

THE UNESCO Courier

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The deep legacy of slavery



- Slave trade and **women**: a forgotten history

- **Gorée**, island of memory

- Quilombos, hotbeds of **Afro-Brazilian** resistance

- Esteban Montejo, **Cuba's** last Cimarrón slave

OUR GUEST

Patrick Chamoiseau,
French writer (Martinique):
"We must have the wealth
of all the languages of
the world"

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Editorial

The history of enslavement has shaped our modern world and still impacts us. This is evident in the pervasive, and sometimes systemic racism, that persists globally especially against Afro-descendants, and that stems from different historic phenomena that used to justify the myth of African "inferiority", including during the Enlightenment Period.

Moreover, the transatlantic slave trade, while establishing the economic dominance of colonial powers, profoundly disrupted societal structures on the African continent. This phenomenon, linked to the multiplication of colonial slavery-based economies in the past centuries, complicates efforts towards peaceful development. If we are to build a more inclusive world, we need to understand and take into account the weight of this legacy.

The history of enslavement is also one of resistance and creation. Through resistance, enslaved peoples affirmed the universality of human rights. Against all odds, they developed an artistic heritage and agricultural and technological knowledge, from rice cultivation to the mastering of iron, that bear witness to an extraordinary capacity for resilience.

The history and impact of enslavement, some of the salient aspects of which are presented in this issue of the Courier, have been analyzed by UNESCO's Routes of Enslaved Peoples programme (referred to as the Slave Route project until 2022) since its creation in 1994 at the initiative of Benin and Haiti. UNESCO's advocacy led to the United Nations' acknowledgment of the transatlantic slave trade and enslavement as a crime against humanity in 2001. The establishment by UNESCO of an International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition (23 August) also pays tribute to enslaved peoples, honoring their legacies.

The programme has enabled us to highlight this heritage, and to raise the question of trauma and memory when implementing inclusion policies. Through the UNESCO Network of Places of History and Memory Linked to Enslavement and the Slave Trade, the programme also promotes research and contributes to the development of sustainable ecotourism through the cooperation of cities whose history is linked to enslavement.

As we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Routes of Enslaved Peoples programme in 2024, we must mobilize to increase awareness of this history and measure its weight and repercussions in today's representations and reality. This will help build more inclusive societies that are fairer and more respectful of rights.

Gabriela Ramos
*Assistant Director-General of UNESCO
 for Social and Human Sciences*

WIDE ANGLE

The deep legacy of slavery

▼ *The "Door of No Return" of the House of Slaves on Gorée Island (Senegal), a symbol of the slave trade.*

Long reduced to silence, the memory of the African slave trade began to emerge in the aftermath of the Second World War. Although it is now being recognized symbolically through memorial laws and national and international commemorations, its effects continue to be keenly felt. This can be seen in the manifestations of discrimination and racism that still affect Afro-descendants.

// Breaking the silence". Thirty years ago, in 1994, this was the main objective of UNESCO's Slave Route programme, now known as Routes of Enslaved Peoples, namely to expose the memory of this human tragedy, which led to the deportation of 12.5 million men, women and children from Africa to the Americas between the 16th and mid-19th centuries. On the coasts of East Africa and the Indian Ocean, it has been estimated that over a million men and women were deported. In addition to this appalling figure, which is based on an international analysis of the archives, some seven million captives died on the internal slave trade routes in Africa.

Originally coming from West Africa – an area between Senegambia and Central Africa – and East Africa, they were deported mainly to Brazil (40 per cent of captives in the slave trade), to the Caribbean islands (60 per cent) and, to a lesser extent, to the United States. This system of human exploitation through violence and domination – slavery – was the first global economy.

The deportation of African men and women enabled the production of commodities – sugar, coffee, indigo and cotton – for Europe, and created a social hierarchy in each colonial society, where colour and civil status were ranked, defining populations in racial terms. Each person was placed according to criteria in which the racial factor (more or less "white") took precedence over the social factor (more or less wealthy). The "white-free-slave-owner" was placed in a position of superiority in relation to the "black-slave" at the bottom of the ladder,

engendering a structural and symbolic violence that was passed down from generation to generation.

“ Recognition of the memory of slavery began to emerge in the aftermath of the Second World War

Silent tragedy

But for a long time this tragedy was kept quiet at the national level. Silence has largely prevailed in constructions of national identity – in Europe as in Africa, in the Caribbean as in the United States, in South America or Asia as in the countries of the Arab peninsula. Yet, slavery has played an important role in the history of Europe and the United States in particular, building their wealth, shaping their ideologies and influencing their philosophical principles. This importance has not been fully recognized however, nor have the legacies produced by the history of slavery.

But is it possible to bury in silence the effects of racial prejudice, racism and discrimination endured by the people

bearing the history of slavery? While this policy of silence has persisted for centuries, recognition of the memory of slavery – defined as the effects of the past on the present – is gradually emerging. One of the main reasons for this has been a change in global relations since the end of the Second World War. On the one hand, intellectuals from the Caribbean colonies, such as Aimé Césaire (Martinique, France), or from Africa, such as Alioune Diop (Senegal), began to denounce the Eurocentrism and contradictions of a Europe built on the notion of "Freedom", while slavery and colonial oppression persisted up until African independence.

On the other hand, this shake-up of thought structures, combined with the monstrosity of the Shoah, has stimulated an interest in the lived experiences of historical subjects. Rather than focusing on globalizing historical discourse, attention is being paid to "witnesses to history". Although there are few direct witnesses to slavery in the Caribbean at the end of the twentieth century, its legacies remain just about everywhere in the world. In the name of the principles of universal equality, the memory of slavery has thus become a matter of public interest. The aim was to take into account the historical factors that explain why unequal social relations and positions are being maintained in contemporary societies – this is the roadmap for the remembrance of slavery.

It was established under pressure from citizens' associations and government policies initiated by political events. The protests in Brazil and South America



against the commemoration of the “discovery” of the Americas, and the reaction to the murders of African-Americans in the United States, are illustrations of this movement.

Apologies and reparations

The memory of slavery has thus justified the establishment of so-called memorial laws, such as those adopted in France in 2001 and in Senegal in 2010, which make slavery a crime against humanity. And while the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban (South Africa) failed to secure a consensus among governments in favour of an apology, several governments have moved on the issue. In 2007, the United Kingdom apologized for its role in the slave trade, followed by Denmark in 2017, the Netherlands in 2022 and Portugal in 2023. Europe, for its part, has apologized for the “untold suffering inflicted on millions of men, women and children as a result of the transatlantic slave trade”.

As part of the shift in the balance of power that has taken place since 2000, dates commemorating the memory of slavery have been introduced. At the international level, 25 March has become the United Nations International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, while 23 August is UNESCO’s International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition (in reference to the slave uprising in Santo Domingo in 1791).

This movement has also been translated into numerous national initiatives, including the *Journée des Mémoires de la Traite, de l’Esclavage et de leurs Abolitions* (Day of Remembrance of the Slave Trade, Slavery and its Abolition) introduced on 10 May in France. In Brazil, two dates have been chosen: 13 May, the day on which Princess Isabel abolished slavery (although not effectively), and 20 November, the National Day of Black Consciousness, the anniversary of the death of Zumbi dos Palmares, leader of the largest Maroon village in Brazil.

The Netherlands has instituted *ketikoti* (“broken irons” in Surinamese) every 1 July to commemorate the end of slavery in Suriname (formerly Dutch Guiana) and the Netherlands Antilles. In Jamaica, as in Trinidad and Tobago and all the former

English colonies, Emancipation Day, on 1 August, celebrates the abolition of slavery, but also the independence of these countries. Mauritius celebrates abolition on 1 February at Pointe Canon.

Political recognition

All these official events constitute political recognition, but it is nevertheless difficult to measure their social effects. Rather than taking into account the memories borne by the heirs of this history, commemoration expresses the political use made of the past.

Over the course of the 20th century, the deportation of Africans to the Americas, their enslavement and the movement of black people across the Atlantic developed into a creative experience within the “black” diaspora. The memory of slavery has been transformed into

discourse, images and heritage. The inscription on UNESCO’s List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of the Maloya song from Reunion and the Mandén Charter (Mali), one of the oldest constitutions in the world, among others, bear witness to this.

Museums have also contributed to this process. In Ghana, the museums of Cape Coast and Elmina, former slave-trading forts, evoke the issue of the slave trade. In Senegal, the House of Slaves on Gorée Island has become a place of pilgrimage and an international symbol of awareness of the atrocities suffered by Africans during the European slave trade, while the Museum of Black Civilizations in Dakar presents a more global approach to Africa.

The message sent out by all these African sites is resolutely outward-looking, particularly towards the diasporas. The

The Routes of Enslaved Peoples Programme turns 30

In 2024, UNESCO’s Routes of Enslaved Peoples: Resistance, Liberty and Heritage Programme is celebrating its 30th anniversary. Created in 1994, the programme recognizes the tragedy of the history of slavery and its influence on the modern world, supporting initiatives on the theme of slavery, resistance to it, and its abolition.

Today the programme also highlights the contributions of people of African descent as well as the heavy impact of this heritage on social, cultural and economic inequalities. Countries can also propose locations to be added to UNESCO’s Places of History and Memory linked to Enslavement and the Slave Trade network and thus have access to UNESCO’s technical assistance and advocacy for the socio-economic benefit of local populations. In addition, twinning of African cities and their diasporas is encouraged to facilitate and reinforce collaboration in the fields of research and training.

To celebrate the anniversary, activities are organized by UNESCO, member states and partners throughout the year to mobilize communities and gather together scholars, intellectuals, artists and members of the public to foster reflection around the legacy of enslavement. They include mapping the routes of enslavement in Kenya, presenting the book *Los negros esclavos* by Fernando Ortiz in Cuba and an exhibit on Ayiti, Women, Vodou and Revolution in Haiti at UNESCO Headquarters.

The archives of the programme are also open to the public.



© Christian Bonzom

▼ *Déportation [Deportation] (2007), painting by French artist Christian Bonzom from the series À l'ombre des Lumières [In the shadow of lights].*

National Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington D.C. (United States), on the other hand, seeks to recognize the importance of African-Americans in the construction of the American nation. The aim is to rewrite the country's history by highlighting their contribution through slavery. In Europe, the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool (UK) was the first to open on the subject.

Demands for justice

As some associations of people who bear the memory of slavery have pointed out, the main memorials have been organized around the abolition of slavery, such as the Arch of Return in New York, the Abolition Memorial in Nantes (France) and the National Slavery Monument in Amsterdam's Oosterpark. Meanwhile, the suffering and injustice caused by the history of slavery are often overlooked. The Intercontinental Museum of Slavery in Port-Louis, Mauritius, due to open in 2023, seeks, on the contrary, to present the destinies of the enslaved.

And there lies the problem. Public policies in their symbolic, legislative and educational forms help but do not resolve the problems of racism and

discrimination. They do not respond to demands for justice and equality, and on the contrary, they give rise to demands for reparations, because questions about the effectiveness of the "end of slavery" continue to be pressing.

“ Symbolic forms of public policy fail to meet demands for justice and equality

In September 2013, under the aegis of CARICOM (Caribbean Community), the Caribbean States, with Haiti, launched a campaign targeting Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. They took them to court, demanding reparation for the damage caused by slavery and colonization. In the United States, this demand re-emerged in a radical way during the racial clashes in Ferguson in 2014-2015 and Charlottesville in 2017,

reactivating the Black Lives Matter movement, which began in 2012.

Justice (in the ethical and judicial sense) and equal treatment, which form the principles of the demands, were put into perspective with a global demand for reparation. The responses have been varied. In the Netherlands, the government decided to set up a 200-million-Euro fund to deal with the contemporary effects of slavery. In the United States, private organizations such as the Chase Manhattan Bank and Harvard, Columbia, and Howard universities, among others, have chosen to finance specific study grants for Afro-descendants.

In 2020, the European Union called for the adoption of national plans to take account of the colonial past and combat structural racism. Changing the way in which history is recorded in public spaces is also a reparation issue. Changing the names of streets bearing the names of slave traders and removing statues depicting slavers are ways of changing the way history is written. Reparations, in all the multiple meanings of the term, help to re-establish justice for a more egalitarian world. ■

The Caribbean calls for restorative justice

The violence inflicted in the context of slavery has left deep and multiple scars throughout the region. More and more voices are calling for reparation, including financial compensation.

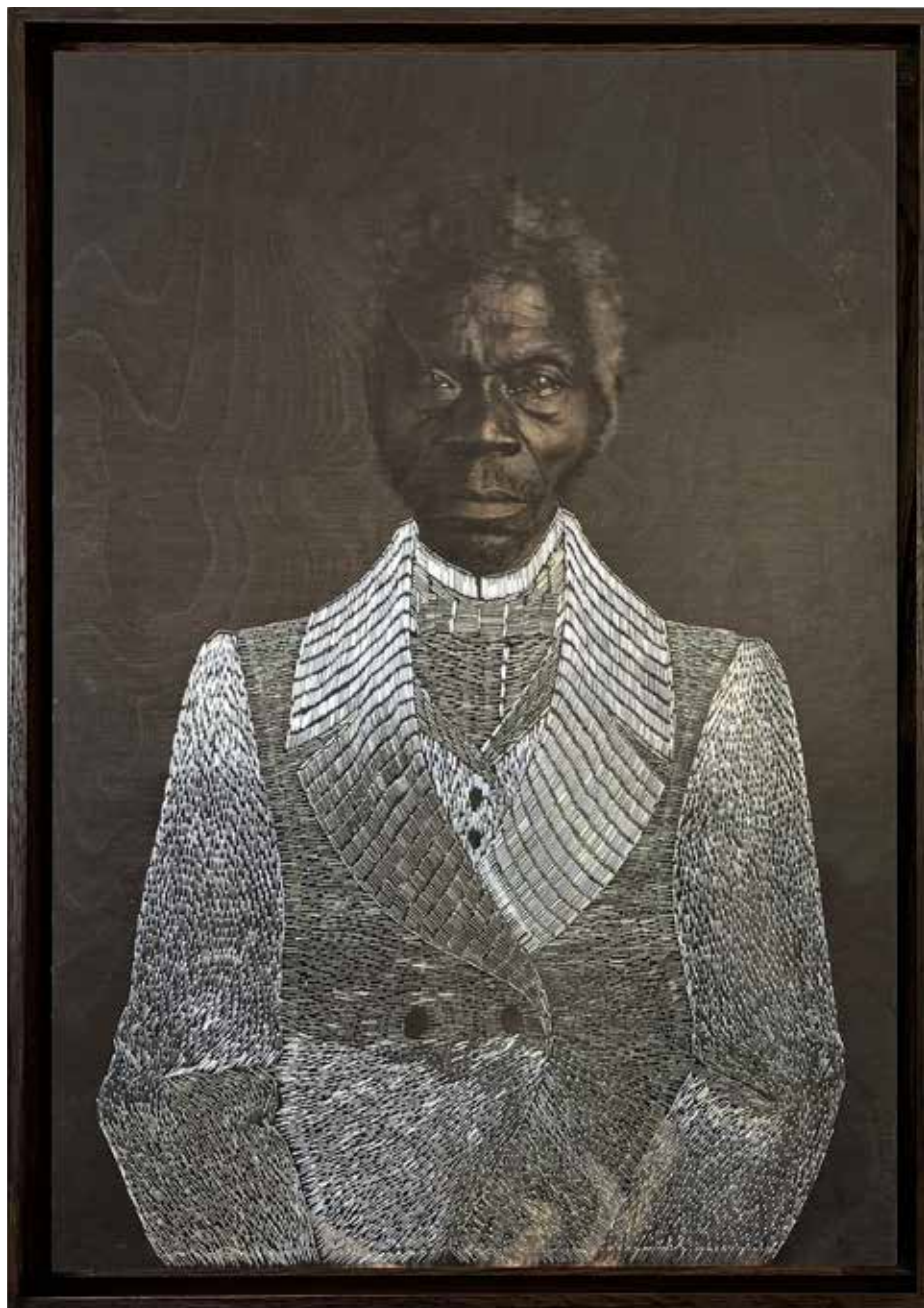
Verene Shepherd

Social historian and Director of the Centre for Reparation Research at The University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica.

The human suffering of the Africans who were captured, trafficked across the sea and enslaved in the Americas, as well as the indigenous peoples who also suffered under the barbaric colonial system, are well known. What may be less known are the enduring financial implications, for the enslaving societies as well as for the slaves and their descendants.

More and more frequently, governments and institutions that benefited from the conquest, chattel enslavement and colonialism are being demanded to acknowledge the role they played in these systems, and to make adequate restitution. This is increasingly so in the Global South, which is broadly comprised of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and parts of Asia and Oceania.

The key demand is for these entities to recognize that their wealth was created from the destruction of countless racial and ethnic communities, cultures and societies, which continue to have far-reaching implications on their ability to thrive. This has already been demonstrated by Saint Lucian economist and Nobel laureate Arthur Lewis, author of *Labour in the West Indies* in 1939; the historian and first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Eric Williams, who



© Sasha Huber and Tamara Lanier. Original images courtesy the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University (Renty, 35-5-10/53037; Delia, 35-5-10/53040)



Many institutions have owned up to their past and urged complicit countries to confront the legacy of slavery

wrote *Capitalism and Slavery* in 1944; and the Barbadian economic historian Hilary Beckles (see page 11 of this issue).

Ancestral denials

These explanations of the need for reparations run counter to many age-old denials, such as the one by American historian Seymour Drescher, who argued that Great Britain's abolition of the "slave trade" in 1807 resulted from the British public's mobilization against it, and not from the diminishing value of slavery for Great Britain.

Even before Williams and Beckles, the economist Arthur Lewis, who was famous for his recommendations for the industrialization of the West Indies, had been a passionate advocate for reparation for colonial wrongs. He reminded Great Britain that the close to 200 years of free labour it extracted from enslaved people in the Caribbean was a debt that must be repaid.

Of course, in the Caribbean, the call for redress for the genocide of indigenous populations, the trafficking and enslavement of Africans, deceptive Asian indentureship and post-slavery and post-colonial injustices, has been a feature of European/Caribbean jurisprudence and history for more than two centuries. The pioneers were enslaved Africans who knew their illegal entrapment was a violation of their human rights, and struggled to end the transatlantic trafficking in chattel enslavement.

Quest for justice

In the post-slavery period, emancipated people took up the struggle, making efforts to secure land and decent wages. The 18th and 19th century saw wars all over the Caribbean; the Morant Bay War in Jamaica in 1865 and the 1930s labour protests across the Caribbean all continued this search for reparatory justice as the governing classes sought to maintain slavery and the masses refused to cooperate.

The Rastafari continued the movement for reparation, framed within the context of repatriation to Africa, until joined by civil society, academics, individual politicians, and, since 2013, by the governments of the Caribbean region. The earliest politician to do so was the late Ambassador Dudley Thompson, who was a key figure at the 1993 Abuja Reparation Conference in Nigeria, attended also by Chief Abiola, a successful Nigerian businessman who worked to place reparations on the international diplomatic agenda, and Lord Anthony Gifford, a human rights lawyer in the UK and Jamaica who fights for Caribbean rights.



▼ Tailoring Freedom – Renty and Delia, 2021, by Sasha Huber. The Swiss-Haitian artist uses staples to “dress” the daguerrotypes of Renty and his daughter Delia, who are unclothed.

Today, many institutions have owned up to their past and urged complicit countries to confront the legacy of slavery and colonialism, and make amends for centuries of violence and discrimination through reparations, grounded in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the Programme of Activities for the International Decade for People of African Descent (2014-2024).

Growing support

Those who push for reparations include universities such as Princeton in the United States and Cambridge in the UK, as well as schools established by enslavers, such as Munro in Jamaica. Other institutions pushing for reparations are the Anglican Church; United Nations mechanisms and treaty bodies; banks; insurance companies and individuals descended from enslavers. The latter, led by former BBC journalist Laura Trevelyan, have formed a group called "The Heirs of Enslavers".



The need for financial reparations is gaining increasing support

There is growing support for financial reparations, and specific figures have been provided by the US consulting firm the Brattle Group. They report that the aggregate sum owed by former enslaving states to 31 countries in the Americas is US\$107.8 trillion. According to this calculation, the UK would have to pay some US\$24 trillion to 14 CARICOM countries and US\$9.5 trillion to Jamaica. The United States would have to pay US\$26.790 trillion for its practice of transatlantic slavery to the United States; and France, US\$9.288 trillion to Martinique, French Guiana, Guadeloupe and Grenada, and US\$1.4 billion to Haiti. Spain, Brazil, Portugal and the Netherlands are also concerned by these claims.

Reconstructing Africa's history

In 1964, UNESCO launched a major project to study the General History of Africa with a view to remedy the widespread ignorance of Africa's past. Unparalleled in its ambition, the project consisted of presenting the continent's history through an African perspective, freeing it from racial prejudices ensuing from slave trade and colonization. The original collection of eight illustrated volumes covers the continent's history from the first appearance of human beings up to the end of the 20th century. It took 35 years of cooperation between more than 230 historians and other specialists from Africa and beyond to complete the work.

As of 2020, three additional volumes are being drafted to update the collection on recent social, political, scientific, and archaeological developments, to analyze African diasporas (Volume X on diasporas was published in 2023). This is part of the second phase of UNESCO's General History of Africa project, launched in 2009, which aims to use the collection to renovate history education in Africa, and to strengthen ties between African people, thereby fostering regional integration and peace.

The estimate of reparations for the post-enslavement period is calculated to be US\$22.9 trillion, putting the total sum to just over US\$130 trillion.

Until justice is served

Aside from this, a Plan for Reparatory Justice has been proposed by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a group of twenty countries stretching from the Bahamas in the north to Suriname and Guyana in South America. A CARICOM Reparation Commission was established by the countries' heads of government, The Centre for Reparation Research at The University of the

West Indies, and National Reparation Committees across the Caribbean. The Ten Point Plan addresses formal apology, illiteracy eradication, the recognition of African knowledge and debt cancellation, among other points.

Whatever the method, the movement for reparatory justice will continue to grow until justice is delivered to all of those harmed by the indecency of chattel enslavement and white supremacy, as expressed through colonialism and manifested in its contemporary legacies.

After all, as Sir Ellis Clarke, the Trinidadian Government's United Nations representative to the Committee on Colonialism stated in 1964: "An administering power... is not entitled to extract for centuries all that can be got out of a colony and when that has been done to relieve itself of its obligations... Justice requires that reparation be made to the country that has suffered the ravages of colonialism..." ■



The movement for reparatory justice will continue to grow until justice is delivered

Slave trade and women: a forgotten history

Women constituted the demographic majority on colonial plantations from the 18th century onward. The slavery enterprise relied heavily on the labour and fertility of enslaved black women. Yet their place in historical research has long been marginal.



▼ Sugar mill in Barbados, between 1915 and 1920.

Thirty five years ago I published a monograph entitled *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados*. Its emergence was the result of a student revolt in my history seminar at the University of the West Indies. Female students protested in the classroom that my presentations were insufficiently focused on enslaved women who they knew were the demographic majority in

the colony for most of the slavery period. I promised that I would dig deeper into the archives with an intention to rectify the situation, a kind of pedagogical reparations.

The book was the first of its kind; the historiography of enslavement in the Caribbean was revolutionized. The journey to gender justice in historical discourse had begun. Since then we have had an explosion of research and publications on

the experiences of enslaved women. The literary output transcends the academic content of history programs. It is now the empirical basis of public advocacy on the theme of reparations for slavery. Once again, I found myself driven by students upon the vanguard of a discursive movement.

My activist students were not all feminists. They all needed to know why there was historiographic silence, a void in fact, around what clearly should have been the starting point for research. Some wanted to know, furthermore, if I had inherited biases and perspectives from earlier generations of scholars, and had not resisted the reasoning received. After one year of exhausting research in the Caribbean archives, I re-inserted my now very curious mind into the documents of the British Empire.

The awakening

The “discovery” in London was Columbus-like. The facts were there all along waiting for some deluded adventurer to speak of their discovery. Here is what I found: there are more references in the plantation slavery data to the experiences of enslaved women than enslaved men. Why, then, did historians not reflect this during a century of writing about slavery? The answer seemed simple enough; the masculine mentality was looking for evidence of self-agency rather than objective gender analysis.



The demographic findings need to be fully explored. Enslavers on plantations preferred a majority of enslaved male labour only in the formative stages of plantation infrastructure development. With trees removed and ditches in place, they believed that females were more productive and efficient in the subsequent maintenance of the plantations.



The colonial system extracted more wealth and services from enslaved black women than from their male counterparts

In the English Caribbean by the mid-18th century, the preference was for a female majority and Barbados led the way. From the 1730s until the end of slavery in the 1830s, black women had outnumbered black men. My students could experience this at an existential level and needed the narrative that explained why they were an analytical minority.

Washerwomen, seamstresses and domestics

Then there was the urban context of colonies. In most towns enslaved women were the majority of labourers. They were the washerwomen, seamstresses, cooks, domestic servants, prostitutes and itinerant vendors. They were “rented out” by their owners and expected to hand over the cash earned. These miscellaneous tasks meant that towns, like plantations, could not survive nor thrive without their services. They also represented an economic sector that enabled white women to own businesses. The majority of urban enslaved females were owned by white women who in contrast, had a minority financial stake in the rural plantation sector.

What was true in the British colonies was also the case in French and Dutch territories. In all places, the slave system was built on the legal premise that only an enslaved woman could give birth to an enslaved child. The black woman, then, was the biological and legal carrier of the chattel status. She was the primary source of productive labour as well as reproductive capacity. Her child, fathered by a black or white male, was accounted for on the business ledger as an asset. She was considered therefore “perfect property”. She was a source of workforce, reproduced herself, and provided socio-sexual pleasures under the constraint of her owner. The business model of slavery, therefore, was based legally, economically and socially on the enslaved black women as chattel.

The deepest end of the slavery enterprise

Within this context, then, the enslaved black woman was super-exploited and existed in the deepest end of the slavery enterprise. The colonial system extracted more wealth and services from her than from her male counterparts. She was the main source of the sustainability of slavery. Her fertility and maternity, plus arms and legs in the field, combined to create the super-slave in the mind of enslavers. Yet, it was precisely because of the attempted management and manipulation of her fertility that the system created in her a

“natural rebel” who sought to protect her inner world from enslavers.

The reparatory justice movement that is built on the premise of enslavement as a crime against humanity should therefore be grounded on the assertion that there was no equality among the enslaved. Women carried the greater share of the burden and any concept of compensation should begin and end with that understanding.

The CARICOM reparations movement has come to terms with this truth in its advocacy and methodology of monetary measurement. The convergence of historical research and public discourse in this regard represents an important tipping point in what was hitherto a male centered narrative. Big movements begin with small questions in otherwise quiet spaces. Scholars have a responsibility to transcend calls from classrooms and go in search of seismic solutions to such enquiry. From gender reflections to reparations conversation, women continue to press against historic walls of masculine knowledge in the discovery of truth and critically, to have them accepted as new beginnings. ■

A rich immaterial heritage

The Cocolo dance drama tradition was developed among the descendants of slaves from the British Caribbean who came to the Dominican Republic in the mid-19th century to work on the sugarcane plantations. This linguistically and culturally distinct community founded its own churches, schools, charities and mutual aid services. The dance drama tradition is one of the community’s most distinctive cultural expressions, and was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008. Other cultural expressions linked to the memory of the descendants of enslaved people are also included on the List, such as The Samba de Roda of the Recôncavo of Bahia (Brazil), the Carnival of Barranquilla (Colombia), the Maroon heritage of Moore Town (Jamaica), and maloya (Réunion Island).

Rhodnie Désir, dancing the past

In *Bow't*, Rhodnie Désir, a choreographer from Quebec, blends traditional dance with contemporary influences to tell the story of expatriated slaves. This intimate solo was enriched and transformed by research into the rhythmic cultures of Afro-descendant people, taking her from Mexico to the United States via Haiti and Brazil.

We catch Rhodnie Désir as she is driving her car between downtown Montreal and her home in the Laurentians, a verdant region on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River. This daily commute has become her way of life, her oxygen. "Driving is a mental release for me," the young woman from Quebec says. "It does me good. Ideas often come when I'm behind the wheel."

Travelling back and forth, it must be said, has shaped Désir's biography from the beginning. She left her native Haiti as a child, when her parents moved to Quebec. After becoming a choreographer, she criss-crossed continents, following in the footsteps of forced migrations of Afro-American slavery – a motif that has nurtured her multifaceted, evolving body of work.

Désir now enjoys widespread esteem – she was the first to be granted associate artist status at Place des Arts, Canada's largest arts and cultural complex – but the road to recognition has been a long one. Ten years ago, Désir was still struggling to gain access to institutional performance venues, which were not very receptive to her Afro-contemporary choreographic language.

Misunderstanding

While her work is now celebrated – notably at UNESCO, where it was presented in 2015 as part of the Slave Route Programme

(renamed in 2022 as Routes of Enslaved Peoples) – it was initially met with incomprehension. In 2013, audiences were baffled by her piece *Bow't*, an intimate solo in which her body unfurls to Haitian rhythms to represent the experiences of Afro-descendant people.

"I was told it was a traditional work; no one grasped its contemporary dimension," she explains. "So I asked myself a lot of questions, and that's how I came to recreate this piece in the various countries where Afro-descendant peoples were exiled."



© Kevin Calixte

▼ Scene from the show *Bow't* Trail Rétrospek, the latest version of the work *Bow't*, for which the choreographer Rhodnie Désir travelled several countries in search of the rhythms of the African peoples who were deported there.

From 2015 to 2021, she embarked on a search for rhythmic to be danced, sung and drummed. Her journey took her from Brazil to Haiti, via Canada, the United States, Martinique and Mexico. At each stop, she gave herself a month to discover the country, meet musicians, historians and sociologists, and recreate a new version of her inaugural *Bow't* solo.



When you bring together all the rhythmic lights in the world, a huge lantern lights up

Through her travels and encounters, her creation was enriched and transformed, becoming *Bow't Trail*. In the process, she discovered a creative method – documentary choreography.

“I was reconnecting with certain root drum and song rhythms, and creating with a local musician without dictating anything to him because he’s the one who holds the knowledge.” By documenting rhythmic and making them her own, Désir uses creation as a tool of decolonization, filling in the missing pages of historical narratives.

Hidden messages

“What I love about Afro-descendant and ancestral rhythmic cultures is the notion of the mask,” she explains. “The ancestors consciously and unconsciously managed to hide messages in their rhythms, dances and gestures, messages that can be rediscovered and reinterpreted today.”

For example? In Rio, Désir was preparing the *Bow't Brazil* version, which was due to open the 2016 Olympic Games. “With Cameroonian singer and saxophonist Manu Dibango, we were to represent Afro-descendant culture in Brazil.” A daunting challenge. It was in a cultural centre built over the vestiges of a former black slave cemetery, in the

region where samba was born, that she envisioned the piece. “I couldn’t present a solo work in a context where a young black man from the favelas dies every 23 minutes.”

When she discovered *passinho*, an improvised dance performed barefoot in the favelas of northern Rio, Désir knew she had to capture it and include it in her creation. “The young people of the favelas had to have their place,” she recalls. “Consequently, the work became an amplifier for their voice, taking on even more meaning.”

Candomblé, Yoruba and Vodou

In the course of her travels, the community of spirit running through Afro-descendant cultures took shape. “There are overlaps expressed in

different rhythms, whether it’s Brazilian Candomblé, Cuban Yoruba or Haitian Vodou. Regardless of borders, when you bring together all the rhythmic lights in the world, a huge lantern lights up.”

Five hours of film also emerged from these travels, showing not only her creative work, but also documenting the daily lives of the people in each country she visited, their struggles and the ways Afro-descendant communities adapted after their uprooting.

Although busy with other choreographies, including *Symphonie de cœurs*, a new creation based on testimonials from doctors and heart disease patients, she has not finished with *Bow't Trail*. The adventure will continue with a return to the source in Africa, where it all began. ■

Healing generational trauma

How can we overcome the generational trauma inherited from the transatlantic slave trade? The report *Healing the Wounds of Slave Trade and Slavery*, published in 2021, puts forward a series of recommendations. In recent years, research has shown that not only can traumatic stress modify behaviour, cognition and psychological functioning, but the effects can be transmitted to subsequent generations. This can occur even when individuals are not exposed to any new trauma; an event one has not directly experienced can have psychological and social impacts on one’s life.

In *Healing the Wounds of Slave Trade and Slavery*, the view is that the fundamental characteristic of slavery is dehumanization, and the authors identify ways to help current generations heal from different aspects of this profound trauma.

Healing practices are centred around remembering and commemorating; reconnecting to human dignity and restoring a sense of wholeness. To take it further, healing relationships and fostering reconciliation is built through creating safe spaces, respectful listening, and deep dialogue.

The report maps the main approaches and practices for overcoming the heritage of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery, based on expert and researcher input. It was developed by an international team collaborating under the aegis of UNESCO’s Routes of Enslaved Peoples programme and the Global Humanity for Peace Research Institute.

Gorée, island of memory



▼ Tourists on board a ferry bound for Gorée Island (Senegal).

A symbol of the tragedy engendered by the transatlantic slave trade, the Senegalese island of Gorée has become a flagship destination for memorial tourism, attracting tens of thousands of visitors every year, including many Afro-descendants from abroad.

At the foot of the distinctive double flight of stairs in the courtyard of the House of Slaves in Gorée, a guide explains the history of this late 18th century building, used notably as a holding centre for slaves before their forced embarkation for the Americas. Facing him, around fifteen visitors listen in silence while others explore the cells where women, men and children were held captive. “I’m shocked at how small and dark the rooms are into which the

slaves were crammed. It breaks my heart to see the conditions imposed on our ancestors,” comments Mohamed, a 14-year-old Senegalese pupil, visiting with his class as part of a school trip.

On the ground floor, at the end of a long, dark corridor, the “Door of No Return” opens directly onto the sea, at the very point where the slaves were taken before their crossing to the West Indies, Brazil, Cuba, the United States or Haiti, among other places. This is one of the most intense moments of the tour. While

some people take photos of themselves in front of this emblematic site, others are too overwhelmed by the powerful emotions it arouses.

Olima, a 21-year-old African-American anthropology student, comes away from the visit with tears in her eyes. “It was very intense,” she says. Her friend Gabrielle, a musician-artist from the state of Virginia (United States), is visiting Africa for the first time. “It’s my responsibility to acknowledge and confront the direct or indirect role that my white ancestors



played in this trade and to understand the history of slavery,” she explains.

Worldwide recognition

Less than four kilometres off the coast of Dakar, Gorée Island has become the emblem of the transatlantic slave trade. The House of Slaves is the most visited site in Senegal, receiving several hundred visitors every day.

This worldwide recognition owes a great deal to the site’s first curator, Boubacar Joseph Ndiaye, who spared no effort to raise awareness of the history of Gorée, even if the central role of the island in the history of the transatlantic slave trade is now debated. Since independence, the Senegalese authorities have been developing safeguarding and promotion policies to make the island a public place of remembrance.

The inscription of the Island of Gorée on UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 1978 marked a turning point. According to the description of the site, “for the universal conscience, this ‘memory island’ is the symbol of the slave trade with its cortege of suffering, tears and death”. Visits by a host of celebrities, including South African President Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul II and US President Barack Obama, have also contributed to the island’s celebrity.

A place of pilgrimage

“Gorée is at the centre of a veritable pilgrimage celebrating the diaspora of Afro-descendants. The significance and place of the island in the minds of the black diaspora enables us to measure the impact of this community, in search of a lost identity, in the crystallisation around Gorée of a memory of the Atlantic slave trade,” explain historians Hamady Bocoum and Bernard Toulhier in their book *La fabrication du patrimoine : l'exemple de Gorée*, published in 2013.

Travel agencies have understood this. “African-Americans who want to retrace the steps of their ancestors make up a large part of our clientele,” explains Mamadou Diagne, Director of the Revina Tours travel agency in Dakar. As a partner of the Harlem Tourism Board, based in New York, he plans to offer his clients a tour of the memorial sites linked to the slave trade in Senegal, Gambia and Ghana.

But foreign tourists are not the only ones to come and pay their respects to the remains of the institutions of slavery. “The development of new means of transport in Dakar has encouraged Senegalese to come. More and more visitors are coming from the African continent in general,” says Kaba Laye, assistant curator of the House of Slaves. In fact, tourism in Senegal has risen sharply in recent years, from 836,000 visitors in 2014 to 1.8 million in 2022.



The House of Slaves is the most visited site in Senegal, receiving several hundred visitors every day

Several initiatives have been taken over the years to safeguard and enhance the site, but also to attract a growing number of visitors and diversify their itineraries. A revitalization programme, supported by the Senegalese government and the Ford Foundation, has been adopted with the aim of combating coastal erosion and creating a route linking the House of



Bintou and Issa on the Island of Gorée

While on holiday in Dakar, twins Bintou and Issa visit the Island of Gorée. During their visit they learn about the tragedy of the transatlantic slave trade and its long-term effects in terms of discrimination and racism.

Targeted to children aged 5 to 9 years, this album is one of a series of seven publications initiated by UNESCO, in partnership with Moroccan publisher, Langages du Sud. Published as part of UNESCO’s Routes of Enslaved Peoples programme, the series is designed to raise the younger generation’s awareness of the history of slavery, the significant figures and places of memory associated with the slave trade, and the fight of enslaved people for its abolition. Written at a child’s level, these books also highlight the contributions made by people of African descent to modern society, particularly in the field of culture.



© UNESCO / Richard Veillon

▼ The House of Slaves, built in the 18th century.

“
More and more visitors are coming from the African continent

Slaves to the Maison Victoria Albis, which now houses a museum on the slave trade and new forms of slavery. “It is also a centre for the interpretation and documentation of the slave trade. As well as carrying out research, the centre provides training, and we want to create a digital library to archive the work,” explains Kaba Laye.

Since 2017, UNESCO has also been working with local stonemasons on an initial project to restore some of the buildings. A second stage will be launched in 2020 to further develop the site by designing tours tailored to its conservation, and by training guides.

A reference for other memorial sites

The success of the Senegalese island has made it a model for others. “It’s clear that Gorée has influenced other memorial

sites that have undertaken the work of remembrance,” observe historians Hamady Bocoum and Bernard Toulhier. This is particularly true of Benin and Ghana, which are seeking to develop interest in their own sites of Ouidah and Elmina.

However, there are those who regret that the economic spin-offs are of little benefit to the island’s population. “It’s mainly a question of tourists passing through, staying for a few hours and then leaving again,” laments Lamine Gueye, coordinator of the tourist office.

Some also feel that the tourist routes neglect certain assets of the island, such as its colonial architecture, or institutions like the *Musée historique de Gorée*, or the Museum of the Sea. “Yet they provide essential knowledge for the history of Senegal and for scientific research,” insists Mamadou Seck, curator of the Museum of the Sea in Gorée. To attract a greater

diversity of visitors and extend their stay on the island, a number of initiatives have been taken, including the Gorée Diaspora Festival and *Regards sur Cours* (Open Courtyards), an event where local residents open up their courtyards and gardens to artists.

Over the years, Gorée has established itself not only as a symbol of the tragedy of slavery, but also as a key place for passing on this painful history. However, there are still two major challenges to be faced if this position is to be maintained – the rapid deterioration of certain historic buildings, and erosion, which is inexorably eating away at the island’s coastline. ■

Quilombos, hotbeds of Afro-Brazilian resistance

Created by enslaved people fleeing forced labour or by black communities after the abolition of slavery, *quilombos* remain spaces of memory and resistance. But many are now threatened by real estate projects.

Whether called *cumbes* (in Venezuela), *palenques* (in Colombia and Ecuador), *maroons* (in Jamaica, the United States of America and parts of the English-speaking Caribbean), *marrons* (in Haiti and several parts of the French-speaking Caribbean) or *cimarrones* (in Cuba, Mexico and Puerto Rico), all these names refer to communities formed by fugitive enslaved people in the USA and many Latin American and Caribbean countries.

In Brazil, they are mentioned in colonial texts from the mid-16th century under the name *mocambos*, and from the late 17th century as *quilombos*, both terms originating in Central Africa and meaning “encampments” or “villages”.

From the very first centuries of colonial occupation and exploitation, forms of black peasantry emerged, whether on plantations or in areas devoted to food production. Complex smallholder farming experiments grew out of the quilombos themselves, and so did indigenous communities formed by people who had fled religious or secular villages and reassembled according to ethnicity.

Fear among large-scale farmers

In addition to the massive *mocambos* and *quilombos* of Palmares (in the Alagoas and Pernambuco regions), led by the chiefs Ganga-Zumba and Zumbi, which lasted from 1575 to 1743, numerous

communities of fugitives appeared in the Amazon, but also in Bahia, Sergipe, Rio Grande do Norte and Piauí. They spread throughout the country, including in the colonial regions of Goiás, Mato Grosso and Minas Gerais.

became even more complex, with the migration of peasant populations that formed territories, localities, communities, collectivities and rural black neighbourhoods, today numbering in the thousands and scattered throughout Brazil.



The 1988 constitutional provisions call for quilombolas to be granted definitive ownership of their lands

In the 19th century, these communities proliferated throughout the country, particularly in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande. Until the eve of abolition in 1888, there were countless collective escapes and creations of quilombos, which struck fear among the large-scale farmers and the authorities throughout Brazil, even reaching the cities.

Quilombos are also the result of secular forms of occupation, as well as the donation of land to freedmen as early as the end of the 18th century. An important historical process we must therefore take into account is the migratory movement of black families and the occupation of land during the last decade of slavery and the first years of post-emancipation. With post-emancipation, these processes



© Nicola Lo Calzo



© Nicola Lo Calzo

▼ The fishing community of Acupe, in the state of Bahia, is one of 6,000 quilombos spread across Brazil. The inhabitants of these essentially rural communities are descendants of fugitive slave groups.

Recognition

In the 1980s and 1990s – and particularly in 1988 with the promulgation of the Constitution, and in 1995 for the tercentenary of Zumbi’s death – the social struggles of *quilombolas* (inhabitants of quilombos) in Brazil gained in strength. The term “quilombola descendant black rural communities” identifies rural communities – also found within urban perimeters – whose inhabitants are descendants of quilombolas, of groups of fugitives and even of freedmen and free blacks.

The term “quilombola descendant” was incorporated into the Brazilian Constitution of 1988. The constitutional provisions called for quilombolas to be recognized as the definitive owners of their lands. Constitutional rights were also to be granted to preserve cultures that would be recognized as cultural heritage.

▼ The memorial practice of *Nego Fugido* in the quilombola community of Acupe. First performed following the abolition of slavery in 1888, it depicts the struggle of the enslaved for their liberation.

But despite this new legislation, the number of communities with agrarian title deeds remains very low. Worse still, the last ten years have seen an increase in the number of murders of rural black quilombola leaders fighting against land grabbers and criminal invasions of their territories.

Paradoxically, these new measures have had the effect of slowing down the granting of titles and the recognition of quilombola territories by the public authorities. Pressure from the agrarian landholding sectors was compounded by the slowness of state and federal bodies to issue definitive titles.

A long-term struggle

Against this backdrop, ethnographers and researchers specializing in the history of quilombos and mocambos in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries have suggested broadening the definition of quilombo, as well as that of remaining communities. There has even been a movement – also involving the inhabitants and leaders of the communities themselves – to redefine the meaning of quilombos based on notions of memory, ethnicity, territory and citizenship.

According to the latest population census, in 2023, around 1.3 million quilombolas are spread across the country. Over the next decade, their number could rise to one per cent of Brazil’s population, bringing them closer to a par with the indigenous community, which currently accounts for 1.6 million.

The struggle for land of these rural black communities is a long-term process, with alternating chapters of political action, government intervention, the participation of historians and anthropologists, parliamentary debates and, above all, the mobilization of social movements.

Debates about racial inequality, access to land, public policy and the expansion of citizenship, and even reparations for over 350 years of colonial and post-colonial enslavement, run through the struggles of contemporary quilombos scattered across Brazil, where they represent nearly 6,000 communities and could count three million people by the middle of the 21st century. ■

Esteban Montejo, the story of Cuba's last Cimarrón slave

In the early 1960s, Cuban writer and ethnologist Miguel Barnet collected the testimony of 104-year-old Afro-descendant Esteban Montejo. The hugely influential account he drew up is a unique document on the condition of captives and the violence of the slavery system.

While reading the newspaper, Miguel Barnet came across a photo that caught his eye – an article about a 104-year-old Afro-descendant, the son of captives brought to this Caribbean island during the last shipment of African slaves in the mid-19th century. His name was Esteban Montejo, and he had been a slave before fleeing as a teenager into the forests of Cuba's central mountains to gain his freedom. He was the last Cimarron.

As a sociology student at the University of Havana, Miguel Barnet immediately realized the interest of his testimony. He went to the Veterans' Centre to meet this tall, youthful man with bright eyes. In the 1960s, it seemed impossible to still be able to find a Cimarron slave in this country, let alone a man whose life had begun in the Spanish colonial era and ended under Fidel Castro's socialist revolution, after having lived through the wars of independence and the intervention of the United States in 1898.

Three years of interviews and writing culminated in a book, *Biografía de un Cimarrón* published in 1966 (*The Autobiography Of A Runaway Slave*, 1968). Written in the first person, the story had a huge impact, well beyond Cuba's borders. The book has been published in many languages and countries – 64 editions at the last count – not to mention unofficial

publications, according to Miguel Barnet's assistant, Lázaro Castilla.

Suspicion and mistrust

This story is part of an already well-established literary tradition in the country. The theme of slavery appeared in the early 19th century in the essays of Félix Varela (1788-1853), considered a precursor of Cuban intellectual thought, and his disciple José Antonio Saco (1797-1879). At a time when African contributions to Cuba's Hispanic heritage were viewed with a certain amount of condescension, Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) – the pioneer of national anthropology and a Barnet scholar – dared to assert that, on the largest island in the Antilles, there had been a "transculturation" by the black people who had been brought by force from Africa, and by their descendants. Between 1763 and 1845, hundreds of thousands of people arrived on the island to work, in particular, on the sugar plantations.

Ortiz's research changed the course of Cuba's cultural perception of itself. Following in Ortiz's footsteps, Miguel Barnet was able to assert, after listening to Esteban Montejo's account, that "much of the character of the Cuban man was to be found in him".

Now aged 84, Barnet still remembers his meetings with the old man, lugging

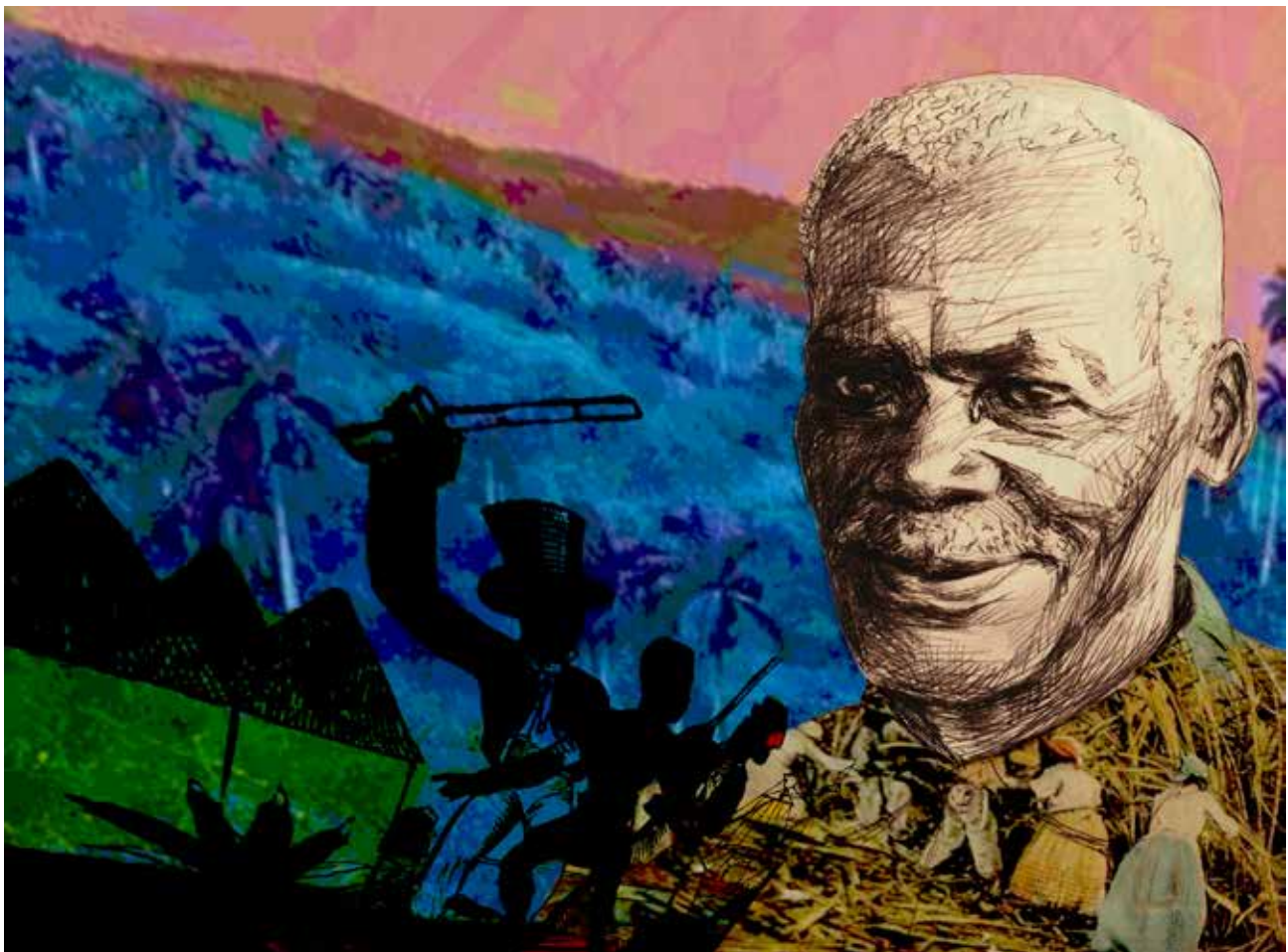
a heavy tape recorder. The first meetings between Esteban and this young researcher with Catalan roots were not easy. "He looked at me with suspicion and mistrust," he writes in the appendix to one of the editions of his book. The presence of the tape recorder helped, though – Montejo was fascinated by the reproduction of his voice. "He became aware that he was an important person," he explains.

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In Cuba there was a "transculturation" by black people forced to come from Africa

Free!

A testimony for posterity, the book depicts the miserable condition of the *barracones* – the basic shacks where the slaves lived – the back-breaking work in the Flor de Sagua sugar mill, and the corporal punishment meted out on slaves, including children, giving a very tangible vision of the violence of the slave system.



© Marc Daniiau for The UNESCO Courier

▼ Esteban Montejo, Cuba's last cimarron slave.

The book also describes the young man's solitude in the mountains, foraging for food and medicinal herbs, and the more contemplative moments spent watching birds, bats and reptiles.

The story is also an invaluable source of information on daily life on the island at the end of the 19th century, on the practice of Afro-Cuban religions – particularly Santería – as well as on dances, traditional medicine and games.

Montejo lived hidden away in caves and groves until the day Black emancipation was decreed in 1886. There was a great commotion from the plantations. "From the cries of the people, I knew that slavery had come to an end... When I left the mountain, I started walking and came across an old woman with two children in her arms. 'Tell me,' I asked her, 'is it true that we are no longer slaves?' She replied: 'No, son, now we're free'", recounts Miguel Barnet in his book.

Barnet describes his work as a "testimonial novel", inspired by an account of the life of a Mexican Indian, entitled *Juan Pérez Jolote, Biografía de un tzotzil (Juan the Chamula)*, published in 1952 by the anthropologist Ricardo Pozas.

Biografía de un Cimarrón is a first-person narrative that confronts the reader with the orality of a man who mixes Cuban peasant oral expressions with bits of African and Caribbean-Indian language, adapted to give the text a literary feel.

“
**From the cries
of the people,
I knew that
slavery had
come to
an end...**

A unique testimony

The Autobiography Of A Runaway Slave is unique in the historiography of slavery in Cuba and Latin America. Its impact was such that, after its publication, Montejo's life inspired an opera by the

German composer Hans Werner Henze, an adaptation by the German poet and essayist Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and a reading by the actor and director Jean Vilar of the *Comédie française*.

Barnet went on to write other books of personal accounts. One of them, *Gallego* [The Galician], pays tribute to the migrant workers of north-west Spain. In 1997, he obtained UNESCO support for the creation of a National Slave Route Museum in a 17th century Spanish fortress in the Cuban port of Matanzas, the cradle of Afro-Cuban culture.

"For him, the African component of Cuban culture is crucial," says Nancy Morejón, a Cuban poet who remembers the poem entitled *Ebbó* ("purification" in Yoruba) *para los esclavos*. "It's an anti-colonial approach to our roots, which he wrote in a colloquial style, without sacrificing formal beauty."

The writer remembers the day when Miguel took her to see Esteban Montejo. "He was 110 years old. He was lying down. And he said to us, 'A machete is all I need'", the phrase that ends the biography, referring to his life as a soldier, cane-cutter and fugitive in the high forests. ■

In Bolivia, Cochabamba's rebel women skateboarders

Who said skateboarding was a man's sport, performed in jeans and a hoodie? Certainly not the women skaters of the ImillaSkate collective, who recklessly careen down the slopes of Cochabamba, Bolivia's third-largest city. Since the group was founded in 2019, they have chosen to practice the sport wearing polleras, voluminous traditional skirts. Introduced during the Spanish conquest in the 16th century, the skirt eventually became an integral part of the identity of the *cholitas*, indigenous women of the Andean highlands.

Bombín bowler hats stuck tight on their heads, long tresses blowing in the wind, Deysi, Brenda and Huara perform this street sport, which has been an Olympic discipline since 2020, without betraying their indigenous origins – or rather, by proclaiming them loud and clear. An obvious choice for these young women born into a society where over 40 per cent of the population is of indigenous origin. "Wearing a *pollera* to skateboard... shows we can all do what we love, regardless of what we wear or where we come from," asserts Tefy, one of the nine members of ImillaSkate.

Their daring captivated Brazilian photographer Luisa Dörr. From her encounter with ImillaSkate, she produced the 2021 series *Imilla*, meaning "young girl" in Aymara and Quechua, the two most widely spoken Amerindian languages in Bolivia.

Imilla is the latest of Luisa Dörr's series presenting women fully empowered in their lives, as in *Firsts* (2016-2017), portraits of women changing the world, and *Falleras* (2018), which shows the costumed inhabitants of Valencia, Spain, during the Fiesta de San Jose, held every year in March. In 2019, the photographer was awarded third prize for this work in the Stories/Portraits category at the prestigious World Press Photo awards. ■

▼ *ImillaSkate's favourite skatepark SENAC in the hills of Cochabamba.*



Photos:
Luisa Dörr

Text:
Katerina Markelova,
UNESCO





▼ *Miriam Estefanny Morales M. 23 (Tefy) thinks that wearing a Pollera to skateboard shows that anyone is capable of doing anything, no matter what they wear or where they come from.*



▼ *Joselin Brenda Mamani Tinta (age 27) and Lucia Rosmeri Tinta Quispe (age 46).*



▼ *Young city dwellers' interest in traditional garments has delighted the vendors at la Cancha market in Cochabamba.*



▼ *María Belén Fajardo Fernández (21) is a physiotherapy student. She would like to match her career choice to her passion by using her medical knowledge to help skateboarders.*



▼ For Deysi Tacuri Lopez (27), skateboarding is not only a sport, it changed her life. She wants to popularize the practice among the young generation.



▼ *Deysi Tacuri Lopez (27) has won several medals in Chile and Bolivia.*



▼ *Luisa Zurita's family didn't approve of her passion for the skateboard until she appeared in a local TV show.*





▼ A spot for skateboarding in Quillacollo on the outskirts of Cochabamba.



▼ *Huara Medina Montaña (24). For ImillaSkate members, hairstyles are part of their indigenous identity.*



▼ For Ellinor Buitrago Méndez, skateboarders wearing polleras sends a message of strength and identity, especially to other women.

Travel without leaving a trace

Transport congestion, skyrocketing property prices, ecosystem degradation: excessive visitor numbers are taking a heavy toll on local residents. From Barcelona to Venice, Kyoto to Bali, authorities are beginning to take steps to stem the flow of visitors without drying up this major source of revenue. A difficult balance to strike.

Joseph M. Cheer

Professor of Sustainable Tourism & Heritage, Western Sydney University, Australia, and Co-Chair of the World Economic Forum Global Future Council on the Future of Sustainable Tourism. He is a Co-Editor-in-Chief of the scientific journal *Tourism Geographies*.

When Louis Turner and John Ash first published *The Golden Hordes: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery* in 1975, concerns about excess tourism were evident. It is no accident that they used the term “golden hordes”, comparing the effects of tourist groups to the “cultural devastation left in the wake of the great barbarian migrations”.

Since then, the golden hordes have only increased. With greater affluence, knowledge, and advances in technology, travel is accessible and affordable. Tourism now underlines local and national economies, comprising 9.1 per cent of global GDP and equivalent to US\$9.9 trillion in 2023.

The concept of overtourism usually refers to excess tourism that is beyond what a locality can cope with. But the usual focus on symptoms, rather than on wider system-related causes, is oversimplifying matters. Overtourism involves factors that negatively affect residents, diminish the essence of places, and contribute to social, cultural and environmental deterioration. It develops from long, slow change and where tourism is the agent of change, it is driven by those who aim to optimize economic returns.

Places “where you ought to have been”

In a work I published in 2019 with Claudio Milano et Marina Novelli called *Overtourism: Excesses, Discontents and Measures in Travel and Tourism*, overtourism is defined as excessive numbers of visitors leading to overcrowding, causing resident to “suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have caused permanent changes to their lifestyles, denied access to amenities and damaged their general well-being.”

Complaints about unmanageable tourism are not new, and emerged as advances in air transportation allowed access to places that were difficult and costly to get to.

As early as 1963, the German geographer Walter Christaller hinted at the urgency to manage tourist demand: “I hesitate to mention such places for thereby I participate in the guilt of making these known,” he said, leading to

little-known places becoming “developed resorts where you ought to have been.”

When exactly the term “overtourism” first emerged is unclear; journalist Freya Petersen used it in 2001 in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* to refer to the unpleasantness of too many visitors at the archaeological site of Pompeii.

“Tourism pollution”

Destinations subject to overtourism are found around the world, and the fallout from excessive visitors occurs for different reasons. For example in Bali, Indonesia, the effects of overtourism are evident in the increased cost of living, and cultural clashes are common when tourists transgress on sacred places. Public infrastructure has not kept pace with increased demands; this can be seen in traffic jams in tourist areas, and in meeting demand for dwindling water resources.

“
Excessive tourism disrupts the social and ecological environment of small islands

For Kyoto, Japan, its rich cultural heritage is a lure for mass tourism and has led to the emergence of *kankō kōgai*, or “tourism pollution”, where the city is challenged with trying to control visitor flows and manage tourism adequately.

Environmental impacts are another result of excessive tourism, especially in small islands where the social and ecological environment are quickly overwhelmed. Boracay Island, Philippines, Komodo Island, Indonesia and Maya Bay in Thailand are all examples of this.

Cruise ships can also have a negative impact, as seen in Venice, the poster child of overtourism. Enthusiasm to consume the city has overwhelmed it. Tourism is concentrated in parts



of the city subject to cruise tourism, and governance measures have yet to regulate it. The evolution of the city highlights the duality of overtourism: economic benefits are prized, while the social and environmental impacts tend to be overlooked.

The evolution of tourism has also affected Barcelona, Spain. The city had minimal prospects before it arrived on the global tourism stage with the 1992 Summer Olympic Games, and the city's cultural heritage has continued to be popularized, including attractions like Antoni Gaudí's architectural icon La Sagrada Família, and Catalanian gastronomy and culture. Barcelona has made efforts to regulate excessive tourism and its continuing growth, for example by restricting access to popular sites such as the famous Park Güell.

But the impacts of overtourism on local residents are largely the same everywhere, no matter the country or locale. As vacation rentals proliferate, residents find themselves priced out of their own neighbourhoods, and have to move; small businesses also have to leave and are replaced by multinational brands. Too many tourists make shopping and

other daily activities difficult for locals, and the noise and rowdy behaviour of visitors at night – including consuming drugs and alcohol in public spaces, and low-level criminal activity – mean that residents don't recognize their own neighbourhoods and no longer feel at home. Too many tourists are seen to ruin a place's character, without even noticing what is special about it in the first place – aside from what looks good posted to Instagram.

“
**Reducing cruise
 ship arrivals
 helps reduce
 overcrowding**

Entry fees and curfews

In response to these threats, municipalities and public authorities have started to take action. Many different types of measures are being applied, and they are constantly evolving. Their success or failure will have to be tested over several tourist seasons to

▲ A crowd of tourists on the Rialto Bridge in Venice, Italy in April 2023.



© Simon LAMBERT / DIVERGENCE

establish what solutions are most effective in the long-term, and most approaches are still new, given the resurgence of tourism in 2023 and 2024 after the Covid-19 pandemic. Some positive results have already provided glimpses of what might work.

Reducing or banning cruise ship arrivals, and the attendant crush of travellers who spend the day in the city is helping to curtail overcrowding. For example, Amsterdam has decided to move its cruise ship terminal away from the centre of the city.

Limiting numbers of tourists to attractions has met with success, and so has redirecting tourist traffic to lesser-known places, whether it's within a museum, a city or a country. Visitors to see Michelangelo's David in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, Italy, will find themselves gently routed to visit other artefacts in the museum. Amsterdam's "I ♥ Amsterdam" sign, popular for selfies, has been moved to an area to reduce congestion, and when planning holidays, tourists are increasingly encouraged to visit alternate destinations – Valencia, Spain instead of Barcelona, for example.

There are also different attempts to protect residents and their housing. Increasingly, short-term holiday rentals must be licensed or registered, to measure their impact on neighbourhoods, and curfews are put in place to reduce noise and disruption at night.

Some tourist destinations, such as Maya Bay, Thailand and Boracay Island in the Philippines have already been closed for a period of months to allow for the environment to rehabilitate naturally after excessive visitors, and the Faroe Islands are closed for maintenance every year.

What has been less successful is introducing entry fees to tourists to manage their impact, as has been seen in Venice, Italy and in Japan. As these charges are relatively modest, they do not deter people from visiting. This also applies to other fees for tourists, such as for 30-day visas to visit Bali, which do not actually reduce visitor numbers.

A difficult balance

The impact of these policies remains to be seen, but one thing is certain: a balance needs to be struck, as overtourism

Tourism and World Heritage

Although an influx of tourists can provide economic benefits for some World Heritage sites, they can also have a significant impact on the quality of life for residents. Responsible visitor behaviour is crucial. Overcrowding, environmental pressure, and strain on local resources are just a few of the challenges that can emerge. To tackle these issues, UNESCO focuses on visitor management, effective interpretation, and innovation.

UNESCO has implemented a number of projects around the world to address overtourism at the local level. One example is "World Heritage Journeys", created in partnership with National Geographic, a web platform that encourages people to travel to lesser-known World Heritage sites in Europe. To address the high influx of day trippers in the old town of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNESCO worked with local authorities to develop the "Mostar Pass" which incentivizes visitors to stay longer and discover more of the city's cultural experiences. An electronic "vignette" system was also introduced to charge tourist buses fees for entering the city. Launched in 2023, these two initiatives combined are expected to generate eight million Euros in annual revenue for the city. In Angkor, Cambodia, a "cash for work" programme led by UNESCO has supported the restoration of community boat tours in the site, creating 40 new jobs while helping to disperse visitation and increase income generation from tourism.

“Tourists are increasingly encouraged to visit alternative destinations

is not going to disappear. Some, like Tony Wheeler, co-founder of Lonely Planet travel guide books, argue that overtourism can be reconciled with a shift in behaviour from travellers if they will just explore "two streets over" saying, "It's remarkable how different the story can be just two blocks away from the main drag."

The challenge is to find the right compromise. Ultimately, overtourism

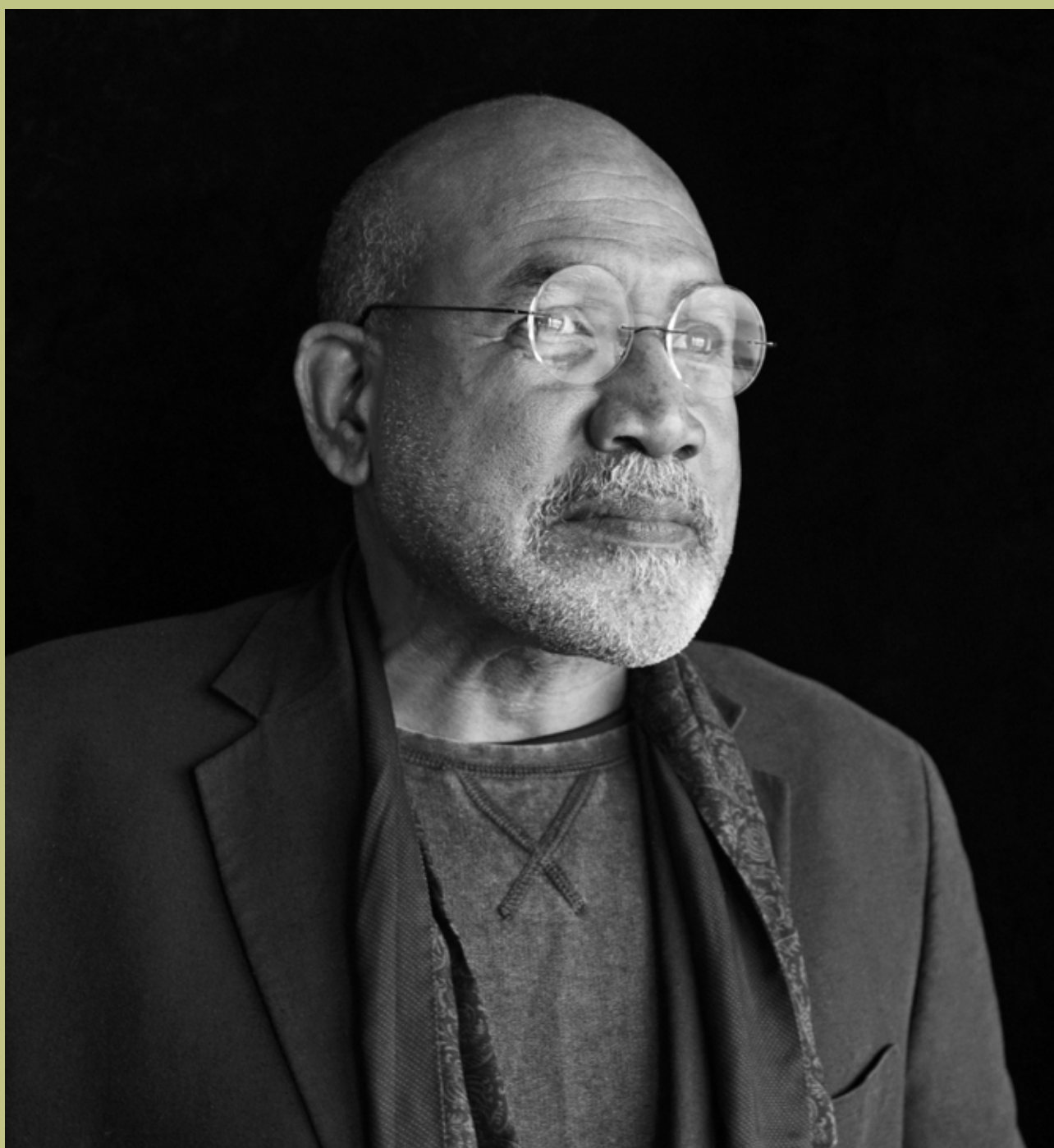
must be addressed through reconciling trade-offs. Tourism is always likely to have an impact and transformations to places are likely – the key is in finding the right balance.

Measures to reduce visitors must be considered carefully or they can be catastrophic for communities where tourism sustains local livelihoods. Finding equilibrium is a delicate balance between effective regulation and planning, while ensuring community well-being.

We must not lose sight of the positive contribution of tourism to communities and their long-term prospects. As Tony Wheeler says, "For every crowded metropolis there are probably a dozen places that would dearly love to be making a baby step up from undertourism". ■

Patrick Chamoiseau :

“We must have the wealth of all the languages of the world”



© Philippe MATSAS / Opale-photo

Patrick Chamoiseau, one of the Caribbean's leading writers, has published numerous essays and novels, including *Texaco*, which won the Prix Goncourt in 1992. This native of Martinique (France), heir to Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant, also helped forge the concept of *créolité*, which places the Creole language at the heart of a project for emancipation and reflection on the cross-fertilization of cultures. Reminding us that no hierarchy exists between languages, he invites us to free ourselves from an inevitably sclerotic monolingual imaginary.

In Une enfance créole [A Creole Childhood], you describe how you were struck dumb when you discovered that a language other than your own, Creole, was imposed at school. How did this first experience, this confrontation with the dominant language, French, shape you?

It was a time when the absolute nature of languages had been imposed on us by the colonizers. To justify their exploitation of the New World, of human beings and of the living world, they had developed a justifying Grand Narrative in which the ideas of "civilization", "progress", "development", "universal", "identity", held pride of place. To justify their contempt for other languages, they had made their own sacred. They had become the only means of access to civilization, culture, the universal, or even true humanity.

The colonized had developed a counter-discourse, exalting in turn their own languages, the better to oppose them to those of the dominant. In so doing, they unfortunately endorsed the idea that languages could be ranked in a hierarchy. Our schoolteachers (very often alienated by this hierarchy) felt it was necessary to save us little black children from the Creole language, from our mother tongue, to enable us to access "civilization", and surely "humanity", through the language of the French master.

In those days, mother tongues still functioned in powerful impregnations. Creole inhabited my mind, structured my imagination and formed the basis of my encounter with the data of reality. To suddenly forbid it was tantamount to lobotomizing me. I no longer had access to spontaneous expression; I was "under translation", as the Moroccan sociologist Abdelkébir Khatibi might have put it. I had to translate my entire existence into French, under the threat and fear that the latter engendered.

Furthermore, a large part of every language is untranslatable, non-communicable and inexpressible. This part is all the more significant in a dominated language, as Creole was and still is in Martinique. So, for me, expressing myself in the dominant language meant transmitting only the transmissible part of

my mother tongue, and all the rest fell into oblivion. You lose a bit of your soul, your creativity, your audacity, and above all the enthusiasm that makes expression powerful when it brings together the sayable, the unsayable and the inexpressible.

“
A large part of every language is untranslatable, non-communicable and inexpressible

What saved me was that before I went to school, I was already reading books. Reading had developed, in a part of my mind, a French skill that was not oral but written. I'd gone from reading to writing, without going through the oral stage. I could write French better than I could speak it. I had become a kind of schizophrenic, as our great Haitian poet Frankétienne would have said. This linguistic tragedy has been the lot of all the world's colonized peoples, but it has also been the irreplaceable ferment of their literatures...

How does one succeed in bringing out a true, inventive and free way of speaking in such a situation? How does one manage to find one's way, one's voice, in this "pathless journey" that is writing?

What I've learned from this painful experience is this: we don't have to rank languages in order of importance, quite the contrary. We must have the wealth, concretely or poetically, of →

all the languages of the world. No language can flourish alone – it needs the collaboration of other languages that it invokes, welcomes and respects.

Finally, we need to abandon the monolingual imaginary of the colonialists, and move towards a *multi-trans-linguistic imaginary*, which has nothing to do with a polyglot faculty, but which tends towards the *desire-that-imagines of all the world's languages*, whether we know them or not. With such an imaginary, no one language would be able to dominate others, and no language would be threatened anywhere without a planetary protective impulse.

This poses many challenges in terms of education and cultural action. As far as writing is concerned, the multi-trans-linguistic imaginary calls for the mastery of language. *The use of words is the taking possession of any language: an authority.* It's not about defending or illustrating any one language, but about expanding every word, every sentence, every meaning, every image, so that they can call upon, signal, invoke, the possibility of the world's other languages.



We should all develop within ourselves the poetic dimension of existence

Their living use breaks down the pride of languages, their academic sanctification, to open them up to their inadequacies, to their inexpressible elements, to the turmoil of their own failure, and thus to force them to desire the presence of other languages around them. The Irish writer James Joyce often said he'd gone as far as he could go with the English language. Martinique poet and novelist Édouard Glissant stated: "I write in the presence of all the world's languages". As for the writer Rabelais, the father of language in France, he already had a prefiguration of this imaginary world in the 16th century. He fed his lightning bolts of words and joy with every language, idiom, jargon, idiolect, gibberish, song and parlance, popular or technical, authorized or not, that came his way. He opened a door that is still open to us...

We know the poetic power of the storyteller in the Creole imaginary and literature. As a writer, how can you reconcile the oral with the written?

It's an impossible task, because they are two different worlds. On the other hand, the *oral artist* and the *written artist* share something. They both live in a poetic state. The poetic state complements our mundane state, which provides us with security, drink, food, reproduction... However, in the poetic state, we live in the presence of love, madness, friendship, dance, song and, to put it simply, Beauty – all those useless things that are in fact the signifying purpose of the mundane. We should all develop within ourselves the poetic dimension of existence.

But as far as our two artists are concerned, they push (as all artists do) the poetic state to a very high intensity in their



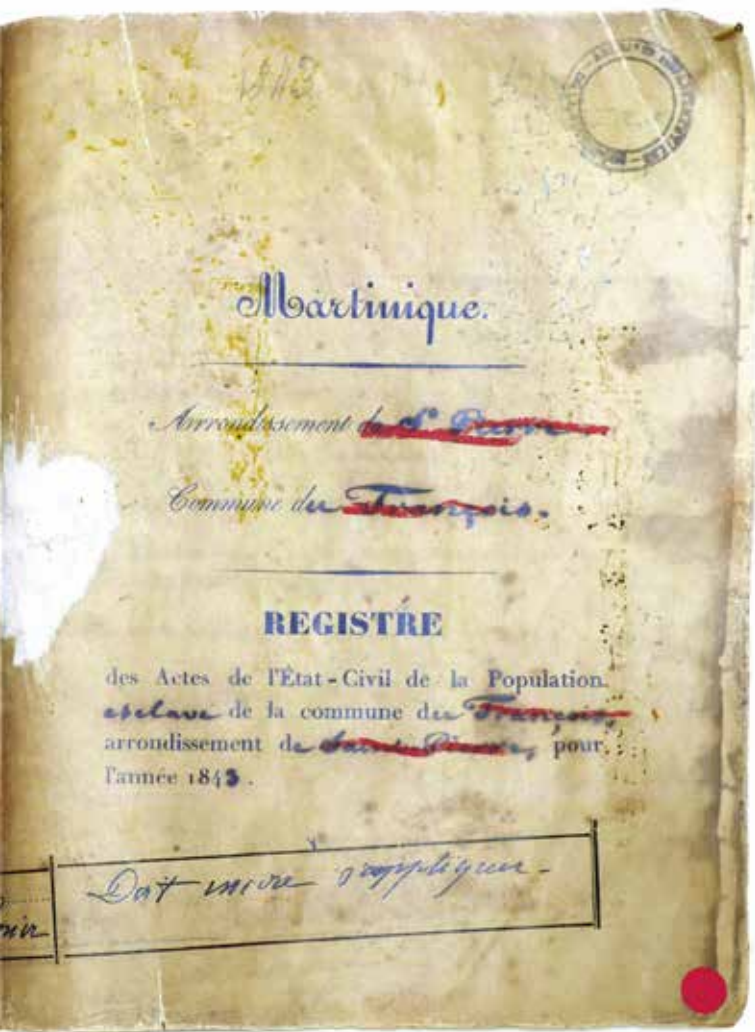
© Gilles Elie-Dit-Cosaque / www.lamaisongarage.fr

existence, which makes them *creators*. The poetic state of the "creative" is far less powerful than that of the "creator", and this is the basis of their difference in courage and power. Every artist, every creator, develops a "toolbox", which is his aesthetic, his questioning relationship with Beauty. We can thus draw on the aesthetics of the storyteller or of the writer, to amplify the spaces of an aesthetic that brings them together.

Contemporary literary language is a product of both aesthetics. The use of language is where everything that concerns language (that which is before, after, and beyond it, the unspeakable, the non-communicable) converges and meets.

It is therefore the basis for the emergence of all new expression.

I think we've already won the battle to reconcile the spoken and the written word. The new horizon is to accept that all around us, in the living world, there exist languages of plants, insects, animals – multiple improbable alphabets that we have ignored and must now reintegrate into our poetics. This is part of the existential change we need to make in the face of the challenges of the contemporary world. In fact, it's connected to a new imaginary – post-Western, post-capitalist, vertical post-humanism – which is that of Relation. The principle of this imaginary is *the connecting of everything in our existences that is separate.*



▼ From the Lambeaux series by artist Gilles Elie-Dit-Cosaque. Made up of a juxtaposition of photos and personal and historical documents, the series takes the form of a diary that questions the notion of memory.

The night was the place of the Creole storyteller, the moment his Word unfolded when the grasp of enslaving power was less strong. What is your relationship to the night?

The mundane is afraid of the night. The poetic sees in it a thousand possibilities, a source and resources. The primordial Creole storyteller lived in the vertical universe of slave and colonial discourse. All authorized possibilities converged solely on the plenitude of the masters... But the night loosened this stranglehold. It allowed the storyteller to open up, within himself and all around him, "lines of flight" as French philosopher Gilles Deleuze would have said, possibilities and futures.

The night inaugurated new creations.

At the dawn of any creative gesture, there must be a symbolic catastrophe, a breakdown of what governs our minds and imposes itself on us, filling up in advance the page we have to write on. So we have to empty the page, and take a leap into the unknown, which then opens into the new.

We've lost our links with the night, whether literal or symbolic, and we need to rediscover them. But, in a way, we must also fight to reinject, into the Western, capitalist day, the lights (to be kept flickering) of another possibility.

You've often talked about the key role played by Frankétienne and Édouard Glissant in your development as a writer. How do you see the question of language and literature for West Indian writers today?

We've overcome the paralysis we felt because of the sterilizing confrontation between our two languages, Creole and French. The poet to come must embody the poetics of the desire-imagining of all the languages of the world. Such poetics can only be initiated by the inaugural words of a great poet, for it is always poetry that inaugurates the new paths of our literatures. Frankétienne and Glissant opened the ways for us. They have remained open. Now we need to keep an eye on the horizons to see what will emerge. Because, today, literary fraternities are not defined by the old identity markers (my territory, my language, my skin), but by the structures of the imaginary, in other words, by our profound relationship to the preserved diversity of the world, what we have called *Diversity*. From then on, our common challenges, our fraternities, our shared futures, can rise up from anywhere on the planet.

You returned to the novel with *Le Vent du nord dans les fougères glacées* [The north wind in the frozen ferns], after years away from this form of fiction. Why did you come back to it after all this time?

I came back with what I call a *narrative organism*. The living use of language had enabled us to be allies of all the languages of the world. The notion of narrative organism should help us get away from the literary partitions between novel, essay, theatre, poetry, fiction, non-fiction... But above all, it will enable us to escape from "narrative".

“

The languages of plants, insects and animals exist all around us, and we need to reintegrate them into our poetics

Narrative is the basis of the imaginary of sapiens. It served to produce small, habitable "realities" in the face of the unthinkable terror of reality. Stories reassure and soothe us, simplifying unbearable complexities. We love happy endings. Narratives have even given rise to the *totalitarian Grand Narrative* that continues to threaten us today. Religions, colonialism, capitalism, fundamentalism and the return of fascism are all Grand Narratives that cut us off from the diversity of narratives, and therefore from the diversity of futures in the world. We don't want any more Grand Narratives! Just give us the open, joyful, celebratory encounter of all the world's narratives! This is the essential condition for that other world we need to imagine. ■

2nd Courier Forum: Cultural exchange along the Silk Roads

On 15 April, UNESCO Headquarters hosted the second UNESCO Courier Forum, where two panels of international experts discussed the historical impact of cultural exchanges along the Silk Roads, and intercultural dialogue and mutual learning in the contemporary world. In line with the *Courier's* role as a laboratory of ideas, the Forum aims to foster debate on issues of international concern. The first Forum was held in June 2018, on the 70th anniversary of the *Courier*.

The event included an exhibit on the history of *The UNESCO Courier*, a display of children's drawings and performances of traditional Chinese music and dance.



EXPERTS from around the world



Doudou Diène
former Director of UNESCO's Division of Intercultural Dialogue



Zhao Tingyang
Professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences



David Abulafia
Professor Emeritus of Mediterranean History at Cambridge University, UK



Elena Paskaleva
Assistant Professor in Critical Heritage Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands



Aya Medany
Olympic pentathlete and Champion for Peace, Egypt



Susan Denyer
Senior World Heritage Advisor, ICOMOS



Zhao Shengliang
Chairman of the Academic Committee of Dunhuang Academy, China



Euan Mackway-Jones
UNESCO Programme Specialist for Inclusion, Rights, and Intercultural Dialogue



Riccardo Pozzo
Chair of the History of Philosophy at Università di Roma Tor Vergata, Italy



José Cassandra
former President of the Regional Government of Príncipe



Lyu Zhou
Director of the National Heritage Center of Tsinghua University, China



Moderator:
Mr Vincent Defourny,
former Director of Public Information at UNESCO

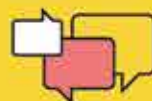
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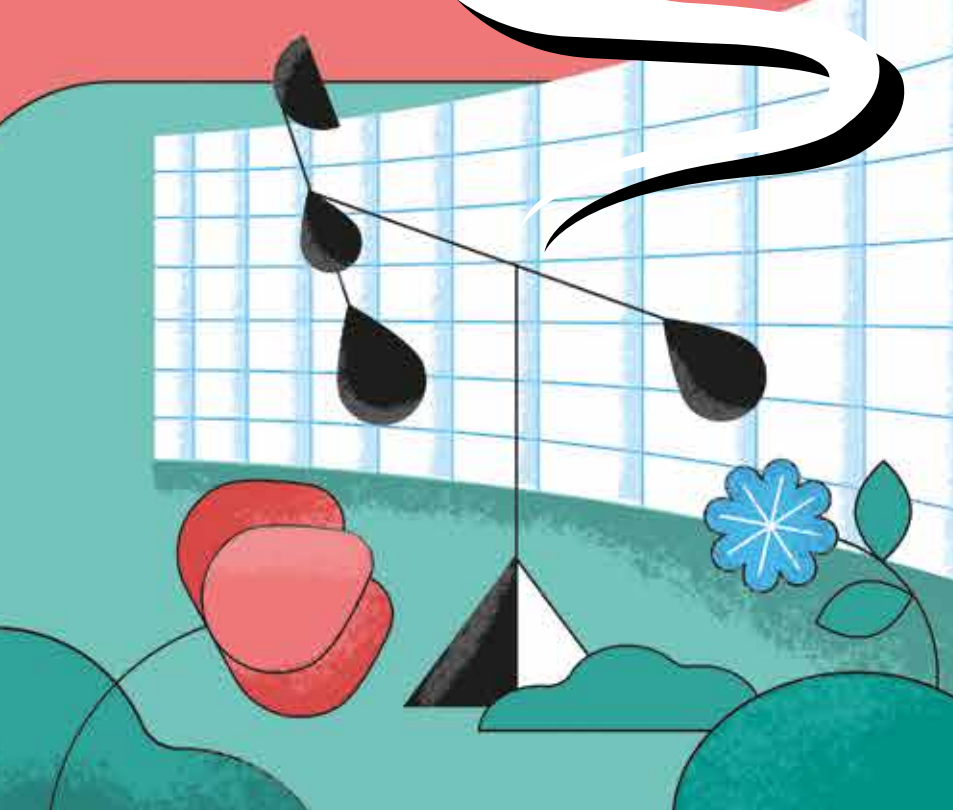
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In this second title in the Bintou & Issa series of illustrated books, the twins, their grandparents and closest friends visit Mauritius in the footsteps of distant ancestors who worked on the sugar plantations there.

This new story plunges readers into an incredible adventure on this magnificent island, its history and its cultural heritage, and in so doing invites them to learn about slavery.

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change the game

#ChangeTheGame

On the occasion of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, UNESCO is launching the **#ChangeTheGame** campaign to celebrate the power of sport to bring people together around values such as social cohesion, respect, solidarity and fair play. The Organization is also drawing attention to the barriers that reduce women's access to sporting careers.

85% of girls are not active enough.

42% of girls drop out of sport at puberty.

40% of women working in sport say they have been discriminated against on the grounds of gender.

Women receive only **4%** of media coverage in sport.