

THE TRAYVON WALK

Hama Tuma

I have always been fascinated by, to use an old term, the political economy of walks, their relationship with crimes and dangerous protest. I once wrote a short story on the case of the criminal walk in which one citizen crossed regional lines, called, Kilil in Ethiopia, and violated the pseudo Bantustan edict against walking in areas and on streets that are not of your own ethnic group. The court labored long to identify what really constituted a criminal walk. And then a Ugandan opposition leader, a clever man to boot, called for a “walk to work” protest in the country where the majority (like the morning human deluge that comes out of the Kibera slum of Nairobi) did walk to work out of necessity. But, his call was deemed illegal and provocative and he was beaten and jailed for his effort. The walk baffles when its impact touches on the political.

And now has come the Trayvon walk which has led and may lead to more deaths. It require being black first and foremost. No menacing face required. Wearing a hoodie is an accessory that makes the walk slide to the realm of the criminal. As the court case against the killer (no need to mention his race) progressed, we came to learn that Trayvon was not walking quickly as if he had just committed a crime or an offence but was walking slow as if he was about to. Now how slow and revealing was that particular walk that led to the death of the young Trayvon? Did he, under the cover of his hood and blackness, hoof it? Trudge and plod? Shamle and tip toe? Wobble and waddle? Slick and slink? Perambulate or swagger? Or lurch and wend? What pushed Zimmerman to kill, other than the rank prejudice that the jury that set him free refused to see? The judge gave us no insight at all in what made up the Trayvon walk thus increasing the anxiety of the parents of so many millions of potential Trayvons. Can Latinos do the walk? Can Ethiopians in the USA, of whom some imagine they are neither black nor white, be caught doing the Trayvon walk unawares? So many questions.

Walk aside, the Trayvon case is notable for shining a light on the American justice system, strength and failings included. Obama, fresh after praising the Apartheid backing Bush senior, the massacre supporter from Bangladesh to Vietnam, the invader of Panama, the

man who avoided shaking hands with Africans during his brief visit to the continent, as a man who contributed to make America healthier, better and what not, spoke of similar experiences he had had in the past. Though Obama is half black, but black skin wise, he said he was followed by guards in supermarkets. He must have read one of my own African Absurdities wailings on the matter because he also mentions old white ladies clutching their bags tight in the buses when they see a black fellow. Black as evil, as pernicious, threatening, criminal, and more—it is still out there despite Obama being elected president for two terms. Racism has more lives than the proverbial cat and the colour black is on top of the list of its victims. Reading a book called Impressing Whites, I was struck by the fact that Indians, who do not consider themselves black and are racist towards Africans, also suffer from racist prejudices because of their color and despite their exotic side(gurus, Hara Krishna, etc.) The Chinese are also racist as are Africans. The generalization is not unintended in this case. But, Trayvon was not killed by any of these (Chinese, Indian or African) and we are forced to raise the question what if the places have been reversed and Trayvon had shot and killed a hooded or not hooded Zimmerman? Would there have been a jury to set him free? That we do not have, to say the least, a certain and sure answer to this highlights the problem. For all that it mattered, Trayvon may have danced an African spear wielders' dance on the street as he walked home but he would have been shot at anyway. He courted death with his color (his parents are to blame actually for his blackness and we Africans whose ancestors allowed the slave trade to take place are also responsible), with his hoodie, timing and that walk that is alleged to have tweaked the alleged self-defense or “stand your guard” (not mentioned by Zimmerman though) instincts of the killer. Zimmerman is now chubby, dressed conservatively, looking as the defender of the helpless white ladies old or young. There are by far too many Trayvon candidates in America at a time when the Malcolm Xs and Rap Browns are not that much in evidence and the Beyoncé and Jay Zs play at being militant.

Writing on Perspectives on Racism, Tracy Baker had the following to say:

“Racism in this country is, and I believe will always be, a permanent condition. It is a thread that was sewn into the very fiber of the American flag. When Betsy Ross sewed the first stitch of the flag that would represent a new country, Crispus Attucks had already died fighting for

every man's liberty--except his own. None other than the forty-first President of the United States, George Bush, Sr., was still practicing this racist tradition in 1991. On January 8, of that year that former President vetoed a Civil Rights Bill. Seven days later, on January 15--Dr. Martin Luther King's official birthday holiday--Bush ordered the largest number of minority soldiers off to fight in a war. The fountain of this country is racism; its nature is racist, and sadly the one permanence that I can count on is racism”.

An exaggeration? Hardly, given the Trayvon murder and the setting free of his killer. As oppression is not an option and most African Americans are not the Rice variety the Trayvons, those dead or alive, will have their day of reckoning and real justice. That’s one other thing we can all count on.

