[SQUEAKING] [RUSTLING] [CLICKING]

MICHEL DEGRAFF: So thank you very much for sharing so generously with our esteemed, distinguished, dear guest. It was very-- I learnt a lot through the back and forth between you and Professor Casimir's questions and comments. I Thank you for sharing so much knowledge.

It's just amazing. And I'm so glad-- thank you, Tom, thank you, MIT OpenCourseWare, for recording this. This is historical. This is historical. And it does have the potential, I think, to reach out to folks on both ends of the spectrum, both the "Lakou" end and the "Lagrandyab" end, both the colonized and the colonizer, in many ways, in a way that can enrich all of us. So thank you for that.

So now we're going to hear Ti Jan Bosal introduce this beautiful chapter, a powerful chapter on the power and beauty of the sovereign people. And then we go around the room and ask questions.

JEAN CASIMIR: Thank you.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: And discuss.

JEAN CASIMIR: And I'm really happy to be here, because I'm in a real context where you feel at home, because everything you have said up till now, even from the very beginning, gives you the sense what is "decolonial reading," "decolonial study," because it's something that starts with your personal position. You must know where you are. You must be aware of where you are. And from that, you see the world, you know what I mean?

Because in fact, this is what is your power, the possibility of seeing the world from your position, not from the position they have given you. You find your position. You define your position. And from your position you are seeing the world.

And something I have written and in my mind is fundamental, the use of social sciences, the raison d'être of social sciences is to regain-- to give to those who have been dispossessed, to re-empower them. If not, I don't know why they study-- I am not there to empower those who are empowered. I have been disempowered. And my aim is to study, to work so I can regain my position over myself, over my people, and for my people to move forward.

Now, this implies understanding myself, understanding my people, and understanding the other. And then I move from there. So the beauty and power of the sovereign people is that we come from a set of individuals, because capitalism and European capitalism, modern time capitalism is based on the desegregation of the communities.

You take the communities. You make of them naked individuals. And then you give them the possibility of rejoining within your own norms-- now called the "syndicate," called the trade union, whatever you want, but after you make of them naked individuals.

We are taken from Africa, in the case of Saint-Domingue, Haiti, at least 24 different nations. Now they mix them all. They mix us up in the country. And we are going to recreate ourselves.

How do we do that? First of all, we create with nothing, eh, a group, a social group just to protect us, because when you reach there as an enslaved person, now they are going to beat you, to-- well, to destroy you, no?

When you finish working, the few times they give you to rest, you will find consolation. You will find affection. You will find love. You will find reciprocity. You will find solidarity. You give and take. You will find human relations. So you will create, you recreate a social group. I mean, this social group you create is going to have a set of principles, a set of norms, no?

And these norms are going to give way to new individuals. You're going to create a new individual according to your own norms, to your own principles. And these new individuals will be power in front of the other power. So that gives you the possibility of discovering out of nothing. Now you're going to imagine another power.

And it is so important that the one who brought you in the Caribbean or in the plantation system to exploit you is willing to spend all his efforts to destroy you because you are something. And you're going to be aware of that something.

For instance, they will say Vodou or whatever we do or be whatever it is is superstition. If it is superstition, it is useless. Let me use it. It's not doing anything.

[LAUGHTER]

If it has no solution, why do you make so much effort to destroy it? I mean-- so therefore you are acknowledging that, no?

Another element that is important also-- granted, you want me to do that, I don't do it, you beat me up. You can even kill me so I can do it. But I never see you killing a donkey because it doesn't want to drink water, because you know the donkey is an animal.

I mean, so they know-- but me you're going to beat me until I'm dead. Therefore, you acknowledge that I'm equal to you. If I was not equal to you, you would not beat me until I am dead. You would do like the donkey. I'd let you beat me [INAUDIBLE].

No, you beat me, because you know I have a will. And this will escapes to you-- escapes you. And this is my power.

OK, with that power in front of you, might-- because you really have a might-- I am going now to create myself, a being, my sovereignty with nothing. I'm going to recreate a new society. That is the beauty of it. And this is what we have to be aware of.

Now, it is not that I feel strong. No, no, no, I'm going to create a whole set of institutions. You see what I mean? A language, a religion, villages, a set of institutions that I create to take care of myself and to reproduce myself and also to have accountability for the members of the group. You see what I mean? So I create another universe in front of your universe, no?

And your universe, since you despise me, cannot see me. I mean, even when they see me, they say, "Oh, these are stupid things niggers are doing," you see what I mean? Even when they see, they cannot adjust.

So therefore, myself, to survive, I first learn what you have in mind. And I, in group-- no, I'm going to imagine how to bypass what you have in mind to the small possibility. Sometimes I can't. Sometime I can. But I will never lose the opportunity of doing that.

This is-- therefore, some people coming down here or brought down here against their will after much suffering, because you do not leave Africa as a tourist, no, you are beaten. And you have to walk sometime hundreds and hundreds of miles. They put you in circumstances you have never imagined. They put you on the boat, et cetera, et cetera. You come here.

And when you come here, now they start humiliating you, doing things that are beyond imagination, no? They sell you. The stamp you, et cetera, et cetera. I will not describe all the things.

But in that, I would say, infinite poverty and destruction, you're going to reborn. This is the beauty of the sovereign people.

Now, how do you do that? I say you create a community. But the community you created in the plantation itself-- I mean, while you're working on the plantation, you're creating social groups, in spite of the intention of the person to call you Black.

"Black" is a colonial world. In Africa, you're not Black. You can be Ashanti. You can be Negro. You can be Igbo. You can be anything but Black, because everybody is Black. So Black does not distinguish one to another.

I mean, so you come here, and you create a little group on the plantation. Now in that group, there are others who really cannot survive in the plantation. They will run away.

And you'll have a set of bandits and people stole, living out of stealing goods, coming in and out, looking for weapons, et cetera, et cetera. They are set of generally male maroons, no? Those male maroons and you are in contact. And at some point in time, they will with their ladies go and create the free village system. You see what I mean?

Now, from the people on the plantation, the independent fighters or brigands or whatever they call them to the village system, you have a constant movement of ideas [INAUDIBLE]. And this is done through the language, through the language.

So you have now a whole-- in the plantation system before independence, you have a whole movement of concept, of habits, of conducts that teach you the possibility of bypassing the system and defending yourself against the system. This is possible, particularly in the larger Antilles or in Suriname or in the Guyanas, no?

And this gives what I call the "counter-plantation system," which is the basis for the nation. Not yet, the nation is being born, but I mean the Haitians or the Jamaicans, et cetera, et cetera. This is one line of the development.

In the case for instance of the smaller island like Saint Vincent, Barbados, Martinique, they have to negotiate within the system. Take Barbados as the best example, because they were the seat of the Royal Navy. So you better behave yourself or they kill you, that's all. I mean, so you have to learn to negotiate within their system.

But this is the same basic position. They are different, because the condition in which they are negotiating are not the condition in which, for instance, Surinamese is negotiating. And the Surinamese have the Amerindians who will show them how the Amazonian et cetera, et cetera.

In any event, this is what we are doing. We prepare ourselves in the negotiation to create the group of people who can see another reality, create another universe, and a universe that the "powerful," so-called, tend to erase, no? And we confront those two universes.

Now when the imperial colonial countries enter in conflicts, now they create a possibility for you to break in, you see what I mean? So there is no difference between the Haitian and the Jamaican except what I told you what happened outside.

There is no difference between the Haitian or Jamaican and the Barbadian, except that one is in the small island, which is-- Barbados is something like 300 times smaller than the whole island there in Haiti, because we have an island in front of Port-au-Prince, La Gonave, which is twice bigger than Barbados, an island only. The country is something 70 times, if you put the D.R.-- So you can imagine the possibility of negotiation in this island and of the Barbadians are quite different, no?

Not to speak of the condition in which Barbados was settled, no-- Barbados was settled by couples, by British who came with their wives, so that one thing, they do not have a lot of people of color. They use-- no, no. They have, but they do not have a lot. That's one condition that we are all, in fact, the basic set of position of self-respect, sovereignty, group autonomy-- this is what is our base.

So beauty-- the beauty is that in the worse condition of living, thing we could not possibly imagine that is happening-- I do not want to enter in the relation between the white males and their enslaved and their kids and their daughters, what they have-- no, we can just imagine that they think they are all-powerful. They do whatever they want. They destroy themselves, but that's another problem.

But forget about that. We simply create our world out of nothing. And it's the Caribbean world, no? When I say out of nothing, we do have resources we remember from Africa. But they are individuals who remember that.

We have an advantage though over the First Nations in America. The First Nations-- all the Jews, also-- they are people that were exploited. But they were a nation that were exploited. They have been forced to witness the destruction of their nation.

You see the Mayas, the Aztec, or the Incas-- they could see the Spaniards coming. And they have lived that. In our case, no, for instance, assuming that they get into Yoruba country or Igbo country, they beat them, and they take you, and they bring you here.

You would say, oh OK, I lost. I had just bad luck. They got me. But the country, nobody can beat the Igbos. Even if it is not true, but you will imagine that you have not witnessed your society being humiliated, your kings being a-- yes, humiliated, et cetera, et cetera.

So we have at least that. We start with local experience from the day we came here in America. And from that local events, we move forward so we can create a new society, a new world with our experience, not with-- we do not carry all the tradition of our society. And we do not carry the "deuil," the sorrow.

Or for instance, there are some wonderful scene in the-- among the first nations. [INAUDIBLE] going all over Bolivia, where they are playing the conquest. I mean, the Amerindians are playing the conquest. You see what I mean? You can see all the sadness in the winning of the alien over-- we don't have that possibility. And in general, our musical production is quite different from theirs.

So this is what I call the beauty of our nation, what we have witnessed, what we have created. The problem is that we have to make our people aware of that. And this is what the system and what Professor DeGraff was showing, wants you not to see, you see?

For instance, the beauty of Kreyòl-- Kreyòl is switching the meaning of key function. One of my great friends and Professor Guillermo Bonfil from Mexico, he said, "Indian," "Negroes" are colonial concept. There were no Indians in America before Christopher Columbus made his mistakes.

Negroes, that you call Negroes-- I mean, I don't know if I'm a Negro. I mean, that's meaningless that I am a Negro, et cetera, et cetera. Those are key concepts of colonialism. They create race. A set of languages in Africa has no word for race.

And in Haiti, "race" means "family" according to Old French, as in "the race of DeGraff," "the race of Casimir." They say, "Watch out with the race of Rodriguez. They are really bad people, all of them. They are witches." But they mean the family, not the race what the West covers.

So we came. And we create another concept. And I don't know if you know, but as everybody knows and I give the example so many times, "whites" do not mean what it means in French or in English.

Whites-- for instance, I have a very good friend of mine from Jamaica I say-- when I do something in my company, I say I trick the white man. But I don't mean white men, the man who is white. I mean, I trick the technology, the dominant one, the one who want the algorithm to work that way. I make it work another way.

I mean, this is why I call it "the white man." And in fact, in my proposition, "white" means in Haiti the responsible of the primitive accumulation of capital. We need to be the dominant capitalist fellow, who comes in, takes whatever he sees, that he is and he take it if he wants it, period. No, he has been-- that's why. So for instance, if he comes home they will say, "there is a Negro asking for you."

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

JEAN CASIMIR: Period.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: So if Tom goes to Haiti, Tom becomes a Negro.

JEAN CASIMIR: A Negro.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Because "Negro" means human being in Haiti.

JEAN CASIMIR: Period, and the reverse is true, too. My daughter is like you all, my son, also. And they are all "white" because they are strangers. They can't speak Kreyòl. They don't know the habits. They are too--

I mean, it's not discriminatory. It's just simply they do not know what's going on. They do not know the rules of the game. That's it.

So you have changed the key concept of the dominant system. And you have create your world where "tout moun se moun," everybody is a person. You have create the word "moun."

I mean, the word "moun" has nothing to do with white, black, male, female. It just mean person. Every person is a person, and should be respected as such. This is something you have done when you are in the "très fond," in the depth of misery.

To get out and to create that group that can survive oppression, you had to erase that. This is why the Igbo disappeared, the Congo disappeared, the Hausa disappeared. You become a moun.

And you have to be-- and as far as I know in Haiti, the worst of all sin is to destroy life. You have to respect life, period. You're not cut tree for nothing. You don't kill an insect for nothing. No, no, no, no, that is a sin. This is what is a sin.

So the beauty of the sovereign people is that it has been able to invent its sovereignty and invent itself as distinct from. And this is where also it has been able to show you, make you see what power means in fact.

Power doesn't mean that you're stronger, you have more strength. No, no, that is not really power. This is appearance of power because your strengths, you have it because I'm powerful.

You see, I like to tell my friend-- well, in fact, that's an idea that is in-- Eric Williams developed, no? Let's see, the Haitians-- to beat the Haitians, Napoleon sent 40,000 persons. And they lost. So we are stronger 40,000 plus 1, at least [LAUGHS] because they lost. So if you want to know what power is, ask us, because we beat him. [LAUGHS]

You must understand what power is. Obviously, in Haiti, they are destroying the use of Kreyòl. They do not want Kreyòl, as you have seen, because Kreyòl is powerful. You must be aware of this power that you control, you manage. And you are the one who invented.

When I say something in French, the French Academy will decide or in Spanish, the Royal Academy, the Académie Royale will decide if it is correct, if you can say it or if you cannot say it.

If I'm talking Jamaican, that the shanty town that will decide if this can be said or not. It's not the government, not even the government. It is us, us in our most inner existence without authority. It is the agreement between us that we decide that what is, for instance, shack up, shacking up, if this is acceptable or not. It is not an authority. It is the consensus between the few people. This is what sovereignty is. So I will stop there.

[CLAPPING]

Oh boy, merci. [LAUGHS]

MICHEL DEGRAFF: What you said about white reminds me of James Baldwin. He has a statement--

JEAN CASIMIR: Oh yeah, exactly.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: --that "white" is a metaphor for power. There's no such thing as whiteness. "White" is Chase Manhattan Bank.

JEAN CASIMIR: Yeah, exactly.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Yeah, yeah, so thank you for this amazing summary of your entire approach really to Haitian history. So all right, so--

AUDIENCE: It's a lot like the white thing-- for me, I hear it as-- it's a political position sort of of your relationality to the world, to things, to land, to food, to people, rather than the color of your skin--

JEAN CASIMIR: Yes, indeed.

AUDIENCE: --your mental state of how you see the world.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: OK, so you can go around the room and ask questions. [INAUDIBLE], actually Gaby had her hand up very quickly.

[LAUGHTER]

[INAUDIBLE] I think I can-- Merelin, you-- OK, all right.

STUDENT: What was interesting that stood out to me in the reading was cultural homogenization and how--

JEAN CASIMIR: Come again.

STUDENT: Cultural homogenization--

JEAN CASIMIR: Cultural imagination?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Homogenization, homogenization, cultural homogenization.

STUDENT: --of how customs, habits, and aspirations were not pursued by the racist and Eurocentric public authorities but rather productions carried out by the sufferers, by the sufferers.

And I thought that it was super interesting to think of it that way, because I'd personally always thought of like, oh, they classify us-- like, we're classified as Black, because there's a racist system that sees us all as like just one person and not like different ambitions.

But I never thought of it as like a positive light like how you spun it. How it wasn't-- it was an aspect of our survival. We had to unify under this one form of culture. And I actually thought that was interesting.

And I was wondering, how did you get to that point of realizing that we formed this one homogenized culture not out of-- just simply out of spite, in some cases, out of survival and out of spite. How did you get to this point? That's what I--

JEAN CASIMIR: I see your point. To be-- I think now you make me see that, I think I should go back to my friend I just mentioned, Guillermo Bonfil. Guillermo is an anthropologist. He said, "Indian is an invention of the Spaniards."

When you take an Inuit-- you know Inuit, no, from Eskimo-- and you take a Tupi, or Mapuche, or Maya, or an Inca, and you call all of them "Indian." "Indian"? What do you mean? Why do you want them to be Indians? I mean, what does somebody who live his life in snow has to do with Tupi or Seminole or whatever it is? Because you want them to work. And you homogenize them in your imagination to make to work and to exploit them the way you want to invent that lie, OK?

So this is one thing he put. And I start saying that therefore is a colonial concept. "White" is a colonial concept.

How does the Haitian call himself? And I found in that book of de Vastey, our first Haitian historian, he called the book *The Colonial System Unveiled.* It is in English. It's 90 pages the book has.

And I realize in these 90 pages, de Vastey used 100 times the word "malere yo" so "malere." And we call ourselves "malere."

And "malere" can be a rich man or poor man. It means you're fragile. You are alone. You are vulnerable. So even if you reach that way, "malere" now, because you can come, fell down, and break your leg.

Not only that, the importance of the "malere" is that I was in Africa going to a picnic with my girlfriend. And all of a sudden came from bandits for no reason to pick me up. And here I am, my girlfriend in Saint Vincent as a slave, me in Cuba as another slave. We have done nothing to deserve that "sort", that destiny, no? We are the "malere" no?

And up to now today, the Haitian defined himself as "malere." And this is why my great friend and translator, Laurent DuBois, takes from Bob Marley the word "sufferer." We are sufferers.

It is not that we are a proletarian who came from and we could move through social mobility outside of the proletariat. We do not have a common history with the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois and the proletariat in Europe come from the "bourg," from the city. And they fought together, for instance, against the nobility and the clergy. And after the French Revolution, they split when capitalism started moving.

But they have the same history. They have the same language. They have the same religion. They have a whole hundreds of-- no, that's not my case. I just-- Boop! They put me together in front of that "planteur" [plantation owner]. And I'm a "malere" because I've done nothing to deserve that suffering thing that happened.

So when I find the word "sufferer," I say, oh boy, that's it. And this is the Kreyòl who gave it to me, "malere." A Haitian do not say I'm poor or I'm-- no, I'm "malere." And you can call anybody "malere." "Gade figi malereèz sa a, non"-- look at that poor lady. You know what I mean? Full stop. But that has nothing to do.

OK, that means also that if I get out of the "malheur"-- of that misery, which is not something that came from my will or from my effort, it's an accident-- an accident put me in it. An accident will take me out of it.

My mother and my father could work their life. They will not make of me a professor. Is one day an accident, a friend of mine was minister-- [INAUDIBLE] minister of what? They found a scholarship. And I get out of it. Obviously I'm not going to lose--

But the fact of the matter is, you don't get out of it. You don't get into it because you're poor. You don't get out of it because you work. Therefore, you should respect all other "malere." So the respect is basic all over.

In Jamaica when I was there, they greet you, "respect." That's the greeting, "respect." That's the greeting, because I may be very rich, I may be very poor, but I earned the same respect.

So this is how I would say, I think-- I get to the word "malere," "sufferer," because it's just in our language. So to my mind for social scientists, you should be aware and know and study your language. If you have a hypothesis, you cannot put it in your own local language, those of us who have two languages, you see what I mean? [LAUGHS] He's not working.

It has to be translatable to our language, because we're working in-- if we work directly in our language, obviously that come out like-- I don't know if I answered your question.

STUDENT: No, you're good, thank you.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: So are you going to speak to-- piggyback on the [INAUDIBLE]? Yeah.

STUDENT: Well, I would just-- yeah, something if it's not--

JEAN CASIMIR: Continue...

STUDENT: Yeah. No, just the concept of being a "malla-gree."

JEAN CASIMIR: "Malere."

STUDENT: "Malla-- malere"-- it was--

MICHEL DEGRAFF: "Malere."

STUDENT: "Malere," yeah. It brings me to think about the wider idea of even like the rational movement of thinking that we are powerful, which is the concept of capitalism, that we are so powerful. You work hard. You get somewhere.

JEAN CASIMIR: Yes.

STUDENT: But most people who work really, really hard are still--

JEAN CASIMIR: "Malere"? [LAUGHS]

STUDENT: Yeah, so but it kind of for me brings a question that I like to maybe hear your thoughts on is the idea of poverty. What is poverty? If poverty is still a definition based on acquiring property, it's even like the relationship to-- also relation to land. If-- You're rich if you own land, rather than if you have relationship to land, and also the idea that we come in and out of circumstances often by influences that are outside of our own doing.

Like, I was going on a picnic with my girlfriend. And suddenly I am an enslaved person in Cuba. This was not my own doing, which is specifically antithesis of the whole capitalist approach of--

JEAN CASIMIR: Exactly.

STUDENT: --everything is your own doing, which doesn't humble itself to other-- I'm just bringing it up to say, how do we provide a different paradigm or perspective to look at what is poverty and what is the human condition, really, in terms of the arrogance of capitalism, which continues to destroy our countries today. Like it is-- like Haiti today is destroyed by neoliberal--

JEAN CASIMIR: Being the poorest country in the world, I think this is where I find the importance of the decolonial studies, because you should see capitalism from your angle. With all due respect for the capitalists, they are a set of liars.

STUDENT: Why'd you say that?

JEAN CASIMIR: I'm going to tell you why. They declared private property is sacred. They came here in America. They took everything that they can see. They took it, literally.

Now in Haiti, they took Saint-Domingue. And the King of Saint-Domingue, of Spain, will give a third of Saint-Domingue to the French. And they declare to me private property is sacred.

Why is it-- who gave them Saint-Domingue? How could they take it for themselves, you see what I mean? Use the Seminole and this thing presented by Peck, no? You come there, you take my land, and you take that man and you tell him he's yours? How do you manage?

I don't know if you see that the documentary of Raoul Peck on the--

MICHEL DEGRAFF: It's called *Exterminate all the Brutes.*

JEAN CASIMIR: *Exterminate all the Brutes.* The brutes come. They take the country. They take over the country. They take all the wealth. When they finish with the wealth in the Caribbean, they go in Mexico, they go in Peru. They take everything they had, no? And they start their capitalism, I mean, they start developing.

And they're telling me private property is sacred, that we have to respect that. How come? If you start lying, you seize what is not yours. No, but you declare that God gave me half of-- whose God, yours or mine? What do we have to see with that?

So the question of poverty, you impoverish me, because you define wealth the way you want. You take it. And you say I have to respect it. And you have a set of institutions-- school, et cetera, et cetera-- to prove to me that I deserve to be poor, for instance, I am Black, I'm the son of Ham, and all sort of really, lies.

Not only that, this question of Ham-- there is a verse. I don't have it in mind, but that is good. Well, in the Exodus, it's said if you take a person, you sell the person, you deserve a death.

But on the other hand, they're going to say the son of Ham's will-- So they are a set of liars. And I do not have to believe that. And I do not have to respect that.

And studies made will show that-- I mean, I'm talking about Madiou, another historian who was a member of the oligarchy for the whole 19th century. He said the system is corrupt, because corruption made the colonial system. So you cannot expect today the authorities of Haiti not to be corrupt.

Same thing in the US, the system is based on corruption. How could you take the land of the Indians? You go and kill Indians, and now you make them poor. You create them. You create their poverty. Not only you create the poverty, you start ruling them with English when they were being ruled. They are-- et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

So I think poverty and wealth-- and this is why also we must be aware of what we call wealth. Wealth is what allows us to survive, to be, to exist. This is where imagination comes, invention comes, all non-material knowledge will come.

I'm not belittling technology, because you have done something with the ways you have taken. And I want to-- I respect that, no? But this is your interest.

Now my job is with my imagination to try to use your technology to foster, to empower my people. You see what I mean? I mean, this is how more or less I see.

Haiti is the poorest country in the world, according to the establishment's views. But as I told you, Lloyd Best, this famous economist from Trinidad, said Haiti is the richest country in America according to Lloyd Best. [LAUGHS] And he wrote a long article on that-- I could look for it-- but to show you that you have a voice

It's not that we like poverty, we like-- no, no, that's not the point. The point is that you respect yourself. You like yourself. You protect yourself.

And these things are quite clear also on that. You know what I mean? This is the-- and you must be aware of that. This is a problem. Don't let people divert your attention towards those material things.

It is important. I have to drink water and clean water. I cannot do without it, no? But it is not that that made me. As we say in Haiti, you are not going to have that to the graveyard with you. You're going to go to the graveyard naked.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Let's go around to it with [INAUDIBLE]. Write down your question and then--

STUDENT: And it's not-- it was just going a [? long way. ?]

STUDENT: I have four questions into one.

JEAN CASIMIR: Lift your mask.

STUDENT: Oh, I have like four questions into one. But they all center around the counter-plantation system.

JEAN CASIMIR: Around the counter-plantation system?

STUDENT: Yeah, so do you think that the fact that France was "a master away from home" helped cultivate the counter-plantation system? And coming from a Dominican person, like someone who was governed by Spain, do you think that is also why Haiti was able to be successful in this system?

Meanwhile, the DR, we still have haciendas and "modern plantations." And thinking about success, how successful was the counter-plantation system? And are we measuring success on the basis of do our people remember or are our people knowledgeable, or we're measuring on a-- have we managed to dismantle the capitalist society that the Pearl of the Antilles was built upon?

JEAN CASIMIR: I'm going to answer the first half and then you reformulate the second half. The hacienda could be the proper translation for the word plantation. So the French never had the counter-plantation system.

The French has an "hacienda." It organized the hacienda properly as a capitalist system, a rational system where every single input oriented toward an output called a merchandise or commodity to produce more commodities. That is the plantation, the hacienda.

Now to save some money, the owner of the hacienda or the plantation have some what we call provision grounds, some "konoko." Where they won't pay you, they have you working on the konoko.

OK, now you're on the konoko, on the provision grounds. You're going to organize the lakou, the yard. You're going to organize a system of solidarity and reciprocity where you protect your people.

So you're making use of one move of the dominant system for your own ends. We call that you serve, you utilize the dominant system to serve your own ends. So therefore, the counter-plantation system is born within the plantation system, within the hacienda.

And when 1791-- let's say, 117, [INAUDIBLE]-- 17-- [INAUDIBLE] '89. When the French Revolution started and the planters, the "hacenderos," start fighting each other, you start developing your konokos. And this is when the nation is going, really, to take a structure but on a national level.

And since I'm there, what is important is that the counter-plantation system, the villages-- it's a village system. The villages are isolated. They are microclimates. They produce certain goods. If you are in the mountain, you can have spices, you can have fruits, et cetera. If you're in the flatland, you have mango, you have banana, et cetera. In the mountain, you have coffee.

So you have to exchange, no? And you are going to create, this is our case, the internal market, because there was no internal market in term of colonial time. What was important was only the export of the commodity.

So you create the counter-plantation you create the internal market. And who manage internal market? The female higglers. The woman was going to tide of the nation, the women the tide of the nation, not the men. The men can work, whatever it is. But those who are responsible to moving goods and moving money are female up to now.

Your parents when they send money home, they didn't send it to any man. They send it to a woman, because she manage money. She manage resources. So she will be the one who will-- tied up-- what I call the "twa wòch dife"-- the three pillars of the nation-- community, internal market, and women.

But what tied them up? Creole language. You see what I mean? You don't see a higgler speaking standard English. [LAUGHS] No. No. Higglers speak rough Jamaican English. And this is what is sustaining the nation. On top of that, an oligarchy is going to-- OK, now give me the second part of your question. [LAUGHS]

STUDENT: So my second question is just like-- I mean, you kind of answered it already. But how successful is the counter-plantation system? And are we measuring success on the basis of do our people remember our history, are they knowledgeable? Or are we measuring on how we manage to dismantle the capitalistic society that was established in the Pearl of the Antilles or Haiti?

JEAN CASIMIR: Wonderful. The counter-plantation system explains the whole 19th century Haiti, no? How we can measure his success? We started independence with maximum 350,000 people. We ended up the 19th century with 2 million people. We multiplied.

But this is not codified by the government. Government want to recreate the plantation, want to recreate haciendas. They will not talk about that. But the fact of the matter is we did that.

Not only did we-- did we do that, we-- I mean, the Haitians, real-- I call them Guinean Haitians, no. The Haitian, real Haitians start absorbing the oligarchy, because the oligarchy has no use for French, because they had no relation, nor religion. So they started speaking Kreyòl.

And they had no-- it isn't until 1860 that the Catholic Church acknowledged the existence of Haiti and started sending priests and 12 or 15, whatever it is. So the people have to use in the spirituality of Obeah or Vodou. So they start being absorbed by.

Now what makes that possible? It's not that we are so special, no. At that time, the big empires of the West were entering in the imperial colonial time. They are conquering Africa, conquering the [INAUDIBLE], et cetera. So they could do-- the Caribbean economy becomes totally secondary. And you had beet sugar, et cetera, et cetera, so they forget about us, thanks God! So we could develop.

So for instance, if you take the case of, let's say, to come back to Barbados-- boy, a good thing there is no [Bajan?] here. You will challenge me, stop thinking about Barbados. But in Barbados for instance, the planters had a hold on the land. And the production of sugarcane after emancipation was higher than before.

To tell you the level of exploitation of the Bajans, to such an extent they were so attacked by hunger that they start migrate to Guyana and then to build the Panama Canal, same thing with Martinique where the planters could have a hold on the land. So they had to migrate outside, no?

Not only that, the migration to the Panama Canal, to the oil field of Venezuela, et cetera, was such that some countries in the Caribbean had no more men. You have only male, old male, kids. And a set of-- Eric WIlliams even points that out, homosexuality started developing to such an extent for instance, in the St Lucia, the word "zanmi," "friend," means "lesbian."

I was making studies in Creole, no, in Creole Trinidadian. And I said, oh, and so and so is my zanmi, my friend. And the St. Lucian said, you can't say that. You can't say-- he can't be your friend.

And I say, why? Friend means lesbian, because the word become normal. And it's not that lesbian [INAUDIBLE] you to deface or to diminish. No, no, no, no, that's normal. The two ladies live together. They are zanmi. That was normal, because there was no male figure, adult male.

In several islands-- Eric Williams even mentioned that in some Caribbean islands that regret-- I mean, their populations started diminishing. I mean, in the case of Jamaica, this is the moment of the migration toward Costa Rica, toward the movement of Marcus Garvey, because there is no way you can attack the land of the British owners.

In the case, of Haiti we didn't go frontally toward the land property. We start occupying it. And the state didn't have strength enough to kick us out of the land.

There are several elements there I could-- well, in the DR, I think something like that happened, because plantation really started with Trujillo. The Americans came. And they needed to heal-- to help them. And you had land.

Not only that, the Dominican Republic I think developed a set of cattle raising to complete, to serve the part of colonial French plantation system. They will sell cattle, no? So there is a whole tradition of cattle raising. And when Haitians start their migration, they start since they were basically agriculturalists, you see, peasants, they start planting.

And this annoyed Trujillo, because anything he made to occupy this land-- if he gave land, the Dominicans go toward cattle raising. And the one who was taking profit of the land given was Haitian origin people. That was their tradition, et cetera, that created certain conflicts with the state, because the capital of the [INAUDIBLE] Eastern part of the country, not the central part of the country.

And incidentally, I don't know if you know that most of our heroes of this period were from-- if not from the Dominican, from the border-- Hinche, these-- Lascahobas-- This part in-between the two countries, and this is where we had most strongest opponent to US occupation.

Yes, indeed, Charlemagne Péralte, the name is "Peralta," in fact, not "Péralte." [LAUGHS] You know what I mean? We say "Péralte." But he's "Peralta," et cetera, et cetera. Did I answer your second question?

STUDENT: Yeah, thank you.

STUDENT: I had two questions. One of them is based on the counter-plantation system.

JEAN CASIMIR: No, no, remove your mask.

STUDENT: I had two questions. One of them is based on the counter-plantation system. But my question was, would you say that the counter-plantation system was an idea given to the enslaved by the colonizers given that-- because I know in history books, they tell you that the colonizers made the enslaved find their own food to sustain themselves.

So I was wondering is that, do you think that's an idea that they were given in a sense? Or was that just a byproduct?

JEAN CASIMIR: That's one?

STUDENT: That's one question. And the second question is, while I was reading the chapter I remember the podcast I was listening to. And one of the guests was saying that they believe that Haiti should have waited before, that Haiti should not have done the revolution when they did it.

JEAN CASIMIR: They were too early. [LAUGHTER]

STUDENT: Right, so my question is, what do you think about that? Because in my opinion, I could see if they had waited, it would change the trajectory of the slave revolutions that came after. But I just wanted to know what you thought about that.

JEAN CASIMIR: OK, too early.

[LAUGHTER]

Listen, first of all, the counter-plantation system, I call it counter-plantation system because it's not the classical peasantry, simply for that, because the classical peasantry is self-sufficient.

If you take, for instance, Mesoamerica or even Central Europe, the peasants produce even their instrument of production, of the-- yes, instrument of production, like Cuba, no? Not only that, they have even the textile. There is no more sophisticated textile than the Guatemalan textile. They weave their thing into something great.

But if you are an enslaved, there is a certain number of things you cannot produce yourself, like button, an instrument, machete, because you don't have any-- while the Africans were very skillful in dealing with iron, but in the Caribbean, where are you going to find iron?

So you have a "peasantry," in quote, that must produce an excess to exchange for the other good. So it's not exactly a peasant. It's why I call it the counter-plantation system.

Now, I don't think the system comes from the-- that has nothing to do with the planters, because the planter cannot imagine a type of relation, family relation like we have. First of all, to understand really our family, we must take into account the fact that the slave has no gender. They have sex but no gender, like cattle have no gender.

So the first creation of the counter-plantation system will be the invention of women. We create our women. We create our agenda. We create our men. We have to imagine a form of structure where that female and that male can function. It did not function under slavery. It function in the counter-plantation system.

Now, we create also the form of a pairing--"mariage," no?-- the formal-- because do we have the mono-- bi-- I don't know. Mono parent--

STUDENT: Monogamous?

JEAN CASIMIR: Monogamy? Do we have polygamy? Do we have-- I mean, that's-- up to now, we cannot solve that question. Let me tell you an anecdote.

STUDENT: Nobody can.

JEAN CASIMIR: Particularly in our countries. For instance, I was telling my wife, my companion that the young lady walking by me is telling that so-and-so of his friend is not there, because the husband went to visit his married woman. And also, her friend is available. She can visit her friend, because the husband of her friend go to see her married woman.

So I tell my wife, "If I say you my married woman, what would you say?" She say, [INAUDIBLE]. [LAUGHS] because the fact of assuming that the companion has a married woman means that they are polygamous. And she is not-- she doesn't feel any bad about that. She's living in polygamy. And the first lady who married the man is a married woman. And she is also the woman.

And for the married woman, don't you believe that this means-- for the ladies, that means-- no, no, that means the fellow is not there all the time to bother them, period. They can do their thing. They organize their life. Simply in the house, some sexual partner when they need or where they arrange themselves. It's a different set, conception of family.

Not only that, when you have a quarrel, you have conflicts, the lady, who is the weakest person in the couple, she is not going toward the husband to help her. She going to the eldest brother, she look in her family who will protect her, not in the family of the husband. She may, but that's not necessary.

What is it say is that the husband-- I mean, sorry, the husband-- the head of the fam-- of her family. The eldest brother or whoever is the head must come out. If the husband come, that will help. But that's not the point. She goes to--

So we have another concept, organization, which is not codified, because we are so brainwashed by the Catholic Church. We're looking for a-- couples all over. And we're saying, the men are so promiscuous. They don't take care of their kids. It's not the father. Well, I won't give more anecdote. I was going to give you another one, but-- [LAUGHS]

The other one is the following. I was teaching in Congo with my wife. We were both teachers. And one of the essays that my wife received said, my eldest father was sleeping under the tree. My wife say, what's that?

So we had the Congolese living with us. He said, listen, what is an eldest father? He has a younger one? And the Congolese start laughing, like hell, he takes five minutes before he answered. He says, yes, because the word for "father" is the same for "uncle." [LAUGHS] That means the eldest brother of his mother as a "father."

And in Haiti, everybody calls me "father." When I go Southern Mexico, they call me "abuelo," grandfather. Everybody calls me "abuelo"-- and "mi abuelo" let me do that, in Haiti, father-- to such an extent the police stop me and say, "Father, give me your license." I say, "Just a minute, my son." "How come you call me son?" I say, "But you just called me father."

[LAUGHTER]

You see, I mean, these are definitions that are contextual. And we use it. But this is not codified. And the state do not want to hear from that, because the state have to be at par with the international community. And there is no way you make them respect that.

And I give this story to Professor DeGraff of that friend of mine who is a member of the great commission of human rights. Now, when we say they should make laws for the people who shack up, he told me shacking up cannot be object of law because it is a crime. [LAUGHS]

I mean, you can imagine a lawyer saying that.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: A human-rights lawyer?

JEAN CASIMIR: Human rights. Somebody of my age, a little bit younger than me-- I mean, but this is what he received at school.

STUDENT: But are we also talking about the difference between citizenship, being a citizen, which is what the state wants us to be, "citizens," and then being a people of the lakou or community--

JEAN CASIMIR: Yes, exactly.

STUDENT: Of like calling you "father," not calling you "citizen."

JEAN CASIMIR: "Citizen," in our case, in our tradition, is the land owner who has a certain number of enslaved. Those are "active citizens." And the others are "passive citizens."

[LAUGHTER]

STUDENT: That's what we're all being pushed to become, less of community people and more of citizens than--

JEAN CASIMIR: No, but the people do not want to be "citizens" either. They do not want the state. The state never did anything for them since they exist, they start existing. I mean, they don't want to participate.

STUDENT: I hope so, but I mean, more people want to be citizens is a problem in the world. I think the concept--

JEAN CASIMIR: No, I'm talking about local history. For in the world, I don't know.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: It is a question that Iana asked about. Was it too early?

JEAN CASIMIR: Oh yeah, that's a really important question. OK, first of all, at least in sociology, you don't decide what's going to happen. Society moves. And we had an opportunity we went through. We were not asked to do.

For instance, De Vastey speak of the "Haitians in spite of"-- the "forced Haitian." Not talking about the set of the freed men, emancipated persons who wanted to move and to be French and who actually maintained France or French up to now as the key of Haiti.

But Napoleon had decided to kill them and to deport them. So they had to fight with the Maroons for independence. So he called them "Les Haïtiens"-- Haitians in spite of themselves, forced Haitians.

And those Haitians were very important in the fight for independence together with the Maroons. If not, we will have a modern society and Bush Negroes like in Suriname. And then they would conquer us again. So they were important. Nonetheless, they didn't choose to fight France. France forced them to fight them. That's one aspect.

Second aspect, which is very, very, very important, when most people are saying Haiti is independent, was independent too soon-- and not anybody said that. I'm talking about Aimé Césaire I'm talking about Derek Walcott.

I mean, people who say, how could Haiti so rich is so poor now? That's not possible. They have been independent too much. No, well, OK, I'm not saying what is the level of living in the other countries of the Caribbean, because I can say the same thing for the US. I don't think the US is that good either. But OK, I grant-- whatever they want, I grant them that.

But what they do not take into account is the fact that the Haitians, by being independent in 1804, protected the Haitian from death. Let me tell you the circumstances. By 1803 or 1802 or 1801-- but anyway, before Haiti become independent, Napoleon gave the order to kill all the Blacks who were rebel and to re-people the islands. But he didn't give the order. He started implementing this order in Guadeloupe by General Richepanse. He started killing Blacks, killing them.

And the Guadeloupeans who had started the revolution, when they realized they are dying, they decided, OK, let's try to live another day, so we will fight tomorrow. And they stop fighting. And they surrender. And they were re-enslaved because they were fighting against re-enslavement.

When they stopped fighting, they found that 10% of them were already killed. So they were about to kill them. In the case of Haiti, they start the same thing at such a point that the Poles who he had sent to fight us-- they were Pol-- they were peasants-- realizing that they say, no, we are not participating in killing civilians and kids. We didn't come here for that. And they move and fight with the Haitians. And this is also another reason why Dessalines declared that the Poles were Black, because this is what we call Black. It's not being Black tinted.

OK, so Haiti became independent. And Napoleon could not kill those Haitians to have-- too many people, they say. In the countries that remain colonies that were not independent so soon, as I just told you, you had to let a set of out migration, because you had hungers in Martinique, hungers in Barbados, hungers in-- great hungers, because the white people-- Barbados is a typical case-- intensified the exploitation of their former enslaved and produce much more without introducing new technology.

You see, Barbados was producing more than Cuba when Cuba had production with new technology. So they increased the exploitation of the Bajans. And more Bajans die in Barbados. And more Bajans had to leave the country in conditions that were very similar to the slave trade.

So it is-- you didn't choose to be independent. The opportunity comes. There is a crack in the system. And you move. And you establish yourself.

But how did you done that? What would happen? Because now that gives us one way out. Haitians become independent. We multiply the population, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

But our development is based on inner management of our inner system. While we do not have one thing the Bajans have or the Jamaicans also, they know how to negotiate with the other person. We don't know that up to now.

It is now that we are learning what happened with the West. When the Americans occupied Haiti, the president of Haiti, Dartiguenave, had no idea of what the Americans were up to. He thought they came to help us. He could not imagine they came to exploit us.

You can imagine the fellow president of the Republic has no idea of the occupant. Not only that, the other day when the US, no, the UN head of mission visited the general headquarters of the army, in the general headquarters of the army, all the big chiefs of the US occupation were there as founder of the Haitian army.

He said, where you have found an independent country where the occupant is put as the creator of the army, of the national army? You can imagine Jamaica's headquarters of the army with all the British there who created the army. For God's sake, at least take them off. But in Haiti up to now, and they had that-- no, not up to now, because Aristide ended this army, but to tell you the situation.

So is Haiti independent too early or not? OK, I don't know. Ask-- as Vastey would say, as those who died on the boat going-- and the life of the Caribbean people in Panama during the construction of the, like-- there's a wonderful documentary made here in the US on the Caribbean people building the Panama Canal.

Oh boy, you are to cry. You are to cry. And up to now they are protesting the way they beat them, the way they treat them, how they died, I mean, in Culebra, building the Panama Canal, because you should not forget that the 19th century is the time of Jim Crow laws here. And those who are building the canal, they are the Jim Crow fellows.

I mean, they are-- just have when the Black North American, when African-Americans start voting, to give you an idea of what happened 50 years earlier in countries that were not even America-- this is how-- you know, you can imagine what was going on there.

Now, so was Haiti independent too early? I mean, are we comparing what is left of Barbados, because we let a set of Barbadian die, because this is what happened.

Barbados is the country, at least compared to Haiti, where even-- everybody has secondary school diploma, everybody, everybody. In Haiti, oh, I think we can count them with your hand. And those who have it, we don't know how bad is that instruction-- in education-- schooling is.

So obviously, this allows certain regions to go forward. But how many of them died? How many of them are not there? Obviously, I'm sure that the state will not speak too much about the suffering.

Martinique knew hunger, while Haiti was at the time in what Manigat called-- one of our historians called ""le bonheur vivrier," the village happiness. I mean, we had full-fledged village happiness. And the knowledge-- we allowed the state building one hospital. Just the knowledge of the people, which was not too much, you could go--

But anyway, that was enough to multiply the population by five. And not only that, there is no country in the whole America where you have a normal increase of the population naturally because of the population. All of them increased the population through migration coming from Europe.

And at this 19th century when they were migrating toward the Latin America or South Africa, et cetera, et cetera, I want to know why they were leaving their country, not because they have too much. Why the Italians left Italy? Why the Spaniard left Spain, the Vatican City?

Why the Dutch and the British left in the 19th century when the Industrial Revolution is taking place, when you have capitalism developing itself and conquering the whole world? What was the level of living, the number of Swedish people who went from Sweden to the US? And you can see their photo and they're showing they are migrants.

Killing Indians, OK, but listen, if you are so well-fed in Swede, you are not coming here to kill-- in Sweden-- to kill Indians. Stay home. So all the things, they are not spoken, this is not spoken. And in that time, the Haitian will multiply. This is another idea of wealth, to answer. You see the wealth? What is wealth?

STUDENT: My question? So I'll say my general question and then give a little bit of background for how I got there. But it seems very general. But my question is like, what is your why. And the way I got to that was I think--

JEAN CASIMIR: Do you say, what is your why?

STUDENT: Your why, like why you're doing this, why you have this power, and things like this. The way I got to this question is I think every week we do readings. We come, someone presents. And while it is based on the readings, it's so based on themselves as well.

And like I said, I've learned so much about all the people in this class and what is their why, and like why they're here, what they take from like every reading and stuff like that. So I wanted to know like specifically and personally what is your why.

JEAN CASIMIR: My why?

STUDENT: Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

JEAN CASIMIR: You mean.

STUDENT: I love your question.

JEAN CASIMIR: You mean, you are mean. Let me tell you.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: That's a good question. I love it.

JEAN CASIMIR: Yeah, because the colonial study implies that you position yourself.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: That's right, absolutely, absolutely.

JEAN CASIMIR: It's a long story. You know, I'm very old.

[LAUGHTER]

My why is long.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: How old are you?

JEAN CASIMIR: 84.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: 84, that's what I thought.

[LAUGHTER]

1938? In one of the interviews, you say that it's important to look when you were born, 1938.

JEAN CASIMIR: First, so I belong to a generation that come exactly after the war. I'm born in '38. The war, the Second World War is starting. And I start seeing, discovering reality after the war in 1946, which is the time exactly when we have what we call the 1946 revolution.

This 1946 revolution is the consequence of the 1915 US occupation. When the US occupied Haiti, they occupied Haiti with two things-- the big stick in one hand, and on the other hand, the Jim Crow policy. So you can imagine they reintroduced in Haiti the whole color problem.

This is when Price-Mars come with the "Ainsi parla l'oncle" on Vodou, et cetera, and when you have the Négritude issue being brewed in Europe and in Haiti. And you have Duvalier and what we call Négrisme, going on to answer the opposition in the country where the Americans were putting in light-skinned people all over, et cetera.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: So Jean Price-Mars, to give some background, was a scholar who gave the idea that, look, we have to go back to Africa to understand who we are as Haitians. So Africa is beautiful. Black is beautiful. And that was in opposition to the Americans that came in and that were very racist. So that's what he's referring to as Négritude.

JEAN CASIMIR: Yeah, and interestingly enough, Jean Price-Mars is the big, son of big landowners in the countryside, like Péralte, I mean, because it is good not to put everybody in one bag. He's a "latifundista," a big landowner. But he is proud of his position, of what he is. And he's a doctor. He's a diplomat.

So anyway... So in 1946, end of the war, who was-- well, the war ended a little bit earlier. Who is president is light-skinned Élie Lescot. And therefore, the students-- oh boy, OK. The students made a so-called "revolution."

And we said, Haiti is a Black country. The president has to be Black. It cannot be whatever is the idea. But they use the term "Black," which is a colonial concept.

And you had as president a Black fellow, Dumarsais Estimé, who is a big landowner also. You see what I mean? So you are going to have a possibility of development, because that's the epoch when the US come with the idea of development. Eisenhower, etc. Truman, when development-- so they are going to take a whole set of policies toward development.

We have to develop the country to make the country capitalist, modernize the country, et cetera, et cetera. So that's the period when I am going to school. I mean, during that period.

OK, so to-- jumping over plenty many things, here I come. I found a scholarship. And I'm studying in Mexico. So I want to know why is it that we are so poor. After such a wonderful economy, a wonderful revolution, after such a wonderful independence, how come we are poor?

And I start studying that. And I wrote my license, my--

STUDENT: Thesis?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: [INAUDIBLE]?

STUDENT: [INAUDIBLE]

JEAN CASIMIR: A [INAUDIBLE] my first level, my-- before master.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Bachelor's thesis.

JEAN CASIMIR: My bachelor's thesis on the Republic of Haiti, where I went through the history trying to explain why we are the way we are, "poor," quote unquote, because I am searching for development.

At the same time, at the end of this period, I entered the UN. And I ended up also in the Economic Commission for Latin America, always after prohibition is run, after development. Let's develop the country.

So I'm working on development to find out that this is the law. It's like the carrot you put in front of the donkey. I mean, you can run. You can run, you never get there. [LAUGHS] et cetera, et cetera.

In the process, I discover "culture." I realized that Haitians from the very beginning have two cultures. And I wrote my PhD thesis with the title "The Oppressed Culture." I was studying in Mexico. I was very much influenced by their conception of the "Creole." So I call it "the dominant culture."

Well, at that time, Mexico was in the process of "Castellanización," to teach Spanish to the First Nations, not because-- as far as the ideology was, that would help them to develop. Now they will modernize, speaking Spanish, because their language is not the language. It's kind of dialogue they are speaking, things that are older than French and Spanish. But anyway, so they want to erase that to teach them to speak.

So the Creole Mexicans, they were the dominant class. So the dominant culture in Haiti I call it the "Creole culture" as opposed to an "oppressed culture," which is the culture of the peasants. And I entered in dichotomy between "Creole" and "Bosal." The Haitian creolized and the Bosal just fresh from Africa.

And that gives a false idea of the process. But that's not the point. That gives the basis for my study on oppressed culture. And I show how Africa was erased from the history of Haiti because of the dominance of the Creoles. OK, so--

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Is it "Creole" in the sense of those who were born in the Caribbean and who basically were assimilated?

JEAN CASIMIR: Out of mixed-- with the assimilated, too, no? And also-- well, I proposed acculturation. So the Creoles were those who were acculturated, who had learned the Western culture who were ruling the country, who were the elite, et cetera, et cetera. You see what I mean.

While the other one was speaking Creole [Kreyòl] the language, and they were the oppressed culture, they have all sort of other institutions, all sort of other systems who were "traditional, backward." I would probably not use "backward," but they were traditional. They are not modern. And you had to pull them out of their traditionalism to modernize them, more or less.

Well, that was a, let's see, one stage. And at the same time, I'm discovering that the UN has five or six decades of investing in development, always coming back to square one. [LAUGHS] There was no development. But they were investing in decades of development. And I was working in that, following privilege.

At the same time, I had used-- and since the theory of dependency-- I mean, the problem of development in Latin America and the Caribbean is that we are dependent of the large countries, the rich countries. And we should try to have a set of-- a sector of our economy that will pull the other sector. And this sector will control it through the national bourgeoisie. You see what I mean?

This was very common in the '60s to explain the situation. Then you try to have an independent sector who will be the locomotive to pull the train, et cetera, et cetera. But obviously nobody never had it. Or those who had it were co-opted. But this is what we were using.

But I still was quite dissatisfied, because that will not take Haiti out of poverty. And not only that, that implies Duvalier as a dictator, the son of Duvalier, et cetera, et cetera, an effort by the US to industrialize the country, et cetera, et cetera, all coming always back to this poverty. So this is when I start-- first of all, I move out of the idea of "development," realizing that "development" is not bringing us anywhere. And therefore, what?

In the process of studying the oppressed culture, I found the counter-plantation system. I found the village society. And I was, by that time, working in Trinidad with my Caribbean friends. I started realizing that plantation-- because we are talking development-- is the locomotive, no, the key part of the train.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: The engine?

JEAN CASIMIR: The engine of development, et cetera, et cetera. And I accept with them that the bush society is a ...metayage... land tenure? Not land tenure... metayage? You say that in Saint Lucia. Oh, boy--

MICHEL DEGRAFF: I was about to say that, actually. Let me look it up.

JEAN CASIMIR: When you rent the land to somebody, [NON-ENGLISH].

STUDENT: Oh, I have an Arabic word for it.

[LAUGHTER]

JEAN CASIMIR: Anyway, so I start thinking of this form of production, sharecropping, where traditional, because you should go into a plantation, into a trade union, et cetera, et cetera. I must tell you also that the same time with Cuba is making is revolution. Cuba is nationalizing. Cuba is moving forward. And we were all obviously pro-Cuban, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So we are seeing that.

But this is not working in Haiti. I mean, this is not work-- not only this is not working, the Cubans in their efforts are helping Angola. They are helping Bolivia. Haiti is just around the corner, [LAUGHS] et cetera, et cetera.

So people start to have doubts, no? And I start seeing that the economic development is not giving us a result. And we have to think in terms of culture. And I start moving with the counter-plantation system, looking at it at its importance. And I start discovering the need for working with Kreyòl, for participation of the people in the development system.

OK, so reaching that point, I wrote a series of article and publish a book called "Haiti and Its Elites..."-- no? "...Dialogue of Death." Of "deaf"? People who can't hear.

STUDENT: Deaf.

JEAN CASIMIR: Deaf? OK, no? And this is the-- let's see, the book announcing Haiti and the decolonial history, because it is at that time that I met my friends of the colonial thinking who thought that my book on oppressed culture, in fact, announces the whole decolonial thinking, because I was trying to see-- and this is the question I was asking myself, since my book on oppressed culture is my PhD thesis.

So my PhD thesis is saying, is asking, what is it that we have done for ourselves? I mean, plantation, planting, all sorts of things-- but we have nothing to do in plantation. That was imposed on us, no?

I didn't raise the question like that. But I could have done it in that book, saying that a plantation is not a Caribbean institution. It is the time when Caribbean is called "plantation America." I said, no, no, we have something else. Caribbean cannot be English Caribbean, Dutch Caribbean, French Caribbean. Caribbean is Caribbean, period. I mean, there is something we have done, which is not English, French, British, or Dutch, what have you, or Spanish.

So I start looking for what we have learned. This is what I call "a dialogue of deaf," because the elite is French, the elite speak French, the laws are French, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

And in one discussion in Aquin, I was presenting the book. And somebody said, but what you're saying there is not an elite. It is an oligarchy. I say, oh God, I should have thought of that, because elite is very simple. If we are 10 shoemakers, the best are the elite of the shoemakers. But if the best does not behave as giving best shoes, they will go down among the others. And other people will come as elite.

This is not the case in our societies. These elite of French speaking people never go down, because they are an oligarchy. So I realized that we do not have an elite. We have an elite, the Vodou priests, the manbo. And those are elites.

But those who govern the country-- our French speakers-- are not necessarily elite. In fact, they are not elite. They are those who are holding us down. And therefore, I start now discovering the decolonial thought. Let me study what we have done, how we have done that. How did the Haitian came to be Haitian? And what makes a Haitian different from a Jamaican, from a Vincentian, or from a Trinidadian? Because their local history's different.

You see, when you take-- for instance, I had the good fortune through the Economic Commission to work 10 years in Trinidad. And I tell the Trinidadians that you never knew slavery. You were a happy people.

And when you think of it, that's true. The Trinidadians, Trinidad was Spaniard, Spanish, Spaniard, no? When Haiti started its revolution beginning of 1790s, Spain starts receiving the planters running away from Saint-Domingue to such an extent that Trinidadians speak the same Creole that we speak. And we understand each other, because they will come to Trinidad with their slaves. And there are several examples like that.

And then the Spaniards and the French planters, which Trinidadians called French Creoles, the French planter and the slave will establish Creole as the basic language of the land together with Spanish, in certain pockets speak Spanish, French, [? but-- ?] so the Spanish and Creole, above all, Spanish and Creole.

So soon after, the British-- Spain cedes the island to the British. And in the ceded island, the British has to recognize, it acknowledges the internal laws of this land.

So the British were governing. And the Trinidadians were speaking Creole and French. The British was the owner.

So I realized at that point in time, by 1817, we are 1803, 1804 when the French start flowing in the country. By 10 years or 20 years after, the British stopped the slave trade. And every time they catch a slave boat in the Atlantic, they come with the slaves and drop them in-- the so-called slave captives, dropped them in Trinidad.

So the population of Blacks in Trinidad are created without slave trades. So the slave masters had to take care of the slaves, because they cannot produce and buy all the slaves. They must make sure that they reproduce themselves locally.

Not only that, soon after 1838, the British stop slavery. You see what I mean? So the slavery Haitians have known for 100 centuries with a slave trade is not what the Trinidadian has known, no?

And when you go to Trinidad, they are happy, happy going, happy looking people. They have never have problems. They never fight. They do not even know how to fight, because they never had to fight.

From the very beginning, the masters has to make sure that they have a slave for tomorrow at the beginning. Then slavery become abolished. So I tell them, you don't know what slavery is. You can imagine that. Not only that, they start with the indentured and flooding the country with indentured, so a whole other dynamic and a-- whole different sets of--

OK, this experience in Trinidad now then come and give me the possibility of seeing local history developing and how we are in our local history producing a way out of quote unquote "our misery." This is how I went and see the importance of the language, the importance of the community, the importance of the higglers because [INAUDIBLE], and I must say also, the importance of the yard.

I have some strong friends, Jamaican friends, particularly Erna Brodber, who wrote on yards. That is-- and the way the yard is important in Jamaica-- in Kingston she wrote that. Me, I'm seeing the world in the countryside.

Then you go to Dominica. There are several studies in Dominica and Saint Lucia on the family property system. All of those are institutions that are Caribbean. It's not that you don't have family property system in France. But it doesn't characterize the land tenure system, while in other countries it is the basis of land-tenure system.

And the work I have used in Dominica shows that those who put-- who has land in the land tenure system produce more than those who have land in the et cetera, et cetera. So this is how I end up in my why.

That's my why, because I reach a point where I can explain to myself what they call poverty and why we are quite happy in that poverty, if you want to see it that way. We will be unhappy in the city, because in the city, we are not able to reproduce the yard, properly, to have our resources to reproduce it.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: OK, that's a good question.

[LAUGHTER]

JEAN CASIMIR: My why, [LAUGHS].

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Yeah. that's a good one.

JEAN CASIMIR: And I had to answer it. [LAUGHS]

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Yes, you had to. And you gave a beautiful answer. So Jezhara?

STUDENT: So I guess my question is--

JEAN CASIMIR: Remove your mask.

STUDENT: Oh, so Creole languages are very important to the Caribbean community. But we refer to English Creole as broken English. Or you promote French over Haitian Creole. So my question is, what do you think will happen to our communities if we keep rejecting that Creole?

STUDENT: I love this question.

JEAN CASIMIR: If you keep projecting our Creole?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Rejecting, rejecting--

JEAN CASIMIR: Rejecting, oh, it's that's suicidal.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: If the state apparatus--

JEAN CASIMIR: But first of all, let me say that I have an unproven theory. And I'm trying to convince some linguists to work on it because I cannot. But they do "la sourde oreille," they don't pay attention.

[LAUGHTER]

Forget about the English Creole and French Creole, because they are identified. They exist. They are bodies. They have their syntaxes, they have their vocabulary. They have their words.

For instance, I don't go. Mick, I see you. You know what I mean? These exist. They are there to see. My problems start when I speak with the Puerto Ricans and the Dominicans. They speak Spanish.

[LAUGHTER]

They speak an imperial language. Yet I'm pretty sure that this imperial language carries a historical tradition that departs from the Castilian-- native Spanish from the Castilian tradition, you see what I mean?

And they must have concept like we have "whites," which is not white, like "black" which is not black. And this is what I call a linguistic archaeology. I want somebody to tell me what the Puerto Rican or the Dominican or the Cuban are producing that define them and make them different from the imperial--

STUDENT: Castilian--

JEAN CASIMIR: Going from the Castilian. You see what I mean?

OK, now in our case, the problem, basic problem-- and this is a problem with France and the French UNESCO and so on, they have to justify their existence. They come with the idea of "universality," the "universal" civilization, "universal" God knows what. And they want to destroy all diversity. And our elite buy into that "universal" thing.

And they will tell you, for instance, if the Haitians speak Kreyòl, they will be isolated. I say, let's go quiet. Haiti has now 8 to 12 million. When I visited Curaçao, they had 90 million, 90-- yeah, "quatre-vingt dix mille"-- 90,000.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: 90,000.

JEAN CASIMIR: 90,000. One day, I was living in Trinidad. And I wanted-- you know, Trinidad is very strict, quite British. And you cannot buy everything. IBM, everything is controlled. So I'm going to Curaçao, which is a commercial place. I have to buy something from IBM.

But I don't know where IBM is. So I come on the street. I saw a fellow well dressed. He should know. I ask, where is IBM? He say, no, no, I don't know. Ask that lady. And the lady is selling fruits.

So I tell the lady, sorry, excuse me, where is IBM? In what language you want the information? [LAUGHS] The [INAUDIBLE] from Curaçao, she speaks to us a Papiamento. But she speaks Dutch. She speaks English. She speaks French. She speaks all sorts of language. I could choose the language to receive my information.

Because in Curaçao, as you would say, Papiamento is taught by school. They teach Papiamento in the schools. And the people speaking Papiamento can speak-- learn and speak, because of the commercial, any language you want. I mean, they are not isolated by Papiamento. Papiamento helps them to be linked with the others.

So if we manage and control our local languages, no?-- Jamaican, Haitians, Vincentians, et cetera, et cetera, and we can find out what is the specificity of our language together with other, we learn to appreciate our language, to appreciate their language, and to appreciate us, who have invented a way of respecting everybody.

So to my mind, this is the point. And this is not a theory. But I don't know how to call it. They are when they are putting down. Or if Haiti speaks Kreyòl, they will be isolated. Aren't we isolated now? And since when do we speak French?

If France just learn how to speak French-- they just learn. It's 100 year. I mean, French is--- I don't know, English is worse, they told me. And French is the language of the administration and of Paris. And French was imposed on the provinces of France to strengthen the central power. And it remains.

I mean, Eugen Weber present that in his book, "Le parler de terroirs"--. It's really important, because French is not a country that come from all French people, because French was a country of peasants. And the plantation is the first capitalist, rational economic concern.

Now this is why when you have English in Jamaica, you have Creole English, Jamaicans speak Creole English, period, all Jamaicans, while in France, you leave one village, you go to another, and you cannot understand what they are saying, because they have a small microclimate, microvillage without this connection that would give you an internal comprehension. This is a fact.

And when they say Haiti-- and then, well, let's say Haiti speaks French. From colonial times up to now. Please, please. [LAUGHS] Now it's-- they find that insolent and insulting that in some Canadian and French University, they request the Haitian to present a kind of TOEFL examination to prove that this French. And this is the fact.

I teach at university. And there is university student who really cannot express-- cannot present an essay in proper French.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Yep, yep.

STUDENT: It's also interesting on top of that about how they keep that structure in French Canada, despite even French Canadians being treated as lesser in the French eyes, because they call Canadian French disgusting French, like they call it lesser French. So it's funny how even in Canada, where it's like their French is deemed lesser, they still keep [INAUDIBLE].

JEAN CASIMIR: Yeah, because they have the English also, because they have the English they think is better. I mean--

MICHEL DEGRAFF: So this is really, really, really good. So we've had an amazing set of questions. And I wanted to follow up on Jazhara's question.

And here I want to go back to the UNESCO issue, because we heard this very eloquent plea from Ambassadeur Dominique Dupuy asking UNESCO on what grounds are you classifying Creole languages as lesser languages? They are languages. That's it.

But your work-- and one thing which I love about your work is that you show the beauty and power of Haitian Creole. You show the richness of the vocabulary and how the vocabulary can tell us so much about our history.

And the fact that you put out so beautifully words like "ras," "abitan," "moun," "nèg," "blan," "blanch," "milat"-- that all these words, for them to have evolved that semantics-- in fact, that's yet another argument against the idea that Creoles evolved from Pidgin, because you see if Pidgin's supposed to be like a tabula rasa, like an empty void of language from which you create a new language. And your argument is that no, look at all this richness in the language.

So I want to stress that, because often we still find in various circles the notion that Creoles evolved from Pidgins. And yet you've given us through history yet another set of arguments against that view.

And one thing I wanted to ask you as well is-- so in your introduction to your lecture on Monday, you were introduced as a historical sociologist, right? But when I speak to you, I often speak to you as a linguist, you see?

What you tell me about Kreyòl, about our national language, you share all this data that I as a linguist can so deeply appreciate, you see? So I want to ask you, so why are you being called a historical sociologist when in fact, so much of your work is linguistic?

And here actually I'm playing devil's advocate, right? I don't want to say that you should be one or the other. I just I just want to hear you talk about the role that linguistics and language make it even more explicit how it plays into your work as a sociologist and as a historian, because I love it. And I think that in a way you give us a model of how the human sciences can really operate together to discover our humanity, our common humanity. So that's-- and so I want to praise you for that. But I want you to say something more about it.

JEAN CASIMIR: Let me say that this idea come from the group of friends with whom I unite every year. The Maria Lugones Decolonial School, no? It's a summer school we have every year during three weeks of-- three weeks, no-- in Holland organized by the University of Utrecht and Duke University's Center with Walter Mignolo.

And they do not believe in disciplines. This group is formed by philosophers, historians, economists, sociologists, artists, of performers, and all sorts of artists and we are thinking. And oh, I forget Catherine. She's a sociologist and activist.

But anyway, and this group, no, they do not even speak of "university." They speak of "pluriversity." You know what I mean? I mean, this is-- we have to save our plurality.

We have to save our diversity, because this is what I was saying, the "universality" that French and the capitalist system want, because they want one "universal" civilization, God knows what. No, no, no, no, we will probably have that "universal" thing. I won't be there to look at it. But when we all in our diversity we contribute, now we are negotiating maybe a "university." For the time being, it's "pluriversity."

So therefore, you raise the question, how is Haiti so quote unquote "poor?" So I say, what is Haiti? Well, the Haitians-- what is a Haitian? For instance, De Vastey says a Haitian is anybody living in the country having no other place to live. So the Tainos are as Haitian as all of those are Haitians.

OK, but if they came from Africa one by one, how come they become Haitians or whatever other countries you have, no? And you see what are the institutions and the process. And local history become the heart of the reflection, local history.

I mean, by local history, it's not the local history you find in the archives, because in the archives you will find the local history of those who won the war. So you have to see you people, who is speaking, because you-- and to whom are you speaking? You are speaking to your people. You have to explain to them what is it that they have done themselves.

This is why I cannot accept that the Caribbean will be British Caribbean, French Caribbean, Spanish Caribbean. Come on, who are in the Caribbean, therefore? I mean, are we British? Are we French? No, no, we are Caribbean. And we have made certain number of things.

But not because we are Caribbean we are all similar. We have also a variety in that. And this is for instance, the real problem when they say we are Blacks. We are Blacks.

OK, "Black" is an invention of the colonial world, of the modern colonial world. The modern colonial world wants all of us to be the same, so we can do whatever they want. So for instance, the richest Blacks among Blacks will teach the other Blacks.

No, no, we all of us have our values. We all respect ourselves. And we want to listen to you. We want you to listen to us, no? And out of this variety of Blacks, if you are to call them Blacks-- I don't call them Black, but that's OK, et cetera, et cetera.

And I think this is something you have while you conquering your sovereignty. For instance, as far as I'm concerned, Haiti's 1970-- 1791 was able to join together people from different nations of Africa and create Haiti.

But when you reach for instance 2010, 2011 in the US, you see all the oppressed of the US come and say "Black lives matter." And when you look at those who are saying that, you have to make an effort to find all the Blacks. You find all the people that are the most exploited is the Black. But you find all sorts of Latins, all sorts of Amerindians, all sorts of whites who have been exploited. And they are "Black lives matter."

And if this respect for the life of the oppressed become effective, if you can impose that on the dominant system, I think many things are going to change. In fact, what you have is the end of an era, an era that is the era where life does not matter, period.

I mean, there is a wonderful movie that just come out, "Don't Look Up." I don't [INAUDIBLE]-- that's a wonderful-- life does not matter, simply not. They have to make more money.

It's a nice movie. It's sad, really. It's sad, but it's comical. I mean, it's cynic-- I don't know more than sad, it's cynical, no more than-- you see what I mean? This is the point.

We are saying "Black lives matter." We are saying life matters, period, the life of the Earth, the life of-- every life matters. And if you can reach that point, you stop that system defined as the producer of inequality. I mean, this is the point, because "Black" is simply an element of inequality.

You can imagine that fellow made a mistake. And he called all those Indigenous people "all those Indians." But that's his mistake. Why should I carry that mistake today when I know it's a mistake? This is worse. This is the problem.

In Trinidad we call East Indian etc. etc. Well, why should I say East Indian? And we are supposed to be West Indians, instead of mistakes, eh, because West Indian originally-- you know it ends, no, in the Philippines. Everything that was from the West was West Indians. From us, America, way down to Philippines, that was the West Indian. I mean, this mistake I don't have to carry it in the 21st century.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: OK, so it's 2:57. So we should think of closing. I see that Merelin-- so can you make it--

JEAN CASIMIR: You have a question?

STUDENT: Yes. So like this whole idea, it's like, how do we have this conversation-- how do we have this conversation outside of the classroom? And if Black and race is a social construct--

JEAN CASIMIR: I don't get you. Come again.

STUDENT: Oh, like how do we have these types of conversations outside of the classroom, because we are having it. And it's a difficult conversation. And also, like if "Black" and "race" are a social construct, then what are we supposed to identify with, especially like in a country where Americans, we like to categorize things? So it's like, what do we do?

Like for me, I struggle. I struggle a lot to say what I am. Like, I am Dominican. I am Caribbean. But like in the US, they do focus a lot on race. So it's like, what are we supposed to--

JEAN CASIMIR: No, I cannot tell you. What I can tell you is that it's a matter of local history. In Haiti, we end up creating the Haitians. In Jamaica, we end up creating the Jamaicans. In Haiti or in Jamaica or in any country of the Caribbean, Blacks are the majority, no?

Then I will tell you about the Dominican [INAUDIBLE] is something that I am the only one to accept, not the Dominicans, not the Haitians. Make me remember that.

The problem is local history. Blacks in the US are 1 out of 10. In Haiti we are 99 out of 100 or in most Caribbean countries. So Black is what exists.

So you cannot say-- one day I told a friend in Haiti, you say, "Black is beautiful," you know what they're going to tell you? "Is there anything else?"

[LAUGHTER]

Because we are all Black. How do I need not to be beautiful?

[APPLAUSE] [LAUGHTER]

MICHEL DEGRAFF: It's to-- end of that term you have to--

JEAN CASIMIR: You have to finish?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: --has to close, right, Tom? Yes. So--

JEAN CASIMIR: No, I haven't finished me.

[LAUGHTER]

But

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

MICHEL DEGRAFF: OK, so, so good.

JEAN CASIMIR: Let me try to do me. So I think this is where the local history. I can understand the US African-American ending up identifying himself as "Black," because this is what unites them, that held their local history. That is not our local history.

And I can tell you, I suffer for that. But because I went one day and say something about Blacks. I say, well, in Haiti, Blacks, that's not an issue. Oh boy, imagine. OK, that's one thing. So the problem is to see how "Black" appears in a given context.

Now, for my Dominican Republic problems-- the Dominican Republic say "Black-- that's in Haiti. I'm not Black. I'm a dark Indian, not a Black." Obviously this is scandalous for those who are not Dominican Republic, except Jean Casimir, because I say, listen, go to Dominica, the island of Dominica, an island which has received a large part of land as a reserve where the Amerindians or the Dominicans lives and they reproduce themselves.

In their society since colonial time, men who make a kid with-- I mean, they are Indians. They are-- ah, not Tainos, Carib. Men who have an offspring with a Black woman, the kid is Amerindian he's carrying. Women of the Caribs who make a kid with a Black outside, the kid is Black. So you can imagine you cannot distinguish between Black and-- because if you living in the Carib among the Caribs, you're a Carib, and et cetera, et cetera.

If you are in Dominican Republic, you are Ladino, or you are a slave bought by Christopher Columbus, and you get in marronage, you go and you are received in an Indian-- an Indian, ha, Taino community, you have a kid, the kid is going to be Black. He's to be Taino, period. He's not Black, no matter how the color is, and so on and so forth.

Now if you are receiving Blacks in Haiti and they will come in the DR, they are Blacks, because they are not born in an Indian society. You see what I mean? So I find normal that the Indians say the Haitians are Black. They are not Black. They are Indians, dark Indian, but they are Indians, because this is the population.

Now Christopher-- not Christopher Columbus. Ha, yeah, that's a good slip. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo-- now we'll use [LAUGHS] that as the slip-- will use that to make of the Black something different and to discriminate against the Haitians and also to discriminate against the Black--

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Dominicans.

JEAN CASIMIR: --Dominicans, because et cetera, et cetera. But I am not supposed to carry the sin of Chris-- Mr. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, the same way I don't want to carry the sin of Columbus, no? So I have to acknowledge the normal Dominican is right. "Black" is Haitian. He is not that... well-- But nobody accept that. [LAUGHS]

MICHEL DEGRAFF: But didn't you say-- was that you also may have mentioned, but it's a whole discussion that there's no time to get into, that in Haiti, there is colorism, right?

JEAN CASIMIR: Obviously.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: That's mixed with class. So there's that famous saying of Jean-Jacques Accau that a rich black is a mulatto and a poor mulatto is black, right?

JEAN CASIMIR: No, no, providing he knows how to read and write.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Exactly, exactly, so anyway, so that's a--

JEAN CASIMIR: Whole other story.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: We have no time for that. So let's be extremely, extremely thankful and I'd like to give a big round of applause to Professor Jean Casimir.

[APPLAUSE]

JEAN CASIMIR: That was nice. That was nice. I applaud to you for your questions. It was nice to meet you. Thank you very much.