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Of Backyards and Hinterlands: 'Cairojan' and Dutch Caribbean Literature

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ABSTRACT

This article will compare two works by two Black Surinamese authors from the last century: Anton de Kom (1898–1945) and Edgar Cairo (1948–2000). While keenly aware that the Netherlands/the Dutch Empire has shaped their world by forceful and violent means, in their writing both Cairo and de Kom effectively push the Netherlands to the margins. In these texts it is present as the evil force to be fought, or as the invisible past evils that have created the present, but these stories are not about the Dutch or The Netherlands. De Kom counters the Dutch narratives and heroes with those of the enslaved people who escape to the hinterlands (*het binnenland*), while Cairo flaunts white colonial norms with his story of what he calls 'the backyard' (*het erf*). De Kom's hinterland and Cairo's backyard echo chronotopes such as Paul Gilroy's slave ship and Édouard Glissant's metaphors of the plantation, the hinterland and the creole language. These are conceptions of the Caribbean and Black diasporic history, voicing some of the ways in which 'culture happened' in spite of the efforts of colonization and the plantation system, offering an alternative that is native to a transplanted people/diasporic people.

KEYWORDS

Edgar Cairo; Anton de Kom; chronotope; plantation; Pan-Caribbean; Édouard Glissant

From 2 to 6 degrees south latitude, from 54 to 58 degrees west longitude, it stretches between the blue of the Atlantic Ocean and the inaccessible Tumak Humak Mountains, which form the watershed with the Amazon Basin, clutched between the broad expanses of the Courantyne and Maroni Rivers, which separate us from British and French Guiana, rich in formidable forests, where the yellow lapacho, the barklaki, the kapok, and the prized wacapou grow, rich in wide rivers, where herons, wiswis, ibises, and flamingos find their nesting places, rich in natural treasures, in gold and bauxite, in rubber, sugar, bananas, and coffee . . . poor in its human population, poorer still in humanity.

Sranang—our homeland.

Suriname, as the Dutch call it.

Their country's twelfth and richest, no, their country's poorest province.

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Hinterland rebels and backyard people in Anton de Kom's *Ons bloed is rood* and Edgar Cairo's *Temekoe/Kopzorg*.

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Between the coast and the mountains our mother, Sranang, has slumbered for a thousand years and a thousand more. Nothing has changed in the dense forest of her unknown hinterlands.

- Anton De Kom, *We Slaves of Suriname*, transl. David McKay.

Suriname is one of the few places in the Caribbean that is not an island, positioned as it is at the top of South America, while also being Dutch-speaking. Landscape and language set it apart within the Caribbean, producing unique imaginaries and theories which have the potential to enrich the field of Pan-Caribbean studies. That place and landscape are hardly ever only a backdrop in (Surinamese-)Caribbean narratives, is shown in novels by Anton de Kom (1989–1945) and Edgar Cairo (1948–2000). In the 1979 novella *Temekoe/Kopzorg*,¹ and the unpublished manuscript *Ons Bloed is Rood*,² Cairo and De Kom (respectively) portray their native Suriname as multi-faceted, composed of specific chronotopes. Chronotopes such as the plantation, the backyard and the hinterlands point to a place and a time – a past in an ever-changing present – that creates specific literatures.

De Kom uses Dutch to narrate a Surinamese story taking place during chattel slavery which might otherwise be inaccessible to Dutch speakers (and which it remained, as *Ons Bloed is Rood* was never published). Cairo challenges the precedence of the Dutch language and its stories by addressing it directly through narrative and his own engagement with the language and its perceived purity. While keenly aware that the Dutch Empire has shaped their world by forceful and violent means, in their writing both Cairo and De Kom effectively push the Dutch language (and thereby the Netherlands) to the margins. Both authors eke out a space for Dutch Caribbean narratives and history – and ultimately, for Dutch Caribbean presence. This article aims to show some of the ways in which these narratives by Cairo and De Kom create space away from colonial accounts of history, and how their narratives creolized these histories through the chronotopes of the hinterland and the backyard in the process.

Pan-Caribbean Chronotopes

Through the selected works of Cairo and De Kom, I will introduce the chronotopes of the backyard and the hinterland that their narratives invoke. As it was employed by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), the chronotope refers to the specifics of time and space invoked by a narrative. In this sense chronotopes are like coordinates, allowing us to consider the setting of a narrative as a spatio-temporal whole. British sociologist and cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy looks to a metaphor which is intrinsic to the (history of the) Caribbean: that of the slave ship. As Guillermina De Ferrari points out: ‘According to Gilroy, the ship is a chronotope (Bakhtin’s term) that not only grounds Caribbean culture in a specific narrative but also provides a figurative framework for the revision of political and moral philosophy’.³ De Ferrari consequently aims to come to a Caribbean moral philosophy through the works of Glissant and Gilroy. Gilroy theorizes the metaphor of the ‘slave ship’ and Glissant comes to ‘the plantation’ as guiding principles. Thus, both introduce chronotopes which can be read as means to capture the linguistic and political diversity and difference of the Caribbean, as well as a means to offer counter histories.

Martinican poet, novelist, and theorist Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*,⁴ and Black British cultural critic Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*,⁵ both turn to elements of the Caribbean and its history to theorize its present on a literary and political level. Glissant speaks of the diffracting nature of the archipelagos to put an image to his concept of Relation. He explains his theory of Relation as not merely a (momentary) encounter or 'a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry.⁶ Glissant posits *métissage* as 'the meeting and synthesis of two differences' while creolization is its superlative, 'a limitless *métissage*,' and its diffracted nature leads to unforeseeable consequences and adds new and original dimensions.⁷ The 'meeting' that has led to creolization and Relation in the Caribbean has caused the formation of 'purely relational societies' that are based in the forced labour of the plantations.⁸ At the opening of *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant explains how the confrontation of the European written word and the orality of African languages led to the formation of Creole languages in the Caribbean:

African languages became deterritorialized, thus contributing to creolization in the West. This is the most completely known confrontation between the powers of the written word and the impulses of orality. The only written thing on slave ships was the account book listing the exchange value of slaves. Within the ship's space the cry of those deported was stifled, as it would be in the realm of the Plantations. This confrontation still reverberates to this day.⁹

This confrontation between the written word and the impulses of orality lies at the heart of Glissant's theory of creolization. Its reverberations are perhaps most pressingly present in art and literature, as it is in communication and narrative (and thus in history) that this confrontation takes place. While society might have moved beyond the direct situation of chattel slavery on plantations, the plantation has become its own point of reference, and the starting point for 'new' (mixed) languages, cultures, religions, literatures, and so on. Both Glissant and Gilroy make use of metaphors to explain elements of the Black experience in the Caribbean and in the U.K., respectively. The plantation and the slave ship as guiding principles come directly out of the furnace that created the Caribbean as it is today. In the context of Suriname and Dutch language literatures, there are elements that can be added to these images of the slave ship and the plantation: Edgar Cairo's 'backyard' (*erf*) and Anton de Kom's 'hinterland' (*binnenland*), as they appear in their literary works. A reading of the works of De Kom and Cairo will show that these conceptualizations are in effect chronotopes that add to the constellation of Pan-Caribbean theory.

While the Caribbean region is marked by linguistic diversity and difference, the Dutch-speaking Caribbean is somewhat of a linguistic oddity. Surrounded by European and Creole languages which are (or are tied to) some of the most-spoken languages in the world, Dutch is decidedly less widespread. The readership and reach of the other European languages that are present in the Caribbean are simply greater, while Dutch-language texts often do not seem to make it out of the neerlandophone space. As Odile Ferly points out in *A Poetics of Relation* (2012) Suriname and the Dutch Antillean corpus specifically have 'long stood in isolation' as a consequence of linguistic difference.¹⁰

Moreover, the Creole languages that have Dutch at their bases are even further removed from potential readers in different language spheres.¹¹ A possible counter to such linguistic isolation can be found in certain conceptualizations which are present in the theory of Pan-Caribbean scholars, and which aim to show the underlying unity in the region. The different countries in the Caribbean share a common history of the transatlantic slave trade, indenture, sugar plantations, and so on. Landscape and historical conditions are shared experiences.

In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995),¹² Haitian American anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot examines how history is produced and, looking at the gaps that fall between what happened and what is said to have happened in history books, theorizes how history-writing is connected to dynamics of power.¹³ Trouillot sees history as both knowledge and narrative.¹⁴ He problematizes the notion that the victors write history, or that history is simply 'reminiscence of important past.'¹⁵ He points out that humans are both actors in history, as well as narrators, and that consequently, history always involves 'the social process and narratives about that process. (...) History is always produced in a specific historical context. Historical actors are also narrators, and vice versa.'¹⁶ The dynamic between the event and the narrativized event allows one to look at history as a narrative of a social process that is itself based in social processes in the present.

The way in which the backyard and the hinterland come forward in the works of Edgar Cairo and Anton De Kom, respectively, is a result of the plantation, which is historical and lies in the past, but which has created the present the authors find themselves in. Especially as we shall see in the case of De Kom, the way he consequently narrates the plantation in a Surinamese plantocracy in *Ons Bloed is Rood* is rooted in that complex not-yet-postcolonial present he was born and raised in. In other words: history is always a narrative, written from a particular present. Glissant states that the Caribbean has been subjected to a 'nonhistory.'¹⁷ It is a history that is 'undergone' rather than steered by the people living it, while acknowledging there have always been forms of resistance, however (un)successful.¹⁸ Similarly, Gilroy points out that slavery is the site of the 'intended erasure' of tradition.¹⁹ Something new, something creolized has since grown there. Gilroy himself is of Guyanese descent (another Caribbean country which is not an island), and his theory addresses an African diaspora that finds its root in the Caribbean experience – and therefore is not rooted in one place. Rather, it is a rhizomatic root. As Jacqueline Nassy Brown points out,²⁰ Gilroy references the 'plethora of places where African descendants live' rather than one fixed place.²¹ Each such place will have its own particularities, but they all share certain Pan-Caribbean traits. Suriname has been subject to the same 'nonhistory,' the language of the country and the people that were transposed there taken over by the (colonial) Dutch. Cairo and De Kom engage with the Dutch language in different ways, but both challenge its centrality in their Surinamese-Caribbean context. Especially in the case of Cairo, language and place produce a creolized Dutch while he uses that language to articulate the chronotope of the backyard.

A Headache

Edgar Cairo was born in Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname, in 1948. His parents were from district Para, and Cairo left for Amsterdam to study Dutch and literature and remained in the Netherlands. During his life he published poetry, plays, and novels. He performed and wrote columns and essays. In the late 1980s he suffered from psychosis, which seems to have led to a switch from writing to painting.²² In 2000 he was found dead in his apartment in Amsterdam. His works range from relating to the Surinamese context to that of the wider Caribbean, and experiences of the diaspora as a Black Caribbean man living in Europe.

When Cairo publishes his first novel, *Temekoe* in 1969, it is only 39 pages long and written in Sranantongo; the Surinamese Creole. A decade later, living and writing in the Netherlands, he publishes a rewriting of the novel as *Temekoe/Kopzorg* (109 pages), written in a mix of Sranantongo and Dutch. Another decade later the third and final version comes out, *Kopzorg: het verhaal van vader en zoon* (*A Headache: The story of Father and Son*), completely written in Dutch this time (195 pages). Because of the way he manipulates the Dutch language in his novel, *Temekoe/Kopzorg*, the second incarnation, is the edition of interest in this analysis. The title translates to *A Headache* and the story focuses on the relationship between a father and his son. It was reworked from the original in Sranantongo (by Cairo himself) in a mix of Dutch and Sranantongo that in its uniqueness has often been called ‘Cairoian’ (*Cairojaans*) by reviewers and scholars alike.²³ Neither fully Dutch nor fully Sranantongo, the mixed language is entirely his own.

Temekoe/Kopzorg is narrated by the son, who is the youngest of his mother’s eight children, but his father’s only biological child. In this strongly autobiographical novella, the image of the ‘backyard’ or ‘backyard life’ is evoked. Michiel van Kempen asserts that: ‘He [Cairo] paints the generational conflict against the backdrop of the impoverished backyard life in a society on the border of the colonial and new age’.²⁴ The novel is set in Suriname, and tells of the backyards in the capital, to which many moved, and of the more rural district Para. Para is a district of northern Suriname, and one of the oldest colonially cultivated areas of the country (since the 17th century). Tobacco, sugar, and wood plantations, alongside bauxite mining (used to make aluminium), were its primary yields. The backyard of Cairo’s childhood on (former) plantation grounds which is sketched in the narrative, is a microcosm of a social structure and consciousness directly descended from enslaved people who never left the plantation after emancipation. It shows them as tethered to the land. The social structures that formed there after the slave ships landed are, to Cairo, entirely Black while also undeniably creolized.²⁵ In the early pages the narrator describes his father when he looks at himself in the mirror:

En dan: mocht ik als zijn zoon, een Paraan heten, hijzelf is dan nóg meer een Paraan als ik, geboren als hij is, daarzo en opgetogen ook! Paraanse groeisel! Want is daarzo, speelde hij, kind, tussen Paraanse kinderen als kind-kind van Paranen. Een plantage-volk, met plantage-jeugd! Met de lach op hun gezicht, die als een sleutel ‘t slot van hun jonge dagen open-draaide, krik-krak krèk!²⁶

[transl.]²⁷

And then: might I as his son, be called a Parane, he is even more a Parane than me, born as he is there, and raised too! Parane growth! Because it's there he played, child, between Parane children as child-child of Paranes. A plantation-people, with plantation-childhood! With a smile on their face, which turned the lock of their young days like a key, krik-krak krèk!

His father, as a native of district Para, is one in a plurality of people the narrator describes, 'a plantation-people with plantation-childhood,' in a rural area in which he is surrounded by others who are from Para's plantation grounds. The son attributes both his own and his father's behaviour to this particular heritage, but there is a lot of information that is held back: no specific characteristics come forward as being especially 'Peraan.' It refers to a happiness and carelessness alongside a wildness in childhood. The plantation childhood that is referenced is one post-emancipation, where the descendants of enslaved plantation workers still reside. It is to live with the sites and memories of enslavement beyond one's skin and experiences with racism or colourism. The backyard bridges this gap between plantation life and that in the capital. Cairo himself explained that he writes about 'poor people:' 'because I came from a poor family, yes, backyard people, I would say, and you come out of the backyard and write on the backyard people (. . .)'.²⁸ These backyards have strong links to the plantation and in the Surinamese and wider Caribbean context, this is where creolized spiritualities, narratives and other cultural elements took hold. There is no return to African culture, or a take-over of European culture; rather, this creolization fuses elements of both – and of the existing cultures of the land – under the (past) pressures of the conditions of the plantation.

One instance where this new social structure of the backyard becomes most apparent, is when the neighbourhood women stand in their backyard, talking and gossiping with each other. The narrator's mother, Selina, is the subject of their judgement. The neighbours are trying to shame her, but in the end, she responds by refocussing everyone's attention:

Dan wanneer ze niemeer kon, werkelijk niemeer kón met al die fietserij van ze, dan trok ze die kinderen van d'r na' buiten, allemaal op rij. Hoor hoe ze schreeuwde (de streng van d'r keel, zoals men 't zegt, kon breken, van geuite drift en spanning)!

“Aaj, jullie! Kijken jullie dan! Ik heb geen hobbellostool in me huis! Ik heb ook geen canapé in me huis waar ik woon hier! En ik hóef die aardse goed nieteens te hebben, goedgeoed!

Ma' wat ik hier heb, wat hier staat op hun voeten! Is gód heeft me deze rijkdom gegeven! God zelf, hòr!' De kinderrijkdom uitgestald

Bijna direct direct, werd alles stil. Piepmuisstil bijna! Wat moesten die meiden daarop zeggen dan? En? Sins wanneer konden zij met zulke prachtkinderen in groot getal aan komen zetten?²⁹

[transl.]³⁰

Then when she couldn't take it anymore, truly couldn't take it anymore with all their badmouthing, then she'd pull all those kids of hers outside, in a row. Listen to her screaming (the chord of her throat, as they say, could break with expressed anger and tension)!

'Aaj, you! Look you! I don't have no rocking chair in my house! I don't have a couch in the house where I live either! And I don't even need worldly goods, my dear!

But what I have here, who are standing on their feet here! It is gód who gave me these riches! God himself, mind!' The wealth of children exhibited . . .

Almost straight away straight away, everything went quiet. Almost as quiet as a quiet mouse! What did these girls have got to say to that? And? It's not like they could show up with such beautiful children in such numbers?

The others fall silent as she shifts the focus entirely away from material possessions, marriage, and parentage. Instead, the focus lands on the children; they are wealth incarnate because there are alive, presenting an alternate set of mores. On a narrative level, this literally takes place in the backyard, but its implications move beyond that, showing a social constellation which rings familiar in a Caribbean context and exemplifying how the creolizing of the Dutch language is part of the chronotope of the backyard. In Cairo's writings Dutch acquires a distinctive rhythm that is rarely found in other Dutch prose and can be traced back to the layering of Dutch and Sranantongo syntax and vocabulary. This syntax, and Sranantongo itself as a Creole language, finds its origins in the conditions of the plantation and its afterlife – the backyard. It is the language of the backyard.

The experience of reading *Temekoe/Kopzorg* is incredibly fast-paced and energetic and submerges the reader into the experience of this backyard life and the social structures between people there. Implicitly it shows not only the conditions of the backyard but also the values that underpin it. Descriptions and words that are just out of the ordinary are combined with onomatopoeic exclamations and interruptions (as in the fragment above). There is a clear connection between orality – and thus, of hearing – and reading and writing. The reader is constantly addressed directly – a move which interrupts the narrative even though it already uses the second person – giving a sense of orality, as though we are being told a story. The sentence in brackets: '(de streng van d'r keel, zoals men 't zegt, kon breken, van geuite drift en spanning)!/(the chord of her throat, as they say, could break with expressed anger and tension)!' feels as personal asides, explanation, someone interrupting the story they are telling to tell you about a language that you do not speak but which gives you an insight into a different way of thinking. Such advances imply the presence of both the narrator and the reader/listener. Cairo utilizes Sranantongo, allowing it to take up space in the Dutch language. The Dutch – the colonizer's language – needs to make way for Cairo's Creole influences; for its rhythm, syntax and structure. Even the spelling is different from what the Dutch would be. Whether you are Dutch or Surinamese, you will have to adapt as a reader. Sranantongo ends up inhabiting a space that was never meant for it. Cairo changes the pacing and rhythm, and the Dutch has to bend to the Sranantongo, not the other way around – an ongoing creolization. It challenges notions of what Dutch literature is and can be (and who it is written by), showing something far more creolized and decolonial than is the accepted norm.

District Para and the backyard are central to the narrative; people who have grown up there and their children inhabit this identity regardless of where they find themselves. Cairo himself explained the situatedness of his writing as follows:

a lot of my themes, the way I write, the structure of my books, all have to do with the black man's position, generally, and the position of all colonized people. What I can call specific in

relation to my work and Suriname culture, or the culture of the black, is that I have what I would call some of the “nigger’s house.”³¹

Cairo speaks of poverty, but specifically of poverty among Black people in Suriname (by default descendent from enslaved Africans). The chronotope presents itself; the backyard is a time and a place – and a people. A people which has been subject to specific forces of (colonial) history. This is the experience of a time, a place, and a community, meaning that others in that same country might not have this same experience.

Temekoe/Kopzorg speaks of the material conditions of the backyard, which is inhabited by the creolized societal and spiritual elements Cairo strikingly describes. Winti, the Surinamese-Creole religion, is similarly present and discussed, although Cairo never names it as such. There are spirits, evil hexes, and magical forces that are present within the characters and which colour their interactions. When people fight, their magic might be part of the altercation, adding the threat of sudden death to a fistfight.³² Even older myths, such as those of the ‘geveugelde souldragers’ (‘winged soul carriers’) are present. They are the mythical Africans who never ate salt after they were enslaved and would therefore still be able to fly back over the ocean to their ancestors in Africa after their death.³³ It is the most literal instance of the presence of African culture in the novel, while the narrative throughout more subtly refers to what is essentially a creolized history. From the start Para is a presence in the text, in named and unnamed ways. As the interview shows, Cairo is well aware of a Caribbean or (post-)colonial context well beyond that of the backyards, Para, or even Suriname itself. De Kom similarly addresses the position of colonized people through a narrative which explores – in this case historical – Surinamese characters and places.

Hinterlands

With the backyard Cairo gives shape to an often-overlooked place; it is one of the spaces where poorer people reside, and while the plantation has a firm hold over the realities and imaginaries of the Caribbean (even in the present), the backyard presents us with one of its consequences – its present incarnation. On the larger scale of Suriname, the hinterlands follow a similar logic. Historical narratives such as John Gabriel Stedman’s (1744–1797) *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796),³⁴ show the difficulty Europeans had in entering the hinterlands when they were in pursuit of escaped enslaved people. The hinterlands denote a space which, like the slave ship, the plantation, and the backyard, signifies an element of the Caribbean consciousness, (hi)story, and landscape. This space is decidedly away from the plantation, but tied to it through resistance.

Anton de Kom is arguably one of the most famous Surinamese writers, best-known for his 1934 book *Wij Slaven van Suriname (We Slaves of Suriname)*³⁵; the only book that was published during his lifetime. Born in 1898, he was only one generation removed from enslavement. Slavery had been abolished in Suriname in 1863 and his father was born enslaved. During De Kom’s lifetime, Suriname was still a colony under a rule that did not want to hear of independence and at times violently suppressed the idea. De Kom moved to the Netherlands and the one time he tried to return to Suriname with his wife and children, he was swiftly arrested and deported as a suspected ‘communist agitator.’ It

is after his return from Suriname that his book *Wij slaven van Suriname* was published. During WWII De Kom joined the resistance in the Netherlands, and was arrested and once again deported, this time to a concentration camp. He died in the hospital ward of camp Sandbostel in Germany in 1945.³⁶

Wij slaven van Suriname is one of those texts which has stood in relative isolation from international discussions because of the limited reach of the Dutch language. In spite of his fame in Surinamese circles, the book did not become a bestseller in the Netherlands until recently.³⁷ The book was not translated from Dutch into English or French during his lifetime, the English only appeared in 2022 and a French translation still does not exist. This limits engagement with his work in international scholarship, specifically in Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean spheres. This is not to say De Kom was not aware of international discussions or the value of the reach that comes with translation. Rather, it was in spite of his efforts that his book was never translated into other languages.³⁸ Until the English translation by David McKay came out in 2022,³⁹ the text had been closed off to a larger readership outside of the neerlandophone sphere.

In *We Slaves of Suriname* De Kom writes a history of Suriname from the perspective of the oppressed; of the black people that were enslaved, of the indentured labourers, of those that emancipated themselves by going into the hinterlands, and of all their descendants. He takes the historical gaze away from the Dutch colonizers (which they still were in his lifetime) and turns it back on them: rather than the heroes from Dutch history narratives, we hear of the abuse that the enslaved suffered at the hands of the Dutch, and the way the land and the people were exploited for financial gain. As he famously stated in *We Slaves of Suriname*:

Geen volk kan tot volle wasdom komen dat erfelijk met een minderwaardigheidscomplex belast blijft.⁴⁰

*No people can reach full maturity as long as it remains burdened with an inherited sense of inferiority.*⁴¹

De Kom underscores this objective by saying that his book therefore has the express purpose of ‘rousing the self-respect of the Surinamese people’.⁴² This sense of inferiority, De Kom explains, is fed by the colonial school system, which is Dutch and entirely focused on the Dutch, painting them as heroes and conquerors. De Kom wrote of heroes for the Black people of the country while the norm still was (and in schools to an extent still is) white, and the heroes colonial imports from the Netherlands; Men that were called heroes because they were actively against his people.

De Kom wrote several other books that were never published during his lifetime. The manuscript *Ons bloed is rood* (*Our Blood is Red*) is such a text. The handwritten manuscript takes up four notebooks and although the notebooks are not dated, de Kom’s name accompanied by the address ‘Johannes Camphuijsstraat 296’ is written on several pages throughout. This is De Kom’s last address before his arrest and internment, placing it in the years 1933–1944. In the corner of the first page is written that this book tells the story of ‘our heroes Bonni, Baron and Joli Coeur.’⁴³ These are three formerly enslaved men who escaped the plantations and planned attacks on the plantations and tried to free others from chattel slavery in 18th century Suriname. However, the text itself does not reconstruct the life-stories of these men. It revolves around the enslaved man Kwakoe

and his wife Amieba. It moves from life and punishment on the plantation of a cruel Dutch planter to escape and life in the hinterlands, from which Kwakoe and his compatriots plan attacks.

On a narrative level, a significant part of *Ons bloed is rood* takes place in the hinterlands of Suriname. In his constellation of Caribbean theory, Glissant also attributes a significant role to the remote hinterlands/highlands. He describes it as the ‘*Arrière-pays*, hinterlands, [the place] where revolutionaries can wait and gather’.⁴⁴ The way Glissant describes the hinterland in *Poetics of Relation* is directly tied to the Caribbean as a constellation of islands. The island is then composed of beach, mangrove, and highlands, or *mornes*. The beach is exposed ‘without cover, without surprises’ and one can feel imprisoned there.⁴⁵ The mangroves on the other hand (which are present in Suriname as well), are a ‘tie between beach and island,’⁴⁶ and the highlands to which enslaved people escaped are the ‘tie between beach and island, which allows us to take off like *marrons*, far from the permanent tourist spots, is thus tied into the dis-appearance – a dis-appearing – [...]’.⁴⁷ The hinterland De Kom writes about has the same properties as the highlands, but one can get much further away from the Surinamese plantation than is possible on an island, and the hinterland has historically secured a much more persistent isolation. It is where the Maroons went from escaping the plantation to form their own societies, and its relevance is made apparent in De Kom’s manuscript too.

The hinterland is where attacks on the plantations are plotted by Kwakoe and the others; the hinterlands are entirely out of view from the plantation, they are a place of refuge, and it is near-impossible to infiltrate for the colonizers. Through the hinterland the focus is shifted away from the plantation and the planters’ lives we are introduced to on the beginning pages. By making the hinterlands and the revolt that is planned there the focus in the novel (and central locus of activity in the narrative), it gains an importance and predominance which it is not allowed in colonial narratives where revolt and resistance always happen in the margins or as a footnote (if it is acknowledged at all).

It is the green of the hinterland to which Kwakoe points in the narrative when the planter almost kills him. Kwakoe has received lashes because he talked back to an overseer, and he is lying in his quarters, bloody and barely alive. His lover Ambieba tells him: ‘Dwing de meester ons als menschen te behandelen, of besluit hem te verlaten.’/ ‘Force the master to treat us like human beings or decide to leave him.’⁴⁸ It is after those words that Kwakoe does the following: ‘Hij wees naar het veelkleurig vergezicht. Daarheen. Leven.’/ ‘He pointed at the multicoloured panorama. There. Life.’⁴⁹ After Kwakoe finally decides to leave, he is described walking further and further away from the plantation, connecting freedom and the hinterland together; Hij liep./Al maar door./ Dieper het land in./Voor de vrijheid.⁵⁰ He walked./On and on./Deeper inland./For freedom. After Kwakoe’s successful escape, he joins one of the free communities who live in the hinterland. It is with them that attacks on the plantation are planned and executed. After one of these attacks the white colonists are driven back and the ‘opstandelingen’ (*insurgents*) take munition and food from the plantation. Their victory song is committed to the page in Sranantongo:

Ni bing di joe katibo
Joe broko mie baka nanga tiele
Ni kong tranga manga ni makie

*Na iwen mie o wienie nomo, nomo.*⁵¹
I was your slave
You have lashed my back
Now I am strong with my friends
*Vanquish, I will defeat you.*⁵²

The narrative of the attack is rounded off in this song, reminding the reader of the reason for the attack and projecting to a future where the white planters are defeated altogether. De Kom creates a space in which the Black people on the plantation are noble, beautiful, and fully capable of resisting the planters and the society they represent. The Dutch planters are, in turn, confronted with their behaviour and retribution is meted out. In *Ons bloed is rood* De Kom's language of choice is Dutch, interspersed with some words in Sranantongo.⁵³ Throughout, this concerns the names of plants and animals and the occasional poem or song such as above. De Kom uses Sranantongo strategically throughout the text; it is not allowed to overtake the Dutch in the way Cairo's language does, but it does interrupt the Dutch. De Kom writes at the time of Dutch colonial rule but shows that he can use the Dutch language without replicating the Dutch colonial perspective and allow space for Sranantongo. Not only is the Dutch colonial perspective challenged directly, the Dutch presence and planters are effectively pushed to the margins as the text carries on. De Kom creates a narrative (a history, in the sense of Trouillot) of resistance. Resistance against a situation which, in the Netherlands in the 1930s, had no such narratives from the perspective of the (formerly) enslaved – especially not in Dutch. Sadly, it did not get the chance to have that impact. *Ons bloed is rood* was never published, and it is very probable this was because of De Kom's status as a known anticolonial and 'communist agitator' in the eyes of the Dutch (colonial) government.⁵⁴

Plantation, Hinterland, Backyard

In their descriptions of various elements of the Caribbean as organizing principles, for both Gilroy and Glissant there is a clear preoccupation with place. Even in concepts that are not rooted as such, there is the presence of place in their metaphors and the descriptive language that is used. It is clear that these chronotopes of plantation, backyard and hinterland create specific – Caribbean – literatures. The linguistic isolation of the Dutch Caribbean corpus' elements of creolization poses ample opportunities for research in a Pan-Caribbean context. Conceptualizations of the conditions of the Caribbean, such as the slave ship and the plantation, might aid the analysis of Dutch-language Caribbean literature, and in turn Cairo's notion of the backyard and De Kom's visualization of the hinterland offer themselves as conceptual elements which might prove useful to the Pan-Caribbean conversation. Following Trouillot's assessment that the dynamic between the event and the narrativized event shows that history is always a narrative, these Caribbean narratives allow for a different approach to history and literature. Considering the discussed works of Cairo and De Kom, how do these narratives create space away from colonial accounts of history, creolizing them?

Both authors are descendant from enslaved Africans, and their narratives offer alternatives which are native to a diasporic people. De Kom seeks to challenge and counter the narratives and heroes of Dutch tales with those of the Black people in Suriname, while Cairo flaunts white colonial norms with his story and use of Sranantongo and Dutch. In

the De Kom's language there is a shift between Dutch and Sranantongo which challenges the way Dutch is used in a colonial context. The narrative does this by focussing on the escaped enslaved people who resisted in the most direct way: by leaving for the hinterlands and then attacking the plantation. Cairo's creolized writing in *Temekoe/Kopzorg* creates a space that is new – or rather, new in that it gives voice to a place and a people who have been oft explained and studied by colonizers (and their descendants) in their language, but rarely seen from the perspective and creolized language that Cairo inhabits. They present imageries which are Caribbean, but their particular approaches show how they have made space for their own creolized histories which leads us to consider new imaginaries and thus conceptualizations of the Caribbean and the place of Dutch-language literature in it.

Notes

1. Cairo, *Temekoe/Kopzorg*.
2. De Kom, *Ons bloed is rood*.
3. De Ferrari, "The Ship, the Plantation, and the Polis," 186.
4. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.
5. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.
6. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.
7. Ibid.
8. De Ferrari, "The Ship, the Plantation, and the Polis," 186.
9. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 5.
10. Ferly, *A Poetics of Relation*, 2.
11. A creole language i.e.: 'a mother tongue formed from the contact of a European language (especially English, French, Spanish, or Portuguese) with local languages' (*Oxford Dictionary of English*). There are two creoles in Suriname which are based in two European languages rather than one; Saramaccan, which is based on English with strong Portuguese influences, and Sranantongo, which is also based on English, but with strong Dutch influences (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).
12. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.
13. Goldstein Sepinwall, "Still Unthinkable?," 75.
14. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 23.
15. Ibid., 14.
16. Ibid., 2; 22.
17. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 65.
18. Pépin, "De marron en de geschiedenis," 52.
19. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 188.
20. Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*.
21. Ibid., 39–40.
22. Van Kempen, "talige draaihoofd van Cairo"
23. Cairo used the term himself as well. Although it is unclear who started using the term first, he seems to be referencing his critics in some of his columns. See: *Ik ga dood om jullie hoofd* (1980) and *Als je hoofd is geboord* (1981).
24. Van Kempen, *De geest van Waraku*, 31. "Hij schildert het generatieconflict tegen de achtergrond van het armoedige erfleren in een samenleving op de grens van koloniale en nieuwe tijd (...)." Translation my own.
25. In the Surinamese context 'Creole' signifies Black/of African descent. To avoid confusion, I reference Glissant's notion of 'creolisation' throughout this article.
26. Cairo, *Temekoe/Kopzorg*, 8–9.
27. Translation my own.

28. Rowell and Cairo, 'An Interview with Edgar Cairo,' 695.
29. Cairo, *Temekoe/Kopzorg*, 39–40.
30. Translation my own.
31. Rowell and Cairo, "An Interview with Edgar Cairo," 693. On the use of the N-word, Cairo immediately follows this in the interview by saying: 'Some people say, "don't use the word 'nigger,' say 'Negro,' blah, blah, blah, blah".' However, he then doesn't use the N-word for the rest of the interview.
32. Cairo, *Temekoe/Kopzorg*, 23–24.
33. Cairo, *Temekoe/Kopzorg*, 23; Nankoe et al., *En de slaaf vliegt weg*, 6.
34. Stedman, *Revolted Negroes of Surinam*.
35. De Kom, *Wij slaven van Suriname*.
36. His family was not aware of this at the time. His remains were identified by the Red Cross in the 1960s, and he was given a reburial in the honorary graveyard in Loenen, The Netherlands. The missing person's report and correspondence between the Red Cross, De Kom's wife Petronella Bosboom, and various witnesses resides in the archive of the Museum of Literature, The Hague.
37. After selling out the first print in the 1930s, it would not have an official second print until 1971. There were illegal copies (copied and stapled pages) that were being spread from the 1960s until the second print run.
38. His literary estate holds letters from his publisher (De Kom's side of the correspondence is lost) and mentions translations into Spanish, German, French, Norwegian, and English. Of these, only an (illegal) German translation in Moscow (1935) and in Zürich (1936) and a Spanish one in Cuba (1981) materialized.
39. De Kom, *We Slaves of Suriname*. There was another English translation in the works in preceding years, by Arnold Pomerans, but De Kom's family/descendants did not approve of this version, and it was never published.
40. De Kom, *Wij slaven van Suriname*, 82.
41. Translation by David McKay.
42. See note 40 above.
43. De Kom makes mention of these three historical figures in *Wij Slaven van Suriname* as well (in the chapter 'Boekoe ("tot stof vervallen")').
44. Glissant et al., 'The Archipelago Conversations,' 160.
45. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 205.
46. *Ibid.*, 206.
47. *Ibid.*, 205–206.
48. De Kom, *Ons bloed is rood*, 39.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 60.
51. Note: There is no official spelling of Sranantongo, and De Kom often spells things differently than it would be done at present.
52. Translated from the Dutch (my translation), which De Kom wrote on the page next to this one.
53. The one known English article by Anton de Kom, in *The Negro Worker* of June 1934, where he is listed as the author of 'Starvation, Misery and Terror in Dutch Guyana.'
54. While successful as a salesman of coffee and tea before leaving Suriname, he could not secure a job once the Dutch colonial government exiled him back to the Netherlands. He was also followed by the predecessor of the Dutch secret services and in the lead-up to the publication of *Wij slaven van Suriname* they visited his publisher as well, as evidenced by letters from Gilles de Neve (the publisher) to Anton de Kom in the archive of the Museum of Literature, The Hague.

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