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Victoria J. Collis-Buthelezi

In April 1904, a Trinidadian newspaper reported to its readers that it had received a copy of the syllabus for Wooding’s Private Preparatory School in Cape Town.1 The school’s founder was Rawson Walter Wooding of Guyana. Henry Sylvester Williams, the convener of the first Pan-African Conference in 1900, was on the school’s board. Believed to be Barbadian-born or the son of Barbadian parents, Williams had grown up in Trinidad, but the precarious status of black peoples resident in South Africa was his motivation for the conference as well as his 1902 pamphlet *The British Negro: A Factor in the Empire*. He moved to South Africa to start a “federation” of non-Europeans (Malays, West Indians, coloureds, and Indians).2 Nearly a decade after Wooding’s syllabus was announced in Trinidad, a picture published in the newspaper of the African Political/People’s Organization (APO) features Wooding and some of his pupils.3

3 The African Political Organization (APO) is also called the African People’s Organization. Founded in 1902, the APO initially included “coloured” and “native” leaders like Sol Plaatje. However, by 1912 the need for an organization that championed “native” rights in particular was felt, and the South African Native National Congress (later renamed the African National Congress) was formed. The APO often partnered with other anti-segregationist groups and later with anti-apartheid groups. Historically it is understood to have been a coloured organization in the contemporary definition of coloured in South Africa. The fluidity and instability of coloured identity in this period is something I attend to in my current book project, “Empire, Nation, Diaspora: Constituting a Black Archive.”
It is dated 8 March 1913. Cissie and Rosie Abdurahman are two of the students identified in the photograph. Cissie Abdurahman would become Cissie Gool, a prominent antiapartheid activist. The photograph of Cissie Abdurahman, Rawson Wooding, and his students belies a moment of foreclosure and opening at the Cape. Here is Cissie Abdurahman, not yet Cissie Gool. Here is Cissie, the sister of Rosie and daughter of the doctor and District Six councilman Abdullah Abdurahman. At the time of the photograph, Cissie was an important member of the community and worthy of being photographed because of her link to two important men: the school’s founder and her father. Both she and her father have entered the annals of South African history as part of the struggle against apartheid. Wooding is absent from any such narratives. The photograph is filed away in the National Library of South Africa in the APO box; there, Rawson Walter Wooding is the stuff of APO and District Six memorabilia. But in that moment there was a mutual hope for education and presumably complete freedom. If the newspaper clipping that references Wooding’s syllabus sits in a Caribbean archive, the photograph resides in a Cape archive; each speak in different national, regional, and urban registers.

Wooding and Williams were not the only Afro-Caribbeans in the early twentieth century who were interested or active in the Cape and South Africa. In the wake of slave emancipation in the British colonies, as many of the old plantocracy and some British intellectuals debated how, or if, they could make Quashee work on the derelict and rotting plantations after slave emancipation, most former slaves were desperate for a way out of the plantation. Often this meant leaving their islands of birth. Those from smaller islands migrated south to Trinidad and South America, some went north to Cuba and the United States, others west to Panama and Costa Rica. Those who had schooling often immigrated to England. A few found their way to the Cape.

According to the 1904 Cape census there were nearly five hundred people resident in the colony who self-identified as being from the anglophone Caribbean. For Caribbean seafarers, the Cape was the first port of entry into South Africa. The Qualified Cape Franchise of 1853 promised Caribbean wanderers of African descent the opportunity not only to earn a living to help their relatives at home but to acquire property and the vote. The Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902 made white seafaring and dock labor scarce; as a result, Caribbean seafarers were
in demand.\(^8\) In his autobiography, the African American seafarer Captain Henry Foster Dean writes of the black crew that worked under him on his ship, the *Pedro Gorino*. Dean saw his ship as the nucleus of his “Ethiopian empire” in southern Africa; the bulk of his crew was of Afro-Caribbean ancestry.\(^9\)

In 1919 the first black trade union in South Africa, the Industrial Commercial Workers’ Union of Africa (ICU), was formed; it was started on the Cape Town docks, and “West Indians” comprised a significant portion of its membership and executives.\(^10\) Often mistaken for the Jamaican Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL), in its early years the ICU enjoyed blurring the lines between itself and the UNIA-ACL. In South Africa, the ICU’s first periodical, the *Black Man*, was often mistaken for the UNIA-ACL’s periodical, the *Negro World*; the ICU and the UNIA-ACL were sometimes synonymous.\(^11\) When Clements Kadalie moved the ICU’s headquarters to Johannesburg in 1922, the motivation was twofold. Kadalie felt the need to have a stronger presence in the mines of Johannesburg, but the move was also a result of his desire to shed the deep ties to the UNIA and Garveyism.\(^12\) For Garvey, if the UNIA-ACL did nothing else, at least it had awakened the race in South Africa.\(^13\) In Jamaica and in England in the 1930s, Garvey titled his new periodicals *Blackman* and the *Black Man*, like the ICU’s first periodical. By the 1920s, as Eric Walrond edited the *Negro World* and touted Garveyism, the black foreign ocean traveler to South Africa became a *swart gewaar* (black danger), and the 1913 Prohibited Immigrant Act increasingly became a tool by which the state could stop black ocean travelers from landing in Cape Town. In 1926, Walrond published his only book-length work of fiction, *Tropic Death*. Though never quite at ease with Garvey’s separatist ideas, as editor of *Negro World* Walrond found a literary home in a New York that was uncomfortable with his blackness as well as

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\(^8\) Ibid., 358, 354.
\(^11\) See the ICU’s first periodical, the *Black Man*, 1919–21. Edited by S. M. Bennett Ncwana, the *Black Man* reflects the ICU’s Garveyite stage, during which the union, at least in Ncwana’s vision, was most strongly tied to the West Indies. When the union moved to Johannesburg, Clements Kadalie headed the editorial team for the union’s new mouthpiece, *Workers Herald*. Away from the docks, the emphasis on Caribbean-Cape-framed blackness is relinquished. The third and final ICU periodical was *New Africa*.
\(^12\) It is unclear what prompted Kadalie’s break from the UNIA and Garveyism. Kadalie’s own autobiography does not offer any clarity in terms of an ideological rift. Up to the first half of 1921 he still made pro-UNIA and pro-Garvey statements in the *Black Man*. Certainly the model on which the *Black Man* was produced was gleaned, in part, from the UNIA. Ncwana and Kadalie started a cooperative through which the periodical was to be published and asked readers not only to subscribe to the organ, but to invest in the cooperative. One possible reason for the break was the growing concern among liberal whites that Garveyism was too radicalizing for local blacks; the break may have been more strategic and pragmatic than ideological. See my reference to the *swart gewaar* in the text.
\(^13\) In an editorial in the 14 March 1923 *Negro World*, Garvey quotes a piece published in the *Cape Argus* about the “danger” the UNIA-ACL posed to the “good work” white South Africans had done in terms of “black development” in South Africa. “It can be readily seen,” he writes, “that the propaganda of the Universal Negro Improvement Association is bearing fruit in Africa. If we have accomplished nothing else but the bringing to the natives of Africa a consciousness of themselves and a desire on their part to free themselves from the thraldom of alien races and nations, we would have justified the existence of this great organization.” See *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association: Africa for the Africans*, vol. 10, 1923–1945, ed. Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 28.
his foreignness. From the *Negro World*, Walrond helped shape the Harlem Renaissance, connecting the literary strivings of the US-based New Negro to the Caribbean and the rest of the black world. It was in *Negro World* that Walrond published “Negro Martyrs” in 1922. There he recounts the Bulhoek Massacre that took the lives of more than two hundred followers of Enoch Mgijima in the Cape. In Walrond’s estimation, Bulhoek was a black attempt to “throw off the yoke of imperial domination.” In South Africa, Bulhoek galvanized black leaders, including the ICU’s S. M. Bennett Mcwana and Kadalie. Celebrated in its time, *Tropic Death* moves across the Caribbean, laying bare peasant life. It is possible to read *Tropic Death* as Walrond’s break from the often propagandistic *Negro World* and “Negro Martyrs,” but if meant as a breakaway from propaganda it does not relinquish an investment in South Africa. The penultimate story, “Vampire Bat,” turns the reader’s attention to the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902. The recent critical anthology *Eric Walrond: The Critical Heritage* adds to a growing body of Walrond criticism that restores his place as well as that of *Tropic Death* in Caribbean letters, but if Walrond and *Tropic Death* must be recuperated as important not only to the Harlem Renaissance and black modernity/modernism but also to “Caribbean poetics,” Walrond’s inclusion of South Africa necessitates an examination of how and what South Africa and Africa signify in Caribbean literature and regionalism.

Such tales of the Caribbean and the South African Cape in the early twentieth century belie practices of resistance that disrupt our contemporary ideas about what the Caribbean is—where it starts and stops—and what exactly it has to do with Africa. They confirm that more than “spiritual, ideological, or cultural,” there were “vital physical linkages . . . developed and maintained through migration and interchange of people of African origin between Africa and the diaspora throughout these years.” To be sure, these threads weave together a particular Caribbean and a particular Africa—the anglophone Caribbean and South Africa. They insert South Africa into anglophone Caribbean early-twentieth-century mappings of the Caribbean that do not emanate from a “roots” discourse but push at the limits of the region’s cartography.

This essay examines the modes of Caribbeanness that Williams’s and Walrond’s *detours* to the Cape enabled through close readings of Walrond’s “Vampire Bat” and Williams’s *The British Negro*. My interest is in field formation, institutional networks, the silences they engender, and what this can tell us about the limits of nationally overdetermined knowledge projects.

16 Caribbean poetics, of course, comes from the title of Silvio Torres-Saillant’s *Caribbean Poetics: Towards an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). It was rereleased in 2013 in the United Kingdom by Peepal Tree Press with a new preface and afterword; I reference the latter edition in this essay.
17 Cobley, “Far from Home,” 349.
18 I use *detour* here with Edouard Glissant’s notion of le détour and le retour in mind. See Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 14; Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 26. The original French emphasizes the interplay of mapping, travel, and Caribbean thought that is softened in the English translation of “le retour et le détour” (Discours antillais, 28) as “diversion and reversion” (*Caribbean Discourse*, 16). Writing about Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, Negritude and *Wretched of the Earth*, Glissant decry the idea that these were universal theories produced by “abstract thinkers”; rather, “they illustrate and establish the landscape
Since the 1980s there has been a burgeoning interest in the circulation of ideas and bodies between the New World African diaspora and South Africa by scholars such as Robert Hill, Gregory Pirio, James T. Campbell, Ntongela Masilela, and Laura Chrisman. The past five years have seen a further rise in scholarship as evinced by Robert Trent Vinson’s book on African Americans in segregationist South Africa and Tshepo Masango Chéry’s dissertation on coloured religiosity in South Africa and black internationalism. Much of this scholarship does important work toward establishing the presence of black foreign travelers from across the Atlantic in early-twentieth-century South Africa. However, none has explored the particularity of Afro-Caribbean detours to Africa as opposed to African American ones and the ways these travels shaped or textured their definitions of the Caribbean as home and region. At the same time, Brent Hayes Edwards and Michelle Ann Stephens have troubled the “Harlem” Renaissance, reading the New Negro and the Caribbean New World Negro as part of black internationalist and transnational networks. They ask us to rethink the African “diaspora” and acknowledge the heterogeneity of blackness. But to put together the seemingly disparate archives and registers of the Caribbean and the Cape is to move away from the metropolitan centers of Harlem, London, Paris, Toronto, or Miami as well as the “New World” in which our studies of black modernity seem to remain. It is not only the refusal of the “continual marginalization” of Africa in the study of its New World diaspora that Louis Chude-Sokei names in an essay about Eric Walrond; he moves us toward a model of African diaspora studies that “thinks Africa differently,” deconstructing diasporic constructions of Africa. Williams and Walrond reveal the ways Caribbean radicals and intellectuals came to know the Cape, be formed by it, inhabit it, and remap it. In so doing, they problematize the map of the New World we have inherited as scholars of the New World African diaspora.

Rather than examples of black internationalism, I read Williams’s The British Negro and Walrond’s Tropic Death as mapping oceanic Caribbean regionalisms that incorporate the of a zone shared by elsewhere.” If in Le discours antillais, Africa serves as that “elsewhere,” it operates not only as a discursive sign but also as a constellation of points on a cartographic map, points of detour from which Caribbean peoples might return to the Caribbean as “the point of entanglement.” The English translation removes the destabilization of the “map” (ibid., 26).


23 I borrow from the title of the 2010 workshop held at the Center for African Studies at the University of Cape Town, “Thinking Africa and Its Diaspora Differently,” at which I foregrounded some aspects of my argument.
Cape. Invested in black life, they are not internationalist because they use the infrastructure of the British Empire in order to make a home. They pressure the maps of region and nation under which we now work, extending across the Atlantic Ocean to tie the Cape to the Caribbean. Their regionalisms are informed by archipelagic geographic proximity as well as the decaying infrastructure of British Empire that extends to South Africa and disrupts some of the narratives about Africa and its New World diasporas implicit in much of our scholarship while challenging our map of the “New World” as well as the logic of Caribbean peoples’ migration within it. In this way their turns to the Cape are less a turn away from the Caribbean space and more a turn toward Caribbeanness. Unlike Paul Gilroy’s black Atlantic, Williams’s and Walrond’s oceanic Caribbean regionalisms do not compartmentalize Europe/England, Africa, and the New World; in their mappings the Caribbean encompasses the Cape, the Cape is part of their imagined Caribbean communities.

What Is Africa to Us?

Over the past three decades, Caribbean literary criticism and theory has pushed for recognition of the region as a unit of analysis across linguistic and political differences with a body of literature that has its own logic and “principles” in which the Caribbean typically “describes the island archipelago, the countries on the Caribbean littoral and Guyana, Surinam and Cayenne.” From Edouard Glissant to Silvio Torres-Saillant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo to J. Michael Dash, Derek Walcott to Jamaica Kincaid, we have heard that the Caribbean has its own ontology and requires its own reading practices. This notion of Caribbean community is based on sea regionalism—community through the Caribbean sea. It includes the islands of the archipelago as well as the coastal communities of South and Central America and at times the US South.

Explicitly or not, many of these claims emanate from the debates of the 1970s in the anglophone Caribbean and the 1980s in the francophone Caribbean about what our literary practices should be and what language(s) could express our experiences. Entangled in these debates were also the questions, How should the Caribbean break away from former (and remaining) European colonizers as well as US hegemony, and what is the place of countries of origin for the descendants of slaves, indentured laborers, and traders? Is “return” to Africa...
(India, China, Syria, or Lebanon) possible? It is necessary? Among the various responses, a tacit consensus emerged; the Caribbean intellectual was a conscript of European modernity who charted an alternative, but Africa (and India) was a source of his or her origins and past. These questions arose in the anglophone Caribbean during the two decades of decolonization (from 1962, when Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago gained independence, to 1981, when Antigua gained independence) following the failed West Indian Federation.

I do not deny that the Caribbean is its own being that requires its own modes of reading and analysis. In fact, this essay emerges from a desire to delineate what was uniquely Caribbean about Williams’s and Walrond’s Cape detours. I do not deny that the Caribbean intellectual has a relationship to Europe that has formed the Caribbean. However, it is telling that often in our desire to articulate what the Caribbean is and who Caribbean people are, we seem unable to escape the double-bind of (European) modernity and (African) tradition (read, unmodern). Africa remains a majestic precolonial place to which the Caribbean intellectual must return, or one he must reject if he wants to lay claim to modernity. In “The Caribbean Writer and Exile” Jan Carew, a lauded Caribbean intellectual and Pan-Africanist, reinscribes the dichotomy of African “roots” versus the European inflected Caribbean present. Gilroy’s notable silence on Africa in his groundbreaking exegesis on black modernity, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness, exemplifies a similar binary between African “roots” and Caribbean present. His black Atlantic privileges Africa as a place of origin. It is somewhere outside of modernity. In describing Martin Delany’s Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party, Gilroy explains Delany’s report as an outline of “his vision of a dynamic alliance . . . between English capital, black American intellect, and African labour power.” But Africa never quite gets beyond being a source of “labour power” in Gilroy’s black Atlantic either. When Africa enters as something other than the source of raw material, as a participant in the kind of hybridity that is black modernity, the emphasis is on “Liberia and Sierra Leone.” Gilroy privileges space in his definition of black modernity. The primary space in which it can

26 The title to this section refers to Countee Cullen’s first line in “Heritage,”—“What is Africa to me?”—as well as Pumla Gqola’s What Is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-apartheid South Africa (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010).


transpire is the West. Hence, Liberia and Sierra Leone are privileged in *Black Atlantic* as they served as the sites of re-settling for “blacks of the West.”

Yet for many Afro-Caribbeans, at different points in time, Africa has been a destination of choice. These include, but are not limited to, the philosopher E. W. Blyden of St. Thomas; the Martinican, French colonial administrator René Maran; the Haitian Benito Sylvain, who served as aide-de-camp to Menelik, emperor of Ethiopia; C. L. R. James and George Padmore as Pan-Africanists and mentors to Kwame Nkrumah; Frantz Fanon as psychiatrist and revolutionary in Algeria; Walter Rodney as scholar, teacher, and revolutionary in Tanzania; Kamau Brathwaite as a member of the British colonial service in the Gold Coast (contemporary Ghana) and later playwright in independent Ghana; and Maryse Condé as scholar and novelist across West Africa. Such sojourns were not simply attempts to reverse the effects of slavery and return to African “roots.” If some visitors were part of colonial administrations and commercial ventures, others attempted *race work* or revolution; some were missionaries, while others still traveled for family or “to find a cure,” as Veronica does in Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon*. Despite the various reasons for these journeys to West and East Africa, as well as to Ethiopia, such travels are often, and perhaps too easily, cast as attempts at return to preslavery African roots. In the case of the anglophone Caribbean at the fin de siècle, South Africa—and the Cape, in particular—offered a special point for exchange more so than the United States, other linguistic zones of the region (French, Spanish, or Dutch), or the rest of the hemisphere. Like the British West Indies, the Cape was a slave-holding British colony. In the Caribbean and the Cape, slavery ended in 1833/34 with the British emancipation proclamation. Black peoples moving from the Caribbean to the Cape at the start of the twentieth century were moving from one former slave society to another, traveling from one corner of the British Empire to another. The British Empire, as the first to abolish the slave trade and slavery, promised imperial citizenship. The sparkle of the New Negro of the 1920s was preceded by the lure of the Victorian liberal subject, the “British Negro” of whom Williams wrote in his 1902 pamphlet, *The British Negro: A Factor in the Empire*. Simultaneously on the African continent and at the heart of British imperial liberalism, Cape Town promised peoples of African descent from the anglophone Caribbean a possibility of (re)building the African race while occupying (British) civilization.

31 *Race work* refers to labors (literary, political, social, economic) undertaken to ensure the uplift of the (black/African) race. Though often used in African American studies, I stretch it to include the work of black peoples at the fin de siècle from across the globe. For more, see Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); and Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
33 While for Afro-Caribbeans the Victorian liberal subject is an ideal toward which to strive from the end of emancipation onward, for African Americans the end of emancipation can be identified as when the Victorian liberal subject (gentleman and gentlewoman) appeals most intensely.
In 1996 Ntongela Masilela challenged Gilroy precisely around the absence of South Africa as a site of black modernity in his paradigm; so too, Laura Chrisman. While their critiques trouble the US centricity of Gilroy’s project at the expense of black South Africa and other parts of the continent, they frame them through the lens of nation, but here it is the South African nation-state. Michelle Ann Stephens delineates a particularly anglophone Caribbean aspect for us in Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914–1962. She uses Gilroy’s privileging of “space” over “period” to attend to the exclusion of Caribbean and black intellectuals from the “current revisionary takes” on empire following the First World War but ignores Africa. In The Other America, J. Michael Dash, much more interested in making an ardent case for the inclusion of the archipelago in New World studies as more than a passing reference, argues for the relevance of the Caribbean in any scholarly field that portends to account for the study of the Americas. If Columbus’s diary is the first New World text, it is written in the Caribbean, and therefore the region must be attended to thoroughly, across linguistic divides. José Martí exemplifies this; Martí the great liberator and intellectual began his struggle in Cuba but was able to reach South America only via the archipelago and with the help of the Haitian revolutionary leader, Henri Christophe. A scholar of the Haitian Revolution, J. Michael Dash uses it to make his case. At the time of the revolution, he argues, Haiti “would neither be relegated to the periphery of the world nor would it succumb to atavistic longings for a racial past.” Yet, what was “racial” about the past? Blackness as a racial identity only came into being in the crucible of colonialism and slavery. At the start of the nineteenth century, Dash continues, Haitian intellectuals “long[ed] for modernity,” hence Toussaint Louverture’s tragic fascination with Enlightenment ideals. Again, Africa is a source of “raw labour power”; Caribbean modernity takes its intellectual force from Europe.

In an effort to identify the contours of New World black or Caribbean modernity, Africa is often inscribed as not modern. If Dash and Stephens are invested in a hemispheric American studies that includes the Caribbean, Gilroy is concerned with making a space for blacks residing in Britain. All three are concerned with invoking national citizenship for blacks in the New World. Thus when Africa is lauded as the motherland, it remains the source of polyrhythms and drums. Much of this may be tied to the history of how Africa has been taught in the New World through the multilayered lenses of racism, colonialism, and narcissistic liberalim. Ultimately, in knowing itself as multiracial, creolized, and syncretic, the Caribbean has learned Africa as its opposite. There are political, psychic, and intellectual implications to learning plantation,
slavery, and creolization as intrinsic to the making of Caribbean selves or modern blacks and to learning of African experiences of slavery, creolization, and the mechanization of human labor under the regimes of colonialism as nonexistent or not quite coeval.

In conjuring Caribbean selves, Caribbean writers and intellectuals often contain Africa in “monolithic categories of heritage and identity,” to borrow from Carole Boyce Davies. Davies is one of few Caribbean (and African diaspora) intellectuals who note that the term Africa is in part a colonial inheritance for which unpacking the archeology and genealogy of [it] is an important exercise in our understanding of how the politics of conquest and domination are so fundamentally linked to naming . . . [and] the implications for how African peoples (particularly in the diaspora) begin to activate monolithic categories of heritage and identity, as, for example, “Afrocentricity.” The political basis of identity formation is a central issue in all of these interrogations. For, again, in the diaspora, under Pan-Africanist ideologies, the reconstruction of “Africa” as homeland occurred, also for management of reality. As resistance to European domination, monolithic constructions of Africa posed an alternative identity and did duty against the European deployment of its reality and its attempt to redefine the identities of large numbers of people taken from their native homelands.40

Davies is concerned with how we have arrived at some of our names and labels for places and people, namely, Africa and black, and the definitions that shift over time and space. What strikes me in the Caribbean intellectual’s engagement with the Cape is the way it necessitates that she or he thinks of Africa as outside of “monolithic categories of heritage and identity.” Less a search for pater and lineage that can dislodge the shame of slavery or a rejection of Africa because of the impossibility of racial or cultural purity, the turn to the Cape recognizes a coeval African present. Unable to find literal ancestors there, Caribbean travelers to the Cape are pressed to think it as a space of shared experience of slavery and empire.

The Caribbean continues to be theorized in relation to the African roots of many of its inhabitants and their routes to the United Kingdom, Europe, and other parts of the Americas. In fact, as Kurt Orderson’s documentary The Prodigal Son (2008) illustrates, there sometimes remains no one to speak of the Cape as a destination for many travelers from the region. Orderson’s paternal great-grandfather, Joseph Orderson, was an immigrant from Barbados who settled in Cape Town at the start of the twentieth century. In search of his paternal roots, Orderson travels to the Caribbean to find his ancestor in the archives and to perhaps reunite with surviving relatives. The archives yield nothing; the remaining Ordersons, if they are relatives, do not know of any family member who migrated to South Africa.41

The documentary casts in stark relief two problems unique to bringing these two registers of the past together. First, the slave history of the Caribbean can frustrate attempts to locate certain selves in the archive; Orderson was the name of a prominent slaveowning family in

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Barbados. Not all islanders with the name Orderson are relatives in blood but relations in chain—they are all the descendants of the chattel slaves of the Orderson family. The filmmaker finds a possible relative in the archives but in a slave register. There is no record in the Caribbean of the former slaves and their descendants who left the islands for the Cape. Second, in a conversation with some older Barbadian gentlemen on the beach, Orderson is asked by one, “They are still cannibals in Africa?” Another man quickly interjects that it is a “foolish” question. The voiceover for this segment is a local historian. He suggests that this notion of Africa as that place where there are “still cannibals” is evidence of the persistent slave mentality of many black people in Barbados and their rejection of their original homeland, Africa. But it seems to me that this segment reveals that on both sides, there is a misapprehension of Africa and the Caribbean person’s relationship to it. The continent remains a site of origin, a source of roots that the Caribbean person must refute as the home of cannibals, or celebrate as the original homeland. If the person on our screen conjures an image of uncivilized “hordes” consuming each other all over the continent, the historian in voiceover speaks of black Barbadians being unaware of their glorious African pasts. The romanticized, monolithic construction of Africa as a site of pastness is not deconstructed; rather, its foundation is secured. The Cape serves as a useful point from which we can begin to consider modes of Caribbeanness and blackness that engage Africa as something other than a source of human capital or Eden after the fall. If Walrond’s detour to the Cape is imaginary, Williams’s is literal.

“The Jaunty Buckras . . . Trekking back to Barbadoes”

If travel is “the destiny of island people,” Eric Walrond was an island man. Born in British Guiana in 1898, he moved to Barbados in 1906 with his parents and siblings. Three years later, William Walrond, his father, is said to have abandoned the family for the Panama Canal Zone. Much like the small boy in “Tropic Death,” the last story in the eponymous collection, Walrond, his mother, and his siblings found themselves destitute and by 1911 left for the Canal Zone to reunite with William. By the time Walrond migrated to the United States in 1918, he had lived across the Caribbean—Guyana, Barbados, Panama, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic; almost everywhere he had been made to feel an outsider. The United States was no different. Despite having worked as reporter for the Panama Star and Herald, a leading Latin American newspaper, for two years before moving to New York, once there, Walrond had to work as a domestic and a dishwasher. As a “West Indian,” he was a “monkey chaser” to African Americans and just another “nigger” to whites. His US career in journalism began at two Garveyite newspapers—the Brooklyn and Long Island Informer and the Weekly Review.

43 Parascandola and Wade, introduction, 2.
45 Parascandola and Wade, introduction, 3.
Eventually, he joined the editorial staff at the *Negro World*. In *Literary Garveyism*, Tony Martin describes Walrond as “the worst offender,” referring to those who opportunistically used Garvey and the UNIA to ensure gainful employment for themselves, whether or not they truly endorsed his ideology.\(^{46}\) In Martin’s estimation, Walrond was vociferously pro-Garvey only while it benefited him to be so; Martin casts Walrond as one of the third kind of opportunists who entered the ranks of the UNIA and the *Negro World*: those with “scarce skills” whom the organization needed but who “never caught the vision of the organization,” seeing their work with Garvey and the UNIA as “jobs” and nothing more. After the success of *Tropic Death*, Walrond left the *Negro World* for the integrationist National Urban League’s *Opportunity*, but in the 1930s he and Garvey reunited and Walrond wrote for Garvey’s *Black Man*. If at times critical of Garveyism, Walrond also appeared committed to the racial pride it proposed.\(^{47}\)

When Walrond’s *Tropic Death* appeared in 1926, it achieved critical success. On the basis of the collection, Walrond received a Guggenheim fellowship to write “The Big Ditch,” a book on the French in the Panama Canal Zone; he never completed it.\(^{48}\) In 1966, the publishers of *Tropic Death*, Boni and Liveright, reprinted the collection; in 1972, the collection was reissued by another press. It was a fairly popular text. Yet from its inception, *Tropic Death* was a bold, if not arrogant, feat. Published when readers were “increasingly trained to equate black experiences and responses with exclusively African American ones,” *Tropic Death* offered a plethora of non–African American experiences, ways of living, and speech. This daring to complicate accepted narratives of blackness, Chude-Sokei asserts, may explain *Tropic Death*’s “fate as the great ‘lost’ work” of the Harlem Renaissance.\(^{49}\)

*Tropic Death* depends on seafaring to move it along; the sea becomes the central and only recurring character, moving bodies from archipelago to isthmus and back. Protagonists leave Jamaica and Barbados for Costa Rica; they leave Panama for Jamaica. Protagonists live in settlements in Guyana. They are of African, Indian, Chinese, and European descent and are already “a nation.”\(^{50}\) *Tropic Death* begins with “Drought.” In it, a young girl consumes “marl” to stem her hunger. Her father is underworked and underpaid. Her mother’s garden lays bare from drought. Marl is all Barbados has to offer this family’s youngest child. Ultimately, she dies. The book takes its title from the final story, “Tropic Death,” and as the title suggests, there is death in this story as well. In the opening tale the child dies; in the concluding story the child lives to fulfill the promise proffered by travel out of Jamaica and onto the isthmus. We begin in drought-stricken Barbados and end in leprosy-ridden Panama, but the signal difference here is not that our protagonists move from the island to the mainland.

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\(^{46}\) Martin, *Literary Garveyism*, 125.

\(^{47}\) Parascandola and Wade, introduction, 3.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{49}\) Chude-Sokei, “Foreign Negro Flash Agents,” 76.

\(^{50}\) I reference Derek Walcott’s famous poetic incantation of Caribbean identity in “The Schooner Flight”: “I’m just a red nigger who love the sea / I had a sound colonial education, / I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me, / and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation.” See Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems, 1948–1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1986), 346.
Concerned with dispersal and migration in the wake of economic privation, *Tropic Death* sits between Claude McKay’s *Banana Bottom* (1933) and Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1926). Like McKay’s *Banana Bottom*, *Tropic Death* posits the Panama Canal Zone, not Harlem, as the space in which working-class people from across the Caribbean meet. There too, young Caribbean peasant men first encounter Yankeeism as an alternative avenue for economic, if not social, upward mobility in restrictive British colonies. Published almost a decade before *Banana Bottom*, Walrond’s collection of short stories is perhaps the most Pan-Caribbean of Caribbean books. In “Tropic Death,” what Robert Hill considers “the greatest short story work in the entire body of [anglophone Caribbean] literature,” Walrond deploys the short story to move across the Caribbean Basin and make palpable the poverty, hunger, and tragic beauty of Caribbean peasant life in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. It does not offer a seamless narrative that follows the maturation of its protagonist, as does McKay’s novel. Rather, each short story comes to represent a Caribbean space. Comprised of ten short stories or vignettes, *Tropic Death* is often compared to Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923). Both implode realist modes of narrative emplotment, refusing temporal progression; in both multiple narratives unfold according to the logic of migration. But if Toomer’s *Cane* tells the story of black migration from the US South to the North and the rise of the New Negro, Walrond’s *Tropic Death* makes migration and travel visible as part of the logic of Caribbeanness. But this is not a travel out of the Caribbean into diaspora; it is a mapping of the region.

If intra-Caribbean movement centers the narrative, the rarely explored *detour* to South Africa in “Vampire Bat,” the penultimate story in *Tropic Death*, challenges any reading of archipelagic intra-Caribbean travel or US Yankeeism as the primary routes to a Caribbean future. In the opening lines, we meet Bellon Prout on his return to Barbados. Prout, we are told, was “one of the island’s few plantation owners and a solid pillar of the Crown.” Having served as an officer in his Majesty’s army in the Anglo-Boer War, we meet him in the Atlantic, just off the coast of Barbados, trudging his way onto shore.

The Anglo-Boer War precipitated the 1910 Union of the British colonies of Natal and the Cape and the Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal as the white settler colony, and eventually nation-state, of South Africa. Barbados is not simply an incidental place

51 In *Banana Bottom*, the black, female protagonist, Bita Plant, is educated in England through the benevolence of the local, white missionary couple, Malcolm and Priscilla Craig. One possible suitor is Hopping Dick Delgado, a young man newly returned from the Panama Canal Zone with Panama Gold. Ultimately, Bita chooses Jubban, a simple peasant farmer who has never left Jamaica and does not have pretensions to do so. Hopping Dick is too crass in his display of Yankee wealth. Claude McKay, *Banana Bottom* (Chatham, NJ: Harper and Row, 1933).
of origin for the soldier. The second and third sentences of the story reveal that it was not only Bellon who “had gone forth at the King’s trumpet call to buck the Boer’s hairy anger”; once the war was over, “the jaunty buckras were trekking back to Barbadoes” (211).\textsuperscript{55} Many white locals had answered the king’s trumpet. \textit{Tropic Death}’s turn to southern Africa is not rooted in a quest for ancestral or traditional Africa but goes to the heart of the British imperial theater at the close of the nineteenth century. It documents a white Caribbean colonial’s return home from the African continent.

There are two ways of reading the specter of South Africa and the Anglo-Boer War in \textit{Tropic Death}. On the one hand, Bellon and the Anglo-Boer War are metonyms of white colonial power. Until World War I, the Anglo-Boer War represented the tragedy and excesses of modern warfare; it ushered in the use of automatic handguns and other artillery now commonplace in modern warfare as well as the first use of concentration camps for civilians.\textsuperscript{56} Here, Walrond bucks against British liberal imperialism in a way that Henry Sylvester Williams does not. Bellon’s undoing seems a direct result of his unwillingness to heed local knowledge of the terrain that conflicts with the codes and regulations of His Majesty’s empire. On seeing Bellon outside as dusk descends, Mother Cragwell, the creole woman at the bakery, asks him, “Mas’ Prout wha’ yo’ a do down yah dis time o’ night?” (215). Bellon retorts, “Can’t a law-abiding colonist walk the King’s highway after dark?” (216). Mother Cragwell refutes the king’s jurisdiction over the roads of the island, asking, “Wha’ dey care ’bout any King?” (219). But despite several warnings from Mother Cragwell and her neighbor about “de man in de canes” and fire hags, Bellon insists on going down the gully home to Mount Tabor. On “the King’s highway,” Bellon encounters a “Negro baby sleeping.” Assuming the child was born out of wedlock and deserted, “another of the colony’s lurking evils,” Bellon decides to take the child home with him (231). His horse Rayside resists, but Bellon ultimately overpowers him; they make it home to the estate and settle at the overseer’s cabin for the night. By morning, Bellon Prout’s dead body, “with a perforation pecked in its forehead,” and the blanket in which Bellon had wrapped the sleeping baby are all that remain in the hut. The story closes with the reader gaining access to the hut. Yet Rayside and “the mulatto obeah girl” responsible for cleaning the hut know that a vampire bat had visited that night (234). It is with this realization that the story ends. We move from Bellon’s experience as a returnee from the war, a “law-abiding colonist,” and an officer who lives by the king’s law to the mulatto girl’s “strang[e] conscious[ness]” through obeah. Bellon is a metonym for white colonial power in \textit{Tropic Death}; his body becomes victim to the very “fears of the uncivilized blacks” at which he scoffs (233).

But “Vampire Bat” usurps Bellon’s control of the narrative, ceding it to the local obeah expert and therein dismantling white colonial power, asking the reader to think about the

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Buckra} is a term used in the anglophone Caribbean to refer to a local white person.

connections between the imperial battlefronts of the Anglo-Boer War and the ruins of the Caribbean plantation and chattel slavery. Mount Tabor, the reader is told on the first page, was “once a star on a pinnacle of wooded earth,” but “the very week that Bellon embarked for South Africa,” a storm left the plantation “a lustrous desolation” (212). Interestingly, it is Bellon who makes explicit the link between the scene in the overseer’s hut—the “buckra” plantation owner nurturing a black baby—and his recent experiences in the Anglo-Boer War. On entering the hut, he says to himself, “If anyone had told me three weeks ago that after dodging the Boer-shot I’d next be mothering a deserted nigger ragamuffin at two o’clock in the morning on a West Indian country road, I’d certainly have called him a God damned liar!” (232). Here the Anglo-Boer War not only is representative of British and white imperial power but seems to make possible its undoing “on a West Indian country road.” The road is verified as something other than the king’s highway; it becomes part of its local geography and spiritual ecology as well as a larger counterculture of the empire. Walrond might not see the Anglo-Boer War as C. L. R. James would later identify it—“one of the first great wars for independence of a colonial people”—but in “Vampire Bat” it serves as a harbinger of British imperial decline and simultaneously the activation of the infrastructure of the British empire to establish connection across disparate spaces. The battlefront is transposed from South Africa to Barbados. “Vampire Bat” deploys the Anglo-Boer War to end plantocratic authority and suggests proximity between Caribbean plantation slavery and its afterlives and British liberal imperialism at the southern tip of Africa.

The British Negro

More than two decades before “Vampire Bat,” Henry Sylvester Williams wrote of the “British Negro,” the ideal liberal Victorian black subject, in an essay titled “The British Negro: A Factor in the Empire.” Thirty-four pages in length, it is a compilation of two of Williams’s lectures—“The British Negro: A Factor in the Empire” and “The Ethiopian Eunuch”—originally presented in Britain to several clubs and associations, including the South Place Debating Society and the Peckham Theological Forum. Williams’s audiences were mainly white, liberal, Christian, and English. But by the end of “The British Negro,” I argue, the audience is split between an overt white one in the metropole and black colonial readers across the Empire. “The British Negro” documents the development of the African race in Williams’s time along “a foreign basis” under colonialism and the ways the so-called British Negro was an agent for good in the Empire. In other words, the British negro was an agent for the British Empire while also being a race man—one committed to working in service of the race. In his opening, Williams identifies this notion of black modernity at the fin de siècle—empire thinking and racial

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57 I am thinking of Paul Gilroy’s notion of “countercultures of modernity.” See Gilroy, Black Atlantic.
58 C. L. R. James, “Towards the Seventh: The Pan-African Congress,” in C. L. R. James, At the Rendezvous of Victory (London: Alison and Busby, 1984), 238.
uplift—as “the practical view.” “The Ethiopian Eunuch,” however, takes what Williams calls the “philosophical standpoint,” exploring African Christianity and civilization.\(^{59}\) I read “The British Negro” here because it is in this essay that South Africa functions as a lens through which Williams envisioned black utopia as a product of the anglophone Caribbean. The state of black South Africa is central to a Caribbean future.

The essay occurs in two parts. In the first, Williams enumerates the number of Africans “wholly or in part” who reside within the empire. At 65 million “souls,” he asserts that the race is an important factor in the empire, consuming something like £45 million worth of British goods each year. As slaves they created and consolidated British wealth; as freed men and women, their “descendants have virtually become the owners of the soil, contributing three-fourths of the total revenue in our West Indian Colonies.” In South Africa, Zanzibar, and other parts of the empire, he explains the “unrighteous exploitation” of black labor continues to render the race “useful.” Additionally, black servicemen have proved essential to the empire’s expansion and maintenance; as such, Williams concludes the first section by asserting emphatically that the black British subject is not a burden to the Empire but a blessing.\(^{60}\)

The second part of the essay turns decisively toward South Africa, which Williams identifies as his central “consideration.” Here his critique of empire is at its sharpest. Despite the “well advertised . . . excuse for the [Anglo-Boer] war” being “the amelioration of Native condition under Boer Government,” Williams maintains his doubts. Gold, diamonds, and the other mineral resources abundant in South Africa are the true reason for the war. He lists the material conditions that would better black life in South Africa, such as unlimited and equal access to education; equal access to public transportation and institutions as well as points of purchase; and religious equality and respect, whereby European missionaries treat “their black or native missionary brother in Christ . . . as a man instead of as a dog” and do God’s work rather than bow to greed. This improvement of black existence in South Africa is connected to a wider black experience: “My sincerest hope,” he writes, “is that throughout the British Colonies a man’s colour will form no hindrance to advancement providing his merit warrants promotion. At present colour-prejudice operates even to the extent of refusing him the franchise, and a sufficient compensation for his labours.” Williams then returns to South Africa: “If British Rule will clean the Augean stables in South Africa of the vicarious evils, blood-curdling and astounding practices carried on even previous to the war, and deposit the loathsome debris in Lethe, then I heartily welcome it, but in the absence of a guarantee, and a wholesome public opinion there, one hesitates to pronounce the ‘gratias agamus.’”\(^{61}\)

For Williams, the improvement of race relations in South Africa would not only ameliorate the conditions of members of his race resident there but also radically shift the discourse around


\(^{60}\) Ibid., 13, 14, 20, 22.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 22.
race and racial injustice globally. Imperial citizenship could be perfected at the Cape and made to work for all across the empire.

South Africa catalyzed Williams. It was only after learning of what was happening in the diamond fields of Kimberley and the mines on the Rand that he started the African Association, coined the term Pan-African, and ultimately convened the first Pan-African Conference. In 1901, only a year later, Williams returned to the Caribbean to drum up members for the Pan-African Association and open branches. He traveled to Jamaica, then Trinidad. His Caribbean sojourn was reported in The South African Spectator, a journal published intermittently out of Cape Town from 1901 to 1919, when its publisher and editor, Francis Peregrino, died.62 H. A. Nurse, father of the spiritual father of Ghanaian nationalism, George Padmore, boarded with Williams’s wife and children after Williams’s death in 1911. When visiting his father, young Padmore would have been exposed to stories of Williams. Both Nurse’s and C. L. R. James’s fathers attended meetings for the African Association during Williams’s return. The Water Riot of 1903 in Trinidad was organized by the Trinidad Ratepayers’ Association, whose members had first joined together under the banner of the Pan-African Association. In Jamaica, several of the members of the Pan-African Association were also in the People’s Convention, an organization committed to mobilizing black men and women to discuss the pressing issues of their time. While touring both islands, Williams spoke of South Africa. Despite the acting governor’s assertion that “oppression of ‘the race’ in the West Indies or Africa” was nonexistent and Jamaicans should not be concerned about “Bantus or Kaffirs of South Africa,” Williams continued to rail about the poor conditions black people were subjected to in South Africa.63 And his listeners continued to be politicized by the issue. In so doing, Williams and his listeners refused to cast South Africa outside their imagined community. The so-called bantus and kaffirs were not outside of their region but, through the binds of empire, in it. Again, oceanic Caribbean regionalism enabled resistance.

Reconsidering the New World Diaspora

In Caribbean Discourse, Glissant invites the reader to remember that Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon have Caribbean origins, that despite the universal appeal of their “poetics” and “politics,” they were not “abstract thinkers,” but steeped in the particularity of their Caribbean island homes. “We must return to the point from which we started” he implores his reader. To move away from the Caribbean in reading them, without returning “to the point of entanglement . . . where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization,” is to “perish.”64 The

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62 Peregrino is memorialized at the District Six Museum as an important member of the community. But he also lived in Upstate New York, where he published another journal titled the Spectator. In my PhD dissertation, “Anxious Records: Race, Imperial Belonging, and the Black Literary Imagination, 1900–1946,” I think comparatively about the two journals and his project as a part of the black intellectual circuits of his time.

63 Daily Telegraph (Jamaica), March 1901, 11; Gleaner, March 1901, 9.

64 Glissant, Caribbean Discourse, 26.
call is to return to not only “the point of entanglement” as “creolization” itself but the Caribbean space in which it transpires. Yet for Henry Sylvester Williams and many of the members of the Pan-African Association in the Caribbean, South Africa and the Cape became the point of entanglement, through which a return to their Caribbean island space—perhaps more liberated—was possible.

For black Caribbean intellectuals, British victory in South Africa promised an extension of the qualified franchise across the empire as it simultaneously threatened a return to naked commercial expansionism all too familiar to those in the Caribbean, itself one of the oldest contributors to Britain’s wealth. When, for instance, the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection societies drafted resolutions against forced labor in postwar South Africa, it was Pan-African activists such as the Afro-Caribbean J. E. Quinlan who pressed for clear language against the conscription of all peoples of African descent within the British Empire. While others asked the Crown not to provide inducements “for labour to migrate to South Africa from Central Africa under British protection, or from Jamaica,” Quinlan implored that they add “or other West Indian colonies.” The West Indies was part of the same space that South Africa occupied. What was often called the “native question” in South African and British administrative circles, also crystallized for black subjects throughout the empire their own vulnerability. The Cape and the South Africa that it promised offered the Caribbean intellectual an uncanny continental home that was evocative of his or her island home. It allowed Caribbean people to locate themselves in Africa without claiming to have returned to their ancestral homeland. In this way the Cape engenders other ways of reading Africa from the Caribbean and the New World. It serves as another lens of Caribbean modernity; rather than a sign of the Afro-Caribbean’s “atavistic longing for a racial past,” it reveals racial community as a modern notion. This is most clear in Williams’s essay. His increasing concern with South Africa is the question of whether the liberation project begun by emancipation will bear fruit. The remapping of the Cape and South Africa in which he engages is precisely about the movement from slave to subject and subject to citizen that animates most Caribbean thought well into the second half of the twentieth century. As in Walrond’s “Vampire Bat,” at the beginning of the twentieth century the drama of plantocratic power in the anglophone Caribbean can be undone by expanding the map of the Caribbean to include the Cape and the imperial battlefronts of South Africa.

To attend to the New World Africa diaspora, the limits of the region to which we refer as “New World” must be thought anew.

66 See Mahmood Mamdani, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). Mamdani explains that the “native question” was the polite term of reference “in colonial discourse, the problem of stabilizing alien rule” (3).
67 Dash, Other America, 44.