

Excavating the creativity and imagination of the Global African Youth

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“Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.”

Frantz Fanon,

Introduction and the imagery of Wakanda.

The question of the future of the African Youth is being debated and contested in major fora internationally, but in music, arts, culture and other areas of creativity, the Global African youth have established their claim for a future dictated by emancipation and freedom. It was the cultural icon and Rastafari artist who called on African youths to emancipate themselves from mental slavery.

This call for emancipation is now even more urgent in this era of intelligent robots and the deployment of the Human Genome Project. It is this era of intelligent robots – when there is a fuller convergence between genetic engineering and nanotechnology – biopolitical questions will become central to democratic questions within the international community. Current research by progressive scholars on the **Algorithms of Oppression** have brought home the reality of **How Search engines reinforce racism**.

The new revelations about brain hacking after the intensification of the white supremacist movements have brought to the fore the ways in which new innovative tools not only expanded the manipulation of technology and information, but elements of psychology unleashed a new industry rooted in the exploitation of human behavior through new forms of propaganda. The dynamism that created an environment fertile for the rapturous investment of these tools and methodologies relied on forces that encompass the history of racial capitalism. In the era when the images of failed states abound in the global media, progressive film makers came out with the movie Wakanda. The fictional story of a bountiful, independent African state called Wakanda in the film **Black Panther**. Wakanda was described as the most scientifically and technologically advanced civilisation in the world — not to mention the wealthiest.

It is not a coincidence that there is a straight line between the aspirations of the African youth as expressed in Agenda 2063, and the depiction of a technologically advanced Africa. From the era of the writings of C. L. R James on the majesty of the Haitian Revolution to the current struggle for the dignity of black lives, the liberation and unification of Africa has always been presented as the basis for realizing the goals of freedom. Examining the meaning of African freedom in the current context of massive technological change requires a new language and a new orientation – an orientation that breaks away from the stultifying concepts embraced by a media moguls and social media entrepreneurs who seek to turn citizens into tribal nanobots without a spiritual core. We are reminded that in this era of artificial intelligence (AI) the future of humanity is the struggle between humans that control machines and machines that control humans. The late Stephen Hawkins observed that artificial intelligence can be the worst event in the history of civilisation. He remarked that “unless we learn how to prepare for, and avoid, the potential risks, AI could be the worst event in the history of our civilisation. It brings dangers, like powerful autonomous weapons, or new ways for the few to oppress the many. It could bring great disruption to our economy.”

Through the lens of understanding this digital terrain of struggle in the Global Africa, it is necessary to interrogate the various initiatives on African Youth and the African Futures to carry forward the self-emancipation project that has been stated by every generation of African thinkers.

African scholarly organs such as CODESRIA has engaged the question of the creativity and vibrancy of the African youth and has emerged as one of the primary spaces to inspiring younger Africans in all areas of life. While the African Union seeks to promote the youth in the context of the demographic dividend, the progressive scholars unleash new studies such as 'African futures and Childhood Studies in Africa.'

This body of scholarly work seeks to counteract the polluted images of those who have created an industry out of "Saving the African Child." There is an international pornographic push to promote images of helplessness and of mendacity in the international community. The United Nations itself is caught between the images and plans to Save the African child and the advocacy of Africans who want a free, united and strong Africa. It is a vision of Africa that is grounded in the aspirations of the youth and enshrined in the seven aspirations of the Africa 2063 of the African Union.

The Sustainable development Goals of the United Nations have targeted the youth and there are a score of youth specific objectives spread over six key SDGs: Goal 2 (hunger), Goal 4 (education), Goal 5 (gender equality), Goal 8 (decent work), Goal 10 (inequality) and Goal 13 (climate change). Yet, these targets must be linked to the international struggles against police violence and the killing of African youths. Whether it is the manipulation of child soldiers in Africa or the historic violence against the African Youth, the new directions necessary for the survival and prosperity of the youth is made clear. Currently, the #Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) has brought to the fore the killings of youth internationally. The International Commission of Inquiry on Systemic Racist Police Violence Against People of African Descent in the United States brought evidence before the Human Rights Council of the United Nations on the targeting and killing of youth. The school to prison pipeline in North America is only one manifestation of the continuities of the killing of African youth.

### Beyond the killing of African youth

The United Nations is now itself one of the major terrains of struggles. Representation to the United Nations Human Rights Council and the struggles over reparations have brought out the divisions within the United Nations about questions of racism. Wars and struggles for hegemony in the international marketplace have sought to obscure the demands for justice beyond racial discrimination. This tug of war is especially noteworthy in the struggles over the definition of state violence against black people.

From the era of enslavement, routine killing of youths became a part of the policing culture of North America. Ed Baptist in his scholarship brought to the fore the killing of a 7 year old in Virginia in 1770 by a white colonist. When brought before the judge and questioned as to why he had killed the boy who could not offend him by word because he could not speak or by actions because he was too small, Riggs responded to the judge, "Perhaps if I had not killed him, he would have killed me." This justification for killing of Black people has been routine in the U.S. for over 300 years and has been one of the prime justifications for police killings: that they were acting in self-defense. Even more egregious has been the use of the self-defense narrative by police to justify the killing of Black children and youths in the U.S.

Fast forward to November 22, 2014 when 12-year-old *Tamir Rice* was shot and killed while he was playing with a toy gun in a park in Cleveland, Ohio. Whether it was Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown or Tamir Rice, the political mobilization of the youths have brought out systemic and institutional violence in Europe and North America.

From the Slave Patrols to the Convict Lease System, to the KKK, the ideas of controlling the bodies and movements of Black people became generalized in the society and was linked to the mode of capital accumulation in the U S, or put differently, the US business model. Police departments throughout the U.S. were trained in the ideas of white supremacy, with police forces and the discipline of criminology becoming infused with eugenic ideas.

The unbroken links between the genocide of the First Nation peoples, the enslavement of Africans, the terror of the Ku Klux Klan, Jim Crow violence, the War on Drugs, COINTELPRO and the current militarization of US society has been obscured by the idea that the United States is a bastion of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. The recent uprisings against police violence have brought fresh attention to the roots of racist policing and the killings of innocent Black and Brown peoples.

Since the popularization of the 1619 Project and a more precise understanding of the role of slavery in the US economy, there has been a sharp denial by the academic and political establishment of the reality of systemic racism in the United States. This denial has given rise to the narrative that police violence can be attributed to a “few bad apples.” However, the new ideas of the white replacement theory and the killings in Buffalo New York has brought to the forefront the sickness of white supremacy. After the killing, President Biden stated that, 'White supremacy is a poison' The other reality is to reflect in our community how our work fertilizes the ideas of white replacement theory. One of the challenges of international organs and academics is to get to the root of this poison.

Killing youths in the Americas.

Whether it is Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti or Jamaica, the killing of youths has reached a pandemic level. In many cases the police deploy false narratives to justify killings. Most recently, A special peace tribunal in Colombia has found that at least 6,402 people were murdered by the country's army and falsely declared combat kills in order to boost statistics in the civil war with leftist rebel groups. That number is nearly three times higher than the figure previously admitted by the attorney general's office.

The killings, referred to in Colombia as the “false positives scandal”, took place between 2002 and 2008, when the government was waging war against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (or Farc), a leftist guerrilla insurgency, which ultimately made peace with the government in 2016. Soldiers were rewarded for the manipulated kill statistics with perks, including time off and promotions.

Demography is not destiny

Walter Rodney in the book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* examined how underdevelopment was linked to slavery and colonialism. Since the end of apartheid, there has been a massive recovery of the African population. Wilson Aiwuyor has written on “Calculated Optimism: Africa's Booming Youth Population and Demographic Dividends.” Numerous platforms now relate to the importance of the African youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Africa's population has exceeded 1.2 billion, and is projected to top 2

billion by 2050. In addition to having the highest population growth rate, Africa is one of the regions with the highest proportion of young people as a percentage of its total population.

According to United Nations World Population Prospects, approximately 60% of Africa's population is less than 25 years old. Only 5% of Africa's population falls within the age range of 60 to 80 years old, remarkably different from other regions such as Europe whose estimate for the same age group is 26%. Consequently, while Africa's population doubles in 2050, Europe's, which is currently over 700 million, will decline to 691 million. The social and economic implications of these demographic changes persuade planners to invest in the future of the youth of Africa away from police killings and marginalization.

### Beyond miseducation

Africa has only 15% of global population but possesses 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land. The continent holds 20% of the world's known natural resources. If Africa's area alone can accommodate China, India, US, Western Europe, and Argentina, whose combined 3.6 billion population is more than half the world population, then the continent should be able to sustain a population that would be about 2.1 billion in 40 years. Every day there are statistics about food security, urbanization and all of the questions that the Working Group is seeking to address. These issues demand a new orientation, especially in the areas of education and cultural production.

It is in this context that the focus should be on education for transformation and for the healing of the African child. The African youth is most directly affected by the issues of Global warming. Yet, in the promotion of media and information about activists for climate justice, African youths are erased from the public discussion. Ugandan activist Vanessa Nakate is known throughout Africa as a fighter for justice, yet in the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2020, when the Associated Press took the pictures of youth Activists linked to Greta Thurnberg, the picture of Vanessa Nakate was cropped out.

This was just one more example of excluding African youth in the global discourse of saving African children. Africa can build the capacity to properly manage its resources, develop its human capacity, and maintain a sustainable population growth. There are enormous benefits to be accrued to the continent if its various governments invest massively in education, health care, infrastructure development, youth development and women empowerment. In fact, education and culture are two frontiers of contestation to insulate the African youth with anti-social values. It is in the area of the cognitive skills embedded in the African languages and cultures that now motivate all of the major digital companies to establish a base in Africa. Contemporary issues of social media and influence are directly linked to the eugenic ideas that are now being transmitted through **the algorithms of oppression**. In the growth of social media companies in the twenty-first century, social media networks and their impact on current events of the day seem to be ever more apparent. Even so, little is known exactly about the undercurrents that drive the functions, value, and digital processes of companies such as Twitter, Facebook, Google, YouTube etc. What is known is the motives of these companies to maximize their profits in any way possible. Essentially, social media companies' worth is intrinsically linked to the accumulation of social capital in the form of the data they gather. In exchange of the social capital they absorb, they can then exploit this data for financial gain.

The League of Nations collapsed after the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. The United Nations has been challenged since the NATO invasion of Libya. The current wars in Ukraine now stand before the world as the choices between peace and warfare become clearer. The UN working groups are torn between saving the African child and supporting African initiatives for repair and an end to racism. It is urgent that the working groups of the United Nations rise above the major thrust of planning African futures without the voices and input of the Africans. The SDG goals relating to youth cannot be realized in a vacuum without acknowledging the terrains of struggles that brought the Black Lives Movement to the forefront of international politics. It is in this context that the warning of Fanon becomes important.

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