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The Actuality of Red Africa

by [Vijay Prashad](#) and [Mikaela Nhondo Erskog](#)

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Topics: [Class](#) [Inequality](#) [Marxism](#) [Race](#) [Socialism](#) Places: [Africa](#)



Logo used by *Parti Africain de l'Indépendance*, a socialist-communist and pan-Africanist group in Senegambia that would later be active in Senegal as *PAI-Rénoation*. Based on depiction in the September/October 1981 issue of *Momsarew*. By [Dahn](#) - Own work, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), [Link](#).

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This article seeks to reflect critically on and extend the analysis of Kevin Ochieng Okoth in *Red Africa: Reclaiming Revolutionary Black Politics* (New York: Verso Books, 2023). The authors are grateful to their colleagues at Tricontinental Pan-Africa (Efemia Chela, Ghassane Koumiya, Grieve Chelwa, Jonis Ghedi Alasow, Kambale Musavuli, Tariro Takuva, and Yvonne Phillips), whose work has produced the overall framework for this assessment of *Red Africa*. Comments from Manolo De Los Santos, Aaron Kamugisha, Dilip Menon, Gabrielle Hosein, Issa Shivji, Mandla Radebe, Peter James Hudson, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore further clarified these thoughts.

In 2020, Kevin Ochieng Okoth, who lives in London, published a broadside in the magazine *Salvage*, where he is also an editor. The essay, "The Flatness of Blackness: Afro-Pessimism and the Erasure of Anti-Colonial Thought," argued that contemporary writing on racism and colonialism has undertaken a deliberate detour around an entire tradition of largely African and Caribbean Marxist writing, a "Red Africa," or an "Afro-Marxism," as he called it, which comprised people

such as Amílcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Agostinho Neto of Angola, Samora Machel of Mozambique, and Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso.¹ The school of thought known as Afropessimism, Okoth wrote, describes a world in which people of African heritage are condemned by modernity to “social death” (to borrow the sociologist Orlando Patterson’s phrase), and in these social conditions can never be seen as or act as political subjects. This tradition of thinking, Okoth argued, means that there is no possibility of any transcendence of the social conditions in a modern world. Such a form of thought, he persuasively contended, immobilizes those who would like to confront racist structures and attitudes; neither can it transform the world into one where humanity can finally exist without hierarchies and qualifications.

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A year and a half later, Okoth returned to the pages of *Salvage* with another powerful essay, “Decolonisation and its Discontents: Rethinking the Cycle of National Liberation.”² In this essay, Okoth took on the approach called Decolonial Studies, which, delinked from an assessment of political economy and political theory, rejected the idea of colonialism, and instead focused on the idea of “coloniality,” which these theories, led by the late Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, suggested was a “mode of power,” and not rooted in the neocolonial structures around the world.³ For Okoth, Decolonial Studies, like Afropessimism, diminishes the economic and political structures of the world and minimizes the fact of the class struggle—if not going so far as to dismiss it altogether. Again, like Afropessimism, the field of Decolonial Studies skips the tradition of national liberation Marxism, or, as Okoth put it vividly, Red Africa. These critiques of Afropessimism and Decolonial Studies showed Okoth that there are several epistemologies that focus on issues of race and racism, but evacuate any space in their theories for praxis. There is simply no room to maneuver, no agency afforded to people of African descent or colonized peoples to struggle to change the world. These epistemologies have become influential in the academies of the Global North, and that social location operates as a powerful social force—including through private and public research foundations—to impose itself on the academies of the Global South; and these theories have had an equally negative impact in increasing the bewilderment in social movements that have emerged out of the spontaneous struggle against the neocolonial structure.⁴ Still, even in the Global North academies, these are

contested approaches that have not been able to suppress the traditions that they seek to malign and overshadow, such as national liberation Marxism. Okoth has taken these two essays from *Salvage* and extended the argument to give us a brief, but punchy book called *Red Africa: Reclaiming Revolutionary Black Politics*. The book opens with a memory of the #RhodesMustFall campaign in South Africa in 2015, when students demanded the erasure of the symbols of the old colonial-apartheid past (or else, demanded that the presence of colonial relics not be normalized) as part of a fight to establish a post-austerity educational system in South Africa. Okoth found that one of the dominant theories propelled by some activists into the protests there, and later in the Black Lives Matter protests in the United States, was bewildering: why would people make arguments from the traditions of Afropessimism that suggested that Blackness “is an eternal condition that precludes Black people’s participation in politics”?⁵

The debates he began to have, which would later be published in *Salvage* and now in *Red Africa*, were not idle, but, as he puts it, were about “the very possibility of a revolutionary Black politics.”⁶ It was clear to Okoth at that time, now further clarified in his book, that the erasure of African politics and philosophy that dates back centuries before colonial conquest, the erasure of the national liberation legacy on the African continent, and the erasure of Marxism in its anticolonial form from the Global South forced a kind of surrender to reality that created an “attitude of despair.”⁷ Part of this erasure is a consequence of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore called the “formation of private intellectuals,” cohorts of people trained in the academies and cut off (almost deliberately) from the side of the dialectic pushed by the working people of the world.⁸ The work of scholars such as Gilmore provides the necessary bridge that links the resources of national liberation Marxism and the imperatives of Okoth’s book. Indeed, through his readings and his assessment, Okoth feels that “the politics of Red Africa have not been exhausted, and that anti-colonial futures might yet be imagined anew.” This is a necessary thesis that Okoth defends in *Red Africa* with verve and credibility.

Origins

A robust criticism of Afropessimism and Decolonial Studies is now available, although few of the critical texts locate these epistemologies in their context as would befit a Marxist analysis; this is precisely what we will try to do in this

section. Almost as bewildering as its contemporary permeations are some of the early uses of Afropessimism in public discourse: the earliest mention in print is attributed to Michel Aurillac, the French Minister of (so-called) Cooperation in the Jacques Chirac government. In a 1987 article, Aurillac cautioned against Afropessimism and the European view that Africa had won the “lottery of contemporary scourges,” only to go on to justify European neoliberal policies on the continent, advocating for the advance of capital, for “private initiative, corporate partnership...[as the] obligatory starting point for economic development.”⁹ For this earlier Afropessimism, Africa was both a disaster and an opportunity, and not a place of struggle to establish sovereignty and dignity. It was pilloried in name by the Guinean scholar Manthia Diawara in his evocative book, *In Search of Africa* (1998).¹⁰

Decades later, Afropessimism took on a new life. Afropessimism’s main voice, Frank B. Wilderson III, published his significant body of work throughout the U.S. presidency of Barack Obama (2009–2017), during which the spate of anti-Black violence did not abate, leading—as it did—to the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013. It certainly was bewildering to see a Black president preside over a state and society convulsed in anti-Black violence, and to watch him attempt to guide state institutions through this violence and the resulting protests. It is not wildly outrageous to assume that, even with a Black man at the helm, the wretched, racist structure in the United States would not budge, and therefore that anti-Blackness is rooted in the very ontology of the modern world. Wilderson’s work *Incognegro* (2008), *Red, White, and Black* (2010), and *Afropessimism* (2020) drew from a long tradition of Afrocentric thought (an illustrative text being Molefi Kete Asante’s *The Afrocentric Idea*, published in 1987), from the “cultural turn” in the North Atlantic academy with its post-Marxist orientation, as well as from a ruthless attack to disenfranchise Black voters in the United States and revoke their right to politics (the high point being the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* case, which undermined the 1965 Voting Rights Act). Though it had outward markers that appealed to young activists in #RhodesMustFall and Black Lives Matter, bandying about thinkers like Frantz Fanon, this Afropessimism fundamentally misread and sidestepped the critical content of key contributors to the Black Studies—and Red Africa—canon. For instance, Okoth gives the example of the sharp distinction that Afropessimists make between the preferable Fanon who wrote on Blackness in 1952 and his later “deviations” in his postcolonial writings.¹¹

If there was no political path forward for African-Americans, then what was the point of any belief in a political agenda or of the possibility of emancipation within what was seen by this tradition as a fundamentally anti-Black culture and society? The tradition of Afropessimism, having rejected Marxism, retreated into a consideration of culture, and forged a politics of permanent defeat.

What is substantially absent in the key work of Afropessimism is the theoretical arsenal produced on the African continent that has engaged in debates around the idea of an “African traditional society,” a term mobilized by sections of African socialists to justify their own political path out of colonialism. One of the most significant critics of the idea of an “African traditional society” is the Beninois scholar Paulin Houtondji, whose *Sur la philosophie africaine* (1976) provides a strong rejoinder to the “ethnophilosophy” that takes refuge in partial knowledge of African pasts and that does not acknowledge the actual dynamic of present African society, the actual movements that are trying to overcome a long—but not eternal—history of oppression and exploitation.¹² Another critic of the idea of African timelessness is the Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe, whose work (especially *On the Postcolony* [2000]) advances, among other things, an attempt to engage the economic violence visited on African countries by structural adjustment policies at a time when Afro-Marxism was on the decline as a hegemonic explanatory system.¹³ Though he is dismissive of Marxism and national liberation as “hollow constructs of dead elements,” as Okoth points out, rather than despair, Mbembe was in search of “the core of a veritable politics of freedom.”¹⁴ None of these assessments or gestures in pursuit of an affirmative politics made their way into the foundations of Afropessimism.

Decolonial Studies has a more bewildering origin story, having emerged in the work largely of South American scholars who went into exile in North America, but moving away from the wide spectrum of Marxism rooted in class relations and the class struggle, not when things appeared futile in South America, but when new projects appeared after the election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998. It was after Chávez had embarked on a mission to break with the United States and integrate Latin America in a Bolivarian project that Quijano published his “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” which defined itself against European thought and sought answers to the problems of dependency not in the class struggle (even as developed by his fellow Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui in his 1928 *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*), but in a

highly romantic understanding of Indigenous thought and traditions (there was no assessment in this tradition, for instance, of the emergence of Evo Morales, an Indigenous man, as the leader of the Movement for Socialism in Bolivia in 1998 and of his presidency from 2006 to 2019, with some members of this broad school even supporting the *coup d'état* against him).¹⁵ For all the talk of decoloniality, the actual texts of these writers rarely engage with thinkers of African origin, and even less frequently with the epoch-making trans-Atlantic trade in human beings.¹⁶ Quijano's career began with books rooted in the class struggle (*El movimiento campesino peruano y sus líderes* [1965] and *Crisis imperialista y clase obrera en América Latina* [1974]), but the new work rejected that entire tradition of national liberation Marxism and its promise.¹⁷

The term "decolonial" has been widely used outside the boundaries set by Quijano and others, who use the term to focus on the cultural side of the struggle against colonialism. Okoth does not tread into this political universe, but it is substantial and important. The historian Dilip Menon has laid out three "clusters of ideas" that define such studies.¹⁸ First, there is the crucial question of who gets to theorize, and what counts as theorization. There is a tendency to say that intellectuals of the Global South *describe* reality, whereas the scholars of the Global North *theorize* it. Part of this attempt to decolonize knowledge is to be alert to the "existing traditions" of intellectual thought in the Global South.

Second, translation of ideas from one language community to another is not an act of transparency, but of deep attention to the slips and slides of different ideas and concepts in different intellectual worlds. Intellectual thought, Menon writes, should not be a "monologue," but a dialogue across languages and conceptual lineages. Finally, there is a case to be made against the idea of time as neutral, when in fact different cultural traditions work with their own sense of time in terms not only of how one lives in the present, but how one understands the past. There are civilizations in our midst that cannot see beyond a few days or the life span of a human, whereas others make policy based on their aspirations for the next century. These reflections are not antithetical to an assessment of the class relations in a society, nor do they ignore, for instance, Marxism in the name of a critique of Eurocentrism.

While it is possible to understand why Wilderson and others developed an Afropessimist orientation given the harsh realities of racism in the United States, it is almost impossible to understand the politics of surrender within Decolonial Studies. Politics does not move in a linear direction, but zigs and zags with

advances and defeats as part of the struggle to emancipate humanity. It requires a great deal of intellectual courage to remain committed to a politics of hope at a time of despair, to catalogue the uprisings provoked by the contradictions of our time, and to theorize the capacity of these spontaneous moves toward the reconstitution of a more organized left-wing politics. The *Caracazo* of 1989, a spontaneous uprising against the austerity policies in Venezuela, emboldened Chávez, who drew the fractions of the left around him not only to win a presidential election in 1998 but to radically transform the apparently intransigent Venezuelan state in a Bolivarian and socialist direction. None of this was taken in hand by traditions of thought that had already departed from the actual historical processes and taken refuge in a philosophical undertaking that could not generate any strategy or tactics (in an interview in 2022, Wilderson said, “Afropessimism doesn’t answer Vladimir Lenin’s question, *What is to be done?*”).¹⁹ Chávez, like Morales, embraced Indigenous traditions and thought, creating a left politics adequate to the times but also built on the national liberation Marxist projects of a previous generation (including drawing from Cuban Marxism, a necessary and crucial resource for all Latin America).

Surrender

Okoth lays out three features crucial to the operation of Afropessimism and Decolonial Studies. First, there is a dismissal of any serious attention to class relations and to the class struggle, which means—in essence—a rejection of Marxism. The entire Marxist tradition is pilloried for being Eurocentric, despite the long history of engagement by non-Europeans and the long history of elaboration of the Marxist tradition to be “slightly stretched” (as Fanon put it) or revised “to make it more precise and give it an even wider field of application” (as Cabral put it) in order to understand the relationship of the slave trade and colonialism to capitalism.²⁰ The critique of Eurocentrism emerged from within Marxism through the work of Joseph Needham, Irfan Habib, and Samir Amin long before it was adopted as a way to attack Marxism from without.²¹ Second, there is a dismissal of praxis, with the emphasis being no longer on trying to change the world, and not even—in the case of Afropessimism—of trying to understand the world, but merely to recognize hierarchies as eternal, and hope as futile. This reprieve from the idea of change draws thought into an impasse, allowing intellectuals effectively to remain detached from the actualities of the struggles of humans to attain some kind of dignity in the world.²²

Third, because of the magnetism of the proponents of national liberation Marxism, even the most anti-Marxist thinkers are drawn to them. The challenge for the anti-Marxist theorist is to domesticate the national liberation leaders and treat them as assemblers of ideas and not people who were part of movements to transform the world. Effectively, these anti-Marxist currents—such as Afropessimism and Decolonial Studies—surrender to reality, allowing themselves to believe that a critique of epistemology and ontology is sufficient as a form of radicalism.

An example of what Okoth describes is to be found in the current revival of interest in Walter Rodney, a Guyanese intellectual who was assassinated in Georgetown as he built the Working People's Alliance, and is part of Okoth's Red Africa. Verso Books is publishing the totality of Rodney's work in finely designed editions. Of the entirety of Rodney's published work, there is no book that is as widely read as *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972; the 2018 Verso edition also includes a foreword by Angela Davis). Rodney left the Caribbean to teach at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania for two stints (1966–1967 and 1969–1974). During his second time at the Hill, as the University was known, Rodney wrote *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, building on the insights of Third World dependency theory and on his own understanding of the role of the slave trade and the colonial assault on the African continent. The ancestor of that book is Kwame Nkrumah's remarkable 1965 volume, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, which was written while Nkrumah was the President of Ghana, and was one of the reasons why he was overthrown in a Western-backed *coup d'état* in 1966.²³ Rodney writes firmly in a national liberation Marxist tradition that includes such figures as Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong, and Nkrumah.²⁴ The resonant connections between this book and Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*, published in 1971, could not be clearer.²⁵ This is a history written from a Marxist standpoint with great literary verve, rooted in the anticipation of a necessary socialist future. In March 2023, Columbia University's anthropology department held a symposium to honor Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. The presentations form a special section in the journal *small axe*, published by Duke University Press behind a paywall. The essays are all fascinating, and the authors are bright people with an accumulated knowledge among them that would make them fabulous companions.²⁶ But most of the essays are

unsatisfying because they write about Rodney despite himself, puzzled by his commitment not only to the Marxist method but also to communist politics, trying to resurrect a post-Marxist Rodney for our times (indeed, a volume of Rodney's political writings was published by Verso in 2022 with the ungainly title, *Decolonial Marxism*, as if Decolonial Studies and Marxism could be so easily brought together in the work of a man who was not “decolonial” *avant la lettre*, but was an anti-imperialist Marxist).

One essay, by David Scott, professor at Columbia University and editor of *small axe*, struck us as emblematic of the problems being raised by Okoth. Scott's insightful essay contains all the limitations of the interest in a post-Marxist Rodney, but we want to focus on two of these limitations:

- Post-Marxist Rodney: A clichéd attack on Marxism emerged in the 1980s from various currents that would come to define poststructuralism and postmodernism. One of the key accusations against Marxism is that historical materialism was anchored in a view of history as stages, with a teleological assumption of the communist finality. Scott, for instance, dismisses Rodney's “stagist and developmentalist teleology.”²⁷ This argument is disingenuous because it elides the fact that all scientific historical accounts must periodize the long sweep of history (and therefore provide “stagist” concepts to differentiate the periods). Indeed, even Scott in his own essay suggests that we have moved from a revolutionary period to a period of reparations, one stage following the other. Apart from the more wooden Marxist texts (and which tradition does not have its share of wood), historical materialism does not have a religious attitude to these stages, but has fundamentally tried to best understand the precapitalist past to better grasp the way capitalism emerged in different parts of the world. Marxists in India, for instance, have struggled to assess the precapitalist and precolonial social formations, partly to better understand how the capitalist structure absorbed hierarchies of caste and tribe into modern Indian society.²⁸ There was no illusion that precapitalist India was identical to precapitalist Europe, something Rodney made very clear in his own writings about precapitalist Africa. A cartoonish dismissal of “stagism” allows for Marxism to be set aside and for a return—in fact—to a pre-Marxist attitude to human life.
- A Post-Revolutionary Rodney: The criticism regarding teleological thinking is equally mystifying. All thought about the present considers the sweep of history that leads toward the future. From its origin, Marxism has argued that the contradictions of capitalism lead in two directions, either to annihilation for the

planet and its populations or to socialism (in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels describe the class struggle within capitalism as leading “either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes”).²⁹ There is no inevitable future. The advancement of capitalism develops the objective conditions for a socialist society, but the subjective forces do not emerge punctually. Capitalism’s contradictions produce spontaneous unrest—a trade union consciousness here and an outbreak against hierarchical behavior there—but these forms of unrest must be generalized into a mass politics that could become powerful enough to drive a transition from capitalism to socialism. These very forces, indeed, can go in the opposite direction, motivated by the wretched hierarchies of the past to a consciousness of hatred that turns toward forms of fascism.

Rodney created the Working People’s Alliance in Guyana to fight for the “revolutionary reconstitution of society at large,” and to prevent the slip into barbarism of poverty and neofascism. Scott argues that the time of revolution is over, and that we are now in the time of reparations and repair, that the ground of exploitation no longer defines us, but that the new ground is of debt.³⁰ It is certainly true that the subjective forces that would build popular power and move a revolutionary agenda forward are not present today in large parts of the world, and certainly not in the English-speaking Caribbean that had harnessed important left formations in the 1970s (leading to the New Jewel Revolution in Grenada). However, that there is a weakened force now does not mean that there cannot be any such driver, even in the near term, and it does not mean that the possibility of a revival of the left in the English-speaking Caribbean is foreclosed (and indeed, the elements of such a revival are very much in place amongst the struggles of socialist feminists, land activists, Indigenous communities, trade unions, and what in Jamaica are called “the sufferers” and the “undercommons”). Scott suggests that a program of reparations is better than a revolutionary program because it is not teleological, since progress “is not one of its generative categories” and since there is no need to worry about “a future to be won.”³¹

Scott’s demand for reparations is one shared with most governments of the Caribbean. In 2014, the twenty countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) endorsed a CARICOM Ten-Point Plan for Reparatory Justice, which actually details the strategy for reparations. In August 2023, Barbados Prime Minister Mia Amor Motley held an Emancipation Conversation in St.

Michael, Barbados, with St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo (now Ambassador of the Africa Export and Import Bank), and the former Prime Minister of Jamaica P. J. Patterson, where they jointly called for reparations from the Global North. That there is a popular upsurge on this issue is without doubt, which is why this kind of high-level event takes place; whether these leaders are actually serious about this issue is to be seen (which, after all, led to the second *coup d'état* against Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004). Then, in November 2023, at a meeting of CARICOM and the fifty-five member African Union, Carla Barnett of Belize, the secretary general of CARICOM said, “We are at an important inflection point in the global movement for reparatory justice,” and that the countries of Africa and the Caribbean must “speak with one voice to advance the call for reparations.”³² When historian Verene Shepherd echoed this call in 2000, it was perhaps then, as Scott positions it, a radical demand. Now, it is in fact a mainstream demand in the Caribbean.

Without a class demand here, the reparations will likely go to a national bourgeoisie who will not advance any agenda to benefit the people. Having turned away from revolutionary politics to reparations, Scott turns to a social democratic politics (“there is a moral-political necessity to struggle for social justice, social equality, and political partnership”), writes himself deeper into despair by saying that the idea of a vanguard party “scarcely remains tenable,” and then says that what we need are “new conceptions of political organization and political mobilization,” but does not offer any suggestions.³³ Such a conclusion marks a decisive break with the revolutionary tradition, coming to terms with the idea of the permanency of capitalism, but then saying that there is no instrument at hand to assist in the kind of humanizing of capitalism that he would prefer. This is an unconditional surrender to the eternal present. It is this surrender that motivates Okoth’s turn to what he calls Red Africa, the world of national liberation Marxism and Afro-Marxism—terms that he uses interchangeably.

Actualities

Red Africa offers brief biographies of several pan-African Marxists, and then abruptly suggests, “It is up to us to build a communism for our times from the ruins of Red Africa.”³⁴ What he does not provide is a map of the current

struggles—led by organizations from a range of left political traditions—to build a new possibility for the African continent. These struggles emerge out of an antipathy to the colonial attitudes and structures of the Global North that define African possibilities. In the catalog of these recent atrocities stand NATO’s destructive war on Libya; the U.S. military project called AFRICOM and its number of military bases from Accra to Djibouti; the punctual French military interventions in Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, and Niger; and the use of the International Monetary Fund to force African states to submit via austerity policies and threats of default to the will of global mining companies.³⁵ This review does not have space to chart out the entirety of the politics, but any such map would have to include the following:

1. The vibrancy in the Sahel (with the governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—taking their inspiration from Sankara—driving a politics that is deeply patriotic, anti-French, and increasingly anti-imperialist).
2. The revival of a socialist and pan-Africanist agenda through the network known as Pan-Africanism Today, with its actual network of political schools in Ghana, South Africa, and Tunisia.
3. The emergence of the West African People’s Organisation, with a coordinating council led by Philippe Noudjenoume of the Communist Party of Benin.
4. The struggles of a range of political forces in Sudan that led to the revolution of 2018–19, driven by the National Consensus Forces, Forces of Freedom and Change, local resistance committees, Sudanese Professionals Association, with the Sudanese Communist Party involved in almost all these mass platforms.

To this review must be added new institutions that have entered the battle of ideas on the African continent:

1. A robust new energy in Kenya produced by the Ukombozi Library, the Organic Intellectuals Network, and Vita Books, each of them lifting up the national liberation Marxist legacy of the assassinated Pio Gama Pinto and others.³⁶
2. A new generation of scholars across the continent who are attentive to the treatment of the African economy as both a crisis for the people and an opportunity for multinational firms, and who are aware of the racist and sexist concepts used to displace the centrality of the African people, have now formed at least two platforms to put forward their own agenda. First, Nawi, or Afrifem Macroeconomics Collective, gathers feminists into a network to intervene in

debates around macro-economic policy, with their focus being to put at the core the labor of working women.³⁷ Second, a collective Nawi works closely with, is the Collective on African Political Economy (CAPE), coordinated by Grieve Chelwa. In April 2023, CAPE released its opening statement, the last paragraph of which deserves to be quoted at length:

CAPE is a new grouping of Africans from different walks of life that are committed to the economic, and thus total, emancipation of the African continent and the Third World more broadly. CAPE hopes to recapture the emancipatory scholarship and politics of a previous generation of intellectuals that emerged from the post-independence movement in the 1960s and reformulate it to respond to the needs of today's world. The lessons of that generation and the institutional infrastructure that it built have been forgotten largely as a result of IMF and World Bank-inspired structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) that began in the 1980s. The SAPs are responsible for widespread destruction, including the evisceration of progressive scholarly communities in Africa and much of the Third World. It is precisely such communities that CAPE hopes to bring to life to rebuild a present, and future, that centres the needs and aspirations of the majority.³⁸

3. In 2024, the centenary birth year of Cabral, the Fundação Amílcar Cabral in Praia (Cape Verde) will hold a series of events, including the publication of several selections from Cabral. The publication of Antonio Tomás's biography of Cabral (in 2007 in Portuguese and in 2022 in English) is a landmark event as we start to recover his full legacy.³⁹
4. The establishment of the Centre Culturel Andrée Blouin in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which drew in and revitalized the energies of the likes of the late Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, and its agenda to revive the work of Blouin—a close comrade of Patrice Lumumba—will help vitalize the Lumumbist currents within the DRC, where they are either under repression or have been incorporated into the system.⁴⁰
5. A landmark three-volume biography of Julius Nyerere (*Development as Rebellion*), written by Issa Shivji, Saida Yahya-Othman, and Ng'wanza Kamata, was published in 2020 by Dar es Salaam's classic Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, run by Walter Bgoya. Mkuki na Nyota has published Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, but also work by Agostinho Neto, Samora Machel, and others from Okoth's Red Africa canon.⁴¹ Shivji, Yahya-Othman, and Bgoya emerged politically in Dar es Salaam around the circle of radicals that included

Rodney. Now, they work in a context that includes Tanzania's vibrant peasant movement Mviwata.

6. Regarding the peasantry, theoretical work on the agrarian struggles on the African continent was advanced at the African Institute for Agrarian Studies, based in Harare, Zimbabwe, now called the Sam Moyo African Institute of Agrarian Studies after its remarkable founder, Sam Moyo, who died in 2015. The Institute created an Agrarian South Network in 2002, and then a decade later, the important journal, *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*. The Network holds a summer school and a training institute for young scholars from across the three continents of the Global South. Such institutes grew on the soil tilled by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, formed in 1973 by a number of intellectuals who came out of the stream of Marxism and national liberation. The council publishes over ten journals in which one can read the thinking of African scholars about African realities.
7. The revival of the intellectual tradition and political legacy of Nkrumah has been long overdue, but welcome. Credit for this goes to the Socialist Movement of Ghana, which has been holding annual events to remember the ousting of Nkrumah on February, 24, 1966, on what they call the "Day of Shame," and has published *The Great Deception*, first in 2005 and now in its fourth edition in 2024, which collects the key documents on the coup. It is through this revival that *The Revolutionary Thoughts of Kwame Nkrumah* has been published in collaboration by Inkani Books in South Africa and Militant Books in Ghana.⁴²
8. Finally, in South Africa, Inkani Books, the new pan-Africanist publishing house, which has released volumes that select the work of Sankara and Cabral and the first Zulu translation of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth (Izimpabanga Zomhlaba)*. Rooted at The Commune Bookshop in Johannesburg, South Africa, Inkani Books has an ambition, through the African Union of Left Publishers, to energize the publication of left books on the African continent.

This list of movements and institutions involved in the battle of ideas on the African continent is merely indicative. They constitute a part of the actual world of Red Africa that Okoth gestures toward. There is soberness here, but also a sensibility that says more organizations need to be built, more mass platforms need to be developed, and more theories, programs, and strategies need to be debated.

Notes

1. ↪ Kevin Ochieng Okoth, “The Flatness of Blackness: Afro-Pessimism and the Erasure of Anti-Colonial Thought,” *Salvage*, January 16, 2020.
2. ↪ Kevin Ochieng Okoth, “Decolonisation and Its Discontents: Rethinking the Cycle of National Liberation,” *Salvage*, September 22, 2021.
3. ↪ A very different genealogy of the idea of “coloniality” in the Caribbean, rooted in the dynamic work of Sylvia Wynter and C. L. R. James, is presented in Aaron Kamugisha, *Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).
4. ↪ This was a point made vividly by Aijaz Ahmad in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literature* (London: Verso Books, 1992).
5. ↪ Kevin Ochieng Okoth, *Red Africa: Reclaiming Revolutionary Black Politics* (New York: Verso, 2023), ix.
6. ↪ Okoth, *Red Africa*, x.
7. ↪ Okoth, *Red Africa*, ix.
8. ↪ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Public Enemies and Private Intellectuals (1993)” in *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation* (London: Verso, 2022).
9. ↪ “[Des forces réactionnaires no. 6: Le discours afropessimiste](#),” *Cases rebelles*, February 2023, cases-rebelles.org
10. ↪ Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
11. ↪ As a counter to the Afro-pessimistic reading of Fanon, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, [Frantz Fanon: the Brightness of Metal](#), Dossier no. 26, March 2, 2020, thetricontinental.org.
12. ↪ Paulin J. Houtondji, *Sur La Philosophie Africaine: Critique De L’ethnophilosophie* (Paris: Maspéro, 1976).
13. ↪ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), or in the original French: *De la postcolonie, Essai sur l’imagination politique dans l’Afrique contemporaine* (Paris, Karthala, 2000).
14. ↪ Okoth, *Red Africa*, 14.
15. ↪ Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000); José Carlos Mariátegui, *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la Realidad Peruana* (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1928); Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Pilar Troya Fernández, Ana Maldonado, and Vijay Prashad, “[A Letter to Intellectuals Who Deride Revolutions in the Name of Purity](#),” MR Online, November 20, 2019.

16. ↵ For a fascinating account of the journey of decolonial thought out of North America and into Africa, see Suren Pillay, "The Problem of Colonialism: Assimilation, Difference, and Decolonial Theory in Africa," *Critical Times* 4, no. 3 (2021).
17. ↵ Aníbal Quijano, "El movimiento campesino peruano y sus líderes," *Revista Trimestral América Latina* 8, no. 1 (March 1965) and *Crisis imperialista y clase obrera en América Latina* (Lima: edición del autor), 1974.
18. ↵ Dilip Menon, "Decolonising Theory: Thinking from the Global South," *Seminar*, no. 747 (2021); ed. Dilip Menon, *Changing Theory: Concepts from the Global South* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2022). Some of these concerns were at the heart of the Coloniality Working Group at the State University of New York at Binghamton in the early 1990s, and their insights can be found in a special issue of *CR: The New Centennial Review* (vol. 3, no. 3 [Fall 2003]), edited by Greg Thomas.
19. ↵ George Yancy, "Afropessimism Forces Us to Rethink Our Most Basic Assumptions About Society," *Truthout*, September 14, 2022.
20. ↵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 31; Amílcar Cabral, *Tell No Lies, Claim No Easy Victories* (Johannesburg: Inkani Books, 2022).
21. ↵ John Bellamy Foster, "Marxian Ecology, East and West: Joseph Needham and a Non-Eurocentric View of the Origins of China's Ecological Civilization," *Monthly Review* 73, no. 5 (October 2023): 1–12, and Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History. Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 1995).
22. ↵ Aijaz Ahmad and Vijay Prashad, *The Political Marx* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books), 2023.
23. ↵ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965); Susan Williams, *White Malice: The CIA and the Covert Recolonization of Africa* (New York: Public Affairs, 2021), 495.
24. ↵ For an overview of that national liberation Marxist tradition, see Vijay Prashad, introduction to *Selected Ho Chi Minh* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2022).
25. ↵ Eduardo Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (Mexico: Siglo XXI Editores, 1971), or, in English, *Open Veins of Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992). The connection is made as well by Leo Zelig, "The World Turned Upside Down: Rodney's 1972 Masterpiece," *Review of African Political Economy*, November 10, 2020, roape.net.
26. ↵ Three of the essays in particular bristle with insights: Natasha Shivji's "Universalism in Unevenness: Writing History at the Hill," Peter James Hudson's

- “History, Method, and Myth: Walter Rodney and the Geographies of Black Radicalism,” Richard Drayton’s “Reading for Time in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*,” and D. Alissa Trotz and Nigel Westmass’s “Insurgent Knowledges: Reading *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* alongside the Rupture in Guyana,” all in *small axe*, no. 72, November 2023.
27. ↪ David Scott, “Between Revolution and Repair: *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* in a Caribbean Intellectual Tradition,” *small axe* 27, no. 3 (November 2023): 67.
28. ↪ The ideas of Marx on the Asiatic mode of production, for instance, varied over time and do not have the narrow meaning that is often imposed on the concept. For Marx’s own writings, see *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Sources, Development, and Critique in the Writings of Karl Marx*, ed. Lawrence Krader (Assen: Van Gorcum and Comp BV, 1975). Key essays in a lively debate in India about the precolonial period have been assembled by Harbans Mukhia in *The Feudalism Debate* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999). See also Samir Amin’s concept of the “tributary mode of production” in *Uneven Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 13–30. The discussion in a special issue of *Journal of Peasant Studies* 12, nos. 2–3 (1985) is very informative, particularly the essays by R. S. Sharma (“How Feudal Was Indian Feudalism?”), Irfan Habib (“Classifying Pre-colonial India”), Frank Perlin (“Concepts of Order and Comparison, with a Diversion on Counter Ideologies and Corporate Institutions in Late Pre-colonial India”), and Chris Wickham (“The Uniqueness of the East”).
29. ↪ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2019), 8.
30. ↪ In fact, Scott has been treading this ground for decades. The interview Scott conducted with Professor Rupert Lewis of the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica, is called “The Dialectic of Defeat” (*small axe* 5, no. 2 [2001]). There is a hint in Scott’s essay of an earlier criticism that says that Rodney sacrificed the “dialect” for the “dialectic,” standing away from his ground and too firmly positioning his feet in Marxism. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, “Dialect and Dialectic,” *Bulletin of the African Studies Association of the West Indies*, no. 6 (December 1973).
31. ↪ Okoth, *Red Africa*, 81.
32. ↪ Joanne Clark, “Regional Leaders Want Collaborative Effort with Africa to Address Reparation Issues,” *Caribbean National Weekly*, November 16, 2023.
33. ↪ Okoth, *Red Africa*, 82.

34. ↪ Okoth, *Red Africa*, 128.
35. ↪ See Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Defending Our Sovereignty: US Military Bases in Africa and the Future of African Unity*, Dossier no. 42, July, 2021. At Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, we have built an archive of material on this context, such as *Resource Sovereignty: The Agenda for Africa's Exit from the State of Plunder*, Dossier no. 16, May 7, 2019; *Defending Our Sovereignty: US Military Bases in Africa and the Future of African Unity*, Dossier no. 42, July 5, 2021; and *Life or Debt: The Stranglehold of Neocolonialism and Africa's Search for Alternatives*, Dossier no. 63, April 11, 2023.
36. ↪ For an introduction, see Shiraz Durrani, *Pio Gama Pinto: Kenya's Unsung Martyr, 1927–1965* (Nairobi: Vita Books, 2018) and eds. Lewis M. Njuguna and Nicholas Mwangi, *Kenyan Organic Intellectuals Reflect on the Legacy of Pio Gama Pinto* (Québec: Daraja Press, 2021). For more voices from the Kenyan Organic Intellectuals Network, see eds. Nicholas Mwangi and Lewis Maghanga, *Breaking the Silence on NGOs in Africa* (Québec: Daraja Press, 2023).
37. ↪ For an excellent introduction to their thinking, see Joanita Najjuko and Crystal Simeoni, "Love or Labour?: The Invisible Wheel that Turns the World," *Interventions* 3, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, November 6, 2023.
38. ↪ "The IMF Is Never the Answer: A Statement from the Collective on African Political Economy," in Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, *Life or Debt*.
39. ↪ António Tomás, *Amílcar Cabral: The Life of a Reluctant Nationalist* (Johannesburg: Jacana Press, 2021).
40. ↪ Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba Bazunini, *The Thought and Practice of an Emancipatory Politics*, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, July 20, 2022 and *The Congolese Fight for their Own Wealth* (Dossier no. 77, June 2024), Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, Centre Culturel Andrée Blouin, Centre for Research on the CongoKinshasa, and Likambo Ya Mabele (Land Sovereignty Movement).
41. ↪ Saida Yahya-Othman, Ng'wanza Kamata, and Issa G. Shivji, *Development as Rebellion: A Biography of Julius Nyerere* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2020).
42. ↪ Vijay Prashad and Efemia Chela, *The Revolutionary Thoughts of Kwame Nkrumah*, (Johannesburg: Inkani Books; Accra: Militant Books, 2024) with prefaces by Kwesi Pratt Jr. (Secretary General of the Socialist Movement of Ghana) and Francis Nkrumah (son of Kwame Nkrumah).

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