

## **THE LEGACY OF W.E.B. DU BOIS (1868-1963): FROM AIME CESAIRE TO STEVE BIKO**

by

Ntongela Masilela

Dr. Du Bois has always been put forward as one of the great  
black men and one of the great leaders of the black people.

But I have said that he is one of the great intellectuals--American  
intellectuals--of the twentieth century, and today and in years to come  
his work will continue to expand in importance while the work of others declines.

--C.L.R. James, "W.E.B. Du Bois", 1965

It is more than appropriate that this twenty-fifth anniversary essay commemorating the passing away of Du Bois on August 27, 1963 in Ghana, should begin with the above statement or tribute by James concerning the intellectual greatness of Du Bois, for with the passage of time, it is becoming more and more evident that their different intellectual systems have always constituted a complimentary historical whole: if the incomparable work of Du Bois has articulated the historical and categorical structure of the black world (Africa and the Diaspora), then unquestionable, the inimitable work of James has mapped the intellectual geography of that historical logic. Concerning James, much will have to be said in another context; suffice to say that today, James, who is 87 years old, is still working on his long-awaited autobiography. the publication of this text will in immeasurable ways profoundly alter our understanding of African intellectual culture in the twentieth century.

The expansion in importance of the historical legacy of Du Bois in recent years has been phenomenal stretching from the current debates on the cultural contours and cultural logic of black modernism and Afro-American postmodernism 1 to the question of the political complexion of Marxism within an African context. If to the generation of James, Padmore, and Nkruman, Du Bois was invaluable as an architecture of Classical Pan-Africanist philosophy, a philosophy, or more appropriately, a political practice which defeated classical colonialism, and in turn was itself defeated by neo-colonialism, than, to our generation, it is other historical preoccupations which have indicated the inexhaustible legacy of Du Bois. As we have attempted to argue elsewhere, Classical Pan-Africanist philosophy received its death blows in the Congo Crisis of 1960-61. From that moment onwards, this philosophy ceased to exist as a real historical force, only to subsist as a romantic ideology which could possibly bring about the political

unity of black people all over the world: this is a conclusion that could be inferred from the recent writings of Amilcar Cabral and C.L.R. James. One of the very few countries in which this philosophy of black unity across class lines could still play a positive historical role is South Africa, where the revolutionary storm is gathering force, momentum and velocity. By and large, Kwame Nkruman's *NEO-COLONIALISM: THE LAST STAGE OF IMPERIALISM*, a book of 1964 written as a political response to the Congo Crisis, was a historical obituary to Classical Pan-Africanist philosophy, which had been inspired by Edward Blyden and stretching from Sylvester-Williams in 1900 to Nkruman himself in 1966. From the moment of his overthrow to the end of his life, Nkruman switched his political alliances from Classical Pan-Africanist philosophy to Marxism-Leninism. From what is formulated here, it should not be thought that the historical forms of this Africanist philosophy have exhausted their political secrets for us.

There can be no doubt that the way Hegel cast his intellectual illumination over the whole European culture in the nineteenth century, Du Bois, with very slight modifications, has done the same in relation to African intellectual culture in the twentieth century. In as much as Marxism emerged as a direct dialectical reaction to the colossal weight of Hegelianism within a particular moment of European history, likewise, African Marxism emerged a quarter of a century ago within our intellectual history as a consequence of the philosophical hegemony which the political philosophy founded, in all essential ways, by Du Bois, Classical Pan-Africanism, had exercised. In another context I have indicated that African Marxism emerged from the Algerian and Guinean revolutions, both of which formed a critical moment in the development of the African Revolution. In many ways, Du Bois has been and still is the spiritual father of the African Revolution.

It is only when we take the intellectual legacy of Du Bois with the utmost seriousness, we see that certain great cultural summits of African intellectual culture in our century which had been overdrawn within European intellectual space in fact belong wholly within an African intellectual tradition. We are referring to the prevalent tendency today to situate Aime Cesaire, the founder of the Negritude literary school, wholly within the Surrealist poetics and philosophy of Andre Breton with the consequence of minimizing the historical lineages which place Cesaire within a black intellectual culture far beyond the cultural parameters of the literary school he founded with Leopold Sedar Senghor. It has usually been acknowledged that without the example of the Harlem Renaissance in front of it, the emergence of the Negritude literary school would have been unthinkable. What has not been usually noticed is that the thinking or philosophy of Cesaire concerning the domination of white people over black people or Europeans over Africans has very striking parallels with, if not direct inspiration from, the texts written by Du Bois at the turn of the twentieth century. It has been

easy enough to indicate the influence of Frobenius on Césaire, which Césaire himself has on earlier occasions verbalized. But for some reason, it seems to have proven difficult to chart the pathways of descent from Du Bois to Césaire. Perhaps the spectacular intellectual clash between Richard Wright and Aimé Césaire during the First Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956, has obscured the interconnections between the black culture in America and that dominant in the Caribbean, represented by figures like C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon and Césaire himself.

If Césaire has been overdrawn within a Surrealist poetics of Eluard, Desnos, and others, Fanon too, though in his instance to a less extent, has been overdrawn within the Existentialist problematic of Jean-Paul Sartre. That Fanon was profoundly influenced by Sartre and Césaire, especially the latter's *ANTI-SEMITES AND JEWS*, cannot be doubted. What is being questioned is the overdeterministic nature of that overdrawing. By pulling Césaire to his proper median line of lineage within African intellectual culture in twentieth century, Fanon will follow suit, since Fanon is the ephebe to the former precursors.

It was André Breton, who upon discovering the great poetic voice of Césaire in April 1941 in Martinique while in exile from the German occupied France and before his departure for the United States, immediately claimed Césaire as a distinguished member of the Surrealist poetic school. Breton came across the poetry of Césaire by chance while leafing through the first issue of *Tropiques*, the literary and cultural review then edited by Césaire himself and René Menil. In an essay, "A Great Negro Poet", written two years later in New York City after this momentous encounter, which subsequently became a preface to Césaire's *RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND*, Breton had nothing but great praise for Césaire, writing among many other wonderful and splendid things: 'A black man it is who masters the French language as no white man can today'. It was in this cultural document of brilliant literary appreciation that Breton completely incorporated Césaire into the metropolitan French cultural system. Note we say incorporation and not assimilation, for Césaire could not be assimilated into French culture because the very essence of his poetic edifice was predicated on his rejection of large tracts of French culture. This rejection was because of French racism and the French imperialistic predatory acts in its colonial possessions, then stretching from Indochina through Senegal to Martinique. It is not accidental that Frantz Fanon was to protest vehemently in *BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS* against this attempted incorporation of Césaire by Breton.

It would be a serious mistake though to suppose that André Breton's attempted incorporation of Césaire was poetically unjustified. In fact, the whole poetic structure of *RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND* is bathed in the Surrealist poetic imagery. This is wholly understandable for partly because the dominant poetic

voices within French culture, but also within large segments of the international literary culture as the instances of Pablo Neruda and Cesar Vallejo in Latin America made clear, at the time when Césaire was finding and turning his poetic voice were the Surrealist poets, and partly because Césaire traced his poetic ancestry to Rimbaud and Lautréamont, the poetic saints of the Surrealist movement. Césaire has written of Lautréamont in one of the early copies of *Tropiques*: '...Lautréamont was the first to understand that what leads to poetry is the road of excess, the breach of all limitations, the quest beyond taboos, within the large obscure tom-tom, until we reach a baffling shower of stars ...' In another essay, "Poetry and Knowledge", a remarkable text analyzing French poetic structure from Baudelaire through Mallarmé to Breton, Césaire makes the following observations: 'Surrealism's glory will be in having aligned against it the whole block of admitted and unprofessed enemies of poetry. In having decanted several centuries of poetic experience. In having purged the past, oriented the present, prepared the future... Lautréamont, the very first in fact, integrated poetry and humor. He was the first to discover the functional role of humor. The first to make us feel that what love has begun, humor has the power to continue.' These statements make clear that Césaire was impelled to join the Surrealist poetic revolution in order to effect his profound innovations within it.

When André Breton attempted to incorporate, or actually succeeded in assimilating *RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND* within French culture, he was not so much blind to the fact that this great poem of defiant black consciousness was a hymn of protest and rebellion, as much as the awareness he had that the poem was all the more 'easily' assimilable because of the disjunction between its poetic form and its structural content. If the poetic form of Césaire's poem is totally within the lineages of French poetic form, the undoubtedly its structural content was wholly determined by the historical linkages of black experiences in our century. Witness the following excerpt:

And my unfenced island, its bold flesh upright at the stern of this Polynesia; and right before it, Guadeloupe slit in two at the dorsal line, and quite as miserable as ourselves; Haiti, where Negritude stood up for the first time and swore by its humanity; and the droll little tail of Florida where a Negro is being lynched, and Africa caterpillaring gigantically up to the Spanish foot of Europe, its nakedness where death cuts a wide swath.

This short extract makes clear the nature of the disjuncture between poetic form and structural content. By appropriating the poetic form, Breton hoped to pull the whole edifice of the poem. What is so unusual about the poem is that usually a disjunctive unity debilitates the structure of a poem; the extraordinary nature of

RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND is that it achieves an organic disjunctive unity, the disjunction becomes an integrated constitutional form of the poem at a very inimitable poetic pitch. Its presence is undeniable.

Jean-Paul Sartre in his magisterial essay, "Black Orpheus", which originally appeared as a preface to Leopold Sedar Senghor's 1948 anthology of Negritude poetry, gives indication of the presence of this disjunction in Césaire's poetry: 'A poem of Césaire, to the contrary, bursts and turns on itself as a fuse, as bursting suns which turn and explode in new suns, in a perpetual surpassing. It is not a question of meeting in a calm unity of opposites but rather a forced coupling, into a single sex, of black in its opposition to white . . . The originality of Césaire is to have cast his direct and powerful concern for the Negro, for the oppressed and for the militant into the world of the most destructive, and freest and the most metaphysical poetry at a time when Eluard and Aragon were failing to give political content to their verse.' Sartre argued further that Negritude poetry was the only great revolutionary poetry. Though this is a very contentious argument, concerning the revolutionary nature of Negritude poetry, it should not detain us. What was truly original in Sartre's presentation was his contention that Negritude poetry would disappear into or form a great historical synthesis in a classless society in which race would disappear as a historical category. The negritudeness of this poetry would disappear. Sartre feigned surprise that the Negritude poets had utilized Surrealist poetic structures. He had always been indifferent to, in fact, even hostile towards, the Surrealist movement until the advent of this great black poetic movement.

In his first book, *BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS*, Frantz Fanon vehemently protested against the political and cultural views postulated by both Jean-Paul Sartre and André Breton concerning the nature and form of Negritude poetics and the philosophical intent of the Negritude literary school. Against Breton, Fanon objected to the fact that the former had designated Césaire as a great black poet, rather than as a great poet. In other words, Fanon thought there was a tinge of racism in such a designation. This objection of Fanon was paradoxical, for simultaneously with this first dissension, Fanon opposed Breton's attempted incorporation of Césaire into the Surrealist school. Fanon felt that this was at a cost of minimizing the reservoirs of black experience, from which Césaire had inexhaustibly constructed *RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND*. For Fanon this black experience had nothing naturally in common with French culture. Fanon thought that the only valid historical connection between the two was the former's oppression of the latter; beyond this, he refused to accept any apparent cultural affinities. Against Sartre, Fanon objected to the fact that by dissolving Negritude poetry within an upcoming revolutionary synthesis, Sartre had in effect confiscated his literary and cultural heritage. Fanon argued for the historical singularity of the Negritude black experience, beyond any forms of

dialectical incorporation, even on class terms. What Fanon was arguing for was the political and cultural autonomy of Negritude historical experience within the dominant French culture, beyond any processes of incorporation and assimilation. That Fanon later in *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH* was to agree with Sartre's intent of dissolving the black strands of the Negritude experience in the historical stream of revolutionary consciousness, is another story for another occasion.

There can be no doubt that Fanon's critique of the way Breton and Sartre viewed the historical nature of the Negritude literary school has had a tremendous effect within French intellectual culture. Since the writing of this critique in 1952, a new perception of the position of Césaire within international literary culture has evolved in French cultural circles. This is apparently evident in an essay, "Who is Aime Césaire?", written by the great Michel Leiris in 1965. In this essay Michel Leiris disputes the necessity of calling Césaire a great black poet, rather than just naturally a great poet. But much more important, Leiris draws attention to the danger of viewing Césaire's great poetic oeuvre too close within the perspective of French culture, even though Césaire was profoundly influenced by some great French poets of the past, rather than within an international domain where it fundamentally belongs as part of resistance to all forms of colonial domination. Leiris also disputes Sartre's point of seeing Negritude as anti-racist racism or reverse racism. For Leiris what is characteristic about Césaire's poetry is its search for a particular identity outside the boundaries imposed by French cultural hegemony. C.L.R. James indirectly confirms the correctness of the new perspective formulated by Michel Leiris by arguing that the achievement of Césaire, particularly in *RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND*, was not only in assisting to establish the national identity of the whole West Indies, but also in replacing the imperial image of Europe with that of Africa in the historical and cultural imagination of the Caribbean peoples. James' essay, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro", which forms an Appendix to the 1962 edition *THE BLACK JACOBINS*, situates Césaire within a Caribbean tradition stretching from Fernando Ortiz in Cuba in the early part of this century through Marcus Garvey and George Padmore to Wilson Harris in Guyana, and continued by Roberto Fernandez Ratamar in Cuba today: a tradition that specifies that any authentic search for a national identity in the West Indies can only be achieved through a simultaneous identification with Africa, the ancestral homeland of the many people in the Caribbean.

For James then, the concept of Negritude is not only synonymous with the ideas associated with the literary school founded by Césaire and Senghor, but rather designates a much wider historical space and scope: the emancipation of Africans and the African peoples in the diaspora from all forms of colonial domination. The concept of colonialism has unquestionably been important in the literary and

historical imagination of Cesaire. In fact, retrospectively, what enabled Frantz Fanon to resist with certainty Breton's and Sartre's attempted incorporation of Cesaire wholly within a European cultural space, was his awareness of Cesaire's formulations on colonialism, which were later published in a book form in 1955 by Presence Africaine . By 1952, when Fanon published BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS, he was well aware with Cesaire's ideas on colonialism, for they deeply influenced the structure of his book. Fanon's later political trajectory was to be the elaboration on the historical plane and through armed struggle of the thesis formulated in DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM.

Though DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM was actually published approximately fifteen years after the publication of RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND, it is clear that it is the historical ideas in the former book that have determined the poetics present in the latter book. It is not necessary here to indicate the nature of that determination. What is much more important, is to indicate that DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM belongs to an African (African in its most comprehensive global meaning) intellectual tradition in this century founded by Du Bois. In other words, Cesaire belongs to a black intellectual tradition stretching from Du Bois pass Frantz Fanon and C.L.R. James to Walter Rodney, than that designated by the names of Arthur Rimbaud and Rene Char. There is a direct line of continuity between Du Bois fifteen-page essay, "The Souls of White Folk", with Cesaire's DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM and Fanon's THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH. This will be made clear in a moment. It is the forms of continuity that constitute for us today the great legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois.

If we are emphasizing that Du Bois founded a particular African intellectual tradition, it is not necessarily because we want to delimit the historical space of this intellectual tradition, for behind him there are Edward Blyden and Alexander Crummell, and even further back there are Juan Latino (in sixteenth-century Spain) and Wilhelm Amo (in eighteenth-century Germany), but because his writings in a profound way transformed this black intellectual tradition. The importance of this black American intellectual was recognized early in his career by African intellectuals, for his first major public, "The Conservation of Races", delivered in 1897 to the American Negro Academy, in which he said among other things, 'For the development of Negro genius, of Negro literature and art, of Negro spirit, only Negroes bound and welded together , Negroes inspired by one vast ideal, can work out in its fullness the great message we have for humanity', was reprinted in the Lagos Weekly Record . In this public address, as with practically all his major works, Du Bois advocated cultural pluralism and never black nationalism.

The colossal importance of W.E.B. Du Bois for an African intellectual tradition

in the twentieth century is beyond overestimation: THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK (1903) founded Afro-American modernism, influencing writers like the late James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, and extending its influence to the postmodernist novel of Ishmael Reed, MUMBO JUMBO; THE SUPPRESSION OF THE AFRICAN SLAVE-TRADE TO THE UNITED STATES 1638-1870 published in 1896 made possible the emergence of Eric Williams' CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY and also Walter Rodney's HOW EUROPE UNDERDEVELOPED AFRICA; BLACK RECONSTRUCTION written in 1935 facilitated the reconstruction of the Haitian Revolution in James' THE BLACK JACOBINS and publication early this year of Eric Foner's monumental RECONSTRUCTION; THE WORLD AND AFRICA published in 1947 made possible the towering historiography of Cheikh Anta Diop, especially in THE AFRICAN ORIGIN OF CIVILIZATION. The parallels and the influences could be drawn even further; but what they do indicate, is that while the figure of Du Bois is evidently apparent in the English-speaking African world, within the French-speaking African world his influence is not apparently evident.

On its original appearance in late 1961, a few weeks before Frantz Fanon's death at the age of 36 from leukemia on December 6th, THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH created a great intellectual sensation, not only because of its brilliance and originality, but also because it was perceived within European intellectual circles as a text that sought to challenge and destroy the hegemony of European civilization using the intellectual constructs and epistemological concepts developed by that same European culture. It was this latter point which made this book such a scandal in many European countries. In other words, THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH was assumed automatically to be a product of European culture. The assumption was that this bible of the dispossessed could only be a product of a European mind, even if clothed in a black skin. Even the incomparable Jean-Paul Sartre in his great Preface to the book pulled Fanon within the confines of a European intellectual tradition: for he praised him as the first person since Friedrich Engels to bring ordering into history. This was indeed great praise, nonetheless misplaced. With the recent unveiling of the prodigious legacy of Du Bois by, among others, Houston A. Baker, Jr. concerning its role in the formation of Afro-American modernism and Manning Marable in relation to its prefiguration of the complex dialectic between black intellectuals and international Marxist culture, it is more than apparent that Frantz Fanon belongs to the African intellectual tradition designated by the name of Du Bois as much as that signified by that of Engels. If it has been easy for European intellectuals to view Fanon totally within their intellectual context in complete isolation from any possible intersecting processes, this is largely due to the fact that THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH, like so many other great documents of black culture, is about contiguous relationships between African national histories and European imperial histories. The historical experience of colonialism has made

this unavoidable.

But in actuality, Fanon belongs to a black international intellectual tradition. The intellectual edifice of Du Bois illuminates also the philosophical structure of *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH*. Two of Fanon's principal thematic structures in the book, the Manichaeism governing the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and the unrelenting critique of European culture and civilization, which in many ways determine his philosophy of history, are directly traceable to some of Du Bois brilliant essays in the early part of this century. The point here is not to claim that Fanon read these philosophical reflections and analyses; in fact, it could be argued on the contrary, that because of the extraordinariness of Césaire, who stood between Fanon and Du Bois, Fanon had no compellingly intellectual reasons for confronting Du Bois directly and historically. Perhaps the correspondence between Fanon and Richard Wright was Fanon's way of coming to terms with the historical experience that had given rise to the historical necessity of a Du Bois. The importance of Césaire for Fanon within these constellations of relationships is due to the fact that *DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM* gave the historical subject for *STUDIES IN A DYING COLONIALISM, TOWARDS THE AFRICAN REVOLUTION* and *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH* to Fanon.

Fanon's Conclusion to *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH* has become a political testament for many Third World intellectuals. Its philosophical contents strikes a remarkable resemblance to the contents of Du Bois' "The Souls of White Folk". This essay by Du Bois was written in 1920, three years after the closing of the First World War; hence, the constant allusions to it. Du Bois writes of Europe in the following manner:

As we saw the dead dimly through rifts of battle-smoke and heard faintly the cursings and accusations of blood brothers, we darker men said: This is not Europe gone mad; this is not aberration nor insanity; this is Europe; this seeming Terrible is the real soul of white culture--back of all culture,--stripped and visible today. . . . If, then, European triumphs in culture have been greater, so, too, may her failures have been greater. . . . How many of us today fully realize the current theory of colonial expansion, of the relation of Europe which is white, to the world which is black and brown and yellow? Bluntly put, that theory is this: It is the duty of white Europe to divide up the darker world and administer it for Europe's good. This Europe has largely done. The European world is using black and brown men for all the uses which men know.

This is the extraordinary prefiguration of what Frantz Fanon was to write approximately forty years later on in *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH*. In this text, Fanon writes:

Europe now lives at such a mad, reckless pace that she has shaken off all guidance and all reason, and she is running head-long into the abyss; we would do well to avoid it with all possible speed. Yet it is very true that we need a model, and that we want blueprints and examples. For many among us the European model is the most inspiring. We have therefore seen in the preceding pages to what mortifying set-backs such an imitation has led us. European achievements, European techniques and the European style ought no longer to tempt us and to throw us off balance. When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.

Cesaire, in a poetic form, continues the same historical critique:

Hear the white world  
horribly fatigued by its immense effort  
its rebellious articulations crack under the  
hard stars  
its inflexibilities of blue steel pierce the  
mystic flesh  
hear its treacherous victories trumpeting  
its defeats  
hear with grandiose alibis the pitiful  
stumbling.

In a philosophical mode, DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM, Cesaire makes a similar riposte:

In truth, I have said something totally different: that the great historical drama of Africa is not so much due to its very late contact to the external world, as much as the manner and way in which that contact was brought about; that Europe at the moment of its expansion was under the control of immoral money-speculators and industrial-capitalists; that it was our misfortune to have collided with this Europe on our path; and lastly, that this Europe itself has to answer to humanity for history's incalculable deaths.

These four passages clearly indicate the patterns of historical awareness of Europe's ravaging of Africa: it is this historical consciousness that defines the constellation of relationships from Du Bois through Cesaire to Fanon: here can be seen the indirect streams of influences within the structure of black intellectual tradition in the twentieth-century.

Du Bois has had a very profound influence on African intellectual culture precisely because of his deep love for Africa, because of his firm grasp of Africa's contributions to human civilization, and because of his unmatched knowledge of African history. It was this placing of Africa at the center of his historical consciousness that informed his political credo and philosophical perspective. Perhaps no other essay by Du Bois shows this more than another essay of 1920 called, "The Hands of Ethiopia". Among the many beautiful things in this essay, the following splendid passages compel one to quote them: `Semper novi quid ex Africa ,' cried the Roman proconsul, and he voiced the verdict of forty centuries. Yet there are those who would write world history and leave out of account this marvelous of continents. . . . Always Africa is giving us something new or some metempsychosis of a world-old thing. . . . As Mommsen says: `It was through Africa that Christianity became the religion of the world.' In Africa the last flood of Germanic invasions spent itself within hearing of the last gasp of Byzantium, and it was through Africa that Islam came to play its great role of conqueror and civilizer.

The references to Africa, which are scattered throughout Du Bois' colossal oeuvre, show beyond a shadow of a doubt that his passionate commitment to Africa was not merely a seasonal or passing matter, but a continuous and profoundly held political conviction. This can easily be shown in his numerous historical works ranging from RECONSTRUCTION and THE WORLD AND AFRICA to many pamphlets on historical matters. What is truly revealing is that even purely literary works, like THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK, are studded with allusions to Africa's great past and to the beauty of Africa's artefacts. In THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK, which is a collection of extraordinary essays on essential matters relevant to the black experience at the turn of the twentieth-century, and which directly leads to the late James Baldwin's THE FIRE NEXT TIME, we find the following allusion to Africa:

The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the Shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx. Throughout history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness.

In many instances, Du Bois' reference to Ethiopia should be seen as a code-name for Africa, for in Antiquity, especially for figures like Herodotus, Aristophanes and others, Ethiopia was synonymous with Africa.

The other thematic structure of THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH, through which Fanon within the intellectual tradition founded by Du Bois, is the concept of Manichaeism. Fanon has the following on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized:

The colonial world is a world divided into compartments. It is probably unnecessary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans; in the same way we need not recall Apartheid in South Africa. . . . Thus we see that the primary Manichaeism which governed colonial society is preserved intact during the period of decolonization; that is to say that the settler never ceases to be the enemy, the opponent, the foe that must be overthrown.

Comparable passages can be found in the work of Du Bois which are concerned with the black-white relationship within the American context:

For two or more centuries America has marched proudly in the van of human hatred--making bonfires of human flesh and laughing at them hideously, and making the insulting of millions more than a matter of dislike--rather a great religion, a world war-cry: Up white, down black; to your tents, O white folk, and world war with black and parti-colored mongrel beasts!

This observation from Du Bois brings to memory Fanon's famous declamation concerning the United States in *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH*:

Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. it succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions.

These citations do not by any stretch of the imagination exhaust the interrelatedness of perspectives between Du Bois and Fanon. What this clearly shows is that Fanon belongs to a particular black intellectual tradition as much as he might have affinities with certain portions of European intellectual tradition.

It is through the influence of Frantz Fanon that an intellectual tradition founded by W.E.B. Du Bois has had its most serious and profound repercussions in Africa today: we mean the influence of Fanon on Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Kenya and the late Steve Biko of South Africa. Ngugi himself had direct acquaintance with the works of Du Bois, or his essay, "The Links that Bind Us", in *WRITERS IN POLITICS*, derives its logic from Du Bois' *DUSK OF DAWN*. The coupling of these two countries is not accidental for the present writer considers both of them to be his Heimatland and also for the reason that neocolonial Kenya is an example of what will become of South Africa if a truly democratic revolution effectively changing the social structure is not achieved. Usually the influence of Du Bois within an African political and cultural context has been traced through

the philosophy and ideology of Pan-Africanism: he deeply influenced Kwame Nkrumah, Peter Abrahams, Jomo Kenyatta, Kamuzu Banda and many others: some of whom patriotically served the African Revolution, and some of whom betrayed it. There are countless books, essays and monographs testifying to this particular influence. If that particular influence of Du Bois through the Pan-Africanist philosophy is only of historical interest to our generation of Africans today in 1988, this is because this ideology, upon defeating and expelling classical colonialism from Africa, in turn, this very philosophy itself was defeated by imperialism in the Congo Crisis of 1960, when imperialism entered a new phase of neo-colonialism. It is in this context that the ideology of Classical Pan-Africanism disappeared from African history as a living philosophy of our central contemporary political problems.

African Marxism, founded by Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral together, respectively within Algerian and Guinean revolutions, has replaced Classical Pan-Africanism as the only living philosophy of contemporary African history and political history. The historical mission of African Marxism is to defeat neo-colonialism and imperialism which are running rampant in Africa today: Ngugi wa Thiong'o is the living embodiment of that mission. To revert to Du Bois for a moment: it is interesting to note that as much as Du Bois found his rendezvous with Classical Marxism unavoidable, so also the other great figures of Classical Pan-Africanism, like George Padmore, C.L.R. James and Kwame Nkrumah, found it also unavoidable. Their confrontation with Classical Marxism had more to do with the entanglements of European history, however much this assisted them in their great achievement of defeating European classical colonialism. In other words, African Marxism is a major African political philosophy emerging from the African continent, not from the diaspora as was the case with Classical Pan-Africanism. In a lecture, "The Particular Forms of Classical African Marxism", given four months ago in May at the Peoples' University in West Berlin, we attempted to theorize the historical structure of this materialist philosophy.

African Marxism then, is a direct outcome and product of contemporary African history. Ngugi wa Thiong'o first came across it in Fanon's *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH* during his student days at the University of Leeds in 1966: Peter Nazareth, the Ugandan Indian scholar, now resident in the United States, has recorded the impact of Fanon on Ngugi. The effect of this impact was to make Ngugi delay producing any serious creative work for a full decade. And when finally a literary work emerged, *PETALS OF BLOOD*, it was profoundly imbued with Fanonist philosophy. In many ways, this novel is an attempt to realize Fanonism in a creative literary work; this attempt partly explains the failure of this novel as a work of the imagination. But much more fundamental is that Fanon's influence was to have a much prouder impact on Ngugi's understanding of African cultural history and on his practice of cultural politics in Africa. It

should also be recalled that Ngugi was also involved in that great cultural process, which happened more concretely in South Africa and Nigeria and just pre-independence and post-independence, that is the formation of national literatures in Africa written in the European languages. The famous Kampala Conference of 1963 was a historical expression of this literary phenomenon. In many ways, however, paradoxical, ironical and bewildering, this attempt to forge a national cultures and national literatures through the medium of the European languages in the 1950s and the 1960s was expressed in three great cultural and literary reviews: *Transition* based in Uganda, *Drum* in South Africa, and *Black Orpheus* in Nigeria. *Transition* and *Black Orpheus* were truly continental periodicals, whereas *Drum* was mainly a national phenomenon. It was in the two former periodicals that the South African national literary school, the Sophiatown Renaissance writers ( *Drum* ), found a home after being exiled following the Sharpville Massacre of 1960. Likewise, Ngugi found a home in *Transition* , as well as Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria.

Thus, in the 1960s there developed two parallel processes which were divergent from each other in Africa's political and cultural history: namely African Marxism and the movement towards the formation of National Cultures and National Literatures: one expressing the class position of the proletariat and the peasantry, the other the class position of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. The historical importance of Ngugi wa Thiong'o in contemporary African cultural history, perhaps more than any intellectual, is that both these process of African Marxism and the movement towards the formation of authentic National Cultures converge in his person. This convergence has had incalculable consequences within African cultural history. In the 1960s was the confrontation between these historical forces in the historical person of Ngugi, in the 1970s the genesis, in the 1980s the consequences and the historical results are still to come: Ngugi's critical works, *HOMECOMING*, *WRITERS IN POLITICS*, *DETAINED*, *BARREL OF A PEN*, and *DECOLONISING THE MIND* are expression of this monumental process.

It is remarkable how one of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's fundamental critical documents he has ever written, "Mau Mau Is Coming Back: The Revolutionary Significance of 20th October 1952 in Kenya Today", a text of 1982 re-conceptualizing the structure of Kenyan national history and the metamorphosis of its cultural configurations, is heavily influenced by Fanon's formulations on the politics of neo-colonialism and on cultural politics. This document might be the most penetrative and thorough going application of Fanon's political insights within a particular African national context. Without a shadow of a doubt, a liberated and democratic Kenya will start from this text in re-interpreting Kenyan history, totally far from neocolonialist interpretations which dominate this area. But much more central to our preoccupations today, that is, a new reading of the cultural

and political legacy of Du Bois, is Ngugi's formulation of a political and cultural credo which is the consequence of the convergence mentioned above. In *BARREL OF A PEN* Ngugi writes:

Thus the major contradiction in the third world is between national identity and imperialist domination. This to me is still the real and fundamental conflict of cultures: viz, a national patriotic culture arising out of and getting its character from the struggle against imperialism. Other contradictions, between the urban and the rural, the modern and the traditional, and between the different nationalities are secondary and they can only be properly appreciated within the context of the larger basic contradiction.

From this political credo, Ngugi was to effect and has been effecting a total re-appraisal and re-evaluation of African cultural history. This reshaping of African cultural history was dialectically connected to a new cultural politics initiated by him. Among the several consequences, the following are among the noteworthy: first, Ngugi was to argue that a truly patriotic and authentic national literature within an African context should and must be written in the African languages; secondly, this new patriotic national literature ought to be written fundamentally from the perspective of the peasantry, in alliance with the proletariat; thirdly, this new mode of national literatures in the African languages would make possible a historical connection to oral forms of artistic expression, which imperialism and colonialism had severely disconnected; fourthly, in order for this patriotic national literature to find its proper cultural space, imperial white colonial settler culture and its accompanying racist literature, which had imposed itself on the national territory, should be thoroughly historically criticized together with its remnants with the aim of expelling it from the national consciousness of the young Third World nations; fifth, for all of this to be effected, a new patriotic political leadership, totally oriented towards the people and towards socialism, should assume State power. There can be little doubt that Ngugi wa Thiong'o has very slowly and with much resistance against him effecting a Long Revolution in our cultural history in Africa.

Following Frantz Fanon, Ngugi is the first great modern poet of the African peasantry, as much as Fanon was its great political philosopher. Ngugi in this regard can be contrasted to Sembene Ousmane, the first great modern poet of the African proletariat. To be sure, Ngugi would object to such a designation, but the fact of the matter is that when Ngugi has attempted to force the poetics of African proletariat in his creative imagination, the results have been the disaster of *PETALS OF BLOOD*. It is perhaps the dislocation of the structure of this novel that has led the brilliant American Marxist scholar, Fredric Jameson, to politely designate Ngugi in his study of Third World literature as being very problematical. Whenever Ngugi has put the peasantry at the center of his poetics,

the fertility of his creative imagination has been unstoppable; whenever Ngugi has attempted to put the working class, well the results are there for everyone to see for themselves. In other words, Ngugi has incorporated into his historical imagination only one wing of African Marxism, the Fanonist wing. The other dominant wing of African Marxism, the Cabralist, does not truly fascinate his imagination, however much in his fundamental essay of 1973, "Literature and Society", he makes repeated references to Amilcar Cabral; compare this essay with that of 1982, "Mau Mau is Coming Back." This historical delimitation of Ngugi's creative imagination by no means lessens his inestimable importance in our cultural history. It would be difficult to disagree with Edward W. Said's judgement that Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a major world artist and intellectual: that is an evaluation of a major literary critic.

In many ways, Ngugi is conscious of the complex splay of the intellectual tradition in which he occupies a prominent position: its extension from America to Africa and onwards to Brazil. In some of the essays he anthologized in *HOME COMING*, he investigated the forms and lineages of the interrelatedness between African literatures and the Caribbean literatures: George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul (whom Derek Walcott today calls V. S. Nightfall and Said refers to as a colonial renegade), C.L.R. James, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe were at the center of that discourse. In *WRITERS IN POLITICS*, one of the essays assembled by Ngugi is called, "The Robber and the Robbed: Two Antagonistic Images in Afro-American Literature and Thought", which examines the historical passages in the formation of black American literary culture. Of interest to us within the context of the present essay, is what he says of W.E.B. Du Bois. Ngugi places Du Bois within an Afro-American cultural tradition stretching from Olaudah Equiano through Paul Robeson and Malcolm X to Imamu Baraka: a progressive cultural tradition articulating the positions of the most advanced forces of social change in the United States. It could be argued that Ngugi situates Steve Biko within an African context in the same progressive tradition, for we find the following statement in *DETAINED*:

Books about economic exploitation, and the Boer fascist oppression of Africans in South Africa are not allowed through: hence Wood's *BIKO* has been returned to sender. Books about slavery, racism, and political oppression in the heartland of imperialism, the U.S.A., are not allowed: hence Haley's *ROOTS* has also been returned to sender. I now want to know more.

The parallelisms between the United States and South Africa are too obvious to need any further commenting, as George Fredrickson made clear a few years back in his acclaimed study.

The question of Steve Biko within the black intellectual tradition we are attempting to cartograph is a very complicated issue, whose complexity is very much open, as the question of South Africa itself is wide open. It can be said with certainty that the two major points of intellectual reference for Biko, which profoundly influenced his intellectual formation as much as his structure of intellectual analysis, were two great Martiniquian intellectuals: Frantz Fanon and Aime Cesaire. Biko's book, *I WRITE WHAT I LIKE*, is one of our outstanding national books that we South Africans possess in which a rich international African intellectual tradition is brought to bear on our historical experience with tremendous effectiveness. Effectiveness, in the sense of presenting correct historical solutions. The book bristles, or more correctly is studded with allusions to Fanon: from the title of one of his essays, "Black Souls in White Skins", which is a variation or play on Fanon's *BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS* to paraphrasing Fanon's "Racism and Culture", anthologized in *TOWARDS THE AFRICAN REVOLUTION*, without attributing the source in Biko's essay, "We Blacks". Cesaire is brilliantly tossed up and down with affectionate ease in many of Biko's essays. The principal object of Biko's analysis was Ideology, its internal metamorphosis, rather than as a product of material processes.

It could be said then, that as much as Fanon polemicised against Breton and Sartre on the question of the autonomy or peculiarity of Cesaire's poetics within the dominant history of French poetics, as much also Cesaire himself polemicised against the French Communist Party in 1956 on the question of the uniqueness or singularity of the black experience within the international communist movement, Biko also unavoidably polemicised against Liberal ideology on the question of the uniqueness of the black experience in relation to white domination in South Africa. Biko derived from Fanon and Cesaire the concept of the political autonomy of any historical experience which is in the process of gestation and maturation. He held fast to the unending prolongation of that process. But equally, Biko always worked for reconciliation and mutual understanding between races, as this was expressed in a statement Cesaire's which he was fond of quoting in several of his essays.:

. . . no race possesses the monopoly of truth, intelligence, force and there is room for all of us at the rendezvous of victory.

In face, *AT THE RENDEZVOUS OF VICTORY* is the title of C.L.R. James' latest collection of essays, a way of saluting Cesaire and remembering Biko.

In arguing for the autonomy of Black Consciousness, Biko felt himself to be a continuator of an intellectual tradition in South Africa. He saw himself as an

extension of the ideology which was central to the African National Congress Youth League: Anton Lembede, the young Nelson Mandela, the young Oliver Tambo and others. It is perhaps this perceived historical connection that made Biko to be absolutely certain of his correctness. He felt that the radicalness of the Youth League was responsible for the Defiance Campaign of 1952 and the Freedom Charter of 1955. In fact, the Freedom Charter is also a constant reference in Biko's essays. Consequently, Biko's relation to the African National Congress seems to have been ambivalent. the real serious limitation of Biko is to have examined Ideology only as a racial category and never as a class relation.

Beyond this limitation, it is remarkable how Biko's essay of 1971, "Some African Cultural Concepts" finds its point of continuity with the Chapter on African Culture in Du Bois' book of 1913, THE NEGRO. In both, History and Culture are articulated into each other to forge different cultural tableaux. Each of the essays refers to the context of the other: in other words, Biko speaking of African culture finds it necessary to refer to Afro-American jazz; likewise, Du Bois relates the African artistic art of weaving and pottery to Afro-American culture. Indeed, the intimate awareness of each other's cultures in this century between South African black culture and Afro-American culture has been astonishing: the exchange of ideas and influences between Booker T. Washington and John Dube, the exchange of letters between Sol Plaatje and Du Bois, the impact of Marcus Garvey on his followers in South Africa, again the exchange of letters between Richard Wright and Peter Abrahams in the late 1940s, the essay of E'skia Mphahlele on Langston Hughes in Presence Africaine in 1957 which eventually led to their close friendship, and the latest Miles Davis jazz album called Tutu. These historical relationships are in their own way an expression of the African intellectual tradition founded by Du Bois.

1 ) See my essay, "The Passion of Literary Theory in Contemporary Black America: An African Perspective", which is a Marxist response to the poststructuralist problematic of Houston A. Baker's Jr. theory of modernism and Henry Louis Gates', Jr., reading of postmodernism in Ishmael Reed's MUMBO JUMBO. This essay is compiled in the forthcoming book, THE PHOTOGRAPHIC VISION OF PETER MAGUBANE AND OTHER ESSAYS (Skottaville: Johannesburg).

) The essay, "The Particular Forms of Classical African Marxism", anthologized in the above mentioned book.

) See the eye-witness accounts of Janheinz Jahn and James Baldwin: respectively, "World Congress of Black Writers", Black Orpheus , no. 1, September 1957, and "Princes and Powers", in THE PRICE OF THE TICKET, New York, 1985.

- ) Andre Breton, "A Great Negro Poet", in Aime Cesaire's CAHIER D'UN RETOUR AU PAYS NATAL/RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND, trans. Emile Snyder, Presence Africaine, Paris 1971, p. 14. First published in French in 1939, though written in 1936.
- ) Aime Cesaire, "Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautreamont", in Tropiques , cited by Andre Breton, op. cit., p. 26.
- ) Aime Cesaire, "Poetry and Knowledge", trans. A. James Arnold, Sulfur 4, 1982, p. 22, p. 26. Originally appeared in Tropiques in January 1945.
- ) Aime Cesaire, RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND, op. cit., p. 66.
- ) Jean-Paul Sartre, BLACK ORPHEUS, trans. S. W. Allen, Presence Africaine, 1971, p. 36, p. 39.
- ) Michel Leiris, "Who is Aime Cesaire?", trans. A. James Arnold, Sulfur 4, 1982, pp. 7-16.
- ) C.L.R. James, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro", and Appendix to THE BLACK JACOBINS, Vintage Books, New York, Second Edition, 1962, pp. 391-418.
- ) Aime Cesaire, DISCOURS SUR LE COLONIALISME, the German translation UBER DEN KOLONIALISMUS, trans. Monika Kind, Wagenbach, Berlin, 1968, will be utilized.
- ) W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of the Races" (1897) cited in Manning Marable, W.E.B. DU BOIS: BLACK RADICAL DEMOCRAT, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1986, pp. 34-37.
- ) Jean-Paul Sartre, Preface, Frantz Fanon, THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH, Penguin Books, London, Reprint 1985, pp. 7-26.
- ) Houston A. Baker, Jr., MODERNISM AND THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987; Manning Marable, op. cit.
- ) W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk", in WRITINGS, The Library of America, New York, 1986, p. 929, p. 930, p. 931.

- ) Frantz Fanon, op. cit., p. 252.
- ) Aime Cesaire, RETURN TO MY NATIVE LAND, op. cit., p. 118-120.
- ) Aime Cesaire, UBER DEN KOLONIALISMUS, op. cit., p. 26-27, my translation.
- ) W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Hands of Ethiopia", in WRITINGS, op. cit, p. 949.
- ) W.E.B. Du Bois, THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK, in WRITINGS, ibid., p. 365.
- ) Frantz Fanon, op. cit., p. 29, p. 39.
- ) W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk", op. cit, p. 937.
- ) Frantz Fanon, op. cit., p. 252.
- ) Ngugi wa Thiongo, "National Identity and Imperialist Domination: The Crisis of Culture in Africa Today", in BARREL OF A GUN, New Beacon Books, London, 1983, p. 80.
- ) Ngugi wa Thiongo, "Literature and Society", in WRITERS IN POLITICS, London, 1981, pp. 3-33; "Mau Mau is Coming Back", in BARREL OF A PEN, op. cit. pp. 7-31.
- ) Edward W. Said, "Third World Intellectuals", Salmagundi , no. 74-75, October 1987.
- ) Ngugi wa Thiongo, "The Robber and the Robbed: Two Antagonistic Images in Afro-American Literature and Thought", in WRITERS IN POLITICS, op. cit., p. 134.
- ) Ngugi wa Thiongo, DETAINED, Heinemann, London, 1981, p. 132.
- ) Steve Biko, "Fear--An Important Determinant in South African Politics", I WRITE WHAT I LIKE, Heinemann, London, 1978, p. 77.