be, the French language does not supersede values. The practice of discernment and notion of evaluating “criterion” appear active in that positioning as, to affirm that statement, one must use good judgement and discernment and operate according to good criteria. Again, critical questions posed through this thought process and thought content expressed in the saying are what values should texturize and govern *lèspri* and therefore, what type of *lèspri* should be promoted. “Lèspri” is complex intelligence that does not account solely on cognition but that also encompasses moral behavior, a factor providing acceptable worth and standing in society. It drives you to “di bon pawòl”—say words that are right—and “fè bon bagay”—do what is right. *Lèspri* is one’s ethics. What testifies to your having *lèspri* is not merely your linguistic ability and its prestige that is French, but how you speak and what you say which elicits the question: is what you say right and good? In this paradigm consequently, as it incarnates “esprit du Blanc,” des Lozières’s parole is but a “palé fransé” or “parole fransé,” that is, superficial aesthetic and not a deployment of language into a complex speech whose content is right. The value of any individual moun is related to their ability to draw properly on their speaking and language abilities to discern and display the right type of *lèspri*. We cannot fail seizing in that a political and radical critique of the racialization of cognition and intelligence of moun and a dismissal of “parole” that asserts that French parameters or the enslavers’ identifying signs such as language—the French language—necessarily elevate.

The axiological and metaphysical fight is of course directly related to humanness or mounness (from moun) and personhood, two severely endangered paradigms in the plantation. So, if like we already underlined “nèg” is “moun,” what of “moun” then? The vision on “moun” is articulated in the widespread phrase, “Tout moun sé moun” that affirms textually that, “all human persons are human persons.” I will not expand as I did on moun—the main theme of this reflection—on how “tout moun sé moun” became implanted in the Caribbean since this will be addressed in my monograph along with the myriad of critical and philosophical meanings and dimensions contained in the saying. It is however important to underline that, today, it is one African originating phrase that is heard in Creole-speaking Caribbeans’ daily routine. “Tout moun sé moun” is systematically said in situations of tension or conflict engaging at least two persons one of whom commits on the other an act that other deems reprehensible and especially, out of the realm of justice and respect for “moun”. The statement itself enunciates the value remitted into the notion of “human person” or humanness, that is, the fact of being moun (human) or belonging to mounness. “Tout moun sé moun” is foundational to Caribbean Pawòl. Not only are all human persons human persons but they are so because they are equal to themselves, that is to human persons, and in this paradigm, no other possibility exists. In the same way as moun is equal to moun, the meaning and value of moun are inherent to moun. The value of moun then is incarnated in the notion of “identity” whereby moun is identical to itself and supports the value of exclusive equality. Moun being itself, what confers humanity is humanity itself. It is also

embodied by totality as the vision establishes itself as exclusively normative for all human persons. Who is human then in the moun paradigm? “Tout moun”—all humans—is. So, while the meaning of moun is inherent to moun, its truth is transcendental as it transcends all boundaries to be (equal to) itself. “Moun” is the single most value that counts. This is why parameters such as race, religion, social background, or gender matter not. When “tout moun sé moun” is shouted, usually as a cry to protest, condemn a wrong, defend oneself against a wrong and claim reparation, one means to strongly set the record straight by asking: “Am I not *moun*?” They do not mean to say, “Am I not a woman, tall, black, white, Vaudouizan, Muslim, a carpenter, a doctor?”. What they mean is: “I am exactly like you and like anyone else that is moun; I am like you in mounness, so why do you treat me as non-moun, outside of mounness?”. Moun is the factor that dictates justice and respect for moun. Such are some of the critical equations that consciously or unconsciously permeate the mind of Creole-speaking Caribbeans when they do utter this phrase in their quotidian today to oppose an injustice or disrespect done to them or others and they want to call for justice and decency. In doing so, they perpetuate a long-standing tradition, situating ethics at the core of (their) human affairs. It is therefore appropriate to recognize that, it is upon this critical thought tradition Anténor Firmin draws in the Haitian post-colonial and post-enslavement times to yet call to order Gobineau’s affirmation about his so called (de l’) “*inégalité des races humaines*” (1855). Indeed, following up onto the footsteps of his African ancestors, Anténor Firmin rectified Gobineau’s parole asserting “tout moun sé moun” in the form of *De l’égalité des races humaines* (1885).

Finally, if French is the Latin of Creole which it provides with its vocabulary, in that language, the Congo word “montou” as it exists in Creole today through its derivative “moun,” is politically and philosophically, certainly the most critical and radical term. The radicality of the gesture, of the term and thought they lead to is to be seen, partly, in the fact that they are not expected, they are the exact opposite to the enslavers’ claim, and they occur in a context where brutality is so astute that it was likely to annul any velleity on the part of the enslaved. We see how creolization is always in ambush. According to Moreau de Saint Mery, the Congos who outnumber the other African groups in the colony of Saint Domingue have a “*facilité à parler purement le créole*” (Moreau de Saint Méry 1875: 38). They are fluent in Creole and in that, we know that the terms and meanings of the plantation do not escape their moral vigilance. The word used to designate the thinking of a human being as well as the meaning of what it means to be such a being, is not in French. In the light of attacks on the humanity of Africans mounted by des Lozières and his counterparts, it becomes philosophically significant that Creole adopts the Congo word for the ‘human person.’ The mere presence of “moun” as an operating and signifying term in Creole, elevates a deep ethical meaning, qualifies the type of *proposition* that the Africans made in response and in opposition to that of des Lozières’ and “*esprit du Blanc*,” and in the same domain related to the definition of, relationship and positioning with the human person. For the salutary and dignifying perspectives it offers in the domain of humanity, this single African word proffered in and through oral language supplants and dismisses des Lozières’s myriads of words written in his multiple books.

Of course, one knows how the systematic violence of the procedure and applied ideology of enslavement during a long period of time have impacted the Africans, namely regarding their sense of worth and self. That sense will often manifest through incoherent behavior. In his times, Aimé Césaire calls this phenomenon “*vieille négritude*” (Césaire 1983: 59) and shows how difficult it is to escape it as he himself sides with white women in a train mocking a Black man reflecting to them, signs of loathsomeness (Césaire 1983: 41). Later, Frantz Fanon addressed that reality in *Peau noire, masques*

blancs. Here, we have also underlined how, despite the African epistemological and philosophical action upon it, the word “nègre” is not exempted from the racial inflections with which the enslaving system constructed it. Some of the wrongs perpetrated by the enslaving system still appear impossible to defeat. This is so much so that the common perspective to refer to the situation of Africans in American plantations systematically consist in affirming that they were dehumanized. Through this, we see how such a perspective and way of phrasing it grants much credit to enslavers of des Lozières’s kind. However, historical reality attests to the contrary. Enslavers invested all their might into attempting to dehumanize or “demounize” Africans, something no human person can achieve in the realm of humans. Enslavers therefore cannot be granted any such credit. They did not succeed in dehumanizing Africans and the language used to report that aspect of this history should align with that historical reality. It is consequently essential to highlight some of the mechanisms thanks to which subjacent but critical opposition were brought to the heavy “demounization” attempt of the said enslaving system. This opposition is imperceptible because it takes place in the intangible aspects of human life such as the metaphysical domain. However, it is real and operating. We can indeed see how “nègre,” a plantation term, is not absent from the African metaphysical equation. It is indeed that race-laden word “nègre” that is equated with “montou”. The forces of the plantation are at play through des Lozières who imposes the word to equate. Notwithstanding, we also do see clearly how the Congo fight and resist and act metaphysically upon this phenomenon from an independent epistemological and semantic locus that does not account for des Lozière’s influence.

Of course, given the violence and advantageous power dynamic that govern it, what is visible and audible is the enslaver’s loud written and spoken parole. Des Lozières states it, the colonial construct imposes books as sole and valid truth-bearer. He adds that his ancestors and counterparts are the root for truth. But we saw how Pawòl that subsumes the Africans’ spoken words challenges his statement. As repository and renditions for these African spoken words, the French-African Creole language, the African-derived Creole word “moun” and African saying in Creole “tout moun sé moun” spoken in the Caribbean, all challenge the anti-moun statement. It is also only logical to identify in that overlooked gesture on the part of these enslaved Africans the choice to challenge the unethical plantation scheme, the imposition to submit entirely to plantation existence, and to see that, while indeed they truly existed, the Césairean *vieille négritude* and Fanonian alienation did not go without saying.

The African intervention is laid on language as it significantly is on values and meaning. Opening up to alternatives that could be possible, moun humanizes language per se as much as the Creole language at the same time as it acts on the notion of humanness in the plantation. It sows seeds that can allow for the germination of a sort of Caribbean philosophy of language. We here see a site where Africans seek to escape the process whereby, they are taught inhumanity. One also sees the way they participate to the setting of an anti-colonial epistemology where knowledge, their knowledge, what is, what is true, what is real, what is just, and the knowledge about themselves do not exclusively spring from plantation teaching and paradigms. One sees a paradigm in which Caribbean Humanism, and to phrase it more accurately, Caribbean Mounism and Ethics, is in the making. As Caribbean peoples and nations continue to engage with the building of a different type of modernity, being aware of and actively mobilizing appropriate African propositions proffered in the Caribbean might well make possible the advent of modes that do not immure the human person into values and structures that compromise for them the opportunity to grow free and equal to themselves.

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- 1 All translations from French and Creole to English are mine.
 - 2 This is a preliminary outline of a larger work on moun, tout moun sé moun and Mounism.
 - 3 There are individual words and phrases. Our focus is on the individual words.
 - 4 “Béqué” (Colonial spelling) or “bétjé” (modern spelling conventions) refers to the enslavers and their offspring.
 - 5 Victor Schœlcher’s spelling is modeled onto French spelling strictly. I transcribed the saying in contemporary Creole orthography.
 - 6 The word “bonda” (des Lozières 1803:113) found in Creole today means “buttocks.” It does not originate from French. It is likely to be Congo. However, des Lozières lists it as a French word and gives a Congo translation for it, “matakou.”
 - 7 Spelled here according to French spelling and phonetics.
 - 8 This question is being answered in a larger work exclusively focusing on Caribbean thought as it is related to Mounism.
 - 9 White French people are also called “Zorèy,” which means “oreilles”—ears. A popular explanation to the origin of this appellation affirms that Africans named White French people so due to their big ears while another claims that it is because of their not knowing and understanding Creole and pulling on their ears to hear better what was said to them. In any case, both motivations are anchored in signaling the strangeness and allochthonous status of the French.

A Response to Hanétha Vété-Congolo's "Moun as Root for Caribbean Humanism"

JOSÉ COSSA
PennState University, USA (jxc6421@psu.edu)

This response comprises a conversation between my work and Hanétha Vété-Congolo's "Moun as Root for Caribbean Humanism" (Vété-Congolo 2024). In this text, Vété-Congolo presents us with a seemingly insurmountable challenge to imagine a reality that is founded in African ancestral wisdom and defies the modernist-imposed reality. This defiance is clearly stated towards the end of the text when Vété-Congolo argues that,

Enslavers invested all their might into attempting to dehumanize or "demounize" Africans, something no human person can achieve in the realm of humans. Enslavers therefore cannot be granted any such credit. They did not succeed in dehumanizing Africans and the language used to report that aspect of this history should align with that historical reality (Vété-Congolo 2024).

For those of us who are black scholars, the defiance serves also as a rebuke of our narratives and description of our own experiences as victims of dehumanization, which give the enslavers and colonizers credit for a power they do not actually possess. The argument follows a sort of syllogism: no human person has the power to dehumanize another human person; enslavers and Africans are human persons; therefore, enslavers have no power to dehumanize Africans, thus Africans were never dehumanized. This fact inherent in the syllogism is unfathomable amidst narratives of victimization and victimhood that inundate the descriptions of the experiences of black people—i.e., in the narratives black people are victims, victimized, colonized, exploited, marginalized, etc.—all of which carry partial important and undeniable truth, but leave out black resilience as the core characteristic that made it possible for black people to be here alive and well despite the attempts to dehumanize and even annihilate them as a group of people. Vété-Congolo's text serves as both a demonstration of such resiliency and a testament for Africa as a cradle of an alternative way to understand humanity or personhood that sustained black people amidst the atrocities inflicted on them through slavery and colonialism.

"Tout moun sé moun" in the Caribbean is evidence of the inseparability of Africans from their philosophical and cosmological reality. This evidence points to the traveling of uBuntu, the African-derived conceptualization of personhood, and its manifestation in the transatlantic world. In other words, "all human persons are human persons" is a manifestation of "a person is a person because/unto/through/with persons," thus a testament of black wisdom and resilience. In this relationship lies partially the answer to Vété-Congolo's quest, "I am interested in understanding the substance of Caribbean Pawòl [...] as well as how Africans might have meaningfully and substantively contributed to it [...]" One might say that Vété-Congolo's mission is to go where many do not dare to go and many perceive as unfathomable territory – i.e., to identify and reclaim the aesthetic amidst the bitter-sweet journey of the African people; to find wisdom in the rubble of oppression, enslavement, plantation, colonialism, and what seems to be a perpetual relegation to a state of lack of own thought and, consequently, lack of radical thought; and, to find inspiration to dream and realize a world outside the confines of the hierarchical and exclusivist western modernity (henceforth referred to as Modernity).

The central theme of the text is the human person (moun) and language provides an essential gateway to knowing how Africans perceived themselves, in contrast to how the westerners perceived Africans. For Vété-Congolo differentiating Parole from Pawòl is a critical starting point because in this differentiation lies the perceptual difference found in the nuances of language; essentially, without Pawòl, Parole can continue to nurture its unethical plantation speech by riding the waves of plantation ideology and attacking moun. We are reminded that it was Parole that gave permission to voice audibly the naturalizing and rationalizing of the myth of racial hierarchies and the (failed) attempts to dehumanize the African—like in the Biblical narrative of creation, Parole acted as God and created (i.e., “existentialized,” to use Vété-Congolo’s term) and de-created or relegated to silence (“de-existentialized,” another term from Vété-Congolo) its creation in the plantation universe, the “black thing.” Moreover, Parole promotes and legitimizes systemic violence against the enslaved yet forbids the enslaved to resort to self-defense when faced with such systemic violence. It is acceptable and even encouraged for the white person to kill the black person, but unacceptable and punishable for the black person to exercise self-defense against life-threatening behavior emanating from the white person.

The subsequent paragraphs, however, follow a line of thinking that is slightly different from what I would have preferred, albeit carrying a spirit, in meaning and intention, that is still closely aligned with my own stance. In other words, this does not take away my admiration for the depth of insight, wisdom, and relevance that this work conveys. Nonetheless, since this is a candid response to the text and “candid” presupposes accommodating difference, and even disagreement, when pertinent, it is important to state that our difference lies in the fact that Vété-Congolo embraces the possibility of multiple Humanisms while I embrace the view that there is only one Humanism, which is a western philosophical moment and orientation. Moreover, my preference is to avoid using Modernity or any aspect appended to it (e.g., Humanism) as a point of reference (Cossa 2020). Here, too, I do not endorse the perception that there are multiple modernities, with African Modernity being one of them, but that there is one Modernity which is rooted in the European Enlightenment and is characterized by a rejection/departure from the worldviews and practices of the Middle Ages, which were deemed superstitious and unreasonable/illogical, in favor of reason and the pursuit of truth through the scientific method. Per my earlier argument, “all human persons are human persons” is a manifestation of “a person is a person because/unto/through/with persons,” thus a testament of black wisdom and resilience. In essence, I am confident that we would both agree that *Tout moun sé moun* and *uBuntu* are the same. However, Vété-Congolo argues that “*tout moun sé moun*” is Caribbean Humanism, while I argue that *uBuntu* is fundamentally different from Humanism (Cossa 2023) as follows:

In *uBuntu* world, as opposed to humanist world, existence is not reduced to thought but to the perception of being that is contingent on, and inseparable from, fellow humans. While in *uBuntu* a community is not made of individuals because the perception of individual is absent in *uBuntu* world, individuals comprise community in Humanism. I argue for the absence of ‘individual’ in *uBuntu*, using as a premise the motto itself and African spiritual cosmologies [...] When translated literally, the motto means ‘a person is a person unto/through/because of persons’ (not others), thus rendering both the singular and the ‘othering’ obsolete by not allowing the definition of personhood through self/individuality. African spiritual cosmologies, on the other hand, presuppose that at no point is the physical entity, often known as the ‘self’ in Humanism,

alone, given that our ancestors are always with us in the real world and daily affairs (Cossa 2023: 40).

This difference between us reminds me of the Schmidt-Eisenstadt diversion characterized by an embrace of a single modernity versus multiple modernities, respectively (Eisenstadt 2000; Schmidt, 2010). For me, “Humanism is the intellectual and secular movement that emerged in the thirteenth century and which stemmed from the study of classical literature and culture during the Middle Ages” (Cossa 2021: 19), thus being an inadequate descriptor of African historical-philosophical underpinnings. Colonialism transfused characteristics of Humanism to Africa as a venom in the Christianizing and civilizing missions and, perhaps as a survival and self-preservation mechanism, Africans often assimilated insurmountably by compulsion to Humanistic thinking. Consequently, what is often labeled as African Humanism is western Humanism manifesting through black bodies and black institutions, not ancestral wisdom. It is therefore important to pay close attention to the labeling of African cosmologies and thought such as uBuntu, Moun, Ujamah (lit., Swahili for extended family), etc. as African Humanism.

My argument against the use of Modernity and Humanism to describe African phenomena rests primarily on the premise that there are critical instances in which African phenomena should not be named after western phenomena, especially if such a name conveys more than just a description of the phenomena. As an illustration, I am comfortable with Renaissance as a descriptor for rebirth in general, thus comfortable with African Renaissance, Harlem Renaissance, Black Renaissance, etc.; but I find in Modernity and Humanism an imbedded system of thought that hinges on the perception of human springing from Cartesianism, not a descriptor for modern/current or for humane, respectively.

In other words, in all civilizations and historical contexts there is what is considered modern and humane, which fits the context of that civilization and its history. For instance, the African Kingdoms of Mali, Monomotapa, and Gaza were modern kingdoms but neither of them developed a universal system of what modern meant or how one could achieve their version of modern, let alone rationalize their modern as the universal point of reference. Ultimately, we ought to name our phenomena in ways that make sense to us. My suggestion here is that Caribbean Mounism should be just that, Caribbean Mounism, not Caribbean Humanism. Caribbean Mounism has a much deeper reach into the human soul than Caribbean Humanism, which would be a contextual application of Humanist principles in the Caribbean, thus not escape from the critique of Lozières that Vété-Congolo so cogently articulates. Essentially, just like Parole is not the same as Pawòl, it would make more sense to me if Vété-Congolo critiqued Caribbean Humanism rather than adopt it as synonymous to Caribbean Mounism. It is noteworthy that, in my view, Vété-Congolo unintentionally remedies this slight dissonance when evoking Congo languages to unveil the resilience of the descriptors “muntou” (also muntu, motho, m’tu, etc.) and “bantu” but maintains the conundrum of interpreting African perception of personhood (uBuntu) through the western perception of personhood (Humanism). Here while Vété-Congolo seems to see singularity (i.e., one human person) in Humanist terms, I argue that African cosmologies “presuppose that at no point is the physical entity, often known as the ‘self’ in Humanism, alone, given that our ancestors are always with us in the real world and daily affairs” (Cossa 2023: 40).

Nonetheless, I have once stated that,

While disagreeing with the premise of the argumentation and claims, I respect the work of those who have brought to the center-stage of historical reflection the effort to reclaim African equitable participation in the world by arguing for an *African Humanism* or the right for Africans to appropriate the term *Humanism* to interpret African phenomenon. However, the lenses of epistemic violence and, more specifically, untranslatability and translation as erasure (Vázquez 2011), might be handy to aid those struggling with my claim of incommensurability of uBuntu as Humanism (Cossa 2023: 23).

This statement applies to my respect for Vété-Congolo's work and, concurrently, my cautioning against falling into the subtle entrapments of epistemic violence inherent in Modernity's tendency to coopt all that it perceives as threatening to its hegemonic status in the realm of knowledge and wisdom. Moreover, my cautioning goes further than epistemic violence into what I call attempts at epistemic genocide (also referred to as epistemological genocide), which "conveys the link between the *genos* and the epistemic because the erasing of the epistemic is intrinsically linked to the erasing of a people" (Cossa 2020: 36). Maintaining Caribbean Mounism at the center of the description of (Afro)Caribbean perception of human protects us from both the epistemic violence and the unceasing attempts at epistemological genocide. It is noteworthy that this argument about attempts at epistemological genocide, which have not succeeded even centuries after their launch, aligns with Vété-Congolo's argument about the failed attempt at dehumanizing the African person. Just as Caribbean Mounism is evidence of resilience and proof that no human has the power to dehumanize fellow humans, Caribbean Mounism is its own point of reference and source of human interconnectedness that disallows the eradication of groups of humans deemed inferior or undesirable by anyone. Here, on the point of reference aspect, I would like to challenge Vété-Congolo's invitation for us to spotlight or cast light on "l'esprit du Blanc" as a way to make Caribbean Mounism and Pawòl salient to "measure the intensity and significance of the African response" (Vété-Congolo 2024). Shining the light on "l'esprit du Blanc" can have a dual effect, if not more: to give us access to the nuances of its aesthetics or to expose the more minuscule of its dirt. This begs the question as to whether or not we need "l'esprit du Blanc" as a point of reference to understand the richness and aesthetics of Caribbean Mounism and Pawòl? Can the richness and aesthetics of African cosmologies and resilience be seen without the darkness of white cosmologies and thirst for denigrating all things African? Was the thirst for denigrating not a shining of light by white cosmologies on themselves, as an attempt to leave unseen the richness and aesthetics of all things African? Should we not be shining the light on African cosmologies to better see their richness and aesthetics? Incidentally, the casting of light casts an apparent contradiction with Vété-Congolo's poignant critique that "Plantation Blanc even uses the term 'philosophy' [...] as the referential point for matters philosophical, and in particular, moral philosophy, in the Caribbean space but also for matters understood as the incarnation of Modernity" (Vété-Congolo 2024). The charge against Lozières and his group's claims in regard to philosophy and exclusive determination of what is Caribbean and modern aligns with my earlier argument in favor of Africans' inherent right to define all things African and contextual historicity of what constitutes *modern*. Ultimately, we ought to realize that the aesthetics of African ancestral wisdom are not contingent on how much we can see the hidden unaesthetics of plantation culture toward Africans. Perhaps it is time for us to focus on what is beautiful about Africans contribution and that, in itself, will seamlessly and consequentially make the ugliness of plantation culture salient.

If we turn the spotlight to Caribbean Mounism, we will not be surprised by the inhumanity inherent in Humanism. It is our connecting Humanism to humane that often gets us mixed-up with the colonial

nature of Humanism as if it were both colonial and liberatory, provided it were a different version of Humanism such as African or Caribbean Humanism. This is what I see to be a main challenge in Vété-Congolo's magnificent work—the difficulty to divorce oneself from Humanism and the assumption that just because it served the western public in a liberatory manner, it does the same for the African. For instance, Vété-Congolo argues that “one understands after all this ‘parole’ the type of educator des Lozières is, that is, he is an inhumanist master-teacher as his discourse amounts to teaching inhumanity” (Vété-Congolo 2024). I argue that Humanism has always been inhumane because it was never intended to benefit the non-western except when it became handy as an instrument for assimilation of the “other” in the Christianizing and civilizing missions. Essentially, Lozières is a true Humanist who is faithful to the mission of Humanism in relation to the African. To “redirect” the argument in the text, I would venture to say that shining the spotlight on Caribbean Mounism is what brings forth the aesthetics of African resilience that Vété-Congolo calls to our attention, “We see here being expressed, one of the origins of Black critical and radical thought and action in America” (Vété-Congolo 2024). It is this focus on the Black experience, not the enslaver, that brings forth the aesthetics and power of African ancestral wisdom.

Amiri Baraka once said,

If we study Equiano, Du Bois, Douglass, Diop, Robert Thompson, and LeRoi Jones we will see that the single yet endlessly diverse African cultural matrix is the basis not only of what's called the Blues Aesthetic, but any Black Aesthetic (Baraka 1991: 102).

I often argue that,

In African cosmologies and more specifically *Sankofa*¹ and related perceptions of time, the past, the present, and the future are interconnected, juxtaposed, and not mutually exclusive [...] Therefore, we ought to stop looking at children, youth, the elderly, the unborn, and the living dead (to borrow John Mbiti's descriptor) as those of the present, the future, and the past, respectively; instead, we are to see them as part of this complex interlinked, juxtaposed, and not mutually exclusive reality (Cossa 2023: n.p.).

What Vété-Congolo offers is a look at the aesthetics of African cosmologies with Caribbean Mounism as a starting point, which is a testament of Sankofa as it connects African ancestral wisdom manifested in the Caribbean to ancestral wisdom in Africa in an interconnected, juxtaposed, and not mutually exclusive manner. The work extends Baraka's insightful argument to demonstrate how such aesthetics are the basis of the aesthetics inherent in tout moun sé moun, thus the aesthetics inherent in the African perception of personhood, which defies hierarchies created and perpetuated by plantation culture (Cossa, Le Grange, and Waghid 2020). This helps us to understand and appreciate the aesthetics of African wisdom inherent in our own interconnected human reality, rather than rely on separatist and hierarchical modernist perceptions as points of reference. Like uBuntu, Caribbean Mounism unites us in a nonhierarchical and non-exclusivist manner yet without imposing itself as a universal. Ultimately, Moun is the root for Caribbean Mounism, not for Caribbean Humanism.

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- ¹ Sankofa (the bird) is used as a symbol of how the Akan people of Ghana perceive time and its relationship. This concept is explained in the subsequent parts of this sentence. The literal meaning of Sankofa is often interpreted as, “go back and get it.”

Annotations on the *Plantation Text*: Reading Vété-Congolo’s Argument as a Global Feminist Contribution to an Anticolonial Critique of Capital

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA
New York University, USA (df2469@nyu.edu)

The argument proposes that the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves. Because of this overrepresentation, which is defined in the first part of the title as the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom, any attempt to unsettle the coloniality of power will call for the unsettling of this overrepresentation as the second and now purely secular form of what Anibal Quijano identifies as the “Racism/Ethnicism complex,” on whose basis the world of modernity was brought into existence from the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries onwards (...), and of what Walter Dignolo identifies as the foundational “colonial difference” on which the world of modernity was to institute itself (...) (Wynter 2003: 260).

Reading the philosopher Hanétha Vété-Congolo’s article, I find a contribution to or, perhaps rather an example of the “unsettling” task the humanist Sylvia Wynter names Man’s overrepresentation of the Human. For the philosopher provides an incisive and deep reading of one of such moment in which Man engulfs the very meaning of the Human. Beyond adding to the library of analyses of plantation discourse, Vété-Congolo writes that the symbolic terrain is to be seen as a broader site of political confrontation between European as well as African ontological and existential signifiers. She also foregrounds the inseparability of the philosophical and the political. For this reason, I find in Vété-Congolo’s argument a welcome contribution to a global feminist anticolonial critique of capital. Though making this claim opens me to charges of misreading the text, I do so because Vété-Congolo’s argument provides elements for assembling of the tools for the analysis of how the methods, instruments, and mechanisms of colonial, racial, and cisheteropatriarchal subjugation are integral to the modern political architecture. More particularly, this misreading allows me to claim—explicitly counter one crucial aspect of Vété-Congolo’s argument, which I discuss in the conclusion—that it belongs to an interrogation of the ethic moment of the post-Enlightenment political architecture.¹ For her interrogation articulated here, I find, goes beyond the statement that “the others of Europe” were dehumanized or excluded; by reading the enslaved’s symbolic interventions as moment of rebely, of refusal, her analysis complexifies when it expands the context of deployment of the very gestures that obtain Man’s overrepresentation.²

In this commentary I briefly identify a few themes for consideration allowed by my intentional misreading of her analysis of Baudry des Lozières’s statements in *Les Égaréments du Nigrophilisme* (1802). The most general theme, which I present through a distinction between *translation* and *comparison*, has to do with how our critical tools, strategies, and moves rehearse aspect of the very mode of thought

they address. When commenting on this aspect, I also indicate how Vete-Congolo manages this predicament, in a generative fashion. A still more or less general theme covers how her argument situates des Lozières' version of the plantation discourse in two battlegrounds, namely, the one against the revolutionary former enslaved persons in Haiti and the other against the framers of what would become post-Enlightenment (modern, to use Foucault's nomenclature) episteme. More specifically, my reading highlights her delineation of a larger symbolic context, which I am calling plantation text, which includes both French and Bantu languages and their corresponding (but not necessarily equivalent) terms and meanings. I also discuss the structure and mechanisms of the plantation discourse (as exemplified by des Lozières), which can be then compared with the racial discourse, which would be assembled many decades later. Finally, I focus on the historical circumstances of des Lozières's articulation of the plantation discourse, which occur as he served as a counter-revolutionary French official in Haiti and the figuring of the nascent version of the political subject it yields. Precisely the political inflection of the argument gives the alibi for reading Vété-Congolo's text on behalf of a global feminist anticolonial critique of capital.

1

From within modern European thought, difference consistently gives a sense of hierarchy or inequality, which presupposes a general (common or universal) qualitative (classifying or defining) or quantitative (measuring or calculating) principle or unit that functions as basis for judgement. For instance, in Sylvia Wynter's argument, a universal (Reason or Evolution) is the qualitative basis for the distinction between the mode of being human that expresses Man1 or Man2 and those that not—respectively, the hierarchy/dichotomy between rational/irrational and selected/dysselected by evolution. Another facet of her argument is that it postulates a generic Human, as the subject (with its many possible attributes or qualities), which has been occupied by the predicates of Man1 and Man2, which European philosophers have constructed as encapsulating the proper mode of being human, a gesture that renders the latter the sole synonym for the former.³ Similarly, when the post-Enlightenment German philosopher, Hegel, says that the Negro is “an object of no value” because “Negroes” lack notions such as individuality and universality,⁴ nothing else needs to be added to show how this is a de-humanizing statement, in which African and European thinking are *compared*—in the terms of the European symbolic regime—and the former expectedly proven a superior because the sole representation of the proper Human. Why? Because the proper Human, according to the post-Enlightenment version, is the one whose mind hosts notions such as universality and individuality as well as liberty and equality. How to halt the vicious circle of this self-fulfilling philosophy?⁵

What I find in Vété-Congolo's presentation of her argument is an assemblage that both rehearses and signals a way out this circle. It happens through a dislocation, that is, attending to the political context of deployment of the gesture of overrepresentation itself. When tracking des Lozières' particular instantiation of the European Man's (in this case Man1) overrepresentation of the Human, she locates differentiation—as attribution of a hierarchy/inequality—in two *political* registers: first, the argument foregrounds the *juridic-economic* context, namely, the plantation (an *economic* unit) and its subjects, the *juridic* figures of the slave (the worker) and the owner (of the plantation and the slaves); and, second, it highlights how the term used to identify the enslaved person, *nègre* signifies in the two *symbolic*

(linguistic-philosophical) regimes that co-exist in the plantation. For the *nègre*, whom slave-owners, like des Lozières, describe as lacking the attributes of belonging to a lower order of Humanity, the enslaved themselves describe with the term *montou*, which means, a human person, according to distinct ontological bases. For Vété-Congolo, it is crucial that there is no equivalence, that is, when using it regarding the *nègre*, each language, French and Bantu, refers the Human to symbolic regimes without a common principle. This images a political context (the plantation), in which at least two symbolic regimes contend. The Congo's, she argues, deploy *montou* not to bridge or resolve grammatical and other related differences; theirs is an insurrectional gesture of political emancipation and ontological repatriation. Hence, one cannot presume that the term *human* means the same thing or that its meaning related to the same things in French as it does in the Bantu language. There is no generic human, as such. No correspondence, or equivalence, no common or generic principle according to which one conception of the human (the French colonizers' or the enslaved Africans') could be *translated* into the other. However, there is one basis on which they can be *compared*, which is the fact that they share, according to Vété-Congolo's reading, the same sense that humanity consists in the highest value, with all that it is implied when it is applied.

Let me continue and explore this thesis of the lack of equivalence and correspondence for *translation* to take place, which is the lack of a common ground or principle—between European slave-owners and African enslaved person's notions of the human. Incidentally, the existence of such a principle is key to any reading the Human (as well as the human) in the constitution of the post-Enlightenment political architecture. The most general theme introduced in these annotations about how the common basis for an *ethical* appraisal, that is one that would allow for attributing the equivalence (need for a comparison) Vété-Congolo finds lacking in the very early nineteenth century would only be assembled much (about 60 to 70 years) later, as the tools of the science of life (of comparative anatomy and evolution) were used in the creation the social scientific apparatus that institutes the Human as an empirical object, namely, raciality, the political-symbolic arsenal that articulates unsublatable moral difference, which is also the one that rules the post-Enlightenment ethic moment, along with the formal notion of humanity and the thesis of transcendentalism (see Ferreira da Silva 2007).

These annotations outline themes that unfold from unsublatable, (that is, that which can and is not sublated in the unfolding of a Hegelian Spirit), the acknowledgement that the slave is not a racial object (a product of raciality) or an ethical subject (under formal humanity), but that the slave is the juridic-economic figure—a distinction that, I find, resonates deeply with Vété-Congolo's argument—, which holds the key for unpacking the liberal political architecture. Let me quickly indicate why I think this is the case. If the slave (the economic) position (as she reads their articulation of *nègre* as human person in descriptions of their economic role and as a gesture of political emancipation) guides a description of the liberal political architecture from its inception, the proper political subject (rational, free, property owner) can no longer be seen as a formal (universal) entity. Instead, we can read des Lozières as an exemplary of how the liberal subject is formed in a juridic relation which gives him the right (as property owner) to deploy total violence against the persons he owns. Key here is the *patriarch*, which by the end of the eighteenth century, in the colonies, would be arche-form for the settler, plantation-owner, slave-owner European and their male descendants.

If the slave (as juridic position)—here Vété-Congolo's argument that equality is not operative at the basis of des Lozières' discourse is crucial—guides an account of the liberal political architecture, one can read the arguments regarding slaves' non- or sub-humanity, in justifications for slavery (and the

authority to deploy total violence), not simply as attempts at defending a hierarchy that should not have a place in a political architecture ruled by liberty and equality. Instead, one can ask the question of what has happened to the authority that had defined the pre-Enlightenment (prior to the American the French, the Haitian, and industrial Revolution) version of the liberal political subject. In the following section, I comment on the key gesture in Vété-Congolo's argument, where I find an account of overrepresentation that successfully exposes the inseparability of its political and philosophical conditions of deployment. After that, in section III, I elaborate on this theme following the thread made visible by a focus on authority and violence in the formation of the liberal political subject as well as opening for thinking rebely without reinscribing the transparent subject. Finally, in section IV, I comment very briefly on limitations of the critical racial focus on de-humanization as an element on colonial and racial subjugation.

2

Language is a treasure chest which, as Walter Benjamin (1979) has noted, gathers all that has been designed throughout human existence, as well as a most efficient impediment to experimenting with, at trying things any way other than the usual ways. Reading Vété-Congolo's presentation of her argument, I find both operations. For the philosopher does show how Caribbean Pawòl hosts a conception of the human person that cannot be attributed to, not original to, the plantation, that is, one which cannot be taken as a *translation* of the European notion of the human, because they do not share an ontological referent. Nevertheless, both in the description of the plantation political context and its hegemonic discourse on the human, *L'Esprit blanc*, Vété-Congolo's own language presumes a common basis for *comparing* it with the Congo's notion of the human.

Luckily, this predicament, given by intrinsic comparability of critical racial tools, strategies, and moves, does not undermine her most important claim, which is that of the political and ontological untranslatability of the enslaved's gesture of naming of the *négre* a human person. I will return to this in section IV. Here I am interested in how her presentation of this argument makes two offerings to a global feminist critique of capital: on the one hand, it implies a more general ethical ground, in which humanity is still a ruling concept, which I call a plantation text (Caribbean Pawòl + *L'Esprit Blanc*); and, on the other hand, it foregrounds the self-interested (economic) character of the plantation discourse, as des Lozières' text reads like a last cry of colonizers who attempted to crush the nascent black republic of Haiti. These signal two venues of study of: (a) the very discursive strategy that performs the overrepresentation of European Man and (b) how it plays out in the figure under construction at that very moment, which is the liberal political subject, under the aegis of the principles of liberty and equality.

The epistemological and political moment could not be more crucial. Louis Narcisse Baudry des Lozières was a French soldier and a lawyer, who married Catharine Milhet, the daughter of a trader, a brother-in-law of the planter Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry. *Les Égaréments du Nigrophilisme* published still during the struggles of the Haitian Revolution—and a year before the publication of Cuvier's lecture on Comparative Anatomy (1802) and six years before Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—is a counter-insurgency piece. By noting that I want to highlight two things. On the one hand, it should

not be ignored that des Lozières is writing about the slaves of St Domingue, in the midst of the Haitian Revolution. He wrote this book while France was attempting to regain control of St Domingue, and he completed it three years before Haiti's independence was finally declared. Impossible not to read his arguments regarding Africans, blacks, negrophiles in the text are part of a counterinsurgency campaign, which would continue for the following decades, and render the black republic untenable. For des Lozières' rejection of the argument against enslavement, on the basis of the principle of equality, is consistent with the fact that he unleashes his defense of slavery under a dramatic political and philosophical reconfiguration. All he had, as Vété-Congolo highlights, was utilitarianism as the ethical framework and syllogism as the basis for asserting the truth of his statement that slavery is good for Europeans and Africans, which is a fine example of Wynter's thesis of Man's overrepresentation of the human.

How is the overrepresentation achieved? Let me use the term *enclosure* as a descriptor for the characteristic gesture of the plantation discourse, as presented in Vété-Congolo's reading. As she notes, it is a typical specimen of what Foucault called the classical order, a utilitarian argument presented syllogistically:

- (A) European social existence is good (humanity, interest, reason) and African social existence is bad (hunger, death)
- (B) Under slavery, Africans enjoy a European social existence
- (C) Slavery is good for Africans and, of course, for Europeans.

Following Vété-Congolo's argument that this construction is *unethical*, I find two ways to read this moment of enclosure. Both readings can be named 'ideological,' that is, as an 'untrue' statement about the state of things which serves an economic interest, which would be exposed by asking a question, which would foreground the economic interests:

- (i) the one in which the distinction between good and bad is made, as in (A), for statement is *ethical* (from a utilitarian point of view) and the *philosophical* question not to be asked is on "on what grounds is the distinction between good and bad made?"
- (ii) the second one (B) is juridic (re slavery) and the question not to be asked is "under what conditions did Africans 'enjoy' European social existence?"

In both, enclosure is a logical construction, which displaces attention from the *economic* interests of the slave owner, settler, colonizer, soldier, who, when des Lozières was writing, engaged in counterinsurgency on two fronts: against the rebellious former slaves in St Domingue and against the anti-slavery (post-Enlightenment) philosophical statements (on formal humanity), which foster equality against the principle of utility.

Let me take this further by contrasting enclosure with the gesture Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak tracks in what she calls European narratives of self-representation (Chakravorty Spivak 1998). Undoubtedly, des Lozières' text differs from the philosophical statements Spivak reads. Unlike the post-Enlightenment philosophers Kant and Hegel—but like the theorist of the social, Marx—des Lozières

writes from a battleground that needs that an ethic and an economic case be made for colonization, but also enslavement. Hence, unlike the German philosophers who, as Spivak shows, manage to bury the colonized “others of Europe,” in the very texts that give birth to post-Enlightenment political architecture, the French colonizer/soldier/plantation writer had to address the ethical question front and center, and in doing so, he had to spell out both the economic and the moral reasons for which enslavement (expropriation of labor under total violence) was necessary (economically) and good (morally), that is, (C) slavery is (morally, not economically) good. Precisely that ethic-economic bind that, Spivak shows, Kant hides under/in the figure of the raw man, Hegel in his reading of the *Gita*, and Marx in the Asiatic Mode of Production, des Lozières has not only to describe but also justify. This is a task he has to perform, as he writes in the moment of emergence of another ethical text (that informed by the Kantian formal rendering of humanity). Under this still incipient ethical text, as Vété-Congolo states, his justifications for slavery are *unethical*.

Two things I would like to highlight here. First, as mentioned before, utility and equality (which rests on the formal or historical notion of humanity) was the governing ethical principle in early nineteenth century. When des Lozières states that slavery was good for billions of African men, his moral argument, his pledge for humanity, must be considered on the basis of the principle of utility and not, as he explicitly argues (in spite the “fanaticism of today’s [post-Enlightenment] philosophers”), the principle of equality. Second, then, precisely because the principle of utility can be deployed in support of slavery, des Lozières’ text gifts us with a wealth of evidence of the substance of the relationship post-Enlightenment that philosophers Spivak reads refused to acknowledge and make explicit as /in their context of existence and condition of possibility for their own thinking.

Enclosure, like foreclosure,⁶ is a signifying gesture that delimits the modern ethical ground; while (post-Enlightenment) foreclosure disavows the very terrain where relationship would or could be possible, (classic or pre-Enlightenment) enclosure exposes while it protects the relationship. For this reason, it cannot but expose both the juridic-economic context and relations it is deployed to defend. Precisely this spelling out of the conditions, terms, and significance of the relationship has consequences in terms of what each gives away regarding the political context. On the one hand, as Spivak describes, foreclosure consists in a preemptive move of disavowal of the other of Europe without the spelling out of why they are not contemplated by the terms of Man (Man2) (Spivak 1998: 80-1). The juridic-economic context, that is, colonial domination is not even named in the founding texts Spivak reads. On the other hand, as Vété-Congolo shows, enclosure consists in a defensive move of acknowledgement and justification of a relationship, under the terms of Man1. Here colonial domination—land and labor expropriation—is not only mentioned but it is also celebrated as crucial to Europe’s prosperity and as part of its civilizing mission. This brings out another theme for consideration, which again cannot be developed here. It concerns the distinction between enclosure and foreclosure, which I find gives a clue to the other difference in Spivak’s reading of Marx and Kant and Hegel. For in Marx, as she tracks how his placing Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) outside the historical process would lead to the constitution of capital, the gesture she describes but does not name, I find is similar to enclosure. The key point, which is emphasized in the following paragraphs (Spivak 1998: 81), is that there seems to be a qualitative difference between the AMP and the Germanic European Middle Ages where Marx finds the seeds of capital. I will return to Spivak’s argument below.

Let me just say that this *qualitative* difference relates to the larger theme of this commentary, regarding how the slave is not a thing of raciality. For while the plantation discourse—and its methodological

(syllogism) and ethical (utilitarian) bases—did not fit in the epistemological context, in the post-Enlightenment (after notions such as Hegel's historic and Cuvier's organic) foreclosure would not suffice, and the difference between Europe and its others had to be spelled out and explained. It would not be until forty years after Marx's *Economic Manuscripts* and the *Grundrisse* notes were written, that the science of man would finally assemble the political symbolic arsenal that would meet this need using the proper scientific (empirical) basis. They assemble the concept of a racial (as opposed to the historical) that gathers the human not as a formal principle but as an empirical one, that is object of scientific knowledge. Much like Marx's materialist (historical) economic subject, the racial subject is born out of the human as a scientific (biological) category, as it institutes a conception of humanity, I will call empirical humanity that does not extend to the non-*blanc*, who as such are not comprehended by the ethical principles of formal humanity, that is, equality and dignity (a proxy for liberty).

In any event, though she does not make this claim explicitly, Vété-Congolo's argument recalls Spivak's famous thesis the subaltern's speech being the place of silence that is also the conditions of possibility for the text of domination. Nonetheless, as I have highlighted, the two claims are not necessarily contradictory when considered through two distinctions. The more general one, as I try above, has to do with the fact that Spivak and Vété-Congolo are examining excerpts of discourses produced in two different moments of modern philosophy, respectively, the pre-Enlightenment (des Lozières' syllogistically presented utilitarian argument) and the post-Enlightenment (the very texts that generate ethical notions such as formal equality, historicity, etc.). A more specific distinction has to do with the kind of excerpts each reads: on the one hand, Vété-Congolo's retrieves a larger symbolic regime (the plantation text), in which des Lozières' argument is historically and juridically-economically located (as on side of relationships of domination) as on behalf of European plantation owners; on the other hand, Spivak's reading of the narratives of modern (self-) representation tracks precisely the moment of vacating of such relationships through a gesture of foreclosure, that is, the assembling of the place of silence. Precisely for these reasons—that is, for these differences—that I find in Vété-Congolo's philosophical Caribbean intervention, which tracks the ideological enclosure to be replaced by philosophical erasure/foreclosure, a contribution to a program to which Spivak has contributed greatly, namely, a global feminist anticolonial critique of capital.

3

In my interpretation, however, Caliban represents not only the anti-colonial rebel whose struggle still resonates in contemporary Caribbean literature, but is a symbol for the world proletariat and, more specifically, for the proletarian body as a terrain and instrument of resistance to the logic of capitalism. Most important, the figure of the witch, who in The Tempest is confined to a remote background, in this volume is placed at the center-stage, as the embodiment of a world of female subjects that capitalism had to destroy: the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone, the obeha woman who poisoned the master's food and inspired the slaves to revolt (Federici 2004: 11).

Let me continue with a couple of themes that take further the above claim. In particular, I focus on how Vété-Congolo's argument yields an image of post-Enlightenment political architecture, which foregrounds the role colonial, cisheteropatriarchal, and racial subjugation performs on behalf of capital. The first is about how the description of the economic moment renders the political subject *corporeal* (but not yet empirical, in the scientific sense), in that it has property and body (as the husband, the father, settler, owner, the brother, etc.) that necessarily recall a juridically established relationship in which it occupies a position of authority (as the ruler), that is, it dislodges, the postulation of equality because the latter only work formally and as a corrector of hierarchy, not authority. A functionary of former Haitian plantation owners and an official of the French counter-insurgency forces, des Lozières (and the pro-slavery argument he advances) represent the commercial capitalist agent and the colonial military combatant. His defense of colonial domination of Haiti and the enslavement of the country's black inhabitants in the name of the colonizer (conqueror, settler, or not), property owners (plantation owner or something else) and slave owners, among them his brother (in-law), who is a husband and father. That is, his version of the plantation discourse recalls precisely the juridic infrastructure of the formal (political) subject of the post-Enlightenment liberal architecture.

Thinking with Silvia Federici, it does not take much cleaning up of the debris of (after the postmodern attacks on) the formally rendered image of the political subject, to read des Lozières' text as an item in the colonial archives, one from which one can gather specimens of the kind of moral argument that could support and authorize deployment of total violence against disobedient slaves and wives (and all mis-behaving women, such as the heretic, the healer, etc.). For the plantation owner whose interests he defends (in writing and in arms) is immersed in a web of juridic relations—as a colonial and cisheteropatriarchal figure—in all of which he occupies the position of authority.

The second theme refers to the centrality of violence in the cisheteropatriarchal, colonial, and racial matrix of capital as well as openings for thinking rebely without modern precepts. The question here is about the work of the symbolic when it is approached not with the usual concepts of the ideological and the cultural, which is how the studies of racial subjugation describe the operations of the racial. With Hortense Spillers, we learn that skin color has done quite a bit of work in absorbing/absolving the juridic-economic context and its constitutive relationships that accounts for the social trajectory of black and brown folks, which means that it also gathers the ethic, where it serves to authorize otherwise unacceptable deployments of total and partial violence. Spillers' "female flesh ungendered," I have showed elsewhere, in a way precisely encapsulates the colonial, cisheteropatriarchal, racial conditions of possibility for any discourse, critical or otherwise (Spillers 1987). Yet, at the same time, for the same reason, she is not available for articulating something like a political consciousness, in the way that Vété-Congolo finds in the language of the Congo. This is so, I find, not because of some fundamental difference between the enslaved in Haiti and in the United States, or between male and female slaves.

The difference is one of approach, of how one sets up the itinerary of the critical analysis. According to Vété-Congolo, by calling the *nègre montou*, the Congo reached beyond the enclosure of the plantation discourse, and hailed a broader configuration, so to speak, which I am calling the multilingual (one can assume the enslaved were extracted from different parts of the African continent) *plantation text*. In it, *nègre* is at once thing (commodity and instrument of production) and human (as an organic entity of a particular genus, the living thing which unlike the spider (which follow its biological programming) has the ability to design/decide how to do perform its tasks, and relatedly

as an ethic [linguistic or cultural] entity), on which, according to des Lozières, Europe depends very heavily economically. In this confrontational text, his writing of the *nègre* as an inferior ethic (linguistic or cultural entity) in the plantation discourse is in the service of the defense of their importance as an economic figure, which is only beneficial to Europe because of its juridic situation, that is, as labor in captivity. It is, however, always already in contrast with and as such attached to, the enslaved's refusal of such discourse and articulation of another one which claims another meaning for the word human, and descriptor for the person, as an ethic figure, a gesture that is juridically (anticolonial/antislavery) and symbolically (philosophically) insurrectional.

4

From Vété-Congolo's argument I gleaned elements that allowed me to envision a plantation text. A symbolic context that could be gathered from writings, documents, books, music, etc., and the strategies deployed in the justification for and the struggle against slavery and colonial domination. True, in comparison with the plantation discourse, there is not much available re slave's own discourse; however, the very possibility for its existence is registered in many ways in what one can call the sources of the Black Radical Tradition, as studied by Cedric Robinson, Robin Kelley, Beatriz Nascimento, Fred Moten and others. The crucial move is not so much the collecting of evidence of the latter, of course it existed—that black people are still found everywhere slavery existed is evidence of anticolonial practice—of rebellion against juridical domination and refusal of ethical enclosure.

My departure from her has to do with the unmarked move in the choreography of her argument, with how she casts the anticolonial gesture. As a philosopher, Vété-Congolo consistently reads the naming and political intervention by the Congo with the post-Enlightenment grammar, framed by its main ethical concepts, such as equality and (formal) humanity. These concepts are the basis for the guiding distinction, which takes the form of a dichotomy: the attribution of an *unethical* character to des Lozières' version of the plantation discourse and of an *ethical* character to the Congo's terms and the Caribbean Pawol that related to them.

Having grown up and been schooled in Brazil, I appreciate the move. I do think, however, that it could do without the unmarked/pre-textual critical racial theorizing's casting of racial subjugation as a matter of de-humanization. for two reasons. On the one hand, for better or worse, I grew up with plenty of evidence of African ontological and existential elements which the enslaved and their descendants brought and which through major and minor anticolonial gestures proliferated in colonial and postcolonial Brazil. On the other hand, and relatedly, I grew up and was trained (as a social scientist) under the anthropological capture of such ontological and existential elements, which rendered them key weapons in the Brazilian political symbolic arsenal. Put differently, the anthropological treatment of the evidence of such anticolonial moves, which served the reformulation of the Brazilian discourse around the 1930s, would not prevent that authorized unacceptable violence be visited upon black Brazilians, which were justified by a discourse that rendered the form the efficient (interior) cause for their social situation. That is so precisely because these key terms,

humanity and transcendentalism (along with raciality) rule in the ethical scene of value, in which they support the notion of dignity and the implied ethical grading that gives it sense.

Precisely that gradation, orchestrated by how transcendentalism supports dignity, which runs underground so to speak, consistently militates against the notion of equality that distinguishes the post-Enlightenment version of the scene of value, and which Vété-Congolo's argument implies would be the guiding principle of the broader ethical context, which I am calling the plantation text. I find this implication of the argument more explicitly articulated when she writes: two statements: first, "having defined what a human person is, that Blanc is human, that Africans are infra-human" des Lozières moves to argue that he does "not regard them as *my equals*"; this leads to, second, Vete-Congolo's statement "one understands after all this "parole" the type of educator des Lozières is, that is, he is an *inhumanist* master-teacher as his discourse amounts to teaching *inhumanity*" (my italics; Vété-Congolo 2024). This equation of refusing equality to Africans to "teaching inhumanity" cannot but obtain equality = humanity, therefore, equality is the higher ethical principle. That is confirmed by the other component of the plantation text, the Africans, who extend equality (humanity) to themselves by calling *negre* a human person. The point here is not to challenge Vété-Congolo's argument but to invite the reader to speculate on the question of what would become of it, if it were not based on the post-Enlightenment political architecture's most famously failed principle, namely equality.

To conclude, I find in Vété-Congolo's presentation of her argument, akin to Sylvia Wynter's intervention, an innovative and provoking contribution, to a global feminist anticolonial critique of capital, which resonates, as it for the most part runs parallels to, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's, Silvia Federici's, and Hortense Spillers,' as briefly indicated above. However, and this is a shared predicament by all of those who challenge the basis of modern thought from within. The critical form under which these challenges are presented also hosts Vété-Congolo's intervention, which grounded by the ideal of equality, which has defined the ethic moment of the post-Enlightenment political architecture, as supported by the notions of humanity and raciality, as noted above. Such approaches cannot but leave it unaddressed that which was crucial to the defense of conquest and settlement and enslavement such as des Lozières as well as other deployments of total violence, namely the very ethical scene of value, in which the notion of dignity (as another name for liberty) does and equality supposedly rule. Of course, a key point that I cannot begin to address here is that precisely this incompatibility between equality and liberty has plagued all programs for social and global justice and plays a crucial role in the emergence and resilience of fascism.⁷

For that reason, I chose to write this commentary as an invitation to the reader to read Vete-Congolo's intervention with that of other feminist thinkers, whose contributions have addressed these very key notions. Hortense Spillers' phrase "female flesh ungendered," for instance, invites the critique of the ethic moment foregrounds the aftermath of slavery, that is, the focus on the symbolic apprehension of the slave through skin color will highlight how blackness then signals a glitch in the post-Enlightenment political architecture, as it refers to juridic modality of total violence.⁸ As such, it foregrounds the body, in the moment of subjugation, that is the slave being punished for a minor or major act of rebely, of insurrection, against the colonial cisheteropatriarchal order. In doing so, it also calls our attention to the ways in which coloniality (as a modality of governance) and raciality (as a symbolic arsenal) has remained operative under the aegis of the formal humanity, in the production of humans without liberty (dignity), in ways that undermine any substantive articulation of the principle of equality.

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- 1 For such treatment see generally Ferreira da Silva (2022).
 - 2 Something crucial that I cannot address in this short commentary is the lack of treatment of indigenous political and philosophical words and meanings. Let me just say that Vété-Congolo's argument creates a space for such consideration in the study of Caribbean thought and beyond.
 - 3 This summary of Wynter's argument obviously does not do justice to its complexities of her argument. For her rendering of the argument see, for instance, Wynter (2003).
 - 4 Here are two relevant quotes "Negroes are enslaved by Europeans and sold to America. Bad as this may be, their lot in their own land is even worse, since there a slavery quite as absolute exists; for it is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing—an object of no value" (Hegel 2001: 113).
 - 5 Here I am not making a case for getting out of modern philosophy altogether. I think I was well-trained by my Brazilian teachers in poststructuralist and contemporary Continental philosophy and know better than to say that there is a complete outside.
 - 6 Lacan's definition of foreclosure, see Spivak (1998: 4).
 - 7 For an elaboration of this argument see Ferreira da Silva (2016).
 - 8 For an elaboration of this argument, see generally Ferreira da Silva (2022).

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José Cossa, Ph.D., is a Mozambican-American scholar, writer/author, researcher, poet, blogger, “twitterer,” podcaster, entrepreneur, and an **Associate Professor in the College of Education at Penn State**. Cossa holds a Ph.D. in Cultural and Educational Policy Studies with a depth area in Comparative and International Education from Loyola University Chicago. He is the author of the book *Power, Politics, and Higher Education: International Regimes, Local Governments, and Educational Autonomy*, the recipient of the 2012 Joyce Cain Award for Distinguished Research on People of African Descent, a Co-Founder of AI4Afrika, and a member of the MacArthur Foundation 100&Change Panel of Judges for two consecutive years (2018 Inaugural Challenge and 2019). Cossa’s research focus is on adult online and distance education, education in Africa, the African Renaissance, power dynamics in negotiation over educational policy; unveiling issues inherent in the promise of modernity, and working towards de-colonializing, de-bordering, de-peripherizing, and de-centering the world; higher education policy and administration; system transfer; international development; global and social justice; and, related topics. Currently, Cossa has engaged in a new (exterior to modernity) theorizing, which he coined as *Cosmo-uBuntu*. Cossa has taught in South Africa, Egypt, and the United States.

Hanétha Vété-Congolo is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures at Bowdoin College, Maine-USA, Chair of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, President emerita of the Caribbean Philosophical Association and Founder and Coordinator of Lyannaj des chercheurs guadeloupéens, guyanais et martiniquais aux États-Unis. Vété-Congolo is affiliated to the Africana, the Latin American, Caribbean and Latinx and the Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies Programs of her institution. She is a member of AI4A-Artificial Intelligence for Afrika, a Board member of Women in French, a member of the Editorial Board of *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, and Membre d’Honneur of the Research Group on Black Latin America at the Université de Perpignan Via Domitia, France (CRESEM/GRENAL, Languages and identities).

Her scholarship focuses principally on Caribbean and (West/Central) African critical thought, philosophy, literature, culture, and orality and, on discourses by and about women of the Caribbean and, West and Central Africa. Vété-Congolo is author of *Nous sommes Martiniquaises. Parvòl en bouches de femmes châtaignes : Une pensée existentialiste noire sur la question des femmes* (2020), *L’interoralité caribéenne : le mot conté de l’identité (Vers un traité d’esthétique caribéenne)* (1st ed. 2011. 2nd ed. 2016), and editor of *Pensées et philosophies d’Afrique. Pour demain : voir, comprendre et penser l’Afrique d’aujourd’hui* (with Hady Ba and Oumar Dia. Présence africaine 201, 2022), *Penser le sujet femme noire francophone*. *Recherches féministes*, vol. 34, N.2, 2022 (with Agnès Berthelot-Raffard), *The Caribbean Oral Tradition* (2016), *Léon-Gontran Damas : Une Négritude entière* (2015) *Le conte d’hier, aujourd’hui : Oralité et modernité* (2014), and *MaComère : Journal of the Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars* (2004). Among other refereed journals, her articles have appeared in the *C.L.R. James Journal: A Review of Caribbean Ideas*, *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, *Journal of Contemporary Thought*, *Journal of World Philosophies*, *Ethiopiennes : Revue négro-africaine de littérature et de philosophie*, *The CLR. James Journal: A Review of Caribbean Ideas*, *Journal of Black Studies*, *Handbook of African Oral Traditions and Folklore*,

Wadabagai: A journal of the Caribbean Diaspora, Postcolonial Text, Présence francophone, Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal, Les Cahiers du GRELCEF, Women in French, Bloomsbury Handbook to Literature and Psychoanalysis.

Her poetry collections, *Avoir et Être : Ce que j’Ai, ce que je Suis* was published with Le chasseur Abstrait in 2009 and, *Mon parler de Guinée* in 2015 with L’Harmattan, coll. Poètes des cinq continents. Her unpublished collection of poetry *Womb of a Woman* was Shortlisted for the 2015 Small Axe Literary Competition.

Denise Ferreira da Silva currently holds the Samuel Rudin Chair Professor in Humanities in the Department of Spanish & Portuguese at New York University. As an academic, her publications include *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minnesota 2007), *Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime* (Johns Hopkins, 2013), and *Unpayable Debt* (Sternberg 2022) and visiting professorships at the University of Paris 8, University of Pennsylvania, University of Toronto, La Trobe University, among others. As an artist, she has exhibited and lectured at renowned international art spaces, including the Centre Pompidou, Whitechapel Gallery, MOMA, Guggenheim, Galway Arts Centre, Glasgow Center for Contemporary Arts, Extracity Kunsthalle Antwerp, MACBA, Munch Museum, Kunsthalle Wien, and the São Paulo, Berlin and Venice Biennials.