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The Place of Pan Africanism in World History

"...the evil system of colonialism and imperialism arose and throve with the enslavement of Negroes and the trade in Negroes and it will surely come to its end with the complete emancipation of the Black people" Mao Ze-dong.

We are in the planetarian era, the epoch of the so-called "rapid globalisation." It took about 500 years to come to maturation: from the world wide primitive accumulation which led to the rise of capitalism in Europe to the extension of capitalism to the most remote corners of the planet Earth. Resistance to the accumulation and the extension had to be destroyed through wars of conquest, genocides, enslavement, colonisations, enclosures, looting, deporting, murdering, "low intensity warfare," violent destruction of self-sustaining survival systems, violence against women (mass rapes, slave breeding farms, forced sterilisation, sex tourism), "imperial diseases," etc. Still, resistance goes on.

African people, Black people, despite their crucial founding contribution as slaves, as gift to capital, as colonial and neo-colonial forced labourers, have lived this period principally as victims and subordinates, i.e. as a legitimate prey. From non-people (speaking machines-cum-commodities) to sub-people (1/3 of a person in the first US constitution) to dominated people.

Indeed, the attempts to justify the resulting unequal system gave rise to the idea of classifying people of the world by race and then setting them in a social hierarchy. The white supremacist doctrine of civilisation was built on it. For a long time, Black people were confronted with a common fate (first racism, then colonialism) which caused them to turn about and accept a common identity - which the negritude movement, for example, sang. Resistance against such an imposed fate was heavy. Some mothers preferred killing their children than
seeing them sold; some refused to bear children for sale. *Lemba Kangaism* -
doctrine and practices for protecting the community - for example, arose in the
slave devastated area of Kongo society. Escaped slaves, here and there in the
Americas, staged maroonian revolts. These profiles of courage are often left in
historical silences. The first successful slave revolutionary victory, under the
leadership of Toussaint L’Ouverture, took inspiration from Lemba Kangaism in
its first anthem: *Kanga Busiïti, Kanga Mindele* — Protect the weak and tie up
(arrest) the white! Abolitionists’ historical self-celebrations have marginalised in
written histories daring slave initiatives.

Ultimately, Pan Africanism, as a form of global consciousness - the realisation
that no Black person will be free until all Black people are free - emerged precisely
to confront the old race-based global consciousness which underlined capitalist
expansionism. It aimed at defending human equality, human rights against racial
discrimination and at organising the process of liberation of Black people from
subordination world-wide. Any thought or doctrine is always determined by that
against which it arises - thus its limitation.

The horizon of Pan Africanism was to develop into a form of internationalism
and emancipatory politics. The latter starts from the conviction that things are not
to remain so because they are so; people may live differently than they presently
live. It is rooted in a break from submissive consciousness in favour of a political
consciousness which is an active, prescriptive attitude to reality, politics and a
prescriptive invention.

Since about 1989, a world-wide consensus seems to exist, especially around
social movements, on the need to expand democratic rights extending to all
people all the human rights. A new global consciousness is rising, one which
discredits the old one built on racial, religious, gender or cultural discriminations.
This is a significant development. Doubts still prevail, though. The ancestors
to this modern global consciousness have not always been consistent in upholding
human equality and rejecting the subordination of Black people. The secular
traditions of the French and American Revolutions did not necessarily recognise
the major contribution by Toussaint L’Ouverture to struggle for human liberty.
The Enlightenment philosophies, for example, could not have seen him as an
associate. Condorcet and Diderot, so much acclaimed, for example, did not
favour rapid transition to the end of slavery. The visions of the global class unity
of the socialist and communist movements often failed to “deminoritise” Black
labourers. Even communist parties held the view that colonialism was a “short-
cut” for the development of productive forces. Pan Africanists such as Aimé
Césaire and George Padmore had to resign from those types of parties.

The claims to a world community of believers in Christianity and Islam did not
consistently fight against the race-based social hierarchy, despite protesting
voices such as that of Las Casas. “Humanist” priests in Kongo kingdom
demanded only that slaves be baptised before boarding the slaving ships - one of these was even named Jesus! Placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy (some Theologians even speculated that Blacks had no soul), Black people were denied civilisation, culture and history. Their experiences were said to have no educational value, no truth value and no knowledge value. It is principally to provoke the break with submissive consciousness, on the part of some Africans believing in their being useless to “humanity,” that people like Cheikh Anta Diop worked so hard to set the record of African civilisations straight.

The notion of a racial hierarchy in intelligence and creativity became most influential when European empires were at their greatest extent (1890-1940). Of course, that imperial museums were filled with African artefacts and that an acclaimed European artist such as Picasso copied some Congolese art forms, for example, does not prove the African artistic inferiority. Anyway, the brutal colonial expropriation of land and labour was justified on the basis of the hierarchy. Western powers portrayed themselves as the purveyors of “civilisation”; the territorial occupation of Africa was done in the name of “bringing civilisation to Dark Africa.”

It was during this period also that concrete organisational forms of PanAfricanism (e.g. Pan African Congresses, etc.) took shape. Despite the colonial condition in Africa, Africans participated actively. Panda’s party, Union Congolese (1919-1930), for example, participated in the 3rd Pan-African Congress which took place in Brussels in 1921. Two other Congolese, from the Belgian Congo, went to Jamaica, in 1928, to meet with Marcus Garvey. A small PanAfricanist movement, led by a certain Jackson, organised an anti-colonial struggle in the Belgian Congo. The maroons’ struggles and successful resistance, slave victories, anti-slavery movements and struggles, the abolition of slavery itself, etc., were not successful in abolishing white supremacist ideology and practices highly supported by European imperialism. The complete freeing of Africa became viewed as the condition for the abolition of the Black person’s bondage.

Certainly, anti-colonial national determination movements gave tremendous impetus to the vision of racial equality. Through its 5th Congress, PanAfricanism made important contributions in advancing to victory those movements in Africa. The establishment of a global system of nations - including African ones -, all with equal legal standing (ending the second-class citizenship in world affairs), the expansion of literacy; national systems of education; formal renunciation, in many national and international declarations, of discrimination by race, ethnicity, religion, or gender and an extension of principles of non-discrimination into many new areas; the changing social conditions of women and the rise of feminist critiques of society, giving rise to a range of debates, not only about gender discrimination, but about the nature of human interdependence generally, leading
to new claims of human rights; technical advances of modern telecommunications; and the end of Cold War, all these things have considerably undermined the race-based global consciousness. PanAfricanist struggles and cultural (arts, music, etc.) and scientific productions have had an impact as well.

Having been obtained on the basis of "defeat through victory," political independence in Africa was a limited victory. It reproduced, with minor changes, the colonial partition of Africa and the imperial restructuring of her economy. Hopefully, apartheid will die soon, with the success of the non-racial democracy being struggled for. Until recently, apartheid, a system exclusively based on the "minoritisation" of Blacks, echoing the race based global consciousness, has continued to drag on. US imperial democrats refused to endorse the UN condemnation of apartheid as "a crime against humanity" and settled only for the weak "gross violation of human rights."

Indeed, the general reluctance to view the Atlantic slave trade as a human holocaust and the continued resistance against the demands for reparations for both the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism (based on unjust wars of conquest and thus having no moral or legal justification), means that the "minoritisation" of Black people on the basis of race remains active in the global consciousness. The recent retreat in the pursuit of racial equality in the imperial democratic USA is well known.

"Despite pervasive litanies about Latin America's "colour-blind racial democracy," blatant discrimination continues to plague descendants of the ten million African slaves who were brought to toil on the plantations and mines of the New world. Such discrimination is compounded by a nearly universal denial of black heritage and identities, even countries with large black populations, that has effectively rendered blacks invisible." While still being squeezed through structural adjustment programmes and debt servicing, Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, is increasingly marginalised and sinking into absolute poverty as she continues to transfer capital abroad. The historical role of Pan Africanism must be revitalised.

World Context of Democratisation

Democratisation or re-democratisation has to be conceptualised at the level of the whole planet Earth. It involves world global relations of power and not just those inside a specific territory. It is good to have full democracy in a reservation; the most crucial thing is to democratically abolish the reservation itself. Democracy has also to be grasped from the point of view of its entire history.

The experiences of a great part of humanity have been bypassed on systematising the theory of democracy. When the majority of the people of the world were reduced to colonised and neocolonised subpeople, initiative and creativity in relation to democracy were made an affair of the few. Imperial democrats have
been responsible, in many ways, for entertaining authoritarianism in many parts of the world - sometimes in the name of democracy.

A democracy erected on the basis of colonial conquests and entertaining in its midst native people in reservations, aborigines, etc., must be critiqued from the point of view of those victims. People without rights in those democracies constitute a radical witness of the limitations of those democracies. In my opinion, the ancient Greek democracy — Agora democracy — is comparable to the Mbonji (fire place) palaver: the first excluded slaves, women and strangers, and the second (sometime only) excluded women. This comparison has been ruled out by the fact that you cannot deny civilisation to people in whose modes of life you can discover civilisation elements. National conferences, at least in some African Francophone countries, did take inspiration from experiences of African palaver.

Social movements (old and new), including democracy movements around the world, are demanding consistent democracy-from-below. Imperial democrats act democrats in some parts of the world, but act imperialists, supporting all kinds of authoritarianism, elsewhere. The Haiti 1990 election, for example, is a radical witness. A broad mass democracy-from-below-movement led to the election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide (16/12/1990). The US imperial democrats, eager to see liberal democracy in Cuba, were reluctant to give unqualified support to President Aristide and the Haitian democratic forces.

As the rule of the people by the people for the people, historical experiences of democracy have been often based on a concept of people which excluded some other people. The challenge of world social movements is to see the entire humanity be constituted as one community of people, i.e. democratisation, at the global level, aims at eradicating situations of "minoritisation" of remaining parts of humanity. It aims at creating a political space of general equality around which multiple and diverse individuals, peoples, groups, races, classes, gender, etc., may contend in the pursuit of their respective destinies. The extension and the centrality of human rights in this challenge, has led people in a wide range of countries to feel free to criticise the state, the principal force, which tampers with various human rights rather than protecting them.

There won't be a meaningful democracy in one corner of the world when the whole world is fundamentally undemocratic. Imperial democrats, now regrouped in the gang of the G7, and other Northern democracies, consume more than 2/3 of the world resources. No meaningful desire (normative imperative) is rising in those countries to democratisise the situation, i.e. to shift power relations in favour of the redistribution of World wealth at all levels. Some level of material empowerment is necessary to democratically compete effectively. Schemes being put in place - from structural adjustment programmes (welfarist aid rather than productive or strategical one) to GATT decisions — still aim at squeezing the remaining 1/3 world resources out of the poor.
Africa is now sending more capital to the Centre than the aid she is receiving, intensifying her sinking into absolute poverty. The UN system, as organised for the world conjuncture of after 1945 - already obsolete - is tending towards becoming a machinery for the New World Order.

Democratisation is creativity itself and not just a model to be applied to a territory. The imperialism of dominant paradigms, concerning democracy as well as development, must be challenged. Western democracies (imperial democracies) should not be allowed to have a monopoly on democracy. The entire range of historical experiences of peoples, movements, and groups who have fought for democracy and peace must be taken into account. Imperial powers are now portraying themselves as the guardians of world peace and democracy, as the best promoters and defenders of democracy and human rights. The starting point of emancipatory politics is that all people think (every person thinks). Dominant paradigms imply that few people have the right to ask questions for themselves and for others, and these others disarm themselves of the right to ask those questions for themselves. The dominated person is the one whom and at the expense of whom dominant paradigms exercise effect, blocking his/her right of creativity and innovation. Each time by whom, for whom, how and for what purpose questions are asked, they must be explicitated for every paradigm. The operationalisation of democracy (scope, forms of representations types of elections, form/regime of state, etc.) must be subordinated to the fact that all human rights of every person be upheld.

The history of democracy is precarious. Advances and deepening of democratisation may be followed by retreats. There are signs of retreat in Western Democracies. While their countries have become internationalised or multinationalised, through immigration laws they are practising a form of national cleansing. They have become increasingly unable to deal democratically with “minorities.” Blinded by capitalist triumphalism, lessons from the collapse of socialist states, as far as democracy is concerned, namely consistent recognition, tolerance for and respect of multiple differences, are not taken up. Western values are presented as uniquely universal and so-called particularist values are fought against. The development of techno-bureaucracy has brought a rule by experts in all domains, restricting political discussions and decisions. A gap is growing between hyper-specialised and esoteric techno-science on one hand and citizen’s knowledge on the other. Knowledgeable people have more rights than ignorant citizens. The desire and need to democratise knowledge seem to be retreating. If the community is unable to control its knowledge, as it is said in Kongo society, the community is at the mercy of the few “sorcerers.”

With the protracted character of world economic crisis, a tendency has developed to reduce politics to economics; democracy is reduced to market economy, and the economy becomes the sole permanent political problem. This
Pan Africanism, Democracy, Social Movements

is the other side of developmentalism in countries of the south. Society is increasingly divided on an unequal basis: the have and have nots, those who have the right to live and those who live by dying little by little.

Talks of the “end of history” are an indication of the collapse of great aspirations for the future. There is a profound crisis of revolutionaryism giving rise to a real intellectual abasement and powerlessness to conceive of great ideals. The healthy conflict of idea is being reduced to conflict of interests or racial ethnocentrism. Democratic institutions (parties, pressure groups, etc.) are already showing signs of decay. Great problems of civilisation - including the threat to the life process per se, posed by industrial civilisation - are not emerging as problems of public debates.

With reference to Cheikh Anta Diop’s typology of states in world history, the existing system of states was born out of conquest. The political independence movements in colonial states born out of conquest did not completely transform these. The articulation between military and civilian power has always favoured the military one. This factor has profound implications for democratisation. How can the articulation be reversed in favour of the civilian power? The defeated states, in 1945, which were forbidden to arm themselves are now rearming themselves. While it is true that liberalisation (marketism) is not the answer to all problems of human rights (as the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberation National - EZLN shows), armed struggles have not necessarily led to consistent democracy.

The Cold War ended; it is a good thing for democratisation. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how to deal effectively with its legacy, i.e. its extensive machinery and militants — the Mobutu’s. It is like in South Africa, where the apartheid legacy will be a major challenge to democratic struggles.

The world is in real motion. Forces of consistent democracy and those of the status quo are contending. A new global consciousness, favouring the first camp, is rising. It stands against racial discrimination; the success of post apartheid non-racial democracy in South Africa and that of resolving the Chiapas question based on the discrimination of Maya native population will be positive development. It stands against religious discrimination; democracy will be challenged by the outcome of the struggle against fundamentalism (in Algeria, ex-Yugoslavia, etc.). It stands against ethnic discrimination: whether in Rwanda, Burundi or elsewhere, the challenge is to build democratically a multiethnic state.

It stands against gender discrimination: the democratic challenge here may be to come up with a new theory/conception/practice of love as the basis of the best interdependence relationship between man and woman at all levels.

The deminoritisation of peoples, groups and the recognition of full individual rights is ultimately a form of emancipatory politics against the submissive consciousness of accommodation to the violation of human rights world-wide. PanAfricanism must internalise these gains to be able to become a truly emancipatory political movement.
Africa: Democracy and Second Independence

For the last five hundred years it has taken the present planetarian epoch to come to maturation, Africa has been under siege. Centuries of international slave trade were followed by economies of predation and formal colonisation. For a long time, most (if not all) of the people of Africa were not people at all, they were commodities often obtained by storming villages. African “mercantilists” who emerged through the process did not feel the labour hunger European mercantilists felt. They were selling abroad the then strategical element of the production process in exchange for commodities which were essentially irrelevant for the local development of production. Their counterpart European mercantilists were putting African slaves into the production process in the so-called New World. In this atmosphere, it was difficult for the remaining Africans to freely relate to themselves.

Institutions of survival which developed under those circumstances, from the Mbongi palaver to the Lemba Kangaism in the Kongo area, for example, are not well known. Histories produced on the basis of paradigmatic silence (echoing the notion that uncivilised people know nothing or only Europeans “discover” things) don’t give any account of those experiences—taken up by oral traditions. Colonial rules, imposed by force, were based on the cultural justification that Africans were not full human beings. Their institutions were defamed and studied only to enhance the colonial grip (“indirect rule” which was in fact very much direct) on the African people.

The colonial partition of Africa blocked the process of Africanisation (various people increasingly coming into contact and relating to themselves) of Africa peoples which was developing. In this regard, by reproducing, with minor changes, the colonial partition of Africa, the OAU is a continuation of the Berlin Conference.

With the gradual (sometimes sudden) break of social ties provoked by the capitalist privatisation of property, many people have lost the secure sources of their means of life, no matter how insufficient these were, and have become reduced to lives of unspeakable poverty and misery. Until very recently, in countries of Africa, community ties (kinship, collective, etc.) were the main forms of social security for most people. The privatisation of clanic land through enclosures without compensations introduced by colonial economies of predation accelerated the breaking of those ties. The latest social tie now under the pressure of being so broken is the family itself (the community family called “extended family” as well as the nuclear one). Its material basis is increasingly destroyed, throwing children to the street which has become their only “social security.”

Even after political independence, African economies continued to be based on forced labour (labour-power paid below its value) making it necessary to
reproduce or create new forms of bondage (clientelism, etc.) as sources of people's means of life. The process of individuation tends, thus, to be limited. Demands for liberal democracy remained limited to urban environments and limited social categories. Mass struggles tended to be based on common identity and demands for group interests and rights rather than individual rights. Models of democracies, proposed by the departing decolonising colonial states, failed to take root.

Dominant myths serving as paradigms of action which emerged through the mass struggles for national independence and self-determination were all based on and emphasised common identity, interests, and rights vis-à-vis the permanent threat of an outside enemy. These included: the West as an enemy and as a model to aspire to cultural identity to be reasserted under permanent siege; independence not as a project of continuous struggle but as a time of victorious celebration; development as a pretext of mass political demobilisation and aspiration to consumerism rather than a vision for mass political remobilisation; liberation as a symbolic call rather than a construction of a rational conception and reasonable vision of the world. Democracy as political pluralism appeared as a threatening anarchy. Cold War polarizations reinforced this global consciousness. The break with early post-colonial experiences of multipartyism was thus seen as an advance - where this happened more or less freely.

In some cases such as Congo-Zaire, the possibility of a people's sovereignty appeared threatening to the Western Cold War powers. Lumumba and other militants who stood firm in favour of people's controlled national sovereignty had to be eliminated. Congolese became unable to relate to themselves freely and practice democracy.

Through Western powers (the USA especially inspired assassinations), instigated secessions and coups d'etat, the people's sovereignty was assassinated, and state power was entrusted into the hands of pro-western Cold War militants (Mobutu and his Binza group). These "abused the Congolese-Zaïrean state to meet the demands of foreigners morbibly obsessed with the threat of communism" in Congo-Zaire. Mass struggles gravitated and were focalised around the demand for a Second Independence, i.e. the resurrection, as it were, of the people's sovereignty. Mulelist mass armed insurrections, protracted students movement struggles (through marches, etc.), workers' often illegal strikes, etc., in the circumstances of the Cold War, made the state become more repressive. Repression became the very core of government's policy. Freedom and human rights of the dissenters and critics were very badly tampered with. A single party state regime became, ultimately, the institutional framework for repression as policy.

Various types of social movements came to the fore after the end of the Cold War and the formal acceptance, by the regime in place, of multipartyism. These
included: struggles against state interference in music and other art forms; struggles against abuses of the Bible in favour of gender oppression - specifically led by the female Protestant Theologians' Association; struggles against arbitrary taxes at the market — led by market women’s association; struggles against bureaucrats’ land enclosures — led by la solidarite paysanne; religious struggles for independent churches against state-coopted ones; struggles for independent student associations against one party youth section; struggles against one party women section; struggles for a second party movement; struggles for a free press and mass media; struggles for the autonomy of magistrates — led by the advocate association, etc. All these struggles and movements aim at the reconstruction of society on the basis of a profound transformation of the state in favour of one which respects the proper articulation between the common interest (public) and the proper (private) interest.  

To achieve this, it became clear that the various protagonists had to come together in a national conference to first empower themselves as people capable of exercising national sovereignty while drawing the contours of a new state and a new society. The local, still existing, Cold War machinery and militants have almost blocked the advance of the democratisation process.

In a number of countries of Africa, democracy has been reduced to multipartyism. When elections did take place, on that basis, they brought minor reforms in the functioning of the state. A vibrant civil society is needed for a real political pluralism to take place.

Africa is experiencing almost all the problems that confront world democracy movements: violation of individual human rights, religious fundamentalist exclusivism, ethnic discrimination/oppression (even genocide), threat of military coups d’etat, racial discrimination/domination, losses, erosion, or usurpation of national sovereignty, gender discrimination/oppression, economic exploitation, foreign domination, civil wars, state terrorism, state non-accountability, intolerance, negative values etc.

There is no real forum in which African masses of people involved in the struggles to confront these problems can exchange their experiences. Pan-African structures of democratic empowerment, independent of states, must be worked out. They may be important for the deepening of the democratisation process, the democratisation of PanAfricanism itself, and the process must bring together those forces, forces inside each country of Africa, which are active in making political pluralism a reality. It will be one way of contending with the pro-imperialist NGO’s aiming at dominating civil society in African countries.

**Conclusion**

The world is in a rising motion; no clarity of a single vision is emerging after the dissolution of socialism. Democratisation and redemocratisation aim at the need
to recognise and respect the multiple differences which characterise our humanity. The unity of humanity must be achieved under the banner of multiplicity and avoidance of one-sidedness. The deepening of democratisation in each country in Africa and the democratic opening of African countries’ borderlines (though various ways, including telecommunications) will allow African people not only to achieve and control national sovereignty but to be able to control the continent and its resources. Pan Africanism must root itself in that process so that its vision can become enriched and popular.

End notes
6. This important theme of paradigmatic silence in historiography is being thoroughly investigated by Jacques Depelchin.
8. For details, see Patrick Manning, op. cit.
15. Details in Patrick Manning, op. cit.


20. Again, for details, see Patrick Manning, op.cit.

21. The Marshall Plan for post-1945 Europe and aid given to defeated Japan, after 1945, constitute cases of strategical types of aid.


25. Cheikh Anta Diop, Civilisation or Barbarism; op. cit. chap.8.


27. Today, members of the African ruling classes keep resources in their accounts abroad rather than invest them at home. Their counterparts in the West put their resources through the World Bank structures to get more money through schemes of debt servicing of developing countries.


30. This articulation has been at the core of democratic thought since Pericles, according to Jacques Rancière (1990) Aux Bords du Politique (Paris: Editions Osiris).