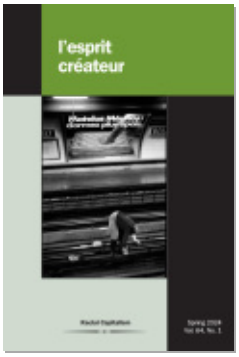
Flourishing after the Family: Racial Capitalism and Suzanne Césaire's Impossible Oikoi



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Abstract: This article intends to short-circuit the masculine homosociality inherent to the current reception of racial capitalism in francophone critical thought. It argues that this reception silences non-masculine critical and poetic promises that go beyond canonical francophone accounts of the imbrications between racism and capitalism. To do so, it briefly reviews the normative genealogy of the conceptual formalization of racial capitalism to highlight the absence of women, feminists, and queer people in the narrative that today reaches francophone spaces. Then, it excavates Suzanne Césaire's prescient critique of capitalism, wage-labor, and the politics of the family, engaging with her articulation of a cannibal poetics.

JUST A FEW DAYS before the publication of the long-awaited French translation of Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, in May 2023, the journal *Marronnages* issued a call for papers for a special issue on "Capitalisme racial?!" highlighting that although "[l]es sciences sociales francophones mobilisent quant à elles encore très peu la notion de 'capitalisme racial,' [...] la question de la relation entre racisme et capitalisme a historiquement occupé une place importante dans les débats sur la race du monde francophone."[1] To substantiate their claim, the coordinating committee reminded us of the now-canonical figures of Anténor Firmin, Jacques Roumain, Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, and Frantz Fanon—a non-exhaustive list, but one that is no less representative of the founding fathers of a heterogeneous French-speaking tradition dating back to the nineteenth century, whose dialogue with "racial capitalism" could prove heuristic. While it remained unspoken in *Marronnages*' call for papers, when *Marxisme noir* came out later in the month, Selim Nadi's preface cleared away doubts as to the genealogical reflex that presides over the reception of Robinson's conceptualization of "racial capitalism" in French. It does not matter, for example, that Suzanne Césaire's name appears in Robin D. G. Kelley's foreword to the 2000 reedition of *Black Marxism* (also translated for the occasion) among the figures of the Black radical tradition; although Nadi highlights the political and theoretical relevance of certain Black Anglo-Caribbean and African-American feminists, the long preface prepared for this "événement important" touches on such developments put forward by Black women in the

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French-speaking world only to lament the simplicity and "radicalité de façade" of the "gauche dite intersectionnelle."[2]

This article intends to short-circuit the masculine homosociality (understood as a relational mechanism of domination) of the reception of racial capitalism in francophone critical thought, a masculine homosociality that feeds the antifeminist orientations of the recent formation/importation of the field of Black studies in these same spaces.[3] Beyond the epistemic violence it renews, justifying in itself the present article, I argue moreover that the production of absence and the silencing at work in the dialogue with racial capitalism in francophone critical thought stifle critical and poetic promises that anticipate, throw into crisis, and go beyond canonical francophone accounts of the imbrications between racism and capitalism. The homosocial encounter between racial capitalism and francophone spaces, in other words, not only reactualizes an epistemic violence repeatedly identified and addressed,[4] but also deprives us of some of the most crucial charges against racism, capitalism, and their imbrications. I shed light on this loss by excavating the spectral presence of Suzanne Césaire, who emerges (once again) in the French translation of *Black Marxism* only to be covered up (once again).

While Suzanne Césaire is not the only absentee, in an exemplary way she allows us to measure what the homosocial reception of racial capitalism prevents. To do so, first, I briefly review the normative genealogy of the conceptual formalization of racial capitalism to highlight the absence of women, feminists, and queer people in the narrative that today reaches francophone spaces. Then, to assess and recenter possibilities obliterated by this masculine homosociality, I unfold the double movement that Suzanne Césaire opens from and towards two meanings of *oikos*—family and world/earth. Following recent discussions on the césairean critique of capitalism in the Caribbean,[5] on césairean literary cannibalism as resistance,[6] as well as on césairean ecopoetics,[7] I suggest more specifically that Césaire's ecology emerges in her essay "Le grand camouflage" from one of the central topoi of the racism/capitalism/patriarchy nexus, namely, the oikos qua family. After assessing its (colonial, racial, capitalist, and patriarchal) necessity and its (Black) impossibility, Suzanne Césaire cannibalizes the oikos qua family and, on this basis, deploys a Black anti-capitalist oikos qua world/earth. Put another way, Césaire formulates an indispensable and overlooked deciphering critique of one of the central topoi of the racism/capitalism/patriarchy nexus, from which she elaborates and anticipates, more directly than her contemporaries, an ecology of what could be. I do not attend here to the detail of Césaire's ecology[8] and instead focus more specifically on the poetic movement she initiates, which

locates ecological possibilities within a radical critique of colonial, racial, and capitalist modernity. This movement is one with which the francophone reception of racial capitalism, and more generally the Black radical tradition, must grapple.

Men discussing racial capitalism

The various engagements with racial capitalism in recent decades, and especially since the 2010s, generally refer (faithfully or loosely) to Cedric Robinson's conceptualization in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. The genealogical narrative goes as follows: in 1983, Robinson repurposes the expression that first appeared, in the 1970s, in the writings and discourses of South African Marxists engaged in transnational political and theoretical spaces, to formalize what is today understood as racial capitalism in activist and academic spaces.

More than ten years before Robinson, the genealogy remembers, Harold Wolpe suggested, concerning the "articulation between ideology, racial political practice and the economic system"[9] in South Africa, that racism and its various mechanisms are the "means of reproduction of a particular mode of production" (Wolpe 429). And in 1976, Martin Legassick and David Hemson, Wolpe's interlocutors and comrades, coined the expression "racial capitalism" in an article entitled "Foreign Investment and the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism in South Africa," agreeing with Wolpe that the "creation of the contemporary forms of racist ideology, and the political forms of racial discrimination, in South Africa, […] was a consequence of capitalist development."[10]

This framing, however, would be hotly contested three years later in the pages of *Ikwezi: A Black Liberation Journal of South African and Southern African Political Analysis*. In its thirteenth issue, published in October 1979, the journal ran a full-scale charge against the analyses of Wolpe, Legassick, and Hemson in an article entitled "Neo-Marxism and the Bogus Theory of 'Racial Capitalism,'" suggesting that "the contention that racialism is a creation of capitalism and can only be overthrown by a proletarian revolution is a load of shit."[11] The anonymous authors, perhaps without appreciating the deliberately restricted historicity of Legassick and Hemson's analyses insisting on "contemporary forms," castigate the conceptualization of racial capitalism by suggesting that it evacuates the "principal contradiction" on which South African social formation rests: the colonial and racial antagonism between the African masses and the white ruling class. Appealing to historical depth, which situates "white hegemony" upstream of the means capitalism has acquired to sustain and reproduce itself, the article argues that racial cap-

italism, as "upheld in the writings of the dubious, white South African pair of Martin Legassick and Harold Wolpe" ("Neo-Marxism" 17) not only fails the test of historical materialism but also is counter-revolutionary in its "interference with the Azanian liberation struggle" ("Neo-Marxism" 19). This virulent opposition, however, did not prevent the expression from finding its way into anti-apartheid discourse in South Africa, as exemplified by the activist Neville Alexander.

Although the expression "racial capitalism" itself does not appear in his book *One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa*, published in 1979, Alexander engages in a discussion of the interweaving of "'race,' nation, 'ethnic group,' color-caste and class."[12] Analyzing South African social formation by correcting, or amending, European Marxian and Marxist propositions, he suggests that ideological and political racism legitimizes and enables the reproduction of capitalist accumulation. And this framing is what, a few years later, he too would come to understand as racial capitalism. In "The National Situation," for example, a speech given in 1982 at the annual congress of the Azanian People's Organization, Alexander describes "the system that guarantees for white South Africa perpetual domination of the black working people" as "the system of racial capitalism."[13] As he points out in 1983, the strategies of this system were "made easier by the fact that in the pre-industrial colonial period white-black relationships had been essentially master-servant relations" (Alexander, *Sow the Wind* 51). While the systematization of racism is essential to the reproduction of the capitalist system dividing "the working people into ever smaller potentially antagonistic groups," Alexander also draws attention to the "[r]acialist attitudes" that enabled the development of capitalism in South Africa (Alexander, *Sow the Wind* 51).

It is this double movement identified by Alexander in the South African context, pulling together the ideas of Wolpe, Legassick, and Hemson along with the anteriority of colonial and racial antagonism insisted on by Ikwezi, that Cedric Robinson would take up in his canonical theorization of racial capitalism in 1983, universalizing it and making it emerge in the pre-capitalist European context. While it is impossible to trace a direct link between Alexander, Ikwezi, white South African Marxists, and Robinson, it is difficult to suggest that they did not share a political and intellectual space of interinfluence. Peter James Hudson, and Zachary Levenson and Marcel Paret point out that, in addition to a keen interest in the anti-apartheid struggle reflected in several of Robinson's articles prior to the publication of *Black Marxism*, "[t]he London-based radical publisher Zed Books printed both Alexander's

One Azania, One Nation and Robinson's *Black Marxism*"[14] and, moreover, Neville Alexander "engaged with A. Sivanandan in the United Kingdom, the central figure in the circles in which Cedric Robinson would find himself in the late 1970s."[15] It is in this context that Robinson suggested in 1983 that racism (or the "sense of racial order"[16]) and capitalism are necessarily and absolutely intertwined in that the former ensures the reproduction of the latter but also, more importantly, enables and grounds its emergence.

While we might think that the century of Jim Crow, the Second World War, the Nakba, and apartheid in South Africa seems to indicate a particular salience of racism, Robinson explains that this organization of violence is "rooted not in a particular era but in the civilization itself" (Robinson 28). It is a structuring pillar of Europe rather than a situated excrescence, and thus, "the social, psychological, and cultural origins of racism and nationalism both anticipated capitalism in time and formed a piece with those events that contributed directly to its organization of production and exchange" (Robinson 9). In this respect, Robinson argues, capitalism presents itself less as a break from feudal social relations than as their political and economic extension, the violence of the feudal social order resting not only on the material function of the working classes, which is to provide the resources necessary for the accumulation of wealth by the ruling class, but also on naturalizing differences to do so. And it is precisely this naturalization of differences as a function of social order that capitalism pursues and reorganizes. The "racial sense of social order" (Robinson 308) is an "enduring principle of European social order" (Robinson 28), a fact of civilization of which capitalism produces different actualizations.

It is to this conceptualization, to Robinson, and to this genealogy that the bulk of current uses of racial capitalism refers, mobilizing, pursuing, criticizing or even disavowing it.[17] While it received little attention in the two decades following the publication of *Black Marxism*, Robinson's theorization gained prominence and became a central topic in discussions on the racism/capitalism nexus following the 2000 reedition of the book and especially during the decade following the 2008 financial crisis, marked by uprisings all over the planet, "because the concept has always been inseparable from struggle."[18] However, while its militant and critical usefulness has come to the fore again over the past fifteen years, primarily within the Black radical tradition, we are also witnessing its fetishization in academic spaces. Along with its increasingly widespread circulation in what Gabriel Rockhill calls the "global theory industry," that is, along with its "enchantment" as an "intellectual commodity"[19] beyond its necessary imbrication with liberation struggles,

not only has the expression come to impose itself in English-speaking spaces as the primary framing for thinking the racism/capitalism nexus, but also the above genealogy, exclusively masculine, has been consecrated along with its exclusions and omissions. Marxist women out of the South African tradition of racial capitalism as much as radical activists and thinkers such as Claudia Jones, with her numerous essays addressing "the gross neglect of the special problems of Negro women,"[20] are left out of its post-Robinson circulation—not to mention Black women outside the English-speaking world such as the Martinican Nardal sisters associated with the Negritude movement. As Carol Boyce Davies asks, and as many Black women, feminists, and queer people have questioned**,** "what if Cedric Robinson had read any work available on or by Claudia Jones?"[21] This question was duplicated and broadened when racial capitalism arrived in francophone critical thought.

Césaire's impossible oikoi

As its rise within the "global theory industry" has implied, the dialogue with "racial capitalism" in francophone critical thought has, in recent years, been at the cost of genealogical choices that reproduce preexisting political and epistemic relations: complete theoretical spaces, in this respect, raise few, if any, eyebrows. This is the case, for example, of Haitian Marxism which, as Jean-Jacques Cade reminds us, distilled Marxian and Marxist thought to analyze the specificities of Haitian social formation.[22] The same is true of Sékou Traoré's "Les intellectuels africains face au marxisme," debating before and at the same time as Robinson, in French, the following question: "le marxisme, élaboré en Europe au XIXe siècle par Karl Marx, est-il applicable à l'Afrique?"[23] But if these silences, mirroring the colonial history that scaffolded relations between center and periphery, contribute to the narrowing of the horizon of anti-racist, Black, and anti-capitalist possibilities and must be addressed, they are not, however, based on an active delegitimization within the spaces of critical analyses of the racism/capitalism nexus.

Beyond some surprising omissions, the energies deployed to reveal the alleged impertinence or even danger of Black women, feminist, and queer endeavors in this regard are distinctive both in the francophone reception of racial capitalism and more broadly in the recent francophone formation/importation of the field of Black studies. Where Selim Nadi caricatures (by his own admission) the pitfalls of intersectionality, Norman Ajari, standing up against what he considers to be the problematic recent arrival of Black studies "par la porte des études de genre et des études féministes" (Ajari 24) synthesizes it with unmatched splendor: "La pensée féministe noire maquille en sui-

cide l'assassinat institutionnel des hommes noirs" (Ajari 112). Moreover, when Black (queer) women are mentioned or rightly praised for their theoretical and political developments, they are located outside francophone geographies. This production of absence and silencing not only contributes to the epistemic reproduction of violent relations but also stifles Black critical and poetic promises that anticipate, challenge, and go beyond canonical francophone accounts of the interweaving of racism and capitalism. The noisy absence of Suzanne Césaire's work, especially her masterly 1945 essay "Le grand camouflage," is a particularly salient example of this stifling. I suggest that the cannibalism she deploys in the 1940s enables the move from the analysis of capitalist, racial, and patriarchal violence to an ecological otherwise: between the oikos qua family, a central topos of (post)plantation capitalism, and the oikos qua world/earth beyond the parameters of Western modernity.

Suzanne Césaire, born Jeanne Ana Marie Suzanne Roussi in 1915 in Martinique, played a leading role as part of the journal *Tropiques,* published between 1941 and 1945, which she co-founded with writers and intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire, whom she first met in Paris in 1933 and married in 1937, René Ménil, Aristide Maugée, and Gilbert Gratiant. She published seven articles in *Tropiques*, which together offer a profound critical analysis of the Caribbean and an aesthetic of creative refusal. If "[t]rop d'injonctions de silences l'entourent encore" (Curtius, *Suzanne Césaire* 17) and particularly concerning the period between the end of *Tropiques* and her death in 1966, three years after she divorced Aimé Césaire, various efforts at rehabilitation[24] have in recent years endeavored to place her squarely at the heart of Caribbean and Black thought. Nevertheless, with the exception of Nick Nesbitt's pages on Césaire's critique of wage labor, which questions and fundamentally rejects the capitalist social form itself "[i]n stark contrast to the other principal figures of the francophone Caribbean critique of slavery and colonialism" (Nesbitt 184), these efforts have so far given very little space to the depth of Césaire's critical analysis of capitalism. And if Nesbitt generously considers Césaire the most radical Antillean anti-capitalist theorist, whereas other césairian revivals engage mainly with Césaire's critique of exotism and surrealism rather than capitalism, his focus on labor and his silence on gender nonetheless prevent him from engaging with the full scope of césairian anti-capitalist critical analysis.

While labor is widely discussed among Caribbean critical theorists, Nesbitt argues that "only Césaire addresses her critique to the *monetary* wage form of appearance of capitalist labor" (Nesbitt 157) in moving away from the "exaltation of work and industrial development" (Nesbitt 184). "Le grand camou-

flage," Nesbitt rightly points out, locates revolutionary desires in the refusal of the "usine," that is, of the "formes dégradantes du salariat moderne,"[25] beyond calls for equal wages: "Qui jettera au rancart, avec le matériel désuet de leurs usines, ces quelques milliers de sous-industriels et d'épiciers, cette caste de faux colons responsables de la déchéance humaine des Antilles?" (Suzanne Césaire 89). Wage labor, Nesbitt reads in Césaire's 1945 "Le grand camouflage," holds no emancipatory hope, and thus is *the* object of refusal. However, while Nesbitt is correct in saying that "Le grand camouflage" (and before that Césaire's 1942 "Malaise d'une civilisation") throws "au rancart" the factory, his account of Césaire's anti-capitalism overlooks the *other* post-plantation Black anti-capitalist object of refusal, more fundamental in that it concerns not only exploitation but also ontological negation: the family. In her final essay, "Le grand camouflage," which seals a political and aesthetic project pulling together archipelagic thought, critical analysis of Caribbean social formation, and the ecology that emerged from it, Césaire's anticapitalist critique not only lambasts wage labor but also cannibalizes, as I will suggest, the family and its impossibilities, an ingestion in which lies the elaboration of a Black "Antilles-Afrique" ecopoetics—from oikos to oikos.

> Quand ils [les métropolitains] se penchent sur le miroir maléfique de la Caraïbe, ils y voient une image délirante d'eux-mêmes. Ils n'osent pas se reconnaître en cet être ambigu, l'homme antillais. Ils savent que les métis ont part avec leur sang, qu'ils sont, comme eux, de civilisation occidentale. Il est bien entendu que les 'métropolitains' ignorent le préjugé de couleur. Mais leur descendance colorée les remplit de crainte, malgré les sourires échangés. Ils ne s'attendaient pas à cet étrange bourgeonnement de leur sang. Peut-être voudraient-ils ne pas répondre à l'héritier antillais qui crie et ne crie pas 'mon père.' (Suzanne Césaire 90)

The oikos qua family, Sara-Maria Sorentino writes, "ends up taking the form of gender, while the slave becomes the negative outside that secures the oikos,"[26] and this shift is not specific to the capitalist social form. But with its emergence, which extends and clarifies the era-specific functions of the oikos in terms of exploitation, extraction, production, and reproduction, its antagonistic figures are also clarified: starting with the transformation of African subjectivities and bodies into Black flesh,[27] the "négresse esclave" (Suzanne Césaire 43) becomes the vector not only of the reproduction of labor-property-flesh but also of ontological negation—"partus sequitur ventrem (that which is brought forth follows the womb), in which the Black child inherits of a non/status, the non/being of the mother," Christina Sharpe reminds us, or "les enfans [sic] tant mâles que filles, suivent la condition de leur mere [sic]" as the *Code Noir* prescribes.[28] In this sense, modern slavery, and therefore

colonial, racial, hetero-patriarchal, and capitalist modernity, require the impossibility of a Black oikos, since "enslavability displaces maternity,"[29] as much as the impossibility of a Black presence within the non-Black oikos, Blackness being the index of enslavability and therefore of the displacement from kinship to property and negation. The oikos qua family is both (colonial, racial, hetero-patriarchal, and capitalist) necessity and (Black) impossibility. And this is precisely what Césaire highlights in the figure of the "Antillais, arrière-petit-fils d'un colon et d'une négresse esclave" (Suzanne Césaire 91). The Antillean fills with "crainte" the "métropolitains" through his ambivalent "mon père," referring to both the literal family and the broader colonial family that the *Code noir* explicitly prescribes in calling "Gardiens Nobles" and "Bourgeois Usufruitiers" to "governer lesdits Esclaves comme bons pères de famille"[30]—this Antillean, that is, "ces garçons inattendus, ces filles charmantes" with whom, nevertheless, "il faut compter" (Suzanne Césaire 90). In 1945, in other words, Césaire offered a critical analysis of the oikos qua family, necessary and impossible, in the precise context of a Caribbean post-plantation "aventure mécanique" (Suzanne Césaire 92). The family signals not only the production of labor and value but also the ontological negation that makes the world of labor and value possible. And in so doing, Césaire already identifies a way out, in that the terrain of violence is at the same time the locus of the otherwise: the (re)production, by the Black womb, of the necessarily impossible oikos is a function of transatlantic slavery, the colonization of the Caribbean space and the development of capitalism on these "vieilles terres françaises," while at the same time it anchors white "crainte" of the possible rupture of Western ontological order that Blackness signals. As Sorentino suggests, "[t]he oikos can be thought as a generative terrain for thinking the stakes of antagonistic figures of liberation, from the abolition of the value-form to the abolition of gender, the family, and, perhaps, the world."[31] Césaire, I claim, not only anticipates such openings but also crafts a strategy for occupying this generative terrain, for abolishing it by consuming it: by cannibalizing it.

"La poésie martiniquaise sera cannibale ou ne sera pas" (Suzanne Césaire 27). The proclamation, frequently cited in works on Suzanne Césaire, poses a radical opposition on two levels. It declares a strategy of becoming, of the possibility of being in the process of becoming (the existence of Martinican poetry can only come about by being cannibal) and accomplishes said gesture in so doing. Adopting both Oswald de Andrade's formula ("Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question"[32])—itself digesting the Shakespearean soliloquy—and the gravity of André Breton's declaration that "La beauté sera CON-

VULSIVE ou ne sera pas,"[33] as Valérie Loichot tells us, the sentence does what it says. Suzanne Césaire's cannibalism envisages the plural gesture of consumption, ingestion, digestion, and regurgitation as a strategy of emancipatory violence in the Caribbean. Emerging from the space of colonial, capitalist, patriarchal violence, the gesture "déterritorialise et reterritorialise l'insulte primaire, 'cannibale,' des premiers conquérants européens" (Suzanne Césaire 312), devours the symbolic architecture stemming from the primary insult, carried on in its *longue durée*, and produces with the devoured object a new arrangement of relations, in excess of the modern hierarchies that it undermines. As Loichot summarizes, "It is thus an intellectual practice of separation, division, reordering, and naming that gives her authority over the organization of discourse and knowledge that she takes in" (Loichot 150). However, while recent scholarship has focused primarily on the literary dimension of the gesture, insisting in particular on the cannibalization of *doudouïsme* (Curtius) and of André Breton's surrealism (Loichot), I argue that Césairean cannibalism can be considered not only as literary but also more broadly as aesthetic, in the sense that Sylvia Wynter confers on it by calling for a deciphering practice.

In "Rethinking 'Aesthetics': Notes Towards a Deciphering Practice," Sylvia Wynter uses cinema, film criticism, and its specific operation in the space of the film-text as the basis for a broader consideration of a "deciphering practice" beyond and across disciplines: "A deciphering practice is therefore part of the attempt to move beyond our present 'human sciences' to that of a new science of human 'forms of life' and their correlated modes of the aesthetic."[34] The principle that governs discursive-semantic practices, or the aesthetic, that is, the principle that determines the practices that make law or make rule with universalizing claims and that identifies their limits and their exterior, corresponds to the principle that governs material inequalities; the aesthetic is in an "epistemic contract" with the principle that governs material inequalities, namely what Wynter will elsewhere call the descriptive statement of the human being as "Man," a white rational, bourgeois, self-possessed, political, and economic subject (Wynter 258). The register of the aesthetic, Wynter argues, is in this way decisive in the set of collective behaviors through which specific human arrangements, and in this case, the descriptive statement of the human being as "Man," are self-realized. A deciphering practice, in this respect, thus intends to identify the instituting rules, the rules that generate a system of meaning corresponding to the descriptive statement of the human being as "Man," in order to overcome them.

A practice of decipherment thus shifts the study, or "mode of inquiry" (Wynter 261), away from the intention of demystifying the constructed character (of the text) and towards what the construction does. A deciphering practice, in other words, intends to reveal the practices of signification of the text itself, to understand them in the social environment in which what they do performs the terms of the descriptive statement that structures said social environment, to identify the regularities and determine what the practices of significations do of and in the social environment and, finally, to envisage them as (necessarily) alterable and to be altered or, we could say with Césaire, to be regurgitated. And this decipherment is activated on what Wynter calls a "demonic ground."[35] This is where, according to the indexical figures—and thus the aesthetics—of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the ontological absence between Miranda, the daughter of Prospero the Rational Man, and Caliban, the expropriated savage, is lodged: "This terrain, when fully occupied, will be that of a new science of human discourse, of human 'life' beyond the 'master discourse' of our governing 'privileged text,' and its sub/versions" (Wynter, "Beyond" 366). Across and in excess of the "epistemic contract" between the system of meaning and the material organization of violence, I argue that Césaire traces and puts in motion a similar, cannibalistic solidarity (or "contract") between the materiality of emancipatory violence and a corresponding system of meaning. It is in this aesthetic rather than literary sense that césairean cannibalism deciphers the oikos qua family as a topos of the capitalism/racism/patriarchy nexus, an ingestion and digestion from which an oikos qua world/earth will be regurgitated.

> Un paysan qui, lui, n'a pas été saisi du tremblement de l'aventure mécanique, s'est appuyé au grand mapou qui ombrage tout un flanc du morne, il a senti sourdre en lui, à travers ses orteils enfoncés nus dans la boue, une lente poussée végétale. Il s'est tourné vers le coucher de soleil pour savoir le temps qu'il ferait demain—les rouges orangés lui ont indiqué que le temps de planter était proche—son regard n'est pas seulement le reflet pacifique de la lumière, mais il s'alourdit d'impatience, celle-là même qui soulève la terre martiniquaise—sa terre qui ne lui appartient pas et *est* cependant sa terre. Il sait que c'est avec eux, les travailleurs, qu'elle a partie liée, et non avec le béké ou le mulâtre. (Suzanne Césaire 92)

After offering a critical analysis of the oikos qua family, necessary and impossible, in the precise context of the "aventure mécanique," Césaire consumes and regurgitates it in a different direction, "beyond the 'master discourse' of our governing 'privileged text.'" The topos of the racism/capitalism nexus once digested, deciphered, its necessity and impossibility now signal the locus of the otherwise, the demonic ground: the "lente poussée végétale" felt by the

peasant is that of a land for which the impossibility of kinship with the "béké" or the "mulâtre" (that is, with the necessary and impossible oikos qua family) is, conversely, necessary. In this sense, in "Le grand camouflage," Suzanne Césaire's oikos qua world/earth emerges from the cannibalization of the oikos qua family. The "particularité de la fusion du paysan martiniquais avec son morne" (Curtius, *Suzanne Césaire* 326), the "*morne maléfique*" that prefigures the Wynterian demonic ground and insists on its ecological matrix, or the "symbiose entre paysans, paysage, géologie, danseuse *bèlè* et *tanbouyés* (joueur de tambour)" (Curtius, *Suzanne Césaire* 330) occurs through the cannibalization of the racial, capitalist, and patriarchal impossibility of "descendance colorée" (Suzanne Césaire 90).

Conclusion: oikopoiēsis *en noir*

The homosociality of the reception of, and dialogue with, racial capitalism in francophone spaces not only reactualizes an epistemic violence often identified and addressed, but also deprives discussions on the racism/capitalism nexus of the radical possibilities it obliterates. In this article, I set out to short-circuit this dynamic by excavating Suzanne Césaire's spectral presence, and particularly the movement she puts in motion between the impossible family and an ecological becoming, that is, new ecological relations and ways of being in the world. Césairean cannibalism, envisaged not only as literary but more broadly as aesthetic in that it refers to the principle that determines the practices that make law or make rule with universalizing claims, transforms the violent terrain of the racism/capitalism/patriarchy nexus into the locus of the otherwise. Suzanne Césaire significantly complicates the critical analysis of the violence of (post)plantation modernity by recentering a topos that is fundamental to it, the impossible oikos qua family before and after the factory, setting up a method for neutralizing it and making it the space of what could be, and, from there, she constructs a Black ecological poetics. While others have rightly identified how Suzanne Césaire's critique of wage labor, ecopoetics, and cannibalism anticipate many contemporary discussions, I have argued here that Césaire not only complexifies the critical analysis of the racism/capitalism nexus through the family but also, above all, teaches us a movement we must grapple with—a way out that we could call, riffing off R. A. Judy, an oikopoiēsis *en noir*.

Judy's poiēsis in black presents itself as a mode of critical (cannibalistic) engagement with Aristotelian poiēsis. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle understands poiēsis as the conscious and intentional production or fabrication, through *mimesis* understood not as imitation but rather re-presentation of reality, of a

new reality from "what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity."[36] Aristotelian poetic activity, Judy synthesizes, is thus the making of what could be by means of a specific calibration of *mimesis*, of the dynamic process of engagement with reality, with "either the kind of thing that was or is the case; or the kind of thing that is said or thought to be the case; or the kind of thing that ought to be the case" (Aristotle 42). "That is to say, it is the species-activity of actualizing in discrete material forms any given conceptualization of being-in-the-world, in accordance with a specifiable set of practices-of-living."[37] In this sense, Judy's poiēsis in black situates and reenacts the radical possibilities of Aristotelian poiēsis, cannibalizes it with and for "those populations designated and constituted within the political economy of capitalist modernity as Negro" (Judy 19): "dynamic process of inventing infinite possibilities associated with human imagination in general, with the preposition linking that species activity to a particular tradition of performance" (Judy 245). A conscious and intentional Black fabrication of what could be, by and as a re-presentation of what is.

From oikos to oikos, Césaire's oikopoiēsis *en noir*: the conscious and intentional Black fabrication of what could be, the ecological becoming from and with the "*morne maléfique,*" by and as re-presentation of what is, namely the racial, capitalist, and patriarchal modernity that the family produces and reproduces before and after the factory. From oikos to oikos, beyond the Colonial Whites, the mulattoes, and the homosocial dialogues.

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Notes

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2. Selim Nadi, "Préface à l'édition française," in Cedric Robinson, *Marxisme noir* (Geneva: Entremonde, 2023), 7–48.
3. See Norman Ajari, *Noirceur: Race, genre, classe et pessimisme dans la pensée africaine-américaine au XXIe siècle* (Paris: Divergences, 2022).
4. For a recent example, see Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel, *Reimagining Liberation: How Black Women Transformed Citizenship in the French Empire* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2020).
5. Nick Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery: Capitalism and Revolution in the Caribbean* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2022)
6. Anny-Dominique Curtius, *Suzanne Césaire: Archéologie littéraire et artistique d'une mémoire empêchée* (Paris: Karthala, 2020); Valérie Loichot, *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013)
7. Anny-Dominique Curtius, "Cannibalizing *Doudouisme*, Conceptualizing the *Morne*: Suzanne Césaire's Caribbean Ecopoetics," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 115:3 (July 2016): 513–34; Natalie Catasús, "Mimicking Seas and Malefic Mirrors in Suzanne Césaire: An Ecopoetic Theory of Caribbean Subjectivity," *Small Axe*, 26:3 (November 2022): 52–66.

8. On Césaire's ecology, see Curtius, "Cannibalizing *Doudouisme*"; Catasús, "Mimicking Seas and Malefic Mirrors in Suzanne Césaire."
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12. Neville Alexander, *One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa* (London: Zed Press, 1979), 13.
13. Neville Alexander, *Sow the Wind: Contemporary Speeches* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 2013), 30.
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15. Zachary Levenson and Marcel Paret, "The Three Dialectics of Racial Capitalism: From South Africa to the U.S. and Back Again," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* (2022): 4.
16. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983) (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000), 308.
17. See notably Michael Ralph and Maya Singhal, "Racial Capitalism," *Theory and Society*, 48 (December 2019), 851–81.
18. Levenson and Paret, "The Three Dialectics," 3.
19. Gabriel Rockhill, "The Myth of 1968 Thought and the French Intelligentsia: Historical Commodity Fetishism and Ideological Rollback," *Monthly Review*, June 1 (2023), https://z.umn.edu/979y.
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24. See Marie-Agnès Sourieau, "Suzanne Césaire et *Tropiques*: De la poésie cannibale à une poétique créole," *French Review*, 68:1 (1994): 69–78; Maryse Condé, "Unheard Voice: Suzanne Césaire and the Construct of a Caribbean Identity," in Adele S. Newson and Linda Strong-Leek, eds., *Winds of Change: The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 61–66; Curtius, *Suzanne Césaire*. See also Loichot, *The Tropics Bite Back*; Natalie Catasús, "Mimicking Sea"; Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery*.
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30. Louis XIV, "Le code noir ou Edit du Roy," 126.
31. Sorentino, "Abolish the *Oikos*," 226.
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