

“Two heads are better than one.”

(Biblical Proverbial Adage)

A Comparative Critical Book Review of Aaron Kamugisha’s work: *Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean’s Intellectual Tradition*. Indiana University Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0-253-03626-1 (hdbk.) ISBN 978-0-253-03627-8 (web. PDF)

Reviewed by:

Dr. Linda Smith¹ and Dr. Malik Sekou²

^{1,2}University of the Virgin Islands, 2 Brewer's Bay, St. Thomas, U.S Virgin Islands 00802
E-mail: linda.smith1@uvi.edu

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Abstract

*This book review presents a comparative analysis of Aaron Kamugisha’s book: *Beyond Coloniality: Cultural Freedom in the Caribbean’s Intellectual Tradition*. Drs. Linda Smith and Malik Sekou present scholarly critiques of the said work. As Caribbean natives and academics who think along lines of advocating potentially promising postcolonial societies, they have seen it fit to analyze Kamugisha’s work, and examine what they deem to be some of its strengths and weaknesses. Simultaneously, they see value in analyzing a work such as Kamugisha’s that speak to the critical issues that impact the lives of colonized peoples in diasporic spaces. Of equal significance to Kamugisha’s critical postcolonial discussions, are the contemporary postcolonial arguments that are advanced by Caribbean Feminist Scholars in the likes of Verene Shepherd, Eudine Barriteau-Foster, Mimi Sheller, Consuelo Lopez et al. Hence, reviews of writings that address the struggles of colonized peoples are incumbent.*

Dr. Linda Smith

Aaron Kamugisha seeks to catalogue a shared vision, imagined communities and directional sites for the Caribbean region in his work: *Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean's Intellectual Tradition* in 264 pages. His work is divided into 2 major sections which are detailed as follows: Part 1, which is entitled *The Coloniality of the Present*, and contains the following sub-sections of The Coloniality of Citizenship in the Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean, and then, Creole Discourse and Racism in the Caribbean. Part 11, *The Caribbean and Beyond*, has the sub-sections A Jamesian Polesis C.L.R James's New Society and Caribbean Freedom, The Caribbean Beyond: Sylvia Wynter's Black Experience of New World Coloniality, and the Human After Western Man, the latter, which is followed by a Conclusion entitled: A Caribbean Sympathy that precedes the Bibliographic Information, and the Indexed entries.

In an effort to critically stage his discussion, Kamugisha, craftily maps out his vision for the Cultural Freedom and Sovereignty of Caribbean peoples. Likewise, he traces the origins of the Colonial Oppression of the colonized peoples that occupy the geo-political, socio-political, and ecological spaces, coupled with the various periods of history in which, various waves of peoples, were introduced to this critical island space- that their descendants- have come to call home. Kamugisha also validates and comparatively juxtaposes his discussion with reference to key Caribbean Theorists in the likes of C.L.R James, Mimi Sheller and Sylvia Wynter, whose scholarship and writings- present the Caribbean's Literary Tradition, a Contemporary Feminist Theoretical Framework, Sociological Compasses and Struggles of the Colonized Subjects squarely in relation to Africa, The Middle Passage, Plantocracy, and Beyond. As an instance in point, Kamugisha quotes C.L.R James's response to Anthony Bogues in an interview that was conducted in 2004. The question that Bogues posed was: "What do you consider to be the oxygen of the Caribbean's Intellectual Tradition? C.L.R. James's riveting response was: "History and Politics . . . These are the generative elements of our tradition" (James qtd. in Kamugisha 5). C.L.R James further provides evidence of his visionary and Caribbean-centered mindset, in several of his writings including his poignant autobiographical novel: *Beyond a Boundary*, in which his protagonist, James moves beyond cultural boundaries and crosses racial lines- to eventually be accepted by the British Cricket Association, and play Cricket as a Caribbean Black Boy, on a White British team during the 1960s.

In a similar vein, Kamugisha references Sylvia Wynter, a Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Thinker (in the sub-section 5), who seems fascinated with the epistemological or the crucial historic and cultural knowledge, theory, methods, and framework of Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Criticism. Additionally, Sylvia Wynter illustrates in her writings of Caribbean significance, that address the classical conditioning of the colonized subject and the search for an identity separate from the patriarchal societal orderings- and seems to get to the root of the struggles that face women of color. Although Kamugisha does not examine and focus on the works of the following list of Contemporary Women and Feminist writers including Marlene Nourbese Phillip, Eudine Barriteau-Foster, Verene Shepherd, Cecelia Green, Consuelo Lopez, Lourdes Casal, Julia Alvarez, Maryse Conde, Merle Hodge, Zee Edgell, Shani Mootoo, Ryhaan Shah, Michelle Cliff and even Alejo Carpentier, a male Cuban postcolonial thinker, in concert with Myriam Chancy, Makeda Silvera, one should note that their invaluable scholarly critiques and fictional contestations also serve to mirror a similar overview of the oppressive patriarchal status quo. However, Kamugisha cites Mimi Sheller, a Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Writer aforementioned, whose work, - embraces the historic, cultural and autobiographical significance of the struggles of peoples of color. From these observations, the women's struggle is deemed by the Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Scholarship- to be a driver in the discourse analysis surrounding the total Black Experience in the so-called New World, that was colonized by the Westernized Man and Colonial Interlopers in the Black and Brown diasporic spaces. Along these same lines, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, an

illustrious Caribbean activist, scholar, and cultural bearer maintained that: “A people without knowledge of their past history and culture are like a tree without roots” (Garvey). What Garvey proposes might be quintessential to help further understandings of the political quagmires, that colonized subjects or Creoles find themselves, in the milieu of. It is then with the said considerations regarding the colonized subject or Creoles, that Kamugisha tackles some of the critical issues of Caribbean Identity Formation, and demonstrates how this identity, figures into the fragmented historical, socio-political, and socio-cultural contexts of patriarchal hegemonic oppression.

In the furtherance of his reference to Mimi Sheller’s work: *Citizenship From Below: Erotic Agency and Queer Caribbean Freedom*, whereby she [Mimi Sheller] sees the Caribbean natives’ ability to acquire sovereignty in their native space as an avenue of relief from the decadent colonial baggage that continues to weigh down on them, Kamugisha demonstrates a similar train of thinking. To be more specific, Mimi Sheller, advocates that Caribbean women: “resist the limits of bio-political patriarchy, by use of their free perception and by use of their “Black body,” as a form of empowerment rather than as a site of pain or victimhood.” (Sheller 254). Simultaneously, she urges Caribbean natives to embrace and utilize their Caribbean culture and lived realities as potential agents of subversion from the binding dictates, exploitation and marginalization of Colonial Society. Here Sheller asserts that women utilize their womanly erotic agency and Caribbean identity as a form of recreating themselves, and as resistant tools to patriarchal oppression. It would also appear then, that Sheller’s view is also reflective of Mikhail Bahktin’s concept of freedom as manifested by the resistant actions to highbrow society of Rabelais, the protagonist of Bahktin’s classic work: *Rabelais and his World*. In Bahktin’s said fictional presentation, Rabelais resents the tastes, mannerisms, puffed up and false etiquette of highbrow society. Rather, he resorts to the unbridled course of speech and actions of the so-called proletariat or those of lowbrow society. Ironically, it is within the uncontrolled space of the so-called proletariat or the “savage culture,” that Rabelais or the native, experiences a true sense of self and place. Suffice it to say then, that Rabelais discovers his unique identity, and a sense of self in relation to the space and place within which, he operates. Instead, he begins to live and not merely to exist, within a marginalized, limiting, and oppressive time and space. Hence, Kamugisha’s discussion involving Caribbean identity and redefining the same, strongly resemble and appears to be inextricably bound up with - the societal dualities of the noble versus the savage, the master versus the slave, and the colonized “other’s” struggle for a voice and safe space for freedom, within the highly stratified and culturally limiting colonized spaces.

Furthermore, Kamugisha mentions Kamau Brathwaite’s critical reference to the significance of the enslaved African, and the voice that continues to echo in the ears of the conscious descendants. Permit me then, to explain what I too, deem to be an underlying reason for Kamugisha’s highlighting of Brathwaite’s timeless legacy. Accordingly, Brathwaite emphasizes the symbolic significance of reliving the experiences of the past through lenses of the language and cultural observances, for example, and he shows how such experiences are what can serve- to redefine a new and realistic theoretical framework for theorizing the Caribbean as a region. Considering its plurality of ethnicities, languages, cultures and experiences, Brathwaite in tandem with other postcolonial thinkers, perceive the Caribbean region as a mozaic or an amalgamation of evolving cultures, that are built on the premise of History, Politics and Culture, rather than as one linear colonial “homogeneous block,” if one could use Consuelo Lopez’s terms, description and critique of the homogeneous hegemonic imagination and perception of the colonized peoples. Hence, Brathwaite already mentioned, posits a return to the original sites of oppression and capitalizing on the culture and experiential banks of the Colonized Native as instructive for undertaking any meaningful dialogue involving Caribbean Identity formation. For a prime example, Brathwaite’s landmark work: *The History of the Voice* emphasizes the crucial role that Nation Language plays in the psychological development of students.

Categorically, Brathwaite appears to tap into a bottom-up model for theorizing the Caribbean region, by virtue of his focusing on the value of Nation Language to Creole learner development. In the same vein, he stresses its crucial cultural and historical significance since Creole is the language of the enslaved African, that was looked down upon, “othered,” and side-lined. Moreover, Brathwaite also points out in the said work: *The History of the Voice*, how interesting it is, to observe that the language of the slave- is the very language, that Modern and Contemporary Scholarship, have turned to for answers in their analyses of the Caribbean region. In comparison, Edouard Glissant’s work: *The Poetics of Relation* in which he emphasizes the pivotal role of Creole Language as a form of identity and culture in stimulating learners’ interest in language development - exemplifies this said All-Inclusionist instructional approach. Equally important, Brathwaite tends to think along the said lines- through his admittance in a video entitled: *Caribbean Writers and Their Art, History: The Caribbean and the Imagination* 1991- that prior to creating and composing poetry in which he could beat out the tropical rhythms of the Caribbean, the Sibilance of the Sea, the glimmer of the water, calculate their cadence, the syncopation of the steel band, and meter, for example, he could not fully connect with his Caribbean audience. He further notes that he could not connect with this Caribbean audience- since their [the Caribbean natives’] lived experiences, were not based on the imitative themes, meter and the traditional European iambic pentameter of Keats, Milton, Marvel et al. “There was a need to de-educate ourselves. Something was missing. We were singing and composing falsely European songs and poetry,” Brathwaite adds. However, as he comes of age, Brathwaite states that the Caribbean rhythms start to resonate with him and his people. In essence to Brathwaite’s profound statements, the echo and Sibilance of the Sea suddenly begins to take on a new form and a deeper meaning. (Brathwaite 1991). Hence, there were clear signs for a familiar cultural and socio-political model with which, visionary educators and people of the Caribbean region, could adapt and begin to authentically perceive themselves.

As a final comment, Kamugisha’s work: *Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean’s Intellectual Tradition*, one deems to be closely aligned to the wider discussions surrounding Caribbean Identity Formation, Decolonizing Philosophies, Cultural Freedom, and the Colonized Natives’ Struggle for autonomy within the broader socio-historical, socio-political and socio-cultural marginalized spaces of the Caribbean’s Colonial State. Generally, Kamugisha’s discussion is centered on these said aspects of the Caribbean’s Cultural Space and Colonized Peoples. Hence, I would highly recommend Kamugisha’s work for use in any academic program of study involving the Caribbean, Decolonizing Methodologies and by extension, Africana Studies.

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Biographical Note

Dr. Linda Smith is an Assistant Professor of English at the Department of English of the Orville E. Kean Campus of the University of the Virgin Islands. Dr. Smith holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of the Virgin Islands (2004), a Master of Arts degree in English Education from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez (2008), and a Ph.D. in Anglophone Caribbean Literatures and Languages from the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus (2018). Dr. Smith has taught on the island of Anguilla for 10 years, 3 years at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus, 8 years in the public schools of the United States Virgin Islands, 1 year in Adult Education, and 5 years at the University of the Virgin Islands. Dr. Smith writes short stories, skits, plays, and composes poetry in her spare time. Her research interests include Postcolonial Women's Literature, Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies. Her recent writings include a Book Review of Patricia Powell's Novel: *Me Dying Trial* in 2020 and scholarly article entitled: *A Goddess-like Power and Possession: Depictions of Afro-Creole Women's Spirituality in Ramabai Espinet's Work: The Swinging Bridge and in Myriam Chancy's Work: The Scorpion's Claw* in 2021.

Dr. Malik Sekou

Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean's Intellectual Tradition adds constructive insights into the theoretical development of postcolonial studies in the Caribbean, particularly the insular areas. Kamugisha boldly approaches the philosophical and ideological pitfalls and contributions of contemporary Caribbean thinkers, as they grapple with coloniality or the condition of neocolonial tendencies within the Anglophone Caribbean. In a methodical fashion, Kamugisha lays out the subject matter in two parts. Part I "The Coloniality of the Present," delves into the complex topic of examining the unfinished work of decolonizing the epistemology, National Consciousness, or sense of "being" that emerges from a formerly colonized region. From a radical standpoint, the author shows how many postcolonial Caribbean leaders and intellectuals have failed to exorcise the demons of white supremacy, European colonialism, and relentless globalization. This latter new global context seeks to defeat Caribbean independence. Consistently, Kamugisha reminds us that the Caribbean's Intellectual Tradition, has been heavily influenced by the radical left intelligentsia, whose well of inspiration would be the Caribbean masses. Throughout Part 1 of the text, Kamugisha sets his sights on drawing the necessary connections between the emergence of early nationalist thought, and thinkers with the present postcolonial era, and therein, he provides useful information for any student of Anglophone Caribbean politics, and society.

Indeed, he states that "the recounting of pre independence Anglophone Caribbean nationalism is crucial in any attempt to formulate a history of the present, for the class ideologies established in this period, the bases of their legitimacy constructs and the forms of regimentation introduced at the time still haunt the Caribbean today" (41). Like the insights of Perry Mars in *Ideology and Change: The Transformation of the Caribbean Left*, Kamugisha supports the perspective that the dominance of middle-class leadership, even if leftist in orientation in the nation state formation era, has the negative impact of their over representation in the modern postcolonial period. To the disappointment of the Caribbean masses, Kamugisha asserts that these middle-class leaders tend to uphold the coloniality of the contemporary period. In Part I, Kamugisha discusses at length, the profound impact of vacillating middle strata or classes have had in formulating and determining identity, citizenship, and new post-colonial formulas for governance. Also, in a surprising form, the new thought of the Francophone Caribbean is addressed- mainly from Guadeloupe and Martinique. Except for the anti-colonial thought and philosophy of Aimee Cesaire and Frantz Fanon, whose views are admired in the text, Kamugisha takes issue with the imprecision of the new paradigm of Creole Identity and Creolite advocates such as Edouard Glissant, Raphael Confiant, Jean Bernabe, and Patrick Chamoiseau. Additionally,

while Kamugisha has a frank discussion of Creolite and the inherent weaknesses of Creole nationalist constructs, greater emphasis should be placed on the modern ethnic realities which address a persistent racism, that is focused on the “darker-skinned” African-Caribbean as well as Indo-Caribbean and even the Chinese citizens for example of the region.

However, in a skillful form, Kamugisha bases his critique of Creolite with the voice of other scholars such as Kamau Brathwaite, and more so, C.L.R James and Sylvia Wynter. With no patience for ambiguities, the author elevates the new scholarship of the past 20 years that clarifies and criticizes a lingering chauvinist or *heteropatriarchal* bourgeois world-view. Certainly, Kamugisha uses a unique word construct to convey the new perspectives on Caribbean sexuality and its oppression from the outside metropole and the perpetrators, who reside among us. With an amazing ability to weave the voice of a literary critic, he shifts from the lofty pinnacle of erudite insights on complex philosophy to communicate the demands for social justice- as if he were, a diligent political activist for equal rights of all citizens, regardless of race, class, and sexual orientation.

Equally important, in Part II, “The Caribbean Beyond,” Kamugisha reveals what one suspects is his area of profound knowledge, insight, and interpretation. He deftly examines C.L.R. James’ intellectual contributions to Anglophone Caribbean Thought. Then, he explores the genius of Sylvia Wynter. Rarely, does any author systematically present in a succinct fashion, James’ evolution as an original thinker to show his imminence in examining Caribbean cricket, Marxism [Leninism-Trotskyism], literature, philosophy, politics, modern society, and family (even to its most intimate details). The author continues his discussion of James into the endnotes, where he reveals his comprehensive awareness of James’ most personal letters and notes. This assessment of C.L.R. James shows that with Paget Henry and Sylvia Wynter, Kamugisha values the prolific career of an African Caribbean intellectual giant. With ease, the author concludes his examination of the major themes of identity, coloniality, and citizenship by examining the prodigious work of Wynter. Similarly, he insists that her scholarship both develops the insights of James, but also diverges to address new concepts of modern identity, feminism, sexual equality, erotic agency, and humanism.

Comparatively speaking, Sylvia Wynter’s latter works, deal with the need for new humanism and Kamugisha informs his readership, that Wynter seeks “to effect a transformation of a magnitude similar to the Renaissance and create a body of thought that for the first time can result in the birth of the human” (185). Kamugisha views Wynter’s works as the logical continuation of the world class contributions of earlier Caribbean Intellectuals, and he queries us to consider her original thought on the basis of its clarity and prescience. Surprisingly, as Part II concludes with clarity and depth on the need for a new humanity little reference is made to the long shadow of Marcus Garvey’s ideas on Caribbean identity, unity, and a new “personality.” Nonetheless, *Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Cultural Freedom in the Caribbean’s Intellectual Tradition*, should be a required reading for students of Caribbean Studies, History, Philosophy, and Africana Studies. Kamugisha adds new insights and interpretations to the existing literature that addressed the Radical Left Tradition, Black Consciousness, and African Caribbean Culture. Additionally, optimism undergirds the text, and the author demonstrates that the Caribbean’s Intellectual Tradition is relevant to the region, and remarkable to the global intelligentsia. Thus, I would recommend Kamugisha’s work as a critical text that can be used in any Caribbean, African or Diasporic Cultural Studies program, that addresses Postcolonial Thought and Decolonizing Philosophy.

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Biographical Note

Dr. Malik Sekou is a professor of Political Science and History at the Orville E. Kean Campus of the University of the Virgin Islands. Dr. Sekou holds a Bachelor of Social Science from the University of the Virgin Islands (1989), a Master of Arts degree in Political Science (1992) and a Ph.D. from the University of Delaware (2000). Dr. Sekou has taught at the University of Delaware and the University of the Virgin Islands. He has taught for over 25 years at the University of the Virgin Islands. Dr. Sekou is currently a mentor to younger faculty members including Dr. Linda Smith. Likewise, Dr. Sekou has written extensively on critical themes and issues of Caribbean relevance. He is also a champion for the causes of marginalized peoples of color in the Black and Brown Communities. His most recent projects include a public education campaign on the themes of Self-determination and Sovereignty in the U. S Virgin Islands and Caribbean Space from 2016 to the present. He has also co-authored the Simplified Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands 1954 with Dr. Paul Leary and Patricia Welcome, Esquire, in 2021.