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African Identities: Pan-Africanism in the Era of Globalization and Capitalist Fundamentalism

Ngugi wa Thiong'o

I.

*W*e live in a world of contradictions. Human technology and ingenuity have opened an endless frontier in outer space and internal space, even decoding the key to life; and yet human greed has decreed that there be poverty and disease on earth. The means to save life are overshadowed by the means to destroy it. Weapons of mass destruction, no matter what nation hoards them, are a sword of Damocles over the globe. Insecurity haunts the streets of even the most heavily armed nations. The prison population is the most rapidly growing sector in both the poorest and the wealthiest of nations. The splendor-in-squalor character of our globe is at the heart of the complex contradictions of globalization. What is Africa's place in this scenario? What is Africa's place in global space?

Every phenomenon in nature, society, and thought, including the character of its being, is affected by the external and internal dynamics of its becoming. African development is no exception. The Cold War of superpower rivalries affected the character of the postcolonial state that emerged in the Africa of the Sixties in the 20th century. The military and civilian dictatorships, while feeding on the fertile soil of weak democratic and economic bases within, were also a function of superpower rivalries, with African regions often fighting proxy wars that provided nothing more than killing fields to test the effectiveness of rival armaments. The struggles for democracy by a broad social movement and the end of the Cold War saw the liberalization of the internal space, with African leaders retiring (instead of being retired by death

through old age or military coups). These are positive internal developments. But just as decolonization took place under the international conditions of the Cold War, which left its mark, these post-Cold War developments are taking place under conditions of intensified *economic* globalization.

Not that globalization is a new phenomenon. It has been a feature of capital since its genesis in the 16th century as a challenge and later a replacement to feudalism as the dominant and determining force in social production. Explorations and colonial ventures are concomitant with its genesis. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels predict the worldwide character of its development when they talk of the bourgeoisie, through its exploitation of the world market, giving a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. They talk of old established national industries being dislodged by industries utilizing raw materials drawn from the remotest zones — industries whose products are consumed not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe.¹ Africa has always been an integral part of the key moments in the evolution of the globalizing tendency of capital, though disadvantageously so. Once again, we turn to Marx who observed that: “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the uprooting, enslavement and entombment in the mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercialized hunting of black skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.”² The “rosy dawn” was the mercantile phase of capital that fueled the slave trade and created slave plantations. Here the African body is turned into a commodity. The industrial phase of the 19th century fueled the scramble for colonies as sources of raw materials and markets for finished goods. Now the raw material is turned into a commodity whose cheap price becomes the heavy artillery forcing capitulation to the capitalist order. The phase of finance capital then follows when money that previously enabled exchange becomes itself a commodity of the highest order, a laser-guided missile that speeds up capitulation and crumbles the protective walls of nations. Both Lenin, in his book *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, published at the beginning of the First World War, and the Bretton Woods Agreement at the end of the Second World War, which led to the creation of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT),³ foresaw the coming global dominance of finance capital. The very titles of these

Bretton Woods institutions signal the globe as the theater for the actions of finance capital.

Globalization today, then, is the maturing of a tendency and process inherent in capitalism. But if globalization has been the tendency and context of the process of capitalist modernity, there is a difference between its pre-Cold War and its post-Cold War manifestations. The earlier phases and forms assumed (or at least paid homage to) the notion of *laissez-faire*, of free competition. There were different paths toward the capitalist paradise. What characterizes globalization in its current form is the ideological and practical imperative of capitalist fundamentalism. Fundamentalism — economic, political, or religious — is essentially an insistence that there is only one way of organizing reality. Margaret Thatcher's often cited phrase *There Is No Alternative (TINA)*⁴ best illustrates this in relation to politics and economy, but it embodies the same reductionism in religious fundamentalism. This capitalist fundamentalism, what some scholars dub neoliberalism, begins, roughly, with the Reagan, Thatcher, and Kohl era, though the threesome did not create it. It literally calls for the worship of the market, with the common credo of privatization: Privatize or perish, it says. If a nation deviates from the ordained path, for instance by questioning the disciplinary mechanisms of "aid" conditionality or failing to privatize public enterprises and introduce narrowly defined forms of liberal democracy, then it faces excommunication from the global capitalist temple and expulsion into purgatory. Julius Nyerere's Tanzania of the 1980s was brought to its knees for questioning neoliberal doctrine. Even previously compliant dictators were not immune from punishment when they tried to retain parastatals, their previous sources of looting and patronage.⁵ This radical turn conceptualizes capitalism as a religious system, with the market as the god-like mediator⁶ in the conflicting claims of its adherents. Unfortunately, it has real consequences for the political economies of peripheral capitalist societies like those in Africa. For one, these states and their internal policies are under constant surveillance for any deviation from the now sanctified conditionalities. The surveillance is also manifested at the international level in the clearly discriminatory policies of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the successor to GATT, especially in the area of agrarian subsidies.⁷ This has adverse effects on the farmer already experiencing social and economic dislocations wrought by the fundamentalist demands for the commodification of public social goods, among them, education, health, and water.

With the insistence that there is only one way of organizing an economy, even capitalism itself, capitalist fundamentalism is already challenging the traditional attributes of the nation-state, such as its assumed right to formulate national economic policies. Many Third World policies are made by the IMF. In some cases, the IMF has offices in the Ministries of Finance and Economic Planning, sometimes even having a say in the appointment of key civil servants as overseers of the national treasury. A state that has to have its economic policies approved by another has already surrendered some of its sovereignty to the approving overseer. Rapid developments in information technology, with the Internet literally drawing the world into one web, further erode the nation-state's control of what is within its territory, for no state can now effectively contain the flow and exchange of information across national borders. Even the state's role as the provider for social needs and the employer of intellectuals has been usurped, this time by the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the secular missionaries⁸ in the era of globalization. Many products of national universities compete for consultancy with the NGOs. These NGOs are funded by the treasuries of foreign governments, mostly Western,⁹ and so they are NGOs only to the Third World states. Otherwise, they are an arm of the foreign policy of the bankrolling states. The products of the hard work of these native consultants, even the language in which the critiques they write are couched, are often within the broad consensus of the sources of funds. A native-based NGO that may call for the overthrow of a corrupt regime or call on the nation-state to challenge capitalist fundamentalism will quickly find that its funding has dwindled overnight. He who pays the piper calls the tune.

The ascendancy of finance capital affects other areas of our social life, such as the conception of politics and specifically democracy. Thus, what is often touted as "freedom" is essentially the freedom of finance capital to go in and out of national boundaries without the interference of the nation-state. But does that mean that this capital is genuinely super-national? Are we talking of a homeless capital? Not really, for, while claiming the globe as its playground, its base is still in the national homelands of what largely goes under the name of the West, mainly its Euro-American sector. It may roam the globe bringing down the walls of other nation-states but it knows where to return with its profits. The result of this process for Africa and many Third World countries around the globe is a state too weak to interfere with the operation of finance capital but strong enough to contain the popu-

lation should they rise up against the ensuing social depredations. Often, these states compete among themselves to prove which is best able to deliver a cheap, submissive labor force and to protect Free Trade Zones that are off limits for the laws of the country.¹⁰ Instability is inherent in that situation. In order to create even a modicum of stability, such a postcolonial state will rely on police boots and military bayonets—a return, ironically, to the character of the postcolonial state during the Cold War. Thus, the emerging post-Cold War state, with its democratic robes, is being turned into its opposite, a policing state that has lost the capacity and the means to speak for the nation. In acting as an overseer of foreign finance capital, the postcolonial state's hold on the allegiance of the population is weakened considerably. The citizens view it with suspicion, as an enemy of the people (which it often is), and their gratitude to NGOs may make them see imperialist nations as their allies against the repressive practices of their own state. The irony is, of course, that the generous NGOs and the local state—rivals for the gratitude and allegiance of the people—are armed by the same Western sources. The state is armed with weapons, and the NGO with coupons.

The policing aspects of the peripheral nation-state will become more pronounced as the social consequences of unregulated market rule heighten the contradictions in a world divided into a minority of wealthy nations, mostly Euro-American, and a majority of poor nations, mostly Asian, African, and South American. And within this global dichotomy, all nations are divided into a very wealthy upper social stratum, the *haves*, and a poor social majority, the *have-nots*.

The two gaps of wealth and poverty *between* and *within* nations, rooted in the economic practice of globalization, are rapidly widening, and herein lies the great paradox of our time. Production is clearly global but the appropriation and disposal of the product is private. *Privatization, then, does not refer to production, for production has become social and global. Instead, it refers to the accrual of profit.* Socialize production, privatize the produce. Public hands propose, private fingers dispose. Globalize production, regionalize profiteering. This adds to the paradox. Despite the enormous power of new technologies brought forth by the globalization of the division of labor, we see the globalization of poverty. Nurture, which could tame the vicissitudes of nature, breeds greater social vicissitudes. The deepening discrepancy between the *have* and *have-not* conditions of an increasingly globalized world is a foundation for new types of authoritarianism.¹¹ The instability may

also generate more fundamentalisms in alliance¹² or in opposition to capitalist fundamentalism.

II.

Unfortunately, Africa fares the worst, despite or because of the fact that Africa has always been a player in the development of the modern capitalist world. Under the slave trade, the African body is commodified. Under the slave plantation system, Africa supplies unpaid labor that works the sugar and cotton fields. Under colonialism, Africa supplies raw materials—gold, diamonds, copper, uranium, coffee, cocoa—without having control over the prices.¹³ Under the new global situation of debts, debt servicing, and conditionalities, Africa becomes a net exporter of the very capital it most needs. Africa, the largest continent on the globe, endowed with all the resources of nature, becomes the land most bowed down by the man-wrought ills of poverty, disease, and ignorance.

How does Africa get itself out of this quagmire and transform into an equal player in the world, an equal giver and an equal recipient? How can it relate to other regions on the basis of equality and mutual respect? Given the fact that the globe is *one* and its resources are not endlessly renewable, how does Africa obtain its fair share of the common globe?

First, Africa must reject seduction into slumber by the Western self-image of an endlessly generous and patient donor. Indeed, Africa has to stop acting the grateful beggar to the West and demand its fair share. The present state of the continent can be blamed on the West. One need only catalogue the ills the West has done to Africa to see that such blame has its basis in solid historical facts. We cannot lay back and wait for the West to realize the harm it has done and repent. Do we really expect that the capitalist West, under the slave system and under the colonial system, could have behaved differently? Now, under the current wave of globalization, will the West come forward and kneel down before Africa and say: "We have wronged you, we have stolen from you; forgive us our trespasses, and, by the way, here are reparations, a token of our repentance"? No, Africa must not let the West off the "moral hook." The continent must heighten its demands for global social justice and the rectification of glaring historical injustices like the slave trade and colonialism. The West must be made to accept its responsibility for crimes against African humanity. Frederick

Douglass once said that power concedes nothing without demand. It never has and it never will. This is true of power within a nation and among nations. Our own history tells us that every gain, and there have been many, has been as a result of our struggles. Freedom from slavery and colonialism was not given to Africa on a silver platter. It was a result of resistance, a result of demand.

But here is another irony: Demands that have a chance of winning cannot be made from a position of weakness. Power has never conceded to weakness. Africa must not wait to get itself out of the quagmire through reparations by the very forces that gain from its weak position. Nor can Africa afford to sit back and blame. Instead, Africa has to lift itself into power.

The starting point must be a thorough self-examination. While conceding that the way out of its historical nightmare is beset with major structural obstacles, Africa must be proactive even within its marginality in the global capitalist system. Although not under conditions of its own choice, Africa must continue to write its own history. Even under the current relentless drive of capitalist fundamentalism, Africa must seize back its agency. Not to do so would be to surrender to the fatalism inherent in Western "TINAism," and a major dishonor to Africa's collective memory of resistance in all the previous phases of globalization.

Taking stock of its own weaknesses and strengths should be the beginning of any proactivism. A struggle that does not inventory what it can do for itself, and then rely on that as its starting base, is doomed to fail. If Africa were to examine its history seriously, the continent could learn useful lessons for the present. The most successful struggles, including those of the Haitian Africans in 1789 and the Mau Mau in the Kenya of the 1950s, were those based on self-reliance and a belief in their capacity to change the world. However weak it may now appear to itself, Africa has to take Nyerere's credo of self-reliance seriously. A belief in self is the beginning of strength.

The self-examination must begin with a serious questioning of the problematic relationship of the national middle class to the imperialist bourgeoisie, on one hand, and to the people, on the other. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon describes this relationship as the location of Africa's weakness and strength. It all depends on which relationship is dominant.

Frantz Fanon sees the national bourgeoisie that leads the anti-colonial resistance and obtains power as an underdeveloped middle class

with no economic muscle, counting neither financiers nor industrialists among its ranks. It is not engaged in production, invention, building, or labor. It is completely canalized into activities of the intermediary type. It has no arms, no guns, no armored vehicles. But whence, in the colonial era, does it get the power to challenge the armed might of the colonial state? It is only through its relationship with the people. It organizes the working people. It works with their dreams for better wages, better returns for their crops, adequate schools, affordable houses, and healthy bodies. Indeed, it facilitates their dreams for the power to change the conditions of their lives. The nationalist middle class puts its resources — its knowledge of the world, books, and ideas — at the disposal of the struggle. In the South Africa of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the ideas of Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Dubois, Marcus Garvey, Karl Marx, and even those emanating from different religious movements (the idea of independent churches, for instance) were being debated seriously, with the intellectuals, through newspapers and books, trying to pass on the ideas to the people in their own languages. In the Kenya of the 1920s, the intellectuals who came across Garvey's *Negro Digest* (now known as *The Black Man*) shared what they read with those who could not access it. This intellectual class is in an organic relationship with the masses. At the national territorial level, it comes up with visions of national unity against the divide-and-rule tactics of the colonial regime. At the continental level, it comes up with a vision of Pan-Africanism that embraces not only those who live on the continent, but also those in diaspora (and it discounts the colonial game of dividing Africa into sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa or else into regions whose identity is derived from the influence of major European powers). At the international level, the anti-colonial struggle is consistent in its characterization of the enemy as the imperialist class, the international class that owns the mines and plantations, along with the manufacturers and bankers — in other words, the class that gains from the miserable conditions of the poor. The intellectual classes are armed with a sense of themselves and their place in history. They are armed with a vision. They are the power base of the successful anti-colonial resistance against imperialism. You would think that this relationship would be the rock bottom foundation of the postcolonial state. But this is not how things work out.

When the nationalist middle class takes over the state, it changes its relationship with the people. Basically, it refuses to see that its power

does not come from its ownership of the levers of the economy, because it simply does not own them. They are still owned by the international bourgeoisie. But the nationalist middle class begins to behave as if its new power comes from its cozy relationship with imperialism. Fanon argues, in the brilliant chapter titled, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," that its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation: "it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism,"¹⁴ under the mask of neocolonialism. Even in the days when nationalization was a magic word, according to Fanon, this class only nationalized and normalized the unfair advantages that are a legacy of the colonial period.

The economic consequences are dire. Even more so is the political fallout, with the consciousness that had risen to visions of national unity, African unity, and Pan-Africanism now becoming regionalized and eventually vulgarized into myopic ethnic and clan horizons. There is the birth of the one-party state and the supreme leader, and, of course, the inevitable military dictatorships tolerated (and in some cases initiated) by the West in the era of the Cold War. The widest vision beyond the leader's personal self-aggrandizement is the ethnic. Often the leader surrounds himself with cronies and sycophants, be they from his village or other regions. His reception by Western leaders, with the inevitable patting on the back for being a faithful ally, becomes its own reward. The military vote and the armed nod from the West—and not the people—are all he needs to maintain power.

In a broader sense, the leader—be he a military or civilian dictator—is representative of the middle class as a whole¹⁵ when it comes to turning his back on the people. The middle class, partially or wholly, is soon able to forget that the location of its power is among the people. This is because, through education and language, its memory has become integrated with that of the European bourgeois. It is not hard to see why. The education of the black elite is all in European languages. Their conceptualization of the world is within the parameters of the language of their inheritance. Most importantly, it makes the elite an integral part of a given global speech community. Within the nation, the European language continues to be what it was during the colonial period: the language of power, conception, and articulation of the worlds of science, technology, politics, law, commerce, administration, and even culture. The nation becomes divided into two: the tiniest group cuts across the various ethnic boundaries but is in the privileged linguistic loop; the other group, the majority, is outside the

loop in every possible way. Frantz Fanon touches on this problem in *Black Skin, White Masks* when he claims that to acquire a language is to acquire a world. The weight of the civilization is carried by that language. By cutting across the various ethnicities, the language may seem to be more national. The tiny group that speaks it is drawn from the top five percent in each of the ethnic nationalities but may come to see itself as somehow constituting the nation. Fanon does not directly cite the incorporation into the European memory as a weakness of the middle class before and after independence, but he assumes it when he accuses the national bourgeoisie of identifying itself with the Western bourgeoisie from whom "it has learnt its lessons."¹⁶

III.

The linguistic incorporation of the African elite into the European memory has dire consequences for Africa, the most obvious being the almost universal acceptance by educated Africans that English, French, and Portuguese are the proper languages for producing and storing knowledge and information. This has meant that the masses, the social agency of change, are being denied access to the knowledge and information they most need to change the world. Trickle-down economics, so beloved by capitalist fundamentalists, becomes reflected in trickle-down education and information. I have talked a great deal about this problem in my books *Decolonising the Mind* and *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, and the more I look into the situation, the more I feel that the linguistic incorporation of the African educated elite into the European bourgeois memory is an active contributor to Africa's backwardness. In that sense every educated African who remains doggedly locked within the linguistic walls of European languages, irrespective of his avowed social vision (of the right or left), is part of the problem and not the solution. European memory sits like a dead weight on the self-imagination of Africa, and it prevents the elite, even the most radical, from connecting itself to what Fanon describes as the revolutionary capital,¹⁷ which is the people. More than anything else, it is this that prevents us from thinking of alternatives outside the Western hegemonic economic-political-cultural matrix.

Take the instance of the elite clinging to Europe's conceptualization of the nation-state. In pre-capitalist times, the world was largely without protected borders over which it was a crime to cross. Borders were often the meeting point of mutual exchange and, in some cases, the site

of intellectual and cultural cross currents. Borders united more than they divided. The nation-state, the form into which capitalist modernity organized its power, was born with notions of ownership in general and of territory in particular. The birth of the European nation-state, the slave plantation, and the colony and prison are simultaneous products of the same moment in history. It is not surprising that these institutions have similar features. The primary one is that of an enclosed space, often with a single point of entry and exit. They are gated spaces with a supervising authority. Like all such spaces, the gate is guarded all the time. You cannot enter or even exit without the approval of the all-seeing centralized authority. The comings and goings are recorded. The border now becomes a wall, marking separation of those within and those without. The plantation, the colony, the prison, and the nation-state mimic and anticipate each other in additional ways as well. The slave plantation is reminiscent of the enclosure movement in England where peasants were hounded out of common lands to become reservoirs of labor in congested towns.¹⁸ Those who turned to stealing sheep as a means of livelihood were hanged. But later they were exported to colonies-as-prisons. A good number of colonies, including Australia and Angola, doubled as penal territories. It is not surprising, for instance, that in France the Minister for Prisons was also in charge of colonies.¹⁹ The nation-state is built on division and separation and central control, with the prison playing an increasing role in its exercise of power. Today, some countries have prison populations that could constitute a separate nation.

The European nation-state created what Césaire, in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, sees as the intractable problem of the proletariat within its own borders and of the colony outside its borders. The colonial state was a creation of the European nation-state. Remaining subject to the mother country, it was not, as such, an independent entity in international relations. It acted more like a police and military force of occupation on behalf of the mother state. But in form, it was a mimicry of the European nation-state and was itself constructed on the contradictory practices of enclosure (the plantation), integration, and separation. The most significant division of Africa was into spheres of influence and control by the European powers that met in Berlin in 1884. The divisions and boundaries were most arbitrary, often combining different nations while dividing other nations into splinter entities under different powers. The Somali nation is the best example of a people who shared a common territory, language, culture, and history being split

five ways—into French Djibouti, Italian Somaliland, British Somaliland, British Kenya, and feudal Ethiopia. The story is the same throughout the continent. Colonial boundaries were both arbitrary and divisive. Within the colony, the colonial state dispossessed the former land-owning, independent, and communal farmers whom, in historical imitation of the English Enclosure Movement of the 18th century, it hounded into towns to create a reservoir of labor. The colonial state survived challenge after challenge from the dispossessed and the new proletariat by ensuring that the communities within its territorial boundary remained divided on ethnic lines. Thus, for instance, in Kenya between 1922 and 1960 (to literally two years before independence), Africans were not allowed to form political unions that encompassed the territory as a whole. The colonial state also thrived on the cooptation of a nascent middle class into an alliance of convenience. The army, the police, and the prisons worked together to maintain the colonial state against a restive population; otherwise why would Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania (all British states) need to have different territorial armies? The same is true for Malawi as Nyasaland and the two British Rhodesias! The postcolonial African independent state was simply a nationalization of the colonial state, with the inherited territorial boundaries now sanctified by necessity and, more significantly, by the inability of the new classes in power to imagine a different form of the state. Among all the emergent postcolonial leaders, it was only Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere who talked of the limitations of their nation-states, and of union with other African states. Otherwise, African identities as nations were mapped, marked, and named for Africa by European nation-states, the former colonial overlords.

Yet Africans need only take a cursory glance at their history to see that the most successful moments in their struggles were those that challenged the way they were defined and grouped by European colonizing memory. Pan-Africanism is the best example. Initially imagined by diasporan African intellectuals and fertilized by additions from continental Africans, this vision was a creative response to European divisions of Africa. "Africa for the Africans at home and abroad," cried Marcus Garvey. W. E. B. Dubois, C. L. R. James, Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore, and a whole range of others imagined a united Africa that would be the base for all black peoples. They envisioned an Africa without internal borders, an Africa playing its legitimate role in the community of nations. The pinnacle of this vision was the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England in 1945, a conference

that resulted in the return to Africa of leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta with renewed vigor and energy. *Africa Must Unite*, penned by Kwame Nkrumah, declared that the independence of Ghana in 1957 was meaningless without the liberation of the entire continent. Europe laughed at him, even mocked him. But look at the reversal of the situation. The Europeans that used to decry calls for Pan-Africanist unity and an African Union government are the ones who are now uniting as the European Union, with a common parliament, a common currency, and freedom of movement across the borders. A united Europe will obviously be in a stronger position to obtain a better share of the resources of a globalized world. But we in Africa, sold on the outmoded European concept of the nation-state, have retreated from the Pan-African vision that got us the few gains we have. Instead, we retreat back into our national borders—and even these are further disintegrating into ethnic and clan states. Thus, we weaken ourselves when others are strengthening themselves.

It is clear that if Africa is to get out of the quagmire and make progress, the African elite must return to its real base: *The People*. An authentic middle class in an underdeveloped country, wrote Frantz Fanon, should repudiate its colonially fated role as the tool of capitalism, "and make itself the willing slave of that revolutionary capital which is the people." Such a class, he continues, ought to "put at the people's disposal the intellectual and technical capital that it has snatched when going through the colonial universities."²⁰ This repudiation would mean nothing less than the intellectual faction of the middle class, the African intelligentsia, disentangling itself from the European memory by rejecting the notion that European languages are the only legitimate means of organizing and articulating reality and dreams. They should not become prisoners of their very success at snatching knowledge in universities at home and abroad. The retrieval and use of African languages is of paramount importance. No people can abandon their language and make much headway. Is it not a blot on the self-esteem of a whole continent that up until now, outside of Ethiopia, not a single treaty exists between Africa and the outside world in an African language? Instead of following the challenge of such a choice, the African intelligentsia as a whole has surrendered, without even an attempt at resistance, before what it sees as insurmountable hurdles. It "disappears with its soul set at peace"²¹ into the comfort zone of European languages. The dreams of Africa remain swaddled in European sounds, inaccessible to African peoples. The

abandonment of the people by its intellectuals, for whom the people have endured hardships in order to get them educated — with the expectation of fruitful returns — is the real triumph of colonialism and a dishonor to the broader African intelligentsia.

Fortunately, there have always been a few intellectuals who have refused to abdicate, and have kept the issue alive. In Ethiopia, there has always been intellectual production in African languages. The 19th and early 20th century Xhosa and Zulu intellectuals debated the best language of African modernity; some, like Mqayi and Vilikazi, standing firmly for African languages. This advocacy is continued in the work of Cheikh Anta Diop and Obi Wali. Currently, there are signs that African intellectuals are beginning to think seriously about the call for African languages, as expressed, for example, in the work of Kwesi Kwaa Prah. The Center for the Study of African Cultures, based in Cape Town, has become an important advocate for the centrality of African languages. In Kenya, a similar center for the advancement of African languages is in the making. Some governments, notably South Africa and Eritrea, have tried to come up with enlightened policies on African languages. In so many ways, the conference on literature and knowledge in African languages, held in Eritrea at the beginning of the year 2000, was a turning point. The conference came up with the Asmara Declaration, which called on African languages to take on the duty, the responsibility, and the challenge of speaking for the continent. This was really a call for Africa to reconnect with its memory and to engage with the world from its base. The Ten Points²² are a manifesto of the only means by which the African intelligentsia can heed Fanon's call to place its intellectual production at the people's disposal and hence connect itself with the revolutionary capital, the people. This is a basic step in Africa's search for a way out of the global quagmire: to arm our people with the knowledge and information that make them better equipped to effectively demand their rightful share of the globe.

It is also clear that we have to heed, as a matter of urgency, Nkrumah's call that "Africa Must Unite." Africa cannot be split into tiny political and economic units and command its share of the globe. But aren't the two proposals a contradiction? Can an Africa of many languages and cultural tendencies unite?

The perception of an irresolvable contradiction persists because of the assumption that monolingualism is the *sine qua non* of modernity. This also leads to the historical fiction of other societies being marked

by monoculturalism. If we think broadly and historically, then we can see that this is not really the case. Even Europe has many languages (100, at least). And if we count the ones brought in by recent immigrants, then we are talking of hundreds of languages and autonomous dialects. The United States, with its fifty states, has more languages, religions, and ethnicities than any other territorial nation-state in the world. The official posture may be that of a linguistic melting pot, but the reality on the ground speaks otherwise. In Canada, the language question continues. The existence of many languages is not a particularly African problem. I am not even sure if it is a problem at all. Still, the assumption persists that many languages are incompatible with unity and a continental African identity. It was this that made Cheikh Anta Diop, in 1948, respond to "the objection, usually raised, that Africans can never have linguistic unity," with the dismissive rejoinder, "Africa does not need such linguistic unity any more than Europe does." He continues:

But it is absolutely false to think that this apparent multiplicity of languages is a serious impediment to the establishment of an indigenous culture. In fact, among the well over six hundred languages being cited, there are just about four which are major languages, the others being merely variants spoken by a small group like regional European dialects Therefore there are in Africa...only four languages capable of being developed to become instruments for the expression of the entire African thought. And this only requires will-power, firmness and determination on the part of Africans to liberate themselves intellectually and morally.²³

It is not necessary to argue that there are only four main languages in order to make the point that the multiplicity of languages is not a barrier to development. We have to admit that in each African country there are many nationalities and languages, and accept that reality as the starting point. Then we must pose different questions: How can the many languages be used to bring about the unity of African peoples within a country and within the continent?

Enriching our languages and encouraging dialogue among them through the tool of translation is the best way to create a cultural basis for African unity.²⁴ Imagine if all the books written in different African languages, and even those produced by continental and diasporan Africans in any language, were available in each and every African

language? Would this not create a sense of common inheritance and a basis for more intellectual production? If an inter-ethnic, inter-regional continental language should emerge (but not on the graveyard of other languages), that would be a gain for Africa, and it would add another dimension to the conversation among African languages.

We should not look at a united Africa as a union of African heads of state but as a union of the African peoples. The struggle and the process are not the sole business of heads of state but of the entire African peoples, with their varied languages and cultures. If we put people first, then we can see the damage being done by colonial boundaries that perpetuate European memory as the basis for the definition of our being. Driven by this "people awareness," we should look at the colonial borders and ask different questions. In so doing, we turn what is seemingly a weakness into a strength. We can turn the division of peoples of the same language and culture, but who span different borders, into a strength by viewing those peoples as a shared community. In nearly all African states, there are people of the same language, culture, and history on either side of a border — what are called border communities. For instance, if Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia itself were to see the Somali people as a shared community, then uniting Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia would not be a union of cultural strangers. We could thus use the notion of a shared community as links in a chain for African unity from the Cape to Cairo, from Kenya to Liberia. A good number of border communities have a common spiritual leader and, in reality, they do not recognize the colonial boundaries that divide them. In their cultural practices, they are challenging the colonially derived nation-state. Again, should we not use these communities, with their common spiritual authority and history, to unite us, instead of criminalizing their border crossings? In short, we should truly imagine an internally borderless continent. We would turn the borders into highways for the movement of goods, services, and ideas across the continent. Then will come to fruition the visions of our foreparents who saw the continent as a material and spiritual home for Africans at home and abroad.

IV.

A borderless Africa, or rather one where the national states have mutated into a continental federal state, cannot be brought about by force. The process of its becoming, in fact, assumes that democracy, in

the Lincolnian sense of the "rule of the people, by the people, for the people," is the driving force. The alternative is raw force, which would not bring about political integration but disintegration through border wars. Continental unity, for it to be real, must be voluntary and people driven. Africa must, however, not assimilate all aspects of Western forms of democracy. Democracy in the West has become less about the society people want to build than about holding elections every four years or so. Elections are important, of course, but they should be part of the overall search for a just society. In this sense, there has always been a major flaw in the Western democratic tradition, from ancient Athens to America today. The Athenian democracy was based on the division of society into free men and slaves and women. Democracy was for the free citizen. Democracy as exercised by colonial powers assumed freedom at home and colonial slavery abroad. It is still the case today. The dominant powers go to great lengths, including deception, to ensure that their population is compliant in the policies they want to carry out at home and abroad. Yet they become impatient with foreign governments that refuse to circumvent the wishes of their people and thereby decline to do the bidding of the West. The neocolonial framework cannot be the foundation or even the cornerstone of African unity. Only a consistent anti-neocolonialism and a people-driven democracy can form such a foundation. In fact, such a people-driven democracy may be at odds with representative democracy, which often means people are passive viewers as their representatives in parliament exercise power on their behalf.

In the exercise of democracy, Africa may once again want to learn a few lessons from its own pre-colonial institutions. The two dominant types of societies in Africa, the one without a centralized authority and the other with a centralized authority vested in the chief, both assumed forms of participatory democracy. Jomo Kenyatta, in his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, describes such a participatory process among the Agikuyu of Kenya. What is striking in the picture he draws is the practice of self-organization at all levels of society. Even young people had their own councils and thus learned leadership as part of their everyday life. This is in stark contrast to the practices of the colonial and postcolonial state that see organized people as enemies of the state. How many times have we seen youth organizations banned, with police chasing them down the streets of major towns? A combination of participatory and representative democratic practices may well

be what Africa needs as the means of realizing and exercising dreams of creative African unity.

But even before a political union, Africa has to start the process of economic and communications integration, and create an All-Africa common market. The models are already there, the best being the East African Community, which once saw Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania share a whole host of services, including a common currency (before a colonized nation-statism gleefully broke it). But such a common market can only endure if it rises to the level of a political union. A continental political unity will further speed up economic integration. The consequent economically and politically united Africa will also be in a better position to engage the other forces in the world in the struggle for a more just global community. Whatever the path toward a continental identity, it calls for a serious questioning and rejection of the sanctity of colonial boundaries.

This is nothing short of a call for the decolonization of our economies, politics, and cultures, in order to create a new beginning for Africa. Even this will not be smooth sailing. The forces of global reaction will still try to divide and dominate. But Africa has to meet this reaction with proaction for the sake of its own being in a rapidly globalizing world.

Some cynics, schooled in self-doubt, will see a dream for the impossible in such a call. But dreams have always drawn images of the ideally possible. In imagination we draw outlines of a future, then try to realize it. In days when a few humans started conceiving of flying, they were dubbed dreamers, not realists. But they continued dreaming and trying. During plantation slavery, those who talked of freedom were seen as mere dreamers. But they did not stop dreaming and trying to realize the goal. It is the same for dreamers of the anti-colonial resistance, who continued to imagine victory and work toward it. Our present day world owes a lot to those who dared to dream.

For a long time now, I have advocated moving the center from a handful of European nations to marginalized nations, and then creating conditions for a healthy dialogue and equal exchange among them all. Although this has been couched in mainly linguistic and cultural terms, my concerns embrace the wholeness of a community—the economic, political, cultural, and psychic. I see all these as the interrelated complexity we call human societies. As opposed to the current forms of globalization that often mean the appropriation of all the other centers and their resources by one “supercenter,” I hope that the ongoing

struggle intensifies for a global alliance of equal centers. I look forward to the day when the margin becomes the center and the center becomes the margin in a dance of continuous reciprocity, because both will be contributing and drawing equally from their common human center.



Notes

1. Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), pp. 476–477.
2. Ibid., p. 474.
3. GATT mutated into the WTO in 1994.
4. For Margaret Thatcher's "There is No Alternative (TINA)," see James H. Mittleman, "Alternative Globalization," in *Civilizing Globalization*, ed. Richard Sandbrook (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 237.
5. See Dr. Eunice Njeri Sahle, "Democratisation in Malawi: State, Economic Structure and Neo-Liberal Hegemony," (Ph. D. diss., Queen's University, Canada, 2001), in which she documents the pressure on Banda to yield to the new conditions. The same is true for Moi of Kenya.
6. I have dramatized this in my forthcoming novel, *Murogi wa Kagogo* (*Wizard of the Crow*, English translation).
7. The U.S.A. and Canada, for instance, heavily subsidize their agricultural and steel sectors but seethe in fury and demand that the WTO pass judgment on others that follow suit.
8. What characterized the 19th-century colonial expansion of capitalism — its scramble for colonies and the ceding of territories to companies like the Imperial East African Company — was paralleled by the rise and expansion of missionary societies, which also carved spaces among themselves, even within the same colonial territory. Though clearly part of the same colonial enterprise, and assuming protection from the colonial state, they also stood as if they were in competition with the state. The missionary societies provided many social services, including education and medicine. Mongo Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba* dramatizes this sibling rivalry between the missionary and the colonial administrator. Foreign NGOs are similarly allocating spaces to themselves and posing as if they are on the side of the people against both the postcolonial state and their financial sponsor, the foreign state.
9. It could be said that the only true NGOs are those in the postcolonial state because those in the West are often subdivisions of the foreign policies of their governments.
10. For more on this, see these seminal documentary films, "The Global Assembly Line" and "Life and Debt."
11. Dr. Eunice Njeri Sahle shows how different varieties of authoritarianism were encouraged as a more reliable partner in the Cold War postcolonial state. See her unpublished dissertation, "Democratisation in Malawi: State, Economic Structure and Neo-Liberal Hegemony."
12. Note the celebrated meeting between Reagan and the Mujahedin, during which he called them "freedom fighters."

13. For data, see Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Nelson, 1965).
14. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press), p. 152.
15. Chinua Achebe's novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1988) shows and dramatizes what is true of the postcolonial situation in Africa as a whole: the fact that the military man and his intellectual collaborators as well as opponents are often products of the same schools and colleges.
16. Frantz Fanon, p. 153.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
18. See Karl Polanyi's discussion of the Enclosure Movement in *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944, 1957).
19. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).
20. Frantz Fanon, p. 150.
21. *Ibid.* Fanon is talking about the retreat of the middle class as a whole into what he describes as "the shocking ways...of a traditional bourgeoisie."
22. (1) African languages must take on the duty, the responsibility and the challenge of speaking for the continent. (2) The vitality and equality of African languages must be recognized as a basis for the future empowerment of African peoples. (3) The diversity of African languages reflects the rich cultural heritage of Africa and must be used as an instrument of African unity. (4) Dialogue among African languages is essential: African languages must use the instrument of translation to advance communication among all people, including the disabled. (5) All African children have the inalienable right to attend school and learn in their mother tongues. Every effort should be made to develop African languages at all levels of education. (6) Promoting research on African languages is vital for their development, while the advancement of African research and documentation will be best served by the use of African languages. (7) The effective and rapid development of science and technology in Africa depends on the use of African languages and modern technology must be used for the development of African languages. (8) Democracy is essential for the equal development of African languages, and African languages are vital for the development of democracy based on equality and social justice. (9) African languages, like all languages, contain gender bias. The role of African languages in development must overcome this gender bias and achieve gender equality. (10) African languages are essential for the decolonization of African minds and for the African Renaissance.
23. Cheikh Anta Diop, "When Can We Talk of an African Renaissance," *Le Musée* (November 1948) and now reissued in *Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in African Culture and Development 1946–1960*, Trans. Egbuna P. Modum (London: Karnak House, 1996), p. 37.
24. See, for instance, David A. McDonald and Eunice Njeri Salhe, *The Legacy of Julius Nyerere* (Trenton: African World Press, 2000).

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