

Controversial Monuments for Enslavers, Enslaved Rebels, and Abolitionists in Martinique and Cuba¹

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ABSTRACTS

Dieser Beitrag analysiert, was im Jahr der gestürzten Statuen in Martinique und Kuba geschah und warum. Die beiden karibischen Inseln sind von der bis in das 19. Jahrhundert andauernden Geschichte der Plantagensklaverei geprägt, weisen aber in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart eine sehr unterschiedliche ethnische Zusammensetzung der Bevölkerung und unterschiedliche politische Systeme auf. Afromartinikanerinnen stürzten vor der Ermordung von George Floyd und der neuen Welle der Bewegung Black Lives Matter (BLM) zwei Statuen des weißen Abolitionisten Victor Schoelcher, der von de-kolonialen Aktivist:innen als Verantwortlicher für die Entschädigung der Versklavenden betrachtet wird. Danach zerstörten sie auch Denkmäler für Versklaver und Kolonisatoren. Nach diesen Ereignissen richteten viele martinikanische Städte Komitees ein, die diskutieren und entscheiden sollen, was mit dem belasteten Kulturerbe geschehen soll. Das kubanische Komitee Aponte, das rassistische Vorurteile bekämpfen soll, drückte nach dem Mord an George Floyd seine Solidarität mit den Opfern des US-amerikanischen Rassismus aus, stellte aber den Verbleib der Gedenkort für Versklavende, Pro-Sklaverei Ideologen und weiße Rassisten in Havanna und anderswo nicht in Frage. Das Monument für den afrokubanischen Helden José Antonio Aponte, Anführer einer Verschwörung gegen die Sklaverei und für die Unabhängigkeit von 1812, ist in Havanna immer noch nicht gebaut worden, obwohl so ein Denkmal schon vor Jahrzehnten versprochen wurde. Hier werden die Debatten und Entscheidungen über Monumente für Versklaver und Rassisten diskutiert, auf Grundlage ihrer Medien-

1 This article is based on the research project *Memories of Atlantic Slavery*, funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG; reference: SCHM 1050/5-1). I thank Michael Glencross for the revision of the text.

präsenz und von Interviews, die mit Kubaner:innen und Martinikaner:innen über die Politik zur Erinnerung an Sklaverei geführt wurden.

This article analyses what happened in the year of toppled statues and why in Martinique and Cuba, two Caribbean islands that are both marked by the history of plantation slavery up until the 19th century but have very different past and present patterns in the ethnic composition of their populations and different political systems. Afro Martinicans toppled two statues of the white abolitionist Victor Schoelcher seen by de-colonial activists as responsible for the indemnification of enslavers, before the murder of George Floyd and the new wave of the movement Black Lives Matter (BLM). They destroyed the monuments of enslavers and conquerors, too. After these events many Martinican towns set up committees to debate and decide what to do with a tainted cultural heritage. The Cuban Aponte committee, commissioned to combat racist prejudices, expressed its solidarity with the victims of US-American racism after the murder of George Floyd, but it did not contest the remaining sites of commemoration for enslavers, pro-slavery ideologues and white racists in Havana and elsewhere. The monument for the Afro-Cuban hero José Antonio Aponte, leader of an anti-slavery and pro-independence conspiracy in 1812, has still not been built in Havana although such a memorial was promised decades ago. The debates and decisions about monuments for enslavers and racists are discussed here on the basis of their coverage in the media and in interviews held with Cubans and Martinicans about the politics of the memory of slavery.

1. Historical Introduction

The history of the Caribbean islands of Martinique and Cuba is marked by plantation slavery that exploited enslaved Africans. Extensive immigration from Spain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made Afro-Cubans a minority in their country; oppositely, the overwhelming majority of the Martinican population is of African descent. Between 1635 and 1832, nearly 217,000 enslaved Africans were brought to the French colony of Martinique.² After the abolition of slavery in 1848, enslavers were indemnified, and they retained landownership.³ The freedmen got nothing and were coerced by vagrancy laws and a harsh labour code to continue work in the sugar cane fields for low wages or under very exploitative tenancy contracts.⁴ The industrial period of sugar production came after emancipation. The frustration over “freedom” without

2 Transatlantic Slave Trade Database II, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates> (accessed 6 January 2021).

3 C. Ernatus, *L'indemnité coloniale de 1849, logique de solidarité ou logique coloniale?*, in: *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe*, 152 (2009), pp. 61–77. On 7 May 2021 a database of the indemnified enslavers of 1825 (Saint-Domingue) and 1849 (all other colonies, according to the law of 30 April 1849) was put online by the research group REPAIRS: *Eslavage & indemnités. Empire colonial français du XIXe siècle*, <https://esclavage-indemnitees.fr/public/> (accessed 10 May 2021).

4 D. Tomich, *Contested Terrains: Houses, Provision Grounds and the Reconstitution of Labour in Post-Emancipation Martinique*, in: M. Turner (ed.), *From Chattel Slaves to Wages Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas*, Bloomington 1995, pp. 241–257. U. Schmieder, *Nach der Sklaverei – Martinique und Kuba im Vergleich*, Berlin 2017, pp. 239–272.

freedom, access to land, and education in a situation of poverty and racist discrimination provoked a liberation war in the south of Martinique in 1870, ending in a massacre of Afro-Martinicans, comparable to the bloodshed that ended the Morant Bay Rebellion (or War) in Jamaica in 1865, which had similar causes.⁵

The hope that becoming a department of France in 1946 would be a particular form of decolonization and bring real equality and certain prosperity was not fulfilled. The lack of economic perspectives led to an exodus of Afro-Martinicans emigrating to metropolitan France, promoted by the French government, which recruited cheap labourers for manual and care work as well as the lower ranks of the public services in France.⁶ Many laws on social security were implemented in Martinique much later than in France. It was only in 1996 that the aim to create equal standards of living was proclaimed, but that aim has still not been attained today.⁷ As an overseas department (*département d'Outremer*), Martinique is de facto a semicolony. The *békés*, white descendants of enslavers (1 per cent of the population), still own 52 per cent of the land and hold a dominant economic position, especially as they control the production of food and the importation of all goods and dictate exorbitantly high monopolist prices.⁸ Mainland French civil servants dominate the administration, and French mobile guards enforce semicolonial rule, often using very violent means against social unrest. Many Afro-Martinicans are unemployed and remain poor because of low wages and high living costs.⁹ The contamination of the island – including soil, flora and fauna, and human beings – by the pesticide chlordecone, forbidden in the United States in 1977 and used on the island on the banana plantations until 1993 with permission of the local and French governments, continues to cause a lot of anger.¹⁰ Besides electing representatives for municipal councils and the assembly of the Collectivité Territoriale de la Martinique, Martinicans can send deputies to the French Assemblée Nationale. Freedom of speech, of assembly, and of the press exists within certain limits, and different discourses on slavery and remembrance can be expressed.

Approximately 983,000 enslaved Africans were deported to Cuba between 1511 and 1870, nearly 551,000 of them in the illegal period of trade between 1821 and 1873.¹¹

5 G. Pago, *L'insurrection de Martinique 1870–1871*, Paris 2011. C. Chivallon/D. Howard, Colonial violence and civilising utopias in the French and British empires: the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) and the Insurrection of the South (1870), in: *Slavery & Abolition*, 38/3 (2017), pp. 534–558.

6 M. Giraud et al., La Guadeloupe et la Martinique dans l'histoire française des migrations en régions de 1848 à nos jours, in: *Hommes et Migrations. Revue française de référence sur les dynamiques migratoires*, 1278 (2009), pp. 74–197.

7 K. Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace. National Identity, Decolonization, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean*, New York 2016, pp. 124–150, 151–174.

8 P. Ismard, Entretien avec Caroline Oudin-Bastide, Les békés des Antilles françaises: une survivance?, in: *Revue Geste*, 6 (2006) pp. 259–275, p. 261, <https://www.revue-geste.fr/articles/geste6/Geste%2006%20Esclavage%20%20Oudin.pdf> (accessed 6 January 2021).

9 M. E. Paquet, *Regard sur l'économie martiniquaise. Essai*, Fort-de-France 2009, pp. 89–90.

10 M. Ferdinand, *Une écologie décoloniale, Penser l'écologie depuis le monde caribéen*, Paris 2019, pp. 184–189.

11 G. Eltis/J. Felipe-González, Rise and Fall of the Cuban Slave Trade. New Data, New Paradigms, in: A. Borucki/D. Eltis/D. Wheat (eds.), *From the Galleons to the Highlands. Slave Trade Routes in the Spanish Americas*, Albuquerque 2020, pp. 201–222, p. 205.

Slavery ended only in 1886, with a period of transition from 1880 onwards.¹² After taking over the role of Saint-Domingue as the world's biggest sugar producer after the revolution of the enslaved in Haiti, Cuba was one site of the so-called Second Slavery, that is to say, the industrialized mass slavery of the nineteenth century. This meant that sugar centrals exploited several hundred enslaved Africans. Big sugar factories processed sugar cane, using the newest technologies.¹³ Since the mid-nineteenth century, Africans worked alongside Chinese contract labourers, whose fate was no better.¹⁴ As commerce with African captives had been illegal since 1820 and enslavers did everything to hide new arrivals, we shall never know the exact number of enslaved Africans who died because of exhaustion or torture in the Cuban killing fields. Usually, the labourers did not survive longer than five to seven years. The sex ratio and the chance to build a family differed from plantation to plantation, but those who were exploited on the big *ingenios* (modern sugar plantations), with several hundred enslaved men and a small number of enslaved women (or even none), had no chance of finding a partner and having children.¹⁵

A particularity of Cuban abolition of slavery (1880–1886) was its entanglement with the process of independence. In the Cuban Republic (1902–1959), the myth was created that the common fight of black and white Cubans in the two wars (1868–1878 and 1895–1898) against the Spaniards had eradicated the racial conflicts inherited from slavery. This ignored the Guerra Chiquita of 1879 (in which Afro-Cuban soldiers continued the fight because white Cubans had signed the peace treaty of Zanjón without the abolition of slavery¹⁶) and the massacre committed in 1912 by their former brothers in arms of the members of the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC), who had dared to rebel against segregationist racism in the neo-colonial republic.¹⁷

Today, the situation of the island seems to be very different from that of Martinique. Most enslavers and their descendants have left Cuba (already during the War of Independence or after the revolution of 1959).¹⁸ Formally, racial segregation was abolished in socialist Cuba. All Afro-Cubans gained access to health care and education, and social and educational inequality diminished.¹⁹ On the other hand, the independent Afro-Cuban press and Afro-Cuban associations were dissolved, and criticism was suppressed. Afro-Cuban religion was not prohibited completely but marginalized, associated with criminality and made incompatible with professional and social advancement. Power

12 R. J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor 1860–1899*, Princeton 1985, pp. 127–197.

13 D. Tomich/M. Zeuske, Introduction, in: *Review, A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 31/2 (2008), pp. 91–100. M. Zeuske, *Schwarze Karibik, Sklaven, Sklavereikultur und Emanzipation*, Zürich 2004, pp. 237–243, 310–315.

14 L. Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves of Cuba*, Philadelphia 2008.

15 Scott, *Slave Emancipation*, p. 12. Zeuske, *Schwarze Karibik*, pp. 312–316. U. Schmieder, *Sklaverei und Sexualität im Kuba der Massensklaverei des 19. Jahrhunderts*, in: J. Fischer/M. Ulz (eds.), *Unfreiheit und Sexualität von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Hildesheim 2010, pp. 162–187, pp. 169–170.

16 A. Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba, Race, Nation and Revolution, 1868–1898*, Chapel Hill 1999, pp. 63, 72–74.

17 S. Castro Fernández, *La masacre de los Independientes de Color en 1912*, Havana 2002.

18 A. Bahamonde/J. Cayuela, *Hacer las Américas: las élites españolas en el siglo XIX*, Madrid 1992, pp. 56–58. A. de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*, Chapel Hill 2001, p. 276.

19 Fuente, *A Nation for All*, pp. 268–279, 307–316.

in socialist Cuba has always been in the hands of the white middle class. Continuing racism is explained as a residue of Spanish and US-American (neo-)colonial rule, not as current white economic and political privilege.²⁰ The disastrous economic situation since 1990 (with a slow and incomplete recovery until 2017 and the return of shortages in 2019–2021) has affected Afro-Cubans more than whites as they receive fewer returns from abroad, they have no houses to rent to tourists, and they are excluded usually from the foreign currency sector of economy.²¹

2. Research Questions, Historiography, and Sources

For France, Johan Michel has defined three types of memory regimes with respect to slavery: the “régime mémoriel abolitionniste” (honouring white abolitionists and the liberating republic of human rights), the “régime mémoriel nationaliste” (silencing slavery and colonialism as this past contradicts the glorious national history), and the “régime victimo-mémoriel” (this is what Christine Chivallon, who studies Antillean memories, would label “contre-mémoires” or “mémoires minorées”, the counter-memories of the descendants of the enslaved, who define their ancestors and themselves as victims of slavery and racism).²² What is missing (in Michel’s work, not in Chivallon’s) yet very important in most post-slavery American and Caribbean societies is the resistance-focused memory regime. For Martinique, the nationalist memory regime should be called a colonial memory regime as there is a Martinican nationalism from below that is based on the resistance paradigm.

After having described the memory regimes that prevail in Martinique and Cuba, this article tries to answer at least partly the following questions about recent events: What happened in the year of toppled statues on both islands and why? How strong was the influence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the toppling statues movement after the murder of George Floyd? Were internal conditions more important? Do similarities in the politics of memory on both islands prevail, as a result of the common past of slavery and incomplete emancipation, or do differences predominate because of the unequal political and socio-economic organization of both Caribbean societies? Who were the actors on the stage of contemporary history? Whose voice was heard and whose voice was silenced?

This article about the memories and public history of slavery and the managing of a tainted cultural heritage cannot discuss in extenso the historiography about slavery in

20 Ibid., pp. 280–296.

21 Ibid., pp. 317–334. E. Morales Domínguez, *La problemática racial. Algunos de sus desafíos*, Havana 2012, pp. 128–129.

22 J. Michel, *Devenir descendant d’esclave, Enquête sur les régimes mémoriels*, Rennes 2015, p. 230. C. Chivallon, *L’esclavage, du souvenir à la mémoire, Contribution à une anthropologie de la Caraïbe*, Paris 2012, pp. 115–116, 384. C. Chivallon, *Rendre visible l’esclavage. Muséographie et hiatus de la mémoire aux Antilles françaises*, in: *L’Homme* 180 (2006), pp. 7–42, p. 11.

Martinique and Cuba. Since the late 1960s, a distinct Martinican history of slavery has developed, focusing on the resistance of the enslaved and their descendants,²³ but French and Martinican historiography stay entangled. Academics move between metropolitan France and the Antilles; they cooperate, and recent historiography produced in mainland France is as critical of slavery and of post-slavery forced labour and repression as the publications written in Martinique.²⁴ Sources from the perspective of the enslaved were published much later in Martinique than in Cuba.²⁵ Cuba has a decades-long tradition of the history of slavery, with an economic branch and a history “from below”,²⁶ the latter having also published the “voices of the enslaved” as they appear in petitions, complaints, and juridical processes.²⁷ Spanish history of Spanish-American slavery is often focused on the economic history of slavery; the trade in enslaved Africans; the history of Spanish laws, political debates, and decisions about slavery and abolition; and sometimes also on the agency of the enslaved.²⁸ The collaboration of Spanish and Cuban historians is marked by the total dependence of the latter on the former, particularly to receive Spanish or European Union funding. Inside Cuban academia, Afro-Cubans are under-represented and are very seldom to be found in higher positions.

Studies about the memories and counter-memories of slavery are rarely published on either island. In Martinique, historians are more engaged in the diffusion of knowledge, being active themselves in the politics of memory²⁹ instead of researching that topic.³⁰ Some publications about counter-memories (of the descendants of the enslaved), sites of memory, and the management of a dissonant heritage have appeared in France and

23 A. Nicolas, *La Révolution antiesclavagiste de mai 1848 à la Martinique*, Fort-de-France 1967. A. Nicolas, *L'insurrection du Sud à la Martinique* (septembre 1870), Fort-de-France 1971.

24 Examples for cooperations: M. Dorigny (ed.), *Esclavage, résistances et abolitions*, Paris 1999. M. Cottias/A. Stella/B. Vincent (eds.), *Esclavage et dépendances serviles: Histoire comparée*, Paris 2006. M. Dorigny/M.-J. Zins (eds.), *Les traites négrières coloniales. Histoire d'un crime*, Paris 2009.

25 C. Oudin-Bastide, *Des nègres et des juges: la scandaleuse affaire Spoutourne (1831–1848)*, Paris 2008. D. Rogers, *Voix d'esclaves. Antilles, Guyane et Louisiane françaises, XVIII-XIXe siècles*, Paris 2015. F. Régent/G. Gonfrier/B. Mailard (eds.), *Libres et sans fers: paroles d'esclaves français; Guadeloupe, Île Bourbon (Réunion), Martinique*, Paris 2015.

26 J. L. Franco, *La conspiración de Aponte*, Havana 1963. J. L. Franco, *Los palenques de los negros cimarrones*, Havana 1973. P. Deschamps Chapeaux/J. Pérez de la Riva, *Contribución a la historia de la gente sin historia*, Havana 1974.

27 G. García Rodríguez, *La esclavitud desde la esclavitud: la visión de los siervos*, México 1996 (Havana 2003). A. Perera Díaz/M. A. Meriño Fuentes, *Estrategias de Libertad: un acercamiento a las acciones legales de los esclavos en Cuba (1762–1872)*, 2 vols., Havana 2015.

28 E. Vila, *Hispanoamérica y el comercio de esclavos*, Sevilla 1977. J. Andrés-Gallego, *La esclavitud en la América española*, Madrid 2005. J. Laviña/J. L. Ruiz-Penado, *Resistencias esclavas en las Américas*, Madrid 2006. J. Belmonte, *Ser esclavo en Santiago de Cuba. Espacios de poder y negociación en un contexto de expansión y crisis, 1780–1803*, Madrid 2011. A. Piqueras, *La esclavitud en las Españas. Un lazo transatlántico*, Madrid 2012. M. Rodrigo/L. Chaviano (eds.), *Negreros y esclavos. Barcelona y la esclavitud atlántica (siglo XVI–XIX)*, Barcelona 2017. M. C. Cozar/M. Rodrigo (eds.), *Cádiz y el tráfico de esclavos de la legalidad a la clandestinidad*, Madrid 2018.

29 For instance: Oliwon Lakarayib (<https://oliwonlakarayib.com/>), Comité Devoir de Mémoire (<https://www.facebook.com/devoirdememoiremartinique/>), cooperating with the Fondation pour la Mémoire de l'esclavage (<https://www.facebook.com/fondationpoullamemoiredesclavage/>).

30 This picture may be incomplete as the semicolonial situation of Martinique restricts the possibilities of publication of research results. Through my academic network, I obtained access to some unpublished studies.

the United States.³¹ With respect to Cuba, these issues are seldom treated, whether in Cuba or elsewhere.³² A branch of Spanish and Cuban historiography refers to the technical heritage of sugar, coffee, or tobacco, separating these topics from the history of the enslaved.³³

3. Martinique: What Happened and Who Reacted How?

On the emblematic commemorative day of 22 May 2020, the 172th anniversary of the self-liberation of the enslaved who forced the French governor to declare emancipation on 23 May 1848 (instead of two months after the arrival of the republican commissioner, which would have been on 4 August, with the risk that a more conservative French government might have cancelled the abolition declared on 27 April in Paris), two young female activists, Alexane Yva Ozier-Lafontaine and Jay Asani, felled two statues of the white abolitionist Victor Schoelcher in the towns of Fort-de-France and Schoelcher.³⁴ Nowhere else in the world have statues of abolitionists been destroyed (with one exception, the removal of a replica of the Emancipation Memorial in Washington in Boston, explained in the introduction). As this happened before the murder of George Floyd, internal reasons must be the cause of this action. The two activists said that they acted as they did because “we have had enough, we, young Martinican women, of symbols which insult us” and that monuments should be created to honour persons who have done something in history and should be admired, but “Schoelcher was completely in favour of the indemnification of enslavers”. The economic domination of the *békés* today would not exist without that indemnification, the campaigners reckoned.³⁵

31 M. Cottias, “L’oubli du passé” contre la “citoyenneté”: troc et ressentiment à la Martinique (1848–1946), in: F. Constant/J. Daniel (eds.), 1946–1996. Cinquante Ans de Départementalisation Outre-Mer, Paris 1997, pp. 293–313. C. A. Reinhardt, Claims to Memory, Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean, New York 2006. C. Chivallon, Museography and Places of Remembrance of Slavery in Martinique or the Gaps in a Memory Difficult to Express, in: A. Cummins/K. Farmer/R. Russell (eds.), Plantation to Nation. Caribbean Museums and National Identity, Champaign 2013, pp. 137–151.

32 P. Perez Sarduy, In Living Memory: The Commemoration of Slavery in Cuba, in: Oostindie, Facing up to the Past, pp. 63–69. S. Testa, Memoria de la esclavitud y debate racial: la cuestión de la identidad negra en Cuba, in: Nuevo Mundo – Mundos Nuevos, Debates (2009) <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/58153> (accessed 6 January 2021). Z. Romay, Cepos de la memoria. Impronta de la esclavitud en el imaginario social de Cuba, Matanzas 2015.

33 O. Zanetti/A. García, Caminos para el azúcar, Havana 1987. A. Santamaría (ed.), Azúcar, patrimonio y paisaje en Cuba, Havana 2019.

34 The first one, created by Anatole Marquet de Vasselot and showing Schoelcher in a paternalistic gesture towards a girl who is looking upwards and thanking him for the liberation, was set up after his death in 1893, financed by public subscription and a grant from the local government. The plan was to inaugurate it in the capital Saint-Pierre on 21 July (Schoelcher’s birthday) 1902. The total destruction of the old capital by the eruption of Mount Pelée delayed the inauguration until 22 September 1904 in Fort-de-France (see: L. Brown, Monuments to Freedom, Monuments to Nation: The Politics of Emancipation and Remembrance in the Eastern Caribbean, in: Slavery and Abolition 23 (2002) 3, pp. 93–116).

35 B. Sat, Statues de Schoelcher brisées en Martinique: réflexion avec deux spécialistes de l’esclavage, <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/statues-schoelcher-brisees-martinique-reflexion-deux-specialistes-esclavage-838076.html>, 31 May 2020 (accessed 6 January 2021). The video is to be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91JwT0-8jqY> (accessed 29 March 2021).

This version of history is simplified from the perspective of historical science,³⁶ but for an analysis of the politics of memory, it is more important to seek the reasons for and the reactions to the toppling of the statues. In France, the destruction was widely condemned, among many others, by President Emmanuel Macron and the Fondation pour la Mémoire de l'Esclavage (FME).³⁷ One important exception was Françoise Vergès, a political scientist from the island of La Réunion and the former president of the Comité pour la Mémoire et l'Histoire de l'Esclavage from 2009 to 2012.³⁸

After the murder of Floyd, the monument to Pierre Belain D'Esnambuc (conqueror of Martinique) in Fort-de-France was toppled on 26 July 2020. The monument to the first governor of Martinique, Jacques Du Parquet, was dismantled in Prêcheur on 6 August 2020.³⁹ On 26 May 2020, the already headless statue of Joséphine de Beauharnais was destroyed completely. The empress from the Martinican enslaver family of Tascher de la Pagerie is said to have influenced Napoleon Bonaparte's decision to re-establish slavery in Guadeloupe and to maintain it in Martinique. Martinican planters had preferred English occupants, who would have implemented the abolition of slavery in 1794, over republican commissioners.

In 1991, the statue of Beauharnais, which in 1974 had been moved from the centre to the edge of the central park by Mayor Aimé Césaire, was decapitated and painted blood red. In subsequent years, the monument was daubed with slogans on various occasions.

36 The association Oliwon Lakarayib has gathered together the most important facts and sources: 'Quel est le rôle de Victor Schoelcher dans l'abolition de l'esclavage?', <https://oliwonlakarayib.com/quel-est-le-role-de-victor-schoelcher-dans-labolition-de-l'esclavage/> (accessed 6 January 2021). The final report of the commission on the abolition of slavery, signed by Schoelcher and Henri Wallon, spoke of "a just remuneration" for the freedmen. Schoelcher thought that the indemnification of the enslavers was necessary because slavery was not legitimate, although legally authorized by the state, and because the proprietors would need that compensation to pay wages to their freed workers. Thus, enslavers and enslaved should be indemnified. The lobby of planters prevented the latter provision from being included in the decree of 27 April 1848. When the law of indemnification was voted on 30 April 1849, the left-wing group of republicans to whom Schoelcher belonged were in the minority. (The documentary does not mention that Schoelcher voted for the indemnification law, as well as two deputies from Martinique who were people of colour, François August Perrinon and Pierre-Marie Pory-Papy. Unlike Schoelcher, they benefited from the law. See J. Balguy, *Indemniser l'esclavage en 1848? Débats dans l'Empire français du XIXe siècle*, Paris 2020, pp. 309–311).

37 Le Monde avec AFP, Deux statues de Schoelcher brisées par des manifestants en Martinique. Des manifestants anti-héritage colonial ont fait tomber des sculptures de l'homme qui a décrété l'abolition de l'esclavage. Emmanuel Macron a condamné ces actes "avec fermeté", in: *Le Monde*, 23 May 2020. Fondation pour la Mémoire de l'Esclavage, La Fondation condamne les destructions de statues de Victor Schoelcher en Martinique le 22 mai, Communiqué de Presse, 23 May 2020.

38 "Bravo to those young Martinican women who say very rightly that they are not the first to protest, that they are part of a long history of resistance against French colonialism. [...] So is there nothing more to be said about the 1848 abolition? Is it to be celebrated without any mention of the fact that the settlers were indemnified, racism maintained and the colonial status imposed?!!!" Françoise Vergès, 1848, c'est le colonialisme français post-esclavagiste qui se déploie, in: *Témoignages*, 25 May 2020.

39 P. Pinel-Fereol, Les statues de Joséphine de Beauharnais et de Pierre Belain D'Esnambuc renversées par des activistes en Martinique, 26 July 2020, <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/martinique/fort-france/statues-josephine-pierre-belain-esnambuc-renversees-activistes-martinique-856692.html>. See also Un symbole colonial déplacé au Prêcheur, 6 août 2020, <https://www.martinique.franceantilles.fr/creola/videos/un-symbole-colonial-deplace-au-precheur-558346.php> (both accessed 6 January 2021).

In 2007, it was removed and in 2010 put back in its initial position, albeit headless.⁴⁰ How much Beauharnais really influenced her husband in the re-establishment of slavery is controversial. Napoleon would probably have taken that decision under the pressure of the lobbyists from the port towns even without her.⁴¹ That does not alter the fact that Martinicans must feel badly insulted by a big memorial for a prominent member of a planter-enslaver family, a defender of slavery, established in 1859 as an expression of continuing white and colonial rule (under the Second French Empire, the statue was a gift from Napoléon III to the Regional Council of Martinique).

The first monument to Schœlcher, which was inaugurated in 1904 and exemplified the abolitionist memory regime, was the response of Martinican republicans to that insult, excluding colonial and white supremacist remembrance.⁴² A pioneer work of remembering the liberation wars of the enslaved – titled *Liberté* – was the relief in malleable iron on stone by Joseph (Khokho) René-Corail in the working-class district of Trénelles in Fort-de-France, inaugurated in 1971 by Césaire on the 22 May square. The work shows a female warrior with a child in one arm and a weapon in the other. A strong upsurge of interest in *marronisme*, or a resistance-focused memory regime, occurred in 1998, the 150th anniversary of emancipation.

Many monuments for maroons, for the enslaved as victims and rebels, and for self-liberation have been established since then in Martinique. A typical example is Hector Charpentier's *Nèg Mawon* at the roundabout of the village of Le Diamant, inaugurated in 1998. A male maroon, with a strong body and in a pugnacious posture, having in his right hand a conch shell to call for his brethren, has broken his chains. At his feet can be seen a drum, the symbol of his African origin. In Saint-Esprit, Michel Glondu even sculpted a six-metre-high statue, *L'esclave libéré*.⁴³ The most famous memorial is the *CAP 110 Mémoire et Fraternité* by Laurent Valère (Anse Cafard, Le Diamant, 1998), which, unlike many others, has become a true *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory), as commemorative ceremonies take place there regularly.⁴⁴ Commemorating a shipwreck in 1830, in which 215 captives drowned, the work consists of 15 statues arranged in a triangle and looking in the direction of the Gulf of Guinea.⁴⁵

40 Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory*, p. 150, 172. B. Béral, *Les œuvres monumentales en Martinique autour de l'esclavage*, unpublished master's thesis, I, Université des Antilles, 2011, p. 24. B. Béral, *La commémoration de l'abolition de l'esclavage en Martinique de 1998 à 2010*, unpublished master's thesis, II, Université des Antilles 2013, p. 66. (I thank Benoît Bérard for drawing my attention to the theses and Béatrice Béral for her friendly consent to my quoting them).

41 P. Branda/T. Lentz, *Napoléon, l'esclavage et les colonies*, Paris 2006, p. 55.

42 Interview with Elisabeth Landi 18 September 2020 (all interviews with Martinicans were conducted via Zoom because of the COVID crisis). Béral, *Les œuvres*, p. 17, 24–25. Béral, *La commémoration*, p. 65.

43 Béral, *Les œuvres*, p. 17, counted 18 such memorials in 2011, pp. 17–18 on René-Corail, p. 28 on the work of Charpentier and p. 29 on Glondu.

44 In 2019: S. Dahné/C. Vicent, #22Mé : plusieurs manifestations prévues en Martinique, 22.5.2019. <https://www.rci.fm/martinique/Infos/Societe/22Me-plusieurs-manifestations-prevues-en-Martinique> (accessed 6 January 2021).

45 Brown, *Monuments to Freedom*, p. 111. F. Thesée, *Les Ibos de l'Amélie: destinée d'une cargaison de traite clandestine à la Martinique, 1822–1838*, Paris 1986. On Cap 110, see Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory*, pp. 139–149 and Béral, *Les œuvres*, pp. 51–52.

But the existing monuments are also criticized. Rodolphe Solbiac, a cultural specialist (an expert in anglophone literature), complained about their anonymity, even though the names of Africans who fought in what preferably should be called “wars of liberation” instead of rebellions or insurrections are known. Moreover, the statues should be situated in the city centres and not at roundabouts.⁴⁶

The enslaved warrior is absent from the city centre of Fort-de-France. The project of a memorial by the Venezuelan artist Annabel Guerrero under the title *Souvenance*, which was intended to commemorate resistance and liberation wars of the enslaved, did not come about because of a lack of money (an argument which, of course, always hides other priorities).⁴⁷

In Martinique, public servants condemned the destruction of the monuments to *Schœlcher*, too, but their fall was welcomed by local reparationists from the Mouvement International pour les Réparations (MIR).⁴⁸ The Afro-Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau stated that it was not Schœlcher – who fought unstintingly against slavery – who should be the enemy but schœlcherisme, which neglected the resistance of the enslaved.⁴⁹ Municipal memorial commissions have been set up in Martinique to make decisions about statues, street names, and other sites of memory. A small survey of students of history of the Université des Antilles (which I was able to carry out, thanks to the idea and support of Dominique Rogers, a historian at the university) showed that only 1 student out of 13 explicitly welcomed the toppling of the statue, while the others criticized it or abstained from making a judgment, and 6 students expressed the wish that the monuments should be used to explain the relevant history.⁵⁰

Nine Martinican interviewees – seven of them people of colour, which needs to be mentioned because social relations are extremely racialized – were not in favour of the destruction. In contrast to the French politicians who were angry because the action targeted a personality seen as a republican hero representing the liberating nation of human rights, these interviewees had explanations for the events. Their arguments included criticism of the *békés*, the French state, and local politicians.

Justin Daniel, a political scientist from the University of the Antilles, argues:

This conflict re-enacts the old socio-racial oppositions, on one side the békés who consider themselves as whites, well white creoles, and on the other the blacks who define themselves as negroes. The question of slavery has become central [...] it's a question that gives rise

46 Interview, 18 December 2020.

47 Béral, *Les œuvres*, p. 25. Interview with Élisabeth Landi, 18 September 2020.

48 Facebook MIR officiel. 31 May 2020.

49 Statement by Patrick Chamoiseau (Facebook FME, 23 May 2020).

50 The positive judgement: Question: “What do you think about the knocking down of the statues of Victor Schœlcher, Pierre Belain d’Esnambuc, Joséphine de Beauharnais, etc.? Answer: “This is a strong gesture, with lots of underlying implications. It reveals the fact that people are ready (once more) to free themselves from their chains.” The student is member of a cultural heritage association.

*to much debate, [...] sometimes to actions in the public space, and has led for example to the toppling of statues.*⁵¹

The teacher Elisabeth Landi – a founding member of the association Oliwon Lakarayib (creole for Autour de la Caraïbe, an organization of teachers of history and geography), formerly second deputy mayor of Fort-de-France, and a member of the left-wing pro-autonomy Parti Progressiste Martiniquais – sees the removal of monuments and the setting fire to sugar cane fields in the island's south as the first signs of a possible civil war because fires had preceded the liberation wars of 1848 and 1870. In her view, the inability of white and black elites to resolve the problems of a desperate youth and to open up a dialogue with the population about the public commemoration of slavery is responsible for the crisis.⁵² The president of Oliwon Lakarayib, Elsa Juston, sees the reasons for the anger to be connected to the social inequalities, the persisting economic power and political influence of the descendants of enslavers, and the chlordecone scandal in which the *béké* minority contaminated the island for profit-making, with the complicity of the French state, which does not recognize or compensate for the resulting health problems of rural labourers. In addition, she asserts that Martinique is a “political desert”, that there has been a “lack of vision” after the death of famous Martinican intellectuals like Césaire and Édouard Glissant, and that there is “political immobility” of the political class and brain drain through emigration of educated young people – all situations that she considers disappointing.⁵³ The retired teacher Christian Jean-Etienne, the president of the association Comité Devoir de Mémoire, believes that the young activists are misguided in knocking down the statues of an abolitionist but explains that such an act is the result of “social inequality, unsupportable tension”, youth unemployment, the high cost of living, and the immense obstacles to a fair economy and the just distribution of wealth.⁵⁴ Rogers thinks that the knocking down of statues, and especially that of an abolitionist, ignores the real problems of Martinique, which are socio-economic and should be addressed.⁵⁵ In contrast, Solbiac, a member of the Comité National pour les Réparations (Martinican correspondent of the Caribbean Community [CARICOM] Reparation Movement), thinks that the destruction of the statues – as a part of the global BLM movement and the continuation of a long tradition of resistance on the island – was an important historical act that may accelerate necessary changes in the fight against cultural oppression and for a convergence of memories in the Caribbean and Europe on the basis of a decolonial approach.⁵⁶

51 Interview 10 September 2020.

52 Interview 18 September 2020.

53 Interview 6 November 2020.

54 Interview 25 September 2020.

55 Interview 16 September 2020.

56 Interview 18 December 2020. R. Solbiac, La destruction des statues de Victor Schoelcher in Martinique. L'exigence de réparations et d'une nouvelle politique des savoirs. The Destruction of the Statues of Victor Schoelcher in Martinique. A Demand for Reparations and a New Knowledge Policy, Paris 2020. For more Martinican opinions, see Statues de Schoelcher et de quelques autres... récapitulatif provisoire de 86 contributions

If one asks what has to happen after this critical diagnosis of racialized social inequality, the answers differ. For Daniel, the distribution of *béké* land and reparation funds would make sense only with a very precise plan of socio-economic reforms that turns away from the export-oriented model of the economy and with a strengthening of the regional integration of the Caribbean instead of an orientation towards France and Europe.⁵⁷ The association Comité Dévoir de Mémoire opts for a combination of reparations on different levels: psychological, against the inherited feeling of inferiority (access to knowledge, funding for libraries, and publication of Martinican master's and doctoral theses); educational (teaching the history of slavery as shared history between the Caribbean and Europe and better access to sources); and economic (diversification of agriculture, self-sufficiency with food, access to land through the purchase of unused land by the *Société d'Aménagement Foncier et d'Établissement Rural* and selling and renting to young local farmers, and cooperation with other Caribbean islands).⁵⁸ The historian Gilbert Pago demands investment in infrastructure, a diversified and sustainable agriculture, investment in education and health, and a fairer distribution of wealth, resources, and income.⁵⁹ Juston speaks out for a reform of the health system and the recognition of chlordecone pollution as an occupational disease and corresponding indemnification, plus an agrarian reform resulting in the promotion of projects leading to less inequality and giving access to land for young farmers. She does not argue in favour of individual payments as reparation.⁶⁰ Rita Bonheur, the president of the Union des Femmes de Martinique, thinks that the restitution of history (ending the occultation of slavery), economic restitution, the repairing of the psychological trauma of *colorisme* (social hierarchies based on skin colour) by building up self-confidence, and the overcoming of violent social relations as a legacy of slavery are all priorities.⁶¹ Solbiac asks for an investment in health and education by the French state, not as development aid, but as an act of redress; the distribution of land owned by the French state and the *békés*; and a French-financed museum of all Martinican peoples (including the *kalinago*, the native people from whom his father's family is descended) that presents the history of slavery and the liberation wars of people of African descent as an interruption in the many thousands of years of African history.⁶² These interviewees did not ask for individual reparation payments or land grants, as the receivers would be difficult to choose in an ethnically mixed society and would create new social tensions. In 2005, the MIR went to court to demand financial reparations from the French state and the beneficiaries of indemnification in 1849, but the president

au débat, MADININ'ART, 7 October 2020, <https://www.madinin-art.net/statues-de-schoelcher-recapitulatif-provisoire/> (accessed 26 September 2021).

57 Interview 10 September 2020.

58 Interview 25 September 2020.

59 Interview 19 October 2020.

60 Interview 6 November 2020.

61 Interview 2 December 2020.

62 Interview 18 December 2020.

of the movement did not explain to whom exactly the money should be paid, how it would be distributed, and for which aims.⁶³

4. Cuba: Nothing Happened. Why?

On the occasion of the murder of Floyd, the Aponte Commission, an organ of the National Union of Writers and Artists, assigned to combat racist prejudice, expressed its solidarity with the victims of US-American racism and strongly criticized the Trump regime.⁶⁴ There was no reaction to the BLM movement or the toppling of statues around the globe – in the sense, racism was not discussed in Cuba. In the declaration of the commission, the “grievous prejudices because of skin colour” in Cuba were mentioned, but, as always in the official discourse, being only connected with colonial slavery and the ideology of the USA imposed during the “neo-colonial” republic of 1902–1959.⁶⁵ Current white rule and privilege are thus not questioned. To speak about police violence against Afro-Cubans remains a taboo.⁶⁶

Statues were not removed, and officially nobody called for such an action. The commission did not contest the remaining sites of commemoration for enslavers, pro-slavery ideologues, or white racists in Havana, and also on the independent webpage *afrocubaweb.com*, demands for dismantling statues were not published. In contrast, during a research visit to Cuba in 2019, Afro-Cuban interviewees commented on statues, monuments, and other sites of memory. Georgina Herrera, the famous Afro-Cuban poetess, was upset about the giant memorial for José Miguel Gómez on the Avenida de los Presidentes because this Cuban president had ordered the massacre of members of the PIC in 1912, a party founded in 1908 that fought racial discrimination.⁶⁷ She also complained about the honours for the son of the famous white leader of Cuban independence José Martí (1853–1895), José Francisco Martí y Zayas-Bazán (“Ismaelillo”, 1878–1945), who was the chief of staff of the Cuban army during the massacre and who participated in the banquet marking the “victory” over the *Independientes*. In 2012 (during the centenary of the massacre), he was honoured with a memorial plaque in his former residence,

63 Interview of Béatrice Beral with Garcin Malsa, 5 April 2012. Béral, *La commémoration*, pp. 109–120.

64 Boletín de la Comisión Aponte, Edición especial, 15 June 2020.

65 Declaración de la Comisión Aponte de la UNEAC, Amamos la Patria de Lincoln tanto como condenamos la tiranía de Trump in: *ibid.*

66 For example, the recent case of the killing of an Afro-Cuban young man (25 June 2020): Hansel Ernesto Hernández Galiano, <http://www.afrocubaweb.com/hansel-hernandez-galiano.html> (accessed 6 January 2021).

67 Interview 15 January 2019. The monument – inaugurated in 1936 by the son of J. M. Gómez, Miguel Mariano Gómez Arias, the president of Cuba for some months in 1936 – had already been criticized during its construction, for example in the anti-racist newspaper *Adelante* on 3 August 1935 (J. C. Guanche, “La gloria es suya y nadie puede quitársela”: Estatuas, monumentos y la memoria del racismo en Cuba, *OnCuba News*, 2 July 2020, <https://oncubanews.com/opinion/columnas/la-vida-de-nosotros/la-gloria-es-suya-y-nadie-puede-quitarsela/> (accessed 5 March 2021). The monument was torn down in 1959, at the time of the revolution, but reconstructed by Spengler, the official in charge of the restoration of the town. See <http://www.afrocubaweb.com/history/eldoce.htm> (accessed 6 January 2021).

today the Centro de Estudios Martianos, unveiled by the town's historian, Eusebio Leal Spengler, and the former minister of culture, Armando Hart.⁶⁸ The murdered leaders of the PIC, Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Yvonnet, are not honoured with statues. Only a small commemorative plaque in Amargura street, unveiled in 2008, commemorates the foundation of the PIC, at least admitting the “bloody repression of 1912” against this party, whose “principal mission was to fight against racism and for the plenitude of rights for all”.⁶⁹

There are a monument and two statues in the Parque Luz y Caballero (on the Avenida del Puerto, near the cathedral), which must be mentioned in this context. The busts show Father Félix Varela – who was one of a small group of white Cuban abolitionists and who spoke out in favour of the (gradual) abolition of slavery in the liberal Cortes in 1821 and had to flee to the USA after the re-establishment of absolutism in 1823 – and José Antonio Saco – who wanted to end the trade in enslaved Africans (not slavery as such) for fear of the Africanization of Cuba and a second Haiti, not out of sympathy with the enslaved. The most problematic monument here is the one dedicated to José de la Luz y Caballero (1800–1862), “the teacher of the Cuban youth” omitting the fact that the “enlightened” racist had owned enslaved persons until his death and that he, like his friend Saco, wanted to abolish the traffic, not slavery itself.⁷⁰

Even Francisco Arango y Parreño, who was the mastermind of the Cuban sugar aristocracy and who had lobbied for the liberalization of trade in enslaved Africans at the Spanish court (which was decreed in 1789), is honoured in Havana. At his former residence, a commemorative plaque explains that he developed from being a supporter of a free slave trade to being a protagonist of its abolition, but what is not said is that he did so for fear of the Africanization and Haitianization of Cuba, not out of sympathy for its victims. He did not want to abolish slavery but instead to transform it into another form of servitude, a fact that is also silenced.⁷¹

As early as 1961, the Afro-Cuban intellectual Walterio Carbonell gave a fundamental critique of the adoration of these white national heroes. Arango y Parreño was described as an “enslaver of the worst sort”, and Saco and Luz y Caballero as “tormented enslavers”. The revolution could not consider these men as “national gods”; they had enforced co-

68 <http://www.afrocubaweb.com/history/josefranciscomarti.htm#Eusebio> (accessed 6 January 2021).

69 Copied on site in January 2019.

70 R. Cepero Bonilla, *Azúcar y abolición*, Havana 1971, pp. 23–32. K. Ghorbal, *Réformisme et esclavage à Cuba* (1835–1845), Paris 2009, pp. 24–25, 93, 139, 176, 179, 238, 399–400, 407, 419, 441–442, 470, 541, 686–687. Varela had never possessed enslaved Africans (pp. 470–471). De la Luz had owned more than 500 enslaved Africans (p. 686, the figure comes from M. Moreno Fragnals, *Azúcar, esclavos y revolución* [1790–1868], Casa de las Américas 50 [1968], p. 42).

71 M. Zeuske, Arango y Humboldt/Humboldt y Arango. *Ensayos científicos sobre la esclavitud*, in: M. D. González Ripoll/I. Álvarez Cuartero (eds.), *Francisco de Arango y la invención de la Cuba azucarera*, Salamanca, 2009, pp. 245–260. J. A. Piqueras, *Los amigos de Arango en la corte de Carlos IV*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 151–166, particularly pp. 160–166. D. Gonçalves, *Francisco de Arango y Parreño o la libertad más allá de la sacarocracia*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 213–228.

lonialism and slavery. They had been enemies of the revolutions and democratic living together. Carbonell fell victim to repression after publishing that text.⁷²

A big mural painting in Old Havana, near the cathedral, represents Cuban society in the nineteenth century on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the town. Of the 82 persons depicted, only 2 are Afro-Cuban: the classical musician Claudio Brindis de Salas and the poet Plácido. Various Afro-Cuban interviewees complained about the eradication of Afro-Cubans from the town's history, including Roberto Zurbano, a literary critic and activist for Afro-Cuban rights;⁷³ Heriberto Feraudy, a writer, member and former President of the Aponte Commission;⁷⁴ Graciela Chailloux, an economist at the University of Havana;⁷⁵ Herrera, a feminist poetess;⁷⁶ and Gisela Arandia, a researcher and writer and a former president of Color Cubano, an organization founded in 2001 (also a branch of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba, UNEAC) that fought for the equality of Afro-Cubans but was dissolved without consulting its members in 2009.⁷⁷ To quote Daisy Rubiera Castillo, an anthropologist and well-known expert on Afro-Cuban history and culture:

*If we look at the history of Cuba and the role that slave men and women played, we notice that many things we are doing at this moment in time repeat what happened in the colonial era. Because in Havana there is a whole series of important sites relating to black men and women which are paid no attention.*⁷⁸

To quote Zurbano: "All are figures from the nineteenth century. They include Domingo del Monte, Gertrudis Gómez Avellaneda, Félix Varela, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. There are only two blacks out of 82 persons." He goes on to state,

*[a]nd today the historian of the town represents it as if he were bishop Espada. As if he were that eighteenth-century historian of the town, reproducing the city to make it whiter, more Spanish.*⁷⁹

Whereas the statues and plaques for white enslavers or racists stay in place, another monument is lacking: the monument for the Afro-Cuban José Antonio Aponte.⁸⁰ He was executed as a fighter against slavery and for independence on a central square in 1812, 56 years before the white national hero Carlos Manuel Céspedes manumitted "his" enslaved men and started the first war for independence. For Afro-Cubans, Aponte is the

72 W. Carbonell, *Como surgió la cultura nacional*, Havana 1961, p. 21. On Walterio Carbonell's critique of racism in socialism and its repercussions, see Fuente, Alejandro, *A Nation for All*, p. 287.

73 Interview 2 February 2019.

74 Interview 12 January 2019.

75 Interview 23 January 2019.

76 Interview 17 January 2019.

77 Interview 5 February 2019.

78 Interview 28 January 2019.

79 Interview 2 February 2019.

80 Franco, *La conspiración de Aponte*. M. Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery*, Chapel Hill 2006.

emblematic hero. In the official Cuban politics of memory, he is honoured to a certain degree,⁸¹ but in contrast to Céspedes – whose statue is situated on the central square, the Plaza de Armas – the monument for him in Havana, promised in the 1990s, has still not been built. With the exception of Esteban Morales, an economist and member of the Aponte Commission,⁸² those interviewed had given up hope of seeing the monument in their lifetime. Zurbano, who lost his job at the editorial and research institute of the Casa de las Américas because of a critical article on Cuban racism published in the US press, is angry that Old Havana shows a bust of Lady Di (Princess Diana), but Aponte is not honoured. Zurbano ascribes this situation to the lack of political will, not financial and practical obstacles. He complains about the celebration of the 150th anniversary of independence in 2018 – “de Céspedes a Fidel” – instead of dating the beginning of independence to 1812 with Aponte’s conspiracy. The hegemonic discourse on history prefers to see the whites as the first protagonists of independence and the blacks as subalterns who could not fight for their own freedom, instead of commemorating the revolts and maroonage of the latter.⁸³ Zuleica Romy, the director of the Afro-Cuban studies programme of the Casa de las Américas, shares the critical view on the narrative about Céspedes as “liberator” of Afro-Cubans and underlines the racist ideology of Céspedes, the incomplete abolition of slavery by the patriots, and the bad treatment of Afro-Cuban soldiers by the white leaders of the liberation army.⁸⁴

The only monument for an Afro-Cuban in Old Havana is dedicated to the Afro-Cuban poet Plácido (Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés) on the Plaza de Cristo (in a working-class part of Old Havana, which only a few tourists find). It was inaugurated in 1978, and its upkeep is neglected. In the park of the Capitolio Nacional, on the edge of Old Havana and central district, one finds the busts of former political adversaries and rivals, such as the Afro-Cuban intellectuals and political leaders and members of parliament Juan Gualberto Gómez and Martín Morúa Delgado. The latter is a controversial politician as he put forward the law that forbade the founding of a party on the basis of skin colour. This law was later used against the PIC.

Other monuments for Afro-Cubans in Havana are the big memorial for Antonio Maceo, the Afro-Cuban military leader of the wars of independence, at the Malecón, which dates

81 There is for instance a reference to him in the room dedicated to slavery in the Casa de África, in Havana, and in the “time tube”, in the new historical museum in the Palacio del Segundo Cabo (both sites visited in January 2019).

82 Interview 31 January 2019.

83 Interview with Zurbano, 2 February 2019 “The celebrations are euro-centric, very white, very Spanish. But the issue of the Black is not present. Aponte has no monument in town, for instance. [...] Now we are celebrating the 150 years of Independence War [...] They do not include Aponte, for instance. Events, compilations do not include Aponte, not the others. Carlota, the conspiracies, Triunvirato, of Matanzas, none of this matters. 150 years, full stop. From Céspedes to Fidel. Because, of course, by starting the history with Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the first moment is that of the whites, when the white creoles are the protagonists of independence. [...] The political discourse of the historiography of today identifies this as the big first moment. Of course, when one highlights Carlos Manuel de Céspedes as giving freedom to the Blacks, then the Blacks are subalterns. The Blacks are not able to fight for their own freedom.”

84 Romy, *Cepos de la memoria*, pp. 17–20.

from 1916, and a smaller one for his mother (“the mother of Cubans”), Mariana Grajales, in the modern district of Vedado on the central avenue no. 23 (between C and D). A monument in the central district on the Plaza del Trillo for the Afro-Cuban soldier and later general in the liberation armies of the 1868, 1879, and 1895 wars, Quintín Bandera, murdered in 1906, dates from 1938. It is not well maintained by the city of Havana; for instance, letters from the inscription have fallen down and not been replaced. Other honoured Afro-Cuban personalities are the communist workers’ leader Aracelio Iglesias Díaz, with a bust, and the poet Nicolás Guillén, with a statue, both in the Alameda de Paula in the area of the port. There is also a relief monument for the African-American leader of the civil rights movement Martin Luther King in the modern district of Vedado. There is no memorial to slavery, resistance, or enslaved fighters in the whole town. Women are under-represented, especially Afro-Cuban women; Grajales is honoured as the mother of a famous man, not for her own agency.⁸⁵

Cuba is too big to enumerate here all monuments in the provinces. Thus I will only point out two emblematic memorials for enslaved resisters. The *Monumento al Cimarrón*, in El Cobre near Santiago de Cuba, was created by the Afro-Cuban sculptor Alberto Lescay, who also sculpted the monument to Maceo in Santiago de Cuba.⁸⁶ El Cobre is the site of copper mines, whose once-enslaved workers obtained their freedom from the Spanish king in 1800.⁸⁷ Atypical for socialist art, the maroon statue has a rather abstract form. At the feet of the standing maroon, an upturned cauldron for sugar cane symbolizes the *nganga*, a recipient for objects devoted to the ancestors in the Afro-religion of Palo Monte. The local Afro-Cubans use the site for religious ceremonies.⁸⁸

The *Monumento al Esclavo Rebelde* is situated on the site of the Triunvirato *ingenio*, near Matanzas, where an important liberation war of the enslaved took place in 1843. It shows the two male leaders along with the female leader Carlota. In 2015, the *Museo al Esclavo Rebelde* also opened on this site. The monument was inaugurated on 26 July 1991 on the occasion of the anniversary of Moncada by Fidel Castro in the presence of Nelson Mandela. Castro said about the monument that it was right and legitimate to erect such a memorial in Matanzas, where more than 100,000 African slaves had been exploited “until their last drop of sweat and blood” and where major uprisings had taken place. He equated slavery with apartheid. Most of Castro’s speech referred to the Cuban intervention in Angola, named after the female fighter Carlota, and the triumph of Cuito Cuanavale against South African troops. He appropriated the resistance of the enslaved for Communist Party goals, saying various times “¡Qué lejos hemos llegado los esclavos!” (How far, we, the slaves, have come!) and talking about “we [...] who were conquered,

85 The under-representation of Afro-Cuban woman was particularly regretted by Daisy Rubiera Castillo, interview 28 January 2019.

86 Alberto Lescay Merencio, Escultor, pintor, dibujante, <http://www.afrocubaweb.com/albertolescay.htm>.

87 M. E. Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670–1780*, Stanford 2000.

88 K. Routon, *Conjuring the Past. Slavery and Historical Imagination in Cuba*, in: *American Ethnologist* 35 (2008) 4, pp. 632–649.

who were exploited, who were enslaved”.⁸⁹ Fidel and Raul Castro – sons of an immigrant from Galicia, a soldier who had defended Spanish colonial rule and a landowner who exploited Cuban and Haitian labourers⁹⁰ – were never conquered, exploited, or enslaved. This appropriation of the resistance of enslaved Africans by a white ruling class – where Afro-Cubans are ousted from that heroic history – is a very characteristic feature of slavery remembrance in socialist Cuba.⁹¹

The memorial was built according to the design of the Euro-Cuban sculptor Enrique Moret Astruells designed in 1976.⁹² The museum and monument are not part of the tourist route. It is very complicated to reach via public transport (one has to go to the nearby small town of Cidra by bus from Matanzas and to walk half an hour from the bus stop). The only visitors are international academics and students who rent a car or bus, schoolchildren from Cidra and Triunvirato (Cidra is the historic town where also descendants of the enslaved of Triunvirato live, and Triunvirato is a new settlement for dispossessed white farmers), and soldiers who are brought there because in the driver’s house there is an exhibition about the *Operación Carlota*.⁹³

Normally one would lament the fact that a monument is situated on a site where almost nobody can look at it. But it is better that almost nobody sees this one: it is an example of socialist realism of the worst sort. The giant figures of the enslaved are nearly naked and represented as ferocious savages (particularly the men). Cuban interviewees who know the monument find it ugly,⁹⁴ but obviously and maybe fortunately it does not have the same connotations for them as for me. The overdone “African” traits (no African or African American has such a face) present the Africans as half-apes as they were drawn in handbooks of “scientific racism” of the nineteenth century, which tried to “prove” that Africans were a species between humans and apes.⁹⁵ For the white artist, Africans are marked by physical strength, fierceness, and dangerousness, not by intelligence and charisma, which the historical leaders of the liberation war surely had.

Finally, I will refer to a mural in Matanzas, in the historic centre, that presents a different history than the mural of white aristocrats in Old Havana. This mural is (also) dedicated to enslaved fighters. The narrative is something like a mixture of the hegemonic

89 Speech by Fidel Castro, 26 July 1991, Matanzas, XXXVIII Anniversary of the Assault on the Moncada barracks, http://www.cubamilitar.org/wiki/Fidel_Castro_discurso_del_26_de_julio_de_1991_con_Nelson_Mandela (accessed 13 January 2021).

90 Ángel Castro Argaz (the father of F. and R. Castro), https://www.ecured.cu/%C3%81ngel_Castro_Argiz (accessed 13 January 2021).

91 Perhaps one could compare it with the appropriation of historical Amerindian resistance by white elites in Spanish-American state formation, where the native population of the time was discriminated against, as are Afro-Cubans.

92 J. Veigas Zamora, *Escultura en Cuba*, Santiago de Cuba 2005, p. 299.

93 Interview with Damaris González, researcher of the museum, 23 February 2019. I visited the museum on this day and on 9 February 2019, the first time accompanied by an Afro-Cuban colleague and friend. On both occasions, we were the only visitors.

94 The (white) historians of slavery María del Carmen Barcia (15 January 2019) and Mercedes García (22 January 2019). Herrera was the only interviewee who emphasized that the physique of Africans was shown wrongly (interview 17 January 2019).

95 See for example the illustrations in: R. Knox, *The Races of Men*, London, 1862, p. 404.

discourse/resistance-focused memory regime (enslaved rebels were “like precursors of our social revolutions”, as Fidel Castro said) and an Afro-Cuban perspective. The resisters have here, at least, a name: “Antonio Congo, José Dolores (Mayimbe), Micaela, Carlota, Fermina, Manuel Mandinga, Eduardo, Pedro Gangá”, all prominent leaders of liberation wars (Triunvirato and Ácana, 1843).⁹⁶ In the heart of “Cuba grande”,⁹⁷ the region with big sugar plantations and centrals where, on each one, several hundred predominantly male enslaved workers were exploited and met a premature death, slavery and resistance cannot be ignored in the same manner as in the capital.

5. Conclusions and Comparisons

On Martinique and Cuba, monuments honouring white enslavers and colonialists, white abolitionists, and enslaved rebels and maroons co-exist, and thus the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inherited colonial, abolitionist, and the recent resistance-focused memory regimes.⁹⁸ The difference is that on Martinique, the statues of enslavers and the “white liberator” have been contested for decades, which recently led to (controversial) acts of demolition and removal. In Cuba, criticism of this politics of memory is expressed in private conversations, very seldom and very cautiously in the press, but nobody seems to dare to topple a monument.⁹⁹ Of course, no municipal commission was formed to decide which monuments and street names of enslavers or racists should disappear; the official narrative about history does not even admit the involvement of white national heroes in slavery and white supremacy discourses. The Martinican activists are being prosecuted for knocking down monuments, and the legal judgement is not yet known.¹⁰⁰ In Cuba, draconian punishments for offences of all sorts are usual. How long topplers of monuments of enslavers or racists would stay in prison, we do not know. What does all this mean? Another form of remembrance of slavery, resistance, and abolition/emancipation – an enslaved fighters-centred one – has been hotly debated in

96 A. K. Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba. La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841–1844*, Chapel Hill 2015, pp. 79–110.

97 Concept of Michael Zeuske. Zeuske, *Schwarze Karibik*, pp. 191–246.

98 The victim-centred memory regime can be connected to a certain degree with the CAP 110 monument in Martinique and is displayed through shackles and chains in Cuban museums, but it is not dominant.

99 Statues of José Martí were not toppled, but painted red by the group named *Clandestinos*, which has nothing to do with antiracist protests, for which Martí the elder would also be the wrong target (*Vandalizan estatuas de José Martí en La Habana*, 2 January 2020, <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2020-01-02-u199291-e199291-s27061-vandalizan-estatuas-jose-marti-habana> (Cibercuba is a voice from Miami). Whether there is a connection with the San Isidro protests of a (multiracial) group of young artists against the repression of artists is unclear, but it is not very probable (<https://www.facebook.com/Mv.SanIsidro/>). For a critical, not US- or Cuban-government directed view on the movement, see: <https://www.afrocubaweb.com/san-isidro-n27.html> (accessed 3 March 2021).

100 *La France, le pays des droits de l'homme s'attaque aux femmes qui ont des couilles en Martinique*, in: *Bonda-Manjak*, 25 November 2020, <https://www.bondamanjak.com/la-france-le-pays-des-droits-de-lhomme-sattaque-aux-femmes-qui-ont-des-couilles-en-martinique/> (accessed 13 January 2021).

Martinique for decades and has been in part achieved, with a new level of recognition by local politics reached in 2020. The violence of protesters against material objects and the violence of the colonial state against persons are part of this conflict in semicolonial Martinique. In Cuba, the liberation wars of the enslaved belong to the hegemonic narrative of a national history based on revolutions, but their protagonists are honoured mostly in distant places, not in the centre of power, in Havana. The white ruling class does not cease to commemorate its white racist national heroes. The possibilities for expressing criticism of that are very limited in a country without freedom of the press or of speech, assembly, or demonstration.