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**Colonial Subjects Torn between Empires and Gods:  
Acadian Heritage in Elizabeth Nell Dubus's *Cajun***

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**Abstract**

This article is about the Acadians who are the religious and political exiles of the eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century North American colonies in Elizabeth Nell Dubus's *Cajun* (1994). Dubus's endeavor to reflect the Acadian cultural heritage in a historical standpoint in the context of the political turmoil and social transformations of these centuries unveils the under-represented history of the Southern Louisiana area. The aim of this article is to analyze Acadian experience of colonial North America in the nexus of imperial power balances and cultural confrontations as represented in Dubus's *Cajun*.

**Keywords**

Acadian, Cajun, Creole, Southern Louisiana, Colonialism, Identity, Representation

**İmparatorluklar ve Tanrılar Arasında Bölünmüş Sömürge  
Kimlikleri: Elizabeth Nell Dubus'un *Cajun* Romanında  
Arkadiyen Kültürel Mirası**

**Öz**

Bu makale Elizabeth Nell Dubus'un *Cajun* (1994) romanındaki on sekizinci ve on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Kuzey Amerika sömürgelerinin dini ve siyasi sürgünleri olan Arkadiyenler üzerinedir. Dubus'un, Arkadiyen kültürel mirasını, bu yüzyılların siyasi karışıklıkları ve toplumsal dönüşümleri bağlamında, tarihsel bir bakış açısıyla yansıtma girişimi, Güney Louisiana bölgesinin eksik temsil edilmiş tarihini açığa

çıkarmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, dönemin emperyalist güç dengeleri ve kültürel çatışmalarının ağındaki sömürge Kuzey Amerika’ında var olan Arkadiyen deneyimin Dubus’un *Cajun* romanında nasıl temsil edildiğini çözümlenektir.

### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Arkadiyen, Kajun, Kreole, Güney Louisiana, Sömürgecilik, Kimlik, Temsil

*What was America in 1492 but a Loose-Fish, in which Columbus struck the Spanish standard by way of waiving it for his royal master and mistress? What was Poland to the Czar? What Greece to the Turk? What India to England? What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All Loose-Fish.*

*What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish? What all men’s minds and opinions but Loose-Fish? What is the principle of religious belief in them but a Loose-Fish? What to the ostentatious smuggling verbalists are the thoughts of thinkers but Loose-Fish? What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?*

*Herman Melville / Moby Dick*

Through his Ishmael’s contemplations, Melville aligns whale hunters’ codes for the *Loose-Fish* and the *Fast-Fish* with those of the worldwide efforts of colonization. With respect to this perspective, Melville expands the layers of colonialism, be it the kings, conquistadors, *verbalists* or authors, and he draws our attention to the most insidious layers of colonization, which not only destroyed natural sources but also distorted our perception of nature. Thus, regarding Melville’s viewpoint on the agents of power, readers are also led to epistemic arguments on the nature of authorial state as a means for legitimizing the self-righteous causes for colonization. For him, act of writing represents a given historical moment. His

perspective on the relative nature of knowledge and how we perceive the outer reality lead to a dichotomous web of relations between the mind and the outside world. Contemporary critics of language have been underlining the polysemic aspects of perception, validating Melville's remarks on the power of representation. Hence, through an elaborative act of reading, *Moby Dick* leads us to a cataclysmic break with nineteenth century Idealism, particularly that of American Transcendentalism in Emersonian sense. All in all, he challenges the ideology blind propaganda of nineteenth-century positivism, self-aggrandized subjectivism of American Romanticism, marginalizing politics of difference, and commodification of sources of both human and nature. Melville's approach to difference found voice with a new venture in the twentieth-century ethnic American literature. However, while there were a proliferating sum of literary works by Asian American, Native American and African American authors such sub-groups as Cajuns remained under-represented until 1970s. Inspired by Melville's overall perspective on the symbiotic relationship between colonialism, imperialism and the act of writing, this article aims at examining Acadian heritage with reference to Elizabeth Nell Dubus's novel *Cajun* (1994), which portrays the history of Acadians after their expulsion from Nova Scotia in the late eighteenth century, and traces their distinct identity through inter- and intra-imperial experiences in southern Louisiana, where they ended up being named "Cajun" in the nexus of French, Spanish and Anglo-American world.

## **I. Introduction**

To begin with the significance of the novel *Cajun* in contemporary ethnic American culture and literature, Dubus's attempt in representing the history of Cajun cultural heritage is momentous, considering the existing academic attention to Cajun Creole culture of Louisiana. In his "Spaces of Affect: Versions and Visions of Cajun Cultural History," (1994) Charles J. Stivale examines the intersection of memory and history through cultural ways and performances. Amidst a popular and distorted image of Cajun identity produced by mass media, Stivale highlights the authenticity of Cajun musical performances as a means of reconstituting a dialogical interaction between their distinct identities and the viewers (Stivale 15). James Dormon's "Louisiana's Cajuns: French Acadians of the South" explores the exilic experience of Cajuns,

referring to their culturally mixed relations with constantly changing political environments in Louisiana. Partly because of their preference of isolation as a way of enduring the constant influx of Anglo-American population and domination in the region and most significantly because of their Catholicism and peculiar French dialect, Cajuns remained as a cultural alterity until 1960s (Dormon 42). Despite the fact that there also emerged a planter bourgeois among Cajuns, who were called as ‘Genteel Acadians,’ “the very word ‘Cajun’ came to mark the separation of the groups: to function as an ethnic boundary marker between the increasingly dominant Anglo-Americans (and those who shared their values) and the minority ‘Cajuns’ in the interior reaches of their South Louisiana domain” (Dormon 41). Nevertheless, Dormon marks that the revival of the Cajun identity started with attorney-politician James Domengeaux’s efforts to gather political and financial support for the preservation of French language in Louisiana. In 1968, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) provided an institutional project for this cultural movement (Dormon 42). Lastly, Dormon states that despite the hardships of overcoming cultural biases dwelt in both internal and external ethnic relationships based on class codes in Southern Louisiana, the foundations of academic institutions like Center for Acadian Folklore at the University of Southwestern Louisiana and the annual festivals which includes music, cuisine and crafts of the area helps to reconstitute the historical and cultural significance of Cajun identity. Similar to the long-term effects of the banishment of French language in Louisiana, which Dormon also refers to in his article, Dave Peyton draws attention to where the word ‘Cajun’ comes from and how it turned out to be an implication of cultural degradation in his 1979 interview with Leonard Deutsch:

The term “Cajun” came into being because the people who had been dispersed from Acadia continued to consider themselves Acadians. And when the English-speaking people asked them who they were, they would say a word that sounded like “ah CAH djens;” this was too French for speakers of English so they would call them “Cajuns.” (Deutsch 82)

As such cultural interactions justify the fact that ethnic identity formations have reciprocal elements in their historical practices, Elizabeth Nell Dubus’s *Cajun* appears as a significant contribution to the recent literature and cultural productions on Cajuns of Louisiana. Her narrative history of Cajuns helps to recuperate the

under-and misrepresented image of the Louisianan people of Acadia, which has been usually subject to non-Cajun authors' stereotypical representations in American literature. Marcia Gaudet's 1989 article "The Image of the Cajun in Literature," surveys this misrepresented image of Cajuns through Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Evangeline* (1847), George Washington Cable's *Bonaventure: A Prose Pastoral of Acadian Louisiana* (1887), Kate Chopin's *Polydore, Azelie* (1897), *The Storm* (1897), *At the Cadien Ball* (1894) and Sidonie de la Houssaye's *Pouponne and Balthazar* (1888). Gaudet observes that these late nineteenth century representations of Cajun identity were mostly from Creole perspectives, and the negative depictions were also prevalent throughout the twentieth century (Gaudet 77). With a similar perspective, Michelle Y. Fiedler also refers to the influence of the negative representations of earlier literature in forming a peculiar ethnicity for Cajuns in her dissertation *The Cajun Ideology: Negotiating Identity in Southern Louisiana*: "This ethnicity is the result, in part, of early literature describing a stereotypically backward, rural Frenchmen who held a class status similar to their plantation slave counterparts" (Fiedler 1). Considering Fiedler's provision for a close analysis on the rhetoric and ideology of the ethnicities, which is in an urge for providing a reconstituted representation of Cajun identity, Dubus's attempt in depicting the Cajun history through their inter-cultural and intra-colonial interactions with French and Spanish Creoles and Anglo-Americans reveals a negotiated process of identity formation as well as a controversial one.

Nonetheless, along with other multiethnic identity formations in the United States, Acadian sense of past and lineage have also contributed to intensifying formations of cultural identities since the late seventeenth-century French and Spanish Louisiana. That being the case, a revisit to Acadian history offers a larger insight into not only seventeenth-and-eighteenth centuries European and British imperialism but also post-Revolutionary history of diversity in the United States. Both as a *Loose-Fish* and a *Fast-Fish* in Melvillian view, Acadians of Nova Scotia and Louisiana have been a nexus of North American colonial and imperial histories as they were once subject to British occupation in Nova Scotia, Catholic French and Spanish in Louisiana before they became the citizens of the United States. Ralph Bauer asserts that in reviewing the evolutionary processes in early modern knowledge which had a prominent impact on forming the geo-politics

and cultural history of the New World, one should evade evaluating the phenomena solely in terms of social, political and economic infrastructures established by European metropolises, as “. . . the early modern changes in Western knowledge cannot be understood in terms of a one-directional “impact” of the New World upon the history of the Old, let alone upon particular histories; rather they suggest that modernity is the product of the complex and inextricable connectedness of various places and histories, of the way in which these places acted upon each other” (Bauer 2). In this respect, published in 1994, Elizabeth Nell Dubus’s historical novel *Cajun*, the first volume of her *The Arcadia Trilogy* gives rise to new prospects on historicism and representation. She portrays the under-represented history and identity of Acadian heritage in Louisiana through the intertwining stories of two families and their descendants, the Acadian Langlinaises and the French Royalist, de Clouets. Based on the comparison between the historically and culturally distinctive manners, they strived to re-establish and sustain French, Spanish and the United States Louisiana, Langlinaises and de Clouets’ stories uncover an alternative viewpoint in reviewing the eighteenth and nineteenth century cultural history of the region. The fact that Dubus grew up in Acadiana has shaped her characterization of her father’s ancestors as French Royalists like the family of de Clouets in the first volume of the *Cajun* (Dubus Foreword). Thus, the characterization process of *Cajun* was inspired by the cultural manners that Dubus grew up with, having a particular sense of past and remembrance of French and Spanish Louisiana. Evident in her assertion of her ethnic identity, she portrays a different perspective of American history for the contemporary Americanists with an urge to find marginalized histories as an alternative to mainstream historical narratives. Without subordinating the factual accuracy to fiction, she underlines the human conduct of history as a challenge to official history. For example, a re-reading of the 1779 battle of Baton Rouge in *Cajun* does not only paint a picture of the empirical geo-politics among Britain, France and Spain over the lower Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico, but it also depicts Spanish Louisiana’s part in the Revolutionary history of the United States. Moreover, historical figure of Acadians confronting British army in Spanish Louisiana, almost a century after Nova Scotia, under the command of the Spanish governor of Louisiana, Don Bernardo de Galvez, is the most significant layer of the story. Beyond the official narrative of how Spanish Louisiana defeated the British forces and emerged as an unpredicted ally to the new born nation of the United States, Dubus raises critical questions

over the autonomy of Cajun identity in the imperial history of the New World. Relevant to her position, Ralph Bauer's remarks on the problematic subject position of colonial identities is noteworthy. Citing from José Antonio Mazzotti's definition on the "ambiguous" colonial identity of the Creole, Bauer emphasizes the undermined status of settler colonials:

In the geo-political constellations of the European settler empires in America before the nineteenth century, the Creole descendants of the European conquerors often occupied an "ambiguous" social and legal space, neither colonized nor colonizers but rather colonials, who often (though not always) stood apart from the geo-political interests of the imperial metropolis and from what post-colonial criticism has come to conceptualize as the colonized "subaltern" – the Native Americans and Africans whose land or labor was being exploited in the imperial economies. (Bauer 5)

In this regard, Acadian diasporic identity can also be observed as analogous to the ideological and political inferiority of the concept of 'Creole.' Uprooted from Nova Scotia, the diaspora of Acadians of French and Spanish Louisiana were even further detached from their imperial metropolises. Nonetheless, as subjects of European settler colonialism enduring through North American history, the author's portrayal of Acadian identity raises vital questions relevant to our contemporary perspectives on representation and historicism in company with the venture of Cajun heritage in the New World. The following parts will focus on Acadians as religious and political outcasts of the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century empires of the New World with reference to their identity formations. With regard to their exilic disintegration from the British rule in Nova Scotia, the part entitled as "Gods and Kings" will highlight Catholicism as the primary source of their marginalization as neutrals before their expulsion. The following part, "And when we get there, we will build another happy land," will examine their experience as colonial subjects of French and Spanish Louisiana with reference to their cultural ways of coming to terms with a changing world. Lastly, the part, "What madness is loosened upon the world?" will be focusing on the cultural and political differences between the Acadian Langlinais and the Royalist de Clouet families under the pressure of Anglo-American influx and influence on the social aspects of French and Spanish Louisiana.

## II. Gods and Kings

Ajar with the maternal beauty of Mathilde Langlinais, Elizabeth Nell Dubus's narration personifies Acadia of Nova Scotia through the ascendancy of the Langlinais family in the territory. Like "the hay" her husband "cut" and "the land" he "plowed," Mathilda's femininity is subject to patriarchal production of power. Mathilde appears as wishful as the fertile New World, as she depends on her husband's will to root in the New World: "Unlike the women whose infants wore them down, made them old, she, Mathilde Langlinais, would blossom like very land her husband plowed, would bear his fruit; their children would harvest this land for generations to come" (Dubus 13). Following this assertion, idyllic description of the Langlinais lands, the downfall of the utopic vision of Acadia is foreshadowed through the rising tension with the British officials as "Four hundred and eleven men and boys were gathering, summoned to the church at Grand Pré to hear yet another resolution from King George II" (15). In a stark contrast to the promising fertility image of Mathilde Langlinais, in the French-settled district of English Nova Scotia of 1755, ". . . the landscape was quiet. Fields were half harvested, orchards half picked" (15). As a representation of the uneasiness of the French Acadians, "half-harvested" fields and "half-picked" orchards foreshadow the paradise-to-fall of Acadia, "whose very name means happy land" (18). As the men and boys of Acadia are gathering to hear the new orders from Charles Lawrence, lieutenant governor of Nova Scotia, the characterization moves on through the description of Claude Langlinais and his brother-in-law, Pierre Boudreaux, who had ". . . Much the same looks, with strong, compact bodies, dark hair and eyes, and skin that never lost a sun-flushed, sun-browned tint," wearing ". . . the gray trousers and loose gray shirts of the Acadian farmer" (15). It is not different from Crevecoeur's *American Farmer* with their toil in the New World as *the tillers of the earth*; however, Acadian colonialists of France consequently become *ambiguous subjects* of English Nova Scotia - in José Antonio Mazzotti's terms. As for Claude Langlinais,

It was hard for him to believe that these people, some of whom tilled farms that had been their family since the early 1600s, could be so sheeplike. A fierce anger boiled in him. That he, Claude Langlinais, a free man, landowner, a husband, a father, should have to come and go at the beck and call of an English popinjay in a red coat! That the English colonel used their



church for his meetings made the situation even worse. When a man did not respect another man's religion, there could be no trust. (15)

Claude Langlinais's point of view on "the English popinjay in a red coat" implies the arrogance of English character as they emerged triumphant in Seven Years' War (1756-63) in Europe. Thus, the rise of Britain as a trans-Atlantic empire had consequences in terms of the eighteenth-century European balance of power as the newly formed European allies before the Seven Years' War involved Britain and France as foes. Regarding this political background, the immediate implication of "the English popinjay in a red coat" is Claude Langlinais's resentment for the victory of Britain in French and Indian War (1754-63), which was fought as the New World counterpart of Seven Years' War.

Nevertheless, not only does Dubus exemplify the in-betweenness of the Acadian colonial population but also the moral dilemmas of British officials, who were appointed to enact the orders received from London. The author portrays two contrasting figures of English officials, who were also subject to their metropolis as the Acadians they had to rule: Colonel Winslow and Thomas Cavendish.

"Dangerous-looking lot, aren't they sir?" The slow aristocratic cadence of Lieutenant Cavendish's speech belied the fire that lay beneath his words. I suppose they could hide all manner of arms under those shirts."

"They are not allowed to bear arms—" Winslow began, and then stopped. Cavendish was baiting him, and enjoying it. Cavendish needed no instructions; he'd probably had an ancestor at Utrecht, watching Queen Anne and King Louis XIV sign the damn treaty that had started the whole bloody mess. . . . It was all very well for Queen Anne and King Louis to agree that England should now govern Nova Scotia, including those parts which had been settled by the French for well over a hundred years. All very well for the queen to graciously allow those Acadians who wished to leave to leave, and for those who wished to stay to stay. Just like a bloody woman to think you could declare French Papist neutral and they would then become so! Would any Frenchman ever honor a Church of England king? (16)

In plain terms, Thomas Cavendish sounds as a perfect exemplar of Claude Langlinais's remarks on the "the English popinjay in a red coat." Thomas Cavendish being comfortable with his aristocratic lineage, his image becomes an embodiment of dehumanized ends of imperial greed. While he is content enough to take his share of Nova Scotia in the name of his metropolis, Colonel Winslow is ashamed of the orders he had to expose the Acadian settlers to. As for Colonel Winslow, "Tragedy that had been written in London was about to begin" (17). The tragedy was that Acadians would have to serve in the army were they to yield to ally with England. Yet, as no armament was allowed for the *papists* according to the law, their status would be limited to full allegiance to the England abandoning their allegiance to their French king. Thus, "a bag of tricks," in Cavendish's words, the governor's orders were soon to keep the Acadians as captives in the church awaiting their tragic end. Meanwhile, both Cavendish and Winslow know that, for the Acadians, these new orders are nothing but a dead-end, as they became the subjects of a defeated France with whom England had been in an ongoing war in Europe.

On the other hand, Claude Langlinais's thoughts demonstrate his indifference to his imperial metropolises of both France and England waiting to hear the new orders from Charles Lawrence, lieutenant governor of Nova Scotia:

So accustomed was he to these meetings, to the continuing harassment by the British of these French neutrals who lived and worked as they had for generations, protected by a treaty signed by royalty of both nations, that Claude let his thoughts wander to his fields, to the work left to be done before all was ready for winter. It was, he thought, one of the best harvest ever. The good God had blessed them well. (17)

Engaged with his best harvest ever, Claude Langlinais assumes no harm with the announcement of new orders from the British governor of Nova Scotia. "So accustomed was he" to such meetings, neither his sense of place nor his unified self as "French neutrals, who lived and worked as they had for generations" have not been dissolved yet. His sense of past abridges his selfhood to his ancestors who "lived and worked" and established themselves in the territory for almost over a century and generates him as a historical agency amidst the oppression he endures through the imperial confrontations of European balances of power.

As an additional point, dwelling in-between the empires, Dubus's colonial Acadians are torn between Gods, as well. English officials' disrespect for the Catholic church of Acadians alienates Claude Langlinais from the undesirable present:

Claude gazed at the church, its shingled spire lifting a cross high above the milling crowd. Every stone, every brick, every beam, had been lovingly brought and lovingly placed by the French people who worshipped there. He and Mathilde had been married there, not two years before. His son, Claude Louis, had been baptized there. His other sons, and their sisters, would be baptized and married there. He and Mathilde would be buried from that church. (15)

However, the *written tragedy* is yet to begin, Claude Langlinais, "...kneeling beside Pierre, had felt the contempt of the soldiers standing around the walls like a blade on his neck" (17). In a deep contempt for being captive in his own church, neither he nor his fellow Acadians yield to their subordinate position: "Within the church, the Acadians had knelt as naturally as though they had come to hear Mass. . . . Deliberately, he had crossed himself and bowed his head. But when the colonel took his place behind the table set in the middle aisle, Claude's head, like that of every Acadian, lifted. They'd bow to no Britisher!" (17). Thus, their resistance in rejecting to bow their heads in front of no authority but their own God, who is neither British nor Anglican, might be the only means for sustaining themselves as a political agency. Torn between Gods Anglican and Catholic and the kingdoms of England and France, the eighteenth-century Acadians of Nova Scotia were bound to be uprooted. However, as the new orders are released, Claude Langlinais with all his fellow Acadians ascertained that there was no hope to hold on to their lands, and their families were to be scattered to "any of a dozen places. New England, the Carolinas. . . ." (25) As Acadians were devoid of their political status as subjects of the French king, "The British soldiers had been rounding people up from all over the district, rounding them up as though with a giant rake, pushing debris before it, to remove them from the land of the terrible British king" (29). Imprisoned in his own church, Claude Langlinais loses his sense of belonging to the place:

The prayer he had not said for days, the prayer he had tried to forget as the church around him had each day become more

and more of an English prison and less and less the temple of his God, that prayer his mother had taught him rose fresh and young to his lips. “Christ Jesus, you are Faith, I have faith in thee. Christ Jesus, you are Hope, I hope in thee. Christ Jesus, you are Love, I love thee.” (31)

In terms of characterization, as “a free man, landowner, a husband, a father” (15) Claude Langlinais represents the prototype of a Cajun, as he calls himself “. . . I am one hell of a smart Acadian” (26). Determined to do his best to protect his family, he learns English from a British soldier guarding him in the church. He somehow achieves to receive sympathy from the British officials and Thomas Cavendish who decides that they should go to Louisiana. Looking at the map,

His eye followed the moving finger until rested. He saw the familiar French spelling, recognized the word. “Louisiana”

Cavendish swung around. “That’s where you should go. Where you must go.” (37)

As “a hell of a smart Acadian,” Claude Langlinais is forgiven by Thomas Cavendish, a representative figure of the “English popinjay in a red coat.” As Cavendish gathers Langlinais family from the listings and sends them to Louisiana, the following part introduces us to next generations of Langlinais as Louisianan Acadians.

### **III. “And when we get there, we will build another happy land”**

Following their exilic journey, Claude Langlinais re-establishes his family in Louisiana in the region called Attakapas. After the exilic episode, part one, *Renascence*, introduces the son, Claude Louis Langlinais who is not a first-generation Acadian in Louisiana, as he was four when taking the journey from Nova Scotia with his parents. However, in Claude Louis’s story of Louisiana, as there is no rest from the ongoing imperial turmoil of the eighteenth century colonial America, the reader is to witness another phase in Acadian identity. Louisiana territory, which was French on the arrival of Langlinais family, is now Spanish. In this sense, Claude Louis’s character represents a break with the French empire, as he is through a series of new ceaseless political statuses from the French to the Spanish and lastly to be the citizen of

the United States after the Louisiana Purchase. Among these chaotic forces of empires, during the 1779 battle of Baton Rouge, he allies himself with the Spanish army against Britain, indirectly protecting the borders of the Revolutionary British colonial settlers who were indeed as British as those whom his ancestors confronted in the Acadia of Nova Scotia.

In addition to drawing the imperial map of Louisiana with reference to the naming of the Attakapas by the Spanish, Claude Louis is depicted with a strong attachment to their new Acadia of Louisiana in the following lines:

There was no way he could remember the terrible years of pilgrimage from Nova Scotia to Louisiana, no way he could know what his parents Claude and Mathilde Langlinais felt when they finally made their way to this piece of land that stretched along the Bayou Teche in a place the Spanish called the Attakapas territory, named for the Indians who once held it. That had been twenty years ago, he had been but four years old. But he had grown up on tales of the hardships his parents, all the Acadians, had suffered as they fought, struggled, endured years of exile in New England, along the Atlantic Coast, in Santo Domingo and Texas, always looking toward this Louisiana Territory, which, no matter if the Spaniards now ruled it, had at least been discovered, colonized, first by the French. (43)

“No matter if the Spaniards now ruled it,” the Langlinais family is still proud of the French heritage in the territory. Their relation to the place stems from the past. Furthermore, the fact that Louisiana is now ruled by the Spanish does not give disturbance to them. As subjects of a Catholic Crown, they can still till the land for the posterity. Despite being deceived by the temporary conjectures of imperial geo-politics, Langlinais family has a strong attachment to the place:

His eyes followed the low swell of pasture and fields stretching away to the horizon. They were not so wide, his father said, as the fields left behind in Nova Scotia, nor the roads that passed along them so well marked. “But there is one thing, Claude Louis,” his father said, bending over and picking up a lump of rich black dirt. “These fields are ours, granted to us.” Sifting the

black rich dirt through his work-rough fingers, watching that slow, fine fall. “I cleared them, I dug the drainage ditches back to the bayou, built the dikes. I said –corn here. Cotton here. Cane here. You know?” And the black eyes, veiled sometimes with pain, but never dimmed, never dulled, gazed at him. “It is our land, Claude Louis. We are bound to it.” (43)

Yet, as the narrative of Langlinais history continues, Dubus portrays a transformation in Acadian identity. In contrast to Nova Scotia experience, which led the previous generation to a mutual confrontation with Britain, Acadians in the late eighteenth century Spanish Louisiana were bred in an immediate recognition of the fact that they had to endure through a more complex web of balance of power. This complexity is most evident in Claude Louis’s perspective as he is to be soon enrolled in the army of Spanish Crown as a subject of Spanish Louisiana to confront the British in the battle of Baton Rouge: “Claude Louis’ mind saw the stretch of the Mississippi River, with British forts rising at Baton Rouge and Natchez, two other posts guarding the approaches to the river between these points. He had always stayed in Attakapas, helping his father; he’d not contact with the redcoats. Nor anyone else” (49). In his wedding ceremony, he is distressed by the ambiguity of the near future. His thoughts dwell in darkness:

He looked down at Cecile. Did that sword shadow her, too? But like all brides, she of course did not expect disaster to be witness to her wedding. She did not know that in forts along the Mississippi River redcoated soldiers might even now be readying their guns, white-breached legs could be moving in marching order. Could the greed for conquest that made these kings, be they French or English or Spanish, look ever on a neighbor’s land, swallow this new Acadia as it had devoured the old? (55)

His confusion rises to utmost level and is dissolved into a new understanding of his Acadian identity as he finally finds himself confronting the British soldiers in Baton Rouge. Contemplating the older story of Acadian tragedy back in Nova Scotia, Claude Louis is haunted by his wife’s traumatized childhood as she told him about the exilic journey of her childhood. Claude Louis recalling his mother’s records of Acadian history, his own perspective of the Acadian identity

is unified rather with a kingdom of God, with which he associates his moral duty, that is, fighting against the army of the British that is portrayed as the evilest of all forces:

The soldiers lying in wait at Fort Manchac, and farther up the river at Baton Rouge, might not be the same as those who could look at a tender young Acadian mother, her dying infant clasped in her arms, and tear it from her, herd her on one boat, her husband and children on the other. But they served in the same army, the same line of kings. Such men should be helped to what awaited them in eternity, and helped with all due speed. Kill such men? Easily. Gladly. His voice raised with the others in resounding declarations of loyalty to the general God had sent to lead them against this British army that would sweep over them, pillaging, raping, devouring. (67)

Proudly armed under the army of the general Bernardo Galvez, Claude Louis represents a new phase for the Acadians of Louisiana in terms of his ethnic identity. Transcending his historical significance, the figure of Bernardo Galvez is transferred to a mythic status as a general that God sent for them. As for himself, Claude Louis sounds well determined to “help” British with “what awaited them in eternity.”

#### **IV. “What madness is loosened upon the world?”**

Moral codes and cultural traditions of the Langlinais family are constantly challenged as the second generation Langlinais couple, Claude Louis and his wife Cecile are confronted with new social formations of Spanish Louisiana. The most significant one of these cultural breaks appears when their new neighbors, the French Royalist couple -Noel and H el ene de Clouet- arrive in Attakapas, escaping from the Reign of Terror. Thus, the stark class difference between the Acadian Langlinais family and the Royalist de Clouets represents the historical asymmetry that the eighteenth-century colonials had to endure through cultural and political revolutions in continental Europe. Moreover, already uprooted from the metropole, the French Royalists of Louisiana, were representative of an Old World in decay. Their assertion to their aristocratic background and courtly manners was far from the ideal of an American farmer in Cr vecoeur’s sense, nor were they to fit to Tocqueville’s notion of democracy. Nonetheless, this historical asymmetry of the late eighteenth-century French Royalists

of Spanish Louisiana is most apparent in the future dominance of the Revolutionary Americans who were to succeed Spanish and French rule through the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Consequently, neither the French Royalist nor Acadians could hold a stable political status amidst the predominance of revolutionary progression of the United States.

Dubus's depiction of this historical transition can be seen in the portrayals of future generation Langlinais and de Clouet families. First of all, H el ene and Noel de Clouet, as courtesans before the French Revolution, have different projections for adapting themselves to the new conditions after their dramatic break with France. Displaced and devoid of political representation, they have nothing but their treasures to invest in the New World. H el ene insists on settling in New Orleans ". . . that was hardly livable, but that at least had the advantages of caf es, theater and shops –and other French Royalists like themselves" (88), whereas Noel's plan was to build a large farm in Attakapas similar to his old chateau Beau Ch ene in France. The chapter called "H el ene" reads as a contrasting depiction of a femme fatale compared to the maternal, ladylike beauty and fertility of Matilde Langlinais in the first part called "Exile." Therefore, while Mathilde Langlinais was identified with the Acadian cause and dominance in Nova Scotia, H el ene de Clouet is the representative of the decaying rule of the French rule. Her flirting manners with another Royalist called Fran ois de la Houssaye annoys Noel as he is haunted with the memory of Beau Ch ene and his wife's high spirit he used to enjoy back in the past.

Noel's strong hold on his Old-World aristocracy is representative of the contradiction between the old values with new ones in the New World. On hearing the news about the sale of the cleric lands back in France, Noel's tension rises:

The Department of Aisne, in which his brother had his country home, was being torn with violence. The bocage country of Normandy, that peaceful and bucolic place where he had spent so many hours almost holy in their harmony with the natural serenity around him, was under siege by insurrectionists. Though the populace spoke of government by vote, the vote was being delivered more often than not by the sword, the rope, and the pistol. Aristocrats in Anjou, the Franche-Comt e, Dauphin e, Vivarais, and Roussillon were fearing no better. His



godfather lived in Anjou.

He reached for his glass, filled it. “My brother—his family—if they stayed in Normandy—and my godfather—in Anjou.” The glass was stiff in his hand, like lilies held by a corpse. “What madness is loosened upon the world?” (90)

Still trying hard to associate himself with the disintegrated world of his past in France, Noel de Clouet’s protest is remarkable: “What madness is loosened upon the world?” Apparently, his class code has deceived his perception of a wider scope of history. Blind to the dialectical forces of the past and present, his narrow-minded protest finds a counter reaction from another passenger:

“Madness?” A man new to the gathering spoke from the shadows of the next table, scraping his chair on the rough brick floor as he rose. He took a stance at the table, peering down at Noel with eyes filled with the kind of rage Noel was becoming unhappily familiar with. “Why, the madness of rabble gone wild. The madness to be expected when the descendants of the Gallo-Romans our ancestors reduced to serfdom are trying take privileges that have been ours for centuries, privileges ours by right of conquest. (90)

This counter-argument of the next table above represents a revocation of Charlemagne age with the Napoleonic cause, for legitimizing the Revolution and the reversal of social hierarchies collapsed with the fall of King Louis XVI. Renouncing the previous reign, the empire of Napoleon Bonaparte marked a break with the past, renaming itself as the First French Empire. As stressed by the next table, the recent Revolution was indeed a historical moment when the political claims over the true identity of French empire made success over the long struggles that can be traced back to the ninth- and tenth-century origins. In his *Emperor of the West*, Hywel Williams emphasizes that

The debate about Charlemagne’s true identity and aims, once started, never went away in subsequent centuries. French republicanism and Bonapartism alike were enthused by Charlemagne’s consolidation of Francia and its subsequent expansion towards and beyond the Rhine. Here was an imperial adventure on the grand scale, and French national history in

the nineteenth century, and some decades afterwards, regarded Charlemagne as a ruler who anticipated Napoleon. . . . Charlemagne had associated his rule with the revival of ancient Roman notions of empire, and Napoleon in a rather similar act of aggrandizement appropriated some of the symbols of early Frankish monarchy. (Williams xviii)

Relatedly, to the man of next table, peasants of the Revolution are the descendants of the Gallo-Romans, whereas, for Noel de Clouet, the peasants are peasants:

He heard the voices around him, cresting as the sea roar crests with the cyclic ninth wave, take up the old, old arguments. “The peasants have used the land, possess that—why should they object to the traditional dues?” “And why object that we maintained our exclusive hunting rights—what peasant properly knows how to hunt?” “The problem of course, is that peasants are stupid.” (90)

Nevertheless, despite his confident talk about the peasants of his feudal past, Noel de Clouet is yet unaware of his future challenges in Louisiana with the realm of the descendants of Acadia from Auray of lower Brittany. This Royalist viewpoint of the peasantry would echo in their son Noel André’s thoughts in the future, as well: “His mother was right. They had left a country to escape rule by peasants to find haven in a country that now belonged to peasants” (168). This conversation illustrates the difference between the colonial subjects and the metropole. Noel de Clouet and the man of next table, in the quotation above, represent the metropole mindset while the colonial subjects, such as French and Spanish Creoles, including Acadians of Louisiana were representative of the political and cultural break with their continental empires.

Thus, the anxiety of an awaited ambivalence that prevailed all through their voyage can be felt when Noel de Clouet arrives in Louisiana:

Two weeks later, when they arrived at Poste des Attakapas, Noel felt, for the first time since his world had begun to disintegrate, despair. For the first time in four centuries, the de Clouet heir had not welcomed the new year at the chateau in Provence; for the first time in six centuries, the de Clouet heir could not

know what heritage his firstborn son would have. Behind were the de Clouet lands in Provence, the de Clouet town house in Paris, the de Clouet position at the French court. Ahead of him, surrounding him, pulling his feet into their spongy surface, where the lands upon which his children's future depended. (90-1)

The complete difference between the Royalists and the Acadians can be observed through Noel de Clouet's first encounter and argument with Claude Louis on land ownership and entrepreneurship. Conversing about the climate of Louisiana, the muddy roads of "what gumbo winter makes" (100), Claude Louis is disturbed by Noel's indifference to the territorial conditions as observed with his elegant dress unfit to the environment: "Claude Louis looked at the man who rode beside him, at the lace-edged cuffs of his shirt, the heavy gilt buttons on his coat. The boots, Claude Louis could tell without even feeling the leather, were the finest pair he had ever seen. Those boots were not made to walk behind a plow, no!" (100) Reacting to Noel de Clouet's ignorance of the land and the climate, Claude Louis is further angered by Noel's pride for his aristocratic class symbolized with a "wall of glass" he set against Claude Louis that obviously had no correspondence in the New World:

Claude Louis felt anger form like a brick in his chest, he could direct that anger to Noel, throw that brick against this wall of glass, startle de Clouet into recognizing that here in Louisiana, the old ways were no more. Claude Louis Langlinais and Noel de Clouet were two men here, two landowners, and, if the truth be known, Claude Louis was better off, because he had been here longer, had made many crops. It was someone else's turn to be the newly exiled. (100)

Dubus's plot structure presents the fall of the Old-World values and mindsets with the moral decadence of the de Clouet family, while depicting the ascendance of Acadian heritage with the Langlinais family. In their assertion related to courtesan manners and aristocratic past, the de Clouets are far away from Acadian work ethic as well as rural and pious character. Hélène de Clouet appears as an embodiment of all the evils of the Old World as she gives birth to Noel André, the illegitimate son of François de la Houssaye. Thus, when Noel André should marry de la Houssayes' daughter in the future, the second generation of the

de Clouet family would be bred on incest. This moral decay of their marriage is connoted with emotional detachment of the son Noel André and his legal father Noel de Clouet, while he is spoiled by his mother. Furthermore, de Clouets have nothing in common with the Langlinais family's political and social perspectives on which the future rule of the United States in Louisiana was to find a fertile ground. While his son Noel André and his wife H el ene were resisting against the New World order, Noel de Clouet's awareness of the reality was obvious: "He felt a chill underneath the bright warmth of this day and thought again that the wealth he had carried here from France would not do for the de Clouets what Claude and Mathilde's riches did for the Langlinais" (129). Despite this harsh reality, Noel de Clouet is determined to re-establish himself in Louisiana. Thus, his determination to build a new life transforms his identity from a Royalist to a plantation bourgeoisie:

Noel stood in the center of a world so fresh, so newly come to man's firm hand, that it seemed to have a life unto itself. Feeling the strength in muscles now accustomed to daily physical work, feeling the expansion of his chest accustomed now to the deep long breathing that work demanded, Noel had a life unto himself, too. He had been forced to step from the high road his ancestors had built for him; he was no longer one of the proud de Clouets of Beau Ch ene, Provence, France. (128)

In contrast to his father Noel de Clouet's transformation in terms of views and manners, Noel Andr e's assertion about his aristocratic heritage, which his mother cultivated in him, impeded his progress. In this respect, third-generation Jean-Claude Langlinais was more confident in adapting himself to the new political and economic conditions as his family had already established themselves in Louisiana before the arrival of the de Clouet family after the French Revolution.

Thus, the Acadian and Royalist generations of Louisiana Territory had nothing in common with each other, except facing the hardships of their ever-changing political identities: "The third generation of Langlinais and the second generation of de Clouets were about to become first generation Americans—that they had in common" (134). This divergence between perspectives is most evident through their conversations over the new political and economic conditions of Louisiana such as the newly emerging merchant profile of the

colonials under the influence of the rising American population right after the Battle of New Orleans and the Louisiana Purchase of 1802. The prelude of the chapter named “Nouvelle Orléans” illuminates such future debates and is significant before presenting the related arguments between Jean-Claude and Noel André on these political and economic changes:

THE LAST QUARTER OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SAW DECLARATIONS OF human rights written first in ink and then in blood in Europe and in America. It was up to the nineteenth century to make good the promises of those declarations—without, if possible, creating more disturbances than were solved. And when Napoleon Bonaparte, at least at the crest of his powerful tide, might have given some semblance of order to the Europe he coveted, in Louisiana Territory, the whims and ploys of kings and emperors that seemed to give so much pleasure to those who used them brought anxiety and unrest. (133)

Lastly, on the eve of transferring Louisiana from Spain to France for the last time before the Louisiana Purchase, Spanish governors lived through an ambivalent balance of powers. Despite having defeated the British along the Mississippi and the entire coast of the Gulf of Mexico in the battle of Baton Rouge, the Americans’ promise for the protection against the British in return for the use of the lower Mississippi creates anxiety: “Spanish . . . knew well the fable of the wolf and the lamb, and the United States, once comfortably at the Spanish gate, would soon long for the riches of Mexico. It would be but a step for that young giant to cross Louisiana, take Texas and sweep down into Mexico” (133). This anxiety had consequences on the political perspectives of the colonial subjects of Louisiana.

Colonials, including Spanish and French Creoles, Acadians and the Royalists had a fundamental disturbance in common: the spread of American ways into their *civilization*:

The instability of Spanish ownership threatened their land grants—but something else was threatened more. Their civilized way of life, their love of theater, of balls, was neither understood nor appreciated by the river rats, as these wild Americans were called, who swarmed over New Orleans,

using raw energy to make up for the zest for life the Creoles possessed in such high degree. “Barbarians,” said New Orleans society, turning up its aristocratic nose. (133)

Despite their leisure of “turning up its aristocratic nose,” both Creoles and the Royalist had to adapt themselves to American ways. In fifteen years following their arrival right after the French Revolution, de Clouets gained a new wealth, transforming their character from aristocratic land and peasant owner to a plantation and slave owner, which was symbolized with the rise of their new Beau Chêne in Attakapas as the replica of the one they left in France. Additionally, with this new prospect of the de Clouets and all other Royalist colonials, it was evident that their old bonds with France was weakened in this period as there had been nothing left out of their ruined metropole of Paris:

When he and his compatriots in Louisiana spoke of France at all, it was as though they spoke of Rome of Caesar, so distant did it all seem. The execution of King Louis XVI and his queen had also been the execution of any hopes they might have had that the madness would be cured, the old ways restored. Now Napoleon was emperor, Josephine his consort, France a republic—and always, it seemed, at war.... Let those peasants, those bourgeoisies, who believed they knew so well what that country needed, bleed and die for her. (136)

Upon hearing the news of Louisiana Purchase, the prominent Royalists, among them the de Clouets, de Gravalles and de la Houssayes, are puzzled by Napoleon’s attempt to sell the whole Louisiana Territory to the Americans. They at least question how Napoleon could pay the bills of his wards in Europe without the income he could receive from his colonial subjects. Among the Royalists, de Gravelle makes the most reasonable remark on Napoleon’s intentions. Since “New Orleans is already full of them—they have begun to move in, have land granted to them—perhaps Napoleon thinks he had better sell Louisiana to them before they simply grab it. Even he cannot wage war on two continents” (137). Following de Gravelle’s remarks, de la Houssaye’s revolting exclamation “But Americans!” is the most emblematic of the discontent for the future of Louisiana:

Every man in that little room echoed those two brief words,

words said in a voice rich with displeasure and disapproval. They had all seen those rough men swarming down the river. And they had some of the better sort, men with the American government sent to negotiate river traffic with the Spaniards. Americans might be clever, might see opportunity where others saw obstacles, but they lacked breeding. Manners. Very simply, they were not pleasant to deal with. They paid no attention to the little ceremonies of exchange, the finer civilities of business dealings. To live under their rule—barbarism. (137)

On the other hand, the Acadian mind represented by the Langlinais family had a different position of the Louisiana Purchase. In contrast to the Royalist subjects, what bothers Claude Louis Langlinais and his son, the third generation Langlinais, Jean –Claude, is not “the barbaric” ways of Americans but the fear of losing their lands granted to them by Spanish and French governments:

“That will be when the bastard king of Spain and the bastard Napoleon finish, at their leisure, disposing of the lives of thousands of people they have never seen,” said Jean-Claude said, bursting from the stool near the fire where he sat. “Talk of this cession has gone on for months and months—someone takes a knight here, loses a pawn there. It is a chess game they play, these European rulers, and we are the pieces! Perhaps it will be not so bad to belong to the Americans—they, at least, do not have royalty!” (146)

Witnessing “the final lowering of the Spanish flag and the raising of the French tricolor” (153) in New Orleans along with other people in Louisiana Territory, Jean-Claude questions his father Claude Louis’s cause for once having defeated the British in the battle of Baton Rouge. As to Jean-Claude, his father and all his fellow Acadians’ bravery under the Spanish army had consequences they had to endure now. Yet, Claude Louis’s answer is clear: “What I did was not important. What was important was that the British did not win, . . . These trappings, this crowd— . . . None of this matters. All that matters is whether, when it is all over, we still have our land” (153).

## V. Conclusion

Consequently, Elizabeth Nell Dubus's *Cajun* presents a clear vision of Louisianan past as a historical site where one can observe the clash of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperial powers in North America. From this point of view, the author depicts multi-vocal voices within the colonial population of Louisiana, having been representative of cross-cultural formations of the region's history since its origins in French and Spanish colonial times throughout the post-Revolutionary United States history. Political perspectives and cultural manners of Creoles, Acadians and the Royalists became influential in forming a collective sense of past and certain cultural sensibilities, which echoed through an ever-lasting ambivalent historical process following the cession of Spanish and French rules. In observing the mindset of colonial subjects, specifically that of the Acadians and the Royalists, the novel particularly illustrates an alternative portrayal of Louisiana and Acadian history. In this sense, Dubus evokes a past experience that is representative of "complex and inextricable connectedness of various places and histories" in Ralph Bauer's terms. Through reading *Cajun*, one can also observe the epistemic and ideological contradictions between the colonial and imperial discourses, the power imbalances and their relevant subject positions which the European colonial populations had to bear. Besides, the Old-World wars, revolutions and cultural breaks that shaped the eighteenth-and nineteenth- century European borders found their corresponding consequences, constantly re-mapping the New World. In this sense, the New World experience had a profound role in shaping the prospects of early modernity, which was projected through a transformative nature of certain dialectics such as the power versus its subjects, authority versus freedoms, civil liberties and political representation. All in all, Elizabeth Nell Dubus's *Cajun* contributes to today's Cajun revival in Louisiana, which is enriched with academic, political and cultural representations such as revitalizing Acadian dialect, cultural manners and aspects varying from food to music. Cajun resistance amidst the assimilating powers from colonial times to present prevails through their strong ethnic bonds and enduring diasporic experiences they had in the New World. Thus, Cajun history and heritage have survived through centuries, transcending its *Loose-Fish* and *Fast-Fish* status in the New World, being an exemplar for readers to be cautious of all forces of the past, present and future.



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