

The Determination of the Subject—in an Antillean Context—through the Appropriation of His Environment

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Abstract

There are numerous reflections by different specialists that question the epistemological rupture historically established between nature and culture. In effect, this dualism which might determine two types of societies—traditional and modern—seems not at all to be founded with respect to a new paradigm that would define the relationship between man and nature. Is it a calling into question of the Cartesian, if not Judeo-Christian, foundation that positions the human at the summit of a nature that is subject to him? In other terms, does the *anthropos* no longer have this (Cartesian) obligation to become master and possessor of nature? Yet would this dialectic which is characteristic of Occidental civilisation be valid in other cultural areas? How then is one to apprehend the prism of the subject and the object? Or how might one do so in societies in which the *we* of society supplants the *I* of the individual? Our research aims to determine the subject outside of his social interactions, but to apprehend him in relation to his or her environment. In effect, through the appropriation of the latter: through the invention of the *jardin créole*; through the domestication of the human as observer of nature; by making the latter an ally in resisting the conditions of existence—the animism of insulars—Afro-descendants have been able to domesticate an insular nature and thereby emerge as subjects and not as completely de-ontologised individuals.

Keywords

Subject, Anthropology, Creole Society, Environment

1. Introduction

A *new ecological order* seems to be surfacing and aims to question a now multi-secular foundation whose point of departure will have been the Christian book of

Genesis. Such is Luc Ferry's [1] theory, by which he intimates his contemporaries to renounce all anthropocentrism so as to establish an order in which nature would no longer be the object that subjects are content to exploit. Without renouncing a foundation that has brought much to the Occidental Christian, the philosopher invites another partnership between the living beings who comprise this nature and the human who, in this cultural context, is the one who must manage, as a good guardian, the creation of the Wholly-Other. The potential powers deployed by this human are sources of a disharmonious cohabitation:

Il nous faut faire un pas supplémentaire, prendre enfin la nature au sérieux et la considérer comme douée d'une valeur intrinsèque qui force le respect. Cette conversion—la métaphore religieuse n'est pas ici déplacée—suppose une véritable déconstruction «du chauvinisme humain» [1].

[We must take an additional step, take nature seriously at last and consider it as being endowed with an intrinsic value that commands respect. This conversion—the religious metaphor is not displaced in this instance—supposes a veritable deconstruction of “human chauvinism”.]

As for Edgar Morin, he does not shy away from contesting centuries of thought. He refuses to be the administrator of a way of thinking that no longer has cause to be. A new ecological conscience prevents him from doing so. Recusing every ethnocentric reflex, Morin declares: «*C'est donc toute l'idéologie occidentale depuis Descartes, qui faisait de l'homme sujet dans un monde d'objets, qu'il faut renverser*» [2]. [So it is all of occidental ideology, since Descartes, that made man a subject in a world of objects, that must be reversed].

These two ways of thinking join that of Hervé Kempf [3] who invites *l'Occident à sortir du clivage homme-nature* [the Occident to exit from the man-nature cleavage]. This anthropocentric dogma is no longer tenable.

In the distant Antillean context, despite the effects of a politics of assimilation *via* education, serious reserves subsist with respect to a vision of the world that would be solely occidental. Whence the difficulty to define the subject according to exclusively European categories. In this sense, is it possible to be a subject in an animist context? De même le serait-on dans un contexte qui fait fi du *je* au profit du *nous*? [The same would be true in a context that ignores the *I* in favor of the *we*]. This enquiry seems [to us] to be fundamental in apprehending this subject in his idiosyncratic singularity. For Elisabeth Vilayleck [4], *L'attitude [de l'Antillais] vis-à-vis du monde végétal est tout à fait différente de ce qu'elle est chez les Européens. Pour la philosophie occidentale en effet la nature est extérieure à l'homme qui en tire profit, la transforme, la dénature ou l'admire, communique avec elle, comme chez les Romantiques, mais lui demeure toujours “étrangers”* [The attitude (of the Antillean) with regard to the vegetal world is altogether different than it is for Europeans. For Occidental philosophy in effect nature is external to man who draws profit from it, transforms it, denatures or admires it, communes with it, as did the Romantics, but remain ever “foreign” to it].

We are among those who are convinced of the existence of this subject. In fact,

two societal models come into confrontation:

- The first: man is at the summit of the chain of the living.
- The second: the human being lives in fusion with nature.

The subject then cannot be defined in the same way. Because the process presiding over his emergence under these two auspices are not the same.

To apprehend our research, we have consulted many works on the subject of anthropology. We also refer to an interview with an eco-agro-forestry specialist in Saint-Lucia (Rose Leon).

This article's objective is to present him in his relationship to the environment. The first point concerns the presentation of the subject in his relationship to the environment in the Christian Occident. The second point is this subject in Creole societies. The third moment of demonstration is the (Creole) subject in his relation to nature.

2. Being a Subject in Occidental Thought: New Horizons

Occidental philosophical thought has been considering the figure of the individual known as the subject since the end of the Middle Ages. The individual appears progressively as an agent on the social scene. A position that is reinforced with the emergence of reasoning-reason as the faculty of each to assume his destiny as a human. In these historical conditions this new social operator emancipates himself of any tutelary power to exist for himself alone alongside other operators endowed with the same potentialities as he. The *Enlightenment* constitutes this effervescence of ideas that arise in the space henceforth occupied by the individual. A transformation of Occidental man following scientific progress, medicine, industrial technologies. Furthermore, the arts and letters are nourished by a certain elevation of the mind among those who intend to play the score of being.

This singular being who is connected to the idealistic tendency of European philosophy "a été assimilé à l'*être soi* (ou à l'amour de soi) et opposé à l'*être ensemble*" [5] [was assimilated to *being-oneself* (or the love of self) and set against *being-together*]. The human and social sciences and anthropology in particular go so far as to critique this subject instituted by philosophy. The expression that emerges from it is:

Qu'en faisant de ce sujet un pur signifié, la tendance dominante de la philosophie européenne glisse en permanence vers des discours qui sont, finalement, théologiques, le sujet se voyant attribuer la place réservée à Dieu, alors que seuls les rapports sociaux et culturels successifs que le sujet entretient avec des signifiants nous sont anthropologiquement accessibles. Dans cette perspective—anthropologique et non plus philosophico-théologique—des processus de subjectivation se construisent de manière réactionnelle à travers des expériences radicales d'extériorité [...] Le sujet ne naît pas magiquement des profondeurs d'une conscience qui serait intériorité [...] mais dans les surfaces des interactions, c'est-à-dire des usages sociaux des signifiants [5].

[That by making a pure signified (*signifié*) out of this subject, the dominant

tendency of philosophy is in permanent slippage toward discourses that, when all is said and done, are theological, in which the subject is attributed the place reserved for God, whereas only the successive social and cultural relations the subject maintains with signifiers (signifiants) are anthropologically accessible to us. From this anthropological perspective—and not a philosophico-theological one—processes of subjectivation are constructed in a manner that is reactionary to a consciousness considered to be interior (...) but at the surfaces of interactions, in other words of the social usages of the signifiers].

In this ethnographic frame, it is a matter of becoming emancipated from European thought in order to apprehend it through realities other than the ontological European reality of Hellenic and Judeo-Christian inspiration. A difference is established between an abstract perception of the subject and a perception that reveals him through contact with realities that are determining for him: *le sujet n'émergerait et n'évoluerait qu'en relation aux autres. Il n'est jamais donné, car il est cette aptitude à devenir lui-même en transformant ce qui vient des autres* [5] [the subject would emerge and evolve in sole relation to others. He is never given, because he is this aptitude of becoming himself by transforming what comes from others].

The direction proposed by anthropology seems to prevail in a context of globalisation in which cultures enter into contact with one another and intermix [se métissent] [6]. Bernard Sichère goes so far as to say that *le sujet est ce qui se produit comme singularité à partir des forces culturelles et selon les lois d'une culture* [7] [the subject is what is produced as a singularity resulting from cultural forces and according to the laws of a culture].

The determinations of the subject are therefore inscribed outside of all ethnocentrism that would consider certain cultures to be minor. All cultures are intrinsically sufficient to bring the individual to resolve the equation of the subject. The context in which he is placed proves to be more than necessary to offer the same field of possibles that are observed in the Occidental context.

The result depends only upon the conditions in which individuals live in their relations to alterity and to their physical environment. Upon these foundations, François Laplantine [5], who did fieldwork in Brazil, doesn't hesitate to affirm: *La culture du candomblé nous arrache à une conception non seulement européocentrique du sujet, c'est-à-dire à l'illusion de nous croire sujet par rapport à un monde-objet. Les séparations (d'avec les autres, d'avec la nature) constitutives d'un "dedans" et d'un "dehors", d'un "intérieur" et d'un "extérieur" sont le fait d'une opération non seulement d'objectivité mais d'objectatilité; elles relèvent de cette illusion de nous croire séparés* [Candomblé culture tears us from a conception of the subject that is not only eurocentric, in other words from the illusion whereby we believe ourselves to be subjects vis-à-vis an object-world. The separations (from others, from nature) constitutive of an "inside" and an "outside", of an "interior" and an "exterior" are the fact of an operation, not only of objectivity but of objectality: they arise from the illusion wherein we believe ourselves to be

separate].

Nevertheless, the concept of the subject is a problematic one. Such is anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner's [6] assertion. This researcher defends *a robust anthropology of subjectivity [...] an anthropology that questions the cultural forms of subjectivity*. By subjectivity, she intends: *the question of the subject as an essentially complex being, a feeling being, thinking and reflecting, a being that makes and that seeks meaning*.

The aforesaid subject is the one that is of interest to us, and whom we wish to discover, not in his social interactions, but in his relationship to his environment.

3. Does a Subject Exist Within Creole Cultural Liquidity? An Anthropological Perspective

This question continues to be asked by certain researchers. Two positions confront each other. One that defends the idea of the non-existence of the subject. The content of this affirmation is nonetheless not declined. This truth is enunciated by two Antillean researchers: by S. Mulo and by P. Donatien. The anthropologist admits:

Que les individus ont du mal à se voir en tant que personnes subjectives et s'envisagent plutôt de façon collective. "On parle toujours de nous, Antillais, de nous, Caribéens, de nous, Français, de nous, descendants d'esclaves [...] Les gens ont du mal à exprimer leur individualité. Et pourtant il faut réussir à se construire en tant que sujet, s'autoriser à exister en fonction de ses propres désirs [8].

[*That individuals have a hard time seeing themselves as subjective people and rather envision themselves collectively. "We always speak of we, Antilleans, of we, Caribbeans, of we, French, of we, descendants of slaves [...] People have a hard time expressing their individuality. And yet it is necessary to be able to construct oneself as a subject, to give oneself permission to exist according to one's own desires.*]

According to Mulo, it is necessary to transform one's (collective) life experience to envision the emergence of the potential subject. The characteristics of the subject would be inhibited by a life managed from outside by the community. The individual cannot come to be as a subject. A logical dynamic shared by P. Donatien: *Nous avons été déconstruit comme sujet par le colonialisme [...] Il y a [même] un ralentissement autour du sujet martiniquais [9]* [We were deconstructed as subjects by colonialism [...] There is (even) a delay around the Martinican subject].

The difficulty of articulating the subject is explicit in these two reflections. If one takes to task the community, the other underscores the nefarious effects of colonisation. Two explanations which, though not false, are not redhibitory for the emergence of the Creole subject. The first explanation could find a sure and solid foundation in an African way of life. Very young, the individual is caught in a web of relations. The corollary is: *qu'en dehors de la relation, l'individu tend vers l'inexistence [10]* [*that outside of relation, the individual tends toward exist-*

ence]. The second explanation is not to be disavowed. Colonisation completely deontologised those deported from the black continent [11]. A property that doesn't escape historian Olivier Grenouilleau who sees in *toute la lutte de l'esclave [la tentation] de recréer des espaces d'autonomie et de liberté dans une société qui l'écrase* [12] [*in each of the slave's struggles (the temptation) to recreate spaces of autonomy and liberty in a society that crushes him*].

The other is the one we defend: the subject exists and presents characteristics that are specific to him. The subject exists and presents his own singularities in a society in which disorder reigns [13]. But he is damaged by the historical circumstances and its repercussions in modernity to the point of having difficulty assuming one's identity: *black skin, white masks*, according to the Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, or the constant reference to the colonial past. This must be taken into account to apprehend this subject who is problematic in all respects and who must waver between his own emancipation and the need for the other, for the community, in order to come to be [13]. There is an ambiguity that is important to lift. The writer, P. Chamoiseau, is intimately convinced of this:

Que l'une des plus grandes modernités du système esclavagiste a été justement de détruire tout collectif. Dans les cales des bateaux négriers, aucune communauté, aucune cosmogonie, aucun absolu ne tient plus. On se retrouve seul et nu... [14].

[*That one of the greatest modernities of the slave system was precisely to destroy all collectivity. In the hull of slave ships, no community, no cosmogony, no absolute lasts anymore. One finds oneself alone and naked...*]

So many conditions that preside over the coming-to-be of this subject, if one omits life conditions that add to the heavy burden of negative emotions that constitute captivity and the middle passage. Marronnage is an example of this will to reconstitute oneself that is soon squelched to avoid the creation of examples to follow.

Which means that the characteristics of the modern subject exist and ask only to flourish. Nonetheless, a certain socio-political reality persists. It is the case of cultural assimilation and the alienation it induces.

Here we intend to demonstrate the impact left on the environment by the deported and the context's influence on them. The dynamism of realisations such as the *jardins créoles* (creole gardens) are visible, the transformations imposed through dwelling on these islands. Only those individuals determined to surpass their conditions and become de facto subjects could have deployed such energies and succeeded. If they did not invent gunpowder, it was necessary for them as continentals to confront the oceanic flows and master them: the *driftwood* borrowed from Amerindians; the *yole* to benefit from the products of the sea; The basketwork of Morne-des-Esses area (in the North) is a Caribbean heritage which is still practiced and has been modernized to the point of offering stuffed bottles of local rum or transformed stylized bakoua (*panadanus*) hats. A perspective that opens other horizons for the becoming-subject.

4. The Emergence of the Subject in the Appropriation of His or Her Environment

It is quite rare to attempt to apprehend the subject in his or her relation to the surrounding nature. Interactions that vary according to the period, according to the societies in question. The ethnologist Édith Planche who produced a reflection on this relationship between *L'homme et de son environnement et la notion de sujet* (*Man and his environment and the notion of the subject*) [15]. She confronts her point of view to the manner in which other (traditional) societies negotiate the living. The anthropomorphic whole must give way to other paradigms.

Avec le XXI^e siècle, on cherche à redéfinir le rapport Homme/nature, à créer une société différente, sur fond de crise et de paroxysme de la chosification des êtres vivants. Les certitudes s'effondrent, les catastrophes naturelles et la pollution réajustent la place de l'Homme... Les curseurs de la classification se déplacent: la classe «Animaux» signifie telle encore quelque chose? [...] À l'opposé de l'anthropomorphisme, on est au seuil de penser que ces derniers évoluent dans d'autres paradigmes certes, mais légitimes..., comme en un temps les dits «primitifs» rejetés de l'humanité pensante, ont gagné de se situer dans des cosmogonies différentes. Nous sommes dans le siècle où l'on revisite les cultures exotiques, non plus considérées comme historiquement «premières» mais comme singulières dans une pluralité des cultures [...] Sommes-nous enfin au seuil de penser tout autre comme sujet conscient, émetteur d'un point de vue légitime? La culture, la science et la technique, produisent de la maîtrise de la nature, de la vie, du vivant; qui peut devenir négative (clonage, etc.). La société protectrice de la biodiversité peut mettre en avant la nécessité de la sauvegarde de l'espèce avec pour interface la destruction de l'individu animal en tant que sujet. Qu'en est-il des cochons, veaux, poules, lapins et autres canards exploités comme des choses, mutilés pour mieux entrer au service de l'Homme? On s'alertera pour la sauvegarde de l'espèce animale dans sa valeur de patrimoine. Mais lorsqu'on peut reproduire la vie et la multiplier en engendrant veaux, vaches, cochons d'élevage, on va aussi se permettre de l'éteindre à souhait lorsque cela ne représente aucun dommage pour l'espèce. Le point de vue implique la notion de sujet. Quel animal d'élevage intensif est-il pris en compte comme sujet sensible et dans son point de vue singulier d'être vivant?

[With the 21st century, the Man/nature relationship seeks to redefine itself, to create a different society, against a backdrop of the crisis and paroxysm of the objectification of living beings. Certainties collapse, shift: does the "Animal" class still signify something? (...) Contrary to anthropomorphism, we are at the threshold of thinking that the latter certainly evolve in other paradigms, but that are legitimate..., such as at a given time so-called "primitives" rejected by thinking humanity, benefited from situating themselves in different cosmogonies. (...) Are we at last on the threshold of thinking altogether otherwise as a conscious subject, a transmitter of a legitimate point of view? Culture, science and technology, produce the mastery of nature, of life, of the living; which can become negative (cloning, etc.). A society that is protective of biodiversity can privilege the necessity for

the safeguarding of the species with as an interface the destruction of the individual animal as a subject. What of the pigs, calves, chickens, rabbits and other ducks exploited like things, mutilated to better enter the service of Man? We are alerted to the safekeeping of the animal species for its value as heritage. But when it is possible to reproduce life and multiply it by engendering calves, farmed cows, we will also allow for its extinction at will when it represents no damage for the species. The point of view implicates the notion of subject. What factory farmed animal is taken into account as a sensible subject in his singular point of view as a living being? [15].

A way of thinking that is inscribed in keeping with the afore-cited reflections and whose intention is to redefine the subject. Édith Planche is describing a typical subject stemming from Occidental civilisation. This ethnologist's intuition guides her in an enquiry that suits our context: *Are we at last on the threshold of thinking altogether otherwise as a conscious subject, a transmitter of a legitimate point of view* [15]?

There is one certainty in her analysis: there are models other than the model willed as universal. These models opt for a true and sincere dialogue with all of nature and don't make man into a purely *cogito* being who thinks to be. He is dialogue with every being that bears vital energy.

Our experience of the Creole subject opens us to other horizons and allows us to conceive of [admettre] a being who, despite several centuries of assimilation, remains deeply holistic in his everyday endeavour, pragmatic in his lived experience, his feet rooted in the soil of his calabash island. He is not the fruit of dogmas that vary from one philosophical trend to another. His sole certainty: to make of his existence an interaction of each instant with the earth, with nature. It's that «les sociétés traditionnelles [...] cultivent le dépassement de la société rationnelle qui coupe l'Homme de la nature et de son lieu au monde» [15] ["traditional societies [...] cultivate surpassing rational society that cuts Man from nature and from his place in the world"]. This subject (of anthropology) is the one that is also described by Marc Augier [16]: a subject in *situation*. Anthropology cannot satisfy itself with an abstract concept that is empty of all concrete realisation. The programme of field social sciences is to consider that there are «non seulement des subjectivations, mais il y a une formation du sujet [...] dans un espace et un moment donnés» ["not only subjectivations, but there is the formation of the subject [...] in a given space and moment"] [16].

From our point of view, three time-spaces allow us to better know this subject:

- The *jardin créole*: a creation that fascinates research and which in our view reveals the complexity of the Creole subject. He will go as far as transporting, into an urban context, this model garden. The "hollow teeth" of the city-centre are full of vegetals that comprise this very garden.
- Nature is that *topos* that inspires in order to express his fellow being and to concern himself with the mysteries of existence.
- As for animism, it carries the vision of a manner of being for this subject with

this environment. In other terms, they interact and are mutually fecund.

4.1. The *Jardin Créole*

According to certain researchers, it would be fair to say:

Que dans un environnement perçu comme hostile, le jardin de case est conçu comme un espace de protection où les forces de la nature sont maîtrisées, et dans lequel certaines plantes protègent l'individu des puissances néfastes. Ce n'est pas le paysage en lui-même qui est hostile, mais les forces qui le traversent, l'habitent ou le peuple [17].

[*That in an environment perceived as hostile, the jardin de case is conceived as a space of protection in which the forces of nature are mastered, and in which certain plants protect the individual from nefarious presences. It isn't the landscape in itself that is hostile, but the forces that traverse it, inhabit or populate it.*]

This vision surpasses anthropological research to join E. Vilayleck's observations [4]. The thinking unrolled by this research allows the garden to be seen, not as a place of production in an economic sense, but as production in the sense of the mastery of natural forces [4].

This garden, long denigrated because disorganised, is a model today for agronomic research. In this sense, the promiscuity of species arose from a logic, which, today, astonishes, even impresses, those who analyse it. An intuitive model, but that responded to a concern for the cohabitation of species such that they be good for one another. One serving the other according to an idea that has been current since the period of slavery, *yonn alòt, yonn épi lòt, yonn pou lòt*. A proverbial formula that, manifestly, was not only relevant for humans but also for the living for whom an almost human dignity was configured.

The aforesaid garden remains a remarkable ecological model, produced from a hybridisation of knowledge between different civilisations; a source of inspiration and socio-cultural resistance. Everything is cultivated, from nourishing plants to aromatic plants through medicinal plants. This memory that we cultivate comes to us from our grandparents' garden. We learned to cultivate plants by drawing a maximum of its benefits—whether culinary or cosmetic. It's the case of the *gombo* (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) whose fruit we consumed and made use of its leaves as a shampoo.

The researcher Harry Ozier Lafontaine [18] describes this model, that can be qualified as a genial agricultural model, in these terms:

Le jardin créole raconte une histoire. À la fois garde-manger, pharmacie, réservoir de biodiversité et de savoir-faire, il s'impose, par la diversité des espèces cultivées, la coexistence de différentes strates (des herbacées aux arbres) multifonctionnelles, comme source de résistance et d'inspiration, face à l'hubris consumériste des temps modernes (2000).

[*The jardin créole (creole garden) tells a story. At once a pantry, a pharmacy, a reserve of biodiversity and know-how, it imposes itself by the diversity of the cultivated species, the coexistence of different multifunctional strata (from grasses to*

trees), as a source of resistance and inspiration, in the face of the consumerist hubris of modern times.]

Note that the rural exodus of the 1960s moved these Creole gardens to the capital. Each family grew ornamental, medicinal, and magical plants in pots.

Before such high praise, what must be concluded as to the capacities to transcend suffering and misery and model one's space as a space that nourishes, heals, and gives birth to an informal economy of barter beyond the constraints of servility. A characteristic of individuals becoming the agents of their existence, taking care of their own and giving birth to a society that is characterised by solidarity. Nonetheless, no one is dupe and mistrust reigns. It's that nature instructs: fireflies, poultry, mammals will aid in formalising the relationship to the other. Whence the emergence of these proverbs:

- *Chak bèt-a-fè ka kléré pou nanm li* [each firefly lights up its own soul].
- *Bèf douvan bwè dlo klè* [the front ox drinks clear water].
- *Ti-poul suiv ti-kanna, i mò néyé* [the chicks followed the ducklings, they drowned].

Nature is the place that nourishes minds and allows for the cultivation of living-together. The school of life forges characters; inspires a philosophy of existence: *an lanmen ka lavé lòt* [it's one hand washing the other] but each must fight in this existence disrupted by the vicissitudes of the climate, whence *chak bèt a fè ka kléré pou nanm li* [each firefly lights up its own soul]. The dialectic of a simple life embellished by *bèlè* and other dances invented in exile. A dialectic in which the *je* and the collective *nous* address one another on familiar terms. In this sense, this subject is never alone. He feels himself to be a member of a human community inscribed in an order that surpasses him—*sa ou pa konèt pli gran pasé w* [what you don't know is older than you]—before feeling fully a subject. In reality, this dichotomy is maintained by solidarity in certain circumstances such as death (traditionally a time of coming together), but is quickly counterbalanced by individualism in other circumstances such as driving a car.

4.2. Nature to Describe the Human

During a study of cultural practices (tales, proverbs, etc.) in Sainte-Lucie, the collected data allowed us to measure the sense of observation of slaves and their survival strategy in a situation of alienation. In effect, a meeting with a specialist of eco-agro-tourism in a very touristed forest, provided the opportunity to measure the connection between nature and language. The specialist seeks to transmit what is called: «La connexion avec la terre, les arbres et tout ce qui constitue la nature» [“The connection with the earth, the trees and everything that comprises nature”] [19].

By evoking each tree, he hears tell the story hidden there; the history of the deported who made the forest a living space. The first species he presented to us is a palm tree bristling with spikes (*gwigwi* or *Aiphanes luciana*)—a tree similar to coconut [20]. The agro-touristic practitioner defends the idea that the proverb,

tout zandoli sav kiles piébwa i ka mouté, emanates from the observation of this palm tree upon which no lizard ventures. An aphorism that is often applied in human situations. Likewise whoever has a rough character is nicknamed *pié gwigwi*.

Aside from the *gwigwi*, logwood (*Haematoxylum*) serves as a referent to describe the heart of a person who is hard. The similarity comes from the hardness of the wood and the hardness of the heart of the person labelled as *tjè kanpèch*. Besides the description of a personality trait, the hardness of this tree allows for the qualification of one who is a strapping guy in labour.

The trumpet tree (*cecropia*) is the tree of meteorology (*a weather plant*). The hidden face of its leaves whiten in a gale. A keen observation that is not always disavowed by modern science. This indication is not its sole utility. In effect, the infusion of trumpet tree leaves put in check sore bellies during women's menstruation. Yet others deserve the attention of researchers for their usage in social life and for their virtues.

If the utilitarian aspect of the forest is not to be obliterated, the constant recourse to describe the existence of those who are animated by the same dignity as these vegetal beings cannot be ignored. A place of refuge, a place in which life is to be found, a place of provision. The forest is the privileged space of observations and by extension of the possibility to establish analogies of the human character.

Only a subject that is conscious of him- or herself and his environment can attain this observational and analytical precision. During the encounter with the Saint-Lucian specialist, he insisted on the scientificity of his observations:

When they observe which plants are poisonous, which plants have medicinal properties, which plants you can use, all of things is through observation as well. The folklore, the tradition is knowledge [18].

The myths developed also contribute to preserving the capital that is the forest, its rivers and the other resources it contains. A balanced ecological management that includes the individual-subject in this totality: earth, air, water, trees. Intuitions that are in keeping with current research in environmental psychology. The perspective adopted by researchers in this field is to surpass the whole subject-environment dichotomy to facilitate a holistic and dynamic perspective [21]. The emancipation of the subject passes henceforth by this global perspective: to be in relation with this nature that it had indeed been necessary to domesticate but for which it is nearly impossible to become its master and possessor. On the contrary, a harmonious approach is worth more than an approach that would be aggressive, and which, in turn, would wound the subject. A charter of mutual understand must prevail in this optic.

4.3. Animism: An Alliance to Resist

In the hostile context that was the discovery of the islands by the deported Africans, they needed nature as an ally in order to resist and to live. In this respect, the maroons of whom it is said that they were veritable ecologists persistently de-

fended this hostile nature against the colonizer. They fought against the deforestation by those who were educated with the idea of dominating nature. In this configuration, the Creole shaman is the ally who masters the positive energies of nature in order to convert the negative ones. The therapy depends upon the circumstances while also being annual. Thus the change of calendar imposes a bath of plants called *ben démaré*. It involves reinforcing one's defences against all hostile forces and approaching the new year under better auspices. A practice that persists even in modernity or, for us, in Creole post-traditionality—this bath comes thus in modern forms: delivery of plants in boxes by companies specializing in the plant trade, tourist caravans allowing you to take part. Only the bank balance counts. Moreover, in the collective unconscious, cutting down a *fromager* (*Ceiba pentandra*) was an ecocide. A group of residents in the South opposed the felling of a *fromager*, sacred tree in Creole culture.

The plant specialist is familiar with its medicinal virtues, but also masters their gathering. For it is not a matter of not respecting what modern science calls the chronobiology of these plants. In addition, for a long time on the plantation, he is the one who also has knowledge of their poisonous effects (*pharmakon*).

This knowledge of nature, this fusion say, was of a great help. It's that this nature, despite its hostility, was able to be vanquished, in part thanks to the Amerindians who practised slash-and-burn agriculture. Their knowledge of the canopy was of a great service. As for the maroons, when escaping from the plantations, they needed to be able to vanquish external forces: venomous plants, venomous animals, meteorological conditions. Plants, remedies issuing from animals are given by the dead—in the Antillean cosmogony the living and the dead frequent one another and maintain relations. This variable defies any logic developed by Occidental science and thought.

According to Philippe Descola [22]:

Dans le sens commun occidental moderne, on admet que l'homme partage le même monde physique que les le reste des êtres qui peuplent l'univers. En revanche, les humains estim [ent] être différents des animaux ou des plantes par le fait [qu'ils sont] des sujets, possédant une intériorité, des représentations, des intentions, qui [lui] sont propres.

[In modern occidental common sense, man is permitted to share the same physical world as the rest of the beings that populate the universe. However, humans consider themselves to be different from animals or plants by virtue of the fact that they are subjects, possessing an interiority, representations, intentions particular to himself].

The anthropologist opposes this naturalism to animism. As a way of inhabiting the world, animism does not oppose species but grants them the same vitality, indeed a human dignity. There are not subjects on one side and objects (even living) on the other side, but beings who possess the same potentialities as subjects, leaving aside different forms.

[L'animisme] attribue à tous les êtres humains et non humains le même genre

d'intériorité, de subjectivité, d'intentionnalité. Il place la différence du côté des propriétés et manifestations physiques: apparence, forme du corps, manières d'agir, comportements [...] Il attribue à tous le même genre d'intentionnalité que nous dirions "humaine" [22].

[(Animism) attributes to all humans and non-humans the same kind of interiority, subjectivity, intentionality. It situates difference on the side of physical properties and manifestations: appearance, form of body, manners of acting, behaviours (...)] It attributes to all the same kind of intentionality that we would call "human".]

In accordance with this reading, there cannot be a double reality that would decline the concepts of nature-culture, of subjects-objects. In this frame, subjectivity is property that would not be the prerogative of some living beings. Man and nature share it for the good of all. The researcher does not see here a simple belief, but an epistemological positioning that reveals the living. Once this scheme is in place, the (human) subject no longer has the anguish of his true knowledge in opposition with other categories that are submitted to him. Henceforth, it is a matter of sharing the dignity of the subject and of no longer being in permanent anguish, of having this concern to the point of exhaustion. The sociologist speaks of the *fatigue d'être soi* [*the weariness of the self*] [23].

In sum, the animist individual who sees in animals and in plants beings such as himself, with good or bad intentions, is no less the subject of his existence. He can have the need to struggle against the forces that inhabit those beings and that constitute a threat to his existence. The kapok tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) is that tutelary tree that houses forces that are hostile to humans, where evil spirits dwell. The subject is never the **ruler/master** of the surrounding elements. He is therefore not at the centre of the world; at the centre of life; and not at the centre of his psyche [24].

5. Conclusions

The omnipresence of the vegetal world in the lives of individuals in these insular territories enabled them to develop a singular relation with this universe. A relation that surpasses the simple need for nourishment to become an ally that makes possible a way of dwelling in a world initially unfamiliar to these continentals.

In the relation to the other, it was necessary to draw inspiration from the practices of the first inhabitants, to borrow from their cultural techniques to envision the future. Slash-and-burn agriculture, the technique of transforming cassava—still thriving today—is a borrowing that demonstrate a will on the part of Creoles to become agents upon their arrival on Antillean soil.

As for the divinities they left in Africa, it was necessary to provide a legitimate frame for them to cohabit with the masters' divinities. What could be more intelligent than to travesty the dominant worship and to carefully conceal the gods of the Vaudun pantheon. True fervor was dedicated to them through this travesty that the colonizer must have underappreciated. As for the clergy, all that mattered

to them was the number of baptisms they could inscribe in the parish ledgers.

In this context, another individual is born, who wishes to assume his existence, and become a subject. Nature is an ally through which different pathways are risked:

- marronnage and subsequent liberty;
- the expression of dance practised with or without his master's approval;
- the quest for greater physiological well-being through knowledge of medicinal plants. The latter can involve borrowings from Amerindian shamans;
- spiritual greater well-being while seeking to appropriate a reserve of vital forces in this space that he knows better than the colon;
- each year, for easter festivities, in order to commune with nature, families go to the beach, the river, the campsite, the forest. Such connection is a ritual act, while they are eating specific local food. Overall, it seems to be a need for healing in the face of a past that has wounded bodies.

In this, he potentialises the characteristics of the subject (Touraine's sociology) for whom: «[Tout] est affirmation de liberté, de capacité d'assumer, de maîtriser son expérience personnelle» [(Everything) is affirmation of liberty, capacity to assume, to master, one's personal experience] [25].

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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