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# The Dialectics of Disaster: The Geopoetics of Catastrophe in French Caribbean Writing

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# THE DIALECTICS OF DISASTER: THE GEOPOETICS OF CATASTROPHE IN FRENCH CARIBBEAN WRITING

Volume I

Emily Eyestone

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## Abstract

This project brings together two historically distinct fields: postcolonial poetry and disaster studies. It argues that geophysical hazards endemic to the Caribbean, like hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanoes, play a central part in shaping the region's cultural identity and literary traditions, while also shaping its current political realities. While disaster studies researchers today emphasize vulnerability as a metric for evaluating the uneven exposure of certain communities and regions to the worst effects of disaster, the inclusion of colonialism's impacts as a specific criterion for understanding disaster has not been systematically explored. I suggest that French Caribbean poetry can enrich our understanding of the historical relation between ecological disasters and colonialism. Martinican authors like Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, and Edouard Glissant turn to geoclimatic hazards as a model from which to chart the convulsive chronology of Caribbean history, to contest Western models of dominance over the natural world, and to demonstrate the ways in which these such managerial paradigms increase disaster risk and ecological fragility. **Chapter 1** explores how Aimé Césaire fashions eruption into a subversive metaphor of anti-colonial resistance and racial awakening in his poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939). Given the urgent political praxis of much of the region's literature, **Chapter 2** traces the historical consequences of a series of disasters, beginning with the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée and culminating in the Vichy Occupation of the Antilles during WWII, to grasp how these events conditioned Antilleans' support for Departmentalization in 1946. **Chapter 3** considers the latent ecofeminism of Suzanne Césaire's essays, published in the literary journal, *Tropiques*, "cannibalize" a tradition of gendered-exotic fantasies of Caribbean space. I show how she enlists the chaotic, destructive forces of the Caribbean climate against cultural assimilation forms of development pursued at the expense of the local environment. **Chapter 4** investigates the early, under-studied poems of Edouard Glissant, from the 1954 collection, *La Terre inquiète.* Glissant proposes a revision of frameworks that perceive disasters as discrete, one-off events and instead insists on understanding disaster in terms of a constantly unfolding chaos. This dissertation argues that French Caribbean literature articulates an anticolonial paradigm for understanding disaster, in which the futures of marginalized communities and their environments are necessarily interdependent.

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## Introduction

In 1990, the Barbadian poet and theorist Kamau Brathwaite observed that "the hurricane does not roar in pentameter."[1] In the essay from which this quote is excerpted, Brathwaite considers the possibility of a distinctly Caribbean poetics. He explains that "we have been trying to break out of the entire pentametric model in the Caribbean and to move into a system that more closely and intimately approaches our own experience."[2] It is significant that Brathwaite chooses the hurricane as the model upon which the region's poetic expression should be based. Hurricanes are an annual reality in the Antilles, and as Brathwaite explains, their power and unpredictability shape not only the islands' geography but their cultural identity as well. Thus, natural disasters also shape how life in the region is expressed. Hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes, and floods characterize tropical space in a way that distinguishes it notably from more temperate northern climates. Rather than anomalies, extreme geophysical events are often seasonally recurrent realities. The deadly 2010 Earthquake in Haiti was a painful reminder that the island sits directly over the "Ring of Fire," the most active geological space on the planet. Inseparable from natural events, Caribbean islands continue to grapple with the inceptive human catastrophes which forced them into modernity (and indeed, through which European modernity was made possible): colonization, the genocide of indigenous populations, and plantation slavery. [3] If violent weather is to some extent an inevitable feature of Caribbean geography, its deadly effects are exacerbated by the fragile economic and ecological realities that have resulted from centuries

[1] Kamau Brathwaite, *Roots.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993, 265.
[2] Ibid., 265.
[3] These events are also the basis upon which European modernity was possible.

of exploitation, resource extraction, and plantation slavery.[4] Even in Caribbean countries that are now officially independent, the vestiges of colonial rule persist both culturally - in terms of language, religion, and certain traditions - and administratively, where state institutions frequently reproduce colonial prejudices that operate on the bases of race, color, and class. As a result, inequality continues to deepen in many Caribbean nations, ensuring that political power remains firmly in the hands of a limited elite, leaving many people poor, underemployed, and more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of severe weather and climate change. Regional economic disparities are also magnified by the dependency of island economies on global markets: multinational companies take advantage of cheap labor in countries with weak governments, low corporate tax rates, and lax labor regulations (or the inability to enforce them). Overdevelopment in urban areas because of industrialization further exposes poor communities to the worst impacts of environmental disaster. As Martin Munro explains, the imbrication of each of these forms of crisis contributes to an "apocalyptic cycle" that seems impossible to overcome.[5]

While natural hazards like hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes represent one form of disaster in the Caribbean space, the way they are experienced depends on the interrelated forms of crisis detailed above. It is not surprising therefore, that efforts to contend with environmental catastrophe appear frequently in the region's literature. Often, this writing emerges in the aftermath of events, like the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Rather than considering disaster narratives, which provide vital, personal testimony, this project focuses instead on how disaster is developed as a poetic device within the fabric of Caribbean poetry, politics, and history more

[4] Antonio Benitez-Rojo, "Sugar and the Environment in Cuba" in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, 33-50.
[5] Martin Munro, *Tropical Apocalypse: Haiti and the Caribbean End Times.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1-34.

broadly.[6] My dissertation explores how Caribbean writers aesthetically link geophysical disaster to the foundational, human catastrophe of colonialism, slavery, and their transhistorical legacy. As Anthony Carrigan points out, "there has been virtually no sustained analysis of the relationship between colonialism and disaster."[7] My project aims to partially fill in this gap by considering the colonial etiology of disaster, and how it is explored in Caribbean literature, and in some part, how the experience of disaster affected the relationships between France and its Antillean colonies, especially as the United States grew as the hegemonic power in the Atlantic over the course of the twentieth century. The objective of my dissertation is threefold: first, it shows how Caribbean literature reveals disaster as a metonym of historical vulnerabilities produced by slavery and colonialism, and sustained today through neoliberal free trade policies and harmful development initiatives that further expose areas of the Global South to environmental degradation. Second, it considers how disasters operate aesthetically within Caribbean writing to resist imperial geopolitics. Finally, it will explore how this geopoetics of disaster cultivated in the region's literature might help to reframe the rhetoric surrounding "natural" hazard, to instead emphasize its socio-historical causes. The corpus of works I have selected is limited to the contributions of Francophone authors from Martinique, as their work tends to address disaster in the context of a particular political relationship: first as colonies, and then as administrative departments of France. My analysis proceeds from one of the seminal works of anticolonial resistance, Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. This first chapter is

[6] Several studies have been published recently on disaster narratives. See Kasia Mika's *Disasters, Vulnerability, and Narratives: Writing Haiti's Futures*. New York, Routledge, 2019. Kate Rigby's *Dancing with Disaster: Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015; Mark Anderson's *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011; Martin Munro's *Writing on the Fault Line: Haitian Literature and the Earthquake of 2010*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014.

[7] Anthony Carrigan, "Toward a Postcolonial Disaster Studies," in *Global Ecologies and Postcolonial Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches.* Edited by Elizabeth DeLoughry, Didur, J. & Carrigan, A. New York: Routledge, 2015, 24.

followed by a more historical consideration of the ways in which twentieth-century disasters reframed Martinicans' relationship to the French state, ultimately foregrounding the Departmentalization decision in 1946. I then turn to Suzanne Césaire's original and highly sophisticated critique of development at the expense of the Caribbean environment in her essays for *Tropiques*, followed by an analysis of Edouard Glissant's early poetry collections. What I hope to show through this spatio-historical and literary progression is not only a diversity of geopoetic thought, but also the ways in which disaster forces writers to question and reframe models of postcolonial progress. I will return to this idea in greater detail in the conclusion.

In the opening of *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer proclaim that "the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity."[8] Writing in the aftermath of the twentieth century's worst human catastrophe, the Holocaust, Adorno and Horkheimer expose the limits of scientific knowledge in demystifying the natural world. They remind us that a positivist disenchantment of the earth is paradoxically founded upon the same - formerly sacred/religious - fear and othering of nature.[9] The Enlightenment effort to secularize nature disabuses Europeans of these beliefs and in their place, offers science as a means by which to not only understand, but to subdue and manage the natural world. Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis provide a framework for understanding "natural disaster" as an ideologically loaded term - one that views natural events as "other", unavoidable, and random; the result of geophysical processes beyond human control. This ontology of hazard has shaped the discourse surrounding disaster for the better part of 70 years. As Greg Bankoff explains, the opposition between human control and natural catastrophe implicitly reinforces relationships of colonial dependency. "The

[8] Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *The Dialectics of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 1.
[9] Ibid., 5.

concept of natural disasters forms part of a much wider historical and cultural geography of risk that both creates and maintains a particular depiction of large parts of the world (mainly non-Western countries) as dangerous places for us and ours. More importantly, it also serves as justification for Western interference and intervention in the affairs of those regions for our and their sakes."[10]

Recently, the field of disaster studies has attempted to create a synthesis of ecological, anthropological, and postcolonial approaches to tease out the social implications of hazards and add to the discourse, which has historically been the domain of policy makers and scientists. Anthony Carrigan defines disaster studies today as "an interdisciplinary field…concerned with managing crisis situations, seeking to reduce vulnerability and assist post-disaster recovery," and he traces its origins to the Cold War.[11] The United States had long held strategic interests in the Caribbean and wished to limit political instability in Latin America to thwart the spread of communism. Understanding that a severe hurricane or earthquake would only increase the fragility of newly independent states, the US developed an approach that Andrew Ross has called "planetary management," based on a logic of "centralized rationalization."[12] US policy makers and military leaders took for granted that disasters were entirely physical events, focusing their efforts in disaster response or technologic prediction. According to Mike Davis, "the social construction of 'natural disaster' is largely hidden from view by a way of thinking that simultaneously imposes false expectations on the environment and then explains the inevitable disappointments as proof of a malign and hostile nature."[13]

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[10] Gregory Bankoff, "Rendering the World Unsafe: Vulnerability as Western Discourse," *Disasters* 25:1 (2001): 27.
[11] Anthony Carrigan, "Toward a Postcolonial Disaster Studies," in *Global Ecologies and Postcolonial Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches,* 19-20.
[12] Andrew Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits*. New York: Verso, 1991, 207.
[13] Mike Davis, *The Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster.* New York: Vintage, 1999, 9.

Beginning in the 1970's, some social scientists began to question this approach and turned their attention to the underlying socio-historic causes of disaster. They ultimately proposed vulnerability as a metric for evaluating the susceptibility of certain regions to climate hazards. Vulnerability slowly entered the vocabulary of aid and development circles in the 1990's but was quickly divested of its critical and practical weight. This is because the solutions offered for mitigating vulnerability have generally focused on development. In fact, the report that followed the UN's World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan (2005) acknowledged that "official development programs can actually lead to greater vulnerability."[14] Discussions about uneven risk remain at the level of rhetoric, and when steps are taken to address risk reduction, the top-down, technocratic solutions offered are frequently out of step with the communities they are put in place to serve.[15] Folding vulnerability into the broader discourse of development has paradoxically undermined its socio-historical potency, once again proposing managerial solutions from the developed world as remedies to problems it has created in the Global South.

Nevertheless, the contributions of researchers in fields like anthropology, sociology, political science, and political ecology continue to integrate discussions of natural hazard with those about political economy and history. I submit that postcolonial literature is another field with a great deal to contribute to this area. Caribbean writers are uniquely aware of how their region's exposure to hazard is augmented by both past and present forms of exploitation. This historical consciousness and set of experiences distinguish Caribbean writing geographically and

[14] Mark Schuller, *Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016, 22.
[15] After the 2004 Tsunami in Southeast Asia, an effort was made to implement a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean. However, the infrastructure that was needed to allow for this communication was lacking in the coastal communities that would have been affected, defeating its entire purpose. See Ben Wisner & Peter Walker, "The World Conference on disaster viewed through the lens of political ecology: A dozen big questions for Kobe and Beyond," *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 16:2 (2005): 89-95.

aesthetically from other forms of modern literature. Caribbean identity is at the same time indelibly marked by its relationship to Europe and the United States, which have influenced its culture in significant ways. Many twentieth-century French Antillean poets were profoundly affected by figures like Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and André Breton among others. Their treatment of revolt, chance, storms, shipwrecks, colonial expansion, and political catastrophe have been taken up and projected into a postcolonial context by Caribbean writers like Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, and Edouard Glissant. Acknowledging those points of transhistorical and transnational connection is useful not only in tracing some of the important sources of francophone Caribbean poetry, but for comparative purposes as well. The ways in which the Césaires and Glissant critically engage European antecedents in conceptualizing an Antillean geopoetics emphasizes the central role that Western modernity has had in shaping what disaster means to Caribbean communities. Addressing such transcultural and transhistorical contacts encourages us to reconsider the temporality and spatiality of disaster. Rather than discrete events happening in the postcolonial periphery, this approach underscores how natural disaster is always the result of aggregated historical vulnerabilities produced at the intersection of global power relations.

Several recent studies have clarified the relationship between ecological disruption, colonial history, and resulting political developments in the Caribbean. As noted above Matthew Mulcahy focuses on the impacts of tropical storms in shaping the early British empire while Sherry Johnson undertakes a historically broader analysis of the impacts of El Nino and El Nino climate patterns in stoking revolution and reform in Cuba and the Spanish Caribbean. Christopher Church's 2017 monograph, *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean* engages a similar approach, analyzing how a series of disasters at the close of

the nineteenth century, culminating the devastating eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902, shifted ideas about citizenship, identity and belonging among both Antilleans and metropolitans.[16] Church's work is notable in that it touches on two essential features that have defined the relationship between France and its oldest colonies; namely, environment and race. Church underscores how both the environmental disaster and the islands' traumatic histories with plantation slavery conditioned black Antilleans' feelings of civic belonging within the French nation. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Antilleans' experiences with disaster shaped and shifted the islands' political relationships with France in significant ways, ways that I will argue set the stage for the Departmentalization Law in 1946.

**Defining geopoetics**

In his 2006 book, *Les Fruits du cyclone: une géopoétique de la Caraïbe*, the Guadeloupean theorist, Daniel Maximin, argues for a unique Caribbean form of literary expression that enlists the variety of geophysical features of the region as a means of contesting imperial geopolitics.[17] Maximin's definition of geopoetics differs from the one developed by Scottish poet, Kenneth White, in the 1970's. White's geopoetics is based on the idea that nature is under threat from an encroaching and toxic consumerism. The solution he proposes is "world poetry," a reconstituted language that "emerges from the contact between the human mind and the matter-energy of the universe."[18] White devises a sort of Nietzschian artist-philosopher (what he terms the "traveler-poet") who alone can bridge the disciplinary divide between philosophy and poetry, as well as the ontological barrier between nature and society. The traveler-poet

[16] Christopher Church, *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.
[17] Daniel Maximin, *Les Fruits du Cyclone: une géopoetique de la Caraïbe.* Paris: Seuil, 2006, 106-108.
[18] Kenneth White, *Open World - The Collected Poems 1960-2000*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 2003, xxvi.

accomplishes his task in part through a nomadic exploration of unseen or historically marginalized spaces. White's idealized "world poetry" is based on an erasure of local difference as the means of transcending antimonies between nature, culture, and science. It also reinforces problematic colonizer penetration fantasies by erecting the figure of a European "traveler-poet" in the image of Rimbaud or Baudelaire who is alone capable of establishing this order of "true" poetry in which word and world are reconciled.

Maximin presents a very different view of geopoetics: rather than exacerbating the dichotomy between nature and culture, he demonstrates how they might be thought of as mutually constitutive. Maximin's geopoetics proposes that the Caribbean - its land, history, and people, are all "les fruits du cyclone." For him, hurricanes and other natural hazards are so foundational to Caribbean history and experience that they must be properly centered in order for the region to be understood. Maximin's geopoetics disputes Western assumptions about nature as subject to human mastery, pushing back on conventional geopolitical logic. His understanding of geopoetics as a form of resistance to exploitative political relations illustrates its practicality and cross-disciplinary salience. Maximin's geopoetics opens up points of contact between literature scholars, geographers, policy makers, and climate researchers. A Caribbean geopoetics can encourage scholars to re-orient and re-frame reactionary approaches to disaster mitigation that fail to account for various socio-cultural vulnerabilities. As Gregory Bankoff writes, "more than simply a matter of academic interest; [unmasking vulnerability] also has real practical value in terms of disaster preparedness and relief…if Western knowledge is fundamentally a means of perpetuating its cultural hegemony over the world, and if…no Western critique can ever fully escape the dominant consciousness within which it was formulated, then, perforce, much greater attention needs to be paid to non-Western knowledge and local environmental management

practices."[19] Part of the non-Western knowledge that should be included in this is the long and rich tradition of Caribbean writing, whose authors enlist geophysical forces unique to their region as a means of contesting imperialist rhetoric surrounding disasters.

**Chapter 1: Revolution as Eruption**

In the first chapter, I consider the eruptive dialectics of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. I argue that for Césaire, the volcano embodies a tension between destruction and creation that underlies both the geologic identity of Martinique and structures his decolonial poetics. The volcano plays a specific poetic and geographic role, functionally fusing the material of historical and geologic experience with the metaphorical/expressive activity of the poem. *Cahier* has traditionally been divided into three sections, which correspond to the poetic subject's progression from "alienation through revolt to a new integration", with the final section celebrating the arrival of a decolonized future. The poem's sequential psychological development reflects the poetic subject's progression from colonial alienation to self-consciousness through a dialectical movement that is also embodied for Césaire by the seismic activity of Martinican geography and history. I argue that Césaire enlists this geohistorical tension between volcanic destruction and creation to formulate his decolonial critique. The poetic subject's emergence into full historical self-consciousness by the end of the poem is facilitated by a revitalized connection with the physical environment from which he has been estranged through the combined forces of slavery and colonialism. In the Caribbean, the volcano constitutes a geologically and historically specific symbol of self-determination and resistance. The volcanic *morne*, part of the mountainous interior regions of French Caribbean islands, often

[19] Gregory Bankoff, "Rendering the World Unsafe: Vulnerability as Western Discourse," *Disasters* 25:1 (2001): 30.

served as a refuge and a site from which slave revolts were launched. And yet, Césaire's use of the volcano is not restricted to a field of purely regional references; I argue that it resonates with a broader range of nineteenth-century French rhetorical practices linking eruption to unease about social transformation, labor unrest, and radical politics. Reading the trans-Atlantic and transhistorical resonances of this metaphor, I suggest that the volcano fits within Césaire's broader poetic and political efforts to maintain cultural specificity, while ensuring that the struggle for Afro-Caribbean freedom was situated within a broader effort toward achieving universal human rights and freedoms. Drawing upon eruption metaphors from the French revolution as well as the Haitian revolution, I situate Césaire's volcanic imagery within a history of geological metaphors being applied to revolutionary upheaval.

**Chapter 2: The Politics of Disaster and Departmentalization**

In the second chapter, I explore how disaster has affected the lived experience and political trajectories of disaster. The eruption of Mount Pelée's in 1902 and the Vichy Occupation during WWII had real consequences for Césaire's political decision-making after WWII, as well as Martinicans' collective sense of self and identity within the French nation. As Sherry Johnson has suggested, climatic disruptions and natural disasters can fundamentally shift relationships between people and their governments.[20] Since Aimé Césaire saw poetry and lived experience as inextricably linked, it is worth understanding how disaster influenced not only his poetics but his political decisions too. Concrete changes in the social fabric of Martinican society

[20] Johnson writes that an integrated study of historical climatology, political science and history shows that, "disaster can be a force behind political change but that disasters do not necessarily have to become political. The authorities' behavior in the aftermath of disaster determines whether the population will react in a positive or negative way, thus making the disaster the trigger that causes a 'critical juncture' in political events'," See Sherry Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011, 6.

were legible both after the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée - which wiped out the city of Saint-Pierre and killed 30,000 people - as well as after WWII, when Martinique was occupied by the racist, Nazi-supported Vichy regime and surrounded by an US naval blockade that led to privations and famine for many Martinicans.[21] After each disastrous event, Martinicans developed a new sense of citizenship, priorities, and understandings of their place within the French nation, the African diaspora, and the broader American-Caribbean space. The aftermath of the Mount Pelée catastrophe laid bare the uneven application of rights and civil liberties supposedly granted to Antilleans after they became citizens in 1848. It also came on the heels of a series of other smaller scale disasters in Guadeloupe and Martinique at the end of the nineteenth-century, coinciding with a period of increasing labor unrest.[22] However, instead of deepening the divide between Metropole and colony, the Mount Pelée disaster galvanized Martinicans' sense of entitlement to the benefits and aid ostensibly guaranteed to them by the French welfare system, prompting many to demand fuller inclusion and truly equal citizenship in the French state.[23] Prior to Mount Pelée, France's response after natural disasters in its *vieilles colonies* had been primarily economic - it prioritized shoring up the once profitable but struggling sugar industry, even as it suspended aid and benefits to Antilleans.[24] The eruption of Mount Pelée demonstrated to Martinicans that their putative civic equality and cultural proximity

[21] Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace: National Identity, Decolonization, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 12-45.

[22] The Mount Pelée catastrophe was preceded by a series of fires in Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1890, as well as a devastating hurricane in 1891 that killed over 700 people in Martinique. See Christopher M. Church, *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017, 63-69; 113-118. For a discussion of labor unrest in Martinique and Guadeloupe around this time, see Elizabeth Heath, *Wine, Sugar and the Making of Modern France: Global Economic Crisis and the Racialization of French Citizenship, 1870-1910.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

[23] Christopher M. Church has studied how the eruption of Mount Pelée contributed to a renewed sense of French citizenship among Martinicans in his book, *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.

[24] Ibid., 4

to their metropolitan peers was not as secure as they had imagined. In response, Antillean citizens insisted on complete recognition and integration as colonial citizens to access the full range of disaster relief (and other benefits) they were guaranteed as citizens. In this sense, the Mount Pelée tragedy did lead to a reset in the relationship between Martinicans and the French state, as it compelled the government in Paris to more fully recognize its responsibilities to its Martinican citizens. While the catastrophe occurred at a time of increasing labor unrest, it had the effect of consolidating Martinicans' feelings of civic and cultural Frenchness, helping lay the groundwork for the unique form of federal, republican sovereignty that Martinique would pursue with Departmentalization.

For its turn, the Pétainiste leadership of Martinique's wartime governor, Admiral Georges Robert, demonstrated the limits of administrative and cultural assimilation for black Antilleans, despite their historical faith in France's republican ideals, setting the groundwork for the Departmentalization Law in 1946. Departmentalization is a decision that was at once idealistic and practical, as Gary Wilder has argued.[25] The law was intended to grant Martinicans a degree of self-determination (in electing their own representatives, for example) while maintaining the economic benefits of being French. The US had been eyeing Martinique as a potential military base in the Caribbean for several years prior to the war.[26] In the years directly following WWII, US leaders became increasingly concerned about the possibility of newly-liberated states "devolving" into communism, threatening its political and economic power in the region.[27] The

[25] See Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015, 106-132.
[26] Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace,* 45.
[27] In a speech to Congress urging the allocation of hunger relief funds to Greece and Turkey in 1947, President Harry Truman noted that, "If we do not extend aid, economic disorganization and human despair in large parts of Europe and Asia will inevitably lead to Communism". From a Draft of suggestions for the President's message to Congress regarding the Greek situation, March 3, 1947, Joseph M. Jones Papers, HSTL, in Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, 64.

administrations of Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower did their best to promote development in these regions as a bulwark against the spread of communism, and repeatedly intervened after natural disasters in an attempt to stabilize the social and political situations.[28] With this context in mind, I argue that departmentalization can also be understood as a creative, defensive posture against US imperialism, and its emerging use of disaster diplomacy in the "Third World" to protect its geopolitical and economic interests.

The eruption of Mount Pelée and WWII meaningfully reshaped Martinicans' political sensibilities, as well as their relationship with the French state, ultimately framing the postwar decision to become a French department. Keeping in mind the work of early disaster researchers like Lewis Killian, who view disasters (whether natural or human-caused) as catalysts for change in social patterns and behavior, this chapter explores how the individual events of Mount Pelée's eruption and WWII factored into the political calculus of Césaire in determining the postcolonial future of Martinique.

**Chapter 3: Suzanne Césaire's Ecofeminist critique of Postcolonial Development**

During these years of Vichy control, the surrealist literary journal, *Tropiques*, acted as an important source of cultural expression and renewal even amid stifling political censorship. Suzanne Césaire, along with her husband, Aimé, and René Ménil (all of whom had previously worked on the journal, *L'Etudiant noir*, while students in Paris) co-founded *Tropiques*, which was published from 1941-1945. The goal of *Tropiques* was to bring about a literary and cultural renaissance, to affect an anti-assimilationist *prise de conscience* among its mostly French-

See also, Julia F. Irwin, "Raging Rivers and Propaganda Weevils: Transnational Disaster Relief, Cold War Politics, and the 1954 Danube and Elbe Floods," *Diplomatic History*, 40 (November 2016), 893–921.

[28] See Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia,* 66-67.

educated Martinican readership. To this end, Suzanne Césaire wrote seven articles addressing the cultural stagnation of Martinique, which she identified as a significant obstacle to liberation. Her essays cover a variety of topics, and strongly advocate the cultivation of a distinctly Caribbean, surrealist literary expression capable of resisting assimilation and objectification. In contrast to Negritude's overdetermination of Africa as the primary source of Antillean identity, Suzanne Césaire bases her understanding of Caribbean identity on cultural and racial interconnection. For her, the Caribbean comprises an "incredible mass of diverse energies,"[29] a historical reality echoed by the region's ecological dynamism and resistance to being "ordered".

Césaire bases her understanding of Caribbean identity on cultural and racial interconnection. For her, the Caribbean comprises an "incredible mass of diverse energies," a historical reality echoed by the region's ecological dynamism and resistance to being "ordered." While resistance to being subsumed into the colonialist global structure is certainly present in Negritude writing, Suzanne Césaire's critique is actually one of the more sweeping and systematic in terms of its approach to capitalism as a *social form*.[30] Césaire's essays combat the "great camouflage," or the "great game of hide-and-seek" that deludes Martinicans into believing that a liberated and autonomous future might be achieved from within imperial capitalism. Suzanne Césaire's essays push back against the notion of development as an effective path forward for decolonizing states. Her skepticism about the potential for modernization and development to provide solutions for some of the intractable, long-term problems created by colonialism is unique among her contemporaries, most notably her husband, Aimé. By contrast, Suzanne Césaire highlights the incompatibility of industrial wage labor with genuine autonomy

[29] Suzanne Césaire, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)*. Ed. Daniel Maximin. Trans. Keith L. Walker. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012, 40.
[30] Ibid., 40.

for Martinique, autonomy both at the level of collective, cultural psyche and of political sovereignty. Throughout her essays, Césaire focuses on the distinctive, tropical climate and geologic character of the islands. Her spectacular poetic descriptions of Caribbean land and weatherscape offer a model of unassimilable diversity upon which Antilleans might construct an independent cultural consciousness, one capable of resisting western cultural and political/economic hegemony. On the one hand, critics like Anny Dominique Curtius and Kara Rabbitt have underscored the important role of landscape in Suzanne Césaire's work, recognizing it as a central model in Césaire's conceptualization of an original, adaptable and unassimilated national identity for Martinique.[31] On the other hand, Nick Nesbitt has recently drawn attention to the materialist critique that characterizes Suzanne Césaire's final essay, "Le Grand camouflage." While his account of Césaire's political critique is brief, he recognizes that her essays "stand alone in [the] Caribbean tradition in addressing their critique to the level of social form that Marx probes in *Capital…*".[32] What has yet to be investigated in the scholarship – and what I set out to do in Chapter 3 – is to draw these two approaches together, exploring the essential role of Caribbean environment in framing Césaire's critique of social form, and more specifically of industrial development. It is this aspect of Suzanne Césaire's work that chapter considers: namely, how her formulation of a uniquely Caribbean feminist geopoetics[33] involves a systematic critique of the colonial-capitalist social form, even as "development" was embraced

[31] See Kara Rabbit, "The Geography of Identity in Suzanne Césaire's 'Le Grand camouflage'," *Research in African Literatures* 39:3 (Fall 2008): 121-131; Anny-Dominique Curtius, *Suzanne Césaire: Archéologie littéraire et artistique d'une mémoire empêchée.* Paris: Karthala, 2020; Anny-Dominique Curtius, "Cannibalizing *doudouisme,* Conceptualizing the *morne*," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115:3 (July 2016): 513-534.
[32] Nick Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery: Capitalism and Revolution in the Caribbean.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022, 185.
[33]I use the term, "geopoetics" to describe Suzanne Césaire's poetry rather than "ecopoetics," partially for the sake of consistency, since this is the term discussed in the introduction and explained via Daniel Maximin's work. I also feel that "geopoetics" is better suited to the structure of my argument in this chapter, as it emphasizes the idea of "earth" as a whole, underscoring the complex dynamics of geophysical and global political-economic relation that connect the Caribbean to other parts of the world.

almost by most postcolonial governments as a path toward autonomy.[34] Unique among her contemporaries, Césaire recognized that modernization produces a tenuous and uneven prosperity that benefits a privileged few and does little to improve the lives of workers. Equally important, economic development depends upon resource extraction, pollution, environmental degradation, and usually reproduces exploitative, neocolonial relationships between newly independent states and more powerful ones.

I suggest that Césaire's imagery of an incendiary, unstable, disorderly nature represented through natural hazard explodes gendered narratives of the islands in the French colonial imaginary. In *doudou*[35] narratives, Guadeloupe and Martinique, France's *îles jumelles* are frequently described in terms of fertility, penetrability and submissiveness, which help to justify their perceived need for rationalization and control.[36] According to Kristen Stromberg Childers, gendered imagery was often used to talk about France's *vieilles colonies*, as it was deemed a more tactful justification for the islands' paternalistic treatment than race, reflecting France's efforts to maintain the illusion of colorblind "colonies of citizens" during the Third Republic.[37] With this in mind, it is possible to understand Césaire's reliance upon natural catastrophe in *Le grand camouflage* as a poetic disruption and of the patriarchal-colonialist gendering of Guadeloupe and Martinique. In its place, Césaire proposes a Caribbean ecological and socio-historical reality premised upon disorder, multiplicity, continual interconnection and change. We can understand Césaire's work as "cannibalizing" an imperial-patriarchal power dynamic that

[34] See Christine Sylvester, "Development Studies and Postcolonial Studies: Disparate Tales of the 'Third-World'," *Third World Quarterly* 20:4. August 1999: 703-721.
[35] *Doudou* refers to a genre of French travel literature popular in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries which permitted a sort of armchair tourism of exotic parts of the French empire, painting tropical spaces as idealized paradises for the enjoyment of European travelers.
[36] See for example, Maxime Petit, *Les colonies françaises: petite encyclopédie coloniale.* Vol. II. Paris: Larousse, 1902, 579.
[37] Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace*, 151.

relegates the feminized Antilles to a site of exploitation and control. Instead, Césaire's reference to disruptive natural hazard subverts the gender hierarchy established in *doudouiste* imagery of a placid and compliant tropical space, not necessarily by denying the connection between landscape and femininity, but by redefining the latter in terms of productive, resistant disruption. Césaire appropriates and subverts a repressive gender paradigm, exploited in the colonial imagination to reinforce a narrative of racial inferiority and dependence.

**Chapter 4: Glissant's Poetics of Duration and Chaos**

Contrary to the revolutionary fulguration of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Edouard Glissant presents a vision of Caribbean liberation that is based in accumulation and duration - gradual, uneven shifts toward liberation realized through the progressive creolization of the world. Glissant emphasizes the potential for new futures contained in chaos and unpredictability, as opposed to the dialectical teleology of Aimé Césaire's vision. Glissant imagines a poetic relation that is "continually in flux and whose disorder one can imagine forever."[38] Chaos becomes a constitutive feature of Caribbean geography and history through which the region asserts itself in the face of Western preferences for control and homogenization. In the fourth and final chapter, I investigate Glissant's development of what I call *durational disaster* in one of his first collections of poetry, *La Terre inquiète* from 1954. In these poems, Glissant explores the entanglement of Caribbean history and geography, and how the foundational disaster of the Middle Passage is anything but past - how it operates continually in the present, shaping everything from the postcolonial political economy to the impact of natural disasters. Using this transhistorical approach, Glissant memorializes the region's founding in

[38] Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*. Betsy Wing, trans. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997, 133.

chaos, while exposing how the original disaster of Antillean history lingers in the present. Disasters in Caribbean history and geography are not framed as discrete, localized, unpredictable events that are departures from a normative status quo. Rather, the poems of *La Terre inquiète* (translated as "The Restless Earth" in English) are presented according to a *longue-durée* in which chaos accumulates over time to decisively shape the present.

Both Mallarmé and Glissant were interested in disaster - its effects on poetic language, and its role in mediating the divide between signification and reality. In keeping with European tradition, Mallarmé equates disaster with the abyss, an undifferentiated and frustratingly inaccessible expanse of reality that always rests outside of language's capacity to represent. Mallarmé perceived an insurmountable divide between representation and reality and felt that the entire project of poetry hinged upon this separation. To counter the failures of language and to restore continuity between sign and object, Mallarmé advocates for a purely poetic language that would annihilate the referent; thus conceiving a "language" that would effectively be a negation of everyday, referential language; one that would "cède l'initiative aux mots."[39] For Mallarmé, words were no longer arbitrary signs deployed in service of the referent; rather, their fullness and agency was actually realized in their severance from it.

Glissant was deeply influenced by Mallarmé's ideas about chaos, chance, disaster, and the negative power of poetic language. Glissant was especially captivated by Mallarmé's work as a student in the 1950's, when he was writing the poems that would become *La Terre inquiète.* However, he pushes back against Mallarmé's abstraction and his orphic notion that everything in the world exists to become a text. In the Caribbean this claim falls especially flat, given that the region's history has been systematically erased from the historical record, from becoming a text.

[39] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Igitur; Divagations; Un coup de dés.* Bertrand Marchal, ed. Paris: Gallimard, 2003, 276.

If Mallarmé's goal was to create a totalizing system based in the sublimation of the referent and annihilation of reality, Glissant develops instead a poetics capable of restoring a "corporeal, concrete particularity of given situations."[40] Glissant's poetry is also based in the notion of abyss and his objective is to find a way to tangibly access this void. For the Antillean subject - the descendent of kidnapped African slaves who survived the Middle Passage - the sea is literally the unknowable abyss - not in the metaphorical sense of Mallarmé, but experientially and historically. It is in this sense that Glissant presents the sea in *Poétique de la relation*. The sea is abyssal and chaotic, but not entirely abstract either, because it contains the swallowed-up past of an entire people.[41] Although exact documentation of this history has been lost, the contours of the void can be felt through the trauma it still exerts in the present.[42] It is this productive trauma that Glissant describes in *Poétique de la relation* as the *gouffre-matrice* (womb-abyss), which offers the potential for an alternative contact with history, one that can only be excavated and reconstituted through a poetry devoted to charting the durational unfolding of chaos and disaster.

Glissant is compelled to poetically plumb the fissures, fractures, and silences of New World history because of the geo-historical disasters that produced and maintained its silence. Glissant's poems translate the silence of the void into a creative, textual beginning. Thus, it is in turning toward the foundational catastrophes of New World history that Glissant is able to initiate a relationship with an otherwise occluded past. After exploring the Mallarméan abysses that give poetic shape to Glissant's own poetic conception of Caribbean history, I suggest that his poetic engagement with disaster not only provides an entry point to the void, but also an

[40] J. Michael Dash, *Edouard Glissant.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 156.
[41] Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* 6.
[42] Daniel Maximin thinks about "all that was lost, stolen, violated, forgotten and denied" as forming Glissant's poetics of relation: "Et là, tout ce qui avait été perdu, volé, violé, oublié, renié, a pu se réincarner secrètement dans une poétique de relation, comme la définit Glissant, entre l'homme esclave et l'île complice…" in Daniel Maximin, *Les Fruits du cyclone,* 81-82.

alternative historiographical approach to studying Caribbean history, one that takes its spasmodic irregularity as the rhythm of its unfolding, rather than as an impediment to traditional historical reconstruction.

To forge a relationship with this traumatic past and create an alternative historiography that is not based in linear progress or retrieval, Glissant turns to Mallarmé, who provides for him a model of how to make an absent present. Mallarmé's intuitions about the nature of the abyss inform Glissant's conceptualization of a Caribbean timeline that is charted through the shocks, dislocations, and occlusions of a disjointed poetic temporality. Like many Afro-Caribbean writers and artists, I suggest that Glissant turns to the convulsive geography of the island itself, which provides a concrete model of the region's convulsive rhythms. I then place Glissant within his own historical moment as a young, black, radical doctoral student in Paris during the 1950's. I argue that Glissant's experiments with creating a divergent poetic chronology for the New World should be seen within the context of an emerging Cold War ethos of development. I submit that his project in *La Terre inquiète* is entangled within the Cold War ideological struggles that would birth the developmentalist vision of the world that produced both modern disaster research, and a series of new crises throughout the postcolonial Global South that have entrenched existing hierarchies of power, poverty, suffering and dependence. To provide a concrete example of this durational disaster Glissant traces in *La Terre inquiète,* I turn to the compounding disasters of the 1928 hurricane and the chlordecone contamination crisis in Guadeloupe and Martinique.

**Conclusions**

This project assembles a diverse set of works that traverse the historical, geographic and geopolitical boundaries of environmental disaster. In presenting eco-catastrophe in the context of historical, colonial vulnerabilities, these works also push back against Western developmental models and timescales. If revolutionary time for Aimé Césaire is dialectical, embodying a productive tension between creation and destruction, Suzanne Césaire, rejects the telos of development, instead viewing disorder as demanding an adaptive, non-oppressive relationship with the tropical environment. For his part, Glissant imagines Caribbean history as a constantly unfolding chaos.

Over the past 20-30 years, optimism about the prospect of ever achieving a truly "post" colonial future has diminished. The increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, combined with financial crises, political instability, and apocalyptic climate change forecasts have eroded hope about the utopian futures once dreamt of by anticolonial writers. [43] The sense of living in a state of perpetual catastrophe has led to revisions of the critical framework of postcolonial studies. David Scott argues that postcolonial narratives tend to replicate a binary conflict between colonialism and anticolonialism.[44] Chris Bongie might read this more as a sustained attachment to an outdated modernism.[45] In any case, progress is implicitly charted on a timeline of postcolonial progress, in which the vestiges of the colonial order must be transcended for a truly postcolonial future to emerge. According to Scott, anticolonial texts generally assume the form of a romance, resulting in "narratives of overcoming, often narratives of

[43] Glissant expresses optimism, for example, about the new networks and sources of connection created by mass media: "On the other side of the bitter struggles against domination and for the liberation of the imagination, there opens up a multiply dispersed zone in which we are gripped by vertigo. But this is not the vertigo preceding apocalypse and Babel's fall. It is the shiver of a beginning, confronted with extreme possibility. It is possible to build the Tower-in every language." Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* 108-109.
[44] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment.* Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 6.
[45] Bongie writes that "Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/colonial Literature.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008, 259-264.

vindication…[that] have largely depended upon a certain (utopian) horizon toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving."[46] Scott's arguments represent a contemporary recognition - among both writers and critics - that the dream of a truly decolonized future is perhaps not as within reach as once hoped, given the countless ways imperialism continues to impose itself. Scott is attentive to the historical nature of his argument, that it is only possible today because in the roughly 60 years since decolonization, anticolonial futures have grown increasingly remote. Bongie makes some version of this argument in *Islands and Exiles*, writing that, "Post/colonialism is that time in which those who are waiting for eruptive solutions anticipated by decolonization (the last of modernity's great metanarratives) must face up to the prolonged absence of any such type of resolution, and the consequent reality of having to learn how to live reactively."[47] Rather than continuing to situate anticolonial "solutions" in a deferred, utopian future, Scott instead focuses on reframing and historicizing the questions being asked at given moments. His intuition is that the range of possible answers we can provide depends on the kind of questions we are asking and the narratological forms through which they are being posed. Thus, the questions that Césaire addressed in the 1950's (i.e. "how can we achieve a decolonized future?") reflect a different set of challenges than those faced by more recent authors like Glissant. I have intentionally selected texts and events that are geographically, temporally, and formally diverse in keeping with Scott's argument, that the "problem spaces" postcolonial authors address derive from the circumstances of their writing, and that the forms they choose to communicate these challenges must shift as well.

[46] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 7-8.
[47] Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/colonial Literature.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, 349.

My intention is to show how strains of nature-oriented aesthetics have accompanied and bolstered anticolonial ambitions in Caribbean literature over time, but consistently in ways that expose and resist geopolitical norms. In the span of nearly a century, writers have articulated various strategies, each of which depend on their personal geo-historical positions. My thesis builds from Scott's suggestion to contextualize both the solutions and questions addressed by writers from different generations. I submit that tracing the evolution - or, in a less developmental sense, the transformation - of how disasters operate in Caribbean poetry highlights not only their essential place in the region's identity, but also how disasters sweep away certain horizons of expectation, historical orientations, and ideological assumptions. As Daniel Maximin contends, the severe eco-catastrophes particular to the Caribbean violently contest Western, neocolonial emphases on stability and control. Disaster studies scholars have welcomed interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate literary studies with the hope that rhetorical shifts in how disasters are talked about might help reframe approaches to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. In this same spirit of resistance, Caribbean geopoetics centered around disaster force us to critically confront the developmental idealism embedded within postcolonial studies and Eurocentric notions of historical progress.

## Chapter 1:

## Destruction and Creation: The Dialectics of Eruption in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*

In an interview in 2002 commemorating the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée, Aimé Césaire noted that the specter of the disaster hung over him throughout his writing career. Césaire describes Mount Pelée as a "haunting" presence in his literary work and life. And yet, evocations of the volcano in his poetic work are not exclusively negative. Césaire often refers to the volcano's importance to understanding Martinican cultural identity and historical experience, describing Martinicans as *un peuple peléen*.[48] The volcano is woven into the fabric of Martinican experience and is framed as a constitutive feature of the island's history and identity.[49] Césaire describes the relationship between Martinican identity and the volcano in terms of a dialectic:

> Le volcan est destructeur mais n'oubliez pas que le volcan est constructeur, nous sommes nées du volcan, c'est fantastique comme image…et c'est valable pour tout, c'est une image humaine. À tous les points de vue, je crois qu'il y a ce double mouvement, l'ambivalence perpétuelle, destructeur, constructeur, la thèse, l'anti-thèse, une sorte de dialectique naturelle…[50]

In contrast to an image of destruction that is purely negative, Césaire sees even volcanic disaster as engendering possibility; new political forms, ideas, and organizations might emerge in the wake of what has been destroyed. Césaire's volcano-as-dialectic is not prescriptive or attached to

[48] Interview with Daniel Maximin, "Aimé Césaire : la poésie parole essentielle." *Présence Africaine* 126 (1983): 10.
[49] "On sait qu'elle est là, qu'elle peut se réveiller à n'importe quel moment, on vit, on s'accoutume, et si elle n'existait pas, on le manquerait beaucoup." For full interview, see Aimé Césaire, *Aimé Césaire: la montagne pelée nous a inventée.* "Vif du sujet" on *France Culture* (Alexandre Héraud). Gens de la Caraïbe. http://www.gensdelacaraibe.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=218:aime-cesaire--la-montagne-pelee-nous-a-inventes&catid=26&Itemid=138
[50] Ibid.

any particular political future but is *generative* of new meaning and possibility itself - possibility that may include a broad range of political arrangements that are still undetermined, and whose realization depends upon the awakening of a personal and then collective racial consciousness capable of asserting its autonomy in the face of a long history of cultural erasure and assimilation.

In this chapter, I sketch the significance of the volcano in Césaire's life and work, and the sedimentation of influences that come together to ultimately create his poetic masterwork of racial awakening, *Le Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.* On their face, volcanic eruptions seem like pretty uncomplicated moments of destruction. And yet, the geological origin story of most islands in the Caribbean - including Martinique and Guadeloupe - attest to the fact that these devastating explosions are *constructive* as well. Eruptions literally lay the groundwork for volcanic island creation. Building upon this dialectical tension between creation and destruction, I suggest that Aimé Césaire's approach to eruption in the *Cahier* belies simple equivalences with anti-colonial revolt (although this is certainly part of its importance). While comparisons to revolutionary upheaval are legitimate, my dialectical reading of the volcano builds upon studies of Césaire's poem from scholars like Nick Nesbitt[51], Ben Baer[52] and Chad Kautzer[53]. These

[51] This study is inspired by Nesbitt's identification of a paradox in Césaire's depiction of the poetic subject's final achievement of racial self-awareness at the end of the *Cahier,* the realization of which is to a large extent enabled by the black subject's reconciliation and identification with the natural world - a move that risks re-absorbing the subject into the realm of the "primitive" or "irrational" - the very racist categories the negritude subject is struggling against. I find the tension between these two poles - the natural/irrational and the human/rational - instructive, helping to clarify the dialectical importance of the volcano as a natural force that is symbolically conscripted into the realization of human subjectivity. See Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature.* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003.

[52] See James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, 175-186.

[53] Chad Kautzer's chapter, "Insurgent Subjects: Hegel, Césaire, and the Origins and Decolonial Phenomenology," has enriched my thinking about the relationship between Hegelian dialectics and Césaire, particularly in the subtle way he enlists dialectics to de-hierarchize potential comparisons between Hegel and Césaire. See Chad Kautzer,

scholars bring to light the nuances of Césaire's poetic project, nuances that are at times obfuscated by superficial and evidently uncomplicated declarations of racial polarity, the supposed prioritization of Africanness over Frenchness, and the celebration of nature over modernity.[54] I suggest that the tension between creation and destruction that grounds the movement of Césaire's epic poem attests to a basic, underlying awareness of the complexity of subaltern self-formation, in which the means for racial self-recognition are sometimes provided by access to a colonial education aimed at assimilation. Therefore, rather than a force of pure annihilation, or absolute anti colonial revolt, Césaire draws upon the geologic and cultural memory of eruption on his island - a history characterized both by incalculable loss as well as openings toward social, political and economic restructuring - to suggest the possibility of a political future in which freedom depended not on absolute revolt but on equality and mutual racial recognition. The geophysical and historical realities of Martinique's volcanism thus form the shifting tectonics from which Césaire poetically explores the entangled relationships between personal and collective experiences of alienation, racial self-awareness, assimilation, and importantly, the relationship of the colonized subject to the metropole.

The importance of the volcano as a structuring device in the *Cahier* reflects its geo-historical, conceptual, political, and personal importance to the island of Martinique and to the

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"Insurgent Subjects: Hegel, Césaire, and the Origins and Decolonial Phenomenology," in *Phenomenology and the Political.* London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, 81-100.

[54] I examine the importance of the volcano in Césaire's work as well as his biography. In doing so, I try to contextualize how this determinant feature of Martinique's history and geography shaped his conception of Afro-Antillean identity as a synthesis between French and African influences. Using Ben Baer's analysis of assimilation and imperial pedagogy in *Indigenous Vanguards: Education, National Liberation, and the Limits of Modernism,* I examine how Césaire's early exposure to Martinican botany, geography, and volcanism through his high school teacher, Eugène Revert, shaped his understanding of the volcano's dialectical underpinning, as a force that *preserves* French influence in the construction of a liberated Antillean subjectivity, even as it *negates* its absolute dominance. See Ben Baer, *Indigenous Vanguards: Education, National Liberation, and the Limits of Modernism,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2019, 139-188. Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature.* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003.

African-descended people transplanted onto its shores. The volcano is a particular geological feature of many Caribbean islands, including Martinique, which sets it apart from the more temperate and geologically stable European continent, and which played a decisive role in the formation of the island itself.

## I. The Geology of Return

In opposing the West's negation of African history and cultural identity, proponents of negritude emphasized the importance of "return," a movement which aimed to aesthetically reconstruct a common lineage shared by all African-descended people. Access to this history, they maintained, would provide the basis for a freer and more integrated pan-African future. In the words of the Burkinabé historian and statesman, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, "…le fait de reprendre conscience de son histoire est un signe de renaissance pour un peuple".[55] In this context, Africa became *the* locus of blackness and shared history for writers in the diaspora, despite the fact that many of them had been separated from the continent for centuries.

Volcanic metaphors do not simply act as a rallying cry for racial awakening or even specifically anticolonial forms of revolt: despite the volcano's obvious geological specificity to the Caribbean, I situate Césaire's eruptive poetics along a long continuum of revolutionary discourse, beginning with the French and Haitian revolutions. I show first how shifting understandings about the naturalness or inevitability of the "Earth's revolutions" in the natural sciences inflected contemporary conceptions of political revolution, which infused rhetoric around the French and Haitian revolutions. I then consider Aimé Césaire's early French education, during which he was exposed to the political ideals of universal human freedom and

[55] Joseph Ki-Zerbo, "Histoire et conscience nègre," *Présence africaine.* No. 16 (octobre-novembre 1957): 53.

justice (as well as their glaring and hypocritical absence in his own homeland) *and* to the particularities of Martinique's unique topography and geology. I argue that this assimilative education acted as a starting point for Césaire to consider, on the one hand, the generative imbrication between the geological and the political in poetry, whereby integration with the dislocated, alienated island poetically enables a more generalized psychological *prise-de-conscience.* On the other hand, I suggest that contextualizing Césaire's use of eruptive metaphors within a longer revolutionary heritage is entirely consistent with his commitments to a universalist understanding of human rights and politics, in which the freedom and equality of Antilleans would represent the true fulfillment of the promises of their French and Haitian predecessors.

**II. A Natural History of Revolution**

For centuries, Afro-Caribbeans' relationship to the island environment had been conditioned through various forms of estrangement, beginning with forced migration, enslavement, and later, extractive colonial labor relations. Physical, psychological, and geographic dislocation facilitated the introduction of European values, allowing assimilation to more easily take root. From a position of uprooting and exile, Césaire's poem fashions a liberated, New World Black subjectivity that restores a sense of history and belonging through collective identification with the island space, which contains a physical archive of a past, the "buried debris and scoria," whose exposure only requires the explosive catalyst of self-consciousness.

On its surface, Césaire's volcanic dynamism seems to draw upon natural features of the island environment to overcome geographic alienation and to cultivate a sense of native, non-

assimilated connection to the land itself, through which a collective self-awareness and resistance might take root. Many passages from the poem, especially its second movement, underscore this attempt.

> il me suffirait d'une gorgée de ton lait jiculi pour qu'un toi je découvre toujours à même distance de mirage
> mille fois plus natale et dorée d'un soleil que n'entame nul prisme la terre où tout est libre et fraternel,
> ma terre (Césaire, 8).

Beyond an insurgent mechanism of subaltern self-building, Césaire's volcano builds upon a long tradition of the *morne* as a topos of revolutionary uprising, which is variously articulated in the lead-up to the French Revolution by philosophers and political theorists like Kant, Burke, and Hegel, as well as by political rebels themselves.[56] The word, "morne" comes from the Spanish *morro* ("small, round hill")[57] and it occupies a place of special geographic and cultural importance throughout the Caribbean. According to Lafcadio Hearn, "'morne,' is a term used throughout the French West Indian colonies to designate certain altitudes of volcanic origin, a term rather unsatisfactorily translated in certain dictionaries as 'a small mountain,'…Mornes usually have those beautiful and curious forms which bespeak volcanic origin even to the

[56] Both Kant and Burke discuss volcanoes in the context of the sublime, treating them as events that remind human beings of nature's "terrible" power. However, Kant manages to translate this experience of smallness and vulnerability into a validation of man's supremacy over the natural world. In this confrontation, a transcendental human capacity to perceive the sublime is triggered by the awesome power of natural forces, Burke's conception of the sublime is more political, perhaps more grounded in the revolutionary anxieties of his lifetime. While the traditional symbol for the sublime is the extraordinary and sometimes terrifying power of nature, Burke notes that "the power that arises from institution in kings and commanders has the same connection with terror". See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Judgement.* Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Cambridge, UK: Hackett, 1987 [1790], 119-123 and Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.* Ed. James T. Boulton. London: Routledge, 1958, 67.

[57] See *The Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage.* Ed. Richard Allsopp. Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2003 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], 387.

unscientific observer…".[58] While not precisely designating an active volcano, the word implies a suppressed yet active potential for eruption. Glissant's poetics contrast the *morne,* a geographic and historical place of refuge for fugitive slaves, to the *plaine*, which symbolizes enslavement and the plantation.[59] Because of the protection they offered maroon slaves, *mornes* became sites of slave uprisings and eventually, labor organizing, in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[60]

While the *morne* is anchored in the the geo-social imaginary of Caribbean, it should be understood within a broader constellation of volcanic metaphors that infused revolutionary movements in the early nineteenth century. French revolutionary rhetoric mobilized environmental metaphors as a way of justifying the "natural" legitimacy of the Jacobin cause and its attendant violence. The Jacobin leader, Prudhomme, for example, rationalized acts of popular violence through recourse to the unpredictability of the natural world.

> Eh bien ! Petits intrigants, plus dangereux cent fois que les agitateurs dont vous parlez, plus séditieux, plus funestes à l'harmonie sociale que ceux que vous accusez de prêcher contre l'aristocratie des riches ; eh bien ! Il faut vous confondre d'un mot. Vous faites d'éternels reproches à Paris pour les jugements populaires du 2 & 3 septembre ; ils furent terribles comme le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne. Les âmes pieuses en ont-elles fait un crime à la providence ? Rien n'arrive sur ce globe, ont-elles dit, victimes écrasées sous les décombres d'une ville entière renversée en un clin-d'oeil. Apparemment c'est Dieu qui châtie les hommes. Il faut adorer et se taire.[61]

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[58] Lafcadio Hearn, "Two Years in the French West Indies," *The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn.* vol. 3. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922 [1918] [1890], 311.

[59] The "morne" is an important symbol in Edouard Glissant's poetics. Its association with maroon communities of slaves is developed into a poetics of "marronage," which Glissant feels is a critical figure for understanding the Caribbean space and identity. J. Michael Dash, "Introduction" to Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays.* Ed. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, Caraf Books: 1989 [1981].

[60] The largest labor strike in Martinique occurred in 1900, when workers across the island responded to the police killing of eight farm workers by setting sugar cane fields and plantation homes on fire. Incendiarism was also a common practice in Guadeloupe after abolition, which resulted in large amounts of damage to crops and homes, and was eventually blamed for the 1899 fire that burned Guadeloupe's capital of Pointe-à-Pitre to the ground. See Christopher M. Church, *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean.* Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017, 170.

[61] Louis-Marie Prudhomme, *Révolutions de Paris, dédiées à la nation, no. 177 (24 November - 1 December 1792)*. Vol. III. Louis-Marie Prudhomme: Paris, 1792, 462.

Prudhomme's association of the violence of the Parisian mob with the "providential" (yet arbitrary) destruction of the Lisbon earthquake justifies revolutionary violence during the September Massacres (1792) by casting it as the inevitable outcome of centuries of class oppression. However, as Mary Ashburn Miller points out, leaders' associations between revolutionary actions and natural catastrophes effectively deprived the public of subjective rationality, reducing them to the mindless, reactionary mob that conservatives accused them of being. Nevertheless, the temptation to equate popular revolt to an unavoidable, "natural" outcome was strong: it allowed leaders to frame the Jacobin cause "not as the embodiment of general will, but as nature's handiwork".[62] Equating the revolutionary mob to volcanic eruption was later picked up by revolutionary discourse in the nineteenth century, most notably by the French historian, Jules Michelet, who cast "le peuple" on the one hand as the stable geological groundwork underlying the Nation, and on the other as containing a buried potential to reconstitute that very same Nation through violent eruption.[63] While less often discussed, eruption was also used in contemporary descriptions of the Haitian Revolution, as well as concurrent uprisings in Guadeloupe and Martinique. In this foreign, tropical context, the volcano absorbed many of the resonances of French revolutionary rhetoric which were then magnified by impressions of Haiti's "natural" instability borne from (incorrect) assumptions about the island's volcanism.[64] While Saint-Domingue lacked actual volcanoes, the insurgence of Haitian slaves -

[62] Mary Ashburn Miller, *A Natural History of Revolution: Violence and Nature in the French Revolutionary Imagination, 1789-1794.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011, 4.
[63] Michelet's use of geologic metaphors is discussed in Göran Blix, *From Paris to Pompeii: French Romanticism and the Cultural Politics of Archaeology.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, 220-236.
[64] Unlike many of its neighboring islands in the Caribbean archipelago, the island of Hispaniola, including Haiti and the Dominican Republic, is a continental island. That is to say, it is an un-submerged portion of the continental shelf rather than a distinct land mass formed through volcanic activity.

whose resistance efforts were launched from the safety of the mountainous interior regions (*mornes*), and centered on a slash and burn strategy that aimed to incinerate crops, farmland, and livestock – was often characterized by French contemporaries using volcanic imagery. The strategies of Haitian rebels mimicked the conflagrant natural forces of the (absent) volcano. In a military history of the Haitian Revolution published in 1819, the French military officer Pamphile de Lacroix, re-deploys this incendiary metaphor borrowed from the Comte de Mirabeau to describe Haitian revolutionaries. "Les créoles, suivant l'expression de Mirabeau, *dormaient sur les bords du Vésuve*. Les premiers jets du volcan ne les réveillèrent point. A leurs yeux fascinés les noirs n'étaient pas des êtres qu'on pût compter pour quelque chose."[65] In quoting Mirabeau, Lacroix re-surfaces a field of volcanic metaphors used to describe the French public during the 1789 Revolution, inserting them within a Caribbean context. To contemporary observers, volcanic metaphors may have seemed even more suitable for describing Haitian revolutionaries, given the widespread misperception of Hispaniola's volcanic origins. Importantly, this discursive transfer reflects a malleability that is baked into revolutionary-geological rhetoric. In descriptions of popular uprisings in France from 1789-1792, natural tropes were deployed by Jacobin leaders used to emphasize an alliance between nature and 'le peuple'. "Naturalizing" the people and their actions lent credibility to their demands for social justice while legitimizing (and sometimes even sanctifying) the violent means used to achieve them.[66] However, the effect is different when this same metaphor appears in Lacroix's account of the Haitian Revolution. Recounted from the more conservative perspective of a French officer

[65] François Joseph Pamphile de Lacroix, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue.* Paris: Pillet aîné, 1819, 89. My italics.

[66] In *The Natural History of Revolution,* Mary Ashburn Miller writes that "by naturalizing revolutionary violence, its advocates also made it seem a necessary step in the regeneration and future progress of the Republic," See Mary Ashburn Miller, *The Natural History of Revolution: Violence and Nature in the French Revolutionary Imagination, 1789-1794.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011, 169.

clearly appalled at the slaves' "violent" tactics, Lacroix initially casts the upheaval as a violation of natural law, writing that acts of retribution and destruction "made nature tremble," providing no context for the violence of plantation slavery that had precipitated the revolt.. "[Les esclaves]…commençent des scènes d'horreur qui font frémir la nature," (Lacroix, 90). After casting the slaves as in some sense *counter* to nature in their perceived violation of natural laws or values, Lacroix then immediately adopts the opposite approach. He writes,

> Ce ne sont plus des êtres humains, ce sont des tigres qui cherchent à assouvir leur rage ; ils couvrent de feu et de ruines le plus beau pays de l'univers. Ils frappent et égorgent sans distinction d'âge et de sexe tous les blancs qu'ils peuvent atteindre, et voient avec une joie féroce les angoisses et les derniers soupirs de ceux vers lesquels ils n'osaient naguère élever leurs regards furtifs (Lacroix, 90).

By reducing black revolutionaries to animals ("ce ne sont plus des être-humains, ce sont des tigres…"), Lacroix places them in a sub-human category of "nature" devoid of conscious agency and driven only by irrational animalistic rage. The slaves' actions are thus historically decontextualized from the violence of the plantation, with their actions framed initially as aberrant violations of natural law, and then in the next breath, as indistinguishable from nature's apparently *lawless,* unpredictable violence. This unregistered contradiction points to the wide range of ideological positions that drew upon nature to justify both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary positions.

Sometimes eruption was positively linked to a "natural" upwelling of justified discontent from below, while at other times it pointed to a dangerous and destabilizing class rage roiling beneath the surface of the political status quo. Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,* captures and self-consciously aestheticizes this irresolvable tension in the way that eruptive metaphors both ordain political incendiarism even as they de-subjectify its agents. On the one hand, Césaire recognizes the need for a kind of communion with the Caribbean environment to

transcend the traumas of dislocation and national estrangement. In this sense, the "naturalness" of revolution underscores the innate, universal right of every human being to freedom and equality. On the other hand, as Nick Nesbitt points out, the submergence of the subject in the natural world is inherently *de*-subjectifying and risks replicating harmful stereotypes about the proximity of subaltern people to nature that deprived them of agency and equality under colonialism in the first place.[67] I suggest that holding both features of this *dialectique naturelle* in a kind of sublated suspension preserves the developing, transhistorical, and universal trajectory of revolutionary activity, as Césaire conceived it, and that Hegel's notion of *sublation* ultimately allows Césaire to achieve that in the *Cahier.*

**III. Changing geo-political paradigms**

As we have seen, social and political discourse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries leveraged geological metaphors for a variety of ideological ends, sometimes to impugn revolutionary violence, sometimes to legitimize it. Why were these geological metaphors so popular at the time for describing political revolution? The answer, it turns out, lies in shifting understandings of the term "revolution" as it existed during the Enlightenment, both in the realms of natural science *and* politics. The porosity of the term "revolution," complicates the task of disentangling modern definitions of revolution from popular understandings of geology that emerged during the Enlightenment. In what follows, I trace the gradual, paradigmatic shift in viewing the planet's history from an ahistorical, *geotheoretic* paradigm concerned with establishing timeless and unchanging laws based in cyclical recurrence gradually gave way to more linear models *geohistory,* by which scientists attempted to reconstruct the historical events

[67] Nick Nesbitt, "Antinomies of Double Consciousness in Aimé Césaire's 'Cahier d'un retour au pays natal'," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal.* 33: 3 (2000): 118.

that had shaped the earth in various regions.[68] Geohistory demonstrated that planet's history proceeded in developmental stages. In what follows, I recapitulate the historical development of "revolution," concentrating on how its meaning evolved as temporal horizons of change in both natural and human history evolved. Departing from a strictly cyclical paradigm, the passage of time in both areas was increasingly understood as linear and developmental, influenced not only by unchanging natural laws but by historical conditions and events.

The epistemic shift from a cyclic to a linear conception of earth history was shaped by new temporalities of *human* history produced through revolutionary social and political change occurring in Europe in the eighteenth century. In fact, the transition from cyclic to a more linear concept of time is embedded in the evolution of the word itself. Originally an astronomical term used to describe the rotation of planets and moons, beginning in the seventeenth century, *revolution* took on a more nuanced meaning as it entered the realm of earth science and politics.[69] In pre-modern Europe, geo-climatic events were understood as part of cycles, influenced by the rotation of heavenly bodies in the same way as tides and seasons. Floods, storms, earthquakes, even volcanic eruptions fit into this Copernican view of the world, which in

[68] Martin Rudwick distinguishes between geohistory - as the "immensely long and complex history of the earth, including the life on its surface (biohistory), as distinct from the extremely brief recent history that can be based on human records…" (Rusdick, 2). On the other hand, *geotheory* is defined as an approach to studying the history of the earth dominant in the 18th-19th centuries. Geotheory assumed broad, ahistorical and interconnected systems in which "all the major features of the earth, considered as a complex physical and biotic entity. Rather than accounting for a specific mountain range, for example, it would have to explain in general terms the origin of all mountains and relate them to oceans, volcanoes, fossils and so on." Geotheories took for granted that, "the causes were to be based as far as possible on known physical entities and observable processes [meaning]...that the present world was to be the key to understanding how the world works," Martin Rusdick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 135-136.

[69] Karl Griewank summarizes the evolution of "revolution," noting that "the event which permanently introduced the word *revolution* into historical writing and political theory [was] the Glorious Revolution of 1688. In contrast to the period of the civil war (1640-1660), which had been introduced into historiography by its first historian, Clarendon, as 'the Great Rebellion,' the later event, which brought about lasting political changes with far less internal turmoil, was unequivocally labeled a *revolution.*" See Karl Griewank, "The Emergence of the Concept of Revolution," in *Revolution: A Reader*. Eds. Bruce Mazlish et al. New York: Macmillan, 1972, 16.

turn shaped popular understandings of how change occurred both in nature and human affairs. The modern sense of the term, "revolution," thus reflects a cross-pollination between geology and politics, and in some sense, it came to be understood in light of both of these opposing theories of natural history, integrating elements of each. Political revolutions were seen as "catastrophic" in the sense that they destroyed and replaced old systems of power. And yet, revolutions were also understood to be part of a progressive historical paradigm, by which outdated, antiquarian social arrangements were replaced by more stable and advanced alternatives.[70] However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the ahistorical and principle-based approach to accounting for the earth's history was thrown into crisis under the influence of the concurrent surge in political and social revolution sweeping across Europe and the Atlantic world. As Martin Rudwick explains,

> [A] new *geohistorical* approach imported into the natural world the methods and the imagery of historians and antiquarians. One of its effects was to allow questions of causal mechanisms to be shelved in favor of first discovering exactly what had happened, where, and when. For nature's revolutions were treated not as being 'programmed' in a predictable way by ahistorical physical laws but as being the result of causal webs as complex and unpredictable as the contingencies of human history. (Rudwick, 296).

The French Revolution of course marked a pivotal moment in the history of modern Europe and its effects spilled out across the Atlantic. It represented the birth of a new, popular historical consciousness as well as a significant rupture with historical precedents, prompting a

[70] James Hutton's doctrine of *uniformitarianism* attempted to integrate nature's revolutions into a sense of broader causal design and deterministic development, based on the notion of return and repeating cycles. Hutton argued that changes in the earth's crust are the result of consistent and continuous processes (i.e., erosion, deposition, compaction, and uplift) that have been in operation since the formation of the planet and are still in effect today. Uniformitarianism quickly became dominant, replacing Cuvier's catastrophism and shifting the understanding of geological history from a literalist-biblical model of a singular geologic "revolution" or catastrophic event that generated the conditions for the modern world, to a much broader time scale that included an oscillation between periods of catastrophe and stability. For more on uniformitarianism, see James Hutton, *Theory of the Earth,* vol. I. Edinburgh: Royal Society of Edinburgh, 1788, 90-98.

reconsideration of normative understandings of historical time, both with respect to human and natural history. The French Revolution represented a critical juncture inaugurating *le peuple* as unique historical actors. Their success in diverting the seemingly inevitable current of historical time contested the widely accepted sense of time as governed by a set of predetermined and inviolable laws, and these events called into question the viability of theories that left no room for chance, deviation, or rupture. At the time, the revolutionaries' actions seemed to reshape notions of historical time not as recurrent cycles of crisis and stasis but instead toward a *directional,* or even developmental movement driven by the dialectical conflict between structure and freedom, preordained fate and chance, and cyclicality and progress.

The social and political upheaval of the French Revolution also called into question some of deepest-held principles of earth science, which had largely subscribed to the idea that universal natural laws and unchanging design held no place for historical contingency. If before, a theory's credibility had rested on its generalizability and timelessness, new methods paid attention to the details of time and place to understand not just the mechanics of a system, but the specificities of the historical record.[71] These new approaches to studying earth history created analogies with social history reconstructed through archaeology. In the preface to the Comte de Buffon's *Les Époques de la Nature*, he writes that,

> Comme dans l'Histoire civile, on consulte les titres, on recherche les médailles, on déchiffre les inscriptions antiques, pour déterminer les époques des révolutions humaines, et constater les dates des évènements, de même, dans l'Histoire naturelle, il faut fouiller les archives du monde, tirer des entrailles de la terre les vieux monuments, recueillir leur

[71] For example, mineralogists like the Dutch scientist, Johann Fredrich Blumenbach, relied heavily on the fossil record in an attempt to understand how life might have changed on earth over time. These comparisons seemed to invalidate the claims of Hutton that conditions on earth had been unchanged since the formation of the planet. Blumenbach, who published the first German translation of James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth,* drew upon fossil evidence to refute Hutton's claims about life on earth having existed in the exact same state since the planet's formation.

> débris, et rassembler en un corps de preuves touts les indices des changements physiques qui peuvent nous faire remonter aux différents âges de la Nature.[72]

This kind of antiquarian approach applied to natural history reflected a contemporary enthusiasm for archaeology, stimulated in part by the closely followed excavations of Pompeii that began in the mid-eighteenth century. The rhetorical conflation of archaeology and geology appealed to naturalists like Blumenbach and Jean-André De Luc, who were interested in understanding the earth's historical record from the "artifacts" it could provide - namely fossils and sedimentation patterns. The historicist studies of the Swiss geologist, De Luc, were becoming widely circulated in the salons of 18th century France, helping to familiarize Europe's intellectual elite with these new theories of geohistory that drew methodologically from archaeology and offered a more dynamic and developmental view of earth history.

The rhetorical, conceptual, and to some extent, methodological overlap between geology and human historiography, combined with the broad translation and dissemination of natural science theories across Europe, including in Germany[73], allow us to make a reasonable assumption about the influence of theories of earth science on philosophies of history that were germinating at the time.[74] It is clear that lines of influence worked in the opposite direction, as German natural scientists in the late eighteenth century were deeply marked by Kant's

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[72] Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Les Époques de la nature.* Vol. 1. Paris: L'Imprimérie royale, 1780, 1.

[73] Beyond France, Blumenbach's brother-in-law, Johann Heinrich Voigt, was editor of the widely read German language periodical *Magazine for the Latest in Physics and Natural History,* published in Jena and likely read by Hegel alongside political periodicals.

[74] The cross-pollination between history and science in German universities at this time is most obvious in the example of Göttingen, where Blumenbach and de Luc were both professors. Göttingen's intellectual environment was particularly interdisciplinary and Blumenbach in particular was influenced by the work of colleagues, especially working in history. Rudwick explains that, "a further source for Blumenbach's ideas had been implicit in his adoption of historical metaphors [which]…[came] particularly easily to a naturalist working at Göttingen, for several of Blumenbach's colleagues were famously bringing new rigor to the writing of human history - and further prestige to their university - by their critical analysis of human documents both sacred and secular," (Rudwick, 425).

metaphysics, in particular, his argument that "natural philosophy must suppose the existence of fundamental opposing forces as constitutive of matter".[75] Given these intersections between the philosophy of human and earth history, it is reasonable to speculate that Hegel's philosophy of history may have been shaped by the shifting discourse in natural science and geology. Cross-fertilizations emerge when Hegel's dialectical vision of history is compared with the new, geo-historical paradigm espoused by Blumenbach and de Luc, who both held that earth history is shaped by unpredictable, discrete events, crises, and revolutions rather than an implacable set of abstract laws. In fact, De Luc's *Lettres,* where he summarized his theories of geo-history at the behest of Blumenbach, were translated into German and published in the Jena-based language periodical, *Magazin für den neueste aus der Physik und Naturgeschichte* (Magazine for the Latest in Physics and Natural History), only a few years before Hegel lived there.[76] German print and newspaper culture during the Enlightenment produced a new generation of political subjects, whose conception of civic engagement hinged upon their knowledge of current, and increasingly international events.[77] Journals in particular covered a vast array of specialized topics that included contemporary scientific discoveries and debates.[78] It is likely that Hegel encountered these new theories of earth history alongside articles about the French and Haitian Revolutions, as Susan Buck-Morss has documented in her famous 2005 study, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History.* In this investigation, Buck-Morss argues that Hegel's exposure to Haiti's slave revolt -

[75] Johann L. Heilbronn, "Physics and its History and Göttingen around 1800," *Göttingen and the Development of the Natural Sciences,* Nicolaas Rupke, ed. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012, 58.
[76] Ibid., 58.
[77] Katherine Aaslestad, *Place and Politics: Local Identity, Civic Culture, and German Nationalism in North Germany during the Revolutionary Era.* Leiden: Brill, 2005, 79-81.
[78] Katherine Aalestad writes that, "In Hamburg alone at least 226 new journals appeared between 1770 and 1800, making [it] a leading creator of journal publication…Thematic journals focused on such specific subjects as politics, history, literature, pedagogy, medicine, economics, natural science, and women's literature," See Katherine Aaslestad, *Place and Politics: Local Identity, Civic Culture, and German Nationalism in North Germany during the Revolutionary Era*, 90.

especially through the left-leaning journal, *Minerva,* played a key role in his formulation of the master-slave dialectic. She writes that,

> No one has dared to suggest that the idea for the dialectic of lordship and bondage came to Hegel in Jena in the years 1803-5 from reading the press - journals and newspapers. And yet this selfsame Hegel, in this very Jena period during which the master-slave dialectic was first conceived, made the following notation, 'Reading the newspaper in early morning is a kind of realistic morning prayer. One orients one's attitude against the world and toward God [in one case], or toward that which the world is[in the other]. The former gives the same security as the latter, in that one knows where one stands'[79]

Alongside analyses of the Haitian Revolution, German commentators carefully considered the geological bases of the modern meaning of revolution. In one such article, entitled "On Revolutions in the Moral and Political World," the author explicitly links revolutions in the geo-social spheres:

> The word revolution, which we use in human history so often, is derived from natural history. But there is a double meaning, one of which is exactly the opposite of the other…According to the *first* [meaning], revolution is a return of certain incidents or conditions conforming to a certain rule. Revolutions in this sense belong to the course of nature; the incidents themselves to the order of natural things. However, following the *second* meaning revolution is[…] a disturbance of the order, a breach of a rule, a repression or even inversion of the course of nature."[80]

As we have seen, the contradictory "double meaning" of the term revolution contains a tension that is drawn from debates and discoveries that animated geology at the time. In broad strokes, the conflict between proponents of geotheoretical approaches - in which natural processes unfolded cyclically according to a fixed set of immutable natural laws - corresponds to the first definition of revolution as a recurrence. On the other hand, the second meaning of revolution -

[79] See Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History.* Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009, 49.
[80] The aforementioned article was published by an anonymous author and appeared in Minerva in 1794 - during both the French and Haitian Revolutions. Quoted in Florian Kappeler, "The Chronotope of Revolution. 'Volcanic Narrations of the Haitian Revolution," *Karib - Nordic Journal for Caribbean Studies* (October 2018) 4(1): 6, 3.

which holds that unpredictable disruption and chaos ultimately generates historical movement - aligns more with the geo*historical* paradigm promoted by naturalists like Blumenbach and de Luc. The conflict between predestined cycles and historical contingency in geology align with social and political debates about individual liberty that fascinated Enlightenment philosophers. Writers like Hobbes and Rousseau contrasted the bondage of human society against the backdrop of a "natural," pre-ordained freedom that existed abstractly outside of time. Hegel, by contrast, seems to have framed his historical understanding of the struggle for freedom and recognition around the particular historical realities of the time, embodied by the political revolutions in France *and* Haiti. As Susan Buck-Morss writes,

> [Hegel]…made the audacious move to reject [liberal Enlightenment theories of human freedom]…and to inaugurate, as the central metaphor of his work, not slavery versus some mythical state of nature (as those from Hobbes to Rousseau had done earlier), but slaves versus masters, thus bringing into his text the present, historical realities that surrounded it like invisible ink. (Buck-Morss, 52)

Hegel's emphasis on historical specificity in his master-slave dialectic seems grounded in the geohistorical sense of revolution - in which the eternal "revolutions" of the planet are interrupted and transformed according to specific historical actors and events. This apparent contradiction is addressed by Hegel in the famous chapter in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* "Of Lordship and Bondage." Here Hegel identifies the dialectic at the heart of the master-slave relationship - a dynamic of exploitation and domination, autonomy and dependence that is anything but static. Initially, it is the slave owner who retains power. The ownership relation objectifies or "thingifies" the slave, meaning that the slave's self-consciousness goes unrecognized by both master *and* slave.[81] In this dynamic, the slave is entirely dependent on the slaveowner, who

[81] Hegel writes that, "The lord relates himself mediately to the bondsman through a being [a thing] that is independent, for it is just this which holds the bondsman in bondage; it is his chain from which he could not break free in the struggle, thus proving him- self to be dependent, to possess his independence in thinghood. But the lord is

provides sustenance and shelter, binding the two together in what seems to be a static relation of power and oppression. However, because the relation is organized as a dialectic, the continual contradiction between the two positions is eventually productive of a new outcome. Firstly, the relationship of absolute domination itself strips the slave of everything "stable and solid" resulting in a paring down to an "absolute negativity" which is the foundation for "pure being-for-itself," the foundation of self-consciousness.

> But this pure universal movement, the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple essential nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, *pure being-for-itself,* which consequently is *implicit* in this consciousness…Furthermore, his consciousness is not this dissolution of everything stable merely in principle; in his service he *actually* brings it about. Through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every detail; and gets rid of it by working on it.[82]

However, what is perhaps more important is the combination of this "dissolution" with the activity of work that is demanded of the slave. Through work, Hegel argues that the otherwise transitory *feeling* of self-consciousness brought about by forced servitude is solidified and objectified for the slave through the *objects* they create and the activity of their labor. "[The

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the power over this thing, for he proved in the struggle that it is something merely negative; since he is the power over this thing and this again is the power over the other [the bondsman], it follows that he holds the other in subjection. Equally, the lord relates himself mediately to the thing through the bondsman; the bondsman, *qua* self-consciousness in general, also relates himself negatively to the thing, and takes away its independence; but at the same time the thing is independent vis-à-vis the bondsman, whose negating of it, therefore, cannot go the length of being altogether done with it to the point of annihilation; in other words, he only works on it. For the lord, on the other hand, the immediate relation becomes through this mediation the sheer negation of the thing, or the enjoyment of it." See GWF Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 115-16.

[82] Hegel explains in the previous paragraph that this "dissolution" which corresponds to the "absolute melting away of everything stable" is an inherent consequence of the domination of the master-slave relation, which is paradoxically also a precondition for the realization of the slave's self-consciousness. "For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience [servitude] has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been taken to its foundations." *Ibid*., 117.

realization] is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence. Work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing. The negative relation to the object becomes its *form* and something *permanent,* because it is precisely for the worker that the object as independence" (Hegel, 118). Thus, for Hegel, the state of slavery paradoxically becomes the source of the slave's self-consciousness and resistance. Through a transformation of the natural world and its supposedly fixed laws, the dialectic of dependence and independence that once defined the relationship between the master and bondsman is reversed. This reversal generates the potential for a transformation of the present conditions and power dynamics, a *synthesis* and progress born from the contradiction of the original two terms. In their dialectical collision, the dynamics of a given historical moment combine to produce a potential to change the "universal" laws by which they were produced in the first place.

In this sense, Hegel's formulation of the dialectic of lordship and bondage seems to bear a methodological resemblance to the shifting theories of geohistory and geological development discussed above. It is important to consider Hegel's classic essay in light of both the Haitian Revolution *and* the geologic-volcanic metaphors that defined German reporting on the events in Haiti, as well as the broader discussions of natural history that may have framed Hegel's understanding of the first anticolonial revolution. Together, this constellation of influences opens up an important socio-ecologic framework from which to understand anticolonial revolutionary struggle, particularly as it reemerged in the twentieth century with Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.*

**IV. French education, eruption, and the emergence of a dialectical-volcanic poetics**

Aimé Césaire's poetry is steeped in the volcanic idiom used to describe revolutionary upheaval since the French and Haitian revolutions. Like Hegel, Césaire's poetry is anchored in the geological history and dialectics of revolution delineated above. As Chad Kautzer writes, "[Césaire] was among the first to adapt G.W.F. Hegel's dialectical and phenomenological methods to the struggle against white-supremacist norms and French rule in the Antilles."[83] Nick Nesbitt was the first to document the Hegelian influences underlying Césaire's decolonial phenomenology. In an interview, Césaire confirmed to him that "When the French translation of the *Phenomenology* first came out, I showed it to Senghor, and said to him, 'Listen to what Hegel says, Léopold: to arrive at the Universal, one must immerse oneself in the Particular."[84] While the influence of Hegelian dialectics on Aimé Césaire's anticolonialism has been thoroughly evaluated over the past 20 years, I will address one feature of this relationship, which relates to the *geophysical* grounding of anticolonial revolt and its dialectical structure in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.* I suggest that Césaire invokes these volcanic metaphors for two purposes: on the one hand, the tradition of eruptive metaphors link decolonial revolt within a historical lineage stretching back to the French and Haitian revolutions, situating it along a transhistorical continuum of the struggles for universal human freedom and dignity. On the other hand, the volcano was a unique and powerful symbol for Martinicans. The volcano literally created the island of Martinique, and Martinicans' rediscovery of their identity as *un peuple peléen* triggers the development of a racial, cultural, and regional self-awareness whose emergence is made possible through a reconciliation with the natural world and its influence. Before discussing these dynamics, I will give an overview of the significance of the volcano in

[83] Chad Kautzer, "Insurgent Subjects: Hegel, Césaire, and the Origins and Decolonial Phenomenology," *Phenomenology and the Political.* Geoff Pfeifer and S.W. Gurley, eds. New York: Rowman & Littlefield: 2016, 81.
[84] From a personal communication with Nesbitt, quoted in Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003, 120.

Aimé Césaire's life, as its biographical presence seems to embody this generative tension between the universal and the particular.

**V. Césaire's Naturalist Education: from assimilation to liberation**

While Aimé Césaire was a high school student at the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France, he took classes from the renowned French geographer, Eugène Revert, who was considered an "innovator in the teaching of geography."[85] Revert was a highly regarded geographer in his own right, but his legacy of establishing geography instruction in schools was just as important. Revert relocated to Martinique early in his career, eventually writing a doctoral thesis on the island's geography in 1949.[86] As a professor at the Lycée Schoelcher, he introduced his classes to Martinique's unique topography and ecology, taking them on excursions into the island's interior to learn about the tropical environment. Revert's insistence on teaching students about local geography was aimed at correcting a particular form of estrangement produced by colonial education, in which students were instructed and tested on all aspects of metropolitan history and geography, at the expense of knowing anything about the physical space they lived in. Revert regretted that most Martinican students felt more prepared to describe features of "the economy of Jura meridional, or even Corsica" than they did their own island.[87] Revert's influence and instruction is reflected in Césaire's life and work in a variety of ways. A *normalien* himself, Revert nominated Césaire for a prestigious scholarship to attend the Lycée Louis-le-

[85] Georges Ngal, *Aimé Césaire: un homme à la recherche d'une patrie.* Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions africaines, 1975, 33.
[86] Eugène Revert, *La Martinique: Étude géographique et humaine*. Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1949.
[87] Georges Ngal reprints the following quote from an interview with Revert: "N'importe quel candidat au baccalauréat avoue sans crainte qu'il préfère tirer au sort une question sur l'économie du Jura méridional, voire sur la Corse, plutôt que sur la Martinique," See E. Délépine, "Pour un enseignement martiniquais et démocratique," *Action,* revue théorique et politique du P.C.P., 7 (1965): 25.

Grand in Paris, where he would prepare for entrance exams to the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Césaire's poetry - particularly the *Cahier* and his work for the literary journal *Tropiques* - is suffused with references to the island's geological, botanical, and climatic features, references which were no doubt inspired by the naturalistic education he received in Revert's classes. According to Vincent Clément, "Césaire was …not only Revert's pupil, but he also went further into the lessons of his geography teacher by reading his research works published nearly 20 years after young Aimé had left the high school in 1931".[88] It seems likely that some of these works would have included Revert's research on Mount Pelée.

Scholars of Césaire have pointed to the significance of Revert's geography classes on Césaire's education,[89] noting that Césaire's preoccupation with Martinique's ecology was inspired by Revert's classes. In their introduction to the English translation of Césaire's *Collected Poems,* Clayton Eshelman and Annette speculate that, "The abundance of Martinican fauna and flora in [Césaire's] poetry probably has as its first cause the influence of a teacher he studied with at the Lycée Schoelcher. Eugène Revert taught geography and attempted to interest his students in the peculiar geographical characteristics of Martinique at a time when standard examination questions were based on mainland French history and geography."[90] Less scholarship has focused on how Revert's interest in vulcanology may have impacted the young Césaire, and eventually, the eruptive landscape of the *Cahier.* Long before writing a thesis on the

[88] Vincent Clément, "Latitude and Longitude of the Past: Puce, Negritude and French Colonial Identity in Aimé Césaire's Poetry," *Caribbean Studies* 39:1/2 (2011): 175.
[89] See for example, A. James Arnold, *Modernism & Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981; Vincent Clément, Georges Ngal, *Aimé Césaire: un homme à la recherche d'une patrie.* Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions africaines, 1975; Vincent Clément, "Latitude and Longitude of the Past: Puce, Negritude and French Colonial Identity in Aimé Césaire's Poetry," *Caribbean Studies* 39:1/2 (2011): 171-193.
[90] Clayton Eshelman and Annette Smith, "Introduction," in *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry.* Clayton Eshelman and Anette Smith, eds., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, 1.

geography of Martinique, Eugène Revert was preoccupied with geology. In the wake of a second eruption of Mount Pelée in 1929, Revert wrote an article for the *Annales de géographie* entitled "La Montagne Pelée et ses dernières éruptions" which appeared in 1931, the same year that Aimé Césaire graduated from the Lycée. In this article, Revert discusses the physical causes of the eruption and its aftermath. While this second eruption has received far less attention than the much more devastating 1902 disaster, it nevertheless precipitated a painful dispossession of Martinican residents from their land. While the 1929 eruption paled in comparison to the power and devastation of 1902, it solidified the image of Martinique as a turbulent and risky investment to French officials. The metropolitan government was "loath to throw good money after bad," and as Christopher Church explains, this led to an even greater disinvestment in Martinique during the 1930's,[91] directly contributing to the dilapidated and diseased rendering of Fort-de-France in the opening salvo of the *Cahier.* The 1929 disaster also signaled the end of the campaign to rebuild Saint-Pierre. After this point, Fort-de-France was firmly established as Martinique's capital, becoming the island's center for commercial, political, and cultural activity thereafter. As will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2, the retrenchment of power in Fort-de-France was demographically significant, as the city was majority black and working-class. This redistribution of power from France's treasured "Paris of the Antilles" in Saint-Pierre, toward the more socialist-leaning Fort-de-France seemed to lay the groundwork for the kind of *surgissement*

[91] Christopher Church writes that, "With what was now established as a pattern of volcanic activity, colonial officials were loath to throw good money after bad. As the 1930's went on, officials restricted all nationally funded construction efforts to those buildings of an absolute public necessity damaged or destroyed during the eruption of 1929, expressly forbidding new construction projects," Christopher Church, "Rhythms of Catastrophe, Iterations of Inequity: Memory, Dislocation, and Disparity during Pelée's Eruption of 1929," *Environmental History* 25 (2020): 352.

of political and individual consciousness that would be distilled a few years later in Césaire's the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.*

Shortly after Mount Pelée's second eruption, Césaire travelled to Paris to study at the ENS. There, he encountered ideas that laid the groundwork for his insurrectionary poetics, and that placed the French revolutionary tradition at the center. In what would become a cornerstone of Césaire's dialectics, knowledge gained from European sources becomes a portal through which self-consciousness is achieved, despite its frequent denials and logical limitations. In an early article from *L'Étudiant noir,* entitled "Jeunesse noire et l'assimilation," Césaire explores the tension between assimilation, cultural authenticity and class mobility for the colonial subject.[92] The epigraph is drawn from Michelet's *Le Peuple,* from a passage in which class ascension is pursued at the expense of personal self-consciousness. "Le difficile n'est pas de monter, mais en montant, de rester soi."[93] This idea of "rising up" evokes the volcanic *surgissement* that Césaire addresses later in the *Cahier* and elsewhere. For Michelet, ascension for the working class unavoidably leads to a loss of cultural authenticity that is *produced* by class admixture. "Presque toujours, ceux qui montent, y perdent, parce qu'ils se transforment; ils deviennent mixtes, bâtards; ils perdent l'originalité de leurs classes, sans gagner celle d'une autre."[94] Césaire and his peers faced a similar dilemma, with the added complexity of racial exclusion on top of class and colonial identities. Numerous questions arose. What were the limits of class mobility for a black Frenchman in Paris? Could assimilative education really provide the equal opportunities for social mobility and racial dignity that the Republic promised? On the other hand, did social advancement in pursuit of these goals foreclose the possibility of

[92] Aimé Césaire, "Jeunesse noire et assimilation," *Les Temps modernes* 5: 676 (2013): 246-48.
[93] Ibid., 247.
[94] Jules Michelet, *Le Peuple.* Paris: Hachette, 1846, 35.

remaining true to one's personal, cultural, and racial specificity? Michelet argued that it would. Césaire turned instead to dialectics and the Hegelian concept of *aufheben* ("sublation") to theorize the relationship between negation and preservation to make sense of these contradictions.

**VI. Césaire's eruptive dialectics**

Césaire's interest in Hegelian dialectics began in the 1930's while he was a student in Paris. Since then, many scholars have recognized the foundational importance of elements of Hegelian phenomenology in his elaboration of negritude.[95] Césaire probably first encountered Hegel's work indirectly, through André Breton's Surrealist manifestoes and the writings of German ethnographer Léo Frobenius.[96] As Nick Nesbitt points out, Césaire did not actually read a translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* until 1941 when he read Jean Hyppolite's French translation.[97] This, of course, came two years after the first publication of the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* in 1939. Yet, as Nesbitt and other scholars have argued, by virtue of his inclusion within select social and intellectual circles comprised mostly of other *normaliens,* Césaire was immersed in a philosophical environment where Hegel figured prominently. Hegel's work

[95] For a detailed account of Césaire's introductions to Hegel and the presence of Hegelian dialectics in his work, see Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature.* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003, 120-144. See also Brent Hayes Edwards, "Aimé Césaire and the Syntax of Influence," *Research in African Literatures.* Vol. 36, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 6-9; and Jamila M. H. Mascat, "Hegel and the Black Atlantic: Universalism Humanism and Relation," in *Decolonizing Enlightenment: Transnational Justice, Human Rights and Democracy in a Postcolonial World.* Ed. Nikita Dhawan. Berlin: Barbara Budrich, 2014, 93-114.

[96] For an account of Césaire's Hegelian/Kojèvian encounter through André Breton, see Chad Kautzer, "Insurgent Subjects: Hegel, Césaire, and Decolonial Phenomenology," *Phenomenology and the Political.* 83-84. For more on his exposure to Hegel's *Phenomenology* via Léo Frobenius' writings, see Harry Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa: Battles Over Schools and the Colonial Order, 1900-1950.* Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017, 140-141.

[97] Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory,* 120.

famously enjoyed a renaissance in Paris during the interwar period thanks to Alexandre Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the École Des Hautes Études from 1933-1939.[98] According to Judith Butler, renewed interest in Hegelian philosophy was linked to the circumstances of the 1930's, and to Hegel's valorization of negativity. In the wake of rapid industrial change, the devastation of the first World War I, the rise of racist and antisemitic nationalism, and widespread economic depression, Kojève's redemptive reading of Hegelian negativity was appealing.[99] Instead of equating negation with pure destruction, Hegel's dialectical method proposed negation as a source of renewal and transformation. According to Butler, "The negative showed itself in Hegelian terms not merely as death, but as a sustained possibility of *becoming.* As a being that also embodies negativity, the human being was revealed as able to endure the negative precisely because he could assimilate and recapitulate negation in the form of free action."[100] Kojève's commentaries on *The Phenomenology of Spirit* broadly propose negativity as the basis of self-consciousness and human action. According to Kojève, human subjects are distinguished from the "natural" world through non-natural desire: they experience something in the existing world that is lacking or problematic, and *desire* for it to be changed. According to Kojève, for change to occur, some part of the undesirable present condition must be destroyed. This could be accomplished by means of a conventional, animal desire (for example, hunger), which still involves negation but does not fundamentally change the objective reality from which it emerged. On the other hand, Kojève defines "non-natural desire," as one that seeks to negate and transform the given conditions of the world, explaining

[98] Allan Bloom, "Editor's Introduction," *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit by Alexandre Kojève.* Assembled by Raymond Queneau. Ed. Allan Bloom. Trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980.
[99] Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012 [1987], 62.
[100] Ibid., 62.

that this kind of desire forms the basis of human subjectivity.[101] When non-natural desire is translated into an action aimed at changing the given conditions of the world, the subject is engaging in a *negating* activity, that is in point of fact *transformative.*[102] As Kojève writes, "But negating action is not purely destructive, for if action destroys an objective reality for the sake of satisfying the Desire from which it is born, it creates in its place, in and by that very destruction, a subjective reality."[103] The implications of Kojève's lectures on Césaire's decolonial aspirations become evident in the latter's dialectical theorization of the volcano in the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.* The volcano becomes a metaphoric figure of non-natural desire through which an oppressive colonial reality is negated, and through which a new world order emerges.

For Césaire, the volcano's "natural dialectic" embodies the Hegelian process of sublation. Sublation describes what occurs when two contradictory terms (fire and earth, for example) encounter each other, producing tension and perhaps, explosive conflict. Through their confrontation, the two elements continuously transform one another. Neither one is destroyed; instead, each is at once sustained but also fundamentally changed. This results in the creation of a third entity produced from the confrontation (and preservation) of the original terms. Hegel explains the process in *Science of Logic.*

> The German "aufheben" ('to sublate' in English) has a twofold meaning in the language: it equally means 'to keep,' 'to preserve,' and 'to cause to cease,' to put an end to.' Even 'to preserve' already includes a negative note, namely that something, in order to be retained, is removed from its immediacy and hence from an existence which is open to

[101] "In contrast to the knowledge that keeps man in a passive quietude, Desire dis-quiets him and moves him to action. Born of Desire, action tends to satisfy it, and can do so only by the "negation," the destruction, or at least the transformation, of the desired object: to satisfy hunger, for example, the food must be destroyed or, in any case, transformed. Thus, all action is negating." Alexandre Kojève, "Introduction to the Reading of Hegel," Ed. Allan Bloom, Trans. James H. Nichols. New York: Basic Books, 1969, 4.
[102] Ibid., 4
[103] Ibid., 4.

> external influences. That which is sublated is thus something at the same time preserved, something that has lost its immediacy but has not come to nothing for that.[104]

In the *Cahier,* the volcano captures this process of sublation; what is destroyed never completely disappears and instead becomes coexistant (albeit it in an altered form) in what is subsequently created. Neither term is every completely abolished, and instead something new results from their confrontation and mutual becoming. Césaire's famous neologism, "négritude," the proclamation of black subjectivity that underwrites Césaire's entire poetic, political, and philosophical project - exemplifies the process of sublation. The first element in the word is an appropriation of the French "nègre," - a demeaning and racist slur. It is then affixed to the Latin suffix -*itudo.*[105] The choice of these terms produces a tension between two terms from radically different traditions. According to Senghor, the suffix -*itudo* was chosen because it most adequately captured the orthodoxy of the Latin grammar underlying the French language. The combination of the two terms becomes a powerful and subversive declaration of black subjectivity, an acknowledgement of its denigration within the French language and the colonial world order, accompanied by a revolutionary subversion of these tools of oppression to proclaim a new and radical form of black subjectivity that would ultimately fulfill the purportedly universal ethics of Western political thought.

**VII. Part 1: Inertia in the Present**

[104] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic.* Edited and Translated by George Di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 81-82.

[105] When coming up with the term, "Négritude," Césaire, along with Léon Gontran-Damas and Léopold Senghor, initially considered using the more conventional French suffix, -*ité* ("négrité") before deciding upon -*itude* which theoretically has the same meaning as the Latin suffix -*itas* from which the French formed -*ité.*

The first movement of *Cahier* is marked by spatial flatness and inertia that corresponds to the temporal present. The supine immobility of the island is reinforced by descriptions of it as splayed out with sickness and disease. The island is "pitted with smallpox," a "wound on the waters," displaying an "aged poverty rotting in the sun." These descriptions and the general impression of prostration is only broken up in fourth stanza, which sets the stakes for the rest of the poem, daring to prophesy an "avenir grandiose" in which "les volcans éclateront, l'eau nue emportera les taches mûres du soleil et il ne resera plus qu'un bouillonement tiède picoré d'oiseaux marins - la plage des songes et l'insensé réveil" (*Cahier*, 12). The volcano is thus introduced on the opening page of the poem, in almost heroic terms as a sort of future agent that will clear away the humiliating and stagnant colonial present, ushering in the possibility of an "réveil insensé." The awakening that is forecast here, which is facilitated by the volcano's eruption, is the overriding purpose and activity of the poem. However, the fourth stanza quickly ends, and the speaker returns to the present. The little town that is invoked as an emblem of Antillean despair is continually characterized as flat, silent, and empty.

> cette ville plate - étalée, trébuchée de son bon sens, inerte, essoufflée sous son fardeau géométrique de croix éternellement recommençante, indocile à son sort, muette, contrariée de toutes façons, incapable de croître selon le suc de cette terre, embarrassée, rognée, réduite, en rupture de faune et de flore (*Cahier,* 12).

Except for the volcanoes exploding in the fourth stanza, the beginning of *Cahier* depicts in spatial and geographic terms the disturbing effects of alienation on the town which is toppled over by a stifling and insidious "common sense." While the scars of colonialism are visible in Césaire's descriptions of the landscape as poxed and leprous, the real horror of the opening pages is found in the collective alienation of the town's population produced over centuries of colonialism. People move mechanically through conditions of extreme poverty and abjection,

conditions to which they have become so inured that they no longer seem to notice: “cette foule criarde si étonnamment passée à côté de son cri comme cette ville à côté de son vrai cri, le seul qu’on eût voulu l’entendre crier parce qu’on le sent sien lui seul…” (*Cahier*, 14). Though the people are seemingly unaware, the degrading effects of colonial alienation, and their tacit acceptance of it, has leached into the spaces in which they live and move. The particular bleakness and despair evoked in the opening pages of *Cahier* which is transposed onto the landscape, is amplified by the contradictions Césaire sets up - “la foule si étrangement *bavarde* et *muette*,” or “la foule qi ne sait pas faire foule”; the crowd that “ne [participe] à rien de ce qui s’exprime…” (*Cahier*, 14). Far from making up a collectivity capable of cooperation or concerted action, the crowd Césaire describes is atomized and estranged from itself, disconnected from one another and from “anything that is expressed”. The spatial flatness and inertia of the town, combined with the disturbing resignation of its residents to their surroundings create the impression of a temporal stagnation as well. Time stretches out and monotonously as a kind of horizontally expanding present, with no sense differentiated past or future

In stanza 9, the flatness of the town gives way to a description of how fear has infected the broader landscape: “cette ville inerte et ses au-delà des lèpres, de consomption, de famines, de peurs tapies dans les ravins, de peurs juchées dans les arbres, de peurs creusées dans le sol, de peurs en dérive dans le ciel, de peurs amoncelées et ses fumerolles d’angoisse” (*Cahier*, 14). The allusion to “fumaroles of anguish” sets off an anthropomorphic series of analogies between the island’s volcanic topography and its people, both beating with a “pouls séismique.”[106] In keeping with descriptions at the beginning comparing the island to an open sore, or a “wound on the

[106] This analogy appears in the final movement of the poem, in Stanza 92.

water," the "fumarole" also reinforces the impression of the island and its people as diseased. A fumerole is an opening in the earth's crust from which gas, steam and even magma are released without causing an eruption.[107] In some cases, the gases released from fumeroles combine with water when they reach the surface to create pools of milky, bubbling liquid, further underscoring their analogy to a puss-filled sore.

Césaire's depiction of the Martinican landscape as putrid and sick opposes colonialist descriptions of the Antilles as a tropical paradise. Like many postcolonial Caribbean authors, including Césaire's contemporaries, like the poet Jacques Roumain and Jean Price-Mars, Césaire poetically reimagines Martinique in staunchly anti-exotic terms. In this way, he resists the European travel writer's version of the Caribbean as a tropical paradise; a vision which obscured the true history of exploitation, extraction, and racial violence.[108] In order to emphasize this suppressed reality, the idealized, tropical landscape is replaced with imagery of infection and putrefaction in *Cahier*, recalling to some degree the morbid eroticism of Baudelaire. In the latter's poem, "La Charogne," for example, romantic poetry and its responsibility to an ideal of beauty are called into question. While its form would suggest that "La Charogne" is a traditional panegyric to one of lyric poetry's favorite objects - the beautiful woman - it quickly turns into a macabre caricature as the woman in question is revealed to be a rotting corpse.[109] The comparison between Baudelaire's caustic caricature and Césaire's subversion of the tropical ideal is even more striking in stanza 14, when the "famished morne" surrounded by water is compared to the body of a woman who floats on her back in the Capot River: "pourquoi une

[107] See Hélène Gaonac'h and John Stix, "Gas, Plumes, and Thermal Monitoring," *Encyclopedia of Volcanoes.* Ed. Haraldur Sigurdsson. Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 1999, 1143.
[108] For more on this, see Lorna Burns, "Landscape and Genre in the Caribbean Canon: Creolizing the Poetics of Place and Paradise," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 17, no. 1 (November 2008): 20-41.
[109] Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes.* Ed. Claude Pichois. Paris: Gallimard, 1975 PAGE NUMBER

femme semble faire la planche à la rivière Capot (son corps lumineusement obscur s'organise docilement au commandement du nombril) mais elle n'est qu'un paquet d'eau sonore" (*Cahier* 16). Baudelaire's necrotic poetics and Césaire's projection of it into a colonial context takes on an even more powerful resonance. Rather than merely an indictment of bourgeois notions of art and beauty, the poetic necrosis in the first movement of *Cahier* - and its entangled application to both human and natural space - poetically demonstrates the fatal, desubjectifying effects of specifically *colonial* processes of objectification on both humans and environment.

Rather than evoking "sang" as a way to delineate possession or justify an ancestral claim over "terre", Abiola Irele suggests that we reverse the relationship and try to understand how references to blood and landscape provide the basis and opportunity through which the alienated subject might rediscover itself through a communion with the phenomenal world. "The image of blood…designates the self as organic entity in both its individual and collective reference…In its immediate aspect, Césaire's ancestralism presents itself as the hankering of a deracinated soul after a sense of origins, as a quest for the ruth of his own self. It can be accepted as a form of atavism, which is nothing other than aspiration to a sense of place."[110]

The interconnectedness that Césaire envisions between colonized people and space emphasizes the bond that they share in overcoming objectification and exploitation. The depiction of the morne in the first section of *Cahier* as gagged, bulimic, "solitary in its bloodshed" parallels descriptions of Antilleans themselves. Emphasizing the consistency between alienated geophysical space and an estranged population underscores their shared history. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, in the absence of historical memory, Antilleans can find traces of their past and a sort of embedded cultural memory in the

[110] Abiola Irele, "Introduction" to Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,* lxv.

geophysical space of the island. In the effort to create a cultural consciousness capable of resisting political oppression, the Caribbean landscape - formerly a place of displacement and extraction - becomes the repository of a shared, authentic cultural and spiritual identity.

In one of the final scenes of *Cahier's* first movement - before it plumbs the depths of Martinique's painful past to reconstruct a sense of shared ancestral consciousness that will be articulated as negritude - a Christmas celebration occurs, that underscores Martinicans' severed relationship to their own history. The tension of the first section builds to a fever pitch in this episode, ultimately "bursting" like a cloud and ultimately initiating the poetic subject's "descent" into his own past, the poverty of his childhood and the "aborted dreams" of parents and hometown, eventually facilitating his return to his country and the start of the poem's second movement: revolt.

**VIII. Part II: Descent, Return, and Negation**

From the start of the second movement, the imprint of Césaire's travels and the more globally attuned consciousness are clear. In this section, Césaire moves away from depictions of the isolated island space, of Martinique as a "wound on the water" which is forgotten in by the rest of the world in its misery. Instead, the second movement begins with a poetic accounting of the collective suffering and solidarity among colonized communities around the world, a realization which is made possible by the poetic subject's exile from his homeland.

> Partir.
> Comme il y a des hommes-hythènes et des hommes-panthères,
> je serais un homme-juif
> un homme-cafre
> un homme-hindou-de-Calcutta
> un homme-de-Harlem-qui-ne-vote-pas (*Cahier*, 7)

The list of colonized "types" provided here to which the poetic subject now identifies are each hyphenated, as it to graphically underscore the identitary schism operating upon each group, and recalling the effects of alienation detailed in the first movement.[111] The humanity of the colonized ("homme") is qualified by a label that not only determines their regional specificity and atomization, but also the suffering they experience. In the next stanza, labels that detail regional particularity are exchanged for the hardships and humiliations they endure:

> l'homme famine, l'homme insulte, l'homme-torture on pouvait à n'importe quel moment le saisir le rouer de coups, le tuer - parfaitement le tuer - sans avoir de compte à rendre à personne sans avoir d'excuses à présenter à personne
> un homme-juif
> un homme-pogrom
> un chiot
> un mendigot (*Cahier*, 7-8)

The use of anaphora in this passage is the first instance of what will become a frequent and highly developed rhythmic and rhetorical device in the rest of the poem.[112] This first series of anaphoras is followed by two others which describe a process of physical change or transformation: a poetic alchemy through which the subject becomes progressively melded or changed into the the earth after having directly confronted the forms of alienation detailed above.

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[111] A hyphenated definition of Blackness viewed from the colonial lens occurs again in Stanza 83:

(les nègres-sont-tous-les-mêmes, je-vous-le-dis
les vices-tous-les-vices, c'est-moi-qui-vous-le-dis
l'odeur-du-nègre, ça fait-pousser-la-canne
rappelez-vous-le-vieux-diction :
battre-un-nègre, c'est le nourrir)

As in the first passage, the hyphenation reinforces to shocking effect the objectification of the black body. The definition of a "`nègre" that is provided is mechanical, and brutal, and all the more grotesque for the off-handedness with which it is presented. Besides reinforcing the objectification of the black slave or colonial laborer, this tone of this passage underscores the brutalizing effects of the colonial system of the colonizer's consciousness and ethical state of mind.

[112] Brent Hayes Edwards, "Aimé Césaire and the Syntax of Influence," 1-18.

It begins with an incantatory series of affirmations, as if the speaker is initiating a spell through which he will be turned into various natural elements.

> Je retrouverais le secret des grandes communications et des grandes combustions. Je dirais orage. Je dirais fleuve. Je dirais tornade. Je dirais feuille. Je dirais arbre….Je roulerais comme du sang frénétique sur le courant lent de l'oeil des mots en chevaux fous en enfants frais en caillots en couvre-feu en vestiges de temple en pierre précieuses assez loin pour décourager les mineur (*Cahier,* 8)

The incantations, which appear in the conditional, set off an accelerated series of reactions, rolling down like a stream of "frenetic blood," resulting in an alchemic transposition of the subject into the landscape, and vice versa. Alchemy was of interest to Césaire, perhaps partially inspired by his readings of Rimbaud, but also because of its promise to transform existing physical substances into others, usually through the application of high heat.[113] In a 1997 interview, Césaire elaborates on his understanding of dialectics as a kind of "alchemical" process in the construction of a black identity that reconciled both its African roots and European influences.

> The West told us that in order to be universal we had to start by denying that we were Black. I, on the contrary, said to myself that the more we were Black, the more universal we would be. It was a totally different approach. It was not a choice between alternatives, but an effort at reconciliation. Not a cold reconciliation, but a reconciliation in the heat of the fire, an alchemical reconciliation, if you like.[114]

[113] Alchemy is the mystical and occult science of turning non-precious metals into gold, or other more valuable metals. In the alchemic process of turning a metal into gold, there are seven steps: calcination, putrefaction, solution, distillation, sublimation, conjunction, and fixation. Interestingly, some of these steps correspond to stages in the process of disalienation in Césaire's *Cahier.* See Enid Sarkie, *Arthur Rimbaud.* New York: New Direction, 1961, 162.

[114] Aimé Césaire, "Interview with Annick Thebia Melson" for UNESCO *Courier* (1997). Printed in *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2:4 (June 2008): 5-6.

In the stanza cited above, the series of verbs in the conditional confer a kind of incantatory or performative impression to the passage. Gregson Davis has called attention to how verbs are used throughout the *Cahier*, focusing on the presence of performative verbal acts in the poem. Davis cites J.L. Austin's text, *How to Do Things with Words,* writing that, "certain speech acts (labeled "performatives" by Austin, precisely because they constitute deeds by virtue of the act of utterance itself) are typically, though not exclusively, embodied in a class of verbs."[115] Noting the importance of verbs in particular in conveying the performative aspect of the text (he calls attention to Victor Hugo's adage, "le mot, c'est le verbe". Davis draws attention to a specific use of verbs in the *Cahier:* as incantation. "In magical discourse it is, of course, axiomatic that words are presumed to possess the capacity to transform elements in the external world. Thus in the magical spell or incantation (whether or not accompanied by ritual acts) words are supposed to carry binding force on human actors and, in the extreme case, to be able to alter natural (material) phenomena" (Davis, 143). The incantatory quality of Césaire's statements is reinforced by the repeated "je dirais…" which sets off a series of "spells" by which the poet is transformed into the natural phenomena he invokes. Understanding the poetic text as magical or alchemic resists the prosaic rationality of western reason. The poetic alchemy Césaire uses to poetically transform the subject into space (and vice versa) is a technique borrowed from Rimbaud's poem, "L'Alchimie du verbe".[116]

> Et vous fantômes montez bleus de chimie d'une forêt de bêtes traquées de machines tordues d'un jujubier de chairs pourries d'un panier d'huîtres d'yeux d'un lacis de lanières découpées dans le beau sisal de d'une peau d'homme j'aurais des mots assez vastes pour vous contenir et toi terre tendue.

[115] Gregson Davis, "Negritude-as-Performance: The Interplay of Efficacious and Inefficacious Speech Acts in 'Cahier d'un retour au pays natal'," *Research in African Literatures,* Special Issue, "Aimé Césaire, 1913-2008: Poet, Politician, Cultural Statesman," 41:1 (Spring 2010): 143.

[116] Interestingly, some of these steps correspond to stages in the process of disalienation in Césaire's *Cahier.* See Enid Sarkie, *Arthur Rimbaud.* New York: New Direction, 1961, 162.

Besides incantations and alchemy, Césaire makes use of sexualized imagery in *Cahier's* second movement to initiate a kind of transformative, physical union between the poetic subject and their landscape. In one passage he writes,

> terre saoule
> terre grand sexe levé vers le soleil
> terre grand délire de la mentule de Dieu
> terre sauvage montée des resserres de la mer avec
> dans la bouche une touffe de céropies
> terre dont je ne puis comparer la face houleuse qu'à la forêt vierge et folle que je souhaiterais pourvoir en guise de visage montrer aux yeux indéchiffeurs des hommes (*Cahier,* 8)

Anthropomorphizing the earth as a female body, it is then transformed through the poetic word, from a state of proneness and disease in the poem's first movement, into a receptacle of fulness and fertility where "everything is made fraternal." A. James Arnold notes that with the beginning of the *Cahier*'s second movement, there are already gestures at a "provisional synthesis" which is accomplished through the repeated allusions to sexual unification. He notes that poetic metaphors of sexual union are a common feature of surrealist poetry as well, where they are most often deployed to initiate a kind of transcendence of the alienation created by the conditions of industrial capitalism. "For the European surrealist, Eros functioned primarily as an ontological gateway with woman as the mediatrix between alienated self and the fullness of being."[117] Arnold suggests that the *Cahier's* eroticism draw its strength from the bond it initiates between Antillean people and landscape, which pushes it beyond the transcendence of self-estrangement, to a sublime and collective reunion.

[117] A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude,* 154.

In the rest of this section, the poetic subject confronts the manifold forms of violence, objectification, and dehumanization inflicted on black subjects over the past several centuries, from slavery through colonial racism and assimilation. The episodes are fragmented and linear; they are often presented in a disconnected non-chronological order, in a way that seems to correspond more to the retrieval of a traumatic memory. In this case, the entire, repressed history of the Black diaspora since its displacement from Africa has been experienced traumatically. Finally, the retrieval and rehearsal of these traumas culminates in a moment of apocalyptic fulguration in which the poetic subject realizes that the end of the world must initiate a new beginning.

> Qu'y puis-je?
> Il faut bien commencer.
> Commencer quoi ?
> La seule chose au monde qu'il vaille la peine de commencer :
> La fin du monde parbleu.

In a 2011 article, John Drabinski discusses the reformulation of apocalypse by Césaire in a way that contests its function in Judeo-Christian tradition. Drabinski claims that if prophecy seeks to *reform* the present to avoid the threat of future apocalypse, Césaire's poetry wishes to finally actualize that apocalyptic future. In this way, it circumvents the corrective impulse of prophecy, which claims to be future-oriented, but only invokes the future to amend the present. Drabinski explains that "the apocalyptic word in *Notebook* proposes a radical method and vision. Uprooting as revolution rather than, as with the prophetic, reforming the meaning of the world through a retrieval of a properly attuned past."[118] According to Drabinski, the *Cahier* is the apocalyptic word itself: "outside reform, the revolutionary function of the apocalyptic word is precisely the

[118] John Drabinski, "Césaire's Apocalyptic Word," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115:3 (2016): 572.

positivity or constructive (building for the first time) character of the new negritude."[119] The *constructive* function of the apocalyptic word provides an important contrast with the destructive function it performs in Western tradition. As opposed to pure annihilation, the *Cahier* proposes that "out of the end of the world, beginning is possible, perhaps for the first time."[120] If the function and power of apocalypse in Judeo-Christian tradition was prophetic and reformative, concerned with restoring a certain "normalcy" in the present, Césaire's apocalyptic word seeks to bring about the end to the present world. Far from advocating a return to normalcy or investing the power of apocalypse as a corrective to the present, Césaire's poetry attempts to stage the apocalypse to create a future freed from the constraints and dehumanizing norms of the present.

Drabinski's reading of apocalypse in the *Cahier* warrants extended consideration, particularly because of the emphasis it places on the capacity of the apocalyptic word to establish different temporalities, in which new subjectivities and new world orders might arise. As was discussed at the start of this chapter, Césaire views eruption dialectically. Rather than total annihilation, the negative power of apocalypse (or volcanic disaster) is that it cannot really destroy everything. In fact, even supposedly totalizing disaster necessarily has a constructive function. Hegel calls this "determinate negation" in *Phenomenology of Spirit.* In his lectures on Hegel, Kojève explained determinate negation as

> The freedom which is realized and manifested as dialectical or *negating* Action is thereby essentially a *creation*. For to negate the given without ending in nothingness is to produce something that did not exist; now, this is precisely what is called 'creating' [. . .]. What is involved is not replacing one given by another *given*, but overcoming the given in favor of what does not (yet) exist, thus realizing what was never *given*.[121]

[119] Ibid., 572.
[120] Ibid., 572.
[121] Alexandre Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Ed. Allan Bloom. Trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1969, 222.

This description enriches Césaire's dialectical conception of the volcano, confirming the constructive function of the apocalyptic "ending" of the *Cahier*. The idea of determinate negation is at the heart of Césaire's definition of negritude, which is defined in a series of negatives. The famous declaration of negritude is foregrounded by another apocalyptic moment in stanza 72, in which the poetic subject considers three different forms of interrelated yet unrecognized creation.

> En vain dans la tiédeur de votre gorge mûrissez-vous vingt fois la même pauvre consolation que nous sommes des marmonneurs de mots.
>
> Des mots ? Quand nous manions des quartiers de monde, quand nous épousons des continents en délire, quand nous forçons de fumantes portes, des mots, ah oui, des mots! mais des mots de sang frais, des mots qui sont des raz-de-marée et des érésipèles et des paludismes et des laves et des feux de brousse, et des flambées de chair, et des flambées de villes…

The speaker here forcefully refuses the colonial characterization of the black subject as a "mumbler of words." Instead, the words are transmuted into the long history of creation and contributions made by black people. Despite being dismissed over centuries of racial inferiorization, African slaves performed the foundational work of constructing the modern world. The transplant of slaves across all corners of the Earth has "wedded delirious continents," building, connecting, and reshaping the world in much the same way as volcanoes and earthquakes. Hegelian negation appears again in the famous declaration of negritude and black subjectivity in Stanza 115.

> Ma négritude n'est pas une pierre, sa surdité ruée
> contre la clameur du jour
> ma négritude n'est pas une taie d'eau morte sur l'oeil
> mort de la terre
> ma négritude n'est ni une tour ni une cathédrale
> elle plonge dans la chair rouge du sol

elle plonge dans la chair ardente du ciel
elle troue l'accablement opaque de sa droite patience (*Cahier,* 23).

The negative statement captures the antinomic structure of Césaire's poetics. And in this passage especially, the use of the negative is especially astute. In fact, had Césaire used an affirmative statement to define negritude, it would have effectively limited its meaning within the positive constraints of that definition. The ascription of a singular meaning (or even a series of meanings) would have risked attenuating the range of possible meanings for the term. Using a negative not only subverts the legacy of white denials of black subjectivity, it also broadens the definition of negritude infinitely by leaving the meaning of what negritude actually *is* open. This gesture partakes of the same process of determinate negation that allows eruption and apocalypse to be valued as liberating and *constructive* events in Césaire's poem.

By harnessing the critical force of the dialectic, Césaire demonstrates that negation (or annihilation, erasure, destruction) is far from an absolute end, but instead just one side of a dynamic movement that is ultimately productive of *potential*. Far from signifying the finality of apocalypse, the irremediable loss of historical memory, or the totalizing destruction of eruption, Césaire's use of determinate negation paradoxically delivers black subjectivity from the dehumanizing effects of colonial negation; in the manner of anticolonial subversion typical of Césaire's poetics, he uses the oppressor's tools to subversively deconstruct the reasoning they supposedly uphold. Rather than successfully denying the subject into permanent objectification and erasure, Césaire shows through the negative construction of negritude that black subjectivity is infinite and expansive.

At the end of the end of this stanza, having escaped the ascription of singular definitions, the force of negritude coalesces into a kind of natural momentum that envelops the earth and sky: "elle plonge dans la chair rouge du sol/elle plonge dans la chair ardente du ciel". The horizontal

inertia of the first movement of the *Cahier* gives way to a vertical mobility that plunges down into the "red flesh" of the earth, then up into the "ardent flesh" of the sky. The anthropomorphism reinforces connections that have operated throughout the poem to bond the colonized subject with colonized space. Abiola Irele notes that the figure evoked in these two verses is reminiscent of a traditional Malian statuette used by the Dogon and Bambara people, which "[represent] a man with his hands raised to the sky while his feet are firmly planted on the ground, symbolic of mankind uniting these two realms in itself and therefore in harmony with the entire universe".[122] This motif captures the symbolic immersion in nature that Césaire has been trying to create throughout the poem. Rather than undermining the humanity of the colonized subject through a complete absorption, the reference to the statue firmly establishes this description within a symbolic realm. At the same time, the figure is also an embodied, sculptural referent - emphasizing that negritude is never an abstract or disembodied form of knowledge or self-consciousness but is developed through a phenomenological experience of the world. As Nick Nesbitt describes, "Césaire's poetic subject never in fact becomes-animal, becomes-tree, but must continue to speak of doing so" (*Voicing Memory,* 89). The poetic subject cannot become fully vegetal because the process of self-consciousness presupposes the emergence of a subjectivity. And yet, for the subject of negritude, subjective agency is not attained in contradistinction to nature, as in western epistemologies, in which human subjectivity arises from and is defined against a passive and objectified natural world. Such a model would only replicate the colonial mode of subject-object relations through which nature is instrumentalized to serve human interests. Although a complete reunification with nature is neither possible nor the goal of Césaire's poetics, its symbolic evocation nevertheless proposes

[122] Irele goes on to explain that this image was adopted as the logo of *Présence Africaine.* See Abiola Irele, *Aimé Césaire's Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,* 117.

an amended form of subjectivity that views the phenomenological relationship with space as transformative, and productive of an alternative kind of postcolonial subjectivity. As Nesbitt summarizes, "Césaire has moved far beyond a simple 'return to nature' and instead confronts us with its very impossibility in the moment of its invocation. It is this highly articulated contradiction that gives Césaire's poetic language its full critical, transformational force…".[123] Despite its impossibility, the act of *writing* this "return to nature" at least textually inaugurates a new kind of subject whose emergence is not conditioned upon subjugation or extraction. In addition, as Nesbitt argues, the contradiction inherent in the poem's "organic subject" produces a tension; like a kind of seismic or tectonic tension that will ultimately facilitate the explosive synthesis of the poem's third movement.

**IX. Sculpting in Time: Subjectivity, desire, and the construction of history**

In the transition to the poem's third section, Césaire's vision for a new, decolonized subjectivity to be produced via a symbolic communion with nature is reaffirmed. As James Arnold describes, the poem's initial confrontation of Martinique's present alienation and tragic history is finally transformed into a "cosmic vision" of the new world that is ushered in by the poetic subject's acceptance of this reality.[124] A fully conscious cognitive and spiritual liberation is achieved through the poem's allegorical revitalization of Caribbean space.

> Et voici soudain que force et vie m'assaillent comme un taureau et l'onde de vie circonvient la papille du morne, et voilà toutes les veines et veinules qui s'affairent au sang neuf et l'énorme poumon des cyclones qui respire et le feu thésaurisé des volcans et le gigantesque pouls sismique qui bat maintenant la mesure d'un corps vivant en mon ferme embrasement (*Cahier,* 28).

[123] Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory,* 89.
[124] A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 163.

The process of subjective regeneration through subsumption into the natural world recalls the double meaning of Hegel's sublation, whereby one term is submerged in another in an operation that both negates *and* preserves its identity. In this case, the former, objectified sense of a dead, inert landscape is neutralized and transformed into a living, breathing and fully self-conscious analogue of the poetic subject. Rather than subsuming human subjectivity into landscape to deny or bury it, the anthropomorphic descriptions of the island as a living, breathing body enlist the island environment in the continual formation of a human subject to forge a new notion of a black subjectivity that depends upon a genuine reconciliation with landscape. Hegel's *aufheben* is a useful tool for understanding this dialectic between preservation and negation given the stakes of comparisons made between subaltern, communities and the natural world in colonial discourse. The impressions of "naturalness," "savagery," and "primitivity" were often ascribed to indigenous communities and functioned to distance these groups from a shared humanity. The perceived proximity to nature facilitated the objectification and exploitation of colonized people, as just one among other natural resources. Nick Nesbitt suggests reading this tension - which is apparent in the final stanzas of the *Cahier* - as part of Césaire's effort to grapple with the uncertainties and practical limitations of whatever this liberated, decolonized future might be.

> The central paradox of the *Cahier* is that for each step the subject of negritude makes towards conquering freedom, each movement away from slavery, human commodification, and dependency into self-consciousness and autonomy, there results an ever greater estrangement from nature within the isolation of an individual subjectivity. As Césaire presents the antinomic logic of this pursuit, in its affirmation of autonomy, an increasingly isolated poetic subject must turn towards a 'reconciliation with nature' and the irrational as a means of recovering this lost subject-object unity. And yet such a gesture abandons the desired individual autonomy, strips the subject of its free will, and turns it into an instrument of nature.[125]

[125] Nick Nesbitt, "Antinomies of Double Consciousness in Aimé Césaire's 'Cahier d'un retour au pays natal', 118.

Ultimately, it is sublation that allows the poetic subject to overcome alienation produced through deterritorialization and forced labor, transmuting this reconciliation into a powerful force in the generation of a liberated subjectivity. The aporetic tension that operates throughout the *Cahier* has a contradictory function in the production of black self-consciousness: first, alienation from the world *must* be achieved if there is to be any hope of recognizing one's own humanity and agency. Second, a separation from a "natural" state in which one is objectified and deprived of human freedom is equally important. The final section of this chapter will explore the tension between the poetic subject's submergence in nature at the last, exultant moment when the subject of negritude finally emerges. Returning to Kojève's lectures on Hegel, I consider how Césaire's use of the imperative inscribes *desire* into the landscape of this last movement, opening a distinction between the "natural" given conditions of the world as it is, and the newly conscious poetic subject, empowered to transform this reality by means of the explosive desire to recreate it.

The third movement of the *Cahier* is marked by a somewhat significant temporal change. The final section of the *Cahier* is by far the shortest, and it is undeniably opening toward an unknown future. Here, the speaker integrates the conditions of an untenable present and a painful history into a moment of conscious acceptance and then resistance. A. James Arnold has described the transition between the second and third movements as "The radical break …[which] coincides with the nodal point at which the accumulated tensions of the process of contradiction are themselves overcome in a new synthesis, according to the Hegelian dialectic."[126] This tension, built up throughout the first and second sections is also reflected in the temporal, or "tense" transitions from the second to the third movements. Temporally

[126] A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude,* 164.

speaking, *Cahier* is largely marked by its use of verbs in the indicative, primarily in the present and past tenses. Occasional uses of future appear throughout the second movement, though forms of the past are more common, as this section of the poem performs an accounting of Martinique's historical traumas. Another verbal mode appears toward the end of the second movement and accompanies the progressive turn to verse and anaphora in the third section. Near the conclusion of the poem's second movement, when the poetic speaker defines negritude for the first time, the imperative emerges as a preferred verbal mode employed by the newly self-conscious subject. Throughout much of the poem, the speaker's position has been marked by inertia. The world has operated upon the colonized subject in ways that reinforce its objectification. By the end of the poem however, the subject has begun to rise to claim the full measure of its humanity, and the transformation from passivity to agency is reflected in the aforementioned shift to the imperative. The emergence of the imperative toward the poem's conclusion is reinforced through repetition; most of the verbal directives that occur in the final pages of *Cahier* coincide with the poem's progressive use of anaphora ("Faites-moi rebelle à toute vanité…Faites-moi commissaire de son sang…Faites-moi dépositaire de son ressentiment…" see *Cahier,* 24-25). Césaire's use of the imperative underscores the newfound capacity of the colonial subject to make demands of a world that has historically negated it. In this sense, the imperative initiates a particular kind of relationship between subjectivity and the natural world that is worth considering in light of Kojève's analysis of desire in Hegel's phenomenology.

Unlike other tenses or moods which only require a subject relation with a verb, in the imperative intersubjective relation is implicit.[127] Statements like "donnez-moi" or "faites-moi"

[127] For a discussion of imperatives, see Wim van der Wurff, *Imperative Clauses in Generative Grammar.* Ed. Wim van der Wurff. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 1984, 3.

depend upon a relationship between subject and object. In these examples, the subject *vous* is not written, but structurally implied, producing an automatic relation between subject and object. Chad Kautzer argues that Césaire's poetry formulates an "insurgent subjectivity" that emerges from an "intersubjective conflict." In his explanation, the colonized person is transformed into an "insurgent" or revolutionary subject through a process of intersubjective conflict.[128] In the final pages of *Cahier,* the imperative helps actualize the subject construction that has occurred over the poem's beginning and middle sections. The imperative shows how this insurgent subjectivity is built upon a Hegelian understanding of consciousness, as constituted through the Other. As Hegel writes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* "Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness."[129] Césaire's use of the imperative in the last pages of *Cahier* affirms the emergence of this new, collective black subjectivity. The verbal clause organizes subject-object relations to show how each mediates the existence of the other, and how the identity of "I" and "you" are conditioned through their reciprocity. On the poem's final page, the most prominent instances of the imperative involve a series of invocations to the wind:

> Dévore vent
> Je te livre mes paroles abruptes
> Dévore et enroule-toi
> Et en enroulant embrasse-moi d'un plus vaste frisson
> Embrasse-moi jusqu'au nous furieux
> Embrasse, embrasse NOUS
> ….
> Et lie, lie-moi sans remords
> lie-moi de tes vastes bras à l'argile lumineuse
> lie ma noire vibration au nombril même du monde
> Lie, lie-moi, fraternité âpre
> Puis, m'étranglant de ton lasso d'étoiles
> monte, Colombe

[128] Chad Kautzer, "Insurgent Subjects: Hegel, Césaire, and Decolonial Phenomenology," *Phenomenology and the Political.* Eds. S. West Gurley and Geoff Pfeifer. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, 81.
[129] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Trans. A.V. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 110.

monte
monte
monte
Je te suis, imprimée en mon ancestrale cornée blanche
Monte lécheur de ciel
Et le grand trou noir où je voulais me noyer l'autre lune
C'est là que je veux pêcher maintenant
la langue maléfique de la nuit en son immobile veerition!

Besides its intersubjective significance, the imperative also inaugurates a tenuous temporality based in the speaker's expression of *desire.* The imperative is used to give orders, commands or to express a wish. Thus, it is oriented toward an unrealized future moment that is far from guaranteed.[130] The ambiguity produces an intersubjective tension, as the speaker depends upon the Other's recognition and validation for the request to be realized. In doing so, the imperative projects a virtual, potential "tense" that, at least initially, *only* exists through desire and the recognition of the interlocutor. The connection between desire and temporality is an important aspect of Kojève's engagement with Hegelian subjectivity, a discussion of which was initiated at the beginning of this chapter. In his lectures, Kojève argued that desire is the basis of all human action, the foundation of self-consciousness itself. Human action that is the response to a desire for something absent or lacking in the world is the driver of history. As Judith Butler writes, "Desire, for Kojève, no longer reveals a pre-given structure of temporal progression within and overarching unity but institutes temporality ex nihilio."[131] When Césaire's poetic subject prevails upon the world in the closing lines of the *Cahier* to "embrace" him and to "bind" without remorse to it, the desire expressed not only demonstrates an intersubjective awareness that

[130] For a summary of the literature and debates surrounding imperatives and temporality, see Magdalena Schwager, "Imperatives and Tense," *Tense Across Languages.* Eds. Renate Musan & Rathert, M. Berlin: DeGrutyer, 2011, 37-47.
[131] Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, 73.

proves the speaker's newfound self-consciousness; the desire communicated by these imperative statements effectively *creates* a new temporality. A new historical moment is inaugurated that, in line with Kojève's analysis, breaks the of history and instead allows for a radically new time to be initiated. As he explains, "Time (that is, historical Time, with the rhythm: Future, Past, Present) *is* Man in his empirical - that is to say spatial - integral reality: Time is the history of Man in the World." Man, according to Kojève (and by extension, Hegel) is disambiguated from nature through his pursuit of "non-natural" or animal desires, such as the desire to feed, find shelter, or procreate. When human beings apply their non-natural desires in the world, the existing state of nature is changed.[132]

> Man…essentially transforms the World by the negating Action of his Fights and his Work, Action which arises from nonnatural human Desire directed toward another Desire - that is, toward something that does not exist really in the natural World…man essentially creates and destroys in terms of the idea that he forms of the Future. And the idea of the Future appears in the real present in the form of a Desire directed toward another Desire - that is in the form of a Desire for social Recognition. Now Action that arises from *this* Desire engenders History.[133]

When communicated through the imperative, the poetic subject - now a fully realized agent with desires that transcend the simple maintenance of a "natural" status quo - expresses a *non*natural wish to harness the powers of the natural world with which he is finally reconciled, to sculpt a new reality. Through this expression of a desired change, the subject projects itself through its actions into the lived experience of time, becoming an agent of history rather than its victim.

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[132] "And indeed without Man, there would be no Time in the World; Nature that did not shelter Man would be only a real *Space*. To be sure, the animal, too, has desires, and it acts in terms of these desires, by negating the real: it eats and drinks, just like man. But the animal's desires are natural; they are directed toward what *is,* and hence, they are determined by what is; the negating action that is effected in terms of these desires, therefore, cannot essentially negate, it cannot change the *essence* of what is.:

[133] Ibid., 138-39.

Nick Nesbitt has observed that the *Cahier's* conclusion - while evidently offering a triumphant arrival at racial self-recognition - seem tenuous or ambivalent. Nesbitt notes the strange tension of the poem's supposedly celebratory final lines, in which the poet appeals to the wind to "devour", "bind", and "strangle" him.[134] According to Nesbitt, these verses may underscore Césaire's apprehensions about the outcomes of a decolonized future years before it would come to pass. The use of the imperative mood in these statements may also provide some answers as to Césaire's word choice, which recall a situation of bondage and enslavement that the speaker has apparently just overcome. The choice of the imperative underscores the absolute dependence of the poet's desire for a new futurity on the Other. As Kojève explains, a non-natural Desire must be recognized by an Other in order it to be transformed and realized into a historical act. Césaire's appeal cannot stand alone but depends on recognition to be fulfilled. Just as "the Other comes into being as a social being to the extent that he is recognized"[135], the transformed future anticipated and desired by the subject is contingent upon intersubjective recognition as well. The will of the newly disalienated black subject to transform his or her own historical experience and spatial reality hinges upon the recognition of the Other, which, as Césaire predicted, was never guaranteed and has still not been fully achieved even since Martinique's decolonization in 1946.

**Conclusion**

In what would later become a cornerstone of Césaire's dialectics, knowledge gained from European sources becomes a portal through which self-consciousness is achieved, despite its frequent denials and logical limitations. Just as the histories of geological and political

[134] Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory,* 82.
[135] Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 74.

revolutions converged during the French and Haitian Revolutions, Césaire's conception of decolonial poetic revolt is premised upon a similar synthesis of natural, historical, and cultural discourses. Far from categorically rejecting French influences or traditions, Césaire "assimilated" the theories, poetry, texts, and traditions that he found useful for his own construction of an authentic Antillean subjectivity. In this chapter, I have explored the centrality of the volcano to Aimé Césaire's decolonial phenomenology, specifically in his 1939 poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.* As a poetic device, the volcano materializes a dialectical tension that was at the heart of Césaire's poetic and political project. Leveraging both the local specificity of Martinique's geology *and* the universal significance of eruptive metaphors, the volcano ultimately gives birth to a new subjectivity, rooted in racial and cultural self-knowledge and thus able to affirm its access to the rights to the full measure of freedom guaranteed by this humanity. Instead of seeing the volcano purely as an instrument of destruction, Césaire enlists and combines Hegelian dialectics with the lived experience of the Martinican environment to poetically re-imagine the terms of historical progress and the meaning of natural disaster. Césaire's understanding of the volcano as exhibiting a *dialectique naturelle* contests normative ideas about natural disaster as purely devastating and instead sees the poetic and phenomenological importance of the volcano as a process through which the objective conditions of the world can be fundamentally and meaningfully transformed.

## Chapter 2

### "Un paysage blanc": Disaster, Development, and Dependence in after the 1902 Mount Pelée Eruption

Since Aimé Césaire saw poetry and lived experience as inextricably linked, it is worth understanding how experiences with disaster shaped not only his poetics, but the socio-political framework of Antillean society during a time of enormous transformation and upheaval from Emancipation in 1848 to Departmentalization in 1946. How can we understand Césaire's eventual support for making Martinique and Guadeloupe officially part of France in light of the islands' historical experiences with disaster? As Sherry Johnson has argued, climatic disruptions and natural disasters can shift relationships between people and their governments.[136] And yet, in contrast to Césaire's conception of disasters as potentially catalytic events whose destruction can result in systematic change, the goals and priorities of French administrators, beginning in the Third Republic, were typically to "return" the colonies to a productive status quo, evaluated on the basis of their economic output. From the perspective of ordinary black Antilleans, disasters revealed the limits of their supposed civic inclusion within the French nation. While they technically enjoyed the benefits of French citizenship, these were conditioned by the continued colonial status of Martinique, which had significant consequences on the forms of state aid available to Martinicans. Experience with disasters prompted many Antilleans to view departmentalization as a means of accessing benefits like disaster relief and social welfare. In what follows, I examine how major geo-climatic *and* socio-political cataclysms - from the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902 to the disastrous period of Vichy occupation from 1940-1943,

[136] Sherry Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011, 193-202.

contributed to a belief that full assimilation and political integration would guarantee equality and welfare on par with what Antilleans' metropolitan peers were entitled to.

This chapter will study the complex interplay of disaster and development in the French Caribbean in the lead-up to the islands' full assimilation into the French nation. The promise of the Third Republic's *mission civilisatrice* was that the benefits of full citizenship would be bestowed on colonial subjects once they reached some mythical and always-deferred level of cultural "development" that would merit full assimilation into the French nation. In certain ways, French Antilleans were perceived as well on their way to achieving this status, having already received the distinction of becoming French citizens. And yet, environmental disasters widened the perceived geographic and cultural distance between metropole and colony, undermining the developmental promise that was at the heart of the *mission civilisatrice*. A recent study of the Mount Pelée disaster from Christopher Church, *Paradise Destroyed,* shows the ways in disaster events - from hurricanes, fires, and strike activity, culminating in the devastating eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902 - exposed the limits of the French Republic's extension of equal citizenship to the majority of poor, black victims impacted by these events. Church finds that forms of individual disaster relief prioritized the recovery of the island's white and mixed-race elite, while offering very little in the way of financial support to black working-class victims.[137]

Building upon Church's excellent work, this chapter focuses on understanding the interplay of disaster, development, and decolonization in Martinique, from the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902 to the aftermath of World War Two. I explore how experiences with disaster exacerbated underdevelopment in Martinique, which was by all accounts already in a state of

[137] Christopher Church, *Paradise Destroyed: Climate and Catastrophe in the French Caribbean.* Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.

disrepair by the turn of the twentieth century.[138] The reality of Martinique's decline and its flagging infrastructure is strikingly at odds with contemporary imageries (strongly held by French metropolitans and Antilleans alike) of the *vieilles colonies* as privileged outposts of French civilization in the New World. Perhaps more surprisingly, conditions of extreme underdevelopment in the Antilles also contrast with concurrent trends toward economic development in French colonial West Africa and Asia, where extensive public works projects were undertaken as part of France's *mission civilisatrice*.[139] My chapter sets out to understand how and why it is that development - or rather, its late nineteenth century precursor, *mise en valeur* - was de-emphasized in the Antilles even as it was enthusiastically pursued in new parts of the French empire. Building upon the consensus of historians that the constant threat of natural hazards, the declining cane sugar market, and the impacts of the plantation economy were to blame,[140] I further suggest that skewed racial and cultural perceptions about the islands' cultural proximity to France led to a misperception of the Antilles as being more modernized than they actually were, obscuring the reality of most people living in Martinique.

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[138] In a speech before the Assemblée nationale in March 1950 - four years after the Departmentalization Law had been passed - Aimé Césaire provides an account of the abject poverty and underdevelopment that still existed on the island. He quotes a thesis by the famous French ethnographer, Michel Leiris, who wrote that living conditions really had not improved for most working-class people in a century. "Le niveau de vie réel ne semble pas s'être élevé pour la majorité des travailleurs depuis 1880, peut-être même depuis l'esclavage, c'est-à-dire depuis 1848." See Aimé Césaire, *Aimé Césaire: Ecrits politiques: Discours à l'Assemblée nationale.* Edouard de Lépine, ed. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2013, 49.

[139] For more on the public works and colonial development projects in West Africa during the Third Republic, see Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997

[140] Christopher Church makes this argument in *Paradise Destroyed,* but other historians of the period have also blamed lack of investment on the combination of environmental disruption and economic decline. See, for example, Christian Schnakenbourg, *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe aux XIXe et XXe siècles.* Tome III: "Fluctuations et dépendances: 1884-1946," Paris: L'Harmattan: 2008; Jacques Dumont, *L'Amère patrie: Histoire des Antilles françaises aux XXe siècle.* Paris: Fayard, 2010. For a similar perspective on a slightly later period, see Jacques Dumont, *L'Amère Patrie: Histoire des Antilles françaises au XXe siècle.* Paris: Fayard, 2010. For a more regional iteration of the same argument, see Bonham Richardson, *Economy and Environment in the Caribbean : Barbados and the Windwards in the late 1800's*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997.

If colonial officials and the French government failed to take public works seriously for the health and safety of Martinicans themselves, their concern began to increase with the shifting geopolitical landscape in the Caribbean. The eruption of Mount Pelée coincided with a period of encroaching US imperialism in the Caribbean, and American officials and the media closely monitored how the situation unfolded. The United States ultimately restrained itself to soft power forms of material aid - sending food, supplies, and monetary donations to Martinique, but France became increasingly concerned about America's growing economic and military presence in the region, as well as its not-so-subtle interest in acquiring the islands. America took a leading role in the international relief effort after Mount Pelée's eruption, but alongside this outpouring of charity, US officials sowed seeds of doubt about France's ability to steward the struggling colony through its recovery.

While it is a small, often neglected part of the decolonization story in the French Caribbean, US hegemony was a serious cause for concern to French officials in the first half of the twentieth century. Its role in the aftermath of Mount Pelée solidified not only concerns about growing American influence but contributed to the very real threat of American annexation of Martinique that persisted during World War Two and into the Cold War. With this context in mind, I argue that departmentalization can also be understood as a creative, defensive posture against American imperialism, and its emerging use of disaster diplomacy in the "Third World" to ensure its geopolitical and economic interests were not compromised. This approach, which expands the binary spatial relationship between France and its *colonies d'outre-mer*, draws attention to the geopolitical role of the United States in shaping the trajectories of both French politics and decolonization choices in the French Caribbean after the Second World War.

The transhistorical and transnational scope of this chapter aims in part at constructing an alternative historiography of national integration in the French West Indies. In contrast to traditional accounts of empire that have viewed (post)colonial political choices exclusively through the binary of colonizer-colony, the radiating impacts produced by environmental disaster dispel the apparent bidirectional relations between metropole and colony, prompting us to consider a wider context of regional, intra-colonial, and inter-colonial geopolitical relations.

**Disaster and Development: Contesting Narratives of Progress**

Through the prism of disasters, this chapter explores how narratives of colonial development, racial hierarchy, and the paradoxical proposition of colonial citizenship, were negotiated, (re)produced, and contested by extreme events in Martinique in the early to mid-twentieth century. The environmental hazards particular to Caribbean climate and geography destabilize historical and spatial narratives of development: namely, that history is a linear march forward in time made possible by technological and scientific advances that radiate out from Western centers of intellectual and material development to the rest of the "undeveloped" periphery. The scale and deadliness of the Mount Pelée catastrophe threw into question nineteenth-century planners' confidence in human beings' capacity to dominate the natural world, and thus to impose historical narratives of progress upon its surface. The disaster did not just strike at some backwater on the edge of the colonial periphery; as I will argue throughout this chapter, Martinique - and particularly its cosmopolitan capital city, Saint-Pierre - was seen as an extension of French soil in a tropical environment. Three centuries of French colonialism had generated a particular set of socio-cultural conditions through which Martinique and Guadeloupe came to be seen as the treasured "daughters" of the *mère-patrie.* At least on the surface, these

tight, familial bonds between France and her *îles jumelles* seemed to transcend geographic distance, racial differences, and a traumatic history of dispossession and enslavement. Like no other disaster before it, Mount Pelée elicited an outpouring of grief, concern, and sympathy from the government and ordinary French people that seemed to attest to the special kind of parental concern France reserved for Martinique, its "pearl of the Antilles." On the other hand, the incredible scale and violence of the eruption further distanced Martinique from "Frenchness" in prompting many to question its assimilability into the broader French nation. Ultimately, *la Catastrophe*, as it came to be known, did not generate or strengthen the kind of sustained bonds (economic, cultural, or political) that would have helped rehabilitate Martinican infrastructure, of which the island was in desperate need. Indeed, the colony's diminishing productivity, stemming from the ongoing sugar crisis and a barrage of disasters at the end of the nineteenth century, intensified public and official apathy toward the *vieilles colonies*, leading to worsening neglect in the years after the eruption, which would continue even after islands finally became full departments in 1946.

**Disaster and the Development Paradox in the French Caribbean**

While this chapter will consider the confluence and tensions between disasters and processes of colonial "development" and "underdevelopment", it is important to clearly define these categories as distinct historical concepts. While there are particular features that are associated with a society's level of "development" - for example, the availability of clean running water, sanitation services, public health infrastructure, and functioning transportation and communications networks, "development" itself is a discourse that emerged at the beginning of the Cold War, and was formulated by US policy makers and economists as a means of

classifying impoverished countries that might be vulnerable to Soviet influence, and then rectifying the conditions of need in these places that, if left unchecked, might facilitate the spread of communism. As Arturo Escobar explains,

> The historical roots of this new strategy (development) are to be found in the political rearrangement at the world level that occurred after World War II. The notions of "underdevelopment" and "Third World" emerged as working concepts in the process by which the West (and the East) redefined themselves and the global power structures.[141]

Historicizing development is important for two reasons: first, as a discourse that took shape in the post-war period, it would be anachronistic to suggest that French administrators or Martinican survivors in 1902 had any concept of what this would mean, or the processes that it became associated with in the 1940's-50's. An embryonic form of development discourse was only just taking shape at the turn of the century in newer parts of the French empire. This method, known as *mise en valeur*, was explicitly aimed at "developing" parts of the colonial periphery to facilitate business expansion. As I will address later in this chapter, *mise en valeur* was not pursued in the Antilles, where economic crisis and an unpredictable climate continued to dissuade investment from metropolitan capitalists. Understanding the geopolitical history of development discourse will be particularly useful in grasping the role of American imperialism in the story of French Antillean decolonization. For convenience, however, I will continue to use the terms "development" and "underdevelopment" to generally refer to the forms of public infrastructure we associate today with development, like functioning roads, hospitals, running water, and basic forms of social welfare.[142]

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[141] Arturo Escobar, "Power and Visibility: Development and Management of the Third World," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 4 (November 1988): 429.

[142] These are also the metrics by which Aimé Césaire would later evaluate his own contributions as mayor to revitalizing Martinique's capital, Fort-de-France. Looking back on his tenure in the 1980's, he noted that, "Working class neighborhoods [were] revitalized, waterworks remade and extended, the sewer network nearly complete,

On the one hand, the lack of basic public services that we recognize as indices of development was the *result* of the entangled economic and environmental crises that gripped the French Antilles at the turn of the twentieth century. A barrage of tropical storms, fires, hurricanes, and drought made the supposedly delimited process of rebuilding into a constant state of reality. On the other hand, the absence of these forms of infrastructure also played a *causal* role - critical forms of underdevelopment made the impact of disasters much worse when they struck. This paradox helps to elucidate the complex entanglement between disaster, development, and dependence that, as I will discuss later in this chapter, informed Antilleans' support for departmentalization in 1946. This dynamic is made manifest in the wake of disasters, but it points to a general feature of the colonial relationship that sustains an imbalanced global economic structure. Colonial dependence on a metropolitan state all but guarantees underdevelopment, which is next to impossible to transcend without development assistance from that same metropolitan power. This paradox of development has been studied extensively by Latin American scholars of the post-war era. Most recently, the historian Margarita Fajardo has used it to help explain how Latin American economists in the 1950's attempted to redress their region's "peripheral" and dependent status in global trade arrangements that left them permanently dependent and chronically underdeveloped.[143] Fajardo defines Latin America's

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electrification actively advancing, new *crêches* opened, 125 new schools, new boulevards being built," In *Aimé Césaire: Ecrits politiques, III.* Edouard de Lépine, ed. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2013, 93.

[143] The causes of Latin America's underdevelopment, according to Fajardo and the group of policymakers she studies (leaders of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, or CEPAL), was baked into the organization of global trade, which depended upon center-periphery trade imbalances. The less resourced and underdeveloped countries of the "periphery" sold cheap primary products, raw materials, or staple crops to countries in the "center". The more industrialized economies of the center were where manufacturing was located. Manufactured products were essential for industrial production, but more expensive. Peripheral countries were thus at a continual disadvantage: to dig themselves out of dependence on the center, they needed to industrialize; and yet, the imbalance in their exchange relations made it impossible for them to do so. This paradigm of perpetual dependence is ultimately articulated by André Gunder Frank in Dependency Theory in the 1960's (although as Fajardo points out, it had been the cornerstone of the *cepalinos'* approach to global trade policy and regional

development paradox as "the need for more trade and aid to withstand the long-term dependence on trade and aid".[144] This trade imbalance was also a feature of the Antilles' relationship with France, and it affected every aspect of material development and infrastructure on the islands. However, the abstract categories of "center" and "periphery" risk shading over the conditions of production, dependence, and development in individual countries and colonies. From a more theoretical perspective, turning attention to the role of environmental cataclysms helps to focus on the concrete, geo-historical conditions active in each specific relationship that might be classified according to the "center-periphery" arrangement. As I attempt to show in this chapter, geo-climatic crises had a decisive practical and historical impact in generating this unique matrix of disaster, development, and dependence in Martinique that paved the way for departmentalization in 1946. Beyond just the abstract economic categories of trade and economic dependence, I am interested in showing how environmental extremes characteristic of the Caribbean climate informed both socio-cultural and racial understandings of development and dependence on the islands

While France justified the continued colonial status of the Antilles through their perceived social and material underdevelopment, theorists like André Gunder Frank remind us that a permanent state of underdevelopment in certain, productive regions of the world is actually an essential feature of colonial modernity.[145] Indeed, as César Ayala suggests, the role of

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cooperation in Latin America since the 1950's). See Margarita Fajardo, *The World Latin America Created: The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in the Development Era.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022.

[144] Ibid., 9.

[145] This logic is expressed in modernization theory, which adopts a linear and developmental historical view, whereby societies progress from more "traditional", undeveloped states to modernized ones, usually through the introduction of technology from more scientifically advanced parts of the world. Modernization theory was developed during WWII and it reflects colonial biases that came to inflect methods of development in the Global South, many of which are still used today.

Caribbean people and environments in the *production* of global modernity makes them essential agents in its creation, despite not being direct recipients of its benefits.[146] Recognizing the interdependence of colony and metropole in creating the modern world economy as well as the liberal democratic order to emerge helps to reorient traditional frameworks that have viewed development as a gradual, linear process in which all sorts of social, political and technological advancement are disseminated from Europe to the more far-flung regions of the "uncivilized" world. As Dipesh Chakrabarty explains, traditional historicism takes for granted that history has progressed linearly and outward from the subjective center of Europe's experience of the world.

> Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. This "first in Europe, then elsewhere" structure of global historical time was historicist; different non-Western nationalisms would later produce local versions of the same narrative, replacing "Europe" by some locally constructed center.[147]

The historicist approach - whether it is used to validate Europe's sense of being the historical and geographic "source" of modernity, or whether it is co-opted to legitimize some other "locally constructed center" - is undermined by recent trends in postcolonialism, migration studies, ecocriticism, and diaspora studies.[148] If narratives of French history have traditionally excluded developments in the colonies as peripheral, scholars like Gary Wilder, Nick Nesbitt, and Tyler Stovall, Alice Conklin, and others have made the case for the pivotal contributions of colonial people both within France and abroad in refashioning French political institutions and cultural

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[146] See César Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom: The Plantation Economy of the Spanish Caribbean, 1898-1934.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 5-22.
[147] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. 2nd Ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007, 7.
[148] cite examples from each of these fields

identity.[149] I find that this approach shares much in common with environmental history, a field devoted to understanding the role of the natural world in shaping the development of modernity. The point of departure for environmental history is the recognition that human societies are situated in, dependent upon, and indelibly marked by their natural surroundings. The natural world provides opportunities and resources while also imposing limitations on the ways in which particular cultures and groups survive and develop.[150] Both postcolonial studies and environmental history seek to remediate the critical neglect in Western historiography, centering the ways in which colonial communities *and* the natural world have indelibly contributed to and shaped global modernity.[151] While ecological disaster has received comparatively less consideration, I contend that it integrates these two critical approaches while providing a unique methodological orientation. Earthquakes, hurricanes, eruptions - even droughts and pandemics - are inescapably global phenomena; from a climatic or geologic perspective, these events cannot be considered "local" or "isolated" as they are produced by the interaction of systemic planetary processes.

This chapter considers how the Mount Pelée catastrophe underscored an intense opposition between the perceptions of greater cultural "advancement" in France's *vieilles colonies*, and a reality of material neglect and underdevelopment that in many ways exacerbated the eruption's impact. Integrating approaches from disaster research and postcolonial studies, I suggest not only that disaster has played a decisive role in shaping the Antilles' colonial and

[149] See for example, Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005; Tyler Stovall, *Transnational France: The Modern History of a Universal Nation.* Boulder, CO: Westview, 2015.
[150] See Sherry Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011, 1-20.
[151] See Mark Carey, "Climate and History: A Critical Review of Historical Climatology and Climate Change Historiography," *WIREs Climate Change* 3:3 (2012): 233-249.

postcolonial trajectories, but also that it provides a useful theoretical and historical lens for alternative, non-historicist approaches to thinking about political modernity. As Chakrabarty describes, European historicism assumes both temporal linearity as well as a spatial rootedness and origin from a particular place. The reverberating effects of disaster across time and space disrupt notions of linear progress, development and the insularity of islands. As Edouard Glissant writes in *Caribbean Discourse*,

> The French Caribbean is the site of a history characterized by ruptures and that began with a brutal dislocation, the slave-trade. Our historical consciousness could not be deposited gradually and continuously, like sediment as it were, as happened with those peoples who have frequently produced a totalitarian philosophy of history, for instance European peoples, but came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation and explosive forces. This dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all characterize what I call a nonhistory.[152]

Building upon Glissant's construction of a Caribbean history that proceeds from shocks and dislocations, my chapter attempts to understand certain aspects of French Caribbean history in the lead-up to departmentalization - like the embrace of assimilation, development, and the widespread faith in political integration as a remedy to economic and racial inequality - in light of the region's most disruptive events.

## Part 1: The Politics of catastrophe

When Mount Pelée erupted on the morning of May 8, 1902, it annihilated the coastal city of Saint-Pierre, France's treasured "Paris of the Antilles" in just under three minutes. The scale and remarkable speed of its destruction served as a stark reminder of nature's power at the start of a century in which human beings would establish their dominance over the natural world as

[152] Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays.* Trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989, 61-62.

never before - through processes of large-scale industrialization, resource depletion, even harnessing the power of the atom to develop nuclear weapons. Mount Pelée's eruption demonstrates a critical aspect of geophysical disasters: namely, that disastrous events are produced by the collision of a natural hazard with a community unprepared to withstand or recover from it.[153] As Alwyn Scarth points out, "[Mount Pelée's eruption] was far from being the most powerful eruption of the century, but it caused the greatest catastrophe."[154] The extraordinary loss of life after Mount Pelée can be blamed in part on scientific ignorance and the hubris of government officials, who minimized the risk to Saint-Pierre in hopes of maintaining public order. As the deadliest volcanic eruption in the Western Hemisphere, Mount Pelée has elicited attention from journalists, historians, and geologists over the past century. At the time, the volcano's eruption was interpreted by many as a kind of revocation of the scientific and political rationality that formed the basis of French colonialism. The destruction and loss of life created by the eruption did not happen in some far-away colonial hinterland; the catastrophe struck at the core of the French colonial endeavor, both historically and culturally. Saint-Pierre was a modern city by European standards, whose architecture, cultural features, and mostly white and upper-class residents exuded a kind of old-world gentility that enchanted French visitors, conferring to Martinique the reputation of being France's "pearl of the Antilles". The imperialism of nineteenth century Europe was premised upon the moral and intellectual capacity of Western civilization to rise above and to tame the "obstacles" imposed by nature, at the same time helping the less advanced societies it dominated to do the same. While developmentalism

[153] For a discussion of disaster and its current definitions, see E. Quarantelli, "Introduction: What is a Disaster?" in *What is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question.* E.L. Quarantelli, ed. New York: Routledge, 1998, 1-9.
[154] Alwyn Scarth, *La Catastrophe: The Eruption of Mount Pelée, the Worst Volcanic Eruption of the Twentieth-Century.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 112.

would not emerge as a field unto itself until after World War Two[155], the republican-imperial discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was fueled by a similar ideology of technological progress, emanating from Europe to the rest of the world to liberate human beings from the challenges imposed by the natural world. One French journalist reflected on this in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, writing that:

> Nous sommes certains de ne plus subir de grandes calamités et que toute menace a disparu avec les eaux du Déluge. Comment penser que des flots ou des tourbillons de feu osent s'attaquer à nos belles villes ? Le Vésuve a détruit des cités antiques; mais notre civilisation défie la lave. Il n'y a pas dix ans qu'un cataclysme dissipa plusieurs îles; mais elles étaient habitées par des êtres de race jaune; la blancheur de notre peau est chère à la divinité et nous n'avons rien à craindre des caprice de la nature.[156]

The author expresses the shock shared by many of his readers that nature's violence could still strike at the heart of modern civilization in such calamitous ways. Not without irony at the arrogance of the West, he points to racialized assumptions about which groups of people should be exempted from nature's power. His comments suggest the unstated but widely held view in Europe that when volcanic disasters befall non-white people on the colonial periphery, it is to be expected, as these uncivilized races lack the advancements or technological prowess that would allow them to master nature. On the other hand, Europe supposedly has achieved these things and thus should be inculcated from disaster. While this reporter approaches assumptions about racial superiority with some degree of skepticism, his whitewashing of the tragedy in Martinique attests to the racial biases that inhibited the colony's recovery, and its neglect and abandonment in the years after the eruption. Mount Pelée's destruction of Saint-Pierre devastated the white creole population in Martinique, killing half of Martinique's white residents; however, its impact

[155] For a discussion on the emergence of development discourse in the post-war period, see Arturo Escobar, "Power and Visibility: Development and Management of the Third World," 428-443.
[156] André Fagel, "La Catastrophe," *L'Illustration: Journal universel* 3090 (1902): 342.

on the black working class was much more extensive and long-lasting. In the following section, I trace the emergence and impact of the disaster, the scientific failure to predict it, and the political motivations of officials in trying to convince the population to remain in the city.

**The Initial Tremors**

In the months and even years leading up to the disaster, signs of increasing seismic activity were apparent, even if contemporary observers failed to notice or interpret them correctly. Sea level rise around Martinique pointed to magma activity below the surface lifting the sea floor. In the six months leading up to May 8, 1902, fumaroles near the volcano's base had been emitting sulfur and other toxic gasses, destroying farms at the volcano's base, and forcing residents to seek shelter in the neighboring city of Saint-Pierre. Several small eruptions were also documented, beginning in January of 1902.[157] However, none of these indications was enough to dispel the widely held belief that Mount Pelée was an extinct volcano - a misperception that persisted despite documented eruptions within the past century.[158] For better or worse, these eruptions had been so small that they had mostly gone unnoticed. Those who were aware of these unthreatening events treated them as confirmations of Mount Pelée's dormancy.[159] The volcano was a popular picnic spot for tourists and well-to-do denizens of Saint-Pierre, who often

[157] Alfred Lacroix, *Montagne Pelée et ses éruptions.* Paris: Masson, 1904, 312-324.

[158] Based on increasing seismic activity in the weeks leading up to the eruption, a scientific commission was assembled that included several military personnel and engineers, as well as two professors of natural history from the Lycée de Saint-Pierre. In their findings, they affirmed that Saint Pierre would be the safest place to be given its distance from the mountain, and that despite recent, unusual activity, that "tous les phénomènes qui se sont produit jusqu'à ce jour n'ont rien d'anormal, et qu'ils sont au contraire identiques aux phénomènes observés dans tous les autres volcans". According to Professor Landes, one of the scientists serving on the commission, "A mon avis, la Montagne-Pelée ne présente pas plus de danger pour la ville de Saint-Pierre que le Vésuve n'en offre pour Naples". For the full report, see "Télégrammes du Câble français du 6 mai 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique.* 9 mai 1902, 342.

[159] Jean Hess, *La catastrophe de la Martinique: notes d'un reporter.* Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1902, 230-231.

hiked the mountain on the weekends to enjoy lunch next to the *Etang sec.*[160],[161]. Not understanding its risks, Mount Pelée was treated as an exotic, and in some sense, domesticated feature of the tropical landscape. At the time, volcanology was only a minor subfield of geology and scientists understood very little about the life cycles of volcanoes, especially the unique threats posed by stratovolcanoes like Mount Pelée. Geologists at the turn of the century were not equipped with either the knowledge or the tools to make accurate predictions about when and how a volcano might erupt.

In the days and weeks leading up to May 8, preliminary eruptions had already caused small earthquakes and a deadly mudslide (called a *lahar*) that killed 400 people in the community of Le Prêcheur, as well as 23 workers at the Guérin sugar refinery.[162] Despite reassurances from local officials, the earthquakes, storms and other unnerving disruptions generated by increasing seismic electricity were alarming the populace of Saint-Pierre. The more privileged among them, many of whom had second homes in the countryside, left the city for safety in regions farther from the volcano. Nevertheless, officials encouraged refugees from areas closer to the mountain to shelter in the city, and about 2,000 people relocated to Saint-Pierre. While the atmosphere in the capital was tense in the lead-up to May 8, the city's newly-elected republican mayor, Rodolphe Fouché, encouraged calm and restraint while assuring

[160] Alwyn Scarth, *La Catastrophe: The Eruption of Mount Pelée, the Worst Volcanic Eruption of the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 29.

[161] Mount Pelée's *Etang-sec* refers to the depressed crater at the summit of the volcano. It is a dipped caldera that forms after an eruption when the magma chamber of the volcano collapses or is emptied in an eruption. In many stratovolcanoes (like Mount Pelée), these calderas fill with water to produce a lake at the summit of the volcano. Because of the presence of underwater vents into the volcano, these lakes are generally very acidic, composed of water mixed with sulfuric and other gasses. However, the caldera at the top of Mount Pelée is so-called because it does not fill with water but remains dry. See:Valentin Gueugneau et al., "Dynamics and Impacts of the May 8th, 1902 Pyroclastic Current at Mount Pelée (Martinique): New Insights From Numerical Modeling," *Frontiers in Earth Science* 8:279 (July 2020): 1-20.

[162] Jean Hess, *La Catastrophe de La Martinique: Notes d'un reporter*. Paris: Fasquelle, 1902, 46-50.

people that the city would be protected from "lava flows" by a series of valleys that separated it from the mountain.[163] He had flyers printed and posted around Saint-Pierre displaying the findings of the Scientific Commission tasked with evaluating the eruption risk, in an effort to reassure people (fig. 1.1)

Fouché's confidence in the safety offered by the city reflected a common misunderstanding among colonial scientists and administrators about the risks of a volcanic eruption. As the geologist Jean-Claude Tanguy writes, "insufficient knowledge of volcanic hazards [and] in particular, the total ignorance of pyroclastic flows or *nuées ardentes* resulted in the loss of about 29,000 lives."[164] Instead, the scientific commission tasked with evaluating the risk of eruption concluded that earthquakes would be the most likely impact felt in Saint-Pierre. Earthquakes were a more common occurrence in the West Indies, and most buildings had been constructed of wood with this in mind.[165] Thus, while the city may have been more protected from lava flows and to some extent, earthquakes, it was the devastating and much more far-reaching *nuée ardente* that led to the cataclysmic damage and loss of life. The pyroclastic flow inundated Saint-Pierre with extraordinary speed, leveling buildings and killing all but two of the 28,000 people who lived and sheltered there. Scalding hot gasses and a thick cloud of particulate matter meant that most people endured excruciating, fatal burns or suffocated to death almost immediately.

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[163] Rodolphe Fouché, Letter from the Mayor, quoted in Scarth, 87.

[164] Jean-Claude Tanguy, "The 1902-1905 eruptions of Montagne Pelée, Martinique: anatomy and retrospection," *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research* 60 (1994): 104

[165] The Caribbean is threatened by a variety of different hazards, which each seem to require different building materials and urban planning approaches. In 1890, Martinique's capital city of Fort-de-France nearly burned to the ground after a devastating fire, leaving almost half of the city's 12,000 residents homeless and destitute. An article in the French newspaper *Le Journal* after the fire reports that part of the fire's destructiveness was precipitated by the fact that most of the city's buildings were single-story structures made of wood, in response to the threat of earthquakes. "...depuis le tremblement de terre de 1839, presque toutes les maisons ont été reconstruites en bois avec un seul étage sur rez-de-chaussée." See "L'Incendie de Fort-de-France" *Le Journal*. 25 juin 1890.

France's "pearl of the Antilles," the commercial and cultural center of French civilization in the New World, was obliterated in under three minutes.

## I. Political (mis)calculations: race, republicanism, and uneven relief

In some ways, the Mount Pelée catastrophe can be seen as the deadly result of an overblown faith in what was at the time, a very limited understanding of volcanology. Faulty science was then legitimated by a political authority that minimized what seemed to most observers to be a clear danger. Officials downplayed the risk partly because they genuinely believed that Saint-Pierre was at a safe distance from the volcano, but also to maintain calm and order among an increasingly anxious population. However, because of the convergence of Mount Pelée's eruption with elections, certain players spun the republican administration's failure to identify the risks as a calculated scheme meant to keep people in the city to vote. In an interview given after the disaster, the *béké* industrialist, Fernand Clerc, expressed these views, which were shared by many white conservatives on the island. Clerc accused Saint-Pierre's popularly elected mayor, Fouché (a *mulâtre* and republican) and Martinique's newly-appointed Governor Louis Mouttet of underplaying the threat in an effort to keep voters in place for the May 11 elections.

> On dit que nulle science humaine ne pouvait prévoir le cataclysme; d'accord, admettons-le, mais admettons aussi que nulle science humaine n'était capable de nier le danger, d'affirmer qu'il n'y avait pas de danger, que l'on était en absolue sécurité à Saint-Pierre....comme cela fut fait.[166]

Clerc goes on to suggest that actually, the true parties responsible were not the mayor or even the unfortunate governor of Martinique (both of whom died in the eruption), but Albert Decrais, the minister of the colonies (who, according to Clerc, acquiesced to Martinique's senator Amédée

[166] This interview appears in Jean Hess, "L'entretien avec Fernand Clerc," *La catastrophe de la Martinique: notes d'un reporter.* Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1902. 83.

Knight in order to ensure the success of republican candidates in the upcoming election scheduled for May 11). Clerc claims that,

> [Gouverneur Mouttet] est mort en héros, victime du devoir professionnel, si, par devoir professionnel d'un gouverneur de la Martinique, vous entendez l'obéissance absolue au ministre des Colonies, pour que le même devoir professionnel consisterait en l'aplatissement devant M. Knight le mulâtre...Et ainsi que l'on fait des cadavres...Beaucoup".[167]

These comments, politically motivated as they are, provide a useful sketch of the political landscape against which contemporary observers viewed the volcanic disaster and its causes. Absolving science completely for its role in the tragedy - Clerc admits that "nulle science humaine" could have predicted the eruption - he lays blame squarely on the shoulders of the republican officials and administrators in charge. Clerc bypasses Martinique's appointed governor to accuse the Minister of the Colonies for his complicity with republican elected officials like "M. Knight le mûlatre," the republican senator for Martinique in the French Senate.[168] Since the Minister of the Colonies was an appointed position, ministers were appointed based on the ruling parties that formed the government. The outgoing government was led by a coalition of Republican parties and hoped to maintain and increase its seats in the upcoming elections. Clerc, who was himself running as the opposition candidate, had managed to eke out a plurality in the first-round election on April 27. However, his two left-leaning opponents, Louis Percin and Joseph Lagrosillière, had together amassed more votes than Clerc and it was expected that Lagrosillière's supporters would shift their votes to Percin in the second-round election, effectively ensuring a victory for the republican coalition.[169] While Clerc

[167] Jean Hess, "Entretien avec Fernand Clerc," *La catastrophe de la Martinique*, 84.
[168] Amedée Knight was the republican-socialist senator from Martinqiue from 1899-1916.
[169] Louis Percin, a Radical-Socialist, was expected to absorb the votes of Joseph Lagrosillière's supporters in the second-round election on May 11. Thus, the election's outcome had been all but decided in the first round and there

directs blame at the minister of colonies for his concessions to the political ambitions of Senator Knight, the tragic irony is that political considerations may indeed have factored into the failed response before the disaster, but in almost the opposite way that Clerc suggests. It was in fact Alfred Decrais, the minister of colonies and member of the same republican government as Senator Knight, who disregarded telegrams from Knight requesting supply ships and emergency lines of credit to be opened, concerned that Senator Knight's requests could be read as politically-motivated with an election just around the corner.[170] Decrais instead replied to less urgent requests from Governor Mouttet - a less volatile figure whose appointed status placed him slightly above the political fray.

Fernand Clerc's incendiary comments had no real basis in fact; more than anything, they aimed at stoking public distrust in his republican opponents. His criticism is, however, reflective of widespread racial prejudices as well as a deepening anxiety among the *béké* elite about their diminishing political power in an era of near-universal suffrage. His testimony points to a complex amalgam of racial prejudice, political hostility, and begrudging economic interdependence that characterized the relationship between white Antillean elites who maintained influence at the local level, and republican government in Paris, to which an increasingly mixed-race class of republican representatives had been elected.[171] For white creoles in the French Caribbean, racial prejudice was intertwined with anti-republicanism, despite the

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would have been little reason for republican officials to scheme to keep voters in place to participate in an election that had already gone their way.

[170] This is although the election was for the General Assembly, the lower house of France's legislature, and not an election that Amédée Knight was running in himself. See Ernest Zebrowski, *The Last Days of Saint-Pierre: The Volcanic Disaster that Claimed 30,000 Lives.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002, 81-83.

[171] Christian Schnakenbourg explains that in response to the sugar crisis, white planters and *usiniers* had taken a more active role in local politics, often setting their sights on controlling the *conseils généraux* in an effort to influence colonial policy toward the Antilles. See Christian Schnakenbourg, *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe aux XIXe et XXe siècles.* Tome III: "Fluctuations et dépendances: 1884-1946," Paris: L'Harmattan: 2008, 20-22.

fact that these same elites relied heavily on the government in Paris for economic relief over decades of the sugar crisis. As Elizabeth Heath has shown, elites both in the metropole and in Guadeloupe had a tense relationship with the republican administration, to which they were often "openly hostile".[172] Republican officials were in turn distrustful of white creoles, and unable to rely upon their political support. And yet, the deep economic depression in which the Antilles found themselves in the latter half of the nineteenth century (which will be discussed in greater detail later on) had precipitated a close if begrudging economic bond between the two groups. Antillean sugar producers continually pressed the liberal government for state intervention in the market to insulate them, both from cheaper foreign products and what they regarded as unfair domestic competition.[173] For their part, republican officials routinely intervened to prop up these producers because cane sugar was the only thing that made the Antilles viable sources of colonial wealth.

Unable to rely on their political support, the Third Republic instead looked to the islands' mixed-race professional class as a bulwark against the islands' historically dominant white minority. Universal male suffrage and other reforms were made to encourage electoral participation from the historically disenfranchised black population. While results were mixed in terms of how many black voters participated in elections, especially in the first decades after

[172] Elizabeth Heath, *Wine, Sugar, and the Making of Modern France: Global Economic Crisis and the Racialization of French Citizenship, 1870-1910.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 87.

[173] Ironically, Antillean sugar producers' efforts to combat the sugar crisis and to secure aid and relief from the French government resulted in their further integration into the metropolitan market, which forced them into more direct competition with the very competitors whose lower prices had driven them to demand aid in the first place. As Christian Schnakenbourg explains, "[Les békés] se joignent aux autres producers coloniaux pour obtenir de la métropole, qui constitue alors pratiquement leur seul débouché, aide et protection; ce faisant, ils s'engagent, sans en avoir toujours très clairement conscience, dans la voie de leur intégration dans le complexe sucrier français et de la perte de toute autonomie dans la recherche de leurs marchés." See Christian Schnakenbourg, *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe aux XIXe et XXe siècles.* Tome III: "Fluctuations et dépendances: 1884-1946," Paris: L'Harmattan: 2008, 20.

Emancipation, the increased influence of black voters did significantly help to shift the political map in the Antilles. A decade after universal suffrage was re-established in the Antilles, mulatto politicians had almost completely replaced metropolitan abolitionists like Schoelcher and Ledru-Rollin in staffing elected positions at the national and local levels like mayoral offices and the *conseils généraux*.[174] Black and mixed-race Martinicans were staunch republicans who viewed their freedom and place in the French nation as coextensive with the *mère-patrie*'s commitments to republican principles of liberty and justice. As a result, most non-white Antilleans were enthusiastic supporters of the Third Republic's approach to republican civic life. Republican administrators in both Paris and the Antilles saw the government's role primarily in safeguarding citizens' *political* rights, without intervening in the economy to create more equitable social conditions. As Elizabeth Heath argues, liberal democracy under the Third Republic cultivated a model of republican citizenship premised upon self-sufficiency and independence.

> The Republic's role in cultivating this liberal vision was to ensure rights and rule of law rather than intervening in the market and society to engineer social equality... [this concept] allowed officials to graft democratic republican ideals onto French society without undertaking significant reforms. By emphasizing the rights of each individual and depicting self-improvement and self-help as one of citizenship's duties, the Republic disavowed responsibility for all but the neediest and most vulnerable (Heath, 80).

To ensure its stability after a century of political turmoil, the Third Republic articulated a form of citizenship that emphasized individual economic freedom and civic participation through the exercise of newly expanded *political* rights. According to this new liberal discourse, the republican citizen proved that they merited new political rights by performing civic duties, like accessing education that would help them to make informed electoral choices and contributing

[174] For more on the racial and political transformations that occurred in the first years of the Third Republic, see C. Oudin-Bastide, "L'assimilation, la stratégie du pouvoir: La lutte des colonies," *Assimilation/Socialisme: La Fin du XIXe siècle antillais*. Bourg-Abymes, Guadeloupe: Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes: 1981, 103-104.

productively to the economic health of the nation through hard work, self-sufficiency, and procreation.[175] If republican citizenship had once been associated with radical social reform during previous revolutions, Third Republic leaders like Léon Gambetta and Jules Ferry reconceptualized citizenship around core values of work, family, private property and individual responsibility.[176] As comparative studies like Heath's demonstrate, the Third Republic applied this project of liberal citizen formation both within France *and* abroad, amongst its newest citizens in the Antilles. In the following section, I explore how the Third Republic's promotion of political rights as a method of strategically bypassing social welfare backfired in Martinique after the Mount Pelée eruption. Through an examination of primary sources culled from newspaper articles, recorded proceedings of the relief commission, and other official and media reports from after the disaster, I show that Martinicans took advantage of their civil rights in ways the liberal administration did not intend. Instead of partaking in electoral rights simply as a means of exercising a civic duty, black Martinicans voted for candidates who truly represented their needs and were willing to use their positions to expand their communities' access to state assistance. The destruction and displacement created by Mount Pelée's eruption led to a heightened need for these forms of social welfare. Against this backdrop of urgent need, black officials responded to those needs in ways that, while circumventing the Third Republic's liberal inculcation of citizenship realized through self-reliance, ironically demonstrated the promise of democratic politics in this new era and region. I argue that electoral democracy helped these new

[175] As Elizabeth Heath explains, "Keenly aware of the failures of Republics past and the volatility of massive social reform, Republican leaders and administrators united around a vision of citizenship that privileged formal political equality and individual responsibility over all other rights of citizenship. It was with these rights that individuals were to create social equality for themselves and undertake the process of transforming society. The state's role was to ensure that these rights could be exercised, and the Republic's laws were observed. See Elizabeth Heath, *Wine, Sugar and the Making of Modern France,* 75-76.

[176] See Claude Nicolet, *L'Idée républicaine en France, 1789-1924: essai d'histoire critique.* Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

citizens to create new forms of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "social capital" in order to supplement the often inadequate aid provided through more official channels.[177] While their status as colonial citizens afforded *all* disaster victims access to the same daily rations and aid agreed upon by the Relief Commission, serious socio-economic differences that corresponded to race produced significant differences in how effective this aid proved to be. While Bourdieu's theory has not widely been applied in the context of disaster studies, his broad definitions of capital - which can include a wide array of non-economic resources and unofficial networks of support - help clarify the ways in which disaster victims accessed alternative forms of support, even ones that were not officially sanctioned by the Relief Committee.

In the following section, I will describe several events, discussions, and characters that show the ways in which republican ideology and democratic rights were applied, negotiated, and transformed within the context of the Mount Pelée disaster. I first explore how Senator Amédée Knight drew upon republican discourse to cast black disaster victims as model citizens, who asked for nothing from the state and heroically sacrifice their lives to save others - notably, women and children. I argue that Knight's description of these self-sufficient disaster victims as "needing nothing" can be seen as a rhetorical attempt to accomplish the opposite - to secure for them the economic relief and aid that they desperately needed and "deserved" as upstanding French citizens. Secondly, I examine decisions made by the Commission des secours aux sinistrés in the weeks after the eruption. Drawing upon Bourdieu's forms of social capital, I

[177] Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or, in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word…the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent…depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected." See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education.* J. Richardson, ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986, 21-22.

explore how electoral rights allowed working-class refugees (who lacked more traditional forms of social capital) to form post-disaster alliances of support which were made possible Black voters putting officials in office who represented their needs and interests.

## II. Victims *and* Citizens? Leveraging republican discourse to justify relief and combat racial prejudice

Amedée Knight represented Martinique at the national level, making history as the first black man to serve in the French Senate. Running on the leftist Radical Party ticket, Knight's victory in 1899 stunned the white minority in Martinique and served as a stark reminder of their decreasing political influence in an era of electoral democracy that increasingly favored the black and mulatto majority. Senator Knight was wealthy, well-educated, and an important ally to the black and working-class communities he represented.[178] During his career, he advocated for the expansion of public education and welfare, housing reform, and workplace protections for his constituents. Alongside his more leftist political sympathies and advocacy for Martincian workers, Knight deploys distinctly republican tropes of self-reliance and independence to cast black refugees not as needy victims but as valiant survivors. At this time the extension of republican citizenship was not entirely consistent with racial or ethnic differences, at least in the Antilles where notions of race and color had always been more flexible.[179] Instead, they were based more on adherence to republican standards of conduct, including individual responsibility and ingenuity, property ownership, hard work, dedication to family life, and education. Those

[178] For more on Senator Knight's personal history and politics, see Alwyn Scarth, *La Catastrophe: The Eruption of Mount Pelée, the Worst Volcanic Eruption of the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 42.
[179] A very different approach toward race and republican citizenship existed in newer areas of the French empire. The French Antilles occupied a somewhat privileged place when it came to notions of Frenchness and race, a particularity that will be explored later in this chapter.

who fell short of these metrics, particularly the working poor and "vagabonds" who existed on the margins of society and required public assistance were excluded. In this spirit, Amédée Knight paints a portrait of refugees as model citizens, whose refusal to ask for anything from their government in the way of assistance proves how deserving they are of help.

In an interview published shortly after the disaster in *Le Figaro,* Senator Knight shares some of his impressions of disaster victims.

> On ne saura jamais ce que furent, en face de danger, certains de ces hommes. J'ai été pendant vingt jours témoin d'actes d'héroïsme obscurément, simplement accomplice, et qui sont si beaux que nos petits-enfant en devront apprendre l'histoire un jour, comme d'exploits de légende…Du courage, de l'abnégation, de la bonne humeur même dans le danger, presque tous ceux dont le rôle était d'en avoir en ont eu, et certains fonctionnaires ont été admirables.[180]

Knight then details several acts of heroism that he witnessed in Morne-Rouge and Le Prêcheur, two communes close to the base of Mount Pelée that were devastated by mudflows and falling ash in the days leading up to May 8. In one anecdote, he recounts how the mayor of Le Prêcheur, who he describes as "un noir de soixante-ans" initially reassures Knight that the town can weather the storm on its own. "Le vieux maire, avec un bon sourire résigné, répond simplement, 'Pour aller où? …' Il ajoute qu'il reste un peu de riz, et qu'à une lieue de là il y a une source d'eau potable. 'Envoyez-nous de quoi ne pas mourir de faim,' dit-il".[181] Knight is careful to create a portrait of a black disaster victim (he takes care to emphasize the mayor's race in his description for *Le Figaro*) that would run counter to racist images of refugees clamoring for government handouts and refusing to return to work that were already circulating in other

[180] "Le Désastre de Sainte-Pierre: Impressions d'un témoin," Entretien avec Amédée Knight par Emile Berr. *Le Figaro,* 17 juin 1902.
[181] Ibid.

media.[182] Instead, Knight demonstrates how Le Prêcheur's democratically-elected black mayor embodies the French republican values of paternalistic responsibility, civic duty, and self-sufficiency. When it later became clear that the town was in danger, after almost 400 people were killed in a deadly *lahar* on May 4, the mayor heroically ensured that all the women and children from Le Prêcheur were able evacuate even while remaining himself, only to die in the eruption on May 8.

> ...[S]ur ces trois bateaux, douze cent personnes sont embarquées, toutes les femmes, tous les enfants du village. *Pas un homme.* Les seuls qu'on voie autour des bateaux qui vont partir sont les noirs qui, pendant les cinq heures que dure l'embarquement, y amènent sur leur frêles pirogues les femmes et les enfants.[183]

In response to the concerns of one of the steamship's captains who worried that these men were only transporting women and children to the larger rescue vessels in a bid to secure safe passage themselves, Knight responds that,

> Ils ne demandent rien. Au moment où les bateaux se mettent en marche, du fond de leurs petites barques, ils soulèvent leurs chapeaux respectueusement, et l'un d'eux crie:
> - A demain, monsieur le sénateur, si nous ne sommes pas morts !
>
> Et ile regagnent le rivage maudit, où les attendent leurs camarades, - 'les hommes'[184]

In presenting Black disaster victims this way, Knight tries to create a counter discourse that would cut through the prevailing racist narratives of Black disaster victims demanding "handouts" and even scamming the government aid efforts in a bid to avoid getting back to work. Knight's rhetoric should be seen, on the one hand, as an effort to counter the racist

[182] The French and American media regarded black refugees with sympathy but also mistrust. Newspapers continually ran stories about the bodies of the dead in Saint-Pierre being looted by "negro marauders". As will be discussed at length later, French officials also suspected refugees sheltering in Fort-de-France of corruption, abuse, and profiteering off of relief funds and rations.
[183] "Le Désastre de Sainte-Pierre: Impressions d'un témoin," Entretien avec Amédée Knight par Emile Berr. *Le Figaro,* 17 juin 1902.
[184] Ibid.

stereotypes conjured elsewhere in the media of black refugees. On the other hand, his portraits can also be understood in light of the particular racial dynamics of creoleness and *métissage* that had long operated in the French Caribbean. In some respects, processes of racial mixing over centuries had generated more malleable attitudes toward race, especially toward the Antilles' mixed-race population (of which Knight was a member). This created a perception according to which black Antilleans were seen as "closer" to Frenchness, in just about everything except geographic proximity. To some degree, these cultural and historical connections helped to shade over racial and geographic differences that were applied more rigidly in newer areas of the Empire, in West Africa and Asia. As the writer Charles Lambolez put it, "La Martinique a des *nègres*, oui, de *bons nègres*. Elle en compte 130,000 environ, sur une population totale de 210,000 âmes: tous *ces nègres-là* sont des citoyens français civilisés !"[185] Lambolez's description is part of a history of Martinique written in the wake of the Mount Pelée eruption and is explicitly meant to maintain interest and support for the colony in the years after the catastrophe. In this spirit, Lambolez takes care to emphasize the shared national and cultural heritage of all Frenchmen and Martinicans, presenting the latter (irrespective of racial differences) as "good blacks" - as fully assimilated republican citizens.

This attitude did not emerge only to drum up sympathy for disaster victims, however. It was also expressed by Republican officials after Emancipation in 1848, most famously, by the abolitionist Victor Schoecher. However, the view was embraced by several colonial officials at the time too. In the 1880's, Paul Dislère, a former Commissioner of the Colonies, proposed that,

> Pour ces anciennes colonies, transformées, je crois que l'assimilation complète est possible, et même facile. Pour nous la Martinique, la Guadeloupe, la Réunion, ce sont de

[185] Lambolez, *Saint-Pierre-Martinique 1635-1902,* 301.

> véritables départements français. Pourquoi ne pas leur donner tous nos droits, ne pas leur appliquer les mêmes charges qu'à la métropole ?[186]

While not everyone in France agreed, Dislère expressed a position that was not uncommon among republican administrators, one that was clearly shared by Amédée Knight. Pointing to lines of profound and lasting connection between France and its oldest colonies, assimilationists emphasized the cultural proximity of the Antilles to the metropole in a way that belied the islands' geographic or racial otherness. The long and "successful" history of creolization in the Antilles emphasized these links, providing a model for the effective introduction of French culture in a radically different environment. In many ways, Antilleans were exempted from new forms of racism and racial categorization because of their long history and tradition of racial métissage. As Christopher Church explains, "French authorities saw Antillean society as a relic of [the] old empire and a product of interracial mixing that served to strengthen rather than diminish French culture and civilization abroad."[187] Beyond their cultural significance, generations of intermarriage and *métissage* had created a sizeable, educated, and professional middle class of mixed-race citizens whose politics generally aligned with those of republicans in the metropole.

The Third Republic also turned to the Antilles' ascendent mulatto middle class in an effort to circumvent the economic power of the islands' staunchly anti-republican white conservatives, on the one hand, and to balance the growing influence of radical politics emerging from labor movements, on the other.[188] Knight's efforts to present disaster victims - and just as

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[186] Paul Dislère, "Troisième Séance général," *Le Congrès colonial international de Paris, 1889.* Paris: A. Challmel, 1889, 149.

[187] Christopher M. Church, *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean*, 19.

[188] As Tyler Stovall explains, "The establishment of the Third Republic in the Caribbean in some ways replicated metropolitan patterns, but at the same time demonstrated local particularities. In particular, the political divisions between monarchists, modern and radical republicans, and socialists took on a strong racial dimension…The white

importantly - black elected officials - as ideal republicans is an effort to situate Martinicans within the fabric of the French nation, as absolutely meriting the full measure of aid. However, the reality was that not all locally elected representatives responded to the disaster in ways that conformed with the Republican government and Relief Committee's prescriptions. In what follows, I detail what kinds of aid was provided, how it was distributed, and how it favored the recovery of white, wealthier victims over the poorer, black majority. In this context, it was the democratically elected mayors of certain communes that took it upon themselves to distribute aid in ways that were not approved by the Relief Committee.

### III. Relief with Reservations: The Comité des secours aux sinistrés and racialized distribution of aid

In Martinique, state relief after disasters had primarily come in the form of tax relief and the relaxation of import duties. This macro-economic approach benefited planters and factory owners but did little to assist the majority of working-class Martinicans who had lost their homes, livelihoods, and sometimes, their ability to work. While tax breaks and credit lines were sometimes extended to rescue Antillean sugar producers, economic assistance rarely reached ordinary citizens. Since Martinicans had become French citizens 1848, they technically qualified for the same state assistance that would have been granted to residents of any other French department. However, Martinique's colonial status limited the kinds of aid it qualified for,

elites, ~~fromer~~former slave owners, had the same disdain for the republic as did monarchists in the metropole, and often boycotted the elections. The black former slaves also largely abstained from voting, partly due to the influence of their former masters and current employers, and also (especially in Martinique) due to disillusionment with the republic after its suppression of the 1870 insurrection. The Third Republic thus brought the third major group in French Caribbean society, the mulatto middle class, to power. This group embraced the republic, seeing it as its pathway to equality and progress." In Tyler Stovall, *Transnational France: The Modern History of a Universal Nation.* New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015.

thereby rendering colonial citizenship as a kind of second-class category. Natural disasters served as a stark reminder of Antilleans' liminality within the French nation. Since Martinique's residents had become French citizens 1848, they technically qualified for the same state assistance that would have been granted to residents of any other French department. In practical terms, Martinique and Guadeloupe were limited in the range of loans, grants, lines of credit and funding sources they had access to. For example, in the week before May 8, 1902, when farms and homes near the base of Mount Pelée had already been destroyed by fumarole activity, it became clear to public officials that some aid would be necessary for losses and rebuilding (even if they had no concept of the devastation that was to come). In response, Martinique's Governor Mouttet requested a small line of credit of 5000 francs from the Ministry of Agriculture. At the time, French departments were entitled to apply for credit through the Ministry of Agriculture in order to help with rebuilding after natural disasters. In spite of that, Mouttet's request was rejected. The Minister of Agriculture explained that he was not authorized to make loans to colonies.[189] When the eruption did occur, to the shock and horror of France and the entire world, the Assemblée nationale overrode this rule and swiftly voted to extend 7 million francs in credit to Martinique.

If the government in Paris had been reticent to expand aid to colonial citizens in the Caribbean before, the scale of Saint-Pierre's tragedy elicited a more active role, which for the first time included direct aid to individual disaster victims, both in the form of rations and even a daily allowance of financial assistance. To implement the relief allocation, the government immediately set up a Relief Committee composed of two branches : one at the national level aimed at receiving and organizing donations, and another at the local level tasked with

[189] See *Annuaire de l'Économie politique et de la statistique.* Paris: Guillaumin & Cie, 1890, 363.

distributing relief funds and donations.[190] The local branch of the commission was composed of Martinicans and based in Fort-de-France. It was overseen by the city's mayor, Victor Sévère, and its members were composed of businessmen, industrialists, and military personnel, as well as some civil servants and professionals, like doctors and lawyers. While an effort was made at diversifying its membership, the committee lacked representation from the black working class, and many of its decisions reflect this bias.

Public assistance for all victims was set at 75 centimes per day, with a daily food ration of 500 grams per person.[191] For the most bereft (mostly widows, orphans, the elderly, and disabled people who were unable to work), the committee also arranged for long-lasting payments, in the form of "perpetual assistance", which generally amounted to a few hundred francs per year.[192] Awards varied widely in amount, with most victims receiving far less than what was necessary to support themselves without supplementing the aid through other wages. Thus, despite the relief commissions' often well-meaning efforts to allocate aid *equally,* it fell short of distributing it *equitably.* This distinction is well-demonstrated in Church's analysis, which shows how socio-economic inequality and racial bias coalesced to produce very different recovery outcomes for Martinique's black working class and white elites. The result was a retrenchment of Martinique's rigid class and racial structure. In one incident, the wealthy businessman, Georges Plissonneau, whose family was fortunate enough to have secured passage to Saint Lucia before the eruption, applied to the Relief Commission for help after the disaster. In

[190] See Church, *Paradise Destroyed,* 200.
[191] *Session de la Commission de secours aux sinistrés*, Fort-de-France, 29 août 1902; *Session de la Commission de secours aux sinistrés*, Fort-de-France, 3 septembre 1902.
[192] Chris Church emphasizes that very few survivors qualified for these more generous grants, and that the amount actually provided through perpetual assistance was "insufficient to maintain a decent standard of living without some form of supplemental income. The state awarded the average perpetual aid recipient approximately 150 francs per year, which was about a tenth of an average Frenchman's yearly wage and less than a quarter of that of an Antillean sugar laborer. See Chris Church, *Paradise Destroyed,* 202.

discussing this request, members express concern and sympathy for the Plissonneau family, who found themselves "sans ressources" in Saint-Lucia. Victor Sévère, the president of the committee, declared that, "sans doute, la commission doit venir en aide à cette famille…".[193] While M. Plissonneau sustained heavy financial losses from destroyed property and investments, he was later able to recover most of what he lost through insurance claims the following year.[194] Beyond this more explicit extension of sympathy to white survivors, qualifying for state assistance implicitly advantaged wealthier and whiter victims. For example, the Relief Commission required refugees applying for perpetual aid to provide an inventory of everything they had lost and its total cost to evaluators. They also required proof of ownership to be provided, such as the deeds to property or houses. For most poor families - many of whom spoke only Creole and were not literate in French - providing this kind of documentation was impossible. Many had also inherited their properties, or else came by them through unofficial channels. This functionally excluded most poor, working-class refugees from consideration, not only for perpetual aid but also for remuneration of damages that was supposedly offered by the government. The irony is of course, that the class of disaster victims most capable of proving their losses were generally the least needful of government aid, as they had many other channels of support, including private property insurance, financial assets, and family connections. The advantages possessed by elite white survivors of the catastrophe can be understood as forms of "capital" which are described by Pierre Bourdieu in his article, "The Forms of Capital."[195] Here,

[193] "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 10 juin 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique,* 12 août 1902.
[194] "Société anonyme par actions de bateaux à vapeur de la Martinique", *Journal officiel de la Martinique,* 21 juillet 1903.
[195] See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 15-29. Bourdieu's use of the term *capital* should not be confused with its meaning as an economic concept. His use of the term, *capital* is much more ambiguous, and refers to a variety of social, cultural, and political sources of influence that determine one's social experience. Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital are symbolic and not rooted in material relations in the same way that Marx's term. As Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl explain, Bourdieu's concept of capital, "does not entail a complete break

Bourdieu defines three primary forms of non-economic capital, including cultural (knowledge, language, customs, education, and previous experience, and cultural norms) symbolic (reputation, credit resulting from social status or class), and social (networks, connections, membership in groups). Bourdieu explains that each of these, while not being *directly* economic, can usually be converted into financial capital.[196] While all members of a society undeniably possess some forms of capital that can be converted into resources after a disaster, people possess capital to varying amounts, qualities and degrees. Given Martinique's context of economic inequality, political exclusion, and racial stratification, especially with respect to the metropolitan government that was spear-heading the relief efforts, poorer, black refugees generally possessed fewer forms of capital to help them recover. In this effort, it is helpful to turn to theoretical methods used in recent years by disaster studies. Scholars in this field have looked to the "social capital" discussed by Pierre Bourdieu in the 1980's. According to Bourdieu, social capital includes an array of economic *and* non-economic resources that people in various social groups have access to. He defines social capital as:

> the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitled them to credit, in the various senses of the word.[197]

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with utilitarian or Marxian notions…Bourdieu deploys the term capital, which originates in 'bourgeois' and Marxian economics, but he extends its meaning and distinguishes between *different forms* of capital." See Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl, "Between Structuralism and Theory of Practice: The Cultural Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu," *The Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Essays*. S. Susen and B. S. Turner, eds. A. Skinner, trans. London: Anthem Press.

[196] Ibid., 16.

[197] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. J. Richardson, ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986, 21.

Disaster social capital is more specific, as these events tend to disrupt or even completely destabilize institutionalized forms of social capital that might have existed before. Of course, this is not always the case: as we have seen, wealthier and middle-class Martinicans had recourse to pre-established forms of cultural, symbolic and social capital that helped them to make much fuller recoveries than poorer victims. Their links to outside groups and resources - like family members in France, financial investments, and insurance policies - constituted forms of social capital that were not disrupted by the disaster. Less-resourced refugees created internal networks of mutual support, generating new forms of social capital that supplemented (and sometimes even ran counter to) the limited aid they received through official relief channels.

Heightened bonds of community support forged in the aftermath of the catastrophe might be best understood according to the concept of *communitas*, which is beginning to emerge in disaster studies scholarship as a theoretical term to describe, "the improvisational social bonds and spontaneous mutual support that arises in communities when disaster strikes."[198] *Communitas* usually refers to non-traditional and unofficial avenues of support that are created by groups of disaster victims themselves when aid from governments is not sufficient, not timely, or not suitable to the needs of the people affected.[199] This term allows us to interpret some of the post-disaster behaviors criminalized by the Relief Commission (such as "hoarding" or selling extra supplies) beyond the framework of opportunism or narrow self-interest. When these activities are viewed from the perspective of under-resourced people responding to a crisis, they can instead be viewed as effective - if unsanctioned - strategies of mutual support. In stark contrast to the familiar imagery of looting and violence that floods the media after disasters,

[198] Steve Matthewman and Sinya Uekusa, "Theorizing Disaster Communitas," *Theory and Society* 50 (March 2021): 967.
[199] Ibid., 965.

anthropological research has actually shown that social cohesion and helpfulness typically surge after crises.[200] It does not seem like a leap to assume that this might have also been the case after the Mount Pelée eruption, with destitute people creating emergent bonds of reciprocal care as they faced a period of extended unemployment, inadequate housing, and penurious state assistance.

In the immediate aftermath of Mount Pelée's eruption, the French public, the international community and administrators on the ground were overcome by sympathy for the plight of Martinicans and the tragedy they had just endured. This spirit of sympathy and shared grief was accompanied by an influx of financial donations from governments, businesses and private individuals around France and the world. Ultimately, the branch of the Relief Committee based in Paris raised 9.4 million francs for disaster victims, with the government itself chipping in 1.5 million.[201] While the Relief Committee based in Fort-de-France committed to distributing this aid "equally" among "all categories of the population", stating that "factory owners, laborers, proprietors or merchants, rich or poor, were all reduced to the same level of deprivation". Bourdieu's explanations of forms of capital makes it clear that ~~of course,~~not all refugees had suffered comparable losses; those who, by quantitative financial measurements had suffered *less*, had often incurred more life-changing and severe losses in terms of their ability to recover. And yet, despite the Relief Commission's early commitments to equality and generosity in providing assistance, racial and class anxieties emerged in the wake of the disaster as thousands of refugees poured into Fort-de-France.

[200] Shinya Uekusa, "Rethinking resilience: Bourdieu's contribution to disaster research," *Resilience* 6:3: 189.
[201] "Listes de souscriptions pour les sinistrés de la Martinique (suite): 123e liste," Quoted in Christopher Church, *Paradise Destroyed*, 200.

## IV. Disaster Social Capital, *Communitas* and alternative networks of support

As the months wore on and the recovery process faltered, the Relief Commission's discussions began to cast most black refugees who sheltered in Fort-de-France as disorderly, dishonest, and in many cases, not deserving of the aid they received. Members heard numerous reports about some refugees hoarding provisions, only to turn around and sell extras.[202] Officials soon began to suspect poorer, black refugees of abusing the system, of creating a sort of black market through which relief provisions were bought and sold. This prompted the governor to issue a warning to the beleaguered population. "Tout sinistré qui aura vendu des vivres à lui distribués, ou qui en aura fait un usage prouvant qu'il n'avait de ces vivres aucun besoin, sera rayé de la liste des rationnaires."[203]

Members of the Relief Commission and colonial officials saw these activities as evidence of refugees trying to game the system, but the absence of written testimony from refugees themselves makes it challenging to nuance that narrative. Limited survivor testimony invites a search for alternative theoretical and interpretive methods for surfacing what the experience of refugees in Fort-de-France might have been like. I think it is possible to think about these "abuses" - which had the unfortunate effect of distancing black Martinicans from Frenchness in the eyes of colonial officials - as in fact forms of mutual aid and support that allowed refugees to supplement government rations.

Most stories about disaster survivors in the mainstream French press highlighted the stories and tragedies of privileged, and mostly white, disaster victims, and their families in France. Amédée Knight's interview in *Le Figaro,* in which he discusses the plight of refugees in

[202] Declaration from Interim Governor Lemaire on 29 August 1902. *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 5 September 1902.
[203] Declaration from Interim Governor Lemaire on 29 August 1902. *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 5 September 1902.

Le Prêcheur, is one of the only accounts that focuses on the experiences of non-white victims. In the absence of direct survivor accounts authored by people in these communities after, we are left to read between the lines of official discourse and media coverage to piece together how less fortunate refugees may have experienced the catastrophe. Scholars in refugee studies point out that refugees are silenced as a result of statelessness and the complexities of their uprooting and displacement. As Peter Nyers explains, "Without citizenship, refugees are denied not only political rights but also something more fundamental - the capacity to speak politically and the expectation that they will be heard…Refugees are voiceless not in any essentialist way but only through the congenital disorder that comes with being classified as the absence of the sovereign voice capable of intervening in the public sphere."[204] Nyers' analysis recognizes refugees as a purely political category, as people rendered invisible or voiceless by their exclusion from affiliation with a sovereign state. Martinicans displaced by the Mount Pelée catastrophe do not quite fit within this category - rather than refugees, they are more accurately described as internally displaced people. And yet, it may be useful to retain the term "refugee" in describe survivors who fled to Fort-de-France. Martinicans already experienced a measured and liminal status as French citizens, and the disaster only hardened the lines of class and racial difference that for decades had upheld legal distinctions.

Combining the reports of the Relief Commission with contemporary scholarship on disaster and resilience offers a slightly more balanced historical picture of how working-class, black disaster victims - who constituted the majority of refugees - may have formed alternative networks of social capital to support one another. In the following section, I continue this examination of disaster social capital and *communitas,* through considering how newly elected

[204] Peter Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond State of Emergency.* New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013, 17.

black republican officials circumvented official policy in order to provide for their particular constituents in ways they felt were more equitable and appropriate. While this local overreach defied the directives of the Relief Commission, leading many colonial administrators to question the "maturity" of black voters to select "responsible" representatives, I suggest that the responsiveness of mayors to their communities' heightened need for state assistance confirmed the efficacy and importance of republican rights to Martinicans.

**V. Republican Democracy and the formation of Refugee networks of Support**

One of the Relief Commission's most contentious debates centered on who exactly should qualify as a "disaster victim" and thus be entitled to state aid. At first, residents from Fort-de-France and its surrounding areas did not receive this distinction. Government officials soon realized, however, that the livelihoods of people in every part of the island had been impacted by the catastrophe. Most had lost their jobs, and volcanic dust had settled on fields across the island, destroying sugar harvests, plantation jobs, and family farms alike. News of the food and clothing distributions in Fort-de-France spread quickly, and many people not initially classed as disaster victims were accused of descending on the city in search of free food and other rations. In time, the Relief Committee began to realize the myopathy of extending aid *only* to those citizens directly in the path of the eruption.[205] The Inspector of Finances, Maurice Bloch, offered a more expansive definition of who might qualify as a "sinistré" when he appeared before the commission in June. "[L'Inspecteur] estime que la définition du mot sinistré doit être étendue. Il peut arriver, par exemple, que telle personne qui n'habitait pas une commune ravagée par les effets du volcan, soit sinistrée, par la perte de ses ressources, des parents qui lui venaient

[205] See "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 2 juin 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique,* 18 juillet 1902.

en aide." In this spirit, the Inspector announced that he would be directing additional money to be distributed not only by the Relief Commission but by local mayors. "Il a porté des fonds qui sont à la disposition du Président de la commission, des maires des communes; il est prêt à les distribuer pour venir en aide à toutes les infortunés." And yet in the very next breath, the Inspector abandons empathy to wonder at the fact that just two weeks after the eruption, refugees in Fort-de-France had still not returned to work.

> Et puis, allons-nous laisser éternellement la population mâle à ne rien faire ? Ces hommes vont s'accoutumer à cette vie facile qui consiste à recevoir une ration le matin, une autre le soir, à dormir dans l'intervalle. Ne pourrait-on pas, moyennant un salaire journalier, les occuper à des travaux de vicinalité? Cette décision aurait l'avantage non seulement de leur donner l'habitude de travail, mais de leur permettre de faire face à leurs besoins avec l'argent qu'ils toucheraient. Si la commission ne se hâte pas d'organiser le travail, des difficultés sociales pourraient surgir plus tard.[206]

Because of their concerns about cash payments and food rations inducing vagrancy and dependence on the state, the Relief Committee decided to focus its long-term plans for recovery on finding immediate re-employment for disaster victims. On the one hand, this approach fit within the patriarchal-liberal vision of self-reliant male breadwinners supporting their families without state assistance. However, the actual prospects of getting people back to work were next to impossible after the eruption. Martinique's economy revolved around sugar, and while not all of the plantations had been in the direct path of the eruption, the ash fall it produced had ruined sugar cane, coffee, and cotton harvests for the year. Finding jobs in the traditional sectors that offered employment to Martinicans - either on plantations or in factories - disappeared overnight.

Soon after the eruption, funds and emergency aid were allocated to local officials to distribute to the *sinistrés* of their particular communes. However, the days and weeks after the

[206] Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 2 juin 1902, *Journal officiel de la Martinique,* 18 juillet 1902.

eruption were chaotic and confusing. Communications and transport networks were destroyed, making it difficult for officials in Fort-de-France to monitor how exactly aid was distributed in each locality. Lack of oversight meant that decisions about aid allocation were often left up to the judgment of local officials, a worrying trend toward decentralization that greatly concerned the Relief Committee. In one session, members discuss the problem of uneven aid distribution in different communes, noting that in some towns refugees were receiving aid in the form of cash payments and not just food or clothing rations. "...La reprise du travail ne peut pas être différée. Il faut qu'avant 10 ou 15 jours, ces pauvres gens des communes sinistrées aient entre les mains quelques pièces de monnaie. Autrement, ils vont murmurer, d'autant plus qu'ils savent que, dans certaines communes, il est fait des distributions d'argent."[207] The horror at the thought of black refugees receiving cash handouts pervades the committee's discussions in the weeks and months after the eruption, and it points to more profound anxieties among the planter class *and* colonial administrators about the availability of a labor force in the post-Emancipation era. Without the ability to legally conscript black labor on plantations and in factories, the colonial plantation economy faced not only a labor crisis but a crisis of authority: if former slaves could provide for themselves in other ways, through subsistence farming or small-holding, the plantation economy would collapse. The preoccupation with re-subordinating the workforce after disasters seems to have been a feature of plantation economies more generally. This tendency is explored in a recent paper by Oscar Webber, who examines the relationship between disaster and the potential disruption of colonial control over the black labor force in the aftermath of crises. He writes that

> whilst British approaches to disaster relief were never formally codified, there were organizing principles that remained constant, meaning it followed an observable pattern throughout the period 1831–1907. The most prominent organizing principle was white fear of an African-Caribbean population rendered "idle." When disasters destroyed and

[207] "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 10 juin 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 29 July 1902.

> disrupted the sites and rhythms of labor, white elites became anxious about the prospect of an idle African-Caribbean population. They feared that, without the disciplining force of labor, this population would mount a challenge to their authority.[208]

And yet, planters' concerns about labor shortages and the implosion of the sugar industry after Emancipation had not been borne out. For a variety of economic, cultural, and social reasons, many former slaves remained within the plantation sphere, whether as wage workers at refineries, as farm workers, sharecroppers, or in secondary cultures like coffee and cotton.[209] However, Mount Pelée's eruption had decimated any possibility of work in the sugar industry that sustained the entire island. Colonial officials now worried not only about the future of the sugar industry itself, but also about the possibility of ensuring a labor force, whose enthusiasm to return to work and get the island back to some level of productivity could only be undermined (as they saw it) by direct financial support to the unemployed. As one official put it, "...Il valait mieux...leur procurer [l'aide] sous forme de salaire. C'est pourquoi il fait, au nom de la commission, les plus grands efforts pour la réorganisation du travail."[210] The Commission ultimately designated one of its members to "appeler respectueusement l'attention de M. le Gouverneur sur le danger de procéder à des distributions d'argent dans certaines communes, et au profit de quelques personnes, quand sur les autres points de la colonie, la masse des sinistrés

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[208] Oscar Webber, "An Intolerance of Idleness: British Disaster "Relief" in the Caribbean 1831–1907," *New West Indian Guide* 93 (December 2019): 232.

[209] See Dale Tomich, "The 'Second Slavery': Bonded Labor and the Transformation of the Nineteenth-Century World Economy," *Critical Readings on Global Slavery.* Damian Alan Pargas & Felicia Rosu, eds. Leiden: Brill, 2017, 1326-1349.

[210] "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 10 juin 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 29 July 1902. In another session, members discuss how to best distribute rations like soap and tobacco to refugees. Some argue that it would be much easier to give refugees money for them to purchase these things in the quantities needed, but that proposal is ultimately shut down, driven by concerns over giving money to refugees. "M. Deslandes propose de distribuer aux sinistrés une petite somme pour leur permettre l'achat de savon et de tabac ainsi que des vêtements. La commission repousse cette motion et décide que du tabac et du savon seront distribués en nature aux sinistrés." See "Commission des secours aux sinistrés" Séance du 13 mai 1902" *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 8 juillet 1902.

n'a encore reçu aucun secours en espèces, et sur la nécessité de retarder toute distribution jusqu'à ce que le travail soit entièrement réorganisé."[211] The Relief Committee's absolute prioritization of work, paired with its resistance to providing cash assistance to *some* segments of Martinique's population[212] recalls the labor relations of a previous era - one in which black labor could be (and was) conscripted in the wake of disasters to rebuild the island.[213] And in fact, the exceptional circumstances surrounding the crisis prompted some Committee members to suggest a return to this regime of slave labor.[214] Calls to re-institute slavery were politely and quietly shut down by Victor Sévère, but they highlight the precarity of black Martinicans' civil rights, more than a half century after they became free French citizens. It is notable that the two communes reproached for having distributed cash handouts to disaster victims - Gros-Morne and Lorrain - were working-class areas populated mostly by sugar refinery and agricultural workers. Gros-Morne was one of the poorer towns in Martinique and Lorrain was one of the communes at the center of

[211] "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 10 juin 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 29 July 1902.
[212] The communes mentioned in this session of the Relief Commission are Lorrain and Gros-Morne. The president of the commission, Victor Sévère, notes that the mayors of both towns had taken it upon themselves to distribute thousands of francs to disaster victims. The commission not only worried that "handouts" would discourage refugees from getting back to work, but also that this disorganized and uneven aid distribution would result in mass movements of refugees toward towns where monetary aid was available.
[213] Webber explains the ways in which Africans were conscripted to rebuild after disasters - most often triggered by hurricanes. He argues that British disaster response after these events focused not only on the material process of rebuilding, but just as much on the re-conscription of black workers. Fearing that the chaos of the post-disaster context would render black laborers idle or otherwise unavailable for work, British planters redoubled their efforts in reconstruction on stabilizing access to this labor force. He writes that, "Though a large-scale contestation of colonial authority never took place following a disaster in the long nineteenth century, the disruption of labor appears to have always precipitated the fear of one." This is a feature of the Mount Pelée disaster response that will be discussed later on in this chapter. See Oscar Webber, "An Intolerance of Idleness: British Disaster "Relief" in the Caribbean 1831–1907," *New West Indian Guide* 93 (December 2019): 201-230.
[214] The Relief Committee's notes indicate that this was a serious proposition made by the government engineer in charge of the reconstruction efforts. "M. le Chef du service des ponts et chaussées dit qu'il y a des sinistrés qui travaillent, sont payés et qui continuent néanmoins de recevoir leur ration. Le président répond qu'il n'est pas possible d'employer des sinistrés sans les payer, et cela uniquement parce qu'il auraient des rations. Ce serait en quelque sorte les soumettre au régime du travail forcé auquel échappent les détenus des maisons d'arrêt." See "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 21 mai 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 8 juillet 1902.

Martinique's island-wide labor strike in 1900, which culminated in the massacre of ten workers at the sugar refinery near the commune of Le François. These working-class areas, centered around sugar plantations, were strongholds of an emerging socialist movement in Martinique.[215] The Relief Committee's concern about losing control over aid distribution in these communes had precedents in the recent past. After the powerful hurricane that hit Martinique in 1891(ravaging towns like Gros-Morne and Le Lamentin in particular), Emile Chaudié, the colonial inspector in charge of overseeing relief efforts, accused the then mayor of Gros-Morne of abusing relief funds. In a deposition, the mayor admitted to "having received but ignored the instructions from the Direction of the Interior" and "refusing to restrict access to foodstuffs to only those designated…'most needy'".[216]

To colonial officials, Gros-Morne's unconventional approach to aid allocation after disasters represented a threat to centralization, to the priority of returning refugees to work as soon as possible, and to their oversight authority. However, the responses of these local officials are also indicative of the early successes of electoral democracy and decentralization in Martinique, although certainly not in the ways that the colonial government had expected or intended. Indeed, these regions' histories of labor unrest may have made members of the Relief Commission even more aware of the "risks" of not immediately returning to a work regime. The new, democratically elected mayors and *conseils* in these areas seemed to be attempting to provide greater, and more diverse or appropriate forms of public assistance to victims, taking

[215] For more on the emerging socialist movement in Martinique, as well as its cooperation and relationship with French socialists, see Jacques Adélaïde-Merland, *Les origines du mouvement ouvrier en Martinique: 1870-1900.* Paris: Karthala, 2000.

[216] E. Chaudié. « Extrait d'un rapport d'enquête au sujet de la distribution des vivres dans la Commune du Gros-Morne. » 20 January 1892. In MAR 72, d.582. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence. Quoted in Christopher Church, *Paradise Destroyed,* 127.

advantage of the general atmosphere of confusion and disorganization to make local decisions about how to allocate aid and best support refugees.

In the absence of work prospects, refugees and their democratically elected mayors formed a kind of disaster-specific *communitas* in the wake of the eruption, with local officials making decisions about how to distribute relief funds in ways that were most supportive of the unemployed and often destitute population. Disaster researchers who use the concept of communitas note that it generally refers to non-official, grassroots networks of social support that emerges in the absence (or inadequacy) of state or external aid. The alliance between local elected officials in Martinique and their black constituents after Mount Pelée's eruption would not seem to conform with this definition. And yet, I argue that using the concept of *communitas* more expansively in this case is useful, in that it helps us to grasp the social bonds that were concretized between black voters and their elected representatives after the disaster. What is more, elected officials like the mayors of Gros-Morne and Lorrain leveraged their political power and social capital in unsanctioned ways that defied official instructions for how aid was to be distributed. In this sense, the Mount Pelée catastrophe had a paradoxical impact on republican politics: working-class voters, many of whom were marginalized from political participation before, may have come to appreciate the value of electing representatives who were willing to circumvent the colonial administration to secure resources for their constituents. This phenomenon demonstrated the efficacy and benefits of republican democracy in Martinique for the average black worker, even as the decisions of local officials contradicted the intentions of colonial administrators about the forms and distribution of aid.

## Part 2. Economic challenges

## I. Re-employment as Relief: Attempting a *reprise du travail* through public works

In the absence of pursuing immediate re-employment for refugees on the destroyed sugar plantations, the Relief Commission faced a crisis: how, on the one hand, were they to get the colony's economy back up and running as soon as possible? On the other hand, how should they quickly find jobs for the thousands of refugees whose reliance on temporary disaster aid they worried would morph into long-term state dependence? At the same time, French leaders faced serious questions about the viability of maintaining a colony with such a volatile climate and topography.[217] Some suggested that providing passage off of the island to those refugees who wanted to leave would spare the expense of having to provide continuous aid.[218] The majority of the Relief Commission in Fort-de-France however, was adamantly opposed to a full-scale evacuation of the colony, even as refugees of all backgrounds clamored for safe passage off the island. It is useful to remember that the makeup of the Relief Commission in Fort-de-France was split between assimilationist republicans and members of the plantocracy with longstanding

[217] Two weeks after the eruption, The New York Times reported that the French government was seriously considering a complete evacuation of the island: "The French government is considering the possibility of the necessity arising for the evacuation of Fort-de-France, and even the whole Island of Martiniuqe…The Minister of the Colonies, M. Decrais, cabled the following message to Gov. Lheurre of Martinique last evening: 'Make known if the situation seems to you to necessitate partial or total evacuation of the island, the means at your disposal, or those you may need…A dispatch from Fort de France published this morning in *Le Journal* says the sole idea of the inhabitants is flight. Many of them have become insane and some of the people threw themselves into the sea," "Martinique May Be Entirely Abandoned," *New York Times*, May 22, 1902.

[218] Perhaps not surprisingly, it was a representative of France's largest shipping monopoly, the CGT (Compagnie générale transatlantique) who argued for this option. "M. l'Agent général demande si la commission ne pourrait point délivrer des secours, sous forme de bons de passage aux habitants de la Martinique qui voudraient émigrer. Le mardi 20, il a délivré cinq cents billets de passage à dix francs. Il a reçu beaucoup de demandes de personnes indigentes qui n'avaient pas toute la somme nécessaire au payement de leur ticket. La commission ne pourrait-elle pas compléter le prix du passage de ces pauvres gens ?" While his proposal is framed as a charitable plea on behalf of the poor who could not afford a ticket, it seems clear that the CGT may have also been trying to benefit from a relief plan that would include a government-funded evacuation of refugees. See "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 26 juillet 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 12 août 1902.

financial interests in the colony. While these groups often did not see eye to eye, one thing that they did agree upon was the absolute necessity of maintaining Martinique as a functioning colony. To secure this future, it was vital to ensure that a workforce remained on the island, to assist with rebuilding and the restoration of the economy. However, many refugees were terrified, bereft, and destitute after losing everything and they wanted nothing more than to escape Martinique. Neighboring islands like Guyana and Guadeloupe viewed Martinicans' eagerness to escape as an opportunity to acquire a new workforce, and they "generously" extended invitations to take in the refugees.[219] The ~~e~~ Relief Commission was careful to police the departure of people from the island.[220] In the end, passage off of the island was a luxury that conformed to the racial and class dynamics that determined life in the colony: victims with more means and connections outside the island were able to evacuate, while the vast majority of black laborers were all but forced to remain.

Desperate to find some kind of employment for the jobless, the Relief Committee decided to focus on rebuilding the island's infrastructure, both as a way of getting the colony back on its feet productively, and also to cut victims' dependency on government assistance.[221] As part of this plan, some portion of the aid received by the commission was earmarked for the

[219] Guyana's offer is transmitted to Martinican officials soon after the disaster and is received with some skepticism. "Le comité de Cayenne, tout en poursuivant l'organisation d'une caisse de secours, s'occupe d'élaborer un programme de colonisation de la Guyane par les habitants de la Martinique qui voudraient bien venir demander à la colonie-soeur une plus grande sécurité d'existence. Les Guyanais ont de l'espace, ils ont des fonds destinés à la colonisation et à l'immigration; ils ne sauraient en trouver un meilleur emploi. L'hospitalité et l'existence par le travail seront assurées à tous ceux qui voudront venir s'établir à la Guyane, il leur est offert les facilités suivantes: gratuité du passage, mise à leur disposition de terrains allotis et défrichés…À ce sujet, M. l'Amiral Servan déclare que la lettre dont il vient d'être donné lecture exprime de fort beaux sentiments avec beaucoup d'éloquence: mais ce serait une mauvaise politique que d'encourager nos concitoyens dans la voie de l'émigration. Tout pays qui se dépeuple s'appauvrit. Il faut, au contraire, rester à la Martinique pour essayer de la relever et lui redonner sa prospérité de jadis.

[220] This was likely another reason for the Comité's concern about refugees having access to money, which could much more easily buy them a ticket off the island.

[221] Alwyn Scarth, *La Catastrophe*, 211-212.

reconstruction of public works.[222] In the months following the eruption, Senator Knight requested a total of 40 million francs from the government in Paris for rebuilding, 15 million of which were to be earmarked for the development of public infrastructure, but the actual amount provided fell far short of this figure. On the surface, the allocation of funds toward public works seems urgently needed. Much of Martinique's already-crumbling infrastructure - including roads, bridges, sanitation systems, and railroads - had been destroyed in the eruption. However, the money set aside by the commission to support this kind of reconstruction was far less than the amount it would have taken to adequately recover and rebuild. Almost as soon as projects were undertaken, officials ran up against the impossibility of completing them with the funds available. Part of the problem was the difficulty of locating supplies, which was exacerbated by massive price inflation on goods like concrete and lumber after the eruption. At one point, the Chef du service des ponts et chaussées reported that he was unable to start important repairs on a bridge outside of Le Lorrain because the Relief Commission had not allocated enough money to cover the cost of labor and materials for the project.[223] The lack of money devoted to public works also undermined the Relief Commission's strategy to reduce refugee dependence upon state aid through re-employing them in reconstruction projects. Budget shortfalls converged with

[222] "La commission …. [décide] qu'une partie des fonds de secours serait destinée à des ouvrages d'utilité publique et générale". See "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 7 juin 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 5 août 1902.

[223] This official testified to the Relief Commission that he had recently been given the order to suspend operations on the bridge because of this budget shortfall. "M. le Chef du service des ponts et chaussées répond que, tout récemment, il a reçu l'ordre de l'Administration de suspendre les travaux neufs, parmi lesquels étaient compris le pont du Lorrain dont le devis est de trente-cinq mille francs et celui de la Trinité qui doit coûter neuf mille sept cent soixante francs. Tous les travaux neufs s'exécutent à l'entreprise, suivant des marchés en cours. L'on ne peut donc pas y employer des sinistrés. Cependant certaines routes mériteraient d'être mises en état, celle de Balata, par exemple…Elle a besoin d'être empierrée, car le tuf a été défoncé. Mais les prévisions du budget ne comportent pas cet empierrement. Ce travail pourrait être exécuté en régie; d'après son devis, il coûterait dix mille cinq cents francs." See "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 7 juin 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 4 juin 1902.

misgivings about the effect state welfare might have on the workforce, leading to an increasing sense of desperation among elites to make sure that workers did not go too long without employment. Sensational accounts of "marauders" wandering around the countryside looting churches and abandoned buildings were picked up by French and anglophone media. American journalists in particular stoked fears of labor unrest through racist imagery of violent and disaffected black workers. A few weeks after the eruption, an article in the New York Times reported that "There is a rising in the north of the island on account of the non-payment of wages, the managers not having received remittances. There is danger of a massacre, but it is hoped that the speedy reopening of the bank will restore quiet."[224] The result of this half-hearted financial and administrative effort at post-disaster reconstruction - which was driven more by the impetus to regain control of the black working class than the will to rebuild - actually led to a situation of even greater underdevelopment and material neglect in the years after Mount Pelée's eruption.

The treatment of disaster victims and aid allocation after the catastrophe also highlights the essential way in which a racialized division of labor was baked into the logic of the colonial economy in Martinique. The nominal effort to re-employ refugees in reconstruction was exposed more as an effort to manage racialized social and economic roles. This awareness points to the ways in which the regulation of racial hierarchy was as much a part of colonial infrastructure - if not more - as roads, bridges or hospitals. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes,

> The state's management of racial categories is analogous to the management of highways or ports or telecommunication; racist ideological and material practices are infrastructure that needs to be updated, upgraded, and modernized periodically: this is what is meant by radicalization. And the state itself, not just interests or forces external to the state, is built

[224] "Further Martinique Horrors: Inundation of Le Prêcheur - Rising in the North of the Island Owing to Non-Payment of Wages," *New York Times.* May 17, 1902.

> and enhanced through these practices. Sometimes these practices result in 'protecting' certain racial groups, and other times they result in sacrificing them.[225]

When it came to rescuing Martinican infrastructure in the wake of Mount Pelée's devastation, the colonial government in Martinique placed a premium rehabilitating the racialized labour infrastructure that would ensure the continuation of the colony's sugar economy. Paradoxically however, the maintenance of this feature of colonial infrastructure was accomplished at the expense of any real effort to revitalize other aspects of Martinique's demolished public works.

## II. Underdevelopment before the Eruption

Despite their perception as colonies of settlement, the Antilles were operated as extractive sugar colonies, and the state of public works and infrastructure on the islands in the late nineteenth century reflected this. The forms of development that did exist were almost entirely centered around the sugar plantations and refineries, and even the limited roads, railways and ports that served sugar manufacturers were falling into disrepair.[226] In 1902, Martinique's two major cities, Saint-Pierre and Fort-de-France, were connected by only two roads, one of which passed too close to the volcano to have made it a viable evacuation route. The other option was described by one reporter at the time as, "moins une route qu'un chemin" and "pas carrossable dans sa plus grande longueur."[227]

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[225] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Restating the Obvious," in *Abolition Geography: Essays toward Liberation.* Alberto Toscano and Brenna Bhandar, eds. New York: Verso, 2022, 265-265.

[226] For more on the deterioration of Antillean infrastructure, see Ferdinand Peck, *Report of the Commissioner-General for the United States to the International Universal Exposition, Paris, 1900.* Vol. 5. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1901, 394. https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/reportcommissio5unit

[227] "Évacuer une ville de 25,000 âmes était une entreprise matériellement impossible en quelques heures. Il y a deux routes de Saint-Pierre à Fort-de-France, celle de l'intérieur (36 kilomètres) mais elle était, au moins dans l'une de ses parties, aussi voisine du volcan "La Catastrophe de la Martinique: M. Mouttet," *Le Temps,* 17 May 1902.

The limited transport infrastructure in Martinique complicated the evacuation of towns and villages at the base of Mount Pelée in the lead-up to the main eruption on May 8. As Amédée Knight alludes to in his description of evacuations in Le Prêcheur, people trying to escape these areas were only able to do so by sea. With their limited number of fishing vessels, only women and children could feasibly be evacuated. According to the government engineer Proszynski, who oversaw bridges, roads and transport infrastructure in Martinique, the distressing state of the colony's railroads was also the cause for the sugar industry's troubles. In 1880, he published a report on the state of rail communications in Martinique, writing that,

> C'est précisément parce que les voies de communication, routes, chemins vicinaux et chemins de fer, font complètement défaut, que la production du sucre et le commerce ont cessée de progresser, et que le seul moyen de donner un nouvel élan aux affaires, c'est de doter la colonie de ces outils indispensables à la vie des peuples modernes.[228]

The reality was more of a catch-22, with Martinique's economic downturn and financial mismanagement making it impossible for the colony to fund improvements for railways, roads, ports, and other forms of infrastructure that might prop up the sugar industry. More than 20 years later in 1902, the improvements suggested in this report had yet to be implemented. The railways that did exist were privately owned and expressly intended to connect plantations and refineries to the main ports, at Saint-Pierre and Fort-de-France. Békés and business elites in the Antilles saw further investment in the sugar industry as the solution: they believed that state support would not only shore up failing plantations and factories, but that this support would radiate out (or perhaps more accurately, "trickle down") to other sectors of the economy. This view was summarized by Martinique's governor, Delphino Moracchini, in the wake of a powerful hurricane that struck Martinique in 1891. Moracchini insists that, "Les secours pécuniaires

[228] B. Proszynski, *Chemins de fer à la Martinique*. Fort-de-France: Imprimerie du gouvernement, 1880, 1.

n'apportent qu'un soulagement passager à quelques-uns. Ce qu'il nous faut, ce sont des mesures générales qui allègent les charges de la production et facilitent le relèvement de l'agriculture et de l'industrie."[229] Unfortunately, this approach - which was adopted after almost every disaster in the late nineteenth century to strike Martinique - never had the intended effect. The sugar industry's crisis was only made more severe by natural disasters like the 1891 hurricane, which not only destroyed the harvest for that year, but decimated agricultural and industrial infrastructure that took years to recover and cost over 50 million francs in damages.[230]

Besides the crumbling and limited transport infrastructure on the island, Martinique faced enormous challenges in terms of public health, which came to a head in Fort-de-France after thousands of refugees sought shelter in the city. Like much of the rest of Martinique, Fort-de-France was unevenly modernized, and working-class neighborhoods were already overpopulated. They lacked paved roads, running water, and adequate sanitation services meaning that outbreaks of water-borne disease were always a risk. The arrival of thousands of refugees put enormous pressure on the city's fragile infrastructure and added to the problem of overcrowding.[231] In the months following the disaster, outbreaks of yellow fever and typhoid were becoming a concern for public health officials. In a meeting of the Relief Commission in August 1902, one of the commission's members, Doctor Matthieu, warned that, "...il règne en

[229] Delphino Moracchini, cited in Edouard Fortier, *Un Cyclone dans les Antilles: l'ouragan de 1891 à la Martinique*. Paris: Rousseau, 1894, 67.

[230] The damage estimate for the 1891 Cyclone was provided by the Director of the Interior at the time, P. Fawtier. The 50 million franc figure was given in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, and Fawtier clarifies that the actual costs could be much greater. *Un Cyclone dans les Antilles: l'ouragan de 1891 à la Martinique*, 66.

[231] One observer noted that a group of government officials visited the neighborhoods of refugees in Fort-de-France to warn people of the dangers of gathering in such large numbers and to encourage them to find other accommodations. "[La commission] visitait les dépôts de sinistrés installés à Fort-de-France et, pour prévenir les dangers d'épidémie qui pourraient résulter de la concentration de sept milles personnes dans des espaces restreints, elle ordonna, sous le plus bref délai, la dissémination des dépôts de réfugiés," In Firmin de Croze, *Martinique: Catastrophe de Saint-Pierre.* Paris: Limoges, 1903, 259.

ville, en ce moment, une épidémie de fièvre typhoïde que n'a jamais été observée ici, et que présente un caractère de perniciosité rebelle à tout traitement".[232] Faced with an impending public health crisis, inadequate housing, and ever-increasing suspicions about the black populations' propensity for civil unrest and criminal behavior, the government ultimately encouraged people to return to their homes near the volcano. Government officials and scientists assumed that the danger had passed, without fully grasping the potential for continued seismic activity in the months and even years after the initial eruption.[233] In August of 1902, just three months after the cataclysmic initial eruption, food rations were discontinued in an effort to force refugees out of the city and return home, despite clear indications of a possible secondary eruption. As a result, on August 30, 1902, a powerful pyroclastic flow killed another 1000-1500 people in the town of Morne-Rouge, many of whom had only recently returned from Fort-de-France. If the original eruption on May 8 was wholly unavoidable, that "no human science" could have predicted it, the same could not be said for this secondary catastrophe in Morne-Rouge. The volcano had been clearly signaling an eruption for over two weeks, and although the residents of Le Morne-Rouge sent a delegation to Fort-de-France to ask the new governor, Georges Lhuerre, to help them evacuate, their request was refused, and the newly returned refugees had little choice but to remain.[234]

**III. Developing Underdevelopment in the Post-Eruption Period**

[232] "Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 10 juin 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique*, 12 August 1902.

[233] Jean-Claude Tanguy, "The 1902-1905 eruptions of Montagne Pelée, Martinique: anatomy and retrospection," *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research* 60 (1994): 104.

[234] Scarth writes that, "On 13 August, Mount Pelee expelled a nuee ardente into the valley of the Riviere Blanche. On the Feast of the Assumption on 15 August, glowing viscous lava, with the consistency of stiff molten glass, oozed up from the volcanic chimney and started to form another huge red-hot dome in the crater. On the following clay, its crest had risen above the rim of the crater." Alwyn Scarth, *La Catastrophe*, 213.

While preparations and scientific prediction failed in the lead-up to May 8, it was in the post-eruption period that developmental deficiencies were fully revealed. As disaster studies researchers point out, the outsized focus on casualties and damage resulting from the destructive agent itself can obscure the radiating effects of disasters as their consequences unfold in diverse and unexpected ways long after the event. As Anthony Carrigan advises, "The life history of a disaster begins prior to the appearance of a specific event-focused agent…both societies and destructive agents are clearly processual phenomena, together defining disaster as a processual phenomenon rather than an event that is isolated and temporally demarcated in exact time frames".[235] As we have seen, Martinique's underdevelopment could be seen in economic divisions that corresponded to deep racial and class inequalities. It also included a deteriorating network of roads and railways connecting the country and a rudimentary public health and public works infrastructure that did not include running water, sewage disposal, or electricity for many residents. Taken together, these limitations inhibited people's ability to prepare for, withstand, and recover from the disaster and severely reinforced the racial and economic inequities mentioned above. Limited and impassable roads made it difficult for people to evacuate before the disaster. After the eruption, lack of running water and hygienic infrastructure in Fort-de-France drove typhoid and cholera outbreaks in the city that obliged refugees to prematurely return to disaster-prone areas near the volcano. Levels of "development" are often measured according to these kinds of infrastructural factors that were lacking in the French Antilles prior to the eruption.[236] However, disaster studies scholars also caution that development should *not* be

[235] Anthony Oliver-Smith, "'What is a Disaster?'": Anthropological Perspectives on a Persistent Question," *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*. 2nd Ed. New York: Routledge, 2019 [1999], 30.
[236] In one of the first formal efforts to address "underdevelopment" in Latin America, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (an auspice of the World Bank) in 1949 targeted 14 different domains that it determined to be markers of underdevelopment. Many of these categories still define approaches to development today. They included: foreign exchange; transportation; industry and energy; highways, railroads, and waterways;

used as a metric for evaluating the relative risk of certain people and regions to disaster. As Dorothea Hilhorst and Greg Bankoff point out, "Vulnerability is a much more precise measurement of exposure to risk from…disasters, and a more accurate concept than poverty in understanding the processes and impacts of 'underdevelopment'".[237] Processes like urbanization, deforestation, erosion, the creation of levees or dams, and use of toxic chemicals to control pests are all supposed markers of development that can actually exacerbate the impacts of natural hazards, sometimes regardless of people's socioeconomic status. To some extent, this was true in the case of Mount Pelée: the eruption itself did not discriminate on the basis of class or color, and wealthy white elites in Saint-Pierre fared no better than the city's poorer black residents. However, in the lead-up and especially in the aftermath of the eruption, stratified infrastructural development did extend the vulnerability of Martinique's black working class to the catastrophe's worst consequences.

In the following section, I detail the way in which the sugar crisis - a historically specific instance of economic downturn in Caribbean sugar producers - can be understood in light of the plantation model. I refer to the sugar crisis to contextualize the already-precarious economic conditions that surrounded the Mount Pelée disaster in 1902, but also to help us better understand the relationship between Martinique's plantation economy, development, and environmental disaster.

**IV. Economic Disaster: The Sugar Crisis**

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community facilities; agriculture; health and welfare; finance, banking and national accounts; petroleum and engineering. For more on this history of development in Latin America in the context of the Cold War, see Arturo Escobar, "Power and Visibility: Development and the Invention and Management of the Third World," *Cultural Anthropology* 3:4 (November 1988): 429.

[237] Dorothea Hihorst and Greg Bankoff, "Introduction: Mapping Vulnerability," *Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development and People.* Dorothea Hilhorst, Georg Ferks, and Greg Bankoff, eds. New York: Routledge, 2013, 2.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Caribbean sugar colonies were in a particular state of crisis, one which reflected the cycles of crisis in the global economy. Falling sugar prices converged with a postslavery labor regime and local environmental problems, like drought, soil depletion, and an onslaught of natural disasters that repeatedly destroyed industrial infrastructure on both Martinique and Guadeloupe at the end of the nineteenth century. After slavery was abolished, sugar production in the Antilles became somewhat modernized, with new technology and methods for cultivation and refining introduced. An American report from Exposition universelle in 1900 attests to these efforts, "It must be admitted that the central factories [in Martinique] have excellent machinery, most of it modern".[238] However, in this same report, the author makes note of a number of obstacles to Antillean sugar production, writing that, "from the facts, as they now stand, it is found that the cultivation of sugar cane is entirely too expensive on the island of Martinique...At the well combined sugar cane factories there is a great need of some technical management and of chemists to carefully watch the progress of work being done".[239] While he concedes that the sugar plantations are themselves "connected by several hundred miles of railroad", the reality was that by the end of the nineteenth century (and to some extent because of accumulating damages from tropical storms), many parts of these rail networks were falling into disrepair. Peck reiterates that railways existed purely to transport sugar and its byproducts from plantations to factories, and then the ports. His appraisal of sugar infrastructure in Martinique aligns with analyses of plantation economies provided by economists from the New World Group, like Lloyd Best and George Beckford. These economists pointed out that the post-emancipation sugar economy in the Caribbean saw the "rationalization of the plantation sector

[238] Ferdinand Peck, *Report of the Commissioner-General for the United States to the International Universal Exposition, Paris, 1900.* Vol. 5. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1901, 394. Accessed 16 July 2021. https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/reportcommissio5unit
[239] Ibid., 395.

but not by economic transformation". This would account for Peck's observation that some of the factories had "excellent," mostly modern" machinery, but that sugar cultivation was still too expensive, inefficient, and, in spite of updated machinery, still lagging behind both European beet sugar production and Caribbean competitors.

Peck's comments reflect the colonial sugar industry's uphill battle during the mid to late-nineteenth century to maintain relevance and profits. Sugar cane was being increasingly undercut by the cheaper domestic beet sugar which had become much cheaper to produce thanks largely to technical innovations in the refining process. Antillean planters were reluctant to embrace these new methods, partially because many could not afford to completely overhaul their entire production processes. Such a transformation would require them to purchase and import expensive machinery from Europe which would in turn displace other aspects of their production process and division of labor (such as slaves, livestock, and older machinery) that would be costly and difficult to sell. "While the processes of sugar production underwent gradual modifications, the basic structure of the self-contained plantation remained intact on the scale on which it had been established in the seventeenth century and suppressed alternative paths of development."[240] While the changes planters implemented were not always piecemeal or unimportant, because they were adopted within the current division of labor and structure of production, they did not ultimately help to make colonial sugar manufacture more cost-efficient.[241] As a result, their impacts were always too limited to make a significant impact on the

[240] Dale Tomich, "Sugar Technology and Slave Labor in Martinique, 1830-1848. New West Indian Guide 63:1/2 (1989): 120.

[241] Tomich explains the particular limitations of the *habitation sucrière* model, the economy of which was relatively rigid, dependent on proportionate expansion of *all* of the various sectors and parts of production. "The relation between the agricultural and manufacturing operations of the *habitation sucrière* in Martinique was established within definite proportions by the physical requirements of sugar production. At the same time, the appropriation of workers as slaves fixed labor in relation to this technical division of labor. A determinate number of workers were adapted to the pre-established organization of the labor process. Once production was established on a given scale, it

colonial economy more broadly. While Tomich focuses on the pressures of rationalization in the pre-emancipation economy, many of these same constraints existed even after abolition, when former slaves became wage-laborers.[242] The shift to wage labor undermined the "harmonious balance"[243] that planters hoped to achieve between all aspects of their production process (labor, animals, machinery, etc.). Although in principle, wage labor was a source of variable capital that freed up the planter to embrace new technologies that may require flexibility in the number of workers, the problem was that no other part of the plantation's production model had changed.

> Once production was established on a given scale, it could be expanded only if all sectors were increased proportionally and labor was appropriately redistributed…increasing the amount of land cultivated and the size of the harvest, even if it were possible, could intensify the pressure on the slaves, the transport system, the fuel supply, the mill, and the refinery, yet have a limited effect on final production unless the capacity of each of these sectors was increased accordingly (Tomich, 122).

The rigid interdependence of each facet of the production process could only be disrupted by a major change to one part of it. While this may describe the abstract mechanics of the plantation economy that discouraged planters to invest in new sugar technology, the impact of natural disasters made innovation even farther out of reach. Repeated cataclysms in Martinique, including droughts, fires, and the devastating hurricane of 1891, reduced capital on the island, precipitated a catastrophic overreliance on credit that ended in the expropriation of many planter families, as well as unemployment and wage reduction for workers. The entangled environmental and financial crises had the paradoxical effect of distancing Martinique from

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could be expanded only if all sectors were increased proportionally and labor was appropriately redistributed…increasing the amount of land cultivated and the size of the harvest, eve if it were possible, could intensify the pressure on the slaves, the transport system, the fuel supply, the mill, and the refinery, yet have a limited effect on final production unless the capacity of each of these sectors was increased accordingly." Tomich, "Sugar Technology and Slave Labor in Martinique, 1830-1848," 122.

[242] As Nick Nesbitt argues, slaves constitute a source of constant capital, like machinery or livestock, in that their physical bodies are purchased outright, rather than the daily sale of a worker's labour power through the wage.

[243] XX

France, as the island came to be seen as a financial liability, while also entrenching her absolute reliance on the metropole for support. To understand this complex relationship between metropole and colony engendered by the plantation system, I will refer to research on the plantation economy.

**V. The Plantation Economy and Underdevelopment**

Scholarship on the plantation as an economic, political and social phenomenon comprises a rich field that can be traced back to the work of Edgar Thompson in the 1930's.[244] Further research in the 1970's from more traditional Marxian historians like Eugene Genovese and Jay Mandle added to the literature. They focused on the particular division of labor and production relations that characterized plantations at the local level, sometimes to the point of obscuring the plantation's essential transnational relationships with the colonial metropole, and the wider global economy.[245] In the 1970's, intellectuals from Latin America began to express what would be fully popularized by André Gunder Frank as Dependency Theory, and by the late 1970's, World Systems Analysis by Emmanuel Wallerstein. These contributions coincided with the scholarship of the New World Group, which included lefitst economists from the Anglophone Caribbean, like George Beckford, Lloyd Best, and Clive Thomas who tried go beyond both the plantation as a isolated, internally distinct unit to situate the plantation a the "globally integrated

[244] See Edgar Thompson's PhD thesis was published in 1931, and later published as a monograph in 1975. See *Plantation Societies, Race Relations and the South: The Regimentation of Populations.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1975.

[245] Both Genovese and Mandle framed their analysis of the plantation according to its internal functioning. They both saw it as a closed unit defined by the use of violence and coerced labor. In this sense, their arguments are more productionist in nature, but they fail to include the important metropolis-satellite relationships that formed the basis of colonial economies in the Caribbean.

peripheral economy".[246] Each of these theories represented an attempt to situate particular continuities in the patterns of production and consumption, of poverty and development, and of economic hegemony and dependence that were maintained even after historically-specific practices like plantation slavery and colonialism came to an end.

One criticism of the plantation economy, however, has been that its proponents construct an idealized and ahistorical model that seems to emerge *a priori* from an amalgamation of common characteristics, effectively subsuming the historical and geographic differences held by each plantation sector as it exists in its own geo-historical context. Dale Tomich has criticized this feature in Mandle's work. He writes that,

> By taking the plantation as the unit of analysis, each author refers particular plantation regimes back to the model…Consequently, historical particulars are understood in terms of general categories that are constructed as logically prior to them. Such a procedure eliminates consideration of the processes through which plantations are historically formed and reformed and results in a process of classification of particular data within a general scheme, rather than analysis of the relations and processes through which specific plantation regimes are constituted.[247]

Tomich takes issue with Mandle's attempts to break out of the capitalist/pre-capitalist polarities that characterized Marxist debates of the time. However, in this effort, Mandle actually reinstates some of the same dichotomies he is ostensibly rejecting: by drilling down on features of the plantation system that made he felt distinguished and set it apart from the "rest" of the world economy, Mandle isolates and reifies the plantation as a unique entity, while failing to grasp its integral role in structuring the broader global economy. Mandle writes that, "to fail to treat a

[246] For more on the history, theories, and main figures of the New World Group, see Lloyd Best and Kari Levitt's recent edited volume, *Essays on the Theory of the Plantation Economy: A Historical and Institutional Approach to Caribbean Economic Development.* Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2009.
[247] Dale Tomich, "Rethinking the Plantation: Histories, Anthropologies, Archaeologies," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 34:½ (2011): 31.

plantation economy as a distinct mode of production is to miss the unique construction and impact of this market-oriented but archaic social organization".[248] While plantation economies can be classed according to unique features that distinguish them from other economic formations, they also vary across time and space. Tomich underscores how Mandle recreates the classical conception of plantation economies as "primitive," "backward," and "underdeveloped" by initiating this divide between its modern "market-oriented" tendencies which are nevertheless at odds with its "archaic social organization".[249] The primacy given to the plantation's self-contained features diminishes the way in which its integration in external networks of trade and metropolitan policy-making actually determine its operation, its "backwardness" being a design feature rather than a flaw, and one which furthermore provides the basis for modernity and development in the colonial center. This reveals the structural ways in which the global system of trade (that included plantation production) conditioned material and social underdevelopment in plantation societies. In contrasting the plantation's "feudalism" to its participation within "advanced" markets, Mandle obscures the fact that the world economy that is in part dependent upon the plantation production has instantiated its backwardness.

With almost all capital flowing between the sugar producers and markets in the metropole (or sometimes select other foreign markets), very little wealth circulated in the colony itself that would have allowed for significant investments in modernizing infrastructure or public works projects. As George Beckford explains,

> An analysis of adjustments and resultant development in the plantation colony is meaningful only within the context of analysis of the whole overseas economy of which it is a part. Second, because linkages are confined to activity on each plantation unit and its corresponding metropolitan connection, there are no significant spread effects from staple production within the plantation colony. And since the product elaboration takes

[248] Jay Mandle, *The Roots of Black Poverty.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978, 10.
[249] Ibid., 10.

> place in the metropolis, the lion's share of the value added accrues there. Third, the nature of the transactions involved in production and sale of the staple is such that money flows in the plantation colony are kept to a minimum. So far as the colony is concerned, very little money income is available to its residents from plantation production and the plantation does not provide the impetus for development.[250]

As Tomich's article suggests, Martinique both fit within the classification of a plantation economy and also exhibited specific characteristics that distinguished it from other sugar colonies. One of the unique features of Martinique's socio-economic history lay in its perception: most French people and many Martinicans understood the island to be *more* advanced, *more* culturally French compared to its neighbors. The accuracy of this perception extended only about as far as the wealthy neighborhoods of Saint-Pierre, but it nevertheless remained influential until 1902. The destruction of Saint-Pierre and its white population brought about a reevaluation of these impressions, shining a light on the pervasive conditions of poverty, disease, and underdevelopment that underpinned the island's economy and racial structure, as well as its relationship to France. George Beckford argued that development trends were framed by the plantation's position in the larger world economy, writing that,

> By its very nature the plantation is an institution of international dimensions…Its establishment necessitated bringing together enterprise, capital, and labor from different parts of the world into new locations. Internally it developed as a total institution and externally it continued to depend in fundamental ways on the outside world. It is therefore not surprising to find that it has been at the center of political and social change of one kind or another…Stimulus from outside, response, and reaction have characterized the whole history of the development of plantations.[251]

According to Beckford, the plantation establishment has always been shaped by external political and economic forces. In important ways, Mount Pelée's eruption (and other environmental

[250] George Beckford, *Persistent Poverty,* 46.
[251] George Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, 37.

disasters that preceded it) underscored this interdependence between metropole and colony. Physically, Mount Pelée was a localized disaster that devastated the colony of Martinique. And yet, Martinique's relationship to France was not *just* confined to commercial links, but longstanding cultural and familial bonds that connected people on the island very concretely to the *mère-patrie,* and vice-versa. In this sense, the disaster did not just strike a colony but France itself - and was treated as a "national emergency".[252] Martinique's unique and somewhat privileged place within the French cultural imaginary was a result of the particular historical and notably, the *environmental* context of its colonial development. As Tomich writes, "each plantation is a distinctive configuration of land, labor, and capital (technology) under specific natural and environmental conditions".[253] In what follows, I take up Tomich's recommendation to consider the ways that plantation economies develop under "specific natural and environmental conditions". If Martinique supposedly occupied this special place in the French imaginary - even if, as we have seen, these understandings did not conform to the material conditions of the vast majority of the population - what are the (often overlooked) eco-historical conditions that might have helped produce such perceptions? To answer this question, I turn to the association between historical discourses of race and climate in the French Antilles. Specifically, I examine how racial creolization was initially viewed positively as a strategy for "strengthening the white race" against the rigors of the tropical climate. Then, I consider how

[252] Chris Church uses the term "national emergency" to explore responses to the disaster within the metropole, and how French administrators and ordinary citizens conceived of their relationship to the colony through the experience of the disaster. He writes that, "Both French officials and the international community saw the eruption of Mount Pelée as a national emergency, as a terrible event that struck the entire nation of France. In part, this reflected the unprecedented devastation that shocked France and the world, as well as the number of *békés* and white functionaires - family members of people living in the metropole - who had perished in Saint-Pierre. But the casting of this event as a national emergency also spoke to the relationship between Martinqiue and the metropole, one that often made people forget that the island was a colony and not an official part of France. See Church, *Paradise Destroyed,* 196-197.

[253] Dale Tomich, "Rethinking the Plantation: Concepts and Histories," 35.

these theories that once created room for greater racial integration eventually hardened in the late nineteenth century into perceptions of climatic determinism, driven in part by the barrage of geophysical catastrophes at the turn of the twentieth century.

## Part 3. Perceptions of Cultural Development in Martinique

### I. "Un paysage blanc" : Climatic Determinism, Development, and the Limits of Cultural Frenchness

For three centuries, the Antilles had been regarded by most French people as a kind of extension of French soil in the New World. In spite of an often unfriendly and unfamiliar climate, there was a longstanding belief in the capacity of France to rationalize the tropics, transforming them from entropic and unpredictable regions punctuated by cycles of crisis into remote, yet fully gallicized tropical territories.[254] More than any previous crisis, Mount Pelée destabilized assumptions about the transferability of French culture into unfamiliar geographies, at a time when France was undertaking the most extensive imperialization campaign in its history. Because climate had long been tangled up with notions of race, the volcanic disaster fueled geographic-racialized perceptions of difference that further distanced black Antilleans from Frenchness and "development" in the eyes of many French people.[255] Even as the disaster contested republican faith in the development and progress narrative at the heart of its civilizing mission, Mount Pelée's devastation also bore out how uneven and inaccessible this development had been. Wealth and development had been concentrated among the white landowning elites and increasingly, a class of wealthy mixed-race professionals who both made their homes in Saint-Pierre. According to many observers, Saint-Pierre resembled a European city, even after

[254] Chris Church, *Paradise Destroyed,* 9-12.
[255] See Chris Church, *Paradise Destroyed,* 20-21.

widespread destruction from a powerful hurricane in 1891.[256] After its destruction, Martinique was left with a crippled sugar industry, deteriorating infrastructure, and a growing refugee crisis. On top of this, the persistent and deepening sugar crisis was already prompting some officials in Paris to question whether Martinique and Guadeloupe were still worth the continued investment. In this period, serious questions were raised about evacuating the island, abandoning Martinique for good.[257]

As the travel writer Henri Monet wrote in 1891 after a hurricane that destroyed much of Martinique,

> De 1657 au 18 mars 1858, on relève à la Martinique, soixante-sept ouragans, la plupart compliqués de tremblements de terre, sans compter ceux qui ne sont pas catalogués ! C'est-à-dire que parmi les convulsions terribles qui ont pu être classées officiellement, étiquetées scientifiquement, il y a eu en bloc, de 1657 à 1858, dans l'espace de deux cent un ans, soixante-sept sinistres, soit une catastrophe tous les trois ans…
>
> Soixante-sept sinistres! Le simple énoncé de ce chiffre frappe comme un deuil, stupéfie par son vraisemblance, trouble comme une légende des temps fabuleux
>
> Soixante-sept sinistres!
>
> On se demande avec une terreur anxieuse s'il est bien vrai, s'il est possible, qu'une population puisse vivre et prospérer sur un sol si redoutable, sous un climat si terrible.
>
> Soixante-sept sinistres !.
>
> …

[256] According to descriptions of Saint-Pierre's well-known Jardin botanique by the travel writer, G. Verschuur, the garden seemed better suited as a European park, drawing a distinct contrast with the profusion and disorder of tropical vegetation. "Ce beau jardin me paraît moins sauvage qu'autrefois; les sentiers plus symétriques et plus coquet qu'on y a tracés depuis ma dernière visite, ne me satisfont pas complètement, et le petit lac, qui autrefois n'existait pas, répond bien plus à l'installation d'un parc européen qu'à la nature désordonnée d'un pays tropical." See G. Verschuur, *Voyage aux trois Guyanes et aux Antilles.* Paris: Hachette, 1894, 14.

[257] In one of the Relief Commission's concluding sessions, Victor Sévère, who was mayor of Fort-de-France and the appointed director of the Relief Commission, summed up the feelings of many of the committee members in reaffirming a patriotic commitment to staying in Martinique, in spite of what he describes as the encouragements of "foreign voices" to evacuate the island. "Bien des voix, surtout étrangères, s'élèvent encore autour de nous pour conseiller l'évacuation de l'île; mais nous nous refusons absolument de les écouter; et c'est seulement lorsque la France nous aura ordonné d'abandonner cette vieille colonie où nos pères ont héroïquement combattus autour de son drapeau, que nous nous résignons à cette trop douloureuse épreuve." See Commission des secours aux sinistrés: Séance du 7 juin 1902," *Journal officiel de la Martinique,* 5 August 1902.

S’attendre chaque jour, à chaque heure, à chaque minute, à chaque seconde ! à sentir la terre onduler, s'entrouvrir, les murs se désagréger sous une force invisible et s’affaisser brusquement, lapidant hommes, femmes, enfants, vieillards, tout ce qui vit…[258]

Monet’s anaphoric stress on the sheer number of disasters that struck Martinique since colonization (“soixante-sept sinistres !”) underscores the relentless battering the colony had experienced over the past three centuries.[259] His description conjures a sense of awe at the extremes of the island environment, a wonder that is echoed in the works by travel writers at the time, whose accounts of the tropics often include detailed descriptions of regional hazards as a kind of exotic-yet-dangerous foil to the otherwise placid, “coquettish” tropical landscape found elsewhere in their writing.[260] By the end of the nineteenth century, the imagery that had fueled an entire genre of travel literature faded against the backdrop of natural cataclysms that proved more than capable of annihilating these carefully curated fantasies of tropical paradise. As one writer at the time expressed:

> Le cataclysme de 1902 n’a fait que réveiller des craintes endormies et ce n’est pas seulement à la Martinique que la terreur a régné, c’est encore dans toutes les petites Antilles...Tandis que nos autres colonies françaises reçoivent des émigrés, désireux de s’établir à jamais sur des terres où flotte encore le drapeau de la France, les hommes de couleur blanche que l’on recontre a la Martinique sont surtout des industriels et des commerçants, transportés là pour faire valoir les ressources du pays et rêvant encore de la mère-patrie...Qu’y a-t-il donc dans ces pays ensoleillés, dans ces régions souverainement

[258] Henri Monet, *La Martinique*. Paris: A. Savine, 1892, 11-12.

[259] Monet’s portrait of Martinique can be understood as an attempt to elicit the indignation but also the sympathy of metropolitan readers. He traveled to Martinique soon after the destructive 1891 hurricane and published and sold his diary afterward, to raise money for disaster relief.

[260] The writer G.Verschuur’s account is a good example of this: he immediately follows up his impressions of the luxurious, idyllic Martinican countryside with a lengthy discussion about the prevalence of hurricanes that threaten the island. He writes, “Sur les flancs des collines s'étendent des cultures variées, des champs de cannes à sucre, et plus près de nous des cocotiers aux panaches élégants et de gracieux bouquets de palmiers. Parfois sous les verts rameaux murmure un ruisseau cristallin qui, descendant du sommet de la montagne, traverse la route et va se perdre dans le précipice que nous côtoyons…Sur plusieurs points les effets du terrible cyclone qui a dévasté la Martinique en 1891 sont encore visible. Nous apercevons des arbres renversés, tordus et dégarnis de leur ramure; nous voyons aussi des maisonnettes en ruines, complètement renversées.” G. Verschuur, *Voyage aux trois Guyanes et aux Antilles,* 20.

> fertiles et dont les richesses sont merveilleuses, qui empêche les hommes de s'y attacher définitivement, comme on s'attache ordinairement au sol où l'on est né ? Il y a, croyons-nous, la menace constante de catastrophes qui se multiplient et qui, toutes, s'inscrivent en pages sinistres dans l'histoire.[261]

In some ways, this author does accurately identify a demographic trend in Martinique at around the time of the 1902 catastrophe, though he mischaracterizes its causes. The white plantocracy that dominated Martinique's economy had incurred major challenges since Emancipation, but especially the 1880's when a global downturn in the price of sugar drove many to bankruptcy and foreclosure. However, many of these families had lived in Martinique for generations and felt themselves to be fully French and Creole. And in fact, their frustration with the republican policies that ended slavery, expanded suffrage, and established labor laws, prompted calls for secession from France. As a result, the characterization of Martinique's "embattled" white minority as "dreaming of the *mère-patrie*" obscures the way in which settler colonialism generated a class of economic elites who absolutely conceived of themselves as fully Martinican.

As historians have discussed, the Third Republic was both a pivotal and complex time in French colonial history.[262] Politicians like Jules Ferry balanced the seemingly contradictory aims of republicanism and colonial expansion through promoting a doctrine of assimilation throughout a rapidly growing empire in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. After the disastrous events of the Second Empire, including the violent unrest of the Commune and France's humiliating

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[261] Jean Hess, *La catastrophe de la Martinique: notes d'un reporter.* Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1902, 283.

[262] Scholarship on colonial policy during the Third Republic is extensive. See for example: J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006; Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997; Margaret Cook Andersen, *Regeneration through Empire: French Pronatalists and Colonial Settlement in the Third Republic.* Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2015; Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, imperialism was embraced by republicans as a means of unifying the nation.[263] Gary Wilder writes that, "constitutionally, the Third Republic was simultaneously a parliamentary state whose authority derived from popular consent and a colonial state whose authority derived from political conquest".[264] In this new era of French colonialism and increasing European nationalism, conceptions of Gallic identity hardened, both beyond the metropole and within French borders. In addition to assimilation policies promoted throughout new areas of its empire, the Third Republic concurrently pursued a program of "internal colonization" through universal education and military service, aimed at unifying diverse cultural and linguistic communities that existed throughout France's different regions.[265] Scholars like Emmanuelle Saada note that assimilation was driven by contradictory notions of Frenchness and French values as both ethnically specific *and* universally attainable.[266] The articulation of such novel conceptions of Frenchness was informed by reinforcing strains of cultural and economic nationalism that were taking hold in much of the world. As Jules Ferry argued in a speech to the Assemblée nationale in 1885, colonial expansion was essential to guaranteeing markets for French goods in an era of industrialization, but also of growing protectionism and tariffs.

> ...Ce qui manque à notre grande industrie, que les traités de 1860 ont irrévocablement dirigé dans la voie de l'exportation, ce qui lui manque de plus en plus, ce sont les *débouchés*. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'à côté d'elle l'Allemagne se couvre de barrières, parce

[263] See for example, the speech of Jules Ferry to the French parliament, encouraging his colleagues to vote to finance a mission in Madagascar. Jules Ferry, "Les fondements de la politique coloniale," *Discours parlementaire.* 28 juillet 1885.
[264] Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between Two World Wars.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 25.
[265] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchman: The Modernization of Rural France, 1879-1914.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976, 292-338.
[266] Emmanuelle Saada & Arthus Goldhammer, *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, 98.

> que au-delà de l'océan les États-Unis d'Amérique sont devenus protectionnistes et protectionnistes à outrance.[267]

The legitimacy and vitality of the French nation was predicated upon creating new "outlets" (*débouchés*) for French exports. In significant ways, the imperial focus of this period moved away from settlement practices like the plantation, and toward conquest of resources and the creation of new markets for French goods. Colonial expansion was justified through the republican discourse of the *mission civilisatrice*, an idea predicated upon the superiority of French culture and the moral and intellectual backwardness of societies it colonized. For many years, the rhetoric around racial inferiority of non-Europeans was expressed through a climatic discourse, which held that physical differences in geography and climate had overdetermined consequences for the cultural, political, and moral development of various populations. Tropical environments had long been associated with moral depravity, laziness and "savagery".[268] However, it was not until the nineteenth century that these Enlightenment-era typologies hardened into absolute categories of racial difference.

> In the nineteenth century, acclimatization and creolity underwent profound reassessments in France. A century prior, the *philosophes* had certainly stressed the dominance of climate over constitutions. But most also recognized that acclimatizing and becoming Creole were necessary steps toward living elsewhere. In the nineteenth century, this cosmopolitan view was first called into question and then utterly rejected by a growing number of scientists, who would reinvent creoity and acclimatization into pathologies.[269]

Bolstered by naturalism and social Darwinism that were gaining influence throughout Europe at the time, climate and geography came to be understood in the nineteenth century as establishing fixed biological distinctions between racial groups. However, while this version of climatic

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[267] Jules Ferry, "Les fondements de la politique coloniale," *Discours parlementaire*. 28 juillet 1885. Emphasis mine.
[268] Eric Jennings, *Curing the Colonizer: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, 11-12.
[269] Ibid., 11-12.

determinism rationalized a new form of French expansion under the Third Republic, it was understood differently in France's oldest colonies in the West Indies, and the contradictions and logical inconsistencies of France's colonial-republican policies in the Antilles took on different forms than in newer areas of its empire.

Initial understandings of climatic determinism held that races developed certain genetic features and attributes that helped them to survive in their native environments.[270] The goal of colonial medicine and acclimatization was to help Europeans adapt to new environments, and creolization was a key part of this process: it was thought that by taking on the biological characteristics of local populations, settlers could help "fortify" themselves against the challenges of the unfamiliar climate. According to Eric Jennings, understandings about creolity, species adaptation, geography, and the nature of human progress and civilization converged to produce a nascent discourse of development that fueled colonial expansion. He writes that, "the language of development derived from that of acclimatibility".[271] While discourses around progress, and later, development, identified a kind of unidirectional transfer of improvements or growth from more "advanced" Anglo-European cultures to ones that were considered less so, the longstanding medical and cultural practices of acclimatization demonstrate a greater appreciation for reciprocity.[272] European colonists consciously tried to adopt characteristics of local cultures in an attempt to acclimate themselves to the new environment. Creolization referred to a whole

[270] Bonham Richardson notes the effects of "socioclimatology" in the British West Indies, explaining that, "The obvious influences of Darwinian evolution on late Victorian thinking inevitably found their way into considerations of tropical development. If individuals and species evolved and progressed in response to the demands imposed on them by their physical environments, one did not have to go far to extend these same ideas to human societies." See Bonham Richardson, *Economy and Environment in the Caribbean: Barbados and the Windwards in the late 1800s.* Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1997, 70.

[271] Eric Jennings, *Curing the Colonizer,* 18.

[272] Of course, this is not meant as a pollyannaish celebration of racial mixing, which, while securing margincal social and political advantages for mixed children, was invariably accomplished at the expense of the sexual and reproductive consent of enslaved African women.

range of adaptive behaviors and practices - including racial mixing - that were thought to strengthen the white race in the tropical environment.

Creolization's perceived success - both in fashioning republican *citoyens* from Martinique's former slave population, as well as in acclimating white colonists to the rigors of the tropical climate - cemented beliefs about the comparative social and moral advancement of the Antilles, especially when measured against newly encountered societies in Africa and Asia. Paul Dislère, a staunch republican who served as the director of the colonies in the Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies, embraced assimilation for Martinique and Guadeloupe, arguing that these "colonies of settlement" occupied a special place in the French nation, making them different than newer colonies of extraction. From an economic perspective, he argued that departmentalization would allow the government to collect more in taxes, but he also made the case for their cultural and historical proximity to France; a fact that, for him, ensured against the possibility of future anticolonial violence or unrest, an outcome that was far from secure in France's newer colonies.

> Pour un certain nombre de colonies, ces révolutions ont eu lieu: le mal est passé ; nous n'avons plus que le bien à en retirer. Donc pour ces colonies anciennes, transformées, je crois que l'assimilation complète est possible et même facile. Pour nous la Martinique, la Guadeloupe, la Réunion, sont de véritables départements français. Pourquoi ne pas leur donner tous nos droits, ne pas leur appliquer les mêmes charges qu'à la métropole.[273]

The views expressed by men like Paul Dislère attest to a feeling held by numerous colonial officials that the *mission civilisatrice* was all but complete in the Antilles. However, perceptions about the Antilles' higher level of cultural proximity to France combined with the result, whites' and mulattos' privileged socio-economic circumstances were taken as a metric for the

[273] Paul Dislère, 149.

development overall on the islands, at the expense of an honest recognition of impoverished conditions in which most of Martinque's former slaves lived and worked.

Nevertheless, more positive attitudes toward creolity and racial difference were sustained in the Antilles, even after ideas about racial difference solidified throughout the rest of the French empire. These more flexible notions of race formed the basis of the Third Republic's supposedly race-blind administration in the Antilles, and the belief that development toward full assimilation into the French nation was possible, regardless of racial differences. And yet, whatever the political or cultural aspirations of republican administrators, they were constantly undermined by an economic calculus that affirmed the Antilles' status as productive colonies over all else. The Mount Pelée disaster reinforced the geographic otherness of the Antilles in a way that entrenched neglect and disinvestment that impacted islanders disproportionately based on race and class.

In certain ways, the French government and public rallied to Martinique's aid after Mount Pelée, extending sympathy and material support that seemed to belie the island's status as *simply* a colony. This support seemed to prove the colony's significance within the conception of French national identity, regardless of racial differences. Black Antilleans are praised for their courage and perseverance in the face of a ferocious climate and geography. The writer Henri Monet describes black Martinicans after the disaster in the following terms:

> …cette population bonne et douce, aux allures d'enfant, au cœur empli de charité, de mansuétude, de bravoure et de grandeur, se rallie autour de son drapeau, qui est l'amour de la Patrie. Grave, énergique et forte, et se met à l'œuvre silencieusement, rebâtissant ses villes, réensemençant ses champs avec une persévérance de fourmi.[274]

[274] Henri Monet, *La Martinique,* 12-15.

In his well-intentioned attempt to get metropolitan donors to open their hearts and wallets to assist Martinicans in their recovery, Monet emphasizes their shared place in the French nation, and particularly, how Martinicans demonstrate their worthiness for citizenship by embodying the republican values of courage, self-sacrifice and patriotism.

While it is tempting to see the outpouring of support after the catastrophe as a reflection of the Republic's race-blind commitments to integration in the Antilles, as Chris Church's quantitative analysis of post-disaster relief campaigns demonstrates, the charity of metropolitan donors often aligned with those victims to whom they felt close personal, cultural and racial bonds.[275] Soon after the eruption, the writer Charles Lambolez captured this sentiment while neglecting the reality that the vast majority of victims were black.

> La Martinique...est, comme nous l'avons déjà dit nous même tant de fois, une terre bien française qui, aux jours les plus tragiques, a su tenir haut et ferme le drapeau de la patrie. Ses habitants sont des *créoles de vieille roche*. Beaucoup d'entre eux se sont illustrés dans les lettres, les arts, les sciences et l'armée. Toutes les sympathies du pays vont donc aux infortunées victimes.[276]

For Lambolez and other metropolitan French people, the image of Mount Pelée's victims were those Creoles who most resembled, and perhaps even merited - by virtue of their (racial) proximity and contributions to French culture - the extension of aid. It is worth taking a moment to explain the term "creole" in this passage, as it captures the evasive rhetorical methods through which racial hierarchy was both obscured and upheld in the French Caribbean. Lambolez writes elsewhere in this same text that,

> Par le mot créole, on a désigné et on continue à désigner *tout ce qui naît sous le ciel des Antilles,* non seulement les *gens,* qu'ils soient blancs, noirs ou mulâtres, mais même les

[275] Chris Church, *Paradise Destroyed,* 217-221.
[276] Charles Lambolez, *Saint-Pierre-Martinique, 1635-1902: Annales des Antilles françaises-journal et album de la Martinique naissance; Vie et mort de la citée créole; Livre d'or de la charité.* Paris: Berger-Levrault et cie., 1905, 230. Emphasis mine.

> animaux, les plantes et les fruits. On dit, en effet couramment, aujourd'hui, et d'entente commune : noir créole, mulâtre créole, aussi bien que blanc créole; on dit également cultures et *bêtes créoles.*[277]

Almost no one living in the French Caribbean today is directly "native" to the islands. Instead, the transplanted peoples and cultures Caribbean as "the place where creolizations and assimilations and syncretisms are negotiated".[278] The author's explanation presents "creole" as a socially inclusive umbrella term that circumvents racial difference to instead emphasize identity through shared geography, meaning that creole refers to "all who are born under the Antillean sun". As the first passage shows, however, the ambiguity of the term "creole" made it so that the word could be metonymically deployed to represent "the whole" of the supposedly cohesive creole community while in fact only designating *certain* of its members. His references to Martinicans' cultural contributions, as well as the even more conspicuous description of Martinicans as *créoles de vieille roche*, make it clear that his use of the term is far less capacious than it would seem, applying in this case only to a subset of white Martinicans. The slippery and cryptic "creole" label reflects a complex discursive method through which racial difference could be linguistically concealed even as it was rigidly upheld by the colonial social-political structure.

While the term "creole" was at times deployed to obfuscate the racial stratification that underpinned Martinique's socio-economic structure, there were other tactics and language applied to the islands' black population in the late nineteenth century that seemed to underscore their racial and geographic difference. Strike activity driven by falling wages and economic stagnation impacted people in both Martinique and Guadeloupe, and this period of increasing labor unrest was accentuated by a series of geophysical disasters at the end of the nineteenth

[277] Ibid., 105-106.
[278] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference.* Jonathan Rutherford, ed. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 230.

century. The confluence of these events, under the growing influence of racial-climatic discourses which assigned immutable, geographic characteristics to ethnic groups, fueled perceptions of black workers as volatile, unreasonable, violent, and tempestuous - more "African" than Antillean, and clearly not ready for the responsibilities of republican citizenship. This shift in the characterization of black Antilleans can be understood according to what abolitionist scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called, "racism's changing same" which refers to the malleable cultural-symbolic mechanisms through which racism is fashioned and refashioned at different times and places, enabling "claims of natural or cultural incommensurability [to] secure conditions for reproducing economic inequalities which then validate theories of extra-economic hierarchical difference".[279] While acclimatibility may have originally produced a greater tolerance for racial *métissage* in the French Caribbean, it also served as a kind of pseudo-scientific justification for the enslavement of indigenous and African people, who were thought to be particularly "suited" to work in tropical climates. The shift to climatic determinism in the late nineteenth century should be seen in light of the expanding range of civil and political rights held by black Antilleans, whose continued economic subjugation and political disenfranchisement now had to be facilitated through a process of "tropicalized de-subjectification" achieved through their comparisons with the volatile equatorial climate.

I have suggested in this section that the perception of Martinique as a settlement colony contributed to an impression, common in both the colonial administration and the broader French public that the island was *more* developed than it was. Longstanding impressions of greater cultural development in the Antilles, generated in some part by the white-washed imagery associated with its elegant cultural capital, Saint-Pierre, helped to obscure the reality of severe

[279] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Race and Globalization," in *Abolition Geography: Essays toward Liberation.* Alberto Toscano and Brenna Bhandar, eds. New York: Verso, 2022, 114.

neglect and underdevelopment that was a fact of life for most Martinicans. This assessment of the Antilles' greater levels of "Frenchness" from a cultural point of view did not translate into corresponding levels of overall material development.

## Part 4. Under(developing) Disaster

### I. Radiating Disasters and the Racial Divide: How discourses of tropicality and climatic determinism drove further disasters

The constant crises - both environmental and economic - that ravaged the Antilles from the late nineteenth century until World War One reinforced a sense of their diminishing importance in a period of new imperialism, when more recent colonies in Africa and Asia offered greater political and economic interest. In a report compiled by France's most powerful colonial lobby at the time, the Union coloniale, Roland Pichevin admonishes the government for neglecting its oldest colonies, which he casts as deplorably underdeveloped despite annually increasing budgets and wasteful spending.

> En 1870, le budget de la Martinique était de 3 millions 214,191 francs; en 1901, il était de 7,763,768 francs. En étudiant de plus près ces budgets, on voit de tous les côtés des dépenses excessives et injustifiées...Quelles sont donc les œuvres qui représentent un tel capital ? Où sont les chemins ? Où sont les canaux ? Où sont les chemins de fer ? Il n'y a rien. Les routes, depuis trente ans, n'ont jamais dépassé une étendue de 490 km; on a dépensé en 14 ans plus de 6 millions pour ces routes coloniales, coût: 870 francs par km et par an, somme véritablement effrayante.[280]

Pichevin goes on to provide a more detailed, quantitative summary of conditions in Martinique, pushing the focus beyond the realm of agriculture to address the state of hygiene, medicine, education, employment, and democratic participation on the island. Leveling blame for Martinican underdevelopment upon newly enfranchised black voters and mixed-race politicians

[280] Roland Pichevin, "Bulletin de l'Union coloniale française," *Quinzaine coloniale*, 10 March 1906, 151-152.

who, according to Pichevin take advantage of uneducated voters' ignorance and poverty, essentially buying votes to secure ill-begotten political power, draining the colony of much-needed capital. Pichevin accuses black and mulatto functionaries and politicians of electoral abuses, but fails to identify the real systemic causes of Martinique's economic and infrastructural crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century, which was much more the result of the global economic depression, and the collusion between local creole elites, whose absolute control over the colonial economy and the sugar industry still held considerable sway over metropolitan policy. As Elizabeth Heath writes, "...in bolstering troubled industries, officials reinforced existing economic structures and inequalities and discouraged new development."[281]

In the 1870's-80's, much of the landed aristocracy started to borrow heavily from the Crédit Foncier Colonial as sugar prices fell. As prices declined year after year, many planters defaulted on loans only to have their land and factories repossessed by the CFC. This created a stifling debt crisis for Martinique and Guadeloupe, as more and more of the land and factories were consolidated, often under the control of only the most powerful *béké* families, and increasingly, investors in mainland France.[282] The mass bankruptcies and expropriations compromised the solvency of the Antillean economy, deepening Martinique and Guadeloupe's dependence on the metropole even as they diminished in productive importance. As a report of the Conseil d'administration noted as late as 1907,

> Exproprier sans avoir les ressources nécessaires pour continuer l'exploitation du centre donne le cas, infiniment probable, où il nous serait resté faute d'adjudicataire...risquait

[281] Elizabeth Heath, *Wine, Sugar, and the Making of Modern France,* 86.
[282] For more on the trend of foreclosures, enclosures, and debt crises in the Antilles during the sugar crisis, see Christian Schakenbourg, "Un grand industriel guadeloupéen du XIXe siècle. Ernest Souques (1831-1908)," *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* 97 (1993): 80-125.

> d'entraîner l'abandon immédiat des cultures et la fermeture de l'usine, en même temps que la perte définitive de la plus grosse partie de notre créance.[283]

While the decades-long sugar crisis had precipitated this trend, the onslaught of natural disasters culminating in the eruption of Mount Pelée solidified the view of Martinique as a risky place for European business interests. If Martinique had been spared the worst of the expropriations during the sugar crisis, the catastrophe further chipped away at the number of wealthy families who owned land and enterprises on the island. As metropolitan investors, and banks and credit agencies largely assumed ownership of plantations after foreclosures, which had effects that were felt far beyond the planter class. Besides driving down wages and creating unemployment, the credit defaults created a perilous debt situation for the colony.[284] Winston Griffiths notes that patterns of absentee property ownership were common under the plantation system. "Colonial monetary arrangements were such that plantation owners, mainly non-residents to the region, could easily transfer their profits outside the region, thus depriving the region of much capital that could have been used for domestic capital accumulation".[285] Under these conditions, colonial governments had very little with which to engage in development or public works projects, making Martinique and its residents even more vulnerable to the worst impacts of natural hazards when they happened. The overreliance of the island's economy on sugar then exacerbated the economic impacts of environmental disasters like hurricanes, fires, and droughts, as planters and workers alike were left with no substantial alternative crops to fall back on.[286]

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[283] Rapport du Conseil d'administration du Crédit Foncier Colonial, 1907. Quoted in Christian Schnakenbourg, *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe aux XIX et XX siècles,* 43.

[284] In Guadeloupe (where the credit crisis was even more severe than in Martinique), the colony at one point owed 6 million francs to the Crédit Foncier Colonial - half of its annual budget. Ibid., 53.

[285] Winston Griffith, "Neoliberal Economics and Caribbean Economies" *Journal of Economic Issues* 44:2 (2010): 507.

[286] An effort had been made by administrators to diversify Martinican agriculture, a move that was fueled not only by the bankruptcy crisis, but also by an awareness of the economic precarity of a monoculture-based economy in a

Pichevin compares health conditions he finds in Martinique with the newer French colonies in Africa, which he notes are significantly better off.

> Tandis que dans l'Afrique occidentale, cette colonie récente, la lutte contre le paludisme a été énergiquement enterprise, à la Martinique, dont la colonisation remonte à 1635, on semble ignorer qu'il existe des moyens pour combattre la malaria. Et dire que les possession des Antilles sont considérées comme des départements français et sont, aux yeux de quelques coloniaux, mûres pour l'assimilation ! (Pichevin, 154).

Exacerbation at the chronic - and largely ignored - conditions of poverty and disease in Martinique are framed by shock that colonies that have been under French control for three centuries - and which supposedly occupy a privileged place in the French nation - are in worse shape than its newest possessions. Pichevin's report - written three and a half years after Mount Pelée's eruption - confirms that hygiene and sanitation services in Fort-de-France remained neglected in the years following the disaster. He also notes that the typhoid outbreaks that were first triggered by the refugee crisis had now become endemic in Fort-de-France.

In French West Africa by contrast, economic development and public health were pillars of the Third Republic's civilizing mission. As Alice Conklin's research reveals, however, such

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region that was vulnerable to climatic disturbances. Administrators in Martinique and Guadeloupe understood that diversifying the islands' agriculture was essential to ensuring any hope of productive self-sufficiency in the future, and - just as in France - they looked to small cultivators to promote *cultures secondaires,* like coffee and cacao. Adolphe Le Boucher, the governor of Guadeloupe, made the case for the promise of *petits propriétaires* in diversifying the colony's agricultural output in a speech in 1886.

> "Qu'il me soit seulement permis de constater que lorsque nous aurons à faire le dénombrement des forces productives de l'industrie agricole, il ne sera que juste de reconnaître que le colonage partiaire et la petite propriété ont fourni à la main-d'oeuvre créole l'occasion de prouver que le noble travail de la terre est loin de lui causer autant de répugnance qu'on l'a prétendu. Le concours de mon administration est donc d'avance acquis à toute mesure devant avoir pour effet de ramener de plus en plus cette main-d'œuvre à la culture."

See Adolphe Le Boucher, Opening speech, *Conseil général, session ordinaire* (1886), 8-9. Elizabeth Heath also provides an important discussion of small-holding in Guadeloupe as part of the Third Republic's attempts to inculcate republican values in the newly-emancipated black population. See Elizabeth Heath, *Wine, Sugar, and the Making of Modern France,* 150-186.

development priorities were not originally part of the French government's imperial strategy. Public works and modernization projects were instead driven by the efforts of individual colonial administrators who paired civil service with their personal business interests. Businessmen and investors joined forces with colonial officials in key positions to pressure the government to partner with them, providing the necessary influx of capital to stimulate development that would allow them to expand their business ventures. A key figure in Conklin's narrative is Ernest Roume, who became Governor General of French West Africa in the 1890's. Roume eventually oversaw the reorganization of the Government General in ways that significantly benefited the powerful colonial lobbies, groups which represented the interests of colonial industrialists, business leaders, railroad executives, and other commercialists with key interests in the newer parts of the French empire. The wealthy and politically influential members of these lobbies - of which the Union coloniale was the most powerful - urged the government to shift its emphasis in West Africa and Asia from a strategy of military expansion to economic exploitation and development of the areas it had already acquired. Conklin writes that,

> "[*mise en valeur*] connoted an exploitation different from what had occurred in the first half of the century…The overseas territories were not to be plundered, as they might have been in the past, for whatever short-term riches they could yield. Such unlimited exploitation was inefficient and potentially undermined the long-term economic value of the colonies to the metropole. Instead a more systematic management of French overseas resources was needed - one in which the state would have a key role. It was this more rational and progressive development that the term mise en valeur apparently designated.[287]

Conklin's work shows that the transition from military conquest to economic development in West Africa occurred at the behest of private commercial interests but depended upon

[287] See Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, 41.

government partnership and investment. In order for development projects to succeed in West Africa and Indochina, investors relied on partnership with the central government, which was able to provide more stability and legitimacy to initiatives, like building railroads, ports, roads or schools.

In its report on Martinique, the Union colonial basically prescribed this same approach of *mise en valeur* that its members were successfully pursuing in West Africa. Their suggestions were never taken up by the French government or investors, however. The continued depreciation in the global price of sugar aggravated financial instability, and only made investors and creditors more wary, a fact which was accentuated by the perception of Martinique's volatile climate and geography. Rather than partnership between private and public finance to "develop" the colony, Martinique experienced the opposite - a phenomenon that, contrary to the political reading provided by the Union coloniale, had much more to do with the island's racialized political economy. While planters in Martinique and Guadeloupe certainly lobbied the French legislature for preferential treatment, their efforts during the sugar crisis were almost always focused on securing tax breaks, loans, bailouts, and other measures that would directly prop up their operations, with no real consideration made for broader development projects outside of this. They showed no interest in the kinds of projects promoted by French industrialists in North and West Africa at the time, who were "[committed] to transforming the federal government into an effective agent of *mise en valeur*" thus producing "a particular conception of how this colonial development could best take place".[288] Instead, planters lobbied the government in Paris for more tax breaks and protections that would protect the price of Antillean sugar on the global

[288] Ibid., 47.

market, an impulse often driven by the urgency of not only financial crises but the repeated disasters that befell Martinique at the end of the nineteenth century.[289]

As a result, no similar form of public-private partnership developed in the Antilles as it did in newer parts of the French empire. What existed instead was a kind of begrudging codependence between local planter elites and metropolitan administrators.[290] Planters argued that if the government did not provide subsidies, tariffs, and bailouts to Antillean sugar producers, that the French Caribbean would cease to be productive, becoming an international embarrassment and a drag on the national economy. In order to secure this aid, planters - contrary to Pichevin's portrait - were deeply involved in local politics, from serving in regional agricultural associations and the *conseil général,* to eventually forming employer's unions after the turn of the century. As Elizabeth Heath writes, "Conservative elites exercised influence as elected officials and members of civic organizations. A quick glance at a list of local mayors or the conseil général reveals this influence."[291] While it is true that the racial and political tides were turning - especially at the national level - to include more progressive and republican

[289] The inclusion of the Antilles in the Méline Tariff was precipitated by the 1891 hurricane, and the intense lobbying efforts of Martinican planters who saw import duty relaxations and other tax breaks as the key to solving the economic crisis and to restoring the productivity of the sugar industry. The Director of the Interior, Paul Fawtier, wrote that, "Il est indispensable de dégrever la propriété, car nul ne saurait aujourd'hui lui faire rendre des impôts." See Edouard Fortier, *Un Cyclone dans les Antilles,* 67.

[290] Elizabeth Heath traces this contentious relationship between conservative agricultural elites in the wine-producing Aude region of France and in Guadeloupe at the end of the nineteenth century. She writes that, "Elite appeals for state intervention and support countered the prevailing model of classical liberal economics and free trade in France, which limited the state's role to infrastructural development and railed against "excessive" intervention and state regulation…As the [global economic] crisis worsened, elite producers argued that the state should in fact regulate the agricultural market and support domestic producers. In pushing the state to think beyond tariffs and customs duties and towards measures like price supports, market equilibration, and other safety measures to protect agricultural incomes, Audois and Guadeloupean elites mapped out an early version of an agricultural welfare policy." Elizabeth Heath, *Wine, Sugar, and the Making of Modern France,* 84.

[291] While Heath is talking directly about Guadeloupe, the same could be said of planters' level of influence over local politics at the time in Martinique. Certainly, the catastrophe of 1902 shifted things, as it immediately wiped out half of the white population on the island. Nevertheless, *béké* influence at the level of local politics had been deliberately acquired for many years. Elizabeth Heath, 87-88.

mulatto representatives (like Senator Knight in the case of Martinique), white planters had positioned themselves in roles of significant local authority to counteract this influence, and to ensure that the protection for the sugar industry could be secured.

While it is true that by 1906, the political influence of the once powerful *béké* elite was ebbing in the realm of local politics (it was severely restricted after nearly half of the white population of Martinique was killed in the Mount Pelée eruption), their dominance had been absolute in local political organizations and on the *conseil général* at least until 1902. Pichevin looks to the immediate and recent aftermath of the post-catastrophe political landscape in Martinique and sees a majority of black and mixed-race politicians and functionaries guiding the direction of the colony. From this, he makes a causal link between Martinique's economic troubles and newly elected black lawmakers and civil servants. According to the conservative Union colonial, the Third Republic's premature expansion of universal suffrage had resulted in the election of self-serving and corrupt black representatives to local elected office. "Dans l'état des choses, tout se tient: la commune a besoin d'argent, le Conseil général avance les fonds et c'est la métropole qui paie au besoin. Quel est l'objectif? C'est la main mise sur la caisse. Quel est le moyen? Le suffrage universel. Quel est le levier? Les luttes ethniques" (Pichevin, 155).

Pichevin shifts the responsibility for economic mismanagement and underdevelopment to black voters and mulatto functionaries, despite the fact that for most of the past fifty years, black participation in elections had been limited and at times, even intentionally discouraged.[292] In reality, these processes can more accurately be traced to the political and economic dominance of

[292] Even as suffrage was expanded to include more black voters by the beginning of the Third Republic, the elections hailed by French officials as successes were also "democratic failures," according to Elizabeth Heath. While these elections ostensibly expanded suffrage, many other barriers to electoral participation existed such that in Guadeloupe, for example, "nearly 80 percent of the population did not vote in any election between 1871 and 1890". See Elizabeth Heath, *Wine, Sugar, and the Making of Modern France,* 58.

*usiniers* and *béké* families, whose single-minded efforts to shore up their personal investments most often backfired, sinking Martinique and Guadeloupe into even deeper debt and financial crisis. Even their supposed "successes" in securing extra protections for Antillean sugar had unintended consequences and only made the Antilles at once more dependent and more marginalized from the French market.

One of the supposedly most successful outcomes of their efforts was the passage of the Méline Tariff in 1892.[293] A thirty-year experiment with free trade was undercut by a series of global economic downturns in the 1860's-80's, which were blamed by officials like Jules Méline on the dangers of international commerce and foreign competition. Antillean planters were ardent protectionists, advocating strongly for the inclusion of France's Caribbean colonies within the Méline Tariff. While they did eventually secure this outcome, which provided tariff protections for Antillean sugar cane on the domestic market, integration turned out to be a double-edged sword. Christian Schnakenbourg explains that despite the supposed "assimilation douanière," the Antilles still had a liminal status within the French nation as colonies. While inclusion within the French customs zone allowed them to pay the same duties on imported goods, they still had to pay tariffs on exports.[294] Schnakenbourg notes that this was a turning point in the economic and political history of the Antilles that solidified the links of dependence and inequality that departmentalization ultimately sought to undo: "C'est le grand tournant dans l'histoire des relations économiques des Antilles avec la France ; à la dépendance commerciale

[293] The Méline Tariff, named for its architect, the French legislator and later Prime Minister, Jules Méline, was crafted in response to France's failed attempt at free trade. Reversing three decades of liberalism, the Méline Tariff aimed to protect French agricultural products and the domestic market, while stabilizing prices.

[294] This was because the Méline Tariff, while it seemed attractive to Antillean planters at first in protecting them from foreign competition, was a measure that explicitly aimed at stabilizing prices for *French* farmers and manufacturers. The approach to protectionism advanced by the Méline Tariff made colonies into privileged markets for an exclusively French sphere.

'simple' qui les caractérisait depuis le XVIIe siècle succède une forme nouvelle, plus contraignante encore, de subordination: l'intégration à l'économie métropolitaine."[295] Even as the value of Antillean exports was undermined on the mainland market, the colonies had no choice but to purchase all other staples on the domestic market. As plantation island economies, with most land and resources devoted to sugar production, the Antilles imported all other goods - including most food, textiles, manufacturing equipment, and agricultural machinery - and at extremely high rates, as these materials had to be shipped across the Atlantic. The cost of living thus soared on the islands after the Méline Tariff was passed, leading to a situation of wage cuts, unemployment, deepening poverty, and scarcity. An American official described the fallout from the new customs arrangement in 1897.

> In previous years, subsequent to the cyclone of the 18th of August 1891, imports invariably exceeded the value of the exports, but since 1894 a gradual change for the better presented itself, and has ever since been increasing. The causes that brought about these changes are various, such as a diminution of articles of luxury and fancy items, from France ...the difficulty of obtaining drafts of remittance; the increased economy of the people generally; the reduction of wages of farm and other laborers by nearly 25%, and the reduction, as a consequence, of the purchasing power of the population.[296]

This "change for the better" as the American Consul puts it - tipping Martinique's balance finally to exceeding imports with exports - was brought about by the customs overhaul triggered by its inclusion in the Méline Tariff in 1892. The higher cost of all imported goods meant that many consumer products (both luxury goods *and* staple products) were no longer affordable to ordinary people, whose reduction in purchasing power forced them to manage as best they could

[295] Christian Schnakenbourg, *Histoire de l'industrie sucrière en Guadeloupe aux XIX et XX siècles,* 23.
[296] Julius G. Tucker, "Martinique," *Commercial relations of the United States with Foreign Countries during the years 1895-1896,* vol. 1. Washington DC: Department of State, 1897, 542.

with what they could grow or provide for themselves locally.[297] Accompanied by a 25% cut in wages and dwindling public assistance (which as Pichevin's report points out, was four or five times less than the amount available in neighboring British colonies[298]), the working class was largely left to fend for itself.

In the racial paternalism characteristic of French republicans at the time, Pichevin deftly weaves a path between absolving, infantilizing, and desubjectifying the majority of the new black electorate. He casts black Martinicans as "une armée d'électeurs dociles, ignorants et facilement suggestionnés" and paints a picture of how their ignorance and poverty is exploited by corrupt mulatto politicians for personal gain. In his view, the application of voting rights was premature in Martinique, as it was unaccompanied by a parallel in advancement in the other foundations of republican civic life. Pichevin's contention is that the expansion of suffrage to all black and mixed-race Antilleans after Emancipation precipitated the *loss* of metropolitan control over the islands, their political leadership having been "ceded" to a racially different group that was viewed, at least by Pichevin and his circle, as not French.

> Dans ce pays, qui contient tant de noirs élevées à la dignité de citoyens français, le spectre blanc est agité perpétuellement et sert à exciter ces excellents nègres contre les blancs. Les populations noires ou de sang mêlé qui votent pour une liste bigarrée dans laquelle entre une unité blanche sont déclarées réactionnaires, cléricales, rétrogrades,

[297] In another part of the report, Pichevin rebukes the impoverished black population for turning to a form of income that involved the deforestation of large swathes of tropical jungle in Martinique's interior, using the wood for fuel. While Pichevin views this activity as evidence of the black workers' ignorance, apathy and short-sightedness with regard to the island environment, it is more accurately seen as a form of mitigating poverty as unemployment and wage contraction drove the working class further into poverty. Pichevin's comments are instructive though, as they anticipate a white-washing in environmentalism that the field is only just starting to grapple with today. For many years, this prejudice has led to the erroneous and racist perception that the impoverished workers of the Third World do not care about the environment, and that its conservation depends upon enlightened white people from the developed world. For more on this see, Malcom Ferdinand, *Ecologie décoloniale: penser l'écologie depuis le monde caribéen.* Paris: Seuil, 2019.

[298] Pichevin's report states that, "A la Trinidad, on dépensait 100.000 francs pour l'instruction et 1.800.000 francs l'assistance publique. A la Martinique, les dépenses pour l'instruction publique sont supérieures, mais celles d'assistance sont trois ou quatre fois moindres." Roland Pichevin, "Bulletin de l'Union coloniale française," *Quinzaine coloniale*, 10 March 1906, 154.

> antidreyfusardes, et tout ce que vous voudrez, alors que ces pauvres gens ne savent même pas ce qu'est la réaction, l'empire ou la royauté (Pichevin, 155).

According to Pichevin, the only way to stabilize the Antilles and to ensure their survival as French colonies was to restrict the autonomy gained through universal suffrage, by replacing new and unqualified Martinican civil servants with more professional French bureaucrats. This approach of metropolitan supervision and centralized oversight was characteristic of the colonial lobby's approach to commercial expansion and development in Africa and Indochina. The suggestion to consolidate more centralized authority over the Antilles emerged from racist impressions that their mismanagement and underdevelopment was the result of the impulsive enfranchisement of a population that was not yet ready for the responsibilities of full citizenship. Returning the colonies to more direct metropolitan oversight and control, according to the colonial lobby, would restore financial stability. However, this superficial, political diagnosis of Antillean underdevelopment ignored the broader and intractable political economy of the colonies that almost ensured their continued neglect. By the end of World War Two, quality of life for most residents had remained stagnant or worsened in the Antilles. Citing this research in a speech before the Assemblée nationale in 1950, Aimé Césaire notes that, "Pour ne parler que de la seule Martinique, un géographe, dans une thèse récent en Sorbonne, va jusqu'à écrire: 'Le niveau de vie réel ne semble pas s'être élevé pour la majorité des travailleurs depuis 1880, peut-être même depuis l'esclagvage, c'est-à-dire, 1848."[299]

## Part 4. Radiating Disaster and Development: The Role of the United States

### I. The Emergence of Disaster Diplomacy

[299] Aimé Césaire, *Aimé Césaire: Ecrits politiques: Discours à l'Assemblée nationale.* Edouard de Lépine, ed. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2013, 71.

Pichevin's recommendations for increased French oversight must also be understood in light of comments at the beginning of his report, comments that reveal growing geopolitical tension between the United States, France, and Martinique since Mount Pelée's eruption in 1902. In calling upon the government to take development in the colony seriously, Pichevin issues a warning about the United States' interest in acquiring the colony.

> Depuis quelques années, la Martinique et la Guadeloupe ont glissé sur une pente si rapide et si dangereuse que le Gouvernement a fini par s'émouvoir. Il était temps. Le moment est venu de prendre un parti. Nos colonies sont un objet de convoitise pour nos excellents amis les Anglais et les Américains surtout. La Martinique, en particulier, avec son bassin de radoub unique en ces régions, avec ses fortifications considérables, avec un matériel de guerre puissant, a attiré l'attention de l'Amérique. L'ouverture prochaine de l'isthme de Panama donne une valeur plus considérable à la Martinique et à la Guadeloupe, tant au point de vue économique qu'au point de vue stratégique…ils ne cachent pas leur volonté de placer sous leur domination les Antilles anglaises et françaises.[300]

As France focused its imperial gaze on other, potentially more profitable parts of the globe, the United States began to take a more meaningful interest in the older parts of the European empire in the Caribbean and South Pacific. Because of its ports and particular geographic position, Martinique had drawn special attention from the US as a potential military base, particularly as construction on the Panama Canal was undertaken. This aspect of the geopolitical relationship between the US, France, and the Antilles has been all but forgotten, as America refrained from taking steps toward acquiring Martinique from France. The close of the nineteenth century saw a scramble for colonies that included not just competition between European imperial powers, but also the United States. Rather than focusing its efforts on colonizing entirely new parts of the world, America instead looked to the weakening of existing empires in the region, focusing its efforts on establishing hemispheric dominance by destabilizing Spanish colonial control in Latin

[300] Pichevin, 151.

America, the Caribbean and the South Pacific.[301] While Spanish possessions like Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines were most vulnerable to US acquisition, America looked to the French Antilles for similar reasons. The brief period of free trade from the 1850's-1890's had reconfigured the historically bidirectional, mercantilist relationships of Caribbean sugar producers with metropolitan powers in Europe. During this period, French, Spanish and British colonies began exporting much of their product to the United States, initiating regional economic networks that established the United States as an important trade partner in the region.[302] As the pendulum swung back toward protectionism in the 1890's, America seized upon the fragility of the old colonial economies on these islands, re-focusing its efforts not on trade but on taking direct control over production through acquiring island colonies. To establish economic and strategic control over Latin America, and to create a corporatist sugar empire on the ashes of fading European projects in the region, President Theodore Roosevelt passed an addendum to the Monroe Doctrine in 1902-1903 called the Roosevelt Corollary. In this document, President Roosevelt granted himself "international police power" to intervene in the affairs of Latin American nations (the original target was Venezuela) for anything from defaulting on loans, refusing to pay debts or anything vague enough to fall under the category of "chronic wrongdoing".[303] Expanding on the Monroe Doctrine, the law also cordoned off the region to US

[301] For more on the Spanish-American War, see Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism 1895-1902,* vol. I. New York: Monthly Review, 1972.

[302] As César Ayala explains, "In the United States, industrialization increased the demand for cotton and…sugar consumption rose dramatically from 12.5 to 65 pounds per capita between 1830 and 1900. The slave plantation economies of Cuba and Puerto Rico in the nineteenth century developed outside the mercantilist framework desired by Spain and abhorred by local planters in the islands." See César Ayala, *The American Sugar Kingdom,* 17. While the focus of Ayala's study is on the Spanish Caribbean, the cases of Martinique and Guadeloupe were not dissimilar. Like Spanish planters, Antillean *usiniers* also lobbied for free trade arrangements prior to the economic downturn of the 1880's and the sugar crisis, attempting to offset the increased competition from beet sugar and other colonial sugar production on the metropolitan market.

[303] Theodore Roosevelt, "Annual Address to Congress of 1904," House Records HR 58A-K2; Records of the U.S. House of Representatives; Record Group 233; Center for Legislative Archives; National Archive.

interests by prohibiting any further European activity in the Western Hemisphere. This went into effect after the Mount Pelée disaster, emphasizing that America's growing interest in the region would be accompanied by substantial military measures to back up its expansionism. America's quest for hegemony was of great concern to France, which made French officials wary of its eagerness to provide aid to Martinique after the eruption. Congress ultimately sent $200,000 in relief, with even more raised through private donations made by individual Americans.[304] The US was able to respond both more promptly, redirectly ships in the region loaded with supplies to Martinique directly after the disaster, and often more efficiently. While French officials deliberated over how much and what kinds of aid to send, Roosevelt took it upon himself to supply Martinique with enough food, medical, and financial aid to get it through the difficult first few weeks after the eruption. As the reporter, Jena Hess, explained, "Dans cet élan de solidarité humaine et de charité apitoyé qui remua toutes les nations civilisées, les Américains des Etats-Unis se distinguèrent particulièrement".[305] Although the French were very much in need of international assistance in the relief effort, especially from the more conveniently located American ships that could continually re-supply the island with food rations, they were suspicious of America's ulterior motives. In fact, only ten days after the eruption, after the US had already committed more than $300,000 in aid from public and private donations, French officials attempted to curtail American support, reporting that Martinique was receiving "too

[304] The New York Times reported on May 18, 1902 - just 10 days after the eruption - that the total US contributions - including the $200,000 allocated by Congress and private donations, amounted to $312,218. Despite the public's obvious interest in the situation and willingness to donate, the article in which these figures appear expresses concern that Martinique was receiving "too much" in the way of disaster aid. "The fear of Martinicans becoming "pauperized," unemployed, and dependent on the state through access to too much aid was also a great concern for the French Relief Commission, as we have seen. Both France and the US - which also had interests in acquiring Martinique - wished to maintain the viability and availability of the black labor force and worried that disaster aid could threaten this". See: "Martinique Relief May Be Overdone: Consul General Ayme Advises that Contributions Cease"

[305] Jean Hess, *La catastrophe de la Martinique: notes d'un reporter*, 200.

much" in the way of disaster aid. As the New York Times reported, "...There was much comment yesterday on a published statement from a newspaper correspondent at Fort de France who declared in the most positive terms that the relief was being greatly overdone and that there was grave danger that the people of the stricken islands would be pauperized…The [American] Consul General [Ayme] advised that subscriptions should cease in the United States at once". Though this rumor was eventually cleared up, with the French Consul General responding that the Relief Commission in Martinique was up to the task of soliciting and allocating aid to those in need, the episode attests to deeper tensions in the French American relationship during the disaster. Indeed, doubts about France's will and competence to assist Martinicans after disasters fed into a narrative about diminishing French authority in the Caribbean, making its *vieilles colonies* ripe for annexation by the US. The colonial lobbies were not the only voices raising concerns about the risks of French indifference and neglect in the Caribbean. Directly after the disaster, several observers expressed concern that the meagerness of French aid - especially when compared to the full-throated support provided by the US - could shift the allegiances of the black population at a time when French leadership on the island was already precarious. "Dans le peuple des noirs, on ajoute : 'Les Américains savent nourrir leurs citoyens en détresse, c'est leur pain que nous mangeons. Si nous avions attendu la farine de France, nous aurions pu 'bouffer' de la cendre…'".[306] Like members of the Union coloniale, French journalists were aware of the geopolitical calculus of America's disaster aid to Martinique. Discussions of the Relief Commission based in Fort-de-France also point to anxieties about America's creeping use of what might be called today, "disaster diplomacy."[307] While it would be cynical to see

[306] Ibid., 201.

[307] Disaster diplomacy is a term that "focuses on how and why disaster-related activities do and do not yield diplomatic gains, looking mainly at disaster-related activities affecting diplomacy rather than the reverse." While

American humanitarian aid as purely opportunistic - particularly given the number of private donations - its generosity should be seen in light of its growing imperial ambitions in the Caribbean region.

As the deadliest volcanic eruption in the Western Hemisphere, the Mount Pelée tragedy commanded the attention of the world. However, coverage of the event in the US press was especially detailed and consistent, remaining front page news in the New York Times for over three weeks. The impetus for journalists to cover the event was not only linked to America's longstanding diplomatic relationship with France; it was also generated by the practical and supportive role played by the US Navy in both evacuating survivors and helping to avert a large-scale famine on the island by continually providing much-needed food and medical supplies. Using subtle and occasionally more overt language, journalists sowed seeds of doubt about the capacity of French officials to handle the situation.[308] In an article that appeared days after the devastating second eruption of Mount Pelée on May 20, discussions of the American General Relief Committee for Martinique and the West Indian Islands are summarized. One member testified that, "It seemed probable that the whole population of Martinique would have to be deported. This might be the duty of the French Government, but, as a matter of pride, America, considering what France had done for her in early days, would want to do what she can." While the Relief Committee in Martinique and French officials were resolutely opposed to evacuating the island, which they saw as the nail in the coffin of Martinique's future as a French colony, the US press covers it extensively, making it seem like the only desirable or humane option for the

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this is a term that is mostly applied to contemporary disaster events, it is a term that could just as easily be used to describe the behavior and motivations of the United States in its response after Mount Pelée.

[308] One article reports that "The presence of relief ships is somewhat helpful to the people, who say, 'the American flag makes safety.' However, the latest eruption probably means a ruined island. All confidence is lost. 'We want not food but only to leave,' is the single and unanimous cry of all, rich and poor alike." See, "Martinique May Be Entirely Abandoned: French Government Prepared for Such a Step," *New York Times*. May 23, 1902.

panicked residents still trapped there. The US Relief Commission's "helpful" offer to assist France in this process can be seen as an opportunistic attempt to help facilitate the evacuation of Martinique, opening it up for a US occupation.

The United States had had its colonial gaze set on the Spanish Caribbean - especially Cuba - since at least the 1820's, when American trade with the island weakened Spain's mercantilist claims over its imports to such an extent that John Quincy Adams once supposedly quipped that "in time, like a ripe apple, Cuba would fall into the lap of the United States."[309] According to this "ripe fruit theory," Secretary of State John Quincy Adams viewed the United States' relationship to Cuba through the prism of the Monroe Doctrine. In a letter to the American Foreign Minister in Spain in 1823, he wrote that,

> There are laws political as well as of physical gravitation; and if an apple, *severed by the tempest from its native tree,* cannot choose but to fall to the ground, Cuba, forcibly disjoined from its own unnatural connection with Spain, and incapable of self-support, can gravitate only towards the North American Union, which, by the same law of nature, cannot cast her off from its bosom.[310]

The United States' sense of entitlement and manifest destiny with respect to Cuba was unique for several reasons.[311] Comparable long-term, serious plans for annexation did not exist for the

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[309] According to this "ripe fruit theory," Secretary of State John Quincy Adams viewed the United States' relationship to Cuba through the prism of the Monroe Doctrine.

[310] Letter from John Quincy Adams to Hugh Nelson, *Writings (1820-1823)*, vol. 7. Worthington Chauncy Ford, ed. New York: Macmillan, 1917, 373. Emphasis mine.

[311] For geographic, geopolitical and economic reasons, the United States had publicly expressed its interests in annexing Cuba since the 1820's. After the Haitian Revolution, Cuba became the largest and most profitable sugar producing island in the Caribbean, making it a significant asset to the colonial power that controlled it. In addition, it was geographically closer to North America, which made it a more feasible candidate for extension of the Monroe Doctrine. Since before the Civil War, Southern states had supported the annexation of Cuba which they believed could help to expand cotton production and stabilize southern economies. The weakening Spanish imperial state, which relied heavily on Cuban sugar production, refused to end slavery until 1886, making it the almost the last in the region to do so (second only to Brazil, which waited until 1888). The continuation of plantation slavery in Cuba long past its combined with tensions over the economic crisis to spark a Revolution in 1895 in which Cuba threw off Spanish rule, much to the delight of the US, which then moved to occupy the new Cuban Republic.

French Antilles, which had maintained much closer cultural and political ties to France over the years. And yet, the turn toward the United States as both a buyer of Antillean sugar *and* as an important and cheaper source of manufactured goods during the era of free market capitalism had initiated a much closer relationship between America and France's *vieilles colonies*, one that America hoped to maintain despite the swing back to protectionism in the 1890's. The Antilles lacked the revolutionary spark that definitively cleaved Cuba from Spain in 1902, sending it falling into the waiting arms of a US occupation. Nevertheless, the Mount Pelée catastrophe catalyzed similar social, political and economic instability that American officials and the press seized upon. To borrow John Quincy Adams' metaphor, the Mount Pelée disaster might be understood as the very real "tempest" that could sever Martinique from its "unnatural" connection to France.

It is in the press that the historical parallels between these two events are most clearly spelled out. Cuba officially declared its independence from Spain on May 20, 1902, less than two weeks after the destruction of Saint-Pierre, and coincidentally, on the same day of the devastating secondary eruption of Mount Pelée that led to conversations about evacuating Martinique permanently. Articles on the eruption appear alongside those celebrating the establishment of the Cuban Republic (fig. 1.2).

While the historical convergence of these two events was coincidental, their juxtaposition in American newspapers underscores the United States' active interest in how both situations would unfold. Ultimately, the United States did not pursue formal annexation of Martinique, but its use of disaster diplomacy, the passage of the Roosevelt Corollary, and the sensationalist coverage of the disaster in the American press, underscored its interest and seriousness in acquiring the island. These fears were renewed after the US annexation of Haiti in 1915, and

again during the Second World War, when Martinique and Guadeloupe fell under the authority of the Vichy government. In the following section, I explore the triangular geopolitical relationship between the United States, France, and Martinique at the start of the Cold War, when the United States again tried to fold Martinique into its sphere of global influence, which at this point took the form of regional hegemony through the promotion of economic development programs that aimed to counter the appeal of communism. In light of this deepening American interventionism and in the disastrous aftermath of the Vichy Occupation, I show that Aimé Césaire lobbied for full integration of Martinique and Guadeloupe within the French state, both as a measure for securing their economic and political equality and for securing protection from the threat of American imperialism.

## II. A New Triangular Circuit Emerges: The United States, Cold War Development Strategies, and the Decision to Departmentalize

The history of the United States' relations with Martinique has to some extent always unfolded in the wake of disaster. In the years leading up to the First World War and beyond, many US strategic and imperial actions in the Caribbean were aimed at undermining German militarization. The 1915 invasion and occupation of Haiti, for example, was intended to thwart the growing influence of German bankers and investors who were buying up real estate and plantations en masse across Haiti. Having witnessed from afar the racism and segregation brought to Haiti by US Marines, Antilleans felt an even closer affinity to republican France, as they continued to push progressively for full administrative recognition after World War One. When a rumor began to circulate suggesting that the United States might acquire Martinique and Guadeloupe as payment for the French war debt, the precariousness of Antilleans' status as

"colonial citizens" was put into harsh relief, and the prospect of a US occupation became a real possibility.

French fears about an American invasion of the Antilles were renewed at the start of World War Two, when Martinique and Guadeloupe both came under Vichy control in 1940. After the French German armistice, individual colonial administrators were left to decide whether to pledge their allegiance to de Gaulle and the Free French or to Vichy. Both Georges Robert, the governor of Martinique and a well-known conservative, and Georges Sorin, the supposedly republican governor of Guadeloupe, aligned with Vichy, in opposition to the political desires of most of the islands' residents.

The alignment of France's Caribbean islands with Vichy was also a significant concern for the United States, which in 1940, had not officially entered the war. The potential for the French Navy - and by extension the colonies it defended in the Caribbean - to fall under Nazi control was taken seriously by the United States and Great Britain. The Roosevelt administration worried that if the Nazis acquired naval bases in Caribbean, they could more easily launch attacks on the mainland United States. As a result, in one of its first actions before officially joining the war, America intervened to support a Naval Blockade established by the British around Martinique and Guadeloupe. The blockade would prevent German U-Boats from docking and refueling at Vichy-controlled ports, preventing most supplies and rations from entering the islands, and effectively cutting off the Antilles completely from mainland France. In spite of the best efforts of Vichy administrators to blame the United States for creating the shortages, most islanders recognized that it was in fact thanks to American ships that any supplies were able to make it past the blockade. The decisive role played by American aid recalled the situation after

the Mount Pelée disaster, when it was primarily US supply ships that provided emergency relief and medical aid to Martinican victims.

French Antilleans also saw most of their hard-fought civil liberties curtailed during the Vichy occupation, while overt racial violence and discrimination from Vichy officials and French sailors increased. The Naval Blockade exacerbated the already desperate socioeconomic reality for most black Antilleans, while exposing the full extent of the islands' dependence on mainland France. The islands' complete reliance on imports for consumer goods, combined with chronic underdevelopment and an agricultural industry entirely devoted to sugar, created a situation in which it was nearly impossible for islanders to provide for themselves when shipments from France ceased. Adlai Murdoch notes that while daily life for residents of neighboring islands changed very little during the war, the experience of French West Indians resembled "a constant state of siege".[312]

And yet, the war years are inscribed in Antilleans' collective memory in complex ways - not only as a period of deprivation and disaster, but also one of resourcefulness, independence and cultural flourishing, as evidenced by the growing political opposition to Vichy, and the cultural contributions of the war-time literary journal, *Tropiques*. Martinicans' growing resistance to Vichy oppression eventually resulted in violent demonstrations in Fort-de-France, which led to the ouster of Admiral Robert, Martinique's governor. Reflecting on the war years, Frantz Fanon observed that in these demonstrations, "La Martinique systématisait pour la première fois sa conscience politique".[313] Antilleans were deeply disillusioned with France after experiencing the racism not only under Vichy, but from republican officials as well, whose

[312] Adlai Murdoch, "The Language(s) of Martinican Identity: Resistance to Vichy in the Novels of Raphaël Confiant," Special Issue of *L'Esprit créateur,* "France's Colonies and the Second World War," 47:1 (Spring 2007): 72.
[313] Frantz Fanon, *Pour la révolution africaine: Écrits politiques.* Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2001, 39.

betrayals and complicity undermined their supposed commitment to a race-blind and egalitarian French Republic.

Given the alienating events of the Second World War, Antilleans' broad support for Departmentalization might seem contradictory, even self-abnegating. However, far from an expression of patriotism or the logical conclusion to centuries of cultural assimilation, Departmentalization was seen as the most viable option through which Antilleans could realize self-determination and autonomy.[314] While departmentalization preserved and in many ways, enhanced, cultural, political and economic bonds between France and its Caribbean colonies, it did so with the goal of finally securing Antillean citizens' full civil rights as French citizens under French law. While departmentalization has often been understood as the culmination of a decades-long push for assimilation, this narrative ignores the profound changes in Antilleans' cultural consciousness precipitated by the disastrous humanitarian crisis created during the Second World War. In addition, it neglects more complex geopolitical calculus which inescapably involves a trilateral relationship between France, its Caribbean departments, and the United States, which I turn to now.

As Aimé Césaire described, departmentalization was intended as a practical response to the poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment that was endemic in Martinique, but which had only been exacerbated by the Vichy occupation during World War Two. Césaire viewed the Departmentalization Law of 1946 as a critical step toward achieving parity for the Antilles with respect to other French departments. The equality Césaire envisioned focused on securing the resources from the French government that would allow for needed material improvements - fixing roads, updating hospitals, improving nutrition, sanitation, education, and public health. In

[314] Nick Nesbitt, "Departmentalization and the Logic of Decolonization" *L'Esprit créateur* 47:1 (2007): 41.

trying to convince his European colleagues of the conditions of desperation generated by centuries of colonial inequality and disinvestment, Césaire remarks that, "Quant à l'équipement public et social, même les observateurs les mieux disposés sont obligés s'avouer qu'il est en retard de plusieurs siècles".[315] He goes on to quote from government ministers, and the well-known French ethnographer, Michel Leiris, who confirm the Antilles' still-deplorable conditions of human misery, poverty, and preventable disease. And yet, instead of providing the needed aid and investment that might have helped to elevate living conditions for Antilleans, Césaire accuses his colleagues of offering military aid instead.

> Aujourd'hui, on vient nous parler de nous rendre bénéficiaires de je ne sais quel programme d'aide militaire. Nous demandons du pain et l'on nous offre des armes ! Et des armes contre qui ? Contre nos voisins, les voisins des Antilles, que nous connaissons bieh pour les voir de temps en temps débarquer dans nos ports ; contre les Américains esclavagistes, contre les lyncheurs de nègres, contre le Ku-Klux-Klan.[316]

It is notable that in this same speech, from 1950, Césaire links this argument for development and public investment in the Antilles to a warning about the growing threat of American imperialism.

Because of the French West Indies' historical dependence on the metropole, national self-sufficiency could not have generated the economic investment necessary to address the urgent problems facing Antilleans, and for this reason, was never under serious consideration. However, as Kristen Childers notes, "the years under Robert had tarnished many Antilleans views of France in such a profound way that many French officials worried about their excessive vulnerability to foreign propaganda and the siren song of the United States".[317] The "foreign

[315] Aimé Césaire, *Écrits politiques,* 73.
[316] Aimé Césaire, *Écrits politiques*, 76.
[317] Kristin Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace: National Identity, Decolonization, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 70.

propaganda" that concerned French administrators was the circulation of anticolonial campaigns by the United States, which supported the dissolution of colonial empires in its pursuit of a more open world market that was conducive to America's economic imperialist aims. The US-backed Caribbean Commission promoted a decolonial federation of Caribbean islands that was quickly gaining traction among some West Indian political leaders. Aimé Césaire felt that such an arrangement could only amount to an American protectorate and he expressed concern about the specter of US imperialism in speeches before the Assemblée nationale, suggesting that if France did not fully departmentalize Guadeloupe and Martinique, that the islands would be susceptible to US domination.

> ...la possibilité du regroupement des Antilles françaises, anglaises, américaines en une sorte de république caribéenne...ne pourrait pas être économiquement et politiquement qu'un protectorat américain…tout délai apporté à l'application de la loi de mars 1946, dite loi d'assimilation, apporte de l'eau au moulin de telles propagandes…[qui sont] largement alimentées...par la politique maladroite que suivent la plupart des gouverneurs envoyés récemment dans nos territoires…[318]

While this geopolitical calculus has been studied very little its relation to departmentalization, Césaire's political speeches from this period reveal that American aggression and anticommunism constituted a significant threat to Antillean autonomy. And yet, the United States also played an instrumental role in French politics at the time. By providing aid and loans for post-war recovery through the Marshall Plan, it engaged in a calculated effort to subvert the increasingly influential French Communist Party (PCF).[319] America's influence in French

[318] Aimé Césaire, *Aimé Césaire: Écrits politiques*, 49.

[319] The historian Edward Rice-Maximin explains that the United States used financial assistance and loans for reconstruction as a means of influencing French politics after the war, in an effort to limit the popularity and influence of the French communist party (PCF) in the legislature. "Early in 1946, France was in great need of economic aid and, to this end, sent the venerable socialist leader, Leon Blum, to Washington where he spent almost two months (March to May). Meanwhile the defeat of the first proposed French constitution in May necessitated the elections of a new Constituent Assembly in June. Many State Department officials felt it imperative that the SFIO strengthen its position in these elections and that substantial American aid to Blum would give them an important

elections meant that the slim PCF majority that had passed decolonial measures like Departmentalization was quickly replaced by moderate socialists who were reluctant to implement the full measure of the law. Césaire's continual pleas to his colleagues in the Assemblée nationale in the years after attest to the shifts in the ideological makeup of the legislature; shifts that had been precipitated at least partially by this conditional distribution of American aid. In the context of the Cold War order that was taking shape after World War Two, the United States wanted to ensure that Western Europe, devastated and economically fragile as it was, aligned with the West. Loans and grants for reconstruction issued through the Marshall Plan should be seen as a form of disaster diplomacy, used to influence the political and economic orientations of European nations like France. US officials were alarmed about the PCF's friendliness with the Soviet Union and worried that "the PCF might try to sabotage the agreements with Léon Blum 'to prevent France from moving towards a successful Occidental orientation of [her] national economy ... to hinder the reestablishment ... of democracy and freedom of commerce in the American understanding of these expressions'".[320]

Among the most enthusiastic support for the PCF came from France's new *départements d'outre-mer.* Despite his famous break with the French communist party in 1956, at the time of departmentalization, Aimé Césaire was among the main proponents of its platform. This support did not fly under the radar of American officials who grew increasingly concerned about the political sympathies of other newly independent and economically fragile nations in Latin

boost. [US Ambassador to France, Jefferson Caffery] viewed such aid as in the 'long-range political and economic objectives' of the United States." See Edward Rice-Maximin, "The United States and the French Left: The View from the State Department," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19:4 (October 1984): 731.

[320] Norris B. Chipman, Memorandum No. 282, 28 July 1946. Quoted in Edward Rice-Maximin, "The United States and the French Left": 733.

America and the Caribbean. Aimé Césaire highlights this threat by quoting from a recent article that appeared in the Chicago Tribune which stated that,

> Les puissances européennes nous ont déjà causé assez d'ennuis. Mais si elles devaient tomber sous les coups d'une agression communiste et si leurs colonies devaient devenir des bases soviétiques en Amérique, la sécurité américaine serait directement menacée. La seule solution sûre est d'exclure les nations européennes de l'Amérique latine et des eaux américaines.[321]

In this atmosphere of Cold War tension, concerns about an American annexation of Martinique were renewed. The suggestion above that European powers should be "excluded" from the Caribbean region recalls the almost exact same assertion of American hegemony in the region invoked in the Roosevelt Corollary of 1904. This time, however, the reasoning was slightly different - barring the presence of European colonial powers in Latin America and the Caribbean was now justified through the fear that their own political and economic precarity after World War Two could facilitate a Soviet alignment, not only in Europe but in their colonies.

Césaire rebukes his more centrist colleagues for their capitulation to American political and economic priorities, which not only undermined the PCF's role in the French government but also stalled the application of departmental status to Martinique, Guadeloupe, La Réunion and French Guiana. World War Two meaningfully reshaped Martinicans' political sensibilities, as well as their relationship to the French state, ultimately framing the postwar decision to become a French department as well as the survival of the measure today. Far from a foregone conclusion or a capitulation to French assimilation, as it has often been characterized, departmentalization was conceived at once as a practical response to the urgent humanitarian crisis on the islands precipitated by the war, and as a creative way for achieving decolonization

[321] Quoted in Aimé Césaire, *Écrits politiques,* 76.

through demanding full, administrative parity with other French departments. While it is a little-studied part of the departmentalization narrative, Aimé Césaire's political speeches from the 1940's-50's reveal that American hegemony was a real and very present threat, and that the immediate failures and disappointments of departmentalization should be understood in light of US imperialism in the region, and American influence in Europe.

**Conclusion**

In significant ways, the Mount Pelée disaster and the crisis precipitated by the Vichy Occupation of Martinique brought to light the inequities, poverty, lack of public services and infrastructure that were symptomatic of plantation economies in the Caribbean. These moments of environmental and human crisis had important consequences for how the relationship between France and her once-treasured Caribbean colony unfolded. As I have attempted to show, the Mount Pelée catastrophe deepened perceptions of geographic and cultural distance between the metropole and colony in the eyes of many French people and republican officials. On the other hand, I have argued that the disaster - perhaps somewhat unexpectedly given the Relief Commission's ambivalent efforts on behalf of working-class survivors - underscored the vitality and potential effectiveness of republican democracy to ordinary Martinicans, who found important advocates in the popularly-elected, black politicians who took it upon themselves to provide greater relief and social welfare for beleaguered refugees even when it went against official policy. While these efforts had little effect on the broader economy or colonial policy toward Martinique, whose annual budgets fell precipitously after 1902, I suggest that it did occasion a greater appreciation for the protections and rights that might be secured through

electoral democracy, strike activity, and labor organizing, rights that continued to be fought for even after departmentalization was finally secured in 1946.

By contrast, the human-induced disaster resulting from the US Naval Blockade and Vichy Occupation of Martinique during World War Two threatened to have a more alienating effect on Martinicans, all of whom dealt with increased racial prejudice and material deprivation during the war. And yet, the severe economic downturn, food shortages, unemployment, and public health crisis produced by the war also precipitated support for the chance to finally secure an equal share in the French welfare apparatus. Aimé Césaire was a pragmatic, flexible, and non-ideological political thinker whose commitments to redressing racialized inequality and poverty in the Antilles and beyond took a variety of different forms over his career.[322] In response to the immediate need that gripped Martinique after World War Two, Césaire saw political departmentalization as the path to alleviating these problems. According to Nick Nesbitt, this form of "political and juridical decolonization" fits within the "Black Jacobin tradition of critique" which he explains as "the political deployment of the idea of undivided equality in defense of popular sovereignty against the various monarchic and oligarchic forms of counterrevolution."[323] As Nesbitt explains, by upholding political emancipation as the panacea of decolonial transformation, Césaire - like many of his decolonial Marxists colleagues at the time - failed to identify the ways in which Martinique would still be folded into a shifting global political economy - a world order that reflects Ruth Wilson Gilmore's idea of a "changing same". Having cast off the yoke of political domination, either through national independence or some version of state federalism, as the French DOM's opted for, leaders like Césaire hoped that

[322] Nick Nesbitt describes Césaire as a "protean" political thinker who at various points championed "departmentalization, federalism, autonomy, regionalization, and decentralization" according to the conditions of a given historical moment. See Nick Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery,* 158.
[323] Ibid., 231.

an autonomous and more equal future might await their countries. And yet, political sovereignty alone did not break the deep-seeded lines of economic attachment that formed the basis of the colonial system.[324] Indeed, the productive energy of land, resources, and labor in these once-colonized, now "Third World" regions was still marshaled to fuel the engine of the global economy, in ways that benefited the modernity's historical "centers". As it became clear that political emancipation alone was not enough to break the colonial bonds of dependence and domination, Aimé Césaire, like many of his leftist contemporaries, embraced a Leninist approach to Marxism that emphasized development as the "unquestioned goal" of political autonomy and equality.[325] Césaire believed that an autonomous Martinique could be achieved through the employment opportunities and greater self-sufficiency offered by the path of industrial development. In essence, Césaire and his colleagues conceived a path toward dignity and equality for the working-class through the very forms of labor and agricultural-industrial development that had produced the conditions he aimed to resist. As Nesbitt writes,

> Césaire, like so many other figures in the decolonization movement, made a claim for recuperative modernization in the former French colonies, now Overseas Departments, in a context in which rationalized industrial modernization constituted the goal and horizon of communist militancy in the 'developing' world: increasing production output on the capitalist model, while addressing inequality at the level of social distribution.[326]

In trying to carve a path toward liberation from within the same imperial-capitalist social form that had produced inequality and domination, Césaire's developmental solutions involve the re-conscription of Martinique's land and labor, though this time supposedly in the service of their own liberation. As we will see in the next two chapters, beginning with Suzanne Césaire's

[324] Globalization describes the historical process that began after World War Two, as Europe's colonial empires dissolved. Driven in large part by the United States,
[325] Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery,* 247.
[326] Ibid., 247.

geopoetic critique of industrial wage labor and the chloredecone pollution crisis that began in the 1960's, the promise of development to secure an emancipated future for Martinique resulted in further socio-ecological disaster and deepening bonds of dependence.

## Chapter 3

### Surpassing Sustainability: Suzanne Césaire's Ecofeminist Critique of Development in *Le Grand Camouflage*

During World War II, the French Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe fell under the control of the repressive Vichy government that controlled much of the rest of France. Concerned about the potential for the islands to be used by German U-Boats to launch attacks on the Allies, both islands were soon surrounded by a US/British Naval Blockade. This was a period of intense hardship for French Antilleans, who found themselves cut off from the metropole for the first time in three centuries. People on the islands experienced serious deprivations and supply shortages because of the Naval Blockade, with some even facing famine. In this context, the surrealist literary journal, *Tropiques*, served as an important source of cultural expression amidst stifling political censorship.[327] Suzanne Césaire, along with her husband, Aimé, and René Ménil (all of whom had previously worked on the journal, *L'Etudiant noir,* while students in Paris) co-founded *Tropiques*, which was published from 1941-1945. The goal of *Tropiques* was to bring about a literary and cultural renaissance, to affect a non-assimilated *prise de conscience* among its mostly French-educated Martinican readership. To this end, Suzanne Césaire wrote seven articles addressing cultural stagnation in Martinique and possibilities for genuine political and artistic freedom. Her essays cover a variety of topics, and strongly advocate the formation of a Caribbean, surrealist literary expression capable of resisting assimilation and objectification. However, in contrast to Negritude's overdetermination

[327] Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace: National Identity, Decolonization, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 12-45.

of Africa as the primary source of Antillean identity, Césaire bases her understanding of Caribbean identity on cultural and racial interconnection. For her, the Caribbean comprises an "incredible mass of diverse energies," a historical reality echoed by the region's ecological dynamism and resistance to being "ordered".[328] While resistance to colonial hegemony is present in Negritude writing, I submit that Suzanne Césaire's approach is one of the more sweeping and systematic in terms of its critique of development. Césaire's essays combat the "great camouflage," or the "great game of hide-and-seek" that successfully deludes Martinicans into believing that a liberated future could be achieved using processes of economic modernization, conceived from within the capitalist social form that effectively reinforce its reach and dominance. While Césaire's body of work has largely been considered from the perspective of its cultural critique, this chapter takes that cultural critique of assimilation and mimicry as a point of departure, attempting to understand how it shapes an equally insightful critique of political economy and decolonization choices. Through her careful historical, social and psychological analysis of Martinique's assimilationist culture, Césaire recognizes that solutions to "underdevelopment" centered upon industrial development could only reinscribe Martinique in a global hierarchy of dependence upon more wealthy, more "advanced" nations, entrenching destructive colonial binaries and relegating postcolonial nations to permanent states of economic inferiority.[329] To this end, I will examine how Césaire refuses mimicry and assimilationist aesthetics by "cannibalizing" a tradition of exoticist, gendered fantasies of Caribbean space, enlisting the chaotic, destructive forces of its climate against the production-

[328] Suzanne Césaire, *Le grand camouflage: Écrits de dissidence (1941-1945).* Ed. Daniel Maximin. Paris: Seuil, 2009, 75.
[329] For more on this, see Nick Nesbitt. *The Price of Slavery: Capital and Revolution in the Caribbean.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022.

driven logic of development. Incorporating scholarship on development theory, ecofeminism, tourism and natural hazard, I suggest that Césaire's imagery of natural disaster in her final essay explodes racist and paternalistic narratives about the islands that reinforced perceptions of Antilleans' passivity and dependence.[330] In addition to her critique of wage labor as a remedy to underdevelopment, Césaire incorporates an equally prescient - yet to-date overlooked - critique of tourism, which coalesces in her last essay, "Le grand camouflage". Along with industrialization and the creation of low-skilled jobs, tourism has emerged as one of the most common methods used by governments and multinational bodies alike to address economic disparities in the Global South.[331] Less academic attention has been paid to the connections between tourism, colonialism, and ecological degradation, despite the fact that tourism is one of the most lucrative global industries, and often exists as the primary source of revenue in postcolonial states.[332]

Césaire's critique of both industrialization and tourism as solutions to postcolonial underdevelopment are understudied yet very original focuses of her work. This chapter will consider Suzanne Césaire as an early voice in the field of postcolonial ecocriticism. While ecocritics often trace the field's emergence to Anglo-American sociologists, policy, and climate researchers, postcolonial ecocriticism takes a more human-centered and cross-disciplinary approach, examining overlapping features of imperialist domination that echo and reinforce one

[330] A version of this argument was adapted into an article published in 2022. See Emily Eyestone, "Cannibalizing Paradise: Suzanne Césaire's ecofeminist critique of tourist literature," *Island Studies Journal* 17: 2 (2022): 52-73.
[331] As Andrew Holden explains, "Access to loans and sources of finance provided by the IMF is conditional on the adoption of policy reforms designed to reduce state economic intervention and generate market-orientated growth. This reduction in state economic intervention includes the removal of any kind of protective measures to fledgling industries, including tourism. See Andrew Holden, *Tourism Studies and the Social Sciences.* New York: Taylor & Francis, 2004, 115.
[332] Anthony Carrigan, *Postcolonial Tourism: Literature, Culture and Environment*. New York: Routledge, 2011, 3.

another. As Elizabeth Deloughrey writes, "Postcolonial ecocritics, while often drawing from US ecocriticism, have emphasized their genealogical origins in more rhizomatic, terms, drawing from historians of empire, decolonization discourse, geography, Marxism, ecofeminism, political ecology and environmental justice work".[333] This is a helpful point of departure for considering the immense literary, theoretical, and cultural significance of Suzanne Césaire's nascent ecocriticism. I argue that her analysis of the multilayered and codependent forms of human and environmental harm caused by colonialism and perpetuated by neocolonial globalization, prefigures a postcolonial ethics of ecocriticism. Embedded in this critique is an equally nuanced treatment of the tension between postcolonial efforts to validate local specificity and autonomy while resisting exclusionary narratives of islands as isolated and dependent. On the other hand, postcolonial ecocritics like Césaire argue for the defining, world-historical role of New World slave economies and island ecologies in the development of the current global system, while pushing back the constant encroachment of economic and cultural homogenization.

Césaire articulates a *geopoetics* that calls upon the Caribbean climate and geography to demonstrate their inseparable place in a larger "world-system" of interconnected, planetary relations.[334] I adopt Daniel Maximin's term *geopoetics* instead of Anny Dominique Curtius' equally compelling analysis of Césaire's ecopoetics in an effort to emphasize Césaire's non-totalizing yet global approach to understanding Caribbean identity and history.[335] The prefix *eco*

[333] Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Postcolonialism," *The Oxford Companion to Ecocriticism.* Ed. Greg Garrard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 321.
[334] The prefix *geo-* refers to the Earth generally and I think underscores the planetary nature of Césaire's critique.
[335] Curtius' understanding of Suzanne Césaire's *ecopoetics* is closely connected to what I describe as Césaire's *geopoetics.* See Anny Dominique Curtius, "Cannibalizing *Doudouisme*, Conceptualizing the *Morne*: Suzanne Césaire's Caribbean Ecopoetics," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115:3 (July 2016): 513-516.

refers to the natural world, to habitats and environments. Geopoetics is based on the idea that Caribbean history, geography, and people, are all "les fruits du cyclone."[336] Curtius defines Césaire's ecopoetics 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 choose Maximin's term "geopoetics" in part for its emphasis on the role of geophysical hazard in shaping the Caribbean history and geography, but also for its resonance with "geocriticism," a term coined by the philosopher Bertrand Westphal.[337] Westphal's geocriticism emphasizes the importance of literary texts in shaping and reshaping our representations of space. Geocriticism seeks to integrate literary insights with those of social sciences in conceptualizing both novelistic and actual space. As Éric Prieto describes, "By asking geographical questions of literary texts and asking literary questions of geographical representations, geocriticsm brings together in a productive way the social sciences and the humanities."[338] Geocriticsm brings these two domains into conversation with the goal of showing the epistemological importance of literary texts in formulating, contesting, and re-mapping pre-established representations of geography that are taken to be natural. Westphal writes that, "…fiction does not reproduce the real, but actualizes new virtualities that had remained unformulated, and that then go on to interact with the real according tot he hypertextual logic of interfaces…fiction detects possibilities in the folds of the real, knowing that these folds have not been temporalized."[339] Approaching "real"

[336] Daniel Maximin, *Les Fruits du cyclone: Une géopoétique de la Caraïbe.* Paris: Seuil, 2006.
[337] Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces.* New York: Palgrave, 2007, 2-7.
[338] Éric Prieto, "Geocriticism Meets Ecocriticism: Bertrand Westphal and Environmental Thinking," *Épistémocritique* 9 (2012) https://epistemocritique.org/geocriticism-meets-ecocriticism-bertrand-westphal-and-environmental-thinking/
[339] Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism,* 171.

space through the possibilities produced in the virtual space of the poem or novel can reveal the ideological way in which space is produced - through borders, political arrangements, wars, and conquests. For this reason, geocriticism can be considered an iteration of postcolonial as well as post-structuralist theory. My understanding of *geopoetics* inherits much from both Maximin's emphasis on the Caribbean as a space produced through a series of historical and geophysical catastrophes, and from Westphal's emphasis on the critical role of literary production in shaping how geography is represented and experienced. I find that Suzanne Césaire shares this orientation, and continually rejects processes of global commodification like industrialization and tourism in favor of a globalizing geopoetics that draws upon climate and geophysical processes to demonstrate the world's multilayered *interdependence* as opposed to colonialist models of dependence and independence. To this end, geophysical hazards like hurricanes, fires, and volcanic eruption play a key role in Césaire's final essay, "Le grand camouflage." I suggest that they disrupt a Western developmental consciousness and instead establish a *geopoetic* consciousness that is framed around the climatic rhythms and geographic identity of the Caribbean region through its unavoidable relationships within the tapestry of the planetary environment. Césaire contends that true liberation rests upon the recognition of the inescapable dependency of people and place; a dependency that must be animated by resilience and openness to change in accordance with the region's geophysical volatility.

**Césaire's Surrealism**

Césaire's comprehensive critique of assimilation begins with poetry and literature, where the indigenous or colonial subject is first brought to terms with the conditions of alienation. To redress estrangement from self, history, and place, Césaire attempts to locate an authentic

Martinican consciousness in the island's geography and climate. If the diversity and disorder of Caribbean landscape provide the poetic model for an unassimilated Martinican identity, then submitting the land to development - and thus degradation - substantively undermines the emergence of such an independent cultural identity, and in fact only reinserts Martinique in a neo-imperial world order. Surrealism plays a key role in Césaire's work, allowing her to access and articulate a liberated ancestral consciousness capable of resisting French cultural domination. As many critics note,[340] Suzanne Césaire was heavily influenced by surrealism, which she referred to as "notre corde raide de l'espoir" (Césaire, 83). She devotes several essays to it, focusing on its founder André Breton, while developing it as a critical tool for Antillean writers attempting to break free from the exoticizing and sentimental literary tropes that had characterized French writing about the Antilles in the past. This tradition, known as *doudouisme,* is explored in detail in the essay, "Misère d'une poésie: John Antoine Nau." Nau is emblematic of this style of *littérature doudou,* which offered glowing yet one-dimensional and often eroticizing descriptions of the Antillean landscape and people. As Any Dominique Curtius explains, "*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."[341] In contrast, Césaire saw Surrealism as providing aesthetic methods that would be up to the task of dismantling the

[340] For more on Suzanne Césaire's engagement with surrealism, see T. Denean Sharpley, *Negritude Women.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 80-104; Jennifer M. Wilks, *Race, Gender, and Comparative Black Modernism: Suzanne Lacascade, Marita Bonner, Suzanne Césaire and Dorothy West.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008, 107-140; Kara M. Rabbitt, "Suzanne Césaire's surrealism: tightrope of hope," *Surrealist Women's Writing.* Anna Watz, ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023, 103-121; Anny Dominique Curtis, "Cannibalizing Doudouisme, Conceptualizing the *morne*: Suzanne Césaire's Caribbean Ecopoetics," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115 (2016): 513-534.

[341] Any Dominique Curtis, "Cannibalizing Doudouisme, Conceptualizing the *morne*: Suzanne Césaire's Caribbean Ecopoetics," 518.

collective, political, *and* psychosocial structures that reinforced assimilationist thinking among Martinicans, and as a result, their political and economic subjugation.

**Surrealism et nous**

Suzanne Césaire's enthusiasm for surrealism and admiration of its founder, André Breton leaps off the page in the essays of *Le Grand camouflage.* She refers to surrealism as Caribbean peoples' "tightrope of hope." For Césaire, the aesthetic freedom offered by surrealism had explicit and political salience, and she links surrealism to helping to facilitate the coalescence of cultural and racial consciousness in Martinique, even in the repressive atmosphere of Vichy rule.[342] Césaire writes that, "Pas un moment au cours de ces dures années de la domination de Vichy, l'image de la liberté ne s'est totalement ici et c'est au surréalisme que nous le devons" (Césaire, 82). her understanding of surrealism as a liberatory tool is reflective of the aesthetic and political orientation of *Tropiques* generally.[343] In this section, I will investigate the surrealist foundation of her writing, and try to answer firstly, why surrealism provided such a promising means of psychological, poetic, and political freedom, and secondly, how Césaire developed an original and ecologically-centered surrealist practice that is distinctly her own. I submit that Césaire's vision of surrealism as a non-totalizing yet total activity allows her to develop it as a

[342] Surrealism quickly expanded beyond the Parisian intellectual scene to encompass a broad and thriving international group of practitioners. This is in part because of its explicit anti-imperialist and anti-rationalist political values, but also because the aesthetic methods it forged lent themselves to imagining alternative and more liberated futures free from political and economic domination. Surrealism's anticolonial ethos was integral to its refusal of the extractive materialism and technologic rationalism at the heart of modern Western culture. The European surrealists' decolonialism was then catalyzed by specific events, particularly France's involvement in the Moroccan Rif War from 1921-25. See Jonathan P. Eburne, "Decolonial Surrealism," *Surrealism,* Natalya Lusty, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 342-62; E. San Juan, Jr., "Aimé Césaire's Insurrectional Poetics," in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture.* Raymond Spiteri and Don LaCoss, eds. New York: Routledge, 2003,

[343] For an index of scholarship documenting the influence of surrealism on Suzanne Césaire's writing, see Kara Rabbitt, "In Search of the Missing Mother: Suzanne Césaire, *Martiniquaise,*" 47-48.

political and poetic *practice* rather than an ideological position or artistic affiliation. Most importantly, I suggest that Césaire uses surrealism to formulate a more comprehensive critique of industrialization and development as a remedy to Martinique's economic disparities.

While surrealism was conceived in Paris, the movement's expansive orientation toward the rest of the world - coupled with its ideological rejection of eurocentrism and positivist rationality - aligned with the priorities of writers and artists from beyond the European intellectual centers. The international popularity of surrealism is also the result of its "theoretical versatility" which allowed its methods to be easily adapted to local languages, practices, and circumstances.[344] While the familiar narrative of Surrealism focuses on Paris and on André Breton as its focal points, more recent studies of the movement - like the 2021 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York - commemorated in *Surrealism Beyond Borders* - provide nuance to this perspective. Taking inspiration from the anti-rationalist and anti-Eurocentric values of Surrealism, the authors of this text present a map of the Surrealist movement composed of many different "dynamic, overlapping routes, looking at the collective interests shared by artists across regions, continents, and countries." The exhibition ultimately seeks to "redraw a map of the world in the time of the Surrealists as an interrelated, recirculating network."[345] It is worth noting that this introduction is framed by Suzanne Césaire's own statement on surrealism, taken from her essay, "Surréalisme et nous." She writes that surrealism is an "activity today that extends throughout the world and [...] remains bolder and more

[344] Effie Rentzou, *Concepts of the World: The French Avant-Garde and the Idea of the International, 1910-1940.* Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2022, ??

[345] Stephanie D'Alessandro and Matthew Gale, "The World in the Time of the Surrealists," *Surrealism Beyond Borders.* New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2021, 9.

tenacious than ever."[346]

Surrealism and its founder, André Breton, garnered interest internationally, including among anticolonial activists, for recognizing the more harmful aspects of western civilization and progress, including imperialism. When Breton came to Martinique in 1942 as a political refugee, he happened to pick up an issue of *Tropiques* at a small bookstore owned by René Ménil's sister. He was amazed by the originality and urgency of the journal and met Aimé and Suzanne Césaire soon after. This meeting was important for the authors of *Tropiques,* helping to launch the work of Aimé Césaire onto the world stage, though it was not their first encounter with surrealism. *Tropiques* was the third (and most successful) attempt at creating a journal of black, international surrealism. The first of these (less successful) attempts - *Légitime défense* and *L'Etudiant noir* - were founded by black students in Paris, though suppressed after publishing only one issue each.[347] Both Aimé and Suzanne Césaire had encountered surrealism during their student days during the 1930's, in contexts that underscore the decentralized and international focus of the movement. Suzanne and Aimé Césaire first met and got to know each other through gatherings hosted by fellow Martinican expatriate, Paulette Nardal, who, along with her sisters, held popular literary salons at their home in Paris. These *cercles d'amis* as they were called, "became a pivotal space for interracial and international interaction"[348] and they often included notable attendees from many parts of the French empire, but also the wider African diaspora. African American artists and writers like Claude McKay, Countee Cullen and

[346] Suzanne Césaire, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945).* Keith L. Walker, trans. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012, 34.
[347] Michael Richardson, "Introduction," *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean.* Ed. Michael Richardson. Krysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, trans. New York: Verso, 1996, 7.
[348] Imaobong D. Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists: Activist-Intellectuals and Global Freedom Struggles.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018, 17.

Marian Anderson joined students from the Caribbean and French West Africa in what became a fruitful incubator of Black internationalist ideas, and a critical, collaborative stimulus for the creation of Negritude by Aimé Césaire and Léon Gontran-Damas.

Thanks in part to their location in the imperial center, these salons allowed for cross-cultural collaborations that were infused with surrealist values and practices aimed at subverting the dominance of Western reason and political domination. Attendees at the Nardals' salons came from a variety of regional, linguistic, racial, and gender backgrounds and represented different political and cultural histories. The salons facilitated the creation of surrealist practices that were both locally authentic and strengthened by their sense of a shared, universal vision: the disruption of the colonial enterprise achieved in part through the legitimation of non-Western epistemologies and artistic modalities. The union of these ideas and collaborations in Paris provided an inherently international space even at the center of the metropole, from which more localized critiques of French colonialism, as well as a cohesive sense of black racial self-consciousness eventually emerged, typified in texts like Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,* or Damas' *Black-Label*. Several important journals also emerged from the conversations and meetings facilitated by Paulette Nardal, including the explicitly surrealist *Légitime Défense*, founded by Étienne Léro and Jules Monnerot, Martinican students of a slightly older generation than the Césaires. *Légitime Défense* "staked out an aesthetic position between André Breton and Louis Aragon, between aesthetics and politics, that asserted the capacity of metaphor to enable the subterfuge of countercultural or politically subversive movements."[349] As Aimé Césaire later explained, he and his fellow students were first exposed

[349] Ming Tiampo, "Exile and Wakening of Race Consciousness," in *Surrealism Beyond Borders*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2021, 169.

to surrealism not necessarily through its direct founder - Breton - but rather through the particular form of black surrealism espoused by the founders of these journals - Etienne Léro, René Ménil and Jules Monnerot.

On the one hand, it could seem like a paradox that writers like Suzanne Césaire turned to an aesthetic system conceived in the French metropole to articulate their refusal of assimilationist policies and literary conventions that had heretofore stifled the coalescence of authentic cultural expression. However, as recent scholarship on global surrealism has explored, surrealism was from the beginning oriented toward the universal, both in its membership, and its theoretical and geographical aspirations.[350] From its inception, surrealism was interested in finding ways of creatively reordering the world, inverting existing relations of political power, cultural value, and racial hierarchy. Louise Tythacott describes this relationship in terms of how European Surrealists approached non-Western art and cultural traditions. She explains that "The Surrealists used other cultures as a means of transgressing, reshuffling, and subverting the orders of Western classificatory systems. By deliberately realigning different cultural realities, adherents believed they could bring into question the very nature of their own European reality."[351] Surrealism gained popularity among colonial artists and writers as well, not only because of its critiques of imperialism, but also because of its genuine curiosity about local forms of artistic and intellectual production that were often dismissed by European institutions as

[350] For more on the global orientation and application of surrealism see, Stephanie d'Alessandro and Matthew Gale, "The World in the Time of the Surrealists," *Surrealism Beyond Borders,* 8-40; Effie Rentzou, *Concepts of the World: The French Avant-Garde and the Idea of the International, 1910-1940.* Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2022; Robin D.G. Kelley & Franklin Rosemont, *Black, Brown and Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009; Jennifer Wilks, *Race, Gender, and Comparative Black Modernism: Suzanne Lacascade, Marita Bonner, Suzanne Césaire & Dorothy West.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008; Rachel Spencer, *Afrosurrealism: The African Diaspora's Surrealist Fiction.* New York: Routledge, 2019.

[351] Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*. New York: Routledge, 2014, 2.

pejorative.

However, the appeal of surrealism among colonial writers and artists is not fully explained by its anti-imperialist politics or even its genuine curiosity in validating the cultural traditions and art beyond Western Europe. Rather than thinking of surrealism as a fixed movement or set of ideas, more recent scholarship has encouraged thinking of it as a "fluid movement between continents and cultures."[352] The elements of surrealist practice that imbue *Tropiques,* for example, are "surrealist" in their restructuring and critique of Western ideas that they could be adapted to a wide variety of cultural and historical contexts, and directed toward the expressive purposes of particular communities. Surrealism was broadly appealing because of its unique "combination of elasticity and specificity; it evokes attitudes that challenge the rational while being malleable enough to respond to changing circumstances."[353] Surrealism was less a predetermined system of values or aesthetic practices but "a means of inquiry through which imposed values can be overturned."[354] In fact, Aimé Césaire later claimed that the set of values and practices labeled "surrealism" by André Breton had already existed in Martinique. "Ma poésie...ne sortait pas des Manifestes du surréalisme de Breton, mais de courants qui préparaient déjà le surréalisme...Quand Breton a lu les trois premiers numéros de *Tropiques*, il a cru que j'étais un surréaliste. Ce n'était pas entièrement faux, ce n'était pas entièrement vrai".[355]

While it was deployed by its contributors for slightly different ends, surrealism was nevertheless one of the founding principles of *Tropiques*.[356] Closely associated temporally (and

[352] M. Nicholson, *Surrealism in Latin American Literature: Searching for Breton's Ghost.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 46.
[353] Stephanie d'Alessandro and Matthew Gale, *Surrealism Beyond Borders*, 14.
[354] Ibid., 14.
[355] Aimé Césaire, "Entretien avec Aimé Césaire par Jacqueline Leiner," *Tropiques*. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1978, vi.
[356] See Michael Richardson, "Introduction," *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean.*

to some extent philosophically) with negritude*, Tropiques* was more regionally-focused, and less committed to resurrecting sources of New World black identity solely in an African past.[357] *Tropiques* covered a range of topics, with articles on French modernists alongside anthropological and naturalistic studies of Martinican folklore and ecology. This eclectic range of material demonstrates the surrealist, integrative approach embraced by the authors of *Tropiques,* who sought to ground an emerging sense of Martinican identity in a particular regional, geographic identity even as they appropriated elements of French avant-garde sources to bolster their resistance to assimilation in the pursuit of an authentic cultural consciousness. *Tropiques* was concerned with addressing the pernicious effects of assimilation in Martinique. Unlike the British, or even more recent examples of French colonization in Africa, France's oldest colonies in the Caribbean experienced an intense and form of self-estrangement through both an almost-total uprooting and erasure of African traditions and their replacement by French culture. As the Trinidadian anticolonial activist George Padmore put it, "Thanks to this device [assimilation] the educated African elite, who, in the British colonies, become the vanguard of the nationalist movements, are in the French colonies, associated with the white Frenchmen as junior partners in governing the mass of unassimilated natives still adhering to tribal customs and primitive institutions."[358] Assimilation was thus understood by the negritude poets as *the* critical impediment to the formation of black racial consciousness, not only because it goes against nature by denying both the reality and legitimacy of blackness, but also because it is an

[357] As Anny Dominique Curtius explains, "*Tropiques* advocated not for négritude per se but for the emergence of a multiplicity of aesthetic practices and discourses that interrogated the effects and psycho-logical predicaments generated by the ideological principles of assimilation in the context of French colonialism" In Anny Dominique Curtius, "Cannibalizing *Doudouisme*, Conceptualizing the *Morne*: Suzanne Césaire's Caribbean Ecopoetics," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115:3 (July 2016): 515.
[358] George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism.* New York: Doubleday, 1971, 173.

unreachable goal, whose full realization would never be permitted by a system built upon racial hierarchy. As Aimé Césaire explained in an early essay in *L'Etudiant noir,* where he compares the assimilationist mindset common among educated Antilleans to madness. He writes that, "Si l'assimilation n'est pas folie, c'est à coup sûr sottise, car vouloir être assimilé, c'est oublier que nul ne peut changer de faune; c'est méconnaître 'altérité' qui est loi de Nature…."[359]

The culture of assimilation was unique in the Antilles in comparison to newer French colonies as well. The success of assimilationist policies in France's *vieilles colonies* was seen as proof of its "civilizing mission made good," justifying its continued presence in the Antilles even after abolition of slavery in 1848.[360] While France implemented assimilationist policies in all parts of its empire during the Third Republic, they were especially successful in the Antilles (at least among the middle class and elite). In part because of their long history as colonies, as well as due to geographic, linguistic, and racial particularities, the Antilles faced a different set of conditions than colonies like Algeria or Morocco.[361] Cut off - in some cases for centuries - from ancestral connections to Africa, Antilleans had been steeped in French culture for generations. Racial *métissage* was common in Antillean society and helped to create a successful middle class of mixed race citizens who enjoyed more of the social and economic benefits of proximity to France. Besides creating a caste system based on color, it also entrenched the widely-held

[359] Aimé Césaire, "Négreriers: Jeunesse noire et l'assimilation," *L'Étudiant noir* 1 (March 1935): 1

[360] See Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005[1960], 18-25.

[361] Assimilation policies were pursued throughout the French empire, but were met with less success in newer colonies, partially because these newer acquisitions were not colonies of settlement as the slave colonies of the West Indies had been. As Raymond F. Betts explains, "..the large colonial empire that France was rapidly amassing hardly lent itself to assimilation by the mother country. The new overseas regions were not *colonies de peuplement*, and, moreover, France with her relatively static population and well-known casanier spirit did not witness considerable migration to these regions. If a policy of assimilation had been possible in Martinique or in Canada, such was hardly the case in the new regions under French control in the late nineteenth century." See *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914,* 21.

cultural understanding that success was to be gained through acculturation to Frenchness.[362] Suzanne Césaire was attentive to issues of class and color, and the unbalanced ways that assimilation impacts the educated elite versus rural and industrial workers.[363] She diagnoses assimilation as the basis of a stultifying mimicry in Martinican writing, and views surrealism as providing a set of tools from which to break out of it, while explicitly clarifying that "the rest is up to us": "Le surréalisme nous a rendu une partie de nos chances. À nous de trouver les autres. À sa lumière" (Césaire, 75).

Furthermore, the Caribbean archipelago is geographically isolated from its neighbors, leading to the development of distinct (though related) creole cultures and languages which inhibited, at least historically, communication and solidarity between island communities.[364] Historical, racial, and geographical alienation made the Antilles more vulnerable to the generalized imposition of French culture. As discussed in Chapter 1, Aimé Césaire's negritude attempted to redress the inferiorization of blackness through a reappraisal and celebration of specifically African sources of identity. In this sense, his interest in surrealism was primarily as a poetic orientation, a means by which to make contact with unconscious aspects of black identity, long repressed through historical erasures and assimilation. For Suzanne Césaire, on the other hand, surrealism served more as what Michael Richardson describes as "critical tool, a means of reflection that would provide [her] with a critical foundation from which to explore her own

[362] Ibid., 22.

[363] In the essay "Malaise d'une civilization," Césaire gives a thorough historical and psychological explanation of the ways assimilation imposed itself (and became widely embraced) among Martinique's more privileged, mulatto class. Suzanne Césaire, *Le Grand camouflage,* 67-75.

[364] Glissant attempts to restore the validity of the fragment in his theorization of archipelagic thinking, summarized primarily in *Traité du Tout-Monde*, where he posits that the "whole-world" is comprised of an infinite fragmentation of cultures and identities, in a way that opposes homogenizing, continental thinking. See Edouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

cultural context".[365]

Suzanne Césaire was drawn to surrealism because she recognized in it a flexible critical framework that could be productively applied to the context of political and cultural assimilation in Martinique. Her first essay for *Tropiques* is a useful illustration of this practice. She discusses the work of German ethnographer, Leo Frobenius, to advocate for the emergence of a non-assimilated Martinican identity rooted in a non-exploitative land consciousness. While Césaire is deeply influenced by Frobenius' delineation of two distinct cultural "drives" animating European and African civilization, her discussion of the *homme-plante* and the *homme-animale* designations are far from absolute, essentialist categories. Instead, her attempt to legitimize the plant-like nature of the Ethiopian is framed against a backdrop of cultural erasure and assimilation, in which the *only* acceptable and validated way of living and relating to the natural world is through domination, ambition and control.

As Césaire explains, Frobenius characterizes Ethiopian civilization through the metaphor of the plant, which embodies cyclical change and flexibility. "L'Ethiopian ne cherche pas à comprendre les phénomènes, à saisir et à dominer les faits extérieurs à lui. Il se laisse vivre, d'une vie identique à celle de la plante, confiant dans la continuité de la vie: germer, pousser, fleurir, donner des fruits et le cycle recommence" (Césaire, 33). Césaire's engagement with Leo Frobenius' *homme-plante*, which reappears throughout her work, forms the basis of an authentic Martinican identity.[366] Centered on principles of adaptability and harmony with nature, the *homme-plante* is a model for a Caribbean cultural identity that pulls to some extent from an African past, but just as much from an emergent local specificity and diversity. Césaire insists

[365] Michael Richardson, "Introduction," *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean,* 7.
[366] In "Malaise d'une civilization," Césaire answers the question of Martinican identity and responds that its basis is the *homme-plante.* "Qu'est-ce que le Martiniquais? - L'homme-plante" (Césaire, 70).

throughout her essays on the Caribbean's ecological and cultural hybridity, where race, among other things, is the result of "relentless intermixing" (Césaire, 75). The *homme-plante* is contrasted with the Frobenius' model for European civilization, the *homme-animal,* which is concerned with "la conquête du droit de vivre par la lutte. Le Hamite est actif, conscient de faits extérieurs auxquels il s'oppose et qu'il lui faut vaincre pour subsister. Il ne s'abandonne jamais aux choses mais s'efforce de les dominer par la force ou par des pratiques magiques" (Césaire, 33). Instead of dismissing African civilization as primitive or backward, the model of the Ethiopian *homme-plante* demonstrates a respectful and non-extractive model of human relations with the natural world. These distinctions help recuperate the value of African civilization outside of European developmental standards, while also allowing Césaire to formulate a critique of history as teleological progress. "Frobenius a découvert en effet, que l'idée du progrès continu, chère au dix-neuvième siècle, qui montrait la civilisation progressant sur une ligne unique depuis la barbarie primitive jusqu'à la haute culture moderne, était une idée fausse" (Césaire, 36).

While Aimé Césaire (like many other decolonial Caribbean writers) used features of Martinican geography to facilitate the black subject's arrival at self-consciousness, Suzanne Césaire views the relationship between Martinican people and landscape more symbiotically. Her treatment of the island space is unique in that the Caribbean environment is not simply the means by which the colonized subject explores an autonomous cultural identity and history; instead, she views the rich, transformative tropical environment as foregrounding a cultural mindset that naturally opposes the dominating drive of Hamite civilization.[367] The achievement

[367] Kara Rabbitt discusses the differences between Suzanne Césaire's engagement with Martinician geography, versus Aimé's, nothing that: "Suzanne's essays offer a sharp contrast to Aimé's contemporary vision of a mute and sterile land, such as found in his opening 'Presentation' in the first edition of *Tropiques*: 'Point de ville. Point d'art.

of Suzanne Césaire's geopoetics is that she comprehensively rejects the notion that human freedom is linked to sovereignty over the land. Césaire draws upon Frobenius' distinctions between Hamite and Ethiopian civilization to support her argument that Antillean culture cannot cannot reproduce the same relations of domination between humans and nature characteristic of European civilization. A resistant and nature-oriented geopoetics underlies Césaire's contributions to *Tropiques.* Her focus on the overlap between global processes of human and ecological exploitation, combined with a critical method aimed at diffusing antinomical thinking, helps her to recognize - quite remarkably for her time, the contradiction between genuine, postcolonial autonomy via industrial development and wage labor.

In the following sections, I explore Césaire's critique of development and tourism in more detail, suggesting that her poetic approach to geophysical hazard in the last essay, "Le grand camouflage" demonstrates the island's resistance to development and objectification, while also providing an alternative model of power for postcolonial communities, centered in adaptability and resistance.

**The Origins of Development in the Postcolonial World**

Development theory encompasses a range of approaches that broadly attempt to describe how desired social and economic growth in a society is achieved. The field coalesced after World War II, as countries devised plans to rebuild after the devastation of two world wars.[368] Beyond economic reconstruction in Europe however, development was also promoted as a

Point de poésie. Pas un germe. Pas une pousse. . . . En verité, terre sterile et muette'." In Kara Rabbitt, "In Search of the Missing Mother: Suzanne Césaire, Martiniquaise," 39.

[368] David J. Telfer, "The Evolution of Development Theory and Tourism," *Tourism and Development: Concepts and Issues.* Ed. Richard Sharpley and David J. Telfer. Bristol, UK: Channel View, 31.

solution to chronic underdevelopment in the decolonizing Global South.[369] Modernization theory emerged as a popular, early iteration of development theory and formed the basis of Eisenhower's Marshall Plan.[370] Modernization theorists hold that industrial transformation and stimulating the growth of new sectors produces greater economic prosperity.[371] One of the founders of modernization theory, Seymour Martin Lipset, drew heavily on Max Weber's and Emile Durkheim's ideas about the interconnection of political, social and economic factors to ultimately suggest that the basis for democracy can be attributed to a country's level of economic development.[372] This approach would have major implications for US foreign policy, in which development is often encouraged through foreign assistance and aid in order to promote democracy.

While the proponents of modernization theory link it more or less explicitly to forms of democratic governance that would support free-market capitalism, development was embraced with equal enthusiasm by socialist and communist governments in the twentieth century. As Uma Kothari et al describe, "Ironically, [development] was also the preferred means [of] national, centralized, state-led economic planning, the primary instrument of the socialist model

[369] This was discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, as the United States in particular, launched foreign assistance programs, hunger relief projects, and massive development initiatives throughout the Global South in an effort to address poverty and to avert the spread of communism.
[370] Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011, 10-11.
[371] In *The Division of Labour in Society,* Durkheim describes a shift in the source of cultural solidarity brought on by industrialization and globalization. He argues that social cohesion in preindustrial societies, called "mechanical solidarity" derives from a relatively homogenous range of jobs people engage in. As industrial development and global economic networks increase, this primitive mechanical solidarity is replaced by an "organic solidarity," characteristic of modernity. Organic solidarity, according to Durkheim, is formed by the inherent interdependence of people in advanced societies who must engage in different types of work, and are thus forced to rely on each other, rather than from a shared identity produced by doing similar jobs. See Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society.* Ed. Steven Lukes. Trans. W. D. Halls. New York: Free Press, 1997, 66-84.
[372] Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *The American Political Science Review* 53:1 (March 1959): 71.

as well, which offered new states an alternative model of political economy."[373] As Cold War hostilities between the Soviet Union and the United States increased, both imperial powers came to see industrialization as the path to achieving political hegemony. Industrialization had been a cornerstone of Soviet political doctrine since the Russian Revolution and is described by Lenin in *State and Revolution* and by Trotsky's in *Permanent Revolution*.[374] Aimé Césaire, drawing upon the example of Lenin in *State and Revolution,* adopted a similarly productionist platform and promoted industrial development as the solution to Martinique's economic disparities.[375] In political addresses and writings throughout his career, he continually returns to the idea that the root of Martinique's persistent unemployment, homelessness, and poverty could be traced to underdevelopment. "S'il est une chose que notre congrès a bien établie, c'est que, pour notre pays *sous-développé*, l'industrialisation est une question de vie ou de mort".[376] In his most recent book, Nick Nesbitt carefully goes through Aimé Césaire's political addresses,

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[373] Uma Kothari et al., "The Political Economy of Globalization," *Development Theory and Practice: Critical Perspectives.* Eds. Uma Kothari and Martin Minogue. London: Palgrave, 2002, 16.

[374] Leon Trotsky adapts Marx and Engel's usage of the term "permanent revolution," in order to describe the possible transition of pre-industrialized nations to communism without first having to pass through a period of bourgeois capitalism and democracy. The traditional Marxist view held that proletarian revolution took place through a series of transitions, and that revolution of the working class could only be met with success after a point of economic and industrial development had been reached, through the mechanisms of bourgeois capitalism. For more on this see Michael Lowy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution*. New York: Verso, 1981, 1-30.

[375] Nick Nesbitt discusses Aimé Césaire's use of Lenin's *State and Revolution* in a 2015 article, suggesting that this early text, reflecting a stage in Lenin's thinking before he accepted Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, still evinced the evolutionary program to proletarian revolution that progressed through democracy and socialism. According to Nesbitt, this allowed Césaire to articulate a political vision for Martinique in which the end goal of a "proletarian" Martinican state was not in disagreement with its progressive realization through French democratic federalism. "While Césaire never indicated that federalism was anything other for him than the telos of a Martinican "proletarian" state existing within a parliamentary French Federated Republic, to cite State and Revolution...was inevitably to invoke the Lenin of August 1917, the Lenin who in April had finally rallied to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution of the immediate revolutionary transition from bourgeois parliamentary democracy to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Nick Nesbitt, "From Louverture to Lenin: Aimé Césaire and Anticolonial Marxism," *Small Axe* 19:3 (November 2015): 135-36.

[376] Aimé Césaire, *Ecrits politiques (1957-1971).* vol. III, Ed. Edouard de Lépine, Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2016, 19. (My emphasis)

and shows how they reveal a complex portrait of Césaire. At once a Marxist committed to the goals of proletarian revolution[377], Césaire tirelessly advocated for (capitalist) economic development in Martinique, which he viewed as the solution to its political dependence.

> Césaire addresses his entire political career to the material transformation of Martinican colonial underdevelopment through meaningful, profound changes in its political status, first via the law of departmentalization, then in the succeeding call for autonomous status that arguably comes to fruition with the 1982-83 laws of decentralization.[378]

As Nesbitt acknowledges, Aimé Césaire's efforts to address underdevelopment in Martinique undeniably resulted in massive improvements in Martinicans' quality of life. Nevertheless, "the multitude of remedies and revisions to underdevelopment Césaire seeks throughout his political career never once call into question the fundamental form of…social relations and wage labour in particular…"[379] Aimé Césaire's commitment to finding political solutions to some of Martinique's most intractable economic difficulties basically provide what Nesbitt calls "tweaks" in the form of "state-based payments and tax reforms," development projects, investments in infrastructure, etc. without ever calling into question more broadly the particular social form they are created within, and ultimately uphold. These measures amount to adjustments around the edges of capitalist democracy and aim to make the existing system more equitable, generally through addressing the distribution of wealth. According to Nesbitt, this is the result of Césaire's social democratic political leanings, and though his efforts did help to raise the standard of living considerably in Martinique, the ultimate goal of autonomy and liberation is continually undercut by his failure to consider the ramifications of pursuing equity

[377] Despite Césaire's public departure from the French Community Party in 1956, which he explains in the famous "Lettre à Maurice Thorez," he was committed to a program of economic justice.
[378] Nick Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery,* 174.
[379] Ibid., 251.

and well-being from within the same economic social form that generates and maintains uneven relationships of extraction and dependency.[380],[381] As Marx observes, capitalist production:

> ...is as much a production process of material conditions of human life as a process taking place under specific historical and economic production relations, producing and reproducing these production relations themselves, and thereby also the bearers of this process, their material conditions of existence and their mutual relations, i.e., their particular socio-economic form."[382]

Aimé Césaire's unflinching commitment to industrialization as the harbinger of progress and increased quality of life reflects something more than an adherence to what Nesbitt calls the "Leninist telos of development."[383] The immediate, pragmatic promise of industrial development to increase the employment, production, and the overall well-being of Martinique overshadowed Marx's observation above that capitalist production produces not just commodities, but the "material conditions of human life." In this sense, no level of political autonomy in Martinique could liberate workers or the environment from what Suzanne Césaire terms, "the degrading conditions of modern-wage labor" (Césaire, 88).

While it seemed to offer a path toward economic revitalization and autonomy, development theory was a manifestation of the contradictions inherent in pursuing development within the capitalist social form. Criticism of development theory began as early as the 1970's, as its failures to increase overall well-being and equality in the Global South became clear.

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[380] Ibid., 252.

[381] Marx uses the term "social form" at several places over different texts (*Formebestimmtheit* or *Formbestimmung*) and as Isaak Rubin explains, in its economic application, it is used to describe how productive relations between people are organized at a particular historical time and place. "If the social function of a thing gives the thing a specific social-economic form, then it is clear that the basic categories of political economy (which we considered above as expressions of different production relations and social functions of things) serve as expressions of social-economic forms which correspond to things. These forms give things their function as 'bearers' of the production relations among people." In Isaak Illich Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value.* Trans. Milos Samardzija and Fredy Perlman. 3rd Ed. New York: Black Rose, 1982[1975][1973], 37.

[382] Karl Marx, *Capital,* vol. 3. Ed. Friedrich Engels, New York: International, 1894, 593.

[383] Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery,* 171.

Critical approaches to development coalesced into two principle fields: Dependency Theory and World-Systems Theory. These approaches saw modernization as perpetuating many of the inequalities created by colonialism, recasting old patterns of domination in new forms, often by exchanging local, political administration for global economic hegemony.[384] In stark contrast to its promises of reducing hunger, unemployment, and poverty, industrial development in the Global South ended up concentrating economic prosperity in the core states. While André Gunder Frank and Immannuel Wallerstein both described how modernization transfers wealth from the periphery (or semi-periphery, for Wallerstein) to core states, their analyses do not specifically address how resource extraction affects environmental integrity.[385] From their perspective in the 1970's, the reliance of development on resource extraction had hardly been considered. More recently, environmental sociologists have emphasized understanding how such unequal patterns also enforce an "ecologically unequal exchange", which has devastating effects on the environmental and political viability of peripheral or semi-peripheral states. "Ecological unequal exchange refers to the increasingly disproportionate utilization of ecological systems and externalization of negative environmental costs by developed countries, and consequently, declining utilization opportunities and imposition of exogenous environmental burdens within LDC's [less-developed countries]".[386] While most postcolonial

[384] See James Rice, "Ecological Unequal Exchange: Consumption, Equity, and Unsustainable Structural Relationships within the Global Economy," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 48:1 (2007): 45.
[385] Environmental sociologists today draw upon Wallerstein's claim that "capital accumulation is the driver of world-systems dynamics", adding that "energy and other natural resources transformed by labor into a multitude of other commodities are deserving of analytical attention, as all economic production is predicated upon ecological additions and withdrawals". See Andrew K. Jorgenson and James Rice, "The Sociology of Ecologically Unequal Exchange in Comparative Perspective," *Routledge Handbook of World-Systems Analysis*. Eds. Salvatore J. Babones and Christopher Chase-Dunn. New York: Routledge, 2017, 431.
[386] James Rice, "Ecological Unequal Exchange: Consumption, Equity, and Unsustainable Structural Relationships within the Global Economy," 44.

states enjoy at least nominal political and territorial sovereignty today, the privatization and development of land and natural resources, often by foreign companies for consumption abroad, undermines residents' full access to the land. "Environmental cost-shifting" exacerbates this inequality by leaving poorer, peripheral states to deal with the consequences of environmental degradation and pollution created by industrial development. Meanwhile, extractive economies absorb most of the economic benefits while incurring none of the immediate ecological burden.[387]

For Suzanne Césaire, the tacit acceptance of development as a remedy for Martinique's economic difficulties was a solution created within the same social form that had produced these problems to begin with. She refuses to accept the "milliers d'images d'usines-claires, d'aciers-vierges, de machines libératrices [qui] ont gonflé les cœurs de nos jeunes ouvriers" (Césaire, 92). Her recognition of the contradiction inherent in premising freedom on the continued extraction of both human and natural resources is remarkable for the time, as concerns about the viability of modernization would not be raised until at least the 1970's, and at this point by mostly American sociologists. One possible exception to the relative absence of critique about the costs of industrial development on ecology comes from Marx. Contrary to portrayals of Marx as a productionist popularized by figures like Trotsky and Lenin, his work demonstrates a careful attention to the combined processes of exploitation imposed upon workers and the natural world by industrialization. In *Capital*, vol. 1 he writes that,

> all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the more longterm sources of that fertility. The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development...the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production,

[387] Ibid., 44.

> therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by *simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth - the soil and the worker*.[388]

For some critics, the possibility of an ecological critique in Marx's work is undercut by of its apparently "anthropocentric value theory" which focuses solely on the production of value by human labor at the expense of the physical environment.[389] However, as this passage demonstrates, Marx demonstrates a subtle awareness of the imbrication of labor and environmental exploitation. Over the past 25 years, however, Marxist scholars from the anglophone world have unearthed an ecocritical potential in Marx's theory of value. Beginning with the publication of Paul Burkett's *Marx and Nature* in 1999 and then John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology* in 2000, critics began to return to texts like *Capital* to investigate the ecological underpinnings of Marx's critique of political economy.[390] Expanding on this, Kohei Saito's 2018 book, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism* attempts to "reveal the immanent systematic character of Marx's ecology" which in his view bears a "clear continuity with his critique of political economy."[391]

Suzanne Césaire was a committed communist throughout her life and read widely, but it is more likely that she arrived at her ecocritical critique of development from a different direction than *Capital*. For Césaire, acceptance of modernization aligned with the pervasive assimilation that characterized Martinican society, for which she strongly advocated surrealism as the solution. She sees the emergence of genuine Martinican culture as inextricably linked to

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[388] Karl Marx, *Capital,* vol. 1. Trans. Ben Folkes. New York: Penguin, 1976, 638. Emphasis mine.
[389] See Hans Immler and Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, *Marx und die Naturfrage: Ein Wissenschaftsstreit.* Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2011, 36.
[390] See Paul Burkett, *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective*. New York: St. Martin, 1999; John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology*: Materialism and Nature. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
[391] Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy.* New York: Monthly Review, 2017, 12.

an acknowledgement of its ecological dependence. In one of her early essays, “Alain et l’esthétique,” Césaire argues that the basis for a new art must be the recognition of man’s “fragility and dependence” on the natural world (Césaire, 51). To this end, she repeatedly encourages the acceptance of an adaptive, non-competitive “vegetal drive” characteristic of Ethiopian civilization as the symbolic essence of black diasporic culture. The essential reciprocity she envisions between Caribbean environment and culture means that the destabilization of the biosphere through industrialization threatens the cultural authenticity and political sovereignty of Caribbean people as well.

Césaire diagnoses the historical causes of assimilation in her 1942 article, “Malaise d’une civilisation,” noting that racial discrimination limiting black Martinicans from working “anywhere except the fields” produced an aspirational model in which freedom was measured - particularly among the black middle class - by acquiring the jobs, status, opportunities, etc. previously denied to them by colonial society. She makes a direct link between the embrace of assimilation as emancipation in 1848. “Au départ un bon mouvement : 1848 - la masse des nègres libérés, dans une brusque explosion du moi primitif, renonce à tout travail régulier, malgré le danger de famine. Mais les nègres, domptés par l’économique, non plus esclaves mais salariés, se soumettront de nouveau à la discipline de la houe et du coutelas.” (Césaire, 73). Césaire is sensitive to the connection between slavery and its replacement by modern wage labor, combined with the culturally destructive effects of assimilation. “...c’est à cette époque que s’établit de façon définitive le refoulement de l’ancestral désir d’abandon” (Césaire, 73). She consistently shows Martinique’s cultural alienation as a symptom of its economic assimilation (through the corrosive effects of modern wage labor) within global capitalism. In addition, by opposing the “vegetal” to the “mechanical” drive at various points throughout her

essays, she elucidates a broad critique of technological development, no matter what economic-political system it is cultivated to support. In her final essay, “Le grand camouflage,” the presence of factories over the Martinican landscape demonstrates the preponderance of Western developmental models as solutions to chronic “underdevelopment.” “Il y a dans des centaines de hangars sordides où rouille la ferraille, une invisible végétation de désirs. Les fruits impatients de la Révolution en jailliront inévitablement" (Césaire, 44). Césaire’s opposition of the mechanical and vegetal derives from her earlier distinctions between Ethiopian and Hamitic civilization adapted from Leo Frobenius. They serve a complementary function in her critique, operating in cultural terms to represent civilizational sensibilities' while also demonstrating the concrete, historical relations between these two systems as the competitive drive of western development dominates and exploits the island’s natural environment for its own ends. This passage, in which the seeds of revolution survive and grow even in the hostile environment of the industrial factory, recalls an idea from one of Césaire’s earlier essays on surrealism, where she expresses hope about surrealism’s potential to ensure cultural survival. “Parmi les puissantes machines de guerre que le monde moderne met à notre disposition ‘leddites et cheddites’ notre audace a choisi le surréalisme qui lui offre actuellement les chances les plus sûres de succès” (Césaire, 81-82). The choice of poetry - an adaptive, nature-centered activity of self-preservation and resistance, dispels the hostile antinomies of modern warfare and political rivalries. Césaire’s geopoetics enlist nature as a model for political action and life that is based on surrender to the rhythms of one’s surroundings rather than domination over it. Césaire’s focus on the central role of the Martinican environment in facilitating the emergence of an authentic cultural identity alerts her to the paradoxes embedded in policies of economic development pursued at the expense of the natural environment.

In the following section, I investigate Césaire's ecocritical and anti-developmental consciousness, not only how it frames her critique of industrial wage labor, but how it foreshadows the transformation of Caribbean islands into service economies through postcolonial tourism. In addition to Césaire's anticipative critique of modernization, I propose that her equally prescient analysis of the incipient island tourism is made possible by the unique, ecofeminist lens she applies to global development. Through her discussion of *doudouiste* travel literature, a genre that relies upon sexualized images of islands and their inhabitants as seductive and available, Césaire's work foreshadows the reinscription of Caribbean islands into global networks of dependency through the establishment of the tourism industry. I suggest that Césaire's continual references to geophysical disasters in her final essay "Le grand camouflage" - including hurricanes, fires, volcanoes, and cyclones - constitute a geopoetic resistance to the islands' objectification as spaces of relaxation and consumption for Western tourists. Césaire's repeated allusions to natural hazard forms not only a geohistorical means of cultural resistance against forms of Western hegemony, but that they form an essential part of her non-totalizing surrealist geopoetics, revealing the interdependence of the whole world in spite of colonial ideologies that would divide the world into center-periphery dichotomies.

**Césaire's Eco-feminist Critique of Tourism**

As discussed in the previous section, Césaire was unique among her contemporaries in identifying the contradictions of development discourse, whose premise of economic advancement and sovereignty are undermined by the exploitation of human and natural resources. Césaire's understanding of development is thus inherently ecocritical, but her critique of imperial capitalist domination is also *ecofeminist* in nature. I believe it is important to

recognize the presence of not only an environmental critique in her work, but the way in which Césaire covertly frames this critique through the lens of gender. Ecofeminists use "gender as a category of analysis" to shed light on "the interconnections of *all* systems of unjustified human domination".[392] Nevertheless, Césaire's has in the past been omitted from studies on Caribbean women's writing often due to its chronological association with Negritude, which as Jennifer Wilks points out, "has had a 'sharply gendered identity' that 'is not only masculine but masculinist' and which has 'pushe[d] literature by women into the background."[393] In addition, Césaire's essays are explicitly concerned with exploring the historical etiology of assimilation and political dependence in Martinique, and with the exception of a few passages, she does not address gender head-on.[394] As Kara Rabbit suggests, "Far from exclusively feministic texts, [Césaire's] essays speak to broad cultural questions of colonial and racial oppression, of national identity, and of literary audacity and innovation. And yet, as she would say, they are there ("pourtant elles y sont")—those "hummingbird-women," those feminine symbols of Antillean, African, American identity that peek out through her pages".[395] It is significant that her sole, famous reference to gender in "Le grand camouflage"[396] is presented as a refusal of the interwoven forms of patriarchal-colonialist domination that support the exploitation of both women and the environment. I suggest that Césaire's body of work should also be recognized

[392] Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, 2.
[393] Jennifer Wilks provides a comprehensive summary of the categorical and historical reasons for which Césaire's work has been neglected over the years. See Jennifer Wilks, *Race, Gender, and Comparative Black Modernism,* 107-113.
[394] The only direct reference to women in the essays appears in "Le Grand Camouflage": "Et quant aux femmes-colibris, aux femmes-fleurs tropicales, aux femmes aux quatre races et aux douzaines de sang, elles n'y sont plus" (Césaire, 86)
[395] Kara Rabbitt, "In Search of the Missing Mother: Suzanne Césaire, *Martiniquaise*," 40.
[396] Suzanne Césaire, *Le Grand camouflage,* 86.

for its contributions to anticolonial ecofeminism, which she pursues through her critique of *doudouiste* literature and tourism. Moreover, ecofeminism attempts to dispel the harmful dualisms of civilized/uncivilized, human/nature masculine/feminine, mind/body, reason/emotion that are reified and operationalized through literature, advertising, media, even scientific discourse and legal institutions.[397] Ecofeminism is a multidisciplinary critical approach that uses "gender as a category of analysis" to shed light on the "interconnections of *all* systems of unjustified human domination."[398] Ecofeminist analysis is attuned to the material and discursive ways in which subjectivity is denied to women, the environment, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups, in order to facilitate the European male subject's liberation from the restrictions of the natural world, or the "realm of necessity."[399] In spite of the absence of a direct gender analysis in these essays, Suzanne Césaire was attentive to the imbrication of what we recognize today as intersectional forms of domination - of race, class, gender, sexuality or ability.

Suzanne Césaire's latent ecofeminism emerges alongside her critique of *doudou* literature in her short essay from 1942, "Misère d'une poésie." The object of her analysis is the French poet and novelist, Antoine Nau, who is little known today but won the first Prix Goncourt in 1903 for his novel, *Force ennemi.* For Césaire, Nau exemplifies a tradition of exoticist travel writing, in which the Caribbean is cast as a reified paradise for European pleasure and consumption. Travel writing was a popular genre across Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it served to implicitly reinforce colonial biases built

[397] See Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens, "Introducing Contemporary Ecofeminism," *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism.* Eds. Mary Philips and Nick Rumens. New York: Routledge, 2017, 5.
[398] Karren Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It is and Why it Matters*. New York: Rowman & Litchfield, 2000, 2.
[399] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism.* London: Bloomsbury, 2014, 5.

around the inferiority of colonized people and the unruliness of the tropical environment, narratives which helped legitimize France's *mission civilisatrice* in the colonies.[400] *Doudouiste* authors produced fantastical tales about exotic peoples and places, playing upon and often generating ethno-climatic prejudices about Afro-Caribbeans' inferiority that were entangled with concerns about the turbulent tropical environment.[401] Richard Burton explains that the figure of the *doudou* embodied the colonial relationship between imperial France and its tropical citizens during the Third Republic.

> ...the mythological representation of the colonial relationship that came to prominence under the Third Republic revolved around the figure of *la doudou*, the smiling, sexually available black or colored woman (usually the latter) who gives herself heart, mind, and body to a visiting Frenchman (usually a soldier or colonial official) and is left desolate when her lover abandons her to return to France, having, of course, refused to marry her though often leaving her with a child who will at least lighten the race…[The *doudou* functioned] to justify the exploitation of the 'feminine' French West Indies by a France now thematized as 'masculine.'[402]

Jacqueline Couti ascribes the resurgent popularity of *doudou* literature during the interwar period because of France's anxieties about the stability of its national and economic dominance. "Eroticism and exoticism directly correlated with the (faltering) national(ist) ego in need of reassurance about its superiority over others, of an individual - often but not always a European male - who exoticized the subject, objectifying and denying their humanity."[403] Against this

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[400] See David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993, 1-13.
[401] For more on the entanglement of racial and climatic prejudices in the French Antilles, see Eric T. Jennings, *Curing the Colonizers: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006; Jacqueline Couti, "The Mythology of the *Doudou*," in *Provocation: A Transnational Reader in the History of Feminist Thought.* S. Bordo, M.C. Alcalde, & Rosenman, E., eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.
[402] Richard D.E. Burton, "'Maman-France Doudou': Family Images in French West Indian Colonial Discourse," *Diacritics* 23:3 (Autumn 1993): 81.
[403] Jacqueline Couti, *Sex, Sea, and Self: Nationalism and Sexuality in French Caribbean Discourse, 1924-1948.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021, 40-41.

backdrop of imperial-libidinal anxiety about France's diminishing hegemony, Suzanne Césaire develops an ecofeminist critique aimed explicitly at this genre of colonial travel writing that fetishized island spaces and their inhabitants.

The feminized image of the *vieilles colonies* popularized by writers like Antoine Nau fulfilled colonial fantasies of the islands as submissive yet entropic regions predisposed to disorder, thus in need of rationalization and control. In the conclusion of "Misère d'une poésie", Césaire condemns the tourist literature that reifies tropical space and entrenches oppressive and extractive power dynamics. She reveals how travel narratives empty Caribbean islands of their cultural-historical depth, instead promoting a superficial tourism that exacerbates the inferiorization of Caribbean culture and its dependence on the West. "De la littérature ?" She asks. "Oui. Littérature de hamac. Littérature de sucre et de vanille. Tourisme littéraire. Guide bleu et CGT. Poésie, non pas" (Césaire, 65). Anny Dominique Curtius notes Césaire's reference to CGT, the French passenger ship line that ferried tourists to and from the Antilles, building a successful business model upon an exoticized, postcard image of the islands.

> ...in 1935 [CGT was] 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.[404]

Curtius then points to the equally subtle, overlapping allusion Césaire makes just before denouncing Nau's rapturous description of the *morne* from the passage below:

> Ô les rires blancs des mornes
> En la fragrante nuit des végétations

[404] Ibid., 518-19. In the 2015 English translation of *Le Grand Camouflage* by Keith Walker, he mistranslates the acronym CGT as the Conféderation Générale de Labour. This error is only obvious if compared to the original French, but taken on its own creates a misleading and confusing association between a trade union organization and colonial tourism.

La houle molle des cocotiers sur les accores, -
La rythmique floraison
Dans la brise, - nuit des madras multicolores
Sur les tiges des beaux corps balancés !

As opposed to the "white laughter of the mountains" and or the "languid smell" of the *cocotiers* swaying on their slopes, Césaire asks, "mais le merveilleux" du morne ? Son aura maléfique ? Sa dure promesse ? La dynamite du morne ? Au lieu de cela, des pâmoisons, des nuances, du style, des mots, de l'âme, du bleu, des ors, du rose" (Césaire, 65).[405] In French Creole, *morne* refers to the rolling hills and mountains found on most islands in the Caribbean archipelago. In francophone Caribbean cultures, it is not only a geographical feature but a cultural symbol imbued with deep historical significance. In the early days of slavery, communities of maroon slaves sought freedom in the secluded mountainous areas of the islands' interiors. As slavery was replaced in the nineteenth century by share-cropping and exploitative labor practices on sugar plantations and refineries, the *morne* became a rallying place for striking workers.[406] Curtius astutely identifies the temporal conjunction between the tercentenary of French colonization in the Antilles and the labour unrest of the same year, two events that are brought into poetic relation by Césaire's reference to the *morne* and to CGT.[407] "Martinican historian Edouard de Lépine (1980) remarks that [the] 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

[405] Curtius notes that Suzanne Césaire's "morne famélique" is an anagrammatic reorganisation of her husband's image of a "morne famélique" in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.* Ibid., 522.
[406] Christopher Church, *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean.* Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017, 147-187.
[407] Anny Dominique Curtius, "Cannibalizing *Doudouisme,* Conceptualizing the *Morne:* Suzanne Césaire's Ecopoetics," 522-23.

necessity for collective struggles against exploitation by sugarcane industry owners, an exploitation that prolonged the slave system under the guise of a patriarchal capitalism."[408]

While Martinicans responded in 1935 to low wages and poor working conditions, industrial production continued to wane and after World War II, and already by the 1970's was replaced by the growth of public sector employment and tourism.[409] The postwar period saw a major expansion of commercial air travel, facilitating the installment of what David Weaver calls the "plantation tourism model." During this time, significant investments were made to develop a tourism industry as the productivity of plantation-based agriculture and sugar refining decreased, despite Aimé Césaire's best efforts to bring development and jobs to Martinique. "Everywhere airports were reconstructed, hotels built, and golf courses and marinas added to the landscape; ports were also rebuilt to enable the docking of cruise ships which, especially in the Antilles, bring in the most visitors".[410] Tourism, while promoted as a solution to the region's decreasing agricultural relevance, only reinscribed Martinique within a network of global economic dependency. In its attempts to attract French and other Western tourists, Martinique, along with most of its Caribbean neighbors, has undertaken real estate and recreational development projects like the ones listed above. Like industrial development, postcolonial tourism depends on two of the central targets of Suzanne Césaire's geopoetic critique of assimilation. It first requires the development of a travel and hospitality infrastructure that often compromises ecological resilience. Tourist development on islands centers on the development of coastlines, which exacerbates coastal erosion, pollution, and the worst effects of tropical

[408] Ibid., 523.
[409] Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier: Départements et Térritoires d'Outre Mer.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 150.
[410] Ibid., 150.

storms.[411] Secondly, Caribbean tourism is promoted through the reification of local cultures that are marketed as another tourist attraction alongside palm trees and beaches. A study by Stefan Gössling reveals the interconnectedness of cultural and ecological alienation stemming from tourism. He writes that "[Tourism is] an agent of modernization which decontextualizes and dissolves the relationships individuals have with society and nature, and increases the separation from structures that are the base of sustainable human-environmental relations."[412] Indigenous communities must not only submit to the development and degradation of their homelands for tourism, they must also accept the objectification of their cultural identity and traditions for touristic consumption. The Hawaiian writer Haunani-Kay Trask notes that in Hawai'i this has resulted in a "grotesque commercialization of Hawaiian culture, [the] creation of a racially-stratified, poorly paid servant class of industry workers, [the] transformation of whole sections of [the islands] into high-rise cities, [and the] contamination and depletion of water sources."[413] Tourism's parallel commodification of island culture and environment is frequently accomplished through a *doudouiste* portrayal of islands and their inhabitants as inviting and seductive. Suzanne Césaire, quite remarkably for the time, identifies the dual processes by which Caribbean environmental and cultural autonomy are undermined, not only through industrial development, but also through tourism.

At the start of what is arguably Césaire's most poetically evocative work, she adopts the perspective of a passenger flying over the islands, high enough to see the network of islands

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[411] See Stefan Gössling, "Tourism and Development in Tropical Islands: Political Ecology Perspectives," *Tourism and Development in Tropical Islands: Political Ecology Perspectives.* Ed. Stefan Gössling. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2003, 4.
[412] Stefan Gössling, "Human-Environmental Relations with Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research,* 29:2 (2002): 551.
[413] Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i.* Rev. Ed., Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, 50.

below and to interrogate the imagery used to describe them. “Il y a contre les îles, les belles lames vertes de l’eau et du silences...Il y a sous mes yeux la jolie place de Pétionville, plantée des pins et d’hibiscus. Il y a mon île, la Martinique, et son frais collier de nuages soufflées par la Pelée” (Césaire, 84). This idyllic overview of the islands is abruptly interrupted as a Haitian peasant watches his horse struck and killed by lightning by the “age old killer storm at Hinche”. The lightning strike produces an instantaneous rupture in the vision of a peaceful tropics evoked in the first few sentences. Through the encounter with the sometimes deadly Caribbean climate, the Haitian farmer is awakened to the reality of his island, including its power, defiance, and “absence of equilibrium.” “Mais cet accès de démence terrestre lui éclaire le cœur : il se met à penser aux autres Caraïbes, à leurs volcans, à leurs tremblements de terre, à leurs ouragans” (Césaire, 84). The lightning strike and impending storm catalyze a moment of recognition, in which the farmer understands the true nature of his islands that opposes the paradisal illusions cultivated in the colonial imagination. Rather than viewing the islands as isolated fragments, sequestered by their various colonial histories and languages, geographically cut off from the rest of the world, Césaire traces the path of the hurricane as it envelops first Puerto Rico, then the Antilles and Haiti, and finally making its way north to Florida. If much of her focus in previous essays has been the particular social and historical conditions of Martinique, “Le grand camouflage” takes a more comprehensive view of the Caribbean region. She explores the region both through her aerial view from the plane window, and through tracking a hurricane as it sweeps across the region. As the storm develops, she notes how the Atlantic, “fuit vers l’Europe à grandes vagues océanes.” The course of tropical storms recalls the “triangular circuit” used to describe the flow of goods and capital between Africa, Europe, and the New World during the slave trade, and yet the chaotic, spiralic power of the storm aboloshes the fixed points of relation

established by the network. Tropical storms form from the interaction between warm water in the Atlantic Ocean and winds blowing westward from the African continent. These powerful weather systems reach their peak over the warm water of the Caribbean, as they make landfall and subside, they frequently dump remnants of wind and rain in Western Europe.[414] The sea asserts its magnificent power over the land in Césaire's description, "stretching its limbs for a greater consciousness of its elemental waterpower" (Césaire, 85). The hurricane dissolves territorial distinctions and draws its strength instead from the interrelation of land masses, oceans, and climatic conditions produced through the triangular circuit. In melting away territorial subdivisions and recognizing the supremacy of the ocean, Césaire points to an alternative model for Caribbean consciousness, one that opposes identity based on fixed, territorial association. In contrast to singular, unitary identity based on place, the hurricane provides a geophysical model of identity created through multiple sources and continuous displacement. According to this view, Caribbean identity emerges from its ecological reality, which is defined not by stability but by instead geophysical disturbance. Kara Rabbitt makes a compelling argument for Césaire's construction of the region's identity based upon "meteorological instability" rather than the fragmentation that had been emphasized by her colleagues at *Tropiques.* "Suzanne Césaire differs from Ménil, Damas and Aimé Césaire in shifting from the concept of fragmentation to one of instability, in refusing the binary of negritude and in exploding the tension of the spatial triangle formed by the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe within their texts."[415]

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[414] See James B. Elsner and A. Birol Kara, *Hurricanes of the North Atlantic: Climate and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

[415] Kara Rabbitt, "The Geography of Identity in Suzanne Césaire's *Le grand camouflage*," *Research in African Literatures* 39:3 (Fall 2008): 123.

This approach seems to foreground Glissant's theory of rhizomatic relation in the 1980's and 1990's, in which he argues that Western land consciousness - premised upon the sacred association between land, lineage, and identity - is inoperable in the Caribbean, where history has been defined by a series of displacements and erasures.

> The massacre of the Indians, uprooting of the sacred, has already invalidated [the search for the rightful "possessors of Caribbean land]. Once that had happened, Antillean soil could not become a territory, but rather, a rhizomed land…But the consequences of European expansion (extermination of the Pre-Columbians, importation of new populations) is precisely what forms the basis for a new relationship with the land: not the absolute ontological possession regarded as sacred but the complicity of relation.[416]

Locating Caribbean identity in the region's geophysical instability forms a measure of resistance against the fixed, hardened images projected upon islands by the imperial gaze. In "Le grand camouflage" Césaire expands her critique of the nascent, creeping influence of tourism to the innovation that would ultimately catalyze its explosive growth in the 1960's: commercial aviation. As the storm clears and Haiti fades from view, Césaire's narrator again surveys the ocean from above.

> Haïti demeure, enveloppée de la cendre de soleil douce aux yeux des cigales, aux écailles des mabouyas, au visage de métal de la mer qui n'est plus d'eau mais de mercure.
>
> C'est maintenant le moment de se pencher à la fenêtre de l'aluminium clipper des grands virages.
>
> De nouveau la mer de nuages qui n'est plus vierge depuis qu'y passent les avions de la Pan American Airways System. S'il y a une moisson qui mûrit, c'est le moment d'essayer de l'entrevoir, mais aux zones militaires interdites, les fenêtres sont closes.
>
> On sort les désinfectants, ou l'ozone, qu'importe, tu ne verras rien. Rien que la mer et la forme confuse des terres. (Césaire, 86).

[416] Glissant writes that the politics of ecology is a critical form of resistance for Caribbean peoples to the "territorial thought" that maintains a sacred entitlement between groups of people and land. Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation.* Trans. Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, 146-47.

The reference to Pan American Airways here is significant, in that it inscribes the Caribbean within a more global sphere of touristic objectification that goes beyond just French colonialism. While Pan American was the first international airline established for civilian use, it was heavily subsidized by the US government, which sought to ensure American hegemony in the Caribbean as a counterbalance to the encroaching presence of German aircraft at the Panama Canal after World War I.[417] Pan American was described by the Hoover administration as the "chosen instrument" in establishing US dominance of commercial air space in the lead-up to World War II, and during the war, its planes secretly transported the parts and chemical agents necessary to create the atomic bomb. [418]

Césaire notes that the view of the islands below is not only obscured by tourism's white washing, but also much more directly by the presence of "prohibited military zones". The view disappears entirely as the plane flies over "prohibited military zones" ("...aux zones militaires interdites, les fenêtres sont closes"). Perhaps because of her historical vantage point, having experienced life in Martinique under the deprivations of Vichy rule and the US Naval Blockade during World War II, Césaire is attuned to the close, shadowy connection between militarization in the Caribbean and Pacific, and the subsequent development of island tourism, a connection that the Hawaiian writer Teresia Taeiwa has identified as *militourism*, a "phenomenon by which military or paramiltary force ensures the smooth running of a tourist industry, masks the military force behind it...The opportunity for rest and relaxation that Pacific islands have afforded sailors, whalers, and traders over the last five hundred years has been sophisticatedly commodified for

[417] Roger Bilstein, *Flight Patterns: Trends in Aeronautical Development in the United States 1918-1929.* Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1983, 170-171.
[418] Ibid., 172.

tourists in the late twentieth century."[419] US militarism is inextricably linked not only to political and cultural imperialism, but to extreme environmental violence and sexual objectification. While Taeiwa addresses the conditions of Pacific islands, militarism has also characterized US imperialism in the Caribbean, even in Martinique despite its long history with French colonialism. In the previous chapter, I argued that increasing US military presence during World War II, as well its strategic interests in acquiring Martinique, informed Aimé Césaire's support for the Departmentalization Law in 1946.

As the narrator gazes from the plane window onto the ocean below, she observes that the once-virginal cloud bank has been disrupted by the traffic of previous Pan American flights, dispelling any illusion of finding the sort of untouched paradises advertised in tourist brochures.[420] Césaire notes that as the windows are closed while the plane flies over a secret military zone, disinfectants like ozone are brought out "so that you really cannot see anything". Césaire credits the powerful disinfectant, ozone, with obstructing the passengers' ability to accurately see the islands below. Besides acting as a disinfectant, however, we know today that ozone is a harmful pollutant emitted by many sources of high-heat combustion, including burning jet fuel.[421] While ozone's polluting properties were probably not understood as early as

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[419] Teresia Taeiwa, "Reading Gauguin's *Noa Noa* with Epeli Hau'ofa's *Kisses in the Nederends*: MIlitourism, Feminism, and the "Polynesian" Body," *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific.* Eds. Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999, 251.

[420] Anthony Carrigan points out the paradox of tourists' demand for unadulterated natural spaces, when the possibility of visiting these spaces and finding the infrastructure in them to support tourism undermines their "virginal" status. "It is deeply ironic that part of tropical islands' allure to tourists depends on perceiving their natural environments as 'pristine', 'untouched', or 'virgin'. The ideological construction of paradise as a 'peaceful unspoilt place' (*OED* 3.a.) is vital to island marketing strategies, even as the presence of tourism necessarily disrupts these romanticized ideals." See Anthony Carrigan, *Postcolonial Tourism: Literature, Culture, and Environment.* New York: Routledge, 2011, 35.

[421] The polluting effects of ozone are complex and vary according to where in the atmosphere they are produced. In the troposphere, the layer of the atmosphere closest to the Earth's surface, ozone is created by burning fossil fuels like gasoline. It is commonly known as smog and causes pollution and respiratory irritation. However, the emission of ozone by aircraft flying in the stratosphere is more complex and its harmful effects are generally more localized.

the 1940's, its inclusion is nonetheless striking to contemporary readers, creating a seamless association between its use as a as a disinfectant, sanitizing the reality of Caribbean life for benefit of foreign visitors - and the compound's polluting effects, in which the transport and presence of tourism itself undermines the mythical "purity" and "virginity" of the islands.[422]

Suzanne Césaire's geopoetic critique of development takes what might be described as a "world systems" approach, to borrow Wallerstein's term. Rather than framing anticolonial struggle through diametric oppositions between developed/underdeveloped, core/periphery, independence/dependence, Césaire's ecofeminist geopoetics upholds a diversity of difference, dispersing "harmful antinomies" in favor of a model of Caribbean history and identity that emerges organically from the dynamism of its geography. In this sense, Césaire's approach is better suited to address the complex circuits and processes in which small islands find themselves entangled today. Rejecting the common perception of islands as isolated, Césaire's *geopoetics* draws upon Caribbean climate, and particularly its geophysical hazards, to demonstrate their interconnectedness on a global scale. Her refusal to accept contradictions between continents and islands, or core and peripheral states is equally important as it demands a realistic consideration of how local autonomy and cultures are undermined as postcolonial nations are absorbed and homogenized as part of the increasingly unequal global economy. Disaster studies scholars observe that globalization has a profound, negative impact on the

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Nevertheless, ozone, along with other greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, is produced by jet engines and contributes to the warming of the planet. See Christopher K. Gilmore et al, "Temporal and Spatial Variability in the Aviation $NO_x$-related $O_3$ Impact," *Environmental Research Letters* 8:3 (September 2013): 1-2.

[422] Cruise lines, resorts and foreign corporations often buy private beaches, islands or ports, providing an example of how global corporate power undermines the territorial sovereignty of small island states. This phenomenon is typified in the acquisition of Labadee Beach in Haiti by Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines in 1985. The company levelled an area of rugged tropical forest and transformed it into a private beach paradise for disembarking tourists. It then appropriated and trademarked the name of the town for use in marketing materials. The entire area is fenced in and protected by armed security guards, making it inaccessible to Haitian locals.

vulnerability of postcolonial economies to natural hazards. "Free unregulated capital flows...have rendered economies even more unstable and less policy independent than before...Therefore, at least in the medium term, these processes are likely to render significant numbers of people more differentially at risk and hence more vulnerable than before."[423] Césaire's geopoetics at once recognizes and affirms the essential geohistorical place of Caribbean within a broader conception of global interrelation, while at the same time pointing out the harmful ways in which its integration in this network manifests. Like many Caribbean writers after her, including Edouard Glissant, Hortense Spillers, and Kamau Brathwaite, Suzanne Césaire opposes a rooted and territorial identity with a distinctly Caribbean one whose authenticity derives from the region's inherent climatic flux and mutability. In discussing his notion of tidalectics, Brathwaite writes,

> Why is our psychology not dialectical - successfully dialectical - in how Western philosophy has assumed people's lives should be, but tidalectic, like our grandmother's - our nanna's - action, like the movement of the ocean she's walking on, coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding (reading) from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future.[424]

The impossible passage of the woman walking across the sea confounds eurocentric conceptions that link identity to a "solid ground" or a stable genealogical source. Instead, the sweeping rhythm of the matriarch dispels the apparent contradiction between "continent/continuum", where the ebb and flow between these two concepts maintains their difference, establishing a temporality of alternation[425] rather than progress. Brathwaite often returns to the idea of "submerged mothers" of Caribbean history, recalling the latent yet instrumental ecofeminist

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[423] J.M. Albala-Bertrand, "Globalization and Localization: An Economic Approach," *Handbook of Disaster Research.* Eds. Havidàn Rodríguez et al. New York: Springer, 2007, 149.

[424] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey.* Rhinebeck, NY: We, 1999, 34.

[425] Elizabeth DeLoughrey notes how Brathwaite's tidalectics encourage an "alter/native" historiography to linear models of colonial progress. This "tidal dialectic" resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean." Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Roots and Routes: Navigating Repeating Islands.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007, 2.

framework present in Césaire's work. While Brathwaite, Glissant, Maximin and others have called upon the tropical environment to elucidate theories of cross-cultural relation and alternate historiographies, Suzanne Césaire's contributions are distinguished by a cultural analysis seen within the framework of political ecology. As Maryse Condé remarks in her 1998 essay, "What differentiates Suzanne Césaire from Brathwaite as well as from the exponents of Antillanité and Créolité is her deep concern for the sociopolitical realities which are a legacy of the plantation system."[426] Césaire's concern with the sociopolitical legacies of plantation slavery is an approach grounded postcolonial political ecology, a methodology that seeks to broaden the understanding of "political and economic contexts…to encompass the complexity of human-environment interactions linked to the alteration of the environment."[427] As we have seen, environmental and gender consciousness merge to offer an original model of black diasporic identity based on multiple sources, interdependence, and adaptability.

In this light, Césaire's repeated allusions to natural disaster in "Le grand camouflage" subvert Western models of development that prioritize technological progress. The competitive drive characteristic of Hamitic civilization proves inoperable in the Caribbean where both ecological and human history are based on displacement and disruption. In the final pages of "Le grand camouflage," Césaire describes in a flourish of poetic detail how a great "Caribbean conflagration" sweeps away any touristic illusions of the islands as enchanting or compliant.

> Cependant les balisier d'Absalon saignent sur les gouffres et la beauté du paysage tropical monte à la tête des poètes qui passent. À travers les réseaux mouvants des palmes ils voient l'incendie antillais rouler sur la Caraïbe qui est une tranquille mer de laves. Ici la vie s'allume à un feu végétal. Ici, sur ces terres chaudes qui gardent vivantes les

[426] Maryse Condé, "Suzanne Césaire and the Construct of a Caribbean Identity," *Winds of Change: The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars.* Eds. Adele S. Newson & Linda Strong-Leek. New York: Peter Lang, 1998, 65.
[427] Stefan Gössling, "Introduction," *Tourism and Development in Tropical Islands: Political Ecology Perspectives.* Ed. Stefan Gössling. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2003, 10.

> espèces géologiques, la plante fixe, passion et sang, dans son architecture primitive, l'inquiétante sonnerie surgie des reins chaotiques des danseuses...Ici les poètes sentent chavirer leur tête, et humant les odeurs fraîches des ravins, ils s'emparent de la gerbe des îles, ils écoutent le bruit de l'eau autour d'elles, ils voient s'aviver les flammes tropicales non plus aux balisiers, aux gerberas, aux hibiscus, aux bougainvilliers, aux flamboyants, mais aux faims, aux peurs, aux haines, à la férocité qui brûlent dans les creux des mornes.

As opposed to tropical flowers and sweet smells, Césaire suggests viewing the Caribbean through the lens of its most destructive events. Her imagery of an incendiary, unstable, disorderly nature represented through natural hazard explodes gendered narratives of the islands in the French colonial imaginary. As discussed previously, gendered imagery was frequently used to talk about France's *vieilles colonies*, as it was deemed a more tactful justification for the islands' paternalistic treatment than race, reflecting France's efforts to maintain the illusion of colorblind "colonies of citizens" during the Third Republic. Césaire invokes natural catastrophe in the "Le grand camouflage" to poetically disrupt the patriarchal-colonialist gendering of Martinique. In its place, she proposes a Caribbean ecological and socio-historical reality premised upon disorder, multiplicity, continual interconnection and change. We can understand Césaire's work as "cannibalizing" an imperial-patriarchal power dynamic that relegates the feminized Antilles to a site of exploitation and control. Instead, Césaire's reference to disruptive natural hazard subverts the gender hierarchy established in doudouiste imagery of a placid and compliant tropical space, not necessarily by denying the connection between landscape and femininity, but by redefining the latter in terms of a productive disruption. This might best be understood in terms of what Maryse Condé described as creative disorder. "In a Bambara myth of origin, after the creation of the earth, and the organization of everything on its surface, disorder was introduced by a woman. Disorder meant the power to create new objects and to

modify the existing ones. In a word, disorder meant creativity."[428] Césaire appropriates and subverts a repressive gender paradigm, exploited in the colonial imaginary to reinforce a narrative of racial inferiority and dependence.

She asks in "Malaise d'une civilisation," "Qu'est-ce que le Martiniquais? L'homme-plante. Comme elle, abandon au rythme de la vie universelle. Point d'effort pour dominer la nature. Médiocre agriculteur ? Peut-être. Je ne dis pas qu'il fait pousser la plante; je dis qu'il le pousse, qu'il vit en plante" (Césaire 70). This sensibility is accessed again in "Le grand camouflage" when the hurricane sweeps across the Caribbean. As opposed to resistance or "consternation", Césaire suggests acceptance. "La consternation saisit les objets et les êtres épargnés à la limite du vent. Ne pas bouger. Laisser passer…" (Césaire, 85). Far from reifying an essentialist relationship between nature and women present in colonialist discourse, however, I contend that Césaire's ecofeminist approach draws attention the imbrication of various modalities of oppression that combine to reinforce the exploitation of human beings and nature - to deliver authentic political, cultural and economic freedom to Caribbean communities. She quite originally for the time - recognizes the false promise of modernization to "develop" peripheral economies at the expense of ecological and human welfare, especially as she centered Caribbean identity near the land. However, as passages like the ones above demonstrate, Césaire calls upon geophysical hazard not only to communicate the true reality of her island and to summon its resistant potential, but also to suggest an alternative, decolonial conception of human-environment relations based in resilience and adaptability as opposed to technological control.

[428] Maryse Condé, "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," *Yale French Studies* 96 "50 Years of Yale French Studies: A Commemorative Anthology," Part I, 1948-1979. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, 160.

Césaire's critique of development distinguishes her work from that of her contemporaries, most notably from that of her much more well-known husband, who pursued policies that in the end, never called into question the viability of development or its inseparability from capitalist growth. Suzanne Césaire on the other hand, enlists characteristics of African civilization, as well as the disorder and resistance of Caribbean geography, to formulate a truly systematic and intersectional critique that reveals the multilayered forms of exploitation enacted by global capitalism. Her skepticism about the potential for either industrialization or tourism to provide solutions for some of the intractable, long-term problems created by colonialism is unique among her contemporaries. While Caribbean theorists like Edouard Glissant and Daniel Maximin have achieved much greater critical attention, their ideas about rhizomatic interrelation and the imbricated identity of Caribbean people and geography were undeniably prefigured by Césaire's work for *Tropiques*. In the following chapter, I will explore how instability and chaos become central features of Glissant's poetics, features which are derived from the geophysical and historical vulnerability of the Caribbean region.

## Chapter 4

## Durational Disaster: Edouard Glissant's *La Terre Inquiète*

One of Edouard Glissant's first collections of poetry, called *La Terre inquiète,* was published while he was a student in Paris in the 1950's. It explores the entanglement of Caribbean history and geography, and how the foundational disaster of the Middle Passage is anything but past - how it operates continually in the present, shaping everything from the postcolonial political economy to the impact of natural disasters. Glissant's poetic insights about what I call *durational disaster* share two important insights with contemporary disaster research. The first relates to the diachronic and historically accretive nature of disaster events. As was explored in Chapter 2 with the example of Mount Pelée, disasters - whether they result from environmental or human causes - have lasting effects that ripple out to impact economic, environmental, and socio-political spheres, meaningfully reshaping life in affected communities long into the future.

Thus, the compounding impacts of a single disaster event urge us to view it as an unfolding chaos occurring along a historical continuum. I argue that the poems of *La Terre inquiète* (1954) present disaster according to this *longue-durée*, where catastrophes - from the Middle Passage to contemporary environmental crises - are not discrete or self-contained events. However, grasping their interpenetrating trajectories is complicated by several factors, which will be explored in more detail in the following pages. First, there is the problem of historiography in the New World since colonization. Few traces remain of the region's foundational disasters - the arrival of European settlers, the genocides and ecocides of colonization, and Plantation slavery - and as a result, these events are experienced as negative fissures in the collective memory of the Black Atlantic. As Neal Allar writes, "the Antillean,

creole condition requires the creation of meaning out of the unfathomable abyss left in the wake of a violent history."[429] I argue that in *La Terre inquiète,* Glissant stares into this abyss, transforming it through the poetic act from absolute void to absolute beginning, and ultimately, a site of knowledge creation. As such, I first consider the negative, abyssal nature of disaster in *La Terre inquiète* and how Glissant poetically turns toward the catastrophic contours of New World history, both as a way of mapping historical experience according to the regional rhythms of Caribbean geo-history, *and* as an alternative to the imposed developmentalism of Western historiography that excludes pasts that are not deposited according to regular, linear patterns. I explore how these poems "anchor" Caribbean chronology in its turbulent weather and geological patterns, allowing Glissant to poetically reimagine Caribbean history, which has been relegated to an abyssal "non-history." This alternative conception of the past as split and scattered as opposed to progressive results in a much different framework for disaster than what was hatched in US policy-making circles in the early years of the Cold War. Rather than viewing disasters as singular events that threaten to interrupt progress made along a relatively continuous timeline, Glissant's *La Terre inquiète* presents Caribbean history as emanating directly from disaster. As such, the region's history is experienced through shocks, effacements, and disjointed connections between non-sequential events. In *La Terre inquiète,* historical and environmental disaster provide the material framework from which a convulsive and occluded history takes shape. Through encounters with European predecessors like Stéphane Mallarmé, I show how Glissant paradoxically transfigures loss and erasure into an "absent present" through the imaginative medium of the poem.

[429] Neal Allar, "Creolizing Mallarmé," *Nineteenth Century French Studies.* 45:3 (2017): 238.

I then situate Glissant's model of black Atlantic history as a continually unfolding disaster within the context of his experience in Paris during the early years of the Cold War. I argue that the disjunctive historiography unveiled in *La Terre inquiète* contrasts with more established narratives of historical development and progress held on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In particular, I compare Glissant's model of history as disaster to contemporaneous models of disaster that were being developed by public policy makers, scientists, and technocrats in the United States, which viewed disasters as discrete ruptures in the regular forward march of history. Beyond simply pointing to the flaws of early disaster discourse or how developmental discourse was unsuited to the geo-historical rhythms of Caribbean historical experience, I also consider the concrete ways that developmental discourse and Cold War understandings of disaster actually stymied the "development" and well-being of postcolonies, including Martinique and Guadeloupe. I specifically look to the chlordecone contamination crisis in the French Antilles as evidence of this tragic irony. In the wake of WWII, synthetic pesticides were promoted as a cure-all for the constant scourge of pests that inhibited agricultural development in the Third World. Instead, the widespread use of chlordecone in Martinique and Guadeloupe has created a much more serious man-made pollution crisis.

Glissant's thinking about disaster prefigures developments in disaster research during the 1980's, when scholars like Kenneth Hewitt began to adopt a view of disasters rooted in political economy, and to insist on their socio-historical etiology as the underlying cause of disasters that were merely triggered by geophysical hazards.[430] Through an engagement with *La Terre*

[430] Hewitt's paradigm-shifting article, "The Idea of Calamity in a Technocratic Age," was published in 1983. One of its central critiques was the ontological distinction upheld between human society and nature in Western science. Under these conditions, science was seen as a tool that could demystify the natural world, and provide human beings with knowledge about it and ways to more effectively interact with it. For Hewitt, this gave rise to a "dominant view" premised upon the assumption of scientific and engineering knowledge as the sole source of solutions to mitigating and controlling disasters' impacts. He writes that, "...the dominant view constitutes a technocratic

*inquiète,* I argue that Glissant's poems expose colonial disasters as a form of, to borrow Rob Nixon's term, accretive, "slow violence" produced through a confluence of socio-environmental catalysts. In his groundbreaking work on the hidden and compounding temporalities of disaster, Rob Nixon defines slow violence as "attritional catastrophes that overspill clear boundaries in time and space and are marked above all by displacements - temporal, geographical rhetorical, and technological displacements that simplify violence and underestimate, in advance and in retrospect, the human and environmental costs."[431] In this sense, disasters in the postcolonial Caribbean are continually *developing,* with their impacts compounded through successive catastrophes, radiating out in a variety of directions. Ironically, this amalgamating chaos is often a consequence of development programs that are aimed at mitigating disaster risks. I believe that Glissant's attention to durational disaster is a close corollary of Nixon's slow violence, though in the Caribbean, durational disaster is always an outgrowth of the original catastrophe of the region's history, namely the slave trade. The complicated dialectic between disaster and development is essential for understanding the nature of catastrophe in the postcolonial Caribbean, which must always be materially situated within the broader context of colonial history, as Glissant's poetry demonstrates.

**History as Disaster**

approach. That means, the work subordinates other modes and bases of understanding or action to those using technical procedures. More precisely, technocracy gives precedence in support and prestige to bureaucratically organized institutions, centrally controlled and staffed or allocating funds to specialized professionals…my own argument amounts to saying that the 'natural science-technological fix' approach to hazards is itself, essentially, a sociocultural construct reflecting a distinct, institution-centered and ethnocentric view of man and nature." See Kenneth Hewitt, "The Idea of Calamity in a Technocratic Age," *Interpretations of Calamity from the Viewpoint of Human Ecology.* London: Routledge, 1983, 7-8.

[431] See Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence: The Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011: 7.

Disaster and development are terms with a broad array of definitions. In the first place, they carry an opposing temporality: development refers to a gradual, regular, and predictable forward progression, while disaster signifies an unexpected toppling or even a reversal of that momentum. Unpredictability and chance are baked into this understanding of disaster, which comes from the Latin, *dis - astrum,* literally meaning an "ill-starred" event, an unfortunate turn of fate written in the stars. Western historiography has traditionally taken a developmental approach to understanding the past, whereby the events considered worthy of documentation are recorded and gathered into a cohesive chronology. This philosophy of the past establishes a sequential, and apparently objective narrative that purports to totality, but in fact relegates much of human history to the margins. As Glissant points out, the Eurocentric vision of the past excludes the vast array of other narratives, rendering any history not included in the master discourse as "ahistorical." Glissant calls this history with a capital "H" and calls out Hegel as one its purveyors. As he writes in *Le Discours antillais,*

> Là où se joignent les histoires des peuples, hier réputés sans histoire, finit l'Histoire. (Avec un grand H.) L'Histoire est un fantasme fortement opératoire de l'Occident, contemporain précisément du temps où il était seul à 'faire' l'histoire du monde. Si Hegel a rejeté les peuples africains dans l'anhistorique, les peuples amérindiens dans le pré-historique, pour réserver l'Histoire aux seuls peuples européens, il semble que ce n'est pas parce que les peuples africains ou américains 'sont entrés dans l'Histoire' qu'on peut penser aujourd'hui qu'une telle conception hiérarchisée de la marche à l'Histoire' est caduque.[432]

New World history cannot conform to Western standards of historical documentation, as the possibility for documentation and recall has been erased, negated, and ignored. As a result, non-white people are relegated to a state of "non-history," leaving a vacuum of ancestral and cultural

[432] Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais,* Paris: Gallimard, 1997 [1981], 227.

knowledge. The process of implanting Western values, education, and cultural identity is facilitated by this lack of historical self-understanding. However, Glissant is careful to clarify in an essay appropriately titled, "Querelle avec l'Histoire," that just because Caribbean history does not conform to regular deposition patterns, its past remains legible in the shocks and dislocations that characterize the region's climatic *and* human history.

> Les Antilles sont le lieu d'une histoire faite de ruptures et dont le commencement est un arrachement brutal, la Traite. Notre conscience historique ne pouvait pas 'sédimenter', si on peut ainsi dire, de manière progressive et continue, comme chez les peuples qui ont engendré une philosophie souvent totalitaire de l'histoire, les peuples européens, mais s'agrégait sous les auspices du choc, de la contraction, de la négation douloureuse et de l'explosion. Ce discontinu dans le continu, et l'impossibilité pour la conscience collective d'en faire le tour, caractérisent ce que j'appelle une non-histoire.[433]

This so-called "non-history" meaningfully distinguishes the contours of loss in black Atlantic memory from historical experience in the West. As John Drabinksi writes, "[Disasters], as kinds of conceptual black holes that suffocate words…gather to them something crucial about the event and the historical experience, and then, in the vanishing function and its after-effect (with complex affects), such traumas bequeath to memory and history (as the mourning of the past and the production of the future) the enigma of another beginning".[434] In Edouard Glissant's poetry and philosophy, disaster becomes a constitutive feature of Caribbean geography and history through which the region recovers its sense of the past and identity, beginning to piece together the dispersed traces of a fractured timeline. Rather than a nostalgic return, the chasm of memory and its ensuing chaos is vindicated as both the starting point and modus operandi of New World historical experience. According to Drabinski, "thinking is always generated in relation to place,

[433] Ibid., 224.

[434] See John Dabrinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019, 26.

so in the Caribbean it is always defined by the experiences of race, marginality and empire that suffuse considerations of language, memory world, and history."[435] Place is a "blend between geographical space and historical experience," that produces specific ontologies and modes of thinking. The New World as a specific location and historical entity conditions modes of thinking grounded in a geo-history defined by a continually radiating chaos. In contrast to the developmental regularity of Western philosophy and history, thinking in the Caribbean conforms to a series of unpredictable shocks, traumas, and erasures. In this respect, I suggest that chaos in *La Terre inquiète* produces a place-based corrective to the universalizing linearity of Western historiography, which marginalizes or entirely erases the genealogies and historical experience of New World communities. Indeed, because of colonialism's erasures and massacres, time in this region can *only* be understood as a continually unfolding, *durational disaster.*

Place in the context of the Caribbean (and perhaps especially Glissant's Caribbean) is a constantly shifting and evolving concept. Glissant's creolized understanding of place is not limited to a fixed location or historical point, but embraces trans-historical and trans-geographic relays. In addition to integrating experiences of race, exclusion, and colonialism, Glissant's place-based imaginary draws upon a variety of revolutionary literary practices, philosophies, and aesthetic traditions - many of them developed by European antecedents - to craft a poetics capable of reimagining the lost contours and absent remains of New World history.

**Cultivating absence: The Mallarméan and Glissantian abyss**

In the absence of ruins or traditional methods of reconstructing a historical record, Glissant turns directly to the chasm itself, poetically plumbing its icy silences to "make absence a presence,"

[435] Ibid., 2.

following the ephemeral path traced nearly a century before by Stéphane Mallarmé. Using the methodology of place discussed above, I explore how Glissant's early poetry draws upon Mallarmé's *poetics of thought* to "cultivate presence from absence." In this sense, Glissant transposes familiar Mallarméan notions of shipwreck, abyss, and disaster into the concrete geo-historical framework of the Caribbean as *place.* When bathed in the oceanic memory of the Middle Passage, these paradigmatic symbols of loss and abstraction in Mallarmé's poetry are transformed into portals, granting poetic access to the real abysses and erasures of the African diaspora. In an essay on Mallarmé from the 1950's Glissant writes that, "The oeuvre-absence is thus (yet) the only present, whose books evermore are the revealers in the negative. Mallarmé lived that tragic and magnificent imbroglio, that insupportable condition, absolutely."[436]

Glissant was deeply influenced by Mallarmé's ideas about disaster, chance, traces, and the negative power of poetic language. Mallarmé's importance is particularly clear in Glissant's early work. Glissant devotes a full essay to Mallarmé in *L'Intention poétique*, a collection published in 1969 that gathers many of the essays Glissant had published over the previous decade in various journals while studying in Paris. One of these essays from the 1950's features a kind of working-through of Mallarméan poetics and thought, with a particular focus on Mallarmé's interest in absence. His engagement with Mallarmé in *L'Intention poétique* is fruitful *because* of the differences outlined between Mallarméan abstraction and the inescapable, but very concrete void of Caribbean history. Mallarmé's dream of the "Book" - a hermetically enclosed virtual space of pure linguistic reality entirely sealed off from reference - falls flat in the Caribbean, where the void is not an "icy chamber" that deliberately locks out referential reality, but a historically conditioned nothingness that is inescapably fixed in a material relationship to

[436] Edouard Glissant, *Poetic Intention*. Trans. Nathalie Stephens. New York: Nightboat, 2010, 59.

the tragedies that produced it. For the Antillean subject, the sea is literally the unknowable abyss - not in the metaphorical sense of Mallarmé, but experientially. Nevertheless, as Hugues Azéard advises, "It makes little difference that Mallarmé's nothingness is less historically determined: there is something bridging these two abysses, which are both fundamental and beyond repair."[437] Glissant's objective is to find some way to tangibly access this referential void, and his efforts are nourished by the "failures" disclosed on Mallarmé's own voyage to the edges of signification. As Glissant writes, Mallarmé's "obstinacy is fortified with his awareness of failure: In this awareness lies plenitude."[438] Glissant's essay on Mallarmé in *L'Intention poétique* helps to decipher his poems in *La Terre inquiète,* many of which hew closer to the classical formats of French verse than the more experimental poetry he would publish thereafter. Considering his interest in Mallarmé during the 1950's, it is likely that Glissant was experimenting with the structures and tropes he found in Mallarmé's poetics when he was writing *La Terre inquiète,* in order to stage the kind of encounter with the abyss that had first been initiated in Mallarméan sonnets like "Salut" or "À la nue accablante tu…". Glissant writes that,

> Il n'étonne pas que Mallarmé ait peu à peu confondu la Parole et l'attente de cette Parole, le Livre et la présentation du Livre, ni qu'il ait consacré tant d'années obscures à la mise en scène de l'Oeuvre. L'ouvrage d'un poète paraît (à ce poète) dérisoire, au regard de ce qu'il a rêvé: ce n'est jamais que l'écume de cet océan d'où il veut arracher une cathédrale, une architecture définie. Mallarmé est l'un des rares à admettre ce manque, à cultiver cette absence : *jusqu'à faire de l'absence une présence, et en quelque sorte du défaut de poésie l'objet et la fin de la poésie*.[439]

[437] Hugues Azéard, "Mesure parfaite et réinventée: Edouard Glissant reinvents nineteenth-century French poetry," *Thinking Poetry: Philosophical Approaches to Nineteenth-Century French Poetry.* Joseph Acquisto, ed. New York: Palgrave, 2013, 209.
[438] Édouard Glissant, *L'Intention poétique: Poétique II.* Paris: Gallimard, 1969, 62. My translation.
[439] Ibid., 62.

Mallarmé's ability to "extract from the ocean's foam a cathedral" is more than a spiritual or purely poetic exercise in the context of the black Atlantic. For the Antillean poet, Mallarmé's poetic formula of "cultivating absence to the point of making it a presence" offers a contradictory way of accessing this real historical void by means of an engagement with the linguistic structures that determine its absence to begin with. As Glissant clarifies, his predecessor's abstract formula is insufficient without reference to the real abysses confronted by the black diasporic subject. "[...] aujourd'hui et pour nous le lieu palpite consubstantiel à la formule. Toute science de la relation est incomplète, qui ne se noue pas dans une terre d'où elle s'évase - et s'évade."[440] All that remains of the event gestured at in Mallarmé's poems is the "foam" left in its wake; the event itself is never circumscribed or fully represented by the poem, which can only ever signal the rapidly effervescing traces of its past-ness.

As Graham Robb explains, "the poem is not just the inevitable failure (like any throw of the dice, it cannot alter the conditions of its production), but merely the ghost or representation of a failure, the simulacrum of disaster."[441] Glissant offers a similar exegesis of the Mallarméan *écume*: "Ces écumes que sont ses poèmes (écumes à la surface du projet, mais jaillies et fontaines pour nous), ces traces la grande houle sévère ne pouvaient en effet que simuler pour lui des malfaçons."[442] We might well wonder why Glissant would be interested in a poet who can offer nothing more than the rapidly evaporating spume from some real, past disaster. Highlighting this point, Glissant writes that Mallarmé's "attitude [...] devant son langage importe autant à la littérature que le corpus de ses poèmes."[443] Mallarmé's dedication to the unattainable Absolute set the stage for the constant failure of ever achieving it, the result of which is a

[440] Ibid., 64.
[441] Graham Robb, *Unlocking Mallarmé.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, 201.
[442] Glissant, *L'Intention poétique,* 62.
[443] Ibid., 63-64.

continual meditation on absence through which, paradoxically, that very emptiness is transfigured into a presence. Glissant discovered in Mallarmé's commitment to the Absolute, and thus to his inevitable failure of ever achieving this, a corollary of the Afro-Caribbean relationship to history which can only be lived through absence.

Glissant sees Mallarmé's poems as "charged" with a "negative energy" that is produced through the structure and arrangements of his poems.[444] For many years, the structure that most fascinated Mallarmé was the sonnet, which even in the 1860's-70's, represented the apex of tradition in French versification. As Roger Pearson writes, "the principle and almost exclusive stage which Mallarmé chose for his intimate [poetic] gallas was [...] the sonnet."[445] Writing almost 100 years later and separated by a century of political and poetic crises that had reshaped the landscape of French and Francophone verse, it is more surprising to find that Glissant also reverts to the sonnet form in *La Terre inquiète.* While many poems in this collection are composed in octosyllabic verse, the poem "Matin" stands out as one of the few near-sonnets Glissant wrote.

"Matin"

Vos champs meurent, vos champs sans fin:
De branche en branche vers l'écho
Le rêve à peine est dans la fleur
Déjà le vent court au matin

Un homme pleure à belles dents
Humble des chiens badauds le flairent
Il médite corps en dérive
Dans la clairière de la foule.

Est-il, à l'orée des épaves

[444] Ibid., 63.
[445] Roger Pearson, *Mallarmé and Circumstance: The Translation of Silence.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 114.

Un lieu de laves où l'aube neige
Par ses oiseaux démesurés,

Comme on voit les clartés en mai
Comme apaisement de marées
Ou comme un bouquet devient gué (Glissant, 1994: 83).

While it lacks the required rhyme scheme, "Matin" conforms to the metrical and organizational architecture of a Petrarchan sonnet: it is composed of 14 lines, and like most of Mallarmé's sonnets composed between 1872 and 1898, it is divided into two quatrains followed by two tercets.[446] Glissant's poem begins with what seems to be an address to his country's landscape, the fields that "die" and continue without end. In the context of Caribbean history, this reference situates the poem among the endless fields of the Plantation, with its stifling and tightly controlled regularity. Black Antillean memory is trapped and dying within the carceral architecture of these endless white fields. The image of the island's dead canefields evokes the infinite expanse of the blank page, initiating a meaningful resemblance between historical and poetic constriction. And yet, it is from within the "dying fields" of the octosyllabic verse and the sonnet that Glissant stages a figurative escape.

This escape is facilitated through a conscious disintegration and diffusion of meaning initiated in the poem's second line. In place of historical epistemology that takes the form of a tree, with roots providing its origin, Glissant proposes a poetic lineage that proceeds, "De branche à branche vers l'echo." This replacement of root thinking with the continuous entangling of branches anticipates Glissant's later theorization of the rhizome over the developmental "root"

[446] Pearson notes that Mallarmé transitioned to the Petrarchan sonnet shortly after the publication of Théodore de Banville's *Petit traité de poésie française,* which argues that the proper rhyme scheme for these sonnets is abba ccd ede. In all, Mallarmé published 21 poems using the form prescribed by Banville. Glissant's "Matin" clearly does not adhere to a regular rhyme scheme, and yet the similarities in structure and meter nevertheless invite a comparison to Mallarmé's poems from this period. See Pearson, *Mallarmé and Circumstance*, 147-48.

genealogy of Western historiography.[447] Glissant's conception of creole identity is "no longer imagined as a single tree rooted in the landscape…but as a tangled, proliferating growth, without beginning or end, containing within its myriad recesses infinite possibilities of interactive transformation."[448] Entangled in this burgeoning undergrowth of branching relations is the word *vers*. From a syntactic point of view, *vers* most logically suggests the preposition, "toward."[449] However, the homonym of *vers* could as easily be translated to "verse," producing a polysemic echo that muddles clear relations of meaning and closed semantic circuits linking sign and signified. Commenting on Heidegger's notion of "being-with," Jean-Luc Nancy critiques the notion of an originary, "root" meaning or substance giving rise to a plurality of "singular meanings" that provide meaning through their relationships to one another.

> Language is the exposing of plural singularity. In it, the all of being is exposed as its meaning, which is to say, as the originary sharing according to which a being relates to a being, the circulation of a meaning of the world that has no beginning or end. This is the meaning of the world as being-with, the simultaneity of all presences that are with regard to one another, where no one is for one-self without being for others.[450]

Glissant initiates a transport or relay of meaning horizontally, through channels of relation that, to use his own term, preserve the individual "opacities" of various elements. The multiplication of meaning through the image of the branch is followed by a related realization in the third verse, that "le rêve à peine est dans la fleur." The reference to the flower recalls one of Mallarmé's

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[447] For a detailed exploration of the root metaphor see Christy Wampole, *Rootedness: The Ramifications of a Metaphor.* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016.
[448] Richard Burton, "'KI MOUN NOU YE': The Idea of Difference in Contemporary French West Indian Thought," *New West Indian Guide* 67:1-2 (1993): 16.
[449] In his translation of "Matin," Jeff Humphries makes the logical assumption that "toward" is the intended meaning of *vers* in this phrase. However, the polysemic possibilities of *vers* are foreclosed in the choice of the English "toward" which obviously does not share any of the same connections that are offered by the French original. See Edouard Glissant, *The Collected Poems of Edouard Glissant.* Jeff Humphries, trans. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, 52.
[450] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural.* Trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, 84-85.

more famous remarks that appears in his 1885 essay, *Crise de vers*: "Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets."[451] Highlighting the constant evanescence of presence and absence, Mallarmé's flower statement helps to demystify the relationship between history, language, and absence in Glissant's "Matin." On the one hand, "flower" evokes a range of tactile and sensory experiences that are immediately available to most readers. *Fleur* "relates man directly to his world," it is "a familiar substance within the grasp of anyone."[452] On the other hand, *fleur* is a general term that encompasses the whole category of flowers and consequently fails to evoke any *real* flower. While the word conjures a unique mental representation of a flower, that image does not correspond to any actual flower that exists.

Glissant is attentive to the unceasing ebbing of presence and absence typified in Mallarmé's elocutionary *fleur*, with the first quatrain of "Matin" capturing this alternating rhythm. Each verse is divided by a caesura at the fourth syllable, separating the line into two balanced *hémistiches* ("Le rêve à peine est dans la fleur/Déjà le vent court au matin). This tidal dialectic submerges the poem in a perpetual exchange between water and sand: the *real* past swells to a wave and then breaks apart at the moment of its potential realization, dispersing into representational virtuality. The "dream" of resuscitating the drowned memory of Middle Passage descendants is "à peine dans la fleur." Like Mallarmé's flower, Glissant's poem provides a tangible link that directly relates the reading subject to this historical experience. At the same time, like the waves cresting and falling in the rhythm of the verse, that immediacy dissipates as

[451] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Igitur, Divagations, Un Coup de Dés,* 251.
[452] Virginia A. La Charité, "Mallarmé: Je dis: une fleur !" *Nineteenth-Century French Studies,* 10:1/2 (Fall 1981): 99.

soon as the word, "fleur" is uttered, leaving only a virtual after-image in its wake. In this same way, Glissant's poetry provides fleeting glimpses of contact with a drowned historical memory. But like the "apaisement de marées" in the penultimate verse, historical representation and reality exist in a continual ebb and flow that forecloses immediacy, *except* through the contemplation of absence generated by the semiotic effervescence of the poem itself. The final verse literally "spills out" of the line and onto the white, "endless field" of the page ("Ou comme un bouquet devient gué"). This is the sole enneasyllabic line in the poem, a rhythmic transgression that confirms that the poetic subject has successfully breached the strictures of conventional verse, flooding out onto the white expanse of expressive possibility. Like the poem, the bouquet is an empty vessel that paradoxically derives its meaning from the absent flowers it can never really "contain." Glissant transfigures Mallarmé's conception of "present absence" into the context of Caribbean memory, eschewing the impossible task of archaeological restoration for the contemplation of the historical abyss. As he writes in "La Maison des sables": "Comme enfin la parole appelle votre absence/Vous êtes mer."[453] The abyssal relationship between sea, memory, and language is crystallized in "La Barque ouverte," the essay that frames *La Poétique de la relation* (1990). Here, Glissant describes a progression of three different abysses that comprise the Middle Passage: the first is experienced in the "belly of the boat" (*le ventre de la barque*), followed by the endless expanse of the ocean floor (*l'abîme marin*), and finally, in the "image renversée de tout cela qui a été abandonnée, qui ne se retrouvera pour des générations que dans les savanes bleues du souvenir ou de l'imaginaire, de plus en plus élimés."[454] This third iteration of the abyss pertains to the impossibility of recovery, and the slippage of memory, which grows increasingly threadbare as the years pass. While collective,

[453] Édouard Glissant, *Poèmes complets.* Paris: Gallimard, 1994, 98.
[454] Édouard Glissant *Poétique de la relation.* Paris: Gallimard, 1990, 18-19.

symbolic representations of the Middle Passage are not available through processes of *conscious* memory, Glissant notes that "la mémoire *non sue* de l'abîme a servie de limon pour ces métamorphoses."[455] Unconscious memory, though it goes unnoticed and literally rests under surface awareness and signification, is nevertheless the alluvium (*limon*) that produces the "metamorphoses" of generations of Middle Passage survivors from subjection, dislocation, and unimaginable suffering to emancipation and an "alliance [...] avec la terre imposée, soufferte, rédimée."[456] If seafoam represents the gaseous byproduct of ocean waves, alluvium is its solid counterpart. Often produced through the union of waterways, alluvium refers to silty deposits of mud, sand, and mineral matter that provides the basis for fertile soil. Both seafoam and alluvium are stirred up by an "éternité d'orages dévinée/sur la souffrance."[457] The tempests and disruptions of Caribbean history - while lost to the abyss, and therefore to conscious memory - can be "divined" through the suffering they still exert in the present. In *La Terre inquiète,* suffering is rendered as the seafoam of an unfathomable history, skimmed from the surface of the abyss itself.

**The Restless Earth in *La Terre inquiète* (1954)**

Attention to disaster is a critical feature of Glissant's historico-poetic project. On the one hand, the New World's conception in disaster accounts for its erasure and neglect from conventional historical records. On the other hand, it is precisely this abyssal history that must be somehow accessed and integrated if the region is to grapple with the catastrophes of a similar nature that persist in the postcolonial present. Glissant's intuition is that this history is legible in the region's

[455] Ibid., 19. My emphasis.
[456] Ibid., 19.
[457] Glissant, *Poèmes complets,* 92.

geography, and that his task as a poet is to decipher the language of "stirring rocks" and "tainted storms."[458] As Raphaël Lauro puts it, "Henceforth [Glissant's] goal would be to situate himself in the current of that 'immobile sea of these unexpected things' where History, buried under the *traces* of these 'speaking landscapes,' must reappear on the condition that it be reinvented in a language that takes into account its 'waves' and its 'undercurrents'."[459]

Since the void of Caribbean historical experience was created and is presently maintained through various forms of catastrophe, Glissant's poems engage with the janus-faced nature of disaster, as obliteration *and* beginning. The poems of *La Terre inquiète* are laced with lavas, storms, raging seas, and shipwrecks; all forms of past and present crises from which he attempts to mold an "elemental" and concrete poetic presence from an occulted past. Disasters are essential to understanding Glissant's poetics of rupture and beginning. As E. Anthony Hurley writes, "[The word 'storm'] sets the tone as well as the context of the collection as a whole, which describes a situation…in which meteorological and geographical disturbance reflects disturbance at other levels: economic, social, political, cultural, and even personal."[460] In *La Terre inquiète,* the same disasters responsible for creating this epistemological black hole in Atlantic history become poetic apertures and sites of beginning. In the poem that begins *La Terre inquiète,* "Théâtre," the stage is set for an historical drama enacted through the dynamic features of the geoclimate:

> Qui époumone cet instant ?
> Déjà le ciel est plus pesant que l'eau bifide dans l'aurore,
> La pluie, la pluie chancelle !
> Je vous connais vous êtes rive et au delà mystère.

[458] Edouard Glissant, *Poèmes complets*. Paris: Gallimard, 29.
[459] Raphaël Lauro, "Edouard Glissant's Excursions and Detours," Emily A. Maguire, trans. *Discourse* 36:1 (2014): 6.
[460] E. Anthony Hurley, *Through a Black Veil: Readings in French Caribbean Poetry*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000, 226.

As the "curtains of rain" (*rideaux de la pluie*) are folded back to reveal the opening scene, the poem is already breathless and gasping underneath a heavy sky. The entire collection proceeds from this moment of collective suffocation, an exploration launched at the very limits of knowledge and expression. Reading these poems alongside Glissant's other work from the 1950's, specifically his prose poem travelog, *Soleil de la conscience*, reveals an abiding interest in the experience of exhaustion. Terms like *époumounter* and *épuiser* are scattered throughout, often applied to his rendering of the island landscape. He writes in one such passage, "C'est que je suis là confronté à cette nécessité d'épuiser en une fois le champ d'histoire déserte (dévastée) où notre voix s'est dissipée, et de précipiter la voix dans l'ici et le maintenant, dans l'histoire à faire avec tous."[461] From within this place of constriction, the speaker addresses the source of its weariness, transforming it from an absolute limit on expression into a shoreline: "Je vous connais vous êtes rive et au-delà mystère" (Glissant, 1994: 77). Shorelines, beaches, and banks proliferate in *La Terre inquiète,* and continue to appear as allegories of Caribbean experience in much of Glissant's later poetry and writing. As François Pare writes, "The island has become a prism, or perhaps even a magnifying device, that allows us to see the liminal spaces, the shorelines, for what they are: a language of limits."[462] I would suggest that shorelines express a "language of limits" but also language *at* the limits of what is possible. They demonstrate the enigmatic meanings that exist *beyond* the horizon, or within the abyss. Shorelines represent edge-spaces of union, where two elements converge and are meaningfully reshaped by their encounter. Shoreline thought helps to unveil the relationship between the poem and the work of geo-historical imagination. Enlisting rain as a veil annuls the neat bifurcation between these

[461] Glissant, *L'Intention poétique,* 49.
[462] François Pare, "Edouard Glissant: A Poetics of Shorelines," *Journal of Twentieth Century/Contemporary French Studies* 7:2 (January 2003): 274.

opposites, liquifying their conceptual separation. As the poem ends, Glissant repeats but slightly modifies a verse from the first stanza.

> La pluie a fermé ses rideaux contre la joue des champs…
> *Je vous connais qui êtes rive et au-delà mystère !*
> La pluie
> Ayant grondé ainsi qu'au moment du rideau
> Entame son dialogue avec la terre, d'eau.[463]

The slight adjustment from the subject pronoun *vous* used in this same line that appeared in the poem's first stanza with the relative pronoun *qui* establishes an evolution from identification to recognition. The first instance (*Je vous connais vous êtes rive […]*) suggests a naming, an establishment of the shore's identity as clearly distinguished from that of the speaker. Here, a material curtain separates the shore from water. The subtle replacement of *vous* with *qui* in the last stanza is not so much a *declaration* of difference as an acknowledgement and acceptance, whereby the riverbank is recognized through its composite nature, in a constant mutual exchange between land and water.

**Glissant in Paris: Writing from the Shoreline**

Writing "from the margins" could be used to describe many of the ways in which Glissant found himself categorized, perhaps especially after moving to Paris in the 1950's. Politically, racially, and geographically on the edges, Glissant developed his poetic voice from overlapping experiences of dislocation. As Jesse McCarthy argues,

> Against the tense historical background [of the Cold War], a new generation of young black writers [...] were undertaking geographical journeys outward from positions of social, racial, and cultural marginalization into the heart of the European metropole, and

[463] Glissant, *Poèmes complets,* 77.

> producing new kinds of autobiographical writing that radically overturned traditional assumptions of European literary authority and presumed black parochialism.[464]

Beyond Glissant's biographical journey from the periphery to Paris, the details of which are richly documented in McCarthy's book, he also embarked on a textual journey from the margins to the metropole, using the material experience of "living on the edges" to subvert the increasing binarization of the world fueled by Cold War ideology. While explicit references to the Cold War are absent from his writing in the 1950's, Glissant was politically engaged and concerned with the consequences of this rapidly emerging world order for postcolonial nations. Because Glissant is more widely known for his later, depoliticized works, particularly *Poétique de la relation* (1990) and *Traité du Tout-monde* (2005), the progressive political commitments in his early work are often overlooked. However, he participated in several congresses in the 1950's-60's that reveal leftist commitments, as well as the weight of Cold War tensions that provide the backdrop for these proceedings. Glissant was a signatory to the 1956 Congrès des écrivains et des artistes noirs organized by Alioune Diop, founder of the renowned journal, *Présence africaine*. While Glissant would later describe the event as "le congrès d'une poétique…pas encore le congrès d'une politique," the fact of its being organized at all was perceived as an existential threat both to the fading colonial centers in Europe and to the emerging Cold War powers, the US and the Soviet Union.[465] Alioune Diop's wife, Yandé Christiane Diop, recalled

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[464] Jesse McCarthy, *The Blue Period: Black Writing in the Early Cold War.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 40.

[465] Glissant's statement about the 1956 Congress of Black writers and artists is excerpted from a 2006 interview. By 2005, Glissant was fully immersed in the era of the "Tout-monde," a poetic practice devoted to celebrating global interconnection, Relation, and a notably depoliticized worldview that was more interested in chaos theory, diversity, the swirling circulation of ideas, and the refusal of clear ideological positions. Looking back on the Congress from 2005, Glissant still recognized its failure to articulate clear political goals, in favor of poetic priorities. Quoted in Bob Swaim, "Lumières noires," *YouTube,* 24 January 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-apY7hTJWNU&t=711s

that during the conference, organizers were keenly aware of French and American concerns about the meeting and feared that they would intervene to stop it from happening. “On avait peur … à cette époque que la France et l’Amérique ou d’autres pays interviennent et fassent échouer cette grande rencontre. Donc nous étions tous très très très préoccupés.”[466] Diop’s main interest was in establishing an authentic black aesthetics and cultural expression free from the limits of French literary models, and he was less explicitly focused on the political possibilities of the gathering. However, the 1956 meeting was framed by the ongoing ideological tensions of the Cold War. As Chris Bonner argues, the numerous Pan-African conferences that preceded Diop’s event - convened by black anglophone intellectuals - were more overtly political and often militantly communist to the consternation of American and European governments.[467]

In addition, the pivotal Bandung Conference was held just the year before in Indonesia. It was at this summit that the concept of the “Third World"” was born, an invention that sought to offer an alternative to Cold War political alignment for postcolonial and non-Western nations. Bandung gathered delegates from 29 Asian and African states to strategize what Third World solidarity, regional cooperation, decolonization, and development might look like in the postwar period. The reception of Bandung in the United States and Western Europe was overall negative: anticolonialism became associated with non-alignment and a refusal of Western economic and military dependence.

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[466] Ibid.

[467] Bonner highlights the “fully Marxist-Leninist” vision of the Fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester, England in 1945. He writes that “Whereas Manchester’s final ‘Declaration to the Colonial Powers’ listed a set of specific political demands, the 1956 Congress’s final resolution declares a wish for ‘various Negro cultures’ to be ‘integrated into the general body of World culture’”. See Chris Bonner, “Alioune Diop and the Cultural Politics of Negritude: Reading the Black Writers and Artists, 1956,” *Research in African Literatures,* 50:2 (Summer 2019): 3. See also Chris Bonner, *Cold War Negritude: Form and Alignment in French Caribbean Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023.

In the shadow of Bandung, all subsequent anticolonial congresses - whether they were explicitly centered on politics or not - were seen through the prism of Cold War politics, both by the participants themselves and by Western powers. Glissant's active involvement in these proceedings situates him within contemporary debates not just about the future of African cultures and aesthetics, but about the concrete paths to decolonization and political emancipation beyond the two sides of the Iron Curtain.

In *Caribbean Critique*, Nick Nesbitt surfaces an obscure treatise from 1961 that Glissant co-created with a group of anticolonial collaborators, called *Les Antilles et la Guyane à l'heure de la décolonisation.* As Nesbitt reveals, Glissant played a key role in conceiving the text along with Albert Méville and Daniel Boukman which displays a radical commitment to the albeit short-lived campaign for Antillean autonomy. The text is a written document of conference proceedings organized by the militant fringe group, Front Antillo-Guyanais pour l'Autonomie. As Nesbitt points out, it is "extremely rare, having been banned immediately upon its printing."[468] The Front Antillo-Guyanais aimed to prevent the resurgence of neo-imperial power dynamics that were cohering under the Cold War global economic order: "'The fundamental principle of the Front…is that autonomy must not lead to a disguised perpetuation of colonialism, nor to the establishment of a new system of exploitation in our countries.'"[469] More overtly political than the 1956 Congress, the Front Antillo-Guyannais unveils a political program situated farther to the left than anything championed by Césaire. Indeed, calling for political independence represented an admission of the failures of Césaire's program to achieve decolonization through departmentalization.

[468] Nick Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Theory from Toussaint to Glissant.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013, 136.
[469] Ibid., 137.

Glissant's involvement with these decolonial congresses demonstrates an early commitment to radical politics, a fact that is often neglected in Glissant scholarship because of the depoliticized thrust of his later and more popular work. As McCarthy explains, "The 'late' Glissant' is more familiar to us, but those writings reflect a background marked by political disappointment and defeat, conditions radically different from those swirling around the young Glissant in his student days in the Paris of the 1950s."[470] Just like the "disappointment and defeats" of departmentalization in the 1970s-80s provide the framework for understanding Glissant's increasing interest in culture and aesthetics, the Cold War provides an essential background for understanding Glissant's poetry from the 1950s. I suggest that Glissant's *La Terre inquiète* implicitly engages with contemporary debates surrounding political alignment, Cold War political divisions, and the role of the black, postcolonial artist in reshaping that world order from the margins. Refusing the reductive polarities of continental "bloc" thinking, *La Terre inquiète* articulates an alternative view of the world from the geographical, historical, racial and literary edges that are so often created by catastrophes.

**Poetry from the edges**

Glissant's early poems in collections like *La Terre inquiète* are filled with images of edges, shorelines, shipwrecks, riverbanks and rock cliffs. On the one hand, these represent the literal and textual spaces to which black expression was relegated in a racialized world system. Such liminal spaces are often spawned by disruptions and disasters: volcanoes create islands, earthquakes gouge the earth into rocky cliffs, hurricanes reshape shorelines, and the oblivion of the Middle Passage paradoxically carves out an unshackled poetic expression that exists "beyond

[470] Jesse McCarthy, *The Blue Period,* 44.

the mystery" of margins. In the penultimate poem of *La Terre inquiète,* Glissant notes that the storms and dislocations of Martinican history provide "roads of the country of knowledge": "Mais je remonte les champs et les orages qui sont routes du pays de connaissance" (Glissant, 1994: 104). Disaster is thus transformed in *La Terre inquiète* from absolute destruction and void, into absolute beginning, and a non-atavistic form of historical knowledge. In the suffering that emerges at the edges, veils, and the interstices between land and water, Glissant sees a potential for historical knowledge that might be transmuted through the poem into historical knowledge ("L'ancêtre parle, c'est l'océan, c'est une race qui lavait les continents avec son voile de souffrance"[471]).

*La Terre inquiète* is marked by shifting sands and subjective displacement. As Jeff Humphries writes, "Here at the edge, the shifting boundary of sea and sand, defines the real and imaginary essence of the island as well as the decentered poetic subject."[472] The focus on liminality, and on definitions produced through multiplicity and union rather than singular essence would become an important feature of Glissant's theory of Relation.[473] Although his poetry and early work from the 1950's is understudied when compared with his fiction and later theoretical works, the seeds of the most recognizably Glissantian concepts were planted early on. As Michael Dash notes, "[Glissant's] major preoccupations are apparent from his earliest writing and return obsessively throughout the various phases of his work."[474] Because these images of liminality and relation emerged within the specific historical context of the 1950's, while

[471] Edouard Glissant, *Poèmes complets,* 78.
[472] Jeff Humphries, "Introduction," in Edouard Glissant, *The Collected Poems of Edouard Glissant.* Jeff Humphries, ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, xxvii.
[473] Because of the fragmentary incompleteness inherent to Glissant's concept of Relation, he admits that it is indefinable. Glissant notes that it cannot be defined, but only imagined through attention to the margins, silences and unexpected associations between elements that challenge the stability of an ordered and logical syntax. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation.* Betsy Wing, trans. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, 183.
[474] J. Michael Dash, *Edouard Glissant.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 27.

Glissant was actively engaging with political discussions about postcolonial politics and black aesthetics, it is important to consider how these repeating images of margins and veils may have been shaped - at least to some extent - by the surrounding geopolitical context of the Cold War. In the following section, I will provide a sketch of the political atmosphere in Paris during the early years of the Cold War, and how the rhetoric of this era intersected with and informed not only Glissant's radical politics, but also his interested in shorelines and edges - literally the spaces in between ideological and geographical alignment.

**Liquifying the *rideau de fer***

In a famous speech from 1946, Winston Churchill memorably remarked that an "iron curtain" had been drawn across the Earth, dividing the Western "free world" from the Soviet bloc of the East. This binary division set the stage for ideological battles, nuclear arms races, and proxy conflicts, and military coups that defined the Cold War. The engagement of writers and artists from the Third World has generally been sidelined from discussions of Cold War geopolitics, despite the fact that the concept of the Third World itself was conceived in the global reordering of the postwar period.[475] Chris Bonner seeks to remediate this omission in his book, *Cold War Negritude,* where he argues that the Cold War context shaped the political calculus of Negritude thought leaders. Bonner argues that

[475] As discussed above, the Third World as an idea emerged from the Bandung conference, which was convened in 1955 and was composed of 29 Asian, Middle Eastern, and African nations at a critical moment in the parallel historical narratives of both decolonization and the cold war. The members of the summit were interested in shaping a postcolonial future beyond the power struggles of the axis powers, through collaboration on the basis of common interests, and a shared history of colonial subjugation. As Vijay Prashad explains, "What they meant was simple: that the colonized world had now emerged to claim its space in world affairs, not just as an adjunct of the First or Second Worlds, but as a player in its own right. Furthermore, the Bandung Spirit was a refusal of both economic subordination and cultural suppression – two of the major policies of imperialism. The audacity of Bandung produced its own image," Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World.* New York: New Press, 2007, 45-46.

> French Caribbean authors' understanding of the relationship between literary aesthetics and emancipatory political commitment was transformed by their participation in the global Cold War. Over the course of the 1950s, French Caribbean authors reevaluated the modernist literary aesthetics of Negritude that had developed over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, and sought to produce alternatives that would be adequate to a radically different conjuncture wherein the urgent political problem was the need to take the measure of the bipolar world system of the Cold War, realigning themselves and their writing within it.[476]

Bonner's work makes an important contribution both to the history of Francophone decolonization movements and the literature of liberation, as well as to the new and growing field of Cold War literary studies.[477] This field brings together the "contemporaneous" yet previously distinct fields of "postcolonial studies and Cold War scholarship." The influence of Cold War geopolitics on decolonization movements has been a blind spot in postcolonial studies, which has tended to gloss over histories of radical politics in favor of narratives of cultural regeneration and aesthetics. Even though "the bipolar logic of the global Cold War was imposed in nearly every region of the world [with] the Caribbean [being] no exception,"[478] classical Cold War scholarship has focused attention on the primary conflicts as they unfolded between the United States and the Soviet Union. And yet, this antinomical world order spawned a third frontier: the as-yet non-aligned and rapidly decolonizing "Third World." To more fully grasp their significance in shaping postcolonial liberation movements and political trajectories, it is

[476] Christopher Bonner, *Cold War Negritude*, 2.

[477] Monica Propescu points out that while Cold War historical scholarship has embraced a more global perspective in the past decade, underscoring the contemporaneous articulation of postcolonial politics, Cold War literary studies has lagged behind, tending to "overlook the cultural output of postcolonial nations" in favor of the antinomical conflict between the Soviet Union and the West. Yet, as Popescu argues, "creative and scholarly writing against colonialism developed concomitantly with the Cold War, when aspiring or newly independent nations were foreign alliances with one of the two superpowers, or among themselves, deliberately attempting to rupture the bipolar world configurations, as in the example of the Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement," Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020, 5.

[478] Chris Bonner, *Cold War Negritude,* 3.

important to consider what Monica Popescu calls the "watermark left by the Iron Curtain in fiction, essays, and memoirs penned by intellectuals from the former colonies."[479]

Although this watermark seems directly stamped into the opening salvo of Glissant's *La Terre inquiète,* his work has not been fully considered in the context of Cold War scholarship. Glissant is mentioned by Chris Bonner throughout his new monograph, *Cold War Negritude*, but Bonner focuses more on classical Negritude figures like Alioune Diop, René Despestre, and Aimé Césaire. The exclusion of Glissant may have had to do with his association with a slightly younger generation of black intellectuals, who were only coming of age during the 1950s. Alternatively, his omission might also be explained by McCarthy's suggestion that the poststructuralist theory of "late Glissant" tends to eclipse the radical writing of his youth.[480] Using relatively understudied early texts like *Soleil de la conscience* and the epic long poem, *Les Indes,* McCarthy shows how the work Glissant published during his student days in Paris reflects the formation of a diverse, deracinated, and increasingly radical community of students from the former French empire, who were "ripe for radicalization." McCarthy sees this politico-literary microcosm as a reflection of the global reordering that resulted from decolonization. My own interest builds upon McCarthy's insights, but ultimately, I am interested more in the ways in which emerging Cold War disaster and development paradigms are contested in Glissant's poems from this period.

While he belonged to a younger, post-Negritude generation of Antillean intellectuals, Glissant came of age at a tumultuous moment in Martinique, one that likely spurred an awareness of his tiny island's inescapable connection to the larger world. Glissant lived through the Vichy occupation of Martinique and the resulting American Naval Blockade, an event that,

[479] Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War,* 3.
[480] Jesse McCarthy, *The Blue Period: Black Writing in the Early Cold War*, 42.

as he later recalled, catalyzed an early recognition of the pivotal role played by islands in global struggles between "great" powers. In an interview with Celia Britton from 2009, Glissant recalls this period: "D'ailleurs, il y a eu des combats : des batailles navales entre la flotte américaine et les sous-marins allemands : je me souviens qu'on trouvait sur les plages des débris de ces batailles [...] Il y avait tous ces échos de la guerre, et l'isolement total [de la Martinique]."[481] As a young person, Glissant witnessed the major conflicts of the twentieth-century playing out on his very own Martinican shores. This early initiation may have shaped Glissant's theoretical preoccupations with openness, relation, and archipelagic thought. Glissant spent much of his career thinking about the world from that beach: viewing and interpreting events, aesthetics, and politics from the purview of the Earth's geographical and historical shorelines. He likely brought this "shoreline" perspective to the dominant global conflict of the 1950's as well. As opposed to the totalizing ideological differences that entrenched the iron curtain and exacerbated Cold War antagonisms, the poems of *La Terre inquiète* liquify the substance of binary opposition, replacing the impenetrable iron separating continental "blocs" with the permeable veil of *La Terre inquiète*'s "curtains of rain," a metaphor that focuses attention on the capacity of concrete meteorological phenomena to dissolve rigid polarities.

**The Logic of Cold War disaster discourse**

The prevailing tensions of the early Cold War seeped into all aspects of political and social life in the 1950's, and not just in the US and the Soviet Union. The looming threat of nuclear catastrophe, combined with the recent devastation of the Second World War hung over Western Europe as well. In 1954, France began its own nuclear weapons program called "Force de

[481] Celia Britton & Edouard Glissant, "Souvenirs des années 40 à la Martinique : interview avec Edouard Glissant," *Esprit créateur* 47:1 (Spring 2007): 97.

frappe" to dissuade a potential Soviet invasion from the East.[482] While France was rebuilding national infrastructure and restocking its weapons arsenal, it was also embroiled in bloody and unpopular colonial revolutions in Vietnam and Algeria. Under these circumstances, disaster, decolonization, and political "devolution" into communism, were perceived as interrelated threats. During the 1940s-50s, the discipline today known as *disaster studies* first emerged in the United States. While conceptions of disaster existed long before the entry of "disaster studies" into the halls of universities, the Pentagon, and policy circles, research conducted during this period standardized a set of influential definitions that have determined everything from how and where aid is allocated after a crisis, to risk mitigation strategies, military interventions, insurance policies, and international development priorities.[483] With the advent of disaster studies, two primary characteristics emerged for defining disaster. First, disasters were understood as extreme, unexpected, and singular *events* that disrupted the normal functions of a society or group of people, creating a "departure from the pattern of normal expectations"[484] in which the "essential functions of the society [are] prevented."[485] This event-based paradigm presupposed

[482] While it is unclear if French leaders decided to accumulate nuclear weapons for use themselves (this was interpreted as suicidal by many in de Gaulle's administration), there was nevertheless a strategic, diplomatic rationale for the *force de frappe* policy. The presence of a nuclear arsenal - even if it was never planned to be used - could still serve to catalyze the United States to France's aid if the Soviet Union threatened a nuclear attack. As de Gaulle explained in 1963, "We will have to use our own strategic force with Russia as a target, as soon as France is attacked. The deterrent effect resulting from our displayed resolve may have some effect [...] Furthermore, this action may, eventually, trigger that of the United States from continent to continent and bring them, as a consequence, to use the only really effective means of defense of continental Europe before it is too late for us." Quoted in Benoît Pelopias and Sébastien Philippe, "Unfit for purpose: reassessing the development and deployment of French nuclear weapons (1956-1974)," *Nuclear France: New Questions, New Sources, New Findings.* London: Routledge: 2023, 249.

[483] Ronald Perry, "What is a Disaster? New Answers to Old Questions," *The Handbook of Disaster Research.* Havidán Rodríguez, Enrico Quarantelli & Russell R. Dynes, eds. New York: Springer, 2007, 5.

[484] Lewis M. Killian, "Some accomplishments and some needs in disaster study," *Journal of Social Issues,* 10 (1954): 67.

[485] Charles Fritz, "Disasters," *Contemporary social problems. An Introduction to the sociology of deviant behavior and social disorganization.* R.K. Merton and R.A. Nisbet, eds. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1976, 655.

that disasters were unique, bracketed events that were radically distinct from the normal conditions and expectations of life and precipitated by an *external* cause. The departure from "normative" reality was understood to be inherently negative, creating the potential for social crisis and disorder. While these first definitions of disaster sought to find a rational, standardized way of understanding disasters and the psychology of post-disaster social behavior, they are not purely objective. Indeed, they reflect the historical context from which they emerged, and more explicitly, the policy priorities and ideological interests of the US establishment at the time. As Ronald Perry writes, "The apparent societal and government concern regarding a Soviet threat of an external attack came to be reflected in the notion that disasters were both events and external to a focal society or social group."[486] As later critics like Kenneth Hewitt would point out in the 1970's, viewing disasters as "external" to a given community neglects the historical and social conditions of certain communities that could make them more or less vulnerable to the effects of a natural hazard or other crisis event.[487]

These early definitions also reflect a concern on the part of the US and its allies about the potential of disasters to catalyze social change. While this may have been an indirect motivation, cold war-era policy makers and scientists were certainly aware of the risks of certain forms of disaster in precipitating revolutionary political action. As will be explored later in this chapter,

[486] Ronald Perry, "What is a Disaster?" 7.

[487] Kenneth Hewitt criticizes the conventional disaster studies consensus that disasters are in some sense unpredictable but inevitable natural events whose impact can only be mitigated through technological and predictionary interventions rather than addressing societal and historical root causes that may precipitate them or at least exacerbate their impact. He writes that "In the dominant view…disaster itself is attributed to nature. There is, however, an equally strong conviction that something can be done about disaster by society. But that something is viewed as strictly a matter of public policy backed up by the most advanced geophysical, geotechnical and managerial capability…the structure of the problem is seen to depend upon the ratios between given forces of nature and 'advanced' institutional and technical counterforce." Kenneth Hewitt, "The Idea of Calamity in a Technocratic Age," *Interpretations of Calamity from the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*. Kenneth Hewitt, ed. London: Allen and Unwin, 1983, 6.

American officials pursued agricultural development in places like Mexico and throughout Asia in an effort to dispel the potential for popular unrest.[488] According to John Perkins, "The American intellectual and political climate from 1945 to 1955 was critically shaped by the development of the cold war, a part of which included a theory that purported to link causally overpopulation, resource exhaustion, hunger, political instability, communist insurrection, and danger to vital American interests."[489] These national security concerns about food insecurity shed light on the similar geopolitical calculus that informed how disasters were being conceptualized at the time. US officials were aware that the spread of communism was not limited to its ever-expanding influence in Eastern Europe, and that the tenuous ties that continued to bind these regions to the West were more at risk of fraying in the event of a mass crisis. Frantz Fanon alluded to this fear on the part of Western governments in *Les Damnés de la terre,* where he wrote that "Enfin l'on connaît le mythe des mouvements de libération dirigés de Moscou. Dans l'argumentation paniquarde du régime, cela signifie : 'Si cela continue, les communistes risquent de profiter de ces troubles pour s'infiltrer dans ces régions'."[490] The partitioning of the world into capitalist and communist blocs did not yet include newly formed nations of the decolonizing Global South, and, as Westad explains, there was intense competition between the US and the Soviet Union to secure the political alignment of these new nations.

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[488] In Mexico, the agricultural development initiative was known as The Mexican Agricultural Program (MAP) and was spearheaded by the Rockefeller Foundation with the support of the Roosevelt administration and then-Mexican president Manuel Àvila Camacho. It was aimed at applying the technologies of plant breeding, hybrid seeds, pesticides, modern mechanization and practices to revolutionize Mexican agriculture to increase its efficiency. In Asia, Nick Cullather describes how similar methods were used, with the express purpose of preventing famines and potentially political unrest. He writes that, "[The United States] aimed to restore a putatively lost 'balance' between food supply and population. Experts saw revolutions and social turmoil as political manifestations of mankind's persistent struggle to wrest sustenance from the soil," Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, 7.

[489] John H. Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution: Wheat, Genes, and the Cold War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 119.

[490] Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre.* Paris: La Découverte & Syros, 2002 [1961], 73.

"[The Cold War] was a competition…for the society of the future, and there were only two fully modern versions of it: the market, with all its imperfections and injustices and the plan, which was rational and integrated."[491] Both the United States and the Soviet Union promoted their own version of developmentalist political ideology, which both felt would stamp out the social problems and backwardness of the past. "Like many Americans, the Soviet leaders believed that 'old' societies, based on local identifications, social deference, and justification of the past, were dead." While the high stakes of the conflict seemed to play out between these two major superpowers, the battlefield for their dueling political-economic visions was set in the so-called Third World. Of course, beyond establishing ideological supremacy, America in particular had pressing, material reasons for wanting to ensure political alignment. Access to natural resources previously guaranteed under the totalizing political domination of colonialism had to be replaced by more nuanced forms of economic access.

I provide this rather extensive background of disaster studies in the context of Cold War geopolitics to offer it as a contrast to the role of disaster as it takes shape in *La Terre inquiète.* Glissant's work from the 1950's reflects a continual focus on catastrophe, though not in the sense it was beginning to take on in disaster studies research. Rather than the event-based paradigm championed by US policy makers, catastrophe appears in *La Terre inquiète* as a gathering storm. Catastrophic events - whether human or geoclimatic - don't happen *in* a vacuum but rather *emerge from* the specific historical vacuum that has obliterated cultural memory and gravely disrupted the natural rhythms of the region. In Glissant's hands, disasters are neither singular events, nor are they, to recall Perry's explanation, "external to a focal society or social group."

[491] Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History.* New York: Basic Books, 2017, 329.

Instead, eruptions and storms are expressions of the interrelated (and often inaccessible) human disaster of the Middle Passage, the obliteration of cultural memory, and Plantation slavery.

Glissant's poetry invents a language through which the original disasters of colonization and enslavement can be read in the contemporary disasters of the present. As he writes in the poem, "Incantation" : "Voyez mes plaies et les cicatrices de mes plaies. Voyez mes orages, mes flux. Je meurs encore, vous qui passez."[492] Open wounds and scars are metonymically transmuted into storms and flux in the next phrase, suggesting a coherence between the personal and the meteorological. Scars of past disasters are legible in the ferocity of storms in the present. From the contemporary point of view, it is tempting to see this equivalence as a prescient ecological critique of Plantation slavery and its relationship to modernity, resource extraction and the climate crisis, which of course fuels extreme storms. It would be anachronistic to read climate concerns into his work from the 1950's, a time at which environmental concerns had not yet risen to public consciousness. Indeed, as Eric Prieto argues, Glissant's early work instrumentalizes nature in much the same way as Negritude poetry. "Throughout the early part of his career, Glissant uses the landscape in an allegorical manner very close to that of Césaire…he [reads] the physical attributes of the landscape in purely symbolic terms, subordinating them entirely to the history of its inhabitants: 'Our landscape is all history'."[493] Nevertheless, the claim that Atlantic hurricanes manifest the historical scars of the Middle Passage constitutes an insightful and frequently overlooked facet of the ecological crisis, as it has been conceived by Western environmentalism. The idea that the historical scars of the Middle Passage are visible today in the intensity of hurricanes underscores the entwined stories of environmental and human

[492] Glissant, *Poèmes complets,* 79.
[493] Eric Prieto, "The Uses of Landscape: Ecocriticism and Martincan Cultural Theory," *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture.* Elizabeth DeLoughrey, George Handley and Renée Gosson, eds. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 239.

exploitation that catalyzed industrial modernity. As climate scientists warn, the growing severity and frequency of hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean are a direct result of warmer oceans. Warmer air and water temperatures lead to more evaporation, ultimately producing more water vapor, heat, and energy that creates bigger storms with higher wind speeds and enormous rainfall.[494] These rising global temperatures are the consequence of $CO_2$ emissions, which are created by burning of fossil fuels like oil, coal and natural gas.

Malcom Ferdinand refers to the conceptual distinction between histories of racial and ecological exploitation as the "double fracture." According to Ferdinand, this fracture is evident today in the siloing of racial and environmental concerns into distinct disciplines. This division hinges upon the continued social and economic oppression of people from the Global South, which maintains their exclusion from environmental movements and academic research programs, as well as the widespread belief that poor and non-white people "don't care" about climate change or ecological destruction. According to Ferdinand,

> Les personnes racisées issues de l'immigration coloniale et postcoloniale qui ramassent les ordures des villes, nettoient les places et institutions publiques, conduisent les bus, les trams et les métros, celles qui servent les repas chauds dans les réfectoires universitaires, livrent le courrier, soignent les malades dans les hôpitaux, celles dont l'accueil souriant à l'entrées des établissements est le gage de sécurité, sont généralement absentes des arènes universitaires, gouvernementales et non gouvernementales soucieuses de l'environnement.[495]

The colonial fracture obscures the critical insight that similar extractive practices that were the basis of colonial enrichment were wielded against the natural world *and* subaltern people, with

[494] For more on the mechanics of hurricane formation under the influence of warming oceans, see I-I Lin et. al., "ENSO and Tropical Cyclones," in *El Nino Southern Oscillation in a Changing Climate.* Agus Santoso, Michael J. McPhaden & Wenju Cai, eds., New York: Wiley, 2020, 377-408.
[495] Malcom Ferdinand, *Une Écologie décoloniale,* 15.

the latter's domination being rhetorically upheld through their perceived primitivity and thus closer "proximity" to nature.[496]

**Disaster as Historical Accumulation**

In "Incantation," the arbitrary chaos of Atlantic storms is harnessed and infused with deep historical salience. Glissant's speaker reminds the reader that "Je meurs encore, vous qui passez," emphasizing the wounds of the Middle Passage are *still* locked in a political relation with the tempest. It is paradoxically through accumulating violence and unbounded ecological disorder that a historical connection with the past can be accessed at all. The contemporary Caribbean person continues to suffer not only the psychological scars of slavery and dislocation, but physically as well, as storms gather up the accumulated silts of past and present environmental crimes. Writing in the 1950's, Glissant was probably not thinking about extreme Atlantic hurricanes as the literal scars of the Plantionocene. However, as Ferdinand points out, Afro-Caribbean folklore has long imagined a historical relationship between storms and the Middle Passage. He writes,

> Dans les imaginaires des Noirs-Américains aux Etats-Unis, les tempêtes de l'Atlantique sont couramment associées à la traite négrière transatlantique…Dans cet imaginaire, la tempête n'est plus uniquement une spirale de vents et de trombes d'eau. Elle est chargée de la mémoire des ancêtres perdus dans l'Atlantique qui viennent s'échouer avec rage sur les côtes américaines. Par ce mouvement, la tempête se comporte comme un navire

[496] Slavery and settler colonialism both hinged upon a denial or reduction of the humanity of non-white European populations, such that "the logic of anthropocentrism is…militarized through racial hierarchies that further distance the white settler from blackness and indigeneity as *animalized* sites of tragedy, marginality, poverty, and primitivism. That is, black and indigenous bodies are dehumanized and inscribed (and continually re-inscribed) with animal status… [in order to] refuse humanness to people of color and colonized subjects." Distancing subaltern people from their humanity facilitated their "use" as "natural" resources in the colonial system. See Billy-Ray Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought," *Societies* 5:1 (2015): 5.

> négrier qui rappelle les injustices passées et renforce les inégalités contemporaines : la tempête devient un cyclone colonial.[497]

Today, of course, the nexus of colonial-ecological disaster has taken on new dimensions. While the triangular circuit forged by slave ships has been abandoned, the rage of the storms that continue to trace its path has only increased. In this case, the causal relationship between hurricanes and colonial violence is hardly limited to a folkloric imaginary. As Eric Williams argued in his groundbreaking monograph, *Capitalism and Slavery*, the colonial transfer of wealth and resources from the New World to Europe and North America fueled the Industrial Revolution, and ultimately, capitalist modernity.[498] The accumulation of wealth through natural resource extraction was enabled by the free labor of enslaved Africans, as well as the expropriation and massacres of native communities that lived in these places before the arrival of European colonists. Writing in the 1930's-40's, Williams obviously did not address the ecological consequences of the Industrial Revolution, or its contributions to global warming. However, his argument provides a framework that more recent scholars like Ferdinand have adapted for addressing the intersecting axes of human and ecological exploitation that occasioned this consolidation of wealth at the expense of the health and well-being of the entire planetary biosphere. The accumulation of wealth and natural resources fueled technological "progress," conferring lifestyles of ease and stability to the privileged few in the old centers of empire. In tandem, colonial modernity has generated a parallel accumulation of *chaos* and

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[497] Malcom Ferdinand, *Une écologie décoloniale,* 113-14.

[498] Eric Williams' 1938 dissertation completed at Oxford was published as the landmark book, *Capitalism and Slavery* in 1944. In it, Williams made the revolutionary claim that, contrary to eurocentric historiographies of slavery and abolition in the British Empire, industrial modernity was made possible through the extraordinary injection of wealth and resources provided by Plantation slavery in the New World. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. As Nick Nesbitt writes, Williams' thesis placed the Caribbean for the first time "at the heart of global modernity." See Nick Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery: Capitalism and Revolution in the Caribbean*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022, 13.

uncertainty for the "off-worlded" human and non-human beings at the margins of the imperial world order.

A diachronic image of catastrophe begins to emerge, in which contemporary crises are locked in a cause-and-effect relation with past ruptures, both social and environmental. Speaking about Atlantic memory, John Drabinski writes that this historical experience of disaster is constitutive of the New World. "Indeed the name Americas can only be uttered *after* so many disasters: conquest, genocide, slave trade, and colonialism."[499] While Glissant often turns to "natural" cataclysms to highlight the psychological violence that has resulted, the fractures brought about by colonization extend to the physical environment as well. To Drabinski's list we can add disasters like species extinctions, pollution crises, climatic changes, sea level rise, and more intense and frequent storms, all of which combine to exacerbate human suffering and vulnerability. In the poem, "Falaise secrète," Glissant writes,

> Labour, ô pays, pur visage
> D'un visage impur et blessé.
> Le vent dans l'oiseau fait liesse
> L'orage vous a délaissée
> Ici commence la cassure.
> Et cueillez à l'orgue l'orage
> En vous il mue et n'a de cesse
> Que ne soit plus nuit ce murmure.[500]

As the storm subsides, a literal fracture (*cassure*) starts, which, like a break in a pane of glass, radiates out in multiple and unpredictable directions. Unlike conventional understandings of disaster derived from the event-based paradigm, the disaster's impacts broaden and accumulate

[499] John Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019, 23.
[500] Glissant, *Poèmes complets,* 88.

over time. The next stanza includes a rich polysemic reference to the acoustic deposition of transatlantic memory ("Et cueillez à l'orgue l'orage"). The raging winds of the historical tempest are gathered by an organ - an instrument that generates music by organizing the movement of air through pipes, gathering and dispersing it to produce sound. Glissant's organ at once concentrates and then diffuses the material of memory. Instead of a physical site, historical memory in Glissant's poem is conceived as a sound that continues echoing across oceans and generations.

The French word *orgue* also indicates a particular geologic formation of volcanic basalt. In volcanic regions like the Caribbean, columnar basalt forms after a lava flow rapidly cools, which creates extensive fracturing of the rock, resulting in formations of thin, vertical columns that resemble the pipes of an organ.[501] This underlying geological reference locates the "sound" as emanating specifically from the Caribbean, the result of explosive dislocation and rupture. The storm embedded within the historical experience of Plantation slavery has no end: "En vous il mue et n'a de cesse/Que ne soit plus nuit ce murmure."[502] The humanitarian disaster of slavery and the ecological catastrophes of colonialism are locked in an indissoluble historical relation whose effects, like a crack in the crystalline bedrock underlying Caribbean time and space, compound upon each other, radiating out in unpredictable directions.

One of these improbable - or at least unpredictable - consequences of the historical disasters Glissant references can be concretely witnessed by tracing the connections between two

[501] Writing about hexagonal fracture systems, James W. Sears explains that, "Hexagonal joint networks occur in basalt flow interiors due to isotropic layer-parallel thermal stress. A joining face results from many discrete fracture events as the basalt cools and shrinks and layer-parallel tensions accumulate until it exceeds the tensile strength of the crystallized basalt layer…" See James W. Sears, "Lithospheric control of Gondwana breakup: Implications of a trans-Gondwana icosahedral fracture system," *Plates, Plumes, and Planetary Processes,* Donna M. Jurdy and Gillian R. Foulger, eds. Boulder, CO: The Geological Society of America, 2007, 595.
[502] Glissant, *Poèmes complets,* 88.

of the Antilles' worst disasters in the 20th century. After a powerful hurricane struck Guadeloupe in 1928, the sugar economy - which had dominated agricultural production in the Caribbean for the past three centuries - was all-but destroyed, triggering a shift to banana cultivation that would shape the economic, ecological, and public health landscape in the French Antilles for centuries to come.[503] Banana cultivation introduced new pests and new forms of pest management, including the carcinogenic insecticide *chlordecone,* a member of the DDT family of chemicals. While the use of chlordecone was finally stopped in the early 1990's, the waterways, soil, and plant and animal life on Martinique and Guadeloupe have been irreparably contaminated.[504] This crisis has forced the islands into a relationship of even deeper dependency on the metropole for everything from bottled water to food imports to healthcare.

The etiology of the chlordecone crisis begins with the 1928 hurricane, because it was the destruction in the aftermath of this storm that precipitated the switch from an Antillean agricultural sector that had for centuries relied on exports like sugar, coffee, and cocoa, to bananas as the primary cash crop. The relationship between these two disaster events encapsulates the notion of *durational disaster* that Glissant explores in his early poetry, in which discrete events are linked over disparate timescales and geographies. I explore the interpenetrating timelines of these two events not only to provide a concrete example of durational disaster, but to demonstrate the inadequacy of the developmental approach to disaster

[503] Christopher Church, "The 1928 Hurricane in Florida and the Wider Caribbean," *Environmental Disaster in the Gulf South: Two Centuries of Catastrophe, Risk, and Resilience.* Ted Steinberg, ed. Louisiana State University Press, 2018, 80-102.

[504] Malcom Ferdinand writes that "L'utilisation du CLD de 1972-1993 dans les bananeraies antillaises entraînera une contamination des terres agricoles pour une durée allant de soixante ans à plusieurs siècles. Un sixième de la production mondiale d'une molécule cancérigène - et qui est un perturbateur endocrinien - fut répandu sur 20 000 hectares de terres agricoles de deux petites îles densément peuplées. Cette contamination affecte l'ensemble des écosystèmes de la Martinique et de la Guadeloupe. Le CLD est retrouvé dans les sols, dans les aquifères, dans les mangroves et les eaux côtières, dans certaines denrées agricoles, animales, ainsi que dans des produits de la pêche," Malcom Ferdinand, *Écologie décoloniale,* 184-85.

response that was the hallmark of disaster discourse when it emerged in the 1940's. As we will see, the introduction of chemical pesticides brought about new forms of suffering and a state of perpetual crisis that have no foreseeable conclusion, and that binds Antilleans even more forcefully to France.

**Sweet intoxicants: Sugar, bananas, and the chlordecone contamination crisis**

The Category 4 hurricane that swept across the Caribbean in 1928 had rippling effects that continue to hang over the French Antilles today. While Martinique was not as directly hit by the ~~storm~~storm as was Guadeloupe, both islands suffered immensely. The hurricane's wind speeds peaked over Guadeloupe, reaching over 135 mph.[505] The hurricane destroyed almost every building on Guadeloupe, leaving thousands of people homeless, jobless, injured, and destitute. As many as 1200 people are estimated to have died during the hurricane and its aftermath.[506] The sugar cane fields, factories, transport infrastructure, and plantations were decimated, as was the capital city of Basse-Pointe. Surprisingly, one emerging cash crop managed to weather the storm. The nascent banana industry was damaged, but because banana plants are herbaceous, they bounced back more quickly than sugar cane and other crops like cocoa and coffee.[507]

While Guadeloupe suffered a direct hit from the storm, every sugar producing island in the region was impacted, including Martinique. As Chris Church explains,

[505] David Longshore, *Encyclopedia of Hurricanes, Typhoons, and Cyclones.* New York: Facts on File Science Library: 2010, 367.
[506] Christopher Church, "The 1928 Hurricane in Florida and the Wider Caribbean," 91.
[507] Adrien Le Page described the consequences of the 1928 hurricane on the Antilles' agriculture, noting that the banana plant's resilience was a key factor. "Vint le cyclone du 12 septembre 1928. Toutes les cultures furent plus ou moins atteintes; mais alors que les arbres furent mutilés, brisés, souvent même arrachés, les plantes herbacées, telles que le bananier, furent simplement couchées et sectionnées au sommet. Un mois après le cyclone, presque tous les bananiers reprenaient leur végétation," Adrien Le Page, *La Guadeloupe.* Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes, et coloniales, 1931, 18.

> While the hurricane had varied consequences across the Greater Caribbean - from failed land speculation and economic gambles in South Florida to mounting military intervention and economic interest in the West Indian archipelago, to off-shore banking, to the short-term collapse of the sugarcane industry - the hurricane can be related to economic development and agricultural practices in the region, interacting with a global sugar economy up for grabs following the devastation of WWI and the rampant growth of the 1920's.[508]

Church traces how the storm reshaped the entire economies and agricultural industries of most islands in the Caribbean and finalized the transition from sugar to banana production. Antillean sugar production had been progressively undermined for the past few decades, initially by beet sugar in Europe, and then by the United States' investment in the former Spanish sugar colonies of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba beginning in the early 1900's. At the time of the 1928 hurricane, the US had also begun draining Florida's Everglades with the intention of establishing a domestic sugar industry. While US-owned sugar plantations also suffered serious setbacks from the storm, especially in Puerto Rico and Florida, its economic dominance and broader investments throughout the region insulated its burgeoning sugar empire from complete ruin. As Church writes, "Despite the devastation [to US sugar plantations], the storm did little to slow Florida's sugar development, much to the detriment of the Caribbean outside of US control, namely the French Antilles, which found it increasingly difficult to compete with American-dominated sugar interests."[509] The 1928 storm caused such extreme crop and property damage in Guadeloupe and Martinique that it represented the nail in the coffin of the centuries-old French Antillean sugar industry, cementing the transition to banana cultivation.

Despite being more resilient to tropical storms, bananas were hardly a panacea for the Antillean economy. The transition from sugar, cocoa, and coffee to banana cultivation

[508] Christopher Church, "The 1928 Hurricane in Florida and the Wider Caribbean," 81.
[509] Ibid., 97.

precipitated new problems in the form of a new pest: the banana weevil. This insect is distributed throughout the tropics and can cause extensive damage to banana crops. Banana weevils bore into the rhizomes of the plants to lay eggs. When the larvae hatch, they bore their way out, weakening the stalks and making the plants more vulnerable to wind damage and collapse. Without treatment, banana weevil damage gets worse over time and can eventually damage 50% of the crop yield, reducing the lifespan of plants from around 30 years to as little as five.[510]

In the postwar period, planters began using chemical pesticides on banana plants to eradicate their population. On Antillean banana plantations, the insecticide chlordecone (CLD) was used extensively from 1973-1993 in an effort to control the pest.[511] Though banned in the US and much of Europe in the 1970's due to its recognized toxicity, CLD was still widely used in Martinique and Guadeloupe until the 1990's.[512] CLD is a pesticide from the same family as DDT, making it highly toxic to the entire ecosystem, and not just the target pest. It is a carcinogen, an endocrine disruptor,[513] and one ~~a~~ that has been linked to elevated rates of prostate

[510] Clifford Scott Gold & William Tinzaara, "Banana Weevil, *Cosmopolites sordidus* (Germar)," *Encyclopedia of Entomology*. John L. Capinera, ed. New York: Springer, 2008, 369.
[511] Malcom Ferdinand, "Bridging the Divide to Face the Plantationocene: The Chlordecone Contamination and the 2009 Social Events in Martinique and Guadeloupe," *The Struggle of Non-Sovereign Caribbean Territories: Neoliberalism Since the French Antillean Uprisings of 2009.* H. Adlai Murdoch, ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019, 55.
[512] The toxicity of chlordecone was first discovered in a plant where it was manufactured outside of Richmond, Virginia. Dozens of workers became sick and the James River was so polluted that fishing, swimming and other recreational activities were banned for decades after. This contamination crisis received a lot of public attention in the US, which may explain why it was quickly taken off of the market. In France however - partly at the behest of planters in the Antilles and winegrowers in France - the pesticide remained a popular method of pest control. Instead of being banned, the patent was purchased by a French agro-business company and it was re-released onto the market under a new name, "Curlone," in 1981. See Giada Santana and Juli Simond, "France Faces Human Rights Case Over Mass Pesticide Poisoning: The Paradise France Poisoned," *Atmos*. March 25, 2024. https://atmos.earth/the-antilles-paradise-france-poisoned-chlordecone-pesticide/
[513] Pierre Benoît et al., "Environmental and human health issues related to long-term contamination by chlordecone in the French Caribbean," *Environmental Science and Pollution Research,* 27 (June 2020): 40949.

cancers among Antillean men,[514] as well as cognitive delays in children,[515] and premature births.[516] Because of its long half-life, CLD can remain in ecosystems for up to several centuries.[517] As a result, almost all agricultural production in the French Antilles - everything from large-scale farming to the smallest family gardens - has ground to a halt. Fishing is banned in most areas, and people are advised to drink only bottled water.

The widespread use of synthetic pesticides is a postwar development that should be understood in light of development discourse and disaster studies. The most notorious chemical villain of this era, DDT, was a close cousin of the chemical agents used in biological warfare. As Rachel Carson writes in *Silent Spring,* "[the synthetic insecticide industry] is a child of the Second World War. While developing agents of chemical warfare, some of the chemicals created in the laboratory were found to be lethal to insects. The discovery did not come by chance: insects were widely used to test chemicals as agents of death for man."[518] Organochlorines like DDT and chlordecone initially showed great promise in controlling insects like lice and mosquitoes that spread disease among soldiers. As David Kinkela explains, "...As the United States entered the war, which expanded across continents and into the tropics, where the threat of insect-borne diseases increased, military health officials on all sides of the conflict demanded new methods to control disease, and DDT was positioned to play an important role in the war

[514] Luc Multingner et al., "Chlordecone Exposure and Risk of Prostate Cancer," *Journal of Clinical Oncology* 28: 1 (2010): 3457-62; E. Emeville et al., "Associations of plasma concentrations of dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene and polychlorinated biphenyls with prostate cancer: a case-control study in Guadeloupe (French West Indies)," *Environ Health Perspect* 123:4 (2015): 317-323.
[515] Olivia Boucher et al., "Exposure to an organochlorine pesticide (chlordecone) and the development of 18-month-old infants," *NeuroToxicology* 35 (March 2013): 162-168.
[516] Philippe Kadhel et al., "Chlordecone Exposure, Length of Gestation, and Risk of Preterm Birth," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 179:5 (March 2014): 536-544.
[517] Y.-M. Cabidoche et al., "Long-term pollution by chlordecone of tropical volcanic soils in the French West Indies: A simple leaching model accounts for current residue," *Environmental Pollution* 157: 5 (May 2009): 1697.
[518] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring.* New York: Mariner, 2002, 15.

effort."[519] While it initially seemed harmless to humans and animals, no long-term studies into its chronic effects in either human or environmental health were conducted before it began being used to control insect populations, both for public health purposes and in agriculture.[520] With the conclusion of the war, the use of insecticides for agriculture was more widely adopted, and not just domestically. The use of pesticides, insecticides, and fungicides was promoted by the United States throughout the developing world as a means of modernizing agriculture and stabilizing the political situations in impoverished areas that it felt were susceptible to the influence of communism. As Nick Cullather documents in the context of southeast Asia,

> Three challenges to the American vision of world order came together in the Asian heartland: communist expansionism, nationalist uprisings and what social scientists called the revolution of rising expectations, a collective aspiration for land, food, and change fed by a growing consciousness of the outer world…The Central Intelligence Agency warned alternately that the remnants of free Asia would join in a continent-wide communist monolith or disintegrate into unstable and vulnerable fragments.[521]

Similar concerns about the link between food insecurity and political instability motivated the Rockefeller Foundation's "green revolution" in Mexico.[522] As Tore Olsson writes, "[the green revolution] was a humanitarian, altruistic effort distinct from Soviet 'red' and Iranian 'white' revolutions, devoid of violence and politics. Yet by the time of its naming, the green revolution

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[519] David Kenkela, *DDT and the American Century: Global Health, Environmental Politics, and the Pesticide that Changed the World.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011, 15.

[520] An article published 5 years after the first commercial production of DDT in 1945 concludes that, "The general consensus…, based on experiments with animals and observations on man, is that D.D.T used with discretion does not constitute a hazard to human health," in V. B. Wigglesworth, "A Case of D.D.T. Poisoning in Man," *British Medical Journal* 1: 4397 (April 14, 1945): 517.

[521] Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia,* 2.

[522] Kinkela expands on this, situating the role played by chemical pesticides in the transformation of Mexican agriculture. "Hybrid seeds, tractors, fertilizers, and chemical pesticides provided the means to awaken a dormant agricultural landscape…The use of these new technologies marked the maturation of a modern nation-state. Changes in Mexican leadership and state policy – reflecting the new belief in science and technology as arbiters of the modern world, the narrowing of entomological knowledge around synthetic chemicals, the expansion of the postwar chemical industry, and, finally, the foreign policy aspirations of the U.S. government – all contributed to the radical transformation of Mexico's rural landscape," David Kenkela, *DDT and the American Century: Global Health, Environmental Politics, and the Pesticide that Changed the World,* 64.

had become a key US weapon in the Cold War, promising to neutralize peasant radicalism and Communist sympathies by filling empty bellies….Of the many Western-led campaigns of 'development' that defined the latter half of the twentieth century, the green revolution likely had the greatest impact on the landscape and population of our planet."[523] David Kinkela also sees use of DDT as an integral tool in the green revolution as inherent to America's program of international development under the auspices of Cold War diplomacy, writing that "Although DDT was just part of a larger agricultural revolution, exploring the chemical's role in the early formation of the 'development project' helps us better understand how DDT became seen as a vital component of U.S. foreign policy in the postwar years.[524]

Of course, the aim of agriculture in the French Antilles was never self-sufficiency, even after they became French DOM's in 1946. Once integrated fully into the French national fold, the US played much less of a role in terms of foreign policy than it had at various points before and during the Second World War. The Antillean economies - though ostensibly liberated from their colonial dependencies on the metropole - still had agricultural industries that hewed closer to the plantation model. Sydney Mintz defines a plantation economy as "a capitalist type of agricultural organization in which a considerable number of unfree laborers were employed under the unified direction and control in the production of a staple crop." While workers were certainly no longer "unfree," the dominion of a staple crop and the social and economic structures that monoculture spawned remained in place. When the toxicity of chlordecone emerged in 1972 and was subsequently banned in the US and much of Europe, it was banana planters - many of them the descendants of powerful *béké* families - that lobbied the French

[523] Tore Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the US and Mexican Countryside*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2017, 99.
[524] Ibid., 63-64.

Ministry of Agriculture to maintain their access to the pesticide.[525] If chemicals like DDT were exported to the developing world with the aim of promoting progress, stability, and free markets, in Martinique and Guadeloupe, the promotion and continuation of CDT instead underscores just how little things had changed since departmentalization, and the tenacity of the imperial economic bonds between the metropole and its new overseas departments. While the planter class in Martinique and Guadeloupe had exchanged sugar for bananas - it maintained its historical influence over Antillean agriculture and the economy. If DDT was promoted in early US-backed development campaigns as a technology in the war against rural poverty, food insecurity, and ultimately, political unrest, the role of CDT use on Antillean banana plantations only entrenched the existing political-economic structure that had existed since colonial times, deepening the lines of dependency between the Antilles and France. The goal in using new technologies like CDT was to safeguard the banana monoculture and had nothing to do with providing agricultural autonomy to the islands. The banana industry was the antithesis of Aimé Césaire's dream of post-departmentalization in Martinique, where he hoped development would occur organically to enable self-sufficiency. In his Lettre à Maurice Thorez, he wrote that "nous voulons que nos sociétés s'élèvent à un degré supérieur de développement, mais d'elles mêmes, par croissance interne, par nécessité intérieure, par progrès organize sans que rien d'extérieur vienne gauchir cette croissance, ou l'altérer ou la compromettre."[526] Instead, Antillean planters retained their traditional economic and political clout, placing all their eggs into the basket of plantation monoculture. Because of steep competition from the vast array of other banana

[525] In *Tropiques Toxiques,* Jessica Oublié provides a detailed reconstruction of the ways in which lobbying efforts by banana grower organizations like SIBACOM succeeded in convincing the French government to allow them to rename and distribute the now-defunct Kepone (the brand name of CDT in the US) under the new name, Curlone. Jessica Oublié, Nicola Gobbi, Katrine Avraam, and Vinciane Lebrun, *Tropiques Toxiques: le scandale du chlordécone.* Paris: Les Escales, 2020, 132-142.
[526] Aimé Césaire, "Lettre à Maurice Thorez," *Présence africaine* (1956): 16.

producing areas in the region, the banana industry had to be heavily subsidized by the French government to survive. The extensive use of CDT over a 20-year period only reinforced a near-total dependence on France. Antilleans must now import nearly everything from France, as the contamination has transformed even the most modest vegetable garden or fishing trip into a public health hazard.[527] While the histories and geopolitical calculations that framed the use of DDT in the developing world and CDT in the French Antilles are distinct, it is still worth tracing the genealogy of these chemicals and the eco-social disasters they have spawned. In their own way, each chemical demonstrates the way in which a tool of development had the opposite effect: these pesticides - used so liberally in marginalized, "backward" regions of the world for the purpose of economic transformation - have obstructed progress and reinforced relationships of dependency. Tracing the chemical lineage beginning with DDT to appreciate the ways in which chemical pest control was enlisted as a tool in Cold War development projects.

The connections between these various crises - beginning with the 1928 hurricane that sealed the Antilles' transition to banana cultivation and the ensuing contamination crisis it has produced - illustrate the spill-over effects of disasters and their resistance to being neatly held within a specific period or geographic space. The CDT crisis in the French Antilles manifests the inadequacy of Cold War-era definitions of disaster, which were premised upon an understanding of disasters as acute and regionally specific events that disrupted the course of history's forward march. Indeed, it was a solution conceived within the developmental ideology of the Cold War - a solution aimed at averting agricultural crisis - that precipitated another disaster of unmitigated proportions.

[527] Jessica Oublié et al., *Tropiques toxiques*, 64-70.

**Unfolding disaster in *La Terre inquiète***

These real, interwoven crises span twentieth and twenty-first century history in the French Antilles, and they collapse the neat boundaries between so-called "natural" disaster events and anthropogenic crises. Similarly, Glissant's conceptualization of durational disaster as in *La Terre inquiète* links disasters across time and space in an effort to manifest the palpable presence of the original catastrophes of the New World: the Middle Passage and enslavement. By creating transhistorical links between disasters across time, place, and cause, Glissant's early poetry encourages us to move away from conventional definitions birthed in the Cold War, which not only saw disasters as discrete interruptions produced by an unpredictable and indifferent nature but promoted development as a solution for preventing future disasters and securing free markets globally. In this chapter, I have put forward the idea of *durational disaster* as a concept that helps to elucidate Glissant's early poetic attempts to contend the occluded history of black Antilleans since colonization. I understand *durational disaster* as the idea that upheaval and disruption in the New World in some sense swirls around the black hole at the epicenter of Caribbean history: the Middle Passage, an event that lacks historical documentation and mostly belies recovery. To forge a relationship with this traumatic past and create an alternative historiography that is not based in linear progress or retrieval, Glissant turns to Mallarmé, who provides for him a model of how to make an absent present. Mallarmé's intuitions about the nature of the abyss inform Glissant's conceptualization of a Caribbean timeline that is in fact charted through the shocks, dislocations, and occlusions of a disjointed poetic temporality. Like many Afro-Caribbean writers and artists, I suggest that Glissant turns to the convulsive geography of the island itself, which provides a concrete model of the region's convulsive rhythms. I then place Glissant within his own historical moment as a young, black,

radical doctoral student in Paris during the 1950's. I argue that Glissant's experiments with creating a divergent poetic chronology for the New World should be seen within the context of an emerging Cold War ethos of development. I submit that his project in *La Terre inquiète* is entangled within the Cold War ideological struggles that would birth the developmentalist vision of the world that produced both modern disaster research, and a series of new crises throughout the postcolonial Global South that have entrenched existing hierarchies of power, poverty, suffering and dependence. To provide a concrete example of this durational disaster Glissant traces in *La Terre inquiète,* I turn to the compounding disasters of the 1928 hurricane and the chlordecone contamination crisis in Guadeloupe and Martinique.

## Conclusion

Situated on a cliff in the popular beach town of Le Diamant, a group of solemn, concrete statues gaze out across the ocean.[528] This memorial - known as Cap 110 - was commissioned in 1998 to commemorate the Slave Trade and its victims in Martinique. The sculptor, Laurent Valère, created 15 busts made of reinforced concrete, assembled in a triangle to recall the route of the slave trade - the triangular circuit made by ships between Europe, Africa, and the New World from the 16th-19th century. The figures are arranged at an orientation of 110 degrees east, staring out over the Atlantic in the direction of Guinea, the point of departure for many slave ships bound for Martinique. The statues commemorate all victims of the slave trade, including those that survived the Middle Passage and the ones who perished along the way.[529]

However, the placement of Cap 110 also denotes a particular catastrophe in the island's colonial past, which highlights the continuous entanglement of ecological and historical disaster in the Caribbean. On the evening of April 8, 1830, a vessel illegally transporting nearly 300 slaves[530] was sunk by a tropical storm when it was blown onto the shallow rocks that surround Anse Caffard, where the Cap 110 memorial now stands. Because the ship was transporting slaves illegally, very little is known about the vessel or its trajectory. Extensive damage prevented even its name from being recovered. Commenting on this event, Edouard Glissant said that, "On n'a jamais pu identifier cet équipage, qui a péri dans le naufrage avec un nombre important d'esclaves enfermés dans les cales."[531] In all, 86 Africans survived the ordeal, and these

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[528] Le Diamant is of special importance in Glissant's oeuvre. It is the site and source of his famous essay, "La place noire" which appears in *La Poétique de la Relation.*

[529] Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "The Debris of Caribbean History," *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking: Toward New Comparative Methodologies and Disciplinary Formations.* Michelle Stephens and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, eds. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020, 264-65.

[530] In the French empire, the slave trade was abolished in 1817, meaning that no new slaves from Africa were supposed to be arriving in its colonies. The institution of slavery itself persisted until 1848.

[531] This quote comes from Manthia Diawara's 2009 documentary on Edouard Glissant. See Manthia Diawara, *Edouard Glissant: un monde en relation.* Directed by Manthia Diawara (2009; Paris: K'a Yéléma Productions), film.

survivors were eventually transported to Fort-de-France, though nothing is known about what happened to them after - whether they remained in Martinique or were given the choice to go back to their homes.[532] While the crew members who drowned were buried in a local cemetery, no such effort was made for the Africans who died - probably close to 200 of them. Though only six bodies were recovered from the wreck, divers recently discovered an array of rusted shackles and chains, the primary artifacts that marine archaeologists use to identify slave vessels.[533] In spite of this frustrating lack of information, the fact that any physical remains were recovered is significant. According to the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, at least 565 vessels were sunk by hurricanes or other natural hazards while carrying Africans to the New World.[534] The vast majority of these remain lost to the ocean depths with little to no hope of being located, let alone resurrected.

If hurricanes have always been seasonal occurrences in the Atlantic, a "natural" feature of the Caribbean's tropical climate, the constant traffic of slave ships that encountered them was not. Since the first ships traced the triangular circuit between the Gold Coast, the New World, and Europe, the capitalist world system and hurricanes have been locked in a political relation. Malcom Ferdinand suggests that "to grasp the political meaning of these storms one has to go inside the ship" - to study the way in which meaning was generated from the destructive

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[532] Jane Webster, "Slave Ships and Maritime Archaeology: An Overview," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 12:2 (March 2008): 12-13. The *Adelaïde* is one of only a few slave shipwrecks that have been excavated in the West Indies, along with the more famous wreck of the English slaver, the *Henrietta Marie,* and the Danish vessel, *Fredensborg.* In the 1982, the French government launched a program devoted to maritime archaeology called the Groupe de Recherche en archéologie naval (GRAN) which developed a project aimed at resurfacing the history of the African slave trade through underwater excavations. This program was called the "Sunken memory of the slave trade" and was a collaboration between GRAN and UNESCO. For more on GRAN's projects, and their work in the French Antilles see http://archeonavale.org/martinique/

[533] Ibid.

[534] For a complete summary of search results see David Eltis et al., 'A Brief Overview of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,' *Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#results (Accessed 10 September 2023).

convergence of these two embroiled phenomena: the storm and the slave trade. The memorial at Le Diamant is significant in several ways. Built on the site of the 1830 shipwreck, about which some information is known, it marks the place and time of a singular disaster. However, the memorial uses this event to symbolically include all victims of the slave trade in Martinique who died under similar circumstances. The memorial thus concretizes the history of a specific event and its victims, while gesturing at an abyss that can never be fully circumscribed. The symbolic province of Cap 110 - like Glissant's postcolonial poetry - is infinite and thus falls short of ever being able to fully represent its referent(s). Glissant's poetry consistently embodies this tension between the desire to materialize past traumas and disasters, and the impossibility of ever being able to do so.

Nevertheless, the shipwreck of 1830 is emblematic of how disaster operates in the (post)colonial Caribbean: a slave ship destroyed by a hurricane underlines the enmeshment of human and environmental catastrophe. This relationship is magnified today as we collectively face the consequences of climate change produced by a capitalist world system. While hurricanes are an intrinsic feature of the Caribbean climate, their encounters with slave ships were anything but "natural". Hurricanes and the transatlantic slave trade have always been locked in a political relation. As disaster studies research emphasizes, a natural hazard only becomes a natural disaster when it strikes a human community that is unable to withstand its impact.[535] Put simply, if hurricanes have always been seasonal events in the Atlantic, the constant traffic of slave ships that encountered them was not. Malcom Ferdinand suggests that "pour saisir le sens politique des tempêtes, il est nécessaire d'entrer à l'intérieur du navire"[536] - to study the way in which meaning

[535] Anthony Carrigan, "Towards a Postcolonial Disaster Studies," *Global Ecologies and Environmental Humanities.* Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Anthony Carrigan, & Jill Didur, eds. New York: Routledge, 2015, 117-139.
[536] Malcom Ferdinand, *Une écologie décoloniale: Penser depuis le monde caraïbe*. Paris: Seuil, 2019, 114.

was generated from the destructive convergence of these two embroiled phenomena: the storm and the slave trade.

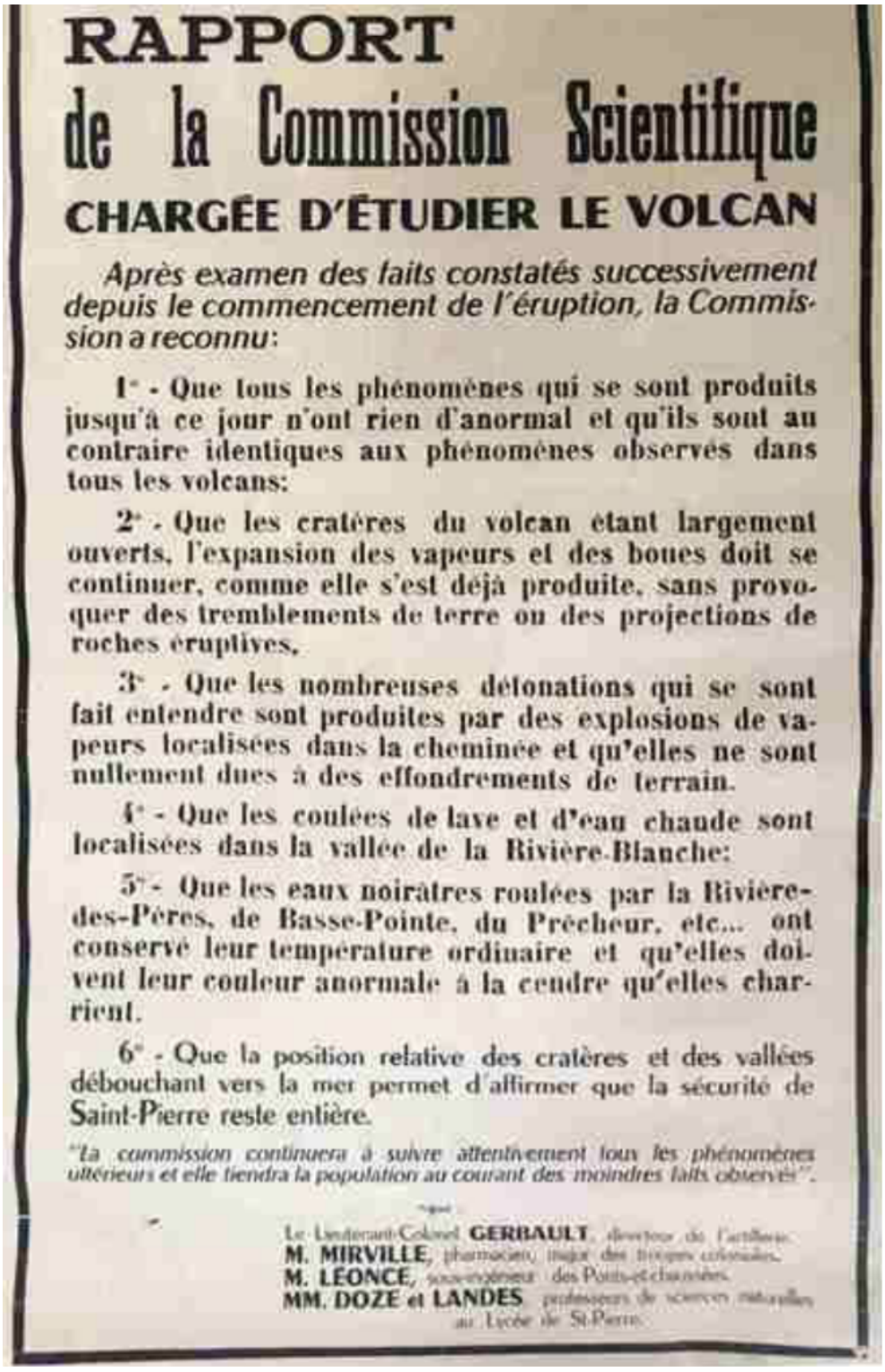
Their connection recalls what Katherine McKittrick calls "plantation futures," which sees traces of plantation logic and politics in modern institutions. According to McKittrick, plantation futures are "a conceptualization of time-space that tracks the plantation toward the prison and the impoverished and destroyed city sectors and, consequently, brings into sharp focus the ways the plantation is an ongoing locus of antiblack violence and death…"[537] While McKittrick focuses on contemporary social spaces like prisons and blighted inner city landscapes, plantation futures are equally legible in the natural environment. They reveal themselves in the increasing reach and severity of tropical storms, rising sea level, contaminated soil and waterways, and in deforested landscapes. The relationship between storms and the slave ship is important not only because it helps make meaning from the arbitrary violence of storms, but because it offers a tangible, immanent presence for the thousands of lives and voices swallowed up by the foundational disaster of the New World. Together, the humanitarian disaster of slavery and the ecological catastrophes of colonialism are linked in an indissoluble historical relation whose effects persist, and indeed, continue to be magnified in the present. If the centuries-long catastrophe of New World slavery created the concentration of wealth and resources that launched modernity and the ecological disasters that is essential for understanding them historically and for enhancing our comprehension of the modern disasters they spawn today.

This project has sought to bring together two historically distinct fields: postcolonial writing and disaster studies. It argues that geophysical hazards endemic to the Caribbean, like hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanoes, play a central role in the region's cultural identity, and

[537] Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17:3 (2013): 2.

have also had a significant role in shaping its current political realities. If violent weather is to some extent an inevitable feature of Caribbean geography, its deadly effects are exacerbated by the fragile economic and ecological conditions that have resulted over centuries of plantation monoculture farming, resource extraction, and overdevelopment. Martinican writers recognize the foundational role of disaster in shaping the region's geography, politics, culture *and* aesthetics. Their work shows geophysical hazard contesting Western models of dominance over the natural world, at the same time demonstrating how such managerial models of disaster response exacerbate ecological fragility. Eurocentric frameworks reflect a particular set of understandings about the natural world and the place of human beings within it – a relationship that pits human communities in a continual struggle with nature for control, in which priority is placed on preserving human infrastructure and economic interests. This project makes the case that Caribbean literature articulates an anticolonial paradigm for studying disaster, in which the futures of marginalized communities and their environments are necessarily understood as interdependent, both having been submitted to a logic of extraction and control under colonialism. While disaster studies researchers today emphasize vulnerability as a metric for evaluating the disproportionate exposure of certain communities to the worst effects of hazards, the inclusion of colonialism as a specific criterion for understanding vulnerability has not been acknowledged.

Figures



# RAPPORT
# de la Commission Scientifique
## CHARGÉE D'ÉTUDIER LE VOLCAN

*Après examen des faits constatés successivement depuis le commencement de l'éruption, la Commission a reconnu:*

1° - Que tous les phénomènes qui se sont produits jusqu'à ce jour n'ont rien d'anormal et qu'ils sont au contraire identiques aux phénomènes observés dans tous les volcans:

2° - Que les cratères du volcan étant largement ouverts, l'expansion des vapeurs et des boues doit se continuer, comme elle s'est déjà produite, sans provoquer des tremblements de terre ou des projections de roches éruptives,

3° - Que les nombreuses détonations qui se sont fait entendre sont produites par des explosions de vapeurs localisées dans la cheminée et qu'elles ne sont nullement dues à des effondrements de terrain.

4° - Que les coulées de lave et d'eau chaude sont localisées dans la vallée de la Rivière-Blanche:

5° - Que les eaux noirâtres roulées par la Rivière-des-Pères, de Basse-Pointe, du Prêcheur, etc... ont conservé leur température ordinaire et qu'elles doivent leur couleur anormale à la cendre qu'elles charrient.

6° - Que la position relative des cratères et des vallées débouchant vers la mer permet d'affirmer que la sécurité de Saint-Pierre reste entière.

*"La commission continuera à suivre attentivement tous les phénomènes ultérieurs et elle tiendra la population au courant des moindres faits observés".*

Le Lieutenant-Colonel **GERBAULT**, directeur de l'artillerie.
**M. MIRVILLE**, pharmacien, major des troupes coloniales.
**M. LEONCE**, sous-ingénieur des Ponts-et-chaussées.
**MM. DOZE et LANDES**, professeurs de sciences naturelles au Lycée de St-Pierre.

Figure 1.1 : Report of the Scientific Commission



"All the News That's Fit to Print"

# The New York Times.

THE WEATHER. Fair; winds north to east.

VOL. LI...NO. 16,340. NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, MAY 21, 1902.—SIXTEEN PAGES. ONE CENT In Greater New York. Elsewhere, Two Cents.

## NATAL DAY OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

### Gen. Wood Formally Transfers the Island to Its People.

American Flag Lowered and the Cuban Colors Raised Amid the Cheers of the Populace—The Simple Ceremonies.

HAVANA, May 20.—The natal day of the Republic of Cuba found Havana arrayed like a Queen to await the coming of her lord. She seemed reinvested for the occasion with the dignity of the prosperous days of her power and wealth. The decorations were universal. In some cases men had worked all night, by the light of torches, to complete elaborate designs. There was not a residence, pretentious or humble, that did not bear upon its quaint façade some emblem in honor of the event. The many arches erected at the entrances of Plazas by political societies, fraternal clubs, residents of various civil divisions of the city, and business organizations, had an air of real grandeur. Bunting spread on Venetian masts canopied the deep, narrow streets from the rays of the sun. Beneath these canopies the Cuban colors and palms graced the open doorways, through which glimpses could be caught of luxuriant gardens in cool, inner courts. Nature seemed in harmony with the spirit of the festivities. The parks were literally aflame with tropical flowers, and the vaulted sky above might have been chiseled out of turquois. From every red-tiled roof rose a Cuban flag.

All the shipping in the harbor was dressed in gala attire. The United States armored cruiser Brooklyn, which was to take Gen. Wood away, and the steamer Morro Castle of the Ward Line, on which the troops were to embark, as well as the foreign warships which had been sent by their Governments to be present at the birth of the new republic, were dressed with streams of signal flags, fore and aft, man-of-war fashion. Outside, the sapphire waters of the gulf, sparkling beneath the tropical sun, washed the rocky feet of the sentinel fortresses which guarded the entrance of the harbor. The American colors, which were to be hauled down in a few hours, still floated above the grim walls.

The early morning was cool and delightful, and the entire population, reinforced by thousands of visitors, was abroad soon after daylight. All was animation and expectancy. Much curiosity was aroused by a status of Freedom which had been raised during the night in Central Park, upon the pedestal where for centuries a statue of Queen Isabella had stood. During the morning a plentiful breakfast was given to several thousand poor children by Mr. Paine of Boston, who has passed the Winter in Havana for many years. As the day advanced the heat of the sun became in-

## PRESIDENT FOLLOWED BY TWO MYSTERIOUS MEN.

### Ten Secret Service Agents Aroused to the Greatest Watchfulness by the Strangers' Movements.

President Roosevelt was surrounded constantly during his stay in this city last night by Secret Service men, five of them having accompanied him from Washington and these five being joined here by five more.

They were constantly on the alert, and when the President was traveling across the North River to Jersey City last night on his way home it leaked out that the Secret Service men had been constantly watching the antics and manoeuvres of two men who, it was said, had been seen about the President's carriage wherever and whenever it stopped. One of these men was said to be short and stocky in build, of stooping shoulder, and wearing a short, round black beard. The description of the other man could not be gotten.

These two men, it was said, were in evidence at all stops in the President's trip through the city and until he boarded the ferryboat last night for Jersey City. They were never clear of the eyes of the Secret Service men.

The detectives said it was probable that the men had merely a desire to see the President from a close range, but that they thought it best to watch.

## RUSSIAN NIHILISTS ACTIVE.

### Outrages Increasing in Alarming Proportions—Minister von Plehwe's Life Threatened.

LONDON TIMES—NEW YORK TIMES Special Cablegram.

LONDON, May 21.—An article in a Lemberg newspaper is quoted by the Vienna correspondent of The Times. It states that the man who wounded Gen. von Wahl, the Governor of Vilna, said he desired to take revenge upon the Governor for the cruelties perpetrated on political prisoners under his instructions.

The newspaper says there is no doubt that the Governor has been condemned to death by the Central Revolutionary Committee, and has received threatening letters to that effect. Similar letters have come to the present Minister of the Interior, M. von Plehwe.

It is declared that the impression produced in St. Petersburg is of greater consequence than the fact that the police prove powerless to cope with such outrages, which are increasing in alarming proportions.

According to a telegram to the Neue Freie Presse, the execution of Balschaneff (the assassin of M. Sipiaguine) has given rise to assassinations, acts of revenge being expected.

By The Associated Press.

ST. PETERSBURG, May 20.—The bullets which were shot into the left hand and right foot of Gen. von Wahl, the Governor of Vilna, on Sunday night have been extracted and the wounded official is progressing favorably.

The attack on Gen. von Wahl was evidently due to political motives. The would-be assassin will be tried by court-martial.

## INJUNCTION GRANTED AGAINST BEEF TRUST

### Judge Grosscup Issues Restraining Order of Wide Scope.

### GREAT CROWD IN COURTROOM

Affidavit of Daniel W. Meredith of Jersey City in Which He Tells of Weekly Meetings of Managers in New York—Actions in Missouri.

CHICAGO, May 20.—The temporary injunction asked for by the Government against the members of the so-called packers' combine is now in force. It was issued this evening by Judge Peter S. Grosscup after the close of arguments in the United States Circuit Court room. The order gives the relief prayed for in the bill filed by District Attorney Bethea on May 10. It is so wide in its scope that if the packers or their agents continue with their present alleged uniform arrangements they will be taken into court on contempt proceedings and the burden of proof will be on them to show that they have not violated the order in any particular.

When the case was called before Judge Grosscup to-day United States District Attorney Bethea had with him Assistant Attorney General W. A. Day, Solicitor General J. K. Richardson, United States District Attorney Worthington of Springfield, Ill., and United States District Attorney Joseph Kealing of Indianapolis.

Little opposition was raised against the Government's petition. Attorney John S. Miller, who was the sole representative of the packers present, pointed out some objectionable clauses in the draft of an order presented by Mr. Bethea. These concerned the alleged agreements for credit, blacklisting, and cartage. Judge Grosscup thought some of these minor clauses had been made too prominent, and he himself drew a form of order that pleased both sides. At the same time the order was entered numerous affidavits and other exhibits were filed for the Government.

The courtroom was crowded as it has seldom been before. There were many office employees of the packers among the spectators.

District Attorney Bethea had read part of the bill before Judge Grosscup interrupted him with the statement that this would be unnecessary, as the court was already advised of the charges made by the Government. Mr. Bethea then read another affidavit, which was filed next made a statement in behalf of the packers. He said that, while he was not prepared to oppose the Government's motion at present, he was authorized to submit to the entry of the order on behalf of his clients. Solicitor General Richards made a brief statement in answer to some of the objections raised by Attorney Miller. Attorney Day also spoke briefly on behalf of the Government. At the conclusion of these remarks the order was taken away by Judge Grosscup for amendment, and later was filed.

Unless the defendants decide to make a fight at an early date in an effort to have the order set aside they will have until design and purpose being to limit the quantity of meats in sight at New York and adjacent points and raise the prices. The affidavit covered at considerable length the manner in which the alleged meetings were conducted.

William C. Rider swore that he was formerly with the Fairbank Canning Company, a corporation owned or controlled by Nelson Morris & Co. In 1898 he transcribed, he declared in his affidavit, a signed agreement between Morris & Co., Armour & Co., and Swift & Co. This agreement, he declared, provided that representatives of the signers were to meet at specified times or upon call of an appointed arbitrator; that prices should be maintained; that a list of discharged employes should be kept, and a fine of $1,000 imposed for violations of the agreement. He deposed that he had actual knowledge of the carrying out of the agreement which he had transcribed.

Charles E. Holland of Brooklyn, N. Y., swore that in 1900 he was employed by Nelson Morris & Co., and that it was his duty to translate telegrams received in cipher. These telegrams showed, he said, the existence of an agreement, A code book and letter press copybook, both said to belong to the Cudahy Packing Company, were submitted in connection with this affidavit.

Willard Lamed, a stenographer for meat packers in Washington, D. C., for twenty-five years, says he has personal knowledge that every week the local managers in that city for the principal Chicago packing concerns held meetings to compare notes; that the number of loads of meat received was divided among the wholesale houses on an agreed basis, and that none of the packing houses was allowed to ship into that market more than its allotted share. He also knew of the existence of a credit or blacklist agreement.

Affidavits of a like character were made by Charles A. Daly, James A. Hoffman, and John B. Schroth, all of Washington, D. C.; Arthur E. Adams of Baltimore, once local manager there for Nelson Morris & Co.; John H. Durbin, a wholesale meat dealer of Denver; Henry Gebhard of Omaha; Charles E. Brumer of Baltimore; Frank M. Black of Baltimore, formerly Mr. Black manager for the Cudahy Company in New York; Thomas B. Carroll of Washington, William Price of Baltimore, Emma R. Mayer, formerly a stenographer for Swift & Co., and William H. H. Hoover, Inspector of Meats and Foods for the Government in the District of Columbia.

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo., May 20.—Attorneys for the Cudahy, Hammond, Armour, and Swift Packing Companies have filed a motion in the Supreme Court to quash the alternative writ of ouster issued several days ago by the Attorney General. They allege the writ was issued irregularly because it is made returnable at a time when the court will not be in session. The court will pass on the motion June 4.

KANSAS CITY, May 20.—Judge John W. Henry in the Circuit Court here to-day issued a temporary order at the request of Attorney General Crow restraining Nelson Morris & Co., packers, from fixing the price of meats or from working in conjunction with the so-called Beef Trust.

The order was issued because the Attorney General doubted whether the quo warranto proceedings instituted last night at Jefferson City against other packers could be maintained against a copartnership such as the Nelson Morris Company.

The order states that Nelson Morris shall be enjoined until further orders of the court from becoming a member or party to any agreement, consideration, combination, pool or understanding with the Armour Packing Company, the Cudahy Packing Company, Armour & Co., Swift & Co., Henry N. Krug Packing Company, and Schwarzschild & Sulzberger Company, or either of them, to fix and maintain in Kansas City, St. Joseph, or elsewhere in the State of Missouri, the price to be paid by retail butchers or dealers in meats, or consumers of lard and meats of any kind.

The attorneys for the packers offered no objection to the filing of the petition for a temporary injunction. Judge Henry will fix the day for the hearing some time this week.

## READJUSTING BEEF RATES.

General Traffic Officials Considering the

## PANIC IN FORT DE FRANCE

### Eruption of Pelee Causes a Rush to Vessels in Harbor.

### TIDAL WAVE AT LE CARBET

A Number of the Inhabitants Are Leaving the Island—An Eruption Back of Fort de France Said to be Very Likely.

FORT DE FRANCE, Martinique, May 20.—This morning at 5:30 o'clock a thick, heavy cloud, lit up by flashes of lightning and the rising sun, rose from Mont Pelée. The cloud was composed of cinders. The people of Fort de France at once became panic-stricken, and it is estimated that 20,000 persons, many of them in scant attire, rushed excitedly through the streets of the town, shrieking and praying. Stones from the volcano as big as hazel nuts fell in the streets.

Many of the inhabitants hurriedly embarked on vessels in the harbor, and it was with difficulty that they were reassured. At 7 o'clock, however, the excitement was over and the people became calm.

The eruption of this morning was similar to that on May 8, but not so severe.

Gov. Lhuerre will leave here on the French cruiser Suchet to inform himself of the situation at St. Pierre. Senator Knight will accompany him.

A severe inundation at Basse Pointe, on the northeast coast of this island, at 2 o'clock this morning, swept away twenty houses, and fifty other buildings were damaged by the flowing mud which has swept over the Vallée de la Rivière. There was no further loss of life, Basse Pointe having been evacuated several days ago.

A tidal wave has destroyed a portion of the village of Le Carbet.

A number of the inhabitants of Fort de France have embarked on the available vessels in the harbor and intend to seek refuge on the island of Guadeloupe, or the islands to the southward.

ST. THOMAS, D. W. I., May 20.—A report from Castries, St. Lucia, says that Mont Pelée, Martinique, has again erupted, and that another eruption back of the City of Fort de France is very likely.

A report from the Island of Dominica is to the effect that at 5:30 o'clock this morning a curious, awe-inspiring fiery

the United States cruiser Cincinnati tomorrow. The burial will take place ashore; there will be no special ceremony.

The volcanic mountain is apparently in greater activity, and the escape of the war vessels, and particularly of the shore party, was exceedingly narrow.

## SIX PEOPLE KILLED BY A WATERSPOUT.

### Wave Twenty Feet Deep Rolls Down Kentucky Hills—Two Million Dollars' Damage Done in Cincinnati and Other Towns.

CINCINNATI, Ohio, May 20.—A terrific wind and rain storm, accompanied by a waterspout, swept over this locality to-day, causing the loss of six lives and injuring many others. The fury of the storm continued only thirty minutes, but the damage wrought in that time will amount to more than $1,000,000 in the business section of Cincinnati and as much more in other parts of the city and its suburbs.

THE DEAD.

Clement Davier, Mrs. Fischner, Willie Willen, aged 4, George Becker, Ferdinand Barge, Mr. W. C. Belleville.

Prior to the unprecedented fall of rain dense clouds were seen to the south and the city became as dark as night. It was afterward learned that there had been a big waterspout on the Lewisburg hills, in the southern suburbs of Covington, Ky. The storm moved over the Kentucky suburbs into this city, passing up the Miami Valley with damage reported as far as Dayton, Ohio.

While storm damages are reported throughout Kentucky, the worst point seems to have been in the suburbs of Covington, Ky., where the waterspout struck. The water rolled down the hills in a wave twenty feet deep at places, and was about 100 yards wide. The frame house of Edward Wehrley was carried a distance of more than four blocks and finally dashed to pieces in the Covington ball grounds. The house was occupied by the members of four families. Of these Mrs. Bonner and Willie Willen were drowned. The others escaped.

Messrs. Davier and Becker, who were driving teams, were swept from their wagons by the rush of water, and drowned. Mr. Belleville, a carpenter, was carried away with the roof of building on which he was working, and killed. Mr. Rapp, who was a peddler, was caught by the water while attempting to take his goods out of a cellar.

Many others, whose names cannot be learned, were seriously injured. Searching parties are still at work to-night in Willow Hollow, at the foot of Lewisburg Hill, where some are reported missing.

The buildings of the Queen City Bathing Club on the river front at Dayton, Ky., opposite Cincinnati, were demolished.

All the towns opposite Cincinnati suffered damage from broken windows and houses being unroofed, but the greatest damage on both sides of the river, especially in the business houses in Cincinnati, and also in Covington and Newport, Ky., came from cellars being suddenly filled with water. The water was for a short time deep in all the streets and traffic was suspended.

Superintendent Bassler of the United States Weather Bureau reports the wind as 72 miles an hour and the rainfall in less than a half hour 2.58 inches, the greatest on record here.

The damage in the cellars of some of the jobbers runs as high as $25,000 and $30,000 each. Several small frame houses on Price Hill were demolished by a landslide, but all of the occupants escaped. There was considerable damage to sewers.

## MURPHY CHOSEN TO

## PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT GREETS FREE CUBA

### Before Presbyterians He Commends This Nation's Work.

### MISSION SPIRIT'S TRIUMPH

With Rebuke for the Softly Living, Non-Combatant Critic, He Praises Army and Navy, and Asserts that Living Truth Is Expanding.

The President of the United States made two speeches in this city last night at meetings in honor of the centennial anniversary of the Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church—one, from the stage of Carnegie Hall, to an audience of 3,500 people; the other, from the pulpit of the Central Presbyterian Church, to a congregation of 1,200.

In the first of these addresses President Roosevelt spoke at some length of his delight at the birth of the Cuban Republic, and of his gratification at the response of the United States to the needs of the sufferers in the West Indies. He expressed the hope that before very long satisfactory tariff arrangements might be made between this country and Cuba.

In the second of the speeches, which was entirely extemporaneous, the President not having been invited to deliver it until after he had finished speaking in Carnegie Hall, his theme was the necessity of the Church in the Republic—the importance of Christian men and women being Christians on week days as well as Sundays. He made reference also to the difficulties of the trust problem, as well as the problem of dealing with the working men of great cities.

THE GREAT AUDIENCE.

A great audience welcomed the President in Carnegie Hall. Tickets had been carefully distributed, and not a single ticket beyond the seating capacity of the house had been given out. Almost every one of those seats was filled at the minute set for the beginning of the exercises, 8 o'clock. In addition to a choir of 200, under the leadership of F. H. Jacobs, there were about 200 guests of honor on the platform.

The walls at the back of the stage were decorated with American flags and evergreens. Among those seated on the platform were ex-Postmaster General John Wanamaker, the Rev. Dr. Sampson Vilbert Peebles, the Rev. Dr. Arthur Howard Duffield, Dudley Buck, Mayor of St. Paul, the Rev. Dr. Henry C. Minton of San Francisco, the Rev. David Gregg of Brooklyn, and Robert C. Ogden.

Previous to the arrival of the President there was an organ prelude. Promptly at 8

Figure 1.2

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