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Return to the Source: Cabral, Fanon, the Dialectic of Revolutionary Decolonization/ Revolutionary Re-Africanization, and the African Renaissance

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Abstract

In the most general sense, the African Renaissance entails Africans combatting the racialization, colonization, and neo-colonization of Africa and committing to the decolonization, re-Africanization, and liberation of Africa. When Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon's radical theory and revolutionary praxis (i.e., Cabralism and Fanonism, respectively) are placed into critical dialog a groundbreaking *dialectic of revolutionary* decolonization *and revolutionary re-Africanization* emerges. This article argues that this dialectic is sorely needed to reanimate—perhaps even radicalize and, indeed, revolutionize—contemporary conceptions of the African Renaissance. To that end, first, this article will explore the conceptual connections between Cabral's theory of "return to the source" and Fanon's theory of "the wretched of the earth." Next, it will investigate Cabral's distinct discourse on revolutionary decolonization and its implications for the African Renaissance. Lastly, the discussion will examine the ways in which Fanon's theory of radical political education is key to understanding his and Cabral's conceptions of, and key

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contributions to, both revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization, as well as their reverberations within the discourse on the African Renaissance.

Keywords
African renaissance, Amilcar Cabral, decolonization, Frantz Fanon, re-Africanization

Introduction: The Dialectic of Revolutionary Decolonization/Revolutionary Re-Africanization and the African Renaissance

Some scholars have gone as far back as Blyden's (1878) essay, "African and the Africans," and Seme's (1906) speech, "The Regeneration of Africa," in their explorations of the origins and early evolution of the African Renaissance (Dunton, 2003; Frenkel, 1974; July, 1964; Kumalo, 2015; Lynch, 1967; Ngqulunga, 2019). However, the modern genesis of the discourse on the African Renaissance has been traced back to Azikiwe's (1937/1968) *Renascent Africa* and Diop's (1996) *Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in African Culture and Development, 1946-1960*. Whether terms such as "rebirth," "regeneration," "renascent," "renewal" or "renaissance" are used to characterize the historic and current struggle for the decolonization, liberation, and unification of Africa, the majority of the proponents of the African Renaissance agree that Africans must embrace *rehumanization* and *re-Africanization* (Acheampong, 2000; Maloka, 2001; Mangu, 2006; Wa Thiong'o', 2009a, 2009b); Okumu, 2002; Sesanti, 2016). Consequently, this article explores the ways in which Amilcar Cabral's concept of "return to the source" and Frantz Fanon's emphasis on radical political education contributes the *dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization* to the discourse on the African Renaissance.

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019), the African Renaissance is simultaneously a "form of resistance" and a "vision of liberation." He further defines the African Renaissance as a "restorative initiative" created to "rebuild Black and African pride after centuries of inferiorization and dehumanization" (p. 4). Contributing to the African Renaissance, and in direct response to the "centuries of inferiorization and dehumanization," Amílcar Lopes da Costa Cabral (1924–1973) offered up his concept of "return to the source" and Frantz Omar Fanon (1925–1961) shared his theory of the radical political education of the "wretched of the earth" (Cabral, 1973; Fanon, 1968).

When Cabral and Fanon's radical theory and revolutionary praxis (i.e., Cabralism and Fanonism, respectively) are placed into critical dialog a groundbreaking *dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization* emerges (Rabaka, 2010, 2014). This article argues that this dialectic is sorely needed to reanimate—perhaps even radicalize and, indeed, revolutionize—contemporary conceptions of the African Renaissance. To that end, first, this article will explore the conceptual connections between Cabral's theory of "return to the source" and Fanon's theory of "the wretched of the earth." Then we will investigate Cabral's distinct discourse on revolutionary decolonization and its implications for the African Renaissance. Third, our discussion will examine the ways in which Fanon's theory of radical political education is key to understanding his and Cabral's conceptions of, and key contributions to, both revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization, as well as their reverberations within the discourse on the African Renaissance. Lastly, this article concludes with a discussion of the ways in which the Fanonist and Cabralist *dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization* is a modernization and continuation of the concept of *Sankofa*: the *use of knowledge from the African past to positively alter the African present and ensure the African future*. Ultimately, this article illustrates that Fanonism and Cabralism are forms of *Sankofa*, and that the concept of *Sankofa* provides us with a framework to more clearly comprehend Fanon and Cabral's contribution of the *dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization* to the African Renaissance.

"The 'Return to the Source' is of No Historical Importance Unless it Brings. . .Real Involvement in the Struggle": Cabral's Concept of "Return to the Source" and its Contributions to the African Renaissance

One of the major elements of Cabral's concept of "return to the source" hinges on his contention that one of the strengths of a revolutionary nationalist movement, such as the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), is that it preserves precolonial traditions and values but, at the same time, these traditions and values are drastically transformed through *the dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization* (Chabal, 1983; Chaliand, 1969; Chilcote, 1991; Davidson, 1969, 1981; McCulloch, 1983). In other words, precolonial traditions and values are altered by the protracted struggle

against the superimposition of foreign imperial cultures and values and the reconstitution and synthesis of progressive precolonial and recently created revolutionary anti-colonial African traditions and values. Therefore, according to Cabral (1966): "The armed struggle for liberation, launched in response to aggression by the colonialist oppressor, turns out to be a painful but effective instrument for developing the cultural level both for the leadership strata of the liberation movement and for the various social categories who take part in the struggle" (pp. 14–15). Anticipating that many may misunderstand him, Cabral (1976) further explained his conception of the national liberation struggle as a "painful but effective instrument":

> As we know, the armed liberation struggle demands the mobilization and organization of a significant majority of the population, the political and moral unity of the various social categories, the efficient use of modern weapons and other means of warfare, the gradual elimination of the remnants of tribal mentality, and the rejection of social and religious rules and taboos contrary to the development of the struggle (i.e., gerontocracy, nepotism, social inferiority of women, rites and practices which are incompatible with the rational and national character of the struggle, etc.). The struggle brings about many other profound changes in the life of the populations. The armed liberation struggle implies, therefore, a veritable forced march along the road to cultural progress. (pp. 54–55)

Cabral's concept of "return to the source," therefore, is not only, as shall soon be shown, a "return to the upwards paths of [Africans'] own culture[s]," but also "a veritable forced march along the road to cultural progress." This "return," similar to Aime Cesaire's, is a critical "return" that "is not and cannot in itself be an *act of struggle* against domination (colonialist and racist) and it no longer necessarily means a return to traditions" (Cabral, 1972a, p. 45, emphasis in original). Rather, the "return to the source" that is at the core of Cabralism (i.e., Cabral's radical theory and revolutionary praxis) is a conscious anti-colonial and revolutionary step. Cabral asserted, it is "the only possible reply to the demand of concrete need, historically determined, and enforced by the inescapable contradiction between the colonized society and the colonial power, the mass of the people exploited and the foreign exploitive class, a contradiction in the light of which each social stratum or indigenous class must define its position" (p. 45).

In defining their position in relation to, or, better yet, *against* the colonial and imperial powers, each member of the colonized society—individually and collectively—*chooses*, must as a matter of life or death, *will* themselves into becoming revolutionary participants, active anti-colonial agents in the

dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization, the protracted process of rescuing, reclaiming, and reconstructing their own sacred humanity, history, and heritage. As Zounmènou (2010) pointed out, "the definition of the African Renaissance varies according to each person. . ..Nevertheless, there is among the protagonists of the African Renaissance a consensus on the relevance of African culture for the liberation process of African countries and the fight against cultural alienation" (p. 207; see also M'Bow, 2007). Cabral's concept of "return to the source" can be considered a major contribution to the African Renaissance in light of its emphasis on the ways in which African culture and African indigenous knowledge should be used simultaneously as a "form of resistance" and to forge a "vision of liberation" specific to the special needs of modern Africa. In Cabral's candid words:

> When the "return to the source" goes beyond the individual and is expressed through "groups" or "movements," the contradiction is transformed into struggle (secret or overt), and is a prelude to the pre-independence movement or of the struggle for liberation from foreign yoke. So, the "return to the source" is of no historical importance unless it brings not only real involvement in the struggle for independence, but also complete and absolute identification with the hopes of the mass of the people, who contest not only the foreign culture but also the foreign domination as a whole. Otherwise, the "return to the source" is nothing more than an attempt to find short-term benefits—knowingly or unknowingly a kind of political opportunism. (pp. 45–46)

The "return to the source" can be said to translate into the discourse on the African Renaissance as the much touted "cultural revolution" that many have often argued proceeds and must continue throughout the national liberation struggle. Culture, when approached from a dialectical perspective, can be reactionary or revolutionary, traditional or transformative, decadent or dynamic, and the "return," in light of this fact, must at the least be *critical* if it is to transcend and transgress futile attempts, as Serequeberhan (1994) sternly stated, "to dig out a purely African past and return to a dead tradition" (p. 107). The "return," therefore, is only partially pointed at historical recovery, socio-political transformation, and revolutionary reorganization. There is another, often over-looked aspect of Cabral's concept of "return to the source" that simultaneously and dialectically strongly stresses *revolutionary cultural restoration* and *revolutionary cultural transformation* (Mendy, 2019; Rabaka, 2017, 2020b; Tomas, 2021).

Cabral's concept of "return to the source," and especially his emphasis on *revolutionary cultural restoration* and *revolutionary cultural transformation*

is categorically in line with the core tasks of the African Renaissance, which Oladipo (2001) identified as: "(1) democracy and good governance; (2) appropriate frameworks for significant socioeconomic development; (3) scientific and technological development; and (4) establishing the conditions for cultural renewal" (p. 62). Consequently, Cabralism embodies and advocates for each of the core tasks of the African Renaissance Oladipo has outlined. However, it is when we turn to Cabral's critical theory of African culture that we come across many of his most innovative contributions to the African Renaissance.

Cabral argued that it was prudent for Africans to develop critical dialogs and "real" relationships with precolonial and traditional African histories and cultures, but he also cautioned us to keep in mind the ways in which colonialism and Eurocentrism, and the struggles *against* racial colonialism and *for* revolutionary re-Africanization, impacted and affected modern African histories and cultures, consequently creating whole new notions of "Africa" and African cultures and traditions. What is more, and what is not always readily apparent, is that the dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization calls into question the very definition of what it means—ontologically, existentially, and phenomenologically speaking—to *be* "African"—which is to say, "African" in a world dominated by European imperialism. Or, to put it another way, it calls into question what it means to be "Black" in a White supremacist colonial capitalist patriarchal world. The dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization at its core, then, redefines "*Africanité*," or "Blackness," if you will. It finds sustenance in Fanon's (1968) faithful words in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he declared: "Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men," of a "new humanity," and the "'thing' which has been colonized becomes man"—by which he means *becomes human, becomes African*—by providing revolutionary answers to the question(s) of liberation and the question(s) of identity, "during the same process by which it frees itself" (pp. 36–37).

"Return to the Upwards Paths of [Our] Own Culture": Cabral's Conception of Revolutionary Decolonization

The sources of a people's identity and dignity are, according to Cabral (1972a), contained in their history and culture: "A struggle, which while being the organized political expression of a *culture* is also and necessarily a proof not only of *identity* but also of *dignity*" (p. 43, emphasis in original). A

people's history and culture (and we may add language [see Fanon, 1967, pp. 17–40]) contain and convey their distinct thought-, belief-, and value-systems and traditions. These systems and traditions are—under "normal" circumstances—ever-evolving, always contradicting, countering and overturning, as well as building on and going beyond, the moralities and philosophies, and the sciences and technologies of the past. Which is why, further, the "return" is not and should not be to the past or any "dead" traditions, but to those things (spiritual and material) from our past (e.g., moralities, philosophies, sciences and technologies) which will enable us to construct a present and future that is consistently conducive to the highest, healthiest, and most humane modes of human existence and experience.

Cabral's (1970) concept of "return to the source" is doubly-distinguished in its contributions to the African Renaissance in that it enables us to critique two dominant tendencies in African and African diasporan radical theory and revolutionary praxis. The first tendency is that of the vulgar and narrow-minded nationalists who seek, or so it seems, to expunge every aspect of European culture, collapsing it almost completely into European colonization, without coming to the critical realization that: "A people who free themselves from foreign domination will not be culturally free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor's culture and other cultures, they return to the upwards paths of their own culture" (p. 5). To "return" to the "upwards paths of [Africans'] own culture" means side-stepping the narrow-minded nationalists' knee-jerk reaction to everything European or non-African, and it also means making a critical and, even more, a dialectical distinction between White supremacy and Eurocentrism, on the one hand, and Europe and other cultures' authentic contributions to human culture and civilization that have, or could potentially, benefit the whole of humanity, on the other hand.

The second tendency that Cabral's concept of "return to the source" strongly condemns are those, usually Europeanized, petite bourgeois, alienated African's living in colonial metropoles, who seem to uncritically praise Africa's precolonial histories and cultures without coming to terms with the fact that:

> Without any doubt, underestimation of the cultural values of African peoples, based upon racist feelings and the intention of perpetuating exploitation by the foreigner, has done much harm to Africa. But in the face of the vital need for progress, the following factors or behavior would be no less harmful to her: unselective praise; systematic exaltation of virtues without condemning defects; blind acceptance of the values of the culture without considering what is actually or potentially negative, reactionary or regressive; confusion between

> what is the expression of an objective and historical material reality and what appears to be a spiritual creation of the result of a special nature; absurd connection of artistic creations, whether valid or not, to supposed racial characteristics; and, finally, non-scientific or ascientific critical appreciation of the cultural phenomenon. (Cabral, 1973, p. 51)

In keeping with most advocates of the African Renaissance, Cabral emphasized "critical analysis of African cultures." In doing so, he developed a distinct dialectical approach to Africa's wide-ranging histories, cultures, and struggles. This is extremely important to emphasize because too often Africa historically has been, and currently continues to be, engaged as though its histories, cultures, and peoples are either completely homogeneous or completely heterogeneous; as if it were impossible for the diverse and dynamic cultures of Africa to simultaneously possess commonalities *and* distinct differences.

Cabral's critical theory of culture, also, includes a unique comparative dimension that recommends placing what Africans consider to be the "best" of our cultures into critical dialog with the contributions and advances of other, non-African cultures. This, he argued, is important in order to get a real sense of what Africa has contributed to world culture and civilization and, vice versa, to discover what world culture and civilization has historically contributed to, and currently offers, Africa. In his own words:

> The important thing is not to waste time in more or less hair-splitting debates on the specificity or non-specificity of African cultural values, but to look upon these values as a conquest by a part of mankind for the common heritage of all mankind, achieved in one or several phases of its evolution. The important thing is to proceed to critical analysis of African cultures in the light of the liberation movement and the demands of progress—in the light of this new stage in the history of Africa. We may be aware of its value in the framework of universal civilization, but to compare its value with that of other cultures, not in order to decide its superiority or its inferiority, but to determine, within the general framework of the struggle for progress, what contribution African culture has made and must make, and contributions it can or must receive. (Cabral, 1973, pp. 51–52)

According to Cabral, it is important to understand both the particularities and universalities of African culture within the specific context in which the war for national liberation is being waged. Therefore, African radicals and revolutionaries must not simply be conversant with, for example, Pan-Africanism, African nationalism, African socialism, Ethiopianism, Garveyism, Negritude, Fanonism, Marxism, and Leninism, among many others, but also,

and more importantly according to Cabral, the specific cultural groups, political parties, social organizations, and religious affiliations of the milieu one is seeking to radically transform. This is to say, even as he stressed "not wast[ing] time in more or less hair-splitting debates on the specificity or non-specificity of African cultural values," Cabral was keen not to diminish the importance of understanding the cultural conventions, "tribal mentality," and "social and religious rules and taboos contrary to the development of the struggle." As Hubbard (1973) argued, Cabral was "an astute observer of the ethnic situation of his own country. He was aware of the potential strengths and problems" of the people of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau (p. 72). As a consequence, "[h]e did not delude himself that they were a homogeneous mass who would respond to the liberation struggle in similar ways."

In Cabral's (1970) critical theory of national liberation, an analysis of the cultural conflicts, "tribal mentality," and "social and religious rules and taboos contrary to the development of the struggle" is a necessity because for the movement to succeed its leaders must base their actions on "thorough knowledge of the culture of the people and be able to appreciate at their true value the elements of this culture, as well as different levels that it reaches in each group" (p. 12). Putting the dialectical dimension of his critical theory on full display, Cabral went even further to emphasize that the leaders of the national liberation movement must also be able to "discern in the entire set of cultural values of the people: the essential and the secondary, the positive and the negative, the progressive and the reactionary, the strengths and the weaknesses" (p. 12).

Assessing "the essential and the secondary, the positive and the negative, the progressive and the reactionary, the strengths and the weaknesses" of classical and contemporary African cultures is one of the core elements of the African Renaissance. As a matter of fact, and echoing Cabral over three decades after his assassination, African Renaissance scholars Sedibe and Tondi (2005) asserted: "Africa has to make efforts to reclaim and revitalize its traditional knowledge systems that have sustained its masses from time immemorial" (p. 134). They importantly went further, "progressive traditional socio-cultural and economic values and structures, if reclaimed and appropriately applied, can be used as a foundation upon which Africa's rebirth can be launched" (p. 140).

In Cabral's critical theory, it is not simply theory that can be utilized as a weapon, but also the new culture that grows out of the overarching processes and dialectics of *decolonization*, *re-Africanization*, and *national liberation*. In other words, Cabral's critical theory is not only distinguished by its emphasis on *the weapon of theory*, but also *the weapon of culture* (Rabaka, 2013, 2014, 2016). Hence, at the core of Cabral's concept of "return to the source"

is his staunch belief that: (1) there must be "critical analysis [and critical reappraisal] of African cultures in the light of the liberation movement and the demands of progress"; (2) the new culture that grows out of the collective processes and dialectics of *decolonization*, *re-Africanization*, and *national liberation* can be used as an effective weapon against colonial, neocolonial, and imperial forces; and (3) when and where culture is used as an effective weapon against colonial, neocolonial and imperial forces, the people struggling for justice, freedom, and lasting liberation are then able to nurture the development of not only a *new national culture*, but also new *ethical culture, political culture, technological culture, scientific culture*, and *popular culture* while simultaneously contributing to global human culture and civilization (Rabaka, 2017, 2020a, 2020b).

"Political Education Means Opening Their Minds, Awakening Them, and Allowing the Birth of Their Intelligence": Fanon, Radical Political Education, and Revolutionary Re-Africanization

Amilcar Cabral's radical theory and revolutionary praxis (i.e., Cabralism) consistently engaged what he called "re-Africanization." In *Return to the Source*, he famously declared: "A reconversion of minds—of mental sets—is thus indispensable to the true integration of people into the liberation movement. Such reconversion—re-Africanization, in our case—may take place before the struggle, but it is completed only during the course of the struggle" (Cabral, 1973, p. 45).

Above Cabral's concept of "return to the source" was demonstrated to be a kind of historical and cultural critical consciousness-raising, a form of radical political education, socialist reorganization, and revolutionary praxis that challenges the wretched of the earth to remain cognizant at all times of "our own situation" and "be aware of our things." "We," Cabral (1979) continued, "must respect those things of value which are useful for the future of our land, [and] for the advancement of our people" (pp. 56–57).

Clearly Cabral gathered much from Fanon, even Fanon's ambiguous offerings with regard to the re-Africanization of the wretched of the earth. Is it possible that Cabral interpreted Fanon to include what I am calling "revolutionary re-Africanization" in his—Fanon's—articulation of the people's need for decolonization? Is it plausible to contend that Cabral detected and corrected a deficit in Fanon's discourse on revolutionary decolonization because it does not sufficiently account for the need for re-Africanization both "before the struggle" and "during the course of the struggle?" An

additional question should be asked here: Are there inherent, even if not always readily apparent, cultural dimensions implied in any authentic theory of decolonization? From the Cabralist perspective, we are inclined to answer in the affirmative on all accounts.

However, whether Cabral did or did not consciously seek to build on and go beyond Fanon seems to be beside the point because, as I have demonstrated in *Forms of Fanonism*, Fanon's discourse on revolutionary decolonization seems to logically lead to questions of culture: questions such as *whose* culture, and/or *which* specific aspects of culture—precolonial, colonialist, capitalist, communist, and/or socialist culture—would be most useful in Africans' efforts to rescue, reclaim, and recreate their distinct humanity, which is to say, their *Africanité*? Africana critical theory argues that—albeit often unnamed—*revolutionary re-Africanization* has been and remains integral to radical and revolutionary Africans' answers to these questions, always and ever showing a critical aversion to colonialist and capitalist culture and, although flirting from time to time with communism and socialism, it would seem that it is the radical and revolutionary aspects of precolonial African histories, cultures, and struggles which have most consistently been at the heart of the revolutionary re-Africanization process (Rabaka, 2009). What is more, where it is widely accepted that "genuine African Renaissance won't be achieved through elite pacts and declarations but through popular struggles for deimperialization, decolonization, and democratization," Cabral and Fanon remind us that, although often unnamed in the discourse on the African Renaissance, revolutionary re-Africanization is also integral to authentic African Renaissance (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019, p. 18).

When Cabral admonishes the wretched of the earth to remain cognizant at all times of "our own situation" and "be aware of our things," his thought seems to be in direct dialog with Fanon's work. Note here the similarities between Fanonism and Cabralism, especially when we bear in mind Cabral's assertion above concerning the wretched of the earth remaining cognizant at all times of "our own situation" and "be[ing] aware of our things." Fanon declared:

> The greatest task before us is to understand at each moment what is happening in our country. We ought not to cultivate the exceptional or to seek for a hero, who is another form of leader. We ought to uplift the people; we must develop their brains, fill them with ideas, change them and make them into human beings. We once more come up against that obsession of ours – which we would like to see shared by all African politicians – about the need for effort to be well informed, for work which is enlightened and freed from its historic intellectual darkness. To hold a responsible position in an underdeveloped

> country is to know that in the end everything depends on the education of the masses, on the raising of the level of thought, and on what we are too quick to call "political teaching." (Fanon cited in Cook & Morgan, 1971, p. 79)

It would seem that what Fanon is referring to here as "political teaching" is apparently inextricable from historical and cultural teaching, and the combination of historical, cultural, and political teaching is, in fact, revolutionary re-Africanization by another name. He asserted that, "[w]e ought to uplift the people; we must develop their brains, fill them with ideas, change them and make them into human beings." In "uplift[ing] the people," in "develop[ing] their brains" and "fill[ing] them with ideas," the question of *whose* and *which* "ideas" will be employed in the "uplift" efforts remains. It is here that Fanon's implicit allusions to revolutionary re-Africanization, once again, resolutely resurface.

In "chang[ing] them"—meaning, the wretched of the earth—and "mak[ing] them into human beings," the question of which specific type or, rather, what particular kind of "human beings" does Fanon have in mind here must be raised? To be sure, as he repeatedly stated throughout *The Wretched of the Earth*, he is not advocating for the racially colonized to take Europeans or European Americans as their models. In fact, he went so far to sardonically say, "we have better things to do than to follow that same Europe." Even further, Fanon (1968) exclaimed, "[w]e today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe" (p. 312). Here Fanon is articulating another core principle of the African Renaissance, which involves the rejection of "Westernism" and acknowledgment of the fact that European cultural imperialism interrupted and colonized African indigenous knowledge, science, and technology. Powerfully speaking to this issue, African Renaissance radicals Sedibe and Tondi (2005) stated: "European imperialism interrupted and disorganized scientific and technological development of the colonized. With its sophisticated philosophies and structures European cultural imperialism made it impossible for the colonized to build upon indigenous traditions of invention and innovation that it found existing and continues to exist within some communities of the colonized" (p. 136; see also Gutto, 2006; Mungwini, 2014; Nabudere, 2006).

Fanon's explicit conception of the radical "political education" of the wretched of the earth is deeply connected to his implicit emphasis on revolutionary re-Africanization; a re-Africanization that takes Cesaire's (1972) critical "return" to "the African past," with its "communal societies," its "societies that were. . .*anti-capitalist*," its "democratic societies," its "cooperative societies, [and] fraternal societies," as its theoretical grip and

grounding point of departure (p. 23, emphasis in original). Along with Cesaire, Fanon characteristically acknowledged the innumerable "faults" of these precolonial African societies but, again similar to Cesaire, he believed that they contained and could convey views and "values that could still make an important contribution to the world" (pp. 23, 76; see also Rabaka, 2015, pp. 149–196).

Therefore, an important element of Fanon's implicit theory of revolutionary re-Africanization—a point that, as we have seen above, Cabral explicitly deepened and developed with his concept of "return to the source"—centers on *the revolutionary recreation of "Africans,"* as well as their cultures and traditions. Taking his cue from Cesaire's summoning of continental and diasporan African revolutionaries to "invent souls," Fanon's (1963) conception of radical "political education" intensely emphasized that both the party and the people should recreate and develop dialectical rapports and more critical relationships with every aspect of their cultures and respective regional and local traditions:

> Now, political education means opening their minds, awakening them, and allowing the birth of their intelligence; as Cesaire said, it is "to invent souls." To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people. In order to put all this into practice, in order really to incarnate the people, we repeat that there must be decentralization in the extreme. The movement from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top should be a fixed principle, not through concern for formalism but because simply to respect this principle is the guarantee of salvation. It is from the base that forces mount up which supply the summit with its dynamic, and make it possible dialectically for it to leap ahead. (pp. 157–158)

Fanon's implicit theory of revolutionary re-Africanization, then, is not in any way about going backward to "the African past," no matter how glorious many may believe that past to be, but it is decidedly about "dialectically. . . leap[ing] ahead" to the *post-imperialist* Pan-African future. Emphasis should be placed on a *"post-imperialist* Pan-African future" here because Fanon warned of "the pitfalls of national consciousness" and asserted that the ultimate aim of a truly revolutionary decolonization and national liberation struggle should be connected to, and inextricable from, not only the national

liberation struggles of neighboring nations, but the liberation of the entire African continent (see Fanon, 1968, pp. 148–205). The creation and spread of national consciousness is extremely important, but it should only be temporary, according to the requirements of revolutionary national liberation struggle. That being said, nationalism cannot and should not stand as a substitute for a radical political program. If the party is truly decentralized, and if the people are really provided with radical political education, then, Fanon's words—specifically, "the movement from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top should be a fixed principle"—will have been heard and, even more, these words will have been brought to life, they will have become a motive force, they will have moved, literally, *from the level of abstract ideas to the level of concrete actions*.

Nationalism elicits certain ideas and actions, where the synthesis of revolutionary Pan-Africanism with an elastic democratic socialism—of course, à la Fanonism and Cabralism, an elastic democratic socialism modified to meet the special needs of Africa and Africans—provokes other kinds of dialectical ideas and critical actions (Rabaka, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2020a). The point here is not to negate the need for national consciousness, but to remind us that national consciousness, which is an extremely important part of the dialectical process of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization, cannot and should not be confused with *social* and *political consciousness*. Once again, then, we see that the Fanonian decentralized party's program of radical political education simultaneously has cultural, social, political and economic aspects, and these combined elements of Fanon's articulation of "political education" suggest revolutionary re-Africanization. Fanon (1961) continued the caveat concerning nationalism's temporary utility and the ongoing necessity of radical political education, even after national liberation or "independence" is achieved:

> [N]ationalism, that magnificent song that made the people rise against their oppressors, stops short, falters, and dies away on the day that independence is proclaimed. Nationalism is not a political doctrine, nor a program. If you really wish your country to avoid regression, or at best halts and uncertainties, a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness. The nation does not exist in a program which has been worked out by revolutionary leaders and taken up with full understanding and enthusiasm by the masses. The nation's effort must constantly be adjusted into the general background of underdeveloped countries. The battle line against hunger, against ignorance, against poverty, and against unawareness ought to be ever present in the muscles and the intelligence of men and women. The work of the masses and their will to overcome the evils which have for centuries excluded them from the mental achievements of the past ought to be grafted

> onto the work and will of all underdeveloped peoples. On the level of underdeveloped humanity there is a kind of collective effort, a sort of common destiny. (p. 203)

Fanon deeply resonates with the discourse on the African Renaissance when he wrote: "The work of the masses and their will to overcome the evils which have for centuries excluded them from the mental achievements of the past ought to be grafted onto the work and will of all underdeveloped peoples." If this is not a major impulse of the African Renaissance then we need to, following in the footsteps of Zounmènou (2010), critically question whether what some folks are calling the African Renaissance is a "myth, mask or masquerade." The fact of the matter is that revolutionary re-Africanization, and by extension the African Renaissance, must not under any circumstances be confused with "regression." It is not an anachronistic wish to "return" Africa and Africans to their precolonial past. It is not a nostalgic nationalism or paradisal Pan-Africanism that vulgarly views Africa and Africans' precolonial past from a utopian perspective. It is not a romanticization or erasure of all of Africa and Africans' precolonial wrongs and "regressions" (More, 2002).

Quite the contrary, revolutionary re-Africanization is the Ghanaian concept of *Sankofa* put into principled practice in the process(es) of revolutionary decolonization. In essence, *Sankofa* entails taking from the past those things which are deemed to be most useful in the present with the ultimate intention of moving forward, of making positive progress. In other words, *Sankofa* boils down to *the benevolent use of knowledge from the past to positively alter the present and ensure the future* (Shabazz, 2005; Tedla, 1995, 1998; Temple, 2010; Willis, 1998). From the point of view of Africana critical theory, *Sankofa* has always been and remains at the heart of Fanon's thought and texts, especially his discourse on revolutionary decolonization. His words are haunted by, or rather, ever-weighted with the *Sankofa* concept, for instance, as when he wrote above: "We once more come up against that obsession of ours—which we would like to see shared by all African politicians—about the need for effort to be well informed, for work which is enlightened and freed from its historic intellectual darkness."

If we take Fanon at his word, then, he is unequivocally asserting that Africans, continental and diasporan Africans, should put *Sankofa* into principled practice. However, Africana critical theory is quick to contend, as continental and diasporan Africans practice *Sankofa* they should duly and diligently bear in mind Cabral's important caveat: "A people who free themselves from foreign domination will not be culturally free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the

oppressor's culture and other cultures, they return to the upwards paths of their own culture."

Therefore, as continental and diasporan Africans practice *Sankofa* they cannot put on blinders and attempt to block out the authentic advances in human culture and civilization that their oppression and exploitation has, ironically, helped to make possible. This is a hard and bitter truth, and one that does not and may never sit well with continental and diasporan Africans, but it is a truth that nonetheless must of necessity be incorporated into the contemporary practice of *Sankofa* and the discursive development of the African Renaissance. To really and truly "return" to the "upwards paths of [Africans'] own culture," to authentically engage in *Sankofa* at this point in African and world history would mean, must mean side-stepping the narrow-minded nationalists' knee-jerk reaction to everything European or non-African. This, too, is a core principle or, rather, *should become* a core principle, of the African Renaissance.

Sankofa *Redux*: Against Dehumanization and De-Africanization, for Revolutionary Decolonization and Revolutionary Re-Africanization

Inherent in the theory and praxis of *Sankofa*, actually at its heart, is a distinct dialectic. A dialectic that enables continental and diasporan Africans practicing *Sankofa* to make critical and, even more, dialectical distinctions between White supremacy and Eurocentrism, on the one hand, and Europe and other cultures' authentic contributions to human culture and civilization, on the other hand. Perhaps nowhere is this *Sankofa dialectic* more pronounced in Fanon and Cabral's discourse than in their respective radical theories and revolutionary praxes revolving around radical political education, revolutionary decolonization, and revolutionary re-Africanization. In each of their various theories and praxes, it is Fanon and Cabral's *Sankofian* conception of history, culture and liberation that distinguishes their discourse from the discourses of other radicals and revolutionaries—African, European, or otherwise.

In Fanon and Cabral's critical theory a "negative" such as colonialism must be responded to by the wretched of the earth with a "positive" (from their point of view) such as the dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization. But, as Fanon stressed in *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Toward the African Revolution* and Cabral asserted in *Revolution in Guinea* and *Return to the Source*, decolonization is only the first step toward returning the wretched of the earth to the "upwards paths of

their own culture" (Cabral, 1972b, 1973; Fanon, 1968, 1969). Deracinating the culture of the colonizer calls for the colonized to, not simply "return" to their precolonial culture, but to *de-imperialize* and revolutionize their past and present culture and adapt it in light of the needs of the national revolution and the liberation and unification of Africa in general. This is to say, in Africa decolonization without revolutionary re-Africanization is a subterfuge. It is *faux* freedom, which is not freedom by any stretch of the imagination. Here, then, we have come back to the significance of the dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization for the African Renaissance.

Fanon and Cabral's emphasis on the dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization ultimately illustrates that at the heart of imperialism in Africa, whether colonialist or capitalist, is a form of cultural aggression or, rather, cultural imperialism that is incredibly *historically significant* in that it, as observed above, racializes, colonizes, apartheidizes, and forces Africans out of their own history and into distorted and demeaning positions in the history of European imperialism—which is currently commonly called, quite simply, "European history" and which includes the tragedies and triumphs of "European America." Fanon and Cabral's emphasis on the dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization exposes the ways in which European imperialism planted the seeds of cultural destruction deep in the fertile soil of African history and culture, over time reducing Africa and Africans to mere pawns and playthings, footnotes and forgotten casualties in European history and culture. Cunningly working to insure *the complete apartheidization of Africa and Africans*, in the most anti-African and counter-revolutionary ways imaginable European imperialists made sure that those "who were loyal to the history and to the culture of the people were destroyed" (Cabral, 1973, p. 49). Africa, quite simply, ceased to be a place where one could be *authentically and unapologetically African*. If, in fact, the African Renaissance is even remotely about the "rebirth," "regeneration," and "renewal" of Africa, then any conception of the African Renaissance that does not sufficiently emphasize the dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization is actually a contribution to *the recolonization and continued de-Africanization of Africa* instead of a contribution to an authentic and unrepentant African Renaissance (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, 2020; Onwughalu & Ojakorotu, 2020; Zeleza, 2009).

Consequently, the fear, shame, alienation, and internalized *Negrophobia* that Fanon eloquently explored in *Black Skin, White Masks* is not simply something that plagues diasporan Africans. In their experience and endurance of the process of dehumanization—for what else was the African holocaust,

and the subsequent racialization and colonization of Africa?—continental Africans also experienced and endured *a process of de-Africanization*. By returning to "the upwards paths of their own culture," in other words, by simultaneously decolonizing and re-Africanizing themselves, again, "without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor's culture and other cultures," Cabral believed that post-imperialist Africa could inaugurate not only a new African, but a qualitatively new human being fundamentally opposed to, and deeply concerned about any form of imperialism, in Africa or elsewhere.

European cultural imperialism in Africa did not stop African cultural growth and development. It is important not to confuse *cultural repression* with *cultural destruction*, Cabral (1973, p. 39) contended. Even with the liquidation of anti-colonial African leaders and the incessant persecution of any African who embraced authentic African culture, as opposed to Eurocentric colonial African culture, African culture continued to evolve. In its earliest stages decolonization reveals that far from being destroyed African culture is carried on under colonialism in the sanctuaries of the villages, the schools, and in the invocation of the spirit of the ancestors, *the living-dead*. It is this repressed, persecuted and betrayed culture, this culture of resistance, this revolutionary culture that is at the core of the dialectic of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization and which must be built on by the wretched of the earth and the radicals of the African Renaissance bearing in mind what Cabral shared with us about never "underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor's culture and other cultures" and "return[ing] to the upwards paths of [our] own culture."

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