Towards a New Vista: Shirley Campbell’s Representations of her Afro-Caribbean Cultural Heritage

“The past recognized, (absences overcome)”
- Edouard Glissant

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This essay engages with the unmistakable project undertaken by Shirley Campbell, in her poem “The Encounter,” in which she re-centres her African heritage as a way of resisting the imprint of British colonial history which her own cultural identity carries. Indeed, she confronts and contests non-Afro centric historical discourse, concerning the origin and ancestry of Blacks in general and of West Indians of African descent in Costa Rica, in particular.

Campbell achieves this by fictionalizing the violent confrontation with Europeanized historical discourse of a black poetic persona who is determined to have the truths about Africa and African history proclaimed. The analysis will be situated within the broad frame of reference established by Stuart Hall’s view that identity is not “already an accomplished historical fact” but is instead a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation” (68).

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