Over the past few years, my primary research interest has been the transnational practices and imaginings of the Caribbean writer as nomadic subject, and the shifting social conditions that facilitate the kind of flexibility in geographic, social, and cultural positioning that nomadic subjectivity suggests. The purpose of this study is to produce a patterned vision of nomadism as condition and practice of the creative imagination in the Caribbean. This paper is more modest in its scope. It is not meant as a systematic overview, but rather as a siting device.¹

One challenge in pursuing this study has been how to focus attention on the role of the creative imagination as a social practice in a discourse currently dominated by social science theories of cross-spatial phenomena. For example, one brilliant study of the cultural logics of transnationality that stirred my interest in the subject in fact recognized only one form of art, the art of government. So, in seeking new approaches to a well-worn theme in Caribbean writing, a singular
challenge has been how to establish and maintain an analytical link between the creative imagination as a site of individual agency and the political, economic, and cultural politics embedded in the transnational practices and imaginings of the Caribbean writer. And how to do this without devaluing either the artistic process or the idea of belonging to a productive, primary place that is both colonial and post, and has assumed the contours of the nation-state. Nomadic subjectivity, and nomadic thought with its implied open-endedness seem to offer a way to conceptualize this project in the provisional, never finished shape of poetics and practice, rather than the relatively closed discourse of nation-states and boundaries. This is not because these discourses are not grist for the Caribbean imagination; they are always part of the equation.

In 2004, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, in a scathing editorial “Nomadism, Nomadology, Postcolonialism: By Way of Introduction,” John K. Noyes determined that it was unethical and opprobrious to use concepts of nomadism in postcolonial discourse, and he cited Caren Kaplan’s *Questions of Travel* (1996) among others in support of his position.¹ But my curiosity was spiked. If Édouard Glissant could use the values of nomadic subjectivity and nomadic thought so brilliantly to conceptualize errantry in *Poetics of Relation*, I would be perverse enough to explore the option. Of course, Glissant sidesteps the controversy that came to a head with the publication of Gilles Deleuze’s “Nomad Thought” in 1973, which was followed by the compendious *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in 1980. Glissant’s term of choice comes to us in translation as “errantry,” errant thought and subjectivity which he situates within the conceptual apparatus of colonialism and the new imperialism. Beyond this, I thought the invention of another terminology would only serve to truncate and disguise a legitimate avenue of thought and I didn’t want to do that. Thus, this paper explores the relation of spatial mobility and the dynamics of critical thought in twentieth-century Caribbean writing and the extent to which spatial mobility functions not only as evidence of the conceptual apparatus of colonialism and the new imperialism, but as “the enabling
presupposition of its critique.” I plan to do this by exploring facets of nomadic subjectivity, or subjectivity in a nomadic mode in the figures of Claude McKay, C. L. R. James, George Lamming and Derek Walcott.

I think we would all agree that the heterogeneous Caribbean imagination, to use Wilson Harris’s phrase, is of necessity located in the interstitial spaces within and between national spatial boundaries. Even within existing national and territorial demarcations in the Caribbean, the imagination establishes its own boundaries from one work of art to another. It is the nation or native landscape and more than the product of either. It is always more than the archive of its genealogy. It may be subaltern, resistant, colonial or post, but in the performance and application of cultural interaction the heterogeneous imagination introduces and interpolates all such categories of subjectivity. In his interview with David Scott, George Lamming makes a strong case for the potency and relevance of the imagination, or as he phrases it, the sovereignty of the imagination:

The sovereignty which literally means your freedom from external influence, external interference in your domestic affairs, that is limited in the sense that you may not always have control to shield or protect yourself from interventions. But what I'm claiming that is not limited is another kind of sovereignty, and that is the capacity you have for choosing and making and remaking that self which you discover is you, is distinctly you. And which in a way is always unfinished, but it has a very special essence that is you, and its power is that it allows you to create the meanings that are to be given to what happens to you. (Scott 147)

As David Scott reminds us in the introductory notes to his interview with Lamming in Small Axe in 2002:

For Lamming, as a consequence, the sovereignty of the imagination has neither to do with the sequestering of
creativity from, nor its absorption (74) by, the world of affairs – this would be merely bad faith. Rather an authentic sovereignty of the imagination has to do with the active will to refuse submission to the shibboleths that seek at every turn to inspire our self-contempt and our unthinking docility, and to command our understandings of, and our hopes for, what it might mean to live as a free community of valid persons. (74-75)

I do not want to lose sight of the sovereignty of the imagination, as a core question in how Caribbean writers negotiate the web of cultural meanings within the normative milieus of print capitalism, how they negotiate the cultural logics of flexible citizenship and the structural tensions between a territorially based Caribbean writer and a deterritorialized one, and all the degrees between.5

I think it is fair to say that Caribbean writers in the twentieth century always made their art against the commodity culture of late capitalism, and they have managed nonetheless to fashion innovative forms of art and transgressive ways of seeing.6 In “Language and the Politics of Ethnicity,” the Dr. Cheddi Jagan Memorial Lecture, York University, 2 March 2002, George Lamming put it this way:

If the metropole directed what is standard and required by the cultural establishment; it is at the periphery of colony or neo-colony that the imagination resists, destabilizes and transforms the status of the word in action. This a mark of cultural sovereignty; the free definition and articulation of the collective self, whatever the rigour of external constraints. (25)

My interest in nomadic thought and subjectivity as a trope and practice in Caribbean writing is that it highlights the networks of negotiation and association that characterize Caribbean consciousness as an ongoing and contradictory process. The imagination of necessity inhabits multiple dimensions of time and space, language and desire, and my quest is for a critical frame reference that opens up the
discourse to poetics and practice though with due regard to “the politics of location.” We would probably agree that Caribbean writers consistently evoke nomadic figurations of identity, thought and practice, though they do not necessarily use variations of the term nomadism to describe the shifting figurations embedded in exile, errantry, migration, travel, journey, flight, quest, itinerancy, homelessness, shipwreck, vagrant, vagabond, castaway, crusader, prodigal, and so on. So why should I add nomad to this list? In part, it is an attempt (in Kamau Brathwaite’s words) “to study the fragments/whole” (1); to see whether the concept of nomadic subjectivity, thought and practice, currently postmodern descriptors--can provide a meaningful framework for exploring an unsettled, restless, wayward, noncompliant disposition in twentieth-century Caribbean writers and their writing, whether demarcated as colonial or postcolonial or nationalist or internationalist.

Any dictionary will include a definition of nomadism as a way of life in which a community has no permanent settlement but moves from place to place, seasonally and within a defined territory, in search of food, water, and grazing land. In fact, for hunting and gathering societies, nomadism does not imply aimless wandering, but suggests an organized rotation of settlements to ensure maximum use of available natural resources. The pattern is circular rather than linear, it is rehearsed and predictable and a strategy for survival. At the other extreme, nomadism is a state of mind. According to Gilles Deleuze:

The nomad is not necessarily one who moves: some voyages take place in situ, are trips in intensity. Even historically, nomads are not necessarily those who move about like migrants. On the contrary, they do not move; nomads, they nevertheless stay in the same place and continually evade the codes of settled people. (Deleuze, “Nomad Thought” 149)

The space-time continuum of the first definition is anthropological and linked to climate related circumstances and the availability of natural resources. The second seems perversely disconnected from the first as
a socially and culturally specific practice. In “Difference, Diversity, and Nomadic Subjectivity,” Rosi Braidotti concludes that the transposition that occurs from one definition to the other reflects the subversion of “historically-established, habits of thought that, until now, have provided the 'standard' view of human subjectivity” (n.p.). She adds her own figuration of the nomad:

The nomad expresses my own figurations of a situated, culturally differentiated understanding of the subject. This subject can also be described as post-modern/industrial/colonial, depending on one's locations. Those locations do differ and those differences do matter. In so far as axes of differentiations like class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and others interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, the notion of nomadism refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once. Nomadic subjectivity is about the simultaneity of complex and multi-layered identities. (Braidotti, “Difference” n.p.)

Like Deleuze, Braidotti writes from a postmodern perspective, and she remains mindful of the distinction Anthony Appiah makes between the historical locations of postcoloniality and postmodernism. Yet, as she observes, both posts similarly problematize “questions about entitlement, agency and subjectivity which continue to rotate around the issue of cultural identity” (Braidotti n.p.). For Braidotti, “The nomadic style is about transitions and passages without pre-determined destinations or lost homelands” (n.p.). And importantly, “nomadism refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour. It is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of travelling” (n.p.). That may be so, but as our writers remind us continually, figurations of travel are a feature of life in the smaller island
and coastal societies of the Caribbean and among peoples of the sea, even when for one reason or another they are turned into prisons or fortresses, and then desire continues to tease the imagination about what lies beyond island horizons.

My interest in contemporary theories of nomadic subjectivity and nomadic thought is that they project multi-dimensional phenomena in Caribbean writing across time and space; in fact they collapse both if we agree with Édouard Glissant that the thought of errantry, or nomadic thought if you prefer, is a poetics. According to Glissant in *Poetics of Relation*, the thinking of errantry and totality (not be confused with universality as he reminds us), is “the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (11); it is relational and dialectical as opposed to the thinking of territory and self which he perceives as ontological and dual, and the thinking of voyage and other as mechanical and multiple (18). I thought it worth re-examining this multi-faceted thematic—voyage, territory and self, errantry and totality (all part of the packaging of nomadic subjectivity and nomadic thought)—bearing in mind some of the major historical changes in the twentieth-century Caribbean that might contextualize shifting configurations of nomadic thought and subjectivity. For example, what began as colonial/anti-colonial discourse in twentieth-century Anglophone Caribbean writing, and for many the vision of a Federated West Indian nation, rather abruptly changed direction in 1962 in favour of what Kamau Brathwaite has referred to as “the `pebble' or single territory complex” (2). Given the size and fragility of the islands, their long history of competing colonialisms and occupation of one kind or another, the idea of the island nation joined with utopian dreams of self-sufficiency, authenticity and disalienation to fashion the social imaginary of the new nations of the Caribbean. Pre-independence anti-colonial anti-imperial discourse was adapted to the discourse of national independence--defined boundaries and managed internal and external political,
economic and social relationships. How then did this shift from agitation for independence from colonial rule to the politics of nation as island space reposition the role of the writer as nomadic subject in Caribbean literary discourse, or did it? What, if anything, was enabled or disabled in the process? If the wanderlust of errantry/nomadic thought is an element of the literature of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism in a period when the nation does not yet exist, in a period when “identification is with a culture … not yet with a nation” (Glissant 13). What happens then to “errantry’s imaginary vision” (20), to the thought of errantry (21), when most nations of the Caribbean turned towards nation-building and continuing the process of decolonization? How did symbolic structures change in classic texts of Caribbean writing?

My point of departure on this occasion, as in previous phases of this study, is “The Occasion for Speaking” in George Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), where he speculates that “If the West Indian writer had taken up residence in America--as Claud MacKay [sic] did--his development would probably be of a different, indeed, of an opposed order to that of a man who matured in England” (24-25). Of course, Lamming provided a working model for this kind of exercise in *The Pleasures of Exile* (first published in 1960), where he thematized/theorized the transnational practices and imaginings of the nomadic Caribbean writer and the social conditions that enabled his mobility as a colonial condition. In establishing an analytical link between individual agency and the political, economic, and cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts, Lamming used the language of migration and exile with some irony to underscore the ways in which colonialism was destructive to the Caribbean psyche in personal and social aspects. In “Sea of Stories,” an interview with Bill
Schwarz that appeared in the (London and Manchester) *Guardian* in October 2002, Lamming observed that:

Migration was not a word I would have used to describe what I was doing when I sailed with other West Indians to England in 1950. We simply thought we were going to an England that had been painted in our childhood consciousness as a heritage and a place of welcome. It is the measure of our innocence that neither the claim of heritage nor the expectation of welcome would have been seriously doubted. England was not for us a country with classes and conflicts of interest like the islands we left. It was the name of a responsibility whose origin may have coincided with the beginning of time. (53)

Lamming argued in *Pleasures* that a colonial relationship to the metropolitan centers of Europe generated both desire and flexibility in geographical and social positioning for the Caribbean writer. *The Pleasures of Exile* is, among other things, a personal and archival record of the way that the Caribbean writer as nomadic subject negotiated the managed cultural connectedness and mobility generated by colonialism and the desire for freedom from its tentacles. On one level in *Pleasures* there is the hermeneutic dismantling of the cultural logics of colonialism, on another a selective embeddedness in a new style of writing being produced by Caribbean writers and public intellectuals like himself, and just as importantly, a cognitive mapping of the African diaspora that begins in the Caribbean, continues in the UK, resumes in West Africa before moving on to the USA, and coming to rest figuratively at the end of the book in his native landscape, Barbados, in a replay of the hail and farewell at the end of *In the Castle of My Skin*. As Glissant conceptualizes errantry, though without reference to Lamming’s *In the Castle* or to *Pleasures*, many of the elements of Glissant’s thought are present in this classic book of errantry.6 Glissant’s *Poetics* is particularly helpful in its sensitivity to the wanderlust
of errantry/nomadism as an element of the literature of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism in a period when the nation does not yet exist: “this thinking of errantry, this errant thought, silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities that yesterday were still triumphant and, at the same time, from difficult, uncertain births of new forms of identity that call to us” (18).

In *Pleasures* Lamming’s reference to McKay is of interest in situating the transnational practices and imaginings of the Caribbean writer and the social conditions that enabled flexibility in geographical and social positioning beyond a direct colonial relationship to Europe. In *Pleasures*, Lamming’s “subject is the migration of the West Indian writer, as colonial and exile” (13), and he asks a series of questions about the phenomenon that anticipate contemporary concerns about the politics of recognition.9 “Why have they migrated? And what, if any, are the peculiar pleasures of exile? Is their journey part of a hunger for recognition? Do they see recognition as a confirmation of the fact that they are writers?” (23). The answers to these questions were apparently, yes and no. Lamming’s rhetorical quest, as he described it, was for “the psychological origins of such a migration so we may be able to reflect on how this journey towards each writer’s expectations may have been responsible for his development both as a man and a writer” (24). In the process he documented and analyzed the cultural logics that shape migration, relocation, and a variety of colonial processes with great specificity. It is in this context that Lamming speculated on migration to the USA as an alternative to the Caribbean writer's migration to the UK in "The Occasion for Speaking" (24-25).7 In this instance, Lamming does not question the necessity of migration in the production of literary capital so much as speculate on the USA as an alternative to the colonial hierarchy of value that made the British critic an agent of recognition and the Caribbean writer an object.
But what then of McKay? When Lamming publishes *Pleasures* in 1960, Claude McKay is already deceased (he died in 1948) and he has in fact left a remarkable record of his development as a writer as internationalist or bad nationalist as he explained it. The broad details of his life are familiar to all of us. Born in Jamaica in 1890, McKay left for the USA in 1912 to attend the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and never returned home. In part at least, this can be explained as forced, the doings of the British Colonial authorities, who were as disturbed as the United States about McKay’s communist associations and activities; they banned McKay from traveling to any of their colonial territories, including Jamaica, and stamped his passport accordingly. But as far as I know there is nothing to suggest that he ever planned to return to Jamaica except through his fiction as in *Gingertown* (1931) and *Banana Bottom* (1933), and his reminiscences of childhood in *The Green Hills of Jamaica* (published posthumously 1979). It is worth remembering that when he publishes his first autobiography *A Long Way from Home* (1937) on his return to the USA, that year is in fact the year of widespread workers’ riots throughout the Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Guyana, etc. and of course the massacre of some 20,000 Haitians in the Dominican Republic). The Caribbean had changed (and not changed) in the years since he left Jamaica in 1912 in respect to steady progress towards independence.

In *A Long Way from Home* (1937), McKay characterizes his relationship with the USA as a stage performance (or masquerade) and uses the agricultural image of grafting to describe his desire to be recognized and valued for his contribution to Black American life and culture. Yet McKay chafed under the restrictive mores of the USA’s institutionalized racism, the class structure of Black American resistance, and a USA radical fear of the left, especially after the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917. In *A Long Way from Home*, he embraced the image of the vagabond troubadour—traveling to England, Russia, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and Morocco (1922-1934) where he claimed to feel most at home, presumably because he
enjoyed a sexual, artistic, and social freedom there that he valued. That is, until French and British colonial authorities began to harass him and he sought to return to the USA and restart his career there (in 1934). His work—fiction, poetry, and non-fiction prose—was published variously in Jamaica, UK, USA, and Russia. From the time he left Jamaica, he was consistently anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and critical of state nationalist hegemony in any form. He is the proletarian writer after all, whose “Magic Pilgrimage” (the phrase he uses in *A Long Way from Home*) is to Russia in 1922 (he spoke at the Fourth Congress of the Third Communist International in Moscow, June 1923, as a much celebrated guest of honour), and whose diasporan identification opens up to the Communist International and then more selectively to an anti-Stalinist black left internationalism, before this closes in on his return to the USA, first to identification with the USA heterogeneous black minority on whose behalf he espoused a community-based leadership (in keeping with the principles of black left internationalism), and then to Catholicism in seeming rejection or perhaps redefinition of all the other isms he had once espoused.

On the one hand, the vagabond is a generic mask that parodies the shifting positions from which McKay views life and writes in his autobiography and in his fiction. Braidotti argues in Bahktinian fashion that “Nomadic shifts designate … a creative sort of becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and knowledge” (*Nomadic 6*). For McKay, it is a period of continuing displacement and deterritorialization inscribed on a body in motion, in which he is often at the perimeter of laws and nation. In fact, McKay inscribes a genealogy of travel and quest that privileges experience and knowledge gleaned on the road. McKay’s mask of the vagabond, like the mask of the troubadour wanderer, is sustainable only in motion. As iconoclast and man of the road, he utilizes the generic function of the rogue and
the clown to lay bare the fatuousness of any sort of conventionality that challenges his "personal freedom" (Way 314). Harassed by the British in Morocco, McKay identifies himself with characteristic vagabond flair:

I said I was born in the West Indies and lived in the United States and that I was an American, even though I was a British subject, but I preferred to think of myself as an internationalist. The chaoush said that he didn't understand what was an internationalist. I laughed and said that an internationalist was a bad nationalist. (300)

McKay's black left internationalism espoused both racial particularity and international class revolt. *A Long Way from Home* is perhaps less explicit on this score than either *Banjo: a Story without a Plot* (1929) or *Home to Harlem* (1928) for obvious reasons, since he is hoping to reform his reputation and generate a sense of his value to the USA culturally. In *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, McKay models his inimitable brand of errantry/nomadism in which he is consistently not only anti-imperialist but also antinationalist though at a time when the idea of West Indian self-government was still a long way from achievement. Trinh T. Minh-ha's notion of the "inappropriate/d other" comes to mind. As she explains: "We can read the term 'inappropriate/d other' in both ways, as someone whom you cannot appropriate, and as someone who is inappropriate. Not quite other, not quite the same" (Inappropriate/d Artificiality” n.p.)

McKay's cultivated bad nationalist image is arguably in the vein of Luis Althusser's "bad subject," though Althusser would not publish "Ideology and Ideological State Practices" until 1969. That is, until McKay's conversion to Catholicism in 1944, though his last novel, *Harlem Glory* (written in the 40s and published posthumously in 1990), suggests that his sympathies remained with the Radical Black Left despite his staunch rejection of Communist Party politics and his overt
investment in Catholicism. This marriage of the “bad subject” and Catholicism introduces a host of ambiguities about the nomadic disposition of McKay at the end of a trajectory of self-perpetuating displacement. Was McKay vanquished by destitution and dependency, or had he in fact assumed another mask, another kind of agency in what might be seen as an act of reterritorialization?

In hindsight, Lamming may have had the better deal, sailing to London in the company of Sam Selvon in 1950. Had he read *A Long Way from Home*, I wonder? Probably not, because he doesn’t spell McKay’s name correctly in *Pleasures* and that would be most un-Lamming. Anyway, Lamming always had one foot in the Caribbean, returning as often as he could, until he resettled in Barbados in 1980, which suggests another kind of nomadism. However, the record shows that Claude McKay’s nomadic style enabled extraordinary influence over the black social imaginary in Africa, Europe and the Americas, from his association with the radical wing of Harlem Renaissance to negritude in its early stages, and young writers like C. L. R. James, Alfred Mendes (who met McKay in New York), and Ralph de Boissiere in Trinidad in the early 30s. Like Lamming in *Pleasures*, McKay’s choice of figuration is that of the iconoclastic nomadic subject that has assumed mythic proportions in Caribbean writing. It is not simply about traveling. As Braidotti defines it, the nomadic figuration “is no mere metaphor but a politically informed cognitive map that reads the present in terms of one's embedded situation” (“Difference” n.p.). In short, it is cultural and intellectual history.

How then does the discourse of being and becoming interact with nomadic thought and subjectivity in the case of someone like C. L. R. James, who travels to the UK in 1932 and then on to the USA in 1938 where he spent some 14 years, refining and clarifying his relationship to the Trotskyist movement, only to be deported ostensibly for overstaying his visa by some ten years after being incarcerated on Ellis Island pending his appeal. Deportation should have come as no surprise to James, and it probably didn’t, because in 1952 the Red Menace manipulated by Senator Joseph McCarthy had reached a climax
of fear: fear of Jewish communist plots, outside agitators stirring up perfectly happy black people and a contented working class, spies, etc. Leftists were being rounded up and sent to detention centers, so why would James not expect deportation? After all, in 1948 Claudia Jones, the Trinidadian-born activist who had lived in the USA since she was about eight, was arrested, convicted for “advocating overthrow of Government” in violation of the Smith Act, and imprisoned at the Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women. She was deported to the UK on her release in 1956. In the year of her arrest, she had been elected to the Committee of the Communist Party of USA and was editor for Negro Affairs on the *Daily Worker*, the party's newspaper (est. 1924).

To return to James, when he left Trinidad for the UK in 1932, he had already established himself as a formidable writer, researcher and cultural analyst. Once there, he intensified his intellectual pursuits and activism. By the time he left for the USA in 1938 (he was sponsored by the Socialist Workers Party or SWP), he was actively campaigning for West Indian independence, had become a leading figure in the liberationist Pan-Africanist International African Service Bureau, joined the Independent Labor Party, and then the centrist (Trotskyite) Marxist League. You know this history, probably better than I do, but I want to make a point about errantry and James’s obsession with knowledge and activism on a worldwide scale. By the time he left the UK for the USA in 1938, James had published *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of the British Government in the West Indies* (1932), written a play about Toussaint L’Ouverture which was staged in the West End and starred Paul Robeson (1933), published *Minty Alley*, his only novel (1936), *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937), *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938).

After very productive years in the USA, and experiencing the humiliation of deportation before his work there was done, he returned to the UK for some six years before he moved on to Trinidad to become active in the Oilfield Workers Trade Union (OWTU), and
Independence and Federation politics. After this he returned to the UK and the USA with the appropriate documentation, to take up a teaching appointment at Federal City College at Washington, D.C. in 1966, and traveled freely in and out of the USA from that point on as far as I know. He continued to lecture and write and work as a Leninist in the cause of Black liberation everywhere. He was living in England when he died in 1989.

This brief bio does not do justice to C. L. R. James’ lifetime achievement but my point is the perhaps obvious one that, taken as a whole, his is not a case of exile or migration or homelessness, so much as a self-perpetuating displacement in a lifelong quest for cultural power that might sustain the cause of Black liberation in the Caribbean, the UK, the USA, and Africa. In The Pleasures of Exile, Lamming asked: “And what, if any, are the peculiar pleasures of exile? Is their journey part of a hunger for recognition? Do they see recognition as a confirmation of the fact that they are writers?” (Pleasures 23). In James’s case, the hunger for recognition is a necessary element of another kind of hunger, the hunger to know and to act on knowledge as it was acquired in a never-to-be completed endeavor. As he explained in “Discovering Literature in Trinidad,” he was raised, “with a sense of intellectual and moral responsibility to the community – it was the atmosphere in which we grew up” (240). In that essay he described, not just the colonial situation that enveloped his world, but an attitude to it. Among his models in this retrospective, is a coterie of black schoolteachers among them his father, J. J. Thomas, and Marcus Garvey, who were all discontented colonials, but colonials nonetheless.

“We are an adventurous people, ready for anything,” James wrote in “On Wilson Harris” (1965). What did he mean by that, if not a disposition to nomadism that is both intellectual and geographical in its boundarylessness. He concluded: “The instinctive feelings and readiness of the West Indian populations for adventurous creation in all fields is proved among other proofs by the literature these territories produce” (“Harris” 171). One might argue that he is describing himself as well as others here, and that this passion for adventurous creation
links him to Claude McKay, for whom colonial Jamaica “was too small a place for high achievement. There one was isolated, cut off from the great currents of life” (Way 20). In a 1989 interview with journalist Knolly Moses in Brixton, James observed, not dissimilarly:

From early I realized I wasn’t going to spend my life in a tiny Caribbean island. If you were doing anything there it meant you had to use the local Press, and the local Press meant the banks and the foreign interests controlled everything. So I said no I am not going to work for them. The only thing left for me was to go abroad. That’s why I went abroad. I was a teacher but I was writing all the time and publishing. Then when I reached a certain stage I asked: “James what are you going to do? They wanted me to take a degree and teach at Queen’s Royal College. What kind of garbage is that? What scope do you have in Trinidad as head of the college?

So I knew that If (sic) I was going to write and all my interests were literary, social and historical, I had to go abroad. That’s why I came to London. (Sunday Guardian, June 11, 1989: 33)

Is there a way of writing and publishing on the edge? In his essay “On Wilson Harris,” I found James’ use of the philosopher Karl Jaspers helpful in finding a language that does justice to the intensity with which James and others like him have defined themselves beyond the insular. James cited Jaspers’ concept of “living in an extreme boundary situation” (163) as a kind of crucible through which an individual’s potential (in thought and action) emerged: “it is when he is living in that extreme limit boundary situation that you find out what man really is and what he is likely to become” (163). In the context of Jasper’s theory of the boundary situation, James reads Harris’s Palace of the Peacock and The Secret Ladder as preoccupied with the tension between the everydayness of life in the village and town and “the extreme boundary limit situation” in the hinterland of Guyana (163-64). I think one can argue that the village and town generate “the extreme
boundary limit situation” as well as the everyday and the ordinary but that was not James’ point.

He remained Trinidadian and West Indian by birth and orientation, and he made the point that he would make again far more elaborately in *Beyond a Boundary*:

I didn’t learn literature from the mango-tree, or bathing on the shore and getting the sun of the colonial countries; I set out to master the literature, philosophy and ideas of Western Civilization. That is where I have come from, and I would not pretend to be anything else. And I am able to speak of the underdeveloped countries infinitely better than I would otherwise have been able to. (238)

In the philosophical space he occupied, James refused, even in 1969, binary distinctions between Western Civilization and the Caribbean. He was himself the proverbial “thinker of the boundary situation” (164):

We live in one world, and we have to find out what is taking place in the world. And I, a man of the Caribbean, have found that it is the study of Western literature, Western philosophy and Western history that I have found out the things I have found out, even about underdeveloped countries. (“Discovering Literature” 238)

He fashioned his knowledge and understanding of Western Civilization and underdeveloped countries as complementary rather than antithetical facets of his being and becoming. Was this the sovereignty of the imagination rearing its perverse head again, I wonder, or was James simply recalcitrant, a “bad nationalist”?

According to Deleuze and Guattari, “The life of the nomad is the intermezzo. Even the elements of his dwelling are conceived in terms of the trajectory that is forever mobilizing them” (380). In respect to the forever mobilizing trajectory that keeps the nomadic subject fuelled,
it is worth noting that even in detailing the cultural tradition with which he identified, and his observed links with Jacob Thomas and Wilson Harris and V. S. Naipaul, among others, James remained open to new directions, “to a new type of West Indian writer [namely, Earl Lovelace and Michael Anthony] … They are not writing with all the echoes and traditions of English literature in mind” (“Discovering Literature” 243). He concluded: “Now I am emphasizing our relationship with Western civilization, with Western philosophy, with Western literature. That’s the way I grew up, but I’m not saying others have to grow up that way, for they will grow up as they please” (“Discovering Literature” 244). However, this is not to be interpreted as gesturing towards self-erasure or inferiority as James makes clear: “We are members of this civilization and take part in it, but we come from outside. … And it is when you are outside, but can take part as a member, that you see differently from the ways they see, and you are able to write independently” (244). James never ceases to impress me with the hard intellectual, cultural, and political work his sense of mission required.

I would like to make a connection here between James’ claim to be an outsider and yet a member of the group, and what I have called McKay’s “inappropriate(d)ness,” or slackness if you prefer, as an element of nomadic subjectivity. The term “inappropriate(d)ness” is Trinh T. Minh-ha’s; she clarified its multiple meanings in an interview with Marina Grzinic:

Since inappropriate(d)ness does not refer to a fixed location, but is constantly changing with the specific circumstances of each person, event or struggle, it works differently according to the moment and the forces at work. To relate this situation [inappropriate(d)ness] in which one is always slightly off, and yet not entirely outside, I’ve also used the term "elsewhere," to which I’ve often added "within here"--an elsewhere within here. That is, while one is entirely involved with the now-and-here, one is also elsewhere, exceeding one's limits even as one works intimately with them. This is a dimension that one develops simultaneously, not something that happens linearly
and successively in two time-phases, with one coming before the other. (“Inappropriate/d Artificiality” n.p.)

In a colonial/postcolonial world this disposition in the writer to figure difference as “elsewhere within here,” to make it the very praxis of the creative imagination, summons a host of other extraordinary Caribbean writers who have made demystification of the creative process an important part of their sense of mission, among them: Wilson Harris, Fred D’Aguiar, V. S. Naipaul, Jamaica Kincaid, Dionne Brand, Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott. In the interests of space allotted to this paper, I would like to consider, if only in passing and by way of a conclusion, the case of Derek Walcott.

It is difficult to characterize Walcott, as is often the case with great writers who first establish their reputations when they are still young; as Fred D’Aguiar reminds us with some irony, before the “senior Walcott,” there was “the young poetic novice and the middle-aged seer.”11 And if we are inclined to overlook the contradictory process of growth and change and continuity that accrues over a lifetime, Walcott has left an extraordinary record in his poetry, drama, and in essays like “Leaving School,” “Meanings,” “What the Twilight Says,” “The Muse of History,” and “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory.” The historical positioning at each point carves out a space that is personal, individual and responsible to community, but is often seemingly out of step with the mask of either "self" or "other" offered by dominant, anti-colonialist and subsequently nationalist Caribbean narratives of identity politics.

Further complicating any critical assessment, is that Walcott is seemingly always on the move, and he writes about ensuing shifts in place and perspective endlessly. Though he does not absent himself from the region for a lifetime as McKay did, or for years on end as C.L.R. James did. As Antonia MacDonald-Smythe observes in “The
Privileges of Being Born in … A Backward and Underdeveloped Society:” “the expansive geography of Walcott’s imagination has necessarily generated myriad subject positions in relation to provincialism” (88). Not dissimilarly, Fred D’Aguiar reminds us in “In God We Troust” that, “the I-speaker in a Walcott poem may sound like the poet distributing the cornucopia of his tone when in fact the I-presence could easily be an assumed identity for the benefit of the poem’s outcome and not the great man at all” (234). Wherever and whatever Walcott happens to be at the time of writing, his poetic practice is to imbue the experience of being there with experiences of elsewhere, seemingly in tandem with Trinh’s compression of nomadic thought and subjectivity in her concept of “elsewhere within here.” (“Inappropriate/d Artificiality” n.p.) Nomadic subjectivity in Walcott is about the simultaneity of complex and multi-layered identities. I am reminded that his praise of St.-John Perse in “The Muse of History” (1974) is a core value in his corpus as a whole, even in The Prodigal (2004):

What Perse glorifies is not veneration but the perennial freedom: his hero remains the wanderer, the man who moves through the ruins of great civilizations with all his worldly goods by caravan or pack mule, the poet carrying entire cultures in his head, bitter perhaps, but unencumbered. His are poems of massive or solitary migrations through the elements. (38)

In Walcott’s case, this is poetic space in ideal terms; it is not the veneration of homelessness but rather what Glissant styles errantry and totality, or “the ontological obsession with knowledge” (19):

Errantry, therefore, does not proceed from renunciation nor from frustration regarding a supposedly deteriorated (deterritorialized) situation of origin; it is not a resolute act of rejection or an uncontrolled impulse of abandonment … very much the image of the rhizome, prompting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in
Relation. Because the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related. The thought of errantry is a poetics, which always infers that at some moment it is told. The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation. (18)

Errantry, like nomadic becoming as Braidotti describes it, “is neither reproduction nor just imitation, but rather emphatic proximity, intensive interconnectedness” (Nomadic 5). 11

Contritely/facetiously, Walcott tries yet again to explain the meanings of errantry in *The Prodigal*:

I have been blent in the surface of the frescoes, in the cracked halos, the tight, eternal gestures – admonishing finger, creaseless brow, in the folds of a sea-blue mantle, in hilltop turrets and a resting fly. So, when I am dissolved, what is that dissolution? My race, my sun?

.................................
Museums are the refuge of the prodigal. I am not made subtly Italian, there is no betrayal, there is no contradiction in this surrender, nor heredity in delight in the knuckles of a Mantegna or abounding Botticellian locks, nor that housefly in the corner of Crivelli; (*The Prodigal* Part III, 16, IV, 92-93)

The narrative technique that Walcott employs here of absorption and perspective is in part the one that C. L. R. James employs so successfully in *Beyond a Boundary* to challenge any notion of mimicry in West Indian cricket. Differentiating between mimicry that repeats and mimicry that represents, the altered frames of reference in the representational positioning of the narrator marginalizes history and its power as a model. Spectatorhood is thus a formal mechanism for discursive destabilization; it is a privileged position in Walcott as in McKay, James, and Lamming, rather than a confession of neurosis.
George Lamming throws interesting light on how the seemingly unmoored nomadic imagination centers itself in the simultaneity of time and place in his interview with David Scott; the issue is not betrayal, nor is it deracination:

Whatever location you have, the one thing I want to hold on to, is that acre of ground because you don't decide that. That acre of ground is that Caribbean wherever I encounter it; it does not matter now whether I end myself in Asia, in Africa, or wherever, it is the window through which I am looking at wherever I am. It is that ground which will never be completed in my excavating of it. One holds that irrespective of wherever you want to locate me – that is your business, that is not mine. It is inexhaustible, and the one thing that one could not bear to lose and go on breathing would be that acre – that is to be held on to. And that is what I mean, too, when I say that no limitation of sovereignty in the political sense can alter that, because that acre is also itself a component of the imagination. (“Sovereignty” 162)

Sovereignty is perhaps a better term than schizophrenia, the word that Walcott used to describe the writer’s creative use of the different cultures that nurture the Caribbean imagination in What the Twilight Says in 1970 (16). Certainly, Walcott’s use of schizophrenia as the idealization/dramatization of the colonial condition as a psychiatric disorder coincided with Fanon’s binaries in Black Skin, White Masks, which first appeared in English in 1968. Though schizophrenia may be an appropriate description of the crisis that Fanon’s binaries might engender, as Edward Baugh argues in “Walcott’s ‘Here’ and ‘Elsewhere’ and the Problematic of Identity,” it is an oversimplification that enshrines stasis and belies notions of identity as an ongoing process of being and becoming that belongs as much to the future as to the past (159).12

The enquiring self, whether cast as vagabond, crusader, errant, sailor, prodigal, emigrant, transnational, or whatever, does not represent any
automatic subversion of the homeland, and that is as true for McKay as it is for James, Lamming, and Walcott. Glissant belabors the point:

The thought of errantry is not apolitical nor is it inconsistent with the will to identity, which is after all, nothing other than the search for a freedom within particular surroundings. If it is at variance with territorial intolerance, or the predatory effects of the unique root (...), this is because in the poetics of Relation, one who is errant (...) strives to know the totality of the world .... (Poetics 20)

If anything, Walcott, like McKay, James, and Lamming before him, employs and mocks the subversive power of poetic lostness. Dubow argues that “thought does not merely follow on distance and dislocation as a convenient analogy or apt metaphor. It is distance and dislocation itself”(218). Thus boundaries in Walcott’s corpus take provisional, never-finished shape; there is always the horizon:

And always certainly, steadily, on the bright rim of the world, getting no nearer or nearer, the more the bow’s wedge shuddered towards it, prodigal, that line of light that shines from the other shore
(The Prodigal 105)

With this study very much a work in progress, I would argue at this juncture that in the case of writers like McKay, James, Lamming, Walcott, and others like Wilson Harris, V.S. Naipaul, Jamaica Kincaid, Dionne Brand, Lorna Goodison, Marlene Nourbese-Philip, and Elizabeth Nunez, to name a few, spatial mobility might be read as evidence of the conceptual apparatus of colonialism and the new imperialism, but it is an apparatus that alters with each attempt to articulate a way out of old schemes of thought. Despite my extensive use of Rosi Braidotti who has made us so aware of the scope of woman and the feminine as signifiers of difference, I have yet to situate the feminist nomads among us in this ongoing project. For Caribbean women writers in the twentieth century, errantry and errant thought, are also vehicles for critical thought and
reflection--political, cultural, and moral--yet the status of Caribbean writing changed steadily at home and abroad with their singular literary contributions. As Jessica Dubow argues in “The Mobility of Thought,” spatial mobility is not merely the sociological condition of such thought, it is “the enablers precondition of its critique” and indeed “the very project of such thought” (227). How then, I might ask, do their projects differ? What overlapping allegiances do their quests reveal? What is their relationship to Caribbean nationalism? How do they negotiate translocal solidarities and the risks of neocolonialist appropriation?

ENDNOTES


2 Noyes approves of some usages: “And yet, there are good reasons for engaging with the legacy of nomadism as a conceptualization of subjectivity, and for situating this within a critique of the conceptual apparatus of colonialism and the new imperialism” (161).

3 As Jessica Dubow argues in “The Mobility of Thought: Reflection on Blanchot and Benjamin”: “The relation between questions of geography and those of philosophy sets an itinerary for modern Western thought” (218).

4 The phrase is Rosi Braidotti’s (Nomadic Subjects 1).

5 For example, Homi Bhabha’s "Third Space," or liminality, functions at the level of nationalist discourses as well as linguistic structures in the "locations of culture" (Location 2). See also 36-39 in Location, and “The Third Space,” or liminality, functions at the level of nationalist discourses as well as linguistic structures in the "locations of culture” (Location 2). See also 36-39 in Location, and “The Third Space,” Identity: Community, Culture, Culture, Difference, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990) 207-21.
Jan Carew’s “Heirs of All Times” situates the current language of globalization in the context of Caribbean writers of his generation of transnationals.

I am borrowing rather freely from Adrienne Rich here: “There was nothing new about this; artists have long made art against the commodity culture. And innovative or transgressive art has itself been commodified, yet has dialectically fractioned new forms and imaginings into existence.” “Credo of a Passionate Skeptic,” *Monthly Review* 2 (June 2001): 25.


For another version of the same, see Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (4).


See Chris Bongie for a thoughtful commentary on “the non-relational, exclusionary thinking that is at the basis of conventional identity politics and its received wisdom” (11).

See Bongie (12-17) for a discussion of how post and colonial come together in an uneasy fit.

“These are the books about the birth of collective consciousness, but they also introduce the unrest and suspense that allow the individual to discover himself there, whenever he himself becomes the issue” (Glissant 15).

In “Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition,” Shuhmei Shih observes that: “The politics of recognition involves the granting of universality to the exceptional particular . . . This logic suggests that particular works cannot be universal unless they are exceptional. The granting of universality to exceptional cases is selective and has to be analyzed in terms of how a particular is selected for the granting” (25-26).

Smarting under the cultural weight of the colonial's relation to England, Lamming succumbs to a childhood romance with the idea of America: "For America had always existed as a dream in my
imagination, a place where everything was possible, a kingdom next
door to the sky" (*Pleasures* 188). Funded by a Guggenheim, he finds
the Black elite in New York, West Indian immigrants among them,
liberated and materialistic: "Negro or not, my blood rebelled against
the colossal myth which, in rewarding their ambitions, had fatally
impoverished their spirit" (203).

17 His first visit to England in 1919-1921 might be read in the context
of race riots following WWI (1914-1918), the anticommunist red
scare of 1919 in the USA, and his association with the radical African
Black Brotherhood. In England, he worked with Sylvia Pankhurst on
*Workers’ Dreadnought*, a weekly paper for working-class women, and
returned to the USA pretty much for the same reasons that he fled in
1919--his reputation as a black leftist radical of influence. Sylvia
Pankhurst was anti-war, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, feminist and pro-
communist in her sympathies.

18 See Braidotti’s characterization of the nomadic subject in *Nomadic
Subjects* (4-5).

19 As Donna Haraway explains in “The Promises of Monsters: A
Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others: “Designating the
networks of multicultural, ethnic, racial, national, and sexual actors
emerging since World War II, Trinh's phrase referred to the historical
positioning of those who cannot adopt the mask of either "self" or
"other" offered by previously dominant, modern Western narratives
of identity and politics” (295).

20 L. Althusser, “Ideology and ideological state apparatuses” (303). See
also, Jennifer B. Gray on Althusser’s “good” and “bad” subjects
(n.p.).

21 “In God We Troust” (216).

22 I am intrigued with Donna Haraway’s use of diffraction in the
discourse of Relation or “elsewhere within here:” (“The Promises of
Others” 300.) Diffraction is also Glissant’s word of choice when he
differentiates the Mediterranean from the Caribbean (33).

23 For responses to the weight of colonialism and the struggle of the
individual consciousness for recognition, see Walcott’s “Culture or
Mimicry?” and C. L. R. James’ *Beyond a Boundary*. See also, Edward
Baugh’s analysis of the pitfalls of reading of Walcott’s use of
schizophrenia as a statement of intent in “Walcott’s ‘Here’ and ‘Elsewhere’ and the Problematic of Identity,” especially 157-59.

WORKS CITED


