



# Unearthing Colonial Violence: Griotic Archaeology and Community-Engagement in Guiana

Gabby Omoni Hartemann<sup>1,2</sup>

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## Abstract

This article intends to address archaeological coloniality and points to the urgent need for epistemological changes within the field. Conceived as an Afroguianese epistemological disobedience, Griotic Archaeology represents an attempt to step away from the disciplinary reiteration of colonial violence. This approach and the engagement of two communities, Moun'Roura and Moun'Wayam, allowed to open space for Afroguianese and Indigenous knowledge, memories, and world-perceptions in the archaeological work conducted at Habitation La Caroline, a site of enslavement in Guiana.

**Keywords** Coloniality · Epistemic violence · Afrodecoloniality · Community archaeology · Guiana

## AGO! Asking for Permission (Introduction)

Ago! Ago Èşú, Laroyê Èşú! Ago Òrìşà Obaluaiyê, Atôtô! Ago Òrìşà! Ago mo Gangan Mana! Ago tout' Gangan-yan, Gangan Moun'La Caroline! Ago pou mo pouvê palé! Ago pou mo pouvê ékri! Ago, Moun'Roura, Agô Moun'Wayam!

[Ago! Laroyê Èşú! Asking for permission to Òrìşà Obaluaiyê! To Òrìşà! Asking for permission to my ancestors from Mana! To all Ancestors, to the Ancestors from La Caroline! Asking for permission to speak! To write! Asking for permission to Roura people, to Wayam people!]

I open this article with an epigraph asking my elders for permission to speak. In my world-perception, I can only start to speak after such an ask has been made.

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✉ Gabby Omoni Hartemann  
gab.hartemann@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Department of Anthropology, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

<sup>2</sup> Omo Òrìşà in the Ilê Axé Iyaba Omi Community, Belém do Pará, Brazil

This is a mark of the centrality of interconnectedness between beings. In doing so, we acknowledge that we follow the steps of those who came before us. By saying “ago,” a West African word that has travelled with my ancestors from one shore of the Atlantic to others, until it made its way into the diasporic languages we created, I reaffirm this connection and my belonging to an Afrodiasporic world-perception.

I, Gabby Omoni Hartemann, am the great-grandchild of Azéda Bourne, who was herself the great-grandchild of Alai's, an African woman who survived captivity and enslavement in the Amazonian territory of Guiana, a contemporary colony of France in South America. My ancestor Alai's planted the roots of our existences in the white sand of Mana, a community she and about 400 other Africans founded over a decade before emancipation was proclaimed in french colonies in 1848. I think, speak, write, and do archaeological work from my position as their descendant, as Moun'Mana, a Guianese person, an Afro Amazonian person, Omo Òrìṣà, a transgender person, and a colonized person.

Affirming my ancestral, cultural, cosmological belonging in such an academic space constitutes a political act, one that is inscribed in the legacy of numerous critical approaches to archaeology that argue for the importance of social positionality (Battle-Baptiste 2011; Castañeda 2008; Fryer 2020; Ribeiro 2017). To date, the need to demarcate our presence as colonized and marginalized subjects is still necessary to unsettle the hegemonic structures that keep excluding our bodies, our non-western knowledge, languages, world-perceptions from knowledge making, and erasing our contributions.

“The colonist makes history” wrote Martinican thinker Frantz Fanon (2005) in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Several decades after his passing, his words sadly carry the same truth. Most official narratives about our own past are still not ours.

Who does archaeology? Those who do not perceive the relevance of this question probably occupy spaces and positions of racial, gendered, bodily, geographic, and/or linguistic privilege. As I write these words in 2020, archaeology is still globally a predominantly white and cisgender field of knowledge (Franklin et al. 2020:758; Heath-Stout 2020:408). It is also a field that directly favors male, western, heterosexual, able-bodied, urban, middle-class people in its disciplinary mechanisms of knowledge production (Heath-Stout 2020:408–409).

This article calls for the need to acknowledge and move away from the colonality within the archaeological discipline that participates in the reiteration of this violence. Beyond considering colonialism, colonial violence, colonized beings and spaces as their objects of study, archeologists must engage in drastic, transformative epistemological change in order to transcend colonial hierarchies and commit to social justice.

Throughout this article, my writing seeks to reflect the political dimension of occupying such a hegemonic space: written, in english, and primarily aimed at an academic readership. Following Afrodiasporic author bell hooks' (1990:146) affirmation that “language is also a place of struggle,” I choose to use the pronoun “we” to refer to marginalized and colonized people. Additionally, my decision to not capitalize words associated with hegemonic actors aims at destabilizing naturalized colonial hierarchies.

## Archaeological Coloniality: Silencing “Others,” their Stories, and their Things

*“What a pain, to be trapped in this colonial order”* (Kilomba 2010)

In her work *Plantation Memories*, Afrodiasporic thinker/artist/psychologist Grada Kilomba (2010) invokes the image of an object, a mask made of metal designed to prevent enslaved Africans from eating sugar cane or cocoa, in order to address colonialism. As she brings back this mask from her memories and chooses to re-tell the stories she heard about it, Kilomba (2010:16) highlights the direct relation between colonialism and the process of silencing: “In this sense, the mask represents colonialism as a whole. It symbolizes the sadistic politics of conquest and its cruel regimes of silencing the so-called ‘Others’: Who can speak? What happens when we speak? And what can we speak about?”

This image serves as a powerful metaphor to initiate a much-needed conversation about the intersection of colonialism and archaeology – particularly the kind of archaeology that intends to elaborate narratives about the enslavement of Indigenous and African people based on the study of materiality. Who can speak about past and present times, things, and people? Who cannot? Who can be a knowledge holder, and who is not recognized as such? The fact that such questions still need to be addressed today reveals the depth and the structural dimension of coloniality. It also translates the extent of our exhaustion.

Archaeology as a discipline is a direct and active participant in the maintenance of colonial structures of oppression (Gnecco 2009; Haber 2016; Jofré 2015). It thrives in and serves the interests of the hegemonic colonial order of the world as well as feeds its structural and historical inequalities. As one modality of modern western science, archaeological knowledge is entirely grounded in its legacy as a crucial tool for the establishment of the project of modernity. Drawing from Argentinean archaeologist Alejandro Haber (2015:135), I point to the urgent need to critically examine the mode of knowledge that is archaeology and its complicity with colonialist and capitalist ontologies.

Much has already been said and written about the direct relation between modern western knowledge and the current modern/colonial order (Bernardino-Costa et al. 2019; Castro-Gomez and Grosfoguel 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2011, 2019; Mignolo 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013; Quijano 2005, 2009; Wynter 2003). Some key elements from these reflections are worth remembering here to further the discussion about archaeology and the notion of coloniality.

The term coloniality, introduced by Peruvian thinker Aníbal Quijano, encompasses much more than the classic understanding of colonialism as merely the historical formation of colonial territories. Coloniality refers to a global and multidimensional project, the dehumanizing logic underlying the projects of modernity and western domination (Maldonado-Torres 2019:35–36). While the modern invasion of non-european geographic spaces and the enslavement and exploitation of non-european beings historically underpin such projects, the structural mechanisms of this logic remain very much in place despite the apparent socio-political transformations that have erased formal colonies or led to the signing of abolition treaties.

Modernity/coloniality as a project of euro-western domination placed knowledge at its center through the transformation of modern western cosmology and epistemology into a great universal narrative about the world (Lander 2005:10, Mignolo 2013:142). An organization of the world based on essentialist binary fragmentations and hierarchies, such as between mind/body, man/woman, adult/child, past/present, human/nature, reason/emotion was imposed in order to define power.

Gikuyu (Kenyan) author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2011:16) emphasizes the place of language in such colonial domination. Coloniality operates through the control of the tools of the colonized to perceive and talk about themselves, among which are their linguistic references. While notions of prestige and high status are granted to the language of the colonizers, colonized people's ways of enunciating their realities are tied to inferiority, lack of intelligence, and even erased through punishment and humiliation (Anzaldúa 1987; Fanon 1986: 27–28; Thiong'o 2011:18).

Therefore, the legitimization of euro-western knowledge, ontologies, epistemologies, languages and simultaneous invalidation of any other forms of knowledge actively contribute to colonial violence. Epistemic violence, to employ the term chosen by Indian thinker Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993) to refer to this particular dimension of coloniality, still constitutes the basis of modern western knowledge.

Despite an increasing number of compelling critiques addressing coloniality and epistemic violence within archaeological ethics, thought, and methodology (Atalay 2006; Cabral 2014; Flewellen 2017, 2019; Gnecco 2008, 2009; Haber and Shepherd 2015; Hartemann and Moraes 2018; Morris 2014; Rizvi 2015) in the past decades, a need for critical self-reflection regarding the participation of the archaeological field of knowledge in the maintenance of structures of oppressions persists.

What are the ways through which the archaeological discipline engages in epistemic violence? I locate the present discussion in the context of Guiana and the archaeology conducted there, more specifically the work dealing with processes of colonization and enslavement. While the elements presented here relate directly to the colonial reality of Guiana, which I briefly present in the following paragraphs, I believe this contribution can help strengthen a general reflection about archaeological coloniality.

## The Colonial Reality of Guiana

It is not uncommon to receive outraged cries from french individuals when referring to Guiana as a contemporary colony of France. On a superficial basis, one could easily be convinced by their arguments, ranging from Guiana's official status as an "overseas territory" to the french citizenship granted to its inhabitants, or even the use of the euro currency in a South American territory. According to them, such elements point to a privileged, or even prosperous situation of Guiana when compared, as it frequently is in these discourses of power, to the dominant images about neighboring Caribbean and South American regions.

Hence, the recurrent social unrest, strikes and protests in Guiana over economic dependency, unemployment and insecurity, as is also the case in other french colonies such as Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Mayotte (Fleming 2017:160–161), are

commonly treated in the french public media as ungratefulness from the small population of a territory, which, after all, “costs more to France than it brings in profit” (Gabriel 2017).

Contrary to the widely circulated myth of Guiana as a “poor colony” which has only represented financial loss since the seventeenth-century french invasion, numerous economic and geopolitical interests in maintaining control over the region exist. In addition to Guiana’s important mining resources, such as gold and oil, wood and fishery resources (Bouamama 2018:4–5), the biodiversity of its Amazonian rainforest can be considered a colonial raw material of the twenty-first century, much sought-after by the pharmaceutical industry. It also represents a strategic component for France’s position as a world leader in ecological issues. The space center established in Guiana in 1964 also counts as an important strategic component for the European Union and is accompanied by a heavy french military presence (Bouamama 2018:6).

A closer examination of France’s colonial occupation reveals Guiana’s status as an overexploited space stuck in heavy structures of extreme economic dependency and very few possibilities for self-sustainability, let alone self-determination. The wealth produced by the exploitation of their territory does not reach the colonized Guianese population, which in turn is submitted to an economic monopoly and a structural dispossession or lack of access to the land, with over 90% of it owned by France (Agence France-Presse 2019).

Often characterized as rapidly growing and multi-ethnic, the Guianese population is composed of Indigenous Guianese communities (Kali’na, Paykweneh, Arawaka, Teko, Wayana and Wayāpi), Maroon Guianese communities (Aluku, Saamaka, Paamaka, Ndyuka), and Afroguianese communities. Other components of the Guianese demographic landscape include numerous Afro-Caribbean, Asian, and South American communities.

Differently from other french colonies, the white population of Guiana mostly originates from relatively recent waves of immigration from France. The majority of white colonists from earlier centuries is said to have left Guiana a few decades after final emancipation in 1848. The presence of contemporary white settlers in Guiana, and specifically their positions as government officials, teachers, medical doctors or scientists, is facilitated by strong economic incentives received from the french government (Hidair 2007:620). The elements that characterize the power position generally held by white people in Guiana are a temporary presence for professional reasons, an ethnic, racial, and linguistic contrast with the vast majority of its population, as well as an informal segregation (Hidair 2007:624).

Although french legislation makes it illegal to include racial and ethnic data in their census (Fleming 2017:9), it is possible to affirm that the vast majority of Guiana’s population is not white, not european, and does not possess french as its first language.

However, the latter is imposed as the sole official language of Guiana, one that is used in administration, health, education and law-enforcement institutions. Education in Guiana reflects particularly well the blatant coloniality through its use of the french school curriculum, based on french cultural and historical references, and its

content taught exclusively in french by teachers and professors who are predominantly white and french.

### Archaeological Epistemic Violence through “Othering”

Raising the question “who does archaeology?” again allows for reflection upon one of the most structural working mechanisms of archaeological coloniality, namely the need to maintain hegemonic subjects in their position as unique knowledge-holders.

Practicing archaeologists in Guiana are all white and originate from France or North America (Canada or the United States). Their native language, which they master orally and in the written form, is french or english, two western languages that both hold a status of privilege and prestige, either as the official language or as an international lingua franca tied to professional success. Most of these white archaeologists, similarly to other white people in Guiana, are only temporarily in the territory for professional reasons – either coming to work on a site for an excavation season or occupying a position in a government organization that may eventually lead them to work at the university for a few years.

As it has also been noted in other contexts (Lee and Scott 2019:87), white archaeologists in Guiana demonstrate an indifference to local political contexts, struggles for liberation or survival of ways of knowing, languages, and historical trauma (Tuhiwai Smith 2012:7). Maori anthropologist Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012:7) description of the category of scientists as people whose “linguistic and cultural homeland” and “cultural loyalty” are somewhere else, and whose “privilege is vested in their legacy as colonizers” seems to perfectly fit the situation as it exists in Guiana.

The overt predominance of white and french people in the field of archaeology feeds the pervasive image of the scientist as a distant, privileged, white outsider from the West. This distance therefore appears as a condition for “making science” and strengthens the figure of the detached observer created by modern epistemology. Put another way, white archaeologists in Guiana position themselves as the “neutral seeker of truth and objectivity who at the same time controls the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate” (Mignolo 2009:162).

This multifaceted position of power occupied by white archaeologists in Guiana allows the discourses about the past (and about the present) created by them to be attributed with unquestionable veracity and trust. It sadly creates and upholds the following equation: truth + knowledge = white = western outsider = french = written form = scientist.

This mechanism of epistemic violence conceals how archaeological knowledge itself is situated and constructed within a western eurocentered epistemology, as well as the geo- and body-political implication of its knowing subject (Mignolo 2009:160–162).

While these individuals are ethnically, racially, ontologically, and linguistically legitimated by the colonial order as the only ones who can produce knowledge,

processes of “othering” and “silencing” are put in place to ensure that colonized and marginalized people, knowledge-systems, and world-perceptions are excluded from knowledge-making.

“Othering,” a concept first coined by Spivak (1985) to refer to the creation of “otherness” and the power dynamics involved in such creation, might be one of the most pervasive and naturalized elements of epistemic violence within the field of archaeology (Atalay 2006:285). It appears almost as a condition for the existence of the archaeological discipline and the hegemonic colonial interests it protects.

The structural delegitimization of the colonized as knowledge holders and knowledge producers is a core mechanism of othering, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012:26) reminds us:

One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the “arts” of civilization.

Archaeological coloniality is made manifest through the maintenance of Indigenous and Afroguianese people as the “Other” of the discipline, the ones who might be studied but who are never recognized as fully legitimate knowledge holders. Delegitimizing semantic categories are created and used to prevent the knowledge systems of colonized people from being recognized as such (Bhattacharyya 1998; Kilomba 2010:28; Mignolo 2009:160). By qualifying Indigenous and Afrodiasporic narratives about past times as “folklore,” “myth,” “legend,” and “superstition,” their knowledge is restricted to a different type of narrative, one that annihilates their possibility of ever competing with modern western scientific narratives.

The many hierarchizing fragmentations of modernity/coloniality (reason/emotion; mind/body; science/art; present/past) also ensure that the diverse forms of transmission of these non-western knowledge systems (orally, musically, in Indigenous and Afroguianese languages) are disqualified.

While I will not detail this specific point here, it is worth noting that the othering process within archaeological coloniality heavily relies on its disciplinary forms of education and training. The academy, as a hegemonic space of knowledge, has historically participated in the violent exclusion of colonized and marginalized subjects from knowledge making (Kilomba 2010:27; Mombaça 2015).

Fieldwork, as yet another critical training space for archaeological knowledge, also appears as a violent space for colonized and marginalized people (Battle-Baptiste 2011:25–26). On a global scale, racism, in much the same ways as homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny, constitutes an integral part of the sociability of archaeological fieldwork (Carle et al. 2018; Franklin et al. 2020). One painful memory I recall from my own experience working at a Guianese site of African enslavement is the many racist “jokes” and comments from white archaeologists, who compared workers to “slaves” and threatened to whip us if the pace was not increased.



Once the colonizer has been established as a knowing subject and the colonized is maintained at the margin of knowledge production, another type of othering occurs through the erasure and disqualification of the existing ties between colonized folks and things, places, and people from other times.

Memory and ancestry – that is, a set of relations of descent/kin that encompass but are not limited to direct “biological” relations (Hartemann and Moraes 2018) represent those ties that have been intentionally severed in order to completely other the colonized. Archaeological epistemic violence operates through the disavowal of the importance or relevance of any relation of descent, memory, and belonging with what has become the “archaeological object” (Haber 2015:131–132).

Additionally, there is a systematic exclusion of non-western cosmologies and epistemologies from archaeological knowledge. For example, Indigenous, African, and Afroguianese notions of time, such as a cyclical understanding of time inseparable from the ancestors’ lives, are completely absent from the archaeological narratives about the past and replaced with western colonial chronological categories (Vázquez 2011:32).

The intentional exclusion of Indigenous, African, and Afroguianese world-perceptions serves as a particularly efficient silencing tool, one that transforms our ancestors, their things, places, and stories into mute objects of study within the archaeological discipline.

### Silencing Stories, Beings, and Things

Silencing is the other key process through which epistemic violence operates within archaeology. Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1995:48) emblematic work on the production of history stresses that “silencing” constitutes an active and transitive process. As Trouillot (1995:25) reminds us, silencing some narratives while highlighting others is an exercise of power, one that reveals hegemonic interests regarding which stories about the past should be told, and how. Paraphrasing Afrodiasporic archaeologist Ayana O. Flewellen (2019:55): “silences are not innocuous.”

Here, I want to elaborate upon and illustrate some of the many dimensions through which the archaeological discipline and its practitioners based in Guiana engage in the process of silencing.

A common misunderstanding when referring to the silencing of non-hegemonic subjects is that they are actually silent, voiceless, mute. As Afrodiasporic archaeologist Whitney Battle-Baptiste (2011:34–35) emphasizes, silencing takes place by not listening to the voices of those maintained in the condition of subaltern:

Frankly, as a woman of African descent, I never felt silenced in my life. Invisible, yes, but not silenced. There were many moments when I was screaming at the top of my lungs, only to look around and realize that no one was listening. As African Diasporic people, we understand that not every person’s voice or story holds equal value in the past or present. ... The voices have not been silent, just in constant communication with other marginalized and subjugated women.



This action of “not listening” is highly visible in the kind of archaeological projects conducted in Guiana. To date there has not been any kind of community engagement initiatives besides the project *Archéo La Caroline, Lavi nou Gangan*. The lack of community-engaged projects is an explicit illustration of silencing carried out by white archaeologists who are actively “not listening” to the needs of communities impacted by the archaeological work in Guiana.

This drastic absence of community involvement reflects a profound lack of interest from white archaeologists in having Guianese communities not just as a part of the research, but also as receivers of archaeological knowledge. In this context, not listening to Guianese folks is not perceived as problematic because the only ones who should be speaking are the white archaeologists (Haber 2015:129).

The state of the archaeological discipline as it currently stands in Guiana shows an affirmation of the exclusive authority of the colonizing, western, white, french-speaking subjects as the sole producers of the official discourse about past and present times. It reinforces their status as the ones who have become the experts in telling the past lives of those who are not their ancestors (Atalay 2006:285; Kilomba 2010:28) and who can tell our stories better than ourselves (hooks 1990:151–152).

A particularly violent dimension of this archaeological silencing occurs in the context of research conducted at places of enslavement of Indigenous and African ancestors. Archaeological research at historical sites of colonization and enslavement in Guiana started almost three decades ago. One of the most prominent research sites is the *Loyola habitation*, an eighteenth-century Jesuit plantation that held up to 500 African people in captivity (Le Roux 2013). Other research projects that involve pre-emancipation contexts mostly look at sugar, cocoa, or annatto production, the architecture of the plantations, or highlight foundation structures of european colonial settlements.

The vast majority—if not the entirety of these research projects—do not examine the lives of enslaved Africans within the scope of their research. Additionally, there is a systematic erasure of processes of enslavement within the historical narratives that are created about sites of enslavement. Enslavement becomes an epiphenomenon, one that is barely mentioned when contextualizing the history of the archaeological site/object.

The erasure of enslavement is linked to a dehumanization and depersonalization of captive people present in archaeological discourse. Africans and Indigenous ancestors who were trafficked, held in captivity, and forced to labor on these sites are referred to as being a “workforce,” or simply “slaves.” Within this rhetoric nothing is stated about the livelihoods of African and Indigenous ancestors besides a vague and quick mention of their condition as enslaved workers.

In his own analysis of the plantation tourism industry in the United States, Afro-diasporic thinker Jarvis McNnis (2019:747) mentions similar practices of historical revisionism through the choice of the term “workers” to refer to enslaved people who at the time were considered as property, less than human. Such an element points to the urgent need to further the global critical review of archaeological and heritage narratives about African enslavement (see Flewellen 2017 for elements of this discussion).

In the specific case of the Africans enslaved in Guiana, not even their possible geographic origin, assigned gender, or any other element retrievable in the archive that could contribute to telling stories about them are visible in widely circulated archaeological narratives, which, after all, are never about them. Interestingly, the systematic erasure of the notion of race in such discourses created by white archaeologists reflects the contemporary french ideological posture of color-blindness (Fleming 2017:6).

Connected to this last element, this archaeological discourse creates and upholds a disconnection between our enslaved ancestors and Africa. When the enslaved are mentioned, it is never as African people, Africans, or even African slaves, but only as “slaves” (Croteau 2004; Le Roux 2013) or, at best, as “slaves of African descent” (Coutet and Losier 2014) as if it were important to stress a distance, a rupture with their homeland. Additionally, the notion of loss, a complete and profound cultural, spiritual loss is systematically stressed when talking about them (Le Roux 2013:4).

A few years ago, as I questioned a white archaeologist about the reason why the living spaces of the enslaved at Loyola had never been the object of research, I was told that such a process would be useless given that “they had nothing,” or only a few things which could never be retrieved since they were made of organic matter and no longer present because of the acidity of the soil (Croteau 2004: 78). Also present in this discourse is the assumption that only the proximity to the sector of the house of enslavers makes it possible to preserve things having been used by enslaved people.

In the Guianese context, archaeological praxis is located in an even further degree of coloniality than the “thingification” we are warned about by Ayana O. Flewellen (2019:57) as being a point of slippage for archaeologists who come to study the lives of people through their materiality. In this case, the danger does not only lie in the exclusive focus on the artifacts and subsequent silencing of people’s lived experiences and stories, since not even the things of colonized people are deemed interesting or worthy of being studied.

As the research questions are exclusively elaborated by these white archaeologists, they reflect not only their dominant epistemologies but also the interests of the french colonial order from which they benefit and for which they produce the official discourses about “heritage.” Stories of resistance, persistence, or ones that hold a potential for healing for Indigenous and Afroguianese collectives are never explored and therefore silenced.

Archaeological coloniality is also made visible in the discourses of white archaeologists in Guiana through the presence of what Afro-Surinamese author Gloria Wekker (2016) has conceptualized as “white innocence.” This notion is initially explored by Wekker (2016:16–17) as she examines the contemporary mechanisms of Dutch racism and grounds it in the white Dutch self-representation as a morally untouchable, selfless, “innocent” people. This same imagination around innocence is activated by other white europeans when it comes to their nations’ active participation in colonialism, as is the case in Denmark (Körber 2018:25).

While an imagination of french colonial and white innocence might be difficult to uphold in colonies with more significant historical populations of enslaved Africans, such as Martinique and Guadeloupe, the idea that enslavement was “less harsh” in

Guiana is often encountered in official discourses about the past (Clay, this issue). Statements from archaeologists either trivializing the degree of violence suffered by the captives of Guiana, diminishing the participation and the responsibility of europeans, or even denying how much racism played a role in enslavement are commonplace and transformed into historical fact because they originate from white scientists.

Mechanisms justifying the apparent silence of Guianese people or their absence in the field of archaeology are in turn grounded in racist and colonialist projections claiming that they would simply not be interested in their own past (Auger and Losier 2012:61). The notions that Afroguianese people are “ashamed” of this past of enslavement because “they sold each other,” that they choose not to remember, or even that they do not “like working in the woods and in the heat” are also commonly invoked. Far from being isolated prejudiced statements from a few individuals, these comments represent a pervasive discourse amongst the french living in Guiana that serves as a mechanism of escapism when faced with possible critiques regarding their privilege.

## **Griotic Archaeology: Epistemic Disobedience by Afrocentering Research**

Stories about slavery haunt our present, as Afrodiasporic author Jenny Sharpe (2003) writes, constituting spectrums of a history that was never properly told and remains that way. In light of the global increase of spaces of conversation about anti-Black racism, I am sure that more and more sites and contexts related to the enslavement and oppression of our ancestors will soon become of interest for the archaeological discipline in Guiana. Therefore, a radical commitment to an epistemological change committed to justice appears more urgent than ever.

My refusal to engage in the reiteration of colonial violence and trauma led me to seek other pathways to conduct archaeological work in Guiana. Activating my own epistemological references to re-understand the role and shape of archaeology revealed to be difficult when I, a colonized Afroguianese person, was still in the process of re-discovering my Afroguianese knowledge system. The dispossession of our world-perceptions is one of our deepest and most painful colonial wounds.

The approach that I will develop in the following lines, which I have initially called *Griotic Archaeology* (Hartemann 2019), represents a first attempt at epistemological disobedience, following what Argentinean thinker Walter Mignolo (2009:160) describes as exercises of rupture from coloniality.

My initial choice of the term *griot* to qualify this decolonizing and Afrocentering exercise derives from my encounter with Boubakar Ndiaye, a Senegalese knowledge holder who self-identifies as a griot. During his performance at the annual Storytelling Festival of Guiana, he said the following words: “Playing the role of a griot is to connect people to one another.” Beyond the numerous similarities with our Afroguianese traditional way of telling stories, his statement appeared as a sign to convince me to explore traditional African and Afrodiasporic notions of what constitutes knowledge.

The word “griot” still holds a symbolic importance in the African diaspora, despite its origin as a unique term utilized by the colonial french authorities to refer to a multitude of different kinds of traditional knowledge holders from the current region of Mali: the Doma, the Donikeba, the Dieli, to only mention a few (Bâ 1981). The crucial role they held in their community as genealogists, historians, poets, musicians, ambassadors, and storytellers can explain why this term represents an inspiration to Afrodiasporic thinkers who seek to ground their epistemological disobedience in traditional African knowledge systems (Toure 2011).

The process of reunderstanding archaeology through a Griotic approach is rooted in two distinct, yet connected dimensions: the reontologization of my personal/ancestral existence through my belonging to a traditional Afrodiasporic community as well as following the decolonizing and Afrocentering (war)paths opened by other colonized and marginalized folks within academic spaces. In doing so, my own Afroguianese cultural references are strengthened by the connections I found within the knowledge systems encountered throughout this journey.

I relearned about West African world-perceptions in Candomblé, an Afrodiasporic spiritual tradition that emerged in Brazil. As my ancestors led me on a path of going back to the worship of the Òrìṣàs, I also returned to an Afrodiasporic *world-sense*. Coined by Yoruba philosopher Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí (1997), this term refers to ontological and epistemological categories to be and to know that were taken away from us by colonialism. The form of knowledge taught and lived in Candomblé is based on the interconnectedness of all beings, as opposed to the colonial fragmentation of the world.

Through my belonging to Candomblé, I have learned to decolonize my understanding and my practice of archaeology as I silently sit on a straw mat, slowly taking leaves off their branch in order to prepare an herbal bath while my elders tell me the stories of the Òrìṣàs. It is by invoking Òrìṣà Èṣú and his energy of chaos, of movement, that I am able to invert the colonial hierarchy that posits that some forms of knowledge are valid and others are not. It is when we chant and dance for Òrìṣà Ògún that I learn not to fear and to face where it hurts. It is when I learn about Òrìṣà Obaluaie that I hold hope that our colonial wounds, as deep as they may be, can be brought to the surface in order to be healed.

I draw from the organic epistemological disobedience re-encountered in my Candomblé community as well as the multiple paths traced through the strategic and painful occupation of academic spaces by African, Afrodiasporic, and Indigenous intellectual elders and siblings.

Critical reconceptualizing approaches of archaeological knowledge were particularly foundational to elaborating the theory and practice of Griotic Archaeology. Here, I want to highlight some of these contributions to epistemological disobedience within the field: Black Feminist archaeology (Battle-Baptiste 2011; Flewellen 2019; Franklin 2001), Indigenous archaeologies (Atalay 2006; Harris 2005; Jofré 2011, 2015; Million 2005), the knowledge-centered approach (Mire 2007, 2011), autoarchaeology and archaeology done by descendants (Engmann 2019 and Morris 2014, 2017), community-engaged Archaeology (Agbe-Davies 2010; Battle-Baptiste 2017; Odewale et al. 2018), Afrodecolonial approaches (Hartemann and Moraes

2018), ethnographic archaeologies (Cabral 2014; Castañeda 2008), and disciplining approaches (Gnecco 2013; Haber 2011, 2012, 2013).

By reunderstanding archaeology outside of its modern framing as a neutral apolitical space, these approaches introduce the notions of archaeological research as being of service to communities (Agbe-Davies 2010:373–374; Mack and Blakey 2004:14), of the responsibility of the archaeologists toward communities and social justice (Battle-Baptiste 2011:21; Castañeda 2008:46; Lee and Scott 2019:87; Morris 2014:167), as well as a critical awareness of the political context in which the research takes place (Castañeda 2008; Howard 2019; Odewale et al. 2018). Some of this work focuses on the existing relations between communities and the things, places, and times studied by archaeologists (Bezerra 2013, 2017; Cabral 2014) and incorporates local epistemologies and world-perceptions into research design (Atalay 2006:292; Hartemann and Moraes 2018; Mire 2011). Additionally, some approaches call for the creation of new languages and methodologies that include personal, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Haber 2016:475; Jofré 2015:56–57; Million 2005:47).

While Griotic Archaeology is based on a conception of archaeology as a form of storytelling and can be tied to existing reflections around the importance of narratives for archaeological knowledge (Gibb 2000), it cannot be solely defined by this aspect. Rather, it should be understood as an anti-colonial reunderstanding of the potential of the archaeological mode of knowledge outside of the western ontological option.

African and Afrodiasporic notions of knowledge, knowledge holders, and forms of knowledge transmission serve as an epistemological foundation to shape Griotic Archaeology in its effort to be meaningful and less violent for the people it serves. In the following paragraphs, I introduce core elements present in West African, Afroguianese, and Yoruba-derived understandings of knowledge, and how they relate to Griotic Archaeology.

## Orality

The absolute centrality of orality in many, if not most, African and Afrodiasporic communities has been one of the many arguments used within the colonial order of the world to justify the invalidation of our knowledge systems. Our choice not to use written forms of expression has been and still is understood as a deficiency within coloniality. The inferiorization of Afroguianese, an oral Afrodiasporic linguistic variety, in the context of Guiana's colonial domination, and its exclusion from knowledge-making illustrate this well.

However, this prominence of orality is rooted in cosmological and ontological perceptions of the world and of humanity. Within traditional Yoruba and Yoruba-derived world senses, a condition to be fully understood as a person, *Ènìyàn*, is to receive *èṁí*, the breath of life and an energetic extract of *Ọlọrun*, the supreme being responsible for creation. Yoruba philosopher Segun Gbadegesin (1991:33–34\_ explains that *èṁí* constitutes an active principle of life which ensures that “the human body, previously lifeless, now becomes a human being—a being that exists.”

The spoken word is understood as carrying *ëmí*, and therefore represents a mighty bond with the divine forces (Machado 2013:44). According to Fula traditional knowledge holder Amadou Hampaté Bâ (1981), such perceptions are widespread in many West African cosmologies.

I acknowledge the prominence of orality in the Afroguianese world sense as one of the expressions of our ontological belonging to the African diaspora. Therefore, a foundational dimension of Griotic Archaeology is oral communication in the Afroguianese language. Beyond the anti-colonial commitment of using our own language to make science, the centering of orality in interactions with people and the dissemination of results ensures that the knowledge being shared befits our Afroguianese world sense.

### Seniority/Ancestrality

Another crucial trait found in African and Afrodiasporic knowledge systems is the direct link between knowledge and the elders, who possess more life experience (Bâ 1981:178–179; Machado 2013:59–60). Their memory is a source of knowledge. This bond extends to the ancestors, who are also perceived as knowledge holders and able to pass down what they learned to their descendants. Stressing the origin of knowledge as being transmitted by an ancestor or an elder is often given as a justification for its worth or its veracity (Bâ 1981:172).

Therefore, the first step within a Griotic Archaeology approach consists in seeking the elders and other knowledge holders of the communities we work with. Archaeology practitioners must be reminded that there are *already* valid, legitimate stories being told about different times, people, their things and their places. Recognizing this existing knowledge is a condition to engaging in archaeological research and collectively designing it with the community. It also represents a possibility for a kind of knowledge making that reinforces the elders in their social role as knowledge holders.

### Memory-Based, Experience-Based, and Holistic

African and Afrodiasporic traditional knowledge is oral and based on memory. Amadou Hampaté Bâ (1981:199) proudly describes this centrality of memory within oral tradition as a capacity to hold and restore a multitude of events or immense stories in their entirety. Similarly, learning processes within traditional Afrodiasporic *Òriṣà* communities occur through repeatedly being present, listening, and remembering.

This element converges with the understanding of knowledge as being experience-based and tightly associated with the circumstances of life. Life is the paramount source of knowledge and knowledge exists to explain life. Hence, knowledge transmission does not happen in a systematic, planned framework but according to who is learning and what is happening around them. Bâ (1981:179) explains that traditional ways of teaching are tied to events or incidents in life, which, as trivial as they may be, can always lead to telling stories about the ways of the universe.

In this sense, traditional understandings of knowledge within African and Afrodiasporic world senses point to it as something that is not possible to be summarized (Bâ 1981:200) or fragmented (Bâ 1981:173). Reflecting upon what characterizes African knowledge systems, Bâ (1981:167) affirms: “If a true African traditionalist were asked, ‘What is oral tradition?’ he would probably be nonplussed. He might perhaps reply, after a lengthy silence: ‘It is total knowledge,’ and say no more.”

Acknowledging that dimension, Griotic Archaeology is defined by its commitment to center memory in research, given that it is understood as one of the driving forces of knowledge. Within this approach, one of the archaeologists’ roles is to provoke the emergence of storytelling through the stimulation of memory.

## Responsibility

The understanding of the spoken word as a connection with divine forces explains why power and importance are commonly attributed to it. This notion entails a need for responsibility with whatever is being said, as stressed by Yoruba literature professor Oyekan Owomoyela (2005:12):

In Yoruba culture a great deal of importance attaches to whatever utterance issues out of the mouth. Speech being the highest form of utterance, the Yoruba approach it with deliberate care, taking great pains to avoid careless, casual, or thoughtless statements whose damage might outlast lifetimes. The proverb “*Ẹyin l’orọ Bó bá balẹ, fífó ní ńfó*” [Speech is an egg, when it drops on the floor what it does is shatter] bears witness to this concern.

In this sense, strong moral and spiritual prohibitions regarding lying are common (Bâ 1981:175). Acknowledging the power of speech, pronouncing certain names, or speaking in certain ways are avoided if one cannot bear the responsibility to do so and the consequences (Abiodun 1994:312; Gbadegesin 1991:123–124).

The notion of responsibility, already stressed in numerous critical approaches to archaeology mentioned earlier, is even more emphasized as a condition to making knowledge in African and Afrodiasporic world senses. The social role of traditional African and Afrodiasporic knowledge-holders, whose responsibility is towards their community, constitutes a foundational element for Griotic Archaeology. This understanding re-frames archaeological knowledge as being primarily in service to communities, which includes the possibility that elders and knowledge holders orient archaeologists to not tell, or to choose different ways to tell certain stories because of their harmful potential.

## “Everything Speaks”

An idea that is intuitively present in African and Afrodiasporic traditional world-perceptions is that every being and every object possesses the innate capacity to



communicate or to be a communication vessel. The spoken word, with all the importance it holds for humans, is but one of the multiple manifestations of the vibrations of the universe. In fact, according to this notion, everything present in the universe holds knowledge and seeks to transmit it if one is able to pay attention and listen to these other, non-human, non-verbal knowledges (Bâ 2003:31; Machado 2013:98).

Illustrating this, Yoruba art historians Olabiyi Babalola Yai (1993) and Rowland Ola Abiodun (2014) have approached Yoruba art and material culture through the concept of materiality as one of such non-verbal communication forms. They analyze traditional crafts, such as paintings, sculptures, pottery or weaving as verbal and material modalities of *oríkì*, one of the Yoruba verbal arts (Abiodun 2014:26; Yai 1993:35). According to Abiodun (2014:26), the interdependency of the oral and visual dimensions of traditional Yoruba art shows that both express in different languages the same pre-formulated and pre-materialized idea, called *òrò*.

In this sense, Griotic Archaeology does not constitute only an epistemological disobedience, but an ontological one. The acknowledgement that “things can talk” (or their capacity to act and live) can be perceived as a radical rupture with the western sense of reality, despite being an exercise already undertaken by some archaeologists (Bezerra 2018; Cabral 2017). Understanding the potential for things and places to tell and provoke the emergence of stories, their own and others, is key to an archaeological approach based in African and Afrodiasporic world senses.

### Communication Made of “Images” and Based on Exchange

A recurring trait found in the multiple languages and other forms of communication used by Africans on the continent and throughout the diaspora is the activation of images. This image-like dimension of communication manifests verbally in the centrality occupied by proverbs (Owomoyela 2005:12) but also in other sayings, maxims, riddles, and stories (Bâ 1981:200–201). I also want to bring attention to the *adinkras*, an Akan visual form of knowledge established through symbols.

In this sense, I was able to observe the similarities between Guianese *dolô* and Yoruba *òwe* (both words translatable as “proverbs”): by activating images drawn from close observation of life, they both convey practical and philosophical knowledge that is immediately accessible and their use in an argument serves as a way of establishing authority. Examples such as “A mizè ki fè tig manjé latè gra” / *It is the misery that forced the jaguar to eat clay* (reproduced in Contout 1995) or Àbúrò kì í pa ègbón nítàn / *The younger person does not give the older person history lectures* (Owomoyela 2005:47) illustrate this particularity of African and Afrodiasporic knowledge transmission.

Therefore, communication within Griotic Archaeology is established through the activation of multiple images. Knowledge can be provoked by the encounter of non-verbal images, such as excavated places and the things they hold, objects kept in the

house, maps, drawings, pictures and movies, and verbal or mental images, such as proverbs, expressions, music lyrics, dreams, prayers.

Finally, the notion of exchange is yet another crucial element within African and Afrodiasporic world senses. Dialogue is a condition for interaction, including for knowledge transmission. Knowledge is a relation, one that needs active engagement. This dimension is particularly perceptible in traditional Afroguianese storytelling, where the teller regularly tests the audience's attention through participative questions or observations that expect an immediate answer. The word "Krik!" marking the beginning of a story needs to be answered by "Krak!" in order for the teller to continue.

Afrobrazilian philosopher and *candomblecista* Tata Nkosi Nambá / wanderson flor do Nascimento stresses this dimension of engagement through an understanding of orality as conditioned by an implication of the subjects, their communities, their ancestors, and reality in what is being said, taught and remembered (Flor do Nascimento 2018:590).

Hence, talking about past times and ancestors goes beyond simply remembering, but aims at "bringing up into the present a past event in which everyone participates—the person who is reciting and his audience" (Bâ 1981:199).

This last element emphasizes the need for Griotic Archaeology to be defined by reciprocity and engagement in the community in order to not engage in archaeological epistemic violence. The need to acknowledge, learn with, and work for the existing knowledge holders cannot be emphasized enough as a key to moving away from coloniality.

The responsibility of the people doing archaeology, then, lies not in their elaboration of a unique explanation about the narratives of other times, but in their active participation in this great conversation. Being storytellers themselves among others, the role of archaeologists is to initiate or to enter a conversation, to provoke an excavation of the community's memory, and to participate in the translation of the non-verbal languages used by the things and places of the past, rather than to control which stories should or should not be told, as well as the ways in which they should be told.

### **"Lavi nou Gangan" – Calling Communities, Places, Things, and Ancestors into Conversation**

The ethnographic and archaeological research project called "*Archéo La Caroline, Lavi nou Gangan*" offered some space to apply a Griotic Archaeology approach. Co-directed by North American archaeologist Elizabeth Clay and myself, it represents the first community-engaged project about the living spaces of enslaved Africans in Guiana, more specifically those who lived and labored in captivity at Habitation La Caroline, a nineteenth-century clove and annatto plantation. While the excavation was not initiated by community demand, *Archéo La Caroline, Lavi nou Gangan* has been characterized from its inception by a commitment to the engagement of different communities in the research process.

Habitation La Caroline is located on the territory of Roura, a municipality 30 km distant from main city Cayenne. Though many different communities have existing relations with the site, here I will discuss the work that engaged two specific communities, *Moun'Roura* and *Moun'Wayam*. The involvement of *Moun'Kayèn*, as we referred to the collective of Afroguianese people from the broader, more urbanized region of Cayenne is presented by Elizabeth Clay (this issue).

Part of the name chosen for the project is *Lavi nou Gangan* means “our Ancestors’ lives” in Afroguianese language. The focus on the lives of the Africans who labored at La Caroline emphasizes their place as the first community whose engagement we sought as organizers. Gathering information from the archive about who they were was a crucial step to start learning and telling their stories.

Most of what we know about *Moun'La Caroline* [people from La Caroline] comes from abolition registers and post-abolition civil records. Despite the scarcity of the elements retrieved in the written archive, we are able to estimate that around 150 people lived on the La Caroline estate. *Moun'La Caroline's* origin at birth, whether in Africa or in Guiana, their names, assigned genders, and ages mentioned in abolition registers allowed Clay and I to draw a portrait of some of them.

At the second abolition, in 1848, 57 people living at La Caroline were registered as being born in Africa, and 44 in Guiana. Their ages varied between three and 79 years old, with most individuals aged between 25 and 44 years old. Assigned genders indicate the presence of 67 men and 34 women while 20 surnames were shared by multiple persons, pointing to the possibility that there were 20 family units.

Interestingly, many of the surnames registered in abolition documents seem to indicate an African origin, suggesting a use of the original names of enslaved people at the time when they were finally able to use them. Hector Abosigne, Antoine Agouba, Isaac Albarque, Hélène Comba, Suffren Dominon, Christine Damozène, Ferdinand Danouba, Sophie Kanta, Pierrot Kouakou, Gabriel Magalan, Gilblas Rouma, John Yaba, and so many other ancestors lived and labored at La Caroline. *Olorun Kosi Pure!*

Stories about multiple forms of resistance from *Moun'La Caroline* are also present in the archive. Historical documents mention the constancy of maronage over the years, and especially highlight the impactful story of ancestor Magdeleine, a 55-year-old woman accused of poisoning two white overseers in 1831 (Moitt 2001:145–146).

Interestingly, mentions of many of the same *Moun'La Caroline* on the estate twenty years following 1848 counters the hegemonic discourse claiming that previously enslaved Africans immediately all left Guianese plantation spaces at abolition. Such details about *Moun'La Caroline* appeared crucial to opening conversation spaces with the different communities engaged in the research.

La Caroline, as a place transformed into an archaeological site, is particularly intertwined with the stories of two geographically close but different communities, *Moun'Wayam* [people of Wayam] and *Moun'Roura* [people of Roura].

Moun'Wayam are an Indigenous community of mostly Paykweneh (Palikur) ethnic background. They are established in Wayam, a village situated on the banks of the river Oyak, a few kilometers distant from the La Caroline site. Wayam was founded by Madame Jeanne in 1973, as she and her family came from Ouanyary, a border region between Guiana and Brazil. Initially, the village's name was (and is still) known by many people as Favard, which was the surname of Habitation La Caroline's enslaver. Moun'Wayam's territory extends beyond the village, as they use most of the neighboring land for their *bati* (places for slash and burn crops), including the area of the site.

Moun'Wayam's participation in the project formally began during the first field season in 2018 through their help with clearing the site area. This initial interaction made way for strengthened relationships between the excavation team and some villagers, who regularly visited, observed, and participated in the excavation process. During the 2019 field season, Wayam tourism agent and village resident Aurélie Lucas took part in the research as a regular member of the research team. Regular participation in the dig by Wayam volunteers, as well as recurrent visits from other community members, contributed to the establishment of a knowledge relation with the research. The project also relied on essential services provided by Wayam's community association Walyku, such as daily river transportation between Roura and Wayam.

Moun'Roura refers to Afroguianese people who originate from the wider territory around the town of Roura. They are now living in its small urban center or are dispersed throughout bigger urban areas such as Cayenne and Matoury. Yet, they still trace their sense of belonging to this region where their African ancestors lived, whether on plantations, in maroon settlements, or in small villages and goldmining camps after emancipation.

Moun'Roura's participation in the project occurred in a somewhat less informal form than Moun'Wayam's, given that the time spent working at the site during the day made it harder to have an interaction as regular as the one we established with Moun'Wayam. However, as most of the excavation team was hosted in the town of Roura over the two field seasons, we were able to establish relations with Moun'Roura through daily visits before leaving for the excavation or upon our return.

The Griotic Archaeology approach that oriented this work of community-engagement emphasized my responsibility as co-organizer to provoke a conversation, to listen, and to facilitate the knowledge relation with the communities involved. By rooting this project in this afrodecolonial exercise, I committed to exclusively using Afroguianese, Moun'Roura's and Moun'Wayam's main linguistic reference, in my interactions with them.

This linguistic choice underscored both their and my legitimacy as knowledge holders and speakers of this language. Other non-colonized, non-verbal forms of

communication were also used to open conversation spaces, such as the traditional drum vibrations that emanated from the site on two occasions.

A key methodological approach within a Griotic Archaeology framework is what I have called *memory conversations* (Hartemann 2019). Acknowledging that “things,” such as the artifacts excavated during the project, are active storytellers in the *knowledge relation* about past times, it became necessary to organize and to facilitate their interaction with people. I organized different memory conversation workshops with Moun’Wayam and Moun’Roura where selected objects that had come to the surface during the ongoing excavation were shared. While the workshops with Moun’Roura elders, Madanm Hortensia, and Madanm Gayou happened during separate moments, others occurred in a multigenerational group dynamic, whether with Moun’Wayam or Moun’Roura (Figs. 1, 2, and 3).

Another methodological approach adopted is the *Sankofa methodology*, a term coined by AfroBrazilian archaeologist Iris Moraes (Hartemann and Moraes 2018). Inspired by the Akan wisdom present in the adinkra Sankofa, this methodology is based on the notion of “going back,” specifically through walking back to certain places. The knowledge relation activated by one’s presence in a place directly dialogues with the situated and memory-based notion of knowledge of the African world sense. Two Sankofa workshops happened during the research by “walking back” to La Caroline with Kapitèn Lucas, the chief of Wayam village, and a small group of Moun’Roura.

Through the encounter of Moun’Roura and Moun’Wayam with the excavated objects and with the space of Habitation La Caroline, different stories emerged from memory. I present this knowledge in the next section.

By being present, having conversations with neighbors, paying regular visits to different Moun’Roura and Moun’Wayam, and providing updates on the ongoing work at the site, Clay and I attempted to work on inverting the understanding that research is something that belongs to outsiders. This approach, coupled with the use of Afroguianese, also served as tools to respect the authority of Moun’Roura elders and Moun’Wayam’s chief and shaman as legitimate knowledge holders in their communities.

**Fig. 1** Encounter between Yolaine Polony (Moun’Roura) and *bèt tanlontan* (photo by Jasper Colt)



**Fig. 2** Memory conversation workshop with Moun'Wayam (photo by Diana Labonté)



Regular positioning of who was part of the research team, as well as making explicit the intentions behind the research were crucial to the notion of responsibility to the communities. In my case, as the only Afroguianese member of the team, my affirmation “Mo sa moun’Mana!” [I am a person from Mana!] served to answer recurrent questions from Moun’Roura about my regional belonging or who my parents and grandparents were.

**Fig. 3** Madanm Gayou (Moun’Roura) showing a *ti grena* [bead] (Photo by author)



## Unearthing Memory, Invoking Ancestors, Knowledge Surfacing

The connection or reconnection of both Moun'Roura and Moun'Wayam with *bèt tanlontan* [the things from before] allowed for the invocation of memory, the Ancestors, and traditional world senses, which in turn were responsible for the emergence of their knowledge.

By seeing and holding *bèt tanlontan*, memories about the ones who know or the ones who passed on knowledge to them were immediately brought to the conversation, stressing the importance of elders as knowledge holders in traditional Afroguianese and Paykweneh ways of knowing. This highlighted knowledge as being inseparable from the elders, their names, and their lives. Being in contact with things from past times was systematically an occasion to invoke the names of elders/knowledgeers who have transitioned into the ancestors' world:

A di nanninannan... Nou pa té 'kó fèt... To savé! Tonton Garçon... défunt... mo trapé bèt konsa ofon só zafè... (Madanm Marlène, Moun'Roura)

[This is from a long time ago... We weren't born yet. You know! Late Uncle Garçon... I found things like that in his stuff...]

As different elements of knowledge emerged, the situated, lived, experienced nature of knowledge for both Moun'Roura and Moun'Wayam was made explicit. The encounter between the now-deceased Moun'Roura elder Madanm Hortensia and a fragmented clay pipe provoked her to explain how it was made, the different types of clay that exist in Guiana, and brought back the memory of her late mother.

Memories about one's own experience with the same thing or a similar object always surfaced. Recognizing and remembering the use of an object were recurrent during memory conversations, translating a feeling of connection with some of the things, particularly expressed by Moun'Roura: "Mo konèt tou sa! Mo lévé ké sa!" [I know all of this! I was brought up with this!]. Moun'Wayam and Moun'Roura remembered having seen some of the things we showed them before, most of the time when working at a *bati*, their own or their parents':

I gain plizière koulè latè gra, hein. I gain latè gra ki jon'... I té ka fè fou ké li, tout' bagaj. Mo manman té ka fè sa, i pa té ka alé piès koté pou achté dipain, i té ka fè so fou, fè so dipain. Aprézan ou pa ka wè sa ankó. (Madanm Hortensia, Moun'Roura)

[There are different colors of clay. There is a yellow clay... They used to make ovens with it, a lot of things. My mother used to make this, she didn't go anywhere to buy bread, she made her own oven, made her own bread. Now you don't see this anymore.]

Nou té ka wè sa bocou ló nou té ka foyé latè pou planté! (Mouché Jean, Moun'Wayam)

[We used to see that a lot when opening the ground to plant!]

Memory conversations opened space for the knowledge Moun'Roura and Moun'Wayam hold about things: what they are for, how they are made, who used them. Images about such things emerged from the memory triggered by Moun'Roura



but also brought up memories about other *bèt tanlontan*, ones we did not necessarily know or find during the excavation. *Kanari* (a ceramic cooking pot), huge ceramic jars (probably *Biot* jars) used to hold water, and their wooden lids are commonly evoked in such images.

Such conversation spaces also revealed Moun'Roura's and Moun'Wayam's own relations with these things of the past. Many mentioned how common it was to find *bèt tanlontan* explaining why they were not necessarily noticed or considered to carry a specific meaning or value. Yet, the category "*bèt lesclavaj*" [things of slavery], a term used both by Moun'Roura and Moun'Wayam, denotes that their origin was always known.

Oui, nou té ka wè beaucoup bèt konsa ló nou té ka fè nou bati, hein! Mè nou pa té mélé telman ké sa... Nou té savé ki i té gain esclaves ki té ka travay la... (Kapitèn Lucas, Moun'Wayam)

[Yes, we used to see this a lot when we were working on our bati! But we didn't really care about it... We just knew there were enslaved people who used to work there...]

Mo té ka wè-l, mè ou savé, nou mèm pa ka okipé di sa, hein. Paske ló mo mèm té ka fè bati ké mo manman... nou gain nou terrain larô... la I té gain esclavaj la aussi (...) Ló yé té ka koupé bati, mo gain tan wè sa annan bati, mo granmanman ka di mo, "véyé vèr kassé-a, a boutèy ki té la lontan, boutèy lesclavaj..." A kon sa yé ka di mo... Et puis, sa resté la... Nou té ka planté manioc annan... (Madanm Hortensia, Moun'Roura)

[I used to see it, but you know, we didn't care about this. Because when I worked on the bati with my mother... we had a piece of land upriver... there was slavery there too (...) when they worked on the bati, I was able to see this on the bati, my grandmother used to tell me "be careful with the broken glass, it's a bottle that was there a long time ago, a bottle from enslavement time..." that's how they explained it to me... And then, it stayed there... We planted yucca in it...]

Interestingly, though most claimed to not give importance to the majority of these things given how common it was to find them, some specific *bèt tanlontan* are deemed worthy of interest by specific people. Madanm Marlène inherited such *bèt lesclavaj* from her late uncle, who used to work as a goldminer and found complete jars upriver. In much the same way, Kapitèn Lucas trusted me enough to show me an almost complete jug that was found during work at his bati and kept safe in his house (Fig. 4).

I draw from the work of Brazilian archaeologist Márcia Bezerra (2011, 2017) and her critique of the preservationist discourse adopted by many heritage professionals. Bezerra (2011:62) argues that to understand the small-scale collecting practices—as they are commonly found in many Amazonian communities, as analogous to looting and the destruction of "heritage" is reductionist. According to her, these practices denote the existence of local relations with past things and places, contrary to the hegemonic belief that communities do not value or give importance to the past (Bezerra 2017:12–13), a belief present in the discourse reproduced by white archaeologists working in Guiana.

**Fig. 4** Kapitèn Lucas (Moun'Wayam) showing the jug found on his *bati* (photo by Diana Labonté)



Generally, the knowledge provoked by the encounter with *bèt tanlontan* is not fragmented and restricted to stories about such things. Rather, such connection brings images that entangle them with stories about other things, past events, the Ancestors, and their ways of life (Fig. 5). For example, the cocoa tree present in what is understood to be the yard space of the house we were excavating provoked memories of the yards of the ancestors of Moun'Roura, activating images of tobacco leaves drying under the shade of cocoa trees and of elders smoking their pipe seated on a wooden bench.

Paske, ló ou wè gran moun' lontan té ka fimin pip... mo mèm té annan kanmza, bati, to ka 'lé ké sa, pas' koté to ka assi ké li latal, ló to assi ké li latal, a ló to fin' fè tout' bagay danbwa. To ké pran pip-a, to ka kalkilé tout' to zafè, to komprann'. Mo mèm, mo té gain, oun' pip! Mè a'n moun' ki pran'l assou mo. I pran'l assou mo. Mo té gain roun' annan mo larmwè. A fè yé té fè-l ba mo. I té fè-l en bois. (Madanm Hortensia, Moun'Roura)

[Because, the elders from before used to smoke pipe... I was in my *kanmza* (type of clothing used for work) at the *bati*... you used to go with it, because anywhere you sit, you go with it and when you're done working in the *bati* in the woods... you smoke the pipe and you think about your own stuff, you know? I used to have one, a pipe! But someone took it from me. They took

**Fig. 5** Encounter between Madanm Hortensia (Moun'Roura) and *bèt tanlontan* (photo by Elizabeth Clay)



it from me. I had one in my closet. They had made it for me. It was made in wood.]

Gro jar... Mo papa té gain roun' gro jar... Gran jar-a, yé té ka réservè dlo pou tchimbé dlo frè, moun' pa té konèt frigidèr. I té ka alé pran dlo ofon puits-a. Dlo-a té ka frè! A té pou fè plizièr voyages... A nou mèm timoun' ki té ka alé pran dlo. Oui, yé té ka fronmin-l ké ou'n gran verso en bwa, a konsidéré a'n barrik. (Madanm Gayou, Moun'Roura)

[Big jars... My daddy had a big jar... This big jar, they used it to keep water fresh, people didn't know fridges. They used to take water from the well. The water was really cold! We had to do many trips... It was us children who went to the well to take water. Yes, they used to close it with a big lid made of wood, like a barrel.]

Moun'an té ka rété assou yé ti ban douvan yé lapot', ló soukou-a té ka tombé, yé té ka mété laboucann et yé té ka konté istwar pou timoun. (Madanm Gayou, Moun'Roura)

[People used to stay on their little bench on their doorstep, in the evenings, they would make some smoke and start to tell stories to the children.]

Both Moun'Wayam and Moun'Roura hold memories about enslavement based on what was told to them by their elders proving that, contrary to what white archaeologists affirm, they know and remember this particular moment of the past. Therefore, the hesitation of some elders to enter into details about this past does not mean that this history was never mentioned but might instead point to the traumatic nature of such memories. I understand Moun'Roura's and Moun'Wayam's willingness to share some of these stories as being enabled by the kind of dialogue established within Griotic Archaeology.

Yé té ka di “Tan desclavaj, sa.” Fini ké sa... Oui, granmoun-ya, yé té ka palé oun' ti mosso assou sa, koté mo té ka lèvé, oui, kouman moun' té ka travay, kouman mèt té ka fè ké yé... Yé té ka palé di sa... Koté mo lèvé, oui, yé pa té ka palé longman, mè oui. (Madanm Gayou, Moun'Roura)

[They used to say “that was during enslavement time.” And that was it... Yes, the elders would tell us a little bit about it where I was raised, yes, how people would work, how the owner treated them... They would talk about it... Where I was raised, yes, they didn't talk too much about it, but yes.]

Among the aspects present in Moun'Wayam's knowledge about the past is their own history of forced work and enslavement by the french, and the opposition of their community leader to their enslavement.

Paske mo ka konté istwar Ouanary... Ouanary i té gain Montagne d'argent... Ou savé... et puis nou té gain nou gran..., nou chef la ba... Nou mèm nou fè esclav, mè pa bocou... Paske a nou chef ki pran responsabilite... I di “oui, mo solda ké travay, mè pa, pa lannuit, lajounnin.” Paske sa, a nou granparents ki raconté nou sa. Chef..blang, i di oui i dakó ké sa. I fè nou travay, vrè, i fè nou travay, mè pa bocou. Lajounnin, et lannuit i té ka dronmi. Mè kréol non, nuit' kon jou yé té ka travay. (Kapitèn Lucas, Moun'Wayam)

[Because I'm gonna tell you a story from Ouanary... In Ouanary there was Montagne d'Argent (*a mountain where gold mining took place*). You know... And then, we had our great... our leader, there... We were enslaved, but not much... Because our chief took the responsibility... He said “yes, my soldiers will work, but not, not at night, only during the day.” Because this, our grand-parents told us this. The... white leader, he said yes, he agreed. He made us work, truly, he made us work, but not a lot. But the Blacks, no, they would work day and night.]

During the Sankofa walk with Moun'Roura, elder Mouché Gayou referred to La Caroline as “small” in comparison to places where there was a higher number of captive Africans. As we were talking about how life at the plantation must have looked, he and Madanm Nadia shared their knowledge that every enslaved person had their own task:

- Esclav-ya, yé té organizé! A té oun' société, a té oun' lizin'! Sa té ka alé aux champs, yé té ka planté, sa té ka construi mézon, yé té ka fè... charpentier!
- Yé chak té gain oun' tach...

- Yé chak té gain oun' tach! Sa té charpentier, té charpentier, sa té maçon té maçon... sa té... cuisinier té cuisinier! (Mouché Gayou and Madanm Nadia, Moun'Roura)
- [The enslaved, they were organized! It was a society, it was a factory! Those who went to the fields would plant, those who built houses would do... carpentry!
- They each had a task...
- They each had a task! There were those who were carpenters, those who were masons, those who were... cooks!]

Violence is mentioned as ever-present during *tan lesclavaj* (enslavement time), but it is mostly the absence of choice that is stressed as being an element characterizing it.

Esclav-a té ka travay, só mèt té toujou dèyè li, si i pa travay i gain fouet', si i pa travay, i ka puni-l... punition sévère... Roura... Yé pa té ka fè sa yé lé... (Madame Gayou, Moun'Roura)

[The enslaved would work, their owner was always on their backs, if they didn't work, they were whipped, if they didn't work, they were punished... A severe punishment... in Roura... They didn't do what they wanted...]

Mo di ou... a tan di... tanlontan esclavaj... yé té ka bat' moun' ceci cela... ou komprann... yé té ka fè yé travay rèd... esclavaj hein, sa... vrai esclavaj, hein... hmm... (Madanm Hortensia, Moun'Roura)

[I'm telling you... During enslavement time... they used to beat people up... do you understand?... they made them work hard... enslavement... real enslavement... hmm...]

As Kapitèn Lucas showed me *bèt lesclavaj* during our Sankofa walk in the forest surrounding the site, we stopped at a huge iron cauldron that was used to boil annatto (Fig. 6). As we reflected and talked about its heavy weight, Kapitèn Lucas sighed and said: “Yé wè mizè...” [They suffered a lot]. During the memory-conversation organized at the public library with a few Moun'Roura women, the presence

**Fig. 6** Sankofa walk with Moun'Wayam (Photo by author)



of a heavy iron hook provoked a silence, as it was perceived and associated with the violence inflicted on the Ancestors from La Caroline. When Madanm Marlène was able to talk, she said “Yé té ka fè méchanceté ké sa... gadé sa. mèt-a té ka fè méchanceté pou moun’an...” [They used to do cruel things with this... Look at this. The enslaver did cruel things to people].

Knowledge about the multiple ways of resistance to enslavement was also made present in the memory conversations. “Mo tendé esclav-ya, i té gain sa ki té ka empoisonné!” [I heard that, the enslaved, there were some who poisoned the masters!] affirmed Madanm Marlène with a touch of pride in her voice. Stories about the solidarity between Indigenous and African folks also made their way into the story-telling emerging from Kapitèn Lucas’s memories:

Mè, yé sovè bocou moun’, bocou Créoles. Montagne d’argent, i gain ou’n gran koté la, Créoles té ka marron, fouré yé kó ofon labou-a, ofon lavaz-a, rien ki sa ki déró... Chef-a ka passé, i ka vini wè, i ka wè yé... I ka ramassé yé, mèté yé koté vilaj-a, a la yé rété... Yé rété bocou, a la yé gran, a la yé viv... Et puis gran chef indien té ka menti bay chef blang-a, i té ka di i pa wè yé... Sa istwar i la, hein! Mo timoun-yan yé konèt’ sa. (Kapitèn Lucas, Moun’Wayam)  
[But they saved a lot of people, many Black people. In Montagne d’Argent, there is a big place there, the Black people who were maroons, they put themselves in there, in the mud... Our chief would pass by, he would come see and see them... He picked them up and put them in the village, and there they stayed... A lot of them stayed, and they got old there, they lived there... And our great leader would lie to the white leader, he would say he hadn’t seen them... This story, it’s there! All my children know it.]

This knowledge relation provoked by the encounter with *bèt tanlontan* allowed for the identification of specific elements of importance within Afroguianese and Paykweneh knowledge systems, ones not necessarily prioritized in common forms of conducting research.

Throughout the spaces of dialogue, a prominent place was attributed to the knowledge related to healing. Mentions of community knowledge holders generally brought memories of elders or Ancestors who used to heal and help in delivering children. The role of certain things from the past as ingredients in specific remedies was also evoked, stressing the existence of a different kind of relation with “ancient objects,” such as old rusty nails, which Moun’Wayam remember being used in some remedies.

Knowledge about plants and their properties was particularly recurrent, thereby denoting their importance. Recognizing plants is central to knowing for both Moun’Roura and Moun’Wayam. As I was walking in the forest with Kapitèn Lucas, he regularly stopped to show me and teach me about specific leaves. Moun’Roura elder Mouché Gayou did the exact same thing, stopping on the side of the path and pointing to specific plants, about which he immediately started telling stories (Fig. 7).

My belonging to a traditional Òrişà community elicited some conversations to emerge about non-visible and non-tangible dimensions. As I visibly engaged in ritual offerings to Òrişà and the Ancestors at different moments of the research process,



**Fig. 7** Mouché Gayou (Moun'Roura) teaching about a plant encountered while walking (Photo by author)



both Moun'Wayam and Moun'Roura were able to see a recognition of such dimensions by a person occupying the place of a scientist. The elements of protection that I wore on a daily basis constituted yet another trigger to open a dialogue about these central, yet extremely silenced dimensions of Indigenous and Afroguianese world senses. As they saw the braided straw around my arms and my *ileke*, Wayam children asked me if they were “*bèt chamane*” (shaman things). Pouring libations as an essential part of the daily routine when arriving on the site highlighted how such a practice is commonplace for Moun'Roura.

-Mo ka bay oun' ti bi dlo... sa a mo pa... pou i bay mo fòss...

-Fóss!

-Hmm! Gangan-yan ké gadé mo hein... Mo sa oun' gangan déjà, kou zot' mèm... Hmm... Bon ben, bwè dlo hein, si zot' swèf... (Madanm Marie-Chantal, Madanm Nadia, Madanm Yolaine, Mouché Gayou. Moun'Roura)

[-I'm giving you a little bit of water... This is from me... So it gives me strength...

-Strength!

-Hmm! The ancestors are gonna watch me, huh... But I'm almost an ancestor already, just like you all... Hmm... Oh, well, have some water then, if you're thirsty...]



Stories about the manifestation of spiritual beings (protectors of the forest, such as *Mèt Bwa*, or spirits of the dead) on and around La Caroline abounded when given the space to be listened to. It allowed me to talk with Kapitèn Lucas about the place where the Ancestors from La Caroline must have been buried and allowed Moun'Roura to shyly refer to their ongoing presence as we were talking about them:

Ah oui oui oui! ... I plein moun' ki mó lá hein... [chuckles] oui, oui... oui paske bon, anvan, esclav... Ló moun' latè mó, i té ka fouyé oun' trou, a té sur place, ou pa té pouvé alé pièss koté... a té bó yé lakou... paske sé moun'yan pa té ka lé soti pli lwen, pa té pouvé alé oun' ti 100 mè. (Kapitèn Lucas, Moun'Wayam)

[Oh yes, yes, yes! There are a lot of dead people here... [chuckles] yes, yes, ... because, before, the enslaved... When someone from there had died, they would dig a hole, it was on the same spot, you couldn't go anywhere... It was in their yards... Because people didn't go much further, they couldn't go further than 100 meters.]

This possibility for knowledge about non-tangible and non-visible dimensions to be part of this great storytelling helped us understand the functions of some of the *bèt tanlontan* we found during the dig. When we showed a tiny glass bead to a Moun'Roura elder, the late Madanm Hortensia, she immediately laughed and looked at it smiling, as if she were seeing a close friend after a long separation:

A'n kolié sa... ! Lontan té plein ké sa, koté zot' trapé sa?... Lontan té plein ké sa, a té sa granmoun'ya té ka mété a yé kou... bèt sériéu, a sa yé té ka mété a yé kou, i té gain pli piti, plusieurs couleurs. Oui... a kolié lontan granmoun'yan lontan té ka mété! Pou protéjé yé, di tout' bagaj... (Madanm Hortensia, Moun'Roura)

[This is from a necklace...! There used to be a lot of them, where did you find that?... A long time ago, there was a lot of that, that was what the Elders used on their necks... Seriously, that is what they were using, there were some that were smaller, of many colors... Yes... the necklaces the Elders used! To protect them, from everything...]

The choice of using Afroguianese to communicate also allowed for our emic semantic categories to emerge in order to name things without their essence being lost in translation: referring to a glass bead as "*ti grená*" and a fragment of a ceramic bowl as "*ti touk*" proved to be more healing than I expected. An even more moving moment happened during the Sankofa walk with Moun'Roura, when elder Mouché Gayou started to tell a story about enslavement in our traditional Afroguianese way (Fig. 8):

Mouché Gayou: Tanlontan... a'n gran nom' ki raconté mo sa, Pierre Polony... Koté so nanm fika mo ka prié pou li... A pa menti menti pass a té gran nom'. So papa ki raconté li sa. I di i té gain oun' esclav', ló mo di chak esclav-ya té gain yé tach, i té gain esclav ki té ka alé lachass. Tou lé jou boug-a ka alé lachass, i pa ka trapé anyen, i pa ka tchoué viand'. I pa ka trapé anyen du tout.

**Fig. 8** Mouché Gayou telling stories at Habitation La Caroline (photo by Jasper Colt)



Kouté mo ka raconté to sa, esclav-a divèt kontan, i ka di “men oun’ boug ki ka konèt istwar-a.” Ló i ka alé lachass touléjou i ka alé, chak fwa i viré, i pa tchoué viand’, i ka pran kou. Yé ka bat’ li, pass i pa tchoué viand, a li pou poté lachè, manjé... Roun’ jou i ka pati, ló i rivé i té gain oun’ jèn tron bwa... I ka jambé tron bwa, ló i ka jambé tron bwa i gadé oun’ moun’ dibout’ anmitan chimin-an. Moun’an di “Eh! Gadé! Chak kou to soti, ló to viré rantré to ka pran kou! Mo wè to ka pran baton, paske to pa ka poté anyen du tout. Alor dépi jodla, mo ka di to, to ka alé to ka tchoué viand’.” Vrè, missié pati, i tchoué viand’. I viré, chak jou i alé a danbwa, i ka tchoué viand.

Madanm Nadia: A Mèt Bwa? (...)

[M.G.: In the old times... a great man told me that, Pierre Polony... Wherever his soul is resting, I’m praying for him... So I’m not lying, because he was a great man. His father told him that. He said there was an enslaved man, I’m telling you every enslaved person had their task, there was an enslaved man who went hunting. Every day the guy would go hunting and would not catch anything, he would not catch any meat. He didn’t catch anything. Listen to what I’m telling you, the enslaved here must be happy, they must be saying “Here is a guy who knows the story!” Whenever he went hunting, everyday he went and couldn’t catch meat, he was beaten up. They beat him because he couldn’t catch meat, he needed to bring food back... One day, he went and when he arrived, there was a young tree trunk... He crossed over the trunk and when he looked, there was someone standing in the middle of the path. The person said “Eh! Look! Every time you go and come back, they beat you up! I can see you ‘take the stick’ because you can’t bring anything back. So from now on, I’m telling you, you will kill something when you hunt.” True, the man went and caught his meat. He went and everyday he went into the woods, he would catch meat.

M.N.: Was that Mèt Bwa? (...).

Mouché Gayou: Chak jou! Oun’ jou so madanm... a pou sa, fanm, fo pa fè pièss fanm konfianss...

Madanm Marie-Chantal: Ah bon?... Expliquez-vous... [chuckles]

M.G.: Non! faut pas faire les femmes confiance... Non! Oun' jou, fanm-an di "Doudou, ki manyen ou ka tchoué viand' konsa, touléjou alé aprézan ou ka tchoué viand' ?" I di, "ah, paske, mo ka tchoué mo viand', Bondyé bay mo-l"... "Non, ou gain oun' bagaj, di mo ki manyen ou ka tchoué viand' konsa?" I akó boug-a, i akó boug-a, i akó boug-a, konsa, i ka di boug-a di'l sa i ka fè pou li tchoué viand... L'homme est très faible devant les femmes!

[everyone laughs]

-Ló i rété, i di, "ou savé ki moun' ki montré mo ka fè mo tchoué viand'an? Gran Mèt mo wè a la rout'-a, danbwa, Mèt Bwa, i di mo alé, mo ké tchoué viand'." Lendemain matin missié lèvé, pran so sac à dos i ka alé lachass, ló i rivé mèm koté-a Mèt Bwa di "Gadé, zot' ka palé trop', zot' pa gain sècrè!" I fout' une kalot', baw! "To pa gain pou to tchoué viand' ankó!" Mèssié Krik!

[everyone else]: Mèssié Krak!

[M.G.: Every day! One day, his wife... this is why, women... you can't trust any woman...]

M.M-C.: Really?... What do you mean...[chuckles]

M.G.: No! You can't trust any women... No! One day, his wife said, "Honey, how do you get your catch like that, every day you go now you kill and bring meat?" He said, "ah, that's because I just get my catch, God gave it to me"... "No, you've got something, just tell me how you get your catch?" She insisted, insisted, insisted, and like that, he told her, he told her what he did to get the meat... A man is very weak with women!

[everyone laughs]

-He told her "Do you know who showed me how to get the meat? Gran Mèt, I saw on the path, in the woods, Mèt Bwa, he told me to go and that I would get my catch." The next morning, the guy got up, took his bag and went hunting. When he arrived at the same spot, Mèt Bwa told him "Look, all of you speak too much, y'all don't have any secrets!" He hit him on the head, baw! "You will not catch meat anymore!" Mèssié Krik!

[everyone else]: -Mèssié Krak!]

Beyond the deep emotion I felt in witnessing the participation of our Afroguianese traditional storytelling in the knowledge making about La Caroline, that moment allowed me to truly visualize concrete pathways for archaeological work that is committed to restoring balance and healing.

## Beyond Epistemological Change, a Need to Tend to Colonial Wounds

Archaeological work intending to move away from the reiteration of colonial violence must first acknowledge its disciplinary participation in coloniality and seek to reformulate its epistemological frame. Only through concrete actions aiming at the dismantlement of written western modern science as the only valid form of knowledge about present and past times will archaeology have a purpose that truly serves colonized and marginalized communities instead of the same hegemonic interests.

The Griotic Archaeology approach presented throughout this article represents an Afroguianese contribution to a body of knowledge based on transformative and anticolonial understandings of archaeological methodologies and goals. The importance of placing non-western world senses, knowledge systems, and memories at the core of the idealization and realization of archaeological projects was highlighted in its application to the work conducted over the course of the project Archéo La Caroline, Lavi Nou Gangan.

While this epistemological shift is much needed, I feel the need to stress that it is not sufficient in order to break away from the colonial violence reproduced through research. Archaeological research, specifically when dealing with contexts of enslavement and colonial violence, needs to acknowledge the contemporary structures of colonial oppression in which it operates, and through which it directs violence onto colonized and marginalized folks. I argue that to continue to study such contexts as if they were separated from current racist and colonial inequalities equates to the same epistemic violence as ignoring them.

Drawing from Grada Kilomba's work, I call for the need to approach these specific contexts as what they are: spaces of trauma. Enslavement and colonialism may be perceived as things of the past, but they are intricately bound to the present (Kilomba 2010:137). Both processes are born within a violence perpetrated at a time that, for some, seems distant. For others, such violence was never gone, but transformed enough to be ignored by those who directly benefit from its maintenance.

Enslavement and colonialism are traumatic in this sense, because of their quiet continuity through the enactment of a same, centuries-old, and naturalized violence of which the painful effects are still felt in the present. Such a past appears unbearable (McKittrick 2014:22) because coloniality and its current power structures do not allow to heal from it. Colonialism and racism constitute trauma, one that is, as Kilomba (2010:132) qualifies it, unspeakable. We are not able to forget, nor do we want to remember. Continuing to silence the places, things, and stories of our African and Indigenous ancestors through archaeological epistemic violence worsens the pain of such trauma.

Opening spaces of conversation about *tan lesclavaj* with both Moun'Roura and Moun'Wayam did not only bring their knowledge about past times to the surface but also awoke deep colonial wounds, present wounds that are regularly reopened by the ongoing processes of colonial oppression. Pain, bitterness, and hopelessness were excavated at the same time as rusty old nails, ceramic sherds, and glass beads.

It is not the pain that their Ancestors went through that hurts Moun'Roura the most when they think of enslavement, provoked by their encounter with *bèt tanlon-tan*, but rather the connection between these past processes of violence and their continuity in the present.

Dispossession appears as one of the most central of these colonial wounds. Remembering *tan lesclavaj* means evoking stories about separation, loss of family ties, and homelands. It also means talking about the ongoing loss of their own world sense and knowledge systems, delegitimized and scorned within the current french administrative order.

The fact that the children spend all day at school in a french educational system and not with their elders anymore is understood by some as being one of the explanations for this loss. “Sa nou timoun’ ka aprann’ lékol?” [What do our children learn at school?] sighed one Moun’Roura elder. A bitter sense of loss of knowledge is ever-present and connected to its appropriation by the french and their sole legitimacy as “those who know.”

Ou savé, plantes médicinales... A prézan, a blang-a ki ka montré moun’ kouman itilizé bèt-a. (Moun’Roura)

[You know, the medicinal plants... Now, white people are the ones showing people how to use them.]

Notre tante, aussi, to matrice tombé i té ka mété an to vent’. I pa té konèt li ké ékri mè i té konèt. Aprézan a pou to fè étid médecine. (Moun’Roura)

[Our aunt, too... if your uterus fell out (after childbirth), she could place it back in your womb. She didn’t know how to read or write, but she knew. Now you have to study medicine.]

Moun’Wayam’s elders sadly remarked that there hasn’t been a traditional Paykweneh celebration in years because none of the younger folks are interested in becoming a shaman anymore. Generational ruptures between Moun’Wayam and Moun’Roura elders and their youth appear in conversations that started evoking the past but end up stressing their helplessness in transmitting a memory and a knowledge that is invalidated by their own.

Zot’ a tè la la, a zot’ koté aussi, zot’ divèt konèt aussi... “ahh, pa ka montré nou anyen!”, paske zot’ pa ka suiv’! sa granmoun’ ka di zot’... ou mèm ou ké tchimbé sa mo ka di, mè pa yé mèm... (...) A pou sa granmoun’ pa té ka di bocou jèn yé bagaj... (Moun’Roura)

[You are here, it’s your country too, you should know too... “ahh, [the elders] don’t show us anything!” That’s because you don’t care! What the elders tell you.... You, I know you remember what I’m saying, but they don’t... That’s why the elders don’t tell young people anything anymore...]

Colonial wounds are made explicit by the gap between the knowledge they inherited from their elders and Ancestors, and the official, french, written version of it learned by their children. During a conversation with a Moun’Roura elder about the location of their family *bati*, I hardly managed to understand the directions because the toponyms now in use are not necessarily the same, and they are spelled according to french phonetics and not Afroguianese pronunciation. I felt heartbroken when this elder almost gave up their explanation and said: “A pa mèm nom yé gain aprézan... Yé ka chanjé tout’ nom tout’ koté...” [They don’t have the same names now... They’re changing the names of every place...].

Mentioning the absence of choice and autonomy of the Ancestors from La Caroline reminds Moun’Roura of their own situation of extreme dependency from France and its economic and legislative system that condemns or discourages traditional rural Amazonian forms of living, the ones lived and known by their parents.

Processes as seemingly trivial as raising chickens in a backyard or growing food in a *bati* upriver are abandoned because people are not economically able to do so anymore. The pride in having been raised with such ways of living, considered healthier and bringing memories of their parents, contrasts with observations about a current way of life that they do not necessarily enjoy or identify with.

As I tried to talk about the kinds of dishes that must have been prepared in the bowls and plates recovered at La Caroline, feelings of sadness and helplessness arose when elders told me that many food items or plants are not found anymore. “Tou sa mo té konèt lontan, mo pa ka wè yé...” [Everything I used to know before, I don’t see it anymore].

By acknowledging that the surfacing of such colonial wounds was only made possible through the establishment of a knowledge relation rooted in the epistemological disobedience exercise that is Griotic Archaeology, one can imagine the depth and the intensity of colonial trauma that these stories activate. Studying, theorizing, analyzing, and writing about past origins of current processes of violence are definitely not enough to transform the current order of the world. It can even cause more pain, deepen and worsen colonial wounds that afflict people on a daily and very concrete basis.

Several Afrodiasporic authors have raised important questions regarding the violence inherent in the study of contexts and spaces of colonial violence and enslavement (Hartman 2008; McInnis 2019; McKittrick 2011, 2014). Katherine McKittrick (2011:948) points to the reproduction of the same eurocentric historical discourses that characterized and maintained Black and Indigenous existences as “those without” within academic production. In his analysis of what he refers to as the “afterlives” of the plantation, Jarvis McInnis (2019:744) asks if such spaces represent “sites of rewounding.”

“How then do we think and write and share as decolonial scholars and foster a commitment to acknowledging violence and undoing its persistent frame, rather than simply analytically reprising violence” asks McKittrick (2014:18)? I believe this last question should constitute a requirement to thinking about archaeological research, particularly when dealing with sites of colonial violence.

I advocate for the acknowledgement of the traumatic nature of the processes of colonialism and enslavement as a condition to engage in archaeological work in contexts of colonial violence. I understand this as a necessary dimension of the commitment to move away from archaeological coloniality. It implies that anyone agreeing to study such contexts accepts to participate in a collective healing of colonial wounds – one that is not limited to scientific research but that should offer concrete, structural, and long-term actions for social justice, redress, and healing.

As a conclusion, I want to extend an invitation to truly and critically reflect upon archaeological praxis, and the many ways through which archaeologists engage in the maintenance of coloniality. Instead of qualifying research as community-engaged, I point to the need of having a researcher-engaged work, one that both restores the legitimacy of non-western knowledge and stresses a commitment to social responsibility with the past and present lives of colonized and marginalized people.

Avenues of possibilities for real, long-term, and concrete change already exist (Flewellen et.al, this issue; Jackson 2012; Odewale et al. 2018) if archaeologists are willing to relinquish the same disciplinary frame of knowledge that contributes to the deepening of colonial wounds and the shattering of worlds and world senses.

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