Remembering George Lamming (1927–2022), with Thoughts on In the Castle of My Skin

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ABSTRACT: The first part of this memoriam essay focuses on the author’s relationship with the famed Bajan intellectual George Lamming during his years at Brown University. The second part explores Lamming’s most famous work, In the Castle of My Skin (1953), which offers important tropes in Black existential thought that are synchronous with Frantz Fanon’s Peau noir, masques blancs (1952), but with a more detailed exploration of the concept of political complicity through Lamming’s portrait of the phenomenon of slime and its correlate, the slimy individual. The author also discusses Lamming’s treatment of the Fanonian motif of colonizing notions of normative development.

KEY WORDS: Black existentialism, Frantz Fanon, George Lamming, Richard Wright, slime

“This house looks lived in.” So said George Lamming, the famed existential novelist and man of letters, when he visited my former home in Providence, Rhode Island.

Moving through and across classes, academics’ houses often reflected aspirations of rubbing elbows with those socially above rather than below. As well, purchasing a house often entails preparing it for future sale. The consequence is often an occupied space instead of one lived in. In a simple statement, Lamming made my family and me aware, at a level of profundity, that we had a home.
A hallmark of existential thought is truthful observation. It is, in listening, seeing, tasting, and touching, to bring to the realm of communication what we often fail to hear, see, taste, and realize when we meet.

My relationship with Lamming was threefold. There was, of course, his oeuvre, which I studied. Then there was our meeting at the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica, at the 2003 conference my colleagues Brian Meeks, B. Anthony Bogues, Paget Henry, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, the late Rex Nettleford, and I organized with Sylvia Wynter on liberating the imagination. That historic conference included the great Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. It was at that meeting that a group consisting of George Belle, B. Anthony Bogues, Patrick Goodin, Jane Anna Gordon, Clevis Headley, Paget Henry, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Supriya Nair, and I co-founded the Caribbean Philosophical Association on June 14, 2003. Finally, there was our growing friendship.

Lamming was a brilliant intellectual. In no exchange was there a moment of him covering reality with fatuous talk. His love for language was such that every word, every gesture, was precise and illuminating. He was also, frankly, cool. His silver Afro was elegant. He dressed without pretense. And he exuded, without verbally declaring so, history.

In Lamming’s eyes, one glimpsed the First International Congress of African/Black Writers and Artists Conference in Paris in 1956, at which were in attendance Amadou Hampâté Bâ, James Baldwin, Aimé Césaire, Cheikh Anta Diop, Frantz Fanon, William Fountain, Édouard Glissant, Pablo Picasso, Jean Price-Mars, Leopold Senghor, Claude Lévy Strauss, Abdoulaye Wade, Richard Wright, and he among other illustrious intellectuals (UHURU n.d.). (The towering W.E.B. Du Bois was banned from traveling from the U.S. because of the government’s refusal to grant him a passport; he participated through sending a letter.) Lamming’s nostrils had breathed in the air of revolution in Cuba, and the efforts to defend the dignity of everyday human beings across Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. His arms held common people who were later embraced as national leaders. And his tongue tasted the culinary treasures shared from the poverty-stricken to the wealthy. For him, however, there was the existential, humanist insight. The best way to take everyone seriously is to take no one too seriously, especially himself.

Paget Henry (known to my children as “Uncle Paget”), Lamming, my family, and I enjoyed our meals, which was always accompanied by wonderful conversation from George’s generous spirit.

Reflections on George Lamming, a great Bajan (Barbadian) son of the Caribbean, began well before his passing. Time and temporal reflection are different for intellectuals who offer us what appears perennial. Even at birth, the
perennial seems always to have been. Accolades for him were many, but the George Lamming I knew seemed to have been an individual who was, as Søren Kierkegaard (1843) would say, beyond the universal. He knew deep down that there was always more, and that what may be is not containable by anyone yet can be glimpsed by all who make the effort.

George Lamming passed in Barbados, the country of his birth, four days short of his ninety-fifth birthday. He will be remembered for so many achievements, among which is the Caribbean Philosophical Association’s Nicolás Cristóbal Guillén Batista Lifetime Achievement Award, which he received in 2015. His plaque was generously delivered to him by then University of the West Indies at Cave Hill Professor Aaron Kamugisha as Lamming couldn’t travel due to illness. It is a testament from the communities of the Caribbean, our comrades across the Global South, and, ultimately, the world that tributes voiced agreement that he rightfully belongs among those with whom he brought insight to the human condition (see Drayton 2022; Henry 2022; Lewis 2022). They ranged from Wilson Harris (the first recipient of the Guillén Lifetime Achievement Award) through to Gabriel García Márquez, his countryman Kamau Brathwaite, and those who have not yet joined the ancestors. I expect none of his achievements will speak to generations to come more than his 1953 first novel In the Castle of My Skin.

I wrote a working paper on that book during the first decade of the new millennium. It was entitled “George Lamming the Existentialist.” Neil Roberts, one of the former presidents of the Caribbean Philosophical Association, included it as “Working Paper 006,” in the Johns Hopkins Working Papers series in 2008. I offer it here, in revised form, in the hope that it may encourage new generations to read George’s work and earlier generations to continue reading it.

### Lamming’s Existential Thought in The Castle of My Skin

“I’m also aware, in a certain way, that for us our politics is central to our aesthetics.”

— George Lamming interview in Small Axe (2002)

There are many ways to do justice to a great writer. One way is flattery through the art of imitation. But such a path would only insult that writer since, in the end, it is to suffer the fate of all imitation—that of always falling short because of being measured by a standard that could never be one’s own. It is a fate wrought with the gnawing consciousness of the unreal, for in the world of the prototype, there is no worse fate, at least when it comes to works of art, than to be typical.
Yet justice demands its due. Much depends on this. The deed that constitutes such achievement must be accorded by the only world that can do so, the world that constantly unfolds as “ours.” Many options await, but I offer two.

First, make it appear. Second, ritualize it by building upon it with the creative force that constitutes its breath.

That George Lamming was a great writer is already given in this reflection. In the world of analysis, however, this observation calls for the task of determining what type of writer he was. As many before him who made words meet in paper and ink, he exemplified the complexity of the Caribbean spirit that defies a singular conclusion. This means that he was, basically, always a little beyond himself, and in that way, he beckoned to us that fundamental incompleteness that we all, human beings, share.

True, we could take the age-old route of “guilt by association.” Lamming, after all, took up company with such ravel-rousers as Richard Wright and Frantz Fanon. The evidence was manifold—Wright’s introduction to In the Castle of My Skin; Lamming’s conversations with Fanon on the Algerian struggle at the 1956 Black Writers Congress. But in the end, those were associations. The existential here faces a moment of its own suspension of its virulent critique of preceding essences for the sake of some ground rules for its own paradoxical appearance. We must let Lamming appear in his own words so that we may consider the man constituted by them in the hope, ironically, of going beyond the man himself for the precious gifts he offered in his thought.

So, I begin with a quotation from In the Castle of My Skin, from his beginnings as a writer of fame, which, ironically, he chose to commence with a reflection on the completion or beginning of his ninth year of life:

RAIN, RAIN, RAIN . . . my mother put her head through the window to let the neighbour know that I was nine, and they flattered me with the consolation that my birthday had brought showers of blessing. The morning laden with cloud soon passed into noon, and the noon neutral and silent into the sodden grimness of an evening that waded through water . . . Nothing mattered but the showers of blessing and the eternal will of the water’s source. And I might have accepted the consolation if it weren’t that the floods had chosen to follow me in the celebration of all my years, evoking the image of those legendary waters which had once arisen to set a curse on the course of man. (Lamming 1970 [1953], 1–2)

Rain, rain, rain; water, water, water. The fluid so free that it is the metaphor of freedom, and as such, it brings forth other metaphors in its constant flow.
that ushers in its paradoxical roles of life and spirit. As life, it flows through us and is most of us; as spirit, it overcomes us in its propensity, as many Romantics saw at many seas’ edges, to become sublime. Yet even water suffers disruptions.

“Slime is the agony of water,” wrote Jean-Paul Sartre in Being and Nothingness (1956 [1943], 774).

Sartre wrote of bourgeois consciousness, one so caught in its own desire to be unbound that it lives itself as if it has no flesh. Such a consciousness convinces itself of a freedom in which it supposedly becomes “complete” while being absolutely unbound. Yet, Sartre argued, such a notion is delusional, and like all delusions, it requires much to maintain itself. It suffers and shifts, eventually, from the agonal to the agonizing. It creates that which clings, leech-like, to each of its moments. He continued:

[Slime] presents itself as a phenomenon in process of becoming; it does not have the permanence within change that water has but, on the contrary, represents an accomplished break in a change of state. This fixed instability in the slimy discourages possession. . . . The slimy flees with a heavy flight which has the same relation to water as the unwieldy earthbound flight of the chicken as to that of the hawk. Even this flight cannot be possessed because it denies itself as flight. It is already almost a solid permanence. Nothing testifies more clearly to its ambiguous character as a “substance in between two states” than the slowness with which the slimy melts into itself. (Ibid)

When I first read that passage, I wondered about the historical significance of Sartre’s reflection. If slime is the agony of water, and if history moves like an unyielding river or, as it is often characterized, tide, then what might the agony wrought by its recent, epochal flow be? What, in other words, is the agony of Euromodern life, which colonized the globe as Euromodernity?

The nine-year-old boy suffers in Lamming’s debut novel. He and many from the community of his childhood suffer the agony of Euromodern colonialism. It is agonizing because it promises that which it is not prepared to give without a costly price. The water first rained down as an omen, and then it was poured on him—witness the washing in the pail in the succeeding chapter (perhaps the dirt from his body symbolizing what is to be washed away while he is expected to remain?)—while the man whose tragedy, as Fanon kept reminding us in Peau noir, masques blancs [Black Skin, White Masks] (1952), through reference to Friedrich Nietzsche (albeit ultimately via Simone de Beauvoir), is carried
through this child who looks ahead, hopes, and dreams. He faces this world supposedly promised to him by empire, and he walks through it with faith in humanity that stimulates anyone who still believes in promises. But that world, he discovers, is slimy.

Richard Wright reflected on that world as one that constantly generates illicit humanity. For him, in *Native Son* (1940), Bigger Thomas was its agony, and even though such structural imposition never meant an absence of responsibility, there was always the sense that such responsibility was elusive at every moment the inner-man confronted a world in which he appeared locked in perpetual childhood. Wright subsequently raised, in *The Outsider* (1953), the question of Euromodern alienation that militated against responsibility through the constant force of innocence. Perpetual guilt takes away agency, which militates against guilt. It collapses upon itself and renders such guilt “innocent.”

“But Jesus called them unto him, and said, ‘Suffer [allow] little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of Heaven,’” wrote St. Luke (18:16) in his Gospel. This, however, makes the Black condition one of double jeopardy—the salvation of becoming an adult man or a woman or simply a human being promises damnation here, but Fanon and Wright were telling us that remaining locked as the innocent child for the sake of biblical salvation is a form of condemnation.

Lamming’s child, the young Lamming, faced the governing, dual roles of water. Its duality was marked in the shores of Barbados, the island of his birth, which border a sea and an ocean. It is there in the island country’s many canals and gutters, an at that time colony whose collective description, one of imitation, casted a shadow over its inhabitants’ identity: “Barbados or Little England was the oldest and purest of England’s children” (Lamming 1970 [1953], 32).

A child country. Such is the way of colonial identities. They are always new, which reconfigures the old. In times past, there were inhabitants whose fate were already washed away by what the tides brought in from, in the Euromodern exemplar, “mother” Europe. In those waves of death was born, allegorically, the new. They occasioned labor to maintain commerce. They occasioned the economy, the identities, the people, the New World. And despite their age of colonization dating back to Columbus’s fifteenth-century voyages, those island countries seemed never to grow up. A world of children of all ages. And as children, always innocent because always supposedly guilty of a failed humanity. As preordained children, none of them were fathers, which means, in effect, that there were, as Fanon infamously declared in *Peau noir, masques blancs*, no fathers among them. There were mothers by virtue of having been born to them, but
no fathers. Fathers, as Lamming recounted, in concert with Fanon, followed the tide of employment to distant shores. Fathers, if they stayed, brought forth allegories of death through their silent presence occasioning a world of children. No Oedipus complex, for how could an Oedipus complex emerge in a world antipathetic to the emergence of adult males? From whom could Caribbean “men” protect their families?

To become an adult (man or woman), one must let some things go. The allegory of Lamming’s character Mr. Foster echoes this insight under the torrents:

“And Mr. Foster?” my mother inquired.

“I was coming to that,” answered the neighbor. “Foster [swore] he [wouldn’t] leave the old house, and went sailing down the river on the roof.” (Lamming 1970 [1953], 6)

Foster forgot that so long as he stood on weak foundations, he would be washed away.

Many themes of Black existentialism permeate this remarkable text. Black existentialism is existence understood through the human condition as lived in black. Insight into this perspective could be found in the etymology of “existence,” which is from the Latin _ex sistere_, which means, literally, to stand apart or to stand out. This makes existence more than being. Something could “be” anywhere, but for it to exist, it must stand out from “here” or “there.” It must emerge. Even if from nowhere, it appears somewhere. Black existentialism is about the question of Black people from the abyss of nothingness or, worse, irrelevance. It is about a struggle from a diminutive blackness to an affirming and meaningful Black actional life.

But more, since Black people did not exist as “black” objects of dehumanization until the violence of special historic events, Black existentialism is marked by the situated struggle with those forces (see Gordon 2022, Part I). They are paradoxical forces, for black people would not have existed without them, and yet, they are the very conditions the overcoming of which would constitute Black liberation. There is, in other words, an imperative from _within_ black—and possibly also Black—realities that call for the seemingly contradictory aims of their overcoming and maintenance. The water needs wash away much, save the blackness without which nothing is left.

Black existentialism exemplifies the reflections on the humanity of Black people in societies that imagine they would be better off without us, and with such reflections have emerged a unique grammar and tone. Together, they
constitute the blues that are the leitmotif of the shared Euromodern condition. Black existentialism has occasioned them through a variety of autobiographical texts. In Frederick Douglass’s three classic autobiographical writings, for instance, there is the boyhood relationship with a mother suffering the contingencies of a history that treats her and her children as irrelevant yet managing to create situations marked by the intimacies of the human face and radical acts of love; there is an effort to reach out through the powerful force of words and reason only to be met by the dialectical limits of an external world that attempts to beat down the spirit of this growing upsurge of freedom; the intimacies of love that promises redemption bolsters the suffering soul; and the search for a talisman for freedom—the sign, the magical transformation of symbols, the semiosis of imagination and conjuring—only to be met by tearful transformation of the self in the face of reality. In these movements, Black subjects face anguish, freedom over the constitution of the self, under the bitter yoke of bondage and the resolve of fighting for what matters more than death. What, Black existentialists interrogate, in the resounding cry from W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), is the meaning of such suffering.

Du Bois argued that such suffering brought, like the proverbial poet, the spiritual leitmotif necessary for an age heavily in danger of losing its soul. The two souls of which he wrote lived a dialectic between the hegemonically real and reality. It is, in effect, the situation of struggling to liberate even the pre-reflective understanding of itself that poses the problem of the self as a “problem self.” Du Bois realized that this required understanding what it meant “to be a problem,” and Lamming, through subtle reflection on a saturated childhood in *Castle*, experienced the same:

The image of the enemy, and the enemy was My People. My people are low-down nigger people . . . . The language of the overseer. The language of the civil servant. The myth had eaten through their consciousness like moths through the pages of ageing documents. Not taking chances with you people, my people. They always let you down. Make others say we’re not responsible, we’ve no sense of duty. That’s what the low-down nigger people do to us, their people. Then the others say we’ve no sense of duty. Like children under the threat of hell-fire they accepted instinctively that the others, meaning the white, were superior, yet there was always the fear of realizing that it might be true. This world of the others’ imagined perfection hung like a dead weight over their energy. (Lamming 1970 [1943], 20–21)
The invisibility spoken of here is a function of a profound familiarity. It is the paradox of invisibility by virtue of being looked at but not seen. It is an observation shared; witness Ralph Ellison’s bringing it to the fore in his classic novel’s title, *Invisible Man* (1952), which, too, charts an epic journey for a Black life through a life lived in black. Ellison’s protagonist, also a function of the New World, went black and blue through the interstices of Euromodern rural and urban life. Realizing that his humanity wasn’t a given, he searched for it and thereby exemplified the form of an existent seeking its essence. While these existential tropes from realization of one’s responsibility for one’s way of living in the world and the ensuing struggle of a Black subject with language; love; the body; double consciousness of a white world imposing a distorted blackness in an effort to stillborn a Black one; recognition; a skewed social world against which to fight tend to be portrayed through an *individual* being—a single protagonist—in the North American writers, they took on the form of an almost transcendental subjectivity made flesh in Caribbean writers such as Fanon and Lamming toward an aim of collective and existential revolt.

Witness Fanon’s *le Noir* and *le nègre* (“the Black” and “the n—”) in *Peau noir, masques blancs*, where the realization of being a “white construction” occasions failures through which is learned the pitfalls of narcissistic self-deception and the over-determining dynamics of language; the impact of the social world on the psychodynamics of love; the ideological deception of constitutional inferiority; the cat-and-mouse game of historicism, implicit reason, and aesthetic-symbolic resistance; the problem of psychopathology where white normativity—white masks—inflates white identity and militates against a coherent notion of neither black nor Black normality; the errors in a dialectics of recognition with a Black subject; and the encomium for the body to transcend the “epidermal schema” in the interrogative of human possibility. One could easily be led to reflecting on what was going on in the Caribbean *Zeitgeist* to stimulate such poetic reflections on skin.

All this is there in the title of Lamming’s novel. We should reflect on the problem of skin, for it is not as though the remedy for the social misrepresentation of skin is to be “skinless.” Skin holds us together, it protects us, as Lamming’s use suggests when he recounted, “The likenesses will meet and make merry, but they won’t know you, the you that’s hidden somewhere in the castle of your skin” (Lamming 1970 [1953], 292). Yes, our skin is supposed to protect us, so when it becomes our enemy, the effect could be as with blood; we struggle against that without which we cannot live. To be imprisoned by our skin requires, as Fanon later reflected in the final sentence of *Les damnés de la terre* (1961), known in English by the problematic title *The Wretched of the Earth*, the
emergence of a new kind of human being—“Let’s start anew [literally, get a new skin (*peau neuve*)], Comrades, and set afoot a new human being”—which brings to mind the constant awareness in all expressivist and dialectical theories of the human, that the human being needs a human world, but such a world, Fanon had already observed in *Peau noir, masques blancs*, is a promissory “yes” in the midst of a contemporary realization of “no.”

The circumstance of a social world that militates against its sociality, against its intersubjective reaching out that constitutes a human world—in a word, humanity—is claustrophobic. Black existential writers, whether they be of the U.S. varieties such as Wright and Ellison—to which I would add Nella Larsen, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison—or the African ones to which belong Amata Aidoo, Steve Bantu Biko, Nathalie Etoke, Rozena Maart, Chabani Manganyi, and Caribbean ones such as Fanon, Jamaica Kincaid, Harris, Lamming, Larsen, and Audre Lorde bring to the fore the insight that the contradictions we live are of a systemic nature, true, but that does not mean, they also remind us, that there cannot be a humanistic resolve to assert the value of humanity, as did our ancestors against worst odds.

The water-laden world of *Castle* eventually overflows in revolt, but as in Sartre’s admonitions, prescience in the African Diaspora met in the coincidence of E. Franklin Frazier (see his *Black Bourgeoisie*, 1955), Fanon, and Lamming on the tragic pitfalls of nationalist leadership’s path from the colonial to the ensuing neocolonial “postcolony”—in a word, *slime*. Behold:

“What do you think about Mr. Slime?” I asked. I wanted to hear him further on the land. Perhaps I wanted to form an opinion myself [of the consequences of Mr. Slime’s intervention at the moment of the villager’s fury against the landlord’s and overseers’ actions against them].

“I don’t have to think much ’bout him,” said Trumper. “An’ I not at all surprised that he do what he do. ’Tis what I learn in the States, an’ I know how to handle all the Slimes that come my way. Way back he promise that he’d make these people here owners o’ this land. He tell them there wasn’t nothing to prevent them buying this lan’, and he wus right, ‘cause I know for a fact that the very money that go in that Penny Bank an’ Society buy this land in his name. That’s what I know. Nothin’ he do ain’t surprise me.”

“There are others involved,” I said. “I know some of them.”
“‘Course there is,” said Trumper. “There’s always more’n one in this kind o’ deal. They ain’t surprise me. The man who set me thinkin’ is the landlord. I don’t quite understan’ why he take that risk. He take a good risk.” (Lamming 1970 [1953], 323; see also Lamming’s reflection in his 2002 interview, 112–113)

We needn’t here recount the history of what became the national bourgeoisie in African and Caribbean neocolonial politics. Although Sartre’s aim was a phenomenological description of an ontological category and Lamming’s was explicitly political, we see here a meeting of ontological, political, and psychological description in Sartre’s 1943 description:

But the slimy offers a horrible image; it is horrible in itself for a consciousness to become slimy. This is because the being of the slimy is a soft clinging, there is a sly solidarity and complicity of all its leech-like parts, a vague, soft effort made by each to individualize itself, followed by a falling back and flattening out that is emptied of the individual, sucked in on all sides by the substance. A consciousness which became slimy would be transformed by the thick stickiness of its ideas. From the time of our upsurge into the world, we are haunted by the image of a consciousness which would like to launch forth into the future, toward a projection of self, and which at the very moment when it was conscious of arriving there would be slyly held back by the invisible suction of the past and which would have to assist in its own slow dissolution in this past which it was fleeing, would have to aid in the invasion of its project by a thousand parasites until finally it completely lost itself. (Sartre 1956 [1943], 778)

The message of an existential analysis is the error of human-nature discourses. It offers, instead, those premised on the human condition. That condition, anchored by reality, takes the mechanisms of nature seriously, as Lamming observed in his reflection on culture in his 2002 interview for Small Axe with David Scott. But as the existential early Marx, approvingly cited by Lamming, observed, “If we assume man to be man, and his relation to the world to be a human one, then love can be exchanged only for love, trust for trust, and so on” (Lamming 2002, 180; Marx 1975, 379). Marx was, of course, speaking, in his “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” of what it means to live in a human world; a world that is a function, fragile though it may be, of things only—or at least primarily—human. It is in stream with reflections found in Hannah Arendt’s The Human Condition (1958), where the divisions of labor,
work, and action affect the tenor of societies in which anyone dominates. Labor is a function of biological necessity; no labor, no life. Work, however, is the activity of making worlds. It is the realm of the imagination, the realm of the artist or what it means to be in a creative relation to one’s life’s tasks. And action is the condition for risk, glory, and power, where words meet deeds to manifest Arendt’s meaning of the political. Crucial in this schema is the importance of thought and the ongoing process of thinking and their necessary relationship with the political.

Do Lamming’s existential leanings work well with the political? It would be a mistake to read them as an over-individualized ideology of the libertarian vein. The bad faith manifested by such a position rests on its denial of the necessary conditions for its assertion. Individuals make no sense without a community from which and in which to live and be differentiated. So, too, with community. Collectivisms that reject any notion of an individual upsurge collapse into mere aggregates of distinct units that do not meet. To “meet” requires another and by extension sociality, which requires an intersubjective, ever-changing whole. But this dynamic reality is a function of communication and language. Denying the reality of such phenomena and their necessary relationship to the kinds of beings we are leads to performative contradictions. The performative contradiction in denying social reality is that “denial” is communicative, is outward directed, even where the reference is to the self, which makes it social. It is, in other words, a social rejection of the social.

The social world is the foundation of the political one, but both are achievements at each moment of the historical unfolding of the human species. The attack on thinking is at the heart of efforts to wipe out the political.

We live in an epoch fearful of those who dare to think. Its material form is the current disaster of market fundamentalism, where almost no critical reflection on the market is tolerated. In political economic terms, we are living in the triumph of a labor-centered proliferation of leisure time without cultivating conditions for work and action. Thus, labor-socializing without labor production leads to consumption as our primary relationship with the “outside” world. The result of such activities is a decline in those that depend on thought over those that depend, simply, on want. As thinking declines, so does distinction, and where there is no distinction, we collapse under the force of sameness or mandatory sameness (where thinking is indecent). All this amounts to a new form of what in days past would simply be called “totalitarianism.”

Ours is a world of market totalitarianism with nostalgia among many for the authoritarianism of colonialism, in which there is nearly no room for any other alternative formulation of the human spirit. And where thought cannot
experience rupture or difference, it projects itself as no longer conditioned but *determined*. In effect, a very inhuman conception of the human has taken root beyond the mechanisms of exploitation to that of solidification, to that of wiping away the human as possibility into the supposedly super-human and subhuman as fact. This collapse, the rendering of the human as law-governed, complete, and concluded, brings to the fore the double-pronged battle of which Fanon warned in the previous century. We need new material and social conditions in which to live. We also need new concepts by which to live.

The Black existential turn brings with it, then, a clarion call for renewing and revaluing practices of freedom. In that task, we have indeed been fortunate to have George Lamming—a beautiful human being whom I came to know simply as George—as one of our best allies in our continued fight to build a genuinely postcolonial condition.

Lamming’s candle ceased to burn on the 4th of June 2022. I’m sure he knew, at his last breath, that the light of struggle continues. Thanks, George, for doing your part. *A luta continua.*

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