

THE BLACK ACTIVIST

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EDITORIAL: Building a national movement after Ferguson

This editorial introduces the fourth issue of the journal of the Black Left Unity Network. The first three issues have solidly made the point that there are organizations committed to building unity to create a solid core for the rebirth of the Black Liberation Movement in the 21st century. There is a radical Black tradition in the US and throughout the African Diaspora as the historical basis we can stand on for the fight we must wage today. As of Fall 2014 it is clear that attacks and fightbacks are jumping out all over the place, coast to coast. In each location there is a cry for unity and yet we know that local struggles can at best create conditions for some reforms, but no real fundamental change. Nor can local struggles be sustained facing the usual ebb and flow of struggle going hot and cold. We need each other. We need a national movement. Nothing short of a revolutionary movement will do.

The BLUN is a network of organized forces and militant individuals. We share our ideas and practical experience toward greater coordination of our struggle. Right now there is national focus on Ferguson, just as there was national focus on the case of Trayvon Martin and before that Oscar Grant. While we fight every day in our local areas it is when we link to the national hot spots that we can all advance together and raise the level each time we go forward. In this editorial we want to suggest why we need to build unity for a new national level of resistance to oppression, how to make the Ferguson fight back a launching point, and the path to make this happen.

There are four articles in this issue from the African Diaspora – Africa (Ernest Wamba dia Wamba), the Caribbean (David Abdullah), South America (Charo Mina-Rojas), and Europe (Gus John). African peoples are under attack all over the world. Each article demonstrates that our experience is no different from the general global trend. We are all in need of rebuilding our movements and finding ideological and political forms of consensus that can help us produce mighty waves of struggle, unity of action on a national and international level.

In general, the international situation is diving deeper and deeper into crisis.

1. The global economy has not recovered from the melt down of 2008. In fact the capitalist state covers over this by lying about the statistics of unemployment, underemployment, and stagnating wages. The top 0.01%, billionaires, continue to ravage each economy and drive more and more people into despair.
2. This extreme polarization of wealth has led capitalist states led by the United States to pursue a policy of permanent war against the third world, Asia, African and Latin

America. The US is particularly guilty of war crimes against humanity. A major example of this is that the US continues to give massive support to Israel in its genocidal war against the Palestinian people.

3. There is massive surveillance ending any semblance of privacy and bringing the demonic state of Orwell's 1984 into existence. Big Brother lives in the White House, CIA, NSA, and the Pentagon. Global media serves not as a basis for democracy but as a propaganda arm of the global capitalist class.

On a national level in the US this global crisis is anchored in every aspect of life, especially for Black people.

1. Permanent war has hit the streets in the US. The Pentagon has militarized local police departments with billions worth of military arms, and turned over training to the Israeli Defense Forces as was the case in Saint Louis County hence impacting Ferguson!
2. The class polarization continues with 95% of the income gains in recent years going to the top 1%. Also white family wealth is just under \$100,000 but for Black families it is just under \$5,000!

These are some of the conditions that set the stage for a spark to ignite an outbreak of resistance, and as we all know, "A single spark can start a prairie fire." (Mao) We had a spark with Katrina. We had another spark with Jena Louisiana. The murder of Trayvon Martin was another spark. Now the spark is Ferguson Missouri with the murder of Michael Brown. We have to ask a very important question: What can lead a spark to start a prairie fire? One kind of fire is a flash fire that can quickly burn out of control and be destructive in unintended ways. Another kind of fire burns down intended targets of opportunity and clears a path for a new future. Forrest fires are natural and clean out the forest in preparation or new growth. How can the spark of Ferguson lead to this kind of progressive fire? In the main, we are speaking of a symbolic fire of mass resistance to oppression, both in the St Louis region and the rest of the country.

A starting point can be the assessment of the social forces acting in different ways in the situation. In Ferguson the Black community was under attack and most forces were moving for some kind of social change. The Black political class targeted the electoral arena as Ferguson is 65% Black but mostly led by white elected officials. The traditional middle class leadership of the civil rights organization and the churches called for peaceful protest but calm and no direct confrontation and civil disobedience. The organized trade unions joined in symbolic protests on the stage of the October 10th march/rally but did not mobilize its membership to lead the militant protests of the community. The main fight back is coming from that sector of the community most impacted by police violence, unemployed young workers, the poor, and youth in general. They have directly engaged the police in street confrontations, but without a program for change with tactics that move the struggle forward.

Our reflection on the struggle in Ferguson represents two paths forward – the movement in Ferguson and the national rebuilding of the Black liberation movement. All forces in the Black community in Ferguson have a role to play. The electoral struggle will need to be organized and the critical issue is the role of the middle class versus the workers, youth and poor people. The masses represent the votes that are needed, but we ask who will these votes elect? And for whoever is elected, what policies will they advance? What will their relation to the masses be after being elected? We propose a five-point program to be part of any electoral campaign:

1. Demilitarize the police and put them under an elected civilian review board
2. Livable wages for all public employees
3. Legalize marijuana to keep Black youth from jail time for such offences
4. Use eminent domain to seize abandoned homes to house the homeless
5. Reduce all traffic fines to a low level with no jail time attached

But we know that this reform agenda will not end the suffering and pain of the people who will need a more militant and radical program. Frequently what we initially think of as change is a reordering of the system of oppression. We need a society in which everyone has a job, a home, health care, life-long education, and plenty of time for rest recreation and cultural creativity. For this we need a revolution, and for this we need a national movement.

Building out from the hot spot of Ferguson should lead to rebuilding the Black liberation movement. First we need to connect the activists fighting in different locations against similar cases of police violence. This has certainly been the contribution of October 22nd. We also have many other battlefronts to connect up. All of these reform struggles need to be connected to the Black left. These individuals and organizations are advancing ideological leadership to envision and fight for a post capitalist fundamental reorganization of society. Our movement is the cauldron for embracing the dialectical unity of reform and revolution. This combines the tactics of the day-to-day struggle of what we are fighting against with the long term strategic vision of what we are fighting for.

Building a movement is more than the spontaneous outbursts of fight back. We need sustainable organizational coordination and that means a higher level of discipline and consciousness. We are called upon to study and build collective processes. This requires us to go beyond our comfort zone of what we agree with to critically and carefully embrace all of the progressive tendencies in our movement. We need to understand each other and not rush to judgment based on ignorance of what each of us stands for. That would be repeating an error of the past. To begin this process the BLUN has developed a draft manifesto for consideration by all of the forces interested in rebuilding the Black liberation movement.

DRAFT MANIFESTO FOR BLACK LIBERATION

The deep crisis facing Black people requires bold radical action. We can accept this challenge as individuals and as groups, but the strategic goal must be the rebuilding of a national movement for Black liberation. There are many groups, small and scattered even when organized on a national level. We are in the hundreds of thousands on an individual level of people who see the need for militant fight back. It is time for a great coming together to rebuild our Black liberation movement on a national level. This manifesto is being presented to you as a draft that we can all debate and make whatever revisions are necessary. We need to be on the same page and channel our efforts into one mighty fist that can strike decisive blows against our oppressors.

Our fight has always been for freedom

The history of Black people involves every aspect of life but there has always been a central theme, how can we get free. This is a critical starting point for all education and self-consciousness in the Black community. It demonstrates the basic humanity of Black people, the will to live and find ways to improve the quality of our lives as a collective, a community, a nation. In order to be a revolutionary you have to know your history.

We have a Black Radical Tradition to build on

Our tradition of militant fight back has been anchored in five ideological tendencies that are most often woven together in the thought and practice of any given individual, organization, or movement. These are: Black liberation theology, Pan-Africanism, Nationalism, Feminism, and Socialism. The most recent concentration of ideological discourse and debate has been in the 1960s represented in the thought, life and work of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. In order to be a revolutionary you must study this radical Black tradition.

We are rebuilding the Black Liberation Movement

There are many ways to identify when we have had a national Black liberation movement. The main point is having a high level of unity of the militant forces actively organizing and mobilizing at local levels. Moreover, this goes beyond single issue movements and grasps the overall character of fighting on all fronts. When we have had a high level of our national Black liberation movement we have had policy formation by bodies of national representation, coordination of national campaigns of struggle, and major conferences in which ideological debate led to consensus and an intensification of resistance. This refers to the 1967 and 1968

Black Power Conferences, the 1970 Congress of African People, the 1970 revolutionary peoples convention of the Black Panther Party, the 1972 Gary National Black Assembly, the 1974 conference of the African Liberation Support Committee, and the 1998 Chicago launching of the Black Radical Congress. In order to be a revolutionary you must study these advanced stages of our national Black liberation movement.

We are the Black Left Unity Network (BLUN)

Based on the lessons of these major conferences and the intensification of the capitalist crisis it has become clear that the Black liberation movement has to be rebuilt on the basis of the fighting capacity of the masses of working and poor people who are the vast majority of people in the Black community. This manifesto is being developed by the BLUN in order to recruit people and organizations who understand that racism and national oppression can only be ended by waging a Black working-class led struggle in which the capitalist system is targeted as the main enemy of Black people, indeed all of humanity.

The BLUN has been in motion for the past seven years networking with individuals and organizations, building unity and joining every struggle that emerges. Our greatest advance in the last two years has been our journal, The Black Activist. This journal represents the kind of unity dialogue that we hope to spread. It begins the general theoretical work that can educate, motivate, and agitate for greater development of the national Black liberation movement that we need.

We are building the BLUN as the organizational framework for all Black revolutionary militants to come together to discuss our ideas, to coordinate our struggles, and to mobilize the vast majority of our people in the fight back that is necessary to oppose and defeat our enemies. To deepen the unity and context of revolutionary struggle, we must get the necessary criticisms from our comrades based on the principle of unity-struggle-unity.

Black History is the fight for freedom

The lessons of history are general summations of a process, and can be about individuals and social groups, from the local level to the entire world. This process includes social forces that represent different classes and nations, as well as many other aspects of humanity (gender, sexuality, religion, generations, etc.). The main dynamic of the African American experience, the theme that embraces all Black people, is the fight not only to survive but to resist and end capitalist exploitation in whatever form it has been developed, from the slave trade and colonialism in Africa and throughout the African Diaspora, through sharecropping, industrial wage slavery, and now being damned to excruciating forms of poverty. The system has been against us but we have always fought back, and the fight back is the great theme of our history.

Africa

Africa was invaded by Europeans. They gave Africa a double blow – they stole the people and forced them into the labor systems of slavery in the West, and they colonized African land and virtually enslaved the people who remained in Africa. In both instances they imposed European culture on African people, especially language, religion, legal systems, what little education that was provided, and cultural aesthetics. The famous colonization frenzy was legalized in the Berlin Conference of 1894-95.

After World War II African resistance movements expelled the invaders and created independent African countries beginning with Ghana in 1957. These countries were mainly guided by a rising African capitalist class who compromised the liberation struggles by aligning their policies with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Many African revolutionaries who represented the working class and struggles against capitalist neo-colonialism were murdered (e.g. Patrice Lumumba, Chris Hani, Amilcar Cabral, Eduardo Mondlane, Pierre Mulele, General China, Kimathi, Stephen Biko, Maurice Bishop, Walter Rodney, etc.). Today Africa is facing the need for a 21st century revolution led by the working class and its impoverished masses.

The European Slave Trade

The process of raping African of its population was to serve the labor needs of Europe, especially in the fields and mines of the Americas. As Eric Williams explains this was a triangular trade that served to link Europe (manufactured goods) to Africa (Labor) to the Americas (extraction of raw materials). This barbaric process spread Africans to every island in the Caribbean and to every region of North, Central, and South America creating the African Diaspora.

The freedom struggle raged against these crimes against humanity. Strong examples are Queen Nzinga Mbande of Angola, Joseph Cinque of the Amistad Revolt, the revolts led by Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser and the freeing of the slaves from the plantations by Harriet Tubman.

The Slave System

Slavery was a labor system that bread, sold and worked Africans to death, lasting about 400 years! Millions of Black people were spread throughout the south to produce tobacco, rice, and many other products, especially cotton. Black field hands were worked to death in a system from “Can’t see to can’t see.”

It was the economic process by which the wealth of the ruling class was created that continues through inheritance and corporate profits till the present day. The production of cotton pulled Black people into the deep-south creating the “Black belt.”

Emancipation

As result of the two labor system – slavery in the South and wage labor in the North – there was struggle over the control of the federal government. This struggle led to the Civil War. Slave labor threatened the wages of white workers, and, added with the moral imperative to oppose this vicious system advocated by the Abolitionist Movement, this motivated the masses of people in the north to support the war.

Black people were not given freedom by anybody. They rose up and fought in many ways to be their own liberators. DuBois in his master work Black Reconstruction discusses the general strike of slaves withholding their labor and undercutting the slave regime. Black people fought in the Union Army at numbers (per cent of total population) far higher than whites. Further during Reconstruction Black voters and elected officials played a dramatic role by democratizing the south including free public education for everybody that had not existed.

The African American Nation

Within the Black belt Black people began to create African American culture that was a continuation of but different from their original African cultures. They created new social institutions, forms of speech/language and collective community life that were demonstrated in the church, musical and other social and political venues. They were concentrated in counties that were majority African American, dominated by the plantation economy, repressive county and state governments and a system of apartheid.

The modern Civil Rights Movement developed in opposition to the barbaric oppression imposed on Black people in the Black Belt, from lynching to peonage.

Dispersal to Proletarianization

During the 20th century there was a push out of the south and pull into the North (West, Midwest and East) that dispersed Black people into the major cities of industrial development. Black people were forced out of the rural agricultural South into the urban industrial North.

Migration out of the South was forced through racist terror as well as an act of resistance in that people were rejecting old forms of oppression in search of a better life.

Urban Ghettoization

Racist segregationist practices dominated the cities and a real estate conspiracy forced Black people into the worst housing, areas that concentrated all of the worse social problems usually under tight police social control. The major transformation was based on Black people being employed in the industrial system and on that basis building from their southern roots into major bases of potential political power.

Crisis of Permanent Poverty

A technological revolution is reorganizing the basis for society, including dramatically reducing the demand for the labor of the old industrial system. The capitalist state is realigning and ending the social safety net brought about by the struggles of the 1930s and 1960s that force the FDR New Deal and the Great Society of Kennedy and Johnson.

A growing section of the Black community is being forced into permanent poverty, under the chemical assault of drugs both illegal and by prescription, and facing a new form of slavery in the prison system.

Our main fight is against the capitalist system

The Black left is fighting on all fronts against all forms of oppression. A central point of unity is that all of our struggles can advance only to the extent that we mount a full assault on the capitalist system. Capitalism is the basis for the 1% control of this society and the source of our misery.

What is Capitalism?

Capitalism is an economic system that exploits the labor of the working people and feeds the greed of the corporations and the rich who own the factories and machines. People work and create value turning raw materials into usable products and are paid much less than the value they create, only the minimum. Most of the rest is surplus taken by the corporations as their profit. There is a struggle between the workers and the owners over the allocation of this surplus – they live fat while we starve.

How is the origin of US capitalism based on slavery?

The wealth needed for the origin of the industrial system in the US was created out of the super profits taken from the sale and labor of the slaves, especially in the cotton fields. This slave based wealth has been used to fund many major corporations and banks, and the basis for wealthy families that maintain control over social and cultural institutions like the major private universities, especially in the Ivy League.

How does capitalism exploit us?

Today we live at a time when capitalism is transforming and increasingly replacing human labor with smart machines. If people are not working for a wage the market system is dysfunction for the circulation of goods and service – no money means people can't buy what they need.

Capitalism has turned to making money on death, including the combination of bad food and bad health care, all varieties of drugs and alcohol, TV culture that kills the mind and the military industrial complex that produces major weapons for imperialist wars and all forms of military aggression including the violence in the cities throughout the U.S. All too often our churches become appendages to the capitalist system by preaching money over morality.

How does capitalism exploit the world?

Using global organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) among others, the global capitalists have invaded almost every country in the world to capture cheap labor and important raw materials. This continues the imperialist practice of moving wealth from the third world into the major European countries and the US.

The United Nations and NATO are used to justify imperialist military aggression.

Can we defeat the capitalist system?

Nothing lives forever – slavery ended, feudalism ended, and capitalism will end as well. More and more the majority of humanity has no stake in the capitalist system and is rapidly growing to hate it. Outside of the US the discourse of resistance is explicit in its rejection of capitalism, but inside we face the soft terror of media and government obsessed with putting a gag rule on any alternative discourse. A good indication of the rejection of capitalism was the "Occupy Movement" that exposed the evil exploits of the ruling 1%. The end of capitalism will only come with our militant unity of action.

Strategic working-class unity starts with the leadership of the Black working class

Why the working class?

The majority of people in the US are working people, all of whom are being exploited by the capitalist system and they hate it. The greatest allies of the Black Liberation Movement are the militants in the working class movement, especially from the oppressed nationalities and peoples. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Of course there is a racist national chauvinism that turns some white workers into enemies of Black people under the false notion amplified by the mainstream media that we are the cause of their misery. As people fight in their own

interest against the bosses, the conditions are created to expose the role of white supremacy, offering opportunities to win significant numbers of white workers to an anti-racist working-class unity. This is meaning of the slogan solidarity in the workers movement.

What was the connection between Black slaves and white workers

When Black people were picking cotton in the slave system the capitalist bosses chained white youth to machines in the textile industry to work the cotton into thread and cloth. Slaves worked side by side with white workers, both exploited, but whites confused by the paltry white skin privilege of a little more pay and the opportunity to join in the oppression of Blacks.

Black workers organizations

The first Black worker organization, The Colored National Labor Union, was formed in 1866 and included Frederick Douglass as one of its early leaders. High points in the organization of Black works have been the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (1969), Black Workers Congress (1971), Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (1972), Black Workers for Justice (1981), and Black Workers Unity Movement (1985). There are also many rank and file Black caucus groups, workers centers, and now the Southern Workers Assembly.

Class unity with Latinos

National oppression and extreme capitalist exploitation of Latinos makes them close allies of Black people. This is especially true with the people who share a heritage from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and other countries in the Caribbean, Central and South America.

The capitalist strategy is to divide workers and play them against each other. The most desperate will take lower wages creating a conflict if people lose their jobs. Our class unity must take a strong position against this capitalist ploy and unite Black and Brown workers in a common cause.

Class struggle and Black liberation

The fight of workers is first and foremost a fight to make their working conditions better, higher wages, with benefits and retirement pension with which they can lead a decent quality of life. People fight as individuals, work teams, whole work places, and entire industries. All of this is necessary. We believe we must go further and link these reform struggles with the vision and preparation to fight to end the capitalist system once and for all. We are in an all-out war of the capitalists against us, the workers. They will always cheat us, because as capitalism dictates exploitation is how the game is played.

We fight on all fronts

The unity of the Black Liberation Movement and the workers movement under revolutionary leadership does not take place in the abstract. The class struggle against national oppression always takes place in a concrete context. It is our theory that keeps us focused on the underlying issues that unite us against the capitalist ruling class. The system of oppression and exploitation has set us against each other, propped up people are in between us and them, and employs the state and its police forces as their pawns of social control. While in the day to day struggle we confront many “in between” types it is important to keep our eye on the real enemy. On each battle front it is useful to maintain a focus on a strategic slogan to guide us.

Women

Black women face the triple oppression of national oppression, patriarchy, and class exploitation because most Black women are working people in a racist country run mainly by white and male supremacists.

The movement we need requires gender equality! Mobilize the women and follow the leadership of women on all battle fronts!

Environment

The capitalist system is destroying the natural environment of the world by unleashing profit seekers to ravage eco-systems, pollute the air and water, unleash nuclear waste, create global warming, and rapidly decrease bio-diversity that has built up over millions of years.

The earth’s resources must be a commons for the use of all humanity to share! End fossil fuel use! Our future must be green!

Elderly

Our society is growing older but lacks sufficient support and respect for senior members of our communities. This includes removing them from trans-generational households and forcing them to face the crisis of declining incomes, weakening welfare support, poor health care, and isolation from loved ones and friends. We must become a sharing and loving society from the cradle to the grave.

Full pension for all retired workers! Build social capital of the elderly to be lifelong contributors to society! All older people must be respected and cared for!

Health

The capitalist system has spoiled our food, used advertising to seduce people to lust for sugar, salt, and fried foods, and turned health care into a factory system that keeps most of us running to the pharmacy dependent on the latest drug commodity hoping the insurance company will pay. Of course there are people with no insurance and have to choose between food, rent, and health care costs. Look around and see the obesity, bad teeth and poor vision and hearing. The capitalists have turned our neighborhoods into food deserts. This has to stop.

Fight for universal health care! Stop fast foods in our community! Forward to community gardens! Ban liquor sales in our community!

Education

The education gains of the 1960s have been wiped out. Our children are not learning to read and write and work with numbers in the public schools while the system takes money out of the public schools to finance the privatization of education. In many urban areas school boards are closing schools in the Black and Latino communities at an alarming rate. High stakes testing results places our youth on a path of failure with limited possibilities for good employment. College attendance and graduate rates are not increasing and with attacks on affirmative action and minority scholarship funding ethnic cleansing of the campus is taking place.

Free universal quality public education for all!

Police repression and prisons

Every 28 hours the police forces in the US gun down a Black person. The vast majority of Black youth are routinely rounded up and placed into the data bases of the police authorities. The prisons are overcrowded with Black men, and Black women are increasing being processed through the prisons camps as well. Many of the militant fighters have been incarcerated in solitary confinement for decades. Our communities are under constant surveillance, and when out of our segregated neighborhoods we are harassed and arrested for driving while Black or wearing a hoodies, just being ourselves. We are still not free in this country!

Release all political prisoners! Stop the surveillance and monitoring of all communication of the Black community! Stop police murder! Community control of police!

Housing

The last few economic crises that have ruined people's lives in this country have targeted Black people most of all and many have been based on housing exploitation. Whether it is outrageous mortgage schemes, or loan programs that cheat the unsuspecting consumer, or the reservation camps of public housing, Black people are facing housing insecurity. And when

housing is found it is usually the poorest in quality and highest in cost. We are faced with an increasing number of people who are homeless, including adults and children.

House everyone and eliminate homelessness! End loan practices that cheat the people!

LGBT

One of the dangerous practices that undermine democracy is devaluing and punishing people who fit into a category that is defined as bad. This has all too often been applied to people with varying gender styles of life, sexual orientations. Everyone must be guaranteed fundamental rights of all people. Same sex relationships and other gender based behaviors must always be respected. It is crucial to link the fight against LGBT oppression to the cultural crisis of the capitalist system.

End homophobia now! Let marriage be a personal choice!

Culture

The capitalist system turns everything into a commodity to be bought and sold, and this includes the cultural production of the community. We all used to sing and now we buy CDs and pay to go hear other people sing. Furthermore they pay them to sing what they want not what we have been doing to serve ourselves and our community. Hip Hop – Rap was invented to serve our community and expression the political critique and aspirations of the youth and has been twisted into the abnormal gangster rap. Perhaps the greatest danger comes from TV and its renaissance of the old stereotypical images of Black people as clowns or gladiators.

On the other hand there is an unbroken history of cultural production that has inspired people to resistance and fight back. The poets and musicians lead the way. Our cultural revolution must re-link to our African origins and embrace the best in the history of our cultural developments as African Americans. Jazz is Black classical music.

Cultural production for Black liberation! Recruit cultural workers to every front of struggle!

Reparations

The exploitation of Black labor and the brutal oppression of Black people is part of the international conditions create by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and system of colonialism. This international system created a major part of the capital accumulation for the development of European and U.S. capitalism. Issues of underdevelopment, lack of opportunity, inequality in social status, and shorter life expectancy for the majority of Black people throughout the world, are some of the injuries built into the capitalist system with continuing impacts. The demand for reparations connects Africa and the African Diaspora to a common international demand of

redress against the governments of colonialism and imperialism and the international economic institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization for crimes against humanity as outlined in the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

Reparations must be one of the major demands for self-determination!

The centrality of the South

The Black liberation movement takes place in every state, every city, and has tasks in many countries around the world. Special consideration must be given to the ancestral homeland of Black people in the US, the former slave states of the South. This is the largest concentration of Black people, the greatest levels of exploitation by US and global capital, and is leading the country in right wing initiatives.

Concentration of Black people

In 2010, 55 percent of the black population lived in the South, and 105 Southern counties had a black population of 50 percent or higher.

Concentration of class exploitation

Throughout the 11 states of the Southern Black Belt, there are 11,523,063 people living in poverty. A single parent of two children working a full-time minimum wage job will make \$10,712 before taxes—more than \$4,500 below the federal poverty line.

Global capital

Because many Southern states have right-to-work anti-union laws the region has recruited global capital to take advantage of cheap labor.

Right wing political concentration

The most backward politicians with anti-democratic policies are based in the South. Their demand for state's rights is a form of autonomy to keep the South as a region

We are part of a global struggle

We all live on planet earth and increasingly our struggles involve issues that impact people all over the globe. We embrace the need to be internationalists and focus on freedom and quality of life for everyone in the world. Our approach is to link especially to the struggles in the African Diaspora.

The struggle in Africa

1960 was proclaimed by the United Nations as Africa Year because so many countries were gaining their independence from European colonization. However this led to neo-colonialism governed by the World Bank the IMF. Furthermore a class of bureaucratic tyrants took control of the state apparatus in most countries and looted the wealth and suppressed the people.

Rebuild the African struggle for independence, unity and freedom!

The struggle of Black people in the Caribbean

All of the Caribbean island countries are part of the African Diaspora. In their origin the difference for African people was only about where the slave trading boat stopped and which European colonial language one was going to be forced to speak. The fight continues in the Caribbean on many levels, from the trade union based Movement for Social Justice in Trinidad-Tobago, to the fight for sustaining socialism in Cuba.

Long live Caribbean unity! Oppose the domination of US and global capital!

The struggle of Black people in Latin America

In Central and South America, including Mexico which is in North America, their history of Spanish colonialism brought African labor and historic Black populations. This is notably in Brazil and Colombia, but there is some manifestation in most places. The impact of US imperialism has forced many of these peoples to migrate to the US creating Latin American Diasporas. We have the joint unity of the origins of the African Diaspora and the contemporary shared experiences of racism and class exploitation.

Long live African American and Latino unity! Build our movements of movements throughout the Americas!

The struggle of Black people in Europe

There are Black communities all over Europe. They have been informed by the militant struggles we have waged in the US and we must embrace their history of struggle as well. They face comparable forms of racism and class exploitation, those born there as well as the recent migrants from the African continent.

Long live the unity of African Americans and Black Europe!

Our fight for reform is linked to a revolutionary strategy

The idea of a revolution is abstract but the fight for one is not.

The day to day struggle

Peoples fight back in the context of their lives, at their place of work, at the unemployment office, at the grocery store, the school, the church, etc. Big political ideas take shape and form on the ground in practical circumstances. When the fight intensifies everybody can get educated, can get political, and can begin to think about the link between the reform struggle and the revolutionary leap that is necessary. It is mainly in this context that a Black left can be grounded in the roots of our people, in the very fight they wage themselves. We join them, embrace their leadership, link their fight with the fight of others, and help them to sum up and learn lessons from victories and defeats, and train militants to increase their ability to sustain the struggle.

Fight back every day! Link the fight for reform to revolutionary goals!

The response to racist attacks

Every racist attack must be opposed and mass resistance built to end it. Just as we raised the slogan “No More Trayvons” as part of the massive nationwide mass mobilization, so we continue that on higher and higher more coordinated levels. This is one of the key tasks of building a national Black liberation movement.

The electoral struggle

The capitalist state is a rigged game controlled by the ruling class. They don't play fair and we can't win by getting in it and trying to reform things. All too often we have been lured into local politics as mayors and city council officials only to try and fix a broken system that can't be fixed with minimal reforms. However electoral politics is a terrain of struggle in which debate and discussion can be used to raise the consciousness of people and present them with an alternative to the hypocrisy and illusions of mainstream politicians. The movement must remain autonomous from the state and NGO control. On the other hand Black power at the local level can be used by the movement, especially if used to build the independent power of the forces in struggle – unionization, minimum wage, use of eminent domain to house the homeless, money for public schools not charter schools, etc.

Hold elected officials accountable to serve the community!

Our struggle will last for generations

Each of us lives a life and we hope to attain the goals we set during that time. It is important to think of struggle as a handoff through the generations in which each generation has a mission, a contribution to make, and then it is up to the next generation to take it from there. We all fight for freedom, but the fight towards freedom goes forward one step, one stage, one historic leap at a time.

The 1960s generation

The last great upsurge was the 1960s. See “How the 1960s’ Riots Hurt African-Americans,” National Bureau of Economic Research. The activists of the 1960s are the current elders of the movement. They are walking living libraries of information. They are also the bearers not only of the experiences of victory and great mass mobilization but of past factional battles and splits within the movement. All of this experience is valuable, both what to emulate and what to avoid.

The 21st century

The 21st century is very different from the 1960s. We are in the midst of a technological revolution that is being used to change all aspects of life and we have to adapt to that and learn how to use digital tools to make our struggle more effective. We don’t have the revolution of rising expectation that we had in the 1960s, fueled by the revolutions in China and Cuba as well as the national liberation battles all over Africa, including Vietnam. Today we are fighting many forms of Afro-pessimism as well as the disease of drugs and a breakdown of many traditional institutions. Today we are being challenged to rebuild on a new basis to take our fight to the next level.

Building revolutionary institutions and rituals to sustain our movement

Our task is to build organization to struggle in every context – workers, students, church members, residents, health care patients, seniors, etc. People get reborn when engaged in struggle and we must engage as our people need a rebirth. Every organization must be built on the foundation of our own people and not based on hand outs from friendly foundations and NGOs.

Dual power: A strategic revolutionary objective of self-determination and workers power

Altering the balance of power between the Black and multinational working-class and the U.S. ruling-class and its imperialist state in favor of positioning the oppressed and exploited masses for social revolution, must be a constant aim of revolutionary strategy.

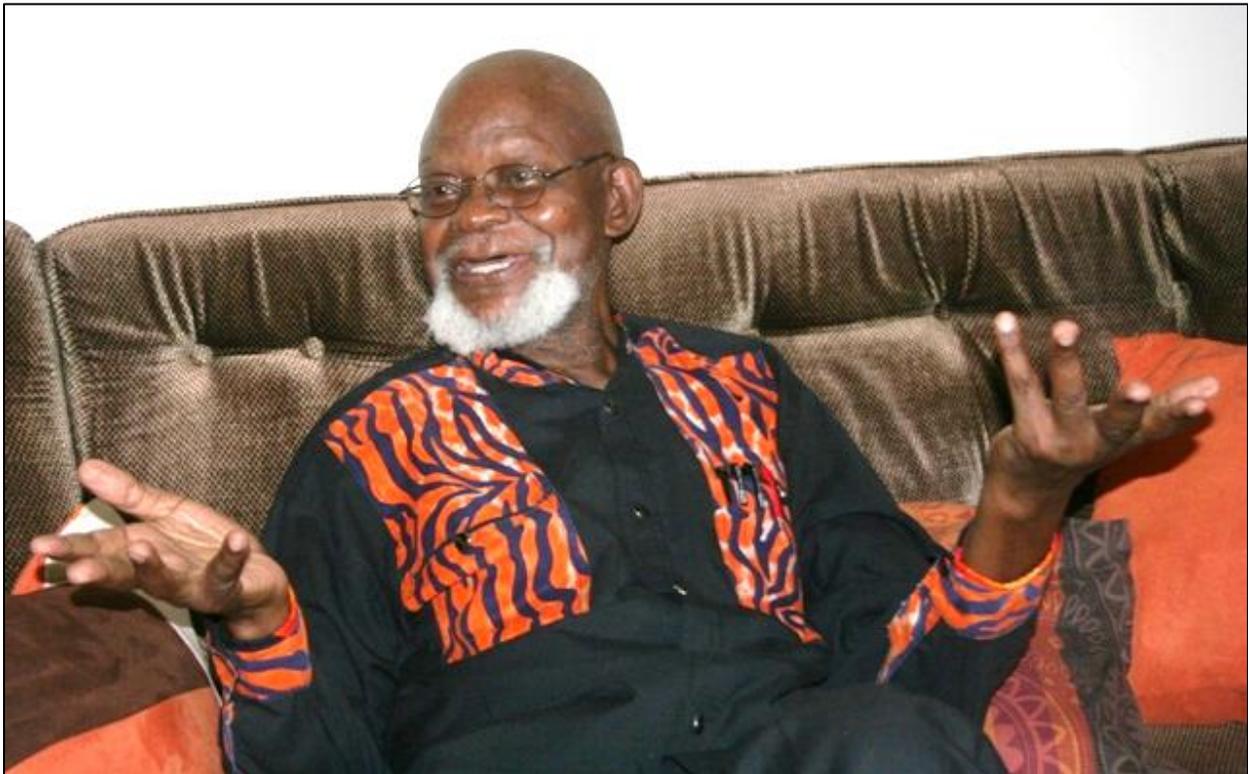
A strategic program focuses mainly on the relationship between politics and economics. It must not only put forward demands for democracy, it must fight for transformative power to organize alternative social, economic and political models that begin to engage the masses in organizing and administering in a different way the places where they work, the communities where they live, the social institutions they rely on and positions in local government. This can be defined as a level of dual and contending power.

Our pledge is to fight for freedom by any means necessary

The BLUN is committed to building a national network of the most militant, most class conscious fighters for Black liberation. Our goal in drafting this manifesto is to create a national dialogue about what basic unity we can reach so that we have a context for coordinating our fight back. This Draft Manifesto will be discussed on conference calls, in face to face regional meetings, and at a National Assembly for Black Liberation. It is a draft so we welcome all comments, criticisms, and revised text.

RETHINKING BLACK LIBERATION IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

03 Africa: Reflections on African Renaissance by Ernest Wamba dia Wamba¹



From <http://www.thehabari.com/habari-tanzania/profesa-drc-amuunga-mkono-rais-kikwete>

The situation in Africa is not good. Despite the hopeful signs of relatively high rates of growth—mainly in the service sector and the extraction industries—in general, the situation is not good. It has not been good, for some time now in some countries.

¹ Wamba dia Wamba is a Congolese revolutionary. He was educated in the US and later taught Harvard before returning to Africa. He became a professor of history at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, and then President of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). During the war against the neo-colonial government of the Congo, Wamba was elected head of the rebel force Rally for Congolese Democracy. He continues to speak and write about African Affairs and is the head of the Ota Benga Center for Human Dignity in Kinshassa.

Are alternative paths of development still an option for African countries today?

Those types of questions are no longer often posed because there are not enough political subjects in those countries that could raise them: Berlinist African states (carved after the Berlin Conference 1884-5) have now the sole desire to be under the umbrella of the Empire. When the world was divided into two, that is up to 1989 or so, discussions on the non-capitalist path to development, the African socialist path to development, or even the scientific socialist path to development were taking place. Some forms of planning structures existed in some countries. The Breton Woods Institutions, among others, have since taken over the “planning” of those countries’ economies.

The whole world, however, seems to be pressed for the need of alternative paths of development. We can differentiate negative pressures and positive ones. Among the negative ones we can mention the health of Mother Earth. Global warming causing climate change is very much affecting that health. This is due to the capitalist path of development based on the destruction of relations favoring healthy ecological reproduction.² What used to be strong beliefs such as that Earth can heal herself or that science and technology will help us heal Mother Earth are dwindling. It is clearer and clearer that survival on this planet may be jeopardized if the world continues on the same capitalist path of development.

The shift in the paradigms on which capitalist path was founded, namely the Enlightenment philosophies and world views—concerning the linear conception of history, the conception of Nature, the belief that if people follow their self-interest this will lead to the greatest common good, etc., is another pressure for change. Capitalist forms of property are curtailing world political will to urgently address the problems.

With the financialization of the world economy³ fewer and fewer people, the 1% or less of the world population through the financial market dominating other markets, control the economy in a very irresponsible way such as entertaining fiscal paradises and refusal to pay taxes. They have come up with neo-liberalism and the so-called ‘less state, better state’ favoring their egoist interests and marginalizing those of the majority of population—such as education, health delivery services, transportation, etc. They thus resist change. Mass uprising and sit-ins, etc. have been targeting them and exposing them. Secret societies, through which that minority is often organized and making decisions affecting the entire world in the pursuit of its egoistic

² See for example: Felix Patet, *Challenging Capitalist Modernity*.

³ Samir Amin, *Sur la Crise Sortir de la crise du capitalisme ou sortir du capitalisme en crise*. Le Temps des Crises, éditeurs, 2009, Pantin.

interests, for example promoting for wars as a quick and sure way of self-enrichment, are being also exposed.⁴

Western democracy, especially the way it is exported to the rest of the world, has been increasingly critiqued in the mass uprisings agitating for new forms of democracy and politics. Expressions of societal decay are also rising; throughout the world people are demanding for fundamental change and for dignity.⁵ Crises faced by the West are very instructive for the people of Africa. Due to the financial crisis Europeans are now facing, the latter certainly understand now, we believe, what a painful experience Africans faced with the past structural adjustment.

The global African family(Africans from the continent and the Diaspora) has contributed a lot through their struggles and lessons drawn from them against oppression, exploitation and humiliation—the most humiliated group in the world—for human dignity; capitalist development, in the main, has failed to guaranty such dignity . Struggles against all forms of slavery and against colonialism, for example, have given rise to forms of healing practices and politics and spiritual renewal—such as the Lemba movement and prophetic movement and politics in the area of Kongo Kingdom—with universal appeal to deal with the capitalist caused afflictions on individuals, families or communities.⁶ However, agitation and debates over reparations have not yet produced anything. Africa, in the main, has been forced to remain an economy based on extraction industries (of material and human resources—including hidden forms of slave trade-sexual slavery.) In general, capitalist path of destruction for development has been linked to wars and genocide (physical extermination genocide and cultural genocide).⁷ Those are few negative pressures in favor of an alternative path of development.

There are also positive pressures on humanity to have alternative paths of development. The late scientific and technological revolution requires new modes of societal organization. We are witnessing a convergence of new technologies: information technology, genetic engineering, biotechnology, cognitive technologies and robotics, etc. These are opening up new ways of acting in society—that would not necessarily be enhanced by capitalist relations of production and their conditions of existence. In fact, capitalist exploitation of these new scientific forces may give rise to certain dangers. Jaron Lanier,⁸ for example, argues that the internet has destroyed the middle class claimed to be the basis of Western democracy. Thanks to some of

⁴ Jan van Helsing, *Les Sociétés Secrètes et Leur Pouvoir au 20ème Siècle*.

⁵ John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*. Pluto Press, 2010.

⁶ John M. Janzen, *Lemba, 1650-1930: A Drum of Affliction in Africa and the New World*. Garland Publishing Inc. 1982.

⁷ Felix Patel, see note 20.

⁸ Jaron Lanier, "The Internet destroyed the middle class" *The Folly of Technological Solutionism*.

these technologies, the African youth is developing independent forms of relating to each other, creating some space of freedom more or less outside of the space of state command.

Important paradigm shifts in science, especially with the discovery of the holographic universe⁹ as the best scientific concept of reality, show that many things are needed to be changed including certain long lasting habits and beliefs. A better understanding of the human energy field, explaining for instance what used to be called abnormal phenomena, may allow us to organize society in more humane ways. Advances in sciences are allowing the rediscovery of spirituality.

The astrophysicist, Dieter Broers, in his book, *Solar Revolution*,¹⁰ shows that increased activities of the sun have been inducing an extension of the Earth magnetism leading to an expansion of human consciousness. This will equip humanity with better abilities to deal with the problems it now faces. It has been predicted that exceptional children will be born.. Those children will be equipped with clairvoyance, clairaudience and healing powers by touch. I have seen one such a type of children in the DRC; his powers of clairvoyance and clairaudience are impressive. A report on the internet¹¹ showed that there exist quite a few of those children in the world. Of course, this is still within the range of hope. And, in a sense, it would be a form of Earth self-healing. But, it stirs our imagination to think bold possibilities.

Studying conditions for effectiveness and excellence in business as well as in life, Stephen R. Covey has, in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*,¹² identified 7 habits which seem to be hampered by some capitalist forms of competition; solidarity(including sharing) seems to be a major condition for effectiveness in life.

Using the knowledge provided by the new sciences and technology, especially the refined techniques made possible by those sciences, techniques which facilitate the detection of very high frequencies in the human energy field, the Congolese scientist, Longa-Seno,¹³ was able to study the connection, in humans, between spiritual energy and bio-chemical energy. Through 3 interrelated approaches: spiritual, physic-chemical and bioorganic, he was able to come up with very interesting results. He is now proposing ways of curing the so-called incurable diseases and has developed 40 nutritional recipes for enduring good human health. He has also discovered that the colonial formatting of the Congolese collective psycho-cultural consciousness has had a devastating impact on Congolese general behavior. He claims to have found ways of reformatting the Congolese collective psycho-cultural consciousness by eradicating the effects

⁹ Michael Talbot, *The Holographic Universe* Harper Perennial, New York, 1991.

¹⁰ Dieter Broers, *Solar Revolution*. Evolver Editions, 2012.

¹¹ From a conversation with C. Elaine Wamba for which I thank her.

¹² Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Simon and Schuster, 1992.

¹³ Baudouin Longa-Seno, *Dossier*, 6 volumes. MS. 2013.

of the colonial one. He has thus developed therapies to heal the Congolese collective psycho-cultural consciousness that has been marked by various successive traumas—mostly generated by the history of capitalism.

I have experienced with some of his nutritional recipes and have been satisfied with the results.

It has been suggested by those detecting the very high frequencies in the human energy field,¹⁴ that a person too focalized on material life—by extension capitalist interests—has his or her frequencies in the lower range. A person with high spiritual concerns has his or her frequencies in the high range. Those, for healing purposes, who manipulate other people's auras, with holographic universe based techniques or forms of healing may enable us to move towards healthier social relations conducive to new paths of development.

Longa-Seno also found that what he calls the "prets à porter", the ready-made-to-use cultural products have a devastating impact on limiting or curtailing cultural creativity. A society reduced to consumerism will find its cultural creativity curtailed. The late N'Kanza NDolumingu and I have been pondering why our graduates fail to acquire a spirit of discovery and creativity in all the disciplines, more so in mathematics. The impact of the colonial mental formatting may explain it.

Calls for African Renaissance continue to being heard. In the hands of state officials, they have not produced meaningful results. Those states more than not incarnate what makes such renaissance difficult if not impossible to emerge. No African renaissance without Africa disconnecting from the West.¹⁵ For some time now the state per se, especially since the demise of the welfare state, has not been a source of emancipatory politics. The continuing demand for the unification of Africa has been part of the appeals. Berlinist states have been unable to get rid of the colonially carved country borderlines on which their interests rest. A Conference on the African Renaissance,¹⁶ for example, brought together intellectuals from the African Global Family (Africa and the Diaspora), in 2004, its follow-up, entrusted to those states, is still being awaited. Cheikh Anta Diopian historian Théophile Obanga, who presided over that conference, wrote: "The pedagogy of the African Renaissance is the sole way out for Africa not to be what she is not and to be what she must be in the world by the year 2015."

A new vision for Africa, of an African renewal, will not come from the state structures. These have the desire of inclusion into the West (Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*.) Obanga also wrote: "Africa has reflected, as they told her to reflect, and she has analyzed, as they told her to

¹⁴ Michael Talbot: *The Holographic Universe: The Revolutionary Theory of Reality*. Harper Perennial, 1991.

¹⁵ Théophile Obanga, *Appel à la Jeunesse Africaine*. Editions Ceinia, Communication, Juillet 2007.

¹⁶ Théophile Obanga, *Renaissance Africaine*. Presentation made at the Conference on Renaissance Africaine au cours du 21ème siècle. Première Conférence des Intellectuels d'Afrique et de la Diaspora, organisée par l'Union Africaine 6-9 Octobre 2004.

analyze.” African official thinking is not free. Africa needs a lot of thinking and analyzing; this will be meaningful only if it is done outside of the beaten paths. In relation to economic matters Carlos Lopes¹⁷ says a similar thing: “Data on Africa will make sense when Africans will control both data and the planning for investments.” We are bombarded by proclamation of high rates of growth in Africa while there is almost nothing to indicate any Improvement in the miserable condition of the large masses. Even in countries like the DRC which can generate their own national budget, the budget is dependent in most part on foreign donors. The simple element of the collection of taxes suffers from the fact that those who are able to pay and should pay accord themselves the privilege of being dispensed from paying taxes.

We need a lot of thinking and analyzing in Africa. “ It is almost certain”, says Obenga,” that Africa cannot and will never develop and consolidate, whatever one says, without a conscientized (conscientisée), assumed and responsible vision.” Neo-liberalism and its political conditions which stifle the possibility of generating such a vision need to be changed. The maxim: people think and thinking is a relationship of the real requires us to look elsewhere among the people, if the states are against such a possibility, to discover new thinking conducive to a conceptualization of alternative paths of development.

In the case of the DRC, I am of the opinion that if one focuses attention on state and state related structures, one will find that the DRC is like a body whose head has already died or dying and whose heart has again died or dying. From the saying that the fish starts rotting from its head; when applying it to a country, people confuse the head with the head of state. For a country the head is constituted by, besides human heads, the structures and institutions of intellectuality, such as schools, universities, research organizations, think tanks, etc. In the DRC, besides the intellectual self-abasement, those structures and institutions are collapsing. Universities, for example, are rising in numbers but, rarely that an inspiring statement of a new vision comes out of them. Despite the rapid growth of new churches, no real empathy and compassion for the miseries of the broad masses of people are expressed and practiced. Leaders of most of those churches aim at self-enrichment and symbols of power. The thinking about the possibilities of an endogenous social self transformation of the DRC must be searched for from elsewhere where people are struggling for survival.

Due to the domination of vulgar materialism on the social consciousness, due to the Impact of consumerism, creative spiritual insights are often overlooked. The short history of the African independences, however is, in my opinion, better explained by Simon Kimbangu’s last sermon—delivered on September 10, 1921. The full text can be read on the internet. In summary, he said the following points:

¹⁷ Quoted by Horace Campbell in his Reconstruction, Transformation and African Unity in the 21st Century. May 13, 2013.

- Kongo and Africa will be independent; descendants of slaves will be free and may return to the land of their ancestors;
- the first rulers of Africa won't serve their people; they will work for the whites;
- on the whites' advice, they will lead their people into wars, a lot of miseries are going to follow;
- people will forget their native languages, cultures and customs;
- young people will leave Africa in search for better places, many will die and won't see their parents again; they will be tempted by the white way of living and they will learn the languages of the whites;
- this will last a long time until Black people will acquire spiritual maturity they lost very long time ago;
- eventually a teacher will emerge to re-educate the people to re-learn the lost languages, cultures and customs; he will be combated;
- then a divine ruler ("ntinu a yenge") will arise with 3 powers: the spiritual, the political and the scientific.

In conversations he had while in jail, with visitors (priests from Kisantu in 1922 and Jean Kiansumba in 1944) prophecies specifically related to the DRC were made. He spoke of the characteristics of the first 4 rulers of the independent Congo, without giving names but describing what those rules would be like and do.

With minor differences in the histories of the Berlinist states, we can say that Kimbangu's prophecy can pass as the paradigmatic horizon of African history. Some earlier rulers tried to serve their people but failed. A teacher has appeared in the DRC, others have also emerged elsewhere calling for the recovery of African cultures. In fact, the appeal for African renaissance seems to have been envisaged. Without going into details, we can see that, in general terms, most of the predictions have, so far, been proven to be accurate. Independences were granted; rulers have not been, in the main, addressing the people's miseries. Elements of African youth have been leaving Africa and many dying in the sea around the Canaries island, etc. I participated, in 2005, in a ceremony of buying back (rachat) for a returning slave descendent from Antigua.¹⁸

It is somewhat tragic that people, like Mobutu, who had knowledge of the prophecies acted almost exactly as Kimbangu had predicted: "the second ruler will destroy the country and will remain for a long time in power ruling with an iron fist." One of Mobutu's collaborators, Kitenge Yezu, is said to have reported that in Mobutu's circles the prophecies were known but they did not take them seriously. Or maybe prophecies are inevitable, whether one knows them or not.

¹⁸ Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, Une Initiative Citoyenne, La Création et le Lancement du Mouvement Congolais d'Affranchissement des Africains. 29 Oct. 2005.

The International Conference on Simon Kimbangu—he had predicted himself that it would take place so that the world will know about him—took place in Kinshasa in 2011. It drew people from all over the world—from the USA, Cuba, Haiti, Spain, Canada, France, Belgium, Brazil, etc. I was one of the organizers and participants.

A new cultural and spiritual awakening has, indeed, been taking place in Africa. Through this, new orientations in thought and existence are being spelled out. We are going to look at least three emergences.

The South African activist, Mmatshilo Motsei, in her book, *Hearing Visions, Seeing Voices*,¹⁹ tells an incredible story of great hope for Africa. She writes that on 25th May 1969, Mrs Kubelo Motsei, a domestic worker, was visited by ancestors who told her to ready herself for an important visitor. On that day, she was in her house and a blinding light appeared and someone entered without opening a door. She was frightened and was trembling. The visitor identified himself as Jesus Christ now assuming the name Rara Konyana. He asked her not to be afraid. He told her that she was chosen by the Holy Spirit to become the path through which Africa will rise again. He told her about the dawning of the Third World; the time of the reclamation of African spirituality and the return of the Holy Spirit to Africa to heal and spiritually liberate all people of African descent had come. In the new century, the world would turn to Africa for guidance. New knowledge and a spiritual curriculum would be developed by the ancestors of all races and religions. The sick would be nursed back to physical, emotional and spiritual health by the ancient healers of Africa, visible and invisible, as well as by Western healers led by the compassionate healing power of Florence Nightingale. With time, the Spirits would heal the world and communicate through a black person, and a woman, Mrs Kubelo Motsei whose name now changed to Mother Toloki.

A time of healing for Africa has come. "...the ancestors will encourage and make possible surgical operations that do not involve cutting the body." In this era, called the African century, the gift is assigned to Africa—by the Voice.

Mother Toloki received powers to communicate directly with the ancestors and to see them. She eventually created a spiritual place where teaching and healing take place. The key message she has been spreading is the restoration of self-pride through, among other things, art forms and culture. Those interested can read the book.

About the same time, in 1969, an engineering student in the DRC, Zacharie Badiengila, was visited by a very tall man telling him that he has been selected to continue the work Simon Kimbangu had started but not finished and to rescue it from its present deviation by, among others, churches created in the name of Kimbangu that retain him as an idol but not his ideals.

¹⁹ Mmatshilo Motsei, *Hearing Visions, Seeing Voices*. Jacana, 2004.

Badiengila has since formed a kind of traditional church, Bundu dia Kongo, providing moral training to would-be politicians, working very hard to recover and teach Kikongo language and Kongo culture to those who have forgotten them as well as those who are interested. He has produced a tremendous amount of documents on various subjects related to spirituality, religion and sciences His name was also changed to Nlongi Ne Muanda Nsemi. I cannot go into details; I wrote an article on his church, Bundu dia Kongo, interested people should read.²⁰

Between 1998 and 2003 a group of young women emerged as spiritual healers, in an area where medical facilities were either impoverished or inexistent. The most known ones, Lukombo and Jeanne, were working at Kingwala village (in the territory of Luozi, in the DRC). They performed, among other things, spiritual surgical operations and they would climb mysteriously to the summit of palm trees to get spiritual medicine. I was diagnosed with the spiritual stick used and was treated by Jeanne.

Recently in Congo/Brazzaville has arisen an important movement, spiritually inspired, of the restoration of Kingunza, the traditional religion in ancient Kongo kingdom. A new message has been received through revelation by the ngunza Auguste Tsula-Mazinga Mlolo. (7volumes) It is a kind of travel warrant or spiritual road map for the process of liberation, in the area that was ancient Kongo kingdom, still not free spiritually, politically and scientifically. It is a spiritual cleansing that is called for as a preparation for the self-liberation of the descendants of the Kongo Kingdom. A Universal Temple to spread Kingunza in the world has been created and it has the leading core in France, under the leadership of ngunza Antoine Nkoyi Ngoka. This is the first organization to have started to present systematically the doctrine of Kingunza Kikulu, as reactivated in the revealed book of Mazinga Mlolo. Some of the notions which have been used in previous ngunza groups get here a systematic treatment. The first volume of the book can be found on the internet.²¹ One can also find there important prophecies made by ngunza Ngoka concerning the whole world in general and the Mbanza Kongo living space (everywhere Bena Kongo people live) in particular.

All the above indications are just to show that even at the spiritual level, different paths are being acclaimed and the restoration of African cultures are said to be the basis—even if new cultural elements are also produced. This call to return to the sources has variants; but, in most cases; it is selective and critical of bad traditions such as witchcraft and other destructive practices which have contributed to destroy African principles such as botho/ubuntu—founded on values of mutual support, sharing, interdependence, as opposed to egoism.

²⁰ Ernest Wamba dia Wamba in: Thomas Spear and Isria Kimambo, (eds) East African Expressions of Christianity. James Currey Publishers, 1999.

²¹ <http://www.ngunza.org>

In line with those trends of African renewal, are also re-activated forms of socio-political organizations of community healing, for example, which emerged throughout the history of struggles against slave trade, colonialism and the need for re-asserting the human dignity of the “most humiliated race in the world”(Simon Kimbangu). One could mention, in the Mbanza Kongo living space: Mbongi and Lemba.

Mbongi-also called Yemba, Boko, Lusanga—was an institutional site where people in each community gathered, around a fire, and all the exchanges over individual or collective daily experiences took place. It was some kind of site for collective/individual thinking, planning, living and acting. Anybody was free to come to Mbongi. Anybody capable of speech was in principle allowed to speak. Even the strangers were welcome to Mbongi; but, they were reminded of the proverb: “eat, drink and go home for you don’t know how the village was built.” One came to Mbongi with whatever one was able to bring: a piece of wood for the fire, peanuts, a cassava root... or one just brought one’s body and especially the mind to share in the conversation. No one was excluded on grounds of not bringing anything to Mbongi. The adults wished that the kids bring wood; they did not chase them if they did not bring wood.

It was at the same time a kind of school. This is where the male children learned most of the customs and culture. Men mostly participated; but there were moments when women did come to Mbongi. Women in the community send to Mbongi their husbands’ food. Men ate together. Unfortunately, the adults ate the lion’s share and gave to male children the leftover. Food sharing was also an occasion for moral education. “The child who obeys never goes hungry,” and “if you are eating, you must look around you, for someone who is not eating. Someday, he or she will be eating and it will be too late for you to be wise,” those are proverbs one hears said.

In Kinshasa, we tried to extend the notion of Mbongi to aim at the whole country and develop it as a new kind of political subject—correcting the shortcomings or the breakdown of the political party. The Mbongi a Nsi—the country’s Mbongi—was also open to everyone who desired to come there and everybody spoke in their own names. The maxim that “people think and thinking is a relationship to reality” was our basis for not refusing thinking to anyone. Terms of reference were given to every participant and discussions started around those terms. As in a traditional Mbongi the aim was, among others, to arrive at principles which are good to all on which to base further collective action. The state functions on the assumption that people don’t think—especially not politics; only the state recognized/certified people should think. The ultimate objective for us is to create a space of freedom and expose the state space of command.

On the occasions of community events, Mbongi sits as a palaver; its process is marked by the nature of the events. Those events are often violations of the fundamentals of functioning of

the community. These include: sharing as opposed to competition, the legal traditional “law”(nkingu) that aims at reconciling contestants in a conflict rather than making one right and the other wrong, and sustainability in relation to the land, the ancestors, to each other. The process is one of resolution of contradictions among the people; it is a form of popular politics and at the same time a process of community healing, learning and educating.²² The idea is not just to get the accused to confess, but it is to cleanse him or her and to also cleanse the community which made it possible for something bad to happen through a member of the community. The palaver must end with a generalized community enthusiasm. Otherwise, contradictions among the people have not been resolved. Defensive prescriptions are heard: open wide your eyes and ears and shut your mouth. Until another round of palaver takes place. The militant of Mbongi intellectuality, focused on revealing truth and eradicating confusion and clarifying or simplifying the speech, is called Nzonzi—a master of speaking, symboling and spiritual massage, a dialectician. He knows when to sing the appropriate song, to cite the appropriate proverb, to keep the talking going.

I cannot go into details here. I mentioned this experience as a possibility in the opening up of new forms of conceptualization of emancipatory politics.

Lemba movement emerged as the slave trade-devastated society’s response for its reconstruction; it is not a state based movement—as the crumbling state had become unable to represent or defend the people. Society had to be reconstituted and made livable; the family had to be recreated and given the needed social massage for the desire to have children to arise again. Slave trade has made it almost impossible to desire having them. The extended family had to be cured of afflictions. The individual had to develop self-esteem again and confidence. People who have been running, hiding in forests had now to come back to form villages. It is more than therapeutic techniques; it is rebuilding society to make human dignity meaningful again. Lessons drawn from this process of social healing should be important for any politics of peace. Lemba was conceptualized as “mukisi wa mfunisina kanda”—“a knowledge and practice of re-peopling the clan.”

Initially, in the ancient Kongo kingdom, Lemba was one of the 3 cultural pillars: Spirituality (Kimpeve), Polity (Kimayala) and Scientificity (Kimazayu). Lemba organized Kimazayu.

In a sense, it is a sign of arrogance to think that people who have passed through or endured the worst inhumane situations will have nothing serious to contribute to humanity. And this is perhaps the rationale of the message delivered to Mother Toloki: those who have suffered the

²² See especially Michael Neocosmos, *Thinking the Resolution of Contradictions among the People in Africa and the Politics of Social Healing: Towards a Politics of Peace*. Unpublished paper, 2012, and Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History*. Mkuki Na Nyota Publishers, 2005.

most shall be the teachers of tomorrow for the world to achieve the needed change to make it be of less suffering.

I tried in this short paper to point out some of the reasons why Africa must retain, once again, and much more so than before, alternative paths of development as an option or perhaps the only option. The general trend of world development points toward new paths of development as condition for the survival of humanity.

Africa does have plenty of natural resources; she is also rich in cultural and spiritual resources that could enable her to move away from the Western conception of politics as a form of war and towards a politics of peace. Africa will develop on her own as she is and should be. Only through an alternative path of development will this happen. Social forces are accumulating to break down the resistance of those who desire to be included in the West. The failure of existing states to act in tune with people's miseries and combats and develop creative forms of resource sharing will increasingly make them be obsolete.

04 The Caribbean: Fifty years after political independence, a promise unfulfilled by David Abdulah²³



Photo courtesy of Newsday in Trinidad and Tobago.

Political independence

August is an important month in the calendar of the English speaking Caribbean. It was on August 1st, 1838 that slavery was finally ended in the British West Indies following the four year period of so-called apprenticeship between the abolition of slavery and emancipation. August 1st has been celebrated as a public holiday – Emancipation Day – in Trinidad and Tobago for almost three decades and a number of other Caribbean countries have followed suit. On August 6, 1962 Jamaica became an independent nation, the first in the English speaking Caribbean followed on August 31st 1962 by Trinidad and Tobago. Within the next 15 years all but a handful of former British colonies became independent. We therefore have had the experience of a half century of being independent, of being in charge of our own affairs.

²³ David Abdulah has been involved in the labor movement in Trinidad and Tobago at a leadership level for more than 37 years. From 1978 to 2008 he was the Chief Education and Research Officer of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (the most powerful and radical trade union in the English Speaking Caribbean). Since 2008 he has served as OWTU's General Secretary. David has been involved in radical politics in Trinidad and Tobago all his adult life. He convened the pre-party political organization the Committee for Labor Solidarity from 1981 until its formation as the party known as the Movement for Social Transformation (MOTION) in 1989, of which he was the Interim Political Leader. He later convened the political party Movement for Social Justice (MSJ) which was formed in 2010 and has been its Political Leader since 2012. The MSJ is a member of the São Paulo Forum, the grouping of left and progressive political parties in Latin America and the Caribbean. David delivered the First Fred Derby Memorial Lecture in Suriname; the First John La Rose Memorial Lecture in London; and delivered one of the Leonard Tim Hector Memorial Lectures in Antigua.

Two years ago, on the occasion of the golden anniversary of independence, there were analyses offered about exactly where we are along the road to fulfilling the promise of political independence. Professor Norman Girvan (the English speaking Caribbean's foremost radical political economist who passed away earlier this year) mused about the experience being "not fifty years, perhaps, of Independence; but fifty years In Dependence."

Why such a bleak assessment? In one word, the economies of the majority of Caribbean countries are in crisis. In the English speaking region all but a few are heavily indebted. From Jamaica in the north to Grenada in the south every single Caribbean Community (Caricom) member state has a debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – a measure of national income - ratio of close to or over 100%. Many are in International Monetary Fund (IMF) programmes. The highly indebted countries are in the infamous debt trap since: interest rates on top of the capital borrowed can never be fully repaid; and the high debt service ratio (which can be as much as 40% of the national budget and after paying essential recurrent bills e.g. public service salaries, there is little or no money left for capital expenditure that could help to drive growth).

These IMF programmes not only structurally adjust our economies and alter governments' priorities to the disadvantage of the working people and poor, they also undermine sovereignty. Professor Norman Girvan described it thus:

The last IMF agreement, made in 2010, is a clear demonstration of the extent to which the government of Jamaica has lost the ability to independently determine its own policies. The Letter of Intent and its Annexes outline 10 undertakings by the GoJ in the areas of fiscal policy, three in monetary policy; and over 40 actions of structural reform ...including undertakings to change a number of existing laws and regulations. There are also nine different quantitative performance criteria which it must observe. On top of all this the government of Jamaica is obligated to make daily reports to the IMF on 13 items, weekly reports on 6 items; monthly reports on 22 items and quarterly reports on 10 items. It would be an interesting project ...to compare the powers exercised by the IMF over Jamaica's economic policy with those exercised by the British Governor and the Colonial Office in London.²⁴

Governments cannot meet even their normal monthly payments for public servants, teachers, police officers, nurses and doctors. Barbados, which was once touted as the best managed economy in the region, has recently begun to lay off three thousand workers, which given its total labor force of just 145,000, is a very significant number of workers; and has introduced additional taxation which has prompted mass protests.

²⁴ Norman Girvan: 50 Years of In-Dependence in Jamaica: Reflections – Paper at the SALISES 50-50 Conference, Kingston, 22 August 2012.

Unemployment is very high for most of the region, with figures ranging from a low of 4% to a high of 25%. Of those who are unemployed, our region's youth are the most affected. Fully 40% of young people between the ages of 18-25 are unemployed.

The banana producing Windward Islands have never recovered from the loss of most of the export of bananas which was occasioned by the decision of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) that their exports to the European Union were a breach of WTO trade rules. The beneficiaries of this decision were the US owned multinational food producers like Dole and Chiquita who own huge banana plantations in Central and South America. Whatever recovery that these islands were making was further set back by the loss of tourism revenue following the collapse of the US Stock Market and large financial institutions which precipitated a crisis in the global capitalist economy in 2008. Other islands have been affected adversely by the refusal by the United States to abide by another WTO ruling that said that its punishment of Antigua and Barbuda for off-shore gaming was wrong. This demonstrates that imperial might is still right as when we lose at the WTO we lose, and when we win we still lose!

Many economies in the region have their foreign exchange earnings sustained by remittances which enable hundreds of thousands of families to keep their heads above the poverty line. At the same time, the very high exchange rates in many countries (in Jamaica \$1US = \$105 Ja; in Guyana \$1US = \$ 205 Guy) means that those who do not have access to foreign currency are at a disadvantage since we largely produce a few commodities for export and import most of what we consume, including food. High exchange rates mean every time prices rise abroad we pay dearly. Those who suffer most are the poor and senior citizens on fixed incomes.

This grim story is mirrored in the social relations and in our inability to create humane societies where life is respected and valued by all, whether it is the criminal who kills without feeling and with impunity or the elite whose obscene lifestyles come at the cost of exploiting workers or by the politicians who implement neo-liberal policies knowing that the result will be greater impoverishment, hunger even, of thousands of their citizens. Cuba is the only Caribbean society where such wanton disregard for life and the well being of all does not exist.

From Kingston Jamaica in the north to Georgetown Guyana in the south, crime and violence are the order of the day. In Trinidad and Tobago with a population of 1.3 million, in the first seven months of 2014 there have been 260 murders. Most of these murders resulted from some form of criminal activity, but not all. There is the killing of our children and of course the violence against women

These wanton acts of violence are a manifestation of a deeper malaise – of an anger that has turned inward. It is a sign of the barbarism that is inevitable once the economic relations themselves become brutal. It is directly linked to the neo-liberal capitalist model which

promotes individualism and denigrates and seeks to break up community and collective. This is why the gangs have become so attractive to young people, young men in particular. These young men are alienated from mainstream society, find belonging and meaning to life in the gang, which becomes the new collective, the new community in the face of the decline of the old forms of social organization.

The neo-liberal capitalist model is based on material advancement being the route to happiness, rather than happiness being derived from the satisfaction of producing something of value or in achieving an individual or collective goal. This consumption driven society emphasises the market place and the “brands” and the importance of money. It is no accident that young people identify with the hip hop artist’s injunction to “get rich fast or die trying.”

But how can they get rich quickly or even live comfortably if they are the social group most affected by neo-liberalism with its feature of high, permanent unemployment of the youth? The only jobs on offer for them are in the low paid, low and semi-skilled service sector. This is not decent work that offers a challenge to the talents and abilities of the youth. Then the education system also alienates the majority of students and causes so many to drop out or “fail.” As a result, a very large number of our youth – and especially young men – don’t even have the minimum academic qualifications and indeed may be illiterate or semi-literate and therefore cannot even seek these low paying jobs. Committing crimes of violence then, in order to get rich or, if not, at least to be able to acquire the latest cell phone, or “bling” for the girlfriend becomes an acceptable activity.

For these young men, unorganized in traditional social and political organizations, the only sense of their power is with a gun in their hand. Killing therefore becomes simply a job no different from selling burgers. In the process we can see the barbarism, the total loss of humanity.

Shifting focus to our political reality there is growing discontent with the post-independence state – which state is, in essence, no different from the colonial state. Most of the institutions of the state are failing:

- In Trinidad and Tobago the police service is unable to deal with rampant crime – the detection and conviction rate for murder is less than 10%, making murder a very low risk activity. White-collar crime including acts of corruption and money laundering are never punished. In this situation impunity reigns.
- The Parliaments have become places where personal attacks are traded by opposing parties instead of informed debate of the real issues affecting citizens. And it passes laws to further entrench the power of the rich and powerful, including the friends and family of members of the government.

- Our Public Services and state enterprise sectors are not delivering quality public goods and service, efficiently to all citizens. Corruption abounds while basic needs for water, electricity, health care, decent schools, proper community facilities, roads and an efficient transport system, drainage and irrigation systems are not met.
- And everywhere there is corruption and at the level of the political and economic leadership there is the total absence of a vision, of hope for the future.
- Nowhere is the absence of courageous, visionary leadership more obvious than in the regional integration project that is CARICOM. In 1992 the Caricom appointed West Indian Commission published its Report entitled “Time for Action.” 22 years after it was “Time for Action”, there has been no progress.
- The consciousness of our citizens is being shaped by external forces because we rely on news networks that provide their version and analysis, which of course is skewed by their capitalist world view. I call this “the gospel according to CNN.” To compound this, failure to use the net wisely leads many to accept as fact “information” that is totally false.

What then of the response by our people to this Caribbean economic, social and political reality? Some of our people have tried to escape this reality by migration in search of a better life. This outward migration results in a huge “brain drain” making our region one of the highest in the world for “brain drain.” The cost to the region in terms of the loss of valuable human resources trained at our expense is enormous.

Poverty is a serious problem. In some countries it is as high as 40%, while even in energy rich Trinidad and Tobago the percentage is 15%. For persons living in such difficult circumstances – and many of them are women, single parents – everyday life is a humongous struggle. Their concerns are how to get enough money to feed a family; or how to find the resources to send the children to school; or where to find a decent job; or how to shelter the family from rain; or how to take care of a sick child. In this situation engaging in collective struggles is almost impossible, except when the momentum of the movement gives them hope and they can participate.

Yet another response is apathy or cynicism. These persons say – we’ve tried but nothing’s changed, so it makes no sense to waste time in struggle; you go ahead and fight for us. This attitude fits in with the neo-liberal philosophy of individualism, of the new alphabet of “A for apple; B for bat and C for myself.” If the slaves throughout the Caribbean were cynical, they would still be enslaved today! Others put self before everything else. They just don’t care. Some fundamentalist religions encourage this attitude by saying – save yourself and don’t worry about the other sinners, which is contrary to the Christian injunction – that we should be our sisters and brothers’ keepers.

Many citizens have used elections to express their dissatisfaction. Disenchanted with the performance of one government; recognizing the corruption, lack of transparency and the failure to address the real issues affecting the working people and poor; the citizens decide to vote out the government and put some good men and women in office. Then after a few years, these good men and women become as bad as the ones that were voted out and so we decide to change governments again. All the time we are hoping that after the change in government we will get some good men and women who will deliver good governance, only to find out that each time; as the celebrated Caribbean radical philosopher CLR James once said, that the good men and women rapidly become bad men and women.

This happens because the real problem is not whether or not the men and women whom we elect are good, it is that the system of governance is bad. The state which these men and women operate is not designed to deliver good governance. It is the old colonial state meant to serve the interests of the elite, the rich and powerful. And so, once in office, the good men and women – people with good, decent intentions, soon find themselves opposing the interests of the people and promoting the interests of the elite. Corruption soon sets in, especially since parties need money to finance their campaigns and those with money, including the narco-traffickers, invest in the parties expecting to receive a rate of return once that party gets into office and is in a position to award contracts to friends, family and political financiers. CLR James also said “If you can’t change the politics, the politics will change you.”

So our efforts at bringing about a better society through changes in government without changes in the system and relations of power have not been successful. And so, frustrated we protest. Most of these protests are short lived and on very specific, localized issues: a workplace action by a single trade union; a community protest over the lack of water, bade roads or a much needed community facility. But these mass protests do point a way forward.

What has gotten us to this point where some even bemoan independence? Indeed, one poll conducted in 2011 in Jamaica found that as many as 60% of Jamaicans believed that they would have been better off if Jamaica had never become independent. To understand where we are it is useful to get an understanding of how we won our independence. In order for us to understand the present, we need to have a grasp of theory and of our past.

Slow accumulation and volcanic eruptions

In a revolution, where the ceaseless slow accumulation of centuries bursts into volcanic eruptions, the meteoric flares and flights above are a meaningless chaos and lend

themselves to infinite caprice and romanticism unless the observer sees them always as projections of the sub-soil from which they came—CLR James²⁵

The history of the Caribbean has been the history of struggle between the process of exploitation by foreign capital and the process of resistance by the exploited and oppressed. This struggle has been described as “the struggle out of slavery, through indenture and up to freedom.”²⁶ It has been characterized by many important moments of “volcanic eruptions” when the mass movement reached a peak and was able to take decisive, collective direct action. Today we call these mass movements, social movements.

Given however that, with the exception of Cuba in 1959 and for a period Haiti after its Independence in 1804, the eruptions in the Caribbean did not result in a break with the system of imperialist economic relations, what emerged were new social settlements imposed from above by first the colonial and later the neo-colonial state, acting always on behalf of capital. Put another way, there has been an ongoing process of struggle between the forces of progress represented by the mass movement and the forces of reaction represented by the local and international owners and managers of capital and their institutions – the local state and supranational institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO etc).

How this struggle plays out depends both on the objective and subjective factors existing at the particular moment. How strong is the mass movement? How conscious is it of its possibilities? How strong are the forces of reaction? Are they divided or distracted? Are there any special conditions that exist that would contribute to the mass movement gaining strength? Are there real dangers in going forward? All these help to shape and determine the outcomes of particular struggles. There has never been, and there is not now a straight line in the struggle. This is particularly true of the period of neo-liberalism where, in spite of all the apparently favorable objective conditions, we have not seen a correspondingly resurgent mass movement.

As Susan Craig notes in her Essay “Smiles and Blood:”

interests of the State coincided with the interests of the propertied. [...] the response of ruling classes to uprisings is often a mixture of token concessions and severe repression, the mailed fist in the kid glove, the ultimate aim being the consolidation of their own power.²⁷

²⁵ CLR James; *The Black Jacobins*.

²⁶ This phrase was used by the Committee for Labor Solidarity (Preparatory) of Trinidad and Tobago in its 1981 Statement of Intent. The CLS was a pre-party formation and became the Movement for Social Transformation in September 1989.

²⁷ Susan Craig: *Smiles and Blood –the ruling class response to the workers rebellion in Trinidad and Tobago*, New Beacon Books 1988.

We will look at some of the key moments in the mass movement and identify the challenges that confront it in this period of neo-liberal globalization. This of course cannot be an exhaustive historical account of those moments, and therefore we shall of necessity have to focus on some of the main characteristics of the mass movements and particularly see what changes have occurred over the years. The key moments that we will look at are those which had major impact throughout the entire region – the 1930s, the 1970s and what occurred in the aftermath of these explosions.

The big eruptions – The 1930s

There is little doubt that the 1930s were the most significant period of region-wide popular revolt. Given the barriers of language it is not well enough known that the entire Caribbean was erupting at that time. As Craig notes:

the nationalist movementin Puerto Rico, the struggle against the dictator....in Cuba, the anti-colonial movement of workers and peasants.... in Suriname, and the wave of strikes in the English-speaking region were systematic attempts of the Caribbean people to shake off their imperial masters.²⁸

The wave of strikes referred to embraced Belize, St. Kitts, Guyana (then British Guiana), The Bahamas, Trinidad, Jamaica, St. Vincent and Barbados, and there were also strikes in Curacao.

The conditions that gave rise to these eruptions were the combination of the economic, social and political. Thus, the capitalist crisis of the late 1920s precipitated in the Caribbean conditions of worsening poverty for the mass of workers. A virtual non-existent programme of social welfare meant that housing and health-care were abysmal and educational opportunities were available for only the elite few. Politically, colonialism frustrated the aspirations of the people of most of the region for self-determination, while dictatorship frustrated their aspiration for democracy in Cuba and racism was a factor everywhere.

Significantly, as there was a crisis of capitalism then, so too there is one now, albeit manifest in some different forms. Will the crisis of today lead to revolts as they did then? That is both a question that we must ask and a challenge to those of use committed to fundamental social transformation in the interest of the working people and the poor.

The 1930s therefore saw the mass movement reaching a new level of consciousness with demands being not merely industrial or workplace related. Sure, workers wanted and demanded pay increases, but to this they added progressive reforms of the social services, proper housing, full adult franchise and self-government. This time too the intensity of the

²⁸ Ibid.

explosion was far greater than before. The result was, as Craig describes one where “the workers struck a blow at property” thus “striking too at the state and the whole structure of colonialism.”²⁹ and “Altogether, these reforms were important because, for the first time, labor had thrust itself into the political arena.”³⁰

But there was still the element of the mailed fist in the kid glove as the imperialists saw these reforms creating a safety valve on the pressure cooker thus enabling the workers to let off steam from time to time, thus averting an eruption of such a proportion that would lead to a complete break with the imperial economic system. Key to the success of the imperialist’s strategy was that trade unions, while being encouraged, should be very much under the control of capital. Thus, the official Colonial Office position stated - “there is a danger that, without sympathetic supervision and guidance, organizations of laborers...may fall under the domination of disaffected persons, by whom their activities may be diverted to improper and mischievous ends...it is the duty of colonial governments to take such steps as may be possible to smooth the passage of such organizations ...into constitutional channels.”³¹

One characteristic of the mass movements of the 1930s: Consciousness

In other words – it’s OK for you to have trade unions, but just make sure that all you do is to negotiate for better wages and workplace conditions. No mass mobilization around wider social and political issues, no development of political consciousness that would lead to workers wanting to end the “whole structure of colonialism.” Many unions succumbed to that strategy. Others didn’t. Craig perceptibly stated that “The history of Caribbean trade unions remains a history of conflict and tension between these competing interests.”³² And it is this contradiction that is a key determinant in the strength of the mass movement. The reality today is that there is a predominance of unions that are comfortable with the routine of industrial relations, and therefore correspondingly, the mass movement is weak.

As James boldly tells us “A spirit of frustration, humiliation, rebellion is not political consciousness.”³³ The leaders of the labor movement of the ‘30s and ‘40s were conscious. To give but one example, several of them participated in the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress (The 6th PAC), which is arguably the most important of all the Pan-African Congresses. The Resolutions and Declarations of that Congress affirm a clear ideological position, with a defined responsibility for labor to play a leading role in the struggle:

²⁹ Craig, Op cit.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ CLR James, Notes on the Life of George Padmore; The CLR James Reader, Blackwell Publishers 1992.

the struggle for political power by Colonial and subject peoples is the first step towards, and the necessary pre-requisite to, complete social, economic and political emancipation...Colonial workers must be in the front of the battle against Imperialism. Your weapons – the Strike and the Boycott – are invincible.³⁴

Today, we need that same sharp focus of the principal political task of trade unions.

The middle-class take-over of the mass movement: Precondition for granting independence

Of vital importance to our understanding of where we are today is the concerted effort by imperialism to ensure that democracy and political independence would not lead to the newly independent nations breaking with the world capitalist system. In the aftermath of World War II British and American imperialist collaboration targeted the labor movement with a strategy to purge it of any radical (communist) influences and leadership. This was not just a reaction to the Cold War. It was in order to ensure that when political independence took place, as the British knew was inevitable, it did so with local political leadership in the hands of the elite middle class and not the “disenchanted elements.” This middle class, educated and schooled in eurocentric thinking and conscious of their position in society rather than in overturning the colonial order, would simply put a local face on the system, but not seek to change it.

The 1970s: Political independence, the masses response and the counter-revolution

In the lead up to and just after Independence, foreign capital was therefore able to freely penetrate and exploit the region. Multinational aluminum, oil, hotel, banking and insurance and manufacturing companies entered the region with great ease, making significant profits as a result of the attractive investment “incentives” offered by governments. As one Trinidadian calypsonian described it in song “Trinidad is a paradise...but for (the capitalists).” The social settlement of Independence with all of its outward symbols of anthem, flag and of our own being in charge had not altered the old imperialist economic and social relations and while political power was now formally in local hands, the real rulers continued to be transnational capital and their local agents. And the working classes knew this.

The result was a growing mass movement. In Jamaica in 1968 the masses of urban working people and unemployed revolted, the spark which ignited the eruption being the banning from that country of the revolutionary Guyanese intellectual Walter Rodney.

³⁴ Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited*, New Beacon Books, 1995.

In Trinidad and Tobago in 1970 the “Black Power” revolt saw the mass movement in the English speaking Caribbean reach a peak not attained since the ‘30s. The government was paralysed by huge demonstrations of youth, workers and farmers that took place virtually every day for two months. And the army mutinied in solidarity with the people’s protests. In fact, the government was almost toppled by these actions.

In the years before and after the Trinidad and Tobago 1970 revolt, movements in the Eastern Caribbean challenged the old order. In Antigua in 1974 there was a massive strike and street protests, eventually resulting in a new political party and trade union breaking the stranglehold on power held by the traditional labor party. In Dominica a similar process took place five years later. However, in neither country could the progressive forces hold state power for long as they failed to recognize the need to transform what was essentially the old colonial state and create institutions of popular power. Within a few years both countries were back under reactionary leadership.

The mass movement in Grenada, led by the radical lawyer Maurice Bishop rose to a peak in 1973 on the issue of the Independence Constitution only to be brutally repressed. Maurice and his colleagues in the New Jewel Movement continued to mobilize and educate the people and tactically shifted to electoral politics in 1976, only to be shut out of office by the corrupted results engineered by the Gairy regime. Then on March 13, 1979 Maurice and the NJM seized power and established the Peoples’ Revolutionary Government (PRG).

A new hope was kindled in the minds of Caribbean people that it was possible to make a break with the old imperialist relations. This was blown asunder in 1983 when the Stalinist group the Organization for Revolutionary Education and Liberation (OREL) in the NJM led by Bernard Coard initiated a coup in the party against Maurice Bishop, claiming that he was a “petit-bourgeois nationalist” and therefore “incapable of leading Grenada into socialism.” This was a nonsense of course, but the OREL faction was so blinded by dogmatism that it failed to understand that their actions were in fact counter-revolutionary and would lead not only to the destruction of the Grenadian Revolution, but set back the left throughout the Region. The assassination of Maurice Bishop and his colleagues on October 19 1983 ended the Revolution and created the conditions for the US invasion one week later. The political forces of global capital and reaction led by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were handed a gift on a platter.

Walter Rodney returned to Guyana in 1974 and immediately set about fashioning a multi-ethnic movement to break up the old order of Afro-Indo Guyanese division. In the end, Walter was assassinated on June 13, 1980 in a bomb explosion. Walter’s assassination created the conditions for the resurgence of ethnic politics as the possibility of Afro-Indo unity of working people receded in the years following his death.

The 1980s and 90s: The ideology of revolution is in retreat and the new spheres of organization

The successive waves of setbacks had profound impacts right through the Caribbean. To this we need to add the fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe on the one hand and the rise of neo-liberalism on the other, shook the very premises on which so many radical activists based their work. The revolution which many had held to be not only inevitable but imminent – especially after the seizure of power in Grenada in 1979 – was now not only seemingly impossible in the Caribbean, but not so inevitable after all.

Most of the small, but very influential left wing organizations collapsed in the aftermath of Grenada. Several were so closely identified with the comrades in Grenada in general and the Coard faction in particular that they had to simultaneously face the need for serious personal introspection on the one hand and hostility to their politics from their own masses on the other. After all, the cold-blooded assassination of the popular Maurice Bishop, a pregnant Jacqueline Creft and other well-known Ministers of Government and leaders of the Revolution by firing squad – no niceties of trial here – were completely alien to our political culture.

There was no doubt that the left was in retreat and, with many of the countries being in the grip of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank structural adjustment programmes, the ideological position of neo-liberalism became not just more strident, but dominant in academia as well as in the public discourse. The right hammered home their advantage trying to get the TINA (there is no alternative) message across to the people.

In Trinidad and Tobago the mass movement was not as affected by the crisis of the left. Thus as late as 1989 the radical political party – the Movement for Social Transformation (MOTION) was launched after a long process of political work. In MOTION's leadership were key national trade union as well as community leaders. Earlier that year there was a general strike against IMF policies that totally shut down Trinidad and then came a series of mass protests in 1990 under the banner of the Summit of People's Organizations (SOPO) – a coalition group involving trade unions, women and community based organizations and religious groups. The growing mass movement coupled with a radical party with a fairly broad base and the fact that the traditional political parties were weak and divided meant that a real opportunity was emerging to challenge for political power. This was not to be, however, as the Jamaat al Muslimeen, a Muslim group that was a member of SOPO initiated armed action, to which SOPO was neither privy nor supported, that resulted in the occupation of the Parliament and the taking of Members of Parliament – including the Prime Minister – hostage. In the aftermath of this, the mass movement was forced to retreat as the continuation of SOPO became untenable in the face of a need to re-evaluate the process of building coalitions of social organizations and a

right wing backlash. MOTION, on the other hand, was splintered by an internal conflict and eventually ceased activity.

In the region, many of the former activists of the left chose one of three paths. Some abandoned political activity altogether. Others became active in the traditional parties that emerged out of the trade union movement. This latter trend was particularly significant in the Eastern Caribbean and gave the old labor parties (St. Lucia Labor Party, Dominica Labor Party, St. Vincent Unity Labor Party, the Antigua United Progressive Party) new energy, leadership and a more progressive platform. Others got immersed in existing or formed new NGOs. Thus throughout much of the region a new breed of NGO flourished. These were opposed to the Washington consensus, committed to advocacy around issues of governance, debt, development, poverty, gender and the environment and imbued with a regional perspective.

The focus of these new NGOs was therefore on “empowerment” of the people – primarily in communities. But for these organizations to survive, they required resources that went beyond that which either the communities or the Governments were able to provide. External funding became necessary and various international donor agencies were the lifeline. Many of the NGO’s programs were in sync with the donor organizations’ priorities and even neo-liberal policies, as “community empowerment” meshed with the “downsizing of the state.” Relatively little was done to raise consciousness or to build movement.

Social organizations or social movements: That is the question

The Caribbean has social organizations with a long history of pursuing the interests of their members. We have also had very powerful social movements as evidenced by the mass movements that brought about major economic, social and political changes. But this paper contends that we do not now have social movements in the manner of those movements that have been changing the face of Latin America. Interestingly, many of the challenges that they now confront such as the relationship between the political party and the movement, the strategy and tactics of electoral activity, the transformation of the state – were posed to us in the Caribbean at an earlier period, given our long practice of western, liberal capitalist democracy.

More generally, however, is the fact that more than four decades of political independence and parliamentary democracy have not resulted in the fundamental transformations that the working people and poor aspire to. 77 years have elapsed since modern trade unions were established and the eruptions of the ‘70s were 40 plus years ago, but the conditions of “persistent poverty”, marginalization and lack of hope are more entrenched than ever before, given neo-liberalism. If ever there was a need for the mass movement conscious of the

relations of power and the requirements to alter those relations, it is now. CLR James repeatedly taught that in the Caribbean “power lies in the streets.”³⁵

There have been electoral successes which resulted from the mass movement demonstrating its power in the streets, but the outcome was a change in government not a change in the relations of power. This limited vision is due to the dominant ideological position in social organizations. With few exceptions the leadership has rejected any notion of revolutionary change. This is true for both the trade union movement where the dominant position is for ameliorating class conflict and the NGO sector where the dominant position is to “facilitate” projects and/or engage in advocacy. True enough, governance is tackled but from the standpoint of transparency, accountability and popular participation. At best there is a demand for constitutional reform.

In reality, however, the traditional parties will not implement changes that fundamentally alter the relations of power, and therefore whatever constitutional reform takes place will entrench and not transform the old colonial state. Neither is the root of the problem – namely the old colonial relations of economic, political and social power - identified and therefore the need to break up those relations is not on the agenda for most, hence the view that we have social organizations, not social movements.

To move from social organization to social movement one has to engage in far more than advocacy. Mass action, the raising of consciousness, building regional solidarity and being a part of international struggles are key aspects of building social movements.

A return to our roots: Movements committed to revolutionary change

In these moments when neo-liberalism is causing so much misery throughout the region and governments are either passively agreeing to or aggressively implementing this agenda, there is a need for progressive forces to retake the ideological and political lead. We need to articulate the ideology of revolutionary change and build political organizations and parties around this programme. We must work to develop the consciousness of the people so that their independent struggles can lead to them seeking to end their conditions of “persistent poverty.”

We must recognize that a space has once again been opened up for social transformation, that space having been created by the social movements in Latin America and the political changes that have resulted. We must be bold, but not overconfident. We must recognize the opportunities even as we appreciate fully the dangers. We must have hope, yet be mercilessly realistic. To say all this is, in fact, to be revolutionary. And that, and not reformism, must be our implacable position.

³⁵ CLR James, Walter Rodney and the Question of Power, Race Today Publications, 1983.

Given neo-liberalism there will be another volcanic eruption by the people – that is certain. But whether we make a leap forward “up to freedom” or suffer setbacks and have the forces of reaction more deeply entrenched, will depend on the work done by the organizations of the people. We end with James’ perceptive comment - “a revolution is made by the revolutionary spirit of the people.”³⁶ That spirit is still alive, and will burst “into volcanic eruptions” sometime not too far away.

05 South America: Black Colombian power, in struggle and creating Black consciousness by Charo Mina-Rojas³⁷



From <http://rootsremediespresents.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/cmina.jpg?w=610>

³⁶ CLR James, Walter Rodney and the Question of Power.

³⁷ Charo Mina-Rojas is an Afro-Colombian human rights defender with more than twenty five years of activism working with Black grassroots and non-governmental organizations in Colombia and internationally. She has served as National Coordinator of Advocacy and Outreach in the U.S, for the Black Communities’ Process (Proceso de Comunidades Negras en Colombia- PCN) and is a founding member of the Afro-Colombia Solidarity Network, based in the United States. She is currently the director of the Afro-Colombian Women’s Human Rights Project (ACWHR) based in Colombia.

Africans in Colombia

Colombia has the third largest Afro-descendant population in the Americas behind Brazil and the United States. In the early 1500s Africans were brought to what was known as the Nueva Granada (today split between the countries of Colombia, Panama and parts of Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Costa Rica, Venezuela and Nicaragua). The entry point for Africans during this period was the port of Cartagena de Indias on the Caribbean coast of present day Colombia. The importation of Africans labor was primarily to work the gold mines, agricultural cultivation (mostly sugar cane) and as domestic laborers. Although not all African presence in Colombia is linked to slavery,³⁸ the majority of Blacks were brought after colonialist-slaver Spaniards had almost wiped out native Indigenous peoples. Slavery was finally abolished in Colombia in 1852.

From the moment that Africans were imported into the Colombian territories they managed to escape and form “maroon” settlements known as Palenques. Other Africans, who were able to gain “free” status by purchasing their freedom from earnings secured through gold mining, formed what were known as “free towns.” These communities were located in the hinterlands of slave entre ports like Cartagena, on the Caribbean coast, and all along the rim of the Pacific Coast region in the Western part of the country south to Ecuador.

Today twenty four percent of the Black rural population still reside in these areas while, mainly as a result of displacement, the rest of the population of Afro-Colombians are now in cities like Bogota, Cali, Cartagena and Medellin.

The lands that Afro-Colombians found themselves on are some of the richest and bio-diverse lands in Colombia. Throughout the Pacific Coast region alone are tropical rainforest, mangroves, hundreds of animal and vegetal species and biogenetical material, diverse minerals and a myriad of rivers and streams. Even though thousands of Afro-Colombians and surviving Indigenous communities have resided on those lands, for almost two centuries the government defined the Pacific Coast region as inhospitable and “empty” lands.

“Racism without race”

Despite its undeniable productive, cultural and intellectual input in the construction of the Colombian nation, African descent peoples in Colombia were rendered politically and socially invisible in Colombian society. Miscegenation or mestizaje also served to construct a discourse that disguised the structural racism that reproduced colonialist social relations in Black communities and the marginalization of large regions where Black-African descendants have been located.

³⁸ There is archeology evidence of trade relations between Africa and Indigenous prior to Spanish colonization.

Living for decades in areas of the country largely ignored and only partially incorporated into the colonial/capitalist production process, two factors: the accelerated expansion of the capitalist market relations and the expansion of the military conflict into Afro-Colombian territories, brought the Afro-Colombian problematic into the center of public policy concerns.



Geographies of terror: Internal armed conflict and geo-economic wars

Colombia has undergone more than fifty years of internal armed conflict deeply rooted in structural social, economic and political inequalities, racial discrimination and endemic corruption at all levels of governance. However, the legal and more often illegal economic interest in gaining territorial control over lands and areas rich in biological, genetic and natural resources (such water, oil, minerals and carbon), that African descendants inhabit, has brought war and violence to Black communities.

Particularly in the past 20 years, the urban and rural areas with the largest Afro-descendent presence have become the center of military operations for various armed groups –guerrillas, paramilitaries colluding with government forces, narco-traffickers, paramilitaries working for powerful economic interests and an assortment of other criminal gangs–. Pressure from this activity along with the imposition of neo-liberal economic development models that contravene the collective economic and cultural rights of the communities, have generated gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Black communities.

Paramilitaries along are responsible for more than 30,000 homicides of labor leaders and men and women human rights defenders. These killings took place with the full acquiesce and

complicity of police and military forces. Colombian military forces are responsible for more than 2,000 reported killings of civilians presented as guerrilla members to show results on U.S. funded policy "Plan Colombia." Aerial fumigations under the guise of eradicating coca crops have destroyed Black farmers crops, poison the waters and resulted in vision, skin and other health problems. Colombia is number one in the world with internally displaced people at 5.5 million; Afro-Colombians make up 1.5 million of that number.

Black men and women human rights defenders and activists have become military targets for guerrilla and paramilitary structures, and victims of State terrorism in the war carried on in Black ancestral territories. Urban Black neighborhoods are controlled by paramilitary forces linked to multinational capital and rural communities find themselves in the middle of cross-fire between State-forces and guerrillas, threats and intimidation of armed men protecting multinational interests.

The result today is an environment of "geo-economic war"³⁹ concentrated in the Afro-descendant territories, with harassment and targeted violence against communities, organizational structures and women, youth and men leaders. The environmental, cultural and economic impacts of almost twenty years of terrorizing violence have resulted in a process that is labeled as "cultural genocide."⁴⁰

The processes of territorial dispossession of Afro-descendant communities has generated not only an accelerated loss of dominion by the communities over their territories, but also has impacted severely the capacity of organizations to sustain autonomous and politically strong organization and mobilization. This is the panorama of what we clearly understand as a declared war against Afro descendant people.

To meet the challenge of official invisibility, disempowerment and systematic discrimination, Afro-Colombians activists have produced structures of resistance grounded in the culture, history and legacy of struggle of the people. One of the most important and powerful organizations in Colombia for Black people is the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN).

³⁹ "Geo-economic wars" refers to "war as a tool and intervention to open new terrains to specific economic interests," where "there is a qualitative change in contemporary wars toward new 'geo-economic wars,' that frequently involved extra-state actors." Oslander, Ulrich, *Constructing Counter-powers to the New Geo-Economic Wars: Ways toward a globalization of the resistance*. From, "Defeating Invisibility. Page 2.

⁴⁰ Ibidem. Page 2.

Black Communities' Process in Colombia, present and future of Black power in the 21st century

In 1991, indigenous and Black-Afro descendants forced Colombia to acknowledge the multicultural and plural character of ethnicity in the country. This recognition was reflected in the National Constitution that affirmed the specific rights of Indigenous, Afro-descendants and Rom (gypsy) peoples as ethnic groups. In the case of Afro-descendant communities, the Constitution recognized that Black communities had a right to collective ownership of their ancestral territories and that the state had a responsibility to define the mechanisms and legal resources to ensure their cultural protection, conditions for sustainable development harmonious with their cultural views, and their political participation.

Law 70 of 1993 constituted one of the most significant achievements of the Black movement in Colombia, and one of the most significant victors for legal recognition of Black people in the African Diaspora. Promulgated in 1993 to operationalize the spirit of the constitutional requirement, Law 70/93 resulted in more than 13 million acres of land being collectively titled to Afro descendants. It also addressed the complex and differentiated needs of Black, populations and promoted special measures or affirmative actions to counter decades of official discrimination.

One the main formations that came out of that process of struggle that began in 1991 were the Proceso de Comunidades Negras or the "Black Communities' Process in Colombia (PCN) established in 1993.

PCN is comprised of diverse organizational elements: cultural, women, youth and internally displaced grassroots organizations and collectives, individuals and community councils (local autonomous authorities in collective territories), located in rural and urban areas. Most of the organizations and community councils are located in the Pacific Coast region from the city-port of Buenaventura, south to the border with Ecuador. PCN is a structure dedicated to educating and organizing the dispersed Black communities. It devotes considerable efforts towards developing and deepening awareness on the history and African heritage of Black peoples in Colombia. Systematizing the knowledge of the peoples' lived experience and the values that have animated black oppositional culture, it is thought that the weapon of consciousness along with organization will ensure success in defending their individual and collective rights. PCN sees the struggle for autonomous power within the context of the semi-colonial situation it finds itself as representing a model of struggle that can offer lessons to other Afro-descendant people in situations of national oppression. In this sense PCN sees itself as part of the ongoing struggle for the liberation and self-determination of Black/Afro-descendant people in throughout the world.



Foundations and principles of the Life Project of PCN's Rural and Urban Afro-descendant Communities

During the first National Assembly in 1993, PCN formulated six principles that have been the backbone of the political ideology and guide of the struggle. These principles represent a radical position regarding identity and rights of Black people, bringing into recognition and self-identification Blacks as an ethnic group rooted in Africa and with the customary rights:

1. to be recognized and be respected in our racial and ethnic background. Equality as citizens and part of a nation is not sufficient, we must be recognized and respected in our ethnic and cultural differences from mainstream culture and society;
2. be entitled to obtain collective titling of the lands where communities have been established for centuries or decades and entitled to have access to land for those who don't have it;
3. been previously consulted and participate in the decision-making process of any action that positively or negatively impacts in the present and future their collective rights and well-being of people and our the communities.

PCN's political principles:

1. IDENTITY or the Right TO BE black reaffirmed in the consciousness of our ethnic and cultural identity and background as African descendant communities.
2. TERRITORY, as a lived space TO BE. We defend the legal recognition of the ancestral right to the territories of the Black/Afro-Colombian communities.
3. PARTICIPATION, as the political exercise of BEING, is the right to organize and participate autonomously in decision-making processes on issues that affect the being, and the right to prior consultation and consent (ILO 169 and Colombian law).
4. AUTONOMOUS GOOD LIVING (contrary to capitalist development), as a right to determine our own sustainable options of present and future, ensuring environmental and cultural sustainability, in the spirit of our cultural, political and economic aspirations and rights for living in dignity, in the context of the well being of Black peoples and communities.
5. RECIPROCAL SOLIDARITY or "We are part of the struggles of the world", as the link between the life aspirations and struggles of the African peoples in the Diaspora and the continent, and other oppressed peoples in the world for the building of a more just world for all.
6. HISTORICAL REPARATIONS, as a critical tool to understand, inform and guide the political struggle by recognizing that the actual global structures of power have been built up on the bases of colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy and therefore oppression, where Black, African descent people have been at the center. Thus, the principle is not simply a debt to be paid but more significantly reparations to be made to the past and present theft, burglary, exploitation, discrimination, marginalization and slaughter of Black people.

Based on these ethical and political principles we build collectively, disseminate and appropriate from community to community, from river to river, from person to person, and form institution to institution the basic ideological and legal framework that have been the backbone of our struggle in defense of our ethnic rights, starting with Law 70/93.

Under these principles we organize and build up ethnic and political consciousness. Black identity is key in the organizing and mobilizing processes. Without that sense of who we are, where we come from and to what we belong to, it is not possible to develop an organization with the power and the tools to defend their rights with agency, with a sense of ownership.

We focus our struggle in defense of our fundamental ethnic rights to: collective territories (not simply land), prior consultation and consent, and community base cultural development (sustainability of traditional practices and knowledge for which we need identity and territory).

We build collectively, under consultation, participation and consensus (as much as possible these days in a context of targeted violence).

We look to alternative, sustainable autonomous, economic and productive activities, through autonomous forms of collective protection and defense of the territory and our territorial rights, named Community Councils, defying State capitalism and neo-liberal impositions.

We have built a capacity to mobilize our communities and organizations and other sector within and outside the movement, as well as internationally to support and defend our struggle and at the same time we support and are part of national and regional political platforms within Afro-descendant and other sectors of the struggles.



Ethics of PCN's political platform

PCN's pillar of action are the autonomous local and regional organizations that establish their dynamics around the solution of local Black social issues understood as part of the aspirations that we have as a collective, without the interference or mediation of any public or private entity.

Our mission is to defend, protect and enjoy the ethnic rights we are entitled to by virtue of our history and the cultural practices that have been transmitted through generations and constitute the heritage that our ancestors left to us and to our renacientes (children).

The legal and political recognitions as well as our collective rights have been gained through political organization and political struggle and are expressed through the exercise of power manifest in the active social participation and mobilization of the communities, in the different context of inter-relations with the State and main stream society.

Therefore National Assemblies since 1993 determined that all relation within our communities and with the State and other social sectors would be informed by and oriented to the recognition, respect and fulfillment of our collective rights as an ethnic group that is part of Colombian society.



The life project: Life, joy and freedom

“The Life Project of Afro-descendant communities is sustained by the possibility of building alternative societies that have as their foundation the conservation of the natural environment

and cultural values that recognize the solidarity and respect for different forms of life. PCN begins with the understanding that the exchange of cultural visions around the defense of natural resources and the territory is not an exclusive project of Black communities but a national building-project, wherein cultural dialogue is the basis. Our proposal is life, joy and freedom, thus our purpose continues to be a project for liberty based on life and joy.”⁴¹

Territory and territoriality are center to the political and life aspirations of Afro-descendant persons, communities and Community Councils members of PCN. “Without territory we are nothing” is a chant and mantra that demand and command that we protect and defend our territorial rights, our territories and the sense of collectivity and community. Urban, rural, ancestral, new and collective territories, all are the sacred space were the Black, African descent Being can mature and evolve personally and politically.

Territory is therefore a lived space where the lives of Black people are interconnected to the land, the environment, the nature and resources, the cultural ancestral practices and the struggle to survive and excel with dignity.

Through decades of searching and building a sense of Being and becoming, PCN has walked through a processes of identity formation, territorial definition and appropriation, local and trans-local political engagement and construction of collectivity where the base is always the territory where the Being can Be.



Black women

The history of the role and participation of Afro-descendant women from the maroon to the movement for Black power-building is yet to be told. It was a Black woman, Mercedes Moya, representing the voice of Black people, who fought politically and intellectually racist politicians, academics and constituents in 1991 to get Black people recognized as full human beings.

⁴¹ PCN First National Assembly, Puerto Tejada. 1993

Women leaders and organizers from small villages, river communities, grassroots organizations, professionals, single mothers, housewives, young and old, contribute to define word by word, from their experiences, cultural practices and memory, recollections of history the notion of territory, forms of land tenure, locations, extensions, productive practices and cosmogony that give account of Black people's interrelationship with land-nature-environment-productivity and community, to construct a law that would serve to recognized and protect Black people's rights. Many defied men's sexism and sat at the meetings outspokenly bringing their sapience and wisdom. Others brought their skills to cook and feed and care of the logistics that will ensure the meetings, workshops and assembles. Many have given their lives in the struggle, defending the rights of Black people, confronting patriarchy, defiant of a racist system and corrupt and repressive right-wing governments.

Nevertheless, a male-centric bias infuses the laws, the movement and all of the organizations despite the presence and participation of large numbers of Black militant women. While many in the Black movement acknowledge the importance of Black women and recognize their pivotal role, the sexist practices and oppressive privileges that men enjoy remain unacknowledged and unresolved. Patriarchy and the male privilege that stems from it, not only create formidable contradictions within organizations, it undermines the collective development of Black people. Therefore, women militants in PCN have identified and named Patriarchy as an essential enemy in the oppression of Black people whose defeat is co-equal with all of the forces that conspire to oppress the community.

The Black Communities Process has been building up and proposing decolonizing frameworks about the politics of identity based on a principle of being equal but different. However, the differences are constructed in a context of social hierarchies and power relationships that engender discrimination, exclusion and marginalization denying equality and leading to domination. Black women in Colombia endure discrimination, exclusion and marginalization in multiple and intersecting forms. PCN as well as the Black movement and even the same Black women organizations need to put into political perspective the issues and oppressions of Black women as issues that are also impediments to advance the political project of liberation and self-determination of Afro-descendant people in Colombia.

It is why a collective of women members of PCN has been organizing to bring to the table the discussion about gender and patriarchy and its impacts in gender identities and relationships.

The Kuagro Ri Chnagaina Ri PCN (that in the maroon language of Palenque de San Basilio means "community of women of PCN"), conformed in 2013, looks to educate and organize politically Black women to link the struggle against structural racism and colonialism to the struggle against patriarchy.

The Kuagro strives to integrate a Black radical feminist perspective into the everyday awareness and work of the Black Communities' Process.

The task is challenging as well, in the violent context of Colombia for Black women, who are disproportionately impacted. As the violent conditions in Black territories have increased, violence against Black women has exacerbated making Black women main military targets and trophies of war. Besides the emotional torture as a result of being in a constant environment of war, the last decade has witnessed physical torture, rape, forced disappearance, death threats, sexual harassment and assassinations of Black women leaders and human rights defenders.

The situation motivated the Kuagro to develop the Afro-Colombian women human rights defenders project (<http://afrocolombianhr.org/index.html>) to reverse the anonymity and neglected attention of the horrendous crimes committed against Black women. During the first six months of 2014 alone, in Buenaventura, women leaders receive daily death threats, are constantly harassed by State authorities and finger pointed as guerrilla members or left militants, which in the context of Colombia means a scarlet sign in their forehead for death.

The challenge of building autonomous and authentic Black power

1. Hold collective property and sustainability in the collective and ancestral territories. This is a challenge that implies not only sustain a struggle in the virulent and vicious targeted violence against Black people, but also have clear ideological and strategic artillery against capitalist, neo-liberal, neo-colonial, slave-type conditions presented as modern opportunities for "development" and "advancement" of Black people.
2. Overcome the potential and dangerous contradictions or diversions that can present a political struggle based on the right to be different-but-equal, or the assertion of cultural difference, with a struggle that radically question and fight the rhetorical of miscegenation that argue equal and democratic opportunities as oppose to racism and supremacist domination.
3. Decolonize western, Eurocentric, one-dimensional ideologies that perpetrate dominance, oppression and self-destruction of Black, Afro-descendant people's identity, by positioning our own ideological structures using tools such as ethno-education and radical Black feminism thought.
4. Preserve political, ideological and economic autonomy to hold and advance Black-Afro descendant peoples organization and movement, easily co-opted nowadays by the delusions created by a capitalist, racist, neo-colonial, patriarchal system or intimidated and demobilized by gun-controlled powers.
5. Sustain, support, defend and develop our urban and rural communities, as a source to nurture our sense of Being and Belonging, against dispossession and gentrification.

6. Continue building under the principle of Ubuntu and Uhuru, principles that keeps us grounded in the sense of a collective and global struggle that connect us with the struggles in the African Diaspora and the continent, and with the struggles of oppressed peoples for a better world for all.

**“With our traditional affirmation to life, joy and freedom;
to resist is not to endure.”**

06 Europe: The global African Diaspora in Britain, transforming the state we're in by Gus John⁴²



Credit: Ashley Carroll Photography

This article aims to explore the structural position of the Global African Diaspora population in Britain as related to the economy, education, employment, criminal justice and political representation. It examines the decline of social movements and of independent political resistance to the structural, cultural, institutional and personal manifestations of racism and

⁴² Born in Grenada in 1945, Gus John has been involved in education, schooling, community development and change management in Britain since the middle 1960s. He is an associate professor and honorary fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London and director of Gus John Consultancy Limited. In 1989 he was appointed Director of Education in Hackney, the first black Director of Education in the UK. When the two departments were amalgamated he became Hackney's first Director of Education and Leisure Services, a post he held for 8 years. In 2007, he assisted the Jamaica Ministry of Education with strategies for improving the quality of teaching and of learning in the school sector. Gus is a founder and now Patron of the Communities Empowerment Network (CEN). Established 14 years ago, CEN works principally with black students excluded from school, or at risk of exclusion, and deals with upwards of 1,000 cases per year in London alone, the majority of those being black boys.

discrimination that still define social relations in British society. It ends by addressing the question of where now for the Africa Diaspora situated in Britain and its links to other movements for social justice.

The African heritage population of Britain now stands at 1.87 million, having been a mere 28,000 at the end of the Second World War. One million of them currently live in London alone and in some boroughs they make up more than 25% of the population. Among the Global African Diaspora (GAD) in Britain, therefore, there are 4 generations of British born Africans in relation to whom the old narrative about 'colored immigrants', 'newcomers' and 'integration once the newcomers have settled and produced British black children' is increasingly meaningless, as the GAD population remains marginalized and subject to widespread discrimination and social exclusion.

Many writers and academics cite the arrival of the ship Empire Windrush at Tilbury port in East London on 22 June 1948 as the start of the growth of the black population in Britain. That ship brought 492 passengers from Jamaica, the largest group of West Indian immigrants to arrive in Britain immediately following the end of the Second World War. Most of them settled in Brixton in the London Borough of Lambeth, a place that would later become the site of some of the fiercest confrontations between the African population and the state as represented by the police.

In fact, there had been a continuous black presence in Britain for at least 400 years before the Empire Windrush docked in June 1948. While it is not possible to state the exact number of Africans that lived in the UK from one century to the next, what is known is that they were to be found in all strata of the society and hailed from the African continent and the African Diaspora. Many were scholars and scientists, artisans and missionaries, musical composers and dramatists, medical doctors, biologists and horticulturalists. Others were seafarers and military personnel.

The British population's ignorance of the history of the African presence in Britain was matched by its cultural supremacist assumptions about itself and its lack of basic knowledge about the social and economic background of the Windrush generation. Apart from believing that 'the West Indies' was a continuous land mass called 'Jamaica', far too many British people felt that post-war African immigrants were uneducated if not illiterate laborers, or peasant farmers, or plantation workers. 'Colored immigrants' were therefore considered to be needy, unskilled, incapable of being positive role models for their own children on account of poor education, low level employment, poor parenting skills and dysfunctional family units that are typified by 'absent fathers.'

While the white working class continued its tradition of workers' struggles in respect of wages and working conditions, and at the same time denying for the most part the racism black workers were experiencing in the workplace, the African Diaspora typically had two sites of struggle. It was necessary to struggle in the workplace and to assist the labor movement in confronting its own racism. But, it was equally necessary to struggle in the community in relation to: police treatment of African people; Stop & Search or Stop & Frisk; racism in the criminal justice system; schooling and education; racist attacks; bigotry, racism and xenophobia; denial of equal employment opportunity; discrimination in the provision of goods and services.

Sociologist John Lambert, in his study of police and race relations in Birmingham in the late 1960s pointed to the under-representation of West Indians, young and old, among the population of offenders, but suggested that there was a very real danger that their numbers would increase. He wrote:

In contrast with the typical British delinquent and his family, the few West Indian delinquents appear to come from families with high aspirations and ambitions. West Indians in general are aspiring and ambitious; many are acutely aware of the poor status that attaches to the kinds of areas and houses in which they live and are ambitious for a better way of life. They are not part of the failure that life in such areas means for many. They seek success within the general framework of values and generally rise above the delinquent and criminal standards prevalent in the areas in which they live. **Clearly the danger is that if their legitimate aspirations for betterment in terms of employment and housing opportunity are not met, with time the crime and disorder which surround them will contaminate their life style and lead, in years to come, to a crime rate that matches that of their neighborhoods. Such influences may particularly infect and misdirect their children's achievement and undermine their chances for success and mobility.**⁴³

It is possible to chart two developments within the African Diaspora community since the 1960s that have sought to engage with the condition of young and African in British society and to resist processes of rendering that community marginal if not invisible. The first was the number of grass roots movements that were formed by the African Diaspora community itself. These included: the British Black Panther Party; the Pan-African Congress Movement; the Black Unity and Freedom Party; Organization of Women of Africa and African Descent; the North London West Indian Parents Association; the Black Parents Movement; the Caribbean Education and Community Workers Association; the Black Youth Movement; the Race Today Collective; the Bradford Black Collective; the African-Caribbean Self-help Organization; New Beacon Publishers

⁴³ John Lambert: *Crime, Police and Race Relations*, pp.128-130. OUP and IRR, 1970.

and Book Distributors; Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications and Walter Rodney Bookshop; the Supplementary/Saturday School Movement; various youth and sport organizations.

The focus of these was on positive identity formation, self-empowerment; community development; self-determination and combating racism in all its manifestations. The grass roots base and political orientation of those entities was responsible in large measure for raising the consciousness of the African Diaspora community, defending the community against manipulation by the state and its agencies and against discrimination in schooling, policing and criminal justice. Those movements in the main sought to make common cause with the struggles of the Global African Diaspora and the liberation struggles in Africa itself. They managed to increase the knowledge and political literacy of African Diaspora people across the generations and to equip them with the tools for understanding and the strategies for tackling the daily racism, class exploitation, gender subordination they experienced daily.

But, theirs was not an exercise in political rhetoric. Communities could see the impact of political organization and taking collective action. Young and old alike had a spring in their step and were emboldened by the knowledge that the community could organize and rise up against police brutality and abuse of power; could challenge the perverse decisions of courts and judges; could hold schools to account; could run neo-fascists out of town and protect their neighborhoods from would-be racist murderers.

The state, however, employed elaborate methods of political sabotage, co-optation, containment and divide and rule. When all of that failed to displace the righteous aspirations of communities and their just demands, and when major uprisings were triggered by the abuse of state power, not least on the part of the police, the state allowed the increasing militarization of the police and on onslaught on the rights and civil liberties of communities, young people in particular.

Since the 1970s, therefore, there has been an ideological war between politicized and collective responses and independent pro-active interventions on the part of communities, and state-sponsored and state-funded projects that are geared towards containing dissatisfaction, unrest and strident demands. The state, through various Ministries and agencies such as the Community Relations Commission and its successor the Commission for Racial Equality, took to funding a growing number of youth projects and in a manner that had much more to do with containment and encouraging dependency than with self-empowerment and tackling those structures and practices that result in the alienation and exclusion of young people.

Worse still, those funding policies and practices helped to further set young people aside from the experiences of the community as a whole and encouraged them to see themselves and be seen as a group apart, disconnected from the experiences and struggles of their parents and

grandparents' generation. Indeed, the schooling system made sure that those young people were totally unaware of the history the Africa Diaspora has made in Britain since the Windrush, let alone the 19th and 20th centuries. Successive governments appeared to be acting according to the belief that that self-help projects will not provide the arena for political struggle, especially when you make it necessary for community groups to crawl over one another, like crabs in a barrel, in order to access funding and endorsement for such projects.

Throughout the 1970s, there was a debate within British the trade union movement and in the Labor Party at local and national levels about the need for autonomous black political organization within their ranks. This debate was fuelled by the widespread evidence of trade unions failing to acknowledge the extent of racial discrimination in the organised Labor Movement and to properly represent black members who brought complaints of racial discrimination.

In the early morning of 18 January 1981, a massive fire broke out at 439 New Cross Road, Deptford, in South-East London, the home of the Ruddock family. Yvonne Ruddock and Angela Jackson were celebrating their 16th birthday, accompanied by scores of other young people aged between 14 and 25. The fire, which the police initially claimed had started as a result of an incendiary device being hurled into the house through a front ground floor window, quickly spread and trapped many of the guests upstairs who had not even been aware that a fire had started downstairs. Thirteen young people lost their lives, including some who jumped from windows upstairs and were impaled on railings at street level. The fire claimed a 14th victim when one survivor succumbed to mental illness and jumped to his death from the 14th floor of the apartment block where he lived.

Deptford was the organizational home of the neo-fascist National Front, at the time of the fire and they had been known to firebomb black people's homes and attack them physically on the streets as they went about their daily business. However, having initially claimed that the fire was caused by a bomb in a racially motivated attack, the police later ruled out the possibility that the fire was a racist attack and instead began concentrating on the Ruddock family to try and find evidence of ongoing conflict that might have caused the firebomb. This earned the police decades of public criticism and community mistrust, especially as they later told two Coroner's Inquests, the second as late as 2004, that they could not produce any witnesses or enough reliable evidence to confirm that the fire had been racially motivated. Both inquests returned an 'Open Verdict.'

The New Cross Massacre Action Committee (NCMAC), led by John La Rose who headed up the Alliance of the Black Parents Movement, the Black Youth Movement and the Race Today Collective, supported bereaved families and survivors of the fire, including 27 young people who had been injured (some seriously) through smoke inhalation or as a result of jumping from

the burning building. Crucially, the NCMAC organized a national demonstration and rally, the Black People's Day of Action, on Monday 2 March 1981. On that ordinary working day, London was brought to a standstill as an estimated 25,000 people from across the UK converged on London and marched from the burnt out house to the Houses of Parliament to protest racist murders and the police handling of the fire investigation.

By 1981 and the New Cross Massacre and Day of Action, communities generally and black members of the Labor Party in particular were challenging not just trade unions, but Labor run councils and the Labor Party at national level. The challenge concerned their record in defending the rights of black people and combating racism in their employment practices, service delivery and selection procedures governing both local and national representation. This, it must be remembered, was a period when it was taken for granted that the Labor Party could depend on the black vote in local and general elections.

The Labor Party Black Sections movement grew out of that community agitation and by 1983 was able to table a demand for greater representation at the Labor Party conference. Four years later, four Black Sections members, Bernie (Bernard Alexander) Grant, Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng and Keith Vaz were elected to Parliament as Britain's first post-war black MPs.

Most outspoken and 'grassroots' of them all was Guyanese-born Bernie Grant (1944 – 2000), a former trade union official and member of the Socialist Labor League. He became the Leader of Haringey Council in 1985, the same year in which black youths (predominantly) on Broadwater Farm rose up against the police in one of the fiercest confrontations with the state in that decade, during which a police officer, PC Keith Blakelock was hacked to death. Bernie Grant was elected Member of Parliament (MP) for Tottenham in Haringey in 1987. In addition to his work as a highly effective constituency MP, Bernie Grant earned a reputation as the 'father' of the campaign for reparations from the British state and ruling class for the enslavement and genocide of millions of Africans in the transatlantic slave trade.

Paul Boateng (of Ghanaian and Scottish heritage) was a lawyer when in 1987 he was elected as MP for Brent South in North West London. In 1992, he became shadow minister for the Lord Chancellor's Department and held that post until the general election in 1997. Labor won that election and Tony Blair appointed him Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the Department of Health, thus making him the first black government minister. In 1999, he became a member of the Privy Council and in 2000 the first Minister for Young People. He became Financial Secretary to the Treasury in 2001, and was promoted to the position of Chief Secretary to the Treasury in May 2002, becoming Britain's first black cabinet minister.

Diane Abbott was elected MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington in 1987, becoming the first black woman MP. She is considered to be a freethinking, independent minded MP who

does not always stick to her party's line. In 2010, she made a bid to become the leader of the Labor Party but lost to Ed Miliband who later made her Shadow Minister for Public Health. In the late 1990s, she started the annual Hackney Schools and the Black Child conference, which some three years later became the London Schools and the Black Child conference, attracting some 2,000-plus black parents, teachers and community workers each year, with a focus on barriers to raising the achievement of black students, African Caribbean boys in particular. Abbott is widely known and highly regarded as a champion of school students and campaigner against school exclusion and for each child receiving their educational entitlement.

In this regard, she is seen as the one who works most closely with communities and seeks to represent their interests, especially with regard to their children's schooling.

Marc Wadsworth, himself an original Black Sections member, writing in the Guardian in October 2008 to mark the 25th anniversary of Black Sections stated:

None of the movement's achievements would have been possible without protest and agitation. The uprisings that occurred in the early 1980s in Brixton, Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool and elsewhere acted as a wake-up call to a society that was either indifferent or hostile to the demands of disenfranchised and disadvantaged black people. But the legitimate calls for fair representation made by black communities whose electoral support was given overwhelmingly to Labor were stubbornly resisted by the party leadership of Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley, who were obsessed with defeating a rising left-wing rank and file.

Despite this opposition, Black Sections won. We achieved a 500-fold increase in African-Caribbean and Asian representation in town halls around the country, four black council leaders, four black MPs, and Bill Morris as the first black trade union general secretary. On top of that, black self-organized groups were formed in trade unions and even by police officers. And the TUC created places on its general council and executive for black representatives.

The New Cross Massacre Black People's Day of Action was both the application of a process of self-organization on a massive scale and an unleashing of people's power and self-assertiveness that impacted even the most resistant institutions in society. The late John La Rose (as Chair of the New Cross Massacre Action Committee) and others from the movement he led brought tried and tested principles and method of organization to the community's response to the massacre. This laid the foundations for sustained action by the mass of unemployed black youths, by black police officers, by Labor Party supporters and many other sections of the black community.

The horror of the New Cross Massacre, compounded by the crass and incompetent response of the State (prime minister, police investigation, coroner) will undoubtedly be a memory the survivors and relatives cannot erase. The political advances the massacre spurred and the momentous contribution to change in British society and to the self-empowerment of black people that the response to the tragedy triggered will hopefully remain lasting monuments to the memory of those who perished.

Staying with the theme of 'self-empowerment,' the jury is still out as to whether or not Westminster-style electoral politics would deliver power to the masses of ordinary people. Diane Abbott, for example, organizes the LSBC conference each year. That conference does not come up with any resolutions or demands to put to the government, not even when Abbott's own party is in power. Apart from the informal networking that takes place during the conference, there is no mechanism for building that conference with all its loyal attendance into a mass movement of parents, or of students, who are concerned with the same perennial and vexing issues. The conference too often feels as if black professionals gather to have a conversation among themselves and share angst and grief, while parents (disempowered by lack of knowledge and information about how the system works and how it should work) listen appreciatively.

In this sense, not only is the professional status and practice of black teachers, school managers, learning mentors, etc., not making too visible a difference year on year, the knowledge gap between them and ordinary parents is widening with each new education reform and each new type of school and school governance the government introduces. The Abbott conference does not publish papers or fact sheets that parents can use to empower themselves and to devise strategies for holding schools to account, let alone act as a basis for challenging government policy on education and the way those policies disenfranchise students and families.

The trade union movement does not have a history of organizing within communities to safeguard and extend children's education rights, despite the fact the white working class has historically be given a raw deal in the schooling and education system. There have been black trade union activists throughout the decades who have played a major role within their unions. But they have functioned very much within the existing trade union framework and have not been able to focus the labor movement on those issues outside the workplace which so directly impact the lives of black, or white, trade union members (education, policing, housing/homelessness, immigration, civil liberties).

That is despite the fact that the equivalent of 'black sections,' i.e., black staff networks, have been established within the trade union movement itself and in particular professions. A few examples are: The National Black Probation Officers Association; the National Black Crown

Prosecution Service Association; the (black and ethnic minority) Network in the Home Office; the Department of Work and Pensions Black Staff Association; the National Union of Teachers Black Members; Unison Black Members; the Trade Union Congress Black Members; the Fire Brigades Union Black Members; etc.

The widespread criticism in black communities of the police investigation into the New Cross Fire and especially of their treatment of the young black party goers, the police conduct during the Black People's Day of Action (BPDA) and the nature of the police operation that led to the Brixton uprising in the summer of 1981, shone the spotlight on black officers in the Metropolitan Police. They began to associate much more directly their own experience of racism in the police service with the way the communities to which they belonged experienced policing in London and elsewhere. Black police officers became increasingly conscious that they were part of an arm of the State that was targeting black people disproportionately through 'Stop and Search', the Sus laws, and raids on places of entertainment and on residences, at a time when the economy was in decline and unemployment was affecting black youth more than any other section of the population.

When Brixton erupted in 1981, whereas unemployment in Brixton stood at 13% overall, among ethnic minorities it was 25.4% and among black youths nationwide it was estimated at between 55% and 60%. It was precisely that group, displaced from the labor market in such high numbers, that bore the brunt of police oppression in cities such as London, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool.

Black police officers drew strength from the political struggles in their own communities to confront the racism they were experiencing in the police service. It is their identification with that resistance in communities, invariably led by young people however spontaneously, that gave rise eventually to the formation of the Black Police Association in the Metropolitan Police Service in 1994. By 1999, when the Home Office framed its plan of action in response to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry's findings and recommendations, it was mandating chief constables in the 43 police forces in England and Wales to support the development and work of Black Police Associations among their black officers and 'non-sworn' staff.

The mass uprisings of the Summer of 1981 in Brixton, Moss Side, Toxteth, Handsworth and elsewhere would probably not have occurred but for the confidence generated among young black people as a result of the BPDA and the politics that shaped it.

The vigilance and awareness black communities once had in relation to police abuse of power, for example, an alertness which led to instant mobilization in relation to oppressive police practices in our communities has largely given way to a form of indifference, save for the spasmodic upsurge of protest in response to 'Stop and Search'. While I have as yet no research

evidence to support this, as someone involved in strategies for combating gun- and knife-enabled crimes in our communities and who talks to young people and adults, including community activists (in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds) on a regular basis, I surmise that the reason for this is the feeling communities have that whatever methods the police use to tackle the fear, mayhem and wrecking of lives caused by 'gangs', guns and knives are alright by them. Parents and young people alike in communities are frustrated by the 'code of silence' that allows perpetrators of such crimes to continue operating outside the reach of the law. Consequently, they focus less on police abuse of power and denial of fundamental rights in their dealings with black young people and the homes in which they live than on the need to end that regime of fear and violence in those communities.

In a word, I believe that we need to revisit the 'Self Reliance' that characterized our political engagement and community activism in defense of rights and in the demand for social and economic justice in the 1970s and 1980s, and raise the political tempo within our communities. That, for me, is the real legacy of the Black People's Day of Action. This is the spirit we need to revive now. Especially in the last 30 years, we have been drip fed on government handouts and socialized into a dependency culture, with the piper calling the tune every step of the way. The policies of this Collision Government (a government on a collision course with the majority of its citizens, i.e., the working class and us Africans as the most visibly excluded of that class) are already having a disproportionate effect on us, our children and our elderly.

It is frankly immaterial that there are some black faces on the benches in the Houses of Parliament or among the profile of members of the various political parties. I even heard a 'brother' seriously propounding recently his theory that

there are many reasons why black people who have settled in England for a long time should join the British national party, especially with all these Romanians and Poles taking our jobs while we have the highest levels of unemployment, especially among our youth.

So, you create your own underdog class and then join forces with your executioner in the hope that he would target the underdog you've created and take the heat off you, if not validate you as finally 'belonging.' How deluded can you get?

If we are to make progress and understand and build upon the legacy of the BPDA, we need to encourage a mature debate in black communities and in the society generally about all these matters and make sure it is an open, free and democratic debate that does not project the issue as exclusive to 'the black community' but as having everything to do with the state of Britain and the condition of being young and black in the society now and for the last four decades.

TARGETING HOT SPOTS OF FRONT LINE STRUGGLES

07 Living the struggle for Marissa Alexander: Patriarchy, domestic violence, and mass incarceration by Aleta Aston-Toure', Rose M. Brewer, and Ashaki Binta

May 2012

The 20 year conviction of Marissa Alexander in the Old Duval County Courthouse was unreal for all of us that witnessed this most god-awful atrocity.

Hearing Marissa's daughter's plea for her mother to the jury was more than an emotional cry but a humane beckoning. Then, "We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest" filled the courtroom as the Dream Defenders sang the lyrics out loud as a non-violent protest. The song spoke to the true sentiment that we all shared, despite the urging of police and the judge to remove these freedom fighters from the courtroom and the courthouse. After 12 minutes of deliberation, a jury of 6 people convicted Ms. Alexander of three counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon with no intent to harm. Her sentence was set at 20 years in part due to the state's mandatory minimum sentencing laws.

Many of us that day decided we would continue the battle for Marissa until she received freedom.

Children leaving a message of desperation

Walking off of the elevator on the third floor of the 550 East Adams Street Jail House, you take 15 steps forward to arrive at two chairs at a table, separated by thick glass, all under huge low voltage office lights. There are words engraved on the table, much like a wooden school desk where elementary students chisel out hearts and words of puppy love. The difference is that the words carved in this jail house portray the desperation of children haunted by not being able to see their incarcerated mothers. The desperate carved words spelling, "I love you mom," were words of unconditional love carved near the windows.

The day of the incident

Marissa Alexander had just given birth eight days prior to this incident. She left the hospital after breastfeeding her preemie baby in the intensive care unit and went to her home that she had purchased with her previous husband, the father of her two older twins. She was attacked in her bathroom by her abusive husband, a man who had attacked her many times before. She fired a warning shot into the air of her home, in the hopes that her abusive husband would leave her alone.

Marissa won an appeal in September 2013 and was released on bail in November. Her hearing has been re-scheduled for August 1, 2014. Her trial will be in December. Her bail and leg ankle brace gives her a debt of \$2,500 per month. If found guilty, Marissa could be sentenced to a mandatory 60 years in prison.

Over-policed and under-protected Black women

Marissa is one of the 324,000 pregnant women in the U.S. that are physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner every year. 85-90% of women in prison have a history of being victims of violence prior to their incarceration, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and child abuse. Across the nation, Black women are consistently failed by the law. In Duval County, all Stand Your Ground cases of Black women were denied last year. Black women are not seen as victims in oppression because the courts are not being empathetic to the fear Black women show for their lives; they are always asked, “why did you not retreat?”

Marissa’s case is one glaring example of how Black women have been over-policed and under-protected. Marissa’s abuser was able to become a domestic violence survivor in the Hubbard House (a local battered women’s shelter) while Marissa faces 60 years in jail for defending herself against abuse. Within domestic violence advocacy circles, Black women may be seen but rarely are their voices heard, which allows our communities to overlook the fact that domestic violence is the largest leading cause of homicide for Black women. Black women are seen as expendable, replaceable, and easily forgotten.

“I would have attacked her just like I did my other 5 other baby mamas”

Too many questions surface upon a close reading of this case: why weren’t police reports and hospital records documenting Marissa as the survivor of abuse allowed as evidence? Also, what about the infamous statement that Rico Gray made that declared, if Marissa hadn’t fired the warning shot, “I would have attacked her just like I did my other 5 other baby mamas?” And why was Rico Gray given shelter at the Hubbard House?

We demand that Marissa's police reports and hospital records be used in the court supporting her fear factor, or Battered Women's Syndrome. We also demand accountability from the Hubbard House for allowing Rico Gray to masquerade as a victim of domestic abuse, rather than the perpetrator of it. We demand that both systems—the courts and the domestic violence centers—validate the lives of Black women like Marissa.

It has been fifty years since the March on Washington, Freedom Summer and the Civil Rights Act. These movements depended on Black women's leadership and fought for the liberation of our communities. Fifty years later, Black communities are still under attack.

This week, District Attorney Angela Corey—who botched the prosecution of the Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis cases and is now prosecuting Marissa Alexander's case—had the nerve to speak at area Black churches denouncing the legacy of protest and movement building in the Black community.

We called for every singer, poet, dancer, every artist and activist, and every person who works for justice to converge onto Jacksonville, FL for Standing Our Ground for Marissa Week from July 25—August 1, 2014 and almost 500 came to the call. Standing Our Ground for Marissa proved that we can come together for the call, "it takes a village."

Aleta Alston-Toure'

Free Marissa Now Mobilization Campaign

Who is Marissa Alexander and what is the struggle to free her?

At the time of Marissa Alexander's conviction in 2012 she was a 30 year old mother of three children, one of whom was a newborn daughter. A Jacksonville, Florida resident, Alexander was convicted of three counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. She had fired a warning shot above the head of her estranged husband. She had been a victim of earlier domestic violence and indicated that she feared for her life at the time of the warning shot. She argued that she had a right to defend herself. Her two sons were in the room at the time. Given this, Florida prosecutor's argued she endangered them.

A jury found her guilty, and she was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Yet, as early as 2009 she had filed an injunction of protection against Gray after his second domestic violence arrest. Alexander was denied the right to a claim "Stand Your Ground Defense." The contested Florida law that allowed George Zimmerman to walk free after the murder of Trayvon, Martin was closed to Alexander. In fact, Attorney General Angela Corey added a new element to the case when she and other prosecutors argued that the sentencing Judge had made an error. Corey asserted that the 20 year sentence (which under the earlier sentencing was actually three 20 year sentences) was incorrect under Florida law. The 20 year sentence could not be served

concurrently by Alexander but must be served consequently, a 60 year sentence. The original trial conviction was overturned, and a new trial is now set for December, 2014.

Marissa Alexander's case is indicative of renewed organizing and political resistance in the Black world. The recent steps in the struggle to free Marissa Alexander include:

1. July 2014: Free Marissa Now and Project South organizing "Stand Our Ground" week to raise awareness of Alexander's case and celebrate exercising civil and human dignity rights.
2. August to December 2014: Organizing nationally for people in New York City to join with people in Florida, people in Mississippi, and going global because this issue of injustice, is like a cancer; it spreads everywhere. Today, it's Marissa. Tomorrow, you. And yesterday, it was Trayvon. And they will keep going unless we speak out as people. We have power; we have voice. Let us raise it together and let them know that we will not be silent while they keep taking our children."

Black women's lives, class, domestic and state violence

The Marissa Alexander struggle as poignantly articulated by Aleta Alston-Toure' of the Free Marissa Now Mobilization Campaign is at the center of Black left feminist thinking about Black women's lives, violence, and the centrality of a class analysis in understanding this case. From the very beginning, it was clear that gender, race, and class would structure the hearing, interpretation, and outcome for Marissa Alexander. We contend that class relations are deeply intersectional with patriarchy, gender, sexuality, white supremacy and nation in the Alexander struggle. The exploitative social relations which are inherent to capitalism must be destroyed. Transformational struggle is the pillar upon which we build our resistance to domestic and state violence against Marissa Alexander and the tens of hundreds of thousands of other Black women who live the intertwined systems of capitalism, domestic violence, and mass incarceration. The struggle is one for Black liberation in all its complexity. This is the key to ending domestic and state violence, capitalism and national oppression.

We understand that the values, ideology and practice of male supremacy as authority, domination, and privilege are deeply rooted in the set of social relations intensified under capitalism. The devastation these values and political economy have leveled on Black women's lives in the US and globally is unparalleled. At the same time, the ideology and structure of patriarchy which informs violence, racism, and the class exploitation of women work together in Marissa Alexander's story. Yet, too, the story is one of powerful fight back. The reality and intensity of the Marissa Alexander struggle reminds us that Black women are standing our ground through deep organizing against the injustices of the system, providing important lessons for building Black left unity today.

US capitalism and imperialism have always been patriarchal in character.

Just as the founding of the North American state was structurally, economically, and politically embedded in the racist system of slavery, it was simultaneously a newly formed state of white male domination where women were also at once politically disenfranchised, powerless, and economically exploited. At the apex of this so-called bourgeois democratic state, stood the American slave woman, racially and sexually exploited for her labor while repeatedly beaten and raped by the men of the slave owning family, forced to breed for more profit.

In the aftermath of slavery, under the patriarchal social and economic system, the Black family and community were structurally shaped to mirror and adopt the features, character, and nature of patriarchy which granted rights and privileges to the male gender over the female gender. The National Negro Convention Movement in the 19th century, in which mostly free Black males in the North met to plan and organize the struggle against slavery, also defined the vision and character desired for the Black community once slavery was overthrown. Black manhood was equated with the “ownership” of his labor, wife, children, and home. Emancipation established the African male as the “head of household” by institutions such as the Freedman’s Bureau. The rights of the Black female were submerged under Black male authority within the family and community structure. Legally, politically, and socially the Black male both defined himself and was granted the “privileges of manhood.”⁴⁴ Of course Black manhood was always under assault given white supremacy and economic exploitation. Nonetheless, Black women as property of their husbands meant that male violence against the woman was state sanctioned.

In short, gender dynamics are embedded in Black life. Beth Richie in her recent book, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation* captures this dynamic pointing out that gender-specific violence: sexual, physical, emotional, pressures Black women to remain silent about physical and emotional abuses.⁴⁵ And, when they do speak out, community, social service systems, and the state response reflects the worst stereotypes of the women as “unabusable.” We can take this further. Domestic violence is rooted in the intersecting forces of structural racism, patriarchy, and capitalism.⁴⁶

It is through capitalism and 21st century ideologies of male privilege and domination in dialectic with so-called Black women’s incapacity that the ideological underpinning of male violence is forged. Black men, of course, experience excessive amounts of violence in their lives,

⁴⁴ Franklin, Donna L. *Ensuring Inequality: The Structural Transformation of the African American Family*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

⁴⁵ Richie, Beth E. *Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation*. New York University Press, 2012.

⁴⁶ White, E. Frances. *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability*. Temple University Press, 2001.

state and interpersonal, but dramatically less domestic violence. It is Black women and children who are the primary victims of domestic violence, emotional and physical. It is in the home and community that the dispossession of Black women's personhood can be most profound. Today, African American women are disproportionately affected by incidents of domestic violence. Black women are nearly 3 times more likely to be murdered by their spouse or intimate male partner than white women, according to numerous up-to-date reports and studies.⁴⁷ Other studies consistently show that at least 30 percent of all Black women (and sometimes men) say they have experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetime, an aspect of Black family life that is greatly under reported due to cultural norms that discourage exposing spousal abuse as well as mistrust of the police and judicial system characterized by racial bias and discrimination.⁴⁸ Moreover economic inequality and exploitation of poor pay, no pay, \$5.00 of wealth, makes it nearly impossible to find justice, whether through leaving an abusive relationship or getting quality legal counsel. Even still, the fundamental issue is a system of exploitation and profit that shapes Black life and Black women's lives profoundly. Accumulation which is fueled by cutbacks in the social wage, the use of cheaper women's labor through a gender division of labor, and the increasing marginalization of large categories of all Black people are the norm. This is the structural context of the case of Marissa Alexander.

But the political economy of capitalism is not simply material; although the intensification of poverty and economic dispossession are all too real in the lives of Black women. Capitalism is ideological and material, expressed in physical, material, and emotional upheaval. Corporate profits and hierarchies of inequality work together with patriarchy and sexism in the African American Community.⁴⁹ Within the wider US system of injustice these forces underpin the domestic violence incident faced by Marissa Alexander in 2010 from her estranged husband Rico Gray and her subsequent arrest, conviction and sentence of 20 years imprisonment under Florida Law in 2012. When Marissa Alexander fired a "warning shot" into the ceiling of her home, she was merely defending herself and her children from another wife beating...another heinous act of domestic violence. State violence in the form of Angela Corey's decision to potentially triple the 20 year sentence to 60 is the travesty in which we root our struggle to Free Marissa Now. Yet, as a movement, do we also see her refusal to be beaten again as an act

⁴⁷ Dallas Morning News. "Black women at greater risk of becoming victims of homicidal domestic violence." September 21, 2013.

⁴⁸ Griffin, Linner Ward, Melissa Chappell, Oliver J. Williams. "Community Insights on Domestic Violence among African Americans: Conversations About Domestic Violence and Other Issues Affecting Their Community." East Carolina University & Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community. 2006.

⁴⁹ Carilla, Ricardo and Jerry Tello, editors. "Family Violence and Men of Color: Healing the Wounded Spirit." Chapter 5, African American Men Who Batter: A Community Centered Approach to Prevention and Intervention. Springer Publishing Company, 2008.

of resistance against a system that allows the lives of women and children to be debased and devalued.⁵⁰

For the poorest Black women in the United States, the dismantling of the social wage through destruction of social welfare, attacks on public education, and increasing incarceration and imprisonment have been devastating.

Drug and sentencing laws have hit hard. Black women have the highest rate of incarceration of all women in the US at 1 in every 19. That is 3 times the rate of white women.⁵¹ Black men comprise nearly half of all prisoners in the US. The high rates of imprisonment of African men and women is directly related to all aspects of a US judicial/criminal “injustice” system that is steeped in racist and sexist patterns of discrimination at all levels.⁵²

The struggle for the freedom of Marissa Alexander is an expression of the fight back against this legal ideology and practice of male domination. This system is intertwined with the US carceral state, mass incarceration, the denial of the rights of Black women to mother, the brutalization of reproduction and the increasing levels of violence in working class and poor Black women’s communities. It is the volatile mix of state violence that raised a warning shot against an abusive spouse to a potential 60 year sentence. Marissa’s case is a profound example of the deep rootedness of sexism and racism and of state violence today. As millions of Black men and women are sentenced, jailed and incarcerated in the U.S., her case offers a look into the features of 21st century racialized capitalism and its impact on Black lives.

For additional information on the case and Standing Our Ground week please go to <http://www.freemariissanow.org/standing-our-ground-week.html>, and contact us at freemariissanow@gmail.com or www.facebook.com/freemariissanow.

Donate to the Marissa Alexander Freedom Fund: <http://gogetfunding.com/project/marissa-alexander-freedom-fundraiser>

⁵⁰ “Defending Yourself from Domestic Violence Should NOT Be a Crime!: Why We Must Support the Campaign to Free Marissa Alexander”, Black Workers for Justice Women’s Commission Flier. June, 2014.

⁵¹ The Sentencing Project: Research and Advocacy for Reform. September, 2012.

⁵² Hattery, Angela J. and Earl Smith. African American Families Today: Myths and Realities. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2012.

THE LAST WORD

Kwansaba for long distance runners by Eugene B. Redmond

Voice-lifted & wakeful rhymers, we salvage
battle-borne selves, savaged between an endless
racial fault line & a gun-lit alley
twistin' toward us like a tornado. Whether
next door or wars away, we fold
night(ly)-mares ntu soular systems. Reclaim selves,
again, from "Hands Up" to "Son Down."

Invented in an EBR Writers Workshop (1995, East St. Louis), the kwansaba is a poetic form containing multiples of 7: 7 lines of 7 words each with no word possessing more than 7 letters. Exceptions to the 7-letter rule: proper nouns, quotations, foreign words, neologisms. Hundreds of kwansabas appear in past issues of "Drumvoices Revue." Practitioners of the form include poets Charlie R. Braxton, Remi Raji, Loue Chinn, Byron Lee, Patricia Merritt, Dahveed Nelson, Shirley LeFlore, A. Van Jordan, K. Curtis Lyle, L. Teresa Church, Jerry Ward, Marie Celestin-Young, Lenard D. Moore, Jaye P. Willis, Michael Castro, Mary Weems, Sherman L. Fowler, Darlene Roy, Tony Medina, Jeffrey Skoblow, Mali Newman, Roscoe Crenshaw and Lena Weathers.

Eugene B. Redmond is the Poet Laureate of East St. Louis, Illinois. This kwansaba is from Planet Ferguson Series #2.



Paper boy by Emory Douglass



Cartoon by Dana Summers