

# Towards Biopolitical Ecocriticism: The Example of the Manifeste pour les 'produits' de haute nécessité

Hardwick, Louise

DOI:

[10.1093/fs/knw127](https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/knw127)

License:

Creative Commons: Attribution (CC BY)

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Hardwick, L 2016, 'Towards Biopolitical Ecocriticism: The Example of the Manifeste pour les 'produits' de haute nécessité', *French Studies*, vol. 70, no. 3. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/knw127>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

## General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

## Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

## TOWARDS BIOPOLITICAL ECOCRITICISM: THE EXAMPLE OF THE *MANIFESTE POUR LES 'PRODUITS' DE HAUTE NÉCESSITÉ*

LOUISE HARDWICK  
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

### *Abstract*

This article undertakes a cultural and political examination of the *Manifeste pour les 'produits' de haute nécessité*, a manifesto co-authored by a collective of leading Martiniquan cultural figures, including Patrick Chamoiseau and Édouard Glissant, in response to the general strikes of 2009 in Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, and Réunion. These strikes focused metropolitan attention on the high cost of living or 'la vie chère'. After a discussion of the aesthetics of the manifesto, with particular attention to the dichotomy it develops between *le prosaïque* and *le poétique* and the wider role of culture in challenging neo-liberalism's global hold which is advanced by the *Manifeste*, this article introduces the new methodology of biopolitical ecocriticism. A biopolitical ecocritical reading of the manifesto, building on the biopolitical work of Foucault through reference to ecocriticism and the philosophical works of Edgar Morin and André Gorz, reveals the fundamental links between global governance and natural life, raising urgent questions about the relationship between language, life, the environment, history, and politics.

The 2009 general strikes in the overseas French Caribbean departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana cast a spotlight on a number of urgent issues pertaining to the relationship between humans and their environment, and the economic — and social — impact of globalization and multi-national companies. Strikers railed against the high cost of living, and the term 'la vie chère' rapidly became the defining refrain, against a backdrop of media reports highlighting the economic disparities between the *métropole* and the overseas departments. The newly formed group *Liyannaj kont pwofitasyon*, known as LKP, which co-ordinated the strike action in Guadeloupe, had opened their list of 120 demands with a call for a 'baisse significative de toutes les taxes et marges sur les produits de première nécessité';<sup>1</sup> the alternative term 'les denrées de première nécessité' was also frequently used.<sup>2</sup>

The strikes can be situated within a wider history of revolt and strike action in the post-abolition francophone Caribbean, although the events of 2009 displayed the most pronounced critique to date of the neo-liberal era.<sup>3</sup> The anthropologist

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Michel Maurhein, *La Guadeloupe du 20 janvier au 04 mars 2009* (n.p.: Auteurs indépendants, 2009), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Guy Numa, 'Les Départements d'outre-mer: des économies sous tutelle', in *La Révolution antillaise: quelle place pour l'outre-mer dans la république?*, ed. by Luc Laventure (Paris: Eyrolles, 2009), pp. 29–47 (p. 29).

<sup>3</sup> For discussion of 2009 in the wider context of revolt, *marronage*, and strikes in the francophone Caribbean, see my 'Depicting Social Dispossession in Guadeloupe: Nèg Maron, *Lettre ouverte à la jeunesse* and the General Strike of 2009', *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 48 (2012), 288–305.

Yarimar Bonilla has suggested that the strikes were an experimental time that ‘served as a pre-figurative movement in which alternative economic, social, and political configurations could be both imagined and experienced’.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, these alternative configurations transcended the sphere of theoretical discourse to manifest themselves in necessary adaptations to the patterns of everyday living. The strikes had wide-reaching implications for the general public, as schools closed, supermarket shelves emptied, and petrol became scarce: indeed, it was a petrol price hike, implemented in December 2008 by the Société anonyme de la raffinerie des Antilles (SARA), the sole petrol supplier to the French Antilles, that had catalysed the strike action.

On 16 February 2009, as Guadeloupe was about to enter a second month of strikes, and as Martinique neared the end of its second week of strikes, *Le Monde* and *L’Humanité* simultaneously published the *Manifeste pour les ‘produits’ de haute nécessité*, which was co-authored by a collective of leading cultural figures and academics from or based in Martinique.<sup>5</sup> In addition, a printed edition was co-produced by Éditions Galaade and Édouard Glissant’s Institut du Tout-Monde; this edition benefited from the financial support of the Île-de-France region, and was sold online at the accessible price of three euros per copy, with the assurance that authors’ rights had been waived and that any funds raised would be ‘intégralement versés aux syndicats de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique, afin de venir en aide aux salariés grévistes’.<sup>6</sup> The manifesto offers a broad discussion of the development of Antillean culture, taking the specific moment of the 2009 strikes as its departure point. Through its title alone, the *Manifeste* directly engages with the lexicon of ‘la vie chère’ and ‘le panier de la ménagère’ by interrogating the value systems in which these terms operate.

The *Manifeste* explores the multifaceted struggle to dominate the specific environment of France’s overseas departments, with a particular focus on Martinique. As the text makes clear, this struggle involves the requisitioning of land so that it may be exploited to maximum profit through commercial development — but at what social and cultural cost? The manifesto explores the effects of this systematic capitalist process of extraction, and demonstrates that the consequences are psychological as well as concrete. In this significant intervention on the strike action, it is the land itself that emerges as the primary site of conflict. The authors argue that whoever controls the land and the way it is used can, in turn, shape and control Martiniquans’ relationship to their *pays natal*. Tracing the historical context that has given rise to the current situation, they also point to the economic and political structures of the colonial past as a means better to understand the postcolonial present.

<sup>4</sup> Yarimar Bonilla, ‘Guadeloupe is Ours: The Prefigurative Politics of the Mass Strike in the French Antilles’, *Interventions*, 12 (2010), 125–37 (p. 127).

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Breleur, Patrick Chamoiseau, Serge Domi, Gérard Delver, Édouard Glissant, Guillaume Pigeard de Gurbert, Olivier Portecop, Olivier Pulvar, and Jean-Claude William, *Manifeste pour les ‘produits’ de haute nécessité* (Paris: Éditions Galaade, 2009); henceforth *Manifeste*.

<sup>6</sup> Éditions Galaade, ‘Manifeste pour les Martinique–Guadeloupe–Guyane–Réunion’, <<http://www.galaade.com/oeuvre/manifeste-pour-les>> [accessed 25 February 2016].

Spanning questions of a political and philosophical nature, from food security, to environmental issues, the *Manifeste* also opens debates on the nature of work, critiquing how it is defined, and why it is undertaken. This culminates in a challenge to the consumer-driven direction of contemporary Caribbean society. Critics such as Chris Bongie and Peter Hallward have provided important and damning interventions through the prism of postcolonial theory and philosophy on the ‘cultural politics’ of French Caribbean authors, with particular emphasis on Glissant, arguing that the late twentieth century witnessed an erosion of political agency congruous with the rise of a concern with aesthetics.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Celia Britton and Charles Forsdick identify a militant politics still at work in that author’s later (often co-written) texts, of which the *Manifeste* is an important example.<sup>8</sup> The manifesto offers an opportunity to work through a politics of culture as it emerges in the context of the social unrest of 2009. In so doing, strategies with which to implement change and to challenge the dominant political order — particularly where the environment is concerned — become apparent. The present article suggests that an understanding of these strategies can be enhanced through a reading that harnesses the insights of Foucauldian biopolitics and more recent critical discourse on ecocriticism. A biopolitical ecocritical reading of the text sheds light on the relevance of the work of Edgar Morin and André Gorz to the authors of the manifesto, and reveals the links between global governance and natural life. Such a reading raises urgent questions about the relationship between language, life, the environment, history, and politics, and demonstrates the *Manifeste*’s contribution to wider debates on questions of food security and climate change in the Caribbean.

### *Manifeste pour les ‘produits’ de haute nécessité*

The *Manifeste* was co-authored by an all-male team, all of whom are Martiniquans or based in Martinique.<sup>9</sup> The nine co-signatories can be divided into two groups: cultural figures, and academics. The first group comprises Ernest Breleur, the well-known sculptor; the author Patrick Chamoiseau; Gérard Delver, a writer and actor; and Glissant. The academic contributors are the sociologist Serge Domi, who has a particular interest in social development in Martinique; a metropolitan French philosopher and teacher, Guillaume Pigéard de Gurbert; Olivier Portecop, the Director of the Centre de ressources informatiques at the Université des

<sup>7</sup> Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Celia Britton, ‘Globalization and Political Action in the Work of Édouard Glissant’, *Small Axe*, 13 (2009), 1–11; Charles Forsdick, ‘Local, National, Regional, Global: Glissant and the Postcolonial Manifesto’, in *Caribbean Globalizations, 1492 to the Present Day*, ed. by Eva Sansavio and Richard Scholar (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 227–44.

<sup>9</sup> That the authors are exclusively male might be seen as upholding the allegedly masculinist dimensions of *créolité*. One significant Martiniquan response to the 2009 crisis included female contributors, and this text and the wider gender issues it raises deserve further critical attention: Suzanne Dracius, Ernest Pépin, Patrick-Mathélié-Guinlet, Hector Poulet, José Pentoscope, Lisa David, Alain Caprice and Liyannaj kont pwofitasyon, *Guadeloupe 26 Martinique en grève générale contre l’exploitation outrancière et contre la vie chère: Liyannaj kont pwofitasyon: les 120 propositions du collectif* (Fort-de-France: Desnel, 2009).

Antilles et de la Guyane (then the UAG; now the UA following the departure of French Guiana in 2015); and two further UAG researchers based at the Centre de recherches sur les pouvoirs locaux dans la Caraïbe: Olivier Pulvar, a media and communications studies expert, and Jean-Claude William, a Professor of political science.

The authors belong to a generation that reached maturity in a period characterized by a growing sense of political disillusionment with departmentalization and subsequent independence movements; both political courses had failed to prevent the (further) erosion of the islands' autonomy. Glissant had famously campaigned for the independence of the *départements d'outre-mer* (DOMs) as a young man, and was subsequently banned by Charles de Gaulle from returning to the French Antilles until 1965. While the *Manifeste* does not explicitly call for the DOMs' independence (since the 2003 constitutional reform, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, and Réunion are now technically designated by the term *département et région d'outre-mer* or DROM; the term DOM is still widely used), it does prescribe greater autonomy, promoting 'une responsabilité politique endogène' (*Manifeste*, p. 4) as a way out of the political and social crisis of 2009. Several co-signatories, including Chamoiseau, are self-declared *indépendantistes*.

The decision to publish in French, and in two established French newspapers, is indicative of the authors' desire to make a contribution to metropolitan audiences' understanding of the situation in the French Caribbean. No Creole version has been sourced, but an English translation of the manifesto entitled 'A Plea for "Products of High Necessity"' appeared on 5 March 2009, published online by *L'Humanité in English*.<sup>10</sup> Does this publication choice — French over Creole, Paris rather than Fort-de-France — undermine the authors' self-proclaimed goal of changing their local society? Not necessarily, if the manifesto is read as an internationally visible online intervention in an ongoing, locally rooted discussion of French Caribbean society. Evidence of the rapid online dissemination of the manifesto via webpages and downloadable PDF versions suggests that in the twenty-first century, digital communication is beginning to circumvent former restrictions concerning publication location and intended target audience.<sup>11</sup>

The manifesto's political goals are announced through its epigraphs. The first, by Gilles Deleuze, is taken from *L'Image-temps*, Deleuze's second study on cinema:

Au moment où le maître, le colonisateur proclament 'il n'y a jamais eu de peuple ici', le peuple qui manque est un devenir, il s'invente, dans les bidonvilles et les camps, ou bien dans les ghettos, dans de nouvelles conditions de lutte auxquelles un art nécessairement politique doit contribuer.<sup>12</sup>

A second epigraph, by Aimé Césaire, is a mark of respect to a literary and political forebear as well as an elegy to new beginnings: 'Cela ne peut signifier qu'une

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Breleur and others, 'A Plea for "Products of High Necessity"', trans. by Isabelle Métal, <<http://www.humaniteinenglish.com/spip.php?article163>> [accessed 25 February 2016].

<sup>11</sup> Ernest Breleur and others, 'Manifeste pour les "produits" de haute nécessité', <<http://bastamag.net/IMG/pdf/manifeste.pdf>> [accessed 25 February 2016].

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *L'Image-temps* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), cited in *Manifeste*, p. 1.

chose: non pas qu'il n'y a pas de route pour en sortir, mais que l'heure est venue d'abandonner toutes les vieilles routes', a quotation taken from *Lettre à Maurice Thorez*, the open letter (a genre itself akin to the manifesto) with which Césaire famously announced his break with the French Communist Party on 24 October 1956.<sup>13</sup> Césaire's open letter was reproduced the following day in *France-Observateur*, and a revised version appeared later the same year in *Présence africaine*, in a manner reminiscent of the rapid media dissemination of the *Manifeste*.

In a close study of the postcolonial manifesto, Charles Forsdick has noted that the manifesto genre, a form most associated with modernism, has re-emerged in turn-of-the-millennium francophone Caribbean literature as a tool with which to experiment with new configurations of identity, politics, and collectivity.<sup>14</sup> In her reading of the *Manifeste*, Nicole Simek regards the text as a revival of an outmoded form that is nonetheless fully aware of the limitations historically associated with the manifesto: to write a manifesto in the contemporary era, she argues, paraphrasing Slavoj Žižek, requires taking the genre more seriously than it takes itself.<sup>15</sup> This possible authorial knowingness aside, the sincerity of the 2009 manifesto is unmistakable, and the *Manifeste* must be placed within a genealogy of recent short French Caribbean texts, pamphlets, and manifestos, most notably the 'Manifeste pour refonder les DOM', which was published on 21 January 2000.<sup>16</sup> Again, Chamoiseau, Delver, and Glissant were three of the four co-signatories; the fourth was the French Guyanese doctor and author Bertène Juminer. This earlier manifesto calls for greater recognition of the ongoing dependency and state of torpor caused by departmentalization:

[L]e rôle de la France ne devrait pas être de décider des cadres de notre liberté, même après consultation, mais d'ouvrir ce qui avait été fermé, de dénouer ce qui avait été noué, d'oxygéner les zones où l'asphyxie avait été permise.<sup>17</sup>

The 'Manifeste pour refonder les DOM' maps out many of the sites of conflict arising from the persistent, unresolved debates on the evolving and pernicious forms of dependence that shape France's relationship with its DOMs. In the period since 2000, the rapid growth of online technology, the 2008 international financial crash, and increasing global concerns about climate change all contributed to the 2009 manifesto's reconsideration of the value systems at work in contemporary Martinique.

Mimi Sheller suggests that the pattern of contemporary consumer culture that is found across the Caribbean is fundamentally linked to the 'contemporary inequalities between the "underdeveloped" Caribbean and the "modern west"'.<sup>18</sup> In the specific case of the French Caribbean, the economic history of the DOMs

<sup>13</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1956).

<sup>14</sup> Forsdick, 'Local, National, Regional, Global'.

<sup>15</sup> Nicole Simek, 'Hungry Ironies in the French Antilles', *Symphokē*, 19 (2011), 107–17 (p. 113).

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau, Gérard Delver, Édouard Glissant, and Bertène Juminer, 'Manifeste pour refonder les DOM', <<http://jacbayle.perso.neuf.fr/livres/manifeste.html>> [accessed 25 February 2016]. In a further indication of these authors' visibility in metropolitan France, this manifesto was also first published in *Le Monde*.

<sup>17</sup> 'Manifeste pour refonder les DOM', quoted in Charles Forsdick, 'Late Glissant: History, "World Literature", and the Persistence of the Political', *Small Axe*, 14 (2010), 121–34 (p. 130).

<sup>18</sup> Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.

has long been characterized by dependency on France. Rather than operating as independent markets, these islands and regions were developed as what French colonial historians Robert Aldrich and John Connell have termed ‘transfer economies or consumer colonies’.<sup>19</sup> From their creation, the early colonies existed in order to benefit the *mère-patrie*, and following the logic of mercantilism, which dominated European thought between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries and which dictated that maximizing net exports was the best way to ensure and enhance national prosperity, it was decided that ‘each nation must carve out its own sphere of economic domination and exclusive profit [. . .]. The colonies, therefore, had to be complementary to the mother country, producing only those commodities not available in Europe’.<sup>20</sup> In the French sphere of influence, the Edict of Fontainebleau of 1727 formally inaugurated the ‘Exclusif’, the economic policy which ensured that France retained monopoly rights over all colonial production. This decree underwent several modifications, but the so-called ‘pacte colonial’ preserved France’s monopoly on trade within the empire through the upheavals of the French Revolution to the era of free trade in the 1860s, and beyond, as France still maintains firm administrative — and therefore political and economic — control of its overseas domains.

The neo-liberal phase of multi-national global capitalism has served to further exacerbate economic dispossession in the Antilles. In 2009, it is these same forms and structures of dependence that the authors of the *Manifeste pour les ‘produits’ de haute nécessité* choose to critique. In particular, they raise concerns about the manner in which the era of multi-nationals has changed, and fundamentally denatured, the relationship between the land and patterns of production and consumption. As early as 1981, Glissant’s *Discours antillais* includes published versions of material on this subject, which the author had been developing since the 1960s and 1970s. In *Le Discours antillais*, Glissant expresses his unequivocal belief that the post-war shift in consumer patterns in the Antilles, which privileges products and cultural goods from elsewhere, cannot but have alienating consequences: ‘Ainsi le consommateur martiniquais est-il “livré” à l’objet qu’il possède [. . .] cette consommation a un moteur d’origine [. . .] et un moteur d’entretien: le désir d’intégration au “modèle blanc”’.<sup>21</sup> In an article published in 1997, the anthropologists Richard Price and Sally Price provide an example of this inferiorizing process at work:

[O]ne television advert ridicules the country bumpkin, visiting his bourgeois cousins, who grates fruit to make juice rather than buying it ready made in a carton at the supermarket [. . .]. Such promotional campaigns have successfully created a whole range of “needs” [. . .] that were virtually unknown just two decades ago.<sup>22</sup>

The combined forces of marketing and media operate to estrange Martiniquans from even the most basic food practices: ‘modernity’ dictates that ostentatious

<sup>19</sup> Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France’s Overseas Frontier: Départements et territoires d’outre-mer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Aldrich and Connell, *France’s Overseas Frontier*, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), pp. 789–90.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Price and Sally Price, ‘Shadowboxing in the Mangrove’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 12 (1997), 3–36 (p. 13).

spending at an out-of-town shopping store must be preferred over the now out-moded — though autonomous, natural, and free — method of making fruit juice.

In the face of these now deeply embedded Western consumption patterns, Bonilla has demonstrated that the physical isolation provoked by the 2009 strikes forced a certain return to traditional food practices and Creole gardens, and it is precisely this re-awakening to what can be produced locally — both in terms of foodstuffs, and in terms of cultural production and personal fulfilment — that the authors of the manifesto explore.<sup>23</sup> For what are the true “‘produits” de haute nécessité”? The *Manifeste* promotes them as concepts and values that are abstract rather than material: taking responsibility for one’s own existence; understanding that *la vie chère* stems from an unfettered global free-market system, and ultimately turning away from France to develop greater self-sufficiency and a more Caribbean-focused market.

*‘Le prosaïque’ and ‘le poétique’*

The *Manifeste* is structured around two dichotomies: it denounces the rise of *le prosaïque* over *le poétique*. Specifically condemned is the rise of the globalizing, hegemonizing forces of the era of late capitalism, which promote unreflective consumerism and exclude any possibility that processes of production and consumerism might be linked with self-fulfilment and creativity. This domination, in turn, reduces all human beings to a role as either *consommateur* or *producteur*, minuscule and ultimately disposable cogs in an enormous economic totalizing machine. The *poétique* denotes everything that brings a ‘sens à l’existence’, such as music, dance, and sport, as well as more abstract concepts such as those ‘d’honneur [. . .], de philosophie, de spiritualité, d’amour, de temps libre affecté à l’accomplissement du grand désir intime’ (p. 2). As they work through and revise the concept of ‘haute nécessité’, the authors jubilantly proclaim that the poetic ideal to which we should all aspire is to ‘vivre sa vie, et la vie, dans toute l’ampleur du poétique’ (*Manifeste*, p. 5).

The *poétique*, then, is unmistakably grounded in the personal sphere of everyday life and specifically Creole culture. It is juxtaposed with the *prosaïque* — the mundane essentials needed for physical survival: ‘les nécessités immédiates du boire–survivre–manger’ (*Manifeste*, p. 2). The authors exploit the double meaning of the term *prosaïque*: the antonym of *poétique*, in that it signifies prose text, it also denotes all that is uninspiring and mundane. The *prosaïque*, according to the *Manifeste*, describes the life that a person chooses when he or she subscribes to the dogma of consumerism, as dictated by the Western world.

The *Manifeste* issues an appeal for all sections of French Antillean society to recognize the perils of capitalism and economic liberalism, asking the reader to reject these systems in favour of self-sufficiency and a focus on all aspects of life that can offer self-fulfilment, understood as *le poétique*. The discussion of ‘la hausse des prix’ and ‘la vie chère’ points to the current economic system as the root of these

<sup>23</sup> Bonilla, ‘Guadeloupe is Ours’, p. 126.



problems: ‘ce sont les résultants d’une dentition de système où règne le dogme du libéralisme économique’ (*Manifeste*, p. 2). Neo-liberalism is portrayed as an unstoppable global menace: ‘il pèse sur la totalité des peuples’ (ibid.). Those who follow it do so with an unquestioning obedience as the system is now ‘étendu à l’ensemble de la planète avec la force aveugle d’une religion’ (p. 4). Unchecked capitalism is blamed for unemployment and the lowering of salaries: ‘le capitalisme contemporain réduit la part salariale à mesure qu’il augmente sa production et ses profits’ (p. 6). Described as ‘la régie capitaliste’, neo-liberalism has, according to the authors, turned the average human into an insatiable, unthinking consumerist monster, deftly and damningly figured as ‘ce Frankenstein consommateur qui se réduit à son panier de nécessités’ (pp. 5–6).

Although Chamoiseau and Glissant represent but two of the nine authors of this manifesto, their voices resonate throughout. The text repeatedly makes use of the metonymic gap, a technique described by Bill Ashcroft as ‘a central feature of the transformation of the literary language [. . .]. This strategy may appear to be a strategy of resistance, and indeed [. . .] the metonymic gap is a *refusal* to translate the world of the writer completely’.<sup>24</sup> The *Manifeste* upholds this refusal and contains multiple linguistic layers, interweaving French with other terms accessible only to Creolophones. For example, the phrase ‘An gwan lodyans’ (*Manifeste*, p. 8), which may be translated as ‘une grande audience’ (or ‘un grand public’), challenges readers who are unfamiliar with Creole. Furthermore, several intertextual elements will be accessible only to those who are familiar with works of Caribbean literature and postcolonial movements. One such example arises when the text refers to ‘les virtualités imprévisibles’ (p. 8) of the *Tout-Monde*, the concept conceived by Glissant to promote a view of the whole world as a network of interacting communities whose contact results in constantly changing cultural formations. This reference indicates that, in its appeal for new ways of structuring the local, the *Manifeste* does not advise that the francophone Caribbean cut itself off from the wider world, but rather that it must work together with other communities and countries to build a fairer global society. This process, however, begins at home: the authors aspire to improved autonomy and self-sufficiency, which they posit as the only way to ‘nous faire accéder à la responsabilité de nous-mêmes par nous-mêmes et au pouvoir de nous-mêmes sur nous-mêmes’ (p. 4).

The manifesto includes a discussion of two Creole terms that captivated audiences across the francophone world during the strikes: *liyannaj* and *pwofitasyon*, which were at the very heart of the LKP movement in Guadeloupe, constituting as they do the L and the P of its name. *Pwofitasyon* denounces the exploitation and abuse inflicted on the Antillean population, inviting a series of re-adjustments to the way the DOMs are perceived externally. Moreover, the aesthetic potential of the term *liyannaj*, which advances collectivity and connections as the agents of change, captivates the authors:

<sup>24</sup> Bill Ashcroft, ‘Bridging the Silence: Inner Translation and the Metonymic Gap’, in *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures: Multilingual Contexts, Translational Texts*, ed. by Simona Bertacco (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 17–31 (p. 25); original emphasis.

Mais le plus important est que par la dynamique du *L'yannej* [*sic*] — qui est d'allier et de rallier, de lier, relier et relayer tout ce qui se trouvait désolidarisé — la souffrance réelle du plus grand nombre (confrontée à un délire de concentrations économiques, d'ententes et de profits) rejoint des aspirations diffuses, encore inexprimables mais bien réelles, chez les jeunes, les grandes personnes, oubliés, invisibles et autres souffrants indéchiffrables de nos sociétés. La plupart de ceux qui y défilent en masse découvrent (ou recommencent à se souvenir) que l'on peut saisir l'impossible au collet, ou enlever le trône à notre renoncement à la fatalité. (*Manifeste*, p. 2; original emphasis)

The rhetoric emphasizes the decisive, iconoclastic potential of *lyannaj*, and the authors particularly welcome the potential of the strike to awaken politically the next generation of young Antilleans.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the manifesto argues, the problems that have come to a head during the strikes can only be resolved if Antilleans take responsibility for their islands, at a collective level, and their actions, at an individual level. It goes on to elaborate the exploitative patterns of trade operating in the DOMs, criticizing their impenetrable opacity:

Ensuite, il y a la haute nécessité de comprendre que le labyrinthe obscur et indémêlable des prix (marges, sous-marges, commissions occultes et profits indécents) est inscrit dans une logique de système libéral marchand, lequel s'est étendu à l'ensemble de la planète avec la force aveugle d'une religion. (p. 6)

Market forces have contributed to the acculturation of Antilleans by alienating them from their own culture and promoting Westernized modes of behaviour (fruit juice, in cartons, from out-of-town supermarkets). In such a way, young Antilleans are conditioned to take up their role as passive, accepting — and therefore vulnerable — consumers in a globalized market.

*Thinking through biopolitical ecocriticism in the 'Manifeste pour les "produits" de haute nécessité'*

The *Manifeste* succeeds in opening up wider debates on the potential of culture to challenge and undermine the contemporary economic and political order, and to bring about new ways of interacting with the Martiniquan environment. This potential can be more fully explored through a biopolitical ecocritical reading of the text. It is my contention that biopolitical ecocriticism can offer a new paradigm with which to investigate the relationship between literature, the environment, power, and politics, with particular attention to the global governance of the natural world.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, ecocriticism has become an important new field across the humanities and social sciences. The term is believed to have been coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism'.<sup>26</sup> There is no single definition of this

<sup>25</sup> On the strikes and the specific issue of youth dispossession, see my 'Depicting Social Dispossession in Guadeloupe'.

<sup>26</sup> William Rueckert, 'Into and Out of the Void: Two Essays', *Iowa Review*, 9 (1978), 62–86. Second essay reproduced as 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 105–23.

broad concept; it implies a sustained focus on interactions with and reactions to the environment in the literary sphere. For Cheryll Glotfelty,

Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies [...] despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it.<sup>27</sup>

Ecocritical research is motivated by the troubling awareness that we are reaching an age of environmental limits, 'a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems'.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, critics argue that a fully developed model of ecocriticism must bring postcolonial and ecological issues into dialogue as a means of challenging 'continuing imperialist modes of social and environmental dominance'.<sup>29</sup>

In turn, biopolitics offers a set of theories with which to study the new forms and ideologies of community in an increasingly interconnected and complex world, looking specifically at cultural identity, relation, and hybridity, and the politics of migration, immigration, indentureship, and diaspora. Investigating the complexities of the links between life and its governance, biopolitics offers considerable innovative potential for literary theory, suggesting new criteria and methodologies for reading the relations between texts and the complex and challenging global society. Although the word 'biopolitics' was first used at the beginning of the twentieth century by Swedish political scientist and politician Rudolf Kjellén, it is through the work of Michel Foucault that biopolitics came to greater prominence. Foucault identifies the rise of biopolitics during the early nineteenth century, when life itself became the object of politics. According to Foucault, it was in this era that the previous forms of sovereign power '*de faire mourir ou de laisser vivre*' were supplanted by a new kind of power: '*un pouvoir de faire vivre ou de rejeter dans la mort*'.<sup>30</sup> What happens in this shift, and what Foucault wishes to signify by the term biopolitics, is '*ce qui fait entrer la vie et ses mécanismes dans le domaine des calculs explicites et fait du pouvoir-savoir un agent de transformation de la vie humaine*'.<sup>31</sup> For the first time, life itself '*passé pour une part dans le champ du contrôle du savoir et d'intervention du pouvoir*';<sup>32</sup> life itself becomes the object of political technologies and disciplinary apparatuses; and life itself is shaped, developed, or reduced through regulatory and normalizing procedures. The biopolitical shift provides the circumstances required for a profusion of the regulatory controls that were already in evidence, and to an extent mirrors the shifts within capitalism from early mercantilism to industrial capitalism to late, neo-liberal finance capitalism. In short, power becomes the agent for the mass management and (inter)national government of the living.

<sup>27</sup> Cheryll Glotfelty, 'Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, pp. xv–xxxii (pp. xviii–xix).

<sup>28</sup> Glotfelty, 'Introduction', p. xx.

<sup>29</sup> Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, 1: *La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 181; original emphases.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir*, p. 188.

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir*, p. 187.

Biopolitics is concerned with how life, 'bíos', became the object of regulatory controls and governmental power. A corollary of biopolitics is to consider how that power extends to the sphere of natural life. I am proposing the methodology of biopolitical ecocriticism as a way of considering and examining the struggle for power over and regulation of the earth's finite resources. If power is the agent for the management and governance of natural life, with the aim of maximizing production and economic growth, then the connection between biopolitics and capitalism emerges as implicit, as do the links with the capitalist ventures of colonialism and imperialism. Capitalism is a system which is contingent on the domination of human and natural life. Just as human populations have been controlled and regulated through measures such as education, healthcare, and prisons, natural life has also become the target of an international network of competition seeking to exert a regulatory governing force with which to control these valuable resources, in order to generate maximum profit. A biopolitical ecocritical reading reveals the fundamental connections between the networks of power which link global governance and the control of natural life. Such a reading draws attention to the ways in which the biopolitical shift has led to the acceleration and exacerbation of regulatory controls over both human and natural life, controls that were already at work under capitalism's earlier forms.

In its rethinking of the economic and social conditions of production and consumption, and their wider environmental and psychological implications, the dynamics of biopolitical ecocriticism are played out in the *Manifeste*. Firstly, the critique of continuing imperialist modes of social and environmental dominance draws attention to the perilous issue of food security and the archaic, precarious, and inadequate food production culture:

[Ces prix] sont aussi ençhâssés dans une absurdité coloniale qui nous a détournés de notre manger-pays, de notre environnement proche et de nos réalités culturelles, pour nous livrer sans pantalon et sans jardins-bokay [sic] aux modes alimentaires européens. C'est comme si la France avait été formatée pour importer toute son alimentation et ses produits de grande nécessité depuis des milliers et des milliers de kilomètres. (*Manifeste*, p. 6)

The *Manifeste* scathingly broaches the issue of the islands' dependence on food imports from metropolitan France. In an important parallel development, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert has demonstrated why contemporary concerns regarding food security in the Caribbean can be better understood with reference to studies of colonial literature.<sup>33</sup> She argues that by reading early colonial accounts of conquest through the filter of ecocriticism, it becomes apparent that the Caribbean's astonishing biodiversity has been subjected, since 'discovery' by Columbus, to a series of man-made environmental catastrophes, including the mass extinction of plant and animal species, which continue to the current day. Paravisini's study traces the links between the political and economic motivations that drove

<sup>33</sup> Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, 'Food, Diversity, Extinctions: Caribbean Fauna and the Struggle for Food Security during the Conquest of the World', Henry Thomas Guest Lecture given at the University of Birmingham, UK, in April 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZksK-8Z8ScA>> [accessed 4 April 2016].

human interaction with the environment under colonialism, uncovering the greed and mania for profit that has long characterized the colonial — and arguably neo-colonial — governance of these areas.

Food security is a contentious issue across the Caribbean, as islands generate little of their own produce, relying largely on imports. As Maeve McCusker has commented, ‘the Antillean people are now feeding on over-priced metropolitan food, mainly purchased in French-owned supermarkets, and have forgotten local traditions of cooking and sourcing food’.<sup>34</sup> Bonilla alleges that consumer goods and services in the French Antilles cost anything between 20 per cent and 170 per cent more than on the mainland.<sup>35</sup> Imported products are subject to a unique added tax called ‘l’octroi de mer’, or sea charge. The sea charge originates from 1670, and is a remnant of the colonial mercantilist policy known as the ‘droit de poids’, one of the earliest examples of an instrumental attitude towards the non-human, which persists tenaciously in the present neo-liberal era.<sup>36</sup> The ‘octroi de mer’ in theory aims to support local businesses ‘en surtaxant tout ce qui vient d’ailleurs’, in other words all products that do not originate in the DOMs and are imported from France and the rest of the EU.<sup>37</sup> The reality, however, is that in a context where little is produced locally, the residents of the French Antilles must contend with exceptionally high product prices, as Numa has shown: ‘Il s’agit d’un droit de douane qui frappe les biens à l’importation et — chose qui n’a étrangement pas été rappelée par les commentateurs — d’un impôt indirect à la consommation qui frappe donc la production locale’.<sup>38</sup> In December 2008, carrots, which could be grown and distributed locally, or substituted with an indigenous crop suited to the Caribbean climate, cost more than three times as much per kilo in Guadeloupe (€4.12) than in Paris (€1.29).<sup>39</sup> The authors of the *Manifeste* echo the population’s resentment of this disadvantageous trading relationship, referring bitterly to the ongoing colonial mentality underpinning this profiteering through behaviours ‘nourries par “l’esprit colonial”’ (*Manifeste*, p. 5).

Valérie Loichot has shown that the French Caribbean can be understood with reference to the recurring and pernicious tropes of starvation and gluttony, both of which work to repress ideological revolt.<sup>40</sup> From the advent of Columbus, she argues, the Caribbean has been pictured either as a tropical paradise resplendent with nature’s bounty, or as a dangerous cannibals’ lair where human flesh is the prized commodity. Under transatlantic slavery, a system of plantations was developed in which hunger was the dominant theme, be it the literal hunger of the slaves who were dehumanized to such an extent that they were dependent on their

<sup>34</sup> Maeve McCusker, *Patrick Chamoiseau: Recovering Memory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Bonilla, ‘Guadeloupe is Ours’, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> See Numa, ‘Les Départements d’outre-mer’, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup> Audrey Halford, ‘Comment les produits d’importation sont taxés’, in ‘Focus/décryptage: les DOM, des départements à l’économie sinistrée’, *Le Monde*, 20 February 2009, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Numa, ‘Les Départements d’outre-mer’, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Un coût de vie nettement plus élevé qu’en métropole’, in ‘Focus/décryptage: les DOM, des départements à l’économie sinistrée’, *Le Monde*, 20 February 2009, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Valérie Loichot, *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

owners to feed them, or the masters' metaphorical hunger for profit. In her highly innovative study of food in French Caribbean culture, Loichot observes that since departmentalization, which came into effect on 1 January 1947, the economic situation in the French Caribbean can be considered to be one of satiation:

The experience of satiety, which has replaced hunger in contemporary Martinique, leads to a similarly overwhelming dependence. On an island where French subsidies have eradicated hunger, where a third of the population is unemployed and receives state funding, satiety, like hunger, creates a form of ideological dependence, which discourages desires and actions toward political independence.<sup>41</sup>

Production patterns have shifted rapidly in the post-war period, moving to an increasingly heavy reliance on imports, and the manifesto attempts to counter the ideological dependence engendered by this shift. Since the Second World War, despite large French subsidies, Martinique and Guadeloupe's sugar producers have been unable to compete on the world market. In 1963, eleven sugar factories were recorded in Martinique, whereas two decades later, only one remained open, while the number of distilleries had fallen from thirty-one to twenty-one; in Guadeloupe, banana production halved in the 1970s.<sup>42</sup> An absence of raw materials, lack of technology and expertise, combined with a lack of interest from the local bourgeoisie in encouraging industrialization, meant that little compensating or replacement industry developed.<sup>43</sup> As the economy re-aligned itself with the tertiary industries, public- and service-sector jobs increased, but higher echelon jobs were, and still continue to be, filled by metropolitan French citizens who have sought a transfer, to such an extent that 'the *fonctionnariat* has become a class apart partly because of the significance of metropolitan migrants in the public service'.<sup>44</sup>

The arguments presented in the manifesto evoke the shift in production patterns, and in the corresponding circuits of global power, identified by the post-Marxist philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their seminal publication *Empire* (although the *Manifeste* does not directly quote their work).<sup>45</sup> Hardt and Negri suggest that the late twentieth century was marked by a transition that saw the end of the supremacy of capitalist nation-states, as power — and wealth — was instead transferred to, or seized by, organizations located in multi-national sites. Throughout the *Manifeste* a critique of liberalism in its current form emerges. This critique is heavily influenced by *L'Empire du moindre mal* by the French philosopher Jean-Claude Michéa, in which Michéa argues that the 'institution imaginaire des sociétés modernes procède, avant tout, d'une défiance radicale envers les capacités morales des êtres humains et, par conséquent, envers leur aptitude à vivre ensemble sans se nuire réciproquement'.<sup>46</sup> The authors of the manifesto are

<sup>41</sup> Loichot, *The Tropics Bite Back*, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Aldrich and Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier*, pp. 133–34.

<sup>43</sup> Aldrich and Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier*, p. 142.

<sup>44</sup> Aldrich and Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier*, p. 144.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> Jean-Claude Michéa, *L'Empire du moindre mal: essai sur la civilisation libérale* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), p. 91.

inspired by this line of thought and go on to cite Michéa's concept of 'épuration éthique',<sup>47</sup> amplifying this notion to suggest the damage wrought by liberalism:

[Le libéralisme économique] s'est emparé de la planète, il pèse sur la totalité des peuples, et il préside dans tous les imaginaires — non à une épuration ethnique, mais bien à une sorte 'd'épuration éthique' (entendre: *désenchantement, désacralisation, désymbolisation, déconstruction* même) de tout le fait humain. (*Manifeste*, p. 2)

This global liberal system determines people's contemporary behaviours and traps the Antilles in a cycle of economic dependence. Although structures of dominance might be mistaken at a local level for racist behaviour invented by the béké to oppress the non-white population, this belief is challenged by the authors when they emphasize that this system has not merely originated 'de la seule cuisine de quelques purs békés' (p. 2). The manifesto pleads for a more global appraisal of an economic monolith that leaves no place for freedom of choice and the exercise of individual morality. Indeed, the list of negative nouns provided in parenthesis, all beginning with the prefix *dé-*, is suggestive of a series of disintegrations, an undoing of the very fabric of humanity.

Moreover, it is through their engagement with Edgar Morin and André Gorz in the *Manifeste* that a strident biopolitical ecocritical critique of contemporary consumer culture emerges. Morin, a leading French philosopher and sociologist holds an itinerant UNESCO Chair in Complex Thought and has developed the concept of 'complexity' throughout his career to encompass ecological, political, economic, and social reflections. His work on *la pensée complexe* has been likened to Glissant's *relation* for its focus on interconnection and cross-fertilization. *La Méthode* is preoccupied with the question of the meaning(s) we bestow upon our lives:

Le sens de la vie est multiple, ouvert, complexe, parce que clignotant, incertain, relative, fragile. C'est dans et par sa richesse que le vivre pour vivre comporte une brèche irrationalisable, non-finalisable, qui relève du mystère, mais où est engagé dans tout son sérieux le métier de vivre, et dans tout son tragique le jeu du vivre. Ainsi, vivre nous apparaît pleinement et simultanément comme un jeu, un métier, un mystère. . .<sup>48</sup>

It is to these reflections on the art of living that the authors of the *Manifeste* gesture as they comment: 'Comme le propose Edgar Morin, le *vivre-pour-vivre*, tout comme le *vivre-pour-soi* n'ouvrent à aucune plénitude sans le *donner-à-vivre* à ce que nous aimons, aux impossibles et aux dépassements auxquels nous aspirons' (*Manifeste*, p. 2; original emphases). The authors turn to Morin to shore up their own claims that Antillean society must change its trajectory, turning away from a capitalist, individualistic model and moving — indeed, returning — to a society based on shared communal values and goals.

The authors of the manifesto owe Morin an even greater debt, for it is he who begins to work through the dichotomy of *le prosaïque* and *le poétique*. In his sixth and final volume of *La Méthode*, entitled *Éthique* and published in 2004, he praises

<sup>47</sup> Michéa, *L'Empire du moindre mal*, p. 105.

<sup>48</sup> Edgar Morin, *La Méthode*, II: *La Vie de la vie* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 409.

all that elevates human life above the mundane in a passage that must surely have inspired, whether consciously or unconsciously, the manifesto:

Vivre de prose n'est que survivre. Vivre, c'est vivre poétiquement. L'état poétique est un état de participation, communion, ferveur, amitié, amour qui embrase et transfigure la vie. Il fait vivre à grand feu dans la consommation (Bataille), et non à petit feu dans la consommation. L'état poétique porte en lui la qualité de la vie, dont la qualité esthétique qu'il peut ressentir jusqu'à l'émerveillement devant le spectacle de la nature, un coucher de soleil, le vol d'une libellule, devant un regard, un visage, devant une œuvre d'art [...]. Il porte en lui la participation au mystère du monde.<sup>49</sup>

Just as Morin's concept of a poetic life is a life attuned to communal activity, exchange, participation, and culture, he, like the authors of the manifesto, denounces consumer-driven urges. In a later publication from 2009, Morin condemns contemporary politico-economic systems for the environmental ravages they cause, precisely because he finds 'une conscience commune d'appartenance à la Terre-Patrie' is lacking.<sup>50</sup> Morin developed the concept of *Terre-Patrie* with Anne-Brigitte Kern in the 1993 co-authored publication of the same name.<sup>51</sup> In the 2009 article, Morin points to the schism between capitalist development and fundamental human qualities:

Le développement, tel qu'il est conçu, ignore ce qui n'est ni calculable ni mesurable: la vie, la souffrance, la joie, l'amour, et sa seule mesure de satisfaction est dans la croissance (de la production, de la productivité, du revenu monétaire).<sup>52</sup>

This represents another confluence with the thought expressed in the *Manifeste*: the latter's redefinition of products of high importance moves to include these very same human qualities, to give value to the abstract values which are the essence of humanity, and which have been sidelined and trampled by capitalism. The links between Antillean thinkers and Morin were cemented by his 2011 visit to Martinique as part of the 'Grand Saint-Pierre' initiative overseen by Chamoiseau, in which Morin advocated 'le bien-vivre' and the 'poésie de la vie' as fundamental components of everyday life.<sup>53</sup>

The second philosopher who directly influences the manifesto is André Gorz, a pioneer of political ecology in works such as *Écologie et politique* and *Métamorphoses du travail*.<sup>54</sup> The *Manifeste* echoes many of the concepts explored in one of Gorz's final essays, published posthumously as 'La Sortie du capitalisme a déjà commencé'.<sup>55</sup> In this essay, Gorz returns to themes he had explored throughout his life's work on political ecology, namely: the belief that work has been denatured by

<sup>49</sup> Edgar Morin, *La Méthode*, vi: *Éthique* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), p. 154.

<sup>50</sup> Edgar Morin, 'Une mondialisation plurielle', *Synergies: pays riverains de la Baltique*, 6 (2009), 19–24 (p. 21).

<sup>51</sup> Edgar Morin and Anne-Brigitte Kern, *Terre-Patrie* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), itself translated as a 'manifesto': *Homeland Earth: A Manifesto for the New Millennium* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 1998).

<sup>52</sup> Morin, 'Une mondialisation plurielle', p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> Francette Rosamont, 'Edgar Morin parle de la nécessité d'entrer dans la poésie de la vie', *Inter Entreprises*, <<http://www.interentreprises.com/fr/actualites-en-images/7822-edgar-morin-parle-de-la-necessite-dentree-dans-poésie-de-la-vie>> [accessed 29 February 2016].

<sup>54</sup> André Gorz, *Écologie et politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), and *Métamorphoses du travail: quête du sens: critique de la raison économique* (Paris: Galilée, 1988).

<sup>55</sup> André Gorz, 'La Sortie du capitalisme a déjà commencé', in Gorz, *Écologica*, pp. 25–42.



capitalism and should be re-conceptualized to include at its core the ideas of self-fulfilment and creativity; the conviction that, if the economy continues on its current path, an environmental catastrophe is inevitable; and the certainty that capitalism in its current form is unsustainable. The essay was written in 2007, just months before the global financial crash of 2008, which it appears to predict (and which Gorz did not live to see).

An impending environmental crisis, caused by the insatiable contemporary appetite for production and consumption, prompts Gorz to comment that 'la décroissance est donc un impératif de survie', which will necessitate 'une autre économie, d'autres rapports sociaux, d'autres modes et moyens de production et de vie'.<sup>56</sup> Such a plan can only be realized through a radical rethinking of how the planet's resources are used and governed, and how people go about their everyday lives; in short, the discussion of the *poétique* and the *prosaïque* found in the *Manifeste* can also be considered as a working through of Gorz's call to question and change society. Furthermore, Gorz's lengthy discussion of 'les producteurs' and 'les consommateurs' criticizes the schism between the two, and calls for 'la rupture avec une civilisation où on ne produit rien de ce qu'on consomme et ne consomme rien de ce qu'on produit', which doubtless inspired the language and arguments of the manifesto.<sup>57</sup>

The *Manifeste* directly references Gorz's elaboration of the concept of a 'socialisation anti-sociale': 'L'ensemble [du système économique] ouvre à cette *socialisation anti-sociale*, dont parlait André Gorz, et où l'économie devient ainsi sa propre finalité et déserte tout le reste' (*Manifeste*, p. 3; original emphasis). Gorz defines this concept in 'La Sortie du capitalisme a déjà commencé', and lambasts the current economic system, which

oblige les firmes à inventer continuellement des besoins et des désirs nouveaux, à conférer aux marchandises une valeur symbolique, sociale, érotique, à diffuser une 'culture de la consommation' qui mise sur l'individualisation, la singularisation, la rivalité, la jalousie, bref sur ce que j'ai appelé ailleurs la 'socialisation antisociale'.<sup>58</sup>

Like Gorz, the 2009 manifesto condemns the capitalist ideology, in which, as Simek has pointed out, culture itself becomes packaged as just another 'product (marked with a bar code)', and in which a totalizing ideological reduction concentrates only 'on expanding access to this "product"; such a politics forgets that the poetic is not a commodity and leaves the ideological lie unchallenged'.<sup>59</sup> Finally, Gorz's condemnation of the 'marchandisation de richesses premières', such as 'la terre, les semences, le génome, les biens culturels, les savoirs et compétences communs',<sup>60</sup> emphasizes the concern central to biopolitical ecocriticism: an examination of the process by which non-human life has become the object of regulatory and governmental power.

<sup>56</sup> Gorz, 'La Sortie du capitalisme', pp. 29 and 30.

<sup>57</sup> Gorz, 'La Sortie du capitalisme', p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> Gorz, 'La Sortie du capitalisme', p. 34.

<sup>59</sup> Simek, 'Hungry Ironies', p. 114.

<sup>60</sup> Gorz, 'La Sortie du capitalisme', p. 39.

*Resolving the conflict?*

Although the principles propounded by the *Manifeste* are admirable in their lofty ambition, the dichotomy created between *poétique* and *prosaïque* is reductive, offering as it does no compromise or middle-ground for readers. The use of the term *poétique* is reminiscent of Glissant's own complex and ambiguous cultural poetics as expanded in the triumvirate of texts: *Soleil de la conscience* (Paris: Seuil, 1956), *L'Intention poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), and *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), *Poétique*, I–III. Bongie draws attention to 'late Glissant's outright rejection of conflictual politics and his obsessive insistence on the restorative virtues of a cultural poetics of Relation', which culminates in utopian scenarios and

which more often gives the impression that this poetics is sufficient unto itself and, as a consequence, that it is not politicians, or people armed with principles, who will be of the most help to us in our dealings with the forces of globalization and Empire but poets.<sup>61</sup>

The *Manifeste* can certainly be viewed as complicit in this same aestheticizing drive. Despite purporting to offer advice on how to move to a fairer, 'post-capitalist' society (*Manifeste*, p. 9), the text fails to offer any concrete, specific advice. It suggests overcoming the problem of food security simply by eating 'sain et autrement' (p. 6), yet does not expand on how this may be achieved. The serious ecological issues raised by the kepone (*chlordécone*) pollution scandal go unaddressed: the scandal, exposed in 2008, revealed that the highly toxic kepone pesticide, with recognized carcinogenic properties, was still used in the DOMs despite having been banned in metropolitan France, and has resulted in the long-term pollution of Caribbean DOM soils.

In their bid for self-sufficiency, the authors recommend rejecting France in order to trade principally with the Caribbean and America: 'il y a donc une haute nécessité à nous vivre caribéens dans nos imports-exports vitaux, à nous penser américain pour la satisfaction de nos nécessités, de notre autosuffisance énergétique et alimentaire' (*Manifeste*, p. 5). New trading arrangements and economic freedom can, the authors imply, lead to greater ideological freedom. The interlinking of economics and ideology has shaped Caribbean society from the slave plantation to its present day, and Katherine E. Browne's study of what she terms 'Creole economics' describes how, since slavery, the Martiniquan population have turned to ways to make undeclared money through strategies that earn them social status as well as income.<sup>62</sup> Despite the French economic and legal institutions that structure Martinique's formal economy, Browne argues that 'deeply rooted creole values channel people into the island's informal economy, where they can work for themselves to enhance their income, their personal autonomy, and their social prestige', and explains that these people identify themselves as *débrouillards*: people who are 'not merely resourceful (the French meaning), but also [...] economically cunning and successful in unorthodox ways'.<sup>63</sup> Browne argues that there is a

<sup>61</sup> Bongie, *Friends and Enemies*, pp. 330 and 337.

<sup>62</sup> Katherine E. Browne, *Creole Economics: Caribbean Cunning under the French Flag* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

considerable social and identitarian investment in these subversive economic strategies, and that they challenge France's domination in subtle ways:

[C]reole economics is an undeniably effective strategy of cultural resistance. [...] For a people oppressed by a cultural, political, and economic reality that offers too many benefits to discard, creole economics provides a way to express personal autonomy from the parent's rules without leaving home.<sup>64</sup>

The very first instance noted by Browne of alternative economies is the historical example of the small garden plots found on the margins of a plantation, which were given to slaves so that they could cultivate their own food. Although the *Code noir* of 1685 stated that slave-owners must provide slaves with a certain level of food, shelter, and clothing, the law was poorly enforced, and slave gardening for subsistence 'came to represent established practice in French colonial life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until abolition in 1848'.<sup>65</sup> This practice might be a secondary activity (some plantations followed a convention that Saturdays were set aside for slave gardening), but, for Browne, 'it was steeped in significance for the development of creole economics: to a slave, his private garden represented an opportunity to earn a profit from his own labour and "reputation" among his peers'.<sup>66</sup> This is the exact same heritage to which the authors of the *Manifeste* gesture when they lament the disappearance of the *jardins-bokay*. In encouraging an alternative economy, the authors simultaneously encourage Martiniquans to find alternative, more ecologically friendly ways of living, which sidestep the hold of both French domination and multi-national capitalism, and which may also challenge the excessive consumption of natural resources. Yet any such production remains small-scale by its very definition and therefore unlikely to change the wider nature of French Caribbean production and consumption patterns and bring about any large-scale ideological shift. Similarly, the suggestion in the manifesto that the reign of the car might end is nothing short of idealistic in Martinique, which has an extremely underdeveloped public transport system: '*On peut renvoyer la SARA (Société Anonyme de Raffinerie des Antilles) et les compagnies pétrolières aux oubliettes, en rompant avec le tout automobile*' (*Manifeste*, p. 6; original emphasis). Created in 1969 as a joint initiative between Total, Elf, Shell, Esso, and Texaco, the SARA enjoys a stranglehold on the French Caribbean petrol market. The 2009 strikes were a direct reaction to a further petrol price hike; the suggestion that, by changing their habits the French Caribbean population can bring the SARA to its knees, is relevant in the context of the events of early 2009, but once again emerges as idealistic and lacking in political substance given the long-established status of the company in the islands.

Yet despite these criticisms, another reading of this slippage between politics and poetics emerges. The authors of the *Manifeste* are writing in full awareness that their implicit message is a call to arms against the very political and administrative

<sup>63</sup> Browne, *Creole Economics*, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> Browne, *Creole Economics*, p. 213.

<sup>65</sup> Browne, *Creole Economics*, p. 122.

<sup>66</sup> Browne, *Creole Economics*, p. 123.

structures in which they live, work, and publish. Against the globalizing totality of late capitalism, it is a strategy of cultural resistance to offer up radical ideas as experiments in poetics: once expressed, they may in turn inspire others and generate their own political momentum. Viewed in this manner, the cultural-political slip-page criticized by Bongie and Hallward can be interpreted as describing and promoting a twentieth-century act of *marronage*, at a planetary scale, where humans live in awareness of the potential for capitalism to enslave, and thus seek out a way of existing in the dominant system that nonetheless resists and runs counter to the values and logic of that dominant system. This is put into practice at an individual level: for example, by eating, travelling, and ultimately thinking differently. Such acts of *marronage* must, like those of the maroons who acted under slavery, inhabit a double time and a double space: they exist within the dominant system (which they fully understand) while attempting to create new spaces of freedom in which individual liberty may still be exercised, and from which wider changes may eventually emerge.

The debates and philosophical reflections on the significance of the strikes of 2009 do indeed point to the potential for change. This process is sketched out at the *Manifeste's* close and, again, borrows an environmental metaphor for a rethinking of the 'ecology' of how French Caribbean citizens live their lives:

Le plein emploi ne sera pas du prosaïque productiviste, mais il s'envisagera dans ce qu'il peut créer en socialisation, en autoproduction, en temps libre, en temps mort, en ce qu'il pourra permettre de solidarités, de partages, de soutiens aux plus démantelés, de revitalisations écologiques de notre environnement. . . (*Manifeste*, p. 7)

Human beings, then, should be considered as connected parts of a wider ecological network — rather than as some kind of centre around which everything gravitates. This wider ecology cannot come into existence without a reconceptualization of the meaning of work. Here again, the thinkers of the manifesto echo Gorz's writing on redefining the very nature of work, and, in a passage which seems to respond directly to the rapid growth of the tertiary sector and the stifling administrative apparatuses it has put in place, they themselves propose that a new shift should and must take place:

Il y aura du travail et des revenus de citoyenneté dans ce qui stimule, qui aide à rêver, qui mène à méditer ou qui ouvre aux délices de l'ennui, qui installe en musique, qui oriente en randonnée dans le pays des livres, des arts, du chant, de la philosophie, de l'étude ou de la consommation de haute nécessité qui ouvre à création — créaconsommation. (p. 7)

The neologism *créaconsommation* defines the system to which the authors aspire: they are not so naïve as to demand that consumerism ceases altogether, but they plead for a revised consumerism that allows for and is driven by creativity and self-fulfilment. The manifesto's conclusion foregrounds this urgent need to rebuild a world which can give rise to a new relationship with capitalism, conceptualized here as a new ecology. Capitalism's vertical dominance, the authors contend, can only be challenged by 'un épanouissement humain qui s'inscrit dans

l'horizontale plénitude du vivant' (p. 9). This closing phrase, whilst poetic and enigmatic, captures the rethinking of human interactions with the natural world for which the authors strive and resonates with the wider interrogation of *le vivant* that marked the later phase of Glissant's life, and that Glissant also embraced in death, most notably through the recurrent refrain of his later work, 'rien n'est vrai, tout est vivant', which is inscribed on his tomb.<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusions

As regulatory powers and local and international governmental forces wage a battle to control natural life — the earth's resources — with the goal of maximizing production and economic growth, it is impossible and blinkered to attempt to study the current environmental crisis without situating that crisis within a network of global struggles to define, master, and control the circuits of power that sustain the connection between planetary life and capitalist accumulation. Ecocriticism needs to take full account of the biopolitical turn if the true factors contributing to environmental damage are to be appraised. A reading of the *Manifeste* that is sensitive to both biopolitical and ecocritical concerns reveals the fundamental links between global governance and natural life. The collective of authors lament the growing estrangement from the natural environment, and argue that this estrangement — caused by the 'marchandisation de richesses premières' identified by Gorz — is contributing to a breakdown in the social fabric.

Rethinking the relationship between work, the land, and creativity, is an important factor in addressing and combating environmental crises in the Caribbean, and on a planetary scale. Gorz and Morin urge that humanity's greatest priority must be a rethinking of how we can live our lives in the knowledge that our every action is part of a wider environmental narrative. They argue that such a rethinking has the potential to lead to a re-evaluation of what Gorz describes as under-tapped human resources: 'il existe beaucoup plus de compétences, de talents et de créativité que l'économie capitaliste n'en peut utiliser', an abundance that 'ne peut devenir productif que dans une économie où la création de richesses n'est pas soumise aux critères de rentabilité'.<sup>68</sup> This philosophy finds a direct echo in the *Manifeste*, which sets creative fulfilment as the ultimate goal in life: 'la haute nécessité est de tenter tout de suite de jeter les bases d'une société non économique, où l'idée de développement à croissance continue serait écartée au profit de celle d'épanouissement' (*Manifeste*, p. 5).

For all its efforts to promote an alternative way of life in the French Caribbean, what is the enduring legacy of the *Manifeste*? Most critics observe that the temporary optimism of the 2009 strikes has given way to disillusionment. At Morin's invited lecture in Martinique in 2011, he advised that a collective raised awareness, or

<sup>67</sup> For a reading of *le vivant* in late Glissant, see two articles in a special issue of *Callaloo* in memory of Édouard Glissant, ed. by Celia Britton: Alessandro Corio, 'The Living and the Poetic Intention: Glissant's Biopolitics of Literature', *Callaloo*, 36 (2013), 916–31, and Valérie Loichot, 'Édouard Glissant's Graves', *Callaloo*, 36 (2013), 1014–32.

<sup>68</sup> Gorz, 'La Sortie du capitalisme', p. 41.

shared 'pensée', was the only way to promote sustained social action: 's'il n'y a pas de pensée, les forces sociales ne sont pas capables de construire au-delà de la révolte'.<sup>69</sup> These words prompted one dispirited commentator to observe that 'c'est bien la démonstration qui en a été faite [sic] après les événements de 2009 aux Antilles-Guyane'.<sup>70</sup> Yet in the manifesto there is an example of the development of a 'pensée', of the basis of a complex thought-system, with its own intellectual genealogy in earlier currents of writing, and which introduces its own innovative lexicon and socio-environmental agenda. This slight but dense intervention is one of the most concise expressions of an increasingly significant philosophical direction for French Caribbean culture, as these small islands, peripheries, position themselves as a potential counterbalance to the might of European and Westernized hegemonic structures.

---

<sup>69</sup> Rosamont in 'Edgar Morin parle'.

<sup>70</sup> Rosamont, 'Edgar Morin parle'.