

# SUGAR'S SEQUELS: INVENTING TRADITIONS IN THE PLANTATION SAGA NOVELS OF MARTINIQUE AND BRAZIL\*

Danielle Carlotti-Smith

University of Virginia

80           The sugar cane itself, like most of the people who work in the Caribbean area today, is descended from Old World stock. But the name GUAJANA is American Indian, Taino, and hence indigenously Caribbean. The flower of the cane is a symbol, then, of the mixture of peoples and cultures, of old and new.

—Sidney Mintz<sup>1</sup>

This essay will consider how plantation culture, and by extension, national culture, is reflected in two literary sagas that depict life in sugar-producing regions of the New World, one by the Brazilian regionalist writer José Lins do Rego (1901-1957) and the other by the Martinican *créoliste* author Raphaël Confiant (b. 1951). The serialization—in other words, the narrative and temporal continuity—of Confiant's *trilogie sucrière* (sugar trilogy) and Lins do Rego's *ciclo da cana de açúcar* (sugarcane cycle), provides particularly fertile terrain for exploring the function of repetition and self-referentiality as they relate to literary production and the construction and promulgation of Martinican and Brazilian national identity. Examining literary works from what are generally considered two distinct cultures zones also highlights the transnational reach of the intersecting discourses of sugar and creolization,<sup>2</sup> and the enduring presence of the sugar plantation in the cultural imagination of the New World.<sup>3</sup> In both places questions of production, self-sufficiency, survival, and autonomy rooted in the plantation past continue to resonate on material and metaphorical levels, and contribute to ongoing economic, political, cultural, literary, and identitarian debates.

As the Martinican writer Édouard Glissant has explained, from its colonial inception, nearly every aspect of life in Martinique was organized according to the

imperatives of the sugar monoculture. Consequently, the decline of the island's sugar industry in the early 1960s signaled more than economic failure for the French overseas department:

[E]n ce pays s'est livrée une lutte intense (souvent inaperçue), sanctionnée par la victoire des betteraviers français sur la canne à sucre. Si on ajoute que celle-ci s'était développée en monoculture, on comprendra que la Martinique soit devenue en fin de compte une terre de change, où il ne se produit plus rien. Terre sans production, la Martinique devient de plus en plus incapable de déterminer son devenir. (Glissant 315)

([I]n this country, an intense battle took place (often unnoticed), sanctioned by the victory of the French [sugar] beet farmers over the sugarcane. Add to that, the fact that sugarcane was a monoculture, and it is easy to understand why Martinique became a wasteland where nothing more is produced. A fallow land, Martinique is increasingly unable to determine its own future).<sup>4</sup>

Glissant's statement also reveals the inherent malaise in Martinique's geopolitical and postcolonial situation. Physically separated from the continental Americas and the other islands of the Caribbean, Martinique depends on France for nearly everything it consumes.<sup>5</sup> Although Brazil declared independence from Portugal in 1822, the cane-growing region of the *nordeste* (northeast) has maintained a similar relationship with the industrialized regions of the south. Geographic, social, and economic isolation made this region seem like an island within the larger Brazilian nation, forging an insularism among its inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> In both Brazil's *nordeste* and Martinique, geographic isolation also contributed to the preservation and perpetuation of the colonial plantation model. Long after Brazil's independence and Martinique's change from colonial to departmental status,<sup>7</sup> the legacy of the plantation lives on in the hierarchical ethnoclass system.<sup>8</sup>

José Lins do Rego's *ciclo da cana de açúcar* and Raphaël Confiant's *trilogie sucrière* (the latter forming a small cycle within Confiant's burgeoning "Comédie Créole"), share the same general characteristics as better known nineteenth-century realist and naturalist saga novels such as Honoré de Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* and Émile Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart*. First of all, as the term implies, saga novels consist of a series of interlinking novels in which a family, social group, society, region, or nation are represented usually over a sustained narrative period; together, the novels in the cycle provide a broader panoramic scope or collective vision of a carefully constructed fictional universe. Secondly, the relationship between individual novels and the novel cycle as a whole implicitly involves a constant intertextual or even, intratextual dialectic, since the cycle can simultaneously be perceived as a collection made up of distinct novels (intertextuality) and as one continuous text (intratextuality). From both vantage points, the interconnections between novels, characters, events, and fictional space reflect the rigid self-referentiality of the saga novel, which creates and validates its own self-contained reality.

On a mimetic level, the manner in which the complex social hierarchy of plantation society is represented in these neo-realist Martinican and Brazilian sagas is also characterized by the interdependence between individual segments and a larger entity, in that each ethnoclass is defined both in relation to other groups and within the ethnoclass continuum as a whole. Moreover, in the case of Confiant's and Lins do Rego's plantation sagas, the self-referentiality of the novel cycle format echoes the self-sufficiency of a New World plantation system that is simultaneously feudal and capitalist in structure<sup>10</sup>: both the literary cycle and the plantation model represented within it are closed or self-contained systems of representation and production. These structural similarities between the saga novel genre, the ethnoclass system, and the traditional plantation complex<sup>11</sup> constitute a significant overlap between the textual space of Confiant's and Lins do Rego's plantation novels and the social space portrayed within them, both enriching and complicating our understanding of the interplay between fictional and social space in these literary sagas. By taking these characteristics of self-referentiality and self-sufficiency into consideration along with the concomitant insular vision they promote, I propose that the plantation sagas of Confiant and Lins do Rego engage in a type of textual performance of Martinican and Brazilian culture that seeks to legitimize itself historically by referring to and establishing continuity with and within its own body of work.

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This textual performance can be seen as a literary instance of what the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm termed "invented traditions," which he defines as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1). The past to which 'invented traditions' refer may be real or invented, but in either case, Hobsbawm stresses, "the continuity with it is largely factitious" (2). The smooth, uninterrupted surface of an 'invented tradition' disguises not only a rupture or moment of crisis, but "the constant change and innovation of the modern world" to which it responds by making reference to the past in order to preserve certain elements of social life and make them appear constant and "unchanging" (2). In the literary instance, Confiant and Lins do Rego's plantation sagas respond to the collapse of the sugar industry in Martinique and the end of the family-owned plantation in Brazil's northeast. These events would trigger the demise of a social order and way of life dating back to the days of slavery (even as racial, economic, and social inequalities persisted thereafter), as well as to the disappearance of linguistic, religious, and cultural practices, which developed in the constrained "contact zone" of the colonial plantation, where African, European, and Amerindian peoples and traditions converged.

But at what cost (moral, ideological) should this insular social life be preserved? If we accept the premise that Lins do Rego's and Confiant's plantation sagas engage literarily in the practice of inventing traditions, it becomes abundantly clear that both sagas are responses to this inevitable cultural dissolution. Since the referent of all invented traditions is the historical past (real or made up), by turning back the

clock in their novels, the authors are able to excise—or at least, delay—the events and transformations that would bring about the end of these self-sufficient agrarian societies. By setting their novels and successive sequels prior to these changes, Lins do Rego and Confiant are able to create the illusion of what Benedict Anderson called the “forward march of homogeneous empty time” (33) and build a seamless connection between real historical occurrences and events in the novels. Each subsequent episode in their sagas validates not only the previous one, but contributes to a re-visioning of the social and historical landscape that these neo-realist novels claim to represent.

## SUGAR'S SEQUELS

Confiant's *trilogie sucrière*, which has alternately been referred to as *la série Commandeur du sucre* (The Sugar Overseer series), in reference to the first novel in the trilogy, fuses history and fiction to produce its self-described *récits*. The term *récit*, which has multiple meanings such as “story,” “narrative,” “account,” “report,” and “chronicle,” lends itself to the ambiguous relationship between fact and fiction in these works. Set against the backdrop of a massive labor and hunger strike of sugarcane workers that took place in Fort-de-France in January 1936,<sup>12</sup> *Commandeur du sucre* (1994) focuses on its protagonist Firmin Léandor, the mulatto overseer of the Bel-Évent plantation, who takes it upon himself to rally the mostly black male and female field hands (the descendants of slaves) to go against history (and their own interests) and continue working at this critical moment at the beginning of the cane harvest, the planting season. Saving the year's crop is only the beginning of the struggle for Firmin. Soon he devises an even more quixotic quest, given the social upheaval brought about by the labor strikes: to harvest a record yield of sugarcane. The challenge of convincing the unwilling workers to join his cause forces the overseer, an uptight and pretentious mulatto with a penchant for the florid language of Victor Hugo (even his name, Firmin, suggests this firmness or obstinance), to reconnect with the Creole language and culture he has shunned for so long. In the process, he gains a heightened sense of identity, and by the end of the novel, while sitting with a group of workers in Dame Yvette's rum shack, Firmin proclaims, “Je suis un nègre-canne!” (I'm a cane Negro!) (327).

The actual historical event in *Commandeur du sucre* serves as a mere reference point for the ensuing search for identity, which paradoxically involves contesting the validity of that very historical event.<sup>13</sup> As readers, we accompany Firmin on his journey of self-discovery, which conveniently provides a screen for our own cultural (re)education, thanks to the author's didactic efforts. Reminiscent of Émile Zola's careful attention to the language and way of life of his characters and their milieus, Confiant's painstaking descriptions of agricultural and industrial processes and their terminology, also provide a bird's eye view of the inner workings of the planta-

tion and the lives of those who work the land and run the refinery.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, its two sequels, *Régisseur du rhum* (*The Rum Steward*; 1999) and *La Dissidence* (*Dissidence*; 2002), also rely on a historical backdrop as a pretext for their plots. Both novels are set during World War II, shortly before and during the Vichy occupation of Martinique. As in *Commandeur du Sucre*, the main character of *Régisseur du rhum*, Pierre-Marie de La Vigerie, a *Béké kalazaza* (a member of the powerful white Martinican-born Creole families who “passes” for white, but has “dubious” mixed-race ancestry), must overcome numerous obstacles such as proletarian unionization, political repression, ostracism from his own *Béké* caste, and most of all, his own ambivalence toward the rum business, before he learns that the *métier* is more than just his livelihood (*Régisseur* 332).<sup>15</sup> The larger thesis of the novel echoes Glissant’s pronouncements in *Le discours antillais*: in the absence of sugarcane, rum, or any other significant industry, and through its material, economic, and psychological dependence on France, Martinique (symbolized here by Pierre-Marie de La Vigerie) is nothing more than

84 a passive spectator in its own demise. Pierre-Marie’s awakening occurs through his contact with the cane cutters and distillery workers during his apprenticeship in the family business. By immersing himself in the operations of the distillery, he imbibes the Martinican culture, falls in love with the beautiful Nègrèsse Laetitia, and finally comes to terms with his own racial identity. As in *Commandeur du sucre*, the reader is left with the final revelation of the main character’s identity at the very end of the novel: “Un mulâtre, voici ce que je suis, oui!” (A mulatto, that’s what I am, all right!).<sup>16</sup>

*La Dissidence*, the final novel in the trilogy, picks up right at the historical point where *Régisseur du rhum* leaves off, the moment when many Martinican men are preparing to escape Martinique via the British island of Saint-Lucia to join the French Resistance. Although the term *dissidence* also applies to the French opposition to Vichy, it in fact refers to the everyday acts of subversion carried out by ordinary Martinican people, necessary both for their survival and to assert their dignity. The title reveals a different narrative perspective from the two previous novels, whose titles point to the presence of a main protagonist (*le commandeur*, *le régisseur*). In keeping with its title, *La Dissidence* proposes the Martinican people as a collective protagonist, as the voice of a shared culture and experience.<sup>17</sup> The narrative perspective shifts between different characters, including Firmin Léandor, the *Béké* Germain de Gourmainville, and a collective narrator, who speaks from the perspective of *nous* (we/us). *La Dissidence* also includes a regular epistolary component in the form of a series of journal entries written by a French enlisted navy man<sup>18</sup> whose real name is not revealed in the novel (*Dissidence* 275-279).<sup>19</sup> Once again, major historical events serve as the backdrop, while the struggle at the forefront of the novel remains the same as in the two previous novels: to keep the sugarcane growing and the rum distilling in defiance of the Vichy government’s strict orders to strip the cane fields and replace them with much-needed food crops to help overcome shortages and rations during the war.

There is, in fact, a double dissidence underway in the novel: on the one hand, to contribute to the efforts of the Resistance to free France and Martinique from the clutches of the Germans and the Vichy regime (the historical pretext); on the other hand, a far more subversive and clandestine operation to hide, cultivate, and protect the age-old sugarcane tradition in order to assure its survival (the ideological motivation), thus ensuring the continued vitality the Creole culture, language, and identity. The sense of secrecy, magic, heroism, and eroticism surrounding the cultivation of cane become both a ritual and a celebratory myth in Confiant's *trilogie sucrière*. Arguably, the ritual of sugarcane serves as a justification and an organizing metaphor for the social hierarchy resulting from colonialism and slavery, which is present in the three novels. Repeatedly, the male protagonists in *Commandeur du sucre*, *Régisseur du rhum*, and *La Dissidence*, are reminded—regardless of their race and station—that sugarcane is both their identity and their destiny, a link to their past and their future, and the reason for their tragedies and triumphs.<sup>20</sup> The impulse to memorialize and perpetuate the legacy of the plantation at all costs derives from an attachment to this space as the site of origin of the Creole language and culture. Even as characters such as Firmin Léandor find creative ways to exert their power and shape historical events, they do so within the limits of the social hierarchy of the plantation. For this hierarchy not only shaped the characters' identities and defined their relationship to one another, but also sustained the plantation's and island's economy for so long. Thus, the social and racial inequality on the plantation and the presence of a fascist colonial occupier on the island are utterly necessary in order to portray characters such as Firmin Léandor and Pierre-Marie de La Vigerie—and by extension, the Martinican people—as righteous dissidents. An identity predicated on the notion of resistance cannot exist in the absence of the injustice and oppression of both colonialism<sup>21</sup> and its founding institution in the tropics, the plantation.<sup>22</sup> This may be the greatest single paradox of Confiant's sugarcane trilogy.

Perhaps due to his own bittersweet experience growing up on a plantation, Lins do Rego's *ciclo da cana de açúcar* does not attempt to cast plantation life as unproblematically heroic.<sup>23</sup> In his *ciclo da cana de açúcar*, Lins do Rego attempts to represent different aspects of the plantation experience from the point of view of various characters, although the heavily autobiographical protagonist of the first novel, *Menino de engenho* (*Plantation Boy*; 1932), is present in all the novels in the series (albeit at times in minor roles). *Menino de engenho*, which begins with Carlos de Melo's (Carlinhos) arrival at the Santa Rosa plantation as a small child following his mother's death, introduces the reader to the self-contained world of the plantation and to many of the archaic northeastern linguistic and cultural practices preserved there because of the region's isolation. *Doidinho* (*Crazy Kid*; 1933), which takes place after Carlinhos has lived on Santa Rosa plantation for eight years, chronicles the main character's difficulties adjusting to life at boarding school, focusing on his infirmity, homesickness for Santa Rosa, and his loss of identity in this unfamiliar environment. Three other novels in the cycle, *Bangüe* (the term for a small labor-intensive sugar plantation and

mill; 1934), *Usina* (Large Sugar Refinery/Factory; 1936), and *Fogo Morto* (*Dead Fire*; 1943) deal more explicitly with the decline of the traditional plantation system and the erosion of a social and economic order dating back to the time of slavery and the early colonial plantations. The turn of the twentieth century marks a shift in the balance of power and wealth from the rural landowning class to the urban industrialists and investors from outside the region, bringing an end to the self-sufficient, quasi-feudal system of the author's youth.<sup>24</sup>

Some critics have erroneously excluded the final novel, *Fogo Morto*, from the sugarcane cycle because it breaks with the autobiographical style of the earlier novels in which Carlos de Melo is both the main character and narrator (Stern 281). By the same token, *O moleque Ricardo* (*The Urchin Ricardo*; 1935) has also been considered an independent novel rather than part of the sugarcane cycle, even though the main character's fate, like that of Carlinhos, has been determined by the legacy of Santa Rosa.<sup>25</sup> A child laborer, the son of Santa Rosa field hands, and the grandson of slaves, Ricardo flees the plantation in search of a better life. But like his childhood friend, Carlos, Ricardo experiences an identity crisis outside the environment of Santa Rosa. In this literary universe, Carlos, the descendent of the masters, and Ricardo, the descendent of slaves, both appear lost and "out of context" in the modern city; both seem unable to function as individuals outside the perimeter of the plantation. Thus, the famous last line of *Menino de engenho* describing Carlos's state of being in the world, "menino perdido, menino de engenho" (lost/fallen boy, plantation boy), applies equally to Ricardo. Another echo of Carlinhos's and Ricardo's related experiences, occurs in *Doidinho*, when one of Carlinhos's classmates at the boarding school insults him by calling him a "moleque de bagaceira" (essentially, "cane trash"), an epithet with both racial and social overtones that equates him with field hands like Ricardo (the black or multiracial descendents of slaves) rather than with his true station among the white Luso-Brazilian plantocracy (*Doidinho* 95). Although Carlinhos has undeniably been dealt a much better hand than Ricardo—and indeed, benefited from the oppression of generations of Afro-Brazilian slaves and workers like Ricardo—both men have been forever marked by their environment and by their common childhood experiences.<sup>26</sup> The cane fields, the mill, the Paraíba River, the big-house, and the *senzala* (former slave quarters), comprise their "shared" universe, a space in which a precise role has been assigned to them by pre-existing historical conditions.

The narrative period of the novels in the cycle, set at the turn of the twentieth century, marks the closing stages of the family-run *engenho* in northeastern Brazil. By this time, Brazil's sugar industry had already undergone a "radical transformation," according to the historian Kit Sims Taylor:

Slavery was gone. The domestic market had surpassed the international market in importance. 70 percent of the 1901 crop was for domestic consumption. The *usinas* were spreading their lifelines, the narrow-gauge private railroads, throughout the cane fields. The old *engenhos* were becoming cane plantations, shutting down their mills and sell-

ing cane to the *usinas*. A tradition of two centuries of subdivision of the original land grants reversed itself as both land and capital came to be concentrated in the hands of the *usineiros*. (67)

Lins do Rego's anachronistic decision to maintain this archaic model in the first two novels gives his writing an undeniably nostalgic and fatalistic quality, especially in light of the fact that the final two novels, *Usina* and *Fogo Morto*, deal with the large-scale industrialized plantations which supplanted the old sugar estate system. The *engenho* becomes a type of museum housing the collective memory of Portuguese colonization, the sacred site of the founding myth of the Brazilian people from a racial and cultural standpoint.

Heavily influenced by the sociologist Gilberto Freyre, Lins do Rego's novels reinforce the myth of Brazil's exceptionalism in terms of its "benevolent" form of slavery.<sup>27</sup> In *Menino de engenho*, most of the Afro-Brazilian characters appear not only to tolerate their position at Santa Rosa, but they actually show loyalty and affection toward José Paulino, the former slave owner and master. Referring to the former slaves of Santa Rosa, Carlinhos explains:

Restava ainda a senzala dos tempos de cativo. Uns vinte quartos com o mesmo alpendre na frente. As negras do meu avô, mesmo depois da abolição, ficaram todas no engenho, não deixaram a 'rua,' como elas chamavam a senzala. E ali foram morrendo de velhas [...]. E elas trabalhavam de graça, com a mesma alegria da escravidão. As duas filhas e netas iam-lhes sucedendo na servidão, com o mesmo amor a casa-grande e a mesma passividade de bons animais domésticos. (*Menino* 54-55)

(The slave quarters still remained from the time of captivity. Some twenty rooms, with the same porch out in front. Even after abolition, my grandfather's Negresses all stayed on the estate, they didn't leave the 'alley,' as they referred to the slave quarters. And there they gradually died of old age [...]. And they worked for free, with the same happiness as in the days of slavery. Their two daughters and granddaughters succeeded them in servitude, with the same love for the big-house and the same passivity of good domestic animals).

Carlinhos's shocking commentary in which he compares the workers to passive domestic animals stands in contrast to Ricardo's own awareness of and anger about his own situation at Santa Rosa in *O moleque Ricardo*. Although his growing consciousness inspires Ricardo to flee Santa Rosa at the age of sixteen for the opportunity of a better life in the city of Recife, he is soon confronted with the unexpected hardship of city life. Gradually, the character begins to lose hope in finding a better life, and comes to equate being a *negro alugado* (a rented/hired Negro) in the city with the work of a slave or a field hand on the plantation. Moreover, he begins to miss the sense of community he felt on the plantation (a quality the reader is implicitly supposed to associate with the paternalism of the plantation), and concludes that the quality of life on the plantation is in fact better than in the city. For Ricardo seems to believe that no one would go hungry in Santa Rosa: "Pobre não nascera para ter direito [...]. Ricardo achou então que havia gente mais pobre que do que os pobres de

Santa Rosa. Mãe Avelina vivia de barriga cheia na casa-grande” (The poor were not born with rights [...]. Ricardo believed, then, that there were people who were poorer than the poor at Santa Rosa. Ma Avelina’s belly was always full over at the big-house) (*O moleque Ricardo* 35).

Although the *ciclo da cana de açúcar* is ultimately a saga about the gradual disappearance of a time and place where a unique culture once existed—something it acknowledges, unlike Confiante’s *trilogie sucrière*—the biggest consequence of the collapse of plantation society for Lins do Rego is the loss of the communal ties binding the inhabitants of the *engenho* to one another through colonialism, slavery, and social paternalism. Against the historic backdrop of the periodic droughts for which Brazil’s northeast is famous, the author provides examples of people in this harsh and isolated environment coming to each other’s aid time and time again. Even though examples of cruelty, violence, and depravity also abound in the novels, the world of Santa Rosa still appears brighter and more humane than the sprawling city, with its

**88** impersonal institutions and cold modernity.

Despite Lins do Rego’s often sympathetic portrayal of Ricardo, his treatment of the character inevitably betrays his own dominant position as a member of the plantocracy.<sup>28</sup> Defying and abandoning his place and role on the plantation prove fatal for Ricardo. In the hope of fostering some of the sense of community and solidarity he associated with the *engenho*, Ricardo becomes involved in a labor union in Recife, is arrested along with other union members for participation in an illegal strike, and is sent to the prison island of Fernando de Noronha. Tragically, Ricardo’s desire for freedom outside the *engenho* ultimately leads to forms of perdition and confinement far worse than those he sought to escape.<sup>29</sup>

## COMMUNAL ROOTS, TELEOLOGICAL OUTCOMES

Lins do Rego’s and Confiante’s plantation sagas offer contrasting visions of the plantation experience. While Lins do Rego’s cycle is ultimately pessimistic, chronicling and foretelling its own end, Confiante’s trilogy serves as a triumphant testament to the endurance and spirit of the Martinican people and Creole culture. In fact, the Martinican writer patently refuses to acknowledge an imaginative and lexical world beyond the sugar estate, in which words like “highway” and “television” are a part of everyday existence (Sabbah 86-87).<sup>30</sup> His attachment to the agrarian and industrial sugar- and rum-based economy of Martinique precludes not only the rise of the middle class and the tawdry trappings of a consumer society much like that of France, but in particular the island’s change of status from a colony to a *département* (overseas department) of France in 1946—rather than seeking independence—, an event that would prolong and exacerbate Martinique’s economic, material, cultural, and psychological dependence on the Métropole and further erode any sense of local self-reliance. Likewise, the manner in which Lins do Rego and Confiante portray their

characters' identities and destinies is markedly different. In Lins do Rego's novels, the characters must passively accept their place and limitations within the sugarcane world, for better or for worse. On the other hand, the identities of Confiant's characters are based on acts of resistance. However, both writers rely on the rigid structure and social hierarchy of the plantation system as a prototype for the representations of their own multicultural societies. The self-referentiality and enclosure that characterize plantation society are also echoed in the structure of Lins do Rego's and Confiant's plantation sagas, which by inventing and perpetuating their own internal truth and reality throughout several novels and sequels, create their own cultural archive of national traditions and myths.

Given the divergent paths of these writers, it may be surprising that men from such distinct backgrounds—one the white grandson of a plantation owner and slaveholder, the other the descendant of plantation slaves—both turn to the plantation in their search for a source of autochthonous literary expression capable of conveying a sense of collective history and national culture. I maintain, however, that the differences between the personal trajectories of Lins do Rego and Confiant and their representations of the plantation experience in their saga novels highlight the pervasiveness of the intersecting discourses of sugar and autochthony, which surface time and time again throughout the New World.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, by rooting the lives of their characters in the plantation landscape, Lins do Rego and Confiant create a teleological connection between the people, the land, and their culture, and thus participate, like so many other New World writers before them, in an obsessive recreation of a “primordial cultural predicament,” which itself becomes a rhetorical device that fuels cultural production (Alonso 15-16). From a broader regional perspective, then, Confiant's *trilogie sucrière* and Lins do Rego's *ciclo da cana de açúcar* comprise but two short installments in a vast New World sugar saga, whose conclusion may not yet have been written.

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## NOTES

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\* Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from French and Portuguese to English are my own.

1. Sidney Mintz, *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life Story*, unnumbered page following the table of contents and list of illustrations.
2. Creolization and *métissage* are sometimes used synonymously with terms such as acculturation, transculturation, and hybridity. I use them more generally here to imply the process by which socio-cultural practices develop and continuously evolve through the contact of different cultures and influences. Édouard Glissant used the term *métissage* in *Le discours antillais (Caribbean Discourse)* in conjunction with *antillanité* (Caribbeanness), and subsequently defined *créolisation* as a global process that is not unique to the Caribbean and the Atlantic coast of the New World.

3. See Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism*. In her pioneering study, Kutzinski examined the convergence of the discourses of sugar and creolization (both cultural and racial) in literary articulations of Cuban identity and the way in which archetypes, allegories, and myths originating in the plantation landscape contribute to a collective sense of national culture.
4. Curiously, this very important passage in the segment "Langues, langage" under the subheading "Créole et production," was excluded from the abridged English translated edition of *Le discours antillais* (*Caribbean Discourse*).
5. Throughout the month of February and March 2009, huge protests were staged in Martinique and Guadeloupe to complain about the elevated cost of living in these French islands, where nearly all consumer products, especially food, are imported from France, and sold at 2-3 times higher than the price in France. The recent protests highlight Martinique's ongoing material dependence on France.
6. Outsiders have often painted a stark picture of the region's mired attempts at self-sufficiency, criticizing France and neighboring Caribbean nations, in the case of Martinique, and Brazil's industrialized south, for their tragic state of abandonment. See for instance, Ève Dessarre, *Cauchemar Antillais* (*Caribbean Nightmare*) and Kit Sims Taylor, *Sugar and the Underdevelopment of the Northeast of Brazil, 1500-1970*.
7. Martinique became a *départementement d'outre-mer* (an overseas department) in 1946, and today is considered a *région monodépartementale* of France, a situation comparable to Puerto Rico's status as a "free associated state" of the United States.
8. I use the term *ethnoclass* in order to highlight the correlation between race (and very subtle and specific gradations of color) and social class, particularly in societies of along the Caribbean basin, which inherited the race/class continuum from the social hierarchy of the plantation.
9. In a review of Confiant's novel, *Case à Chine* (2007), Carine Gendrey, aptly compared the author's indefatigable publishing schedule and sweeping historical portrait of the island's different social and ethnic groups to Balzac, calling the ensemble of his novels (nearly thirty in all so far), "La Comédie créole" (Gendrey).
10. According to Philip D. Curtin, the colonial plantation model in Brazil, which became the basis of future plantations in the Caribbean, absorbed elements of late European feudalism as well as early capitalism (Curtin 46).
11. Philip D. Curtin defines the plantation complex as "an economic and political order centering on slave plantations in the New World Tropics." Noting the interplay between the different components of the plantation complex and the system as a whole, he insists that the "plantation complex is nevertheless an interrelated aggregate of human experience that deserves investigation as an entity" (Curtin xi-xii).
12. For a historical examination of the strike, see Édouard de Lépine, *La crise de février 1935 à la Martinique*.
13. As previously stated, the logic of both the plantation novel and the literary saga involves only acknowledging the realities within its own structure.
14. Examples of Zola's detailed depictions of different types of work abound in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. To name but a few: both laundresses and roofers in *L'Assommoir* (1877), miners in *Germinal* (1885), and peasant farmers in *La Terre* (1887). See also Carlos J. Alonso, *The Spanish American Regional Novel: Modernity and Autochthony*. Alonso discusses the importance of anthropological attention to the description of work on the land in the *novela de la tierra*.
15. In the novel, the sickly infant, Pierre-Marie was reportedly revived on the very day he was born by being baptized with rum: "une eau-de-vie au sens propre du terme, c'est-à-dire, une eau qui m'avait ramené à la vie au jour-même de ma naissance..."(308).

16. The narrator (Pierre-Marie, referring to himself as “tu”) adds that Pierre-Marie might not have avowed his racial heritage were it not for his imminent departure to join the Resistance in Europe, where he might be killed (332).
17. The collective novel harkens back to the “roman du nous” (the novel of us), which Glissant is credited with pioneering in *Malemort* (1975).
18. These journal entry segments are invariably titled “Carnets d’un engagé volontaire” (Notebooks of a volunteer enlisted man). It is also notable that the volunteer enlisted man falls in love with one of Confiant’s most frequently recurring characters, a Fort-de-France prostitute named Philomène.
19. Confiant reveals the correspondent’s real name (René Aucque) and elements of his real experiences in Martinique during the war in an epilogue titled “Une incroyable rencontre” (A remarkable meeting).
20. See A. James Arnold, “The Erotics of Colonialism in Contemporary French West Indian Literary Culture.” As Arnold explains, in the “sharply gendered” literary landscape of the French-speaking Caribbean, the Créolistes belong to a “masculinist” tradition.
- 92 21. By stopping the clock in 1945, as he does in the sugarcane trilogy, Confiant does not have to deal with what he and the other *Créolistes* consider to be Martinique’s biggest political errors. Rather than becoming an overseas department of France in 1946, the *Créolistes* believe that the island should have sought independence from France.
22. I am in no way implying that injustice and oppression no longer exist in post-departmentalized Martinique.
23. José Paulino, Carlinhos’s grandfather, does appear to hover heroically throughout *Menino de engenho*, as one of the last grand *senhores de engenho* (plantation owners).
24. It goes almost without saying that those on the lowest rungs of the plantation hierarchy, the former slaves and field hands, remained at the bottom. The plantocracy was toppled by corporate interests and large-scale plantations and refineries. In *Menino de engenho*, José Paulino, the protagonist’s grandfather and the owner of Santa Rosa plantation, insists that things actually got much worse for former plantation slaves once they were freed, since plantation owners could no longer afford to provide for the workers’ material needs or feed them as well as they could prior to abolition and their wages were insufficient (91).
25. José Paulino, and Carlos play minor roles in *O moleque Ricardo*, along with several other characters from *Menino de engenho*.
26. Carlinhos and Ricardo, along with some of the other child laborers, not only spend their early years playing together, but also go through many formative experiences and rights of passage together. White and black children often shared the same *mãe de leite* (wet nurse), usually a house servant. Their precocious first sexual awakenings and experiences frequently occurred with the same women or with each other on the plantation. In fact, in *Menino de engenho*, both Ricardo and Carlinhos have both contracted a venereal disease from the same woman.
27. Lins do Rego’s “sugarcane cycle” in many ways parallels Gilberto Freyre’s ambitious “anthropological” study, *Casa grande e senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*; 1933) and *Região e tradição* (*Region and Tradition*; 1941).
28. It is also important to note that while Carlinhos is both the main character and narrator of *Menino de engenho*, *Doidinho*, and *Bangüê*, Ricardo is not the narrator of *O moleque Ricardo*, which has an omniscient narrator.
29. The consequences of Ricardo’s departure from the plantation reveal Lins do Rego’s determinist vision.

30. As of the nineteenth century, writers and statesmen, particularly in Spanish America and Brazil, began exalting hybridity and creolization in proto-national narratives highlighting the hardness and originality of New World society in order to distinguish it from the Old World European civilization of the colonial rulers and garner support for anti-colonial struggles. In the postcolonial era, nativist discourses have continued to serve as a platform for a wide range of political agendas in Latin America and the Caribbean.
31. In a 1993 interview for *Télérama* magazine, Confiant declared that his "...imaginative world stops in the mid 1960s when the sugar refineries closed one by one...When we started stripping the cane [fields]. I would be incapable of writing [the word] "highway" or "television" in one of my novels. It's this sugarcane society that interests me, from which the Martinican people and their culture was born." The original French quotation reads "Mon imaginaire s'arrête au milieu des années soixante, quand les usines à sucre ont fermé une à une...Quand on a commencé à arracher la canne. Je serais incapable d'écrire 'autoroute' ou 'télévision' dans un de mes romans. C'est cette société de la canne qui m'intéresse, c'est d'elle que sont nés le peuple martiniquais et sa culture." (Qtd in Sabbah 86-87). For the complete interview see *Télérama* 2273 (August 4, 1993).