# Caribbean Travelers and the "Realistic Shock": from Lamming to Condé

*Abstract:*

*This essay reads memoirs and travelogues in which Caribbean writers describe their journeys to, and lives within, West African countries. It identifies a recurring trope – "realistic shock" – in which an encounter with the "real" Africa dispels earlier "romantic" notions of the continent as source-culture or homeland for Caribbean people. Writers used this trope – during the years of decolonization and independence – to express skepticism towards positivist or utopian claims for African-Caribbean connection. The travelogue form and the rhetoric of realism were associated with European histories of representation, and in the work of George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul, they are used to commute this pragmatic or disenchanted position. But in the work of Maryse Condé, the trope of realist travelogue is itself revised, to articulate a move from skepticism to a new understanding of the relationship between the Caribbean and Africa.*

*Key Words:*

*Maryse Condé ; George Lamming ; V.S. Naipaul ; Realism ; Travel Writing ; Life Writing.*

The African Survival hypothesis was an important subject of debate for Caribbean writers and cultural theorists in the 1960s and 70s. This hypothesis posited that elements of pre-colonial African culture – kinship structures, belief systems, and languages – had survived the "social death" of the Middle Passage and the mechanisms of plantation slavery and still underwrote the culture of the contemporary Caribbean.[1] The name most associated with this hypothesis is that of the poet, cultural theorist, and historian Kamau Brathwaite, but his work – including essays such as "Contradictory Omens" (1974) and "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature" (1974) – was only a part of a wider project among Caribbean intellectuals in this period. It was not only a high-cultural or academic phenomenon, but dovetailed with a rise in popular debate about the position of black people within the Caribbean, which found expression in the "Black Power" movements of 1969-70. It was also an area of Caribbean thought in which the connections between Francophone and

Anglophone intellectuals were extensive. Francophone and Anglophone writers both expounded the African survival hypothesis, often in dialogue with one another and with earlier landmark texts – Francophone and Anglophone – of Caribbean pan-African thought.[2]

Questions about the relationship between Africa and the Caribbean had been (and would continue to be) important to Caribbean thinkers throughout the twentieth century. But they were especially acute in the years following constitutional independence in the larger Anglophone Caribbean territories.[3] National sovereignty had been achieved, but without discernible changes in the colonial social structure that had characterized life on the islands: in the economic and political dominance of the Europeanized middle classes. Proponents of the African Survival hypothesis were motivated by a desire to redefine what Brathwaite called the 'cultural and spiritual dynamo' of Caribbean societies which continued to be dogged by the residual structures of British colonialism (Brathwaite, *Roots* 37). They 'reached towards Africa,' as Alison Donnell says, in an attempt 'to redress colonial bias and bypass European perspectives' (Donnell 36).

Writing in 1995, Stuart Hall notes that "Africa" has been important to Caribbean writers as an abstraction: a concept through which the writer can imagine and articulate a future that differs from the European colonial past (Hall 11-12). Derek Walcott has at different points in his career put this case more strongly, arguing that Africa can only helpfully function as a "mythopoetic space" in the Caribbean and African-American mind (Mukherjee 91). Nonetheless – as David Scott notes – African survivalist thought in the 1960s and 70s was largely "verificationist" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 107). Texts such as Brathwaite's "African Presence", or Sylvia Wynter's "Jonkonnu in Jamaica" (1970), attempted to make empirical claims about linguistic or cultural survivals, claims which could be confirmed or disproved. In this sense – Scott argues – they relied on Western-derived

anthropological protocols; and indeed the work of Western anthropologists of the African diaspora, such as Melville Herskovits and Sidney Mintz, was drawn on extensively by survivalist thinkers.[4] Even among those sympathetic to their political motivation, many found the attempt to substantiate these positivist, survivalist claims difficult and frustrating. Indeed, this experience of disappointment – in which the scholar or traveler fails to experience a vital or meaningful connection with Africa – became in its own right a dominant trope in Caribbean writing from this period.

Scholars and creative writers explored the African Survival hypothesis using different methods, and described their explorations using different genres. Sociological studies, historical writing, poems, novels and memoirs from this period all testify to the tempting and controversial nature of this hypothesis, and to the difficulties which attended its exploration. Building on Donnell's panoramic survey of the novels and poems spawned by this search (*RAL* 46.4), I want to focus on a narrower, and slightly different body of texts. In this essay, I am interested in those moments of disappointment or frustration that she describes; but the objects of my enquiry are those non-fictional texts, travel writing and memoir, by Caribbean writers who travelled physically, rather than imaginatively, to Africa. The writers I discuss in detail – George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul and Maryse Condé – were among the most prominent Caribbean writers who came of age in the transition from colonialism to independence.[5] Each had an interest and stake in the African survival hypothesis, though the stakes were – evidently – different. And each used travel narratives to express skepticism about African survivalist claims, and to articulate what they believed to be the true relation between Africa and the Caribbean.

In a 1965 essay, Guyanese writer Oscar Dathorne describes the characteristic experience of the Caribbean traveler arriving in Africa as one of "realistic shock". The

Caribbean traveler, he suggests, arrives primed to discover similitude – recognizable continuities between Caribbean and African societies – but is instead confronted by the disorienting sense of difference. He describes this experience elsewhere in the same essay as the dawning of "discomfiting realism" (Dathorne 271, 275). The experience of "realistic shock" – in which received ideas about African survivalism and diasporic continuity are disrupted on arrival in Africa – is a prominent and recurring trope in these travel narratives. For each writer, the travelogue – contesting abstract ideas with "the authority of the eyewitness" – is a paradigmatically realist mode (Gikandi 90).

Since J.J. Thomas's famous 1889 critique of J.A. Froude's *The English in the West Indies,* the travelogue form – related to ethnography – had been seen by anti-colonial intellectuals as a crucial form through which colonial powers represented the non-European world.[6] In a similar way, the Caribbean writers I discuss would not have been unaware of the historical and geographical moorings of "realism" as a mode of writing. Sylvia Wynter famously spoke of the "bewitched reality" of the Caribbean, arguing that to "reinterpret" this colonial "reality" was "to commit oneself to a constant revolutionary assault against it" (Wynter, "Reflections," 24, 26). J. Dillon Brown has shown how Caribbean writers of the 1950s and 60s – including Lamming himself – increasingly turned towards modernist or experimental styles in response to the perceived Eurocentrism and quietism of the realist tradition (see Brown 1-13). The realist travelogues I discuss do not just to make constative claims about the European nature of Caribbean subjectivity, but also embody this assimilated subjectivity on the level of form. The trope of "realistic shock" describes a realism that irrupts upon the subject; he or she has not sought it. In this context, "discomfited" realism is above all a discomfort *with* and a resignation *to* realism. By invoking the rhetoric of realism at such moments, these writers draw attention to how residual European narrative structures not just shape their ways of seeing, but also their ways of writing.

But the rhetoric of realism was not just deployed as an historico-formal allusion to the state of conscription or resignation to Europe. It also, in the hands of these writers, foregrounded a "self-conscious effort" to undercut or revise "previous conventions of representation" in order to reach the unmediated "reality" beneath (G. L. Levine 8). Each text presents itself as cutting through inherited and stylized representations of the world in favor of something more truly representative, and in this way attempts to revise or critique the African survival story as the writers – at different moments – receive it.[7] Lamming, experiencing a moment of "realistic shock," is experiencing a moment of disappointment, in which previously held ideas about the legibility of Africa to the Afro-Caribbean writer are disabused. But he also, through the same rhetoric of realism, presents himself as stripping away a superannuated and untrue way of seeing Africa and its connection to the Caribbean, and opening a space for a more "real" account to come. This is a challenge picked up on by future writers, such as Condé.

Gikandi has described how English travelers like Froude and Trollope "write the West Indies so that they can understand the condition of England" (Gikandi 90). Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) and Naipaul in "Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro" (1984) – drawing on this tradition – write Africa so that they can understand the condition of the West Indies. Condé, in *La Vie sans fards* (2012), writes about the same period, but with the benefit of hindsight. Like Lamming, her experience is one of alienation and disappointed expectations, and Condé is more explicit than either of these two writers that hers is a work of realism. Unlike Lamming and Naipaul, however, she sees the solipsism of these earlier accounts, the extent to which they focus on preordained questions or ideas and fail to attend to the contemporary African spaces that each traveler encounters. Condé's realist narrative engages with the history of realist travelogue – but in this case her points of reference are Naipaul and

Lamming themselves, earlier West Indian writers, as much as European writers like Froude or Trollope.

Lamming, Naipaul, and Condé each used the realist travel narrative to commute disenchanted experience. Their travel narratives sit in provocative dialogue with both "verificationist" and more speculative or utopian accounts of African-Caribbean connection. But reading these texts comparatively, as a genealogy, is also a reminder that these concepts – realism, the travelogue – are not fixed but plastic: minutely redefined each time they are used. In this way, moving from Lamming to Condé, a new relationship between the Caribbean and Africa comes into view. In Condé's work, Africa is no longer a space through which evidence for a past connection might be discovered (or not discovered), nor a symbol through which anticolonial sentiment can be articulated. Rather it is a site of contact, cohabitation, and difficult collaboration that does not look to the pre-colonial past, but grew and is growing in the postcolonial present.

## I. LAMMING'S REALISTIC SHOCK

In his 1962 book *The Mind of Africa*, the Ghanaian philosopher W.E. Abraham contrasted the relatively shallow, incomplete process of "acculturation" or "westernization" in British-occupied African territories with what he understood to be the situation in the West Indies. "The West Indies," he wrote, "where the acculturation into Europe has gone very far, will […] find very little to pose against the European cultures, now or at independence". "The West Indies are Western," he concluded, "and might do well to accelerate the process of westernization as the only really practical alternative given to them" (cit. Dathorne 275–6). Given the prominence that the African Survival hypothesis has assumed for later scholars, this argument can now seem odd. Yet to Caribbean readers at the time of publication it would

have been familiar. In a 1960 address, the Trinidadian statesman Eric Williams lamented that "the other colonial areas of the world have been somewhat more fortunate than the West Indies". The relative brevity of British colonial rule in Abraham's Ghana, for example, "made it impossible for imperialist attitudes to harden and crystallize to a similar extent as in the West Indies". "They had a language of their own, a culture of their own, a religion of their own […] a sense of values of their own which they could oppose to Western Imperialism. We in the West Indies have nothing of our own – a few artefacts and place names are all that remain of the aboriginal civilization" (cit. Ryan 494).

Responses to what Williams presented as this quintessential West Indian "dilemma" changed markedly through the 1960s (cit. Ryan 494). Deborah Thomas has described how in late-colonial Jamaica, the "striving middle classes" and "respectable poor […] considered 'Africa' a symbolic representation for much of what was viewed negatively in society" (Thomas 5). But from the late 1950s onwards, the years of Federation and independence – prompted by the sense that despite a series of constitutional reforms "for many black people not much was changing in daily life" (Ellis 157) – "a more racialized vision of citizenship" which looked towards Africa began to emerge across the Caribbean (Thomas 11). This shift – which tapped into pan-African ideas from earlier in the century – was registered in the imaginative literature and cultural criticism of the period: with the late 1960s seeing the publication of landmark essays such as Sylvia Wynter's "We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk About a Little Culture" (1968-9), and Edward Kamau Brathwaite's "Jazz and the West Indian Novel" (1967-9).

Derek Walcott, writing in 1970, defined the swell of African survivalist writing as 'our African phase'. He saw African survivalism as "romantic" (this is Walcott's own word), owing more to European primitivism than to any authentic experience of Africa. "Our

pathetic African carvings, poems and costumes […] are not sacred vessels placed on altars but goods placed on shelves for the tourist." "Ogun," he continues, is "an exotic for us, not a force" (Walcott 8). Oscar Dathorne, writing in 1965, had similar ideas. An imaginative attachment to "Africa" (as a concept or symbol) might be helpful for Caribbean people, it might even spawn interesting literature, but an encounter with Africa itself would only lead to confusion and disappointment. This is the context in which he speaks of "realistic shock," using his own novel, *The Scholar-Man*, as an example. His hero, he writes, quoting his novel, travelled to Africa with a romantic concept of "'the slave blood in his veins that made him somehow a part of Africa'". "But on his very first night in Africa," Dathorne continues,

> he waked to the realization that 'neither song nor singers nor the voices of the strangers who spoke a foreign language meant anything to him.' This was the beginning of his estrangement and I wonder if this is not the main difference – a kind of discomfiting realism – between the Africa of the West Indies and the real one – if, indeed this does not show the difference between the West Indian writer who has actually lived in Africa (apart from the casual visitor) and the West Indian writer who lives through his Africa in the West Indies (Dathorne 270–1).

Naming the "six" Caribbean writers who had lived or travelled in Africa itself, Dathorne emphasizes the singularity of his perspective (and, by extension, the originality of his book). But *The Scholar Man* was not the only, nor was it the first, Caribbean text to register this "realistic shock". Dathorne's book starts from the assumption that African survivalism was a romantic concept, but by its very existence begins to qualify that claim. Rather than viewing African survivalist literature as embodying a single trope or idea, it is better to see it as a hypothesis that Caribbean intellectuals – such as Dathorne himself – were exploring and

attempting to refine. If one mode in which this connection was explored was "romantic", another defined itself in contradistinction, in the rhetoric of realism.

One such account of "realistic shock" is found in "The African Presence," the penultimate chapter of Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*. Arriving in Ghana in 1958 – a year after Ghanaian independence, but some years before the independence of Trinidad, Jamaica or Lamming's native Barbados – Lamming watches a troop of schoolchildren at the airport greet a boy-scout master from England. "It was a profound experience," Lamming notes of the parade the Ghanaian children had prepared, "for I was seeing myself in every detail." "Habits and history were reincarnated in this moment" (Lamming, *Pleasures*, 161-2) For Lamming's readers, too, another "reincarnation" or repetition is taking place. The pageant scene has strong similarities to the Barbadian pageant for the Queen's birthday described Lamming's semi-autobiographical debut novel *In the Castle of My Skin* (Lamming, *Castle* 28-35). But just as Lamming seems to be drawing a link between African and Caribbean colonial experiences, and suggesting his own privileged or interior knowledge of the African pageant, the scene – or his reading of it – breaks into incoherence. The pageant ends. "The boys forgot their uniform and turned the whole place into their own jamboree […] They were all talking at the same time. The voices clashed like steel":

> What were they quarrelling about? Or what were they rejoicing about? For it was difficult to distinguish which noise was war and which was peace. I turned to ask my West Indian friend what it was all about. He smiled; and suddenly I realised the meaning of that smile and the fact about the invading noise. Neither of us could understand a word of what those boys were saying (Lamming, *Pleasures* 162).

The point Lamming is making is a familiar one. Despite the apparent similarity of their experiences of colonization (an experience exemplified in the pageant itself), what happens

when the pageant ends illustrates for Lamming the difference between Africa and the Caribbean. The Ghanaians, unlike the West Indians, possess latent, non-European linguistic, social and cultural reservoirs unavailable to the West Indian. But what is interesting is the way he articulates this dawning awareness. The break-up of the pageant strips away the viewer's sense that he comprehends the scene. Suddenly, he finds himself in an apparently chaotic world whose logic evades his inherited and outdated modes of organizing it into narrative. This, I suggest, is a characteristic realist maneuver.

"Your [...] surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun." George Eliot's famous metaphor for the contrast between realism and providential romance is writ large on Lamming's scene. The Ghanaian children – to borrow Eliot's words from the same passage – go "everywhere impartially," and it is only Lamming's mind's "exclusive optical selection" which persuades him, for a moment, that he can read their behavior (Eliot 248). Moreover, the scene not only performs this moment of realist revelation, but is propositionally about this fundamental realist concern: the failure of received or inherited languages. Realism, as diverse theorists and historians from George Levine to Fredric Jameson have noted, characteristically gestures towards an "unattainable, unmediated reality," an "absence" beyond the conventionality of language, "beyond words" (G. L. Levine 7–8, 11–12).[8] The "incoherence" of the scene derives from the fact that it moves from within to outside Lamming's linguistic repertoire, from English to "Fanti and Ga." Lamming's companion, a resident, greets this sudden change with a smile. But for Lamming, at first, it is shocking: he calls it a "terrifying chorus of discord" (Lamming, *Pleasures* 162).

*The Pleasures of Exile* – published in 1960 – predates texts like Brathwaite's "African Presence" by more than a decade. It rejects the middle-class scorn for "Africa," but the collage of essays, travelogues and journal entries are nonetheless ambiguous as to the nature "the African presence" in Caribbean societies (see Lamming, *Pleasures* 224). As Ellis notes, Lamming's fascination with pan-African identity and black solidarity was "profound enough to compel persistent attempts at its definition" (Ellis 87). Yet at the same time, his work displays 'a paradoxical, agonistic sense of belonging to the West" (Ellis 82). In an early, and much quoted, passage of *Pleasures*, Lamming distinguishes his own technique, as a novelist, from other ways in which West Indian experience has been narrated or represented. Notably, he picks out travel books, such as Fermor's *Traveller's Tree*, anthropologists reports, and Government white papers. All were European forms, and all – he suggests – worked like "old fashioned cameras": recording only the external or visible surface of Caribbean experience, and failing to see "inside" the Caribbean community, indeed, into the subjectivities and memories of West Indians themselves (Lamming *Pleasures* 37–8).[9] Lamming was sympathetic to the idea that African survivals had shaped Caribbean subjects in crucial ways; and this was not an idea his trip to Africa forced him to reject. Moreover, his vision of black, anti-colonial activism was internationalist: rejecting, as Mary Chamberlain notes, "the divisions of the world generated by colonialism" (Chamberlain 181). But in this moment of encounter, of "realistic shock," he presents himself as an outsider: this interior perspective which he saw as central to his work, was – he suggests – not in this context attainable. His own "travel book" engages with, rather than breaking down, what he sees as the historical constraints of the form. It foregrounds only the "external or visible surface." The use of the travelogue manifests on the level of form the sense of conceptual and linguistic poverty which Lamming felt on his arrival in Ghana: it is deployed under duress, and the affect is one of pathos.

In the last chapter of *Pleasures,* in which he discusses future prospects for West Indian writing, Lamming recounts a conversation he had with Sam Selvon before going to Ghana in 1958:

> I was persuading Sam to go to India, because I would have liked to see on paper what he, as a descendant of Indians, would make of India in the light of his experience as a West Indian. I had contemplated a book in which I would put beside his experience of India my own experience of West Africa. Sam hasn't yet got to India, but that book may still take place. It will be valuable for the West Indies; and for obvious reasons (Lamming, *Pleasures* 224).

Selvon never completed this account, nor did Lamming expand on the short fragments in *Pleasures* which describe his experience of West Africa. The absence of this book – or rather, Lamming's allusion to an unwritten book – is suggestive. With the fragment he leaves, and the unwritten book he promises, Lamming presents this to future readers and writers as an open question. Anthropological, archaeological, or imaginative inquiries into African survivals within the Caribbean were one thing. Political solidarity between Caribbean and African anti-colonial movements was another. But how might these connections be meaningfully added to through travel and personal encounter? Via what forms might these encounters be commuted into written narrative? How might these writings shed new, "valuable" light on West Indian experience in the second half of the twentieth century?

## II. PARANOID REALISM

Sam Selvon did not follow up on Lamming's suggestion that he write a travel book about India. But V.S. Naipaul did, and *An Area of Darkness* (1964) registers, in recognizable ways,

the "shock" of an encounter with an ancestral country that does not, on arrival, feel familiar or comprehensible. In the two decades that followed, Naipaul also wrote extensively about his travels in West and Central Africa. These writings appeared alongside, or shortly after, a series wealth of travelogues, essays and novels – from *The Middle Passage* (1962) through to *Guerillas* (1975) – which anatomized the burgeoning "African phase" in Caribbean culture from a hostile perspective.[10] Like Walcott, he saw it as "sentimental" or romantic (Naipaul, *Middle Passage* 81). In reviews of Lamming's work specifically, he had commented Lamming's the treatment of "Africa," and the role of "Africa" in the Caribbean had become a site of debate between the two men.[11] Intuitively, it would seem probable that his African travelogues would speak – at least implicitly – to this Caribbean problematic, to the same questions with which Lamming was grappling (albeit from a different subject position – Naipaul was not of African origin – and from a more hostile perspective). Academic scholarship on Naipaul – particularly outside the Caribbean – has tended to neglect this point. But Naipaul's work did emerge from, and engage with, this Caribbean problematic. And, for writers like Condé, it was always clear that this was the case.

One reason Naipaul's African travelogues have tended not to be read as engaging with Caribbean political contexts is because Naipaul himself has not presented them in this way. For much of his career, Naipaul understated or obscured the extent to which he read, and was read by, other writers from the Caribbean region, insisting instead on the singularity of his work.[12] The terms in which he makes this claim to singularity are interesting. His work, he suggests, is not engaged in political debates, but seeks disinterested objectivity: greater and greater realism. The best known of these pronouncements, the essay "Conrad's Darkness" (1974) was first published in the UK under a different title, "The Reality and the Romance". In it, Naipaul draws on Conrad's preface to the "Nigger of the Narcissus" to make a case for the "interpretative function" of the novelist: the imperative for the novelist to cut

through inherited forms and outdated styles to register newly the sensory immediacy of a passing world. It is a paradigmatic realist manifesto, and one in which Naipaul registers his dissatisfaction with the inherited traditions of the novel form, a train of thought that would draw him to present his own travelogues as a new form of novelistic realism (Naipaul, *Literary Occasions* 180).

Critics of these texts have interrogated Naipaul's self-presentation in this period. Where he presents himself as a disinterested, detached narrator registering "with scrupulous fidelity the truth of his own sensations," there has been an attempt to situate these "sensations" as the product of cultural processes (Naipaul, *Literary Occasions* 173). Rob Nixon, for example, has suggested that Naipaul's African travelogues – such as "A New King for the Congo" (1975), *A Congo Diary* (1980), and "Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro" (1984) – are not novel, or realistic, but draw on earlier European constructions Africa as a "heart of darkness". In *RAL* 22.2 (1991), Nixon sits Naipaul's African travelogues alongside the work of André Gide, Graham Greene, Alberto Moravia and Patrick Marnham (Nixon 177–8). Nixon traces the way in which Naipaul's debt to Conrad is not only methodological, but also manifests itself in the tropes and metaphors through which Naipaul describes his experiences of Africa. Indeed, a steamboat journey tracing the route Conrad took through the Belgian Congo (an experience Conrad later wrote up in *A Congo Diary* and "Heart of Darkness") forms the center of Naipaul's travel during research for his own *Congo Diary* and his essay "A New King for the Congo", texts that would provide extensive genetic material for his own Conradian "Heart of Darkness" narrative: *A Bend in the River* (1979). Nixon is right to contest the superficial realist rhetoric with which Naipaul promoted his texts in this period. And in an era in which Naipaul's representations of the "nihilism" of postcolonial Africa was being circulated (to an apparently credulous audience) by major American periodicals and publishing houses, the need for such a critique is evident. To the historian of

Caribbean literature writing today, however, a similarity becomes evident between Lamming's use of the travelogue to produce an "abjected" portrait of "the African subject, as marked by an ineffable separateness," and Naipaul's use of Conrad's seminal travel narratives to a similar end (Ellis 82). Naipaul was not a European writer but a Caribbean one, and the context of his encounter with African societies was different to that of Conrad: he had grown up in a society and a city that was predominantly Afro-Caribbean, and the relationship between Africa and the Caribbean had been a live question for him through his career.[13] So, why do his travelogues return insistently to inherited, colonial modes of travelling in, and writing about, the continent? And why do they do so – from the title of the *Congo Diary* downwards – in such an excessive and flagrant way?

"Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro," an account of Naipaul's travels in the Ivory Coast, first published in the *New Yorker* in 1984, sheds light on this question. In this text Naipaul explicates in more detail the ideas that underwrote the earlier African travelogues. A thesis Naipaul explores throughout this piece is that the "African" world and the "European" world are fundamentally distinct, and invisible to one another. The way he articulates this distinction is by returning to the language of "reality" and "fantasy". Juxtaposing the rapidly developing, "ultra-modern" cities of the newly independent Ivory Coast with the autochthonous "feeding ritual" of the president's "sacred", or "totemic" crocodiles, he voices the idea that – to the Ivorian – the imperative for Western-style development may be in some way "unreal" (Naipaul, *Finding the Centre* 91–2). "Faith" in the "new world" of Western-style development was "fragile": would it survive, he asks, "or would the Africans be claimed by another idea of reality?" (162). The Abidjan visible to the tourist, he is told, is "make-believe": "If the Europeans were to go away it would all vanish" (166).

Naipaul publicized these travelogues as works of stoical realism – "This is Africa, exactly as I saw it" ("V.S. Naipaul"). But in tension with this, another logic of "realism" sits

within the texts themselves. This is a paranoid version of realism, in which the "real" African world – invisible to Naipaul – can only be pointed to in the vaguest terms: "energy," "power," "earth magic" (*Finding the Centre* 176-7). His concept of the real in this context consists of a number of handed-down tropes from colonial travelogues (Conrad in particular); but he validates them as "realistic" precisely because (unlike the "make-believe" Western-style structures which are visible to the foreign traveler) he – as a foreigner – cannot see them. The paranoia, or "persistent delusional system" (OED), that this creates leads to a second scene of "realistic shock". After a trip to see the crocodiles, after listening to gruesome tales from a European expatriate about child-sacrifice and burial rituals, Naipaul experiences a troubled sleep.

> I dreamed I was on a roof or bridge. The material, of glass or transparent plastic, had begun to perish: seemingly melted at the edges. I asked whether the bridge would be mended. The answer was no. What had been built had been built; the roof or bridge I was on would crumble away. Was it safe, though? Could I cross? The answer was yes. The bridge was safe; I could cross. And in the dream that was the most important thing, because I wasn't going to pass that way again (168).

When he wakes, he looks out of the window at the foggy Abidjan streetscape: the new, Western-style buildings, "as fragile as the bridge in my dream"; the "African" interior invisible, but threatening. This is a different scene from Lamming's. Whereas Lamming had figured the illegible chaos of Africa as bursting upon him, for Naipaul it is a latent, received idea that he carries with him. But Naipaul's sense of his own capacities for navigating and understanding the continent "crumbling away" with the end of colonialism recall the sense Lamming has of the colonial pageant suddenly breaking apart. And, similarly, the effect of this is described in terms of cognitive disturbance. The street scene Naipaul wakes to is

disturbed by the dawning awareness that a different, illegible reality lurks within it. But the sensory stimulus here is either deferred (he sees the crocodiles earlier in the day) or not present to him at all (he only hears of the child-sacrifice second hand). Unlike Lamming, he carries this expectation of "realist chaos" with him to Africa. As I say, it is normally assumed that he takes this idea from Conrad, and Conrad was evidently a key influence. But the context of enunciation is different, and his (often-disavowed) imbrication within Caribbean intellectual debates is not accidental. There is evidence in this text that he is drawing on, and referring to, a set of ideas drawn from a tradition of Caribbean thought and inquiry. In this sense, this scene of "realist shock" and that of Lamming participate in the same conversation.

Though he protests that the genealogical ties between West Africa and the Caribbean did not originally motivate his trip to the Ivory Coast, he nonetheless acknowledges that his understanding of Caribbean slave communities is where his idea about the two realities (African and European) comes from. (92). The idea that Caribbean slave communities performed carnivalesque social rituals (often at night time), in which the social order of the plantation society was in some way parodied or undercut is a key strand of thought in African survival literature. Naipaul writes about it at length in his extensively researched history of Trinidad *The Loss of El Dorado* (Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado* 272–80). In the Ivory Coast, his question is whether this other "reality": "the African world" which may have been visible in early Caribbean slave communities is still visible or comprehensible today. Nixon, contesting the realism of Naipaul's account of the Ivory Coast, has fixed on Naipaul's decision to rely on the testimony of expatriates as evidence of his inauthenticity. But it is notable that Naipaul's principle guides are not European but Caribbean. Naipaul's search is mediated through his Caribbean concerns and intellectual background, and this is literalized in the persons of two Antillean interlocutors – Andrée and Arlette – who at different points in the narrative act as his guides. A collectivity of Caribbean testimony is enlisted to expand the

purview of Naipaul's investigation. The question is implicitly altered, from, "was it comprehensible to me", to "was it comprehensible to them, or to us"?

Andrée and Arlette act as symbols for the contemporary attempt among Caribbean people to rediscover their African origins. Their provenance from the French-Caribbean *départements* – then and to this day part of France – foregrounds their colonial status in Naipaul's eyes. Both Arlette and Andrée try to escape French colonial space, but nonetheless follow the routes of the passing empire. Their failed marriages to African men become metaphors for the difficulties they face in attempting to affiliate.[14] This is a gendered way of representing the Caribbean attempt to affiliate with Africa that Condé will pick up on and develop. In the contrasting figures of the two women, Naipaul describes possible responses to this position. It could lead to disillusion, disappointment and alienation, or to a (necessarily incomplete) elective assimilation. Andrée adopts the first approach, Arlette, to an extent, the second. "Arlette, in her own mind, had been re-educated and remade by Africa. Her solitude, as an expatriate, was different from Andrée's" (*Finding the Centre* 127).

One scene in which Naipaul focalizes his investigation through these Caribbean intermediaries in a pointed way is the scene in which the two women combine to arrange an interview for Naipaul with an Ivorian "drummologie" expert, Georges Niangoran-Bouah (168). Drums were a key trope in the African survival literatures. Sylvia Wynter, in a 1970 essay, had contrasted "European" writing with the "African drum script": arguing that in the Caribbean, "the Drum, central to African religion and belief, became a focal point of physical and cultural resistance" (Wynter, "Jonkonnu", 36). In *Season of Adventure*, Lamming had figured the African drum as a sacred object, that spoke in an extra-linguistic, African rhythm to Afro-Caribbeans despite their loss of African languages. It is notable, therefore, that Naipaul seeks out a "drummologie" expert to explicate or translate, as he explores his thesis

about the two "realit[ies]," the different worlds of Africa and Europe. What is foregrounded in the meeting, however, is not what Bouah says, but the mediating role of the two women. Naipaul describes, for example, how: "Gently, like someone performing a welcome domestic duty, Andrée put down her knitting and gave me three sheets of thick new paper," on which to record Bouah's words. Later, Arlette begins to speak as a kind of accompanist to Bouah: " '*Le monde des blancs est reel,*'" Bouah begins, "'*Mais […] nous autres africains noirs, nous avons tout cela dans le monde de la nuit, le monde des ténèbres*.' […] Arlette, eyes bright said, '*Ils pratiquent le nuit*.' 'They do it all at night'" (*Finding the Centre* 174-5). Naipaul's choreography and phrasing here foregrounds not just the way these Caribbean women arrange and stage the scene for him, but also the way they mediate its transcription: the way they gloss it, explicate it, and – providing Naipaul with the paper – enable it to be written down. Naipaul admires Bouah – "I began to understand the richness of the material he had made his subject" – yet his own descriptions this "material" remains phatic rather than precise. They are "mysteries", "African things" whose significance – like the totemic crocodile ritual that sits at the heart of the narrative – he cannot pin down with certainty (179). The same, crucially, is true of his Caribbean guides. Where Bouah speaks of "we Africans" (*nous* […] *africains*), Arlette refers, telling, to "they" (*ils*) or them. Her phrase, "they do it at night" attempts to corroborate Boauh's story, but is in fact more vague, less articulate. Despite her elective affinity with Bouah, even Arlette cannot finally explicate the crocodile symbol at the center of the narrative. "Nobody knows," she answers, when Naipaul asks her what they mean (180).

Naipaul was not a European, but a Trinidadian of Indian descent. It has been speculated that his relationship with African and Afro-Caribbean culture derives from his origins within a minority Indian community often seen as "recalcitrant": resistant to the anti-colonial project because they feared that, in the majority-black Caribbean, this would

disenfranchise them.[15] What is certain is that he saw "Black Power"' as a form of racially exclusive fanaticism that was threatening to the lives of minorities, and to the development of a cosmopolitan state.[16] A jaundiced observer of the rise of "Black Power," he was anything but disinterested in the African Survival literature on which it drew. Like Lamming, Naipaul begins from a position that he – a Caribbean colonial figure – does not possess the linguistic or conceptual repertoire to perceive or describe African "reality". Again, in a paradigmatic realist maneuver, he figures this "reality" as sitting outside or beyond (his) language: a space which disturbs the viewer's inherited vision of coherence and looks, from the outside, like chaos. For Lamming, this posed an open-ended question, which he would explore in subsequent works. But Naipaul makes this disturbance, and the experience of threat it engenders, a conclusion beyond which he cannot see. His "realistic shock" does not enable a new, clear vision, but lingers on the sense of chaos. Rather than seeing this chaos as demonstrating an unwitting, Eurocentric filiation to Joseph Conrad, we can also – in "Crocodiles" – see it emerging from a Caribbean field of debate. In light of this, there is cause to look again at Naipaul's African writings: in what sense is his affiliation with Conrad strategic: designed to signify provocatively in this Caribbean discursive field? Despite the Delphic commentaries that accompany them, what these travelogues themselves foreground are the limitations of his vision. Through figures such as Andrée and Arlette, he slyly suggests that this limitation may be held in common by Afro- as well as Indo-Caribbean travelers, the product of the history of cultural erasure in the Caribbean. They intimate a profound pessimism about effects of colonialism on Caribbean societies. The African "reality," Naipaul suggests, is unavailable, not just to imperial, but to Caribbean eyes.

## III. FROM "PARENTHESIS" TO "PERIMETER"

In "What the Twilight Says," Walcott accuses proponents of the African survival hypothesis of cutting their cloth to fit their pattern: "on such journeys the mind will discover what it choses" (Walcott 23). But Naipaul was also choosing what he wanted to discover on his African journeys. By discovering the unhappiness bred by the attempt to "wed" Africa and the Caribbean he was making a point about Caribbean politics. Caribbean polities – he suggests – rely exclusively on colonial scaffolding (administrative and cultural) to which there is no alternative, but which at the same time is rotten and passing away.

Among the Caribbean writers who never believed Naipaul's disinterested pose, who thought that Naipaul was always implicitly and often deliberately making mischievous interventions in Caribbean debates, was Maryse Condé. In a 1983 essay, she figures Naipaul as a necessary antagonist who played an important role in mobilizing a Caribbean public sphere. Naipaul's provocations, she suggests are "inexplicable" if one imagines he is addressing an exclusively Western audience:

> because in that case he would be preaching only to the converted […] Rather, he targets precisely the Antillean society, Antilleans, intellectuals, academics and writers: his peers. It is here that the hate arises, of which we have already said too often that it is another face of love. In a word, the fascination Naipaul exercises on the Antilles has no equal bar that which the Antilles exerts on him. At the end of the day, he has assigned another function to the writerly vocation: not to comfort but to provoke despair, and to irritate at any cost."
>
> ("Si Naipaul ne s'adressait [pas qu'à l'Occident, elle [la rage] ne s'expliquerait pas, car alors il ne prêcherait qu'à des convertis […] C'est que précisément il vise la société antillaise, les Antillais, intellectuels, universitaires et écrivains, ses pairs. C'est là qu'il entend faire naître une haîne dont on a dejà trop dit qu'elle n'est que l'envers de

> l'amour. En un mot, la fascination que Naipaul exerce sur l'intelligentsia des Antilles n'a d'égale que celle qu'exerce sur lui les Antilles. Il a en fin de compte assigné une autre function à l'écrivain. Celle non pas de conforter, mais de désespérer et d'irriter à tout prix." (Condé, "Naipaul" 7. My translation)).

She called her article, 'Naipaul and the Antilles: a love story'. A common assumption among scholars – which Condé alludes to – is that Naipaul's travelogues of the 1970s and 1980s were written for an audience in Britain and America, and it is true that this would have been their primary readership ("Crocodiles," for example, was first published in *The New Yorker*). But for Condé, this was only part of the story. She identifies a sphere of Caribbean intellectuals - including herself – who read and responded to his work. And her suggestion is that Naipaul was never ignorant of the way his work would impact upon his Caribbean "peers". The intellectual world Condé evokes is not only an Anglophone one: it is "Antillean" rather than "West Indian," as "Crocodiles" had itself suggested. And parts of Condé's own work – in particular her memoir of her life in Africa – can be read as a complex response to this provocative, Naipaulian "despair".

*La Vie sans fards* – which recounts Condé's life in West Africa in the 1960s and 70s – begins with a quotation from a thumbnail biography of the author circulated at one time by her publicists. The extract describes her first encounter with Mamadou Condé, a Guinean actor, who she met in Paris, married, and then lived with in communist, postcolonial Guinea. "These phrases create a seductive image," she writes: "that of a love affair ignited by activism" ("Ces phrases créent une image séduisante. Celle d'un amour éclairé par le militantisme";Condé 11).[17] They also recall the circumstances of "Andrée" and "Arlette". Yet, Condé insists that this image is a false one: not only are the facts wrong (she first travelled to Africa without her husband, and lived in the Ivory Coast), but the wider impression it gives of her relationship to

Africa is misleading. Reversing the genders of the spousal metaphor that Naipaul and her own publicists relied upon, she compares her relationship to Africa with that of Swann and Odette (in Proust's *Un amour de Swann*). "I ask myself," she writes in *La Vie sans fards*, "if, regarding Africa, I could not apply to myself the words of Proust's hero […], almost without modifying them: '[…] that I ruined years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I had my greatest love with a woman who didn't attract me, who was not my type'" ("En fin de compte, je me demande si, à propos de l'Afrique, je ne pourrais reprendre à mon compte presque sans les modifier les paroles du héros de Marcel Proust dans *Un amour de Swann* : 'Dire que j'ai gâché des années de ma vie, que j'ai voulu mourir, que j'ai eu mon plus grand amour pour une femme qui ne me plaisait pas, qui n'était pas mon genre. '") (16). Setting her own narrative in opposition to the publicists' thumbnail, and to the conventions of the romantic narrative that this implies, *La Vie sans fards* frames itself, at its opening, in fundamentally realist terms. Indeed, it narrates that point of her life in which the exigencies of work and raising children made writing impossible, and – quoting Sartre: "write or live, one has to choose" as its epigraph – a recurrent idea in the text is that real experience will always push out the possibility of written representation ("Vivre ou écrire, il faut choisir") (9). Describing a scene is always a form of falsification. The title, *La Vie sans fards* (life without pretense or makeup), points to this familiar realist aporia.

Condé's revision of Naipaul and Lamming is easier to describe as a formal move than as a propositional or discursive departure. In fact, in many ways, *La Vie* ratifies and fleshes out some of the arguments made – or left implicit – in "Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro," and also in *The Pleasures of Exiles.* Notably, Condé describes the expatriate Caribbean communities in the Ivory Coast and Guinea as detached from Ivorian or Guinean society. They formed, she suggests, an isolated community, perceived as "colonials" by the Africans: that is, either as mediator figures between European administrations and African peoples, or as belated expatriate communities adrift after the retreat of the French Empire, or else as

sympathetic but deraciné figures, isolated from the body of the populace by their lack of local knowledge and local languages (Condé, *La Vie sans fards* 40–45, 67–8).[18] Condé's own inability to speak Malinké, and the difficulties this occasioned – are the subject of frequent reflection. And the inadequacy of shared political commitments – or the sense of a shared pan-African inheritance – for fostering interpersonal connection is parodied in moments of "realistic shock" that will now be familiar. Condé describes discovering Césaire as a student. But when she presents the *Cahier* to her husband, he is uncomprehending: "Who is he writing for?" Mamadou asks. "Not for me, certainly. I don't understand it" ("'Pour qui écrit-il? Certainement pas pour moi qui ne le comprends pas.'") (29). On her first night in Africa, in Senegal, her Senegalese host intimates that Caribbean expatriates – still associated with their role in the colonial civil service – are distrusted and resented.

> 'And René Maran!' I protested, outraged.
>
> 'Who is René Maran?' he asked me, perplexed.
>
> I believed first of all to have misunderstood. Dismayed, I discovered the limits of literature
>
> ('-- Et René Maran! protestai-je, outrée. | -- Qui est René Maran? me demandat-il, perplexe. | Je crus d'abord avoir mal entendu. Consterneée, je découvrais les limites de la littérature.") (37).

The inability of the Senegalese host to recognize the name "René Maran" – a French-Guyanese novelist – is met by total mutual incomprehension. It is the experience of shock – "dismay" or "consternation" – which strips Condé's illusions about Pan-African solidarity, and the ease of her assimilation into African society.

But this scene does not just repeat a familiar idea that might be found in Lamming or Naipaul. It is also, as I say, a parody. The allusion to a relatively minor writer – Maran as opposed to Césaire – draws attention to Condé's naivety. Moreover, Maran was best known for his consecration by French literary gatekeepers – he won the *Prix Goncourt* for *Batouala* (1921), a token gesture Sartre alludes to in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* – so Condé's outrage implicitly ratifies what her host has been saying: she is still in the thrall of the hierarchies of colonial taste. Exaggerating her naivety through dramatic irony, Condé creates a distance between the position of herself and her readers (in 2012), and her character at the time: what was shocking then is, in retrospect, not that shocking. Indeed, that it was ever shocking might be seen as funny. In contrast to Lamming, Condé points to the experience of realistic shock as something that is now familiar and at risk of parody. Whereas in Lamming it constituted the large part of his fragmentary narrative, whereas in Naipaul this shock was the payoff or conclusion beyond which one could not venture, in Condé this is the start of the story: the remainder of the narrative will describe her attempt to accommodate and adapt to this continually unfurling revelation.

"I saw it straightaway: the Antilleans lived only amongst themselves. Across the whole of the African continent, a gap separated them from the Africans" ("[J]e m'en aperçus tout de suite, les Antillais ne vivaient qu'entre eux. À travers l'ensemble du continent africain, un fossé les séparait des Africains") (42). But if the argument of the narrative does at times condense into these pessimistic, synthetic statements about the fate of the Antillean community, the structure of the book does not operate centripetally to foreground these moments of propositional synthesis. *La Vie sans fards* is in one sense structured like a travelogue: it begins with Condé's arrival in Africa and ends as she leaves. Yet she resists the narrative structure of the journey. Her peregrinations are presented as relatively random, and the effect is perspectival, as she accrues experiences, encounters, relationships that – if they

do not discredit her moments of synthetic thought – reveal them to be specific, situated responses. In this way, she distinguishes herself from the response of African-American tourists, in this case visiting Ghana in search of the sites from which their ancestors were shipped as slaves. "What did Africa signify" to them? she asks:

> A change of scene from the hard quotidianity of their existence, circumscribed by racism and hindered by the slowness of the progression of civil rights. Within days, they would be leaving again for Brooklyn, Washington D.C., or Ames, Iowa, their eyes blinded by light, their ears ringing with sounds and rhythms, their palettes intoxicated by unusual flavors […] I could not commune with them. For me, Africa represented neither a change or scene nor a parenthesis in my existence. It was the perimeter within which I had struggled for many years.
>
> (Que signifiait l'Afrique pour ces touristes afro-américains? Un dépaysement dans la dure quotidienneté de leur existence, délimitée par le racisme et entravée par la lenteur des progrès des droits civils. Dans quelques jours, ils allaient repartir pour Brooklyn, Washington D.C. ou Ames, Iowa, les yeux aveuglés de lumière, les oreilles bourdonnantes de sons et de rythmes, le palais enivré de saveurs inhabituelles. […] Je ne pouvais communier avec eux. Pour moi, l'Afrique ne représentait ni un dépaysement ni une parenthèse dans mon existence. C'était le périmetre à l'intérieur duquel je me débattais depuis des années) (201).

The response of these African-American tourists contrasts with that of the Caribbean travelers so-far discussed. Perhaps because these Ghanaian sites have now been developed specifically as tourist sites, they do not experience the shock of disconnection, but are furnished, she suggests, with the "African" experience which they travelled to find. But the metaphors she uses to describe the journeys might also describe the journeys of Naipaul and

Lamming. These journeys are "parentheses"; they are quests made with the intention of bolstering – in the face of racial harassment – a nourishing sense of personal genealogy and historical ties. This is the same conception of the "African journey" that Lamming had had. His journey had not been felicitous, but the sense of shock he describes could only arise within this framework: to travel with expectations, to find those expectations disappointed. In a related way, Naipaul, "travelling on a theme" as he puts it, had known what he was going to find (cit. Foden). He exaggerates the structure of this "realistic shock" narrative to draw his own preordained conclusions. Condé, by contrast, rejects the shape of these narratives. Her African experience is not a quest, a "parenthetical" journey made to clarify a Caribbean life or dilemma. Rather, "Africa" serves as a "perimeter". This is a different metaphor for her experience and, by extension, for her narrative. For Condé Africa is a perimeter, a physical space only: it has boundaries (it is not shapeless) but within those boundaries there is no governing infrastructure which determines her experience. And this is a spatial construction she approximates within her text. *La Vie sans fards* is bounded by her arrival and departure on the continent, but presents itself – internally – as "shapeless": a series of encounters and episodes that do not reach towards, arrive at, or disabuse one particular thesis. Her early discovery that the ideals of *negritude* have not arrived in Africa, for example, is consistent with her observations about the mutual isolation of African and Caribbean communities. But she will teach in African schools and participate in Guinean protests and social activism. She will feel a distance from her African interlocutors, yet she, and the Antilleans she meets, are part of the African landscape she describes: they sit within the perimeter. In her written account of these experiences, the parenthetical travelogue structure – crystallized in the trope of "realistic shock" – has been dilated into a more expansive form of life writing "without makeup". Condé presents herself as dismantling the old, inherited genre, in favor of what she suggests is a new and truer realism.

Condé's book ends in Kaolack, in Senegal, where she meets her second husband. This encounter, she suggests, marked the beginning of the end of her time in Africa. The new couple would travel together to Europe, to Guadeloupe, and then to America where she would take up residence as a university professor. "Africa," she reflects in the last lines of the memoir, "at last tamed, metamorphosed: poured itself out, docile, into the hinterland of my imagination. It would become no more than the subject matter for numerous fictions" ("L'Afrique enfin domptée se métamorphoserait et se coulerait, soumise, dans les replis de mon imaginaire. Elle ne serait plus que la matière de nombreuses fictions") (285). This is an ambivalent conclusion. On the one hand, it participates in the more pessimistic aspect of the book, emphasizing disconnection. Just as integration into African communities had always been a struggle, so her future writings about Africa will be "fictions": artificial versions of the place itself. Yet on the other hand, her fictions would be precisely what defined her professional life to come. And these fictions take her experience in Africa – albeit somewhat altered – as their subject matter: Africa constitutes the perimeter in which they move. Thinking forward, in broad-brush terms, across her oeuvre, this makes sense. Novels such as *Heremakhonon* (1976) are marked by an awareness of disconnection between Antillean and African; yet Africa – in this case Guinea – remains the perimeter in which they operate. These are not just portraits of West Indian subjectivities in exile, but also partial portraits of African societies, of which the Antillean diasporas form important and revealing parts. The nature of the African-set fiction, then, is linked to her experience and background as a Caribbean writer, but it also linked to the nature of her engagement with Africa itself.

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In "Negotiating Caribbean Identities" (1995), Stuart Hall described the Caribbean idea of a literal reconnection with Africa as an attempt to "go back through the eye of a needle". It is important, he said, to remind certain "nostalgic and temperamental nationalists in the Caribbean," that not only have Caribbean societies been altered by centuries of Western colonialism, but Africa, too, has "moved on": it "is not waiting there in the fifteenth or seventeenth century […] for you to roll back across the Atlantic and rediscover it in its tribal purity". In place of a "literal" understanding of African survivals and continuities, Hall described "Africa" as a "symbolic language" in the Caribbean imagination (Hall, 13). Twenty years later, in the pattern of Hall's argument, Nadia Ellis's *Territories of the Soul* figured "Africa" as an imaginative locus, a utopian "*elsewhere*" that animated diasporic thought, but was "not accompanied by the possibility of any actual connection in the so-called real world" (Ellis 2-3).

This suspicion of literalism – "the so-called real world" – was always present among Caribbean intellectuals but became more and more dominant in cultural criticism from the 1990s onwards. In the wake of this, literary texts from the era of Naipaul and Lamming which eschewed the referential claims and stylistic norms of realism have recently received a lot of critical attention. In his 2012 book *The Caribbean Novel Since 1945,* Michael Niblett describes Wilson Harris's writing as "irrealis[t]": engaging with "a past that did not come to fruition" and making it visible and concrete in his postcolonial present (Niblett 65). J.Dillon Brown has championed the "counterconventional impulse of modernist form" as a vehicle for "anticolonial critique" (Brown, 11). And Michelle D. Commander has recently shown how the impossibility of a "literal return" to African "origins" led to a rise of "speculative cultural production" which "blur chronological time and portray interactions between real, ghostly, and imagined figures" (Commander, 5).

The tradition of realist travel narratives that I have discussed first arose in response to a "verificationist" moment in diasporic thought, in which literal connections were being sought and taxonomized. Emphasizing that the connection *was* predominantly symbolic, and delimiting the purchase and limits of this "symbolic language," they also sit in productive counterpoint with those more experimental texts that emerged at the same time. In Lamming's work we see this counterpoint within a single oeuvre: the moments of realist skepticism – the travelogues – contrasting with, framing, and catalyzing a burgeoning investment in the "symbolic language" of Africa in novels like *Season of Adventure*. In other texts by Caribbean writers which sprung from a journey to Africa, such as Dennis Williams's *Other Leopards* or Kamau Brathwaite's *Masks,* the tension between disappointed skepticism towards and speculative investment in what Brathwaite called the "obscure miracle of connection" between Africa and the Caribbean can be seen behind the complex generic and affective architecture of those works (cit. Scott 106). It is notable that, from his early pieces onwards, Brathwaite's aesthetic manifestos contained readings of Naipaul which both acknowledged the value and criticized the politics of Naipaul's skeptical, realist vision.[19] The writers I discuss use the realist travelogue to commute disenchanted experience. But the realist maneuvers they make can be seen irrupting within, or in provocative dialogue with, texts in other genres: texts more invested in exploring the affordances, rather than outlining the limitations, of the African survival hypothesis.

This genealogy of Caribbean realist travel-writing was an historically specific phenomenon. As Condé alludes to in her parody of the "realistic shock," it responds to a specific, mid-century moment in African survivalist thought, in which verificationist claims were prominent, and the extent of pan-African unity was (in Condé's view) overstated. Yet her substantially later book, *La Vie sans fards,* does not just repeat the narratives of Lamming and Naipaul. It also uses a similar rhetoric of realism – stripping away inherited or received

conventions – to expand on their account, and to describe the relationship between Africa and the Caribbean differently. Simon Gikandi has written of nineteenth-century European travelogues about the West Indies that these journeys were "necessitated by theoretical negativity – the need to understand ourselves by appropriating the strangeness and difference of others" (Gikandi 90). Naipaul and Lamming, slyly adopting this idiom, do a similar thing in a new context: they "write Africa so that they can understand the condition of the West Indies". For Condé, these narratives are solipsistic, "parenthetical" texts which serve only to confirm or deny previously held theories. What they fail to do is to attend to the African spaces in which they travel, which are themselves pluralistic spaces, full of European and West Indian expatriates. Her perspective, she suggests, is singular and limited in many of the ways Lamming and Naipaul had outlined. But the subject of her text is not just West Indian subjectivity, but the ongoing, lived encounter between Caribbean and African people in postcolonial African societies.[20] The African presence in Caribbean culture may have been imaginative or symbolic, but – as we have seen – it occasioned real journeys and encounters, moments of disagreement and solidarity. Shifting the frame from "parenthesis" to "perimeter," from the travelogue to the life narrative, Condé brings into view a messy, ongoing history of postcolonial cohabitation. Her interest lies less in the African presence in the Caribbean than in the Caribbean presence in Africa.

## Endnotes

[1] The idea of African "survivals" - cultural memes that were literally carried over – is a commonplace in the literature of the 1960s and 70s (see, for example, Wynter, "Jonkonnu" 39). The notion of Atlantic slavery causing "social death" was coined in Patterson, *Slavery*

*and Social Death*. This book post-dates (and arises in response to) the rise of the what I am calling the "African survival hypothesis"; but it looks back – in a nuanced and qualifying way – to received wisdom about the social impact of slavery from an earlier period.

[2] See, for example, Sylvia Wynter's reading of Jean Price-Mars's *Ainsi parla l'Oncle* in Wynter, "Jonkonnu" 34-5.

[3] An excellent historical account of what I am calling "African Survivalism," and its prevalence in the post-independence period – particularly as these trajectories pertained to the career of Kamau Brathwaite, can be found in Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 106–13.

[4] "The now familiar figure of the New World African as bereft of authentic sources of history and culture and as parasitic on Europe scarcely requires recapitulating," Scott argues. "The rationalist historiography through which this normalizing narrative was produced set the epistemic terrain of the debate about the sources of Afro-Caribbean culture. If you wanted to enter this debate – to make, for example, a counter-claim about identity – you were virtually *obliged* to provide the counter-evidence (the historical and ethnographic evidence) to demonstrate that as a people your cultural sources were *not* (or not *only*) European ones (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 111).

[5] The texts I examine are substantially later than Claude Mackay's *A Long Way Home* (1937), in which the passages of North-African travelogue respond to a different historical problematic.

[6] Mary-Louise Pratt has shown the link between the modern European travelogue and the scientific expedition: an attempt to confirm or deny a certain hypothesis or "empirical question" (Pratt 16). In the West Indian context, Simon Gikandi has shown how in the travelogues of J.A. Froude and Anthony Trollope "the claim to facticity and the authority of the eyewitness" served to ratify and confirm "a set of [a priori] *theoretical* assumptions about the relation between nation and empire" (Gikandi 91)

[7] One way of putting this – in the language of Caroline Levine – would be to say that "realism" as a set of rhetorical maneuvers has "affordances" for writers which are not limited to the literary-historical connotations the carry. Jameson describes how discussions of "realism" as a representative strategy, ideal, or discursive structure always morph into discussions of its historicity. See Levine 6-11 and Jameson 1–11.

[8] See also Jameson 31.

[9] According to J. Dillon Brown, it is in this context – an attempt to describe "interior" states of mind unavailable to non-Caribbeans – that Lamming turned to the prose techniques of European modernist writers. See Brown 75–102.

[10] In *The Middle Passage* (1962), for example, he refers to the "self-contempt" of the Afro-Caribbean bourgeoisie: slavery, he writes, "set him [the bourgeois subject] the ideals of white civilization and made him despise every other" (Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* 62). Nonetheless the "Trinidad" chapter concludes with a new sight: a procession in Port of Spain that was "anti-white, anti-clerical, and pro-African"; and the spread of this "racialism" becomes a prominent theme in his journey through the other Caribbean territories (Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* 82). His subsequent engagements with the subject were frequent, the most extended being "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad" first published in the *Sunday Times* in 1972 (rept. in *The Return of Eva Peron* 1-91).

[11] Reviewing George Lamming's *Of Age and Innocence* in the *New Statesman and Nation* in 1958, Naipaul had spoken of the scorn that the Afro-Caribbean Trinidadian had for all things "African": "Africa has been forgotten, films about African tribesmen excite derisive West Indian laughter" (Naipaul, "New Novels" 827). Lamming, in response, said that this "derisive laughter" was instead a revealing sign that "Africa had not been forgotten" (*Pleasures*, 224). Naipaul soon discovered (as he documents in *The Middle Passage*) that Lamming was right.

[12] Recent books which document the performative aspect of this posture, and bring to light Naipaul's engagement with Caribbean literary culture in Port of Spain and London include those by Rahim and Lalla and McIntosh.

[13] A later, retrospective passage from Naipaul's semi-autobiographical *The Enigma of Arrival* attempts to articulate Naipaul's self-understanding as a "colonial" rather than "metropolitan" traveler: who shared an "education and a culture" with the "metropolitan traveler," yet had a fundamentally different relationship to the target society. See Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* 167–8.

[14] I use "affiliate" in the sense defined by Edward Said in "Secular Criticism." Said contrasts people bound "filiatively" to a culture "by birth, nationality, profession" with those who bind themselves "affiliatively": "by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation" (Said 24–5).

[15] On Eric William's description of the "recalcitrant and hostile minority" within Trinidadian politics, and the controversy that ensued, see Palmer 266. An excellent account of the racial dynamics in late-colonial Trinidad, its influence on Naipaul's thought, and the way it inflects his writings about people of African descent, can be found in Rampersad 24-47.

[16] He suggests that both African and Indian "racialism" in Trinidad always implicitly targeted the other group. "In the Negro-Indian conflict each side believes it can win. Neither sees that this rivalry threatens to destroy the language of Calypso" (*Middle Passage*, 81).

[17] All translations from this text are my own.

[18] Bella Brodzki, drawing on Condé's failure to integrate linguistically, notes that the 'untranslateablility' of the autobiographical (Caribbean) subject in a foreign (African) setting is a key trope in the book. See Brodzki 99-105.

[19] See for example "Roots" (1963: rept. in *Roots* 28-54), "West Indian Prose Fiction" and "Timehri". I discuss Brathwaite's writing on Naipaul in XXXXXXX.

[20] In this way, *La Vie sans fards* has more in common with the West-African travelogue passages in Caryl Phillip's *Atlantic Sound* (2000): a journey by a significantly younger writer, undertaken in the 1990s.

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