

*Caribbean Revolution and
Print Publics: Leonora Sansay
and 'The Secret History of the
Haitian Revolution'*

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IN A NOW OFTEN-QUOTED PHRASE, the historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot has described the Haitian Revolution as 'unthinkable.' In his book, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Trouillot writes: "The Haitian Revolution did challenge the ontological and political assumptions of the most radical writers of the Enlightenment. The events that shook up Saint Domingue from 1791 to 1804 constituted a sequence for which not even the extreme political left in France or in England had a conceptual frame of reference. They were "unthinkable" facts in the framework of Western thought."¹

The question of the unthinkable is different from what is secret, what is private, or what is hidden. The unthinkable is not that which does not appear but that which cannot be comprehended, even when it does appear. The unthinkable, one might say, is what is hidden in plain sight. As Trouillot indicates, the

1. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 82.

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Haitian Revolution has not, historically, been included in accounts of the so-called 'Age of Revolutions' and this is so for two reasons: first, because a culturally dominant ontology presupposed that there were degrees of humanity indexed by race; and second, because the colonial system relied upon this increasingly racialized ontology to effect its day-to-day workings. Such a system understood slaves to be collectively content if not individually so, as well as fundamentally dependent and incapable of political self-determination. In the face of such an ontology, empirical evidence to the contrary, such as that provided by the Haitian Revolution, simply failed to register on the screen of Western history.

In contrast to this account of an unthinkable history of revolution, theoretical work on print culture and revolution rests upon the presumption of the transparent nature of historical evidence and political argument as it appears in print. To print is to make public and thus make known; to read is to 'see' both visually and conceptually. The association of print with liberty has generated a body of work exploring the historical intersection of publicity and political freedom. In its most well-known, though certainly not uncontested formulation, Jürgen Habermas has described publicity or the public sphere as constitutive of liberal political formations dating to the eighteenth century.² The model of the print public sphere that we have associated with the rise of liberal republicanism and democratic nationalism presupposes that information circulates according to a principle of critical rationality and that this principle binds publics together into larger political communities. Habermas's formulation—whether we want to understand it as a historically descriptive model or a normative one—owes its enduring appeal to the clarity of self-evidence. Once people are free to express their ideas, so the theory goes, ideas will compete with one another on the basis of their logic

2. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1989).

and rationality rather than on the basis of the prestige or power of their speakers: the impersonality of print, or, alternatively, the rules of public sphere engagement, ideally guarantee the triumph of reason and its Enlightenment corollary, justice. But another historical corollary of Enlightenment has cast a shadow on the sunshine of the rational public sphere, and this corollary is that of colonialism and the geopolitics of race, including race slavery and the genocide of indigenous peoples in the Americas. Is modernity, then—as associated with the Enlightenment, with rational critical debate, publicity, print, and universalism—a project that was simply incomplete in its eighteenth-century Atlantic formulations? Or, alternatively, does modernity have a constitutive underside to it—an underside of violence and oppression that gives the lie to a theory of the print public sphere as a source of reason and political liberation?

A number of intriguing answers to this question have been proposed, among the most prominent of which is that of Paul Gilroy who has articulated a model of diasporic African-Atlantic culture that he identifies as a 'counter-culture of modernity.' He identifies the roots of this culture as largely distinct from, if not antithetical to, norms of communicative reason as well as print publicity. For Gilroy, privileged instances of this counter-culture are music and memory as characterized by an aesthetic of indirection and of resistance that is 'not reducible to the cognitive.' Gilroy explains that 'the extreme patterns of communication defined by the institution of plantation slavery dictate that we recognize the anti-discursive and extra-linguistic ramifications of power at work in shaping communicative acts.'³ In other words, given the ways in which slaves within an Atlantic plantation culture were forbidden from using a Habermasian toolkit of rational communication, an alternative, counter-culture of expression developed, characterized above all by its resistance to the form and content

3. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 57.

of Western Enlightenment and rationality. The rules of rational communication, one might say, were precisely what needed to be evaded so that interchange could take place among slaves while avoiding (increased) violence at the hands of white masters.

Such a formulation about the nature of an alternative communication system would seem to be something of an answer to Trouillot's question concerning the silence of the slave revolt in Haiti. Gilroy gives an account of a response to the fact that the rationality of the Enlightenment contains and constrains its 'other' to irrationality, such that the logic and even the reality of slave revolt became unassimilable to public histories of enlightenment revolution. And yet it seems clear, as well, that Gilroy captures a problem of production in his account of alternative communication more so than he accounts for matters of reception or reading. If, as I will argue below, accounts of the Haitian Revolution are hidden in plain sight, this means not that such accounts were never written, never printed, or never circulated, but that somehow that circulation did not compel an audience to make sense of it, did not compel an audience of readers to integrate the Haitian Revolution into an understanding of the Age of Revolutions, or into histories of, say, the Louisiana Purchase and United States Manifest Destiny, but instead enabled the Haitian Revolution to remain within a shroud of non-publicity—a shroud of isolation from world history and a shroud of silence.

In this essay, then, I explore not the lack of production of information or printed materials about the Haitian revolution, but their lack of reception among a reading public. The problem of reception is not, however, unrelated to Gilroy's claims concerning the counter-culture of Atlantic modernity. Given that Gilroy proposes that a counter-culture was created in antithesis to the discursive norms of Enlightenment rationality, recovering or reading the traces of this counter-culture (or of the many counter-cultures of the Atlantic) will require techniques of reading and reception other than those with which we

are most familiar.⁴ In what follows, I consider a question of reading and reception that arises in relation to a single printed text, namely, a novel written by an American woman named Leonora Sansay that was published in 1808, titled *Secret History, or the Horrors of St. Domingo*. I turn to this novel for a number of reasons: first, the oxymoronic tension within the very term, 'secret history' seems particularly germane to the question of how publicity does or does not operate with respect to revolution; second, as a literary scholar I am interested in the genre of the novel and the theoretical questions raised by considering works of literature in relation to the politics of liberty and revolution in Atlantic print culture.

With respect to the literary form of the novel, even more so than with respect to the political pamphlet, philosophical treatise, or even the newspaper, it seems crucial to ask whether print generates its audience and therefore its reception procedurally or by way of argument. Does the activity of reading serve to shape political communities or, alternatively, does the content of print have a persuasive effect upon a reader and thus an effect in creating political communities? A Habermasian account would indicate that the content of the argument is what matters about print, but Benedict Anderson's influential account of the novel and its relation to the formation of the imagined community of

4. A number of scholars have begun to engage in precisely this work—that is, scholarship that proposes new modes of reading Atlantic culture. Sibylle Fischer, in *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), for instance, analyzes materials as diverse as wall paintings and political, religious, and historical paintings from the nineteenth century in relation to the Haitian Revolution; Joanna Brooks in *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), excavates a rich culture of early printed work by Native Americans and African Americans in relation to a specific institutions such as the church and freemason societies; performance studies scholars including Joseph Roach (in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1996]) and Jill Lane (*Blackface Cuba, 1840–1945* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005]), have generated important new accounts of circum-Atlantic and hemispheric culture in their work; and Fred Moten (*In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003]) has proposed an analytics of diasporic and African-American music that stands to revise our understanding of the archive of modernity. Much of this work exists at the intersection of print culture with performance, visual arts, and music.

SECRET HISTORY;
OR,
THE HORRORS OF ST. DOMINGO,
IN
A SERIES OF LETTERS,
WRITTEN BY A LADY AT CAPE FRANÇOIS
[With Leonora Sansay]
TO
COLONEL BURR,
LATE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,
PRINCIPALLY DURING THE COMMAND OF
GENERAL ROCHAMBEAU.

PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED BY BRADFORD & INSKEEP.

R. CARR, PRINTER.

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1808.

[Leonora Sansay], *Secret History or, The Horrors of St. Domingo, in a Series of Letters, Written by a Lady at Cape François, to Colonel Burr, Late Vice-President of the United States, Principally During the Command of General Rochambeau* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1808).

the nation suggests that the procedure of reading may be as significant as the content of what is read. According to Anderson, the novel and the nation serve as analogues insofar as both operate within an 'empty, homogenous' time—a time in which a variety of persons (citizens of a nation, characters in a novel) pursue their own lives yet understand themselves to stand in relation to others whom they don't know—other individuals who occupy a narrative/national 'meanwhile.' Further, Anderson specifically provides a model of creole nationhood that is generated in relation to the print forms of the newspaper and the novel; his examples in *Imagined Communities* include Mexico, Peru, and the Philippines. Consider, for instance, his account of the colonial newspaper, which, like the novel, procedurally links disparately located individuals in a shared imaginary space:

What were the characteristics of the first American newspapers, North or South? They began essentially as appendages of the market. Early gazettes contained . . . commercial news (when ships would arrive and depart, what prices were current for what commodities in what ports), as well as colonial political appointments, marriages of the wealthy, and so forth. In other words, what brought together, on the same page, *this* marriage with *that* ship, *this* price with *that* bishop, was the very structure of the colonial administration and market-system itself. In this way, the newspaper of Caracas quite naturally, and even apolitically, created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers, to whom *these* ships, brides, bishops and prices belonged. In time, of course, it was only to be expected that political elements would enter in.⁵

Only in the last sentence of this passage do we find an oblique reference to revolution: Anderson argues that because people understand themselves to occupy the homogenous time and space of the nation insofar as they read newspapers and novels

5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed., (London: Verso Editions/NLB, 1991), 62.

that they understand to be addressed to people like themselves, so too do they develop a sense of community that would 'of course' generate a new political formation. For Anderson, print generates a readership that generates revolution.

In contrast to Habermas's account of the relation between print and revolution, Anderson indicates that an imaginative engagement in a collectivity (a new public) results in the new political form of the nation. But to what extent does temporal homogeneity in the novel or the newspaper generate a homogenous community of readers? And is the political form that results from this community logically a nation? In a useful critique of Anderson, Ed White has argued that the United States was not conceived in its earliest form as an imagined nation, in the terms Anderson suggests, but rather was at its origin an imagined empire—an empire constituted as a series of nations rather than as a single nation. White further suggests that a sense of unified nationhood was late to arrive in the United States; only under the presidency of Andrew Jackson did a stronger sense of unity begin to script United States culture, despite the advent of the United States nation as a political entity some fifty years earlier.⁶ Following White's analysis, I would suggest that the framework of United States nationalism that has pervaded the study of the early American novel has contributed to making Sansay's novel about the Haitian Revolution illegible, just as the Enlightenment rubric of the 'Age of Revolutions' has rendered the Haitian Revolution invisible. Read in light of an alternative geopolitical imaginary, however, Sansay's novel has much to say about both the nature of early America and the significance of revolution in Haiti.

Both at the time of its printing and in the nearly two hundred years that have elapsed since then, Sansay's novel about the Haitian Revolution has not generated a wide readership. Unlike novels such as Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, or Hannah Webster

6. Ed White, 'Early American Nations as Imagined Communities,' *American Quarterly* 56 (2004): 49–81.

Foster's *Coquette*, which went through multiple editions and found large readerships in the United States, Sansay's novel was published in one 1808 edition by Bradford and Inskip in Philadelphia. It has not, since then, found a wide scholarly audience either; indeed it has long been out of print, although a new scholarly edition edited by Michael Drexler is forthcoming.⁷ Further, the novel is not included in accounts of the early American novel; most notably it does not appear in Cathy Davidson's fairly exhaustive account of the early American novel, despite the fact that it was written by an American author and published in Philadelphia.⁸ Yet in what follows, I argue that Sansay's novel has been hidden in plain sight. Her novel provides a secret history not of creole nationalism, but of a creole cosmopolitanism that has been overwritten by accounts of print and the novel as generative of and legible in relation to national publics. The dominant national imaginary of the United States ultimately took the form of a racially white identification; as a result, the creole cosmopolitan origins of the United States that were abundantly evident when the American Revolution was placed next to the Haitian Revolution have been effectively erased. Sansay's novel, however, brings the shared creole politics of the early United States and the Haitian Revolution into view.

Sansay's epistolary novel recounts the journeys of two sisters, Mary and Clara, who travel to Saint Domingue in 1802 with Clara's French husband, St. Louis, in order to reclaim property he abandoned there at the outset of revolutionary violence in the 1790s. When the novel opens, the main city of Saint Domingue, Le Cap Français, is controlled by the French General Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, who had been sent by Napoleon to reassert French colonial control over the island. Sansay thus depicts a historical moment at which the French sought to reinstall

7. Leonora Sansay, *Secret History; or the Horrors of St. Domingo and Laura*, ed. Michael J. Drexler (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2007). Further citations are from this edition.

8. Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (1986; reprint New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

a colonial regime of race slavery, and thus to turn back the clock on a decade of turmoil during which blacks had successfully fought to abolish slavery and had consolidated political leadership in the figure of Toussaint Louverture. When Leclerc's expedition arrived with massive numbers of troops, Toussaint was serving as governor of the island in the name of the French Republic. Toussaint was thus by no means an official enemy of the French state, yet Napoleon was clearly worried by the degree of power exercised by the black leader, and gave Leclerc orders to depose immediately all black generals from positions of power and thus to reestablish a racial hierarchy on the island that coincided with the ontological claims of colonial race slavery. Napoleon imagined that it would not be difficult to take over the island and indeed, proposed that Leclerc's expedition would proceed to Louisiana after establishing control of Saint Domingue. Yet Napoleon was proven quite wrong: while Leclerc managed to capture Toussaint and remove him from the island, Leclerc's troops died by the thousands, devastated by war and disease. News of the reinstatement of slavery by the French in nearby Guadeloupe galvanized black forces on the island under the leadership of Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Leclerc himself died of yellow fever in 1802 and was replaced by General Donatien Marie Joseph de Rochambeau, a man who quickly became notorious for the atrocities he committed against black revolutionaries. Ultimately, however, Rochambeau's forces were routed by Dessalines and Haiti was established as the first independent black republic in the west under Dessalines's leadership in 1804.

In its main outlines, Sansay's novel is strikingly autobiographical and thus true to the historical events of the final years of the Haitian Revolution. Sansay was herself married to a French planter, Louis Sansay, and she traveled with him to Saint Domingue in 1802, where she observed the death throes of French colonial rule that she describes in the novel. In the novel, the primary correspondent, Mary, writes to her close friend, Aaron Burr, then vice president of the United States, about her travels

with her sister Clara to Saint Domingue, their flight from the island during the overthrow of French rule, and their travels among a refugee community of women in the Caribbean in the wake of the revolution. Sansay was, herself, a close friend and perhaps a lover of Aaron Burr's and the novel thus duplicates her own experience in this regard as well, albeit with one important distinction—namely, the novel bifurcates Sansay's persona into the character of two sisters, thereby enabling Sansay to recount the intrigues of Clara's love life through the eyes of a more distant observer, Mary. The tale recounted in the novel is bifurcated as well. On the one hand, the novel tells the story of the final years of the Haitian Revolution, during which the slave regime of French colonials was overthrown by the only successful slave revolt in the modern West. And on the other hand, the novel trains its attentions on the 'domestic' account of Clara's troubled relation with her tyrannical husband, St. Louis, and the affairs of the heart of elite colonials and creoles in Saint Domingue.

In its opening pages the novel strives to evoke the fantasy of coloniality that Napoleon and his military emissaries sought to recreate. Mary writes, for instance, that she would like to see the black revolutionary forces defeated in order to enjoy a life of white colonial luxury: 'I wish [the black revolutionaries] were reduced to order that I might see the so much vaunted habitations where I should repose beneath the shade of orange groves; walk on carpets of rose leaves and frenchipone; be fanned to sleep by silent slaves, or have my feet tickled into extacy by the soft hand of a female attendant' (58). Yet Mary is repeatedly forced to acknowledge that this ideal is not possible: 'the moment of enjoying these pleasures,' she writes, 'is, I fear, far distant' (58). More intriguing than the fact that colonialism and white privilege are fatally under attack in the novel, however, is the critique of colonial nostalgia that Sansay presents through the development of her white characters. While Mary initially seeks to find the pleasures of colonial luxury, Sansay also posits that Mary eventually abandons her pursuit of them because she becomes suspicious of them—

that is, as the novel progresses, the fantasy begins to fade, not because it is unachievable (although it is ultimately that), but because it becomes undesirable.

Interestingly, however, the luster of colonial fantasy is dispelled within the novel as much in relation to a developing critique of the gender politics of colonialism as in relation to racial politics. The primary figure around whom the allure of luxury is constellated in the novel is Mary's sister, Clara. Unhappy in her marriage, only the diversions of society and the staging of her beauty before wealthy admirers draws her out of her lassitude in Saint Domingue. Ballroom scenes thus become theatrical centerpieces within the early pages of the novel. Mary writes:

The ball announced by the admiral exceeded all expectations and we are still all extacy. Boats, covered with carpets, conveyed the company from the shore to the vessel, which was anchored about half a mile from the land, and on entering the ball room a fairy palace presented itself to the view. . . . Never had I beheld [Clara] so interesting. A robe of white crape shewed to advantage the contours of her elegant person. Her arms and bosom were bare; her black hair, fastened on the top with a brilliant comb, was ornamented by a rose which seemed to have been thrown there by accident. (59)

In both her regal glamour and her island ennui, Clara is represented as analogous to another figure whom Mary meets upon arrival in Saint Domingue, namely, Pauline Leclerc, the beautiful wife of General Leclerc and the sister of Napoleon. Madame Leclerc spends her days languishing upon a sofa in a darkened room, entertained by an intrigue with one General Boyer, whom she bewitches with her 'blue eyes . . . flaxen hair . . . [and] voluptuous mouth' (52). However, the aura of conquest in which both Clara and Madame Leclerc seem to bathe is soon dispersed by the revelation that the women are themselves forms of property embedded within the colonial regime.

Madame Leclerc's husband, we learn, has been granted control of the island of Saint Domingue because Madame Leclerc received

it from her brother, Napoleon, as her 'marriage portion.' As such, both Pauline Leclerc and Saint Domingue serve as colonial properties that are exchanged between men. When General Leclerc dies of yellow fever, Madame Leclerc performs an extravagant show of mourning, cutting her flaxen hair, and quickly exits to France. Further, Clara's triumphant scene of ballroom conquest, in which she wins the eye of the new colonial commander, General Rochambeau, rapidly results in her utter disempowerment as she becomes entrapped between her husband's jealous attempts to imprison her and Rochambeau's predatory attentions. When black revolutionary forces led by General Dessalines approach Le Cap, vowing to kill all the women and children in the city, Rochambeau attempts to abduct Clara on the pretext of protecting her. Yet Clara insists that to depart from her home against St. Louis's will amounts to a death sentence: 'Here I must stay if I am sure to perish,' she asserts.⁹ Ironically, then, Clara is more terrorized by her husband's death threats than by those of the approaching army.

Sansay thus displaces the violence of race revolution with that of patriarchal, domestic violence. Indeed, the 'secret history' of the revolution seems to have more to do with the story of violence internal to heterosexual marriage than with that of black on white violence. Mary writes, 'Nothing can be more brutal than St. Louis in his rage! The day of his affair with the general, he threw [Clara] on the ground, and then dragged her by the hair: — I flew to her, but his aspect so terrified me that I was obliged to withdraw: and when his fits of tenderness return he is as bad in the other extreme.'¹⁰ Later in the novel, St. Louis threatens to disfigure Clara by rubbing acid in her face. The intimate 'horror' of such scenes within the novel tends to affectively supersede the intermittent anecdotes of revolutionary violence that are reported by Mary as occurring at a distance. Accordingly, we might say that Sansay substitutes the violence of gendered oppression

9. Sansay, *Secret History*, 65.

10. Sansay, *Secret History*, 68.

for that of race revolution. What are the political implications of this substitution? In one respect, Sansay would seem to thereby erase the politics of race from the scene of the Haitian Revolution in favor of a story of white, elite marriage. Yet a careful reading of the novel indicates that Sansay more often entwines issues of race and gender such that her accounts of domestic violence in colonial spaces function to critique a colonial fantasy of white superiority and black incapacity as well as the inequities of marriage.

Indeed, Clara's self-understanding shifts decisively at a moment when General Rochambeau's violence is revealed to extend from gender relations to race relations. Although increasingly disaffected by Rochambeau's aggressive pursuit of her, Clara's career as a coquette is brought up short in relation to scenes of racial violence. Rochambeau, Mary reports, has presided over the burning at the stake of three black revolutionaries in the public square. While she reports on the general censure of this 'cruel act,' she also indicates that this particular cruelty is but a prelude to a more disturbing one: namely, Rochambeau's attempt to extort money from a white creole named Feydon and his subsequent execution of Feydon for failing to produce the funds demanded. 'Since the death of Feydon,' Mary writes, 'the general [Rochambeau] appears no more in public. A settled gloom pervades the place, and every one trembles lest he should be the next victim of a monster from whose power there is no retreat . . . Clara is in the greatest dejection. She repents bitterly the levity of her conduct.'¹¹

Clara regrets pursuing Rochambeau when she comes to see him as the embodiment of colonial policies that are fundamentally unjust and oppressive. The primary catalyst for Clara's new understanding of Rochambeau (and of colonialism more broadly) is his treatment of the white creole; however, this treatment is revealed to be of a piece with his violence toward blacks and women as well.

The category of the creole thus becomes central to the events of the novel and to Sansay's understanding of the meaning of the

11. Sansay, *Secret History*, 82.

Haitian Revolution. In the language of colonialism, creoles are individuals of European or African descent who are born in the colony; creoles are thus natives of the New World who are nonetheless not indigenous peoples. From a metropolitan colonial perspective, white creoles of the West Indies were typically viewed as degraded figures. In their distance from metropolitan culture and climate, white creoles were presumed to have imbibed a certain social degeneracy from the world of the plantation—a degeneracy that was not biologically racial (not explicitly a matter of racial mixing, for instance) but that was nonetheless often metonymically associated with discourses of racial impurity. In the novel, Clara and Mary initially embrace this account of the creole as indolent and degenerate but subsequently develop sympathy for the plight of the creole in the colonial setting and, accordingly, significantly revise their understanding of creole character. Mary describes this shift in viewpoint as one that occurs in relation to the social disorder caused by the revolution: ‘The creole ladies have an air of voluptuous languor which renders them extremely interesting. . . . Almost too indolent to pronounce their words they speak with a drawling accent that is very agreeable: but since they have been roused by the pressure of misfortune many of them have displayed talents and found resources in the energy of their own minds which it would have been supposed impossible for them to possess.’¹² In narrative terms, this shift of viewpoint regarding the creole is rendered central to the novel when Clara redefines her identity from that of a metropolitan colonial (a Pauline Leclerc figure, wife of a French planter, mistress of Rochambeau) to that of a creole refugee (an American woman in flight from anti-colonial revolution).

Significantly, the creole refugee, according to Sansay, is as much in danger of being the victim of metropolitan colonial violence as of black revolutionary violence. When bloodshed breaks out on the island, Mary writes, ‘Many of the Creoles, who had

12. Sansay, *Secret History*, 56.

remained on the island during the reign of Toussaint, regret the change, and say that they were less vexed by the negroes than by those who have come to protect them. And these negroes, notwithstanding the state of brutal subjection in which they were kept, have at length acquired a knowledge of their own strength. More than five hundred thousand broke the yoke imposed on them by a few thousand men of a different colour, and claimed the rights of which they had been so cruelly deprived.¹³ This passage indicates that Mary's sympathies for the situation of the creole are related to what we might call an ontological shift in her understanding of race as well. Rather than accepting colonial doxa concerning the degeneracy of the creole and the incapacity of blacks for self-rule, she asserts that white creoles are not well-served by colonial policy and asserts, as well, that colonial policy is fundamentally flawed in its understanding of the peoples (white and black) who inhabit Saint Domingue.

To be sure, Sansay's primary interest generally lies with the situation of white women. However, because her concern is with white women from the colonial periphery of the Atlantic world, her plot focuses on the development of a creole consciousness that tends to cut across racial categories rather than reinforce them: in effect, Sansay finds the dichotomy between metropolitan and creole identity more significant than that between white and black identity. Black creoles thus become subjects of sympathy in her narrative, as do white creoles.¹⁴ When Mary and Clara see the atrocities committed by Rochambeau against blacks and white creoles, they seek to leave the island and are ultimately able to do so because they are American women: French men are not allowed to leave the island because they are required to defend it, and, moreover, British blockades around the island prohibit

13. Sansay, *Secret History*, 60.

14. A significant instance of this is the story of Zuline, related by Mary in the novel, a creole mulatta whose efforts save a white man during the revolution. A novel titled *Zelica the Creole*, which follows the fate of a mixed race creole, was published in 1821 in London and has been attributed to Sansay, though critics are divided on the accuracy of this attribution.

French men and women from passing their lines. Americans, on the other hand, are allowed to leave, and the two sisters join a community of refugee creole women who are dispersed across the Caribbean. Traveling first to Cuba and then Jamaica, Mary repeatedly writes of creole women who have been left without property or husbands by the revolution. Yet what emerges from these tales of creole women and their daughters is something of a utopic community of independent women: 'Every talent, even if possessed in a slight degree of perfection, may be a resource in a reverse of fortune; and, though I liked not entirely [the creole ladies'] manner, whilst surrounded by the festivity and splendour of the Cape, I now confess that they excite my warmest admiration. They bear adversity with cheerfulness, and resist it with fortitude.¹⁵ The creole women are now unattached to men or to property and what emerges in the space of this lack is a bounty of individual talent and previously untapped interior 'resources.' Creole women thus become figures of strength who are mobile and independent: no longer a form of property (like Pauline Leclerc) that changes hands between men, they are sources of value and labor unto themselves.

Ultimately disburdened of both Rochambeau and St. Louis, Clara is united with her sister in Kingston at the close of the novel, and Mary announces their plan to travel to Philadelphia to make a new home. Further, Mary ends the letter with the image of an idealized marriage and home that is premised on the figure of the independent creole woman the novel has championed. Mary's marital ideal is based on conjoining men and women of equal inner resources: 'Attachments between [equals] last through life, and are always new. Love continues because love has existed; interests create interests; parental are added to conjugal affections; with the multiplicity of domestic objects the number of domestic joys increase. In such a situation the heart is always occupied, and always full. For those who live in it their

15. Sansay, *Secret History*, 93.

home is the world; their feelings, their powers, their talents are employed.¹⁶ Appearing in the final pages of the novel, this marital ideal is implicitly predicated on the figure of the creole woman who is not dependent upon any resources exterior to her own, but who generates resources from within. Moreover, the creole marriage is generative of a cosmopolitan sensibility: for such a couple (who carry their valuables within them as a productive capacity) 'their home is the world'—that is, they are at home in any location in the world including the colonial periphery. In effect, Sansay's novel describes the Haitian Revolution as generative of a female creole subjectivity that will be most at home anywhere, including Le Cap, Kingston, Santiago, and Philadelphia.

In her focus on the figure of the creole, Sansay indicates that both Haiti and the United States are Atlantic colonial peripheries in which a creole politics is required to throw off the fetters of colonialism. Moreover, I would argue that Sansay was not alone in understanding the relation between Haiti and the United States in these terms. President John Adams, for instance, quickly moved to establish diplomatic relations with Toussaint Louverture when the black leader assumed control of Saint Domingue. Indeed, Adams was instrumental in passing a law known as 'Toussaint's Clause' in 1799 that established trade with Saint Domingue despite the poor state of United States-French relations at the time. As such, Adams encouraged Toussaint to break with French policy in order to trade freely with the United States. This course of action is one that repeats the story of United States commercial and political independence from European powers, and Adams urged Toussaint to follow this route in order to establish a commercial alliance of unrestricted 'creole' trade between the United States and Haiti. Northern merchants who depended on the Caribbean trade were supportive of this policy; however, southern planters objected strenuously to

16. Sansay, *Secret History*, 120.

recognizing a black leader and voiced concerns about the potential 'contagion' of antislavery revolution to the United States South. When Jefferson assumed the presidency, he abruptly reversed Adams's policies, cutting off diplomatic and commercial relations with Toussaint and offering assistance to Napoleon in removing Toussaint from power. One might speculate that for Jefferson, a Virginian slave-owner, the racial opposition of black and white loomed far larger in his understanding of the situation than did the metropolitan-creole divide that united an independent Saint Domingue and an independent United States in Adams's mind.

After Jefferson was elected, the harbor at Le Cap 'emptied of American vessels so swiftly, that Toussaint was moved to ask sarcastically, 'if the change in administrations had destroyed all the American ships.'¹⁷ Historian Michael Zuckerman concludes, 'Color countermanded everything for Jefferson.'¹⁸ Certainly, in the 'empire for liberty' that Jefferson imagined as the future of the United States, a racial division between blacks and whites was foundational.¹⁹ Further, the foundational nature of a black-white divide has tended to underpin accounts of the 'imagined community' of the United States nation from Jefferson's time forward. In sum, the concept of a creole cosmopolitanism, imagined vividly by Sansay in her novel, has largely disappeared

17. Michael Zuckerman, 'The Power of Blackness: Federalists, Jeffersonians, and the Revolution in San Domingo,' in *La Révolution Française et Haïti*, 2 vols. (Port-au-Prince: Société Haïtienne d'Histoire et de Géographie [Editions Henri Deschamps], 1995), 2: 126.

18. Zuckerman, 'The Power of Blackness,' 135.

19. Famously, the passage from *Notes on the State of Virginia* in which Jefferson addresses the possibility of blacks and whites living together in the future of the United States is an apocalyptic vision of race war: 'Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expense of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions, which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.' For useful discussion of Jefferson, race, and empire, see Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

from cultural histories of the United States, as has an understanding of it as structurally related to Haiti by way of the geopolitics of Atlantic colonialism.

One way in which to understand the exclusion of the Haitian Revolution from the world stage of history is to consider its erasure from print, either by way of enforced illiteracy of New World Africans (as Gilroy suggests) or by way of forceful measures of censorship, that, as Julius Scott has shown, were indeed used in the Atlantic world to arrest the spread of antislavery revolution.²⁰ But a novel such as Sansay's raises a different question about the relations among print, revolution, and silence. When histories and ideas appear in print and fail to circulate, the instrumentality of print needs to be relocated in other realms, and most particularly in the realm of reception. It is difficult to give an account of how Sansay's novel was received, save to say that by and large it did not attract much attention and has not in the years since its first publication. Indeed, the novel may have fallen upon an unreceptive audience at the time of its publication because it did not provide what its title seemed to advertise—namely, an account of what Americans had come to expect as the 'horrors' or scenes of atrocities committed by blacks against whites in the Haitian Revolution that were widely reported on in the United States press from the 1790s forward.²¹ In other words, the novel proposed an imagined community that bore little resemblance to

20. Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution*, Ph.D. diss. Duke University, 1986.

21. Representative newspaper references to the horrors of St. Domingo include the following two from 1802: 'With one hand the black demons of slaughter were seen holding up the writhing infant, and hacking off its limbs with the sword in the other. Those that escaped the sword were preserved to witness more horrid sensations, being dragged by the negroes to their strong places in the mountains, to serve as hostages or to glut their fury' (*Boston Gazette*, March 15, 1802, 14: 2). 'The latest accounts from St. Domingo, represent that Colony as being once more in a state of general insurrection, the negroes having risen throughout the whole interior, and commenced the repetition of those outrages which have heretofore rendered St. Domingo a scene of devastation and horror' (*Spectator*, New York, 6 [547]: 3). The latter quotation gives something of the flavor of the generic invocation of the 'horrors' of St. Domingo as familiar scenes of black on white vio-

the one that was then taking shape in the United States—a community in which a black/white opposition was increasingly deeply inscribed and a community in which the creole identity of white and black Americans had receded from view.

If we return to the question posed early in this essay—How is print related to revolution?—we can say quite clearly that Sansay's novel did not generate an acceptance of the premises of creole cosmopolitanism or an embrace of the forms of community that she asked her readers to imagine. Thus neither in terms of argument nor in terms of the procedure of generating a readership did her novel effect revolution. As such, it seems imperative that critics consider scenes of dissemination and reception in any analysis of the relation between print and revolution.²² Nonetheless, it seems worth noting, as well, that the dissemination and reception of a given text is not necessarily temporally discrete. In other words, if Sansay's novel was not often read in 1808, it may nonetheless still be read (and taught) today as exemplary of an alternative imaginary—an imaginary that may still exist in our future insofar as we learn to read it in our past. If we learn new ways to read, we may eventually discern a variety of counter-cultures still to come in the rich archive of materials available to us from the Atlantic world in the Age of Revolutions.

22. Certainly a great deal of work in the field of history of the book is attentive to precisely these questions. Robert Darnton's model of communications circuits, set forth in 'What is the History of Books?' (in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery [London and New York: Routledge, 2002], 9–26,) is particularly useful in this regard.

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