



Editorial Notes

# Africa

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

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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.<sup>1</sup>

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-

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<sup>1</sup> 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 100<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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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".<sup>3</sup> 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:

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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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 Africanity 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,

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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.<sup>6</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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

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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.<sup>9</sup> 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

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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 emasculation 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?<sup>10</sup>

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,

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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.<sup>11</sup>

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.

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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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