Christina Kullberg

The Poetics of Ethnography in Martinican Narratives: Exploring the Self and the Environment. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013. 217 pp. (Paper US\$ 27.50)

The Poetics of Ethnography in Martinican Narratives does two things brilliantly: it demonstrates that ethnography and fiction feed each other in a reciprocal relation of solidarity, and it presents the environment as a necessary complement—and agent—to understand Martinican production. Christina Kullberg of Uppsala University, Sweden, intermingles the voices and methods of novelists and essayists such as Patrick Chamoiseau, Édouard Glissant, and Suzanne Césaire with those of ethnographers such as Ina Césaire, Richard Price, and Michèle Baj Strobel. After finishing the book, we are left with the vivifying conviction that Price is as much a creative writer as Chamoiseau is an ethnographer.

Through the central term “ethnographic poetics” (p. 180), Kullberg offers a thorough intellectual history of literature and ethnography in Martinique that combines analyses of well-known texts and figures with others that she rescues from critical neglect. For instance, the book creates a space for the discussion of Ina Césaire’s novel *Zonzon tête carrée* and *Soleil de la conscience* by an early Glissant, and for a meticulous reading of the journal *Tropiques*. The temporal span, ranging from Lafcadio Hearn’s 1880s travel writings to Chamoiseau’s 2009 *Un Dimanche au cachot* offers a thorough intellectual history of Martinique.

Right from the introductory pages, the book’s elegantly fluid style engages us in a compelling narrative about museums, complex genealogical trees, Amerindian inheritance, and self-knowledge. Kullberg reshapes the definition of Martinican literature and its “outside” and “inside” by, for instance, reading Michel Leiris as part of a Martinican corpus and presenting Glissant’s *Soleil de la conscience* as an ethnography of metropolitan France. She highlights the ethical imperative of “watching in return” (p. 3), which often takes the collective form of the subject privileging the “we” as stance (p. 13). *Tropiques*, published 1941–45 under the leadership of René Ménil, Aimé Césaire, and Suzanne Césaire, logically provides Kullberg’s initial ethnographic literary field. Particularly enlightening is her reading of Suzanne Césaire’s budding “ethnographic snapshots” (p. 30) via German ethnologist Leo Frobenius’s Africanist theories.

“Self and the City” offers a rare reading of Glissant as a “self-ethnographer” and of his relationship to Leiris. Kullberg argues that in *Écrire en pays dominé*, Chamoiseau adopts Glissant’s self-ethnographic gaze, all the while redirecting it on his homeland of Martinique. “Creole Storytelling and the Art of the Novel” goes further into exploring Chamoiseau’s mixed methodology. With his neolo-

gism “word scratcher” (*marqueur de parole*), the novelist forges a hybrid position whereby the fiction writer projects himself as an ethnographer, note-taker, and participant observer of his own fictional world. By pairing Chamoiseau with Ina Césaire, his compatriot trained as an ethnographer and folklorist, Kullberg presents a quasi-reversibility between the fiction writer and the ethnographer. Her fascinating study culminates in “A Field of Islands,” in which she discusses Price’s *The Convict and the Colonel* and Glissant’s *La Lézarde* through the lens of landscape. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s trope of “digging” (*fouiller*) helps her to relate geological search, ethnographic exploration, and fictional endeavor. She also refines the anthropological term of “field” (as in “field work”) by rerooting it in the literal land or field. Statements such as “landscape is a discursively produced environment” (p. 142) indicate the new critical discipline that she builds, turning her gaze on ethnography as inseparable from an environmental poetics.

Kullberg’s meticulous study is “anchored in the island” (p. 187). This undeniable strength may also have led to one of the book’s weaknesses. Readers are left wanting for a more generous discussion of the tradition of an ethnographic poetics in the greater Caribbean where there is indeed a deep tradition of fluid solidarity between literature and ethnography. Take for instance Cuba’s Lydia Cabrera and Zora Neale Hurston’s work in Haiti, to name just a few flagship figures.

To date, the main books published on ethnography and Caribbean fiction have dealt specifically with ethnography and the Surrealist moment. Celia Britton, J. Michael Dash, and Michael Richardson have focused on the World War II encounter between André Breton, Michel Leiris, André Masson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, René Ménil and the Césaires. Kullberg’s book, which ranges beyond that context, will pique the interest of scholars, professors, and students in Caribbean Studies, ethnography, anthropology, and French and Caribbean intellectual history. It also contributes to the rich new ecocritical discourse on the Caribbean such as Supriya Nair’s *Second Arrivals* and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée Gosson, and George Handley’s *Caribbean Literature and the Environment. The Poetics of Ethnography* is the first book that reflects on ethnography, the land, and literature in Martinique with such depth and breadth. As such, it makes a significant contribution to the field of Caribbean Studies.

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