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Cannibalizing *Doudouisme*,  
Conceptualizing the *Morne*:  
Suzanne Césaire's Caribbean Eco-poetics

### Interrogating the Lacunae

**F**ocusing on Suzanne Césaire's essays published in *Tropiques* (1941–45), this study is a critical intervention in the productive debate about the insightful contribution of Francophone Caribbean women writers to the emergence and fruition of Caribbean critical theory.<sup>1</sup> In this study, I examine how through key concepts such as *morne* (a small, rounded, and steep hill in the Caribbean), *homme plante* (man-plant), *doudou* (a gendered paradigm that intertwines colonial patriarchy, exotic sexuality, entangled female agency, and Edenic feminized Caribbean geography), cannibal, and camouflage, Césaire critically interrogates what she calls a “Martinican pseudo-civilization” and carves out a methodology to annihilate the tenets of exoticism and mimicry, to produce a new and emancipatory aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, I contend that her essays astutely observe the social and political implications of the enslavement of nature and of men and women through nature and methodically analyze the intricacies surrounding the emergence of a culture, an aesthetics, and a land consciousness. I argue that through her work she offers a comprehensive outlook of the most significant

literary and political preoccupations of *Tropiques*. In so doing, Césaire is the spokes-theorist of *Tropiques*.

Clarisse Zimra demonstrates that Francophone Caribbean women writers' positions on négritude must be apprehended in their fictional work. The challenge for these writers in modeling a fictional négritude is twofold since, as Zimra expresses it, they need to "come out from under the double patriarchal jeopardy of the islands" both as niggers and as females "before [they] can all proceed to a world wide, 'fully human' dimension" (1984: 61–62). Interestingly enough, even though she acknowledges that "Suzanne Césaire was her husband's collaborator and contributed to the creation of *Tropiques*, passionately arguing for the end of imitative literatures and a new, original poetics," Zimra (56) does not direct close attention to Suzanne Césaire's new poetics. Instead, she focuses on the works of Maryse Condé, Marie-Magdeleine Carbet, Jacqueline Manicom, Michèle Lacroisil, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and Jeanne Hyvrard to bring out the fictional dimension of négritude. In addition, Condé's stark critique of Aimé Césaire's négritude in the 1970s adequately frames Zimra's argument, since she sees Condé's critique "as just as necessary a liberating step for the younger generation, as standing up to the white man under the banner of *négritude* had been for their elders" (61).<sup>3</sup> Has Zimra concluded that Suzanne Césaire's "original new poetics," as she terms it, was too close to her husband's négritude to warrant closer examination, especially since Zimra dismisses the masculine genealogy of the movement? If this assumption is inaccurate, how should one interpret, then, her hasty yet laudatory recognition of the central role Suzanne Césaire played in the creation of *Tropiques*?

Regardless of the peculiarity of Zimra's methodology and the critical choices in her oversight, I identify in her study a rhetoric of restraint that can also be found in Nick Nesbitt's recently published *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant*. Nesbitt does not choose to have Suzanne Césaire take part in a dialogue with the other male theorists about what he calls the "Caribbean critical imperative."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, he refers to how Condé—the only female Caribbean theorist whose work is examined in his book—characterized Suzanne Césaire's significant legacy: "Condé points to Césaire as the inventor, theorist, and practitioner of the 'literary cannibalism' that her husband would later describe. . . . Condé recognizes Suzanne Césaire as an important Caribbean thinker and proposes that the general failure to recognize the importance of her contributions to Antillean letters reveals a reactionary, phallogocentric dismissal of her independent mind" (Nesbitt 2013: 128–29). Zimra's and Nesbitt's modes of inquiry, published twenty-nine years apart, have the merit of interrogating masculine

genealogies of Caribbean critique, reassessing overlooked theoretical voices, proposing critical imperatives, redefining Caribbean modes of critique, and examining the distinctiveness of Caribbean critical theory and its ongoing contribution to critical theory. However, there are certain contradictions in their endeavors that separate their intentions from their actual practice of rethinking Caribbean critique, especially with respect to Suzanne Césaire's work. I investigate these lacunae and disrupt this interstitial zone where Zimra's and Nesbitt's well-intentioned claims and their simultaneous reluctance to discuss Césaire's work confront each other. To do her justice, my study explores what I call Césaire's Caribbean eco-poetics.

### Shifting the Frameworks of Caribbean Critique

Suzanne Césaire (1915–1966) played a key role in shaping the political and theoretical orientation of *Tropiques*, a major Martinican literary and cultural journal, published between 1941 and 1945. Although she cofounded *Tropiques* with Aimé Césaire and Martinican philosopher René Ménéil and published regularly in the journal, she was known primarily as the wife of Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), the world-acclaimed Martinican poet, playwright, essayist, and politician. *Tropiques* contributed to the ideological nurturing of Martinican intellectuals, as it articulated a cultural dissidence with the quasi-dictatorial regime of Admiral Georges Robert, the high commissioner of the Vichy government to the Antilles and French Guiana from 1939 to 1943. *Tropiques* advocated not for *négritude* per se but for the emergence of a multiplicity of aesthetic practices and discourses that interrogated the affects and psychological predicaments generated by the ideological principles of assimilation in the context of French colonialism.

Drawing on Aristotle's concepts of *poiesis* and *mimesis* as related to the production of discourse, the description of literary forms, and the articulation of epistemological reflections about diverse literary and linguistic forms and imaginaries, I use the term *poetics* to characterize Suzanne Césaire's writing as a nature-centered discursive practice where the Caribbean landscape and weatherscape are astutely woven together with issues of colonial expansion, historical trauma, social injustice, and struggle for political agency in the Caribbean. I contend that in her work, her perception of Caribbean space goes beyond the notion of exotic wanderings, the purity of nature, and romantic reverie, to evolve toward ecopolitical awareness.

My approach of eco-poetics expands the epistemological underpinnings of the Euro-American ecocritical canon and, as such, coincides with Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley's observation that "recent

scholarship theorizing the development of ecocriticism and environmentalism has positioned Europe and the United States as the epistemological centers, while the rest of the world has, for material or ideological reasons, been thought to have arrived belatedly, or with less focused commitment,” to sound ecocritical conceptualizations (2011a: 8). They propose to include diverse ecocritical imaginaries, methodologies, and discourses from the global South that have always examined and theorized the relations between humans and the land. Likewise, they stipulate that to prevent postcolonial literatures from being relegated to “the footnotes of mainstream ecocritical study” and in order not to “homogenize the complexity of ecocritical work,” it is important not to adopt “one genealogy of ecocriticism . . . that is blind to race, class, gender, and colonial inequities” (9).

After Martinican historian Roland Suvélor reiterated in an interview with me in 2008 that Suzanne Césaire articulated the theoretical orientation of *Tropiques* and embodied the critical and dissident vision of the journal, I was subsequently struck that her practice of theorizing, of meshing pamphlets, a nonconformist and oppositional rhetoric, and strongly personalized prose-like lyrical and critical texts, was akin to Kamau Brathwaite’s call for a “tidalectics,” that is, the intertwining of Caribbean landscape, seascape, and history in the shaping of resonant Caribbean literary and cultural productions (pers. comm., Fort-de-France, Martinique, December 3, 2008). As a counterepistemology to a Hegelian dialectic, and “as a ripple and a two tide movement,” Brathwaite’s (1999: 34) tidalectical poetic performance underscores the anthropology of historicized bodies and voices crossing the Middle Passage and emphasizes the interconnection of old and new worlds in the creation of diasporic communities and imaginaries.

I also perceive how Suzanne Césaire’s practice of bringing land sovereignty, ethnic hybridity, body anthropologies, ecological disturbances, and historical trauma into the realm of an ecopolitical positionality resonates with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s recent conceptualization of globalectics. By calling for a “globalectical imagination,” he advocates for the “riches of a poor theory” that questions the inert allure of theory when it is “weighed down by ornaments.” Thus globalectics is a symbiosis of “the global and the dialectical to describe a mutually affecting dialogue, or multi-logue, in the phenomena of nature and nurture in a global space” (Ngũgĩ 2012: 1–8). It is notable that his globalectics echoes the Glissantian paradigm of relation, as well as Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s (2011: 2) call for a theory that adopts the anthropological model of creolization to foreground the underpinnings of a cross-disciplinary theoretical framework in order to do “justice to the

lived realities of subaltern subjects, while explaining their experiences in terms of an epistemology that remains connected to those realities.”

Rather than simply advocating that Suzanne Césaire laid out the critical underpinnings of these aforementioned epistemologies that speak to relationality, I am more interested in examining how, in the early 1940s, she established a fruitful and critical conversation with her European (Léo Frobenius, André Breton) and Martinican peers (the contributors of *Tropiques*), including Aimé Césaire, in her desire to carve out Martinican cultural theories. For instance, how should we understand why she decrees the birth of “a cannibal Martinican poetry” (S. Césaire 2012d: 27) and why she argues that the desire for mimicry that was originally performed by Martinicans as “a defense mechanism against an oppressive society” has subsequently “migrated to the area of fearsome secret forces in the unconscious” (S. Césaire 2012c: 32)? Similarly, it is worth exploring if what she calls “une inquiétude ancestrale” (“an ancestral anxiety”) (28) is an insightful conversation with Aimé Césaire’s *négritude*.

The following passage, often quoted in scholarship on Suzanne Césaire, reveals one of her most thought-provoking declarations and deserves further attention: “Come on now, real poetry lies elsewhere. Far from rhymes, laments, sea breezes, parrots. Stiff and stout bamboos changing direction, we decree the death of sappy, sentimental, folkloric literature. And to hell with hibiscus, frangipani, and bougainvillea. *Martinican poetry will be cannibal or it will not be*” (2012d: 27; emphasis added). The terms *bamboos*, *littérature doudou*, and *cannibal* need to be foregrounded because they allow her to address key questions that are at the core of her theoretical reflection on Caribbean literature: How should Caribbean-born writers rethink the tactics of agency carved out by local communities, how should they bring ecocides and the traumatic history of the New World in a multilogue with the land, and which paradigms are relevant to deconstruct the early Edenic appropriations of the Caribbean? Césaire articulated her oppositional discourse by addressing issues relating to land exploration, destruction, and dispossession. Interweaving the implications of the conquest of the New World with slavery, slave rebellions, post-slavery farmhand strikes, and the repressions of the Vichy regime in Martinique from 1939 to 1943, she shows that the land in the Caribbean has been repeatedly, since colonial expansions, the template of capitalism and disempowerment but also the matrix of a post-plantation literary consciousness.

In “Misery of a Poetry: John Antoine Nau,” she reflects on the necessity for Caribbean writers to eschew sentimental, folkloric literature, or *littérature*

*doudou*. Thus she refers to Nau's poetry, which "Martinicans have not forgotten," because no one like Nau has described "more amorously . . . the 'charm' of Creole life," the "languor," the "sweetness," and the peacefulness of Martinican landscapes. "Saint Pierre, the volcano," the hill, and "mornings like blue satin" (S. Césaire 2012d: 25) are artificialities that she vividly rejects.

Nau (1860–1918) was a French writer whose 1903 novel *Force ennemie* was awarded the inaugural Goncourt Prize that same year. He was haunted by the discovery of new geographical horizons, mostly in the tropics, and his numerous errancies nurtured his poetic impulse. He traveled to Martinique in the early 1880s and through his poems remained forever nostalgic of its beauty as an island.

The ideology of *doudouisme* from which sentimental literature like Nau's emerged is evident in the relatedness of his enchantment with the beauty of the Caribbean landscape and the birth of his poetic imaginary from this particular enchantment. Fifty years after Nau's travels to Martinique, *doudouisme* was vivid in Martinican literature as well as in the colonial mentality and the Vichyist propaganda tailored by Admiral Robert. *Doudouisme* is this intertwining of exoticism, assimilation, political patriarchy, the male colonial gaze, and a feminized vision of the islands that Suzanne Césaire rebuffs as a deficient paradigm for the architecture of a new Martinican literature. For Césaire, Nau embodies this exotic imaginary and his poetry is tailored to represent it, and she elaborates the critical angles through which *doudouisme* can be examined and deconstructed.<sup>5</sup> She establishes Nau's poetry as the kind of text that should be rewritten, because it is trapped within the logics of imaginaries and blurs that prevents the burgeoning of a new aesthetics "that responds to a new consciousness of the world, to a new consciousness of the human" (S. Césaire 2012a: 18). Although Nau is directly rejected in her essay, it is, nevertheless, an entire *doudouist* Parnassus that is being attacked, as she refers later in the essay to Leconte de Lisle, José-Maria de Heredia, and Francis Jammes.

Similarly, by subtly including the initials CGT for Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (General Transatlantic Company), a French ship line, in a list of the problematic ingredients of literary tourism that must be avoided in the formation of a new Martinican poetry, she invites us to reconsider key historical facts, including the 1935 commemorations of three hundred years (1635–1935) of colonial contact between France and the Antilles. To follow her argument, we need to pay attention to the ship line CGT, which was in 1935 one of the major vehicles for translating, symbolically and concretely, the imaginaries and propaganda of a successful French colonization in the

Antilles. Among the plethora of grandiose commemorations of the tercentenary in Paris and in the French Antilles in 1935 was a sumptuous cruise organized in December onboard the *Colombie*, a ship that belonged to the CGT. Besides these events, I see Césaire's reference to the CGT as a close dissection of a *doudouist* habitus that will determine Nau's aesthetics. Reusing Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of the habitus as an "immanent law," which is "the precondition not only for the coordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination" (1979: 272), I see Nau's aesthetics as a habitus in the sense that his *doudouist* scape is not a hypothesis but a self-evident and instinctive principle that constantly fuels the imaginaries. Nau is part of a process of the collective acquisition of a literary habitus, through which generations of French exotic writers have printed in their imaginary a fixed and repetitive process of literary representations of the French Antilles.

Because of a mind-set determined by a permanent nostalgia and constant feelings of estrangement in Europe, Nau in his poetry seeks to capture the essence of a specific soul inscribed in the Caribbean landscape.

Reconsidering Nau's participation in this poetic quest for a black soul, Suzanne Césaire observes: "Il passe à côté. Il regarde. Mais il n'a pas 'vu.' Il lui arrive de plaindre le nègre. Mais Nau n'a pas connu l'âme nègre" (1942b: 49) ("He misses the point. He looks. But he has not 'seen.' He manages to 'pity' the Black. But he has not experienced the Black soul" [2012d: 26]).<sup>6</sup> To illustrate her comment, she cites long excerpts of Nau's poem "Lily Dale," where he reflects upon the poor living conditions of a black girl in the bayous of Louisiana and the sexual brutalities she is exposed to. For Césaire, two perspectives confront each other: Nau looks but cannot realize and fully assess the social and historical predicaments that determine this "Black soul." In the passages that she chooses to focus on, she observes how Nau's two imagined characters, Lily, the little black girl from the South, and the good black Martinican fishermen "cast upon the water like . . . flies" and "lost in the blue ocean spray," watching, "heart panged, volcanic peaks of mauve fade away" (S. Césaire 2012d: 25), are transposed into geographies—the bayous of Louisiana and the Caribbean Sea—that are too embroidered to shape the eco-poetics that she advocates for. By dismissing Nau's supposedly profound interior vision of the land and the people, Césaire crafts an eco-poetics where the landscape, the seascape, and a historical mindscape coalesce to mold a new aesthetics that she calls "cannibal."

Reappropriating Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1986: 18) conceptual mapping of deterritorialization and reterritorialization to define a minor literature as a political, collective, subversive, and revolutionary

“machine-to-come of expression,” I argue that Césaire’s conceptual cannibalism, or her aesthetic intention, has a function of escape and rejuvenation in reaction to the effects of colonial expansions, the imagined geography of *doudouisme*, and the territorial transformation of Martinique and the French Antilles into a dictator’s colony under Robert’s Vichy regime. Deleuze and Guattari posit that since “minor . . . designates . . . the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature” (18), and since “there is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor” (26), the minor writer can carve out “the possibility to express another possible community” (17), to connect “the individual to political immediacy” (18), and “forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (17). Interestingly enough, Césaire’s use of the notion of “misery” is significant since it qualifies not only the nonemancipatory potential of *doudou* literature but also the colonized and subaltern matrix, namely, cannibal, from which will emerge a new literary mode of existence.

Her deterritorialization of a prevalent, well-established, and institutionalized *doudou* aesthetic produces a line of escape for a fragile community. Thus, while Aimé Césaire’s *négritude* focuses on race, humanism, and emancipation, her conceptual cannibalism is a declaration of cultural and civilizational existence as well as an aesthetic intention. Suzanne Césaire’s conceptual cannibalism, her ecopoetics, excavates, deterritorializes, and reterritorializes the primal insult of the first explorers’ “cannibal,” whereas Aimé Césaire excavates, annihilates, and then valorizes the second insult of the colonists: “Negro.” He declared in the last years of his life: “Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai” (“Negro I am, Negro I will be”) (A. Césaire 2005). Had Suzanne Césaire lived until the early twenty-first century, she might have declared: “Cannibal I was called, cannibal I am in my mode of deterritorializing practices of representation of otherness.” Hence I read Aimé Césaire’s reconfiguration of Shakespeare’s Caliban, the monster, into a political, insubordinate, and revolutionary Caliban, as a theatricalization of Suzanne Césaire’s conceptualization of cannibalism.

In this post-Columbus Shakespearian perspective, Suzanne Césaire’s cannibal act of talking back interweaves the geological and historical realities of the *morne*, the Caribbean hill, which bears witness to the Caribbean people’s struggle for political and economic agency and deflates the CGT and the *Blue Guide* as the two routes of “hammock literature.” She writes: “But what about the ‘wondrousness’ of the tropical mountain? Its malefic aura? Its hard promise? The explosive power of the mountain? Rather than that, swoons, blues, golds, and some pink. That’s nice. How overdone! Litera-



ture? Yes. Hammock literature. Literature made of sugar and vanilla. Tourist literature. The Blue Travel Guide and [General Transatlantic Company] Poetry, not in the least" (S. Césaire 2012d: 26–27). Pinpointing the *Blue Guide* as "literature made of sugar and vanilla," she foretells Roland Barthes's rigorous critique of the *Guide bleu* in *Mythologies*, published in 1957, where he explains that because the "*Guide* testifies to the futility of all analytical descriptions, those which reject both explanations and phenomenology, . . . [it] becomes, through an operation common to all mystifications, the very opposite of what it advertises, an agent of blindness" (1972: 74–76). Focusing on descriptions of Spaniards in the *Blue Guide*, Barthes (75) shows how it is the virus of essentialism, so particular to the bourgeois mythology of the human being, that characterizes the *Blue Guide*'s permanent masking and reduction of human experiences to a "graceful commedia dell'arte." Barthes's discussion of this virus of essences is precisely at the core of Suzanne Césaire's critique of Nau's reduction of the socioeconomic conditions of Martinican fishermen to a neat ballet of flies scattered on the Caribbean Sea. The dichotomy between Nau's "swoons," "laments," and "sea breezes" and the fishermen's abrupt socioeconomic reality unveils the very notion of blindness that Barthes proposes as the major attribute of the *Blue Guide* and which echoes Césaire's notion of camouflage, a key aspect of her eco-poetics.

[And so] the Caribbean conflagration blows its silent fumes, blinding for the only eyes that know how to see, and suddenly the blues of the Haitian mountains, of the Martinican bays, turn dull, suddenly the most glazy reds go pale, and the sun is no longer a crystal play of light, and . . . if the flowers have known how to find just the right colors to leave one dumbstruck, . . . if my Caribbean islands are so beautiful, then it is because the great game of hide-and-peek has [prevailed], it is then because, on that day, the weather is most certainly too blindingly bright and beautiful [for us] to see clearly therein. (S. Césaire 2012b: 45–46)

As an antidote to hammock, *Blue Guide*, and CGT literature, her eco-poetics unveils a *morne* that is malevolent, while Nau retains the imagery of the "white laughing" *morne* "that triggers reveries and upon which an anguishing but intense happiness glides" (Nau 1904: 156). Nau's *mornes* are rounded and steep cliffs invaded with soft exoticism. One recalls the omnipresence of the *morne* in the opening pages of Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. His *morne* is *famélique* (famished):

Its malarial blood puts the sun to rout with its overheated pulses.  
 . . . The repressed fire of the morne [is] like a sob gagged on the verge of blood-thirsty outburst, searching for an evasive and unconscious ignition.  
 . . . The morne squatting in front of a boulimia a craving for thunderstorms and mills, slowly vomiting its human exhaustion . . .  
 . . . The famished morne, and no one knows better than this bastard morne why the suicide victim, aided by its hypoglossus, choked by rolling back his tongue and swallowing it. (A. Césaire 1995: 75–77)

The anagrammatic twist between Aimé Césaire's *famélique* and Suzanne Césaire's *maléfique*—though not perceptible in English—does not evoke, to me, a harmonious assonance. Instead, it reveals an insightful dialogue between *Notebook*—which is hardly known in 1942—and Suzanne Césaire's "Misery of a Poetry." Through her notion of malevolent *morne*, while she lays out the underpinnings of her new cannibal Martinican poetry, she offers the first critical look at Aimé Césaire's *Notebook*. Thus I contend that "Misery of a Poetry" establishes the *morne* as a key paradigm for Caribbean critical theory but also articulates Suzanne Césaire's first critical assessment of the aesthetic, social, and historical dimensions of Aimé Césaire's *Notebook* before Breton's "Un grand poète noir," written in New York in 1943 and published in *Tropiques*, no. 11, in 1944 and then in *Martinique Snake Charmer* in 1948. Her conceptualization of the *morne* is an example of the specificity of her thought process, in her use of one single concept that spreads out to various social, historical, and political events and meshes into multiple critical horizons, literary traditions, and aesthetics. I argue that, whereas the *morne* is a metaphor and is metamorphosed in Aimé Césaire's poetry, the *morne* is a method and has a theoretical potential in what I call Suzanne Césaire's geography of thought and thought of geography. Likewise, the *morne* stands as a contested third space where its uncanny beauty meets with the tragedies of a violent history.

While Nau's Edenic iconography of the magnificent tropics is tied to the exoticism of the 1935 commemoration of the tercentenary, I posit that Suzanne Césaire's critical paradigm of the *morne* is shaped and inscribed in the spirit of the social upheavals that occurred in Martinique in 1935. On February 11, 1935, Martinican sugarcane workers marched for the first time to Fort-de-France in a protest against hunger and miserable wages. In *La crise de février 1935 à la Martinique: La marche de la faim sur Fort-de-France*, Martinican historian Edouard de Lépine (1980) remarks that these historical and audacious street demonstrations in the heart of Fort-de-France, by a then ostensibly silent Martinican labor class, heralded in 1935 the birth of a

sociopolitical awareness, the emergence of Martinican trade unions, and the necessity for collective struggles against exploitation by sugarcane industry owners, an exploitation that prolonged the slave system under the guise of a patriarchal capitalism.

In Suzanne Césaire's eco-poetics, the *morne* is a locus of entanglements where social cataclysms, ecological disturbances, land dispossession, political awareness, and cultural agency are constantly interrogated. This certainly reminds us of how the *morne* and the plantation subsequently stood out as two of the hallmarks of Edouard Glissant's fictional oeuvre and his philosophical poetics and more specifically his relational aesthetics between community and land.<sup>8</sup> Considering Glissant's fruitful dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari in reconfiguring their remapping of relationality, and their conceptualization of models of thought through a metaphorical use of the botanical characteristics of the "rhizome" and the "root," one can only but regret Glissant's missed opportunity to articulate a fruitful dialogue with Suzanne Césaire. Indeed, his critical distinction between ecology as politics (criticism of the sacredness and exclusiveness of the territory and a driving force for the relational interdependence of all lands) and ecology as mysticism (an infertile way of thinking about the earth, a sacred thought of territory akin to the "return to the land" championed by Maréchal Philippe Pétain) (Glissant 1997: 146–47) evolves around her eco-poetics.

Glissant's reference to Pétain's unproductive call to return to the land nearly relates his conceptualization of ecological mysticism to the grim political context of the Vichy government in Martinique. It was during this time, under the plenipotentiary gaze of the information services of Admiral Robert, that Suzanne Césaire camouflaged her oppositional eco-poetics, established the *morne* as the pillar of a new aesthetic, and redefined the Martinican as an Ethiopian *homme plante*, that is to say, "the long-lasting and fruitful harmony" between the land and Martinican people "inhabited by the Ethiopian desire for abandon" (2012c: 30–31).

This notion of the Ethiopian *homme plante* is the synthesis of a reflection that Césaire carefully carves out from Frobenius's ethnographic conceptualization, in the early 1920s, of the meaning of Africanness and civilization. In "Léo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations" (S. Césaire 1941b), her first analytical essay and the very first critical essay of *Tropiques*, she lays the foundations of a necessary critical reflection with the German anthropologist's cultural theory but also articulates the orientation of her thought process. With this article, one cannot argue that she merely follows the steps of Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, whose conceptualizations of

their *négritude* had been significantly influenced by Frobenius's work. With this essay she tackles the difficult task of articulating Caribbean cultural theories through European models of thought, in order to configure an aesthetics that will express the particularities of a "Martinican civilization." With her appreciation of Frobenius's ethnology and later of Breton's surrealism, she recognizes the value of the critical tools they lay out, but she also proposes a constant retheorization and reconfiguration of these European critical tools, as one can see in her last essay, "The Great Camouflage."

Although Frobenius's theories are groundbreaking and audacious for this time, and they deconstruct G. W. F. Hegel's discourse on the primitive African and the barbarous and nonhistorical African continent, they are deeply problematic in the sense that they construct an ideal African essentialism that will continue to nourish anthropological theories that distinguish between Western rationality and non-Western mentality confined in a repetitive, primitive, and mythical cycle.

Unlike Senghor, who considered Frobenius to be "the spiritual energy behind the emancipation of a black Africa, which had once developed an original and beautiful civilization, and whose idealistic vision of an untamed Africa, not yet contaminated by external influences, vividly nourished the fervor of young *Négritude* militants" (1978: 147–48; my translation), Suzanne Césaire did not celebrate Frobenius's conceptualization of an African essence per se. Again, for Senghor, Frobenius prompted the *négritude* militants' abilities to "get out of the ghetto of the original phase of *Négritude*" and "open it to a harmonious consent" and "an integral humanism" (1973: 403; my translation).

Instead, I contend, Césaire focused more on Frobenius's major research objective: the understanding of the origin of cultures and their complexities and the emergence of civilizations under the impetus of profound and obscure forces that cannot be apprehended through a cognitive and intellectual analysis of the world because of their relatedness to plants, the cosmos, and seasonal cycles.

Similarly, to reach this major objective, Frobenius argued that *paï-deuma*, that is, the ability to be profoundly seized by a mysterious and abstract organic force that predates humanity, manifests itself under two separate forms of civilizations: the Ethiopian civilization (primitive mysticism related to the vegetative cycle of life) and the Hamitic civilization (the right to conquer and dominate). Following Frobenius's framework, Césaire pinpoints, for example, the local tradition of burying the placenta under a coconut tree or a banana tree, or she elects that, in its architecture, the Martinican shack

is “an exact reproduction . . . of the huts of the Beni-Maï people” of the Congo Kasai region, where “dominates the ‘Ethiopian’ sentiment of life.” She concludes then that the “Martinican is typically Ethiopian” (S. Césaire 2012c: 30). He is, “in the depths of his consciousness,” a “plant-human,” and “while identifying oneself with the plant, the desire is to abandon oneself to the rhythm of life” (31). This anthropological insight is certainly problematic, since it does not take into consideration the complex dimension of hybridity that defines the Martinican people and to which Césaire refers at the end of this essay. Recognizing the challenge that poses a strict stratification of the Martinican people into these two categories, the Hamitic and the Ethiopian, she observes, however: “Hence, the drama, evident for those who analyze in depth the collective self of the Martinican people: its unconscious continues to be inhabited by the Ethiopian desire for abandon. However its consciousness, or rather its pre-consciousness, accepts the Hamitic desire for competitiveness. The race for economic fortune, diplomas, unscrupulous social climbing. A struggle shrunken to the standard of being middle class. The pursuit of monkeyshines. Vanity Fair” (32).<sup>9</sup> Négritude is not mentioned in her article on Frobenius because the cornerstone of her thought process is to articulate the grammar of a “pseudo-Martinican civilization” and a new “Martinican cannibal literature.” Indeed, she declares:

Let me be clear:

It is not at all about a backwards return, a resurrection of an African past that we have learned to know and respect. On the contrary, it is about a mobilization of every living strength brought together upon this earth where race is the result of the most unremitting intermixing; it is about becoming conscious of the incredible store of varied energies until now locked up within us. We must now deploy them to the maximum without deviation, without falsification. Too bad for those who consider us mere dreamers. The most unsettling reality is our own. We shall act. This land, ours, can only be what we want it to be. (33)

For Césaire, there has been in Martinique “a coerced submission, under pain of the whip and death, to a system of ‘civilization,’ to a ‘style’ both even stranger to the new arrivals than the tropical land itself” (29). Furthermore, she observes that as Martinicans they have been “in the past . . . unconcerned about expressing [their] ancestral anxiety” and that “the urgency of this cultural problem escapes those who . . . [do] not [want] to be disturbed from an artificial peace” (28); hence, for her to decree “the death of folkloric

literature" (27) so that a cannibal poetry can emerge, she opts to carve out a method whose preface is crafted through Frobenius's discussion of the relation between the profound emotional experience of culture that results from the action of the obscure forces of the *paideuma* and the subsequent representation of this emotional experience through art.

Therefore, one understands the acute organization and evolution of her thought process, with which she first tackles the complexities of the formation of civilization and confronts the question of aesthetics with her article on French philosopher Emile-Auguste Chartier (also known as Alain) and her two essays on surrealism as the "tightrope of hope" of French Caribbean intellectuals (S. Césaire 1943: 18). Her discussion of Frobenius's idea of civilization reveals the specificity of her thought process, which to evolve from observation to method needed to foreground the essential questions that French Caribbean intellectuals of *Revue du monde noir* and *Légitime défense* posited in the early 1920s and which are debated in *Tropiques*, namely, her notion of "inquiétude ancestrale." Her thought process evolves from this very notion of ancestral anxiety to expand into a method of literary cannibalism over colonial camouflage, from an anxiety about questions of race and civilization into a method to carve out a lucid aesthetics that is necessary to rethink the fruitful literary paradigms.

It is important to observe that Suzanne Césaire's anthropological conceptualization is articulated within the context of Robert's tropicalization of Pétain's motto *Travail-famille-patrie*.<sup>10</sup> Through his reappropriation of the paradigms of labor, family, and homeland, which sustained France's sense of nationalism and strength under the Vichy government, Robert reimagined the relation between Martinicans and the land for the sole purposes of his colonial dictatorial ideology. To this extent, Robert's imagined Martinican people would include generations of laborers assimilated to the homeland, happily working in the sugarcane fields for the unique benefits of the *béké*<sup>11</sup> plantation owners who were lawful to Pétain's motto. It is essential to point out that in 1942, while Suzanne Césaire was deconstructing Robert's Martinican imagined community, by giving substance to the *morne* and the *homme plante*, Joseph Zobel, in the same year, articulated a similar counter-discourse to Robert's ideology through his character Diab'-la. Ultimately, Zobel's novel *Diab'-la (The Devil)* (1946) was censored by Robert's administration for its seditious construction of a narrative where the main character, Diab'-la, refuses to work in the sugarcane fields and defiantly works on his plot of land, on his *morne*, for his own well-being, at his own rhythm, and for the agency and prosperity of his community.<sup>12</sup>

Within this eco-poetic consciousness that circulates between Zobel's *Diab'-la* and Césaire's "Misery of a Poetry" and "The Malaise of a Civilization," I posit that her eco-poetics not only deconstructs Robert's Martinican imagined community but also articulates the origin of the genealogy of male Maroon characters in Caribbean literature.<sup>13</sup> Her eco-poetics of the *morne* is a counterhabitus, the habitus of an exoticism and a *doudouist* aesthetics channeled through the Edenic iconography of the Caribbean, namely, the hammock, the ship line CGT, the *Blue Guide*. As I developed earlier in this essay, a *doudouist* aesthetics rationalizes a self-evident and instinctive principle that fixes the French Antilles and its people within the paradigms of beauty, sexual consumption, and colonial patriarchy. A *doudouist* aesthetics is the habitus of the nonexistence of a Martinican reality. It is the habitus of an illusion, of a social and cultural deficiency, and as such it cannot be legitimate for the new liberating aesthetics that Césaire crafts with her conceptualization of the *morne*.

With her counter-*doudou* habitus, she clearly posits that from the perspective of the outsiders, their Edenic perception of the Caribbean cannot be ephemeral, because it is geared toward the selfish fulfillment of pleasure and the nourishment of an aesthetics. Because *doudouisme* is a self-evident rule in their imaginary, *doudouist* poets cowrite a colonial and patriarchal text and participate in an institutional and colonial masquerade. From the perspective of the local, nonwhite intellectuals, *doudouisme* creates confusion since their appropriation of the ideology and their own *doudouist* representation of the land and the people do not correspond to the daily colonial reality of the Antilles, which they unavoidably bypass. Hence, prefacing Frantz Fanon's own discussion of the neurotic existence of the Antillean *évolué* in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Suzanne Césaire pushes her argument further by declaring:

Not one upwardly mobile Martinican will ever admit that he is only engaging in mimicry, so natural, spontaneous, and born of legitimate aspirations does his present situation seem. And, in so doing he will be sincere. He honestly does not KNOW he mimics. He is *unaware* of his true nature, which nonetheless does exist. . . . The effort required of a Martinican in adapting to an unfamiliar life style will not have been without creating a state of pseudo-civilization that one can qualify as *abnormal*, of *teratoid aberration*.<sup>14</sup> (2012c: 32)

The vehement tone of her attack, her severe criticism of colonial professors who appreciate this *doudouist* poetry ("Misery of a Poetry"), reveals that it cannot be assumed that a *doudouist* habitus can disappear with time, but, on

the contrary, it can be dangerously stitched within the mind-set of future generations in the Antilles. Hence, by deconstructing the geography of utopia that is prevalent in the *doudou* ideology and that threatens to camouflage the colonial sociopolitical reality of the island, she offers a methodology that is deeply inscribed within the ecopolitical dimension of the *morne* so that the “great game of hide-and-seek” (“The Great Camouflage”) does not prevail. This is to me one of the most powerful contributions of Suzanne Césaire to Caribbean critical theory.

In the 1980s, Glissant’s poetics opposes the tranquility of the topos of the meadow, as it is reconfigured in a European aesthetics, to the *morne* and the plantation, as they are deployed in Caribbean literary aesthetics (Bader 1984: 92–93). For Suzanne Césaire, however, in 1942, one needs to fully capture how the threads of the canvas of *doudou* literature have been sutured in the imaginary of Martinican writers and how a methodology of resistance can subvert and dislocate the mimicry that nurtured the imaginary of Martinican writers in the 1940s. This is where the paradigm of the “stiff and stout bamboos” becomes significant in her methodology of resistance to the mimicry of an untenable *doudou* literature.

## Coda

In the opening lines of this essay, I showed how Suzanne Césaire is left out of the discussions that seek to elaborate a “Caribbean critical imperative,” in Nesbitt’s terms, or a mode, in Zimra’s terms, that reconfigures *négritude* through feminine lenses. Thus my discussion of Césaire’s Caribbean ecopoetics seeks not only to include her in a Caribbean critical imperative but also to make her part of a postcolonial engagement with an aesthetics of the earth as articulated in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley 2005) and *Postcolonial Ecologies* (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011b). In their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies*, DeLoughrey and Handley (2011a) reappropriate Glissant’s aesthetics of the earth and his conceptualization of the thought of the other / the other of thought as the matrix of their postcolonial ecology. I propose that an astute conversation between Césaire’s ecopoetics of *doudouisme*, *morne*, *homme plante*, cannibalism, and camouflage and Glissant’s aesthetics of the earth can complexify DeLoughrey and Handley’s postcolonial ecologies. It can also help us avoid “homogeniz[ing] the complexity of ecocritical work” and adopting “one genealogy of ecocriticism . . . that is blind to . . . gender and colonial inequities” (9), as they stipulate. Similarly, they observe that an aesthetics of the earth



for Glissant raises “the challenge of appreciating beauty even when the land and sea have been ravaged by colonial violence” (27). However, Suzanne Césaire lays out another important theoretical challenge when she shows that a postcolonial Caribbean literary consciousness must coalesce and interrogate *doudouisme*, mimicry, camouflage, lucidity, beauty, civilization, and enslavement of and through nature. Hence I posit that Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse* and *Poetics of Relation* are not the only epistemological centers of Caribbean ecocritical thought and that his discussion of land consciousness, relationality, and otherness deserves to be analyzed jointly with other Caribbean ecoconceptualizations and perhaps owes more than one may think to Suzanne Césaire’s.

Furthermore, I evaluate the complex type of “ecological thinking” that one needs to articulate in order not to idealize either Césaire’s eco-poetics or the Caribbean landscape. Thus, in her way of conceptualizing Martinican civilization according to the parameters of a *homme plante*, I perceive a reduction of nature, history, and ethnography that unsettles her very notion of Martinican civilization. Following Frobenius’s ethnographic observation of African civilization, she opts for, what is to me, an ambivalent Martinican *homme plante* fossilized in land, history, Ethiopianness, ethnography, and disenfranchisement. Césaire’s *homme plante* along with Zobel’s Diab’-la, who fathered literary sons such as Derek Walcott’s Makak and Simone Schwarz-Bart’s Wadamba, does call for post-Frobenius reflections on the Ethiopian *homme plante*. Nonetheless, Césaire’s eco-poetics is not an essentialist and contrived discourse,<sup>15</sup> and it is perhaps in her 1945 essay “The Great Camouflage,” through Bergilde, her fictional female dancer who actively participates in the shaping of a socioeconomic agency for Martinican workers, that Césaire translates her Ethiopian *homme plante*.

My study has sought not to idealize Suzanne Césaire’s critical paradigms but rather to shed light on them as meaningful prefaces and contributions to ongoing debates on entangled constructions of identity and land consciousness in Caribbean critical theory. By the same token, I insist on the necessity to interrogate the masculine genealogy of Caribbean critique and to reconfigure our epistemological centers and methodologies by insightfully widening the scope of our critical frameworks. Furthermore, I posit that when examining Césaire’s poetics, once the traditional genealogies of Caribbean critique have been deconstructed, once we have identified her work as a “literary treatise that prefaced the legacy of Shakespeare’s Caliban for the birth of Caribbean literary consciousness” (Condé 1995: 18), and once we have identified her as, to borrow again from Condé (1998: 66), “the

founding mother of all the postcolonial critics,” it is worth, as Smita Tripathi (2005: 116) observes, expanding Condé’s “linear, ‘stage-ist’ model [of thought] that does not . . . approximate the multidimensional textual frameworks in the *Tropiques* essays.”<sup>16</sup> I also question Daniel Maximin’s use of an old sepia photograph of Suzanne Césaire on the front cover of his novel *Soufrières* (1987). This photograph, which used to be on the inside cover of the first edition of *Tropiques*, has been used in many frameworks of Maximin’s oeuvre. In *Soufrières*, while he evidently uses her photograph to make Césaire—the “submerged mother” of the journal *Tropiques* (Brathwaite 1999: 29–33)—part of a multilogue with young Guadeloupean intellectuals anxiously awaiting the apocalyptic eruption of the Soufrière volcano in Guadeloupe, I argue that Maximin’s use of Césaire’s picture to shape his geopoetics<sup>17</sup> ambivalently articulates an orientalist epistemology.

In “The Great Camouflage,” Suzanne Césaire’s last, thought-provoking theoretical testament and also the final article of *Tropiques*, which ceased publication in 1945, she describes how, from the window of a plane, she “glimpses at a possible harvest in the process of ripening” and calls for “complete clear-sightedness to catch by surprise, beyond these shapes and perfect colors, the inner torments upon the very beautiful Antillean face” (1945: 268–69; my translation).

In *A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid describes, also from the window of a plane, the beauty of the island of Antigua from the perspective of a tourist whose plane descends for landing. Kincaid writes: “Antigua is too beautiful. . . . Sometimes the beauty of it seems as if it were stage sets for a play, for no real sunset could look like that. . . . The unreal way in which it is beautiful now that they are a free people is the unreal way in which it was beautiful when they were slaves” (1988: 77, 80). A tidalectics of “rememory,” to borrow from Toni Morrison (1987), connects Kincaid’s and Césaire’s land and aesthetic consciousness. No method, no paradigm, no landscape, no seascape is too poor to shape this oppositional tidalectics.

## Notes

- 1 This study draws from my book in progress titled “Dévoiler le camouflage: L’écopoétique caribéenne de Suzanne Césaire” (“Unveiling the Camouflage: Suzanne Césaire’s Caribbean Eco-poetics.”)
- 2 For an analysis of the origin of the term *doudou*, see Burton 1993. For a literary deconstruction of the *doudou*, see Lacascade 1924.
- 3 Zimra refers to the essay “Pourquoi la négritude? Négritude ou révolution?,” which Condé read at the conference “Négritude africaine, négritude caraïbe” at Université Paris-Nord, Villetaneuse, in 1973. In this essay, which Zimra relies on, Condé states: “Césaire’s

version of Negritude is nothing but a gratuitous descent into hell, a masochism with no effect on the struggle for liberation which it is supposed to achieve. Liberation can only be achieved by the prior assertion of our position in the family of man" (2014: 103).

4 The other theorists are Toussaint Louverture, Baron de Vastey, Aimé Césaire, René Ménénil, Frantz Fanon, and Edouard Glissant.

5 While Krista A. Thompson's (2007) concept "tropicalization" problematizes the appropriation and visualization of the Anglophone Caribbean for tourist consumption, the term *doudouisme* encompasses the complex intertwining of gender, patriarchy, and sexuality in an imagined Caribbean geography.

6 I suggest "he walks by" instead of "he misses the point," and I propose "he occasionally pities" instead of "he manages to."

7 It is essential to note that Keith L. Walker mistranslates the initials CGT as "General Confederation of Labor," for *Confédération Générale du Travail*, a French trade union whose initials are also CGT, and in so doing misguides the reader and loses the profound critical link that Césaire establishes between these two parameters of the literary tourism that she attacks, namely, *Guide bleu* and CGT (*Compagnie Générale Transatlantique*). Walker's mistranslation is misleading since it states that Césaire criticizes the French Union CGT and brings it within the realm of tourism literature, which is inaccurate, because she was a Communist, and this trade union had historic ties with the French Communist Party.

8 Marie-Agnès Sourieau's pertinent article "Suzanne Césaire et *Tropiques*" (1994: 76) reveals how Césaire's poetics of the community prefaces Glissant's remarks that Caribbean artists are the spokespersons of the collective conscious of their community.

9 I propose "being obsessed by mimics" to replace "the pursuit of monkeyshines," and "fascination for futilities" to replace "Vanity Fair."

10 Here my use of the term *tropicalization* differs from Thompson's (2007) concept.

11 *Béké* is a term used in Martinique to refer to a white Martinican ethnoclass, whose members are descended from early French settlers of the French Antilles.

12 Written in 1942 for his "Martinican compatriots who were moaning in the darkness of the 'National Revolution,'" as Zobel (1946: 9; my translation) states in an introductory note to his novel, *Diab-la* was ultimately published in April 1946.

13 This relational dynamics between the *morne* and the destiny of community is of course evident in contemporary Francophone and Anglophone literatures, as exemplified through the character of Papa Longoué in Glissant's fictional works or of Pipi in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Chronique des sept misères* (*Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*; see Curtius 2014) or as embodied through Simone Schwarz-Bart's Wademba and Ti-Jean in *Ti-Jean l'horizon* (*Between Two Worlds*), Derek Walcott's Makak in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, or Zampi in Ismith Khan's *The Obeah Man*.

14 Walker uses "upwardly mobile" to translate *évolué*. Most English translations of *Black Skin, White Masks* and scholarship on Fanon keep the French word *évolué*. The term *évolué* was commonly used in colonial Martinique and across the French colonial empire. It fully encompasses France's assimilation policy and civilizing mission and the strong desire of colonized people to be assimilated, which both Suzanne Césaire and Fanon problematize. Walker uses "teratoid" to translate the adjective *tératique*, which is also found in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. *Tératique* is also given as "teratical" in some English translations of *Cahier*.

- 15 Gérard Genette (1993: 5) opposes a closed and essentialist poetics to a conditionalist and open poetics that is not locked in a specific genre.
- 16 While I agree with Tripathi's (2005: 115) argument concerning Condé's methodology, I notice the contradiction in Tripathi's desire to position Césaire as a theorist who rethinks subjectivity in the context of wartime Martinique and her ambivalent use of "journalistic" to label Césaire's essays.
- 17 The term *geopoetics* travels through Maximin's essay *Les fruits du cyclone: Une géopoétique de la Caraïbe* (2006).

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