

## The Historical Moment of the Africanness of Aimé Césaire\*

by

Ntongela Masilela and Sandile Ngidi

I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And it has seemed to me that if we want it to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are---that is, of the first act of our lives: that we are black: that we are black and have a history, a history that contains certain cultural elements of great value; and that Negroes were not . . . born yesterday, because there have been beautiful and important black civilizations.

-Aimé Césaire interviewed by René Depestre at the Havana Cultural Congress in 1967.

Identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed.

-Stuart Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities" (1995).

Since the historic elections of 1994 in our country, South Africa, the most essential reflections on the historical meaning of Africa emanate from the historical imagination of the former President Nelson Mandela. At the closing ceremony of the 25th anniversary of the signing of the treaty that established CARICOM (the Caribbean Community and Common Market) and of the 19th meeting of Caribbean Heads of Government, which took place on July 4, 1998 in St. Lucia, Mandela made the following observations:

But inasmuch as our freedom completed the liberation of our continent, we can say in truth that this encounter [between the Caribbean and South] has had to wait upon centuries of colonialism and bondage. It has been made possible by our shared African heritage of resistance and renewal . . . This region has, in song and verse, in political philosophy and action. Long been a source for the articulation of both the lamentations and aspirations of black people everywhere . . . We are bound by our common heritage. When Africans were wrenched from their continent, they carried Africa with them and made the Caribbean a part of Africa . . . It is . . . no accident that the vision of an African continent reborn through the unity of its peoples has long drawn deeply from thinkers with their roots in the Caribbean. It is not

---

\* The essay is written in memory of the greatness of Aimé Césaire who passed away several months ago, on April 17, 2008, at 94 years old.

surprising that our Solomon Plaatje, a founding father of the African National Congress, should have drawn from that well . . . As we dream of and work for the regeneration of our continent, we remain conscious that the African Renaissance can only succeed as part of the development of a new equitable world order in which all the formerly colonized and marginalized take their rightful place, makers of history rather than the possessions of others . . . Our shared vision for the redemption of Africa is founded on aspirations that extend beyond Africa and the people and countries of the African Diaspora. As we enter the new millennium. Let us join hands with all those everywhere working for human dignity and upliftment.

In interrelating and counter-posing the historical constructs of the African Renaissance and the African Diaspora, President Nelson Mandela was outlining in stereographic form the two historical ideas that have been central in determining and structuring the modernistic practices in South Africa in the twentieth-century.

The notion of "The Regeneration of Africa" was an intellectual and political invention by African American proto-Pan Africanists in the nineteenth-century such as Martin Delany and Alexander Crummell about how Africa could be uplifted from what they perceived to be the 'darkness' and 'barbarism' of African heathenism to the 'enlightenment' of Christian civilization. The principal exponent of this idea was Crummell in the essay of 1865 called "The Regeneration of Africa", which he later assembled in his book of essays of 1891 which was entitled *Africa and America*. This construct was already present in Martin Delany's book of 1852, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, but in an untheorized state. Crummell was precise and specific in articulating the concept of The Regeneration of Africa: it meant to him the redemption and evangelization of Africa. Through his United States connection, Edward Blyden also participated in this modernist project. When they were both teaching in Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, both Crummell and Blyden as well as other diasporan intellectuals, sought to redeem Africa through evangelization in combination with education. Perhaps having to do with the fact that he was the first great Caribbean intellectual to seriously engage Africa, Edward Blyden posited Islam rather than Christianity as the potential great redeemer of barbarism in Africa. Despite this major difference between them, they were both adamant that only black Christians from the Diaspora can effect evangelization rather than white Christians, particularly those from Europe. In other words, they were totally convinced that only the Ne Negroes could bring modernity to Africa: for them modernity being synonymous with Christianity. It could be argued that by advocating black essentialism concerning The Regeneration of Africa, these diasporan intellectuals were shifting slowly but progressively towards the radical politics of Pan-Africanism,

a politics W. E. B. Du Bois seems to have had a firmer grasp of than Henry Sylvester Williams. In mentioning Solomon T. Plaatje as the father of the African National Congress who had drawn inspiration from the Caribbean modern political culture, I think Nelson Mandela was alluding to the fact that Edward Blyden in the very early part of the twentieth-century was in correspondence with New African intellectuals in South Africa such as John Tengo Jabavu, Plaatje himself, Allan Kirkland Soga through their newspapers, respectively, *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Native Opinion), *Tsala ea Batho* (The People's Friend), and *Izwi Labantu* (The Voice of the People). These three New African intellectuals were proselytizers of modernity.

The real father of the African National Congress was not really Solomon T. Plaatje as President Nelson Mandela proposes, but rather, Pixley ka Isaka Seme. Although Plaatje for many South Africans today is considered to have been the greatest intellectual, it was Pixley ka Isaka Seme in actual fact who founded the African National Congress in 1912 as a political instrument for modernizing the political consciousness of New Africans. It was also Pixley ka Isaka Seme who brought political modernity to South Africa by compelling through persuasion and political education the Old Africans to transform themselves into New Africans by constructing national identities, beyond tribal and ethnic persuasions. The historical lesson Pixley ka Isaka Seme appropriated from observing New Negro modernity while he was an undergraduate student at Columbia University between 1902 and 1906. But much more crucial for our purposes here, is the need to indicate that it was Pixley ka Isaka Seme who also appropriated the idea of The Regeneration of Africa from Alexander Crummell, Edward Blyden and Martin Delany and extended and disseminated it in Africa in original ways. Whereas for the three diasporan intellectuals the construct The Regeneration of Africa had profound resonances of ecclesiastical principles of religious conversion, Seme transformed this borrowing to effect a change in the critical consciousness and sensibility of new Africans in synchrony with the dawning modern age. Seme effected this extension and transformation in his major essay of 1904, appropriately called "Regeneration of Africa." It is this essay that launched the New African Movement in South Africa by announcing that the question of modernity was the historical and national project of the twentieth-century, which the New African intellectuals must engage themselves with. We need not emphasize here that the New African Movement modeled itself on the New Negro Movement of United States. The motto(s) of the New African Movement were the redemption of Africa through the construction of modernity, the necessity of education as an entranceway to modernity, and the absolute necessity of the victory of Christian civilization over heathenism and barbarism. All the New African intellectuals in South Africa subscribed to these ideological principles. Since one of us has written extensively on these matters elsewhere, we will not say much here. Let us indicate here in short hand strokes

that by launching the New African Movement and founding the African National Congress, Pixley ka Isaka Seme initiated New African modernity. This version of South African modernity is inconceivable without New Negro modernity. Need we add that the construct of the New African is directly modeled on that of the New Negro!

We would like to emphasize in parenthesis for later purposes that the achievement of Pixley ka Isaka Seme in realizing the New African Movement has been so extraordinary and monumental that when President Nelson Mandela for the first time proposed the idea of the historical possibility of achieving an African Renaissance to African Heads of State at the Organization of African Unity meeting in July 1994, just three months after the historic elections, he reverted to the same historical terms and philosophical ideas that Seme had employed nearly a century earlier. The reason perhaps for this re-discovery and re-birth and renewal of historical consciousness is that the idea of the African Renaissance is an attempt to complete the project of modernity which the New African Movement never completed because of the hegemony of white nationalism in my country.

But we would like to move on, as it were from Edward Blyden to Henry Sylvester Williams, in narrating the intervention of Caribbean intellectual and political culture in the making of New African modernity in South Africa, an intervention which to this day has not been fully recognized in my country's intellectual and cultural history. But there seems to be a very "legitimate" historical reason for this unrecognition or willfull blindness. The great enigma of Sylvester Williams in relation to South Africa is very representative of this issue. Sylvester Williams is largely remembered today for having convened the first Pan-African Congress in 1900. An important matter that has been forgotten, that is not even mentioned by his biographer J. R. Hooks, is that it was Sylvester Williams who idirectly brought the Pan-Africanist ideology to South Africa. It was he who persuaded the Ghanian, F. Z. S. Peregrino, following this Congress of 1900 to come to South Africa to disseminate this ideology. Peregrino attempted to achieve this through his Cape Town newspaper South African Spectator by propagating the ideology of Pan-Africanism as a philosophy of black internationalism in modernity. The selection of Peregrino was very shrewd because having studied in England and having lived around the New York area (specifically Rochester) for about a decade, the Ghanian represented an extraordinary blending of New Africanism and New Negroism. In other words, Peregrino was simultaneously a New African as well as being a New Negro. I think the reason of the failure of Pan-Africanism in becoming the ideology of the African National Congress and the philosophy of the modernistic practices of the New African Movement before 1920 is that it was too advanced for the critical sensibilities of the New African intelligentsia and masses. Coming from the

outside and representing the historical sensibilities of the diasporan intellectuals, the avant-garde of black modernity in the twentieth-century, Pan-Africanism could not anchor itself in the sensibilities and outlooks of the New Africans who were still preoccupied with the major struggle between tradition and modernity. From the time of the founding of *South African Spectator* in 1900 to its demise in 1919, which was triggered by F. Z. S. Peregrino's death, Pan-Africanism could not and would not inhere itself into the cultural sensibility of South Africa. It is only with the return of "Professor" James Thaele in the 1920s, a New African intellectual who had studied in United States, that Pan-Africanism in the form of Garveyism begins to gain adherents and exponents. Note that it was Garveyism from United States not from the Caribbean, as one would have expected given its origins in Jamaica. We will come back to Thaele and Garveyism in South Africa in a moment.

It is with obsession of making a fortune in the Johannesburg gold mines that seems to have brought Henry Sylvester Williams to South Africa in 1903-4, not matters concerning the ideology and philosophy of Pan-Africanism. Although J. R. Hooker's *Henry Sylvester Williams: Imperial Pan-Africanist* does not mention this, in all likelihood, before he left London for Cape Town, Henry Sylvester Williams met with the young New African intellectuals such as Alfred Mangena and Richard Msimang, both of whom were then at the Court's Inn (in London) studying to be barristers. They were the ones, together with Pixley ka Isaka Seme, who had also studied at the Court's Inn a few years after them, who drafted the Constitution of the ANC at the moment of its founding in 1912. Instead of allowing their ideological vision inform his understanding of South Africa, Sylvester Williams aligned himself closer with the political practices of John Tengo Jabavu, who had become by then more and more conservative and reactionary. In fact, from 1897 the hegemony of Jabavu's newspaper *Imvo Zabantsundu* was challenged against its extreme conservatism by the *Izwi Labantu* newspaper edited by four young New African intellectuals: Walter Benson Rubusana, Allan Kirkland Soga, S. E. K. Mqhayi and Nathaniel Cyril Mhalla. All of this information concerning John Tengo Jabavu, Henry Sylvester Williams could easily have obtained from Alfred Mangena and Richard Msimang. As his biographer observes, Sylvester Williams had become too British to understand the nuances and complexities of New African politics in South Africa. One important relationship he cultivated was with Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman, President of the African political Organization, which was to dominate Coloured politics for over forty years. As an indication of the lack of seriousness in engaging South Africa as a historical experience of modernity, F. Z. S. Peregrino, in *South African Spectator*, not even once mentions the presence of Henry Sylvester Williams in South Africa, let alone commissioning an intellectual and political portrait of him. *South African Spectator* was the newspaper that pioneered the continual coverage of the relationship between Africa and the

African Diaspora; a relationship displayed by means of intellectual, political and religious portraits and sketches of New Africans and New Negroes as well as of other outstanding blacks in other parts of the world. Having said this, J. R. Hooker indicates a very important point that Henry Sylvester Williams acted as a London agent for all the pre-ANC African delegations protesting to the British Government or Parliament one political outrage after another against Africans by hegemonic whites in the Crown Colony of South Africa. A complex and enigmatic man whose historical due has perhaps not been fully given as it should.

As indicated earlier, Garveyism consolidated itself in South Africa in the decade of the 1920s. It expressed itself in two historical forms: in one instance it was articulated as a philosophy of modernity in the writings and political activity of the New African intellectual James Thaele, who was the leader of the regional ANC in the Cape Province; in the other instance it became an ideology of a millenarian movement led by Wellington Buthelezi. In both instances Garveyism became a means of re-invigorating Ethiopianism that had been invented and launched by Mangane Maake Mokone in 1892. Ethiopianism was a major social movement that established Independent African Churches in South Africa. A number of these independent black churches had broken away from the hegemonic white churches because of the familiar matters of racism and paternalism. In a real sense, Ethiopianism was a search for the authentic forms of African modernities in the struggle against the oppressive forms of European modernities. It would be revealing to inquire into the parallelisms between Rasrafarianism and Ethiopianism. In its reaching out to the AME Church in the United States, Ethiopianism facilitated the construction of institutional supports and channels between New Negro modernity and New African modernity: quite a number of Africans who were hindered from obtaining higher education in South Africa, were able to come and study at the historically black institutions of higher learning, such as Wilberforce University and Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. One such student was Charlotte Manye Maxeke who studied under the young W. E. B. Du Bois at Wilberforce University, who upon returning to South Africa in 1900 became a great apostle of modernity. James Thaele, who had studied at Lincoln University, wanted the ANC to adapt Garveyism as its ideology, but to no avail. In his writings in such newspapers as *The African Voice* and *The African World* (the latter echoing Garvey's *The Negro World*), Thaele theorized the meaning of the slogan "Africa for the Africans" in the context of South Africa. Wellington Buthelezi led a movement that saw in the "American Negro" Marcus Garvey a "Moses" who would lead the oppressed African people to the promised land. This millenarian movement caused pandemonium and hysteria in South Africa about American Negroes as modern day liberators.

The intervention of George Padmore in the formation of South African modernity is of a different order from that of Marcus Garvey. Padmore's contribution as "Our London Correspondent" to *The Torch* weekly in Cape Town in the late 1940s and in the early 1950s was confined largely to a small circle of Coloured Trotskyists who owned the newspaper. The weekly articles by Padmore covered two fundamental themes about the British colonial territories: the emergence of nationalism(s) and the corresponding nationalist and/or national parties; and the disintegration of the British imperial order hand in hand with the demise of English colonialism. The articles canvassed the whole map of British colonial order from the West Indies to Malay, and from Kenya to India. Padmore's name never appeared on his by-lines. The articles were succinct and to the point, displaying a profound certainty that the Africans were on the progressive side of history. In one article entitled, "Africa Demands Freedom Says West Africans: Mass Meeting on Trafalgar Square," which appeared on the December 19, 1949 issue of the newspaper, it named Dr. Mnandi Azikiwe as one of the speakers to the approximately 1,500 students and workers from the British colonial empire protesting recent killings of Nigerians in Lagos by British soldiers. "Our London Correspondent" concluded the article with these words:

Mr. George Padmore, speaking on behalf of the Negroes in the West Indies, assured the Africans that the people of African descent in the Caribbean colonies, who were taken away from the ancestral homes in Africa during the cruel slave trade, have never forgotten the racial links with 'mother Africa.' They were proud of their racial heritage and any wrongs done to Africans were wrongs inflicted upon them. All progressive West Indians---socialists, trade unionists, anti-imperialists democrats---Africans as well as Indians, feel a spirit of solidarity with the Nigerians and send them a message of goodwill and sympathy to those who had suffered bereavement during the shooting of unarmed people at Enugu, Aba, Onitsha and Port Harcourt. He appealed in particular to the colonial students---Africans and West Indians---to return to their countries and help the common peoples to form trade unions, peasant and farmers' unions, councils for civil liberty, youth organizations and thereby help to elevate the down-trodden masses by inspiring them with civic discipline; political understanding of the principles of freedom and democracy. 'Intellectuals must not divorce themselves from the masses. The educated have a moral duty to render unselfish service to their less fortunate brothers and sisters,' declared Mr. Padmore.

Arguably, this passage represents one of Padmore's quintessential expressions of his concept of Pan-Africanism. It would be interesting to analyze these articles of this great political leader and brilliant intellectual concerning his ideas of nationalism and Pan-Africanism in relation to the reflections of the ANC Youth League intellectuals (Anton Lembede, A. P. Mda, Jordan Kush Ngubane, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu) who were examining the same issues at

the same time in their intellectual forum, the weekly *Inkundla ya Bantu* (Bantu Forum). It is with these young New African intellectuals that George Padmore had more political and cultural affinities than with his left-wing sponsors in Cape Town.

Despite this invaluable contribution of George Padmore in helping them to project their internationalist vision, when these Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) New African intellectuals (I. B. Tabata, Ben Kies and others) decided to select a diasporan intellectual culture that could have invaluable lessons for South African national culture concerning matters of literary modernity, they preferred those imparted by the Harlem Renaissance above and beyond those exemplified from the Caribbean (supposing that they were aware of this great mosaic of national cultures), be it the Haitian Renaissance around Jean Price-Mars, or the Cuban Indigenist Movement around Nicolas Guillen, Wilfredo Lam, Alejo Carpentier and others. The barrier here was perhaps the familiar one of language. This choice is not apparent as it seems despite the patterns of influence between New Negro modernity and New African modernity alluded to above. At issue here is a great paradox concerning the self-representation of great Caribbean intellectuals in relation to their own national cultures. We will touch on it in a moment. The editorial board of *The Torch*, spelling the rationale for selecting certain books as Books We Should Read, wrote: "These books give their readers a better insight into the problems of the people about whom they are written, and reading them will help us all to form ideas about our problems (give us a better understanding of them besides providing us with much pleasure and satisfaction)" (January 30, 1950). The book selected on this date was Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), a selection accompanied by this parallelism: "In the incidents which make up the four stories of this book, *Uncle Tom's Children*, we see the pattern of violence between Black and White, which is so familiar to us in South African society." Wright's collection of short stories was situated in the context of his other writings, and his whole literary project was viewed in relation to the Harlem Renaissance. The second book selected for Books We Should Read was the compendium, *An Anthology of American Negro Literature* (1929), edited by Victor Francis Calverston. The rationale given here was the following: "They [the ideas therein] reveal the fact that the rapid growth of literature by Negroes since the twenties is in the nature of a cultural challenge" (February 13, 1950, emphasis in the original). The essays by W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Arthur Schomburg were selected for special attention. An anthology in close proximity to the Harlem Renaissance is selected for mention. The obvious question here is: why was Alain Locke's classic anthology, *The New Negro* (1925), not selected for consideration, since it was a book that was quintessential expression of the Harlem Renaissance! Is it possible that Calverston was a Trotskyist? The third and last text selected was Fredrick Douglass' *The Life and Times of Fredrick Douglass* (1845) (April 10, 1950). This was



an usual selection because Douglass seems to have been indifferent towards Africa, consequently practically all the New African intellectuals within the New African Movement have not said much about him. This makes the choice all the more unique. This was later to be the situation of Ralph Ellison. These ruminations in *The Torch* were a clear indication that whatever the ideological leanings of any African intellectual or political movement in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth-century, New Negro modernity was absolutely compelling.

The first New African intellectual who appropriated the literary achievements of New Negro modernistic sensibilities to inspire his own outstanding literary achievements was Peter Abrahams. Abraham's autobiography, *Tell Freedom* (1954), tells of his first moment of encounter with New Negro literary culture in the library of Bantu Men's Social Center in Johannesburg, which was in many ways an important moment. Important because it was a classic representation of how generations of South African intellectuals from the Native Education Association intellectuals (John Tengo Jabavu, Elijah Makiwane, Pambani Mzimba, Walter Rubusana and others) in the 1880s to *Staffrider* writers and intellectuals (Njabulo Ndebele, Mafika Gwala, Wally Serote, Sipho Sepemla and others) in the 1970s have found their expressive literary voices through an encounter with African American intellectual culture. From the time he went to voluntary exile in 1939 at approximately 21 years of age, Abrahams arguably has had the most sustained and the most consequential engagement with African American intellectual culture: he was inspired by and became friends with some of its greatest exponents in the first half of the twentieth-century: Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, W. E. B. Du Bois, Countee Cullen and others. Peter Abraham's early poetry poetry, his first collection of short stories *Dark Testament* (1942) and his first two novels *Song of the City* (1943) and *Mine Boy* (1946) reflect this profound influence. To be more precise and specific, without Richard Wright, it would be hard to imagine Peter Abrahams as he is known today. This unprecedented engagement with United States never tempted Abrahams to migrate there. Totally unexpectedly, after spending nearly two decades in Britain, he moved to the Caribbean in 1957, specifically to Jamaica where he has since permanently resided. His book *Jamaica: An Island Mosaic* (1957) was the expression of this new historical identification. This embracing of Jamaican national culture has been problematic and uneven. But this is not our immediate concern here.

For our purposes here it is interesting how Peter Abrahams engaged Jamaican literary culture for a critical point we would like to indicate. In a chapter entitled "Jamaica 300," he examined Jamaican literary history from the poet "Tom Redcan" (Thomas Henry MacDermont) in the late nineteenth-century, who later encouraged Claude McKay and published two volumes of his dialect verse

*Contab Ballads and Songs of Jamaica*, through J. E. Clare McFarlane, Adolphe Roberts, Vivian Virtue, Roger Mais, George Campbell, Michael Scott, Herbert George de Lisser, S. A. G. Taylor, W. G. Ogilvie, John Hearne to Vic Reid in the present (that is 1956). It is a revelation how Peter Abrahams structured this chapter as a conversation between Vic Reid and himself. While Abrahams' erudition about this national literary culture was compelling and dazzling, particularly his seemingly easy facility with it, an odd thing occurs when he discussed McKay. We can say with almost certainty that only McKay was familiar to Peter Abrahams during his High School days together with Ezekiel Mphahlele in South Africa in the 1930s when he first encountered New Negro literary modernity. We are not in a position to say that the ample space given to Claude McKay in this chapter, more than to any other writer, was a function of the intrinsic qualities of McKay (his genius), or was it because he was a member of what Abrahams characterizes as the "New Negro Renaissance," that is the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Secondly, Abrahams hardly wrote of McKay as an integral part of Jamaican national literary culture, who later fully engaged himself with New Negro modernity. Abrahams wrote of him with any cogency only as a member of the New Negro Renaissance. We know that during this Renaissance McKay was either in Moscow or moving between Paris and London, and was very ambivalent about being situated within the ambience of this cultural movement. Here also something is being revealed without being fully stated.

The predisposition of Peter Abrahams to situate Claude McKay within a cosmopolitan context rather than a national one, would seem to indicate something very enigmatic about the Caribbean intellectual culture. All the great intellectuals from this region whom we have invoked, in so far as they actions intervened in the formation of modern South African culture, be it Edward Blyden or Henry Sylvester Williams or Marcus Garvey or George Padmore, delineated several historical peculiarities. First, they were acknowledged in Africa as exponents of New Negro modernity of United States, hardly recognized as black intellectuals from the Caribbean. Such an entity or cultural space as the Caribbean seems not to have existed in the historical imagination of New African intellectuals. We are speaking of the late nineteenth-century and the early part of the twentieth-century. Any black intellectual who spoke only English and had no facility with the African languages (Sierra Leone and Liberia being exceptions), was invariably taken in South Africa to be a New Negro intellectual. This linguistic explanation seems to be only a screen of a deeper underlying historical cause. This leads us to the next observation. Secondly, these intellectuals, we have no reason for doubting that this was not also true for most of the intelligentsia from this region, again we would like to emphasize that this is from the perspective of Africa, seem to have expressed their intellectualism or cultural practice as if it were in negation of their national and cultural origins or

against their particular and respective Caribbean national culture(s): they seem to proclaim their intellectualism against their national origins. Is it surprising that these great intellectuals seem not to have left in South Africa or for that matter in Africa any historical residue and cultural resonance of their Caribbeanness! In contrast, just taking one example, Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1900) a book that had incalculable effect in South Africa, expressed its politics and philosophy of pedagogics through the New Negro experience in United States. The book was even translated in 1959 into Nelson Mandela's vernacular language, Xhosa, by one of our most formidable poets J. J. R. Jolobe. There was no disjuncture here between his intellectual practice and his national origins, because American Negroism was the texturing principle of the book's intellectual outlook, or for that matter, its avoidance of radical politics. It was such texturing of New Negro experience on many African American cultural expressive forms that compelled the New African intellectuals in South Africa to believe that no historical form of any modernity would be possible for them without instructing themselves in New Negro modernistic sensibilities. This explains the recurrent outbreaks of mass intellectual and cultural hysteria among New Africans for the intellectual achievements and cultural attainments of African Americans: from Negro Spirituals in the nineteenth-century through Richard Wright and jazz in the twentieth-century to hip-hop music in the twenty first century.

But we would like to move on to the next peculiarity of Caribbean culture, or more correctly, of its outstanding intellectuals. Thirdly, it was extraordinary how Caribbean intellectuals, or let us be safe and say certain individuals among them, articulated their cosmopolitanism against their national cultures, or at least with an indifference towards their national formations. This was perhaps more epistemological. We would like to emphasize that we are talking about a particular historical moment. Let us take the example of the great C. L. R. James. There was a direct line of development in James from his reflections on Captain Cipriani (in the 1930s) to *Modern Politics* (1960) and *Beyond a Boundary* (1962) to later writings, which traced a progression from Trinidadian national culture to cosmopolitanism and Europeanism. Take *Modern Politics* which was ostensibly about European modernity and modernism, but which in actual fact was a hymn to Europeanism. Consisting of Public Lectures given at the Trinidad Public Library, the book achieved the astonishing feat of never relating European modernity to Caribbean forms of modernity. Going even further, given the many lessons that Walter Rodney has given us about how Europe underdeveloped Africa, James not even once mentioned the fact that Europe modernity was largely constructed on the back of African history. He was principally concerned with the evolution of the idea of democracy from Greek antiquity to the present as a modernist experience. Despite these oversights, the historical panorama of *Modern Politics* is amazing. It is a great book. We would not compare it

unfavorably in relation to the *Black Jacobins* (1938). Given that what made James James was complex, his Europeanism never stood in any way of his anti-imperialism and in the way of his unrelenting support for the politics of decolonization. Let us mention that we are aware of James's brilliant essays on V. S. Naipaul, Mighty Sparrow and others. But these are sectoral studies rather than an integrated and a diachronically based study of modernity in Trinidad. We think the recent work of Selwyn R. Cudjoe as exemplified in his recent essay, "C. L. R. James and the Trinidad & Tobago Intellectual Tradition, Or, Not Learning Shakespeare Under a Mango tree," which appeared in *New Left Review* (May/June 1997), was important because it situated James within Trinidadian intellectual traditions in relation to his cosmopolitanism. It would be interesting and fascinating to compare *Modern Politics* to Du Bois's *The Negro* (1915), a book that attempted to map the structure of black modernities in the first two decades of the twentieth-century. *Beyond a Boundary* is arguably James' most moving book because it achieves a remarkable balance between his Europeanism and modern Trinidadian national traditions.

The fourth peculiarity was that there seems to have been a historical necessity for the adjacency of Caribbean black modernities to African American modernity. With the exception of Henry Sylvester Williams, Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey and George Padmore many Caribbean intellectuals seem to have had a need to pass through United States before engaging Africa. New Negro modernity in one form or another seems to have been unavoidable. As to the historical meaning of the adjacency of these black modernities is a matter for further investigation. Even C. L. R. James who went directly from Trinidad to England, it was only when he was in United States for approximately fifteen years that he came to a serious or at least a consequential engagement with Africa in the person of Kwame Nkrumah.

It is at this juncture that we would like to introduce the name of Aimé Césaire. There is a sentence on page 187 of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), whose intellectual resonance has not diminished across half-a-century of black political and intellectual activity: "Once again I come back to Césaire: I wish that many black intellectuals would turn to him for their inspiration." Indeed, Césaire was a poet for all seasons. Since the dichotomy between cosmopolitanism and national culture exemplified in the political and intellectual practices of the Caribbean figures we have mentioned seems to have been necessitated by the very nature of modernist experience itself, it is not surprising that it also inhered in the epistemic system of Aimé Césaire. Two texts of his configure this dialectical tension: if "Poetry and Knowledge" (1945) is Europeanistic in its position, then *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950) is Africanist in its orientation: one is centered on Europeanism and the other on nativism or oppositionality. We

would like to quote from "Poetry and Knowledge" to indicate the forms of this Europeanism:

Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge. Mankind, once bewildered by sheer facts, finally dominated them through reflection, observation, and experiment. Henceforth mankind knows how to make its way through the forest phenomena. It knows how to utilize the world . . . Prosy France went over to poetry. And everything changed. Poetry ceased to be a game, even a serious one. Poetry ceased to be an occupation, even an honourable one . . . And so Baudelaire . . . It is significant that much of his poetry relates to the idea of the penetration of the universe . . . As for Rimbaud, literature is still registering the aftershocks of the incredible seismic tremor of his famous letter du voyant (the seer's letter) . . . There is no longer any possibility of doubt about Mallarmé's enterprise. The clear-eyed boldness of his letter to Verlaine makes Mallarmé rather more than the poet whose shadow is Paul Valéry . . . To pass from Mallarmé to Apollinaire is to go from the cold calculator, the strategist of poetry, to the enthusiastic adventurer and ringleader . . . I come now, having skipped a few stops, I confess, to André Breton . . . Surrealism's glory will be in having aligned against it the whole block of admitted and unprofessed enemies of poetry. In having decanted several centuries of poetic experience. In having purged the past, oriented the present, prepared the future.

And so on. French poetry of the modern era was viewed as the summit of world poetry. French poetry was celebrated for its penetration of the world. French poetry was world civilization, and still further, white civilization was synonymous with world civilization.

*Discourse on Colonialism* postulated a different concept of civilization, for Aimé Césaire here articulated Europeanism or European civilization or French civilization in the modern era as inseparable from imperialism and colonialism. We would like to quote the following passage from this text:

In other words, the essential thing here is to see clearly---that is, dangerously---and to answer clearly the innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies.

This passage was representative of what Césaire declared in this book: that because of imperialism and colonialism, Europe was morally and spiritually indefensible; that it was fallacious to equate Christianity with civilization (this is a fundamental critique of the African modernist project from Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden in the Diaspora to R. V. Selope Thema and John Tengo Jabavu in South Africa who consented to such an equation); and thirdly, Césaire refuted the equation of paganism with savagery. That this so-called paganism can be a source or a fount of historical and "scientific" knowledges: one needs only to think of Macandal, the rebellious slave in Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* who used African herbal medicine to poison the slave owning class; or the young woman Mhudi in Solomon T. Plaatje's novel of the same name, an indomitable woman who was absolutely clear that modernity must be entered into by the African people---she interrogates the forms and the nature of the entrance.

Further in *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire equated Christianity with barbarism and Nazism. He argued that Nazism terrorizing Europe in the 1930s and in the 1940s was no different from what European colonialism(s) had been doing in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Here he mentioned the names of Pizzaro, Cortez and Marco Polo. This condemnation of particular forms of European civilization lead him in effect to a rejection of a particular Europe:

And now I ask: what else has bourgeois Europe done? It has undermined civilizations, destroyed countries, ruined nationalities, extirpated 'the root of diversity.' No more dikes, no more bulwarks. The hour of the barbarian is at hand. The modern barbarian. The American hour. Violence, excess, waste, mercantilism, bluff, gregariousness, stupidity, vulgarity, disorder . . . I know some of you, disgusted with Europe, with all that hideous mess which you did not witness by choice, are turning---oh! In no great numbers--toward America and getting used to looking upon that country as a possible liberator.

There can be no doubt that these are the pages the book that had a profound effect on Frantz Fanon as he nearly duplicated them in the concluding portions of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), which were very extraordinary in their rejection of Europe:

Come, then, Comrades; it would be as well to decide at once to change our ways. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent, resolute . . . Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe . . . When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.

Fanon was anxious to close the option that Aimé Césaire felt that some black intellectuals may be tempted to shift their choices and options from Europe to United States, for he further wrote:

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

For Fanon it would seem that the historical period, as we argued, in which the modernistic political and intellectual practices of Caribbean intellectuals in Africa, be it Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey, and George Padmore, needed New Negro modernity as its touchstone, was over. But Fanon himself could not escape the deep influence of Richard Wright: one needs only to note the references to Wright in *Black Skin, White Masks* and in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Given that Fanon held Wright and Césaire as his intellectual idols, it must have been depressing to view the violent quarrel between them at the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956 about the nature of African modernities: Wright believed that African modernities were unrealizable, whereas Césaire thought otherwise. Abrahams in his *Return to Goli* (1954) has some fascinating things to say about Wright's experiencing of the conflict between modernity and tradition in Africa.

But returning to Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire. A return is necessary because Fanon's revolutionary practice in Africa has been the most consequential of all from the Caribbean intellectuals in the modern era (both in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries). What Césaire imparted to Fanon poetically, Fanon practiced in Africa through revolutionary praxis. It is eerie to note that whereas the first half of *Discourse on Colonialism* influenced *Black Skin, White Masks*, its second half had a palpable effect on *The Wretched of the Earth*. There are other intriguing affinities between the two. When Fanon wrote the following words in the concluding part of *The Wretched of the Earth*, he was postulating ideas that Césaire had formulated a decade earlier in *Discourse on Colonialism*:

No, there is no question of a return to Nature . . . If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries.

Césaire's turn to Africa from Europe was a search for new discoveries and new inventions. As Fanon postulated with the concept of Nature, there could not be a return to the so-called source (Amílcar Cabral meant and designated an altogether different thing: a revolutionary élan rather than a romanticizing of the past) and a rejection of modernity. In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire wrote this

remarkable passage, in aligning himself with modernity from the standpoint of Africa:

For my part, I make a systematic defense of the non-European civilizations . . . This being said, it seems that in certain circles they pretend to have discovered in me an 'enemy of Europe' and a prophet of the return to the anti-European past. For my part. I search in vain for the place where I could have expressed such views; where I ever underestimated the importance of Europe in the history of human thought; where I preached a *return* of any kind; where I ever claimed there could be a *return*. The truth is that I have said something very different: to wit, that the great historical tragedy of Africa has been not so much that it was too late in making contact with the rest of the world, as the manner in which that contact was brought about; that Europe began to 'propagate' at a time when it had fallen into the hands of the unscrupulous financiers and captains of industry; that it was our misfortune to encounter that particular Europe on our path, and that Europe is responsible before the human community for the highest heap of corpses in history (emphasis in the original).

For Césaire there could never be a return to the African past, or for that matter, a return to its geographical space. Secondly, for him the important and critical issue was not so much the late arrival of Africa into modernity, as much as the nature of the encounter between Africa and Europe, and the subsequent imposition of modernity on Africa. Thirdly, Césaire could not possibly reject Europe because for him it represented historical progress, however tragic or compromised.

In an Interview by René Depestre, which forms an appendix to *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire mentioned that it was Léopold Sédar Senghor, during their student days in Paris in the 1930s, who revealed Africa to him:

Yes, the Negro question. At that time I criticized the Communists for forgetting our Negro characteristics. They acted like Communists, which was all right, but they acted like abstract Communists. I maintained that the political question could not do away with our condition as Negroes. We are Negroes, with a great number of historical peculiarities. I suppose that I must have been influenced by Senghor in this. At the time I knew absolutely nothing about Africa. Soon afterward I met Senghor, and he told me a great deal about Africa. He made an enormous impression on me: I am indebted to him for the revelation of Africa and African singularity. And I tried to develop a theory to encompass all of my reality.

Of course the theory Césaire spoke of here was the philosophy of Negritude. Negritude was a search for the historical peculiarities of Negro-ness, Africanness and of Africa itself. A particular distinction needs to be indicated here concerning the Caribbean intellectual system of identifications. The uniqueness or the singularity of Aimé Césaire was that he sought the explanatory system of the



historical peculiarities of Negro-ness in Africa. His intellectual journey was truly a search for Africa. It was in Africa that Césaire sought the historical knowledge of what would explain what Africa was or is, had been and would become. We think the real reason for the clash and conflict between Césaire and Wright in 1956 was that Wright thought Africa could not possibly provide the historical knowledge that would explain Africa's intractable problems in undergoing the historical experience of modernity. To Wright it was clear that in Africa tradition had overwhelmed and triumphed over modernity. In contrast to Aimé Césaire, the Caribbean intellectuals we mentioned earlier, Edward Blyden, Henry Sylvester Williams, Marcus Garvey, and George Padmore sought to engage Africa by bringing Western modernistic intellectual apparatuses to illuminate and enlighten the continent. Any historical knowledge would be a product of this violent encounter, rather than Africa in and of itself or in its singularity providing it. Edward Blyden being always somewhat of an exception, sought these historical explanations in Islamic religion: Islamic religiosity rather than African cosmological systems. In contrast to Césaire, Jean Price-Mars sought the historical explanations in survivals and retentions in the African Diaspora itself. This is a very plausible location because it could be argued that Haiti was more African than Africa itself. Frantz Fanon, being a true student of Césaire sought the historical explanations of Africa in the African revolutions. C. L. R. James was a peculiar paradox. James hardly concerned himself with such matters. Even his ostensibly 'African' book *Nkrumah and the Ghanaian Revolution* was not really about Africa, as about the failure of Ghana to adapt itself to Western constitutional political modernity. Contrast this with Du Bois's two books on Africa: *The Negro* (1914) and *Africa and the World* (1938). Since James was nearly of the same stature as Du Bois, a deeper explanation would seem to be in order.

The collocation of the Europeanism of "Poetry and Knowledge" and the nativism of *Discourse on Colonialism* through African historical knowledge gave rise to the black cosmopolitanism of *Return to the Native Land*. We are aware that the dating of these books would seem to contradict the thesis we are postulating here. We think Césaire in the interview with Depestre postulated some of the principles governing the nature of African historical knowledge: the creation of a new language that communicates African heritages---giving a European language a black character; establishing a process of disalienation (a fundamental theme of Fanon's intervention in Africa); recognizing the cultural particularities of Africa in Africa and in the African Diaspora; giving cognizance to Haiti as the center of the African Antilles; striving through Negritude to create a national history of the black world; and establishing the singularity of black identity through universal values and aesthetics. The following passage from Aimé Césaire's essay of 1987 "What is Negritude to Me," affirms the expressive nature of these principles:

Negritude is not a philosophy. Negritude is not a metaphysics. Negritude is

not a pretentious conception of the universe. It is a way of living history within history . . . That is to say, that Negritude in its initial stage can be defined as a sudden awareness of difference, as a collective memory, as loyalty, and last, as a form of solidarity . . . Negritude has been all this: the search for our identity, the affirmation of our right to be different, the appeal to all to recognize this right and to respect our collective personality.

It was this conception of the philosophy of history and life that made *Return to the Native Land* a seminal poetic work of the twentieth-century it was. We would like to excerpt this passage from it:

. . . Haiti where Negritude arose to its feet for the first time and said it believed in its own humanity; and the comic little tail of Florida where they are just finishing strangling a Negro; and Africa gigantically caterpollaring as far as the Spanish foot of Europe: the nakedness of Africa where the scythe of Death swings wide.

With just a few poetic strokes, Aimé Césaire established the unity of the black world. His commitment to Africa has been profound and everlasting.

It is because of the kind of intellectual that Aimé Césaire was that this commitment has been so durable through all kinds of travails Africa has faced. There are many historical lessons in this for many African intellectuals participating in the creation of the conditions of possibility of the African Renaissance. In an Address to the Havana Cultural Congress of 1967 entitled "Ten Points On The Nature And Responsibilities Of The West Indian Intellectuals Redefined Within The Context Of The Cuban Revolution" C. L. R. James sought to understand why the Caribbean had given rise to outstanding intellectuals out of proportion with its geographic and demographic size. As far as we are aware this document has only been published in Andrew Salkey's book *Havana Journal* (1971). Although James only mentioned Frantz Fanon, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Alejo Carpentier and Wilson Harris, we think Aimé Césaire fits in well in this intellectual profile. James gave two reasons for the disproportionate role of Antillean intellectuals in relation to Africa in modern times: the importance of the Cuban Revolution in giving fertility of expression to these intellectuals; and the use of highly developed modern European languages in structuring their imagination. One critical point he mentioned was that this type of West Indian intellectual had utilized Western intellectual discourses to destroy Europe's hegemony in Africa thereby emancipating the continent while retaining his or her commitment to Western civilization. Secondly, this type of intellectual prepared the way for the abolition of intellectuals as the embodiment of culture. We think Aimé Césaire was a classical embodiment of such an intellectual. The embodiment of such a type of intellectual by Césaire was a way of a search for an identity (personal, cultural, national, international) in relation to Africa.

In a fascinating and instructive essay "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," Stuart Hall argued that there can be no Caribbean identity without a renegotiation and discovery of Africa, a passing through an encounter with Africa, the discovery of blackness, the affirmation of an African personality, and a valorization of the African connection. In short, there can be no Caribbean identity without a symbolic return to Africa. For Stuart Hall, Césaire was the epitome of this historical identification which was a renegotiation of a Caribbean consciousness with the African past. Hall indicated that the projection of modernity by Césaire was in large part a continuation of the enterprise of the Harlem Renaissance. We would like to quote this passage by Hall of what he viewed as the "vernacular modernity" of the Harlem Renaissance:

... when Aimé Césaire started to write poetry, he wanted, because of his interest, alerted and alive to the subterranean sources of identity and cultural creativity in his own being, to break with the models of French classical poetry. And if you know his notebook on the *Return To My Native Land*, you will know how much that is a language which, in its open roaring brilliance, has broken free from those classical models ... The writers of the Harlem Renaissance did not wish to be located and ghettoized as ethnic artists only able to speak on behalf of a marginal experience ... their historical trajectory into and through the complex histories of colonization, conquest, and enslavement, is distinct and unique and it empowers people to speak in a distinctive voice. But it is not a voice outside of and excluded from the production of modernity in the twentieth-century. It is another kind of modernity. It is a vernacular modernity, it is the modernity of the blues, the modernity of gospel music, it is the modernity of hybrid black music in its enormous variety throughout the New World.

In connecting Caribbean modernity to New Negro modernity, Hall wrote of their search for their respective and singular distinctiveness: with Aimé Césaire it is the search for the subterranean sources of identity and cultural creativity, and with the Harlem Renaissance it was a question of establishing a vernacular modernity. We would likewise postulate that the fundamental historical project in creating an African Renaissance would be the search of the subterranean sources of identity and cultural creativity in creating a singular 'vernacularness'. The subterranean identity or cultural creativity or vernacularness can be achieved by the African Renaissance if it examined and reconstructed the cultural lineages of the history of the New African Movement whose modernity was incomplete. The singular aim of the African Renaissance should be a reconstruction of the historical pathways of the New African Movement: it is in this subject that the African Renaissance will find the historical knowledge of its own pre-history which is a necessary subject that will enable it to realize its future. It is in this context that we think Aimé Césaire had some historical lessons to impart to the idea of the African Renaissance, as we

hope we have indicated above in delineating his struggle with the contradictions within Caribbean modernity.

The historical and the cultural lessons of Aimé Césaire would seem to be inexhaustible even in our present moment (late modernity). The theoreticians and practitioners of Creolism, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant have appropriated the historical vision of Aimé Césaire for present day cultural and intellectual struggles and identities, while very much aware of its limitations. Characterizing themselves as the “sons” of the great master who have undergone the baptism of Césairian Negritude, they write the following appraisal in their great manifesto, *In Praise of Creoleness*:

To a totally racist world, self-mutilated by its own colonial surgeries, Aimé Césaire restored mother Africa, matrix Africa, the black civilization. He denounced all sorts of dominations in the country, and his writing, which is committed and which derives its energy from the modes of war, gave severe blows to post slavery sluggishness. Césaire’s Negritude gave Creole society its African dimension, and put an end to the amputation which generated some of the superficiality of the so-called doudouist writing . . . A man of both ‘initiation’ and ‘ending,’ Aime Césaire had exclusively the formidable privilege of symbolically reopening and closing again the circle in which are clasped two incumbent monsters: Europeaness and Africanness, two forms of exteriority which proceed from two opposed logics . . . one monopolizing our minds submitted to its tirture, the other living in our flesh ridden by its scars, each inscribing in us after its own way its keys, its codes, its numbers.

What they found praiseworthy was that his historical vision was not so much anti-Creolism as ante-Creole, in the sense of an antecedent not conscious of its full historical implications. Though criticizing the Negritude of Césaire in having replaced the European illusion with an African “illusion” and in not having solved the aesthetic problems of the Caribbean, they nevertheless praised him for having placed the Caribbean and Africa contiguous to each other: “Yet African tropism did not prevent Césaire from very deeply embedding himself in the Caribbean ecology and referential space.” What the exponents of Creolism found very exemplary in Césaire was in having forged a synthesis that opened the path to cultural history as well as to the future.

It was this particular Césaire who forged a synthesis that opened a path to history who has been influential with two outstanding South African intellectuals: the great Zulu poet Mazisi Kunene, and the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement Steve Biko, who was assassinated in 1977 by the agents of the recently defeated apartheid regime. This Césaire who synthesized processes of history has been saluted by C. L. R. James in his essay “From

Toussaint L'Overture to Fidel Castro", which is an appendix to the 1963 edition of *The Black Jacobins*:

As a West Indian he [Césaire] has nothing national to be aware of. He is overwhelmed by the gulf that separates him from the people where he was born. He feels that he must go there. He does so and discovers a new version of what the Haitians, as had Garvey and Padmore discovered: that salvation for the West Indies lies in Africa, the original home and ancestry of the West Indian people. The poet gives us a view of Africans as he sees them . . . The vision of the poet is not economics or politics, it is poetic, *sui generis*, true unto itself and needing no other truth.

We would like to note in passing that for James the idea of the national does not exist for the Caribbean intellectual: a very intriguing and fascinating postulation. Continuing with his observations, James believed that Césaire had made a seminal contribution with *Return To My Native Land* by uniting three historical processes in modern thought which hitherto had been separate: the union of the African people and the Western world; the past and future of mankind were historically and logically linked; from their own self awareness as Africans and Africa will move towards an integrated humanity. In an Introduction to the 1969 English edition (published in London) of *Return To My Native Land*, Mazisi Kunene postulated a comparable reading to that of C. L. R. James. First, Kunene viewed Césaire as having given a new definition of humanity as a result of the revolt of African people. Secondly, Kunene praised the insistence of Césaire on the contribution of the African to world civilization. Thirdly, Kunene read Césaire together with Fanon as being the great ideologists of the Third World who brought modern enlightenment to Africa by their unrelenting opposition to colonialism and racialism. Fourthly, Kunene found as exemplary the way Césaire had incorporated the topography and geography of Martinique into his poetic masterpiece: the volcanic imagery is given special mention. Fifthly, to Kunene the Negritude of Césaire was an affirmation of the distinctiveness of African cultures and civilizations: the uniqueness of African cultural identities. Lastly, for Kunene *Return To My Native Land* represented the voice of African rebellion against oppressive Western modernistic values.

The importance of this appraisal lies in the fact that it was simultaneous with Mazisi Kunene's construction and creation of his own Zulu epic *Emperor Shaka The Great*. As to the nature of the possible influence of Césaire on the South African poet, is a matter that still needs to be investigated. In the Preface to the epic, Mazisi Kunene postulated a vision of history that is not dissimilar to that of Aimé Césaire in that the epical was a representation of national history:

I was fortunate in having relatives both on my mother's side (Ngcobo family) and on my father's side who took great pride in preserving and narrating our national history. As is well known, the peoples of the African continent developed, par excellence, the techniques of oral literature, its

preservation and its performance. Through these traditions and literary techniques I was able to learn much about the history of Southern Africa. The dramatization and enactment of the important historical episodes added great meaningfulness to the facts of the cultural life . . . I have in translating my work from Zulu to English, cherished particularly the thought of sharing our history and literature with the many peoples of Africa and also other parts of the world.

If the African Renaissance in South Africa ever becomes a historical possibility, posterity may designate *Emperor Shaka The Great* as marking the moment of its becoming.

If the influence of Aimé Césaire on Mazisi Kunene could be said to be about matters concerning the poetic vision of history, his impact on Steve Biko, the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement, has been in the field of the politics of oppression. Three documents by Aimé Césaire seem to have been central in shaping the political consciousness of Biko. The following lines from the famous 1956 *Letter to Maurice Thorez*, the then Secretary General of the French Communist Party, seem to have had a profound effect on Biko:

The peculiarity of our place in the world is not to be confused with anyone else's. The peculiarity of our problems which aren't to be reduced to subordinate forms of any other problem. The peculiarity of our history, laced with terrible misfortunes which to no other history. The peculiarity of our culture, which we intend to live and to make live in an ever realer manner.

In quoting this excerpt from Césaire in his book *I Write What I Like*, Steve Biko seemed to imply that not only it gave him the historical justification in ceasing to work with white liberal organizations, but it also gave him the political consciousness to form a blacks only organization, the Black Consciousness Movement. Through this organization, Biko sought to indicate the singularity of African history, the peculiarity of the African problem and the uniqueness of African culture(s). Elsewhere in his book Steve Biko quoted the following excerpt from *Discourse on Colonialism*:

When I turn on my radio, when I hear that Negroes have been lynched in America, I say that we have been lied to: Hitler is not dead: when I turn on my radio and hear that in Africa, forced labour has been inaugurated and legislated, I say that we have certainly been lied to: Hitler is not dead.

The lesson to be had here was that the oppression of African Americans was similar to the oppression of Africans in South Africa, whatever their specific peculiarity. It was not accidental therefore that the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa was modeled on the Black Power Movement of United States. Elsewhere in his book Steve Biko also quoted from the famous lines in *Return To My Native Land*:

No race possesses a monopoly on truth, beauty, intelligence. There is room

for all of us at the rendezvous of victory.  
Here the lesson to be had was that Africans are just as capable as any other race, and that humanity will collectively eventually triumph against all forms of adversity.

Like Fanon in the late 1950s, who towards the end of his life had reflected on what a liberated South Africa would mean for African history and the African Revolution in two essays assembled in *Towards the African Revolution*, likewise a half century later, in this first decade of twenty first century, has evaluated the contribution of two New African intellectuals to the black word within human civilization. In a documentary film about his own poetic contribution to the twentieth century, Euzhan Palcy's *Aimé Césaire: A Voice for History* (2002), he remarked on the historic nature of the release of Nelson Mandela from a thirty-year imprisonment a decade earlier in February 1990:

At last, Mandela comes out of prison. At last Mandela is free! It was an extraordinary cry of joy for all of humanity. I remember. I was on the road in Martinique. It was a fantastic day, an extraordinary sight . . . The blooming of *gloriosa*. I turned on the radio. Nelson Mandela was free. I felt within me the sound of all the bells ringing . . . Nelson Mandela! Nelson Mandela! Nelson Mandela! Nelson Mandela! It was extraordinary. The life of this man has been remarkable . . . and I realized that coming out of prison was maybe not the hardest, there was a reality to be coped with. And what self-control he showed by trying to establish a dialogue and to restore the rights of Blacks, to recommend and win acceptance of the coming of a new democratic South Africa. That is important. A non-racial [South Africa], and founded on equal rights. I think he is truly a remarkable man!

Just a few months before Mazisi Raymond Fakazi Mngoni Kunene passed away on August 10, 2006, Césaire passed this judgement on the prodigious poetic productivity of Africa's greatest poet:

The heritage of Kunene, this great spokesmam is without a doubt indispensable to the restructuring of the foundation of the reconstruction of the identity of the African continent.

That Césaire could make such acute observations about a New African political leader and a New African intellectual bespeaks of his high moral seriousness in his engagement with the country from the moment of his condemnation of apartheid South Africa in *Discourse on Colonialism* in 1950.

If Aimé Césaire's vision of history has had such a pronounced effect on two brilliant South African intellectuals (Mazisi Kunene and Steve Biko), belonging to different generations, one preoccupied with cultural creations and the other with political manifestations, then surely it could possibly inform the possible historical project of the African Renaissance which President Nelson Mandela has been clamoring for. It would seem then that such a historical vision would impel that one of central historical projects of the African Renaissance must be

the completion and reconstruction of modernity which was so fundamental to New African intellectuals within the New African Movement in the first half of the twentieth-century.

What is to be done and where to begin? One of the most compelling things about the exponents of Creolism, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiat, Jean Bernabé in their engagement with the historical figure of Aimé Césaire's caliber was their conceptual reconstruction of the cultural and literary history of Martinique and the examination of the historical and geopolitical space of Caribbeanness. This endeavour and achievement accounts for the greatness of *In Praise of Creoleness*. Likewise, before the historical possibilities of an African Renaissance could be effected, a conceptual and cultural history of the New African Movement would have to be constructed and the relevant documents assembled.

#### **Bibliographical Notes.**

1. Anonymous, "Books That Should Be Read: *Uncle Tom's Children* by Richard Wright," *The Torch*, January 30, 1950.



2. Anonymous, "Books That Should Be Read: *Negro Anthology*: A Cultural Challenge," *The Torch*, February 13, 1950.
3. Anonymous, Books That Should Be Read: Frederick Douglass: Fighter For Liberation," *The Torch*, April 10, 1950.
4. Abrahams, Peter, *Return to Egoli*, Faber and Faber, London, 1954.
5. -----, *Jamaica: An Island Mosaic*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1957.
6. Bernabé, Jean, Chamoiseau, Patrick, Confiant, Raphaël, "In Praise of Creoleness," *Callaloo*, vol. 13 no. 4, Fall 1990.
7. Biko, Steve, *I Write What I Like*, Harper and Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1978.
8. Césaire, Aimé, *Return To My Native Land*, translation by John Berger and Anna Bostock, Penguin Books, London, 1969 (1939). With Introduction by Mazisi Kunene.
9. -----, "Poetry and Knowledge" (1944-5), in *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry 1946-1982*, translation by Clayton Eshelman and Annette Smith, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1990.
10. -----, *Discourse on Colonialism*, translation by Joan Pinkham, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972 (1955). An Interview with Aimé Césaire by René Depestre.
11. Crummell, Alexander, *Africa and America*, Willey and Springfield, New York, 1891 (1969).
12. Cudjoe, Selwyn R., "C. L. R. James and the Trinidad and Tobago Intellectual Tradition, Or, Not Learning Shakespeare under a Mango Tree," *New Left Review*, no. 223, May/June 1997.
13. Du Bois, W. E. B., *The Negro*, Henry Holt & Company, New York, 1915.
14. -----, *The World and Africa*, Henry Holt & Company, New York, 1947.

15. Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Makmann, MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1968 (1952).
16. -----, *Toward the African Revolution*, translated by Haakon Chevalier, Monthly Review Press New York, 1968.
17. -----, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington, Grove Weidenfeld, New York, 1968 (1961).
18. Hall, Stuart, "Negotiating Caribbean Politics," *New Left Review*, no. 209, January/February 1995.
19. Hooks, J. R., *Henry Sylvester Williams*, Rex Collings, London, 1975.
20. C. L. R. James, *Modern Politics*, P. N. M. Publishing Company, Port-of-Spain, 1960.
21. -----, *Beyond a Boundary*, Stanley Paul/Hutchinson, London, 1963.
22. -----, "From Toussaint L'Overture to Fidel Castro," (1963), an appendix to *The Black Jacobins*, Vintage Books, New York, 1963 (1938).
23. -----, "points on the Nature and Responsibilities of the West Indian Intellectuals Redefined with the Context of the Cuban Revolution" (1967), in *Havana Journal* by Andrew Salkey, Penguin Books, London, 1971.
24. -----, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, Allison & Busby, London, 1977.
25. Kunene, Mazisi, *Emperor Shaka The Great*, Heinemann, Portsmouth, 1979.
26. Mandela, Nelson, "Address by President Nelson Mandela at the Closing Ceremony of the 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community and Common Market": the document can be found on Nelson Mandela's Official Website:  
<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/Mandela/1998/sp980704.html>
27. Padmore, George, "Africa Demands Freedom Says West Africans: Mass Meetings on Trafalgar Square," *The Torch*, December 19, 1949.

28. Seme, Pixley ka Isaka, "The Regeneration of Africa," *Royal African Royal* (?), vol. 5 (1905-6).