

Rehvana's "Negritudism" or Mat(h)ildana's Métissage-marronnage in Suzanne Dracius' *L'autre qui danse* and *L'âme sœur*

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Supériorité parce que liberté, du *Métis*, qui choisit, où il veut, ce qu'il veut pour faire, des éléments réconciliés, une œuvre exquise et forte.  
L S Senghor, de la liberté de l'âme ou éloge du métissage

In *L'autre qui danse*, her first novel published in 1989, Martinican writer Suzanne Dracius portrays two mixed race sisters, Rehvana and Matildana in the suburbs of Paris. The names of the protagonists were inspired by Martinican Curtis Louisar's song "Aganila, personnification de la Révélation" and the story of a *fait-diver* the author read from the Martinican local newspaper.<sup>1</sup>

Matildana seems to enjoy life according to sound terms and shows strong qualities such as maturity, good judgment, mental and physical stability, reliability, independence and consistency. On the other hand, her sister Rehvana displays an irretrievable instability. Firstly, she forms alliances with two men from two different geographical regions. These relationships are revealed to be misalliances and contribute to the girl's alienation and ultimate decadence. She demonstrates similar behavior while in Paris when she binds herself by oath with a group of young French Caribbean immigrants who advocate their own absolutist concept of Africa, *Négritude* and black solidarity. After realizing that she cannot fulfill her quest for an authentic, exclusive and absolute identity within this group, Rehvana goes back to Martinique with her boyfriend Eric. Once in Martinique, Rehvana strives to attain a Martinican authenticity and identity by befriending an old Martinican woman who introduces her to obsolete mores. Rehvana obstinately insists on living according to anachronistic rites and practices. Finally, after giving birth to a daughter, Aganila, and suffering from Eric's despicable ill-treatment, Rehvana returns to France where she dies of hunger with her daughter.

This protagonist suffers from a *mal-être du métissage* (Rinne 370) which means that she is unable to come to terms with her mixed biological

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<sup>1</sup> In an email the author sent me on 1/21/2006, she says: "As to Rehvana's fate, I derived it from a true *fait-divers* I read in "France-Antilles"—"Quant à la fin de Rehvana, elle est issue d'un fait divers réel, lu dans "France Antilles".

and cultural inheritance. The main theme developed in the novel is identity, which according to Ralph Premdas' definition:

[. . .] emerges from collective group consciousness that imparts a sense of belonging derived from membership in a community bound putatively by common descent and culture. As a subjective phenomenon, it imparts to the individual a sense of belonging and to the community a sense of solidarity which is a vital need of human existence.  
(3)

In the novel, the theme of identity is articulated within a dual paradigm that consists in juxtaposing the psychological natures of the two female characters to represent two dissimilar visions of identity. The oppositional structure that governs the author's portrayal of the respective protagonists lies in their differing self-representation. This is in compliance with Stuart Hall's affirmation that identity is constructed within representation (236). Interestingly enough, in 2003, Suzanne Dracius published a short story, "L'âme sœur",—literally, "soul mate"—which is a kind of intertext, and is in fact, the continuation and conclusion of the novel *L'autre qui danse*. In the short story, Matildana, Rehvana's supportive sister, is the focal point and reversely portrayed as modern, self-assured, stable and triumphant for having accepted and harmoniously reconciled all of the constituents of her identity, racial and cultural. The short story is also a way for the author to reaffirm, strengthen and develop *Métissage-marronnage*<sup>2</sup>, the theory of identity introduced in the novel. *Métissage-marronnage* is the unrestrictive and equal embracement of all components of one's racial and cultural identity. It is offered as the sole most viable and appropriate way to confer stability and serenity upon the Martinican people

It is clear that Dracius' texts are meticulously structured to progressively defend her theory through the character of Matildana who, unlike Rehvana, experiences a *bien-être du métissage*. At first glance, *Métissage-marronnage* can be seen as the fourth identity discourse that is meant to complement the three known theories developed by Martinicans: *Négritude*, *Antillanité* and *Créolité*. Suzanne Dracius therefore uses Aimé Césaire's method that consists in displaying her theory through the means of a literary text and not through a manifesto like the fathers of *Créolité*. This notwithstanding, if we take into account Shalini Puri's words about desire, Dracius' discourse of *métissage* can be read as a manifesto which highlights her own desire. Dracius would belong to a school of Caribbean writers whose discourse of *métissage* seeks, to use Puri's words, "[. . .] a new mood, accenting possibility rather than constraint, dwelling in the optative rather than the conditional, imagining conciliation rather than conflict, appealing to a present erotic rather than a deferred pleasure. They thereby seek to create new enunciative positions from which the question of equality could then be framed differently" (85).

Dracius' two literary texts are as analytical as they are political and ideological. Through the deeds of her protagonists the author analyzes and

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<sup>2</sup> "L'autre qui danse/L'âme sœur," 4/12/2006

criticizes the existing identity theories to better posit hers. So, the plots suggest that unlike her sister, Rehvana makes a fatal choice by rejecting the model extolled by *Métissage-marronnage*. It is further suggested that *Négritude* is confusing and automatically lends itself to misinterpretation that can lead to dangerous radicalism. At the same time is the astonishing fact that Dracius's contention echoes Senghor's assertion according to which one needs to select the appropriate elements of each heritage—African and European—to create a new form of identity (103). *Antillanité* is also presented as limited in scope, target, and range. Interestingly, the *Créolité* manifesto, *Eloge de la créolité*, was published in 1989, the same year as *L'autre qui danse*. However, Suzanne Dracius maintains that her novel was written two years before (*L'autre* 358). To avoid confusions and dispel the coincidence, the term “créolité” is never used, whereas “négritude” and “antillanité” are expressly mentioned. Additionally, comparing her theory to that of the Creolists, Suzanne Dracius raises a critical difference and introduces *Métissage-marronnage* as fundamentally wider, more open, and more inclusive<sup>3</sup>. This said, the only factor that distinguishes Dracius' discourse from *Créolité* is that it includes the Martinican Diaspora in the process of the identity quest. This is not surprising given that the author belonged to the Martinican Diaspora of hexagonal France. She lived in Sceaux since the age of four and returned to Martinique in 1982 (Rinne 359). Dracius' discourse also heavily draws on *Antillanité*, Édouard Glissant's theory, which offers a definition for the term and the process of *métissage* in *Le discours antillais* (428).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, not only does *Métissage-marronnage* seem paradoxical, but in addition, it is not exceptionally innovative and seems to be a collage of the existing theories on identity. More importantly, the character Rehvana is depicted as acting out the true spirit of *Négritude* against which *Métissage-marronnage* is a plea.

<sup>3</sup> In an email sent to me Suzanne Dracius says: “As Mat(h)ildana, my idealistic character can show it, my theory is less sectarian than “Créolité.” It is wider and takes into account the diasporic Antilleans (which Créolité barely does) from France and elsewhere.”4-12-2006.

<sup>4</sup> “If we are talking about mixed cultures (like for instance the Antillean culture), it is not to define a category per se that would challenge other categories (of “pure” cultures), but it is to assert that today, there is a whole new approach to the Relation, as a conscience and as a project: as a theory and as a reality. [. . .] Métissage is not the extolling of the composite construction of a people: [. . .]. Métissage underlines that it is now useless to glorify one's ‘unique’ origin of which one's race would be the guardian and the promoter.” My translation of: « Si nous parlons de cultures métissées (comme l'antillaise par exemple), ce n'est pas pour définir une catégorie en-soi qui s'opposerait par là à d'autres catégories (de cultures « pures »), mais pour affirmer qu'aujourd'hui s'ouvre pour la mentalité humaine une approche infinie de la Relation, comme conscience et comme projet : comme théorie et comme réalité. [...] Le métissage en tant que proposition n'est pas d'abord l'exaltation de la formation composite d'un peuple : [. . .]. Le métissage comme proposition souligne qu'il est désormais inopérant de glorifier une origine « unique » dont la race serait gardienne et continuatrice ».

*Marronnage* is the phenomenon observed among slaves during the colonial era whereby they fled from slavery and sought freedom in the mountains. Victor Schœlcher affirms that there were maroons from the very inception of slavery in the Caribbean<sup>5</sup> while Reverend Labat points to the ferocity of the maroons and the persistent nature of *marronnage*. According to Labat, once the slaves had set themselves free through *marronnage* one could not make them return to bondage (230).<sup>6</sup> The subversive nature of *marronnage* brought intellectuals, political and cultural activists as well as artists to view *marronnage* from an ideological and symbolic perspective and today *marronnage* is used as a concept that expresses resistance, ideology and culture.

Given the historical and symbolic connotations of *marronnage* and the heavy ideological meaning of *métissage*, what Dracius would want to state with *Métissage-marronnage* is that by totally accepting one's mixed heritage, and regarding each element as equal, one would maroon and thus challenge received ideas or factual and symbolic slavery and death, and definitely be free. This freedom would make any identity quest unnecessary. Given the outcome of the novel and the short story, the identity quest is presented as cumbersome, useless and to some extent unfounded. To be a *métisse* is unquestionably *bien-être* which goes without saying, but it is also to be a maroon and therefore combative and free. Notwithstanding, this equation seems to be posed in the same essentialist terms that Dracius purports to contend through her plots. There is no moderation in any of the characters' attitude and position. Both have extremist ways of defending their standpoint. In addition, the symbolic scope given to *Métissage-marronnage* is lessened by the sisters' racial *métissage*. As I will show later in the discussion, the latter factor present the author's discourse as racialist and essentialist.

Although *L'autre qui danse* expands on Rehvana's fate, it is Matildana who is the heroine. Matildana, the trope of *métissage* in *L'autre*, is said to be "[...] well rooted in the confusion of her mixed blood"(40).<sup>7</sup> Robert Young notes the positive aspects of such an attitude: "Today's self proclaimed mobile and multiple identities may be a marker not of contemporary social fluidity and dispossession but of a new stability, self-assurance and quietism" (4). Given Young's words, Matildana is assuredly the model to emulate. In *L'autre qui danse*, she is introduced under a chapter entitled "The other" which leads one to believe that in reality, Matildana is "the other one who dances" and thus gives meaning to the title of the novel—literally in French, "The Other who Dances."<sup>8</sup> Dracius asserts in an interview with Suzanne Rinne: "I am not

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<sup>5</sup> Victor Schœlcher, *Des colonies françaises, Abolition immédiate de l'esclavage*, pp.102-103

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Voyages aux isles, Chronique aventureuse des Caraïbes, 1693-1705*, Paris, Phébus libretto, Edition établie et présentée par Michel Le Bris, 1993, p.230

<sup>7</sup> « [...] bien plantée dans la confusion de ses sangs »

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, when I asked her in an email which one of the two characters was patterned after her, Suzanne Dracius answered as follows: "I really hope I am more like "The Other

Rehvana, but I am the Other who dances” (371).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, one understands that the character Matildana is the author’s self-representation. Indeed, a *mûlatresse* herself or a *métisse*—that is, a person of mixed race. Suzanne Dracius likes to describe her multiracial and multicultural origins as follows:

Not only am I *racially* a mulatto - I have black blood and white blood too, of course, but also Indian with or without feathers, and I have a Chinese great grand-mother -, but I am also culturally mixed (Am I not a Greco-Latin semi-negro?), oh, yes, I experienced it, the Antilles-Métropole-Africa triangle”, the so-called triangular slave trade! *But I refuse to live it in the hold*. I chose to live as a rebel who fights against confinement. That is the reason why I take so much pleasure in conversing with the Other. No, I am not Rehvana. (Rinne 370)<sup>10</sup>

By virtue of her multiple ethnicity and cultures and her judicious choice to celebrate these attributes, Suzanne Dracius states that she is an “enlightened mulatto” (Rinne 370). The author’s explanations are likely to lead to strong reservations about *Métissage-marronnage*. Indeed, one may well think that *Métissage-marronnage* argues that only a combination of racial and cultural *métissage* is likely to bring stability and happiness. A *bien-être du métissage* could therefore be achieved only through the alliance of the two forms of *métissage*, biological and cultural. This is precisely my reservation about Dracius’s theory. Her characters are both racially mixed while they are acting out an identity meant to be collective; this functions to singularize the people of Martinique. Yet, the latter are not racially mixed in their entirety. The author’s visible projection of herself onto Matildana in order to symbolize the people of Martinique is disturbing since most Martinicans are far from being “Greco-Latin semi-negro.” At this point, it is of paramount importance to underline that Matildana’s attitude is in fact one extolled by Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the *Négritude* eulogists. Long before *Antillanité* or *Créolité*, *Négritude* had extensively promoted both biological and cultural *métissage*. Senghor asserts that the *Métis* are superior because they are free “to choose where they want what they want to produce a strong and exquisite work” (103). In light of this, Dracius’s contention about the Martinican identity lacks accuracy and credibility, and is paradoxical. I have said that the author aims at opposing *Négritude* through the exaggerated portrayal of Rehvana and the depiction of Matildana as more representative of the Martinican identity. Yet, contradictorily, Matildana’s actions and thoughts appear to

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who Dances” and not like the one who gets entangled in her roots. So, Matildana is the one who looks like me. She is the eponym heroine. It is she who brings hope.”

<sup>9</sup> My translation of : «Je ne suis pas Rehvana, mais, *L’autre qui danse*, c’est moi.»

<sup>10</sup> My translation of : «Métisse non seulement *racialement*,—j’ai du Noir, et du Blanc, bien sûr, mais aussi de l’Indien avec ou sans plumes, et une arrière grand-mère chinoise—, mais aussi *culturellement* (ne suis-je pas une semi-négresse gréco-latine ?), oh, oui, je l’ai vécu, le «triangle Antilles-Métropole-Afrique», celui du trafic dit triangulaire ! *Mais je refuse de le vivre à fond de cale*. J’ai choisi de le vivre en rebelle, en lutte contre l’enfermement. C’est pourquoi j’ai tant plaisir à converser avec l’Autre. Je ne suis pas Rehvana».

be a reflection of the very flaws Dracius argues exist in the ideology of *Négritude*. The following quotation catches our attention because, concerning the characters' respective psychological particulars, Dracius explains the protagonists' names and claims that she refused to grant them names that already exist in real life (Rinne 370).<sup>11</sup>

However, the characters' names already exist poetically in Curtis Louisar's song prior to their use in Dracius' text. This implies a kind of determinism that could announce their respective fates. Given the critical importance of a name in terms of identity, the naming process is highly symbolic for this particular text.<sup>12</sup> The morphology of the respective names informs us on the girls' particular natures. Illustratively, the author spells the character's name <Mat'> at the end of *L'autre* as to stress her mathematical properties (343). In "L'âme sœur," the author goes even farther and modifies the spelling of the name and "Matildana" becomes "Mathildana."<sup>13</sup> Mat(h)ildana's<sup>14</sup> mathematical mindset is only alluded in "L'âme sœur" where she reflects on Rehvana's turmoil that she aspires to decipher and understand (148-149). However, the very presentation of this character as scientific, objective and rationalistic amounts to erecting the concept of *Métissage-marronnage* as the absolute, the sole and unquestionable way to conceive the Martinican identity. Therefore, it is clear that Dracius falls into the same absolutism and fanaticism she denounces in the theory of *Négritude*. Evidently, Rehvana's name is also meant to match her psychological disposition. In considering the root, "rêve," meaning dream, one can clearly associate her name with "irreal" or even the "surreal." This suggests that the narrator is explicitly conveying to us that Rehvana is driven by the "emotion" that "the memory of her race" causes her as it is articulated in *L'autre* (147).

Mat(h)ildana is the symbol for *marronnage* and her *marronnage* is itself very symbolic. Her freedom is symbolically characterized by her

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<sup>11</sup> "I voluntarily decided to discard true first names and surnames for my characters. So that they be more atemporal and more multiple as well. Multiforms. In Rehvana there can be heard dreams, in Matildana, there is math, mathematics, rectitude, logic and a sense for abstraction, a capacity to analyze: Matildana is the look. The one who understands and deciphers while her sister is made of chimeras." My translation of: «C'est volontairement que j'ai éliminé les vrais prénoms, et également les patronymes. Pour qu'elles soient plus a-temporelles, plus multiples aussi. Multiformes dans Rehvana, il y a rêve, dans Matildana, il y a math, mathématiques, rectitude, logique et sens de l'abstraction, capacité d'analyse: Matildana est le regard. Celui qui comprend et qui décrypte, quand sa sœur est faite de chimères».

<sup>12</sup> *Names*, Journal of the American Name Society, vol. 31, N. 4, déc. 1983.

<sup>13</sup> From now on the character's name will be spelled "Mat(h)ildana" as the author wrote it in her answers to my emails.

<sup>14</sup> When, in an email I asked her whether this modification was a coincidence or a deliberate way to translate mat(h)ildana's mathematical mindset, she answered what follows: "You are right [. . .] I insidiously bring her closer to "math," to mathematics, to rigor, to wisdom. As if the "h" in Rehvana had passed on to her after Rehvana's death."— « Je la rapproche insidieusement, de plus en plus, de « math », de mathématique, de la rigueur, de la sagesse. Comme si le « h » de Rehvana était passé en elle, dans la mort ».

portrayal as a *marronne*; that is, a free run-away slave. This metaphorical characterization of the female as a *marronne* is at the core of Dracius' writings and I might say that all of her characters, Rehvana being the exception so far, are actual or symbolic *marronne* heroines. This said, the author goes even further in her statement and suggests evidently that *métissage* is *marronnage*. To be a *métis*, biological and cultural, is to maroon.

Interestingly, Mat(h)ildana's introduction in *L'autre* starts with a comparison to the historical figure of the maroon and her shoulders which are a steady anchor for Rehvana and are said to be free and "naturally maroon": "They are marked with the lis flower that identified the slaves convicted of *marronnage*." (43) The author continues this characterization by using the girl's idiosyncrasies to offer a definition for the maroon: "A warrior, free of all marks of infamy, neither to a king nor to a master or a bent malediction, Matildana was a long and untied force, a noble and Grand person freed of all chains" (44). Significantly, it is added that she is imperishable (44). In "L'âme sœur," the author insists on this portrayal of Mat(h)ildana and reminds the reader that, like maroons, the woman is used to fighting and is determined to conquer adversity (148). To magnify Mat(h)ildana's symbolization, Dracius portrays her dancing an ancestral dance, the same dance her slave ancestors performed, and which brings enlightenment and reveals knowledge. In both texts, it is this dance, the seminal passage on which Dracius's discourse relies, that inscribes the text within the marvelous realism paradigm. This is meaningful when one reads Sangari's assertion according to which: "marvelous realism is attached to a real and to a possible" (quoted in Puri 144). Therefore, it is implied that Mat(h)ildana as a model is not only real but the very manifestation of her existence is in addition and above all, possible. What is even more crucial is that through this dance performance she literally applies and demonstrates the author's identity theory. This is indeed highly critical as Gabriel Entiope asserts in his *Nègres, danse et résistance* that the slaves will use the dance as "[. . .] a means to regain their freedom" (250). This is so much so that Labat, as reported in Entiope, states that: "[. . .], the slaves would walk long distances to reach a place where they knew there was a dance" (252). Many slaves would even challenge their masters' interdiction against going to a nocturnal dance meeting to such an extent that Sala-Molins expends on the importance of the night and writes that it is at this special time that they: "[. . .] braved the whip, the lis flower and death to play for some hour the game of life and freedom" (252).

Mat(h)ildana's positioning and representation of Africa, Martinique and Paris becomes an explicit and indispensable vector for her success. This dance, which is fusion and communion (*L'autre*, 74), cannot be danced alone and requires acknowledgement of the past and a collective solidarity. In fact, the girl is able to perform "the act of imaginary rediscovery" that Stuart Hall deems necessary for any rediscovered identity (224). Her dance is a "*re-telling* of the past" (Hall 224) that allows

its reappropriation. It is true that “the perspiration running along the faces restores the tropics as African heats sweating along the bodies [. . .]” (*L'autre* 72). Interestingly, Mat(h)ildana reaches this extreme and accurate sense of self through the dance (*L'autre* 74).

Mat(h)ildana dances in a group of friends from around the world and all of them, regardless of their distinctive identity, nationality and culture, perform appropriate and harmonious steps on the same beat. Again, Gabriel Entiope stresses that: “[...] from the moment this get together becomes conscious of itself as an active ‘we’ different from the rest of society; we are no longer dealing with a crowd or a mass of people, but with an active group with a collective consciousness that targets a common action” (256).

Through the dance, and thanks to the body as a vessel for the fulfillment of the fusion, all three lands, Africa, Martinique and France are acknowledged as a possible home and therefore, as equal and adequate agents and constituents for identity. Mat(h)ildana lays claim on this triangular geography that gives significance to her identity and conjures at the same time the old antagonism brought about by the colonial *traite triangulaire*. She too is engaged in a *traite* except that hers is a transgression and a manifestation of her subjective negotiation with all three “homes.” This subversion and correction of the colonial *traite*, that is the fruitful exchange/collaboration between all three spaces, is also the expression of the protagonist’s *marronnage*. In addition to acknowledging the mutual reliance between the dance, the body and the music, Mat(h)ildana acknowledges the legitimacy of the dance as well as the legitimacy of her body as an integral and adequate part of the dance (72).<sup>15</sup> As suggested by the circle, the cosmic fusion between the body and the dance stresses the importance of good judgment and openness. All of this is even more enhanced by the metaphoric explosion reached through the intensity of the dance: “Little by little, everything evolves; everything becomes more intense and explodes in the same way as in a fire without artifices” (72). A character itself, the body succeeds in turning the coincidence of its presence into a fruitful and appropriate sharing. Thanks to the body performing the dance, one reaches due ownership of the self. It can therefore be inferred that the body performs the identity all the more so as Mat(h)ildana’s mixed body is a visible incarnation of *métissage*: “One sets everything free; one avenges and pays off oneself. One belongs to oneself. I say *one belongs to oneself*” (73).<sup>16</sup>

Since they are in a perfect harmony, the body and the mind are equally free. One has full ownership over the body and the mind. It is all

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<sup>15</sup> “Matildana discovers that when she entered the circle, her body had its share of it. It was there and instinctively knew when to enter it, exactly when to get out of it and what to do in it.” My translation of: « Matildana découvre, quand elle est rentrée dans le cercle, que son corps en a pris sa part, et qu’il s’est trouvé là, qu’il a su de lui-même quand y aller, quand en sortir et quoi y faire ».

<sup>16</sup> My translation of : « [...] on libère tout, on se venge et se paie, on s’appartient, je dis qu’on s’appartient ».

the more interesting that the body of the slave who maroons is often characterized by its mutilation.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the dance that allows the body to transcribe the identity and to be in a transcendental communion with others is also meant to redeem the historically mutilated body. The dance is a remembrance of the dismembered body for which it proposes a “(re)memberment.” Thus, the narrator authoritatively proclaims: “one has nothing to lose and everything to regain” (72). Mat(h)ildana knows the secret to a stable, dignified and universal identity because she chooses to be initiated. She knows the dance and performs it actively and instinctively, unlike Rehvana who just watches her passively (73). This dance is significantly “the exaltation of her ego”(74). By performing this very ancestral dance, Mat(h)ildana proves to be exceedingly defiant and iconoclastic. Indeed, it jars with her way of life, which is definitely modern, and with the classical dance and music she likes to perform and listen to. It is not expected that these two types of dances and music form a harmonious fusion. Symbolically and concretely, Mat(h)ildana takes the liberty to use her self as a fusion body for the two cultures. This is to be seen as an act of conscious self-empowerment and declaration of inalienable freedom. It has to be noted here that this process was crucial in Senghor’s reflexion on *Négritude*. According to Robert Jouanny, Senghor’s goal was: “to define, reconcile while opposing them, to associate in a contemporaneous practice, to “métisser” in other words, two worlds that carry irreplaceable values [ . . . ]”(25). Given this, Suzanne Dracius’ implicit and explicit discourse on *Négritude* is aporetical. Her portrayal of Mat(h)ildana agrees with Senghor “who refuses to mistake difference and antagonism” (Jouanny 27). Mat(h)ildana is one of the *Nègre nouveau* Senghor exhorts black people to be and this is in accordance with her portrayal as a maroon. She is a maroon precisely in her defiance and freedom of the mind and the body. Judging from her thoughts and actions, what Mat(h)ildana acts and defends is also a *poétique de la Relation*, as articulated in Glissant’s *Introduction à une poétique du divers*:

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<sup>17</sup> Reverend DuTertre gives us an example of the mutilation suffered by the slaves: “If by law one demands that the bodies of those who are condemned to death, be burnt after they have been strangled, one obliges the negroes to each carry a piece of wood to make the fire. However, if they are not to be burnt, one scatters the bodies and one places the limbs at public places except the head that is always given to the master so that he places it in the middle of the Great House to instill even more fear into their slaves.” —« Si par l’Arrest l’on ordonne que le corps de ceux qui sont condamnez a mort, seront bruslez apres avoir ete estranglez, l’on contraint les Nègres de porter chacun vn morceau de bois pour composer le feu ; mais lors qu’ils sont exempts du feu, l’on écartelle ces corps & l’on en attache les membres aux avenues des places publiques, a la reserve de la teste qui est tousiours donnee au Maistre pour la faire mettre sur un poteau au milieu de son habitation, pour imprimer plus de crainte a ses esclaves ». (Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles Habitées par les François*, Tome II Editions des horizons Caraïbes, Fort-de-France, Martinique, 1973, 496).

What I am saying is that the notion of the being and of the absolute aspect of the being is tied to the notion of identity with a “unique root” and of an exclusive identity and that if one considers a rhizomatic identity, that is with a root that means to encounter other roots, then what is important is not the absolute nature of each root, but the mode and the way they get into contact with other roots: the Relation. (30-31)<sup>18</sup>

It must be underlined that the ultimate freedom is reached only when one inscribes oneself within a multicultural community as a Whole and one aligns one’s own self to that of others in a communicant relation. This is exemplified by the Martinican dramatic *Voyé monté*—literally meaning “throwing oneself upward”—that inexorably takes place in a time of intense dancing and celebration. This *voyé monté* consists in responding in the most merging way with one’s body and voice to the call of the music or the singer. Mat(h)ildana does exactly this when her body gets in a trance, it is literally transmuted in extreme contortions and her voice transfigured into the collective *OUÉÉÉ* generally launched out to express one’s transcendental satisfaction. Like in a zouk concert or in a zouk party, the multiple voices of the crowd are voiced as one in this crucial *OUÉÉÉ*, which is the materialization of the *voyé monté*. This scenery and image of the body possession echoes the vivid and intense atmosphere of a voodoo ceremony. Adlai Murdoch points out that: “What Matildana responds to in fact is, in a sense, the call of hi/stories, the transmutation of the slave rhythms whose call-and-response signaled community and resistance into the transnational, cross-cultural cadences of zouk and calypso, whose polyvocality is the hallmark of Caribbean expression” (170-171). Here, one senses the esoteric atmosphere and the impression of a mass or a ceremony held to profess one’s faith to one’s religion at the end of which will come the Revelation. Moreover, Curtis Louisar’s influence can well be noticed since Dracius uses the title of his song as a parable to rewrite Mat(h)ildana as the *personification de la Révélation*. As indicated by the expression “nocturnal celebration” Mat(h)ildana is, together with the group of dancers, a practising member of this religion. In other words, the protagonist practices hybridity. To the slave, the nighttime, the practice of voodoo and the dance are inextricably linked together and all authoritatively allow for their freedom. Mat(h)ildana also acts like a *prêtresse vodou*. Entiope reminds us that during the Haitian Revolution: “. . . the voodoo priests were, for most of them, maroons such as Makandal, Boukman, Petit Noël or Don Pedro [ . . . ]” (256). This impression is all the more lingering when the author uses specific Martinican esoteric terms such as *démaré*—literally, “to rid oneself of impurities”—directly derived from *ben démaré*, an ancestral custom Martinicans observe for purification that consists in bathing in the sea. In

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<sup>18</sup> « Ce que je dis c’est que la notion d’être et d’absolu de l’être est liée à la notion d’identité « racine unique » et d’exclusive de l’identité, et que si on conçoit une identité rhizome, c’est-à-dire racine, mais allant à la rencontre des autres racines, alors ce qui devient important n’est pas tellement un prétendu absolu de chaque racine, mais le mode, la manière dont elle entre en contact avec d’autres racines: la Relation ».

*L'autre*, Dracius' narrator asserts that: "One must know how to disencumber oneself, to empty and to purify oneself [. . .]" (75). Needless to say, the music is critical in this ceremonial, esoteric, religious and purification process. One cannot help perceiving in this esotericism a tonal commonality with Curtis Louisar's song, which bears a powerful, mystical and esoteric tonality. It is therefore judicious to infer that, just like the dance and the body, this music is the music of identity.

The narrator even boldly calls upon the reader's judgment and thus exhorts them not to misunderstand the obvious act that is at play. It is indeed the identity that is very symbolically *en production*, *en représentation* or *en revelation* (73). Stuart Hall asserts that: "[. . .] we should think, instead, of identity as a "production" which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (222).

The narrator purports to show that since Mat(h)ildana is equally at ease with classical music—one of the symbols of European culture—as well as with the African or Martinican drum beat, since she studies at La Sorbonne—one of France's cultural and intellectual symbols—and goes on to teach the vernacular Creole—a strong symbol for Martinican identity—in Martinique later on, and since she is not averse to dancing the same traditional dance as her African ancestors together with others, then indeed, she has a rhizomatic identity of which she is conscious. She practices and acts out the Glissantian Relation and can even be regarded as the Relation itself. This is also another manifestation of the protagonist's symbolic *marronnage*. This chosen Relation with the world and with the ancestors, thus this Relation with her inner self, crystallized by the dance and made possible by the drum through the body is Mat(h)ildana's first alliance. Apparently, Mat(h)ildana shares Glissant's position about the identity quest as he expresses it in *Le discours antillais*:

Today, Caribbean people no longer deny the African component of their identity nor do they have to defensively promote it as exclusive. It is necessary that they recognize it. They understand [. . .] that *another reality* resulted from this history [. . .] They know that the synthesis is not at all the bastardizing process they were told but it is rather a fruitful practice that enriches the components. They have become Caribbean. (25-26)<sup>19</sup>

Above all, the character makes an alliance with each of the components of her identity and by virtue of this, she positively responds to Senghor who, in "De la liberté de l'âme," asserts that: "Our mission as colonized people is to overcome conjuncture contradictions as well as the antinomy that is artificially erected between Africa and Europe, our biological heritage and education" (103). It is true that this protagonist's choice to return to her

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<sup>19</sup> My translation of the French: "Aujourd'hui l'Antillais ne renie plus la part africaine de son être; il n'a plus, par réaction, à la prôner comme exclusive. Il faut qu'il la reconnaisse. Il comprend que de toute cette histoire [. . .] est résultée *une autre réalité*. . . . Il conçoit que la synthèse n'est pas l'opération d'abâtardissement qu'on lui disait, mais pratique féconde par quoi les composantes s'enrichissent. Il est *devenu* antillais."

native land for active reasons, to teach the country's mother tongue, is a powerful symbol for her denoted cultural and political activism. It is also Mat(h)ildana's second alliance. Like *marronnage* and the drum, Creole, as a language, is the trope for resistance, freedom and probably the best indicator of identity.<sup>20</sup> She supports her country's future and along her discourse of *métissage*, she articulates a discourse of nationalism in this subtle way. This shows that the fact that identity discourses are often intertwined with political activism. To this respect, Shalini Puri contends that, "[. . .] hybridist manifestos and nationalist manifestos are *twin* forms of imagining community" (104).

If the term *créolité* is never mentioned Mat(h)ildana embodies it very actively. In "L'âme soeur," the character identifies both herself and her sister in a proclamation that strangely reminds the reader of the Creolists' statement on *Créolité*: "neither a strong *négresse* [. . .] nor a white woman with a capital W [. . .] neither one nor the other but mixed, *métisse*, [. . .]" (149).<sup>21</sup> In her desire to sustain her discourse and oppose Mat(h)ildana's symbolism to Rehvana's, the writer goes as far as to presenting the former character as "immortal," "eternal" and "imperishable" (*L'autre*, 44). When in *L'autre*, Rehvana's friend, Jérémie, thinks of her his words to describe his perception is unquestionably one of deep but naive admiration (39-40).<sup>22</sup>

However, it must be pointed out that the description conveys a great deal of idealism that matches Rehvana's own excess, absolutism and extremism. Both representations are exasperating and this belittles the author's attempt to proffer an alternative to the existing identity theories. Even though Mat(h)ildana is meant to exemplify inclusiveness, universalism and stability, the fact is that she is categorically presented as the only true alternative. Mat(h)ildana appears to be the author's own utopia. Consequently, *Métissage-marronnage* and *L'autre qui danse* may well be Suzanne Dracius's *outrévidence*. Mat(h)ildana epitomizes the new species that can redeem the world from its racial and cultural cleavages. It would also be justified here to question Dracius' assertion in

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion on Creole in *L'autre qui danse* see H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole identity in the French Caribbean Novel*.

<sup>21</sup> « Ni Négresse debout, [. . .] ni blanche avec un grand B [. . .] Ni l'un ni l'autre mais sang-mêlé, métisse[. . .] »

<sup>22</sup> "This incredible new beauty at the bridge of so many centuries, this sumptuous harmony contrasted with all merging races. Oh! the twist and turn of history all quietly united in her, she, of mixed blood. It is as if each race, each people had invested in her flesh their most beautiful features; as if some alchemist, some visionary genius, had the power to concentrate in this woman all of the wonders of the universe and to distribute them in a wise dosage and to unify them in a perfect symbiosis." My translation of: «[. . .] cette incroyable beauté neuve au confluent de tant de siècles, cette fastueuse harmonie contrastée de toutes races convergentes. Superbe errement de l'histoire, elle le confondait sans rien dire, la sang-mêlée. C'était comme si chaque race, chaque peuple avait investi dans ses chairs tout ce qu'il avait de plus beau; comme si quelque alchimiste, quelque génie visionnaire, avait eu le pouvoir de concentrer dans cet être toutes les beautés de l'univers, de les y répartir en un savant dosage et de les y unir en une symbiose parfaite. »

an e-mail that Mat(h)ildanas is to be understood as purely rationalistic, logic, objective and mathematical,<sup>23</sup> since her emotion and subjectivity guide this very choice of defending her linguistic heritage. The author may have stated that her character was to be understood as such but neither of her literary texts demonstrates it. Even though Creole is the language of *marronnage* and a metaphor for syncretism, inclusiveness, integration and fusion, it is still the language widely spoken in Martinique and as such, representative of this specific people. Since Creole is also the language of opposition and contention, choosing it instead of French amounts to radically choosing the people it represents and opposing resistance to linguistic, and thus cultural, domination. France exerts the cultural domination experienced by the people of Martinique. Therefore, like Rehvana, Mat(h)ildana finally selects very subjectively and ideologically, one aspect of her culture and identity over others.<sup>24</sup> As performed in the texts, Mat(h)ildana's actions do not prove her objectivity and rationality hence the unconvincing nature of *Métissage-marronnage*. The latter still do not ward off Rehvana's morbidity and alienation.

Importantly, while it is clearly shown that Mat(h)ildana corresponds with her ancestors through the dance, and therefore acknowledges her belonging to the African continent, the author does not provide such a poignant example of the protagonist's embracement of the European/Parisian culture and heritage to balance her discourse. This again lessens the author's attempt to propose *Métissage-marronnage* as the sole viable model for identity. In fact, paradoxically, Mat(h)ildana seems to agree with *Négritude* rather than solely laud *Métissage-marronnage*.

By making Rehvana die at the end of the novel, the author underlines the noxiousness of the character's choice. Thus, with "L'âme sœur" published fifteen years after *L'autre qui danse* and the double focus on Mat(h)ildana, Suzanne Dracius aims at affirming her ideological discourse once more. The time that elapsed between Dracius' two publications could suggest that the author has an objective view on the issue of Martinican identity since, thanks to the passage of time, she could take stock of and observe the situation lucidly and accurately. Nevertheless, if one considers carefully the way Dracius depicts Rehvana's understanding of *Négritude*, one may question the author's own understanding, critique of and opposition to *Négritude*. Rehvana's deeds, words and quest are triggered by her adherence to the concept of *Négritude*. This implies that she is merely following guidelines as exposed by the latter concept. Nowhere is

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<sup>23</sup> See footnote 14

<sup>24</sup> The author herself points to this strict selection: "I am [ . . . ] for a métissage with harmonious integrations of cultures, one that takes the best from each of the cultures and that rejects what is constraining, archaic and barbaric." My translation of: « Je suis contre une créolité qui serait synonyme d'enfermement tyrannique, pour un métissage en tissage harmonieux des cultures, prenant dans chacune d'elles ce qu'il y a de meilleur, et rejetant ce qu'il y a de contraignant, d'archaïque et de barbare » E-mail:4/12/2006.

it suggested that hers is a subjective and misleading interpretation of *Négritude*.

Rehvana's case is worth studying in light of historical facts since, according to prominent Martinican intellectuals and theorists including Césaire, Fanon, Glissant, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, colonization and slavery caused a severe psychological disturbance among colonized people. First of all, hers is the legacy of a long lasting, unsolved and unsettled history based on violent colonization, slavery and suffering. This history has led to so much aberration that Rehvana embraces some of the pernicious theories developed during the colonial era about hybridity or *métissage* even though there is a radical shift to serve her end. Mixed race people were to be discarded for the benefit of the white race while in Rehvana's world they ought to be rejected for the sake of the black race. Indeed, according to Aron, for nineteenth century biologists, a hybrid person is an aberration since they have two different natures. They are regarded as a biological and ontological scandal (qtd. in Périna 98).

Rehvana's character is to be found in several historical paradigms that echo those of her slave ancestors. If Mat(h)ildana can be said to be a maroon, Rehvana can well be regarded as a slave, hence their ultimate and symbolic distinction. The deportation primarily caused a psychological transformation in the slaves' apperception as well as in the way they were perceived (Fanon 60). In their new environment, the slaves were constrained to live according to a dichotomy and separatist standpoint that irremediably confined them, the blacks to one side, while their masters, the whites, were on the other. As a matter of fact, in the French colonies the Code Noir drew a clear separation between the two populations to such an extent that Fanon will hold it true even in the twentieth century and state that: "[. . .] there are two camps: the white and the black" (8). Rehvana experiences a similar displacement since she lives in Paris and is brought to see the world from a reductive perspective with the whites on one side and the blacks on the other.

Indeed, the slaves' apperception was constructed by the masters' perception. Thus, through the overbearing pressure of the masters' perception, many slaves were led to perceive themselves as inferior. To such an extent was this the case that in *Esclavage et colonisation*, Victor Schœlcher points out that many slaves were so brainwashed that they promptly repented when recaptured from *marronnage*. Yet, *marronnage* was a means by which they could enjoy freedom as runaways (67).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "There are some of these poor fellows who do not understand their desire to flee. They feel guilty; they would have liked to be good hard working slaves. They blame themselves sincerely for not being able to resist. They do not realize the victories their instinct win over their will. They think a spell has been cast out on them and because of the partial Christian education they are given, they naively ask their masters to pray for them to chase away from them the evil spirit and to prevent them from running away." My translation of: « Il est de ces pauvres gens qui ne comprennent pas leur désir de fuite. Ils s'en trouvent fort coupables; ils voudraient être de bons esclaves bien réglés, bien assidus à l'ouvrage; ils s'accusent avec sincérité de ne pouvoir résister; ils ne se rendent

In *L'autre*, Rehvana feels a similar guilt. She is significantly compared to a slave in a harem willing to obey to the male's sexual instinct (114). In light of their physical displacement and the displacement of their apperception, the issue of identity was immediately a reality to the slaves. Actually, Rehvana is the only character who experiences such an issue and ironically, she accuses her peers of ignorantly being in "a reasoned slavery" (36).

Like for Césaire in his *Notebook*, Rehvana's quest is a counter reaction to the pernicious aftermaths of both colonization and slavery on the colonized psyche, body and existence. However, her position is at radical variance with Césaire's since the latter claims that: "[. . .] what I want is for universal hunger/ for universal thirst/ to summon the race free at last/ to produce from its close intimacy/ the succulence of fruit" (115-118). Very significantly, Césaire also affirms that his *Négritude* "is neither a tower nor a cathedral" (115). Rehvana's posture also jars with that of Senghor who asserts that the mission of the *Nègre nouveau* is precisely to make the world know all of the values, all of the virtues of *Négritude* and, "above all, those that are align to the contemporary world and which, in a perfect harmony with those of other civilizations, must be used to build the civilization of the Universal. Then we shift from a *Négritude-objet* to a *Négritude-subjet*" (231-232).

Rehvana has become a member of a sect whose guru, Abdoulaye, is her boyfriend. Named the Ebonis, or the children of Agar the members of the sect are in fact diasporic Africans who have never set foot in Africa. With their own belief in and corrupt interpretation of *Négritude*, they aspire to a world dominated by Black people. In light of this, the sect's *Négritude* is in fact a *négritudism*, one that lacks the humanism and relativity of *Négritude*. It is one that, according to Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme*, "turns in on oneself" and is bound to fail because it lacks the necessary oxygen that sharing and exchanges bring (9). Thus, Suzanne Dracius aims at warning against the perverse consequences such a mindset could bring about, but as already underlined, this characterization of Césaire's thought is her own subjective and much extrapolated interpretation. The author simply extracted one aspect of Césaire's theory—the unashamed love for one's kind due to its denigration—and reduced it to her interpretation for the sake of her plot and own political discourse.

Césaire makes a point in articulating his will to abolish alienation (109). In *L'autre*, the alienation is voluntarily maintained and reinforced by violence. It starts with an attempt on the life of Rehvana and ends with her actual death. Césaire rejects the idea of a black essence and a focus solely on black skin color. In *Notebook* he presents his *Négritude* as a

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pas compte des victoires que l'instinct remporte sur leurs volontés; ils croient qu'on leur a jeté un sort, et avec l'incomplète éducation chrétienne qu'ils reçoivent, ils viennent demander naïvement au maître de faire dire des messes sur leur tête pour chasser l'esprit du mal, pour les empêcher d'être marrons ».

cosmic force that is nourished with the elements of the universe thereby encompassing and celebrating humankind (115). Césaire also asserts: “and the determination of my biology, not prisoner to a facial angle, to a type of hair, to a sufficiently flat nose, to a sufficiently melanous complexion, and negritude, not a cephalic index any more or a plasma or a soma [. . .]” (125). Contrary to Césaire’s choice, the sect has made these two parameters the focus of their activism and this echoes the racist and colonial focus on the color of the blacks, and of the mulatto. The perverse conditioning brings the female members of the sect to marginalize Rehvana because of her skin color and social origins. Through this marginalization, a degree of jealousy can be perceived which connotes the hypocrisy about their plea for racial unity (24).<sup>26</sup> This is all the more interesting since Dracius says that to her “the issue of métissage is linked to the feminine condition” (Rinne 369). So, such an interpretation of Césaire’s *Négritude* brings about a sexist and a feminist issue. Juxtaposing Rehvana’s obsession to Jérémie’s free and balanced nature is a way for Suzanne Dracius to voice her sarcastic opposition to *Négritude*. When introducing Jérémie to the reader, the narrator says: “As to him, Jérémie was hearing neither slaves’ chains clanking nor the voice of Africa [. . .] He got out of no line, he simply existed. Is it possible that all of this is only a matter of appearances?” (30-31).<sup>27</sup> In this statement can be perceived an answer to Césaire’s: “From the hold I hear shackled curses rising, the gasp of the dying . . .” (107).<sup>28</sup> Of course, the sect additionally encourages active racial hatred in the name of their *Négritude* whereas Césaire carefully insists that his proclaiming his blackness as beautiful is not intended to belittle other races: “But in doing these, o my heart, preserve me from all hatred/ Do not make me this man of hatred for whom I feel only hatred/ [. . .] what I want Is for universal hunger/ For universal thirst (*Notebook* 117).

After having searched for her identity through a mythical return to Africa, Rehvana returns, quite unexpectedly, to her birth country, Martinique. Interestingly, Édouard Glissant stresses that to return to one’s

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<sup>26</sup> “And the women in their brocaded boubous were already scarified. More or less the accomplices of this voluntary and sinister farce, the women, with their piercing cries, more and more full of hatred, urged Rehvana that she had to look like them and that there was no reason why this little bourgeois and light skin woman, this pretentious girl with her soft hair, should be their leader’s girl and refuse to do what she had to, to be totally integrated.” My translation of: « et les femmes en boubous chamarrés, déjà marquées, elles, et complices plus ou moins volontaires de cette sinistre mascarade, les femmes exhortaient Rehvana de leurs cris aigus, de plus en plus haineux, car il fallait qu’elle soit comme elle, il n’y avait pas de raison que cette petite bourgeoise à peau trop claire, cette mijaurée aux boucles souples, ait gagné les faveurs de leur beau mâle et se permettre de refuser de faire le nécessaire pour être totalement des leurs ».

<sup>27</sup> « Jérémie, pour sa part n’entend ni cliquettements de chaînes d’esclaves ni la voix de l’Afrique [. . .] Il ne passe aucune ligne, il existe. Se pourrait-il que tout cela ne soit qu’apparence ? ».

<sup>28</sup> Odile Ferly gives a good account of Dracius’ rewrite of some of Césaire’s lines. “Diversity Is coherence: métissage and créolité in Suzanne Dracius’ *L’autre qui danse*.”

native land is the first urge felt by those who cannot maintain the former order of their values: “The Return is the obsession of the One: [. . .] it is a way to consecrate permanence and the non-relation” (*Discours* 44). It is worth insisting that it is in Martinique, land of birth, land of exile, and land of return, that Rehvana suffers from the worst type of violence. The country seems as tormented, alienated and preoccupied with futile concerns as is Rehvana and one wonders whether there is any space or time for an experience such as Mat(h)ildana’s.

Suzanne Dracius continues her sarcasm by using the term “antillanité” literally but also figuratively: “To out Herod Herod, aggressive and filled with an activist antillanité, Rehvana all alone, refuted all that according to her, was not absolutely authentic” (*L’autre* 119).<sup>29</sup> The word bears two connotations as on the one hand, it refers to Glissant’s concept of Caribbean identity and on the other hand, it defines the peoples of Martinique and Guadeloupe, as they like to be called. There again, *Antillanité* is not presented as the ideal choice judging from the author’s irony. However, just like the idea Dracius wants to promote, Glissant explicitly states that caribbeanness is, “[. . .] a necessity of the swirl and of encounters, and of the harmony of different voices”.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, Rehvana’s death is announced by her mental disorder and anachronistic life. *L’autre qui danse* conclusion is that she died for not being able to live as an African (358). But Édouard Glissant had already asserted that, having a “racine unique,” causes death (*Introduction à une poétique du divers* 59). This said, it is in “L’âme sœur” that Rehvana’s tragic fate is better summed up. Again, it is made explicit that her identity and truth as a “*métisse créole*” were obvious to others such as Jérémie, Man Cidalise or Mat(h)ildana who could ascertain and name it—but not to her. The identity documents found next to her corpse symbolically and very ironically clarified her identity (147).<sup>31</sup> Rehvana has to die because she misses the ability to identify and name her self accurately, one of the principles at the core of identity. Contrariwise, in “L’âme sœur” Mat(h)ildana has the power to name her inner self and to define the terms of her identity of her own accord. To concretize this power, she invents a fruitful terminology that renders her identity more faithfully, in addition to rectifying and resituating Rehvana’s own identity as a *métisse créole*—subnegro—. This authoritative act of naming and the name itself stress a

<sup>29</sup> «Plus royaliste que le roi, agressive, éperdue d’antillanité militante, Rehvana s’insurgeait, solitaire, contre tout ce qui, à ses yeux, n’était pas paré d’authenticité sans conteste ».

<sup>30</sup> « [. . .] une nécessité du tourbillon et de la rencontre—et de l’accord des voix». *Paradis brisé*.

<sup>31</sup> “In a gothic paradox that typifies the antillais baroque, the Martinican woman who was suffering from a chronic identity crisis perished with her passport in her hand. She could then be identified immediately with all of her identity papers (her national identity card, her official family record book etc). [. . .]” My translation of: « En un gothique paradoxe, bien digne du baroque antillais, la Martiniquaise qui souffrait de crises d’identité chroniques a péri son passeport en main, immédiatement identifiable, tous ses papiers d’identité (Carte National d’Identité, Livret de Famille etc.) [. . .]. »

symbolic rebirth and purport to redeem Rehvana's barren life and quest. Once more, the principles that govern the *Créolité* current of thoughts can be read between the lines. In "L'âme," Mat(h)ildana claims that Rehvana is a: "[. . .] subnegro, as to be oneself, even though one is not completely nothing, neither black nor white; for not being nothing (since nothing is never all black or all white)" (149).<sup>32</sup>

Again, symbolically Mat(h)ildana's serenity and power challenge Rehvana's fatal delusion. Indeed, Mat(h)ildana's identification with Africa is done from home, her native land, and not from Paris. This legitimizes her as a model to follow. As she visits the country with Térance, Mat(h)ildana walks barefoot "[. . .] on the steep rocks of an unknown Bain des diabesses that rising up in front of Senegal [. . .]. They felt at ease within themselves, in their fulfilled métissage. [. . .] Looking in the direction of Gorée, the youngsters knelt" (*L'âme* 151).<sup>33</sup> Despite this allegiance to Africa, Mat(h)ildana attempts to rectify Rehvana's going astray by calling Man Cidalise, Rehvana's old friend, the ancestor. Thus, she articulates that her immediate Caribbean ancestry is as valuable as, and can cohabit with, their remote African ancestors (*L'âme* 153). To make this explicit, the narrator reminds us that Man Cidalise's grandmother was African and thus can be acknowledged, integrated and named with the same nomenclature (154).<sup>34</sup> In this context, Africa would be the motherland while Martinique is the homeland. Consequently, the author purports to present Mat(h)ildana not only as a modern character but as postmodern since she is characterized as being conscious of the different parts that constitute her whole. In this, Dracius would belong to the spectrum of thinkers, who, according to Shalini Puri, "claim the Caribbean's hybridity enables a path toward a productive modernism" (44). However, the focus is on Mat(h)ildana's African heritage and her choice to return to Martinique and teach Creole. Although the intent seems to be such, Suzanne Dracius does not totally succeed in demonstrating that *Métissage-marronnage* rejects a supreme authority to any of the constituents that make up identity.

Unquestionably, by incorporating the diasporic element into the Martinican discourse on identity, Suzanne Dracius enriches the quest and revives the debate even though hers is first of all, not exceedingly different from the existent discourses especially from *Créolité* and secondly, presents many questionable aspects. After examining her two texts one realizes that hers is an insufficiently nuanced critique of *Négritude*. Mat(h)ildana, her emblematic heroine, shares many converging ideological views with *Négritude*. What is even more interesting is that this character's standpoint and actions place her at the crossroads of

<sup>32</sup> « [. . .] subnègre, pour être soi, même si on n'est rien tout à fait, ni noir, ni blanc; pour n'être pas tout à fait rien (rien n'étant jamais tout noir ou tout blanc) ».

<sup>33</sup> « sur les roches escarpées d'un bain des Diabesses inconnu, dressé face au Sénégal, [. . .]. Eux se sentirent bien dans leurs peaux, dans leur métissage épanoui. Le regard tourné vers Gorée, juvéniles ils se recueillirent ».

<sup>34</sup> « Des lointaines rives de guinée, l'ancêtre venait leur parler ».

*Négritude*, *Antillanité* and *Créolité*. Contrary to what the author aimed at, it seems that her heroine is the product of a fusion between all three theories and this is where her *métissage* lies. This brings the conclusion that this Martinican identity, writers and theorists expatiate on, would rather be neither *Négritude* nor *Antillanité* nor *Créolité* alone but a combination of all.

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