

# Preface: Paths Are Made By Walking

**David Scott**

O traveler, there is no path  
Paths are made by walking  
—Antonio Machado

In many respects this is our motto, our *cri de guerre*, you might say, our standard. From its formal inception as a journal project in March 1997, *Small Axe* has always been—and self-consciously so—a work-in-progress, an ongoing platform for critical engagement that is never not in the process of finding its feet in the very act of planting them on the uncertain ground, without a pre-ordained or ready-made map of the right path to follow. To be sure there are those who went before us, whom we honor, and from whom we have taken (and continue, in some measure, to take) our bearings: they are the pioneers, one might call them, who labored in the quarry of journal work. In this regard, we have always acknowledged the fundamental examples of *New World Quarterly* and *Savacou*, differently historically situated and theoretically accented projects to be sure, but both exemplary in their profound commitments to elaborating the idea of a Caribbean journal of criticism. And there are, of course, deeper narrative traditions that connect us to *Bim* and *Kyk-over-al* and *Focus*, and to the many other “little magazines” and literary-political periodicals that are part of our anticolonial and postcolonial histories. We take our *bearings* from them, as I say, but we *find* our own way in our own—differently configured—worlds and—differently resonant—vocabularies.

With this issue, *Small Axe* 27, October 2008, we begin to rough out a new journey of inquiry and connection. Each year for the next several years, the October issue of *Small*

*Axe* will be devoted to the French/Kreyol Caribbean. It is a sad but familiar fact of our inheritance (or, if you like, our *disinheritance*) in the Antillean world, not only to have been ruled by colonial masters of varied European provenance, with varied social, political, institutional, and intellectual histories and traditions (Spanish, English, French, Dutch, for the most part), but to have been ruled by them in and through their constitutive *rivalries* with each other for imperial ascendancy. Our subordinate Caribbean modernities, in slavery and emancipation, were in part made by coercively inserting us into the maelstrom of these competing global ambitions that made Europe what it is. The Caribbean story of large swathes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can in fact be told as the story of islands changing colonial masters as booty of war. Can it be surprising then, given this divisive colonial history, that the geopolitical orientation of these islands remains *away* from—rather than toward—each other?

You will perhaps recall Aimé Césaire's discerning and excoriating comment about our encounter with this militaristic and avaricious Europe, in his essay *Discours sur le colonialisme*: "Notre malchance a voulu que ce soit cette Europe-là que nous ayons rencontrée sur notre route [Our misfortune has been that it be this Europe we met on our path]."<sup>1</sup> Europe would of course not escape reaping the whirlwind of its systematic dehumanization of the colonized because *nul ne colonise innocemment*, no one colonizes innocently. There would be what Césaire called, polemically, a *choc en retour de la colonisation*, a return-effect of colonization, when Hitler would apply to Europe colonialist procedures, *des procédés colonialistes*, until then reserved for the colonized.<sup>2</sup> We pause in this issue of *Small Axe* to remember and honor Aimé Césaire, and the gift to us of his life and work. We mourn his passing. You will doubtless recall too that he was also one of our pioneers in the quarry of journal work—the Paris-based *L'étudiant noir* of the 1930s (which he founded with fellow students Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon-Gontran Damas), and the Fort-de-France-based *Tropiques* of the 1940s (which he founded with Suzanne Césaire, René Ménil, and others shortly after his return to Martinique in 1939). . . . These are just two of the names that announce traditions we will have to learn, and learn moreover to incorporate into our wider Caribbean literary-political self-understandings.

1. Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955), 26. (*Discours* was initially published in 1950 in Paris by Réclame; the Présence Africaine edition is a revised edition.) I have altered somewhat the translation as it appears in the standard English edition of Césaire's book, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 24.

2. Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, 18, 21, 14; *Discourse on Colonialism*, 17, 20, 14. Again, the translations have been slightly altered. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), had a similar insight about the relationship between totalitarianism and imperialism.