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Tendai Rinos Mwanaka (Editor), *Africanization and Americanization Anthology: Africa Vs North America : Searching for Inter-racial, Interstitial, Inter-sectional, and Interstates*. Zimbabwe: Mwanaka Media and Publishing Pvt. Ltd. Year: 2018. 273 pp. ISBN # 9780797486164.

Reviewed by Harriet Lewis, University of Phoenix & Principal Consultant, Konesens Development,

Africanization and Americanization Anthology is an ambitious project that connects both similar and different lived and historical experiences. It a collection of works from multiple genres that tackle identity, angst, and anxiety through the struggle for freedom. It also serves as a reflection and transformation through the over-arching theme of an urgency to resist—to resist the accepted status quo, to resist the structural oppression, and to resist self-hatred.

The authors and writing styles are diverse yet harmonious. On one hand, they reflect a coming of age and consciousness of one's identity while on the other many address complex issues such as labor and systemic bias. The beauty of the anthology is that it is a representative work, collecting authors who experience the human condition from various vantage points and privileges. While the lives and experiences of the authors span continents and racial identities, the editor manages to create a level of cohesion.

The challenge of reviewing an anthology of over one hundred works from various genres is avoiding review of each work independently. The compilation is divided into ten sections; however, as with the challenge of editing an anthology, some of the works included did not fit into any of the identified parts and seemed randomly placed at times. The themes of subsections included: *Institutional Racism, Leadership and Governance; Slave Trade; Nonfictions; Self-Hatred; Racism, Bigotry, Tribalism, and Tragedies; Migrants, Irritants, Aliens and Assimilation; Fictions; Language, Identity, Colour and Colourism; Cultural Diversity, Transcontinental, Transactional, Meeting Spaces; and Play*.

Some selected writings demonstrate a significant nuanced expression of the depth of oppression and struggle. A few notables include Tanatsei Gambura's *Sophie*, Raymond Nat Turner's *The Hyphen Between Africa and Amerikan is Wyoming—wide*, Wanjohi wa Makokha's *From Exile to Inxile*, Allen Kolski Horowitz's *Primary Facts*, Sheree Renée Thomas' *Return Song, or Why I Went South*, and Paris Smith's *Country Club*.

Given the purpose of this book, the themes seemed out of order. It would have made more sense to begin with *Part Two: Slave Trade*; Mwanaka writes the opening narrative in the section on slavery, in which he eloquently writes about people who have lost everything reclaiming an intentionality to re-connection and freedom. In the melody of what one 'leaves' and 'unleaves'

he writes, “They leave the road that seemed to twist and turn on its way to an African address. They unleave the bridge that has waited to connect them.” This is the purpose of the anthology—to re-connect people across time and space who have been disconnected or separated by race, class, ethnicity, religion and to inspire a change that liberates one from oppression, even when we are our own oppressor.

Tanatsei Gambura’s *Sophie* powerfully illustrates an experience of self-hate or racial identity conflict. She shares an experience not uncommon for little Black girls growing up under colonization or as an oppressed minority, influenced by standards of beauty that do not reflect them, who sees that everything good and perfect is attributed to others who do not look like them. She opens with a seven-year old girl’s need for multi-colored crayons owned by another girl whose skin she desires.

“Those damned crayons spread out on
The table the opposite side of the
Hemisphere, they engendered
My misfortune.

They gleamed at me, magnificent in their resplendent multi-colored skins.
Side by side-
-staring.

The little girl reaches out to the owner of the crayons who is White and is rejected. By the end of the poem, we read of a young woman seeking to reclaim the identity of the mother who bore her. The little girl’s desire to wash her brown skin down the drain is reminiscent of Whoopi Goldberg’s 1984 stand up performance of a little girl who wears a white shirt on her head and imagines that it is her long blond hair that would transport her to places she sees on television as she desires to be White.

Raymond Nat Turner eloquently captures the lived realities of institutional racism in the United States in *The Hyphen Between Africa and Amerikan is Wyoming—wide*. A prose about the hyphenated version of the ethnic label African American, which was created to connect Blacks in the United States to the African continent as a whole, who could not claim a specific country as their ancestral origin due to the way Africans were enslaved and transported to the Americas. A controversial hyphen at one point in time, Turner punctuates through his poem that connecting the descendants of enslaved Africans is not an easy feat. Impacted by broken promises and systemic racism, in reference to the length of the hyphen Turner writes,

Plantation to ghetto—
Long as 56 licks last
on Los Angeles streets
long as the list of white jurors
trying black men accused
long as the sentences to San Quentin
and Angola fused
long as the serpentine comma

between “No justice, No peace”
long as the exclamation point
behind ““hug’ the police!”

The sentiment is that it is nearly impossible to connect Black Americans to Africa when police brutality and the injustice of long sentences in the prisons of San Quentin and Angola continue. How can one look to Africa when people are struggling the United States to survive? A popular notion that identifying with Africa is a luxury for which regular people don’t have the time at times is viewed as a form of self-hatred and placed within that section of the anthology.

While re-connecting to the African continent may not be the desire for some, Sheree Renée Thomas’ *Return Song, or Why I Went South* depicts a desire to still to re-connect to one’s roots in the southern part of the United States, where many Africans landed in the United States to toil the soil. She depicts a need to reengage a forgotten or never learned identity,

Because I wanted to remember
the things I was supposed to forget
to learn them as blood learns the way
of sweet veins, as a river learns
the sway of its own banks

Displacement and loss are burdens not only carried by the descendants of African prisoners of war, enslaved and transported to the Americas, but also for the internally displaced, the refugees, the asylees, and the migrants. Wanjohi wa Makokha captures the pain of living in a new land, away from the familiar and familial in his poem *From Exile to Inxile*. He takes readers into the depression of someone yearning for home that brings him deep within himself where he finds his mother. A poem about someone displaced recalling his identity, Makokha reveals a layer of the transnational human condition through a national anthem sung to a child as a lullaby,

It is a song mum sang me, to sleep
It is the song father sang to death
The song of a country I carry within
A country song almost lost...in here...
Mummy called it: *Soomaaliyey, toosoo?*

In addition to themes of identity, self-hate, slavery, and loss, Mwanaka is intentional to include writings that lift up allies in the struggle for racial liberation: allies who struggle with us, struggle for us, and sometimes die in Mississippi and South Africa. They stand up for ideals that may not be “their fight,” but who view it as our collective fight, although sometimes imperfect.

Allen Kolski Horowitz’s *Primary Facts* is a poem that critically assesses class struggle while weaving prose on institutional racism, greed, dictators, and common struggles for freedom. He takes the reader into a mind that is plagued by self-doubt and privilege, yet with a commitment to

liberation. As told through a story of a political organizing workshop titled “Intro to Marxism”, he writes,

and can I fill out and bring life to words
class privilege corruption revolution
resistance decay decency pride
having regard to generations of anointers and usurpers
hero worshippers and betrayers
generations of take and take more
genocide migration stock theft and insurrection

While connected to the struggle for liberation by educating the masses, the privilege of the trainer’s reality is juxtaposed with his ability to leave the poverty behind until the next workshop.

Finally, the fictional narrative, *The Country Club* written by Paris Smith, intelligently weaves together shared struggles as told by a middle-aged character who reflects on his eleven year-old self and his memory of an incident that left three people bruised by hate. While the story reflected the shared human condition of hard work and racial prejudice, the moral of the story is the need for solidarity to create change,

And the real lesson I think I learned from that loathsome incident showed me how all the injured parties involved were driven apart in the face of the racist adversity, instead of bonding together to overcome it.

Mwanaka is successful in his effort to connect people impacted by common oppression across the Atlantic Ocean. There is an urgency to resist the artificial social divides and accepted truths that have been taught by colonizers and learned in religious institutions. There is a need to experience the soul of the other and strengthen the ties that bind us in our shared humanity.

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