

Nokoko



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Nokoko is an open-access journal promoting dialogue, discourse and debate on Pan-Africanism, Africa, and Africana. *Nokoko* brings forward the foundational work of Professor Daniel Osabu-Kle and his colleagues when they started the Journal of Pan-African Wisdom in 2005. 'Nokoko' is a Ga word that means something that is new, novel, surprising and interesting. The journal offers a venue for scholarship to challenge enduring simplified views of Africa and the African diaspora, by providing other perspectives and insights that may be surprising, interesting, and refreshing.

Combining spaces for academic and community reflection, *Nokoko* creates an opportunity for discussion of research that reflects on the complicated nature of pan-African issues. It provides a forum for the publication of work from a cross disciplinary perspective that reflects scholarly endeavour, policy discussions, practitioners' reflections, and social activists' thinking concerning the continent and beyond. Hosted by the Institute of African Studies, at Carleton University (in Ottawa, Canada), *Nokoko* provides a space for emerging and established scholars to publish their work on Africa and the African diaspora.

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Editorial Notes

Africa

The Front Lines *and* the Margins of a Global Anti-Poverty Movement

Toby Leon Moorsom

With the large number of existing journals in African Studies it is understandable we should justify our efforts to establish yet another. The contributions to this second issue of *Nokoko* provide sufficient evidence of the need, while also revealing some of the contours that will inevitably shape its trajectory. While we accept papers outside our established theme for each issue, our call for papers particularly sought out contributions that examined the place of Africans in global struggles against poverty. In the following months it became clear that the concerns motivating our call were clearly shared by many throughout the world. In fact, in the past year we have witnessed the heroism, conviction and sense of justice of Africans inspire a renewed global anti-poverty movement unlike anything seen since the days of African independence struggles and the civil rights movements against institutionalized racism, patriarchy and war –

particularly as experienced in the United States, but whose participants saw as a global struggle.

Events in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere on the continent have clearly placed Africans at the heart of a global anti-poverty movement. Yet simultaneously it became clear to many in North America and Europe that, in relation to the institutions that construct and maintain global inequalities, Africa is at the margins. The bankers who have pillaged our planet over the past years have done so within enabling legal and financial systems written with their left hand while they hold state military might in their right. These facts were not lost to those who camped into the winter on the streets of North America and Europe. In fact, one of the most encouraging aspects of the "Occupy" movement is that it reveals an unprecedented willingness among those in the north to build new forms of global solidarity in the fight for social justice. Moreover, evidence continues to reveal increasing levels of popular mobilization within Africa with whom a new generation of activists is able to build links.¹

This issue of *Nokoko* shows that emerging scholars will be integral to a bold, new moment of critical Africanist research that has capacity to mobilize. I refer here, not just to a mobilization of action, but also an integrated mobilization of the intellect. Young people today face the protracted convulsions of an increasingly savage global capitalist system in which core power-brokers reveal virtually no interest in addressing the most pressing issue of all. That is, of course, climate change. Not only is it the singular most pressing issue for all of humanity, it is one that burdens Africans and societies of the South more immediately and to a greater degree than all others despite the fact they contribute the least to its underlying causes. For this reason it is my personal hope that *Nokoko* can be rooted intellectually in the movements that work to challenge this global or-

¹ I have written on key dimensions of these movements and their limitations. see (Moorsom: 2011)

der, and that it can be one more space to inspire people to use their brains courageously toward the “next liberation movements” on the African continent as well as amidst the future anti-racist struggles everywhere. Anti-racist struggle for Africans of course coincides with ongoing exploration and celebration of the meanings of Africanness for those who embrace such identities, whether they reside in the Americas, Europe or Guangzhou, China.

The contributions to this volume reveal some of the dimensions any renewed anti-poverty struggle must take. At least three significant trends run through the articles we present below. First, it is clear that despite the understandable fanfare with which US president Obama came into office, we are nowhere near a “post-race” moment of history. While liberal attitudes toward a black elite may have softened, hard economic data shows that racialized groups have disproportionately felt the burdens of the 2008 financial crisis. Secondly, and perhaps not surprisingly, the production of knowledge about Africa itself continues to be a terrain of struggle. University systems and a wide variety of other institutions established to address many of the issues that concern African populations are being colonized by a market-logic that serves to perpetuate inequalities. Third, feminism continues to claim its space in Africa and it does so in a manner that respects the agency of women as they struggle in their differing socio-cultural spaces. Feminism is of course intimately linked with broader issues of gender and sexuality, which are becoming dangerous battlegrounds in societies increasingly influenced by bigoted religious fundamentalisms. In this context, all of us with greater degrees of privilege must continue to explore the connections between different forms of oppression, highlight the histories of sexual diversity within Africa and its diasporas and champion the ideal of equality among all human beings regardless of race, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, or religious practice.

Race Still Matters

A disturbing reality of our time is that enormous achievements in struggles against racism sit amidst a context in which growing numbers of racialized people live in poverty. The ANC celebrates its 100th anniversary while a black man with a Kenyan father is president of the US. Yet across the African continent, the majority of people have not seen any increase in their standard of living in the past 20 years. George Ayittey examined misleadingly presented World Bank data, which shows that "Half of the people in Sub-Saharan Africa were living below the poverty line in 2005, the same as in 1981. That means about 389 million lived under the poverty line in 2005, compared with 200 million in 1981" (Ayittey: 2009, 36). Between 1980 and 2005, the average annual growth in income per person in Africa was -1.75 (McNally: 2011, 129). As Acemoglu and Robinson note, due to the rise in China and India, for the first time in world history, the majority of the world's poor (living on less than \$1 a day) are in Africa. These differences coincide with massive divergences in other factors of health, welfare and life opportunities (Acemoglu and Robinson: 2011).

Victoria Schorr examines the degree to which negative perceptions of Africa play a role in maintaining these circumstances in which African countries struggle to become significant players within a global capitalist system. She looks specifically at the potential impact of perception on the willingness of global capitalists to invest on the continent. Schorr recognizes there are debates over whether or not the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) actually serves a developmental role in peripheral economies, but points to its significance among a number of factors shared by Asian countries that have managed to take greater place in global production lines in recent years. She offers a rigorous review of literature on elements of Afro-pessimism and tries to pull some answers out of some diverse statistical data. Whether or not causality is proven, she makes clear a whole number of racist and inaccurate perceptions of Africa contin-

ue to exist in popular culture and among investors. Diverse countries are treated in homogeneous terms that replicate colonial tropes and often exaggerate realities. The continent is associated with illness, disease and starvation, and dominated by corruption, tribal politics, and in constant threat of war and coups. Conrad's horror is alive and well in global media. Schorr notes that credit rating agencies regularly list African countries at lower levels than are deserved. Most of us are of course aware of these negative perceptions of Africa. As Pius Adesanmi explains in his recent collection of essays; those of us who teach and write on Africa in the academy cannot escape the image of Africa in the western imagination. We are inevitably students of Eurocentricism (Adesanmi: 2011, 143).

Does perception influence capital flows? Certainly. George Soros has been well aware of that.² But Schorr's article provokes the question whether Africa's future should be determined by how much it can contort itself to the demands of outsiders. Surely there must be other formulations in which Africa's huge pools of unemployed labour can be productively used. Moreover, feigning positivity about the continent rather than focusing on the enormous challenges facing Africans is also highly problematic. Witness, for example, a recent World Bank publication that focuses on what it considers to be success stories in Africa. (World Bank: 2011). Not surprisingly, many of the "successes" it lists revolve around the historically overdetermining role of basic commodity production for export markets, liberalization of agricultural markets, privatization of public services and expanding tourism on the continent. The headlines in *African Business* in recent months have also been nothing short of ecstatic about the state of the continent, with the January, 2012 issue asking

2 Conventional economic analysis in fact tends to greatly overstate the significance of perceptions, suggesting the current crisis in Europe and North American economies are crisis of confidence in the markets. This stems, however, from actual material limits to markets because people and governments have been pushed into debt walls. They simply cannot sustain more payments and continue to buy cars, houses and electronics.

“Will the African Lion Roar Again in 2012?”. They drool over the new contracts and exploration rights being given out in South Sudan. Off-shore oil projects of enormous proportion and complexity are underway in Angola and Ghana. Much fan-fare is also made of a growing ‘middle-class’ market of possibly as many as 100, million people capable of purchasing low-cost household products. Indian companies are buying up hospitals to sell medical procedures to those with the money, who would otherwise travel to India or Europe for treatment. Of course, most significant of all is the rush to gain access to African minerals desired by the expanding BRIC economies.

These facts, however, tell us little about production within Africa and the living conditions of the majority. On this basis neoliberalism has been highly successful in bringing three things; cell phones, a regular supply of basic commodities and greater access to transport. Yet alongside these things the majority have suffered to extraordinary degrees while multiple new crisis have emerged. The influx of consumer goods sold in disposable packages has turned much of the continent into an informal landfill, the removal of marketing boards and agricultural subsidies have created food shortages and famines. Costs of basic utilities continue to rise despite inconsistent provision. Growing shantytowns are built in flood zones and lack basic sanitation. Access to healthcare remains grossly insufficient. Daily transport consists of grossly overcrowded and unsafe vehicles - the majority not designed for the uses they are put to. Moreover, cities are facing gridlock while decrepid and unregulated vehicles poison the air. Unemployment levels are enormous – especially for the millions of young people who missed out on schooling due to the harsh SAPs of the 1990s. Understandably, people are becoming tired of the indignities of life for the majority of the continents 1 billion people and they are not going to be placated by the knowledge that at best 10 percent can now be considered “middle-

class".³ As Adesanmi suggests, under these circumstances the challenges of trying to remain an Afro-optimist can be likened to trying to fill a basket with water (adesanmi, 145).

One of the reasons dictatorial tendencies remain so prevalent in Africa is that consent cannot be achieved under these circumstances. Martial law is the Janus-face of wages that are so low they can produce such massive returns on foreign investments in extractive industries. Fortunately Africans across the continent are revealing their willingness and their ability to resist. Over the past year Senegal, for example, has faced regular disruptive demonstrations over the high prices paid for intermittent electricity. Before the highly problematic, Julius Mulema was thrown out of the ANC he was taking part in massive demonstrations against poverty and calling for nationalization of South Africa's mines. As I write this Nigeria is in complete stand-still during a second day of a nation-wide strikes against the end of fuel subsidies, a move the Nigerian and some neighbouring governments made on the advice of the IMF. Emboldened by the removal of the ruling party of 20 years, workers on the Zambian Copperbelt have undertaken a wave of strikes for higher wages – most recently at Quantum minerals, listed on the Vancouver stock exchange.

Of course, opposition in many African countries has yet to take a form that actually challenges the growing social inequalities. Most of the time we continue to see battles between big men over controls of the spoils while their cadres of unemployed youth fight it out – sometimes to tragic consequences. The worst instances in the past year have been Cote d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo. After more than 30 years of neoliberal policy in Africa the situation remains in certain respects as Geoffrey Kay described it in 1975 when he suggested that while Africa is super-exploited in the global economy, it is also, in certain ways, not exploited enough (Kay:

3 For figures see the United Nations Population Fund report from 2009, reported on BBC: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8366591.stm> accessed January 9, 2012

1975, p. x.). Most simply, there is not a large, waged industrial working class and nothing in the designs for an "African Renaissance" shows an interest in truly establishing one.

Hegemony, Charity and Knowledge Production

Charity, of course, is not established to change these dynamics. Imara Rolston's article in this issue offers excellent original analysis of the ways global responses to the HIV crisis in Africa have been disempowering to Africans. It is of course on the face of it quite bizarre that hegemonic actors in the international community are so deeply involved in the fight against HIV while their day-job seems to be rendering African societies utterly incapable of coping with it. The neoliberal prescriptions of the Washington Consensus have attacked the very capacities of self-defense in the societies they are imposed upon. Education, healthcare, labour unions and whole variety of social infrastructure have been dismantled while intellectual property rights limit access to potentially life-saving drugs.

Rolston argues that these same dominant forces behind neoliberalism "have not only impacted prevalence rates they have also ultimately built the foundation of international perspectives on HIV/AIDs prevention." A particular aspect of this perspective is the institutional focus on individual behaviour change. As Rolston argues, people act within a larger economic environment that has reshaped their lives, placing them ultimately in high-risk environments. In one case example he shows how men are forced to move into migrant labour while women, with few other options to escape poverty, venture away from their homes to sell sex. Instead of addressing the underlying factors of poverty, the "hegemonic benevolence" of charity places the onus of change on the individuals trapped in systemic violence. In the process a whole number of racial ideologies and mythologies have been invoked in ongoing processes of 'othering' embedded in supposedly scientific approaches to the

disease. Thus he sees it as “a form of ‘international cooperation’ that stands in tandem with various forms of structural violence to form a superstructure that promotes designs of disempowerment.”

The apparent benevolence described by Rolston is strikingly similar to what Adesanmi calls the “Mercy Industrial Complex”, in which the ideological function of people like Bono, Oprah, Angelina Jolie, the Gates and others are the necessary counter-movement to the forms of “Freedom” brought by the Military Industrial Complex. Cowen and Shenton describe it as the intentional development that functions as the countermovement to a development that is otherwise seen as imminent: that is, the expansion of market forces (Cowen and Shenton: 1996). Rolston rightly notes that this entire approach needs to be challenged in a way that overturns a system of structural violence.

New Diasporas

In our call for papers we also sought out contributions that address the circumstances of African diasporas. Wendy Thompson Taiwo provides a fascinating and intimate entry into a subject stemming from her PhD research on Africans, predominantly Nigerians, working in the export trade in Guangzhou China. Following her research in China she travelled to Lagos to investigate further steps in the commodity chain. Taiwo’s photo-essay reveals new dimensions of the internationalization of Africa and some of the complex ways Africans are embedded in processes of globalization. She describes her informants as “unafraid of the risks and open to the wildest of encounters, these were contemporary explorers riding headfirst into a new global economy”. The challenges and dangers they face show the heroic efforts Africans are taking simply to ensure their compatriots have shoes on their feet, clothes, as well as radios, televisions, computers and cell phones to keep their communities connected to the rest of the world.

It is interesting to consider the relationship to production of these traders. In crude class terms they would be considered “petty-bourgeoisie”. In neoliberal theory this should be a step up from waged labour, yet without the protections afforded full citizenship in China they are clearly part of a global precariate facing all manner of discrimination. Africans face similar experiences in many other parts of the world. The recent tragic murder of Senegalese vendors in Italy by right-wing racist, Gianluca Casserio shows that Taiwo’s informants are just some among many possible examples of Africans victim to the various manifestations of racism in the global economy.⁴ It is worth asking whether the precarious existence of these traders is a reasonable cost to the “efficiencies” neoliberalism was to bring in as it destroyed the struggling Import-Substitution-Industrialization initiatives of the early post-colonial years. Taiwo shows that African traders in China are victim of robbery, bribery, arbitrary state power, police raids, detention, forced to hide like cockroaches from portions of society where police are more likely to roam – police who might also, in another logic of social reproduction *protect* those Africans involved, especially because they are there to help sell Chinese products.⁵ Clearly these ‘efficiencies’ are ones that should be opposed and labeled for the economic apartheid they represent. Thus, the apartheid struggle is clearly far from over.

Given the particularly new cultural spaces being opened up by Africans navigating life on margins in places like Guangzhou our concepts of diaspora and particular claims to Africity will inevitably be challenged. Once again I refer to Adesanmi, who has pointed out problems posed by post-modern theory that challenge essentialisms and grand narratives of oppressor and oppressed (Adesanmi,

4 As Guardian reporter notes, “The Florence killings are a symptom of a wider racism”, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/dec/16/florence-killings-racist-italy> Friday 16 December 2011 13.44 GMT, accessed, January 9, 2012

5 There are hundreds of thousands of people living out similar circumstances in Canada. I learned this in intimate detail while working in a food bank in Toronto.

73-81). Of course since 1949 anti-colonial Africans have had a particular affinity with China, in part because it saw a revolution made by the peasantry. It was then seen as a model that could support a people's revolution without having to travel through a capitalist stage of history. With China, Africans could see that those at the margins were making history. Moreover, in trying to remain unaligned between the USA and USSR, countries like Zambia and Tanzania found financing for key infrastructure in China. Yet today we see numerous cases of Africans being exploited and oppressed by Chinese people. This will push Africanists to work harder to provide rigorous and politically powerful analysis that avoids the pitfalls of territorializing, or what David Harvey, following Henri Lefebvre, refers to as processes of aestheticization – where the past gets rewritten to support new political narratives of exclusion. This is currently most obvious in the new South African xenophobia that erases deep bonds of solidarity that came into being across the continent in fighting apartheid.

At the same time, we have to avoid temptations to drift unanchored into the terrain of contingency, particularity and tentativeness. We cannot throw out the broader narratives of racism, eurocentricism, and imperialism simply because the world continues to be complex. Here the article by Leslie Wells offers a useful entry into discussions of diaspora that are sufficiently pliable to avoid the traps of essentialism that people like Malcolm X found themselves in.⁶ Wells suggests that "By promoting a discussion of a more self-defined, agency-conscious definition of diaspora through the creation of new discursive spaces, these communities have the potential to mobilize this identity against concepts of nationalism, inequality and false narratives of "progress." Claims of Africanity can of course continue to be made with political goals in mind and in fact should be celebrated, even if it is no more than a concept.

6 Manning Marable's biography is essential reading for all Africanists

Women, Gender and Sexuality

In our call for papers we also asked how, as activists and Africanists, we can relate to African women in struggle. We see the need to recognize the multiple burdens of women without resorting to clichéd ideas of their passivity that also conflate them with tasks of child-rearing. There seems to be a particularly dominant though intellectually lazy group of career feminists that have become a political fixture in African countries over the past 20 years. These are the people who seem to simply offer a few paragraphs to every UN, World Bank and large NGO report that comes out. Inevitably they put in a few words about “women and children” being the poorest, needing to be ‘consulted’, ‘targeted’ and represented. More recently they began adding the use of “gender” to fulfill demands of funding agencies, even though it is clear so few actually understand its full implications.

As the article by Oluwasinmisade Akin-Aina reveals, this is a trend that stems from western feminisms that had a tendency to portray all third world Women as a homogenous group. Yet the kind of “global sisterhood” called for by figures such as Obioma Nnaemeka recognizes that Women are not all socialized in the same way as gendered beings cross-culturally. Akin Aina points to differing histories of women’s struggle in the colonial era which fed into anti-colonial struggle, yet afterwards women tended to be sidelined in post-colonial political processes. She argues that diverse histories of African women’s struggle can be understood as a feminism negotiation’, dealing with a culturally-specific issue in a way that upholds the rights of women in society, while also valuing the positive aspects of one’s traditions. “Whether it be through negotiation and compromise, rejection of hegemonic notions of gender and cultural identity, or working towards the emancipation of women through a variety of tactics, strategies and acts, these are all context-specific and reference the locations in which these struggles are waged”.

It is fitting then that Nadege Campaore opens a challenging discussion that asserts greater agency of black women as they counter the complex terrain of African hair. Campaore challenges past liberation discourses over African hair, noting ways they can essentialise Africanity and in doing so overlook the diversity of appearances and experiences among Africans and the diaspora. Drawing on Chandra Mohanty, she suggests counter-discourses should acknowledge the possibility of multiple meanings and support ‘a politics of engagement rather than a politics of transcendence’. The debate, quite surprisingly, parallels important radical critiques of liberal-feminist judgements of the niqab. The French government of course dramatically imposed a headscarf ban on girls in schools as part of a broader wave of Islamophobia that is particularly burdensome on African diaspora from some of France’s former colonies. To the surprise of many, some of the fiercest defense of the headscarf came from young, very vocal girls who do not at all fit the stereotype of Muslim oppression.⁷ Outsiders – a predominantly white parliament – deem the practice oppressive and yet in doing so they erase the agency of those who wear them. The headscarf is of course immersed in broader social forces and is therefore not free from practices of patriarchy. Yet how can one advocate protecting women if their own agency is not valued? Here claims of feminism become a guise for islamophobia.

All women must navigate the ways political economy is played out on women’s bodies, on the constructions of beauty that fight to define the very meaning of female identity.⁸ In this context perhaps simply to exist is to necessarily resist. One fights these images each day whether one wants to or not. This is on top of the basic challenges many of us have in pulling ourselves out of bed each morning and presenting ourselves to the world as if we do not carry multiple

7 See the excellent documentary film “the Headmaster and the Headscarves” by director, Elizabeth C. Jones

8 As Fahs (2011) reveals, these pressures are also highly heteronormative.

burdens on our shoulders. Is it not fair enough, for a woman to ask for greater space to carry on other tasks they find important to their sense of identity? Is it not reasonable for a women to claim space by pointing out that "I am more than my hair". Even if hair practices were entirely rooted in self-hatred of ones African features, can we not let one live with their contradictions while they fight what might be more interesting or more important battles for that moment? Furthermore, perhaps spaces of contradiction can allow for greater exploration of identity.⁹ Would any of us really believe that a white women is less of a feminist if they permed their hair, coloured it, cut it short or grew it long? What would we then have to say about the act of tattooing? Surely we can accept that we are complex beings and that the essence of liberation has to be in self-expression.

Campaore is not blind to the broader context of generalized and increasing levels of poverty of African women globally throughout the neoliberal era. In this context issues of beauty are obviously intertwined with the various intimate pressures on African women *vis-à-vis* men. According to UNWomen, estimates suggest women represent 70 percent of the world's poor. On average they are paid less than men, with the average wage gap in 2008 being 17 percent. Women face persistent discrimination when they apply for credit for business or self-employment and are often concentrated in insecure, unsafe and low-wage work. Eight out of ten women workers are considered to be in vulnerable employment in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (UN Women). In Africa women are concentrated in insecure jobs in the informal sector with low income and few rights. They are often deprived education, but actually perform the majority of work in society.

A recent report in the US shows black women are by far the poorest in society. The Insight Centre for Community Economic Development found that Single black women have a median wealth of

9 It should be noted that a number of popular weaves and wigs allow one to sport dreads, afros and braids.

\$100 compared to white women who had \$41,500. The figures for Black men were \$7,900 to \$43,800 for white men. Single Hispanic women were almost as poor with a net worth of \$120. Net worth figures subtract debts from incomes to generate a more accurate picture than income levels (Hollar: 2010). US Bureau of Labour Statistics show black women are more likely to be without jobs (2011). and are more likely to work in the public sector. That latter fact means that African American women are the greatest victims of US cuts to the public sector following the 2008 crisis and bank bailouts (Beyerstein: 2011, Reuters, 2011).

Yet in this context African American women spend disproportionately on their hair. According to a New York based industry publication, “while blacks make up 13% of the US population, they account for more than 30% of industry spending in a \$4 billion hair care market” (Mason: 2003, 42). Although women are poor, hair products represent one of their primary means of participating in markets in Africa. Is it the case that spending on beauty may be connected to the fact that they are in a highly competitive dating market – in which black women are also least likely to have committed partners? This may be the case, but we also have to be careful in thinking that grooming among black women is something new. As Ashe (2001) notes, there is evidence that hair care has been an important social activity of black women for hundreds, if not thousands of years. (Ashe: 2001)

The Politics of Play: Sex, Gender and Anti-Racist Alliances

If we can accept that we are complex beings and that the essence of liberation has to be in self-expression then it is not a far reach to suggest that spaces of play and exploration of gender and race are important for men also. Increasing incidents of homophobia and the imposition of laws against homosexuality in Uganda, Malawi, Ghana, and elsewhere on the continent are subjects that

should be explored intellectually as much as they are opposed politically. It is extraordinary, for example, that Africans are increasingly being told by Pastors of US-based Christian evangelical churches that homosexuality is “unAfrican” and is a “neocolonial cultural import”. What intellectual processes are taking place that prevent people from seeing these ironies? Is homophobia a response to a sense of immasculation among men as the failures of independence era have been incapable of absorbing huge pools of labour into meaningful work? Are these same men also being threatened by the increasing space women are occupying in formal workplaces? Are they afraid of having to alter the so-called “traditional” gender roles in which women do the vast majority of work necessary for reproducing life on a daily basis?¹⁰

Even if the absurd theories of queerness being a neocolonial import were true then it relies on erasures of the roles Africans and African Americans have played in queer culture in the metropolises of the world. Queers of multiple racial ancestry were involved in the Harlem Renaissance, the civil rights movement, the Stonewall riots and the vibrant queer culture that continued to battle for equal rights thereafter. Harlem writer and artist Bruce Nugent's 1926 short story *Smoke, Lilies and Jade* is widely considered to be the first publication by an African-American depicting gay sexuality between two black lovers (Wirth, 2002). Michael Bronski shows that both homosexuals and African Americans were drawn to places like Harlem and Greenwich to escape the stigmatization, criminalization and marginalization they were facing in rural areas. Greenwich was in many ways excepting of people of colour while Harlem's “primarily African American community was accepting of homosexuals of colour as well as some white homosexuals”. Harlem was to then become a site of exploration of African American culture as well as public manifestations of homosexual culture. In the 1930s, African American,

10 Thabo Msibi (2011) argues that this sort of “anxious masculinity” is precisely what is happening.

Gladys Bentley performed dressed as a man and like drag queen, Gloria Swanson was wildly popular (Bronski: 2001, Ch6). Throughout the 1920s and 1930s a popular annual “Faggots Ball” at Rockland Palace would draw 8000 participants. These were not, however, culturally marginal but in fact a major centre of African American and a growing Pan-African culture. These were the spaces where icons such as Duke Ellington, James Baldwin and Malcolm X were most at home.¹¹

African Americans and Africans continued to be very influential figures in metropolitan queer cultures. Numerous DJs from New York and Paris claim Cameroonian artist, Manu Dibango’s 1972 album *Soul Makossa* was the first disco record ever. The album was a classic in New York after-hours clubs and private parties, which as Cornell Professor, Judith Ann Peraino notes, “were gathering spots for people at the margins of dominant culture: homosexuals, African Americans and Latinos” (Peraino: 2006, 176-177). Thus:

For many urban gay men, disco music became a determining factor in their experience of community and communal identity – an identity that, through disco music, became more evident in mass culture in general... discussions of disco registered debates about the appropriate expressions of gender, the visibility or invisibility of race, and the construction of desire... the macho of the multi-racial Village People and the effeminacy of the African American singer Sylvester together highlight the intersection between the politics of gender and the politics of race in the gay community in the late 1970s (ibid).

Struggles against racial oppression have historically been intertwined with struggles for sexual freedom and sexual equality. Moreover, Africans and African Americans have been central figures in these struggles and in the cultures that have been built out of them.

11 Manning Marable’s majestic post-humus biography of Malcom X shows Malcoln was no stranger to Harlem’s queer culture and claims he may have even partaken in it.

Yet Peraino also notes Africans have shared in the backlash to their cultural spaces alongside gays and other racial minorities. The reaction against disco that came with a revival of the 4 piece rock band was a product of this. "If black and latino men could be linked to disco, then their sexuality could be called into question and straight white men (represented by rock) could be assured of their supremacy" (Ibid: 178).

The backlash against disco that came at the end of the 1970s was of course much more than that. It was the beginning of a massive assault on all the achievements that came out of post war struggles for freedom among women, racial minorities and formerly colonized peoples everywhere. Reagan's smashing of the air-traffic controllers union and Thatcher's smashing of the coal-miners was followed by the rise of monetarist policies, most dramatically with the "Volker shock" in 1980. As the US treasury contracted the money supply interest-rates shot up on the millions of dollars in loans recently doled out to African nations. In doing so they relegated Africa to 30 years of debt slavery as they paid the amount of the original loans multiple times over. The grotesque sums are put in perspective by Toussaint as he notes that "between 1980 and 2002, the populations of peripheral countries have sent the equivalent of fifty Marshall Plans to creditors in the North" (Toussaint: 2005, 149).

Research for Mobilization

It seems very clear that the last thing Africa needs at the moment is research that claims to be simply objective. If we are not actively undertaking a research agenda that mobilizes in the most progressive terms possible then we are allowing an unacceptable status quo to prevail. In fact, if we are not mobilizing, we can be sure that others are. We should not see ourselves as mobilizing "stakeholders", and undertaking "capacity-building" in paternalistic condescen-

sion. Instead, we should be providing space to critically examine and articulate alternate visions of a future Africa in the world.

In the first anti-colonial struggles key intellectuals shunned material prosperity within the colonial economy and took on the slow task of anti-colonial popular education. They rode bicycles between villages and stayed in the houses of the poor. In the best instances they developed organic connections with the struggles of the poorest while promoting a politics of self-emancipation in the manner promoted by people like Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral. Spontaneity and mass action played a vital role in many instances but there was also a political philosophy – however imperfect – to tap into. Today few intellectuals of this sort exist. Committed academics are absorbed in trying to keep universities functioning while others spend their time doing work for International Organizations and NGOs. Others have left to work in the US, Europe and elsewhere – often with the reasonable desire to support their families on the continent. Regardless of the motivations, the result is that the educated classes have largely abandoned the struggles for independence and social justice.

Today African leaders boast of a mythical “African Renaissance”, yet universities everywhere suffer from funding shortages amidst growing class sizes. In many institutions dormitories built for 2 are housing 6 or more. Universities are regularly closed due to strikes and when student demonstrations threaten to embarrass governments. What “renaissance” ever took place that was not, at its foundations, based on a great respect for knowledge? The university is a political battleground and we exist in a moment where we have an obligation to take sides. Lets hope *Nokoko* can provide a valuable space sharpening our swords.

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Economics of Afro-Pessimism

The Economics of Perception in African Foreign
Direct Investment

Victoria Schorr

The main ingredient in the power of the weak state is the image it has in the minds of decision makers in the powerful states.

— Onwudiwe, E. and Ibelema, M. (eds), 2003, p. 4).

Afro-pessimism – briefly, the perception that ‘Africa’ has always been and will continue to be a scary, backward and poverty-ridden place – is a familiar perception to many in the West, most especially for any scholar of modern Africa. Comments that would be considered ignorant, if not outright prejudicial, in other fields of study are commonplace in discussions on sub-Saharan Africa. Misconceptions, stereotypes and negative images of Africa abound. Each semester, Professor Jo Ellen Fair of the University of Wisconsin, a largely liberal university renowned for its African studies, asks students to describe their images and ideas of “Africa” and “Africans”:

... I get the usual litany of stereotypical negative, and often condescending descriptions. To my students, “Africa” is: “basket case,” “jungle covered,” “big game, safari,” “impoverished,” “falling apart,” “famine plagued,” “full

of war," "AIDS-ridden," "torn by apartheid," "weird," and "black." Moreover, my students describe "Africans" as "tribal," "underdeveloped," "fight[ing] all the time," "brutal," "savage," "exotic," "sexually active," "backward," "primitive" (Fair, E.F., 1993, p.5).

Afro-pessimism is largely studied by scholars of African literature, sociologists, anthropologists and media studies, not economists. Literature exploring any possible correlation between Africa's negative image in developed countries and the continent's development pace are scarce (Onwudiwe and Ibelema, M., 2003, p. 5). According to the constructivist school of political thought, however, perceptions have power, often overriding rational state interests. These state interests, most especially in the democratic OECD countries, are often determined by the general populace and their perceptions. The opinions of the population are in turn largely informed by the media. Thus, if the populace includes business people, investors, CEOs, bankers, economists, development workers, etc., then what is the impact of their perceptions on their interests? If Afro-pessimism can and does affect international political decision-making, could it not also impact international economic decision-making? Just as American inner city neighbourhoods, with the perception of high drug use and crime, do not encourage investment, "primitive" Africa populated with "savages" who are "brutal" and "fighting all the time," and probably rapists since they are "sexually active", sounds like a risky location and an equally unappealing investment (p. 7). Therefore, it does not seem such a large leap that negative images of Africa in rich and powerful countries could affect and even be retarding the continent's development (p. 7).

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is now often advocated as an important component for Africa's growth and development. Whether FDI causes growth in developing markets is debated, but many advocate that in order to cut poverty rates in half, the region must attract greater FDI flows. Since political risk is ranked as one of the most important factors when investing in Africa, clearly investors'

perceptions of African politics will have an impact on foreign direct investment. Invariably these perceptions are based on investor-friendly (or unfriendly) policies but also by their perceptions of sub-Saharan Africa in general. For this reason, FDI has been chosen to elucidate how perceptions of Africa, and African politics in particular, can affect economic development and policy prescriptions. This is by no means the only way in which economics are affected by perceptions, as will be mentioned in the final section of this study, but is perhaps one of the most well-known, if not well-documented, forms. Further study needs to be done to better determine the relationship: surveys of CEO images of "Africa" similar to those in Professor Fair's classrooms, perhaps even anthropological in-depth studies. This paper, unfortunately, does not have such resources to draw upon and is thus meant only as a starting block to encourage such an avenue of future study.

The analysis will begin with an overview of the literature on Afro-pessimism, followed by a thorough definition of Afro-pessimism, its colonial antecedents and its continuation via Western mass media. A brief explanation of constructivism and the possible impact of Afro-pessimism will be discussed in section three. The fourth section will then review the literature on foreign direct investment in Africa and perceptions of risk. A brief analysis of the available data on FDI in sub-Saharan Africa and developing Asia will examine the actual flows of FDI, raising several questions. Finally, the last section will conclude as well as make some suggestions for further areas of study.

Review of Afro-Pessimism in the literature

A comprehensive review of the literature on Afro-pessimism would require an essay in itself. This analysis does not have the scope to treat the topic so broadly and will thereby be only a brief overview of what was a popular topic in academic writing in the 1990s. As mentioned, the topic of Afro-pessimism has largely been discussed with-

in the fields of African fiction and literature, sociology, anthropology and media studies, with some mention in African history and political science. However, there has been appallingly little study of Afro-pessimism within economics or development studies. Perhaps, if Paul Krugman's prediction is correct, there will be further study of behavioural economics in the years to come (Krugman, 2009), opening the way for more focus on the impact of perceptions on irrational economic outcomes. For now, however, much of the literature will be from other fields of study and largely dating from the 1990s. Many of the articles reviewed will be used in greater detail in the proceeding section, the definition of Afro-pessimism.

Much of the debate around Afro-pessimism took place in early 1994 with both a famous article by Kaplan, published in the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled "The Coming Anarchy," and an edition of *A Journal of Opinion* dedicated to "The News Media and Africa" (2004). Though Afro-pessimism was by no means a new topic at this time, 1994 was perhaps both the culmination and the catalytic year for Afro-pessimism literature, perhaps due to the US intervention in Somalia.

Kaplan's article (1994), which received significant publicity at the time, is riddled with gross generalizations and Afro-pessimistic statements. His thesis centered around climate change's environmental effects, which he predicted would cause rifts between cultures and an eventual 'clash of civilizations'-style warfare. This spawned a number of critiques, namely Besteman's anthropologically-based essay with the title, *Why I Disagree with Robert Kaplan*. This debate, however, did not deeply analyze Afro-pessimism itself, but focused on the various ways in which cultures interact with one another.

A book edited by Beverly Hawk, *Africa's Media Image*, published in 1992, was the inspiration behind *A Journal of Opinion*, dedicating a special edition to "The News Media and Africa." This volume sparked greater critical analysis of the existence of Afro-pessimism. In this was an analysis of the coverage of Africa in *Time* and *Newsweek*

Magazine between 1989 and 1991 (Domatob, 1994). It illustrated the clearly unfair treatment, both in the number of stories and types of stories, of Africa in the media. Since then, there have been several similar studies of media attention regarding Africa and the developing world in general, which will be cited in the following section of this study.

This evolved into the debate between the 'Afro-pessimists' and 'Afro-optimists,' with each at times being equally unrealistic. The Afro-pessimists, who frequently call themselves 'realists,' cite all the terrible things that have happened on the continent. The Afro-optimists, often stating there is a burgeoning African Renaissance,¹ claim that Africa is treated unfairly in these critiques and that the achievements of Africa are inordinately ignored. David Rieff's article, "In Defense of Afro-Pessimism" (1999), is an excellent example of the list of negative information drawn upon by the pessimist school of thought. Hounnikpo's review in 2004, entitled "Africa Between Despair and Hope," illustrates the debate between the two schools from the pessimist perspective.

On the other side, "The Other Africa," written by David F. Gordon and Howard Wolpe in 1998, lists a number of achievements in sub-Saharan Africa and attempts to convince the American reader that the United States should become more involved with African development. Additionally, the book edited by Ebere Onwudiwe and Minabere Ibelema, *Afro-Optimism: Perspectives on Africa's Advances*, attempts to show a number of political achievements in sub-Saharan Africa as well as decry the idea that Africa has regressed since independence.

Meanwhile, a second school of Afro-optimists do not base their study on Africa's success stories but that where the various countries have failed, it is the fault of the international system, not Africa. Au-

1 'African Renaissance' largely referred to a dawning age of political peace and cooperation between African countries, inspired by the NEPAD as well as the ending of a number of civil wars around the same time.

thors such as William G. Martin (2008) and K. Mathews (2000), thereby fit into the school of African studies named the 'dependency and underdevelopment' school by Chazan et al. (1998, p. 16).

Regarding the economic literature, there is a very small body of literature mentioning Afro-pessimism. This comes largely from those articles with the expressed purpose of demonstrating Africa's progress with regards to largely ignored economic statistics. John Sender's article, *Africa's Economic Performance: Limitations of the Current Consensus* (1999), is perhaps the best example. Equally, Martin's article in 2008 and Austin's in 2000 also mention the various instances of improvement in sub-Saharan Africa that tend to be ignored by the economics literature. However, even in these articles, no attempt is made to suggest that Afro-pessimism may be affecting economic growth and development. Aside from the frequent mentioning that Africa's image is deterring foreign direct investment,² it seems that no study has attempted to delve into the matter.

The elements of Afro-Pessimism

Finding an adequate definition of Afro-pessimism is a difficult task as it is both historic and modern as well as involving various concepts based in images and symbols of what "Africa" is to Western audiences. Therefore, inherent in its definition is the role of the modern Western mass media as its primary vector of continuation. The majority of the literature defines Afro-pessimism with only a couple of the elements involved or in simple terms such as that given in the introduction of this paper. As it is the crux of this analysis, an extensive, complete definition is necessary. James Michira (2002), provides the most inclusive outline for Afro-pessimism's various elements, if not as encompassing an explanation of these elements,

2 The Preface by Secretary General of UNCTAD in *Foreign Direct Investment in Africa: Performance and Potential*, 1999, is a prime example.

and, as such, will be used as the starting point of what should be a more comprehensive definition.

The first element of Afro-pessimism is **homogeneity**. Okwui Enwezor, a photographer, describes it best as,

... sweeping impressions whereby spatial and cultural distinctiveness and diversity become one blurry, indistinguishable thing... [for] a landmass ten times the size of Europe ... (Enwezor, 2006),

'Africa' is often referred to in the manner of a country, not a diverse continent. This allows for a lumping together of all the bad qualities that can take place within nearly 50 countries. I say nearly fifty because 'Africa' refers most commonly to sub-Saharan Africa. The 'African,' as used in the Western press, does not mean anyone who lives on the African continent, but rather people who are black and live on the African continent (Hawk, 1992, p. 8). While I maintain this distinction has its utility, the by-product is that 'black Africa' becomes viewed as one homogeneous culture. Of course, my use of the term 'Western' is equally a homogenization of various European cultures and their prosperous ex-colonies. Despite that, one does not see reporters on the news saying they are in southern Europe or western Australasia reporting on a story.

The second element of Africa's pessimistic image is its **colonial mythos** as the "Dark Continent." It could be said that Afro-pessimism is as old as the invention of Africa as the darkest of all places in human history (Enwezor, 2006). Africans are lusty and promiscuous (Monroe, 2006, p.30) heathens with backward traditions, practices and superstitions (Michira, 2002, p. 3). While having ancient and immutable cultures, simultaneously, Africans are people without history, having contributed nothing to the advancement of humanity (Enwezor, 2006). This is entirely the colonial imaginary of

'Africa,' promulgated by Joseph Conrad and images of Livingstone and Stanley cutting through dense unknown jungle.³

The third element of Afro-pessimism involves the perception of **illness and disease**, more recently emphasized by HIV/AIDS. This too has a colonial antecedent. Given that Africa is where humans have been the longest, it is also home to the highest number of diseases that affect humans (Diamond, 1998). When European colonizers arrived, they had not developed natural immunities or decreased susceptibility to these illnesses and thereby often had high mortality rates from these new and scary illnesses (Bryceson, 2000). Schraeder and Endless surveyed articles from the New York Times between 1955 and 1995 and found that Ebola and AIDS were often topics with regards to coverage on Africa (Schraeder and Endless, 1998, p. 33). In a smaller review of several daily American newspapers during a one-week span in 2005, the mention of violence in articles on Africa was the most common, however, disease was the second most common reference, often in tandem with promiscuity (Monroe, 2006, p. 30). The connection of HIV/AIDS with Africa may be justified, given the prevalence rates in southern Africa, but rarely is it mentioned that some African countries have prevalence rates equal to places such as Washington D.C.⁴ Michira points out (p. 5), however, that not only is AIDS associated with Africa but that "the media attributes the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS in Africa to ignorance, the reluctance to change sexual behavior, as well as backward cultural and religious traditions." In this way, the AIDS 'epidemic' and promiscuity are mutually reinforcing images. Lastly, it is important to note that UNAIDS has accepted that its measures of HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in Africa have been historically over-

3 This historical imagery is extensively described in Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa*.

4 Ma, F. 'DC responds to HIV rates with push for STD tests', Private MD News, 31 August 2009. It is also interesting to note the quote itself: "Our rates are higher than West Africa," Shannon L. Hader, director of the District's HIV/AIDS Administration, told the Washington Post. "They're on par with Uganda and some parts of Kenya." Neither Kenya or Uganda are in West Africa.

estimated (Bennell, 2004). Bennell notes that the majority of African countries have rates around or below ten percent and that several countries prevalence rates have been declining. His conclusion is that rates seem to have peaked on the continent. This is hardly the image that is shown in the media nor by UNAIDS itself, however, which continues to articulate that “no turning point has been reached” (Bennell, 2004, p. 4).

Fourthly, the conception of Africa as a place of **starvation**. This is more modernly portrayed as a Malthusian situation of overpopulation on poor, and continually degrading, soils. Children with swollen bellies, flies around their heads and pleading looks is a well-known image in Western media portrayals. These images have even earned an appalling term of their own: development pornography (Gidley, 2005). Such images are a legacy of some of the earliest media coverage of post-colonial Africa, such as the starvation of the Biafran War, as well as an extension of the colonial idea of Africans being unable to take care of themselves: 'the white man's burden.'

In contrast, the fifth element of Afro-pessimism is **Africa as National Geographic** (Schraeder and Endless, 1998, p. 29). This involves images of the heart-breaking beauty of Africa's natural world where man is virtually absent unless there are tourists, conservationists or researchers, invariably Westerners (Enwezor, 2006). When Africans are mentioned, either it is that their traditional practices, corrupt governments or warlords are somehow threatening this untouched wilderness, or that Africans still live in small tribes and villages as in pre-colonial times (Enwezor, 2006).

This leads into the sixth element, **violent tribal conflict**. This is the idea that somehow Africans are naturally violent and that their 'tribes' are a constant feature, forever pitting one group against another. Besteman, in her critique of Kaplan's essay, also attributes this perception to that of Africa's homogeneity:

This has consequences: once a culture is imagined to be bounded, distinct, and unchanging, then one can attribute all kinds of actions, behaviours,

and beliefs to it. For example, "cultural differences" can stand in as a facile explanation of why people are at war with each other. I cannot count the number of news articles I have read in the United States that claim "the war in [name of African country] results from ancient cultural [or ethnic, tribal, clan] differences" (Besteman and Gusterson (eds.), 2005, p. 89-90).

The vocabulary used in descriptions of these conflicts is itself problematic. By using the term "tribal conflict," the message to the audience is that African events do not follow any pattern recognizable to Western reason and thus require a terminology of their own; the conflicts in Yugoslavia were not described as "tribal" (Hawk, 1992, p. 7-8). There is also a tendency to conflate culture and biology (Besteman and Gusterson (eds.), 2005, p. 90). Such ideas have been amply proven untrue by countless anthropologists (p. 90-91) but have their roots in the "scientific racism" of nineteenth century colonizing Europe (Onwudiwe and Ibelema (eds.), 2003, p. 4). Rwanda is well known for the colonial forces having designated tribal affiliations based on height, cranial size, etc. even though, due to intermarriage, such distinctions did not always hold (Besteman and Gusterson, 2005, p. 94-95). Nevertheless, the rigid 'tribal' structure that was put in place, catered to antagonistic and violent group relations, causing 'tribal violence.'

This notion of African violence leads into the seventh element of Afro-pessimism, the **African Big Man and political instability**. Interrelated to this is the impression that everywhere in Africa is in a state of civil war. While there have undoubtedly been many civil wars in Africa, there are also several countries that have never been touched by civil war. Schraeder and Endless' 50-year survey of the New York Times, however, found that the defining characteristic of whether an African country would make it into the top ten list of media attention – that is how often they are mentioned – is the existence of civil conflict (1998, p. 32). Conflict portrayed with ethnic connotations was 48 percent of all reporting in their study (p. 33).

Added to this is the often referred to case of Sierra Leone's civil war. Kaplan's infamous essay (1994) as well as movies such as Blood

Diamond and Lord of War present this stereotype: the Reno model (Reno, 1998). In this scenario, the leader controls the major material assets of the country (oil, diamonds, etc.) and sells them abroad, keeping nearly all of the money himself and giving large cuts to those he deems loyal. In addition, however, some of this money is used to fund rebel soldiers who attack the population of the country in order to get foreign aid. The leader attracts this foreign aid under the guise that, one, he will combat these rebels, and two, his population needs food, medical supplies, etc. The food and medical supplies are then of course either kept for the leader's use or again given to cronies, rebels and those whose loyalty must be bought.

Civil war is not the only stereotype of political instability. Coups, almost universally resulting in a dictatorial form of government, are also a common image of Africa.

We all know the caricature and set-up: the despotic, corrupt "African Big Man" rules a Potemkin state (a banana republic of some sort), the kind novelist V. S. Naipaul gave us in noxious writings like "The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro" (Enwezor, 2006)

The movie *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), a portrayal of Idi Amin and his dictatorship in Uganda, is perhaps the best caricature. He rules by whim with unpredictable actions (he is as likely to be your best friend one day as slit your throat the next) and incomprehensible decisions; a mad tyrant. Needless to say, this portrayal does not evoke a perception of political stability.

Moreover, these are not the only common negative motifs of inept African governance. The third stereotype is that of the horribly corrupt, though not necessarily psychotic, African Big Man. The phrase 'do a Mobutu' (Chang, 2007, p. 42), named after the Zairian dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, refers to a leader who steals money from their country, spends it frivolously or puts it in a personal foreign bank account as insurance for when he is inevitably ousted by an-

other equally corrupt African Big Man.⁵ The label is called a Mobutu despite the fact that he stole an estimated five billion dollars compared to Suharto's estimated three times that amount (Chang, 2007, p. 42). Nevertheless, it is not 'do a Suharto.'

Finally, there is the less malign African leadership image often epitomized by Nigeria. This is the classic corrupt leader who is neither mad nor obscenely violent, but rules through patrimonial networks and bribery.⁶ This image is often presented as a reason for Africa's lack of development. This corrupt leader ensures his power by manipulation of the courts, laws and government institutions. For example, if a powerful figure in that country, a minister or judge, does not agree with the leader or refuses to bribe him, the Big Man will have this person arrested on false charges, ironically often for corruption. Such images have appeared in the recent coverage of Mugabe's Zimbabwe.

None of these political models presents a particularly positive image of African leadership and again only furthers the idea that 'Africa' is hopeless and can not rule 'itself.' Moreover, even when the media reports on democratic countries, a study by Boston University found that the language used was clearly pejorative and often used words usually restricted to describing coups and autocracies (Stith, p. 7).

Lastly, we have the perception of unrelenting **poverty**. This element is no doubt a culmination of the previous seven; however, it constitutes an element in itself due to its presence in economics literature. Economic Afro-pessimism is most characterized by a listing of various economic indicators, such as GDP or the number of land-line telephones in a country, with reference to the rest of the world.

5 It is important to note that African leaders themselves hoard much of their money abroad, an indication of the Afro-pessimism that can affect them as well as their Western counterparts.

6 This is well-documented by Chabal and Daloz (2008), *Africa Works*, as well as a Nigerian website dedicated to revealing all of the countries' governance ills, www.saharareporters.com.

However, this negative perspective is also achieved through a glass-is-half-empty use of vocabulary and indicators. Economic-based papers and books on Africa tend to begin formulaically with a listing of the various economic indicators proving that Africa is poor and underdeveloped before moving on to their analysis. Which indicators they use and how they phrase them is important though. For example, Mathews states that

the GDP growth in the 1995-98 period averaged four per cent a year. The significance of this achievement can be gauged when one compares previous growth rates of 0.4 per cent for the entire 1980s and 0.9 per cent for 1990-94. Eleven countries had economic growth rates of 6 per cent or higher in 1997: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Ghana and Uganda. Such economic growth would be remarkable for any world region, let alone one so economically disadvantaged (Mathews, 2000, p. 82).

In an article in *The Economist*, these same facts are stated thusly:

For a brief moment in the mid-1990s, there were signs of improvement. World Bank figures showed a clutch of African countries achieving economic growth rates of more than 6% ...There was talk of an "African renaissance".

It was an illusion. ... Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole had a growth rate of less than 3% in that period, which just about kept step with the rate of population increase. ... African countries need growth rates of 7% or more to cut [poverty] in half in 15 years.

... Last year, sub-Saharan Africa as a whole grew by only 2.5%. Most of these countries cannot do better, says the Economic Commission for Africa, because, apart from South Africa, Botswana and Mauritius, they lack the basic structures needed to develop (*The Economist*, 2000).

The contrast could not be more blatant. *The Economist* illustrates the glass-is-empty vocabulary that tends to be used in economic literature and Western media. John Sender's article, "Africa's Economic Performance" (1999), is a rare counterpoint to this majority. Sender's statistics on Africa clearly show an upward trend in life expectancy and drastic decreases in child mortality rates. This is in contrast to

the mass media reports of low life expectancies and high infant mortality rates in sub-Saharan Africa compared to the rest of the world. The result is the impression that nothing is improving in Africa and implies that the continent can not improve.

All of these elements add up to an overall negative image of Africa in the Western consciousness. Schraeder and Endless demonstrate that 73 percent of all articles studied provided negative images of African politics and society (Schraeder and Endless, 1998, p. 32). This is corroborated by the survey by Boston University of five influential print media, several of them with worldwide readerships (Stith). Inherent in this negativity, is the comparison of African countries to modern Western standards. Beverly Hawk, author of *Africa's Media Image*, states,

by comparing them to our economic and technological standards, we are able to create an image of Africa in the American mind that is a chronicle of its deficiencies to Western standards (Hawk, 1992, p. 9).

This overall impression of deficiency builds an automatic attitude of disbelief in the positive image of Africa and Africans (Monroe, 2006, p. 15). In this way, even when positive stories of Africa are shown, they are rejected as anomalies in the minds of the audience because they conflict with previous beliefs about the region. Related to this is a point rarely touched upon in the literature, that emphasis is placed on the idea that the more contact one has with Africa, the better the understanding of its deficiency and its obvious backwardness (Enwezor, 2006). When reporting on the continent, national media prefer their own correspondents or Western 'experts' regardless of their degree of knowledge, instead of black Africans (Paterson, 1991). It is not the amount of years of study or the number of degrees that matters, but how long one has been in Africa that determines how much a person must know about the continent. In this way, one person's experience, regardless of their preconceived ideas before they traveled, is taken as valid but the professor in London who has studied

for decades is accused of being an 'armchair academic.' This is not to say that first-hand experience is not important, as anthropology itself proves, but that the portrayal of Africa is unique for its emphasis of the personal over the professional.

But why is the media's role important in this perception? Why does its influence so strongly determine Western perceptions of Africa? The media holds a special importance as the source people turn to when they want to be informed. In turn, their interpretations most often define the understanding of events by readers and viewers.⁷ Added to this is the contention that Africa is special because there is little common understanding between Africans and Westerners to provide a context for interpretation. There is little mention of Africa in school curricula and Western audiences lack contextual knowledge with which to interpret African events. Added to this, the cultural symbols and repertoire regarding Africa that exists in the minds of Westerners are primarily colonial. Most reporters do not have the time or space to give the entire historical and cultural complexities behind their story. Thus, the simplest way for the media to communicate an African story in an easily understood manner and in limited space is by the use of the colonial symbols, metaphors and terms that are familiar to their audience.

This is made worse by the lack of media interest in Africa. The sheer invisibility of Africa in the news is a foremost constraint. Meanwhile, when Africa is covered, the news usually concentrates on the sensationalist and often negative aspects of the continent (Schraeder and Endless, 1998, p. 29).

Those aspects of African life covered by the foreign media are stories easily reported in brief dispatches and comfortably understood by the American audience. Such events are racial stories, coups and wars, famine and disease. ... Although a water pump in a rural area may transform a community and

7 The following paragraph relies heavily on Hawk, B.G. (ed). (1992). Much is paraphrased or borrowed directly.

its economy, it hardly makes good copy. Coups and wars make better copy (Hawk, 1992, p. 6-7).

This spotty and sensationalist coverage of the continent leads to a confusing barrage of events without context or continuity.⁸

According to Schraeder and Endless, the media also has an important agenda-setting role within the realm of American foreign policy (Schraeder and Endless, 1998). Thus, such inaccurate and misleading images can have a profound effect on international relations. Schraeder and Endless used the New York Times specifically because it is one of the newspapers most often read by those in the foreign policy establishment and because other media outlets rely on its reporting, due to its large international bureau and strong reputation for accuracy (p. 30)

The constructivism of Afro-Pessimism

The constructivist school of international relations argues that ideas have power. Even within an anarchic international system, international norms, common interests and common values, will constrain and direct states in their behaviour.⁹ Material self-interests have meaning only within a social context. Even the concept of states, anarchy, power, and cooperation are social constructs whose meaning and context vary across time and place.

These subjective constructs affect identities, which in turn underlie interests, which then drive policy choices. These interests and identities are not constructed in isolation, but in an ever-changing "society of states" (Brysk, Parsons and Sandholtz, 2002). Equally,

8 This is not limited to the United States. A study in 1999 by the Glasgow Media Group looked at television programming in the United Kingdom and found that stories on developing countries in general were rare and limited to disasters, bizarre events and visits by prominent Westerners.

9 The following two paragraphs rely heavily on Brysk, A., Parsons, C. and Sandholtz, W. 'After Empire: National Identity and Post-Colonial Families of Nations', *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 8(2), 2002. Much is paraphrased or borrowed directly.

there can exist multiple, overlapping international societies as well as interconnected sub-societies (churches, ethnic groups, diasporas, activist groups, professions, etc.). Moreover, there can be groups of states with different interests from other groups of states, as shown in the Cold War, though all of whom may also subscribe to some norms universally.

To uphold their theory, constructivists give examples of state behaviours that do not always accord with purely self-interested motives but where they can and do work cooperatively either in accordance with international norms or to uphold such norms. For example, the US sanctions against apartheid South Africa, according to Audie Klotz, also can not be explained by material or economic interests but because the international order and the American populace – who were also influenced by the American mass media portrayal of the struggle in American civil rights language and images (Hawk, 1992, p. 11-13) – believe that white oppression of black people is wrong (Klotz, 1995). Meanwhile, far worse human rights offenses have been entirely ignored because of a lack of international norms with regards to those countries and/or their ethnic compositions (Donnelly, 1988).

In this way, perceptions, ideas and images have international repercussions. Eberé Onwudiwe extends this to say that, while powerful countries can employ economic, military or diplomatic muscle as instruments of power, the weaker states depend on subtler and more intangible instruments of appeal (Onwudiwe and Ibelema, 2003, p. 5). For the weak state, their image with regard to international norms, whether they be in the UN or within a country's demographics, is one of their major means of negotiation with more powerful states. Thus, "in a bargaining situation between a weak and a powerful state, the weak state is better off (i.e. in a stronger bargaining position) if its stereotype (image) in the mind of the powerful state is positive" (p. 5).

So, given that ideas can influence political decisions at the international level, it is logical to assume that they can also affect economic decisions. Onwudiwe's statement could equally apply to trade negotiations; trade obviously having a large impact on national economies. The economic impacts with regards to FDI is especially important when one considers that investors may not have any knowledge or experience regarding Africa except for the perceptions and images presented to them throughout their lives in Western society.¹⁰ For that reason this paper will now focus on the possible distorting effects of Afro-pessimism on FDI.

Foreign direct investment in Africa

Whether foreign direct investment (FDI) causes growth in developing markets is debated (Asiedu, 2005, p. 8). Some studies have found a positive relationship between FDI and growth, while others claim that FDI only causes growth in certain environments, such as a certain educational threshold (Borensztein, 1998), a certain level of income (Blomstrom et al., 1994), a well-developed financial sector, etc (Alfaro et al., 2004). However, a large body of literature suggests that FDI is an important source of capital, complements domestic private investment, provides new jobs and opportunities and enhances skill and technology transfers (Chowdhury and Mavrotas, 2006). Since income levels and domestic savings in Africa are low, Asiedu maintains that FDI is needed to fill an annual resource gap of \$64 billion (Asiedu, 2004, p. 42). UNCTAD stands behind the role of FDI so strongly that, as early as 1999, they published a booklet for corporate executives of transnational corporations to advertise Africa's investment potential (UNCTAD. 1999). Ndikumana and Verick, find that FDI and domestic private investment are mutually reinforc-

10 Corby (1985) states people retain the stereotypes and mythical images in American published materials and media throughout their lifetimes (in Monroe, 2006).

ing, though the latter has a larger effect on the former than vice versa. In this way, FDI crowds in private investment and enhances domestic capital accumulation (Ndikumana and Verick, 2008, p. 26). Thus, while it may or may not be a cause of economic growth, its contribution to a well-thriving, growing economy is clearly important.

Meanwhile, though there has been a significant increase in FDI globally in the last two decades, very little of this is going to Africa. While sub-Saharan Africa is receiving higher rates of investment in absolute terms, Table 1 shows that, compared to the rest of the world, its share has consistently lessened in comparison to other regions. This has not changed with the new millennium. UNCTAD reports a near doubling of FDI stocks between 2003 and 2007, yet even still the numbers are far lower than in other regions of the world (World Economic Forum, 2009, p. 3). Furthermore, the investment that is going to the continent is concentrated in a handful of countries. Between 2000 and 2002, Angola, Nigeria and South Africa absorbed 65 percent of FDI flows to the region (World Bank, 2004). This is obviously due to the oil reserves of the first two and the size and significance of the South African market on the other. This shows the trend for investment in resource-rich countries, however, Ndikumana and Verick highlight that infrastructure plays an important role in attracting foreign investment in non-resource rich countries. Unfortunately, sub-Saharan Africa's infrastructure has been steadily disintegrating since the structural adjustment cut backs (Akyüz, and Gore, 2001). Lack of adequate infrastructure is now often cited as a major impediment to FDI in Africa (Griffiths, 2008; Chang, 2007). Asiedu concurs but also includes a number of other factors in which Africa has not maintained its competitiveness in the world investment market since independence (2004). While she notes there have been improvements, the improvements have simply not been enough to keep pace with competitive Asian economies (p. 47). This is despite the fact that the US government's Overseas Pri-

vate Investment Corporation says that Africa offers the highest returns in the world (Macdonald, 2005) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) asserts that the average return on inward investment for Africa as a whole is four times that from the former G-7 and twice that of Asia (Shelley, 2004, p. 11).

Table 1
Annual Averages of Net FDI Inflows to Developing Countries and Selected Regions, 1970-1999 (\$m.)

Region	FDI net inflows			Growth rate (%)	
	1970s	1980s	1990s	1970s-80s	1980s-90s
East Asia and Pacific	749	3,967	43,347	430	993
Latin America and Caribbean	2,498	5,714	3,7480	129	556
Middle East and North Africa	-129	806	3,836	-725	376
South Asia	61	256	2,278	323	789
Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)	773	1,102	3,509	43	218
All developing countries	4,013	12,059	10,3078	201	755
SSA's share (%)	19	9	3	–	–

Source: Asiedu, E., 2004, 'Policy Reform and Foreign Direct Investment in Africa: Absolute Progress but Relative Decline,' *Development Policy Review*, 22(1).

So what determines FDI? This as well is highly debated, with studies often using the same data arriving at contradictory conclusions. Asiedu and Morrisset have found that markets which are more open – that is those with higher trade to GDP ratios – attract more FDI. This is refuted by Akyüz and Gore's comparison of sub-Saharan Africa with East Asia (Akyüz and Gore, 2001). They conclude that the opening of markets during the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s and 90s even caused considerable disinvestment (p. 281). Debt, at least, is agreed to deter investment not just within the public sector but also FDI (p. 284). Sub-Saharan African countries in general have very high indebtedness levels. As mentioned above, infrastructure is also considered to be a determinant of FDI. Good infra-

structure facilitates production and reduces operating costs, attracting investment (Asiedu, 2004, p. 45). Akinkugbe (2003) emphasizes a high per capita income with an outward oriented trade framework, a high level of infrastructure development, and a high rate of returns on investment, in the attraction of FDI. Basu and Srinivasan (2002) look at a number of successful African case studies and conclude that their success was based on several factors: 1) political stability with macroeconomic stability; 2) being rich in natural resources; 3) having either a large enough domestic market or a high level of economic development; 4) open market; 5) minimal state intervention in markets; and 6) a supportive institutional environment including a well-functioning banking and financial system. Finally, it is possible that Africa's geographic location is hindering its ability to attract FDI.¹¹ Such studies are nearly endless in their prescriptions and proscriptions and as such a comprehensive review is not possible but neither are concrete conclusions as the data and evidence is not giving consistently robust results.¹²

But what about the effects of politics in sub-Saharan Africa? The policy environment for these investments has been suggested to matter heavily in a number of the aforementioned studies. Corruption is often cited in the literature to be a primary factor holding back FDI (Asiedu, 2005, p. 4). Governance has become the recent catchword in international development, with donors now making governance an important criteria for the receiving of aid. Kaufmann and Kraay (2002), as well as Rodrik et al. (2004), find poor governance to clearly be detrimental to development and welfare (p. 4). Several papers have shown that inefficient institutions, as measured by corruption and weak enforcement of contracts, deter foreign investment

11 Sachs and Warner, 1995. Natural Resource Abundance and Economic Growth,' NBER Working Paper No. 5398. While they are speaking of economic growth and not specifically FDI, many of the constraints they mention (being landlocked, tropical climate affecting equipment, etc.) are applicable.

12 For a more comprehensive study, see Blonigen, 2005, 'A Review of the Empirical Literature on FDI Determinants,' NBER Working Paper No. 11299.

(p. 5). The issue, however, is how to measure such intangibles as the magnitude of corruption or inefficiency. Putting a number to such concepts is difficult and inaccurate but may also be affected by pre-conceived ideas and stereotypes. This will be touched upon again shortly.

For investors, Asiedu (2005) finds corruption ranks very high on the list of obstacles to FDI by the World Business Environment Survey, World Development Report Survey, World Investment Report Survey and the Center for Research into Economics and Finance in Southern Africa Survey. Equally, political instability is shown to strongly deter investment flows to Africa. Jaspersen et al. find that high levels of country risk have a significant negative impact on private investment (Jaspersen et al. in Collier and Pattillo (eds.), 2000, p. 71-95). Moreover, they find that private investment appears to be significantly lower in Africa than is explicable in terms of solely economic fundamentals (Collier and Ginning, 1999, p. 20). Collier and Pattillo state,

survey evidence indicates that firms currently identify risk, and in particular the risk of policy change, as the single most important obstacle to investment [in Africa] (2000, p. 5).

There are also a number of books from investors with personal experience in Africa that laud it for potential but decry its corruption and the 'palm greasing' necessary (Shelley, 2004; Beckett and Sundarkasa, 2000; Mwakikagile, 2007). Collier and Pattillo (2000) add that not only is Africa perceived as an unusually risky environment, but firms have fewer coping mechanisms to deal with this risk.

So how are these risks determined? As mentioned, measuring such intangibles is a difficult task. Because firms attach such great importance to determining risk, however, a market of specialist services agencies has arisen to measure risk's various components (Collier and Pattillo (eds.), 2000, p. 5). Haque et al analyzed three of the major risk assessment agencies – Institutional Investor, Euromoney

and Economist Intelligence Unit – for their accuracy with regards to Africa. Their findings are astounding.

We have found that Africa's credit ratings are lower than is warranted by the fundamentals ... Nonetheless, our analysis has shown that there is considerable persistence in the ratings so that a country tends to retain its rating over time unless significant adverse or positive developments occur. Indeed, the combination of the lagged value of the country's rating and economic fundamentals typically accounts for 80 to over 95 percent of the variation in credit ratings (Haque et al. in Collier and Pattillo, 2000, p. 63).

Equally surprising, while this study is over a decade old, it seems to be the only one of its kind! Given the power of these agencies' assessments, further study of possible biases in their evaluations would be prudent. It would seem for now though, that African governments suffer from a 'bad neighbourhood' effect that is retarding the impact of reforms in those that are attempting to realign policies to better attract FDI (Haque et al. in Collier and Pattillo, 2000, p. 63). Whether or not this is due to Afro-pessimistic perceptions within the risk assessment agencies is unknown though not outside the realm of possibilities. If governments, who have political advisors, diplomats and specialists at their disposal, can be inordinately affected by Afro-pessimism in the media, economists evaluating intangibles such as institutions and political risk may equally be influenced. A quick look at the list of evaluation criteria in *The Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009*, shows just how many factors are not based on hard data.

This leads to how corruption in Africa is perceived, by comparison to other areas. After all, don't the Asian Tigers also have corruption? It is well-known that to conduct business in China requires 'palm-greasing', and in larger amounts than in Africa. Kenneth Good writes on corruption in Botswana but also has a chapter on American corruption, which he argues makes Botswana look great by comparison. Arthur Goldsmith mentions that governance in America's 'Gilded Age' had public institutions that were highly secretive,

personalistic and arbitrary and yet was an era of unprecedented growth (Goldsmith, 2005, p. 11-17). Akyüz and Gore, in their comparison of the 'African failure' and the 'East Asian miracle,' note that many attribute African economic failure to a 'predatory state,' a 'rentier state,' a 'patrimonial state' (2001, p. 277), but that many of these were the policy prescriptions of the time and were similar to the many types of state intervention in the economy as occurred in the Asian miracles. Mustaq Khan and Jomo Sundaram have an entire book documenting the rampant corruption that occurred in various newly industrialized Asian countries.

Akyüz and Gore attribute the difference between why corruption was not negative in East Asia but was in Africa to four factors (p. 277). First, the governments had a tendency to regard domestic capitalists with suspicion, whereas Asian governments were often thickly involved in their major industries.¹³ Second, rents provided to chosen economic sectors and industries were not contingent on performance (Khan and Sundaram, 2000, p. 50-51). Thirdly, a number of measures were implemented in Africa to counter-act colonial discrimination. In this way, many firms received privileged or monopoly access to certain avenues of capital accumulation, often meaning the economy was not oriented in a maximizing fashion (i.e. they didn't preferentially treat the right sectors of the economy). Fourthly, many African states used development policies as a central element of their multi-ethnic state-building coalitions. Such coalitions were seen as essential for national unity and stability but the redistributive measures tended to focus on government consumption, which reduced efficiency and dissipated investment funds. Akyüz and Gore also mention, however, that Asia and Africa started from very different baselines, with demographics and initial endowments being very different and much lower in the latter (2001, p. 278). Regardless, by these conclusions, it would appear that African governments were far

13 This has also been complained about in the media and among investors due to resulting favoritism.

too egalitarian (through their redistribution policies) and not corrupt enough (via their relationships with private industry)! Goldsmith concludes that, while good governance is a worthy goal in itself, it does not provide growth or development. If other conditions are favorable, he states, public institutions operating at low standards of transparency and accountability are adequate for the creation of jobs, wealth and new industries. Finally he presents an evolutionary cycle of economic development eventually causing good governance, rather than the other way round (Goldsmith, 2005, p. 26).

Could it be that corruption in Africa is so highlighted because it parallels nicely with the Afro-pessimistic images of African leadership? De Sardan's *A moral economy of corruption of Africa?* (1999), claims that corruption is inherent in African 'sociocultural logics.' But what about Chinese culture? While there is rampant corruption in China without a deleterious effect, perhaps the confluence of the many negative images associated with Afro-pessimism creates a sense of these problems being worse and more intractable in Africa. Haque et al's findings (in Collier and Pattillo, 2000) show there is undoubtedly a connection between perceptions of Africa and risk evaluations but a further analysis of investor's opinions on African governance, including vis-à-vis other areas of the world, would be needed to show the relationship. Unfortunately, no such study has been performed. Given that most investors rank political risk as one of the most important factors when investing in Africa, it is surprising that no such study has been attempted.

Data comparisons: Sub-saharan africa and developing asia

Data on foreign direct investment with regards to Western countries is easily available. The annual *Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009* contains statistics on a multitude of various factors regarding FDI including the Executive Opinion Survey. Equally, The

World Bank's 2003 business survey, *Investment Climate Around the World*, reveals insights on the opinions of investors already in foreign markets. It is partially for this easily accessible data that FDI has been chosen as the comparison for this study.

The second reason for the choosing of FDI is the stated importance of political risk factors in investment in Africa. The 2003 World Bank report states that investors stress different factors for choosing to invest in Africa than compared to other regions of the world. Asiedu finds that corruption is a large obstacle to FDI according to investor surveys (2005, p. 4). Similarly, the Economic Commission for Africa states that one of the reasons why FDI lags on the continent is

uncertainty: one of the reasons why foreign investors are reluctant to invest in Africa, despite its enormous profitable opportunities, is the relatively high degree of uncertainty in the region, which exposes firms to significant risks. Uncertainty in the African region manifests itself in three different ways: political instability...macroeconomic instability...lack of policy transparency (Dupasquier and Osakwe, 2005, p. 13-14).

Therefore, given the uniquely politically-based determinants of FDI to Africa, perceptions regarding African politics seem particularly relevant. This is not to say that other factors don't also affect investment, poor infrastructure being an often mentioned concern, but that those factors are less likely to be impacted by perceptions, given that hard data is available for such measures.

This section will briefly look at the various FDI statistics available, with particular attention toward perceived political stability, strength of institutions and pervasiveness of corruption. Several comparisons between countries will be made but these will be purposefully unbalanced. That is, the highest ranking African countries, in terms of institutions, will be compared to two of the lowest ranking developing Asian economies to attempt to show that even in such favourable comparisons, FDI to Africa still lags behind regardless of their governance scores or what investors already in those

countries claim about corruption and political instability. The exceptions will be Nigeria and Malaysia, who are included in order to show the opposite extremes within both regions.

According to the most recent Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) rankings, some African countries are doing quite well; however, the majority remain at the bottom of the list. Out of the bottom 25 countries, 16 are in sub-Saharan Africa. But what makes a GCI score? There are twelve pillars, divided into three major categories according to what is needed in which stages of development. The first are the basic requirements, of which are institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic stability and health and primary education. In the second category are the efficiency enhancers: higher education and training, global market efficiency, labour and market efficiency, financial market sophistication and technological readiness. The third category, innovation and sophistication factors, is made up of business sophistication and innovation. These categories are then weighted according to a country's stage of development, as shown in Table 2. Sub-Saharan African countries are largely in the factor-driven stage, with Botswana in transition and only three in the efficiency-driven stage. In general, the trend seems to be the higher the GCI ranking, the more complex the stage of development with regards to sub-Saharan African countries. Again, it is important to note that the majority of factors, including all the institutional factors, are not based on hard data. For this reason, one must ask how fair these rankings are, especially as institutions make up 15% of the total GCI ranking for most African countries. Unfortunately, surveys of the evaluators' opinions are not available, nor are they likely surveyed at all. However, given the results of Haque et al, an evaluation of these evaluations would be advisable.

Table 2
GCI Category Weighing According to Stage of Development

Weight	Factor-driven stage (%)	Efficiency-driven stage (%)	Innovation-driven stage (%)
Basic requirements	60	40	20
Efficiency enhancers	35	50	50
Innovation and sophistication factors	5	10	30

Source: Porter and Schwab, 2008, *The Global Competitiveness Report 2008–2009*, World Economic Forum: Switzerland, p. 41.

How reflective is the GCI to actual FDI flows? Table 3 shows the flows of FDI to selected developing countries. The numbers show a clearly lower trend in sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Nigeria. This includes when comparing South Africa, ranked number 45 in global competitiveness, to Indonesia, ranked 55. Botswana and Mauritius are ranked numbers 56 and 57 respectively in the GCI rankings, right behind Indonesia. Nigeria (ranked 94), on the other hand, received nearly double the outward FDI flows as Indonesia, while Mauritius and Botswana were nowhere close to any of the other selected countries. Vietnam, ranked 70, has even received greater continuous flows of FDI than South Africa. Nigeria clearly shows the preference for resource rich countries, but the remaining comparisons all raise questions of why the GCI rankings do not accord with actual investment flows.

Table 3
Net FDI Inflows to Developing Countries (\$m.)

Country	GCI Ranking ^a	1990-2000 (annual average)	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indonesia	55					
Inward		1,584	1,896	8,337	4,914	6,928
Outward		622	3,408	3,065	2,703	4,790
Malaysia	21					
Inward		4,722	4,624	3,967	6,048	8,403
Outward		1,550	2,061	2,971	6,041	10,989
Vietnam	70					
Inward		1,322	1,610	2,021	2,360	6,739
Outward		-	-	65	85	150
Botswana	56					
Inward		20	392	281	489	495
Outward		9	-39	56	51	51
Mauritius	57					
Inward		51	11	42	105	339
Outward		12	32	48	10	58
Nigeria	94					
Inward		1,477	2,127	4,978	13,956	12,454
Outward		309	261	200	228	261
South Africa	45					
Inward		854	799	6,644	-527	5,692
Outward		1,203	1,352	930	6,725	3,727

Source: UNCTAD, 2008, World Investment Report 2008, Country Fact Sheets, online.

^a From Porter and Schwab, 2008, The Global Competitiveness Report 2008–2009, World Economic Forum: Switzerland.

So, if global investors are not aligning with GCI rankings, what do investors say are important factors? A look at the Executive Opinion Survey results, with particular attention to institutional factors, reveals interesting conclusions. Table 4 shows the following information for better comprehension. In Malaysia and Indonesia, inefficient government bureaucracy tops the list of the most problematic factors for doing business. Corruption was mentioned as the second most problematic factor in Malaysia with 14.5% of those surveyed and in Indonesia it ranked third at 10.7%. By comparison, Nigeria –

often cited as a haven of corruption – had nearly the same amount of respondents as Malaysia claim that corruption was the most problematic factor (14.0%). Interestingly, Nigeria's institutions, according to the GCI rank at 106, while Malaysia ranks 30. Infrastructure, however, was number one in Nigeria at 22.3%, with financing ranking second most problematic at 19.9%. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, inflation, infrastructure and an inadequately educated workforce were the top three factors, followed by corruption at 9.0%. Mauritius and Botswana, on the other hand, championed for their good governance, show corruption to be indicated 8.0% and 6.3% respectively.

Mauritius' institutions in the GCI were number 50, Botswana, 53, and Vietnam at 71. Despite this, Vietnam's inward FDI flows were almost twenty times that of Mauritius! At the top of the list for Mauritius is inefficient government bureaucracy and inadequate infrastructure. In Botswana, both these factors rank in the top four, just under 'poor work ethic in national labor force' and inadequately educated workforce. Finally, South Africa's most problematic factors are an inadequately educated workforce along with infrastructure and again government bureaucracy. Uniquely, crime and theft come in second with 19.8%. Corruption in South Africa was in accordance with the trend at 6.2%.

As mentioned, this is a purposefully biased comparison. Therefore, institutional scores are uncommonly high for the sub-Saharan African sample and low for the Asian developing economies sample. Even with these skewed results though, FDI flows do not appear to be in accordance to institutions or competitiveness. Even more contradictory, Vietnam, who ranks lower than all the sample African countries except Nigeria, attracts more FDI than all the sample African countries except Nigeria. This is in spite of 16.5% of its companies also complaining about inadequate infrastructure.

Table 4
Executive Opinion Survey Results for Selected Countries

Country	GCI Ranking	GCI Institution Ranking	Most Problematic Factors for Doing Business (%)
Indonesia	55	68	Inefficient government bureaucracy (19.3) Inadequate supply of infrastructure (16.4) Corruption (10.7)
Malaysia	21	30	Inefficient government bureaucracy (16.7) Corruption (14.5) Crime and theft (8.3)
Vietnam	70	71	Inflation (17.9) Inadequate supply of infrastructure (16.5) Inadequately educated workforce (10.6) Corruption (9.0)
Botswana	56	36	Poor work ethic in national labour force (19.0) Inadequately educated workforce (14.0) Inefficient government bureaucracy (11.1) ... 8. Corruption (6.3)
Mauritius	57	39	Inefficient government bureaucracy (18.6) Inadequate supply of infrastructure (15.2) Inadequately educated workforce (15.2) ... 5. Corruption (8.0)
Nigeria	94	106	Inadequate supply of infrastructure (22.3) Access to financing (19.9) Corruption (14.0)
South Africa	45	46	Inadequately educated workforce (22.3) Crime and theft (19.8) Inadequate supply of infrastructure (12.9) ... 6. Corruption (6.2)

Source: Porter and Schwab, 2008, *The Global Competitiveness Report 2008–2009*, World Economic Forum: Switzerland.

If one looks at the 2003 World Bank survey of investors, shown in Table 5, the image is no less contradictory. Overall, the four major constraints to investment in sub-Saharan Africa are financing, corruption, infrastructure and inflation. In developing East Asia, the

constraints are street crime, corruption, and a tie between inflation, exchange rate and organized crime. From this survey, it would seem that both developing Asia and Africa are deterring investment with their corrupt practices. This leads one to wonder if there are other factors causing investors to put their money in Vietnam over Mauritius by twenty times as much or if perceptions are playing a role in investors' decisions. Likely it is both.

Table 5
General Constraints on Firms

Region	Leading Constraint	Second Constraint	Third Constraint	Fourth Constraint
Africa	Financing	Corruption	Infrastructure	Inflation
East Asia Developing	Street crime	Corruption	Inflation / Exchange rate / Organized crime (tie)	

Source: Batra, Kaufmann and Stone, 2003, Investment Climate Around the World: Voices of the Firms from the World Business Environment Survey, The World Bank: USA.

The conclusion would seem to be that it is indeed factors other than corruption and institutions that are actually deterring investment in Africa. This begs the question as to whether there may be a large herding effect – that is that investors go where it is popular and not necessarily where it maximizes profit. Such an effect would undoubtedly be affected by Afro-pessimism, as herding is itself based on perceptions overruling purely rational decision-making. The problem with all the investor survey studies, however, is that they are conducted among those businesses that have *already* decided to invest in developing countries. This raises several, currently unanswerable, questions. For example, perhaps those businesses that invest in Nigeria are already aware of the stereotype of corrupt Nigerians. Because they were already expecting corruption, in the surveys they instead focus on other factors that they had not taken into account before they invested. Similarly, those investors in the 'miracle' Asian economy of Malaysia, are expecting miracles, not corrupt bu-

reaucrats. This would mean that corruption scores of businesses in African countries would be artificially low and that 'Asian miracle' countries' scores would be unusually high. Of course, without an in-depth study, such an effect is currently unknown.

Also, by studying those already investing in developing economies, we do not know what potential investors think will be their major constraints. After all, these potential investors may not have as accurate a picture as those already invested in Africa. Put another way, if we assume that all the aforementioned various studies are correct in their observation that Africa attracts less FDI due in large part to perceptions of political risk and corruption, then these observations by companies already in invested those countries are irrelevant. What we need to know is what those who are considering investing and have not yet done so, think of Africa and what they think their most constraining factor(s) would be. In addition, we need to know how investors determine where they will invest, what agencies they use, consultants, and 'site locaters' – those who find sites for other companies to invest in abroad according to what those companies say are their major criteria. For example, if these companies and agencies rank corruption and political risk to be overly high, when compared to the business surveys in those countries and recent policy changes, then perhaps their Afro-pessimistic stereotypes are having an effect on investment.

These questions, unfortunately, are as yet impossible to answer. Thus, while anecdotal information from various sources suggests that Afro-pessimist-affected perceptions are deterring investment unfairly (UNCTAD, 1999), statistical facts to corroborate or deny this are unclear. Perhaps the most telling result is found by going back to the basics: simply, the dismally low FDI flows to African countries despite their GCI ranking and stated profitable opportunities.

Conclusion and further areas of study

Between 2001 and 2008, growth in Africa's GDP averaged 5.9% annually (World Economic Forum, 2009, p. 3). This is not due to only one or two countries bringing up the average, 24 countries in 2003 had growth rates over 5% (Macdonald, 2005). Even in the global recession, the IMF is projecting growth on the continent to the order of 2% in 2009 and 3.9% in 2010 (World Economic Forum, 2009, p. xi). Despite this, FDI in the region does not reflect the economic opportunities to be gained.

To say that Africa has been marginalized is a gross understatement. The fact is that Africa simply does not appear on many corporations' global business plans. Africa has been left out for a variety of reasons, including strife, health, insecurity, bad press, and corrupt leadership. But the most relevant reason is that many people simply don't know enough about the continent (Shelley, 2004, p. 14).

This is perhaps most entertainingly summarized by the introduction title of Beckett and Sundarkasa's book – meant as a guide to investing in Africa – “Tarzan Does Not Live Here Anymore” (Beckett and Sundarkasa, 2000, p. xi).

The FDI data speaks for itself: even when African countries are rated highly in global competitiveness, South Africa still receives less investment than Vietnam. Jaspersen et al. concludes that investment in Africa is significantly lower than explicable by the economic fundamentals. Meanwhile, the risk assessment agencies that investors get their advice from are shown to be rated riskier than warranted (Haque et al. in Collier and Pattillo (eds.), 2000, p. 63). Finally, the news and media sources, to which investors look to be informed, are biased and woefully inaccurate in their portrayals of Africa. All of this suggests that perceptions of Africa may be having an inordinate effect in investment decisions. Africa's image is hindering its ability to attract FDI, despite the policy changes that have been put in place.

Nor is FDI the only way in which Afro-pessimism may be affecting economic development. Fairhead and Leach's analyses of tradi-

tional African farming practices on poor agricultural lands in north-west Africa, leads one to question the impact of Afro-pessimism in agricultural production (Fairhead and Leach, 2000). By treating African farmers as though they know nothing about their climate and need to be taught by white experts, trained for largely European and North American climates and soils, are we not continuing Afro-pessimistic ideas? Agriculture is by far the main occupation in sub-Saharan Africa and the base upon which industry and manufacturing must grow. Thus, perhaps Afro-pessimism's influence on agricultural research and policies is hindering African development? What about the kinds of aid that are given to African countries? Instead of giving food to 'starving' people, perhaps the Western charities should be funding malaria research? Instead of hundreds of post-graduates going to South Korea to teach English, maybe they should be going to Botswana to help develop their human resources base? In this way, the impact of Afro-pessimism may not be limited to FDI and would be an excellent avenue for further study.

All hope is not lost, however. There are attempts to change Africa's negative image. Besides the investors' guides to Africa, several organizations have been formed to try and improve Africa's image. 'Image of Africa' is one such organization in Australia. *South Africa: The Good News* is an alternate news source out of South Africa with the goal of presenting more balanced reporting about life in South Africa as well as sub-Saharan Africa in general. There is even a movie entitled *Africa: Open For Business* (2005), that was shown at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006.

Despite these efforts and slowly creeping changes, sub-Saharan Africa's positive image has an uphill battle. There are now magazines on the shelves of many bookstores with titles like *African Business*, *Africa Investor* and *Jeunes Afrique Economie*. Nevertheless, these are specialist magazines and will have a hard time competing with *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, etc. In the end, it is important to remember, however,

...[that] as development specialists now celebrate the stunning economic achievements of China, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and those following them, they tend to downplay the intellectual despondency that characterized development studies of Asia in the 1950s and through the Vietnam War (Chege, 1994, p. 197).

So perhaps images can change and what may have once been decried as impossible, is not as impossible as it seemed.

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Beyond an Epistemology of Bread, Butter, Culture and Power

Mapping the African Feminist Movement

Sinmi Akin-Aina

For African women, feminism is an act that evokes the dynamism and shifts of a process as opposed to the stability and reification of a construct or framework ... Feminism is structured by cultural imperatives and modulated by ever-shifting local and global exigencies.

— Nnaemeka, 2003; 378

The objective of this study is to identify and frame the elements that make up African feminisms and the African feminist movement. In this task, I borrow Sperling, Ferree and Risman's definition of feminism as, "that in which participants explicitly place value on challenging gender hierarchy and changing women's social status, whether they adopt or reject the feminist label" (2001, p. 1158). As stated in the preceding quote, African feminisms are shaped by a variety of contexts, movements and historical moments; a reading of African feminist movements must be grounded in these elements.

Thus, the African feminist movement is characterized by: an ongoing process of self-definition and re-definition; a broad-based membership; a resistance to the distortions and misrepresentations by Western global feminism; a 'feminism of negotiation'; as well as efforts to reconcile power dynamics on the continent, nationally and within the movement.

Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYW), Kenya's oldest and largest women's organization, embodies the tensions and transformations inherent in African feminisms. MYW personifies African feminisms as it enjoys a broadly-based membership. It is also continuously engaging in processes of definition and re-definition; although the organization pursues feminist ideals, it is unwilling to subscribe to the label of 'feminist', as within the Kenyan context this is coded as Western, anti-religious and anti-man. Additionally, MYW has periodically contended with issues of power brokerage within the movement and nationally. Lastly, MYW undertakes a 'feminism of negotiation,' tackling specific cultural issues in a manner which emphasizes and is embedded in the emancipatory elements of Kenyan traditions.

This paper shall map the evolution of the African feminist movement from its genesis in pre-colonial women's activities and social organizations to its contemporary incarnation in women's organizations. Much of the literature shall draw specifically from examples in Eastern and Western Africa. The majority of early theorizing on African feminisms originates from West African scholars in the Diaspora or on the continent. As such, this study shall draw from historical examples from East and West Africa, and shall be framed by the theories produced mainly by West African scholars.

The African feminist movement, in spite of its internal lack of homogeneity, often posits itself as counter-canonical to certain tendencies of mainstream Western feminism and encompasses various sometimes-oppositional strands, which inform each other and create a reflexive internal dialogue (Edwin, 2006). By referring to Western feminisms, the aim is not to essentialize the different

strands of feminism stemming from the Global North, but to draw attention to the spatial distinctions between African feminisms and Western feminisms, the relationship between the two, as well as the power asymmetries, distortions and co-optations that have characterized this relationship. In light of these tensions and history, it remains difficult for African feminists to unite in 'true global sisterhood' with feminists of the Global North (Nnaemeka, 2005). Such 'global sisterhood' remains somewhat elusive as the aforementioned distortions, co-optation and silencing persist.

African feminisms cast a critical eye on the processes of colonization and on post-coloniality with regards to writing, activism and theorizing around Africa. African feminisms also point to a diversity of tactics, theories and standpoints, especially in the interplay between scholarship, practice and activism and how these inform each other.

The first section of this essay will look at the concept of social movements and what it means for African feminisms. The second part of the paper then explores a definition of African feminisms. This is followed by a mapping of women's movements in African history and an examination of gender and social organization and the impact of processes of colonization and nationalist struggles thereon. Colonialism transformed traditional modes of social organization, predicated for the most part on status and kinship, rather than gender. Additionally, nationalist struggles created a space for women's organizing within the independence movement. These were largely ghettoized or co-opted into the state machinery of primarily single-party states after independence (Wanyande, 2009). Lastly, the paper looks at the evolution of women's organizations and their contemporary representation as embodied by the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization from its origins in the colonial era until the single-party state period of the 1990s.

Maendeleo Ya Wanawake is an interesting example of a home-grown broad-based women's organization that cuts across social

class differences. It is led by middle class women but has a large rural base made up of women in trading and agricultural occupations (Nzomo, 1989). Maendeleo Ya Wanawake was allied with the dominant nationalist party but has built an extensive nation-wide independent base of women's groups genuinely involved in large-scale zonal mobilization of women (Nzomo, 1989). Because of its broad-base it is ideologically eclectic and is better defined as an 'umbrella' of women's issues that recognize its multi-class, multi-regional and multi-ethnic composition.

A brief statement on methodology is in order. This paper is not a comprehensive study of African feminisms or feminist movements but rather an exploration of how certain strands within the broad movement are defining and asserting themselves in response to certain dominant trends emerging from conventional Western feminism. It is based mainly on content analyses, literature reviews and examination of secondary sources that profess this counter-canonical trend. The aim is to outline the differences and enrich our analysis of the broad range of alternatives that constitute the feminist movement and feminisms.

African Feminisms

The project of circumscribing the parameters of a social movement is a potentially difficult one to undertake. Movements by their very nature evolve and are subject to changing objectives, goals and contexts. Political scientist Cyrus Zirakzadeh defines social movements as:

- A group of people who consciously attempt to build a radically new social order;
- Involve people of a broad range of social backgrounds; and
- Deploy politically confrontational and socially disruptive tactics. (1997, p. 4)

While this paper examines an African feminist movement, it recognizes that African feminisms are multi-faceted, multi-purpose, and reflect the diverse nature of feminist organizing, practice and scholarship on the continent.

In her discussions on African feminism, Nigerian scholar and feminist Obioma Nnaemeka notes:

It will be more accurate to argue not in the context of a monolith (*African feminism*) but rather in the context of a pluralism (*African feminisms*) that captures the fluidity and dynamism of the different cultural imperatives, historical forces, and localized realities conditioning women's activism/movements in Africa...the inscription of feminisms...underscores the heterogeneity of African feminist thinking and engagement as manifested in strategies and approaches that are sometimes complementary and supportive, and sometimes competing and adversarial. (1998a, p. 5)

As such, African feminisms are in continuous flux; engaging with the context in which they are wrought, they resist elements of Western feminism which do not speak to the African experience. They are in constant negotiation with elements of custom and tradition and the goal of emancipating women. Lastly, they wrestle with the various power dynamics implicit in the movement, as well as those outside of it.

Important variants of African feminisms resist the importation of certain European feminist paradigms into African society because the latter are defined by the struggles and contexts from which they emerge. One such notion is the idea of the social construction of gender. According to Oyewumi (2005), understandings of the social construction of gender as a means by which all women are oppressed universally and across the world does not take into account variations in histories, world-views and social organization across the globe. Indeed, women are not all socialized in the same way. Additionally, the primacy given to gender as the 'primary unit of social analysis' may not be universal according to all cultures and worldviews. The emphasis on gender as a means of delineating so-

cial positionality does not occur the same way everywhere. Oyewumi writes:

From a cross-cultural perspective, the implications of Western bio-logic are far-reaching when one considers the fact that gender constructs in feminist theory originated in the West, where men and women are conceived oppositionally and projected as embodied, genetically driven social categories...On what basis are Western conceptual categories exportable or transferable to other cultures that have a different cultural logic? This question is raised because despite the wonderful insight about the social construction of gender, the way cross-cultural data have been used by many feminist writers undermines the notion that differing cultures may construct social categories differently. (2005, p. 11)

She further asserts, "In Yoruba society...social relations derive their legitimacy from social facts not from biology. The bare biological facts of pregnancy and parturition count only in regard to procreation, where they must. ...the nature of one's anatomy did not define one's social position" (2005, p.13).

Nnaemeka (2004) coins the term nego-feminism to speak to the tensions and aspirations of African feminisms. She speaks of this as the feminism of compromise, contending with the multiple aspects of patriarchy on the continent and dealing with this in an African-specific way:

First nego-feminism is the feminism of negotiation; second nego-feminism stands for "no ego" feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise and balance. African feminism[s] (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines. (2004, p. 22)

Thus, nego-feminism is a guide for dealing with the feminist struggles that occur on the continent; it considers the implications of patriarchal traditions and customs and aims to dismantle and negotiate around these. Nego-feminism also hopes to detach personal gain and pride from the overall goal of achieving equity for women –

thus 'no ego'. This is not always the case, as with all ideological constructs, the practice of nego-feminism on the ground is subject to emotionality, personal goals and even ego. However, aspirations for a more complete form of nego-feminism remain a noteworthy goal.

The main point of contention by feminists in the Global South with regards to Western feminism has been in relation to the representation of Third World women and feminists. These distortions have been elaborated upon by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her seminal 1988 essay "Under Western Eyes". In her work, Mohanty points to the universalization of Third World women in Western feminist writing, alternatively, concurrently and unceasingly as victims of patriarchy, religion, globalization, development, economics, neo-colonialism and colonization. Not only are they described as a homogenous group, the nebulous conflated entity that is 'Third World' women rarely resists or challenges the multiple forms of oppression she is subject to. Even while challenging and resisting, she never sheds the status of 'victim'. Thus, according to Mohanty:

...third world women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as: religious (read "not progressive"), family-oriented (read "traditional"), legal minors (read " they-are-still-not-conscious-of-their-rights"), illiterate (read "ignorant"), domestic (read "backward") and sometimes revolutionary (read "their-country-is-in-a-state-of-war-they-must-fight!") (1984, p.352)

Both Oyewumi and Nnaemeka seek to challenge the distortions, misrepresentations and silences that occur in history, theorizing and teachings about African women, both in Africa and the West. Nnaemeka notes that African women are either portrayed as a universal, singular entity, or left out of the narrative altogether;

Distortions in the study and teaching of African concerns stem from imperialism's refusal to historicize and differentiate African space and people. We Africans must realize that our survival depends to a large extent on our ability to reclaim our history. As bell hooks correctly notes, "our struggle is also the struggle of memory against forgetting." (2005, p. 63)

Such distortions construct African women as a homogenous monolith without a diversity of experiences, knowledge and objectives. Additionally, the misrepresentations of African women further reproduce relations of inequality, with the first world and first world feminist writing doing the objectifying and defining of Third World women. Lastly, the stereotyping of African women creates a neo-colonial discourse, whereby *knowledgeable* and *enlightened* Western feminists step in to save poor African women.

This distortion and silencing also occurs in the dissemination of African feminist thought for Western (in this specific case, American) study. Nawal El Sadawi, Egyptian feminist and novelist, speaks to her experiences in producing work for consumption in the United States:

Yes and here is a very subtle form of exploitation practiced unfortunately by feminists.... Gloria Steinem of Ms magazine writes me a letter in Cairo and asks me for an article about clitoridectomy. So I write her an article setting forth the political social and historical analysis as well as comments about my personal experience. She cuts the political, social and historical analysis and publishes only the personal statements.... The second example is Beacon Press in Boston. I gave my book, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, to the publisher in London: he published all of the book- the preface, introduction, everything. The preface which is a long preface is crucial and important to the book. Beacon Press cut it without my permission, making me feel that I have been exploited and my ideas distorted. Without the preface, it appears that I am separating the sexual from the political, which I never do. (as quoted in Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 54)

In light of these distortions, misperceptions and silences, it is impossible to reach true global sisterhood, a political goal of Western global feminism. Such global sisterhood is represented by standing in solidarity with women across the globe, acknowledging and recognizing their unique struggles and contexts, as well as by *not* further replicating systems of oppression through the silencing of their voices and potential usurpation of their roles:

We African women have witnessed repeatedly the activities of our overzealous foreign sisters, mostly feminist who appropriate our wars in the name

of fighting the oppression of women in the so-called third world. We watch with chagrin and in painful sisterhood these avatars of the proverbial mourners who wail more than the owners of the corpse. In their enthusiasm, our sisters usurp our wars and fight them badly-very badly. The arrogance that declares African women "problems" objectifies us and undercuts the agency necessary for forging true global sisterhood. African women are not problems to be solved. Like women everywhere, African women *have* problems. More important, they have provided solutions to these problems. We are the only ones who can set our priorities and agenda. Anyone who wishes to participate in our struggle must do so in the context of our agenda. In the same way, African women who wish to contribute to global struggles (and many do) should do so with a deep respect for the paradigms and strategies that people of those areas have established. In our enthusiasm to liberate others, we must not be blind to our own enslavement. Activities of women globally should be mutually liberating. (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 57)

Lastly, Oyewumi (2005) points to branches of Western feminism that posit African feminisms as singularly concerned with bread, butter, culture and power -- a politics of subsistence and survival as it were, which speak to the conditions and concerns of women on the continent. Oyewumi (2005) challenges this depiction of 'bread and butter politics' as not representing the multiplicity of concerns expressed, and struggles and ideological battles waged, by feminists on the continent. The African movement draws from a wide base of membership that includes: urban women, rural women, scholars, activists, politicians and community workers. Issues of survival and culture are present in the movement, but so too are concerns over political representation, gender and sexual identity, and class.

Women's Movements in African History

In keeping with Zirakzadeh's (1997) definition of social movements, this paper describes the African women's movement as the diversity of activities, engagements and tactics used currently and historically to advance the rights and opportunities of African women in multiple spheres of their lives. As such, this would span a broad-range of multi-class, multi-generational and ideologically- and

spatially-differentiated individuals and groups advocating for African women's concerns. Such movements could include pre-meditated organizing by formal groups such as trade unions, or spontaneous acts of protest that turn into collective political dissent. I will give a few examples from colonial Nigeria and Kenya.

Historian Judith Van Allen (1972) details the collective action of the Igbo women of South-eastern Nigeria as practiced in the custom of 'sitting on a man', whereby the public censure by the women in the community was a form of discipline. 'Sitting on a man' or 'making war on a man' involved:

Gathering at his compound, sometimes late at night, dancing, singing scurrilous songs which detailed the women's grievances against him and often called his manhood into question, banging on his hut with the pestles women used for pounding yams, and perhaps demolishing his hut or plastering it with mud and roughing him up a bit. (Van Allen, 1972, p. 171)

A man could be sanctioned in this manner, if he mistreated his wife, disobeyed the women's market rules, or let his cattle eat their crops (Van Allen, 1972).

The Aba Women's War in South-eastern Nigeria in 1929 was a seminal display of women's political action in African history (Geiger, 1990). Upon discovering that they were to be taxed by the colonial government, women in the South-eastern region of Nigeria proceeded to 'sit on' British warrant officers. This became a mass movement involving more than 10,000 women who, with painted faces and fern-covered sticks, set upon the administrative offices of the colonial government. The women destroyed several colonial buildings before intervention by soldiers and police, resulting in the death of 50 women, and 50 more were injured. There were no male casualties, either British or Igbo (Van Allen, 1972).

In the South-western region of Nigeria, women grouped together to form three different kinds of organizations: the Lagos Market Women's Association, which came to its inception in the mid-1920s, the Nigerian Women's Party and the Abeokuta Women's Union of

the 1940s (Hunt, 1989). These groups were distinctly concerned with the organization of women's markets, the mobilization for women's welfare, and anti-taxation protests.

In the 1920s in Kenya, women subversively resisted unfair labour policies by singing scurrilous songs while engaged in work (Hunt, 1989). Additionally, during the anti-colonial Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s, several women were imprisoned; some participated in secret networks supplying food, weapons and medicines to the fighters. Other women joined the struggles and went into the forest to care for their families and to fight.

Colonialism and gender (dis)parity

With the advent of colonialism came the practice of 'benign female exclusion' by colonial administrators. During colonial reign there were three main apparatuses for spreading and consolidating Western control in East and West Africa: the colonial administration, the mission/church, and trading establishments. With the use of colonial control as a tool for instituting the mechanics of capitalist economics, and Western Christianity as a means of regulating African social and cultural life, the colonial regime drastically altered the conditions and roles of African women from the late nineteenth century and through to World War II. Colonial governments controlled economic life through law, taxation and the creation of an economic and bureaucratic infrastructure. Western Christianity regulated much of social and cultural life, delimiting the boundaries of what was socially and morally acceptable and right. As such, this process had the unprecedented result of granting power to local imperialist regimes.

Colonial rule led to the decline of various Islamic imperial regimes in the West African region. One of these was the Sokoto Caliphate, ruled by Usman 'dan fodio from 1802, which encompassed the region of now-Northern Nigeria and Niger. Umar Tal also

formed a similar empire in Senegal in the 1850s (Hill, 2009). The British and French colonial governments disbanded the political and geographic holdings of the various caliphates and imperial regimes (Hill, 2009). Yet, even while its political structures were eroded, Islam as a religion tended to spread widely under colonial rule, in part as a way to resist the latter. In West Africa the spread of Islam was often accompanied by the institution of Shari'a, according to which the practice of *purdah* required the seclusion of women from the opposite sex, public space, status and office (Bergstrom, 2002). The combined influences of Islam and Christianity further eroded the traditional rights and roles ascribed to women.

Four factors were instrumental in instituting a new form of gender bias that pervaded the African colonized states: Christianity, Western education, the adoption of Western marriage systems and alternative legal systems (Mikell, 1997). Christianity's emphasis on monogamy as well as its imputed message of female subjugation, obedience and domesticity redefined roles for African wives, mothers and daughters (Mikell, 1997). By the same token, Western education privileged the scholarly advancement of men over women (Mikell, 1997). Male education was emphasized as men were expected to later be integrated into the labour market and formal systems of production. Additionally, in a concession to traditional modes of social organization, colonial governments allowed for both Christian and traditional marriage systems (Mikell, 1997). Christian marriage, however, often gave property rights to women, something traditional marriage did not do. Alternative legal systems instituted by the British colonial governments acknowledged women's rights to independence in theory, while substantively treating them as legal minors (Mikell, 1997). These preceding changes affected gender relations, progressively undermining the power, freedoms and positions women had traditionally held, while at the same time limiting their access to new forms of status which were increasingly male-dominated, male-focussed and patriarchal.

In this period, however, European settler women, colonists' wives and missionaries, were instrumental in creating some of the formalized structures of social welfare and activism still in existence in parts of Africa today (Wipper, 1975). They created community groups, charities and services, which although not radical in nature, saw to the needs of women, children, families, the poor, sick and indigent. One such group was Maendeleo Ya Wanawake, as discussed below.

With the introduction of capitalism in the pre-colonial period came the transformation of gender roles and relations. In economic activity, male-focussed modes of production were emphasized above all else. For example, in West Africa women's production of cotton was taken over by the colonial government who sought to expand and consolidate cotton production and exportation (Mikell, 1997). As such, women were progressively eliminated from the production of cotton, effectively removing the former from an independent source of income and autonomy. The arena of cotton production came to be solely dominated by men who benefitted from its avails. As land became more important for cash cropping, there arose a general confusion over the means by which wives and children were to be compensated as it was difficult for women to inherit property within the traditional system (Mikell, 1997). Traditionally in much of West Africa wives and children farmed the land and received shares of the crops they had cultivated for the running of their respective households. Additionally, modes of colonial governance as well as labour market dynamics resulted in the predominance of men in urban settings and government bureaucracy positions, despite the increased presence and migration of educated women to city centres (Mikell, 1997). According to Mikell, "most African women were restricted from the cities by either statutes, the dynamics of apartheid, or the difficulty of finding housing and employment" (1997, p. 21).

The Promises of Independence

With the advent of nationalist struggles and independence, leaders promised gender inclusion and a return to traditional modes of corporatism and social equity, in return for women's support for and engagement with the independence cause (Mikell, 1997). Post-independence, African leaders betrayed their promises of corporatism, claiming that a return to traditional modes of organization would result in tribalism. What emerged were single-party states, meant to symbolize a classless African society devoid of ethnicity, status distinctions, traditional political models, and above all, gender differences (Mikell, 1997). State efforts to ensure social services in health provision, access to education, water, sanitation and roads, were seen as benefitting both men and women, and notable reasons to defer the gender question. Gender bias continued to pervade in governance structures with a marked absence of women, despite increasing female literacy and education (Mikell, 1997). The end of the liberation and nationalist struggles in the 1970s was characterized by the popular injunction for women to retreat from the public sphere, take on the role of caregiver and 'rebuild communities' (Mikell, 1997).

The 1980s saw the continued oppression of women in the labour market as a result of the financial crisis at the time. The implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs designed by the IMF and World Bank resulted in cuts to social programs across the continent, an emphasis on free trade, tax cuts to foreign investors, and the production of goods for export (Rakodi, 1997). This was a process global social policy analysts dubbed 'the race to the bottom,' which further resulted in the excessive downloading of social welfare activities such as childcare, care for the sick, poor, old and indigent to communities, families and ultimately women (Gibson, 2003).

Women's Organizations

Women's organizations in the colonial period were the primary social organizations upon which the formal institutional structure of the African Women's Movement – and subsequently African feminisms – was built. These organizations were legitimately recognized state and civil society institutions that brought women's issues and concerns to the fore. They provided services to a wide range of women, sought to improve the conditions of women's lives, were implicated in the political struggles of the time, and shifted their priorities according to the changing concerns of women.

The arrival of colonialism transformed the roles and status of women, as a result of patriarchal capitalist norms and their collusion with pre-existing patriarchal gender relations (Akin Aina, 1997, p. 2). This instigated the creation of new and different forms of female autonomy that addressed the changing social and material conditions of women, such as women's market associations, farmers' groups and hawkers' associations (Akin Aina, 1997, p. 3). Apart from representation in various municipal structures, and a platform from which to air their concerns, these economically-focussed groups also provided mutual support, personal development and communal aid. In the post-independence era however, women's groups were perceived as having lost their autonomy and as mere puppets of the state machinery (Akin Aina, 1997, p. 4). Ngunyi and Gathaika identify three major factors in the erosion of autonomy of women's groups in Kenya, these include:

1. The beginning of gravitation towards a "maximum leader" and the disintegration of the "nationalist coalition".
2. The emergence of factional patronage networks.
3. The enfeeblement of certain institutions of civil society and actors on the...political stage. (1993, pp. 31-32)

Aili Mari Tripp further details how women's organizations in Tanzania were repressed in efforts to centralize political power:

The government and party expanded their monopoly control of social relations by gradually centralizing party activities, by abolishing local governments in 1972, and by absorbing, eliminating or curtailing key independent organizations, creating new ones and preventing others from being formed... The crowding out of interest group activity was part of a trend of party and government expansion that saw these institutions increasingly encroach into new political, economic and social spaces. (Tripp, 1992a, 230)

In many postcolonial African nations, the formal women's organization was co-opted by state powers in a bid to further the party agenda. Informal organizations, which were involved in activities such as 'mutual aid', childbirth, local death, and burial organizing, were largely ignored by the state. As a result of the economic crisis of the 1980s, African states were unable to provide services and guarantee protection; people then looked to informal organizations to fill the widening gap left by state abandonment of social welfare.

Where the state's attempts to exert monopolistic control over society and the economy exceeded state capacity to regulate social relations and allocate resources effectively, people own organizational structures often emerged to fulfil a variety of societal needs. The state's growing inability to guarantee adequate police protection, ensure that wages bore some relation to the cost of living, and provide basic social and public services led people to form their own organizations to cope with the difficulties they faced. (Tripp, 1992a, 235)

In African city centres, women were a main component of this welfare provision, both as women's groups and with men, responding to the AIDS pandemic, providing health, education and a myriad of other services. The state reaction to this surge of global interest and independent organizing was to integrate these groups into the political infrastructure, in what Amina Mama terms a 'femocracy':

State-directed feminism operated via the first ladies (wives of African presidents and heads of state). With the dual intention of cornering the increasing international funding for women's organizations and directing efforts away from protests, femocracy emerged in the 1980s as an alternative mode of organizing the relations between the state and women's organizations (1994).

Thus, African states saw the integration of women's organizations and single party politics. On the one hand women's organizations granted the state some of the popularity and mass appeal it enjoyed, while the government provided these organizations with a broad range of resources. This gave women's organizations mainstream and state-sanctioned legitimacy, moving them from the periphery of social movements to a position of relative primacy. However, this was not always in the interest of all women, as women's organizations were often aligned with the power elite and served to keep dissenting female voices in line. This system however was only tenable as long as there were resources to sustain it and only through its connection to a male head of state or first lady (ladies) who controlled it (Akin Aina, 1997, p. 5).

Maendeleo Ya Wanawake: Ongoing African Feminist Activism

Maendeleo Ya Wanawake was part of this original breed of colonial women's organizations, and it has remained active through the colonial period, the independence struggles of the 1960s, the subsequent single-party government and is still thriving in Kenya's present democratic state. Today, the organization exemplifies the African feminist movement as it embodies the tensions, ideals, struggles and objectives inherent in African feminisms. MYW enjoys a broad-based membership, has and is undergoing a process of self-definition and re-definition, engages in a 'feminism of negotiation', and, lastly, pursues efforts to reconcile power dynamics on the continent, nationally and within the movement.

MYW has long enjoyed membership from a wide range of women, a result of its long history as well as its status as an umbrella organization under which women's groups with a variety of concerns, needs, and contexts can be integrated. MYW is the largest of the women's organizations currently operating in Kenya, both in

terms of membership as well as the number of women's groups associated with it (Nzomo, 1989).

The organization was started in 1952 by a small group of European women with the injunction of the colonial government's Department of Community Development and Rehabilitation, to "promote "the advancement of African women" and to " raise African living standards" (Wipper, 1975, p. 99). The name of the group roughly translates to "women's progress" in Kiswahili. In the first ten years of its existence MYW was quite effective in mobilizing and engaging women, especially those who lived in rural areas. During this time, the organization focused on subsidizing skills-based training for women in areas such as hygiene, nutrition, housekeeping and childcare. MYW was also able to offer financial incentives to its members through a number of its subsidized programs (Nyancham-Okemwa, 2000). The organization was also closely linked to and supported by the colonial administration, both socially and financially. Kenyan women joined MYW in large numbers in their search for respite and diversion from the harsh conditions of forced colonial labour (Nzomo, 1989).

MYW was also characterized by moments of definition and re-definition of their objectives, goals and aspirations for women in Kenya. One such period was in the early 1970s following independence. At this time, the role of MYW had decreased significantly to the point where the organization was ineffective at mobilizing a mass group of rural women (Nzomo,1989). This was as a result of the overall exclusion of women's organizations in the post-independence political landscape, as women and women's issues were ignored in the nation-building project. Upon realizing that women had been left out of the nation-building process, and were not given the space to speak their concerns or opportunity to provide input and leadership, MYW articulated a clear position on the social and political marginalisation of women in Kenya in their magazine, *Voices of Women*:

Although women have an important role to play in the development of the nation, yet the role which women have to play in Kenya in the nation building seems as yet undetermined. Open though the opportunities are, the men assume that the women have not as yet reached a level where they can effectively participate in the nation building.

According to the African man's view, a woman is only supposed to be in the house. Her role educated though she might be seems only to look after the home and the entire nursing of the young ones. This view has been taken to such extremes that the men appear to neglect or completely underrate the part which our women folks can play in the nation. (Wipper, 1971, p. 433)

MYW was subject to the power struggles that characterized the Kenyan state from the colonial period to President Moi's post-independence single-party rule. In his 1986 bid to do away with civil society, President Arap Moi gave the directive for MYW to be officially affiliated with KANU, the then-only political party in what was a single-party country. By 1987, MYW had officially changed its name to KANU-MYWO (Adar and Munyae, 2001). Thus, with presidential support as well as the internal restructuring that took place earlier in 1975, MYWO had returned to the privileged status it previously enjoyed under the colonial government. This had an effect on membership and participation; the organization again became the leading NGO with the ability to muster and mobilize a wide range of women, particularly rural women (Nzomo, 1989). By 1985, MYWO had the largest countrywide membership, 300,000 divided into 8,000 women's groups (Nzomo, 1989).

Despite the external power struggles it was subject to, this period marked a shift in the focus of MYW's programmatic activities from one concerned primarily with care work (childcare and domestic activities) to one concerned with women's health, livelihoods and human rights. From the mid-1980s to today, MYW's programmes have centered on reproductive health, maternal health, infant mortality, family planning, female genital cutting, forced child marriages and employment training (<http://mywokenya.org>, Mazire, 1994). Although some of their programs were firmly located in specific are-

nas such as healthcare and economic livelihoods, a number of MYW's programs sought to address the intersecting struggles of Kenyan women. One such program was the *jiko* or cookstove program established in 1992. Women and girls were spending a significant amount of time and labour collecting and using firewood for various domestic tasks, and activity which had a significant impact on their health, safety and standards of living (Kammen, 1995). Women in both rural and urban households were continuously exposed to the smoke from the fire, were at potential risk when collecting firewood, and were required to collect firewood in addition to their other domestic duties and possibly after a full day of work (in or outside the home) or school (Kammen, 1995). The *jiko* stove program provided women with cookstoves and training in the repair and upkeep of the *jikos* as an income-generating activity (Kammen, 1995). The *jiko* program was an energy-saving measure, as well as a livelihoods and public education campaign.

As a result of its connection to the ruling party and the previous colonial government, MYW has been seen to benefit and prosper from its close relationship with state machinery. The organization itself was also embedded in power brokerage within the national women's movement and engaged in the *de facto* disciplining and censure of women's group and voices that did not reflect KANU's party line.

For example, MYWO was a vocal critic of Kenyan Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai and her activism around the Green Belt Movement, a grass-roots movement concerned with sustainability and the protection of the environment. Maathai was considered a threat to the single-party leadership as a result of her growing popularity and vociferous campaign against 'land grabbing' by Moi and his cronies (Mathenge, 2011). Maathai protested the co-optation of public forests and lands for private use by the members of Moi's cabinet. Moi engaged in multiple efforts to undermine her legitimacy and leadership, attempting to prevent her from accessing leadership positions

and re-directing funds and leadership upon her accession to the role (Mathenge, 2011).

MYW also engages in a 'feminism of negotiation' in their campaign against female genital mutilation (FGM). In 1995, MYW established an Alternative Rites Program, to counter the practice of FGM in Kenya. FGM is highly prevalent among the Kisii, Masai, Kalenjin, Taita Taveta and Meru/Embu ethnic groups (Chege, Askew & Liku, 2001). MYW sought to address FGM in a culturally appropriate way, pointing to and eliminating the harmful practice of cutting itself, while emphasizing the beneficial components of the ceremony such as inter-generational exchange and education, peer socialization and the public recognition ceremony:

An alternative rite of passage ritual refers to a structured programme of activities with community-level sensitisation to first gain support and to recruit the girls who will participate, which is followed by a public ritual that includes training for the girls in family life education (FLE), and a public ceremony similar to that in traditional rites of passage. The intention is to simulate the traditional ritual as closely as possible without actually circumcising the girls. (Chege et al, 2001)

As such, MYW engages in a 'feminism of negotiation', dealing with a culturally-specific issue in a way that upholds the rights of women and girls in Kenyan society, while also valuing the positive aspects of the tradition.

Maendeleo Ya Wanawake has always occupied a somewhat-paradoxical position, initially as representative of colonists, and later as that of the political elite, while at the same time striving to engage in grassroots organizing. Although this particular women's organization has been subject to many of the dysfunctions that have formerly plagued women's organizations (such as being implicated in power struggles, being a tool of the state machinery, or left out of the governance process altogether), it is still popularly recognized for its ability to effectively mobilize a large number of people and vast amount of support and resources, and subscribes to some of the key

values inherent in African feminisms, namely the inclusion of a diversity of women, advocacy for women's rights and strategies of negotiation.

Conclusion

Although MYW would not describe itself as a feminist organization, this group embodies much of the tensions, struggles and history of African feminisms. MYW is comprised of a broad range of multi-class, multi-generational, multi-regional and multi-ethnic women. It is fully embedded in the institutional history, struggles and successes that characterize the growth and formation of social movements in general and African women's organizations in particular. MYW has always reflected and advocated for a wide range of women's rights and opportunities. This group is the first and longest lasting institution of the women's movement in Kenya, and as such is integral to the definition, contestation, activities and pursuits of African feminisms. Lastly, in keeping with Nnaemeka's definition of neo-feminism, this group engages in the negotiation of cultural constructs and traditions while also ensuring the protection of Kenyan women's rights.

Much of the political action undertaken by the African feminist movement has been shaped by oppositional historical forces, differing trends, and sometimes competitive ideologies, including: traditional leadership vs. colonialism; colonial governments vs. nationalists; and single-party governments vs. civil society advocating for greater democratic space. The debates within this movement (over topics such as the contested notion of global sisterhood and power dynamics within the movement) have also played a central role in shaping what African feminisms look like, react to and engage in today. However, these debates, differences and oppositions force African feminist theory and activism to respond to the multiplicity of conditions and contexts on the continent, and to engage in real

women's lives and the naming of their own conditions. Whether through negotiation and compromise, rejection of hegemonic notions of gender and cultural identity, or working towards the emancipation of women through a variety of tactics, strategies and acts, these are all context-specific and reference the locations in which these struggles are waged.

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Designed Disempowerment and Hegemonic Benevolence

A critical analysis of individual behavior change
HIV/AIDS prevention programming in Sub-Saharan
Africa

Imara Ajani Rolston

*'Of all forms of inequality, injustice in health
is the most shocking and the most inhumane'*
— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a communicable disease. One transferred through blood, sex, and from mother to fetus or infant. It is a grouping of seventy conditions that are the result of the complete and painful collapse of the human immune system. The retrovirus is not a forgiving one. AIDS dismantles our natural ability to fight infection and fosters the invasion of other viruses. The body, if left untreated, becomes helpless and open to slow decay. Over time, the virus has become one of the single most destructive pandemics of this century. While disabling and dismantling the

bodies of men, women, and children, the virus has devastated communities, countries, and societies, ultimately challenging the fabric of humanity.

AIDS is not only a disease that kills. It is a deeply revealing disease that has stripped away the façade of untreated inequalities, and unaddressed injustices in that it has most severely affected peoples and geographies that have a long history of imposed deprivation and marginalization. This is most certainly true in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through periods of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and now globalization the political and socio-economic landscape of Sub-Saharan Africa has vacillated between the great hope offered by new and independent leadership and the struggle that has accompanied the international powers' persistent desire to impose designs of disempowerment through neo-liberal policies and, practices, and impositions. These designs of disempowerment have co-existed with an apparent stroke of benevolence that has been marked by the international community's increasing involvement in the fights against AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa through aid and HIV/AIDS intervention programming.

This paper is a critical exploration of this co-existence, and will attempt to deconstruct how it this co-existence has impacted the character of HIV/AIDS prevention. This will happen through a critical discourse that deconstructs the popularized prevention approach that defines "individual behavior change" as the proven mode of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS (Basu, 2003, p. 1). This paper posits that the focus on individual behavior change models of prevention is the result of a convergence of what I have termed as "designed disempowerment" (global mechanisms, principles, philosophies) and the "hegemonic benevolence" of international aid.

A discussion of designed disempowerment will place forms of 'structural violence' within the context of historical and global principles and philosophies that have served to shape the international community's perceptions and practice in relation to HIV/AIDS in

Sub-Saharan Africa. Neo-liberal policies, racialism, and racism stand as interconnected forces that form the latticework of 'structures of violence.'¹ This latticework has adversely shaped the international community's participation in the HIV/AIDS pandemic in various parts of Sub Saharan Africa. I will treat each one of these forces separately and illustrate their relation to the international community's focus on individual behavior change. The notion of designed disempowerment removes the causal relationship between past and present and places the pandemic in the context of global mechanisms and trends that possess intention and purpose. It acknowledges that HIV/AIDS interventions have been promulgated through the previously named forces and the structures of violence they erect. A complete shift in international thinking would need to occur in order to ensure that prevention efforts do not inherit the latticework of structural violence. I suggest that this critical discourse has never taken place. These dominant forces have not only impacted prevalence rates they have also ultimately built the foundation of international perspectives on HIV/AIDS prevention. I argue that individual behavior change has been positioned and stands at the center of designed disempowerment schemes through programming based on destructive assumptions, philosophical impositions, and critically flawed logic.

Hegemonic benevolence will serve as the framework through which I critique the international community's approach to HIV/AIDS funding and programming. The term hegemonic benevolence refers to a form of 'international cooperation' that stands in tandem with various forms of structural violence to form a super-

1 Parker (2003) based on reference to the work of Schoepf (1992, 1995) and Farmer (2005) identifies structural violence as an "existence of social structures which constrain individual agency". While this analysis is useful it does not seem to go as far as to identify the inherent historical intentions that underpin the structures. In my interpretation it ignores that the violence of these structure are grounded in historical relationships characterized by oppression and marginalization.

structure that promotes designs of disempowerment. Throughout this critique I will argue that bilateral agreements like President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is an example of a mechanism whose principles and approaches to HIV/AIDS prevention stand as accessories to the structural violence inflicted upon the poor and ill of health in Southern Africa. Through its insistence on the Abstinence, Be Faithful and Condomise (ABC) prevention models and restrictions on working with commercial sex workers, PEPFAR dedicated sizeable amounts of funds to prevention programming that has arguably exposed many to greater risk (Behrman, 2004, p. 35). PEPFAR's circumvention of larger multilateral agreements like the Global Fund to Fight AIDS Tuberculosis and Malaria provides the opportunity to fully explore its principles and practices. While I will focus on PEPFAR, it will serve as a case study in recognition that this bilateral partnership is not the only one of this sort.

To engage in a critical discourse without observing potential spaces for change is a sort of crass form of critique. Through a discourse on the convergence of these two concepts – designed disempowerment and hegemonic benevolence—and their impact on HIV/AIDS prevention, the analysis stands as a platform for the offering of recommendations. I borrow my vision of change from the discipline of liberation theology that suggests that to serve the vulnerable, those most affected by structural violence, those patronized by hegemonic benevolence, requires deep and radical change from our global systems of exchange all the way down to our interpersonal exchanges (Farmer, 2005, p. 140)

This paper is not meant to ignore the many men and women who work within these mechanisms spirited with great intention and dedicated to righteousness with a true desire to see social change. It is meant to problematize the structures that potentially undermine the dedication and contribution of people working on the ground and cull some the genuine efforts of those working within the international community. Furthermore this paper does not attempt to

ignore the great importance and place that bio-medicine and international cooperation hold in the fight against AIDS. One cannot deny the great contributions that these have made in the alleviation of symptom manifestation and to the understanding of prevention, care, and treatment of the disease. One cannot ignore the great input of the international community (although it may fall short at times) where prevention, treatment, care, and support are concerned. This is a critical examination of the forces that serve to distort the strong intentions of global efforts ultimately weakening the potential for true solidarity.

'Structural Violence' as the foundation of Designed Disempowerment

To ignore the connection between historical relationships and current events is to speak without context. The vast disparity in HIV/AIDS prevalence between regions is staggering. The difference is most apparent between industrialized nations like North America with rates below 0.1%, and the poorest and hardest hit nations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Current UNAIDS statistics place 32% of people living with HIV/AIDS globally in Southern Africa alone (UNAIDS, 2006, p.2). The question must be asked and has been asked: why are there such massive disparities? Many have come to recognize that these disparities are not casual and cannot be explained through variations in sexual behavior. Despite the international community's focus on individual behavior change as sound HIV/AIDS prevention, many have openly criticized the shortsightedness of these initiatives.

In order to understand why a great deal of internationally driven HIV/AIDS prevention is intently focused on individual behavior, it is important to unpack the perspectives and beliefs that have shaped the international community's view of the pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa. I argue and maintain that the very same perspectives and beliefs that have historically shaped the international community's encounters with Sub-Saharan Africa have served to influence the

formation of partnerships in the fight to end the pandemic. The impact in my view has been negative. While the international community has offered financial and technical support in the fight, the visions of HIV/AIDS prevention specifically have been distorted by forces that have historically bolstered the structural violence that encouraged the spread of the virus. The overriding focus on individual behavior change education models neglects the myriad of socio-economic factors that encourage the spread. So why the focus on individual behavior change education? Two forces – amongst others – have served to influence the shape of international prevention. One is racism and racialism, and the other is neo-liberal thought and practice. It is through the examination of these forces as constants in the West's encounters with Sub-Saharan Africa that reveals perceptions and principles that serve to shape the broader conceptions of HIV/AIDS prevention.

Racist and Racialist Mythology ²

The shared history of Sub-Saharan Africa and the West is one heavily influenced by racial imbalance based on dominant racist ideologies and the predominant economic desires that preceded them (Rodney, 1972, p.50). Colonization marked the point at which Sub-Saharan Africa became cast as the 'other' and the subsequent understanding of region flowed from this context. The presence of the western world in Sub-Saharan Africa was therefor entirely devel-

2 I specifically make a distinction between racialist and racist viewpoints to highlight the important distinction between the two. Racialist is the conception that there are inherent differences between races outside of a racial hierarchy. Racialism has most often been applied to racial difference in intelligence. Racism is the presence of specific beliefs of racial hierarchy and supremacy. I use these two terms as stand against the idea that one can be conceived in separation from the other, especially in relation to HIV/AIDS. There are a number of theorists that have attempted to split the two in order to put forth theories with racist implications under the guise of a racialist standpoint. It is my perception that a number of theorists who have written on HIV/AIDS in its beginnings were guilty of this confusion.

oped from this standpoint and ultimately influenced the future formation of relations between the two geographies. While I recognize that the experiences of colonial rule and confrontation across the continent are not monolithic and varied, it is safe to say that in most regions relations between Western powers and African peoples were predominantly hegemonic and destructive.

It is a forgone conclusion that the international slave trade, colonial rule, and the subsequent subjugation of African peoples and resources throughout the continent served to develop foundational latticework for the forms of structural violence we see today. This foundation has influenced a great deal of the continent's encounters with the rest of the world and has continued to reproduce relationships of imbalance through powerlessness and subjugation albeit in more subtle formations. The explosion of HIV/AIDS across the region has created a new platform for encounters between the West and Sub-Saharan Africa. These new encounters have in no way escaped the influence of ideologies and mythologies that marked previous encounters. This is most obvious in the realm of globally driven HIV/AIDS prevention strategies with specific reference to individual behavior change approaches. As Farmer recounts:

For example, when we were faced with sexual practice or AIDS outcomes that were manifestly linked to poverty and inequality, we wrote about exotic reflections of cultural difference.... The conflation of structural violence and cultural difference has marred much commentary on AIDS, especially when that commentary focuses on the chief victims of the disease: the poor. A related trend is the exaggeration of the agency of those most likely to become infected. Often such exaggeration is tantamount to blaming the victim. Explorations of AIDS have involved intense scrutiny of local factors and local actors, including the 'natives' conceptions and stated motives. (Farmer, 1990, p. 8-9)

Of the utmost importance is Farmer's acknowledgement of the manner in which historically racist and racialist conceptions have greatly influenced the international community's conception of the pandemic and in turn the technical responses that have been developed.

It becomes critical to clearly identify how historical conceptions of African society have resurfaced in the discourses of HIV/AIDS.

According to Gaussett (2001), the 19th century and early 20th century marked a period in which the West developed its distorted fascination with various African sexualities. Missionaries and disconnected "anthropologists" engaged in rudimentary and shallow studies of local traditions ultimately branding them as primitive and immoral. By the 1950's these accounts were rare but in Gaussett's view they have seen a resurgence with the advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This resurgence is most apparent in studies that have specifically identified race as a predictor of sexual behavior. For example, Rushton and Bogaert (1989) suggested that sexual and reproductive strategies vary according to the race. They believed that these differences influenced susceptibility to AIDS. From a racist standpoint inherent with racism they invoked archaic categories of racial classification such as 'mongoloid', 'Caucasoid', and 'Negroid' and proposed that each group possessed different levels of sexual restraint. Needless to say the 'Negroid' was deemed to have the least restraint.

Other theorists of this period created generally constructed conceptions of African cultural systems of sexuality and reproduction and defined them in relation to Western cultural systems in order to explain differentiations in the pandemic. Caldwell characterized African systems through weak marriage bond, a lack of importance placed on chastity, the accepted sexual freedom of young men and women, and the seemingly high emphasis placed on human fertility (Caldwell, 1989, p.188). Interestingly enough, Caldwell cautioned against broad judgments and loaded terms, clearly from a disguised racist standpoint, while ignoring the vast constellation of African societies and civilizations and their massive cultural diversity that exist even within a country. This sort of analysis further consolidates the conception that the difference in AIDS prevalence rates is related to the difference between African and European culture and sexuality (Hunt, 1996, p. 520).

The formulation of African peoples, societies, and places as 'other' has ultimately created an environment in which all things seemingly different are suspect and therefore implicated in the spread of HIV/AIDS. As it has been made clear often these differences are conceived through a racialized lens. In this context 'culture' is often co-opted as a barrier in the creation of individual behavior change programming and unrestrained sexuality becomes the focus. As Katz argued, this focus is antithetical to what we know about global sexual behavior:

What seems to emerge from the literature with consistency is that multiple, mostly serial, casual and unprotected sex is common in Africa, Europe, the USA and parts of Asia, with most men everywhere having more partners than most women.... Differences in sexual behavior between regions, countries and cultures appear to be small, although of course, in every population group, there are people whose vulnerability is acute or whose risk taking is high. (Katz, 2002, p. 130)

So why the focus on individual behavior change? It has been made painfully clear throughout the pandemic's history in Sub-Saharan Africa that as Farmer said, 'cultural difference has been conflated with structural violence'. Racist and racist mythologies and conceptions of African culture and sexuality have served as overt participants in historical encounters between Sub-Saharan Africa and the West; AIDS, as the new platform for encounter, is no different. As racialism and racism has formed the latticework for historical forms of structural violence, racialism and racism have most certainly informed the obsessive focus on individual behavior change approaches in the structure of globally driven HIV/AIDS prevention. This focus has ultimately been driven by historical 'othering' and skewed perceptions of culture and sexuality. These forces ultimately stand as integral parts of programs designed to dis-empower through a dangerous and hegemonic blaming game. Basu posits that individual behavior based approaches to programming often are not helpful and in fact do not impact long-term determinants, as long-term

determinants lie beyond the grasp of the individual, community, and even the national government (Basu, 2003, p.10). As many have come to realize, and as I will argue next, neo-liberalism and its policies and practices have stood in support of racist and racialist mythologies as it relates to their impact on the pandemic and have formed both a crucial place in the latticework of structural violence and in the structures that form designed disempowerment schemes.

Neo-liberal Policies and Practices

The connections between HIV/AIDS and poverty have been clearly drawn and many are now onside in the recognition of inextricable link between the two. It is argued by many that neo-liberal policies and practices stand at the head of Sub-Saharan Africa's struggle with poverty. As Basu puts fourth:

HIV transmission is a background of neo-liberalism- a context where the rapid movement of capital is privileged over long-term investment and the ability of persons to secure their own livelihoods. Increases in forced migration are strongly correlated with some of the most significant increases in HIV transmission across Southern Africa, East Asia, East Europe and Latin America (although few members of the public health community have addressed this fact) ,and such migration most often occurs when rural agricultural sectors are destroyed after the liberalization of markets and the subsequent drop in primary commodity prices, which leads (mostly male laborers) to find work in urban centers and leave their families behind. (Basu, 2003, p. 10)

Basu points out that the impact of neo-liberal policies is multifold. The spread of HIV and the increase in prevalence rate of AIDS was directly connected to growing socio-economic decline, growing debt burden, and structural adjustment programs, which were to become IMF and World Bank supported Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). The major proponents of the neo-liberal policies in Sub-Saharan Africa, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, identified positive growth in many countries severely struggling with rapidly declining rural living standards. The rationale?

They provide the neo-liberal mantra: greater activity in the national capital markets and greater, albeit unequal, integration into international markets. This was the fertile garden bed for the planting of a potential pandemic. As social welfare systems were dismantled in favor of the market system, AIDS took root and devastated populations. Neo-liberalism ultimately became an additional support to the structures of violence.

As with racism and racialism Sub-Saharan Africa's confrontation with neo-liberalism was not relegated to a history of economic subjugation and oppression. Neo-liberal principles were present when the international community returned in support of efforts to stem the tide of the AIDS pandemic. Of great concern to this discussion is the influence that neo-liberal policies and practices had on HIV/AIDS prevention.

Within the context of neo-liberal thought, HIV/AIDS preventions were designed. Paired with the evolving institutionalization of AIDS expertise and a development discourse that to a greater extent fell in line with neo-liberal principles, the conceptual frameworks that emerged were dominated by particular professions and spoke little to the deeper and more complicated realities contributing to the increase in prevalence rates (O'Manique, 2004, pp. 17-18). Prevention once again was distilled down to the biomedical construction of AIDS and its focus on the individual behavioral dimensions of the disease. Furthermore, programs that focused on the individual were assessed not just through the lens of bio-medicine but the also the reductionist zero-sum approach of cost-effectiveness. Prevention efforts, aimed at saving lives and improving health were weighed against other "more pressing" interests in the world of aid. These practices fell in line with the foundational principles of SAPs that helped to create the forms of structural violence that fed the spread of HIV. In both cases the fundamental human right of health was weighed in relation to other more pressing initiatives. As Kelley points out:

Rather than a 'meeting of minds' health policy is being shaped foremost by broader context of certain value systems, beliefs, aspirations, and so on that seek to maintain a particular world order.... [D]ebates over how health should be defined are being reframed, from a concern with how to ensure health as a basic human right available to all and collectively provided, to health as a product whose attainment and consumption by individuals should be regulated by the marketplace. This shift is further reflected in the normative criteria and resultant analytical tools (e.g. Burden of disease, cost-effective analysis), which are applied to translate certain values into decisions over, among other things, the allocation of limited health resources. (Kelley, 2002)

For example, in the gold mining region of Summer town South Africa approximately 70 000 male migrant workers leave their homes and travel for miles to work in mines for unseemly pay and extremely dangerous circumstances. Migrant work and the mining of gold is a means to earn a wage and a means to support their families. Within the all-male setting a strong and rooted commercial sex work industry has expanded greatly. Women migrate to town to escape poverty. They erect shanty settlements and sell sex and alcohol to men in order to survive (Campbell, 2003, p.12). HIV rates among the mineworkers were estimated at 22%, ultimately meaning that prevalence rates for women may in fact be much higher. HIV/AIDS prevention projects funded by international donors identified peer-education, condom distribution, and treatment and care as priority areas. While these are most certainly initiatives worth funding they are funded at the behest of larger and more telling indicators related to prevalence. Never are the roots of poverty and migration addressed. The miners place in the larger economic environment reshaped their lives placing them ultimately in a high-risk environment. Even more importantly are the women whom in order to escape poverty, with almost no options venture away from their homes to sell sex. In the instance of Summertown the structural violence of gender inequity is supported and strengthened through the structural violence of poverty and economic inequality. Yet individual behavior change remains the focus of prevention.

Clearly as neo-liberal policies stand in tandem with degradation of local social safety nets these policies and practices have also had great influence on the conceptualization of HIV/AIDS. Where systems of economic inequality clearly contribute to prevalence rates, prevention programs problematize the sexual behavior of people rather than the structures of violence that inflict pains of poverty and marginalization. Within a framework of neo-liberal thought the violence of market mechanisms and consolidated capital are ignored. To design HIV/AIDS programming in this context is to design disempowerment. Designed disempowerment robs individuals of their agency as potential actors and activists for their own health. The popular individual behavior change approach constructs a one-way dialogue with the community and pronounces that prevalence rates are the fault of the people alone.

Designed Disempowerment

Conceptualized within the tight-knit and traditionally privileged circle of bio-medicine, conceptions of HIV/AIDS prevention have focused intensely on individual behavioral analysis. Expanded within the hallowed halls of public health think tanks, the management of HIV/ AIDS was conceptualized through the management of people's behavior (O'Manique, 2004, p. 17). It was believed that to make people's behavior healthy was to make people healthy. Bio-medicine and public health are sciences that do contribute to positive outcomes but without critical reflection shows the wider unequal forces that often form the context of their practices. Racism and Racialism, and neo-liberal thought and practice have served as influential forces in the formation of bio-medical based HIV/AIDS prevention programming. As a consequence, the outcomes have been individual behavior change education approaches that function as *designed disempowerment*, ultimately blaming the victims and obscuring the root determinants of AIDS prevalence in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Through a programmatic discourse that conveys very strong messages of personal responsibility, self-esteem, and choice without attention to structural violence and its manifestations in people's lives this approach reinforces powerlessness and dis-empowers. The *designed disempowerment* scheme is given its greatest voice through multilateral and bilateral partnerships. While many global partnerships aimed at stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS have been positive support to the fight, some partnerships have been distorted by dogma reflective of the designed disempowerment scheme. These partnerships reflect a *hegemonic benevolence*.

Hegemonic Benevolence: PEPFAR a Case Study

In the final chapter of *The Invisible People* Greg Berhman writes about the beginnings of President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS. PEPFAR was deemed to be a sharp turn of policy in that up until January 28, 2003 America had for the most part abdicated itself from full participation in the international fight to stem the pandemic (Behrman, 2005, p.306). Due in large part to the quiet work of Secretary General Collin Powell, the pandemic and its impact on Sub-Saharan Africa was placed squarely as new international policy priority for the United States Government. In his address, President George. W. Bush Jr. pledged \$15 billion for 5 years to address AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean. While many applauded the effort and its symbolic shift in American foreign policy as it related to the pandemic many were skeptical. Berhman recounts:

Focused on only fourteen countries in Africa and the Caribbean, lacking a sufficiently aggressive diplomatic plan of attack, assuming a bilateral approach, and conceptualized as a humanitarian "work of mercy" it was not a comprehensive global strategy. (Behrman, 2005, p. 315)

While PEPFAR dedicated rather sizeable amounts of funds to anti-AIDS efforts the conceptual framework of the funds are of the great-

est concern to this discussion. Although there has always been welcomed room for bilateral partnerships in the fight against AIDS, PEPFAR chose bilateralism at a crucial time in the pandemic. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS Tuberculosis and Malaria promised to be one of the most effective and comprehensive strategies for generating financial and political support, and also promised to be one of the more articulate and grounded forms of fund disbursement. The infusion of American funds would have served as leverage to encourage other international partners to financially and politically enlist in the global effort. But, even more importantly, as a bilateral partnership the United States government ensured that it had full control over the philosophy and practice of the partnership. In time what became painfully apparent was that this seemingly benevolent stroke of what was deemed *compassionate conservatism* was accompanied by clearly conservative dogma.

PEPFAR is marked by standards that allocate 20% of funds to HIV/AIDS prevention specifically. It was within this 20% allocation that the hegemonic nature of the partnership was revealed. Touting Abstinence, Be Faithful and Condomise (ABC) approaches as the definitive AIDS prevention strategy, PEPFAR has confined the work of many in Sub-Saharan Africa to work within this framework. Many organizations grounded in creation of holistic programs were forced to restrict their activities to suit the tenements of PEPFAR.³ Within the 20% demarcation 33% were slated to be directed towards abstinence until-marriage funds (IOM. 2007). Furthermore, based on the Mexico City Policy enacted in the Reagan era revived in the Bush era

3 See, for example, Ghanotakis, Mayhew and Watts 2009. I also witness the impacts of PEPFAR on civil society through my own personal experience in Botswana and the regional civil society conferences that took place in my time there. My experience is also related to my time on the PEPFAR steering committee beginning in 2004 in Botswana many youth-based organizations had radically shifted their focus to fit the ABC framework while family welfare organizations that advocated for access to emergency contraceptives and worked with commercial sex workers dwindled and in some cases closed. Botswana is unique in that a great deal of funding comes from PEPFAR in that it has been deemed an middle income country and very few donors identify it as a priority country.

PEPFAR restricts work with commercial sex workers. Many have rallied against these stipulations as prevention policy ruled by religious dogma and political conservatism, but, within the larger discourse of this paper the foundations of the program philosophy are multifold.

The Abstinence Be Faithful Condomise strategies fall firmly within the context of designed disempowerment schemes. It is important to recognize that the ABC approach has in many ways inherited the same perceptions and principles of designed disempowerment and are in turn blind to the larger societal and global determinants of health that impact on HIV/AIDS. As the U.S Institute of Medicine in their evaluation of PEPFAR to date suggest:

An effective sustained response requires programs to attack social factors that sustain the epidemic, in particular the low social status of women and girls.... [T]he legislation that established PEPFAR specifically called for US initiatives to support programs that address the conditions that make women particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS including....improving women's access to paid work and economic resources, and advancement of women's legal rights. (Institute of Medicine,2007, p. 35)

Within the already myopic focus on individual behavior change, the layering of heavy right-wing political thought has served to disempower people on the ground, and the restrictions of the program have served to bind the work of lively civil societies engaged in HIV/AIDS intervention. The Institute of Medicine evaluation report went on further to suggest:

The abstinence-until-marriage budget allocation in the Leadership Act hampers these efforts and thus PEPFAR's ability to meet the target. Despite the efforts of the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS coordinator to administer the allocation judiciously, it has greatly limited the ability of Country Teams to develop and implement comprehensive prevention programs that are well integrated with other. (Institute of Medicine, 2007, p. 36)

The PEPFAR framework is potentially hugely damaging to the strong and articulate response to HIV/AIDS in various parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Even further, the impact that the policies have on the grass-

roots level is potentially devastating. It has been widely shared and proven that in many cases young women specifically contract the virus within marriage making the abstinence-until-marriage portion of prevention programming potentially dangerous rhetoric (HRW, 2005). By restricting work with women caught in commercial sex-work without addressing the economic factors that force tough decisions, programming only serves to further stigmatize victims. If we revisit the story of Summertown, South Africa we are forced to imagine a prevention program that doesn't see the young women forced to flee impoverishment through sexual trade as worthy of the support and change these funds might offer. The migrant workers of Summertown would be offered a great deal of support through various programming that acknowledges their presence in the pandemic. Young South African women are, in essence left to suffer in poverty and eventually die.

Individual behavior change education and its place in HIV/AIDS prevention have often stood in unison with various forms of structural violence disempowering the powerless further and obscuring the larger issues, the global issues, the issues that donors were not comfortable addressing. PEPFAR serves as an example of how the designed disempowerment scheme of individual behavior change assumes its prominence and is in turn established as the dominant model for HIV/AIDS prevention. While the bilateral strategy has offered a great deal of funds in support of Sub-Saharan Africa's fight against HIV/AIDS, this form of benevolence has served a particular hegemony that is a reflection of the international community's historical encounters with Sub-Saharan Africa. This hegemonic benevolence is further complicated by the influence of current day compassionate conservatism. As designed disempowerment and hegemonic benevolence converge we see a conception of HIV/AIDS prevention arise that is distorted by the latticework that has formed the structural violence. This is violence that has encouraged the pandemic using the very same latticework that has now formed the

structure for internationally driven HIV/AIDS's prevention and its conception.

Potential For Change: Recommendations

I preface my discussions of potentials for change with the words of Gustavo Gutierrez who cautions:

Misery and injustice go too deep to be responsive to palliatives. Hence we speak of social revolution, not reform; of liberation, not development; of socialism, not modernization of the prevailing system. "Realists" call these statements romantic and utopian. And they should, for the reality of these statements is of a kind quite unfamiliar to them. (Gutierrez, 1983, p.44)

I begin with Gutierrez, firstly because of his suggestion that true and deep change is radical. The established system of global public health as it relates to HIV/AIDS has for the most part been anything but radical. Partnerships and their subsequent support have always operated within the confines of the acceptable, neither disturbing international order nor encouraging others to do so.

Contemporary shifts in HIV/AIDS programming practice have begun to champion rights-based approaches to HIV/AIDS. While rights-based approaches recognize that there are fundamental rights that human beings should not be denied, *liberation theology* espouses that there are fundamental human responsibilities we should never ignore. One of the most significant of these responsibilities is a true and deep commitment to fight for the poor and powerless. Secondly, the principles reflected in liberation theology pose a great threat to power. So much so that in 1982 advisors to Ronald Reagan argued that "American foreign policy must counterattack (and not just react against) liberation theology" (Boff, 1987, p.86); a clear indication that principles of change are a threat to power.

The notion of radical change and liberation may seem extreme, but I suggest that in order to counteract and oppose designed disempowerment and hegemonic benevolence radical change is necessary.

Admittedly, I do not have recommendations for radical change. Rather, I offer the following recommendations that may encourage a shift that may ultimately lead to wider change. If narrow individual behavior change education is supported by bilateral partnerships then it is within these frameworks that recommendations can be made.

From Bilateral Partnerships to Solidarity Movements: In many cases multilateral and bilateral partnerships involve a particular set of stakeholders: governments in both geographies, international NGOs in the donor country, and local and International NGOs in the recipient country. These stakeholders often serve to shape the nature of the partnerships and in many cases reproduce the sorts of dynamics discussed in this paper. But there are others invested in the fight against HIV/AIDS in their own countries, such as NGOs and community-based organizations that work in the donor countries, unrestricted by their country's foreign policy. It is my suggestion that a beginning to true change is the creation of solidarity movements that range beyond the usual stakeholders involved in HIV/AIDS internationally. For example, the American based Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP) project is an HIV/AIDS intervention program that works specifically within the context of social justice on a platform of anti-racism and economic justice (see www.champnetwork.org/). The CHAMP project focuses specifically on historically marginalized peoples being African Americans, Gay and Lesbian communities, and Latin Americans. These voices are rarely present during the construction of international AIDS initiatives. International solidarity movements that link like-minded activist and NGO's serve to create a platform for knowledge and experience sharing that is not currently present. Often many organizations that work within the donor countries have strong and important critical perspectives on their countries foreign policies and partnerships and are already strong advocates for change.

The liberation of Nation States: As long as countries in Sub-Saharan Africa continue to service debt, the funds needed to rebuild health and education infrastructure will continue to flow back into the pockets of the powerful purveyors of the new international economic order. The recent discourse has centered on debates around debt forgiveness. The liberation of enslaved economies would single the point at which countries could truly achieve self-determination.

A Stronger United Nations: The strength of UNAIDS as an international advocate is curtailed by its silence of issues of Global Distributive Justice. While the agency along with the World Health Organization (WHO) have recognized the connections between poverty and HIV/AIDS but have not yet stood as global leaders in the fight for economic equality and forging markets systems that encourage justice rather than injustice. The United Nations and World Health Organization need to start taking radical stances on the issues that underlie the spread of the HIV/AIDS.

From the Bottom-Up as opposed to Top-Down: The affront of individual-behavior change is its lack of complexity in relation to the lived realities of people at the grassroots level. As of recent, a number of initiatives attempted to build programming around the actual lived realities of people. Initiatives like Community Capacity Enhancement programs place the voices of people at the grassroots at the center of programs design. While communities are not perfect spaces, the acknowledgement of the communities' voices as an important stakeholder in the design of programs offers as strong alternative to internationally designed behavior change programs.

Conclusion

While this paper may seem to vilify the larger global effort to stem the tide of HIV/AIDS, that is by no means the intention. It does not intend to suggest the complete dismantling of the system but encourages these systems to be on the side of equality-empowerment

and true social change. It acknowledges the great contribution of the bio-medical community but to recognize that a bio-medical approach operating with a racist framework is dangerous and damaging. It is recognized that health viewed through a cost-effective framework within a neo-liberal context suffers and is more often than not degraded. Like anything, there is a need to unpack the baggage that accompanies HIV/AIDS prevention and not take what is offered at face value.

Benevolence is beautiful and loaded and as we've always known the path to ruination is paved with good intentions. Once we unpack, we may recognize that designs for good intention can become designs of disempowerment and that benevolence, regardless of how loaded, can become hegemonic and damaging. The intention of this paper is to recognize PEPFAR's potential as a great contribution to the global effort, and honour that greatness with a critical honesty that challenges our partnerships to improve and grow in depth.

Fundamentally, this discussion has been about an uneasy truth. The truth being that the pandemic is the world's responsibility, because the pandemic is the world's creation. AIDS is not just about the sexual relationships between a man and woman, a man and a man, or a woman and a woman. AIDS is not about a man or woman's addiction to intravenous drugs. AIDS is about a global world that can no longer ignore that wealth is often propped on top of poverty. It is to recognize that the pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa is about histories of subjugation and enforced deprivation, and that the world cannot ignore that its relative prosperity was built upon deep and massive pain. With this in mind the world is challenged. The world is challenged and charged with the task of ensuring that the support offered is not accompanied by the old forces of domination and subjugation. It must recognize that the answers are about international market policies, grassroots prevention programming, and virtually everything in-between.

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“Something Ironic Happened on the Way to the Black Revolution”¹

The Politics and Power of Definition and Identity
Construction within the Historiography of the
African Diaspora

Leslie Wells

The main ingredient in the power of the weak state is the image it has in the
minds of decision makers in the powerful states.

— Onwudiwe, E. and Ibelema, M. (eds), 2003, p. 4).

The field of diasporic studies is a complicated one. Not only is it genuinely interdisciplinary – drawing contributions from history, cultural studies and English literature, among other fields – but the term “diaspora” itself lacks a clear, widely accepted definition. This poses a unique problem for historians on two different fronts. From

1 The inspiration for this title came from a line in Paulla A. Ebron's chapter “Strike a Pose: Capitalism's Black Identity” in *Recharting the Black Atlantic: Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections*. See Ebron (2008) for more details.

a methodological perspective, one needs to be able to define their subject of analysis in order to know what to look for within the historical record. Secondly, and more importantly, historians are poised to play a key role in theoretically crafting this definition themselves, as understanding the past is indispensable in categorizing the present. An examination of the historiographic record on diasporic formation suggests that there has been no shortage of attempts by historians to engage in this very task. Many of these conceptions of diaspora are, indeed, valuable and have served their purpose of guiding and developing research. However, when these are examined in sum, and in light of their impact on identity formation within the diasporas themselves, it becomes clear that there are some severe theoretical flaws in the way many historians have talked about this issue thus far.

The notion of "diaspora", as a historical construction, can be considered problematic, because it is conceptualized as a fundamentally reactionary phenomenon that restricts diasporic identity to the historical past while simultaneously dehistoricizing the present. This way of thinking precludes a discussion of the power relations that influence the labelling of a group as "diasporic", and, furthermore, of the ways in which the academic treatment of diasporic identity can work more closely with agency-conscious, community-defined identities, which are tools by which these power relations can be challenged. The African diaspora within North America and the Caribbean will be used as a case study as its long history of exploitation, the depth to which it has been studied, and its interrelationship with issues of racism will make for a particularly fruitful examination. This paper will begin with theoretical concerns surrounding the process of historical construction, then assess and critique recurring elements within conventional definitions of diaspora, and examine the way these definitions have been influenced by global and national power structures. It will then proceed to posit potential elements of a more proactive, agency-conscious definition of diaspora,

with an eye for the ways in which this new definition can be practically used in a positive way.

It should be noted that the goal of this paper is not to decisively prove that certain ways of thinking about diaspora should be abandoned outright, or to pose a conclusive, watertight solution to the problems being discussed. I can also not pretend to speak for a community of which I am not myself a member. The goal, instead, is to simply discuss ways in which the current method of thinking may be improved upon, and to open doors for discussion and further exploration at a future date. It is also important to mention that the members of what is termed the "African Diaspora" are an extraordinarily diverse group of people hailing from all corners of a large continent and can have very different histories, cultures and conceptions of community. Also, as Anthias (1998) highlights, there are power relations at work within these smaller groups, such as historically-rooted clan disputes or instances of gender inequality. Although it is very important to acknowledge these internal power differentials and their impact on each individual's ability to craft their own sense of identity, diasporic or otherwise, addressing some of the issues with macro-community identity is a positive first step in opening doors to dealing with some of these inequalities in the future. While acknowledging these issues, the term African Diaspora will be used in this paper, both because it is precisely the usage of this term that is the subject of analysis, and as an umbrella concept in order to facilitate a broad-based theoretical exploration that could potentially be applied to more specific groups within the diaspora at a later date.

Comparing Communities

The problems associated with the construction of units of analysis are not new to those who study history and are highlighted by comparative historian Michol Siegel. Some of the critiques of comparative history discussed by Siegel (2005) are particularly salient for

diasporic studies because, by defining a diaspora, one is inherently engaged in a level of comparison. Seigel defines comparison as "the relational process of self-definition," on the geopolitical, national, and community levels as well as that of the individual (p. 64). A "diasporic" community lives in the same place as, often has a similar socioeconomic makeup to, and is sometimes not even visually distinguishable from the general population, thus, a level of comparison is necessary to determine what actually differentiates one community from another. The very creation of a definition of diaspora is, itself, a comparative act. With this in mind, we can now assess comparative history's critiques of subject formation as they apply to demarcating a diasporic community.

Seigel (2005) argues that comparative studies focus necessarily on differences between two groups being studied in order to demonstrate that a comparative study is actually valid in that case. This precludes a discussion of the overlap, dynamism, and exchange between the groups, which are integrally important because they have the potential to obscure power relations (p. 64). In the context of diasporic communities and their relationship with the general population, ignoring the extent to which diasporic culture is being subsumed by that of the host country's majority population or, conversely, the extent of positive cultural pluralism, can prevent the historian from identifying the diaspora's actual position within the social structure, as well as what elements of any working definition are indigenous to the diaspora, and which are the product of cultural exchange.

Seigel assigns special importance to the role of the academy within this process. By creating definitions that are based on the problematic process of comparison, and discussing them without acknowledging their constructed nature, they go through a process of reification and are no longer really problematized, both within the academic community and outside of it. The definition becomes "fact," for all intents and purposes. Also, the position and bias of the

historian him/herself is rarely, if ever, acknowledged. This has the potential to affect parameters chosen for study, as well as which of the units is better understood, or receives more analysis (Seigel, 2005, pp. 64-5). In the context of diaspora studies, this notion of reification can be troublesome because, as Chowdhury (2010) states, diaspora is not a "sociopolitical configuration" so much as a "theoretical construct". Through the very process of using the term "diaspora" to describe something that exists in the world, historians *make* it a sociopolitical configuration that can be called upon, discriminated against, commandeered, or glorified by real people in their own lived experience.

Werner and Zimmerman (2006), in their article "Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisee* and the Challenge of Reflexivity" also provide arguments that can be added to this discussion. Expanding on Seigel's points about the role of the academic in the process of subject formation, they discuss the ways in which historians are not only inherently biased, but are incapable of escaping their own context (p. 33-4). This implies that if you asked American historians of different races – one black and one white – to define the African diaspora, you would likely get two very different answers due to both the nature of their education and the communities that they interacted with in their personal life. It can be argued that this problem can be overcome by historians taking a specifically reflexive approach to their research. Reflexivity, however, requires intentionality and it remains perfectly possible for historians to study and publish within the diasporic studies field without ever having to critically examine their own place in the research. Now that we have examined some of the methodological challenges involved in using diasporas as an academic unit of analysis, we can now move to a discussion of the ways that these challenges have manifested themselves in the literature.

Defining Diaspora

The term "African Diaspora" was first used by George Shepperson in 1966, likening the movement of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the expulsion of the Jews from Palestine in the thirteenth century. By the 1970s, the term "diaspora" had become commonplace within the academy and was used to refer to any group of people living away from their ancestral homeland. (Chowdhury et al., 2010, p. 2). Robin Cohen (2008), James Clifford (1994), and Paul Gilroy (1993) provide some of the most widely discussed, if not necessarily widely accepted, definitions of diaspora as it applies to those of African ancestry.

Robin Cohen (2008) posits nine features of a diaspora. He acknowledges that all diasporas do not necessarily possess all nine characteristics, but instead intends the list to be used as a rough guide whereby diasporic communities can be distinguished from non-diasporic ones. His nine characteristics are emigration from an original homeland, often forcibly and under traumatic conditions to at least two foreign destinations; expansion from homeland for trade, work, or as a result of colonialism; preservation of myth and memory regarding the homeland; idealization of ancestral home and commitment to its maintenance and prosperity; development of a return movement; ethnic consciousness and sense of difference; troubled relationship with host country; sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members elsewhere in the world; and potential for enriching the cultural life of the host country (p.6). Cohen further characterizes the African diaspora as a Victim Diaspora, similar to the Jewish community in that they both have long histories of servitude or enslavement, forced migration, and the inability to return home. Cohen (2008) does acknowledge that Jews have not been technically enslaved *en masse* for thousands of years, and do not experience the same level of racism within their adopted communities as members of the African diaspora do (p. 40).

James Clifford (1994) puts forth another complementary definition. He says:

Diaspora is different from travel (though it works through travel practices) in that it is not temporary. It involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home (and in this it is different from exile, with its frequently individualistic focus). Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference. Diaspora cultures are not separatist, though they may have separatist or irredentist moments. (p. 308; emphasis in original)

Clifford's definition is particularly important because it emphasizes, perhaps more than Cohen's, the fact that diasporas exist necessarily within another community. If they did not fulfil this requirement, they would not be considered a diaspora by any standard. It also emphasizes, implicitly, the importance of geographic separation from "home" as part of the definition but also that multiple "homes" can exist.

Paul Gilroy (1993), in his widely-referenced book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and the Black Atlantic*, adds a further dimension in that his conception of diaspora strongly emphasizes the impossibility of full assimilation. He makes the argument that the defining feature of the African diaspora is their "double consciousness"; their ability to be, simultaneously, both African and European (p. 2). Consequently, each of these identities is by nature incomplete. Gilroy pushes for a greater acknowledgement of the fundamentally transatlantic character of the African diaspora in an attempt to get around these issues of unfinished identities (p. 16). However, in order to properly embrace transatlanticism, diasporic communities may never fully assimilate into their host communities, which requires making a choice between the practical expediences of increased assimilation into one's long-term home, and the full maintenance of one's heritage in its most genuine form.

Although Cohen, Clifford, and Gilroy provide but a brief taste of the myriad of definitions of “diaspora” that exist, they provide a sufficiently representative sample of the existing work for the purposes of this paper as these definitions enable us to discuss what I believe to be three of the most common themes within conventional conceptions of diaspora: the dichotomies between self- and other-asciption, between historical sameness and contemporary community, and between “home” and “away”. These themes may initially appear to be progressive in nature, but, through an evaluation of their theoretical underpinnings and implications, it will be shown that they are deeply problematic.

Deconstructing a definition

Perhaps the simplest way to define a diaspora is that it is a group which individuals choose to identify themselves. As long as there are people who choose to make this identification, a diaspora exists. As soon as they no longer wish to, it becomes relegated to history (Chowdhury et al, 2010, p. 5). Robin Cohen (2008), however, suggests that it is not so simple. He agrees that self-identification is important for the creation of a diasporic community, but he also says that what the outside population thinks cannot be discounted completely (p. 5).

Cohen (2008) has a decidedly valid point. It would be theoretically possible for a white South African to move to North America and self-identify as a member of the African diaspora. By many definitions, they would be perfectly justified in doing so. However, many members of the African diaspora would likely reject their self-identification, as would many members of the outside community, because of the political and historical implications of being a white African. Yet, if a black youth whose family has lived in North America for centuries decides independently to identify as a member of the African diaspora even though his/her parents or community do not,

it is arguable that she would have a much easier time having this identity accepted both within the black community and outside of it. Thus, it is clear that in terms of identity creation, it is *both* one's own self-perception and the way they are viewed by others that are significant.

This raises a number of significant problems. First and foremost, one must question, as Radhakrishnan (2003) does, whether these two contributors to diasporic identity are "hierarchically structured" (p. 121). Radhakrishnan's work centres on the place of Indian immigrants in American society, but his analysis has currency for other communities and within other contexts as well. He asks whether or not one's individual identity necessarily becomes subsumed by that of the majority population by simple force of numbers, and whether individual conceptions of identity that are not corroborated by the "other" can survive at all. Even if they can, he wonders: "...[W]ould society construe this as a non-viable 'difference', that is, experientially authentic but not deserving of hegemony?" (p. 121) Thus, we can see that defining a diasporic community in practical terms requires the cooperation and basic agreement of all parties involved, not all of whom have equal power in the relationship. This issue will be explored in more depth below.

The second major theme to be found within definitions of diaspora is the juxtaposition between the shared history of a community, and their contemporary interactions. Patrick Manning has been one of the foremost scholars discussing this issue and his work on the African diaspora brings to light interesting points. Manning (2009) argues that the black diaspora shares a generally common historical past with some internal variation, and it is contemporary community interactions in the context of this history that are significant for creating and defining the structure of the grouping. He believes that the ideas of "inherent black unity" and conceptions of a "shared ancestry", which are sometimes used to define the African diaspora are actually the product of the extreme longevity of some of

these community interactions and traditions that date so far back that they are often conflated with racial traits in public discourse (p. 12).

Manning goes on to say that black people themselves are the ones responsible for creating the community that would come to be known as the diaspora, chiefly as a reaction against racism. What he terms "black identity" was born out of a rejection of homogenizing discourse but, ironically, black identity itself is homogenizing as well. Communications advances in the twentieth century allowed this conception of diasporic identity to be dispersed on a much wider scale than ever before, and have resulted in transnational, transatlantic expressions of solidarity between blacks in North America and Europe, and those in Africa. He uses television personality Oprah Winfrey's charitable work in South Africa as an example of this (p. 338).

Manning's arguments, although recognizing the agency of black people in the creation of their own communities, are also flawed in a number of ways. Manning acknowledges the diversity that exists on the African and American continents, but he does not significantly question what are seen to be the defining events of this supposed "shared history". Discourses of African diasporic history are often centred on the slave trade and colonialism, both of which involve severe exploitation of black Africans by white Europeans.

There was a history of internal colonialism, and certainly of internal slavery, in Africa long before European contact and although the European-implemented version was by far the most severe incarnation, to imply that it is the most significant, because it involved *Europeans*, is problematic. It is by no means being argued that the transatlantic slave trade or European colonialism were not enormously significant and detrimental episodes in African history, nor that it is necessarily incorrect for Africans to define their history in terms of these events, but such a definition is fundamentally reactionary, defining an entire group of people in terms of the negative

parts of their history. When history-bound definitions of diaspora have as much power to affect individuals' identity as they do, this pessimism can have detrimental impacts. Manning does point out that many cultural rituals practised by slave communities, and reincarnated as modern popular culture, have roots in pre-contact African cultural rites (p. 334). This would be a much more positive reference point for community identity than a long history of exploitation, yet it does not receive the appropriate recognition by historians.

Finally, perhaps the most prevalent theme within definitions of diaspora is that of the "home" and "return movement," something easily seen in both the Cohen and Clifford definitions. A key defining feature of diaspora for many is a perpetual linkage to a "homeland" that is geographically separate from the location in which they currently reside. This linkage needs to be continually emphasized not necessarily by physical migration back "home", although this is sometimes present, but the culturally expressed desire to one day return and the explicit acknowledgement that the community's physical home and cultural home are not, and can never really be, the same.

Defining "home" is, similarly to the construction of diasporic identity, a two-way street. If a member of a diaspora wishes to call their adopted country home, this desire must also be reciprocated by an equivalent wish from the majority population to welcome them. Braziel and Mannur (2003) define the home-nation as "a place of belonging and civic participation" (p. 6). They argue that discourses about what constitutes a real home-nation "devalu[e] and bastardiz[e] the states of displacement or dislocation, rendering them inauthentic places of residence" (p. 6). Radhakrishnan (2003) asks if this discursive separation between "native" residents and "diasporic" outsiders is one of the ways by which individual identities are regulated by the state (p. 123). By having the diaspora defined as historical outsiders by both themselves and the majority community, dis-

cussions of inclusion and material citizenship for these communities gets sidelined. The possibility of a diaspora without an ancestral home seems to be a problematic one, and, although beyond the scope of this paper, an exploration of its theoretical possibility is certainly merited.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2010) also notes that the concept of "Africa" as we are familiar with it today in no way existed at the time when slaves were being transported to North America, so many of the inaugural members of the diaspora would have had no conception of themselves as "African" at all. The idea of a monolithic Africa emerged with the beginning of the Pan-African political movement during Africa's decolonization period in the 1950s and 1960s (p. 5). This is evidence of the way that contemporary political concerns have influenced representations of history and presents practical difficulties in terms of actually pinning down what a return to Africa movement might look like today.

For the African diaspora, the task of returning home has been somewhat problematic as descendents of slaves do not always know exactly what part of the continent their ancestors came from originally. Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ethiopia have all been adopted as "ancestral homes" for members of the diaspora, the first two being explicitly created for that purpose and Ethiopia being adopted due to its association with perpetual independence on the continent (Cohen, 2008, p. 44). Desires of returning "home" have proved to be extremely problematic in the case of the Jewish diaspora, and similar problems exist for Africans as well (Cohen, 2008, p. 125).

Firstly, the concept of return is incredibly dehistoricizing, as not only does it assume that simply sending people back where they come from will make amends for their forced removal in the first place, but it also assumes that people of African descent would be just as happy in one part of Africa as another, and, furthermore, that they would be happy there at all. Individuals whose ancestors have lived in North America or Europe for many generations, even if they

continue to culturally identify with the continent of Africa, are not necessarily prepared to go back and live there permanently. Building on this point, those of African ancestry whose families were taken to North America in the seventeenth century have had extraordinarily different historical experiences than those who remained. How much in common does an African, who has experienced slavery, have with an African who has experienced colonialism? How much does an African who has experienced racism and disadvantage have in common with an African who lives in absolute poverty? Is the experience of exploitation enough, or does it go deeper than that?

These are critical questions in unpacking dichotomies of "temporary" and "ancestral" homes.

It has thus been argued above that the recurring themes throughout conventional definitions of diaspora have potentially severe theoretical problems within them, generally stemming from questions about who has a stake in defining diaspora, defining historical significance, and reconciling the necessity of a theoretical return movement with the difficulties of ever having one in a practical sense. If we want to move past some of these issues, a deeper understanding of the role of power relations in diasporic identity construction will be necessary. Three main issues are examined: discourses of indigeneity (who becomes conceived of as indigenous and how this process unfolds); the conditions of possibility that allow for the formation of diasporic identity; and, the limited actions and practical options available to those who wish to take diasporic identity further.

Exploring the footprint of power relations

In exploring the potential parameters of definitions of diaspora, Chowdhury et al. (2010) point out that North American aboriginal groups are not considered diasporic and, indeed, that white North Americans have taken on the label of indigeneity as well. They ques-

tion the manner in which one comes to consider oneself indigenous to any one location. On the surface, indigeneity seems like a fairly straightforward concept, but there is a great deal of variation in interpretations of what exactly this word should mean. Chowdhury et al. (2010) mention briefly the argument that central Africans are the only truly indigenous people as everyone else migrated out from Africa at some point in human history. Thus, even North American aboriginal populations, with whom the term indigenous is most generally associated, are immigrants too (p. 4). The other end of the spectrum has been briefly mentioned already and forms the dominant, or at least the relatively unquestioned, position. Descendants of Europeans have lived in North America for so long now that they are considered by most to be *bona fide* indigenous to the continent in that there is no longer any realistic expectation that they will one day go back to where they came from. This latter position is the one most applicable to diasporic studies as they are understood today.

Returning briefly to the idea of comparative definitions that was discussed previously, it would be very difficult to talk about the African diaspora at all if there were not another large group that was not considered diasporic to juxtapose them against. Yet, Europeans in North America fit almost half of Robin Cohen's (2003) nine criteria of diasporic communities. This begs the question of how they came to move from a diaspora to an "indigenous community" within popular discourse. This is not a question that has an easy answer, and certainly not one that can be explored fully within the confines of this paper but one can speculate that the answer could lie in the Euro-North Americans' control of the state, and, thus, their ability to define citizenship criteria, national myths, history curriculum and the like. It is also debatable as to the possibility that members of the African diaspora could ever achieve the same level of adopted "indigeneity" to North America, as much of an oxymoron as it is.

Virinder S. Kalra et al (2005) ask if American society would be constructed any differently if it were conceptualized as a "land of

diasporas" rather than a "land of immigrants" (p. 15). They argue that it might not change things significantly, but it would begin to challenge the seemingly un-challengeable hierarchy that exists between immigrants or diasporas and the white population. They write: "[T]o be called diasporic can only be constituted as a threat when it interrupts the black/white divide" (p. 15). In this way, it becomes clear that a diaspora does not exist in a vacuum, or even in a society in which all else is equal. Diasporic identity can only be defined in relation to a majority community that has deemed itself to be "indigenous" to their locality, regardless of the majority's actual historical origins. Consequently, there can never be a diasporic community that is in a position of social power. What begins as a simple recognition of historical origins and unique cultural practices is, in reality, an admission of subordinate status. This has implications for the other power structures that will be discussed below.

Martin Sokefeld (2006) argues that the construction of a diaspora requires what he calls opportunity structures, such as communication channels and open political structures (as cited in Cohen, 2008, p.13). What is meant by this is that people of a common background and a common cultural tradition need to be free and able to associate with one another in order to form a diasporic community. James Clifford (1994) expands on this idea and says that the number of people who identify with a diaspora, and the strength to which they identify, changes depending on the prevailing opportunity structures of the time (p. 306).

Within the context of opportunity structures, Virinder Kalra and his colleagues make a particularly interesting point. When writing about the implications of the racism prevalent in the 1970s British government, they quote Ambalavaner Sivanandan as saying: "The time was long gone when black people, with an eye to returning home, would put up with repression: they were settlers now. And state racism had pushed them into higher and more militant forms of resistance." (p. 26) This is crucially important because it implies

that an element of exploitation is necessary for a diaspora to come together as a community and identify as such.

Not only do diasporas exist as subordinate groups within the social structure, as previously discussed, it is this subordination that causes them to identify with others and a "home" they may never have been to, and to resurrect or create cultural practices that symbolize home to them, giving them a reason to gather together as a community with others in a similar situation. However, coming back to Sokefeld's argument, they are unable to accomplish this without the requisite opportunity structures. The questions remain as to what they are who creates these structures in the first place. The political and legal systems, as well as freedom of communication and association are all regulated by the state within much of the global north. As previously argued, diasporic communities very rarely constitute a dominant population, let alone form the state itself. Members of a diaspora may work within the state, but almost always in a minority position. Consequently, in authoritarian, racist, or otherwise unfree countries, in which the potential for exploitation and thus the need for community solidarity is the highest, these structures may not exist, and the diaspora will not form to any meaningful extent, or may be pushed underground. Thus, the formation of a diasporic identity, as has been alluded to previously, requires the cooperation and tacit agreement of the rest of society, especially the state, which can be problematic in situations where diasporic identity is being purposely suppressed.

The last issue to be discussed in relation to the operations of power structures within experiences of diaspora are the limitations in which these identities can be mobilized towards action. This issue will be examined through the example of the underpinning rationale for the Garveyism movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Garvey's main goal was to have the African diaspora contribute to the development of "modern civilization" in Africa. C. Boyd James (2009, p. 6) argues that this desire was not rooted in

materialism or political economy, but in Garvey's own personal interpretation of "black redemption" and how those of African descent relate to the communities and nations around them. Central to Garvey's philosophy was the concept of black imperialism, in which members of the African diaspora had to bring capitalism to the "backwards tribes" in Africa, whereby they could be "civilized". James argues that black imperialism was not rooted in materialism, but in what Garvey saw as the divine mandate of the African diaspora to assist those on the "home" continent and to eventually return there (James, 2009 p. 7).

The example of Garveyism is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows that the ways in which members of the African diaspora could interact with Africans themselves was extremely limited by the dominant discursive paradigm of the time. Western society did not yet know how to talk about African people as equals, and had only ever interacted with them from a position of presumed superiority, be it either through the slave trade or colonialism. Consequently, members of the diaspora, despite the common history and common cultural traditions they identified as sharing with Africans, they were themselves unable to create their own way of interacting with them outside of the European framework – through the lens of imperialism.

James (2009, p. 101) argues that this was largely a result of the fact that African Americans had never been given the opportunity to see themselves as agents of their own history; they were simply spectators. As a result, the very acts of enslavement and colonialism were normalized into part of the natural order of things whereby the European lost the label of oppressor and simply became white and the African lost the label of oppressed and simply became black. Indeed, Garvey viewed the experience of slavery as a necessary step in the African diaspora's advancement to the point where they were able to "assist" those remaining in Africa (James, 2009, 145). This example illustrates the way that the discursive paradigm of a particular time

has the power to define how a community can conceive of themselves and their own history in such a way that it is barely noticeable.

Thus far, we have seen that the concept of a diaspora began as a historical construction which has gone through the process of scholarly reification to the point where it is now a discernable and definable entity. Conventional definitions of diaspora in historical literature have been shown to be problematic based on the fact that they do not acknowledge the function of global, national, and local power relations in determining which communities “qualify” as diasporic, who becomes a member of these communities, and what that means for them and their own lived experience. In order to begin to move past these problems within diasporic studies, we need to begin to think about a different way of speaking about diasporic communities.

Moving forward

Scholars engaged in work on the African diaspora, and other groups in similar situations, should resist the urge to try and craft the one, singular, “accurate” definition and instead focus on finding a way to talk about diaspora in an academic forum while still providing latitude for communities encompassed by this definition to make it meaningful in their own circumstances. Two potential solutions are posited below: using the language of Max Weber’s “ideal types” more explicitly to help prevent academic constructions from becoming unconsciously reified in popular discourse, and by basing definitions on negative, rather than positive, ascription.

Max Weber’s theoretical concept of the ideal-type is an extremely useful tool for addressing some of the problems that arise through the process of historical construction (Cohen, 2008, p. 5). The ideal-type can be defined as: “an ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view” according to which “*concrete individual* phenomena ... are arranged into a unified analytical

construct'; in its purely fictional nature, it is a methodological "utopia [that] cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality" (Sung Ho, 2008; emphasis in original). Similar in nature to Robin Cohen's definition of diaspora, yet more explicit in its intention, the ideal-type is simply a collection of specific examples of a social phenomenon distilled down to their most fundamental characteristics, without which they would not exist as they do. These characteristics are then combined into a single definition for the purposes of making it methodologically easier to discuss these phenomena both within the academy and in popular discourse. The most important part of the ideal-type is the explicit acknowledgement that it does not actually exist in any practical incarnation.

This concept can be useful both for discussing diasporas, in general, and in specific terms. Definitions rooted in the discourse of ideal-types can enable historians to more easily talk about disparate social phenomenon without worrying about claiming sweeping generalizations as factual when indeed these generalizations may not be one hundred percent representative of all lived experience. When discussing a specific group, like the African diaspora, seeing it as an ideal-type can help historians acknowledge the elements of historical and cultural commonality across the diaspora, while still leaving room for the discussion of particularities within it, which is crucial for a self-defined but other-accepted definition of diasporic identity.

The second way in which definitions of diaspora can be modified to better reflect the needs of the communities themselves is by discussing what diasporas are *not* rather than what they *are* (Clifford, 1994, p. 307). This does not mean that definitions should be based on conflictual relationships, or that they should ignore purely introspective assertions of identity. Instead, given that diasporic communities are sometimes not in a position where they have complete control over the formation of their own identity, by defining themselves in opposition, they can create the discursive space necessary to engage with their history on their own terms.

As discussed previously in the context of opportunity structures, African diasporic identity was often formed in the context of late twentieth century state racism in Europe and North America. Similarly, we have talked about the ways in which discourses of indigeneity were used by the dominant majority to construct ideas of difference between themselves and "diasporas". In both of these cases, it is the dominant majority that has engaged in "othering" the diaspora, but both of these concepts can also be turned on their head, allowing the diaspora to actively separate themselves from the general population for their own set of strategic reasons.

Paula A. Ebron (2008) makes some very interesting arguments about the prevalence of black style and culture within "oppositional" and "anti-capitalist" movements in North America that are applicable to this discussion. The crux of Ebron's argument is that hip-hop and "street culture", which evolved within the African diaspora as a mode of resistance against racism and economic exploitation has ironically become one of the major marketing strategies for large corporations (p. 319). What is significant here is the fact that Ebron does not attribute this process solely to the process of "co-option". Instead, she emphasizes "...the role of contingency in creating new structures of culture and political economy" (p. 319). This comes back to the issue of Clifford's (1994) opportunity structures that have been discussed previously. It was argued above that the dominant majority, and by extension, the state were the ones with the power to create and define opportunity structures, and thus to create and define the time and place in which diasporic identity could be constructed. What Ebron's argument suggests, however, is that "opposition" itself may be able to create opportunity structures of its own. Opposition or rejection of dominant structures can be the starting point, the initial commonality, that brings similarly affected communities together later to articulate themselves as a diaspora.

Building on Ebron's use of the hip-hop example, the relationship between rap, race, and the state in Cuba provides some interest-

ing insights here. The discourse of the Cuban Revolution, which very much persists to the present, worked to reinforce the idea of a unified Cuba where all were now equal under the socialist banner, irrespective of race or former class. Racial tension between Cubans of African descent and those with Spanish ancestry is, however, still common in certain parts of Cuban society, yet this goes unrecognized by the state for the reasons mentioned above. As with so much of political debate in Cuba, issues surrounding race and racism are consequently discussed in unconventional ways, in this case, through the lyrics of rap and hip-hop artists, many of whom are Afro-Cuban themselves. Because race lacks a formal platform for discussion in public political life, Cubans who experience racism or discrimination often have nowhere to turn for support outside of their own immediate social landscape. By combining a political message with a cultural form particularly resonant with Afro-Cuban youth, hip hop, in this context, has the potential to act as a bridge connecting disparate groups with similar experiences of disenfranchisement and discrimination.

What is even more interesting is the relationship between Cuban rap artists and the state. For obvious reasons, having racial tensions exposed in the public sphere is undesirable for the government, as it undermines the concept of a unified Cuban people that is so crucial for the continuity of the revolution. However, the hip hop scene is tacitly tolerated by the state due to the fact that rappers rarely criticize the principles of the revolution itself outright. Instead, their criticism is targeted at the fact that all Cubans have not equally experienced the revolution as it was laid out in 1959. The state chooses to interpret this as a call for continuing improvement of the revolution and thus does not engage in active censorship (Baker, 2005, p. 373). Whether or not the artists or their audiences intend the music as criticism of the revolution is another question entirely and one that is not easily answered. This illustrates that conversations about issues that affect the diasporic community which begin

outside the arena of the state can, once developed, be brought into the public arena to raise awareness and spark debate on issues that would normally not receive that level of attention.

By using structures of resistance as a starting point, fledgling diasporas can position themselves discursively outside of the majority population, thus creating the space they need to articulate their own commonalities without initially having to worry about "other-asciption". Once this strong community identity is formed, the diaspora is in a much more advantageous position from which to engage with the dominant majority about issues of inclusion and respect within the society. The only thing that remains is to discuss the implications of changing the way diaspora is talked about and defined within the academy and popular discourse, and whether doing so would be a positive step for members of the diasporic community. It is argued there are two main issues related to new conceptions of diaspora: diaspora could act as a challenge to the modern conception of the nation state, and could help to achieve development goals for the "home" countries of the diaspora.

Diaspora as a challenge to the nation state and to nationalism is a prevalent concept within the literature. As indicated above, diasporic communities that do not feel welcome within their adopted nation state can begin to take action against it, but even just the presence of a large, active diaspora community can potentially be enough to destabilize the notion of a homogeneous, self-contained state (Chowdhury et al. 2010, p. 5). Nation states require at least a basic historical and cultural definition in order to justify their existence as separate from their neighbouring countries. Some countries allow immigrants to participate in more of their own cultural traditions than others, but they still need to be open to participating in, accepting or, at the very least, tolerant of the national culture in order to be considered "citizens" with all the benefits that citizenship entails.

This is not as easy as it may initially sound, however. James Clifford argues that diasporas are fundamentally different from immigrant groups, because they cannot by definition be assimilated (Clifford, 1994, p. 307). If a black community in North America identifies firstly as African and, secondly, as American and their presence is, at least in theory, only temporary, then there is no reason they should wish to be considered "American". The idea that all those who live in America, even if their families have lived there for hundreds of years, are not "Americans", calls into question what it actually means to be an "American". It is in this way that diasporic groups, through a strong assertion of their diasporic roots and individual identity, can challenge concepts of national identity.

Diasporic identity can also challenge "us and them" narratives that exist within the discourse of nationalism. Not only does a strong African cultural presence in Europe and North America challenge the eurocentric, and sometimes racist, binarisms that existed during the colonial period, but it also challenges similar discursive separations that exist even within postcolonial studies or the development industry (Brazier and Mannur, 2003, p. 4). It problematizes the idea that those in the West are fundamentally different from those in Africa, and that they are better suited to "solve" Africa's problems of poverty, because "Africa" is not just "over there", it is present in the West as well. This can decrease instances of othering, both conscious and unconscious, that continue to exist within both postcolonialism and development studies.

Robin Cohen (2008, p. 168) states that diaspora, in addition to rhetorical support, can provide much more concrete assistance to development initiatives back "home". Cohen notes that the idea of remittances sent from members of the diaspora back to the native country shares some common themes with the Garveyism movement discussed previously, in that they both mobilize the diasporic community to contribute to the material well-being of those still back "home". There is a key ideological difference though. Gar-

veyism's concept of black imperialism advocated the expansion of capitalism into Africa, requiring the diaspora to actively engage in this process, bringing the market to the "uncivilized" (James, 2009). Remittances do not have this same prescriptive element, and can be more accurately described as a redistribution of wealth from the diaspora back to Africa without any strings attached to how it is spent.

Manning (2010) suggests that the creation and constant revisiting of histories of exploitation is key in preventing the dominant majority from repeating past actions, and serves as an ever-present implicit reminder in an active African diasporic community can help with this (p. 346). He writes that he worries that the history of slavery and the slave trade will one day be forgotten in America, (p. 349) but by creating this historical memory, this can be prevented.

Conclusion

Through an evaluation of the discursive and historiographic trends within diaspora studies, it can be concluded that the concept of diaspora is a problematic historical construction that defines membership in terms of historical experience, yet simultaneously dehistoricizes diasporic members' present experiences. This is largely a result of the influence of local, national, and global power structures on who can be defined as a diaspora, how they are able to construct this identity, and what that means for individual lived experience. By promoting a discussion of a more self-defined, agency-conscious definition of diaspora through the creation of new discursive spaces, these communities have the potential to mobilize this identity against concepts of nationalism, inequality and false narratives of "progress." Due to the fairly recent popularization of world historical studies, many conversations surrounding the practice of world history are still very much confined to the theoretical realm as practitioners attempt to work out the parameters, philosophical foundations, and methodological practices of the field. By engaging

in exercises such as the problematization of diaspora studies, historians can work towards some of these goals while also thinking about the real-world implications of their work. By bridging the gap between theoretical history and its practical application, we can better understand the discursive framework that we as historians operate within, our role in perpetuating it, and the ways in which we can work towards challenging it.

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Indian Hair, the After-Temple- Life

Class, Gender and Race Representations of the
African American Woman in the Human Hair
Industry

W. R. Nadège Compaoré

The penultimate paragraph of an online marketing campaign for
Virgin Remy Indian hair reads as follows:

Polished Natural Relaxed Straight *Virgin Remy Indian* Hair provides the finished Silky *straight look* of newly informal¹ African American hair without rival or peerless in shine, texture, luster, body and movement that will demand the attention of any multitude! Gathered directly from the *temples of India*, this *rare* natural hair texture is in *high demand globally* for its soft texture showing an affinity to that of silky straight relaxed *African American hair* (eIndianHair.com, para.9; my emphasis).

¹ Note that 'informal hair' is used in this paragraph as a synonym of 'relaxed hair', perhaps erroneously so, given the usual meanings of "informal" outside the hair context. Relaxed hair refers to chemically treated hair that transforms naturally curly hair into straight hair. The other common term for relaxed hair is permed hair.

In many respects, the above content is telling of the “production”² process, the targeted clientele, the intended use, as well as the key racial and spatial dimensions involved in the marketing of “Virgin Remy Indian Hair”³ as a commercial product. Furthermore, when examining the name of the product, the distinctive trait of the hair (the fact that it is *human* hair) appears silenced at the benefit of the racial and geographic attributes of the hair (the fact that it is *Indian*). As such, the attribute “Indian” can be seen to be an implied brand, thus carrying a weight equal to that of the terms “Virgin” and “Remy”⁴.

This paper follows Virgin Indian Remy hair from its production in India to its global distribution, with a focus on its marketing, distribution and use in the United States (US). The focus on the US is justified by the storyline in the above advertisement, which identifies Virgin Indian hair as having an ‘affinity to that of silky straight relaxed *African American hair*’ (eIndianHair.com, para.9; my emphasis). In this context where the US as an importing country is privileged among other regions, and given that the advertisement implicitly stresses stereotypical attributes of female hair textures, as well as a tacit focus on Black women⁵, the paper seeks to situate and discuss the class, gender and race representations of African American women, within the marketing, distribution and use of Remy Indian hair. Specifically, the paper questions what such representations of African

² Since the paper deals with human hair rather than manufactured synthetic hair, production simply refers to where the hair originates, how it is collected, sewn (so as to be used for extensions or weaves), and packaged for distribution.

³ “Virgin Remy Indian hair”, “Virgin Remy hair”, “Virgin Indian hair”, “Indian hair”, “Remy hair”, will be used interchangeably in this paper. These terms will also be used to connote the human hair in general.

⁴ Virgin hair simply refers to unprocessed (chemically) hair, but this term will be problematized later on in the paper, as it pertains to the notion of “Virgin Indian” hair that is not mixed hair from other races. Remy hair refers to hair cut or shaved for sale, which still has ‘the cuticles on, and in the same direction to keep the hair soft, long lasting, and tangle free’ (Hair & Cuticle Inc., 2008).

⁵ In addition to referring to African American hair in their advertisement, the pictures on the website of eIndianHair.com solely depict women, and mostly Black women.

American women mean *vis-à-vis* Indian women who “produce” Virgin Remy hair; and what they mean *vis-à-vis* men. Furthermore, the paper is particularly interested with *self-representations* of African American women *vis-à-vis* the use of Indian hair, and seeks to understand what these self-representations mean *vis-à-vis* the identity of Black women in the US. Indeed, this investigation seeks to uncover useful tools for locating and unpacking discourses and practices for and against the use of human hair within African American women’s self-representations. Specifically, the study seeks to emphasize the race, gender, and class dimensions of the global impact of marketing human hair, and to thus uncover the multiple power relationships involved in the human hair industry. Ultimately, a close analysis of these self-representations can serve to justify the need for exploring two important issue areas. First, it will provide the basis for a clearer understanding of fundamental constructions of “blackness” within the Black American community, which can be located within global production chains such as the human hair industry. Second, it will provide a needed appreciation of the mechanisms through which representations of Black American women in Hollywood and in the American music industry impact on the beauty ideals and the self-representations of Black women in Africa, the Caribbean, Europe and Latin America. In other words, as a study which aims to expound the linkages between body politics (in this case hair politics) and identity politics in African American communities, this paper also positions itself as trigger for future analyses on the political economy of the human hair industry globally. To be sure, although this is not the focus here, the paper hopes to provoke debates on the linkages between the human hair industry and enduring structural conditions of poverty and subordination within and across Black American communities and Black communities worldwide.

Anchored within Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (2003) anti-colonial and anti-capitalist feminist project, this paper identifies key self-representations within the human hair debate in the African

American community as centered on a dichotomization of “natural” “Afro” hair *versus* “non-natural”, “White-like” “straight” hair. In this context, the empirical and theoretical examination of the use of human hair extensions as a means to “straight” hair is pertinent for locating narratives and counter-narratives of the connections between hair politics and identity politics within the African American community. Mohanty’s anti-colonial and anti-capitalist feminist discourse is useful for decolonizing feminist discourses from representations of the “other” as simplistic homogeneous entities that are either authentic or not, legitimate or not, oppressed or not. Furthermore, recognizing the importance of wider capitalist structures in shaping power relations between different groups around class, gender, and racial dimensions is crucial to this analysis.

The paper suggests that dominant discourses of resistance by some black feminists against the use of human hair by African American women problematically apprehend African American women as a homogeneous and singular category that can be captured in space and time. Rather, this essay advances that there is no hairstyle that is authentically “black”, “natural”, and as such, exclusively legitimate for African American women. The discussion aims to show the importance of engaging with multiple meanings of “blackness”⁶, as a means to productively examine hair and identity politics locally within the American context, but also globally. The focus on the global speaks to the importance of capitalist power structures that construct and perpetuate a specific politics of hair and identity. The rest of the analysis is presented in a threefold discussion. In the first section, the paper opens up with a critical examination of the assumptions that guide the production, marketing, and “consumption”⁷ of Virgin Remy Indian hair. The second section discusses pow-

⁶ This proposition reacts specifically to bell hooks’ (1992) discussion of “blackness”, whereby blackness is implicitly understood as a “singular universal” (Mohanty, 2003).

⁷ As in the disclaimer regarding the “production” process, consumption here simply refers to the use of human hair by individuals, for hairstyling purposes.

er relations at the intersections of class, gender, and race, with regards to the production and consumption of Virgin Remy Indian hair locally (within India and within the US), and globally (in particular between India and the US). Building from the previous sections, the third section tackles the core theoretical concern of this paper, and addresses the significance of African American women's self-representations within various discourses on, and practices of human hair extensions.

Selling Indian, Constructing *the* African American Woman

The Indian Preference

Via internet, phone, regular mail, or international delivery services, individuals or groups worldwide can purchase any type of Virgin Indian Remy hair (straight, wavy, curly, etc.), using cash or a major credit card⁸. Before being accessible to people everywhere, from Kingston Jamaica to Kingston Ontario, Indian Remy hair as the name conveys, originates in India. While there are other types of Remy hair on the market such as Chinese, Brazilian, Malaysian and Russian hair (Dream Girls, 2007: para.2), Indian hair remains the preferred type of human hair in the US market, and so despite it being the most expensive kind (Good hair, 2009). It is important to question why there is a privileging of Indian hair in the African American human hair market; what explains the increasing demand of Indian hair in the US in particular; and how the supply mechanisms of Indian hair has sustained this demand.

An investigation by journalist Swapna Majumdar (2006: para.12-13) shows that while the Chinese demand for Indian hair has steadily risen over the years, (whereby China has maintained the

⁸ Indeed, all the online sites examined in this paper and which advertise and sell Virgin Remy Indian hair offer the aforementioned means of payment.

lead as India's number one hair exporter)⁹, US imports of Indian hair have also grown significantly, with \$82 million worth of hair exported to the US in the 2004-2005 fiscal year. One is right to ask why, given that the quality of human hair is primarily determined by whether it is remy (cuticles on, and in the same direction) and virgin (unprocessed), preference is given to Remy Indian (rather than Remy from other races) in the African American community. Some distributing companies advance that the affinity between Indian hair texture and that of *relaxed* African American hair is what makes Indian hair the preferred choice of African American women (eIndianHair.com: para.9). Others claim that 'Indian Remy hair is the most popular type for most African Americans because it naturally matches *their own hair texture* so well' (Remy Hair Talk, 2009: para.1; my emphasis). However, the difference between "natural" African American hair texture and "relaxed" African American hair texture is significant. Indeed, going from one to the other requires intense chemical treatment. Thus, this disparity in explanations from otherwise analogous marketing campaigns justifies that doubt be cast upon the so-called affinity between Indian hair and African American hair as a selling factor. Furthermore, basing African American women's preference for Indian hair among others is an undoubtedly clever marketing move, as it justifies a continued supply for Indian hair based on the supposed demand for it by the African American community. In this sense, the marketing story is conveniently made to correspond to basic neoliberal accounts of the market, according to which *demand determines supply*.

In order to further problematize the above aforementioned marketing accounts for the privileging of Indian hair in the US hair market, this analysis suggests that the marketing of Indian hair heavily determines its demand rather than a simple demand and supply mechanism. That is, Indian hair has been constructed as more desir-

⁹ Note that China exports Indian hair in order to resell it eventually worldwide (Majumdar, 2006: para.13).

able than other types of hair, without such a characteristic having actually been tested. Indeed, apart from the above explanations, there has been no concrete evidence from the examined distribution companies. Thus, although the term “virgin” in the human hair industry has come to signify unprocessed hair, one may view the “virginity” of Indian hair (recall the name of the product as “Virgin Remy Indian hair”) to be implicitly constructed and marketed on racial lines. As seen above, Remy Indian hair is privileged in the US market relative to other types such as Brazilian, Chinese, and Russian hair for instance. It may be argued that rather than resulting from its necessary affinity with African American hair¹⁰, Indian hair is the preference of African American women because it has been made so through marketing that emphasized a racial hierarchization of hair, with Indian hair placed at the top of the hierarchy. In other words, Indian hair has been constructed as “rare” (eIndianHair.com, para.9), exotic, and better than European or Chinese hair. The Merriam-Webster (2011) online dictionary defines “rare” as either ‘marked by unusual quality, merit or appeal’ or ‘seldom occurring or found’. Given that the *unusual appeal* of Indian hair sharing an affinity with African American hair has thus far been contested in this paper, one is left with the second meaning of rare as ‘seldom occurring or found’. In relative terms however, one need not conduct intensive research to be aware that the Indian population is much higher than that of Russia or Brazil for instance, rendering the seldom factor untenable. As such, it is difficult to sustain a justification for the privileged status of Indian hair, especially as it remains the most expensive kind as discussed above. It is no surprise therefore that some of the distribution and export sites resort to the fact that Indian Remy hair, unlike Chinese, European or Brazilian hair, is collected in Hindu temples as a selling point – or should we say an “exotic” factor

¹⁰ The “affinity” explanation is also especially dubious given that African Americans (both men and women) have many different types of hair textures, yet the marketing campaign assumes “African American hair” to be a coherent and singular kind of hair.

upon which to build an image of rarity (see eIndianHair.com; Human Hairs Impex, 2007). In addition to the homogenization of African American hair, the various marketing campaigns construct a homogenized view of all Indian Remy hair as a coherent category of hair that is always better than all non-Indian hair. One would have a hard time believing however that each Indian woman's hair is always more desirable than the hair of other races, including the African American community. The discourses that underpin the marketing of Indian hair are therefore homogenizing on three levels: 1- viewing African American hair as homogeneous; 2- viewing Indian Remy hair as a homogeneous category, and 3- viewing all non-Indian hair (such as African American, European or Chinese) as less desirable groups of hair relative to Indian hair. Finally, and very illustrative of the above discussion on the virginity of Indian hair as readable on racial lines, is China's exports of Indian hair, with the purpose of mixing the latter with Chinese hair, so as to ultimately resell it at a lower cost (Majumdar, 2006: para.11). In this sense, the fact that clients assume Indian hair to be of superior quality relative to other types of hair automatically justifies the lower price that one is expected to pay if Indian hair is mixed with any other kind of hair; this testifies to the successful hierarchization of hair within the human hair industry.

Marketing to African American Women: "Made" in India or "Made" for the US?

That Virgin Indian Remy hair has successfully gained preferential treatment among the African American community is now evident. The final part of this first section seeks to illuminate the fact that in the marketing process, the production stage (dominated by Indian men and women) is profoundly disconnected from the consumption stage (dominated by African American women). The rationale behind this discussion is that such disconnect may aid in understanding why the purchase of actual Indian hair by African American

women appears less problematized by this group of women (as individuals and as a community), than their use of the hair.

In the documentary *Good Hair* (2009), which analyzes the various traditions and trends in “Black” hairstyles, interview questions posed to women who purchased human hair (more often than not, Indian hair), revolved around why they used human hair, the affordability of the hair, as well as the social and political implications of their practices for their social, political, and economic status in the US. In short, the fact that the hair came from the shaven heads of actual Indian women who donated their hair to deities was never directly discussed with interviewees, nor were the choices and working conditions of those who worked on the hair (washing, drying, sewing it in manufactures nation-wide and worldwide). To be sure, the documentary *Good Hair* did raise awareness of the production process, but separated its discussion of the production process from its coverage on the use of Indian hair by African American women. One may argue that this divide serves to explain why throughout the film, fond “consumers” of Indian hair (mostly African American singers and Hollywood personalities) do not show awareness or concern of the issues and actors involved in the production process.

This situation is also problematically reflected in the marketing campaigns of the sample of US-focused and (perhaps even more problematically so) of non-US focused distribution companies examined in this paper. By US-focused companies, this paper refers to those companies whose marketing campaigns are principally but not exclusively targeted to African American women (as in the opening paragraph of this essay). Note that in the sample of the nine online marketing/distribution companies examined in this essay, three are Indian-based Import-Export companies (Human Hairs Impex, 2007; Gupta Group, 2009; The Indian Remy Hair, 2007), one is a Toronto-based Canadian company (Hair & Cuticle Inc., 2008), while the remaining five are American-based (Dream Girls Hair, 2007; eIndian Hair.com; International Hair Company, 2010; Remy Hair Talk,

2009; Remy Hair Today, 2008). With this brief inventory in mind, it is telling that beyond mentioning the temple-collected hair and the washing, sorting, and sewing of the hair by Indian women on or off site, none of these companies render visible the choices, conditions, actors and structures involved in the production of Virgin Remy hair. For instance, Remy Talk summarizes the steps from producing to distributing Virgin Indian Remy hair in the following manner:

Indian hair comes from various temples in many different parts of India, and is sold at auction to companies all over the world¹¹. In turn, these companies wash and sort the hair for use in many different forms including putting it on wefts, in wigs, in creating various pieces, and much more (Remy Hair Talk, 2009, para.1).

As such, Virgin Remy Indian hair is made to be free of any power struggles, reflecting a classless, genderless, raceless image. For instance, how does the hair get to the various Hindu temples, and why? Are hair donors voluntary? Forced? Remunerated? Are they aware of what happens to their hair after they leave the temple? What are the class, gender, and race dimensions at play? Is the hair collection institutionalized or informal? Who benefits and who loses? Apart from the knowledge provided by some sites which explain that the hair is donated to the temple based on Hindu religious beliefs, potential clients who visit any of the aforementioned sites will conveniently purchase their chosen style of Virgin Remy without any further concerns for issues that may be involved in the production phase of the hair in India. As such, past the name of the product (Virgin Indian Remy hair), it may be forgotten that the hair physically originates in India and used to belong to someone else. What appears important in these websites is the commercialization of the product, hence the heavy emphasis on its marketing, as assessed in the earlier part of this section. Thus disconnected from any grounds

¹¹ As the Indian-based Import-Export companies point out, these companies can also be found inside India, such as the Chennai-based Gupta Enterprises (Gupta Group, 2009; Human Hairs Impex, 2007).

on which to potentially problematize the product that they are being encouraged to purchase, eager clients such as African American women seeking to model their looks according to Hollywoodian standards of beauty, are able to concentrate on the image and lifestyle that is being sold to them. With the glamorous head shots of Hollywood celebrities such as Halle Berry and Kelly Rowland (respectively on the top left and top right hand corner of eIndianHair.com's webpage titled "Straight Indian Hair"), the focus is solely and without a doubt, on appealing to the potential buyer, in this case African American women. When local workers are mentioned, it is again solely to reassure the customer that the company only deals with "skilled workers" (The Indian Remy Hair, 2007: para.3). Therefore, in this consumer-focused and producer-blind marketing process, the fact that Virgin Indian Remy hair is produced for the US market is more visible than the fact that it is produced in India. Ultimately, this discussion serves to further problematize an implicit homogenization of African American women, by highlighting a marketing process that assumes that all African American women interested in Indian Remy hair are attracted to the Hollywood lifestyle.

Power Relations in the Human Hair Industry

For an unconventional business such as the trade of human hair, extant academic scholarship on the topic is scarce. Indeed, Black feminist scholarship and other scholarship on hair politics tend to remain centered around the issues of hair in general (Banks, 2000), hair relaxing and synthetic hair, (hooks, 1992; Banks, 2000), and so even when they acknowledge the use of human hair (Banks, 2000). As such, the rest of this section will draw heavily from the 2009 documentary film directed by Jeff Stilson, and narrated by comedian Chris Rock on the one hand, as well as from the work of journalist Swapna Majumdar reporting for the Women's eNews (2006). This

phase of the paper seeks to situate the various power relations locally and globally, *vis-à-vis* the market mechanisms underpinning the trade of Virgin Remy Indian hair. To do so, one must first understand the actors and structures at play in the production process.

Although their roles remain invisible on the web pages of the various distribution companies examined so far, temples play a very active role in the Indian human hair business. From collecting tonsured hair to auctioning it, Majumdar shows that temples are formidable administrative organizations that contain a panoply of actors of different kind (2006). Devotees who go to Hindu temples to offer their hair to their deity have their heads tonsured by temple barbers. The occupation of barber is largely held by male barbers, although there has been an increasing amount of female barbers, given the increased levels of tonsure due to a rising population (Majumdar, 2006: 19). Once the hair is tonsured, temple workers garner it into bags, in preparation for auctions. Temple administrators deal with the logistics and finances relating to the auctioning of hair, by advertising auction notices on the temple's official website, and holding scheduled auctions (Majumdar, 2006). Temples were said to have collected at one point in time in the early 2000s, an average of about \$1 million for 3 million kilos of hair sold (Majumdar, 2006: para.18); with increased demand, this number is expected to have increased. While these workers are remunerated with unequal salaries, the devotees who offer their hair as a sacrifice to show gratitude to their deity are simply not remunerated, and would probably refuse any monetary payment. In effect, most do not seem to realize that the hair is auctioned off all over India and abroad. The answer of a newly-tonsured woman to whether she expects to see the hair on someone else's head is telling of this reality: "God likes hair too much"¹² (*Good Hair*, 2009). The level of trust that this devotee as an individual places in her religious institution constitutes a highly sig-

¹² The implication is that God likes hair too much to give it away.

nificant power structure. This kind of power relations will not be explored further in this paper, but is useful in terms of stressing that class, gender and race are but a chosen focus in the present analysis. It also serves to stress that while one may be tempted in understanding the stages in which the hair is collected as a succession of events, the various power relations that are constantly negotiated and played within the temple, as well as between the temple and outside entrepreneurs is so complex and multi-layered that it would be faulty to understand the process as linear. It is worth indicating that while both men and women offer their hair in sacrifice to their deity, women's hair is the kind that is used for weaves and extensions, whereas men's hair is usually used for 'coat linings and to extract L-Cystein (...)' (Majumdar, 2006: para.7).

It is only after this very complex process that the successfully auctioned hair can be sent off to a manufacturing site where workers sort out, wash, and tie the hair into wefts. Remy Indian hair is the most sought after category of hair as per Majumdar's findings, with this type of hair selling for as much as \$160 per kilogram (2006: para.8). Exporters confirm that Hollywood is the biggest consumer of human hair (Majumdar, 2006: para.14), which explains why Chris Rock comically dubs LA "the weave¹³ capital of the world" (*Good Hair*, 2009). If one is to believe the fact that the Black Hair industry is a \$9 billion industry, with 60 to 70% of that industry being made of the human weave hair alone (*Good Hair*, 2009), then there is need to further problematize why those at the very core of the production of weave hair (the Indian women who donate their hair to their Gods, the Indian men and women who work in the temples to collect the hair, and all those who work on manufacturing sites inside and outside India) do not share the bigger portion of the benefits in this global industry. However, it is imperative to insist that one not

¹³ A weave is 'synthetic or natural hair that is braided, sewn, bonded (i.e. glued), or woven into already existing hair (Banks, 2000: 173). Weaves are the most common way through which human hair is used. In this paper, weaves strictly refer to human hair weaves.

look at this issue as one of poorer Indian “producers” of human hair *versus* rich American “consumers” of human hair. Indeed, to do so would be to trivialize the important structural foundations that underpin the various power relations at play, and which resist any homogenization of the different groups of actors involved in the human hair industry.

A Structure versus Agency Debate

Good Hair juxtaposes on the one hand the work of Indian women who “produce” human hair, with the pleasurable use of the produced hair by African American women on the other hand. Indeed, the poverty that characterizes the conditions in which Indian women must work to process the human hair (*Good Hair*, 2009) takes a more poignant meaning when contrasted with the opulence that defines the lives of Hollywood celebrities who made up a large number of the film’s interviewees.

However, one should be careful so as not to simply retain a representation of poor Indian women contrasted to rich African American women. For instance, Majumdar (2006: para. 1-2) points out that Bollywood actress and Miss India 1976 ‘offered her waist-length locks at the 1,200-year-old Sri Venkateswara Temple in Tirupati (...) to thank its deity for granting her a private wish (...)’. In a parallel vein, many customers who buy human hair in the US are working class¹⁴ women ranging from hairdressers to teachers and students, who believe that they must wear human hair to enhance their looks (*Good Hair*, 2009). Ironically, one may link these two groups of women on religious grounds, given that, as one male interviewee believes, ‘the weave culture is a culture of indoctrination’ (*Good Hair*,

¹⁴ We recognize here that a definition of “working class” is a subject of debate and may have conceptual limitations. I use it here rather loosely, recognizing it may encompass the unemployed, students, and people who might otherwise see themselves as “middle-class”, or who may in some definitions be considered “petty-bourgeoisie”.

2009). Without going further into that debate, it is clear that women of all classes in India (from poor women working in the manufacture to sort out collected hair to rich women like Nafisa Ali who donate their hair to deities), as well as women of all classes in the US (as per the above brief discussion) participate in sustaining the market of Indian human hair, willingly or not. In other words, the transnational power relations between Indian and African American women involved in the human hair industry goes beyond a mere rich women *versus* poor women issue.

Rather than a simple dichotomization of the actors involved, I suggest that women in India and women in the US confront power relations that are shaped by the local and global structures that regulate their actions. As such, in terms of local structures - although for instance Nafisa Ali did not plan for her hair to be auctioned off to an unknown buyer - the Indian state's policies, which make the hair trade a legal one in India, does not guarantee any measures against the practices of Hindu temples in India¹⁵ auctioning off hair, nor do temples forbid it. In turn, such local policies and rules work to the advantage of the African American woman who is interested in buying Indian human hair, thus providing African American women with a sense of entitlement to hair that does not belong to them. Local power structures may work in similar ways in the United States, and can be found for example in expectations created by the music industry. The case of Melissa Ford, a renowned "video girl" whose career involves appearances in numerous hip-hop and R&B music videos, is a telling example. Indeed, Ford proudly asserted that she changes her weave monthly, and does not know what she would do 'if she did not have the kind of money that [she does]' to afford it; she reports spending between \$,3000 to \$5,000 monthly just for the purchase of the weave (*Good Hair*, 2009). Although Ms. Ford's

¹⁵ The Indian government has a council on hair. The council was represented in Majumdar's report by its representative, the regional director of the time (2006: para. 13).

statements suggest independent choices of hairstyles, it is clear that the privileging of Black women with extra long wavy or straight hair in the Black American music industry constrains her to keep using human hair in order to fit the demands of the music industry and remain competitive, thus maintaining a degree of longevity in her career. Therefore, one is presented with another case of local¹⁶ powerful structural forces that are able to subordinate the independence of individual actors.

Furthermore, global capitalist structures that allow individual entrepreneurs, companies and other institutions to pay workers such as Indian temple barbers a meagre \$68 a month¹⁷ (Majumdar, 2006: para.21), while simultaneously allowing importing countries such as the United States to pay \$1.50 for a strand of hair that expensive beauty salons may then weave into extensions or wigs that can sell for between \$1,500 and \$3,000' (Majumdar, 2006: para.5), participate in justifying and perpetuating unequal power relations within and between the aforementioned actors. To be sure, these actors are diverse and the power relations discussed can be captured both within and between class, race and gender dimensions. The actors in consideration in this paper include global capitalist entrepreneurs, Indian citizens who offer their hair in sacrifice and Indian workers in the human hair business, female American celebrities and working class American women, decision-makers in the entertainment business, American and Indian states who shape and control the policies that regulate the import and export of human hair. The next section looks at the gender dimensions of such structurally-founded power relations.

¹⁶ Note that although the United States is the leader in terms of shaping practices in the R&B and hip-hop music industry, this industry is truly global in its nature and functioning, and goes well beyond the boundaries of America. Therefore, this example speaks to the importance of global power structures.

¹⁷ About 100 female barbers are said to cater to approximately 4,500 to 20,000 female devotees a day.

Gendered and Racial Power Relations

In order to examine gendered power relations in the US, it is important to recognize that the subject of hair is fundamentally linked to that of sexuality. A quick look at the pictures of the women displayed on the various websites show very glamorous, sexually alluring women. The marketing on these websites often appeal to the heteronormativity of hair politics in the African American community. This is especially pronounced in the movie *Good Hair*, whereby most questions to men and women imply that human hair weaves are designed to sexually attract the opposite sex. Thus, actress Nia Long speaks of “weave sex”, only addressing heterosexual sex, where the man has to abide by the rules of weave sex determined by the woman (i.e. no weave touching, as this might temper with the expensively acquired weave). Melissa Ford for her part cautions that “men have to be patient” while the weave is being done, as this may take up to eight hours; and an African American male interviewee goes as far as to commodify African American women: ‘the price of maintaining [an African American] woman is like real estate in new York City, it’s skyrocketing’ (*Good Hair*, 2009). It is important to note that there appears to be a consensus among the men and women interviewed, who view the weave as a means to appeal to the opposite sex, and view men as the expected providers of the means to purchase the weave, should the women not be able to afford the price

These gendered relations lead to a layered racial and gendered power relations involving African American women, African American men, and White women in the US. I suggest that this is so, given two conditions. First, the sentiment among African American men that they “cannot afford a [African American] woman because of their hair”, or that rules that emanate from the use of human hair such as “weave sex” make matters too complicated for them (*Good Hair*, 2009). Second, the fact that in the US, Black women’s sexuality

'has been constructed in a binary opposition to that of white women' (Hammonds, 1997: 170). These two conditions thus explain why when men in a barber shop are asked whether they think White women were easier to deal with than African American women (sexually), many strongly answered "yes" (*Good Hair*, 2009). Paradoxically, the question may be whether the "straight" White-like look that the weave provides is a means for African American women to appropriate a White woman's body in order to reclaim the interest of African American men.

Self-Representations: Hair and Identity Politics

When invoking the term "body", we tend to think at first of its materiality –its composition as flesh and bone, its outline and contours, its outgrowth of nail and hair. But the body, as we well know, is never simply matter, for it is never divorced from perception and interpretation (Peterson, 2001: ix).

This analysis fully embraces Peterson's understanding of the body not only as material substance, but also as a site of *perception and interpretation*. Who perceives and interprets, to what purpose, and what are the wider implications of such perceptions and interpretations on the body? In seeking to tackle these questions within the present topic, this section posits African American hair types as reflective of, and impacting on various perceptions and interpretations of "the Black female body"¹⁸.

"Straight" Hair versus "Natural Hair": Internalized or Internal Racism?

¹⁸ The expression is borrowed from the title of the 2001 edited book by Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson "Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women".

The title of the first chapter of bell hooks¹⁹ book *Black Looks*, is unambiguously telling of its agenda: 'Loving Blackness as Political Resistance' (1992:1). In this chapter, hooks denounces the perpetuation of white supremacy reinforced daily by Black people through images in the mass media; she calls this phenomenon "internalized racism" (hooks, 1992: 1). Hooks (1992: 2) argues that unless Black people are free from 'hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being', they cannot liberate or decolonize themselves, nor can they contribute to non-Blacks removing their colonizing gaze. In order to make further sense of how Black people practice internalized racism, how these mechanisms develop and how they are sustained, hooks (1992: 6-7) critically examines images in the mass media, which she calls the "spectatorship" of 'images of race and representation'. It is in this context that hooks examines the fixation of the music industry on hair, specifically that of African American women. She contends that highly sexualized images of Tina Turner and Diana Ross sporting White-like long hair are designed to represent these singers as desirable to White males (hooks, 1992: 70-71).

Hooks' call for resisting such internalized racism may at first sight, be echoed with Mohanty's call for an anti-colonial feminist discourse and praxis, whereby colonization is defined as 'almost invariably imply[ing] a relation of structural domination and a suppression – often violent – of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question' (Mohanty, 2003: 18). In this sense, this paper would align with hooks that a representation of the Black female body in the mass media is one where light-skinned Black women with "straight" long hair are favoured (Turner and Ross for instance), and where images of dark-skinned "nappy-haired" women are suppressed. Thus, the homogenization and objectification of African American women would reflect a colonization of the Black female body

¹⁹ The paper will maintain the name of this author in lowercase letters, to reflect the author's wish; hooks' rationale for this is that what matters most is the "substance of books, not who I am" (William, 2006: para.1).

through a regulation of their hairstyle. As such, the promotion of a product such as Virgin Indian Remy hair can be seen as serving to discipline the Black female body. To be sure, wearing weaves made of Indian hair would thus represent an attempt to suppress the heterogeneity of “natural” hair textures and styles in the African American community, and an attempt to force African American women into sporting White-like “straight” hair. These observations echo longstanding concerns regarding popular expressions in the American Black community such as “good hair”. “Good hair” is defined as ‘hair that is naturally straighter in texture. However, “good” hair can be quite curly but not tightly coiled or curled such as nappy hair’ (Banks, 2000: 172).’ In this definition, the binary that opposes “good hair” (straight and White-like) to “bad hair” (nappy and African-like) is evident. These are all discursive representations that would support hooks’ argument of internalized racism.

Nevertheless, this type of criticism risks repeating the problems that it seeks to address, on two accounts. First, one may argue that seeking to socialize African American Women so that they all are “Happy to be Nappy”²⁰ (hooks and Raschka, 1999), is an attempt to discipline the Black female body into following a specific path, that of what may be called “the nappy way”. Second, assuming that all African American women would have relatively nappy hair at once essentializes and homogenizes their bodies into a single coherent group, when many African American women (much like Black women in other continents) naturally do not have “nappy” hair. As such, this kind of assumptions can bring not internalized racism, but *internal* racism within the Black community, where those who do not have “nappy” hair are implicitly assumed to be relatively “less Black” than the nappy-haired individuals, and become ipso facto a lesser discussed group. It can therefore be argued that dichotomizing the hair debate into “nappy/natural/liberated” hair *versus* “straight/non-

²⁰ The title of a children’s book that hooks co-authored with Chris Raschka as the illustrator.

natural//colonized" hair duplicates the very problematic that such a debate initially sought to redress, namely the dichotomy between "good" *versus* "bad hair".

"I am Not My Hair"

Inspired by bell hooks' insistence to keep her name in lowercase letters so that readers focus on the substance of her books rather than focusing on who she is (William, 2006: para.1), one can seek to negotiate a differentiation between hair and identity. Indeed, many African American women have already offered counter-discourses to criticisms of "internalized racism", in order to assert their capability to wear any kind of hairstyle – including weaves made of Virgin Remy Indian hair – without compromising their racial identity as African American women. In this vein, singer India Arie's popular song powerfully entitled "I am not my hair" (released in 2006), is the illustration *par excellence* of such counter-discourses. Her chorus (A-Z Lyrics, 2011: para.3) sums it best:

"I am not my hair
I am not this skin
I am not your expectations, no no
I am not my hair
I am not this skin
I am a soul that lives within"

Echoing Arie's lyrics, and commenting on her own use of weaves made of human hair, rapper Eve maintains that "I am not my hair...It's just like putting on clothes" (*Good Hair*, 2009). Thus, these women bring their voices, resisting labels of not being "natural" or "Afro" enough, instead claiming their hair as a mere adornment that does not impact on their identity. While the rationale behind discourses and practices such as India Arie's can be justified as resistance mechanisms to the homogenization that may emerge from essentializing and disciplining constructions of Black American

women as “natural” “nappy” women, it would be a mistake to agree with these resisting voices that one’s identity can be totally divorced from one’s body. Rather, one’s hair is apprehended as a reflection of one’s body, and in Peterson’s definition, it is subject to perception and interpretation. As was suggested at the beginning of this section, such perceptions and interpretations are best understood in a plural sense. By this stage, it is clear that both the body being apprehended and the body doing the apprehending perceive and interpret, respectively self-representing and representing the apprehended body. This explains the focus of the analysis so far not just on representations but also on self-representations.

To claim that “I am not my hair” denies the fact that the body is inescapably perceived and interpreted by oneself and by others. This would be an untenable position, as it would assume that one’s body exists in isolation from other bodies. Rather, this paper suggests that in order to refrain from homogenizing and essentializing discourses and practices (in short from colonizing methods), counter-discourses should acknowledge the possibility of multiple meanings. With this premise, one can transform the risks of hooks’ proposition of “loving blackness” from a proposition that may lead to colonizing practices into one that brings productive debates. To do so, “blackness” cannot be understood as a singular, but rather as expressing multiple meanings, which would therefore transcend essentialist discourses. However, to accept the possibility of a plurality of meanings involves the acceptance of the fact that there is always a perception and an interpretation for a meaning to be expressed. Hence, I, as a subject that accepts the existence of other subjects, can no longer say that “I am not my hair”, but I may assert that I can be apprehended as more than one kind of hair, and still be apprehended as a *legitimate* subjectivity that is continuously in the making.

I Can Be More Than One Kind Of Hair

To acknowledge the legitimacy of multiple meanings is to also acknowledge the importance of language in creating or suppressing possibilities. As such, one should consciously recognize that the way in which one uses language can fundamentally be colonizing or emancipatory. Here, Mohanty's concern over homogenizing discourses and practices can be tied with Katie King's concern with "the politics of naming", and can help unpack the implications behind the term "blackness" or "African American hair" for instance. In King's 2002 piece entitled "Lesbianisms, Feminisms, and Global Gay Formations", she argues that using the term "lesbian" in singular may suggest that there is only one way of being a "lesbian" (and quite often, the hegemonic Western way). Yet, a lesbian may mean different things to different people (King, 2002). For some, it cannot be temporal, while for others, it is essentially in fact, a transition (King, 2002). Similarly, the term "blackness" can be used in many registers. However, blackness in hooks' understanding is intended to define a certain way of being an African American. For women for instance, this may be based on whether they wear long straight hair – keeping in mind that some Black women may have naturally long hair straight hair, or whether they happily sport nappy hair – if they happen to be naturally "nappy-haired" indeed.

In essence, this section argues that the implication that someone "can wear their race wrong" (Rooks, 2001) is highly problematic. Indeed, unless there is an openness about what blackness may be, and an acceptance of the possibility that it can be the "happy nappy" or the weave-on Remy Indian hair for instance, the debate risks creating new hegemonies. To be sure, this argument does not deny the many issues that stem from the human hair industry, and which have been discussed above. Rather, it contends that the denunciation of these issues should not create other ones or duplicate the challenges it is trying to address. For instance, movements such as "the

Black Power" in the 1960s that aimed to reclaim pride in "Afrohair" and that expressed their mottos through expressions such as "black is beautiful", "dark but beautiful", can be alienating to light-skinned African Americans who are 'are obliged to "prove" their blackness', given an assumption within the African American community that lighter-skinned African Americans feel superior to others (Shohat, 1997: 203). It can be convincingly argued that similar alienating effects would target African American women who choose to wear Virgin Indian hair, within an environment that constructs such hairstyles as "un-black" or "un-African". This implies the understanding that African American Women (rather than the implicit conceptualization of the African American Woman) are plural subjectivities, and that their individual transformations need to be engaged with, rather than arbitrarily suppressed. In this respect, Shohat (1997: 204) evokes the work of Kobena Mercer who points out that "natural hair" in the African American diasporic context is 'not itself African; it is a syncretic construct. Afro-diasporic hair styles, from the Afro to dreadlocks are not emulations of "real" African styles but rather neologistic projections of diasporic identity'. The terms *syncretic* and *neologistic* are particularly important here, as they speak to the fact that the black female body, like other bodies, cannot be isolated in space or time, as it is continuously changing at the contact of other bodies. In this sense, Rooks' (2001: 283) attempt at a "sense-making dialogue" between African American bodies who claim the right to adorn their bodies with different hairstyles, and African American bodies who seek to retain their hair as is, represents a productive beginning at initiating a plural, engaging, and constructive representations of African American women.

Concluding Remarks

In the preceding analysis, I have argued that the so-called "authentic" or "natural" African American woman must be able to be

bound in time, and “untouched” by outside bodies in order to be indeed, “natural”. This, it is clear, is not possible. Therefore, one must instead recognize the possibility of multiple subjectivities, and be willing to openly engage with these subjectivities in a constructive manner. Furthermore, attempts at counter-discourses on the use of human hair by African American women risk turning into exceptionalist and essentializing discourses, as they myopically focus on local conditions – on the US for example, thus failing to understand in what ways alternative discourses and practices can negotiate new productive spaces and meanings. As far as concerns the industry of Indian hair specifically, a productive avenue that can begin to shape new discourses and new understandings of the linkages between local and global politics of hair and identity will be one that will identify and engage a common agenda across class, gender, and racial dimensions. Thus, engaging with debates surrounding the cultural appropriation of “black” hairstyles globally (such as dreadlocks, cornrows, braids), can serve as a productive way to assess what “black” hairstyles mean for other groups that come into contact with the multiple meanings of black cultures, and what such appropriations mean for the appropriation of other cultural practices by black communities – through the weave world for instance. Through such a productive engagement, one can begin to subsequently engage with the implications of various cultures of “blackness” – as represented through the use of human hair for instance – for the socio-political and economic conditions of Black communities, and for the agency of individuals and groups within Black communities. Only by opening up new spaces and meanings in this manner, can one open up the possibility of discourses and practices of ‘a politics of engagement rather than a politics of transcendence’ (Mohanty, 2003: 122), the consequence of which will be truly decolonizing and anti-capitalist.

In closing, the paper proposes a shift in focus that will consider the importance of locating African American women’s experiences

such as their discourses and practices *vis-à-vis* the use of Virgin Remy Indian hair (and human hair in general), within wider global capitalist power structures. In other words, understanding African American hair and identity politics as part of a global puzzle is a *sine qua non* to a more productive discussion of the socio-political and economic underpinnings and implications of the debate undertaken in this paper. Shohat (1997: 208) illuminates this point best when she states that ‘the global nature of the colonizing process and the global reach of the contemporary media virtually oblige the cultural critic to move beyond the restrictive framework of the nation-state’.

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Guangzhou / Lagos

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I was in Nigeria in May, the year I turned twenty-nine. And aside from the few hours of electricity per day, the way most of the food twisted my stomach or burned my tongue, and that the terrible stifling heat made life difficult at times, I was excited to be exactly where I needed to be: Lagos. Once the political center of Nigeria, it is still reigning as the financial and economic capital. And from what I saw, it was a thriving, bustling, chaotic metropolis where swindling police officers, savvy market women, racing okadas, and the occasional goat shared the streets with everyday Lagosians.



Picture 1: Lagos: Women passing along Mile 12 Market in Ketu where one can buy household goods, reusable items, and general foodstuff such as yams, goat, dried fish, pepper, and tomatoes brought in from around the country.

I was pursuing the second leg of a research project devoted to examining the everyday lives of Yoruba traders I had met in Guangzhou. In 2009, a series of news reports shifted focus to a sizable West African trading community in southeastern China following a protest by an approximated two hundred African men in front of a police station that drew a crowd and shut down traffic. The protest was in response to earlier events in which an immigration raid staged by Chinese police in a clothing mall frequented primarily by Nigerian traders led to at least two reported injuries, one critical.



Picture 2: Guangzhou: Chinese soldiers leaving the Guangzhou train station.

The incidents were examples of the growing tension between Chinese authorities who claimed to be simply doing their job—rounding up and expelling illegals without valid passports or visas—and African traders who felt profiled, discriminated against, and harassed. I went with my camera in hopes of capturing some of these moments but ended up coming away with many more complex images of casual, even friendly interactions. At the very center were the men and women who made the long journey east, following the flow of new money and sellable goods from Lagos to China. And in the end, it only made sense that I continue on with the project in Nigeria where most of the goods ended up.



Picture 3: Guangzhou: Yoruba trader passing a Chinese man transporting goods on Guangyuanxi Road.

The camera followed me to Lagos and I made sure to photograph what I saw as Nigerian everyday life. Chasing after a man riding an okada with a goat draped across his lap as an example of efficient livestock transportation and capturing the hand painted images on a wood signboard that advertised the precise cut and appearance of frozen chicken and fish alongside a dignified portrait of the shop's owner. I even managed to photograph personal scenes: a woman brushing her teeth outside of her compound, two boys play fighting with long sticks in a private world of their own.



Picture 4: Lagos: A Chinese restaurant owner flanked by a Nigerian waiter in a restaurant in Ojota's Chinese Shopping Complex. Inaugurated in 2005 by former first lady, Stella Obasanjo, the complex which resembles a cross between a European fortress and a large Chinese courtyard compound is now a faded pink color with a mix of occupied and empty storefronts.

I was also schooled in Nigerian Life 101. I watched as black skinned catfish were transformed into a deep red pepper and tomato stew. I curtsied when introduced to a father-in-law, uncles, and aunts. I politely picked up the tab every time a few of us walked down the dirt road to buy something from the provisions seller who kept milk, juice, and beer in a Chinese manufactured freezer powered by a small generator. And I learned to trust Tmony, the trader I had followed from China to Lagos who held a cellular phone steady and illuminated the walls in rooms lightless as the deepest parts of the ocean.



Picture 5: Guangzhou: A man talks on his cell phone in front of Lotus Market near the Sanyuanli Metro Station. The cell phone, an indispensable tool in China, connects traders with family, potential buyers, sellers, agents, and associates who can quickly send updates about a party or an alert that a police raid is in progress.

He knew that I had wanted answers and invited me to Nigeria to “see everything”—from his large extended family and childhood home in Ilasamaja to the corruption and lack of jobs that made it nearly impossible to thrive honestly in a country known for fraud.



Picture 6: Lagos: A man transports a goat by okada.

The latter predicament was what led many Lagosian youth, disillusioned with the long promise of a bright future, to go abroad. Every week it seemed like another one of Tmony's friends, associates, neighbors, or schoolmates had "traveled down." They were in India, China, Malaysia, Egypt, and Dubai armed with student visas, work visas, or tourist visas. Unafraid of the risks and open to the wildest of encounters, these were contemporary explorers riding headfirst into a new global economy.



Picture 7: Lagos: Customers queue at the bakery counter in Shoprite, an African chain supermarket on Victoria Island.

At least that's how it felt for many of the men I encountered who had little to no experience in business or travel. When first arriving to China, Tmony had the equivalent of a high school education and had last worked as a machine operator in a Lebanese-owned biscuit factory. He would study briefly in Qinghai before finding his way to Guangzhou after his student visa expired, joining the rest of the undocumented men and women involved in trade.



Picture 8: Lagos: Schoolchildren passing on a street in Ogba.

The same year that the protest took place there had been reports that claimed there were approximately 20,000 Africans in China's southern coastal province of Guangdong although many speculated that the total number was actually higher due to the large number of undocumented persons living there (Osno, 2009). Nigerians made up the largest population of those Africans and comprised an extensive network of buyers, seller, and entrepreneurs. Their constant movement between two cities with the fastest growing economies in Asia and Africa was nothing short of fascinating to me, a recent Ph.D. graduate who had spent six years fixating over historical racial situations in the United States.



Picture 9: Lagos: Roadside shoe seller. Many sellers in Lagos receive their merchandise directly from Guangzhou. The merchandise is then sold at a higher price with the cost of shipping and taxes factored in.

Prior to beginning this project, I had done some reading on China's multiple investments in Africa and had even considered claims that China was increasingly engaged in neocolonialism on the continent. However, seeing Africans in China was seeing a different side of the global machine in motion.



Picture 10: Lagos: A Mobile Policeman (MOPOL) relaxes between two men under the shade of a tree on a busy street.

I had so many questions and saw this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to sort out some of the anxieties I had about race, borders, and the bodies of my parents—one black and one Chinese. I assumed that many African traders would have had to interpret and negotiate these same themes and embarked on my journey to encounter these new global citizens.



Picture 11: Guangzhou: Two traders catch a lift on a three-wheeled motorized taxi on Guangyuanxi Road.

I had arrived during the holiday season and Christmas decorations were everywhere in Guangzhou. Tmony introduced me to small community of Yoruba traders and many were in high spirits despite not being in Lagos to spend time with family and friends. The majority of the men were in their mid-twenties or early thirties.



Picture 12: Guangzhou: Two Yoruba traders take a night stroll.

They dressed well in either business casual attire or fashions that looked as if they were lifted from the adverts in a hip hop magazine. If they were married back home, I couldn't tell as most kept an African or local Chinese woman as a girlfriend. And when it came time to asking questions, most answered openly after first greeting me politely.



Picture 13: Guangzhou: Woman and children passing on Guangyuanxi Road. This is the main thoroughfare where hotels, wholesale markets, barbershops, and export and shipping agents catering to Nigerian clients can be found.

It actually seemed quite easy to get “linked in” to the trading network in Guangzhou. Not seen were the large debts or underlying stress that the traders carried. From the very beginning, men and women are expected to pay exorbitant fees to agents, employees in the consulate, and informal lenders in Lagos in order to obtain a way into China.



Picture 14: Guangzhou: A man passes by a police vehicle on Sunday morning. In 2009, it was estimated that twenty thousand Africans were living in Guangzhou; however that number remains unverified since a number of men and women continue to live there off the record—either with expired visas or without passports. Some of the Nigerians without passports had sold theirs to fellow countrymen who wanted to return home.

Once paid, the person would be given a name, a cell phone number, or a hotel room and address. Upon arrival in Guangzhou, that same person would place a call or take a taxi to the designated contact and the rest would be up to him. Of course, this all came with a price and you could never be sure who was really your friend but most of the traders usually became seasoned after their first few months or the second time being ripped off whichever came first. Several times Tmony had merchandise destroyed or stolen by customs officials, shipyard workers, or middle men who promised to personally deliver the goods to Lagos. But it was all still worth it.



Picture 15: Lagos: Men rest along the road at Mile 12 Market.

Tmany and most other traders each turned enough profit to continuously order shipments of goods to be sent to Nigeria while some had even gone on to start their own business working as barbers, restaurateurs, shipping agents, wholesalers, and consultants. A small number of women supplemented their income by braiding hair, selling food, and providing sexual services. And children, while few and far between, occasionally assisted their parents on shopping trips and provided the everyday joy. But there was a dark side to life as a trader.



Picture 16: Guangzhou: Men inside of a Yoruba owned barber shop in the Tong Tong Hotel. The hotel's staff would occasionally notify Nigerian patrons ahead of time if the police showed up looking for illegals. The men—both Igbos and Yorubas—come to the shop regularly, not only for a touch up but to socialize and hear about the latest news.

For the undocumented living in Guangzhou, the added burden of having to conceal one's status in order to prevent harassment, arrest, or jail time forced many men and women to operate within the peripheries. Tmony was one of those people. He explained that while he often relied on other traders to give the "all clear" via calls made to his cell phone, he usually avoided certain areas and ventured out only when it seemed safest. This meant we had to watch where we went and that it was up to me to book both our transportation arrangements and hotel rooms using my American passport as identification for the both of us.



Picture 17: Guangzhou: Chinese staff inside Bestway African Restaurant where an Igbo cook prepares such staples as pepper soup, egusi soup, and semo for a predominately Nigerian clientele.

In spite of this, Tmony remained eager to answer my questions and show me the everyday grind of traders living and working in Guangzhou. He introduced me to his personal shipping agent and barber. He maneuvered me past countless stalls in wholesale malls that sold everything from infrared goggles to sequined halter tops.



Picture 18: Yoruba man walks along side a Chinese woman in Ojota's Chinese Shopping Complex. In addition to restaurants and small shops selling clothing, textiles, shoes, and accessories imported from China, there are residential apartments in the complex with most of the tenants hailing from Mainland China.

He directed taxi cab drivers in pidginized Chinese phrases that I hadn't heard since girlhood. And we shared a meal of egusi soup and semo with another trader which was a change from the cheap meals they frequently had at McDonalds, KFC, or any of the myriad of cafeteria style fast food Chinese restaurants in Guangzhou.



Picture 19: Guangzhou: A Yoruba female trader carrying a home theater system in Dashatou. Accessible by bus, Dashatou is home to a large electronics bazaar where traders buy laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices in bulk.

It seemed oddly fitting that I was in China eating Nigerian food in the company of Yorubas who had picked up basic Chinese. Yet, I would see a similar kind of hybridity in the experiences of Chinese and Lebanese men and women in Lagos that following spring. For them, learning pidgin or any of the five hundred plus languages spoken in Nigeria as well as creating relationships with local people and adopting particular customs and social norms were essential to a smooth survival. Like the traders in Guangzhou, Chinese and Lebanese small business owners, contractors, and their spouses and children were grappling at the edges of a new cultural world where life was complex and required certain adaptations.



Picture 20: Guangzhou: Trader pricing shoes in Canaan Market. Canaan Market is the main wholesale market catering to Nigerian traders, known for selling garments, shoes, and accessories. However, some Chinese sellers have begun selling products targeting to African buyers: hair extensions and wigs and Chinese produced imitation wax and lace fabric.

One of those adaptations was being prepared for the possibility of change. For Tmony, this meant staying afloat amidst the daily cycle of births and deaths in Lagos after permanently returning there a month after we last saw each other in China. He had found a way to raise the money needed to pay off fines associated with his overstay and had bought a one-way plane ticket home. Since then, he had been selling what few goods his older brother in Sichuan Province could ship down. But with business being slow, he often found himself idle and thinking about traveling abroad again.



Picture 21: Guangzhou: Laborers take a break to eat lunch by the side of the road in Tienhe.

If anything, Tmony's experience reveals not only how fast money passes through the hand but how hungry Nigerian young people are for a taste of their own destiny; hungry enough to risk safety, leave the familiar, and live suspended between two cities, continents apart. I had gone to Guangzhou to see how capitalism was motivating ordinary African men and women to change the direction of their futures and left Lagos having witnessed the other side of the trade.



Picture 22: Lagos: Mile 12 Market.

It was, in fact, nothing short of inspiring: young people finding creative ways to become powerful, exercising their economic freedom beyond their wildest imaginations, and running ever so fiercely after the edge of their own dreams.



Picture 23: Guangzhou: Goods packed and ready to be shipped to Lagos.

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