“I wait for me”:
Visualizing the Absence of the Haitian Revolution in Cinematic Text

By

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Department of Social Justice Education
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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis I explore the memory of the Haitian Revolution in film. I expose the colonialist traditions of selective memory, the ones that determine which histories deserve the attention of professional historians, philosophers, novelists, artists and filmmakers. In addition to their capacity to comfort and entertain, films also serve to inform, shape and influence public consciousness. Central to the thesis, therefore, is an analysis of contemporary filmic representations and denials of Haiti and the Haitian Revolution. I employ a research design that examines the relationship between depictions of Haiti and the country’s colonial experience, as well as the revolution that reshaped that experience. I address two main questions related to the revolution and its connection to the age of modernity. The first concerns an examination of how Haiti has contributed to the production of modernity while the second investigates what it means to remove Haiti from this production of modernity. I aim to unsettle the hegemonic understanding of modernity as the sole creation of the West. The thrust of my argument is that the Haitian Revolution created the space where a re-articulation of the human could be possible. I submit that the relegation of Haiti in the cinematic world should be seen as an active response by the apologists of European universalism to the ways in which the revolution undermined claims to Western superiority. Such relegation is a process through which modern Euro-American societies reproduce and sustain their own understanding of the human, an understanding that dates back to the colonial era. I argue, therefore, that the struggle for memory with respect to the Haitian Revolution requires an anticolonial conception of humanness that explicitly repudiates slavery and colonization. For the filmmaker, this entails a cinematic practice that challenges the forces of imperialism and its consequences for postcolonial subjects while providing a revised visual conception of what it means to be human.
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INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Haiti is the modern world’s first postcolonial society. The Haitian Revolution, through which enslaved Haitians liberated themselves from French subjugation, remains a defining event of the modern world because it was the only revolution that was predicated on racial equality and freedom from slavery. There has been an upsurge of scholarship (Buck-Morss, 2000, 2009; Dubois, 2004a, 2004b; Fick, 1990; Fischer, 2004; Munro, 2010; 2007, 2010; Sheller, 2000), over the last ten to fifteen years, triggered by the works of Carolyn Fick (1990) and of the late Michel Rolph Trouillot (1995), concerning the suppression of the Haitian Revolution. Scholars have argued that this suppression is evident even in the writings of the most celebrated thinkers on modernity and revolution. This corpus of work on the Haitian Revolution challenges and contests the paradigms of colonialism, which help to smother and silence the Haitian Revolution. In this thesis, I join this group of academics who seek to give currency to Haiti’s history of enslavement, the revolution of 1791-1804, Haitian independence and the meaning of that independence for black liberation movements in the Americas and elsewhere. My project stands alone, however, because it is the only one of its kind that examines the excision of the revolution from the world of cinema. Central to this project, therefore, is an analysis of contemporary filmic representations and denials of Haiti and the Haitian Revolution.

Drawing on the work of, in particular, Laurent Dubois, Michel Rolph Trouillot, C.L.R. James, Edward Said and Sylvia Wynter, I address two main questions related to the Haitian Revolution and its connection to the age of modernity. The first concerns an
examination of how Haiti has contributed to the production of modernity while the second investigates what it means to remove Haiti from this production of modernity. I aim to unsettle the hegemonic understanding of modernity as the sole creation of the West. The project is located in the vast literature on colonial studies, which links slavery and colonialism with the economic prosperity of Europe and the sociopolitical and cultural formations that have come to define modern Western European societies (see for example Coronil, 1997; Dubois, 2004b; James, 1938; Mintz, 1985; Said, 1993). I will demonstrate that the labor of enslaved people of Saint-Domingue helped shape the foundation of French modernity while underpinning the formation and development of France.

The thrust of my argument, which draws on the work of such philosophers as Sylvia Wynter (2000; 2003), is that the Haitian Revolution created the space where a re-articulation of the human could be possible. I submit that the relegation of Haiti to the margins of modernity should therefore be seen as an active response by the apologists of European universalism to the ways in which the Haitian Revolution undermined claims to Western self-invention and superiority. I argue that this is a process through which exclusionary conceptions of what it means to be human are reproduced and maintained in modern Western Societies. It follows therefore that the struggle for memory with respect to the Haitian Revolution requires a recovery of a particular conception of “humanness” which has been smothered since the dawn of the Middle Passage.

I use a Jamesian/Black Marxist perspective to analyse the sociocultural and political transformation that was to emerge from the Saint-Domingue underclass (1938; 1952). I mobilize C.L.R. James’s anti-racist and anti-colonial reformulations of Marxism
as an analytical tool for thinking about the revolution and its absent presence in cinematic text. As a joint product of earlier philosophical thoughts and human and social sciences, including Hegelian dialectics, empiricism and materialism, Marxism as a philosophy has come to engage intellectuals and theorists in such diverse academic disciplines as economics, sociology, political science, philosophy and anthropology. A Marxist analysis is relevant to this project on the place of the Haitian Revolution in contemporary cinematic text because of Marx’s insights on power and social relations and, in particular, because of his recognition and exposition of the kind of inequalities that the modern economic system of capitalism has created. A Marxist perspective, I would argue, is relevant in any project concerned with understanding the structures of social hierarchy, privilege and oppression.

For my inquiry, I rely on a black radical tradition of Marxism that is concerned with understanding the material condition of the African diaspora through an examination of capitalist exploitation, slavery, colonialism and imperialism. It is a tradition that finds currency in the work of W.E.B. DuBois, C.L.R. James, Richard Wright, Eric Williams, Walter Rodney or George Padmore. These black anticolonialist radical activists are connected to the development of a counterculture of struggle and resistance. I am also inspired by such Marxist concepts as “ideology” as elaborated by Louis Althusser and “hegemony” as disseminated by Antonio Gramsci. Stuart Hall’s developments of these concepts derived from Marxism provide my project with important analytical tools.

I integrate history, sociology and anthropology in order to explore the ways in which the Haitian Revolution redefined and reshaped the language of rights, liberty and equality along with the meaning of citizenship. I aim to expose the colonialist traditions
of selective memory, the ones that determine which histories deserve the attention of professional historians, philosophers, novelists, artists and filmmakers.

As I demonstrate in the project, a number of academics (Buck-Morss, 2000, 2009; Dubois, 2004a, 2004b; Hoffman, 2009; Sepinwall, 2009) have offered an overview of how European and American historians, philosophers, artists and novelists have looked at the Haitian Revolution. Few scholars have systematically investigated the relationship between the revolution and the cinematic world including Hollywood, European mainstream cinema or even the New Latin American Cinema. Such examination is long overdue and it is this task I will undertake in the thesis. I argue for a critical filmography that brings to the forefront the profound contribution made by Haitian revolutionaries to the ideals of freedom for subjugated people in the Americas and around the world. I employ a research design that explores the connection between contemporary representations of Haiti and the country’s colonial experience, as well as the revolution that reshaped that experience. One important dimension of my study, therefore, has to do with how filmic depictions of Haiti inform the disavowal of its revolutionary achievements through systematic reproductions and preservations of Eurocentric and racist concepts of modernity. To date, this question has been largely overlooked. I offer a critique of the films used in this project that is located within postcolonial discourses on (re)presentation. I am concerned with the contradictory and overlapping modes of depiction of Haiti and its revolutionaries in my unwavering determination to expose the type of European universalism that has worked to silence the memory of the Caribbean nation since its inception. In this thesis, I call for new ways of thinking about, depicting

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and visualizing those leaders of the Haitian Revolution who reshaped the vocabulary on freedom and equality along with what it means to be human. Hall’s (1980) neo-Marxist analysis of culture, and particularly his theory of encoding/decoding is fitting for this research. It is a theory predicated on the understanding that a text has multiple meanings and that it can be read and interpreted differently by different individuals. The films considered for this project include *White Zombie* (1932), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), *Live and Let Die* (1973), *Burn!* (1969), *The Last Supper* (1976) and Phillippe Niang’s 2012 miniseries, *Toussaint Louverture*. I also consider *The Patriot* (2000) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1980). As I discuss in this thesis these films, collectively and over time, provide a sociohistorical trajectory for understanding the cinematic discourse of nearly every decade of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. *White Zombie* and *I Walked with a Zombie* were inspired by books written at the height of Jim Crow laws in the United States and American occupation of Haiti. *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, *Burn!* and *The Last Supper* were produced concomitantly with the oppressive regimes of American-backed François Duvalier and his son Jean Claude, who ruled the country and brought it to the brink of destruction. *Toussaint Louverture* was made during the UN occupation of Haiti and shown in New York City in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, which claimed the lives of well over 200,000 Haitians and displaced millions. *Burn!* and *Toussaint Louverture* come closest to a meaningful depiction of the revolution. Their plots are organized around actual events of resistance and emancipation. Among the commonalities between all these films are the complexities and contradictions in representing not just Haitian history in particular but the history of slavery and
emancipation in general. On the surface, these films have little or no connection to Haitian history. Yet they make very specific comments and observations concerning the unfolding of the Caribbean nation’s history. They are all haunted, Morrison (1987) would argue, by the uncomfortable truths of slavery and oppression.

This project also seeks to elucidate some important connections between film and questions of black or Caribbean ‘cultural identity’ in this postcolonial moment for Haitians living in Haiti and abroad. Haitian identity is hybrid and it exists at the intersection of multiple identities—somewhere in-between Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and, ultimately, Canada and other locations of modern Haitian migration and exile. Filming or visualizing the Haitian diaspora therefore requires the implicit understanding and recognition of that diversity. It also requires valorizing the country’s contribution to modernity, which includes, among other principles, a redefinition of justice, equality and freedom as well as a re-articulation of what it means to be human. I would argue that how these concepts are presented in cinematic text profoundly impacts the ways in which Haitians view and understand themselves and how they are perceived in contemporary political discourse. At a minimum, cultural self-esteem for Haitians, including those in the diaspora, depends heavily on the recognition of Haiti and its revolution as distinctively cogent examples of ground-breaking, revolutionary achievements.

**Research Ethics**

My own identification as a Haitian Canadian, various forms of migratory displacement, relocation and dislocation in my own family, along with the uniquely vexed and ambiguous ideas of home and belonging into the Canadian multicultural
fabric, shape my perceptions and motivations for conducting this research. My relationship with this research is predicated, in part, on a complex set of overlapping processes of identification that transcends Canadian and Haitian national boundaries. As a Haitian Canadian I tread between two worlds, new and old, here and there, a wealthy Western, capitalist society and a desperately impoverished nation, what Fanon (1963) has called “the wretched,” that struggles for survival and recognition. In a general sense, the racialized black Haitian can be seen as a bifurcated postcolonial subject who will never be entirely at home in a Canada filled with racism, prejudice and discrimination and for whom Haiti, with its socioeconomic and political calamities, has become strange, foreign and distant. Haitian Canadians are said to be included in the Canadian family but are excluded from it through the hegemonic, discursive and semiotic practices of othering, silencing and erasure. As they negotiate “the collective memory of a painful past” (Malena, 1999, p. 49), Haitian Canadians are forced to adopt an unfamiliar reality in Canada; yet however (un)succesful that adoption, the feelings of psychological and emotional dislocation and the desire to return home may never end. This is not to bemoan the experience and condition of relocation, however, as I recognize the many possibilities of cultural growth, transformation, creativity and a “plurality of vision” which they have afforded me, “an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that…is contrapuntal” (Said, 1984, p. 55).

These factors, which are connected to Haiti’s colonial experience, inform an unwavering desire in me not only to showcase the sociopolitical achievements of the Caribbean nation but to expose the neocolonial and imperialist forces that conspire to silence them. Edward Said (1984) would view this desire as a condition of the exile or
the refugee, a way of “compensating for disorienting loss” (Said, 1984, p. 52). In time, this may help to recover segments of my roots while making sense of my routes. It may also help to answer the question: what can be learned from the experience of loss? The desire to showcase Haitian history and to expose the excision of it through the cinema can also be seen as an act of resistance. That is, I seek to reject and subvert the socio-cultural and collective traditions that work to relegate the Haitian Revolution to the margins of history, in an effort to relocate it within a revised dialogue on modernity, revolution, history and memory.

In the next chapter I outline the methodology that I used for my research. The research itself is grounded in theories related to representation. I refer here to Hall’s (1980) theory of encoding/decoding, a theory concerned with the ways in which audiences generate meanings. I am also influenced by Edward Said’s (1978) concept of Orientalism, which describes the postcolonial period in terms of its discursive arrangements of the world. I am interested, moreover, in moving away from current modes of Western aesthetics. In this project, I use the term aesthetics not just in the literary sense, but in the sense articulated by Sylvia Wynter where “Man further defines itself as homo oeconomicus, in the reoccupied place of its pre-nineteenth-century conception of itself as homo politicus (political man), as well as in that of its originally matrix feudal-Christian conception of itself as homo religious (religious man)” (Wynter, 2000, p. 25). In Chapter Two, I discuss the demographic structure of the colony of Saint-Domingue, as it was called before 1804, along with some dominant social theories associated with that structure including Marxism, cultural studies and postcolonial theories. I also examine how the social structure of Saint-Domingue led to armed
struggle. In Chapter Three I discuss slave emancipation in the colony. It is here that I introduce Toussaint Louverture, one of the people whose leadership and heroism helped shape the achievement of the Haitian nation. I conclude this chapter by exploring the relevance and implications of the Haitian Revolution for other abolitionist movements in the Caribbean and for the struggles for decolonization and democratic possibilities elsewhere in the black diaspora. This chapter takes a closer look at how the Haitian Revolution is remembered among academics, intellectuals, social theorists and literary critics.

Chapter Four presents an examination of filmic documents of various genres. This examination is intended to engage the reader in a critical visual and illustrative analysis of the silencing of the Haitian Revolution. I offer an in-depth investigation into the theoretical underpinnings grounding my analysis in order to provide a greater understanding of the themes, ideas, events, politics and ideologies associated with the relegation of Haiti and its history. I draw on a range of theoretical frameworks related to culture, colonialism and the visual, including critical race theory, semiotics and cultural studies. I conclude the thesis with a discussion on the relationship between filming the Haitian Revolution and the process of identity construction for Haitians both in Haiti and in the diaspora.
CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Deciphering the Coloniality of Memory and Representation

*Research Design*

In this project I reconcile cultural studies with analysis and interpretation of contemporary filmic representations of the Haitian nation and the revolution that created it. I discuss the ways in which the revolution not only exposed the contradictions of the modernist project but, more importantly, how it rearticulated the meanings of nationhood and citizenship. My thesis is also concerned with why and how the memory of such a defining event continues to be relegated to the margins of popular imagination in the West. As I will demonstrate, a small group of scholars (Hoffman, 2009; Sepinwall, 2009) have discussed the ways in which French and American historians and novelists have looked at the Haitian Revolution. Those scholars have addressed questions of power relations, as well as the defense and preservation of national identity in France and the United States in the disavowal of the Haitian Revolution. But to date, no research has systematically examined the methodologies of the suppression of the revolution in popular cinematic texts. In this chapter I develop the analytical underpinnings and methodological tools I employ for doing so.

For the purpose of this thesis I focus on examining the place (or absence) of the Haitian Revolution in contemporary feature films. Films, one may argue, have the potential to move and influence public consciousness in a variety of overlapping and contradictory ways. Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (2000) points to the place and importance of the cinema as a feature of contemporary mass media. In addition to their
capacity to comfort and entertain, films serve to inform, persuade and educate their viewers. They “also shape[ ] taste, intellectual judgement and states of consciousness” (Gutiérrez Alea, 1997, p.110). Ousmane Sembène calls them “…l’école du soir du peuple.’ [...the people’s night school.]” (as cited in Gadjigo et al, 1993, p. 2). In this manner, films are somewhat like textbooks. They have also gained status as instruments of cultural production, as artistic institutions, as methods of entertainment and distraction or as channels for history in modern Western societies. Moreover, films have the ability to visualize silence in ways other forms of historical documents often cannot. My purpose is to demonstrate that feature films are among the most recent mechanisms of denial for the Haitian Revolution.

Unlike documentaries, feature films are often difficult to decode or decipher. That is because their storyline is usually subtle and blurred with imaginative cinematic codes. They allow for more nuanced observations and interpretations of historical events. Feature films tend to be dramatic, sometimes poetic, sometimes humoristic. Some may even blur the distinction between fact and fiction. Following Natalie Davis’s approach in *Slaves on Screen* (2000), I refer to films that may be consciously historical or those with an imagined, more creative story line but influenced by specific cultural and historical events.

To begin, given the absence of black history and black experiences in the cinema, it is not surprising that the slave-revolt that shaped the achievement of the world’s first black republic has not been exploited by any feature film production or any major movie companies. None, as far as I have been able to determine, has examined how slaves-turned-citizens shattered the edifice of colonialism and demanded justice, equality and
the right to citizenship in Saint-Domingue. Moreover, no feature film has been made about Toussaint Louverture, the man who emerged as a central figure leading the enslaved of Saint-Domingue toward the achievement of nationhood and citizenship.\(^2\) No filmmaker, writer, producer or director has focused on the paradox of the Enlightenment, the philosophical movement that “proclaimed the inalienability of human rights but excluded to various degrees and for different reasons entire categories of humans…from the purview of their applicability” (Sala-Molins, 2006, p. xi). I should point out in this context that the bicentenary of the Haitian Revolution in 2004 went virtually unnoticed in the cinematic world.

Meanwhile, an exhaustive collection of filmic productions can be found that are based on the American and French Revolutions of the eighteenth century.\(^3\) *April Morning* (1988); *Thomas Jefferson* (1996); *1776* (1972); *The Crossing* (2003) and *The Patriot* (2000) are among the spate of feature films that deal with the memory of the American Revolution. Movies about the French Revolution include *La Marseillaise* (1938), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935, 1958, 1980), *Marie Antoinette* (2006), *Affair of the Necklace* (2001), *La Révolution française* (1989), *Les Misérables* (2012). These movies not only work to showcase the political and historical achievements of the revolutions; they also trumpet the sociocultural “grandeur” of European and North American societies. *La Révolution française* (1989), for instance, is a compelling production that is intended to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of the events that shaped modern French society. Here the viewer is introduced to important revolutionary

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\(^2\) Black American actor, producer, filmmaker and activist, Danny Glover, has long been trying to direct a film commemorating the life of Toussaint Louverture and the revolution that shook the path of history while redefining the age of modernity. Danny Glover, it is said, has offered a non-Western interpretation of the revolution. Russian filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, attempted *The Black Consul* in 1931 but failed.

\(^3\) [http://www.vernonjohns.org/snuffy1186/movies.html](http://www.vernonjohns.org/snuffy1186/movies.html)
personalities like the eloquent Honoré Gabriel de Riqueti, known as Mirabeau, the revolutionary spokesman who challenged the king; the abbé Siéyès who, in January 1789, published the pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?* in which he argued in favor of the masses, the Third Estate, as the one essential segment of French society; or Maximillien de Robespierre, “l’in込むr uptible,” the man who preached the gospel of virtue and oversaw the Reign of Terror in France. But more importantly, the viewer is introduced to the principles of natural rights which Enlightenment philosophers had espoused and which laid the foundation for the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, a legal document metonymic with the “progress” of the Enlightenment and modernity at large.


It is worth pointing out, for the purpose of this discussion on the silencing of the Haitian Revolution in modern cinema, that despite the colonial histories of European and American societies and despite their intimate connections to Caribbean slavery, these filmic productions do not engage in any significant way with the violent conquest of Caribbean and other colonized lands, with the systematic genocide against indigenous peoples, or with the wholesome dehumanization of African slaves on Caribbean plantations. They completely overlook the *Code noir* which, as we shall see, stood in
stark contradiction with and survived the French Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the corresponding 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. This is reminiscent of a point made by Chris Healy (2003, p. 228) that “colonialism has regularly been figured as pathologically amnesiac – forgetful of the damage of civilizing, forgetful of the colonized, forgetful of the wounds and scars of colonizing which persist in the present.” Moreover, the names of Toussaint Louverture, Jean Jacques Dessalines, Henry Christophe and other Haitian revolutionaries who ascribed new meanings to the ideals of justice and equality are nowhere to be found. Their consequences for slavery and emancipation and for the evolution of philosophical debates concerning modernity, nationhood and citizenship have been pushed aside as unimportant. The purpose of this project, therefore, is to investigate the state of narcissism that dominates contemporary Western societies, as well as the cultural practices of silencing and disavowing (Fischer, 2004).

The films about Haiti that do exist typically focus on the Vodou religion as a primitive set of demonic and superstitious practices. I refer here to a series of horror productions like *White Zombie* (1932), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), *Live and Let Die* (1973) and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), among other thrillers, that appeal to public responsiveness to particular representations of blackness and Haitianness as constructed in the modernist project. *White Zombie* and *I Walked with a Zombie* are based on William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929) and Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) respectively. Wes Craven’s *The Serpent and the Rainbow* is based on a supposedly non-fiction book of the same name, written in 1985 by Canadian
anthropologist Wade Davis.⁴ These lurid productions speak to a rather pejorative depiction of Haiti and its history, which includes Haitian culture, language and religion. Here Vodou is associated with witchcraft, paganism, sorcery or “black” magic and is not depicted as a legitimate religion (Bellegarde-Smith, 2004). But the Vodou religion should be seen as a manifestation of new cultural practices and institutions created by the slaves that were embedded in the process and unfolding of resistance. Moreover, as it has been shown repeatedly by scholars of the Haitian Revolution (Bellegard Smith, 2004, Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert, 2003), Vodou played a pivotal role in fomenting revolutionary enthusiasm in Saint-Domingue and has evolved as an integral element of Haiti’s social organizations and national identity. The denial of the Haitian Revolution can thus be contextualized partly in the kinds of representation made of the Vodou religion and the people who practice it.

It is important to recognize a number of independent films and documentaries that shine an explicatory light on Haiti’s dire socioeconomic and political conditions. They include, but are not limited to, Jonathan Demme’s The Agronomist (2003), Nicolas Rossier’s Aristide and the Endless Revolution (2005), or the PBS documentary Égalité for All: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution (2009) produced by Patricia Aste and narrated by Edwidge Dandicat.⁵ These films are about giving voice to a beleaguered nation that has been muted from its inception. They also present a critique of colonialism, its process and practice of exploitation and its painful consequences on

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⁴ Wade Davis also wrote Passage of Darkness three years later in 1988 to shed some light on the practice of Vodou in Haiti. But like The Serpent and the Rainbow, Passage of Darkness also blurs the boundaries between Vodou and witchcraft or phantasm.

⁵ An example of a much more complex and positive representation of Vodou is Des Hommes et des Dieux/Of Gods and Men (2011), which explores the role of gay and transgender practitioners in Vodou. See also Poto Mitan (2011) about the survival strategies of female street vendors in Port-au-Prince.
the daily lives of contemporary Haitians. But these documentaries are known primarily in academic communities that focus on the historical particularities of Haiti and do not circulate widely among mainstream academics and historians. They seldom make it to major movie theatres, video stores or for-profit internet content sharing services such as Netflix. They are rather unfamiliar to the general public or to many history students, professors and departments, in part because they lack the kind of sensational, entertaining or pleasure-inducing characteristics of mainstream cinema. They, too, struggle for their own recognition and legitimacy in the annals of knowledge and historiography.

These films should be understood in terms of what is known as Third Cinema, the kinds of “films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the system” (Solanas and Getino, 1970 p. 120). Since its inception in the 1960s and 1970s, Third Cinema has been about understanding and interrogating colonial, sociopolitical and historical dynamics and ideologies. It is a challenge to the first cinema, which, according to Argentinean filmmaker and co-inventor of the movement (with Octavio Getino), Fernando Solanas, “expresses imperialist, capitalist, bourgeois ideas. Big monopoly capital finances big spectacle cinema as well as authorial and informational cinema. Any cinematographic expression…likely to respond to the aspirations of big capital, I call first cinema.” First Cinema operates like an industry and promotes consumerism. First Cinema can thus be viewed as part of the superstructure, a Marxian concept which refers to a set of human-made structures, institutions and organizations that serve as a bedrock for the ideas of ideology in a capitalist society. The superstructure can also include political, legal and educational systems such as religion, the media, music, literature and film. First Cinema, which includes most Hollywood and mainstream European films, does much to
reproduce and to sustain the ideology and the material, financial interests of modern Western societies.

By contrast, Solanas defines Third Cinema as “the expression of a new culture and of social changes. Generally speaking, Third Cinema gives an account of reality and history…Third Cinema is an open category, unfinished, incomplete. It is a research category. It is a democratic, national, popular cinema” (Solanas, as cited in Pines & Willemen, 1989, p. 9). Third Cinema, “the socially conscious cinema” (Bambara, 1993, p. 128), is concerned with a range of ethical and political questions which help to examine such issues as race, class, ethnicity, cultural identity, language, religion, power, and nationality. It may be understood as a visual apparatus for challenging the forces of imperialism and its lingering consequences and manifestations on postcolonial subjects. This form of cinematic production, inspired in part by Marxist cultural theories and by anti-colonial and postcolonial theories, is relevant to my research on the memory of the Haitian Revolution in film because of its ability to provide a visual representation of postcolonial subjects and their experiences of subjugation and emancipation. It is one way for postcolonial Haitians to challenge the distorted ideological discourses of dominant colonial cinematic texts.

For the filmmaker Third Cinema is about liberating black cinema from what Clyde Taylor has coined the “opiate of aestheticism.” This process of liberation is connected to a “crucial site of the contest out of which the human is rewritten” (Taylor, 1988, p. 85). This form of cinema is fundamental as a site of struggle because it presents a view of history as interpreted by emancipated Africans. It is the kind of cinema which may work to redefine the human based on what Taylor (1989) has called a new
iconography. Haile Gerima’s film *Sankofa* (1993), Ousmane Sembène’s *Ceddo* (1977), Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers* (1966), Tomas Gutiérrez Alea’s *The Last Supper* (1976), Sergei Eisenstein’s unfinished *The Black Consul* based on the novel of Anatolii Vinogrado (1935) of the same title, and Danny Glover’s upcoming *Toussaint* are pertinent examples of this kind of cinema. These kinds of films work to preserve popular memory, Teshome Gabriel argues, by delving “into the past, not only to reconstruct, but also to redefine and to redeem what the official versions of history have overlooked” (Gabriel, 1989, p. 57). These films collectively depict the plight and oppression of the “voiceless” underclass while portraying them as heroes in their own struggles. Former slaves or ex-colonized populations thus become the focus of the narrative.

A word must be said concerning the attempts by Russian director Sergei Eisenstein and black American actor and activist Danny Glover who envisioned *The Black Consul* and *Toussaint* respectively, to commemorate the meaning of the Haitian Revolution. The films did not come into fruition although they originate from opposing sides of the Cold War divide. To begin, as Sergei Eisenstein explained to his Russian students in 1932, making a film on the Haitian Revolution was impossible in the United States in light of the American occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). “When I was in America” he said, “I wanted to make a film of this rising in Haiti, but it was impossible: nowadays Haiti is virtually a colony of the USA” (Bergan, 1997, p. 267). In the Soviet Union he proposed the production of *The Black Consul* (1931) a film that would address questions of race and racial equality as well as the processes of emancipation for the enslaved populations of Saint-Domingue. This proposal met with hostile resistance from soviet film authorities, however. As James (1996) tells us, “Washington was at the time
engaged in negotiations with Moscow over recognition of the Soviet government, and made it quite clear that if the Russians made any such film, it would be regarded as a serious obstacle in the way of an understanding” (James, 1996, p. 54). There was swelling pressure on Sergei Eisenstein and other artists, to produce art favorable to the political propaganda of the Stalin Regime (Forsdick & Hogsbjerg, 2014).

About half a century following the failure of The Black Consul American actor Danny Glover, attempted the production of Toussaint, a biopic about the life of Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution. This project received virtually no attention let alone financial support from producers who complained that the movie lacked white heroes (Danny Glover’s Haiti Film, 2008). “I couldn’t get the money here” says Glover in a speech given in Paris. “I couldn’t get the money in Britain. I went to everybody. You wouldn’t believe the number of producers based in Europe, and in the States, that I went to” (Danny Glover’s Haiti Film, 2008). Toussaint received encouragement and financial support from the late Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez. Chavez hoped such a project would shine a light on European enslavement and colonialism, along with the meaning of the Haitian Revolution to the spirit of emancipation. More specifically, Chavez recognized the connection between the Haitian Revolution and liberation movements in Latin America, including Venezuela. The film was never realized.

The failure of the Black Consul and Toussaint speaks to the active relegation of the Haitian Revolution to the margins of historical consciousness. These films are intended to depict a “story that features blacks in revolt and in control of their own destinies, absent of any white interference, inspiration or ‘savior’, as is often the case in films of this stature” (Obenson, 2015). They challenged the ideology of first cinema
aesthetics. Had they been produced, they would have been cogent examples of Third Cinema because of their attempts to represent the struggle of the underclass.

Let us be clear. My intention is not to present the cinema in terms of fixed disciplinary boundaries. Instead, the cinema should be seen in terms of its complexity and diversity. First cinema, including Hollywood itself, is full of contradictions. Also, while Third Cinema can be synonymous with Third World Cinema, the value of Third Cinema is not located in where it is made, but rather in the kind of ideology that sustains it. Third Cinema is the kind of cinema that challenges the forces of colonialism which may include class oppression as well as gender and racial inequalities (Gabriel, 1982). Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers* is a good example of this. While it was made in Italy (and Algeria), this film presents the events of the Algerian Revolution (1954-1962) through a markedly subversive, anti-colonial perspective.

Much of the literature in film studies differentiates between film and cinema. According to Monaco, “the ‘filmic’ is that aspect of the art that concerns its relationship with the world around it; the ‘cinematic’ deals strictly with the esthetics and internal structure of the art” (Monaco, 2000, p. 228). For the purpose of simplicity and convenience I use the terms interchangeably along with the term *movie* to refer to the transformation of reality into ordered, moving images that can be projected onto the screen. I am concerned with how those images combine in order to construct and convey particular sets of meanings. My contention here concerns a process of disavowal of Haiti in the world of cinema that is not much different from the strategies of relegation found in historiography and modern literature. I will show for instance, how the work of academics like François Furet and Mona Ozouf, Friedrich Hegel, Hannah Arendt, or
Victor Hugo has consistently set aside or minimized the epic contribution made by the Haitian Revolution to our understanding of freedom and equality.

My interest in how mainstream industrial filmic productions handle Haitian history points to the suitability of a research design that challenges relations of oppression and subjugation while fostering social justice, as well as the capacity for emancipation. I am concerned with the empowerment of the powerless and ‘giving voice’ to a class of people that is typically voiceless, the disenfranchised, the subaltern who cannot speak. I allude here to Gayatri Spivak’s seminal and perhaps most important essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak” (1988). The term *subaltern* was first used by Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci “who died in Mussolini’s prisons in 1937,” to signify the marginalized groups of Italian society, the proletariat or peasantry. By “speak” Spivak did not refer in a literal sense to speech. Rather, she meant to ask: can the subaltern be heard in colonial discourse? As Partha Chatterjee and other postcolonial critics have argued, it is “only by…reading for the silences and absences in colonial texts, that subaltern voices could be heard” (as cited in Hall, 2000, p. 24). I employ a research design which helps to identify the socio-cultural and political terrain that inform the silencing of the Haitian Revolution through carefully crafted pejorative, racist representations of descendants of the revolution.

I have chosen to examine nine filmic productions for this project, with special attention paid to *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), *White Zombie* (1932), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) and *Live and Let Die* (1973). I foreground these four films because the misrepresentation of Haitian cultural traditions is central to them. The broader question of my analysis is to ask how Western cinema shapes the memory of Haiti and its
history and for what purpose. In order to provide context and contrast I also discuss the contents and narratives of *The Patriot* (2000) and *A Tale of two Cities* (1980), two feature films that commemorate the events of the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 respectively. The aggrandizement of the Euro-American self, Said (1978) tells us, is dependent on the vilification of its diametric *other*. I shall demonstrate an important contrast in the kind of discourse used by Hollywood (the location of the studios that made these films), in the shaping of Euro-American identity in the cinema. To be sure, a two-part miniseries called *Toussaint Louverture*, produced in 2012, displays certain intellectual and political acumen regarding the revolutionnaires of Saint-Domingue. I aim to examine the ideology of this film in an effort to expose its misrepresentation of the Haitian Revolution. *Toussaint Louverture* not only downplays the insidious violence that permeated the colonial experience, it also presents the slaves as cheerful and living happily among their masters (Sepinwall, 2013). *Toussaint Louverture*, along with Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1969 *Burn!*, speaks of the Haitian Revolution as part of a current of goodwill and divine compassion of esteemed Enlightenment intellectuals, and not as the outcome of careful organizing by the slaves of Saint-Domingue. I examine, moreover, Gutiérrez Alea’s 1976 *The Last Supper*, a film about slave society in Cuba. While this film was inspired by the events of the Haitian Revolution it downplays the role played by the revolution in the making of Cuban society.

Hall’s (1980) theory of encoding/decoding, which challenges the most traditional and revered theories on media discourse for being overly linear, is fitting for this research. Hall rejects the assumption embedded in the theory of behaviourism developed
at the Centre for Mass Communication Research at the University of Leicester, that a televisual discourse has a singular, fixed, linear and, predetermined meaning transmitted from creators or producers to audiences. Rather, he views communication as a complex set of relations, not as a simple exegesis of reality. Hall’s theory is predicated on the understanding that a text has multiple meanings and that it can be read and interpreted differently by different individuals. According to Hall (1980), moreover, a text is part of its socio-cultural context, which in turn is shaped within specific hegemonic relations of power. Viewing and responding to the text is therefore a dynamic process of negotiation between the viewer and the text itself. The viewer should thus be seen, not as a passive recipient of information that has already been constructed, but as an active maker of meanings from or of the television program. It follows, therefore that there is a connection, although not a direct or uniform one, between people’s social situations and the kinds of meaning they are likely to decipher from a television program. One important effect of Hall’s theory of encoding/decoding is the politicizing of mass communication and popular culture research. He viewed television messages as fraught with beliefs, assumptions and values that inform our understanding of the world. Hall’s chief purpose was to challenge the claim of objectivity and transparency of mass communication or the claim that media messages are direct reflections of social reality (Rojek, 2003). His approach can be used to examine and complicate the place of the cinema in the formation of ideology.

Encoding and decoding are about the production and interpretation of texts respectively. They are the points “of entrance into and exit from the systems of discourse” (Procter, 2004, p. 59). Encoding and decoding are complex processes
implicating both conscious and unconscious practices of representation (Rojek, 2003). It is indeed through a process of encoding and decoding the films used in this project that hidden meanings about Haitian history can be made intelligible. While journalists, broadcasters, cartoonists and filmmakers have greater access to what gets transmitted onto the screen and therefore control the nature of the text at the level of encoding, I am particularly concerned with the process of decoding or point of exit, since my focus is on the kinds of data provided by the films on the effacement of the Haitian Revolution in the world of cinema. Decoding allows me to transpose ideological or common-sense language about Haiti into concepts and meanings, which the reader can understand.

The semiotic character of this process is embedded in a system of signs, both visual and textual, that we use to represent human cultural practices and activities. Semiotics is useful in this project on cinematic text because of the ways in which it accounts for the text and its meaning. As Bal and Bryson (1991) frame it “human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs” (Bal & Bryson, 1991 as cited in Rose, 2001, p. 69). Signs themselves do not carry fixed meanings; their meanings are constructed and are the results, as Hall puts it, “of a signifying practice – a practice that produces meaning, that makes things mean” (Hall, 1997, p. 24).

My research also involves an examination of the many agencies—filmmakers, directors, actors or movie companies—which contribute to the making of the textual code as part of the process of encoding. This is part of the “circuit of communication” according to Hall, “a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked
but distinctive moments – production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction” (Hall, 1980, p. 163).

The concept of preferred reading, which refers to a set of dominant codes used to inscribe the text through practices of encoding, is central to Hall’s theory of encoding/decoding. The theory of preferred reading, inspired, in part, by Althusserian philosophy, suggests that television programs tend to offer the kinds of meanings that work to sustain dominant ideologies. It is this preferred reading which helps to explain how and why different viewers will read a text in different ways. The preferred reading is further divided into three main components. They include the dominant reading, which is produced by a viewer likely to embrace the dominant ideology that the text produces; the negotiated reading, which is produced by a spectator who might fit the dominant ideology, but must inflect it in order to take into account his or her own social positioning; and the oppositional reading which includes readings produced by those members of society whose social conditions place them in conflict with dominant ideologies (Fiske, 1987). One important feature of preferred reading, therefore, is that it works to include certain meanings at the same time as it excludes others. It provides ‘the rules of formation,’ the explanation or justification for what counts as meaningful knowledge or information and what gets pushed to the margins of popular consciousness. With respect to my inquiry on the representation of Haiti and its revolution, one important question has to do with the mechanisms used to inscribe one particular dominant reading over another.

Given the centrality of racist images and ideologies in the excision of the Haitian Revolution in cinematic representation, an aesthetic criticism may be in order. This form
of criticism will help to expose the patterns of meaning that shape social beliefs, values and traditions. It will provide the conceptual tools for excavating expressions of white supremacy which are encoded in the films. Aesthetics can be defined as that branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of art, notions of beauty, order, standards of taste, perception and values, historical conceptions and practices of representation. Aesthetics is also concerned with concepts of ugliness in the perception of an object, event, someone or idea. All of these, Crispin Sartwell tells us, are related to sociopolitical matters. That is, they are embedded within specific constitutions of identity, power relations and negotiations (Sartwell, 2010).

In the context of the cinema, Clyde Taylor (1989) speaks to a certain inadequacy of Western aesthetics to appropriately represent black African culture, and argues for a black cinema which integrates Africa. That is because, according to Taylor in his “Black cinema in the Post-aesthetic Era,” “the birth of black cinema takes place in the context of the struggle between a dying concept of the human and an emerging one. If black cinema is to evolve as a significant player in this critical historical juncture, it will do so through predications outside ‘aesthetics’, rewriting its version of humanity while passing through a hypothetical zero aesthetic point” (Taylor, 1989, p. 97). Taylor proposes to go beyond the sort of black aesthetic movement, which came out of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s led by LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal and later by Amiri Baraka in the United States, but which in many respects reproduces Western conceptions of black cultural identity. He argues, instead, for the legitimacy of a post-aesthetic practice and interpretation. Post-aesthetics, for Taylor, is about rethinking and reorganizing knowledge, breaking away from the hegemonic discourse of Western conceptions of beauty, history and
civilization. Post-aesthetics seeks to create the space where a counter-knowledge or a counter-discourse can be imagined. It “represents an effort to revivify and validate meanings dismissed or obscured in imperial knowledge” (Taylor, 1988, p. 84). This is obviously crucial to my analysis on what it means to excise Haiti and the Haitian Revolution from the production of modernity.

Sylvia Wynter (1982) draws on two of Clyde Taylor’s essays, “We Don’t Need Another Hero: Anti-Theses on Aesthetics” (1988) and “Black Cinema in the Post-Aesthetic Era” (1989) in her rethinking of the phenomenon of aesthetics. Wynter uses the “captive populations” found in such characters as that of Ivan in the film The Harder They Come (1972) and Raheem of Do the Right Thing (1989) to examine the function of aesthetics in our current human “form of life.” Rethinking aesthetics, she argues, is about a practice of decipherment based on Taylor’s notion of post-aesthetics in the context of reimagining the human. A deciphering practice, in turn, views the signifying practices of film as the objects of a new form of inquiry that will undo the “traditional barriers between the natural sciences and the humanities” (Pagels, as cited in Wynter, 1992, p. 261). This approach, she qualifies, will serve to challenge and even cancel out the “‘specious autonomy’ of cultural production” as she puts it, as well as the role played by material production in writing the human. A deciphering practice is about finding out what a text can be deciphered to do instead of what it can be deciphered to mean.

According to Wynter, a deciphering practice functions at four levels. The first level entails investigating the “signifying practices” of the actual cinematic text. The second investigates the social and cultural contexts in which the text has been produced. Level three combines the results of the first two in order to show the relationship between
those patterns and regularities that reproduce each other in the text. It is at this level that we obtain the data from which to make out what the signifying practices are intended to do at the level of representation. Finally, the fourth level is about finding a “separate language” with which to know, talk about and make sense of our social reality.

I built one set of field notes from each of the main nine films. I then “fractured” and categorized the data into conceptual and theoretical topics. I organized them into tentative themes and ideas in order to establish patterns as related to the question of how cinematic representations of Haiti inform the denial of the Haitian Revolution through systematic replications of concepts of modernity. Discourses of race, class, colonialism and memory are pertinent examples. It will be clear, for instance, that racist depictions of backwardness, strangeness and primitivism operate within a complex relationship where “production is actually consumption” (Williamson, 2005, p. 71). In this relationship the viewer becomes enclosed in a concept or mental image of Haiti and Haitians as a “people without history” (Wolf, 1982 ). We will see, moreover, how the relationship between production and consumption of negative images constitutes the kinds of stories which narrate modern Euro-American nationhood. I will expose the underlying narrative structures of the films in an effort to elucidate such Manichean binary oppositions as good and evil or civilized and uncivilized.

These binary oppositions are consistent with the various meanings that continue to accumulate over the word ‘black’ where, as we shall see, ‘blackness’ as a racial category tends to carry specific sets of negative connotations that have become “common sense.” For example Blacks are ‘naturally’ poor, deviant, violent and angry and therefore dangerous; they are intellectually inadequate and highly salacious. And as Friedrich
Hegel and Victor Hugo confirmed, blacks have no history since “Africa has no history.” Africa, for Hugo, is “a mass of sand and ashes, an inert and passive pile, this monstrous Ham who by his size blocks Shem (...) a land of excessive heat and darkness” (Victor Hugo, in a speech delivered in 1870, as cited in Sala-Molins, 2006, p. 151n2). This is reminiscent of a point made by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, which, for Chinua Achebe, speaks to the desire or need “in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (Achebe, 2016, p. 15). As Achebe has pointed out, *Heart of Darkness* is a book which questions the very humanity of blacks. In the words of Conrad himself “‘A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards’” (as cited in Achebe, 2016, p. 22). I share Achebe’s sense of disbelief that Conrad’s racism has gone virtually unchallenged in academic criticisms of his work. Furthermore, the word ‘black’ itself may also be used antithetically to legitimate the dominant position of whiteness as the symbol of virtue, purity, intelligence, civilization or economic development and advancement. “The white culture,” says Jeff Lewis, “remains the ideology or paradigm on TV and in contemporary films. Whiteness orders itself in terms of success, legitimacy and beauty” (Lewis, 2002, p. 155).

The term ideology is relevant here especially since, according to Teshome Gabriel (1982), it occupies a significant place in critical film scholarship. Ideology refers to “the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings” (Marx, 1983) that reflect, support, and reproduce the dominant social order or the interest of the dominant social class(es) in a
given society. For example, in the Middle Ages, it was in the interest of the aristocracy to believe that the rights, power and authority of kings came directly from God and therefore were beyond question. In capitalist societies like Canada, the United States, France or Britain, the dominant class “is compelled, merely to carry through its aim, to present its interests as the common interest of all the members of society…it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones” (Marx & Engels, 1970). Ideology, for Marx, is false consciousness because it is predicated on the interests of the ruling class and because it is appropriated by the underclass (Lewis, 2002).

For French Marxist intellectual Louis Althusser:

ideology is a matter of the lived relation between men and their world. This relation, that only appears as ‘conscious’ on condition that it is unconscious, in the same way only seems to be simple on condition that it is complex, that it is not a simple relation but a relation between relations, a second degree relation. In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their condition of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an ‘imaginatory,’ ‘lived’ relation. (Althusser, 1977, p. 233. Italics in original)

Althusser sought to take Marx’s conception of ideology one step further in his effort to elucidate why it is that subordinate classes appear to comply with their own processes of oppression. He explained how capitalism continuously renews and reproduces the conditions necessary for its own survival by shaping individual subjectivities through key institutions like schools or the family or religion. These institutions, which he called ideological state apparatuses, function by sustaining systems of oppression, power, privilege and authority. Other examples of ideological state apparatuses include the education system, political parties, the legal system, the media, music, literature and the cinema. The cinema, with its ability to “instruct” and shape
public consciousness can be seen as part of those institutions that work to disseminate the dominant ideology.

For my purpose Althusser’s notion of ideology helps to understand the historical cultural tradition and material relations, which inform and buffer the (un)conscious relegation and effacement of some people and the corresponding glamorization and commemoration of others. Ideology thus becomes useful for thinking about how filmic representations of Haiti construct, rationalize and naturalise the excision of that Caribbean nation from the production of modernity. Through the concept of encoding/decoding I expose the ideological representational practices of vilification, bastardization and marginalization of Haiti and Haitian history.

**Representation and the Practice of Disavowal**

Representation is the assigning of meaning through a variety of social and political institutions such as the media, which may include television or the cinema. Hall (1997) distinguishes between two kinds of representation, which work together to produce meaning. The first is about depiction or portrayal, in the sense that an image may represent a particular event. The second involves “standing for,” symbolizing or substituting. To use Hall’s example, “In Christianity, the cross represents the suffering and crucifixion of Christ” (Hall, 1997, p.16). For the purpose of my discussion, I am particularly interested in the form of representation that seeks to depict or portray an experience. Especially when dealing with difference, says Hall, representation “engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way” (Hall, 1997, p. 226). Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall (1997) and other critics on representation I shall
discuss how Western cinema has represented Haiti and its history in a way that has normalized, naturalized and absolutized it as inferior or unimportant. This process of normalization or naturalization occurs, Wynter would argue, “by means of the ‘ideological mechanism’ of our present discourse of aesthetics” (Wynter, 1992, p. 250). I will demonstrate how this representation is embedded in a certain claim to know Haiti in stable, fixed and static ways, a claim which operates within complex structures of power.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) Edward Said makes allusion to Edward Thompson’s reading of *The Other Side of the Medal* (1926) where he discusses the misrepresentation of Indians and Indian society by their British colonizers.

Indians, he says, see the English entirely through the experience of British brutality during the 1857 ‘Mutiny.’ The English, with the pompous, cold-blooded religiosity of the Raj at its worst, see Indians and their history as barbaric, uncivilized, inhuman. Thompson notes the imbalance between the two misrepresentations, that one misrepresentation has all the power of modern technology and diffusion to back it—from the army to the *Oxford History of India*—whereas the other relies on the pamphlet and the mobilizing rejectionist sentiments of an oppressed people. (Said, 1993, p. 206)

In this context, Britain controlled the ideological construction of images along with the means of knowledge production and information dissemination, which include pamphlets, newspapers and novels.

Any form of misrepresentation is generally sustained and replicated using particular modes of stereotypical images. Stereotyping can be defined as a set of representational practices that reduce people to a limited number of essential traits or characteristics which are not only simplified or exaggerated, but presented as “fixed” and natural (Hall, 1997). Gilman (1985) calls it “a crude set of mental representations of the world” (Gilman, 1985, in Hall, 1997, p. 284). Stereotyping is connected with the
construction of “otherness” and the corresponding exclusion of the other especially because, according to Hall, it is a central component of racial difference. Moreover, stereotyping symbolically fixes boundaries between individuals, and serves to exclude or marginalize those who do not belong from those who belong. This is achieved through a process of delineating the normal from the abnormal, the deviant. Another important feature of stereotyping is that it is most prevalent in contexts of power inequalities (Hall, 1997). In the words of Ania Loomba, the organizing “of ‘information’ about non-European lands and peoples and ‘classifying’ them in various ways determined strategies of control. The different stereotypes of the ‘mild Hindoo’, the ‘warlike Zulu’, the ‘barbarous Turk’, the ‘New World cannibal’, or the ‘black rapist’ were all generated through particular colonial situations and were tailored to different colonial policies” (Loomba, 1998, p. 97). Stereotyping, for Bhabha (1994), is about ‘normalizing’ the set of beliefs and ideas that shape colonial discourse in the process of disavowal.

In his 1985 article, “The Structure of Stereotypes,” Gilman tells us how stereotype helps to posit a binary opposition between the “self” and the “other.” As he puts it, “our Manichean perception of the world as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is triggered by a recurrence of the type of insecurity that induced our initial division of the world into ‘good’ and ‘bad’” (Gilman, 1985, in Hall, 1997, p. 285). In this division, the construction of blackness as the epitome of aggression, brutality and irrationality and whiteness as inherently innocent and superior seems natural and readily comprehensible. This is made evident in the films which I examine for this project where selective depictions of violence, primitivism, bestiality, grotesqueness and sexual prowess are embedded in a practice of othering, inferiorizing and marginalizing racialized black Haitian people. This is not surprising in
light of the kind of historiography that serves to erase or disavow vestiges of black experience and black historical achievements. On the Saint-Domingue plantation, these stereotypes were used to rationalize the exploitation and the corresponding dehumanization of the slaves. Stereotypical images are used in the films in order to divert attention away from the experiences of slavery and colonialism and from the revolution that worked to dismantle those experiences.

In this thesis, I highlight the ways in which the cinema has deployed stereotypical images and misrepresentations of Haiti in order to silence and move to the margins of modernity the epic achievements of Toussaint Louverture, Henry Christophe or Jean Jacques Dessalines in the making of Haiti. Wynter would view these images as part of the “encoding of our present hegemonic Western-bourgeois biocentric descriptive statement of the human” (Wynter, 2006, 119).

Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* is important here. This groundbreaking work, inspired in part by the work of Michel Foucault (1972; 1975) and Antonio Gramsci, is about Western representation of non-Western cultures; it shows the symbiotic relationship between Western knowledge about the ‘other’ and colonial power. It is through the concept of hegemony, according to Said, that Orientalism continues to prevail in the way in which Western media represent the East. More specifically, *Orientalism* is concerned with the West’s discursive fashioning and understanding of itself, in direct relation to the “Orient.” According to Said:

Without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the
limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of
Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action.
(Said, 1978, p. 3)

Orientalism is about the ideological representation of racial identity, ethnicity,
difference and otherness. Said analyses texts such as literature, political tracts, travel,
poetry and religious books, primarily in colonial Britain and France, but also in
contemporary United States. These, according to Said, are the greatest representatives of
colonial networks. As he puts it, France and Britain dominated Orientalism from the
beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II while the United States
took over after the war (Said, 1978). Said examines the work of Chateaubriand,
Lamartine, Flaubert, Burton, among others which embody Western ideology (Bayoumi &
Rubin, 2000). While Orientalism met with fierce criticism among Orientalists who spoke
of Said as “reckless,” “arbitrary,” “insouciant” and “outrageous,” scholars and academics
in the humanities and social sciences, including history, sociology or political science,
continue to praise the book for its marked contribution to questions of difference and
representation (Bayoumi & Rubin, 2000). In fact some critiques of Orientalism “found
in the work the possibility of ‘writing back,’ of giving voice to their experiences silenced
by the cultural hegemony of the West. Native Americans, Africans, Asians, Latin
Americans, and other colonized peoples and oppressed groups located in Orientalism a
method to challenge a chronic tendency of the West to deny, suppress, and distort their
cultures and histories” (Bayoumi & Rubin, 2000, p. 67).

For a place like Haiti shaped by centuries of colonial enslavement and
postcolonial exploitation, the binary opposition of Orientalism entails the mobilizations
of stereotypes concerning the country. Said’s critique of Orientalism helps to make clear
the mechanisms by which Euro-American societies construct knowledge about the world’s first postcolonial society. The aim is to fix the difference between Haiti, Europe and North America as part of a psychological and oppositional tactic by the West to imagine and to overrepresent “itself as if it were the human itself” (Wynter, 2003). Films like *White Zombie, I Walked with a Zombie, The Serpent and the Rainbow, Live and Let Die, Burn* and even *Toussaint Louverture* help shape the dichotomy between rational Europe and its irrational other, the racialized, the impoverished, through systems of representation. My contention, following Said, is that this dichotomy is important not just to the shaping of European culture and identity as an empire; it is also central to the maintenance of European rule and power as well as political, economic and military presence in Haiti. More importantly, for the purpose of my discussion, it helps to elucidate how Western relegation of Haiti’s history of slavery, colonialism and revolution is connected to Western assertion of itself as lawful, rational and political bearers of humanity and as guardians of liberty as outlined in the Declarations of the Rights of Man and Citizen in France and the Declaration of Independence in the United States of America. It is a form of cultural Darwinism articulated as “part of a larger scenario in which the ‘civilized world’ was rightfully asserting itself against the weaker inferior races” (Dash, 1997, p. 29). The films used in this thesis can thus be utilized as a set of tools with which to read and understand Euro-American processes of identity formation.

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6 Women like Marie Olympe Aubry de Gouges protested the failure of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen to address the question of women civil rights on the same terms as men. Gouges decried the inherent contradiction in the condemnation of aristocratic tyranny over men while the tyranny of men over women went completely overlooked. In her 1791 pamphlet, *The rights of women* (as cited in Williams, 1999) which was intended to coincide with Louis XVI’s ratification of the new constitution, she vehemently advocated for the rights of humanity, not just of men. But as Williams (1999) tells us, even the most progressive thinkers, Enlightenment philosophers like the comte de Mirabeau or Abbé Siéyès remained unmoved by Gouges’s arguments concerning the rights of women. Gouges was eventually executed on November 3rd, 1793. See De Gouges’s *Zamore et Mirza ou l’esclavage des nègres* (2007) for her own problematic attitude towards enslaved resistance.
It is in this sense that a number of academics, including Homi Bhabha (1990) and Benedict Anderson (2006), have viewed the nation as narrated through and with particular forms of stories.

In his later work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said gestures to the importance of narrative fiction in the construction and preservation of imperial discourse. The Edward Said of *Culture and Imperialism* is influenced by such Marxist intellectuals as Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams or Georg Lukács. Here, Said speaks to a relationship between literary giants like Joseph Conrad or Jane Austen and the workings and effects of European colonialism. The point is, according to Said, that stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history. The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future—these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. (Said, 1993, pp. xii-xiii)

Said’s comments on the place of narrative fiction in what he calls the “contrapuntal analysis” are intended to complement *Orientalism*, which, according to critics, did not adequately address the response of the colonized to the experience of colonization and Western domination. The contrapuntal is a musical concept, which, adapted to literary criticisms, suggests a reading of European culture in terms of its geographic relations to empire and in terms of the new forms of cultural productions embedded in the process of resistance by the colonized (Bayoumi and Rubin, 2000). Said uses the concept of contrapuntality as a tool for thinking about, examining and
understanding literary texts, historical events or even the positioning of the self in the wider world.

As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts…. [W]e can read and interpret English novels, for example, whose engagement (usually suppressed for the most part) with the West Indies or India, say, is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization, resistance, and finally native nationalism. At this point alternative or new narratives emerge, and they become institutionalized or discursively stable entities. (Said, 1993, p. 51)

The contrapuntal helps to understand the complex relationships between culture and imperialism within the modern era. It shows how culture plays a role in the making of empire at the same time as it can work to dismantle it. West Indian literature and criticism are thus discussed in Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*.

*Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, two seminal texts which have come to inform and in many ways define the fields of postcolonial and cultural studies, are pertinent to my inquiry on the memory of the Haitian Revolution because of their engagement with principles of liberation and emancipation for the colonized and the colonizer alike. They are helpful texts for thinking about notions of decolonization, race and gender identity as well as the relationship between culture and imperial authority. *Culture and Imperialism*, in particular, is about the articulation and manifestation of resistance to the forces of colonialism. It shows the many ways in which the West imagines itself through the social, political, economic and cultural transformations which emerged out of imperialism. This is achieved in part by relegating or dismissing the contribution made by the colonized to the project of modernity by “othering” or “Orientalising” it. The invisibility of the Haitian Revolution is thus embedded in a
deliberate effort by the West to excise the Caribbean nation from the production of modernity and to silence its contribution to the making of Western European and American societies.

Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* (1987) is profoundly relevant to this project on the memory of the Haitian Revolution in cinematic text because of its concern with what it means to be human, its effort to make palpable the absence of the African American sociohistorical account and because of its preoccupation with the concept of haunting or ghostly apparitions. To be sure, *Beloved* is a novel filled with a variety of complex narratives concerning black life in modern times. *Beloved* also exemplifies the psychic realities of descendants of both enslaved and enslavers. It is a story about enslavement and emancipation. It is significant that the book has been dedicated to “Sixty Million and more.” This number, according to Morrison, is the approximate number of Africans either as captives or on the slave ships who never even made it into slavery.

*Beloved* is the story of Sethe Garner, a runaway slave woman from the “Sweet Home” farm in Kentucky, who tries to kill all her children in order to spare them the horrors of slavery. She succeeds in killing her two-year-old baby girl. This decision should be understood in the context of Sethe’s complicated past, a past fraught with the pain and trauma embedded in the history of Africans and their descendants. Central to the novel, therefore, is an examination of the conditions that would drive a parent to kill her child. In 1873, eighteen years after the murder, the child returns as the spirit of a young adult into 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati, a place “full of strong feeling,” a place not unfamiliar with ghostly apparitions. Sethe calls the young adult Beloved. Beloved is not evil but sad, in line with the emotional state of the house. Incapable of coherent
speech, she provides no identification or history. At a literary level, this may be seen as a
metaphoric manifestation of the many layers of loss which slavery has created. Sethe
lives with her daughter Denver at the beginning of the story; the haunting at the house has
scared away Sethe’s two teenaged sons, Howard and Buglar, who left just before the
passing of their grandmother, Baby Suggs. Then comes Paul D, a kind, gentle man who
had also survived the horrors of “Sweet Home.” Paul reproaches Sethe for her acts
maintaining that “you got two feet, Sethe, not four.” This bestial imagery is symbolically
significant to the unfolding of the book given the practices of dehumanization which
were so endemic to the institution of slavery. The enslaved, as we shall see, were
stigmatized as subhumans.

Infanticide, like abortion and suicide, was a form of slave resistance, not only as a
way to curb the multiplication of the reserve army of workers but because, it was thought,
physical death and perhaps an afterlife had to be more bearable. For Sethe, death for her
children was better than “that other life” to which they were subjected on the plantation.
She wanted a place for the children “…where no one could hurt them. Over there.
Outside this place, where they would be safe” (Morrison, 1987, p. 163). Killing the
children, for her, was about securing a sense of freedom and humanity for them.

While the novel Beloved should be celebrated for its literary accomplishments, it
presents slavery as something, which in many ways, continues to haunt Western
imagination in a variety of contradictory ways. The story of slavery is one that continues
to be silenced but that cannot be forgotten. Its traces can be felt in most sociopolitical
institutions including schools and school curricula, government policies, police
organisations and so on. They are also manifest in the psychic realities of the
descendants of both slaves and enslavers. *Beloved* integrates questions of slavery and the memory of the past for racialized black Africans of the New World. At a symbolic level, the child Beloved is a ghost from Sethe’s horrific past, a past scarred with invidious violence, which includes the rape of Sethe’s mother and her friend by crewmen in the Middle Passage; the savage, near lethal whipping of Sethe herself on the plantation which has left the mark of a tree on her back; the gagging and the hanging of her mother. This is all embedded in the history of Africans and their descendants, the history, which Paul Gilroy (1993) has called “the black Atlantic.” Sethe’s past also includes the killing of her own child. It is made obvious in the novel that Sethe will be unable to move on until she confronts her past. The purpose of the “ghost” is to represent the past and its relationship with the present.

Haitian history is a history that continues to be rendered “stone quiet,” but at the same time appears like a “ghost” in modern Western empirical thought. I use Morrison’s concept of the “ghost” as a metaphor representing modern historical knowledge or modern historiography. In many respects traces of the revolution continue to linger and to haunt both Haiti and its former enslavers. Haiti’s current socioeconomic condition and the condition of the “locked” populations of the African diaspora speak to the presence of the ghost as a representation of the haunting presence of modern plantation slavery in the black diaspora. At the same time the ghost of slavery also occupies a central place in Euro-American historical consciousness. It is a spectral persistence in contradictory forms of absence and presence, in simultaneously denying slavery while constantly hinting at it. It speaks to the need of former enslavers to confront the history of slavery and its legacies.
The need to tackle the negation of the Haitian Revolution is especially pressing in light of recent pejorative representations of Haitian people and Haitian cultural tradition within mainstream news media following the earthquake that devastated the capital city of Port-au-Prince and other areas on January 12, 2010. It may be interesting to examine the ways in which this particular earthquake has been represented in popular media. That is, Haitians are often represented as helpless victims of strife, failed government or natural disasters. I argue in this thesis that if one is to understand present-day Haiti and to imagine a livable future for its people, one must seek to understand its complex history of slavery, oppression and resistance. This includes challenging what Deborah Britzman has called “the psychic difficulty of learning from the traumatic experiences of others” (Britzman in Simon et al., 2000, p. 28). Understanding Haiti also implies appreciating its myths, belief systems, language, religion, art and other forms of cultural practices. Yet, conversations about Haiti take place in mainstream North American and European media only in moments of crisis; and the disavowal of the country and its people continues even in the midst of those rare occurrences.

This research is intended to shine a light on the hegemonic, taken-for-granted colonialist traditions that determine which histories are worthy of investigation and representation, and which ones are to be dismissed. One should not, however, lose sight of some blatant contradictions in the historical relationships between research and progressive social movements. Bogdan and Biklen (1998), for instance, point to the repressive colonial practices used by some anthropologists to represent indigenous

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7 Haiti has experienced other catastrophic earthquakes in Port-au-Prince in 1751 and 1770 and in the whole island in 1842. Major hurricanes are also common to Haiti, which usually add stress on the country’s struggling economy. In 1966, for instance, Hurricane Cleo ruined many of the country’s farms while in 1981 Hurricane David destroyed much of its coffee crop. Coffee, alongside sugar, has been a significant crop in Haiti since the 1720s.
peoples. Linda Tuhiwai Smith concurs in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), maintaining that “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful” (Smith, 1999, p. 1). I draw on Smith to suggest that in order to adequately research the memory of a place like Haiti, it is crucial to recognize the many ways in which research itself can be embedded in multiple layers of oppressive, colonial and neocolonial practices and interpretations.

The project seeks to locate *White Zombie* (1932), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), *Live and Let Die* (1973), *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), *Burn!* (1969), *Toussaint Louverture* (2012) and *The Last Supper* (1976) within the context of a deliberate effort by modern Western civilizations to relegate Haiti and the revolution that created it to the margins of historical and popular consciousness. This entails investigating how those films renew or reproduce particular notions of modernity. I present a textual analysis of the films that focuses on narrative structures and visual techniques, as well as representations of race, slavery, and imperialism. I also focus on a construction of identity that is articulated through concepts of Americanness, Europeanness or Haitianness, which are attached to the main characters of the films. I examine how the films obscure Haiti’s contribution not just to modern European economic affluence but also to European or American sociopolitical and cultural configuration. For the sake of organization I group the films together based on certain commonalities such as cinematic style or time of production. For instance, I examine *White Zombie* (1932) and *I Walked
with a Zombie (1943) together because of the ways in which they engage with issues related to modernist constructions of blackness using primarily white characters. Live and Let Die (1973) and The Serpent and the Rainbow (1988) can be grouped together since they come closer to an explicitly demonic visual representation of Haiti. Toussaint Louverture and Burn! have been grouped together because they come closest to providing a plausible account of the Haitian Revolution. Toussaint Louverture is the only film, however, that provides a French perspective on the memory of the Haitian Revolution. The Last Supper will be examined alone because it is the only film that presents the history of slavery from the perspective of the slaves. The value of The Last Supper (1976) to this thesis resides in its failure to acknowledge the impact and influence of the Haitian Revolution to the making of slave uprisings in Cuba. The Last Supper too is haunted by the events of the Haitian Revolution. The Patriot (2000) and A Tale of two Cities (1980) go together because of the contribution that they make in the narration of two imperialist nations. Wherever possible I highlight overlaps and differences across the films.

I also examine the role played by such cinematic codes as lighting, props, music, set, technologies and camera movement in this organization. I aim to build typologies from the films and to make comparisons across them. How these conventions have been encoded into the films is crucial to their narrative structure. Attention has been paid to different forms of relations among the data. The point was to “look for relationships that connect statements and events within a particular context into a coherent whole” (Maxwell, 1998). As Michel Foucault tells us, it is useful to examine:

relations between statements (even if the author is unaware of them; even if the statements do not have the same author; even if the authors were unaware of each
other’s existence); relations between groups of statements thus established (even if these groups do not concern the same, or even adjacent fields; even if they do not possess the same formal level; even if they are not the locus of assignable exchanges); relations between statements and groups of statements and events of a quite different kind (technical, economic, political, social). (Foucault, 1972, p. 29)

Another purpose of this strategy is to contextualize the analysis in order to better understand the various stories, narratives and representations embedded in the construction of memory and disavowal in the films.

In a similar spirit, I examine images from the films syntagmatically in order to comprehend how they make sense in relation to each other. Certain images may carry extra meanings especially in cases where they have occurred in previous scenes (Rose, 2001). From a semiotic perspective, the “syntagma” or sequence of the images helps to demonstrate their linear narrative arrangement (Monaco, 2009). I considered certain editing procedures and certain dialogues and images in an effort to understand the relationship between the films and the processes of remembering and forgetting colonial slavery in Saint-Domingue and the revolution that worked to dismantle it.
CHAPTER TWO  
FROM COLONY TO EMANCIPATION

Modernity

The age of modernity is commonly thought to span from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries and usually refers to the period in the historical configuration of contemporary Western European societies. Philosophically, modernity connotes progress, science and objectivity. Definitions for modernity (Berman, 1988) are often predicated on a certain conception that it is uniquely European and North American. By this conception, modernity is understood as something that is subsequently disseminated into other parts of the world as part of the civilizing mission of European colonialism.

For my purpose, modernity provides the framework for understanding plantation slavery in Saint-Domingue as a capitalist practice and the ideologies of race and racism that became intimately connected to it. This is relevant, Gilroy (1993) would argue, in thinking about the origins of contemporary black politics. This includes problems of autonomy and citizenship as well as questions of nationality, diaspora, location and identity. Plantation slavery was linked to modernity’s new, inventive idea of the nation, as well as industrial state capitalism. It was also linked to new forms of social stratification and identification which included not only the racialization of the enslaved but the corresponding dehumanization of them. This connection between slavery, capitalism and the principles of modernity helps to dispel the view of a number of intellectuals, including Adam Smith, that slavery is a premodern practice associated with backwardness and traditionalism. I explore this connection in order to expose what Robin Blackburn (1997) rightfully calls “the dark side of progress” and to discuss the
ways in which the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture, reevaluated and redefined what it means to be modern and human. To be sure, the conception of slavery as a premodern practice is one way to circumvent the paradoxes of enlightened rationality and industrial ‘progress.’

Paul Gilroy (1993) compels us to locate slavery at the centre of conversations concerning modernity because of insights which it provides about black identity in the West. As he puts it in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) black life in the African diaspora created a ‘double consciousness’ which in turn brought about a counterculture of modernity. Gilroy borrows the concept of double consciousness from the work of W.E.B. DuBois (1903) which refers to a condition faced by black Americans of seeing themselves as human beings living and functioning in the United States while at the same time they are treated as second class citizens whose lives matter less than those of other Americans who are considered by the state to be fully human and therefore entitled to those rights usually reserved for humans. For Gilroy, this goes beyond the United States, to include all of the African diaspora. The institution of slavery which includes the denial of basic humanity for the slaves, places them outside the confines of modernity. At the same time, he explains, the African diaspora has its place in modernity through its contribution to economic, political and scientific innovations. It is important to understand that it was in that period that the enslavement of African human beings on Caribbean plantations defined and enabled the expansion of European economy, wealth and consumption. This was achieved through a series of calculated practices that stripped the slaves of their humanity.
The Pearl of the Antilles

The colony of Saint-Domingue, which covered an area of 10,714 square miles, occupied the western third of the island of Hispaniola and was by far the wealthiest and most valuable of the French colonial empire. The French presence in Hispaniola dates back to the beginning of the sixteenth century (Williams, 2006). By the Treaty of Ryswick (1697), France acquired Saint-Domingue from Spain while Spain retained the eastern part of the island known as Santo Domingo. Covered with sugar plantations, the colony of Saint-Domingue experienced a staggering economic expansion at the start of the eighteenth century, supplying two thirds of the overseas trade of France and making Saint-Domingue one of the world’s richest colonies. It was called the Pearl of the Antilles and was the envy of all European imperialist nations.

The colony of Saint-Domingue assumed its current indigenous name Haiti in 1804, following the Haitian Revolution. The new name should be seen as a symbolic gesture from Haiti’s revolutionaries, which implied that the territory of Haiti is neither African nor European and that the process of decolonization cannot disavow the genocidal experience of indigenous populations within the modernist project. The enslaved Africans who populated Saint-Domingue were captives who had been brought there through the force of coercion. They came from a number of African ports, including Senegambia, Allada, or the Bight of Benin in the west and the kingdom of Kongo in west-central Africa, and they belonged to diverse ethnic and linguistic groups such as the Yoruba, the Fon, and the Ewe (Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert, 2003). It is important to point out that the kingdom of Kongo provided much of the political ideology for the Haitian Revolution, including the role and powers of the king in the shaping the political structure of the new Haiti. The king was to lead fairly and to share his wealth
and power unselfishly. Selfishness, greed, exploitation and not the invocation of specific spirits, were seen as witchcraft (Thornton, 1993).

In an effort to destroy all possibility for linguistic or cultural recollection, the slaves were systematically intermixed. The result was an ongoing creation of new cultures, which also included a number of heterogeneous European and Aboriginal cultures. This process, which Fernando Ortiz (1947) calls trans-culturation, worked in part to challenge and resist the idea of the “mission civilisatrice,” the violent imposition of French language, culture and philosophy on the enslaved. Trans-culturation thus provided the sociocultural and political ideals for a democratic revolution in Saint-Domingue. It also helps to understand the kinds of transnational, fragmented identities that are characteristic of contemporary Haitianess.

**Slavery, Capitalism and Modernity**

In this section of the project I discuss capitalism and the corresponding exploitation of humans in the Caribbean. Critical scholars of capitalism typically rely on the work of nineteenth century German theorist Karl Marx in their specification of the elements that define the type of social relations associated with capitalism. While capitalism should be understood in terms of “things used to produce more things,” it is important to note, in the Marxian sense that “things used to produce more things become capital only when these things are used under certain socio-economic relations. The socio-economic relations in question are specified by Marx as those between wage labour separated from the instruments of production and the entrepreneur owning those instruments” (Inikori, 1993, p. 3). Max Weber points to free wage-labor as the defining characteristic of Western capitalism. He argues, as Marx would, that the socio-economic
and political patterns in a capitalist society are driven largely by the separation of workers from the material means of production. Capitalism is about complex forms of contradictory relations that generate socio-economic and political inequality between classes of people. In the context of Saint-Domingue capitalism relates not only to the instrumentalization of African people but to the rationalization of the labor processes that worked to exploit those people on the plantations.

Another way to speak of capitalism is to view it in terms of its implicit colonialism and its manifestations of accumulative means. For the modernist, colonialism is about ‘progress’ and is equated, as Loomba (1998) puts it, with “the mastery of ‘man’ over ‘nature’” or with “the triumph of science and reason over the forces of superstition” (Loomba, 1998, p. 21). Colonialism thus incorporated industrialization as well as new navigational knowledge, techniques and technology that helped shape the exploration of the Caribbean region. For the Marxist thinker, however, colonialism is most adequately understood as a violent conquest of land and populations, a forcible takeover of economy and a merciless restructuring and reorganization of local, non-capitalist economies (Loomba, 1998). Modern European colonialism, including the conquest of Saint-Domingue, “produced the economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry” (Loomba, 1998, p. 4). Colonialism, then, should be seen as an integral feature of capitalist development.

Early modern European societies witnessed a voracious demand for plantation products such as coffee and sugar and this demand offered considerable prospect to merchants and planters as long as they could find the labor necessary for the cultivation of those products. In order to meet the demands of European consumption, European
ships kidnapped human beings from the western coast of Africa, brought them to their
Caribbean colonies, and shipped back plantation commodities to Europe to be sold by
European merchants. The importation of human beings reached its highest point in 1790
when close to 48,000 enslaved Africans touched the shores of Saint-Domingue (Dubois,
2004a). The majority of the enslaved in Saint-Domingue were African-born by the late
1700s (See Moreau de Saint-Méry, 1796). That is because, as one woman put it in 1782,
‘they are always dying.’

Focused on short-term gain and for the most part unburdened by humanitarian
concerns, many masters and managers in Saint-Domingue coldly calculated that
working slaves as hard as possible while cutting expenses on food, clothing and
medical care was more profitable than managing them in such a way that their
population would grow. They worked their slaves to death, and replaced them by
purchasing new ones. (Dubois, 2004a, p. 40)

In a capitalist system, Marx contends, money and commodities take precedence over
human values and human relations. The importation of slaves in Saint-Domingue was
intimately bound to capitalism both in practice and principle.

Cedric Robinson, in his 1983 Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical
Tradition, compels us to investigate the inadequacy of Western Marxism to consider the
racial character of capitalism. Robinson is concerned with decentering Marxism from
white European traditions so as to include the experiences and historiographies of
(post)colonial Africans. Robinson shows how Marx himself minimizes the influence or
impact of slavery on human history while accentuating European class struggle in the
making of human civilization.

The work of Trinidadian historian, activist and revolutionary, C.L.R. James helps
lay the foundation for new ways of thinking about the black experience. As he puts it in
an interview conducted in 1980: “All of my studies on the Black question are [Marxist] in reality.... On the whole, I like to think of myself as a Marxist who has made serious contributions to Marxism in various fields. I want to be considered one of the important Marxists” (James, 1980 as cited in Hogsbjerg, 2014, p. 5). James was also influenced by such socialist historians as Jean Jaurès, and Georges Lefèbvre, who coined the phrase “history from below” (Hogsbjerg, 2014, p. 186). But Leon Trotsky’s *The History of the Russian Revolution* was by far James’ greatest inspiration (Hogsbjerg, 2014). Trotsky links social and political contradictions to the emergence of the masses as makers of history. At the same time, he recognizes the role of individual actors in the making of the masses (Blackburn, 1995). James calls for a kind of consciousness that would come out of the struggle for black awareness and renewal. His work is intended to inspire a new mode of aesthetics with which to examine Caribbean historical achievements as well as black Caribbean political and cultural identity, an identity located at the intersection of Africa, Europe and the Americas. An avid supporter of self government in the West Indies, James argued that politics and culture were important for nations with limited economic resources (Worcester, in Henry, 1992).

James’ thoughts are relevant to this thesis especially in light of his 1938 *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, the classic and epic text on the Haitian Revolution and the life and figure of Toussaint Louverture. *The Black Jacobins* is important not just for analyzing the paradoxes of the colonial period but also for understanding the experience of slavery and the revolutionary processes of 1791-1804. It exposes a kind of Eurocentricism, which dismisses the subaltern perspective in thinking about the Haitian Revolution. For my purpose, *The Black
*Jacobins* provides some valuable tools for thinking about ways to fashion black cinema and for visualizing black life in the postcolonial present.

**Slavery, Race and Capitalism**

Eric Williams\(^8\) (1944) speaks to the connection between the enslavement of Africans and the accumulation of wealth by modern European societies and although his comments are specific to the relations between England and the British Caribbean, they are certainly applicable to Saint-Domingue. In his celebrated *Capitalism and Slavery* (1994) Williams argues that profits from slave labor shaped the foundation for the Industrial Revolution in Britain by providing the capital that financed it. Williams’ argument, often referred to in historiographical literature as the “Williams thesis,” interrogates the deeply held causal link between African physical characteristics and cultural tradition and the inferior status which black people occupied on Caribbean sugar plantations. Slavery, according to Williams, should be seen principally as a system of free and abundant labor concerned with profit-maximization. “The features of the man,” he says, “his hair, color and dentifrice, his ‘subhuman’ characteristics so widely pleaded, were only the later rationalizations to justify a simple economic fact: that the colonies needed labor and resorted to Negro slavery because it was cheapest and best” (Williams, 1994, p. 20). In Saint-Domingue and in the colonial system in general, humans were taken for slave labor from Africa through the power of coercion and were used to produce tobacco, sugar and cotton for the global economy. The ideology of racism was deployed and employed to justify that practice. That is, in order to view the African

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\(^8\) Historian Eric Eustace Williams served as premier and then prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago from 1956 until his death in 1981.
slaves as instruments of production, they came to be defined as sub-social or sub-human. The slaves had no rights, no status, and no access to social mobility. It thus became convenient to view them as cattle, and exploitation of them occurred on the same economic principle as that utilized to exploit cattle.

In this project, I am interested in the connection between European demands and the corresponding supply of Caribbean staples and the resultant building of European nations as a primary factor in the construction of race and racism within the institution of slavery. I use Williams’ argument in Capitalism and Slavery to suggest that the ideologies of race and racism prospered in Saint-Domingue because there were observable and measurable profits in the mistreatment of black people. I submit, moreover, that the excision of Haiti in modern media, including the cinema is more about silencing how African slavery in Saint-Domingue has constituted a productive source of wealth for the French republic.

Leon Trotsky saw the black struggle as a temporary condition that was commensurable to national struggles in Eastern Europe, which he argued, would cease as soon as those revolutionary movements manage to solve themselves (Hall, in Henry, 1992). By contrast, in The Black Jacobins James (1989), argues that “the race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental” (James, 1989, p. 283). James refers here to a rather complex, conflating relationship between race and class divisions within the colonial order, a point which he debated with Trotsky in Mexico in 1939 (Hall, in Henry, 1992).

The various categories of whites in Saint-Domingue, while diverse in their social and political status, made up the first class of Saint-Dominguans. Among them were official
representatives of the king, lawyers, shopkeepers, grocers, carpenters and so on. There were also buccaneers, vagabonds, debtors, smugglers, thieves and criminals who defected to Saint-Domingue. Whatever their status or origin, says Fick (1990), the simple fact of whiteness, as constructed in the modern era, guaranteed a certain degree of privilege and respectability that is superior to that of the enslaved. This is not to suggest, however, that whites in Saint-Domingue or elsewhere should be understood in homogeneous terms with respect to rights, status and privilege. C.L.R. James gives a detailed breakdown of the distinctions between grands blancs (big whites), petits blancs (small whites) and so on, but while I discuss its place in the conception of the films used in this project, an examination of the complexities of whiteness is beyond the scope of the project.

The class of affranchis or free blacks or mulattos, far from being homogeneous, was the intermediate group in Saint-Domingue. The mulattos were the result of widespread concubinage by the whites with their female slaves, followed by grants of freedom to the offspring. Some were able to buy their freedom using payments from employments they were allowed to hold. With some respectable positions in commerce, trade and the military, not to mention one-third of the plantation property, this group benefited from the ‘common sense’ and juridical maxim which asserted that “a white is never in the wrong vis-a-vis a black” (as cited in Fick, 1990, p. 18). At the same time, while the affranchis imitated ‘white manners’ and educated themselves and their children in France, they were defined legally as an inferior class subject of a myriad of socioeconomic and political limitations.

But it was the black slaves who made up the greatest portion of the Saint-Domingue proletariat. They were the ones who built the wealth of the colonial planters and of the
French bourgeoisie. For the white planter class, motivated by capitalist accumulation, “the first and foremost aim...was to make money, to make more money and to make it all as quickly as possible” (Fick, 1990, p. 16). And this depended on the unpaid labor of more than half a million black slaves. Racial identification was clearly connected to class and was instrumental in the kind of social relations that governed Saint-Domingue society.

**Self/Other and Colonialism**

Race, as a creation of modernity, implies certain notions of hierarchy, which Stephen Gould (1981) has characterized as “social prejudice.” In Saint-Domingue, this hierarchy is rooted in the view that the colonial world is divided into two distinct, incompatible and irreconcilable zones, one white and one black, constructing a Manichean reality that presents blackness as inferior and whiteness as superior (Fanon, 1963, 1967). Historically, the category ‘black’ has been constructed as backward, depraved, feminine, evil, ugly and stupid while ‘whiteness’ is seen as advanced, civilized, masculine, good, beautiful and intelligent. Africans thus came to epitomize the absolute lack of reason. Toni Morrison (1990) calls this *Africanism*. It is “the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people” (Morrison, 1990, p. 6-7). It is a conception of blackness in American literary imagination that works to construct, shape and delineate the parameters of whiteness and American national identity. *Africanism*, Morrison asserts, is evident in the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Melville, and Hawthorne, among others,
where discourses of Africanism shape the language for thinking about racial difference and for signaling modernity.

The Manichean theorization and cataloguing of race is consistent with the aesthetic tradition of a generation of European philosophers like G.W.F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche or Arthur Schopenhauer who considered European cultural identity in opposition to black African culture. This aesthetic tradition, which, as Clyde Taylor puts it, is “synonymous with Western aesthetics” (Taylor, 1988, p. 80), viewed Europe as a standard for imagining discourses of beauty, sophistication, creativity, elegance, sublimity, art, culture and history. It is an eighteenth century Western aesthetics that serves to control the functioning of society in the benefit of the ruling class of the so-called first world (Taylor, 1988). In this context, the commonplace idea of white supremacy and scientific manipulation of power/knowledge, serves to negate any possibility for black sophistication.

Sylvia Wynter (2003), like Fanon (1963, 1967), links this Manichean system of representation to the kinds of interactions that defined modern European colonial expansion. For instance, in the Spanish encomienda systems, New World indigenous peoples were constructed as ‘natural slaves’ and portrayed as an impoverished race, lacking culture and incapable of Christianity (Goldberg, 1993). Also, while it was understood that Africans belonged to a variety of religious, social and political mores, all blacks, based on the color of their skin, were perceived as having more in common than differentiating them. They were homogenized on the plantations under the name “Negro.” For Wynter, European colonialism, along with the socioeconomic and political systems that came with it, worked to impose new ways to imagine and evaluate the very
category “human.” Wynter’s work is important to my discussion since it integrates history, politics, literature, religion and film among other disciplines. Her thinking is about interrogating the “purely biological definition of what it is to be, and therefore of what it is like to be, human” (Wynter, 2001, p. 31). For the Haitian Revolution and cinematic representation, this entails a revised visual conception of the human.

Initially, ideas of the human became embedded in the difference between those who were created in the image of God and the others, the “enemies of Christ,”

“infidels and pagan-idolaters,” the “degodded,” those who inhabited the New World, a world which European settlers and religious missionaries and evangelists—the contemporaries of Dominican priest Bartolomé de Las Casas—had considered “physically uninhabitable” (McKittrick, 2006). Christianity had thus become the ultimate standard against which to measure all things. The category human eventually included “a more secularized, political state actor whose planetary interests were/are underwritten by bodily schemas and their attendant geopolitical constructs: ‘the rise of Europe’ and its construction of the ‘world civilization’ on the one hand, and, on the other, African enslavement…” (McKittrick, 2006, p. 126). In the context of European colonialism, “The commodities that were to be slaves in the Americas were transformed in a mass of humanity called Nago, Lucamee, or Lucumi…and ultimately negro, niggers, coons, Blacks, and a variety of other names that suggest the slaves and their descendents were less than fully human and were just a commodity that is chattel or the property of others who are fully human” (Foster, 2007, p. 408).

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9 In addition to its original meaning “follower of Christ,” the French word Chrétien (Christian) has evolved in Haitian Creole Kretyen to signify “human being.”
Wynter outlines the ways in which categories of Man/human have come to shape the world since the early days of colonization. For Wynter, modernity or European colonial expansion can be understood in terms of its formulation of a conception of Man that views Man as the only manifestation of humanness through the power of language and discourse. “The struggle of our new millennium,” she asserts, “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” (Wynter, 2003, p. 260). This struggle also entails the category of what Zygmunt Bauman (2005) has called the “new poor,” the excluded, the “invisibilized” the under/mis/represented, the stereotyped, the silenced or the disavowed. For postcolonial Haiti, this translates into a population that has been the object of a kind of sociopolitical and economic isolation that is embedded in disdain and racism. Wynter goes on to suggest two distinct stages of Man. In the first instance, Man1 can be found in the fifteenth through to the eighteenth century, the period which Marshall Berman (1988) has called the first phase of modernity. This “Man” is supremely rational and highly political, homo politicus. This “Man” is the Renaissance Man, the Man of the Scientific Revolution and the Man of the Enlightenment, including radical philosophers like Rousseau, Montesquieu, Kant or Locke who were oblivious to the blatant contradictions of the Enlightenment. Man2, which spans from the nineteenth century to the present, imagines itself in terms of an economic Man, homo economicus. It is bio-economic. The bourgeois intellectual European Man is located in this conception of Man. It is this conception of Man which seeks to relegate the Haitian
Revolution to the margins of historical consciousness. This Man includes the historian, the poet, the philosopher, the novelist and the filmmaker of the late nineteenth century to the present. These inventions of Man occurred concomitantly with the rise of modern physical and biological science, slavery and territorial expansion and exploitation. They overrepresent themselves as the only forms of human. These inventions of Man also occurred differentially and oppositionally with the ‘other,’ the subhuman, the thing, the freak, the outcast, the irrational, the slave, the non-political, the Indian, the nigger, the poor, the jobless, the underdeveloped, the third world, the “people without history.” For my purpose, the ‘other’ is also synonymous with the freedom fighter, the reformer, the maverick or the revolutionary. Central to this project is the challenging and deconstructing of the current conception of Man, the bio-economic Man, as the only form of human, a conception which informs the memory and representation of the Haitian Revolution in cinematic text.

“Discipline and Punish”

A number of European scholars, particularly from the age of Enlightenment, the philosophical movement celebrated for its assertion of the ideals of universal, fundamental equality between individuals, sought tirelessly to rationalize slavery. For Thomas Hobbes, for instance, the bondsman was provided with sustenance, shelter and security in exchange for domination while John Locke recommended labor for the landless. Charles de Montesquieu, in The Spirit of the Laws, justified slavery based on climate and physical characteristics, which included ‘flat noses’ and ‘black from head to foot.’ These characteristics were seen as evidence of African inferiority since they deviated from European physical profile and since they violated ideas of beauty and
perfection as defined by aesthetic discourses (Williams, 2013). Those philosophers, the same ones who vacillated about the moral relevance of race, saw in slavery an inevitable part of the logic of power, necessary for the achievement of public order, social welfare and discipline (Davis, 1975). “The propagandists of the time,” says C.L.R. James in The Black Jacobins (1989), “claimed that however cruel was the slave traffic, the African slave in America was happier than in his own African civilization” (James, 1989, p. 7). Another way to accommodate this contradiction was to adopt a legal definition of slaves that stripped them of their humanity.

This is not to dismiss the antislavery movement that ensued, especially in the late 18th century that found legitimacy in the activism of the Société des amis des noirs (the Society of Friends of Black People), a network of liberal-minded intellectuals that advocated the elimination of the slave trade, in the writings of philosophes like Voltaire and Rousseau, and in a number of literary productions in which the protagonists were slaves who struggled for their freedom.

But it was indeed in the age of Enlightenment that the African slave trade and Caribbean plantations enjoyed their golden years (Davis, 1966) and the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, despite its unprecedented revolutionary humanism and rationalism, did nothing to challenge that. Catalanian-born French philosopher Louis Sala-Molins (2006) underscores the cold exclusion of black slaves from any description by the Declaration of their rights, freedom and equality. This type of exclusion from the social body, he argues, should be at the very foundation of contemporary debate concerning the Enlightenment. For instance, while the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen guaranteed justice and equality for French men (it also
excluded all women), the *Code noir*, a French set of laws of sixty articles, codified and regulated administrative arrangements such as the feeding of slaves, religious instructions and practices, their punishment, freedom of movement, working conditions as well as the process of emancipation for the slaves in the French Caribbean (Williams, 2006). The *Code noir* was drawn up in 1685 under Louis XIV, last edited in 1788 in the context of the French Revolution, and lasted until 1848 when it was repealed by the Second Republic. The *Code noir* outlawed major gatherings of slaves “under the pretext of weddings or otherwise” especially in remote and isolated areas. The punishment was whipping, the branding of a *fleur de lys*, the symbol of French monarchy, or sometimes even death. The *Code noir* legalized a status of political nothingness for the slaves and legitimated a bestial or subhuman treatment of them.¹⁰

Discipline was maintained through a calculated practice of terror and brutality where the harshest punishment was administered for the simplest error. In *The Black Jacobins* C.L.R. James (1989) records the pernicious violence that accompanied the exploitation of the slaves on the sugar plantations:

> Whipping was interrupted in order to pass a piece of hot wood on the buttocks of the victim; salt, pepper, citron, cinders, aloes, and hot ashes were poured on the bleeding wounds. Mutilations were common, limbs, ears and sometimes their private parts, to deprive them of the pleasures which they could indulge in without expense. Their masters poured burning wax on their arms and hands and shoulders, emptied the boiling cane sugar over their heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them up with gunpowder and blew them up with a match; buried them up to the neck and smeared their heads with sugar that the flies might devour them; fastened them near to nests of ants or wasps; made them eat their excrement, drink their urine, and lick the saliva of other slaves.

¹⁰ “Déclarons les esclaves être meubles, et comme tels entrer dans la communauté…” Let us declare that slaves are chattel, and that they enter into the community as such…” (Article 44 of the *Code noir*, as cited in Conteh-Morgan, 2006, p. xxi, Introduction to Louis Sala-Molins, 2006, English translation by Conteh-Morgan).
One colonist was known in moments of anger to throw himself on his slaves and stick his teeth into their flesh. (James, 1989, pp. 12-13)

These bestial practices, Foucault (1995) would argue, were an expression of social war, a way to distill the operation of Saint-Domingue society. So calculated and so well authenticated, they were not only “the incentive to work and the guardian of discipline;” they were meant to posit the inhumanity of the enslaved and the corresponding supremacy of the masters. They were also a form of public spectacle aimed at breaking the spirit of other slaves who were forced to watch and sometimes even participate (James, 1989). Psychologically, therefore, they were intended to reduce the slaves to a state of powerlessness that could only be reserved for inanimate objects. The following question is important here: what is the humanity of the European enslavers that would excuse or rationalize such practices? These practices, which contradict any form of human civility, speak to the type of conceptual inconsistencies that permeated the age of Enlightenment and make it rather difficult to celebrate the era entirely for light and radiance. They would be seen as witchcraft in Kongolesse philosophy because of the disregard for human value that they posit. It is important to point out also that those practices are almost completely absent in the films which I examine in this project, except for The Last Supper. To be sure, Steve McQueen’s Twelve Years a Slave (2013) makes a sensible depiction of the kind of genocidal violence associated with slavery in the United States. Yet, this film was still limited in what it could show on the screen while attracting audiences. One is compelled to question the possibility of good cinema and the history of slavery in the United States. There is also Haile Gerima’s film, Sankofa (1993), which presents a powerful example of branding, in addition to whipping, as a moment of dehumanization. These films are highly subversive. Sankofa, for
instance, exposes the dehumanizing monstrosity of enslavement while calling for rehumanizing reforms in the present. These films are particularly relevant in light of contemporary cases of state brutality of the police in North America, as evidenced in such police or vigilante violence and murders as those of Rodney King, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, Laquan McDonald, Oscar Grant, Jamar Clark, Delrawn Small and Alton Sterling, the 558th person to be killed by police in 2016 as of July 6 (Huffington Post), not to mention non-lethal acts of violence such as the brutal sodomy by police officers of Haitian immigrant, Abner Louima in New York City in 1997. Canadian examples include, but are not limited to, Andrew Loku, Jermaine Carby, Michael Eligon, Reyal Jardine Douglas or O’Brien Christopher-Reid. Most of the police officers who carried out those killings went unpunished for their crimes. There are also the conditions of unemployment, underemployment, homelessness, mass imprisonment, and so on, conditions which continue to plague poor racialized communities, what Wynter has called the “captive populations” of North American societies, conditions which lock them out of the nation. This is an obvious manifestation of the wounds of modernity’s social organizations, including racial slavery. In Saint-Domingue, enslaved Africans were seen and treated as an inferior species. They were animals or furniture that could be bought, sold, rented,

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11 The death of Eric Garner at the hands of New York police officer, Daniel Pantaleo, is a stark reminder of the experience of Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn) in Spike Lee’s 1989 film *Do the Right Thing*. Placed in a chokehold, both Garner and Raheem plead for their lives while their breaths are squeezed out of them. Raheem’s death was inspired by the story of Michael Stewart who died in a similar fashion in New York City in 1983 (Stern, 2014).
inventoried, auctioned, advertized, lent, borrowed and used for profit. They were also mutilated or even slaughtered.\textsuperscript{12} \textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{CHAPTER THREE}

\textbf{THE REVOLUTION}

Religion, Spirituality and the Practice of Emancipation

\textit{Basic Principles of Vodou}

In this thesis I examine the connection between Vodou and its meaning to the claiming of humanity and the pejorative, stereotypical representation made of it by Euro-American cinematic apparatuses. I contend that the negative portrayal of Vodou, embedded in the relegation of the Haitian Revolution to the margins of historical consciousness, should be seen as part of the process through which modern Western societies reproduce and maintain their own conceptions of humanness.

Scholars of the Haitian Revolution typically identify Vodou,\textsuperscript{14} a Creolized religion in Saint-Domingue, as a catalyst to and as intricately connected to the revolution

\textsuperscript{12} According to Calvin Candie (Leonardo Di Caprio), the wealthy slaver in \textit{Django}, “the science of phrenology is crucial to understanding the separation of our two species [black and white].” Candie illustrates this point with the skull of an old slave, Ben, who lived on his father’s and grandfather’s plantation. He explains that the skull of an Isaac Newton or a Galileo has been constructed by nature and through divine benevolence in a way to execute complex, creative computation, while “the skull of old Ben, unburdened by genius,” is more suited for docility and submissiveness. Calvin’s “craniometric” illustration is predicated “on the belief that differential degrees of intelligence—with the culture specific intelligence of the middle-class mode of the subject has been represented as generic human intelligence—had been allotted in varying degrees to each ‘ethnic’ and ‘racial’ population group, and that, therefore, these differential degrees could be assessed by measuring typical cranial shapes and sizes of such groups” (Wynter, 1992, p. 251).

\textsuperscript{13} This is not to endorse the mistreatment of animals in any way. However, it helps to illustrate the degree of inhumanity, which permeated modern slavery. I recognize and decry the hegemony of anthropomorphism, the sort of human attitudes and assertions of superiority over animals, which inform the domination and mutilation of them. In fact, it may even be the anthropocentric social structures in which we live, that make the terms ‘inhumane’ and ‘dehumanization’ intelligible. Author, Marjorie Spiegel points to certain commonalities in Western culture in the treatment of animals and the enslavement of blacks. “The oppression of animals,” she writes, “was in many cases used as a prototype for the oppression of blacks” (Spiegel, 1988, as cited in Malamud, 1998, p. 28).
The early leaders of the Revolution, Dutty Boukman and Jean François, were reputed to be powerful Vodou practitioners whose knowledge of the powers and poisonous properties of herbs and plants allowed them to strike a campaign of fear against their masters. At the ceremony of Bois Caiman, on the night of August 14, 1791, the slaves swore a sacred oath to rise against their masters and to shatter the colonial arrangement that stripped them of their humanity. The ceremony was to confirm the spirit of resistance and a desire for liberation along with a redefinition of the political order of Saint-Domingue society. In what follows, I discuss the relationship between Vodou, the religion of the slaves, and the achievement of revolution in the colony of Saint-Domingue in my effort to elucidate how and why historians, novelists and filmmakers continue to frame and reduce the Haitian Revolution to the level of scorn and ridicule.

Practiced largely by the masses of Haitians, Vodou is an important feature of Haiti’s culture and national identity and by the 1987 Haitian Constitution it has been legitimated as an official religion in the country alongside Roman Catholicism which was imposed by European colonialists. The massive importation of slaves from various regions of Western Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries meant a variety of religious traditions and practices in Haiti. Vodou is a syncretic religion, the product of colonial processes resulting from the blend of Roman Catholic saints and African deities.

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14 Several spellings can be found to signify this complex religious system including vodun, vaudun or vodoun. Hollywood employs voodoo to refer to the sensationalism and Western fantasy of witchcraft and sorcery. This form of representation is often complemented with the use of another Hollywood construction, the “voodoo doll,” designed to ridicule and marginalize this cultural and historical particularity of Haiti. Nathaniel Murrell (2010) gestures to how in the United States, the terms “voodoo economics” and “voodoo politics” have come to designate a program of fiscal irresponsibility. Murrell reminds us of a speech given by George Bush Sr. at Wheaton College in which he refers to Ronald Reagan’s proposed economic policies as “voodoo economics.”
particularly from the Kongoles, Dahomean, Igbo and Yoruba regions of Africa. In addition to Christianity, Vodou also assimilates certain elements of Islam, Freemasonry and Aboriginal religions (Bellegarde-Smith, 2004; Murrell, 2010). In his 2005 *Fragments of Bone* Patrick Bellegarde-Smith defines Vodou as “a heteroclite compendium of many African cults ‘rendered’ in a Haitian historical and sociological context. It appears perhaps as the most creolized of African-derived systems in the Americas. Its liturgical language is Haitian (Creole), not Fon, Ewe, Yoruba, or Lingala. Cut off from the source of ‘fresh’ Africans, paradoxically because of its early independence, and abandoned to itself, Vodou has become the least ‘pure’ of the new religions, neither Nago or Kongo, yet African in its essence” (as cited in Murrell, 2010, p. 69).

Vodou exemplifies the trans-cultural, contrapuntal characteristics of Saint-Domingue society. It is evocative of the many strategies of transformation and survival used by the slaves as they negotiated the gruesome realities of their lives in the new Saint-Domingue environment. As Dubois (2012) tells us, contemporary Vodou songs often reflect the conditions in which groups of worshipers came together. “Sou lanmè”—“On the Ocean”—for instance, speaks rather explicitly to the kinds of

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15 A number of the Africans taken as slaves to Saint-Domingue were Muslim. Francois Makandal, for instance, the fugitive slave whose sacred mission was to drive the whites out of the colony, was said to have professed Islam and may have possessed some capacity in Arabic. Makandal’s plan failed and he was arrested. “At his trial, he testified that in making his *wanga*, or poisonous charms, he invoked the name of Allah as well as the Christian God and Jesus Christ” (Sublette, 2004, p. 104-105). See Murrell (2010) for examples of Taíno and Roman Catholic influences on Vodou. For Murrell vestiges of Taíno culture still live on through Vodou culture. For instance, the name of Azaka, the god of agriculture, as well as the symbolic power of the priest, all show Taíno influences. Evidence of the influence of Roman Catholicism in Vodou includes, but is not limited to, crucifixes, candles, the use of holy water, the singing of hymns and a picture of the Virgin Mary. Even “the Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6: 9-13) has been incorporated into Vodou rituals. See also Brown (1994), Desmangles (2002) and Fleurant (1998).

16 Noted in Dubois (2012). The music video for “Sou lanmè” by Wawa and Racine Kanga accompanied by the drum can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pg7q3NnRve4
relationships that were formed among shipmates on the transatlantic journey. “In the hold of the ship, on the turbulent waters of the Atlantic, it announces, ‘we all became one.’ Sung within Vodou ceremonies, the song is another reminder of the way in which the new culture was born out of a common experience of captivity, exile, and ultimately resistance” (Dubois, 2012, p. 22). The lyrics of “Sou la nmè,” among others, may provide the opportunity to understand why historians, artists and filmmakers willfully relegate the history of Haiti to the extreme peripheries of memory. They help to unsettle the over-examination of abolitionist movements in Euro-American scholarship, while revealing the true evil of slavery.

Vodou is one of a range of Afro-Creole or African diasporic religions in the Americas. Other variations of this religious mix include Obeah and Cumina in Jamaica, Santeria in Cuba and Puerto Rico, and Candomblé and Macumba in Brazil. There is also Hoodoo in the southern regions of the United States. But Haitian Vodou is by far the most stereotyped, misrepresented, ridiculed and despised African-based religion in the Americas. That is because, I would argue, it is connected to the only revolution that effectively shook the very foundation of the institution of slavery.

In order to understand Vodou and its philosophy, one must resist the temptation to evaluate it using Christian beliefs and dogmas (Murrell, 2010). Films such as Gerima’s Sankofa (1993), Nelson Pereira dos Santos’ O Amuleto de Ogum (1975) or Julie Dash’s Daughters of the Dust (1991), all pertinent examples of Third Cinema, may help to understand the complexities of African or African-based religions and their significance in the formation of culture and identity among the black populations of the Caribbean. In her 1953 book Divine Horsemen Maya Deren speaks of Vodou as “a religion of major
stature, rare poetic vision and artistic expression…that…contains a pantheon of divinities which, in astronomical terminology, could be called a constellation of first magnitude” (Deren, 1953, p. 15). It is a religion predicated on the sanctity of all things, which include plants, animals, water, air, humans and so on. The term Vodou itself, and much of the terminology around it, is Fon from Dahomey (present day Benin) in Africa. It “is said to come from two words Vo du, which mean ‘introspection into the unknown’” (Bellegard-Smith, 2004, p. 25). The term Vodou can also refer to “spirit,” “god” or the “sacred.” “Vodou also refers to one of the ritual dance styles, or rhythmic patterns and movements, that bring the community in sync with the spirits in a progressive and mutual relationship of experience and fullness” (Murrell, 2010, p. 59). Vodou ceremonies, which usually revolve around drum beats, singing, dancing, eating and possession, take place at a hounfort or temple and are led by a hougan or his female counterpart, a mambo.

Vodou rituals revolve around a set of spirits known as loa, each representing a particular set of ethics or moral principles. There are two major rites of loa which share some important commonalities while at the same time they display some distinctive differentiating characteristics. First, the Rada loa, which can be traced back to the region of Dahomey, are said to be soft, mild or sweet-tempered. They are affectionate, protective and benevolent. They are usually passive, says Deren (1953), unless the need arises to defend and protect their moral principles. Those loa reflect the monarchical system of Dahomey, a system based on agriculture with special emphasis on co-operation. Examples of Rada spirits include, but are not limited to, Atibon Legba, Ayida
Wedo, Danbala, Erzulie Freda, Gede, Ogou Feray, Azaka Mede, Lasirenn and Labalenn (Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert, 2003).

Second, the Petro loa, which may include Met Calfou (or Carrefour), Simbi Andezo, Erzulie Danto and Baron Samedi, are known as Creole loa, born in Saint-Domingue out of the harsh realities of modern plantation slavery. As Deren explains:

the conditions of the new world were not those of Dahomey. The stability, the integration, the traditional, established patterns were disrupted, diffused, broken and violated, often brutally. The traditional defensive, protective attitude could not suffice where there was no longer anything organized or solid to defend. It was a moment of specific and urgent need: the need for action. In the new world there arose a new nation of loa, the loa of the Caribbean: the Petro nation. (Deren, 1953, p. 61)

Petro loa are associated with fire; they are known as hot loa. They are fierce, forceful, temperamental, tempestuous and unpredictable. Petro is born out of rage, Deren continues.

It is not evil; it is the rage against the evil fate which the African suffered, the brutality of his displacement and his enslavement. It is the violence that rose out of that rage to protest against it. It is the crack of the slave-whip sounding constantly, a never-to-be-forgotten ghost….It is the raging revolt of the slave against the Napoleonic forces. And it is the delirium of their triumph. For it was the Petro cult, born in the hills, nurtured in secret, which gave both the moral force and the actual organization to the escaped slaves who plotted and trained, swooped down upon the plantations and led the rest of the slaves in the revolt that by 1804, had made Haiti the second free colony in the western hemisphere, following the United States. (Deren, 1953, p. 62)

It was at a Petro ceremony at Bois-Caiman, near the town of Le Cap, in the northern part of Saint-Domingue, that religious leader and Vodou priest Boukman Dutty, a marron from Jamaica, also known as Zamba, urged the slaves to swear their oath of loyalty which included a promise of solidarity, confidence and secrecy on the part of those in attendance (Métraux, 1972). Boukman’s nickname Zamba, which probably
means “elephant” in Kikongo for his large stature, is evidence of Kongo influence on the Haitian Revolution (Fick, 1990; Thornton, 1993). Boukman was a driver and a coachman on the Clément plantation, one of the first plantations to be burned in 1791 and as Fick (1990) points out, his position as coachman exposed him to the politics of the colony and allowed him to establish contacts and to create networks among slaves of various plantations. According to Boukman:

The Good Lord who created the sun which gives us light from above, who rouses the sea and makes the thunder roar—listen well, all of you—this god, hidden in the clouds, watches us. He sees all that the white man does. The god of the white man calls him to commit crimes; our god asks only good works of us. But this god who is so good orders revenge! He will direct our hands; he will aid us. Throw away the image of the god of the whites who thirsts for our tears and listen to the voice of liberty that speaks in the hearts of all of us. (as cited in Fick 1990, p. 93)

A number of accounts point to Cécile Fatiman, an African woman who also officiated at the ceremony. While the Haitian Revolution was the result of careful, unprecedented political organization on the part of the slaves, one can easily see how religion served as a source of inspiration for the revolutionaries. The Petro ceremony of Bois Caiman and its overarching Vodou religion provided the space for the articulation and proliferation of political ideologies while cultivating a sense of community and collective identity among the slaves of Saint-Domingue. The ceremony speaks to the role played by religion in the achievement of freedom in the colony. Religion also served to consolidate the powers and confidence of the leaders of the revolution. It has been argued that \textit{marronnage},\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} Many slaves ran away from their masters’ plantations as a form of resistance, escaping tortures and refusing to accept the status of thing or property. The desire to escape was generally regarded in the medical community as a type of illness. Dr Samuel A. Cartwright (1851) called it drapetomania. The impact of desertion on the Haitian Revolution continues to be a matter of debate among academics. According to David Patrick Geggus (2002), this practice, known as \textit{marronnage}, was usually short term and was of little threat to the institution of slavery. But for Carolyn Fick (1990), \textit{marronnage} was a way to defy the condition of bondage and may indeed have shaped the foundation for the uprising of 1791. There is some evidence, she suggests, that leaders of the revolution like Jean-Francois and Boukman were \textit{marrons} at the outset of the revolution. \textit{Marronage} was also illegal under the \textit{Code noir} and \textit{marrons} who were
the practice of slave desertion, also provided the space for the blacks of Saint-Domingue
to organize their religion (Mennesson-Rigaud, 1958). Boukman Dutty himself was
probably a marron; so were Makandal, Jean-François and Biassou. The statue of “nèg
marron,” created in 1968 by Haitian sculptor Albert Mangones, and located rather
pointedly in front of the national palace, is perhaps the greatest symbol of the symbiotic
connection between Vodou and marronnage. It is the statue of an escaped slave blowing
a conch shell as he calls for revolution. The conch is usually used to communicate the
start of a Vodou ceremony as it was in the ceremony of Bois Caiman on August 14, 1791.

Vodou ceremonies worried planters and administrators who understood the
volatile, seditious capacities of those ceremonies. Vodou was usually prohibited by the
colonial administration because it posed a threat to the hegemonic position of Roman
Catholicism and Christianity in Saint-Domingue. It had already been outlawed by the
Catholic Church and the Code noir of 1685, which required planters to provide a
Christian education for their slaves. By the provisions of the Code noir, slaves had to be
baptized, attend mass every Sunday, engage in Christian instructions and of course,
renounce any connection or identification with this African religion. Subsequent
legislations limited slave movements, banned drumming and dancing, and prohibited the
gathering of slaves without the presence of a Catholic priest (Murrell, 2010).

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absent for extended periods of time could lose one of their ears, have a fleur de lys branded on their
shoulders or in cases of recidivism, the marrons could be executed (Dubois, 2004b). In Twelve Years a
Slaves, Solomon Northup, whose name has been changed to Platt by his slave masters, was ordered to whip
Patsey (Lupita Nyong’o) because her master, Epps (Michael Bassbend), thought she had run away. And in
Gutiérrez Alea’s The Last Supper (1976), the overseer, the brutal Don Manuel not only whips Sebastian for
running away, he also cuts off his left ear and feeds it to the dogs. These vivid examples speak to the kind
of violence and cruelty which defined the institution of slavery. They also demonstrate the impact of
marronnage on the psyche of the enslaver and might serve as evidence why historians of slavery and of the
Haitian Revolution should pay more attention to that practice.
Violence and the Reclaiming of Humanity

The issue of black citizenship put to the test the principles professed by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. To begin, the gruesome execution of Vincent Ogé and Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, two mulatto rebels who had led the mulatoes into uprising in fall 1790, along with subsequent volatility in Saint-Domingue, seemed to have embarrassed some of France’s revolutionary politicians who so vociferously proclaimed universalism of rights but maintained an ambiguous silence on the questions of race, slavery and colonialism. With hesitation, on May 15, 1791 the National Assembly in Paris declared full French citizenship to free people of color born of free mothers and fathers with sufficient property (Dubois & Garrigus, 2006). But colonial representatives along with white plantation owners, infuriated by this decree, vigorously opposed and sabotaged its implementation. They flatly refused to accept citizenship for free people of color, maintaining that their own rights to private property guaranteed by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen were being violated. Some even threatened secession from the colony as an expression of their disapproval and as a means to halt the decision of the National Assembly. The decree of May 15th, 1791 failed and it was partly in the context of that failure that enslaved blacks in Saint-Domingue took everyone by surprise during the summer of 1791.

While it seemed likely that slavery would outlive the French Revolution, as it outlived the American Revolution about a decade earlier, these events helped shake the foundation of the institution in some significant ways. In August 1791, a violent and
speedy insurrection in North Saint-Domingue shocked the colonists who never thought that the slaves were capable of such fury (Dubois & Garrigus, 2006). “The slaves destroyed tirelessly,” says James (1989, p. 88), “Like the peasants in the Jacquerie or the Luddite wreckers, they were seeking their salvation in the most obvious way, the destruction of what they knew was the cause of their sufferings.”

The violence used by the slaves was cathartic, Fanon (1963) would argue. That is, the enslaved responded by turning the violence back toward their masters in a way that allowed them to reclaim their humanity. As we have seen, the entire edifice of slavery along with the colonial enterprise that sustained it was built on a foundation of force and brutality. This type of violence was about depravation, objectification and humiliation along with a particular kind of social and political repression. Any form of decolonization, therefore, could be achieved only through a violent dismantling of the colonial system. In the context of Saint-Domingue, equality could be possible where revolutionaries not only seized their freedom through a struggle for liberation, but where those revolutionaries participated in decisively aggressive action in order to expunge themselves of a colonial tradition that dehumanized them. The moral justification, in Fanonian terms, was based on an assumption that violence transformed the enslaved physically, allowing him/her to regain his/her dignity in the traumatic institution of slavery. Haile Gerima makes a similar argument in Harvest: 3,000 Years (1976) and in Sankofa (1993), two films which respectively captured millennia of oppression endured by poor, exploited peasants in Ethiopia and enslaved people in the U.S. South. Gerima presents violence as the only mechanism for the peasants and unfree to regain their dignity and free themselves from social and economic exploitation. This is consistent
with the kinds of observations made by James regarding the ways in which the enslaved armed and defended themselves. James himself was acquainted with the writings of anarchist Peter Kropotkin who in *The Great French Revolution*, stressed the revolutionary violence of the oppressed. For Kropotkin, the “true fount and origin of the Revolution’ was ‘the people’s readiness to take up arms’” (Kropotkin, 1909, as cited in Hogsbjerg, 2014, p. 186). According to James, if Haitian revolutionaries “destroyed much it was because they had suffered much.” The slaves attacked home estates, killed their masters, and burned huge areas of cane fields. “Vengeance! Vengeance!” was their credo but still, according to James, this revenge of poverty and oppression did not compare in spirit and in principle with the cruelties of property and privilege carried out by the plantation owners. For instance, no slave buried his/her master to the neck smearing his head with sugar in order to attract flies, aunts and other insects; no slave filled up his/her master with gunpowder and blew him/her up with a match (James, 1989). Anticolonial violence, the violence of the colonized, “is the negation of the earlier Manichean view and the articulation of a positive one which can, without reference to colonialism, create new ways of life” (Gibson, 2003, p. 3). It was also a means to create a new society of citizens that refused to be restricted by the contradictory limits of modernity. For Saint-Domingue revolutionaries, the purpose was to transform themselves into human beings and to be recognized as human beings. It also meant political consciousness along with the possibility of nationhood and self government for the next generations of Haitians.

I should point out, however, that some accounts of the events that were produced and spread across Europe presented exaggerated tales of horror and savagery committed
by the revolutionaries. Laurent Dubois (2004b) gestures to one example that depicted a carpenter tied between two boards and sawed in half while another portrayed “the body of a white child impaled upon a stake.” While unsubstantiated, this type of image was used as an instrument to criticize and condemn the spirit of emancipation for the enslaved. Radical French journalist and politician, Camille Desmoulins, for instance, blamed his political opponent, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the Société des amis des noirs and the abolitionist movement “if so many plantations have been reduced to ashes, if pregnant women have been eviscerated, if a child carried on the end of a pike served as standard of the blacks” (as cited in Dubois, 2004a, p. 111). Another function of these accounts was to represent colonial whites as defenseless victims while blackness itself as a ‘racial’ signifier was synonymous with irrational brutality, barbarity and inhumanity. This, of course, is anchored in the Manichean order in which blackness is vile and grotesque and whiteness the symbol of innocence. Every effort was made to confirm the cruelty and inhumanity of the slaves, especially by the white intellectuals of Saint-Domingue. By depicting the blacks of Saint-Domingue as symbols of backwardness and savagery, those white intellectuals were fashioning and defining themselves, by contrast and with exaltation, as the paragons of modernity. They were also obscuring the relation of exploitation and dehumanization that was the very foundation of modernity.

**Emancipation**

On August 29, 1793, Saint-Domingue Commissioner Léger Félicité Sonthonax abolished slavery in the north and declared full citizenship for the enslaved of that region amid mounting pressure and demonstrations in Cap-Français. It should be noted, as well, that Sonthonax abolished slavery in exchange for the slaves’ assistance in defeating
Saint-Domingue’s new governor, Thomas François Galbaud, who was suspected of plotting against him. Étienne Polverel, a colleague of Sonthonax, followed suit on September 21, 1793 and, with notable vacillations and reservations, declared freedom in the south and west of the colony to the slaves who had fought against Galbaud. The freedom which Sonthonax and Polverel offered was thus one of expediency and was in the words of Geggus “a form of profit-sharing forced labor” (Geggus, 2002, p. 126; see also Blackburn, 1988). The 1795 French Constitution contains an official ban on slavery and recognized the same laws for the colonies as in France beyond racial and ethnic differences. The color line had been broken—at least in this legislative space.

Like the May 15, 1791 proclamation that sought to extend full French citizenship to free blacks and mulattoes in Saint-Domingue, the August 1793 emancipation proclamation was greeted with rapturous hostility by white plantation owners. Shortly after the 1793 emancipation proclamation, Étienne Polverel implemented a series of labor laws that were intended to convert the new citizens into “profit-sharing serfs” who would be remunerated with a portion of the commodities they produced on the plantations. Polverel explains:

Africans, listen to me carefully. You can rest on Saturday, on Monday, everyday of the week, if you want. No one has the right to force you to work a single day if you don’t want to. You are completely free. But you have to eat and clothe yourselves; you also want occasionally to have a special meal with your friends. You want your women to be well dressed to honor you and to be more attractive. You want to be properly dressed yourself and to have comfortable furniture, to please your women, for your health, theirs, or that of your children. Only the products of the land will allow you to supply all these needs. That land does not belong to you. It belongs to those who purchased it, to those who inherited it from its first buyers. You can lay claim to the products of this land only through agriculture. And I have told you that the portion assigned to you in the revenues of the land will be given to you in compensation for your work.... (Polverel, as cited in Dubois & Garrigus, 2006, p. 140)
Women were to be paid less although they did the same work as men. This was justified, according to Polverel, because of the “‘inequality of strength that nature has placed between them and men.’” Polverel also made allusion to “‘the intervals of rest which their pregnancies, their child birth, their nursing, oblige them to make,’” as added justification for the differential pay between men and women (Dubois, 2004b, p. 186). It is important to emphasize, in this context that the 1794 decree of the National Convention, which I mention below, saw emancipation as a movement from slavery to “manhood.”

Designed to keep the capitalist plantation system viable, these decrees worked to control and restrict the labor of the new citizenry of Saint-Domingue. Resistance to these decrees by the former slaves was usually punishable by imprisonment or forced labor. It should be noted, of course, that, among other things, many slaves saw in their manumission the opportunity to cultivate a piece of land and raise a family freely, with dignity and without persecution (Mintz, 1974). But Polverel’s plan did not correspond with the sort of citizenship the slaves had envisioned. What the slaves wanted was a revised form of relationship with the French Republic. They wanted legal rights and civil liberties, which included the right to vote, to participate in politics, or to hold public offices. They demanded full and unambiguous recognition as citizens, insisting on the right to freedom, to equal treatment by the French; they also insisted on the right to claim social benefits such as employment and education. In sum, they rejected the paradoxical, Janus-faced abstractions of citizenship that the Enlightenment as an intellectual movement was espousing. Slave resistance would thus continue in Saint-Domingue so
long as their demands for general liberty were not fully met and so long as Enlightenment principles of citizenship remained Janus-faced.

**Toussaint Louverture**

Perhaps the most remarkable figure in the Haitian Revolution was a Creole black known as François Dominique Toussaint Louverture, a fifty-year-old former domestic slave who had been freed around the age of 45. Initially named Toussaint Bréda, after the plantation on which he was born, Toussaint took the name Louverture—the opening—probably implying that he could make “an opening anywhere.” In *The Black Jacobins* (1989), C.L.R. James presents the life and achievements of Toussaint Louverture as the embodiment of “The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organize themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day” (James, 1989, p. ix). James’s perspective on the transformation of the masses, which runs through *The Black Jacobins* and his earlier works on the Haitian Revolution, has been influenced by Leon Trotsky of *The History of the Russian Revolution*. “It would seem,” for Trotsky, “that one might, at least with equal justice, demand attention to a series of collective historic dramas which lifted hundreds of millions of human beings out of non-existence, transforming the character of nations and intruding forever into the life of all mankind” (Trotsky, 1977, as cited in Høgsbjerger, 2014, p. 169). To date, only one biopic, Phillipe Niang’s 2012 *Toussaint Louverture*, has addressed the life of Toussaint Louverture in his contribution to the making of the modern world.
While Toussaint Louverture’s political records reveals a certain ambivalence in his views, he saw himself as a true defender of freedom. “Brothers and friends” he said as he appealed to the oppressed and dispossessed people of Saint-Domingue,

I am Toussaint L’Ouverture, my name is perhaps known to you. I have undertaken vengeance. I want liberty and equality to reign in San Domingo. I work to bring them into existence. Unite yourselves to us, brothers, and fight with us for the same cause, etc. Your very humble and very obedient servant. TOUSSAINT L’OUVERTURE, General of the Armies of the King, for the Public Good. (James, 1989, p. 125)

Louverture’s appeal, made on the same day as Sonthonax’s decree of August 29, 1793, is undeniably quite significant. First, it worked to distinguish him from Sonthonax as the true embodiment of hope for the slaves in Saint-Domingue. Another aspect of Louverture’s appeal is that it is reminiscent of a point made by Karl Marx (1848) about half a century following the Haitian Revolution, that the oppressed must unite in order to change their condition. That is, “the proletariat must…organize, mobilize, and act as a class-conscious group to transform society” (Grabb, 1997). One salient feature of capitalism, it should be emphasized, in addition to terrifying and terrorizing the oppressed, is to divide them, making any idea of unified revolution virtually impossible. “‘Let us unite together forever,’” says Louverture, “‘and, forgetting the past, work from now on to crush our enemies and take vengeance against our perfidious neighbors’” (as cited in Dubois, 2004a, p. 179). Louverture was quick to understand that the slaves represented the most dynamic and the most powerful social force in Saint-Domingue and that slave revolution could be possible only if the slaves would unite in the common goal to combat exploitation along with dehumanization.
In a general sense, while many revolutionaries sought to achieve only their own liberty, the slaves soon began to view and organize themselves as a common class. That is because, according to James, “By hard experience they had learned that isolated efforts were doomed to failure...” (James, 1989, p. 86). Their struggle toward humanity and citizenship began in their shared experience of capture, labor and exploitation (Nielsen, 1997). They understood, as Louverture did, that political power over Saint-Domingue, which was the territory in which they lived, was critical if they were to secure an end to slavery. These were the social forces that had prepared the slaves for mass uprising. They were also the same forces that helped Toussaint Louverture to lead the slaves in Saint-Domingue toward the achievement of freedom and human dignity.

**Toussaint Louverture and the Revolutionary Army**

Toussaint Louverture enlarged his army by incorporating into it fugitives and stragglers from the French army, defeated enemies as well as free-lance military groups (Blackburn, 1988). His lieutenants included such former slaves as Henry Christophe, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, his brother Paul Louverture and his adopted nephew Moise. Many freed blacks held posts of command in his army. Louverture’s entourage also included several long-standing white and mulatto advisors who had identified with slave revolt and emancipation from the outset. His secretaries were usually French religious personalities. The aim here was to harness the experience of the colonists, military or otherwise, and turn it around to the benefit of the enslaved. It was also to transcend the old racial prejudices and to join blacks, whites and mulattos into a unified army that would lead Saint-Domingue to the achievement of liberty and equality. This, James would argue, is evidence for drawing certain similarities between Toussaint Louverture
and Vladimir Lenin of the Russian Revolution. “Just as Lenin and the Bolshevik Party understood the necessity to retain the skilled, educated, and managerial strata of the czarist regime in the new revolutionary state, so did James approve of Louverture’s calling on the know-how of the French and offering them posts within his new administration” (Dupuy, 1995, p. 107). Highly skilled and remarkably disciplined “the army, except for a few white officers, was a revolutionary army through and through, and that was his greatest strength” (James, 1989, p. 147).

One must remember that at the end of the French Revolution the new French Republic, under the leadership of the National Convention, was committed to defeating what it considered to be its internal and external enemies. Louis XVI was executed in January 1793\(^{18}\) and by February, France was at war with Spain and Britain along with Austria, which had declared war the year before. The Caribbean too, including the colony of Saint-Domingue, was at war over the fate of the new Republic. Both Spanish and British military leaders saw in these wars a perfect occasion to conquer and control the wealthy French colony of Saint-Domingue. The Spanish were hoping to regain control of a colony that they had lost a century before while for the French Republic, despite slave insurrection and the violence that had wounded the colony, Saint-Domingue still remained a major source of sugar, cotton and coffee production. The abolition of slavery and self-government for black people were nobody’s concern. It is in that context that Toussaint Louverture issued his decree on “liberty and equality” on August 29, 1793. In a spirit of diplomatic expediency and in the interest of securing freedom for the enslaved, Toussaint Louverture along with a number of black revolutionaries, including

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\(^{18}\) The National Convention tried and found the king guilty of treason. It then voted 901 to 848 in favor of the death penalty. Louis XVI was guillotined on January 21.
Jean-François Papillon and Georges Biassou, sided with the Spanish and fought against the French forces in Saint-Domingue agreeing to an offer “of land, honors, and freedom, though only for soldiers and their families” (Geggus, 2002, p. 175).

**Toussaint Louverture and his Shift of Allegiance**

In early 1794, Toussaint Louverture, along with his increasingly effective forces, shifted his loyalty from the Spanish to the French Republic, which was now at risk of losing its immensely wealthy colony of Saint-Domingue to Spain and Britain. This reversal was soon followed by a successful campaign to recapture most of the northern part of Saint-Domingue from the Spanish invaders. It also prevented the British from completing their occupation of the colony. Experts on the Haitian Revolution invariably consider this volte-face, which also included breaking with Jean-François and Biassou, to be a major turning point in the Haitian Revolution (Dubois, 2004b; Geggus, 2002; James, 1989). By siding with and defending the French Republic, Louverture forced French administrators to embrace the cause of the enslaved. By this volte-face, Louverture was also affirming himself as an autonomous revolutionary.

Toussaint Louverture was indeed metonymic with Saint-Domingue’s political life from 1794 until 1802 when he was captured by Napoleon Bonaparte’s brother-in-law General Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc. Louverture became the de facto ruler of Saint-Domingue, especially after expelling Léger Félicité Sonthonax from the colony on August 24, 1797. He was appointed Governor in April 1796 by Étienne Maynard Laveaux, the ranking delegate of Saint-Domingue. While he never intended to sever formal relationships with the French Republic, Louverture quickly began to implement
his own laws and to negotiate directly with foreign states, including England and the United States. It was in that context that General Gabriel d’Hédouville came to Saint-Domingue from France, with explicit orders to restrict the powers and influence of Toussaint Louverture. Hédouville sought to replace Louverture with his main rival, André Rigaud, a pro-French mulatto general; he substituted black troops with white ones in key locations; and he arrested Moise, a commander quite popular among the ex-slaves. Moise escaped and, under Louverture’s orders, Hédouville was arrested and expelled from Saint-Domingue (Dubois, 2004b).

But Toussaint Louverture could not gain full control of Saint-Domingue until he crushed mulatto resistance and until he defeated André Rigaud. In order to defeat Rigaud the black revolutionary negotiated the purchase of arms and ammunitions from Britain and the United States, a move which not only went counter to metropolitan rule but more importantly posited the status of Louverture as leader of an autonomous nation. Following Rigaud’s defeat and temporary exile to France in 1800, Louverture divided the south of Saint-Domingue into four military districts, each to be commanded by one of his officers (Fick, 1990). With the support of a critical mass of armed revolutionaries led by his nephew, General Moise, Toussaint Louverture proceeded to consolidate his position by also bringing Spanish Saint-Domingue under his authority. This, it was believed, was necessary in order to put a decisive end to the slave trade. The Spanish governor ceded formal control of the territory to Toussaint Louverture on January 21st, 1801, making him the supreme and only authority in the whole island (Fick, 1990).
The Constitution of 1801

In 1801 Toussaint Louverture’s electoral assemblies chose deputies to a central assembly with a mandate to draft a constitution for the island of Saint-Domingue. Louverture’s revolutionary constitution, which was promulgated on July 8, 1801, identified the territory of Saint-Domingue as part of the French colonial empire but that would be governed by its own set of local laws. This was a decisive move toward autonomy, one may agree, a move which angered France’s First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte, especially in view of his efforts to secure and strengthen his grip over the colony. Napoleon Bonaparte was a legendary military strongman who rose to power in 1799. It should be mentioned that Bonaparte’s wife, Josephine, was a member of the French Creole planter and slave-owning class of Martinique. She had lost her property to the British occupation of the island in 1794. Louverture’s constitution was intended to be a response to Bonaparte’s new constitution which made no formal mention of slave emancipation and which did not guarantee representation for Saint-Domingue in the French legislative body. Only a statement by Bonaparte made assurances that freedom would not be taken away from the ex-slaves. Louverture’s constitution promised liberty for all people living in Saint-Domingue regardless of race. “All men born in this land live and die free French men” (Dubois, 2004b, p. 365). Slavery was a thing of the past, and “virtues and talents” were to be the only distinction between individuals in matters related to employment. Davis reminds us in Inhuman Bondage (2006) that these measures became appended to the American Constitution only after the Civil War, a generation following the Haitian Revolution. The phrase “virtues and talents” is worth noting since it challenged the differential treatment that defined the relationships between black and white people in the colonial system. It is significant also since, as Etienne
Balibar (1994) has argued, liberty and equality are codependent even to the point of quasi-interchangeability. That is, as Louverture’s constitution seems to suggest, to be free in a system of racial inequality is a contradiction in logic and in principle. The aim of Louverture’s constitution, in short, was to bring liberty and equality to a class of people that have been denied dignity and humanity for so long. Toussaint Louverture, however, concentrated all power by declaring himself governor for life with the authority to name his successor.

Sybille Fischer (2004) compels us to take a close look at the French constitutions from 1791 to 1799 in order to understand the radical nature of Toussaint Louverture’s constitution. As Fischer puts it:

In 1789 there was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which became the Preamble to the constitutions of 1791, 1793, and 1795 but was modified at each step. Only the post-Thermidorian constitution of 1795, which otherwise is far less radical than the Jacobin one of 1793, contains a ban on slavery. The constitution of 1799 no longer includes the Declaration of Rights and drops all references to free labor, let alone slavery and abolition, thereby clearing the way for the reintroduction of slavery in the French colonies in 1802. (Fischer, 2004, p. 264)

Toussaint Louverture’s 1801 Constitution was not a formal declaration of independence for Saint-Domingue. But, as noted above, while Saint-Domingue would maintain some continuity with France, Louverture’s Constitution recognized a type of relationship between France and Saint-Domingue that is analogous only to that of two equal nations.

**Napoleon Bonaparte and the Louverturian Constitution**

Toussaint Louverture’s new constitution infuriated Napoleon Bonaparte who saw it not only as a sign of defiance but as something dangerously close to a declaration of
independence. So, for Bonaparte, Louverture was a rebel negro slave who needed to be eradicated. His reaction was to send an expeditionary army of twenty thousand troops to Saint-Domingue with the mandate to reassert control over the colony and crush the authority of the revolutionary leader. The first wave of the expedition arrived in Saint-Domingue in February 1802 under the command of Bonaparte’s brother-in-law General Leclerc. General Leclerc brought with him a squadron of five to ten thousand troops, the finest of the French army, and a set of instructions that carefully outlined each stage of the expedition. First, Leclerc would win over the black generals with assurances of his goodwill and non-aggressive intentions, under the guise of protecting the colony. Second, he would wage war against the black generals with special attention to Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and General Moïse. This was to break the spirit of the masses who would then become leaderless. The entire black population would be disarmed by the third stage and they would be forced back on the plantations (Fick, 1990). In sum, the plan was to re-establish French supremacy in Saint-Domingue as part of the reconstruction of the slave trade as well as a French empire in the Caribbean. This was greeted with utmost enthusiasm by “negrophobes” like Deslozières who saw in Bonaparte’s decision a “return to the political nothingness to which nature condemns [the negro]” (Sala-Molins, 2006, p. 116). Leclerc complained in summer 1802 that his efforts were undermined by the massive return of merchants and planters who boasted rather openly about the return of slavery in the colony. This was significant and particularly alarming for Saint-Domingue revolutionaries especially in light of news that slavery had

19 Upon Napoleon’s order, Leclerc also brought his wife Pauline and their son Dermide. Pauline Leclerc moaned miserably at the idea of leaving her mansion in Paris to ‘live in exile among savages and snakes.’
been reinstated in nearby Guadeloupe, a fact completely overlooked by the films examined for this project, including Phillipe Niang’s biopic *Toussaint Louverture*.

**The Capture of Toussaint Louverture**

General Leclerc’s formidable armada was unprepared for the stern, skilful and heroic resistance it initially met from the black revolutionaries. But it managed by May 1802 to secure the surrender of most of the major leaders and their followers, including Henry Christophe in the North, Jean-Jacques Dessalines in the West and Toussaint Louverture himself. In June 1802 Louverture was lured into a deceptive negotiation with French general Brunet, who had him arrested, tied and shipped to France. Toussaint Louverture died of cold, starvation and humiliation on April 8, 1803 in the isolated prison of Fort-de-Joux in the Jura Mountains at an altitude of over 3,000 feet. He was fifty-nine years old. Louverture’s last days are central to the unfolding of Phillipe Niang’s miniseries. The story itself is narrated by the revolutionary leader as he is interrogated by Bonaparte’s special envoy, the fictitious Pasquier. I am concerned in this thesis with the *mode* of depiction and representation of Louverture’s story.

The defeat of Toussaint Louverture can be explained in a variety of ways and will continue to incite much debate among academics. First, Louverture alienated the mulattoes of the colony by deporting rather than reconciling with mulatto general André Rigaud in 1800. Rigaud and other mulatto leaders were sent in 1802 to reinforce the Leclerc expedition. Second, Louverture executed Moise in November 1801 for advocating in favour of the masses of new citizens and for opposing, among other things, Louverture’s plantation policies for the new Saint-Domingue. Moise and a number of
other black leaders were brave, trusted men who would have galvanized mass resistance against General Leclerc. But more importantly, in the context of the revolution according to James in his frequent analogies between the Haitian and the Russian revolutions, “it was almost as if Lenin had had Trotsky shot for taking the side of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie” (James, 1989, p. 284). Louverture also alienated his black labourers by forcing them to keep working on the plantations while reintegrating former white colonists and plantation owners as his partners in building a new socially and economically viable society in Saint-Domingue. This, of course, put him in conflict with the aspirations of many of the colony’s new citizens. Finally his declaration as governor for life put him at odds with the people. As Fick indicates Toussaint Louverture “had pursued a policy of power consolidation and a political vision of social conservatism that, rather than solidifying his forces, ended up dividing and weakening them” (Fick, 1990, p. 213). This, says James (1989), was a grave error, a total miscalculation. While Louverture considered himself “a black like them,” he neglected his relationship with the masses of blacks who had hoisted him to power. Louverture’s fatal error, according to James, was his failure to dispel the rumour that he was indeed moving toward a reinstatement of slavery. The freedom which the blacks had gained was not a benevolent gift from the modern French republic. It was a response to a powerful campaign for liberty by the blacks which included a great deal of struggle, death, suffering and transformation. They were suspicious of and unwilling to accept what appeared to be a mere abstraction of freedom. Confused by Louverture’s actions, the ex-slaves “did not understand what he was doing or where he was going. He took no trouble to explain. It was dangerous to explain, but still more dangerous not to explain” (James, 1989, p. 240).
This kind of uncertainty concerning Louverture’s actions critically weakened black resistance to the expedition of 1802. James qualifies Louverture’s attitude as overly presumptuous, maintaining that “Toussaint, shut up within himself, immersed in diplomacy, went his tortuous way, overconfident that he had only to speak and the masses would follow” (James, 1989, p. 240).

But as Fick (1990) tells us, Toussaint Louverture’s constitution, his move toward eventual independence and his efforts to consolidate power were not the main reason for military expeditions to Saint-Domingue and the removal of the leader. Fick points to the fact that preparations for the expeditions had been under way much before news of the constitution had reached the First Consul. The 1801 constitution merely irritated him further and was therefore a convenient excuse. “In the interest of the former colonial aristocracy, reactionary white émigrés, and the maritime bourgeoisie, Bonaparte’s intentions were no less than the reimposition of slavery, of the Black Code, the slave trade, and the pre-1789 colonial regime” (Fick, 1990, p. 206). The project of modernity had not yet been completed and Toussaint “the Opening” stood as a dangerous interruption. Saint-Domingue, as we have seen, had been an extremely valuable market for the European capitalist slave trade. It had been the pride of France, the pearl of the Antilles. The First Consul had the support of liberal states like England and the United States. Both of these states were sympathetic to the reassertion of colonial slavery and white supremacy over Saint-Domingue and opposed to a free and independent Saint-Domingue. As Louis Sala-Molins (2006) would argue, Bonaparte and his allies were determined to block the movement of history and to return to the bestiality of the *Code noir*. This is ironic, of course, in light of Bonaparte’s position as leader of one of the
world’s most “modern” and most “enlightened” nations. Shortly after the death of General Leclerc on November 2, 1802, his successor, General Jean-Baptiste Rochambeau, resorted to a policy of partial genocide as Davis calls it because “the French concluded that Saint-Domingue could be pacified only by exterminating most of the existing black and mulatto population, which could later be replaced by African slaves” (Davis, 2006, p. 168). The removal of Toussaint Louverture should be seen as an act to remove the freedom, equality and dignity of half a million black human beings who resisted the status of “political nothingness” and had fought for recognition as human beings.

The Revolution and its Aftermath

Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Haitian Independence

The racial brutality of General Rochambeau who “ordered his victims (both military and civilian) burned alive, drowned in sacks, hung, crucified, asphyxiated by sulphur fumes in ships’ holds” (Dubois, 2004a, p. 293) had one major impact in Saint-Domingue: the emergence of a new form of unity among the residents of the colony. Rochambeau’s acts of barbarity, unparalleled since the dark days of slavery, worked to alienate even the most loyal of French supporters. I should point out that shortly before his death in the fall of 1802 Leclerc had recommended Rochambeau as his successor because for Leclerc, Rochambeau “is a person of integrity, a good military man, and he hates the blacks” (as cited in Fick, 1990, p. 229). I discuss later Phillipe Niang’s

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20 In 1802 General Jean-Baptiste Rochambeau had ordered bulldogs from Cuba that were utilized as weapons in the genocidal campaign against the black insurgents. Examples of this can be seen in The Last Supper (1976), a film about slave activity in Cuba. More vivid examples can be found in Quentin Terantino’s 2012 drama Django Unchained, a film which depicts the experience of slavery in the United States.
depiction of General Leclerc as gentle and benevolent while Rochambo himself does not appear in the film. But since July 1802, when news of the restoration of slavery in Guadeloupe reached Saint-Domingue, Jean-Jacques Dessalines had explicitly instructed his troops that they were fighting a war of independence. He understood that freedom would always be in danger unless Saint-Domingue achieved complete independence from France. In fact, as early as January 1803 General Rochambeau had made a formal request for permission to restore slavery immediately in Saint-Domingue. Legend has it that on May 18, 1803, at the Congress of Arcahaie, Dessalines tore the white band from the French tricolour and the initials “R.F.” (République française) were replaced by the motto “Liberté ou la mort” (Liberty or Death). Jean-Jacques Dessalines managed by 1803 to amalgamate and command the forces of hundreds of leaders throughout the colony. He was now the recognized leader of the indigenous army, and it was a united black and mulatto army. The conflict soon became a mass uprising involving both men and women who were less frightened by the gruesome experience of war than by the prospect of defeat and a return to modern slavery. Jean-Jacques Dessalines directed a final attack against the French on November 18, 1803 at Vertières near Le Cap in north Saint-Domingue. Rochambeau surrendered. Dessalines ordered the destruction of the remaining white colonialists in February and March 1804 with the Creole slogan “Koupé têt, boulé kay” (Cut off their heads, burn their homes), a move which continues to spark considerable debate among experts on the Haitian Revolution. An estimated 50,000 French were dead throughout Saint-Domingue, most of them soldiers who were sent to the colony in 1802.

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States. This was a tradition inherited from Christopher Columbus who, three centuries before, had brought dogs to the colony in order to terrorize and devour the indigenous population (Dubois, 2004a; Fick, 1990; James, 1989).
On January 1, 1804 in Gonaives, Jean-Jacques Dessalines proclaimed the Republic of Haiti. He was the new Governor General. The French name of Saint-Domingue was replaced by the original Taino name of Haiti as a reminder that the former slaves were no more native to the land than their European colonizers (Dubois, 2004). Jean-Jacques Dessalines became Emperor of Haiti on October 6, 1804 as a way to maintain equality of status with Napoleon Bonaparte who had become Emperor of France that same year. This was empowering, Bhabha (1997) would argue, since the colonized subject could return and consequently challenge the colonizer's gaze. This argument rests on the notion that “the gaze (and integrity) of colonial authority is always troubled by the fact that colonial identity is partly dependent for its constitution on a colonized Other who is potentially hostile” (Maley, Moore-Gilbert & Stanton, 1997, p. 34). On May 20, 1805, Jean-Jacques Dessalines promulgated a constitution for the new Haiti that asserted universal racial equality while affirming principles of diversity and difference (Fischer, 2004). The very concept of race was redefined; and so was the idea of land ownership. By the constitution of 1805, no white could come to Haiti as master or land owner. That was a way to preclude any possibility of re-enslavement in the new nation. Dessalines insisted, instead, on redistributing the land to the new citizens of the country, those who, until recently, had been property themselves.

One should remember also the tripartite racial organization that operated the structure of Saint-Domingue society. In that structure white masters were at the top, black slaves at the bottom and affranchis or mulattos or free blacks in the middle. Dessalines intended to diffuse this color division by declaring in his 1805 constitution that all Haitians are “black,” regardless of skin color or country of origin. This included
some Poles, some Germans and some French who had openly opposed and rejected the evils of slavery and subjugation. The 1805 Constitution was intended to disrupt the racialist or biologicist practices of dividing and controlling people.

**Impact of the Haitian Revolution**

The Haitian Revolution was indeed a source of hope and inspiration for enslaved Africans throughout the American continent. The influence of the revolution could be felt in places as distant as Louisiana, Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica, Colombia, El Salvador, Venezuela and Brazil where slaves pointed to Haiti as the ultimate example. In Brazil, in 1805, black soldiers wore “medallion portraits of the emperor Dessalines” (Dubois, 2005, p. 305). Ten years later, in neighbouring Jamaica, “young blacks had vowed to kill off the white population if they were not granted freedom” (Davis, 2006, p. 170). As David Brion Davis (2006) tells us, a number of Jamaican slaves escaped to Haiti as white refugees fled to Jamaica. The Haitian Revolution provided the space and the confidence for free black Jamaicans to claim civil and political rights. Denmark Vesey, the free black who led the slave insurrection in Charleston, South Carolina in 1822, had been a slave in Saint-Domingue on the eve of the revolution in the 1780s. Vesey read newspapers that routinely reported the events of Saint-Domingue. In Cuba in 1812 Cuban black leader José Antonio Aponte hung pictures of Christophe, Louverture and Dessalines in his own home in a proud display of revolutionary enthusiasm. “Across the Americas,” says Martin Munro (2010), “the 1790s recorded the highest frequency of slave revolts, and all of the major uprisings took place during the forty years after 1791. Although many different factors were at play in these revolts, historians have consistently found connections to the Saint-Dominguan uprising. From the 1790s, ‘French’ slaves
and free coloreds were implicated in revolts in English-, Dutch-, and Spanish-speaking territories” (Munro, 2010, p. 38). And in the southern regions of the United States, merchants and planters were particularly fearful of the refugee mulattos and free blacks from Saint-Domingue, people who had brought the spirit of the revolution with them. It remains surprising, therefore, that the Haitian Revolution, which laid the foundation for revolutionary enthusiasm in the Americas, including Brazil and the United States, has not been seriously addressed by filmmakers since the advent of the film industry in the nineteenth century.

The Haitian Revolution provided the confidence for slaves in the Americas to challenge the stereotypes which have been used historically to rationalize slavery (Depestre, as cited in Petty, 2008). The Haitian Revolution also worked to provide added impetus and momentum to British abolitionists like James Stephen, Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce and later Victor Schoelcher in France. Schoelcher was instrumental in the repeal of the *Code noir* as well as the abolition of slavery in the rest of the French Caribbean on April 27, 1848. For C.L.R. James the Haitian Revolution was one event that helped shape the foundation for decolonizing and emancipatory possibilities in Africa. In the words of Frederick Douglass, a fugitive slave who later became an influential black leader and went to Haiti as consul of the United States,

We should not forget that the freedom you and I enjoy to-day; that the freedom that eight hundred thousand colored people enjoy in the British West Indies; the freedom that has come to the colored race the world over, is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons of Haiti ninety years ago. When they struck for freedom...they struck for the freedom of every black man in the world. (as cited in Davis, 2006, p. 157-158)
**Saint-Domingue Refugees in New Orleans**

One significant impact of the Haitian Revolution is the migratory movements of some colonists and their slaves along with thousands of free blacks and mulattoes from Saint-Domingue to other areas of the Americas. They moved by the thousands to Cuba, Jamaica, Martinique, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, New Orleans, South Carolina, and other port areas of the United States. In the host territories, the Saint-Dominguans created new cultural practices that reflect the continuous blend of African, European and Indigenous cultures. In New Orleans, for instance, which, for many of the refugees, was a second destination, the influence of the refugees could be felt in matters concerning economy, education, politics and social organizations (Dessens, 2008). They were journalists, educators, writers, singers, poets, artists, architects, cooks, tailors, shop keepers and so on. They were Catholic, Freemason and Vodou practitioners.

One avenue for further research on the United States and the Caribbean has to do with the relationship between the movement of Saint-Domingue refugees and the emergence of musical traditions such as salsa, soca, calypso, reggae and dancehall, and zouk. These musical traditions share some common threads in part because of the shared experience of slavery. These musical traditions should also be seen in terms of a synergetic, dynamic cross-fertilization, a “musical miscegenation” (Gioia, 1997) between African, American, European music on New World soil. It is this musical miscegenation that has come to form the richness of New Orleans jazz. Douglas Daniels (2003) gestures to the roots of jazz in the Vodou rhythms as they blended with Louisiana music and religious practices:

Perhaps most important is the fact that jazz started out as a dance. Dance is at the very heart of the music, embedded in the roots even if not so obvious today in the more recent developments. When you read accounts by dancers such as Malcolm
Little, later Malcolm X, and others, you realize that not only is this dance serious business, but dancers reach certain heights that remind us of the role that dance plays not only in vodun but in fundamentalist churches in the U.S. and, of course, in West Africa. (Daniels, 2003, p. 113)

One commonality among African musical traditions is that instruments emulate human voice (Gioia, 1997). “This technique,” signals Ted Gioia, “which also plays a key role in jazz music, even extends to percussion instruments, most notably in the Kalangu, the remarkable talking drum of West Africa” (Gioia, 1997, p. 9). We see here the fertile influence of the Saint-Domingue refugees on the socio-cultural characteristics of Louisianan society. Yet this contribution continues to be systematically ignored by academic historians and filmmakers. In Ian Fleming’s 1957 novel Live and Let Die, for instance, New Orleans’s cultural elements are presented as though they were monolithic and homogeneous. One appropriate representation of black popular music is to view it in terms of the challenge that it posed to European colonialism and European cultural absolutism. It should be remembered also that the beat of the drum, along with the sound of the conch shell, were used to signal attacks on the colonists of Saint-Domingue. It is interesting in this context that the August 14, 1791 ceremony, which propelled the events of the Haitian Revolution, was one of dance and drumming. One can readily discern why the use of the drum was banned in Saint-Domingue and why the drum itself is reduced to ridicule in the films which I examine in this project.

**Haiti and its State of Dependency**

Haiti and its “captive population” have experienced a calamitous history since Haitian independence from France in 1804. That can be explained in part with the fact that Haiti has been the brunt of political and economic isolation. Understanding this
condition of isolation is crucial to my inquiry on the memory of the Haitian Revolution in cinematic discourse where the figure of the Haitian revolutionary, the underclass, has been constructed through a narrative structure that underrepresents or downplays the experience of the colonized. Since the Haitian Revolution was predicated on a re-articulation of what it means to be human, to break away from the state of political nothingness, this isolation of Haiti should be understood in terms of the effort by modern societies to sustain their conception as the only form of the human. Maurice Lubin (1968) is among a small group of academics to pay serious attention to the study of diplomatic relations between France and Haiti. He documents Haitian determination to be “free and independent” and their unwavering willingness to die rather than to live under French subjugation. Lubin also documents a series of calculated efforts by the French government to create a condition of pariah and political nothingness for Haiti.

The French government resolved to starve and debilitate the Haitian “bandits” by blockading commercial and economic relations with the country. It was formally declared as early as June 1804 that “Les bâtiments dont la destination sera prouvée pour les ports venant des ports occupés par les révoltés, seront considérés comme ennemis de la France” (Jean Augustin Ernouf, governor general in Guadeloupe, June 1804, as cited in Lubin, 1968, p. 291). “You are with us or against us” is a fitting translation for this logic, a bifurcation all too familiar in contemporary international diplomacy. French pirates and corsairs thus attacked merchant ships en route to Haiti. This policy of the French government did much to infuriate the American government not only because it was seen as an onslaught to the sovereignty of the United States who wished to maintain its own influence over Haiti and the Caribbean region, but more importantly because, as
Yves Auguste (1979) tells us, there were measurable profits at the time in maintaining commercial liaisons with the black republic. Auguste refers to a special imperialist interest from the United States that was connected to Haiti’s ongoing abundance in natural resources such as sugar, molasses, coffee, coco, fish, salt, rice, flour and so on.

In addition to the economic blockade and political isolation which the French government imposed on Haiti, the new black republic was forced to pay a heavy indemnity of one hundred and fifty million francs\(^1\) in exchange for commercial and diplomatic relations and for recognition of its independence. Such a debt should be seen as a punishment by those who defended slavery and colonialism of a negro state that stood up against the edifice of capitalism and white supremacy. It was meant to compensate the French bourgeoisie for lost revenue incurred through emancipation. For one French foreign minister, in a letter addressed to United States President James Monroe, “the existence of a Negro people in arms, occupying a country it has soiled by the most criminal of acts, is a horrible spectacle for all white nations…. There are no reasons…to grant support to these brigands who have declared themselves the enemies of all government” (as cited in Sheller, 2000, p. 73-74). Trouillot (1995) describes this form of diplomatic isolationism as only one symptom of an implicit disavowal of the Revolution. But the real irony is that the modern France that guaranteed freedom from injustice and social inequalities for its citizens insisted on economic profits when it comes to the freedom of the other. This speaks not only to the paradox of modernity but to the systemic and institutional power imbalance which it has created. Haiti, through the

\(^{21}\) The annual budget of the French government of the time was about equal to this amount.
events of 1791-1804, interrupted the capitalist exploitation of the modernist project but did not end it.

Haitian president Jean Pierre Boyer signed the treaty of indemnification\textsuperscript{22} while the French Atlantic fleet floated off the coast of Port-au-Prince (Blancpain, 2001). Haiti was also forced to concede certain trade and commercial privileges to France. While the indemnity was renegotiated and eventually reduced to ninety million francs, payments of the debt consumed eighty percent of the Haitian national budget. The last installment was made in 1947, nearly one and a half century following the Haitian Revolution. As Peter Hallward puts it “no single factor played so important a role in establishing Haiti as a systematically indebted country, a condition which in turn served to justify a long and debilitating series of international raids on the Haitian treasury” (Hallward, 2007, p. 12). Ousmane Sembène’s film \textit{Xala} (1975) has dealt with the link between Euro-American societies and the socioeconomic and cultural strangulation of a number of African states. It is a condition predicated on a certain dependency by Third World societies on former colonial powers. This, Wynter (2000) would argue, is all connected to the effort by the West to ‘lock’ Haiti in as the ‘defective Other’ of ‘Man,’ the ‘\textit{homo oeconomicus}.’ I call for a cinematic representatiom of Haitian history that shines a light on the true ideological

\begin{verbatim}
Article 1. Les ports de la partie française de Saint Domingue seront ouverts au commerce de toutes les nations. Les droits perçus dans ces ports, soit sur les navires, soit sur les marchandises, tant à l'entrée qu'à la sortie seront égaux et uniformes pour tous les pavillons, excepté le pavillon français en faveur duquel ces droits seront réduits de moitié.

Article 2. Les habitants actuels de la partie française de Saint Domingue verseront à la caisse fédérale des dépôts et consignations de France, en cinq termes égaux, d'année en année, le premier échéant au 31 décembre 1825, la somme de cent cinquante millions de francs, destinée à dédommager les anciens colons qui réclameront une indemnité.

Article 3. Nous concédons, à ces conditions, par la présente ordonnance, aux habitants actuels de la partie française de Saint Domingue, l'indépendance pleine et entière de leur gouvernement.

Et sera la présente ordonnance scellée du grand sceau.

Donné à Paris, au château des Tuileries, le 17 avril de l'an de grâce 1825, et de notre règne le premier.

Signé Charles (as cited in Blancpain, 2001, p. 55)
\end{verbatim}

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relationship between European colonial powers and the pauperization, as well as the corresponding destabilization and political decline of the Caribbean nation.

**Remembering the Haitian Revolution: The Revolution and Modern Literature**

As Sybille Fischer (2004) observes in *Modernity Disavowed*, there is no entry for slavery or colonialism in what may be one of the most consulted books on the age of revolution, *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* by François Furet and Mona Ozouf. In that volume Fischer was able to locate but one mention of the *Société des amis des noirs*. But even more perplexing, according to Fischer, is the wholesale disavowal of the Haitian Revolution by such colossal political theorists and philosophers as Hannah Arendt and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

In his much celebrated *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) Hegel speaks of the dialectic relationship between slave and master, identifying fundamental conflictual tensions between the two, each desirous to be recognized by the other. This kind of theorizing can be found, in varying forms and interpretations, in the work of a generation of anti-colonialist writers, including David Brion Davis. In his 1975 *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution: 1770-1823*, for instance, Davis offers an allegory of Hegel’s argument in a fictional encounter between Toussaint Louverture and Napoleon Bonaparte.

Yet Hegel makes no mention of modern Caribbean slavery or the Haitian Revolution in any explicit way. According to Susan Buck-Morss (2000, p. 844), “either Hegel was the blindest of all the blind philosophers of freedom in Enlightenment Europe”
or quite simply he “knew about real slaves revolting successfully against real masters” (Buck-Morss, 2000, p. 844). We know this because, as Buck-Morss tells us, Hegel, a keen political observer, was acquainted with and read the important English and German newspapers, including Minerva, an intellectual journal founded by Archenholz, “the best of its genre,” which reported at length the events of the Haitian Revolution. Buck-Morss even points to the possibility that Hegel may have “elaborated his dialectic of lordship and bondage deliberately within this contemporary context” (Buck-Morss, 2000, p. 844). Still Haiti and the slave uprising that transformed the age of modernity were simply brushed aside.

Haiti and its revolution also caused trouble for Hannah Arendt, a twentieth century political theorist concerned largely with questions of freedom, public action, authority, nationality and violence. While Arendt rightly outlines the major fundamental differences between the American and the French Revolutions, she presents those events as the uniquely defining revolutions of the modern era. In her 1963 On Revolution, Arendt applauds those revolutions for their commitments to political freedom, individual liberty and sovereign constitutions. More specifically, she defends the American Revolution and attacks the deeply Eurocentric analysis of modernity, maintaining that “revolutionary political thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has proceeded as though there never had occurred a revolution in the New World and as though there never had been any American notions and experiences in the realm of politics and government worth thinking about” (Arendt, 1963, p. 218). But the real irony, which speaks to the inconsistencies of modernity, is that Arendt comments on the American Revolution as though it was the only revolutionary event in the Americas (Fischer, 2004;
Scott, 2004). By doing so, she disavows the Haitian Revolution and the significant challenges that it presented to the modernist movement. She ignores, furthermore, the achievement of Toussaint Louverture, the revolutionary leader who rose from among the most wretched to become a statesman of monumental stature.

Fiction and Revolution

The repression of the Haitian Revolution can be traced in the literature of the nineteenth century and is evident in the fact that by the second half of the century, only about a dozen published fictional works in France were motivated by the events of Saint-Domingue. With the exception of Alphonse de Lamartine’s *Toussaint Louverture* (1850), these works sought to downplay the significance of the revolution “and spoke instead of ‘revolts,’ ‘mutiny,’ ‘uprisings,’ ‘perfidy,’ ‘sedition,’ and ‘criminal plots’ on the part of ‘barbarian ingrates’ and ‘ferocious Africans’” (Hoffmann, 2009, p. 341). The aim of these writings was to represent Haiti and its citizens as impervious to social and cultural development and to dispel any possibility of black nationhood or political autonomy. Lamartine’s play was a celebration of Toussaint Louverture, the black leader in Saint-Domingue who was betrayed by Napoleon Bonaparte while changing the course of history. But, as Hoffmann (2009) tells us, Lamartine was accused by his contemporaries of being unpatriotic.

Hoffmann gestures to some characteristics that are common to the few works of fiction inspired by the Haitian Revolution.

In these works, the hero is often a young Frenchman just arrived in Saint-Domingue, shocked at first by the treatment of slaves but soon realizing that blacks are not ready for emancipation. His betrothed heroine is in constant danger of being outraged by the villain or villains and depends entirely on the hero for rescue.
The villain is either a brutal and libidinous white overseer (often of foreign origin) or a bloodthirsty black leader. A faithful and feeble-minded African can provide comic relief with his naiveté and childish way of speaking French. (Hoffmann, 2009, p. 345)

Another important characteristic, according to Hoffmann, is that while most of those works of fiction decry the inhumane treatment of the slaves, they seldom denounce the institution of slavery itself. That is because they recognized a connection between the enslavement of Africans in Saint-Domingue, as elsewhere in the Caribbean, and the economic transformation of European society.

**Bug-Jargal**

Victor Hugo’s short historical novel, *Bug-Jargal* (1926), is no exception to these patterns. In *Bug-Jargal*, Hugo contrasts rich plantation life with the subhuman existence of the slaves in Saint-Domingue. Captain Léopold D’Auverney arrives in Saint-Domingue from France to stay with one of his uncles, a rich and cruel plantation owner whose eldest daughter, Marie, D’Auverney was intended to marry. Marie is also coveted by Bug-Jargal, “a young black of colossal stature” who lives and works as a slave on the plantation. D’Auverney is infuriated by “the revolting supposition of having a slave as a rival” (Frey, 1999, p. 38). The concept, possibility and complexities of interracial intimate and amorous relationships are thus explored in the novel. It is worth emphasizing, of course, that open interracial liaisons between white women and black men were frowned upon by colonial authorities. Napoleon Bonaparte even ordered General Leclerc to expel from the colony any white woman who had had sexual relations with blacks (Sala-Molins, 1987). The two protagonists of the novel, D’Auverney and Bug-Jargal, also develop a brotherly relationship, “a fraternity of black and white” (Frey,
Bug-Jargal eventually saves Marie’s life from a horrifying crocodile, an act that is greeted with utmost gratitude from both Marie and Léopold D’Auverney. Led by the cruel Biassou, the grotesque dwarf Habibrah and Bug-Jargal himself, the slaves of Saint-Domingue rise up on the same day as the couple’s wedding on August 22, 1791. This is ironic since the Biassou of the Haitian Revolution, along with Jean-Francois ordered the execution of Jannot, one of the leaders of the revolution, precisely because of his cruel and inhumane actions. Biassou’s real ‘infraction’ in the eyes of the French, is that he made peace with the Spanish and not with the French in 1793. In Bug-Jargal a delicate and innocent D’Auverney is eventually captured and brought to Biassou for execution. But he is saved by Bug-Jargal. D’Auverney entrusts Marie to Bug-Jargal. The latter is then executed by French soldiers who thought that he had killed Léopold D’Auverney. Bug-Jargal dies in order to spare the lives of ten of his men who would have been executed as a reprisal. Marie dies in the midst of revolution while Léopold D’Auverney returns to France where he dies courageously in a military campaign.

Victor Hugo is considered by literary critics to be one of the greatest modernist writers and Bug-Jargal is viewed as one of the most important works of colonial fiction of the nineteenth century (Bongie, 2004; 2008). The novel takes up the question of slavery whereby, in the words of Leopold D’Auverney, “the sad condition of these slaves was made even worse by the insensitiveness of their master.” A particular emphasis is placed on the slogan “liberté, égalité, fraternité” taken from the spirit of the French Revolution. The book was first written in 1818 and then published in a revised version in 1826 when Victor Hugo was only about twenty-four years old. French recognition of
Haitian independence in 1825 may have sparked “a new degree of interest” for the young novelist.

Toussaint Louverture, it has been suggested, was probably the inspiration for the character of Bug-Jargal. This can be inferred from the titles of the many English translations of the novel from 1833 to 1966, mostly by anonymous translators. The first translation was *The Slave King, from the Bug-Jargal of Victor Hugo* (1833) which later was republished as *The Slave King: A Historical Account of the Rebellion of the Negros in Saint-Domingue*. Other translations include the 1845 *Noble Rival; or The Prince of Congo* (Bongie, 2004). According to Bongie (2004), these English translations were intended to shine an explanatory light on the rather opaque and enigmatic title of the novel, *Bug-Jargal*. In any event, the character of Bug-Jargal is presented to us as an exception to the rule of black vice, malice and iniquity. He is an African prince of European education, an exemplary Negro who displays courage, honesty and faithfulness, a man of high moral standards and principles. “His face [figure], on which the characteristic signs of the black race were less apparent than on those of the other Negroes, presented a mixture of ruggedness and majesty that would be difficult to imagine” (Hugo (earlier version) as cited in Bongie, 1998, p. 252). Bug-Jargal is an educated polyglot who not only stands up for his rights but sees himself as equal to the white masters (Frey, 1999).

Another aspect of Hugo’s novel is related to the author’s perception and interpretation of the Haitian Revolution, the chain of events that interrupted the project of modernity and shaped the movement of the slaves from a status of political nothingness to full human beings. In the words of Victor Hugo himself, *Bug-Jargal* is the story of
“the revolts of the blacks of Saint-Domingue in 1791, a struggle of giants, three worlds having a stake in the matter, Europe and Africa as combatants and America as battleground” (as cited in Bongie, 1998, p. 253). It was on the basis of bringing these three different worlds together, Sylvia Wynter would concur, “that today’s Caribbean and the Americas, like modernity itself, was to be born” (Wynter, 2000, p. 28).

However, while Bug-Jargal engages with the slave revolution that led to the creation of an independent Negro state in Haiti, it does not speak of the Haitian Revolution as an outcome of successful slave organizing. It fails to invoke the spirit of resistance or to legitimate the final defeat of Napoleon’s Republican army in November 1803. The principle of slavery itself, as an economic institution, managed to survive the scrutiny of the author (Hoffmann, 2009). As a matter of fact, Hugo spoke of Africa as an empty land that “God has given… to you, white people: take it” (speech delivered May 8, 1870, as cited in Sala-Molins, 2006, p. 144). Victor Hugo, like Alphonse de Lamartine of Toussaint Louverture, among other critics, lamented the loss of France’s wealthiest and most prestigious colony, the Pearl of the Antilles. And this, Hoffmann points out, is a common characteristic of the scant corpus of works of fiction inspired by the Haitian Revolution. Victor Hugo offers instead a graphic depiction of the Haitian Revolution and he provides the space for grotesquely macabre and disparaging representations of the enslaved, which include savagery, brutality, barbarity and demonic practices of bloodthirsty natives (Hoffmann, 2009). In the remainder of the thesis I bring into focus the contribution made by the cinema as an ideological state apparatus to the reproduction of these Orientalist modernist concepts in the deliberate effort to relegate the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) to the margins of Western historiography.
CHAPTER FOUR

HAITI AND THE CINEMA

_White Zombie_ (1932), _I Walked with a Zombie_ (1943), _Live and let Die_ (1973) and _The Serpent and the Rainbow_ (1988) constitute a good starting point for thinking about the memory of Haiti and its representation in film. _White Zombie_ (1932) and _I Walked with a Zombie_ (1943) especially, were produced at a time when the cinema itself was still burgeoning; _The Serpent and the Rainbow_ (1988) is a particularly engrossing production from “that master of the gore genre” (Muir, 1998, p. 131); and while opinions and reactions to _Live and Let Die_ (1973) vary, James Bond and his films have become a cultural phenomenon the world over. These films are important to my inquiry on the memory of the Haitian Revolution because of their status as relevant visual and textual representation of Haiti’s socio-historical landscape and cultural identity. An analysis of them will help to illuminate the processes of representation that shape the disavowal of the revolution. They shall be considered partly in the context of the kind of attention paid to Haiti since the 1920s and 1930s that viewed “Haiti as an exotic object of desire within American culture” (Renda, 2001, p. 19). The idea of zombies, “the dead coming back to life,” along with the infamous “voodoo doll” or “the sticking of poisonous pins in dolls” continue to animate anxiety and prejudices among Euro-American viewers about Haiti’s historical and cultural traditions. _Burn!_ and _Toussaint Louverture_ are also important because they work to alleviate the cinematic neglect concerning the Haitian Revolution. But given the position of filmmakers in the production of ideology, these films also employ an approach to representation that dismisses the possibility of the enslaved of Saint-Domingue to shape their own narratives. One commonality between these films is
that they are haunted by the need to dismiss the history of racial slavery and its lingering consequences for the socioeconomic status of modern Western societies and the psychic conditions of former slaves and their descendents. Finally, while *The Last Supper* is obviously motivated by the events of the Haitian Revolution and all the radicalism that came with it, the revolution appears only as a mere spectre.

**Print and Literary Origin of Cinematic Sensationalism**

Cinematic representations of Haiti have been inspired by print representations in newspapers, magazines, short stories and books which emerged long before the invention of the cinematogramme by the Lumière brothers in 1895. Those print representations are forms of knowledge production that have worked to fuel widespread fears of Haiti’s religious and cultural practices while obscuring and dismissing the historical achievements of the country. Anthropologist William Wells Newell, for instance, in “Myths of Voodoo Worship and Child Sacrifice in Hayti,” an article published in the first issue of the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1888 stated “that charms and spells supposed to possess magical efficacy are employed in Hayti and elsewhere under that name” (Newell 1888, as cited in Cowan, 2008, p. 158). Stephen Bonsal (1909) viewed Vodou leaders as “the devil’s priests” and he warned travelers against drinking anything in Haiti. He reasoned that “The prospect of waiting four months or even six to know whether you have been poisoned or not is far from being a pleasant one” (Bonsal, 1909; as cited in Cowan, 2008, p. 159). Further examples of strident, disparaging remarks on Haiti at the turn of the twentieth century can be found in such literary works as Spencer St. John’s *Hayti or the Black Republic* (1889), Frederick Ober’s 1893 travel book *In the
Wake of Columbus, and John Houston Craige’s Black Baghdad (1933) and Cannibal Cousins (1934).

Perhaps the most influential work to sensationalize Haitian history and religion is William Seabrook’s best-selling 1929 novel, The Magic Island, a book which, according to one academic, was “exceptionally entertaining.” The New York Herald Tribune called it “the book of the year.” The Magic Island impressed academics and intellectuals, ordinary readers and even school children (Renda, 2001). The Magic Island paints an image of Haiti that is connected to primal innocence. According to Seabrook, “The Haitian peasants are thus double natured in reality – sometimes moved by savage, atavistic forces whose dark depths no white psychology can ever plumb – but often, even in their weirdest customs, naïve, simple harmless children” (Seabrook, 1929, p. 91).

The Magic Island is about Seabrook’s experience in Haiti as he observed the workings of Vodou on the Caribbean island. His account presents Haiti as grossly erotic and utterly uncivilized. “In the red light of torches which made the moon turn pale, leaping, screaming, writhing black bodies, blood-maddened, sex-maddened, god-maddened, drunken, whirled and danced their dark saturnalia, heads thrown weirdly back as if their necks were broken, white teeth and eyeballs gleaming, while couples seizing one another from time to time fled from the circle, as if pursued by furies, into the forest to share and slake their ecstasy” (Seabrook, 1929, p. 42). In The Magic Island, Camille, a “fair-skinned octoroon girl” moves to Haiti’s capital city of Port-au-Prince where she will be sponsored by her aunt and uncle and where she eventually marries a dark-skinned man. While rich, sophisticated and well educated, this man sometimes goes off to what Seabrook calls “Nocturnal Excursions.” On the couple’s first wedding anniversary,
Camille is taken to sit with four dead bodies who will, according to her husband, arise in order to dance and drink with her.

These print representations of Haiti should be understood in the context of the American occupation of 1915-1934. Implicit in this occupation, of course, was a process of Americanization, which included systemic racism, insidious discrimination and a persistent attachment to slavery and colonialism. In the words of Michael Dash:

The military intervention of the United States in Haitian affairs in 1915 initiated an intense and bitter phase in relations between the two republics. Perhaps even more decisively than the numerous political commentaries of the time, the fiction and travel books of the period reveal the unofficial truth of the Occupation. Often the literature of this period in a shrill and explicit fashion returned to many of the stereotypes that had evolved during the preceding century. (Dash, 1997, p. 22; see also Renda, 2001)

These texts all make allusion to cannibalistic practices in Haiti and the need for U.S. intervention in the country (Dash, 1997). Set in a “foreign land” these print representations which include travel books, memoirs, biographies and novels and other forms of commentaries speak to how Americans imagine themselves as a nation of civility while denigrating and misrepresenting Haitian cultural traditions. Benedict Anderson (2006) would consider those documents for their contribution in the making of American national aggrandizement. They were motivated by the modern principle of “civilizing mission” or “the white man’s burden,” which was to cleanse Haiti of its savagery and backwardness. Colonialism is often dependent on the vilification of the colonized. While according to Dash, the print documents could not shape national policy, they worked to legitimate American intervention in a country that supposedly lacked history, sophistication and civilization. This attitude is made evident in the words of an American officer, a character in Leon Lalau’s *Le Choc* (1932): “you hate
Americans. We know that. We would never have come here, if you were not monkeys. We have come to civilize you” (Lalau, 1932, as cited in Dash, 1997, p. 39).

While the movies White Zombie (1932) and I Walked with a Zombie (1943) were both based on the literary imagination of the 1920s and 1930s, Live and Let Die and The Serpent and the Rainbow (1988) were based on the works of British novelist Ian Fleming and Canadian anthropologist, ethnobotanist and author Wade Davis respectively. Live and Let Die (1973) is archetypal of Fleming’s novels which, according to Italian semiotician Umberto Eco (1966), are usually reflective of a world divided into good and evil. It is a Manichean division that is located primarily in the context of the Cold War, a clash of ideologies between the former Soviet Union and the United States and its allies. In this context, evil is associated with communism especially since communism was viewed as a threat to capitalist principles such as free market and free enterprise, not to mention the hegemony of the United States.

But the Manichean division can also be understood in terms of a polarity between Britain and non-Anglo-Saxon societies. In Live and Let Die (1973), it is a polarity articulated through particular ways of representing African and Caribbean people. While there is no direct or explicit mention of Haiti in the book, the story is obviously constructed around a fixed portrayal of Haitian Vodou and cultural identity. Allusion to the French language, the depiction of the “cult voodoo shop” in New Orleans along with the character of Baron Samedi (Geoffrey Holder), the Haitian god of the dead, “master of the cemeteries,” depicted as vengeful and angry, are pertinent examples or indications of the surreptitious presence of Haiti in the story. Moreover, Mr. Big, the black American
gangster, the antagonist of the story, was born in Haiti and he “had been initiated into
Voodoo as a child.” Mr. Big

was known to have originated an underground Voodoo temple in Harlem and to have established a link between it and the main cult in Haiti. The rumour had started that he was the Zombie or living corpse of Baron Samedi himself, the dreaded Prince of Darkness, and he fostered the story so that now it was accepted through all the lower strata of the negro world. As a result, he commanded real fear, strongly substantiated by the immediate and often mysterious deaths of anyone who crossed him or disobeyed his orders. (Fleming, 1957, p. 21)

As a master gangster, Mr. Big is also depicted as the embodiment of Harlem society. This is not surprising since the racism and the dehumanizing discourse that have befallen blacks in Haiti have many parallels in the black population of the United States. Black Americans, themselves textualized as grotesque and primitive, felt a particular affinity with the dispossessed Haitians. In the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural and intellectual movement in the 1920s aimed at revitalizing black achievements, black Americans saw Haiti as exemplary for breaking the yoke of slavery and for its defiance of modern understandings of race. As we have seen,

The Haitian Revolution that began in 1791 dealt blows to the notion of innate European, “white” superiority, sending cracks through the colonial edifice that could never be repaired and that, over time, brought the whole enterprise crashing down. The events in Haiti effectively realized the lofty egalitarian ideals of the European Enlightenment: played out on the battlegrounds of colonial Saint-Domingue, the struggle between enslaving, domineering supremacism and liberating universalism demonstrated how notions of liberty, equality, and fraternity could not be applied exclusively but had to include race, nation, and individual. For this reason alone, Haiti is the single most important point of origin for the Caribbean and perhaps also for broader New World black communities. (Munro, 2010, p. 24)

Harlem solidarity with Haiti is evident in the works and observations of prominent contemporary intellectuals like John Durham, James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. Dubois and others who challenged U.S. occupation of Haiti and insisted on the country’s hard-
earned independence. W.E.B. Dubois, for instance, in a letter written to President
Woodrow Wilson in August 1915, stated “that he was ‘deeply disturbed over the situation
in Hayti’ and wished to be assured that the government had ‘no designs on the political
independence of the island and no desire to exploit it ruthlessly for the sake of selfish
business interest here’” (as cited in Dash, 1995, p. 49). In *Live and Let Die*, the character
of Mr. Big is used as a locus of representation for two societies, Haiti and Harlem, that
have been systematically marginalized. Mr. Big thus uses “voodoo” as understood in
popular discourse as an instrument to control and maintain the loyalty of his henchmen
(Chapman, 2007). One can readily see how the Harlem Renaissance, in its identification
with and legitimation of Haitian historical achievements has been made a casualty of
American sensationalism. This treatment of Haiti in *Live and Let Die* has escaped the
critical imagination of film historians, semioticians and scholars of Ian Fleming and his
novels (Del Buono, 1966; Chapman, 2007; Bennett, 1983).

Tony Bennett identifies a series of narrative codes in Fleming’s novels that
regulate how characters relate to each other. He differentiates between the ‘sexist code,’
the ‘imperialist code’ and the ‘phallic code.’ The ‘imperialist code’ is especially
pertinent to my analysis on the memory of the Haitian Revolution as it regulates the
relationships between Western societies and their discursive, aesthetic and semiotic
constructions of Haitian history. One important question, therefore, has to do with the
connection between the silencing of the Haitian Revolution and the maintenance of
Western hegemony and imperialism. From this perspective, to create a film on the
Haitian Revolution, the only successful overthrow of European imperial rule by African
slaves might be considered unpatriotic. We may recall for instance that nineteenth
century author and playwright Alphonse de Lamartine was accused of a certain lack of patriotism for celebrating the determination of the slaves of Saint-Domingue to rehumanize themselves.

Wade Davis’s novel *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1986) and the 1988 film that derived from it by Wes Craven, do not enjoy the status of popular cultural phenomenon of the Bond series. However, the film has reached hit status, grossing more than $20 million,23 (Wooley, 2011) and has come to signify Haiti most intimately in North American popular culture. When I speak of Haiti as my place of birth, the concepts of the underworld, witchcraft, or satanic rituals often come up. Around 1990, for instance, when I introduced myself as Haitian, one classmate made allusion to *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, which had just been released, as a source of intimate knowledge of the Caribbean country and its people. This may be connected to the taken-for-granted and irrational maxim that images speak for themselves or that a picture is worth a thousand words. Images are certainly louder than words. I had not seen the movie at that time. Moreover, it is a classic example of how, in the context of Hall’s (1980) theory of encoding/decoding, a viewer/interpreter will tend to gravitate toward a dominant or preferred reading of a text.

In his book, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (and also in *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of Haitian Zombie*) Wade Davis (1986) sought to discredit the perception of zombification as the sole result of witchcraft and sorcery. Davis traveled to Haiti in 1982 in search of that infamous “zombie drug” a sort of pharmacopeia which explains the supposedly psychotropic condition, which Seabrook has called zombification. Davis’ trip was financed by a major pharmaceutical company in New York City. Davis’ objective

23 In contrast, Wes Craven’s 1986 *Deadly Friend* had only grossed under $9 million (Wooley, 2011).
was to demystify some myths regarding zombies, the walking-dead, and the plant-based
drug associated with it. But while Davis claims to defend Haitian history and culture
from racism and misconception, the conclusion to his book does much to reproduce those
very pernicious orientalizing constructions of Haiti which he claims to demystify. “I
turned to a man pressed close beside me and saw his arm, riddled with needles and small
blades, and the blood running copiously over the scars of past years, staining some leaves
bound to his elbow before dripping from his skin to mine. The man was smiling. He too
was possessed, like the youth straddling the dying bull, or the dancers and the women
wallowing in the mud” (Davis, 1986, p. 316). In the words of Dayan (2000) Davis’s
book “remains the best recent example of what it means to confuse Vodoun with the
practice of sorcerers and secret societies” (Dayan, 2000, p. 33). Dayen compels us to
contextualize Davis’s book, maintaining that “we must keep the economics of the
situation in mind” (Dayan, 2000, p. 33).

Like the Bond series, the film version of The Serpent and the Rainbow is quite
graphically different from the book. In the filmic adaptation of Davis’s novel “we are
also confronted once again by a vast oversimplification of Haitian Vodou, a reductionism
to which cinema horror has now contributed for more than seventy years” (Cowan, 2008,
p. 163). Haiti is often understood in terms of fixed, simple binary oppositions. At the
level of encoding, Hall (1980) would view this as exemplifying the ways in which a
certain reading of the text is preferred. In keeping with modernist constructions of
Manichaeism, Craven added a number of graphic details designed to posit diametric
racialist differences between black and white civilizations. The character of the powerful
Peytraud (Zakes Mokae) constructed as the antagonist of the story or as opposition to the white heroic character of Dr. Dennis Alan (Bill Pullman) is a cogent example.

**Race, Space and the Cartography of Necromancy**

Haiti is presented in the films as a phantasmagoric, necromantic place where corpses are routinely stolen from their graves for purposes of economic exploitation, where the dead walk among the living, where caskets are burned on the streets, where ordinary citizens eat glass and fire without bleeding or burning, and where graveyards, tombstones as well as snakes, skulls, rotten and decomposed bodies and other signifiers of the underworld make up the infrastructure of the country. The encoding of this form of representation or characterization of Haiti is another pertinent example of modernity’s many inconsistencies. In the words of Doctor Bruner (Joseph Cawthorn), a Christian missionary in *White Zombie* (1932), “Haiti is full of nonsense and superstition. They’re always mixed up with a lot of mystery that’ll turn your hair grey. I’ve been a missionary here for 30 years and at times, I don’t know what to think.” Dr. Bruner goes on to explain later in the movie that he has “lived in these islands for a good many years and I’ve seen things with my eyes that made me think I was crazy. There are superstitions in Haiti that the natives brought here from Africa. Some of them can be traced back as far as ancient Egypt and beyond that yet in the countries that were old when Egypt was young.” Africa is implied here as the origin or birthplace of evil. In the context of the supposed darkness of the Haitian underworld, Dr. Bruner is depicted as the bearer of knowledge and reason, the ultimate symbol of enlightenment, rationalism and positivism.

In *White Zombie* (1932), the first of the zombie genre, Madeline Short (Madge Bellamy), a young white American woman arrives in Haiti in order to reunite with and
marry her fiancé, Neil Parker (John Harron). The couple intends to stay at the mansion of a middle-aged wealthy plantation owner, Charles Beaumont (Robert Frazer). They are driven in a carriage by a nameless black man (Clarence Muse). The film opens with what appears to be a ceremony by a group of chanting Haitians in the middle of the road. Some of the participants are equipped with shovels while others have pikes. They dig and shovel as they sing and drum much to the bewilderment of Neil and Madeline:

Neil:   Looks like a burial
Madeline:  In the road? ... Driver, what is it?
Driver:  It’s a funeral, m’amselle. They’re afraid of the men who steal dead bodies, so they dig the graves in the middle of the road where people pass all the time.

In *The Magic Island*, William Seabrook asks the questions “Why do they bury them so often in their own yards, close to the doorway? Why, so often, do you see a tomb or grave set close beside a busy road or footpath where people are always passing? It is to the poor unhappy dead such protection as we can” (Seabrook, 1929, p. 94). Those words spoken by Polynice, Seabrook’s Haitian informant, show the influence of *The Magic Island* in the shaping of *White Zombie*. This scene, one may agree, is meant to establish some basic understanding of what Euro-American civilization has come to understand as Haitian “zombiism.” Neil describes it rather sarcastically as “a cheerful introduction…to our West Indies.”

In the next scene, the couple meets the mysterious Murder Legendre (Bela Lugosi), a powerful man with diabolical abilities. Murder, as the name suggests, is depicted as the embodiment of evil and cruelty. His steps are measured, his moves

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24 Bela Lugosi is best known for his role in *Dracula.*
calculated; he has hypnotic eyes; he wears a hat and a long cape and he is escorted by men understood to be zombies,\textsuperscript{25} the living dead, “people whose decease has been duly recorded, and whose burial has been witnessed, but who are found a few years later living with a \textit{boko} in a state of idiocy” (Métraux, 1972, p. 281). Seabrook’s informant defines the zombie as follows:

It seems…that while the \textit{zombie} came from the grave, it was neither a ghost, nor yet a person who had been raised like Lazarus from the dead. The \textit{zombie}, they say, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life—it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive. People who have the power to do this go to a fresh grave, dig up the body before it has had time to rot, galvanize it into movement, and then make of it a servant or slave, occasionally for the commission of some crime, more often simply as a drudge around the habitation or the farm, setting it dull heavy tasks, and beating it like a beast if it slackens. (Seabrook, 1929, p. 93)

It should be noted that Murder’s zombies were men who had crossed him over the course of their lives. As living corpses, they are now his faithful servants. The sight of those zombies frightened the driver and prompted him to drive away frantically. “Why did you drive like that, you fool?” Neil asks, “We might have been killed.” “Worse than that, monsieur,” the driver replies, “we might have been caught.” Alluding to the zombies, the driver adds: “They are not men monsieur. They are dead bodies...yes monsieur, zombies, the living dead, corpses taken from their graves who are made to work the sugar mills and fields at night.” The character of the unnamed native Haitian driver with his bulging eyes, performed by black American actor Clarence Muse, is intended to conjure some credibility not just for the idea but for the very meaning of the term “zombie.”

\textsuperscript{25} The term \textit{zombie} first came into use with the publication of \textit{The Magic Island} in 1929. The figure and idea of the zombie became increasingly amusing so that by the middle of the twentieth century, the zombie theme had become part of the American cultural fabric. In addition to the zombie movies of the 1930s, there was also the opening of the Zombie Restaurant in the imposing 1940 World Fair in New York City with direct reference to the “South Sea” (Renda, 2001).
It is important to point out that Madeline is also coveted by Charles Beaumont, who seeks Murder’s assistance in winning the heart and attention of the young lady. For Murder, this can be achieved only through the zombification of Madeline, which entails killing her with a potion or powder, burying her and then bringing her back to life as a zombie. Beaumont resists at first, but eventually poisons and kills Madeline the night of her wedding. Murder Legendre and his zombies, along with Charles Beaumont revive Madeline shortly thereafter and return to Legendre’s castle where Beaumont himself is made into a zombie.

A word must be said concerning the spatial arrangement and composition of the opening scenes in the movie. First, the dim light, especially during the “burial,” is intended to convey a sense of mystery and eeriness. Second, the first two scenes are joined together through a fade displaying a set of dreadful, hypnotizing eyes, presumably those of Murder Legendre. Third, following the conversation with Murder, the driver speeds by a set of tombstones and crosses which are to signify Haiti’s natural landscape. Finally, there are the sounds of barking dogs as Doctor Bruner enters the scene. These spatial arrangements, which include filmic or cinematographic codes and conventions such as the intricacies of camera shots, lighting, sounds and suspense, speak to the kinds of sequences in *White Zombie* and the other films considered in this thesis that provide a context for the Haitian cultural landscape. Concerned with “what follows what,” they are syntagmatic arrangements that point to the linear narrative structure of the film. These spatial arrangements, somewhat histrionic in nature, should be seen as a deliberate effort by the makers of the films to prepare the audience for a projection of Haiti that is

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26 Umberto Eco (1972) distinguishes between *filmic codes* and *cinematic codes*. Filmic codes refer to the rules which govern how a film tells a story while cinematic codes have to do with the reproducibility of reality by cinematographic apparatuses.
connected to gore, witchcraft and phantasm, the “land of the living dead,” the underworld. They are encoded as part of a systematic depiction of Haiti that works as an artifact for the reproduction and preservation of particular understandings of modernity.

Perhaps the clearest and most visually striking and necromantic representation of Haiti’s landscape is Wes Craven’s *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988). This film recounts the story of Dennis Alan, a fearless white American anthropologist who goes to Haiti in order to investigate the alleged process of ‘zombification’ in Haiti’s Vodou religion and the secret powder, the so-called “zombie drug” used in that process. Dr. Marielle Duchamps (Cathy Tyson), a Haitian psychiatrist who runs a local clinic for the underprivileged, is Alan’s main contact in Haiti. Dr. Duchamps and Dr. Alan go on a religious pilgrimage along with thousands of Haitian “voodoo” adherents. They walk toward the foot of Haiti’s historic palace of Sans-Souci, singing and humming and holding candles. As the pilgrims lie on the ground forming a carpet of bodies before the Sans-Soucis, a snake slowly crawls on and frightens Dr. Alan. Upon waking up Dr. Alan eventually meets Christophe (Conrad Roberts), a zombified schoolteacher, and radical activist, the one who fought for justice and liberty for the Haitian people against the grip of the Duvalier regime. Christophe is accompanied by a veiled bride who slowly approaches the young researcher. Curious, Dr. Alan lifts the veil of the bride only to discover a desiccated corpse underneath. He is frightened when a giant snake flies out of the corpse’s mouth and bites him on the neck.

This is one example of the type of representation made of the Haitian landscape in *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988). This example is significant to my analysis especially since it highlights the Palace of Sans-Souci, a palace built by King Henry
Christophe of Haiti to protect the newly formed republic of Haiti against those empires that wished to reinstate slavery in the country. I discuss Henry Christophe and the palace of Sans-Soucis later in this project. Another example of this kind of representation in *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988) can be seen when Dr. Alan awakes to find an enflamed boat carrying the same dead bride sailing toward him. His room transforms into a coffin, which immediately fills up with blood. In *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), even the most artificial scenes of the film still carry with them an aura of unyielding realism. In the words of Bob Morrish, “From the film’s opening moments, Craven begins to blur the line between hallucination and the perceived real world, weaving lush Haitian landscape, shadowy darkness and dazzling special effects into a tapestry of alternative realities” (as cited in Muir, 1998, p. 131). We are reminded of a point made by Homi Bhabha (1994, p. 95) that colonial discourse, in “its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness,” is concerned with the construction of the colonized as racial or cultural degenerates.

In 1943, another zombie movie, *I Walked with a Zombie*, appeared, displaying an equally eerie representation of the Caribbean region, a place where “there’s no beauty… only death and decay…. Everything good dies here; even the stars.” *I Walked with a Zombie* has been influenced by *White Zombie*. It is also based on a story called “I Met a Zombie” written by Inez Wallace in *American Weekly* and on Charlotte Bronte’s 1847 *Jane Eyre*. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha, a young woman locked in a room in which her uncle had died believes she is haunted by her uncle’s ghost. As indicated on the back

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27 *Stylus Magazine* ranked *I Walked with a Zombie* the fifth best Zombie movie of all time (listofthebest.com).
28 While Wallace’s “I Met a Zombie” was an anecdotal account of Vodou in the Caribbean, her story has no direct relation to the plot of *I Walked with a Zombie*. 
cover of the film, “take the gothic romance of *Jane Eyre*, reset it in the West Indies, add the direction of Jacques Tourneur…and the overriding terror of the living dead and you have *I Walked with a Zombie*.” One has reasons to believe that *I Walked with a Zombie* is set in a Haitian context given the use of Haitian Creole in the film and given the many allusions to such Vodou gods as Legba, Carrefour and Damballa. In fact Producer Val Lewton had “asked his writers…to do research on Haitian voodoo practices.”

The movie tells the story of Betsy Connell (Frances Dee), a Canadian nurse trained at Memorial Hospital in Ottawa, who comes to the island of Saint Sebastian in the West Indies to care for Jessica (Christine Gordon), a white woman who has been transformed into a zombie. There are mentions in the film that Jessica might simply be a “mental patient.” It is even suggested that she be sent to a mental institute in the Virgin Islands. Betsy takes Jessica to a Vodou ceremony in search of a cure. At the ceremony, she discovers that Jessica’s mother-in-law, a white Christian missionary, Mrs. Holland (Edith Barrett) who secretly practices Vodou, is actually responsible for the zombification of her daughter-in-law because the latter threatened to run away with her husband’s half brother, Wesley Rand (James Ellison). Betsy falls in love with Jessica’s husband, Paul Holland (Tom Conway), creating a love triangle which eventually ends with the death and zombification of Jessica. *I Walked with a Zombie* is described in Phil Hardy’s *Horror* (1985) as “a haunting nightmarishly beautiful tone poem of voodoo drums, dark moonlight and somnambulist ladies in floating white, brought to perfection by Tourneur’s direction, Hunt’s camerawork and Wray’s dialogue” (Hardy, 1985, p. 82).
Race, religion and modernity

The issue of race is, without question, central to the development of White Zombie, I Walked with a Zombie, The Serpent and the Rainbow and Live and Let Die. The films skillfully use Haiti as a backdrop for the reproduction and re-articulation of modernist notions of racial identity. Haiti thus functions as a site of racialization. In White Zombie and I Walked with a Zombie the concept of “whiteness” itself takes an interesting turn especially since both films feature primarily white characters. “Whiteness” should be understood as a modern biologic social construct that is usually associated with reason, order and civility (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez & Chennault, 1998). The makers of White Zombie and I Walked with a Zombie as Goldberg (1993) would argue, seem to imply that race as a marker of classification is morally irrelevant. One may even get the impression that the hierarchy of races, as constructed in the modernist project, has been inverted, making blackness or Haitianess and the Vodou religion that goes with it, the locus of desire or fantasy, or that whiteness has been brought to the level of decadence, at least temporarily. Yet, at the same time, one may notice an obvious correlation in the films between Haiti and its black population and sorcery, demonic spells, necromancy or religious degeneracy. This is one way to articulate the black/white Manichean opposition that has been so endemic to the age of modernity, in the articulation of the human, since the sixteenth century. In this context, the “evil” of Vodou is intimately connected to modern understandings of what it means to be Haitian. In fact, the very title White Zombie along with the submissive relationships of the white women in both films to Haitian Vodou is intended to be highly provocative and deeply problematic. Gelder (2000) calls it “strikingly aberrant.” “Whiteness” as a signifier of racial identity has been displaced from its common sense status of moral
referent, purity, rationality and innocence. “The white zombie is an unnatural figure,” says Gelder, writing about Jessica in *I Walked with a Zombie* “because she is both white and yet has surrendered to voodoo to the extent that it seems to possess her completely” (Gelder, 2000, p. 96).

However Edward and Victor Halperin and Jacques Tourneur may have imagined the question of race in their respective productions, race continues to matter as an underlying principle of identity and both films present an understanding of race, especially in the Haitian context, that is both oppositional and antagonistic. Here, the politics of race is embedded in the white characters of Madeline in *White Zombie* and Jessica in *I Walked with a Zombie* as they operate on a phantasmagoric tropical island. In *I Walked with a Zombie*, Jessica finds comfort in the presence of Betsy Connell, a good-hearted white woman who is depicted as the embodiment of beauty and virtue and a representative, along with Dr. Maxwell (James Bell), of modern medicine and scientific rationality. Betsy and the doctor are unable to cure Jessica Holland. For the doctor, Jessica’s condition is the result of an incurable tropical fever, which affected her spinal cord. In her Hippocratic effort to find a cure for Jessica, the zombie, Betsey takes her to a Vodou ceremony. On the way to the ceremony, Betsy and Jessica meet Carrefour (Darby Jones), a shirtless black man, a zombie himself. Carrefour, as the name implies, is “the lord of the crossroads.” He is the guardian of the entrance to the hounfort, which is located rather surreptitiously at the heart of a cane field. In Vodou, Carrefour is a part of the complex Petro divine pantheon born out of the fury of modern slavery.

In *I Walked with a Zombie* Carrefour’s image is constructed in diametric opposition to that of Betsy. It is an image that feeds into Western conceptions of
blackness in terms of difference or otherness. To begin, “a slightly out of focus close-up of Carrefour efficiently conveys the thought that he is not human” (Bowman, 2003, p. 77). Carrefour is imposing; he has bulging eyes, which do not blink; he does not speak; and he shows no emotion. Images from this scene, along with Carrefour’s character itself, work to reinforce the racist stereotypes about black Haitian identity as deformed, spooky, creepy and mysterious. They form a seemingly logical sequence, a linear narrative that is both orderly and intelligible. It is a narrative that is produced or encoded into the film and that carries particular meanings concerning Haiti.

Guy Hamilton’s (1973) *Live and Let Die* and Wes Craven’s (1988) *The Serpent and the Rainbow* are other visual representations of the Manichean classification of race where blackness is readily understood as the epitome of evil and where the white hero brings about law, order and civility, defeating evil, thus reinforcing the supremacy of whiteness. *Live and Let Die*, especially, lends itself to the hugely successful theme of “blaxploitation” films of the 1970s. These films usually present an image of black men and their surroundings that emphasizes sirens, cop cruisers and criminal behaviour. In these films “revolution equals criminality, militants sell dope and women, the only triumph possible is in a throwdown with Mafia second-stringers and bad-apple cops on the take, the system is eternal” (Bambara, 1993, p. 118). The films chosen for my research are consistent with this agenda. *Live and Let Die* takes an approach similar to *I Walked with Zombie* in its unidentified, yet not so subtle stereotypical representations of Haiti and its culture.

In *Live and Let Die*, James Bond (Roger Moore) travels to New York City in order to meet Felix Leiter (David Hedison), a CIA agent who will assist him in
investigating the disappearance of three other agents who have been killed by Dr. Kananga (Yaphet Kotto), the Prime Minister of San Monique, a fictitious island in the Caribbean region. As noted above, the story is constructed around a fixed portrayal of Haitian Vodou and culture, a set of ‘textualizing’ characteristics that constitutes the essence of Haitian identity. Mr. Big, the black American gangster, and Dr. Kananga are one and the same in the film. Prime Minister Kananga is a drug lord who owns a heroin operation in New Orleans. His plan is to make heroin readily available in the United States, a plan which would not only create a nation of heroin addicts, but more importantly put his competition out of business. All of Kananga’s accomplices are black, except for Solitaire (Jane Seymour), a young white woman who, in opposition to the blacks in the film, “can divine the truth in people” (Chapman, 2007, p. 137). She is Kananga’s slave and he dominates her through fear and terror. Solitaire eventually shifts allegiance as she falls in love with James Bond, the handsome, suave, courageous, masculine, patriotic, persevering, just and honest British special agent who defends Western values against the depraved, devilish or criminal activities of Kananga’s Caribbean. Kananga’s henchmen include, but are not limited to, master criminals like Tee-Hee (Julius Harris), the imposing smiling black man with a metallic hand, the quiet Whisper (Earl Jolly Brown), and Baron Samedi (Geoffrey Holder), one of Vodou’s complex pantheon of gods, but presented in the film as a fixed, bloodthirsty evildoer. While the character of Baron Samedi appears irrelevant to the development of the film, it may be connected to a deliberate effort from Hollywood to insinuate the underworld of Haiti and the irrationality of Vodou as understood in popular Western imagination. Baron Samedi, it should be noted, also appears in Wes Craven’s The Serpent and the
Rainbow. Baron Samedi is killed in *Live and Let Die* when the white hero throws him into a coffin full of snakes. Bond also eventually kills Dr. Kananga before he can consolidate the trafficking and distribution of heroin in the United States. Blacks in this context are used collectively as a backdrop to posit the innocence, morality and heroism of the white characters in the film. With respect to these binary representations of race in *Live and Let Die*, the question “Why are all the blacks either stupid brutes or primitives deep into the occult of voodooism?” posed by Richard Schickel in a 1973 entry of *Time* magazine is quite pertinent to my analysis of the memory of Haitian history and culture in cinematic production.

The reproduction of the Manichean relationship between black and white in Western civilization is also evident in Wes Craven’s *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1987). In *The Serpent and the Rainbow* Dr. Duchamps is presented to us as the embodiment of beauty and elegance. With a Western education in medicine, an impeccable command of the English language and with a particularly light skin tone, Duchamps is closer than any other Haitian in the film to Western civility and rationality. And while she is a believer and practitioner of Vodou and while her father was a houngan or Vodou leader, Duchamps is depicted as an exception to the rule of Haitian brute and grotesqueness. She is a major contradiction from the perspective of Dr. Alan who “still [has] a hard time putting you [Duchamps] and all that stuff together.” Mrs Holland of *I Walked with a Zombie* makes a similar comment to Betzy Connell, the white nurse who asks if she believes Vodou has the power to cure a sick person. For Dr. Alan, Dr. Duchamps, a rational, competent psychiatrist, routinely leaves the rationality of Western medicine to adhere to a static belief that has no moral or scientific justification. This is
connected of course to an oversimplification of Haitian religious practices, an oversimplification that is rooted in the reproduction of modernist notions of Haitian culture and identity as spooky and hellish.

Captain Dargent Peytraud is the antagonist of the story. He is a gory “voodoo” leader and a chief of the despotic *Tontons Macoutes*, a para-military establishment in the Haiti of François Duvalier and his son Jean Claude who ruled the country to the brink of destruction from 1957 until 1971 and 1986 respectively. Peytraud (pronounced /petro/), whose name is homonymic with the fiery, revolutionary *Petro loa*, is both powerful and dangerous. His henchmen are big, bald and black, predictable descriptors for black monstrosity and brute strength, “big black menacing African bucks,” similar to the ones depicted in Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, a film to mobilize fear among American audiences concerning American blacks in the United States while sustaining the race-based character of capitalism. Like Mr. Big in *Live and Let Die*, Peytraud and the *Tontons Macoutes* use “voodoo” in order to intimidate those considered to be enemies of the state. Schoolteacher Christophe Juran (Conrad Roberts), for instance, has been poisoned by Peytraud in 1978 because of his activism and his attachment to the ideals of justice and democracy in Haiti. It is important to point out that although Christophe is pronounced dead by a white French missionary doctor (William Newman), he is not quite dead. He becomes a zombie, or living dead. A tear even rolls down his right cheek as he is lowered into the ground. As a zombie, Christophe is depicted as disheveled. His clothes are ripped, his skin greasy and although he can speak and remember the past, he appears oblivious to his current reality. Implicit in this representation are Christophe’s particularly unkempt dreadlocks. While according to McAlister (2002) long locks can be
associated with freedom from a Duvalier regime that punished men for having long hair, Christophe’s locks, like those of Cécile Fatiman of the French miniseries, *Toussaint Louverture*, seem to signify his dissolution into an underworld. Captain Peytraud also “kills” and psychologically torments Dennis Alan, the young American researcher. Dug up by Christophe, the “zombie,” Dr. Alan manages to confront and defeat the “devilish black man” by releasing and freeing the souls of those people Peytraud had captured. Captain Peytraud is thus presented as cruel and wicked and the symbol of murder and destruction. He “is the man to watch.”

The racist undertones in *Live and Let Die* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* are quite evident. They have been constructed in a way that can only invoke sympathy and admiration from the viewer, whether black or white, for the white heroes and hatred as well as disdain for the black antagonists. These films thus engage the viewer using emotions, feelings and sensory manipulations. The narrative structures of the films reveal much about how certain forms of representations of Haiti are intended to obscure and therefore disavow the socio-cultural and historical richness of the country. The deliberate effort to obscure and disavow is a function of haunting and it operates to reproduce ideology. One fundamental question for me has to do with the impact of films like *The Serpent and the Rainbow* or *Live and Let Die* on the memory of Haiti. How do they shape the memory of slavery and revolution in Saint-Domingue?

In discussing the concept of race it may be interesting to note that both *The Serpent and the Rainbow* and *Live and Let Die* make allusion to the theme of miscegenation, a theme which has occupied white imagination since the early days of the modern era. Eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, in his elaboration
of race, saw miscegenation as unnatural and argued that it was degrading to the white race and that it did not necessarily elevate darker races (Sutherland, 2008). Victor Hugo takes up the issue of miscegenation in *Bug-Jargal* (1826) through the characters of D’Auverney, the young man who arrives from France to marry his uncle’s daughter, Marie, on a Saint-Domingue plantation, and Bug-Jargal, the black slave who also falls in love with Marie. As we have seen, Bug-Jargal is eventually executed, Marie dies at the hands of the revolutionaries while D’Auverney dies heroically in France, leaving the question of miscegenation unresolved. It is worth remembering that the novel and the character of Bug-Jargal were likely inspired by the real-life personality of Toussaint Louverture. Moreover, by the provisions of the Jim Crow laws in the United States both cohabitation and interracial marriage were considered unlawful. This preoccupation with the theme of miscegenation is also evident in D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*.

White anxiety concerning miscegenation, in this case the amorous bond between a black man and a white woman, is often connected to the racist discourse of protecting the innocent white woman from the depraved sexual violence of the oversexualized black male. This anxiety is also connected to the maintenance and preservation of the ‘purity’ of whiteness as constructed in modernity. This is implicit in a deeply conservative identity politics that not only blames non-whites for all social ills but invariably deploys ideologies such as work ethics and family values (Kincheloe et al, 1998). It lends itself, moreover, to the understanding of whiteness as rational, disciplined and orderly while blackness epitomizes irrationality, promiscuity, and an intrinsic lack of morality and self control. It is a “rationalistic modernist whiteness” say Kincheloe et al. that “is shaped and confirmed by its close association with science. As a scientific construct, whiteness
privileges mind over body; intellectual over experiential ways of knowing; and mental abstractions over passion, bodily sensations, and tactile understanding” (Kincheloe et al., 1998, p. 5). In the context of my discussion on Haiti and its history, “The barbarity of native men becomes a major justification for imperial rule, impels colonial policy, and shapes and directs colonial confrontations” (Loomba, 1998, p. 154). One important function of postcolonial studies and, more recently, whiteness studies, is to examine whiteness as a social and cultural construct, not as a scientific fact. Whiteness studies emerged in the 1990s and aimed to destabilize whiteness from its position of invisibility and inordinate preeminence and to expose the corresponding racialization and bastardization of the colonized other (See Roediger, 2007).

In Live and Let Die, the power of Solitaire to predict the future is dependent upon her virginity. She is informed by Dr. Kananga that she will lose it whenever he decides to take it away. The theme of miscegenation is evident in Live and Let Die and, as Chapman (2007) points out, there is a deeply racist undertone with respect to how it is treated in the film. According to Chapman, Solitaire gets ‘saved’ by losing her virginity to James Bond, the white hero, and not to the black villain, Kananga. Chapman’s observation is evocative of a point made by Frantz Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks that “For the majority of white men the Negro represents the sexual instinct (in its raw state). The Negro is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions” (Fanon, 1967, p. 177). Fanon’s argument is about the assumptions from white society concerning the black man’s alleged sexual appetite, prowess and superiority, which can be translated into modernist notions of primitiveness or inferiority of the black man. This scene from Live and Let Die speaks to that image of the black man, an image articulated
through the character of Haitian-born Mr. Big or Dr. Kananga and his complicated relationships with Solitaire and the “Great White Hope,” as movie critic Richard Schickel called James Bond in an article published in 1973. One may recall that Napoleon Bonaparte made it explicit through General Leclerc, at the time of the 1802 expedition, that white women would be deported from Saint-Domingue if they had sexual relations with the blacks. “The fear is that such contact will ‘people the isle with Calibans’\textsuperscript{29} (to use the words of Shakespeare’s savage when he is charged with attempting to rape Prospero’s daughter Miranda). The spectre of miscegenation most graphically brings together anxieties about female sexuality and racial purity, and, as colonial contacts widen and deepen, it increasingly haunts European and Euro-American culture” (Loomba, 1998, p. 158). Napoleon’s order should be understood, of course, as part of the Consul’s vision of reinstating slavery and the \textit{Code noir} in Saint-Domingue, a process which not only required the (re)affirmation of white supremacy in the colony but which also required the division of Saint-Domingue society across class and racial lines (Sala-Molins, 1987). One purpose of the Haitian Revolution was to defy and overthrow that division. One can readily see how the movie \textit{Live and Let Die} works to reproduce and preserve the modernist discourse which the Haitian Revolution sought to dismantle.

While sex between Kananga and Solitaire is forbidden, the theme of sexual liaisons between white men and black women is explored in \textit{Live and Let Die} as in \textit{The Serpent and the Rainbow} in a way that warrants the kind of question posed by Richard Schickel: “why is miscegenation so often used as a turn-on?” Lutz and Collins (1993), in their research on the attitude and reaction of men toward “nude” images of non-Western

\textsuperscript{29} Caliban is a Shakespearean character inspired by the Caribbean and known for his savagery, grossness and his fantasy of raping Miranda. He is diametrically opposed to Ariel, the image of purity and the ethereal.
women in *National Geographic*, concluded that “When white men tell these stories about covertly viewing black women’s bodies, they are clearly not recounting a story about a simple encounter with the facts of human anatomy or customs; they are (perhaps unsurprisingly) confessing a highly charged—but socially approved—experience in this dangerous territory of projected, forbidden desire and guilt” (Lutz & Collins, 1993, p. 172). This is not to suggest, however, that such stories are limited to white males, say Lutz and Collins, as they point to a joke made by comedian Richard Pryor that *National Geographic* is the black man’s *Playboy*.

The Bond of *Live and Let Die* is permitted to connect with a black woman, Rosie Carver (Gloria Hendry). Carver, who identifies herself as “Mrs. Bond” in order to have access to the special agent, turns out to be a spy working for Dr. Kananga. She is depicted in the words of James Bond himself, as “a lousy agent but the compensations [which I take to mean her female black body] speak for themselves.” She is also described by Bond as “a deceitful, perverse woman, a liar, a cheat...” This is in line with a point made by Mayotte Capecia in her 1948 *Je suis martiniquaise* that “a woman of color is never altogether respectable in a white man’s eyes. Even when he loves her” (Capecia, 1948, as cited in Fanon, 1967, p. 42).  

Carver is eventually killed, albeit mistakenly by Kananga’s henchmen, shortly after making love to the British agent.  

It may be interesting to point out that while Solitaire’s role had been planned for a black woman, United Artists “insisted on a white

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30 Using the experience of Mayotte Capecia Frantz Fanon discusses “the relations between the woman of color and the European.” One consequence of these relations, according to Fanon, is an element of self hatred, a dislocation of the self from the self that is attributable to a certain perception even from the colonized subject, of the superiority of whiteness. “I loved him because he had blue eyes, blond hair, and a light skin” says Capecia (Capecia, 1948, as cited in Fanon, 1967, p. 43).

31 In Apartheid South Africa, the love scene between Bond and Rosie Carver had been deleted by the South African censor.
leading lady.” Conversely, the role of “CIA agent, Rosie Carver, was written as ‘a beautiful, dazed white girl.’ The part went to Gloria Hendry” (Barnes & Hearn, 2002, p. 107).

In *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, Dr. Alan falls in love with Dr. Duchamps and the couple is shown making passionate love inside a concealed mountain cave. This scene is particularly erotic. The episode begins with Dr. Alan kissing Dr. Duchamps on the ground in the cave. Dr. Duchamps decisively flips over shifting the locus of ‘control.’ She sits on Dr. Alan; she kisses him; she caresses him; she lowers the upper section of her dress exposing her breasts; and she gyrates with conspicuous energy. The camera, which focuses almost exclusively on Dr. Duchamps is intended to highlight the intrigue and exuberance of her sexuality. This is evident especially with the use of a close-up, a cinematic technique used “for expressive and dramatic purposes” (Prince, 1997). The close-up also helps to emphasize the importance of Duchamps’s character to the narrative structure of the film. This is adumbrative of how Western cinematic narratives reproduce the assumptions, stereotypes and general aesthetic vocabulary of Orientalism. In this instance it is through “titillating viewers with the thrills of unbridled passion, miscegenation, and wild adventure in a raw and natural setting” (Bernstein, 1997, p. 3). What is more, Dr. Duchamps is shown to be in a trance-like state during that sexual experience. The ideological aspect of this scene along with the many meanings which it communicates to the audience with respect to black female sexuality is quite evident. It follows the portrayal by eighteenth century French academic Moreau de Saint-Méry (1985) of black or mixed-race women in Saint-Domingue as sexual degenerates. The character of Dr. Duchamps operates discursively and ideologically as
an object of sexual fetish. At a minimum she provides some visual pleasure to the colonial gaze. At issue, of course, is how the audience receives, and interprets or decodes the scene since it is through the process of decoding that the encoded message generates its meaning. Audiences do not generally pay attention to technical methods or production strategies but they actively consume the content as it is produced and presented discursively. They usually decode what Hall calls preferred readings or preferred meanings.

There is an obvious diametric difference in the depiction of black and white female sexuality in the films *Live and Let Die* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* where the viewer is caught between the oversexualized black woman and the sexual morality of the white woman. While the white Solitaire of *Live and Let Die* is modest, naïve and virginal, the black women in both films are presented and ‘textualized’ in ways which corroborate Western understanding of black female sexuality as exuberant, explicit and exhibitionist. In keeping with the meaning of representation that is concerned with designating or depicting, Dr Duchamps is presented to us as emblematic of Western knowledge of black women. In light of the connection made between skin color and evolutionary progress, this is a sign that black women have not yet reached the level of modesty and other characteristics of civilization (Lutz and Collins, 1993). “Colored women” says Haraway (1989), “densely code sex, animal, dark, dangerous, fecund, pathological” (Haraway, 1989 p. 154). It is particularly significant that this scene coincides with the religious pilgrimage, the most gory and most frightening scene in the movie. It is also significant that it occurs at the foot of the Palace of Sans-Soucis, one important icon of Haitian revolutionary efforts and independence.
Henry Christophe: A Degenerate Revolutionary

Implicit in the American occupation of Haiti in 1915-1934 was a new form of fascination by authors, journalists and playwrights with stories of “black kings and emperors” (Renda, 2001). Eugene O’Neill, for instance, drew on the history of Henry Christophe to write The Emperor Jones, a play which critically exposed the exploitative characteristics of colonialism while at the same time reproducing an image of Haiti that is located in notions of exotic primitivism. Former lieutenant A. J. Burks, who had lived a short time in Haiti, is another example especially in light of his depiction of Henry Christophe as “‘the greatest monster in all history’” (as cited in Renda, 2001, p. 216). Burks later acquired the title “speed merchant of the pulps” because of the enviable profit made from the thirty-five books and well over 1,200 stories he wrote on Haiti and its revolutionaries. Renda (2001) views this type of fascination with Haiti as part of a systematic effort to blur the power relations that enable imperialism to survive and that help to shape and fix Haiti into a commodity that can be sold in the United States. The achievements of Haitian revolutionaries like Henry Christophe have been sacrificed and a new image has been constructed for the purpose of commodification. As Renda (2001) frames it, “Americans transformed the very idea of Haiti into an object of value in capitalist exchange” (Renda, 2001, p. 216).

White Zombie’s Murder Legendre is presented as the classic signifier of evil and cruelty. He is reminiscent of Mephistopheles, a demonic creature found in Medieval German mythology. In fact, as Gary Rhodes (2001) tells us, Lugosi’s makeup and hair resemble those of actor Feodor Chaliapin in his rendition of Mephistopheles in a stage adaptation of Goethe’s Faust and those of Emil Jannings in F. W. Murnau’s 1926 film version of the same story. Christians would call Murder Legendre the antichrist. For
Charles Beaumont in *White Zombie*, he is simply “You Devil!” Murder Legendre is surrounded by a number of zombies, men who had crossed him in real life. They are now his “servants” as he calls them, his bodyguards. “In their lifetime they were my enemies” he says. They include, but are not limited to, “the witch doctor, once my master…Richard, once minister of the interior; Gardia, brigand chief; Marquise, captain of Gendarmerie; and this, this is Chauvin, high executioner…who almost executed me.” “I took them” he continues, and signaling to Madeline’s tomb he adds: “just as we will take this one.” It is those soulless men who assist Murder in the process of bringing Madeline back to the world of the living. The various titles of Murder’s zombies validate him as a powerful, high-functioning political figure in his community. His pride and anger, along with his determination for revenge are especially evident in this scene.

Murder Legendre lives in a rich, extravagant castle located in a remote area, atop a mountain, overlooking the countryside. His castle, one may argue, is evocative of Henry Christophe’s palace of Sans-Souci or perhaps the Citadelle Laferrière in Milot, Haiti and may serve as evidence that Murder Legendre is intended to represent Henry Christophe of the Haitian Revolution.

Similarly, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* makes a representation of Henry Christophe and Sans-Souci that posits a connection to demonic rituals and satanic spells. We have seen, for instance, how a snake slithers on Dr. Alan’s body at the time of the pilgrimage and how Christophe, the zombie, escorts the desiccated corpse under the veil in the front yard of Sans-Souci. The following questions are important in this context: Why is the palace of Sans-Souci depicted so conspicuously at a pilgrimage which

32 The structural integrity of the palace of Sans-Souci was greatly affected by the earthquake of 1842 in northern Haiti.
highlights the nightmarish experiences of the underworld? Why does Christophe appear in this scene concomitantly with the palace while he is escorted by the very embodiment of fright and gore? Why has the zombie been named Christophe? The correlation between this scene and the real life Henry Christophe and his palace is manifest and should be seen as part of a calculated effort by modern Western civilization to draw a picture of Haiti that legitimates the relegation of its history. It speaks to a reality haunted by the gruesome experience of racial slavery.

For the purpose of my discussion of representation of the memory of the Haitian Revolution, I shall discuss the relevance of Henry Christophe in the achievement of freedom in Saint-Domingue, along with the meaning of Sans-Souci not only to the defense of the new republic but also to the construction of Haitian national identity. This will help to understand the many ways in which Haiti and its revolution continue to be pushed to the margins of historical consciousness. The questions I am trying to tackle in this project are connected to the structures of power that operate to dismiss Haiti directly through outright silencing or indirectly through ridicule and mockery.

As we have seen, Henry Christophe was among Toussaint Louverture’s chief military officers. Like Louverture, his world was significantly different from that of most blacks living and working on the plantations (Dubois, 2012). Born of free parents in 1767 on the island of Grenada, Christophe belonged to the relatively privileged segment of black Saint-Domingue society. He became king of the northern part of Haiti in 1807 and soon built an impressive palace called Sans-Souci among about 300 castles. He also built the fortress of La Citadelle Laferrière atop a mountain not far from Sans-Souci. The Citadelle, in particular, the largest structure of the Americas, packed with ammunition,
was built as a response to the threat of an invasion from foreign powers that wished to restore slavery and the plantation system in Haiti. Let it not be forgotten that slavery was reinstated in the French colony of Guadeloupe in 1802. The Citadelle and the palace of Sans-Souci were impressive especially because of their size. Sans-Souci itself was surrounded by gardens, waterworks and an artificial spring. We see here an obvious parallel between *White Zombie*‘s Murder Legendre and Haiti’s Henry Christophe and his castles. This parallel may be linked to the fact that Henry Christophe was actually a ruthless king and that the palace was costly both in currency and in human lives. Many died during the construction of the Sans-Souci. What is not made evident in *White Zombie*, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, or in any filmic production, however, is the fact that the palace of Sans-Souci was built by a class of people who had been slaves only a generation before, for a black king determined “to provide the world with irrefutable evidence of the ability of the black race” (Trouillot, 1995, p. 35). The palace of Sans-Souci is erected on an old French plantation that Christophe took over during the Haitian Revolution (Trouillot, 1995). Indeed, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) tells us, the palace impressed such personalities as nineteenth century German geographer, Karl Ritter, one of the fathers of modern geography, who found Sans-Souci to be “very impressive to the eye,” visiting American physician who spoke of Sans-Souci’s “reputation of having been one of the most magnificent edifices of the West Indies”’ and John Candler, a British visitor, a particularly harsh critic of the palace, who conceded that the palace was “‘Splendid’” (Trouillot, 1995, p. 35-36). I should point out also that Colonel Jean-Baptiste Sans-Souci was actually the name of a man among a number of men who, in the words of Jean Jacques Dessalines had “become obstacles to freedom”
and had been liquidated by Henry Christophe. Sans-Souci opposed the leadership of Christophe and Dessalines because he felt “no real place in the Louverturian society that Toussaint had forged” (Fick, 1990, p. 233). As Fick (1990) and Trouillot (1995) have observed, the story of Colonel Sans-Souci speaks to how nationalist Haitian historians themselves in their efforts to glamorize the main leaders of the revolution have silenced important aspects of the Haitian Revolution. This kind of observation is important in the interest of a complex conception of the revolution in place of a romantic, reductive recounting of it. In any event, in the context of European colonialism, the palace of Sans-Souci, much like the Citadelle, falls into the category of what Trouillot would qualify as unthinkable. But for White Zombie and The Serpent and the Rainbow, it is the locus of necromancy.

Henry Christophe was the first to resist General Leclerc at the time of Leclerc’s expedition to Saint-Domingue in February 1802 (Dubois, 2012; Fick, 1990). That is, he refused entry to the general and his troops on February 3 and ordered the evacuation and the burning of the city of Le Cap the following day. The slaves had used similar tactics in the uprisings of 1791. This should be seen as an act of resistance from Christophe and his revolutionaries, a way to deny access to what General Leclerc called “the world’s prime colony.” Henry Christophe, like Toussaint Louverture and other slave leaders and revolutionaries were determined to liberate the people of Saint-Domingue from their status of political nothingness. They resolved to confront the colonial practices of discipline and punishment which organized the lives of Africans and produced black labor in Saint-Domingue for European consumption. General Leclerc’s plan was the deportation of most black and mulatto officers from Saint-Domingue while his successor,
General Rochambeau, wanted to kill off all the blacks, to replace them with new ones from Africa, to obliterate the spirit of revolution in the former colony, and to restore slavery there.

As king of northern Haiti, Henry Christophe called himself “Destroyer of tyranny, Regenerator and benefactor of the Haitian Nation, Creator of its moral, political and military instructions” (Dubois, 2012, p. 61). Again, like Toussaint Louverture, he sought to develop a state in the north that would be based on a strong and viable export economy with a noticeable presence in the world market. That was one way, according to the king, to free Haiti from subordination to the colonial powers of Europe. Christophe is also known for his Code Henry, an extensive and rather impressive legal code of about eight hundred pages, which outlined the civil, criminal, and military laws of the country. The Code Henry even stipulated food security for the people as well as environmental preservation and protection from deforestation. To be sure, these are forward-thinking ideas that have come to dominate twentieth and twenty-first century Western politics.

According to Sir Joseph Banks, the British botanist and naturalist who cofounded the abolitionist African Institution, the Code Henry “is worthy to be written in gold; nothing I have ever seen which was written for the same purposes by white men is worthy to be compared to it” (as cited in Dubois, 2012, p. 68). Banks was probably thinking of the Napoleonic codes which, like the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, assured legal equality for French citizens but denied basic humanity for black slaves in the Caribbean.

Henry Christophe is also celebrated for his determination to make of Haiti an educated nation. Thus it might be interesting to note that the Christophe of The Serpent
and the Rainbow is a successful educator. While he could not read or write, Haiti’s Henry Christophe recognized that a firm education system was an important component of a free society and that it was one way to ensure the socioeconomic development and political advancement of Haiti. Education, one may argue, is at the base of innovative methods for the expansion of agriculture, health care and other social programs. One important objective of any Haitian government, therefore, should be to educate the children or the next generations of Haitians.

One should recognize also that the French mission civilisatrice was predicated on the idea of Gallicizing Africans through education (Moore-Gilbert et al, 1997), a process which, for the African, could imply a violent dislocation of the African self from herself/himself as Fanon would argue in his articulation of the psychological consequences of colonialism on the colonized subject (Fanon, 1952). Christophe thus understood that education is essential, especially from the perspective of the colonized as a mechanism for eradicating the values and philosophy of the oppressor. This is consistent with a point argued by Paulo Freire a little more than one and a half century later concerning the “oppressor consciousness.” In Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) Freire gestures to the presence of the “enemy” in the psyche of the oppressed since, historically, the oppressed has internalized the values, philosophies and sometimes even the ideologies of the oppressor. Christophe thus embarked on a project to educate Haitian children so that by the end of his regime, an estimated 72,000 children received some form of public instruction. He also insisted on building school buildings for women and on hiring teachers who would teach his soldiers (Dubois, 2012). One of Christophe’s greatest accomplishments, Laurent Dubois observes, was the creation of a chair of
medicine in Le Cap where young Haitians could study anatomy, the treatment of diseases and surgery.

In discussing the memory of Haiti, it is worth pointing out that despite the successes of Henry Christophe as a military general in the Haitian Revolution and despite his cultural accomplishments as king of Northern Haiti, his memory continues to be grossly unflattering. “Professional historians who deal with Christophe’s rule always note the king’s fondness for grandiose constructions and his predilection for the Milot palace, his favorite residence” (Trouillot, 1995, p. 44). Moreover, as Fischer points out, his solution to the postcolonial question “has often been seen as a mere curiosity or, the relentless severity of his regime notwithstanding, a picturesque footnote to history on the periphery” (Fischer, 2004, p. 246). Several scholars have signaled to the fact that Christophe had been a soldier at the 1779 battle of Savannah in the American war of independence, when he was only about twelve years old (Dash, 1997).

In *White Zombie* and in *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, Henry Christophe is the subject of ridicule and demonization. In *White Zombie* he is presented, through the character of Murder Legendre, as a brutal necromantic, a man feared for his wickedness. The Christophe of *The Serpent and the Rainbow* is a zombie living in a cemetery and while he has been a victim of state dictatorship, he is a disheveled schoolteacher whose companion is a desiccated corpse. Vodou, the national religion of Haiti, what Maya Deren (1953) has called “a religion of major stature,” serves as a backdrop for these portrayals.
The theme of slavery is an important feature in *White Zombie* and *I Walked with a Zombie*. In *White Zombie*, in order to meet with Murder Legendre, Charles Beaumont must traverse Legendre’s sugar factory, a seemingly highly productive factory worked exclusively by Legendre’s zombies, darkened white men who have been zombified and enslaved. The scenes in the sugar factory are the most important aspect of the film, according to John Cohen (1932). “Around the primitive mills they turn like so many black, white-eyed, emasculated Samsons. They walk around in death-like groups, emotionless, lethargic and quite frightening” (Cohen, 1932, as cited in Renda, 2001, p. 226). The factory itself, noted *Time* magazine in August 1932, “is going full force. Corpses carry baskets, grind the mill, do the upstairs work” (as cited in Renda, 2001, p. 226). They carry fire logs, they push wheel-barrels and they act as sentinels for the factory. They also protect Murder Legendre, the zombie master himself. These “men” “work faithfully” for Murder Legendre and as he puts it, “they’re not afraid of long hours.” Legendre thus suggests that Charles Beaumont “could make good use of men like mine on your plantation.” Legendre’s comments speak to the political status of those “men” as chattel or things that can be used exploitatively for capitalist production. They also speak to the attitude of racist Eurocentric intellectuals like Victor Hugo who, as we have seen, in his speech delivered in May 1870 saw Africa, “the southern continent,” and its inhabitants as a gift which God has given to Europeans (Sala-Molins, 2006).

*White Zombie* sheds light on the evil of slavery by showing how the institution turns even the strongest men into soulless, “emasculated” zombies and by associating it with a subhuman, necromantic, phantasmagoric, creepy monster, in the shape of Murder Legendre. At the same time, evil and spookiness are presented as an inherent element of
Haiti’s religion and Murder Legendre, as we have seen, is presented as one of Haiti’s leading revolutionaries. This is adumbrative of a point made by Homi Bhabha that “the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest…” (Bhabha, 1983, p. 6). Haiti’s current socioeconomic and political difficulties are often depicted as a manifestation of the country’s “Voodoo black magic,” removing white Europeans and North Americans along with the legacy of slavery itself from any responsibility for the poverty and suffering that have become such defining attributes of the country. Francis Huxley, for instance, wrote in his 1966 *The Invisibles*: “Notorious for its Voodoo and its zombis…poverty is disgusting, its politics horrible, its black magic a matter of fantasy” (as cited in Dash, 1997, p. 106). Grounded in European aesthetic traditions, Huxley’s comments on Haitian society, which may also be used to talk about the economic successes of Euro-American societies in terms of the affiliation of those societies with Christianity, work to reinforce the discourse concerning Haiti as the *other* (Dash, 1997). They also serve to obscure the position of prestige, power, privilege, opportunity and supremacy associated with the very idea of whiteness or European and North American identities. Sylvia Wynter (1992) would view this as one example of what signifying practices are *intended to do* at the level of representation. That is, in the sphere of symbolic imagination, the Haitian man and woman are not quite human. In addition to presenting Haiti’s historical memory and the revolutionaries that created it as demonic, *White Zombie* erases Haiti’s history of colonialism from the violence of the transatlantic voyage, to the depravity of life on the plantation, to the ceremony of Bois Caiman and its significance, to the events of 1791-1804, to the proclamation of Haiti as an independent
nation. No explicit mention is made of Toussaint Louverture or of the set of events which led to the re-articulation of the human.

Jacques Tourneur’s *I Walked with a Zombie* takes up the question of slavery in an altogether different fashion. The first visual reference to slavery is made on the boat as Betsy travels to Saint Sebastian. Here a group of black men are shown cooking meat, lounging on deck, and singing while another black man operates the boat. The blacks are depicted “tearing at the meat with cruel, greedy, animal gestures.” *I Walked with a Zombie* was produced by Val Lewton and as Curtis Bowman tells us, “Lewton’s films typically imply more than they show, relying on viewers to supply a great deal for themselves in their imagination” (Bowman, 2003, p. 74). The scene on the ship can thus be interpreted as the passage of kidnapped black people from Western Africa to the Americas. This is especially evident in the context of the next scene where, according to the coachman who drives Betsy to the Holland plantation, “the Hollands…brought the colored folks to the island. The colored folks and T-Misery…. The enormous boat brought the long-happy ago Fathers and the long-ago Mothers of us all - chained down to the deep side floor.” T-Misery is the “figure of Saint Sebastian” but according to Paul Holland, the main character of the film, “it was once the figurehead of a slave ship. That’s where our people came from, from the misery and pain of slavery, generations they found like a burden. That’s why they still whip when a child is born and make merry at a burial.” Paul Holland thus identifies a Saint Sebastian in which contradictory forms of freedom have come to coexist. A statue of T-Misery has been erected in the Holland courtyard with arrows planted into his body. The statue of T-Misery, I submit, is
intended to shine a light on the relationship between modern plantation slavery and the dire socioeconomic conditions of postcolonial Saint Sebastian.

*I Walked with a Zombie* speaks to Saint Sebastian’s history of oppression and makes a fairly plausible representation of Vodou and its connection to that history. It makes appropriate allusion to the processes of dislocation and relocation which have come to define life in Saint Sebastian and elsewhere in the Caribbean. However, the experience of the slaves “chained down to the deep side floor” is merely suggestive and the image of the blacks as enchanted meat-eating travellers is grossly inaccurate. While one may infer the abundance of the Caribbean region, the reality is that slaves were not allowed to consume the products of their labour, especially under the watch of white colonialists. One must remember also, that in the context of transatlantic slavery, black bodies were stacked like “books on a shelf” and as we have seen, many died along the way from malnutrition and diseases: the “sixty million and more.” The film glosses over the experience of brutality, degradation and dehumanisation, what Foucault calls the “macrophysics” of power, which was endemic to the sixteenth and seventeenth century transatlantic journey. I suggest that this is part of the wilful attempt from Western civilisations to portray European slavery and colonialism as Edenic or paradisiac for the enslaved. The film ignores, moreover, the many slave insurrections which took place aboard ships, as a response to the dehumanizing practices of white discipline, punishment and brutality and as evidence of the capacities of the blacks to fight for their freedom.

The most striking visual allusion to slavery in *I Walked with a Zombie* is made as Betsy and Jessica walk through the fields of sugarcane to a Vodou ceremony. This scene has been criticized, according to Gelder (2000, p. 96), on the grounds “that it exists
only for effect,” an effect of enchantment, and that it has no reality or history. But this scene, one may argue, is engaged in a certain recounting of slavery as a historical moment and is emblematic of what the film is about. To be sure, the allusion to slavery is largely symbolic. To begin, the lengthy voyage by Betsy and Jessica through the fields of sugar cane portrays the sugar plantation as Krista Thompson would suggest, as an actor, not just as stage for the scene. As Thompson puts it in “The Evidence of Things Not Photographed,” her study of the memory of Jamaican slavery in nineteenth century photography: “The centrally positioned stalk of sugarcane assumes a domination and almost figural presence in the image, and the cane fields generally subsume the laborers in the photograph” (Thompson, 2011, p. 45). In *I Walked with a Zombie*, the central figure of the towering Carrefour stands in front of and guards the path or entrance to the hounfort, a path made rather conspicuously of sugarcane. The presence of Carrefour amid the wealthy sugar plantations serves as a visual reminder for the experience of slavery in the Caribbean.

But perhaps more important in this scene and crucial to my analysis on the memory of Haiti is what is hidden from view. As Thompson would argue, the absence of slavery in the film “should be viewed not as a lack for which compensation is necessary, but as an intrinsic part of, and even representation of, the history of slavery and post-emancipation in the region” (Thompson, 2011, p. 63). In semiotics, the term absence makes allusion to existence in *abstentia*, that which is conspicuous by its absence. For my purpose, absence here should be understood paradoxically as an indication of the socioeconomic and political significance of plantation slavery in the making of modern European societies. It should also be seen as evidence of the meaning of the Haitian
Revolution in the redefinition of justice and freedom. The slaves and their history are hinted at or perhaps even evidenced by their absence. The cane field in the background makes an obvious allusion to the history of Haiti, but it is an allusion which only links enslaved Africans to zombies and does not include the calculated process of dehumanization of the slaves by Europeans.

Through the cinema, modern societies have managed to downplay the historical practices of terrorizing Africans. This is embedded in the effort to preserve the kind of national narrative that is constructed on the ideals of natural rights, freedom, equality and moral progress. Amid such disavowal, a former colonial empire like France can evade the paradox of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, which includes the principles of the French Revolution and the provisions of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. For the United States, it blurs the fact that slavery outlived the American Revolution by nearly a century and that the Declaration of Independence was written by a slaveholder (Davis, 1966). Thomas Jefferson, I should point out, had vacillated on the question of Haitian independence. For a place like Canada it is a way to cloud the disconnect between the idealisms of tolerance, peace and welcome and the tarnished history of slavery, systems of oppression and genocide. But more importantly, it obscures the role played by Caribbean slavery in the sociocultural and economic achievements of both European and North American societies.

*The Sound of Freedom*

In this section of my project on the memory of the Haitian Revolution in the cinema, I examine the role of sound, particularly of music in the films which appear in the project. Sound is one component of cinema that is often overlooked especially
because, in the minds of several film historians, it “destroyed the ‘pure’ cinema of the silent era” (Gray, 2010, 144, n7). But like color, lighting, framing, camera movement and editing, film music is a significant aspect of mise-en-scène, adding multiple layers of meanings and interpretations. It helps to portray social reality with a particular gloss. One important function of music in film “is the creation of a convincing atmosphere of time and place. Movie music is used to characterize, musically, the locations, settings, and cultures where the story occurs. The sound impacts/influences perception. Often, this may involve the use of special instrumentation that reflects regional or ethnic characteristics” (Prince, 1997, p. 176). I focus on the drum because it was the instrument used by the slaves of Saint-Domingue in the making of Haitian independence and because it continues to play a pivotal role in the collective identity of Haitians living in Haiti and in the diaspora. The sound of the drum has been used in the films in order to inform our comprehension of the films’ narratives and to create particular forms of mood, sensation and meanings.

As notions of identity, culture and civilization became solidified around modernist racial stratifications, the drum became almost exclusively associated with blackness and African identity. That is, according to Munro, “From the earliest days of slavery, Europeans in the New World (forgetting their own traditions of rhythmic folk music) came to associate drumming with Africa and black culture and thus disorder, otherness, and danger” (Munro, 2010, p. 10). Most of the films examined in this project present versions of the drum as important characteristics of a bastardized cultural identity. This is not surprising since, historically, according to musicologist Ned Sublette, “the drum was the instrument of what the Church considered the devil:
polytheistic Africa” (Sublette, 2004, p. 74). Sublette goes on to explain that for centuries, the Church had disapproved not just of drumming and dancing, but of instruments altogether which explains the origin of the term and concept \textit{a cappella} to signify unaccompanied singing. On the plantation, the drum was prohibited because it was perceived as subversive and dangerous to the colonial order (Munro, 2010).

The movie \textit{White Zombie} makes allusion to the drum on three distinct occasions. The movie opens to the sound of beating drums followed by chants of Haitians at the time of a burial which takes place in the middle of the road. In a subsequent scene as Jessica prepares for her wedding, one of Beaumont’s maids opens the balcony door, exposing what is presented as the spellcasting sounds of the drum. For the maid, “they are driving away evil spirits.” I should point out, of course, that while “they” are never formally introduced to the audience, “they” can be taken to mean Haitian black people or at least spooky “voodoo” adherents. “They” are the Orientalized, diametric opposite of the rational “us.” In the words of Stephen Prince (1997), movie music “has the special ability of hinting at the unseen whereas images can only show what is visible. Music can extend the range of meaning of images by adding psychological or emotional qualities not possible in the pictures alone” (Prince, 1997, p. 177). “Close it, close it” says Madeline with a disquieting aura of fright and disgust as if to protect herself and others from the underworld of phantasmagoric Haiti. The next time the drum can be heard in the film, an old black man warns a younger one of the presence of “evil spirits in the road.” He gives him a protective sac attached to a rope. He also gives him one for his oxen. This interaction between those Haitians appears rather amusing to Neil and Dr. Bruner who make eye contact with, and smile at, each other.
The difference between Neil and Dr Bruner and the two black men is visually striking. While Neil and Bruner are dressed rather elegantly with white and grey suits (the film is in black and white) and stylish, sophisticated fedora hats, the Haitian men, especially the older one, are covered with ripped clothes and ripped straw hats. Even the white men’s horses are shown to be more elegant than the old man’s horse. Moreover, one can readily see a lack of intelligence in the young man and the absence of rationality in the old who believes in the power of a sac for protection, what Mrs. Rand, the Christian missionary, calls in *I Walked with a Zombie* “some of this voodoo nonsense.” Mrs. Rand is also a medical doctor. Curious, Dr Bruner asks the old man to take him to the mountain where the drum can be heard.

Old man: Turn back before it is too late.

Bruner: No, no. I’ve come too far to turn back now.

Old man: I’m too old to go all this way with you.

Bruner: Well listen, can’t you get somebody to go visit?

Old man: My people are all afraid of the mountain.

Bruner: Why?

Old man: Because it is called the land of the living dead

Bruner: Well, have have you ever been dead?

Old man: I am the only man that ever came from there alive. There is an evil spirit man that is called Murder…..

The drum is thus vilified through its association with Murder Legendre while at the same time, the sound of the drum is intended to be one way to posit and illuminate the evil of Murder. I have discussed the symbolic connection between Murder Legendre in *White
Zombie and Henry Christophe, the Haitian revolutionary, the only Haitian head of state to reside in a castle atop a mountain. We have seen how, through the character of Murder Legendre, the film presents an ill-spirited perception not just of Haitian revolutionaries but of the revolution itself. The sound of freedom is thus (re)presented discursively as evil and demonic.

The 1943 film I Walked with a Zombie makes some positive allusion to the drum, recognizing its power, at least in the minds of Vodou practitioners, to speak to the gods. It recognizes the drum as a symbol of resistance for the slaves of Saint-Domingue, or as an instrument of survival and healing and a lasting feature of Haitian and Caribbean cultures and belief systems. In the search for a cure for Jessica, Alma (Teresa Harris), a maid of African descent, an obvious believer in the power of Vodou argues that “the houngan will speak to the Rada drums and the drums will speak to Legba and Damballa….” Alma is probably referring to the Kalangu drums or the Batá drums, or the Iyá and Itótele or Okonolo, “consecrated drums used for sacred ceremonies.” “Sacred drumming is a complex form of playing in which each drum plays a particular phrase that contrasts with the others to produce a polyrhythmic ‘symphonic synthesis of rhythms, tonalities, and chords. The Batá drums are said to be able to ‘speak’; Iyá and Itótele usually carry on a complex conversation, while Okonolo maintains a basic rhythm” (Canizares, 1993, as cited in Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert, 2003, p. 70). Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert (2003) remind us that those drums are more than just musical instruments and that they embody the manifestations of the spirits. Alma thus refers to the power of the drum as evidence for the healing power of Vodou to cure Jessica. Vodou is particularly important to its adherents in providing medical treatment. As for
the houngans, while Bonsal (1909) calls them “the devil’s priests,” Alma calls them “better doctors.” The makers of *I Walked with a Zombie* were obviously aware of the meaning of drumming in the collective consciousness and spirituality of Haiti.

Yet, at the same time on all other occasions, the sound of the drum is used as a talisman for awe and wonderment. We observe, for instance, a pause in a conversation between the Canadian nurse Betsey Connell and American Wesley Rand, brother of Jessica’s husband, the sugar planter. This pause is interrupted by Wesley who provides information concerning the drum and its purpose. For Wesley who speaks with an aura of enlightened confidence, it is “the jungle drums, mysterious, eerie. That’s the work drum over the sugar mill, Saint Sebastian’s version of the factory whistle. As a matter of fact, it means that the sugar syrup is about ready to be poured. I’m afraid you’ll have to excuse me.” While *I Walked with a Zombie* cannot deny the historical connection between the production of sugar and life in Saint Sebastian, it still fixes Haiti as a place of mysterious rituals animated by a certain eeriness of the drum. It ignores, however, as Sydney Mintz (1985) would argue, the role of sugar in the historical formation and development of European societies. This eeriness is posited a little later in the film as Paul Holland shifts the focus of his conversation with Betsy. Paul was in the process of explaining how his wife was taken ill when the drums start to beat which prompted him to suggest “I think it would be best to all of us not to discuss this again. Thank you. I know you meant to be kind.” In this sequence, the sound of the drum has come to occupy a discursive space that is normally occupied by the act of language.

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33 It is worth mentioning that Alma’s idea of “better doctors” is contrasted with the notion of “doctors that are people.” “Doctors that are people” refer to the rational Dr. Maxwell or those who practice Western medicine. Modernity, as we have seen, (re)defines itself partly through the blatant denial of the condition of humanity for Africans and their descendants.
The longest drumming sequence in *I Walked with a Zombie* is, of course, the one in the hounfort, or Vodou temple. This should not come as a surprise since, as we have seen, the drum is an integral part of any religious Vodou ceremony. Rather, I draw attention to the kind of representation made of the ceremony itself and to the place of the drum in that representation. As Prince tells us “viewers tend to interpret sound in reference to images. The information sound conveys is contextualized by viewers in terms of the image on screen. Viewers relate sounds to the images on screen and define them by those images. Often…it is sound that structures the image” (Prince, 1997, p. 154). The scene in the hounfort revolves around the infamous “voodoo doll,” a Hollywood creation predicated on the idea of controlling someone’s body and soul through a doll. The “voodoo doll” is another important characteristic in the understanding of Vodou in popular discourse. According to Hollywood, a person who has been victimized by the spells of “voodoo” can be influenced, dominated and manipulated. As for the origin of this commercial creation, “One has only to read the history of France to know that the figurine, made of wood or wax, that was stabbed with a pin in order to kill the King or another person, was in use even before the discovery of Haiti. In fact, although this was current practice in Europe since the 13th century, its popularization in the Court of France was the work of Signor Costino Ruggieri of Florence, a protégé of Catherine de Medici” (Benjamin, 1976, as cited in Murrell, 2010, p. 69).

In *White Zombie* Murder Legendre carves a wax effigy of Madeline outside the Beaumont estate. This “voodoo doll” of Madeline made from a candle is used by Murder to dictate her every move. Similarly, in *I Walked with a Zombie*, the Sabreur assumes
control of Jessica Holland using a plastic doll. Jessica walks out of the Holland estate after Wesley Rand opens the gates. Wesley follows her with a spear which he has pulled from the statue of Ti-Misery. From a cinematic perspective, the audience is taken back and forth from this scene to the Vodou ceremony at the Hounfort, which makes it easy to see how the Sabreur controls both Wesley and Jessica using a doll. Wesley then stabs Jessica as the Sabreur stabs the doll. This interchange, one may agree, is intended to educate the audience on the workings of what Hollywood has called the “voodoo doll.” It is also intended to present Vodou as a demonic cultural practice from the underworld of Haiti and to posit Haitian identity and the history that created that identity as intrinsically evil. The scene at the hounfort itself is a long scene, which means that it commands the attention of the viewer. This interchange, I argue, maintains the attention of the viewer with a closeup of the doll and the mysterious, histrionic performance of the houngan. These images which obviously speak to a negative, caricatured representation of Haitian cultural tradition are structured by the sound of the drum, making the drum and the images of witchcraft equally assertive. They are equally important because they are mutually defining. The sound defines what viewers see and what they understand Vodou to be while the images are presented as a depiction of how the sound should be interpreted.

We see here a carefully edited, selectively organized set of cinematic sequences intended to produce a particular kind of story. These sequences, which obviously speak to the “evil” of Haitian identity, also highlight the drum as a rhythmic backdrop, a soundtrack for the uncanny. They should be seen as a textual reminder of Western perception concerning Haitians, Africans and the drum. In other words, they are
embedded in a long-standing stereotypical image and racist attitude about Haiti, its people and its culture. They constitute yet another example of the many ways in which Haiti gets pushed to the margins.

The Color of Revolution: “The Patriot” and “A Tale of Two Cities”

In this section I comment on the contents and narratives of The Patriot (2000) and A Tale of two Cities (1980), two feature films that commemorate the events of the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 respectively. The Patriot recounts the story of a father’s determination to protect and defend his family in the midst of confrontation while A Tale of Two Cities is a story of love and self-sacrifice told against the backdrop of the French Revolution. These films have been chosen from a vast, heterogeneous corpus of films and other culture documents that highlight the memory of the French and American Revolutions in a variety of ways. They have been chosen primarily because of their status as appropriate teaching materials in history courses, from elementary school through to university and graduate level courses, and because of their ongoing status as expressions of ideas and philosophies concerning the human desire for justice, liberty and equality.

34 There are numerous filmic adaptations of Charles Dickens’ A Tale of Two Cities and more than one copy can be found for each year (1997; 1998; 2001; 2002; 2004; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2011). Production of A Tale of Two Cities goes as far back as the 1958 adaptation produced by Betty Box and Ralph Thomas or the one in 1935 produced by David O. Selznick or the one in 1917 directed by Scotsman Frank Lloyd. The cinematograph itself had been invented only about 25 years before by the Lumière brothers. The overall interpretation of the French Revolution does not change in those adaptations even with new technological innovations within the film industry.

35 The Russian Revolution, too, has been dramatized in film. The End of Saint Petersbourg (1927), October (1927), Mother (1926) and The Battleship of Potemkin (1925) are examples of cinematic productions that celebrate the memory of the Russian Revolution. October, for instance, at least according to Robert Rosenstone (2006), makes an interpretation of the Russian Revolution that is not so different from those of historians and other experts on the revolution.
It is important to point out at the outset that my purpose in this discussion is not to determine the historical (in)accuracies of the films. Moreover, I am not particularly interested in depicting the French Revolution as a mere bourgeois revolution, as it has often been done, or the American war of independence as a grossly exaggerated civil war. Both events have been instrumental in shaping the sociopolitical order in their respective societies and have had wider significance in the world. Rather, using those revolutions and the filmic productions that commemorate them, I wish to interrogate the active relegation to insignificance of the Haitian Revolution by historians, novelists, cinematographers, directors and ordinary citizens, from conversations concerning modernity and revolutions. I am especially interested in how *The Patriot* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, among other films, dim or shine a light on the memory of the Haitian Revolution.

**The Patriot**

In *The Patriot* (2000), Benjamin Martin (Mel Gibson), a short-tempered farmer and community leader, is faced with the ultimate challenge of protecting his family in the midst of the incendiary events of the American Revolution. He is reluctant to fight in the war of independence because of his gruesome experience in the French and Indian War/Seven Years War\(^{36}\) (1754-1763), a bloody conflict between the French and the British over the control of North America. Benjamin Martin decides to join the struggle only when his eldest son, Gabriel Martin (Heath Ledger), enlists and is captured by

\(^{36}\) The French and Indian War is sometimes referred to as the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763). French Canadians call it The War of Conquest because it was after this war that France surrendered its North American possessions, which included the regions of Quebec and Acadia to Britain. The islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, however, off the coast of Newfoundland, still remained under French domination. The French and Indian War has been represented in the historical movie, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992).
British Colonel Tavington (Jason Isaacs) and other British army personnel. Tavington also shoots and kills one of Benjamin’s sons, Thomas, for attempting to defend his brother, and orders Martin’s house be set on fire. Benjamin leads an American militia army against the British army led by General Cornwallis and eventually kills Colonel Tavington in a face-to-face confrontation.

The Patriot is about the challenge of imperial control in the Thirteen Colonies and the struggle for independence from Britain to establish the Republic of the United States of America. The viewer of The Patriot is introduced early on in the film to the colonial assembly as it votes “for the independence of one nation,” “an American nation.” The movie highlights such radical ideas as the relationship between taxation and popular representation, natural rights of the individual, the division of powers within the government, the sovereignty of the people, nationhood, citizenship and of course, a constitution. As one may notice, there is an obvious contrast in the kind of discourse used by Hollywood in the shaping of American identity in the cinema. In the case of Haiti, however, it is its strangeness and spookiness as well as its barbarity, savageness and human sacrifice that have brought it onto the screen. We have seen how, according to Edward Said (1978, 1993), the construction of the other as uncivilized degenerate is usually connected in very intimate ways to an exalted conception of the self. Films such as White Zombie, I Walked with a Zombie, Live and Let Die and The Serpent and the Rainbow, which have worked to relegate Haiti as a “people without history,” are not so much about Haiti as they are about Euro-American self-proclaimed notions of humanity, civility, rationality and cultural sophistication. Cinematic text cannot be said to be a
simple reflection of reality; it is a complex web of representational practices sustained by totalizing forces of ideology.

_The Patriot_ recreates the battle of Cowpens where on January 17, 1781, the South Carolina militia united with a number of troops from the Continental Army to defeat the British. The movie also highlights Yorktown where British soldiers found themselves trapped by about 17,000 French and American soldiers (Raphael, 2002; Tindall & Shi, 1992). It does not mention, however, such battles as the battle of Savanah of 1799 where about one thousand Haitian volunteers sailed from northern Saint-Domingue under the leadership of Comte Charles Hector d'Estaing to fight with American revolutionaries against British forces (Dash, 1995). It goes without saying that no movie could portray all the battles of the American Revolution.\(^{37}\) One may notice, however, that _The Patriot_ makes explicit reference to France and to Jean Villeneuve, the French naval officer who helped train American militiamen. Villeneuve is thus one foreign army officer worth depicting in the film while Haitian volunteers and revolutionaries, like the young Henry Christophe who had been injured at the battle of Savanah, have fallen into oblivion. In fact, Dash (1997) views the battle of Savanah as a graphic example of shared political ideals between the American and Haitian Revolutions especially in light of the fact that American merchants sold arms and ammunition to Saint-Domingue in its struggle against the French republic. We may recall that Toussaint Louverture’s arms purchases infuriated Napoleon Bonaparte because these purchases illustrated Saint-Domingue’s increasing autonomy from France. Both Haiti and the United States emerged out of

\(^{37}\) It should be noted that American revolutionaries lost most of the battles of the revolution (Tindall & Shi, 1992). But in keeping with the project of building an American national narrative which includes trumpeting and commemorating the heroism and achievements of the American Revolution, _The Patriot_ has chosen to focus on the battles which were successful.
uprisings against European societies that did not extend to them the same ideas of freedom they enjoyed for themselves (Logan, 1941; Montague, 1941; Sepinwall, 2009). Moreover, both revolutions were fought by generals who later became national symbols in their respective societies. Yet, in spite of these similarities, the United States did not recognize Haiti as an independent nation until 1862 when the circumstances of the Civil War were changing the political landscape of the United States (Sepinwall, 2009).³⁸ It was more difficult, says Michel Rolph Trouillot (1995), for the United States (or the Vatican) to recognize Haitian independence than it was for the slaves of Saint-Domingue to defeat Bonaparte’s army. That is because the very fact of slave independence was inconsistent with modern Western ideologies (Trouillot, 1995). It is worth noting also that the American Revolution, as depicted in the movie, featured the kind of violence that is usually associated with revolutions, except that violence in this revolution cannot be said to be the cathartic, rehumanizing violence which we have seen in Saint-Domingue. The American Revolution was a political struggle between white men, which centered on creating a colonial society with a different face, while the slaves of Saint-Domingue sought to redefine liberty and equality and to reconfigure the very idea of being human. Furthermore the violence of the American Revolution is celebrated as heroic and liberating while the violence of the Haitian Revolution, according to the films which I examine in this thesis, is criticized as brutish and uncivilized. Colonialism and the Manicheism that derives from it are predicated on the understanding of the colonized as inherently evil.

³⁸ Britain recognized Haitian independence in 1833, the same year that Parliament passed legislation abolishing slavery on its colonies.
**A Tale of Two Cities**

The movie, *A Tale of Two Cities*, produced by Norman Rosemont and directed by Jim Goddard, is based on Charles Dickens’ 1859 historical novel of the same name. Inspired by Thomas Carlyle’s *The French Revolution* (1837), Dickens’ novel is viewed by literary critics as “one of the most successful, if not the most successful, historical novels ever written” (Newlin, 1998, p. xi). According to Charles Dickens himself, *A Tale of Two Cities* should be read “First, because I hope it is the best story I have written. Secondly, because it treats of a very memorable time in France” (as cited in Jones, McDonagh and Mee, 2009, p. 1). There is an important parallel between Dickens’ novel and Rosemont’s film in that they both engage in commemorating the events and ideologies of the French Revolution. For the purpose of my discussion on film and the representation of the colonial past, I am interested in *A Tale of Two Cities* on the screen as a visual apparatus for remembering the French Revolution. This will help to highlight and contrast the absent presence of Haiti and its revolution in cinematic text. I argue that this absent presence depends in a large measure on an active effort by filmmakers and producers to relegate the Haitian Revolution to the margins of historical consciousness.

*A Tale of Two Cities* is about socio-economic and political exploitation in Old Regime France and the unequivocal response of the French people to such exploitation. Before 1789, France was divided into three distinct but highly heterogeneous classes or estates and an individual’s social value as well as his/her political and legal rights depended heavily on the estate to which she/he belonged. With a *lettre de cachet*, an aristocrat could imprison his enemies without charge or trial and for any length of time.³⁹

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³⁹ In some cases the *lettre de cachet* could be bought and then filled out later by the purchaser with the names of his enemies (Newlin, 1998).
The story of *A Tale of Two Cities* originates with the rape of a young woman by a member of the Saint Evremondes aristocratic family in 1755, an incident which, according to Lawrence Frank, is charged with social and historical implications. For Frank, “the rape points to the ruthless exploitation of one class by another, and to the consequences which must follow” (Frank, 1998, p. 112). Doctor Alexander Manette (Peter Cushing), who was summoned by the Saint Evremondes to tend to the victim of the rape, was thrown into the infamous Bastille for his efforts to report the crime and other injustices carried out by the Evremondes family.

The spirit of the French Revolution was to confront such abusive practices as well as the feudal division of France and the absolute monarchy that worked to sustain them. The *lettre de cachet* was declared unlawful by the Paris Parliament in 1788 and due process, which refers to the respect for individual rights when taking legal action against someone, became law of the land by the National Assembly of France in 1789. The spirit of the French Revolution was also intended to challenge the unequal distribution of wealth that was characteristic of French society. It was to create a platform upon which the socioeconomic and political grievances of the French people could be heard.

*A Tale of Two Cities* gives rightful currency to the French Revolution as a world historical event. But while it recognizes the tension and paradox of the time as a season of light and darkness, the film, like the novel, completely overlooks one blatant and important contradiction that defines the age of Enlightenment. As we have seen, the French Revolution and the corresponding 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen guaranteed political rights for French people while ignoring the status of political nothingness that shaped the lives of black people in Saint-Domingue and elsewhere in the
Caribbean. They presented a conception of “Man” or the human, which obviously did not include enslaved Africans or the “captive populations” of Saint-Domingue. The movie does not mention the horrific *Code noir*, the 1685 legal code that also stripped the slaves of their “personhood” and which spoke of them in terms of chattel or furniture (Article 44).

One purpose of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 was to expose this contradiction. The Haitian Revolution forced Enlightenment reevaluations of the principles of freedom and equality. More importantly, the revolution shook the foundation of slavery through a re-articulation of the language of rights and freedom and through a redefinition of what it means to be human. It also shattered the modernist notion of European superiority. Slavery was thus abolished in Saint-Domingue in 1793 and throughout the French Caribbean in 1794. This set of events completely escapes the scrutiny of *A Tale of Two Cities* both on the screen and as a novel. That is not surprising, however, given Dickens’ support for the governor of Jamaica, Edward Eyre. Eyre had violently suppressed the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 led by Paul Bogle to destabilize the position of the white planter class in Jamaica. While *A Tale of Two Cities* makes explicit reference to the American Revolution, it fails to notice how “the riches produced by the slaves of Saint-Domingue created wealth that enabled the bourgeoisie to challenge the monarchy in the French Revolution of 1789” (Sublette, 2004, p. 110) and the subsequent nineteenth century industrial revolution in France. “What we are observing here” Trouillot would suggest, “is archival power at its strongest, the power to define what is and what is not a serious object of research, and therefore, of mention” (Trouillot, 1995, p. 99).
Memory, Symbolisms and National Consciousness

Historical memory can be articulated in part through the commemoration of national symbols. Gabriella Elgenius (2007) gestures to a particular connection between national symbols and the emergence of the ‘nation’ as a modern invention. According to Elgenius while pre-modern communities used symbols to represent themselves, early symbolic devices were not adumbrative of nationality in the modern sense. In addition to the use of symbolism as a literary device, both A Tale of Two Cities and The Patriot are fraught with the kind of historical symbols typically celebrated in the construction of French and American collective imaginations. One example is how both films make explicit reference to the flag as a bedrock for nationhood. In The Patriot, while the Union Jack carried by colonel Tavington connotes the oppressive expressions of British colonialism, the stars and stripes are to symbolize heroism as well as hope and renewal for the newly imagined community of Americans. A Tale of Two Cities flaunts the French tricolor in a similar fashion. In fact, and perhaps more importantly, the colors blue, red and white make up the décor of virtually every scene in the film. Almost all characters are dressed rather conspicuously in the colors of the flag of France. Their pants, skirts, shirts, socks, hats, bonnets, cockades, scarves and so on, all reflect a particular commitment to the popular movement of emancipation. The drums, which beat the rhythm of patriotism and revolutionary enthusiasm, are decorated in blue, red and white; the carriages that carry members of the aristocracy are either blue or red. Madame Defarge, a leading revolutionary woman in the film, knits a tricolor shroud all throughout the film. Even the streets and the walls, with their bluish appeal add to the spirit of revolution in eighteenth century France.
No serious work on the memory of the French Revolution can overlook the July 14th, 1789 storming of the Bastille, the old medieval prison which the French people regarded as an emblem of monarchical despotism, tyranny and oppression. Filled with emotional connotations, this event is known in history as the ultimate symbol of the determination of the French to shape their destiny. Another important symbol of French history featured in the film is the guillotine, the killing machine which stands as a popular institutionalization of violence in revolutionary France. King Louis XVI, we may recall, was killed by the guillotine on January 21st, 1793.

My purpose in this section is not to dismiss the significance of symbols in the construction of French or American national consciousness. For France, symbolisms are important to commemorate the end of monarchical despotism and for the United States they mark the challenge of imperial control in the Thirteen Colonies as well as the struggle against unjust taxation policies. Rather, I seek to underscore the inflated valorization and overrepresentation of Western historical symbols in the construction of nationhood in contrast to the racist vilification of Haiti and its history. The symbols in A Tale of Two Cities and The Patriot are reminiscent of the kind of political engagement that characterized the French and American revolutions. They represent patriotism as well as freedom, dignity, citizenship and humanness. The Bastille and the guillotine in A Tale of Two Cities and the flags in both films connote the heroism of the French and American revolutionaries and their devotion to the principles of justice and equality before the law.

Conversely, we have seen how the films used in this project have constructed particular symbols of Haitian history and the Haitian Revolution. Items intended to
symbolize Haitianess in the films include, but are not limited to, cemeteries, snakes, corpses, blood and bones. The Palace of Sans-Souci and the Citadelle, which for Haitians represent the memory of the revolution and protection against foreign invasion, have been textualized as the epitome of evil and eeriness. While the kinds of drums featured in the French and American revolutions are connected to emancipation, the Kalangu drums, the Batá drums, or the Iyá and Itótele drums of Haiti are associated with “the evil of Voodoo black magic” where as Wynter (1970) would argue, this “evil” had to be removed from the people in order for them to be humanized. Moreover, in The Serpent and the Rainbow, the Haitian flag appears as Dr. Alan heroically frees the souls of Peytraud’s victims. The usage of the Haitian flag in this sense is associated with evil and with a photo of Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier at its centre, it is intended to signify not just the ruthlessness of the Duvalier regime but the backwardness of Haitian identity. That is, the Haitian flag is presented as an object that carries magical or supernatural powers. To be sure, the Haitian flag is of particular significance to the Haitian Revolution and to the unfolding of Haitian memory. One may recall that revolutionary-turned-emperor Jean Jacques Dessalines tore the white stripe out of the French tricolor on May 18, 1803 in a symbolic display of the end of European colonial rule.

The Last Supper

With the fall of slavery in Haiti, Cuban society, located only a few miles away, was transforming in ways to emulate the kind of prosperity that had made Saint-
Domingue the envy of the imperial world (Ferrer, 2009, 2014). It was a prosperity based primarily on sugar production sustained by the labor of Africans whose humanity had been stripped away from them. Planters and politicians such as Francisco Arango thus argued for the expansion of slavery in Cuba “with a half-million working slave population” (Fraginals, 1976, p. 27). But this dream of reproducing Saint-Domingue slave society also came with a deep-seated fear of replicating the events of the Haitian Revolution. That is why organizations like the Real Consulado’s Junta de Fomento occupied themselves thinking about strategies to combine the growth in the slave population and sugar production with the maintenance of order and compliance (Ferrer, 2009). One way to do this was to emulate the gruesome working conditions of Saint-Domingue where slaves were subjected to extreme forms of discipline and control. Overseers in particular were ruthless and had no respect for the humanity and dignity of the slaves.

The coexistence of slave conversations about rebellion and news about the Haitian Revolution created cause for concern and anxieties for Cuban planters and slave owners about the possibility of another Haiti (Ferrer, 2009). Rumors of conspiracies, rebellions, self-liberation, freedom and actual uprisings of various kinds were frequent. The Junta de Fomento noted in 1798 how “five attempts at, or signs of, insurrection of a more or less serious nature have appeared in the short space of three years, which leaves no doubt that the seed of rebellion has evidently been planted among our slaves” (as cited in Ferrer, 2009, p. 228). Cuban slaves seemed well informed about Haitian revolutionaries, invoking the names of Jean-Francois, Henry Christophe or Toussaint Louverture and others who had transformed themselves from slaves to generals and who
had altered the status of non-existence to full citizenship. In Havana in 1812, José Antonio Aponte and his followers, hoisted the Haitian flag while wearing Haitian hats as a testimony of their identification with the Haitian Revolution (Davis, 2006). Conspirators also made allusion to a strong sense of solidarity between the enslaved population of Cuba and the newly independent Haitian nation. They believed that assistance, military or otherwise, would come directly from Haiti for their own liberation. These are the stories, which motivated the content and the spirit of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *The Last Supper* (1976). But more importantly, the revolt was motivated by letters sent by Cuban pro-slavery planters (who called themselves the ‘body of sugar planters of Havana’(Ferrer, 2014, p. 27)) to the king of Spain at the start of the Haitian Revolution. The letters illustrate both the desire by the Cuban planter class to profit from the revolution by expanding their own slave imports and sugar production, while showing the importance of protecting Cuba from the events of Saint-Domingue (Ferrer, 2014).

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea is perhaps the most prolific and reputed of Cuban filmmakers (Blasini, 2005). He is known for such productions as the satirical *Death of a Bureaucrat* (1966), the first of his films to be released on the international stage; *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968) and *Up to a Certain Point* (1983). Inspired by Marxist theories and also by the writings of Frantz Fanon, these films all engage in a form of subversion that is related to the politics of the Cuban Revolution which culminated in 1959. That is, they eulogize heroes and revolutionaries of the anti-Batista struggle. These films are about educating and mobilizing Cuban audiences about Cuban life while valorizing Cuban sociopolitical and historical issues. In 1964, Gutiérrez Alea released *Cumbite*, a filmic production based on the novel *Les Gouverneurs de la rosée*.
(1944) by Haitian author Jacques Roumain. *Cumbite* is about ideas of unity, collectivity and cooperation of the oppressed and against petty division and selfish individualism. The oppressed, Marx contends, must unite in order to confront his/her condition of oppression. For my purpose in this project, I focus on *The Last Supper* (1976), the only film by Gutiérrez Alea, which deals with the memory of slavery and the many contradictions and ambiguities of modernity. It is arguably the only film that does justice to the question of transnational slavery, race, racism and to black resistance and emancipation in the Spanish colony of Cuba. *The Last Supper* addresses the ways in which enslaved Africans, who had been disenfranchised and dehumanized through the institution of slavery, challenged colonial authority. Central to my thesis, of course, is how these issues have gone unnoticed by traditional screenwriters and filmmakers, directors and producers. In keeping with Third Cinema aesthetics, *The Last Supper* locates the enslaved at the centre of their own narrative, a position rarely occupied by slave characters in cinematic text. *The Last Supper* was based on Manuel Moreno Fraginals’ seminal book *El Ingenio* (1964), which chronicles an event that occurred sometime in the 1780s. In that event slaves rose up in mutiny against His Excellency the Count de Casa Bayona despite His Excellency’s decision to humble himself before them in an act of Christian fervor. To be sure, *El Ingenio* is about the meaning of sugar production in the history of Cuba. The book was translated into *The Sugarmill* in 1976. Fraginals worked as a mentor to Gutiérrez Alea in the filming of *The Last Supper*. While *The Last Supper* was influenced by the events of the Haitian Revolution, the film merely glosses over that revolution. My purpose, therefore, is to shine a light on how even Gutiérrez Alea, like Gillo Pontecorvo of *Burn!*, influenced by Marx, Fanon and
anticolonial discourses, also has trouble depicting the Haitian Revolution as an unprecedented, unique set of events which redefined ideas of liberty and human dignity. Toni Morrison would view this as a symptom and manifestation of haunting.

*The Last Supper* is set against the backdrop of the Christian holy week but is told at the end of the eighteenth century. It is the story of a pious, self-righteous sugar plantation owner, the Count of Casa Bayona (Nelson Villagra), as he hosts twelve of his slaves in a feast reminiscent of Jesus Christ’s Last Supper. The slaves are obviously intended to represent the twelve disciples, while the Count, Narcissus-like, plays the role of Jesus Christ. The same slaves later organize an uprising against the Count.

On Holy Wednesday, Don Manuel (Luis Alberto Garcia), a cruel, vicious and all powerful mulatto overseer, an important signifier of despotism in the film, sets out to find Sebastian (Silvano Rey), a slave who had run away on a number of occasions in order to escape the gruesome experience of slavery in Cuba. The character of Don Manuel reminds us of the *maréchaussée* in Saint-Domingue, a law-enforcing body composed principally of mulattoes whose tasks included hunting down and punishing the slaves. He is responsible for maintaining discipline and the functioning of the colonial order. He publicly cuts off Sebastian’s ear, which he feeds to the dogs. This, as we have seen, was one form of punishment in cases of repeated *marronnage*. The Count is visibly upset at the sight of this mutilation, but does nothing to stop it. As a mulatto, Don Manuel enjoys some of the privileges that come with whiteness while at the same time he is despised by the whites who consider themselves superior to him. Don Manuel “is a menial in relation

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40 The *maréchaussée* was formed principally to hunt down runaway slaves using tracker dogs. According to Carolyn Fick (1990), by making the *maréchaussée* exclusively mulatto, the whites enjoyed the double pleasure of reinforcing mulatto contempt for his black origin while exploiting his affinities for the very slave society that also inferiorized him. Michel Foucault (1995) would view the *maréchaussée* as a body complicit in shaping and disciplining Saint-Domingue slave society through systems of surveillance.
to the proprietor, a subjugator of the slaves; portrayed as a plausible apostle of the Count, but not worthy of an invitation to supper” (Jaehne, 1979, p. 48).

On Holy Thursday, on the eve of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Count orders Don Manuel to select twelve slaves for the supper and insists that Sebastian, the ex-fugitive, be among them. The Count washes the slaves’ feet as Christ had done to his disciples. This infuriates the overseer especially since he is ordered to bring more water for Sebastian’s injured foot. As Natalie Zemon Davis (2000) reminds us, it is a common practice for European monarchs, including Spanish monarchs, to wash the feet of the poor in church on Holy Thursday. At the table, where the tension between the power of the Count and the slaves’ desire to be free is made evident, the enslaved are introduced not as uniform and monolithic, but as a fundamentally heterogeneous group with conflicting, overlapping and sometimes contradictory views concerning power and strategies of resistance. Most of them are African born. They include Antonio, a Christian who refuses to be among the “dirty slaves” in the fields; Bangoché, the former Guinean king; Old Pascual who is granted his freedom; and the proud Sebastian who will lead the slave uprising. This diversity among the slaves exemplifies the revisionist character of The Last Supper and speaks to Gutiérrez Alea’s affiliation with postcolonial discourses and reflections. The Count sees Sebastian as emblematic of Judas, the man who had betrayed Jesus Christ. While an older slave, Pascual, has been granted his freedom, Sebastian, the fugitive, spits in the Count’s face in response to the question “Who am I?” posed by the Count. This is important to the anticolonial practice of destabilizing colonial order since Sebastian has refused to recognize the power and authority of the Count. It is problematic especially for the Count since the relationship
between him, the colonizer, and Sebastian, the colonized, is dependent upon mutual recognition. “Without the others,” says Stuart Hall, “there is no self, there is no self-recognition” (Hall, 1995, p. 8). We see in this interaction, a palpable tension between the institution of slavery and the slave-owning class of Cuba. It is the first sign in the film that the structure of power and control was beginning to crumble.

Served in a candlelit room, with sombre lighting, the dinner itself displays the opulence and abundance of the owning class in stark contrast to the slaves’ conditions of destitution. This form of inequality between the bourgeois class and those who struggle for basic humanity is an obvious manifestation of capitalism. Conversations at the dinner table revolve around four main themes. The first is about why it is that blacks cry. It is a story based on Western African folktale about family members selling each other in times of hardship. The second is about Saint Francis and Brother Leo’s teachings that the patience to bear the suffering sent by God is the fount of true happiness, while the third promises eternal life after death through sacrifice, both told by the Count.

The theme of religion and biblical connotation is obviously pivotal to the development of _The Last Supper_ and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea brings to light the many contradictions that define the relationships between slavery as a dehumanizing practice of economic production and the teachings of Christianity in Caribbean contexts. “The _raison d’être_ of slavery was economic,” says Moreno Fraginals, “but it needed religious justification” (Fraginals, 1976, p. 53). As he demonstrates in _The Sugarmill_, while Spanish theologians adhered to a tradition of anti-slavery, the local church in Cuba had erected a whole complex of justification for the institution. As Fraginals explains, “It was based on the belief that the chief reason for bringing the black savage from Africa
was to redeem him by work and teach him the road to Christian salvation. This lent the sugarmill the fragrance of a redemptive shrine and transformed the slave trade into a rosy-cheeked missionary society” (Fraginals, 1976, p. 53). Religious authorities were the symbols *par excellence* of hypocrisy, placating the slaves by associating the trauma of slavery with eternal happiness. In *The Last Supper*, upon emancipating Old Pascual, the Count argues that freedom does not bring happiness since the slaves have nowhere to go. Gutiérrez Alea’s judgements concerning the relationship between Christianity and the peculiar institution are obvious. While his comments are not antireligious or anti-Catholic, he presents the Catholic Church as an institution of repression from which the slaves needed to free themselves and reinvent their humanity.

The last and most significant story is told by Sebastian, the rebellious slave who has remained silent to this point. Sebastian’s silence should be understood as a loud form of resistance intended to challenge colonial authority (Miller, 2013). His ear has been cut off, after all. With a blood-stained bandage around his swollen head, indicating suffering and trauma, and understanding, of course, that trauma is nothing to be enjoyed, Sebastian tells a Yoruba story concerning the struggle between Truth and Lie in human culture.

> When Olofi made the world, he made it complete: he made the day, he made the night; he made a good thing, he made bad things; he also made lovely things and he also made ugly things... Olofi made well all the things in the world: he made Truth and also he made the Lie. The Truth appeared nice to him. The Lie did not seem good to him: it was ugly and skinny, skinny as if he was sick. Olofi thinks it pitiful and gives it a sharp machete to defend itself. Time passed and people always wanted to go with the Truth, but no one, no one wanted to go with the Lie... One day Truth and Lie meet each other in the road and as they are enemies they fight... The Truth is stronger than the Lie, but the Lie has the sharp machete which Olofi gave him. When the Truth was careless and dropped his guard, the Lie - zip! - cuts off the Truth’s head. The Truth no longer has eyes and begins to look for his head with his hands... Looking and looking he suddenly blunders into the head of the Lie and - whup! - pulls off the Lie’s head and puts it where his own head had been.
To make his point, Sebastian places the head of a roasted pig in front of his face. We see in Sebastian’s story a violent conflation or interpenetration between Truth and Lie, which, according to him, accounts for the origin of deception in the world. We see, moreover, that while Truth is inherently better than Lie, Lie is better equipped with technology, power and ideology. The concept of historical truth is obviously important to Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and is a vital element of the film’s narrative structure. I view his *Last Supper* as an analogy, a metaphor for the difficulty of Western historiography which may include historians or filmmakers to adequately represent slavery and its legacies. It is important to note that most of these conversations occurred to the sound of African drums. We have seen the effectiveness of music in the shaping of realism in film. The purpose of this cinematic choice by Gutiérrez Alea, I would argue, is to evoke the memories of African reality while challenging and moving away from traditional film music aesthetics.

On Holy Friday, Don Manuel, the overseer, insists on making the slaves work despite the Count’s promise to give them a day off. The slaves had sung and danced in anticipation of that day. According to Don Manuel, a man whose only concern revolves around economic profit and production, “the Count was drunk and said things he didn’t mean.” He acts in obvious violation of the Count’s recommendation. The priest tries to dissuade him but to no avail. Don Manuel’s decision also goes against the provision of the *Codigo negro*, the Spanish version of the French *Code noir*, which, as we have seen, stood in contradiction with Enlightenment ideals of justice, freedom and humanity. Like the *Code noir* in Saint-Domingue, the Spanish *Codigo negro* controlled religious instructions, education and punishment for the slaves. To be sure, religious and colonial
authorities had guaranteed time for mass as well as catechism and religious instructions. This penal code was unpopular among slave and sugarmill owners for limiting their control over their slaves. This is not to suggest a certain respect for human dignity by the Code, however. On the contrary, like the Saint-Dominguan Code noir, the Codigo negro legalized a status of political nothingness for the slaves and legitimated a bestial or subhuman treatment of them. The Codigo negro was implemented in Cuba in 1789. I should point out that the Count does nothing to defend the slaves or to keep his promise. He betrays them by arguing that Don Manuel is ultimately the overseer. One purpose of Don Manuel, therefore, is to carry out the acts of violence endemic in the colonial system, freeing the Count of any responsibility.

This sparks a slave revolt led by Sebastian, where the slaves burn down the sugarmill, and where Don Manuel and a number of his men are put to death. Upon receiving news of the uprising, the Count is quick to allude to Saint-Domingue as its ultimate origin. The slaves spare the church and the house of engineer Gaspar Duclé, a mulatto refugee from the Haitian Revolution, a revolution which not only drove out white planters, but also a number of aristocratic mulattos. The slave revolt is repressed in The Last Supper. The Count then demands the execution of the slaves one by one, and their heads impaled on spikes. Duclé eventually hides and protects Sebastian from capture by Don Manuel. Sebastian escapes once more. This time he is invincible and free.

Gutiérrez Alea dedicated The Last Supper to his protégé, the late Sara Gomez, a renowned Cuban director and filmmaker who had been influenced by the Black Power movement in the United States. Gomez directed ten documentary shorts between 1964 and 1973, but is well known for her 1974 De Cierta Manera (One Way or Another), “a
film about real people, and some fictitious ones” (Rich, 1998, p. 94). *One Way or Another* is about Cuban sociopolitical and cultural life. It is a critique of race and class discrimination, misogyny and resistance to class injustice. *One Way or Another* gives voice to the “locked” population of Cuban society prior to the 1959 revolution. *One Way or Another* was completed and released in 1978 by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea because of Gomez’ death and because of damage to the negative. *The Last Supper*, it can be argued, may have been one way to keep Gomez’ memory alive.

Haiti appears as a spectre in *The Last Supper* through the character of Gaspar Duclé, a refugee mulatto from Saint-Domingue. Duclé is representative of a hefty number of refugees who arrived in Cuba throughout the Haitian Revolution. Those refugees included shop keepers, planters, merchants, priests, slave-owners and their slaves. They also included French administrators and military officials who had been defeated by the Saint-Domingue Revolutionaries. It was primarily those refugees that made up the planter elite in Cuba. Gaspar Duclé is a well-spoken, educated engineer, an expert in sugar refinery. In Cuba’s burgeoning sugarocracy, as Moreno Fraginals (1976) calls it, it was understood that in addition to slaves, land and money, Cuban success in the sugar industry also depended on new, modern technical modifications. To be sure, it was a sugarocracy which featured the discipline, organization and the time-consciousness typically associated with modern capitalist industry. This sugarocracy needed qualified technicians for its functioning, men who could calculate and understand the complex machinations of slave populations along with the science of sugar production. Engineer Gaspar Duclé thus appears in the film as one of those technicians whose responsibility was to keep the Cuban sugar industry viable. Aware of what had happened in Saint-
Domingue, however, Duclé made it clear that “I don’t want my head used by the blacks as a football.” In response to the prospect of importing more slaves, he warns against repeating the mistake made by French colonialists in Saint-Domingue where over half a million blacks outnumbered the whites and mulattoes. He feared that the devastation of the Haitian Revolution, only about fifty miles away, could be possible in Cuban territory. While Gaspar Duclé enjoys a positive relation with Don Manuel and all that he represents, he also hides and protects Sebastian from capture and eventually helps him escape. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea speaks of Gaspar Duclé as a complicated man who could potentially require his own film. For Gutiérrez Alea, Duclé’s “position is that of a person who has a secret, that is, a particular skill which he is able to sell to the Count and thus obtain a certain degree of freedom. As a salaried employee, he continues to be dependent on the property owner, but not to the same degree as the slaves. Coming from Haiti, he is more marked by French culture, by the ideas of the French Revolution. . . . His sense of justice was rather abstract, to say the least, but he was disturbed by the injustices he saw around him. . . . We had to reduce his importance within the film leaving him simply a spectator who is closer to us, the audience of the film” (Gutiérrez Alea, as cited in Jaehne, 1979, p. 52).

It is remarkable that even for progressive, Marxist-inspired Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, perhaps the greatest and most astute of Cuban filmmakers and Third Cinema aesthetics, a man concerned with recovering the versions of history which have been smothered over the centuries, the Haitian Revolution cannot figure as a paragon for freedom and equality, let alone the redefinition of the human. While Gutiérrez Alea’s Gaspar Duclé is depicted as a man of justice, disturbed by the gruesome realities of racial slavery, Duclé’s sense of
justice, according to Gutiérrez Alea, however abstract, can only be a function of his association with French culture and the French Revolution and his importance has been reduced. This conception, embedded in the “common sense” or “taken-for-granted,” does much to (re)present and naturalize Europe as the makers of history. This is yet another case of an ideological conception of history that works to downplay the connection between Saint-Domingue and what was happening in France, which includes (at the very least) a re-articulation of the human as espoused in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. In other words, even in the minds of those filmmakers, where a decent representation of slavery can be found, the Haitian Revolution still figures as unthinkable.

Those progressive filmmakers and producers also contribute in the reproduction of what Hall (1980) calls the dominant ideology. Ideology, according to Hall, has the power to construct meaning as obvious. While Gutiérrez Alea obviously knew about what was happening in Saint-Domingue, he makes no explicit mention of the relationship between the Haitian Revolution and Cuban slave society. No critical attention has been paid to the connection between slavery and the making of the West. In many respects, this is adumbrative of the feelings and attitudes of such political theorists as François Furet and Mona Ozouf, Friedrich Hegel or Hannah Arendt, to mention a few, in their wholesale relegation of the Haitian Revolution to the margins of history. These theorists, as we have seen, present the French and American Revolutions as unique defenders of political freedom, nationality and citizenship.

Let me be clear. It would be grossly inaccurate to accuse Tomás Gutiérrez Alea of disavowing the Haitian Revolution. I argue, however, that the filmmaker sidelines the
influence of Afro-Haitian culture and revolutionary ideals in Cuba. The crossing of ideas, as well as financial and military assistance from Haiti is nowhere to be found. There are no slaves from revolutionary Saint-Domingue on the plantation in the film, although given the movements of refugees between Cuba and Saint-Domingue, there likely would have been. This is made evident in Alejo Carpentier’s novel The Kingdom of This World (1985) where the main character Ti Noel, spends the years of the Haitian Revolution in Cuba with his émigré master, as was the case for many enslaved people from Saint-Domingue. Gaspar Duclé, the mulatto engineer, is the only direct representative of Saint-Domingue in the film. Haiti thus appears in The Last Supper as a warning, not as a source of inspiration. Gutiérrez Alea overlooks the signification of the new nation, which includes its intellectual contributions to liberation movements around the world. In this sense, Hall (1997) would argue using his “intentional approach” to representation of meaning, Gutiérrez Alea imposes his own meaning on the Haitian Revolution through The Last Supper. While obviously not pejorative like such reductionist, Orientalist and Africanist productions as Live and Let Die and The Serpent and the Rainbow to black cultural traditions, The Last Supper is undeniable testimony to the ambivalences of historical representation in cinematic discourse.
A Spectre of Hope: Burn! and Toussaint Louverture

I now turn to two films that have exploited the events of the Haitian Revolution in more favorable terms: Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1969 fictional film *Burn!*, which makes allusion to the revolution and Phillipe Niang’s 2012 miniseries *Toussaint Louverture*, the only direct depiction of the revolutionary leader as he created the path to slave emancipation in Saint-Domingue. These two films address questions of freedom, justice, and heroism as well as principles of nationhood and citizenship. But while the films recognize the monumental character of the Haitian Revolution, they present it as owing its success to the thoughts and philosophies of French abolitionism and not to the careful organization of slaves whose humanity had been stripped from them since the sixteenth century. The films thus serve as evidence for the limited ways in which even well-meaning professional historians, novelists and filmmakers have documented Haiti’s contribution to the making of the modern world.

*Burn!* integrates several stories into one narrative. It is at once a travel adventure and a tension between English bourgeois ideology and the discourse of independence and nationhood for the subjugated populations of the colonial period (Davis, 2000). It is a film about William Walker (Marlon Brando), a British Navy officer who, in the 1840s, came to the fictitious Caribbean island of Queimada, a Portuguese colony, in order to shape a slave rebellion, which would make it possible for Great Britain to capture the island’s lucrative sugar industry. “Queimada” is Portuguese for “burn.” As the name suggests, the island had been set on fire by Portuguese colonists several years before in an effort to suppress a rebellion by the enslaved populations of the island. For Walker, José Dolores (Evaristo Marquez) was the man to lead the revolution following the brutal execution of Santiago, the slave leader who had led the rebellion in Queimada to that
point. Santiago’s story speaks to the spirit of resistance and revolution in the Caribbean region. While Walker betrays a group of insurgents led by Dolores to the Portuguese authorities, he provides them with rifles, teaches them how to shoot, and drives them to kill off Portuguese soldiers (Sepinwall, 2006). Walker also convinces Creole plantation owners to assassinate the governor of Queimada. Slavery is eventually abolished on the island; the Portuguese colonizers are expelled; and a new, independent Queimada emerges.

*Burn!* is a parody of slave uprisings in a number of Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Brazil, Jamaica and Cuba. The events of Saint-Domingue (1791-1804) provide much of the theoretical and conceptual underpinning for the film (Davis, 2000; Sepinwall, 2006). While the character of William Walker was motivated by the kind of British abolitionism which was infiltrating Latin America in the nineteenth century (Giral, 1987), it is also reminiscent of French Enlightenment philosophers and abolitionists like Abbé Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal who in 1770 called for a “new Spartacus”41 in Saint-Domingue. It is worth mentioning that there are obvious parallels between *Burn!* and Stanley Kubrick’s 1960 *Spartacus* (Davis, 2000), which tells the story of a major slave revolt in Southern Italy and Sicily in 71 B.C.E. Another example of the influence of the Haitian Revolution on *Burn!* can be found in the character of the charismatic José Dolores who led the people of Queimada to freedom and nationhood and was eventually captured and murdered by the colonial authorities. Dolores can thus be compared to Toussaint Louverture of the Haitian Revolution. Where

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41 Spartacus was the leader of the third major slave uprising in southern Italy and Sicily. From 73 to 71 B.C.E. he led a slave army that grew to about seventy thousand. The revolt was crushed and Spartacus, along with six thousand of his followers, was crucified by the Romans (Davis, 2006). The motion picture *Spartacus* (1960), based on the novel by Howard Fast, provides a visual interpretation of slavery in ancient Rome and the social struggle to confront it.
Toussaint Louverture speaks of the breath and depth of the roots of liberty, José Dolores, upon his capture, reminds his soldiers that “Someone of us will always remain. Still others will be born later.” Both serve as evidence for epic leadership and for the slaves’ determination to be free.

Directed by Philippe Niang, *Toussaint Louverture* was screened at the 2012 African Diaspora International Film Festival in New York City. It was also aired on the French television station France 2. Given Western indifference and condition of amnesia toward the Haitian Revolution, historian Alyssa Sepinwall (2013) finds it remarkable that it was even made and that it was made in France. In fact, this three-hour miniseries comes closest to filling the gap of cinematic representation of the Haitian Revolution.

*Toussaint Louverture* presents the history of Haiti, slavery and revolution to an audience that continues to be uninformed about the relationship between Haiti and the making of the modern West. The Taubira law, which not only recognized slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity, but mandates the teaching of slavery in French primary and secondary schools only came into effect in 2001. Until then, the Saint-Domingue narrative had been a spectre in French collective imagination. To be sure, the portrayal of Toussaint Louverture (Jimmy Jean-Louis) differs rather conspicuously in this film from the kinds of portrayal usually found in modern literature. Toussaint Louverture and his revolutionaries, including Henry Christophe (Thierry Desroses) and Jean Jacques

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School curricula and studies in history and social sciences shall accord to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade the place which they deserve (My translation).

This law was introduced in 1998 by Christiane Taubira, the deputy from French Guiana. It was voted into effect by the French National Assembly in February 1999 and by the Senate in May 2001 (Reinhardt, 2006).
Dessalines (Hubert Koundé) are depicted as dignified statesmen, who embody courage, honor and valor. In a general sense, the movie displays the intellectual and political acumen of a class of people desirous to reclaim their humanity. At the same time, however, the makers of *Toussaint Loussaint* describe the film as a work of fiction (Sepinwall, 2013) in order to rationalize the many factual errors and historical inaccuracies, omissions and anachronisms which permeate it.

**Mission civilisatrice**

Gillo Pontecorvo addresses questions of colonialism and colonial history from a postcolonial perspective while addressing the socio-political impact of that history on former colonial societies. In *Burn!*, he exposes European attitudes toward the black peoples of the Caribbean. To begin, William Walker’s conception of “civilization and progress” includes industrialization, technological and social institutions as well as the management of profit and accumulative means. He makes this clear in his reaction to General Dolores’ desire to “clear the whites out!” “Who’ll govern your island, José?” asks Walker:

Who’ll run your industries?  
Who’ll handle your commerce?  
Who’ll cure the sick?  
Teach in your schools?  
This man?  
Or that man?  
Or the other?  
Civilization is not a simple matter, José.  
You cannot learn its secrets overnight,  
Today civilization belongs to the white man  
And you must learn to use it.
Without it, you cannot go forward.

Walker’s conception of progress, which obviously infuriates General Dolores, is embedded in the modern colonial tradition of restructuring or destabilizing indigenous economies for the profit and interest of the colonizer. It should be seen as part of the unfolding of capitalism. Another way to understand Walker’s conception of “civilization and progress” is to view it as constituent of a curriculum of colonial doctrine embedded in the broader agenda of the *mission civilisatrice*. But for José Dolores, if this is the measure of civilization and progress, “then we are better uncivilized.”

Both *Burn!* and *Toussaint Louverture* present white European abolitionism as the catalyst for slave emancipation in the Caribbean and both fail to highlight the agency of the enslaved to shape their own revolution and transformation. In *Burn!*, while William Walker is portrayed as manipulative and self-interested, he is depicted as a benevolent man, “a friend,” as he puts it, sent by Great Britain to organize a slave revolution in Queimada and save the black population from the evil of slavery. His presence on the island is crucial according to Creole planter Teddy Sanchez (Renato Salvaroti): “without you, nothing will ever get done.” *Burn!* thus figures among a number of American films such as *Amistad (Friendship)* and *Mississippi Burning*, that deal adequately with the question of slavery but which usually rely on a white hero (Sepinwall, 2013). As Shohat and Stam (1994) would argue, *Burn!* turns the historical enemy of the revolution—white European bourgeois intellectuals—into heroes while turning the historical heroes into supporting actors taking orders and instructions for the revolution from those considered to be compassionate, enlightened and civilized. Even the reclaiming of black humanity is dependent upon the benevolence of the “great white hope” in the shape of William
Walker, the central figure of the story. As we can see, even Gillo Pontecorvo, a Marxist, anticolonial, Fanonian filmmaker, finds it difficult to showcase the agency of the slaves in shaping their humanity. That is because, Trouillot would argue, the Haitian Revolution still figures in modern Western historiography as inconceivable. *The Power of One* (1992) or *Invictus* (2009), in South African contexts, have been constructed around the same principles. In many ways, these films remove the agency of the blacks of South Africa to shape their own liberation from the oppressive system of Apartheid. For the William Walker of *Burn!* “What is needed here is someone with courage. Someone who knows he has nothing to lose, and yet, is not afraid.” To find this man, Walker provokes a number of Africans in order to evaluate their reaction to oppression and injustice and to assess their readiness to lead a revolution. He eventually chooses José Dolores. Walker’s next step is to gather a critical mass of slaves, to arm and train them, and to encourage them to kill their Portuguese oppressors. Walker thus organizes a bank robbery, with José Dolores as the ringleader, a move which will not only attract the attention of white soldiers, but which will confirm the status of Dolores as the man to cast a light on a dark landscape that stripped the slaves of Queimada of their humanity. “If I had told you, José, to start a revolution,” says Walker in his effort to justify the plan, “you wouldn’t have understood me. To rob a bank, yes, that was possible. First, you learned to kill in order to defend yourself, and later you had to kill to defend others, and the rest came by itself.”

Similarly, in *Toussaint Louverture*, the newly manumitted Toussaint Louverture is shown to be inspired by a passage by Enlightenment philosopher Abbé Raynal, that change in Saint-Domingue was possible “only through some cataclysmic upheaval, such
as a rebellion of the slaves led by a black Spartacus, who would be a vehicle for Nature asserting her rights against the blind avarice of Europeans and American colonists” (Davis, 1966, p. 17). Abbé Raynal was making allusion to a leader “sufficiently courageous to lead them to vengeance and slaughter. Where is that great man to be found,” he asked, “whom nature perhaps, owes to the honour of the human species? Where is this new Spartacus…?” (Raynal, 1776, as cited in Blackburn 1988, p. 54). The next scene begins with a close-up of Raynal’s Histoire des deux Indes (1770), a multivolume treatise on the colonial system, in which he conceded that European expansion into the Caribbean was characterized by unspeakable slaughter and cruelty and that the institution of slavery was indeed inconsistent with any idea of human nature (Blackburn, 1988; Davis, 2006; James, 1989). The treatise was illegal both in France and in the colonies although it circulated without much interference. The close-up as a cinematic convention and the sharp sound, placed synchronously with the book, are quite significant. They work to posit and underscore the importance of Raynal’s thoughts to the making of Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution. They also function to isolate the scene from other scenes, making it readily recognizable. “This book is incredible,” says Toussaint Louverture as he recounts the story of his life to the young Pasquier (Arthur Jugnot), a fictitious character supposedly sent by Napoleon Bonaparte to inquire on the location of Louverture’s alleged treasure.

Pasquier: I’ve read this book. Most of it has been attributed to Diderot.

Louverture: Whatever; That book opened my eyes. Back then, I thought of myself as happy. But I was only a slave who was slightly better off than the others. (as cited in Sepinwall, 2013)

43 This book, a bestseller of its time, is also attributed to other radical Enlightenment philosophe, including Denis Diderot.
Toussaint Louverture, the film demonstrates, through his enlightened spirit, was to transform himself into the type of Spartacus that Raynal was promoting.

_Burn!’s_ William Walker can be seen as a composite of a number of characters including French radical intellectuals, British abolitionists and modern CIA agents and the Island of Queimada is presented as a timeless allegory for slave rebellion and modern radical revolutions in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Walker educates and inspires José Dolores to lead the people of Queimada toward freedom and equality and to transform them into full human beings. This is a Eurocentric conceptualization of the revolution. Louis Sala-Molin writes with appropriate sarcasm:

Shackled, ironbound, starved, amputated, a runaway countless numbers of times, he needed Raynal and Diderot to tell him in some big fat book to free himself before he could think of doing just that. Without them he would have understood nothing of the irritation of the colonists. The eternal runaway did not know what freedom was: his perfectibility had not sprouted to that degree. Capable of hearing, perhaps of understanding, he was certainly incapable of thinking for himself. (Sala-Molins, 2006, p. 123-124)

It is this type of logic, Sepinwall asserts, which has inhibited the production of a film on the Haitian Revolution, which would do justice to its contribution to the redefinition of what it means to be human. For Dubois (2004b), if Abbé Raynal could talk about slave insurrection, it was because of an existing undercurrent of resistance among the slaves of the colony. Moreover, Michel Rolph Trouillot (1995) signals to a certain kind of ambiguity in Raynal’s discourse that was typical of the Enlightenment project. As he points out in _Silencing the Past_ (1995), alluding to Abbé Raynal “the evocation of a slave rebellion was primarily a rhetorical device. The concrete possibility of such a rebellion into a revolution and a modern black state was still part of the unthinkable” (Trouillot, 1995, p. 85).
With *Toussaint Louverture*, Philippe Niang makes a significant contribution towards filling the gap in a filmic area that has received scant attention. But at the same time, Niang presents the revolutionaries in terms of a tapestry of depravity and brutality, lacking reason and civility. At the 1791 Vodou ceremony of Bois Caiman, for instance, the blacks are portrayed as blood thirsty, cannibalistic heathens and savages, possessed by the devil, and desirous of killing white children, men and women. This is encoded in the words and attitude of Boukman (Jocelyn Regina) who presided the ceremony, along with Cecile Fatiman, as he prays for the strength to “touye blan yo [kill the whites].” a prayer for which Niang provides no context. Without context the viewer is locked into a Manichean conception of the revolutionaries as bloodthirsty savages. The eeriness of the scene is made evident with such stylistic devices as lighting and sound effects that are reminiscent of terror. It is of course this kind of modernist, reductionist conception of Vodou, which shaped Spencer St. John’s *Hayti or the Black Republic* (1889), Frederick Ober’s *In the Wake of Columbus* (1893) or William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929) along with the many books, newspapers, magazines and articles which made disparaging comments on the impoverished Caribbean nation and which helped diametrically, to imagine the community of the American nation.

A word must be said concerning the character of Georges Biassou (Ruddy Sylaire), which is intended to shape viewers’ perception and interpretation of blackness in ways that are commonly acceptable to Euro-American aesthetic imagination. Niang’s Biassou stands for the stereotypical, essentialized black figure. He is a master gangster like Mr. Big or Dr Kananga of *Live and Let Die*, the type of grotesque and repulsive figure that is usually characterized by high levels of irrational violence and hooliganism.
Biassou is a brutal savage. He is drunk, cavalier and arrogant. He carries a gun. His gangster attitude is illustrated early on in the film when he shoots Toussaint Louverture for refusing to drink the blood of a pig which had just been sacrificed at Bois Caiman. Protected by supernatural or superhuman powers, Louverture remains unshaken. This form of representation of George Biassou is not new. We see it in Victor Hugo’s *Bug Jargal* (1826) where the cruel, monstrous Biassou is portrayed as a traitor to the revolution. It can also be found in the work of Jean-Baptiste Picquenard (1798) which presents Biassou as an “ignorant Negro, who had succeeded in winning the trust of his brothers-in-arms through a cruelty of character so pronounced that it inspired terror even in the most bloodthirsty among them” (as cited in Bongie, 1998, p. 241). Like Hugo’s *Bug-Jargal* (2004), Picquenard’s *Adonis, ou le bon nègre* (1798), and other literary classics, Niang’s *Toussaint Louverture* in many ways reproduces a modernist conception of Georges Biassou that is embedded in an oversimplified, reductionist Manichean order of life. The premises of these works echo what Edward Said describes in *Orientalism* as textual attitude. That is, Said would argue, they “can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (Said, 1978, p. 94). These works make a particularly fixed representation of Biassou and this way of conceptualizing him, Michael Dash would argue, has been granted “a greater authority than reality itself” (Dash, 1997, p.102). Hall would view it as part of the preferred reading that buffers dominant ideologies. Biassou’s character has been conflated with that of the cruel Jeannot, perpetuating fundamental errors about the Haitian Revolution and implying that one leader of the revolution is interchangeable with another. I argue in this thesis that Haitian revolutionaries and their descendents cannot claim their humanity until those fixed, racist
conceptions and representations of them are unsettled. To be sure, the Georges Biassou of the Haitian Revolution was indeed a complex personality. One of the early leaders of the revolution, his relationship with Toussaint Louverture was highly nuanced with complex, sophisticated diplomatic and political exchanges and negotiations. While Louverture had broken with Biassou and other revolutionaries in his volte-face, the two leaders had fought side by side to defeat the imperialist forces in Saint-Domingue.

*Reporting Colonial Violence in Neocolonial Contexts*

It is a common practice of colonial discourse to underscore slave violence while downplaying or overlooking the insidious violence which accompanied the exploitation of Africans on the sugar plantations of Saint-Domingue. Thus, in *Toussaint Louverture*, acts of violence committed by the slaves become highlighted in a way that serves to insinuate and reproduce a certain notion of black barbarism. Conversely, whites in *Toussaint Louverture* are seen as innocent victims who must be protected. Catherine Delambre (Virginie Desarnauts), for instance, among a number of other whites, was compelled to hide behind a tree in order to protect herself and her young child from the blacks. Catherine is eventually lynched from a tall tree in a blatant display of black brutality. Lynching, we may recall, was a modern strategy used by white Americans to eliminate the blacks while stripping them of their status as humans. It was often used as an extra legal form of justice or punishment administered against the marginalized black population of the United States. Lynching is a well-known symbol of mob violence embedded in deep-seated anti-black racism. At a minimum, the lynching of Catherine
Delambre is bound to exert a powerful impact on the viewer. It is intended to engender certain feelings and emotions in the viewer. Once decoded, it is meant to substantiate and authenticate the barbarity and primitivism of the enslaved.

Philippe Niang’s attempt to visually narrate the Haitian Revolution is obviously fraught with what we shall call historiographical repression. It is the scholarly recounting of past events that works to reproduce the memory of colonialism and the corresponding supremacy of whiteness within various forms of knowledge, power and ideology. Niang’s film *Toussaint Louverture* presents a white character as the victim of lynching while it fails to engage with colonial violence including the monstrous *Code noir*, the legal document which not only guaranteed the status of political nothingness for enslaved Africans but which dehumanized them through coercive means. Colonial violence has a habit of being rendered invisible or commonsense. Instead, we see in *Toussaint Louverture* a blatant reproduction of the Manichean organization of the modern world, which posits black savagery in opposition to white innocence and defenselessness. What is unfortunate here, perhaps more than the distortion of history itself, is that the distortion is presented to an audience whose knowledge and understanding of Haiti originates from news and television clips and from cinematic texts which are motivated by profit, consumerism and the values, aspirations and material interests of bourgeois societies.

The few corrupt whites in the film include the slave vendor who threw Louverture’s father in the water while the latter was chained; the men who raped, brutalized and ultimately caused the death of Louverture’s sister; the men who, for no apparent reason, attacked the newly freed Louverture in the marketplace. They threaten to throw him in the water as they had done to his father. There is also General Cafarelli
(Féodor Atkine) who murdered Louverture’s servant, Mars Plaisir (Magloire Delcros-Varaud), for failing to inform him of the location of Louverture’s supposed hidden war treasure. Even the ruthless General Leclerc (Joffrey Platel), Bonaparte’s (Thomas Langmann) brother in law, the man who slaughtered countless blacks and mulattos with the mission to re-establish slavery and white supremacy in Saint-Domingue, is presented as gentle and benevolent. Niang’s Leclerc also allows Louverture’s children to disembark along with his expeditionary army in February 1802. The general’s negrophobia which has been chronicled by a number of academics (Dubois, 2004a, 2004b; Fischer, 2004; James, 1989) is nowhere to be found.

Alyssa Sepinwall argues that Niang’s Toussaint Louverture overlooks the insidious violence that defined Saint-Domingue’s embattled history. In “Happy as a Slave: The Toussaint Louverture miniseries,” she demonstrates that the film glosses over the connection between slavery itself and the tradition of cruelty and brutality. She shows how attention is shifted over to slave violence and on occasions, to that of the Spanish colonists. The film makes no allusion to the kind of depravation and repression along with the process of dehumanization, that were so closely related to the colonial period. But more importantly, according to Sepinwall, the slaves are portrayed as happy workers, implicated in profit sharing. Life on the Bayon plantation involves extravagant parties, pleasure-rides, and of course the manumission of Toussaint Louverture as his birthday present. This is reminiscent of a point made by Bruce Chadwick (2001) with respect to movies based on the American Civil War of the 1860s which depict “slaves as ‘happy darkies’ eager to help their owners save their plantation” (Chadwick, 2001, pp. 5-6).
One commentator critiquing Sepinwall under the pseudonym of Oswald Durand, so named after the nineteenth century Haitian poet, argues: “I don’t think that the main flaw of the film was that it didn’t depict the violence of slavery in Saint-Domingue, if it tried to it would have degenerated into a sadist’s wet dream.” Durand recognizes, however, that Niang’s miniseries presents the Haitian Revolution “as a brainless business” and that it overlooks the complex set of diplomatic relations between the different actors of the revolution.

Durand’s discomfort concerning the portrayal of violence is consistent with the claim that to represent colonial violence is to dwell on the negative aspects of the past. This, of course, prompts the question of what can be told or visualized in historical discourse. But given the nature of slavery and the brutality that came with it, any form of representation of it will necessarily imply negative recollections (Gilroy, 1993; Walcott, 2000). Durand’s criticism may also have been motivated by the fact that while Sepinwall makes the link between slavery and brutality, she provides no explanation for the purpose and function of systematic violence in the making of the colonial project. She provides no explanation for why film and other cultural archival documents have a tendency to dismiss the history of violence and why the adequate reporting of colonial violence is central to the discourse of anticolonial subversion and resistance. What does it mean ontologically and epistemologically to visually narrate colonial brutality? What does it mean to suppress the traumatic experiences of the enslaved and their descendents? What is being done with the suppression of the embattled reality of the “locked” populations of Saint-Domingue? Those questions are related, of course, to the central concern of this project: what it means to excise Haiti from the production of the modern era.

https://disqus.com/home/discussion/fffh/happy_as_a_slave_the_toussaint_louverture_miniseries/
As we have seen, colonial encounters were predicated on ruthless and antagonistic forms of violence, the kinds of violence that maintained ‘discipline’ and that beg the question of European humanism and its limits. Colonization was about exploiting, expropriating, dispossessing, displacing, repressing, subjugating, objectifying and dehumanizing kidnapped Africans. In keeping with Sylvia Wynter’s rethinking of the human, this form of violence should be seen as part of the modernist grammar of Man to secure and overrepresent itself as the only form of human. In Saint-Domingue and elsewhere in the Americas, it was an assertion of European supreme humanity, constructed in diametric opposition to the subhuman status of the blacks. A number of colonial laws, which included the *Code noir*, facilitated that process. Furthermore, racial violence helped shape the foundation for neat binary divisions between the European self, Man, and its racialized *other*, those “who are negatively marked as *defective humans* within the terms of Man’s self-conception, and its related understanding of what it is to be human” (Wynter, in Givanni, Ed., 2000), the indigenous, the black, the alienated, the outcast, the undesirable, the ‘degodded,’ the non *kretyen*. Racial violence justified the creation of racial and cultural divisions and boundaries.

It is important to point out that the violence of slavery and colonialism extends beyond the physical to include an assault on the cultural and political customs of the colonized to the point where the lives and identities of those colonized become radically reconfigured. There is also the experience of cultural dislocation, involuntary migration and relocation along with social, political and economic oppression. While I do not propose a form of representation of colonial brutality that is melancholic or that would evoke a ‘site of black victimage,’ as Gilroy calls it in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), one must
recognize the many ways in which the traumas of slavery continue to haunt the black populations of the Americas on a psycho-emotional and political level (Gilroy, 1993; Walcott, 2000). Following Walcott’s “Pedagogy and Trauma,” I submit that sociopolitical and cultural self-esteem for postcolonial and post-Enlightenment Haitians is dependent, in part, on a process of working through the experience of slavery and the cruelty that came with it. In that context narrating violence in cinematic text may prove to be a healthy proposition as it provides the space for understanding black and Haitian life in the present. The Haitian Revolution was about exposing the concepts of modernity, which include the racialization of Africans as well as the resultant brutality of racism and racial discrimination. I argue that the relegation of the Haitian Revolution has been dependent on a deliberate effort to smother the violence of colonialism and its legacies. Thus for Haitians living in Haiti and abroad, filming the ruthlessness of slavery may be both cathartic and therapeutic; it may also be emancipatory. It may provide the space for thinking about and understanding the colonial past and the neocolonial present which it has created. Filming the evil of slavery may help to work through the legacies and challenges of colonialism and to configure notions of identities and identifications as well as ideas of nationhood, citizenship and belonging. Like the Haitian Revolution itself, it may also provide the space for reimagining what it means to be human.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have combined history, sociology and anthropology, as well as cultural studies, in order to investigate some of the ways in which the Haitian Revolution reformulated the vocabulary of rights and justice while re-articulating what it means to be human. The revolution challenged modernist understandings of race and shaped our conceptions of nationality and citizenship. The revolution realized a notion of universalism that also includes the blacks of Saint-Domingue and by doing so, shook the very foundation of European colonialism.

This project has also been concerned with the active silencing and relegation of these events in the annals of historiography and among the most celebrated cultural theorists and thinkers on modernity. I have moved beyond literature, the novel and newspapers, to examine the silencing of the Haitian Revolution in the world of cinema. I have presented the cinema as the most recent apparatus for the disavowal of the Haitian Revolution. I have discussed how films like *White Zombie* (1932), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), *Live and Let Die* (1973) and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988) do much to replicate the racializing discourse of the modernist movement while animating fear among Euro-American consumers concerning Haitian history. This is evidence of a point made by Homi Bhabha (1997) and Jürgen Habermas (1983) that modernity is not quite complete. *The Patriot* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, in their commemoration of the American and French Revolutions respectively, overlook the Haitian Revolution despite its intimate relationship with those other revolutions. We have seen the films’ utter disregard for the contribution made by Haiti to the cultural, political and economic
configurations of modern Western societies. Even the makers of *Burn!* and *Toussaint Louverture*, two films that display the political intelligence of the slaves, have difficulties representing those slaves as makers of their own history. *The Last Supper*, epic for its revisionist representation of slaves and slave emancipation, sidesteps the importance of the Haitian Revolution in the making of Cuban society.

Using Stuart Hall’s theory of encoding/decoding, I have been interested in finding out how filmic productions organize and classify language, spoken or written, sonic or visual, concerning the Haitian Revolution. This includes investigating what is being done discursively with that language and for what purpose. How does filmic language produce history and historical consciousness? How does it situate ideas of statehood, nationhood and citizenship? How is it that specific discourses of Haitianness have infiltrated popular imagination in a way that is taken-for-granted or ‘commonsense’? While we may speak of an outright absence of the events which decisively redefined the age of modernity, I have shown that contemporary effacement of the Haitian Revolution has also become a discursive practice, embedded in particular images of Haiti that are connected to systematic (re)productions, (re)presentations and fixity of modernity’s concepts of race and racial classifications. Articulated through discourses of civility, those ideas of race continue to divide between those who belong and those who do not or are positioned as the *other*. The *other* is thus presented and represented as the binary opposite of the civil *self* and belongs outside of one’s race, ethnicity, class, culture or social structure. In other words, while the Western *self* is understood as moral, civilized and industrious, the non-Western *other* is constructed as immoral, savage, brutal and barbaric and exists outside the realm of history and civilization. I have discussed the presence/absence of the
Haitian Revolution and the accomplishment of Toussaint Louverture in visual and oral forms of cinematic representations in particular and in conversations concerning modernity and revolutions in general.

On August 14, 1791, the enslaved of Saint-Domingue swore a sacred oath to rise against the capitalist structure that had governed their lives since the sixteenth century. Violent insurrections spread throughout the colony shortly thereafter. This was one way for the slaves to regain their humanity because, as we have seen, decolonization was about “the substitution of one ‘species’ of mankind by another” (Fanon, 1963, p. 1). The French National Assembly was thus compelled to declare political rights for free blacks on April 2, 1792. French commissioner Léger Félicité Sonthonax declared the abolition of slavery on August 29, 1793 and on February 4, 1794 that declaration was ratified by the National Convention in Paris. Toussaint Louverture rose to the position of leader of the blacks and became governor-general of Saint-Domingue on May 15, 1797. In 1801 Napoleon Bonaparte of the French republic sent a large expeditionary force to Saint-Domingue under the leadership of General Charles Leclerc. The idea was to regain control over France’s richest colony and to bring the new citizens of Saint-Domingue back to a status of political nothingness through the barbaric institution of slavery. The rebels resisted under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture. Louverture was captured by Leclerc and sent to prison in France, where he died on April 8, 1803. The new leader of the revolution, Jean Jacques Dessalines, declared Haiti an independent nation on January 1, 1804. This set of events transformed and reshaped the vocabulary of rights, liberty and human dignity. It redefined modernity insisting on true universality of human rights.
Critical reflections on the Haitian Revolution typically turn to the works of C.L.R. James, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Susan Buck-Morss or Sybille Fischer in their elaboration of the cultural transformation associated with the revolution. In his groundbreaking *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), Trouillot shows how the Haitian Revolution has been pushed to the corners of Western historiography precisely because it is unthinkable in the context of eighteenth century Western societies. “The events that shook up Saint-Domingue from 1791 to 1804 constituted a sequence for which not even the extreme political left in France or in England had a conceptual frame of reference” (Trouillot, 1995, p. 82). A case in point is how renowned political theorist Hannah Arendt forcefully defends the American Revolution against a historiography that privileges the French Revolution of 1789 while ignoring the events of the Haitian Revolution. Another cogent example is the attitude of German philosopher, Georg Friedrich Hegel, whose work has exemplified the difficulty of nineteenth century intellectuals to conceive of the slaves of Saint-Domingue as makers of history. Hegel’s scholarship on the master-slave dialectic, which has informed the work of twentieth century racial theorists such as Frantz Fanon or David Brion Davis, is evidence that he must have known about the events of the Haitian Revolution. In fact as Susan Buck-Morss observes in “Hegel and Haiti” (2000), the slave revolution and its effects on the sociocultural and political configuration of Western civilizations were primordial in Hegel’s imagination. In order to suppress this contribution, Hegel, European philosopher *par excellence*, devised a conception of race that worked to posit the kind of Manichean and modernist differentiation of the world, a differentiation which saw European culture as rational while Africans are depicted as pre-modern savages who lack any notion of
history and progress. These attitudes of Hannah Arendt and Friedrich Hegel toward the Haitian Revolution point to the kind of anxiety experienced by the philosophers with respect to the idea of Euro-American universalism.

The Haitian Revolution challenged the divisions of race and racial identity as understood in modernity and brought about the achievement of the world’s first black republic. Yet the filmic documents analyzed in this project present a view of Haiti that is embedded in the construction of race or essential differences. The films themselves have been legitimated and given the power and authority to engage audiences in thinking about Haiti’s past while textualizing fixed, essentialized images of its present. They also reproduce the values and attitudes as well as the practices that govern the categorization of and the meanings attached to race. The filmmaker or encoder employs certain codes to encode the films and the decoder to decode them as meaningful (Pillai, 1992). To be sure, this practice is never free of ideology. And as Hall (1997) might argue, meanings cannot be completely fixed and audiences may decode films in ways not intended by filmmakers.

Luisa Passerini has argued that “there is no ‘work of memory’ without a corresponding work of forgetting” (Passerini, 1983, p. 196). *White Zombie, I Walked with a Zombie, Live and Let Die, The Serpent and the Rainbow* along with *The Patriot* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, and to a lesser degree, *Burn!,* and *Toussaint Louverture* and even *The Last Supper*, among others, engage in a politics of memory that operates within a process of omitting the events of 1791-1804 in Saint-Domingue, the only events that reshaped Western understandings of universal freedom and racial equality. These productions can be understood as part of the effort by the European Man to imagine itself
as if it were the only conception of the human and to overrepresent its history and civilization as universal. This is achieved through a calculated reproduction of concepts of modernity, a reproduction embedded in binary Manichean representations of Haiti and its past. This is not surprising since the majority of these films belong to the commercial, capitalist, imperialist form of cinematic text, what Solanas and Getino have called “First Cinema,” a cinema concerned with profit and entertainment. Both Sylvia Wynter (1994) and Edward Said (1993) lament the ways in which intellectuals continue to shape identity and memory through unquestioned processes of binary simplification and essentialisation.

Postcolonial reflections still await the script for a filmic production that gives currency to the Haitian Revolution. Such a script will expose the contradictions and ambivalences in the formation of historical knowledge. It will help shine a light on the creation of modern Western societies and on Haiti’s “locked” condition of dependency, a condition that is so tightly linked to Euro-American reactions to the country’s independence from France in 1804. Furthermore, such a script may present a critique of the past and at the same time represent Haiti not as a land of strife, misfortune or melancholia, but as a land where a livable future is still possible. At a minimum, I call for a cinematic text that concerns itself with “making a break from the repressive doctrine of aesthetics” or “from the seductions of first-world ideology” (Taylor, 1988, p. 80). This entails new modes of narration that can articulate the complicated material, psycho-historical and political existence of Haiti and its people. In this manner we may begin to challenge, disassemble and dismantle the current poetics of representation, a poetics embedded in the understanding of the human as *homo oeconomicus*. For postcolonial
Haitians living in Haiti and in the diaspora, this script is essential not just to the commemoration of their common past; it is essential also to their collective identities in the present.
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