

Clipping in and out of the Trenches

For more than two decades, I have been fascinated by the startling inclusion of an entire article in untranslated French that runs across two pages in Claude McKay's great 1929 novel *Banjo*, which W. E. B. Du Bois famously described as at once "the description of a series of episodes on the docks of Marseilles" and "a sort of international philosophy of the Negro race." As Stephen Casmier has pointed out, McKay's novel can be read as an extended meditation on the politics of journalism, and characters buy and read and quote and argue about a striking number of newspapers: the *Chicago Tribune* (McKay, *Banjo* 264), the *New York Herald Tribune* (264), the *London Daily Mail* (136, 264), *Le journal* (264, 273), *L'humanité* (264, 273), *L'action française* (273–74), *La race nègre* (74), *The Negro World* (77, 102), and a host of unspecified "American Negro newspapers" (253, 322). But unlike these other examples, the French article grafted into the novel is not a diegetic element of the plot; it goes unmentioned in the incessant dialogue among the characters. Nor is there a description of how it came to be read or clipped or shown or shared. Instead it enters the narrative only in an extended internal reflection by Ray, the Haitian intellectual and self-described "vagabond poet" at the center of *Banjo* who—like McKay himself in the late 1920s—lives among the footloose gang of drifters and "beach boys" (319) who hang out and play music together, "trying to scrape a temporary existence" (68) from the underbelly of commerce in the thriving Mediterranean port, even if Ray "could not scrap his intellectual life and be entirely like them" (322).

For Ray, the article is a piece of evidence: proof of what he considers to be "a fundamental contempt for black people" that is just as pervasive in France as in "the Anglo-Saxon lands," despite the penchant among the French to insist on the unparalleled "benefits of French civilization—especially for colored people" (275). But what is startling about the article as a piece of evidence is the aggressive confrontation it poses for the anglophone reader who is abruptly faced with a long passage in a foreign language that is neither translated nor even summarized:

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“Un tirailleur sénégalais, pris d'on ne sait quel vertigo, a fait, à Toulon, un affreux carnage.

“On s'évertue maintenant à savoir par quelle suite de circonstances ce noir a pu fracturer un coffre et s'emparer des cartouches avec lesquelles il a accompli le massacre.

“Qu'on le sache, soit. Mais la question me semble ailleurs. Il faudrait peut-être se mettre la main sur le coeur et se demander s'il est bien prudent d'apprendre à des primitifs à se servir d'un fusil.

“Je n'ignore pas qu'il y a de belles exceptions; qu'il y a des 'nègres' députés, avocats, professeurs et que l'un d'eux a même obtenu le prix Goncourt. Mais la majorité de ces 'indigènes' à peau noire sont de grands enfants auxquels les subtilités de notre morale échappent autant que les subtilités de notre langue. La plus dangereuse de ces subtilités est celle-ci:

“Tu tueras des êtres humains en certaines circonstances que nous appelons guerre.

“Mais tu seras châtié si tu tues en dehors de ces circonstances.

“Le Sénégalais Yssima appartient à une catégorie humaine où il est d'usage, paraît-il, quand on doit mourir de ne pas mourir seul. Le point d'honneur consiste à en 'expédier' le plus possible avant d'être soi-même expédié.

“Si cela est vrai, on voit où [sic] peuvent conduire certaines blagues de chambrées. Pour tout dire franchement, il n'est pas prudent de faire des soldats avec des hommes dont l'âme contient encore des replis [sic] inexplorés et pour qui notre civilisation est un vin trop fort. Sous les bananiers originels, Yssima était sans doute un brave noir, en parfaite harmonie avec la morale de sa race et les lois de la nature. Transplanté, déraciné, il est devenue [sic] un fou sanguinaire.

“Je ne veux tirer de cet horrible fait divers aucune conclusion. Je dis que de semblables aventures (qui ne sont d'ailleurs pas isolées) devraient nous faire réfléchir sérieusement. . . .”

(277–78; ellipsis in original)¹

When I first tried to make sense of this gesture, it seemed clear enough that it was a gambit of what Emily Apter calls deliberate “non-translation.” It is hard not to see McKay's strategy as an “explicit desire to disturb monolingual complacency,” as the pages force the reader to confront “linguistic

strangeness” (Apter 61). I thought of it as a staging of “linguistic disjuncture in the reading process itself” (Edwards 216), closely related to the novel's painstaking depiction of the multilingualism of the milieu of the migrants and wanderers “all dumped down in the great Provençal port, bumming a day's work, a meal, a drink, existing from hand to mouth, anyhow any way, between box car, tramp ship, bistro, and bordel” (McKay, *Banjo* 6). For me, *Banjo* as a novel of diaspora insistently foregrounds intradiasporic linguistic difference—the “problems in translation” inherent to diaspora (Spivak 186)—even if this is ultimately not a symptom of inevitable failure (proving the impossibility of political solidarity or cultural exchange), but instead the realm of the inexhaustible creativity of vernacular social life at the crossroads. For Ray, the interaction among the “black boys” is animated by a thrilling “necromancy of language”: there was “no act or fact of life for which they could not find a simple passable word” (McKay, *Banjo* 321).

But what is just as striking about McKay's gesture is that even if the act is not narrativized, the article is explicitly framed *as a newspaper clipping*. To Ray, the predilection of the “white mind” (276) to derive a caricature of the entire race from the most egregious individual behavior is a telling indication of that “fundamental contempt for black people” (275). In France, “like anywhere,” he muses, “one black villain made all black villains as one black tout made all black touts, one black nigger made all black niggers, and one black failure made all black failures” (275). Here are the paragraphs immediately preceding the long quotation in French, and the only place where the content of the article is glancingly explained:

Ray had been specially entertained by one of these slaughtering, resulting from a terrible crime committed by a crazy Senegalese soldier and for which the entire black race was haled before the bar of public opinion.

It was authorized by a radical paper supporting the radical government under whose régime the West African Negroes were being torn out of their

native soil, wrenched away from their families and shipped to Europe to get acquainted with the arts of war and the disease of syphilis. It was such an amusing revelation of civilized logic that Ray had preserved it, especially as he was in tacit agreement with the thesis while loathing the manner of its presentation. (276–77)

“Ray had preserved it”: in other words, the article is framed without further elaboration as the result of what one might describe as the character’s demotic archiving.² Admittedly this is not a matter of a collection of the records of an “administrative body” held in an institutional repository (Muller et al. 14).³ It is minor, colloquial, “homespun” (Peterson and Macola)—a single loose clipping, not even subsequently collated into a scrapbook. Ray is compelled to cut it out and keep it, to privilege and protect its status as telling evidence. In this way, the example (however small, however fleeting) might be described not only as a point of contact between nodes in the “media ecologies of empire” (Burton and Hofmeyr 7)—a point where the novel seizes and incorporates a fragment of the newspaper—but also as a novelistic practice of the archive.

From the very first time I read *Banjo* decades ago, beyond the provocation of linguistic difference, my encounter with what seemed to be presented as an archival scrap instilled a desire to unearth the source—to track down the article, both to confirm its veracity and to consider what it might tell us about McKay’s reading practices. This catalyzation of desire—the peculiar way the clipping seems to compel the reader of the novel to undertake further research—brings to mind Arthur A. Schomburg’s famous 1925 proclamation that under “the very pressure of the present” the New Negro is driven to think “more collectively, more retrospectively than the rest, and . . . to become the most enthusiastic antiquarian of them all” (670).

The problem is that the novel gives the reader so little to go on: neither the author nor the date nor the place of publication. With only the knowledge of the approximate periods McKay lived in Marseille across two or three years at the end of the 1920s, I got in the habit during my regular visits

to do research in France of looking through newspapers, starting with some of the ones mentioned in the novel (*Le journal, L’action française*) and then expanding my survey to some of the others that seemed most likely, including mainstream newspapers (*Le temps, Le figaro*), publications devoted to the French empire (*La dépêche coloniale, Le courrier colonial*), and papers from the region (*Le radical de Vaucluse, Le petit marseillais*). It was impossible to take a systematic approach, so instead, every time I went, I would take some time to dip into some reels of microfilm, sporadically, hoping to get lucky. This silly private quest may be more a sign of my compulsiveness than a lesson in archival method but, odd as it may sound, I came to find something comforting in the rhythm of my futility, perhaps something like the way an argonaut in the 1848 gold rush might have come to be mesmerized by the repetitive gestures of panning.

As many have observed, the rapid spread of optical character recognition scanning has transformed the practice of historical research (see Putman, “Transnational”; Moss et al.; Mussell). Over the past couple of decades, as the Bibliothèque Nationale de France has gradually digitized large segments of its periodical collection, it has felt like new strata of information have become available as entire print runs magically lurch into searchability. Last fall, as I was preparing to teach *Banjo* again, it occurred to me to search for a phrase from the article: “Tu tueras des êtres humains en certaines circonstances que nous appelons guerre.” And there it was. After years of intermittent searching, poring over frame after frame of eye-dulling microfilm, I found the source of the article in less than ten seconds.

The clipping Ray has “preserved” comes from a column in another of the most prominent papers of the Marseille region in the interwar period, *Le petit provençal* (Négis; see fig. 1). For more than three decades, the critic, novelist, and playwright André Négis (1886–1966) penned a short, daily front-page column titled “Carnet d’un grincheux” (“Notebook of a Grouch”). The column became a familiar feature of the newspaper, set among and in contrast to the main political headlines of the day, in which Négis lightened the portentous mood of the

Carnet d'un Grincheux

Un tirailleur sénégalais, pris d'on ne sait quel vertige, a fait, à Toulon, un affreux carnage.

On s'évertue maintenant à savoir par quelle suite de circonstances ce noir a pu fracturer un coffre et s'emparer des cartouches avec lesquelles il a accompli le massacre.

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Je n'ignore pas qu'il y a de belles exceptions ; qu'il y a des « nègres » députés, avocats, professeurs et que l'un d'eux a même obtenu le prix Goncourt. Mais la majorité de ces « indigènes » à peau noire sont de grands enfants auxquels les subtilités de notre morale échappent autant que les subtilités de notre langue. La plus dangereuse de ces subtilités est celle-ci :

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Si cela est vrai, on voit où peuvent conduire certaines blagues de chambrées.

Pour tout dire franchement, il n'est pas prudent de faire des soldats avec des hommes dont l'âme contient encore des replis inexplorés et pour qui notre civilisation est un vin trop fort.

Sous les bananiers originels, Yssima était sans doute un brave noir, en parfaite harmonie avec la morale de sa race et les lois de la nature. Transplanté, déraciné, il est devenu un fou sanguinaire.

Je ne veux tirer de cet horrible fait divers aucune conclusion. Je dis que de semblables aventures (qui ne sont d'ailleurs pas isolées) devraient nous faire réfléchir sérieusement.

ANDRÉ NÉGIS.

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Fig. 1. André Négis, "Carnet d'un grincheux," *Le petit provençal*, 18 June 1926, p. 1.

coverage with a series of grumpy but glancing observations on customs and episodes in the modern world. As a review of one of his plays in 1939 phrased it, readers of *Le petit provençal*

ont, depuis longtemps, apprécié la qualité de sa collaboration quotidienne et savent tous que l'esprit le plus fin, le bon sens le plus aigu et la plus philosophique sagesse éclatent dans ses *Carnets d'un Grincheux*. Les événements, les moeurs, les variations des idées ou de la mode, tout est, pour André Négis, matière à réflexions piquantes. Son oeil aussi saisit avec vivacité les aspects et les travers de notre époque, que son esprit fait étinceler dans de véritables petits miroirs littéraires où, souvent, chacun de nous se reconnaît, en souriant. (Souchon)

have long appreciated the quality of his daily collaboration and know that the finest mind, the keenest good sense and the most philosophical wisdom burst out in his *Carnets d'un grincheux*. Events, customs, shifts in ideas or fashion—for André Négis everything is material for piquant reflection. His eye avidly seizes the aspects and foibles of our era, which his mind makes sparkle in veritable little literary mirrors in which each of us often recognizes oneself, smiling. (my trans.)

Jean-Christophe Cloutier has written suggestively about what he calls the development of an "archival sensibility" among African American fiction writers in the mid-twentieth century, including McKay. Cloutier defines an archival sensibility as a "preservationist strain" in modernist literary practice that "reflects a desire to accumulate, process, and conserve experience not as a means for dusty repose or historical exactitude but rather as a way to retrieve the past for the living" (96). His 2019 study *Shadow Archives* is an attempt to make sense of "both the archival function novels serve—the way they can stand as alternative, expanded, or even counterfactual sites of historical preservation—and the roles that novelists have played as archivists and record creators" (24).

Cloutier points out that recent scholarship might be said to conceptualize and approach the relationship between fiction and the archive in multiple ways. If there is a strand of work that "investigates the surge of narratives that feature archives at the core of their plots, usually by having the protagonists perform archival research in libraries or other repositories" (28; see also Keen), there is also

scholarship that makes the case that the novel itself can be organized conceptually like an archival repository: fiction can perform “certain archival functions, such as the storing and ordering of records in a dossier-like fashion” (Codebò, “Records” 191; see also Codebò, *Narrating*). Literature can also be considered as what Marilyn Booth calls an “imaginative archive,” a counterfactual or “ghost-archive, a record of alternative possibilities and alternative visions that also, through divergent narrative, highlights and shows as arbitrary the boundaries of the official record” (277). Another branch of scholarship treats literature as what might be called an archive of sensibility, a “cultural repository” that, without providing empirical documentation, affords the historian a means to gain “insight into states of mind, conscious and unconscious assumptions, attitudes, opinions, prejudices, and emotions” of past societies (Pasco 374, 373). And finally, the novel form can be made to include a “mishmash” of fragments and artifacts in a manner to suggest it should be read as a sort of “raw archive in disarray, a ‘special collection’ of disparate genres not yet arranged but bound together between two covers as a means of stretching novelistic boundaries” (Cloutier 32).

Cloutier makes a case that McKay’s 1941 novel *Amiable with Big Teeth* should be read as the key instance of the shift in the writer’s archival sensibility late in his career: drawing on but refashioning a variety of historical incidents and individuals, it is a particular sort of “roman à clef, a genre that is dedicated to the embedding of sociohistorical facts but that nevertheless resists the tyranny of ‘actual’ history—in that way, he was able to offer a more empowering speculative history” (Cloutier 97). One might observe, then, that in *Banjo* McKay seems to be doing something rather different: less speculative history than contemporary political critique.

While McKay grounds *Amiable* “in key documents—an imperial letter, photographs, newspapers, and ledgers—and thus insists on a materiality that demands to be confronted and questioned” in a narrative that is obsessively concerned with “authentication” (Cloutier 22, 118), those items are all fictional. They are not framed as found

documents in a manner that tempts the reader to go out and track them down. But in *Banjo* it seems crucial that the document is clipped from an actually existing newspaper, making the reader imagine Ray grappling with the print culture of the milieu and moment in which the fiction is set. As much as it serves to confront the anglophone reader with linguistic difference, then, the retention of French also highlights the clipping’s status as a found document. The fiction thus seems to grasp the world of its historical setting through the staged preservation of an artifact.⁴

Although McKay’s inclusion of the French article in *Banjo* is a fascinating case study, it is important to recognize that in the interwar period, these sorts of cutting-and-pasting tactics were ubiquitous. The discourse of anticolonialism emerged primarily through the periodical, in networks of editors linked up by an intricate, interwoven “exchange system” involving widespread practices of clipping, citation, and reprinting (see Hofmeyr and Peterson; Younis). The divided field of periodical print culture came to be riven by a sort of trench warfare with its own particular rhythms, often conducted underground but erupting intermittently into view, in which the native arsenal of editorial work—“circulation, citation, and commentary” (Putnam, “Circum-Atlantic” 215)—gave black intellectuals a way to seize, reframe, and contest sources from the mainstream Western press. In clipping, repurposing, and critique, editors found what Musab Younis terms “a theoretical grammar through which worlds could be grasped and turned against themselves.”

This discourse of anticolonialism was not primarily or originally a metropolitan phenomenon. As Lara Putnam points out, “the interwar surge of periodicals by and for publics of colour did not merely radiate outward from North Atlantic capitals” such as New York, London, and Paris, but instead connected periodicals in those major cities with siblings throughout the diaspora, from Lagos, Abeokuta, and Accra to Port-of-Spain, Fort-de-France, and Kingston; from Durban and Johannesburg to Kampala, Nairobi, and Eldoret. The links among periodicals in these far-flung

locations were not delimited by language, region, or empire, and they “included dense lateral branching as well as circuits linking metropole to colony” (Putnam, “Circum-Atlantic” 218). Across Africa, newspapers served as “the forcing-houses for new political solidarities: they launched campaigns and gave a tempo to things. Newspapers were also the hosts for new forms of address. They were the incubators for the creation of literary genres and the genesis of new African voices” (Peterson and Hunter 1).

Nor was the archival aspect of McKay's practice itself unusual. Karin Barber suggests that in Africa, too, the engagement with print culture was characterized by what she terms “tin-trunk literacy” (4): the predilection of individual readers to build their own collections of clippings and ephemera in scrapbooks, drawers, or closets. This habit was rooted not in nostalgia or fetishism but instead in a vernacular recognition of the power of the printed word. In the hands of the writer or editor, these sources could be mobilized as a “source of orientation,” providing a sense of ideological stakes and references for future arguments (Hofmeyr and Peterson 19). Collecting such a repository could also be a “means of gaining leverage over the predominant order” in the ways documents could be recontextualized and contested, allowing writers to interject their voices and write back to empire (18). In this sense even the modes of archiving that might seem the most passive or idiosyncratic could have radical potential if the scraps were activated into new significance or collated into unexpected juxtapositions. Since by definition “clippings are not news but the recirculated and repurposed extractions from the news which live on as history or evidence or commentary in a way that the news, aiming to be up to date, does not” (Brockman, “Clio's Clippings” 191), any clipping can be mobilized into a “coercive reordering of media” (Garvey 49). And such “writing with scissors” (Garvey)—thinking by means of the material practice of editing—was one of the primary weapons wielded by anticolonial intellectuals across the Africa diaspora.

Even McKay's use of the novel as a sort of archival repository is not out of the ordinary. Given the “fluid” boundaries among types of publications

that circulated in the media ecologies of empire, “printed matter published in one format was often recycled into a different venue” (Hofmeyr and Peterson 4). As scholars such as Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr have pointed out, “books in the age of empire” must be understood not as autonomous, monumental artifacts but as “the portable property of an ever-evolving imperial commons” that “presumed shared values but also sponsored debate, doubt, critique” (Burton and Hofmeyr 4, 13). Books are “dispersed events” that need to be read “against the sprawling media ecologies of empire that take shape as different circuits and systems of textual transmission intersected” (9, 7). In this turbulent space of exchange, commentary, and repurposing, “the book was not always a prefabricated thing, ready-made and unified along a neat vertical axis. More often than not, what arrived between covers was the consequence of a variety of imperial trajectories: upcyclings from pamphlet material or recyclings from scissor-and-paste newspaper clippings” (2).

There is a tiny error in McKay's rendering of the article from *Le petit provençal*: in the clause “il n'est pas prudent de faire des soldats avec des hommes dont l'âme contient encore des replies inexplorés” (“it is not prudent to make soldiers out of men whose souls still contain unexplored recesses”), the novel gives *replies* (which is not a word in French) in the place of *replis* (McKay, *Banjo* 278). In the typescript of *Banjo*, this is one of a few minor errors, mostly issues with accents and imposed anglicisms (for instance, writing “subtilities” in the place of “subtilités”)—that is, the kinds of small mistakes an English speaker might make in transcribing French. While most of these were corrected in production, however, McKay or the copyeditor missed *replies* (McKay, “Banjo” 322). But there is something telling in the slip. One might go so far as to say that, as innocuous as it is, the error authenticates the article as a found document: a source not fabricated but instead extracted and incorporated by hand—by clipping and copying—into the fiction. And equally strangely, the error preserves a quiet and inadvertent record of the political multivalence of clipping as a

strategy. While they share an etymological source in the Latin *replicare*, derived from *plicare* (“to fold”), the English *reply* and the French *repli* might be described as different tendrils of that common semantic root: their conflation is a hint that, in this materialist practice, talking back (rejoinder, critique) is inherently a matter of folding back—that is, of paper work: grasping and creasing the printed page.

Placing *Banjo* into a wider context of related activity does reveal some of the specific contours of McKay’s intervention, however. Editors and writers found multiple ways of recasting and handling interpolated clippings.⁵ Considering the prominent modernist examples that come to mind, McKay takes a different approach than, say, James Joyce in the Aeolus chapter of *Ulysses* or Walter Benjamin in *Einbahnstraße* (*One-Way Street*), who famously mimic journalistic crosshead titles.⁶ McKay chooses not to remediate the newspaper by taking up its characteristic forms. Nor does he make recourse to the facsimiles of, say, Louis Aragon’s *Le paysan de Paris* (*Paris Peasant*), which reproduces newspaper layouts, advertisements, restaurant menus, and placards (Aragon 85, 97, 113).⁷

In analyzing practices of citation and commentary in African diasporic periodicals, Putnam highlights the category of the “glossed citation,” in which editors and letter writers framed selections from the metropolitan European press with their own annotations and responses (“Circum-Atlantic” 215), thereby formalizing a “critical optic” that ensured that “white authors’ own positioning was not allowed to remain an unmarked category” (234). Thus, for instance, Lapido Solanke and Kobina Sekyi published articles in the *Gold Coast Leader* in the early 1920s that critiqued imperialist pretensions in specific cited articles in the *Evening Standard*, the *Daily News*, and the *African World* (see Younis); and John Dube’s bilingual newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal* printed a takedown of the discussion of “native policy” in the white-run *Natal Mercury* in 1906 with extended annotated quotations (see Hofmeyr and Peterson 10). In McKay’s *Banjo*, there are passages alluding to particular

historical episodes such as the murder trial of the notorious Dr. Bougrat in Marseille in 1926 (McKay, *Banjo* 266) and named historical figures such as the journalist Léon Daudet, the cofounder of the nationalist *L’action française* (274). But aside from the vague phrase “authorized by a radical paper,” the article in French is something different: a gloss of a source for which a citation is refused.

Stephanie Newell has demonstrated that anonymity and the use of pseudonyms played a pivotal role in early-twentieth-century African periodical print culture, allowing writers a certain liberation from the scrutiny of the colonial administration to “experiment with voices, genders, genres, and opinions; to vocalize across identities; and to play against biographical methods and desires” (3). But with the French quotation in *Banjo*, the technique is deployed in the other direction: it is Négis who is rendered anonymous, sundering the clipping from its author and from its original embedding in the serial output of a well-known columnist. Elsewhere in the novel, Ray reflects that “during his passage through Europe it had been an illuminating experience for him to come in contact with the mind of the average white man” (McKay, *Banjo* 135). And the clipping comes to stand in for that “average” colonial common sense. By eliding Négis’s authorship, McKay renders the clipping not the piquant bons mots of an individual commentator but instead “a clear and eloquent exhibition of the universal attitude, which, though the method varied, was little different anywhere” (312).

It is not coincidental that the clipping Ray has preserved is an article about an African soldier (described with the familiar French euphemism “tirailleur sénégalais” [“Senegalese rifleman”; 277]) who has been driven to madness and murder by the psychological pressures of the First World War. The “ultimate cipher of France’s colonial legacy” (Bloom 35), the *tirailleur sénégalais* could be said to epitomize the paradoxes of French racial attitudes in the interwar period, as both the archetypal figure of the triumph of French assimilation (that is, the conscription of the colonial “indigène” [“native”] into the military defense of the empire)

and the archetypal figure of the immutability of racial difference, a smiling “primitive” ubiquitous in advertising and popular culture of the time (see Echenberg; Mann). As a figure of difference, the *tirailleur sénégalais* is also associated with linguistic difference, above all through *petit nègre*, the grotesquely simplified version of French that was taught to the soldiers.⁸ This is to say that the clipping is not only a document of French colonial common sense, but moreover an artifact that captures the volatile overlaying of racialism, colonialism, and violence in the postwar metropole.

It is also important to recall that Ray himself has just been the victim of a violent encounter with the French police. A few days earlier he had been walking home to his new lodgings in a “respectable quarter in his most respectable rags, armed with respectability—in the form of the Paris editions of the *New York Herald Tribune*, the British *Daily Mail* and *Le Journal*,” when two policemen approach him in the street “without warning,” beat him viciously, and arrest him without explanation (McKay, *Banjo* 264). Ray files a report about the incident, but he is too cynical to hope his attackers will be brought to “justice.” Instead he tells the police inspector that “what he really wanted was to know why he had been beaten and arrested. Was it because he was black?” The inspector replies with a nonsensical declaration that inculpates Ray racially even as it exonerates him individually. “The policemen had made a mistake,” the inspector declares, “owing to the fact that all the Negroes in Marseilles were criminals” (266). In other words, in the context of the narrative the clipping is a means of responding to violence with violence: in what is in every sense a trenchant echo of Ray’s treatment by the police, the article is singled out, snatched out of its “respectable” milieu, and made to serve as evidence of a generalized tendency.

In *When Africa Awakes*, the 1920 volume featuring selections from the editorials and articles he had published over the past three years in *The Voice*, *The New Negro*, and *The Negro World*, Hubert H. Harrison develops a fascinating theory of what he calls “camouflage” in political discourse.

He uses the term first of all to critique the duplicity of Western capitalist democracies during the First World War: “The Great War of 1914–1918 has served to liberate many new ideas undreamt of by those who rushed humanity into that bath of blood. During that war the idea of democracy was widely advertised, especially in the English-speaking world; mainly as a convenient camouflage behind which competing imperialists masked their sordid aims” (5). But in the section of articles titled “The Negro and the War,” Harrison extends this critical analysis of imperialist camouflage in order to sketch a counterstrategy in his own journalism:

While the war lasted those of us who saw unpalatable truths were compelled to do one of two things: either tell the truth as we saw it and go to jail, or camouflage the truth that we had to tell. The present writer told the truth for the most part, in so far as it related to our race relations; but in a few cases camouflage was safer and more effective. That camouflage, however, was never of that truckling quality which was accepted by the average American editor to such a nauseating degree. I was well aware that Woodrow Wilson’s protestations of democracy were lying protestations, consciously, and deliberately designed to deceive. What, then, was my duty in the face of that fact? I chose to pretend that Woodrow Wilson meant what he said, because by so doing I could safely hold up to contempt and ridicule the undemocratic practices of his administration and the actions of his white countrymen in regard to the Negro. (25)

When Africa Awakes makes it clear that, like the novel, the newspaper can serve as a certain sort of archive, preserving and classifying information in a manner that can then be referenced. But the newspaper can equally serve as a counterarchive, a documentary medium through which “a dominated group aspires to re-create itself as a public and, in doing so, finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group, but also with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as a public” (Warner 80). Thus, Harrison notes in a prefatory paragraph to his article “The White War and Colored Races” that the article had been rejected

in 1918 by “a certain well known radical magazine” as “too radical” for publication (*When Africa Awakes* 116). In a November 1917 article from *The Voice*, he transcribes a nasty short note from Mary White Ovington, the prominent board member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, scoffing at the founding of Harrison’s newspaper (“My dear Mr. Harrison, I don’t see any reason for another organization, or another paper” [57]), thus preserving and circulating it as a “fairly good representative of the class of ‘good white friends of the colored people’” in the civil rights movement (56). Similarly, in “Race First versus Class First,” a March 1920 editorial from *The Negro World* in which Harrison critiques the Socialist Party position that class must always take precedence over race in issues of organizing around the interests of labor in the face of capital, he publishes an extended quotation from an internal report written by Socialist Party leaders in which they admit that “race feeling” is “deeper than any class feeling and will outlast the capitalist system” (81).

But in a few instances, the way that Harrison archives his periodical output by reorganizing and preserving it in *When Africa Awakes* involves what might be described as a certain cunning or camouflage. The most remarkable example occurs on the second page of the first article in the book, which is about the founding of Harrison’s political organization the Liberty League at a mass meeting at Bethel Church in Harlem on 12 June 1917. In the book, the article includes the following paragraph:

Mr. Marcus Garvey, president of the Jamaica Improvement Association, was next introduced by Mr. Harrison. He spoke in enthusiastic approval of the new movement and pledged it his hearty support. (10)

But as Jeffrey Perry has pointed out, this paragraph did not appear in the original article published in *The Voice* in 1917 (figs. 2 and 3).⁹ At the time, Marcus Garvey was an unknown, a recent arrival with no reputation in African American political circles; indeed, the Bethel Church meeting was Garvey’s first public appearance in the United

States. But by 1920 when Harrison is putting the book together, Garvey has made his meteoric rise as the most popular black nationalist leader of the interwar period, outstripping Harrison in fame and influence to the point that Garvey hired Harrison as the managing editor of *The Negro World*. So in archiving his own article, Harrison revises it to take a certain retroactive credit for introducing Garvey to Harlem in the first place—but this editorial addendum goes unacknowledged.

One might identify a similar furtive sensibility in the character Ray in *Banjo*. Ray is Haitian, but has spent time in the United States and speaks English fluently as well as French. Among the “black boys” in Marseille, he “enjoyed his rôle of a wandering black without patriotic or family ties” (McKay, *Banjo* 136). But it is not just that he takes pleasure in the vagabond existence. Ray also has a tendency to allow himself to be misrecognized by those he meets: “He loved to pose as this or that without really being any definite thing at all” (136). In many of the conversations and encounters in the novel, Ray “sometimes posed as British, sometimes as American, depending upon his audience” (135). He does so in a sort of strange ethnographic spirit, camouflaging his origins and language capabilities in order to provoke his interlocutors into exposing their hypocrisies. If he presents himself in a manner that lures them into lowering their defenses or tempts them into sanctimoniousness, he finds, “a few words would usually take him to the center of a guarded, ancient treasure of national hates” (135). For instance, in one particularly revelatory deception, he pretends to be African American:

Sometimes, on meeting a French West Indian, Ray would say he was American, and the other, like his white compatriot, could not resist the temptation to be patronizing.

“We will treat you right over here! It’s not like America.”

Yet often when he was in public with one of these black *élites* who could speak a little English, Ray would be asked to speak English instead of French. Upon demanding why, the answer would invariably be, “Because they will treat us better and not as if we were Senegalese.” (136)

represented at the meeting. The audience rose to their feet with cheers when Harrison was introduced by the chairman. The most striking passages of his speech were those in which he demanded that Congress make lynching a Federal crime and take the Negro's life under national protection, and declared that since lynching was murder and a violation of Federal and State laws, it was incumbent upon the Negroes themselves to maintain the majesty of the law and put down the law-breakers by organizing all over the South to defend their own lives whenever their right to live was invaded by mobs which the local authorities were too weak or unwilling to suppress.

The meeting was also addressed by Mr. J. C. Thomas, Jr., a young Negro lawyer, who pointed out the weakness and subserviency of the old-time political leaders and insisted that Negroes stop begging for charity in the matter of their legal rights and demand justice instead.

Mr. Marcus Garvey, president of the Jamaica Improvement Association, was next introduced by Mr. Harrison. He spoke in enthusiastic approval of the new movement and pledged it his hearty support.

After the Rev. Dr. Cooper, the pastor of Bethel, had addressed

Fig. 2. Hubert H. Harrison, "The Liberty League of Negro-Americans: How It Came to Be," *The Voice*, 4 July 1917 (in Harrison, *When Africa Awakes*, Porro Press, 1920), Hubert H. Harrison Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, series VIII, box 19, folder 6.

The question is how we should understand the relationship between this penchant for social dissembling, on the one hand, and the camouflaged citation of the Négis clipping, on the other. Both involve linguistic performance, first of all, although whereas the role-playing is predicated on bilingual facility, the grafted clipping seems to pose a deliberate obstacle to comprehension.¹⁰ In each case, however, one might observe that the duplicity is framed as a strategy, a way of "look[ing] deeper than the noise for the truth," as Ray phrases it (275).¹¹ And the two approaches might be said to unearth the same lesson, exposing the delusional assumptions and "fundamental contempt" concealed under the surface of social niceties and nationalist pretenses. In this sense, we could understand both of these contrasting modes of camouflage as archival strategies—ways of using the novel form to preserve these recorded insights. As McKay put it in a 1939 article, "When creative writers become politically-minded, they owe it to the public to dig down to the facts and interpret them" ("Where the News Ends" 231).

Finding a source you've been hunting for years is a lark. But the thrill isn't the point, in the end. In fact, the epiphany of the discovery has very little to

represented at the meeting. The audience rose to their feet with cheers when Harrison was introduced by the chairman. The most striking passages of his speech were those in which he demanded that Congress make lynching a Federal crime and take the Negro's life under national protection, and declared that since lynching was murder and a violation of Federal and State laws, it was incumbent upon the Negroes themselves to maintain the majesty of the law and put down the law-breakers by organizing all over the south to defend their own lives whenever their right to live was invaded by mobs which the local authorities were too weak or unwilling to suppress.

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After the Rev. Dr. Cooper, the pastor of Bethel, had addressed the meeting, the following resolution, which is a denial of the existence of Negroes from Florida, New York;

That we intend to go to agitate by every means until we win these hands of our government to protect from these dangers, and the deeds of our nation's declarations;

That we create adequate means for securing these make our voice heard in the councils of our and

That copies of these be forwarded to the United States and other public bodies as proper to us.

2. What It Stands For (From The Clarion, 5) DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES.

(Drawn up by Hubert H. Harrison, President of the Liberty League of Negro-Americans was born of World War into which entered in 1914 and

Fig. 3. Hubert H. Harrison, "The Liberty League of Negro-Americans: How It Came to Be," *The Voice*, 4 July 1917, collected in "Early Writings" scrapbook, Hubert H. Harrison Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, series IV, box 13, folder 2.

do with the revelation of the citation. The insight that emerges is something much more sobering, tinged with consternation at a unique brand of archival transgression. It was only when I found the article that I realized that revealing its source could undermine what McKay had accomplished in grafting the clipping into his novel. Only then did it occur to me that he had deliberately rendered it practically untraceable for the reader, given the affordances of the print mediascape of his time. What makes this archival strategy radical is precisely the way it forcibly and definitively uproots the article from its provenance.¹²

In the recesses of its narrative, *Banjo* even includes an intriguing juxtaposition of archival strategies. Ray reencounters a white French taxi driver he had met months before in Toulon. They had struck up an instrumental camaraderie there: the chauffeur "had been of service to Ray in giving him the low-down in that interesting sailor town,

and Ray had returned it by teaching him the right English phrases for his frequent pick-up trips to Nice and Marseilles, where he met the right sort of tourists that helped eke out his wage pittance" (244). The driver, we are told, supplements his income by working as an informal "guide" to the red-light district in Marseille for foreign tourists hoping to sample the exotic sex trade there. When they run into each other again, the chauffeur tells Ray that with the money he has been saving through shady investments in the houses of ill-repute in what the denizens of the port call "Boody Lane," he is planning to get married and to buy a nice home in the suburbs. This disgusts Ray, even if he interprets it as an unsurprising illustration of the "scheme of life" in the popular quarters of Marseille, where "bawdiness was only a means toward the ultimate purpose of respectability" (248). For Ray, this upward mobility is the height of hypocrisy because he is well aware that "there were many luxury-clear people who had become high and mighty by traffic in human flesh. As a Negro, Ray was particularly sensible to that fact—that many of the titled and ennobled and fashionable and snobbish gentry of this age have the roots of their fortunes in the selling of black bodies" (287).

Ray recalls that while they were hanging out in Toulon, the taxi driver

had once recounted to Ray how he had been arrested in a raid, when the police took from him a miniature ledger in which he kept a check-and-balance account of all the extra change he made, the places and persons (when he knew their names) that contributed to it.

The affair had been very amusing for Ray, just as it had been amusing for him to give the chauffeur all the tips and hints and cues he knew that he could follow up to gain something. In his picturesque uniform, old and overworked symbol of a free and reckless way of living, the chauffeur's ways of eking out his means of enjoying life did not seem at that time unbeautiful.

(287–88)

Ray's reaction to the anecdote about the ledger—in other words, about the strange career of yet another demotic archive—is described with the same adjective ("amusing") he applies to the clipping from *Le*

petit provençal: "it was such an amusing revelation of civilized logic that Ray had preserved it" (277). When Ray assumes that their parallel homespun archives are motivated by the same logic—"eking out" a "means of enjoying life" in the face of systemic exploitation, in a manner that records a critique of that system—he is amused by the parallel between their tactics in the trenches. But when he realizes that the chauffeur was in fact "trafficking obscenely to scramble out of the proletarian world into that solid respectable life," he finds him "unbearably ugly" (288). It is a reminder that however playful, however improvised, however eclectic, however fleeting, any archival practice is animated by a sensibility that is political as much as materialist—never just digging, but also a means of waging war.

Brent Hayes Edwards

NOTES

1. Although quotation marks are generally considered redundant with an indented block quotation, in *Banjo* this article is both indented and marked off with quotation marks, as though to emphasize that it has been extracted from a newspaper. The novel is inconsistent in this regard: throughout the book, indented song lyrics are usually cited in quotations (35, 36, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 110, 119, 120, 140, 166, 172, and 174), as is the character Taloufa's immigration status document from the United Kingdom (311), but there are some exceptions, including a song lyric (280) and the only other extended passage cited from a newspaper in the book (75–76). Interestingly, in the case of the article in French, the quotation marks were added by hand in the corrected typescript by McKay or the copyeditor (McKay, "Banjo" 322).

Here is my translation of the passage:

"An African soldier, taken by who knows what kind of vertigo, has caused a terrible carnage in Toulon.

"The authorities are doing their utmost to find out by what suite of events this black man was able to break into a chest and seize the ammunition with which he enacted the massacre.

"If they find an answer, so be it. But it seems to me that the question lies elsewhere. It might be necessary to put one's hand on one's heart and ask oneself if it is really prudent to teach primitives how to use a gun.

"I am not unaware that there are some fine exceptions; that there are 'nègre' legislators, lawyers, professors and that one of them even won the Prix Goncourt. But the majority of

these black-skinned 'natives' are big children, for whom the subtleties of our ethics are as evasive as the subtleties of our language. The most dangerous of these subtleties is the following:

"You will kill human beings in certain circumstances that we call war.

"But you will be punished if you kill outside of these circumstances.

"The Senegalese Yssima belongs to a human category for whom it is a custom, apparently, not to die alone, when one has to die. The point of honor consists in 'sending off' as many others as possible before being killed oneself.

"If this is true, one sees how far certain barrack-room jokes can lead. To put it frankly, it is not prudent to make soldiers out of men whose souls still contain unexplored recesses, and for whom our civilization is too strong a wine. Originally, under his banana trees, Yssima was doubtlessly a good black man, in perfect harmony with the ethics of his race and the laws of nature. Transplanted, deracinated, he has become a bloodthirsty madman.

"I do not want to draw any conclusion from this horrible *fait divers*. I say that such adventures (which moreover are by no means isolated) should make us reflect seriously. . . ."

2. The term "demotic archiving" is adopted from Hofmeyr and Peterson 19.

3. An archive is defined as the group of records produced by an "administrative body" in the pioneering *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* prepared in 1898 by the Dutch archivists Samuel Muller, Johan Adriaan Feith, and Robert Fruin. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that even in the *Manual's* famously narrow definition of an archive, a single clipping could make up a "whole": if "only a single paper of an archival collection is preserved, that one paper constitutes the collection; it is in itself a whole and must therefore be described by itself" (Muller et al. 14).

4. That the novel imbues the clipping with this sort of "reality effect"—although in this instance not through the inclusion of descriptive details (as in Roland Barthes's classic definition) but instead through the implied materiality of the clipping—also forces the reader to confront the question of the relationship between author (McKay) and character (Ray). Does the status of the clipping as a found document solidify the fiction of Ray as a historical actor (reading the actual newspapers of his time), or does it instead foreground McKay's own grappling with documentation as he cobbled historical sources and references into his novel? I am grateful to Rayna Kalas for pushing me to think further about this question.

5. The varieties of novelistic strategies for incorporating or remediating material from the newspaper have been exhaustively cataloged in scholarship on Victorian fiction; see, for example, Rubery 13; Valdez.

6. On Joyce's fertile relationship to the newspaper, see especially Brockman et al.

7. For a discussion of these aspects of the books by Benjamin and Aragon, see Huysen.

8. On the history of *petit nègre*, see Edwards 51–53; Echenberg 114–17.

9. See Perry's bracketed editorial note on the article "The Liberty League of Negro-Americans: How It Came to Be" (Harrison, *Hubert Harrison Reader* 87).

10. Interestingly, in the other instance where an article from a periodical is quoted in *Banjo*, it is given in English translation. The Senegalese proprietor of the African café on the quai of the Vieux Port, who has spent time in the United States, gets into an argument with a Senegalese seaman. The café owner insists that racism exists in France and that it is "no better than America. In fact, America is better every time for a colored man" (73). To clinch the argument with his compatriot, the proprietor "brought down *La Race Nègre* on him" (74). He

spread out the copy of *La Race Nègre* and began reading, while the Senegalese crowded around him with murmurs of approval and that attitude of credulity held by ignorant people toward the printed word.

He read a list of items:

Of forced conscription and young Negroes running away from their homes to escape into British African territory.

Of native officials paid less than whites for the same work.

Of forced native labor, because the natives preferred to live lazily their own lives, rather than labor for the miserable pittance of daily wages.

Of native women insulted and their husbands humiliated before them.

Of flagellation.

Of youths castrated for theft.

Of native chiefs punished by mutilation.

Of the scourge of depopulation. . . .

(75–76; ellipsis in original)

The barkeeper concludes, "That's how the Europeans treat Negroes in the colonies," and the "protesting seaman appeared crushed under the printed accounts" (76). Later Banjo asks Ray why he didn't jump into the argument, and Ray replies, "I always prefer to listen. . . . You know when he was reading that paper it was just as if I was hearing about Texas and Georgia in French" (77).

It is not clear whether the passage is an actual quotation from an article or instead a summary of the items the barkeeper enumerates as he reads. There is no article with such a passage in the collection of *La race nègre* in the Archives Nationales Section d'Outre Mer, although the holdings are incomplete and the article could presumably come from one of the issues that are missing, such as the second issue from the summer of 1927.

11. A macabre fable about an African soldier driven to madness and murder on the front lines of the First World War, David Diop's 2018 novel *Frère d'âme* (*Soul Brother*; published in English translation as *At Night All Blood Is Black*) resonates in intriguing ways with the episode recounted in

the clipping in *Banjo*. Diop's novel is equally concerned with translation, and one might suggest that there is a parallel between the recourse to camouflage in *Banjo* and the implications of translation in *Frère d'âme*, in which a key passage declares that "[t]o translate is one of the only human activities in which one is required to lie about the details to convey the truth at large" (*At Night* 138). As with the clipping in *Banjo*, language difference is used to signal opacity—a disjuncture that impedes comprehension—although *Frère d'âme* accomplishes this in another manner: the French of the narrative is "relexified" (to adopt Chantal Zabus's analytical vocabulary) in a manner to make it clear that Alfa Ndiaye, the *tirailleur sénégalais* at the center of the novel, does not speak or read the language. In a book consumed with near doubles of various sorts—starting with the homophone in the title, in which "frère d'âme" ("soul brother") is a deliberate echo of the military euphemism "frère d'armes" ("brother in arms")—Diop's novel also emphasizes the interrelation between its setting in the "trenches" (*la tranchée* in French, a term derived from the verb *trancher*, "to slice") and Alfa Ndiaye's gruesome ritualized killings of German soldiers, in which he "slashes the back of [the enemy's] knees" ("lui tranche le jarret"; *At Night* 18; *Frère d'âme* 24) to disable them before disemboweling them and cutting off their hands as gruesome trophies. In other words, *Frère d'âme* likewise suggests a link between the context of racialized violence and a counterstrategy of cutting or bodily "clipping."

12. Taking this point even further, one might say that both in its content and in the way it is handled in *Banjo*, the clipping reinforces a resonance between three senses of the term *radical*: a political commitment to large-scale social transformation is linked at once to issues of diasporic migration—recall that in the article Négis claims that the soldier's madness has resulted from the fact that he has been "transplanté, déraciné" ("transplanted, uprooted"; McKay, *Banjo* 278); Ray seems to be in "tacit agreement" with this contention when he reflects on the ways that "the West African Negroes were being torn out of their native soil" (276)—and to a mode of critique based in materialist strategies of newspaper clipping.

In this regard it is striking that, in the two short paragraphs preceding the French quotation, the narrative describes the article as having been "authorized by a radical paper supporting the radical government" (276), in which the term seems to be a reference to the governing Parti Radical. (On the history of this prominent French political party in the early twentieth century, see De Tarr; Hayward; Nicolet.) Highlighting the term *radical* with this repetition, the novel here might be said to elaborate a theorization of black radicalism through a multifaceted critique of the hegemonic white radicalism of the time.

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