

BEYOND THE COVID 19 - VOICING OURSELVES AND RESUMING FOUNDATIONS

HERE WE ARE: THE BEGINNING OF 2021.

I was in Paris for the New Year, working with MNG Radio, a grassroots metropolitan station I have been engaged with for twenty years. As our New Year special programme went out, one of my colleagues, Hortense, argued on air that COVID 19 must become a turning point for our way of being in the world; that it must focus attention on a shared humanity, that we must reverse what we usually consider to be unsinkable economic priorities. If we do not,, like the Titanic, we may sink with suffering and loss of life

COVID 19 AND THE TITANIC. I think about the so-called unsinkable boat that, surprisingly, sank on its first transatlantic voyage from Britain to New York in 1912 causing thousands of deaths. And it sank in one night only. In one night only an iceberg broke thousands of hours of work and millions of invested money. It sunk like a joke. COVID 19 needs to be considered as our 21st century Titanic. It is even our Tsunami. Lessons must be learned, individually and collectively. And actions need to be taken if we are to progress beyond the virus .

THE TITANIC AND COVID 19. I also think about the film that dramatized this event, especially in the bravery and despair of the Captain, Edward John Smith. Captain Smith was one of my favourites characters. When the collision happened and his crew came to explain to him what will happen, how the boat will sink, he turned his eyes desperately and walked away to his death

COVID 19 AND EXTINCTION REBELLION. After a speech during an Extinction Rebellion rally in Bristol, I was kindly invited for a drink. My interlocutor had been surprised listening me explain the climate change impact on Africa, especially on my native D.R. Congo, and even more so for my native Mai-Ndombe, when considered as the border between the rain forests and the savannahs. He had never learned of this and listened about the impact of the climate change in Africa and how we could help from outside. I must convince him that it is possible to live in our new wonderful world by stopping planes from burning petrol, by using more and more bikes, and stopping using our cars. And Covid 19 has proved that this is now possible as, for almost one year, our sky became clear with only a small number of planes, that could be counted on our fingers; our cities also as we learned to be without cars and buses and trains so that we are now breathing fresh air as our cities clear of pollution. Even our own family and our close relationships seem somehow to have been focused by COVID 19. The lockdown reminded us the strength of being human lies in sharing the same planet and also in listening to the voiceless. This crisis, with over three million deaths, could have been better managed, maybe the worse avoided, if some of our voices had been heard, particularly those from the South including the voices of Africans who have experienced many other pandemics before. Alas! it is a forewarning.

HERE WE ARE: LOST. We have lost our elders; we have lost our parents; we have lost our leaders. Our grassroots organisations have closed down because of lack of funding and sponsorship. But we must resume the job now of using our skills and assist our communities: to be or not to be, that is now the existential question. We must jump beyond the BLM voices and act and act now for us all...

AND NOW HERE WE ARE. We are part of the problem and must become much more part of the solution than so far. This is the only way the world can become a safer place to live; a better place. It is the only planet we have... But even now the new immigration proposals suggest the UK is withdrawing from shared responsibilities, the Government cutting aid to water and

regeneration projects that could keep places habitable, cutting contributions to research into viruses that would benefit everyone, cutting aid to the poorest – and punishing those who seek refuge only to survive.

Norbert MBU-MPUTU



Norbert Mbu-Mputo is a journalist, writer, researcher and community activist. He was born in DR Congo (Mai-Ndombe province) In DRC he was a teacher, a UN worker and Team Leader of a British NGO. In the UK he was founder and coordinator of South People's Projects (SoPPro), a registered charity in Newport, and of the Community Space Partnership (Newport), a hub of community organisations. He is a trustee and member of a range of organisations including Church Action on Poverty, Anti-Poverty Network Cymru, Sub-Saharan Advisory Panel (Wales), Free Fair DRC, Wales Peace Institute, United Nations Association Wales, the Diaspora Changemakers, Exiled Journalists Network, City of Newport Ambassador, Anti-Poverty Ambassador. He now lives in Bristol.