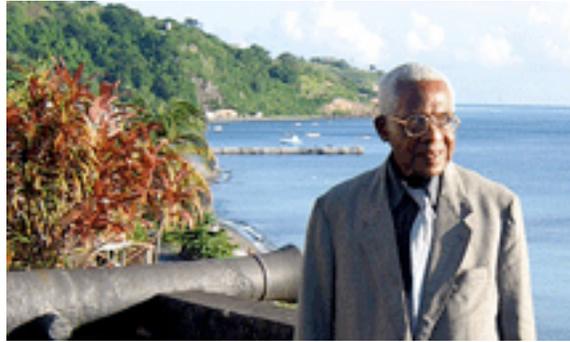


# Aimé Césaire and the Crisis of Aesthetic and Political Vanguardism<sup>1</sup>

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Aimé Césaire

In his *Lettre à Maurice Thorez*, Aimé Césaire argues that the Parti Communiste Française (PCF) had been reluctant to address the “particularities” of decolonization in the declining French Empire, especially in Algeria and the French Caribbean, and was concerned about the party’s idealization of the Western proletariat as the subject of revolutionary transformation:

The colonial question, cannot be treated as a subsidiary part of some more important global matter, as part over which deals can be arranged or upon which others patch up compromises they think they have a right to seek in the name of an overall situation which they retain the exclusive right to interpret . . . our colonialism, the struggle of coloured people against racism, is much more complex, indeed, it is of a totally different nature than the struggle of the French

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a shortened version of my chapter on Aimé Césaire from my Ph.D. dissertation, entitled “Philosophies of Confrontation: Aesthetic and Political Vanguardism, 1917-1956” (City University of New York, 2007) in which I analyze the evolutionary principles of revolutionary art within a historical context in the expectation of augmenting some of the conceptual distinctions between avant-garde cultural production and revolutionary politics, particularly within movements that sought to originate alternatives to the prevailing social order of bourgeois (capitalist) society. The focus on Césaire is meant to uncover some of the distinguishing elements of vanguardist art within its postcolonial context, an attempt to rethink the interrelationship between revolutionary communism and decolonization that I argue emerged most notably after 1956.

workers against French capitalism, and cannot in any case be considered a part, as a fragment, of that struggle.<sup>2</sup>

Although it is clear that Césaire was responding to the turbulence over Khrushchev's "speech" in 1956 in which Stalinism was denounced, and who like many intellectuals that had joined the party in the post-World War II era formally broke with the Communist International in the wake of such revelations, Césaire's criticism is directed at the party's unwillingness to address imperialism and the localized struggles of what Frantz Fanon would label "les damnés," a point which he understood as an internalized racism within the PCF leadership which he found to be a systemic problem of Western Communism in general.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Césaire originally believed that working within the PCF would bring about an opportunity to broaden the struggles against imperialism and racism, which he maintained was inbuilt within the structure of capitalism itself, and which he argued was a theoretical limitation of Western Marxism, a critical point he attempted to rectify as early as 1950.<sup>4</sup> His alignment with the PCF, then, signified an attempt to synthesize the elements of Westernized Marxism within the movement toward decolonization, a process he thought was hindered by the stringency of the party line after 1956, yet nonetheless a decisive element in his formation of a revolutionary praxis through which the relationship between international communism and the "colonized other" could be materialized.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Susan Frutkin, *Aimé Césaire: Black between Worlds* (Washington, D.C.: Center For Advanced International Studies), 1973, 39. For the full text, see Aimé Césaire, *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956). It is widely argued that Césaire's break with the PCF, as noted above, stemmed from his disgust with the Communist International's reluctance to address the crimes committed under Stalin's rule that were described in Khrushchev's speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1956. It has also been argued that the Soviet invasion of Hungary the same year solidified Césaire's split with the PCF, a fact that seems unlikely, since Césaire composed his *Lettre* months before the invasion. While it is clear that Césaire had been frustrated with the party line on the colonialism since the 1940's, it is unclear whether his repudiation the party had anything to do with Stalinism itself, which in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* he argued was the guiding light for world liberation, a contradiction in his aesthetic and political commitments which is central to my argument here. For more on the PCF, Stalinism, and de-Stalinization, see David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals*, (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 215-237.

<sup>3</sup> Frutkin, 37.

<sup>4</sup> See Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1950); see his later position on the formation of revolutionary decolonization in his post-PCF years in *Toussaint Louverture: La Révolution française et le problème colonial* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1961), and Gary Wilder's critique in his "Race Reason, Impasse: Césaire, Fanon, and the Legacy of Emancipation," *Radical History Review* 90 (Fall 2004): 31-60.

Contrary to what can be construed as a renunciation of Marxism, in fact, Césaire later makes clear his commitment to revolutionary communism, as it represented to him the necessary step in the building of a movement against imperialist racism, as he states in his *Lettre*: “It’s neither Marxism nor Communism I repudiate. . . . [W]hat I want is that Marxism and Communism be harnessed into the service of colored peoples, and not peoples into service of Marxism and Communism.”<sup>5</sup> His emphasis on Négritude was meant to unveil what he called the “doubly proletarianized and alienated” position of the colonized other, which unlike the white proletariat of Europe and America, had been “denied even the notion of humanity.”<sup>6</sup> Specifically, in order to construct an oppositional praxis that channeled forces into decolonization, Césaire utilized Marxism as a formative methodology. In his 1959 speech “L’Homme de Culture et Ses Responsabilités” (“The Responsibilities of the Intellectual”) at the Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, Césaire writes, “In brief, our task is not one of repositioning colonialism or interiorizing servitude. We must destroy it, annihilate it in the true sense of the word, or to be exact, to tear it out at the roots, and that is why true decolonization will be revolutionary or will not be at all.”<sup>7</sup> The configurations of imperialism and racism in the colonies is what normalized the super exploitation of workers within the Western sphere of domination, a critique that both anticipates and contextualizes the work of Franz Fanon, who extends Césaire’s analysis in order to formulate a phenomenological praxis of decolonization, as his *Peau Noir, Masques Blancs (Black Skin/White Masks)* and *Les damnés de la terre (The Wretched of the Earth)* would demonstrate subsequently.<sup>8</sup>

Taking into consideration the above characterization of Césaire’s political background we can see that Césaire’s resignation from the PCF and his subsequent channeling of revolutionary Marxism into the ideology of Négritude can be read in relation to what Raymond Williams has described as the dialectic of the “residual” and

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Frutkin, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Interview with René Depestre,” in *Discourse on Colonialism*, Trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Press, 1972), 78-9.

<sup>7</sup> Aimé Césaire, “L’homme de culture et ses responsabilités,” *Présence Africaine* 24-25 (1959), 119; translation mine.

<sup>8</sup> See Franz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), and his *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963); for an analysis of Fanon, Césaire, and Négritude, see the final section to this chapter.

“emergent” effects of cultural production, specifically as it relates to the crisis of avant-garde cultural politics that resonates in Césaire’s influential break with the Communist International and the ways in which the constituencies of his aesthetic principles coincide with the revolutionary objectives of which vanguardism generally structured itself, particularly in the post-World War II era. That is, as a proponent of the confrontational aesthetics of the French Surrealists, as well as being committed to revolutionary communism, Césaire’s work demonstrates the extent to which vanguardism symbolized the “compulsory” step toward both political resistance and artistic experimentalism. For Césaire, however, aesthetic and political vanguardism, which had roots in Westernized thought, represented the very medium by which colonialism was naturalized and thus it existed as an hindrance for decolonization in Martinique, as well as for other movements on the African continent. In this respect, Césaire’s reformulation of aesthetic and political vanguardism exposed the widening crisis of representation that the historical avant-garde had been experiencing since the early 1930’s. More concretely, the materialization of the historical avant-garde was contingent on the extent to which it could be realized as political praxis, as it began to rely on the mechanism of confrontation through which its association with political awakening could be reproduced on a broader scale. As a way to advance an ideological position within pre-revolutionary societies, the avant-garde artist became reliant on political party lines, which is the reason a detailed critique of the crisis of the historical avant-garde must begin with an explanation of the overall determination of vanguardism and its attempt to emulate the material conditions of social revolution, especially after 1917. The question, then, is to what extent the non-European vanguard, represented here by Césaire’s creation of Négritude, assimilated the structural requirements of “Western” vanguardism; that is, what effects did the historical avant-garde have in the emergence of Négritude both before and after Césaire’s resignation from the PCF? More specifically, as a process through which aesthetic and political resistance is formulated, did Césaire’s work after 1956, which can be described as a neo-avant-gardism, produce a continual space of confrontation that was able to undermine the ideological configurations of imperialism by creating an alternative to the dominant structure of European aesthetic and political vanguardism? Furthermore, to what extent does Césaire’s reformism of the historical avant-garde succumb to the

disformulating process of late capitalist subsumption, a critique that situates Césaire's post-1956 aesthetic and political vanguardism in the divergence between the necessity of nationalist culture and the prospects for the revolutionary transformation on a global scale? What is evident, in this sense, is that there is an inherited dialectical movement within the structure of Césaire's Négritude that lends itself to an understanding of the progression of aesthetic and political vanguardism after 1956, particularly the ways in which the decolonizing task that Césaire initiated was able to restructure the paradigm of vanguardist art in its non-European geographical context as it attempted to tear down imperialism and its legitimizing ideology of racist domination.

### **The Poetics of Négritude in the Context of the Historical Avant-Garde**

The form that Césaire's Négritude takes after 1956 contrasts the way in which it was revealed in his first published collection, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Although original in its attempt to reawaken colonized subjectivity in the body of the text, it is evident that Césaire had adapted the European model of aesthetic and political vanguardism as a medium through which his version of Négritude could be expressed. As such, the poetics of Négritude must be read as a dialectical interchange that emerged from within the effects of modernist discourse, or more specifically, in relation to the critical representation of the historical avant-garde and its revolt against the bourgeois institutionalization of art. Moreover, it is clear that, precisely because the poetics of Négritude became a methodology of collective action that revolted against the authenticity of European models of aesthetic and political vanguardism, it also exposes the crisis of representation that the historical avant-garde experienced throughout the first half of the twentieth century, a crisis that culminates in the formation of the neo-avant-garde itself. In his *Modernism and Negritude*, James Arnold locates Césaire's poetry within the tradition of modernism, which he argues was a necessary step in Césaire's formulation of the poetics of Négritude. As Arnold writes, "There is probably no direct connection to be made between Césaire and Pound, Yeats, or Malraux. Yet Césaire had at his disposal the same European intellectual tradition as these writers when he set out to

become the poet of negritude.”<sup>9</sup> Arnold refers to the aesthetic manifesto “Poetry and Cognition” of 1945 in which Césaire outlines the intellectual tradition out of which he establishes a line of influence. “The poet,” writes Césaire, “is that very ancient yet new being, at once very complex and very simple, who at the limit of dream and reality, of day and night, between absence and presence, searches for and receives in the sudden triggering of inner cataclysms the password of connivance and power.”<sup>10</sup> Arnold contends that this essay and a number of others produced within the same period and published in the short-lived journal *Tropiques*, represented a further development in Césaire’s revolt against Western thought, particularly in his use of Nietzsche, whose hostility toward Western rationalism Césaire found adaptable to his own subversive position.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is rationalism that for Césaire structures imperial racism, what he saw as an ideological component of subjugation that governed the social boundaries of the colonies themselves.

In this respect, Négritude was meant to “enrich” Western culture by affirming black collectivity, a position that highlights the philosophical criticality in Césaire’s work in its concurrent incorporation and repudiation of Eurocentric models of cultural production. The Western intellectual tradition of modernism, which Césaire suggests was a precursor to the *radical return* of black collectivity, is embraced in what Fredric Jameson characterizes as a “paradoxical turning around of a phenomenon into its opposite of which the transformation of quantity into quality is only one of the better known manifestations.”<sup>12</sup> This is not to specify the poetics of Négritude as a process of negation; rather, it is meant to draw out the particular construction of what can be called the dialectic of subversion that Césaire incorporates as creative revolt, a process that becomes aesthetic form in *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*:

Leaving Europe utterly twisted with screams  
the silent currents of despair

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<sup>9</sup> James Arnold, *Modernism and Négritude* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Poetry and Cognition,” in *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry, 1946-82*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1990), 56.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold, 55.

<sup>12</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 309.

leaving timid Europe which  
 collects and proudly overrates itself  
 I summon this egoism beautiful  
 and bold  
 and my ploughing reminds me of an implacable cutwater  
 [et mon labour me remémore d'une implacable étrave]  
 .....  
 But in so doing, my heart, preserve me from all hatred  
 do not make me into that man of hatred for whom I feel only hatred  
 for entrenched as I am in this unique race  
 you still know my tyrannical love  
 you know that it is not from hatred of other races  
 that I demand a digger [bêcheur] for this unique race  
 that what I want  
 is for universal hunger  
 for universal thirst  
  
 to summon it to generate,  
 free at last, from its intimate closeness  
 the succulence of fruit.<sup>13</sup>

Through the attempt to reinscribe the severed body of the colonized other in textual form, Négritude confronted systemic forms of imperialist doctrine, ingredients of racist subjugation which for Césaire were intrinsic to Eurocentric socio-cultural experience. As Abiola Irele writes, "Césaire's literary work, especially when considered in conjunction with his political activities, represents more than the expression of an attitude or a symbolic gesture, but a privileged form of action — that is, poetic action whose direction is the activation of the mind of the West Indian and whose purpose is the total transformation of his mode of insertion in the world order."<sup>14</sup> It is in this sense that

<sup>13</sup> Aimé Césaire, *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 59, 71, cited in-text subsequently.

<sup>14</sup> Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 133.

Michelle Wright also argues that the counterdiscourses within the tradition of the African Diaspora, the representative of which was the poetics of Négritude, challenged the “central tenets” of European racism in the attempt to recreate the subjectivity of the black-as-other.<sup>15</sup> Wright argues that racist ideology emanated from two seminal philosophical works, Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* and Arthur de Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, both of which invent the otherness of black subjectivity as a means of legitimizing Eurocentric notions of white superiority. The Négritudists, of which Wright maintains Césaire and his long-time colleague and friend Léopold Senghor were the primary figures, developed a materialist critique of colonialist discourse through conceptual narratives that in their moment of negation recognize the “fallacy of Western logos,” which as a consequence replaced the abstraction of black subjectivity with a commonality of black collective identity, an identity that struggled with the predicament of Western rationalism itself.<sup>16</sup> “Césaire,” Wright asserts, “must grapple with the contradiction of being Othered while being deeply implicated within an antagonistic and exploitative Western environment.”<sup>17</sup>

Césaire’s poetics of Négritude, then, while emphasizing the paradoxical position of the black intellectual of the African Diaspora, confronts and antagonizes systemic forms of capitalist rationality, both aesthetically and politically. Rather than simply considering Césaire as being subordinate to modernist discourse, we can view Négritude as a pivotal movement within the historical formation of aesthetic and political vanguardism, since it both sustained and expanded the mode of confrontation that was essential to the historical avant-garde’s attack on bourgeois socio-cultural production. Furthermore, by analyzing the poetics of Négritude in the context of Césaire’s relationship to the Surrealist movement, we also can witness the process by which Césaire confronts the limitations of vanguardism in his reformulation of its premises in the praxis of decolonization, specifically after 1956.

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<sup>15</sup> Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

It is of course evident that the influence of Surrealism on Césaire's early formations of the poetics of Négritude was immense. André Breton was greatly impressed with Césaire's development within the Surrealist tradition, and perhaps in the context of his own struggle against colonialist rule, he viewed Césaire's work as a crucial step in the resistance against Westernized versions of aesthetic production.<sup>18</sup> In his 1943 study, "Un grand poète noir," which would later become the 1944 preface to Césaire's *Cahier du retour au pays natal*, Breton exclaims, "This poem was nothing less than the greatest lyrical monument of our times. . . . And here, written in capital letters, is what has always been the first article in the program of surrealism: to deliver a fatal blow to 'common sense' which has impudently arrogated itself to the title of reason."<sup>19</sup> In his 1967 interview, Césaire recounts his encounter with surrealism and the way in which he sought to utilize its techniques:

Surrealism had provided me with what I had been confusedly searching for. I have accepted it joyfully because in it I have found more of a confirmation than a revelation. It was a weapon that exploded the French language. This was very important because the traditional forms — burdensome, overused forms — were crushing me. . . . Surrealism interested me to the extent that it was a liberating factor.<sup>20</sup>

Later in the interview, Césaire characterizes his experience with Surrealism as a "process of disalienation," a decisive concept that needs some explanation in the context of Césaire and his evolution within the tradition of aesthetic and political vanguardism.<sup>21</sup> For Césaire, as for Franz Fanon, it is not through alienation that the *poète noir* is able to rescue black collectivity from imperialist racism; that is, since the institution of

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<sup>18</sup> For a thorough analysis of Césaire, Breton, and Surrealism, see Jean-Claude Michel, *The Black Surrealists* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000), 59-95.

<sup>19</sup> Breton, *What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings*, ed. Frank Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder, 2002), 306, 310. Frantz Fanon correctly points out that there is a racist exterior in Breton's characterization of Césaire in this essay, a critical focus of Fanon's own work that is meant to expose the systematization of racism, and not simply an attack on Breton, whom Fanon would have regarded as a true revolutionary. See *Black Skin / White Masks*, 17-63.

<sup>20</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Interview with René Depestre," in *Discours sur le colonialisme* 67-8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

colonization initiates alienation as a precondition of material and psychological control that delimits the possibilities of genuine liberation, disalienation, then, becomes a necessary step in the conceptual founding of black collectivity to the extent that it becomes a method which demystifies the imposed abstraction of colonized rule. Disalienation, then, is a “dialectical subversion” of the condition of alienation, which as an effect opposes and antagonizes the reification of subjectivity. The theme of disalienation, in fact, becomes a central theme in the work of Fanon, whose *Black Skin/White Masks* engages the dialectical experience of black consciousness to inform a radical methodology in which the black other must confront the psycho-existential of decolonization and its consequences.

Césaire’s dedication to revolutionary communism and his joining of the PCF in 1945 marked his evolution as a pivotal figure in the transformation of the avant-garde, or rather as the inheritor of aesthetic and political vanguardism that began with the Surrealists’ commitment to the expansion of its aesthetic base by associating it with Marxist liberation. The poetics of Négritude, in the form of aesthetic and political vanguardism, attacked the legitimacy of the Eurocentric socio-political domain in order to reconstruct colonized subjectivity within history, an attempt to annihilate the system of dehumanization that is systemically inbuilt in imperialism. In *Cahier du retour au pays natal*, we can see that the reconstituted “body” of colonized subjectivity, abstracted under the continual and obscuring presence of the totalizing effects of alienation, achieves a formative reconciliation with black collective identity, and to this extent, a newly realized oppositional praxis to confront Westernized models of socio-cultural production:

oh friendly source of light  
 oh fresh source of light  
 those who have invented neither powder nor compass  
 those who could harness neither steam nor electricity  
 those who exploited neither the seas nor the sky but those  
 without whom the earth would not be earth  
 gibbosity [gibbosité] all the more beneficent as the bare earth even more earth  
 silo where that which is earthiest about earth ferments and ripens  
 my negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of the day

my negritude is not a leukoma [une taie] of dead liquid over the earth's dead eye  
 my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral  
 it takes root in the red flesh of the soil  
 it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky  
 it breaks through the opaque prostration [troue l'accablement] with its upright  
 patience (*Collected Poetry* 68-9).

Commenting on what he calls the “Epic of Negritude,” James Arnold writes, “At the outset the Martinican poet, whose literary culture is essentially European, cannot but use the elements of style provided by the colonizer. The language and literary forms at his disposal belong to the very tradition that he must attack in order to affirm the uniqueness of his own community.”<sup>22</sup> *Cahier*, as such, represents Césaire’s attempt to subvert the language of the colonizer to recreate a black collectivity that had been denied the concreteness of expression, a process which derives from the Surrealist concern with the intensification of collective activity and the subversion of reified forms of socio-cultural production.

What the above poem reveals, in fact, is the struggle that would later culminate in Césaire’s reorganization of the prospects for the Third World Revolution, a conflict that for him would begin with the localized radicalization of social relations, particularly within the Caribbean Diaspora. For the “rootedness” that Césaire describes in the above poem articulates the concern with locality, with nurturing a collectivity with the “flesh” and “soil” in order to illuminate its existentiality, the very expression that, in fact, negates the abstractness by which colonized subjectivity has been determined. Although not clearly located in the text above, the objective of *Cahier* is the reformulation of lost identity, which as a fortification against the systemization of imperialism and the legitimating ideologies of racism, sought to reconnect with the physicality of *pays natal* itself. Nascent in the subsequent confrontation with the overarching project of the Communist International, which for Césaire never had formulated an effective theory against imperialist racism, *Cahier*, in this sense, illuminates the ensuing conflict between localized and international cultural politics; for, on the one hand, the demand for

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<sup>22</sup> Arnold, 166.

reinstating a colonial identity, which by localizing its being in the materiality of community, challenges the obfuscation of the colonizer's identification of otherness, or what can be thought of as a revolutionary process that validates decolonization itself. On the other hand, the Third International presupposed that the revolutionary process stemmed from the totalization of working-class social relations, which Césaire after 1956 believed would not transpire without sufficient analysis of the differences between the European proletariat and the liquefaction of the colonized other that continually took place on the fringes of Empire. Thus, the paradoxical character of Césaire's decolonizing project here is that, while locating himself within the tradition of European aesthetic and political vanguardism, Césaire necessitates a denaturing process that opposes the structures associated with Westernized hegemony, yet within that pursuit to reconstitute colonized subjectivity, he must displace and subvert the very foundational elements upon which the process of revolt is built and through which he sought to rejoin the totalizing system of revolutionary communism. Césaire's intention, it seems, is to break out of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "Imperialism of the universal," a totalizing mechanism, which by draping itself "in the legitimacy of international bodies" can subsume and re-insert the "revolt against the reason which cannot be separated from the abuses of power which are armed or justified by reason," a paradoxical dimension of Césaire's Négritude that through the analysis of Fanon will reveal some important discrepancies between national culture and the global revolution.<sup>23</sup>

For now, it is important to continue with an analysis of the ways in which aesthetic and political vanguardism is revealed through Césaire's other major poetic works. In his next three full-length books of poetry, *Les Armes miraculeuses*, *Soleil coupe*, and *Corps perdu*, Césaire utilizes the poetics of Négritude to expose the particularities of the colonized other through a process of semantic dissection, which Janis Pallister suggests draws attention to the sometimes irresolvable ambiguities of Césaire's work after *Cahier*.<sup>24</sup> As Pallister rightly argues, it would be a mistake to assume that Césaire was simply employing the Surrealist renunciation of words in favor of objective chance, as that would diminish the intent to reinscribe the colonized other in the

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<sup>23</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (New York: The New York Press, 1998), 19-20.

<sup>24</sup> Pallister, Janis, *Aimé Césaire* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 29.

body of the text.<sup>25</sup> Gregson Davis' suggestion that Césaire's infusion of Surrealism into the poetics of Négritude is associated with "Magical Realism" also overlooks the structure of Césaire's revolutionary project, especially since the implicit elements of "Magical Realism" simply relegate Césaire's socio-political agenda to a marginalized escapism, rather than recognizing it as an attempt to formulate an oppositional praxis within the aesthetic itself.<sup>26</sup> Instead of seeing Césaire's utilization of Surrealism as a way of valorizing the psychic dimensions of "the marvelous," we can see that the desire to de-rationalize expression, an overall aesthetically predicted process, is manifested in Négritude as an ideological process in which the potentiality for building revolutionary consciousness on a wider scale was the definitive concern. The emphasis on exploration, then, is dramatized as a process of dissection, which in its dialectical inversion endeavors to demystify the colonized space within which it emerges and becomes visible. What this draws attention to is the fact that the poetics of Négritude, as E. San Juan Jr. realizes, is not abstraction, but a concrete process of "gaining consciousness," a specific dimension of Surrealism that Césaire incorporates to materialize the corporeality of black collectivity:

Césaire's identity evolved from a particularizing of Communism in the moment of Négritude. His conceptualization of Négritude sublated the inside and outside into a world-historical movement. But Négritude encompassed the solidarity of all black people in various parts of the world, not only in Africa; hence Césaire's belief that the Harlem Renaissance, the insurrectionary past of Haiti, the revolutions in Algeria and Brazil and elsewhere, are all registered in his sensibility as part of a global 'Negro Situation'.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, as a theory that calls into question the hegemony of capitalist functionality, it is possible to understand Césaire's utilization of Marxism as a tool for decolonization and thus as a means of creating a future for international communism that

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>26</sup> Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 73.

<sup>27</sup> E. San Juan, Jr., "Aimé Césaire's Insurrectionary Poetics," in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, ed. Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 226-246.

would emerge from the Third World Revolution, or rather with the initial liberation of “native” collectivity. It is for this reason that the convergence of the poetics of Négritude and Marxism results in a convincing relationship that, in turn, will become a focal point in the analysis of Césaire’s comparative position in the crisis of historical avant-garde, as it will also draw attention to the constituent developments in Césaire’s struggle to materialize an operative dialectic of subversion in his own aesthetic and political vanguardism.

### **Négritude, Marxism, and the Political Implications of Decolonization**

What is important to point out here is that Césaire’s discouragement with the PCF does not stem from the combination of aesthetic stagnation and political difference that Breton and the Surrealists experienced in the 1930’s. That is, as I have been arguing throughout, the residual effects of the break between Césaire’s aesthetic of Négritude and the Communist International are felt in Césaire’s Négritude after 1956 to the extent that he refuted the party line on imperialism, not to mention the party’s disinclination toward recognizing the transformation that had been occurring within the configurations of the revolutionary proletariat, especially in the colonies themselves. In fact, Césaire pursued Surrealism in his aesthetic work at the moment he was a deputy in the PCF. As James Arnold points out, however, by 1950 Césaire came to the conclusion that his poetry had become a “hindrance” to his political work, a frustration out of which grew his major theoretical work, *Discourse on Colonialism*.<sup>28</sup> It is at this point in Césaire’s development that the aesthetic dimension of his politics, which originates out of the poetics of Négritude itself, is assigned an ancillary role within the overall context of his commitment to the wider expansion of revolutionary consciousness to subvert what he calls the “tyranny of a dehumanized bourgeoisie.” Thus it can be argued that the politicization of Négritude, a project that was originally meant to impel colonized subjectivity beyond the margins of the aesthetic dimension, contributed to Césaire’s realization of his subordination to Westernized configurations of liberation, a situation

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<sup>28</sup> Arnold, 178.

that facilitated a transition in his political life that culminated in his eventual break with the PCF.

That stated, however, the opposition between Marxism and Négritude has often been seen by critics as one that fundamentally emerged out of Césaire's turn toward a localized politics that focused on black subjectivity, a view that often denies the dialectical formation of Négritude and its relation to what I argue signifies a crisis in the re-emergence of aesthetic and political vanguardism after 1956. While it is evident that the theoretical tenets of Négritude were constructed on the basis of cultural and nationalist identity that radically called into question the overarching objectives of revolutionary communism, Césaire's intention was to utilize Négritude for the purposes of bringing about the total revolution, as the ontology of cultural liberation that could be organized toward a wide-ranging anti-capitalist response. This is often overlooked by critics who falsely make a connection between the project of Négritude, which Césaire in fact embraced wholeheartedly after 1956, and his resignation from the PCF, thus denying the structural roots of Césaire's movement and instead characterizing his post-PCF period as pro-nationalist and anti-communist, exemplified by his abrupt resignation from European Marxist circles. Susan Frutkin, for example, suggests that Césaire's "Letter to Maurice Thorez" is testament to the incompatibility of Communism and Négritude, since she argues Négritude "is far more a vital force for the world's Black people."<sup>29</sup> Although it is true that Césaire's alienation from and disappointment with the PCF occurred as a result of his inability to accept the subordination of decolonizing struggles to the universalism of Eurocentric idealism, Césaire's intention was not to dismiss the principles of Communism, only to redirect its responsibilities toward the immediate needs of the colonized other. As Gregson Davis points out, such efforts became the

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<sup>29</sup> Frutkin, *Aimé Césaire: Black Between Worlds*, 42. See also Jean-Claude Michel's comments in *The Black Surrealists*, 95-101 and Lilyan Kesteloot, *Intellectual Origins of the African Revolution* (Rockville: Black Orpheus Press, 1972). By using the term anti-communist I mean to emphasize the overwhelming critical reactions by scholars to modernist authors who identified with Marxist aesthetic and political positions, as such theoretical principles have come to be identified with authoritarianism, especially by those who identify with postmodernist discourse. For an analysis, see Barbara Foley, "Marxism in the Post-Structuralist Moment: Some Notes on the Problem of Revising Marx," *Cultural Critique* 15 (1990): 5-37 and Grover Furr, "(Un) Critical Reading and the Discourse of Anti-Communism," *Red Critique* 11 (Winter/Spring 2006) <http://www.redcritique.org/WinterSpring2006/index.html>

foundation for Césaire's *Parti Progressiste Martiniquais* in 1958, which focused on what has been labeled a "Third World Marxism" and the building of solidarity among black leaders in the Caribbean and on the African continent.<sup>30</sup> "In that sense," writes Davis, "it did not so much mark a new intellectual tangent as bring memorably into the open [Césaire's] fidelity to the prior cause of *négritude* and its corollary, the struggle to eradicate racism, which he saw as a deeply rooted problem."<sup>31</sup> The emphasis on the particularities of black experience and the questioning of whether or not revolutionary consciousness rests with the proletariat or with the oppressed of the colonies is what distinguishes Césaire's politics of *Négritude*, a point that James Arnold asserts puts Césaire in dialogue with Latin American and African brands of Marxism and theories of decolonization. Arnold argues that *Négritude* and Marxism are interconnected to the degree that the latter allows for a more thorough analysis of the politics of race and the establishment of a reformist socialism that would cater to the potentiality for sustaining popular decolonizing movements, as the independence of Guinea led by Césaire's friend Sekou Touré revealed. As Arnold writes, "The insistence on recognizing the particular nature and needs of societies in what has since come to be called the Third World assures Césaire a modest place among those who have gradually transformed Marxist theory."<sup>32</sup>

Arnold is mistaken, however, in suggesting that Césaire's ultimate break is a result of the French Communist Party's adoption of socialist realism as an official line. As much as Césaire disagreed with sole usage of socialist realism, the cultural position of Césaire's aesthetics, as it especially related to the poetics of *Négritude*, presupposed enough of a revolutionary approach that such a conflict would not have given cause for his resignation, in contrast to what Breton and his faction of the Surrealists had experienced.<sup>33</sup> Rather, the praxis of Césaire's Marxism, which begins in *Discourse on Colonialism*, represents, thematically at least, an assertion of localized resistance as a formula that articulates the unfolding of a voice for the colonized other, a challenge both to the structural determinant of colonization and to the hegemony of Westernized

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<sup>30</sup> Davis, 98.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Arnold, 46, 171.

<sup>33</sup> See Helena Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism* (New York: Paragon), especially 119-140.

Communism. The alternative perspective that Césaire offered is similar to the vernacular of Mao Tse-tung's inclusive availability of Marxism which categorically shaped a movement that concretized the ambiguities of Marxist-Leninism. Commenting on Chinese Marxism, Arif Dirlik writes, "Politically, it pointed the way to the possibility of a genuinely universal Marxism in its insistence that a Marxism that refused to incorporate local voices into its structure reintroduced in a radical form the Eurocentric hegemony that was built into its historical origins."<sup>34</sup> The function of the politics of Négritude was designed to assume responsibility for the "reinsertion" of the colonized other into the milieu of a revolutionary praxis that focused on the specialized needs of localized struggle. It is for this reason that the affinity with Maoism, as Dirlik's interpretation claims, puts Césaire's Third World Marxism in a synecdochic relationship to the overall objectives of Western Marxism, as an embodiment on a pragmatic level of the universal significations of the total overthrow of capitalist hegemony. The identification with localized struggle is what also leads E. San Juan, Jr. to label the politics of Négritude an "insurrectionary poetics" that "does not omit, elide or forget the catalyzing power of the subaltern peoples of colour without which revolution in the 'first world' is impossible."<sup>35</sup>

The politics of Négritude for Césaire, then, is a process that both negotiates and reforms the organization of Westernized thought as a means of interiorizing struggles for decolonization and an emergent praxis that is designed to empower the colonized other within a concretized framework of anti-imperialist collectivity. To this extent, the political structure of Négritude dismantles the rigidity of European vanguardism by shifting the emphasis from form to a praxis that, on the aesthetic level, presents a new means of measuring concrete social relations that have not been given a fixed and objective reality within the context of human history. What becomes clear is that the conceptual apparatus of Négritude is not an external development to the European model,

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<sup>34</sup> Arif Dirlik, "Mao Zedong and 'Chinese Marxism,'" in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, ed. Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca E. Karl (New York: Routledge, 1996), 144. There is no evidence to suggest that Césaire favored Maoism over Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, though it is clear in the context of his movement toward the formation of a national culture after 1956 that Césaire sought to displace the Eurocentric version of Communism in favor of the construction of a revolutionary discourse similar to the Maoist vernacular. See especially Mao Tse-tung, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970), 160-166.

<sup>35</sup> E. San Juan, Jr., "Aimé Césaire's Insurrectionary Poetics," 245.

even though it attempts to entrench a permanent figure of resistance as a methodological approach to decolonization; rather, in order for it to exist as a radical critique of European cultural models, Négritude must perpetually exist at the center of domination, an attribute of its construction that demonstrates its preoccupation with the development of national culture as a bulwark to imperialist doctrine. Furthermore, it is for his reason that Négritude cannot simply be understood as an antithesis to the historical avant-garde, an analysis which would reconstruct a pre-colonial African “spirituality” that informed newly situated value systems exterior to Eurocentric cultural production. Instead, Césaire’s synthetic concept of Négritude consisted of a participatory approach that aimed to establish a concretized rationale for black collectivity as a continuity of resistance that was separated from Eurocentric visions of liberation.

His efforts to designate an oppositional praxis that addressed the problems relative to black identity and the colonial situation became the foundation of his major essay of the period, “Culture et colonization,” delivered at the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in 1956. The basis of his argument is that the imposition of civilization, a term that has been juxtaposed through European dominance, has divested the colonized other of the “particularism” of cultural identity, what he labels “cultural anarchy”:

This can mean only one thing; namely, that a political and social system that suppresses the self-determination of a people thereby kills the creative power of that people. Or, what amounts to the same thing: wherever colonialism has existed, whole peoples have been deprived of their culture, deprived of all culture. . . . Wherever European colonization has occurred, the introduction of an economy based on money has led to the destruction or weakening of traditional links, the break-up of the social and economic structure of the community. . . . When a member of a colonized people makes this kind of remark, European intellectuals tend to reproach him with ingratitude and to remind him complacently of what the world owes Europe.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Culture and Colonization,” in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, ed. Chinua Achebe and Okwui Enwezor (New York: Prestel, 2001), 420.

Susan Frutkin argues that both works suggest Césaire's final replacement of Marxism with a commitment to Négritude, as the former "could only be valid to the degree that it was applicable to the colonial situation."<sup>37</sup> Césaire's call for a national consciousness would thus be equivalent to the abandonment of revolutionary communism, a characterization which fails to recognize the international dimension of Marxist theory which Césaire sought to infuse in the structure of Négritude. On the contrary, what is evident is that the inherent reformism of his post-1956 Négritude can be understood within the context of his overall critique of European aesthetic and political vanguardism, which consigned the liberating possibilities of localized struggles for decolonization under the totalizing policies of the PCF itself. Césaire's commitment to Négritude, which for him represented the concretization of an oppositional praxis, allowed him to disseminate the tools for liberation on a localized scale, an act that incorporates rather than imposes the paradigms of European aesthetic and political vanguardism to the extent that it is subsumed by a newly formed native heritage beyond the framework of colonization:

A process of naturalization, ascribable to the dialectic of *having*, has taken place. Foreign elements have become mine, have passed into my being because I can dispose of them, because I can organize them within my universe, because I can bend them to my uses, because they are at my disposal, not I at theirs. It is precisely this operation that is denied to the colonized people.

Wherever colonization occurs, native culture begins to wither. And among the ruins there springs up not a culture, but a kind of subculture, a subculture that, because it is condemned to remain marginal as regards the European culture and to the province of a small group, an "elite," living in artificial conditions and deprived of life-giving contact with the masses and with popular culture, is thus prevented from blossoming into a true culture.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Frutkin, 35.

<sup>38</sup> Césaire, "Culture and Colonization," 433.

By exploiting the features of the historical avant-garde, Césaire simultaneously removes the boundaries that had determined the framework of colonial liberation and reinscribes the potentiality of aesthetic emancipation in the form and content of black collectivity. The distance that is apparent between the explorative characteristics of Négritude and its reassessment of European aesthetic and political vanguardism proves to be more complex than what has been deemed his “break” with revolutionary communism. That is, the politics of Négritude that Césaire “chooses” after 1956 seems to provide a vehicle for discussing the estrangement of the historical avant-garde from a truly unique oppositional praxis that reappropriates the materialist construction of revolutionary subversion. The question of whether or not the historical avant-garde can lay claim to the knowledge and praxis of revolution has occupied Marxist theory since the Realism versus Modernism debates of the 1920s and 30s. The emphasis here, in slight contrast, is the comparison between the critical effects of Négritude and what Fredric Jameson calls the overall “crisis of historicity” that has consumed Marxist critical reflections on aesthetic agencies.<sup>39</sup> What should become consistently evident is the tension that is produced by the seemingly irreconcilable categories of aesthetic autonomy and political engagement become reaffirmed in the transitional character of Négritude — a development that not only illustrates the crisis of vanguardism and its re-emergence in the neo-avant-garde and in its various forms, but also the ways in which it is subjected to the subsumptive influence of late capitalism itself, as will be analyzed below. To this extent, Césaire exposes the parameters of the neo-avant-garde reaction to vanguardism, especially in his conscious reformation of a revolutionary discourse that favors the particularities of cultural diversity over the universalizing probability of a working-class revolution that would result in the strengthening of the proletariat as the vanguard class. Such an assumption is contingent on Franz Fanon’s critique of Négritude as a means of further analyzing whether or not Césaire is able to sustain the transformative effects of his aesthetic and political paradigm in the context of late capitalism and the mechanism of subsumption that is at its core, an analysis that I hope will also uncover the emergent forms of the neo-avant-garde and the historicity of its struggle for recognition.

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<sup>39</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Reflections in Conclusion,” in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 2002), 198.

### **Beyond the Vanguard: Frantz Fanon and the Critique of Négritude**

It is important to outline Frantz Fanon's critique of Négritude in the present context, for it will facilitate a more thorough interpretation of Négritude's relationship to the process by which the structure of aesthetic and political vanguardism became subjected to a crisis that could be resolved only in the dialectical re-structuralization of the neo-avant-garde. The proposition here is that, in order for the revolutionary specificities of Césaire's Négritude to be formed into a living praxis, it was imperative that a nationalized project be developed to subvert the reformist impasse of the black intellectual who had been able to cultivate a native identity separate from the European derivative, a position that Fanon brings to the fore in his work. The incompleteness of Césaire's Négritude for Fanon does not stem from a declining interest in localizing revolutionary struggle, for the politics of Négritude was fundamental in constructing a confrontational theoretical exemplar for national liberation, as it signified an ideology of radical otherness that could be utilized in the destruction of what Fanon refers to as "The White Gaze," or rather the totalizing mechanism by which black subjectivity must rely on the Eurocentric dimensions of cultural production. Fanon strongly recognized that Négritude initialized a confrontation with the enclosing mechanism of the white gaze, the hegemonic capability of Eurocentric definitions of subjectivity of which colonized subjectivity was defined.<sup>40</sup> For Gary Wilder, Négritude created an ideology of Africanness "as a standpoint from which to critique the violent implications of European modernity" and thus "to counter the evolutionary argument" of African culture that had been determined by European scholars, a reason, in fact, that Fanon criticizes Jean-Paul Sartre's interpretation of Négritude, despite the fact that the intention was to legitimate the powerful mechanism of its ideological position.<sup>41</sup>

On the contrary, it is the extent to which the neo-avant-garde character of Césaire's Négritude, which channeled Western Marxism into anti-imperialist cultural politics, seems to reject the operation of native identification that could be utilized for

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<sup>40</sup> See Robert Bernasconi, "The Assumption of Negritude": Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and the Vicious Circle of Racial Politics," *Parallax* 8, no. 2 (2002): 69-83.

<sup>41</sup> Gary Wilder, "Race, Reason, Impasse: Césaire, Fanon, and the Legacy of Emancipation," 48.

insurrection, thus uncovering its fundamental contradictions into which the black intellectual of Négritude is coerced. The need for cultural revolution becomes paramount for Fanon, as he attempts to contradict the imposed authority of colonial ideology in his “Decolonization and Independence”:

The oppressed peoples know today that national liberation is part of the process of historic development but they also know this liberation must be the work of the oppressed people. . . . It is the colonial people who must liberate themselves from colonialist domination. . . . True liberation is not that pseudo-independence in which ministers having a limited responsibility hobnob with an economy dominated by the colonial pact. . . . Liberation is the total destruction of the colonial system, from the pre-eminence of the language of the oppressor and “departmentalization,” to the customs union that in reality maintains the former colonized in the meshes of culture, of the fashion, and of the images of the colonialist.<sup>42</sup>

Nigel Gibson argues that Fanon’s critique of Négritude begins with his emphasis on the “bourgeois individualism” that the black intellectual inherits from colonialism, which must be shed in order for cultural identification to be integrated in the struggle for liberation.<sup>43</sup> Fanon distinguishes between the political objectives of Négritude, which he believed should be employed to annihilate imperialist ideology, and the failure that results from the black intellectual’s contradictory reliance on European models of revolutionary confrontation.<sup>44</sup> It is the emphasis on developing a national culture that Fanon sees as the project of the black intellectual, a project that facilitates the building of patterns of revolt:

While at the beginning the native intellectual used to produce his work to be read exclusively by the oppressor, whether with the intention of charming him or of denouncing him through ethnic or subjective means, now the native writer

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<sup>42</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 105.

<sup>43</sup> Nigel Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 82.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people. It is only from that moment that we can speak of a national literature. . . . This may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It is a literature of combat, because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space.<sup>45</sup>

David Hanley argues that Fanon's revolutionary conceptualization of national culture is dependent on the interiority of the localized struggle, which in relation to the ideological tools needed for such a process, situates Négritude at the core development of that conflict, albeit contradictorily.<sup>46</sup> The ideology of black collectivity according to which Négritude revolted against the hegemony of the white gaze, then, fostered a "political consciousness and the will to mobilize at the level of the nation," a point which for Fanon is central to the concept of national consciousness and the uses of its tenets for the purposes of revolutionary action.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, it is within the interior spaces of national culture, in fact, that revolutionary action is deemed to move beyond spontaneity, which Fanon, like Lenin, saw as a necessary progression toward communist revolution, especially in relation to the immediacy of alleviating the conditions of the suffering peasantry, yet also as a contradictory process in its relation to the totalizing objectives of national struggle.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the inherent conflict between national and international revolution entailed constitution of the organization by which such objectives could be accomplished. Under imperialism, workers in the colonies were unable to develop the required characteristics of proletarian consciousness that was evident in the European working class, a result of capitalist super exploitation in the colonies, and thus alternative ideological dialogue

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<sup>45</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 240.

<sup>46</sup> David Hanley, "Frantz Fanon — Revolutionary Nationalist?," *Political Studies* 24, no. 2 (1976): 122.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* For more on Fanon's analysis of spontaneity, see the *Wretched of the Earth*, 107-148. For a communist analysis of nationalism and Marxism, see Lenin's *Collected Works*, V. 20 and Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1942), 7-69.

through which the movement toward total liberation could be achieved was needed.<sup>49</sup> For Césaire and Fanon, as well as for Jean-Paul Sartre, the cultural and political ideology of Négritude would foster such consciousness. Moreover, it is nationalism rather than national culture that needed to be obliterated, a crucial idea which Lenin had been arguing as early as 1914, and yet as Césaire and Fanon would come to realize, the national struggle in the colonies still remained a problematic impediment to the PCF as well as to the Communist International overall, as the Algerian conflict would demonstrate most notably.<sup>50</sup> What the struggle for Algerian independence unveiled for Fanon is the extent to which the ideological configuration of racism determined the structure of imperialist doctrine, particularly as the French counter-revolutionary forces utilized them to legitimize the colonial regime. It is for this reason that Négritude signified a crucial mechanism of confrontation that destabilized the wide-ranging effects of racist ideology and which for Fanon initiated a restorative conditioning against the incursion of the seemingly intractable structure of colonized subjectivity.<sup>51</sup> For Césaire and Fanon, it is systemic racism that continually obscures the possibility of collective social relations within the colonies and thus needs to be confronted and abolished prior to the social revolution, or rather as a pre-condition for the “revolution from below” that shaped itself according to cultural nationalism. As Fanon writes, “Racism stares one in the face for it so happens that it belongs in a characteristic whole: that of the shameless exploitation of one group of men by another which has reached a higher stage of technical development.”<sup>52</sup> According to Edward Said, Fanon’s shift from “national independence to the theoretical domain of liberation” begins with the elaboration of the black intellectual’s self-identification with his native culture, an act which in turn confirms Fanon’s rigorous critique of imperialism itself.<sup>53</sup> The potential effect of national liberation “leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history,” the

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<sup>49</sup> See the seminal work of Samir Amin, especially *Imperialism and Unequal Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), and *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 1997). For some key distinctions between European working-class consciousness and the Third World proletariat, see *Peasants and Proletarians: The Struggles of Third World Workers*, ed. Robin Cohen, Peter C.W. Gutkind, and Phyllis Brazier (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979).

<sup>50</sup> See Danièle Joly, *The French Communist Party and Algerian War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991).

<sup>51</sup> See Franz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks*, chapters 1 & 2.

<sup>52</sup> Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 37-8; italics mine.

<sup>53</sup> See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

“international dimension” that results from the associative expression of conflict that the narrative of combat contributes to the external progression of internal struggle. Here is evidenced the dialectical movement of Fanon’s thought, which is often connected to nationalism rather than to a Marxist-based critique of imperialist ideologies.<sup>54</sup> This does not mean that Fanon intended to adopt Western Marxism as a tool for decolonizing struggles, since such a move would not be adequate in overcoming racism to which the black intellectual responded on a psychologically embedded level. In fact, to continue with Said’s interpretation, it becomes clear that Fanon seeks to critique Western Marxism’s weakness on the question of imperialism; that is, Fanon and other “Third World” Marxist theorists were able to critique Empire from within the colonies, rather than from an external position that, for Fanon, disallowed a genuinely programmatic model for liberation. It is for this reason, furthermore, that the applicability of such a program sought to fortify an interior decolonizing model through the abolishment of hybrid frameworks, which of course meant excluding an outside influence of party politics, as Said observes:

That there was a conscious attempt not only to write history saturated in, taking maximum account of, the struggle between imperial Europe and the peripheries, but to write it in terms of subject matter and of treatment or method, from the standpoint of and as part of the struggle against imperial domination. . . . If this meant, as it usually did, adopting a partisan position of advocacy, then so be it; it was impossible to write of liberation and nationalism, however allusively, without also declaring oneself for or against them.<sup>55</sup>

It is evident that the localization of struggle, which begins with the abolishment of colonial influence in favor of a cultural nationalism, represented Fanon’s subjective solution to the structuring process by which Empire internalizes its own crises, an interpretation which is at the core of his critique of Césaire’s *Négritude* and its reformist framework. What Fanon exposes in his critique of *Négritude* is the process of

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<sup>54</sup> For a thorough analysis of Fanon’s dialectical thought, see Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> Said, 268.

conciliation that forms Négritude's response to Eurocentric notions of aesthetic and political liberation, a critical assessment that can be extended to the present argument as well. For what is revealed is the ways in which the restructuring of revolutionary cultural politics sheds light upon its relation to the overarching problematic of aesthetic and political vanguardism after 1956 and the ways in which Césaire's move from the proletarian revolution associated with Communism to national liberation depended upon the ideology of Négritude and its localizing capabilities. More specifically, as an expression of the crisis of the historical avant-garde agenda that reveals itself in a critique of the Eurocentric authority of cultural production Césaire's Négritude needs to be reconsidered in relation to the critical responses that were sparked by the political institutionalization of Négritude in the form of a neo-avant-gardism that emerged in decolonizing societies in the Caribbean and on the African continent, one that for Fanon is intimately ascribed to the character of reformism that distinguishes Césaire's own dissatisfaction with the utopian magnitude of the Communist International. What should be emphasized here is that the crisis in representation of vanguardism is categorically related to the critique of Négritude only to the extent that they both fall victim to the hegemonic paradigms of late capitalist subsumption; that is, the discontinuity of Négritude's response became the basis for constructing decolonization as an alternative to European centralism, one that challenges the subsumptive effects of late capitalism only by localizing its revolutionary program in the reformist project of national culture. Négritude, then, like the neo-avant-garde itself, becomes a form of perpetual negotiation, one that as a concrete negation of Eurocentric influence must continue to build itself through the predicament of crisis that structures the totalizing configuration of postmodern social relations. Négritude's failure lies in its inability to recognize the historicity of late capitalist subsumption and the enduring project of imperialism, or rather its inability to reexamine itself in relation to what exists external to the localization of struggle, which through the dialectical process of assimilation that resides within the structure of late capitalism is able to diffuse the revolutionary objective of which Césaire's Négritude was composed. In other terms, Fanon exposes the restrictedness of Césaire's politics of Négritude as it moves from the internationalism associated with revolutionary communism to the localization of black collectivity; thus, the latter must

necessarily deny the former yet paradoxically infuses the residual character of it into what can be described as a neo-vanguardism, one that, as a consequence, may foster a limited anti-imperialist sentiment yet does not go far enough to eradicate the constituencies of capitalist exploitation in its entirety.

And yet, as Gary Wilder writes, “Rather than dismiss Césaire and Fanon for failing to resolve the predicament of colonial racism, we need to recognize the way that their work illuminates that predicament, as well as the way it bequeaths to us alternatives for working through it politically.”<sup>56</sup> From a Marxist perspective, it is evident that Césaire’s reformist Négritude reflects the extensive failure of the revisionist left in many of the decolonizing movements which by identifying with nationalism delimited the prospects for genuine revolutionary organization to occur, something that further reveals the crisis of aesthetic and political vanguardism as it entered into the era of late capitalist hegemony. Thus, Césaire’s Négritude reveals the predicament of the neo-avant-garde in its conscious marginalization from totalizing structures associated with the revolutionary communism, a problematic development which can be explored only in relation to the historical junctures between late capitalism and subsequent nationalist revolutions in Latin America and on the African Continent. While Négritude perpetuates the ideological complexities by which the project modernity has been shaped, Césaire’s project also signifies a challenging historiography of the intellectual origins of the Third World and postcoloniality, a history which warrants a redefinition of the peripheral forces that have hitherto been disregarded in the larger narrative framework of aesthetic and political vanguardism as it has been theorized according to the centrality of Eurocentrism, its universalized authority.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Wilder, 56-7.

<sup>57</sup> See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002) on the ideologies of modernity; for an inquiry into the intellectual origins of Third World revolutionary praxis, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007).