

THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF FRANTZ FANON IN THE POSTMODERN ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

by

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[for Kwesi Kwaa Prah who introduced me to Frantz Fanon when I was eighteen years old in High School living in exile in Nairobi in 1967 with my mother and three younger brothers; we met for the second time in December 1986 when I was living in West Berlin and he was there attending a major Conference and purely by chance saw an advertisement mentioning on that particular day I would be making presentation at Technical University of Berlin in commemoration of the twenty fifth anniversary of the death of Fanon; after the presentation on being introduced to him, unforgivably I had forgotten who he was. This essay written in Los Angeles is a salutation to Prah's dedication to Africa and the African Revolution.]

Globalization of exclusion is the mirror image of economic globalization. It is no secret that economic globalization today is creating a greater inequality not only between North and South but also within Western societies. *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* and *The Wretched of the Earth* are not outmoded texts when we choose to read them as an appeal to the future and what it could hold. They only appear dated if we read them in the indicative mood, as simple assertions . . . Fanon's reflections on humankind and its evolution are, we are told, anachronistic in this era of economic globalization, cognitive assertions, and exclusionary subjectivity.

-Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* (2000, [2006]).

In attempting to understand the intellectual legacy of Frantz Fanon in 2011, the fiftieth year anniversary of his death, one could not begin with a more exemplary text than Alice Cherki's *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* which originally appeared in French in 2000 and subsequently translated into English in 2006. Its singular achievement is that more any other book on this intellectual titan that has appeared in English language since *Fanon* (1970) by David Caute was published, and subsequently followed by other approximately six studies by other scholars, it presents for the first time the political, social and philosophic trajectory of Fanon's *historical subjectivity* as it participated in bringing about the decolonization process in Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s and facilitating the construction of new African postcolonial states which largely occurred after

his death in 1961. The book traces his emerging and developing political, social, moral and intellectual consciousness as it traversed and negotiated distinct intractable historical conjunctures: between the Caribbean (Antilles) and Europe, between Europe and Africa, between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. In effect, Alice Cherki traces the historical imperatives that drove Fanon's revolutionary practice to bring about what he himself characterized with these words quoted in *Towards the African Revolution* which originally appeared in the logbook he kept as he explored under trying physical circumstances to open a war front in southern part of Algeria on behalf of the Algerian Revolution against French imperial occupation and domination of the country: "To put Africa in motion, to cooperate in its organization, in its regrouping, behind revolutionary principles. To participate in the ordered movement of a continent--this was really the work I had chosen." In presenting the unrelenting historical subjectivity of this Caribbean scholar/French psychiatrist/African revolutionary intellectual, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* is an excellent complementary to Irene Gendzier's equally revelatory book of many years ago, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (1973), which focused on the political philosophy of this extraordinary intellectual.

Although Alice Cherki was profoundly influenced by Frantz Fanon, having interned with him at the Blida psychiatric hospital from 1956 when she was very young and being initiated into psychiatry under his guidance, subsequently joining him in exile in Tunis upon his expulsion from Algeria in that same year, the book itself, written approximately forty years after the narrative it reconstructs with tremendous literary vivacity, is not necessarily celebratory of a person unquestionably admired because it is a work of critical maturity. It is this critical imagination that bonded them together as revolutionary intellectuals as well as another symmetrical factor: Dr. Cherki being an Algerian Jew in a predominantly Muslim society and Dr. Fanon having been a black person in white French society during his student days and a Christian in Muslim Algeria still under French colonial domination. The fundamental thesis of *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* is that although Fanon shifted from psychiatric practice in Blida (Algeria) through the 'national' politics of the Algerian Revolution in exile in Tunis to the Third World revolutionary politics of decolonization in Africa, he never abandoned his epistemological practice of being a *clinician* of historical situations he subsequently encountered. This seminal observation of Alice Cherki is endorsed by a careful reading of Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* (1967, originally published as *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*) and *Toward the African Revolution* (1967), especially of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). It needs mentioning in passing that she emphasizes the critical role of European publishers such as François Maspero in France and Giovanni Pirelli in Italy who were important intellectuals in their own right in disseminating Fanon's publications and ideas. Pirelli even created a Frantz Fanon Center in Milan that lasted a few years and

ceased to exist with his death in 1972. This writer began academic professional life at the Frantz Fanon Research Institute at Drew University of Medicine and Science in Los Angeles in 1976, after discovering Frantz Fanon while in High School in Kenya in the late 1960s living with his parents exiled from South Africa. Given the youthfulness of this discovery at the historical juncture of the onset of the neo-colonization of Africa, Frantz Fanon has always embodied a permanent state of relevancy given the seemingly perpetual crisis of Africa in self-definition and in self-articulation.

It is legitimate to ask what possible relevance could Frantz Fanon still have for Africa after the exhaustion of the African Revolution and the implosion of several postcolonial African states at our postmodern moment of globalization. There are possibly three critical reflections or formulations of Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* which still possess historical resonance in our time: the fundamental distinction between *national consciousness* and *nationalism*; the revolutionary role of intellectuals in intervening on behalf of the dispossessed in civil society; and the positive role of political leadership in enhancing the democratic participation of the masses in postcolonial African societies. In many ways Fanon's political intervention in the African Revolution was motivated by political and philosophical principles of the French Enlightenment to which he wholeheartedly subscribed in opposition to European imperial domination of the Third World. Paradoxically, European imperial systems themselves were part of the distorted logic of the Enlightenment in their attempt to universalize European historical experience: the historical conundrum of spreading or implanting democratic principles in an undemocratic and oppressive manner. But since the Latin American intellectual Walter D. Mignolo has revealed the contradictory valences and vectors of European history and the Enlightenment moment regarding modernity, we need not detain ourselves on this matter.

Since the postmodern moment articulates a historical logic that contravenes and subverts the principles of the Enlightenment project and the structuring coordinates of modernity itself, a stereographic examination of postmodernism is in order. Principally in two texts, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) and *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (1998), Fredric Jameson has formulated a conceptual structure of postmodernism. For Jameson postmodernism is the cultural expression of the commodification (commercialization) of culture and its cultural products within multi-national (late) capitalism. Postmodernism, in other words, is the cultural expression of a crisis due to the disjuncture between the phenomenological experience of the individual subject and the economic (social) structures that totalize life. It could be said that postmodernism is the principal symptom of the illness that is overcoming late capitalism. The constitutive features or characteristics of postmodernism are indicative of this historical crisis: the

emergence of depthlessness and the weakening of historicity due to the attempted abolition of the distinction between appearance and essence; the appearance of simulacra (shiny or glossy surfaces) in painting and in film because of the weakening of content in relation to form; the disappearance of historical concepts in postmodernist theories; the cannibalization of artistic styles rather than their synthesis within a particular perspective; the appearance of pastiche (a blank parody or imitation through a dead language) as a mode of artistic representation; the articulation of nostalgia in opposition to historicity as a mode of recollection or retrieval of history; the transformation of oppositional features into decorative ones; the emphasis on fragmentation and differentiation over unification; the syntax and grammar of representation appearing in populist forms (artificial and superficial) rather than in truly democratic and authentically popular ones; the dissolution of 'semi-autonomy' in cultural formations; the abolition of critical distance in observation; and the questioning of the very possibility of gaining knowledge through art. Perhaps the over-riding feature of postmodernism is the emergence of spatial logic (space) over temporal logic (time), which was so characteristic of modernism. With this totalizing perspective, Jameson postulated a unified theory of differentiation within the postmodern.

Historically situating postmodernism and the postmodern with the emergent globalization since the historic year of 1989, Jameson, in *Jameson on Jameson: Conversations on Cultural Marxism* (2007), consisting of interviews given between 1982 and 2007, elaborated further on this cultural expression and its accompanying and enabling historical experience: postmodernism is a mediatory concept of the cultural logic of capitalism; the singular form of spatialization and temporalization in postmodernism enabled architecture become the semaphore of its emergence; the cultural logic of the moment is neither positive nor negative; while postmodernism effects the loss of autonomy of culture, it equally enables its democratization and plebianization; art and social life are interwoven into each other in the postmodern; postmodernism is a global cultural style; theorizing postmodernity is systematizing a process that evinces anti-historicism; and allegory is par excellence a representational form of postmodernity. In these formulations Jameson is moving in the direction postulating globalization as the economic structure of postmodernity. In his major essay on the globalization, "Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," assembled in a book co-edited together with Masao Miyoshi, *The Cultures of Globalization* (1998), he argues that although postmodernity and globalization are intertwined, the distinctiveness of the latter is that it is a communicational concept reflecting the remarkable innovations in communicational technologies which in effect is a foundation of the accelerated modernization of many countries in the world. He argues further that this communicational concept is transformed into a vision of the world market based

on uneven dependencies between United States and the rest of the world. Fundamentally, globalization is the contact and interpenetration of cultures.

Although on the one hand this enables cultural pluralism and diversity on the global scale, on the other hand it facilitates the hegemony of American mass culture (American film, television, music) in practically all corners of the world: the American way of life is or has been globalized. Jameson indicates the paradox of dissymmetry at the center of globalization process. This is clearly exemplified by the hegemony of the English language in the twenty-first century. This is particularly true in the postcolonial Africa where the European languages, particularly English and French, have colonized, traumatized and decentralized the role of African languages in the cultural and historical imagination of the African people. Many contemporary African intellectuals are oblivious to this tragic situation. Jameson concludes the essay with some of the paradoxes at the vortex of globalization and postmodernity: the deep interpenetration of the economic and the cultural; the decentering and proliferation of differences; culture identified with the state in Third World countries while in the First World countries is identified with capitalism (economic system); and religious fundamentalism, which the Enlightenment had defeated through reason and rationality, seems to be the only ideology capable of resisting globalization. He postulates that the Hegelian and the Marxian dialectics historicize the paradoxes of globalization and postmodernity. In a later book, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (2010), he undertakes this historicization process. In "Globalization as a Philosophical Issue" essay Jameson salutes C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) examination of the contradictions at the center of the conflict between the Haitian Revolution and the French Revolution as a classic in dialectically analyzing historical paradoxes such as globalization.

In his landmark essay, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984), Jameson postulated the decade of the 1960s as the historical disjuncture between the exhaustion of modernism and the emergence of postmodernism. In an essay written in the same year, "Periodizing the 60s" (1984), he analyzed the historical factors and processes that made this decade of the most determinant in the trajectory of the twentieth century. Among the historical vectors and valences that he takes to have been determinant of this moment were the following: the Algerian Revolution that was galvanized throughout the 1950s against French colonialism and imperialism and the Cuban Revolution in the second half of the 1950s in opposition to American imperial domination, and the respective revolutionary intellectual and political practices of Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara within them. Jameson views both of them as the last representatives of a new prototype of revolutionary intellectual which eventuated anew in the historical conjuncture between the Second World War and the revolutionary decade of the 1960s. He correctly situates them as

emanating from the intellectual practice Jean-Paul Sartre was articulating as he shifted from Existentialism towards Marxism. The most immediate connection between Fanon and Guevara is that the former in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) called on the Third World to defend the Cuban Revolution against the intervention of American imperialism, particularly given the tragedy of the Congo Crisis of 1960 and the assassination of Patrice Lumumba that American machinations had unleashed on the world. Alice Cherki in *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* informs us that both Fidel Castro and Che Guevara admired Fanon and wanted him upon the completion of the Algerian Revolution to return to the Antilles (the Caribbean) to participate in the Latin American Revolution which they thought the Cuban Revolution had just initiated. Perhaps this is the reason why Fanon about a year before his unexpected death in 1961 wanted to be posted in Havana (Cuba) as the ambassador of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). The world at large was made aware thirty years after the fact by the publication of Guevara's *The African Dream: The Diaries of the Revolutionary War in the Congo* (1999, 2000) that Guevara had fought in the Congo (Zaire) in the middle of the 1960s before moving on to his tragic death in Bolivia in 1967.

In "Periodizing the 60s" Jameson shows that Fanon's theses of the struggle between the Colonizer and the Colonized, the 'redemptive violence' between the Slave and the Master (originally formulated in *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952]), the 'hierarchical positions' of the Self and the Other, the Center and the Margin that *The Wretched of the Earth* so influential in this revolutionary decade and embraced as the Bible of the Third World, were influenced by Sartre's concept of 'objectifying reversal of the look' mapped in *Being and Nothingness* (1948) and in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). In the essay, "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity", first given as a lecture in Venezuela in 1995 now assembled in *The Cultural Turn*, argues that Sartre's concept of the Look was influential on Fanon's historical examination of the 'colonial or colonizing gaze' of the Colonizer on Colonized. Indeed, Jean-Paul Sartre's influence on Fanon was massive, even though at the beginning of his intellectual career Fanon was hostile towards Sartre believing that the essay *Black Orpheus*, which was an introduction to the Negritude poetry of Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor and others, had mischaracterized the historical poetic project of the black poets, but by the time of *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon self-recognized himself as a disciple of the master: the evidence of this is Sartre's Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*. Alice Cherki is convincing in portraying Fanon's excitement when he embarked on his trip from Tunis to see Sartre in Rome where he had self-exiled himself because of the assassination threats and attempts by the rightwing French *colons*; she is equally captivating in conveying the endless fascination Fanon had for Sartre; but she is less convincing when she argues that Fanon was cool on receiving the Preface to his book; even more unbelievable when she blames the Preface as the culprit that made many in the First World to

view Fanon as the 'prophet of violence'. Barely separated by a decade, Fanon born in 1925 and Jameson in 1934, what made Jameson an astute reader of Fanon is that they both belonged to the same generation that could not evade the deep influence of Sartre. Given that Jameson's dissertation which he transformed into his first book was on the Existential philosopher, *Sartre: The Origins of Style* (1961), it is perhaps not surprising that this intellectual imprint continues in his latest book, *The Hegel Variations*. The other major intellectual who made seminal references to Fanon in the postmodern era, and had greater affinities with him than Fredric Jameson, was Edward Said.

Jean-Paul Sartre formulated his concept of the committed intellectual in the introduction to the inaugural issue of *Les Temps modernes* (Modern Times) magazine that was launched in 1945. Though "Introducing *Les Temps modernes*" was first translated into English in the early 1950s, since 1988 it is one of the appendices to Sartre's *What is Literature and Other Essays*. Sartre conceptualized his idea of the intellectual around the following constructs: an intellectual or writer is a worker on matters of the mind situated in a particular historical context determined by particular social forces; such an occupation is a social position determined by bourgeois culture that makes it impossible for an intellectual to locate herself outside her particular historical moment; given this situational context, an intellectual or artist cannot be characterized by disinterestedness or gratuitousness since that would be surrendering to, or engaging in, irresponsibility; for an intellectual be concerned only with matters of style or the poetics of prose is an evasion of historical responsibility; being a writer has social consequences on society in one form or another; to be an intellectual is to commit oneself to a particular perspective and to situate oneself in a particular moment; to be engaged with intellectual activity is a process of saying something because writing possesses meaning; an intellectual is implicated in his particular time and or moment; the dominant views prevailing at a particular moment have an impact on intellectual activity; it is impossible for an intellectual or writer to write himself or herself outside of that particular moment; given that there are practical consequences in being an intellectual, an intellectual must embrace his or her time tightly since there is no escaping it; since an intellectual is made by the time and moment in which she is born and is determined by it, it is logical that she should be engaged with that particular moment; if an intellectual is not engaged with her time, she misses out on particular events of that moment, this has to be viewed as regrettable; an intellectual can only live in her moment; for intellectuals to be passive about their moment is a form of action about it; it is impossible to evade one's moment; one cannot abstain from one's moment; to live at a particular time is already to be engaged in it; an intellectual should not be concerned with the future since she cannot determine the nature of futurity at the moment of its occurrence; an intellectual does not write for immortality but for the present; an intellectual can

only write for her contemporaries; since every age discovers an aspect of the human condition, it is that aspect that the writer should be engaged with; by engaging with singularity of one's era, an intellectual makes contact with the eternal; the eternal is actualized in its contemporary form; an intellectual's engagement with a particular moment is not being a relativist, rather, it is confront the practical; an intellectual becomes immortal by engaging passionately with her moment; a writer or intellectual is responsible in assisting to effect change in a particular moment or society; an intellectual's practical purpose is to change the human condition and the concept of humanity; an intellectual should search and construct a particular conception of humanity through words and action; being an intellectual is to be a social function; an intellectual should construct a totalizing view of humanity; an intellectual locates herself in a particular class or group other than through birth by the choices she makes and by utilization of the imagination; first and foremost, an intellectual is concerned with the metaphysical condition of lived experience rather than with the nature of the human psyche; the distant aim of an intellectual is liberation; an intellectual is engaged with the freeing of the other through the freeing of the self; an intellectual should adopt a synthetic perspective, not an analytical mode, since it enables her to have a complete view of life; and lastly, the practical aim of an intellectual, writer, or artist is to attain freedom or to bring freedom into being.

With this conceptualization of the social responsibility of the intellectual, Jean-Paul Sartre influenced all over the world a legion of writers and intellectuals and artists who came of age after the Second World War, not only the national cohorts of a Jameson or a Fanon, but from Angel Rama in Uruguay through Mario Vargas Llosa in Peru and through Roberto Fernandez Retamar in Cuba to Roland Barthes in France itself. This is what made Jean-Paul Sartre the most important philosopher in the world in the two decades after the War, that is, until the emergence of structuralism as an intellectual movement in the early 1960s in France. With retrospective hindsight, the emergence of structuralism and followed by poststructuralism was a clear demarcation that the logic of modernity had ended and that of postmodernism had arrived. Postmodernism attempts to refute Sartre's conceptualization of the role of the intellectual by arguing that it is based on the teleology of history which is not only mistaken but is also merely an ideological construction of the Enlightenment that has no historical validity in the postmodern. The different monumental work and the different political positions of Jameson and Jürgen Habermas contradict this postulation of postmodernism.

It was possibly in Latin America that Sartre's conceptualization of the role of the writer and intellectual had the most seminal and long lasting influence or effect. Mario Vargas Llosa, the 2010 Nobel Laureate for Literature has on many

occasions affirmed that his intellectual outlook in the first two decades of literary practice, from the early 1950s to the 1970s, when he began denouncing the Cuban Revolution which he had earlier supported, was guided by the articulations of Sartre, as much as his literary sensibility was forged by William Faulkner, Jorge Luis Borges and Cervantes. In the Nobel Lecture given on December 7, 2010 in Stockholm we find these sentences:

In my youth, like many writers of my generation, I was a Marxist and believed socialism would be the remedy for the exploitation and social injustices that were becoming severe in my country, in Latin America, and in the rest of the Third World. My disillusion with statism and collectivism and my transition to the democrat and liberal that I am
And the truth is I owe to France and French culture unforgettable lessons . . . I lived there when Sartre and Camus were alive and writing . . . I am most grateful to France for the discovery of Latin America.

The unforgettable lessons he learned from Jean-Paul Sartre are evident in his fundamental essay, "Social Commitment and the Latin American Writer," (1978). Taking his fellow compatriot, the great writer José María Arguedas who committed suicide in 1969 in middle life, as exemplary of the social responsibilities undertaken by Latin American writers as intellectuals, Mario Vargas Llosa argues that they too like him politically and socially identified and aligned themselves with the dispossessed, especially the Amerindian people who in the past had created great civilizations. In contrast to First World writers, their counterparts in Latin America not only assume a personal responsibility to the artistic values and originality that enrich their languages and culture generally, they also assume a social responsibility to the political, economic and cultural problems that galvanize their societies. This commitment to the social and the political is an inescapable obligation. The creative impulse to produce excellent and original artistic works is interrelated, but not reducible, to the challenges of participating in overcoming illiteracy, misery, exploitation, prejudice and injustice.

Tracing an encapsulated history of Latin American literature, he maps that imaginative world of the essay form represented by figures such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (Argentina), José Martí (Cuba), Manuel González Prada (Peru), José Enrique Rodó (Uruguay), Jose Vasconcelos (Mexico), José Carlos

Mariategui (Peru) to show its close adherence to objective reality with the consequence that the most authentic representation of Latin American social problems in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are found in literature. This is the literary tradition that major Latin American novelists of the twentieth century, Miguel Angel Asturias (Guatemala), Alejo Carpentier (Cuba), José Lezama Lima (Cuba), Augusto Roa Bastos (Paraguay), Carlos Fuentes (Mexico), Gabriel García Marquez (Colombia), Manuel Puig (Argentina) have inherited and expanded into a higher excellence. Using the Sartrean term 'situation', Vargas Llosa spells out that this social commitment is necessitated by the specificity of Latin American context. He is quick to point out that this 'objective reality' is not only captured by 'realist literature', but also by Latin American 'fantastic literature': he has in mind the Mexican Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955). He concludes by warning that social commitment should not be made to dominate the autonomy of artistic vision. Although lack space bars consideration of "How I Started To Write" (1988) by Carlos Fuentes, in the same volume as Vargas Llosa's essay, it too points to Jean-Paul Sartre as a major influence and the impossibility of avoiding social commitment in Latin American literary practice. In a way, both Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa confirm the thesis in Pascale Casanova's highly acclaimed book *The World Republic of Letters* (1999, 2004) that Paris was the capital of world intellectual culture in the twentieth century.

The most distinguished Latin American literary critic and literary scholar in the twentieth century Angel Rama (Uruguay), in "Literature and Exile" (1981) has argued that although the social commitment of Latin American intellectuals and writers has led to their exiling by military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes in large stretches of the twentieth century, the paradoxical positive effect of their close adjacency to each other invariably in Paris, also in Barcelona, has resulted in the 'transculturation' of Latin America culture beyond the national parochial perspectives that had prevailed before. Contrasting the old definition of exile characterized by the expulsion of citizens from their homelands and the new definition of exile typified by citizens voluntarily abandoning their countries to avoid persecution, Rama postulates the latter process as enabling the revelation of the diversity of Latin American national cultures to each other as well as making possible the linkage of its exiled intellectuals and people. The person whom he designates as having initiated this process is the nineteenth century Cuban intellectual José Martí, whom Fidel Castro was to retrospectively select as having given intellectual authorization to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Indeed, the essays of Martí emanating from New York City where he was largely forcibly based and published in major national newspapers in Caracas, Mexico City and Buenos Aires forged a new Latin American modern consciousness. Also the Nicaraguan poet Ruben Darío participated alongside Martí, although from different geographical locations, in establishing a Latin American modern

intellectual conscience. Rama tabulates the advantages that accrued from this exiling experience in the postmodern era: it facilitated cultural exchange and unification among certain segments of Latin American societies; it opened Spanish-speaking Latin America and Portuguese-speaking South America to each other; it generated a generalizing vision among Latin America countries rather than being controlled from New York or London as had occurred in the past; it replaced regional and national visions with a singular and comprehensive continental vision---this latter vision coordinated the vastness of time and space through a uniformity of interests; it revealed the complex dependency between private and public spheres within these societies as well interrelated to each other the native sphere, the foreign sphere and the diasporan sphere; and fundamentally, it opened a trend towards the macrostructure of Latin American cultures rather than narrowly confined to their microstructures.

Published a year after his tragic and unexpected death in 1983, Rama in *The Lettered City* (*La Ciudad Letrada*, 1984 [1996]), a book written from a committed Marxist perspective, interwove cultural history, intellectual history, literary history and political history in constructing a developmental process of the macrostructure of Latin American cultures from the time of the arrival of Spanish colonial conquerors to the middle of the twentieth-century. Although the book consists of only 140 pages, its innovative approach and its syntheses of complex themes made it enthusiastically accepted in many Latin American intellectual circles. Its combination of the ideas of Walter Benjamin, José Martí, Michel Foucault and Pedro Henríquez Ureña made its conceptual forms and theses truly original: the cities in the New World were planned to facilitate their spaces being occupied by particular forms of writing or words that would enable the hegemony of a particular imagination; the ordering of city space and historical space were made in a particular manner to shape a new consciousness in the New World; the ordering and rationalization of culture and thought by *letrados* (men of letters, chroniclers, lawyers) was a process of imposing Spanish culture on the indigenous people since the written word has more power than the one spoken; writing was a means of consolidating a political order; the construction of signs configured a future (modernity) while at the same time they erased the past of Amerindian civilizations; the Spanish Baroque ideas imposed themselves by the signs in the form of words; the writing of European philosophy and theology by the *letrados* began controlling the spiritual realm of Amerindian civilizations; the power of the lettered city resided in administrative power, the evangelization and transculturation of indigenous people, communication systems that ideologize space and the formation of the Creole elite (whites born in the New World); nevertheless, among the Creole elite there emerged intellectual producers who began creating literary forms of representation according to the dictates and imperatives of New World history not European history; after the Wars of Independence of the 1820s and of the 1830s crystallized

a new class formation that inferiorized African (ex-slave) and Amerindian cultures; universities began emerging after the liberation struggle; corpus of laws, edicts and codes were enacted that resulted in the exaltation of writing; indigenous and African languages were regarded as enemy territory; cultural dominance was expressed through the usage of European languages; exclusionism was facilitated by writing and through linguistic purism; Latin American national literatures were forged in the context of this purism and exclusionism; José Martí and José Pedro Varela, among others, at the center of the modernization process in the late nineteenth century struggled and facilitated literacy to dispossessed social and racial groups; the emergent newspapers and journals became pillars of the modernizing system; universities became instruments of modernization and national integration; academies emerged and the writers became resolutely urban; Sílvio Romero, among others, encouraged the making of modern Brazilian literature through a recourse to oral traditions in order to forge a new national identity and a new national spirit; the creation of national literatures encouraged the making of national literary histories; in the context of the internationalist modernizing of Latin America and Mexican Revolution, the ideologies of positivism, populism and nationalism emerged; journalism flourished and Latin American writers moved towards specialization; while United States imperialism began to impose itself on Latin America, the continent itself was undergoing a democratization process however haltingly; symbolically José Martí stood at the crossroads of several processes from integrating of Latin America internationalist discourses through the syncretism of the national and the international to the absorption of political and ideological doctrines from Europe and United States; after José Martí, in early twentieth century there came into being in Latin America a second era of revolutions and revolutionary struggles propelled by the struggle between democracy and dictatorship. With this remarkable book, Angel Rama conveyed the monumental political struggle in the cultural sphere between the imperializing process and the decolonizing process. There are evident affinities between *The Lettered City* and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. It should be indicated that although Fanon in this book emphasized that Africa should learn from the political mistakes of Latin America countries, it is absolutely clear in our time that Africa has much more to learn from the extraordinary intellectual achievements of Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century and in early years of the twenty-first century.

It is this splendid genealogical cultural structure that produced the towering Latin American literature that is considered in "Some Theoretical Problems of Spanish American Literature" (1975) by Roberto Fernández Retamar, the internationally acknowledged ideologue of the Cuban Revolution and former editor of *Casa de las Américas* journal. Although not considered here, the most important theoretical and ideological document by Retamar is the major essay

"Caliban" (1971) which in the process of defending the Cuban Revolution makes serious references to C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, George Lamming and other black intellectuals from Africa and the Caribbean. Among other things, what makes *Caliban* a seminal text in Latin American cultural and political history is that a white or *mestizo* (biracial of the admixture of Europeans and indigenous people) Latin American intellectual integrates the black intellectual culture of the Antilles or Caribbean into a central place within Latin American culture which had never been done before, with the possible exception of José Martí, the foremost influence on Retamar. All of this is not surprising in a major intellectual who in several places has revealed of having been influenced by Sartre in the 1950s, very much like Fanon himself. This alignment with the French intellectual culture may partly be due to the fact that Sartre was the first major European intellectual to write in defense of the Cuban Revolution: *Sartre on Cuba* (1961).

Synthesizing the ideas of José Martí, that Latin America must articulate its distinctive nature of Americaness in contrast to that of United States, and those of José Carlos Mariategui, that a national culture must speak in the voice of its indigenous people, "Some Theoretical Problems of Spanish American Literature" argues the thesis that the intellectual instruments for assessing and evaluating Latin American literature should emanate from its own cultural and intellectual context: Latin American literature and culture have their own particular values which are not merely a reflection those of Europe, even though these are assimilated into them; the literature can locate its peculiarities through self-knowledge; the synthesis of Latin American literature should be original to itself, not an imitation of European or United States synthesis; the precondition for understanding literature is predicated on the understanding of the world; the European radical tradition (i.e. Marxism and Jacobinism) and its instruments of interrogation, among others, can assist Latin America in constructing its original and peculiar synthesis; the exemplary nature of José Martí for Retamar resides in his unrelenting search for the historical coherence of Latin American cultures---in other words, the central issue is finding historical and critical instruments that make continental coherence of the converging and diverging tendencies of various national literatures; in the context of the search for continental coherence, an important issue is the distinction or demarcation between what is literature and what is not---the nature of literariness; the fundamental of Latin American literature is hybridization; an important literary generic form of this literature is 'ancillary', a form that is a mixture composites (memoirs, testimonies, diaries)---that is, they are not traditional literary forms; the 'ancillary' literary forms open the Latin American literary imagination to 'folklorization'---for example, the magical realism of Marquez; this 'folklorization' has led to the 'mestizozation' of the poetry of major poets such as Pablo Neruda and César Vallejo; the uniqueness of Latin American history is responsible for the openness and

porousness of its literature---that is, its inventiveness and improvisational quality; Latin American literary history should be periodized in relation to the hierarchies and interrelationships of these peculiar generic forms; Retamar postulates Latin American literary history as a dialectic between generational (chronological) periodization [dynamic] and the hierarchical (structural) periodization [static]; given this distinctiveness, Latin American literary criticism should engage the cultural politics at the center of Latin American literature; finally, Latin American literature and criticism must look at the concrete reality and specific features of Latin American history in order to contribute to world literature. Undoubtedly, these formulations by Roberto Fernández Retamar were made possible by the new political and historical space opened by the Cuban Revolution for intellectuals to think in counter-intuitive ways.

Roberto Fernández Retamar wrote "Some Theoretical Problems of Spanish American Literature" in the tumultuous background of the 1960s in which Fanon's conception of a revolutionary intellectual in *The Wretched of the Earth* had a major influence on a large swath of the Third World. This is not surprising since Fanon was one of the central political figures of this remarkable decade. In his retrospective appraisal of the decade, the aforementioned "Periodizing the 60s", Jameson mentions the influence of Fanon's political practice in shaping the ideological and contestations of the era: "Fanon's great myth [of violence] could be read at the time, by those it appalled equally well as by those it energized, as an irresponsible call to mindless violence. In retrospect, and in the light of Fanon's other, clinical work (he was a psychiatrist working with victims of colonization and of torture and terror of the Algerian war), it can more appropriately be read as a significant contribution to a whole theory of cultural revolution as the collective reeducation (or even collective psychoanalysis) of oppressed peoples or unrevolutionary working classes." Jameson's reading of Fanon's revolutionary practice is astute because Alice Cherki in her book shows how Fanon transformed the clinical, political and cultural practice of psychiatry in the early 1950s in Algeria. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) also reads Fanon in a similar manner as Fredric Jameson as having partly initiated the cultural revolution of Third World intellectuals in their opposition to American and European imperialism and Orientalism. Having been influenced by both Fanon and Michel Foucault, Said, in another context, argued that the African psychiatrist and political philosopher was an important thinker than the French poststructuralist thinker. This appraisal and evaluation may be based on the fact that Fanon's influence on him was such that it led to his founding of Postcolonial Studies together with Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Edward Said's notion of an intellectual formulated in *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), a text that will be considered in a moment, was influenced by Fanon's revolutionary intellectual practice within the Algerian Revolution and his unwavering solidarity with the Arab struggle against European domination. Said's first

evident encounter with Fanon was in *Orientalism* (1978), a book considered by many as having launched Postcolonial Studies.

Fanon's exhortation of what the role of an African revolutionary intellectual should be in *The Wretched of the Earth* was a product of *revolutionary practice* not of *theory*. Across three chapters, "Concerning Violence", "Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weaknesses", and "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness", he makes the following observations regarding the political and social responsibilities of African intellectuals to the masses and to the nation: her analytical approach should not be particularistic in explaining complex problems to the nation since that could only result in failing to recognize the totality of the process at issue; she must guard against opportunism which could manifest itself when the truthfulness of the situation or analysis is not understood in all its consequences; one of her primary tasks is to introduce new concepts and new ideas that demystify circumstances that require transformation in order for a new nation to come into being; her intellectual practice must take cognizance of the ideological contestations which are prevalent at her particular historical moment; she must redefine the historical mission of the nation as one of the means of overcoming domination and oppression whether in its internal or external forms; she must guard against false application of concepts that invariably emanate and have little relevance to a particular national situation; she must participate in the making of or participate in the national organizations that are progressive and seek to express the will of the nation; she must guard against regionalism and ethnic chauvinism which compromise the national project; she must possess an absolute awareness between principle and compromise; lastly and much more fundamentally, she must participate in the development of national consciousness through criticism and self-appraisal.

What made Frantz Fanon so insistent on the role of progressive and revolutionary intellectuals in bringing enlightenment to the masses of the was that their *class position* as middle class members had always in the decolonizing process betrayed the fundamental interests of the working class and the peasantry. The chapter "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" has an extraordinary catalogue of the shortcomings of the African national bourgeoisie in the decolonizing process and also in the postcolonial national reconstruction period: its failure to crystallize the emergence of a *national consciousness* through its incapacity to forge links with the dispossessed people; being an undeveloped middle class in comparison to the European bourgeoisie, it lacks intellectual productiveness, a totalizing vision of society which is necessary for construction of national unity, absence of the comprehension of the structure of national economy, a lack of recognition that nationalization of the economy serves the best interests of the emergent nation, an inordinate desire to imitate the depravities of the European bourgeoisie rather than its many enormous

achievements, its reveling in religious animosities and racial philosophies, its fascination with the 'cult of personality' which tragically lead to dictatorships that invariably subvert the democratic process, and its unwillingness to learn from history. For Fanon the fundamental failure of the African national bourgeoisie and the African intelligentsia is their inability to understand the historical distinction between *national consciousness* and *nationalism*.

The extraordinary work of Edward Said, particularly *Orientalism, Culture and Imperialism, Representations of the Intellectual* refute the seemingly prevalent notion that since Fanon was writing in late modernism, in the interregnum between modernity and postmodernity, before the onset of globalization, his conception of the social and political responsibilities of Third World intellectuals is hardly applicable at the onset of the second decade of the twenty-first century. In some of the essays assembled in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2000) Said shows that although the idea of the classic intellectual which emerged in the Enlightenment, whose last representative is taken to have been Jean-Paul Sartre, has been transformed to that of Public Intellectual in the globalization period, the actual *mode of intellectuality* itself has not altered that much. Sartre's political interventions in Third World political eventuations and happenings beginning in the 1950s to the end of his life in 1980 were the prefiguration of the role of the Public Intellectual. This was at the center of Fanon and Said's admiration for Sartre, extraordinarily enough in the case of the latter, being an American-Palestinian who strongly disagreed with Sartre about the Arab-Israel War of 1967 and the tragic situation of Palestinians. Few intellectuals in our time have equaled Edward Said's deep sense of objectivity about something so profoundly immediate to his personal experience and subjectivity. His inordinate respect of the African National Congress (ANC) the way it harnessed international support in the struggle against apartheid is astonishing. His absolutely negative comparison of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in relation to the ANC is understandable though historically unacceptable since the struggles were historically different, that of the Palestinians being much more complicated and complex than that waged by South Africans. All of this makes it all the more apropos that these reflections on the role of African intellectuals in a globalizing context end with the words of this great Fanonian intellectual. In the words of Cornel West: "Edward Said is the most distinguished cultural critic now writing in America."

Being one of the books written in the last decade of his life, having passed away in 2003, *Representations of the Intellectual*, which consists of the 1993 Reith Lectures, is a major statement on the role of a critical intellectual in the twenty-first century. Concerned to highlight the public role of the intellectual as an outsider, Edward Said enumerates the paramount characteristics of intellectual practice: one task of an intellectual is to breakdown stereotypes and reductive

categories that are barriers to logical and historical thinking; an intellectual engages with cultures that are intermingled therefore their contents and histories are interdependent and hybrid; intellectuals are public figures whose views are not predictable nor amenable to dogma, sloganeering and orthodoxy; an intellectual must talk the truth about human misery and oppression; there is no universal and single standard of what is an intellectual because of the complicated relation between the universal and the local; intellectuals, as opposed to experts who promote special interests, interrogate patriotism, nationalism, corporatism and all forms of privilege regarding class, gender and race; an intellectual strives for universality in order to go beyond personal background, language and nationality; an intellectual also strives for a single standard for human behavior; there are no rules in the practice of being an intellectual; a secular intellectual does not worship any gods; all intellectuals represent something of the audience as well as to themselves; an intellectual must represent something; an intellectual searches for the truth value of things; intellectuals can serve the language, tradition, historical situations of their country or oppose them; likewise, intellectuals either serve institutions (church, academy, etc.) or oppose them; the principal duty of an intellectual is to search for relative independence from all societal pressures; by nature an intellectual is an exile and therefore in a sense marginal; the role of an intellectual as an outsider is seemingly being powerless against the powerful; it is the spirit of opposition rather than accommodation that characterizes the consciousness of an intellectual; supporting the formulation of Michel Foucault, Said characterizes an intellectual as possessed by 'endless erudition'; an intellectual revives forgotten or abandoned histories, exhuming buried documents, and searching for alternative sources; an intellectual is an individual with specific public role in society; an intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, a philosophy or an opinion in the best interests of the public; an intellectual must confront and challenge dogma and orthodoxy; and lastly, an intellectual engages on the basis of universal principles. Later in the book Edward Said mentions his conception of the intellectual as largely derived from the ideas of eighteenth century Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico and those of the twentieth century Italian Communist philosopher Antonio Gramsci against those of the nineteenth century literary and cultural critic Matthew Arnold.

Having made an extraordinary lecture tour in South Africa in 1991 which was highly acclaimed in most segments of our society, it is not surprising that a few years later in *Representations of the Intellectual* he made this acute observation about our then tragic political and cultural history: "The South African Boers, for instance, have seen themselves as the victims of British imperialism; but this meant after surviving British "aggression" during the [Anglo-]Boer War, the Boers as a community represented by François Malan felt themselves entitled to

assert their historical experience by setting up through the doctrines of the National Party what became apartheid. It is always easy and popular for intellectuals to fall into modes of vindication and self-righteousness that blind them to the evil done in the name of their own ethnic or national community.” This ‘national pitfall’ as Fanon characterized it engulfed many outstanding Afrikaner intellectuals, I daresay also English-speaking white intellectuals, during the segregationist and apartheid period of our history. Hermann Giliomee’s major historical, political and cultural work *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (2003), among many of its brilliant achievements, despite its several faults, is in showing how a truly outstanding intellectual like N. P. van Wyk Louw by uncritically supporting the National Party ended joining the Broederbond and supporting apartheid. Van Wyk Louw fell into this pitfall by failing to give cognizance to the distinction that Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* sought to convey Third World intellectuals, particularly to African intellectuals: the distinction between *national consciousness* and *nationalism*. The fact that he postulated the “just survival” of the Afrikaner nation does not vindicate him from this tragedy. Despite all this, for those of us who have no facility in the Afrikaans language, on reading his poetry assembled in *Afrikaans Poems with English Translations* (1962), an anthology that assembled other Afrikaner poets of the *Driemanskap* [Triumvirate] (C. Louis Leipoldt, Totius, J. F. E. Celliers, perhaps Eugène Marais) and the *Dertig* [The Generation of the Thirties or the Second Afrikaans Language Movement] (Elisabeth Eybers, Uys Krige, D. J. Opperman, Van Wyk Louw himself, C. M. van den Heever), one cannot doubt that Van Wyk Louw was one of our major poets of the twentieth-century. One other way to avoid this ‘national pitfall’ that bedevils many postcolonial societies at the high noon of globalization and postmodernity that is in the process transforming itself into the emergent “contemporaneity” is to accept the distinction that Jürgen Habermas makes and elaborates on in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (2003): the fundamental difference between ‘constitutional patriotism’ and ‘national patriotism’.

That the profound lessons of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Jürgen Habermas are still relevant to all of us members of the African National Congress (ANC) was made clear by the attempt of the ANC government of Jacob Zuma in large stretches of 2010 to muzzle and destroy a free press in the country under the pretext of wanting to change the constitution through parliament to allow the creation of press tribunals which would in effect suppress news that are unpalatable to the government such as its incompetence and corruption. That important intellectuals such as Jeremy Cronin, former General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, and Blade Nzimande, present General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, both Ministers in the government of Zuma, supported such an undertaking and measure, is a measure of the still lacking understanding of democratic principles, especially in

regarding civil society. This was a straightforward betrayal of the democratic intellectual traditions of the African National Congress articulated through the New African Movement by such New African intellectuals as H. I. E. Dhlomo, Solomon T. Plaatje, Ruth First, Henry Selby Msimang. The intellectual traditions of the New African Movement expressed in the Freedom Charter clearly teach one to constantly pay reverence to 'constitutional patriotism', not to 'national or ethnic patriotism', let alone to 'party patriotism'. If there is such a thing as the latter, it exists in the form of fascism as the tragic history of apartheid in our country should have taught us.

(2011)

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