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Nature's Equal, or Her Conquerer:  
Two Island Visions of Drought, Land, and Community

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The relationship between environment and community figures prominently in the Haitian novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée* ("Masters of the Dew," 1944) by Jacques Roumain and the Cape Verdean novel *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* ("Victims of the East Wind," 1960) by Manuel Lopes. Both books are classics in their respective national literatures. Both are about the effects of drought on small island African-creole peasant communities, and the concurrent relationship between the ravaged land and the peasants. The isolated, enclosed island environment is elevated to central status in both books, subsuming or standing in for social and political considerations in the plots. The novels each divide the environment into two distinct elements: drought—the oppressive force of destruction and despair; and land—the nurturer and intimate partner of the people. The land is not just landscape, it is practically a character in its own right—this is emphasized by the fact that the land is often personified. This dramatization of the environment presents a framework for the relationship between the land and the community confronting their drought adversary.

Haiti and Cape Verde share a history of colonialism, though *Gouverneurs de la rosée* was written well after Haiti had gained independence from France, and *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* was published 15 years before Cape Verde would earn independence from Portugal. Critics have interpreted drought in early Cape Verdean literature as a symbol of Portugal's neglect of its island colony.<sup>1</sup> In the politically charged *Gouverneurs de la rosée*,

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<sup>1</sup> Lopes himself asserts, in response to the question "Para si, quem é o grande responsável das fomes que conheceu Cabo Verde: o clima ou o homem?", "A Natureza hostil (estiagem) de sociedade com os sucessivos (des)governos (insuficiência dos socorros enviados pelos governantes de Lisboa)—eis o drama histórico das nossas ilhas" (89). ("For you, who is most responsible for the famines in Cape Verde: the climate or man?" "Nature hostile (dry spell) to society with the successive (non)governments (insufficiency of aid sent by the Lisbon government)—this is the historical drama of our islands.") Lopes attributes the starvation to both the inevitable weather and the lack of attention Portugal paid to the colony.

drought likewise functions as a class enemy for a suffering people. Yet while Lopes shies away from presenting a political solution to the drought, offering instead a fatalistic vision of helplessness, Roumain explicitly proposes a Marxist system, drawn both from contemporary politics and traditional Haitian social practice, to remedy the problems in the village of Fonds Rouge.

In setting up drought as the enemy, each book forces a closeness between the community and the land. The books' differing perceptions of land inform different relationships between the people and the earth, and contribute to opposite outcomes to the stories. In *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, the land is feminized; the relationship between community and land is equated to that between a man and a woman. This vision presents a psychological male fantasy of simultaneously having an intimate union with the land (as with a woman) and a caring—but ultimately self-serving—control over it (as over a woman).<sup>2</sup> The plot itself follows the fulfillment of this male fantasy: the solution to the problem of drought is a male-engineered technological feat, reinforcing dominance and control of the earth, rather than a sustainable, restorative change. There are instances when reality momentarily pierces this male fantasy, when the subjugated earth and subjugated woman each offer alternate perspectives, but the main male characters ignore these moments. That the whole plot is a male fantasy is reinforced by the fact that the drought itself is ahistorical.

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<sup>2</sup> Annette Kolodny analyzes the historical roots and modern implications of the land-as-woman ("comprising all the qualities that Mother, Mistress, and Virgin traditionally represent for men") archetype in United States literature and imagination in *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1975). Though Kolodny argues that the pattern she traces is uniquely American, I contend that the image of land-as-woman in *Gouverneurs de la rosée* is based in the same psychology, and has similar implications for society, as Kolodny describes.

In contrast to the singularly patriarchal view of land as woman in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* presents two visions of the earth: both anthropomorphized to the point of being indistinguishable from the people of Terranegra, and an entity entirely separate from humanity. The people are intimately connected with the land, not in a man-woman relationship, but in a genderless unification of human bodies and souls with the earth. But the land also possesses its own, also genderless, identity apart from humans, and this distance between people and nature bespeaks reality; the villagers struggle to raise crops but, under no illusions, finally leave their homes when they realize they cannot win against the environment. The independence of the land in *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* produces a reality-based fatalist psychology different from the fantasy-entangled technologist attitude of *Gouverneurs de la rosée*.

The two books endow the land with different degrees of agency, which result in entirely different outcomes for the stories. *Gouverneurs de la rosée*'s Marxist system prevails when water and peace are brought to the community, but it works to the advantage of the male villagers only—who refigure the oppressive class hierarchy as a gender hierarchy within their society. There is an illusion of liberation for men, women, and land from the oppressive drought; ultimately, however, the men retain power over both the women and the land. In contrast to the deceptively happy ending of *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* presents a uniformly devastating situation culminating in chaos and death. Tragedy and desparation conquer faith, as the villagers are unable to combat the weather or control the land. The gendered fantasy in *Gouverneurs de la rosée* ushers in a flawed system for liberation that does not remedy the entirety of the problem, whereas *Os Flagelados do Vento*

*Leste's* distancing of a genderless land from humanity actually helps to define and strengthen the unity of people to earth.

### **Drought Imagined**

Jacques Roumain's 1944 novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée* remains a classic of Haitian literature, even though it defies a key convention of the standard Haitian novel: historical truth and specificity.<sup>3</sup> The fact that there are no apparent ties to real events in Haitian history sets the book apart from the majority of the national literature. At the same time, the book must be read in its national context. Written during a time of increasing nationalism, the plot illustrates nationalist sentiment by focusing on the ties between a people and their land, and the political relationships between the people themselves. In addition to the strong political sentiments, Roumain's inclusion of creole language and ethnographic attention to Haitian peasant culture represent new steps in his country's literature, which contribute to the novel's recognition as an important and innovative work.

The book's Marxist vision of class struggle is readily apparent. The protagonist Manuel speaks at length of *la huelga*—the peasants' strike against the ruling class—and his desire to bring the Marxism he experienced in Cuba to his home, Fonds Rouge. The villagers accept his overtly political brand of Marxism as a variation on their long-lost *coumbite*, an indigenous form

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<sup>3</sup> "It must be the only Haitian novel that makes no reference to any episode of Haiti's history." J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1998) 76. It also defies the conventions of the peasant novel. Michael Dash shows Manuel to be "unprecedented as a phenomenon in the peasant novel" because he is grounded in the traditions of his community, yet due to his political beliefs he is "the source of confrontation" with that tradition. J. Michael Dash, introduction, *Masters of the Dew*, by Jacques Roumain, trans. Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook (London: Heinemann, 1978) 14.

of communal work. Ultimately, the village comes together in a show of communal effort that brings water and saves the town. Yet apart from a minor policeman who is mentioned just once, the book provides no evidence of a class oppressor, of any class at all besides the peasantry, or of any authority to struggle against necessary for its Marxist ideology to unfold. Thus, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* advances a clearly Marxist agenda despite flouting the primary convention of Marxism, the class struggle.

Ironically, the absences of historical, environmental, and Marxist reality exist within a 'realist' novel in the sense that the book narrates a straightforward tale grounded in real social conditions and activities. Roumain's inclusion of colloquial language and other ethnographic details of Haitian peasant life further point to the reality he attempts to depict. Yet in relying heavily on allegory and in basing the plot on the fulfillment of a fantasy, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* departs from strict realism. Haitian author Jacques-Stéphen Alexis writes

In Roumain's work we find a kind of symbolic realism. The novel is a kind of popular poem with classical contours and symbolic characters. Without underestimating the enormous artistic value of Roumain's style, one must make the comment that he does not continue nor develop our critical realism.<sup>4</sup>

"Critical realism" in Alexis's view means that history must be present fully and unadulterated in the work. Critic J. Michael Dash concurs that the "poetico-mythical world" of *Gouverneurs de la rosée* "makes the Socialist Realism of the text a little less than ideal."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques -Stéphen Alexis, preface, *La Montagne ensorcelée*, by Jacques Roumain (Paris: Français Réunis, 1972) 24.

<sup>5</sup> J. Michael Dash, *Literature and Ideology in Haiti, 1915-1961* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981) 148, 190.

Jacques Roumain came from a wealthy mulatto planter family, at a time when mulattos were the ruling class in Haiti. He attended school in Switzerland and Paris. While in Europe, Roumain became a Marxist and he founded the Haitian Communist Party upon his return to Haiti. His early fiction focused on the upper-class, though not exclusively.<sup>6</sup> In 1936 Roumain was exiled and went back to Europe to study anthropology. Roumain's exile presents a possible autobiographical link to Manuel. When Roumain returned to Haiti in 1941, he devoted himself to the study of Haitian peasant culture, and his writing turned to reflect his interest in peasants and Marxism.<sup>7</sup> *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, Roumain's last work, is perhaps the epitome of his fiction's focus on rural life and socialist politics.

The book tells the story of Manuel, a young man who has spent time in Cuba. He returns to his village in Haiti, which is plagued by drought, with strong Marxist values that he tries to impart to the villagers. At the same time, he embarks on a search for a spring to bring water to the community. The story of the quest for and appearance of water parallels Manuel's process of bringing Marxist ideas to his community. Since drought is rare in Haiti's tropical climate, the drought which is central to *Gouverneurs de la rosée* symbolizes not reality, but the absence of organized, unified community ethos and action; the restoration of water to the village at the novel's end represents the subsequent spreading of Marxist values and programs in the village.

In his mission, Manuel also takes on the role of both Christ and Prometheus; his name, derived from Emanuel, meaning "God is with us," points to his position as a holy figure with a

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<sup>6</sup> J. Michael Dash, introduction, *Masters of the Dew* 6.

<sup>7</sup> Dash, introduction, *Masters of the Dew* 8.

new vision for the community. The hero Manuel has been someplace (to Cuba), learned something (Marxist politics and action), and brings back his Promethean knowledge to a population that does not understand it. The story traces Manuel's arrival with the tools of revolution and his uncanny ability to find water for his village as they transform a poor, divided town into a thriving cooperative community. Though Manuel is ultimately martyred, his positive vision of the future becomes reality. The parallel strategies of political and natural difficulties help advance a narrative that concludes in a Marxist utopia of irrigation.

Just as the novel itself is set in an ahistorical time and place, so too the environmental problem of drought is presented without reference to climatological reality. Drought is rare in Haiti, though there is evidence that there were several small droughts in the 1930s, in particular one during 1937 that coincided with the return of Haitians to their home country from the massacre in the Dominican Republic.<sup>8</sup> In the novel, however, there is no reference to the particular historical circumstances of any actual drought, only to drought in general as a timeless problem. Data from the *World Weather Records* puts average rainfall in Port-au-Prince at about 1295.6 millimeters for the years 1921 through 1930, and 1309.1 millimeters for the years 1931 through 1940, as compared to a genuinely drought-stricken country like Cape Verde where, according to *WorldClimate*, average yearly rainfall is about 223.5 mm in Praia and

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<sup>8</sup> The novel *Les Semences de la colère* by Antony Lespès describes the difficulties faced by Haitian survivors of the Dominican massacre of 1937 when they returned to their homeland. The online Handbook of Latin American Studies notes, "Exiles in their native land, these refugees came back to face drought, disease, starvation, and an undeclared war with peasants of the region." ([Handbook of Latin American Studies](#), 1999, Library of Congress, 8 December 1999, <[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/quer...las\\_qloB::@@@mdb=hlasbib,hlasretro](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/quer...las_qloB::@@@mdb=hlasbib,hlasretro)>.) *Les Semences de la colère* depicts a real drought in Haiti, one that also coincides with a time not long before Roumain completed the manuscript for *Gouverneurs de la rosée*.

about 100.9 mm in Mindelo.<sup>9</sup> The failure of the context of the novel to match up with Haiti's environmental reality makes the drought stand out as an anomaly, and its significance as a metaphor is thus all the more dramatic.<sup>10</sup>

The absence of historical specificity emphasizes the novel's allegorical potential. The tale of a troubled community resolving its problems and achieving harmony is made universal, not tied to an explicit community or point in history. This timelessness, along with the novel's focusing on one small village and its homogenous population, accentuates the universality of the village of Fonds Rouge.<sup>11</sup> Haiti is no longer a country with specific, differentiated problems and peoples. Instead, the country and all its various struggles are collapsed into one location, Fonds Rouge, with one set of problems—drought and community discord. The significance of timelessness, however, extends beyond allegorical power to what Dash calls the author's "anxiety for establishing a truth beyond words."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *World Weather Records 1921-1930*, arranged by H. Helm Clayton, vol 90 (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1934) 378. *World Weather Records 1931-1940*, arranged by H. Helm Clayton and Frances L. Clayton, vol 105 (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1947) 400. *WorldClimate*, 1996-1998, Butter and Tuttle Ltd, 1 December 1999, <<http://www.worldclimate.com>>. Note: According to the WorldClimate website, the data for Praia is averaged from 599 months between 1921 and 1981, and the data for Mindelo is averaged from 667 months between 1921 and 1976. There were several relatively significant droughts in the 1930s around the time when Roumain was writing *Gouverneurs de la rosée*. The CIA World Factbook 1999 cites "periodic droughts" as a natural hazard in Haiti, and the World Weather Record lists precipitation rates of 1068.2 mm for 1933, 1071.0 mm for 1938, and 1046.7 mm for 1940. (*CIA—The World Factbook 1999—Haiti*, 1999, Central Intelligence Agency, 1 December 1999, <<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/ha.html>>.) These numbers mark about a one-quarter reduction in average rainfall for other years in the 1931 to 1940 period, which tends to be approximately 1415.0 mm per year. Though Roumain may have drawn on these examples of historical drought for inspiration, he did not use them specifically, which contributes to the novel's allegorical strength but diminishes the seriousness with which the earth is treated.

<sup>10</sup> The portrayal of the timeless problem of drought parallels the timeless problem of class oppression. The problem of the earth as devoid of water and productivity, and the resultant lack of sustenance for both the land and the community stands clearly at the center of the novel. The emphasis on environmental language serves to further the metaphor of drought as a symbol for community disintegration.

<sup>11</sup> Dash, *The Other America* 80.

<sup>12</sup> Dash, *The Other America* 76.

With no link to history or fact, the story's truth must make itself from scratch. The project of creating a Marxist utopia requires inventing a new language for understanding reality; Roumain's way of making this new language is to eliminate connections to history. Roumain also creates a new literal language in *Gouverneurs de la rosée* by writing much of the dialogue in Haitian creole and a creolized French accessible to French-speakers. This was a radical step in Haitian literature, though it makes sense both for the theme of finding a new language to tell a new social history, and for Roumain's interests as an ethnographer and an author interested in portraying peasant reality.

The language Roumain creates to express "a new truth about Haitian society" has the interesting characteristic of silencing two sectors of society: women and earth.<sup>13</sup> According to Dash, Manuel is the main articulator of the new language; he is the "sovereign voice and master narrator."<sup>14</sup> In his authority, he purports to speak for the land itself, mediating its message to the creole-speaking peasants: "Manuel avait traduit en bon créole le langage exigeant de la plaine assoiffée, le plainte des plantes, les promesses et tous les mirages de l'eau." ("Manuel had translated into good Creole the exacting language of the thirsty plain, the plaint of growing things, the promises and mirages of the water.")<sup>15</sup> The language is also figuratively inscribed directly on the earth by the men who bring water to the village; the novel's concluding image of the new aqueduct (Manuel's vision to save the village) winding its way toward Fonds Rouge provides a concrete picture of man's mark upon the land. Staying true to the novel's insistence on the woman-earth relationship, the aqueduct's insignia on the land echoes the mark left by

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<sup>13</sup> Dash, *The Other America* 78.

<sup>14</sup> Dash, *The Other America* 79.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Roumain, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (Coconut Creek, FL: Educa Vision Collection Héritage,

Manuel on his pregnant wife Annaise, who gazes down at the construction with her hand on her belly. Just as Manuel writes his language of dominance upon the feminized land and the female body, he also speaks for the earth and for the women of Fonds Rouge, silencing any possible autonomy these two presences might have.

The novel turns on two parallel problems: the problem of earth and the problem of blood. Manuel returns home to a village devastated by drought and starvation. His mother opens the book with the lines, “Nous mourrons tous: les bêtes, les plants, les chrétiens vivants.”<sup>16</sup> (“We will all die: the animals, the plants, the living Christians.”) The cause of the death is the dry soil, which quickly runs through Délira’s hands: “la poussière coule entre ses doigts. La même poussière que le vent rabat d’une haleine sèche sur le champ dévasté de petit-mil, sur la haute barrière de cactus rongés de vert-de-gris, sur les arbres, ces bayahondes rouillés.”<sup>17</sup> (“The dust flows between her fingers. The same dust that the wind blows with a dry breath over the devastated millet field, over the high hedge of cactus eaten by verdigris, over the trees, those blighted acacias.”) The land once flowing with water has become a dusty land hostile to life. But it is not only the dusty land that plagues Fonds Rouge. Manuel also learns that a feud has split his family apart from Annaise's family, and in effect divided the entire village. Manuel devises a single solution to this dual problem of earth and blood: bringing the community together in the necessary struggle to obtain water. His solution in a sense unites man with man and man with nature, but, as has been shown, his technologist approach builds strength amongst

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1999) 147. Translation from Dash, *The Other America* 79.

<sup>16</sup> Roumain 9. Translations are mine except where noted.

<sup>17</sup> Roumain 9.

the men and liberates them from the oppression while withholding true liberation from the women and the land.

The picture given in the first scene of the book sets the tone for the entire novel and establishes the metaphor of the relationship between land and society. This introductory scene provides a window onto all the major themes of the book. It begins with a description of the starved body of the earth, which seems to bear the head of a black woman.

Derrière la maison, la colline arrondie est semblable à une tête de négresse aux cheveux en grains de poivre: de maigre broussailles en touffes espacées, à ras du sol, comme une sombre épaule contre le ciel, un autre morne se dresse parcouru de ravinements étincelants, les érosions ont mis à nu de longues coulées de roches, elles ont saigné la terre jusqu'à l'os.<sup>18</sup>

(Behind the house, the rounded hill resembles the head of a negress with hair like grains of pepper: skinny bushes in spaced tufts, at the soil, like a somber shoulder against the sky, another hill faces the ravines, the erosions have exposed the long lines of rock, they have bled the earth just to the bone.)

The land-as-woman connection is made as soon as the central problem of drought is introduced. A sexual image of undressing ("mis a nu") describes the attack of erosion upon the woman-earth; the attack has gone so far as to bleed her to the bone. It is clear from this passage that both the women and the land of Fonds Rouge are fully oppressed by the drought. Yet the suffering of women and land will be forgotten by the end of the novel. When the drought is finally conquered, it is the men's glory and only they are liberated; the women and earth remain under the control of the men.

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<sup>18</sup> Roumain 11.

The passage then laments the community's mistake in having removed the trees in the area.

Pour sûr qu'ils avaient eu tort de déboiser. Du vivant encore du défunt Josaphat Jean-Joseph, le père de Bienaimé, les arbres poussaient dru là-haut. Ils avaient incendié le bois pour faire des jardins de vivres, planté les pois-congos sur le plateau, le maïs à flanc de coteau.<sup>19</sup>

(They had been wrong to deforest [the land]. Through the whole life of Josaphat Jean-Joseph, the late father of Bienaimé, the trees grew thick. They had burned the wood to make gardens, planted congo-beans on the plateau, corn on the hillside.)

They burned the once-thick forest to grow food that would sustain them, and now regret that decision. The passage later reveals the tragic result of the deforestation that occurred in the name of agriculture: the water stopped flowing. The recognition that human error contributed to causing the drought is a rare moment of reality peeking through the novel's pervasive male fantasy. Bienaimé reaches a moment of clarity when he could decide to call for a reforestation project to restore water to the area. But doing so would disrupt the fantasy of man's ultimate power to determine his own fate by any means he imagines.

Instead, Bienaimé's thoughts turn to the old days when the *coumbites* unified the whole community in groups to share the work of harvesting or clearing. "A l'époque on vivait tous en bonne harmonie, unis comme les doigts de la main et le *coumbite* réunissait le voisinage pour la récolte ou le défrichage."<sup>20</sup> ("At that time they lived in good harmony, united like the fingers of the hand and the *coumbite* brought the neighborhood together for harvesting or clearing for

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<sup>19</sup> Roumain 11.

<sup>20</sup> Roumain 12.

cultivation.")<sup>21</sup> The days of the *coumbite* system, a native Haitian model of communal work, are recalled fondly; they were a time when everyone lived in harmony with each other. In the present time, the implication is, the *coumbites* have disbanded and the community is no longer united.<sup>22</sup> Bienaimé's belief that there is no substitute for the *coumbites* is eventually validated and his wish for their return is eventually fulfilled by the male-created solution to build an aqueduct in order to alleviate the drought. His fantasy of restoration of the past is realized. However, as the men are able to envision options for bringing water to the village besides reforestation, the restoration of the trees is not even considered. We can imagine reforestation as the land's wish, which would enable it, too, to return to a happier past; but as the land has no agency, its wish is not fulfilled. The land is left out of the restoration and liberation because the male fantasy that drives the novel objectifies the earth.

The passage concludes by making a connection between the lack of trees and the lack of water:

...Une herbe sèche comme de l'étope a envahi le canal. Il y a longtemps que les hautes tiges des roseaux se sont affaissées, mêlées à la terre. Le fond du canal est craquelé comme une vieille faïence, verdi de matières végétales pourries. Avant, l'eau y courait libre, au soleil, son bruissement et sa lumière faisaient un doux rire de couteaux. Le petit-mil poussait serré, dissimulant la case à la vue de la grand'route.

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<sup>21</sup> Ethnographer Joan Dayan cites this passage as an example of the "illusion of change"—the false belief that "there was a time when the peasantry, though impoverished, could look back to a time *before*, when things were different"—which she claims Roumain propagates in his work. Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995) 86.

<sup>22</sup> Anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits describes the social role of *coumbites* in his 1937 study, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975) 70-73. Herskovits writes, "...for the Haitian [*coumbite*] symbolizes recreation and enjoyment—the stimulus of working with one's fellows, the pleasure of gossiping with friends, and the partaking of the feast which marks the climax of the day...The scene in a field where a large *combite* is at work is an arresting one. The men form a line, with a drummer in front of their hoes. The *simidor*, who leads the singing as he works with the others, adds the rhythm of his song to the regular beats of the drum, thus setting the time for the strokes of the implements wielded by the workers" (70-71).

–Ah ces *coumbites*, songe Bienaimé...<sup>23</sup>

(A dry weed had invaded the streambed. It had been a long time since the high stems of reeds had given way, blending with the earth. The bottom of the streambed was cracked like old porcelain, green with rotten vegetation. Before, the water ran free there, in the sun, its rippling and its light making the soft laughter of cutting knives. The millet grew densely, hiding the house from view of the main road. ‘Ah, those *coumbites*,’ dreamt Bienaimé...)

The placement of the section about the loss of water after the nostalgia for the *coumbites* indicates that perhaps it was not the deforestation alone that stopped the flow of water. The disunity of the village seems implicated in the present dry, cracking stream, littered with rotting plants unable to grow in what once was a riverbed. “Avant,” we are told, in the days of the *coumbite*, water flowed freely, bringing its delightful music to the village and causing the millet to grow so thickly that it literally blocked the house from view of the road. In those days of harmony, nature—always a vehicle—separated man from modern problems; the past, it seems, had an innocence that was always better than the present. The passage ends with Bienaimé, Manuel’s aging father, deeply nostalgic for the *coumbites*.

This passage highlights the book’s themes of the earth as a woman, of drought as a symptom of environmental destruction and a shift in social attitude, and of community unification as an ideal. Sexualized environmental language pervades the book. Bienaimé contemplates the meaning of living “en bon ménage avec la terre” (“in good keeping with the earth”), a process of husbandry which involves being an attentive farmer and rewarding the land when you reap the reward of food.<sup>24</sup> The process is linked to living in favor with one’s wife or woman: after you

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<sup>23</sup> Roumain 12.

<sup>24</sup> Roumain 21.

“open her up” and “sow her with seed,” you must please her with gifts, as Bienaimé remembers doing with his wife Délira. When Manuel begins his search for water to irrigate the village, he contemplates what might be “bonne terre” (“good land”) that would bring his vision of a verdant land lush with ripe fruit.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the most potent of the telluric references is the title, a phrase repeated by Manuel throughout the book. He dreams of a future when each person will be a “gouverneur de la rosée,” having the power to control the delicate water that feeds the crops, having the power to create his own destiny, having a power similar to the relationship one has with a woman, only more so because it is extended to the earth. Ironically, in Manuel’s vision, this supreme individual freedom can only be achieved through a system of communal cooperation, a collective of “gouverneurs.”

Although Manuel appears to hold the vision of mastery for all members of the society, there is no comfortable space for women in a scheme based on a patriarchal view of the human relationship to the earth (or rather, man’s relationship to the earth-woman). Women, it seems, will not actually have the opportunity to govern their own destiny, as evidenced by Annaise, who despite her initial insistence on chastity, suddenly agrees with Manuel’s dream of their future home and life together.<sup>26</sup> Like the reality of deforestation, which is remembered as part of the male nostalgic fantasy and resolved not through reforestation but through carving an aqueduct into the land, the reality of Annaise's initial protests to Manuel's advances is ignored as part of the fantasy that results in her giving in to a sexual encounter. Unsurprisingly, during the encounter Annaise's body is equated with the earth, as she is laid on the ground and "la rumeur

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<sup>25</sup> Roumain 52.

profonde de l'eau charriait en elle une voix qui était le tumulte de son sang" ("the low murmur of the water washed along in her in a voice that was the tumult of her blood").<sup>27</sup> No doubt after this moment "qui se laissa anéantie dans l'étreinte de l'homme" ("that left her prostrate in man's embrace"), she does not need Manuel's assurance that "tu verras que ton homme [est] un gouverneur de la rosée véritable" ("You will see that your man is a true master of the dew").<sup>28</sup> Ironically, his statement is both a promise that he will be able to provide for her and an exertion that he will control her, since she and the land are one.

At the same time as they are subjugated, women play the central role in bringing Marxism to the community. Manuel instructs Annaise, "Tu diras [aux femmes]: ...Manuel a découvert une source. Mais il dit que c'est tout un tracas de l'amener dans la pleine, qu'il faudrait faire un *coumbite* général, et comme on est fâché, ce n'est pas possible et la source restera là où elle est sans profit pour personne." ("You will say [to the women]: Manuel has discovered a spring. But he says that it's such trouble to bring it to the plain, that we must have a general *coumbite*. But as the village is divided, it's not possible, and the spring will stay where it is without benefiting anyone.")<sup>29</sup> By spreading the dual message of water and cooperative work, the women will convince the men to participate in bringing water and Marxist communal effort to the village. Yet in the end their reward is only to be proud of their men.

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<sup>26</sup> Roumain 91. Annaise says to Manuel, "Je suis une négresse sérieuse, tu sais. Aucun garçon ne m'a jamais touchée. Je suis venue parce que je suis sûre que tu ne seras pas abusant." ("I am a serious woman, you know. No man has ever touched me. I came because I am sure that you will not take advantage of me.")

<sup>27</sup> Roumain 131.

<sup>28</sup> First quote Roumain 132. 'Anéantie' is actually quite a strong word, and can mean 'crushed,' 'exhausted,' 'overwhelmed,' 'ruined,' 'destroyed,' or even 'obliterated.' Second quote Roumain 173.

<sup>29</sup> Roumain 97.

Like women, the earth is a mere conduit for men's projects. As drought is an allegory for class oppression, the oppressed land serves as a foil for the novel's nationalist agenda. Roumain capitalizes on the nationalistic aspects of talking about land, such as the idea of the earth as *patrimoine* ('patrimony') of the people and as soul of the nation, to reinforce the power of his politics. Speaking to his friend Laurélien about Cuba, Manuel says,

C'est un pays, cinq fois, non, dix, non vingt fois peut-être plus grand qu'Haiti. Mais, tu sais, moi je suis fait avec ça, moi-même.

Il touchait le sol, il en caressait le grain:

Je suis ça: cette terre-là, et je l'ai dans le sang. Regarde ma couleur: on dirait que la terre a déteint sur moi et sur toi aussi... nous sommes ce pays et il n'est rien sans nous... nous ne savons pas encore que nous sommes une force, une seule force: tous les habitants, tous les nègres des plaines et des mornes réunis. Un jour, quand nous aurons compris cette vérité, nous nous lèverons d'un point à l'autre et nous ferons l'assemblée générale des gouverneurs de la rosée, le grand *coumbite* des travailleurs de la terre pour défricher la misère et planter la vie nouvelle.<sup>30</sup>

(It's a country five times, no, ten, no maybe twenty times bigger than Haiti. But, you know, I myself am made of this. He touched the soil, caressing the grains of dirt: I am this: this earth, and I have it in my blood. Look at my color: one could say that the earth has rubbed off on me and on you too...we are this country and it is nothing without us...we don't know yet that we are a force, a single force: all the inhabitants, all the blacks of the plains and the hills united. One day, when we have understood this truth, we will lift ourselves up from one point to the other and we will make a general assembly of masters of the dew, the great *coumbite* of workers of the earth to clear away the misery and plant a new life.)

Manuel acknowledges that Cuba surpasses Haiti in size, and of course it is the place where he gained his Marxist experience. Yet his identity lies solely with the land of Haiti; the earth is part of him and he is part of the earth. The things that his friend contests make Cuba better than Haiti—the wealth, the ease of life—Manuel claims can be made to happen in Haiti if only the

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<sup>30</sup> Roumain 77-78. 'Défricher' is an agricultural term usually used to mean clearing land for cultivation.

peasants who build the land would come together to demand their rights. The author, a member of the upper class mulatto elite, clearly idealizes the representation of peasants as intimately connected to the earth in order to advance his Marxist beliefs (that peasants, as the true caretakers and cultivators of the earth, and as the providers of sustenance, should take full control of the natural resources).

Despite the novel's completely outward Marxist intentions, the plot peculiarly lacks a socialist motive, an upper class oppressor for the peasantry to rise against. The only authority figure is a solitary policeman who is barely present in the novel. Apart from this unique and insignificant character, the only class portrayed in the novel is the peasantry. The lack of a class enemy poses a problem for promoting a politics based on class tension. In the conversation with Laurélien, Manuel talks about striking against the oppressor, but he mentions no one in specific. Laurélien offers some suggestion of who the wicked authorities might be: "Le juge de paix, la police rurale, les arpenteurs, les spéculateurs en denrées, [qui] vivent sur nous comme des puces." ("The judge, the rural police, the land surveyors, the commodities speculators, [who] live on us like fleas.")<sup>31</sup> But these authorities do not figure prominently in the novel, and Manuel, the holder of wisdom and determiner of action, only speaks of an oppressor in the abstract. He asserts, "Ce pays est le partage des hommes noirs et toutes les fois qu'on a essayé de nous l'enlever, nous avons sarclé l'injustice à coup de machette." ("This country belongs to the black men and anytime that someone has tried to take it from us, we have weeded out the injustice with the cut of a machete.")<sup>32</sup> Manuel uses the neutral "on" to talk about the force that has tried

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<sup>31</sup> Roumain 77.

<sup>32</sup> Roumain 77.

to take the land from the people. Like not putting the drought into history, not naming the injustice against which the black peasantry has supposedly rebelled in the past allows for universality.

By omitting the conventional class oppressor, Roumain constructs a situation where the only thing to protest is the drought. This simplification of the Marxist paradigm dresses the inescapable, uncontrollable force of nature in the oppressor's clothes. Manuel speaks of rising up and striking against those who hold you down, but his community is faced with an oppressor they cannot combat with a strike. He is locked in Marxist rhetoric to describe a struggle against the nature's abstract power. However, Marxist rhetoric works well for the author's point. Since there is no human authoritarian opposition to join or reject, the community is forced to resolve their feud and come together—or starve. Roumain intends the drought to be an allegory; if there can be a Marxist revolution against the weather, then surely there can be one against any human oppressor. The anonymity of the drought lends it an “every oppressor” quality, so that it can stand in for any class enemy, in any time and any place.

Why did Jacques Roumain write a novel that centers around an unreal environmental crisis, especially since the book is a work of realism? Anchoring a work of fiction in a historical event can certainly stir people's emotions about the history and its implications. Why then was Roumain not satisfied to tie his plot to one of the droughts of the 1930s? Writing a historical novel that sticks closely to the facts is quite limiting; being specific in standard ways would not allow Roumain the freedom and reach that he may have wanted. Allegory, on the other hand, tends to last. Its themes apply to any time and any place. In the pessimistic vein, the allegorical struggle in *Gouverneurs de la rosée* may be seen as a perennial Haitian issue; it does not

matter who the oppressor is, just that oppression is always present. But the ending of the story gives hope for the outcome; it is possible to overcome the persistence of injustice and restore goodwill to society. The allegory of *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, however, stresses that only through Marxist ideology will persecuted peoples be able to regain their freedom, dignity, and self-sufficiency. The people feel strongly bound to the land; it is their homeland and point of origin, and they see themselves as the ones that make it productive and worthwhile. Ultimately, however, through the book's decidedly masculine socialist environmental ethic, only the men benefit from Manuel's Marxism.

Land is also made bearer of and witness to the great allegory of the hero who arrives on the scene with his new and strange ideas and struggles to bring them into acceptance. The community finally comes together after his death, too late for him to witness his dream, but his message and spirit are passed on through his not-yet-born child. In this tale, the land is a conduit for human stories, a surface to be written upon, and in its eternity it is the witness for what the hero is unable to see with his own eyes.

The land ethic in *Gouverneurs de la rosée* primarily symbolizes something more indirect. Drought is a metaphor for the social ills that plague Fonds Rouge; the coming of life-bringing water represents the liberating Marxist resolution. The earth cannot be healed until the people heal their relationships; they cannot get the water until they work together. The metaphor of the ruined earth fuels the assertion that fixing the people is a matter of Marxist-inspired collective action. There is also an obvious consensus among characters in the novel that communal work is a superior model for accomplishing tasks and fostering healthy village life. The nostalgia with which the *coumbite* work system is viewed indicates that the villagers

favor socialist work, even without the political aspects of striking and revolution. *Coumbite* is looked upon not only as an efficient work effort, but also as a place where culture and community are created: during *coumbites*, the participants laugh, sing, drink, and tell stories.<sup>33</sup> This is a homegrown socialism, one that is a profound part of the peasants' intimate relationship with the land. But the men of Fonds Rouge, with their dual nostalgic and future-oriented power fantasies, can never return to the past. They need a Marxism that reflects both their cultural identity and ideals of progress.

Also pertinent to the novel's environmental ethic is the sentiment that Bienaimé brings up in the beginning of the book when he says that the drought is due partly to the village's careless deforestation of the land. This assertion alters the idea that drought is an uncontrollable natural disaster, to the understanding that it is (at least in part) humans' fault.<sup>34</sup> However, not once is the solution suggested to come together as a community to plant trees; the villagers only discuss joining together to seek out a new source of water. Just as Manuel says the community is ignorant of Marxist ideas of the people's power, they exhibit an ignorance of alternatives for environmental restoration. But *Gouverneurs de la rosée* is really a book about community struggle that uses the environment as a metaphor. As has been demonstrated, the objectification of women and earth (and the fact that they are conflated into one thing) means that these two

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<sup>33</sup> Herskovits 70-73.

<sup>34</sup> Environmental historian Richard Grove traces the origins of the idea—known as 'dessicationism'—that deforestation is linked to lack of rainfall in his pamphlet *The Culture of Islands and the History of Environmental Concern*, delivered as an address to the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Science Doctoral Students Conference (New Haven: Program in Agrarian Studies, Yale University, 4 February 2000). Grove writes, "By the beginning of the 1790s (and a little earlier in the French colonial context) these combined phenomena ["the professionalization of science and particularly natural history, the emergence of global networks of botanical and other specialist information flow and...the development of detailed perceptions and experiences of the environmental degradation of oceanic islands"]

entities are not liberated along with the men. The novel presents a flawed Marxism that leaves some groups behind; perhaps the village of Fonds Rouge needs another hero, to bring the message of environmental restoration, sustainable development, and egalitarianism.

### The Reality of Drought

"Oi Cabo Verde	Oh Cape Verde
.....	.....
Nha vida nascê	I was born
Dum desafio di bô clima ingrato	from a challenge to your arid climate
.....	.....
Estendê bôs braços	Open your arms to me
Bô tomá nha sangue	Take my blood
Bô regá bô tchom	Water your soil
Bô flori	And make it bloom"

—"Doce Guerra" ("Sweet War") by Antero Simas, sung by Cesaria Evora<sup>35</sup>

*Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* was published in 1960 by author Manuel Lopes after he had moved to Portugal, where he still lives today. Lopes was a founder of Cape Verde's first national literary movement, Claridade, in the 1930s. Claridade began as a literary magazine, and its authors wrote poems, stories, plays, and novels, typically dealing with the themes of drought, hunger, and emigration that affected Cape Verdeans, particularly before independence from Portugal in 1975. Drought is a reality in Cape Verde. With so little rain, the Cape Verde islands are poor supporters of life; in fact, prior to Portuguese colonization in 1462 and their bringing of African slaves to the islands, no humans (and no large mammals or snakes) lived there at all. Lopes emphasizes that he deliberately tries not to address political issues in his

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had given rise to a coherent theory of 'dessicationism' connecting forest destruction to rainfall change and

works, yet in *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*, simply by recording the daily realities of his characters, Lopes illuminates the unfairness of the colonial regime.

Though much contemporary Cape Verdean literature has moved away from the Claridade themes and turned towards subjects such as post-colonial identity and creole culture, drought persists as a common theme in *morna*, the national music (sung in Kriolu), which has been popularized internationally by Cape Verdean singer Cesaria Evora.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, in the introduction to the 1984 re-printing of *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*, Lopes emphasizes the lasting impact of the droughts of the past by drawing a comparison with the impact of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima:

*Àqueles que consideram os factos aqui narrados apenas uma tragédia pungente do passado, responderei: pois sim; como a bomba de Hiroxima--uma permanente advertência à memória dos homens de boa vontade, e o aviso de que a espada de Damocles continua suspensa sobre a população de Cabo Verde como, em escala maior, a ameaça atómica sobre a Humanidade.*

*A diferença existente entre essas duas calamidades, e guardadas as devidas proporções, reside no facto de esta última ser provocada pelo instinto destrutivo dos homens associado à passividade da Natureza, e a primeira pelas forças da Natureza associada à passividade dos homens.*<sup>37</sup>

*(To those who would consider the facts narrated here only a painful tragedy of the past, I would respond: certainly not; like the bomb at Hiroshima--a permanent warning to the memory of the men of good will, and the warning that the sword of Damocles continues hanging over the population of Cape Verde like, on a greater scale, the atomic threat over Humanity. The difference existing between these two calamities, and keeping the proper proportions, resides in the fact that the latter is provoked by the destructive instinct of men associated with the passivity of Nature, and the former by the forces of Nature associated with the passivity of men.)*

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regional aridification and to a very specific kind of interest in tree-planting and afforestation" (6).

<sup>35</sup> Cesaria Evora, "Doce Guerra," writ. Antero Simas, *Cesaria Evora*, Nonesuch Records, 79379-2, 1995.

<sup>36</sup> See David Brookshaw for more on the shift in themes of Cape Verdean literature.

<sup>37</sup> Manuel Lopes, *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 1985) 9. Italics in the original.

The events of the past serve as a reminder that their danger is still present. The difference is that the bomb was a result of man's destructive power, whereas the droughts in Cape Verde were a case of Nature's forces acting while man remained passive. That man is in essence passive and helpless against the power of Nature is the theme of *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*, and one which sets it apart from the theme of man's power to conquer nature in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*. *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* offers another, different way of looking at nature that on the surface seems hostile and unattractive. However, it is really a more responsive and responsible way of imagining nature. Whereas in *Gouverneurs de la rosée* the land is always feminized, *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* presents two non-gendered visions of the earth: as unified with humanity, and as a separate self.

Though *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* is different from *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, it does not characterize all of Cape Verdean literature or culture. The morna cited above is an example of an attitude of wish fulfillment along the lines of *Gouverneurs de la rosée*. The singer is engaged in a loving struggle with the earth; she wants the personified earth to bloom for her, using her blood. The feeling of nostalgia expressed in morna and in much Cape Verdean culture resembles that found in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*.

*Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*, which won the 1960 Prémio Meio Milénio do Achamento das Ilhas de Cabo Verde, is considered a national epic in Cape Verde, and indeed it spans multiple themes reflecting Cape Verdean culture and life. The story begins with José da Cruz, a Christ figure like Manuel who intends to save his community from starvation. In spite of his neighbor's speculations, José has faith that the absent rains will come to his village of Terranegra on the island of Santo Antão. He has a prophetic dream of rain, and prepares to

plant his few remaining seeds in the dusty, dry earth. The rains do come, in a deluge accompanied by the *lestada*, or harmattan wind (a strong eastern wind), and the community is ravaged again. The climate, be it wet or dry, is perpetually crippling. The desperation provokes the community to theft, and many people flee Terranegra to look for work in the city. José da Cruz at first refuses to leave his village, although his home and children are quickly falling victim to the climate and the chaos. He finally leaves after losing his wife Zepa, and in the second part of the novel he arrives at the mountains and streets of Porto, where his son Leandro, a formerly upstanding citizen, has taken to robbery. Leandro has been unjustly accused of committing a crime, and is lynched as punishment. Still under the terror of the wind, the novel ends with Leandro's death, completing the disaster that has befallen José's family and community.

Similar to the realist *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* is a work of neo-realism.<sup>38</sup> In interviews, Lopes has expressed particular feelings about the neo-realist movement in Cape Verde and its place in Claridade literature. He asserts that Cape Verdean neo-realism is different from neo-realism elsewhere because it deals neither with political nor ideological themes, which he feels inhibit literature:

Neo-realism developed in Cape Verde three or four years before it did in Portugal. In Portugal it was primarily a political, social movement, opposed to the dictatorship of the time. In our case, we depicted the life of the people in a colloquial, direct style. I feel an affinity with the

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<sup>38</sup> Neo-realism in Portugal took place in the 1940s and was closely linked to Socialism. Baptista argues, "A sintonia com os problemas sócio-existenciais não implica de modo nenhum em Manuel Lopes um posicionamento de tipo marxista, timbre praticamente obrigatório nas produções que se assumem como representativas dos postulados estético-ideológicos do Neo-Realismo" (Baptista 179). ("Being in tune with socio-existential problems does not imply in any way in Manuel Lopes a Marxist position, the practically obligatory stamp on productions that accept themselves to be representatives of the esthetic-ideological postulations of Neo-Realism.")

American writers John Steinbeck and Erskine Caldwell. I do not think realism and politics go well together. Political concern puts blinders on a writer. It can make him one dimensional.<sup>39</sup>

Lopes claims not to be political, but he compares himself with John Steinbeck, whose impassioned writing about American culture certainly calls attention to socio-political concerns. Steinbeck himself was a notable environmental writer, and his work has been examined for the environmental ethics it puts forth.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, when writing about the environment, an author cannot help but issue opinions of an environmental socio-political nature. Though the politics in *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* may not be as overt as those in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, the novel still expresses views that helped define the first generation of Cape Verdean literature and pre-independence national identity.

Lopes insists on the Claridade movement's role of asserting cultural individuality and identity, free from stereotypes. The 'claridosos' used the metaphor of "fincar os pés na terra" ("driving the feet into the earth") to describe the movement's mission.<sup>41</sup> Lopes elaborates on this concept, linking the environment to the freedom these writers sought:

'...a revista surgiu sem programa. Mas esse fincar os pés na terra teve para nós um significado especial. O impulso inicial implicaria esta metamorfose: em contacto com a terra os pés se transformariam em raízes, e as raízes se embeberiam do húmus autêntico das nossas ilhas'...  
A *Claridade* apresentou-se...mais como testemunho social e telúrico de tipo específico...do que político e ideológico...<sup>42</sup>

(...the magazine arose without a plan. But this driving the feet into

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<sup>39</sup> Baptista 16.

<sup>40</sup> See Susan F. Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw, and Wesley N. Tiffney, Jr., eds., *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> 'Claridosos' refers to the writers of the Claridade movement. The term is used in Manuel Ferreira, *Literaturas africanas de expressão portuguesa--I* (Portugal: Instituto de Cultura Portuguesa, 1977) 65, and Manuel Ferreira, preface, *Claridade: revista de arte e letras*, ed. Manuel Ferreira, (Praia, Cape Verde: Instituto Caboverdiano do Livro, 1989) XXXI.

<sup>42</sup> Manuel Lopes, interview, Lisbon, 1984 (83-4).

the earth had special significance for us. The initial impulse would implicate this metamorphosis: in contact with the earth the feet would transform themselves into roots, and the roots would absorb the authentic humus of our islands'...*Claridade* presented itself more as social and telluric testimony of a specific type than as political or ideological testimony...)

This central metaphor of *Claridade* indicates that the whole movement was founded on an image that unites people and earth. But Lopes falsely believes that focusing on the social and ecological precludes the political and ideological. Simply by choosing the environment as the theme for a social movement, the 'claridosos' politicize nature. Lopes himself calls attention to the hard facts of overpopulation on the under-resourced islands in the introduction to the 1985 edition of *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*. And of his own work and its place in neo-realism, Lopes makes a distinct judgement about the environment: "Os meus escassos trabalhos de ficção...reflectem o meio ambiente e resultam da vivência e da observação atenta do meio e do homem nele integrado—daí a importância que dou à paisagem física envolvente."<sup>43</sup> ("My scarce works of fiction...reflect the environment and result from experience and attentive observation of the environment and of man integrated in it—thus the importance that I give to the compelling physical landscape.") Already, by intending to write what he observes and experiences of the environment, Lopes puts forth a subjective view with political implications. His perception of man as an integral part of the environment emphasizes a closeness between people and nature and contrasts with the vision of man as master over the earth presented in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*.

As opposed to man's ability to master the environment, which results in a happy ending in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, the absence of man's mastery over the environment in *Os*

*Flagelados do Vento Leste* leads to its profoundly negative conclusion. But whereas in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, the inequality of the relationship to the environment means that not everyone benefits in the end, the distance between humanity and the environment in *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* allows the people to gain perspective on their relationship with nature. When they leave their village, it is because they have done all they could to make a living in cooperation with the land, letting it maintain its autonomy. *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* is distinctly fatalistic; the religious characters believe that everything is dependent on God's will: "Este é que é destino de homem: cavar e meter grão. A espiga vem do desígnio de Nosso Senhor. Se não vem é porque Ele não quis." ("This is man's destiny: to dig and to plant seed. The ear of corn comes from the intention of Our Lord. If it doesn't come, it's because He doesn't want it to.")<sup>44</sup> Early in the novel, José da Cruz goes against the norm and tries the technique of "sementeira em pó" ("sowing in dust") to plant a corn crop. Da Cruz believes that rain will come; it visits him in a prophetic dream. Because "a chuva era um símbolo de Fé" ("rain was a symbol of Faith"), the reader learns that da Cruz is a man of absolute faith in God.<sup>45</sup> But by putting all his trust in God, he ultimately concedes to man's fundamental lack of autonomy. The text's fatalism is also an expression of *saudade*, a feeling of unrequited longing unique to the lusophone world. In Portugal, *saudade* is expressed musically in the national song called *fado*, meaning 'fate.' In Cape Verde, the same fatalism and longing exists in *morna*.

José da Cruz's faith goes hand-in-hand with his fierce attachment to the land, which he refuses to leave even after his village has been abandoned and his home wrecked. He departs

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<sup>43</sup> Lopes, interview 92.

<sup>44</sup> Lopes 33.

<sup>45</sup> Lopes 14.

only after his wife's death, when he is left completely alone. José da Cruz's decision is an archetype for the intense, enduring peasant relationship to the land. Lopes says, "Tento... chamar a atenção para o tipo representativo da classe rural em que o sentimento de apego a terra é a característica mais marcante—mesmo em condições extremas como as descritas n'*Os flagelados do vento leste...*"<sup>46</sup> ("I try to call attention to the representative type of the rural class in which the sentiment of attachment to the land is the most marking characteristic—even in extreme conditions like those described in *Os flagelados do vento leste...*") In his analysis of Cape Verdean literature, Manuel Brito Semedo succinctly states the pull of the native land on the peasant's life, even when the land brings no good:

Os dois romances de Manuel Lopes, *Chuva Braba* (1956) e *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* (1959) são hinos telúrgicos entoando uma mensagem de resignação cuja tensão dramática advém do dilema partir/ficar... É interessante notar que *Chuva Braba* termina num cântico à fecundidade da terra sagrada e *Flagelados do Vento Leste*, em cânticos macabros e fúnebres a uma terra amaldiçoada (emphasis in the text).<sup>47</sup>

(Manuel Lopes's two novels, *Chuva Braba* (1956) and *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* (1959) are telurgic hymns chanting a message of resignation whose dramatic tension results from the dilemma of going or staying... It is interesting to note that *Chuva Braba* ends in a canticle to the fecundity of the holy land and *Flagelados do Vento Leste*, in macabre and gloomy canticles to a cursed land.)

Brito Semedo's statement also notes that despite the common theme of resignation to the weather, not all of Lopes's works portray a harsh land.

Lopes himself traces people's attachment to the land to a direct connection between personal identity and landscape: "O homem feito à imagem do ambiente que o formou.

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<sup>46</sup> Lopes, interview 69.

<sup>47</sup> Manuel Brito Semedo, *Caboverdianamente Ensaando*, vol I (São Vicente, Cape Verde: Gráfica do Mindelo, Lda., 1995) 45-6.

Ecologicamente certo...O cabo-verdiano...tem as estiagens. O seu principal heroísmo caracteriza-se por essa luta de séculos para sobreviver.<sup>48</sup> ("Man is made in the image of the environment that shaped him. Ecologically certain...The Cape Verdean...has the dry spells. His principal heroism characterizes itself by this centuries-old struggle to survive.") In an assertive show of faith in the effect of the environment upon human development, Lopes attributes full power to the physical environment to shape human characters, an act which his books show also produces in people a lasting but realistic commitment to nature, so that they remain dedicated until the question of their own survival is at its gravest.

The environment's power to affect human life is evident in the names of the villages in both *Gouverneurs de la rosée* and *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*. *Gouverneurs de la rosée*'s Fonds Rouge and *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*'s Terranegra translate to 'Red Earth' and 'Black Earth,' respectively. Both villages are named after the land, indicating the centrality of the earth to the life of the rural communities. The colors perhaps reflect the tones of the local earth, but they might also hold symbolic value for the novels' themes. In the case of *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, red offers a clear reference to the book's Marxist theme. In the case of *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*, black likely symbolizes the emptiness of the land and, correspondingly, of the villagers' spirit.

The land in *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* is often anthropomorphized but not feminized as it is in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*. Usually, the land is genderless, which opens the interaction between land and man to equality, particularly when the two are shown as unified.

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<sup>48</sup> Lopes, interview 87-8.

One example of the egalitarian unity between man and land appears after a passage describing the mountains (as neither woman nor person) and the rain that finally comes. José da Cruz

Aspirou o ar, impregnado de um cheiro gordo e bom a terra saturada. Sentiu-o penetrar-lhe o sangue como uma comida substancial entrando num estômago faminto. Não havia para ele melhor perfume que este; o cheiro a suor da terra, que penetrava o corpo e o espírito do homem, alimentava-lhe os músculos dos braços e a vontade de viver, e abria-lhe uma certeza e um caminho.<sup>49</sup>

(He breathed in the air, filled with an ample, good smell of saturated earth. He felt it penetrate his blood like substantial food entering a famished stomach. For him there was no better perfume than this; the smell of the sweat of the earth, that penetrated the body and spirit of man, nourished the muscles of his arms and his will to live, and opened to him a certainty and a path.)

The earth takes on the human property of sweat, and as the smell of this sweat enters José da Cruz's blood, the earth joins his body. The earth's smell is his physical and spiritual sustenance. The two worlds interpenetrate, and man and earth become one through the liquid water/sweat.

The earth is specified as being part of all people, regardless of gender: "Havia neles qualquer coisa de terroso, como se fossem raízes arrancadas à terra. Raízes insepultas que Deus, com toques de barinha mágica, tivesse transformado em homem, mulher e filhos..."<sup>50</sup> ("There was in them something earthy, as if they were made of roots pulled out from the earth. Roots that God, with touches of magic, had transformed into man, woman, and children..."). God is named as the presence that joins the human-earth relationship.

The peaceful connection between people and the earth exists even in the face of environmental and social disaster. However, the hardship wrought by natural forces

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<sup>49</sup> Lopes 29.

<sup>50</sup> Baptista 137.

necessitates that the land will not always interact gently and equally with people. When man senses his agricultural work is a chore, the land becomes an indirect oppressor. Boys are described as being enslaved to the earth once they reach manhood:

Aquela tira de carrapato era sinal de trabalho, simbolo de emancipação, na ideia do rapaz. Significava que nele se estava operando a passagem de menino para homem. Na verdade, era o começo da escravização do menino pela terra, sob o disfarce tentador da responsabilidade de homem.<sup>51</sup>

(That piece of cord was the signal of work, symbol of emancipation, in the mind of the young man. It signified that the passage from boy to man was operating in him. In reality, it was the beginning of the slavery of the boy to the earth, under the tempting disguise of manly responsibility.)

The boy thinks his newfound work duties are initiating him into the power of manhood, when in fact the agricultural life surreptitiously takes away all of his freedom. Man's intimate reliance on the land forces him to surrender to it. The earth remains genderless and in fact only indirectly implicated in the slavery. This neutrality allows it to retain its importance as the intimate relation to people, despite the hardship the environment imposes on them.

In the 1984 interview, Lopes indicates that he has an opinion about the gender of the Cape Verdean land by comparing it to the Azores islands, despite not making gendered land central to the text of *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*:

Não é de mais salientar o contraste entre a paisagem máscula e agreste das ilhas cabo-verdianas, onde as linhas de erosão se desenham nítidas no céu amplamente iluminado num desafio à vontade de sobrevivência do homem, e a paisagem feminina, curvilínea, generosa, rica e dadivosa das ilhas açorianas.<sup>52</sup>

(It is not too much to point out the contrast between the masculine landscape of the Cape Verdean islands, where the erosion lines stand

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<sup>51</sup> Lopes 43.

<sup>52</sup> Lopes, interview 85.

out sharply in the sky amply illuminated in a challenge to man's will to survive, and the feminine, curvilinear, generous, and rich landscape of the Azores islands.)

Lopes defines a masculine landscape as one which shows clear signs of erosion and presents a challenge to man's survival instinct; feminine landscapes, on the other hand, are plentiful in biodiversity, undulating, and inviting. In *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, however, the eroded land is feminine. In its drought state, the land is uninviting, and it presents a constant challenge to the farmers who must pamper it in order to reap their harvest; yet it is still portrayed as feminine. It seems that both authors draw a connection between female bodies and the shape of the land. In Lopes's case, however, drought-stricken land indicates not a stubborn woman, but a masculine temperament.

## **Conclusion**

The very different visions of the natural world offered by *Gouverneurs de la rosée* and *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* suggest deeply contrasting accounts of the relationship between humans and nature in two similar island communities. In *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, the feminized land serves primarily as the object of a male fantasy of domination, conquest, and technological triumph. An imagined, timeless drought exists as a force for men to overcome-- the analogue for the class oppressor that allows the Marxist allegory to proceed. But although the drought is a metaphor, it implicates a relationship between men and the land that has deep ramifications within and beyond the novel. The community of men must band together to survive; in doing so, they ignore any autonomous presence of women just as they ignore the needs of the land.

The Cape Verdean reality of drought enforces a fatalism and more intense realism in *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste*. The novel offers two characteristics for the land: as a unified being with humanity, and as an autonomous presence often expressing power over the community members. While the land is often anthropomorphized, it has no specified gender in the novel. The relative unimportance of the land's gender universalizes the deep land-person relationship across the community of Terranegra, and in fact extends it to all Cape Verdeans, as the epic aims to depict a national characteristic. The residents of Terranegra embody the *Claridade* vision of Cape Verdeans united as one with the earth. In addition to unity with humanity, though, the earth possesses its own character separate from people. Though the challenges the land presents prove insurmountable, the novel still offers a vision in which the environment is at least respected—just as all the people in the community are respected participants in the community's attempts to overcome drought. Gender relations in *Os Flagelados do Vento Leste* are varied; they are not forced into the single paradigm of male dominance and desire that pervades *Gouverneurs de la rosée*.

Though both of these books are about drought, only Manuel Lopes intended to elaborate a model for the human relationship with the environment. But the project of ecological literary criticism extends to examine both those books that are and are not concerned with commenting explicitly on man's relationship with the environment. Humans' relationships with the environment in each of these books echoes relations within the human community. Exposing the parallels between gender relations and human-environment relations in literature helps to identify the similar patterns of oppression that mark both.

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