Taiye Selasi ~ Don’t Ask Where I’m From, Ask Where I’m A Local

When someone asks you where you’re from … do you sometimes not know how to answer? Writer Taiye Selasi speaks on behalf of “multi-local” people, who feel at home in the town where they grew up, the city they live now and maybe another place or two. “How can I come from a country?” she asks. “How can a human being come from a concept?”

About Taiye Selasi:
A writer and photographer of Nigerian and Ghanaian descent, born in London and raised in Boston, now living in Rome and Berlin, who has studied Latin and music, Taiye Selasi is herself a study in the modern meaning of identity. In 2005 she published the much-discussed (and controversial) essay “Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What Is an Afropolitan?),” offering an alternative vision of African identity for a transnational generation. Prompted by writer Toni Morrison, the following year she published the short story “The Sex Lives of African Girls” in the literary magazine *Granta*.

Her first novel *Ghana Must Go*, published in 2013, is a tale of family drama and reconciliation, following six characters and spanning generations, continents, genders and classes.

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Achille Mbembe ~ On The State Of South African Political Life

Achille Mbembe – Photo: www.ru.ac.za

In these times of urgency, when weak and lazy minds would like us to oppose

“thought” to “direct action”; and when, precisely because of this propensity for “thoughtless action”, everything is framed in the nihilistic terms of power for the sake of power – in such times what follows might mistakenly be construed as contemptuous.
And yet, as new struggles unfold, hard questions have to be asked. They have to be asked if, in an infernal cycle of repetition but no difference, one form of damaged life is not simply to be replaced by another.

The force of affect
Indeed the ground is fast shifting and a huge storm seems to be building up on the horizon. May 68? Soweto 76? Or something entirely different?
The winds blowing from our campuses can be felt afar, in a different idiom, in those territories of abandonment where the violence of poverty and demoralization having become the norm, many have nothing to lose and are now more than ever willing to risk a fight. They simply can no longer wait, having waited for too long now.
Out there, from almost every corner of this vast land seems to stretch a chain of young men and women rigid with tension.
As tension slowly swells up, it becomes ever more important to hold on to the things that truly matter.

A new cultural temperament is gradually engulfing post-apartheid urban South Africa. For the time being, it goes by the name “decolonization” – in truth a psychic state more than a political project in the strict sense of the term.
Whatever the case, everything seems to indicate that ours is a crucial moment in the redefinition of what counts as “social protagonism” in this country. Mobilizations over crucial matters such as access to health care, sanitation, housing, clean water or electricity might still be conducted in the name of the implicit promise inherent to the struggle years – that life after freedom will be “better” for all.
But fewer and fewer actually believe it. And as the belief in that promise fast recedes, raw affect, raw emotions and raw feelings are harnessed and recycled back into the political itself. In the process, new voices increasingly render old ones inaudible, while anger, rage and eventually muted grief seem to be the new markers of identity and agency.

Psychic bonds – in particular bonds of pain and bonds of suffering – more than lived material contradictions are becoming the real stuff of political inter-

subjectivity. “I am my pain” – how many times have I heard this statement in the months since #RhodesMustFall emerged? “I am my suffering” and this subjective experience is so incommensurable that “unless you have gone through the same trial, you will never understand my condition” – the fusion of self and suffering in this astonishing age of solipsism and narcissism.

So it is that the relative cultural hegemony the African National Congress (ANC) exercised on black South African imagination during the years of the struggle is fast waning. In the bloody miasma of the Zuma years, these years of stagnation, rent-seeking and mediocrity parading as leadership, there is hardly any center left standing as institutions after institutions crumble under the weight of corruption, a predatory new black élite and the cynicism of former oppressors.
In the bloody miasma of the Zuma years, the discourse of black power, self-affirmation and worldliness of the early 1990s is in danger of being replaced by the discourse of fracture, injury and victimization – identity politics and the resentment that always is its corollary.
Rainbowism and its most important articles of faith – truth, reconciliation and forgiveness – is fading. Reduced to a totemic commodity figure mostly destined to assuage whites’ fears, Nelson Mandela himself is on trial. Some of the key pillars of the 1994 dispensation – a constitutional democracy, a market society, non-racialism – are also under scrutiny. They are now perceived as disabling devices with no animating potency, at least in the eyes of those who are determined to no longer wait. We are past the time of promises. Now is the time to settle accounts.
But how do we make sure that one noise machine is not simply replacing another?

Settling Accounts
The fact is this – nobody is saying nothing has changed. To say nothing has changed would be akin to indulging in willful blindness.
Hyperboles notwithstanding, South Africa today is not the “colony” Frantz Fanon is writing about in his Wretched of the Earth.
If we cannot find a proper name for what we are actually facing, then rather than simply borrowing one from a different time, we should keep searching.

What we are hearing is that there have not been enough meaningful, decisive, radical change, not only in terms of the life chances of the black poor, but – and this is the novelty – in terms of the future prospects of the black middle class.
What is being said is that twenty years after freedom, we have not disrupted enough the structures that maintain and reproduce “white power and

supremacy"; that this is the reason why too many amongst us are trapped in a "bad life" that keeps wearing them out and down; that this wearing out and down of black life has been going on for too long and must now be brought to an end by all means necessary (the right to violence?).
We are being told that we have not radically overturned the particular sets of interests that are produced and reproduced through white privilege in institutions of public and private life – in law firms, in financial institutions such as banking and insurance, in advertising and industry, in terms of land redistribution, in media, universities, languages and culture in general.
"Whiteness", "white power", "white supremacy", "white monopoly capital" is firmly back on the political and cultural agenda and to be white in South Africa now is to face a new-old kind of trial although with new judges – the so-called "born-free".

Politics of impatience
But behind whites trial looms a broader indictment of South African social and political order.
South Africa is fast approaching its Fanonian moment. A mass of structurally disenfranchised people have the feeling of being treated as "foreigners" on their own land. Convinced that the doors of opportunity are closing, they are asking for firmer demarcations between "citizens" (those who belong) and "foreigners" (those who must be excluded). They are convinced that as the doors of opportunity keep closing, those who won't be able to "get in" right now might be left out for generations to come – thus the social stampede, the rush to "get in" before it gets too late, the willingness to risk a fight because waiting is no longer a viable option.

The old politics of waiting is therefore gradually replaced by a new politics of impatience and, if necessary, of disruption. Brashness, disruption and a new anti-decorum ethos are meant to bring down the pretence of normality and the logics of normalization in this most "abnormal" society. Steve Biko, Frantz Fanon and a plethora of black feminist, queer, postcolonial, decolonial and critical race theorists are being reloaded in the service of a new form of militancy less accommodationist and more trenchant both in form and content.
The age of impatience is an age when a lot is said – all sorts of things we had hardly heard about during the last twenty years; some ugly, outrageous, toxic things, including calls for murder, atrocious things that speak to everything

except to the project of freedom, in this age of fantasy and hysteria, when the gap between psychic realities and actual material realities has never been so wide, and the digital world only serves as an amplifier of every single moment, event and accident.
The age of urgency is also an age when new wounded bodies erupt and undertake to actually occupy spaces they used to simply haunt. They are now piling up, swearing and cursing, speaking with excrements, asking to be heard.

They speak in allegories and analogies – the "colony", the "plantation", the "house Negro", the "field Negro", blurring all boundaries, embracing confusion, mixing times and spaces, at the risk of anachronism.
They are claiming all kinds of rights – the right to violence; the right to disrupt and jam that which is parading as normal; the right to insult, intimidate and bully those who do not agree with them; the right to be angry, enraged; the right to go to war in the hope of recovering what was lost through conquest; the right to hate, to wreak vengeance, to smash something, it doesn't matter what, as long as it looks "white".
All these new "rights" are supposed to achieve one thing we are told the 1994 "peaceful settlement" did not achieve – decolonization and retributive justice, the only way to restore a modicum of dignity to victims of the injuries of yesterday and today.

Demythologizing whiteness
And yet, some hard questions must be asked.
Why are we invested in turning whiteness, pain and suffering into such erotogenic objects?
Could it be that the concentration of our libido on whiteness, pain and suffering is after all typical of the narcissistic investments so privileged by this neoliberal age?
To frame the issues in these terms does not mean embracing a position of moral relativism. How could it be? After all, in relation to our history, too many lives were destroyed in the name of whiteness. Furthermore, the structural repetition of past sufferings in the present is beyond any reasonable doubt. Whiteness as a necrophiliac power structure and a primary shaper of a global system of unequal redistribution of life chances will not die a natural death.
But to properly engineer its death – and thus the end of the nightmare it has been for a large portion of the humanity – we urgently need to demythologize it.

If we fail to properly demythologize whiteness, whiteness – as the machine in which a huge portion of the humanity has become entangled in spite of itself – will end up claiming us.
As a result of whiteness having claimed us; as a result of having let ourselves be possessed by it in the manner of an evil spirit, we will inflict upon ourselves injuries of which whiteness, at its most ferocious, would scarcely have been capable.
Indeed for whiteness to properly operate as the destructive force it is in the material sphere, it needs to capture its victim's imagination and turn it into a poison well of hatred.
For victims of white racism to hold on to the things that truly matter, they must incessantly fight against the kind of hatred which never fails to destroy, in the first instance, the man or woman who hates while leaving the structure of whiteness itself intact.
As a poisonous fiction that passes for a fact, whiteness seeks to institutionalize itself as an event by any means necessary. This it does by colonizing the entire realms of desire and of the imagination.
To demythologize whiteness, it will not be enough to force "bad whites" into silence or into confessing guilt and/or complicity. This is too cheap.
To puncture and deflate the fictions of whiteness will require an entirely different regime of desire, new approaches in the constitution of material, aesthetic and symbolic capital, another discourse on value, on what matters and why.

The demythologization of whiteness also requires that we develop a more complex understanding of South African versions of whiteness here and now.
This is the only country on Earth in which a revolution took place which resulted in not one single former oppressor losing anything. In order to keep its privileges intact in the post-1994 era, South African whiteness has sought to intensify its capacity to invest in what we should call the resources of the offshore. It has attempted to fence itself off, to re-maximize its privileges through self-enclaving and the logics of privatization. These logics of offshoring and self-enclaving are typical of this neoliberal age.
The unfolding new/old trial of whiteness won't produce much if whites are forced into a position in which the only thing they are ever allowed to say in our public sphere is: "Look, I am so sorry".

It won't produce much if through our actions and modes of thinking, we end up

forcing back into the white ghetto those whites who have spent most of their lives trying to fight against the dominant versions of whiteness we so abhor.
Furthermore, we must take seriously the fact that “to be black” in South Africa now is not exactly the same as “to be black” in Europe or in the Americas.

After all, we are the majority here. Of course to be a majority is a bit more than the simple expression of numbers. But surely something has to be made out of this sheer weight of numbers. We can use this numerical force to create different dominant standards by which our society live; paradigms of what truly matters and why; entirely new social forms; new imaginaries of interior life and the life of the mind.
We are also in control of arguably the most powerful State on the African Continent. This is a State that wields enormous financial and economic power. In theory, not much prevents it from redirecting the flows of wealth in its hands in entirely new trajectories. As it has been done in places such as Malaysia or Singapore, something has to be made out of this sheer amount of wealth – something more creative and more decisive than our hapless “black economic empowerment” schemes the main function of which is to sustain the lifestyles of the new élite.

The neurotic misery of our age
Finally, it is crucial for us to understand that we are a bit more than just “suffering subjects”. “Social death” is not the defining feature of our history. The fact is that we are still here – of course at a very high price and most likely in a terrible state, but we are here.
We are here – and hopefully we will be here for a very long time – not as anybody else’s creation, but as our own-creation.
To demythologize whiteness is to dry up the mythic, symbolic and immaterial resources without which it can no longer dabble in self-righteousness or in the morbid delight with which, as James Baldwin put it, it contemplates “the extent and power of its own wickedness.” It is to not be put in a position in which we die hating somebody else.
On the other hand, politicizing pain is not the same thing as advocating dolorism. In fact, it must be galling to put ourselves in a position such that those who look at us cannot but pity us victims.

One way of destroying white racism is to prevent whiteness from becoming a deep fantasmatic object of our unconscious.

We need to let go off our libidinal investments in whiteness if we are to squarely confront the dilemmas of white privilege. Baldwin understood this better than any other thinker. “In order really to hate white people”, he wrote, “one has to blot so much out of the mind – and the heart – that this hatred itself becomes an exhausting and self-destructive pose” (Notes of a Native Son, 112).
This is what we have to find out for ourselves – in a black majority country in which blacks are in power, what is the cost of our attachment to whiteness, this mirror object of our fear and our envy, our hate and our attraction, our repulsion and our aspirations?

Part of what racism has always tried to do is to damage its victims’ capacity to help themselves. For instance, racism has encouraged its victims to perceive themselves as powerless, that is, as victims even when they were actively engaged in myriad acts of self-assertion.
Ironically among the emerging black middle class, current narratives of selfhood and identity are saturated by the tropes of pain and suffering. The latter have become the register through which many now represent themselves to themselves and to the world. To give account of who they are, or to explain themselves and their behavior to others, they increasingly tend to frame their life stories in terms of how much they have been injured by the forces of racism, bigotry and patriarchy.

Often under the pretext that the personal is political, this type of autobiographical and at times self-indulgent “petit bourgeois” discourse has replaced structural analysis. Personal feelings now suffice. There is no need to mount a proper argument. Not only wounds and injuries can’t they be shared, their interpretation cannot be challenged by any known rational discourse. Why? Because, it is alleged, black experience transcends human vocabulary to the point where it cannot be named.
This kind of argument is dangerous.

The self is made at the point of encounter with an Other. There is no self that is limited to itself.
The Other is our origin by definition.
What makes us human is our capacity to share our condition – including our wounds and injuries – with others.
Anticipatory politics – as opposed to retrospective politics – is about reaching out to others. It is never about self-enclosure.

The best of black radical thought has been about how we make sure that in the work of repair, certain compensations do not become pathological phenomena.
It has been about nurturing the capacity to resume a human life in the aftermath of irreparable loss.
Invoking Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko and countless others will come to nothing if this ethics of becoming-with-others is not the cornerstone of the new cycle of struggles.
There will be no plausible critique of whiteness, white privilege, white monopoly capitalism that does not start from the assumption that whiteness has become this accursed part of ourselves we are deeply attached to, in spite of it threatening our own very future well-being.

Previously published in http://africasacountry.com/2015/09/achille-mbembe-on-the-state-of-south-african-politics

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André Fernandes ~ Renewable Energy In Slums

Renewable energy is a great opportunity to decrease costs, amplify the access to electricity in underserved areas and generate jobs/income opportunities in the communities.
In Brazil, it's common to see in many slums illegal access to electricity, as people say "gato". In addition to be illegal, the lack of a proper installation let the whole slum vulnerable to accidents, like a fire.

And in addition to the solar energy, what other sources of energy can we imagine for slums?

From the feedback given by Laurent – see on the comments – this idea also connects directly to sanitation management, that's another huge challenge to face

in slums. And IDEO has already worked on a business model for sanitation management in Ghana. Check here: http://fr.slideshare.net/jocelynwyatt/ghana-sanitation-opportunities Considering this IDEO business model on sanitation management, what else could we consider?

Read more: https://challenges.openideo.com/renewable-energy-in-slums

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Thando Njovan ~ On Achille Mbembe's "The State Of South African Political Life"

http://slipnet.co.za/

In light of the events concerning institutional reform in South Africa over the last two years, Achille Mbembe's essay on the political life of the black majority is both timely and important. As other commentators have noted, however, the premises of his arguments are somewhat off-base. While T.O. Molefe critiques the connection Mbembe establishes between black majority rule and the actual material power and say in structural issues in South Africa, Nomalanga Mkhize argues that if the current generation does not have the terms to say what they mean it is because they have been failed by the education system. My own points of disagreement with Mbembe involve the pathologisation of black narrative,

specificallyfically as this pertains to the aftermath of Apartheid, the resonances of which can be felt to this day. In what follows, I briefly engage with these concerns and points of disagreement.

Although concentrating primarily on the issue of movements such as Rhodes Must Fall for the greater part of his essay, Mbembe connects this to criticism of the ANC government and what he perceives as a politics of impatience and a pathology of victimisation among the black middle-class. With regards to the latter, he argues that there is no real discussion going on about politics because the terms of communication have been delimited by the appeal to affect, to "raw emotions and raw feelings [which] are harnessed and recycled back into the political itself". This appeal, he maintains, leads to a shutting down of conversation because at any point black people can just say that "you would not understand unless you have endured the same". There are several reasons why this leap in logic is problematic.

Firstly, Mbembe is collapsing distinctions between strata of political life for black South Africans, strata which are interrelated but distinct. On the one hand, we have the black-led ANC government which has been criticised for not meeting the promises of democracy, for corruption, and so on. On the other hand, we have the disillusionment with the socio-political dream of the Rainbow Nation where all people are treated as equally in the eyes of the law, God, socially, etc. Likewise, located within these systems are the black poor, working class, middle-class, and the elite. Any discussion of political life must therefore account for the levels of difference, difficulties, and privileges as signified by the political location of these subjects.

Both of these strata are further complicated by issues of capital and economic mobility. Black life is, in other words, multiferous and varied and cannot be accounted for or analysed using blanket terms such as "black South Africans". "In the bloody miasma of the Zuma years," Mbembe contends, "the discourse of black power, self-affirmation and worldliness of the early 1990s is in danger of being replaced by the discourse of fracture, injury and victimization – identity politics and the resentment that always is its corollary". This generalisation does not do justice to the multiplicity of black life in South Africa. This means that if we are to start having a conversation about the political state of affairs in our country, there is indeed a need to come up with new terms of engagement, as Mbembe himself acknowledges.

Secondly, it is quite clear that Mbembe is directly referring to the recent nation-wide student 'uprisings' in his diagnosis of the mobilisation of affect and what he contemptuously calls "the fusing of self and suffering in this astonishing age of solipsism and narcissism". This mobilisation, he argues, occurs within a discourse which anachronistically appropriates figures such as Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko. Rather than condemning these associations, perhaps a more crucial questions should be: what kind of resonances do the student movements derive from Fanon and Biko and how are these resonances be remodelled to reflect contemporary circumstances? Two possible answers to these questions appear to be most relevant at present.

As exemplified by Mbembe's own stance on affect, academia has a long and abiding suspicion of emotive language. Lewis Gordon and others have however highlighted Fanon's use of anecdotal narrative to frame his philosophical musings. I would even go so far as to say that his philosophical and psychoanalytical observations stem directly from his engagement with his personal narrative. I do not share this suspicion of narrative, perhaps because I think there are certain dynamics which only come to light via the vehicle of narrative, rather than the stringent and sometimes over-policed language of academese. In the aftermath of human rights abuses such as apartheid, perhaps the main form of narrative that black South Africans can muster currently is that of the autobiographical. There is nothing remarkable or out of place about this, as many societies have adopted this strategy in the past (e.g. dearth of autobiographical writing on the Holocaust and slavery by survivors and/or their descendents). With regards to the uses of personal narrative to mobilise political thought, South Africa is by no means exceptional. This means that political mobilisation and, indeed its very language, need not adhere to established forms in order to be legitimate. In other words, the terms of engagement must be opened up to be more inclusive of all voices.

In his essay, Mbembe employs the psychoanalytical diction with reference to libidinal drives, while simultaneously attempting to regulate the terms through which the psychological impact of injustice on the psyche of black subjects. Rather than seeing expressions of pain as redemptive or as a means of gaining coherence with the self and with others, he instead perceives it as a destructive exercise. How do we heal if we are not able to express our pain? How is regulating the means through which this pain is expressed a constructive act? To

be clear, I am not advocating for the freeflow acceptance of hate speech and racial hatred. Rather, I'm arguing that black people also need space to feel – yes, I'm using affect – themselves. Telling them that their stories do no intellectual work is misplaced. Is it not therefore possible that expressions of pain arise not so much out of victimhood, but rather as attempts to make sense of being survivors of an unjust past in order to come to terms with it and find ways or renegotiating a just future?

Perhaps it is the case that our discussions of political life are inadequate precisely because they neglect to factor in the psychological dynamics embedded within political discourse. What would be valuable would be to examine the ways in which the political and the psychological overlap to form a communal imaginary across all racial divides. It remains to be established how and in what form this kind of work could be undertaken.

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See: http://rozenbergquarterly.com/achille-mbembe-on-the-state-of-south-african-political-life/

NDTV ~ Waterless Toilet By IIT-B Professor Hopes To Put An End To Open Defecation In Rural India, Slums

The Dry San Hygienic Rural Toilet is a waterless system where waste doesn't have to be flushed. Prof Dr Kishore Munshi, senior professor and former dean of the Industrial Design Center at IIT-B, has developed the Dry San to reduce open defecation, improve hygiene, and help vulnerable sections including women and children.

"The project has been developed for rural India, targetting mainly the farming community with the basic premise that there is dearth of water in most rural areas. Thus, the flush toilet cannot be part of the solution.

Therefore, an autonomous solution based on water-less or minimal water usage was invented," said Prof Munshi. The Dry San has been developed after garnering financial support from the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, along with CTech, an IIT-B incubated designed company. It comes in various dimensions, along with an easy manual.

Read more: http://www.ndtv.com/waterless-toilet