Squatters, Space, and Belonging in the Underdeveloped City

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City air makes you free. This medieval German maxim referring to the role of the city as a haven from the harsh laws of feudal vassalage might serve as a perfect epigraph for Patrick Chamoiseau's novel <u>Texaco</u>. Near the beginning of his third novel, Chamoiseau's narrator, the so-called Word Scratcher, writes "to escape the night of slavery and colonialism, Martinique's black slaves and mulattos will, one generation after another, abandon the plantations, the fields, and the hills, to throw themselves into the conquest of the cities."[1] In <u>Texaco</u>, the powerful matriarch of a squatter camp, Marie-Sophie Laborieux, recounts the epic battles she and her ancestors have fought to gain a home in the city. This struggle has helped shape urban space, creating a highly cosmopolitan but also extremely polarized social geography in the Martinican capital of Fort-de-France. The fragmented geography of urban space described in Chamoiseau's novel ensures that the freedom of the city will be alloyed with suffering, its cosmopolitanism shot through with inequality and unrest.

At the beginning of the new millennium, humanity passed a remarkably significant but insufficiently acknowledged milestone: for the first time, over 50% of human beings live in cities.[2] In thirty years time, this proportion is predicted to rise to three-quarters. On a scale that dwarfs previous experience, urban spaces have become cosmopolitan entrepots through which vast quantities of capital, goods, information, and population flow on a daily basis. This development has had important political consequences. During the last decade, for instance, the increasing prominence of cities had a destabilizing impact on older spaces of governance such as the nation-state.[3] So-called global cities such as New York, London, and Tokyo function as command centers, subordinating the rest of the

world system to significant instability as massive amounts of capital move into and out of particular national economies at lightning speed. Inter-urban flows have increased in magnitude as such cities develop stronger connections with one another than with their rural hinterlands, exacerbating longstanding patterns of uneven development. Contemporary cities, it should also be noted, are the primary sites for humanity's consumption of natural resources and pollution of the environment.[4] The dominant urban mode at present, that of the United States, is particularly destructive in environmental terms. Single-use zoning laws, automobile dependency, and the consequent suburban sprawl that characterizes the cities of the U.S. will, if reproduced on a global level, lead to unsustainable levels of environmental degradation.[5] The cradles of human civilization, cities now lie at the core of a potentially terminal ecological crisis.

Yet the powerful global cities of the developed world are an increasingly anomalous embodiment of the urban realm and public space. According to the United Nations, cities in the developed world are fast disappearing from the list of the world's largest urban sites. For example, Lagos is projected to become the third largest city in the world by 2010, after Tokyo and Mumbai. Such predictions suggest the inadequacy of recent attempts to theorize globalization by focusing exclusively on cities in the developed world.[6] Urbanization has for the first time become the predominant experience in many underdeveloped nations of the global South, with massive attendant transformations in the predominantly agrarian character of these cultures. Although cities in the underdeveloped world do not in general appear in the global city literature, they share many of the characteristics of such cities, including cultural and ethnic heterogeneity, transnational

flows of labor and capital, and uneven spatial and social development. Indeed, the cities created by colonial-era urban planning actually anticipate many of the characteristics ascribed to the supposedly novel global cities. And, with the increasing internationalization of capital since the 1960s, peripheral and semi-peripheral cities have grown important as industrial centers engaged in production for export to markets in core countries.[7] Like their counterparts in the North, the global cities of the South have also become increasingly connected with one another, transforming the exclusive connection with the imperial metropolis that characterized colonial culture into a series of lateral connections with other sites in an emerging transnational urban system of the South. With populations swelling above 20 million, the global cities of the South literally embody the future of mankind.

Patrick Chamoiseau's Texaco does not focus on one of these mega-cities: Fort-de-France is no Mexico City or Buenos Aires. The diminutive size of Martinique's capital underlines the difficulty of making generalizations concerning cities of the global South. Moreover, the cultural specificity apparent in Texaco suggests that globalization cannot be construed as a homogeneous or uniform process. Yet, despite the specificity of urban social formations, Texaco's picaresque narrative records a paradigmatic experience for the many millions experiencing urbanization in the global South: displacement. The poor of the world are growing in number and in destitution. Despite global increases of wealth which far outstrip population growth, between 1/4 and 1/3 of all urban households in the world live in absolute poverty.[8] Even more than those of the North, the global cities of the South lack basic forms of equity and consequently consign their poor inhabitants to live in

conditions of extreme deprivation that intensify the environmental and social contradictions of the city. The social elites of both North and South seem intent on ignoring the increasingly desperate conditions of humanity's immiserated majority, choosing instead to cocoon themselves inside heavily fortified "gated communities." [9] However, the economic, political, and environmental problems of cities in the underdeveloped world will soon dominate the human scene if they remain ignored and unchecked.[10] Patrick Chamoiseau's Texaco challenges this marginalization of the poor and of the cities in which they live by centering attention on the squatter citizen, a figure central to the urban imaginary of the twenty-first century's global cities.

Previous waves of urbanization - such as those that created great cities of the industrial age like London, Paris, and New York - have seen the integration of the urban masses into the social order of capitalism. In the global cities of the North, the state largely underwrote collective consumption, ensuring a close tie between urban scale and social reproduction.[11] The form of such cities, for instance, was crucially affected by state attempts to discipline and maintain a working class population. With the shift of production to the South following the crisis in social reproduction of the 1970s, a new urban order has begun to emerge. As cities like Sao Paolo, Lagos, and Mumbai displace the urban areas of the North as the cutting edge of globalization, their residents are generating novel forms, identities, and contradictions in the fabric of city life. Unlike those of the North, the cities of the global South are populated by masses of people to whom the regimented order of the Keynesian welfare state has never been extended. Despite their formal inclusion in the social order as citizens, the vast majority of those

residing in the global cities of the South remain squatters, extraneous to established notions of belonging on both a material and symbolic plane. The struggles of such squatter citizens for resources and legitimacy will define the form and character of the global cities of the South and, by extension, the shape of modernity in the twenty-first century.[12]

Ethnographic Fiction and Creole Aesthetics

In telling the story of Marie-Sophie Laborieux, Chamoiseau's novel draws on the Hispanic-American testimonio genre that characterizes ethnographically influenced literary works such as Miguel Barnet's influential Biografia de un cimarron.[13] Written against the grain of a salvage ethnography that typically represented non-European cultures in the New World as self-enclosed societies doomed by the onset of modernity, Barnet's account of the life of a former fugitive slave in Cuba insists on the dynamic syncretism of subaltern cultures.[14] This stress on hybridization makes the testimonial genre part of a broader tradition of what Angel Rama calls transculturation, in which imposed colonial cultural forms are transformed and refashioned by local cultures in the New World.[15] The testimonio genre has had a strong impact in the Francophone Caribbean, and oral history is an important source for Chamoiseau and other writers of the *kréyòl* [Creole] movement such as Raphäel Confiant. Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe, the testimony-novel of Gaudeloupean ethnolinguist and activist Dany Bébel-Gisler, is also an important precedent for Texaco, foregrounding as it does the role of women as producers of creole culture.[16]

Texaco reflects the creolized cultural forms evident in such ethnographically inspired works, as one might expect given Chamoiseau's role in drafting the Éloge de la Creolité. In this manifesto, Chamoiseau and his co-authors announce their project of creating a specifically Caribbean literature through the recovery of forms of collective memory embedded in the counter-culture of creole orality.[17] Like Latin American writers of ethnographic fiction such as Miguel Angel Asturias and Alejo Carpentier, Chamoiseau and his colleagues focus their attention on the popular culture of the subaltern classes, exploring the social role of syncretic belief systems such as Vodoun. As Gayatri Spivak has noted, there are significant theoretical, social, and political problems inherent in such attempts to articulate subaltern consciousness. Despite the radical intent of the testimonio as a vehicle for representing marginal populations such as indigenous groups, the genre's dependence on a literate interlocutor dramatizes its necessarily hierarchical relation with orality.[18] The spoken word and life histories related by members of the subaltern are necessarily transformed if not traduced as they are recorded in written form. Chamoiseau is certainly aware of this problem, and, indeed, the question of transcription is an integral aspect of the structure of Texaco.

Although the vast majority of Texaco is written in standard French rather than Creole, Chamoiseau's novel embodies its creolized status in multiple ways. For instance, Chamoiseau copes with the ethical dilemma of representing the subaltern by including an authorial persona in the narrative itself. The Word Scratcher character dramatizes the problematic relation between what Chamoiseau calls oraliture - the primary medium of Marie-Sophie's life story - and the written word with which the author documents that life.

Although Chamoiseau emulates the non-linear, prolix character of the spoken word in his narrative style, the Word Scratcher character foregrounds the thorny politics of representation implicit in Chamoiseau's project. Moreover, the complex and at times uncomfortable relationship between the Word Scratcher, Marie-Sophie (also known as The Source), and other members of the Texaco community often breaks into the smooth flow of the novel's narrative, disrupting claims to transparent narrative authority and unsettling the primacy of the written word. In addition, Chamoiseau's novel openly displays a didactic scaffolding that includes explanatory footnotes written by the Word Scratcher, excerpts from the autobiographical notebooks of Marie-Sophie, and letters from a Martinican urban planner who also figures in the narrative. Texaco begins with a theatrical scene entitled "the annunciation" in which this young urban planner, dispatched to begin demolition work on the squatter community in which the novel's protagonist lives, is nursed by Marie-Sophie after being stoned by a mysterious assailant. Realizing his importance, Marie-Sophie sets out to narrate Texaco's history in an attempt to convert the urban planner and thereby save her community. Following this narrative frame, the novel gradually spins out a correspondence between the testimonies transcribed by the Word Scratcher, Marie-Sophie's own journals, the letters of the urban planner, and various other documents. These intertwined textual modes highlight the multi-voiced character of the reality Chamoiseau wishes to document. Yet it is in the narrative of Marie-Sophie, which traces her evolving relation to the city, that the process of creolization and cognate issues of urbanization in the South are most apparent.

Chamoiseau's decision to cast himself within the novel in the role of amaneunsis to a working class black woman is obviously important given the marginalization of women in studies of creole culture.[19] However, as Anne McClintock notes in a discussion of inter-racial oral historiography in South Africa, oral history often reproduces the hierarchy of mental and manual labor that characterizes the societies from which they emerge.[20] The multi-voiced character of <u>Texaco</u> is an attempt to render these issues of hierarchy and <u>author</u>ity visible on a textual level. Notwithstanding the skepticism concerning representation that these strategies elicit, Chamoiseau's Marie-Sophie Laborieux - an urban <u>matadora</u> - represents an important intervention into depictions of urban experience. If the modern city was typically represented as the acme of rational planning, it has also traditionally been associated with the masculine values associated with the realm of public culture. The urban crowd, in contrast, was represented in explicitly feminized terms as an undifferentiated mass that threatened to disorient and engulf the subject. Not only did such representations occult the essential role of women in the social reproduction of the city, they also elided the many barriers to physical mobility that often prevented women from occupying and traversing urban space. Chamoiseau's <u>matadora</u> challenges this traditional gendering of urban space, playing a vital role in a creolization of urban space.

Creole Urbanization

According to one of the author's footnotes, the Creole language represents the city less as a reified physical space than as a set of fluid social relations:

> The Creole language does not say <u>la ville</u> ['the city'], but rather, <u>l'En-ville</u> ['The
>
> In-city"]: <u>Man ka désann an-vil, I ka rété an-vil, Misié sé an-vil, An-vil</u>
>
> <u>Fodfwans</u>…[I am going down to city, He lives in city. This fellow is from City,
>
> from Fort-de-France]. City thus designates, not a clearly defined urban geography,
>
> but essentially a content and therefore a kind of enterprise. And here that enterprise
>
> was about living(<u>T</u> 492).[21]

This Creole definition of the city highlights the agonistic character of urban space. In

contrast with the "clearly defined urban geography" of French colonial space, the Creole

term <u>L'En-ville</u> emphasizes transformation rather than stasis, thereby alluding to the

willful incursion by subaltern populations into the carefully planned but exclusionary

precincts of the colonial city.[22] Cities like those in <u>Texaco</u> are saturated by and productive

of social tensions as a result of their primary orientation to the outside world.[23] The

colonial city's metropolitan orientation is evident, for instance, in both cultural and

material terms. Such colonial cities were, in general, built to cater to the needs of

metropolitan capital for resource extraction. This exploitative history is particularly

evident in a region such as the Caribbean, where colonizers encountered no major urban

sites of indigenous settlement and where cities were clearly subordinated to the massively

profitable rural plantation economy for the better part of four hundred years. The opulent

baroque architecture that graces many cities of the Caribbean is a testament to the

mammoth amounts of capital extracted from the plantation economy, capital which C.L.R.

James argues was instrumental to the European industrial revolution.[24]

Yet the urban spaces that so proudly announced colonial wealth systematically excluded the black masses that produced this wealth.[25] This is because, as its etymology suggests, the city is the space in which citizenship is realized. Although French colonial urban milieus tended to include a significant assimilated and often mixed-race population, the city nonetheless ostracized the majority of the colonized.[26] Chamoiseau's account of the transitive character of the Creole word for the city sediments this history of racial exclusion. The Creole city cannot be a simple geographical site, but rather is an ongoing process of becoming that materializes the elisions and contradictions of colonial and postcolonial citizenship. As illegal occupants of urban space, squatters quite literally incarnate these contradictions. Typically, in both colonial and postcolonial settings, such squatters are a vital source of labor but an unwelcome presence in the body politic. Chamoiseau's depiction of zones such as Texaco that inhabit the interstices of l'En-ville thus articulates the long history of subversion, resistance, and revolution through which subaltern groups have transformed colonial and postcolonial cities.

The creolization of urban space in Texaco begins with the life of Esternome, Marie-Sophie Laborieux's father. Esternome is freed by his master after he saves him from a vengeful maroon during a hunting trip. After leaving the plantation, where his manumission has left him with no viable social role, Esternome travels to the city of Saint-Pierre. Capital of colonial Martinique, Saint-Pierre is an extremely cosmopolitan place, a site in which the paths of white elite, mulatto aspirants, and various classes of slaves and manumitted people cross continually. Yet it can hardly be said to be a utopian space. Like other colonial cities, Saint-Pierre serves as a node of transport and communication as well

as a center of political and bureaucratic control for the plantation economy in its

hinterlands. As Anthony King notes, these structural characteristics of the colonial city, as

well as the polarized social relations of its denizens, are forerunners of what are now

known as global cities.[27] Texaco helps remind us of the structural similarities and mutual

dependency of metropolitan and colonial cities. These parallels challenge the exclusive

focus on the capitalist core that characterizes much of the recent literature on global cities.

Such assessments of global cities tend to elide the colonial history through which most

cities in the capitalist core were formed. In addition, an exclusive focus on the developed

world blinds us to the increasing similarity of cities in the North and South.

Like both colonial and global cities, for example, Saint-Pierre is stratified by rigid

racial demarcations. As Benedict Anderson has noted, tensions between those born in the

metropolis (france-whites) and those born in the colonies (békés) were often constitutive of

anti-colonial nationalism among the white elite.[28] In fact, in Saint-Pierre a growing class

of mulatto merchants and intellectuals chafes against white control of the city. Yet during

Esternome's sojourn there, both whites and mulattos look to France for their cultural and

political identities.[29] Indeed, the ambitious mulatto bourgeoisie invoke the Declaration of

the Rights of Man to empower themselves but not the black masses of the island. The

mulattos are, of course, separated from the blacks by an elaborate system of racial

classification based on percentages of African blood. While Esternome has been legally

manumitted, his skin color interpellates him as a plantation worker. He is, as a result,

carted out of the city and back to his master repeatedly by the colonial police. Despite his

dogged attempts to establish a home in Saint-Pierre, Esternome remains an urban maroon, a man out of place in the elite racial enclave of the city.[30]

Unable to anchor himself in the city, Esternome turns his attention increasingly to the so-called land slaves who come down from the country once a week to sell their wares. For these slaves, the city is a mystery just as impenetrable as is the plantation owner's manor house. Aware of the hostility they feel as a result of his manumission, Esternome nevertheless finds in the land slaves a powerful autochthonous urge that upends the metropolitan orientation of the mulattos. For these slaves, freedom is to be gained through conquest of the land rather than through an emancipation decree handed down from France. Freedom, in other words, must be taken not given. Esternome quickly learns the justice of this bit of wisdom during the emancipation period. A bloody race riot in Saint-Pierre gains an official decree of emancipation, yet unequal property relations remain undisturbed by abolition.

Marie-Sophie's narrative of her father's life emphasizes the continuity between the era of slavery and the post-emancipation era for the majority of Martinicans. Esternome tells his daughter that stubborn ex-slaves like his lover Ninon, who refuses to surrender her dreams of autonomy, were promptly arrested notwithstanding emancipation. The béké landlords institute a wage system, against which former slaves like Ninon rebel by heading to the rugged hills. Esternome and Ninon settle in one of the high valleys above Saint-Pierre and attempt to carve out a life independent of béké power. Yet this rural idyll gradually comes apart. Nonetheless, the lessons in autonomous living learned by Esternome during his period in the mornes or hills will be reapplied in the struggle to

survive in the interstices of the city. The white landlords respond to black intransigence after emancipation by importing indentured laborers from British colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East to undercut black demands for equitable wages. As large sugar factories gobble up the smaller plantations, the racialized geography that confined the black masses to rural areas is dismantled. With the disappearance of plantations, former slaves are forced to migrate to the cities in search of a better living. However, technologies of colonial power remain in place even in these urban areas.

This becomes evident when Esternome takes refuge in one of the squatter camps in the outlying districts of Fort-de-France following the destruction of Saint-Pierre by a volcanic eruption. If the colonial city was structured by the plantation economy, this growing post-emancipation city is divided neatly in two along lines that reflect the racialized geography of power in Martinique.[31] The European core of the city is surrounded by a ring of squatter settlements produced by the failure of land reform following emancipation. As one of the urban planner's letters to the Word Scratcher notes:

> The Creole city had not planned on the influx of people from the hills [mornes]. It had been structured by military necessities, shaped by the import-export business, leaving it to the Plantations [Habitations] to house the thousands of hands used in agricultural production. When these hands piled up in the city, an unproductive trading post city, they could be channeled neither into jobs nor into housing. They had to force themselves into the interstices. The destructuring of our Plantations was not followed by an economy of manufacturing, factories, or industries. The Creole city did not inhale [n'a pas inspiré] the workhands useful to its expansion, it

simply suffered (while resisting) the shockwave of an agricultural disaster… (T 234)

Urban form in Fort-de-France and other cities in the periphery is inextricably connected to broader colonial policies linking the city not simply to its surrounding hinterlands but to the global system of capitalist exploitation. As Raymond Williams argues in his magisterial work on the ties that bind urban and rural spaces, the binary model of the city and the country has extended beyond the bounds of the nation-state to create the system we now know as imperialism.[32] Neither abolition in the mid-nineteenth century nor the end of political imperialism in the mid-twentieth century should be allowed to obscure the enduring forms of economic, monetary, and commercial domination that link metropolis and periphery, urban and rural areas of the global system. This is particularly true of Martinique, whose neo-colonial status as an overseas département of France has not prevented it from experiencing severe and enduring forms of underdevelopment. As Esternome's itinerary from the hills to Fort-de-France makes clear, migration from rural to urban spaces and from global South to North cannot be considered in isolation from the structural economic factors that make life in the rural areas of the global South untenable. Through its exposure of the circumstances that breed squatter settlements, Chamoiseau's Texaco historicizes the polarized urban spatial form that typifies global cities of the South.

The Conquest of the City

In Fort-de-France, Esternome finds himself in one of the blank spaces that are the obverse of the European colonial city's baroque precincts.[33] Colonial power, however, is just as pervasive in this squalid neighborhood as in the city center. The Quarter of the Wretched where Esternome meets Marie-Sophie's mother Idoménée is the product of colonial spatial planning practices designed to segregate European bourgeois zones of cleanliness, civility, and modernity from the purportedly diseased, dangerous, and premodern quarters of the colonized.[34] With the failure of industrial development in Martinique and the concomitant problem of large-scale unemployment, the displaced subaltern become, in Esternome's image, a sea endlessly crashing onto the city (T 172).

Esternome's daughter Marie-Sophie spends her life battling the displacement that results from this uneven development of urban space. Like her father, Marie-Sophie is initially unable to find a place for herself in the social life of the city. Her early years in Fort-de-France are spent in subservience to the mulatto elite. This domination documents the popular classes' lack of political entitlement. However, Marie-Sophie's history as she resides in various bourgeois mulatto households also offers a critique of the assimilationist tendencies in Caribbean literature. As Chamoiseau and his collaborators note in Éloge de la Créolité, Francophone writers of the Caribbean have perceived their world through the filter of Western values.[35] Such assimilation takes place in Texaco on both an intellectual and a political level. While living with Monsieur Gros-Joseph, for instance, Marie-Sophie absorbs the world of French letters, learning from him the love of writing as a sorcerer of the world. This period of relative tranquility is cut short by the Nazi invasion of France, which drives Gros-Joseph insane. Marie-Sophie subsequently lives with another

metropolitan-identified mulatto, Monsieur Alcibiade, who urges political autonomy and cultural assimilation for Martinique. When his values are overturned by the election of Aimé Césaire – the great poet of Négritude - to the city council in 1945, Alcibiade also becomes deranged, raping Marie-Sophie and locking her up in his mansion. This period of Marie-Sophie's entrapment leads ultimately, however, to her liberation and healing. Consequently, her history embodies the hard-won electoral power and autonomy of the squatter settlements, whose residents return Césaire to power and embrace his anti-colonialist cultural politics.

Unlike Alcibiade and other members of the assimilationist bourgeoisie, Marie-Sophie elects to embrace the indigenous culture of Fort-de-France's creole quarters. Contrary to her lover Félicité Nelta, who dreams of fleeing Martinique for wider worlds of experience, Marie-Sophie decides to build rather than to dream, to establish a foundation rather than to become nomadic. She finds a spiritual guide for this project of rooting herself when she is taken to meet an old man named Papa Totone. Papa Totone is a Mentoh, one of a number of such figures in the text who represent mystic emanations of Creole awareness. Their presence in Texaco testifies to Chamoiseau's determination to take popular spiritual beliefs in Martinique seriously.[36] In each instance in which they appear, the Mentohs represent a vital connection with the ancestors. This connection provides the novel's protagonists with a sense of direction in crucial moments of their lives. It is a Mentoh, for instance, who first commands Esternome to "conquer" Saint-Pierre. A group of these figures remind him of the need to win freedom rather than to wait for it to be granted during the struggle for abolition. Like her father's spiritual guides,

Papa Totone articulates the collective conciousness of the black, Creole-speaking masses to Marie-Sophie. Perhaps most importantly, he heals her when she is overcome by despair after her period of captivity in Alcibiade's mansion and following the destruction of her first house in a neighborhood called Morne Abelard. Although this healing takes place primarily through the ineffable sense of tranquility that he emanates, Papa Totone also revives Marie-Sophie's will to resist the displacement she has experienced by reminding her of the collective power that coalesces in the city. In one of Marie-Sophie's fragmentary notebooks, deposited in Martinique's Victor Schoelcher library by the Word Scratcher, the following "words of the old blackman of the doum" are recorded:

> What is City [l'En-ville]? You say.
>
> It's the bottleneck where all our stories come together. The Times too. The plantation used to keep us apart. The hills planted us in rooted driftings [dérive immobile]. City gets going ties moors blends and blends again at full speed […] In City one does not talk any more. Storytellers dead or turned babblers. But *The Word* is not all talk. You've got to fight here. To maroon somehow. The gasoline offers you its cradle… (T 291-92)

Papa Totone's cryptic utterances suggest that urbanization fosters new forms of unity among the black masses, overcoming the isolation imposed by the plantation economy. This process also creates new blends or hybrid cultures, whose identity remains open and in question. Papa Totone seems to suggest that traditional culture, embodied in the storytellers, is dying out as the city catalyzes the formation of new creolized cultural formations. Yet he also tells Marie-Sophie that resistant consciousness can be forged

through the assertion of belonging that he characterizes as urban marronage. By occupying the interstitial spaces of the city, the zones that have been left blank in the urban grid established by colonial power, Marie-Sophie may revive the tactics of resistance that characterized the culture of the maroons during the slave era.[37]

After absorbing these healing words, Marie-Sophie decides to set down roots by building a house on a small patch of hillside terrain that overlooks the city. This land is owned by a local béké distributor of the Texaco oil company. Needless to say, the flimsy hut she erects quickly attracts the attention of the proprietor, who calls in the French riot police (the C.R.S.) to evict Marie-Sophie and her fellow squatters. The flimsy huts the squatters have erected are quickly knocked down by the C.R.S., but they are just as quickly re-erected after the authorities depart. Nearly thirty years of continuous belligerence by the metropolitan state follows Marie-Sophie's establishment of her squatter camp in 1950. Chamoiseau's use of Texaco as the name of his protagonist's embattled encampment highlights the direct connection between squatter settlements and global capital. As Manuel Castells has argued, squatter settlements are not marginal parts of underdeveloped cities as they are frequently perceived to be; instead, they are "a crucial means of lowering the social wage assumed by capital or the state in the economies of developing countries."[38] The massive squatter settlements that ring cities in the underdeveloped world, as well as the improvised forms of dwelling that permeate every available interstitial space in many such cities, are an integral part of the accumulation strategies of global as well as local capital.[39] The repeated assaults of the riot police in Texaco make it abundantly clear that the state, far from withering away as some analysts of globalization have contended,

plays an integral role in crushing resistance to the conditions of extreme poverty that characterize squatter quarters. Moreover, Texaco's origin also points to the ecological and social costs of capital's sometimes violent and always mercenary appropriation of the land as raw material for accumulation.

Near the conclusion of Chamoiseau's novel, Marie-Sophie reveals that she has taken Texaco as a kind of totem or secret name. By naming herself Texaco, she has re-possessed a paradigmatic brand name of global capital, turning its displacing power against itself through an assertion of local communities of solidarity. For it is in the battle against the Texaco béké and the riot police that Marie-Sophie gains her reputation as a <u>matadora</u>, a woman of power who rallies a community consisting largely of other displaced women to defeat the disaggregating power of global capital. In the course of this struggle, she must grapple not simply with the French riot police but also with the emissaries of the local state. The election of poet and communist Aimé Césaire as mayor of Fort-de-France after liberation in 1945 sparks ideological inspiration in Marie-Sophie and the creole underclasses; it also provides them with a degree of access to one layer of state power.[40] It is the communist deputy mayor Georges Gratiant, for instance, who orders the béké-controlled French riot police to stop beating up the inhabitants of Texaco. Underlying this transformation of the local state is the calculus of electoral power, a dynamic that Marie-Sophie analyzes in a potent update of Marxist theory:

> City was undone, its defenses against the Quarters were broken. The communists with Césaire at their head had spoken loudly, had threatened, denounced, made a terrible circus. They had changed the people from the old Quarters into a people's

army. They had understood that crate and wood and asbestos misery was ready to be called upon, sensitive to the least bloodshed, avid for any dreamy flag, as long as it permitted them to enter City. The communists had understood that their old troops from the fields and from the central factories had taken the colonial roads, forgetting the Trails, to pile up here, right in City's mouth. A proletariat without factories, workshops, and work, and without bosses, in the muddle of odd jobs, drowning in survival and leading an existence like a path through embers (T 314).

According to Marie-Sophie, Aimé Césaire recognizes the potential of the new urban subjects who will define the social struggles of the twenty-first century. No longer inhabiting factories or fields, these heterogeneous masses remain unorganized and largely disenfranchised. Yet despite this canny embrace of the electoral potential of squatter communities, Césaire and the communists do not decisively rout the raids of the French riot police. Indeed, rather than seeking to provide squatters with a means of leveraging their autonomous organizing through the legalization of informal settlements, Césaire lobbies the metropolitan authorities simply to demolish fewer shanties. Césaire himself visits Texaco during one particularly violent attack by the C.R.S., leading to what Marie-Sophie calls the Césaire effect: the police begin selectively demolishing unoccupied or ill-constructed huts, and take to explaining the rationale for such destruction to the inhabitants of Texaco. Notwithstanding their populist rhetoric, the communists do not, therefore, represent a decisive break with the forms of centralized planning that characterize colonial urbanism.

Furthermore, despite their newly minted legitimacy, social workers continue to prod Marie-Sophie and her comrades into abandoning Texaco for subsidized housing. Doggedly asserting their autonomy, Marie-Sophie and friends end up without official addresses, undermining their attempts to solicit various forms of state aid. As Neil Smith has suggested, questions of collective consumption center on the intimate spatial scales of the body, the home, and the community, producing a gendered urban geography.[41] At last beginning to win the battle for belonging, Marie-Sophie and the other residents of Texaco find themselves confronted by fresh struggles over the right to water, electricity, and other basic services. Social reproduction thus becomes a politicized issue. The rise of the communists and Césaire is not, in other words, an unmitigated boon for marginalized social groups such as the inhabitants of Texaco. They must still fight the enduringly paternalistic tendencies of state power, whether local or metropolitan.

The epic historical narrative that unfolds throughout Texaco is, of course, Marie-Sophie's ultimate defense of her quarter and her home against the state. The prodigious effect of this defense is conveyed powerfully by one of the urban planner's notes to the Word Scratcher:

> In the center, an occidental urban logic, all lined up, ordered, strong like the French
> language. On the other side, Creole's open profusion according to Texaco's logic.
> Mingling these two tongues, dreaming of all tongues, the Creole city speaks a new
> language in secret and no longer fears Babel. Here the well-learned, domineering,
> geometrical grid of an urban grammar; over there the crown of a mosaic culture to
> be unveiled, caught in the hieroglyphics of cement, crate wood, asbestos. The

Creole city returns to the urban planner, who would like to ignore it, the roots of a

new identity: multilingual, multiracial, multihistorical, open, sensible to the world's

diversity. Everything has changed (T 220).

Marie-Sophie's account of her and her ancestors' conquest of what they call L'En-ville

creates the framework for a creolized vision of urban space that undermines the rigid

binaries of colonial discourse. Like the Creole language that provides Chamoiseau with

inspiration, the Creole city embraces the hybrid collective forms created by the historically

marginalized black populace of Martinique. In turn, for Chamoiseau the tales told by the

city's inhabitants constitute a "fictional register" [cadastre fictif] that shapes his densely

layered account of city space.[42] With his eyes opened to the long history of Creole

urbanization, the urban planner elects to transform Marie-Sophie and the other denizens of

Texaco into citizens of the city at long last. Perhaps this servant of the state glosses a little

too quickly over the forms of biopower that the municipal government continues to wield

within Texaco. Behind the urban planner of course stands Chamoiseau himself, who in

Éloge de la Créolité embraces a model of global hybridity that seems severely limited

given the ratcheting up of global antagonisms following 9/11.[43] Despite the theoretical

limitations of this position within a global framework, it has significant purchase in the

context of Marie-Sophie's narrative. Considering the forms of oppression that she and her

ancestors have suffered in the past, Marie-Sophie clearly takes her conversion of the urban

planner to be the culminating triumph and vindication of her long history. To celebrate

this success, the urban planner is renamed The Christ and Marie-Sophie reveals her secret

totemic name to the Word Scratcher at long last. In doing so, she completes the revelation

of popular memory that <u>Texaco</u> as a testimony-novel transcribes, both to her amaneunsis the Word Scratcher and to the readers of Chamoiseau's novel. Aware perhaps of the enduring struggle faced by squatters such as Marie-Sophie, Chamoiseau concludes <u>Texaco</u> not with the quarter's successful rehabilitation into an established part of the city in 1983 but with the Word Scratcher's account of the funeral of Mme. Sicot, the model for Marie-Sophie Laborieux. It is the Creole word, vehicle of popular history and agency, rather than the temporary incorporation and assimilation of Texaco effected by that word, that Chamoiseau ultimately privileges.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Patrick Chamoiseau's <u>Texaco</u> is an extremely moving evocation of poor communities' ability to resist and ultimately to overcome the displacing power of the global capitalist system across two centuries. The novel is one of the few exemplary narratives to depict the struggles of the urban subaltern, who are an increasingly significant demographic component of the world's population. As the urban planner states in one of his notes to the Word Scratcher: "Listening to that great lady's last words, a shiver ran through me: in a few years, <u>more than half of humanity will face, under similar conditions, what she calls City</u> (<u>T</u> 368)." The optimism of this narrative needs, however, to be placed in the context of Aimé Césaire's successful campaign to incorporate Martinique as a département of France. Despite the country's lack of development since then, this official status has sheltered the nation and its capital from the more extreme forms of structural adjustment visited on other countries of the region since the 1980s. One could imagine a

very different denouement to this story of the urban subaltern were the novel to have been set in Kingston, Jamaica for instance. The optimistic conclusion of <u>Texaco</u>'s picaresque narrative should not cloud our awareness of the social discord and ethnic strife that several decades of planned immiseration have helped generate in the global cities of the South.

The illegality of the squatter settlements that now dominate these cities is part of a much broader problem of displaced people. Too often, the needs of these squatters are arrayed against those of transnational capital for economic infrastructure and superprofits as well as against those of the dominant local elites for their own ostentacious social reproduction. The result of this conflict has been an intensification of the polarized geography of fear bequeathed by colonial urbanism. Faced with spiraling struggles over social reproduction, both state forces and private mercenaries acting at the behest of urban elites in the South typically resort to draconian forms of spatial control and violence. To counter the tendency towards increasing social and spatial fragmentation, the kinds of technical support and affordable infrastructures that Marie-Sophie's epic narrative garners from the urban planner need to be made available far more widely. In addition, local communities must be afforded avenues for participation in decisions concerning urban form and development.[44] Unfortunately, many communities are too transient and insecure to allow citizens to communicate effectively with representatives of the state in the manner depicted in <u>Texaco</u>. In such cases, the state must be pressured both from below and by international bodies to help foster collective participation in and democratic governance over infrastructure provision. Too often the state plays precisely the opposite role,

mercilessly repressing squatter demands and pushing them into even more marginal spaces that worsen the fragmentation of underdeveloped societies.[45]

The efforts of local groups such as the women of Texaco to defeat such oppression need to be recognized and furthered whenever possible.[46] Too often, neglect by formal institutions flows from such communities' lack of resources, leading to the victimization of their inhabitants by the violence associated with organized crime and corrupt officials. While narratives such as Chamoiseau's Texaco take on quixotic tones given the tremendous odds faced by locally based social movements today, they help articulate a stark reality. Unless basic issues of equity are addressed on a global scale, the intense deprivation and resulting social instability and environmental damage that characterizes global cities of both the North and South is likely to generate increasingly unmanageable crises. As the visionary architect and social theorist Richard Rogers argues, "the idea that the rich few can turn their backs on the pollution and poverty of these cities and operate in comfortable isolation from these seats of desolation is short sighted in the extreme."[47]

<u>Notes</u>

1. Patrick Chamoiseau, <u>Texaco</u>. Trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 3. Hereafter cited in the text as <u>T</u>.

2. Richard Rogers, <u>Cities for a Small Planet</u> (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 4.

3. Saskia Sassen, <u>Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

4. While the increasing proportion of humanity living in cities around the world will inevitably concentrate ecological problems in urban areas, cities are not necessarily inefficient when compared to other forms of human habitation. However, few cities in the global South have managed to accumulate capital for investment in pollution abatement at rates equal to that of the intensification of pollution. For an historical overview of pollution and urbanization, see J. R. McNeill, <u>Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World</u> (New York: Norton, 2000), 269-295.

5. For a discussion of progressive environmental alternatives to the U.S. model of urbanization, see Timothy Beatley, <u>Green Urbanism: Learning from European Cities</u> (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000).

6. See, for example, Janet Abu-Lughod, <u>New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's Global Cities</u> (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and Saskia Sassen, <u>The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo</u> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

7. Anthony King, <u>Global Cities: Post-Imperialism and the Internationalization of London</u> (New York: Routledge, 1990), 17.

8. United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat), <u>The State of the World's Cities Report 2001</u>. 20 Feb 2002. <http://www.unchs.org/istanbul+5/statereport1.html.>

9. For a discussion of the fragmentation of urban space in post-apartheid South Africa, see my forthcoming "Geography of Fear: Crime and the Transformation of Public Space in Post-Apartheid South

Africa," Public Space, ed. Neil Smith (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

10. Rogers, Cities, 8.

11. Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as a Global Urban Strategy," Antipode 34 (2002): 439.

12. Developments in the global cities of the South therefore seem to bear out and intensify Castells's definition of urban life in terms of struggles over collective consumption. See Manuel Castells, The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements (U of California P, 1983).

13. Miguel Barnet, Biografia de un cimarron (La Habana: Instituto de Ethnologia y Folklore, 1966).

14. Amy Fass Emery, The Anthropological Imagination in Latin American Literature (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 12.

15. Emery, Anthropological Imagination, 11.

16. Dany Bébel-Gisler, <u>Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe</u>, trans. Andrea Leskes (Charlottesville: U P of Virginia, 1994).

17. Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphäel Confiant, <u>Éloge de la Créolité</u> (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 37.

18. Emery, <u>Anthropological Imagination</u>, 17.

19. Vera M. Kutzinksi and Cynthia Mesh-Ferguson, "Afterword: Convergences" in Bébel-Gisler.

20. Anne McClintock, <u>Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest</u> (New York: Routledge, 1995), 311.

21. Note that Chamoiseau's translators attempt to capture the difference between these two terms by rendering one with and one without a definite article; "la ville" is always translated as "the city," while "L'En-ville" is always "City."

22. Richard Burton has criticized Chamoiseau for indulging in binary oppositions in this representation of a battle between "L'En-ville" and Texaco. He cites the notion of "linguistic continuum" as an alternative

model that emphasizes the mutual imbrication of City and slum, French and creole. While this objection might be sound on a linguistic and philosophical plane, it critically underestimates the geographical and social contradictions between the core metropolitan areas where capital is invested and the ex-urban locations where the majority of workers and squatters live in global cities of the South. For Burton's critique, see Le roman marron: études sur la littérature martiniquaise contemporaine (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 191-97. For a discussion of the crisis of social reproduction in global cities of the South, see Smith, 442.

23. David A. Smith, Third World Cities in Global Perspective: The Political Economy of Uneven Urbanization (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995), 5.

24. C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution (New York: Vintage, 1963), 47.

25. Compare with the suppressed relation between rural exploitation and the city, where such

exploitation is realized and concentrated, in Britain. See Raymond Williams, <u>The Country and the City</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 48.

26. For a discussion of urban space and citizenship in colonial Africa that bears on this discussion, see Mahmood Mamdani, <u>Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism</u> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 18.

27. King, <u>Global Cities</u>, 38.

28. Benedict Anderson, <u>Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism</u> (New York: Verso, 1991), 50-65.

29. This lack of genuine autonomy anticipates the neo-colonial status of Martinique as an overseas départment of France from 1946 on. For a discussion of the implications of Martinique's peculiar colonial history, see Richard D.E. Burton and Fred Reno, eds., <u>French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana Today</u> (London: Macmillan, 1995).

30. For a discussion of the significance of Chamoiseau's redefinition of marronage, see Richard D.E. Burton, <u>Le roman marron</u>, 16-18.

31. Compare with Frantz Fanon's analysis of the Manichean structure of the colonial city in <u>The Wretched of the Earth</u> (New York: Grove, 1963), 39-46.

32. Williams, <u>The Country</u>, 279.

33. Gwendolyn Wright, "The Ambiguous Modernisms of African Cities," in <u>The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994</u>, ed. Okwui Enwezor (New York: Prestel, 2001), 226.

34. Jane Jacobs, <u>Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City</u> (New York: Routledge, 1996), 20.

35. Bernabé, <u>Éloge</u>, 14.

36. On the need for literature to accept forms of popular belief, see Bernabé, <u>Éloge</u>, 41.

37. On Francophone maroon culture, see Gabriel Debien, "Marronage in the French Caribbean" in Richard Price, ed. <u>Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas</u> (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

38. Castells, The City, 211.

39. For a discussion of the simultaneous excesses and lacks associated with housing in contemporary Mumbai, see Arjun Appadurai, "Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millenial Mumbai," Public Culture 12.3: 627-651.

40. Manuel Castells emphasizes the role of political mobilization in relationship to the local state as a crucial component of urban social movements. See Castells, The City, xviii.

41. Neil Smith, "Homeless/Global: Scaling Places" in Jon Bird et. al., eds. Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change (New York: Routledge, 1993), 143.

42. Patrick Chamoiseau, Interview. Karibèl 3 (Nov/Dec 1992), 54.

43. See Bernabé, Éloge, 52.

44. Rogers, Cities, 58.

45. The effacement of indigenous land claims in South Africa is particularly interesting for comparative purposes. See David Johnson, "Theorizing

the Loss of Land: Griqua Land Claims in Southern

Africa, 1874-1998," David Eng and David Kazanjian,

Eds., Loss (Berkeley, CA: U California P, 2003), 278-

299.

46. For a discussion of the impact of gendered

inequalities on urban space and development, see

United Nations Human Settlements Program, 18.

47. Rogers, Cities, 8.