

## KAMARI CLARKE

### RESPONSE BY AUTHOR

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The recent inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States has been seen by many as a critical moment in America's history. However, despite the reality that Obama is the first black president of the United States his assumption of the office of the President serves as an extension of central spheres of American power. And despite this, the reality that President Obama has an intimate history and knowledge of Africa—with paternal roots in Kenya—is insignificant in relation to the strategies necessary for Africa's development. In his recent visit to Egypt and then Ghana in summer 2009 and Hilary Clinton's trip to seven African states, starting in Kenya, moving to South Africa, Angola, the DRC, Nigeria, Liberia, and culminating in Cape Verde, they both highlighted the extent to which Africa's future was in Africa's hands. Good governance, freedom from corruption and violence were seen as being the responsibility of Africans alone. However, the reality on the ground is that a significant component of governance issues in Africa are integrally tied to the international community. This connection represents part of the continuity with the politics of the past that I attempted to highlight in my essay. That is, ontologies of the past are interconnected with the present and though they extend the present, they sometimes represent a significant shift that extends the cartographies of the old in a new form.

Some temporal breaks mark significant moments in the transformation of particular communities. And while I mark the significance of a black President of the United States, I am also very clear that our first black President also represents the extension of America unilateral power, not the adunbration of it. Similarly, what I am calling for is a recognition of an ontology that is an extension of the modernity of state formation and the hierarchicalization of racial difference but that also represents a new node of shift in the formation of contemporary capitalism.

Yet Jean Rahier disagrees. He argues that my conceptions of "old" and "new" is problematic. But the key is that I am interested in marking a dialectical relationship at play on both sides of the Atlantic. For indeed there are continuities, but there are also critical breaks. What I see as the "new" is fundamentally related to the outbreak of Africa's civil

wars over the past twenty years. This reality is connected to the post-cold war disengagement with Africa by the U.S. and the former Soviet Union. The vacuum it created formed the basis for the "new scramble for Africa" which is central to Africa's resource wars.

Paul Zeleza, a historian, is concerned with different forms of "African diasporas," and different cartographies of "Africa." The presumption that we can refer to our "Africa" as the Africa of American American heritage without thinking about the "Africa" of contemporary economic strife is part of the dialectic of things African. In this regard, this moment in which the emergence of a new elite is part of an international solution for postcolonial capitalism represents a moment in which Paul Zeleza's "Africa" of the African Union is both part of the problem and the solution. Whether our Africa is "sub-Saharan Africa," the entire continent, or it is mapped along deterritorial spheres that exceed modern cartographies, the key question is not so much where Africa is and to try to pin it down, but to understand how Africanness is being rearticulated and, in that regard, how new forms of subject-making are taking shape in this contemporary period.

For Michelle Wright, it is temporality that she argues must be "considered, invoked, located and defined to better understand the complexity of our diasporic formations." Clearly, I use time to define problems and solutions at work and, indeed, the temporality of transatlantic slavery reflects a particular moment, the 21st century and pre-Westphalian periods also represent nodes to be marked on modernity's continuity. And neoliberal capitalist globalization characterizes the contemporary moment that both marks the rise in humanitarian capitalism and the spread of a new continental African diasporic economy at play. Ultimately, and as Wright agrees, how and when the temporality of the Middle Passage is invoked should depend on the relevance of its context. It should also be interpellated to insure that "Africa" is more than a symbolic holding place for African American identities.

At the core of my intervention is an attempt to mark the changing dynamics in global conceptions of black suffering in terms that highlight new nodes of articulation.