

# PETITION FOR COLLABORATION WITH HARRIET TUBMAN INSTITUTE @ YORK UNIVERSITY / TORONTO / CA

*By Georges Goma-Gakissa, Ph.D.*

The following insights are brought to the attention of Professor Paul Lovejoy and its Team in the lead of Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on Global Migrations of Peoples Having an African Descent. The purpose lies in fostering my interest in joining the institute. I have background in Sociology but I am also a fierce advocate of the multidisciplinary perspective with specific interest in neighboring sciences such as Social Work, History, Social Psychology, International Relations, Political Sciences, Global Health, and Anthropology. Here and below, I'm going to sketching, a bit rapidly, what I would like to achieve with the Institute. I might eventually, further with great details one's proposal if, as I'm strongly expecting, Tubman Institute grants me an ultimate opportunity to house my potential contribution to its core research agenda. Moreover, in addition to my background, I am an internationally-based instructor at the crossroad of three main cultural streams (Africa, Europe, and America) and, I speak five active languages. This may be an asset while sharing with an internationally-based research institution such as Harriet Tubman Institute.

## **SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN MIGRATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA: NEW TRENDS**

This is my primary topic of interest while thinking of Tubman. My personal life experience is no stranger to this orientation. I left Africa (the Congo) in my early college years; spent all my academic instruction and an extensive research and teaching experience in Europe (France); then, got an extraordinary almost four years teaching experience in the US (California). This is, by itself, an exceptional "research-field-tracking-process" when it comes to think of patterns of migration. I have an expanded network made up of friends scattered around the world. This personal assessment brought me to questioning this increasing and deepening new trend in migrations especially with skilled peoples from almost all the former French colonies choosing to migrate rather to Anglo-Saxon areas in particular North America and Australia than going to or staying in France for instance. I am still one of them with serious reasons to continue managing going through. In May 2007 and in July 2008 I made two presentations at conferences. The first at California State Polytechnic University Pomona near Los Angeles and the second in Tours (France) hosted by the International Council in Social Work. The abstract of both my presentations is available at: <http://georgesgomag.squarespace.com/storage/Conference%20AbstractGoma.pdf>

My deepest conviction is that I think I'm holding here a relevant research project to thoroughly move forward in understanding innovative and meaningful dimensions of African Diaspora that encompasses knowledge drawn from History, Sociology, Psychology, International relations, Economics, and Demography. This sounds a social-total-phenomenon according to the nice expression coined by Marcel Mauss in the way it critically impacts all the dimensions of our life in society at a far-reaching global level.

Sociology and International Social Policy are definitely crucial to address these patterns of migration by attempting to dig deeper around this pure and simple question: Why do skilled people from Africa choose to leave motherland countries or France for more or less remote territories of Anglo-Saxon culture? The potential answer to this apparently mere questioning might be, however, a very complex one as it touches, unexpectedly, international relations, geopolitics and Geostrategy. To address the dynamics of migrations through geopolitical lenses is breaking new ground from my point of view. This research prospect would allow us to fundamentally depart from the traditional explication as to how causes of migration patterns are solidly tied with poverty, famine, attractiveness of the West, etc. to mainly focus attention upon what

is actually nestled at the interlaced design of foundation interrelationships between nations unevenly made up or maintained as such. By the same token, Sociology would help us to envision and conceptualize what happens once the migration process to Canada or North America by Africans has been accomplished. This would be an opportunity to build on then to grasp the contemporary dynamics of African Diasporas in North America. How the constitution and the historical structuring of African Diasporas may impact, in return, the political economy of the black continent. For example, in the early 2000s, The California Delegation chaired by Dr. Ramona Tascoe while building upon The National Summit on Africa released a thick document titled “The California Delegation’s Response to The National Draft Policy Plan of Action for U.S.-Africa Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. This is the commitment of the very old African Diaspora (African Americans descendant of former slaves unwillingly brought to America) to Africa. But there is, likewise, the making of New African Diaspora in North America (African immigrants) as an important component of the complex racial and ethnic identities and cultures that are presented in North America. Whether they settle in Canada, the United States, or elsewhere in the American hemisphere, African-born black peoples do enrich the racial and ethnic tapestry of the great American continent. It would be, I think, worthy to study how culturally, politically, and economically, their presence adds another layer of internal diversity in the formation of not only the overall Black Diaspora in the Americas but also the global making up of the American society.

History remains the mother-science at understanding the overall condition of African Diasporas within the new and the old world continuum. The workshop on the teaching of African history held in early November this year at York University was absolutely terrific and enlightening. The inquiry I would like to formulate at this point is to know how history and present times can be intertwined; in other words, what are lessons learnt from the past and what are challenges for today and tomorrow regarding the dimensions of international migrations. History can also provide new tools to re-bridging the black world, the overall African Diaspora including African Americans, Caribbeans, and Africans. How to move from a conflict perspective that marks, to some extent, the identity issue between these different black worlds to more integrated relationships. The economic dimension of African Diaspora dynamics is very important as well.

I have sketched here a few ideas which I would like to conceptualize in order to write a more precise and powerful proposal upon Dimensions of African Diasporas in North America within the Harriet Tubman Institute’s cutting-edge research program. In the event the Tubman institute manages to welcome my application, my research activity will be strengthened by a teaching activity to the department of Sociology at York University. While still teaching in California, I got in touch with that department through an application I did send in April 2010. I have been, then, included in the pool of potential instructors to be hired depending on vacancies. So, having attended the three workshop days last November has been a great opportunity to meet also with colleagues to the department of Sociology to talk about teaching positions. However, because I am neither a Canadian citizen nor resident in Canada, it would be an immigration issue. The meeting went greatly and Professor Nancy Mandell Chair of the department just advised me to find ways to enter York University as an international scholar with Tubman Institute for instance. What was amazing is that she made that proposition without knowing anything about my early connection to Tubman institute. She knows Professor Paul Lovejoy, and more Dawn Ralph, and Carlos Algandona too I do remember she told me. Jacqueline Siebert the chief administrative support officer also knows the issue and might be contacted in case of need. Professor Mandell also did introduce me to Professor Lawrence Lam who is in charge of undergraduate instruction. Bottom line: Tubman Institute is the key. The key to a dream of collaboration. The key to have a chance to share my knowledge with fellow scholars.

Best Regards to you.

*Georges Goma*