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TITLE: *Creole Renegades: Rhetoric of Betrayal and Guilt in the Caribbean Diaspora*

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Creole Renegades: Rhetoric of Betrayal and Guilt in the Caribbean Diaspora, an original look at the problem of cultural affiliation, loyalty, and betrayal in the Caribbean, North America, and beyond, tackles the phenomenon of the exiled Caribbean author from a new perspective that not only underscores the contentious relationship with the home island, but also the complicated positionality that tension produces. For decades, Caribbean literary and cultural studies has presented this cultural space as a periphery, most often of Europe (in the case of former French, British, Dutch, and Spanish colonies) and occasionally of the United States. Boisseron convincingly updates this argument by showing how, over time, the role of the former colonial centers has been diminished, leading to the increasingly recognized phenomenon of the “decentering” of these relationships between former colonies and metropolises. Most of the recent criticism of this type presents decentering as liberatory: the cultural destinies of the postcolonies in the Caribbean are no longer exclusively yoked to their former metropolises in Europe; rather, the Caribbean subject is free to make lateral or “minor-to-minor” connections with other cultures, mostly in the Americas. Where Boisseron’s manuscript parts company with much of the recent critical work in the areas of decentered subjectivities, transcolonialism, and diaspora is in its simultaneously audacious and persuasive case that the former peripheral spaces

of the colonial world have, in our ostensibly decentered times, adopted the logic of the former colonial centers. In other words, the postcolonial condition has plenty of entanglements of its own, and the source of the limiting and sometimes oppressive authority for determining appropriate cultural attitudes and comportments has in certain cases shifted from Europe to the Caribbean itself.

This, though, is only the preamble to the central argument. A handful of cultural gatekeepers in the Caribbean have begun to characterize the movement of Caribbean intellectuals toward North America and elsewhere as a betrayal, a very effective and appropriate trope in this context. Studies of the Caribbean diaspora tend to focus on the difficulties of adaptation in the land of exile (e.g., the U.S., Canada, Europe). The true originality of Boisseron’s work lies in its focus on “betrayal” as the signifier of exclusion that emanates from the Caribbean itself. By considering the works of a wide range of important Anglophone and Francophone authors (primarily novelists and essayists) who span the 20th and early-21st centuries, Boisseron is able to show how—and, more impressively, explain why—the Caribbean replicates the logic of the center in its castigation of cultural actors who, whether by choice or force of circumstance, leave for North America and, in a few cases, Europe. She does this primarily by examining how the Caribbean (second-generation) diasporic author responds to the charge of betrayal and the

heated rhetoric deployed in these debates (the background Boisseron provides on circum-Caribbean polemical modes such as the “dozens” and “signifying” is particularly useful). For instance, Boisseron considers how Edwidge Danticat and Dany Laferrière, two Haitian authors transplanted to North America, respond in their works to the question of whether writing about home constitutes a cultural obligation—an expression of a guilty conscience—or an act of opportunism or cultural parasitism. In other chapters, she contemplates betrayal through a reflection on Anatole Broyard and the trope and practice of racial passing; presents the queerness in Maryse Condé’s novels as constituting in the Caribbean imagination an index or even result of exile from the Caribbean; and examines why authors such as Jamaica Kincaid and V.S. Naipaul are compelled to so dramatically distance themselves from and thereby betray the Caribbean. Each chapter therefore constitutes a case study of a particular type of “breaking away” from

the Caribbean that culminates in the most striking case of Caribbean apostasy, which is that of Kincaid and Naipaul.

The book’s case studies of authors “in exile” who refuse to be simple bearers of Caribbean creole culture (thus the *Renegades* of the title) serve as the means for Boisseron to delve into a set of largely ignored cultural codes of belonging and exclusion in the Caribbean diaspora. We understand, through her careful analysis, how identitarian policing has partially shifted from Europe to the Caribbean, creating or at least giving voice to what one might characterize as a type of Caribbean cultural conservatism that the authors in question aim to challenge. But Boisseron sometimes loses sight of the fact that their renegade status is not a virtue in itself, which lends a slightly hagiographic quality to the portrait of, for instance, Maryse Condé. This, though, is a minor problem in an otherwise excellent contribution to Caribbean Studies.