Environment and Identity in the Nineteenth-Century French Caribbean Novel: Traversay's *Les amours de Zémédare et Carina* and Bergeaud's *Stella*

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Abstract
This article compares Traversay's *Les amours de Zémédare et Carina* (1806) and Bergeaud's *Stella* (1859), which portray Caribbean landscapes altered by plantation economy. Examining these understudied novels through the lens of ecofeminism and eco-postcolonialism allows us to understand how Francophone colonial authors perceived the history of the land to be inseparable from socio-political history on both a regional and an international level, and also how the authors portray new Caribbean identities as dependent on landscape and the role of women.

Note on Contributor
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Scientists, explorers and writers have long been aware of damaging changes inflicted upon the environment by mankind. French writer and botanist Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre stated that "l'homme […] dérange les plans de la nature; il détourne le cours des fontaines, il excave le flanc des collines, il incendie les forêts, il massacre tout ce qui respire" ([1784] 1804, 77). Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's era was one of colonial expansion and resource exploitation, and colonies offer early insights into the development of environmental awareness (Pacini 2011, 87). Changes in topography and climate were provoked by the "geographical violence" of imperialism (Said [1993] 1994, 271). Even in the mid-seventeenth century, "the colonial plantation investments made by the European trading companies (especially the Dutch, English and French East India companies) were instrumental […] in bringing about rates of soil erosion and deforestation on Caribbean and Atlantic islands that were unprecedented in Europe" (Grove 1995, 52). Such effects did not go unnoticed: "the degradational impact of new settlement and agricultures exercised in what were now economically peripheral zones was quickly appreciated by local colonists" (63).

Such politico-environmental concerns pervaded the works of writers from the islands, who also discussed issues connected with the exploitation of landscape. Imperialist attitudes not only scarred the colonial landscape, but also caused trauma for indigenous and

transplanted populations. Colonised peoples, animals and the environment are "often excluded from the privileged ranks of the human, rendering them available for exploitation" (Huggan and Tiffin [2010] 2015, 5). Women also suffered because of a European imperialist mentality. For Silvia Federici, "land expropriation […] [is] related to the continuing attack on women" (2004, 11–12). Maria Mies states that "in the last four or five centuries[,] women, nature and colonies were externalized, declared to be outside civilized society, pushed down, and thus made invisible" ([1986] 1998, 77). Through engaging with such connections, nineteenth-century Francophone writing from the colonies is able to provide us with insights into how humankind has cultivated relationships with landscape, as well as into how Creole writers have perceived identity to be connected to colonised landscapes and a land ethic.

In this article, the term "landscape" corresponds to the definition provided by Bryn Green in *Countryside Conservation*: "a particular configuration of topography, vegetation cover, land use and settlement pattern which delimits some coherence of natural, historic and cultural processes and activities" ([1981] 1996, 15). I will consider topographical features such as mountains, vegetation cover (trees/plants), and land use and settlement patterns, especially plantations. The alteration of landscape features and ecosystems will also be explored. Due to the nature of alterations in the Caribbean landscape because of the colonial process, a large part of the present discussion will focus on trees.

What can we learn about the literary portrayal of new identities in the French colonial world from an ecofeminist and eco-postcolonial perspective? This article examines two early Caribbean novels: Auguste Prévost de Sansac de Traversay's *Les amours de Zémédare et Carina* (1806), set in Martinique, and Émeric Bergeaud's *Stella* (1859), set in Haiti. Both correspond to Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's position that "Caribbean literature has continuously addressed, rather than belatedly discovered, its commitment to the environment," and that "from a very early stage in the development of the region's literature, its writers have explored the relationship between colonialism and the environment" (2011, 100). No comparative analysis of these novels has been conducted, despite their similarities. Each novel considers the history and landscape of the Caribbean from the perspective of a white male Creole writer, and is written from the periphery for the metropolitan centre (Curtis and Mucher 2015, x; Couti 2016, 29). Both are historical novels, the first of their kind: Traversay's is the first Martinican novel, and Bergeaud's is the first Haitian novel. Moreover, both express environmental concern while engaging with a paradisaical island landscape that assumes a significant role.

Writing half a century apart, Traversay and Bergeaud support opposing sides of the colonisation debate. Bergeaud's novel is filled with reprehension for "l'hydre coloniale" ([1859] 2009, 73), "cet affreux commerce de chair humaine" (241), and landscape destruction (24). He wishes to show how Haitian rebels "fonderaient une patrie glorieuse sur les ruines de la colonie coupable" (73). Traversay desires the success of the colonial project and plantation economy. Consequently, while *Zémédare et Carina* and similar texts "contain the first references to Caribbean landscape […], they also reveal the real motives behind this regionalism and this love for the native land: the need to preserve it and to keep control over it" (Corzani 1994, 468). These aims colour the identities based on relationships with landscape in the texts.

This article will first explore how connections between women and landscape are used to shore up new Caribbean identities. Second, I will examine how landscape destruction negatively impacts those identities. Finally, my analysis of the novels' idylls addresses connections between systematic exploitation (and devaluing) of landscape, women and colonised peoples. I ultimately reveal that, despite the authors' different perspectives on

colonialism, both display a hegemonic attitude towards all three, which unsettles the newly created identities that they describe.

The Role of Women and Landscape in Forming a National Identity in Colonial Regions

Whilst Jacqueline Couti and Dafne Duchesne have discussed female allegories in *Zémédare et Carina* and *Stella*, respectively, we can add to their arguments when examining how female allegories are inextricably tied to landscape.

From 1806, the year *Zémédare et Carina* appeared, "white Creoles [saw] themselves as contributing to a greater French nationalism" (Couti 2016, 3). They felt the need to establish themselves as French to obtain protection from the *métropole*. For Traversay and others, "their main goal was to highlight their forgotten contribution to the greatness of France" (219–20). Traversay's representation of white Creole women assists his construction of a national identity through a regional one:

> While he perpetuates a canonical view of motherhood that dictates the role of birthing, guarding, and embodying the nation, in both the physical and symbolic sense, he transforms that role into the exemplar of, and the propaganda instrument of, Creole society, model par excellence for the French nation. (26)

Traversay shows a "patriarchy […] in need of a virtuous mother" (27), a mother exemplified in Madame Sainprale. Engaging with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's image in *Émile* of motherhood rooted in "les sentiments de la nature" (1762, 34), Traversay "weaves deep symbolic and political connections between the island, the woman, the mother, and the nation" (Couti 2016, 38). The *mère-patrie*'s views on women are transported to the islands and used in Traversay's novel to establish an identity on a regional and national level that is, in fact, French. Indeed, Traversay's novel "presents the colony Martinique as laboratory and *fabrique* of [French] nationalism" (23).

Traversay's work interacts with landscape beyond the demarcation of "the female body as a (passive) symbolic territory and the mother as an (active) guardian of that very territory" (Couti 2016, 39). According to Traversay, Martinique assists France with maintaining its greatness—the gains open to the *métropole* from possessing the island are largely to be found in the land's resources ([1806] 2017, 7, 23). Timber is transported to France, resulting in an upsurge in France's profits, advancements and consequent national pride. Furthermore, French vegetation is transplanted thousands of miles from the *mère-patrie* in order to reinforce the colony's Frenchness. In a statement that is both literal and allegorical, Traversay talks of planting European greenery alongside the island's own: "on y cultivait les racines du pays" (24). The Creole inhabitants cultivate their own roots in the occupied island by fostering those of the *mère-patrie*. Traversay directly ties this notion of planting with the ideal mother-figure of Madame Sainprale, who encourages it: "il se rappela que Mme Sainprale lui avait souvent parlé du chagrin qu'elle ressentait de voir […] que, presque nulle part, on ne trouvait de plantations d'arbres, faites exprès pour jouir de leur ombrage et recueillir leurs fruits" (101).

Bergeaud also uses female and landscape allegories to discuss national identity. In *Stella*, a new Haitian identity is established following a revolution aimed at breaking from France. As Duchesne asserts, "the articulation of the Haitian Revolution and the French is embodied in the characters of Stella, a white French lady exiled in Saint-Domingue, and Marie L'Africaine, a slave and the mother of the Haitian fictional heroes Romulus and Remus" (2015, 104). Marie inspires the slaves' revolt as revenge for her murder at the hands of the Colonist, a brutal slave master who allegorises the colonising enterprise. In opposition to this antagonist, a new nation connected with Marie is initiated: "cette mère revivra bientôt

pour eux dans la patrie" ([1859] 2009, 205). The eponymous Stella, rescued from the house of a violent plantation owner by Romulus and Remus, is an allegorical figure: "je suis la Liberté, étoile des nations!" (237). Consequently, Stella plays a literal and metaphorical role in establishing an independent Haitian identity.

Landscape is as important as female allegory in the construction of a new Haiti. Indeed, the two are inextricably tied. As Marie dies, "le regard suprême de l'Africaine, aussi précis que la parole, indiqua aux deux frères la montagne où ils devaient prochainement se retirer pour venger sa mort" ([1859] 2009, 35). Her spirit subsequently reminds them that "c'est en mon nom que vous avez pris possession de cette montagne" (62). The mountain becomes a new motherland giving birth to an individual Haitian identity. By contrast, Bergeaud describes France as "une mère dénaturée qui veut la destruction de son enfant" (144), underlining the unnatural colonial repression of people and land, and reminding the reader that the protagonists' new identities are to be forged in harmony with the island landscape, in opposition to France.

The brothers retreat to the mountain to establish a headquarters, and this birthplace of a new identity is used to protect Stella (Bergeaud [1859] 2009, 64). Stella, as liberty personified, asserts that "cette montagne est un saint lieu que je prends sous ma protection" (84). The mountain becomes not only the space from which the revolutionaries draw their life blood, but also a space of mutual safety: there, they protect the freedom necessary to maintain their new nation, and their identity is protected by that freedom. As the brothers proceed "à la montagne [pour] offrir à Stella les prémices de leurs succès," we learn that "la jeune fille, assise à l'ombre du palmier de la grotte, les reçut avec joie. Elle symbolisait la sagesse dont tous ses discours exhalaient le céleste parfum: c'était Débora, la prophétesse de l'Écriture, sur la montagne d'Éphraïm" (106). The reference to Deborah, the fourth biblical judge, confirms that the mountain encapsulating a new Haitian identity is a site of literal and metaphorical elevation, for it contains power, wisdom and justice.

Once liberty has been established, it must take root if a new national identity is to thrive. Bergeaud, like Traversay, employs arboreal symbolism to convey this:

> Parmi les arbres qui croissaient à l'entrée de la grotte, se distinguait un palmier, orgueilleux et fier de sa souveraineté naturelle. La victoire en a fait depuis un symbole. […] [L]e palmier, tente glorieuse d'un peuple vainqueur, a été nommé *l'arbre de la liberté*; consécration immortelle du droit le plus sacré de l'homme, par une des plus nobles productions de la nature. ([1859] 2009, 87)

The tree also restores the voice of the oppressed: "le palmier frissonnant au vent de la montagne semblait prendre part à l'entretien mystérieux qui avait lieu sous son frais ombrage. Il figurait comme un personnage de plus dans ce tableau d'une beauté primitive" (89). In the novel's penultimate chapter, the tree of liberty is moved from the mountain into the town, and the roots of an independent identity are established throughout the island (234). Giulia Pacini talks of the "arboreal imagination of the Romantic period" (2016, 174). On an island where the loss of trees was strongly felt, Bergeaud underlines the emotional attachment of mankind to an arboreal landscape. The roots of self, identity, and even liberty are to be found in mankind's attachment to trees.

Landscape Destruction and the Effect on Identity

If identities blossom in relation to landscape, we can anticipate that landscape abuse creates issues of identity. Traversay and Bergeaud voice this concept through concerns over alterations in island topography. *Zémédare et Carina*, whose chapters shift between the

protagonists' romance and descriptions of the Martinican landscape, sees Traversay both criticise deforestation and encourage planting in one of his spatially descriptive chapters:

> À quel prix exorbitant s'élèvent déjà, à la Martinique, les bois de construction? Un arbre de moulin coûte jusqu'à deux et trois milles livres de France; et si nous ne remplaçons pas les arbres que nous avons détruits […], où nos enfants pourront-ils s'en procurer pour entretenir et conserver les établissements que nous leur destinons? ([1806] 2017, 104).

Due to the destruction of trees, the future is insecure: traditions and literal roots will be lost. A loss of trees also impacts the ability to forge ahead with French identity. How can Martinique play a significant role in French success if it cannot satiate a need for resources? Furthermore, how can what Traversay perceives as a decidedly French population survive if "les racines du pays" (24) are destroyed? In asking "pourquoi […] nous refusons-nous si obstinément à multiplier les arbres?" (104), Traversay reveals his awareness of environmental consequences: "nous voyons, par l'effet des abatis d'arbres, le nombre des sources diminuer, le cours des rivières se changer" (104). His words echo those of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre twenty years earlier.

A loss of trees is also significant in *Stella*. Romulus and Remus, pitted against each other by the antagonist, fail in their first attempts to secure liberty. The germination of their new Haitian national identity is stifled, which Bergeaud uses arboreal symbolism to highlight. Romulus argues that, "en me renversant, on n'a abattu que le troc de l'arbre de la liberté des Noirs; il repoussera par les racines, parce qu'elles sont nombreuses et profondes" ([1859] 2009, 156). His statement proves to be correct: after the brothers regroup in the chapter that is fittingly named "Retour à la montagne," revolution is successful.

Mahogany trees were commonly felled in the colonies during the early nineteenth century: "the result of generations of wholesale woodcutting in the Caribbean […], while clearing the way for sugar production, led to the virtual disappearance of West Indian mahogany" (Anderson 2004, 47–48). In addition to clearing the mahogany trees to make way for plantations, "the growing demand for luxury woods began to be felt on small islands" (Grove 1995, 63), inflicting a heavy blow on Caribbean island ecology. This materialistic demand for mahogany is made clear early in Traversay's and Bergeaud's novels. *Zémédare et Carina* mentions those trees that "étaient les meilleurs connus pour les ouvrages de menuiserie et de charpenterie, tels que les balatas, des noyers, des courbaris, des acajous de montagne" ([1806] 2017, 23). Mahogany is one of the material resources that help the island contribute to French greatness.

Whereas Traversay perceives the mahogany trade as benefiting the plantation class, Bergeaud sees a symbol of the suppression of colonised peoples' identities. In *Stella*, the Colonist's plantation house emphasises the link between clearing the land for sugar production and an insatiable desire for valuable wood. The Colonist's "portes massives d'acajou" ([1859] 2009, 45) and "large escalier, aussi en acajou massif" (46) show that the trees felled to make way for his plantation have been turned into symbols of wealth and oppression: the repetition of *massif* underlines his desire to use the land's resources to solidify his imperialist power. *Stella* articulates the fact that there will be no freedom and no independent identity without such trees, since deforestation makes way for slave plantations. Yet, the novel shows that colonists' desires can be overcome, with the mahogany tree assuming another symbolic role. After the Colonist's initial success in ending the rebellion, Remus meets Le génie de la patrie. This allegorical character takes Remus deep into the woods "jusqu'à une sorte de clairière formée par la chute d'un acajou séculaire" (125). The mahogany tree has fallen, like the brothers' hopes for a new nation. However, this fallen tree

becomes the platform for the voice of the Nation's Spirit and a new beginning: the spirit, sitting "sur le tronc pelé de l'arbre mort" (125), informs Remus of the brothers' mistakes in fighting each other and states that success will follow their reconciliation.

Island Idylls: Colonial Hegemony Unsettling the Foundations of Identity

In contrast to Bergeaud's clear argument about the impact of deforestation on the creation of a Haitian identity, Traversay's worries about deforestation affecting future Creole generations are ironically undermined. Despite concerns over environmental destruction and cultivating roots, *Zémédare et Carina* displays a mercenary attitude towards forests and mountains. This attitude reveals Traversay's supposed commitment to environmental praxis to be marred by the promotion of colonial politics. The mountain-covered landscape is described as "un échiquier garni de ses pions" ([1806] 2017, 7), ready to be exploited. Similarly, Traversay's commitment to planting is revealed to be informed by the trees' monetary value: the "plantation[s] de mille pieds d'arbres" are "sources vraies et intarissables de richesses, ouvrages faciles de l'industrie des hommes" (105 [see also 23]). His superlative-laden descriptions of the land initially appear to indicate an idyllic Martinican landscape and people: "la colonie la plus florissante et la plus précieuse de celles que la France possède. La richesse de son sol, la beauté de son climat et sa salubrité, la rendent bien digne d'être habitée par les plus généreux, les plus affables et les meilleurs des hommes" (7). The stereotypical island paradise is the perfect jewel in France's crown, with fauna worthy of an idyll. In the words of Zémédare, "je voyais le volage colibri sucer le nectar des fleurs. […] Son plumage brillant offre les reflets de l'émeraude, de l'améthyste, du saphir, de la topaze et de toutes les pierres précieuses" (34). However, these hyperbolic descriptions are tinged with the vocabulary of monetary worth. Traversay typifies Huggan and Tiffin's argument that "the plaintive search for 'lost pastoral havens' might well be seen as belonging to the […] structure of colonial violence itself" ([2010] 2015, 101), largely because "the psyche of civilization remains to guide [the author's] responses to nature" (Meeker 1972, 91). For Traversay, the land is paradisaical because of its economic value to the coloniser.

This notion of landscape presentation as a part of colonial violence suffuses *Zémédare et Carina*. Traversay employs the common colonial hierarchy of skin colour to justify slavery, and firmly links the coloniser's exploitative attitude to the land with his treatment of slaves:

> En Europe, d'après l'ordre actuel des choses, l'esclavage y serait honteux pour l'humanité […]. Dans les colonies, le climat ne permet pas de confier aux hommes blancs la culture des terres; il a donc fallu recourir aux hommes que la nature a différemment organisés pour habiter et cultiver les parties des continents, et les îles placées dans l'étendue de la zone torride? Cette vérité, démontré par l'expérience, et bien reconnue de tous, les établissements des colonies ont nécessité le transport des hommes noirs de l'Afrique. ([1806] 2017, 69)

Traversay's words correspond to the idea of "the landscape […] as a participant in th[e] historical process [of colonial violence] rather than a bystander to human experience" (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 4). The desire for violent alteration in topology leads to the violent displacement of peoples, since the supposed requirements of the landscape are used to justify the slave trade, as Traversay's colonial apology reveals.

A similar hegemonic attitude is directed towards women. Radical Ecofeminists, who have long argued that "the earth is dominated by male-developed […] technology, science, and industry" (Merchant [1992] 2005, 202), are adept at "mak[ing] connections between [women's] exploitation in what is seen as a patriarchal socio-political system and the system

of exploitation of the environment" (Devine 1992, 2). In *Zémédare et Carina*, the landscape is revealed to be at the mercy of patriarchal values when it comes to naming trees. The "monstrueux baobab, qui avait près de 80 pieds de circonférence, et qui couvrait une surface de 400 pieds carrés," the "superbe acomat," and the "très grand fromager" are named for men, whereas the "beau lecythis," with its "fleurs magnifiques," and the "courbari, de la plus belle venue," relate to women ([1806] 2017, 23). The trees embody gender stereotypes in eighteenth-century France: "the trees named for men are, predictably enough, associated with height, girth, and enormity, while those named for women are evoked in terms of their beauty, flowering, and sexuality" (McCusker 2018, 219). But we can go further: the landscape is not only named according to patriarchal values, it is to be disposed of as they dictate. Carina's father plants a wood when she is born, intending to fell it for her dowry ([1806] 2017, 23 [see also 105]). The buying and selling of trees is thus equated to the buying and selling of women. Control over landscape equals control over those deemed socially inferior, and Traversay's land ethic stems less from concern for the ecosystem and more from a desire to fuel the patriarchal system. The patriarchy itself, along with the European vegetation and Rousseau's views on women, has been transplanted from France to the colonies in the landscape.

The white Creole population did not find it straightforward to establish a national identity in the regions. As McCusker argues, "a sense of dislocation, unsettlement, and exile […] was the destiny of all who migrated to the Antilles under the plantation regime" (2018, 209), which leads Traversay's novel to "testify to insecurity of ownership" (211). When a relationship with the land is employed to construct an identity, insecurity about land tenure creates difficulties in establishing a firm identity, especially when coupled with the landscape's own lack of firm historical grounding: not only are the roots of the planted trees shallow, but the rock formations and mineral deposits are relatively recent, too (219–21).

Traversay's desire to present Martinique in an idyllic light stems from a desire to control the land, but the latter desire undermines the former. The need to maintain dominion over the landscape builds a hierarchy of power that results in the white coloniser's dislocation from the landscape. The coloniser's mentality connects the land with the race and sex to be dominated due to assumed social inferiority, namely the black slave population and women. As a result, a narrative of belonging in that landscape cannot be established for the white male coloniser. Moreover, exhorting colonial policies does not demonstrate ownership of landscape, but rather damages the relationship to it and harms the people who rely on it. Despite Traversay's claims, the land so worthy of French ownership is no idyll: it is infested by a plague of ants brought on the colonisers' ships: "ils s'emparent des maisons, ils dévorent […] tous les faibles animaux et les enfants mêmes, s'ils les surprennent endormis" ([1806] 2017, 77). The future generation is again under threat due to colonisation interfering with the local ecosystem. An ecoregional identity is therefore shaky from the start, and McCusker's observation can be extended. It is not only the lack of connection with the island's past that causes spatio-temporal insecurity. The attempt of those in the plantation class to identify with a landscape tied to minority groups and kept at a distance because of the desire to appear superior to it also threatens their spatio-temporal security in the present. And the fact that they systematically destroy this landscape in full knowledge of the effects threatens their spatio-temporal future security.

By contrast, Bergeaud's protagonists are slaves and women, who constitute the oppressed minorities linked with the exploited landscape. Bergeaud does not undermine their relationship with the land, their ability to draw what they need from it, or their own identity. Instead, he highlights that the slaves are required to donate their lifeblood to the colonial cause, just as the earth is forced to surrender its resources: "l'esclavage tenait courbées sous

sa main de fer ces patientes créatures, condamnées à demander à la terre des trésors qu'elles payaient de leur sueur et de leur sang" ([1859] 2009, 24). Romulus, Remus and their followers easily draw their identity from the landscape, as everything is scarred by the coloniser's yoke. Bergeaud also ties the landscape to the two maternal figures who exhort and aid the germination of a new Haitian identity as they protect the landscape. Thus, just as the mother figure gives birth to Romulus and Remus, the new Haitian identity is reborn from the motherland tied to her.

The island's idyllic qualities are enhanced by the oppressed people's ability to construct a new identity with the aid of the landscape. Consequently, Bergeaud's version of the pastoral idyll initially seems to be more successful than Traversay's. Like the earlier author, Bergeaud presents hyperbolic description:

> Quel riant séjour que Saint-Domingue la Reine des Antilles! Que de beautés […]! Des montagnes altières ennoblissent l'aspect du pays, l'entourent et le protègent […]. À leur pied s'étendent d'immenses plaines, où leur ombre se projette sur un éternel océan de verdure. […] Remarquez ces bosquets d'orangers que l'homme n'a pas plantés […]. Admirez ces forêts de palmiers qui s'étendent à perte de vue ([1859] 2009, 25–26).

However, *Stella* conveys idyllic qualities that are not found in the land's ability to further economic or political desires, but in areas spared from mankind's interference, and in reference to the very landscape features determined as vital to a new identity. We therefore see an example of "the post-pastoral" (Gifford 1999, 150) in the form of a "new Caribbean pastoral" that "re-imagines identity as conditioned by a dynamic interaction between place and displacement" (Casteel 2003, 16), "informed by ecological principles of uneven interconnectedness, as well as an educated understanding of the symbiotic link between environmental and social justice both at the local level and beyond" (Huggan and Tiffin [2010] 2015, 131). Bergeaud's novel ends with an image of utopia that makes clear the importance of social justice: "la nature entière est libre. […] Voyez ce pays si richement doté, […] toujours couvert de fleurs! Rien n'y souffre […]. Si l'esclavage est une monstruosité, c'est incontestablement dans cette île, où sa hideur faisait contraste avec les beautés les plus ravissantes de la création" ([1859] 2009, 235–36).

There appears to be a progression between Traversay's novel—published in the aftermath of the French loss of Haiti, and therefore wanting to encourage continued colonial possession of Martinique—and Bergeaud's novel, which appeared a decade after the abolition of slavery in the French colonies. Changes in attitude towards landscape can be said to mirror changes in attitude towards colonialism, but such a general conclusion is overly simplistic. Novelists more liberal than Traversay drew attention to the impact of landscape destruction before 1806. In fact, *Zémédare et Carina* was formulated as a riposte to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788), with a particular desire to correct the latter's portrayal of landscape and colonised peoples (Couti 2017, x). Moreover, Bergeaud's depiction of a successful new Haitian identity is imperfect: there is a simplistic treatment of women, slaves and landscape, as well as a failure to show how Haitian rebels "fonderaient une patrie glorieuse sur les ruines de la colonie coupable" ([1859] 2009, 73).

Bergeaud's post-revolution Haiti encompasses such symbiotic harmony that the island becomes Eden itself ([1859] 2009, 248). However, his idyll reveals a Western assumption that paradise is to be found on tropical islands—a colonialist mentality destined to be shattered in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939). Unlike Césaire, Bergeaud ignores the fact that traces of colonialism persist in landscape and people even after the coloniser has been removed.

Bergeaud also adopts a patronising approach to colonised peoples: “Ils étaient à peine sortis de l’état de nature; d’indomptables passions les tyrannisaient” ([1859] 2009, 230). His description of the indigenous inhabitants of the island reflects similar bias: “ce peuple primitif […] vivait dans l’état sauvage et ne s’éloignait de la barbarie que par ses mœurs paisibles et douces. Ses connaissances se bornaient à des chansons et à des fables, poésie primitive qui avait peut-être le charme et la magie du lien qui l’inspira” (238–39). The focus on “primitive,” “limits,” “barbarism” and “uncontrollable passion” implies that these people require civilising, and the reference to charms and magic reveals little more than an exotic stereotype of the kind also later debunked by Césaire. Bergeaud’s depiction of the slave rebels is similarly problematic. Stella, who allegorises the French Revolution and its values, travels from France to the colonies in the aftermath of the failure of the revolutionary project (Duchesne 2015, 112). Thus, “Stella chooses to represent instead the Haitian Revolution” (111), and there are “parts of the novel where France and the ideals of the Revolution are named as the direct source of Haiti’s independence and abolition of slavery” (112). Bergeaud’s text reveals a desire to see the ideals of the European Enlightenment achieved outside of France, with the rebels wishing for nothing other than to serve a white woman come from France to save them:

> De ce jour, les deux frères n’eurent plus qu’une ambition, celle de mériter l’amitié de la jeune fille qui consentait à vivre près d’eux, à partager leur solitude et leur misère. Ils lui bâtirent dans l’enceinte du camp un toit de branchages […]. Cette construction rustique se transforma bientôt en un temple, et la vierge qu’elle abritait, en une sainte idole. ([1859] 2009, 53)

Bergeaud’s depiction of the creation of a new identity is thus reliant on a white saviour mentality, which compounds his association of slaves with primitive barbarism. Upon closer scrutiny, Stella’s inhabitation of the mountain of Marie L’Africaine is not so much an act of protecting an identity gained from a landscape tied to the black mother; rather, it is an act of intentional white displacement of that mother and her landscape.

Bergeaud’s island also appears idyllic because the needs of women are considered. Marie L’Africaine and Stella suffer at the hands of the Colonist, but regain their voice and power in the new Haiti. Nonetheless, Bergeaud’s female allegories remain essentialist and restrictive, revealing an attitude that continues to promote female oppression. *Stella* reflects the thinking of “many cultural feminists [who] celebrate an era in prehistory when nature was symbolized by pregnant female figures, trees, […] and in which women were held in high esteem as bringers forth of life” (Merchant [1996] 2013, 10). Cultural ecofeminists posit that “women have a superior relationship with nature” (Nhanenge 2011, 102), reaffirmed through “celebration of their common reproductive abilities” (102). Since the new Haitian identity in *Stella* is tied to an allegory of female-landscape that is revealed to be a problematic echo of nineteenth-century gender bias, we are left with questions about the perfection of the new situation. Like Traversay, Bergeaud connects women, motherhood and birth with nature in a manner reminiscent of Rousseau’s writings, indicating that the progression between the two novels is not so considerable after all.

Conclusion

The close analysis conducted in this article shows that nineteenth-century Francophone colonial authors portray landscape as a key feature in socio-political history on a regional and an international level in terms of resettlement, plantation, resource management, the patriarchal system, revolution, and regime change. In looking at the landscape as a participant in the changing nature of France’s overseas territories, we have seen that the tropical island landscape becomes a site for discussing regional and national identity, and for dealing with

problems that arise with attempts to establish new Caribbean identities. By examining *Zémédare et Carina* and *Stella* through the dual lens of ecofeminism and postcolonial ecocriticism, I have advanced an understanding of the portrayal of land, slaves and women that expands discussions of nationality, revolution, identity, and allegory. My exploration of the connections between systematic exploitation of landscape, colonised peoples and women in nineteenth-century Caribbean fiction highlights an important link between the destruction of landscape and the problematic construction of a secure Caribbean identity. Ultimately, my analysis reveals a striking similarity between Traversay and Bergeaud: despite the changing political scene during the fifty-three years separating the novels, despite two very different Caribbean identities being addressed, despite ostensibly different attitudes towards colonialism, and despite a common commitment to a land ethic, both attempts to record germinating Caribbean identities are problematised by hegemonic attitudes to landscape and oppressed peoples.

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