

‘French Accounts of the Vincentian Caribs’, translated and introduced by Peter Hulme, in *The Garifuna: A Nation Across Borders: Essays in Social Anthropology*, ed. Joseph O. Palacio, Belize: Cubola Books, 2005, pp. 21-42.

In 1748 Britain and France had agreed to regard St Vincent as neutral, outside the limits of each other’s penetration in the Caribbean, and therefore effectively in possession of the Caribs. After 1763, however, at the end of the Seven Years’ War, the island became – as far as the British were concerned – British, and commissioners were sent out to organise the surveying and sale of land for the plantation of tropical crops, especially sugar. The activities of these commissioners occasioned several major incidents in the 1770s in which the Caribs, with an acute sense of what was at stake, destroyed surveying equipment and maps in order to prevent a road being built into the fertile windward valley that the British planters especially coveted; and with Carib help the French took back control of the island between 1779 and 1783.

For many years before 1795 British planters and commissioners had clearly wanted the Caribs removed altogether from St Vincent, but the British government was, in the eyes of the planters, too sensitive to the opinion of sentimental do-gooders, including missionaries, who in their eyes knew little about the realities of Caribbean life. The Carib uprising in March 1795 converted the government to the need to remove the Caribs from St Vincent once they had been militarily defeated, and Carib collusion with the French enemy silenced humanitarian voices. Once that removal had taken place, the only voices who wanted to tell the story, *their* story of suffering and eventual triumph, were the British planters and their allies. Through their pens, the planters’ version of the ethnography of the Vincentian Caribs entered the historical record, where it has never been seriously challenged. William Young produced what he called an “authentic account” of the Black Caribs, providing evidence which, he writes, “a British court of justice would admit as competent, and decide upon as true”.¹ Thirty years later Charles Shephard and F.W.N. Bayley wrote accounts of the Carib wars firmly based on the memories of surviving British planters.² In effect,

¹ William Young, *An Account of the Black Charaibs in the Island of St Vincent’s* [1795], London: Frank Cass, 1971, p. 3.

² Charles Shephard, *An Historical Account of the Island of Saint Vincent* [1831], London: Frank Cass, 1971; F.W.N. Bayley, *Four Years’ Residence in the West Indies during the years 1826, 7, 8, and 9 by the Son of a Military Officer*, London: Kidd, 1830.

Young's, Shephard's, and Bayley's versions have become historical truth because these men appeared to be the only witnesses prepared to give testimony. Even recent historiography more sceptical of these British versions has contented itself with reading them – and other British documentation – against the grain, rather than seeking alternative or complementary accounts.³

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce two previously ignored French voices into the debate about the nature and constitution of Carib society and culture in the Windward Islands, and particularly on St Vincent, during the eighteenth century. French testimony about the Caribs has long been recognised as important. After the beginnings of French and English settlement in the Caribbean, from the 1620s, a series of French missionaries and officials spent lengthy periods on the Windward Islands, sometimes living with Carib groups for many years, and in several cases compiling accounts of language and lifeways which provide an extraordinarily rich body of material about indigenous life in the Caribbean after nearly two centuries of cultural contact. Raymond Breton, Charles de Rochefort, Jean Baptiste du Tertre, and Jean Baptiste Labat are the most important names.⁴ In the English-speaking world, the most influential of these figures has been the engaging Jesuit, Père Labat, a short selection of whose writings has been available since 1931 in an English translation.⁵ Labat's colourful career in Martinique and his lively interest in all aspects of the islands he inhabited for eleven years make him a lively guide to the early eighteenth-

³ Bernard Marshall, "The Black Caribs – Native Resistance to British Penetration into the Windward Side of St. Vincent 1763-1773", *Caribbean Quarterly*, 19:4 (1973), 4-19; J. Paul Thomas "The Caribs of St. Vincent: A Study in Imperial Maladministration", *Journal of Caribbean History*, 18, 2 (1984), 60-73; Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, London: Methuen, 1986, chap. 6; Nancie L. Gonzalez, *Sojourners of the Caribbean: Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Garifuna*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988; Michael Craton, "From Caribs to Black Caribs: The Amerindian Roots of Servile Resistance in the Caribbean", in Gary Y. Okihiro, ed., *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986, pp. 96-116; and Michael Craton, "The Black Caribs of St. Vincent: A Reevaluation", in Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman, ed., *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1996, pp. 71-85.

⁴ Their principal works are as follows: Raymond Breton, *Dictionnaire caraïbe-françois*, 2 vols. (1665-66); Jean Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les Français*, 4 vols. (1667-71); Charles de Rochefort, *Histoire naturelle et morale des Îles Antilles de l'Amérique* (1665); and Jean Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau Voyage aux îles de l'Amérique*, 6 vols. (1722). Translated extracts are included in Peter Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead, ed., *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, chapters 9, 10, 11, and 13.

⁵ *The Memoirs of Père Labat, 1693-1705*, trans. and ed. John Eaden, London: Constable, 1931, rpt. London: Frank Cass, 1970; and cf. Everild Young and Kjeld Helweg-Larsen, *The Pirates' Priest: The Life of Père Labat in the West Indies, 1693-1705*, London: Jarrolds, 1965. Rochefort was translated in full into English as early as 1666, but the translation is not easily available.

century Caribbean. However, he arrived in the region after two centuries of European colonisation had wrought dramatic changes to Carib culture and lifeways and, in any case, had himself only rather brief contacts with surviving Carib communities.

French involvement in St Vincent lasted almost a century beyond Labat's return to Europe, yet French material from this period is rarely referred to or quoted.

The two writers translated below had very different careers. Emmanuel-François, marquis de Lambertye (1719-1814), hailed from the Périgord. He became a chevalier de S.-Louis and maréchal de camp, in other words an important military figure. Lambertye went to the French Antilles in the early 1750s in a senior administrative capacity during a time of bitter Anglo-French conflict.⁶ He seems to have had particular responsibility for relationships with neighbouring islands, and certainly travelled to St Vincent, St Lucia, and Dominica. *Histoire des Caraïbes: Nation Sauvage qui habite les Isles du Vent en Amérique et partie de la Terre ferme ou Continent* was written on his return to France in 1760. It is a handwritten, well-bound manuscript of 295 small pages, addressed to Her Most Serene Highness Madame the reigning Margravine of Baaden-Dourlac (Karoline Luise of Hessen-Darmstadt, 1723-1783), and it presumably remained in her descendants' private library until it was acquired by the book collector Edward Ayer. It formed part of Ayer's donation to the Newberry Library in Chicago in 1911.⁷ Lambertye – strongly associated with the Ancien Régime – survived the Revolution but died in poverty in Paris.

Lambertye's manuscript gives perhaps the fullest extant account of Carib life in the middle of the eighteenth century.⁸ With little organisation, it wanders through many aspects of native life, frequently focussing on natural history, with long sections on the Caribs' use of poison, on their techniques of fishing, and on the indigenous plants and crops which the French adopted. He also discusses the origins of the division between the Black and Red Caribs on St Vincent, providing valuable evidence on this contentious topic. Indeed Lambertye mentions having in his possession both a manuscript written by the Red Carib chief, and letters written by the Black Carib

⁶ See C.A. Banbuck, *Histoire politique, économique et sociale de la Martinique sous l'Ancien Régime (1635-1789)*, Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1935, pp. 121-140.

⁷ Ayer ms 1114, *Histoire des Caraïbes*, by the marquis de Lambertye.

⁸ The other French account from this period, based on a visit between 1751 and 1756, is limited to the small remaining Carib population on Martinique: see Jean-Baptiste Thibault de Chanvalon, *Voyage a la Martinique, contenant diverses observations sur la physique, l'histoire naturelle, l'agriculture, les moeurs, y les usages de cette isle, faites en 1751 & dans les années suivantes*, Paris: J.B. Bauche, 1753, pp. 38-57.

chief. Particularly valuable are his references to named Carib individuals who do not otherwise, to the best of my knowledge, appear in the historical record.

The second writer, Alexandre Moreau de Jonnès (1778-1870), was, during the nineteenth century, a distinguished historian of the French Caribbean islands and author of studies of yellow fever, the slave trade, and the general principles of statistical analysis. However, in 1858, at the age of 80, he published a memoir of his first career as a soldier, *Aventures de guerre au temps de la république et du consulat*,⁹ much of which had apparently originally been compiled during the four years (1809-1813) Moreau spent in an English prison-ship in Portsmouth. Moreau's extraordinary adventures included several extended tours of duty in the Caribbean, the first of which lasted from August 1795, when he crossed the Atlantic in a privateer, until June 1796, when he was taken prisoner by British troops in St Vincent and deported back to France. Moreau's most extended visit to St Vincent lasted for three months, after he had been appointed by Victor Hugues to strengthen Carib forces in preparation for an attack on Kingstown, the capital of St Vincent.

Neither of these French sources is in any simple sense authoritative. Lambertye was clearly involved in French native policy at a superior level and his account is no doubt highly interested, although seemingly ignorant of his French predecessors; Moreau published his memoir more than half a century after the events it describes and he writes as a friend to the Caribs just as the British planters write as bitter opponents. In particular, the apocalyptic events of the 1790s mean that all evidence about the disposition of Black and Red (or Yellow) Caribs or their relationships with the French or British needs to be read as extremely context-specific. Indeed the evidence of Lambertye and Moreau is quite contradictory on this score.

However, the national difference is also significant. The French had massacred many Caribs in their time, especially while ruthlessly annexing Martinique and Grenada during the seventeenth century, but they had also developed the commercial

⁹ *Aventures de guerre au temps de la république et du consulat*, 2 vols., Paris: Pagnerre, 1858. An abbreviated edition was later published: *Aventures de guerre au temps de la république et du consulat*, preface by Léon Say, Paris: Guillaumin, 1893. There are two partial English translations, both of which leave out much of the ethnographic material: *Adventures in the Revolution and under the Consulate*, trans. Cyril Hammond, with an introduction by The Hon. Sir John Fortescue, London: Peter Davies, Ltd, 1929 (reprinted, with an introduction by Michael Glover, London: Peter Davies, 1969); and *Adventures in Wars of the Republic and Consulate*, trans. Brig-Gen. A.J. Abdy, London: John Murray, 1920.

tradition of the *coureurs des îles*, which had brought them into closer contact with the Caribs: the *coureurs* would often dress as Carib, have Carib wives, speak Carib – and presumably at least on occasion simply become Carib. In addition, French settlers on St Vincent had small plantations on which they grew coffee, tobacco, indigo, and cocoa, none of which had a deleterious effect on the environment, from a Carib point of view, while the British drive in the four islands they gained in 1763 was to develop sugar plantations, involving the large-scale destruction of the islands' forest which the Caribs needed for hunting and planting, but which the planters tended to see as especially malign if it were likely to harbour savages who might attack them. As a result, British contact with Caribs was infrequent, limited, and often antagonistic. It therefore makes sense to take particular cognisance of French sources relating to the Caribs when these can be located.

Moreau's friendship with the Caribs during a time of war undoubtedly led to greater intimacy and arguably, therefore, to greater knowledge. During these months at the end of 1795, Moreau certainly lived in much closer daily contact with the Vincentian Caribs than any other outsider at this time, possibly during the whole course of the eighteenth century. And Moreau's time in St Vincent coincided with that historical moment when the conjunction of the abolition of slavery with the development of what he calls those "exploratory procedures of the modern sciences" was leading to the development of ethnographic methodologies.¹⁰

In both cases I have translated selections from the texts to try to indicate the different slant of French sources, focussing mostly on the individual experiences of the two writers. The translations from Lambertye are made with the permission of the Newberry Library, Chicago. The translations from Moreau de Jonnès are made from the 1858 edition. Where I've made use of the existing English translations (which are partial), these have been amended.

¹⁰ *Aventures de guerre*, II, p. 271. See Joseph-Marie Degérando, *The Observation of Savage Peoples* [1800], trans. and ed. F.C.T. Moore, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969; and cf. Miranda J. Hughes, "Philosophical Travellers at the Ends of the Earth: Baudin, Péron and the Tasmanians", in R.W. Home, ed., *Australian Science in the Making*, Cambridge: CUP, 1988, pp. 23-44, and Peter Hulme, "Black, Yellow, and White on St. Vincent: Moreau de Jonnès's Carib Ethnography", in Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed., *The Global Eighteenth Century*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, pp. 182-194.

Marquis de Lambertye, *History of the Caribs: A Savage Nation Living on the Windward Islands of America and Part of the Mainland.*

We know through hallowed tradition that good faith, candour, and humanity prevailed throughout Peru and the two Mexicos, and everywhere else on the American mainland; but until now no traveller has written in detail about the manners of the Savages who have ruled over the Windward islands and who still live on some of them, although they are now mostly dispersed along the Orinoco, the Amazon, and other mainland rivers in an attempt to avoid the tyranny of the Spaniards and pious monkish cruelties.

These people – the gentlest in all the New World – enjoyed in peace and quiet this archipelago, which stretches from the 10th degree of latitude north to the 22nd. They lived here in abundance: frugality was the source of their happiness. Content with little, ambition – that tyrant of the Europeans – still had no ministry in the Antilles. Fishing, hunting, and relaxation were the equal parts of the gentle and independent life they led.

...

Almost at the centre of the chain of the Antillean archipelago is the island of Martinique, long occupied by the French. This island has a circumference of 64 leagues, including its bays and ports. Originally called Mandanina, it was only inhabited by women, whose power was so sovereign that they did not allow men, even of their own nation, to visit except for two particular months each year, when they were admitted not only to the island but to their beds. The following year the fathers would take away with them the male children they had helped procreate and the females would stay with their mothers, who would bring them up according to the usage and customs of the island.

The Savage Caribs, who preserve this tradition, made me understand by their way of retelling it that this custom had long fallen into disuse and that a long time before the arrival of the Europeans they had mixed with their women on the island, just as their neighbours did.

...

Caribs are usually small: I've seen them at five and a half feet tall, but only rarely. They are thick-set, short-necked, very fleshy, with strongly rounded and high shoulders, thick legs and thighs, and squashed and flattened foreheads – although this isn't a natural feature but rather an artificial perfection, like small feet in China. As soon as the child is born, the parents fasten a small plank to its forehead, tying it tightly at the back. The child stays like this for several months until it's certain that the forehead has been completely flattened.

They have good and very white teeth, very small eyes, a squashed nose, and long straight hair, as black as a jay, which comes down to their waist and even beyond.

Their skin-colour is bronze, but of a reddish brown, both naturally and through the continual application of a tincture of roucou, which they grind and mix with Palma Christi oil.

This tincture serves as their clothing since they go about as bare as a hand. It forms a crust which protects them from the strength of the sun as well as from persecution by the mosquitoes which are so common in these hot and humid climates but which can't resist the stench of these two drugs.

...

Caribs are naturally gentle and good: they always have been and are still, even after they saw Europeans and were stimulated to trade with them through their attraction to unknown things, which they now avidly desire. Previously they scorned what they didn't know, but now they try to acquire all the novelties they see.

They are humane and generous, but shouldn't be pestered inopportunistly; and if you want to prove your impartiality, you should only demand of them what they aren't making use of at the time. So, if you ask a Carib for his bed when he is about to sleep, he will refuse you; but when he wakes up, he'll give it up without protest – as he will everything he possesses.

Just as they are unattached to whatever belongs to them, so also they might take a fancy to whatever is in anybody else's possession and seems easy to acquire: it's very dangerous to give them the opportunity to fix their eyes on something you're determined to keep hold of. They are very stubborn and will quite irksomely refuse everything you want of them, however disproportionate, if you haven't first satisfied their fantasy.

...

The Savage Caribs are melancholic and don't laugh easily, unlike their women, who have an agreeable disposition and a really jovial nature. They also have a much better figure than the men, though they are a little too fat for their height. Like the men, they use paint or roucou, with the difference that the women just use roucou, while the men mix it with genip, which stains as black as ink and gets right into the skin, so much so that it takes nine days for the skin to recover its natural colour when they try to get the genip out.

This genip is a fruit quite similar in appearance to a pear, borne by a tree which grows in the open air. The fruit is highly acidic: the Negroes and Savages think highly of it and find it very agreeable to taste. My opinion is quite different.

When a Carib gets up, he runs to the sea or to the river, if there's one nearby his carbet or dwelling house. After washing himself, he goes back to his house and sits on the ground on a reed mat. His wife brings him a calabash cut into two, called a couï. One half is filled with roucou dye, the other with genip dye; and with a brush made of reed or maho she paints his body and face, while singing a rather sad song. Each stroke of the brush is applied in time to the song, and the perfection of this ridiculous savage ornamentation depends on the type of song being intoned.

I've said that they go naked. but I should add that they wear a belt, or more exactly a string around the kidneys from which hangs a small Flemish knife, and in the front the more civilised wear a skirt three inches long. This skirt is made of cotton, often fringed with glass beads or small bells or sometimes shells. The Caribs from the main land or continent, who live along the Orinoco and the Amazon, wear breastplates of pure gold.

The women's skirt is much more decorated than the men's, with many more glass beads or other matching decorations; but neither sex covers up more than the other, so that they are equally indecent in the eyes of strangers unused to so much nudity.

The women also wear glass beads on their neck, arms, wrist, legs, etc. Sometimes even the waist is decorated with this ornament, which constitutes all their finery.

When they're one year old, or rather more, half-boots of worked cotton are put round their legs, almost in the form of a braid, and these are never taken off: they stay there until they fall to pieces.

...

As I've said, the women look after the household, bringing up the children especially, and also making useful objects such as the hammocks and other cotton ware.

The men go fishing and hunting and make reed baskets in which they carry everything they need, whether the journey is by land or by sea. These baskets are so well made that their canoes often overturn without the water getting into them so that nothing being carried suffers or is damaged in any way. In another place I'll speak about these baskets and their different purposes.

Their weapons are a Flemish knife, a club, and bow and arrows. Everyone knows the shape of the knife. The club, which they call a boutou, is about three feet long, including the handle. It consists of a piece of flat wood about ten to twelve inches long with a round handle. The club is carved with some of the hideous figures they revere as deities.

They choose as their gods the most deformed reptiles, preferring above all others the mabouya, which is part-lizard, part-toad, a very dangerous creature which is as harmful to other animals as to men, who sometimes die from its bite. Since the Caribs are often attacked, they fear it greatly and therefore revere it as an evil divinity, putting its image everywhere, especially on their boutous, or clubs, and on their coüis, or cut calabashes, which they fill with genip and roucou, as well as indigo and other dyes. This club is very dangerous because they wield it so adroitly.

...

These Savages have their moments of fury, almost madness, usually if their hunting or fishing has not gone well: they blame their women and children, who have stayed behind in the carbets, for having evil ideas for which the evil spirit has punished them through their poor hunting or fishing. This evil spirit is the devil, who they both greatly fear and revere. They say that their wives or children have invoked this evil spirit and that they can only appease him through a cruel punishment, which often leads them to revoke their families on this pretext. But ultimately these attacks of inhumanity only possess them after long-standing jealousy; because they are extremely jealous and vindictive, and always remember the harm that somebody did to them, or intended to do. I think that this repeated derangement of their reason stems from the custom of flattening the foreheads of newly-born babies, as I've explained.

...

Apart from the bracelets and skirt with which they decorate themselves, they have another ornament which looks quite extraordinary to us. This is a piece of metal they call caracoli, which they get from the mainland. White metalsmiths say that it's a natural composite of gold, silver, and copper. This metal is very hard and difficult to work, which is why our metalsmiths combine it with other metals and even add a portion of the purest gold, using it then in the same way they use gold. In this form it's common among the Spaniards, the Portuguese, and even the Dutch, though the French and English rarely use it.

The Savages make earrings in the form of crescents or horsehoes which they hang by a chain made of the same metal. They also attach them to their nostrils, often to their lower lip, and sometimes even to their cheeks and chin. They wear others as plates on the stomach or make them into bracelets for the arms and legs.

The Caribs of the Antilles don't find this caracoli on their islands, they bring it back from the trips they make to the rivers of the Essequibo, Orinoco, and Amazon, and sometimes to Spanish Trinidad or Margarita, two islands near the continent which belong to this nation and where Caribs native to the country still survive. It's during their stays on this latter island that they fish for pearls, whose number is now decreasing, producing far less than they did in the early days. I've seen it done, but without my curiosity being really satisfied, after using up valuable time with little success. I was told on the spot that the fishing used to be better. That might well be. Other people assured me that my Indian divers weren't serving me faithfully and that they dove in poor places. I can believe this, because they have their own particular business with the Spanish.

The Savages from the mainland exchange the caracoli for various other Antillean goods which the Caribs bring with them, such as birdfeathers, with which they like to adorn themselves on days of celebration or when they go to war. I forgot to say that the Caribs also decorate their bracelets with caiman teeth and glass beads, as well as with greenstones from the Amazon.

The greenstones are common in the Amazon and Orinoco: they are also found on the Essequibo, the Coca, the Curana, the Corrientes, the Baya de Canaas, and several other rivers close to the Amazon. The Savages in these countries told me that they've

found them by going up this river as far as the Charles and the Maragnon; and that other nations up there had many of them.

These greenstones have been recognised as marvellous treatment for attacks of epilepsy. Creoles use them during their birth labours since they prevent loss of blood; and they have been used successfully to treat snakebite by introducing a piece of the stone into the wound or bite, out of which soon seeps a blackish water or fluid: it then swells until the suppuration is well-established, through which the poison is withdrawn. Usually, on the third day, the stone falls out of its own accord: by then it is black and giving off a cadaverous odour; the wound soon heals and, if you want to make further use of the stone you need to drop it as soon as possible into warm milk so that it can cleanse for as long as it was in the wound. You then wipe it carefully and it has regained its original purity.

These stones are clear blue in colour, fairly flat, and the size of a 24-sol French coin or an English shilling: they are uneven and irregular. When you break them, they shatter. You need to bear these observations in mind so as not to be duped by many of the Indians who substitute other stones of similar appearance which they sell at high prices as Amazon greenstones.

Here's a proof which I offer as a guarantee, having twice used it successfully. Throw the stone in a glass of water: if it falls to the bottom and fizzes enough to make the water shoot several inches up the glass, then you can believe it's genuine.

I've seen one of them in the hands of an inhabitant of Martinique, M. Acier, an Adviser to the Council, which was oblong, and another almost round which belonged to a priest on Grenada, but I think I'm on firm ground in doubting the authenticity of these two stones because they differ in shape from all those that I've seen in the hands of the Savages on the rivers where, as I've said, they are commonly found. I owned several of them which were then stolen from me by the English when they took me prisoner at sea: they were also of a very different shape. I'd obtained them first hand. The colour of the two belonging to those two people wasn't the same as mine: it seemed to me to shade towards blackish-brown, while mine and those of the savages were slightly different. At the end of the day it's very difficult to be certain of having a true greenstone unless you receive it directly from the savages along the rivers who produce them; since they have fewer sightings of and dealing with whites, they don't as a consequence have enough skill, or perhaps wickedness, to attempt deception. Wickedness is found, but only rarely: they're more honest than we are.

...

Carib commerce is fairly extensive throughout the Savages of the region: it consists of these baskets, of which I've already spoken, which they sell in great numbers to the inhabitants of all the islands. As these baskets, or panniers, are light, and shut perfectly, and are clean and commodious enough to carry linen and clothing through areas where vehicles can't be used because of the mountainous terrain (which forces people to transport everything from one place to another on the heads of blacks), these baskets have become so useful that they're now used in the same way as trunks and suitcases are used in Europe. In this way an object of little value in itself has become a quite extensive branch of internal commerce, which is an interesting way for people who have need of so little to acquire their necessities.

...

The Savages all gather together when a subject of national interest is at issue, such as going to visit their savage brothers established on the mainland, or travelling to the English or French islands to make complaints, demands, or representations, etc. They often go the mainland to help their friends when these are at war, and they have 'passed the word' – this is the expression used among the Savages of America in such cases. Then the ancients, and preferably the piaias or boyers, who are at the same time their priests, soothsayers, and doctors all together (and in all these professions impostors, charlatans, and simpletons) drink a great deal and dance and smoke to excess.

These figures make speeches to them to indicate the subject of the assembly: say the need to repair to the place suggested by their friends and allies. To decide the question, everyone scours their memory for all the good reasons to support the proposal. When it's a question of war, they remember the motives of vengeance the nation ought to have preserved since such and such a time towards the enemies they are to fight. They persuade themselves through extensive arguments that these enemies will be exterminated; their own courage is vaunted and the enemy's is decried. They discuss what use they'll make of so many prisoners: each one rejoices in advance at seeing all the captives arriving at the carbet, where they imagine them: they plan to make them work growing fruit or vegetables, they propose to sell them to other savages in exchange for bows, arrows, axes, hammocks, and many such things,

or they even abandon them to crueller enemies whose alliance they gain through this sacrifice, and these have them roasted at a stake, after torturing them with chants.

The aim of all these fine plans, which are often interrupted for frequent libations of ouïcou, is to get completely drunk and to repeat for each other what they will then put into action. At this moment the complaints and memories of quarrels with fellow Caribs come into their heads and they take out their knives and throw themselves on one another, regardless of the closeness of relationship: father, son, friend, neighbour, all stab each other if their knives meet, without distinction or repugnance. I once attended one of these assemblies: fortunately a Carib who was obliged to me, and who wasn't yet quite drunk, advised me and my people to withdraw, because he foresaw that blood would soon be spilled.

I took his good advice and got back on board ship with my people, but I was still in port when a Carib, who had once served a white officer in Martinique, called out to us and asked if we could sew up his father's stomach, which another Carib had cut open with his knife. We replied that we had no surgeons among us – which satisfied him, since he was very drunk. He lay down in the place from which he'd called to us, and doubtless went to sleep there, leaving his father to sew up his own stomach as best he could; except that he would avenge himself on another occasion, which would not be lacking. When they talk, they get animated, and start drinking; then for no reason a Savage will pull out his knife and say to his neighbour: compère (this is the name they call each other, and even whites), you have killed my father (or my brother or my son), and so I need to kill you to avenge myself; and at the same time he will throw himself on the object of his fury, and won't usually miss.

This is how almost all their assemblies end. The next day they throw the bodies into the sea, thinking no more about it, or bury them in their carbets in a ditch dug to the height of a man but no more than two feet across. The corpse is put into this hole along with his bow and arrows, and a couï filled with manioc flour, some bananas, potatoes, roucou and genip, an axe, and a little tafia or cane juice, commonly called rum, or even some ouïcou in an earthenware dish or calabash. Once the supposed needs of the deceased have been dealt with, the hole is covered with a mat, without further ado. The relatives then start drinking, dancing, and smoking, on the mat and round about, singing the praises of the dead man: they recount his brave deeds, praise him to the skies, and claim that he is not dead but merely sleeping, that his spirit has gone behind the mountains and across the sea, where he's now drinking, dancing, and

disporting himself with women younger and more beautiful than those he's left behind in the carbet, and that he's preparing a sumptuous feast to receive them all when they rejoin him behind the great mountain across the sea.

These people are very prone to drunkenness. One day when I quarrelled with one of these savages who was in my service, reproaching him for the scant regard he paid to my remonstrations and for his incorrigible addiction to this vice, I asked him among other things why he drank cane juice rather than wine. He replied, phlegmatically: Master compère, it makes me drunk more quickly. This trait is enough to convey the vicious brutality of these barbarians, especially when I add that this Savage was one of the *least* brutal of his nation: his father was Tourouïa, the sovereign cacique of the Black Caribs of the island of St Vincent, a man of true merit in his own way. I recognised the signs of great probity, justice, and integrity as much in his observations as in the wisdom of his administration. He seemed to me very attached to natural law, without always failing to lend credence to the lies of his magicians (doctors and priests together) – though, as far as I could tell, rather out of political expediency than weakness of mind. On several occasions he questioned me about the truths of Christianity and he seemed charmed by everything I told him about it, especially the way I slighted the charlatanry of the Catholic monks and priests. Since he wasn't lacking good sense, he immediately objected to the impossibility that those gentlemen should demand pious belief in what has always horrified educated thinkers.

Tourouïa also asked me to teach him how he should look after himself during ill-health and to give him some general ideas about the means to follow in treating the different illnesses to which they are most exposed – and he assured me on this occasion that he had never been duped by the ignorance of the piaïas or boyers. He asked me if ours were also doctors, since they called themselves soothsayers and could remove sins or make the deity descend into a small piece of white bread. I satisfied him entirely on these points, and we were equally happy with each other. This Savage was very different from his peers in bemoaning his ignorance. It was for this reason that he had given me his son to train through being in my service, so that he could then use him as a model, but in no way was the son his father's equal. I witnessed the unavailing efforts he made to free his people of the dissolute customs to which they adhered. This leading barbarian wrote me several letters when I was in

Martinique, which – although in quite bizarre style, quite unlike the European – demonstrate his virtue and his morals: I have carefully preserved them.

...

This is the place to speak about the origins of these Savages, who are so different from all others in America, being black rather than red.

In the early days of European settlement in the Antilles, on a ship coming from Guinea full of Blacks for the cultivation of the colonies, the slaves revolted and threw all the whites into the sea after killing them; but as they didn't know how to navigate they were forced to let the ship drift in the currents. The trade winds, which are prevalently easterly throughout the year between the tropics, quite naturally led the slave vessel to the first land in the most windward part of northern America: the island of St Vincent was the first that the Blacks saw. Naturally, wherever the ship ended up, they would run it aground so as not to drown. As might be imagined, they all hurried ashore to look for signs of life. The Red Caribs – American natives who occupied the island – received them with their usual humaneness and showed them a side of the island previously uninhabited where they could establish themselves. The Blacks, more hard-working, more continent, and less inclined to destroy each other, as well as naturally cleverer, developed their small colony, while the Reds were destroying and diminishing theirs. The Blacks sought to merit the protection of the Europeans who occupied the neighbouring islands: more supple and pliant than the Reds, they were soon considered by the whites as an instrument to play a large part in the plan that had been formed to force the Red Caribs to entirely abandon possession of their islands. The Blacks were supported and even covertly encouraged in the first quarrels between the Reds and Blacks, which took place soon after the two nations had agreed to share the same island.

The Black Caribs named themselves a sovereign chief to govern them in despotic fashion: they never wanted to submit themselves to the Reds' cacique, while the latter – indifferent to the vanities of this world – hardly bothered to impose themselves. Over time the Blacks' colony has grown to the point where there are now more than 20,000 of them just on St Vincent (even though there were no more than about 200 when they arrived), as opposed to three or four thousand Red savages at the most. The latter realised their mistake, but too late. They wanted to chase the Blacks away, but these took the right measures to render their rivals' plan futile and have had

themselves recognised by the Governor Generals of the Windward Islands on behalf of the King of France, under the name of Black Caribs, as the free inhabitants and possessors of the leeward part of the island of St Vincent, whose principal settlement they called Le Managaro. So as to distinguish themselves from other enslaved or free Blacks, of whom there are a great number in the Antilles, they practice the flattening of their infants' foreheads in imitation of the Red Caribs. It's almost the strongest of their divisions that I met with on the island on St Vincent (and in the Windward Islands as a whole), where I made the acquaintance of this Tourouïa, sovereign cacique of the Savage Black Caribs, a title passing from father to son since their arrival in America. I was received very honourably in his carbet, where he owns excellent and abundant lands, worked by around 100 black slaves which he bought in our colonies and who are not his subjects, but are regarded by him and other nations as free and independent: the slaves do not have flattened foreheads.

It was then that he asked me to take charge of his son's instruction: he allowed me and even entreated me to make use of him as a valet, a position in which he acquitted himself rather poorly. He eventually became more burdensome than useful, and my other servants, especially the white ones, pressed so hard for his dismissal that I didn't want to take him back to Europe. His drunkenness was the only cause of his disgrace: he was a really gentle person, very faithful, and he seemed attached to me beyond what I would have expected from a Savage: his friendship really embarrassed me when he was drunk, because it had no limit.

At this time Vincent Prat, sovereign chief of the Red Caribs, presented to me a long memoir which he had had written by a white inhabitant of the island to whom he had conceded some land, with which this individual had become rich. The object of this memoir was to engage my support for his approach to the General-in-Chief, M. De Bompar and to M. Rouillé, Special Governor of Martinique. This memoir is a fairly detailed narrative of his forefathers' rightful possession of and authority over all the Antilles or Windward Islands, and at the same time an account of the way in which the negroes of Guinea (now become Black Caribs), imposed themselves and took advantage of the Red Savages, natural and creole inhabitants of the Antilles, who are now reduced to the contested possession of a very small portion of the island of St Vincent.

But since I was obligated in various ways, and beholden for the considerations received from the cacique Tourouïa, I couldn't honestly get involved in the quarrel

between these two chiefs of savage nations. Besides, I knew that the French court did not intend to extirpate the Blacks from the island of St Vincent, and I was witness to the great difference between the discipline of the Blacks and that of the Reds, the former as scrupulously honest as one can expect from Savages, the latter giving continual cause for complaint through the results of their intemperance.

I limited myself to giving particular encouragement to each one – and remained neutral. Justice would have forced me to favour the Red Caribs, and gratitude would have led me to favour the Black. However, while assuring the Reds that I would never make use of their petition, I did receive it from them in order to offer them some satisfaction. I still have it, because it is very detailed and it could serve to clarify the history of these peoples for any curious person who should undertake to take up from the beginning what I have only sketched here, perhaps too succinctly, just with a view to giving an idea of these extraordinary peoples among whom we live in America, and about whom much is said without their manners and customs being described.

...

When I travelled to Dominica, one of the Windward Islands seven leagues from Martinique (and where there are about 700 Red Carib families), smallpox was rife. During a hunt, I spotted a prominent-looking carbet and intended to go in, but I was surprised to see – or rather first to smell – several dead Caribs lying in their hammocks, and yet to find the whole carbet full of domestic utensils in use as if they were all alive. The intolerable smell from the corpses prevented me from investigating further: I only had time to observe a particular expression throughout. These Savages use it as soon as their relatives die from an illness: I should indicate that this custom is only practised by the Reds.

Moreau de Jonnès, *Adventures in Wars of the Republic and Consulate*

I saw the last days of the last indigenous people of the American archipelago, a people which dared above all others to stand up against the Spanish conquistadors without fear of their men-of-war and of the invincible superiority of their weapons; the same

that fought for three centuries to defend its country and independence, and which, when it fell, had seen the destruction of the great native empires of the New World and the disappearance of all the primitive inhabitants of the West Indies.

[The privateer on which Moreau is travelling to the Caribbean in August 1795 captures a small vessel carrying a British army captain, Dawson, who is himself travelling from St Vincent to Martinique with a written memoir describing to the general in charge of the British forces there the situation on St Vincent.]

Captain Dawson described how he had the unique opportunity of penetrating the part of the island of St Vincent inhabited by the Caribs, which formed their last refuge. He had made use of his stay there to reconnoitre from a military point of view that area of difficult access, to study its defensive positions, its paths, its ravines, its fortified caves, and its hidden food stores, which were state secrets for these Savages. He wound up with a calculation of the number of fighting men that could be placed in the field by the two principal island populations, the Red Caribs and the Black Caribs; and he described just how their territory and villages could be invaded, their stores of provisions carried off, their crops burned, and finally their destruction effected by famine or their extermination by fire and sword.

This cruel plan was signed by the author who had devised it when, after falling sick, he had sought relief in the mountains of the island, where the air is truly healthy. It was under cover of the hospitality given him by many Carib families that he had conceived this treachery and thought through the means of putting it into practice.

[Moreau eventually reaches St Vincent.]

It was the first time I had seen indigenous people from the New World. I was as much struck by their appearance as was Christopher Columbus. The first thing I noticed was their serious demeanour, dignified and proud. There was in this respect some likeness to the Spaniards. It was easy to recognise a people never disgraced by slavery, who clearly regarded themselves as anyone's equal. Their looks were assured, and in them could be read the indomitable courage which had stood the test of more than three centuries. Their weapons were beside them in the canoes. These were a bow of iron wood, a quiver full of stout arrows, and a kind of tomahawk, a

club without a handle made of a piece of wood, heavy as lead, brightened with coloured designs, and operated by means of a thong, which served to launch it near or far with irresistible force. Their boats were carved, ornamented, and inlaid, made of a wood so light that though they held five men it only took two to carry them over the reefs without unloading any of their baggage. As for their persons, the Caribs were of average size, sturdy, well-shaped, agile, and very strong. Their skin was copper coloured, very like the hue that the leaves of certain trees take in autumn before they dry out. No crossing with a black race gives a similar colour, and it is impossible to confuse a Carib with a mulatto or another métis, as has been suggested, quite wrongly, in a contemporary novel. The arms and shoulders of the rowers of all the canoes were perfectly beautiful; any one could have been taken as an academy model. Another perfection, present in both sexes and characteristic of the race, was the smallness of hands and feet. In Europe these individuals would have belonged to a superior class, whereas here this was the common type. Not a man was fair, ruddy, chestnut, yellow, or bearded, as among our people. They all had raven-black hair, piled in a tuft on the top of the head and carefully combed and bound. There were no beards: this mark of manhood is foreign to the human race in the New World, without any prejudicial effect to its reproduction, as might be believed.

Except for the men, who no doubt believed that they owed it to their dignity to maintain a serious demeanour, the whole crowd was cheerful, talking loudly and without pause, laughing to themselves or out loud, and being amusing by the tricks the young girls were playing on each other. For example, when one of the prettiest would admire herself by taking up a pose, her attire would almost always be disturbed by one of her companions, who would quietly untie her hair or the garland of flowers covering her breast. These tricks were so enjoyed by their victims that their best friends couldn't have served them better.

As we drew near the shore we saw a war canoe, manned by 60 rowers, emerge from an entrance concealed by rocks and shaded by large trees. This was the chief of the red Caribs who came officially to receive me and to honour the flag of the French Republic. He made a speech addressed to me, and personally directed the schooner to the harbour where we were to stay under the protection of his fraternal hospitality. This haven was a basin surrounded by a shelf of basalt 15 to 20 feet high; the depth of its water was enough to house a frigate. Two hillocks covered with rich vegetation stood on each side of its opening to the sea, and their tufted trees, bending over the

surface, formed a canopy. Beside a rushing stream which flowed from the mountains of the interior into the harbour rose the many huts of a carbet, like beehives in the shape of their roofs, made of palm-leaves, but with their wattled sides admitting refreshing breezes and daylight.

In the middle of the village was a communal house containing an assembly-hall at least 80 feet long; there I found gathered together the chiefs and warriors of the two tribes, the Red and the Black Caribs. I hadn't previously seen the latter and from misleading accounts I'd formed quite a false idea of them. I believed, from what the missionaries had said, that they owed their origin to negro slaves escaped from neighbouring colonies. I was much surprised to find them of another race entirely. In place of woolly hair, flat nose, and gaping mouth set with thick out-turned lips, they possessed Abyssinian features: smooth hair, long and black, more like a mane; straight nose, standing out from the face but slightly curved at the end, and such as you would never see from Cape Bon to the Gulf of Guinea; and finally, a mouth furnished with thin lips in no way like that of a negro, except for the beauty of the teeth. They had, moreover, an air of sovereign pride which changed at the least opposition to a savage expression, full of threats, arrogance, and fierceness. However, the chief of this tribe came to meet me, and invited me to visit his carbet, which lay in another part of the island. He and his people only associated with the Red Caribs in important matters.

[Moreau returns to St Vincent from Guadeloupe in September 1795 as lieutenant in the marine artillery to liaise with the Caribs in their war against the English. One of their most famous warriors is the daughter of the Red Carib chief, Pakiri.]

Her fame was already known to me as the heroine of Victory Hill, the saviour of the town of Pointe-à-Pitre. In Guadeloupe they never stopped talking about her courage and beauty. To give the alarm to the sleeping garrison, while risking being put to the sword, she had to sail her war canoe right through the English fleet. Not daring to fire at her, which would betray their presence, the enemy tried on several occasions to board her, but the speed given the canoe by its 60 rowers, their sharp changes of course, and the poisoned arrows they sent flying towards those who got too close, kept this new Clélie from the danger she had had the audacity to court and which would have stopped the most intrepid of men in his tracks.

She had rendered many such services to the inhabitants of Guadeloupe and Martinique. She often visited the latter island, where she had been brought up in the convent at St Pierre. Since her mother had died giving birth to her and her only brother has died fighting the English, she was the only object of love and consolation left to her father. Compelled to recognise the superiority of the white men, the chief of the Reds had wished his daughter to grasp their ideas in order to use their resources for the health and well-being of his race. This plan had been completely successful. Education had grafted its powerful advantages onto the strong and energetic qualities of savage nature, and the Caribs recognised that she had as much wisdom in the councils of the great Carbet as she had bravery and skill in war. However, instead of attributing the stature of this young girl to its proper cause, they sought a supernatural origin and explained it by means of a fable. They claimed that their chief, overwhelmed by the misfortunes that his family had suffered, had consulted about the future of his last child the hidden Siren who lives in a cave hollowed from the rocks of the south coast. Nobody could – or would dare – repeat the response he'd received, but it was imagined that the spirit had been charmed by the beauty of this little girl, had been disposed in her favour, and had proceeded to offer her protection. She had advised sending her away for a white education, and it was claimed that she had chosen for her a symbolic name which foretold a happy future: Eliama, which means rainbow.

...

We were then in winter, which is the season of storms. In the area around the port, where the schooner was moored, the heat was stifling and the mosquitoes was thick. These insects, armed with a poisonous dart, are among the worst torments human beings can suffer. Ever attentive to our well-being, Chief Pakiri housed the artillerymen in a fresh and airy cave and gave me a pretty little carbet next to his own up in the hills, open to the sea breeze and to the Carib countryside. It was a charming spot, surrounded by the prettiest flowers in the world, fed by fresh water streams, and cooled by the trade winds. The Chief's daughter had lived there as a child, and she had tended the garden with her own hands, intertwining huge and sweet-smelling jasmines and nurturing striking amaryllises: all these flowering myrtles, laurels, and palms were planted by her. She had done more. In her garden she had grown for the benefit of the ill and afflicted a group of medically beneficial plants whose virtues she

understood, and which she dispensed with wise advice to those whose health was suffering. More recently, her father had built for her a larger house, more suitable for an already renowned fighter who he wanted to remove from more peaceful pastimes. Because of this, I had the good fortune to live in this Elysium, which has stayed in my memory as the place where I spent the best days of my life.

...

During the three months I spent in the mountain carbet with my Carib friends, my days were a tissue of silk and gold. This was truly Eden, as Milton describes it, with its perpetual spring, its shady forests, its magnificent views, its flowering groves, its singing birds, adorned with the most varied and brilliant colours. Nothing was missing, since a second Eve lived in this pleasant retreat.

Pakiri, the chief of the Reds, had developed a deep affection for me, and his daughter a sweet friendship. These were not, as they are in Europe, transient feelings in the midst of the innumerable distractions of daily life, but rather profound connections, matters of life and death. The native chief had only two cares, one in his soul, the other in his heart. The first was the love of war, the second the love for his daughter. The defence of his country and the happiness of Eliama were his life; and this man, who seemed so impassive with his warriors, was distraught enough to let his tears fall when he spoke to me about the fate awaiting his homeland and his only child if we did not defeat his implacable enemies. I associated myself with his worries, his hopes, and his plans; and, as far as my youthful military experience and our indifferent means allowed, I prepared the campaign we were impatient to open against our neighbours, the English colonists of St Vincent.

Already for a long time the Caribs had adopted the use of firearms, though from necessity and custom they continued to use arrows, clubs, and a cutlass which they handled with great skill. I had obtained from Guadeloupe powder, balls, and some muskets, and I extracted from the wrecked frigate ten times as much with the help of the intrepid Carib swimmers who dived into its submerged holds. At the same time, my artillerymen became instructors, teaching the Caribs to handle their muskets and to manoeuvre like our light troops. Success was prompt and effective. These were not the usual dull peasants, but active and alert hunters, with a straight eye and a sure foot, who had only to learn how to work in groups. They became so good in shooting at the target that I was obliged to attribute the cause to the old mother of the chief of

the Black Caribs, whose powers of sorcery must have speeded their rapid progress. Her two granddaughters, Morning Star and Flower of the Forest, never missed the target once. Looking on this general training of girls, armed to defend their homes instead of groaning and calling on Providence as they do in Europe, I could not believe that the fortune of war would fail so fair and holy a cause.

I had already learned how, in the West Indian islands, the great variations in terrain render the study of the theatre of war very difficult, and complicate the operations which might take place over a very small area. I decided to acquire an extensive knowledge of the country, as much for the purpose of learning the means by which it might most effectively be defended as for finding bases for the most advantageous lines of attack on the enemy's territories. Every day I covered some portion of the island right up to the frontier of the English colony, taking care to be accompanied on these excursions by the most intelligent of the guides. Pakiri himself wanted us to inspect together the crest of the mountains which divided the Carib part of the island from that invaded by the English.

[Moreau is recalled to Guadeloupe by Victor Hugues. On St Vincent Moreau had made a sketch-map of the island, showing all the tracks and paths, and indicating the best military positions. Hugues was impressed enough to send Moreau on a perilous mission to British-occupied Martinique to map the British defences around St Pierre in preparation for a French attack. He enters Martinique as a travelling doctor with a taste for botany and draws 45 sheets of maps kept in a leather case disguised as a herbal. After the maps have been sent back to Guadeloupe, Moreau is taken prisoner by the British but exchanged for a captured English officer. On board a French ship he learns of the arrival of British reinforcements under Abercrombie, which have turned the tide of the insurrections on St Lucia, Grenada, and St Vincent. Moreau's sense of honour insists that he return to St Vincent so he has himself dropped off on the windward coast, close to the village where he spent those three idyllic months the previous year.]

The sea-breeze, which had risen with the moon, carried my boat so quickly that two hours before dawn I had landed on a solitary rock on the east coast of St Vincent. I was fully armed, I knew thoroughly the route I had to follow, and I had made up my mind quite spontaneously; still, when the boat sailed away, leaving me alone at the

foot of the high cliffs, separated from the friends whose devotion had freed me and saved my life, I felt sad and uneasy and oppressed by dark forebodings. The total silence around me certainly contrasted strangely with the joyous and lively reception I'd been given some months before at the same place by the Carib people coming to salute the French flag and welcome back one of its children. Now, I said to myself, the people are gathered in the mountains to keep the enemy from attacking and, if ever Providence has protected the weak against iniquity, it will surely give victory to the Caribs and protect the last aboriginal people of this vast archipelago from a final defeat.

After musing in this way, I followed along the rocks of the shore a narrow path which led me to the mouth of the pool where at the time of my first voyage I had put in with my schooner. I pushed under the large trees which covered this entrance with their tufted tops, and stepped slowly and quietly along a track which led over a flowery meadow up to the huts of the carbet close by. I expected every moment that the Carib dogs would awaken their masters by announcing the approach of a stranger, but all was quiet, and I thought they had recognised me as a friend. Pressing forward, I discovered a red glow close to the ground, from which sparks rose when fanned by the night breeze. Alarmed at such a sight, I hurried towards it, and stumbled over something on the path. I bent down to look, and found with horror the corpse of a murdered Indian. Going further, I found thirty more, sometimes a warrior, then a woman and child, and more often an old man. The village had been surprised by a body of pitiless enemies, who had cut down the unfortunate inhabitants and burnt their homes. There was no more left of this carbet than the ashes from which the wind still fanned yellow flames like those from the fire of a human ossuary. I summoned the courage to examine all the bodies scattered on the ground, thinking I would find among them at least one person dear to me, but this terrible search was happily unsuccessful.

With no one left to enlighten or guide me, I went on towards my mountain residence, at first under the light of the moon, which soon disappeared.

On the winding path which climbed among thick clumps of bush up into the mountains, I took every precaution to avoid surprise and to learn the enemy's position. No distant noise came from the desolated fields, as the English soldiers, tired with slaughter, and the natives, terrified by defeat, slept by their arms, waiting – respectively with impatience and with fear – for the rising of the sun to give the sign

to resume the fighting. The only sound was the morning song of the birds welcoming the new day, their melodic expressions of joy and love bursting forth as if nothing had changed around them.

As I drew near the home where I'd spent such happy days, garlanded with the friendship of the young Indian and her brave father, the Red Carib chief, my anxiety nearly overcame me, and I was obliged to sit down. As far as I could judge, the enemy had not got so far as this. Everything there looked as calm as always, with the jasmines and other flowers still forming their sweet-smelling arbours. I went into my house with its woven reed walls. Everything was as I had left it: even my elegantly woven hammock was stretched out as if it had been prepared for me. I had just sat down on it to recover my breath, when a dog rushed up and sat at my feet with every sign of affection. It was Eliama's spaniel, which had faithfully remembered me. He had escaped from the hands of Zami, the chief's daughter's maid, who had hidden with him in a cave at the back of the rocks. Hearing his barks of joy, which announced the arrival of a friend, the young girl followed him. The moment she saw who I was she flung herself at my knees, embracing them, and sobbing as if her heart would break. I took her in my arms and tried everything I could to calm or settle that grief, that anguish of a soul on the point of leaving such a fragile and delicate body. I hardly dared to question her, fearful of the horrors she would have to tell me. "Who are you with here?" I asked her. "No one," she replied. "What! Are you alone?" "Alone." "And your master?" "Killed." "And your mistress?" "Dead." Hearing these words, punctuated by groans and spoken in a failing voice, I was seized by despair. I wanted to doubt the reality of such an awful catastrophe, but the child had witnessed it all. She had seen the chief fall at the head of his warriors, struck in the side by a bullet which had killed him instantaneously. His daughter, wounded several times in the retreat through the forest and feeling her strength failing, had sought refuge on the top of the Soufrière. She had been chased by the enemy's negro trackers and, finding herself about to fall into their hands, had flung herself into the great fissure of the volcano, which spews out torrents of sulphurous vapour. The barbarians, eager not to lose her, had rushed into the fumes to get hold of her, and the child, who was on the rim of the mountain, praying for her mistress's safety, had never seen them come back: no doubt they'd been engulfed by the volcano.

The causes of the Carib defeat were: the knowledge of their defences as reported to the English generals by Captain Dawson, the enemy's huge superiority in numbers,

the tardy arrival of help from Guadeloupe, and, above all, the employment by General Abercrombie of a battalion of negroes raised in Martinique and commanded by two Creoles accustomed to hunting slaves in the woods. These negroes crept through passages believed to be inaccessible, and, getting to the rear of military positions, they reached the redoubt which served as a refuge for women and children and a storehouse for munitions and food. They sacked everything, pitilessly killing the harmless occupants, pillaging and burning the provisions which would have sustained them and the Carib warriors. The warriors, hearing of this disaster, lost courage. The death of their chief left them without a leader. Several groups entered into negotiations, were persuaded to lay down their arms and were taken to Kingstown. Others resolved to fight to the last gasp. Major-General Stuart, who later served with distinction in Egypt, made them repeated offers; in exchange for their lands in St Vincent he promised them other land on a more fertile island. The natives replied that if the land he wanted to give them was so good the English had better develop it and leave the Caribs to their ancestral acres. They told the parliamentary officer they would rather die than exhume the bones of their forefathers and carry them into exile to a foreign land. After this resolution, they brought together all the surviving warriors and joined the French, who occupied tactical positions opposite Morne La Vigie.

At night, skilfully led by little Zami, I reached this fortified post, having skirted the enemy's outposts all day. A glance was sufficient to convince me that we should have to surrender very soon. Provisions and discipline were equally lacking. I should have been on short commons if the child had not unearthed some potatoes and yams from a silo and cooked them for me. The next day I asked permission of the commandant, Marinier, to dislodge a line of English skirmishers who were within range of our post. After a vigorous attack the enemy was obliged to evacuate the positions which he had taken. The same thing happened the next day, and we thus obtained several partial successes. But during this time the English general had driven the Carib population from the mountains, and taken them to the port, where they were embarked on the transports that had carried the invading force. These vessels, employed in movements to and from Barbados, were infected with yellow fever, and this horrible disease carried off a large portion of the Caribs shut in the holds of vessels before they reached the island of Rattan, a desert, uncultivated and half barren, on which the survivors were abandoned. As for the natives who had

rejoined us, they fought intrepidly alongside us up to the last moment. When they learned that capitulation could no longer be postponed and that all our efforts were unsuccessful, they resolved to avoid captivity by escaping at night in their war canoes, which they had hidden in the Siren's grotto. I found it hard not to join them, as they begged me to do, but I was then engaged in the defence of a post which was regarded as the key to the position, and my furtive disappearance would have amounted to desertion. Notwithstanding surveillance from the English men-of-war, the canoes, with paddles wrapped in cotton to deaden their sound, set out from St Vincent and landed on the coast of the mainland near Trinidad those unhappy people who had just lost for ever their dear homeland.

Trans. and Introduction © Peter Hulme