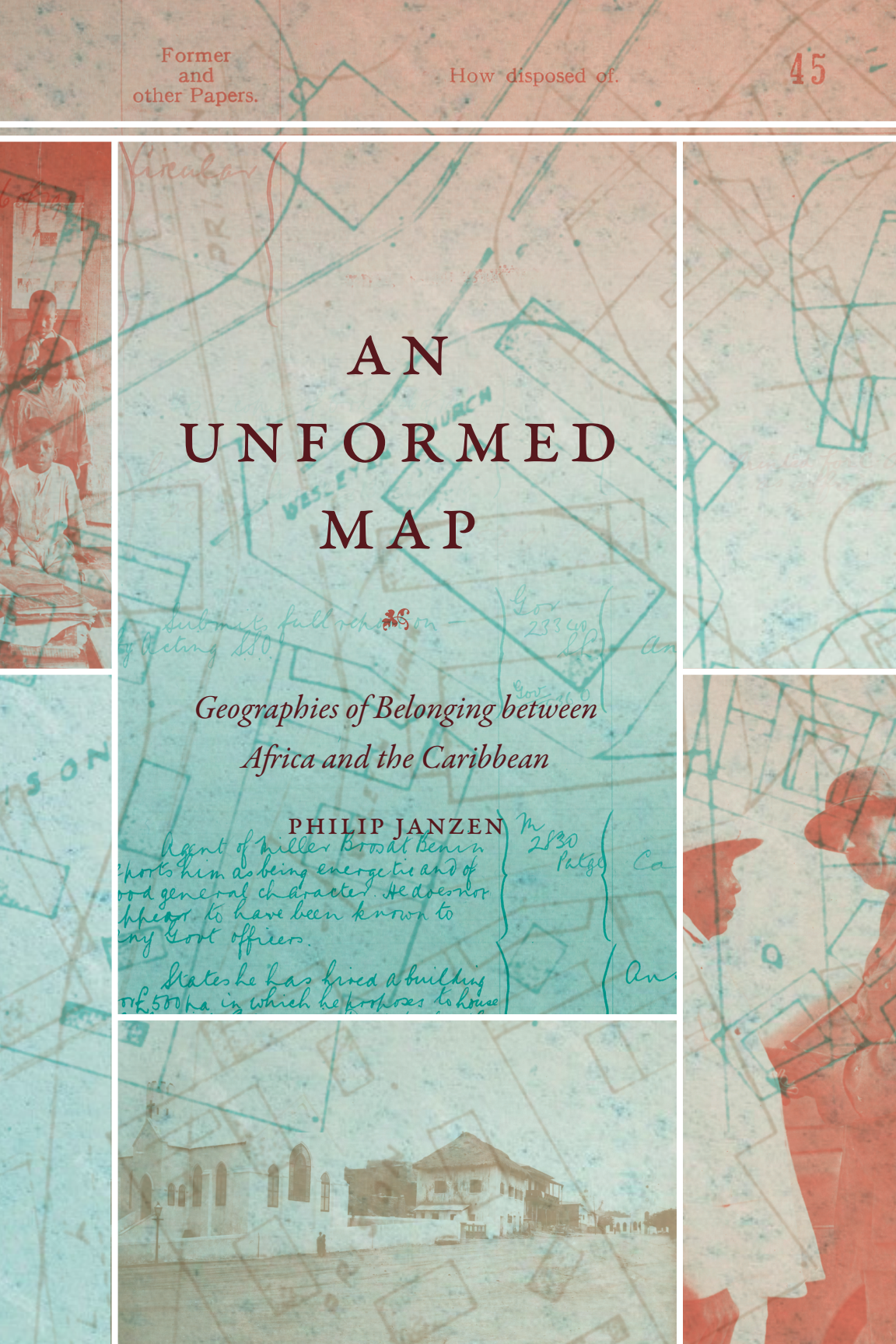

AN UNFORMED MAP

Geographies of Belonging between Africa and the Caribbean

PHILIP JANZEN

AN UNFORMED MAP

THEORY IN FORMS
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For Rachel

Et mon originale géographie aussi ; la carte du monde faite à mon usage, non pas teinte aux arbitraires couleurs des savants, mais à la géométrie de mon sang répandu.
—AIMÉ CÉSAIRE, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939)

It was a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being. It was also a physical rupture, a rupture of geography.
—DIONNE BRAND, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2001)

Contents

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

FAULT LINES

The sound of wind came first. It careened down from the Blue Mountains and rushed unsteadily through the streets, swirling around trees, scraping across corrugated iron roofs, and rattling shutters. Then, at half past three, the ground began to tremble. For thirty seconds, the city shook. Brick walls crumbled, houses collapsed, tram lines twisted, and water pipes burst open. Stone and splintered wood piled into the streets. Telegraph poles swayed and fell, their wires tangling in the debris. As the tremors eased, desperate voices called out through the rubble, piercing the abrupt stillness. By evening, fires had engulfed the remains of Jamaica's capital and clouds of yellow-gray dust filled the air, floating eerily over the city. Not a building was left untouched. More than eight hundred people lost their lives.[1]

The next morning, January 15, 1907, Kingston lay in ruin. The streets, overcome by the wreckage, were impassable. Familiar landmarks, such as the Colonial Bank, the Jamaica Club, and the Parish Church were unrecognizable. Most

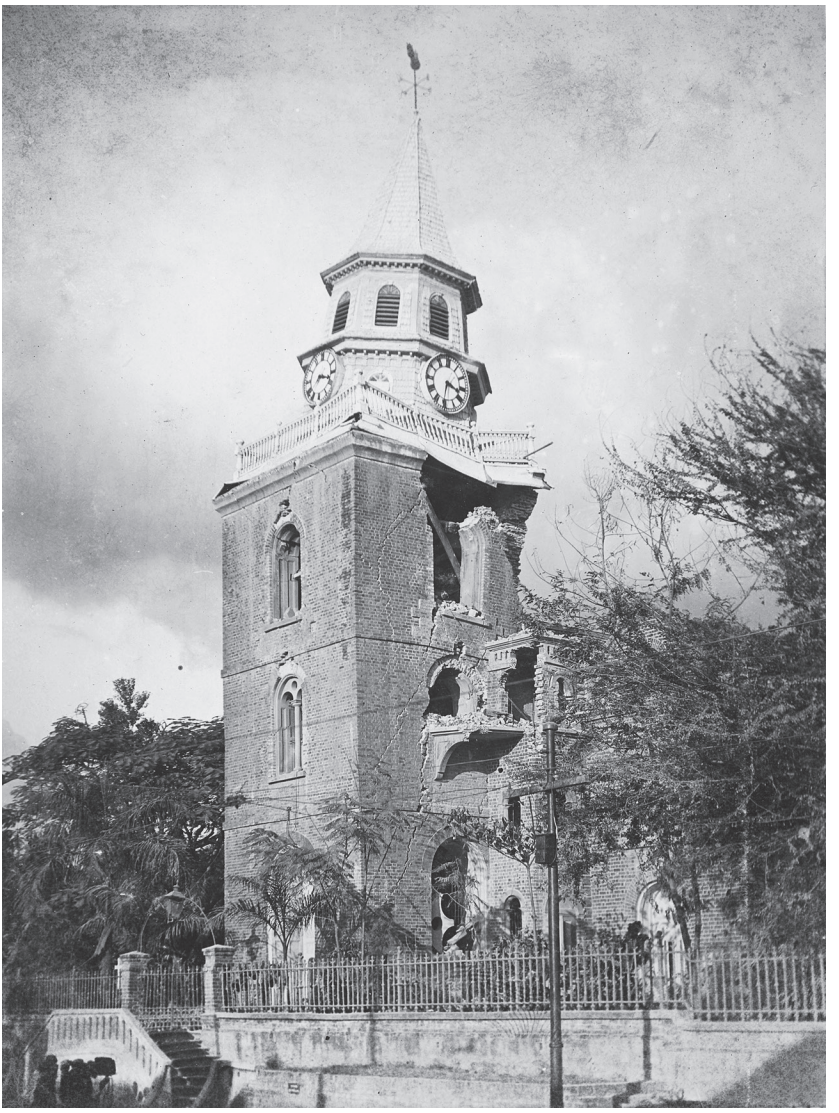

FIGURE 1.1. The Parish Church in Kingston, Jamaica, after the 1907 earthquake. *A Visit to Jamaica in 1907*, University of Florida Manuscript Collections.

people sought refuge at the Race Course at the north end of the city, taking shelter in circus tents and hoping to reunite with family and friends. Some found solace listening to sermons and singing hymns. All were overcome by the scale of destruction, and in the days that followed, they began tending to the difficult tasks of honoring the dead and rebuilding their home.

News of the earthquake spread quickly around the world. When the first reports arrived in southern Nigeria, five thousand miles away, a young teacher named Lebert Josiah Veitch was devastated. Veitch was from the north coast of Jamaica, from the parish of St. Ann, and he had studied and taught in Kingston for nearly a decade. In January 1905, however, he had taken a position at a British colonial school in Bonny, near the mouth of the Niger River. As Veitch read about the effects of the earthquake, the Atlantic Ocean's expanse loomed. "A quivering blow as of a giant's fist smashing the lower side of the earth's crust," read the Reuters news telegram printed in *The Lagos Standard*. "Provisions are needed most urgently."[2] Worried and helpless, Veitch turned to a friend, Dandeson Coates Crowther, the archdeacon of the Niger Delta Pastorate.[3]

Crowther, the youngest son of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, had formed the Pastorate in 1892 with other Saro returnees in reaction to the exclusionary racism of the Anglican-run Church Missionary Society.[4] In April 1907, a few months after the earthquake, the Pastorate was celebrating its fifteenth anniversary, and Crowther invited Veitch to give an address. Veitch's evocative description of conditions in Jamaica left the audience in "sobs and tears." Crowther then passed a resolution expressing "sympathy" with the people of Jamaica and called for the contribution of "adequate funds for their relief."[5] By the end of June, *The Daily Gleaner* in Kingston happily reported that Crowther's resolution, combined with Veitch's "stirring appeal," had raised more than £28.[6]

Compared with the total extent of the damage, this was a tiny sum, but its significance was more than material. For more than two centuries, the Niger Delta had been a hub of the transatlantic slave trade, a site where European empires had fractured history, and these ruptures echoed into the twentieth century. On colonial maps and in colonial archives, always centered in Europe, Jamaica and Nigeria were partitioned, pushed to the margins, linked only by their shared status as colonies of the British Empire. By coming together to support the rebuilding of Kingston, however, Crowther and Veitch asserted a common cause, transcending the naturalized fault lines that divided Africa and the Caribbean.

This book is about moments of disjuncture and the creation of new geographies. It is also about the forms of colonial archives and the challenges of writing

history across imperial boundaries. At the center of this study are the lives and ideas of Caribbean people who, like Veitch, joined the British and French colonial administrations in Africa. While Veitch's story is in some ways exceptional, his path from Jamaica to Nigeria was not unique. Between 1880 and 1940, more than five hundred others from the Caribbean followed this path.[7] Typically two or three generations removed from slavery, Caribbean administrators grew up in colonial societies, saw themselves as British and French, and tended to look down on Africans as uncivilized and inferior. Once in Africa, however, they were doubly marginalized—excluded by their European colleagues and unwelcome among Africans. The effects of this middle position were profound. How did Caribbean administrators reckon with assimilation, racism, and dislocation? And what do the traces they left behind reveal about the designs of colonial archives and the distortions of colonial knowledge production?[8] *An Unformed Map* responds to these questions by examining the uneven intellectual trajectories of Caribbean administrators in Africa. As they learned African languages, collaborated with African intellectuals, and engaged with African cultures and histories, many began to rethink their positions in the British and French empires. I argue that such exchanges generated new geographies of belonging, foundations from which others could imagine new political horizons. Moreover, by weaving together a range of unconventional sources, methods, and narrative forms, this book offers a model for writing history in the face of archival fragmentation.

So looking through a map
of the islands, you see
rocks, history's hot
lies, rot-
ting hulls, cannon
wheels, the sun's
slums: if you hate
us. Jewels,
if there is delight
in your eyes.
The light
shimmers on water,
the cunning
coral keeps it
blue.[9]

Archives and Methods

An Unformed Map follows a wave of research on African diasporic exchanges in the first half of the twentieth century.[10] Typically centered in "Black London" and "Paris Noir," this vibrant field of study analyzes how cosmopolitan settings in Europe facilitated relationships between Africans, Antilleans, and African Americans that were not possible anywhere else. These "Black Atlantic" histories emphasize the importance of translation, cultural production, and intimate, everyday interactions in the creation of political and cultural networks. Much of this scholarship also highlights the irony that the capitals of the British and French empires acted as seedbeds for the rise of anticolonial movements that profoundly altered the meanings of empire, nation, and citizenship.

Individually, these are important works, but taken in the aggregate, the focus on London and Paris reinscribes an imperial geography of "centers" and "peripheries," a map of rocks and hot lies. This staging of history, buttressed by the national archives of former empires and typically segregated between British and French, forecloses opportunities to consider people and their ideas from beyond a colony-metropole nexus.[11] In these asymmetrical narratives, the histories—and historiographies—of people from Africa, the Caribbean, and "elsewhere" are fragmented by the methodological nationalism of European-based periodizations and analytical categories. What emerges as coherent takes form only in relation to the metropole, with sprinklings of "local color."[12] Rendered invisible, meanwhile, are the many histories that were not circumscribed by imperial boundaries.[13]

The trajectories of Caribbean administrators in Africa starkly reveal the limits of such approaches. They also illuminate a method for composing "Black Atlantic" histories that move across different geographies.[14] When I began research on this project as a graduate student, I followed the existing scholarship to the colonial archives of the United Kingdom and France—after all, Caribbean administrators were civil servants.[15] I did find relevant sources, including government correspondence, annual reports, and personnel files. Yet the forms of these archives—their colonial logics, geographical divisions, and conceit of totality—limited the kinds of questions I could ask. In these archives, Africans and African-descended peoples became legible as historical actors only when they fell within the purview of the British and French empires as "colonial migrants."[16] For those who produced these records, the classificatory infrastructures of empire made exchanges like those between Veitch and Crowther unthinkable.[17]

In an attempt to move beyond these limitations, I began to follow the paths that Caribbean administrators followed themselves, paths that led away from the conventional fieldwork patterns of Ghana–United Kingdom and

Martinique–France.[18] Over the course of two years of multi-sited research in Africa and the Caribbean, I gradually assembled a unique, transatlantic archive—colonial reports mixed with newspapers, political pamphlets, private correspondence, ethnographic notebooks, novels, handwritten dictionaries, and a suitcase full of poems. By "reading across" these seemingly disparate sources, I saw how Caribbean administrators overcame divisions of language and geography, creating new connections between Africa and the Caribbean. In short, by following their boundary-crossing examples, I uncovered histories made incommensurable by the design of colonial archives.[19]

After completing my research, however, I struggled to find a suitable model for bringing my sources together. In the end, I produced a dissertation that was constrained by a biographical mode of intellectual history, one that reified the categories and cartographies of empire. When I began revising that work and writing this book, I became increasingly frustrated with these shortcomings. The British and French empires had fragmented the lives of people such as Lebert Veitch and Dandeson Crowther and then reproduced this fragmentation in the colonial archives that recorded their stories. Yet Veitch and Crowther, along with many others, had transcended these doubled fragmentations, leaving traces of extra-imperial networks of belonging across the Atlantic. How could I assemble my sources into narratives that would reflect both the disjunctures of empires *and* the moments of connection that emerged outside their grasp? And how could I historicize the effects of colonial archives without reproducing their forms?

It had not been enough, I realized, to shift away geographically from London and Paris and toward obscure archives not found on the old maps of colony-metropole research itineraries. More important was to move away from the epistemologies of empire that have undergirded much scholarship on Africa and the Caribbean over the past century.[20] Indeed, the conventions of academic history writing prescribe boundaries of knowledge production in the same manner as colonial archives.[21] The result is an institutionalized fragmentation of forms and methods under the guise of "disciplinarity," a broken geography of inquiry.[22] Seeking a new framework to bring together my disjointed sources, I turned to the writings of Caribbean intellectuals and found inspiration in the figure of scattered islands.

> Looking through a map
> of the Antilles, you see how time
> has trapped
> its humble servants here. De-
> scendants of the slave do not

lie in the lap
of the more fortunate
gods. The rat
in the warehouse is as much king
as the sugar he plunders.
But if your eyes
are kinder, you will observe
butterflies
how they fly higher
and higher before their hope dries
with endeavour
and they fall among flies.[23]

Form and Fragmentation

Earthquakes, like the one that hit Jamaica in 1907, have played a central role in Caribbean history. The archipelago itself was shaped—and continues to be shaped—by tectonic shifts thousands of feet below sea level. No less significant have been the seismic changes wrought by European imperialism: the genocides of Indigenous peoples, the enslavement of Africans, the creation of plantation societies, the importation of indentured laborers from Asia, underdevelopment, and neocolonialism. The reverberations of these geological and imperial ruptures have imposed new political, cultural, and economic geographies on the Caribbean.[24] They have also produced a view of the region as fragmented—islands separated not only by water, but also by history, language, nation, race, and other factors.

Caribbean intellectuals have long questioned such representations, however, asserting the region instead as a space of relation. Sylvia Wynter, for example, contrasts the "alienation" of the plantation with the "folk culture" of the plot, or provision grounds. The plantation and its heirs, she writes, have used "the myth of history" to maintain their power, while the plot, with "its own history," is a space that offers "other possibilities" and connections, a "social order" outside of the plantation system.[25] Édouard Glissant similarly questions the dominant narratives of a fragmented Caribbean, suggesting that the "subterranean convergences" of the region challenge a "linear, hierarchical vision of a single History."[26] Unlike the Mediterranean, Glissant writes, "a sea that concentrates," the Caribbean Sea "explodes the scattered lands into an arc."[27] George Lamming, meanwhile, sees the islands of the Caribbean as a "continuous family of mountains" that

"broke and fell beneath the sea." "Long submerged," he writes, these mountains "left an archipelago of peaks like a swarm of green children patiently awaiting its return."[28] And Daniel Maximin describes the Caribbean as a "rosary of islands," a space whose "open insularity" has generated an "archipelagic consciousness."[29]

An earlier variation on these powerful ideas comes from Aimé Césaire's landmark poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. In a frequently cited passage, Césaire describes the ruptures of the Caribbean:

> Iles cicatrices des eaux
> Iles évidences de blessures
> Iles miettes
> Iles informes
>
> Islands scars of the waters
> Islands evidence of wounds
> Islands crumbs
> Islands unformed[30]

For Césaire, these islands are "scars" and "crumbs," disjointed by time and space. They are also "evidence" of a brutal history that has left the Caribbean divided and wounded. A few lines later, however, Césaire asserts that these fragmented islands are also potent sources for imagining a new formation:

> Raison rétive tu ne m'empêcheras pas de lancer
> absurde sur les eaux au gré des courants de ma soif
> votre forme, îles difformes,
> votre fin, mon défi.
>
> Mulish reason you will not prevent me from casting
> absurd upon the waters at the mercy of the currents of my thirst
> your form, deformed islands,
> your end, my challenge.[31]

Even "mulish reason," Césaire declares, will not prevent him from pursuing his "challenge": finding coherence in these crumbs, "casting" these fragments together, and transforming the colonized, "deformed" geography of the Caribbean into an arc.

Particularly striking in Césaire's reflections on form and fragmentation is the word "*informes*," a French adjective that evokes a dizzying spiral of meanings. Most dictionaries translate *informe* as "shapeless," "formless," or "without form," the latter recalling its use at the beginning of the book of Genesis: "La terre était informe et vide." In their 1983 English translation of the *Cahier*,

however, Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith translated "*informes*" as "unformed."[32] This peculiar, though productive, translation pulls the adjective in multiple directions simultaneously. On one hand, *unformed* looks backward, to something that once had form but was rendered shapeless. Yet *unformed* also gestures to the future, anticipating the possibility of a new form only beginning to take shape. This translation thus contains both incomplete destruction and inchoate creation, past and future circulating within each other, new forms emerging from the decomposition of older ones. In the context of Césaire's poem, "Islands unformed" suggests both the breaking down of a perspective that sees the Caribbean as fragmented islands and, at the same time, the possibility of joining those islands together into a new, cohesive form.

Césaire's decision to use *informe* also connects this passage with the thinking of French philosopher Georges Bataille. In 1929, two years before Césaire arrived in Paris as a scholarship student from Martinique, Bataille launched *Documents*. This short-lived publication about archaeology, art, and ethnography brought together intellectuals such as Michael Leiris, Marcel Griaule, and Carl Einstein.[33] Rather than reproducing the forms of other art journals, Bataille and his collaborators attempted to unsettle oppositions such as high/low and modern/primitive with ironic and often provocative juxtapositions of image and text. As Leiris later wrote, *Documents* was "a war machine against received ideas."[34] One recurring feature of the journal was the lively "Dictionnaire Critique," and in the December 1929 issue, Bataille offered a definition for *informe*, quoted here in part:

> Un dictionnaire commencerait à partir du moment où il ne donnerait plus le sens mais les besognes des mots. Ainsi *informe* n'est pas seulement un adjectif ayant tel sens mais un terme qui servent à déclasser, exigeant généralement que chaque chose ait sa forme.[35]
>
> A dictionary would begin as of the moment when it no longer provided the meanings of words but their tasks. In this way *formless* is not only an adjective having such and such a meaning, but a term serving to declassify, requiring in general that every thing should have a form.[36]

In Bataille's rendering, the "task" of *informe* was to "declassify" the enclosures of form. Much like *Documents* itself, Bataille used *informe* to challenge naturalized categories and structures and to disrupt their power to exclude and delegitimize. Later in the entry he also referred derisively to the forms that "*les hommes académiques*" imposed on their objects of study. Yet Bataille's paradoxical definition—or, rather, "negation of definition"—also allowed for other possibilities of representation: *informe* "requir[ed]" the generation of form.[37]

There are clear resonances of this potent ambiguity in Césaire's usage of *informe*, with its tensions between destruction and creation. It seems unlikely that Césaire had any direct connections with Bataille, though it is possible that Césaire read *Documents*—he was an admirer of Leo Frobenius, who contributed to the journal.[38] Whatever the case, the multiple versions of the *Cahier* reveal that Césaire had a careful relationship with the word. "*Iles informes*," and the surrounding section, did not appear in the original version of the poem, published in *Volontés* in 1939.[39] Nor did this section appear in either of the 1947 revisions.[40] Rather, Césaire added this conspicuous fragment toward the end of the 1956 edition published by Présence Africaine.[41] Perhaps as he prepared this "édition définitive" in the wake of the disappointments of departmentalization, he found refuge in a word that conjured a new geography, one that disrupted and unsettled the legacies of French colonialism in the Caribbean.[42] For Césaire, this unformed geography may not have been within reach politically, but poetically it was within his grasp.[43]

There is an echo of Césaire's *informe* in the thinking of Kamau Brathwaite. In a 1992 essay, "Caliban's Garden," Brathwaite recalled a transformative childhood experience in Barbados. Walking along the beach near Bridgetown, Brathwaite had a "vision" of the "sweep of islands" between Florida and Venezuela:

> I also began to recognise that these broken islands were the sunken tops of a mountain range that had been there a million years before. That in addition to the death of the Amer-Indians I was also witnessing the echo of an earlier catastrophe. That the islands had been part of a mainland. That we once had been whole—and that what we now had between each other was holes. But that whole and hole, those two types of things should somehow come together. That was a challenge I knew I had to be able to span. To find the rhythm.[44]

Brathwaite's "challenge," much like Césaire's "*défi*," was to span the "holes"—or "scars"—of the Caribbean Sea, to disrupt the impositions of colonial forms. Looking through a map of the Antilles, there were only dots, a mountain range *unformed* into "broken islands." In the spaces between, however, there was possibility, a plural unity that might come to be, as yet *unformed*. This "challenge" is a thread that runs through many of Brathwaite's other works, both academic and poetic.[45] Whether writing about African cultures in the Americas or about the effects of colonialism in the Caribbean, he sought to "find the rhythm," to bridge the "holes" with the "whole," to join the fragments with form. As he noted in the famous one-sentence conclusion of his 1974 essay on creolization, "The unity is submarine."[46]

A year later, in 1975, Brathwaite used this same phrase—"the unity is submarine"—at the beginning of an essay titled "Caribbean Man in Space and Time."[47] Reviewing the state of scholarship on the Caribbean, Brathwaite, like Wynter, criticized the focus on the plantation as the "main unit of study," a unit that derived from the plantation system itself.[48] In its place, Brathwaite advocated for new attention to culture, "creative arts," oral sources, and the plural processes of creolization. He also called for a "multi-dimensional model" as an alternative unit of Caribbean study. This model, he explained, would attend to "interaction between inner and outer plantation, inner and outer metropole, and the lateral and diagonal relationships between these."[49] At the end of the essay, Brathwaite closed with a variation on his aphorism: "The unit is submarine." Kelly Baker Josephs suggests that this "repetition-with-a-difference" may have been Brathwaite's subtle way of emphasizing the importance of searching for new, submerged units of study. For Brathwaite, it was imperative to trace "lateral and diagonal relationships" beyond the plantation, even if they at first appeared unformed in the sky-blue frame of the map.[50]

The layered meanings, translations, and genealogies of *informe*, articulated through the poetics of Césaire and Brathwaite, provide a conceptual language for writing the scattered histories of Caribbean administrators in Africa. This language, with its residue of dissolution, carries the colonial logics that produced my fragmented archive—the plantation, the holes, the broken islands, the hot lies, the imposition of a linear, hierarchical History. At the same time, the futurity implicit in this language holds possibilities for disrupting colonial logics and casting these fragments together in new forms—the plot, the whole, the arc, the continuous family of mountains, the rosary of islands. *An Unformed Map* embraces the productive ambiguity of this language. By tracing the submarine convergences of an unformed archive, this study uncovers how Caribbean administrators in Africa transcended the fault lines of empire and created new geographies of belonging.

> Looking through a map
> of the islands, you see
> that history teaches
> that when hope
> splinters, when the pieces
> of broken glass lie
> in the sunlight,
> when only lust rules
> the night, when the dust

is not swept out
of the houses,
when men make noises
louder than the sea's
voices; then the rope
will never unravel
its knots, the branding
iron's travelling flame that teaches
us pain, will never be
extinguished. The islands' jewels:
Saba, Barbuda, dry flat-
tened Antigua, will remain rocks,
dots, in the sky-blue frame
of the map.[51]

Narratives

In the chapters that follow, I draw on the conceptual language of *informe* to assemble my disjointed sources, making narrative form—and fragmentation—an integral part of my arguments. To this end, I pay close attention to composition, structure, staging, vocabulary, and tone.[52] I also inflect the text with images, "temporal distortions," and extracts of letters, fiction, and poetry to represent the contingencies and confluences in the lives of Caribbean administrators.[53] Finally, to disrupt the artificial divisions of academic disciplines, I blend methods from history, literary studies, human geography, linguistic anthropology, and ethnography.[54]

In chapter 1, I examine the economic and ideological factors that prompted Caribbean people to join the British and French colonial administrations in Africa. Following the tone of my sources, I present this historical context in the constrained idiom of the colonial archive, looking through a map of the islands. Chapter 2 continues in this stilted, conventional manner, drawing mainly on the petitions of René Maran in Oubangui-Chari and Cunliffe Hoyte in the Gold Coast. I use their particular experiences to describe the general in-betweenness of Caribbean administrators in Africa, especially their fraught relationships with Africans and Europeans. These petitions, however, also show how Maran and Hoyte began to question the contradictions of colonial categories, and I mirror this shift in my prose, using termites, metaphorically, to disrupt the yellowing mustiness of *sentiments distingués* and humble, obedient servants.

Chapter 3, the turning point, begins with a series of "orchestrated fragments."[55] In my analysis of these fragments, I suggest that the scopic metaphors that prevail in scholarship on colonialism only serve the illusion of archival plenitude. Then, using the story of Francis Simmons, I narrate my own frustrations with the seductive forms of colonial archives. The chapter closes with examples of Caribbean administrators creating new geographical alignments amid exclusion and alienation. The remaining four chapters follow this example, assembling disparate sources with new methodological alignments in four detailed case studies of African-Caribbean exchanges.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on translation, examining how learning African languages changed the intellectual trajectories of David McNeil-Stewart of Trinidad and Félix Eboué of French Guiana. Chapter 4 examines how McNeil-Stewart's study of Fante, Twi, and Ewe in the Gold Coast allowed him to develop close relationships with leaders in Kumasi and Keta, including leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. I also speculate on the ways he may have translated Trinidad in West Africa as he reflected on the linguistic connections between Akan languages and the Creole he grew up speaking in Belmont. The chapter ends with McNeil-Stewart's son, Kenneth, and his place in the burgeoning print culture of 1930s Accra.

In chapter 5, I explore Eboué's understudied ethnographic work from Central Africa and his intimate networks in Oubangui-Chari. More specifically, I use his dictionary and collection of Banda folktales to uncover his relationships with interpreters and colonial-appointed chiefs. I also chart his development of a "*géographie cordiale*" with figures such as Fily Dabo Sissoko as he moved back and forth across the Atlantic in the later stages of his career. Finally, I consider how, after his death, Eboué's ethnographic fictions transformed him into a Pan-African symbol.

Chapter 6 turns to the social and political networks of three teachers who worked in the Gold Coast and Nigeria: Joseph Britton of British Guiana, Edith Goring of Barbados, and Lebert Veitch of Jamaica. I focus in particular on their relationships with their students, some of whom became leading figures of West African nationalism in the mid-twentieth century. Rather than narrating the stories of Britton, Goring, and Veitch chronologically, however, according to the forms of the archives that hold their stories, I have assembled them in a series of layered, interconnected recollections.

Finally, in chapter 7, I turn to the remarkable case of Henri Jean-Louis Baghio'o, a lawyer from Guadeloupe who worked as a judge in French Congo from 1923 to 1925. Using Jean-Louis's suitcase of poetry, I trace his journeys across the geographies and temporalities of decolonization, from 1950s Algeria

to nineteenth-century Guadeloupe to sixteenth-century Mali. Written mostly in rhyming stanzas, the poems highlight a trajectory from civil servant to devout anticolonialist. The poems also draw together a network of politicians and activists that Jean-Louis encountered in Congo, Cameroon, and Sénégal and around the Caribbean. Ultimately, by articulating these sources and methods in creative dialogue, this study destabilizes the optic of empire and challenges the structures of colonial knowledge production, opening new possibilities for gathering the fragments of scattered histories.

In Book Three of *Omeros*, Derek Walcott describes Achille's dreamlike voyage from St. Lucia to Africa. Winding his way up a river in a pirogue, he arrives at a settlement of "peaked huts," where he meets his father, Afolabe.[56] Pointing to their hearts, they introduce themselves, but Achille cannot remember the name his father gave him. Nor can his father, even as he tries to explain its importance. A sound is "missing," and the fault lines of "the deaf sea" come to the surface.[57] They are separated by language, slavery, empire, and three centuries. Achille is "only the ghost / of a name."[58] As he finds his way back to St. Lucia, Walcott describes the transformations of the Middle Passage: "Each man" became "the nameless freight of himself," leaving "their remembered / shadows to the firelight."[59]

Like Achille, Caribbean administrators had to reckon with missing sounds, forgotten shadows, and lost meanings. Not African, but not British or French either, they moved along the slippages in-between. At times, eager to assert their imperial identities, they reinforced the geographies of empire. At other times, they found themselves isolated and betrayed, embodying the contradictions of colonialism. In these spaces of exclusion, however, there germinated new geographies of belonging, grounded not in particular imperial territories but in the networks they formed across the deaf sea, the traces of an unformed map.

Geography, as Katherine McKittrick writes, may appear "static" but is always "alterable terrain."[60] Caribbean administrators understood this as well as anyone. Their mobility, facilitated by the British and French empires, also allowed them to subvert imperial forms. As they cut across the Atlantic, their trajectories became transversals, evading, disrupting, and undoing colonial divisions of space.[61] At the same time, they were assembling new connections beyond the sky-blue frame of the map. By forging ties across disjuncture, they conjugated the tensions and multiple temporalities of *informe* into action, creating a transatlantic nexus between Africa and the Caribbean.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. For eyewitness accounts of the earthquake, see "The 1907 Earthquake," in Paton and Smith, *The Jamaica Reader*, 199–202; Caine, *The Cruise of the Port Kingston*; and Treves, *The Cradle of the Deep*. See also Smith, "A Tale of Two Tragedies."

2. "News Telegrams," *Lagos Standard*, January 23, 1907, 6.

3. On the Niger Delta Pastorate and the growth of independent churches in late nineteenth-century Nigeria, see Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891*; Hanciles, "Dandeson Coates Crowther and the Niger Delta Pastorate"; and Tasie, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta, 1864–1918*.

4. In 1807, British ships began patrolling the West African coast to "liberate" Africans aboard slave ships, and about 75,000 "liberated Africans" ended up in Sierra Leone. Some of those who were originally from Nigeria later returned. The best known of these Saro returnees was Samuel Ajayi Crowther. For a recent history of "liberated Africans" in West Africa, see Anderson, *Abolition in Sierra Leone*.

5. Lebert Josiah Veitch, letter to the editor, *Lagos Standard*, June 5, 1907, 6–7.

6. "Current Items," *Daily Gleaner*, June 29, 1907, 2.

7. Their arrivals were part of a longer history of migration from the Caribbean to Africa. In the late eighteenth century, for example, the British deported maroons from Jamaica to Sierra Leone via Nova Scotia. Others came in subsequent decades as missionaries, soldiers, and civil servants or seeking to escape the constraints of the post-emancipation Caribbean. On these migrations, see Banton, *More Auspicious Shores*; Blyden, *West Indians in West Africa, 1808–1880*; Dyde, *The Empty Sleeve*; Nicol, "West Indians in West Africa"; and Wariboko, *Ruined by "Race."*

8. Traces, as Paul Wenzel Geissler and Guillaume Lachenal suggest, "always point to the absence of their cause" and are "always remains of something alive." Geissler and Lachenal, "Brief Instructions for Archaeologists of African Futures," 16.

9. Brathwaite, "Islands," in *The Arrivants*, 204–5.

10. See, e.g., Stovall, *Paris Noir*; Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*; Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*; Stephens, *Black Empire*; Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*; Matera, *Black London*; and Goebel, *Anti-imperial Metropolis*.

11. This tendency also characterizes many of the ships launched by the call to study colony and metropole in a "single analytic field." Stoler and Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony," 4. On the "staging" of African history in the twentieth century, see Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa*. For a similar critique, see Mann, "Locating Colonial Histories."

12. Feierman, "Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories," 206. The larger argument in this section draws from Feierman's essay.

13. Recent works on "back to Africa" migrations from the United States tend to be similarly grounded in the imperial grasp of US historiography, often overlooking the methods and languages employed by historians of Africa. Two important exceptions are Lindsay, *Atlantic Bonds*, and Vinson, *The Americans are Coming!*

14. An important model in this regard from the postindependence period is Bedasse, *Jah Kingdom*.

15. The two main historiographical reference points for this topic are Blyden, *West Indians in West Africa*, and Hélénon, *French Caribbeans in Africa*.

16. The British Security Service, for example, kept personal files on figures such as C. L. R. James, Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, and Nnamdi Azikiwe. NAUK, KV2—The Security Service: Personal Files. In France, meanwhile, the Service de Liaison avec des Originaires des Territoires de la France Outre-Mer monitored colonial subjects in France and wrote monthly reports on "les milieux indigènes," including "la colonie noire." ANOM, SLOTFOM III.

17. See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, esp. chap. 3. Keguro Macharia similarly suggests that "encounters" between Africans and Afro-Caribbeans in the twentieth century "generate[d] forms of being together unimagined and unimaginable within white-supremacist frames." Macharia, "On Being Area-Studied," 185.

18. I was also following Brent Hayes Edwards's suggestion to trace diasporic connections outside of colonial metropoles. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 9. On this point, see also Putnam, *Radical Moves*; and Putnam, "Circum-Atlantic Print Circuits and Internationalism from the Peripheries in the Interwar Era."

19. Lisa Lowe describes a "practice of reading across archives" to disrupt the "discretely bounded objects, methods, and temporal frameworks canonized by national history." Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 6. Jean Allman reckons with similar issues in the writing of postcolonial African history. Allman, "Phantoms of the Archive."

20. On the power of the "colonial library," see Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*. Here I am also following the arguments of Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*; Mignolo, *Local Histories, Global Designs*; as well as Ranajit Guha's *Subaltern Studies* collections.

21. Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency."

22. "Discipline," as Katherine McKittrick writes, "is empire." McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 36.

23. Brathwaite, "Islands," 204.

24. Ferdinand, *A Decolonial Ecology*.

25. Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation." See also Scott, "The Re-enchantment of Humanism."

26. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 66.

27. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 33–34.

28. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 16.

29. Maximin also suggests that the geography of the Caribbean "evades (*déjoue*) representations of space, its scales and boundaries." Maximin, *Les fruits du cyclone*, 89, 100, 107–8. Similar declarations about the underlying connections of the Caribbean islands mark the work of many other scholars, poets, novelists, and artists, including Derek Walcott, Alejo Carpentier, and Antonio Benítez-Rojo.

30. Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1983), 54–55. The translation is from Eshleman and Smith, *Aimé Césaire*, 75.

31. Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1983), 55. The translation is from Edwards, "Aimé Césaire and the Syntax of Influence," 11. My analysis of this passage also draws from Edwards's article.

32. Eshleman and Smith, *Aimé Césaire*, 74–75. In their 2017 translation of Césaire's "Séisme," Eshleman and A. James Arnold also translate "*informe*" as "unformed." Arnold and Eshleman, *The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire*, 532–33.

33. For background on *Documents*, see Hollier, "La valeur d'usage de l'impossible."

34. Leiris, "De Bataille l'impossible à l'impossible *Documents*," 689.

35. Bataille, "Informe," 382.

36. Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, s.v. "Formless," 51–52. This volume includes the complete collection of the "Dictionnaire." On Bataille and *informe*, see also Bois and Krauss, *Formless*.

37. Alastair Brotchie, "Introduction," in Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, 23.

38. Frobenius, "Dessins rupestres du sud de la Rhodésie." On Césaire, Bataille, and the colonial context of interwar France, see Edwards, "The Ethnics of Surrealism."

39. Césaire, "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal." On the different versions of the *Cahier*, see Arnold, *The Original 1939 Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*; and Gil, "Bridging the Middle Passage." My thanks to Alex Gil for sharing the different versions of the poem.

40. Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (New York, 1947); and Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris, 1947).

41. Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris, 1956). Césaire inserted this section just before the strophe about geography quoted in one of the epigraphs for this book. As far as I can tell, this was the first time Césaire had used *informe* in his poetry. The word also appears in the poem "Séisme," published in *Les Lettres Nouvelles* in 1959.

42. The 1956 edition of the *Cahier* was published in June 1956, and four months later, Césaire made his decisive departure from the French Communist Party. "The anticolonialism of French communists still bears the marks of the colonialism it is fighting," he wrote in his famous letter of resignation. Near the end of the letter, he also denounced the "petrified forms" that "obstruct[ed]" the path forward. Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez," 150, 152.

43. Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

44. Brathwaite, "Caliban's Garden," 4. This essay was originally part of Brathwaite's 1990 lecture series, "Conversations with Caliban," at the University of Kent.

45. See, e.g., Brathwaite, "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature"; Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*; Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820*; Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*; and Brathwaite, *Middle Passages*.

46. Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, 64.

47. Brathwaite, "Caribbean Man in Space and Time," 1. This essay was reprinted in 2021 in *Small Axe*, along with an introductory essay by Kelly Baker Josephs, "Caribbean Studies in Digital Space and Time." My analysis in this section draws on Josephs's essay and from Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole."

48. Brathwaite, "Caribbean Man in Space and Time," 3–4.

49. Brathwaite, "Caribbean Man in Space and Time," 11.

50. Josephs, "Caribbean Studies in Digital Space and Time," 106–7.

51. Brathwaite, "Islands," 204–5.

52. Nancy Rose Hunt suggests that historians might use form to "create shapes, suggest meanings and tones, confront enigmas, enable surprise, and even please the senses." Hunt, "History as Form, with Simmel in Tow," 128, 144.

53. Hunt, "History as Form, with Simmel in Tow," 137.

54. In my use of sources, I follow the example of McKittrick, who, drawing on Glissant, writes that "subaltern spatial practices . . . are written into and expressed through the poetics of landscape . . . through theoretical, fictional, poetic, musical, or dramatic texts." McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxiii.

55. On "orchestrated fragments," I take inspiration from Edwards, "The Taste of the Archive."

56. Walcott, *Omeros*, 135.

57. Walcott, *Omeros*, 137.

58. Walcott, *Omeros*, 138–39. Earlier, in Book Two, Afolabe appears as a slave building a fort in St. Lucia. He is described as "Achille's ancestor," and "the small Admiral" renames him Achilles—not Achille. Walcott, *Omeros*, 82–83. On this point and other acts of naming in *Omeros*, see McKinsey, "Missing Sounds and Mutable Meanings."

59. Walcott, *Omeros*, 150.

60. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xvii.

61. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 66–67. On transversals and Atlantic history, see Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom*, 5–10.

CHAPTER 1. FROM THE CARIBBEAN TO AFRICA

1. NAUK, CO 111/529, Barbour-James Colonial Service Application, November 5, 1901.

2. This description of Barbour-James's childhood in Epsom comes from his application form and from Jan Carew's 1958 novel, *The Wild Coast*, about life in Tarlogie, a village on the Corentyne coast close to Epsom.

3. NAUK, CO 111/529, Barbour-James to Governor of British Guiana, November 23, 1901.

4. NAUK, CO 111/529, Governor of British Guiana to Secretary of State for the Colonies, December 4, 1901.

5. NAUK, CO 111/529, Colonial Office Minutes, February 5, 1902.

6. NAUK, CO 111/531, Barbour-James, President of the Victoria Institute Villagers Association, to Government Secretary, March 14, 1902. On imperial culture and the Boer War in the British Caribbean, see Smith, *Strolling in the Ruins*, esp. chap. 1.

7. NAUK, CO 111/531, Governor of British Guiana to Secretary of State for the Colonies, March 21, 1902.