Special Issue: Climate Change, Decolonization, global Blackness

Cultural Dynamics

Cultural Dynamics
2025, Vol. 0(0) 1–15

DOI: 10.1177/09213740251363574
journals.sagepub.com/home/cdy
Sage

The climate of theory: Hurricanes, skeletons of the enslaved, tidalectical archives

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Abstract

Skeletons of enslaved Africans were exhumed by Hurricanes Iris, Luis, and Marylin in 1995 in Guadeloupe, and by Hurricane Dean and Hurricane Gamède in 2007 in Martinique and in Réunion respectively. In the case of the Caribbean Island of St Eustatius, bones of enslaved Africans were not unearthed by the ocean, hurricanes, and climate change, but were discovered in 2021 near an airport on the site of a former plantation. Thus, this article proposes a transoceanic analysis of the ways in which an emotional landscape and archeological studies trigger a different understanding of enslavement, mourning, and ancestral anxiety for the African diaspora in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. The article unpacks how memory communities, activists, and grassroots organizations create new memorializing grammars and work through the resurfacing trauma of slavery by unsettling entangled archives and silences of history, crafting symbolic burial ceremonies, envisioning new oceanic epistemologies of refusal and transforming tortured geography into decolonial therapeutic spaces. Forging the notions of "tidalectical archives" and "climate of theory", the author crosspollinates trauma and resilience, implicated archeologists, implicated descendants, embodied experiences, creative spiritual art, critical fabulation, and geopolitical re-appropriations of the skeletons of the enslaved. The author further posits a reimagination of epistemological platforms and methodologies to assess the entanglements of climate crises in social and geographical contexts where historical trauma is caused by the enslavement of nature and the enslavement of people through nature.

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Keywords
tidalectical archives, climate of theory, hurricanes, slave burial grounds, ancestral anxiety, community engagement, decolonial praxis

Excavating the skeletons of enslaved Africans to unsettle the silences of history; desecrating slave burial grounds; reburying the remains of enslaved Africans in proper resting places; imagining new symbolic burial ceremonies; envisioning new memory communities and oceanic epistemologies of refusal; transforming tortured geography into therapeutic spaces; theorizing to decolonize the archeology of silence; carving out analytical methodologies for an archeology of slavery. These are some of the multifaceted statements and critical positionalities that I seek to unpack in this essay in order to explore the entangled archives of slavery and the ways in which they are transfigured and inhabited by communities of the African diaspora, carving out new memorializing grammars while climate change excavates additional layers of trauma.

Images of shackled bodies confined head-to-foot in the hold of a slave ship have become a familiar iconography of the dehumanization of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade. Unveiling the macabre intimacy of capitalism and slavery in the hold of the ship, detailed diagrams cross sections of slave ships showing rows of bodies marked as cargo have filled the pages of captains' logbooks, which circulate across times as the only official archives of the Middle Passage. Nevertheless, when skeletons unearthed by the ocean, by hurricanes, and by climate change disclose an archive-catastrophe and an emotional landscape for archeological studies, a different type of visualizing enslavement, mourning, and ancestral anxiety is imposed on us. This visuality, I argue, may well become familiar as more burial grounds are exposed over time due to increasingly powerful hurricanes blasting through the Circum-Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and other regions of the Global South, disfiguring the land (Figure 1).

Examining the multiple critical and emotional positionalities that these two images[1] spark, I argue that the image on the right, which documents archeological work conducted on slave burial grounds on the island of Réunion in 2007, stands as a crucial counter-narrative and counter-archive to the official iconography of enslaved bodies that appears on the left. Yet, with time, the image on the right is doomed to become another type of official archive as professional archeologists store, classify, catalogue, exhibit, digitize, and study them as new information providing insight into the material culture and living conditions of enslaved populations. Additionally, one needs to consider how communities, activists, and grassroots organizations reassess and re-appropriate the skeletons of enslaved ancestors and the ocean space as they are working through the resurfacing trauma of slavery. To this end, I want to suggest that subsequent spiritual and geopolitical re-appropriations of the skeletons are the preface for another type of counter-narrative, one that I will identify as a tidalectical archive. Thus, after I examine how the skeletons were discovered and how communities unpack the attendant entanglements of memory, I will explore how the notions of anarchive and tidalectics can constitute a fruitful palimpsestic ecosystem that nourishes what I call the climate of theory. Reflecting on Montesquieu's determinist theory of climates in *De l'esprit des lois* [*The Spirit of the Laws*] (1748) and

Figure 1. Left, the hold of the slave ship ~ Right, the archeology of slavery. Left: Public domain image from Wikipedia. Right: Image from "Découverte de squelettes d'esclaves à Saint-Paul," *Zinfos974*, June 22, 2011, https://www.zinfos974.com/decouverte-de-squelettes-desclaves-a-saint-paul/. Image courtesy of *Zinfos974*.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's "The Climate of History" (2009), I forge the notion of "climate of theory" to offer a platform that may compel us to interrogate our critical methodologies and closely observe the ways in which slave burial grounds, community engagement, creative spiritual art, critical fabulation (Hartman, 2008), and archeological excavations and research intersect. To engage with the goals of the Climate Change, Decolonization and Global Blackness Lab,[2] I will crosspollinate concepts, poecepts (the contraction of poetry and concept I borrow from Patrick Chamoiseau[3]), decolonial praxis, embodied experiences, and epistemologies of refusal. Such a crosspollination entails dealing with various types of implicated actors, conceptual frameworks as well as memory communities, and exploring how subjectivities are impacted, tested, and challenged through transformative experiences.

From an archeology of silence to an archeology of slavery

In 1995, Hurricanes Iris, Luis, and Marylin blasted through the Caribbean Island of Guadeloupe with devastating long-term effects. A similar phenomenon happened in 2007 in Réunion in the Indian Ocean and in Martinique, after Hurricane Gamède and Hurricane Dean, respectively, severely impacted the two islands with record rainfall and flooding in the case of Réunion. While these hurricanes were among the most damaging in collective memory, and while the trauma they generated is cyclically reactivated every time island populations grapple with the lasting effects of these hurricanes, massive soil erosion exposed slave burial grounds on beaches of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Réunion.

After the hurricanes excavated[4] these bones from burial grounds, the French National Institute for Preventive Archeological Research (INRAP) began—in the late 1990s in Guadeloupe, in 2007 in Réunion, and in 2013 in Martinique—to carry out groundbreaking studies on enslaved populations that allowed scientists[5] to shift from an archeology of absence and silence—namely, an over reliance on narratives and chronicles by missionaries, travelers, slave traders and owners—to an archeology of slavery. In 2011, archeological research conducted on the burial grounds in Réunion confirmed that the remains found after Hurricane Gamède were indeed skeletons of enslaved populations who were buried in coffins near the ocean after some funeral practices had been performed. From another critical perspective, evidently this oceanic land-surge of skeletons reveals that the seascape and landscape stand as intangible witnesses of a camouflaged archive. The hurricane unsettled an archeology of silence, evidently triggered a resurgence of traumas, and channeled symbolic commemoration practices by grassroots communities. Thus, the findings of this needed scientific research and the commemoration practices are necessarily connected as intertwined layers of a framework where encounters, cultural narratives, and scientific evidence reflect on the knotted dimension of collective memory.

Similarly, several forms of agency should be considered: the agency of scientists supported by the state (in this case, regional and national French institutions), and the agency of grassroots communities who, galvanized by an embodied memory of slavery, pondered whether these popular beaches should be repurposed and permanently transformed into sacred memory sites. The agency of the dead can also be considered, as Alexandra Affidou of the Reunionese association *Rasin Kaf*[6] [African Roots] argued: "our ancestors exposed themselves so to speak to allow scientists to conduct research on their remains, as if they had understood that time had come for us to know. […] This is a return of History that we all expected" (2011).

Communities and acts of memory

In Réunion, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St Eustatius (French and Dutch overseas territories), various practices and performances diffuse a restorative meaning and culminate into the vastness of healing. For instance, ecumenical ceremonies were organized in 2011 by a dialogue group composed of religious leaders in Réunion. The *Cimetière des oubliés* [Cemetery of the Forgotten] was inaugurated in Saint-Paul in Réunion on May 10, 2019, on the location of the burial ground discovered in 2007. Alexandra Affidou from the *Rasin Kaf Association* enthusiastically welcomes the work done by local and national scientists and speaks of "a catharsis long overdue that repairs what has been torn apart and which today can be 'thought'." She further observes that "revealing the traces of the past and honoring the ancestors opens up a healing dialogue for all Reunionese people" (Affidou, 2011). Now the site includes the Cemetery of the Forgotten, the nearby landscape and seascape and the *Mémorial aux ancêtres fondateurs. Zetwal la Souvenans* [Memorial to the Founding Ancestors. Stars for Remembrance] designed by Reunionese sculptor Jack Beng-Thi. The commemorative stela of the memorial shows Beng-Thi's following homage to enslaved peoples.

Here rest in peace those who crossed the ocean.

After the abduction and rape of bodies stacked

in the dark belly of predator-slave ships.

Here rest in peace those from Africa…

Women from Quiloa and Zanzibar

Uprooted from their native land, their gods, their dances,

their ancestral wisdom.[7]

In Guadeloupe, where the skeletons of 276 enslaved adults and children were excavated, ceremonies are regularly held on the beach at Anse Sainte-Marguerite by the association *Lanmou ba yo* [Love for them]. This grassroots association, created in 2005, seeks to rehabilitate the different sites of memory where skeletons were found. It organizes yearly ceremonies honoring the memory of slave ancestors, fosters a deep intimacy and affiliation with slave ancestors, and creates forums and discussion groups to work through historical trauma and establish genealogical work. It is noteworthy that each May 27th (the day for the commemoration of the abolition of slavery in Guadeloupe), members of *Lanmou ba yo* organize a dawn mourning procession from the Edgard-Clerc museum in the town of Le Moule, where the bones are currently stored, to the beach at Anse Sainte-Marguerite. As Gaetano Ciarcia notes, a complex pilgrimage involving archeologists and community members "redeems a past of suffering and the loss of genealogical links with enslaved descendants" and generates "the liturgical reconstitution of a lost filiation" (2020: 131). Referring to his interview with Jean-Luc Romana, a founding member of *Lanmou ba yo,* Ciarcia adds that the secular (the archeological scientific explanations) and the sacred (the communities' pilgrimage to the beach) are intertwined as the bones go through a liturgical metamorphosis. The bones become family relics, pilgrims walk seven km to the beach, initiate for 7 seconds symbolic patterns of connection that subsequently materialize through trance and other forms of embodied experiences, flags are raised on seven pillars, and flowers launched in the ocean. It is noteworthy that the number seven is symbolically repurposed as an act of resistance by members of *Lanmou ba yo* to restoratively engage with Father Jean-Baptiste Labat, a French missionary and slave owner who wrote extensively in his 17th century chronicles about enslaved populations on plantations in the French Caribbean. According to Labat, it took 7 days to transform an African into a slave once he got off the slave ship.

In Martinique, the Memorial Lans Bélé in the town of Anses-d'Arlet is unique in the sense that it shelters the bones of enslaved Africans, and Arawak and Kalinago peoples restituted to the Martinican local association, Kolektif Anse Bélé (KAB) created in 2020. These bones were exhumed by Hurricane Dean in 2007 on the small cove of Anse Bellay where the former 18th century Le Chalet plantation was located. The unprecedented nature of this bone restitution stems from the fact that normally, once excavations and archaeological studies have begun, bones are officially designated as "archaeological furniture" and become the property of the French State, most specifically the DAC (*Direction des affaires culturelles*) [Department of Cultural Affairs] and INRAP. However

as local residents, including the Martinican fishermen who fortuitously discovered the bones, became increasingly aware of the historical and memorial magnitude of this discovery, the KAB managed to engage in entangled yet fruitful discussions with the Prefect of Martinique (France's High government official) and several heads of French cultural organizations. With the support of Thomas Romon, the INRAP's archaeologist in charge of the excavations and the Mayor of Anses-d'Arlet, Eugène Larcher, restitution was ultimately granted to the KAB in 2019. Archeological excavations and studies conducted between 2013 and 2019 revealed a slave cemetery dating from the 17th to the 19th century with 56 burial grounds[8] holding bodies of men, women and children, wrapped in shrouds, arranged on their backs, and bearing African initiatory marks. As for the indigenous burial ground that dates back to the pre-Columbian period between the 5th and 12th centuries and located underneath the African burial ground, it contained pre-Columbian wooden and ceramic objects, tools such as gouges made out of conch shells, and bodies buried "in a semi-seated position, in an oval grave and possibly in a hammock or basket."[9]

The Memorial that comprises the marble ossuary containing the bones, and the surrounding environment, including the ruins of the plantation Le Chalet smothered by roots of a banyan tree, was inaugurated on March 22, 2023 with KAB members, State officials, local residents including children designated as symbolic transmitters. It is noteworthy to add that the ossuary was built on a nearby small hill to protect the grave from coastal erosion and future risks of marine submersion, thus allowing future archeological studies to be conducted on the site. Martinican writer Nicole Cage and member of the KAB explained to me[10] that the Memorial not only has an oceanic and telluric force but is the result of a symbolic victory.

> Unfortunately, not all our struggles have ended in victory. But this victory is sufficiently beautiful and powerfully symbolic for us to allow ourselves to be moved by it. It's a fight led by a citizens' committee that has succeeded in creating something unprecedented. When I need to comfort myself in the face of prevailing pessimism, I reconnect with this victory. It has great symbolic power, because it brings together different strata of settlement in the same space. The bones of our ancestors, the First Indigenous Peoples and African Peoples, are gathered at Anse Bellay, and when I go there, I receive the symbolic weight of this gathering. Even before the ossuary was built, I felt that something very strong was happening and connecting me to this place. There's an emotional charge in this place that doesn't leave you unscathed even when you do not know its story.

Before the March 2023 inauguration, in 2019, Martinican artist Isambert Durivaux had granted the site a spiritual dimension with his artwork *Roch listwa* (history stone). One side of the stone facing West Africa shows a Sankofa symbol representing the wisdom of the past as a path to know the present and the future; the other side shows an Indigenous symbol found on a ceramic plate in the excavations. The marble grave that also displays these two symbols as well as Durivaux's *Roch listwa* symbolically cancel the official designation of the bones as "archeological furniture", a violent resonance to Article 44 of the *Code Noir* defining enslaved Africans themselves as furniture, and invalidate the

ONF's (*Office National des forêts*) [National Forests' Office] initial goal to "clean up" the site and repurpose it as a hiking and recreational trail.

The last site that I'd like to analyze is a slave burial ground in St Eustatius, a Dutch public entity in the Caribbean. In this case, 75 skeletons of enslaved Africans were not found after a hurricane, but were excavated near the airport on the site of the former Golden Rock plantation by a team of US and Europe-based archeologists commissioned by the government. In July 2021, several organizations including Ubuntu Connected Front, Brighter Path Foundation, SEAD, and EcoRA coordinated protests to stop the excavations. The following declarations by Kenneth Cuvalay, Chair of the political party the Ubuntu Connected Front Caribbean and now President of the Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance, unveil a decolonial narrative that warns against the "unethical disturbance of their enslaved ancestors:"

> These sacred soils should not be disturbed by gravediggers whose only motive is to use taxpayer's money to write academic glory into their own job profiles. They claim their motive is scientific but how many bones do they need to disturb if only to describe the suffering of countless tortured souls? These culturally insensitive foreigners have carried out their toil on our soil […] in a very disrespectful manner without following the protocols for community engagement and properly engaging with the descendant community beforehand as per the international codes of ethics. […] We claim respectful treatment and reburial of the remains of our ancestors, structural engagement with us on all matters pertaining to archeological project work and a permanent memorial. […] We are lobbying Afrikan scholars, academics, archeologists, and anthropologists. We are appealing to Afrikan Sisters and Brothers, and Afrikan organizations in the diaspora to help us stop this colonial and barbaric attack on our ancestors' spirituality.[11]

The excavations were eventually suspended in 2021 and the government assured that the bones would be respectfully kept in a place for osteological analyses until subsequent re-burial takes place with community engagement.[12] While a spiritual reconnection to the land and the ancestors is noticeable in the case of Guadeloupe and Réunion, protest and mistrust against the research teams and the local Statian government suspected of trying to encourage heritage tourism on the island characterize the nature of the efforts led by the Statian Alliance. Nonetheless, in its efforts to give regional and international visibility to these sites of memory, the Alliance approached the offices of CARICOM Reparations Commission and experts from the University of the West Indies, and they started a petition[13] and applied for St Eustatius' burial grounds to be labeled on UNESCO's Routes of Enslaved Peoples project. Now the site is listed as "Godet & Golden Rock (Kingdom of the Netherlands)" under UNESCO's Network of Places of History and Memory linked to Enslavement and the Slave Trade.

Unpacking the anarchive, engaging afresh with the palimpsest as metaphor, excavating tidalectical archives

Unpacking (in both the literal and figurative sense) the anarchive begins from an engagement with the critical potential of the term Derrida proposed in *Archive Fever* (1998), but must also navigate across various post-derridian theoretical and grammatical[14]

avenues that unfold new critical paradigms in order to reassess the historically, politically, and emotionally charged cultural baggage I examined earlier. Derrida's psychoanalytic claims about rethinking the dynamics of power and control of the archives as a site, an institution, and an object, and his discussion of the patriarchal and authoritative principles of classifying, preserving, and institutionalizing the archive is important when considering the entangled yet necessary excavations and scientific study of the skeletons of the enslaved. Thus, this entangled and anarchivic situation compels an archival project of the remains, the land, and the ocean as a "working through" (La Capra, 2001) of a complex and enduring process of self-questioning, of detaching oneself from the obstacles blocking the conscious and unconscious in order to better manage trauma and build agency. Drawing on the connotative potential of notions such as "failure," "simulacrum," "mask," "deinstitutionalization," and "translation," as did Derrida (11), is useful to me since I navigate an epistemological territory charted by forgetting, remembering, resurfacing, and suppression of all parameters that disorient and reorient communities in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean when come times for mourning. As Brian Massumi argues, the "anarchive needs documentation, requires the archives from which to depart and through which to pass. It is an excess energy of the archive: a kind of *supplement* or surplus-value of the archive" (2016: 7). Massumi's understanding of the anarchive as a "*feed-forward mechanism*" is compelling when we consider that in Réunion, Guadeloupe, and Martinique communities progressively occupy the official archive that is being built around the archeological research on the skeletons. While recognizing the value of the research, the communities deconstruct its rigid structure and authority, enhance it with political substance, awareness, memory performances, and multilayered temporalities. Thinking with the skeletons simultaneously addresses the lack of archives and the sudden abundance of archives longing for classification, dates, and identification. But thinking with the skeletons also addresses the need for declassification and a respectful and political return to the grave and the ocean.

When thinking with the skeletons of the enslaved and working through the trauma, the palimpsest is a fruitful metaphor that provides enough conceptual fluidity to craft memorializing grammars across temporalities, repertoires, and the reactivation of layers of trauma. The palimpsest navigates the domain of the archive, the manuscript, and the multiple layers of meaning, scriptures, interpretations, styles, transfers. It is also relevant to navigate other forms of geo-historical materiality such as sand, ocean, waves, coastline, salt, when "water", as Valérie Loichot observes, is "fully endowed with its sacredness, beauty and relation" (2020: 230). The palimpsestic ecosystem that embodies this entangled memory is related to intangibility and allows subaltern voices to be heard. Bodies in performance, common prayers, mourning ceremonies, and choreographies of meaning in Guadeloupe, Martinique and Réunion are the palimpsestic remarking on and of the silences of history, and the rewriting of the official iconography of enslaved Africans packed in the hold of a slave ship.

When we consider the multiple narratives, temporalities, and agencies that populate the palimpsestic dynamics that constitute the folds of history, we can think of the agency of the communities, the archeologists, the hurricane, the ocean, the spiritual leaders, the activists, and most importantly the agency of the ancestors who voluntarily exposed themselves "as if they had understood that the time had come for us to know," as Alexandra Affidou

commented. We also find the agency of filmmakers who creatively replenish, in modes of critical fabulation, the exposure of the bones and the acts of memory.

To this end, French filmmaker Florence Lazar's, 2024 documentary film, *Sous les feuilles/Anba Fey* [Under the leaves] unsettles colonial violence and archival silences as it unpacks the discovery of the bones at Anse Bellay, and amplifies poetically the ecological spirituality of the site while closely reflecting on the ways in which local populations cope with the resurfacing of memory fissures. The French/Creole title of the film *Sous les feuilles/Anba Fey* draws from these multilayered meanings, the *graine-en-bas-feuille* being a plant with numerous medicinal properties, and the creole expression *anba fey* referring to concealed individual and collective behaviors. Similarly, Lazar's camera lens captures Anse Bellay's fragmented historical texture by interweaving the symbolic immateriality of footprints, bone imprints, soil, sand, sea, trees in order to interrogate social entanglements and mental health and care in Martinique. Indeed, the film also focuses on how psychiatrists tap into the symbolic power of the site of Anse Bellay to develop novel curative approaches for patients who can sense and see the invisible, and hear voices. A psychiatrist observes in the film that Anse Bellay could then become a therapeutic space where patients would take therapeutic walks and feel safe to say what they hear, see and sense, a healing method that a KAB member, in the film, connects to Fanon's land-anchoring therapy for his Algerian patients.

In an opening scene of the film an endemic tree is symbolically granted the mission to speak and see what lies under the leaves, what is camouflaged (Figure 2).

In this image, the eye of the tree, namely the oval ampulla that in forestry typically stems from a scar, from a wound on a tree or from a broken branch, evidently begs for more symbolic meanings given that the eye of a tree generally mutates into a nascent bud. By crafting a subtle close-up on the eyebrow of this tree ampulla, on the eyelid, on the intensity of the gaze emanating from the pupil, and on the nascent line of the nose, Lazar interrogates the knots of history and the vastness of a silence to be filled by the discerning eye of a tree-ancestor. The intertwining of the eye of the ancestor with the eye of Lazar's camera exposes her vulnerability and cinematic agency along with the impetus of local residents to transform Anse Bellay into a space for solitary and intergenerational meditation, spiritual reconnection, memorial walks, and the community's determination "not to beg for reparation, but on the contrary to make reparation" as Nicole Cage stated.[15] Ultimately, to me, Lazar's cinematic poetry explored above interestingly coalesces with this poetic excerpt of Cage's commemoration address[16] at the Anse Bellay Memorial:

> Le rivage de l'Anse Bellay frissonne et murmure un chant que seules les oreilles aguerries perçoivent… D'aucuns croient que c'est le cliquetis habituel des vagues léchant le rivage. Ils ne savent pas que les Ancêtres sont là qui murmurent un chant de lakontantman, un chant de célébration. Les enfants… les enfants, deux par deux, auxquels furent précautionneusement remis les trésors, les enfants passerelle, entre Eux et nous, les enfants conscients de la gravité du moment, s'avançant sur le sentier balisé de konn-lanbi qui grimpe jusqu'à l'ossuaire […] Il y eut un choc, il y eut un vouloir. Il y eut un rêve devenu tangible, là, dans la fraîcheur du vent de l'Anse Bellay. Il y a désormais, en retrait du rivage où la mer parfois déchaînée pourrait l'éroder, il y a un témoin d'un pan de notre Histoire. Le chapo-lévèk et les ti-bom centenaires sont là pour l'attester.

Figure 2. Image courtesy of Florence Lazar, director, *Sous les feuilles/Anba Fey*, Sister Productions, 2024.

> The shoreline of Anse Bellay shudders and whispers a song that only seasoned ears can hear... Some think it's the usual clatter of waves licking the shore. Little do they know that the Ancestors are whispering a *lakontantman* song, a song of celebration. The children pairing up... the children to whom the treasures were carefully handed over, the bridging children, between Them and us, the children aware of the gravity of the moment, walking along the trail marked out with *konn-lanbi*, and that climbs up to the ossuary […] There was a shock, there was a desire. There was a dream that became tangible, there, in the cool breeze of Anse Bellay. Now, set back from the shore where the sometimes-raging sea could erode it, there is a witness to a part of our history. The century-old *chapo-lévèk* and *ti-bom* trees are there to attest to it.

Considering Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics and my previous discussion of the critical fluidity of the anarchive for its de-institutionalizing, translating and feed-forward potential, I posit that the oceanic exposure of the skeletons of the enslaved is a tidalectical archive. In his ocean poetics and philosophical reasoning Brathwaite creatively crafted a vision of an old Jamaican woman repeatedly sweeping her sandy yard and walking freely on the Atlantic Ocean reconnecting the Caribbean to the African continent, reenacting the Middle Passage. It seems interesting to me to propose to the reader to connect the discerning eye of the tree-ancestor and Brathwaite's grandmother's counter-narrative to the Middle Passage. Brathwaite imagines the movement of the ocean the Jamaican

grandmother crosses as tidalectical and not dialectical. Imagining the Jamaican grandmother freely transmuting the temporalities and fluxes of the ocean, interlacing Africa and the Caribbean, enlivening the skeletons of the enslaved in the belly of the ocean, and acting as an ontological intercessor who diffuses knowledge and behavior that defy transparency, Brathwaite senses the scale of multilayered subjectivities that artists, researchers and communities must generate to decipher the Middle Passage and produce oceanic epistemologies and ecologies of refusal. Thus, the tidalectical reasoning he imagines diverges from Aimé Césaire's poetics of abject expressed as such in the *Notebook of A Return to the Native Land*:

> At the end of the dawn, […] no one knows why a woman seems to float on her back in the Capot River (her brilliant and obscure body settles tractably at the command of the navel) but she is only a bundle of sonorous water. (1968: 36, 38)

Brathwaite specifies that she is "coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding ("rea- ding") from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the (ir) future…" (1999: 34). Thinking with tidalectics as a poecept, I build on the agency of the dead and Brathwaite's vision for a "creative chaos of the (ir) future" to carve out my notion of tidalectical archive, which interrogates a complex set of translations, negotiations, and reappropriations of the trauma embedded in the Ocean. The tidalectic mentality and epistemology that I work with is in dialogue with what Elizabeth DeLoughrey articulates, namely "a merging of water and land, north and South, human and nature" (2018: 99). Thus, a tidalectical archive perceived as an in/tangible, oceanic evidence nurtures the climate of theory.

Conclusion: The climate of theory

In the climate of theory, crosspollinating concepts, poecepts, philosophical reasoning, and diverse modes of cross-disciplinary thinking is a necessary dialogue and a compass to navigate the objective modes of critique, political statements, consciousness-raising actions, and the embodied experiences I explored in this essay. The climate of theory calls for new theoretical paradigms that pay attention to a multiplicity of visions by various implicated subjects, descendants and non-descendants. The cross-disciplinary study of temporary performances on social media or yearly planned commemorations, the archeological study of slave burial grounds, and the study of subaltern agency of grassroots civilians can significantly expand epistemologies and methodologies for working through the trauma and the memory of slavery and grappling with the trauma of climate catastrophes.

As mentioned earlier, Montesquieu's contentious theory that climate can impact the nature of human beings and the temper of their minds and Chakrabarty's thoughts were helpful to forge my notion of climate of theory. Chakrabarty argues that "what scientists have said about climate change challenges not only the ideas about the human, […] but also the analytic strategies that postcolonial and postimperial historians have deployed in the last two decades in response to the postwar scenario of decolonization and globalization" (2009: 198). He further reflects on the ways in which "the crisis of climate change

appeals to our sense of human universals while challenging at the same time our capacity for historical understanding" (201). The climate of theory may seem at first a play on words and a rhetorical wink at Chakrabarty's "climate of history" and Montesquieu's "theory of climates," however the climate of theory mostly posits a reimagination of our epistemological frameworks when assessing the entanglements of climate crises in postcontact[17] island territories. The climate of theory is about the endless possibilities of theory when there is an awareness of archival silences, when climate catastrophes exacerbate systemic precarity and ancestral anxiety. In other words, how do we theorize problems caused by climate change in social and geographical contexts where historical trauma is caused by the enslavement of nature and the enslavement of people through nature? Beaches, ocean, and forests are historical loci where uncanny beauty contrasts with the ugliness and tragedies of a violent history. Similarly, how should one think about the positionality of grassroots and political organizations in St Eustatius who have strong reservations about the methods and identities of scholars who will participate in the reconstruction of an archive and who require a decolonial methodology? A clear border is established between culturally insensitive foreigners on one side, and Afrikan academics, archeologists, sisters, and brothers on the other side who are considered as the only legitimate guardians of memory and protectors of slave ancestors.

Unlike Guadeloupe, Martinique and Réunion, climate change and strong hurricanes did not trigger the oceanic surge of skeletons in St Eustatius. Nonetheless, other devastating *tempests* with colonial and postcolonial implications or Shakespearian or Cesairian inflections triggered the appearance of the bones in St Eustatius, a view that fits well within the spectrum of historical tensions and entanglements that the climate of theory addresses. In St Eustatius, where decolonial praxis and a need for a sustainable awareness and community engagement[18] must prevail over unethical digging, tidalectical imagination matters to weave layers of meaning within the history of transatlantic slave trade.

The ocean has unveiled the ghosts of history and an archive of silence where enslaved bodies molded into the soil of the violent space of the plantation rematerialize no longer as the ghosts of history or the furniture of the Black Code, but as the human grammar that needs to be deciphered. The ecological and human disasters caused by the hurricanes, the uncanny beauty of the Caribbean, the historical violence that is the matrix of the region, clearly remind us of what Suzanne Césaire theoretically assessed in 1945 in *Tropiques* as a poetics of camouflage. She writes, "if my Antilles are so beautiful, it is because the great game of hide-and-seek has succeeded, it is then because, on that day, the weather is most certainly too blindingly bright and beautiful to see clearly" (2012: 46).

Climate change, hurricanes, and the construction of infrastructures for heritage tourism may have been *Deus ex Machina* that gave visibility to what was camouflaged. Before the discoveries of these slave burial grounds, descendants of the African Diaspora had no resting places for their enslaved ancestors, no tangible grave sites to mourn and spiritually cradle. Drawing on Kathryn Yusoff's call for a "poetry to refashion a new epoch" and a "praxis" of a black aesthetics that "locates an insurgent geology," (2018: 100-101), I posit that the geology of silence is now a geology of irruption and ritual that nurtures a geopolitics of memory, where several grammars, theoretical paradigms, and subjectivities intervene and intertwine. Beautiful seascape and landscape, trauma and resilience,

implicated archeologists, implicated descendants, engaged communities, embodied experiences are all ingredients to galvanize an epistemological cross-talk on how to unearth the skeletons of history in times of climate catastrophes.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. This image and its description appear in my essay "Tidalectical Bodies: Reclaiming Skeletons, Liana∼Hips, and Feet with Nathalie Hermine, Suzanne Césaire, and Kamau Brathwaite," In *Women, Theory, Praxis, and Performativities: Transoceanic Entanglements in Francophone Settings*. Eds. Jacqueline Couti and Anny-Dominique Curtius, Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2025.
2. Michaeline Crichlow and Denise Ferreira da Silva, https://fhi.duke.edu/research/entanglement-project/climate-change-decolonization-and-global-blackness-lab/.
3. "Conférence 934: 'Quand les murs tombent,' réflexion transatlantique sur la créolisation du monde," Consulate General of France in New York, April 8, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg5HE7-Wx_g.
4. Alissandra Cummings, Thomas Romon, Patrice Courtaud and Sacha Kack discuss absence and presence as key paradigms for future research on the archeology of slavery in *Archéologie de l'esclavage colonial*. Delpuech A and Jacob J-P (eds) (2014).
5. For detailed descriptions of the archeological studies see Jacquot's chapter on Réunion and Courtaud's, Romon's, and Dutour's chapter on Guadeloupe in Delpuech and Jacob (eds) *Archéologie de l'esclavage colonial* (2014).
6. This Reunionese association seeks to reaffirm the right to speech, memory, identity, and culture of slave descendants, restore and establish memorial sites, and protect the environment and heritage-related sites.
7. My translation. https://www.portail-esclavage-reunion.fr/lieux-de-memoire/memorial-aux-ancetres-fondateurs-zetwal-la-souvenans/ (accessed 12 October 2023). All subsequent translations from French in this article are mine.
8. Thomas Romon, Patrice Courtaud, Sacha Kacki, Jérôme Rouquet, Marie-France Deguilloux, Fanny Mendisco et Estelle Herrscher, "Archéologie funéraire et (re)connaissance des populations esclavisées des Antilles françaises: l'exemple du cimetière de l'Anse Bellay à la Martinique," *Bulletins et mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* | 2024.
9. "Anse Bellay à Les Anses-D'Arlet," (Martinique), INRAP, 2014.
10. Interview with the author, May 16, 2025.
11. "Opposition is mounting to Archeological Excavations on St Eustatius". Available at https://bes-reporter.com/opposition-is-mounting-to-archeological-excavations-on-caribbean-island-st-eustatius/. (accessed 10 September 2023).

12. The blog of the Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance offers detailed information about the steps taken by the government to protect the burial ground and give the population access to the depot where the excavated skeletons are located.
13. View the petition at: https://www.change.org/p/dutch-government-stop-the-excavations-at-st-eustatius-african-burial-ground?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=35203c80-8f79-11e8-88f1-4548c7e7290c.
14. Anarchive has undergone an interesting trajectory as it was given a different grammatical form—from Derrida's adjective "anarchivic" to the noun "anarchive".
15. "Dinité Lonnè Respé pou yo," Inauguration address, March 22, 2023.
16. "Commémoration Mémorial Lans Bèlè," Commemoration address, 2024.
17. I use this term after scholars in Francophone Studies such as Françoise Lionnet and Michel Laronde, to refer to islands territories still freighted with entangled colonial histories.
18. On December 11, 2022, The St Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance hosted the screening of Joseph Curran's and Dominic Aubrey de Vere's documentary *A Story of Bones* (2022), which sheds light on the unexpected discovery of the remains of about 9000 formerly enslaved Africans on the island of Saint Helena where Napoleon was sent into exile.

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