



© Anthony Bogues

Africans in the diaspora during a protest march in the Caribbean.

# 'We are an African people' Anti-colonial internationalism and black internationalism: Caribbean and African solidarities



*By Anthony Bogues*

Don't care where you come from  
As long you're a black man  
You're an African  
No mind your nationality  
You got the identity of an African.

Peter Tosh<sup>1</sup>

Black man it's time to know your history  
That it is Africa we come from  
An where we go to forward. forward  
To help the black brothers and sisters  
Who is at the frontline fighting for black liberation.

Twinkle Brothers<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Continental Africa was/is of central significance to African Diaspora politics and cultural practices for many hundreds of years. The Atlantic slave trade, in which millions of Africans were transformed from humans into captives, then into Atlantic commodities and inserted into a social system of racial slavery, was one foundation of the order that created colonial modernity. The transformation of Africans within a coercive regime of labour in which they became what the Caribbean historian, Elsa Goveia, called 'property in person' was a feature of world historical significance. Such significance has been recognised in many contemporary accepted historical

---

1 African, 1977.

2 Free Africa, 1990.

understandings that racial slavery and therefore black labour in the Americas created the foundation for the wealth of European colonial empires and America. However, there is a second significance which deserves attention. Racial slavery and colonial domination in the Caribbean, as well as racial slavery on the American mainland, established the grounds for a series of political ideas and cultural practices which are of historic political and intellectual importance. Certainly, by the early twentieth century it was impossible to think of international politics without taking into consideration Marcus Garvey's movement, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), or the various Pan-African congresses, particularly the ones which demanded the ending of European colonial domination of Africa.

Thinking through historical flows, the following can be discerned: the emergence of colonial modernity began with the European conquest of the islands and territories of the so-called, 'New World'; the construction of racial slavery and plantations; the colonial domination by direct rule of India in 1858; and continued through the colonial conquest and domination of Africa after the 1885 Berlin Conference. This configuration of colonial modernity was exemplified by the fact that by the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain ruled a quarter of the world's population. It is of course common knowledge that South Africa was integral to the processes briefly described here, since Jan van Riebeeck landed at the Cape in 1652. To put the matter differently, the formal ending of apartheid in 1994 brought to a close a historical moment which began with the voyages of Columbus in the fifteenth century to the so-called New World. This historical moment was one in which colonial power and racial white supremacy as forms of overt domination after hundreds of years of flourishing, were finally brought to heel.<sup>3</sup>

Within this historical flow there originated, as I have indicated, political ideas and theories which challenged the colonial and racial configurations of power. From within the African diasporic space, these political ideas raised conceptions about identity and liberation, while producing questions about the character of international solidarity which ran counter to the conventional global politics established by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This treaty opened up a period in European history where territorial nation-state sovereignty was a characteristic of the European political order. In this frame, conceptions of international relationships between different states occurred. What the politics of the African Diaspora did was to confront colonialism and racial power while challenging the conventional contours of how international politics were conducted. This was done in part by the construction of notions of solidarity.

African diasporic politics had many streams. There was one stream which emphasised the global common oppression of African peoples and therefore the necessity to make common cause. This was an important stream because it also

---

3 This does not mean that the legacies of these forms of domination have been eradicated. What it does mean is that overt and official forms of domination (with their various forms of ideological justification) in this period have historically ended.

attempted to deal with the issues of identity. Colonial and racial powers had scattered Africans in the West. This scattering meant that for a long time in African diasporic politics, attempts were made to practise a politics of exodus ... of return. This politics of return was, of course partly, physical but included efforts at cultural identification with Africa and the proclamation that 'We are an African people'. What this meant was that no African in the West could be free until all of Africa was free from colonial domination. This sentiment was crystallised in one of the UNIA's slogans, 'Africa for Africans, those at Home and Abroad'. Certainly, the UNIA slogan proclaimed the end of colonialism in Africa and, in the South African case, the ending of complex colonial domination, first by the Dutch and then by the British.

There was, however, another stream of African diasporic politics which at the level of international politics was the practice of various forms of black internationalism and radical anti-colonial internationalism. This stream was inclusive of Pan-Africanism; the radical political work of W.E.B. DuBois; and the radical black politics of individuals like George Padmore<sup>4</sup> and C.L.R. James.<sup>5</sup> In the 1930s, these two Caribbean political figures formed an organisation, the International African Service Bureau (IASB), which practised a black diasporic politics of internationalism that challenged the world order as it was then constituted. Typically the political claim on Africa and Africaness was one way to confront the colonial world. For the UNIA and some forms of Pan-Africanism up until 1945, Africa was a claim of identity which operated as a political claim for nationhood. For others like Padmore and James, the term African, as Brent Hayes Edwards puts it, 'marks a particular take on internationalism; a project of service ... as an insistence on self reliance and self-emancipation'.<sup>6</sup> In constructing this kind of political practice, twentieth century black, radical, diasporic political thought developed a perspective of politics in which the conception of rights

4 George Padmore was born in colonial Trinidad in 1903. He left there to study in the US and very soon became a member of the Communist Party of the US. He then went to the Soviet Union and became the leading black official of the Communist International. He broke with the Communist International in 1934 because at the time it advocated soft peddling of agitation against colonial empires. He moved to London where he first worked with C.L.R. James in the IASB. Over time he became a close associate of Kwame Nkrumah and was the main organiser for the extraordinary 5th Pan-African Congress held in 1945 in Manchester, England. From that conference the tactics for the Ghanaian independence struggles were developed. Padmore joined Nkrumah in Ghana after its political independence and was the convener of the All-African Conference in 1958 held in Ghana which debated questions of the armed struggle in Africa and the various political ways to end colonial domination in Africa. Padmore's political life still awaits a major biography, but for discussions on him and his ideas, see B. Hayes Edwards, *The Practices of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); R. Lewis and F. Baptiste eds, *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary* (Kingston: Ian Randle Press, 2009).

5 C.L.R. James was born in Trinidad in 1901. In the early 1930s, he went to England to become a writer and quickly became a major Marxist theorist. The author of the seminal book on the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, James worked with the IASB as the editor of the organisation's newspaper, *The International African Opinion*. He then left London and went to the US, where he developed an independent view on Marxism. He was also deeply involved in the movement for Caribbean federation and political independence. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he returned to the US and was instrumental in developing the programme which led to the 6th Pan-African Congress held in Tanzania in 1974. For a discussion of his political ideas, see A. Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James* (London: Pluto Press, 1997).

6 Hayes Edwards, *The Practices of Diaspora*, 303.

was based upon human solidarities.<sup>7</sup> While this conception was grounded in a notion of solidarity that Africans were all oppressed people and therefore should find ways to make common cause where possible, it was also based on the understanding that there was a link between African oppression and general colonial domination of the many peoples of the world.

Today, black diasporic politics can be divided into the pre-independence, post-independence and civil rights periods. From this periodisation, it may be discerned that in the post-independence period, black diasporic politics took two forms which deserve attention. The first was the continuation of mass protest politics against colonialism in Africa, particularly Portuguese colonialism in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique; Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in white Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe); and B.J. Vorster's apartheid regime in South Africa. These mass protests become clear when the following are examined: African Liberation Day protests; boycotts by trade unions of South African goods; divestment campaigns; and mass activity to support sporting boycotts. The other form of solidarity was at the international institutional level. Here the newly independent nations of the Caribbean in meetings of the United Nations (UN), the Commonwealth and particularly in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), moved resolution after resolution, and proposed programmes of action to end Portuguese colonialism; to end UDI and to establish the political independence of Zimbabwe; and to end the authoritarian white supremacy rule of apartheid in South Africa.

One aim of this chapter is to tell the story of both these forms of solidarity – how they interacted while sometimes occurring separately. In reviewing these, readers will see how the formal political institutional and the popular level were integral to anti-imperialist politics of the late twentieth century when a decolonial moment in Africa and the Caribbean had opened up. It should be noted, however, that this relationship between the institutional and the popular was sometimes fraught with tension. Thus, a second dimension of this story examines what happens when African liberation solidarity meant anti-imperialist politics and how some independent nations behaved in ambivalent institutional ways and had to be pushed by local popular groups formed to support African liberation in general and South African anti-apartheid struggle specifically. Therefore, while this is a story about various and complex forms of solidarity, it is also one about the politics of the African Diaspora in the Caribbean; the politics of independent Caribbean states; and in the final analysis, the story of the practice of internationalism in world politics particularly in the twentieth century. In the end it is a story which at its many turns, runs counter to the ways in which international relations are currently studied within the frameworks of realism, liberal internationalism or different kinds of power politics. Julius Nyerere once remarked that:

---

7 On this concept as central to radical black political thought, see A. Bogues, 'Radical Anti-colonial Thought, Anti-colonial Internationalism and the Politics of Human Solidarities', in R. Shilliam ed, *International Relations and Non-Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 2011), chapter 12.

There are two fundamental things that the anti-colonial liberation movement contributed to humanity. The first is simply that the suffering of a whole chunk of human beings through the actions of others was halted. The arrogance of one group of people in lording it over the human race ... was challenged and discredited ... that was a positive contribution made by the liberation struggle to all humanity.<sup>8</sup>

As readers examine the solidarity movements and acts of solidarity with the various movements for African liberation and specifically with the South African anti-apartheid movement as moments in this anti-colonial liberation movement, hopefully they will grapple with the fact that the historical process of decolonisation was a moment of world historical meaning.

### In the beginning

In 1787, the ex-slave, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, published his remarkable book, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*. The book was not only a document of freedom which re-organised and re-fashioned what has been called the 'slave narratives'; it also developed a radical theory of natural rights for the eighteenth century. For current purposes, Cugoano called for the abolition of slavery, and the ending of all colonial empires which he called a system which has a 'dreadfully perfidious method of forming settlements, and acquiring riches and territory'.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, he also called for the ending of colonialism in the Cape Colony.

This call by Cugoano opened up a trajectory of political thought in the African Diaspora which combined the concerns of specific oppression in the Americas and the Caribbean with that of ending colonial and racial power in Africa. For Cugoano, the ex-slave who had left the Caribbean island colony of Grenada and resided in London when the book was published, it was not only a matter of solidarity but rather of understanding that the system of colonial power was a global one. Secondly, the ending of this system of power required common action across conventional territorial boundaries. By the nineteenth century, many Caribbean individuals were living in African port cities and by 1904, the Cape Town census noted that there were 487 persons of Caribbean descent living in the Cape.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it was no surprise that the individual who many considered to be the founding father of Pan-Africanism and the general secretary of the 1st Pan-African Congress held in 1901, Henry Sylvester Williams (a Trinidadian by birth), left London and by 1903 was a lawyer in the Cape.<sup>11</sup> In March 1904, Williams chaired a meeting to protest the conditions of the

8 J. Nyerere, *New Internationalist Magazine*, no. 309 (1999).

9 Q. Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, ed. V. Carretta (London: Penguin, 1999), 65.

10 For a discussion of this, see University of the West Indies Library, Mona, Kingston, Special Collection: A. Cogley, 'Far Away from Home: The Origins and Significance of the Afro-Caribbean Community in South Africa', Unpublished paper, nd.

11 For an extensive biography of Williams, see M. Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa and the African Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2010).

coloured people in the then Transvaal and along with others he founded the South African Citizens Defence Committee. He left South Africa in 1905 but there were other individuals from the Caribbean and the United States (US) who advocated politics which combined continental Africa and African diasporic interests, including Martin Delany, Bishop Turner, John Bruce, and of course, Edward Blyden.

Two points should be noted here. The first is that the presence of West Indians and also African Americans in Africa and particularly seamen, should open up another way of thinking about the so called 'Black Atlantic' movement by the African Diaspora between different sites/venues. Readers should think not just of geographic movements but flows of ideas between Africa and the Americas. Secondly, within these flows new political ideas were generated. In this case many ideas generated at one site then criss-crossed, in a process of 'motion of the notion',<sup>12</sup> landing and re-adapting themselves. So, while there was movement of people from seamen to individuals like Blyden, there was also a back and forth flow of political ideas. These ideas constituted a black radical tradition of political thought for which the political idea of solidarity was a key notion.<sup>13</sup> In the early twentieth century, no movement and set of political ideas exemplified this better than the Garvey movement and the UNIA.<sup>14</sup>

The political history of the UNIA need not be recounted here. However, it is known that by the mid-1920s the movement was the single largest and most important black organisation on the world stage. Africa was central to the UNIA's programme. As Tony Martin notes, 'Garvey saw Africa essentially as the only place where black people could launch a successful bid for equality with other nations and races'.<sup>15</sup> The UNIA's anti-colonial influence was so strong that in 1923, the British colonial authorities banned Garvey from some African colonies when he announced he would undertake a world tour which would include Africa. Of course the UNIA's newspaper, *The Negro World*, was banned in many colonies. Martin notes, however, that the UNIA's success in Africa was most spectacular in South Africa. Martin reports that there were UNIA delegates at the 1927 Non-European Conference in Kimberley. He also points out the relationship between the UNIA and the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU)<sup>16</sup> and the African National Congress (ANC). What should be noted here is that many UNIA supporters in South Africa were not just West Indians or continental Africans, but were also African Americans. The political work of the Garvey movement and its singular focus on Africa helped to create the international conditions for other diasporic black radicals to pursue politics of solidarity which would always integrate Africa with the specific concerns of the African Diaspora.

12 The phrase is that of the African American intellectual, Geri Augusto.

13 For a discussion of the black radical tradition, see C. Robinson, *Black Marxism* (London: Zed, 1983); and A. Bogues, *Black Heretics and Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

14 For a documentary history of the UNIA, see R. Hill, ed., *Marcus Garvey and the UNIA Papers, Volumes 1–11* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).

15 T. Martin, *Race First* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 113.

16 Martin, *Race First*, informs us that Clements Kadalie of the ICU said that two members of the leadership of the union were West Indians.

Other Caribbean figures who came after Garvey also had this preoccupation with Africa. For example, Padmore, while contesting Garvey's politics, drew from the organisational patterns which the UNIA operated. As Padmore and others developed different forms of Black Internationalism distinctive from that of the UNIA, they had to consider Garvey's work. With regard to South Africa, Padmore was clear and over time would enunciate an original political perspective on South Africa. In his book, *The Life of Negro Toilers*,<sup>17</sup> he recounts the imperial domination of the continent. In his description of this domination he highlights South Africa, noting that 'the Union of South Africa is the most important section of this part of the continent', and he states further that,

politically, the country is under the complete domination of English and Boer imperialists, who exploit the native population in the most brutal manner. In order to do this the South African bourgeoisie have imposed upon the native population what is known as Reserve and Compound systems, together with a number of repressive anti-labor and racial laws.<sup>18</sup>

For Padmore and many others, apartheid in South Africa was a special form of domination combining all the ways which colonial and racial power operated. By the time he left the Comintern, Padmore had developed an analysis that the form of domination which operated in South Africa was what he called 'colonial fascism'. He writes as follows in a chapter describing this phenomenon:

Here, as in no other country in the world, a racial minority lords it autocratically over a majority ... South African whites do not even give lip-service to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights ... Long before the world heard of Hitler, prominent South African leaders expounded their 'herrenvolk' doctrine.<sup>19</sup>

This critical analysis of the domination of white power in South Africa, created a new political category. Later on, many black radicals, including Amie Cesarie, would point out the links between the emergence of Nazism in Europe and the ways in which German colonialism operated in Namibia (then South West Africa) during its colonial occupation of that country.<sup>20</sup> By calling white domination in South Africa 'colonial fascism', Padmore was suggesting that the form of domination in South Africa was so extreme that it required people to pay special attention. He and others were to give it this attention in one of the most important nodal moments of black radical international politics in the mid-twentieth century, namely the 5th Pan-African Congress held in Manchester, England, in 1945.

17 G. Padmore, *The Life and Struggle of Negro Toilers* (Hollywood: Sun Dance Press, 1971). This book was the result of an international conference of black workers which Padmore organised in Hamburg in 1930. As far as is known, this was the first such conference organised for black workers.

18 *Ibid.*, 9–10.

19 G. Padmore, *Africa: Britain's Third Empire* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 30.

20 For a recent book which documents this process, see D. Olusoga and C. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).



The 5th Pan-African Congress marked a pivotal moment in the decolonisation process and the political history of the twentieth century. The Congress brought together political activists, trade unionists, political figures and individuals who were deeply concerned with anti-colonial freedom. Organised by Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah, the congress became the venue at which the tactics, general strategy and methods of constitutional decolonisation were worked out. After the conference, Padmore edited the published programme of action of the conference, *Colonial and ... Coloured Unity: A Programme of Action*.<sup>21</sup> The programme covered the entire black world, with special attention paid to racism in Britain; imperialism in North and West Africa; the Caribbean; Ethiopia and the Black Republics; and of course 'oppression in South Africa'. The South African writer Peter Abrahams, who was closely associated with the congress, wrote the summary of the congress in Padmore's book. He notes:

This Subject Peoples' Conference was largely an exploratory gathering ... its success and the warm response to the World Pan-African Congress and officially organized Asian Relations Conference in India, bring international Colonial and Coloured unity in sight. We see, then that the colonial struggle has entered a new phase, a militant phase. [This report] constitutes the programme upon which the struggle for national liberation and social emancipation of the Colonial and Coloured peoples will be based, a struggle which must be fought and won before we can establish the Century of the Common Man.<sup>22</sup>

The political thinking of the conference was shaped by anti-colonial global politics but it was felt that action against the colonial empires should be international and concerted. This struggle for decolonisation, the conference argued, was a historic one which would shape the twentieth century in a specific way. It would place on the global political agenda what the conference report called the 'common man'. Thus, this struggle was also not only about political independence and against racial power but was about the social transformation of colonial societies. It is an important point because later anti-colonial political thought, for example the work of Frantz Fanon and that of the national liberation movements in Africa, would further elaborate on this matter.<sup>23</sup> When the conference turned to South Africa, the session under the chairmanship of W.E.B. DuBois heard reports from Peter Abrahams and Marko Hlubi. Both recounted the brutalities of the white supremacist regime and Hlubi called upon 'brothers everywhere to help ... break the bonds which shackle ... to the white *Herrenvolk* masters'.<sup>24</sup> Abrahams noted in his report that there was '100 per cent

21 G. Padmore, ed., *History of the Pan-African Congress* (London: Hammersmith Books, 1945).

22 *Ibid.*, 61.

23 Any examination of the political programmes of the African national liberation movements (including the ANC) in the mid-twentieth century would reveal this preoccupation with social transformation as part of the national liberation and anti-colonial process.

24 Padmore, *History of the Pan-African Congress*, 61.

sympathy and support expressed to the South African people by representatives from the West Indies and other colonies'.<sup>25</sup> The final conference resolution on South Africa called for the following:

- Political equality for all South Africans over the age of 21 at all levels of government, central and local;
- Compulsory free education and school uniforms for all children up to age of 16, with free meals and books where necessary;
- Freedom of speech; full equal rights to all citizens regardless of race colour or sex and revision of the land question in accordance with the needs of the Africans.

The report on South Africa ended with the following words: 'This Congress regards the struggle of our brothers in South Africa as an integral part of the common struggle for national liberation throughout Africa'.<sup>26</sup> The conference was organised by West Indians and continental Africans who were then residing in the colonial metropolis of London. They made it clear that the struggle in South Africa was pivotal to anti-colonial freedom and could not be separated from the general national liberation struggles. A few years later in Paris in 1956, there was another nodal moment in twentieth-century black literary cultural and political history when the first Writers and Black Artists Conference was held. Taken together, these two conferences to my mind created a series of political and intellectual platforms which shaped African and African diasporic intellectual and political life well into the twentieth century.

As we reflect upon this, we should record how this congress was also a seminal moment in political and intellectual history with deep reverberations. The moment was one of those events that would shake the political frames of many during this period.<sup>27</sup> The Atlantic slave trade had created an African Diaspora. Colonial power had conquered many nations and created a world of subject peoples. In this process, white-dominated South Africa was an exemplar of these forces. As the national liberation and the decolonisation process gained momentum and achieved some success, the political status of South Africa remained unchanged. By the time political independence in the Caribbean was achieved in the post-1960s, the apartheid regime was still firmly intact. Solidarity with the struggle to dismantle and overthrow apartheid therefore became unfinished business. With political independence, new international forums were opened in which this solidarity work could occur. Independent nation states were now, if they wished, in a position to negotiate on the international terrain in organisations like the UN as well as the organisations founded by the these newly independent nations, such as the NAM. It is this dimension of the story that I will now discuss, paying specific attention to the newly politically

---

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, 105.

27 There was another such moment in the early 1960s which shaped the future of African politics and had a profound impact upon the African Diaspora. The murder of Patrice Lumumba was a moment in the process of decolonisation which like a flash combined all the forces which later came into play with attempts to reverse the national liberation movements in many African countries.

independent Caribbean states. As I do so, I will summarise in a schematic form the different periods of solidarity. In an earlier phase, the politics of African Diaspora considers Africa as a place of return for an exiled African population. In the next phase these politics shift and African political independence becomes central to black liberation in general. This is followed by a phase in which the anti-colonial struggle is understood as a global one. The next stage is the moment of formal decolonisation when many Caribbean states became formally independent, along with the political independence of some African countries. In this stage the late Caribbean historian, Walter Rodney, argued: ‘Pan-Africanism (and I would argue here, black internationalism) is in so far as it seeks the unity of peoples living in a large number of juridically independent states ... simultaneously a brand of nationalism.’<sup>28</sup> This was a tension which emerged forcefully in the solidarity work of many Caribbean states. It is to this story that I now turn.

### Decolonisation and transnational solidarity

The decolonisation anti-colonial moment opened a new period in twentieth-century global history. The collapse of various colonial empires saw the emergence of new nation states which transformed international organisations like the UN, creating the possibilities for new spaces in which an alternative practice of international politics could occur. The decolonisation moment, however, also had to contend with the emergence of the international politics of the Cold War. It is in such a context that the Bandung Moment was formed. In April 1955, two years before the formal political independence of Ghana, a group of 29 leaders from former colonies in Asia and Africa met and outlined a series of principles primarily for the practice of international relations in a world where various colonial empires were on the wane. At the core of these principles was the ‘recognition of the similarity of the purpose and unity of action amongst oppressed peoples to address their common problems and to take an active role in changing the existing world order’.<sup>29</sup>

The Bandung Conference was the precursor to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In September 1961, the first NAM conference was held in Belgrade, in the former Yugoslavia. The major concerns of the conference were shaped by the events of the times; East–West conflict and the rising tempo of national liberation struggles in Vietnam, Algeria and Angola. The meeting was also convened against the background of the murder of Patrice Lumumba. Three major commitments emerged from the Belgrade meeting, namely:

- Peace and disarmament;
- The right of self-determination for all colonial subjects and the ending of systems of racial domination;
- Economic equality on a global scale and the re-organisation of the international economy taking into consideration the structural terms of this economy.<sup>30</sup>

28 W. Rodney, ‘Pan-Africanism and Neo-Colonialism in Africa’, *The Black Liberator*, 2, 3 (1974–75), 257.

29 A.W. Singham and S. Hume, *Non Alignment in the Age of Alignments* (London: Zed, 1986), 67.

30 On this conference, see *ibid.*, 14–16.

Over the next few years, these commitments became central to the NAM's international politics. But I will focus on the issue of self-determination.

In 1961, all the English-speaking Caribbean countries were still formal colonies. Jamaica became politically independent in 1962; Guyana's move towards independence was troubled by external American intervention and it became independent in 1966. Trinidad and Barbados quickly followed Jamaica in becoming independent. Prior to political independence there was an attempt to construct a political federation of the region as the political vehicle through which independence would be achieved. But, like many other initiatives for federation as part of the decolonisation process in other parts of the British empire, the attempt was unsuccessful.<sup>31</sup> However, despite not yet being independent, Jamaica, which had achieved internal self-government on the way to full political independence, declared a ban on South African products coming into the country. A year later, once politically independent, the new government continued that ban. In the 1960s, as Caribbean governments became politically independent, whether or not they supported the West or held an anti-imperialist stance, they opposed the apartheid regime in international forums. Although they were members of the NAM in the early years of political independence, the organisation was not considered central to the foreign policy platform of many Caribbean governments. When it became more relevant to the practices of foreign policy in the 1970s, two issues were of paramount concern. The first was southern Africa (Namibia, the Smith regime in Zimbabwe, and the Vorster regime in South Africa). The second preoccupation was the character and structure of the world economy.

One of the NAM's first major activities was to recognise the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as full members of the organisation. The case of Namibia (then South West Africa) was an important one. A former German colony, it had been a mandated territory in 1920 by the League of Nations to be administered by South Africa. However, the territory was illegally occupied by South Africa and despite many international rulings, including by the International Court of Justice, the occupation continued. The NAM immediately focused on Namibia because all the international rulings demanded that South Africa, governed by a white minority, should leave the territory. Many independent nations felt that this was a crucial issue because Namibia was considered as one of the lynchpins of the apartheid regime's continued white domination in South Africa itself. The early 1970s therefore became a period in which the NAM pressured the international community on this issue. The matter became even more important between 1974 and 1975, when the territories of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Mozambique, São Tomé and Angola achieved political independence. With Smith and Vorster as the two remaining pillars of colonial and

---

31 The process of decolonisation in the Anglophone Caribbean was a two-staged affair triggered by the regional workers rebellion of 1937–1938. In the aftermath of the rebellion and the formation of anti-colonial nationalist movements, Britain agreed to a two-step process in which the first was universal adult suffrage and political equality with internal self government. However, foreign affairs and defence remained in the hands of Britain. The second stage was formal decolonisation and full independence.

racial power in southern Africa, the apartheid regime now had to intensify its political tactics of securing its hold on power. These tactics included destabilisation of the newly independent regimes. In an attempt to resist these efforts, the NAM pressed within the UN in 1973 to have SWAPO declared as the legitimate representative of the Namibian people. In doing so, the NAM had to fight the veto power of France, Britain and the US. By August 1976, at the NAM's 5th conference, priority was given to the national liberation movements in Africa. One part of the summit declaration of the conference read as follows:

The emancipation of Africa, the ending of racial discrimination against people of African origin all over the world, the protection of Africa from the rivalries of external powers, the de-nuclearization of Africa, *and international cooperation for the economic and social development of Africa, should not be merely regional or continental concerns but the priorities of the Non-Aligned Movement and of the United Nations.*<sup>32</sup>

This focus on Africa was the result of a push at the time by African nations often with President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, taking the lead. The push was fully supported by Caribbean governments headed by two Caribbean political figures, namely: Forbes Burnham of Guyana and Michael Manley of Jamaica. In a 1977 address to the International Conference in support of the peoples of Zimbabwe and Namibia, held in Maputo, Manley noted that while the 'world fiddles with Zimbabwe and Namibia, the ultimate villain of the piece, South Africa, remains largely unscathed'.<sup>33</sup> He continued:

As part of the overall strategy to liberate Zimbabwe and Namibia, the power and the influence of Pretoria obviously cannot be ignored. We repudiate as dangerous, short sighted and ultimately counter-productive all attempts at tactical accommodation with South Africa.<sup>34</sup>

It is clear that Manley was arguing for a perspective which had as its central feature the liberation of the entire southern African region of which the apartheid regime was the lynchpin. He called for the ending of all military ties with the Vorster regime; the severing of all economic ties; the severing of all cultural contacts; and the mobilisation of international opinion against the apartheid regime. Finally, he advocated

giving full political, moral, financial and other material support to those movements which have been established by the indigenous people of South Africa, and which have been recognised by the OAU for the liberation of their homeland.<sup>35</sup>

32 Singham and Hume, *Non Alignment in the Age of Alignments*, 286–287 [emphasis added].

33 M. Manley, 'Freedom, Justice, Majority Rule Now' (Kingston: Agency for Public Information, 1977), 3.

34 *Ibid.*, 10.

35 *Ibid.*, 14.

At the same conference, Manley announced that in support of the armed struggle in southern Africa both Jamaica and Guyana had offered volunteers, 'to fight alongside the liberation forces'.<sup>36</sup> Although it seems that these volunteers never served, Caribbean governments developed a programme of training and education for students from Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. These programmes were developed in the fields of nursing, university education and some technical areas. In some Caribbean countries the presence of these individuals created a boon for local anti-apartheid activity. We should not leave Manley's speech without noting his political analysis on the centrality of South Africa to the historical process of decolonisation. Observing that the world was 'witnessing the death throes of the colonial era', Manley warned against the international community negotiating too soft with Pretoria. He and other third world political leaders at the time felt that South Africa was the last major bastion of formal juridical white supremacy and that the regime was trying to halt its 'death throes'. As such he felt that the 'world was on trial'. Time and time again acting in concert with NAM, Caribbean leaders pushed for alacrity in the enforcement of international positions already agreed. As late as 1985, Trinidad and Tobago along with other countries, drafted Resolution 566 submitted to the UN Security Council, urging member countries of the UN to take measures against South Africa. These included the stopping of new investments; the prohibition of the sale of Kruger rands; and of course, sporting restrictions.

It is safe to say that in the aftermath of political independence, the cockpit of activity of Caribbean governments' solidarity with the struggles against apartheid circled around working in the UN and pushing an agenda of national liberation for Africa in the NAM. This was a different kind of solidarity from that which had emerged and was practised by Caribbean figures in an earlier period. There was also the commitment by some governments to the support of the armed struggle of national liberation in the southern African region. The practise of this form of solidarity may be called a transnational solidarity. It rested on the idea that national liberation was a human right and that political sovereignty was the frame from which newly independent nations could make their voices heard on the world stage. While calling for political sovereignty and the ending of racial oppression, this form of solidarity often operated outside the boundaries of conventional norms which governed international relations and created consternation for major powers. One consequence is that when some Caribbean governments acted in defiance of major powers, they felt the wrath of American power. No case illustrates this more clearly than that of the 1970s South African intervention in Angola.

### **The struggle that binds**

When the apartheid regime began its military incursions into Angola, first by backing Jonas Savimbi and the National Union for the Independence of Angola (UNITA) and

---

36 Ibid

then sending in its own army, as to be expected there was great consternation especially amongst African countries that operated as frontline states. The independence of Angola alongside that of Mozambique troubled the apartheid regime since it now meant that South Africa would be encircled by regimes openly hostile to apartheid. In response, the destabilisation of some of the newly independent countries, particularly Angola and Mozambique, became South Africa's policy. With regard to Angola, the backing of UNITA was considered a necessary military tactic by the apartheid regime. In response to South African backed military tactics, which further enveloped the country in a civil war, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola – Partido do Trabalho (MPLA) sought Cuban military assistance. In his unpublished autobiographical notes, Manley picks up the story and writes:

In December 1975, Kissinger was on a short holiday in Jamaica ... as a courtesy, I invited him to lunch at Jamaica House. By coincidence, the news had recently broken of a build-up of the Cuban army in Angola ... apart from Kissinger and myself the only other luncheon guest was Jamaica's foreign minister, Dudley Thompson. As the main course was served Kissinger with disarming casualness said he wished to raise an issue which was likely to come to a vote in the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Secretary of State made it clear that he was most unhappy about this turn of events in Africa and wanted me to promise not to vote in favour of Cuban intervention. He went on to say, with every appearance of pragmatic understanding, that US-Jamaica relations could accommodate an abstention but that a vote in support of Cuba's action would not be viewed with favour. I pointed out that the whole situation in Southern Africa involving apartheid and the illegal occupation of Namibia by South African force of arms was one which Jamaica took seriously. After lunch Kissinger and I withdrew to the living room for a final coffee ... as suddenly as his earlier introduction of Angola [he] mentioned a \$100 million loan which Jamaica had recently broached in Washington. Kissinger said he knew of the proposal.<sup>37</sup>

In the end, Jamaica voted to support the Cuban troops in Angola. The \$100 million loan never appeared and a chain of events occurred from that moment onwards which destabilised the Manley regime. In a public speech in April 1976, recounting the story but in much less detail, Manley stated that his reason for voting in support of Cuban troops in Angola was:

It is the opinion of people like myself and Nyerere that if South Africa had succeeded (and they had got 700 miles into Angola at one stage) that our cause would have been set back the rest of this century, probably 50 years.<sup>38</sup>

37 Extract from the notes of Michael Manley's unpublished autobiography.

38 Michael Manley, Speech to the people of Montego Bay, 7 April 1976.

For Manley and others, the issue of Cuban troops in Angola was not about the politics of the Cold War but rather about the ways in which the apartheid regime was seeking to maintain itself and reverse successful independence struggles.

For Henry Kissinger and others the apartheid regime had become a bastion against Soviet Communism. Cuba, in Kissinger's eyes, was a pawn of the Soviet Union, never mind that they had acted in Angola without the prior consent of the USSR. For Kissinger this move on the part of a small nation was outside the game plan of the chess game between two superpowers within the context of twentieth century Cold War politics. The Jamaica decision and its consequences exemplifies the primary concerns of the NAM and the huge differences at the time between many Third World countries and major powers. The Jamaican decision ran counter to the then accepted norms of the practise of international relations based on big power politics and the country and others were made to feel the consequences.

For example, the Barbados government had agreed that the Cuban planes carrying the troops to Angola could refuel at the main airport in Bridgetown. In October 1976, Cubana Airlines flight 455 was blown out of the skies over the west coast of Barbados by a bomb placed on the plane by anti-Castro exiles. Two things should be noted here. Firstly, that acts of solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement and African national liberation movements often went against the international policy of many Western governments. Secondly, that for many Caribbean governments, Western domination of the world after decolonisation meant that there was often tacit support in some Western quarters for the apartheid regime buttressed by a view of black incapacity for self-government held by many in high policy positions. In addition, there was the crucial question of Western investments. All these were often unspoken assumptions and were only challenged with the disinvestment campaign.

It should also be noted that besides the actions of governments, there were individuals who played a major role in the solidarity movement with South Africa. One of these individuals in Caribbean governments who played such a role was Dudley Thompson.<sup>39</sup> In 1979, in a speech delivered to the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, Manley noted that the committee was honouring six individuals, namely: Henry Sylvester Williams of Trinidad; Dantes Bellegrade of Haiti; George Padmore of Trinidad; Frantz Fanon of Martinique; Jose Marti of Cuba; and Marcus Garvey of Jamaica. He went on to observe that imperialism was the root of apartheid and that it was a lie for the West to argue that the 'choice in Southern Africa [was] between stability and communism'. He ended his speech by noting: 'We in the Caribbean have consistently demonstrated our commitment to the cause of liberty and to Africa.'<sup>40</sup> It was this commitment to Africa which would reveal itself in myriad ways at the level of the ordinary person.

39 The late Dudley Thompson has been recognised as a leading Caribbean figure with a deep interest in Africa. He was part of the defence team for Jomo Kenyatta; and was awarded an OAU medal for being a 'legend of Africa'. See D. Thompson and M. Thompson, *From Kingston to Kenya: The Making of a Pan-Africanist Lawyer* (Kingston: Majority Press, 1993); and R. Johnson, *Fighting for Africa: The Pan-African Contributions of Ambassador Dudley Thompson and Bill Sutherland* (Maryland, DC: University Press of America, 2011).

40 M. Manley, 'Address at Special Session of UN Special Committee against Apartheid to Pay Tribute to Caribbean Leaders for their Contribution to the Struggle against Apartheid', 22 May 1979, Kingston, Jamaica. Copy in my possession.



## The grassroots

At the level of the newly politically independent Caribbean state, the centre of activity with regard to solidarity for African national liberation struggles and the anti-apartheid struggle seemed to be pushing the international system to pay attention to the structures of white domination of South and southern Africa. Hence, a policy motivated in part by a strong sense of the historical impetus of anti-colonialism and what might be called its unfinished business, at the level of the popular, was required and the matter of solidarity became an integral element of local radical politics in the post-colonial period. This meant that often there were conflicts between governments and popular organisations about the character of support for African liberation. The level of the popular solidarity with African liberation struggles could be divided into two currents. One current in particular, Rastafari, considered the African struggle as the primary site of liberation for black freedom. The following example will suffice.

A few years prior to Caribbean political independence, a group of young black radicals in Jamaica, influenced by Rastafari, black nationalism and the Cuban revolution, attempted to overthrow the colonial state by armed struggle. The rebellion, known today as the Henry Rebellion, was unsuccessful. In planning the armed revolt the group had written a letter to Fidel Castro in which they offered to turn over to him the governing of Jamaica after they defeated the colonial state. In turn they asked the Cuban government for ships and arms which would be used to launch a campaign to end colonial domination in Africa. The rebels claimed that they were not interested in Jamaica as their home but wished to return to Africa.<sup>41</sup> This group represented a current in Jamaican politics for whom Africa was home. Considering themselves to be in physical exile, the group was profoundly shaped by the political and religious thought of Rastafari and understood solidarity as support for Africa as homeland. In this perspective, struggles in Jamaica were nothing more than a staging ground for the real struggle on the African continent. But, as is typical in politics, there was no homogeneity and some groups affiliated to Rastafari advocated liberation for both Jamaica and Africa. These groups, like the Rastafari Movement Association (RMA), advocated the end of neo-colonial domination in Jamaica and white supremacy in Africa, in particular South Africa.<sup>42</sup> Alongside these groups were active popular organisations and individuals who supported the African national liberation movements and the anti-apartheid struggle as specific instances of anti-imperialist politics. All this makes the story of Caribbean solidarity with African liberation movements a complicated one. It is a story in which the actions of ordinary individuals as well as groups outside the formal political party processes played key roles. Thus, while post-independence governments played a vital role in international affairs, ordinary popular groups also played important and often crucial roles, pushing many governments to be consistent.

41 See Bogues, *Black Heretics*, for a discussion of this rebellion; and B. Meeks, *Narratives of Resistance* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2001).

42 The leader of this group was Ras Disiliva. Another key individual of this grouping was the extraordinary publicist and editor of the newspaper, *Rasta Voice*, Ras Historian.

## Anti-apartheid committees

In many Caribbean nations, a plethora of anti-apartheid committees were established. In Jamaica, there were three such committees that will receive attention. Firstly, there was the African Liberation Day Committee (ALDC). The first African liberation day march took place in 1972 and was organised by Roderick 'Pilot' Francis, a figure whose commitment to Pan-Africanism in Jamaican politics was legendary. A sea pilot by profession, 'Pilot' as he was called, had in 1945 organised an event in which funds were raised to send a Jamaican delegate to the 1945 conference in Manchester. After the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, he organised what was described in the local newspaper as a 'monster' meeting in Kingston, the island's capital city. There was also mass student protest against the massacre held by the students of the University of the West Indies. In 1972, 'Pilot' organised the African liberation march as the continuation of his political activity in support of Africa.<sup>43</sup> According to reports, the march was a small success and led to the formation of another group. Francis himself formed the Pan-African Secretariat to facilitate his Pan-African political activity. Others, including the journalist and writer, Beverley Hamilton, formed the ALDC. The Pan-African Secretariat became the body through which a relationship was built with elements of the African American movement who had turned their attention to working on the 6th Pan-African Congress held in Tanzania in 1974.<sup>44</sup> The year before, 'Pilot' was appointed a member of the temporary secretariat of the 6th Pan-African Congress Planning Committee. The Jamaican secretariat quickly became the clearing house for news on Africa, with priority given to news about southern Africa and in particular South Africa. This focus on news was part of an educational campaign waged by the secretariat in which a magazine, *Domiabra*, was produced and the radio air waves were saturated judiciously with Pan-African themed time slots.<sup>45</sup> The secretariat also held frequent public meetings.<sup>46</sup>

If the Pan-African Secretariat became a clearing house for regular news on Africa, the ALDC became the umbrella organisation in general support of African national liberation. The ALDC seemed to have been formed as a result of a call by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church for all African support groups in Jamaica to unite. This was an important call. Ethiopia has always had a special place in the imagination of the African Diaspora. The formation of Rastafari in Jamaica in the late 1930s was a nodal moment in twentieth-century black cultural politics. And there was of course the emergence in South Africa of various forms of African Christian practices which

43 This effort was part of a Caribbean-wide initiative in which the Guyanese political personality, Eusi Kaywana, played a leading role.

44 The story of this congress is recounted in A. Bogue, 'C.L.R. James and Black Radicalism', *Critical Arts*, December 2011.

45 Note that the South African writer and journalist Peter Abrahams was perhaps the most consistent radio voice at this time. He used radio commentary to educate his listeners on the situation in South Africa. He made Jamaica his home in 1956. See P. Abrahams, *The Black Experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: An Autobiography and Meditation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).

46 In 1999, Kam-Au Ron Amen wrote an honours thesis (at the University of West Indies, Mona), on the life of Roderick Francis. A great deal of the information here is drawn from this unpublished work.

were called 'Ethiopianism'.<sup>47</sup> This meant that the church had a certain cache which many groups could not ignore. Thus it was unsurprising that several groups answered the unity call. These included UNIA; the African Studies Association (a group of individuals interested in the study of Africa); United Africa; and the Mystic Revelation of Rastafari (a musical group led by musician Cedric Brooks with the master repeater Rastafarian drummer, Count Ossie). Brooks became the first coordinator of the ALDC and in 1982, Hamilton, became the first formal chairperson.<sup>48</sup>

The organisation's initial focus was on southern Africa and the general African liberation struggle. Its campaign modalities were marches and various public educational forums. It paid special attention to cultural and musical activities and produced concerts in support of African liberation. To give an example of the ALDC's activities, in 1988, it planned the following events to mark 25 May, the date observed annually for African liberation. The day before, on 24 May, there was a public forum focusing on South Africa with the featured speaker being Cecil Abrahams, the then president of the National Association of South Africans in Canada. On 25 May, the ALDC organised a cultural evening of music, poetry, dance and African fashions along with the poet Mutubaruka. On the following day, Abrahams delivered a public lecture to school children and this was followed on 28 May, by a special workshop on African liberation.

It is clear from all these events that the ALDC's central thrust was that of public education. This core activity, I would argue, resulted from the organisation's view that although Jamaica was a majority black country, political independence had not shifted its cultural symbolic order in a profound way and significant residues of black inferiority remained in the island's dominant symbolic order. Therefore the preoccupation on Africa was twofold. Firstly, it was to call attention to the liberation struggles in Africa; and secondly, it was to educate the *Jamaican population as an African population*. Hence the emphasis placed on fashion and cultural practices. The organisation's work was fairly well received in the public domain with active support from grassroots participation and it became a leading African organisation in the island.

The ALDC also paid special attention to South African students who were sent to Jamaica for technical training and invited many of them to give talks at educational forums. Today, the organisation continues to function in a much reduced form. In 2009, three African missions accredited to Jamaica, South Africa, Nigeria and Senegal worked with the ALDC to celebrate Africa day in Jamaica. It should be noted that the programmatic character of the committee's work has shifted since the ending of apartheid and the achievement of political independence in South Africa. Today, while working with African diplomatic missions to celebrate Africa Day, the ALDC

47 For a discussion of the attitude of the colonial authorities and how they viewed John L. Dube's relationship to this movement, see H. Hughes, *First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011). There are dissimilarities between Ethiopianism in Africa and the Caribbean, but it is safe to say that this stream of black politico-religious thinking can be said to belong to a current of black prophetic tradition.

48 Interview with Beverly Hamilton, conducted by Anthony Bogues, Kingston, Jamaica, 18 May 2011.

has also focused on issues linked to racial slavery and its legacies in the Caribbean in 2004, on the bi-centenary of the Haitian revolution. In these ways the committee attempts to remain steadfast to its initial objectives.

### The Jamaica Anti-Apartheid Movement

In politics the centrality of a particular struggle often becomes so singular that it defines the politics of a period. For many Jamaicans, the struggle against apartheid was one such struggle. Many Jamaicans might not have been aware of the various nuances of the African liberation struggles but they were clear about South Africa and its significance for global politics and African freedom in general. A consequence of this clarity was that various progressive groups attempted to position themselves in relation to South Africa. In the early 1980s, one such group was the Workers Party of Jamaica (WPJ). Formed in the late 1970s as a Marxist-Leninist party, the WPJ saw the Jamaican struggle against imperialism as part of a worldwide struggle against imperial domination. It gave critical support to the Manley regime in the late 1970s while attempting to develop its own independent political base. The WPJ's initial political programme did not pay any special attention to the struggle against apartheid other than the usual support. However, in the early 1980s, Rupert Lewis, the well-known Garvey scholar and at the time a leading member of the party, returned from a tenure in Prague. There he had come into contact with leading members of the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). On his return to Jamaica, along with others he formed the Jamaica Anti-Apartheid Movement (JAM). Meeting regularly as a committee, JAM attempted to carve out a political space for itself in Jamaica, focusing on the anti-apartheid struggle. Its organising modalities were those of public education and maintaining a vigilant stance on the issue of sanctions. Using the contacts made in Prague, the committee invited ANC speakers to the island, held public forums and used the radio programmes to educate the Jamaican public about the struggles against apartheid.<sup>49</sup> It worked closely with the Jamaica Council for Human Rights, then led by Flo O'Connor, and argued that the lack of basic rights for black South Africans was a human rights issue. Over time, O'Connor emerged as the central figure of the organisation, becoming a champion of the anti-apartheid cause in Jamaica.<sup>50</sup> JAM also produced a newsletter.

While JAM worked with other groups, it saw its focus as primarily on South Africa rather than a general attention to Africa. In other words, for many of the other groups, the Pan-African Secretariat and the ALDC Africa as a political and cultural force was critical to creating an alternative symbolic order for Jamaica in the post-independence period. For JAM, what was important was solidarity with the ANC and the various movements in South Africa at that time. One consequence of this focus was that in

49 Interview with Rupert Lewis, conducted by Anthony Bogues, Kingston, Jamaica, 19 May 2011.

50 The two women who were central to the anti-apartheid and southern African liberation causes in Jamaica were Beverly Hamilton and Flo O'Connor.

the early 1990s, when the anti-apartheid struggle shifted gears, JAM could not sustain its organisation.

In addition to JAM and other organisations, many individuals and cultural and religious organisations played a critical outreach role. In particular, the Jamaica Council of Churches formally affiliated to the World Council of Churches and the African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica. The latter became a site for studying African cultural retentions in Jamaica and a space for academic discussions on these matters. Paying special attention to an outreach programme for high schools, the institute offered many educational programmes on South Africa.<sup>51</sup>

In 1991, Nelson Mandela visited Jamaica to thank the government and people for their support in the anti-apartheid struggle. In the island's national stadium, he made it clear that Jamaica had stood shoulder to shoulder with the oppressed majority. There was a massive turnout for this extraordinary visit. As Mandela spoke to the thousands in the stadium, many people realised that while in the early 1990s they lived in a world order in which global power had tilted in favour of imperial power, the country which had for many years fought bitterly against the changes of the mid-twentieth century was undergoing profound changes. Political freedom in South Africa generated a feeling of hope in many in that audience. Jamaican political independence had not produced the social transformations which had been desired by the ordinary Jamaican, but with the ending of apartheid in South Africa, the promise of change was still alive.

### **The politics of black solidarity**

Throughout the politically independent English-speaking Caribbean, organisations and groups emerged which focused on solidarity with southern Africa and the anti-apartheid struggle. In this section of the article, I will pay particular attention to three, namely: the Southern African Liberation Committee (SALC) in Barbados; the Afro-Caribbean Liberation Movement (ACLM) in Antigua; and the African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA) in Guyana.

#### ***The Southern African Liberation Committee***

In 1977, a group of individuals in Barbados decided to establish the SALC. The key individuals involved in this decision were Michael Cummings, Norman Faria, Ricky Paris, Harry Husbands, Claire Kennedy (who was an African American and had migrated to Barbados) and Viola Davis.<sup>52</sup> There was an organisational precursor to this organisation. The 1960s was a period of intense radical political activity where global anti-colonial movements influenced and shaped the Black Power movement

51 The institute is formally part of the Jamaican state agencies that are in charge of cultural and archival policies on the island.

52 I wish to thank Viola Davis, Michael Cummings and Rodney Worrell for spending time with me in Barbados in July 2011. They shared their experiences of this movement with me and provided many of its published documents.

of the period. In turn, the Black Power movement impacted upon post-colonial Caribbean politics, producing a series of radical ideas and groups which challenged the nationalist politics of the period.<sup>53</sup> Central to this challenge in many Caribbean nations was the emergence of a politics of solidarity with Africa. Within the Caribbean political/intellectual and cultural life the experience that Stuart Hall calls 'twice diasporised', has been a mark of Caribbean life.

In the 1960s, many Caribbean individuals went to study in London and Canada. Many of them became politically active and returned home to play major roles in the early post-independence period. One such person was Bobby Clarke, who after his return to Barbados in 1966, formed the African Caribbean Liberation Movement along with figures like Tim Hector of Antigua.<sup>54</sup> Clarke was also a member of the Marxist-oriented Peoples' Progressive Movement that published a newspaper titled, *The Black Star*. Rodney Worrell observes that this newspaper 'espoused a form of revolutionary Black Nationalism'.<sup>55</sup> One objective of the newspaper was to inform the Barbadian population of events and news about Africa. Clarke and others were also involved in the Caribbean steering committee which prepared for the 6th Pan-African Congress. It is safe to say that there was a group of Caribbean activists who were deeply shaped by Black Power, the anti-colonial moment, conceptions of revolution and the possibilities of the transformation of the Caribbean post-colony. In this experience many of them became Caribbean and moved to embrace political positions which they saw as Pan-Caribbean. When many of them returned home they continued to practise this kind of politics. In such a context solidarity with African struggles was critical. In Barbados after the demise of the Peoples Progressive Movement, another group emerged, calling itself Black Night. This group explicitly called for Black Power in Barbados. Its demise was sealed when some members of its leadership joined the two-party Barbadian political system.

The SALC emerged out of these complex conditions and its immediate objectives were the following:

- To carry out educational work in solidarity with the struggles of the liberation fighters in southern Africa;
- To organise and co-ordinate activist campaigning in support of the liberation movement;
- In any other way as determined by the executive, to render material or oral support and solidarity with the oppressed people of southern Africa.<sup>56</sup>

53 There were two events which illustrate this point: firstly, the 1968 Walter Rodney riots in Jamaica. On this, see R. Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998); and second, the 1970 Black Power Rebellion in Trinidad. See S. Ryan and T. Stewart eds, *The Black Power Revolution 1970: A Retrospective* (Trinidad: ISER, 1997); and B. Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston: UWI Press, 1996).

54 Interview with Bobby Clarke, conducted by Anthony Bagues, Barbados, July 2011.

55 R. Worrell, *Pan-Africanism in Barbados* (Washington, DC: New Academia, 2002), 47.

56 *Ibid.*, 75–76.

The SALC developed dynamic educational and publicity policies. Writing numerous letters of protest and holding public meetings and educational forums, the group focused on South Africa and the case of Namibia. In December 1981, it 'made a gift of books to the library of the Namibian students now studying in Cuba'.<sup>57</sup> The following year, the SALC issued a press statement condemning the 'brutal murder of nine black South African gold miners by the South African authorities', calling the government a 'fascist regime' and stating that

the anti-apartheid SALC, which has been in the forefront of sponsoring solidarity activity in Barbados with the liberation movements in Southern Africa like ANC and SWAPO, also urged the Adams government to pressure the Ronald Reagan administration to withdraw what the SALC sees as Washington's 'covert and overt' acts of support and collaboration with the racist state.<sup>58</sup>

In a public educational forum held in May 1980 the SALC speaker argued that the apartheid system was being 'propped up by multi-national corporations'. The SALC understood one of its public roles as pressuring the Barbadian government to follow an international stance which would be strong against apartheid. For example, it continually requested the government to protest against US policies. The SALC's activities created controversy and there were numerous letters to the newspapers complaining about the group's activities. There were two of its major activities which make it a significant Caribbean grouping acting in solidarity with the African national liberation movements and with the anti-apartheid struggles. These were the group's public education on apartheid sport, particularly the 1982 cricket tour of South Africa by a group of West Indian cricketers;<sup>59</sup> and the exposé of the Space Research Corporation (SRC) in the Caribbean and its illegal selling of artillery shells to the apartheid regime's armed forces in the late 1970s. It is to this latter story that I will now turn.

In November 1977, the UN passed Resolution 418 which prohibited the sale of armaments to South Africa. However, many companies continued to ship arms to the apartheid state illegally. The arms embargo was a crucial element of the international boycott and trade with the regime. The ANC had noted that if South Africa was deprived of arms shipments, such action 'if accompanied by the breaking of all other economic diplomatic and cultural relations with Pretoria, [would cause] the white minority regime ... [to] come tumbling down'.<sup>60</sup> Given the fact that the apartheid regime relied upon security apparatus at home and military operations externally, the procurement of arms was a necessity for the regime's survival. In the 1960s, a

57 Ibid

58 Press statement issued by the SALC, in my possession.

59 On apartheid sport and West Indian cricket links, see M. Stofile, 'The Struggle for Non-racial Sport in South Africa', in SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 6 (1990–1994)* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2013).

60 Cited in undated SALC publication newsletter on apartheid, in my possession.

company called the High Altitude Research Project established its base in Barbados. Its main principal was Dr Gerard Bull a Canadian citizen, who was internationally known as a ballistic expert. By the 1970s, the company seemed to have been absorbed into another company, the SRC, and received contracts for the supply of military shells. The SRC developed sites in Barbados and Antigua where it performed the testing of shells. However, in 1977, it was established that shells were being shipped to South Africa and that one point of procurement was Antigua.

Both the ACLM and the SALC mounted massive campaigns on this issue. In early 1978, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police carried out its own investigation of the SRC and found that the company had broken the arms embargo on South Africa. The various governments of independent Barbados and Antigua were embarrassed because they had signed legal agreements with the SRC. The SALC, in response to this embarrassment noted that:

SALC differs from the government's position in that we feel that any collaboration by multi-national corporations with racist South Africa must be brought to the attention of the general public rather than be discussed solely among government officials.<sup>61</sup>

It was this tension between popular organisations and many Caribbean governments which often characterised Caribbean solidarity with South Africa. The SALC published a major pamphlet on the SRC's activities which became a popular document in Barbados and other parts of the Caribbean. The pamphlet ended by advocating that the Barbados government formally recognise all the African liberation movements. It noted:

The liberation movements and newly independent countries like Zimbabwe in Africa need such relationships. By forging them, it is possible to give assistance in staying the hand and rendering ineffective the forces that operate South Africa's weapons, some of which were partially developed on the test ranges in Barbados.<sup>62</sup>

In the end, under pressure the Barbados government removed the SRC from the island.

Throughout the 1980s, the SALC raised within Barbados societal concerns about African liberation and the anti-apartheid struggles. They did so in a society which, although it was politically independent, economic structures of the colonial society remained untouched. In the absence of economic transformation, issues of African liberation and political independence became a terrain on which local political issues were often fought out. In other words, the politics of solidarity was also about

---

61 SRC, 'How a Transnational Munitions Co. Used a West Indies Government to Test Artillery Shells for the South African Armed Forces', SALC publication, St Michael, Barbados, undated. Photocopy in my possession.

62 Ibid.



urgent political matters still to be addressed in the Caribbean political process of constitutional decolonisation.

An illustration of this is the struggle waged in 1990 by the SALC and others to rename Farley Hill National Park, by calling it Mandela Freedom Park. In March 1990, a group of individuals and organisations calling themselves the Free South Africa Committee demanded the name change. It seems that it had already been agreed to change the name at a previous well-supported rally to celebrate the release of Mandela. However, the economic elite in Barbados opposed this. In response, the committee wrote a public letter in which it noted that while the name Farley Hill had served the country in a limited capacity for some 133 years, it was now time to change this and that the name Mandela Freedom Park would 'better enable [the] nation Barbados to identify with the struggle for African liberation and for the promotion and maintenance of international human rights'.<sup>63</sup>

At the time of writing this chapter, some 20 years later, the name of Farley Hill National Park remains unchanged.<sup>64</sup> There are always politics involved in naming an event, a street or an airport that has symbolic significance. What I think is clear is that for Barbadian society the politics of African solidarity was linked to a quest for black Barbadian identity. In the Jamaican context, such a quest for identity was in part worked through Rastafari and the extraordinary counter-symbolic order it presented. In Barbados, I would argue that in the 1970s and 1980s, the terrain for this kind of symbolic struggle was worked out in relationship of black solidarity with the African liberation movements. Another juncture in the historical flows which constitute the politics of the African Diaspora has been reached.

### ***The Afro-Caribbean Liberation Movement***

The ACLM represented in Caribbean post-colonial politics one of the few radical organisations which explicitly drew its political and intellectual resources from a radical Caribbean intellectual tradition. It was also one of the few leftist organisations founded in the period of Caribbean independence which had organic political links to other organisations throughout the region. This is an important point because as seen earlier when discussing the SRC, there were attempts to ship armaments through Antigua. The late Tim Hector was one of the region's leading political thinkers and was ideologically close to C.L.R. James. On his return to Antigua from McGill University, Hector developed a political practice which has been called 'political and cultural reasonings'. Critical to this practice was the newspaper, *Outlet*, which for many years was the leading leftist newspaper in the region. The paper consistently advocated the boycott of South African goods and carried numerous articles exposing

63 Photocopy of letter in my possession.

64 Interviews with some of the individuals involved in this effort of re-naming reveal their bitter disappointment and a general sentiment that the various Barbados governments had avoided a confrontation with the economic elite to maintain the pact that had emerged in Barbados at a time when political parties were in charge of party politics of the island but economic power remained in the hands of an elite.

the apartheid regime. In its issue of 7 May 1975, for example, it featured an article which documented the character of international isolation of the regime within the context of the emergence of African independence. Under the headline ‘The Struggle Continues’, it discussed the consequences of the political independence of Angola and Mozambique for the apartheid regime. In 1977, *Outlet* featured a long article in which it argued that Antigua and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) were under the ‘same oppression’. It went on to note that

the very same multi-national corporations that ensure the survival of the Vorster and Smith regimes have for a long time also extended their domination to these parts. The struggle for economic and political independence is therefore an international one against an oppressive and repressive system that has spread its tentacles throughout the world.<sup>65</sup>

This was at the core of the ACLM’s political analysis. The world order was governed by multi-national corporations whose drive for profit paid no attention to issues of apartheid or different forms of political domination. The struggle for African independence and against apartheid was therefore a common global struggle. For the Caribbean this was a common struggle based not just on race but on common oppression and a historical relationship. Thus, the political badges produced for African Liberation Day by the ACLM had the maps of Africa and the Caribbean on opposite sides separated by the Atlantic Ocean but joined by two black hands which were breaking chains. The political slogan on the badges read, ‘Breaking the Chains of Oppression through Unity’.

To advocate a political position in which the postcolonial Caribbean was seen as being in the grip of foreign economic domination and that there was a single struggle between the drive for African national liberation in South Africa, was to suggest that the politics of the governing political grouping in the Caribbean was at its core neo-colonial. Such a claim would of course create difficulties between many Caribbean governments and their critics. Again, this illustrates how African solidarity was a complicated matter in the Caribbean. Similar to the work of many support groups in the region, the ACLM engaged in mass educational work. Many film documentaries were shown and ANC representatives were invited to speak on public platforms. The ACLM also held African Liberation Day marches from 1972 to 1977, with the largest such march in 1973 when 14 000 persons took to the streets in defiance of the government’s restriction order.

The ACLM played a major role in the exposure of the SRC project. In October 1979, Hector appeared before the UN giving evidence on the illegal transshipment of arms. The SRC affair had another consequence for Caribbean labour and politics. A group of dockworkers at the Antiguan port, who refused to load what they recognised

---

65 *Outlet*, 26 May 1977. I wish to thank the present members of the ACLM for taking the time to answer my various questions on the organisation and for sending me copies of *Outlet*.

as an arms shipment, were threatened with dismal. One of the region's leading trade unions, the 'Trinidadian Oilfield Workers' Trade Union (OWTU), made it clear that if this happened and the Antiguan government did not take action against the SRC, then the union would place a ban on all goods coming out of Antigua.<sup>66</sup> Here was an instance in which solidarity actions created another circle of solidarity, again illustrating how closely tied in a political knot the African liberation struggles were to radical Caribbean postcolonial politics.

In the end what I am examining are the passages between anti-colonial politics and anti-imperialist politics. While many Caribbean political parties in power had anti-colonial credentials, one key political question posed in the post-independence period was this: within the new global configuration of power, how would anti-colonialism translate into anti-imperialism? This issue lay at the root of the tension between many Caribbean solidarity groups and their governments. Certainly for the ACLM it was the primary one, for as a group of ACLM members stated in July 2011, 'the ACLM has always been anti-imperialist and therefore considered itself a part of the global struggle against imperialism'.<sup>67</sup> As has been noted before, what the Antiguan case demonstrates is how in the final stages of the anti-colonial struggles in Africa, the efforts of solidarity became one platform from which new struggles in the Caribbean would be waged.

### ***ASCRIA and the case of Guyana***

Many Caribbean governments in the aftermath of Caribbean political independence gave some form of support to the African liberation movements and the struggle against apartheid; however, it is safe to say that in the 1970s, two governments led the way within the region. They were Forbes Burnham and the People's National Congress (PNC) and the People's National Party Government of Michael Manley. Prior to this period in Guyana, one of the Caribbean leading anti-colonial figures, Cheddi Jagan gave voice to militant anti-apartheid sentiments. In a 1959 article in the journal, *Thunder*, he responded to a developing concern about the possibility of a West Indian cricket tour of South Africa. He noted: 'West Indians and Guyanese cherish freedom ... we must stand and fight racial discrimination in all its forms. Let us not go to South Africa. Boycott their games and their goods'.<sup>68</sup> He continued his advocacy of boycott when he was in political office from 1961 to 1964.

With regard to the PNC, it is important to note that it came to power on an external political platform which made it clear that it was against apartheid. Ethnic and racial differences in the colony of British Guyana had split the national movement along

66 The OWTU was one of the most consistent advocates of strong support and solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle. Another was the National Joint Action Committee. Of course when the Grenadian Revolution occurred in 1979, the political leadership led by Maurice Bishop also gave strong international support to the anti-apartheid struggle.

67 Email exchange with ACLM members, July 2011.

68 C. Jagan, 'Boycott', *Thunder*, January, 1959.

ethnic lines.<sup>69</sup> The PNC under Burnham's leadership then emerged as an Afro-Guyanese dominated political party with a complex ideological formation in which a strand of 'socialism' called 'co-operative socialism' and anti-imperialism were often mixed with strains of authoritarianism.<sup>70</sup> The issue of solidarity with African struggles was a central aspect of PNC foreign policy. Eusi Kwayana, one of the most important political Caribbean figures of the twentieth century, and a founding figure in the Guyanese anti-colonial movement, made the point that, 'In Guyana the government assumed the role from above taking over the press and radio and the diplomatic and international platform'.<sup>71</sup> The PNC government allowed the Cuban military to use Timhehri Airport to transport troops to Angola in order to fight the incursions of the South African army. Along with the Jamaican government at the time, it also promised volunteers to the liberation movements. In international forums, like the UN and the NAM, the PNC government was a strong voice urging the strongest possible sanctions against the apartheid regime. The case of Guyana was different from that of say, Antigua. There was no equivocation of support for African liberation by the PNC and as Kwayana said, 'we the left organisations also supported the government's position'.<sup>72</sup>

So what was the role of those groups outside the orbit of the PNC government within a social context of a country divided along ethnic lines? For groups like ASCRIA the support of African liberation and the anti-apartheid struggle became linked to issues around African identity in Guyana as well as broad support for a global anti-imperialist struggle. ASCRIA was founded by Kwayana after he left the PNC. While in the PNC, he was its diplomatic personality who did a great deal of work connecting the independent African countries to Guyana, leading a 1965 mission to Africa. With the formation of ASCRIA, Kwayana focused his political energies on developing a Pan-African political perspective and political practice. From the 1970s, ASCRIA became involved in a series of international meetings which it called 'seminars of Pan-Africanists and Black Revolutionary Nationalists'. It went on to say: 'We are an African people. Let us meet somewhere, think, talk, decide and act'.<sup>73</sup> The appeal argued that the 'two nation areas must then seek an effective relationship direct or indirect with the combatant communities in Africa which are still under white rule and with African governments that are actively concerned with questions of liberation'.<sup>74</sup> The purpose of the seminar meetings was to develop both organisational and programmatic unity for the black world.

69 The participation of Britain and the US in this split is well documented. For a recent study, see C. Palmer, *Cheddi Jagan and the Politics of Power* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2010).

70 It was this strain of authoritarianism which led to certain kinds of repressive action and the assassination of the political figure who best represented the link between radical African liberation movements and radical postcolonial Caribbean politics, Walter Rodney.

71 Interview with Eusi Kwayana, conducted by Anthony Bogues, Guyana, July 2011.

72 *Ibid.*

73 Appeal no. 1, Copy courtesy of Eusi Kwayana.

74 *Ibid.*

One of the first activities of this grouping, along with stating that it had movements in Guyana, Antigua, St Kitts and St Vincent, was the organisation of African Liberation Day marches throughout the region. The circular sent to organisations requesting participation as well as funding, read:

After consultation with various liberation movements based in Zambia and Tanzania, [the decision was taken] to name 25 May 1971 as the worldwide Day of Solidarity with the armed liberation struggles of Africa. It is the plan of the Secretariat that on this day donations of money ... medical supplies and vehicles will be collected ... The Prime Minister of Guyana, the Presidents of Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Guinea have all given their consent to these activities.<sup>75</sup>

Here was a case in which the push came from below but there was a positive response from the ruling party. Indeed this seems to have been the general case in Guyana. The result was that African liberation marches in Guyana appear to have been successful affairs. Within this context it was the Guyanese government which made the first move to stop an English cricket tour of the region because of the links which an individual, Robin Jackman, had to South Africa. So it is to that story that I now turn.

### Cricket and apartheid

Cricket has historically been one terrain on which the ideas of Caribbean nationalism and nationhood worked themselves out. As a game it was organised to occupy time. One of the most astute writers on the game, C.L.R. James, notes that, 'cricket is first and foremost a dramatic spectacle ... It is so organised that at all times it is compelled to reproduce the central action which characterises all good drama'.<sup>76</sup> A colonial game, the sport became very central to Caribbean life and in many ways became a social barometer in the Caribbean colonies. It is interesting to note which British colonies picked up the game and why. For South Africa, it seemed to have become a 'white man's game'. In the Caribbean, it evolved into a sport in which Afro- and Indo-Caribbean individuals played with imagination and vigour, contesting the colonial conception of the 'native'. Anti-colonial nationalism has always worked itself through different aspects of colonial life. In the Caribbean, cricket became one such site. When the great black batsman, George Headley, was not made captain of the West Indies cricket team, there were howls of protest. In 1960, Frank Worrell was made the first black captain of the West Indies cricket team. Under his leadership the team began to develop into a formidable one. By the late 1970s, it was the dominant cricket side in the world, a position which it held for over a decade. This incomparable achievement in sporting history was tied to a post-independence Caribbean identity

<sup>75</sup> Circular SOL/1/70 of the Pan-African Secretariat, copy courtesy of Eusi Kwayana.

<sup>76</sup> C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Kingston: Sangster's Bookstores, 1963), 192.

which included the emergence of reggae music on the world stage and the personality of Bob Marley. Cricket in postcolonial Caribbean was not just sport, it was also deeply enmeshed in the drama of the quest for Caribbean identity on a global scale. It is from such a stance that I will examine the various episodes in which both Caribbean governments and populations intervened in the game in opposition to South Africa's participation.

In 1959, the South Africa Sports Council appealed to the West Indies cricket team not to accept an invitation to play in South Africa. The team agreed and the tour was cancelled. As the West Indies team began to dominate the game with exciting new stroke players and fast bowlers, South African sporting authorities began to make what were then substantial monetary offers to members of the team. This followed a pattern in which successful offers were made to English test cricketers and other sporting personalities. The West Indian cricket fans were thus already aware that there were consistent efforts to puncture the sporting ban that had been imposed on the apartheid state.

In 1981, Jackman was chosen to join the English team on tour of the Caribbean. Before the second test match it was discovered that Jackman had been a regular coach in South Africa. Manley, in his remarkable book, *A History of West Indian Cricket*, picks up the story:

Suddenly the tour was in the midst of a full blown crisis ... the government of Guyana promptly claimed that his [Jackman's] presence in the England side was a breach of the Gleneagles Agreement and ... that Jackman would not be allowed to play in that country.<sup>77</sup>

The 'Jackman Affair' as it came to be known, split the Caribbean governments in a debate about the fine distinctions of the Gleneagles Agreement. However, the Burnham government stood its ground and the test match in Guyana was cancelled. There were loopholes in the Gleneagles Agreement and Clive Lloyd, the captain of the West Indies cricket team at the time, noted in a speech before the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, that: 'It seems to me, that while the Gleneagles Agreement has served a useful purpose in the world's continuing struggle for the elimination of apartheid in sport, it nevertheless is not without its deficiencies.'<sup>78</sup> These deficiencies were to plague the steadfast maintenance of sporting ban on South Africa consistently.

But the 'Jackman Affair' was just the beginning. A few months later it was revealed by the SALC that a group of some of the best West Indian players had accepted to play in South Africa. Led by the stylish Indo-Guyanese batsman, Alvin Kallicharan, a team was being assembled to play a series of matches in South Africa. Kallicharan

77 M. Manley, *A History of West Indian Cricket* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1988), 292.

78 Cited in *Advocate News*, 12 January 1983. The Gleneagles Agreement was developed by the Commonwealth heads of state at the 1971 summit. It reaffirmed that 'apartheid in sport, as in other fields, is an abomination'.

himself had been made an honorary white and began playing for the then Transvaal. The revelation of this tour created an uproar in the Caribbean. It was a painful moment on two accounts. Firstly, the proposed tour went against all the principled ethos of anti-colonial nationalism which had nurtured West Indian cricket. Secondly, it involved some of the most gifted players of the game, particularly the batsman Lawrence Rowe.

Despite the efforts of many officials, including the West Indies' Cricket Board, the tour went ahead. The manager of the tour, the Barbadian cricketer, Albert Padmore, went on record as saying that 'because of their financial positions they could not refuse the contract, even though they loathed apartheid'.<sup>79</sup> Lloyd, however, responded as follows:

I don't think that the players concerned understand what damage they could do not only to cricket but those Third World countries and all those people who are fighting against apartheid ... I know that the money is very tempting but that is not all in life.<sup>80</sup>

The tour marked a pivotal moment in West Indian cricket and led to some amount of rebuilding as all the players who made the South African tour were banned for life and were not allowed to play cricket in the region. The episode put to the test the steadfastness of the region in support of the anti-apartheid struggle. It galvanised all sectors of Caribbean society and the various public meetings on the issue throughout the region brought together workers, trade unions, teachers, churches, youth organisations and the general public, all of whom condemned the players and called for a life ban. If the South African cricketing authorities of the period were hoping that the 'rebel' West Indian tour was a breach which would open the floodgates and allow major sporting personalities to participate in apartheid sporting events, they were proved wrong. The ban for life and the international public discussion on the issue created the conditions where another cricket tour became impossible to organise. In this regard, the Caribbean, along with the anti-apartheid movement in countries like New Zealand, played a major role in maintaining the international isolation of the apartheid regime.<sup>81</sup> This isolation was a necessary political tactic in the global struggle against apartheid.

## Conclusion and a musical note

The twentieth-century struggle against apartheid was an extraordinary effort of human solidarity. For the Caribbean, solidarity was a complex affair involving patterns of African diasporic politics. Colonial modernity had constructed systems of domination in which racial slavery and colonialism had subordinated African

<sup>79</sup> Report in *Advocate News*, 12 January 1983. See also Stofile, 'The Struggle for Non-Racial Sport'.

<sup>80</sup> Report in *Advocate News*, 12 January 1983.

<sup>81</sup> The reference here is to the 1981 campaign in New Zealand to prevent the Springbok rugby tour.

populations in the 'New World'. The politics practised by the population had many phases. Sometimes, there was the search for a home, the end of exile. Sometimes it was the search for an identity; and at other times, for finding a common bond of oppression and engaging in a global struggle. But no matter what the practice of politics, Africa always mattered. In a world constructed on a racial order, the idea of Africa was constructed as something strange, as a place of otherness, not quite human. For the African Diaspora the challenge to such representations and constructions was an essential element of the struggle against colonial domination and white racial power. As the decolonisation process emerged and took wings, South Africa became the site where the historic past and weight of colonial modernity remained firm. For the Caribbean and African Diaspora, the challenge to work for the overthrow of this system became a primary effort. In such an endeavour all aspects of human creation were important, from politics to sport to cultural practices. In this regard, no story of Caribbean solidarity with the African liberation movements can be written without paying some attention to the musical forms of the region, in particular reggae.

For reggae music, Africa was a trope and a dream-space in which freedom was possible. Profoundly shaped by the religious/philosophical positions of Rastafari, reggae music became the music of the black liberation struggle. Its lyrics and *riddim* tracks were the sound tracks of and ideas for the possibilities for social change in a world where domination was the order of the day.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps no other reggae figure symbolises the centrality of the music as a sound track for black struggle than the music of Marley. With regard to African liberation readers are reminded of his verbal text, *Zimbabwe*.

Written in Ethiopia, this song became an anthem for many guerrilla fighters in southern Africa. The text begins with the line: 'Everyman has a right to decide his own destiny'. It is an appeal for the right of self-determination. This line is then followed by: 'And in this judgment there is no partiality, so arm in arm with arms we'll fight this little struggle, 'cause that's the only way we can overcome our little trouble'. These lyrics speak of the centrality of the self-determination and call for a collective armed struggle against domination. The third stanza of the song calls for Africans to liberate Zimbabwe. Performed in Zimbabwe in 1980, the song rocked the stadium. For the militants of southern Africa and for many young blacks in South Africa, Bob Marley and Peter Tosh became iconic figures of the black struggle. In popular black culture, music is a public sphere which is enmeshed in community life. Reggae music as a practice of radical black cultural politics opened a space in which texts and sounds would emerge that addressed the conditions of racial and colonial domination.

In twentieth-century African diasporic, cultural, political and intellectual life, Africa called. It was a call that was answered. As such, solidarity with the African liberation movements and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa was a requirement for

---

82 For a discussion of the history of reggae, see L. Bradley, *Bass Culture* (New York: Viking, 2000).



African diasporic life. In answering the call of Africa the African Diaspora made new grounds for solidarity and developed a set of political ideas which today constitute one current of a larger African and African Diaspora political and intellectual tradition. In this regard, while Caribbean solidarity was part of a global solidarity against apartheid, it also constituted an aspect of a black radical political intellectual tradition. I shall leave the final words to Marley. In his recording, *Redemption Song*, he sings the following words:

Old pirates, yes, they rob I  
Sold I to the merchant ships  
Minutes after they took I  
From the bottomless pit ...  
Won't you help to sing  
These songs of freedom?

Singing songs of freedom was the cry of the African Diaspora. To work in solidarity for the political freedom of South Africa was but one chord of that freedom.

