la Biennale di Venezia
56. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte
Partecipazioni Nazionali

# HALKA / HAITI

18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W

C.T. JASPER
JOANNA MALINOWSKA

EDITED BY
MAGDALENA MOSKALEWICZ

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56. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

# THE POLISH PAVILION AT THE 56TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION— LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

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INVENTORY PRESS

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# FOREWORD

HANNA WRÓBLEWSKA

The Venice Biennale stands alone in preserving the convention of national pavilions. All other major artistic events have long since dropped the "Olympic" system of national representation, opting for either a star curator/curatorial collective's unifying theme or a simple division into participating galleries, as happens at the increasingly influential art fairs. While keenly aware of the rules of the game (as demonstrated by the careful selection of the main show's artistic director and the coordination of its date vis-à-vis commercial events), the Venice Biennale carefully nurtures its conservative/avant-garde character. Every year, it proudly reports an increasing number of national representations, celebrates exhibition openings at each of the national pavilions, and awards a prize for "best" national exhibition.

Paradoxically, this somewhat old-fashioned model has for years provided an opportunity for critical analysis of the very paradigm of nationality. For examining notions of national identity (or any identity), both in terms of localities and also of universal or universalistic ideas and theories. For questioning a nation's own history or attempting to present its forgotten or concealed episodes in a new context. For changing the perspective and making everyone see certain phenomena in a different light. And finally for going—or attempting to go—beyond established conventions and modes of storytelling.

Central to the successive presentations at the Polish Pavilion in Venice are the artists—together with the curator, they are the ones who construct the narrative. This time they turn our attention towards Stanisław Moniuszko's opera *Halka*, considered a national opera in Poland but little known internationally; towards nineteenth-century provincial cities (Warsaw and Vilnius, where *Halka* premiered); and towards a little-known

fragment of history connecting, through the person of Napoleon Bonaparte, two distant places on the world map: Warsaw, Poland and Cazale, Haiti. They take us on a journey through time and space, asking whether the nineteenth-century form of an opera, and a national one at that, has anything to offer to people from a different hemisphere, people who share with Poland but a single episode of history from two hundred years ago. They raise these questions using the medium of a national pavilion, namely Pavilion POLONIA, in Venice, and the organizational and creative support of Zachęta—National Gallery of Art.

I thank the project's curator, Magdalena Moskalewicz, and the artists, C.T. Jasper and Joanna Malinowska, for all the questions raised during this project's production and for all the answers (including the uncomfortable ones) resulting from both the presentation of *Halka/Haiti 18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W* in Venice and from this book, carefully edited by the curator.

This project would not have been possible without funding from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the collaboration of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, both of whom we thank for their support.

*Hanna Wróblewska*
*Director of Zachęta—National Gallery of Art*
*Polish Pavilion Commissioner*

# HALKA / HAITI

18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W

THE OPERA

# CAST OF CHARACTERS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| HALKA | a village maiden | SOPRANO |
| JONTEK | a young highlander, Halka's true friend | TENOR |
| JANUSZ | a nobleman, Halka's former lover and father of her child | BARITONE |
| ZOFIA | a lady to be married to Janusz | SOPRANO |
| STOLNIK | a nobleman, Zofia's father | BASS |
| DZIEMBA | Stolnik's steward | BASS |

Stolnik's noble guests at Janusz and Zofia's engagement ceremony

*The events take place in the late eighteenth century in the highland region of Poland.*

DZIEMBA

To your health, O loving couple!
'Tis the day your vows are spoken.
May good fortune e'er attend you,
Pledge your love be never broken!

Hail the heirs of houses noble,
join in wedlock to ennoble
each escutcheon and its glory
worthy of their ancient story.

Mark the dignity reflected,
mark exalted ease enacted!
Janusz as if born for splendor,
Zofia charming and so tender.

Jewels both of virtues olden
and tradition that is golden.
In ideal joined affiance
honored houses in alliance.

## ACT I, SCENE 2

JANUSZ — Now your blessing gracious father
on your children do bestow.

ZOFIA — In your goodness you have chosen
him whose love I cherish so.

TOGETHER — Now your blessing, now your blessing
Gracious father do bestow!
As our love is full requited,
father bless the love we vow.

STOLNIK — 'Twas my wish and long intention
that your hearts be thus united.

## ACT I, SCENE 4

HALKA

Like windswept flower broken and dying,
my anguished soul cries out in pain.
Why, prey oh tell me my heart is sighing,
my maiden wreath lost all in vain.

Jasko, you've gone, oh where can I find you?
My noble falcon, I'm lonely.
My heart's devotion yearns to remind you,
Jasko beloved, you are my only.

## ACT I, SCENE 4

HALKA — My noble falcon, my ray of sunshine,
you heart's affection must be ever mine!
You're with me always, of you I'm dreaming,
Oh tell me dearest, you'll always be mine!

JANUSZ — Accursed moment! To lie is useless!
Her tears torment me, I must be bold!
Oh Halka dearest, oh do believe me,
I love you truly, just as of old!

## ACT II, SCENE 2

JONTEK

And so you trust him, oh peasant maiden?
He has betrayed you, believe him not!
By all the dark clouds with thunder laden,
by all the tempest the cedars sway in,
he's lied to you, he's not your lot!

You peasant maiden, he is your lord!
Aye village maiden, he is your lord!
Remember than, he is your lord!

Oh trust not maiden his false affection
'tis but another adventure for him.
Do not believe him and his protection,
be not deluded by his perfection.
His love for you—a noble's whim!

## ACT II, SCENE 4

JANUSZ

And now explain your action bold!
Why brought you here this poor and suff'ring maiden?
Is life so glum and wearisome in the village?
Tell me now, the truth unfold!

Accursed he, the maiden is again demented!
Now bring her back, there's nothing she will lack,
and your reward I vow, will make you long contented.

Your reward I vow, will make you long contented!

## ACT IV, SCENE 2

JONTEK

As the mountains winds are sighing
'mid the whispering pine,
then my heart is sad and crying,
weary heart of mine!

For none other cause me anguish,
why oh why my heart must languish?
As I long for you Halina, just for you alone!
Just for you my own Halina, just for you alone!

I recall the days of childhood, when for you I'd dare
scale the cliff to bring the birds you wanted as they
nestled there.
How I searched for pretty flowers at the mountain base,
or a string of rosy corals at the village marketplace.

Ever have I loved you madly, while you've blossomed
as a rose!
For you dear, I'd always gladly die if fate so chose!
On and on the days were fleeting like a
mountain stream,
came the noble and the meeting, blighting love's
young dream.

There is nothing that can grieve me,
Only you my love believe me!
Oh my Halka, oh my only,
dearest heart of mine!

## ACT IV, SCENE 5

**STOLNIK, JANUSZ, ZOFIA**

God Almighty, hear our prayer,
we Thy people beg of Thee!
Bless and keep us in Thy care,
Bless us Lord we pray to Thee!

## ACT IV, SCENE 5

HALKA

Ah! Our darling child is dying, lonely and dying!
Our child is starving and dying!
Its mother here and father there!

Its tiny arms are extended,
its pleading eyes calmly crying,
its mother here and father there!

Ah! e'en birds of prey are defended
guarded from stranger and danger.
Yet there my baby is dying!

Sweet baby, you're sleeping,
no longer weeping,
for you I pray—who'll lay you away?

Oh who will dress you,
Who will caress you?
Silent in sleep, eternal sleep?

## ACT IV, SCENE 8

HALKA

I could not harm you, Jasko my dearest,
Master of mine, oh forgive me!
Oh pardon, darling, my tears of anguish,
I have forgiven, believe me!

Live Jasko with your beautiful lady,
live and be happy and always true.
And just remember me when you pray, dear,
my blessings Jasko, I bless you!


COUNCIL

# BEHIND MOUNTAINS MORE MOUNTAINS

MAGDALENA MOSKALEWICZ

## OVERTURE

Already by morning on the Saturday the opera was to take place in Cazale, dark clouds were gathering over the mountains that surround the village, making the Polish team seriously nervous. That day's performance of *Halka* was supposed to take place *en plein air*, on a road nestled between houses leading further up into the mountains. A one-time show for the local community, this collaboration between an opera team from Poland and musicians and dancers from Haiti had been planned for many months—and it was meant to be filmed panoramically, all in one go. There was technically a back-up plan, but everyone knew that rain would ruin everything.

The folding chairs borrowed from the neighboring Episcopal Church had stayed on location from Friday's dress rehearsal, awaiting the musicians' return. Likewise, the gigantic power generator, tucked behind the wooden houses, stood ready to once again power the electronic piano and the loudspeakers. The orchestra's instruments and music stands were to be delivered that morning from the Cosmos Hotel, where the production team had been staying, at the entrance to the village at the other side of the Bretelle River.

The film crew had left the hotel before dawn to capture the sunrise, which was meant to serve as a cinematic prologue to the opera. Having flown in from Poznań, Poland a few days earlier, the opera team was arriving from their hotel in Ouanga Bay at the seaside, north of where the mountain road to Cazale meets the national highway. The Haitian orchestra, for its part, was coming in two buses from Port-au-Prince, to the south. The two men who had delivered the piano the day before and the two technicians who had brought the electric equipment had all stayed overnight

somewhere in Cazale to avoid the capital's knotty traffic. The dancers, who all came from the village itself, could simply walk.

The performance was scheduled for two in the afternoon, but the audience started arriving, according to local custom, at about three. The first out-of-town guests were three men from the town of Cabaret who had read about the event in the newspaper. (The orchestra had sent a notice to the press.) With the help of the local justice of the peace, the team had sent invites to important members of the community. Posters were also pasted around town for all to see.

The opera was to be sung in its original Polish, so before the orchestra sounded its opening notes, the characters and the plot were introduced both in English and Creole. "This story is a Polish 'Choucoune'!" proclaimed the opera director, naming the well-known Haitian song, which is similarly a nineteenth-century story of love destroyed by class differences. The crowd understood. It also reacted with bemused recognition when two Polish soloists started dancing the *kokoda*, a local dance, to the tune of the Polish mazurka. (Just as the local dancers had mastered the polonaise, the Poles learned the *kokoda* and *kompa* from older Cazalois during dance workshops a few days earlier.) Amidst the sundry cultural interchanges—the dances, the languages, and the shared histories—there was one performer who was perfectly at home in both spheres: It was the goat who turned out to be a natural fit for both the Old Poland evoked by the opera and the tangible realities of present-day Cazale.

As the opera progressed to its tragic end, the day, too, was slowly darkening. By the time Halka met her fate and the final bows were made, with vodka and Coca-Cola following as a celebratory toast, it was almost nightfall. It didn't rain that day in Cazale.

## THE FIRST SONG

In 1802 and 1803, some 5,500 soldiers from the Polish Legions in Italy were dispatched from the ports of Livorno and Genoa to the Caribbean, where they were to fight alongside the French in the colony of Saint-Domingue, the "Pearl of the Antilles."

This war of independence for what became the Republic of Haiti had started as a slave rebellion in 1791 and had many phases.[1] After France's short-lived abolition of slavery throughout its colonies in 1794, Napoleon reinitiated the conflict by sending a military expedition under the command of his brother-in-law, General Charles Leclerc, in 1801. The Polish contingents were sent as his reinforcements in the following years.

This was hardly a Polish war. Never having owned any overseas colonies, the country itself had just disappeared from the map. After Poland's third and final partition by its neighboring empires—Prussia, Austria, and Russia—in 1795, its former citizens' main preoccupation was regaining their own independence. One effort toward that end was the formation of the Polish Legions in Italy in 1797. With the outbreak of the Napoleonic wars, Poles decided to fight alongside the French emperor in the hope of supporting his defeat of their occupiers. The legions were a peculiar creation in themselves: these volunteer-based units had their own commanders, flags, and uniforms. But they fought for Bonaparte.

The vast majority of Polish soldiers shipped to the island of *Ayiti*—"land of high mountains" in the language of the indigenous Taíno—fell in bloody battles or died of yellow fever. Legend has it, however, that between two hundred and three hundred of the remaining Poles deserted and sided with the black revolutionaries.[2] Due to a scarcity of historical documents and to the contradictions among extant reports, it's not entirely clear whether this alleged shift in allegiance refers to a bona fide desertion where Poles fought *against* the French, or if it pertains, instead, to a discrete rejection of the command to massacre unarmed blacks at Saint-Marc in 1802. Alternatively, these Poles could simply have been captives who ended the war on the Haitian side.

Each of these scenarios may in fact describe the fate of a different battalion.[3] If the Poles did desert the French, it was amidst the more frequent side-switching of the Haitians themselves. In fact, General Jean-Jacques Dessalines, one of the Haitian leaders—and later Haiti's first emperor—had fought on the French side for a full six months, between April and October of 1802, before deciding to re-join the revolutionaries.[4] It might have been together with Dessalines that some of the Poles turned against the French.[5] (Another Polish group might have been war captives of a second defected general—and later king—Henri Christophe.) It is known that Dessalines had a personal Polish guard, called *Les Polonais*. It was also Dessalines, as author of the constitution of 1805, who granted Polish soldiers citizenship in the newly established republic and gave them land they could settle.[6]

To illustrate the particularly confusing character of this war, where loyal French subjects fought soon-to-be-former French subjects, historians underline how both Leclerc's forces and the Haitians who opposed them sang the exact same French revolutionary songs during battle—to mutual bewilderment.[7]

If the Poles were singing something too, it would have been the "Song of the Polish Legions in Italy," also known as "Dąbrowski's Mazurka," a

cheerful and hopeful tune about the Poles' return to a freed motherland. Written for the legions by General Józef Wybicki, and first performed in 1797, before being sung during the numerous nineteenth-century Polish uprisings, the song became the independent Republic of Poland's national anthem over a century later and is Poland's official anthem once again today. Its second stanza mentions Napoleon by name:

*We'll cross the Vistula and the Warta,*
*We shall be Polish.*
*Bonaparte has given us the example*
*Of how we should prevail.*

For the author, becoming Polish was contingent upon returning to the land; the actual, physical return is stressed through the metonymy of crossing Poland's rivers. It was equally contingent upon learning the supposedly triumphant lesson of Napoleon Bonaparte. Because of the song's continued symbolic importance, these two conditions are still relevant for understanding Polishness today. But what about these Poles who didn't follow Napoleon's example? What about those who never returned?

## THE OPERA HOUSE

The titular hero of Werner Herzog's 1982 movie, Fitzcarraldo dreams of building an opera house in the Amazon. An Irishman in early industrial Peru at the start of the twentieth century, he plans to fund this project by making a fortune in rubber. Fitzcarraldo buys a steamship and steers it towards his newly purchased land, but what's meant to initiate the opera project ends up consuming him completely and dominating the entire movie.

The well-known scenes show the white-haired protagonist playing opera on a gramophone from the ship's deck, as if either to evangelize to the imagined listeners hidden in the surrounding rainforest or to defend himself from their potential attack. Belief in the unquestionable power of opera seems to be the Irishman's prime motivation. "This god does not come with cannons," declares Fitzcarraldo when compared to an imaginary "white god" awaited by the indigenous tribe. "He comes with the voice of Caruso!"

By virtue of how it's told, with the main focus on Fitzcarraldo's outlandish but successful attempt to carry his steamship over a mountain, the story becomes as much about power relations in postcolonial Latin America as it is about opera. Herzog's hero "can't look" at the "rubber barons"—effectively

oligarchs of Peru—who find pleasure in playing cards and express it in almost orgasmic terms. ("Das ist Extase!" one exclaims.) For Fitzcarraldo, opera is what brings ecstasy. But his path to pleasure won't be much different from theirs. The money for his steamship comes from his mistress, who runs a whorehouse; it is profit extracted from native prostitutes. The manpower that will famously carry the ship over the mountain will likewise come from indigenous Peruvians. "Following the familiar pattern of Old World encounters with the New World... Fitzcarraldo will, without soliciting their opinions about the venture, conscript the native inhabitants for their labor, divest them in their habitat, and civilize them to the strains of Enrico Caruso."[8]

Fitzcarraldo is clearly a madman; a benevolent one at times, as when he offers a box in his opera house to a pig; a fearless one at others, as when he destroys his hands rowing 1,200 miles down the Amazon from Iquitos to Manaus in order to hear Caruso; and sometimes a cruel one, as when he gifts the chief of a local tribe a block of ice without informing him of its ephemeral character. "The reality of your world is just a caricature of the make-believe reality of grand opera!" he screams wildly at the ignorant barons,[9] disclosing his view of social reality as such.

Whatever mix of madness, naiveté, and arrogance drives him, Fitzcarraldo ultimately plans make his money just like the rubber barons do. Herzog remains silent about whether this cultural end is noble enough to justify the same means.

At the end of the movie, almost in passing, Fitzcarraldo manages to stage an opera on a ship, which seems to disclose the misguided structure of his whole enterprise. It is precisely this difference, however—between staging an opera and building an opera house—that reveals the core of Fitzcarraldo's motivation. A symbol of identification and social positioning over centuries, the opera house has become "a physical demonstration of a state's political, social, and economical status—and a long-lasting one, across the changing structures of political power."[10] The architectural focus of his vision underscores Fitzcarraldo's investment in the cannon-like force of the opera; it follows the established logic of colonialism.

## THE PREMIERE

In 1858, some fifty-five years after the Polish troops landed in Saint-Domingue, Stanisław Moniuszko's *Halka* premiered at the Warsaw Opera House. Enthusiastically received by the audience and critics alike, this tragic love story of the eponymous highlander peasant-girl seduced and rejected

by her mighty landlord was quickly proclaimed a Polish "national opera." More than a simple, folk-themed romance, the enduringly successful opera has exerted long-lasting power over the Polish collective imagination.

At first glance, the broken-hearted Halka appears to be a typical nineteenth-century European peasant heroine. Deflowered and left with a baby, Halka initially tries to win over her former lover, the landlord Janusz, as he is getting engaged to a noblewoman, Zofia. An adoring highlander friend, Jontek, accompanies the heroine in her mission while she gradually goes mad, recognizing the reality of her situation. After the death of her child, Halka initially decides to set the church on fire on Janusz and Zofia's wedding day, but she ends up choosing to kill herself instead. The opera ends with Halka throwing herself into the river while the wedding proceeds uninterrupted.

According to its first admirers, *Halka*'s huge success lay in its uniquely national spirit, in its expression of the Polish temperament both in music and lyrics, and in its masterful depiction of the Polish highlanders' folk customs.[11] The work's popularity continued in the following decades, and by 1919 Aniela Koehlerówna could conclude:

> *Halka* won the audience's hearts from the very first moment, and inspired awe in everyone. There was a feeling it was the first truly Polish, truly national opera.... The nation was mirrored in this music...[12]

Indeed, the story was set in the mountains of southern Poland and decorated by Moniuszko with traditional Polish dances: the polonaise, the mazurka, and a "highlanders' dance." However, any direct references to Polish folk music are more difficult to trace.[13] Its Polish-language libretto, authored on commission by young socialist poet Włodzimierz Wolski, depicts the complex social dynamic of the time. The story is haunted by echoes of the bloody peasant revolt of 1846, underscoring the tense class relations between Polish landlords and their feudal subjects. The opera's revolutionary themes are analyzed by Katarzyna Czeczot in her essay in this volume, where she traces the libretto's direct literary precursors and its subsequent interpretations.

*Halka*'s Warsaw premiere came six decades after the final partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—the same event that instigated the formation of the Polish Legions. In fact, a modest, two-act concert version of *Halka* had premiered in Vilnius in 1848, but it was initially rejected by the Warsaw Opera House, probably because the tsarist government feared the potentially inflammatory theme of class conflict.[14] Moniuszko added

the aforementioned ballet scenes and extended the opera to four acts to soften the work specifically for the 1858 Warsaw production that proved such a triumph.

Interestingly, the same revolutionary elements that had proven problematic under tsarist occupation contributed to *Halka*'s popularity a century later when Poland was under Soviet control. Telling the story of class struggle rooted in local history, it conformed perfectly to the socialist-realist doctrine that art should be "socialist in content but national in form."

If the 1858 Warsaw audience saw in *Halka* the expression of a uniquely Polish national spirit, it was specifically because of a demand precipitated by a particular historical moment. The partitions had torn the nation apart. Subjects of three different foreign states, Polish intellectuals were striving to define and solidify their national identity, following the European nineteenth-century zeitgeist that elevated the concept of nation above other principles of social organization. Not unimportantly for *Halka*'s reception, by the time of its premiere, Moniuszko was already known as the author of the first *Home Song Book* (*Śpiewnik domowy*, 1843). This extremely popular compilation grew to twelve volumes, which were to dictate musical "Polishness" to generations of families and professionals alike.

*Halka*, too, would prove extremely influential. Cherished in the free Poland of the interwar period and valued for different reasons in the People's Republic of Poland, it is still considered by many to be "the most precious gem in the crown of works by Polish composers." The opera was performed five hundred times by the end of the nineteenth century, and by its 150th anniversary in 2008, it is believed to have been performed two thousand times in Warsaw alone![15]

## THE TOUR

The Polish national opera, *Halka* was also shown on the international stage. It traveled to Prague, Moscow, and St. Petersburg in Moniuszko's lifetime and was performed in Europe and the U.S. in the early twentieth century. More recently, Maria Fołtyn, an ambassador of Polish music with a very particular mission, dedicated her life to popularizing Moniuszko's opera with almost missionary zeal. The Polish soprano, whose own professional debut was as Halka in 1949, began her directing career in the early 1970s and was even known as "Moniuszko's widow" for her uncritical devotion to the composer's oeuvre. A real-life Fitzcarraldo *avant la lettre*, Fołtyn staged *Halka* in Havana in 1971, and organized subsequent local productions of it in Mexico City (1974), Ankara (1979), Novosibirsk (1984), Toronto (1986), and

Curitiba (1990), among others.[16] A Polish female version of Herzog's hero in a far more benevolent—and successful—incarnation, Fołtyn championed Moniuszko's opera like a gospel for several decades, and across several continents, to foreign professionals and audiences alike.

In her memoir, tellingly titled *I Lived Art, I Lived Love*,[17] Fołtyn gives a detailed account of her tours and her numerous admirers. She begins the chapter about *Halka* in Cuba with a story of a handsome Ricardo, before going on to list the preparations: discussions between the Opera Nacional de Cuba, the Polish Embassy, and the Ministry of Culture; shipments of costumes and stage design; the libretto's translation into Spanish; collaboration with the Cuban national ballet; and—most notably—asking Fidel Castro's permission to cast a particular black singer in the titular role.

A true diva, Fołtyn speaks from the heart about her unquestionable love for the composer and her desire to bring his music to the world. In her telling, the audience always appreciates her efforts; a Mexican crew, to give one example, is pictured crying backstage, moved to tears by Moniuszko's music.[18] Fołtyn's motivations seem as true as they are surprisingly uncritical. She sees *Halka* as "motherland-carrying" but universal—a rather simplistic reading from someone who directed the piece repeatedly over four decades. Her insistence that the opera was essentially apolitical—in 1986, when the Poles from a recent *Solidarność*-induced wave of emigration refused to attend a performance she brought on a state-sponsored tour to the U.S[19]—hints at a level of blind focus worthy of Fitzcarraldo himself.

Full of energy and dedication, Maria Fołtyn didn't need to build an opera house. Her performances were organized fully within the existing structures of an opera world replete with local theaters, crews, and audiences. *Halka*'s Cuban performance, for example, was staged in the 1837 colonial Gran Teatro de La Habana. Fołtyn's monumental tours sometimes included over a hundred people, which was especially notable given the political context. At home, the structure that made these operatic journeys possible was the Polish art agency PAGART. Established in 1957, the agency managed all international tours by Polish performing artists, granting them the rare privilege of travel at a time when other citizens' mobility was strictly controlled and mostly confined to the Soviet Bloc.

In the end, Maria Fołtyn's mission of bringing Moniuszko to distant places had less to do with the far-flung destinations than the specific point of departure. Together with her colleagues, the diva was acting officially on behalf of the socialist state to deliver a pre-approved version of Polish national culture beyond the Iron Curtain.

Moniuszko, for his part, wanted his operas to be staged abroad, but he was also aware that the local provenance of his work made it unattractive internationally.[20] Even today, Polish opera professionals often lament *Halka*'s absence from worldwide opera repertoires, but scholars see this omission as somewhat deserved. For instance, the opera's lukewarm entry in the *Oxford Music Dictionary* states that *Halka* "has remained a product for home consumption only. Its characteristic blend of conservative Italianate melodic idioms and Polish national dance rhythms at times results in music of lively charm, but also courts mediocrity."[21]

Why, then, its ongoing popularity in Poland?

Opera's historical and continuing success as an institution can be located in the "specific but multiple phantasm" of the nation. Being a part of an opera audience has been a way for individuals to form and perform an attachment to the collective.[22] In the words of Vlado Kotnik, "the opera has been the privileged place for enacting the phantasy of a mythical or 'imagined community.'"[23] This argument is a specific application of Benedict Anderson's influential anti-essentialist understanding of nation as a social construct that emerged when print media first allowed for the broad dissemination of national languages. This created a new feeling of affinity across social groups previously unconnected by any conception of shared experience or identity.[24]

This nation-making function of opera became especially prominent in Europe after the Spring of Nations of 1848, when opera was "put in the position of confirming and affirming political realities, social messages and political missions of the newly awakened nations."[25] Opera houses became for their visitors not only symbols of social positioning, but now also of national identification. Indeed, when the Warsaw opera house opened in 1833, its first performance had to be *The Barber of Seville*, because the Russian tsarist government would not allow a Polish-language piece. It was already apparent by then that "going to the opera was a clear symbol of national feeling and belonging, and as such, a ritual of determined political emancipation."[26]

This pan-European phenomenon was particularly strong in Poland, where "the fall of the republic came simultaneously with the European processes of creating the consciousness of modern nations."[27] Accordingly, *Halka* entered the pantheon of national masterpieces on national rather than aesthetic grounds. But even this national grounding is rather arbitrary. Paradoxically, as Ryszard Golianek argues, *Halka* doesn't even fulfill the basic musical requirements of a national opera. These being: the inclusion of existing folk rhythms, folk melodies, vocal idioms, and instrumental

modalities in addition to a harmonious combination of word and music, where the melody and rhythm result from the language's original intonation. Such combination allows for the piece to be perceived as an organic creation of a particular culture.[28] However, as with *Halka*, the audience ignores these aesthetic considerations and proclaims something national based on its hardly definable "national feelings."[29] Ultimately, the political, social, and psychological functions of the piece decide its status.

*Halka* is one of the archetypical cultural creations that Polish society sees as bearing shared symbolic capital. Through the canonizing power of repetition, the ubiquity of its elements became internalized as both representations of and foundations for Polish national identity. This is not to say that its continuing presence is a cherished one. Just as *Halka* served as a vessel for the expression of national feelings in the nineteenth century, it stands as a piece of worn-out taxidermy in the twenty-first. Uncritical admiration of Moniuszko's work over decades means that Poles in general don't take it very seriously; it has also precluded the inventive use of his oeuvre among professionals. Even though *Halka* remains ever-present in the Polish opera repertoire, it is rarely experimented with. The younger generation of musicians and music scholars diminishes the value of Moniuszko's work and stays away from it—not least because of its popularity in socialist Poland.[30]

If the national opera is ossified, what does this say about the nation?

The nation's self-image has solidified around outdated forms from nineteenth-century literary culture, as Maria Janion has brilliantly shown. Using tools of postcolonial theory, especially those of Edward Said, Janion describes Poland as a nation with a paradoxical postcolonial mentality that is a result of both its nineteenth and twentieth–century occupations by others and of its unfulfilled dreams of having its own colonies.[31] According to Janion, Poland's current situation is characterized by phantasms of moral and spiritual superiority over the West and a civilizing mission in the East—direct manifestations of the nation's inferiority complex.[32] The sense of an undeserved peripheral status combined with a messianic pride in suffering creates a vicious circle of inferiority and superiority and results in a condition of complete incapacity. These phantasms make Polish culture repeat the same narratives and cling to outdated representations of national identity.[33]

Interestingly, Janion doesn't call for the abandonment of Romantic forms. Hers is a plea for the re-evaluation of the foundational pieces of culture that continue to shape Polish national identity.[34] In order for Poland to overcome its inferiority complex, and to become more diverse culturally, new narratives need to be told, ones that incorporate representations of others, in order to shape a new Polish imaginarium.[35]

## THE SILENCE

The Haitian Revolution "entered history with the peculiar characteristics of being unthinkable even as it happened," in the words of influential anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot.[36] In the late eighteenth century, within the existing philosophical categories introduced by the Enlightenment, no one, whether white or black, could have imagined a successful uprising in a slave-based colony. In his essay "An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-event," Trouillot explains that the revolution challenged even the most radical ontological and political assumptions of its time by upending the very framework in which race, slavery, and colonialism were examined.[37] The failure of these categories led to active denial as many states refused to recognize Haiti as an independent republic. It also led to a failure of narration.

One of the strategies used to silence the revolution has been to call it a "revolt" or "rebellion" when it was in fact a full-blown revolutionary struggle for independence. Another one is simply ignoring Haiti altogether while writing global history, an "ignorance that produces a silence of trivialization."[38] While pointing to this silencing, Trouillot also mentions the Polish historians, who—along with the French and the English—have failed to give it prominence in their narratives.[39]

While nineteenth-century Poles repeatedly rose up against their various occupiers, none of their uprisings was successful; Poland only regained its independence in 1918. Ironically, the Haitian episode might possibly be the only victorious nineteenth-century fight for independence in which Poles participated, which would make it an event worth remembering. When told from a Polish perspective, however, the story of the Haitian Revolution can quickly turn into a story of Polish glory, complete with Polish heroes who recognized the righteous cause and made a decision to support it in opposition to the corrupt agendas of European colonizers. This perspective dangerously approaches one of the silencing strategies—namely, explaining the revolution via external influences.[40]

Along with condemning the revolution's silencing,Trouillot warns its interpreters against the rhetoric of heroism—often exercised by Haitian historians—that glorifies revolutionary leaders, as it lacks criticality and too often serves as legitimization of current power.[41] This warning can be also repeated to the Poles, for whom the half-mythical story can easily become an uncritically heroic one, a compensation for Poland's inferiority complex as described by Janion. Reprising Trouillot's call in this volume—by including his influential essay, published twenty years ago—is not simply to ask historians of Poland for a belated affirmation of the Polish

involvement in this unique struggle. It is rather a call to see that engagement in its proper context.

A slight shift in perspective allows us to assess its historical significance differently, and to see the Polish soldiers not as mythologized heroes but as agents of their own destinies. Crucially, a majority of the few hundred Poles who stayed in Haiti were simple foot soldiers and former peasants. So it may not have been a general longing for Polish independence—as per the common narrative—but specifically the shared experience of exploitation that pushed Polish peasants into sympathizing with Haitian slaves, and maybe even directing their own bayonets against Napoleon. The sociopolitical structure of European serfdom had much in common with the institution of slavery—as Kacper Pobłocki convincingly argues in his essay in this volume. Seen this way, what united these soldiers with the black insurgents—and furthermore, what made them stay in Haiti—would have been a striving for independence not so much from an occupying foreign state, but rather from their landlords and owners.

Encouraged by Dessalines, the Haitian Poles are believed to have changed their surnames as they became citizens of the new republic, dropping their peasant-class ones in favor of those from the Polish nobility. This clearly shows that being given citizenship and, more importantly, land meant a dramatic shift in their social status. In Poland, that shift would only be possible decades later, first in the Austrian territories, where the abolition of serfdom was the result of the same 1846 peasant revolt that echoes through *Halka*'s libretto.

To follow Trouillot's call, then, would not be to stress that the Poles courageously supported the Haitians' struggle for independence, and were granted special privileges in return. Instead, it would be to emphasize that the Poles needed black Haitians and their struggle against slavery to help them gain their own independence—something they couldn't get in Poland itself.

## THE SHOW

There is great potential in this recently rediscovered Polish-Haitian affinity.[42] For contemporary Poland—where diversity of any kind is still often seen as a threat to a narrowly defined national identity—the relatively unknown fact of Polish engagement in the Haitian Revolution can provide a much-needed vantage point on the Polish "postcolonial" mentality, as Maria Janion identifies it. It gives us Poles a way of seeing ourselves not only as victims of imperialist oppression, but also as active (if minor) agents in the history of colonialism.

The fact that many descendants of those Polish soldiers still live in Haiti, in Cazale, gives us a rare opportunity "to take over the external point of view and confront it with our cultivated internal image of ourselves."[43] If we think of national community as shaped by a collection of shared experiences, the Cazalois' own story of origin—which Géri Benoît re-tells in her essay in this volume—is particularly moving, because they tell the story of the late eighteenth to nineteenth–century Polish struggle for national independence as their own.

It was for the descendants of these soldiers who did not return to the motherland, as well as for their friends and neighbors, that *Halka* was staged in the mountain village of Cazale on Saturday, February 7, 2015.

The final shape of the performance in Haiti resulted from a collaborative process, where the original form of the work was adapted to its new setting. Receiving the Cazalois' trust and willingness to collaborate was the decisive moment in C.T. Jasper and Joanna Malinowska's project, which started as a research-based creative experiment but evolved into a more robust cultural interchange. Ultimately, the opera was performed by five soloists and the conductor from the Poznań Opera House, twenty-one musicians from the Holy Trinity Philharmonic Orchestra of Port-au-Prince, and eighteen dancers from Cazale, to an audience of more than one hundred people. (The Polish and Haitian participants also contributed to this book, giving responses to the same set of questions about their national identities, the power of art, and their personal understanding of this shared endeavor's significance.)

*Halka/Haiti* went beyond the regular, institutionalized opera circuit with its purpose-built opera houses—buildings that supported the nation-making processes in nineteenth-century Europe but are associated with a history of colonial domination in the New World. Presented to a very particular audience, the performance added another layer to the complex history of *Halka*'s reception, which was already marked over time by dramatically different political systems. This spatial and contextual repositioning of what is still today a "national opera" provides an intentional counterpoint to its numerous solidifying repetitions. To perform *Halka* in Cazale is to change the opera itself. Precisely because its status is so grounded in the "national," setting the opera's coordinates to 18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W also reorients its national significance. Set in Cazale, the class tension in *Halka* resonates with the shared Polish-Haitian history of actual revolution to connect, for a moment, two culturally and geographically distant communities.

The performance was filmed in order to be presented in the Polish Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale. Exhibited as a multichannel, cinematic

installation recalling the format of painted panoramas, *Halka/Haiti* probes the power of traditional artistic genres to construct national identities in the twenty-first century. By focusing on the community of Cazale, and the relationship between Poles and *Le Poloné*, the performance, the film, and this book all intend to highlight this little-known aspect of Polish-Haitian history. Conceived specifically for the International Art Exhibition in Venice, the world's preeminent presentation of art in a nation-centered framework, this project responds to the Biennale's very premise by presenting a complex intermixing of two national identities.

## CODA

*Dèyè mòn gen mòn* is a Haitian proverb that translates as "behind mountains, there are (more) mountains." The saying can evoke the permanency and irresolvability of any struggle, as traversing one peak means encountering another. But there is also something comforting about this image in a country named after its mountain-filled island. The phrase might also mean "fortune is fickle." In fact, each Haitian I asked explained the proverb differently. Let's leave it at that, agreeing only on the general principle: Beyond the mountains in *Fitzcarraldo*, we might find the Polish mountains from *Halka*, which, in turn, may lead us to the peaks surrounding Cazale.

Notes

1 See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Unthinkable History: Haitian Revolution as Non-Event," in *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 89. Essay reprinted in this volume, 158.

2 Jan Pachonski and Reuel K. Wilson, *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy: A Study of Polish Legions in the Haitian War of Independence 1802–1803,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). Sebastian Rypson reports various historians' accounts of these potential desertions by Polish soldiers, summarizing existing literature: Sebastian Rypson, *Being Poloné in Haiti*, (Warszawa: ASPRA-JR, 2008), 51–62.

3 Nineteenth-century Haitian historian Beaubrun Ardouin directly links Polish soldiers' alleged disobedience in Saint-Marc to their defection to Dessalines and the formation of his guard. See Rypson, *Being Poloné*, 51–52.

4 Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History,* (New York: Picador, 2012), 37–40.

5 Pachonski and Wilson, *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy,* 101–108.

6 For more details, see Géri Benoît 's essay in this volume, 87-103.

7 Dubois, *Haiti*, 37.

8 Richard John Ascarate, "'Have You Ever Seen a Shrunken Head?' The Early Modern Roots of Ecstatic Truth in Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo,*" *PMLA* Vol.122, No. 2 (March, 2007): 484.

9 Holly Rogers, "Fitzcarraldo's Search for Aguirre: Music and Text in the Amazonian Films of Werner Herzog,"

*Journal of the Royal Musical Association,* Vol. 129, No. 1 (2004): 93.

10 Vlado Kotnik, "The Adaptability of Opera: When Different Social Agents Come to Common Ground," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music,* Vol. 44, No. 2 (December 2013): 312.

11 Ryszard Daniel Golianek, "Twórczość operowa Stanisława Moniuszki a idea opery narodowej" in *Opera polska w XVIII i XIX wieku,* ed. M. Jabłoński, J. Staszewski, J. Tatarska, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo PTPN, 2000), 119–128.

12 Aniela Koehlerówna, *Stanisław Moniuszko 1819–1919. Ku czci mistrza w stuletnią rocznicę urodzin.* (Poznań–Warszawa: Księgarnia Św. Wojciecha, 1919), 35. Quote from Golianek, "Twórczość," 121. This author's translation.

13 Ibid., 126–128.

14 Jim Samson. "Halka," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.* Oxford University Press, accessed February 25, 2015, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/O003834.

15 Janusz Pietkiewicz, notes in *W 150-lecie prapremiery w Teatrze Wielkim. 4 stycznia 2008. Stanisław Moniuszko. Halka.* Opera program from the special 150th-anniversary performance at the National Opera in Warsaw, January 4, 2008.

16 Fołtyn also staged another Moniuszko opera, *Straszny Dwór,* in Bucharest, Tokyo, Osaka, and other locations.

17 Maria Fołtyn, *Żyłam sztuką, żyłam miłością,* (Warszawa–Radom: Wydawnictwo i Zakład Poligrafii Instytutu Technologii Eksploatacji, 1997).

18 Ibid.,153.

19 Ibid., 200.

20 Golianek, "Twórczość," 119.

21 Jim Samson, "Halka."

22 Kotnik, "The Adaptability," 308-309.

23 Ibid., 321.

24 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

25 Kotnik, "The Adaptability," 313.

26 Ibid.

27 Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszyczna. Fantazmaty literatury,* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 259.

28 Golianek, "Twórczość," 124–128. As the third requirement of the national opera the author provides including national themes in the narrative, which, however, only relates to the libretto.

29 Ibid.

30 As argued by Jarosław Mianowski, "O trzech kręgach Moniuszkowskiej mitologii. Apologeci, krytycy i socrealiści," in *Opera polska*, 154.

31 Janion, *Niesamowita*, 11-12.

32 Ibid., 322–329.

33 Ibid., 12, 328.

34 Przemysław Czapliński, "Ścieżka w narodowej bibliotece Babel," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 23, 2007, 13.

35 Janion, *Niesamowita*, 329.

36 Trouillot, *Unthinkable History,* 73. This volume, 147.

37 Ibid., 82-83. This volume, 153-154.

38 And even though Susan Buck-Morss has, since the publication of Trouillot's book twenty years ago, placed Haiti at the very center of the narrative in her influential essay "Hegel, Haiti and Universal History" (2000) and book of the same title (2009), this major historical silencing and its causes and effects are still critical to point out today.

39 Ibid., 99. This volume, 165. Trouillot mentions the seminal study on Polish involvement, Pachonski and Wilson's *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy,* as an exception to this rule, in a footnote.

40 Ibid., 103. This volume, 168.

41 Ibid., 105-106. This volume, 169-170. In footnote 65, Trouillot criticizes historian Carolyn Fick for this.

42 Rypson's book from 2008 is the most significant evidence of this re-emerging interest, together with accounts of Jerzy Grotowski's 1980 visit to Cazale. See, e.g., Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Grotowski w gąszczu narracji haitańskich," *Konteksty* 1–2 (2012): 107–117.

43 Ryszard Nycz, "Polish Post-Colonial or Post-Dependence Studies," *Teksty Drugie* No.1 (2014): 9.

# WILSO ANNULYSSE

WHAT DOES BEING HAITIAN MEAN TO YOU?

In my opinion, being Haitian means first and foremost having Haitian nationality, Haitian identity, Haitian soul. It also means being a good patriot. But from a global perspective, you could say that nowadays being Haitian means being miserable, limited, humiliated, ignorant. In 2015, you hear in the media about the public hanging of a Haitian in the Dominican Republic. In this sense, being Haitian is not something to be proud of. We are looked down upon all over the world. For me, being Haitian means having to confront all the world's problems. Because, we shouldn't lie to ourselves, we have to be aware of our own situation. I'm definitely proud to be human because it means that I can make my own efforts to improve—but I'm not so proud of being Haitian. In life, you can improve, no matter where you are.

DOES ART HAVE THE POWER TO REPRESENT IDENTITY?

First of all, what does "art" mean? According to the Larousse Dictionary, art is the expression of an ideal of beauty that corresponds to a determined civilization. Art also refers to the collection of means and traditions that aim toward a certain aesthetic end. In this sense, it's a synonym for ability, communication, and knowledge. According to these definitions, art can represent identity. Art is a great thing; it is the product of human activity where the idea directs itself to the senses, to the emotions, and to the intellect. For all these reasons, art may very well represent a civilization or a nation.

WHY BRING AN OPERA TO THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD?

In order to bring an opera to the other end of the world, one needs to leave Europe for Latin America, travel many miles, and have money at hand too. It's not only two or three people who came to Cazale, but a fair number, plus a group of singers with an orchestra. Organizing an opera like this does not happen overnight. One might do this to present a piece about one's nation. It might be done to show the relationship one has with the country where the opera is shown. Surely, *Halka* is a poem that carries a big lesson: a young peasant is in love with a nobleman, and she drowns in sorrow when he marries a woman from his own class. I would like to congratulate the team for presenting such a beautiful tragedy.

*Translated by Sarah Demeuse*

# PAWEŁ PASSINI

WHAT DOES BEING POLISH MEAN TO YOU?

Poland is a space of encounter; it is the Eastern Gate, a wedding of the familiar with the foreign. To be Polish means to belong to a nation that defines its identity through the union of language and history. Polish culture doesn't depict our identity; it *is* our identity. We live in language, in our songs and books, in our wonderfully heterogeneous culture. Being Polish means being a voice of the many. Polishness is consonance.

DOES ART HAVE THE POWER TO REPRESENT IDENTITY?

Far more than representing identity, art asks questions of it. And these are definitive questions. Who knows this better than we, the children of Grotowski and Kantor?

WHY BRING AN OPERA TO THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD?

In my theatre work it is precisely singing that has proven—again and again—to have the purest and most universal energy. When you sing, you exist for me. Suddenly in your existence, there is room for my sensitive ear, for my focused presence—a space of encounter is created, an encounter that can be, for a moment, complete and beautiful. Singing is like opening your arms—a gesture, repeated ad nauseam by generations of Polish opera singers, that can be traced back to the lament of Halka and Jontek. Somehow we have learned this yet again from our trip to meet our forgotten compatriots in Haiti. And such is the significance of this trip—to remind ourselves where these worn gestures come from and why we still have them. To meet ourselves and to free ourselves. One of our collaborators in Haiti, a man who had just experienced theatre for the first time in his life, tried to explain the meaning of the actor's work to himself like this: "When you can enact something, it means you can evoke it, and that means you are able to free it." Thank you for this forgotten knowledge!

*Translated by Marcin Wawrzyńczak*

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# A PEASANT WOMAN AND A VENGEANCE

## THREE VERSIONS OF HALKA

KATARZYNA CZECZOT

### A ROMANTIC STORY WITH A SOCIAL TOUCH

Halka, the main protagonist of Stanisław Moniuszko's eponymous opera, is a simple highlander peasant woman who, jilted by a lover, loses her mind and throws herself into the river—a type of story definitely not uncommon in nineteenth-century European literature. No wonder, then, that the music critic Józef Sikorski wrote in his review of *Halka*'s 1858 Warsaw premiere, "The libretto's author, Włodzimierz Wolski, didn't particularly rack his brain over the intrigue.... The plot is very common and, one might say, un-Polish."[1] Love, madness, and suicide were some of the preferred literary themes of the era; the suffering of a girl unhappily in love was a staple of romantic sensibility, widespread throughout the continent. Moniuszko's Halka fits into a larger pattern of representations of female characters that Elaine Showalter calls "Opheliac."[2]

However, within this popular nineteenth-century European genre of girls madly in love, *Halka* also represents a particular sub-type, one that could be called "anti-feudal." Here, the tragic love story takes on an overtone of social critique. It is of fundamental importance that Halka is a peasant woman and her seducer comes from the gentry. Hence the whole misfortune: Janusz may love Halka, but he is about to marry a woman from his own sphere. Left with a bastard infant and derided by the village, Halka goes mad when the baby dies, and, as her beloved marries Stolnik's daughter, she drowns herself in a river. Her sad and then lunatic arias can be interpreted as an indictment of the cruel, soulless, and power-abusing Polish gentry (*szlachta*). Significantly, there are numerous hints in the libretto suggesting that Halka's is not an isolated case. Another protagonist, Jontek, a peasant man in love with Halka, sums up Janusz's behavior as "the

common lordly deed." It should be remembered that as the squire of the surrounding villages, Janusz is not only positioned higher by both birth and and wealth than Halka—he is in fact her owner, with the right of unlimited access to her body. His abuse is just part of a wide range of sexual violence that peasant women suffered at the hands of feudal lords and their lackeys. Moniuszko's audience would have been aware of this, and they may have seen *Halka* not only as a plea for the peasantry and an attack on the nobility but also as a more robust critique of the social order, a passionate argument against the feudal system itself.

Indeed, Moniuszko's peer, Karol Baliński—the poet, activist, and, interestingly, advocate for the abolishment of class privileges—considered *Halka* a dangerous work. For him, the story of the seduction of a peasant woman was primarily about social conflict. In 1848, when *Halka* was being considered for staging in Warsaw, after the first performance in Vilnius, Baliński wrote to Józef Sikorski, a great admirer of Moniuszko's, to warn that pieces like *Halka* are either "illogical (for the peasant won't read them or, if he hears them at all, won't understand them) or harmful (if he actually hears and understands them), since they are hateful. They may be impressive, but they'll never be Christian."[3]

It is precisely this view of *Halka*—as an appeal on behalf of the oppressed peasantry or as an actual condemnation of feudalism—that I would like to discuss here. What I am interested in, above all, is the transition, usually disregarded in the literature of the subject, from being "anti-nobility" to being "anti-feudal." Is Moniuszko advocating the moral improvement of the upper classes, or is he advocating a revolution? And how do these views relate to another label that was given to *Halka* early on—right after the Warsaw premiere in 1858—and is still present, namely that of a Polish "national opera"?

## REVOLUTIONARY OPERA?

During the era of the People's Republic of Poland, the question about *Halka*'s anti-feudalism was usually answered emphatically in the affirmative. Moniuszko's opera was a perfect candidate for a new cultural canon adhering firmly to the socialist hierarchy of values; the opera presented an episode in the history of class struggle and took the side of the working class. The program from Leon Schiller's 1953 adaptation serves as an interesting testimony to the values of the socialist-realist era. *Halka* was one of the last works staged by the director, who had debuted in 1917 and whose professional career had peaked during the interwar period, when his shows were

praised for openly confronting burning social issues. In his staging of *Halka*, Schiller expresses his leftist sympathies, seeking to present the opera as realistic drama, specific to its time and place, and preoccupied with the plight of the peasant class. This effort is served, in part, by ethnographically accurate stage design. Moreover, the program includes a telling biographical note on Moniuszko, written by Schiller, presenting the composer as social activist, vigorously devoted to the peasant cause: "Acquainted with the country folk from childhood, he was well familiar with their customs, songs, poetry, and their misery."[4] Like many of Moniuszko's biographers before and after, Schiller mentions the composer's paternal uncle, Dominik Moniuszko, who had famously emancipated the serfs on his small estate, introducing instead a rent system, proceeds from which were partly used to fund local schools. Calling his views "radical-democratic," Schiller notes that he had "left executive and judiciary matters up to the peasants to settle, banning them only from resorting to physical punishment, which he deemed detrimental to human dignity."[5] At the time, this was a bold experiment. Stanisław Moniuszko's ideological formation was completed, Schiller continued, by political events, including the Galician peasant revolt of 1846. Consequently, according to Schiller, Moniuszko commissioned the libretto of his next opera, which was to tell the story of a peasant woman, from a "fervent advocate of the peasant cause,"[6] the young poet Włodzimierz Wolski.

Most Polish researchers publishing during the socialist era tend to approach Moniuszko's biography along similar lines, catering to the socialist regime's demand for historical figures of activists working on behalf of disadvantaged social classes. Witold Rudziński was one biographer who probably contributed more than any other to preserving Moniuszko's image as an artist "sympathetic to the peasant cause."[7] In his 1970 monographic publication, Rudziński argues that the composer stood out from the rest of the Polish left of his time: "While many democrats, disappointed and embittered, said that the peasants didn't deserve to have freedom, Moniuszko wanted to know the reasons for the class hatred dividing the nation."[8] This echoes his interpretation of *Halka*, which traces it to the 1846 Galician peasant uprising even more directly than Schiller's does. The plot, Rudziński writes, "is a kind of commentary on these events, seeking to highlight the underlying reasons for the peasant's hatred of the landlord."[9]

Present in most studies of *Halka*, the context of the "Galician slaughter," an 1846 peasant uprising aimed against the nobles, is rather curious. We are talking about a revolt that led to the collapse of the extant social order—one that, according to many historians, had been directly provoked by the sexual violence that peasant daughters suffered from the landlords and their

underlings.[10] By burning down manor houses and killing their owners, the peasants—whose status at the time wasn't much different from that of plantation slaves in the United States—won freedom. Serfdom was soon abolished in the part of Poland under Austrian rule. To mention this event in the context of a tragic story about an abused peasant woman is highly significant, attesting to a tendency to consider Moniuszko's opera as something more than a critique of feudalism. Schiller openly calls it a revolutionary work. But is it really?

## BLOODY PROTOTYPES

Revisiting the prehistory of *Halka*, namely the eponymous poem that is considered the libretto's prototype, proves highly instructive. Wolski didn't live to see this first *Halka* in print; it was only published in 1951 in the periodical *Pamiętnik Literacki*, from a manuscript that is full of censorial, and probably authorial, interventions which make it difficult even to read in places. The text was published again in the anthology *Cyganeria warszawska* (The Warsaw Bohemians); that book's editor, Stefan Kawyn, suggests that Wolski decided against publishing the work precisely because of the Russian censors' "significant interventions, which had distorted [the poem's] artistic form and ideological/intellectual logic."[11] The divergences between Wolski's poem and his libretto for *Halka* are many and wide-ranging. In the original version, the landlord actually marries Halka, who is only brought to death by his mother, who can't abide her son marrying beneath his class. The narrative structure differs too, as the poem is ostentatiously achronological, full of ellipses and sudden breaks in thought. But what seems most significant is the different mood. The earlier *Halka*, dating from 1843, is gloomy, ominous—there is nothing in it of the sentimental melodrama. It doesn't arouse pity or compassion. It arouses fear.

Wolski was associated with *Przegląd Naukowy*, a periodical published by the socialist Edward Dembowski. Much inspired by the likes of Saint-Simon and known because of his political sympathies as the "Red Lord," Dembowski sought to spark a radical popular revolution that would not only win Poland back the freedom it had lost with the Third Partition of 1795, but also abolish feudalism. In 1843, Dembowski published in *Przegląd* Wolski's poem *Father Hilary*, a provocative "confession" that began with the words, "I am a serf and slave by name and kin." The poetic account of the peasants' abject living conditions and the bloody vengeance perpetrated (or just dreamed about) by the protagonist was hailed by Dembowski as a masterpiece. And *Halka* was meant precisely as a kind of follow-up to *Father Hilary*.

Like *Father Hilary*, the 1843 *Halka* is about love and vengeance. The poem opens with a ghastly description of a corpse. Standing in despair over the dead body of her daughter, Halka's mother swears vengeance. A series of flashbacks tell us what happened. When Halka's husband had gone to the war, his mother started harassing the girl. She had her bound, birched, and chased naked through the village. Halka's mother avenges her death by pulling the murderer's heart out and placing it, still bleeding, by her daughter's corpse. A sense of uncanny horror, as if from a Pre-Romantic German ballad, is evoked not only by the bloody frenzy but also by descriptions of a space haunted by departed spirits. The ghost of the dead peasant girl speaks mercifully ("Oh mother, do not avenge yourself on a mother!"), but the voice of the place itself proves more powerful. Sketching the image of a cursed land, a space tainted with innocent blood, Wolski makes it cry out for justice:

> And outside the echo howls:
> "The girl lives, vengeance lives!"[12]

According to the majority of researchers, *Halka* was inspired by Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki's piece *Góralka* (Highlander Woman), featured in a volume published in 1840. A generation older than Wolski, Wójcicki is best known for his collective portraits of communities such as the Warsaw artists or students, but he also collected folk tales and legends; *Highlander Woman* belongs to this genre. A cross between a drama and narrative prose, it follows more or less the same tragic plot as *Halka*. There is a blasé nobleman named Lutomir, a peasant girl he seduces—also named Halka!—and a gentlewoman he eventually marries, driving his former lover to madness and eventually, suicide. The divergences are few but highly significant. Lutomir, for example, also commits suicide. Rather than exploiting the motif of peasant vengeance, Wójcicki plays out the folk principle of symmetry between crime and punishment, the latter meted out by supernatural forces. There is no peasant woman with a bleeding heart here; instead, water nymphs and vampires roam the area, "hungry for young blood."[13]

A comparison of these three texts could not be more telling. In *Góralka*, justice is dispensed by non-human forces—creatures of an unclear ontological status, ghosts and nymphs. In Wolski's early poem, it is demanded by the victims. In the opera libretto, in turn, justice is indefinitely postponed; instead of a vengeance-thirsty peasant mother or fearsome apparitions, we get a sensitive girl who merely arouses compassion.

The changes that Wolski's poem underwent circa 1847, when at Moniuszko's request, the author began rewriting it as a libretto, have been

interpreted in various ways. Leon Schiller disregards them altogether; admitting that the earlier poem depicted the misery of the peasants in a "much more drastic, perhaps even wild, Romantic, fashion," Schiller argues it was nonetheless "imbued with the same emancipatory social ideology, and reflected the same humanistic outlook that determined the lasting value of Moniuszko's work."[14] Witold Rudziński in fact praises the composer's role in revising the plot: whereas the poem was about an "exceptional case, the landlord being noble-minded and courageous," the opera "typifies the situation."[15] Tadeusz Kaczyński writes along similar lines in *A Stage History of* Halka: "The plot became less bloody but thus truer and emotionally more powerful."[16]

One finds it hard to agree with these opinions. A comparison of Wolski's poem with Wójcicki's *Góralka* makes us realize that the story about a peasant girl abused by the landlord changed in yet another way. As author of the libretto, Wolski not only cut the motif of vengeance and would-be punishment; he also softened the setting with lighter, milder hues, removing anything potentially dreadful and silencing the ghosts of the dead. In short, he exorcised the spooky original.

## NATIONAL ERASURE

In the postwar literature, many facts from Moniuszko's life were manipulated to conform to the propagandistic image of a left-winger deeply devoted to the peasant cause. As Agnieszka Topolska demonstrates in her doctoral dissertation on the construction of the myth of Moniuszko as a "national composer," authors determinedly ignored evidence suggesting that *Halka* was originally conceived in 1843, which meant it could not have been a response to the 1846 Galician peasant revolt.[17] Also treated in a somewhat offhand manner was the fact that in the documents left by Moniuszko there are virtually no references to the issue of the abolishment of serfdom. "One needs not attach much importance to this," wrote Rudziński. "No artist is obliged to express his preoccupations otherwise than in his work."[18]

This lack of peasant-related themes may in fact have been a deliberate omission on Moniuszko's part; preparing a staging of *Halka* in Warsaw, then part of the Russian Empire, he had to reckon with the censors. But this can hardly be the whole explanation. Let us notice that another of Moniuszko's pieces with a claim to "national opera," *Straszny dwór* (The Haunted Manor), is based on a similar gesture of spatial exorcism: as the plot progresses, the manor is no longer haunted. The vows of never marrying made by the

brothers Stefan and Zbigniew are broken, and the lads get betrothed to two fine ladies. Any hint of cultural transgression, of non-heteronormativity, is silenced on behalf of a traditional love story. The "haunted manor" turns out to be a Polish manor house. The stakes in the process, crucial for the formation of *Halka*'s libretto, of taming space and chasing away the bloody apparitions, are similar: the overriding objective is to inspire a national community. Even at the expense of the exploited peasants.

As Przemysław Wielgosz rightly notes, "numerous historians and artists, notably Wyspiański, made sure that the 'Galician slaughter' was remembered as something barbarian, inhuman, and completely irrational."[19] In Polish culture, the year 1846 left drastic images of vengeful peasants armed with scythes and pitchforks, or landlords sawed in half, rather than a triumphant sense that serfdom had been abolished. Simultaneously, another process was taking place—one in which the national aspect of the story was played up, and the peasant revolt overshadowed by a patriotic narrative identical with the history of Polish insurgencies against Russia. Moniuszko's opera performs this kind of erasure. Even though Schiller and others exert themselves in finding its revolutionary element, *Halka* turns out to be a symptomatic work—one that, while castigating the abuse and exploitation of serfs, also rules out the possibility of their taking action against their oppressors.

Numerous scholars have also pointed out *Halka*'s similarity to Daniel Auber's opera *La muette de Portici* (The Mute Girl of Portici).[20] Indeed, the opening scene is almost identical: the wedding of Alfonso and Elvira is interrupted as a mute girl, whom the viceroy's son has seduced and abandoned, rushes in. The ending is the same too: the mute girl of Portici drowns herself. In Auber, however, her tragic fate sparks a revolution, as Neapolitans stage an uprising against Habsburg Spanish rule. At the end of *Halka*, by contrast, the peasant literally offers the gentleman a hand. The revolution has been cancelled.

*Translated by Marcin Wawrzyńczak*

Notes

1 Józef Sikorski, "Halka. Opera w czterech aktach do słów Włodzimierza Wolskiego, muzyka Stanisława Moniuszki," *Ruch Muzyczny* 1 (1858), 1.

2 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

3 Tadeusz Kaczyński, *Dzieje sceniczne Halki* (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo

Muzyczne, 1969), 11.

4 Leon Schiller, "Stanisław Moniuszko," in: *Halka. Program opery* (Warszawa: Państwowa Opera w Warszawie, 1953), 6.

5 Ibid.

6 Schiller, "Stanisław Moniuszko," 11.

7 Agnieszka Topolska, *Mit Stanisława Moniuszki jako wieszcza narodowego. Studium na podstawie polskiego piśmiennictwa w latach 1858–1989* [The myth of Stanisław Moniuszko as a national composer. Study based on Polish literature, 1858–1989], Ph.D. thesis (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydział Historyczny, 2012), 199, accessed February 24, 2015, http://depotuw.ceon.pl/handle/item/121.

8 Witold Rudziński, *Moniuszko i jego muzyka* (Warszawa: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1970), 62.

9 Idem, "Przedmowa," in: Zdzisław Jachimiecki, *Moniuszko* (Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1983), 7.

10 Przemysław Wielgosz, "Pięćset lat kacetu. Ojczyzna-pańszczyzna," *Lewica.pl*, accessed February 20, 2015, http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=26675&tytul=Przemys%B3aw-Wielgosz:-Pi%EA%E6set-lat-kacetu.-Ojczyzna-pa%F1szczyzna.

11 Stefan Kawyn, "Komentarze," in: idem, *Cyganeria warszawska* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2004), 161.

12 Włodzimierz Wolski, "Halka," in: *Cyganeria warszawska*, 204.

13 Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki, *Stare gawędy i obrazy, t. II* (Warszawa: Nakładem Gustawa Sennewalda Księgarza, przy ulicy Miodowej, 1840), 201.

14 Schiller, "Stanisław Moniuszko," 11.

15 Rudziński, Halka *Stanisława Moniuszki* (Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1972), 17.

16 Kaczyński, *Dzieje sceniczne...*, 11.

17 Topolska, *Mit Moniuszki...*, 182.

18 Rudziński, *Stanisław Moniuszko. Studia i materiały, cz. I* (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1955), 24–25.

19 Wielgosz, "Pięćset lat kacetu".

20 Kazimierz Nowowiejski, "Fenella i Halka," *Życie Literackie*, 36 (1958).

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WHAT DOES BEING HAITIAN MEAN TO YOU?

Being Haitian means being the carrier of a history full of heroism and humanism, and always having to declare it to the world. It is also being the heir to a weighty legacy made of *métisse* cultures that borrow from ancestral traditions and a unique patrimony. It is, in the end, the pride of being Haitian despite my incoherencies and excesses.

DOES ART HAVE THE POWER TO REPRESENT IDENTITY?

A people's culture is always expressed through its traditions and its customs, which are strong elements of one's identity. One finds that different people from around the world express their traditions and customs through dance, song, music, painting, theatre, and so on.

WHY BRING AN OPERA TO THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD?

In the framework of cultural exchanges, artistic events have always helped one become better known to others. They also promote cultural diversity. In the specific case of your opera project, it's about regaining the relationship with the descendants of Polish soldiers who enlisted in the Napoleonic army and who embraced the cause of the insurgent blacks in the Haitian War of Independence in 1803. It is about reuniting with the Cazalois through Polish art.

*Translated by Sarah Demeuse*

WHAT DOES BEING POLISH MEAN TO YOU?

I personally think that it's a constant conflict, a sense of being torn between aspiring to be significant and having a peripheral identity. It is an acute sense of exclusion regardless of context, which results from a demanding attitude towards oneself and one's environment. My observations and conversations with Haitians, not only those of Polish origin, suggest that we have a lot in common here.

DOES ART HAVE THE POWER TO REPRESENT IDENTITY?

Art is a great tool for testing the shifts and limits of identity, for delineating things that are repressed from memory or symbolically inaccessible. I believe that through art identity can be shaped and understood as a shifting concept, as a "work in progress." Artistic practice that is exercised on "our" behalf dares to explore peripheries—places both dangerous and liminal—which are the possible foundation of identity.

WHY BRING AN OPERA TO THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD?

Staging a Polish opera in Haiti, in a village with allegedly Polish roots, which neither side wants to fully identify with, has a touch of a mild colonial invasion. Organizing the event disturbed the usual rhythm of everyday life in the village. The artists asked for the sawmill to cease operations for a while and for the automobile traffic to stop; from the nearby residents we expected cooperation, presence, and attention during the show, and perhaps even gratitude for sharing some Polish cultural heritage. The response of the villagers was mixed, and this is where we encounter a paradox. On the one hand, forcing the cultural patterns of our identity on others, we perform our own vivisection; on the other, we rouse the Haitian public, the 'victim' of our actions, to resist and thus to defend their own cultural sovereignty.

So in the context of that event, bringing an opera to the other end of the world may be an act of colonial supremacy, one of few such acts in Polish history. I think we long for it because history has been harsh on us; we have been—and still are—the subject of colonial oppression.

*Translated by Marcin Wawrzyńczak*

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# DEVELOPING CAZALE

## PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

GÉRI BENOÎT

### THE COMMUNITY

In its common usage in Haiti, "community" usually refers to the physical space where people live.[1] The geographical reference may also connote what kind of person one is. In Creole—the only language spoken by all Haitians and one of Haiti's two official languages, with French—one would ask: *Moun ki bò ou yé?* or *Moun ki koté ou yé*? (literally, "Person of where are you?" or: "Where are you from?"). A person's place of origin is considered crucial and is usually part of the introductory conversation with any new acquaintances. This is not because Haiti is immense or because people travel extensively inside the country. The reason for this is historical.

Under the regime begun in 1957 by François (Papa Doc) Duvalier, the rural people of Haiti suffered acute political pressure, which prompted large migrations toward urban areas—especially to the capital, Port-au-Prince, where most of the lines of government, power, commerce, education, and every other important feature of social life converged. It was therefore likely that nearly anyone you met in Port-au-Prince came from someplace else, or that his or her parents did. So in that initial conversation the answer would usually be: "I am from…," or "I was born in Port-au-Prince, but my parents are from…." If someone said that they were from Cazale, three associations would likely spring to mind: people of Polish descent, the massacre of 1969, and the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1983. This essay will tell the story of Cazale's past and present, while also addressing the more general question of how communities can utilize their heritage and sense of belonging to mobilize all their human and physical resources for development and self-improvement.

## POLISH BEGINNINGS

The story of how Cazale came to be where it is begins more than two hundred years ago, during the climactic stages of the struggle for independence. During the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue, Napoleon sent about 5,000 Polish troops to the colony to help the French army supress the revolt. Surprisingly, some of the Polish soldiers changed sides and fought alongside the slaves, because they realized they were fighting for the same ideals: freedom and ownership of their land. Once Haiti won its independence, some of these Poles decided to stay and make Haiti their new home. Researchers have reported that in 1805 Jean-Jacques Dessalines—later, Emperor Jacques I, our first head of state—personally gave land in Cazale to the Polish soldiers, making it the largest and most accessible Polish settlement in Haiti. Because it was situated off the main road, Cazale was considered a safe place for these new citizens. And since the flora and fauna of Cazale were rich, and because most of the Polish volunteers in the Légions Polonaises were believed to be peasants before being forced by circumstances to become soldiers, historians seem to think that this was a most fitting site.

The general Jean-Jacques Dessalines was made emperor under the post-independence Constitution of Haiti, promulgated on May 20, 1805. In Article 12, this founding document also stated: "No white man, of whatever nation he may be, shall put his foot on this territory with the title of master or proprietor, neither shall he, in the future, acquire any property therein."[2] The Poles, however, were among those granted exceptions in Article 13: "The preceding article cannot in the smallest degree affect white women who have been naturalized Haitians by the government. Nor does it extend to children already born or that may be born of said women. The Germans and Polish naturalized by the government are also included in the dispositions of the present article." In order to reward these Polish soldiers for their support, the new government had already issued the necessary decrees to naturalize them and give them Haitian citizenship. This article of the Constitution now guaranteed the Poles the rights of ownership that accompanied the status of citizen.[3]

According to the Napoleon Foundation archives, about four hundred men of the Légions Polonaises returned to Europe. It is believed that the Poles who stayed in Haiti were not officers, but rather foot soldiers with no formal or military education. With the passing of time, their names began to sound more Haitian. By adopting the lifestyle of the Cazalois who had lived there before, these people became Cazalois themselves. Slowly, most of the original Polish names have vanished from official records, and though renowned academics such as Professor Józef Kwaterko agree on this

story of origin,[4] only a few names—Lovinski, Belnowski, Sobieski, Laboda—remained in the documents. The known part of the Polish soldiers' story only covers a three-to-four-year span, and it mostly relates to their journey to Haiti and their participation in the final battle, la Bataille de Vertières. Either too little has been written about the rest of their story or the documents themselves have been lost. Since the soldiers were all men and family storytelling in Haiti is mostly the affair of women, it is understandable that most of the historical facts would disappear with scarcely a trace. There is no museum, and there is only one compilation that tries to tell the story of the Poles of Cazale, prepared in 2003 by a local organization called Institute of Women Entrepreneurs (IFE), which was started by the author of this essay.[5] Even the cemetery, where one can find a few gravestones with Polish names, tends to be neglected and is at times almost completely overrun by creepers. Cazale is therefore struggling to find the means to recover its origins for presentation to others and to market itself as a documented historic site and a plausible touristic one.

Historians Jan Pachonski and Reuel Wilson offer the most complete account of the origin of these Polish soldiers.[6] The fate of the Polish people, like that of the Haitians, seemed to be in the hands of France at the end of the eighteenth century. Poland had started to disappear from European maps in 1772 with its first partition, when it was parceled out among its economically and militarily powerful neighbors: Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The second partition happened in 1773, and Poland entirely disappeared from the map two years later, after the third partition. Poles turned to revolutionary France for inspiration, hoping to find the means toward their own freedom under the banner proclaiming the universal rights of man. Polish exiles (officers, soldiers, and volunteers) under the leadership of General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski pledged their services to Napoleon Bonaparte in exchange for his help in regaining Poland's independence. In 1797 they formed the Polish Legions, an army of about 10,000 men, led by Polish officers and outfitted in its own distinctive Polish uniforms. A few years later, some of these soldiers eventually found themselves dispatched from their base in Genoa and Livorno—not to liberate Poland but to suppress Haiti's liberation—arriving in May of 1802 for service under Bonaparte's brother-in-law, General Charles Leclerc.

An uprising of African slaves during the early years of the French Revolution had sparked a decade-long struggle for control of the island, in which the forces of General Toussaint-Louverture, a freed slave of the African diaspora, finally prevailed. Louverture had consistently pledged his allegiance to France, but he governed the island autonomously. Now Leclerc

had orders to put this "upstart" on a ship to France, and reinstate slavery, restoring the colony of Saint-Domingue to its former status as the crown jewel of the French Empire.

The Polish troops were inappropriately dressed for the tropics, but that was only the beginning of their maladaption to the role. It seemed clear Bonaparte would not keep his word, and they felt nothing in common with the French soldiers in Haiti, whom they later remembered as arrogant, brutal, and inhumane. Most importantly, they had come to see in the black slaves they were supposed to be fighting against the mirror image of their own longing for independence and freedom from occupation. Pachonski and Wilson report that the Poles not only shared the blacks' ideals but shared food and friendship with them as well. Contemporaneous reports describe Poles deserting to fight alongside blacks, and it is said that at one point General Dessalines had a thirty-man honor guard called "Les Polonais."

By the war's end on November 20, 1803, most of the Polish Legionnaires had either died of yellow fever or been killed in action. A few departed for Jamaica, Cuba, or the United States. Only about 240 legionnaires are known to have stayed in Haiti and been granted citizenship as Haitians in 1805. Pachonski and Wilson are unsure if they stayed by choice or by force of circumstances. What can be said is that the majority of those who remained settled in Cazale and married local women, either Creoles or former slaves who had originally come from Benin or Sierra Leone. Unlike the remaining French, the Poles were among the few white men whose lives were spared from Dessalines's order to eliminate all white men by *Coupe têt, boulé Kay* ("Cut off their heads and burn their houses"). Polish men joined with local women and men as inhabitants of Cazale. For years to come, the people of Cazale were therefore referred to as *moun rouge*, or "light-skinned people." In *Présence Polonaise en Haïti*, six full pages show local people with the light eyes and high cheekbones of their Slavic ancestors.[7] However, one needs to always keep in mind that the Imperial Constitution of Jacques I, in Article 14 declared : "All acception [sic] of colour among the children of one and the same family, of whom the chief magistrate is the father, being necessarily to cease, the Haytians shall hence forward be known only by the generic appellation of Blacks."[8]

## COLOR AND CLASS

In Haiti, class distinction based on color goes back a long way, to the Spanish and French occupation of Saint-Domingue in the seventeenth century and

the establishment of the Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas. Black slaves had been imported from the Songhai and Yoruba empires in Nigeria and Benin. Class distinctions emerged between those who worked in the field and were blackest (and often newly arrived) and those who worked in the house (and were sometimes the offspring of white male owners). This hierarchy created a bitterness among the slaves—one which persisted over time, even as they confronted white oppression. During the battle for independence, Europeans and Americans feared that the first black state in the Americas would inspire slave insurrections in other colonies and in the Southern U.S. That is why they ostracized newly independent Haiti. After the war, General Dessalines had all the whites assassinated, except for the French doctors and the Polish people, in accordance with the Imperial Constitution. That, however, did not settle the matter of color even then, and Article 14 of the Imperial Constitution, as quoted above, clearly stated that all Haitians should be called "Blacks," regardless of their actual skin color. Well before independence, the rebel generals and their armies were divided along color lines. This distinction was underlined with Dessalines's death, when black-skinned Christophe became king in the North, in 1811, and the mulatto Pétion became president in the West, in 1808. After Pétion's death, his mulatto friend Boyer stepped in, to be followed in turn by Geffrard, also a mulatto. Thus the color hierarchy became firmly established. The poor masses were blacks who spoke mostly Creole, had little access to education, and practiced Vodou. The elite, on the other hand, were generally light-skinned, well-educated, French-speaking Roman Catholics.

During the war for independence, factions had at various times sought alliances with outside powers to gain an internal advantage. This pattern reemerged in 1914, when the Americans invaded Haiti with the support of the elite and stayed until 1934 to protect U.S. investment in the Haitian National Bank and the Haitian Railroad Company. Americans owned these holdings via elite proxies, circumventing Haitian laws prohibiting any foreigner from being a sole owner of a property or businesses. While the U.S. Marines administered the country, they also organized elections so that the mulatto Sudré Dartiguenave would lead the Senate. They also created the Garde d'Haiti, the foundation of the Armed Forces, which was composed almost exclusively of mulattoes. A new black middle class emerged under President Estimé in 1946, but it was Duvalier who, with his pro-black speech, and deliberate sponsoring of blacks, encouraged their social and political participation. Despite this rhetoric, however, Duvalier left economic power in the hands of the mulatto elite, which is where it remains today. The "color problem" has never been resolved and remains a potent

issue that can be tapped for political advantage whenever necessary. Today, in 2015, some people in Haiti are back to using the concept of *tirouge* to differentiate light-skinned people, and many ordinary citizens believe that the government still grants these people privileged treatment.

According to the people of Cazale in particular, being identified by their skin color involves a caricature that distorts rather than describes them. The Cazalois are peasants and farmers, and as the Haitian proverb puts it, "Rich blacks are mulattoes, and poor mulattoes are blacks." By this logic, the people of Cazale could only be considered black, no matter the color of their eyes and skin and even if we are now back to referring to light-skinned people as *tirouge*.

## THE MASSACRE OF 1969

Color has persistently been a crucial political factor in Cazale's history. The political party PEP (Parti d'Entente Populaire) was established in Cazale in 1966.[9] The town also became the "base of resistance" for intellectuals from Port-au-Prince who had studied in Europe. They felt secure here because the community shared their political views, and they blended in perfectly with the villagers of Polish descent. That is why Alix Lamaute and Roger Méhu, activists not originally from Cazale, came there to hide in 1967. Two yeas later, in 1969, those two, and many others, were also to die in Cazale. That year will be remembered as one of the saddest under the Duvalier regime. Hundreds died nationwide in what was seen as a campaign of extermination against progressive youth.

Duvalier had steadily tightened his grip on Haiti in the preceding years. After winning the elections of 1957, he was fraudulently reelected in 1961 and organized a referendum in 1964 to make himself President for Life. From then on, his only campaign was to eliminate anyone who disagreed with his views. Supported by the United States, which in the early 1960s needed an ally against Cuba, Duvalier had only to label his adversaries as "communists" to get rid of them without any outcry, since the international human rights organizations were only beginning to emerge. In 1969, Nelson Rockefeller's visit to Haiti confirmed Duvalier's power. Most politicians in the opposition had either been killed or sent into exile. Intellectuals had also fled the country, to teach in French-speaking Africa and Canada. Yet, a new breed of militants in their twenties was emerging. Although inspired by Che Guevara, the Cuban Revolution, and Mao Tse Tung, mostly they had humanitarian and democratic ideas and wanted to change things at home. In 1968–69, a national campaign of arrests swept Haiti, from Port-au-Prince

to Cap-Haïtien, in places including Arcahaie, Plaine du Cul-de-Sac, La Tremblay, and of course, Cazale. Duvalier did not discriminate among his victims, killing men and women, young and old, light-skinned and black. The people in Cazale had never trusted Duvalier and did not vote for him in the 1957 elections that established his reign. This led, they believed, to their village being economically marginalized while the nearby town of Cabaret was rewarded. Built in the seventeenth century, Cabaret was renamed Duvalierville in the early 1960s because it was to be the model town of the "progressive" Duvalier regime. The town had been selected for "special attention" because its inhabitants had supported Papa Doc en masse in 1957.[10] A decade after those first elections, the people of Cazale were victimized for the second time as a result of the Cabaretians' denunciations of the activities of Cazale's youth.

If the village's light-skinned population stood out for their resistance, for standing up to the atrocities of the paramilitary corps known as the Tonton Macoutes, this population also became a target. But if they were not part of any mulatto elite, what threat did they pose to Duvalier? The answer to that question takes us back a long way.

Tensions had already existed between the people of Cazale and those of Cabaret. Certain facts reported by elderly residents of Cazale show that the roots of this friction run deep along economic lines. Between 1915 and 1919, when the peasantry under Charlemagne Péralte conducted guerilla warfare against the Marines, the whites, and the occupation, notable members of that campaign came from Cazale, including Jean-Pierre Isaac Belneau (Papa Blanc) and Da Agénor Garçon Benoît. In 1955, people from Cazale burnt their own market in protest against the Magloire government and its followers, who were abusing the peasants. In 1966 Jérémie Eliazer, who was a member of the Prefecture, eliminated the administrative taxes imposed by the Cabaret section chief, Saintervil Dupervil. This incident was considered a declaration of war between Cabaret and Cazale. In 1968 the people of Cazale rebelled against paying taxes on sales of agricultural products and for their use of river water. Jérémie Eliazer, who led the uprising, humiliated the tax collector, a man from Cabaret named Neker Jean-Baptiste, by forcing him—in front of the whole population—to cross the river, over which there was no bridge, with his shoes on. A short time later the Tontons Macoutes came for Eliazer and his friends, but they had already escaped.

That brings us to the time of the Massacre. The Tonton Macoutes were after anyone who opposed their power. On Holy Thursday, March 27, 1969, they came to Cazale from Cabaret and started burning down houses and raping women. On Good Friday, March 28, they arrested two members

of the resistance group, Saintibert Valmont and Joseph Victomé. That is when other members of the resistance burned down the office of the representative of the Prefect and took down Duvalier's black-and-red flag and ran up the pre-1957, blue-and-red flag of Haiti. On Saturday, March 29, the regime struck back. Jérémie Eliazer's daughter, who lived in Port-au-Prince, was arrested and held for twenty-four hours—enough time for her father to learn about it and turn himself in. The next day, military men came to Cazale and started the massacre. When it was over, the bodies of twenty-five people were counted dead,[11] and forty others had disappeared forever. In addition, eighty-two houses were looted and then torched. Mills for corn and rice were also destroyed. The army carried off whatever bags of grain they needed and burned the rest. Cattle met the same fate. Women were raped and forced to dance with the soldiers, who lingered in the town to celebrate their "victory."

As for the missing, they joined the thousands who were "forced to disappear" under Duvalier. In international human rights law, forced disappearance is considered a war crime and includes "unlawful confinement, failure to allow due process, and failure to allow communication between the arrested person and the outside world. It often involves torture and cruel, inhuman treatment, and too commonly, it involves murder."[12] Forced disappearance is a form of political repression; the objective is not simply the victim's capture and subsequent maltreatment. The names of individuals belonging to the Tonton Macoutes were rarely disclosed, and this anonymity gave them impunity, creating a state of uncertainty and terror in both the families of victims and society as a whole.

After the massacre, the economic activities of the village never fully recovered. Some families were wiped out; many who escaped had lost their homes and did not dare rebuild locally. Some even left the country. The Duvaliers, father and son, never tried to help or make amends. One of the most serious side effects of the 1969 massacre was to disrupt the relationship between generations. Elders were seen as powerless, and they saw themselves the same way. The most talented and dedicated leaders among the young were assassinated. Only now do senior citizens share their wisdom—their accumulated métis knowledge about the history of Cazale and its people—with the new generation. This transmission is vital, since nearly all of that history is oral rather than written, and in the silence following the massacre, the links to the past threatened to snap one by one as old people died. The children and young adults can bring a fresh approach to the new debates that are forming. Local officials and the traditional leaders have the political savvy to keep the community rooted in reality, and young

energetic leaders will hopefully begin to emerge once again to keep the community pointed toward a better future.

## WHERE IS CAZALE TODAY?

But where exactly is Cazale, the place, to be found? To answer properly, one must first understand the administrative subdivisions of Haiti. There are ten departments, with forty-two districts and 140 towns, each divided into communal sections or villages, totaling 565. Cazale is located in the Ouest Department and is one of four communal sections of Cabaret, which was declared a town in 1934 and maintained that status under the 1987 Constitution that prompted Decentralization. Cabaret covers an area of 226.85 km$^2$ and has a population of about 80,000. While most villages around Cabaret are on the coast, its most famous, Cazale, is inland, 11 kilometers from the national highway. The road to Cazale is unpaved and often impassable when there are heavy rains.

In 1999 the population of Cazale was estimated to be 21,424—living on 111 km$^2$ divided in eleven *habitations*. By 2014, the number of inhabitants had swelled to 35,000. To this day, the village's soil is very rich, and though no special care is given to its agriculture, it produces the best "*mangoes franciques*" in the country (dixit former Agriculture Minister François Séverin) and a large yield of bananas, sold in the weekly Tuesday market. The land for the marketplace was donated by Lydia Belneau in 1999, with construction starting in 2003. Part of the field was also used to build the only public high school. Since March of 1999, electricity, telephone service, and running water have been available. However, the electrical plant is no longer in use, because the community didn't organize to pay for the necessary fuel. Now, those who can afford them have their own generators or solar panels. The only medical clinic has been under renovation for a couple of years, because the work is often slowed down by disruptions which have led to calls for increased police presence. Fortunately, the medical personnel has been reinforced, mostly by doctors from Cazale and by medical students who have returned from their schooling in Cuba. Residents no longer need go to Cabaret for the most elementary care.

Education, however, remains a major concern. There are seven registered primary schools and two secondary schools. The teachers at these schools are assigned by the Ministry of Education, but they hardly get their paychecks on time. There are no professional schools. Saint Michel church, which collapsed in 1998, was rebuilt with the help of the Catholic Church and with money raised by emigrant citizen associations in the U.S. These

days, transport is provided by a handful of small buses and by the many motorbikes that make the 11-km round-trip to the main road throughout the day. The drivers complain about the road conditions, and their concern is widely shared since the road's disrepair marks the whole community as being undeserving of development (though the truth is there are hardly any funds to build any secondary roads in the country). Another road (Cabaret-Cazale-La Chapelle) was identified further north than the regularly used Duclos-Cazale road, but it remains neglected. The bridge on the River Bretelle was built after 2008 when the four Hurricanes (Fay, Gustav, Hanna, Ike) in September of that year brought heavy rains; flood waters damaged the roads and bridge and filled them with mud, while also destroying many homes and crops.

The springs feeding the River Bretelle are only a few kilometers away from Cazale, and the river is an inconstant friend. It runs through the village, yet peasants lack the infrastructure to properly divert its water for irrigation. When heavy rains come, the Bretelle leaps its natural bed and has been known throughout the years to flood both houses and the adjacent farmlands. Discussions on harnessing the river for hydroelectricity have long been held, but the talk seems likely to remain just talk for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, the village depends on individual fuel-powered generators for the limited service it does have. Most residents think the government should provide electricity for free since they lack the means to obtain it themselves. The same goes for telephone service, though these days both telephone companies, Digicel and Natcom, have installed the necessary systems for the use of cellular phones and Internet.

Besides the road, the other main concern of the villages is rising delinquency. The villagers have tried their best to establish a small police headquarters. Some citizens even offered their own land, to no avail. There seems to be a consensus that a police under-commissary is of the utmost importance to keep the peace that is needed for the village to go forward and be productive.

Despite the lack of means, Cazale is not seen as being destitute. It has a civil courthouse and a new building to house local government authorities—even though there have not been elections since 2011. The three-member municipal cartel elected in 2006 should have been renewed four years later, but instead it was simply replaced by a new group of people arbitrarily named by the central government.

Cazale was spared during the dramatic earthquake of 2010, as the community only lost two very old houses, and there were no casualties. However, one of the outcomes of the earthquake nationally was that

600,000 people were displaced throughout Haiti. As a result, Cazale was expected to welcome back from Port-au-Prince all the people who had previously left the community, along with their children and friends—more people than it could possibly support.

The population of Cazale is of various ages, but it is getting  getting older as children are migrating to cities for school and young men and women are leaving in search of employment and opportunities in urban areas. The exodus that emptied out the Haitian countryside began in the 1960s when Duvalier gave priority to cities, particularly what came to be known ironically as the Republic of Port-au-Prince. Under Duvalier, most major public works were reserved for the capital, which, along with other major cities, also got the lion's share of foreign aid for projects. Rural areas, especially those farthest from the capital, were either forgotten by the government or, worse, put in the hands of the army in the person of the rural section chief or left at the mercy of the Tonton Macoutes. Section chiefs were renowned for their brutality, and for their rapaciousness in collecting taxes, fines, and bribes without any hint of return service. People in places like Cazale had to watch helplessly as their young men and women departed, searching for a better life and fleeing the stagnant economy and the threats of political reprisal. The flood of emigration did not end in the cities but spilled across national borders, until nearly two million Haitians were living in the U.S. alone by 2010. (According to the Inter-American Development Bank, these American residents contributed almost two billion dollars to the Haitian economy in 2012.[13]) It is hard to say exactly how many Cazalois are living abroad in total, but we do know that there are Cazalois in New York, Florida, and Massachusetts, as well as in Venezuela, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and the Dominican Republic.

One day a year, on September 29th, the people of Cazale gather together—arriving from the capital and abroad as well as from just down the road—to celebrate the feast day of the Archangel Michael, the patron saint of the village. At first this might seem odd, since Cazale, despite the very visible presence of the Roman Catholic Church, is now predominantly Protestant. But puzzlement fades when one sees how the social aspect of the celebration overlaps with the religious one. Yes, people get together to pray, but also to laugh, to do small projects, and to make plans for the future.

## SOURCES OF POVERTY

As a French colony, Haiti was so wealthy it was called the "Pearl of the Antilles." Most of the riches, however, were repatriated to France. During

the war for independence, the means for generating wealth were destroyed. Most farmland was burned to deter recolonization. After independence, France waited sixty years before recognizing the new country and demanded 150 million francs in indemnity. The debt was repaid with borrowed funds, which were retired only in 1922. A vicious cycle of borrowing and refinancing from foreign lenders was established, curtailing any opportunity for real economic growth. The U.S. was also hostile to Haiti after independence, and its occupation of Haiti in 1915 stirred reciprocal animosity.

For twenty-nine years, the Duvalier regime institutionalized a system of corruption and economic apartheid that left only one percent of the population receiving forty percent of the national income. The army, the section chiefs, and the Tonton Macoutes robbed the population like pirates, and Jean-Claude Duvalier, who ruled from his father's death in 1971, left Haiti in 1986 with millions of dollars. The three years of the coup (1991–1994) saw the return to piracy with mass transfer of aid money to foreign bank accounts.

The country got another chance for development in 1994, when the international community tossed the army out of power. That led to improvements, but it did not touch an underlying confusion about the meaning of development. "Development" has various meanings for social scientists, but the primary meaning for Haitians is "reparation," rather than "growth" or "progress." There is still a sense among the majority that the foreigners pulling the strings of local allies have robbed ordinary people of the fruits of their labor. Aid, commonly a synonym of international development assistance, is an appropriate example of this perspective: "aid" in the Haitian context has come to mean loans that do not have to be repaid. This view reflects the anger and despair of centuries. Yet people are learning through interactions with NGOs and others that this is not how the world works. Gradually development is coming to mean "realizing a change in fortunes." Development is coming to be understood as food, education, roads, and pride.

In asking why a place like Cazale, in particular, is so poor, one wonders: Is it inadequate resources, government mistakes, center-periphery dependency, market failures, or culture? Many of these factors are interrelated, of course, but in untangling the riddle of why it is so hard for local people to work together effectively, three primary strands emerge: colonial history, the tradition of *mawonaj*, and a strong culture of mistrust and fear.

Some of the barriers are inherited from the colonial past. Civic participation in Haiti has always had a distinctively French flavor, based on its educational system and class relationships. As Michel Crozier[14] would argue, this legacy makes it difficult for public and private sectors to adapt quickly to the

fast pace of social and economic change in a globalizing world, discourages participation by the people most affected by a problem, and distorts communications, especially those that involve face-to-face exchanges. French institutions in 1804 were centralized and impersonal. Haitian institutions are no different. In universities there are unusually wide gaps and no real contact between students and teachers; most classes are still lectures delivered in impersonal amphitheaters. Course content is usually abstract and divorced from real-life application; it is tailored for people entering strictly demarcated social strata. Until 1987, teaching in Haiti took place only in French and not in both official languages, as it does now. One guaranteed side-effect of this practice was to shut out those from rural areas. The policy-making system in France has also been characteristically conservative, more concerned with safeguarding rank and privilege than with trying new ideas. Citizen participation was tightly circumscribed, and whole groups were deliberately excluded. The French are still struggling to fully implement the decentralization law enacted in 1982. Haiti's own recent experience with decentralization is still very much a work in progress. The lack of people with public-service training, the lack of funding to accomplish enough projects to instill hope in the system, and the persistence of scandals requiring national intervention to change councils all show how difficult it is to legislate tradition away.

The second obstacle, *mawonaj* ("marronage"), refers to a slave's ability to escape and hide from his master—both literally, as with runaways, and figuratively, as in wearing one's face like a mask. After slavery, *mawonaj* lives on as non-commitment, or the refusal to assume responsibility. These traits are easily observed in Haitian society. They also interact with aspects of French culture, including the dysfunctional relationship between the French labor movement and industrial management, which has been further damaged by interventions from the highly centralized government. Communications between workers and employers are impaired; workers do not air their grievances directly but through centralized structures, so they cannot see the link between a proposed remedy and actual resolution. Even when they are involved initially, the delays—between meetings to decide what to do and the actual doing of it—are so long that people lose faith in the process. When there is an even longer tradition of nothing changing, as there is in Haiti, the cynicism runs even deeper, so it requires extraordinary effort to mobilize people toward a shared goal.

The third obstacle to cooperation is mistrust and fear. During the Duvalier days, freedom of association was banished, and violating the ban could endanger one's life. And when the terror is constant and seeps from

public to private life so that one can never be sure what another person's true beliefs are, the basic trust that must be the foundation for any cooperation is eroded. Even when people witnessed something positive getting done, it was as a product of patronage—not of cooperative effort—and tended to favor personal over public interests.

The concept of trust or its lack has been of concern to social scientists. In Edward Banfield's "amoral familism," distrust is the pervasive residue of centuries of negative experiences. This distrust makes it difficult even to organize basic education programs that could build social capital for other kinds of social investments.[15] Poverty does not breed idleness so much as chronic fatigue, since the poor are constantly seeking the means to simply scrape by. The endless grinding builds fatalism, smothering the ability to see how a peasant's life could ever improve. The cumulative effect of this syndrome is the inability of people to come together for their common good, or for any end transcending the immediate material interest of one's family, a syndrome that Banfield places at the heart of extreme poverty and backwardness.

Robert Putnam, in studying Italian civic participation, emphasizes the positive side of the equation, saying that a social fabric of trust and cooperation will create a civic community whose citizens "are more than merely active, publicly spirited, and equal. Virtuous citizens are helpful, respectful, and trustful toward one another, even when they differ on matters of substance."[16] Mutual trust and social cooperation spark economic development when translated into participation in community affairs. Francis Fukuyama takes it a step further in considering a culture of trust to be the source of the spontaneous sociability that allows enterprises to grow beyond family into professionally managed organizations. However, "social capital, the crucible of the trust and critical to the health of the economy, rests on cultural roots."[17] This implies that Haitians must first change their culture of distrust to get the benefits of social capital. But cultures change very slowly, and in the case of Cazale particularly, the important question is: Can the experience of brutality and fear be expunged sufficiently so that there is room for trust and cooperation to grow and flower?

## "SOMETHING MUST CHANGE..."

In order to reap the direct and indirect benefits from their work, the people of Cazale must first answer the difficult question of who they are as a community. No individual or group likes the moment of evaluation, especially when it requires dredging up and confronting painful memories. However,

it is imperative to find the true answer if community development is to happen. The process of searching for the truth can help bring the community into being since people must together define what their community stands for—what it values most. Establishing a commonly held identity makes it easier to define a shared vision and convert that vision into a working plan. One thing that makes the people of Cazale distinctive is their Polish origin. They are also very proud of steadfastly fighting for justice and democracy, whether against the French armies or the Duvalier dictatorship.

In addition, the people of Cazale consider Pope John Paul II as one of their own because of his Polish origin. When the Pope came to Haiti on March 9, 1983, three important events took place. First, a delegation from Cazale went to greet the Pope at the airport. They were thrilled by the Holy Father's words of acknowledgment of Polish relations through the adoration of the Lady of Częstochowa (the Polish Black Madonna) and his blessings. Second, for Christians around the world, the speech was memorable because it also called for a "New Evangelization." The Pope called for a novena that would prepare Christians for the quincentennial celebration of the New World in 1992, and proclaim Christ to a new post–Cold War world faced with new problems, challenges, and transformations. Finally, the Pope called for political changes, and mandated the Haitian Church to help mobilize the sentiments and energies needed to bring them about. The Pope's declaration that "Something must change…" is now legendary, ushering in the beginning of the end for the Duvalier regime. Now, again, in 2015, something must change.

Regenerating community means using challenges and interests to recreate ties. Cazale needs to find the trust that existed before the Duvalier repression, before the massacre by the Tonton Macoutes. Patriotism and history, of course, are going to play a big part in mobilizing the community. Collective action in the past has failed perhaps because of a lack of leadership, and certainly from a lack of mobilization. The way to circumvent both hazards is to create networks of horizontal cooperation, beginning with projects that require the participation of the most people, so that the connection is made between reciprocity and self-help.

The village of Cazale has incredible assets that should exploited to improve the lives of its people: the proximity to Port-au-Prince and beautiful beaches, the lush and green environment, the richness of its soils, the availability of clay, the thousands of hectares of banana (a crop that is a staple of the Haitian diet and can be transformed into paper and fabrics); the potable water, land irrigation and electricity that could come from the river; the pilgrimage possibilities because of its spiritual connection to the

Black Madonna of Częstochowa and connection with Saut-d'Eau; and the village's indisputably rich human resources.

What is missing now is a project that makes use of these assets, a project that includes the participation of every one in the village—as was done in the beginning of the century for the bicentennial of Haiti's independence. The feeling of despair, and the tendency toward reckless activities that we have seen lately would lessen if together the village could develop a medium-to-long-term plan for its future. Re-energizing the three former committees—on Education-Culture, Environment-Agriculture, and Health—would not only help mobilize the villagers but also provide a link to the government, to family members living abroad, and to friends from foreign lands when engaging in development projects. This is especially important in the absence of elected officials. A well-coordinated project, with systematic follow-through and constant and transparent evaluation from everyone involved, is crucial to Cazale's future development and to its establishment as an autonomous *Commune* in the future.

## Notes

1 This essay is based on the author's previously published article "Harnessing History to Development: The Story of Cazale," *Georgetown University-Trinity College Haiti Papers*, February 2003.

2 "Second Constitution of Haiti (Hayti) May 20, 1805. Promulgated by Emperor Jacques I (Dessalines)," *New York Evening Post*, July 15, 1805. All subsequent citations use this translation.

3 Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haiti, Tome III 1803–1807*, (Port-au-Prince: Editions Henry Deschamps, 1989).

4 Józef Kwaterko, "Mémoire nationale et mémoire historique. Les écrits des légionnaires polonais et la révolution haïtienne (1802-1804)," *'Memoire et Culture,' Actes du colloque international de Limoges 10–12 decembre* (2003), ed. Michel Beniamino and Claude Filteau (Limoges: Presses de l'Université de Limoges, 2006), 421-433.

5 *Monographie de Cazale* is a compilation of field-work reports and correspondence that IFE has prepared and used for its exchanges with existing partners and potential future collaborators.

6 Jan Pachonski and Reuel K. Wilson, *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy: A Study of Polish Legions in the Haitian War of Independence 1802–1803* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

7 Laurore St Juste and Enel Clerismé, *Présence Polonaise en Haïti* (Port-au-Prince, 1983), 50–6.

8 *Imperial Constitution...* Spelling after the original.

9 Gérard Pierre-Charles, *Haïti: Jamais plus! Les violations des droits de l'homme à la époque des Duvaliers* (Port-au-Prince : CRESFED, 2000), 113.

10 Cabaret regained its original name in 1986, after Papa Doc's son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc), was ousted.

11 The people who died include: Neufort Victomé, Gardiner Benoît, Olive Eliazer, Max Belneau, Benoit Philantus Willy Joseph, Christian Valmont, Dinéus Inome, Mervius Pierre-Louis, Michel Pierre-Louis, Pierrisca Pierre, Philippe Dulorier, Bélizer Cajuste, Lamarre St. Germain, Elisme Elie, Louis-Juste Ismero, Jérémie Eliazer, Thomas Victomé, Alix Lamaute, Théophile

Victomé, Roger Méhu, Antioche Benoît, Syion Brutus, Maryo Jean.

12 Corine Dukka, 'Forced Disappearances,' in Roy Guman and David Rieff, eds., *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know* (New York: Norton, 1999), 124.

13 Multilateral Investment Fund, Inter-American Development Bank, *Remittance to Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: February 2012).

14 Michel Crozier, T*he Bureaucratic Phenomenon: The Importance of Bureaucratic Action in the French Social System* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

15 Edward C. Banfield, with the assistance of Laura F. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, (Glencoe, Illinois : Free Press, 1958), 170.

16 Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 89.

17 Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1998) 33.

# WASLY SIMON

WHAT DOES BEING HAITIAN MEAN TO YOU?

It's been 211 years since the birth of the Haitian people. They mainly consist of black people who had to fight in order to give themselves freedom. But our forefathers were missing a vision for the future, a social foundation. (We have certainly been good warriors, but we haven't really matured politically.) This explains why we are still a people that tears itself apart for power. The situation in Haiti is pitiful, and living conditions are very miserable. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for young people to develop intellectually. There is no trustworthy education available, and the society is badly organized, so there's no competent state that can envision progress. The irresponsibility of our leaders also plays a big part in the bestial condition we are in (we are one of the poorest countries in the world). Being Haitian doesn't mean much for me, given our condition of perpetual conflict, and of "dog eat dog." To be really honest, I would say it's something to be ashamed of. I am proud, but I'm not proud of being Haitian (for obvious reasons). I'm proud of being human.

DOES ART HAVE THE POWER TO REPRESENT IDENTITY?

In the same way we can say that the body has a soul, I think a people has one as well. And we can find an expression of that soul in music, dance, and theatre. In short, it's in the way of life and in the habits of each people. Can art represent identity? The art of a people is its culture, its mindset, its daily life; it's the expression of its deepest feelings. And I have no doubt that the identity of a people can be represented through its art.

WHY BRING AN OPERA TO THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD?

Leaving Poland to come to Haiti—a long route I haven't yet traversed—and taking an entire staff along is intense in terms of distance and time, and money. But why make such a decision? Isn't it crazy? In as far as I know the project, I think what was made was very symbolic. Personally, it made me aware of the familial relationship between Cazale and Poland. Taking an opera from Poland—one similar to the Haitian song "Choucoune"—is a way of bringing the Polish soul to life in Haiti. I don't think it was a crazy decision but rather a way of helping these two siblings in space and time—Cazale and Poland—get better acquainted with one another.

*Translated by Sarah Demeuse*

# WERONIKA PELCZYŃSKA

WHAT DOES BEING POLISH MEAN TO YOU?

I don't know if I can answer this question. I'm Polish, I live in Poland, I speak Polish on an everyday basis, yet at the same time I consider myself a citizen of all of Europe. My Polishness is inscribed in my cultural heritage. For me being Polish equals on the one hand a daily dose of pessimism, it equals lack of distance, or it equals egocentrism. But, on the other hand, it equals being sensitive to history; it equals irony, belief, openness to new experiences, willingness to work hard, need for community, care for family, or desire for rebellion.

DOES ART HAVE THE POWER TO REPRESENT IDENTITY?

It does. I remember my first observation from an improvisation class at the SEAD dance school in Austria. People of different nationalities usually suggested different dramatic/structural solutions, while people of the same origins, of similar cultures, used a similar theatrical "vocabulary," proposing variations on common themes. On the other hand, art is not a simple consequence of identity, cultural or otherwise. What was interesting in staging *Halka* in Haiti was the confrontation between the classical costumes, music, and a libretto set in the Polish mountains and a completely different climate, tradition, and set of circumstances.

WHY BRING AN OPERA TO THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD?

This is, in fact, a question for the project's initiators. Personally, I see in it a desire to present the history and aesthetics of this particular work in a new context, using specific people and tools. From day one of working on the project I wondered what the main purpose of our actions was: Creating with, and for, the Haitian community? Working on an opera? Making a film for the exhibition in Venice? Or the meeting of two cultures? In any case, I would hope that a project like this contributes to a raised awareness about our common past and to building a potential future.

*Translated by Marcin Wawrzyńczak*

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# HOW POLES BECAME WHITE

KACPER POBŁOCKI

*We're not people, we're just negroes.*

This surprising phrase was recorded by the anthropologist Elizabeth Dunn during her fieldwork in the industrial town of Rzeszów in 1997. *Murzyn*—a common and often derogatory Polish word for a person of color, which Dunn rendered as "negro"—must have seemed to the Polish factory workers like an acceptable synonym for "nobody," as they were "unaware how shocking such racist terminology was to a North American listener." According to Dunn, the factory worker "did not mean to be as pejorative as the English term suggests," but rather express the feeling that "the firm considered line workers to be 'slaves' or 'unpersons' in an abstract sense." In Poland, Dunn argued, "race and ethnicity are completely naturalized."[1]

It was the "revolutionary" Second World War that turned Poland into an ethnically homogeneous country, as erstwhile minorities, most conspicuously the Jews, were systematically annihilated.[2] Since Poland itself was invaded and occupied by other whites (Germans and Russians, both in the nineteenth century and during World War II) and has never owned its own overseas colonies (despite desiring them on numerous occasions), Poland's tumultuous history is often presented as if it occurred without the complications of race. Yet references to it keep cropping up. "Do not laugh at your father," says one of the proverbs jotted down by another anthropologist in the 1980s, "or else you'll become black."[3] Maybe then we should take such utterances seriously—what if there is an older "structure of feeling" behind this? What if some Poles, like the Irish and the Jews in America, *were* once "black"?[4]

Many people in the West believe that the name for Slavs derives from the Latin word for slave, *sclavus*. Although this is etymologically

unsubstantiated ("Slav" most probably originates from *slovo*, the word for "word," used to denote people who speak one language), there is indeed substantial weight to the idea that slavery has been an important force constitutive of Polish history over the last thousand years. And yet, this experience of slavery in Poland is often ignored or downplayed, while Polish history is also race-washed into one of being uninterruptedly "white." So these references to being black, which may at first seem incongruous and merely racist, also serve an important role: they point us back to the history of slavery in Poland. In other words, to understand how Poles became white, we must first acknowledge, and understand, the way in which some of them were once "black."

Ideas tend to get "incarcerated" in places.[5] One goes to India to study hierarchy, just as one would go to the West to study modern capitalism, and to the Caribbean to talk about race and slavery. Poland is where one focuses on anti-Semitism, but it would be the last place on Earth to look for race or vestiges of slavery. But slavery was not shackled to one locale. Bringing slavery into the realm of universal history was, after all, an important aspect of the Haitian revolution.[6] This project is furthered primarily by giving voice to the "specters of the Atlantic"—embedding the history of Black Jacobins within the global narrative that usually excludes them.[7] But the history of slavery goes beyond the Atlantic Triangle of Western Europe, West Africa, and the Americas, so everybody's history—even Polish factory workers calling themselves black—is connected to it. It is important to analyze the universality of slavery for global history, to see how it is constitutive of identity and history even in places, like Poland, where nobody would expect slavery to be an important social force. We can appreciate this only once we disentangle the slavery-race knot, analyze the parallel—and often interdependent—trajectories of racism and slavery, and place both phenomena into a truly global context.

## THE CURSE OF HAM

Why would laughing at one's father make one black? This bizarre proverb is actually a direct reference to a relatively minor story in the *Old Testament*, one that became "the single greatest justification for black slavery for more than a thousand years."[8] In the *Book of Genesis,* we learn how one evening, having drunk too much wine, Noah fell asleep naked. When his sons saw Noah's disgrace, they shunned the sight. Only one of them, Ham, was not ashamed of looking at his besotted and unclad father. When Noah woke up, he "knew what his youngest son had done unto him," and cursed

Ham's son, Canaan, to become "a slave of slaves."[9] Curiously, this same story has reemerged in a surprising number of historical contexts and locations all over the world. It proved handy in vindicating in Biblical exegesis the Iberian subjugation of Native Americans, or in driving the Celts out of Ireland. In Poland, too, it has a long lineage.

There is no reference to race in this original *Old Testament* version, but race somehow made its way into the Polish proverb. For centuries before the advent of European colonialism, the largest market for slaves was in the Islamic World. Yet, "despite the persistent inflow of African slaves into the Middle East for over a thousand years, there are no traces of their descendants anywhere constituting a separate community, which is perhaps a tribute to the social tolerance of the Islamic World in its ability to absorb 'the other.'"[10] Since Arabs were the ones buying slaves, and not "producing" them, they did not feel inclined to justify slavery. Similarly in ancient Rome, slavery was not framed as a consequence of original sin, but rather as a misfortune that could happen to *anyone*.[11] Slavery was not linked to race or any other form of cultural, physical, or ethnic identity. Nor was it linked directly to class, as even upper-class people—those who fell into debt or became war captives—could also be enslaved. In that sense, slavery had been universal.

Racism emerged as an ideology of the slave raiders and slave traders. It was Judaism and Christianity that were most successful in racializing slavery. Vernacular Hebrew versions of the story—in the form of Midrashic and Talmudic commentaries on the *Torah*—have direct references to race: "Since you have disabled me from doing ugly things in the blackness of night," Noah was believed to have said, "Canaan's children shall be born ugly and black! Moreover, because you twisted your head around to see my nakedness, your grandchildren's hair shall be twisted into kinks, and their eyes red; again, because your lips jested at my misfortune, theirs shall swell."[12] The Curse of Ham became a rhetorical means to racialize slavery.

The transformation of this story shows how fluid the border between race and class often is. In early modern Europe, the subject of racial lineage was so influential that figures as prominent as Voltaire and Robert Boyle felt compelled to have their say on it.[13] Various (upper) classes invented family trees connecting back to ancient tribes and even further back to the family of Noah. In France and Germany, the elites claimed they were the progeny of warlike tribes such as Franks or Goths, who in turn were descended from Noah's son, Japheth.[14] Poland-Lithuania—Europe's largest country in the sixteenth century—was no different. Its nobility argued that it constituted a different racial group from the Jews and the peasants, maintaining that "the

descendants of Shem prey, the descendants of Japheth fight, the descendants of Ham work."[15] By the seventeenth century, Polish-Lithuanian nobility were convinced they were a race apart, and that even their veins contained a different sort of blood—with traces of gold. (The corpus of their racial theories was called Sarmatism, an ideology based on the premise that the gentry, unlike the serfs, were directly heir to Japheth via the Iranian tribe of Sarmatians, and that this was the reason for both their cultural and physical distinctiveness.[16]) The global popularity of the Curse of Ham notwithstanding, it was only in Poland and Russia that it entered the vernacular. Over the years, the serfs, who were believed to be the progeny of Ham, were increasingly called *chamstwo*. Thus while in the Atlantic world race is often how class relations are mediated, in the Polish story, it was class that had the tendency to be expressed in racial terms.

Even in the late 1970s, Polish anthropologists record villagers saying, "We descend from Japheth," while describing people in a different village as the progeny of Ham.[17] Indeed, the "categorical opposition between *Pan* (lord) and *Cham* (plebs) lies at the foundation" of Polish national identity. *Chamstwo* not only "came to signify in the socialist period all rude and uncivilized behavior"[18] but has also been employed for nearly five centuries to distinguish nobles from savages, true elites from aspiring ones, and the deserving from the undeserving. It was especially salient after 1945, when the descendants of the Polish nobility universalized the gentry culture as the dominant idiom for the national one. It is only at this late date, in fact, that most Poles "became white."

This transformation of the "exotic Other" to a "stigmatized brother" has only been exacerbated under neoliberalism.[19] While in everyday parlance one rarely encounters overt references to race, when interviewed by anthropologist Lonia Jakubowska the descendants of Polish nobility—who still occupy many of the top positions in Polish society—would openly differentiate between the people who "had" and who did not "have race." Here, race does not refer to skin color, but "connotes a distinct demeanor, one that exudes confidence, competence, and authority. Although the phantom of mythical ancestry might still linger, this embodied sense of entitlement comes not from genetic endowment but from the socially inherited differences in wealth, prestige and power." "Most gentry," argues Jakubowska, "indeed still exert a commanding presence, aptly transforming ideology of superiority into bodily capital accumulated through bearing worn as if a second skin, which—armored by manners and the use of proper language—marks their claim to distinction."[20] In other words, in Poland race has not become naturalized, as Dunn suggested, but culturalized.

Nowadays, one recognizes a descendant of Ham not by the way he or she looks or what family they were born into but by the way they behave.

## DEBT AS THE ORIGINAL SIN

Was this spectacular spread of the Story of Ham a mere accident? Global simultaneity is seldom a coincidence.[21] Around the same time *chamstwo* as a distinct class and race was born in Poland-Lithuania, at the other end of the nascent West-centered world, chattel slavery was being introduced.[22] Islands such as Puerto Rico (first colonized in 1509 and never independent), Barbados (first colonized in 1627), Haiti and Jamaica (Columbus claimed the former in 1492 and the latter in 1494), despite their "absence of ruins," are a veritable palimpsest of successive waves of colonial conquests from virtually all the European powers.[23] Hence, as the anthropologist Sydney Mintz argues, "once it can be acknowledged that the Caribbean colonialism is truly ancient, its history can help to give additional nuance to the term 'postcolonial.'"[24]

The West trudged on its path to industrial modernity *because* it developed "under-developed" peripheries that provided it with the raw materials it needed, as was famously argued by Immanuel Wallerstein.[25] For example, British workers transformed the cotton grown by slaves in America into textiles. England's towns boomed because people no longer had to work in agriculture and could move to towns (where they would eat bread made from imported grain). They could subsist on this bread because they washed it down with sweetened tea. Without the "drug foods," such as the Caribbean sugar that provided the additional and very cheap energy boost, Western ascent would be simply unthinkable.[26] Thus the three distinct social formations: wage labor in Britain, slavery in the Americas, and serfdom in Eastern Europe had a common origin and were mutually constitutive.[27]

There is, however, a tendency to look at them as distinct social formations derived from different phases in an evolutionary scheme of development that proceeds from antiquity through feudalism to capitalism. Yet treating slavery, serfdom, and wage labor as tokens of "stages of development"[28] is both empirically inaccurate and grossly Eurocentric. Jack Goody devoted a lifetime to denouncing theories of Western exceptionalism. Europe was somehow unique, he insisted, but precisely for that reason, it cannot serve as the yardstick for global history. It did not invent, but actually "stole," capitalism.[29] Feudalism is not a universal epoch preceding capitalism, but a quintessentially European predicament, precipitated by the nearly total collapse of the economy after 600 AD; other areas didn't experience this meltdown

and developed much more gradually. The Renaissance was a miracle only in Europe, because it was when the West finally *caught up* with the Rest—and not, as Westerners tend to think, when the West invented science, philosophy, or humanism.[30] At the brink of the seventeenth century, Western Europe was "the least promising of the world's civilizations… among the worst equipped to profit from the world's 'Age of Expansion' which began with initiatives weighted in favor of China and Islam… with states of greater dynamism in Africa and the Americas than any visible in the Latin west."[31] Thus, even colonialism was not a Western invention—other civilizations began expanding much earlier, and they were initially more successful at it.

Caribbean sugar plantations represented "bountiful agricultural factories"[32] already in the early seventeenth century, and all the elements of industrial modernity, such as the rational organization of the labor process, were present there from the very onset.[33] Although there were differences between a Caribbean slave and a British worker, neither "had much to offer productively but its labor. Both produced; both consumed little of what they produced. Both were divested of their tools." Thus, Mintz argues, "they really form one group, differing only in how they fit into the worldwide division of labor others created for them."[34]

This of course does not mean they were all the same—quite the contrary. Western workers were the privileged underprivileged. The difference between slavery, wage labor, and serfdom was one of degree and not of kind. The common image we have of the "working class" is one of white, middle-aged men in denim overalls toiling in a factory or on a dock. But this picture is historically erroneous, because until the late nineteenth century, the West's working class (as Eric Wolf insisted) was comprised largely of the most vulnerable groups—women, children, and immigrants.[35] This is why many of them spoke not of wage labor but of "wage slavery"—their nominal freedom was not much worth given the abject conditions they had to endure.[36] Even their freedom of movement was often merely theoretical. Because of the Poor Laws introduced in 1601 and abolished only in 1834, British workers were tethered to their parishes; they could not subsist without the relief they got from their local church.[37] Thus, they were not much "freer" than Eastern European serfs; their different status meant only that their mobility was limited by economic rather than strictly legal mechanisms.[38]

Likewise, "there were many periods in the Caribbean past," argues Mintz, "when slavery and other forms of labor coercion were hardly distinguishable."[39] The main difference between serfdom and slavery was that serfs were *obliged* to work for their lord, while slaves were owned by their

master. In other words, chattel slaves were a financial asset.[40] What distinguished them from ancient slaves and also serfs was their entanglement in a wide and highly monetized international market.[41] Yet many travelers to Eastern Europe would openly compare serfdom to slavery; both systems, in their eyes, were equally brutal and unjust.

People like Prince Stanisław Lubomirski, who owned a latifundium of 1,071 landed estates, making him the richest man in eighteenth-century Europe (he had a private army and a court, and his income was higher than that of the Polish king), was also a master of life and death to nearly a million serfs.[42] He had also a vast army of administrators who, in the words of Daniel Defoe, "trampled the poorer people as dogs." Serfs were not only denied a freedom of movement and choice over whom they would marry, but they could also be killed with impunity. Malnourished and overworked, the serfs indeed increasingly resembled a "different race"—sallow, skinny, and sluggish in movement (the prime "weapon of the weak," to use James Scott's formulation, of those performing coerced labor). In 1764, a French traveler reported with horror that the "penury of the serfs is beyond description. They sleep on straw together with the cattle, and their slovenliness has become legendary."[43]

Also legendary was the class brutality. Polish folklore is peppered with examples of often-arbitrary violence inflicted upon the serfs; the traditional figure of the devil bears an uncanny resemblance to a member of the gentry. Some nobles, particularly notorious for their cruelty, were also remembered by name. Marcin Mikołaj Radziwiłł, for example, was known for violently abusing serfs as he pleased. He was also said to have hanged a man whose only crime was that he sought to ingratiate himself to the magnate: the poor man kept following Radziwiłł so he could remain in his "field of vision." When passing the sentence, Radziwiłł observed wryly: "Now thou shall always be in my field of vision," as the gallows were located at the very center of his estate—reminding everybody that they could be hanged at will.[44]

Still, serfdom ought not be dismissed as "backward." "For more than two centuries," argued Andro Linklater, "it turned out to be a far more dynamic way of owning the earth than private property." Not surprisingly, it produced some of the wealthiest people in world history. It was also Poland's most successful export to date. The future "Iron Kingdom" of Prussia and its Junker class learned from the Polish nobility the techniques of class rule and perfected these forms of direct coercion.[45] Likewise, by adopting serfdom, "the great serf empires of Austria and Russia would spread faster and further until in 1789 they enveloped all of central and eastern Europe, from Vienna to the Urals."[46]

While the abolitionist movement convinced many that slavery was inhuman, even the most progressive of commentators in Eastern Europe thought that serfs actually deserved their miserable lot.[47] In the 1860s, when some four million slaves were emancipated in the Americas, forty-seven million Eastern European serfs were also freed. Yet serf liberation was actually not about freeing people from being moored to the land, but rather freeing land from the people, so it could be put on the market. The terms of a buy-out offered to former serfs were so harsh that many fell into a spiral of debt. The freedom they gained was thus very bitter, as in many cases they experienced an actual degradation in status.[48] Little wonder the Polish underclass believed that system only *really* ended when the communists abolished agricultural latifundia in 1944.[49]

If serfdom and slavery are more modern than the standard evolutionary schemes would have it, wage labor, on the other hand, is much more ancient than one would often assume. Indeed, wage labor can actually be seen as a *modification* of slavery, the most ancient of humanity's economic institutions. As David Graeber puts it: "Most of our contemporary language of social justice, our way of speaking of human bondage and emancipation, continues to echo ancient arguments about debt." In those times, to be "free" meant essentially to not be a slave. Slaves were traditionally war captives, so they were considered *socially* dead. (The groups that lost them even organized funerals.) Hence "the English word 'free' is derived from a German root meaning 'friend', since to be free meant to be able to make friends, to keep promises, to live within a community." When one became a slave, one died socially, and was reborn as on object. The freedom of slaves was bought and sold, the freedom of serfs was extracted, and the freedom we possess, we rent out. After all, a wage-labor contract is "an agreement between equals in which both agree that once one of them punches the time clock, they won't be equals any more."[50] Nowadays we are free inasmuch as we can freely suspend our freedom. We cast ourselves as *both* master and slave: Owners of our own bodies, we also must sell them on a daily basis.

The first slaves in human history were recruited not only from groups of war captives but also from the class of debtors. The institution of debt is at least 5,000 years old and *predates* money. The great thing about bullion is that it is mobile: it can be given, taken, and transported. Coins first appeared around 600 BC in the Middle East, India, and China simultaneously and were born from war—soldiers (not factory workers) were the first wage earners in history. As they plundered temples and houses of the rich, precious metals were "placed in the hands of ordinary people … broken into tinier pieces, and began to be used in everyday transactions." Money

is thus, as Graeber puts it, a solution to the "debt problem," namely, when ordinary people refuse to carry an abstract burden that has been imposed upon them.[51]

Debt, which dominates in times of peace and not war, is a relationship of trust. It is based on the idea that it is immoral not to pay one's dues. Thus "there is a connection between money (German *Geld*), indemnity or sacrifice (Old English *Geild*), tax (Gothic *Gild*) and, of course, guilt."[52] Since creditor and debtor are at first equals (they freely agree to engage in the transaction), if the former "cannot do what it takes to restore herself to equality [i.e. to pay back], there is obviously something wrong with her; it must be her fault." Debt is thus "an exchange that has not been brought to completion."[53] In order for this incompletion to function, this relationship has to be anchored in something both perennial and extra-economic. In order to perpetuate actual inequality and coercion via formally free and equal transactions, debt therefore needs to have its "original sin." This is why it often operates via racial theories such as the Curse of Ham. These theories take on different guises, just as the institution of slavery has been modified in different times and different places, despite its universal and very ancient core.

## A THOUSAND YEARS OF SLAVERY

But we can delve even deeper into the netherworlds of Polish history. The genesis of slavery in Poland actually predates racial theories vindicating social subjugation and economic debasement. The Polish word for a black person, *murzyn* actually has the same root as the English word "Moor," or a North African Muslim. In this, it is a witness to perhaps the most ancient of the relationships that tie Poland to the rest of the world. The system eclipsed by serfdom in the sixteenth century was not feudalism—unlike in the West, there were no large agricultural estates in Poland in the Middle Ages. Instead, there was a dual economy based partly on free peasants and partly on what the historian Karol Modzelewski dubbed "state slavery." These slaves were the exclusive property of the king. Very few of them worked in agriculture. Instead, they worked in over forty different trades—ranging from baking and winemaking, through falconry, net-making, and dog-breeding, to shipbuilding and coal-mining—and each slave-based settlement specialized in a particular one. Still today, there are over 600 village or town names in Poland that refer to these specializations.

Yet the scale of this system was larger than that. "If the King granted slaves to his allies such as the Church by the hundreds," writes

Modzelewski, "he must have owned them by the thousands."[54] The slave-baker did not serve the king by coming to work at his court; instead, the king travelled to him. The king had at least three main residences and a dozen minor ones, and he spent his time by moving his court between them, so over the course of a year, he would pass by each settlement he owned, collecting his dues from each. The very first Polish state, established between the tenth and twelfth centuries, was a giant network of slave-based settlements that all together constituted yet another entity on the slavery/serfdom/wage labor continuum. Unlike slaves in ancient Rome, the Polish variety did not work in agriculture but had very specialized—one could even say "urban"—trades, the Polish state resembled in a way a giant, sprawling city, except that its inhabitants were scattered spatially and the king was the only link among them. And, of course, these specialist workers did not receive wages.

How did this system come about? For centuries, the capture and trade of slaves had been Europe's most profitable economic endeavor: "From the southern Mediterranean, the northern shore and its hinterland appeared in the ninth century as a vast arc of slave supply."[55] This pertained to *all* the northern tribes, from the Celts via the Germans to the Slavs. When "the first crusade took large numbers of westerners to Constantinople for the first time, they were regarded by the urbanite inhabitants of the 'Second Rome' with awe inspired by savagery." Their description, jotted down by the emperor's daughter, could just as easily have been found amongst the writings quoted in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. She described Western barbarians as sensual and visceral, both loathsome and somehow attractive—crafty, venal, and arrogant noble savages who were "a slave to no man" but also "marvelous to the eyes."[56] They were free because they specialized in enslaving others and peddling them to the Islamic World.

Prague was at the time home to Europe's biggest slave emporium, and the major slave trade route went from there via Kraków to the Dneiper River (in today's Ukraine) and down to Constantinople.[57] Archeologists have found over 200,000 Islamic coins in Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe—many of them cut into pieces, which means that they "probably circulated as the currency for everyday transactions." Interestingly, around 975 AD, due to "geopolitical shifts in Central Asia," their steady flow to Eastern Europe dried up.[58] Was it, again, merely a coincidence? Around this same time, some Slavic slave raiders started to build the very first Polish state and to mint their own coins. Did they realize that instead of selling war captives they could keep them for expanding their power at home? We do not know this for certain. But slaves were also those who fell into debt, so

we can assume that it was a matter of time before some of the more astute slave raiders realized that they could keep free peasants in check and tell them to pay taxes by threatening them with enslavement. The willingness with which freeholders aided the king in capturing runaway slaves is a good indicator of the disciplinary power the institution of slavery had over the "free" population.[59]

How many future "sons of Ham" were recruited from the grandchildren of slaves? That is hard to say. Did Poland "invent" serfdom in the sixteenth century because its elites already had extensive experience in organizing another, older form of coerced labor? That is also impossible to establish conclusively. But we can ascertain that while in the Atlantic world, class undergirds racial relations, in Poland the history of class has also, in a very different way, been entangled with ideas about race. Moreover, slavery was constitutive of Polish society *before* some of the Poles "became black"—that is, before the birth of *chamstwo*.

Curiously, one of the last meanings of the word *murzyn* is "ghostwriter." Is this another accident? Maybe this is also what Dunn's interviewees were unwittingly relaying to us: the institution of slavery—in its many guises, including the modern ones—has ghostwritten Poland's history for the last thousand years. Like everywhere else, actually.

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# INTERVIEW with C.T. JASPER and JOANNA MALINOWSKA

TREVOR SMITH

SMITH

Joanna and C.T., with *Halka/Haiti* each of you is drawing on long trajectories of working with existing literary, filmic, or ethnographic texts, drawing them into situational encounters. I'm thinking here of C.T.'s recent project, *Sunset of the Pharaohs*, 2014, which removed all human presence from the epic Polish cinematic work *Faraon* (Pharaoh) (1966). In Joanna's *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres*, 2009, Masami Tomihisa plays a toy piano to a composition by Olivier Messiaen, "Visions de l'Amen," while homeless men you know from your neighborhood in Brooklyn performed roles as planets in the solar system.

JASPER

Our individual works may seem dissimilar but turning existing literary or cinematic material into a haptic and even tactile experience is certainly a common denominator. It seems that most answers already exist in the world, and it's inevitable for today's artists to reference and work with the "already existing." I think we are destined to be "recyclers" and scavengers, but some artists do it more intentionally or perversely than others. Most of my recent pieces were a form of intervention into cinematic masterpieces, where existing footage became fluid, flexible matter. An act of appropriation may seem brutal, but changing contexts, reshaping meanings and narratives seem to be natural elements of a larger dialogue.

MALINOWSKA Each of us takes that text or thing to an extreme place that, oddly enough, sometimes transforms it into something empirical. I've only just realized that there is a relationship between *Halka/Haiti* and my old project *In Search of the Miraculous, Continued... Part II*, 2005, in which I installed a solar-powered boom box to play Glenn Gould's recording of Bach's "Goldberg" Variations in the Arctic desert of Nunavut—literalizing Gould's *The Idea of North,* if you will.

Of course, the unquestionable godfather of this project was *Fitzcarraldo*. Werner Herzog's film followed the delusional title character on his mission to build an opera house in the rainforest of Peru and to bring the renowned Italian tenor Enrico Caruso to perform there. Fitzcarraldo's faith in the benevolence and power of opera was extreme and unshakable—at one point in the story, he uses a gramophone playing a scratchy Caruso record as a kind of magical shield to enter the territory of an indigenous nation that was believed to be particularly dangerous and bloodthirsty.

SMITH Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) is a fiction that feels like a documentary. *Halka/Haiti* is a situational documentary masquerading as absurdist fiction. How important is it that you were not so much staging an opera as capturing your attempt to do so.

MALINOWSKA There is so much to be said about that. I'm fascinated by the amount of lies, exaggerations, and self-mythologizing in the early accounts of voyages to geographically or culturally distant territories. Then, there is the question of representation and documentary. For example Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) is usually described as the first ethnographic film, but *Nanook* was staged and manipulated in many ways to fit the presumptions of its intended audience. It's quite astonishing. So keeping things real, letting them roll in front of the camera uninterrupted, was important for us.

JASPER Maybe there is a bit of thrill-seeking in letting a camera document things as they are, but it was also important to maintain a certain vulnerability or self-doubt of the

"author" or "narrator," which is especially important when working outside of one's usual cultural or geographical setting.

SMITH I suspect your interest in Herzog goes beyond *Fitzcarraldo*. Much of his work, whether in the fiction or documentary genres, is based on people whose pursuit of a dream places them outside mainstream society. Or their inner life contrasts radically with their seemingly conventional appearance. One of the most powerful aspects of his films is that he allows himself the risk of failure, of the enterprise being completely unraveled. He believes in belief, so he places himself in situations where he is only barely in control over a scenario that he may or may not have staged.

MALINOWSKA Chaos, chance, and risk are fundamental artistic tools and even basic art materials for me. I'm laughing here, but I'm also dead serious. These are essential elements of the universe that can't be ignored, and I want to embrace them. While I've done it quite literally and wholeheartedly in many of my past projects—you just mentioned the Messiaen video for example—I feel that with *Halka/Haiti* the risks were somewhat well calculated. Admittedly, we were not prepared for the rain; we didn't have a spare camera; our best car could easily break down on the insanely bumpy road to Cazale. At any moment a soloist could have suffered from a case of diarrhea. At the same time, the amount of research and preparatory work that we and our curator, Magda Moskalewicz, did, and with all the people involved in production, it felt like we were, like Fitzcarraldo, carrying a boat across a mountain.

JASPER When it comes to chance and risk, Joanna and I are two opposites. I generally prefer a methodical approach or at least an illusion of control. Or put it differently, I'm interested in chaos or risk as a subject matter, but not as a way of working. That our control is illusory was particularly apparent on the day of the performance as we held our breath watching rain clouds build up on the horizon.

SMITH So why did you choose the opera *Halka*?

JASPER We wanted to use *Halka/Haiti* to simulate the inherent artificiality of international relations, such as play out at the Venice Biennale. *Halka* is our "cultural ambassador" if you will. I'm sure that had we conducted a survey among Poles and asked them what opera best represents Polish culture and should be presented in Cazale, *Halka* would have won unanimously. Its storyline is quite universal—love, betrayal, suicide. It is a Polish-flavored *Madame Butterfly* with traditional dances, depictions of folk culture, a glimpse into the life of the nobility. There is religion and a church that the eponymous heroine attempts to burn in her final moments of insanity. During our research on Haiti, we stumbled upon "Choucoune," a nineteenth-century poem, which was turned into a song that every Haitian child knows. It tells a story that sounds like a version of *Halka*, written from a standpoint of a man mourning the loss of his dark-skinned lover, who left him for a Europeanized mulatto.

MALINOWSKA Composed with a Polish libretto, *Halka* has the status of a "national opera" in Poland. Although its storyline doesn't address political circumstances, Włodzimierz Wolski's libretto is actually quite political and explicit in its anti-feudal sentiments. The very act of composing a libretto in Polish at the time was in a sense a patriotic gesture, a way of preserving a cultural and national identity at a time when Poland had been wiped off the map—swallowed up by the surrounding Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires and the Kingdom of Prussia.

*Halka* premiered in Vilnius in 1848, coinciding with the wave of revolutions that swept Europe that year. It is not my favorite opera in general, nor is it my favorite Polish opera; however we are, both in Haiti and in Venice, speaking for "our nation," in a sense. *Halka* is one of the operas that get perpetually presented in Polish-American circles in the U.S., for example. The great soprano and opera director Maria Fołtyn made it one of her life's missions to present *Halka* all over the world.

SMITH Did you consider other operas?

MALINOWSKA We briefly considered working with *The Haunted Manor* (1865), a later, far more cheerful opera by the same composer, Stanisław Moniuszko. Its anti-Russian undertones made it very popular among the Poles, and it was banned by the tsarist authorities who were running the country at the time. *The Haunted Manor* would have fit our project perfectly in relation to the parallel struggles for Polish and Haitian independence. But the opera's very specific references to the partitions of Poland are hard to understand if you are not well versed in that history. It's also a much grander operatic piece than *Halka* and therefore much more difficult to perform in the rugged setting of Cazale.

We also explored using *Harnasie* (1931), by Karol Szymanowski, whose music is much closer to my personal ideals. Like *Halka*, it is set in the folk culture of the mountains, but technically it's more of a ballet-pantomime than an opera. I must say, *Halka* grew on me significantly on having heard it in such an unusual setting and having my

own small role in the performance turning the pages of the musical score for the conductor/accompanist.

JASPER It was also amazing to see how versatile this opera is. What we presented in Cazale was an abbreviated version, reduced to its very essence. The whole third act was removed to accommodate our limited staging means. However iconoclastic this may sound, it worked perfectly this way, and in my opinion the main essence of the storyline was preserved. Actually, Moniuszko himself had left two versions of *Halka*. The original version premiered in Vilnius was a two-act opera, but the one presented ten years later in Warsaw had grown into a four-act piece. I think it is more common that one suspects for opera directors to take liberties with original material and reshape it to a particular vision or circumstances. Without the third act, we missed some of the more "populated" and vivid village scenes, but I don't think we lost the aspect of social critique inherent in *Halka*.

SMITH Your ambitions extend beyond simply staging an opera in an unusual location...

JASPER We were also hoping to break down the hierarchy between the performers and the audience. The video we will be projecting in Venice is a nearly 360-degree panoramic view of the event, so it's not just what happens "on the stage" but also what happens outside of it. We were more interested in the vulnerability of process and recording things as they happen. We were grateful for the motorcycles rolling through during the performance. Our makeshift stage happened to be the middle of the road. In courting these kinds of chance events, we were rebelling against the popular, perfectly controlled live-streams from the top opera houses.

MALINOWSKA I wish the donkeys that crossed "the stage" so often during rehearsals had been a part of the final performance, but our hosts took matters in their own hands. They redirected the animal traffic and silenced the sounds of sawing from

the nearby carpentry shop/coffin producer so that they wouldn't disturb the performance.

SMITH How did the mix of an orchestra from Haiti and opera singers from Poland play out?

MALINOWSKA The orchestra is from Holy Trinity Music School in Port-au-Prince. We did two research trips to Haiti and were lucky to meet Colette Pérodin of the Foundation Culture Creation, who took us on a special field trip to the heart-breaking ruins of what used to be the Holy Trinity Church and introduced us to Père David César, the conductor of the orchestra and director of the music school. He initially agreed to look at the score and eventually got involved in what must have sounded to him like a pure theatre of absurdity.

JASPER We had to choose between an amateur group of opera soloists from the Podhale region in Poland and the professional company from the Poznań Opera House. Both groups

perform *Halka* regularly and both were very excited by our project. We were torn apart trying to decide between them. Would working with a highly professional company amplify the notion of "cultural colonization" that we initially critiqued in our project proposal? Did we want to magnify the obvious contrast between the humble location and the extravagant excess that naturally accompanies a troupe grounded in the so-called "grand theatre"? Or did we want to make it more subdued? Which of the two groups would be more resilient under the unquestionably difficult circumstances of Cazale? Did we want to work with people that can perform almost on autopilot or people who passionately pursue music as a hobby?

There were also dilemmas about tone and stylization. Because this opera was written during the period of the Polish resettlement in Cazale, we were interested in making *Halka* a kind of time capsule. The group from Podhale had emphasized their focus on preserving its historical and traditional folkloric elements, especially in their diligent reconstruction of historical costume. On the other hand, the Poznań company provided an opportunity to collaborate with a young director, Paweł Passini, whose visions were significantly more contemporary. He is in the process of preparing a new staging of *Halka* in the Poznań Opera House. One of the ideas he has been considering for this new staging is having Janusz (the male lead) discover a change in his sexual orientation and leave Halka for another man. So the spectrum of choices at our disposal was rather vast.

MALINOWSKA Despite such considerations, circumstances ultimately dictated the scenario, as they did in so many other aspects of this project. A severe snowstorm interrupted audition plans with the group from Podhale and, due to our extremely tight production timeline, we couldn't extend the process any further.

SMITH I know this idea has been in the back of your minds for a long time. How did it come about?

JASPER Maybe not so much the specific idea of staging *Halka* in Cazale, only the scattered and random seeds of what it ultimately has grown into. For example, I'm obsessed with drive-in movie theaters and for a long time wanted to build one in a place where it would seem completely dislocated—the Trans-Amazonian Highway or the Gobi Desert. This simple architectural fantasy was a starting point for other ideas. At one stage, Joanna and I were contemplating a new branch of Anthology Film Archives in the rainforest.

SMITH What was the specific interest in Haiti?

JASPER Haiti is an intersection of major, often painful historical ironies: from the "discovery" of America, to colonization and slavery. In the 1790s, the slaves rose up and freed themselves from the French colonists and established an independent republic. The twenty thousand troops that Napoleon sent to quell the slave rebellion in Saint-Domingue (later, Haiti) in 1802 included five thousand Polish soldiers. Poland had allied itself with Bonaparte and the ideals of the French revolution in the hopes of gaining leverage over Prussia, Russia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire who had partitioned Poland in 1795. The mission was unsuccessful and a great many soldiers died of yellow fever. This history connecting Haiti to Poland is an example of how local history is nearly always a part of larger a narrative, often related to and influenced by events happening thousands of miles away.

MALINOWSKA That Polish connection is the fundamental reason we decided to focus on Haiti, and more specifically the village of Cazale.

JASPER Cazale is one of several villages inhabited by descendants of the two hundred survivors of those five thousand Polish troops. The Poles initially joined Napoleon hoping to fight for the freedom of the occupied Polish state. However, obvious parallels between the independence struggles of the Poles and those of their Haitian "enemies" apparently

disillusioned the troops, and many decided to switch sides to unite with the rebels. After the uprising ended successfully, they settled in the independent Haitian Republic. More than two hundred years later, the descendants of Polish soldiers can still be identified by lighter hair, blue eyes, or other Slavic features that are highly distinctive in Cazale. Even some of the houses in Cazale seem to echo the architecture of Polish manor houses...

MALINOWSKA The interesting aspect of this is not genetic but cultural: some Cazalois do consider themselves culturally, if not mythically, Polish. The square in front of the Catholic church bears the name of John Paul II. One of this church's most precious objects is a copy of the painting of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, one of the most sacred Polish Roman Catholic images—Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the Solidarity movement, was always seen with a Black Madonna lapel pin on his jacket.

SMITH Opera is an art form that is usually performed under highly controlled conditions. In Haiti, you bring this to

the streets, but not in the usual evangelical manner that is designed to promote opera to people who don't know it. Instead, you seem to be staging a confrontation between simultaneous realities.

JASPER We wanted to question opera as an art form and explore whether it could function outside of its hermetic, well-manicured boundaries. While it is an invention cultivated by the elites of Western culture, is it necessarily an oppressive tool of colonization if staged outside of a European opera house? How fragile is opera in comparison to other forms of storytelling or musical entertainment? How is opera impacted by the global expansion of interest through "Live in HD" and streaming on demand?

MALINOWSKA Then there is the very pragmatic but very real question of acoustics. The voice needs to bounce off something, and we were not sure until the very last moment if our location would offer such a situation.

JASPER Certainly this project was about confronting differing realities or temporarily erasing boundaries between them. This is one of my ongoing artistic pursuits. Now we are digesting our experiences producing the work and wondering to what extent it offered any answers to the questions we were trying to pose. Does the project read as a critique of cultural colonization? Or does our model of cultural exchange function like a Trojan Horse invading an unsuspecting village? I'm actually quite curious whether hearing and seeing our production of *Halka* made the Cazalois of Polish descent change the way they think of their identity.

SMITH This kind of work that crosses over cultures can be so easily misconstrued. What is it that drives you to engage this terrain? I know Joanna was particularly fascinated by the work of Franz Boaz...

MALINOWSKA And even Franz Boas can be misconstrued. I was just watching an educational YouTube video on Boas, and saw some quite frightening statements in the comments thread.

I'm not going to quote the neo-fascist rhetoric that poor long-dead Boas can still inspire even though he was often described as an emblem of kindness and humanity. In a way, there is the answer to your question. I can't imagine locking myself in a box, when the whole world seems like a boiling pot of unresolved cross-cultural tensions.

SMITH There is a kind of fearlessness in your selection of canonical texts and how you work with groups who do not necessarily come from your culture or background. What is your motivation to explore such connections?

JASPER There are so many cultural clashes—if not gruesome religious wars—happening at the moment, so it's almost impossible to be indifferent to it. It is impossible for it not to find its way into the work.

MALINOWSKA I suspect that this recurring need to devise or reconstruct cultural clashes has its hidden roots in our own cultural experiences (and occasional cultural traumas). We were brought up in Poland, a country that to this day seems to be recovering from the long history of threats to its sovereignty—the partitioning of the country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and then, of course, the two World Wars and the period behind the Iron Curtain. All of these events breed a seemingly inevitable and often suffocating nationalism. I know that it is a gross oversimplification, but growing up in Poland I always felt as if our culture was impossibly homogeneous. Filtered by the opposing narratives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Communist Party, there was always a great fear of any unusual behavior or cultural change. So our interest in our distant cousins in Cazale is a kind of antidote against such homogeneity, and it's hardly surprising we dare to cross cultural boundaries and oceans to get away from it.

JASPER In 2015 it may seem surreal, but we were born in a Poland that was actually quite isolated. Before the Iron Curtain fell, a passport to travel outside of the Soviet Bloc was nearly unattainable. Even getting a letter or a phone call from a

friend or relative in the West could get you into serious trouble. We're probably the last generation who experienced it very directly—so the idea of crossing to the other side, to other geographical or social realms, is probably to some extent a result of this early repression.

SMITH Joanna, we've talked before about the idea that undertaking a failed or impossible quest is practically the definition of romantic heroism.

MALINOWSKA A character's lonely failure to reach either spiritual or geographic heights shapes and defines Romantic dramaturgy. *Fitzcarraldo*, although shot and written in a relatively recent past, and set in early–twentieth century Peru, is a perfect representation of this nineteenth-century ideal. But as with most narratives that end with a spectacular fiasco, one always wonders how it could have ended differently. Our project reverses the predetermined fortune of a Romantic hero—a product of the period that roughly coincides with the revolution in Haiti, times of Napoleon, and creation of *Halka*.

SMITH How does this reversal play out?

JASPER We staged an opera in Cazale, a hard-to-reach village in picturesque mountains, without a steady flow of electricity or running water, among people with whom we share only a very elusive heritage. Not knowing Creole, it was not always very easy to communicate with the people we met. Yet we made it happen, even if our own definition of success was quite flexible.

Another important motif of Romanticism is the glorification or exoticization of the setting. For us, it was fundamentally important that Cazale was a real location that was neither idealized nor fictionalized. If you look up the various names of locations and indigenous groups in *Fitzcarraldo*, they do not always reflect the geographic reality. This is one way in which we tried to distance ourselves from our inspirational hero and the circumstances of his quest. While the idyllic and very lively landscape of Cazale

hardly recalls the untamable terrains depicted by Herzog, or Caspar David Friedrich, the difficulty of working on location meant that at times it did feel like we were traveling to truly unreachable places, and perhaps a bit like carrying a boat across the mountain, as Joanna already mentioned.

SMITH Do you see any relation to someone like Christoph Schlingensief who really did work to establish an opera village in Burkina Faso? What about Paul Chan's *Waiting for Godot*, staged in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans post-Katrina...

MALINOWSKA Perhaps less intentionally than Schlingensief, we established a temporary opera village within a village. Besides the two of us and the curator, we had a choreographer, theatre director, and a conductor. All of them devoted significant amounts of time to working outside of their usual contexts. There was a large group of young people from Cazale who became heavily invested in our project. For a full week, every day they came to Weronika Pelczyńska's dance workshop and spent hours practicing the traditional Polish dances that are performed in *Halka*. They helped us spread the news to the whole village, and a couple of them worked as our Creole interpreters. We all feel that this was just a beginning, and we hope to continue this very special relationship.

We had a really absurd encounter with the headmaster of the local high school that we visited in search of project participants. Before allowing his students to accept our invitation, he wanted us to prove our abilities as artists. I pulled out my cellphone and showed him the photo of the sculpture of a bear that I recently erected in New York's Columbus Circle. That trick worked during our first visit to Cazale, when I tried to explain to a small crowd in broken French what I do in life. They cheerfully applauded the bear photo, but the headmaster was more demanding. After a moment of panic, our contingent of Polish cultural ambassadors presented one of the dances, a polonaise, in the courtyard in front of the entire school.

JASPER It took us three trips to Cazale, many meetings with the elders, priests, many serendipitous encounters before we were to achieve the Haitian premiere of *Halka*. It took a lot of effort to build the relationship with the community and gather an eager group of local collaborators.

SMITH I read in the interview with you and Magda in the Polish magazine *Notes.na.6.tygodni* that you were looking at Google Maps and found that your location was: "Unnamed Road, Cazale, Haiti." Even the rhythm of it reminded me the stage directions for Beckett's *Godot*. A Country Road. A Tree. Evening. Is Beckett any kind of touchstone for you?

JASPER We tap from many sources, some more consciously than others. In fact, we spent an evening during one of the frequent electricity blackouts discussing how *Halka*, reduced to its bare minimum, might evoke the tradition of the Japanese Noh theatre. We didn't specifically think of Beckett's stage directions, though now that you mention it, it somehow feels like we subconsciously did!

WHAT DOES BEING HAITIAN MEAN TO YOU?

To be Haitian is to be free. It is the perfect synonym for freedom, not only because we are the first black nation to fight for our independence, but also because freedom is intrinsic to the way we live. We are also proud people; proud to be called "negro," as this name reminds us where we come from, what we achieved, and whom we helped to be free. Even though we are considered to be the one of the poorest countries in the world, we are still happy people who survive difficulties others could not.

DOES ART HAVE THE POWER TO REPRESENT IDENTITY?

The identity of Haitian people is our culture. This is the only thing no one can steal from us. This the only thing we are always ready to fight for, as it means a lot to us. Our culture is our oxygen. It is what keeps us alive in the face of natural tragedy, political tumult, or sickness. After the earthquake, when 300, 000 family members and friends passed away, it was our art that kept even more people from dying. We believe in our traditional dance, in our music, in our fairy tales, in our way of expressing our feelings, in our particular way of ironizing misery.

WHY BRING AN OPERA TO THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD?

As I was watching the faces of people in the mountains of Cazale paying attention to the opera, I saw excitement, happiness, curiosity.

Bringing the opera into the mountains is to retrace the common history between Haitian people and Polish people and to renew the friendship. It is mostly to educate people, as many Cazalois had never seen a live opera (just as many Haitians never have). Now they know what opera is, and they can share that knowledge with others.

WHAT DOES BEING POLISH MEAN TO YOU?

First of all it means being a part of a certain culture. What seems particularly important for my "Polishness" is a sense of regional identity.

DOES ART HAVE THE POWER TO REPRESENT IDENTITY?

It does. Art is an individual statement by an artist, who, like everyone else, is shaped by his or her context: place and time, people, experiences, tradition, historical consciousness. After all, there is something in culture that makes Italian music sound different than Russian music. Something that made Impressionism start in France, while Germany gave birth to "mathematical" post-serialism. And this has to do with something more than just Chopin's wistful willows or Sibelius's misty Northern landscapes. Whether we want it or not, art is an expression of who we are and of the times in which we live.

WHY BRING AN OPERA TO THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD?

First of all, to realize that we are all brothers! That we have more in common than we think.

The story of *Halka* could have happened in Haiti, or anywhere in the world. It is incredible indeed that people representing cultures so different—who speak different languages, live thousands of miles apart—are moved by the same story, by the same sounds and images. It's remarkable that we can travel to another continent, sit down with a group of strangers, put the music on the stand, and do something that speaks a language understood by everyone.

Secondly, for enrichment.

We've long known that areas of cultural encounter are places full of unique energy. Why not create another colorful "borderland," brimming with artistic potential, of two cultures whose histories had already intertwined once before? We performed *Halka* on a dusty road in a Haitian village, surrounded by a crowd of Cazalois, who danced the polonaise with us. A Haitian orchestra played along with the background sounds of everyday life. I think this is a very creative contribution to the new life of Moniuszko's nineteenth-century opus.

*Translated by Marcin Wawrzyńczak*

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# AN UNTHINKABLE HISTORY

## THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION AS A NON-EVENT

MICHEL-ROLPH TROUILLOT

*The young woman stood up in the middle of my lecture. "Mr. Trouillot, you make us read all those white scholars. What can they know about slavery? Where were they when we were jumping off the boats? When we chose death over misery and killed our own children to spare them from a life of rape?"*

*I was scared and she was wrong. She was not reading white authors only and she never jumped from a slave ship. I was dumbfounded and she was angry; but how does one reason with anger? I was on my way to a Ph.D., and my teaching this course was barely a stopover, a way of paying the dues of guilt in this lily-white institution. She had taken my class as a mental break on her way to med school, or Harvard law, or some lily-white corporation.*

*I had entitled the course "The Black Experience in the Americas." I should have known better: it attracted the few black students around—plus a few courageous whites—and they were all expecting too much, much more than I could deliver.*

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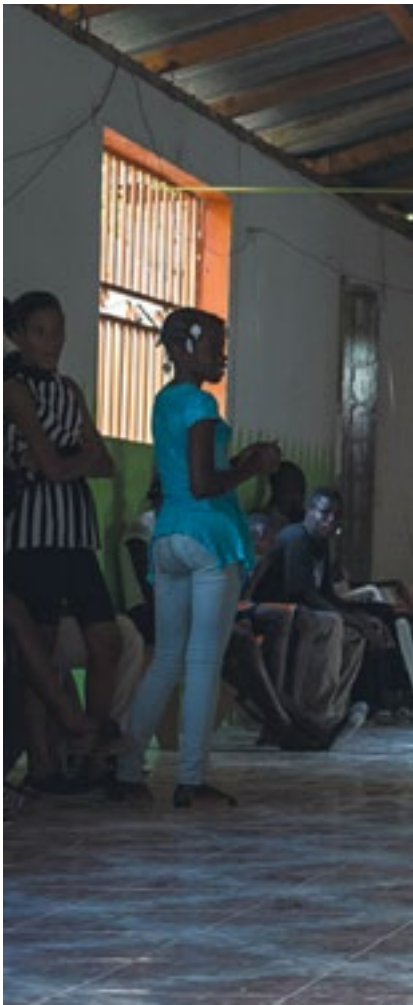
# HALKA / HAITI

18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W

## THE PROCESS

Upon receiving the invitation for his students to attend dance workshops, the principal of Lycée Jérémie Eliazaire immediately challenged the Polish instructors to demonstrate their dancing skills.



Daily dance workshops at the Cosmos Hotel welcomed participants of all ages, together with any spectators.


LET'S JUST
ASSUME
I KNOW

After weeks of practicing the polonaise and mazurka pieces from *Halka* on their own, the orchestra met for a rehearsal with the opera's conductor at their school in Pétionville.

It was at the music school in Pétionville that the singers practiced for the first time after arriving in Haiti.

An evening rehearsal took place in the Holy Trinity Music School's other location, in downtown Port-au-Prince, right next to the ruins of Holy Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, which was destroyed in the 2010 earthquake.


OPST
OPST
OPST


TOYOTA

The final performance took place in the neighborhood of Cazale called Abadal, not far up the road from the Episcopal Church. The rehearsals aroused the interest of some dedicated young viewers, but most people—with their cars, motorbikes, and donkeys—proceeded up and down the road as on any other day.

Rehearsals on location were accompanied by noisy machines from the nearby carpenter's workshop.

Making decisions about the final shape of the performance included discussing the stage movements of singers and dancers.

Enthusiastic dance-group coordinators and dedicated Creole-to-English translators, Wasly Simon and Wilso Annulysse led the polonaise as part of the first two couples both during the rehearsals and in the final performance.

The film crew positioned the four-camera setup in various places, trying to achieve the most inclusive and panoramic view of the show.

Between finding the proper eight-octave electronic piano with weighted keys, which had to be driven up the mountain from Port-au-Prince, and finding the perfect goat, who was pulled and coaxed from a nearby lot, there were a lot of arrangements to be made before the opera could begin.

Walking through the streets of Cazale in their traditional Polish costumes, the soloists looked as if they had just gotten out of a time machine.

The crew and audience mingled in the street after the performance finished, sharing vodka and Coca-Cola.

Run by the very supportive Monsieur Benoît, the Cosmos Hotel was a place of daily rest and refuge for the production team. Below, project photographer Damas Porcena.


4x4


WELCOME
COSMOS HOTEL

# BIOS

## C.T. JASPER

Born in 1971 in Poland, C.T. Jasper is an artist who splits his life between New York and Ulan Bator. His works oscillate on the threshold of various media, concentrating principally on video and electronic-partisan interventions in already existing film works. Jasper's most recent projects include *Erased* (2013), *Sunset of the Pharaohs* (2014), and *Vertigo* (2015). His projects have been presented in exhibitions in North America and Europe, most recently in *Relations Disrelations* (2015), a two-person survey show with Joanna Malinowska at Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź in Poland.

## JOANNA MALINOWSKA

Born in Poland in 1972 and based in New York, artist Joanna Malinowska works in sculpture, video, and performance. Her projects—often inspired by interest in cultural anthropology, cultural clashes, and music—have been exhibited in both solo and group exhibitions in the United States and Europe, at venues including the Sculpture Center, Art in General, Postmasters, and CANADA in New York; Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton in Paris; Saatchi Gallery and Nottingham Contemporary in Great Britain; Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle and Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw. She was also included in the First Moscow Biennale, Performa 09, and the 2012 Whitney Biennial. A graduate of the sculpture departments at Rutgers University and Yale School of Art, Malinowska has received awards from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, Smack Mellon, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, and the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, among others. She is represented by CANADA gallery in New York.

**WILSO ANNULYSSE**
Wilso Annulysse was born in 1993 in Cazale, where he currently lives. He comes from a family of twelve children (eight boys and four girls), of which he is the fourth. He is in his final year at the Lycée Jérémie Eliazer in Cazale. After completing high school, he would like to study languages, communication, agronomy, and engineering.

**GÉRI BENOÎT**
Géri Benoît is a Haitian diplomat and social scientist, and formerly first lady of Haiti as the wife of President René Préval (1996–2001). Since the 1990s, she has worked on development projects for Cazale and Haiti, including Institut Femmes Entrepreneurs, which she founded in 1998. She has represented Haiti in numerous international bodies, such as the Organization of American States, speaking publicly on numerous occasions on issues of poverty, women's rights, and child labor in Haiti. Benoît holds degrees in Marketing and Social and Commercial Communications from the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and from the CELSA Paris-Sorbonne University. She also holds an M.A. in International Public Policies and International Development from Johns Hopkins University. She is the daughter of Agatha Belneau and Sylvain Benoît, both born in Cazale, and when in Poland, she includes the Polish version of her mother's last name: Géri Benoît Belnowski.

**KATARZYNA CZECZOT**
Katarzyna Czeczot, born in 1979, is a historian of literature. She works at the Institute of Literary Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences, where she is a member of the Department of Romantic Literature and of the Gender Studies Group "Literature and Gender." Czeczot's research interests include representations of madness in European culture in the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries, as well as the cultural contexts of psychiatry and feminist critique. She has authored numerous articles devoted to Romantic and contemporary literature. Czeczot is a lecturer in Gender Studies and most recently co-edited the volume *Encyklopedia gender. Płeć w kulturze* (Czarna Owca, 2014).

**BARBARA KAJA KANIEWSKA**
Born in 1983, Barbara Kaja Kaniewska is a cinematographer and scriptwriter. For many years, she has been working with documentary forms in film and photography, traveling in developing countries in Asia, Eastern Africa, and the Caribbean. Currently, she is focusing on experimental and fiction movies. She visited Haiti for the first time in 2009, when together with the traveller Światosław Wojtkowiak, she planned to investigate Vodou festivals around the country. After they were attacked and seriously wounded by an angry mob during one of the demonstrations in Port-au-Prince, U.N. forces suggested they leave the country. Instead, they decided to take refuge in Cazale, a Polish village in the mountains they had heard about, where they remained for the rest of their trip, staying with a local family who helped them heal their wounds. The photographic record they made on that trip has been exhibited and published both in Poland and abroad.

**MAGDALENA MOSKALEWICZ**
Magdalena Moskalewicz, born in 1984 in Warsaw, is an art historian, critic, and curator. Currently A.W. Mellon Postdoctoral C-MAP Fellow at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, she leads a research group focusing on twentieth-century experimental art from Central and Eastern Europe as a part of MoMA's initiative, C-MAP. Previously editor-in-chief of Poland's monthly contemporary art magazine, *Arteon*, she now serves as co-editor of C-MAP's digital publication, *post.* Awarded a Ph.D. in art history from Adam Mickiewicz University for her research into the Polish neo-avant-garde of the 1960s, Moskalewicz has published and lectured internationally on Polish abstract painting, assemblage, and conceptual art. She has also written on more contemporary practices, most recently for *Central European*

*Companion to Political Ideas* (Central European University Press, 2015). In her scholarly, editorial, and curatorial work, Moskalewicz critically investigates local art histories and representations of national identities in order to reshape and revise dominant historical narratives.

### PAWEŁ PASSINI

Paweł Passini, born in 1977, is a theatre director who completed his academic education in the Directing Department of the State Theatre School in Warsaw. Passini also participated in the Academy of Theatre Practices run by the acclaimed Gardzienice Theatre (one of Poland's best-known troupes of the so-called anthropological genre, based in a small village in southeastern Poland). He is the head of the neTTheatre—the first Internet theatre in the world—as well as co-founder of CHOREA Theatre Association (formerly Ancient Orchestra). Passini has directed over thirty performances in numerous theaters both in Poland and abroad. His work has won several international awards, including the Herald's Angel and Total Theatre Awards, given to his production of *Turandot* at the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland (2011).

### WERONIKA PELCZYŃSKA

Weronika Pelczyńska, born in 1985, is an independent dancer and choreographer who graduated from the Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance and from the Warsaw University of Technology. In 2013, she won the DanceWEB scholarship for the ImPulsTanz - Vienna International Dance Festival, and in 2013 she won a Carte Blanche residency from Modul-dance. As a dancer she collaborates with dance companies in Poland, Germany, and Austria, while also making her own works and developing choreography for theatre and film. She enjoys working in the liminal areas of various realms of art. Pelczyńska is a member of Centrum w Ruchu ("Center in Motion"), an association of choreographers and performers in Warsaw.

### COLETTE ARMENTA PÉRODIN

Colette Armenta Pérodin, born in 1958 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, holds a degree in specialized studies (DESS) in Strategies of Cultural Development and Arts Administration from Avignon University in France. For twenty-three years, she has been a founding member and the executive director of the Fondation Culture Création. Armenta Pérodin is also in charge of the project Education through the Arts, started by the foundation in 2003. Her research includes: "Les Manifestations culturelles: enjeux et retombées dans la ville" (report given at Université d'Avignon, France in 2002) as well as organization of documentation for Haitian artists Jean-René Jérôme, Ludovic Booz, Gesner Armand, Hilda Williams, and Bernard Séjourné (*L'artiste et son* œuvre, 1992-2000). Her article "Festival et rituel: le rara dans l'impasse" was published in the French journal, *Lettre du réseau de la Formation Internationale Culture* (no. 21, 2001) and also in *Revue Rencontre* (no. 18, 2003) in Haiti.

### KACPER POBŁOCKI

Kacper Pobłocki, born in 1980, is an assistant professor of Anthropology and Urban Studies at the University of Poznań in Poland. A graduate of University College Utrecht and Central European University, he was a visiting fellow at the Center for Place, Culture and Politics at CUNY Graduate Center in 2009. His prime interest is in a historical analysis of uneven development and a non-occidental comparative study of urbanization. He has published in *Critique of Anthropology*, *Polish Sociological Review*, and *Focaal - Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, among other journals. He co-authored a handbook for urban activists (*Anty-bezradnik Przestrzenny*, 2013), and he is currently preparing a book on how Poland has "turned south" since its EU accession in 2004.

### WASLY SIMON

Wasly Simon was born in 1995 in Cazale, where he still lives. He is the second in a family of six children, and he is currently

a student in his second-to-last year at the Lycée Jérémie Eliazer in Cazale. After finishing high school, he wants to study law, communication, and diplomacy.

### TREVOR SMITH

Born in 1964, Trevor Smith is the Curator of the Present Tense at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, where he leads a cross-departmental team working with artists to explore how creativity and cultural change emerge at the intersections of cultures, disciplines, or technologies. Smith studied at the University of British Columbia and has held curatorial positions at museums in Canada, Australia, and the United States. Known for working closely and collaboratively with artists, Smith has produced exhibitions and commissions at PEM with Céleste Boursier-Mougenot, Candice Breitz, Nick Cave, Peter Hutton, Michael Lin, Susan Philipsz, Jo Ratcliffe, and Charles Sandison. Previous projects include *Singapore Biennale 2011: Open House*, *Martin Creed: Feelings* (CCS Bard), *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space* (New Museum and Contemporary Art Museum Houston), and *The Divine Comedy: Francisco Goya, Buster Keaton, and William Kentridge* (Art Gallery of Western Australia).

### GRZEGORZ WIERUS

Born in 1978, Grzegorz Wierus has been a conductor at the Poznań Opera House since 2012, conducting performances of operas by Stravinsky, Ravel, Verdi, and Tchaikovsky, among others. Previously, he worked with the Symphony Orchestra of the Łódź Philharmonic, along with other ensembles. Wierus also collaborates on a regular basis with the Kiev-based Ensemble Nostri Temporis, the leading Ukrainian group specializing in contemporary music. A significant share of his activity is devoted to projects connected with contemporary and alternative music, and to various forms of musical theatre. These include performances of the *Solaris Electronic Opera* at the Malta Festival in Poznań, in 2007; *Haendel/Nepelski – Giulio Cesare,* at the Iubilaei Cantus Festival in Nowy Sącz, in 2009; and *Oratorium Dance Project,* in cooperation with the Chorea Theatre in Łódź, in 2012. Wierus is also engaged in multiple projects that bring together professional and amateur musicians.

### BERNADETTE STELA WILLIAMS

Bernadette Stela Williams was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1983. After graduating from the Holy Trinity Music School in 1997, she joined its Philharmonic Orchestra, and two years later she also joined the school's staff as a cello teacher and librarian. In 2002, she became the principal of the cello section. Since then, she has been coordinating the orchestra's annual U.S. concert tour with the Boys Choir and the Chamber Ensemble, in which she also performs. Williams also coordinated the El Sistema program for youth from disadvantaged parts of Port-au-Prince in partnership with the Organization of American States from 2009 to 2013. She is dedicated to promoting classical music throughout Haiti and to supporting talented youth by opening new musical centers in the Haitian countryside. Williams holds two bachelor's degrees, in accounting and business management, from Université Épiscopale d'Haïti.

# PROJECT PARTICIPANTS IN HAITI

## SCRIPT AND DIRECTING

C.T. Jasper and Joanna Malinowska
in collaboration with Magdalena
Moskalewicz

## THE POZNAŃ OPERA HOUSE

*Soloists*

SOPRANO, HALKA
Monika Mych-Nowicka
TENOR, JONTEK
Piotr Friebe
BARITONE, STOLNIK / DZIEMBA
Andrzej Ogórkiewicz
SOPRANO, ZOFIA
Natalia Puczniewska
BARITONE, JANUSZ
Julian Kuczyński

CONDUCTOR
Grzegorz Wierus
OPERA DIRECTOR
Paweł Passini
CHOREOGRAPHER
Weronika Pelczyńska
ARTISTIC COORDINATOR
Renata Borowska-Juszczyńska,
director, *The Poznań Opera House*
PROJECT COORDINATOR
Robert Szczepański, deputy director,
*The Poznań Opera House*
MAKE-UP
Anna Hampelska

## HOLY TRINITY PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA OF PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI

ARTISTIC COORDINATOR
Bernadette Stela Williams
FIRST VIOLINS
Guerlyn Esperance, Thara Norde,
Gerline Joseph Riard, Sindy Etienne
SECOND VIOLINS
Jessica Metellus, Anne Ludia Louigene
VIOLAS
Rolande Dha Jean, Jovanny Payen
CELLOS
Bernadette Stela Williams, Joanne Jean
Pierre
BASS
Fabienne Paul
OBOE
Frantzdy Monteau
FLUTES
Théophile Joseph, Deborah Etienne
CLARINETS
Kerline Philogene, Jacques Anderson
Bernier
BASSOON
Dimy Samuel Joseph
FRENCH HORN
Peterson Allah
TRUMPET
David Saintilus
TROMBONE
Leone Saincyr
PERCUSSION
Joisil Benisson

## DANCERS FROM CAZALE

COORDINATORS
Wilso Annulysse, Wasly Simon
DANCERS
Wilso Annulysse, Chrisléne Annulysse,
Alex Belfort, Rose Darline Cajuste,
Todline Louis Charles, Yonel Charles,
Theresa Christelie Cinéus, Bebyram
Démas, Johana Frénaud, Josue Haraus,
Djenisca Josaphiat, Stéphanie Lavaud,
Emmanuela Lavaud, Elisca Moles,
Joseph Ronald, Wasly Simon, Bicline
Valmont, Mervilus Viterson

## FILM CREW

DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Barbara Kaja Kaniewska, Mateusz Golis
SOUND
Kamil Radziszewski, Marcin Popławski
CAMERA ASSISTANT
Bartosz Górka

## PHOTOGRAPHER

Damas Porcena (Dams)

## COORDINATION

Joanna Waśko, Magdalena Moskalewicz

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# EXHIBITION

*Halka/Haiti 18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W*
C.T. Jasper & Joanna Malinowska

Exhibition Curator: Magdalena Moskalewicz

The Polish Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition—la Biennale di Venezia

May 9–November 22, 2015

Polish Pavilion Commissioner: Hanna Wróblewska
Deputy Commissioner: Joanna Waśko

Organizer of the exhibition: Zachęta—National Gallery of Art

ZACHĘTA

pl. Małachowskiego 3
00-916 Warsaw
zacheta.art.pl
labiennale.art.pl

Director: Hanna Wróblewska

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Exhibition in collaboration with

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*C.T. Jasper & Joanna Malinowska*

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