

Toward the African Revolution

In the wake of Frantz Fanon

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On my way by plane to the pan-African Congress being held in Munich [1], I re-read 'Toward the African Revolution' to fire myself up and reassure myself that this was still the right path. 'Toward the African Revolution' will be the theme of our round table on 6 December this year as we mark the 50th anniversary of Fanon's death. This round table will follow the film we are showing in his honour. The revolutionary outbreaks in North Africa are like a boomerang of history and the springtime that has spread has a tang of optimism. 'The optimism that reigns in Africa today is not born of spectacular natural forces that are at last turning in favour of Africans. Nor is this optimism due to the discovery that the attitudes of the former oppressor are now less inhuman and more benevolent. The optimism in Africa is the direct result of revolutionary action by the African masses, whether political or martial – and sometimes both.' [2]

Returning recently from Tunisia and Egypt, I realised that, behind this optimism, there certainly lies a long road and that these advances may well not give birth to revolution, so affected are they by culturalism, integrism and imperialism. I noted, too, how fragile these progressive forces still are and incapable of steering this historic movement. The same applies to the Congo which remains, as Fanon had predicted, the trigger of Africa, and which, instead of turning the violence against imperialism, turns it on itself. This Congo is a geological horror story that has experienced what Fanon feared most. Its millions of dead, sacrificed at the altar of our post-modern consumerism and our disputes that are maintained by a truncated capitalism implore Africa, through their tragedy, to become united. Fanon is right again: we need to complete the progress begun in North Africa and push Africa towards total emancipation. It is not only the people of the Maghreb and the Congolese that need to read or re-read 'Toward the African Revolution', but all Africans. It is a collection of political texts, logbooks and letters by Frantz Fanon first published by Maspero. It spans the time from his youth when he wrote *Black Skin, White Masks* in 1952 until he penned *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1961, the year he died. As a synthesis of the anti-imperialist and class struggles, this work speaks of the colonial evolution and the hidden traps inherent in decolonisation. It gave Fanon an opportunity for introspection, an understanding of alienation, of the depersonalisation of the colonised and of racism in all its forms. In it Fanon illustrated the necessity for those colonised to consider their psyche and prepare their retort. The universe he depicts shows that the world of the colonised is a mirror broken at every level by the oppression and alienation of the coloniser and that national liberation has to be preceded by individual liberation. Combining his experience as a psychiatrist with that of a man caught up in the Algerian war, he calls upon his left wing comrades and urges those from the continent to join forces in a revolutionary, Panafrican movement. During the 25 years of the Group for Research and Initiative for the Liberation of Africa (GRILA's) existence [3], we have advocated the total liberation of Africa as seen by Fanon whose analysis is still relevant and current for pan-Africanism. In other words, he still challenges us to consider what form social transformation in the post-colonial era should take. In the 21st century, pan-Africanism is at a crossroads while our continent is being attacked by new and complex forms of imperialism. I am giving the name 'supraimperialism' to the particular form of hegemon that neoliberal financialised oligopolies has imposed through globalisation during the past 30 years. Its contradictions impel it to intensify the capitalist mode of

production and predatory consumption although this is bound to be a blind alley. The most critical tension in the system will be played out between three declining centres – the US, Japan and Europe – and the emerging countries whose leading runners BRICS, - Brazil, Russia, India and China South Africa - are as much capable of reinvigorating capitalism as of speeding up its chances of being steered in another direction. The latter can only happen if they opt to start in a self-centred surge within a more multi-centred world. In this regard, the class interests of their leaders and of their people will be decisive; the case of South Africa is a microcosm of the whole. Africa, which contributes so much to global growth, is nevertheless, still very much locked in the cash economy of the old international division of labour. This order is increasingly synonymous with the resources sold off by transnational corporations and local business people unconcerned about the condition and fate of the Africans. The strategy of imperialistic forces to control our resources and our resistance by military power will not fade.

Fanon gave us a clear warning of this: 'Africa will be free. Yes, but she must get down to work and not lose sight of her own unity. It was in this spirit that, among others, one of the most important points of the first meeting of All-African Peoples' Conference at Accra in 1958 was adopted. The African peoples, it was said in this resolution, commit themselves to forming a militia that will be responsible for supporting the African peoples in their struggle for independence.' [4] Instead, after a 20th century full of brutal imperialist interventions, our people, paralysed and divided, are participating in a 21st century that looks as though it will continue in the same way. In, 2011, we have been presented with some 14,000 incidents of NATO combat aircraft bombing targets, often civilian, in Libya where nation building is now interrupted and where secession lurks. We also saw the neo-colonial recolonisation of the Ivory Coast, and the creeping extension of AFRICOM, for various pretexts, in the ranks of our armies and territories, destabilisation in countries like Sudan, or Mali, social media propaganda and militarized internet buzzwords from yahoo youth and NGO'S teleguided by the CIA.

Fanon said 'It may be that the colonial expeditions conform to a given, known pattern – the need to impose order among the barbarians, the protection of the concessions and interests of European countries, the generous gift of western civilisation – but we have not publicised sufficiently the stereotypical ways that the founding cities use to remain attached to their colonies.' [5] In reality the barbarity is fostered by the unyielding expansion of a capitalism in crisis that replies with counter-revolution every time we make advances in our struggles. Everywhere, it leads to compromises to which the social democratic and even radical left forces succumb, afraid of putting up opposition on an uneven playing field. However, there is nothing left to reform. The international cooperation, the declaration of Paris with its 'aid' effectiveness and the apologetic bilateral enthusiasms no longer deceive people. The instrumentalisation of multilateral forums is even more pronounced than in the last century. The IMF, the World Bank and WTO have been preserved, despite their obsolescence and their obvious failure, as instruments reproducing the international order. However, the latter has been slowly overtaken by a transnational order where the role of the large corporations, as well as major culturalist ditch and civilisational gaps, cannot be regulated by the G20. This means a gradual world governance by a G20 that has no democratic mandate to do so. The UN had the regulatory mandate but has been transformed into a chamber for recording the wishes of NATO, and new tools such as the right to interfere at a humanitarian level and the responsibility to protect have torn to pieces the international right to some of the most powerful strategic benefits.

What Fanon said about the sequestration of Congo still resonates: 'Lumumba's mistake was firstly to believe in the good-natured impartiality of the UN. He strangely forgot that the UN currently is no more than a reserve assembly set up by the powerful to continue between two armed conflicts the 'peaceful struggle' over how to share out the world'... 'Our mistake as Africans is to have forgotten that the enemy's retreat is never trustworthy. He never understands.

He capitulates, but does not change'.

[6]

More than ever, the revolutionary imperative seems appropriate and the progress enabled by the fall of apartheid, and the recent upset of senile autocracies in North Africa must be followed through. Along the same lines, the colonial struggle of Fanon's days has been substituted by the struggle against neocolonialism and the retrogressive influences that are as 'comprador' as those vast sections of our societies that have been alienated and confused by the mirages of capitalism. 'The inter-African solidarity must be real, a solidarity in action, a concrete solidarity of people, resources and money.' [7] The African Union - that replaced the Organisation for African Unity - is for many of our fellow citizens an institution that is distant from their real concerns; it resembles a union of heads of state that cannot afford its own policies. Libya was the only African country without debt. The assassination of Gaddafi is bringing about a loss of finances for the African Union that was so unfortunately dependent on Libyan funds. Libya had ended up paying a third of the operational costs of the organisation as numerous countries were no longer contributing. In fact, with Libya, Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt each contribute a little less than 15 percent of the expenses. Apart from this embarrassing quirk, surely we must deplore the fact that these African countries only contribute on average eight percent of the AU budget, while 92 percent comes from foreign partners and donors. Jean Ping would say that finance from outside Africa amounts to more like 77 percent. (Officially, the AU budget for 2011 was predicted to be US\$256,754,447 of which \$122602.045 would come from member states and \$134.152.402 from international donors).

It is not only the funding that is problematic. The debate about the sort of pan-Africanism we want to construct has not started yet. There is a patent lack of political will and the Monrovia group, which has symbolically taken over from the Casablanca group, is dominating thinking. The most important aspects of this thinking – which may by chance be progressive – turn out to be unworkable. The members of the organisation still believe in the feasibility of NEPAD, a scarcely viable project left to the discretion of the West and whose futility for the continent we had already demonstrated at its launch at the Kananaskis G8 summit. [8] Today, Fanon would be deploring the fact that Africa still does not have a continental developing plan and that is why we are encouraging a move in this direction by offering the alternative of pan-African self-reliance (panafricentrage). [9] Pan-Africanism would gain in fact by being geared towards two requirements suggested by panafricentrage: the reconstruction of what it is to be African and a forward-looking renewal to control accumulation and develop our productive capacity. Both need to return to the question of progress and modernity and, therefore, development and decide on other homeomorphic imperatives (that is, those that challenge their local equivalent). 'Africanity' and the pan-African renewal could both be based on a balance between maat and internationalism – in other words, the fertile roots that provide for a harmonious future for Africa and its diaspora. To reconnect, without narcissistic attachment to the past, with our common roots; to regenerate them scientifically after all the assaults in our history that have led to amnesia and apathy. The revitalisation of pan-Africanism rely on many urgent needs. Among them, the fact that the

moment has come to set up an international and pan-African conference on the grabbing of land and resources in Africa, especially agricultural land, following the example of Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams who launched a similar event in 1900 thereby inspiring the pan-African movement. The work of WEB Dubois, de Marcus Garvey, Lamine Senghor, Garan Kouyate, Price Mars CLR James, Casely Hayford, Alioune Diop and *Présence africaine* since 1947 were to fire the pan-African congresses and projects. Their legacy is perpetuated by their successors such as Lumumba, Ben Barka, Fanon, Nkrumah, Cabral, Sankara, Rosa Parks, Makonnen, Malcom X, Booker T Washington, Kenyatta, Diop, Rodney, Mandela... These future ancestors are still a shining light for us. The reconstruction of revolutionary pan-Africanism offers us not only a critique of Eurocentric Africanism, but also a rigorous and above all objective and historical review of Africa and its contribution to the arrival of globalisation. We must first fully recognise humanity's monocentric origin that refuses all forms of racism and eugenics; the anteriority of the ancient negro-african civilisations needs to be re-established as does their contribution, like those of subsequent traditional periods, to the building up of global systems. There is also the need to understand how Africa was of service to Europe's periphery, that is the Americas, before herself moving onto the fringes of capitalism. This is where she still is, in an unjust and outdated division of labour that is perpetuated by internal, predatory dynamics. UNICEF seems powerless to prevent the death of about 29,000 children under five every day – 21 a minute – chiefly from preventable causes. One child in eight in Africa dies before reaching the age of five. [10] Fanon Wrote 'We Africans have been saying that for more than 100 years the life of 200,000,000 Africans has been life on the cheap, life that is put in question and perpetually haunted by death. We have been saying that we should not put our trust in the good faith of the colonialists but that we should arm ourselves with fortitude and a fighting spirit. Africa will not be liberated by the mechanical development of material assets; it will be the hand and brain of the African that inspire and successfully complete the dialectic of the continent's liberation.' [11] Nobody will save our people; we must do it ourselves and soon we will number one billion of whom three quarters still live as described above. The need for renewal involves the struggle against the almost collective amnesia relating to the real history of Africa and its diaspora, but above all it involves the need to start learning lessons from the anti-imperialist struggles and decolonisation; independence that had to be negotiated, struggles for national liberation and, most of all, the failure of institutional Panafricanism. It entails admitting that the complete liberation of Africa and its diaspora has yet to be achieved. This requires a bold reorganisation of the forces of change, especially our youth who, despite their capacity for outrage and reaction, have lived through more than two decades of depoliticisation and political disaffection. This phenomenon was maintained as much by our states being disengaged from the economy and functioning as puppets of the Bretton-Woods institutions and other donors as by the diminishing field of vision of many of our political parties mired in scenarios of artificial pluralist democracies and co-opted civil society. We have to make an essential and immense effort to create strategies and unity, but we also need a certain introspection in order to have respect for ourselves and others. In doing this, while many would wish to label 'panafricentrage' as one of the African doctrines, I want to make it clear that 'afrocentricity is preferable to 'afrocentrism'. Afrocentrism, like eurocentrism, is precisely a form of culturalism and other integrisms, blind alleys that need to be critiqued and surpassed. 'Panafricentrage', rather, is a doctrine that draws on its reactivated roots. It can be expressed on the one hand in terms of a philosophy that stresses *maa't* (in its sense of cosmic, terrestrial and personal balances and of truth and social justice) and the rediscovery of our historic, socio-cultural and political programmes for regulation. On the other hand, it also depends on a practice of integrity that leads to pan-African and internationalist autocentred progress which is ecological and

not sexist and which can contribute to a multi-centred world. This is a historic materialism, which begins with the historic conditions of material existence of Africans and understands their process of transformation and reproduction in order to achieve a revolutionary praxis. It is up to working people and the organic intellectuals of Africa and the diaspora to build this alternative against the predatory phases of globalisation that only allow comprador options and their chimeric efforts at continental integration. We have to learn to endure and counter oppression by multiplying and channeling thousands of networks and ramifications that are moving in the same direction as this panafrican impetus. 'Panafricentrage' is a process of acquiring a political and historic awareness of the collective autonomy of the continent. By breaking away discerningly from the dominant capitalism, it favours the control of accumulation and equitable redistribution. It promotes the revaluing of our traditions and ways of being in solidarity and is a socio-cultural renewal that enables Africa to make an active contribution to our age. Moreover, the conditions for the revolutionary awakening are becoming clearer: the global financial crisis; the closure of islands of prosperity to our disillusioned youth wishing to emigrate; the combination of the exasperation that is now affecting not only the poorest classes with the despair that narrows horizons that are clouded by the autumn of senile, predatory capitalist models. Finally, there is a ray of hope, glimpses of dawn that enable us to see the revolutionary advances that have started, timidly, here and there on the continent. Space is short, but let us illustrate one dimension of it.

TOWARDS AN URGENT, AUTOCENTRED STRATEGY FOR AGRICULTURE

The devices of neoliberal recolonisation must be tirelessly combated, as much with land grabbing as with rapacious commercial crops or the introduction of GMOs. [12] One of the battle fields is the issue of world food and for Africa this is an issue of prime importance as more and more of its land is being sold off while the food problem remains chronic. The world's current food production could feed the planet, but much of the cereals – 40 percent - is used as concentrated fodder for cattle to provide meat for the most affluent. Moreover, the FAO – the UN organisation for food and agriculture – advocates a second green revolution, doubling food production between now and 2050. In the meantime, the rise in food prices is putting more than a billion people at risk of famine and is triggering the cycle of hunger riots. Autocentred development requires agrarian reform and self-sufficiency in food. We need organic farming methods and appropriate technology. It means production and processing, throughout an agricultural system that is as organic as possible, conforms to a different law of value, with more balance of income between town and country, a strategy for full employment, the fair cost of production and processing, etc. This project takes the form of collective self-reliance, in other words it enables the exchange of products between areas and cross-subsidies between regions of surplus and deficit. The productivity in all types of activities can be spectacular while at the same time generating full employment in the preparation and processing stages of production. A bio-organic approach to agriculture refuses to use chemical inputs and recycles all its rubbish. It is easy to envisage production of biogas that can be used both to clean the villages and towns and to provide energy. This could be coupled with solar energy to meet the energy needs of the communities. The jobs in growing and processing the crops encourage the people to stay local as their improved incomes and quality of life make the rural exodus less interesting. Biological farming (biomass, rotation, percolation, green pesticides, etc.) is falsely said to be less productive by the industrial producers of pesticides and chemical fertilisers and biotechnologies. An improved concentration per hectare is possible with this integrated, intensive model that preserves the adjoining environment as well as the sustainability of the arable ecosystems. We advocate, therefore, not sustainable, but endurable development. This is at the

heart of the construction of an internal market of goods for consumption by the people, based on our products and selective imports that respond to our essential needs. But here, as elsewhere, there are several obstacles in the way of Panafricentrage. Let us briefly identify the immediate strategic horizons that condition the future struggles of Africa and its diaspora and that are likely to help them triumph with the help of internationalists from the North:

- Self-sufficiency in food, agrarian reform, modernisation of agriculture to the rhythm of each society; arrival of markets with goods for mass consumption, to satisfy basic needs.
- Nationalisation of resources conditional to popular, patriotic participation
- Light industrialisation that complements the agriculture and the rebalancing of urban/rural income.
- Regional and continental integration accelerated by complementarity and levelling out.
- Backing patents and technology that are within our grasp and our means.
 - A central bank, continental currency; bi- or tri-continental parliament for the main issues regarding development and security.
 - A continental army and a civil brigade for prevention of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction.
 - Tricontinental cooperation against speculation, with internationalists from the North who share with us the fight against impunity, illicit amassment of wealth and the violation of human rights.
 - Collective fight against paying the debt; disengage from programmes capping poverty-prsp etc.. and weigh up how to reform the international institutions in favour of internationalist cooperation with a 0.7%,untied ODA.
 - Full emancipation of women and change of male mentalities.
 - Democratic repolitisation of the people and their own organised efforts to counter imperialism, comprador regimes and anti-progressive behaviours. Active participation of young people in socio-political mechanisms for the making and implementation of decisions.
 - Decipher the irresponsible, ostentatious consumerist behaviour and rediscover ways of living solidarity.
 - Safeguard natural and environmental resources, by living ecologically and with a social conscience.

Steer the energy of the progressive diaspora and the life forces of the continent towards Panafricentrage. Arrange the return to Africa from the Americas and elsewhere of the African diaspora

- Work for a progressive, humanist, multi-centred world and for the preservation of common 'goods' via development that is both responsible and of the people.

Nobody can predict the outcome of these struggles; the immediate future will rise out of the disruption of the balances of power – the socio-political, economo-cultural, gender and generational. In the meantime, it is a question of consolidating the gains, broadening the scope of a social, humanist and progressive (and, if possible, socialist) response to the unilateral market model with its global apartheid. We must advance into our future, eyes open, uncompromisingly and without nostalgic attachment to the past. However, for this future to be realised, we need concrete projects, on the scale of social formations, that is state-nations, major social reforms, indeed viable social projects. This does not seem possible to me without attempting selective disengagement and anti-capitalist self-centering and, above all, mutual support by integrating collectively those who opt for such an alternative. The option for a people's national and democratic movement for Africa (states and peoples) -within a dynamic of Panafrican self-reliance that opposes the logic of compradorisation - would be able to form, through consultation and consistency, a response to defend such a project, even the birth of another world. 'Africa must be free,' said Dr N'Krumah in his inaugural speech. We have nothing to lose but our chains and

we have a huge continent to conquer. In Accra, Africans swore loyalty and support to each other.' [13]

A luta continua. Amandla Ngawethu ! UHURU !!

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