

# AN INTELLECTUAL ITINERARY

by

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We want history of facts and records, not of mere opinions and false partisan interpretations; history established by study and observation, and not by logical arguments; history which is guided by principles of humanism, rather than the dictates and niceties of scholasticism; history that takes into account human nature and geographical and other factors, rather than that which blindly adheres to rules of classicism and scholarship.

---H. I. E. Dhlomo, "The Evolution of the Bantu", *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 21 November 1931.

Africans are fond of the American Negroes and often look upon the rapid progress and achievements of this group as an indication, an example, of what the black man here can and must do. One of the chief points in Negro technique in their battle for liberation and progress, is to support and boost as loudly as possible their individual men and women of talent and achievement. Their patriotism and enthusiasm in this direction are remarkable . . .

---H. I. E. Dhlomo, "Personal and Cultural Achievements", *Ilanga lase Natal*, 14 August 1948.

Being one of the four teenage sons whose South African parents were in voluntary exile in the 1960s assured that my intellectual formation would be forged in a cosmopolitan context of exile politics. With hindsight, there can be no doubt that Nairobi was one of the best places in the world for an African between the ages of fifteen and nineteen to have experienced and attempted to make historical sense of the paradoxes, contradictions and transformations of that legendary decade. What made the 1960s so memorable and equally uncharacteristic were the revolutionary hopes and historical expectations that made the experiencing of the temporality of the moment seem a series of unending perpetual changes.

My intellectual formation was determined in 1967 at age eighteen when I discovered or encountered the historical dimensions of the Cuban Revolution, the political thinking of Frantz Fanon and the epistemic structure of Western Marxism. A year before this determinant year I came across one of Jean-Paul

Sartre's shortened essays of the 1940s on Existentialism that argued that its fundamental essence was a search for Freedom. This short piece appeared of all places in a 1964 or 1965 copy of *Life* magazine. Libraries and bookstores, a few years after Kenya entered its postcolonial phase, having attained its independence in 1963, were well stocked with all kinds of books, journals and magazines. I started reading many of his writings in English translation that were available at the MacMillan Library, a public institution which had deep connections to the British settler community in the country. The two books by the French philosopher that I read then and are still present inside me were *What is Literature?* and *Search for A Method*, which although it was an 'Introduction' to *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, was published in English translation by itself in 1963. On reading these two books I discovered that Sartre had shifted from Existentialism in the direction of Marxism. The reading of them, one on political commitment in literary practice and the other on proper epistemological methodology in establishing explanatory connections between structures and agencies, converted my lightweight Christianity into engagement with Marxism. In a strange way, the Marxism of Sartre made me retrospectively understand two African political 'events' whose importance dawned on me because of the agitation and anger it caused in my parents and adults around me: the assassination of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba of the Congo in January 1961 at age twelve while I was at Thulasizwe Primary School in Soweto (Orlando West); and the assassination of President Sylvanus Olympio of Togo in January 1963 at age fifteen while I was at Emerson Junior High School in Los Angeles (Westwood). Sartre made me begin to have a grasp on the phenomena of European colonialism and American imperialism. The importance of Sartre at this time was to make me aware of European intellectual traditions other than the English literary tradition from Shakespeare to Auden that our English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish teachers diligently gave us in Nairobi with the utmost seriousness and determination.

Although Jean-Paul Sartre preceded Fanon in my intellectual formation, it was the latter's writings which, to quote Perry Anderson on the effect of the writings of Fredric Jameson in revealing the nature of the postmodern in our time, 'exploding like so many magnesium flares in a night sky . . . suddenly transforming its shadows and obscurities into an eerie, refulgent tableau' (Foreword to Jameson's *The Cultural Turn*). This could safely be said of Fanon in regard to my generation be it in Africa or in the African Diaspora: *before and after Fanon*. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* opened me to so many historical and intellectual horizons: the Negritude Movement of Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Pan Africanism of W. E. B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore, the unending African Crisis, the Cuban Revolution of Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the African American intellectual culture of Richard Wright and Langston Hughes. Fanon made several things

fundamentally clear to me that have since been at the center of my intellectual preoccupations: the aim and idea of the Cuban Revolution must be defended at all costs against the machinations of European and American imperialism(s); that Africa *politically* had much to learn from the Latin American experience than it could ever do from Europe; that classical colonialism had ended and neo-colonialism had ensued; that Europe and United States can never be the true benefactors to Africa; that at the center of the African Crisis was and is poor skills of African leadership and the inherently tragic nature of the African national bourgeoisie; that the dialectic between race and class, and ethnicity and nationhood, in Africa, are distinct and unique thus consequently can not be directly extrapolated from other historical experiences. Given these historical lessons from the master of the African Revolution, with hindsight, I would have to say that all of the essays assembled in this anthology are a homage to his remembrance in this fiftieth year (2011) anniversary of his death.

There were other lessons to be had in Nairobi other than those imparted by Frantz Fanon. While *The Wretched of the Earth* examined the historical structure of European colonialism, among other things, it was African literature in the European languages, which was encountered for the first time at this moment, that its impact on the African psyche was revealed in its most devastatingly graphic form. The two novels of the Cameroonian writer Ferdinand Oyono, *Houseboy* and *The Old Man and the Medal*, have been peerless in portraying the psychological mechanism of colonialism. Even though I read them only once nearly forty-five years ago, and never again revisited them, they still remain to me to this day a fundamental reference as to the nature of colonialism. I would have to say that no other African writer within this 'school' of African literature in the European languages has had a comparable continuing endurance on my intellectual consciousness. It was this writer, whose importance I cannot possibly overestimate who made the 'normalcy' of African literature in the European languages real to me. It was only on encountering Mazisi Kunene a few years later in the mid 1970s at University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA, he as a professor and I as a graduate student) that I became aware of the existence of African literature in the African languages. Although I encountered Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* at this moment too, since it the assigned African literary text in my English Literature component of 1967 Cambridge University 'O' Level Examinations, the book has never had any fascination for me, let alone comparable to that of Ferdinand Oyono. To this day I still lament that upon completing these memorable works Oyono (including his later novel *Road to Europe*) before reaching thirty immediately joined the diplomatic service of his country with the sad consequence that he never wrote anything in his subsequent fifty years of life until his death in 2010.

The other African writer who had a nearly comparable impact at this time was my compatriot Ezekiel Mphahlele in whose collection of short stories *In Corner B* there is the widely acclaimed short story "Mrs. Plum". The collection was published in 1967, a year after he departed with his family to the United States, and a year after the arrival of my family in Nairobi from Los Angeles. The publication of the book was four years after Kenya gained its independence from Britain. The euphoria of living in a new nation was still very strong but the postcolonial challenges and tensions were beginning to emerge. Two years later in 1969 the politics of postcoloniality made their dramatic appearance with the assassination of the controversial, flamboyant but brilliant Cabinet Minister Tom Mboya who was a member of the Luo ethnic group; this despicable act was widely believed to have been instigated by the president of the country Jomo Kenyatta who belonged to the Kikuyu ethnic group. The animosity and rivalry between the two ethnic groups never abated to resurface in a violent form in the fiasco presidential elections of 2007-8. But in 1967 the intellectual culture was extraordinarily vibrant, the country producing journals and magazines of excellent quality. To top it off the country had its own Kenya Publishing House which published the book. It was the first book written by an author I knew personally. This lent gravitas to the book. I had first seen Mphahlele when I was nine years old because his family and my family resided on the same block of Maseko Street in Orlando West in Soweto before his departure for Nigeria in 1957. Reading *In Corner B* a decade later, especially the aforementioned short story, it made me grasp the hypocrisy of Liberalism and the evils of apartheid.

Living among many exiles from different African countries in Nairobi seemed to make everything one did or did not do to resonate with political implications. Ras Makonnen, the great Pan Africanist from Guyana who was exiled to Kenya from Ghana when Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966 taught me that the quest for serious knowledge is one of the most important political commitments that a black person could possibly achieve in the twentieth century. We formed a study group together which continued for about eighteen months and came to an end in September 1969 only because I had to leave Kenya to undertake my undergraduate studies at the University of California in Los Angeles. In meticulous detail we studied the writings of Fanon besides *The Wretched of the Earth*; that being also *Towards the African Revolution*, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* and *Black Skin, White Masks*. The most gratifying experience was in analyzing together Hollis Lynch's *Edward Wilmont Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot 1832-1912* which was published in 1967. Makonnen held Blyden in high esteem. He mentioned to me perfunctorily in passing his interactions with Nkrumah, Fanon, Padmore and others in Accra in the 1950s, with W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, Marcus Garvey, Paul Robeson, Jomo Kenyatta, Peter Abrahams, George Lamming in London and Manchester in the 1930s and 1940s. It was in this context that he would impart to me his understanding of, and reflections on, the

history of Pan African Movement. Perhaps I never gained as much as I should I have about the profound cultural and political interconnections of the black world because at the time I had began committing myself wholeheartedly to Marxism thereby my reading of the *Selected Four Volumes* of the writings of Mao Zedong in the context of the Chinese Revolution, Regis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution*, the *Tricontinental* quarterly magazine published in Havana, and the writings of Che Guevara in the context of the Cuban Revolution, was more important than reading about the history of Pan Africanism. Nonetheless, I do hope that the essays assembled here which I began writing in West Berlin in the 1980s and continued in Los Angeles in 1990s do indicate that I learned something from the great Pan Africanist. Being a humble and a modest man he was, it is only on reading the writings of C. L. R. James and Kwame Nkrumah in the 1970s in Los Angeles did I become aware that he had been one of the central pillars of the Pan African Movement in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s as it moved from its central location in London to the continent in the persons of Kwame Nkrumah, Hastings Banda, Jomo Kenyatta and others to challenge colonialism and actually defeat it as symbolically indicated by the African Independence Year of 1960. This intensive interaction with Ras Makonnen, as was followed by a similar engagement with Mazisi Kunene in Los Angeles in the 1970s and with Ngugi wa Thiong'o in the first decade of the twenty first century, have been among the most privileged moments of my intellectual life.

Although my study of Pan African history under the guidance of Ras Makonnen facilitated an entry way to the African Diaspora, it was my compatriots slightly older than me who made me appreciate African American (then Negro) cultural achievements. As dissident members of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) who fled from Tanzania they were more likely to be aware and knowledgeable about black culture in the world than myself who as an intransigent sympathizer of the African National Congress (ANC) was more likely to be preoccupied with European radical thought. In the cosmopolitan and poor section Nairobi known as Eastleigh we would get together every Saturday and Sunday afternoon listening to American jazz late into the night. Today when I reflect on it I think the Eastleigh of the 1960s in Kenya must have similar to the Sophiatown of the 1950s in South Africa. The Sophiatown in Lionel Rogosin's 1959 film Come Back Africa is very much similar to Eastleigh. The cosmopolitanism of this section of Nairobi, be it religious or cultural or linguistic or in the form of music, was astounding. The cacophony of different and dissonant sounds was truly amazing: the cultures and their accoutrements of Hinduism, Muslim, Christianity, animism and independent black churches were compressed together in a very positive and fruitful way. It was in this context that my fellow compatriot exiles introduced me to Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Oscar Peterson, Sarah Vaugh, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and many others. Other than in Eastleigh, we would run into each at the American Library which was located at

the mid center of the city. We all voraciously read books and magazines by and on African Americans. The book that was at the center of our admiration of African American culture was Amiri Baraka's *Blues People* (1963). This book about African American jazz and blues strangely enough led me to read in a concentrated period of about six months all the novels and books of essays that James Baldwin had written up to that moment. The two books read then which have remained unforgettable are *Go To Tell It On The Mountain* (1953) and *Notes Of A Native Son* (1955). Subsequently I practically read everything he published except his theater work. Although the essays assembled here on African Americans here were written in West Berlin in the late 1980s, they reflect the instructive and joyous encounter with black American culture in the 1960s in Nairobi.

Although my deep admiration and respect for African Americans which began in the 1960s has constantly endured and undiminished to the present, paradoxically when I lived in Los Angeles in the 1970s, despite the fact that I was closely working with black Americans in their opposition to apartheid concretized in their material support to the liberation movements in Africa, my engagement with African American culture somewhat disappeared. I attribute this disappearance and diminishment to the Cuban Revolution and Marxism and the two aforementioned intellectual figures who brought them into my intellectual experience. Sartre led me to Marxism which invariably led me to develop an interest in European radical philosophy, while Fanon led me to the Cuban Revolution which logically made me develop an interest in Latin American culture. Latin American culture and Western Marxism displaced the centrality of African American culture in my intellectual horizon. Perhaps the real reason for this displacement my stumbling on the *New Left Review* journal at this period. This is the one journal whose bi-monthly installments I have read religiously over the last forty years. I also at this moment in my life discovered the incomparable books of poetry by the great Peruvian Communist poet César Vallejo on the shelves of the Los Angeles Central Public Library located downtown. Accompanying these discoveries and stumblings was my encounter with Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form* (1971), Perry Anderson's *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976), Octavio Paz's *Children of the Mire* (1974). These three books apparently altered my intellectual horizon in a fundamental way which was unbeknownst to me until I embarked twenty years later on in the 1990s on returning back to Los Angeles on my lifetime intellectual project on the New African Movement. Perhaps the real intellectual inspiration of this project was the late major South African poet Mazisi Kunene who was then Professor of African Languages and Linguistics at UCLA and about whom I have written extensively elsewhere. I had daily intensive interactions with him on campus across five years.

Through the Cuban Revolution I discovered Latin American literary and film culture, since as it is universally acknowledged the Revolution facilitate the emergence of the historical space in which the New Latin American novel of Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez, the New Latin American cinema of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Jorge Sanjinés, the New Latin America music of Víctor Parra and Mercedes Sosa came into being. Equally determinant of my intellectual formation in Los Angeles was the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* of Glauber Rocha and Nelson Pereira dos Santos. The reason I would like to emphasize here this cinema of Alea and Rocha is that it had an inestimable influence on many students at UCLA (African Americans, Africans, Iranians, Mexicans), largely consisting of filmmakers who were largely known as the Los Angeles School. For instance one can draw an arch of interconnections from Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954) through Humberto Solás *Lucía* (1968) and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991); the latter is an African American. The three essays on the Los Angeles School included here touch on this matter. My happening to be among the members of the Los Angeles School which has been a given prominent a relatively important place in the history of African American culture in the second half of the twentieth century was because of my initiation to film culture which I received which I received from European expatriates in Kenya in the previous decade. The Kenya Film Society which was organized by them showed at the Kenya National Theatre every Sunday evening top quality films from Europe: the New Wave films, the Neo-realist films, classic Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s, Eastern European films especially from Poland and Hungary, and the early Soviet Union films from Dziga-Vertov to Sergei Eisenstein. It was perhaps when watching these films in the 1960s that the idea of "European modernity" began crystallizing in my mind when thirty years later on I began postulating the construct of the counter-narrative of "New African modernity" within the New African Movement. With hindsight, as many things become clearer within its purview, the extensive reading of African American literary culture in the 1960s was instrumental when also I established the connection and the influence of "New Negro modernity" of the New Negro Movement on "New African modernity" of the New African Movement in the 1990s. All in all, the most important thing in my intellectual development in the 1970s was the cultural enrichment enabled by my unyielding solidarity with the Cuban Revolution: my serious reading of Latin American literature in English translation.

The most meaningful writer for me from this part of the world has been the Cuban Alejo Carpentier whose masterful novella *The Kingdom of this World* (1949) about the historical tragedies that compromised the Haitian Revolution has necessitated my revisiting it many times. His equally superb novella *Concierto Barrocco* (1974) about the contradictory and paradoxical impact of the European Enlightenment on African people in United States, Africa and Latin America is

equally exemplary in its profound understanding of diverse black cultures in the modern world. Lest I forget, it was on arriving back in the United States in the early 1970s when I encountered Roberto Fernández Retamar's landmark essay "Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America" in the pages of *Massachusetts Review* journal written in defense of the Cuban Revolution that compelled me as a Marxist intellectual to open myself to modern Latin American literary culture of the twentieth century. I should state that I wholeheartedly agreed with Retamar's principled political position although I was very much aware of Carlos Moore's essay that appeared in *Présence Africaine* in the middle 1960s denouncing the Cuban Revolution for its alleged racism against black Cubans. I waited for nearly thirty years before I would eventually meet Carlos Moore as I will indicate in a moment. I did meet with Retamar twice in 1977 at the combined meeting of the African Studies Association and the Latin American Studies Association in Houston and in 1988 in West Berlin when a contingent of Latin American intellectuals came to the Academy of Arts for a Conference. The essays in the anthology traversing some aspects of Latin American and Caribbean intellectual cultures are a tribute to this remarkable essay.

On returning to Kenya in early 1979 after completing my doctoral studies at UCLA and eventually the Vice Chancellor allowing me to teach at the University of Nairobi, one of the courses I taught was on Latin American literature in English translation. The University at this time, like many other universities in African countries, was in perpetual turmoil and revolt with students protesting the incompetence of postcolonial African leadership that Fanon had prophetically foresaw and the essay on him in this anthology touches on these matters. At the end of the academic year my work permit to teach at the University was withdrawn and informed that I would be allowed to work only at the Industrial Area of Nairobi as an Industrial Sociologist. Since I was a South African exile with a United Nations passport I was given this option while about eight junior Kenyan faculty members like myself were outrageously detained for some extended periods of time. It was under these circumstances that I decided to leave for Eastern Europe, either Poland or Hungary, with two aims in mind: one to see how socialism was like in actuality since I was a Marxist and also to study to be a film director since a passion film as an art form, which was to be challenged by my new passion five years later in West Berlin for classical ballet and modern dance. I need to backtrack slightly about the matter of studying film directing in a socialist country: on receiving my doctorate in Sociology from UCLA in 1977 I flew from Los Angeles to New York to speak with Johnny Makhathini who was then the ANC Representative to the United Nations about whether he could make it possible for me as a member of the organization to study film directing in Cuba. After a year of waiting to receive permission from the Cuban government I decided to return Kenya. The primary reason for the importance of Cuba for me over all other socialist countries was because I



wanted to experience how socialism affected black (African) people. The other obvious reason is that I had been impressed by films of these outstanding Cuban directors: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Santiago Álvarez, Humberto Solás, Sara Gómez, Pastor Vega, Julio García Espinosa, Sergio Giral. When the preference of Cuba would not materialize, I decided in the future I would go to any other socialist country, with preference for Poland or Hungary. Both countries had their own distinguished directors whose films I had seen at the Kenya Film Society's screenings in the 1960s and at the UCLA Film Archive screenings in the 1970s. The two films seen during my teenage years in Kenya that awakened me to film form as a serious work of art and as having the capacity to portray the complex processes of history were Andrzej Wajda's Kanal (1957) and Miklos Jancsó's The Round-Up (1965). It is the latter film that instilled in me a permanent passion for film.

My arrival in Poland in October 1980, a few months after the founding of the *Solidarnosc* political movement, inaugurated my decade long in Eastern Europe and Western Europe. My stay in communist Poland and subsequently in capitalist West Germany were relatively happy experiences despite trying moments now and then. I must say in the interests of intellectual integrity I developed a tremendous love and admiration for Europe against my deepest wishes and inclinations before arriving because of what it had outrageously done to Africa through capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, though in regarding to "European modernity" is a complex matter. From my personal experience and from what I could observe around me I think both countries treated African students, for that matter foreign students, with the utmost fairness and understanding. For sure, African immigrants living there would wish to repudiate and contradict this statement as a naïve assessment. Besides the great challenge of spending a full year learning the Polish language, the other great personal challenge was being a Marxist, who was a foreigner and black, in a socialist country where the majority of the people violently rejected socialism felt were living under Russian domination. I understood this to be the unresolvable historical clash between nationalism and socialism. This challenge was never resolved in the three years I spent there despite the fact that it emotionally disturbed me with the consequence of losing tremendous weight and the authorities suggested that I should leave the country permanently to alleviate my health situation. I never took up the offer with the result that I met my Polish wife and the two daughters that followed from the marriage.

Besides the primary reason of wishing to experience 'actually existing socialism', the secondary one was to study film directing. The Leon Schiller National High School of Film, Television and Theater, better known as Lodz Film School was one of the best in the world. Founded in 1948, its first class to graduate in film directing included Andrzej Munk, Kazimierz Karabasz, Janusz Morgenstern and

Andrzej Wajda, Wojciech Jerzy Has, Witold Sobocinski whose outstanding talent upon graduating in the 1950s enabled them to make films that were subsequently designated as representing the 'Polish School'. History books on world cinema today compare the 'Polish Film School' to the Italian Neo-realism as two of the most important expressions of national film culture in the decade following the Second World War. In the subsequent three decades Lodz Film School was nurture outstanding cinematographers and film directors represented by the following: Krzysztof Zanussi, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Jerzy Skolimowski, Edward Klosinski, Wojciech Marczewski, Roman Polanski, Piotr Sobocinski, Feliks Falk, Filip Bajon, Juliusz Machulski and a few others. Walking on the grounds on which these remarkable artists had done before was an exhilarating and humbling experience. The great Polish Romantic culture of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly continued by these visual artists in the second half of the twentieth century. The three years I spent in Poland convinced me of the deep rooted romanticism of its artistic culture paradoxically underlined by a profoundly pessimistic political culture. Andrzej Wajda's great and best films deal with this duality of Polish culture: Kanal (Canal, 1956) which was subsequently designated as not only epitomizing the arrival of the 'Polish School' but also expressive of its high brilliance definitely engages itself with pessimism; Wesele (Wedding, 1973), about an aristocratic young poet who marries a maiden peasant in the early years of the twentieth century, is coordinated around romanticism; and Krajobraz po Bitwie (Landscape after Battle, 1970), the tragedy of the Second World War imposed on the country principally because of its geo-political location between Germany and Russia, remarkably combines pessimism, romanticism and hope in this great work of art. I understood this pessimism not to be natural to the Polish nation but rather as historically induced by what practically all its people felt to be the superimposition of Soviet socialism and communism not only on their nationalism but particularly on their national sovereignty. Strangely enough, I imbibed this pessimism which I did not previously have from this Polish experience; it has remained with me permanently remained in the three decades since I left the country.

There were other instructive experiences to be had in this remarkable country. Being the first European country I encountered, it gave me not only an appreciation of European political culture but also the complex nature Slavic culture. Since my mastery of the Polish language was tenuous at best, I could not read Polish literature in the original in any serious way. When I moved to West Berlin from Poland I read many Polish writers at the Stats-Bibliothek (State Library) of the then tragically divided city. Although I had read Alexander Pushkin while I was a student at UCLA decade earlier, in part because of Afrocentrists attempt to claim him as their own because of his supposed 'blackness', it was my encounter with Adam Mickiewicz that I could understand

the distinctiveness of Slavic Romanticism from English Romanticism: the latter largely attempted to forestall industrialism through celebrating the supposed solitude and placidity of nature while the former predominantly married poetic form to politics in the noisy struggle against the imperialism of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The poet who best exemplified for me the politics of poetic form in dire historical circumstances was the non-Slavic Hungarian poet Sándor Petöfi. The discovery of Petöfi made me think of him as a patron saint not only of the Janscó's cinema of the late 1960s and the early 1970s but also of Third World poets in the second half of the twentieth century: from David Diop in Senegal to Javier Heraud in Peru. Besides the understanding of the complex differential national forms of European Romanticism that Poland gifted me with, it was my viewing of The Mirror (1975) by Andrei Tarkovsky on campus at the film school in the early 1980s that made me appreciate the largeness of his visual style. Although I had earlier in 1974 seen Andrei Rublev (1966) in London on my way from Los Angeles to see visit my mother in Nairobi, it was The Mirror that despite its stupefying complexity baffled me into a preliminary awareness of world historic importance of this Russian artist. It was on repeated viewing of this film which still continues in the present, as well as showing it with his other films to my class on the creative process at Pitzer College, where I have been teaching for the last twenty years in Los Angeles, that I began to have a measure of his particular singularity by examining him adjacent Janscó and Theo Angelopoulos when I recognized all three as exponents of the visual style of Antonioni: the Greek and the Hungarian historicizing it while the Russian utilizing it as a searching instrument for world's spirituality. Despite these unrepayable cultural enrichments that Poland gave me, on recognizing that I had no talent whatsoever for film directing, I decided to decamp from the East across the Berlin Wall to the West. I learned to accept my intellectual and artistic limitations in whatever form they presented themselves.

On leaving the city of Lodz in Poland I moved to city Bayreuth which is in the state of Bavaria in West Germany. This move was in late 1983. It is here I retreated to heal my first and only major intellectual and political crisis I have ever had which principally instigated by Polish nation's rejection of socialism and by the threat of the Warsaw Pact countries to invade Poland to put an end to the Solidarnosc workers' movement which opposed socialism. I stayed at the apartment of Mgwebi Snail and his wife and their son for nearly a year; they were PAC members helping a fellow compatriot who was a member of the ANC and a Marxist in a grip of an unfathomable political crisis. Without them I'm not sure that I would have survived at all, let alone the way I did survive. To them I'm eternally grateful. On his return to South Africa Mgwebi Snail became a Professor at Vista University and later worked at the Freedom Park Foundation. What made me survive and began healing my political and intellectual crisis was reading the great essay "Living in the Interregnum" by Nadine Gordimer

immediately on its appearance in the *New York Review of Books* (January 20, 1983) at the American Library in Warsaw about six months before I moved to West Germany. Basically the essay turned me away from Europe in the direction of Africa by compelling me to shift my intellectual perspective from 'Marxism within European Philosophy' to 'Marxism within African History'. This is one of the most important documents I have ever read in my life because it gave a sense of direction when I thought I had reached total impasse and chaos.

Mgwebi Snail studied Political Science at the University of Bayreuth. As is well known to many people, Bayreuth is the city Richard Wagner with the financial assistance of King Ludwig II built his opera house, Bayreuth Festspielhaus ("Festival Theatre"), where his operas have been staged annually since it opened in 1876. Not once for the nearly two years I was there did I ever set my foot inside one of the highly esteemed 'temples' of European culture partly because the price of entrance was too exorbitant besides being exclusive for the select few, but fundamentally because I find opera to be too artificial though its music is forbiddingly brilliant and hence spiritually uplifting. Although the University then was relatively new having been founded in 1975, it had already begun assembling rare documents and books about Africa with the intent of becoming one of the best, if not the best, university in Germany (then West Germany) to study African Studies in Europe. Ulli Beier, the brilliant Austrian Africanist, who had founded *Black Orpheus* magazine at the University of Ibadan in the 1950s and the made the university the center of intellectual vitality in whose context Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo and many others emerged, was holding a Chair at the University Bayreuth when I was there. Within a few years he was to leave Germany to undertake new intellectual and cultural challenges when Papua New Guinea attained its independence. The seriousness of the University was displayed in bringing Ngugi wa Thiong'o from London for several months as a Visiting Professor in Africana Studies. I got an opportunity to have prolonged discussions with Ngugi as was to happen again two decades later on at the University of California in Irvine [Los Angeles]. Since I had so much time struggling to determine my future direction, I spent most of my time at the Bayreuth Institute of African Studies library extensively reading the back copies of many African magazines and journals: *Transition*, *Black Orphues*, *East African Journal*, *Mawazo* and many others whose names I have forgotten. At the University Library itself I reacquainted myself with the back copies of journals such *New Left Review*, *Telos*, *Monthly Review*, *Socialist Register* and other journals on the left which I had voraciously read at Kenyatta University Library in 1979 before I was offered a position at the University of Nairobi. Unbeknown to me then, this reading was healing me from the spiritual crisis Poland had unleashed; this recovery was to be evident in West Berlin where I arrived a few years later by way of the city of Bochum, located in the industrial area of West Germany.

The greater portion of the essays, or at least the most important of them, were written while I was residing in West Berlin.

When I was in Bayreuth I sent many applications to various foundations and institutions in West Germany for assistance in doing post-doctoral work or support in going back to the university study again in a new direction even though I already had a doctorate in Sociology. The *Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst e. V. (EED, the Protestant Development Service)* invited me to come to Bochum to German language and move to a university anywhere in the country that would accept me. This was astonishing and unbelievable that I could study in a country I had admired from afar although with a tinge of fear and reservation given its recent tragic history. After being separated from each other for a year, I was able to bring my expecting wife to join me with our two year old daughter: my eldest daughter was born in Lodz in 1982 and the youngest daughter was born in Bochum in 1985. The two years spent in Bochum were much more enjoyable than Bayreuth partly because I audited one course in Art History at Ruhr University taught by the distinguished German art historian Max Imdahl. He was given the Chair in Art History in 1965 at the age of forty just three years after the founding of the university. By the time I audited his course in 1985, he had been teaching for twenty years and his courses were popular with students who were very serious, judging from the course I took. He had a novel theory that an art should only be assessed from the perspective of the contemporaneousness of the viewer. He founded a museum of fine arts on campus in order for students and workers to have a constant and continuous interaction with art. A few years later when I was in West Berlin it was truly saddening to read in the newspaper that he had passed away. Later the university named a major adjacent street in his name. What I really admired about Professor Imdahl was not only the breadth of his knowledge but also the openness that characterized his sense of immediacy and spontaneity. It was in the context and setting that I started reading seriously art magazines and journals. The university library had large holdings on practically any subject. It was here I started reading film journals from East Germany (Democratic Republic of Germany) which had extensive writings on documentary films made in the West (the then capitalist Europe and United States). A recollection of these journals made it easier for me a few years later in West Berlin to write an essay here included here on American film director Lionel Rogosin who made the historic film on South Africa *Come Back Africa*. Although my remembrance of Max Imdahl is across twenty-five years, he remains unforgettable because of the impression he left on me. He was only twenty years older than me and in contrast forty years older than most of his students. Perhaps the reason why he remains lodged in my imagination is that I was indirectly led to him on reading Meyer Schapiro's *Modern Art: 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (1979) immediately on its publication and feeling intellectually overwhelmed by it. After reading it I

promised myself that I would audit a course in Art History should an opportunity ever avail itself. Before reading the book I had no idea who Meyer Schapiro was. Since discovering him thirty years ago this great art historian has been a constant presence in my intellectual life.

The move from Bochum to West Berlin surrounded by the Berlin Wall deep inside East Germany was to an entirely different world. Although nominally West Berlin was part of West Germany but because of the surrender and peace agreements signed after the defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War (1939-1945), this divided portion of the city legally 'belonged' to the French, British and United States (the capitalist countries), and the other divided portion of the city was likewise a nominal part of East Germany but legally also 'belonged' to the Soviet Union (a socialist country). Because the divided city of Berlin was at the center of the Cold War as to which social system was better, capitalism or socialism, the capitalist countries invested enormous amount of money in West Berlin. Being at the center of this ideological warfare and contestation, it is not accidental that the city acquired characteristics which made it completely distinct from the rest of West Germany: the large population of Germans living there were very young in their early twenties partly because young male Germans did not have to serve the required two-year service in the West German military service; this youngish population was counter balanced by the Turkish population who were Islamic in religious faith and had come to West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany) on the invitation of the government as 'Guest Workers'; living in West Berlin was very inexpensive, socially, culturally and economically, because of the huge subsidizing by the 'victorious' capitalist countries; the presence of many foreigners from Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe, as well as the family members of the French, American and British soldiers, made the city very cosmopolitan; cultural activities of all kind of varieties were in abundance from jazz to opera, theater to dancing, concerts to readings, because of their inexpensiveness; and lastly, there were all kinds of exiled political organizations as well as those created by the immigrant populations themselves. It was fascinating to re-read while in West Berlin the innovative Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky's *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917-1922* (1923) and *Zoo, or Letters Not About Love* (1923) to compare the kind of cosmopolitanism that was in existence in the early 1920s during Weimar Republic period when he had temporarily exiled himself from Russia to the one that there during my stay in that extraordinary city. It was equally gratifying also to be walking in the streets of Berlin having read a decade earlier Walter Benjamin's major essay "My Berlin Childhood" written in 1938 about the city at the turn of the twentieth century. Talking about memories of Berlin in the mind of premier intellectuals: one day I passed a building with a metal plate on the wall written that the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky had

once lived there. All this made clear that Berlin had been one way or another at the center of European culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Since the Soviet Red Army was the first to arrive in Berlin as it defeated the Nazi Wehrmacht war machine, when the city was divided into two separate spheres the most important cultural, political and social institutions were incorporated into East Berlin: the Altes Museum which was built by the renowned architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century; the Pergamon Museum; the historic Humboldt University; and the equally renowned Friedrichstrasse which was at the center of the Weimar Republic culture. Inspired by the major essays of Fredric Jameson on the emergent postmodernism, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984) and "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology" (1985), which postulated that architecture was in the forefront of all the other arts at the beginning moment of the postmodern era, I crossed several times from West Berlin to East Berlin on day-visits to study the Schinkel building as to what it can teach me about the historical development of architecture in the West. In response to the Soviet Union having taken for itself the historic sections and institutions of Berlin, the United States, France and Britain built new comparable institutions in West Berlin: the New Nationalgalerie (Neue Nationalgalerie) which was built by Mies van der Rohe and opened in 1968; the Berliner Philharmonie designed by Hans Scharoun and opened in 1963 as the home of the world renowned Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra directed by the late Herbert von Karajan; the Free University of Berlin founded by students and scholars in 1948 and subsequently funded by Western powers, and United States built the remarkable John F. Kennedy Library which became 'a home from home' were I researched many of the essays in this anthology; and the Ethnological Museum (Ethnologische Museum) on the campus grounds Free University in the Dahlem section of Berlin. Practically all of the essays on African American literary culture in this anthology were researched at the Kennedy Library whose extensive holdings are devoted to United States.

The reason I moved on with my family from Bochum to West Berlin was to do post-doctoral studies in Media Studies at Technical University of Berlin (Technische Universität Berlin, popularly known as TU) which was established in 1946. It was in this city that I spent some of my most satisfying moments intellectually. The School of Architecture of the university had its own separate library with extensive holdings on the history of architecture. The newly published books and the many journals and magazines it had enabled me to follow closely the contentious debates on postmodernism and postmodern architecture. It is on the shelves of this library that I discovered several books by the great Italian Marxist historian of architecture Manfredo Tafuri translated into the English language. The happiness was really brought about by reading the

books of the American Marxist Fredric Jameson that I had neglected reading a decade while I was at UCLA a decade earlier as well as the new books: *Marxism and Form* (1971), *The Prison-House of Language* (1972), *Fables of Aggression* (1979), *The Political Unconscious* (1981), and the two volumes of *The Ideologies of Theory* (1981). The essays on African American literary culture were written in the intellectual ambience created by these exemplary Marxist scholars.

While I was in Nairobi, Los Angeles and Lodz I had been largely preoccupied with widening my knowledge of the history of cinema and the history of its generic forms, in West Berlin I learned about the history of the technology of the various media, especially the film medium. This new orientation had a revolutionary effect on my intellectual orientation because for the first I became aware of the concrete interrelationship between technology and the arts: without technology there would not be any film culture, perhaps this is also fundamentally true also of music culture, in that without the invention of music instruments and their particular design there would not be any music at all except rudimentary and natural sounds only; perhaps this principle is true for all the arts. This had not dawned on me before my arrival in the Media Studies Department of the Technical University. Perhaps this is what true learning is about: changing ones intellectual perspectives in completely unexpected and in unanticipated ways. A particular professor was responsible for this seminal transformation of my knowledge: Siegfried Zielinski. This new orientation made me develop a serious appreciation of the history of the book on reading Lucien Fevre and Henri-Jean Martin's classic *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800* (1958, [1976]) in Los Angeles in the early 1990s. All in all, most the courses I took fostered in me a deeper appreciation of interdisciplinarity which became extremely helpful when on returning to Los Angeles on receiving a teaching position in the Department of English and World Literature at Pitzer College.

Two other intellectual discoveries or encounters occurred that were to enrich and expand further my cultural orientation: one was my first viewing of Come Back Africa after hearing so much about it in two preceding decades; the other was intermittently auditing a course in the Department of Music by the eminent scholar and critic Carl Dahlhaus who was superseded only by Theodor Adorno among German scholars of music in the twentieth century. A few more words about this great musicologist: having not read his highly acclaimed magnum opus *Nineteenth-Century Music* (1989) which is forbidding but rather only his 'lesser' work *Aesthetics of Music* (1967), *Between Romanticism and Modernism* (1974), *Foundations of Music History* (1977) and *The Idea of Absolute Music* (1978), I was convinced immediately of his supreme exemplary nature as a scholar; all the more surprising upon reading Edward Said's dismissive attitude towards him in *Musical Elaborations* (1991) as an epigone of Adorno. It was profoundly



saddening aboard a flight from West Berlin to Los Angeles on March 15, 1989 on reading in a German newspaper that Carl Dahlhaus had died on March 13<sup>th</sup> at the age of sixty one; this terrible news is what I will always remember about my departure from Europe to United States where I had spent a momentous decade.

I think Come Back Africa awakened in me a sense of self-recognition that I should intellectually engage myself centrally with African historical matters rather than with European philosophical systems, an inclination that had already been instilled in me by Nadine Gordimer as previously indicated. Since Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba and Bloke Modisane, members of the *Drum* writers 'School' of the 1950s (Sophiatown Renaissance) featured prominently in the film, their presence awakened in me an interest at their particular historical and cultural moment, and through them in later years to the epistemic field of the New African Movement. Besides the fascination I had for the film, the very fact that Lionel Rogosin had written the script of the film together with Lewis Nkosi and Can Themba, made develop an interest in the film director himself. The essay on him in the anthology is one of the consequences of this. It was at this time I met Lewis Nkosi for the first at one of the annual conferences organized by Robert Kriger, a South African doctoral student of theology and literature, at the city of Bad Boll in West Germany. Meeting Lewis Nkosi was revelatory, not only because of the great admiration I had for his critical acumen in literary matters, but also of an important question I wanted to pose to him. In order to supplement my income, I worked on the editorial staff of the German dance magazine *Tanz Aktuell* based in West Berlin, writing on classical ballet and modern dance. In the midst of dissatisfaction with myself concerning my continuing preoccupation with European cultural and intellectual matters, I read a footnote with utter excitement in Albert S. Gérard's *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (1971) that a certain H. I. E. Dhlomo had written on Zulu traditional dance; my hope being that Dhlomo would lead me away from European culture and dance to African culture and dance. When at one of the Bad Boll conference meetings I posed a question to Lewis Nkosi about this certain Dhlomo, he just laughed and refused to answer. A few years later when I returned to Los Angeles and doing research on Dhlomo, I discovered that not only was Lewis Nkosi present in Dhlomo's house as he was dying in 1956, but that he even wrote a threnody on his passing. But the most important thing here is that my discovery of H. I. E. Dhlomo in West Berlin lead me not only to write a monograph on him (*The Cultural Modernity of H. I. E. Dhlomo*, 2007), but to a lifetime project on the history of the New African Movement, at whose center has been the influence of African American culture on African culture in South Africa on the question of modernity. The essays on African American literary culture as well as the interview with Stanley Crouch regarding jazz in this anthology were composed not in full awareness of the depth of the interaction

between the two cultures across the Atlantic Ocean. This awareness occurred the following decade of the 1990s in Los Angeles.

One of the seminal occurrences while I was in West Berlin that awakened my intellectual consciousness in completely unexpected ways was a lecture by Professor Abdul Alkalimat (McWorter) at the John F. Kennedy Library sponsored by USAID (United States Agency for International Development). He was teaching and doing research at the Free University. Alkalimat was one of the founders of Black Studies stemming from his critical role in the Black Arts Movement and the Black Power movements of the 1960s. His lecture given in February 1986 was on two outstanding African American literary scholars, Henry Louis Gates and Houston A. Baker, about whom I did not know anything, let alone their names. The presentation was a *tour de force* in every conceivable manner: regarding content, conceptualization and historical contextualization. I made decision at the end of the lecture that I must embark on a serious research on them in the process of which I read all their books and essays in many journals over a six-month period. I found everything that they had written until then at the basement of the John F. Kennedy Library. It was in this context that I discovered the extensive holdings of the Library. For nearly the whole period I was there I was a very close friend and associate of a husband and wife partnership of African American dancers: Gayle McKinney Griffith, who had been a leading ballerina of Dance Theater of Harlem led by Arthur Mitchell who had been a soloist in the New York City Ballet of George Balanchine, and Donald Griffith who had performed with some of the leading American modern dance companies. They formed an organization called Fountainhead Tanz (Dance) Organization through which they taught every evening and also showcased African American culture through festivals and presentations. I assisted them in organizing a major Black Cultural Festival in 1986 and in subsequently years until my departure. I also accompanied them twice to the Summer Dance School they organized in Arezzo, Italy in 1986 and in 1987. In the evenings, from Monday to Friday, approximately over a two-year period, I would observe them teaching ballet and modern dance. It was during this period I developed an everlasting passion for these two dance forms. As already mentioned, I started working on the *Tanz Aktuell* dance magazine. One of great joys of West Berlin was to see Ishmael Ivo, the Brazilian international modern dance artist who was a resident of the city, perform many times to the point of becoming acquaintances. Although I had seen the Alvin Ailey Dance Company on its African tour in Nairobi while I was in High School in the mid 1960s and found the performances mesmerizing and compelling, I was seriously engaged with my recent discoveries of Marxism and the cinema of Jean-Luc Godard to make any sense of the revelations I was seeing on the stage.

A few days after his stunning lecture, Gayle McKinney and Donald Griffith invited Abdul Alkalimat for dinner at their residence. It was a wonderful evening of conviviality. In my subsequent several meetings with him he mentioned that Henry Louis Gates and Houston A. Baker were part of a major cultural revival of African Americans in the 1980s. This appraisal was subsequently confirmed by my readings of America magazines and journals at the Library. In their co-authored book *The Future of the Race* (1996), Cornel West and Henry Louis Gates designated the decade of the 1980s as the "Second Renaissance", alluding to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. They went even further by stating that the second one surpassed the first one. The election of Bill Clinton to the presidency of United States in 1992, with the central role of the African American electorate, did wonders to the political spirit of Black America to the extent that Toni Morrison called President Clinton "the First Black President of United States". In probability this spectacular cultural awakening and the happiness of African Americans with the presidency of Clinton must be at the center of the explanation of *New York Times* Gallop Poll in the mid 1990s indicating that 67% of black Americans were positively happy with to their living experience in United States. This is an astonishing affirmation by any measure given the sad racial history of country, although by no means as tragic as what happened to Native Americans.

An awakening only to the political and cultural experience of blacks in United States within a Pan African perspective would have been incomplete without its extension to other parts of the black Diaspora in the Caribbean, Central America and in Latin America. Although I became aware of the Caribbean through the Cuban Revolution and the Haitian Revolution and through reading and studying C. L. R. James' *The Black Jacobins* (1938) with the great Ras Makonnen in my High School days, this was regarding *revolutionary politics* and not *cultural politics*: in the other words, the revolutionary politics of *socialism* and not the cultural politics of *blackness*. Although the Brazilian Cinema Novo cinema I had seen in the previous decade of the 1970s in Los Angeles centrally featured black Brazilians and the history of black enslavement within its parameters, it was largely within the ambience or specifically within the mythology of 'Brazilian racial democracy' that the country was supposedly constructing in the present. Having experienced 'actually existing socialism' in Poland in the early 1980s, in the late 1980s in West Berlin I could no longer support automatically the position that revolutionary politics can always command cultural politics without recognizing the singularity and autonomy of the latter, and likewise socialism regarding blackness or for that matter in relation to gender and sexual orientation. This interrogation happened without leading me to abandon Marxism because of intractable contradictions. But what really facilitated the historical search for a common understanding between blacks in Africa and in the African Diaspora was the founding of Umoja Center in 1987. This was an

association of Africans in West Berlin largely from Ethiopia, Nigeria, Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa. We had regular monthly meetings and made presentations about the condition of the black world in the late twentieth century. I was privileged in giving an inaugural address on the founding of the organization. One of the essays included in the anthology is an address I gave at the Umoja Center in 1988 in recognition of the hundredth anniversary emancipation of slaves in Brazil.

Parallel with my political and intellectual allegiance with the Umoja Center was my collaboration on *Awa-Finnaba* magazine which was founded by my compatriots Macingwane Vusi Mchunu and Mbukeni Herbert Mnguni who were the central core of the African Writers Association (of West Berlin). The magazine came into existence a year or two before arrived in the city in the Summer of 1986. Since I have written in detail in the Foreword to Keyan G. Tomaselli's *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinemas* (2006) about my happy intellectual association with the magazine despite the death threats from the South African Embassy in Bonn that we stopped forthwith its publication, I will not say much here except to mention that two of the essays in the anthology first appeared in it. It is my sincere hope that when both Mchunu and Mnguni eventually summon enough intellectual effort in writing their autobiographies they will delve into specificities about this splendid moment in our common cultural front.

It remains to conclude that the odd essay in the anthology on Marxism was commissioned by the German Marxist philosopher Wolfgang Fritz Haug and his journal *Das Argument* in celebration of, and presented on, May Day (1988) at 'The Peoples' University' held on the campus of Technical University of Berlin.

(This document is an Introduction to the forthcoming book *A South African Looks at the African Diaspora: Essays and Interviews*).