



# **REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE RECHERCHE EN COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION ET DEVELOPPEMENT (RIRCED)**

**Revue annuelle, publiée par :  
L'INSTITUT UNIVERSITAIRE PANAFRICAIN (IUP),**

Autorisation : Arrêté N° 2011 - 008/MESRS/CAB/DC/SGM/DPP/DEPES/SP  
Modifiée par l'Arrêté N° 2013-044/MESRS/CAB/DC/SGM/DPP/DEPES/SP

**Sous la direction du :**

**Pr Gabriel C. BOKO &  
Dr (MC) Innocent C. DATONDJI**



**Editions Africatex Médias,  
01 BP 3950 Porto-Novo, Bénin.**

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**Vol 1, N°09 – NOVEMBRE 2019, ISSN 1840 - 6874**

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Sites web : [www.iup.edu.bj](http://www.iup.edu.bj) / [www.iup-publication.bj](http://www.iup-publication.bj)

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**ISSN 1840 – 6874**

**Bibliothèque Nationale,  
Porto-Novo, République du Bénin.**

**Impression**

**Imprimerie Les Cinq Talents Sarl,**  
03 BP 3689, Cotonou République du Bénin  
Tél. (+229) 21 05 33 16 / 97 98 19 23.



**Editions Africatex Médias,**  
01 BP 3950 Porto-Novo, Bénin.  
**Novembre 2019**

**RIRCED**

**REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE  
RECHERCHE EN COMMUNICATION,  
EDUCATION ET DEVELOPPEMENT**

**Vol. 1, N° 09, Novembre 2019, ISSN 1840 – 6874**

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Elle doit être brève et insister sur l'originalité des résultats de la Recherche.

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Pour un livre : Nom, Prénoms (ou initiaux), Titre du livre  
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Lieu d'édition, Editions, Année d'édition.

Pour un article : Nom, Prénoms (ou initiaux), "Titre de  
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Le système de référence par année à l'intérieur du texte est également toléré.

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Tous les articles doivent être envoyés à l'adresse suivante : [iup.benin@yahoo.com](mailto:iup.benin@yahoo.com) ou [iupuniversite@gmail.com](mailto:iupuniversite@gmail.com)

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- Communication et Information,
- Education et Formation,
- Développement et Economie,
- Sciences Politiques et Relations Internationales,
- Sociologie et Psychologie,
- Lettres, Langues et Arts,
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Au total, la RIRCED se veut le lieu de rencontre et de dissémination de nouvelles idées et opinions savantes dans les domaines ci-dessus cités.

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## **EDITORIAL**

La Revue Internationale de Recherche en Communication, Education et Développement (RIRCED), publiée par l'Institut Universitaire Panafricain (IUP), est une revue ouverte aux enseignants et chercheurs des universités, instituts, centres universitaires et grandes écoles.

L'objectif visé par la publication de cette revue dont nous sommes à la neuvième publication est de permettre aux collègues Enseignants-Chercheurs et Chercheurs de disposer d'une tribune pour faire connaître leurs travaux de recherche. Cette édition a connu une légère modification au niveau du comité de rédaction où le Professeur Titulaire Gabriel C. BOKO, devient le Directeur de Publication et le Professeur (Maître de Conférences), Innocent C. DATONDJI est le Rédacteur en Chef.

Le comité scientifique de lecture de la RIRCED est désormais présidé par le Professeur Médard Dominique BADA. Ce comité compte désormais huit membres qui sont tous des Professeurs Titulaires.

**Pr Gabriel C. BOKO &  
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**ISLAND IN CONFIANT NUÉE ARDENTE  
(BURNING CLOUD)  
L'AGONIE DES HABITANTS DE L'ÎLE DES  
CARAÏBES À CONFIANT NUÉE ARDENTE  
(BURNING CLOUD)**

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite its beautiful landscape and weather which entice tourists globally, the Caribbean island is paradoxically characterised by natural hazards which comprise earthquake, hurricane, volcanic eruptions and torrential rains. Most islands in the Caribbean are particularly susceptible to a range of disasters both natural and man-made for a number of reasons. Caribbean countries are vulnerable to series of hazards due to and often exacerbated by their geology, tectonic setting, location and topography as well as their poor land use and environmental management practices. These natural

hazards are responsible for numerous deaths, destruction of goods and properties and which ultimately lead to massive exodus of people from their natural environment. This study examined the agony of living in the Caribbean island with its attendant challenges. It adopted psychoanalysis and sociological theories in understanding the psychological ordeal being endured by the Caribbean. The methodology adopted is content analysis which is an investigative manner of examining texts. The paper discovered that the people living in the Caribbean are still exposed to numerous challenges occasioned by disasters being experienced in the area. It is recommended in the paper that Caribbean leadership should intensify their effort towards finding lasting solutions to various housing challenges occasioned by the impact of volcanic eruptions and other natural hazards in the region.

**Keywords:** Agony, Caribbean, Volcanic eruptions, Earthquake, Hazards.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Malgré ses beaux paysages et sa météo qui attirent les touristes dans le monde, l'Île des Caraïbes est

paradoxalement caractérisée par des risques naturels qui comprennent le tremblement de terre, l'ouragan, les éruptions volcaniques et les pluies torrentielles. La plupart des Îles des Caraïbes sont particulièrement exposées à une série de catastrophes naturelles et d'origine humaine pour un certain nombre de raisons. Les pays des Caraïbes sont vulnérables à une série de dangers dus à et souvent exacerbés par leur géologie, leur environnement tectonique, leur emplacement et leur topographie ainsi que par leur mauvaise utilisation des terres et leurs pratiques de gestion environnementale. Ces risques naturels sont responsables de nombreux décès, de destructions de biens et de propriétés et qui conduisent finalement à un exode massif de personnes de leur environnement naturel. Cette étude a examiné l'agonie de vivre dans l'île des Caraïbes avec ses défis. Il a adopté la psychanalyse et les théories sociologiques pour comprendre l'épreuve psychologique endurée par les Caraïbes. La méthodologie adoptée est l'analyse de contenu qui est une manière d'investigation d'examiner des textes. Le document a découvert que les personnes vivant dans les Caraïbes sont toujours exposées à de nombreux défis occasionnés par les catastrophes



rencontrées dans la région. Il est recommandé dans le document que les dirigeants des Caraïbes intensifient leurs efforts pour trouver des solutions durables aux divers problèmes de logement occasionnés par l'impact des éruptions volcaniques et d'autres risques naturels dans la région.

Mots-clés: agonie, Caraïbes, éruptions volcaniques, tremblement de terre, danger

## **INTRODUCTION**

Agony is described as a severe physical pain or mental distress, it is also seen as a period of affliction leading to one's death. Agony is chronic pain which can result in a sense of anguish and also trigger recurring mental distress or emotional grief. It is a distasteful feeling (sorrow) of a mental or non-mental origin. Martinez describes it as "how much you are hurt as a human being". It is believed to be an inevitable feature of human existence because nobody is invulnerable from it. Agony affects everyone irrespective of sex, financial or academic status. It is an enduring, horrible and insupportable feelings occasioned by pessimistic assessment of self-

imperfection. As beautiful as the Caribbean island is, there are innumerable geographical and natural challenges that can provoke unwarranted agony. Several earthquakes have caused severe damage throughout the Caribbean archipelago, the 19th Century earthquake in Jamaica and Guadeloupe and more recently the Jamaica earthquake of 1993 which killed several thousand people. Some of the islands are also vulnerable to instances of volcanic eruptions and torrential rains which also caused severe human and material loss. The catastrophe caused by tsunami is indeed overwhelming given the number of deaths and magnitude of destruction recorded during this ugly event. Tsunami can cause severe damage as a result of its speed. It travels at an average velocity of 500 to 600km per hour (310 to 375 MPH) rising to a maximum of 800km/h. Flooding is another most frequently occurring natural disasters in the Caribbean. It is most prevalent during the hurricane season in several Caribbean towns and it poses serious threat to the socio-economic development of the region. In Guyana 2005, floods resulted in \$55million damages to the agricultural sector and the following year caused approximately \$22.5million

damages to the same sector (UNDP,2011:15). Volcanic eruptions have caused massive destructions in the region resulting in loss of human lives and monumental damage of houses, churches, hospitals, buildings among others. Consequently, the victims of these natural hazards are forced to leave their homes and settle in most cases in temporary shelters or rehabilitation camps which are often over populated.

In January, 2010, the inhabitants of Port-au Prince in Haiti, woke up to a massively devastated city. This particular earthquake exterminated over 300,000 people while over 100,000 houses were badly destroyed sparking habitation crisis the country was particularly ill-endowed to confront. More than 1.5million Haitians were living in some 1,500 camps built in Port-au-Prince and in neighbouring towns following this dwelling crisis. This figure is different from thousands who were also displaced but who chose to seek shelter with friends and family members. Those who had to leave their houses continue to encounter a range of difficulties associated with this unexpected relocation. In fact, 74% of the families that were forced to leave their abode took the decision because

their overall living conditions have become worse since the disaster. In October, 2016, the country also had an unpleasant and upsetting experience with Hurricane Matthew which resulted in deaths and destruction of environments. Images from one of the towns show hundreds of flattened houses and damaged farms, the town appeared to have been virtually detached from the rest of the world as a result of damaged communication network. It is the most powerful Caribbean storm in nearly a decade, according to an eye witness. The wreckage that we are seeing is horrible... The town is really in dire straits and it is very, very bad down there. Mr. Oxfam, an official for Aid agency opines that more than 10,000 people had been displaced. A key bridge had been destroyed, roads are inaccessible and phone communications are terribly bad. The destructive force of Hurricane Matthew was largely felt in the Southwest of the country where we have several trees fallen, banana crops uprooted and flattened, houses under water and men and women trying to get the debris out of the way. Disasters in the Caribbean often cause millions of dollars in losses to infrastructure and to economic and social sectors. Rescue efforts are under way

to assess the destruction left in the wake of the most powerful Caribbean storm. The government and UN officials estimate that about 400,000 people are in urgent need of assistance. To this end, the United States of America sent its USS Mesa Verde Navy ship to assist with rescue efforts, as well as 9 military helicopters to help in delivering food and water to the hardest-hit areas. The Red Cross has also launched an emergency appeal for \$6.9million to provide medical, shelter, and water and sanitation assistance given the unexpected surge in cholera cases with the sanitation system already overwhelmed.

## **1. AN OVERVIEW OF *NUÉE ARDENTE* (*BURNING CLOUD*)**

The global attention was focused on the island of Martinique in 1902 following the violent volcanic eruption which caused absolute destruction of the town of St. Pierre and its 300,000 inhabitants. When the volcanic eruption occurred on 8th May, 1902, a large and violent cloud swept down the south west slope of the mountain with incredible swiftness and in a span of minutes completely obliterated the town. The town was for several years, the

economic, cultural and intellectual capital of Martinique; it was also known as small Paris. Raphael Confiant tells us about the last hours of Saint-Pierre through his novel which discusses fear, migration, complex, slavery and class dichotomy. The author brings to the fore the numerous evil acts committed against the black slaves. He also highlights the inhabitants' fear having been warned about the impending volcanic eruption. Unfortunately, the Governor takes advantage of the people gullibility through the church which assures them that the impending danger could be averted through prayers. The inhabitants lost their lives as a result of erroneous religious beliefs against scientific recommendation of prompt evacuation to a safer place. Confiant is of the opinion that the tragedy is quite preventable but for the insensitive Governor who encourages the residents against leaving the town because he does not want to postpone the second round of elections. The author uses other characters to illustrate the story.

It is remarkable to note the fact that evacuation has been a recurring safety precaution in the Caribbean island given the island vulnerability to natural hazards. There are

instances where residents have been evacuated from high risk areas ahead of natural disasters. The authorities have evacuated residents to safer locations to avoid loss of lives. The residents normally stocked up food items hurriedly and supermarkets are also crammed with residents seeking essential supplies. The government in most cases normally offered unspecified amount of money and transportation to safer neighbouring islands. Thousands of people packed up their belongings and left their homes in obedience to evacuation order. Unfortunately, the story in this novel is pathetic because the Martinique residents could not differentiate between religious bigotry and scientific precautions.

### **1.1.The agony of displacement in *Nuée Ardente* (*Burning Cloud*)**

Confiant uses his novel to explore the theme of agony in Martinique following the scientific warning of an impending volcanic eruption by a renowned and highly respected volcanologist. There was palpable fear in the town because of the magnitude of destruction of lives and properties during the previous volcanic eruptions. The

residents became apprehensive and there was large exodus of people as a result of the natural hazards. The white plantation owners and the few béké started relocating their immediate family to safer places while certain poor blacks resigned to fate and decided to dare the imminent catastrophe. Latouche muddles the people nightmare by corroborating the volcanologist scientific fore-cast which focuses mainly on inevitability of the violent volcanic eruptions. He remarks unequivocally that:

Mesdames et messieurs, bonnes gens et bonnes gensses de Saint-Pierre et d'ailleurs, Oyez! Oyez! Un grand savant qui vit incognito parmi nous, un homme qui a lu et relu tous les livres de l'univers, vient faire une découverte magistrate, phénoménale, grandiose. Oui, mesdames et messieurs, vous mourrez tous! Ha-ha-ha, oh! Pas de votre belle mort, non vous mourrez sous un déluge de feu que crachera notre bonne vieille montagne Pelée. Ha ha-ha! (p.103).

Ladies and gentlemen, good men and women of St. Peter and elsewhere, Hear ye! Hear ye! A great scholar who lives incognito among us, a man who has read and reread all the books of the universe, has just made a phenomenal, spectacular and magisterial discovery. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, you will all die! Ha-ha-ha, oh! Not pleasant death, no, you will die under a deluge of fire that spits our good old mountain Pelée. Ha ha-ha



This declaration brings to the fore the repressed anxiety that is relegated to the unconscious but brought to the surface by the reality of imminent danger and destruction. The repressed anxiety is triggered by seemingly traumatic situation occasioned by the imminent volcanic eruptions. The natives are being tormented by the reality of the natural hazards as much as they attempt to prevent it from their memory. The inhabitants become nervous and timid because of the impending catastrophe with its attendant misfortunes. Latouche statement appears quite frightful and intimidating and this clearly explains why the residents are apprehensive and restless. The whites and mulattos are conscious of destructive tendencies of volcanic eruptions and they move swiftly towards escaping the imminent destruction while few blacks, especially the down-trodden remain indifferent to the warning. The attitude of the indigenous blacks is informed by their poor financial status and the belief that volcanic eruptions are not strange in the islands. The indifferent behaviour accounts for large number of deaths and loss of properties in the islands densely populated by the natives.

It is interesting to observe that the anxiety generated as a result of imminent volcanic eruption brings the whites, the blacks, the mullatos and other nationalities in the Caribbean islands together. They become one as a nation and they jointly look for possible solutions to the environmental challenges. They forget temporarily their racial differences and prejudices which normally cause suspicion, hatred and division among them. The trauma of imminent catastrophe brings them together to not only confront the natural hazards but to propose permanent solutions. Confiant describes the unity of purpose among the people thus:

A l'égalité des Blancs! Au reste, tout le monde avait oublié sa couleur, il n'y avait plus ni nègres ni mulâtres ni Chabins ni Indiens ni Chinois ni Békés mais des êtres humains désarçonnés devant ce qui avait tout l'air d'être les prémices de la fin de monde (p.150).

As much as many whites and others! Everyone had forgotten his color, there were no more blacks and mulattos, neither Chabin nor Indian, Chinese or Béké, but human beings who were despoiled by what seemed to be the first signal of the end of the world

It is evident that the assembly of people from different cultural background is motivated by the superego

which compels them to make sacrifice for the good cause which is their safety from the looming volcanic eruptions. The superego makes them to forget their individual origin and identity while ruminating on means of tackling the menace. The author also uses dreams, which according to Freud are all forms of wish fulfilment and means of unravelling the mysteries of the world. He defines dreams as attempts by the unconscious to resolve a conflict of some sort, whether something recent or something from the archive of the past. He also opines that there are three types of dreams. The direct prophecies received in the dream, the foretelling of a future event and the symbolic dream which requires interpretation. Our area of interest is the second type which is foretelling the future event. It should be noted that dreams in most cases draw its resources from residues of lived experiences of immediate and past events. This explains the reason why the author draws our attention to an anonymous character who is referred to as l'Afrique – Guinée. The Negro narrates his dream concerning the volcanic eruption thereby aggravating the residents' ordeal. He gives a vivid description of the eruption through his dream which

reveals how rivers outflow their banks making roads impassable and how houses, ancient monuments, trees are flattened as a result of volcanic eruptions. L'Afrique-Guinée summarises his dream in this manner:

J'ai fait un songe, personne ne peut empêcher les aveugles de voir. songe. Chaque nuit, je fais un songe et c'est ainsi que je n'oublie pas. Savez-vous que nous sommes devenus des aveugles, nous les nègres de ce pays-la, mais Personne! Je vois des fleuves démesurés qui montent à l'assaut du ciel, des forêts impénétrables, des tigres, des compères éléphants. Je vois, autour du foyer sacré les gardiens des ancêtres qui, lentement, tourne et vire, tourne et vire, et j'entends chaque mot de sa langue natale (p.114).

I had a dream. Every night, I dream and then, I do not forget. Do you know that we have become blind, we the Negroes of this country, but in a dream no one can prevent the blind from seeing. No one! I see huge rivers rising to the sky, impenetrable forests, tigers, elephant comrades. I see around the sacred hearth, the guardians of the ancestors who slowly turn and turn, turn and turn, and I hear every word of his native tongue.

The narration of his dream compounds the residents' anxiety about the looming disaster and the helpless indigenes who cannot raise the needed fund for relocation decide to remain in their native island. It is pathetic to note

here that while the white plantation owners and the mulattos are making arrangement for the relocation of their families, the welfare and the fate of the blacks who toil interminably on the sugarcane plantations do not mean anything to them. The anonymous character tries in vain to counsel the residents to change their conservative stance about the volcanic eruption and relocate to safer places in the island. He notes regrettably: « *Cette vie-là ne durera pas, nègres de peu de mémoire! Cette ville est condamné aux pire tourments* (p.115) *This world will not last, Negroes of little memory! This city is condemned to the worst torments*”. Unfortunately, the residents refused to heed to the scientific warnings and they perish in the natural hazards.

The attention of readers is also drawn to the respected black lawyer who also informs his fellow Nègros about the violent eruptions. He notes soberly:

J’ai reçu plusieurs câbles de New York... Les nouvelles ne sont pas très bonnes, my dear friend. Pas bonnes, du tout. Des vulcanologues américains paraissaient inquiets de l’évolution des manifestations qui agitaient la pelée depuis quelques mois (p.174).

I received several cables from New York ... The news is not very good, my dear friend. Not good at all. American volcanologists appeared worried about the evolution of the demonstrations which had been agitating for several months.

The renowned lawyer tries to convince the indigenous Caribbeans that the natural disaster is real and they should not take the natural warning for granted. He discloses the source and reliability of his information and encourages his fellow Négros to do the needful concerning their safety. The lawyer is confident that the volcanic eruptions is imminent and cannot be salvaged. He is visibly disconcerted given the source of the information and the anxiety of American volcanologists. Unfortunately, the black Caribbean community appears unperturbed by their kinsman's scientific admonition.

Confiant provides an insight to the reason why the native Caribbeans are indifferent. He observes that volcanic eruptions have been a recurrent natural disaster in the region and they are used to the natural scourge. They under-estimate the degree of damage to be triggered by this particular volcanic eruptions and do not expect the magnitude of destruction of lives and properties worth

billions of dollars. The author describes their erroneous feelings thus: « *Cela fait trois bons siècles que nous vivons avec ce volcan et nous sommes habitués à ses sautes d'humeur...* (p.185). *It's been three good centuries that we live with this volcano and we are used to its humming swings.*” As far as the natives are concerned, they have become acquainted with the natural hazards and they appeared equipped to confront it without realising the fact that the extent of destruction of this specific volcanic eruption will be unprecedented. The town is completely wiped out as a result of massive destruction of lives and properties. The unfortunate incident exposes the ill-preparedness of the Caribbean government to cope with natural disasters with its attendant consequence on lives and properties.

Another reason advance by the author for the natives' indifference to scientific warning is that the people are of the opinion that the volcanic eruption is a form of vengeance for the whites plantation owners misdeeds. They believe that God is deliberately punishing the whites who own most beautiful houses through illegal earnings on the sugarcane plantations. The Caribbean

Negros believes that the riches being enjoyed by the recalcitrant whites are unjustly made through the natives who work laboriously and interminably to earn peanut. The conflict perspective also uncovers the undeserved privileges and opportunities which are deliberately and unlawfully bequeathed to the whites. The Negro community feels cheated and neglected by the prejudiced access to societal wealth. They view the natural disaster as their own vengeance on various properties and money acquired exploitatively by the whites. L’Afrique-Guinée the black anonymous character opines ignorantly and confidently:

Sainte Pierre est une ville maudite, braillait-il! Son opulence s’est batie sur la sueur de nos ancêtres qui furent arrachés à la Terre –Mère et qui jour après jour, semaine après semaine, mois après mois, année après année, siècle après siècle, se sont esquivés dans les champs de canne pour le seul profit des Blancs et de leurs complices, leur fils batards... L’enrageaison du volcan sera notre vengeance et il ne laissera pas un mur debout! (p.188).

Saint Peter is an accursed city, he shouted! His opulence was built on the soul of our ancestors who were torn from Mother Earth and who day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, century after century, have squatted in the cane fields.



For the sole benefit of whites and their accomplices,  
their bastard sons... The disturbance of the volcano  
will be our revenge and it will not leave a wall  
standing!

The assertion by the Negro which is not only naïve but also conservative is inaccurately premised on the inhuman and exploitative treatment of the blacks by the whites. The flawed statement is also influenced by the past unpleasant experience of the character on the plantation farm. He is of the opinion that God intends to avenge past human right abuses and other exploitative inclinations of the whites. This belief is informed by suppressed feelings and past pain and agony that Negroes have endured on the sugar plantation; they presuppose that volcanic eruption is meant for punishing the white for their misdeeds. The black community, according to him, has nothing to fear because the divine punishment (to borrow Camus' expression) is meant for the callous Caucasians. L'Afrique-Guinée and some black Caribbeans believe that the violent eruption is targeted at the whites whose properties will be consumed by volcanic eruption. While nursing this erroneous belief, they never imagine the enormity of the impending catastrophe. The natives lost their lives and their wretched

properties in the violent eruptions which neither spares the whites nor the self-acclaimed righteous blacks.

Confiant also uses his novel to explore the theme of displacement, mass movement of people from an area that is perceived to be dangerous to a safe place. Such movement were initially restricted within the Caribbean region but from the early 1900, the United States had become a major destination for Caribbean migrants due to improved economic opportunities but it should be noted that Caribbean migrants leave the islands for various reasons. Some members of the elite and skilled professionals emigrate the islands for political reasons while others flee as a result of natural disasters like earthquake, volcanic eruptions and others. The author presents Louis Mouttet, the Governor who moves round the town in company of some security officers to ascertain the degree of fear and the manner of exodus of people from the islands. He is surprised that the natives are overwhelmed with fear despite repeated assurances from the government about their safety. He discovers to his chagrin that many roads that use to be busy are deserted and absolutely silent, most banks, shops and other

financial institutions are closed. He remarks disappointedly that:

Au dehors, les rues étaient étrangement silencieuses, hormis le chuintement de quelques rares carioles. La plupart des maisons de commerce avaient fermé et le marché du mouillage était désert (p.257).

Outside, the streets were unusually silent, except for the hissing of a few rare carioles. Most of the trading houses had closed and the anchorage market was deserted.

The Governor is terrified by this development and he tries in vain to convince the people to continue with their normal life. He is greatly disturbed by the traumatic atmosphere of the town which makes the residents to leave the town in search of a more secured habitation. This is apparently a habitation crisis that requires sound environmental management skill but regrettably, the residents seem unimpressed with the government panic safety measures. Monsieur Landes, a professor of natural science who is on the Governor's entourage advises him among other urgent recommendations to evacuate the residents who live very close to the major river so as to avert loss of human lives. He says soberly:

Nous recommandons donc que les populations qui vivent à proximité des cours d'eau, en particulier la Roxelane et la rivière des pères, soient évacuées sur les hauteurs (p.260).

We therefore recommend that the people living near the rivers, in particular the Roxelane and the other major rivers, be evacuated to the heights.

This safety measure, though urgent and inevitable, appears belated because the residents are already apprehensive and nervous about the crisis. It is worthy to note that the professor of natural sciences also advises the government to send law enforcement agents to the borders so as to control the number of people leaving the town in fear. He paradoxically informs the Governor that he has already relocated his family to a safer place and he is sure that the white plantation owners will follow his steps. The selfish attitude clearly shows the insincerity and insensitiveness of the Caribbean political leaders who are more concerned about the welfare of their immediate family members at the expense of the masses. He suggests arrogantly:

Il faut évacuer la population, dit de Maucourt d'une voix plus calme mais grave, et surtout poster la

troupe aux entrées de la ville pour arrêter l'exode des campagnards. Ma propre famille est déjà à l'abri à sainte – Lucie depuis quelques jours, monsieur le gouverneur, et je vous assure que la plupart des planteurs, des usiniers et des commerçants s'apprêtent à suivre mon exemple (p.261).

We should evacuate the people, said Maucourt, in a calmer but grave voice, and, above all, to send the troops to the city gates to stop the exodus of people. My own family is already sheltered in Saint Lucia for a few days, the Governor Sir, and I assure you that most planters, millers and traders are preparing to follow suit.

The professor does not see anything wrong in relocating his family at the expense of the less privilege blacks whose fate hangs in the balance. Freud enlightens us through his theory of egocentric behaviour. He states that “there lives within each of us a selfish, cruel beast” which tends to satisfy our personal needs before thinking about others. He further explains that the selfish impulse is concealed in the unconscious mind of individuals. In essence, the professor is being motivated by his selfish impulse which prevents him from considering the natives’ fate. The blacks live from hand to mouth as a result of poor remuneration offers to them for working on the sugarcane plantation and which makes relocation difficult.

The Governor appears to be in dilemma about the evacuation options as recommended by professor Landes. He does not know how to evacuate about thirty thousand people without creating panic or aggravating seemingly tensed atmosphere. He remarks perplexingly:

Et comment pourrions nous faire évacuer trente mille personnes, je vous prie? Et vers où? ajouta Gerbault. La route coloniale no. 1 est très difficile, vous le savez bien et je ne nous vois pas pousser des milliers de malheureux à l'emprunter. Ce serait d'ailleurs provoquer une panique générale (p.264).

And how can we evacuate thirty thousand people, please? And where? Added Gerbault. The Colonial Route no. 1 is very difficult, you know well and I do not see ourselves pushing thousands of unhappy people to exile. It would also cause general panic.

It is quite evident that the governor is psychologically disturbed about the appropriate safety measures to be adopted so as to avert undue nervousness among the residents who are seemingly apprehensive. Regrettably, he does not have all the time because of the impending disaster. He is so much distressed as he ruminates on the next line of action. He asks himself two rhetorical

questions about forcing the people to stay or evacuating them to safer place. He asks puzzlingly:

Il savait qu'aucune des deux solutions envisageables n'était la bonne: rester sur place revenait à se mettre à la merci du volcan, pousser la population à l'exode, c'était déclencher des mouvements incontrôlable qui pouvaient faire tout autant de dégâts (p.265).

He knew that any of the two possible solutions was not right: to stay on the same spot at the mercy of volcano, to push out the population was to trigger uncontrollable movements that could cause so much damage.

The Governor is obviously worried in his mind and the people begin to move from pillar to post looking for safe haven. They occupy every open place, abandoning their houses for fear of being collapsed and uprooted as a result of volcanic eruptions. These people lie down in fields, cathedral compound, open markets and all other available places. The author describes the pitiable atmosphere thus:

Ils n'avaient pas de point de chute. Tout leur était matelas et couchage. Partout était à eux. Les jardins de la cathédrale, les salles du Grand Marché, les

ruelles du mouillage, les arrières-cours de fond coré, sur la terre nue, ils dormaient, ivres comme des vieux macaques, et jamais ils ne lavaient leurs figures pouilleuses (p.273).

There was no place to lie. They had their mattresses all over the place. The gardens of the cathedral, the halls of the main market, the alleyways of the anchorage, the backstreets of the Korean background, on the naked ground, they slept, drunk like old macaques, and they never washed their dirty faces.

The traumatic scene being presented here is a replica of rehabilitation centre of internally displaced people (IDPs) who flee their homes as a result of imminent danger. The health condition of the temporary abode is terribly poor given the number of people who throng the centre for safety. The poor natives are devastated facing the reality of volcanic eruptions to which they are ill prepared having been forced to flee their homes. They face a variety of challenges associated with sudden displacement. They sleep on their beds while some sleep on mats and some are seen lying on the ground because of fear of volcanic eruption. Unexpectedly, the volcanic eruption began and



the destruction, yelling and agony were unprecedented. The people are seen running helter-skelter, shouting and crying painfully. Parents run desperately leaving their children to their fate, husbands leaving their wives. Storey buildings and important monuments are destroyed in the twinkling of an eye as a result of the swiftness of volcanic eruptions which move at amazing speed. The wild fire being produced by the eruptions is massive and it is incredibly burning even on the sea, consuming ships. The destructive power of volcanic eruptions is terribly damaging. Farm products like banana trees, palm trees, maize, sugarcane and others are destroyed and the whole town appeared flattened. The trauma, agony and distress are better imagined than being experienced. The town is completely consumed by the violent eruptions. The only survivor, Syparis, the condemned armed robber who is kept in the thick walls of stone of his dungeon gives a description of the town wreckage. He notes that:

L'En-ville est sous la chape de la nueé ardente. Les maisons en pierre de taille à deux étages s'effondrent dans des craquement sinistres. Les

gens courent hurlent, se debattent, supplient le ciel  
(p.301).

The entire town is under the cover of the burning  
nude. The stone houses of two-storey size collapse  
into crunches loss. People are screaming,  
struggling, beseeching the sky.

Sypris affords us the opportunity of knowing the extent of  
damage cause by volcanic eruption and also enables us to  
know how the people attempt to save their lives but  
eventually consumed by the natural disasters. Confiant is  
his mouth-piece as he provides authentic information about  
the magnitude of destruction, being the sole survivor of the  
natural disaster.

The author attempts in his novel to criticise the  
civilization mission of the church and to ridicule the  
erroneous religious beliefs instilled in the black  
community. He introduces monsieur Dupin, a white  
missionary, who believes that the black race has not  
attained the right degree of civilization that will enable  
them to manage their affairs. He talks arrogantly about the  
need to continually 'guide' the blacks who he considers as  
uncultivated and untamed animal. He says unequivocally:

Elle n'a pas abdiqué ce devoir qui lui ont confié les saintes Écritures d'évangéliser le monde\* et de civiliser les peuplades sauvages qui vivent en Afrique, en Asie, et dans nos Amériques... (p.67).  
It did not abdicate this duty which the Holy Scriptures entrusted to her, to evangelize the world and to civilize the sanitary people who live in Africa, Asia, and in our Americas.

It shows clearly that this white missionary does not see the blacks as human beings who deserve any form of courtesy. The erroneous view is corroborated by another white man, Pierre-Marie who is more biased in his prejudiced assessment of the black race. The Caucasian who is still being influenced by biased and ancient view insists that the Negros are naïve, crude and brutish. He says without betraying any emotion that:

Parfaitement! Les Africains ne sont rien d'autre que des animaux qui parlent, une espèce intermédiaire entre l'espèce animale et l'espèce humaine (p.181).  
Perfectly! Africans are no other than speaking animals, an intermediate species between the animal species and the human species.

Confiant, while attempting to dispel the wrong perception opines that the black race is a civilised race long before the arrival of the whites. This view is corroborated by Lord Macaulay's Address to the British Parliament on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb., 1835. He remarks that "*I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief, such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation.*" The above statement validates Freud's opinion in his book, *Psychology of Colonial Oppression*, where he states categorically that the essence of the so called European civilisation is to render African culture invalid and crude so as to alienate the natives from their culture, thereby forcing them to

embrace European culture as being superior. He therefore considers the so called civilisation mission as misleading, mischievous, exploitative and hypocritical. The author also ridicules the religious beliefs instilled in the black race. As far as the church is concerned, the volcanic eruption is a form of punishment from God for their numerous sins. The white religious leaders encourage the black community to attend church service to ask for forgiveness of their sins:

A la cathédrale! A la cathédrale! Pour demander à Dieu la rémission de nos péchés, Frère et sœurs!...

On a tous de respecté les lois du seigneur. Si non, pourquoi il chercherait à nous punir (p.194–195).

To the cathedral! To the cathedral! To ask God for the remission of our sins, brother and sisters!... We have all disobeyed the laws of the Lord. If not, why would he try to punish us.

The religious belief appears absurd given the scientific predictions about the natural disaster. The functionalist perspective offers lucid explanation of the irrational spiritual belief. It shows also the dysfunctional nature of the church which many view as a deliberate

weapon being used by the whites to suppress black agitation. Religion as a social institution is used to create fear and uninhibited obedience in black adherents leading to oppression by clergy men. Church becomes dysfunctional given its exploitative and deceitful tendencies. The religious body makes the black people to believe that the imminent volcanic eruption is due to their numerous sins. It is quite disheartening to see the black community in their credulity holding on to this religious claim. They confess incredibly that:

Nos sexes ont mignoné, palpé, tripoté, trituré les chairs lascives, se sont abreuvés aux désirs les plus fous. La salive de nos baisers, le joui de nos génitoires, la sueurs de nos frottements et le sang de nos menstrues ont inondé le chemin de nos vies, seigneur Jesus, pardonne-nous! (p.198).

Our men and women have caressed, fingered, messed about, triturated the lascivious flesh, have been drinking to the wildest desires. The saliva of our kisses, the enjoyment of our genitals, the sweat of our rubbings and the blood of our menses have flooded the path of our lives, Lord Jesus, forgive us.

The church succeeds in indoctrinating the people that their immoral sexual behaviour is responsible for the natural disaster and if they can confess their sins, the disaster will be averted. The black community is further motivated to confess more hidden sins and they begin to confess unreasonably. They state that:

Seigneur, nous, la race des Nègres, avons volé et pillé. Nous avons emporté des chandeliers en argent massif et des fableaux de grands peintres d'Europe, des coffres en bois de cèdre du Liban, des étoffes précieuses et des poudriers en or du Pérou, des caisses de morue séchée et des tonneaux de beurre de Normandie... Seigneur, Pardon! (p.199).

Lord, we, the Negro race, have robbed and plundered. We carried silver candlesticks and fables of great European painters, Lebanon cedar, wooden chests, precious stuffs and Peruvian golden compacts, dried cod boxes and barrels of butter from Normandy... Lord, forgive us.

The natives' gullibility is brought to the fore and it is wrongly motivated by part of their superego which is their

conscience. The conscience motivates them to confess their sins which they perceive as the cause of the impending volcanic eruptions. The black Caribbeans continue to confess more seemingly concealed sins in anticipation that the volcanic eruptions will be averted. They are so gullible to the extent of confessing all ungodly foods and drinks they have consumed and which can provoke God. They confess further that:

Seigneur, nous avons boissonné toute qualité de boissons. Notre rhum bien-aimé qui fait fondre les douleurs plus vite que presse qu'un philtre magique, le gin des Anglais qui coupe les jarrets, le whisky des Américains baille témérité aux jeunes gens, le vin de Madère qui emporte dans une rêvasserie sans limites... Seigneur, Pardon (p.198).

Lord, we have drunk every quality drink. Our beloved rum, which melts the pains more quickly than a magic philter, the gin of the English who cuts the hocks, the whiskey of the Americans temerity to the young men, the Madeira wine which carries away in an unrestrained dream. .. Lord, forgive us.

The black Caribbeans continue outrageously to confess their hidden sins to the admiration of the white



missionaries but regrettably the confession of these sins could not stop volcanic eruptions from ravaging their town. The author criticises the church for misleading the gullible black congregation who believe innocently the missionaries' admonitions which are regarded as God's instructions to humans. It is remarkable to note that Confiant's opinion is a reminiscence of Albert Camus' view about the church. Camus criticises the conservative belief of the church, regarding the use of drugs. He presents Reverend father Paneloux in his novel *La Peste* who refuses to visit the medical doctor saying that it is an irony for a reverend father to visit a medical doctor. The conservative reverend father later dies as a result of his refusal to take drugs. Confiant's opinion about the church is that scientific beliefs are different from religious belief and scientific challenges demand scientific solutions and not religious solution through endless prayers.

Apart from criticising the negative influence of the church on the society, Confiant also criticises the political leaders for misleading the people for political reason. He introduces Marie-Egyptienne, the black woman launderer who is engaged in discussion with a fellow black woman

who believes that the presence of top government functionaries in their neighbourhood is an indication that all is well. The woman opines ignorantly that: « *Tu crois que s'il y avait vraiment danger, ces grandes gens – là seraient venues à Saint Pierre?* (p.196). *Do you think that if there were any real danger these great people would have come to Saint Peter?*” The naive woman is carried away by the visit of the Governor and his entourage and she believes that their visit indicates that there will be no disasters. Marie-Egyptienne who appears more knowledgeable rebukes the woman and educates her on the authentic motive of the Governor’s visit which is clearly in connection with the forthcoming elections. She remarks assuredly that:

C’est pour les élections pardi! Tout le monde sait ça.  
Ils veulent qu’on aille voter dimanche prochaine...  
Mais tu verras, ce soir ils seront repartis à fort-de  
France (p.196).

It is for the elections pardi! Everyone knows that.  
They want us to vote next Sunday ... But you will  
see, this evening they would have returned to Fort-  
de-France.

She tries to educate the poor woman that the visit is for political reason and to douse the fear and tension of volcanic eruptions. She notes further that:

Son Excellence le Gouverneur de la Martinique en personne était accouru à Saint Pierre pour rassurer la population (p.225).

His Excellency the Governor of Martinique himself had rushed to Saint Pierre to reassure the population.

She maintains that the visit cannot stop the volcanic eruption and the government is not interested in their welfare because the officials have relocated their family members to safe haven leaving the masses to their fate. The author also introduces Edmée Lemonière, a white rich woman who detests the manner of treating the black slaves who labour endlessly on the plantations to earn peanut. She is determined to end the natives' trauma of poverty and injustice and to this end she finds an ally in Joseph Largrosillière, the brilliant black lawyer. She encourages the young man to form a political party that will champion the cause and interest of the downtrodden so as to liberate them from their pathetic and traumatic situation. She gives large sum of money to him so as to form a labour party

whose major preoccupation will be the eradication of exploitation of workers. Confiants notes in his novel that:

Il est grandement surpris d'apprendre qu'elle avait offert une somme d'argent conséquente au parti de travailleurs emmène par le brillant avocat Joseph Largrosillière dont l'objectif avoue était d'éliminer de la surface de la terre les bourgeois, les ploutocrates et les usuriers, selon une formule consacrée (p.232).

It is greatly surprising to learn that she had offered a substantial sum of money to the workers' party led by the brilliant lawyer Joseph Largrosillière whose objective was to eliminate from the surface of the earth the bourgeois, plutocrats and the usurers, according to a devoted formula.

The black lawyer appears unyielding to liberate his people from the shackle of poverty, thereby assisting them to heave a sigh of relief from their traumatic experience of working on the sugarcane plantations.

Finally, the author condemns the act of slavery and other inhuman and exploitative measures put in place to tame slaves who are regarded as sub-humans. He criticises the practice of putting chain on slaves to prevent them

from fleeing and also putting inscription on them to indicate ownership. Confiant regards this practise as barbaric and inhuman, he remarks in his novel:

Chacun d'eux portait une étiquette où était inscrit le nom de son propriétaire, mais la sublimissime nègresse ne savait point lire et retenait tout de tête (p.22).

Each of them bore a label or the name of its owner, but the sublime Negros could not read and kept everything from head to foot.

He denounces the ignoble treatment of humiliating slaves and making them to believe that they are less-human. This is seemingly a replica of conflict perspective occasioned by colour. The irrational classification of human beings based on colour cannot be justified by any reason except for hatred for unprivileged group of people. He makes reference to monsieur Dupin who queries the rationale of using colour as a parameter of determining humanity. Dupin observes inquisitively:

Pourquoi certains êtres, du seul fait de la couleur de leur peau, étaient-ils quasiment exclus de l'humanité, alors que d'autres, pour une raison

exactement identique et inverse, étaient considérés comme une espèce supérieure? (p.66).

Why were some beings, by the mere fact of the color of their skin, virtually excluded from humanity, while others, for exactly the same reason and inversely, were considered a superior species?

He does not understand the reason for using skin colour as a sole criterion to consider the black race as inferior and the same yardstick to justify the white as a superior race. This double standard is condemned by Dupin who accuses the white of extolling their colour while deliberately denigrating the black colour. The whites succeed in convincing the blacks that they are sub-humans and they are also created to serve the whites. Gaston on the other hand opines confidently in the novel that he studies the history of human civilization and he knows quite well that there are people who are uncivilised and of inferior status. He is obviously referring to the blacks and also justifying the unfair treatment that is being meted to them. He notes that:

Il fallait donner le temps aux nègres d'atteindre un degré supérieure de civilisation... J'ai étudié

l'histoire des civilisations, j'ai beaucoup voyagé à travers le monde et je puis vous assurer que de notre petite Martinique, nous avons singulièrement tendance à ne voir les choses qu'à notre modeste échelle. Partout à travers le monde, nous assistons au réveil des peuples dits inférieurs. Notre cas est loin, forte loin, d'être une exception (p.162).

I had to give the negroes time to reach a higher degree of civilization ... I studied the history of civilizations, I have travelled extensively throughout the world and I can assure you that from our little Martinique we have singularly inclined to see things only at our modest scale. Throughout the world, we are witnessing the awakening of the so-called inferior people. Our case is far, far strong, to be an exception.

Gaston tries to encourage the blacks to accept their fate and get humbly civilized by the whites who are seemingly superior. Initially, the blacks imbibe this erroneous belief but they later begin to query the claim following the direct exposure to authentic facts about human civilisation. They become conscious of the fact that the blacks are not by any standard inferior to the whites. The development affords

them to start asking audacious questions about the civilisation mission of the whites. Questions are also being asked about the original owner of the Caribbean islands. They do not understand the reason for being treated like slaves and strangers on their land despite their numerical strength. They become resolute in their resistance to unfair treatment and undue exploitative tendencies. Pierre-Marie, a young black man describes the Negroes feelings in this form:

Ceci...tout ceci est notre mais...ne nous appartient pas. Cette ville n'est ni aux mulâtres ni aux nègre, cela tu ne dois jamais l'oublier. Tu m'écoutes, Rose Joséphine? Que nous soyons considérablement plus nombreux que les Blancs n'y change rien. Elle est leur bien, leur chose et il faudrait une révolution pour qu'ils acceptent de lâcher prise (p.87).

This... all this is ours but... does not belong to us. This city is neither of the mulattoes nor of the Negroes that you ought never to forget it. Are you listening to me, Rose Josephine? That we are considerably more numerous than the whites does not change anything. It is their goods, their things and it would take a revolution for them to let go.

The battle line appears to have been drawn and a day of reckoning seems imminent. They are convinced about the significance of unyielding confrontation since the



whites will not let go effortlessly. They are determined for this reason to put up fierce agitation for their legitimate rights and to assert the authenticity of the black personality.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, we have been able to establish that the native Caribbean still encounter daunting habitation challenges in the region given the scourge of natural disasters being experienced. We have also demonstrated the ill preparedness of the Caribbean government to confront the menace. It is expected that the native Caribbean will change his conservative stance about the ravaging plague and adopt prompt precautionary measures. The Caribbean government should live up to its responsibilities by taking envisioned steps towards tackling the devastating consequences of the natural disasters.

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